

DHAMMA for the Asking VOLUME 2



The Skype Sessions

by

Ajahn Suchart Abhijāto

“THE GIFT OF DHAMMA
EXCELS ALL OTHER GIFTS”

- *The Lord Buddha* -

DHAMMA
for the Asking
VOLUME 2

The Skype Sessions

by Ajahn Suchart Abhijāto

DHAMMA for the Asking VOLUME 2: the Skype Sessions

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01

Dhamma Talk

November 4, 2014

When you are listening to a Dhamma talk, what you want to gain is understanding. If you can understand what I say, then you will remember it. If you don't, don't worry, because you don't listen to Dhamma talks just once. You have to keep listening to Dhamma talks at least once a week, or more because when you listen to Dhamma talks, you will learn something that you have not learned before, especially the practice of meditation. You want to meditate. But do you know why? Do you know what we get from meditation? Meditation in Buddhism consists of two parts. The first stage is called *samatha-bhāvanā*, meaning meditation for calmness, for stillness of mind, for peace of mind. The second stage of Buddhist meditation, we call *vipassanā-bhāvanā*. This is for the development of insight. These two stages have to be achieved in order to attain to the various levels of Dhamma. The goal

is to let go of everything that you have right now, because all things that you have are temporary. They only stay with you for a certain period of time and eventually will have to leave you, or you will have to leave them. If you know ahead of time that you have to lose everything, and if you prepare your mind for the eventuality, when these things happen, your mind will not be affected. Your mind will remain peaceful and happy because you have already relinquished and are detached from everything.

What are you? You are the mind. The mind is not the body. The mind comes into possession of the body at the time of conception in the womb of the mother. After nine months, the body and the mind come to this world. So you have to understand that the body is your temporary possession. One day it will have to get sick. One day it will have to get old. One day the body will have to die. But the mind is not the body, and the mind doesn't get old, doesn't get sick or die with the body. So what you have to do is to teach the mind this truth because right now your mind is under the influence of delusion. Delusion is the mind mistakenly thinking that the body is itself, so it clings strongly to the body. And the more strongly it clings to the body, the more stress, the more misery the mind will have. Once you know the truth that you are not the body, that you are just the mind, you can exist and be happy without the body.

So you want to train the mind to detach from the body, not to cling to the body. And this is what Buddhist meditation practice is about. It is to train the mind to let go of the body and everything else. And not just your own body, but other people's bodies as well, like the bodies of your loved ones, your parents, your sisters and brothers, your husband, your wife, your children. They are all temporary. Sooner or later they will leave you, or you will leave them. But this is okay, there is nothing wrong with the body. This is just how the body works. But the mind of each individual, like your father, your mother, your sister, your brother, your husband, your wife, your children, their minds don't die with their bodies.

So if I should find an analogy, the body is like a puppet, the mind is like the puppeteer (puppet master). The mind is the one who directs the body to do all kinds of activities. Like tonight, before you could go to Wat Palelai, the mind had to instruct the body first, that tonight you were going to Wat Palelai, and then you directed the body to take the mind to Wat Palelai. If the mind hadn't instructed the body to go to Wat Palelai, then you wouldn't have been there tonight. So this is the relationship between the body and the mind. The body is temporary. The mind is permanent. So what you want to do is take care of your mind, teach your mind the truth, and train your mind to let go of everything. Because once you are capable of letting them go, you will not be sad when you lose them.

So sitting in meditation is one way of letting go. When you sit in meditation, concentrate your mind on one object such as a mantra. In Thailand we use the recitation of the Buddha's name: *Buddho, Buddho, Buddho*. This will prevent your mind from thinking about this and that. And when you don't think, your mind becomes blank, and eventually becomes still. When your mind becomes still, the mind temporarily lets go of everything. It lets go of the body and everything else because it has no thoughts about them. This is a temporary detachment because you can only stay in this state of peace of mind temporarily. When you meditate, your mind may stay in absorption, for maybe 20 minutes, 30 minutes or more, depending on your ability. But shorter or longer, sooner or later, you will have to come out of your concentration and return to the body. When you return to the body, then you will start to cling to the body again.

When you sit in meditation, your mind becomes still; it stops thinking temporarily. You stop being aware of the existence of the body. So you are temporarily detached from the body. But when you withdraw from this meditation session, and you come back to awareness of the body, you will start thinking again. And the delusion will start to direct you to cling to things again, to cling to your own body, and to the bodies of other people. So what you have to do after you come out of meditation is to instruct your mind

to know that everything that you have, every person that you know, they are all temporary. Sooner or later you and everybody else have to depart from this world because everything is *aniccaṃ*, *dukkhaṃ*, and *anattā*. *Aniccaṃ* means temporary, impermanent. *Dukkhaṃ* means suffering/stressful. *Anattā* means you cannot control them, you cannot own them. This is how you have to instruct your mind when you are not in meditation. And you have to instruct your mind to detach from everything—not just your body, but your work, and everything that you have—because if you cling to them, you will be affected, you will want them to be with you all the time. But when they leave you, you will become stressful. So you have to meditate a lot. When you sit in meditation, you will have something better than what you have now. The happiness that you achieve from your meditation will give you strength and the capability to let go of everything.

So once you have this kind of happiness (happiness from meditation), then you can let go of everything. The reason why you still cling to things and people is because you need them to make you happy. But once you have this happiness from meditation, then you don't need things and people anymore, you don't need anything anymore, and you can be happy not having to have anything. All you have to do is know how to calm your mind, make your mind peaceful, and make your mind stop creating

desire from thinking. That is all you have to do. Once you have this ability, then you can live alone. You can become a monk. That is what monks do. We don't rely on things or people; we rely on the happiness that we create from our meditation practices.

You can do the same. What you need is time, because in order to achieve results, you have to practice a lot—practically all day, from the time you get up, to the time you go to sleep. Monks can do this because monks don't have other occupations. Monks have no other work to do, so they can concentrate on their practice. When they are not sitting, they develop mindfulness by concentrating the mind on one object, either a mantra, or focusing attention on the body. Watch your body movement from the time you wake up to the time you go to sleep. Couple the mind with the body. Don't let the mind wander here and there. If you can maintain this level of concentration, when you sit in meditation, you can focus on your breathing and your attention will be continuous. It won't take long—maybe five to ten minutes and your mind can become still—and then you will have the kind of happiness that the Buddha said is the profound blissful happiness.

This kind of happiness exceeds all other kinds of happiness. Once you have this happiness, then you know that you can live alone, you don't need anything. You don't need anybody. So when you come out of meditation and your mind starts to desire things or

people, tell your mind that what the mind desires is in fact suffering and not happiness. This is because the things that the mind desires can only be possessed temporarily, not forever. When things that you possess leave you or you lose them, you become sad again. So you don't need these things. You can always go back to your meditation and have the happiness within yourself.

So this is what you have to do when you are not in sitting meditation. When you are not developing mindfulness, you should develop insight/wisdom, which means you have to look at everything as *aniccam, dukkham, anattā*. If you see things as *aniccam, dukkham, anattā*, you will stop your desires. You should tell yourself *I don't need it; I can be happy without it. Why should I get something that lasts temporarily which I will have to lose sooner or later, and then when I lose it, I will be unhappy?* This is what you should try to teach your mind. When the mind has desire for this or that thing, this or that person, especially when the mind still has sexual desire, you want to have a boyfriend or a girlfriend, or a husband or wife. That is because when you are alone, you feel lonely. You feel that if you have a friend, you can share happiness by having a sexual encounter. If you still have this feeling, then you should develop *asubha kammaṭṭhāna*. It is the contemplation on the repulsive aspects of the body. You are attracted to the body because you see

the beautiful part of the body. But if you look at the repulsive part, then you can eliminate your sexual desire. So this is another kind of insight/wisdom that you have to develop if you have problems with sexual desire.

This is basically what you want to do if you want to have peace of mind all the time without having any stress, any anxiety, worry, or fear. The mind has wisdom to instruct itself not to have attachment to anything. We can still have things. We can still have people, know people, but so long as you are not attached, your mind will not be affected when something happens to them. If your mind becomes anxious and worried, that means you already have attachment, you have attachment to them to be like this or like that. And when you feel that your desires cannot be fulfilled, you become agitated and unhappy. But the truth is we cannot control them, we cannot tell them to be like this or like that. So if you don't want to be unhappy or stressful, you should just let them be, let them go, and not try to manage them.

This is the goal of Buddhist meditation: to release the mind from all kinds of stress, anxiety, unhappiness and sadness. You can do it, but you have to put in time. It is like playing a sport such as golf; in order to be a good golfer, you have to put in a lot of time and practice a lot. If you only do it once in a while, then you will not be able to enter professional competitions. If you want to be a professional golfer,

then you have to dedicate all your time to practice. It is the same way if you want to have complete elimination of stress from the mind: you will have to practice all the time. And the best way to have the time to practice all the time is to ordain as a monk or as a mae chee, in Thai for ordained women. Then you don't have to worry about working and earning money because you will be supported by the Buddhist community and provided with a location or a space that is conducive to meditation practice. In order to achieve easy and quick results, you have to live in a quiet environment, away from all the sights and sounds, the hassle and bustle of things and people. It is like living in the forest. The forest is where the Buddha achieved his enlightenment, and that is why the Buddha teaches all meditators to seek this kind of place if they want to achieve results. So this is basically what I want to relate to you tonight and end here so I can give time for you to ask me any questions.

Questions & Answers

November 4, 2014



Question 1: Lately after meditating, I find that my head is too heavy or pressurized. I have someone saying that I am over-concentrating. So can Phra Ajahn give some pointers in terms of technique to apply to relieve this pressure from the head?

Tan Ajahn: First, you have to seek the middle way. Even though you have to put in the effort, you should not expect too much. You have to find the balance between exerting enough and not exerting too much. The problem is that when you sit, you expect either very quick or very powerful results. Don't worry about the results when you sit. Just try to concentrate on the meditation object and let the results happen by themselves. If they happen, fine; if they don't, it doesn't matter. Just develop mindfulness. Just be mindful of your meditation object; for example, if you are mindful of your breathing, just keep watching. When you are

breathing in, be aware that you are breathing in. When you are breathing out, be aware that you are breathing out. Just know. Don't try to force your breathing. Use the breathing as an anchor, to tie your mind, to prevent it from thinking about this and that.

And whether you have results or not depends on your focus and concentration. The problem with people is that when they have to sit still, they tend to react, and they don't like to be still. They are used to doing all sorts of activities, and when they have to sit still, they become stressed. So maybe this is one of the reasons for your problem with your body when you sit in meditation. But you don't have to worry; it is not a big deal. Just acknowledge it and come back to your meditation, come back to your concentration, come back to your focusing or meditation object. If you don't think about them and don't worry about them, then you will not get distracted. Once you get distracted, you cannot go on. So forget about everything that might appear at the time of your meditation, only pay attention to your meditation object. If you use breathing, just focus on your breathing, and ignore everything. Sometimes you might feel an itch here and there, and sometimes you might feel you are leaning too much to the front or to the back, to the left or to the right. Don't worry, don't adjust your body posture. Leave it alone, keep on focusing and concentrating on your meditation because these are the distractions that you have to

face in your meditation practice. And if you pay any attention to them, you will lose your concentration and will not be meditating anymore. So keep on focusing/concentrating on your meditation object only, regardless of whatever you feel. If you feel itchy, forget about it; don't try to scratch because if you scratch, you will keep on scratching. Just keep on meditating.

Maybe when you first start, you might not see much progress, but the result that you have already achieved is that you are able to sit for a while, to be able to sit still and meditate. You have already achieved something by doing this, and you have to do more and more, especially the development of mindfulness. Before you come to sit in meditation, you first must have mindfulness if you want to have any result. If you don't develop or maintain mindfulness before you come to sit, when you sit, your mind will be wandering here and there. Your mind will be thinking about this and that. And you will find it very hard to focus on your meditation object.

So first of all you must try to develop mindfulness in your daily activities from the time you get up. When you start to get up, you must start your mindfulness first. You should ask your mind: *where am I? Am I with the body? Or am I with the mantra? Or am I thinking about this or that?* If the mind is thinking about this or that, bring it back. You can think,

of course, if it is something important. Like you might have to plan what you are going to do today. But once you know what you are going to do, you should then come back to the present, back to the body or back to your mantra, and continue with the daily activities mindfully: going to the bathroom, washing your face, and brushing your teeth. Whatever you do, just be with that activity. This is what is meant by maintaining mindfulness or developing mindfulness. Once you have the mind concentrated or fixed on the body activity, when you sit down, you can use the mantra or you can use the breath as your meditation object, and your mind will not wander here and there, thinking about this or that. And you can get the mind to become still very easily and very quickly.

Question 2: Can you share with us the meditation method taught by Luangta Mahā Boowa?

Tan Ajahn: Luangta Mahā Boowa taught the recitation of the Buddha's name, *Buddho, Buddho*. That is what he used when he developed his meditation. But he did not stop people from using other meditation objects, such as *ānāpānasati*. Sometimes he also instructed other people to use *ānāpānasati*, meaning mindfulness of breathing. And he also taught people to be mindful of their bodily activity. Whatever the body is doing, the mind should be watching at all times because this is a way of maintaining mindfulness. But when you sit,

you can choose any meditation objects. You can use a mantra. You can use the breathing. Or, if you cannot concentrate on your mantra or on your breathing, you can even chant or recite the *Sutta* in English or in *Pāli*, it doesn't matter. This will let your mind have something to do and stop it from thinking about this or that. And after you chant or recite for maybe half an hour or an hour, you feel tired, and then you are ready to focus on your breathing. Because when you feel tired, that means you don't want to think anymore.

So you have to adjust your meditation method according to your situation. Sometimes your mind is restless; sometimes you might even have to use *paññā* or wisdom to calm your mind. For instance, when you try to sit and meditate and then find yourself worrying about your job, friends, or family, then you have to use *paññā* or insight to look at those things that are bothering you. You have to look at them as *aniccam*, *dukkham*, *anattā*, meaning you cannot always have them be the way you want them to be. So if you cannot, then you have to let go. Maybe a friend is sick and may die. There is nothing you can do. You have sent your friend to the hospital to receive the best care by the physician, but you are still anxious, you still worry, because you want him to be well. Your desire to want him to be well is the cause of your stress, your restlessness, your worries, and your anxiety. So if you look at him as *aniccam*,

dukkham, and *anattā*, that sooner or later he will have to die, it will become clear that he is *anattā*: beyond your control. You are sitting here meditating, you cannot do anything, you cannot change anything. Once you see this clearly, your mind will let go, and then your mind will become calm and peaceful and be ready to meditate. So these are some of the things you might have to do.

Question 3: When we meditate to improve our well-being, is there any higher purpose to the meditation? If there is, what is it?

Tan Ajahn: The well-being that you are referring to is the well-being of the body and the well-being of the mind. Well-being of the body is, like I said, temporary, it is not permanent. What you want to have is well-being of the mind. The mind that is always peaceful and happy, having no stress, realizing the cessation of all forms of stress or suffering and the end of all rebirths. This is the goal of Buddhist meditation. Because if you still have to be reborn, then you still have to get old, get sick and die. So the Buddha said the goal is not to be reborn. In order not to be reborn, you have to eliminate all forms of desire. The Buddha mentioned three forms of desire that are the cause of your rebirth. *Kāma-taṇhā* means the desire for sensual pleasure, *bhava-taṇhā* means the desire to become this or that, and *vibhava-taṇhā* means the desire not to become this or that.

So these are the three desires that you have to eliminate and you can do this with *samatha-bhāvanā* and *vipassanā-bhāvanā*, or in other words, *samādhi* and *paññā* that you are doing right now. Right now you are developing *paññā*. *Paññā* can arise from listening to Dhamma talks. When you listen to Dhamma talks, you get to know the way to eliminate your desire. The next step is to remind yourself of what you have heard. That is because if you don't remind yourself by contemplating what you have heard tonight, you will forget. Keep on repeating, reminding yourself what you have heard tonight, what you have understood, and then try to apply this knowledge that you have learned to your life.

When you become attached to something or someone, then you must use this knowledge to detach your mind from them. If you can detach your mind, then you don't have any desire for them to be this or that because you know eventually they will be whatever they will be. If the body has to get old, get sick, or die, regardless of whatever you do, you cannot stop this process. So this is *paññā*. We call them the three levels of *paññā*. The first level is the *paññā* that arises from listening to the Dhamma talk; in *Pāli* we call it *suttamaya-paññā*. Then you take this knowledge that you have heard from the Dhamma talk and repeat it in your mind, contemplating again and again, this is call *cintamaya-paññā*. Like tonight you have heard that you have to let go of everything because everything is *aniccam*, *dukkham*, *anattā*.

If you take this knowledge and try to contemplate it in your daily life, whatever you do, try to keep in mind that everything is *aniccam*, *dukkham*, *anattā*. You must not have any attachment to them. You must not have any desire for them to be this or that. If you can remind yourself of this all the time, when you have to interact with them, you will interact with them in a way that will not cause any stress.

Question 4: Does the desire to achieve concentration result in blocking the relaxation of the body and mind?

Tan Ajahn: When you meditate, don't have any desire. The only desire you should have is to focus on your meditation object. Don't have the desire to get results, because this will make you worried or anxious. You are sitting here for a few minutes and then you start worrying *When will I get calm?* Or *When will I get the result?* When you start thinking like this, you are not meditating anymore. So forget about the result. What you have to do is just maintain mindfulness, focusing your mind on one meditation object, and then this meditation object will lead you to the result eventually.

Question 5: After prolonged meditation, with mindfulness of the breath, I get a very strong nauseous feeling, which persists for a number of hours or a few days, during which eating has to be forced. So how do I manage this?

Tan Ajahn: When you go to the movies, do you experience this?

Lay: No, Tan Ajahn. Only after meditation, but going to the movies, I'm ok.

Tan Ajahn: So it is your defilement. It is your desire or your *kilesa* reacting. It wants to prevent you from meditating, so it creates this obstacle. You should ignore it because other people don't have this kind of experience.

Question 6: Does Tan Ajahn have any message for us?

Tan Ajahn: Just keep on practicing. The practice will give you the result; giving up will never give you the result. You have to be patient and avoid the trap of expecting this to happen overnight. Many monks have to spend many years before they can become enlightened. Ajahn Mun became enlightened when he was over 60 years old, when he went to stay alone in the forest of Chiang Mai. So this is not something that will come easily. But it will come if you are steadfast with your practice. So just keep on practicing. It is like eating, if you only eat one or two spoonfuls of food and then stop, you will never be full. But if you keep on eating, eventually you will become full. It is the same way with the practice. You should just keep on practicing, putting in as much time as possible. Because if you practice one hour a day, it is very little,

compared to the time that you spend doing other things during the day. So you have to put in more time. That is all the advice I have for today.

End of *Desanā* and Q&A

Sādhu Sādhu Sādhu.



02

Dhamma Talk

November 11, 2014

Like I said during last week's talk, when we are listening to the Dhamma talk, we should concentrate on just listening. Don't pay attention to any other thing, don't do anything, don't talk, and don't think about other things. Just focus your attention on the Dhamma talk that you are listening to. If you can do this, you will absorb the Dhamma into your heart. From listening to the Dhamma talk, you can achieve two different goals. One, if you cannot understand what you are listening to, but you concentrate on listening to the voice of Dhamma, the voice of Dhamma can calm your mind and make your mind calm and peaceful. Two, if you can understand the Dhamma talk, the reason, the cause and effect, then you can gain *paññā* (insight or knowledge).

The knowledge in Buddhism consists of three levels. The first level is called *suttamayapaññā*, knowledge that you learn from listening to a

Dhamma talk. The second level of knowledge is called *cintamayapaññā*, the knowledge that you acquire by contemplating or thinking about Dhamma. The third level of knowledge is called *bhāvanāmayapaññā*, meaning the knowledge that you apply in eliminating your mental suffering, your stress, anxiety and worry. The knowledge that you acquire from listening is not strong enough yet to eliminate the stress and the suffering in your heart. From what you have learned and what you have heard, the next step is to contemplate them so it stays with you in the mind. Once it stays with you in the mind, when you want to apply it to eliminate your suffering, you can readily do it.

What we have to contemplate all the time is the impermanent nature of things. Things are not permanent. They don't last forever. Sooner or later they will leave you or you will leave them. There will be separation from things and from people that you love. If you are not ready, if you have not prepared yourself for this, when it happens, it can cause sadness, sorrow and lamentation in your heart. But if you are constantly observing your mind, reminding yourself that you live in an impermanent world, in which there will be separation, if you just keep on reminding the mind of this, then you will not forget. You will then prepare the mind for the separation. When the separation happens, the mind will not be affected. Instead, it will just be calm and peaceful, acknowledging the truth that sooner or later we will all have to go our different ways.

We can see this in the life cycle. The mind and the body come together at the time of conception and stay together in the womb of the mother. When the body and the mind leave the womb, the mind is the master, the body is the servant. The mind directs and tells the body what to do, like tonight your mind told your body to go to Wat Palelai. If you didn't tell the body to go there, your body would not be there. If you told the body to go to your friend's house instead, then the body would be at your friend's house, and not at Wat Palelai. So the mind is the master, the one who controls the body. But it can control the body only to a certain extent. There are things in the body that the mind cannot control, that is, the process of aging, sickness and death. These are beyond the ability of the mind to control. If the mind clings to the body and has desire for the body to last forever, to not get old, to not get sick or die, then when the body gets old, gets sick, or dies, the mind will be unhappy.

Some people with terminal cancer may be told that they only have three months to live. Their mind may have already lost the appetite to live when in fact the body can still last for three months. And there are a lot of things you can do in these three months. But when people don't have the Dhamma, they don't know how to cope with this situation. All they do is to look for ways to cure the cancer. And if they could, they would end their lives because they don't want to go through the physical pain. But if you have

studied the Dhamma, and learned how to cope with the aging, sickness, and death of the body, you will not be affected by what is happening to the body. So this is what we come to do: train the mind to cope with the eventuality of the body, that one day the body will have to get old, one day the body will have to get sick and it will be painful. But the mind can rise above, can transcend this sickness and physical pain if the mind knows how to stay calm.

This is where meditation comes into play. We sit in meditation in order to calm our mind. We are learning to calm our mind, so in time of stress, in time of physical sickness we can calm the mind. And if the mind is calm, the mind can still be happy and blissful without having to worry about the physical pain. The physical pain will not be strong enough to disturb the happiness that the mind has acquired from being calm. So this is very important, because we all have to go through the process of separation, losing things that we love, losing people that we love, and even having to lose our body finally. But now we will be able to do it peacefully and happily. This is how the Buddha and all the Noble Disciples dealt with their passing away. Their minds were not affected by the passing away of their bodies, or by the pain that arose during sickness, or the difficulties they had to go through during old age. These things will be considered minor issues to the mind if the mind is peaceful and calm.

But if we don't know how to calm the mind, the delusion will tell the mind to reject the sickness and the pain that arise in the body. When the mind does that, it will create more stress and more suffering. So we need to develop calm, and once we have developed calm, the next thing is to know how to keep it calm during the time of stress. During the time of stress when we cannot enter into *samādhi*, into full concentration, we have to use *vipassanā* or *paññā*, which means the knowledge that we use to instruct the mind to stay calm. The knowledge that will keep the mind calm is the fact that everything is impermanent, everything is beyond our control. We cannot do anything when things unfold beyond our control. All we can do is remain calm. And the way to be calm is to not to have any desire for the things you cannot control. You have to let go. If you cannot fix the body, if you cannot cure the body, you just have to let the body be. If you let it be, your mind will have no stress. Your mind will remain calm and peaceful.

So this is the practice of meditation that we try to develop, in order to be able to control the mind. We cannot control everything, but we can control the mind. The mind can be in our control if we have mindfulness (*sati*), *samādhi* (calm), *paññā* (knowledge/insight). These are the three Dhamma necessary to keep the mind peaceful, calm, and happy at all times—regardless of what may happen. You might lose your loved ones, you might lose your job,

you might lose whatever you have, and you might lose your body. But the mind that is trained to face these situations will remain peaceful, calm, blissful and happy. So this is what we come here tonight for, to learn how to keep the mind calm. And the tool that will make the mind calm is called *sati* or mindfulness.

Mindfulness is something that you have to first develop before you can calm your mind. If you have no mindfulness or little mindfulness, when you sit in meditation, you cannot focus on your meditation subject. You might be able to focus briefly, then your mind will dash out to think about this and that. If you just let the mind think about this and that, then your mind will never be peaceful. You can sit for maybe ten or fifteen minutes, and then you will feel the desire to get up, because you cannot control your thoughts about getting up and doing something else. But if you have strong mindfulness, you can focus your mind on your meditation subject, be it a mantra like recitation of the Buddha's name, *Buddho, Buddho*, or watching your breath. If you can focus or concentrate on either of these two subjects continuously, then your mind will gradually converge to become one, to become peaceful and calm. When the mind remains at peace, then you don't need to maintain your meditation subject anymore because the mind has already stopped thinking. So this is what you want to achieve from your meditation. But before you can achieve this, you must try to develop mindfulness, before you sit down and meditate.

You can develop mindfulness all day long, all the time when you are awake. From the time you open your eyes, you should start your mindfulness. Some choose to repeat a mantra. If you use a mantra, then start your mind with *Buddho, Buddho*. Don't allow your mind to think about this and that, unless you have to think of something that you have to do for the day, like planning your activities for the day. You can then stop your mantra temporarily and think about what you have to do. Once you have done that, then you should stop thinking and come back to your mantra, come back to your *Buddho*, your mental recitation. Just recite *Buddho, Buddho*, mentally. While you are getting up, going to the bathroom to wash up, getting dressed, and going out to work, be mindful by repeating *Buddho* all the time so that you don't have to think. If you do think, it will be very brief, like when putting on your shirt or clothes, you can use *Buddho* until the time you have to focus on your work. Then after you finish doing whatever you have to do, you just go back to your mantra, your mental recitation. Keep reciting *Buddho, Buddho*.

If you can maintain this level of mindfulness when you sit in meditation and focus on your meditation subject, you can continue with the mantra, if you like. If you want to use your breath as your meditation subject, you can also do that. Either one will do. If your mindfulness is strong, your mind will not wander to other things; it will stay with your mantra or with your breath. And

your mind will gradually become calmer and calmer and eventually stop thinking. Sometimes it can even separate from the body. The body will disappear from the awareness. All you have is the knowing, the knower. But there is nothing to know except emptiness and peace and the neutrality of mind. There is no emotion. The mind is completely neutral with no likes or dislikes. This is the result that you will get from sitting using mindfulness to keep your mind focused on your meditation subject.

Once the mind becomes peaceful and rested, let it rest for as long as possible, and don't do anything with the mind except maintain your mindfulness, your awareness of the state of mind at that time. If you should see or hear things in your meditation, don't pay attention to them; keep paying attention to your meditation subject. If you don't, you can be misled. What you see or what you hear, although it might be interesting or wonderful, is not beneficial to the mind because it will agitate the mind with desire and discontent. So you must try to make the mind ignore whatever might come up during meditation. You should just keep on focusing on your meditation subject until the mind finally converges to become one, to become the knower, to be peaceful and calm and have nothing to experience, nothing to see or nothing to hear. Then you should let the mind remain in that state for as long as possible because it will give your mind the strength to resist your desire when you come out of your meditation. The longer

you stay in that state of peace of mind, the stronger will be your resistance to your desire.

This is the prerequisite to the development of *vipassanā-bhāvanā* (insight meditation). You do insight meditation after you come out of your *samādhi*, your state of calm, noticing that your mind withdraws from the state of calm and starts to receive knowledge that comes through your senses, like your eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body. When you see things, when you hear things, your mind will start to have desire: either desire to have them, or desire to get rid of them. When this happens, you must use *vipassanā* knowledge. The knowledge that the Buddha teaches us develops the ability to leave everything alone, because these things are harmful to the mind. Whether you like or dislike things, you have to leave them alone and not have any desire for them. If you have desire for the things you like, you will chase after them. When you get them, they will only give you temporary happiness and then will disappear, and you have to chase after more things to make you happy. It is better not to go after things, it is better just to remain peaceful and calm, because you can always have this peace and calm and the happiness associated with it.

So this is what *vipassanā* is about. It is about teaching your mind not to seek happiness with things and people or what you see, hear, feel, touch, smell, and taste. They create temporary happiness that

can make you miserable when you cannot get what you want. So this is what you have to keep telling your mind: everything that the mind thinks is good is actually not good because everything is *aniccam*, impermanent, temporary. All things are *anattā*, beyond your control. Sometimes you get them, sometimes you don't get them. When you get them you are happy, when you don't get them you become sad. So it is better not to want them at all. It is better to just have the happiness that arises from peace of mind.

So this is what you have to do when you come out of your meditation. When you notice the desire to drink something that you don't really need, don't drink it. If you want to drink to sustain the body, just drink plain water. Don't drink beverages with sweet or sour flavours because this is a kind of desire that can get you hooked on them. Once you are hooked, you have to keep on drinking them, and when you cannot drink them, you become unhappy. This is the work of *vipassanā*, to teach the mind not to rely on anything for happiness. Rely only on peace of mind for happiness. Come back to meditate more, or come back to your meditation subject, like the mantra, *Buddho, Buddho*. Every time you want something that you don't have to have, just repeat *Buddho, Buddho, Buddho*. After a while you will forget what you want to have, and in this way you will be able to eliminate all your desire. When there are no desires in your

mind, your mind will be pure. Your mind will always be peaceful and happy. Because the mind doesn't have to rely on anything to make it happy, it can be happy on its own. It doesn't need anything—even the body. Should the body die, the mind will not be affected by the dissolution of the body because the mind is content and happy. It is peaceful and calm. So this is what your goal is: to make your mind calm, peaceful, and happy by letting go of your desire and attachment to things and people. Try to meditate more and more, as much as possible.

When you have experienced some of the results from your meditation, you will get strong encouragement to practice more, and the more you practice, the more results you will have. Then eventually you will want to practice all the time because there is nothing in this world that is as good as the happiness that arises from your meditation. But when you first start on this journey, you have to have faith in the Buddha that this is the right path for you: the path to the end of suffering, the path to real and eternal happiness, because the mind is eternal. The mind doesn't die with the body. And the happiness that the mind can create by being calm will stay with the mind forever.

This is the faith that you have to have in the Buddha, and in the Noble Disciples. Believe that before they became the Noble Disciples, they were just like us—full of desires and suffering. But after having heard of the Dhamma teachings, they followed

the teachings wholeheartedly and completely, putting their total effort into the practice. And after practicing, they eventually became the Noble Disciples. Then they helped the Buddha spread the Teachings further. They are the people that you can trust, the Buddha and the Noble Disciples. Any time you have any doubt, go to the teaching; study their biographies, how they lived, how they struggled with their problems, how they resolved their problems. Use their ways, their examples.

Every time you feel discouraged, when you think of the Buddha and the Noble Disciples or think of the Buddha's teachings, you will become encouraged again. Every time you listen to Dhamma talks or read Dhamma books, you will be energized to practice more. So it is important that you keep studying the Dhamma teaching on a regular basis, listening to Dhamma talks or reading Dhamma books, especially the books written by the Noble Disciples or books about what the Buddha himself taught. If you read books that are written by other people who haven't become enlightened yet, they can mislead you because they themselves don't know the real truth yet.

So you have to be discriminating when you study the Dhamma teaching. Make sure you get teachings from the original source, from the enlightened ones themselves. Like all the *Suttas*, the Discourses, they are the words of the Buddha that you can trust and

follow. You have to keep studying because you can forget if you only study once in a while. And then you can misinterpret the teaching. But if you keep studying the teaching as well as practicing, these things have to go together. You don't study first then practice separately, but you have to do both. You study, you listen to Dhamma talks, then you apply it in your practice. Then after a while you come back to listen to more Dhamma talks and then you will gain more knowledge. You will understand more deeply the different ways of practicing. And if you have questions you should seek the advice from those who have experience. If you seek advice from people who don't have the experience, they can mislead you, because they themselves don't know the answer, but they themselves don't want to say no, that they don't know. So they might tell you something that they think might solve your problem. But this is not good enough. You should ask those who know, who have the experience. They can tell you the correct answer, the correct way of overcoming your problem.

So I think for tonight, I have spoken quite enough, and I will let you ask questions.

Questions & Answers

November 11, 2014



Question 1: Is it possible to reach the higher stages of Noble Attainments by keeping only the five precepts?

Tan Ajahn: The five precepts are not enough to realize any result from your meditation. You need at least the eight precepts. This is because the five precepts cannot get rid of your hindrances, such as the *kāma-chanda*, your sensual desire to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch. But when you take up the eight precepts, they will tell you to stop this desire. When you have the desire to sleep with your husband or your wife, if you take the eight precepts, you cannot do it. Then you have the time to meditate. If you take the five precepts, you are allowed to sleep with your spouse, but you will lose precious time, and you will not have time to meditate. And after your sexual activity you are too tired, you want to go to sleep instead. So if you want to have the time to

meditate, then you should keep the eight precepts. Besides the desire to sleep with your spouse, you will also have the desire to watch movies, seek entertainment, go to parties, or go out to meet friends—to do all sorts of activities. Rather, you should eliminate all the activities that will take your precious time away. You want to have all the time for your meditation.

This is for people who really want to practice. Some people who observe the eight precepts usually do it on the holy day, once a week. The Buddha said that Buddhists should stop working, should stop seeking happiness through their bodies, and come find happiness through their minds by keeping the eight precepts and staying in the temple, especially one that is quiet and peaceful. There shouldn't be any group activities. If you want to meditate, you should seek seclusion because then it will be easier for you to develop mindfulness, and you can take your time either to walk or sit. But if you have group meditation with group activities, then this will interrupt your individual practice. So if you want to advance quickly, it is better to practice individually.

But when you first start, you might need to start with group meditation like you are doing tonight. That is because if you are alone, you don't have the willpower to force yourself to meditate, so you have to drive half an hour to the temple in order to meditate. But once you know how to meditate, you can meditate

at home; just go into a room where you can be by yourself and meditate. You don't have to drive all the way to the temple. But going to the temple may be good if you want to listen to a Dhamma talk. Or if you cannot force yourself to sit alone yet, you might need your peers or your friends to accompany you, to give you the willpower to sit. But once you can sit alone, it is better to be alone because you need a quiet surrounding. When you sit with other people, some people might cough, some people might move and this can affect your concentration. But when you are alone, then you can be free from all these distractions, and by maintaining mindfulness continuously you can achieve results very quickly.

So, to answer the question whether you need to have the eight precepts, yes, you have to. You might ask why some lay people in the past could achieve the highest level of enlightenment without having to become a monk. That is because these people have already developed a strong mind, a strong base of their mind. They have *samādhi*, a calm mind, and they already have kept the eight precepts or they have ordained as a monk in their past lives. So they already have it, even though they don't show it in this life. They still have that in their minds. So when they listened to the Buddha's teachings, they could understand and do exactly what the Buddha told them to do. So these are exceptions. For most people, they have to go from the five precepts to the eight precepts, then to ordain to become a monk or

a *bhikkhunī*. You need to be alone and have 24 hours of your time meditating to achieve the results. The Buddha said if you can do this, you can achieve this in seven days, if not seven days then seven months, if not seven months the maximum is seven years. But you have to be living like a monk, having no other activities except meditation and development of insight or *vipassanā-bhāvanā*.

Question 2: How much concentration is required for one to develop real insight in the practice and to attain at least Stream-Entry?

Tan Ajahn: Your mind has to enter the fourth *jhāna*, when it becomes totally detached from the body. And it can see that without the body, it can still be happy. Once it understands this truth, and when it comes out of this *jhāna*, this fourth level of *jhāna*, which we call *apanā-samādhi*, it can then instruct the mind to relinquish the body, to leave the body alone. Because it knows that it can be happy without the body. Should the body get old, leave it alone. Should the body get sick, leave it alone. Should the body be painful, leave it alone. The mind will have the mental strength to just be detached, to be aware of the physical pain but with no desire to have the pain removed. Because if you have the desire to have the pain removed, you are not leaving the body alone. You are not seeing that the body is not yourself; you are still mistakenly seeing that the body is yourself. It is just like when other people get sick, you leave

them alone right? You don't expect to go remove the pain from their bodies because you know you cannot do it. So too with your body, it is the same thing. You cannot remove the pain from the body, but you can live with the pain if you have a strong base of calm. If your mind has come out of the *fourth jhāna*, then you can have a strong mental equanimity (*upekkhā*), and remain neutral, peaceful, and calm. Leave the physical pain alone, or even at the time of death, just leave the body alone. Let it die. If you can do this, you can achieve the first level of Noble Attainments, the Stream-Enterer level (*Sotāpanna*). You have realized or understood that the body is not yourself, and you can leave the body alone. Your mind is not affected by whatever happens to your body. Your body will seem like it belongs to other people. You treat your body like you treat other people's bodies.

Question 3: Is *jhāna* a must in our meditation practice or is mindfulness practice enough to have insight to see the Dhamma?

Tan Ajahn: Not enough. You see the Dhamma, but you don't have the strength to let go of your attachments. It is only when you have *jhāna*, that you have let go of your attachment, but you only let go temporarily in your *samādhi*. After you come out of your *samādhi*, your attachment returns. That is where you use *vipassanā*. Use the knowledge that the body is not yourself, that the body is impermanent,

that if you cling to your body, your mind becomes painful and stressed. If you don't want this, then you have to let go of the body. If you have *jhāna*, you will have the strength to let go. If you don't have *jhāna*, you don't have the strength to let go.

Question 4: Is it a must to practice mindfulness in our daily life in order to help us to see insight/wisdom in the Dhamma?

Tan Ajahn: You need mindfulness to help you to meditate to enter into *jhāna* first because if you don't have *jhāna*, no matter how much you know about the Dhamma, your mind will not be able to go any further. Like now you have read so much about the Dhamma already. You know that the body doesn't belong to you, you know that the body will get old, get sick and die, but every time you think of it, your mind becomes unhappy, because your mind still clings to the body. But if you have *jhāna*, your mind will become detached. And when you come out of *jhāna*, you can direct your mind, telling it that clinging to the body is more painful than letting go. When you let go of the body, it is like entering into *jhāna*. When you cling to your body, it is like you are holding onto a hot, burning coal which is painful. You can see the difference if you have *jhāna*. If you don't have a calm mind, a peaceful mind or *jhāna* mind, you cannot see the difference between clinging and not clinging, between attachment and detachment.

Question 5: How do we know when our mind is calm enough to practice contemplation and how and what do I contemplate to develop wisdom?

Tan Ajahn: *Jhāna* is something that you will know right away when you have found it. It is something out of this world. It is something that you never have experienced before in your life. Sometimes when it happens, it feels like your mind just drops suddenly, like falling from a tall building, falling into a well, and becoming still, peaceful, and happy. For most people, the first time will be brief. It happens suddenly and then it is back to normal. But at least you could feel the happiness that you have experienced even though it was just for a moment or so. If you continue to meditate more and more—I mean, almost all day long, either sitting or walking—then when you sit, your mind will become peaceful and calm and can enter into *jhāna* for a longer duration. The longer the duration, the stronger the ability to detach, to let go. So this is what you have to develop first. Once you have this ability, when you think of the body as impermanent, as something that doesn't belong to you, your mind is at peace. But if you cling to the body, you will be clinging to a burning fire. When you see this, you will want to let go of the body. When you let go, you will return into *jhāna*, into peace, into happiness. So this is the level of *jhāna* that you have to develop.

Question 6: Mindfulness and thinking is not the same thing. Can Ajahn please elaborate on this?

Tan Ajahn: Mindfulness is to be aware of one object, like a mantra, *Buddho, Buddho*, or being mindful of the body activity from the time you get up. As soon as your body rises from your sleeping position, to sitting down, to standing up, to walking, your mindfulness has to be there right away. Just to know about the body activity only and not to think about other things. If you think about other things, then you are not mindful of your body anymore. Or you can be mindful of your mantra, by reciting *Buddho, Buddho, Buddho* during your activity. This is being mindful.

Thinking is simply the mind activity about what to do or where to go. Thinking can be good and it can also be bad. But for most people, we usually think about bad things, think about hurting ourselves. What I mean by hurting ourselves is thinking about greed, hatred and delusion. Normally this is how an unenlightened person's mind thinks. When he sees something, he wants to possess it, to cling to it. This is a bad thought. To think a good thought, when you see something you like, you should think, no – you should not have it, because it is impermanent, it can cause you suffering. Because you will be possessive, you will be attached, and when you lose that thing, you will become unhappy. So you have to train your mind to think in a different direction, not possessing

but letting go, giving up. But normally it is hard to do if your mind has no calm, no *jhāna*, because you have nothing to replace the happiness that you get from things. But when you have *jhāna*, when you have happiness inside your mind, then you can tell your mind not to get or possess this or that thing. You will have a way of making yourself happy without having to have those things.

Question 7: In order for one to gain any significant improvement in one's own meditation practice, generally how long (in terms of how many hours per session) or how frequent does the practitioner have to meditate. Is there any general guideline for this, Tan Ajahn?

Tan Ajahn: I think there is a saying that *practice makes perfect*. So the more you practice, the more you become perfect at it. So the Buddha said you have to strive. You have to have *virīya* or diligence in your practice. The more hours you put in, the better result you get eventually. It is like in sport. If you want to be a good athlete, you have to put in the practice, you have to train. If you are a runner, a marathon runner, you have to run every day. If you run once a month, you will not be able to run a marathon. This is the same thing. If you want to have strong mindfulness, you have to keep developing and maintaining mindfulness at all time. If you want to have *jhāna*, you have to sit and meditate many, many hours, until you eventually get the result. There is no other way.

Question 8: I have been meditating earnestly, but realized more thoughts are coming to my mind when I meditate. Is this the correct way?

Tan Ajahn: When you meditate and you have thoughts coming inside, that means you don't have strong mindfulness. You have to try to develop mindfulness.

Question 9: How much sleep typically should a yogi have?

Tan Ajahn: Normally the Buddha said four hours a night. This is what he teaches the monks, not the lay people. From six to ten, monks should meditate, either walking or sitting. And then from ten to two o'clock, the monk takes a rest, reclining on the right side of the body, sleeping in what is called the *Lion's posture*. Before going to sleep, he maintains mindfulness, reminding the mind that as soon as the body wakes up, he should get up and start practicing again. So you sleep until about two o'clock in the morning. From two o'clock you should start meditating by sitting and walking until dawn, until the time to go to *piṇḍapāta* (alms round), which is about six o'clock. So this is the normal length of time that the Buddha recommends for a monk to sleep. Some monks sleep even less. Some monks take the three postures, *dhutaṅga*, that is not to lie down, but just stand, sit or walk. And if he should fall asleep, he should be in either one of these three positions. By maintaining this kind of observance,

it will force the body to sleep very little, maybe one or two hours. You don't sleep for a long time. Then you have more time for your practice.

In order to be able to do this, you have to eat very little, because the more you eat the more you want to sleep, the less you eat the more alert you become. Some people fast for three, five, or seven days; then their minds become very alert, and they don't need to sleep a lot. But when you eat a lot, you become drowsy right away after you finish eating, and you don't want to do anything but seek the pillow.

Question 10: In the *Sutta*, it is written that one should seek seclusion by going into the forest to look for caves or sit under the trees, so I suppose that is for monastics or for the monks. For lay people, how should we apply this, maybe by staying or practicing alone at home, is it ok Ajahn?

Tan Ajahn: If you can have a room to yourself with an air-conditioner, shut the window, shut the door, turn on the air-conditioner, and put a sign outside, *do not disturb*. Turn off your phone, turn off everything that can disturb you, then it is like being in the forest.

Question 11: How can I practice for my long-term happiness?

Tan Ajahn: If you want to have long-term happiness, you have to have long-term practice.

Question 12: Around 7 or 8 years back, I remember that I was doing *dāna* offering with much joy, but now it seems that I have lost much of the joy in offering *dāna*. So how can I get back the same level of joy and enthusiasm?

Tan Ajahn: Giving *dāna* is the first step of having spiritual happiness, but the mind is like the body. When you were born you could be happy with just drinking milk, but as your body grew bigger, you found that drinking milk alone was not enough, so you had to have more, something heavier like rice, meat, and vegetables in order to make you feel full. That is the same way with Dhamma practice. When you first start, your mind is like an infant. When you give *dāna*, you feel very happy. But after a while your mind becomes accustomed to this happiness and it wants something stronger, something heavier, and something more. That's why you have to start keeping the five precepts. When you start keeping the five precepts, you feel happier, happier than giving *dāna*. After you have been keeping the five precepts for a while, you feel that you need something more, so you have to keep the eight precepts. After keeping the eight precepts, then you have to also practice meditation, because these two go hand in hand.

If you want to practice meditation, you should keep the eight precepts. When you keep the eight precepts and meditate, you will have more happiness, bigger happiness. And once you have developed

jhāna, you want more happiness than that, because *jhāna* can give you only temporary happiness. You are happy when you are in meditation in *jhāna*, but when you come out of your *jhāna*, your mind can start to think about and desire things, and it can make you lose that happiness. So if you want to have longer, lasting happiness, you have to use *vipassanā*, you have to use *paññā*, which is *aniccāṃ*, *dukkhaṃ* and *anattā*. You have to contemplate *aniccāṃ*, *dukkhaṃ* and *anattā* in everything that you see or are involved with. You have to teach your mind to let go, because these things don't belong to you. Sooner or later the original owners will come and take them away from you. Who are the original owners? They are the four elements: earth, water, fire and wind elements. These are the things that make up everything in this world, including the human body and the animal body. Eventually the human body will dissolve and return to the four elements. This is something you have to teach your mind, remind your mind, tell your mind to readily to give it up when the time comes. If you think like this, then the mind will not want to have anything because no matter how much you have, one day you will lose it all. So it is better to have something that you will not lose. That something is peace of mind—peace of mind that you can achieve by sitting in meditation and letting go of everything leading to the development of *vipassanā* or *paññā*.

Question 13: I heard that if a monk disrobes, it will create negative *kamma*. Is this true? And if it is true, how about temporary ordination?

Tan Ajahn: It is like resigning from your school. You study for two years and then you say you don't want to study anymore, so you drop out. You don't achieve what you should achieve. It is like walking backwards. That is all.

Question 14: Thailand has long been well known for being a Buddhist country. However, having traveled to many places in Thailand, I have seen weapons like knives or guns being sold in many places. On the same note, I have seen many Thais both in Thailand and also here in Singapore who were heavy drinkers. I have been to Laos but I didn't notice many Laotians drinking. Alcohol is consumed mostly by tourists. What is Ajahn's take on this?

Tan Ajahn: In Thailand, even though most people are considered Buddhists, they are not true Buddhists because they never study the teaching of the Buddha. The only things that are considered Buddhist are to pay respect to the Buddha and the monks and to give *dāna*. But they never keep the precepts. They never stay away from the vices, like drinking, gambling, going out at night, keeping bad company, or being lazy because they never go to the temple to listen to Dhamma talks. They are only Buddhist in the sense that this is what their

ancestors were. But they themselves are not really true Buddhists. They don't practice the complete teaching of the Buddha. They only practice very little. Giving *dāna*, they might only do it on special occasions, like on a birthday, on New Year's Day—something like that. And if they go to the temple, they might just drop a few coins into the donation box and then pay respect by offering incense and flowers to the Buddha image. Or sometimes if they have bad luck, they might go to the temple and ask for forgiveness. This is not the teaching of the Buddha.

This is like worshiping an idol, which is not the Buddha. The Buddha image is just to remind us of his teachings, that we should study his teachings, and then follow his teachings. But that is not the case for most Thai people. I think nowadays people in other countries know more about Buddhism than Thais do. There are many foreigners who come to Thailand to seek ordination and stay as monks. But for Thai people when they ordain, it is only as a ritual or as a duty. It is believed in Thailand that, if you become a monk, you have paid your dues to your father and your mother. That is all they do. Even if they ordain, they are only counting down the days to disrobe. So these people are not really considered to be true Buddhists. They don't keep the precepts on a regular basis. They don't practice meditation. They don't study the Dhamma. They don't listen to Dhamma talks. So this is what you get when you don't follow the Buddha's teachings.

Question 15: What is Ajahn's message to prepare us to meet Ajahn next week?

Tan Ajahn: To practice hard. To practice more. Because practice will give you results. But before you practice, you should study the teachings first, in order to know the proper way of practice. Once you know, then don't hesitate. Throw yourself into it. Concentrate all your effort, or as much as you can, because the result will only happen from your practice, not from your study. Studying Dhamma by itself is not enough to bring you the result. If it could, you should all be enlightened by now, because you have been listening to the Dhamma talk for almost an hour already. By listening to the Dhamma talk, you still cannot apply the Dhamma teachings, to let go of your defilements, your desires—your *kilesas*. So this is what you have to do, you have to build the strength of mind to apply the Buddha's teachings in giving up and letting go of everything. So please maintain mindfulness every day, right from the time you get up. And tell me next time, how long can you maintain mindfulness from the time you get up? Can you maintain mindfulness from the time you get up to the time you go to sleep? This is the homework for you.

End of *Desanā* and Q&A

Sādhu Sādhu Sādhu.



03

Dhamma Talk

November 18, 2014

Before you can practice effectively, you need to first study the teachings of the Buddha. If you haven't studied before, you might not understand the reasons behind the Buddha's teachings: what is the purpose of meditation, what is the goal of meditation. The Buddha's goal in teaching meditation was to use it as a tool to eliminate all the bad feelings that we have. Bad feelings can only be eliminated by the practice of Buddhist meditation. Nothing else in this world can eliminate your bad feelings. If there is anything else in this world that could have eliminated your bad feelings, you would have already eliminated them. But you still have bad feelings. That is because nothing in this world can cure or get rid of your bad feelings. You need the teachings of the Lord Buddha. The Buddha discovered the right way of eliminating your bad feelings. Once he had eliminated his bad feelings, then he taught other people how to do it. People who listened to and followed his instructions

were eventually able to eliminate their bad feelings. So too with all of you. If you follow his teachings, his instructions, you can also, one day, completely eliminate all your bad feelings.

The Buddha taught three steps towards the total elimination of bad feelings. The first step is called *dāna*, which means charity. The second step we call *sīla*, which means keeping the precepts or abstaining from hurting other people and animals, other living beings. The third step is what we call *bhāvanā*, which consists of two parts. The first part is *samatha-bhāvanā*, calming the mind by meditating, sitting, closing your eyes and concentrating on one object to stop your mind from thinking aimlessly. After you have calmed your mind, it becomes peaceful and is then ready to learn the truth that the Buddha discovered. Because if you know the truth that the Buddha knew, then you can eliminate all of your bad feelings. Your bad feelings arise because you don't know the truth. You see the truth not according to what the truth is, but according to what you think it is. And what you think it is, is delusional and not according to the truth. So you have to teach or reteach your mind the truth. This is the third step, the final step, before you will be able to eliminate completely all your bad feelings.

So these are the steps you have to go through. You cannot skip them because they are interdependent and support one another. Like the practice of *dāna*,

it supports the practice of maintaining the precepts, which in turn will support the practice of meditation. The first step of meditation is bringing your mind to peace and calm. After your mind has become peaceful and calm, then you can teach your mind the truth. And once the mind sees the truth, it will act appropriately. Right now the mind doesn't act the way it should be acting. It is not thinking the way it should be thinking. It is thinking contrary to the truth, working against the truth. When you do this, you will generate stress and bad feelings in yourself. So this is what you have to develop, from the first step to the second and on to the third and fourth steps. Some of these practices can be done at the same time, but with different levels of intensity.

When you first start, you might practice from the lowest level of intensity, such as when you give *dāna* or to charity, you might give a little bit at first, maybe one-tenth of your income, and then you can maintain your precepts about one-tenth, and you can meditate about one-tenth. But if you increase your practice of *dāna*, of charity, by giving more, then you will be able to maintain more of the precepts and you will be able to practice meditation more. So this is how things go. You have to first let go of your attachment to your possessions because the attachment to your possessions will prevent you from being able to keep the precepts. Sometimes when you want something badly, you are willing to do something bad, just to keep what you have. But if you are not attached to

your possessions, then you will be able to maintain and keep your precepts. So the first step is to try to let go of your possessions as much as possible. Let go of the things you love. Let go of attachment to the people you love. Because when you are attached to people or things that you love, you will want to do everything possible to keep them. But sometimes things may happen in a way that prevents you from keeping them. But you might still try to do it in the wrong way, like breaking the precepts, being dishonest, cheating, or hurting other people, for instance.

So charity is actually a means for you to let go. You should not have too many possessions because they cannot get rid of your bad feelings. The fewer things you have, the fewer bad feelings you will have. The more you have, the more bad feelings are generated. So the Buddha's teaching is living in a frugal and austere manner—just having enough to maintain life and no more. Anything more than that will be the cause of bad feelings and not good feelings because when you have things, you want them to be with you all the time and don't want to lose them. But like the nature of everything in this world, they are also not permanent. They are subject to change and dissolution. One day, sooner or later, you will lose everything that you have today. But if you are not attached to what you have, when you lose them, you won't have any bad feelings. But if you are

attached, when you lose them you will have strong negative feelings. So this is the first step to get rid of your bad feelings—letting go of possessions, people, and things that you have.

You have to remind yourself constantly that all the things that you have are your temporary possessions. It is so for anything that you have, even your body. One day you will lose your body. We all will lose our bodies. No one can stop it, because that is the truth. So if you can constantly remind yourself of this fact, it will help lessen the grip on your possessions, and lessen your desire for possessing more and more. But if you don't reflect on the cessation of the body, you will forget and be driven by your delusion, thinking that to have more will make you happier because you can do more. But whatever you do, it might give you some pleasure, give you some joy, but it is all temporary. It can never completely get rid of the bad feelings. If you have bad feelings, your possessions cannot stop your bad feelings from arising. So you must try to let go of your attachment to possessions, people, and things by being charitable. Keep only what you really need, and you will be a lot happier. You won't have to work so hard to get all these possessions. Once you have them, instead of them making you happy, they are making you unhappy because you worry whether you will be able to maintain and keep them forever. So this is what you should teach yourself every day.

The Buddha teaches us to contemplate the impermanent nature of things all the time. This will stop your desire to acquire more and more. Some people acquire a great deal of money, even though they could never spend it all, but they forget that they will lose it one day. They don't know that this money cannot cure or get rid of the bad feelings. The thing that will help you get rid of the bad feelings is to get rid of your possessions. Get rid of the attachment to people and things that you love. This process happens naturally when it is seen that bad feeling arises from attachment.

Once you give away your possessions and your wealth and you share them with other people, it will generate loving kindness and compassion in you. You will have love, kindness and compassion towards other people and things. When you have this, you don't want to hurt other people. You want to make people happy. You want to help people when they are in need. Doing this brings you happiness and a sense of joy and fulfillment, knowing that you have helped other people and made them happy by your sacrifice. You will have another kind of happiness, a kind of happiness that you won't get from acquiring things. It is a different kind of happiness, the kind that will keep your mind peaceful and prevent your mind from being greedy, possessive, and wanting even more. You will become content. You won't want to be rich, because being rich doesn't help you get rid of your bad feelings. So when you give to charity,

you have compassion and love for other people. Then you will be able to keep the precepts.

First is the five precepts. Once you can keep the five precepts, you can move up to the eight precepts because if you want to meditate, you need to keep the eight precepts. You can start by keeping the eight precepts on your day-off, the day that you don't have to go to work, combining this with your meditation practice. You should set a special day when you will not do other kinds of activities. You want to concentrate on the activity of the mind. You want to bring peace and happiness to your mind. You can do this if you stop other activities, such as those that are prohibited in the eight precepts, like killing, stealing and sexual activity. If you keep the eight precepts, you cannot have any sexual activity even with your own spouse. If you keep your five precepts, you can have sexual activity with your spouse. But if you have sexual activity, it will interfere with your meditation. It will take away your time to meditate. And you won't have the heart to meditate.

So if you want to develop peace of mind or happiness of mind, you have to give up your physical pleasure like sleeping with your spouse or your partner, just for one day, one night. You want to switch to a different kind of happiness by switching to a different kind of activity. This activity is called *bhāvanā* or meditation. If you can maintain the eight precepts, then you won't waste your time sleeping

with your spouse. You won't waste your time eating because you only eat until noon. You don't have to eat in the evening, or even at night before you go to bed, because your body has plenty of food already. What is really hungry is not the body, but usually it is the mind that is not calm. When your mind is not calm, there will be a lot of desires arising, wanting to see, to hear, to drink, to eat. So you want to calm your mind. Once you can calm your mind, then your desire for things in the sensual world will disappear. And you can be happy and comfortable doing nothing.

So you have to try to maintain the eight precepts. Fix a day for this. For Buddhists (in the Buddhist calendar), we count the start of the day from sunrise, about six o'clock and the end of the day by the next sunrise, completing 24 hours. This is the duration you want to devote to the development of peace of mind and happiness of heart. So on this day, you want to keep the eight precepts. You want to be isolated because when you meditate, it is very helpful to be alone. You don't have to worry about giving *dāna* on that day. You can do so on other days. So when you get up in the morning, before you start your practice, you might have to make your resolution first, *adhiṭṭhāna*. *Adhiṭṭhāna* in Buddhism doesn't mean prayer for something. It means to set up a goal, a purpose. For example, today you set up a purpose: *I will keep the eight precepts from 6:00 a.m. today to 6:00 a.m. tomorrow morning. I will try to develop*

mindfulness from the time I get up to the time I go to sleep. And when I don't have to do anything, if I can sit down, I will sit down and meditate, like what you are doing tonight. But what you want to do is more than half an hour. You have 24 hours. You might allocate four hours for your sleeping, so you have 20 hours to meditate, to develop mindfulness.

When you meditate, before you can meditate successfully, you first need to have mindfulness. Because mindfulness is the tool to stop your mind from thinking, to stop your mind from being restless and agitated. If you have mindfulness, you will be able to pull your mind into calm, to peace, to happiness. If you don't have mindfulness, your mind will keep on thinking endlessly and aimlessly. As long as your mind keeps thinking, you will not be able to experience peace of mind or calm. So from the time you get up, you should develop mindfulness. You can use anything as your object of mindfulness. You can use a mantra, or you can use your body, for instance. If you use a mantra, like *Buddho*, you just keep reciting *Buddho, Buddho, Buddho*. As you get up, as you go to the toilet, wash up, brush your teeth, get dressed, prepare to eat, while you eat—whatever activity you do, keep your focus on your object of mindfulness. If you use a mantra, just keep repeating your mantra, *Buddho, Buddho, Buddho* as you do your activity.

If you don't like to recite a mantra and you like to observe your body, just watch every action, every moment, from the time you get up, to sitting on the bed, and walking, step by step. Watch every step of your movement. Watch every activity that you do with your body. Don't let your mind stray to something else. If you can maintain this level of mindfulness, when you sit and meditate, you can concentrate on your meditation object and the mind will not wander. If you can focus and stay with your meditation object continuously, your mind can become calm very quickly. In maybe five to ten minutes, your mind can already be calm. But if you don't have any mindfulness, you will not be able to focus on your meditation object continuously. You might be able to watch your breath for a few second, then your mind may start to drift and think about this and think about that. It may take a while before you realize it. You start to watch your breath for a few more seconds, then you go off thinking again. So after 30 minutes, you don't see any result because your mind is not fixed on your meditation object. And your mind cannot be fixed, because your mind does not have mindfulness. So you must develop mindfulness first before you are able to meditate successfully.

So developing mindfulness is the most important thing in your meditation practice. But you need the support of your precepts. Your precepts act like a fence, preventing your mind from wandering from

your meditation activity. If you don't have precepts, you don't have a fence. Like if you want to keep pets or farm animals in place, you need a fence. If you don't have a fence, they will go wandering off everywhere. It is the same with your mind. If you don't have the fence, the precepts, then your mind will just go anywhere it wants and do anything it wants. And if it leads to breaking the precepts, this will then cause problems for the mind. It will bring bad feelings because when you do something bad, you feel bad. So you need the precepts. If you cannot keep the eight precepts, then try keeping the five precepts first.

If you cannot keep the five precepts, it means you don't have a charitable heart. You are still greedy. You still want more and more. You don't care if you hurt other people, because you never care for other people. But when you give to charity, if you practice *dāna*, it means you care for other people. You want to make other people happy and help other people, so you give away what you don't need. You only keep what you need, because you see that anything extra is useless and will never help in eliminating your bad feelings. On the contrary, it would actually create more bad feelings for you. So it is not useful if you have more than you need. Just keep what you need, and it is wise to keep some reserve for the future. Once you have enough, then you should share the rest with other people. Help those who are in need. Or give to those who have been kind and helpful

to you. You should be grateful. Being grateful is a quality of a good person. Not being grateful is a sign of a bad person. This kind of person only wants to take and never wants to give back. You will never have any friends if you behave like this. If you are grateful and are willing to give back, to share what you have with other people, you will have lots of friends. You won't have many enemies. You will feel good that way. So please try to share what you have.

Just think that on the day you die, these things (possessions) won't mean anything to you. They won't be useful at all. But if you share them today, it will lift your spirit, your mind, and your heart higher. You will become nobler because you sacrifice, give things away, and think of other people. When you do this, you will find it easy to keep the five precepts because once you are charitable at heart, you don't want to hurt other people. You don't want to kill. You don't want to steal other people's money. You don't want to commit adultery. You don't want to lie. And you don't want to drink alcohol because it will make you drunk and prevent you from being able to maintain good behaviour.

So this is the step you need to take. Do charity, practice *dāna* and then you will be able to keep the five precepts. Once you can keep the five precepts, on your day off from work and other activities, keep the eight precepts, using that day for meditation practice. Stay alone. Don't associate with anybody.

Don't give in to the desire to socialize because if you socialize, then you waste your time. And because you will have to talk and entertain others, you might not be able to maintain the eight precepts. The purpose of maintaining the eight precepts is to help you to be alone, to prevent you from socializing and finding entertainment. They are fun, but they cannot help you eliminate bad feelings. What can eliminate your bad feelings is meditation. You need to have the time to meditate. If you still do other kinds of activities, like going to dinner, going to a party, going to a wedding reception, socializing with friends, going to entertainment with your friends, then you won't have the time to meditate. On this special day, you want to stop all social activities. Even turn off your social media on this day: phone, internet, everything. Disconnect, because if you don't disconnect, you cannot meditate successfully. Your mind will keep wondering whether someone is calling you and you want to know who is doing what. You won't be able to maintain your mindfulness. So this is the pre-requisite to a successful meditation practice. Once you have done this, you will find that your meditation will progress easily.

If you encounter some hindrances such as sleepiness, you might have to use a more austere or severe tool to overcome it. One way is to fast because when you are hungry, you don't feel sleepy. But you must be able, at a certain level, to control your mental

hunger. Most hunger doesn't come from your body, but from your mind thinking about food, and when you do, you start to become hungry right away, even though you may have just had something to eat. So you have to have a certain level of mindfulness to be able to stop your mind from thinking about food, like maintaining your mantra, repeating *Buddho, Buddho*. If you can maintain that, then you don't feel hungry.

When you sit in meditation, you don't feel sleepy. And you can meditate for a long time. If you sit and you feel tired, get up and do walking meditation. Your meditation process is still the same. Just switch your position from sitting to walking. If you use the mantra as a meditation object, you can use it while you are walking also by repeating the mantra. You can also use your breathing as your meditation object. But if you find it difficult to focus on your breath, you can use your feet as a meditation object. Just be aware of your feet when you walk: left, right, left, right. The important thing is not to let your mind think about this and that. And after you have walked until you feel tired, then you can come back and sit again. If you can keep on doing this, I guarantee you that eventually your mind will become calm and peaceful. And you will have succeeded in your first level of meditation practice. Practice for calm.

Once you have achieved calm, when you come out of meditation, you want to direct your mind to think in the way of truth. Think of the things that you

possess, the things that you love, and look at the true nature of what they really are. If you look, the Buddha said, they are all impermanent. If you look harder, you will see that they are all not your possessions. They don't belong to you. They are temporary possessions. And they are not always under your control—just like your body. You see with great clarity that you cannot stop your body from aging, from getting sick, or from dying. Once you understand this truth, you will adjust your mind, your attitude towards these things. Instead of trying to force them to be what you want them to be, you will let them be. You will live with them. If the body is going to get old, let it be. If it is going to get sick, let it get sick. If you can cure it, you cure it. If you can have medicine to fix it, fix it. If you cannot cure or if you cannot fix it, you just have to let it be. Just look after your mind. Don't let your mind have any desire. Because once your mind starts to have desire, your mind will become stressful and all sorts of bad feelings will arise. The mind will create the desire for the body to get well when it is sick or the desire not to die when you know that the time for you to die is coming soon. If you accept the truth, your mind will return to peace and calm. And you will not be affected by the dissolution, sickness, or aging of the body.

This is what we call *vipassanā* (insight), to see the truth of things, not the way we used to see them: as permanent, belonging to us, giving us happiness.

They don't. They are the opposite, because they are impermanent. Because they are impermanent, we cannot control them. They will only bring bad feelings. So if you can develop to this level, you will start to be able to eliminate your bad feelings. And eventually all your bad feelings will disappear because your bad feelings arise from your desire for things to be this or that. But when you know that you cannot have what you want all the time, sometimes things will go their own way. And if you don't have any desire for them to be otherwise, you won't have any bad feeling. So to conclude this talk today, you have to develop the whole approach, the three practices, *dāna* (charity), maintain the precepts, and meditation (*bhāvanā*), *samatha-bhāvanā* then *vipassanā-bhāvanā*. If you can do this, you can eliminate all your bad feelings eventually. So let me close this talk for now and give you a chance to ask any questions.

Questions & Answers

November 18, 2014



Question 1: From last week's talk, Tan Ajahn advised that we read and learn from the *Suttas* and practice at the same time. Could Tan Ajahn please point out which *Suttas* are important to study, which can help in our practice?

Tan Ajahn: There are several major or important *Suttas*. The first is the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* or the First Sermon. This is the first talk that the Buddha gave to the five ascetics, his five former disciples, in which he taught about the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. This is the core of the Buddha's teachings. You have to know what the Four Noble Truths are: *dukkham*, *samudaya*, *nirodha*, *magga*. *Dukkham* means stress or suffering, mental suffering. *Samudaya*, the cause of this mental suffering, consists of the three desires: desire for sensual pleasure, desire to become and the desire not to become. These are the causes of your mental stress

and mental suffering, not the physical suffering. The problem is not the physical suffering but the mental suffering. The physical suffering is minute compared to the mental suffering. So we have to develop the tool to eliminate *dukkhaṃ*, this mental suffering caused by the three desires. The Buddha said that this tool is called the *magga*, the Noble Eightfold Path, which boils down to the three practices that I mentioned to you tonight: *dāna*, *sīla*, and *bhāvanā*. If you can develop *dāna*, *sīla*, and *bhāvanā*, then you will have the tool to get rid of your desires. When you have no desires, there will be no suffering, no stress. This is the first sermon.

The second *Sutta* will instruct you how to develop the *magga* (the path) especially the four major factors of the Noble Eightfold Path: *sammāsaṭi*, *sammāsamādhī*, *sammādiṭṭhi*, *sammāsaṅkappa*. It is contained in the *samatha-bhāvanā* and *vipassanā-bhāvanā*. So this is what you have to learn—how to develop mindfulness. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* will instruct you how to develop mindfulness. It will instruct you how to sit in meditation in order to bring the mind to calm and peace. And after you have developed calm and peace of mind, when you withdraw from that state and your mind starts to think, you then direct your mind to think in the way of insight. The way of insight is to look at everything as having the three characteristics. These characteristics are the foundation of wisdom that we emphasize over and over: *aniccaṃ* (impermanent), *dukkhaṃ*

(stressful) and *anattā* (beyond our control). Things come and go like the weather. They are nature. We cannot control nature. We have to abide by and live with nature. So this is the second important and most important Sutta for meditators.

But if you are a lay person, and you still have to be involved with people, activities, social interactions and so forth, then you should learn the *Maṅgala Sutta*, the auspicious actions. There are 38 of them, starting with knowing who to keep as your company. The Buddha said you should keep company with the wise and avoid keeping company with the foolish. This *Sutta* will provide instructions on how to interact with people and things surrounding you, all the way up to the practice of meditation and the attainment of *Nibbāna*. So I think you should study and read these three basic/important Suttas. You can then search for commentaries that will provide further explanations because these *Suttas* will just contain the headlines. They might not be in detail; you might have to search for the commentary that will widen the scope of the *Sutta*.

When I first meditated, when I could not sit and focus on my meditation object, I memorized the Four Foundations of Mindfulness *Sutta* (*Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*) in English because I could understand what I was reciting/memorizing. I sat down to meditate, and then just used reciting of this *Sutta* to calm my mind, to stop my mind from being restless and

agitated. After I finished reciting this *Sutta*, I found I could sit down and focus on my breath. This *Sutta* takes about 30 to 40 minutes to recite. It can help maintain and develop your mindfulness and calm your mind to one level, but not complete calm.

Question 2: Is the heart the same as the consciousness aggregate?

Tan Ajahn: First of all let me clarify that we can use several terminologies to mean the same thing. So when I say *mind* or *heart*, I mean the part of us that is not the physical part. The physical part is our body. But the other part, the one that thinks, feels and knows is the non-physical part. In Buddhism we call it *mind*, in *Pāli* we call it *citta*. *Heart*, in *Pāli* is called *mano*. They refer to the same thing, the non-physical part of us. But this non-physical part has several parts called aggregates: *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhāra*, and *viññāṇa*. These are the aggregates or the components of the mind, of the heart. The mind uses these aggregates to navigate. The mind in itself is in a pure form. When it is completely calm, it is just knowing. But when it has to interact with other minds, it needs to have these aggregates, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *sankhāra*, *viññāṇa*.

Vedanā is feeling. *Saññā* is memory or perception. *Sankhāra* is thoughts. *Viññāṇa* is consciousness, being conscious of the things that enter into the mind such as the images we see, the sounds we hear, the smells we smell, the tastes we taste and the things

that we touch. The *viññāṇa* will receive this sense data and send it to the mind. Once it comes into the mind, then the *saññā* will come into action. *Saññā*'s role is to try to figure out what this sight/picture is that we see, whether it is a man or a woman, whether this is your friend or your enemy. When *saññā* has figured out what this picture is that the eyes see, then you will have feelings. If you see your friend, you will have good feelings. When you see your enemy, you will have bad feelings. After you have these feelings, your thoughts will come into play. If you have good feelings then your thoughts will say *let us have more of it*. If you have bad feelings, you will think *let us get rid of it*. So this is how your four *nāma khandhas* work, helping the mind interact with other minds, with other people.

Question 3: I use the mantra *Buddho* for my meditation practice. Recently in my meditation practice, my head has started to twitch and shake by itself every few minutes and can be quite forceful. Typically I ignore it and just concentrate on *Buddho*. If my mind can drop into a deeper calm, then the shaking stops but will start again. Could I please seek Tan Ajahn's advice on this?

Tan Ajahn: You should just ignore whatever happens. Just try to concentrate on your meditation objects. Sometimes your mind, your defilements/your *kilesas*, will try to disrupt your concentration by creating all kinds of obstacles, all kinds of

experiences. But if you ignore them and just concentrate on your meditation object, then when your mind becomes calm, all these things will disappear. But if you pay attention to them, then you will not be able to continue with your meditation. So try not to pay any attention to anything except your meditation object. Then you will find success in your meditation.

Question 4: If my breath is not stable, I can't even maintain clear and continuous attention. What should I do, Tan Ajahn?

Tan Ajahn: Whether your breath is stable or not stable is no problem. All your mind has to do is to acknowledge and just be aware of the breath. You don't have to interfere with your breath. Leave it alone. You only want to use your breath to keep your mind anchored to something, so that it doesn't go thinking about this and that. The Buddha said if the breath is short, just be aware that it is short. If the breath is long, just be aware that it is long. If the breath is coarse, just know that it is coarse. If it is subtle or fine, just know, just be aware. Don't think about anything, even about the breath; don't think that it should be this way or that way or try to control the breath. Just be aware. Just watch. You don't want to think. When you think, you lose your purpose, you lose your goal. You won't achieve what you want to achieve.

Question 5: Do people with good logical/ analytical skills have an advantage in *vipassanā* meditation?

Tan Ajahn: I think they will, because in *vipassanā*, we use rationality and logic. We use cause and effect—this thing happened which makes this other thing happen. The Four Noble Truths is logic, the cause and the effect. Our bad feeling arise from our desires. Our bad feelings disappear when we get rid of our desires. And the thing that will help us get rid of our desire is *vipassanā*, the knowledge of impermanence, stress and *anattā*. In some ways, people with good rational minds will advance quickly when they arrive at the *vipassanā* level.

In some cases, it can be a hindrance when they try to calm the mind, to stop the mind from thinking, because they want to keep on thinking. So for people who don't think much, it might be easier to develop calm, while for those who think, sometimes it can be difficult. Overall, though, the logical thinking process helps calm the mind. For instance, when you sit and try to calm the mind, when you start to worry about something or someone, then you have to think rationally about that something or someone. While you are here and that thing or someone is over there, can you do anything about it? Can you stop that person from being impermanent? Can you stop that person from doing whatever that person wants to do? If you can see this truth, then you can stop worrying

about them, then your mind can start to become calm enough for you to focus on your meditation object. So this is something that you might want to use when you try to meditate and your mind starts to worry about this or that. And there is no other way to stop it, except using logic to reason with your mind, so that it can stop worrying about that thing or that person.

Question 6: From Buddhism's perspective, how does it view the use of sedative drugs to keep our loved one who is terminally ill semi-conscious in order to ease his pain while dying?

Tan Ajahn: Like I said before, there are two kinds of pains: physical and mental. The physical pain is minute compared to the mental pain. So if a person knows how to control the mental pain, then the physical pain will not be a problem. You don't need to sedate. But if you have never trained the mind to reduce or to get rid of the mental pain, when the physical pain arises, you are creating another level of pain, the mental pain. This is something that you feel you cannot endure, and that is why you need to sedate or take a pain killer to stop your physical pain. Once your physical pain disappears, your mental pain will also disappear. But if you meditate and develop *vipassanā*, you can leave the physical pain alone and control your mental pain. But if you cannot, then you have to rely on medicine to help. But relying on medicine to help is not the way to stop your problem because your problem is self-induced. So you have

to stop it yourself. If you use other methods, you are just side-stepping the issue; you are not facing your problem and you will never be able to get rid of your problem. Even in your next life, when you experience the same thing, you will use some other things to help you. But if you learn to manage your mental pain, then eventually you won't need to have anything.

When the Buddha and his Noble Disciples experienced pain, they just used *vipassanā* and *samatha-bhāvanā* to get rid of the mental pain, but they didn't get rid of the physical pain, because there was nothing they could do. But like I said, the physical pain is minute compared to the mental pain. Once you can control or manage your mental pain, the physical pain won't affect your mind and your mind can remain peaceful and calm. Your mind can live with that physical pain. So this is what you want to do, to face it, to solve the problem at the source, not side-stepping it by using other means to help you eliminate this pain. Think about what happens if you are in the position where you don't have anything to help you? Then you will have to suffer a lot. But if you know how to manage your physical pain, then you won't need anything. You won't need pain killers or sedatives. You can live with the physical pain. It's no problem at all if your mind can become calm and peaceful and eliminate the desire that caused the stress in the first place.

Question 7: Why are there many setbacks in life, one after another despite one's continuous efforts to cultivate merits, such as through meditation, practicing *dāna* etc.?

Tan Ajahn: Setbacks come because of your desires. You want something and you cannot get it, so you say it is a setback. So what you should do is to eliminate your desire and just do as much as you can; just be contented with whatever you get, then there will be no setbacks. If today you can sit for ten minutes, just be contented with that. Tomorrow you can sit for 30 minutes, just be contented with that. Whatever you do, just don't have any desire that you must do it, you must accomplish it. Otherwise, you will feel disappointed if you cannot accomplish it. You have to acknowledge that there are many factors in your life that you cannot avoid, prevent, manage, or control. They can be the causes for your setbacks, so you have to accept that this is normal in life. Whatever you do, you cannot always get what you want. Sometimes you can, sometimes you can't. So if you don't get what you want, don't be discouraged. Just accept that it is part of life and move on. So long as you keep moving, keep on doing good, keep on practicing according to the Lord Buddha's teaching, eventually you will get to where you want to go. You have to be patient.

Question 8: From last week's session, I got the message that Buddhism has little regard for marriage,

as you taught that in order to achieve concentration you need to separate from your spouse. I feel that it should be joint agreement for a couple. There was a TV program in which a *Bhikkhunī* divorced her partner. I do not know any *Sutta* with regards to family life by the Buddha. What are Tan Ajahn thoughts on this?

Tan Ajahn: You have to understand that people have different desires in life. Some people want to be happy living with a family, and they can do that. There are ways that they can be happy living in a family. But this level of happiness is not as high a level as a meditator's way of life. So there are two levels of happiness in this world. At the level of living socially with your family and friends, you can be happy, but at the same time you also have to pay the price when you lose your loved one or when you lose the things that you love. Then there is the other level of happiness. If you don't want to lose things, you don't have to have things. If you have nothing, then you have nothing to lose. This is another level of happiness.

So it is the individual's choice. Buddhism is not against anything. Buddhism teaches the way of living these two kinds of happiness. If you live as a family, keep the five precepts and be charitable. Share your wealth, share your happiness with others, then you can have happiness. If you want another kind of happiness, the happiness of being alone, of having

a peaceful mind, then you have to follow the eight precepts, live alone, be self-reliant, and find happiness inside, not outside. It is like going to an automobile dealer, and they show you different kinds of cars. They have different price tags and each car has different features. So you choose which kind of features you like. So it is the same way with your life, which way you want to live. You can choose. You want to live socially? You can do that. You want to live alone? You can also do that. There is no conflict. There is no discrimination or anything like that, because people have different preferences. So there are people who will be family-oriented; there are people who will be an ordained or be meditators. So it is up to you to choose for yourself.

Question 9: How can we teach young children (age 5-7years old) to meditate progressively?

Tan Ajahn: I think it is applying the wrong tool to the wrong person. Children do not have the ability to maintain this level of mindfulness. For children, what they need is good basic teaching on how to be a good person, like keeping some of the precepts, not lying, being obedient to elders, teachers, and parents, and being respectful and charitable. This is something that you must teach them first. You don't start them at highest level of teaching because they cannot absorb it. It is too much for them.

Question 10: On certain occasions, my meditation can proceed quite smoothly, resulting in peace and calm. On other occasions, the meditation is not peaceful or calm, during and even after the conclusion of meditation. Why is this?

Tan Ajahn: Because in your life, you go through different activities every day. Sometimes you have lots of work with many problems to solve, and they can linger in your mind, hindering your meditation. Some days everything is fine—no problems, nothing remaining in your mind when you meditate, enabling you to meditate successfully. And sometimes it depends on your mindfulness also; some days you can maintain more mindfulness. So the more mindfulness you have, the better will be the result of your meditation. Just look at everything as impermanent. You cannot expect them to be the same, day in and day out. Today it may be easy, tomorrow it may be hard. This is the way things work in this world. There are so many activities going on and so many changes around you, how can you expect your mind to remain the same every day?

Question 11: How can I apply the middle path in daily life? How do we know that we have strayed from the middle path? For example, some people take unfair advantage of us or have crossed the limit of acceptable behavior. How should I respond so that I am keeping to the middle path?

Tan Ajahn: In order to maintain the middle path, you have to learn to develop the four *brahmavihāras*, the four states of the *Brahma*, which are *mettā*, *karunā*, *muditā*, *upekkhā*. These are the four qualities to apply in your daily lives. *Mettā* means to be friendly, to have no enemies. If people do you wrong, you should forgive them. Don't hold a grudge. If you have something you can share with other people, share it; make friends, don't make enemies. This is *mettā*.

Karunā is helping people when they are in need. When you see someone in need and you can help them, give them a hand and you will feel good, feel happy. The third, *muditā*, is if someone has succeeded in whatever they do, you should be joyful and congratulate them. Don't be jealous of their success even though they might be your competitors. Like when you play sports, one side will have to win and the other side will have to lose, so the loser should be gracious and should be happy with the other side's success. If you can do this, then you will be peaceful and happy and have no enemies because you will not see anything bad in your opponents. You accept that in life there will be winning and losing. But you don't have to get angry, sad, or mad when you lose. And when you get angry or mad, you are hurting yourself, not your opponents. So try to be gracious when you lose or when people are more successful than you are, and feel happy with them.

The fourth is *upekkhā*. This is keeping your mind in a neutral position. When things go wrong or things go bad with you or with somebody else, and there is nothing you can do or help, then you should just have *upekkhā*, just be neutral. Don't react. Don't feel bad, because feeling bad won't change anything. Like when someone you love gets sick or may be dying. You don't want him/her to die, but there is nothing you can do because this is the way things work. In this world people come and go. They are beyond your control. To feel sad or bad is only hurting yourself. So sometimes you just have to remain *upekkhā*. And the way to have *upekkhā* is to meditate. When you meditate and your mind becomes calm, then you will have *upekkhā*. Once you have this *upekkhā*, when things happen and there is nothing you can do, you can bring your mind to *upekkhā*. You won't feel bad. You just accept that this is the way things work. So this is something you should try to develop and use in your daily life when you interact with people.

Question 12: Also, if I am biased about someone, I will see him very negatively no matter what he does. How do I apply the middle path in this case?

Tan Ajahn: You should look at the common things that we have with other people. Like when we are born, we are all subject to aging, sickness and death, so we are the same in this aspect. We also have the same 32 parts, we have hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, and all the organs of the

body. There is no difference. If you hate the other person, you also hate yourself because everything that you hate, you have as well. If you think this way, then you will stop hating. Because it is like looking in the mirror, looking at yourself and hating the picture you see in the mirror. You are hating yourself. What for? You don't get anything from hating except bad feelings. So you have to think that we are all the same. We already have enough suffering from getting old, getting sick, and dying, so there is no need to create more suffering for other people. So you have to come back to having compassion, having loving-kindness.

Question 13: When we harbour ill feelings such as hatred and anger towards other people we can ask ourselves to let go, but what happens when we encounter people who harbour ill feelings towards us. What can we do?

Tan Ajahn: First you can avoid contact with them. But if you have to have contact with them, you can meditate, control your mind, recite the meditation object, such as *Buddho, Buddho, Buddho* and do not think about those people. If you cannot do that, then you might think that if they don't like you, you should be thankful that they haven't said anything bad about you. Should they say anything bad about you, you should be thankful that they haven't physically hurt you, like beating or hitting you. If they hit you, you should be thankful that

they haven't killed you. If they kill you, then you have to be thankful that we are all going to have to die sooner or later anyway. So maybe it is the time for us to depart. If you can think like this, then you can stop your anger or your hatred.

Question 14: As mentioned, in order to achieve higher bliss in meditation, one must observe the eight precepts for long term. How can I observe the eight precepts if I have an executive position in the company or I am a sales person. One of the eight precepts includes abstaining from using perfume or telling lies?

Tan Ajahn: That is why I said earlier that, in order to practice the eight precepts and meditate, you should do it on your day off, the day that you don't have to go to work. And once you have practiced and achieved results, then you will find that the result is far better than the money that you get from working. Once you have this, then you will be willing to give up your job and practice full time. Just like I did.

Question 15: Are *nimittas* essential for Awakening?

Tan Ajahn: Most *nimittas*, or visions, are bad for your development of meditation because they can be a distraction, leading you out of the middle path. The middle path when you meditate is to enter into emptiness, into calm and peace. But when you

start to sit and see all sorts of *nimittas*, and the mind follows them, you will forget to meditate. And you will never be able to enter into full concentration, into the peace and happiness that arise from being fully concentrated. So when you meditate, should you have any *nimitta*, you should disregard it. Just concentrate on your meditation object. And if you do this, eventually this *nimitta* will disappear and your mind will then enter into full concentration. When it does that, you will have nothing left except emptiness, peace and *upekkhā*. And you can see the mind in its pure form, the one who knows, the knower. Then you will know the mind and the body are two separate things. During that time the body will disappear from the mind's awareness. Then, when you come out of the meditation, it will give you the capital or the strength to let go of everything because you know that the mind can be by itself and be happy. It doesn't need to have anything.

Question 16: May Tan Ajahn please share with us some techniques to overcome restlessness?

Tan Ajahn: Restlessness occurs because you think too much. You have no mindfulness to restrain your thinking. So you should try to develop mindfulness by keeping your mind busy with your meditation object, instead of thinking about this or that thing, this or that person, or this or that event. You have to stop thinking by developing, repeating, reciting your mantra. If you

don't like *Buddho*, you can use something else. You can use counting if you like; just keep on counting one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. Keep on counting. When you concentrate on your counting, then you will not be able to think about other things. When you don't think about other things, then your mind will become empty and peaceful.

End of *Desanā* and Q&A

Sādhu Sādhu Sādhu.



04

Dhamma Talk

November 25, 2014

Let me start with the good news. It is good news for you all that you are all blessed with the four great fortunes. The first great fortune is being born as a human being because if you are born as an animal, you are not able to study the teachings of the Buddha. And you cannot practice the teachings of the Buddha. So you cannot be enlightened if you are an animal. But when you are a human being, like you are now, you can study and you can practice following the Dhamma teachings. So this is the first great fortune.

The second great fortune is to have discovered or found the Dhamma teachings. You need the Dhamma teachings to lead you to enlightenment. If there is no Dhamma teaching in this world, nobody will be able to become enlightened by themselves. Only the Buddha can teach himself to become enlightened. All other human beings have to rely on the Buddha's teachings. All of the Buddha's Noble Disciples and

all the *Arahants* had to listen to the teachings of the Buddha and then practice by following the teachings. So this is the second great fortune, to have found or to have discovered the Dhamma teachings of the Buddha.

The third great fortune is to be alive, to be breathing. If you are not alive today, you cannot be there tonight. In order to become enlightened, you have to be alive so that you can listen or study the Dhamma teachings. And after you have learned the Dhamma teachings, you can apply the Dhamma teachings in your practice. So this is the third great fortune, being alive.

The fourth great fortune is to have the time and the effort to study and practice the Dhamma teachings, like you have tonight. You have the time and you make the effort to bring yourself to Wat Palelai so that you can listen to the Dhamma talk and meditate. If you don't have the time or the effort to practice, even though you might be a human being, you might have found the teachings of the Buddha, and you are still alive, you are not be able to utilize your great fortune. So it is all up to you. You are the only person who can find the time and the effort to study and to practice the Dhamma teachings. If you do find the time and the effort to practice, the result of your practice will eventually appear because this is the way people have become enlightened from the time when the Buddha gave his first Dhamma discourse

to the five ascetics. Listening to Dhamma talks is like studying. After the ascetics had listened, they applied it in their practice. They had already developed *dāna* (charity). They had already developed *sīla*, keeping precepts. They had developed *samādhi*, a calm and peaceful mind. So all they needed to do was to develop *vipassanā*.

Vipassanā is to see clearly the truth that the Buddha has expounded, that is the Four Noble Truths: the truth of suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path leading to cessation of suffering. So once people have heard the Four Noble Truths, when they look inside their minds and inside their hearts, they can see the Four Noble Truths. So when they have suffering, they know that it is caused by their desire. And they know that the way to eliminate the desire is to have insight into the nature of things, to see things as they are, namely impermanent, suffering and not belonging to them. They cannot control, manage, or tell them to be like this or like that. Everything evolves according to natural processes, like the sun, the wind, the rain. So when they see this truth, they then get rid of their desire, and let things be. Let the sun rise. Let the sun set. Let the wind blow. Let the earth shake. Let the flood happen. Because there is nothing they can do. The only thing they can do is to let go of their desire. When they have let go of their desire, their mind will become peaceful. They will have achieved the cessation of suffering. So this is the goal of practicing

the teaching of the Buddha, which is to get rid of the desire that we have in our mind and our heart.

This desire will make us feel unhappy, sad, worried, fearful/afraid, because we still want things to be in a certain way, which usually doesn't happen. We want to have longevity, to live forever, but that is not possible. We want to have good health, without sickness, yet that is not possible. We don't want to die, but again, that is not possible. So if we can see the truth, we see the three characteristics of existence of the things around us: they are all impermanent, they can bring us sadness or suffering if we cling onto them or desire that they be this or be that, and they are *anattā*—not under our control. We cannot make them be like this or like that. We might be able to do it for some time, but not all the time. Like right now we can control or manage our body to a certain extent, but when the body gets sick, we cannot stop it from getting sick. The body is continually getting older and older. We cannot stop it from getting older. Eventually the body will die. But the death of the body is not the death of the mind. The mind where we reside doesn't die with the body. So right now, due to delusion, we mistakenly believe that we reside in the body, that the body is ourselves, when in fact our residence is in the mind. So when the body dies, we become sad, unhappy, pained, and fearful. This is where we have to develop *vipassanā*, to see things as they really are.

The Buddha discovered that the mind is not the body and that we don't live in the body. We live in the mind, the mind that doesn't die. The mind came to take possession of this body at the time of conception and after it was born, the mind and the body, according to the delusion of the mind, became one. So this is where we have to work to correct this delusion. We have to separate the mind from the body. And the method to do this is to meditate, to develop meditation for calm, *samatha-bhāvanā*, and to develop *vipassanā-bhāvanā* for insight. We need both of these to see the truth clearly.

So the first step is that we must develop *samatha-bhāvanā*. In order to do this, we need mindfulness or *sati*. *Sati* is the Dhamma that will stop the mind from thinking, a process that will bring the mind into calm, into concentration, into oneness, into singularity, into the real mind, into the one who knows—all characteristics of the healthy mind. Right now we don't discern the knowing from the knower. We see the thoughts. We have been constantly thinking from the time we are born to the present. We might stop thinking when we go to sleep, but the rest of the time we are constantly thinking and cannot see the thoughts or the knower behind the thoughts. When we stop the mind from thinking, we will see the knower. We will see that this is the mind, and we will understand that this mind is not the body. It is this mind that came to take possession of the body and it is this mind that will lose this body

when the body dies. So this is the first thing you want to do, that is to separate the mind from the body by developing mindfulness.

Mindfulness is concentrating or focusing your mind only on one object, such as the recitation of a mantra. In Thailand we use the name of the Buddha. We keep reciting mentally *Buddho, Buddho, Buddho*, from the time we get up to the time we go to sleep. Because when we can maintain the recitation of *Buddho*, the mind cannot think. And when the mind cannot think continually, it will eventually stop and become concentrated into the knower. When you meditate, you will see the real face of the mind, and this face is simply the act of knowing. That is all that the mind does. It knows. But it is being deluded to follow the thoughts; whatever the thoughts say, it believes. The thoughts say this body is *I*, this body is *mine*, and the mind believes the thoughts. So whenever things happen to the body, like getting old, getting sick, or dying, the mind becomes miserable because the mind doesn't want the body to get old, get sick, or die.

So when you meditate, and your mind has temporarily withdrawn into itself, the awareness of the body and everything else will disappear. All you have left is the mind. So you know that even though there is no body, the mind still exists. After you have experienced this truth, when you come out of your meditation, when you come out of your concentrated

state and become aware of your body and things around you, what you want to do next is to keep reminding your mind that the mind is not the body and that the mind cannot keep the body forever. Also everything else that the mind has acquired, be it fortune, wealth, money, status, fame or the happiness that the mind gets and acquires through the body are all temporary, all impermanent. One day, sooner or later, the mind will lose everything.

If the mind is constantly reminded of this fact, the mind can then make preparations for this eventuality. When things happen, when the mind loses anything, it will not have any desire to have it back because the mind doesn't really need it anyway. If the mind has developed *samatha-bhāvanā* and *samādhi*, the mind will be peaceful, contented, and happy. So it knows that it doesn't need anything to make it happy and that nothing in this world can make it forever happy because everything in this world is temporary. So this is the development of *vipassanā*, to constantly remind the mind to let go, not to cling to the body and to things because clinging will only cause the mind to have suffering, sadness, misery, fear, worry, and anxiety. So this is the development of *vipassanā*. You can do it effectively only after you have developed *samatha-bhāvanā*, after you have experienced the true mind, seen the true mind, known that the true mind is not the body, and experienced the peace and happiness that arise from this experience. Then you will know

that you can let go of everything because nothing you have is as good as what you have from your *samatha-bhāvanā*, from your peace of mind.

This is very important. You first must have something better, a better kind of happiness, before you can give up the lesser kind of happiness. If you don't have this happiness that comes from having peace of mind, from *samādhi*, you cannot give up the happiness that you have through your body. This is the reason why the Buddha said you must first develop *samādhi*. If you have no *samādhi*, your mind will be constantly desiring, wanting, hungry for this or that. But when you have *samādhi*, your mind will become peaceful and calm, your mind will become contented, it will be full. It doesn't feel like it needs anything. Once it has this fullness, this contentment, then it can give up everything, especially seeing the result of not giving up, of clinging. When you cling to something and when you lose it, it can make you become very unhappy, very miserable.

So this is the thing that you have to develop, this *samādhi*, and *samādhi* can only happen if you have mindfulness. So you need to first develop mindfulness, which you can do all the time, from the time you get up until the time you go to sleep. You don't have to go the temple. You don't have to be alone. Yes, it will help if you can be alone, or if you can go to the temple. But if you have not yet gone to the temple, or been alone for a long time, you can still develop the mindfulness by reciting the mantra.

When you don't have to use your thoughts for necessary activities, keep reciting your mantra. Don't let your mind think aimlessly and emotionally because it is useless and harmful to your state of mind. It can only make you feel miserable, unhappy, and discontented.

So you can try to develop mindfulness from the time you get up. When you open your eyes and become aware of yourself, start to recite the mantra. You might need to stop temporarily if you have to think about something important like *what day is today? What do I have to do today?* After you have thought of what you have to do for today, and you prepare yourself for the daily activities, keep reciting the mantra, *Buddho, Buddho*. If you can do this, your mind will not wander aimlessly, your mind will be stable and fixed in the present. And this is important because the mind only becomes peaceful and calm in the present, not in the past, not in the future. The mind has to be in the present in order for it to become peaceful, calm, and contented and to experience the kind of happiness that exceeds all other kinds of happiness. So mindfulness is very important. Never overlook it. The Buddha said mindfulness is like the footprint of an elephant. The footprint of an elephant is larger than that of all other animals; it can cover the footprints of all the other animals. Likewise, if you don't have mindfulness, you cannot have *samādhi*. If you don't have *samādhi*, you cannot develop *vipassanā* or insight to be able to see the Four Noble Truths within your mind.

In order to develop mindfulness effectively you need to be alone. So you might have to do this on your day off, when you don't have to go to work. Try to set aside all your other activities and devote all the time of your day off to this activity, to this development of mindfulness. In order to do it productively, you need the support of your *atthasīla*, your eight precepts. Because your eight precepts will prevent you from engaging in other kinds of activities, such as sleeping with your spouse, having food after mid-day, watching all sorts of entertainment, going out to various places for fun and enjoyment. If you observe the eight precepts, you won't waste your time with these activities.

And when you sleep, you just sleep on the hard floor, because it will keep you from sleeping too long. The body only needs four or five hours to sleep. But if you sleep on a comfortable bed, after the body wakes up, you don't want to get up, so you sleep for another four hours. You will lose this precious time that you can use for the development of mindfulness and meditation.

Before you can keep the eight precepts, you must first be able to keep the five precepts. And in order to be able to keep the five precepts, you must first be charitable. You must first like to give away things. You don't want to possess, you don't want to acquire; you want to lessen your possessions, your wealth. You just want to keep enough for your

existence. Anything more than that will be a burden for yourself because you have to look after it and you might want to use it to make yourself happy. When you have money, you can go out for fun, for enjoyment, for pleasure, so if you use money in this way, you won't have the time to meditate. And when you use money, then you will have to make money, you have to go to work. And when you have to go to work, sometimes you might have to cheat, you might have to break the five precepts because you might want to get a lot of money and get it easily.

But if you don't have the desire to make money, to be rich, to use money to buy happiness, then you won't need much money. All you need is the money to keep the body alive, which doesn't take much. Then you will not be forced to break the five precepts, and you will find that keeping the five precepts is very simple, very easy. And once you can keep the five precepts, on your day off you can keep the eight precepts. And when you can keep the eight precepts and remain alone, whether in the house or a temple, then you will have nobody to disrupt your development of mindfulness.

When your mindfulness is continually developed, you will have the ability to sit, meditate, and make your mind calm and peaceful and concentrated into one, the one who knows. You will experience the kind of happiness that nothing in this world can compare to. Once you have this kind of happiness, you will be

energized to practice more. You want more of this kind of happiness, and you find it easy to give up what you have. You can give up your other kinds of happiness. All you want now is to be alone, to be able to practice, develop your mindfulness, maintain your mindfulness, and sit in meditation.

After you withdraw from your meditation, you want to develop insight, instructing the mind to look at the Four Noble Truths inside your mind because that is where all the problems lie. All our suffering, all our anxiety, misery, restlessness, worry, agitation, sadness, and fear arise inside our mind. They are created by our own delusion. Our delusion makes us think that having things will make us happy. Having things that we can experience through our body will keep us happy. But it is all only temporary. When you can no longer have this kind of happiness, you will only have sadness. So this is what you will be able to see inside yourself. You no longer need anything because you know that needing things will only make you suffer, not make you happy. Then you can give up everything. When you no longer cling or attach to anything or have any desire for anything, then your mind will have no suffering, no depression, no sadness; your mind will constantly be peaceful, calm, and happy. This is the happiness that arises from peace of mind. So this is basically the path to enlightenment that the Buddha taught.

You have to go from the first step, to the second step, to the third step, to the fourth step, not skipping any one of these steps. If you do, you will find that you are not able to practice successfully. It is like climbing a ladder. The ladder has many steps that you have to climb in order to get to the top. So it is the same way with the practice for enlightenment. For the cessation of suffering, for the cessation of sadness, stress, anxiety, worry, you need to start from the bottom. You need to be charitable. You want to give away as many of your possessions as you can. You don't want to use your money to buy happiness, because the kind of happiness you get from buying things with your money can be harmful to you later on, when you run out of money or when the things that you buy leave you. You see clearly that they are all impermanent. And they are *anattā*, meaning they cannot be under your control all the time.

So you should stop spending money to buy happiness. When you do, you don't have to make money or work for it, so you will have the time to keep the eight precepts, to meditate, to be alone. And because you have this time to study and practice, the result of your practice will become apparent slowly or quickly depending on your own ability. Some people can become enlightened in seven days, some in seven months, some in seven years. But eventually they become enlightened if the cause of enlightenment is there, that is the practice

of *dāna*, *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā*, *samatha-bhāvanā* and *vipassanā-bhāvanā*.

Samatha-bhāvanā is *samādhi*. *Vipassanā-bhāvanā* is *paññā*. So it is all up to you. You are the one who can make it happen. Nobody else can make it happen. And you have all the necessary ingredients to make it happen. You have human birth, you have found the teachings of the Buddha, you are alive. So all you need now is the time and effort to really study and to really practice. Once you have them, then you will have the results. The results consist of the four paths and four fruits. The first path and fruit is called *Sotāpanna*. The second path and fruit is called *Sakadāgāmī*. The third path and fruit is called *Anāgāmī*. And the fourth path and fruit is called *Arahant*. Once you have arrived at the fruit of *Arahant*, you also will proceed on to *Nibbāna*.

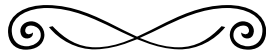
Once you have realized *Nibbāna*, you will no longer have to take birth again. You will no longer have to get old, get sick, die, and be separated from your loved ones or face the things or people that you don't like to face. All these only happen when you take birth. When you don't have to take birth, there is no sickness, aging, dying or separation. So this is what we call eternal happiness. *Paramam sukkaṃ* means supreme happiness. It is supreme because there is no sadness, no suffering in this kind of happiness. And it lasts forever. So these are the things you should consider. You are blessed with the four

great fortunes. All you have to do now is to make all these four great fortunes into *Nibbāna*, into the cessation of suffering, into the cessation of endless rounds of rebirth.

I think I have spoken long enough. So I will stop for now and give you the opportunity to ask questions.

Questions & Answers

November 25, 2014



Question 1: Can Tan Ajahn teach me a method to develop wisdom after I have a sufficient level of calmness?

Tan Ajahn: You should look at the things that you cling to or you love and see the impermanent nature of these things. Everything that you have, one day you will have to lose it. Even before you lose it, it will be changing. Like when you buy a new car, if you use it for a while, your car will become older and will no longer be like when you just bought it. You might have to repair it. Sometimes you might lose it or when you park it somewhere, it might be stolen. So this is the impermanent side of things that you always have to apply to everything that you love, that you want to keep, because you cannot keep it. So when you know this, when things happen, you will not be afflicted by sadness.

Question 2: How much calm (*samatha*) is required or is there any minimum stage of *jhāna* to attain before I can start to develop wisdom?

Tan Ajahn: The level of calm you have will support that particular level of insight or wisdom. If you have 20 percent of calm, you have 20 percent of wisdom. So you can keep moving up, from 20 you go to 30, then you go to 40. And your ability to see things clearly will be better and quicker.

Question 3: How does one practice to reach *jhāna* and how does one know which level of *jhāna* or stage of *jhāna* he is in?

Tan Ajahn: If you haven't read the book with the description of each *jhāna*, you probably wouldn't know which *jhāna* you are in, but it doesn't matter, because all you want is to get to the fourth *jhāna*, the point where your mind stops working/stops thinking. Before that you might go through some of the other stages of *jhāna*. You still have thoughts, you still think, but you also have happiness. I can't remember all the descriptions; you have to look them up in the texts. But it is not important. What is important is to be fixed with your mantra, stay focused with your mantra because it is your mantra that will lead you to your final destination, which is the fourth *jhāna*. If you haven't gone to the fourth *jhāna*, don't stop repeating your mantra. Keep on repeating it. It is like eating, you don't care which

level of fullness when you are eating. You just keep eating until you feel full. When you feel full, you stop eating. You don't have to open up the text to look for what level you are now. So it is not important to know all these bits of information. All you need to know is that your mind has stopped thinking and that the body sometimes disappears from your awareness. If it doesn't disappear, at least your mind is not concerned or doesn't have any interactions with your body. Your body might be painful here and there, but your mind will feel comfortable. You may not be affected by the pain in your body, or the sounds you might hear will not bother your mind.

So this is where you want to go, this is called *upekkhā*. *Upekkhā* is having no emotions, no reactions to anything that comes to your body. So this is where you would want to get to. When you get there, you will know. So don't worry. When you meditate, don't speculate. When you start to speculate, you stop meditating. If you are repeating the mantra, just keep reciting it. Don't stop. When you start to speculate: *Which jhāna am I in now?* you've started thinking. When you do this, you have stopped meditating. You are not reciting your mantra. So you will not go further than where you are. You have come back to your starting point where you think about this and that. So be very careful, not to be fooled by your curiosity or by your desire to achieve results. When you meditate and when you want to achieve the result, this is already thinking. You are no longer with

your mantra. So, don't worry about the result; only worry about whether you are reciting your mantra or not. If you do this, then your mantra will lead you to the fourth *jhāna* eventually.

Question 4: Why is it difficult to attain *jhāna*?

Tan Ajahn: Because you don't have mindfulness that is strong enough to pull your mind inside. Your mind is constantly being pushed outward by your defilements (*kilesas*), by your desire. Your desire keeps pushing you out towards the sight, sound, smell, taste and tactile objects. It pushes you out towards the physical activities. It pushes you out to acquire things. You never pull your mind inside. So when you start to do it, you feel that it is almost impossible. It is like a novice boxer going to box with the heavyweight champion. When you first start boxing, you cannot face the heavyweight champion, you have to slowly develop your ability and strength first. Here it means developing your mindfulness. When your mindfulness becomes stronger, you will find that it is easier to sit and become calm. And the level of calm will be deeper and deeper, until eventually when you have very strong mindfulness, you can enter the fourth *jhāna*, full concentration, and *upekkhā*.

So right now you are like a novice, starting to meditate, starting to develop mindfulness. So you must first try to develop mindfulness until you can

bring your mind to the here and now, to the present, not allowing it to think aimlessly. In order to do this productively or efficiently, you need to be alone. When you are alone, you will not be distracted by other people or things. That is why people become monks. As monks, they can be free from all other kinds of contact. They don't have to go to work. They don't have to go to social functions. They can go into the forest, be alone, and develop mindfulness. That is why most of the people who became enlightened were monks, not laypeople. Laypeople are not professional meditators, they are amateur meditators. You only meditate, maybe half an hour a day, so how can you compare with people who meditate all day, developing mindfulness all day and night, except for the few hours they sleep? So this is the effort you have to put in if you want to have the result, otherwise you will just get what you are getting right now. But don't be disappointed. Don't be discouraged. You have to encourage yourself with the knowledge that if you want to reach the level that the Buddha attained, like his Noble Disciples did, you have to follow their path. Do what they did.

Question 5: Is it better to set an alarm clock or is it preferable to do without? In the case of not using the alarm clock, how do I know when it is the right time to end my meditation session?

Tan Ajahn: If you have to attend to a certain engagement, then using an alarm clock can be

important, because you don't want to miss your engagement. Of course, when you have to go to work, you might have to set an alarm clock. The drawback when meditating is that when you set an alarm clock, sometimes you are not concentrating on your meditation object, but you will be concentrating on your alarm clock. You're waiting for it to sound the alarm, because your mind wants to get up, wants to stop meditating. So if you don't have any engagement, you don't have to do something at a certain time, it is better not to use an alarm clock. And you just sit until you can no longer sit. You will know when you can no longer sit and you want to get up. That means you have exhausted your mindfulness strength. Your defilement is stronger, and it is pushing you to get up and go to do something else.

Question 6: This person noticed a pattern in his meditation. When he starts meditating, there are many thoughts, and then he noticed there are fewer thoughts. However, towards the end of the session, he noticed that there are more thoughts reappearing again. So why does he feel more restlessness towards the end of the meditation?

Tan Ajahn: The restlessness is the result of your lack of mindfulness. When you are reciting your mantra, your mind will be calm. When you forget to recite your mantra, then your restlessness will come back. So it is a tug of war between restlessness and mindfulness. If you have mindfulness, there will

be no restlessness. If you have no mindfulness, there will be restlessness. So that is why it is important to repeat what I said earlier on: that it is very important to develop mindfulness. If you have mindfulness you can almost entirely eliminate all your hindrances.

Question 7: Some people say meditation is 50 percent about relaxation. So if one can relax easily, can he also meditate more easily?

Tan Ajahn: When you meditate, the result of the meditation is that you feel peaceful and at ease, feel relaxed. But in order to have this result you need mindfulness. So when you develop mindfulness, you will find that there is stress because your mind doesn't want to be mindful. Your mind wants to wander aimlessly. And when you force it to stay with a mantra, it will fight. It will create stress in you, so you will feel uncomfortable. But if you can persist, eventually your mind will stop resisting and become peaceful. But the goal of meditation is not just to be relaxed, the goal is to get rid of all your desire, which is the cause of all your bad feelings, the cause of your suffering, restlessness, worrying, anxiety, agitation, fear. All these will be eliminated by the practice of *vipassanā*. Yes, of course, if you want to relax, instead of going to a bar to have a drink, you want to sit for half an hour. Surely you can do that. But that is not the goal of Buddhism. The goal of Buddhism is to go beyond this. We want to end the endless rounds of rebirth. We don't want to come back again, because

being born again will subject us to getting old, getting sick and dying, which leads to separation again.

Question 8: There are also people who force the mind to concentrate on one point and they can also concentrate. Is this the correct method to use, Ajahn?

Tan Ajahn: Each individual has different levels of mindfulness. Some might have developed a lot of mindfulness in their past lives. So they might not need a mantra to induce the mind to become peaceful and calm. They can just use their mindfulness, telling the mind to stop thinking, and the mind will stop. So each individual has different levels of strength of mindfulness. You have to find out for yourself how much mindfulness you have by meditating. See if you can just sit and tell your mind to stop thinking without having to use the mantra, or just watch your thoughts and stop your thoughts every time your mind starts to think. If you can do this, you don't need a mantra. Some people have strong enough mindfulness to do this by just watching their breathing. Each individual is different. You have to find out yourself how strong your mindfulness is.

Question 9: Just now Ajahn said that when we don't want to sit or meditate anymore, it means that the defilement is stronger than mindfulness. So what should we do to progress from this point? How do we train ourselves to have stronger mindfulness?

Tan Ajahn: You can continue practicing mindfulness by walking meditation (*caṅkama*). If you feel that sitting is too painful for you, you can start walking meditation instead and still develop mindfulness at the same time. If you use a mantra, continue using the mantra while you walk. Keep walking until you feel very tired and you want to sit down. Then you come back and sit again. So this is what you have to do all the time, when you are not sitting in meditation, you have to develop mindfulness. Then your meditation will be longer, you can sit longer, and your calm and peace will be deeper and deeper until you get to the bottom, to the deepest level.

Question 10: Can I replace meditation with chanting, and how can I overcome my daily challenges with chanting or meditation?

Tan Ajahn: Chanting is like reciting the mantra, only that chanting is longer. Instead of one word, you chant many words, like the discourse of the Buddha in *Pāli*, for instance. When you concentrate your mind on chanting, then you can stop your mind from thinking aimlessly. So you can find some peace/calm from chanting. But you might not go as deeply as you would with your mantra or with mindfulness of the breath. Once you know how to chant continuously, you can use chanting to overcome your challenges. When your mind feels bad, when you have to face something that you don't like to face, you can keep chanting inside to stop your mind from reacting

negatively to the things that you have to face. And the same is true if someone makes you mad; you just keep on chanting. When you chant, you will forget the incident that made you mad, and then the anger will disappear. Or when you are sad, when you have lost someone, you can use chanting to stop your sadness. Just keep on chanting until you forget about the person that you have lost. Once it is no longer in your mind, you will no longer be sad. So you can use this as a method for facing your challenges. But this is not as good as using insight because if you can use insight, you can eliminate all the difficulties that you have in facing your challenges. You can face your challenges calmly and peacefully.

Question 11: How do we get our teenage children who are over 17 years old to learn meditation?

Tan Ajahn: First of all, you have to find out whether they want to learn or not. If they don't want to learn, it is very difficult to force them to do it. But there are ways that you might be able to get them to do it: by doing it yourself or make it a family activity, like eating together. So if you can do something like this, from the time when they are much younger, they might be able to develop this ability to meditate. Then, when they become older, they can continue with the meditation practice. But if they don't want to do it, even an elephant cannot force them to do it. Then you just have to accept that some people are not meant for meditation.

Question 12: We are advised to avoid foolish, unwholesome people. What if that person happens to be your spouse? What can I do?

Tan Ajahn: Get a divorce. If you cannot get a divorce, then you just have to leave that person alone and don't try to change or manage him or her. And try not to let him or her lead you to his or her foolish ways. If he or she find it is difficult to live with you, then he or she might ask for divorce eventually, anyway.

Question 13: If my colleague keeps on preaching to me about other religions, what should I do, or how should I react?

Tan Ajahn: If you cannot stop him from talking, then you just have to listen. Or if you don't want to listen, then pretend to be listening while reciting the mantra inside your mind. Let the person talk until he is tired and then he will stop talking. You'll find that if you try to stop him from talking, he will resist and want to talk even more. So it is better just to be still, not to react. Let the person talk all he wants. And after he gets tired, he will stop talking.

Question 14: We learn Dhamma and meditation so we are able to have right mind, right speech and action. But if children (teenagers) use violent actions towards the parents, what should the parents do?

Tan Ajahn: You have to teach them, teach your children. This is your responsibility as parents. Parents are their children's first teachers. So if you don't teach them early what is wrong, what is good or bad, then when they do something bad, you cannot stop them. But nowadays, I think the parents don't want to teach. They send their children to school and let other people teach for them because they don't have time. They have to go to work and earn money to be able to provide for the family. So sometimes they neglect the most important duty, that is to teach their children what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad. And teaching doesn't mean talking only. Teaching also has to be done by example. If you don't want your kids to be violent, you must not be violent yourself. You must not show them when you become violent. If you don't want them to smoke, you must not smoke. If you don't want them to drink, you must not drink. Once you have taught them all the things that you have to teach, and if they cannot absorb it, then you have to cast them away. They are beyond your ability to help them. So they have to face the consequences of their ignorance. There is nothing you can do. It is the work of *kamma*. *Kamma* means having developed a certain trait or character from past lives. And this character or trait is embedded in your sons/daughters. And if this trait or character is very strong, then you might not be able to change it. It can only change from within. They must see for themselves what's wrong with their trait or character

and the harm their trait or character brings to them. Then they might be able to change.

Question 15: How can I help my son (aged 18) who has bad thoughts, speech and action? He doesn't want to go to the temple? Can I become a nun to repay my past karmic actions?

Tan Ajahn: Like I said, all you can do is teach them, and if they don't believe or want to follow your teaching, there is nothing you can do. As far as paying for your karmic actions is concerned, *kamma* is not something that you can repay. Once you have done something, your kamma will eventually produce the result. The only thing you can do is to prepare yourself to accept the results of your *kamma*. But if you don't want to have any result of your *kamma*, then don't create any. Just sit and meditate. When you sit in meditation, you are not making any *kamma*. You are stopping your *kamma*. But if you have created certain *kamma*, you just have to be prepared—like Angulimala, the disciple of the Buddha. Before he became the disciple of the Buddha, he was misled to believe that if he killed many innocent people, it would lead to enlightenment. But when he met the Buddha, and the Buddha told him that that was not the way to be enlightened, he switched and followed the teachings of the Buddha and eventually became enlightened. But when he travelled to the village where he had killed some of the villagers, he usually got a bad reception from the people. It was the natural result

of his actions that he had to accept. Sometimes he got stoned. But he wasn't afraid, he wasn't disturbed, because his mind had separated from the body. And whatever happened to his body didn't bother his mind. So this is what you want to do, to develop your mind to become so strong that it doesn't matter what happens to your body. Your mind will not be affected. So you will not be afraid of any result of your past *kamma*.

Question 16: That would be our last question for today's session. Does Ajahn have closing or last remarks for us?

Tan Ajahn: Like I repeatedly emphasized, keep on studying, and keep on practicing. Don't give up. This is your best opportunity. It is only once in a while that you become a human being and come across the Teachings of the Buddha. It doesn't happen in every lifetime. Each time you become a human being, it doesn't mean there will be the Buddha's teachings waiting for you. So this is like the last bus that you can catch to go home, to go to *Nibbāna*. If you don't catch it, then you might have to walk, and when you walk, you might take a long, long time. So I think you should give up everything and get on the bus, or else you will be walking, and who knows for how long before you get to *Nibbāna*.

End of *Desanā* and Q&A

Sādhu Sādhu Sādhu



05

Dhamma Talk

December 2, 2014

Let me start tonight with the four Dhamma qualities that are necessary or essential for accomplishing whatever you want to do. In *Pāli* it is called the four *iddhiphāda*, which can be translated as the four steps to success. The first is called *chanda*. The second is *viriya*. The third is *citta*. The fourth is *vimaṃsā*. These are the four Dhamma qualities that one needs to have if one wants to accomplish or to be successful in any endeavor. The first one, *chanda*, means you have to like what you do. If you want to be successful in meditation, you have to like to meditate. In order for you to like to meditate, you must know the result or the benefit that you will gain from your meditation practice. In order to be able to see the benefit, you need to listen to someone who has already benefited from the practice of meditation like the Lord Buddha and his Noble Disciples. So when you listen to Dhamma talks, you are learning the benefits of meditation practice.

Once you have learned that you can gain happiness through peace of mind, you can eliminate all your mental suffering, such as stress, anxiety, worry and fear. Then if you want this benefit, you will like to meditate.

Once you like to meditate, then the second quality will follow. *Viriya* means energy or effort. When you like to do something, you will naturally have the energy to do it and find it easy to do. If you don't like to do it, you will find that you have no energy, no desire. So when you like what you want to do, you will put in your effort. You will work hard to accomplish what you have set out to do. To set this up, you need to listen to people who have the experience in meditation practice; then after you have learned the benefits that you can acquire from meditation practice and you have also learned how to meditate, you will like to meditate. When you like to meditate, you will make time and put in the effort to meditate. You will put off other things because in life you only have so much time to do so many things. So in order to have the time and effort to meditate, you might have to give up other things. Like tonight you had to give up some other things that you normally do, maybe watching television, or going out to some entertainment venue, or some other activities that you might want to do. You were willing to sacrifice, to give up those activities, so you could go to the temple and meditate. So if you have *chanda*, liking what you do, then you will have *viriyā*, energy/effort.

And then you will also have the third quality, which is *citta*. *Citta* means to devote most of your time and effort to the meditation practice because you want to experience the benefit that you can get from your meditation practice. Just imagine if you are successful, your mind will be peaceful and calm, and happy. And this kind of happiness is better than any kind of happiness that you have ever experienced before. Even if you become rich and famous, the happiness that you get from being rich or being famous cannot compare to the happiness that you gain from your meditation practice. You have to experience the result of your practice and you will have no doubt. Right now you are just listening; you have not yet experienced the full result, so you might not yet see the benefit. But at least you have heard about it.

Now in order for you to make it happen, you have to have *viriya*, you have to put in your time and effort. You have to have *citta*. You have to devote your entire life to the meditation practice, only wanting to meditate. This is what is meant by *citta*: your mind is focused only on this thing that you want to do. You will not want to go and do other things. If your friends call you up and ask you to go out, maybe to go out to play golf or tennis, or go to a theater, to a movie, sight-seeing or shopping, you will not accept the invitation. You would rather spend that time meditating. This is the essence of *citta*. Your mind is solely focused on the thing that you want to do and accomplish in order to receive the benefit.

And the fourth quality is your thoughts. You will use your thoughts to think analytically. This is the meaning of *vimaṃsā*, thinking analytically, meaning you have to analyze to see how your practice is going, whether you are moving forward or not. You have to analyze to find out what causes your practice to move forward and what causes your practice not to move forward, as well as what causes your practice to fall behind. These are the things that you have to analyze so that you can eliminate the things that stop you from going forward, and develop the things that will push you forward.

What will make your meditation successful is the development of mindfulness—in *Pāli*, *sati*. *Sati* here means that you have to focus your mind on only one object. You don't want to let your mind think aimlessly. If you need to think, you only think about one thing. For example, you might have to think about what you are going to do today or someone you have to meet, and so forth. Once you have thought out what you have to do and made the preparations, you should stop thinking and concentrate on your development of mindfulness, which can be carried out in several ways. You can use a mantra, like reciting the name of the Buddha "*Buddho, Buddho, Buddho*" as you go on preparing yourself to do whatever you have to do. Or you can use the activities of your body as the point of your focus. Just focus on whatever you are doing at the moment. If you are walking, just focus

on walking. If you are taking a shower, just focus on that activity. If you are getting dressed, combing your hair, or putting on your shoes, simply focus on that. Don't let your mind go elsewhere. Don't think about other people, things, or places. Just keep focusing solely on the activities of the body. This is called *kāyagatā-satipaṭṭhāna*, using bodily activities as your mindfulness object. If you use the mantra, reciting the name of the Buddha, you are using *Buddhānussati*, development of mindfulness (*sati*) by reciting the mantra, the name of the Buddha.

There are also other methods. You can reflect on impermanence, for instance, of your body. You can contemplate the fact that your body is subject to aging, sickness, and death. You are subject to separation from your loved ones. If you reflect on these truths, it means you are developing mindfulness. And for this particular case, you are also developing insight into the nature of the body. If you keep contemplating, keep reflecting on these truths as you go about your daily activities, you can tame your mind, make your mind calm to slow down your desire and greed. Normally we tend to be greedy, we want to have this and have that. But if we think for a moment that eventually we will die, what is the point of having all these? Because when we die, we cannot get anything. We cannot take anything with us. Even this body we have to leave behind.

The only thing that can go with you is the mind. So if you use this, you are developing both mindfulness and insight. And when you have the time to sit and meditate, when you don't have to do anything, you should find a quiet room, some place that you will not be distracted. Close your eyes and focus on your meditation or mindfulness object. If you use the mantra, keep reciting the mantra. If you use the movement of the body, just focus on that activity. And if you want to use the breathing, watch your breath. Watch your breath at the point where the air contacts the body, which is usually at the tip of the nose, or above the upper lip. Just focus on that point. Be aware of the in-and-out breath. When you are breathing in, be aware or know that you are breathing in. When you are breathing out, just be aware or know that you are breathing out. Don't think about other things. Should you have any thoughts, ignore them and concentrate on watching your breath.

If you find it difficult to use your breath as your point of focus, you can switch to the mantra, if you like. Repeat *Buddho, Buddho, Buddho*, mentally. But if you find that this is difficult to do, you can use chanting. If you can remember some chants, just chant. Like *Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa*. Or *Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi, Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*. Whatever you can remember, keep reciting it. You can do it repeatedly; it doesn't

matter how many times. The purpose is to prevent your mind from thinking about this person or that person, about this thing or that thing. Because when you think like that, you will agitate the mind, and you will prevent the mind from entering into calm and converging into one. So this is what you have to do first, before you will be able to accomplish the first level of meditation.

The first level is called *samatha-bhāvanā*, the meditation for peace of mind, for calm, for tranquility, for stillness—just knowing without any thinking. When the mind enters that stage, it will experience peace and happiness that is greater than any kind of happiness. Once you have experienced this, you know this is the thing that you will want to have for as long as possible. So you will have more *chanda*, *viriya*, *citta*, *vimāṃsā*. You will have more liking of the meditation practice. You will want to devote more time and effort to your practice and will be single-minded in your meditation. You don't want to go do other things and you will use your mind to analyze your practice so that you can improve and move forward.

Once you have accomplished the first level, your mind enters into *jhāna*, to *upekkhā*, to merely know without having any thoughts. What you want to do is to leave it alone for as long as possible. Don't force your mind to think; even if you want to develop insight or wisdom, this is not the time to do it.

You want to wait for the mind to withdraw from that state first, wait patiently until the mind starts to be aware of the body and the surroundings. Then if you want to develop insight or wisdom, you can do that.

But usually when you first start, you want to maintain your mindfulness. You want to be more proficient and more adept with the meditation for calm first. You want to do it in order to enter into calm, into *jhāna*, any time you want. If you come out of *jhāna* and start to think, you might think that you are developing insight. Your mind may be misled to think about other things. Instead of developing insight (*paññā*/wisdom), you will actually start to agitate your mind. So if you cannot control your thoughts yet, try to stop them first, as you come out of your *jhāna* or out of your *samādhi*.

You should continue developing your mindfulness, keep repeating the mantra, or keep watching your body activities. Like when you get up and you want to practice walking meditation, you can concentrate on walking, using the body as your object of concentration. In the case of walking, you should watch your feet. When you walk on your left foot, just know that you are walking on your left foot. When you walk on your right foot, just know that you are walking on your right foot. Just go left and right, left and right, watching as you walk. The reason why you have to walk is to change your body position because if you sit for a long time, your body can get numb and can

be painful and uncomfortable. So you want to relieve that discomfort by walking. After a while when you become tired of walking, then you can come back and sit again if you don't have anything else to do. Try to sit as much as you can until you know how to enter into *jhāna*. You should be able to enter into *jhāna* quickly, in five or ten minutes at the most. Once you are proficient or adept in your meditation for *jhāna*, then you can go on to the next step: meditating for insight.

Meditating for insight is different from meditating for calm. When you are meditating for calm, you want to stop your thinking; you don't want to think at all. You want to rest your mind, to keep the mind content and happy. But when you develop insight, you have to think, only you have to think in the way of the truth; namely you have to think of the three characteristics of all existing things, like your body and other people's bodies. They have three characteristics. *Anicca* means that things are impermanent, they are temporary. They arise, remain for a while, and then they cease, they disappear. The body, after birth, will grow, and after growing up fully, it will become old, will become sick, and then will die.

Contemplate not just the body, but everything that you have, including all the external possessions, like your wealth, your money, your house, your spouse, your family, and your job—everything. You will eventually have to lose them. If you contemplate

and remind yourself that this is what you have to go through, then your mind will not cling to them. Your mind will prepare for the eventuality that you will have to depart from them. When the mind is ready, it will be prepared to depart without clinging to them. When the time for separation comes, the mind will do it peacefully, without having any sadness or stress. So this is what you want to do, to teach your mind, to tell the mind of the things that will happen in the future, at any time, because no one can predict when this will happen. That is why it is called *anattā*. You don't know when it is going to happen. You cannot manage events or people; you cannot tell them to leave you at a certain time. It is like your body, you cannot say that the body should leave you at the age of 80 or 90 or whatever, because the body can leave you any time. So you must be prepared by constantly reminding your mind of this truth.

Once the mind has fully absorbed this truth, it will not resist or deny the truth. It will accept the truth peacefully. So this is the way of getting rid of your stress and mental suffering, by teaching your mind the truth that everything that you have in your possession, sooner or later, will leave you or you will leave them. But you will not leave with sadness because if you have *samādhi*, if you have developed *jhāna*, the *jhāna* will protect your mind, will feed your mind with internal happiness. So losing anything will not affect your mind at all. Your mind will be constantly peaceful and happy. So first you must

develop *jhāna* in order to have this peace of mind and happiness so that you can withstand or endure your losses when they happen.

These are the two steps that you have to develop if you want to be successful like the Buddha and his enlightened disciples. This is what they did, and this is what they taught us to do. If we follow what they taught and what they did, we will also be like them. We will be free from stress, anxiety, worry, and fear. We will always be peaceful and happy regardless of whatever might happen because we know that we don't need anything anymore. What we need, what we want is the happiness that arises from peace of mind, the happiness that arises from letting go of everything.

So this is what you will have to do. First you must develop the four *iddhipāda*: *chanda*, *viriya*, *citta*, *vimaṃsā*. *Chanda* means having to like what you do. If you like to meditate, then you will have the heart/ the mind to put in the time and effort which is *viriya*. And you will have devotion (*citta*); you will devote all your time to this practice and you will think analytically to figure out what is making you move forward, and what is holding you back (*vimaṃsā*). For example, right now you can only meditate for a little while, maybe once a week, or if you are more serious, you might meditate every day. But since you still have to go to work, you might only be able to meditate once in the morning before you go to work,

and once in the evening when you come home before you go to bed. Sometimes you might not feel like doing it because you might feel tired from working, so instead of meditating, you might want to watch a movie just for relaxation.

You find that working is a hindrance to your progress because you have little time to meditate. If you want more time, you might have to work fewer hours. So you might have to accept less income. In order to manage your life with less income, you might have to spend less; you might have to use less money. So you will have to think, *what should I do?* You might have to give up a certain kind of activity that requires you to spend money. In this way you can have the time to meditate, and you don't have to work too hard or spend too much time working. This is what we call *vimaṃsā*, thinking analytically concerning your practice: what is moving you forward, what is pulling you back. So you must eliminate what is pulling you back and support what is pushing you forward. This is the thing that you have to do.

You will find that developing mindfulness continually is the thing that pushes you forward in your meditation practice. So you want to have more time for developing your mindfulness. And to be successful in developing your mindfulness, you need to be alone and free from other kinds of activity, like working. This is something that you have to analyze so that you can go forward. If you just practice blindly, not knowing what is helping you or what is impeding

you, then you will not succeed in your meditation practice. So these are the four steps to success, the four *iddhiphāda*: *chanda*, *virīya*, *citta*, *vimāṃsā*. Once you have these, you will be able to develop mindfulness. And when you have mindfulness, when you sit in meditation, your mind will be focused on one object, and your mind will fall into calm. Your mind will become one and become the knower. Your thinking will stop and you will find peace and happiness from that state of mind. You'll find that you will want to do this as much as you can until you become proficient, until you can sit and become peaceful and calm easily and quickly.

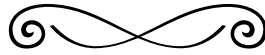
Once you have this, then the next step is to contemplate the three characteristics of things when you are not sitting in meditation, when you withdraw from that peaceful state, and when you start thinking. Don't let your mind think about making more money, gaining more happiness from people around you or from things that you buy because they are all illusions of happiness. They last very briefly and leave you empty-handed while wanting to have more. And no matter how many things you have or how many times you have them, you will still feel the same afterwards. So you must not let the mind think about those things. Instead you should think that they are impermanent. They only create more stress for you because you will have more desire for them. And when you have desire, you cannot remain peaceful and calm.

So think of what you want to have and do as *anicca*, *dukkhaṃ*, and *anattā*. *Anicca* means they are temporary. *Dukkhaṃ* means they don't give you happiness; they give you stress, worry, anxiety and fear. *Anattā* means you cannot stop them, you cannot manage them all the time, you cannot control them all the time, and you cannot tell them to give you only happiness because they will leave you sooner or later. So this is what you do after you have developed *samatha* or *jhāna* and become proficient with this practice. And when you come out of *jhāna*, you can develop insight by contemplating the three characteristics of everything that you possess. In this way you will not cling to them, depend on them, or rely on them for making you happy. You discover that you can be happy with your *jhāna*, and that's all you need—peace of mind and calm which you can maintain using mindfulness. Once the mind has stopped clinging to everything or having any desire for anything, your mind will no longer have any stress. It stops because you have eliminated the cause of your stress or suffering: your desire.

So this is what I have to say to you tonight, and I will stop now and let you ask some questions.

Questions & Answers

December 2, 2014



Question 1: How can we strike a balance between our responsibilities in life like taking care of family and our commitment to practice?

Tan Ajahn: You will have to start by taking a small step first. You don't do it suddenly at one go. You might still go to work but reduce the amount of time you spend working and reduce time spent trying to make yourself happy with your bodily activities. You want to reduce them slowly and gradually increase the time for your Dhamma practice. First you might meditate once a day in the morning or in the evening, then you might increase it and do it twice and you might extend the duration of your meditation. Let's say you normally meditate for half an hour. You might extend it to one hour and so forth. So this is something you will do gradually. And maybe on your day off, instead of going out to have fun with your friends, you might want to devote your day off

for the practice of meditation. Just try to carve out as much time as possible.

But if you still have some commitment to your family, you might have to take your family to go shopping or sight-seeing. But when you don't have to, then try to use that time for your meditation. So slowly increase your Dhamma practice and slowly decrease your other activities. Eventually, when things are right for you, when you no longer have any responsibility for your family or your work, then you might be able to practice full time.

Question 2: When Tan Ajahn mentioned *chanda*, which means the desire (such as liking to do meditation), how is this different from *taṇhā*, which also means desire?

Tan Ajahn: Desire is a neutral term. When you apply it to things that are beneficial to you, we call it *magga*, the path to the cessation of suffering. When you apply it to the things that increase your stress then we call it *kilesa* or *taṇhā*. When you have desire to meditate, the result that you get from meditation is peace of mind, which is beneficial to your mind. But when you have the desire to have fun with your friends or doing whatever you want to do, you will become addicted to these activities, and when you cannot do them, you will become unhappy. So this is the difference between the meanings of the word *desire*. There is beneficial desire and damaging desire.

The Buddha teaches us to eliminate the three damaging desires because it causes stress in the mind. But the positive or the beneficial desires, he encourages us to develop like the desire to make *dāna*, to give to charity; the desire to keep the five precepts and the eight precepts; and the desire to go to the temple to meditate, to listen to Dhamma talks. These are all beneficial desires. But the desires to have happiness from seeing, hearing, eating, and drinking are damaging desires because they are like being addicted to drugs. Once you become addicted, you cannot stop. Once you are addicted to drinking coffee, you cannot stop drinking coffee. You have to have coffee to make you feel better. When you have no coffee, you are upset or unhappy. So these are the reasons why the Buddha is trying to tell us to stop the damaging desire, the desire for sensual pleasures, and the desire through your five *āyatana*: the eye, ear, nose, tongue and body. This is a damaging desire.

The second damaging desire is called *bhava-taṇhā*, desire to be something: to be rich, to be famous, to be respected by people, to be anything that you want to be. When you cannot be what you want to be, you become sad. Let's say you want to become a politician, to enter the parliament, and to do so, you want to win in an election. When you lose you become sad, you become unhappy. So this is the second desire, the desire to become something or somebody.

The third desire is the desire not to become the things that you don't like, like becoming sick, old, or poor.

These, then, are the three damaging desires that the Buddha wants us to eliminate. He wants us to develop the positive desires, *chanda*, the desire to practice meditation, the desire to give up your money so that you can become a monk, the desire to spend your whole life keeping the precepts, and developing mindfulness, *samādhi* and *paññā*. These are positive/beneficial desires.

Question 3: There is constant awareness of the arising and ceasing of aggregates even when I am not in *samādhi*. What do I do next?

Tan Ajahn: After you are aware of the rising and falling of the aggregates, the objective is then to be aware of the aggregate that you are attached to, such as your body. Are you aware that your body is also arising and ceasing? Your body is constantly evolving, changing. And the eventual final destination of the body is death. This is something that you want to be aware of so that you can tell your mind to let go, not to cling to the arising and cessation of the body. Because if you cannot let go, when the body has to cease, the mind will be stressed. So you have to be aware of the object that is your concern. You don't want to be aware of the object that is not your concern. And the object that is your concern is the object that you consider to belong to you. When you

believe that something belongs to you, you will have the tendency to want it to be with you all the time, you don't want it to separate from you. So when you have this desire, you are creating stress for your mind. This desire is what we want to eliminate by being aware that these things will eventually cease. Knowing that they will eventually leave you or you will eventually leave them, the mind stops clinging to them. And then when they leave you, you will not feel any stress.

Question 4: Can I practice mindfulness of feelings, mind, and mental qualities directly and skip mindfulness of body?

Tan Ajahn: Mindfulness is usually developed through the mantra or through the body activities because when you first start, your mindfulness is very slow, very weak. You are not able to watch your mind or your feelings because they are too subtle for the beginner. For the beginner, it is easier to use a mantra or use the body, which you can see. Sometimes there is no feeling, so where are you going to place your mindfulness? And when you have severe feelings, you cannot maintain your mindfulness anyway. When you have a painful feeling, you lose all your mindfulness because your desire to escape the pain will take over. Your desire will say, *I want to get rid of this feeling. I am feeling bad. I am feeling terrible.* So the mindfulness of *vedanā* (feeling) and that of the mind are the second and third levels of mindfulness.

The first level is the mindfulness of the body. In the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the Lord Buddha teaches first the mindfulness of the body, then the mindfulness of feelings, then the mindfulness of the mind. So you have to go step by step. You cannot just go up to the highest level. For instance, if you have strong painful feelings, can you still remain calm and peaceful? If you can, that means you have mindfulness. But when you cannot become calm and peaceful and you start to become irrational, become restless, that means you don't have the ability to have mindfulness of your feelings yet.

Question 5: What is the reason for frequent mental chatter? I find that my mind tries to find something to fill the gap of empty space between thoughts. How does one deal with this?

Tan Ajahn: Your mind is constantly being pushed by your delusion. And your delusion tells you that you have to have something in order to make you happy, which is the opposite of the truth. The truth is you should not have anything because having nothing is what will make your mind happy. But your delusion tells you that you need to have something all the time. So when your mind has nothing, it automatically starts to think of something to do, to see, to drink, and to eat. So you are being constantly pushed by your delusion to go and find what you think is one form of happiness or another. That is why you keep moving from one thing to the

next, never staying still. When you are forced to stay still, you become stressed because you are not used to being still.

Question 6: I achieve calmness and pleasure when I meditate, but there is no light *nimittas*. How do I progress in my meditation from here?

Tan Ajahn: *Nimittas* (visions) are optional. For some, *nimittas* occur just as by-products of meditation. For others, there might not be any *nimittas* at all. But this is not important. The real goals of your meditation are emptiness, peace of mind, (*upekkhā*), and knowing. That is all you want. That is the fourth *jhāna*. Before entering that state, some people might see, hear, or feel something. Sometimes you feel you have goose bumps; sometimes you might have tears flowing because you experience some feeling that you have never experienced before. But these things are *aniccam*, *dukkham*, and *anattā*. *Aniccam* means that they only happen temporarily, and they will disappear. *Dukkham* arises if you are attached to them, if you want them to be there all the time, and when they are not there, you will not be happy. You don't want to be attached to *nimitta*. You just want to know them for what they are. They come and go. They are not the real thing for you. The real thing is attaining emptiness, peacefulness, calm and knowingness; these are all you want.

Question 7: When I started to meditate for the first time, the tears kept flowing down, why is that?

Tan Ajahn: Like I just said, sometimes when the mind experiences something, it can affect the emotion and the mind will react accordingly. But this is not important, you should disregard it. Just be aware that it happened and then eventually it will disappear. What you should do is concentrate on your meditation object. Don't be distracted by this event because if you do, you will not move forward.

Question 8: I have been meditating for a long time now and I am able to calm my mind until there are no thoughts. However, joy and peace never arise. It is just quiet and then I come out of my meditation. Where have I gone wrong?

Tan Ajahn: I think you haven't gone deeply enough yet. You have only gone half way to *jhāna*. You haven't reached the fourth *jhāna*. If you have reached that, you will experience something that you have never experienced before—a life changing experience. You will find that there is no other kind of happiness in this world comparable to this happiness. If you meditate and you still don't feel any joy or happiness, it means you haven't yet reached the goal. You should concentrate on your meditation object and continue meditating. Don't stop. If you don't succeed this time, try the next time. Keep doing it. The reason why you haven't reached that

point yet is because your mindfulness is not strong enough to overcome the resistance. The mind is constantly being pushed by your desire to go out, to go do the things that you want to do, to see, to hear. So you have to use this mindfulness to push it back in. If your mindfulness is not strong enough, you cannot push it into the deepest level yet. So you have to develop more mindfulness. Keep on practicing more and more.

Question 9: I am practicing mindfulness of my mind, mental qualities, and feelings and I can see them arising and changing clearly. Is there still a need for concentration?

Tan Ajahn: Yes, because you haven't yet developed any concentration, you haven't yet developed any *jhāna*. All you are doing is just watching the feelings and your mind, which might be comparable to watching people coming and going. It doesn't make your mind peaceful and calm. You have to sit, close your eyes and focus on your meditation object and push your mind into the deepest level. If you haven't yet experienced this life changing experience, you haven't yet achieved anything in your meditation. Without having this experience, this mental strength, you will not be able to develop *vipassanā* in order to counter or eliminate your desire, which is the cause of your stress. So you need first to have this peace that you achieve from full concentration. Once you have this peace, this full concentration, this full happiness,

you don't feel like you need or want anything, and when your desires come up, you can easily get rid of them because you know you can live without them, you don't need them. But when you don't have this concentration, you will not be able to resist your desires. You can be watching your mind or watching your feelings, but when you see an ice-cream or you see a cup of coffee, you might not be able to resist that desire.

Question 10: Are there any observable characteristics of someone who is an *Ariya* or at least one who has reached *Stream-entry*?

Tan Ajahn: You have to be at that level first before you can gauge other people because you need to have a standard for measurement. If you do not have a standard, you cannot measure the other person. So you first have to become a *Sotāpanna* before you can know whether the other person is a *Sotāpanna* or not. A *Sotāpanna* cannot tell whether the other person is a *Sakadāgāmī*, an *Anāgāmī*, or an *Arahant* because the other person is at a higher level than him. It is like a student who has graduated from high school, he cannot tell whether a person has graduated from college because he doesn't know how to measure that person's knowledge yet. So you have to also talk to that person to be able to assess how much they have achieved. You have to achieve the level first, because if you don't, when you talk to them, they can deceive you and you won't know the difference.

But don't worry about whether someone is an *Arahant* or not. It shouldn't matter to you really. You should be more concerned about whether you yourself are an *Arahant* or not. If you are not, then you have to make yourself an *Arahant*. And the way to do it is to follow the teaching of the Buddha. If you are listening to the teaching of other monks (that is, not the Buddha) and if you are not sure, don't worry. The Buddha teaches you in the *Kalama Sutta* that you don't have to believe what other monks tell you, even if you think that they are your teacher. If you cannot verify it yourself, then don't listen to them, don't believe them yet. The Buddha said you have to prove to yourself that the things they teach you can eliminate stress from your mind; then you know that the person knows what he is talking about. If he teaches you something and you apply it in your practice and achieve no result, maybe he is not telling you the truth, or maybe you are not practicing it correctly. So you have to be patient, you don't want to jump to conclusions.

Question 11: With regards to meditation, is it generally true that one should aim to meditate as long as possible, before the *kilesas* set in? For example, after being able to sit for one hour, should one try to increase it to one and a half hour and then two hours and so on?

Tan Ajahn: The amount of time that you are able to sit depends on the strength of your mindfulness.

If you have strong mindfulness, you can sit for a very long time because you can enter into *jhāna* very quickly. Once you are in *jhāna*, it is like you are in a timeless zone. You don't know the time. You don't feel anything. You can sit for a long time that way. But if you haven't entered *jhāna*, you will have to experience all kinds of distractions. This can disturb your meditation and you will not be able to sit for long. So the important thing is to try to develop strong mindfulness first. Try to develop and maintain mindfulness all day long. Try to stop thinking about things that you don't need to think about, and then your meditation will improve. It improves correspondingly to the improvement of your mindfulness.

Question 12: How can I move up the ladder from *dāna* to *bhāvanā*? I like to do *dāna* and I am doing it wholeheartedly, but I can't sit in meditation. How should I cultivate the *bhāvanā* practice from here?

Tan Ajahn: The reason why you want to do *dāna* is to get rid of your money, your surplus money. Because when you have surplus money, sometimes you want to buy things, you want to go do something. This will take away your time to meditate, to develop your mindfulness. So if you want to go on a holiday trip, why not spend that money on *dāna* instead, and go stay in a temple. You have to force yourself to do these things and force yourself to develop

mindfulness. It doesn't come automatically, especially for those people who haven't had any mindfulness previously. Some other people are fortunate. Maybe in their past lives they have developed a certain amount of mindfulness, so for them to meditate might be a lot easier than for those who haven't yet developed any mindfulness. If you have no mindfulness at all, then you must force yourself to develop it. And this is the reason why you want to do charity. Instead of going on holiday for a week, you stay in the temple instead and spend your money paying the temple for the facilities that you have used. This will enable you to be alone to focus on developing mindfulness all day long, from the time you get up to the time you go to sleep. And when you are in the temple and you are close to a teacher, you can ask any questions that might come up. So this is the real reason for charity, for *dāna*. It is for you to get rid of your surplus money, so that it doesn't take away your time, so you can have the time to be alone and to practice mindfulness.

It will also help you keep the precepts because when you give money to charity, you will become kind-hearted. You will think of the welfare of other people. You will not be selfish and not want to hurt other people. When you don't want to hurt other people, you find that keeping the five precepts is very easy. But if you only think of yourself, that is, if you want to make a lot of money to spend on yourself, you will not care about other people. You will find

that keeping the precepts is very difficult, and even more, you will find it to be a hindrance to making money because when you want to make quick and easy money, sometimes you have to cheat or lie.

So this is the purpose of *dāna*: to help you develop *mettā*, compassion, loving-kindness, and to be less selfish, so that you will think of the welfare of other people and not want to hurt them. You can easily keep the five precepts. Once you do, your mind will become a lot calmer and more peaceful. If you cannot keep the precepts, your mind will be constantly agitated by the bad things that you have done. You will worry that you might be caught or you will have to pay for your bad *kamma*. So if you can keep the precepts, you won't be creating any bad *kamma*, and you will find it a lot easier to be peaceful and calm as your mindfulness develops. This happens because when you develop mindfulness, you want to go stay alone in quiet places. But if you have done something bad, your conscience will always bother you. Especially when you stay in the forest monastery, you might worry about your bad *kamma*, which will make you pay for what you have done. So you might not be able to stay alone in the temple if you have a bad conscience. You want to prevent this by keeping the five precepts. And in order to keep the five precepts, you have to be kind and caring towards other people, so you have to give *dāna*, be charitable. And you will then have the time to meditate. If you are selfish, you want to find happiness for yourself, perhaps by

going on holiday instead of going to the temple, so you will never have the time to develop mindfulness, and you will never be able to *bhāvanā* successfully.

Question 13: When I donate \$5 or \$10, my ego is small, but when I donate \$1,000 my ego gets bigger. It is also similar to when I am helping out in the temple for an hour, and my ego is smaller compared to when I spend time helping for more hours when my ego is bigger. How should I train myself in order to eliminate/reduce ego and to cultivate detachment from the *dāna* that I make?

Tan Ajahn: When you do *dāna*, you must do it altruistically and not want anything in return. You just want to feel good, that is all. People are sometimes confused; especially some Buddhists think that giving to charity will give them a happier/better life. This is not the result that you will get from giving to charity. The result is to gain a greater sense of well-being, of fullness, of goodness in yourself, that you have done something selfless. You want to eliminate your ego. Giving *dāna* is one way of cutting down your ego. And you find doing this hard, because the more you give, the stronger your ego gets and resists your giving. But if you can win this battle over yourself, then it means you have moved forward. So you used to give \$5 and now you want to give \$10, but when you find it difficult, you must force yourself to do it. If you can do it, you will feel much better than giving the \$5, and the next time you will want to give more than that.

And you can do this by asking yourself, *do I really need to keep this money?* If the answer is no, then what do you keep it for? You are not going to use it anyway. When you die, you cannot take it with you. Why not give it away? When you give it away, you will feel proud that you have done certain things that you could not do before. You should also think of great people like the Lord Buddha. All these people gave up everything that they had. The Buddha was a prince and was willing to give up his princely life to live like a beggar. If he hadn't done this, he wouldn't have become a Buddha. If you want to be able to be successful in your meditation, you have to be willing to give up everything. So by giving gradually at first, it is just a step-by-step approach to get you more accustomed to giving, to sacrificing, to letting go of your attachments, and to eliminating your ego. These are the things that are important if you want to move forward.

Question 14: Intuition or gut feeling, is there any mention in the Dhamma with regards to this? What is their equivalent in Buddhism?

Tan Ajahn: Whatever you think or feel are the products of your past *kamma*. This is the equivalent. You have certain intuition because you have been doing something, feeling something, thinking about something until it becomes second nature. Sometimes it is hidden in your sub-consciousness; sometimes it will suddenly

come out or there is something that triggers it. But they are all considered to be the results of your past *kamma*, good and bad.

Question 15: What will Ajahn's advice be for someone who is about to die? Will Ajahn's advice be different if the advice is given to meditators or to non-meditators?

Tan Ajahn: It depends on how much they can do. If they cannot meditate or cannot understand the three characteristics, they can be told that the body is not you, that it doesn't belong to you, and that you have to give it up. If they cannot do this, then you might ask them to calm their mind, stop thinking about death, just chant or use a mantra. If they cannot do this, maybe ask them to listen to a Dhamma talk, just to get their mind away from thinking about death, because they are not ready for death yet. Or you can tell them to reflect on the good things they have done, the charity they have done. Ask them to think that dying is just like going to sleep. And when you awaken, you get a new body; this is like the changing of the body. When you die, you go to sleep, when you wake up, you wake up with a new body, you become a baby. So it depends on the person. Try to tell them everything, so that they can decide what to do because sometimes I cannot tell exactly what they need, so I try telling them many different ways.

Question 16: Follow up from last week's question that we are advised to avoid foolish people, what if they are our parents or our siblings?

Tan Ajahn: If you can live in a different place, move out. If you don't have to live with them, move out. But if you have to stay with them, don't let them influence you—that's all. If they want to tell you to do things that you know are inappropriate, you just don't have to do them. It is not disrespectful or ungrateful. If your parents tell you to cheat or lie, you don't have to do it. If they ask you to drink alcohol, you don't have to do it. You can live with people, but you must not let them lead you down the wrong path. Of course, it will be easier just not to live with them, but if you have to, make sure that you don't let them influence you or lead you astray.

Question 17: Sometimes I am affected by doubt. What I mean is occasionally when I make a decision about something, after some time, the thoughts will arise questioning the decision that I have made, trying to convince myself that I have made the wrong decision. Why is this so?

Tan Ajahn: Because when you do something, you are not sure what you are doing. You don't know the reason behind it. So before you do anything, you should think carefully and make sure you know exactly what to expect from your actions. Once you know, you won't have any doubt. But if you are not

sure what you are doing, then all sorts of doubts will come up. So think before you do anything.

Question 18: Where does the mind go when one is sleeping?

Tan Ajahn: The mind and the body are not really in the same place. The mind has its own place of existence, and the body has its own place of existence. Let me give you an example. The mind is like the controller of the spacecraft. You send a spacecraft into space, and the controller is on earth. You communicate through radio waves. This is the same way that the mind communicates with the body, we call it *viññāṇa*. *Viññāṇa* will receive all the data from the body such as the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and mind. Then the mind will use *saṅkhāra*, which is thinking to instruct the body what to do. So the mind is in what we call the celestial world or in the spiritual world, while the body is in the physical world. The mind is in contact with the body through the *viññāṇa*.

So this is like the spacecraft and the controller. The controller stays on earth, while the spacecraft is in space. So when the body goes to sleep, it means that the mind and the body stop communicating temporarily. So the mind sometimes will do whatever it likes. Sometimes it will think of the past, it will go to some places that it might have visited before; it can be quite varied, but you don't know about it.

Sometimes when you dream, you are not sure what you were dreaming about, whether you were dreaming about this life or past lives. Sometimes you don't dream at all, or sometimes the mind just wants to rest. It stops thinking. But the mind and the body are never in the same place. Should anything happen to the body, should there be a nuclear bomb and all the bodies are incinerated, the mind will still remain the same. The mind of everybody remains the same. The mind is indestructible, because the mind is not in this world. Even if this world should explode, when this world no longer exists, the mind still exists. And the mind, if it has any desire, will go look for a new body on a different earth, in a different world. Imagine the people in a spacecraft; if they lose this spacecraft, they will build a new one, and then they will send the new spacecraft into space to explore some more. So this is like the body and the mind.

Finally, let me remind you that you are the mind, that you are not the body. Don't worry about the body, you will lose it one day. Take care of your mind. And the way to take care of the mind is to *bhāvanā*, to develop mindfulness (*sati*), *samādhi* and *paññā*. That is all you have to do because the mind will be with you all the time. The mind is your real possession. But right now it doesn't have the right knowledge to look after itself. It doesn't have the Dhamma necessary to become peaceful, calm, and wise. The mind is still deluded. The mind still thinks it is the body.

So this is what you want to do. When you *bhāvanā*, you will eventually get to the state where you see that the mind and the body are two separate things. In the meantime, just keep reminding yourself, *I am not the body. I am going to lose the body one day, sooner or later. But losing the body is not important because I can always get a new body. I have lost so many bodies before so I won't worry about losing the body.* The only worry is to worry about not having the Dhamma to look after the mind.

End of *Desanā* and Q&A

Sādhu Sādhu Sādhu



06

Dhamma Talk

December 9, 2014

The Buddha, The Dhamma, and the *Saṅgha* are like people with perfect eyesight, while we, the Buddhist followers, are like blind people. We cannot see the path that will take us to enlightenment. So we must first develop faith in the Buddha, in the Dhamma and in the *Saṅgha*. Faith here is not blind faith. Faith here means to believe in his teachings and then follow them. This is so we can prove to ourselves that what the Buddha had seen and experienced is something that we also can see and experience. We can prove that the Buddha was real, his teachings were real, and his Noble Disciples were real. If we do not have faith in the Buddha, in the Dhamma teachings, and in the *Saṅgha*, then we will not follow the Buddha's or the *Saṅgha*'s teachings because we don't believe them. If we don't follow the Buddha's teachings and the *Saṅgha*'s teachings, then we cannot prove to ourselves whether their teachings are real

or whether they will bring the results that they have claimed.

So this is the kind of faith we need to have—the faith to put ourselves to the test, to take up the challenge. The Buddha said he had become enlightened, he had eliminated all forms of mental suffering such as stress, depression, anxiety, worry, and fear. To eliminate these mental sufferings, we must follow his teachings, follow his example and how he practiced to achieve this goal. This is what we have to do if we want to prove whether the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the *Saṅgha* are real or whether they are just fairy tale stories told by people from a long time ago, just to lure us to do good without getting any results. So what is crucial, in order to have faith in the Buddha, is to believe that the Buddha is a self-enlightened person.

Before he was enlightened, he was like us: blind to the truth that caused his suffering and blind to the truth that eliminated his suffering. And after he put in the effort, he searched, practiced, and eventually came to see the truth. The truth that he perceived is that of the Four Noble Truths: the truth of suffering (*dukkha*), the truth of the cause of suffering (*samudaya*), the truth of the cessation of suffering (*nirodha*) and the path that leads to the cessation of suffering (*magga*). The Buddha discovered this truth of what was inside his mind and what is inside the minds of every being, like you and me.

The difference between the Buddha and us is that the Buddha saw this truth and we haven't yet seen it. So this is what we want to do. We want to find and discover this truth inside our mind. And in order to be able to see this clearly, we have to follow the example of the Lord Buddha or follow his teaching. He taught us to abandon everything because everything that we have hinders self-awakening to our enlightenment. So if we want to become enlightened, sooner or later, we have to give up our possessions and our way of life because they do not lead us to enlightenment; on the contrary, they lead us to more delusion, more rounds of rebirths, more suffering, depression, stress, worry, and anxiety.

So this is the faith that we have to establish: that the Buddha was just like us before he became enlightened. He lived like us and had possessions. And even though he lived like a prince with all the royal trappings, the apparent happiness of a prince could not eliminate the depression, the mental suffering in his mind and heart. So he decided to give all these up after realizing that he would get old, get sick, and die. And when this happened, he would not find any happiness. He knew that, in order to find happiness in the normally accepted way, he needed a healthy body, not a sick body, not an old body and he had to be alive, but eventually no one can escape death. Once that happens, all the happiness that we have through the body will no longer be available.

So this insight into the impermanent nature of the body drove the Buddha to seek a new refuge. He knew that the body was not a permanent refuge, so he wanted to find the permanent refuge, one where he could be truly happy all the time. And he knew that, by living the way he used to live, he would never be able to find this new refuge. So he followed the path of a group of people who gave up their worldly lives and possessions, seeking solitude and refuge in the practice of meditation. After many years of reflection, he finally decided that he had to leave the palace life, and this happened after he received news that his wife had given birth to his son. He uttered the word *bondage*, referring to his son and knew that if he remained with his son, he would not be able to live a meditative life. So he decided in the middle of that night to leave the palace without telling anybody, knowing that if he told anyone, they would not let him leave. So that is what the Buddha did in order to be free of the mundane life and to lead the spiritual life which he thought could provide him with a permanent refuge.

He practiced meditation for about six years under the guidance of two renowned teachers who could only guide him to the level of *jhāna*. This level of *jhāna* can help eliminate stress and suffering, but only temporarily. When you are in *jhāna*, all your stress and suffering will disappear. But after you withdraw from *jhāna*, your stress,

your worry, your anxiety, and your fear will return. The Buddha couldn't find anybody else to teach him how to permanently eliminate this stress, so he had to look for it by himself. Eventually he found the path that led him to this permanent refuge. He called this path, *magga*, which is part of the Four Noble Truths.

First he discovered the truth of suffering; he knew his mind was constantly suffering from stress, depression, sadness, loneliness, and fear and after practicing meditation, reflecting, and contemplating, he eventually discovered the cause of his suffering: the three desires. The first of the three desires is the desire for happiness—using the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body, to experience sight, sound, smell, taste and tactile objects. This kind of desire will lead your mind to become restless. Once you have this desire, you cannot remain peaceful and at ease, like when you have the desire to go to a party, go watch a movie, or just go out to do something. If you cannot go, for instance, if you are sick or you are somehow restrained from going, you will feel terrible inside. But if you could go, you would only experience a brief period of happiness. When you came back home, you would be in the same state as before you left home. You would feel lonely and then feel the need to go out again. So if you keep obeying your desire and doing what your desire asks you to do, you do not eliminate your desire, and the consequence is the suffering that follows. The only way to eliminate your suffering is

to stop your desire. And the tools that the Buddha discovered that we can use to stop our desire are called the *magga*, or the path.

The path the Buddha expounded had eight factors, or sometimes he condensed them down into three factors. The three factors that he normally taught to the lay people are *dāna*, *sīla*, and *bhāvanā*. The reason why he didn't instruct the monks on *dāna* was because a monk has already given up all his possessions; there is nothing else to give. So he skipped that *dāna* part and taught the monks the *sīla* and *bhāvanā* parts.

Bhāvanā consists of *samādhi* and *paññā*. When he taught monks, he would expound the *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, which are similar to *sīla* and *bhāvanā*. *Sīla* is to maintain the five precepts, the eight precepts and for a monk, 227 precepts. And then he taught meditation, *samatha-bhāvanā* and *vipassanā-bhāvanā*. And if anyone can do this, they can become enlightened. When they become enlightened, they will see what the Buddha saw. They will see the Four Noble Truths alive inside their mind. The Four Noble Truths that you hear about right now are not the live ones; they are the story of the name of the Four Noble Truths, not the live or the real Noble Truths. The live or the real Noble Truths will appear in your mind when you meditate, when you bring your mind back inside.

Right now your mind is not inside. Your mind goes out to the body, to the sight, sound, smell, taste and tactile objects. When you meditate, you are pulling your mind away from these things, bringing the mind back into the center of the mind, which we call *apanā-samādhī*. When we sit, meditate, and concentrate on one object, persevering and maintaining this concentration, the mind will eventually or sometimes even abruptly return to the center of the mind. When that happens, the mind will become peaceful and calm and will not have any thinking. It is unaware of the body, or the sight, sound, smell, taste or tactile objects. So first you have to bring the mind back inside, and then when your mind is inside you will be able to see the Four Noble Truths, the *dukkha*, the suffering that happens in your mind, and the cause of suffering, or the three desires, and then the way to eliminate this desire by using the *magga*.

The *magga* leads the mind to see that none of the things that the mind desires brings happiness. Instead of bringing happiness, everything that the mind desires will bring suffering or sadness. Why? It's because everything that the mind desires or acquires is impermanent. You can have it in your possession for a certain period of time, and sooner or later, it will change, disappear or leave you—or you will leave it. So the happiness that you have from the thing that you acquire will also disappear, and you will be back to where you started—having nothing,

feeling empty—and this empty feeling makes you want something else to fill it, so you create a new desire. This is the cycle that you will go through if you do what your desire tells you to do. So the Buddha said that you have to stop this cycle by realizing that this is not the way to happiness, but just the way to more suffering, more sadness, more loneliness, and more desire.

If your mind has achieved *jhāna*, your mind will be strong and contented. It can resist the desire because you can be happy without having to have or do anything. So you first need to bring the mind inside, bring it to *jhāna*, bring it to *apanā-samādhī*. Once you have this, then you have the strength or the mental happiness that you can rely on without having to rely on other things to make you happy. And when your desire comes up, you can tell your mind that whatever your desire wants you to do or to get, the happiness that you get will be brief and it will leave you just like before you had the desire. So when you realize that this is the truth, then you can stop your desire, and you are able to resist it. But if you have no *jhāna*, you will have no strength, you will have no happiness to keep you happy, and so when you think that you need this or that thing to make you happy, you will go after it right away. And when you go after it, you will be happy briefly, but then after a while that happiness will disappear, and you will feel like having something else to make you happy. So this is the *magga* that you have to use to resist your desire.

This is something that will happen when you meditate, when you practice *samatha-bhāvanā*; you will get *jhāna*, contentment, and mental happiness. And when you withdraw from that state, when your mind starts to have desire for this or that thing, then you have to use the three characteristics to teach your mind, to remind the mind that what it is seeking is to see clearly the three characteristics: *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkhaṃ* (suffering), and *anattā* (something that you cannot control, something that you cannot keep forever, something that you cannot say this is *I* or *mine* all the time). Once you have this knowledge, you can stop your desire, and your mind can still realize the happiness that it has achieved from entering into *jhāna*.

So these are the Four Noble Truths. We are enlightened by seeing the Four Noble Truths, the truths that we have never seen before even though they are in our mind all the time. The reason why we don't see them is because we never look at them. We are always looking outside. We always go outside and go after the things that our desire asks us to satisfy. So we never see our desire, we never see our suffering when the desire arises, and we never know the way to resist our desire, to eliminate our suffering. But if you practice, then you will realize what we call *seeing the Dhamma*. The Buddha says, *one who sees the Dhamma, sees the Buddha*. One who sees the Dhamma and sees the Buddha is part of the *Saṅgha*, the Noble Disciples.

This is the first step of enlightenment, which we call the *Sotāpanna*, when the mind investigates the nature of the body and fully sees that the body is impermanent. The body is not *self*, no one owns this body. The mind only takes possession of this body temporarily, and sooner or later the body will say goodbye to the mind because this is the nature of the body. But when one has the desire for the body to last forever, one will create suffering (*dukkha*). When one sees the truth that the body does not last forever and lets go of the body, then the suffering will disappear simply because there is no more desire for the body to last forever.

So this is what will happen when the mind truly lets go of the body and also lets go of the painful feeling, the feeling that the mind doesn't like to have but always has to experience. Every time the mind experiences the painful feeling, the mind has the desire to get rid of this painful feeling. When that desire arises, the mind creates suffering or *dukkha* in the mind which is much stronger than the painful feeling of the body. Once the mind realizes that the main problem is not the painful feeling of the body, but that the *dukkha* (suffering) of the mind is caused by the desire for the painful feeling to disappear, then the mind can stop this desire. When this desire stops, the suffering in the mind will disappear, and then the painful feeling of the body is tolerable. The mind can face this painful feeling of the body without any

problem because the mind has let go of this desire to get rid of this painful feeling. So this is what will happen when the mind has let go of the body and the painful feeling: the mind will become peaceful and calm because the mind has eliminated the first level of suffering. The mind will then see that the teaching of the Buddha is real, effective and will see that the person who teaches this teaching must also be real, not a fairy tale.

There was actually a Buddha and there were actually his teachings that can help eliminate all forms of mental suffering. The person who has realized this truth is at the first level of *Ariya-Saṅgha*, the *Sotāpanna*. Once you see this truth, you will also eliminate your doubt of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the *Saṅgha*. Your faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the *Saṅgha* will be unshakeable because you know that they are real. But before you reach this stage, you can sometimes doubt whether the Buddha was real, whether his teachings were real, whether they are capable of eliminating the suffering from your mind, or whether the *Ariya-Saṅgha* are real. These are things that you haven't proved for yourself. But when you develop *samatha-bhāvanā* and *vipassanā-bhāvanā* by contemplating the nature of the body and the nature of the painful feeling, you will then realize the truth. You will come to see the Four Noble Truths alive in your mind, and you will see clearly and internalize the first two Noble

Truths: the truth of suffering and the truth of the cause of suffering. These first two, you will realize, by using the *magga*, the fourth truth. *Magga* is *sīla*, *samādhi*, *paññā* or *dāna*, *sīla*, *bhāvanā*. So this is what you should do.

The Buddha said your job is to develop the *magga* to its fullest. The *magga* is like medicine. You have to take all the medicine that a physician prescribes to you if you want to get well. If you do, eventually your illness will disappear. So too will all your mental suffering if you follow the Buddha's instruction and develop *dāna*, *sīla*, *bhāvanā*. Right now you are doing this but not to the fullest; you are not giving everything away, you are not keeping the precepts all the time and you are not practicing *bhāvanā* all the time. You have to look at the Noble Disciples' example; they followed the instructions of the Buddha to the fullest. They used to be lay people like you. But they gave up their lay life, became monks and *bhikkhunīs*/nuns, and spent all their time on *bhāvanā* and keeping the precepts. Once they had done that, sooner or later, they became enlightened. According to the Buddha, if you follow his teachings completely and work hard, you can become enlightened either in seven days, seven weeks, seven months, or seven years. So this is what you have to do, you have to develop the *magga*: the path that will lead you to enlightenment. The path consists of *dāna*, giving away your possessions, observing the *sīla*—starting with the five precepts—then moving up to the eight

precepts, then to *bhikkhu* and *bhikkhunī*'s precepts. In addition, the path includes committing all your time to sitting, walking, standing, or lying down meditation.

The first thing that you have to do in your meditation practice is to develop mindfulness because mindfulness is the prerequisite to achieving *samādhi* and *paññā*. Without mindfulness, you will never be able to establish *samādhi*, your mind will never enter into *jhāna*, never enter into *apanā-samādhi*. Without *samādhi*, you cannot contemplate the three characteristics and see the Four Noble Truths inside your mind. You need to have *samādhi*, to bring your mind inside. You have to be face to face with the Four Noble Truths. Right now you have never entered into your mind. All your life from the time you were born until now, your mind has constantly been directed outward, involved in all the things that you can see, hear, feel, touch, smell, and taste.

But never once have you gone inside to the center of your mind, and so you could never see the Four Noble Truths. So when you are suffering, you don't know that it is caused by your desires. Instead of eliminating your desires, you follow them because you feel that your suffering is caused by not following your desires. Like when you want to have a cigarette: when you don't have it, then you feel bad. When you smoke, you feel good for a while. The same with alcohol, drinking, drugs, having sex, going to a

movie, going to a party—all these are desires. You don't know that the way to get rid of these unhappy feelings is not to follow your desires but to resist your desires.

If you have no contentment and no *jhāna*, you cannot resist the painful feelings that arise from your desires. So you have to first develop mindfulness because this allows your mind to enter *jhāna*. Mindfulness means to fix your mind onto one object all the time, from the time you get up to the time you go to sleep, with a few exceptions, such as when you have to think about something important. If you don't have to think about anything important, you should not think, but just focus on one object, a mantra like the name of the Buddha, or watch your body movement, your body's activities. Don't let your mind drift away from your body activities. When you have this constant mindfulness, when you sit in meditation, your mind can enter into *jhāna*.

When you enter *jhāna* and then come out of *jhāna*, when your mind starts to have desire, you will see the suffering that arises and then you will know that your suffering is caused by your desire. All you have to do is to resist following your desire. When you do that, your suffering will disappear. From then onwards, you will always look inside your mind, attentively noticing your desire, because you know that your suffering or bad feelings all arise from your desire. And if you constantly watch, you will

then prevent other desires from arising until there is no more desire left in your mind. Then you have achieved the final stage of enlightenment. You have reached *Nibbāna*: that state of mind where there are no longer desires left in the mind. We call this *purity of mind*.

Desire makes us impure, makes us sad and unhappy. When we get rid of desire, the mind will always remain blissful, happy. So this is what you have to do. The Buddha cannot do it for you. The Noble Disciples cannot do it for you. They can only tell you what to do, but it is you who will have to do it yourself and you are left with less time with each passing day. Your life is like a lit candle. Once the candle is lit, it will slowly burn itself up, and eventually there will be no candle left. Likewise, your life is moving to the end, and there is nothing that you can do to stop its inevitable course. So you should take advantage of the time that you still have left and try to develop the *magga*, the path to enlightenment. Nothing else in this world can help you eliminate your mental suffering; it is the only path to enlightenment that will be able to help you. No one can develop this path but you. So it is up to you what you want to do with your life.

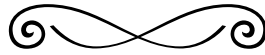
Do you want to waste your life by doing what your desires tell you to do? Look at what has happened; you have been doing this for the past

how many years from the time you were born until now? What have you got from following your desires? Have you ever eliminated your suffering? Have you ever experienced any blissful feeling or any feeling of contentment? You should be smart enough to know that what you have been doing was the wrong path, not the path that you should pursue. You should pursue the path that the Buddha and his Noble Disciples pursued because they have already told us that this is the path to the cessation of suffering. This is the path to permanent happiness, to the supreme happiness, called *Paramaṃ sukkaṃ*.

I think I will stop this talk now so we can have time to answer questions.

Questions & Answers

December 9, 2014



Question 1: Does the desire disappear because we are resisting it or because we use *paññā* to eliminate it?

Tan Ajahn: When you resist your desire without knowing the reason why you resist it, you will not be able to eliminate it entirely or permanently. You have to see that your desire does not bring you happiness but suffering. It is like when you have the desire to take drugs, you have to see that taking drugs does not bring you true happiness, but it will surely bring you immense suffering. When you can see that, then you will stop. When you resist it, you might resist it from time to time, but when your resistance is low, you might not be able to resist it again. So you have to see the cause and effect of your actions following your desire that will not take you to contentment but only to more desire, eventually killing you if you take drugs. And then it will take you to a new birth to

suffer more aging, sickness, and death. So you have to see the cause and effect of following your desire and not following your desire. It is like taking poison; if you know that what you are taking is poison, will you take it? Everything that we take, every single thing that we desire, is poison, but the problem is we don't see the suffering that ensues. We only see or remember the transitory happiness that follows. When we buy something, we are happy for a spell, but we don't see the suffering that follows when we run out of money and when we want to buy more things but cannot buy them.

Question 2: After listening to Tan Ajahn's Dhamma, our *saddhā* (faith) and *virīya* (effort) increase, but the motivation to practice and to see the urgency to practice has been going up and down. I can apply this motivation in my daily routine only to a certain degree. Can Tan Ajahn give advice on how to use a skillful means to remember this urgency and not to lose focus in our practice?

Tan Ajahn: You need to be around people who practice, you need to have a good environment. If you stay around people who practice, they will constantly remind you to practice. But if you live with people who don't practice but who do other things, they can distract you from practicing. If you cannot live in the company of people who practice, like living in the temple, then you must constantly think about your practice and constantly think about the fact that you are getting sick, getting old, and dying. This

will spur you into action. But I think the best thing is to leave your present environment if it is not supporting your practice. The distractions are a hindrance to your practice. That is what I said in my last talk; you have to use *vimaṃsā*, analytical thinking. You have to differentiate what supports your practice, what pushes you forward, and what pulls you back. Whatever pulls you back, you should eliminate or get away from. Whatever pushes you forward, you should keep them around you.

And the Buddha said the environment that will push your practice forward is to live in seclusion, to be alone where no one will distract you from your practice, to only be with your own desire/*kilesa*. But that is only one part. If you live with other people and you live in a bad environment, then you have five other things that pull you away from your practice: sight, sound, smell, taste, and tactile objects will keep pulling you away from your practice. So you need to go live in seclusion, and live near a meditation master, a teacher who will constantly remind you, who will constantly energize you.

Question 3: I am able to note my breath when it gets refined or when it becomes coarse or when I start to get restless, exercising *vimaṃsā* both during and after my meditation sitting. However, my focus still increases and wanes. Am I doing it correctly? Could Ajahn please advise me what to do next to develop *vimaṃsā* correctly?

Tan Ajahn: When you meditate for calm, you should not analyze. You should not use your thoughts at all because the goal is to stop your thoughts. When you analyze, then your thoughts will keep thinking. When you are watching the breath, all you want to do is to know, to be aware or to acknowledge whether the breath is short or long, coarse or subtle. You don't want to analyze or have any thoughts about it, just using your breath as your point of focus in order to stop your mind from thinking about other things. If you think, you are going to think about your breathing, and it will obstruct your mind from entering into *jhāna*. So you want to just know, be aware of your breathing and be aware that you are not thinking about anything, not even about your breath. This is the proper way.

With *vimamsā*, you only do it after you withdraw from your *samādhi*, when you finish your sitting session. Then you can analyze: *How come today I sat and I didn't get the result I wanted? Am I thinking too much? Do I have mindfulness?* This is what you should do afterwards. But when you are doing it, you should not think. It is like a boxer, when he goes up to the ring, he doesn't analyze. He has to box and beat his opponent. But after he finishes the match, he can look at the tape, analyzing what he did right and what he did wrong. So this is what *vimamsā* is about. You should do it afterwards.

Question 4: Tan Ajahn mentioned last week that we cannot do mindfulness of mind before we have practiced mindfulness of the body. However, I find that I can watch my mind more clearly and easily than my body. If so, can I just be mindful of my mind?

Tan Ajahn: If you can be mindful of your mind, you should be able to enter into *jhāna* right away. Can you do that yet?

Question 5: I don't have much lust and attraction to the opposite sex. Do I have to practice *asubha*? If so, how does *Asubha* meditation help in my practice?

Tan Ajahn: Right now you may not have any lust because you may have acquired what you want and become temporarily gratified, so you don't know whether you have lust or not. Try to take the eight precepts and stop having any sexual conduct to see what will happen, to see whether you still have any lust or not. When it comes to this issue of sexual attraction to others, whether you have lust and attraction to the opposite or same sex makes no difference. In either case, you must use *asubha* on that person to whom you are attracted. You have to see that that body is not attractive; see it as loathsome, undesirable, and repulsive in order to get rid of your lust permanently.

Question 6: How do I investigate the elements (water, fire, wind, earth) in meditation? Do I do it during or before the meditation sitting? Is it necessary to do it?

Tan Ajahn: Contemplation or investigating the four elements is part of the *vipassanā* practice. So it is not usually done before you have your *samatha* practice because it will not be effective. You can do it, but it doesn't bring any good result. You have to do it after you have *samatha*. But it doesn't mean that you cannot do it. You can. You can reflect on and investigate the four elements if you find that it suits your character, is good for you, or makes you calm and peaceful. That is OK also. But the point is that the reason why we want to reflect on the four elements is to be able to see that the body is just the four elements—that there is no *self*, no *you*, no *me*, in this body. The body is made up of the four elements, and one day, sooner or later, it will return to the four elements. You want to see this so that you can let go of your attachment and your delusion, thinking that the body is you.

The body is just your puppet or a toy, a living doll that can breathe. The difference between the body and the toy that children play with is that the toy cannot breathe, but the body can breathe and it does things that the mind tells it to do. That's all. But it is the same thing as the toy. The toy is made up of materials, and so is the body. The body is made

up of the four materials: water, air/wind, earth/solid material, and heat or temperature/fire. These will form the body, but they will stay together for only a certain length of time and after a while will start to disintegrate/separate. When that happens, the body stops functioning. The body dies.

So this is what you want to reflect on until you truly see that it is not your *self*. You (that which contemplates) are not the body. You are part of the mind, the one who knows. You are the thinker. Thinking makes you think that you are *you*. You think you are *you*, so you believe you are *you*. You think the body is you, so you believe that. And when you believe that, whatever happens to the body, will make you worried and anxious because you don't want anything to happen to your body. You think that whatever happens to your body is happening to you. But you can see clearly after your contemplation that the body is simply the four elements; then you can stop your anxiety, worry, and fear of losing your body.

Question 7: Is there a sequence when to use the mantra, the breath, the elements, or the *asubha* objects?

Tan Ajahn: It is up to each individual practitioner to choose the right kind of meditation object or mindfulness object for himself. For a person who likes a mantra, he can use the mantra all day long from the time he gets up to the time he goes to sleep and

while sitting in meditation. He can use the mantra all the time. The goal of using the mantra is to stop the mind from wandering, to stop the mind from thinking. When the mind doesn't wander or think, it stays in the present with the body and then you don't have to use the mantra. But as soon as it starts to wander, starts to think of this and that or going to the past or future, then you should bring it back to the present.

And when you have time, you should sit, because your mind cannot enter into *jhāna* while the body is still moving. You need a still body to bring the mind to stillness, to bring the mind to *jhāna*. So sitting is very important if you want to have *samatha*, if you want to have *apanā-samādhī*. You need to sit down, close your eyes, and focus only on the meditation object; then your mind will eventually enter into *jhāna* and become one with itself. It will separate from the body temporarily. All the things that come through your body will no longer be in your mind, such as sight, sound, smell, taste and tactile objects; then the mind is peaceful and left alone. But it can only remain in that position for a short while. The stronger your mindfulness is and the more you sit, the longer your mind will remain in that state. But when you first start, it might just stay there briefly and then withdraw from that position; we call that *khaṇika-samādhī*. *Khaṇika* is brief. *Apanā-samādhī* is longer in duration—5 minutes, 10 minutes, 20 minutes, 30 minutes, 40 minutes, or in some cases

one hour. Some yogis can remain in it for seven days, depending on the strength of their mindfulness.

Question 8: Could Tan Ajahn please give instructions on *asubha* meditation?

Tan Ajahn: *Asubha* meditation is to reflect on the repulsive aspect of the body. There are many aspects of the body that we don't see. We see just the good-looking aspect, but we know inside our heart that the body has a lot of parts that we don't like to see, and yet we remain blind to them. So what we want to do is force the mind to look at the repulsive aspect of the body. Since it is being protected by the skin, you would need the aid of medical journals, like the study of anatomy where they will show you all the parts under the skin, show you the skeleton and all the organs. And this is something that you want to keep in mind, constantly thinking about it until you don't forget, until eventually when you look at a person, you see the inside (organs) also, not just the outside. When you see both the outside and the inside, then you can get rid of your desire for that person. If you only see the outside parts of a person, you can become deceived and have the desire, have lust for them. But when you can look inside by memorizing the picture that you see in the anatomy books, for instance, your desire/lust can be stopped or eliminated. So this is what you need to do. If you cannot see it right now, if you cannot imagine

the picture, then you need to see some illustrations in the anatomy books.

Or if you want something more than that, you might go to a hospital or a medical school where they have dissection of the body. You can even ask to be an audience to watch the dissection of the body so you can see what is under the skin. In the old days, since they didn't have these kinds of illustrations, monks were instructed to go to the cemetery. During the Buddha's time, when people died, they didn't cremate or bury them. They just took the body to the cemetery and left it there to decompose or be eaten up by dogs, worms, or vultures. Monks were instructed to see these parts of the body, to see how the body changes and decomposes after one, three, or seven days. Once they saw these things, then they could replay these images in their mind to keep them constantly alive. So every time they had lust, they could use these images to squash the lust/desire.

You need to have *samatha* first, because the mind will resist if you have no *samatha*, if you have no calm. Your defilements will create the bad feeling in you every time you look at something unattractive. Every time you look at the repulsiveness of the body, you will feel a gagging sensation. This is the working of your *kilesa*. But when you have *jhāna*, your mind has suppressed this *kilesa*, so it will not create this bad feeling for you, and you can look at the body objectively. You need *samatha* before you enter into *vipassanā*. If you don't have that, you will find it very

difficult. You might even eventually hate doing it and won't want to do any more practice.

Question 9: Do I just repeat the 32 parts until the feeling arises or until certain parts of the 32 parts are more focused or more prominent than other parts?

Tan Ajahn: You can do it any way you want, but the goal is to be able to use it to stop your sexual desire.

Question 10: I find personal effort is important in maintaining the right effort in our practice, but sometimes the mind doesn't want to practice and I have to overcome it by sheer determination. However, this personal effort interferes with my practice because I am putting in more effort to practice, and, therefore, I have more expectations. So how do I balance between effort and expectation?

Tan Ajahn: I think people put effort into the wrong things. What they should put effort into is in developing mindfulness, which is so simple and easy to do, and they can do it all the time, all day long. But they are not doing that. So without mindfulness, they will find doing everything else is very difficult, very hard to do. So they should focus first on developing mindfulness. From the time they get up, they should develop mindfulness by either reciting a mantra or constantly watching the movement of the body. Whatever the movement of the body is, just keep

watching, keep staying with the body, and don't let the mind wander to other things. This is so simple and you can do it anytime, anywhere, but at times there is resistance to doing that. You just want to sit and meditate right away, and you find it very hard to do because you don't have mindfulness. So this is what you have to do first of all, that is to develop mindfulness. The Buddha said that mindfulness is the key to all the other Dhamma. If you have no mindfulness, you cannot have all the other Dhamma.

Let me give you an illustration. When you want to drive a car, what do you have to do first? You have to get inside the car, right? If you have no key, can you open the locked door? You cannot. So you have to find the key, you have to have the key to open the locked door. Once you open the door, you can get in the car, sit in the driver's seat, and put the key in to start the car and drive to wherever you want to go. But you have to have that key to get inside the car. Without it, you cannot drive the car anywhere. So you need mindfulness first in order to sit and meditate and to achieve results. Once you have *jhāna*, you have *apanā-samādhi*; then you can develop insight, or *vipassanā* because the mind will not resist, the mind will not create obstacles to your development of *vipassanā*.

So there is no skipping this step. You have to go step by step. It is like before you can run, you have to learn to walk first. Before you can walk, you have to learn to stand first. These are basic things that

you have to do. You cannot jump from crawling to running. It is the same way when the practice becomes hard; you find it hard to exert your effort because you put in the effort on the wrong things, the hard things that you still cannot do. The efforts that you can make all the time, you are not doing. That is all. Just develop mindfulness first.

Question 11: After *samatha* meditation, does insight arise automatically?

Tan Ajahn: No. *Samatha* only gives you peace, calm, a sense of well-being, and a sense of contentment, but no insight whatsoever. You can only have insight when you point your mind towards an object that you have *dukkha* with, you have problems with. A good example is having problems with your body. You have to point your mind towards the body and study the nature of the body until you clearly see the three characteristics inherent in the body; then you will be able to eliminate your desire, which is the cause of your suffering. This is called *insight*, being able to see the three characteristics of the body and to see your desire as the cause of your suffering.

Therefore, if you haven't seen the three characteristics of your body, then you must study, you must investigate. Ask yourself: is your body permanent or not permanent? Does the body belong to you or not? Can you keep the body with you all the time or not? Does the body give you happiness or give you

suffering? When the body gets sick, do you feel happy or do you feel sad? When the body gets old, do you feel good or do you feel bad? When your body dies, do you feel good or do you feel bad? You have to ask this. What makes you feel bad when the body dies? Because of your desire, you want your body to last forever, you don't want the body to leave you, but is that possible or not?

So this is what you have to contemplate, to investigate, to ask yourself, and to think about analytically. This is what we call *vimamsā*. When you find the cause, then you can eliminate that cause. Like when a patient who comes to see a doctor is sick and wants to get well, the doctor will have to figure out the cause of the sickness. If the doctor cannot figure out the cause of the sickness, the doctor cannot cure the disease. Once the doctor finds out the cause, s/he must then find the medicine that can cure this cause. If s/he cannot find the medicine, then s/he cannot cure this disease. So this is the way the practice of Dhamma works. Insight happens after you analyze your problems. And your problem is that you don't see the three characteristics in the things that you are attached to, in the things that make you unhappy, such as the body. But when you can see the body as having the three characteristics, then you know that you cannot cling to your body because the body will not stay with you all the time. If you cling, it follows that when the body leaves you, you will become

very sad, very unhappy. But when you let the body go and accept the truth that the body is impermanent, that it doesn't belong to you, then when the body leaves you, you won't feel any suffering.

Question 12: I understand that we are building our *paramīs* while practicing and this is something that we build life after life. Suppose I am unable to attain *Sotāpanna* in this very life, am I right to assume that I have to rely on my own *paramī* to progress until I am released from this *samsāra* world. Can Tan Ajahn please comment on this?

Tan Ajahn: *Paramī means* perfection of the character. There is a group of ten qualities developed over many lifetimes by a bodhisatta, the “Buddha-to-be”: generosity (*dāna*), virtue (*sīla*), renunciation (*nekkhamma*), discernment (*paññā*), energy/persistence (*virīya*), patience/forbearance (*khanti*), truthfulness (*sacca*), determination (*adhiṭṭhāna*), good will (*mettā*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*).

Let me give you an example, when you are travelling to a place that you have never been before, you have two choices: to have a guide or not have a guide. If you have a guide, you can get there very easily and quickly. When you don't have a guide, you have to look for the way yourself so it will take you longer. Such is the way when there is no Buddhism in this world; there is no guide to lead you to *Nibbāna*. When there is Buddhism in this world, then what you

have to do is to follow the teaching of the Buddha. Then he can guide and take you to *Nibbāna* quickly and easily. But when there is no teaching of the Buddha left in this world, you have to rely on yourself. So that is what *paramī* means. You have to build up this *paramī*, and it can take you many lifetimes before you can be enlightened yourself.

Question 13: In certain traditions, they emphasize the teaching of *Abhidhamma*, but not in the Thai tradition. Why is this so? And do we need to study *Abhidhamma* in order to progress in our meditation practice?

Tan Ajahn: Have I ever said anything about *Abhidhamma* here? I always talk about mindfulness, that's all you need. The more you know, the dumber you become. So try not to know too much. Just know enough; that is all you need to know.

Question 14: When I sit in meditation and when the mind starts to calm down, I feel at the tip of my nose there is this itchiness. Why is this happening?

Tan Ajahn: That is because your mind has yet to become completely calm, so anything can happen to your body. Pay no attention to it. Just continue focusing on your meditation object until your mind is completely calm and is not affected by whatever is happening to the body.

Question 15: Sometimes I can meditate for an hour, sometimes it can be 45 minutes or even shorter, and I become very unhappy when my meditation session ends early. Should I get pre-occupied and fixated over the duration of the meditation?

Tan Ajahn: You should just accept the truth of whatever result you get. That's all that you can do at that time because each time you sit, many different things can determine how long you will sit. Sometimes, if you have a lot of problems in your work, your family, or friends, when you sit, you might find it very difficult to become calm. Some days you might have no problems with people or things or your mindfulness may be very strong on that day. If you have strong mindfulness, the result should be better than having weaker mindfulness. The same is true if you have problems or no problems prior to your sitting. So these are the things that can influence your results, and you should not expect to have the same results because the causes are not the same. What's more, getting disappointed or mad at yourself doesn't do any good anyway. Like I said, if you are displeased with your meditation, you should then use the *vimamsā* to figure out what was wrong and what was right and then try to eliminate the wrong things and try to develop the right thing. If you have problems with your work, stop working. If you have problems with your family, go live alone. If you cannot, then you will constantly be affected by these things.

Question 16: I was taught by one teacher to practice open awareness of whatever comes to mind; that means I just accept and note whatever arises in the mind—not thinking, not reflecting, not judging. Is this enough to gain enlightenment? Is there anything else I need to do to make my practice complete?

Tan Ajahn: Can you accept everything when it happens, without any reaction? Can you accept when somebody beats you up? Can you accept when somebody takes your wife away? Can you accept when somebody cheats you or takes your money away? If you can, then you are already enlightened. If you can't, then remain on the path and continue to meditate.

Question 17: There is awareness that stands apart from all the sense consciousness. It doesn't move or change. From the time this became clear to me, I did not actively practice concentration as the three characteristics constantly display themselves in all the perceived phenomena. *Kilesas* can still squeeze in the heart when they arise but they don't linger for long. Could Tan Ajahn comment on this?

Tan Ajahn: You should eliminate all your *kilesas* and nothing can affect your heart at all, even death, sickness, or whatever might happen to the people you love or like; when anything happens, your mind should remain peaceful and calm. That is how an enlightened person will react. He will remain calm at all times, regardless of whatever might happen.

Question 18: How do we eliminate sleepiness and pain during sitting meditation?

Tan Ajahn: Sleepiness can be eliminated by many different means. The simple one is not to sit, not to lie down, just keep on walking. If you still cannot eliminate this even if you walk, then try to walk backwards instead of walking forward. If you still feel sleepy, maybe you can wash your face, put water on your head, and see if you can eliminate this sleepiness. If you still cannot do it, then maybe you should just go to sleep and before you sleep, just remind yourself that as soon as you wake up, you want to get up right up away and continue with your practice.

There are some other methods as well that may be harder, but more effective. The method of fasting can also help eliminate sleepiness. When you don't eat, your body is hungry, and this hunger will prevent you from getting sleepy. But in order to fast, you have to have strong mindfulness to prevent your mind from thinking about food. You'll find that if you cannot stop your mind from thinking about food, when you think about food, you become even hungrier and find that you cannot meditate; you cannot concentrate on anything but food. So someone who wants to fast must have strong mindfulness to be able to stop the mind from thinking about food.

Or if they have *vimaṃsā*, which is *paññā*, if they can think of the repulsive aspect of the food, look at

the food that enters into the mouth, enters the stomach, and exits at the bottom; if you look at the food like that, you can also stop your hunger for food. So these are ways you can use when you fast. You can use mindfulness by repeating the mantra constantly to prevent your mind from thinking about food. But if you cannot stop and still find yourself thinking about food, don't think about the food on the plate, think about the food when it enters your mouth, when you chew and mix it with your saliva. And if you want to see the real picture, spit it out and try to eat it again. A more extreme approach would be to look at the food when you vomit or when it enters the toilet bowl. This is food with various stages of appearance. If you want to think about food, think this way about food; then it will stop your mind from getting hungry.

Question 19: At times I use the mantra *Buddho* to suppress the feeling of fear or guilt. Is this wrong? If yes, what is the right thing to do?

Tan Ajahn: If you can use it to stop your fear, it is OK, but it is only a temporary measure because the next time when you meet fear, you will become fearful again and have to use the mantra again. But if you want to completely get rid of your fear, then you have to look at the cause of your fear. Normally we are afraid because we don't want to die: we have this desire to have the body live forever. But we know the truth that the body, sooner or later, will have to die. So if you want to become completely fearless,

you have to accept that the body dies. When you can do this, then you are no longer fearful. You are ready to die anytime. So whatever happens to the body, you will not be afraid. This is the way to fix the problem permanently. You have to use *vimaṃsā*, or *paññā* or *vipassanā*. You have to see that the body is impermanent—subject to aging, sickness, and death.

Question 20: How does the joy arising from *dāna* or helping others help us to meditate better?

Tan Ajahn: The joy that arises will make your mind more peaceful and calm; it will enable you to be able to keep the precepts, making your mind calmer. You need a calm mind to meditate effectively. If your mind is still agitating for money, for things, you will find it difficult to sit and meditate; your mind wants to have more money, thinking that if you have more money, you will become happier. But instead you become more agitated. When you do the opposite and give *dāna*, you give money away. Your action signals that you don't want any more money, that you want to have less money, or that you want to have just enough money for maintaining your life. If you have that attitude, then your mind will not be agitated by your desire for money, and at the same time when you help other people with your money, you have compassion, *mettā*, and *karuṇā*. This will make you not want to hurt other people, and you will find that keeping the precepts is very easy.

When you break the precepts, your mind will become agitated, anxious, and worried. When you do not break the precepts, your mind will be peaceful and calm, so it will be easy for you to develop mindfulness and to meditate. They are the prerequisites for your *bhāvanā*. *Sīla* is the prerequisite for your *bhāvanā*, and *dāna* is the prerequisite for your *sīla*. If you cannot give away your money or you want more money, you will find it difficult to keep the precepts because when you want more money, you will do anything to get it. If you have to cheat, you will cheat. If you have to lie, you will lie. But when you don't have the desire for more money, but have the desire to help other people, then you will find that keeping the precepts is easy.

Question 21: Is it OK to do *dāna* with the intention to gain merit for myself rather than for the benefit of the recipient? Is it the correct way of thinking, and if it is not correct, what can reduce this intention to gain merit for myself?

Tan Ajahn: Giving *dāna* is like eating food. When you eat food, what do you get? You get fullness in your stomach. It is the same way if you give to charity. You create a sense of fullness in your mind; you don't have to ask for it, you don't have to expect it. It is the result of your *dāna*. So you shouldn't expect anything from the people who receive the help from you. You don't want anything from them. All you want is to make other people happy, which in turn will

make you happy. You want nothing but to be happy. This is one of the reasons for giving *dāna*. Another reason to get rid of your desire is because if you have money, sometimes your desire is to spend the money on yourself, like buying a new dress, a new pair of shoes, a new bag or going on holiday. However, this kind of happiness is very brief and can become addictive. You have to keep doing it again and again, and you never have any sense of the fullness that comes to you from giving to charity. So this is the purpose of giving to charity: to get rid of your money so that your desire cannot use it.

Question 22: Is it possible for a free thinker or follower of another religion to practice meditation to eliminate defilements and gain wisdom? How will Tan Ajahn advise a free thinker to practice meditation?

Tan Ajahn: Other religions have ways of meditating also, like when they sing hymns in the chapel, this is also a form of meditation. When you sing hymns, you stop thinking about things that make you worried, sad, or unhappy. So this is a form of meditation. It is like repeating the mantra or chanting the *sutta*. It is the same thing. So every religion uses some form of meditation to calm the mind. Some people cannot go to sleep, so they count sheep. This is another form of meditation. They just keep counting sheep: one sheep, two sheep, and three sheep. They just keep on counting. This will prevent you from thinking about things that make you agitated and

restless. When you don't think about those things, then your mind will fall asleep. So I think there are different forms of meditation, it is just that people don't call it meditation, or maybe they are not as intensive as in Buddhism. In Buddhism we do a very intensive meditation because we want the highest goal. And the highest goal can only appear by rigorous meditation.

Question 23: I understand that suffering is not getting what we want. However, I am not craving anything, yet I am suffering. Family challenges keep coming to me regularly. How can I use my practice to overcome this suffering?

Tan Ajahn: Not wanting to face your family challenges is another form of desire. You have to accept that when you live with people you are bound to have challenges, you cannot avoid them, and you have to face them calmly. That's all you have to do. But if you have the desire not to face them, this is the cause of your suffering—not the challenges, but the desire to avoid them. So you have to watch your mind closely. What do you desire right now? It's this desire you want to get rid of, not the things that cause you to have this desire.

Question 24: How do we know if our deceased parents or relatives have received the merits which we dedicated to them? Is there any sign or feeling to indicate so?

Tan Ajahn: If they don't come into your dream, or when you meditate, they don't come to see you, then you won't know. You just have to assume that they did, but also keep in mind that it doesn't matter, as long as you do your part. That's all you have to do.

Question 25: How can we know that we have attained *Sotāpanna*, *Sakadāgāmī*, *Anāgāmī*, or *Arahant*? How do we know that we have eradicated *sakkāyadiṭṭhii*? Is it important to know?

Tan Ajahn: When you are sick and you get well, do you know the difference? It is the same way. When you still have suffering with your body, suffering with the painful feeling of the body, then you haven't yet attained *Sotāpanna*. But when you no longer are affected by the changes in the body, whether it is getting old, getting sick or dying, then you know that you have achieved *Sotāpanna* because you have let go of the body. You have used *paññā* to see that the body is just the four elements. There is no part of you in that body, so you no longer care what happens to the body.

Question 26: I do not have a good foundation of Dhamma and I am very new to Buddhism. Could Tan Ajahn please advise and guide me to start walking the Dhamma path correctly?

Tan Ajahn: The first step is to study the Dhamma teachings, like tonight you are there to listen to

the Dhamma talk and the discussion we are having. You are studying the Dhamma teachings. You have to do it until you fully understand what you have to do next. First you have to study everything to know what you have to do. Once you know what you have to do, then you do it. That is the second level we call *paṭipatti*. The first level we call *pariyatti*, which means study. First you study the Buddha's teachings through Dhamma talks or reading the *Suttas* or books written by the Noble Disciples, and after you have studied, you know what you have to do—then you do it. After you have done it, you will experience the result from your practice which we call *attainment*. You will achieve various stages of *attainment*. For example, you know you have to give to charity, you know you have to keep the precepts, and you know that you have to develop mindfulness in order to be successful in your meditation. So you have to do it. Once you do it, then the results will appear.

Question 27: If we wish to practice full time, can we practice without ordaining as a monk or nun? Is there any age limit to be ordained?

Tan Ajahn: Normally when people want to practice full time, they usually start as lay persons first, and after they have practiced, achieved some results, and know that this is the path that they want to follow, then they will go look for a meditation temple or monastery. It is essential to know, though,

that there are many different types of monasteries in Thailand. There are monasteries that don't do any meditation, and there are monasteries that do meditation. So you have to find the right monastery for you and then ask permission from the teacher whether you could ordain. After ordination, stay with him and practice with him. Starting as a lay person first is easy, it doesn't take much time. To ordain takes a lot of time. You have to learn the chants, all the precepts, how to behave, and how to live like a monk. So this should come later on.

In the beginning stage, you should develop a certain amount of ability to practice. It follows that if you cannot practice, then when you become a monk, you will find that you can become restless and agitated, and you might not be able to remain in robes for long. So first you must be sure that you can meditate, you can practice, and you can live as a monk because there are many constraints on a monk. There are 227 precepts you have to maintain, and you cannot go here and there as you like. You have to be locked up in the monastery. So you have to think of this challenge first and find out for yourself whether you can do it or not by going to stay in the monastery as a lay person, maybe staying for seven days, two weeks, or even one month. We have some lay people who come and stay in this monastery for maybe six months before they ask for ordination.

To be ordained as a monk/a *bhikkhu*, you need to be 20 years of age. But to be ordained as a *sāmaṇera*, you have to be at least six years old, and you need to have the guidance of a teacher monk to look after you.

Question 28: I would like to know as I am meditating now, how do I get advice from Tan Ajahn after this session if I run into problems with my meditation?

Tan Ajahn: You can go back and listen to all my talks or can read my books. I cannot personally entertain all of your questions because I don't have the time. I am sorry, but there is nothing else I can do.

Tan Ajahn: May all of you be ever closer to the Dhamma goal. Until the next time.

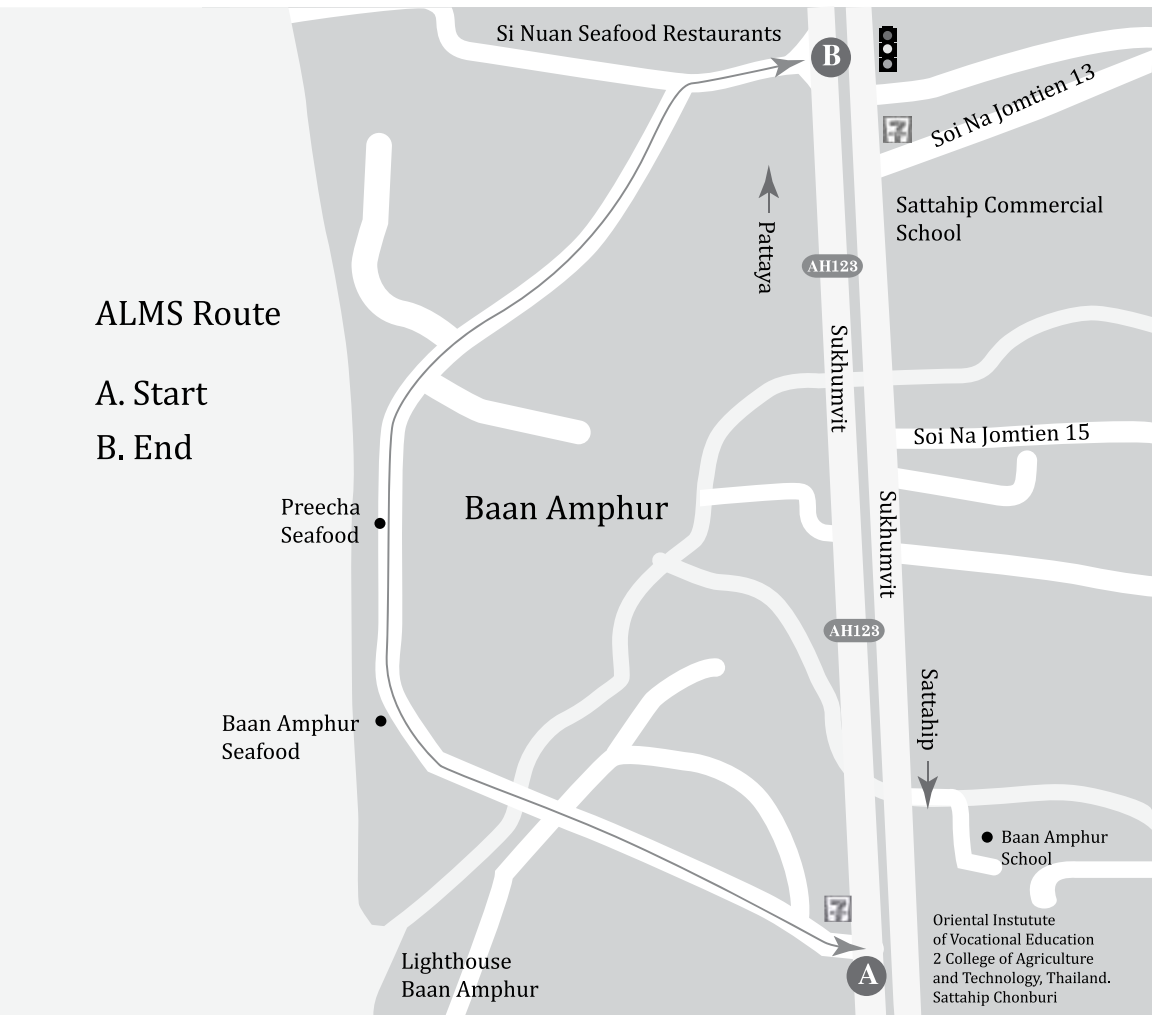
End of *Desanā* and Q&A

Sādhū Sādhū Sādhū.





Mural at Wat Palelai, Singapore



Addendum

Daily Life Schedule of Phra Ajahn Suchart Abhijāto

- 5:54 a.m. – 6:40 a.m. (approximate time) Walking with other monks from Wat Yan for alms around Baan Amphur

- 8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m. At the Sālā (dining hall) at Wat Yan. - Morning meal and conversation with visitors afterwards. On every Buddhist Holy Day, Saturday, and Sunday, Phra Ajahn Suchart gives a 30-minute Dhamma talk (around 8:00 a.m.) at the Sālā (dining hall).

- 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. At Chuladham Sālā on Chi-On Mountain – Giving a Dhamma talk on every Holy Day, Saturday, Sunday, and Buddhist Holiday while other weekdays will be Dhamma conversation with visitors.

****Please do not visit Phra Ajahn outside of the scheduled time.****

****When ladies plan to visit Phra Ajahn or to attend a Dhamma talk, please refrain from wearing short pants or short skirt around the temple or the meditation retreat.****

****Phra Ajahn Suchart does not accept any out-of-temple events or functions.****

Phra Ajahn Suchart Abhijāto Websites

www.kammattthana.com

www.PhraSuchart.com

www.facebook.com/PhraAjarnSuchart

Glossary

Abhidhamma: (1) In the discourses of the Pāli canon, this term simply means “higher Dhamma,” and a systematic attempt to define the Buddha’s teachings and understand their interrelationships. (2) A later collection of analytical treatises based on lists of categories drawn from the teachings in the discourses, added to the Canon several centuries after the Buddha’s life.

adhiṭṭhāna: Determination; resolution. One of the ten perfections or pāramīs.

ajaan, ajahn, achaan, etc.: (Thai). Teacher; mentor. Equivalent to the Pāli Ācariya.

Anāgāmi: Non-returner. A person who has abandoned the five lower fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth, and who after death appears in one of the worlds called the Pure Abodes, to eventually attain Nibbāna and thus never returns to this world again. The third of the four stages culminating in the attainment of Nibbāna.

ānāpānasati: Mindfulness of breathing. A meditation practice in which one maintains one’s attention and mindfulness on the sensations of breathing.

anattā: Not-self; ownerless. It is one of the universal characteristics of existence.

Angulimala: An important early figure in Buddhism, particularly within the Theravāda suttas. A ruthless killer who is redeemed by a sincere conversion to Buddhism, he is seen as an example of the redemptive power of the Buddha's teaching and the universal human potential for spiritual progress, regardless of one's background.

anicca(ṃ): Impermanence; instability; transience. It is one of the universal characteristics of existence.

apanā-samādhī: Full absorption samādhī. In apanā-samādhī, the citta completely 'converges' to the very base of samādhī. Perceptions of body and mind totally disappear from awareness at the time, leaving only the essential "knowing nature" of the citta alone on its own. Clear, bright, and expansive, the citta simply "knows". There is no object, no duality, just "knowing". The previous sense of dividedness is replaced by a wholly unified mental state, and feeling of pure and harmonious being that is so wondrous as to be indescribable. This is the advanced stage of samādhī.

Arahant: One who, by following the Buddha's Path to Freedom, has totally eradicated his mental defilements (kilesas) and thus possesses the certainty that all traces of ignorance and delusion have been

destroyed, never to arise in his heart again in the future. Having completely severed the fetters that once bound him to the cycle of repeated birth and death, he is no longer destined for future rebirth. Thus, the Arahant is the individual who has attained Nibbāna.

Ariya: Noble, ideal. Also, a “Noble One.”

asubha: Unattractiveness, loathsomeness, foulness. The Buddha recommends contemplation of this aspect of the body as an antidote to lust and complacency.

asubha kammaṭṭhāna: The contemplation of the body’s impurity.

atthasīla: The Eight Precepts, usually observed on Uposatha or lunar observance days by lay practitioners, as a support for meditation practice and as a way to re-energize commitment to the Dhamma. They are: Not to kill; Not to steal; Not to engage in sexual activity; Not to tell lies; Not to take intoxicants; Not to eat food between noon and the following dawn; Not to sing, dance or watch entertainments, and not to use ornaments, cosmetics or perfumes; and Not to sit or lie on a large or high seat or bed.

āyatana: Sense medium. The inner sense media are the sense organs: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The outer sense media are their respective objects.

bhava-taṇhā: Craving to be.

bhāvanā: Mental cultivation or development; meditation.

bhāvanāmayapaññā: Wisdom resulting from mental development; understanding through practice.

bhikkhunī: A Buddhist nun; a woman who has given up the householder's life to live a life of heightened virtue in accordance with the Vinaya in general, and the Pātimokkha rules in particular.

brahma-vihāra: The four “sublime” or “divine” abodes that are attained through the development of boundless mettā (goodwill), karuṇā (compassion), muditā (appreciative joy), and upekkhā (equanimity).

Buddha: The name given to one who rediscovers for himself the liberating path of Dhamma, after a long period of its having been forgotten by the world. According to tradition, a long line of Buddhas stretches off into the distant past. The most recent Buddha was born Siddhattha Gotama in India in the sixth century BCE. A well-educated and wealthy young man, he relinquished his family and his princely inheritance in the prime of his life to search for true freedom and an end to suffering (dukkha). After six years of austerities in the forest, he rediscovered the “middle way” and achieved his goal, becoming Buddha.

Buddhānussati: Recollection of the Buddha.

Buddho: Supremely enlightened. A traditional epithet for the Buddha, *Buddho* is a preparatory meditation-word (*parikamma*) that is repeated mentally while reflecting on the Buddha's special qualities. In its simplest form, one focuses attention exclusively on the repetition of "Buddho", continuously thinking the word "Buddho" while in meditation. One should simply be aware of each repetition of "Buddho, Buddho, Buddho" to the exclusion of all else. Once it becomes continuous, this simple repetition will produce results of peace and calm in the heart.

caṅkama: Walking meditation, usually in the form of walking back and forth along a prescribed path.

Chanda: Will, aspiration; the will to do; resolve; zeal; desire; impulse; wish; loving interest; desire for truth and understanding.

cintamayapaññā: Wisdom or knowledge based on thinking.

citta: The *citta* is the mind's essential knowing nature, the fundamental quality of knowing that underlies all sentient existence. When associated with a physical body, it is referred to as "mind" or "heart." The true nature of the *citta* is that it simply "knows." The *citta* does not arise or pass away; it is never born and never dies. Ultimately, the "knowing

nature” of the citta is timeless, boundless and radiant, but this true nature is obscured by the defilements (kilesas) within it.

dāna: Generosity; giving, liberality; offering, alms. Specifically, giving of any of the four requisites to the monastic order. More generally, the inclination to give, without any expectation of the reward.

desanā: The teaching of Dhamma, discourse; instruction; Dhamma talks.

Dhamma (Skt. Dharma): Truth; the ultimate order underlying everything; the teachings of the Buddha.

Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (Skt. Dharmacakra Pravartana Sūtra): The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of Dhamma is a Buddhist text that is considered to be a record of the first teaching given by the Buddha after he attained enlightenment. According to tradition, the Buddha gave this teaching in Sarnath, India, to the five ascetics (his former companions with whom he had spent six years practicing austerities). The main topic of this Sutta is the Four Noble Truths, which are the central teachings of Buddhism that provide a unifying theme, or conceptual framework, for all of Buddhist thought. This Sutta also introduces the Buddhist concepts of the “middle way”, impermanence, and dependent origination.

dhutaṅga: Ascetic practices. The Dhutaṅgas are a set of 13 specialized ascetic practices that Buddhist monks voluntarily undertake. Their purpose in each case is to counteract specific mental defilements (kilesas). They are: 1) Wearing only robes made from discarded cloth; 2) Wearing only the three principle robes and no others; 3) Going on alms round everyday without fail; 4) Not omitting any house on alms round; 5) Eating only one meal per day; 6) Eating all food directly from the alms bowl; 7) Refusing to accept food offered after the alms round; 8) Living in the forest; 9) Dwelling at the foot of a tree; 10) Living in the open – not at the foot of a tree or under a roof; 11) Living in a cemetery; 12) Being satisfied with whichever bed or resting place is available; 13) The sitter's practice; that is to say, sitting, standing or walking, but never lying down.

dukkha(m): Disease, discomfort, discontent, suffering and pain; it is the unsatisfactory nature of all phenomena. It is one of the universal characteristics of existence. It is also the first Noble Truth.

iddhiphāda: The Four Paths of Accomplishment; the means of accomplishment. The four iddhiphāda are: will power (chanda), effort (viriya), consciousness (citta), and wisdom (vimamsā).

jhāna [Skt. dhyāna]: A meditative state of profound stillness and concentration in which the

mind becomes fully immersed and absorbed in the chosen object of attention. It is the cornerstone in the development of Right Concentration.

Kalama Sutta: A discourse of the Buddha contained in the Aṅguttara Nikaya of the Tipiṭaka. In the sutta, the Buddha taught the Kalama people not to accept or believe anything immediately just because it fits with any of a number of criteria. He listed ten such criteria for them to be wary of, so they could avoid becoming anyone's intellectual slave, even of the Buddha Himself. This principle enables us to choose for ourselves the teachings that are truly capable of quenching suffering (dukkha).

kāma-chanda: Sensual desire; excitement of sensual pleasure.

kāma-taṇhā: Sensual craving; craving for sensual pleasures.

kamma (Skt. Karma): Volitional actions of body speech or mind. Such actions carry with them a specific moral content—good, bad or neutral—and leave in the ongoing continuum of consciousness a potential to engender corresponding results in the future.

kammaṭṭhāna: Literally, “basis of work”, Kammaṭṭhāna refers to the “occupation” of a practicing Buddhist monk: namely, the contemplation of certain meditation themes that are conducive to uprooting

the defiling forces of greed, hatred, and delusion from his mind. In the ordination procedure, a new monk is taught the 5 basic Kammaṭṭhāna that lay the groundwork for contemplation of the body: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, and skin. By extension, Kammaṭṭhāna includes all 40 of the classical Buddhist meditation subjects. The term Kammaṭṭhāna is most often used to identify the particular Thai forest tradition and lineage that was founded by Ācariya Sao and Ācariya Mun.

karunā: Compassion; sympathy; the aspiration to find a way to be truly helpful to oneself and others. One of the four “sublime abodes” (brahma-vihāra).

kāyagatā-sati: Mindfulness immersed in the body. This is a blanket term covering several meditation themes: keeping the breath in mind; being mindful of the body’s posture; being mindful of one’s activities; analyzing the body into its parts; analyzing the body into its physical properties; contemplating the fact that the body is inevitably subject to death and disintegration.

kāyagatā-satipaṭṭhāna: Body contemplation; using bodily activities as your mindfulness object.

khandha: Literally, “group” or “aggregate”. In the plural, Khandhas refer to the five physical and mental components of personality (body, feelings, memory, thoughts, consciousness) and to the sensory

experience in general (sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations). Also known as “aggregates of attachment” because they are the objects of a craving for personal existence, they are, in fact, simply classes of natural phenomena that continuously arise and cease and are devoid of any enduring self-identity whatsoever.

khaṇika-samādhī: Momentary concentration.

kilesa: Mental defilement. Kilesas are negative psychological and emotional forces existing within the hearts and minds of all living beings. These defilements are of three basic types: greed, hatred, and delusion. All of them are ingenerate pollutants that contaminate the way people think, speak and act, and thus corrupt from within the very intention and purpose of their existence, binding them (through the inevitable consequences of their actions) ever more firmly to the perpetual cycle of rebirth. Their manifestations are many and varied. They include passion, jealousy, envy, conceit, vanity, pride, stinginess, arrogance, anger, resentment, etc., plus all sorts of more subtle variations that invariably produce the unwholesome and harmful states of mind which are responsible for so much human misery. These various Kilesa-driven mental states interact and combine to create patterns of conduct that perpetuate people’s suffering and give rise to all of the world’s disharmony.

luangta: (Thai). ‘Venerable (maternal) Grandfather’, a reverential term for an elderly monk.

magga: Path. Usually referring to the eight-fold path leading to Nibbāna, that is: Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. When it is used in the combination of magga, phala and Nibbāna then it refers to the four Noble paths – the path to Stream-entry (Sotāpanna), the path to Once-returning (Sakadāgāmi), the path to Non-returning (Anāgāmi) and the path to Arahantship. The fourth Noble Truth.

Maṅgala Sutta: A discourse (sutta) of the Buddha on the subject of ‘blessings’ (maṅgala, also translated as ‘good omen’ or ‘auspices’ or ‘good fortune’).

mettā: Loving-kindness; friendliness; pure love.

mano: Mind; thinking function; thinking faculty.

muditā: Appreciative/sympathetic joy. Taking delight in one’s own goodness and that of others. One of the four “sublime abodes” (brahma-vihāra).

nāma: Mental phenomena. Nāma refers to the mental components of personality (nāma-khandha), which include feelings, memory, thoughts, and consciousness.

Nibbāna (Skt. Nirvāṇa): Literally meaning “extinguished”, Nibbāna is compared to a lamp or

a fire going out. That is to say, the threefold fire of greed, hatred and delusion goes out in the heart due to lack of fuel. The extinguishing of this fire frees the mind from everything that binds it to the cycle of rebirth and the suffering experienced therein. Nibbāna is Absolute Freedom, the Supreme Happiness. As such, it is the ultimate goal of the Buddhist training. It is said to be Unborn, Deathless, and Unconditioned, but being totally detached from all traces of conventional reality, a description of what Nibbāna is, or is not, lies wholly beyond the range of conventional figures of speech.

nimitta: Mental image; vision. A samādhi nimitta is an image that arises spontaneously during the course of meditation. Nimittas may take the form of extrasensory perceptions, visualizations, symbolic representations of reality or prophetic dreams.

nirodha: It is the cessation of suffering (dukkha). The third Noble Truth.

Pāli, Pāḷi: An ancient variant of Sanskrit, Pāli is the literary language of the early Buddhists and the language in which the texts of the original Buddhist Canon are preserved.

paññā: Wisdom; intuitive insight.

pāramī: Perfection of the character. A group of ten qualities developed over many lifetimes by a Bodhisatta, which appear as a group in the Pāli

Canon only in the Jātaka ('Birth Stone'): generosity (dāna), virtue (sīla), renunciation (nekkhamma), discernment (paññā), energy/persistence (viriya), patience/forbearance (khanti), truthfulness (sacca), determination (adhiṭṭhāna), good will (mettā), and equanimity (upekkhā).

pariyatti: Theoretical understanding of Dhamma obtained through reading, study, and learning.

Pāṭimokkha: The Buddhist monk's basic code of monastic discipline, consisting of 227 rules for monks (bhikkhus) and 310 for nuns (bhikkhunīs). It is usually recited rule by rule before an assembly of monks once every fortnight.

paṭipatti: The practice of Dhamma, as opposed to mere theoretical knowledge (pariyatti).

Phra: (Thai). Venerable. Used as a prefix to the name of a monk (bhikkhu).

piṇḍapāta: Walking on the alms round to receive food.

saddhā: Conviction; faith. A confidence in the Buddha that gives one the willingness to put his teachings into practice. Conviction becomes unshakeable upon the attainment of stream-entry.

sādhū: "It is well." Commonly used in Buddhist circles, sādhū is an exclamation expressing appreciation, assent, or approval.

Sakadāgāmi: Once-returner. A person who has abandoned the first three of the fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth, has weakened the fetters of sensual passion and resistance, and who after death is destined to be reborn in this world only once more. The second of the four stages culminating in the attainment of Nibbāna.

sakkāyadiṭṭhi: The view that mistakenly identifies any of the khandha as “self”; the first of the ten fetters (saṃyojana). Abandonment of sakkāyadiṭṭhi is one of the hallmarks of stream-entry (Sotāpanna).

samādhi: Meditative calm; absorbed concentration, having many levels and types.

samatha-bhāvanā: Concentration development; the method and practice of concentrating the mind; tranquillity development.

sammāsaṅkappa: Right thought; right mental attitude; right motives; right aspiration.

sammāsati: Right mindfulness; right attentive-ness.

samudaya: The Cause of Suffering; the Origin of Suffering. The second Noble Truth.

Saṅgha: The community of the Buddha’s disciples. On the conventional level, this means the Buddhist monastic order. On the ideal level, it refers

to those of the Buddha's followers, whether lay or ordained, who have attained at least the first of the four Transcendent Paths culminating in Arahantship. Community; assemblage; a chapter of (not less than four) Buddhist monks; the Saṅgha; the order; the Buddhist clergy; the Buddhist church; Holy Brotherhood.

saṅkhāra: As a general term, sankhāra refers to all forces that form or condition things in the phenomenal world of mind and matter, and to those formed or conditioned phenomena that result. As the fourth component of personality (sankhāra khandha), it refers to thought and imagination; that is, the thoughts that constantly form in the mind and conceptualize about one's personal perceptions. Sankhāra creates these ideas and then hands them on to saññā, which interprets and elaborates on them, making assumptions about their significance.

saññā: Label; perception; allusion; act of memory or recognition; interpretation.

sati: Mindfulness, self-collectedness, powers of reference and retention. In some contexts, the word sati when used alone covers alertness (sampajañña) as well.

Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta: The Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

sīla: Morality; moral behavior; the five moral precepts.

Sotāpanna: Stream-enterer; one who has abandoned the first three fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth and has thus entered the stream leading to Nibbāna. The first of the four stages culminating in the attainment of Nibbāna.

sutta: A discourse or sermon spoken by the Buddha. After the Buddha's death, the Suttas he delivered to his disciples were passed down in the Pāli language according to a well-established oral tradition. They were finally committed to written form in Sri Lanka around 100 BCE and form the basis for the Buddha's teachings that we have today.

suttamayapaññā: The wisdom which results from listening to and studying the teachings of the Buddha.

taṇhā: Craving – craving for sensuality, for becoming, and for not becoming; the chief cause of dukkha.

upekkhā: Equanimity. One of the ten perfections (Paramīs) and one of the four “sublime abodes” (brahma-vihāra).

vedanā: Feeling - pleasure (ease), pain (stress), or neither pleasure nor pain.

vibhava-tanhā: Craving not to be.

vimamsā: Investigation; reasoning; reflection; examination; testing.

viññāṇa: Consciousness; simple cognizance. As the fifth component of personality, viññāṇa khandha simply registers sense data, feelings, and mental impressions as they occur. For instance, when visual images make contact with the eye, or when thoughts occur in the mind, consciousness of them arises simultaneously. When that object subsequently ceases, so too does the consciousness that took note of it.

vipassanā: Clear intuitive insight. Aided by a clear, quiet state of meditative calm, Vipassanā is spontaneous insight into physical and mental phenomena, as they arise and cease, that sees them for what they really are: inherently impermanent and unstable, bound up with pain and suffering, and devoid of anything that can be identified as “self”.

vipassanā-bhāvanā: Insight development.

virīya: Persistence; energy. One of the five spiritual faculties and powers (bala), one of the seven factors of enlightenment (bojjhaṅga), and identical with right effort of the Eightfold Path (magga).

wat: (Thai). Monastery; temple-monastery; temple.

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