

Joy at Last to Know There is No Happiness in The World

A Talk on the First Three Noble Truths

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NAMO TASA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMASAMBUDDHASSA.

This evening I want to talk about the Four Noble Truths (suffering, its cause, its ending and the path leading to its ending). Towards the end of any retreat, whether it is a three-month rainy season retreat or a shorter one, it's worthwhile to bring the meditator's attention to the core teaching of the Lord Buddha. Bringing the attention to this marvellous and profound teaching might be sufficient to take the meditator just that one step into full awareness, full knowledge and full realisation of the *Dhamma*. Thereby you might see what the Lord Buddha saw under the Bodhi tree. This will qualify you to enter the stream and to make the transition to the Noble Person (*Ariya-puggala*) - that is, seeing this very profound and powerful teaching of the Four Noble Truths. Obviously, it's important to first know those Four Noble Truths theoretically, and each one of you here has that theoretical knowledge. I am going to try to build upon and deepen that knowledge in this talk.

Joy At Last

As I was about to give this talk I brought to mind a well-known picture of my teacher, Ajahn Chah (a Thai meditation master), visiting his first monastery in England. In this picture, he has his arms raised above his head in imitation of a statue

from another monastery. Beneath this picture it says, "Joy at last to know there is no happiness in the world".

I'm going to start from there because so often in our practice and in our lives we are seeking for happiness in the world. We seek for happiness in so many areas and in so many ways, always seeking in the wrong place. Eventually we realise that not finding happiness in these places doesn't mean there is something wrong with us. It doesn't mean we are incompetent or hopeless. Insight will show us that there is no way anyone can find happiness in the place we were looking. The mind realises that the world can only be *dukkha* (suffering). The wise person, instead of being distressed by that suffering and wallowing in it, contemplates what The Lord Buddha says about suffering, the Four Noble Truths. That means, they seek to understand this whole process of suffering.

Sometimes the suffering can be raw, going deep into the bones, even deeper than the bones, right to the very source of what we think we are. It goes so deep and can cause so many problems. It's such a relief to find out that this is par for the course, that there's nothing wrong with this. This is the nature of the world. What do we expect?

Sometimes we go about with the false expectation that if we're clever enough, if we're smart enough, if we keep all the rules and do all the right things, somehow we can have a happy life. Sometimes we think everybody is happy but me. Often people in this monastery think, "I bet everybody in this monastery has experienced *jhāna* (meditative absorption) but me". What we need to understand is that there is nothing special with us, and that as we practise in this monastery these are things that everyone has to deal with. Ajahn Chah said that when we first come to a monastery, when we first start to practise in the true way, we can expect suffering. We're going against the stream, and we can expect to feel the pressure of the defilements, just in the same way as when we go against the wind we can feel the force against our bodies. This is a sign we are getting somewhere.

Wisdom Power Better Than Will Power

You will find that when suffering arises, you have two options. You can either try to escape from the suffering or you can investigate it.

Ajahn Maha Boowa (a contemporary Thai meditation master) would only give talks when there was a special occasion to do so. I'm pretty sure that when I went to visit him as a young monk it must have been such an occasion because he asked one of his senior Western monks to translate for the visiting Western monk, which was me. Fortunately, I could already speak Thai so I understood perfectly what Ajahn Maha Boowa was saying. -- the story that he told -- which I took for my own benefit - - turned out to be very instructive for my whole monastic life.

He was talking about himself as a young monk in the time of Tan Ajahn Mun (Thai meditation master and 'reformer' of the Thai forest meditation tradition). He was saying that once he had malaria and, instead of just laying in bed, in typical Ajahn Maha Boowa style he decided to fight it, to battle it and conquer it with his will. So he got off the floor, went out of his hut, got a broom, and started to sweep even though he was sweating and shaking. Tan Ajahn Mun saw him and told him off. Later that evening he gave a talk to the monks saying: "There are some people in this monastery who are born boxers and they haven't changed". He was of course alluding to Ajahn Maha Boowa who was a boxer when he was a layperson. Ajahn Mun said that's not the way of Buddhism. He actually said it is the way of Hindu yogis. The way of Buddhism is to investigate suffering, not to fight it. Because if you fight you will find that you just get more and more suffering. Instead, use wisdom power rather than will power. Wisdom power is always much more effective because it's coming from a good place. Will power, in nearly all cases, comes from ego, from self, and you cannot expect it to produce results if it's coming from such an unfortunate source.

To use wisdom power means remembering the Teachings and looking at your experience in the framework of those teachings, the framework of the Four Noble Truths. The Lord Buddha taught that birth is suffering, old age, sickness and death are suffering. And all that goes in between is also suffering. In brief, life is suffering. So

when suffering comes -- as disappointment, as frustration, as loneliness or depression, or as wondering what you're supposed to be doing -- you're seeing here a basic truth of nature which every human being, whether in a monastery or outside, must come across from time to time in their lives.

There are times when you don't know what to do because the suffering is so bad. As Ajahn Chah used to say, "You cannot go forward, you cannot go back, you cannot stand still" -- you don't know what to do. This is a beautiful time. It is the time you can really understand what the Lord Buddha was talking about -- about the suffering of life. The thing to do when suffering arises is to investigate. To investigate means to watch and to observe in silence. You have to watch without interfering, without getting involved, because if you get involved you're not watching fully.

It requires courage and strength to stand your ground and just watch. One of the things you will see is that suffering passes and it always passes into happiness. This is the play of *samsāra* (the perpetual wandering from life to life), the play of night and day, the play of warmth and cold. It is the basic duality of experience. There is no escape from that in this realm or in any other realm. It will always follow you around, this duality of experience. The Lord Buddha said that getting what you don't want is suffering and not getting what you do want is also suffering. I often ask myself, "Just what do I want?" I use that as a mantra as I walk along the meditation path, or as I sit if my mind is restless. "What do I want?" I've been in this world long enough now -- forty-eight years - and I have experienced much of this world. I wasn't born in a monastery, and from all that I have experienced and seen, from all that I have known, I know there is not a corner of this world where I can find happiness¹. By its very nature, sensory experience is going to be disappointing, and I know that if I ask for something the world can never give me, I will suffer. When I crave for something I cannot reach, I know I am just torturing myself more than necessary.

Putting Make-Up On The Mirror

Instead of craving for something else you learn to be content with what you have. When you talk about contentment you are talking about the Third Noble Truth. The Third Noble Truth is letting go of craving. Contentment is the letting go of wanting something else. It is learning to be at peace with what you have. This is where in this struggle - and it is always a struggle you can be at peace. How can you be content when everything is going wrong? How can you be content when the body is on fire with pain? How can you be at peace and content when the mind is going crazy with so many thoughts? Even in these situations you can find contentment in letting go, letting go of the 'controller'.

I gave a simile to some Thai's last week. I gave this simile to the Thai ladies because some of them are very vain - you've all seen the way they dress up when they come to the monastery. I told them it's just like when one sees oneself in the mirror, and sees this ugly person, but instead of actually doing something with one's face, one puts make up on the mirror. One tries to make the mirror look good! Of course, it's a complete waste of time. The mirror might look good for a while with all the make up on it, but when one walks somewhere else and sees another mirror one is back to square one again. Putting make up on the mirror is like trying to solve the 'outside' by craving instead of trying to solve the 'inside' through contentment. For the last sixteen years I've worked hard - extremely hard, as many of you would know trying to build up this monastery. It's been a complete waste of time trying to make a perfect monastery, or even trying to make an adequate monastery, because it's never good enough. The way that craving works, the Second Noble Truth, is to delude you into thinking that if you just try and do a little bit more, if you just strive harder, work harder for just one more day, then everything will be O.K. "I'll just work another year and I'll pay off my mortgage." "I'll just sit for one more retreat, that's all I need, and I'll get my *Jhānas*." "There's this one last course of medicine then I'll be healthy again." You might put off sickness for a while, but you'll never escape it. It's just the nature of the body. You might put off suffering for a while, but you'll never escape it in that way. You're just putting it off.

The Happiness and Suffering of the Senses Are Just Contrast - That's All

It is the nature of a human being to get suffering and happiness in roughly equal proportions. If we're suffering now, it's because of some happiness that we had before and lost. Happiness is no more than the end of suffering, just as suffering is no more than the end of happiness. We go around in this cycle throughout our lives.

This existential fact is why The Lord Buddha says in the First Noble Truth that the five aggregates (*khandhas*) that make up a human being are suffering. By their very nature they are suffering. So, if anyone comes for an interview with me and says she is having a terrible time, often I want to say, "Of course, what's wrong with that?" Ajahn Chah used to say it's like someone who goes into the army to become a soldier, and then goes on to complain about being shot at and being wounded. What do you expect when you join the army? That's what happens. What do you expect when you become a human being? It's suffering.

Sometimes in the world, people run away from suffering, they hide from it. You ask them how they are and they say, "I'm doing fine today", even though they are going through divorces, psychotherapy, chemotherapy or the like. They keep on saying they are 'fine' because that is what we are supposed to say in this world. That's what's expected of us. If only people were really honest, you'd ask them how they are and they'd say, "I'm blooming awful today - I've got a headache, I've got a stomach ache, the family is causing me all sorts of trouble, I feel rotten." If most people were honest, that's what they would say. If they really knew what was going on, that's what they would say. There's nothing wrong with recognising the suffering of existence. It's being honest and having the courage to face up to the truth.

How many people do you know who are happy - really happy, really content? Not just people who say they are happy but people who really are happy. The only people I have ever seen in my forty-eight years of life who are happy are the Enlightened Ones (*Arahants*) whom I have had the good fortune to meet. Other than that, nobody! When you understand this you understand the First Noble Truth, that the very nature of life is suffering, and you understand it in the very deepest of senses.

We have this world of the five senses. When we analyse it in the way the Lord Buddha asked us to, we use wisdom to ask, "Well, what is this world anyway, this world is made up of sight, sound, taste, touch, smell, and mind?" When we analyse it in that way, we can see that what we see, hear, taste, and touch by their very nature are part of the duality of happiness and suffering. Even the food we get here, which is so wonderful, after a while it's not good enough. If we had rotten food here as I had in my first years of being a monk, after a while we would get to like it. It's just contrast, that's all. The happiness and suffering of the senses are just contrast.

I've known people who went to great restaurants, and because the food wasn't quite up to the standard it was the week before, they got upset and complained. Whereas other people would be glad just to get anything to eat because they hadn't eaten for days. With the same food, why is it that some people find it joyful and others find it full of suffering? Just contrast, that's all! Whatever you take to be happiness in the world is all of the same nature. Take sexual happiness, most of that is just the excitement of wanting beforehand. When that happiness is reached it becomes exhausted in no time. Sexual desire is basically a hunger, a thirst, a state of separation from what you want, and you take that to be happiness! What The Buddha said is suffering, you take to be happiness!

It's craving you take to be happiness. But actually, the craving, the thirst, the stressing out to try and reach something that is always beyond your grasp, is suffering. Wanting is suffering. The trying to achieve what you want, the manipulating, the thinking, the planning, that's all suffering. How much time have you wasted on this rains retreat planning, manipulating and thinking about how you can get what you want? How much more freedom would you have if you had no 'wants' at all and didn't need to plan? When all the manipulation or craving is abandoned, can you understand the peace and contentment that will come then?

Pulling Out the Thorn

Often, when there is great pain in the body, or when there is great disturbance in the mind, a skilful meditator can just say 'stop!' They can let go in a moment and stop fighting, stop craving, stop trying to control. But when you experience great pain you may think you are going crazy and fight even more. Ask yourself, what's wrong with being in great pain or being greatly disappointed? The answer is, nothing is wrong. Such things are a natural part of life. They are unavoidable. So, let go of the 'controller'.

When you let go of the controller and stop craving, a strange thing happens. The madness stops and the pain disappears. I had that happen to me with great pain once. Every monastic has to come across this sooner or later. Some just want to run away, but they know they can't. It's a case of wanting to go forward, but you can't go forward, wanting to go backwards, but you can't go backwards, wanting to stay still, but you can't stay still. You don't know what to do! You can't go forward, you can't go back, you can't stay still - this is where you let go. When you do let go, you find out that half of the suffering was the fighting.

The Lord Buddha said there are two thorns which cause suffering in a human being (see SN, 36 6). The first thorn is the thorn of the five senses which is physical suffering. The second thorn is the mental thorn. There's the thorn of having sickness, having pain, and having to hear, see, taste, smell, and touch unpleasant things. Then there is the proliferation that goes around that, which is mental pain. It's very important here to notice the physical pain - seeing what you don't want to see, hearing what you don't want to hear, and doing what you don't want to do. And it's important to recognise there's not much you can do about that. For example, when I was a young monk I thought if I ever became an abbot, it would be fine because I could always do what I wanted to do. I could give all the orders, and I'd only give the orders I wanted to. Ironically, I found out that the more authority I had, the more of a prison I was in! I couldn't just do what I wanted. I had responsibility. I was even more controlled by the situation than before. So in the end I realised I had to give up trying to control, trying to somehow make things different.

Let go, just be with the present moment. You will find out that if you can let go of the pain and allow it to be, the whole situation changes. The first time I did this as a monk in Thailand was with a toothache. As soon as I let go the pain disappeared. It was quite a remarkable event in my monastic life to see intense pain suddenly go - just through wisdom power. Ajahn Chah and other great monks, following The Lord Buddha, always taught the Third Noble Truth as a way to end suffering, that is to let go of craving. They kept on saying it again and again, but theory is never as powerful as practise.

If you really let go, the whole problem just caves in - it fades and disappears. This is a beautiful moment of insight. Not insight based on thinking or theory, but insight based on experience. For a moment you let go of suffering because you don't fight. Thus the Second and Third Noble Truths are not just something to be thought about, written about, and theorised about, they are to be practised, especially the Third Noble Truth about letting go.

That is why in this monastery I have been teaching meditation aimed at letting go of the 'controller', particularly in deeper meditation when we can carelessly get too involved in trying to make the breath quiet or make some mental images (*nimitta*) appear and move it this way or that. What are we doing that for? - or rather, what's doing it? As we look deeper and deeper into the problem, we might have enough wisdom and enough courage to let go. Every meditator who has ever come to me and said that they got into a deep meditation always says that it was because they let go of something - that 'controller', that 'doer'.

You can only teach the Four Noble Truths deeply once a person has done a lot of meditation, because suffering, its cause, and the end of suffering, can only be seen through practise, through letting go of suffering. When you are meditating you are letting go of the world. You are letting go of one thorn, the physical thorn of suffering, for a short while, by going into the world of the mind.

Revulsion Towards This Thing We Call Existence

The Lord Buddha kept on saying that the five aggregates are suffering. I know some monks who say it is just attachment to the five aggregates that is suffering, not the aggregates themselves. You just chanted the *Anattālakkhana Sutta* (the Discourse on Non-Self, M, 1, 6, 3 8-47), a very beautiful Sutta which does say quite clearly that it's not just the attachment to the aggregates that is suffering: it's form (*rūpa*), this body itself, that is suffering, feeling (*vedanā*) is suffering, perception (*sañña*), consciousness (*viññāna*) and mental formations (*sankhāra*) are suffering. All formations are suffering (*sabbe sankhāra dukkha*; ANJ11, 13 4).

If you see this, you get revulsion (*nibbida*) to these aggregates. Revulsion means that you see that the five aggregates are just a bunch of suffering. To really see it means that you get fed up, you get disinterested, you get repulsed from these five aggregates! Not just from one of them but from all five, especially the mental aggregates. Why do you always want to go out into the world and get more feeling, more sensations, and more experience? "Let's go out and see a movie and get more experience. Let's go out and get a wife, get a husband, and have children. You haven't lived until you've had kids", so people say. That's stupid! That's just getting more feeling to be worried about, to be concerned about, and to torture yourself with. The whole point of the practise of Buddhism as expressed in the Third Noble Truth is to try and let go of feeling, to try and let go of perception, to try and calm mental formations and to try and eliminate consciousness, to bring it all to an end.

Sometimes I get into trouble when I say that consciousness is suffering. I like to use the metaphor for consciousness of a television screen. When you really investigate it, you see that this is not one 'television set' with six different programs on it, ie. sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch and mental phenomena, but it's six completely different types of televisions with only one type of program on each. This is where you actually see what consciousness truly is. When there is consciousness there will be suffering. 'Consciousness is the condition for suffering' (*viññāna paccaya dukkha*), as is stated in the *Sutta Nipata* (734-735). If you know this, you know the danger (*adinava*) in consciousness, and then you get revulsion towards consciousness.

The world, life, no matter how you arrange it, always ends up in suffering. You get your share of happiness, then suffering, then happiness, then suffering in whatever realm. Even if you get into the bliss of *Jhānas* it doesn't last, you have to come out afterwards. You have a beautiful two-week retreat, and when you come out, you find your disciples are going up the wall and you've got work to do. No matter how high you get on your retreat, you've got to come down. This is just the nature of life. So what we actually see when we use wisdom power is that wherever we go in the world, no matter what we do, ultimately all we have is suffering. Ajahn Chah used to tell the story of the mangy dog. It itches so much that it goes into the sun to try to get rid of the mange. It doesn't go away, so it goes into the rain. The itch doesn't go away, so it goes under a rock, into the forest, into the village, but of course, wherever it goes it always takes the mange with it. It doesn't matter where we go in this world, or in other worlds, that suffering which we experience now will go with us. There is no escape in that way because suffering is inherent to human existence and even to the existence of the *devas* (heavenly beings).

Whether you get into *Jhānas* or you don't, there is still suffering. After a while, looking at all the different aspects and all the different types of happiness to be found in the world - sex, drugs, rock'n'roll, even right up to the high meditative happinesses - you see that each one of them are by their very nature impermanent and are therefore conducive to suffering. After a while you realise what the Lord Buddha was saying: form is suffering, feeling is suffering, perception, mental formations, and consciousness are suffering - the whole caboodle is suffering.

When you truly see suffering, and that wherever you go suffering will be with you, then you get revulsion towards this thing we call existence. You find that whether it's in the *deva* realms or in the hell realms or in the human realm, it's just like the dog going to different places to get rid of the itch. It's just that some realms hurt more than others, but all realms hurt. When the *Jhāna* realms fall apart, there comes the hurt and pain. The higher the happiness you have, the more suffering there is when that happiness disappears. It's like people in the world, the more they love someone, the more they suffer when that person dies. The more you love your existence in the great *Jhāna* realms, in the higher *deva* realms (*brahmaloka*), the more

suffering there is when that existence collapses and disappears. This is the nature of experience. After a while you realise that the whole purpose of the Buddha's teaching is to end suffering through the ending of birth - to find the cause for birth and to eliminate that cause.

Why Would You Crave For Suffering

As to this particular life you have now, you're stuck with it. If you try to end it prematurely you just get another life, and you have to go through the whole thing all over again. That's not the way to end life, through suicide. You end life through cutting off craving, cutting off the cause. If you investigate things according to Dependent Origination (*Paticca Samuppāda*), you will see how rebirth occurs and what this process is that makes you go into another life in the future. You are already fueling that process now from the delusion of a self and from the delusion that there is some happiness somewhere in the world. You crave based on the lie that somewhere, some place, there can be happiness, there can be fulfilment, there can be what you really want. What you are really looking for in the world, "It's over there somewhere", so you think. For that reason you crave.

If you knew there is no happiness in the world - no place, no where - why would you crave? All sorts of craving would be taken away. If you really saw that 'all formations are suffering', if you could actually understand and accept this fully, that would be the end of craving. Why would you crave for *dukkha*? You only crave for what you assume to be happiness. This 'happiness' has been burning you for lifetime, after lifetime, after lifetime.

When I ask myself what I really want, I always get the same answer. What I really want is more *dukkha*. "Stupid monk, shut up!" Seeing that you're looking and searching for more *dukkha*, is a good way to end wanting. You actually see that the illusion (*avijja*) is that you think you're going to get happiness. Again, if you see with clear understanding that what you really want is suffering, you can give up wanting.

What do you want in the world anyway? What do you really want? What you are asking for is just more suffering. Let go!

Renunciation Leads To Peace

When you've been meditating, you find that the most happy times, the times when you've come closest to real happiness, are when you've been content. You find in your life that you can be happy with such a small amount. In fact, the less you have, the happier you can be. That's why the path of renunciation and letting go overcomes craving. It's the path of the Third Noble Truth - renunciation leads to peace.

Practise that principle in your life. Every time there is some suffering, which is where you have to renounce. What are you hanging onto anyway? Give up something, let go of something, be content. As soon as you are content the problem is solved. You don't need to think about it, just be at peace with whatever happens. Who knows, maybe the mob has been hired to come and beat me up tonight. OK, I can handle that. Whatever happens to you, if you know contentment, then you know the path to freedom from suffering. This is the Third Noble Truth. Don't just think about it, practise it - let go of craving. If ever there is a problem in your meditation or in your life, instead of trying other solutions to overcome suffering, try The Third Noble Truth Solution - let go of something, let go of craving. Again, you're craving for something, and that is causing suffering, so abandon it. Find out what you want, what you really want, and you'll know what's causing you to suffer. Give it up!

"I want to be healthy", - give it up! Just be content being sick. "O.K., I'm sick. Let's see how sick I can be!" That sort of attitude really gets Mara² worried. When you do things like that, the reply comes back, "Come on, don't be stupid, you'll get even more sick and it will hurt even more." See how sick you can be. That's the sort of contentment that goes in the opposite direction of craving. This is what release is.

Don't Make Any Future Houses

“Blinded by illusion, fettered by craving”, we actually take up and create our 'houses' for the future (see Dhp, 153-154). That creating a house for the future is *bhava* (literally 'existence'). Its like when we are building huts here in the monastery; we have to build the hut before someone can move into it. We build our next existence in this life through illusion and craving. We are making the *kamma* (volitional actions) and creating the *bhava* for the next life. We're just creating a house for the future.

That's why you've heard - and it comes straight from The Buddha's teachings - that for people who make great merit there is a heavenly mansion (*vimāna*) already waiting for them in a heavenly realm. For those who are creating bad *kamma* the pots of boiling liquid are already being heated up for them, waiting for them to fall down into hell. You are already creating your house for the future.

If you really are a homeless one, an *anagārika*, you should not just sell your existing house in this world but make sure you're not making any future houses for your fantasies, dreams, and hopes for some sort of happiness at some time in the future. Again, with those dreams and fantasies you're actually creating the conditions, you're building the house, building the state of existence where you'll find rebirth. Don't underestimate the power of the mind to create realms of existence. "Mind is the forerunner and mind is the chief" (Dhp, 1 - 2). Mind is the main thing. The world exists in the mind. The mind can create whole worlds, whole universes, whole states of existence through illusion and craving.

The Lord Buddha kept on saying that because you've been fed up, because you've been depressed until you've gone crazy, because this thing has happened to you and because that thing has happened to you, you've cried more tears in all of your existences than the water in all the oceans of the world (SN, 15 3). That's a lot of tears you've shed and a lot of crying you've done. When are you going to stop filling up the oceans? When are your bones going to stop filling up the graveyards? When

you see the Four Noble Truths, that's when. The Lord Buddha said that once you've seen the Four Noble Truths and seen the inherent suffering of life, you get revulsion coming up - this beautiful, wonderful revulsion, which does not seek for escape outside, but seeks for escape inside instead. You're not like that dog with the mange trying to go somewhere else to get rid of the mange, and you're not like a dog trying to kill itself to get rid of the mange. Instead you're trying to be content with the mange, learning to live with rather than against. You find that when you can be content with the mange, the mange disappears. Through craving you've known suffering. From fully seeing suffering you get revulsion. From revulsion comes dispassion (*virāga*). Dispassion is the fading away of everything, things disappearing, going, ending. It is wonderful when you start to see things disappear, the whole world fading away and vanishing into emptiness. It's marvellous to know things vanishing.

I remember as a young man travelling in the south of Mexico to a town called Oaxaca. It was the centre of the mushroom culture, but I wasn't interested in mushrooms and I wasn't taking them either, because I was already a Buddhist by that time. I remember getting a mental image (*nimitta*) while in a room and seeing the walls and the ceiling become like butter and just melt and disappear into nothingness. That was quite scary at the time. But it was just a sign that I was beginning to understand what perception is all about and allowing things to disappear, fade, and go empty.

All of this that you take to be real is an illusion. As The Lord Buddha said, this body of yours is just like froth on the river Ganges (SN,22 95). You poke it and there's nothing really there. It's not yours, it's just a body. Just blood and bones made up of food. You look at feeling, and it's just like a raindrop hitting a puddle. During my retreat - during one of the rainstorms when I came to the end of my walking path under my verandah, there was heavy rain. There was a puddle there and there was froth on one side and little bubbles coming from the drips in the gutter. I thought to myself that this froth is just like my body, and the little bubbles caused by the drops of water hitting the puddle is all feeling is. Happy feeling, unhappy feeling, in between, pop! - and it's gone; another one, and another one, and another one, completely

uncertain and beyond my control. You know that sometimes you will feel happy and that sometimes unhappy, and there's nothing you can do about it in this life. It's just nature.

The More You Give Up, The More Happiness You Have

“Joy at last to know there's no happiness in the world.” That means there is nothing wrong with you. When you actually understand this, you can let go of this building up of more worlds. When you understand it, then, in meditation, you make the world more and more simple. And how much more simple can you make it than by getting into a deep meditation where there's hardly anything left? Sometimes you can get to the point where there's only the breath left, and that's the only thing left in the whole world. That's pretty neat! Sometimes you can let go of the breath, and you've only got a mental image left, just a beautiful 'light' in the mind. It's not going away and it's completely stable. That's beautiful! That's probably the best bliss you've ever experienced. But go deeper and you get into *Jhāna* which is complete, unchanging, completely satisfying, very simple, and really blissful.

It's great to be able to reflect on the *Jhānas*. First *Jhāna* is so much less than you had before. You've given up so much. There's hardly anything of existence left, just this small little blip called First *Jhāna*. You enter into Second *Jhāna*, and there's only half a blip left. You're hardly there, and you can hardly say that you exist. You're not doing anything. You're like a rock, stable, still. There's nothing much going on because you've given up so much. There's just this last little vestige of consciousness remaining. You find that's the most blissful experience so far. When you get into Third *Jhāna* you've given up even more. You really get into this giving up business. You really get off on it. You really get off on renunciation (*nekkhamma*). You can't wait to give up more: “How much more can I give up?”

You realise this is the path to liberation from suffering - letting go. You understand why, because deep down there is no one in here. When there is no owner, your possessions are free for anyone to take. When there is no owner nature can go

right ahead and take your happiness and give you suffering, because you know it's going to take your suffering and give you happiness later on. These things don't belong to you.

All of our joys and depressions, our wisdom and craziness, don't belong to anybody - it's all just nature. That's all there is. So we can let go and learn to live with it, because we know it's going to change. Every time we get down, we know we're going to get up again soon. Every time we get up, we know we're going to get down again. It's just the nature of us. That's why we can smile when we're down because we know it's not going to last. That's why we can be peaceful when we're up because we know that's not going to last either.

This is how to deal with suffering and to learn to let go of things - understanding that the more you give up, the more happiness you have. It takes time though; you've got to give yourself time to be able to do these things, you have to be patient. It's a natural process and each one of you already has enough of a start. You've experienced enough suffering in this world; so don't go looking for happiness in the wrong places, otherwise you will just find more suffering. Don't be like the mangy dog. Just sit down and stay in one place, and watch the suffering just disappear all by itself without you doing anything. The best thing to do when you go through difficulties as a monk, as a nun, or as an *anagarika*, is just to stay still and not move.

Do as The Lord Buddha in the *Bhayabherava Sutta* (MN,4). If he was walking and fear came, he would carry on walking until the fear left and only then would he change to another posture. If he was sitting he wouldn't get up, he would just stay there until the fear subsided. If he was lying or standing, it was the same. Let it be the same when you get any suffering in your life. Don't change your position. What I am talking about here is don't do anything different, just carry on, and I guarantee whatever suffering you experience will just disappear. You'll find that suffering has got nothing to do with how you try and manipulate it. It's got nothing to do with the monastery, with your body, with your health, with your age, or with whatever. That's just what suffering does, it comes and goes all by itself.

Whatever you are, whatever you do, it's the nature of suffering - it just comes when it wants to. Uninvited it comes, and it leaves without permission. It will go when it wants to go, not when you want it to go. In fact, the more you want it to go, the longer it will stay. It's perverse like that. Actually, if you invite it in and allow it to stay, it can't stand you any longer and it goes away. That's the nature of suffering.

But it's particularly important to know deeply that the five aggregates of themselves, even consciousness, are suffering. The less you are conscious of, the more peaceful you are. *Jhānas* are the highest happiness's you can experience until you let go completely and reach the attainment of cessation (*nirodha samāpatti*) where there is no consciousness at all. The five aggregates just stop for a while. Once those five aggregates have stopped and you come out afterwards, you have to know - there's no other way - that consciousness is suffering, perception is suffering, feeling is suffering, the body is suffering, mental formations are suffering, birth is suffering, and life is suffering. So when you suffer it just proves The Buddha was right. Also, you know that the more you can let go, the less suffering you have. That too just proves The Buddha was right again. If you can let go completely, you know the cause of all future suffering is finally overcome.

A Workman Waiting For His Wages

In the *Anattālakkhāna Sutta* (Mv, 1, 6, 38-47) The Lord Buddha says that from revulsion comes dispassion - when you get fed up with these five aggregates they start to fade. And from dispassion comes freedom (*vimutti*). You know from that freedom that you're not building any more houses. You have completely abandoned everything. You know that birth is destroyed. You've just this life to live. You're like a workman waiting for his wages (see Thag, 1003). You've done your work, and you know there is no more existence in the future for you. That in itself is great happiness - to know that whatever suffering you have to experience between now and

the dissolution of the aggregates (*parinibbāna*) is just that much, and that's the last of the suffering that you have to experience in *samsara*.

If you haven't attained that or if you haven't entered the stream, it means the suffering ahead of you in *samsara* is endless - life after life of going through the same old thing. But don't blame anyone else for your suffering, and don't blame yourself. It's the very nature of existence. Just apply the Third Noble Truth of letting go or the Fourth Noble Truth of the practices of morality (*sila*), sustained attention (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*pañña*). Keep precepts and you lessen suffering. Develop sustained attention, gentleness, persistence and stability of mind and you lessen suffering even more. Develop wisdom and you end suffering. Joy at last!

Ajahn Brahmavamso

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Abbreviations

Mv	Mahāvagga (Vinaya)
MN	Majjhima Nikāya
SN	Samyutta Nikāya
AN	Anguttara Nikāya
Dhp	Dhammapada
Sn	Sutta Nipāta
Thag	Theragāthā

¹ It is important to realise that although one speaks about the alternation of happiness and suffering in life, ultimately it's all suffering. An experience you now perceive as happiness due to some previous suffering, may be perceived as suffering later on in comparison to an even greater happiness. Thus, in the broadest sense, all experience is suffering.

² "Mara ... is the Buddhist 'tempter' – He appears in the texts both as a real person (ie. As a deity) and as the personification of evil and passions, of the totality of worldly existence and of death." See: Nyanatiloka Thera, *Buddhist Dictionary* (4th Rev. Ed.) p 116, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka, 1980.