

A Tree in a Forest

A Collection of Ajahn Chah's Similes



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Buddha Dharma Education Association Inc.

A Tree *in* *A Forest*

A COLLECTION OF AJAHN CHAH'S SIMILES

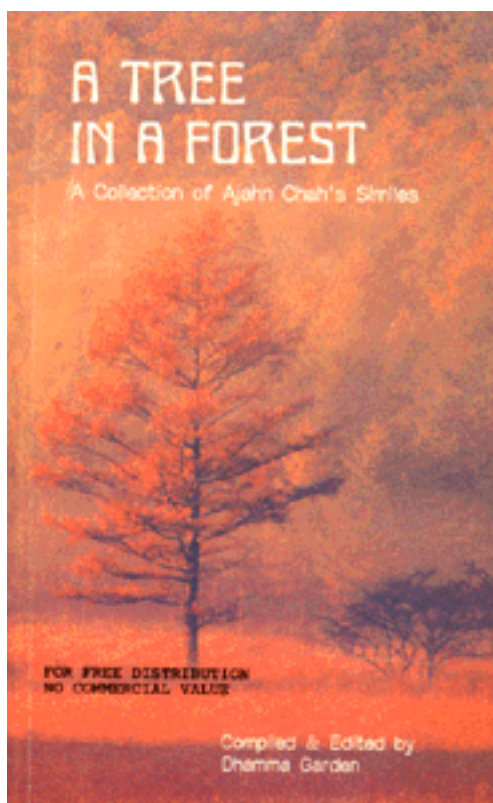
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AJAHN CHAH

People have asked about my practice. How do I prepare my mind for meditation? There is nothing special. I just keep it where it always is. They ask, "Then are you an arahant?" Do I know? I am like a tree in a forest, full of leaves, blossoms and fruit. Birds come to eat and nest, and animals seek rest in its shade. Yet the tree does not know itself. It follows its own nature. It is as it is.

Ajahn Chah

Ajahn Chah was born in 1918 in a village located in the north-eastern part of Thailand. He became a novice at a young age and received higher ordination at the age of twenty. He followed the austere Forest Tradition for years, living in forests and begging for almsfood as he wandered about on mendicant pilgrimage.

He practised meditation under a number of masters, among whom was Ajahn Mun, a highly respected and accomplished meditation teacher of the time. Ajahn Mun had an indelible influence on Ajahn Chah, giving his meditation practice the direction and clarity that it lacked. Ajahn Chah later became an accomplished meditation teacher in his own right, sharing his realization of the Dhamma with those who sought it. The essence of his teaching was rather simple: be mindful, don't hang on to anything, let go and surrender to the way things are.

Ajahn Chah passed away in peace after a long bout of illness on January 16, 1992, at his home monastery, Wat Pah Pong, in Ubon Ratchatani.

For more information on books on Ajahn Chah write to: Wat Pah Nanachat, Bahn Bung Wai, Warinchamrab, Ubol Rajathani, Thailand.

Editor's Note

Due to popular demand, we have decided to separate the English and Mandarin parts of the original bilingual publications of *A Tree in a Forest*, Vols. I & II, and publish them under separate covers. Each new language edition has been divided into two parts: Part I consists of the 75 similes that appeared in the first volume of *A Tree in a Forest*, and Part II consists of the 108 similes that appeared in the second volume.

Foreword

The teachings of Ajahn Chah were originally made available to the English-speaking public by the efforts of his Western disciples who were able to translate from Thai or Lao, the languages that Ajahn Chah taught in. Although for some time now these English publications have been circulating in Chinese-speaking communities, particularly in Singapore and Malaysia, and more recently in Taiwan, they have remained accessible only to those with an adequate knowledge of the English language. These readers, inspired by Ajahn Chah's teachings, have often expressed regret that those among their compatriots with little or no knowledge at all of English shouldn't have the chance to benefit from the wisdom of Ajahn Chah's words. For this reason, a joyfully willing and dedicated group made up of members from both the Buddhist monastic community and laity, decided to translate the works of Ajahn Chah. They come from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia, and all are blessed with the facility to work in both the English and Chinese languages. Also, and more importantly, they all have adequate experience and understanding of the Dhamma coupled with the "feel" and genuine appreciation of Ajahn Chah's teachings. It is a credit to their goodness and sincere wish to spread the Dhamma in whatever way they can, that this work is now in your hands.

We would like to acknowledge gratitude to all who took part in any aspect of the production of this book, be it designing, proofreading, copying, contributing toward the cost of its printing, and so on. May the Light of the Triple Gem continue to shine in their hearts and give them the peace and happiness they deserve.

You will note that no one's name has been mentioned and none given any special credit. This is just a way of following Ajahn Chah's teaching of "not trying to be anything: not an *arahant*, not a *bodhisatta*, nothing..." not even a translator.

A DISCIPLE

Translators' Note

It is said that if a person should find a bright star, he has no right to put it into his pocket and keep the light all to himself, but should bring it out and let it shine for the good of everyone. For this reason, we are pleased that we have been able to take part in translating Ajahn Chah's teachings into Chinese so that others, as well, may benefit from the light of wisdom that shines from his Dhamma talks.

Translating the works of Ajahn Chah has not been an entirely easy task. There ran the risk of using an over-literal approach which could sometimes end up sounding clumsy, or using a freer approach which although would read more smoothly, could turn out to be less accurate. There was too the risk of sounding too academic which is not at all the style of Ajahn Chah. He himself read very little. In fact, when once asked which books of Buddhism he would recommend people to read, he replied, "Only one." He then proceeded to point to his heart.

So, each of us has had to compromise in different ways, but not in a way that has sacrificed the clear simplicity of Ajahn Chah's talks nor their profound meaning. If the Dhamma "star" of Ajahn Chah has lost some of its original luster in the translation process, we humbly apologise. Yet we cannot help but feel that it is better to have a star out in the open to shine on everyone than for it to be shining, be it ever so brightly, in somebody's pocket.

In the end, there is never a best or last translation of anyone's works, only different styles. As long as the essential meaning of what is being translated is captured and conveyed effectively, that is what matters.

To you holding this book in your hands, even if it be only a mere glimmer of light that you catch from that "star" of Dhamma which shone so brightly from Ajahn Chah's heart, and that glimmer of light should bring direction and inspiration into your life, we will feel that we have accomplished our task.

THE TRANSLATORS

Introduction

Ajahn Chah reminded us that the Buddha himself could only point out the way and could not do the practice for us, because, the truth is something that cannot be put into words or given away. “All the teachings,” Ajahn Chah taught, “are merely similes and comparisons, means to help the mind see the truth. If we establish the Buddha within our mind, then we see everything, we contemplate everything, as no different from ourselves.”

Many of the similes that Ajahn Chah himself used to teach came out of his vast experience of living in the forest. His practice was simply to watch, all the while being totally open and aware of everything that was happening both inside and outside himself. He would say that his practice was nothing special. He was, in his own words, like a tree in a forest. “A tree is as it is,” he’d say. And Ajahn Chah was as he was. But out of such “nothing specialness” came a profound understanding of himself and the world.

Ajahn Chah used to say, “The Dhamma is revealing itself in every moment, but only when the mind is quiet can we understand what it is saying, for the Dhamma teaches without words.” Ajahn Chah had this uncanny ability to take that wordless Dhamma and convey its truth to his listeners in the form of a simile that was fresh, easy to follow, sometimes humorous, sometimes poetic, but always striking a place in the heart where it would jar or inspire the most: “We are like maggots; life is like a falling leaf; our mind is like rain water.”

The teachings of Ajahn Chah teem with similes and comparisons like these. We thought it would be a good idea to collect them all in the form of a book as a source of inspiration for those who may want some respite from the “heat of the world” and seek some rest in the cool and abundant shade of “a tree in the forest.”

(These similes have been gleaned from the following publications: *Bodhinyana*, *A Taste of Freedom*, *Our Real Home*, *Samadhibhavana*, *Living Dhamma*, *Food for the Heart*, *A Still Forest Pool*, and from a recently published book entitled *Venerable Father, A Life With Ajahn Chah*, that was written by Paul Breiter.)

AJAHN CHAH

In the olden days, they taught that we should gradually, ca-a-arefully gather in the net, feel our way with it, without losing it. This is how we practise.

FISHERMAN SIMILE



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Part I



We have to talk about the Dhamma like this, using similes, because the Dhamma has no form. Is it square or is it round? You can't say. The only way to talk about it is through similes like these.

AJAHN CHAH

AIMLESS WANDERER

When we have no real home, we're like an aimless wanderer out on the road, going this way for a while and then that way, stopping for a while and then setting off again. Until we return to our real home, whatever we do we feel ill-at-ease, just like somebody who's left his village to go on a journey. Only when he gets home again can he really relax and be at ease.

Nowhere in the world is any real peace to be found. That's the nature of the world. Look within yourself and find it there instead.

When we think of the Buddha and how truly he spoke, we feel how worthy he is of reverence and respect. Whenever we see the truth of some thing, we see his teachings, even if we've never actually practised Dhamma. But even if we have knowledge of the teaching, have studied and practised them, but still have not seen their truth, then we're still homeless like the aimless wanderer.

BANANA PEEL

When you see things in the world like banana peels that have no great value for you, then you're free to walk in the world without being moved, without being bothered, without being hurt in any way by all of the various kinds of things that come and pass away, whether pleasant or unpleasant. This is the path that leads you to freedom.

BLIND MAN

Both the body and mind are constantly arising and ceasing, conditions are in a state of constant turmoil. The reason we can't see this in line with the truth is because we keep believing the untrue. It's like being guided by a blind man. How can we travel with him in safety? A blind man will only lead us into forests and thickets. How could he lead us to safety when he can't see? In the same way, our mind is deluded by conditions, creating suffering in the search for happiness, creating difficulty in the search for ease. Such a mind can have only difficulty and suffering. Really we want to get rid of suffering and difficulty, but instead we create those very things. All we can do is complain. We create bad causes, and the reasons we do so is because we don't know the truth of appearances and conditions and try to cling to them.

BOTTLE OF MEDICINE

We can compare practice to a bottle of medicine a doctor leaves for his patient. On the bottle are written detailed instructions on how to take the medicine, but no matter how many hundred times the patient may read the directions, he is bound to die if that is all he does. He will gain no benefit from the medicine. And before he dies, he may complain bitterly that the doctor wasn't any good, that the medicine didn't cure him. He

will think that the doctor was a fake or that the medicine was worthless, yet he had only spent his time examining the bottle and reading the instructions. He hadn't followed the advice of the doctor and taken the medicine. However, if the patient had actually followed the doctor's advice and taken the medicine regularly as prescribed, he would have recovered.

Doctors prescribe medicine to eliminate diseases from the body. The Teachings of the Buddha are prescribed to cure diseases of the mind and to bring it back to its natural healthy state. So the Buddha can be considered to be a doctor who prescribes cures for the illnesses of the mind which are found in each one of us without exception. When you see these illnesses of the mind, does it not make sense to look to the Dhamma as support, as medicine to cure your illnesses?

CHILD PLAYING

When we have contemplated the nature of the heart many times, then we will come to understand that this heart is just as it is and can't be otherwise. We will know that the heart's ways are just as they are. That's its nature. If we see this clearly, then we can detach from thoughts and feelings. And we don't have to add on anything more if we constantly tell ourselves that "that's just the way it is." When the heart truly understands, it lets go of everything. Thinking and feeling will still be there, but that very thinking and feeling will be deprived of power.

It's like at first being annoyed by a child who likes to play in ways that annoy us so much that we scold or spank him. But later we understand that it's natural for a child to play and act like that, so we leave him alone. We let go and our troubles are over. Why are they over? Because we now accept the natural ways of children. Our outlook has changed and we now accept the true nature of things. We let go and our heart becomes more peaceful. We now have right understanding.

COBRA

Mental activity is like a deadly poisonous cobra. If we don't interfere with a cobra, it simply goes its own way. Even though it may be extremely poisonous, we are not affected by it. We don't go near it or take hold of it, and so it doesn't bite us. The cobra does what is natural for a cobra to do. That's the way it is. If you are clever, you'll leave it alone. Likewise, you let be that which is not good — you let it be according to its own nature. You also let be that which is good. Don't grab onto liking and disliking, just as you wouldn't interfere with the cobra.

One who is clever will have this kind of attitude towards the various moods that arise in his mind. When goodness arises, we let it be good. We understand its nature. In the same way, we let be the not-good. We let it be according to its nature. We don't take hold of it because we don't want anything. We don't want evil. We don't want good. We don't want heaviness

nor lightness, happiness nor suffering. When our wanting is at an end, peace is firmly established.

COCONUT SHELLS

Desire is a defilement, but we must first have desire in order to start practising the Way. Suppose you went to buy coconuts at the market and while carrying them back someone asked:

“Why did you buy those coconuts?”

“I bought them to eat.”

“Are you going to eat the shells too?”

“Of course not!”

“I don’t believe you. If you’re not going to eat the shells, then why did you buy them?”

Well, what do you say? How are you going to answer that question?

We practise with desire to begin with. If we didn’t have desire, we wouldn’t practise. Contemplating in this way can give rise to wisdom, you know. For example, those coconuts: Are you going to eat the shells as well? Of course not. Then why do you take them? They’re useful for wrapping up the coconuts in. If after eating the coconuts, you throw the shells away, there is no problem.

Our practice is like this. We’re not going to eat the shells, but it’s not yet time to throw them away. We keep them first, just like we do with desire. This is how the practice is. If some-

body wants to accuse us of eating coconut shells, that's their business. We know what we're doing.

COOKING

At first, we train the body and speech to be free of unwholesomeness which is virtue. Some people think that to have virtue you must memorize Pali phrases and chant all day and all night, but really all you have to do is make your body and speech blameless, and that's virtue. It's not so difficult to understand. It's just like cooking food — put in a little bit of this and a little bit of that till it's just right and it's delicious. And once it is delicious, you don't have to add anything else to it. The right ingredients have already been added. In the same way, taking care that our actions and speech are proper will give us *delicious* virtue — virtue that is just right.

CRAZY MAN

Suppose one morning, you're walking to work and a man yells insults at you. As soon as you hear his insults, your mind changes from its usual state. You don't feel so good. You feel angry and hurt. You want to get even!

A few days later, another man comes to your house and tells you, "Hey, that man who abused you the other day, he's crazy! Has been for years! He abuses everybody like that. Nobody takes notice of anything he says." As soon as you hear this,

you are suddenly relieved. That anger and hurt that you've pent up within you all these days melt away completely. Why? Because now you know the truth. Before, you didn't. You thought that man was normal, so you were angry at him and that caused you to suffer. As soon as you found out the truth, however, everything changed: "Oh, he's mad! That explains everything!"

When you understand this, you feel fine because you know for yourself. Having known, then you can let go. If you don't know the truth, you cling right there. When you thought that the man who abused you was normal, you could have killed him. But when you found out the truth, that he's mad, you felt much better. This is knowledge of the truth.

Someone who sees the Dhamma has a similar experience. When attachment, aversion and delusion disappear, they disappear in the same way. As long as we don't know these things, we think, "What can I do? I have so much greed and aversion." This is not clear knowledge. It's just the same as when we thought the madman was sane. When we finally see that he was mad all along, we're relieved of worry. No one could show you this. Only when the mind sees for itself, can it uproot and relinquish attachment.

CUP OF WATER

Many of those who come to see me have a high standing in the community. Among them are merchants, college graduates, teachers, and government officials. Their minds are filled with

opinions about things. They are too clever to listen to others. It is like a cup of water. If a cup is filled with stale, dirty water, it is useless. Only after the old water is thrown out can the cup become useful. You must empty your minds of opinions, then you will see. Our practice goes beyond cleverness and stupidity. If you think that you are clever, wealthy, important, or an expert in Buddhism, you cover up the truth of non-self. All you will see is self — I and mine. But Buddhism is letting go of self. Those who are too clever will never learn. They must first get rid of their cleverness, first empty their “cup.”

DAM

The training in concentration is practice to make the mind firm and steady. This brings about peacefulness of mind. Usually our minds are moving and restless, hard to control. The mind follows sense distractions wildly, just like water flowing this way and that. Men, though, know how to control water so that it is of greater use to mankind. Men are clever. They know how to dam water, make large reservoirs and canals — all of this merely to channel water and make it more useable, so that it doesn't run wild and eventually settle down into a few low spots, its usefulness wasted.

So, too, the mind which is *dammed* and controlled, trained constantly, will be of immeasurable benefit. The Buddha himself taught, “The mind that has been controlled brings true happiness, so train your minds well for the highest

benefits.” Similarly, the animals we see around us — elephants, horses, buffalos, and so on — must be trained before they can be useful for work. Only after they have been trained is their strength of benefit to us.

In the same way, the mind that has been trained will bring many times the blessings of that of an untrained mind. The Buddha and his Noble Disciples all started out in the same way as us — with untrained minds. But, afterwards, look how they became the subjects of reverence for us all. And see how much benefit we can gain from their teachings. Indeed see what benefits have come to the entire world from these men who had gone through the training of the mind to reach the freedom beyond. The mind controlled and trained is better equipped to help us in all professions, in all situations. The disciplined mind will keep our lives balanced, make work easier, and develop and nurture reason to govern our actions. In the end our happiness will increase accordingly as we follow the proper mind training.

DEEP HOLE

Most people just want to perform good deeds to make merit, but they don’t want to give up wrongdoing. It’s just that “the hole is too deep.

Suppose there was a hole and there was something at the bottom of it. Now anyone who put his hand into the hole and didn’t reach the bottom would say the hole was too deep. If a

hundred or a thousand people put their hands down that hole, they'd all say the hole was too deep. No one would say that his arm was too short! We have to come back to ourselves. We have to take a step back and look at ourselves. Don't blame the hole for being too deep. Turn around and look at your own arm. If you can see this, then you will make progress on the spiritual path and will find happiness.

DIRTY CLOTHES

It is only natural that when we put on dirty clothes and our bodies are dirty that our minds, too, will feel uncomfortable and depressed. However, if we keep our bodies clean and wear clean, neat clothes, it makes our minds light and cheerful.

So, too, when morality is not kept, our bodily actions and speech are dirty, and this is a cause for making the mind unhappy, distressed, and heavy. We are separated from right practice and this prevents us from penetrating into the essence of the Dhamma in our minds. The wholesome bodily actions and speech themselves depend on the mind properly trained, since mind orders body and speech. Therefore, we must continue to practice by training our minds.

DRINKING GLASS

How can you find right understanding? I can answer you simply by using this glass of water I am holding. It appears to us as

clean and useful, something to drink from and keep for a long time. Right understanding is to see this as broken glass, as if it has already been shattered. Sooner or later, it *will* be shattered. If you keep this understanding while you are using it — that all it is — is a combination of elements which come together in this form and then break apart — then no matter what happens to the glass, you will have no problem. Similarly, the body is like the glass. It is also going to break apart and die. You have to understand that. Yet when you do, it doesn't mean you should go and kill yourself, just as you shouldn't take the glass and break it or throw it away. The glass is something to use until it falls apart in its own natural way. Similarly, the body is a vehicle to use until it goes its own way. Your task is to see what the natural way of things is. This understanding can make you free in all the changing circumstances of the entire world.

DRUNK

Anyone attached to the senses is like a drunk whose liver is not yet destroyed. He doesn't know when he has had enough. He continues to indulge and drink carelessly. He's caught and later suffers illness and pain.

DUCK

Your practice is like raising a duck. Your duty is to feed it and give it water. If it grows fast or slow is the duck's business, not

yours. Let it go and just do your own work. Your business is to practise. If it's fast or slow, just know it. Don't try to force it. This kind of practice has a good foundation.

EMPTY SPACE

People want to go to *nibbana* but when you tell them that there is nothing there, they begin to have second thoughts. But there's nothing there, nothing at all! Look at the roof and floor here. Think of the roof as a "becoming" and the floor as a "becoming" too. You can stand on the roof and you can stand on the floor, but in the empty space between the roof and the floor there is no place to stand. Where there is no becoming, that's where there's emptiness, and to put it bluntly, we say that *nibbana* is this emptiness. People hear this and they back up a bit. They don't want to go. They're afraid that they won't see their children or relatives.

That's why whenever we bless the laity by saying, "May you have long life, beauty, happiness and strength," they become very happy. But if you start talking about letting go and emptiness they don't want to hear about it. But have you ever seen a very old person with a beautiful complexion or a lot of strength or a lot of happiness? No! But we say, "Long life, beauty, happiness and strength," and they are all pleased. They're attached to becoming, to the cycle of birth and death. They prefer to stand on the roof or on the floor. Few are they who dare to *stand* in the empty space between.

FAMILY

If you want to find Dhamma, it has nothing to do with the forests or the mountains or the caves. It's only in the heart. It has its own language of experience. There is a great difference between concepts and direct experience. With a glass of hot water, whoever puts his finger into it will have the same experience — hot — which can be called by many words in different languages. Similarly, whoever looks deeply into the heart will have the same experience, no matter what his nationality, culture, or language may be. If in your heart you come to that taste of truth, of Dhamma, then you become like one big family — like mother and father, sisters and brothers — because you've tasted that essence of the heart which is the same for all.

FERTILIZER

Our defilements are like fertilizer for our practice. It's the same as taking filthy stuff like chicken manure and buffalo dung to fertilize our fruit trees, so that the fruit will be sweet and abundant. In suffering, there is happiness; in confusion there is calm.

FIRE

Nothing happens immediately, so in the beginning we can't see any results from our practice. This is like the example that I have often given you of the man who tries to make fire by rub-

bing two sticks together. He says, “They say there’s fire here!” He then begins rubbing energetically. He’s very impetuous. He rubs on and on, but his impatience doesn’t end. He wants to have that fire, but the fire just doesn’t come, so he gets discouraged and stops to rest for a while. He starts again, but by then the initial heat he had has disappeared, so the going is slow. He just doesn’t keep at it long enough. He rubs and rubs until he is tired and then stops altogether. Not only is he tired, but he becomes more and more discouraged. “There’s no fire here!” he finally decides and gives up completely.

Actually he was doing the work, but there wasn’t enough heat to start the fire. The fire was there all the time, but he didn’t carry on to the end. Until we are able to reach peace, the mind will continue as before. For this reason the teacher says, “Just keep on doing it. Keep on with the practice!” Maybe we think, “If I don’t, yet understand, how can I do it?” Until we are able to practise properly, wisdom won’t arise. So we say just keep on with it. If we practise without stopping, we’ll begin to think about what we are doing, and consider our practice.

FISH

We don’t want desire, but if there is no desire why practise? We must have desire to practise. Wanting and not-wanting are both defilements, both are problems, delusions, lacking wisdom. Buddha had desire too. It’s there all the time, only a condition of the mind. Those with wisdom, however, have desire

but no attachment. Our desires are like catching a big fish in a net — we must wait until the fish loses strength and then we can catch it easily. But all the time we keep on watching it so that it doesn't escape.

FISH AND FROG

If you attach to the senses, you're the same as a fish caught on a hook. When the fisherman comes, struggle all you want, but you can't get loose. Actually you're not caught like a fish, but more like a frog. A frog gulps down the whole hook right to its guts. A fish just gets it caught in its mouth.

FISH TRAP

If you see clearly the harm and the benefit of something, you won't have to wait for others to tell you about it. Consider the story of the fisherman who finds something in his fish trap. He knows something is in there. He can hear it flopping about inside. Thinking it's a fish, he reaches his hand into the trap, only to find a different kind of animal. He can't see it, so he's not sure what it is. It could be an eel, but it could also be a snake. If he throws it away, he may regret it. It could be an eel, something nice for dinner. On the other hand, if he keeps on holding onto it and it turns out to be a snake, it may bite him. He's just not sure. But his desire is so strong that he holds on, just in case it's an eel. The minute he brings it out and sees that

it's a snake, however, he doesn't hesitate to fling it away from him. He doesn't have to wait for someone to call out, "Hey, it's a snake! Let go!" The sight of the snake tells him what to do more clearly than words could do. Why? Because he sees the danger — snakes can bite and make you very sick or kill you. Who has to tell him about that? In the same way, if we practise until we see things as they are, we won't meddle with things that are harmful.

FISHERMAN

Our practice of contemplation will lead us to understanding. Let us take the example of a fisherman pulling in his net with a big fish in it. How do you think he feels about pulling it in? If he's afraid that the fish will escape, he'll rush and start to struggle with the net, grabbing and tugging at it. Before he knows it, the big fish has escaped. The fisherman was trying too hard.

In the olden days, they taught that we should do it gradually, carefully gathering it in without losing it. This is how it is in our practice. We gradually feel our way with it, carefully gathering it in without losing it. Sometimes it happens that we don't feel like doing it. Maybe we don't want to look, or maybe we don't want to know, but we keep on with it. We continue feeling for it. This is the practice. If we feel like doing it, we do it. If we don't feel like doing it, we do it just the same. We just keep on doing it.

If we are enthusiastic about our practice, the power of our faith will give energy to what we are doing. But at this

stage, we are still without wisdom. Even though we are very energetic, we will not derive much benefit from our practice. We may continue with it for a long time and a feeling will arise that we are not going to find the Way. We may feel that we cannot find peace, or that we are not sufficiently equipped to do the practice. Or maybe we feel that this Way just isn't possible any more. So we give up!

At this point, we must be very, very careful. We must use patience and endurance. It's just like pulling in the big fish — we gradually feel our way with it, we carefully pull it in. The struggle won't be too difficult, so we continue to pull it in without stopping. Eventually, after some time, the fish becomes tired and stops fighting and we're able to catch it easily. Usually this is how it happens. We practise gradually and carefully gathering it together. It's in this manner that we do our contemplation.

FLASHLIGHT

In Buddhism we are endlessly hearing about letting go and about not clinging to anything. What does this mean? It means to hold but not to cling. Take this flashlight, for example. We wonder: "What is this?" So we pick it up: "Oh, it's a flashlight." Then we put it down again. We hold things in this way. If we didn't hold anything at all, what could we do? We couldn't do walking meditation or anything else, so we must hold things first. It's wanting, yes, that's true, but later on it leads to perfection.

It is like coming here. First you had to want to come here. If you didn't want to do so, you wouldn't be here today. We do things because of wanting, but when wanting arises, we don't cling to it, just like we didn't cling to that flashlight — “What's this?” We pick it up. “Oh, it's a flashlight.” We then put it down again. This is what “holding but not clinging” means. We know and then we let go. We don't foolishly cling to things, but we “hold” them with wisdom and then let them go. Good or bad, we let them all go.

FREEWAY

It is wrong view to go on thinking that we are the *sankharas* or that we are happiness and unhappiness. Seeing like this is not full, clear knowledge of the true nature of things. The truth is that we can't force things to follow our desires. They follow the way of Nature.

A simple comparison is this: Suppose you go and sit in the middle of a freeway with the cars and trucks speeding down toward you. You can't get angry at the cars, shouting, “Don't drive over here! Don't drive over here!” It's a freeway. You can't tell them that. So what can you do? You get off the road. The road is the place where cars run. If you don't want the cars to be there, you suffer.

It's the same with *sankharas*. We say they disturb us, like when we sit in meditation and hear a sound. We think, “Oh, that sound's bothering me!” If we understand that the sound

bothers us, then we suffer accordingly. If we investigate a little deeper, we will see that it's we who go out and disturb the sound. The sound is simply sound. If we understand it in this way, then there's nothing more to it. We leave it be. We see that the sound is one thing and we are another. This is real knowledge of the truth. You see both sides, so you have peace. If you see only one side there is suffering. Once you see both sides, then you follow the Middle Way. This is the right practice of the mind. This is what we call straightening out our understanding.

In the same way, the nature of all *sankharas* is impermanence and death, but we want to grab them. We carry them about and covet them. We want them to be true. We want to find truth within the things that aren't true. Whenever someone sees like this and clings to the *sankharas* as being himself, he suffers. The Buddha told us to contemplate this.

FROG

The more you neglect the practice, the more you neglect going to the monastery to listen to the Teachings, the more your mind will sink down into a bog, like a frog going into a hole. Someone comes along with a hook and the frog's days are over. He doesn't have a chance. All he can do is stretch out his neck and be caught. So watch out you don't back yourself up into a hole. Someone may just come along with hook and pull you up.

At home, being pestered by your children and grandchildren, and possessions, you are even worse off than the frog! You don't know how to detach from these things. When old age, sickness and death come along, what will you do? This is the hook that's going to catch you. Which way will you turn?

FRUIT TREE

Sometimes, when a fruit tree is in bloom, a breeze stirs and sends blossoms falling to the ground. Some buds remain and grow into small green fruit. A wind blows and some of them fall too. Still others may become fruit nearly ripe, or some even fully ripe, before they fall.

And so it is with people. Like flowers and fruit in the wind, they, too, *fall* in different stages of life. Some people die while still in the womb, others within only a few days after birth. Some people live for a few years, then die, never having reached maturity. Men and women die in their youth. Still others reach a ripe old age before they die. When reflecting upon people, consider the nature of fruit in the wind — both are uncertain.

Our minds are also similar. A mental impression arises, draws and *blows* at the mind, then the mind *falls* — just like the fruit.

The Buddha understood this uncertain nature of things. He observed the phenomenon of fruit in the wind and reflected

upon the monks and novices who were his disciples. He found that they, too, were essentially of the same nature — uncertain! How could it be otherwise? This is just the way of all things.

GARBAGE PIT

If your mind becomes quiet and concentrated, it is an important tool to use. But if you're sitting just to get concentrated so you can feel happy and pleasant, then you're wasting your time. The practice is to sit and let your mind become still and concentrated, and then to use that to examine the nature of the mind and body, to see more clearly. Otherwise, if you make the mind simply quiet, then for that time it's peaceful and there is no defilement. But this is like taking a stone and covering up a smelly garbage pit. When you take the stone away, it's still full of smelly garbage. You must use your concentration, not to temporarily bliss out, but to accurately examine the nature of the mind and body. This is what actually frees you.

GIFT

We should investigate the body within the body. Whatever's in the body, go ahead and look at it. If we just see the outside, it's

not clear. We see hair, nails, and so on and they are just pretty things which entice us. So the Buddha taught us to look at the inside of the body, to see the body within the body. What is in the body? Look closely and see! We will see many things inside that will surprise us, because even though they are within us, we've never seen them. Wherever we go, we carry them with us, but we still don't know them at all.

It's as if we visit some relatives at their house and they give us a gift. We take it and put it in our bag and then leave without opening it to see what is inside. When at last we open it we find it is full of poisonous snakes!

Our body is like that. If we just see the shell of it, we say it's fine and beautiful. We forget ourselves. We forget impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self. If we look within this body, it's really repulsive. There's nothing beautiful in it. If we look according to reality, without trying to sugar things over, we'll see that it's really sad and wearisome. Dispassion will then arise. This feeling of disinterest is not that we feel aversion for the world. It's simply our mind clearing up, our mind letting go. We see all things as not being substantial or dependable. However we want them to be, they just go their own way, regardless. Things which are unstable are unstable. Things which are not beautiful are not beautiful.

So the Buddha said that when we experience sights, sounds, tastes, smells, bodily feelings or mental states, we should release them. Whether it's happiness or unhappiness, it's all the same. So let them go!

GRASS

You must contemplate in order to find peace. What people usually mean whenever they say peace is only the calming down of the mind and not the calming down of the defilements. The defilements are simply being temporarily subdued, just like grass being covered by a stone. If you take the stone away, the grass will grow back again in a short time. The grass hadn't really died, it was just being suppressed.

It's the same when sitting in meditation. The mind is calm, but the defilements are not really calm. Therefore *samadhi* is not a sure thing. To find real peace you must develop wisdom. *Samadhi* is one kind of peace, like the stone covering the grass. This is only a temporary peace. The peace of wisdom is like putting the stone down and just leaving it there. In this way the grass can't possibly grow back again. This is real peace, the calming of the defilements, the sure peace which results from wisdom.

HAND

Those who study theory and those who practise meditation misunderstand each other. Usually those who emphasize study say things like, "Monks who only practise meditation just follow their own opinions. They have no basis in their teaching."

Actually, in one sense, these two ways of study and practice are exactly the same thing. We can understand better if we

think of it like the front and back of our hand. If we put our hand out, it seems like the back of the hand has disappeared. Actually the back of our hand hasn't disappeared anywhere. It's just hidden underneath. When we turn our hand over, the same thing happens to the palm of the hand. It doesn't go anywhere. It's merely hidden underneath.

We should keep this in mind when we consider practice. If we think that it has “disappeared,” we'll go off to study, hoping to get results. But it doesn't matter how much you study about Dhamma, you'll never understand because you won't know in accordance with the Truth. If we do understand the real nature of Dhamma, then we begin to let go. This is surrendering, removing attachment, not clinging any more, or if there is still clinging, it becomes less and less. There is this kind of difference between the two ways of study and practice.

HOLE

At times it may seem to some of you that I contradict myself when I teach, but the way I teach is very simple. It is as if I see someone coming down a road he doesn't know well but on which I have travelled on many times before. I look up and see him about to fall into a hole on the right-hand side of the road, so I call out to him to go left. Likewise, if I see someone else about to fall into a hole on the left, I call out to him to go right. The instructions are different, but I teach them to travel in the

same direction on the same road. I teach them to let go of both extremes and come back to the center where they will arrive at the true Dhamma.

HOUSE

All my disciples are like my children. I have only loving-kindness and their welfare in mind. If I appear to make you suffer, it is for your own good. I know some of you are well-educated and very knowledgeable. People with little education and worldly knowledge can practise easily. But people with a lot of knowledge is like someone who has a very large house to clean. They have a lot to do. But when the house has been cleaned, they will have a big comfortable living space. Be patient. Patience and endurance are essential to our practice.

HOUSEWIFE

Don't be like a housewife washing the dishes with a scowl on her face. She's so intent on cleaning the dishes that she doesn't realize her own mind is dirty! Have you ever seen this? She only sees the dishes. She's looking too far away from herself, isn't she? Some of you have probably experienced this, I'd say. This is where you have to look. People concentrate on cleaning the dishes, but they let their minds go dirty. This is not good. They're forgetting themselves.

JACKAL

The Buddha once saw a jackal, a wild dog, run out of the forest where he was staying. It stood still for a while, then it ran into the underbrush, and then out again. Then it ran into a tree hollow, then out again. Then it went into a cave, only to run out again. One minute it stood, the next it ran, then it lay down, then it jumped up. The jackal had the mange. When it stood, the mange would eat into its skin, so it would run. Running, it was still uncomfortable, so it would stop. Standing, it was still uncomfortable, so it would lie down. Then it would jump up again, running to the underbrush, the tree hollow, never staying still.

The Buddha said, “Monks, did you see that jackal this afternoon? Standing, it suffered. Running, it suffered. Sitting, it suffered. Lying down, it suffered. It blamed standing for its discomfort. It blamed sitting. It blamed running and lying down. It blamed the tree, the underbrush, and the cave. In fact, the problem was with none of those things. The problem was with his mange.”

We are just the same as that jackal. Our discontent is due to wrong view. Because we don't exercise sense restraint, we blame our suffering on externals. Whether we live in Thailand, America or England, we aren't satisfied. Why not? Because we still have wrong view. Just that! So wherever we go, we aren't content. But just as that jackal would be content wherever it went as soon as its mange was cured, so would we be content wherever we went once we rid ourselves of wrong view.

KNIFE

A knife has a blade, a spine and a handle. Can you lift up only the blade? Can you lift up only the spine of the blade, or only the handle? The handle, the spine and the blade are all parts of the same knife. When you pick up the knife, all three parts come up at the same time.

In the same way, if you pick up that which is good, the bad must follow. People search for goodness and try to throw away evil, but they don't study that which is neither good nor evil. If you don't study this, then you won't have real understanding. If you pick up goodness, badness follows. If you pick up happiness, suffering follows. Train the mind until it is above good and evil. That's when the practice is finished.

KNOT

We contemplate happiness and unhappiness as uncertain and impermanent and understand that all the various feelings are not lasting and not to be clung to. We see things in this way because there is wisdom. We understand that things are this way according to their own nature.

If we have this kind of understanding, it's like taking hold of one strand of a rope which makes a knot. If we pull it in the right direction, the knot will loosen and begin to untangle. It'll no longer be so tight and tense.

This is similar to understanding that things don't always have to be the way they've always been. Before, we felt that

things always had to be a certain way and, in so doing, we pulled the knot tighter and tighter. This tightness is suffering. Living that way is very tense. So we loosen the knot a little and relax. Why do we loosen it? Because it's tight! If we don't cling to it, then we can loosen it. It's not a condition that must always be that way.

We use the teaching of impermanence as our basis. We see that both happiness and unhappiness are not permanent. We see them as not dependable. There is absolutely nothing that's permanent. With this kind of understanding, we gradually stop believing in the various moods and feelings which come up in the mind. Wrong understanding will decrease to the same degree that we stop believing in it. This is what is meant by undoing the knot. It continues to become looser. Attachment will be gradually uprooted.

LADLE

If you just listen to the Dhamma teachings but don't practise, you're like a ladle in a soup pot. It's in the soup pot every day, but it doesn't know the taste of the soup. You must reflect and meditate.

LEAF

Right now we are sitting in a peaceful forest. Here, if there's no wind, a leaf remains still. When a wind blows, it flaps and flutters.

The mind is similar to that leaf. When it contacts a mental impression, it, too, *flaps* and *flutters* according to the nature of that mental impression. And the less we know of Dhamma, the more the mind will continually pursue mental impressions. Feeling happy, it succumbs to happiness. Feeling suffering, it succumbs to suffering. It's in a constant flap.

LEAKING ROOF

Most of us just talk about practice without having really done it. This is like the man whose roof is leaking on one side so that he sleeps on the other side of the house. When the sunshine comes in on that side, he rolls over to the other side, all the time thinking, "When will I ever get a decent house like everyone else?" If the whole roof leaks, then he just gets up and leaves. This is not the way to do things, but that's how most people are.

LETTER

Just know what is happening in your mind not happy or sad about it, not attached. If you suffer, see it, know it, and be empty. It's like a letter — you have to open it before you can know what's in it.

LOG

If we cut a log of wood and throw it into a river, it floats downstream. If that log doesn't rot or get stuck on one of the banks of

the river, it will finally reach the ocean. Likewise the mind that practises the Middle Way and doesn't attach to either extreme of sensual indulgence or self-mortification will inevitably attain true peace.

The log in our analogy represents the mind. The banks of the river represent, on one side, love, and on the other, hate. Or you can say that one bank is happiness and the other unhappiness. To follow the Middle Way is to see love, hate, happiness and unhappiness for what they really are — only feelings. Once this understanding has been achieved, the mind will not easily drift toward them and get caught. It is the practice of the understanding mind not to nurture any feelings that rise nor to cling to them. The mind then freely flows down the river unhampered and eventually flows into the “ocean” of *Nibbana*.

LUMBER

If you don't bother to train your heart, then it remains wild, following the ways of nature. It's possible to train that nature so that it can be used to advantage. This is comparable to trees. If we just left trees in their natural state, then we would never be able to build a house with them. We couldn't make planks or anything of use to build a house with. However, if a carpenter came along wanting to build a house, he would go looking for trees in their natural state. He would take raw material and use it to advantage. In a short time he could have a house built.

Meditation and developing the heart are similar to this. You must take this untrained heart as you would take a tree in

its natural state in the forest, and train this natural heart so that it is more refined, more aware of itself, and more sensitive.

MAGGOT

Contentment doesn't depend on how many people we are with. It comes only from right view. If we have right view, then wherever we stay, we are content.

But most of us have wrong view. It's just like a maggot living in a pile of dung. It lives in filth, its food is filth, but it suits the maggot. If you take a stick and dislodge it from its lump of dung, it'll squirm and wriggle back to its home.

We are the same. The teacher advises us to see rightly but we squirm about and are uncomfortable. We quickly run back to our old habits and views because that's where we feel at home. If we don't see the harmful consequences of all our wrong views, then we can't leave them. The practice is difficult, so we should listen. There is nothing else to practise. If we have right view, then wherever we go, we are content.

MANGO

We say that morality, concentration and wisdom are the path on which all the Noble Ones have walked to enlightenment. They are all one. Morality is concentration — concentration is morality. Concentration is wisdom — wisdom is concentration. It's like a mango. When it's a flower, we call it a flower. When it becomes a fruit, we call it a mango. When it ripens, we call

it a ripe mango. It's all one mango, but it continually changes. The big mango grows from the small mango, the small mango becomes a big one. You can call them different fruits or all one. Morality, concentration and wisdom are related like this. In the end it's all the path that leads to enlightenment.

The mango, from the moment it first appears as a flower, simply grows to ripeness. We should see it like this. Whatever others call it, it doesn't matter. Once it's born, it grows to old age and then where? We should contemplate this.

Some people don't want to be old. When they get old, they become regretful. These people shouldn't eat ripe mangoes. Why do we want the mangoes to be ripe? If they're not ripe in time, we ripen them artificially, don't we? But when we become old we're filled with regret. Some people cry. They're afraid to get old or die. If it's like this, then they shouldn't eat ripe mangoes. They'd better eat just the flowers! If we can see this, then we can see the Dhamma. Everything clears up and we are at peace.

MEDICINE & FRUIT

Those who don't practise don't be angry with them. Don't speak against them. Just continually advise them. They will come to the Dhamma when their spiritual factors are developed. It's like selling medicines. We advertise our medicines and those with a headache or stomachache will come and take some. Those who don't want our medicines, let them be.

They're like fruit that are still green. We can't force them to be ripe and sweet — just let them be. Let them grow up, sweeten and ripen all by themselves. If we think like this, our minds will be at ease. So we don't need to force anybody. Simply advertise our medicines and leave it at that. When someone is ill, he'll come around and buy some.

MERCHANTS

Everything that you do you must do with clarity and awareness. When you see clearly, there will no longer be any need for enduring or forcing yourself. You have difficulties and are burdened because you miss the point. Peace comes from doing things completely with your whole body and mind. Whatever is left undone leaves you with a feeling of discontent. These things bind you with worry wherever you go. You want to complete everything, but it's impossible to get it all done.

Take the case of the merchants who regularly come here to see me. They say, "Oh, when my debts are all paid and property in order, I'll come to get ordained." They talk like that, but will they ever finish and get it all in order? There's no end to it. They pay up their debts with another loan, they pay off that one, and do it again. A merchant thinks that if he frees himself from debt he will be happy, but there's no end to paying things off. That's the way worldliness fools us. We go around and around like this never realizing our predicament.

OIL & WATER

Oil and water are different in the same way that a wise man and an ignorant man are different. The Buddha lived with form, sound, odour, taste, touch and thought. He was an *arahant* so he was able to turn away from them rather than toward them. He turned away and let go little by little, since he understood that the heart is just the heart and thought is just thought. He didn't confuse them and mix them together.

The heart is just the heart. Thoughts and feelings are just thoughts and feelings. Let things be as they are. Let form be just form, let sound be just sound, let thought be just thought. Why should we bother to attach to them? If we feel and think in this way, then there is detachment and separateness. Our thoughts and feelings will be on one side and our heart will be on the other. Just like oil and water — they are in the same bottle but they are separate.

ORPHAN

In the end, people become neurotic. Why? Because they don't know. They just follow their moods and don't know how to look after their own minds. When the mind has no one to look after it, it's like a child without a mother or a father to take care of him. An orphan has no refuge and, without a refuge, he is very insecure.

Likewise, if the mind is not looked after, if there is no training or maturation of character with right understanding, it's really troublesome.

OX CART

Suppose we had a cart, and an ox to pull it. The wheels of the cart aren't long, but the tracks are. As long as the ox pulls the cart, the tracks will follow. The wheels are round, yet the tracks are long. Just looking at the stationary cart, one couldn't see anything long about the wheels, but once the ox starts pulling the cart, we see the tracks stretching out behind. As long as the ox keeps pulling, the wheels keep turning. But there comes a day when the ox gets tired and throws off its yoke. The ox walks off and the cart is left there. The wheels no longer turn. In time the cart falls apart. Its constituent parts go back into the four elements of earth, water, wind and fire.

People who follow the world are the same. If one were to look for peace within the world, one would go on and on without end, just like the wheels of the cart. As long as we follow the world, there is no stopping, no rest. If we simply stop following it, the wheels of the cart no longer turn. There is stopping right there. Following the world ceaselessly, the tracks go on. Creating bad *kamma* is like this. As long as we continue to follow the old ways, there is no stopping. If we stop, then there is stopping. This is the practice of Dhamma.

POOL

Be mindful and let things take their natural course, then your mind will become quiet in any surroundings. It will become still like a clear forest pool and all kinds of wonderful and rare animals will come to drink from it. Then you will clearly see the nature of all things in the world. You will see many wonderful and strange things come and go. But you will be still. This is the happiness of the Buddha.

RAIN WATER

Actually the mind, like rain water, is pure in its natural state. If we were to drop green dye into clear rain water, however, it would turn green. If yellow dye were added, it would turn yellow.

The mind reacts similarly. When a comfortable mental impression *drops* into the mind, the mind is comfortable. When the mental impression is uncomfortable, the mind is uncomfortable. The mind becomes *cloudy*, like the coloured water.

When clear water contacts yellow, it turns yellow. When it contacts green, it turns green. It will change colour every time. Actually the water which turned green or yellow is naturally clean and clear. This is also the natural state of the mind — clean and pure and unconfused. It becomes confused only because it pursues mental impressions. It gets lost in its moods.

RIVER FLOW

There's nothing wrong with the way the body grows old and gets sick. It just follows its nature. So it's not the body that causes us suffering, but our own wrong thinking. When we see the right wrongly, there's bound to be confusion.

It's like the water of a river. It naturally flows downhill. It never flows uphill. That's its nature. If we were to go and stand on the bank of a river, and seeing the water flowing swiftly down its course, foolishly want it to flow back uphill, we would suffer. We would suffer because of our wrong view, our thinking "against the stream." If we had right view, we would see that the water must flow downhill. Until we realize and accept this fact, we will always be agitated and never find peace of mind.

The river that must flow downhill is like our body. It passes through youth, old age and finally dies. Don't let us go wishing it were otherwise. It's not something we have the power to remedy. Don't go against the stream!

ROAD

Wherever you are, know yourself by being natural and watchful. If doubts arise, let them come and go. When you meet defilements, just see them and overcome them by letting go of them. It's very simple — hold on to nothing.

It's as though you are walking down a road. Periodically you will run into obstacles. When you meet defilements, just

see them and overcome them by letting go of them. Don't think about the obstacles you have already passed. Don't worry about the obstacles you have not yet met. Stick to the present. Don't be concerned about the length of the road or about your destination. Everything is changing. Whatever you pass, do not cling to it. Eventually the mind will reach its natural balance. Then it will be still whether you sit with your eyes closed or walk around in a big city.

ROCK

The teaching that people least understand and which conflicts most with their own opinions is the teaching of letting go or working with the empty mind. When we conceive this in worldly terms, we become confused and think that we can do anything we want. It can be interpreted in this way, but its real meaning is closer to this: It's as if we were carrying a heavy rock. After a while we begin to feel its weight, but we don't know how to let go. So we endure this heavy burden all the time. If someone tells us to throw it away, we say, "If I throw it away, I won't have anything left!" If told of all the benefits to be gained by throwing it away, we would not believe it, but would keep on thinking, "If I throw my rock away, I will have nothing." So we keep on carrying this heavy rock until it becomes so unbearably heavy, and we become so weak and exhausted, that we just have to drop it.

Having dropped it, we suddenly experience the benefits of letting go. We immediately feel better and lighter and we know for ourselves how much of a burden carrying a rock can be. Before we let go of the rock, we couldn't possibly know the benefits of letting go. Later on we may start carrying burdens again, but now we know what the results will be, so we can now let go more easily. This understanding — that it's useless carrying burdens around and that letting go brings ease and lightness — is an example of knowing ourselves.

Our pride, our sense of self that we depend on, is the same as that heavy rock. Like that rock, if we think about letting go of self, we are afraid that without it there would be nothing left. But when we can finally let it go, we realize for ourselves the ease and comfort of not clinging.

SCREW

If you clearly see the truth through meditation, then suffering will become *unwound*, just like a screw. When you unwind a screw, it withdraws. It's not tightly fixed as when you screw it, clockwise. The mind withdraws like this. It lets go, it relinquishes. It's not tightly bound within good and evil, within possessions, praise and blame, happiness or suffering. If we don't know the truth, it's like tightening the screw all the time. You screw it down until it crushes you and you suffer over everything. When you *unwind* out of all that, you become free and at peace.

SEEDLING

In meditation, you must continuously be attentive, just like when planting a seedling. If you plant a seedling in one place, then after three days you pull it up and plant it in another place, and after three more days, pull it up again and plant it somewhere else, it will just die and not grow up and bear any fruit.

Meditation is the same. If you do a seven day meditation retreat and after leaving it, for seven months you go around “soiling” the mind, and then come back and do another seven-day retreat where you don’t speak and you keep to yourself, it’s like the tree. Your meditation practice won’t be able to grow and it will die without producing any real results.

SHARP KNIFE

When we say that the mind stops, we mean that it feels as if it’s stopped, that it does not go running about here and there. It’s as if we have a sharp knife. If we go and cut away at things randomly, like stones, bricks and glass, without choosing carefully, our knife will quickly become blunt. We must cut only those things which are useful to cut.

Our mind is the same. If we let our mind wander after thoughts or feelings which have no use or value, the mind will become weak because it has no chance to rest. If the mind has no energy, wisdom will not arise, because the mind without energy is a mind without concentration.

SNAKE

People want happiness, not suffering. But in fact happiness is just a refined form of suffering. Suffering itself is the coarse form. We can compare them to a snake. The snake's head is unhappiness. The snake's tail is happiness. The snake's head is really dangerous. It has the poisonous fangs. If we touch it, it'll bite right away. But never mind the head! Even if we go and hold onto the tail, it will turn around and bite us just the same, because both the head and tail belong to the one snake.

Likewise happiness and unhappiness, pleasure and sadness, arise from the same snake: wanting. So when we're happy, the mind isn't really peaceful.

For example, when we get the things we like, such as wealth, prestige, praise or happiness, we become pleased, but the mind remains uneasy for fear of losing them. That very fear isn't a peaceful state. Later we may really lose those things, then we truly suffer. So if we're not aware, even when happy, suffering is imminent. It's just like grabbing the snake's tail — if we don't let go, it'll bite. So be it the snake's tail or head, that is, wholesome or unwholesome conditions, they're all just characteristics of the Wheel of Existence, of endless change.

SPIDER

Watching a spider can give rise to wisdom. A spider spins its webs in any convenient niche and then sits in the center, staying still. Later a fly comes along and lands on its web. As soon

as the fly touches and shakes the web — boop! — the spider pounces on it and winds it up in thread. It stores the insect away and then returns again to collect itself silently in the center of its web.

This is not at all different from our own minds. Our mind is comparable to the spider, and our moods and mental impressions to the various insects. The senses constantly stimulate the mind. When any of them contacts something, it immediately reaches the mind. The mind then investigates and examines it thoroughly, after which it returns to the center.

“Coming to the center” means living mindfully with clear comprehension, being always alert and doing everything with precision — this is our center. There’s really not a lot for us to do. We just carefully live in this way. But that doesn’t mean that we live heedlessly thinking, “No need to do sitting or walking meditation!” and so forget all about our practice. We can’t be careless. We must remain alert like the spider waiting to snatch up insects for its food. This is how we abide — alert, acting with precision and always mindfully comprehending with wisdom.

STILL, FLOWING WATER

Have you ever seen flowing water? Have you ever seen still water? If your mind is peaceful, it will be just like still, flowing water. Have you ever seen still, flowing water? There! You’ve only seen flowing water or still water, haven’t you? When your mind is peaceful, you can develop wisdom. Your mind will be

like flowing water, and yet still. It's almost as if it were still, and yet it's flowing. So I call it "still, flowing water." Wisdom can arise here.

SWEET FRUIT

Even though a fruit is sweet, we must first taste it before we know what its taste is like. Yet, that fruit, even though no one tastes it, is still sweet. But nobody knows it. The Dhamma of the Buddha is like this. Even though it's the truth, it isn't true for those who don't really know it. No matter how excellent or fine it may be, it is worthless to them.

THERMOS BOTTLE

Read yourself, not books. Truth isn't outside. That's only memory, not wisdom. Memory without wisdom is like an empty thermos bottle — if you don't fill it, it's useless.

THIRSTY MAN

A man comes walking along a road. He is very thirsty from his journey and is craving for a drink of water. He stops at a place beside the road and asks for a drink. The owner of the water says, "You can drink this water if you like. The colour is good, the smell is good, the taste is good, too, but if you drink it, you will become ill. It'll make you sick enough to die or

nearly die.” The thirsty man does not listen. He’s as thirsty as a person after an operation who has been denied a good drink of water for a while. He’s crying for water! So he dips out a bit of water and swallows it down, finding it very tasty. He drinks his fill and gets so sick that he almost dies. He didn’t listen to the warning that was given to him because of his overpowering desire.

This is how it is for a person caught in the pleasures of the senses. The Buddha taught that they are poisonous but he is *thirsty* and so he doesn’t listen. He drinks in sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations and mind-objects and they are all *delicious*. So he drinks without stopping, and there he remains stuck fast until the day he dies.

THORN

All things are just as they are. They don’t cause suffering to anybody. It’s just like a thorn, a really sharp thorn. Does it make you suffer? No, it’s just a thorn. It doesn’t bother anybody. But if you go and stand on it, you’ll suffer. Why is there suffering? Because you stepped on the thorn. The thorn is just minding its own business. It doesn’t harm anybody. It’s because of we ourselves that there’s pain. Form, feeling, perception, volition, consciousness... all the things in this world are simply as they are. It’s We who pick fights with them. And if we hit them, they hit us back. If they’re left alone, they won’t bother anybody. Only the drunkard gives them trouble.

TRAP

The Buddha taught that the objects of the senses are a trap, a trap of Mara's. It is a hunter's trap and the hunter is Mara.

If animals are caught in a hunter's trap, it's a sorrowful predicament. They are caught fast and are held waiting for the owner of the trap. Have you ever snared birds? The snare springs and — boop! — caught by the neck! A good strong string holds it fast. Wherever the bird flies, it cannot escape. It flies here and flies there, but it's held tight, waiting for the owner of the snare to come. When the hunter comes along, that's it! The bird is struck with fear and there is no escape.

The trap of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch and mind-objects is the same. They catch us and bind us fast.

TRAVELLER

Naturally people who wish to reach their home are not those who merely sit and think about travelling. They must actually undertake the process of travelling step by step, and in the right direction as well, in order to finally reach home. If they take the wrong path, they may eventually run into difficulties, such as swamps or other obstacles, which are hard to get around. Or they may run into dangerous situations and thereby possibly never reach home.

Those who reach home can relax and sleep comfortably. Home is a place of comfort. But if the traveller only passed by

the front of his home or only walked around it, he would not receive any benefit from having travelled all the way home.

In the same way, walking the path to reach the Buddha-Dhamma is something each one of us must do individually ourselves, for no one can do it for us. And we must travel along the proper path of morality, concentration and wisdom until we find the blessings of purity, radiance and peacefulness of mind that are the fruits of travelling the path.

However if one only has knowledge of books, sermons, and sutras, that is, only knowledge of the map or plans for the journey, even in hundreds of lifetimes one will never know purity, radiance and peacefulness of mind. Instead one will just waste time and never get to the real benefits of practice. Teachers are those who point out the direction of the Path. After listening to the teachers, whether or not we walk the Path by practising ourselves, and thereby reap the fruits of practice, is strictly up to each one of us.

TREES

We can learn Dhamma from trees. A tree is born due to a cause and it, grows following the course of nature until it buds, flowers and bears fruit. Right here the tree is discoursing Dhamma to us, but we don't understand this. We're unable to bring it within and contemplate, so we don't know that the tree is teaching us Dhamma. The fruit appears and we merely eat it without investigating: sweet, sour or bitter, it's the nature of

the fruit. And this is Dhamma, the teaching of the fruit. Then the leaves grow old, They wither, die and fall from the tree. All we see is that the leaves have fallen down. We step on them, we sweep them up, that's all. We don't know that nature is teaching us. Later on, the new leaves sprout, and we merely see that, without taking it further. This is not the truth that is known through internal reflection.

If we can bring all this inward and investigate it, we will see that the birth of a tree and our own birth are no different. This body of ours is born and exists, dependent on conditions, on the elements of earth, water, wind and fire. Every part of the body changes according to its nature. It's no different from the tree. Hair, nails, teeth and skin, all change. If we know the things of nature, then we will know ourselves.

TURTLE

Looking for peace is like looking for a turtle with a moustache. You won't be able to find it. But when your heart is ready, it will come and look for you.

TWIGS & ROOT

As soon as we're born we're dead. Our birth and our death are just one thing. It's like a tree. When there are twigs, there must be a root. When there's a root, there must be twigs. You can't have one without the other.

It's a little funny to see how at a death people are so grief-stricken, and at a birth so delighted. I think if you really want to cry, then it would be better to do so when someone's born, for actually birth is death — death is birth; the root is the twig, the twig is the root. If you've got to cry, cry at the root, cry at the birth. Look closely and see that if there were no birth, there would be no death.

UNTHRESHED RICE

People who study the Dhamma without penetrating to its true meaning are just like a dog sleeping on a pile of unthreshed rice. When it's hungry, it bounds off the pile of rice grain and runs off looking for scraps of food. Even though it's sleeping right on top of a pile of food, it doesn't know that. Why? Because it can't see the rice. Dogs can't eat unthreshed rice. The food is there but the dog can't eat it. It doesn't know the rice. It might not be able to find anything to eat for a long time, and it may even die... right on top of that pile of rice! People are like this. No matter how much we study the Dhamma, we won't see it if we don't practise. If we don't see it, then we won't know it.

WATER BUFFALO

The Buddha really taught the truth. If you contemplate it, there is nowhere you can argue with him. But we people are

like a buffalo. If it's not tied down by all four legs, it'll not let itself be given any medicine. If tied down and it can't do anything — aha! — now if you want to, you can go ahead and give it medicine and it can't struggle away. At this extent it will give up. We people are similar. Only when we are completely bound up in suffering will we let go of our delusions. If we can still struggle away, we will not give up very easily.

WILD CHICKENS

As long as true wisdom hasn't yet arisen, we still see the senses and their objects as our enemies. But once true wisdom arises we no longer see them as such. They become the doorway to insight and clear understanding.

A good example is the wild chickens in the forest. We all know how much they fear humans. Yet since I've lived in the forest, I've been able to teach them and learn from them too. I began by throwing them rice to eat. At first they were afraid and wouldn't go near the rice. But after a while they got used to it and even began to expect it. They first thought the rice was a dangerous enemy. But there was no danger in the rice. They just didn't know the rice was food, so they were afraid. When they finally saw there was nothing to fear, they could come and eat peacefully. Wild chickens learn naturally like this.

Living here in the forest, we learn in the same way. Before, we thought our senses were a problem, and because we didn't know how to use them properly, they were troublesome.

Through experience in practice, however, we learn to see them according to the Truth. We learn to use them, just as the chickens did with the rice. Then they're no longer against us and problems disappear.

YARD FULL OF ANIMALS

People often presume there would be a problem with language for the Westerners who wanted to stay at Ajahn Chah's monastery, but this was not the case. Someone once asked Ajahn Chah, "How do you teach all your Western disciples? Do you speak English or French? Do you speak Japanese or German?"

"No," replied Ajahn Chah.

"Then how do they manage?" he asked.

"Do you have water buffalos in your yard at home?"

"Yes, I do."

"Do you have any cows, or dogs, or chickens? "Yes, I have them, too," was the reply. "Tell me," Ajahn Chah asked, "do you speak Water buffalo or Cow?"

"No, of course not."

"Well, how do you manage then?"



Part II



*All the teachings are merely similes and comparisons,
means to help the mind see the truth.*

AJAHN CHAH

A HUNDRED OF EVERYTHING

People only think about the pleasure of acquiring and don't consider the trouble involved. When I was a novice I used to talk to the lay people about the happiness of wealth and possessions, having servants and so on: a hundred male servants, a hundred female servants, a hundred cows, a hundred buffalos... a hundred of everything. The lay people really liked that. But can you imagine looking after a hundred buffalos, or a hundred cows, not to mention the two hundred servants? Would that be fun? People do not consider this side of things. They have the desire to possess, to have the cows, the buffalos and the servants, hundreds of them. But I say fifty buffalos would be too much. Just twining the rope for all those brutes would already be one big headache! But people don't consider this. They just want to acquire as much as they can.

ANTS' NEST

When we sit in meditation we want the mind to become peaceful, but it doesn't. We don't want to think, but we think. It's like a person who is sitting on an ants' nest. The ants just keep on biting him. Why? Because when the mind is in the world, then even though a person is sitting still with his eyes closed, all he sees is the world. Pleasure, sorrow, anxiety, confusion, they all arise, because he still hasn't realized Dhamma. If the mind is like this, the meditator can't endure the worldly dhammas,

he can't investigate. It's just the same as if he were sitting on an ants' nest. The ants are going to bite because he's right on their home. So what should he do? He should look for a way to get rid of them.

APPLE ORCHARD

If you ask people why they were born, they probably would have a lot of trouble answering, because they're sunk in the world of the senses and sunk in becoming. For example, suppose we had an orchard of apple trees that we were particularly fond of. That's becoming for us if we don't reflect with wisdom. How so? Suppose our orchard contained a hundred apple trees and we considered them to be *our* trees. We'd then be born as a worm in every single one of them, and we'd bore into every one of them. Even though our human body may still be back at the house, we'd send out *tentacles* into every one of those trees.

It's becoming because of our clinging to the idea that those trees are our own, that that orchard is our own. If someone were to take an axe and cut one of the trees down, we would *die* along with the tree. We'd get furious and would have to go and set things straight. We'd fight and even kill over it. The quarrelling is the birth. We are born right at the point where we consider anything to be our own, born from the becoming. Even if we had a thousand apple trees, if someone were to cut down just one, it would be like cutting the owner down. Whatever we cling to, we are born right there, we exist right there.

APPLES

You can begin doing away with selfishness through giving. If people are selfish they do not feel good about themselves. And yet people tend to be very selfish without realizing how it affects them.

You can experience this at any time. Notice it when you are hungry. If you get a couple of apples and then the opportunity arises to share them with someone else, a friend, for instance, you think it over. Really, the intention to give is there, but you only want to give away the smaller one. To give the big one, well, it would be a shame. It's hard to think straight. You tell your friend to go ahead and take one but then you say, "Take this!" and give him the smaller one. This is one form of selfishness, but people don't often notice it. Have you ever seen this?

In giving, you really have to go against the grain. Even though you want to give the smaller fruit, you must force yourself to give the bigger one. Of course once you've given it to your friend, it feels so good. Training the mind by going against the grain in this way requires self-discipline. You must know how to give and how to give up and not nurture your selfishness. This is called going against the grain in a correct way.

BAMBOO SHOOTS

No matter how much you like something you should reflect that it's uncertain. Like bamboo shoots: they may seem to be

so delicious but you must tell yourself “not sure!” If you want to test out if it’s sure or not, try eating them every day. Eventually you’ll complain: “This doesn’t taste so good any more!” Then you’ll prefer another kind of food and be sure *that* food is delicious. But you’ll find out later that’s “not sure” too. Everything is just “not sure.”

BIG STICK, LITTLE STICK

People aren’t able to see themselves out of their problems because of wrong view. They’re like the man who throws away a small stick and picks up a bigger one, thinking that the bigger stick will be lighter.

BLIND PERSON

To know the taste of Dhamma, you will have to put the teaching into practice yourself. The Buddha didn’t talk about the fruits of the practice in much detail because it’s something one can’t convey in words. It would be like trying to describe the different colours to someone who has been blind from birth. You couldn’t do it. You could try, but it wouldn’t serve much purpose.

BODY & ITS CHARMS

We are deluded by the body and its charms, but really it is foul. Suppose we didn’t take a bath for a week. Could we bear to

be close to each other? We'd really smell bad. When we sweat a lot, such as when we are working hard together, the smell is awful. We go back home and rub ourselves down with soap and water, and the fragrance of the soap replaces our bad body odour. Rubbing sweet-smelling soap on the body may make it seem fragrant, but actually the bad smell of the body is still there, temporarily suppressed. When the smell of the soap is gone, the smell of the body comes back again.

Now we tend to think the body is beautiful, delightful and strong. We tend to think that we will never age, get sick or die. We are charmed and fooled by the body and so we are ignorant of the true refuge within ourselves. The true place of refuge is the mind.

BOILED RICE

The teachings of the Buddha can help us to solve our problems, but first we must practise and develop wisdom. It's like wanting to have boiled rice. We must first build a fire, wait until the water comes to a boil, and let the rice cook for as long as it needs to. We just can't throw rice into a pot of water and have boiled rice right away.

BRICK OVEN

If some sensation makes an impression on the mind, don't simply disregard it. It's like baking bricks. Have you ever seen a

brick oven? They build a fire up about two or three feet in front of the oven so that all the smoke gets drawn into it, and none is left outside. All the heat then goes into the oven and the job gets done quickly.

People who practise the Dhamma should be like a brick oven. All their feelings will then be drawn inwards to be turned into Right View. Seeing sights, hearing sounds, smelling odours, tasting flavours, and so on, the mind draws everything inwards. Feelings thus become experiences which give rise to wisdom.

BRIDGE

Let your mind be like a bridge which is steady, and not like the water that rises and falls underneath it.

BUDDHA STATUE

Enlightenment does not mean to become dead like a Buddha statue. An enlightened person still thinks, however he knows that the thinking process is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and empty.

Through practice we can see these things clearly. We need to investigate suffering and stop its causes. If not, wisdom can never arise. We must see things exactly as they are — feelings are just feelings, thoughts are just thoughts. This is the way to end all our problems.

BUILDING A HOUSE & DYEING CLOTH

Only wanting to make merit without developing virtue is like building a beautiful house without preparing the area first. It wouldn't be long before the house would collapse.

Or it's like wanting to dye a piece of cloth without washing it first. Most people do it like that. Without looking at the cloth, they dip it into the dye straight away. If the cloth is dirty, dyeing it makes it come out even worse than before. Think about it. Would dyeing a dirty old rag look good?

Yet this is how people are. They just want to perform good deeds, but don't want to give up wrongdoing. They still haven't understood that it is only when the mind is free of impurities that the mind can be peaceful.

You have to look into yourself, look at the faults in your actions, speech and thoughts. Where else are you going to practise but in your actions, speech and thoughts?

CARS

All religions are like different cars all moving in the same direction. People who don't see it like that have no light in their hearts.

CAT

If defilements arise, you have to do something about them. Defilements are like a cat. If you give it as much food as it wants, it will constantly be coming around to look for more. But if one

day it scratches you and you decide not to feed it any more, it will finally not come around. Oh, yes, it will still come around meowing at first, but if you remain firm it “will finally stop doing so. It’s the same with the different defilements of your mind. If you do not feed them, they will not come around to disturb you again and again, and your mind will be at peace.

CHICKEN IN A COOP

As the mind develops calm, it is held in check by that calm, just like a chicken that is put in a coop. Once inside the coop, the chicken is unable to wander outside, but it is still able to walk around within the confines of the coop. The action of walking to and fro doesn’t lead to any great harm because the chicken is always inside the coop.

Some people don’t want to experience any feelings or thoughts when they meditate, but thoughts and feelings do arise. The awareness that is present when the mind is calm, however, keeps the mind from getting agitated. This means that whenever there are thoughts or sensations *walking around* in the mind, they do so within the *coop* of calm, and so cannot cause you any harm or disturbance.

CHILD

If you don’t oppose and resist your mind, you just follow its moods. This is not right practice. It would be like indulging

a child's every whim. Will that child be a good child? If the parents give their child everything it wishes is that good? Even if they do so at first, by the time it can speak they may start to spank it occasionally because they're afraid it'll end up spoiled and helpless. The training of your mind must be like this. Don't indulge its whims.

CROOKED TREE

The essence of our practice is to watch intention and examine the mind. You must have wisdom. Don't discriminate. Don't get upset with others if they are different. Would you get upset at a small and crooked tree in the forest for not being tall and straight like some of the others? That would be silly. Don't judge other people. There are all varieties. No need to carry the burden of wishing to change them all. If you want to change anything, change your ignorance to wisdom.

DIRTY TRAY

Many people contend that since the mind is inherently pure, since we all have Buddha nature, it's not necessary to practise. But this is like taking something clean, like this tray, for example, and then I come and drop some dung on it. Will you say that this tray is originally clean, and so you don't have to do anything to clean it now?

DOWNSTAIRS, UPSTAIRS

We invent names for the sake of study, but actually nature is just as it is. For example, we are sitting here downstairs on this stone floor. The floor is the base. It's not moving or going anywhere. Upstairs is what has risen out of this floor. Upstairs is like everything that we see in our minds: form, feeling, memory, and thinking. They don't really exist in the way we presume they do. They are merely the conventional mind. As soon as they arise, they pass away again. They don't really exist in themselves.

DROPS OF WATER

Keep your precepts. At first you'll make mistakes. When you realize it, stop, come back and establish your precepts again. Maybe you'll go astray and make another mistake. When you realize it, re-establish yourself.

If you practise like this, your mindfulness will improve and become more consistent, just like the drops of water falling from a kettle. If we tilt the kettle just a little bit, the water drips out slowly — plop!... plop!... plop! If we tilt the kettle a little bit more, the drops fall faster — plop, plop, plop! If we tilt the kettle even further, the water doesn't drip any more but turns into a steady stream. Where do the *plops* go? They don't go anywhere. They simply change into a steady stream of water. This is how your increasing mindfulness will be.

DUCK

However much we want the body to go on living for a long, long time, it won't do that. Wanting it to do so would be as foolish as wanting a duck to be a chicken. When we see that that's impossible, that a duck has to be a duck, that a chicken has to be a chicken, and that the body has to be the body and get old and die, then we will find strength and energy when we have to face the changes of the body.

EARTHWORM

Some people come and ask me whether a person who's come to realize impermanence, suffering, and non-self would want to give up doing things altogether and become lazy. I tell them that's not so. On the contrary, one becomes more diligent, but does things without attachment, performing only actions that are beneficial.

And then they say, "If everyone practised the Dhamma, nothing could be done in the world, and there'd be no progress. If everyone became enlightened, nobody would have children and humanity would become extinct." But this is like an earthworm worrying that it would run out of dirt, isn't it?

EXCREMENT ODOUR

No matter where you go in the world there is suffering. There is no escape from it as long as your mind is in the world. It would

be like trying to escape the odour of a big pile of excrement by moving over to a smaller one. In big piles or little ones, the odour of excrement is exactly the same wherever you go.

EXPENSIVE OBJECT

Suppose we come to possess a very expensive object. The minute it comes into our possession our mind changes: “Now where can I keep it? If I leave it here somebody might steal it.” We worry ourselves into a state, trying to find a place to keep it. This is suffering. And when did it arise? It arose as soon as we understood that we had obtained something. That’s where the suffering lies. Before we had obtained that object there was no suffering. It hadn’t yet arisen because there was no object yet for the mind to cling to.

The self is the same. If we think in terms of *my* self then everything around us becomes *mine*. And confusion follows. If there is no *I* and *my* then there is no confusion.

EXTERNAL SORE

People wonder why they have so many problems when they start cutting down on their desires. They can’t figure out why they have to suffer so much. It was easier before, when they satisfied their desires, because then they were at peace with them. But that’s just like a man who has an infection inside his body but only treats the sore outside on his skin.

FALLING FROM A TREE

If we divide up the Paticcasamuppada as it is in the scriptures, we say Ignorance gives rise to Volitional Activities, Volitional Activities give rise to Consciousness, Consciousness gives rise to Mind and Matter, Mind and Matter give rise to the six Sense Bases, the Sense Bases give rise to Sense Contact, Sense Contact gives rise to Feeling, Feeling gives rise to Wanting, Wanting gives rise to Clinging, Clinging gives rise to Becoming, Becoming gives rise to Birth, Birth gives rise to Old Age, Sickness, Death and all forms of sorrow. But in truth, when we come into contact with something we don't like, there is immediate suffering. The mind passes through the chain of the Paticcasamuppada so rapidly that we can't keep up.

It's like falling from a tree. Before we can realize what's happening — thud! — we've already hit the ground. Actually we pass by many twigs and branches on the way down, but it all happens so fast that we aren't able to count them nor remember them as we fall.

It's the same with the Paticcasamuppada. The immediate suffering that we experience is the result of going through the whole chain of the Paticcasamuppada. This is why the Buddha exhorted his disciples to investigate and know fully their own mind, so that they could catch themselves before they *hit the ground*.

FALLING LEAVES

Our lives are like the breath, like the leaves that grow and fall. When we really understand about growing and falling leaves, we can then sweep the paths every day and have great happiness in our lives on this ever changing earth.

FARMER & MOTHER

Wherever you are still lacking in your practice, that's where you apply yourself. Place all your attention on that point. While sitting, lying down or walking, watch right there. It's just like a farmer who hasn't yet finished his field. Every year he plants rice, but this year he still hasn't gotten his planting finished, so his mind is always stuck on that. His mind can't rest happily because he knows his work is not yet finished. Even when he's with friends, he can't relax. He's all the time nagged by the thought of his unfinished field.

Or it's like a mother who leaves her baby upstairs in the house while she goes to feed the animals below. She's always got her baby on her mind, for fear something might happen to it. Even though she may be doing other things, her baby is never far from her thoughts.

It's just the same for us in our practice. We should never forget it. Even though we may be doing other things, our practice should never be far from our thoughts. It should constantly be with us, day and night. It has to be like this if we're really going to make progress.

FOOTBALL

Even though simply listening to the Dhamma might not lead to realization, it is beneficial. There were, in the Buddha's time, those who did realize the Dhamma, even became *arahants*, while listening to a discourse. They could be compared to a football. When a football gets air pumped into it, it expands. Now the air in that football is all pushing to get out, but there's no hole for it to do so. As soon as a needle punctures the football, however, all the air comes rushing out.

This is the same as the minds of those disciples who were enlightened while listening to the Dhamma. As soon as they heard the Dhamma and it hit the right spot, wisdom arose. They immediately understood and realized the true Dhamma.

FRIENDS

The Buddha didn't want us to follow this mind. He wanted us to train it. If it goes one way, go the other way. In other words, whatever the mind wants, don't let it have it. It's like having been friends with someone for years, but we finally reach a point where our ideas are no longer the same. We no longer understand each other. In fact, we even argue too much and so we split up and go our separate ways.

That's right, don't follow your mind. Whoever follows his mind follows its likes and desires and everything else. This means that that person has not yet practised at all.

FRUIT IN HAND

It's of great importance to practise the Dhamma. If we don't practise it, then all our knowledge is only superficial knowledge, just the outer shell of it. It's as if we have some sort of fruit in our hand, but we don't eat it. Even though we have that fruit in our hand, we get no benefit from it. Only through the actual eating of the fruit will we really know its taste.

FRUIT TREE

A tree matures, blossoms, and fruit appear and ripen. They then rot and the seeds go back into the ground to become new fruit trees. The cycle starts once more. Eventually there are more fruit which ripen and fall, rot, sink into the ground as seeds, and grow once more into trees. This is how the world is. It doesn't go very far. It just revolves around the same old things.

Our lives these days are the same. Today we are simply doing the same old things we've always done. We think too much. There are so many things for us to get interested in, but none of them leads to true completion.

GARBAGE CAN

Sometimes teaching is hard work. A teacher is like a garbage can that people throw their frustrations and problems into. The more people you teach, the bigger the garbage disposal

problem. Don't worry. Teaching is a wonderful way to practise Dhamma. The Dhamma can help all those who genuinely apply it in their lives. Those who teach grow in patience and in understanding.

GOING ASTRAY

People think that doing this and memorizing that, studying such-and-such, will cause suffering to end. But it's just like a person who wants a lot of things. He tries to amass as much as possible, thinking if he gets enough his suffering will get less. It's like trying to lighten your load by putting on more things on your back. This is how people think, but their thinking is astray of the true path, just like one person going northward and another going southward, and yet believing that they are going in the same direction.

GOING INTO TOWN

Some people get confused because these days it seems like there are so many teachers and so many different systems of meditation. But it's just like going into town. One can approach the town from many directions. Whether you walk one way or another, fast or slow, it's all the same. Often the different systems of meditation differ outwardly only. There's one essential point that all good practice must eventually come to — not clinging. In the end, you must let go of all meditation systems, even

the teacher himself. If a system leads to relinquishment, to not clinging, then it is correct practice.

GOOD DIGESTION

Don't be in a hurry to get rid of your defilements. You should first patiently get to know suffering and its causes well, so that you can then abandon them completely, just as it's much better for your digestion if you chew your food slowly and thoroughly.

GRAND CENTRAL STATION

When it comes to practice, all that you really need to make a start are honesty and integrity. You don't have to read the *Tipitaka* to have greed, hatred and delusion. They are all already in your mind, and you don't have to study books to have them.

Let the knowing spread from within you, and you will be practising rightly. If you want to see a train, just go to the central station. You don't have to travel the entire Northern Line, Southern Line, Eastern and Western Lines to see all the trains. If you want to see trains, every single one of them, you'd be better off waiting at Grand Central Station. That's where they all terminate.

Some people tell me that they want to practise but don't know how, or that they're not up to studying the scriptures, or that they're getting old, so that their memory's not so good

any more. Just look right here, at *Grand Central Station*. Greed arises here, anger arise here, delusion arises here. Just sit here and you can watch all these things arise. Practise right here, because right here is where you're stuck, and right here is where the Dhamma will arise.

HAIR IN YOUR SOUP

Why does the body attract you and you get attached to it? Because your body-eye sees and not your heart-eye. The real nature of our body is that it is not clean, not pretty, but impermanent and decaying. See the body like a hair in your soup. Is it pretty? See clearly that the body is nothing but earth, fire, water and air — nobody there. You only fall down when you want to make it beautiful.

HAIR THAT HIDES A MOUNTAIN

Our opinions, attachments, and desires are like a hair that can hide a whole mountain from our view, because they can keep us from seeing the most simple and obvious things. We get so caught up in our ideas, our self, our wants, that we can't see how things really are. And that's when even a hair can keep us from seeing a whole mountain. If we're attached to even a subtle desire, then we can't see that which is true, that which is always very obvious.

HALL

We are only visitors to this body. Just like this hall here, it's not really ours. We are simply temporary tenants, like the rats, lizards and geckos that live in it, but we don't realize this. Our body is the same. Actually the Buddha taught that there is no abiding self within this body, but we believe it to be our *self*, as really being us. This is wrong view.

HANDFUL OF MUD

If you grab a handful of mud and squeeze it, it will ooze through your fingers. People who suffer are the same. When suffering has a squeeze on them, they, too, try to seek a way out.

HEN OR ROOSTER?

Teaching people with different levels of understanding is very difficult. Some people have certain set ideas. You tell them the truth and they say it's not true: "I'm right, you're wrong!" There's no end to this. If you don't let go there will be suffering. It's like the four men who go into the forest and hear a rooster crowing. One of them wonders if it is a rooster or a hen. Three of them decide it's a hen, but the curious one insists it's a rooster. "How could a hen crow like that?" he asks. They answer, "Well, it has a mouth, doesn't it?" They argue and get

really upset, but in the end they are all wrong. Whether you say a hen or a rooster, they're only names. We say a rooster is like this, a hen is like that, a rooster cries like this, a hen cries like that. This is how we get stuck in the world! Actually if you just say that there's really no hen and no rooster, then that's the end of it.

HERBAL MEDICINE

The theory of Dhamma is like a textbook on herbal medicine, and going out to look for the plants is like the practice. Having studied the book, we know what it says about herbal medicine, but we do not know what the actual herbs look like. All we have are some sketches and names. But if we already have the textbook on herbal medicine, we can then go looking for the plants themselves, and do so often enough so that we can recognize them easily when we see them. In this way we give the textbook value.

The reason we were able to recognize the various herbs is because we studied the textbook. The textbook on herbal medicine was our teacher. The theory of Dhamma has this kind of value. However, if we depend completely on practice and do not take time to learn, then it would be like going out looking for herbal plants without having first done some study. Without knowing what we were looking for, we would not succeed in finding any. So both theory and practice are important.

HOST & GUESTS

Your mind is like the owner of a house and the feelings are like the guests that come and go. But have only one chair in your *house* so you can see each *guest* clearly. See the moods and emotions that come to bother you, then let them go. Keep mindfulness in every posture. If you just follow your moods, you won't see them.

HOT IRON BALL

The cultivators of old saw that there is only the arising and ceasing of dhammas. There is no abiding entity. They contemplated from all angles and saw that there was nothing stable. While walking or sitting, they saw things in this way. Wherever they looked, there was only suffering. It's just like a big iron ball which has just come out of a blast furnace. It's hot all over. If you touch the top, it's hot. If you touch the sides, they're hot. If you touch the bottom, it's hot, too. There isn't any place on it which is cool.

HOT IRON BAR & CANDY

It is unlikely that we can really affect the state of mind of a dying person very much, either positively or adversely. It's like if I took a hot iron bar and poked you in the chest with it, and

then I held out a piece of candy with my other hand. How much could the candy distract you?

We should treat dying people with love and compassion and look after them as best we can, but if we don't turn it inwards to contemplate our own inevitable death, there is little real benefit for us.

HOTEL

We are all born with nothing, and we die with nothing. Our house is like a hotel and so is our body. We'll have to move out of them both one day and leave them behind.

HOUSEHOLDER

What is the mind? The mind doesn't have any form. That which receives impressions, both good and bad, we call *mind*. It is like the owner of a house. The owner stays at home while visitors come to see him. He is the one who receives the visitors. Who receives sense impressions? What is it that perceives? Who lets go of sense impressions? That is what we call *mind*. But people can't see it. They think themselves around in circles. "What is the mind, what is the brain?" Don't confuse the issue like that. What is that which receives impressions? Some impressions it likes and some it doesn't like. Who is that? Is there one who likes and dislikes? Sure there is, but you can't see it. That is what we call *mind*.

IGNORANT CHILD

Actually, you know, we human beings, the way we do things, the way we live, the way we are; we are really like little children. A child doesn't know anything. If an adult observes the actions of a child, the way it plays and jumps around, its actions don't seem to serve much purpose. If our mind is untrained, it is like a child. We speak without awareness and act without wisdom. We may degenerate but not know it. A child is ignorant and so it just plays as children do. Our ignorant mind is the same. That is why the Buddha taught us to train this mind of ours.

INFANT

See like and dislike arising from sense contact, and do not attach to them. Don't be anxious for quick results or instant progress. An infant has to crawl first before he learns to walk and run. Be determined in practising virtue and keep on meditating.

ITCHY HEAD

If we don't know how to handle suffering when it arises, we won't be able to get any relief from it. It's just as if we have an itch on our head and we scratch our leg! If it's our head that's itchy, then we're obviously not going to get any relief by scratching our leg.

KEY

If we take the precepts simply out of tradition, then even though the master teaches the truth, our practice will be deficient. We may be able to study the teachings and repeat them, but we have to practise them if we really want to understand. If we do not develop the practice, this may well be an obstacle to our penetrating to the heart of Buddhism, and we will not get to understand the essence of the Buddhist religion.

The practice is like a key to a trunk. If we have the right key in our hand, no matter how tight or strong the lock may be, when we take the key and turn it, the lock falls open. If we have no key, we won't be able to open the lock, and we will never know what is inside the trunk.

LEAD FOR GOLD

The *arahant* is really different from ordinary people. The things that seem true and valuable to us are false and worthless to an arahant. Trying to interest an arahant in worldly things would be like offering lead in exchange for gold. We think, "Here is a whole pile of lead, so why won't he want to trade his piece of gold which is so much smaller?"

LEAVING AN OLD FRIEND

Greed, hatred and delusion are the causes of all our suffering. We must learn to overcome them and free ourselves from their

control. This is very hard to do. It is like having the Buddha tell us to leave a friend we have known and loved from the time we were still children. It is not easy to make the separation.

LIGHT SWITCH & BOWL

It is necessary to have concentration firmly established in our practice before wisdom can arise. To concentrate the mind can be likened to turning on a light switch, and wisdom to the light that appears as a result. If there were no switch, there would be no light. Likewise, concentration is like an empty bowl, and wisdom is like the food that you put in it. If there were no bowl, there would be no place to put the food.

LIZARD

The sutra gives us the simile of a certain man trying to catch a lizard which had run into a termite mound. The mound had six holes in it. Now if the lizard had run in there, how could he catch it? He would have to close off five of the holes, and leave just one hole open. Then he would have to sit and guard that hole. When the lizard ran out — bop! — he's got it.

Observing the mind is like this. Closing off the eyes, the ears, the nose, the tongue and the body, one leaves only the mind. To *close off* means to restrain the five senses, leaving only the mind to be observed. Meditation is the same as catching the lizard.

LOST SOMETHING?

If you understand that good and bad, right and wrong, all lie within you, then you won't have to go looking for them somewhere else. Just look for them where they arise. If you don't, it'd be like losing something in one place and then going to look for it in another. If you lose something here, you must look for it here. Even if you don't find it at first, keep looking where you dropped it. But, usually, you lose it here, then go looking over there. When will you ever find it? Good and bad actions lie within you. One day you're bound to see it. Just keep looking right here.

LOTUS LEAF

The Buddha said that the Enlightened Ones were far from defilements. This doesn't mean that they ran away from defilements. They did not. Defilements were there. He compared it to a lotus leaf in a pond of water. The leaf and the water exist together. They are in contact but the leaf doesn't become wet. The water can be compared to defilements and the lotus leaf to the enlightened mind.

The mind of one who practises doesn't run anywhere. It stays right where it is. Good and evil, happiness and unhappiness, right and wrong they all arise, and he knows them all. The meditator simply knows them, but does not allow them to wet his mind. In other words, he does not cling to any of them.

LOTUSES

We can compare the mind to lotuses in a pond. Some of the lotuses are still stuck in the mud, some have grown through the mud but are still underwater, some have reached the surface of the water, and some have opened in the sun. Which lotus do you want to be? If you want to be below the surface, be careful — the fish and turtles will bite!

LUMP OF ICE

How does the body decline? Consider a lump of ice. Originally it was simply water. We then freeze it and it becomes ice for a while, and then it melts and turns into water again. We can see how the ice declines much the same as the body.

We all, without exception, are *lumps of deterioration*. When we are born we bring this inherent nature of dissolution with us. We can't avoid it. At birth we bring old age, sickness and death along with us. Right now the *lump* is hard, just like the lump of ice. But look at the body closely. It's ageing every day. It declines just like the lump of ice, following the way of nature. Soon, like the lump of ice, the body will *melt* away and be all gone, too.

MANGO

We speak of wisdom and concentration as separate things, but in essence they are one and the same. They arise from the same

place but take different directions. It's like a mango. A mango is first small and green. It then grows larger and larger until it is ripe. The small mango, the large one and the ripe one are the same mango, not different mangoes. Only its conditions have changed. In Dhamma practice, one condition is called concentration, and the later condition is called wisdom, but in actuality *samadhi* and *panna* are both the same thing, just like the mango.

MARKET LADY

Don't be disappointed if you don't see quick results in your practice. What is important is simply to continue your practice with determination and perseverance. Don't give up so readily, like a market lady who wants to sell her goods won't. She keeps on yelling, "Coconu-u-u-ts, rice c-a-a-akes! Get your coconuts and rice cakes here!" She's determined to sell them and won't give up until she does.

MEAT

All that people want these days is money. They think that if they just get enough of it, everything will be all right. So they spend all their time looking for money. They don't look for goodness. This is like wanting meat, but not wanting salt to

preserve it. You just leave the meat around the house to rot. Those who want money should know not only how to find it, but also how to look after it. If you want meat, you can't expect to buy it and then just leave it lying around the house. It'll just go rotten.

Goodness arises from a cause. Whenever we create good actions, goodness arises in the mind. If we understand causes in this way, we can create those causes and the results will naturally follow. But people don't usually create the right causes. They want goodness so much and yet they don't work to bring it about. This kind of thinking is wrong, and the result of wrong thinking is rotten results — just turmoil and confusion.

MEAT BETWEEN YOUR TEETH

It's hard to give up sensual pleasure. Consider sensual pleasure like eating some meat which gets stuck between your teeth. When you get it out, you feel some relief for a while. Maybe you even think that you won't eat any more meat. But when you see it again, you can't resist it. You eat some more and it gets stuck again. When it gets stuck, you have to pick it out again, which gives some relief once more, until you eat some more meat. That's all there is to it. Sensual pleasures are just like this. When the meat gets stuck in your teeth, there's discomfort. You take a toothpick and pick it out and experience some relief. There's nothing more to it than this with sensual desire.

MILLIPEDE

If many people live together, as we do here in the monastery, they can still practise comfortably if their views are in harmony. It's not true to say that there will be disharmony just because there are many of us. Just look at a millipede. A millipede has many legs, doesn't it? Just looking at it you'd think it would have difficulty walking, but actually it doesn't. It has its own order and rhythm. In our practice it's the same. If we practise properly, even if we number in the hundreds or thousands, no matter how many we are, we will live in harmony.

MILLIPEDE & CHICKEN

Westerners are very "clever" and can't accept many principles of Dhamma. I once asked some learned people if they had ever seen a millipede. It has many legs, but how fast can it run? Can it outrun a chicken? No! Yet a chicken has only two legs. How come this animal with so many legs can't even keep up with a chicken?

MONEY, WAX, & CHICKEN DUNG

Rules and conventions are established to make things more convenient, that's all. Let's take money, for example. In olden times, people used materials and goods to barter as money. But they were difficult to keep, so they started to use coins and notes. Perhaps in the future we'll have a new royal decree say-

ing only lumps of wax can be used as money throughout the country, or chicken dung. Then people would start fighting and killing each other over wax or chicken dung. This is just the way it is. What we use for money is simply a convention that we have set up. It is money because we have decided it to be so, but in reality what is money? Nobody can say. When there is a popular agreement about something, then a convention comes about to fulfill the need. The world is just conventions.

But it is difficult to get ordinary people to understand this. Our money, house, family, our children and relatives are simply conventions that we have invented, and we really believe they are all ours, but seen in the light of Dhamma, they don't belong to us. It's when we think that they do that we suffer.

MONKEY

When we know that it is the nature of the mind to be constantly changing, we will understand it. We have to know when the mind is thinking good and bad, that it's changing all the time. If we understand this, then even while we are thinking we can be at peace. For example, suppose at home you had a pet monkey. Monkeys don't stay still for long. They like to jump around and grab onto things. That's how monkeys are. Now you come to the monastery and see the monkey here. This monkey doesn't stay still either, does it? It jumps around, too, but it doesn't bother you. Why doesn't it bother you? Because you are raising a monkey yourself so you know what they're like. If you know just one monkey, no matter how many provinces you go to, no

matter how many monkeys you see, you won't be bothered by them, because you're someone who understands monkeys.

If we understand monkeys, then we won't become like a monkey. If we don't understand monkeys, we may become like one ourselves. When we see it reaching for this and that, we shout, "Hey!" We get angry. But if we understand the nature of monkeys, we'll then see that the monkey at home and the monkey at the monastery are just the same. Why should we get annoyed by them? When we see what monkeys are like, that's enough. We can be at peace.

NEST OF RED ANTS

Sensual pleasure is like a nest full of red ants. We take a piece of wood and poke at the nest until the ants come running out, crawling down the wood and into our faces, biting our eyes and ears. And yet we still don't see the difficulty we are in. In the teaching of the Buddha, it is said that if we've seen the harm of something, no matter how good it may seem to be, we know that it's harmful. Whatever we haven't yet seen the harm of, we just think it's good. If we haven't yet seen the harm of anything, we can't get out of it.

OLD GRANNY

Most people wait until they get old before they start going to a monastery and start practising the Dhamma. Why do they leave it till they get old? It's like old grandma. You say, "Hey,

Granny, let's go to the monastery!" "Oh, you go ahead," she answers. "My ears aren't so good any more." You see what I mean? When she had good ears what was she listening to? Finally if she does go to the temple, she listens to the sermon but hasn't got an idea of what's being said. Don't wait until you're all used up before you start thinking of practising the Dhamma.

OLD LIAR

Our habits try to deceive us over and over again, but if we remain aware of it, we will eventually be able to ignore them altogether. It's like having an old person come around and tell us the same old lies time after time. When we realize what he's up to, we won't believe him any longer. But it takes a long time before we realize it, because deception is always there.

OLD RAG

If we see everything as uncertain, then their I value fades away. All things become insignificant. Why should we hold onto things that have no value? We should treat things as we do an old rag that we keep only to wipe our feet with. We see all sensations as equal in value because they all have the same nature, that of being uncertain.

PADDY WORKER

Practise consistently and not in spurts like the way some people work in their rice paddy. At first they work very hard and then they stop. They don't even bother to pick up their tools. They just walk off and leave them behind. Later on when the soil has all caked up, they remember their work and do a bit more, only to leave it again shortly afterwards. Doing things this way, you'll never get a decent paddy. Our practice is the same.

PARTY REVELLERS

People go through life blindly, ignoring death like revellers at a party feasting on fine foods. They ignore that later they will have to go to the toilet, so they do not bother to find out where there is one. When nature finally calls, they have no idea where to go and are in a mess.

PEDAL SEWING MACHINE

When we sit in meditation, we only watch the breath. We don't try to control it. If we force our breath to be too long or too short, we won't feel balanced and our mind won't become peaceful. We must just let our breathing happen naturally. It's like using a pedal sewing machine. We can't force the pedal. We push it up and down and let it go naturally. If we force it, the sewing won't be smooth and easy. So before we actually start to sew anything, we first practise pedalling the machine

to get our co-ordination right, then the machine can do its work naturally. Watching the breath is similar. We don't get concerned over how long or short, weak or strong it is. We just note it. We simply let it be natural and follow it.

PIECE OF CAKE

If you still have happiness and still have suffering, you are someone who is still not yet full. It's as if you're eating a piece of your favourite cake, but before you can finish eating it, it falls out of your hand. You regret the loss, don't you? When you feel the loss, you suffer, don't you? So you need to throw away both happiness and suffering. They're only food for those who are not yet full.

In truth, happiness is suffering in disguise, but in such a subtle form that you don't see it. If you cling to happiness, it's the same as clinging to suffering, but you don't realize it.

So be careful! When happiness arises, don't be overjoyed, don't get carried away. When suffering comes, don't despair, don't lose yourself in it. See that happiness and suffering have the same equal value.

PLANTING FRUIT TREES

Our practice can be likened to planting fruit trees. As with fruit trees, it's possible to get fruit quickly by taking a cutting and planting it, but the tree won't be long-lasting or resilient. Another way is to take a seed and cultivate the tree right from

the seed. In this way it will be strong and enduring. This is the same with our practice.

POISONOUS INJECTION

There are two kinds of suffering: ordinary suffering and extraordinary suffering. Ordinary suffering is the suffering that is the inherent nature of all conditioned phenomena. Extraordinary suffering is the kind that creeps in from the outside. Let's see how they differ by using the following example: Suppose you are sick and go to see a doctor. The doctor decides to give you an injection. When the needle pierces the skin, there is some pain, which is only natural. When the needle is withdrawn, the pain disappears. This is like the ordinary kind of suffering. It's no problem; everybody experiences it.

The extraordinary kind of suffering is the suffering that arises from grasping onto things. This is like having an injection with a syringe filled with poison. This is no longer an ordinary kind of pain. It is the pain which ends in death.

PRECIOUS PEN

If you don't understand what peace is, you'll never be able to find it. For example, suppose you had a very expensive pen which you usually carry in the right front pocket of your shirt. But one day you put it somewhere else and forgot. Later when

you reach for the pen in its usual place, it's not there. You get a fright. You think you've lost it.

You get a fright because of wrong understanding. You don't see the truth of the matter and so you suffer as a result. Whatever you do, you can't stop regretting having lost your precious pen: "Such a shame! I spent so much money on it and now it's gone!" But then you remember, "Oh, of course! When I went to bathe I put the pen in the back pocket of my pants!" The moment you remember this you already feel better, even if you still haven't seen the pen. You no longer worry about it. And as you're walking along, you run your hand over your back pocket, and there it is. Your mind was deceiving you all along. The worry came from your ignorance. Now, seeing your pen again, you are beyond doubt, beyond worry. This sort of peace comes from seeing the cause of the problem, the cause of suffering. As soon as you remembered that the pen was in your back pocket, your suffering ended. Knowing the truth brings peace.

RAGING TIGER

This heart of ours is like a raging tiger that lives in a cage. If it can't get what it wants, it growls and makes trouble. It must be tamed with meditation.

Our defilements are also like a raging tiger. This tiger we should put in a solid cage made of mindfulness, energy, patience, and endurance. We then don't feed it its habitual desires, and it'll slowly starve to death.

RED-HOT COAL & BIRD

The household life is easy and difficult at the same time. It's easy to understand what to do, but difficult to do it. It's as if you were holding a piece of red-hot coal in your hand and came to me complaining about it. I'd tell you to simply let go of it, but you'd refuse saying, "I want it to be cold." Well, either you drop it, or you must learn to be very, very patient.

"How can I just drop it?" you ask. "How can I just drop my family?" Just drop them in your heart. Let go of your attachment to them. Of course you still have obligations to your family. You are like a bird that has laid eggs. You have the responsibility to sit on them and look after them after they have hatched. Just don't think in terms of my family. This kind of thinking is just another cause of suffering. Don't think either that your happiness depends upon whether you're living alone or with others. Just live with the Dhamma and find true happiness.

RESTLESS MONKEY

The mind out of control is like a restless monkey jumping here and there senselessly. You have to learn to control it. See the real nature of the mind: impermanent, unsatisfactory, and empty. Don't just follow it as it jumps around. Learn to master it. Chain it down and let it wear itself out and die. Then you have a *dead monkey*, and you're finally at peace.

RIVERS & STREAMS

When people enter the stream of Dhamma, it's the one Dhamma. Even though they may come from different places, they harmonize, they merge. Just like the rivers and streams which flow to the sea... once they enter the sea, they all have the same taste and colour. It's the same with people.

ROPE

Trying to end suffering without first understanding the cause is like pulling on a rope that's stuck. You just pull the end of the rope over here. The other end of the rope is still stuck over there so it never comes. What to do to make it come? It does not come free because you never seek out the source, the root. You just get lost in pulling on this end. What is it stuck on? It must be stuck on something, and that's why it doesn't come. Go to the source, untie the knot, and be free.

SAND & SALT

Problems occur because people cling to conventions and what they suppose things to be. If you look closely, in the absolute sense, however, you will see that things don't really exist. Our house, our family, our money are simply conventions that we have invented. Seen in the light of Dhamma, they don't belong

to us. Even this body is not really ours, and just because we suppose it to be so doesn't make it so.

It would be like taking a handful of sand and agreeing to call it salt. Would that make it salt? Well, yes, it would, but in name only and not in reality. You still wouldn't be able to cook with it, because no matter what you call it, it's still sand. Supposing sand to be salt doesn't make it so.

SCHOOLBOY

Practising Dhamma is like a child learning to write. At first he doesn't write nicely — big, long loops and squiggles. He writes like a child. After a while the writing improves through practice. Practising the Dhamma is like this. At first you are awkward, sometimes calm, sometimes not. You don't really know what's what. Some people get discouraged. But don't slacken off. Live with effort, just like the schoolboy. As he gets older he writes better and better. From writing badly he grows to write beautifully, all because of the practice from childhood.

SPILLWAY

When you make a dam, you must make a spillway, too. Then when the water rises too high, the water can flow off safely. When it's full to the brim, you open your spillway. You have to have a safety valve like this.

Understanding impermanence is the safety valve of the Noble Ones. If you also have this safety valve, you will also be at peace.

SPLINTER IN YOUR FOOT

The Buddha taught us to escape from suffering using wisdom. For example, suppose you had a splinter embedded in your foot. Sometimes you step on a stone which presses on the splinter, and it really hurts. So you feel around your foot. But not finding anything, you shrug it off and walk on a bit more. Eventually you again step on something else, and the pain is there again. This happens many times. What is the cause of that pain? The cause is that splinter in your foot. Whenever the pain arises, you may take a look and feel around a bit, but not seeing the splinter, you let it go. The pain recurs again and again until the desire to take it out is constantly with you. Finally it reaches a point where — you make up your mind once and for all to get that splinter out — because it hurts!

Our effort in the practice must be like this. Wherever it hurts, wherever there's friction, we must investigate. We must confront the problem head on and not just shrug it off. Just take the splinter out of your foot. Wherever your mind gets stuck you must take note. As you look into it, you will know it, see it and experience it as it is.

STUBBORN HORSE

The mind is as stubborn as a horse and as hard to train. What do you do when you've got a horse that's stubborn? Don't feed it for a while and it will soon come around again. And when it listens to your command, feed it a little. We can train the mind in the same way. With right effort, wisdom will arise.

STUMP

You should get at the root causes of things. It's like you are going for a walk and you trip over a stump. So you get a hatchet and cut it, but it grows back and you trip over it again. So you cut it again. But it keeps on growing back. You'd better get a tractor and plough it up. But don't put it off. It's like saying to yourself, "Should I go today? Should I...? Maybe I'll go tomorrow...." Then the next day, "Should I go, or shouldn't I?" And you keep on doing this day after day until you die and you never go anywhere. You've got to think "Go!" and that's it!

SWEET DESSERT

Practice is a matter of directly looking at the mind. This is wisdom. When you have examined and understood the mind, then you have the wisdom to know the limitations of concentration or books. If you have practised and understood not-clinging, you can then return to the books. They will be like a

sweet dessert. They can help you to teach others. Or you can go back to practising absorption, because now you have the wisdom to know not to hold onto anything.

SWEET MANGO

Dhamma is in your mind, not in the forest. Don't believe others. Just listen to your own mind. You don't have to go and look anywhere else. Wisdom is in yourself, just like a sweet ripe mango is already in a young green one.

SWEET PAPAYAS

Defilements can be useful if used skilfully. It's like taking chicken and buffalo dung and putting them into the ground to help make our papaya trees grow. Dung is filthy stuff, but when the trees give fruit, the papayas are so nice and sweet. Whenever doubt arises, for example, look at it, investigate right there. This will help your practice grow and bear *sweet* fruit.

TAPE RECORDER

If listening to Dhamma makes your heart peaceful, that's good enough. You don't need to make an effort to remember anything. Some of you may not believe this, but if your heart is peaceful and you just listen to what is being said, letting it pass

by while contemplating continuously, then you'll be like a tape recorder. After some time, when you *turn on*, everything will be there. Have no fear that there won't be anything. As soon as you turn on your *tape recorder*, everything will be there.

THIEF & BOXER

People who have wrong understanding practise meditation like a thief who, after having got caught, hires a clever lawyer to get him out of trouble. Once he is out, however, he starts stealing again. Or they are like a boxer who gets beaten up, nurses his wounds, and then goes to fight again which only brings him fresh wounds. And this cycle goes on endlessly.

The purpose of meditation is more than just calming ourselves from time to time, getting ourselves out of trouble, but seeing and uprooting the causes which make us not calm to begin with.

THIEVES & MURDERERS

Your body and mind are like a gang of thieves and murderers. They keep trying to drag you into the fire of greed, hatred, and delusion. They cheat you through the pleasures of the senses. They call in sweet melodic voices from the other side of the door, saying, "Oh, come here, please come here." And when you open the door, they shoot you.

TIGHTLY WOVEN NET

Know and watch your heart. It's pure but emotions come to colour it. So let your mind be like a tightly woven net to catch emotions and feelings that come, and investigate them before you react.

TREE

Fostering the practice of Buddhism can be likened to a tree. A tree has roots, a trunk, branches and leaves. Every single leaf and branch, including the trunk, depend on the roots to absorb nutriment and send it up to them. A tree is dependent on the roots for sustenance. We are the same. Our actions and our speech are like the trunk, branches, and twigs. The mind is like the root which absorbs nutriment and sends it out to sustain them which in turn bear fruit. Whatever state the mind is in, be it based in wrong view or right view, it expresses that wrong view or right view outwardly through our actions and speech. So nurturing Buddhism through the practical application of the Teachings is very important.

TREES GROWING OUTWARD

Does anyone order the trees to grow the way they do? They can't talk nor can they move around, and yet they grow away

from obstacles. Wherever it's cramped and growing will be difficult, they bend outwards. Trees by nature don't know anything. They act on natural laws, yet they do *know* enough to grow away from danger, to incline toward a suitable place. People are like this. We want to transcend suffering, and if that which we like and that which we don't like are suffering, we should then not go so close to them, not be cramped by them. When we incline toward the Buddha, suffering will lessen and eventually come to a complete end.

VANITY

Worldly people usually speak out of vanity. For example, suppose there was a certain person whom you hadn't seen for a long time, and then one day you happen to meet on the train: "Oh, I'm so glad to see you! I was just thinking to look you up!" Actually it's not so. You hadn't even thought of him at all, but you just say so at the time out of gladness. And so it becomes a lie. Yes, it's lying out of heedlessness. This is a refined form of lying, and people tend to speak like this. This, too, is a defilement which we should practise to get rid of.

VINE

A growing child is like a growing vine. A vine will grow and attach itself to the nearest tree. It won't follow some other tree or

form, and it's from that tree that it will get its shape and direction. If the tree is growing straight and upwards, the vine, too, will grow straight and upwards. If the tree is growing crooked and sideways, so will the vine.

Understand that your teaching of a child really comes more from how you are and what the child sees than from anything you say. So your practice is not just your own, but also for your children... and others around you.

VULTURE

Many people who have studied on a university level and attained graduate degrees and worldly success find that there is still something missing in their lives. Although they think high thoughts and are intellectually sophisticated, their hearts are still filled with pettiness and doubt. It's like a vulture: it flies high, but what does it feed on?

WATER IN AN URN

If we keep on contemplating in meditation, energy will come to us. This is similar to the water in an urn. We put in water and keep it topped up. We keep on filling the urn with water so that the larvae which live in the water don't die. Making effort and doing our everyday practice is just like this. We must keep it *topped up*.

WATER BUFFALO

Our thinking follows sense objects and pursues them wherever they go. Yet not any one of the sense objects is substantial. They are all impermanent, unsatisfactory, and empty. When they arise, observe them and see what happens.

It is like looking after a buffalo in a rice paddy. When someone looks after a buffalo, he lets it walk around freely, but he keeps an eye on it. If the buffalo goes near the rice plants, he yells at it and the buffalo backs off. If it doesn't obey, it gets to feel the hard end of a stick. The person watching the buffalo can't doze off either, or he'll get up finding the rice plants all eaten away.

The mind is like the buffalo, and the rice plants are like the sense objects. The one who knows is the owner. When observing the mind, the one who knows notices everything. It sees how the mind is when it follows sense objects, and how it is when it doesn't follow them. When the one who knows observes the mind like this, wisdom will arise. When the mind meets an object, it'll grab hold, just like the buffalo will bite on a rice plant when it sees one. So wherever the mind goes, you must watch it. When it goes near the *rice plants*, shout at it. If it will not obey you, just give it the stick.

WELL & ORCHARD

You'll have to work to find peacefulness in the world. It's like reaching water for a well — it's there but you have to dig for

it. Or like an orchard that's already planted — the fruit are there, but you have to pick them. They won't just fall into your mouth.

WOODEN LOG

One can't separate *samatha* and *vipassana*. *Samatha* is tranquility, *vipassana* is contemplation. In order to contemplate, one must be tranquil, and in order to be tranquil, one must contemplate to know the mind. Wanting to separate them would be like picking up a log of wood in the middle and wanting only one end of the log to come up. Both of its ends must come up at the same time. You can't separate them. In our practice, it isn't necessary to talk of *samatha* or *vipassana*. Just call it the practice of Dhamma, that's enough.

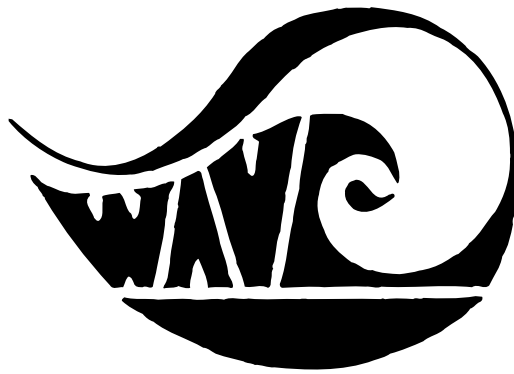
WRONG ROAD

If you don't understand the truth of suffering and how to get rid of it, all the factors of the path will be wrong — wrong speech and action, and wrong practice of concentration. It would be like wanting to travel to a certain village. You make a mistake and take the wrong road, but you find it comfortable to travel on and so continue walking in the wrong direction. No matter how comfortable and convenient the road may be, however, it won't take you to where you want to go.

How does the Dhamma teach the proper way of life? It shows us how to live. It has many ways of showing it — on rocks, or trees or just in front of you. It is a teaching but not in words. So, still the mind, the heart, and learn to watch. You'll find the whole Dhamma revealing itself here and now. At what other time and place are you going to look?

With even a little intuitive wisdom we will be able to see clearly through the ways of the world. We will come to understand that everything in the world is a teacher. Trees and vines, for example, can reveal the nature of reality to us. With wisdom there is no need to question anyone, no need to study. We can learn enough from Nature to be enlightened.

“THE GIFT OF TRUTH EXCELS ALL OTHER GIFTS”



W. A. V. E.

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