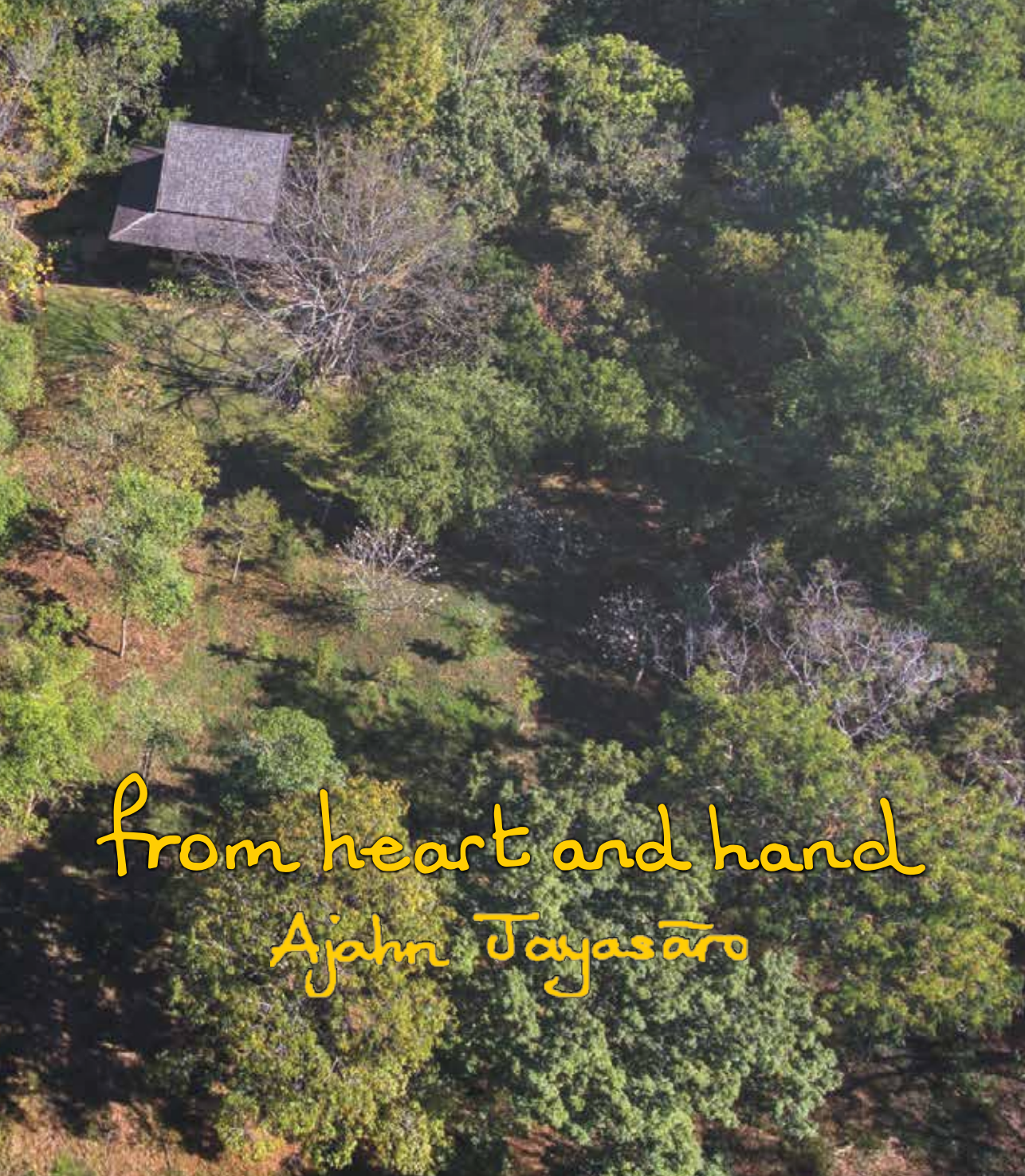
from heart and hand
Ajahn Jayasaro

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Foreword

For some time now, I have been composing short hand-written Dhamma teachings. Modern technology allows them to be shared with students of Dhamma around the world. There have been many requests to gather these teachings together into book form, and 'from heart and hand' is the result of those requests. I would like to express my appreciation for all of those involved in the printing of this book for free distribution. May they all, together with all the books' readers, realise freedom from suffering.

Ajahn Jayasāro

It is easy to forget how unstable and unpredictable our life is. We often live carelessly, as if we were going to live forever. We waste precious moments as if they were as cheap and plentiful as grains of sand.

The Lord Buddha teaches us to wake up to the simple truth that we can take nothing for granted. We may be separated from our loved ones at any moment. We don't have enough time to get angry and upset with them over silly, petty things. Our time together is so short. Let us use it as well as we possibly can.

The meter of a poem
does not restrict the poet.
The composer's score
does not restrict the musician.
Precepts do not restrict
the student of Buddhism.

Intelligent boundaries
adopted voluntarily
are not the enemy of creativity
but a vessel in which it can flourish.

Love the goodness
in your heart;
love the goodness
in their heart.

The ability to love goodness
wherever it appears
is a wonderful jewel of the mind.

In daily life the training in Right Speech is one of our most important practices. We should seek to develop speech that is:

1) true
2) useful
3) timely
4) kind
5) polite

These are the five characteristics of the speech of the great sages.

Practising the Dhamma does not necessarily mean that the path of life becomes smooth. What does become smooth is our journey along that path.

Imagine a rutted mountain road full of potholes. Now imagine the difference between travelling along that road in an old truck with no suspension and in an air-conditioned S.U.V. It is the vehicle that matters; and the most important vehicle we have is our mind.

The Buddha taught:

"Conquer anger with loving-kindness;
Conquer the wicked by goodness;
Conquer the stingy by generosity;
Conquer the liar by speaking the truth."

If we seek victory at any cost, then we lose our principles. If we lose our principles, we lose ourself.

Being heedless means neglecting the things that truly nourish our life, and giving time to things that drain our energy, and make us feel agitated or depressed.

The Buddha said:

"Heedfulness is the way to the Deathless; Heedlessness is the way to death. Realising this distinction, the wise rejoice in heedfulness, the path of the noble ones."

Awake and aware in the present moment — this is our home base.

Whether we are in our house, at work or even travelling abroad far from our loved ones and friends, if we can access this bright clear awareness we feel instantly at home.

The good things in a garden grow well when the gardener works hard to keep the garden free from weeds.

Our heart is like a garden. Virtuous qualities will grow well and blossom when we work hard to keep it free from the weeds of defilement.

The Buddha said that those who abandon foolish actions and devote themselves to the path of wisdom and compassion, illumine the world like the full moon emerging from a cloud.

Showing others through our life the human capacity to make real and positive changes is a wonderful gift that everyone of us can offer to the world.

Every good action has a good result, immediately. A kind action immediately increases the power of kindness in our heart, and immediately reduces the power of unkindness. It is one small step to liberation.

Usually however, a good action will only have a good effect on our life in the world, if those around us value goodness. In some places, for instance, kindness is seen as weakness. But internally, every single act of goodness, no matter how small, helps to purify our heart.

It is not enough to make sure that our views and opinions are reasonable and well-founded. We must also learn how to hold them well. If we grasp onto our views too tightly it feels as if they become a part of us. Then, if anyone criticizes our view it seems like a personal attack, and that is painful. So, with mindfulness, try to see a view as a view, an opinion as an opinion. No more, no less.

Meditation is like rubbing two sticks together to make fire. You need a lot of patience to be successful, and you need consistency and continuity. Perhaps you start with great enthusiasm, but that won't last. If, when you start to feel tired or bored or discouraged, please understand that you can't just stop for a while, for a few days or weeks, and then just carry on. The two sticks will be cold and you will have to start again.

So even if you only do a little ever day, never mind. What is important is that you don't stop.

Neither believe in your worries, nor fight with them. On the path of wisdom you must learn to step back from the content of your worries, "If that happens, then...", and look at the process.

Worry is an event that occurs in the mind. Seeing it clearly as a phenomena that has a beginning and an end, seeing how it arises and passes away within the mind, leads to peace.

Teach your mind as you would teach a child: with great patience, intelligence and love. If a child acts badly or foolishly the good parent doesn't get angry, doesn't panic or become discouraged. The parent's only concern is the welfare of the child. Sometimes the parent must be very firm, even though the child becomes upset, and sometimes more gentle. The more mindful parents are, the better their parenting skills become. Teach your mind as you would teach a child.

Observe the joy of learning and cultivate it. Encourage those around you – teach them when you can – to observe the joy of learning and to cultivate it. This joy of learning, of growing and of flourishing as a human being, will gradually wash away our joy in things that harm our bodies and damage our hearts.

Listen to the news every day. Listen many times. Not the news on a screen or in a newspaper but the news of your body and mind. This is the most important news. What is happening right now? Observe how your actions and speech affect your mind. Observe how your mental states condition your actions and speech. This is how we investigate the law of kamma in every day life.

Nothing and nobody has the power to make us angry. There is always a part of us that wants to be angry, that enjoys it. Anger arises when our unrealistic expectations of situations and people are frustrated. We want everyone to respect us and feel angry when we are disrespected We want the world to be a fair and kind place to live in, and feel angry to see its unfairness and cruelty.

The more clearly we understand all the causes and conditions that lead to things happening the way the way they do, and to people acting the way they do, the less we will rage that things are not as we want them to be, are not how we think they should be. From this calm place we can move forward, abandoning what should be abandoned, developing what should be developed.

Letting go of things does not mean that we stop putting effort into our lives. Letting go does not lead us to neglect our responsibilities.

What we let go of is not the thing itself, but our unwise relationship to it. In particular, we let go of our habit of allowing the sense of 'me' and 'mine' to infect our world.

One dead fly can spoil a big pot of delicious soup. Grasping onto a single thought of 'me' and 'mine' can spoil even the most beneficial situation.

The Buddha taught that heedlessness (pamāda) is the path to death, and heedfulness (appamāda) is the path to the deathless. Heedfulness is such an important virtue that it the teaching emphasised by the Buddha in the last words he spoke before he left the world. Heedfulness means keeping ourself awake to the truths of our body and mind, and of the world around us. It means not allowing ourself to forget that youth, health and life itself are unreliable and uncertain. It means not taking anything or anyone for granted.

In family life, heedfulness means finding the time to take care of the quality of our most important relationships: being mindful of how we act towards those we live with, how we speak to them, and how we hold them in our thoughts.

Thoughts of anger and revenge are always poisonous. The more we try to justify them as being natural and appropriate, or as being honourable or patriotic or sanctioned by our religion, the more intense the poison becomes. Nothing is more dangerous than a foolish angry person unshakeably convinced that he is right.

There is no lasting victory to be achieved throught acts of vengeance. Everybody loses – both immediately and in the future, in this life and future lives.

Forgiveness doesn't mean that angry vengeful thoughts disappear overnight. It means that we don't act upon them. By not feeding them, we allow them to fade away. We do this because we see that the suffering that occurs when we become poisoned by hatred far exceeds any pleasure that may be derived from hurting someone who has treated us badly.

If you scratch an itch it feels good, and you feel better for a while. But after some time the itch comes back, usually stronger than before. The more you scratch, the more you itch.

Satisfying our cravings is like scratching an itch. The Buddha encouraged us to inquire: Which is better: the pleasure and temporary relief that comes from scratching an itch, or the happiness of having no itch to scratch?

In the Samyutta Nikāya the Buddha says:

"Unimaginable, bhikkhus, is a beginning to the round of rebirths. For beings obstructed by ignorance and fettered by craving, migrating and going the round of births, a starting point is not to be found. It is not easy, bhikkhus, to find a being who has not formerly been one's mother... been one's father... one's brother... sister... son.. daughter during this long long time.

– S.N. 15. 14-19

And if this is true, how can we not forgive those that hurt us?

Often there is no alternative to being busy. We have so many responsibilities to fulfil and time is limited. Nevertheless, we should try to simplify our life wherever it is possible to do so.

Beware of allowing busyness to become an addiction, so that you are always having to rush onto the next thing. And beware of using busyness as an excuse for not attending to the more difficult matters of the heart. You have to spend time with your heart if you want to learn how to heal it.

One who looks for sweetness in a sack of chillies will be disappointed. One who looks for a dropped key in a place that is easy to search, rather than where it was lost, will not find it.

Impermanent pleasures can never provide the lasting happiness that our heart desires. Only by learning how to look closely at our body and mind will we find the key to liberation.

One of the most powerful superstitions in the human mind is the belief that as long as there is growth, increase, gain in our life, we are safe. In other words, as long as we are accumulating wealth, status, experiences we will not die. It is not just greed that drives people to compulsively add to what they have already. It is the fear of death.

The Buddha taught us to understand gain and loss, to understand their relationship, to see gain as simply gain and loss as simply loss. Most importantly, he taught us to look within at the very root of our fear of death.

Going into nature means entering a world that has its own rules, rules that make no compromises with your desires. You cannot bargain with nature. You cannot bully it. Nature is unmoved by your tears. If you are to survive in nature you must respect it. You must learn its ways and adapt to them.

When you are respectful and humble, patient, alert and intelligent then nature will bless you with joy and understanding. This is true of both the world around us, and the world that we discover when we close our eyes in meditation.

It is common for us to focus too much on what makes us different from each other. This over-emphasis leads to arrogance and insecurity, prejudice and fear.

As Buddhists we seek to prevent this imbalance by constantly returning to an awareness of those things that unite us all. We reflect on the simple indisputable truth that everyone of us are companions in birth, old age, sickness and death. Everybody wants to be happy. Nobody wants to suffer.

We don't deny differences or ignore them. But we recognise them within the context of our shared nature as sentient beings in a challenging and fragile world.

Wherever there is gain there is loss.
Wherever there is status there is loss of status.
Wherever there is pleasure there is pain.
Wherever there is praise there is blame.

We desire gain, status, pleasure and praise.
We fear and dislike their opposites. But
these things are inseparable. The more
we attach to the impermanent states that
we like, the more we suffer when they
disappear.

Gains and losses ebb and flow. There
is no stability. The wise person takes
nothing for granted and so at a time
of gain is not intoxicated and at a time
of loss is not brought to despair.

There are many stories in the Suttas in which Māra, 'the Evil One', disguises himself in various ways in order to deceive the Buddha. But the Buddha is never fooled. In every case, he merely says "I see you, Māra" and Māra, disappointed, disappears.

These stories teach us that it is our ability to see mental defilements clearly for what they are that is our greatest protection.

With mindfulness we say calmly to ourselves "I see you, greed", "I see you, anger", "I see you, anxiety." Because these defilements are simply unwelcome guests, not who we are, having been fully recognised and acknowledged, they retreat.

Farmers clearing a field for cultivation for the first time meet many obstacles. They may have to dig out roots that reach down much deeper than they thought. Often there are rocks concealed beneath the surface, some quite small but others big boulders. Farmers persevere because they know that if they want to cultivate that land and grow delicious and nutritious food, they have no choice.

Be patient in the cultivation of your mind-field. Do not allow yourself to get angry with your tree roots and hidden rocks. Nobody who has ever completed this work has regretted the time and effort it took to do so. On the contrary, when looking back at their efforts and the fruits of it, the great masters say that if they had endured a struggle a hundred times as hard, or a thousand times, it would still have been worthwhile.

The defilement of māna, or conceit, is rooted in two ideas; one is measurement and the other is holding up a flag. We measure ourselves against others. We hold up an idea of ourself like a flag, as if to say: 'Look at me. This is who I am.

There are three kinds of conceit:
'I am superior to you'
'I am inferior to you'
'I am equal to you'

In religious groups 'I am inferior to you' is often mistaken for humility. In democratic societies 'I am equal to you' is often not seen as conceit at all. But wherever we have a fixed idea of who we are, whether superior, inferior or equal to others, we fall into the trap of conceit.

We tend to assume that when we find an idea difficult to understand, it must be profound. But in fact, arguments expressed in unnecessarily long words and jargon are often quite shallow. Language is being used in them to disguise the idea rather than reveal it, and to intimidate the student.

The most profound matters are not so difficult to understand intellectually. What could be simpler to explain than impermanence? The challenge is to train the mind to the level that the intellectual understanding may act as a springboard to a direct life-changing insight, beyond the reach of words.

If a masseur discovers a sensitive area on a person's body, that person doesn't say, 'Oooh! That's painful. Please don't massage there. Massage where it doesn't hurt.' On the contrary, although it feels unpleasant, the person is pleased that now the location of the problem has been discovered, work to alleviate it can begin.

When we look into our mind we should cultivate a similar attitude. When you discover an area of mental discomfort do not move away from it so quickly. Gently probe and massage until the craving that lies beneath the emotion can be revealed and healed.

One day recently a student of mine was praised for being kind. As a result, he immediately felt a warm feeling in his heart. Later, he wondered whether his reaction was a mental defilement. He asked me "Do truly wise people feel pleasure when they are praised?"

I replied that wise people do not see themselves as the owners of their good qualities. They don't crave praise for their goodness or become attached to it. But they may feel a kind of joy, just as gardeners may feel when people praise the beauty of flowers in their garden.

As Buddhists we study our humanity. We learn about our body and mind, and how to prevent them from becoming a source of suffering. Looking at the body we begin with those parts that can be easily seen: head hair, body hair, nails, teeth and skin.

Are these things truly attractive? Do they really belong to us? Consider skin for example. People identify with skin a lot. They worry about its texture and its colour. In Asia women want pale skin; in Europe they want a tan. Huge sums of money are spent every year on beautifying the skin. But what exactly is skin? Here are some of my favourite skin facts:

50% of dust in the home is actually dead skin. Globally, skin accounts for about a billion tons of dust in the atmosphere. The number of bacteria living off each person's skin is about 1,000,000,000,000.

By examining the objects of desire and attachment more closely, the unrealistic assumptions on which they are based become clear, and the path to freedom opens up.

If you think again and again about something you are afraid might happen – perhaps something concerning your family – a number of things occur. Firstly, a mental habit will be formed that can easily become an obsession, draining all your energy. Secondly, because the images that appear in your mind become very vivid and the emotions that arise very strong, you may assume that the fear is reasonable, and the bad thing likely to occur, when in fact that may not be true at all.

With mindfulness, we must recognise that a mental image is simply a mental image, an emotion is simply an emotion. The thing that we fear may or may not be likely to occur, but the strength of feeling that the matter evokes is not a reliable guide in deciding what action to take.

Yesterday was Mahā Pavaranā Day, the last day of the Sangha's annual three-month Rains Retreat. On this day monastic communities come together to perform a ceremony in which every monk makes himself open to admonition from every other monk for any inappropriate behaviour he may have committed during the retreat.

The willingness to sincerely open ourselves to admonition from all those around us, irrespective of seniority, is one of the surest ways to get to know our blind spots and deal with them. The willingness to offer admonition at the right time and place, with kindness and well-chosen words, is one of the signs of a true friend.

I once read a story in which two friends, anxious to get rich, heard about an island populated by people with just one eye set in the middle of their foreheads. They decided to sail to the island, kidnap a one-eyed person and sell him to the zoo in their local city. On arriving at the island, however, they were spotted by a group of young one-eyed men, captured by them, and sold to the island zoo.

How often does it happen that at precisely the time when we believe ourselves to be most smart, we are in fact most foolish? The results of greed and selfishness are rarely as neat and immediate as in this story, but sooner or later they do manifest. Recognising this truth from examining our own experience and that of those around us leads to restraint and wisdom.

There are always good arguments for not meditating. Apart from the favourite, 'I'm too busy', there are many others: 'it's too early, its too late, I'm too hungry, I'm too full, I'm too tired, I'm too restless'. We always seem to be 'too' something or other to meditate.

Please don't make meditation into a burden. Try seeing it as spending quality time with your mind. Don't fight with yourself. Be reasonable, gentle and firm. Agree that yes, I am busy; yes, I am tired, and so on. But rather than deciding that given these factors you won't meditate at all, choose to meditate just a little bit, just for a short while, just for a few minutes.

Decide, 'I will do it, without expectations, as an offering to the Buddha, as an offering to my teachers.
You may find that you meditate longer than you intended.

We can recognise fear and anger as normal reactions to aggression, without lashing out wildly in order to make those feelings go away. We cannot expect too much from this world. As long as foolish immature people can find justification for their actions in philosophies and religious texts, there will never be true peace.

What we can do is to cultivate a boundless compassion accompanied by a wisdom that is calm, cool and alert. The wisdom we need to deal with complex problems comes from clarity of mind, not outraged emotion.

The Buddha taught us that hatred is never overcome by hatred. If we hate those that hate us then we too become haters, no better than them. All that results is that the total amount of hatred in the world increases.

The Buddha said that without wisdom being close to the teacher or the teachings we are like a spoon that gains no knowledge of the taste of the food.

With wisdom, we are like the tongue that knows every taste of the food. Proximity to great masters is not enough in itself. One long-time disciple of Ajahn Cha never overcame his bad temper. Finally, one day, he killed someone in a fit of rage. Not long after he died in prison, not of a physical illness, but from his feelings of shame.

So where does this wisdom come from? We can't just decide to be wise. What we can do is to be sincere in letting go of all those habits and attachments that impede the flow of wisdom. We approach the Dhamma with a mind which is open and attentive, humble, alert and calm.

We spend a lot of time in our lives waiting for something we want. It might be waiting to be served in a shop, waiting for a traffic jam to end, waiting for someone to say yes to a request, or perhaps waiting for someone to forgive us. There are so many different things we wait for. But what exactly is waiting? How is it different from normal sitting, standing or lying down. Why does it seem to make time slow down so much?

Look to see how the feeling of waiting arises when we allow our minds to drift into the future. Subjectively, waiting is the sense that we are filling in the time between now and when the event in the future occurs. But that sense of waiting so easily leads to tension and frustration. Why not keep the mind in the present and use this interval between the awareness of a need and the moment of its resolution to dwell in calmness and clarity? These short periods of time need not be a source of suffering. They can be enjoyed.

The Buddha taught that only when people are free of worries concerning the essential needs for clothing, food, shelter and medical care, can they progress spiritually. Rather than overlooking the importance of material development the Buddha recognised that it forms the necessary foundation for the fulfilment of the deeper spiritual needs. Problems arise when material development becomes the sole focus of life.

The results of such an approach range from stress and depression to drug abuse and suicide. A balanced life is one in which we take care of both inner and outer needs. But as inner needs are not so obvious and outer needs are much more pressing, time for inner cultivation does not often present itself. We must make time for it.

It was February 1976. I was a teenager travelling alone through southern India. I remember climbing down from a crowded bus after a long dusty journey at the edge of a large town. It was already dark and I walked through the town looking for a cheap place to spend the night. As I rounded a corner I heard a voice shouting out to me. I looked over to see a woman sitting at the side of the road by an old cooking pot, dishing out lentil soup to her many children. She insisted that I sat down with them and take a plate of soup and some bread. I was very hungry and the simple food tasted delicious. When I looked up, I saw the woman was watching my enjoyment with a look of genuine affection and satisfaction on her face, as if she had just fed her own grown-up son rather than a stranger.

Almost forty years have passed by. There must have been times on my travels when I was treated unkindly but I can't remember them now. The kindness of people like this poor woman however, living in rags on the street with her children, has never left me. Please do not underestimate small acts of kindness. They have a power and an influence and a beauty that lasts for a very long time.

During meditation, when the mind is firm, clear and alert in the present moment, it as if the world and the person we believe ourself to be, disappears for a while. At that time we have no sense of name, gender or status. We do not experience ourself as a son or daughter, as a sibling, a spouse or a parent. We don't look on ourself as good or bad, intelligent or stupid. We have entered another dimension of life, one characterised by a feeling of well-being that seems completely normal and natural. It is as if we have come home.

Opening our eyes and returning to the world of relationships and responsibilities, the memory of that other more profound dimension of life gives us a new perspective. We are conscious of a realm of peace within us, untouched by all the ups and downs of daily life. We fully participate in our world but don't take it quite so seriously as before.

The Buddha said:

"Drop by drop is the waterpot filled.
Likewise by performing good deeds
Again and again
People fill themselves with merit."

Happy New Year to you all !
May your hearts be filled
with all that is good, kind and wise
in this coming year.

May the virtues of the Buddha,
the Dhamma and the Sangha
guide and protect you.

When you are alone, one way of increasing mindfulness during daily tasks is to vary the speed at which you perform them. Making all your movements very deliberate, almost as if you are moving in slow motion, is a good exercise for developing awareness of the body, for calming the mind, for being aware of intention, and all the thoughts and emotions that normally flash through your mind. At other times it can also be helpful to do things very quickly. Trying to perform everyday actions such as getting dressed at speed and without mistakes brings a sharpness and energy into our minds, and a healthy exhilaration.

When sitting and walking meditation are practised alternately, meditators are able to greatly extend the length of time they can meditate. Alternating the two kinds of meditation allows meditators to develop awareness both in stillness and movement, thus independent of posture. If either sitting or walking is preferred, then the preferred option can be longer, but the other option should not be abandoned altogether. The particular value of walking meditation is that it produces an awareness more easily integrated into daily life than that which is cultivated in the sitting meditation. Walking mindfully in nature, up and down on a path some twenty to thirty paces long, in the shade of tall trees, is a wonderful practice! Walking meditation is especially valuable for those discouraged by painful feelings during sitting meditation.

Today is the 24th anniversary of the death of Ajahn Cha. His disciples have gathered together in his monastery for three days of Dhamma practice in his honour. This afternoon thousands of people will circumambulate the stupa in which his relics are enshrined in a beautiful ceremony of remembrance.

All the qualities of the Kalyāṇamitta, the True Good Friend, were possessed by Ajahn Cha. He inspired his disciples with love and affection, with respect and with the determination to practice his teachings and follow in his footsteps. He was patient with the defilements of his disciples. He never became discouraged in teaching them. He willingly endured much pain and suffering in order to teach the Dhamma. He was a master of effective communication, adapting his words and manner to the needs of his audience. He was able to reveal the Dhamma in a clear, direct way that made even the most profound subject understandable. He never misled any of his disciples. He never abused his authority or their trust in him.

His life was the most wonderful gift to the world. At his feet, I bow my head.

In a group of a hundred people, silence can only occur when all hundred people co-operate — not an easy thing at all. In a group of a hundred people, however, noise and disturbance may be caused by a single person.

A forest that has stood for a thousand years may be destroyed by a single fire. A building that took hundreds of years to complete may be destroyed in a single bomb blast. Good kamma accumulated over many lifetimes may be destroyed by a single moment of anger.

Care for the good. Learn how to protect it. Never take it for granted. Goodness is a beautiful and fragile flower.

Lūang Phau Līam, Lūang Phau Chā's successor as abbot of Wat Pā Phong only went to school for a few years. Nevertheless, without academic training he has designed and overseen the construction of many monastic buildings, including the large Dhamma Hall in his own monastery. He has also worked as a craftsman and a labourer on these projects. He does everything in a calm, unruffled way. He is a great teacher of mindfulness in action.

One evening after a long hot day on a major construction project some lay guests visited him. They asked when the work would be finished. Lūang Phau Līam replied, 'I finish every day.'

Lūang Phau meant by this that wherever his body left the work site his mind left too. He didn't carry worries and unresolved issues with him. This is the value of a well-trained mind. When it needs to think and plan and solve problems, it does so; when there is no need to think it can put down the thinking until it's time to work on more. This may sound impossible but monks like Lūang Phau Liam prove that through practice of the Buddha's teachings it can be done.

An old story tells of the day on which Jīvaka, the Buddha's physician, graduated from his medical studies at Taxila University. On that morning Jīvaka's teacher gave him the task of walking out in the countryside surrounding the university for the whole day and of bringing him back specimens of every kind of plant with no medicinal properties whatsoever. Jīvaka returned in the evening, head downcast. He had been unable to find a single plant with no medicinal properties at all, and he was sure that he had failed his exam. But his teacher smiled and said 'Now that you have realised that every single plant has a medicinal property of one kind or another, you are ready to leave the university, go out into the world, and begin healing.

All unenlightened beings suffer. With Right View, every single experience, welcome or unwelcome, pleasant or painful, may be used by students of Buddhism to cure the ignorance and craving that causes that suffering. Our love of learning and capacity for learning enables us to go beyond a life in which we are endlessly struggling to escape the unpleasant and hold tightly to the pleasant.

The Buddha once told of a tar trap used by hunters in the Himalayas to catch monkeys. Intelligent monkeys keep well clear of these traps, but foolish inquisitive monkeys go up to the trap and put a paw into the tar. Immediately, a monkey who does this realises that it is stuck and thinking to free itself, grabs with the other paw. Now it is even more stuck. Thinking, 'I'll free both of my paws', it grabs with its foot and the foot gets stuck too.

Thinking, 'I'll free both of my paws and my foot, it grabs with its other foot. Now that both paws and both feet are stuck, it tries to save itself by grabbing with its mouth. Now, completely stuck, all it can do is wait for the hunter to arrive.

Some sensual pleasures are so addictive that once we form an initial attachment to them, it is almost impossible to free ourselves. Indeed, when lacking wisdom, our very struggles to escape may make the situation worse. For this reason, wise people are aware of their limitations and keep far away from such sticky tar-like experiences.

The more you worry about things the more of a habit it becomes. Worry becomes an addiction. If you don't have something rational to worry about you find something irrational. Worrying about a form of suffering that may or may not occur in the future, you create suffering for yourself in the present. Worry doesn't affect your mental health alone. It depletes your immune system and makes you vulnerable to many kinds of physical illness.

So what can you do? The most important thing is to shift your attention from the object of worry to the experience of worry itself. And what is the first thing to notice? It has a beginning and an end. It comes and goes. A very simple observation but a profound one.

Worry is merely a visitor to our mind; it doesn't live there. When worry appears, don't welcome it and don't try to drive it away. Recognise 'worry' as 'worry', an unwelcome visitor. If you do this patiently, again and again, you will create a new healthy habit of mind. Worry will fade away.

A good reason can always be found to do the wrong thing. The more educated people are the easier they find it to justify wrong actions. Indeed, many intelligent people are able to prove to themselves that the wrong thing is, in fact, the right thing. The ability to convince oneself and others that the wrong thing is the right thing is a dangerous gift.

The untrained mind cannot be fully trusted. As long as our mind still lacks mindfulness, inner peace and wisdom it can be its own worst enemy. Keep observing your mind. Through constant observation you will develop the ability to recognise when you are starting to lie to yourself. Only when you understand the way that desire and attachment arise in the mind, can you protect the mind and make it truly trustworthy.

Having no choices in life is depressing. But having too many can cripple us. When there are a great many options to choose from, fear of making the wrong choice, or of not making the very best choice, can mean that we make no choice at all.

There are so many Buddhist teachings and traditions to choose from these days. It is wonderful that in the modern world there is such easy access to the Dhamma. But that easy access brings with it its own dangers. If we can turn on or turn off the Dhamma with the tap of a screen, we risk becoming mere passive consumers of Dhamma rather than its students.

The Dhamma is challenging us to use the tools it provides to take responsibility for our lives. Choose a path and learn the Dhamma by committing to that path through the smooth times and the rough.

It is sometimes said that the Buddhist teaching of contentment leads to passivity. If we are content with what we have already, people say, then why struggle to improve anything? If everybody in a country were content then how could there be any economic development?

In fact, the teaching of contentment is never separated from teachings on right effort and diligence. The value of contentment is that it protects our mind from being consumed by thoughts of jealousy, depression and resentment when we compare ourselves with others who have more than us, or when we dwell on all the things that we don't have.

Even when conditions are difficult we should try to be at peace with them, see their good points, during our efforts to improve them. Then we don't have to wait until we reach our goals some time in the future before we can be happy.

Notice the different feelings evoked by the words 'this body' and 'my body', 'this pleasure' and 'my pleasure', 'this pain' and 'my pain'. Observe how the sense of ownership arises, how it feels, and how it passes away. The sense of 'me' and 'mine' is not always present in the mind. When it arises, suffering appears. When it passes away, suffering ceases.

When a human being emerges from its mother's womb we say it's born. This kind of birth occurs only once in every lifetime. But in Buddhism the word 'birth' has a second meaning. It refers to the arising of the sense of 'me' and 'mine' in the mind, and all of the suffering that comes with it. This kind of birth takes place a great many times every day. We could say that in our practice of meditation we are learning a natural means of birth control. The non-arising of the sense of 'me' and 'mine' means the end of birth and with it the end of death. The Buddha called this Nibbāna, the Deathless Realm.

When we have difficulties with other people, we usually think that 'it's mostly their fault'. We think, 'How much better our life would be if that person wasn't around!' But if the situation does change and the person we are blaming for our suffering leaves, why is it, that before long, someone else takes their place? If this happens its an indication of a pattern. We need to look more closely within.

It would be wiser to look on these people as our teachers. Sometimes we say that they 'press our buttons'. Another way of putting this is to say that they draw out the defilements in our hearts. The discomfort is not really due to us having to be with these people. It is rather that we are being forced to face things inside us that we would rather not see.

For this reason we can say thank you to all the difficult people in our life for reminding us how much work on our defilements we still have to do. And get down to work.

Imagine living in a cottage on the side of a mountain. You can hear the sound of a chainsaw in the forested valley below. It is a very irritating sound, and because the noise is not even, it is hard to ignore. But after some time you get more used to it. Minutes pass without you being aware of the sound, but when your mind is drawn back to it again you realise that your body and mind have been tense the whole time.

And then the noise stops. It is not an absolute silence. You can still hear the wind in the trees and the singing of the birds. But those sounds don't disturb the silence. They seem like parts of it.

The cessation of suffering may be understood in this way. Cessation is not extinction. It is like the end of the sound of the annoying chainsaw. Nature, the wind, the trees, the birds remain.

Some people take no interest in what other people think or feel. They are very confident. They think they are smart. They do what they want to do and refuse to take any responsibility for the suffering they cause other people. They think they are winners and everyone else are losers.

Other people care too much about what other people think or feel. They worry all the time about how they are being judged for their actions. They want everyone to like them. Sometimes they do things they know are wrong because they crave the praise of others and fear criticism.

The first group of people take themselves as refuge. The second group take other people as refuge. These refuges are narrow, foolish and unsafe. The Buddha taught us to take the Dhamma as our refuge. This means basing our life on generosity, precepts and inner cultivation.

A new year makes us think of new beginnings. But we can only truly move forward when we know where we have come from, how we have got to where we are now, and what destination we hope to reach. This means we need to know how to take a step back from all our daily activities and spend a little time considering the big picture of our life. Start the new year with wisdom.

The more short-term are the goals of a person, an economy, a nation, the more reasonable it seems to focus on material progress. The more long-term the goals, the more necessary it seems to focus on values. The wise approach is to consider the two together. Identifying our core values and then pursuing short-term goals that promote them or, at the very least, do not undermine them, is the way to sustainable progress both on the individual and social level.

On this Thai New Years Day of 2559 may the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha bless and protect all that is good and noble in our hearts, and in this dear country.

A Noble Truth is one that ennobles the person who truly understands it. 'There is suffering' is a Noble Truth. 'I am suffering' is not. Enlightenment occurs only after we have seen suffering as a conditioned phenomena. Only depression, self-aversion and self-pity result from taking it personally.

The understanding that 'there is suffering' arises from observation of experience. The assumption that there is an 'I' that is suffering arises from a lack of observation of experience.

Whenever we don't pay attention to the reality of our body and mind, we create the sense of 'I'. In Dhamma practice we learn how to stop taking this 'I' so seriously, and ultimately how to let it go.

One day during my teenage years, I remember entering a huge library and feeling deeply discouraged. In those days I was thirsty for knowledge, I wanted to know everything, and yet at that moment I became aware that even if I was to spend my whole life in that library and do nothing but study, I would only ever be able to read a small portion of the books gathered in it. Then as I stood there overwhelmed, I remembered a question posed by a great Indian sage, 'What is the one thing, knowing which, you will know all things?' I realised that it was all very simple. I didn't need to read all the books in the world. I needed to study and understand my own mind.

There is so much we need to learn to survive in this world and prosper. But the most important thing of all is to know the one who knows.

As a schoolboy I was quite curious. I liked asking questions and looking at things from unusual angles. One day I recived an essay I'd written back from my English teacher. Commenting on the ideas in my essay, he'd written in the margin 'Not all questions that can be asked need to be answered.' More than forty years later I still feel grateful to my teacher for this comment.

We can waste so much time asking questions that don't need to be answered. In doing so we neglect asking questions that should be asked. Calming the mind and choosing the best questions to ask in any difficult situation is an important life skill to develop

Here is an example of a question that should be avoided. When a problem arises, or a mistake is made, the common tendency is to ask, 'Who is to blame?' This question over-simplifies issues and sets people against each other. A better question to ask is 'what did each person or each party involved contribute to this problem or mistake. Looking at contributions rather than deciding who is to blame leads to clarity and intelligent solutions.

Renunciation of attachments seems intimidating because it feels as if we are being asked to give up things which give us a lot of pleasure - or, at least, more pleasure than pain.

If we still perceive things in this way there can be no renunciation in the Buddhist sense. True renunciation can only occur through clear seeing.

By looking again and again at our mind we see that, in fact, the pleasure that we receive from our attachments is much less than we thought, the suffering much more. When we see this truth with a peaceful mind we throw off the attachment without regret.

Ajahn Chā said it was like a fisherman who grabs a poisonous snake from a net thinking it is an eel. The moment he realises what he is holding he throws it as far away as he can.

Even with teachers who care for us so much and give us so many wise teachings we find progress on the path to be slow and difficult. How much more difficult it would be without a teacher! And how marvellous that the Buddha realised supreme enlightenment all by himself! He completely eliminated every kind of mental defilement, and achieved absolute perfection in virtue, wisdom and compassion without anyone to show him the way. For this reason we bow at his feet.

Even to successfully explain very simple matters to people we know and love can be a real challenge. How wonderful that the Buddha was able to explain the most profound matters with words that have touched the hearts of people all over the world for over 2600 years! For his skill and patience in teaching the Dhamma we bow at his feet.

Even to create a family or an organisation or an institue that can thrive and prosper for two generations is a great achievement. The Buddha created a monastic order that has survived over a hundred generations, and has preserved his path to liberation and transmitted it to countless beings.

For his wisdom and kindness in ensuring the happiness of future generations, we bow at his feet.

There are two kinds of harmony: one supportive and one destructive. In the destructive kind of harmony the members of a group avoid speaking about anything that might bring up bad feelings or create conflict, even when certain topics need to be discussed. The unspoken agreement in this kind of group is 'I won't say anything about your behaviour if you don't say anything about mine. Lack of overt conflict is mistaken for social harmony.

In the supportive kind of harmony, the members of a group are devoted to the true welfare of both themselves and others. They humbly accept that they have blind spots and make mistakes. They open themselves up to words of advice and admonishment from those around them. They take on the responsibility of offering words of advice and admonishment at a suitable time and place, having first made sure of the facts and cleansed their mind of anger.

Even though there may be some hurt feelings every now and then, the kind of harmony that develops from this way of living together is strong and nourishing.

Once upon a time a young man did a great service for the king. The king gave him a reward of one hundred gold coins. The young man stuffed the coins into his pockets and rushed home to his family. When he arrived home he counted the coins again. Only ninety nine remained. He realized that one of his pockets had a small hole and a coin had slipped through it. He was so upset about losing that one gold coin that he forgot to feel happy about the ninety nine coins that he still possessed.

In the course of performing some good action, we often make a small mistake. We tend to suffer so much over that small mistake that we forget all the good kamma we made before and after it. The wise person analyses the mistake and takes measures to prevent it happening again. He mends the hole in his pocket and moves on.

Moment by moment we identify with aspects of the body and mind as being self or belonging to self. We say 'my body', 'my feelings', 'my ideas', 'my hopes', 'my fears' and so on. But if these things truly belong to us, why do we have so little power over them? Why, for example, can't we just decide to be less anxious and more happy? Why can't we forbid our body from getting old? In what sense does this body and mind belong to us at all?

The Buddha taught us that the false idea of a permanent independent 'me' who is the owner of experience is the fundamental cause of human suffering. All mental defilements spring from this one mistake. As meditators we must train to create the inner strength, stillness and happiness to enable us to see the body and mind clearly. Then we will discover for ourselves that there is simply a natural flow of phenomena with no owner to be found. This is the Buddha's path of liberation.

In a forest monastery the bell is rung for the first time every morning at three a.m., and then at intervals throughout the day, signalling each event in the daily schedule. The value of the bell is not restricted to announcing the time. Monks are taught to use it as a means of establishing mindfulness. How do they feel when they hear the sound of the bell? Is their immediate reaction one of enthusiasm, pleasure, indifference or resistance? How does their reaction to the sound of the bell vary throughout the day and from one day to the next?

Simplifying our life allows us to observe our reactions to the regularly recurring elements in it. By observing again and again how our mind reacts to repetitive events we gain insight into how our mind works, to its prejudices, its desires and fears, its resolution and goodness.

Change we cannot control is frightening. The usual reaction to it is to search for something that does not change. Dogmas recorded in holy books seem to provide that. In times of rapid and bewildering changes fundamentalist religion flourishes. Superstition and prejudice infect people like a virus.

In Buddhism we look at the sense of insecurity, without trying to suppress it with beliefs. When we investigate our life with a mind calmed by meditation we can see that there is no solid "me" facing a threatening unstable world. Our body and mind is changing moment by moment due to causes and conditions, some of which we may influence, some we may not. The more we understand inner and outer change, the more our anxiety dissolves. We find our refuge not in beliefs, but in observation of the way things are.

One of the inspiring qualities of wise people is their ability to sense the appropriate behaviour in different places and different times, with different groups of people and different individuals. They know when it is the right time to speak and when it is the right time to listen; when it is the right time to lead and when to follow; when it is the right time to be active and when to be passive. They don't always follow their own way like a singer with only one song. They don't just blindly follow what everyone else is doing. Through the practice of Dhamma they are able to be both flexible and firm.

The ability to act in harmony with the needs of time and place is undermined by desires and fears, by anger and prejudice, and by mental confusion. It is strengthened by mindfulness, clear awareness of context and environment, and by respect for others.

On the full moon day of July well over 2500 years ago the Buddha walked into the Deer Park in Sarnath in north-eastern India. His intention was to 'set in motion the wheel of Dhamma' by giving his first ever teaching. His proposed audience consisted of five former followers. These five men had abandoned him after he renounced the practice of severe asceticism. They believed that by giving up asceticism he had given up the path to enlightenment, and would soon return to a life of luxury in his father's palace.

The Buddha immediately put their minds to rest by telling them that a life of sensual indulgence was ignoble and meaningless. But their relief turned to surprise when he continued to say that a life of severe asceticism was also ignoble and meaningless.

Then the Buddha taught a middle way between these two extremes. It involved a comprehensive education of action, speech and mind that led to true freedom by eliminating the ignorance and craving that is the cause of human suffering.

At the end of the talk, Kondañña, the leader of the group of five, realised 'Stream Entry' the first level of enlightenment.

Today, throughout the Buddhist world we commemorate this special day.

We must always be careful not to allow the joy that arises from listening to and reading the Dhamma to fool us into thinking that we know more than we actually do. The knowledge that comes from listening and reading is still quite superficial. It doesn't have the power to uproot the defilements that are so deeply embedded in our minds.

Ajahn Chā once said that many students of Buddhism are like ants that crawl around on the outside of a mango, without actually ever tasting the juice inside it. Having studied the teachings we must learn to apply them in our lives. They should be looked upon as a map for practice or a recipe. The vital thing is that we don't just collect teachings but make use of them on the path to liberation.

Precepts are not commandments. There is no commander. The motive for keeping precepts is not the desire for rewards or the fear of punishment. Precepts are objects of mindfulness that must be adopted voluntarily after clearly seeing the value of doing so. Keeping precepts promotes a safe, trusting environment and an inner freedom from guilt and remorse.

In daily life, where the grey areas far outnumber the black and white, the recollection of the precepts gives clear guidelines for action and speech that cut through our tendency to follow our moods, and to rationalize our defilements. Keeping precepts keeps us safe from bad kamma and its results.

Why is it that we so love the feeling of gaining things and making a profit? Why do we so hate the feeling of losing things or making a loss? Why is it that we can feel so much pleasure at trivial gains and suffer so badly over unimportant losses?

It is not the things that we gain or lose that is so important to us as what gain and loss signify. Deep inside us we believe that gain means life and loss means death. We feel a gain to be a step away from death, a loss a step closer. And because we crave life and fear death, we suffer.

Through meditation we see how arising is always followed by passing away. Life and death are revealed as inseparable. The less we perceive ourselves to be the one to whom life and death occur the more free of them we become, the less obsessed with gain and loss.

We give so much importance to our moods. We feel stupid and we conclude that we are stupid. We feel good and we conclude that everything is good. We feel bored and we conclude that our situation is boring. We feel depressed and conclude that our life is depressing.

Don't hold on to ideas about how you should or should not feel. Simply look at how you are feeling right now and see that as a feeling. No more and no less. A feeling is not who you are. A feeling is not necessarily a reflection of how your life is.

Watching your mind is like watching over a small child. Even when your eyes are not directly on the child, you are constantly aware of where the child is, whether its safe or in danger, whether it's happy or sad. You may be working or talking or relaxing, but you never forget the child. To begin with you may sometimes have to rush over to move the child from a dangerous situation. But as you become more proficient you are able to anticipate its movements and prevent it from straying into danger. At the beginning you may have to keep picking the child up and comfort it. But as you become more proficient you can intervene before the child begins to suffer. It requires a lot of effort to look after a child well, especially at the beginning. But, if you truly love the child, it doesn't feel like a burden at all. Quite the opposite.

Our views are conditioned by the information we have access to, and the processing of that information. Both are subject to distortion. How can we be sure that our information is correct? Or if it is correct how can we be sure that it is complete? We cannot. A theory based upon incomplete information may be completely logical but deeply misleading. How sure can we be that our processing of information has been efficient and without bias, conscious or unconscious. Even with a system of checks and balances there is room for error.

Considering the unreliable foundations of our views and beliefs we can become more humble and wise. Being absolutely convinced that we are right about something may feel good, but it is both foolish and dangerous. How much suffering is created in the world today by people who are convinced that they – and only they – are right?

During the three-month monastic Rains Retreat, lay Buddhists often try to be stricter with their precepts. Success varies. Three types of response can be observed in those that fail, which show us a lot about how our minds work when we don't follow up on commitments

a) 'No I didn't. Not really.'

We break our vow but refuse to accept that we did so. Usually this involves re-defining the vow. For example, we say that in fact the precept does not prohibit all consumption of alcohol, only getting drunk

(b) 'Yes I did. But.....'

We break our vow but try to minimise the importance. For example: 'Well yes I did tell a lie but it was only a small one, it wasn't malicious, and being too strict with these things is not the Middle Way.

(c) "Yes I did. And..."

We break our vow but make a bargain with ourselves in order to feel better about it. For example "Well yes, I did break my vow but I'm going to keep it even more strictly in the future.

Keeping vows requires us to be aware of how tricky our mind can be. Don't be fooled by it. If you do break a vow, don't give up. Learn from your mistake and humbly start again.

The eight worldly conditions are gain and loss, status and obscurity, praise and criticism, pleasure and pain. Wherever we go, there is no escape from these things. They are always present, whether we are in a busy city or a secluded monastery. Even fully enlightened beings experience them.

The mental suffering lies not in the conditions themselves, but in our attitude towards them. Unwise people take the eight worldly conditions very seriously, because they do not see how temporary, unreliable, and unable to provide true happiness they all are. People become attached to gain, status, praise and pleasure. They fear separation from them and when they experience their opposites: loss, a decline in status, criticism, and pain, they feel grief and depression. The wise know these eight conditions for what they are: unavoidable aspects of the human realm. They look after their minds, not allowing them to become obsessed by mere worldly conditions.

As meditators we must always be on our guard against pride. But sometimes we go too far. We come to believe that by downplaying the goodness within us we are practising humility. The Buddha did not teach that kind of humility.

He taught us to observe and find joy in our good intentions and good actions. Learning how to appreciate the goodness arising in our mind is like sprinkling it with water; it grows and grows. Humility lies in remembering the debt of gratitude that we owe to the Buddha and his disciples. Without the example and instructions of our teachers these beautiful mental states would never have found a home in our hearts. We also should remind ourselves that this goodness doesn't belong to us. It is the result of cultivation. It will only continue to flourish if we look after it wisely.

Continuity of effort is vitally important. Meditators must try to establish a constant awareness whether walking, standing, sitting or lying down. When this awareness has been established no mental state can overpower the mind. Insight into impermanence and not-self arises naturally. It is as if we are in a room with only one chair. If we sit on the chair in the middle of the room we become immediately aware of anyone who comes in or out. Having no place to sit down our guests will not stay long. In the same way, when mindfulness sits on the chair in the middle of our mind, then any mental state that arises is known for what it is immediately. Having no opportunity to sit on the chair and take over the mind, no visiting mental state stays for long.

Last Sunday was the birthday of Mahatmā Gandhi. One of my favourite stories about him concerns the occasion he climbed aboard an extremely crowded train. As the train began to leave his friends dragged him inside the train and in doing so one of his shoes slipped off onto the platform. Immediately, without thinking, Mahatmā Gandhi threw his other shoe out after it. His remaining shoe was of no use to him now, and the one on the platform would be of no use to anyone who found it. At least now one person would have a good pair of shoes.

Without thinking, a well-trained body can perform at a high level through muscle memory. Similarly, without thinking, a well-trained mind spontaneously responds to events with wisdom and compassion. At such moments there is no sense of self, and afterwards there arises a deep appreciation of the beauty of Dhamma.

There is no natural reason why red should mean stop and green mean go. And yet, when we reach a traffic light we all stop at the red and go at the green.

We do so because we have all agreed on the meanings of red and green in this context. There are so many things in our daily life that depend upon a shared agreement.

Money is another obvious example. There is no natural reason why we should be able to exchange a bank note for goods or services. We are able to do so because we have all agreed that it is possible to do so. A thing that exists because of a shared agreement is called a convention. In the ability to create conventions we see the genius of human intelligence.

The difficulty with conventions is that we tend to confuse them with natural truths. We give them too much importance, get attached to them, and so we suffer. The most fundamental of our conventions, and the one we attach to the most, is the idea of self. In Buddhism we do not reject conventions. We simply learn to see conventions as conventions, without taking them to be ultimately real.

By doing so, we are able to use conventions wisely. We live in a world of conventions without being deluded by them.

In a sports match the commentator informs his audience about everything that is happening on the pitch. He expresses excitement and admiration, criticism and expectation.

The commentator's words have nothing to do with the game itself. Without the commentator the game would carry on in exactly the same way.

In our meditation practice we have so many voices inside us commentating on our performance: voices expressing appreciation and criticism, judgement and anticipation. We assume that these are the voices of objective commentators like the oneswho watch sport matches.

In fact all of the voices are part of the practice, not observers of it. Meditators must be mindful and alert to all of the voices. If we take them seriously they can become considerable hindrances on the path to liberation If we simply recognize them for what they are – 'There's the judge', 'That's anxiety come to visit again' — they soon leave of their own accord.

Faith plays a much smaller role in Buddhism than in other religions. It is like the rocket required by a spacecraft to pull free of the gravitational pull of the earth. Once it has served its purpose it falls away.

The objects of faith in Buddhism are verifiable by every Buddhist. They should all be put to the test. These include the following principles.

① All mental suffering is conditioned by 'defilements' such as greed, anger, hatred, jealousy, confusion etc.

② Defilements are all impermanent, conditioned phenomena.

③ All defilements can be completely eliminated by practice of the Eightfold Path.

④ Elimination of defilements results in profound inner peace and the perfection of wisdom and compassion.

⑤ Freedom from defilement is the greatest possible human achievement.

The rocks on a mountain top are harsh and jagged because nobody disturbs them.

The rocks on a river bed are smooth and beautiful, because the water makes them rub against each other again and again.

Living with others may not be so peaceful as living alone, but it rubs away our jagged edges.

Do not resent the uncomfortable feelings that arise in the presence of others. If we are wise, we can allow this friction to wear away our love of self, and make us as smooth and beautiful as river stones.

We assume that the ground under our feet is solid like concrete, but in fact we are always walking on thin ice. There is no true safety or refuge to be found in the material world. We cannot control the constant changes taking place, and if our happiness is dependent on things being a certain way, we will never be more than a single step from suffering. It is by observing change in all its forms that we can learn to respond wisely to the challenges that life provides us, rather than blindly reacting to events with fear or desire.

There is something truly beautiful and inspiring in seeing a person given to the pursuit of essentially trivial goals such as wealth and power wake up to the precicusness of this human birth, and take a new direction in their life. Seeing the kindness of someone who used to be unfeeling, or the humble behaviour of someone who used to be extremely conceited is especially moving.

People can change in the most uplifting ways. Not through an act of will or the grace of a god, but through patient and intelligent effort. The Buddha declared that seeing someone change in this way is as beautiful as seeing the bright full moon emerge from behind a dark cloud.

Many years ago, before I became a monk, I spent some time living in a grass-roofed hut on a beach in India. One day a coconut fell down from a nearby tree. I wanted to eat the flesh of that coconut and drink its milk so much. Unfortunately, I had no machete and no means of opening it up. The more I thought about the inside of the coconut the more thirsty I became, but to my frustration, there was nothing I could do. In the end, I had to leave the coconut there in the sand where it had fallen. It might as well have been a green rock.

The flesh and milk of the Dhamma is far more delicious and nutritious than that of a coconut, and its outer shell can seem even more difficult to penetrate. But by steady, patient practice of the Buddha's path of generosity, morality and mental cultivation, we can all come to understand the Buddhas words: 'Of all the tastes in the world, the taste of the Dhamma is the most excellent.

The Buddha once said that monks, like fruits, may be divided into four categories:

Rotten on the outside and rotten on the inside.
Rotten on the outside and ripe on the inside
Ripe on the outside and rotten on the inside.
Ripe on the outside and ripe on the inside.

This teaching reminds us that when we see a monk whose outward appearance is inspiring we should not immediately assume that he has a pure mind. He may have, but he may also be acting in a way he hopes will gain some advantage with lay Buddhists. Similarly, we should not take it for granted that a monk whose outward appearance is uninspiring has an impure mind. He may have, but if he is not breaking any of his precepts, his unattractive personal habits and manner may simply be the results of old kamma.

The Buddha said that it is only after observing for a considerable time whether a monk shows evidence of greed, hatred or delusion in his actions and speech that we can decide whether it is wise to place our trust in him.

We often confuse our personal responses with an awareness of objective reality. When we complain that something is boring what we really mean is that we are bored by it. When we criticize something for being offensive what we really mean is that we are offended by it. If we understand that there is something out there which is boring or offensive then it seems inevitable that we should be bored or offended. But if we see the feeling of being bored or offended as being conditioned not only by the experience itself but also our response to it, then it becomes clear that there is something we are doing to construct these feelings that we have chosen to do and don't have to.

The mind that is easily bored is usually one that is addicted to stimulation, or too coarse to appreciate the subtleties of the objects it experiences. The mind that is easily offended is one attached to ideas of right and wrong. Wise people seek to eliminate these faults.

Having decided on a path of practice after careful consideration, give yourself to it for a pre-determined period of time. Only after that period has elapsed should you make any decision as whether or not to continue the practice

During this period do not fall into the trap of doubt. Three main kinds of doubt may appear to test you

1. Is the goal attainable?
2. The goal is attainable, but is it worth the hardships needed to reach it?
3. The goal is attainable, worth every hardship, but am I capable of reaching it?

Is it real? Is it worth it? Can I do it?

When things get tough, observe how the mind tends to fall into one of these ways of thinking. Don't repress doubt. Simply recognize doubt as doubt, a passing mental state, and let it go.

The optimist says the glass is half-full. The pessimist says the glass is half-empty. The Buddhist says that the glass is already broken.

When we reflect on the glass as being already broken, we can use it without attachment. We make the most intelligent use of the glass while never forgetting its temporary nature. When it does eventually break, we are not suprised and we don't suffer.

We create a false sense of self moment by moment by the way we relate to our body, feelings, memories, perceptions, thoughts, emotions and sense consciousness.

1. We may assume those phenomena to be one and the same thing as the self, just as we consider there to be no separation between the colour of a flame and the flame itself
2. We may consider those phenomena as belonging to self in the way that a tree's shadow belongs to the tree.
3. We may consider those phenomena as being in self, as the scent is in the flower.
4. We may consider those phenomena as containing the self as a casket contains a jewel.

We don't have to abandon the self; there is nothing to abandon. We abandon the craving and attachment that are the conditions for the illusion of self.

As a high school student I was fond of the works of the American Buddhist poet Gary Snyder. One short poem, 'Hay for the Horses' affected me strongly. In it an old man reviews his life:

"I'm sixty eight" he said,
"I first bucked hay when I was seventeen.
I thought, that day I started,
I sure would hate to do this all my life.
And dammit, that's just what
I've gone and done."

It was one of the saddest things I'd ever read. Reflecting upon it again and again was, I think, the first step I took towards my eventual decision to spend my life as a Buddhist monk.

If you like sweet milky coffee and the cup of coffee in front of you is too bitter, what do you do? Do you pray for heavenly assistance to make it more sweet? Do you blame old kamma and try to accept your bitter coffee fate? Do you throw the coffee away? None of these, I hope. My suggestion would be to add some more sugar. And if it's too sweet, add more coffee or more water.

If you know how each ingredient of a cup of coffee affects its taste, you have the information you need to make it more tasty. If you analyse a situation in your life until you clearly see the causes and conditions underlying it, you have the information you need to see where and to what extent you can make wise changes.

A visitor to the monastery said to Ajahn Chā, 'They say you are fully enlightened. Does that mean that you can fly through the air?

Ajahn Chā replied, 'What has flying got to do with it? Dung beetles can fly.

Ajahn Chā did not encourage talk about psychic powers. He said it was like someone looking up into the sky when he would be wiser to keep his attention on the ground beneath his feet.

As Buddhist practitioners we remind ourselves:

"Others may be greedy and selfish, but I will try my best not to add even the smallest amount to all the greed and selfishness in the world

Others may be cruel and full of hate and anger, but I will try my best not to add even the smallest amount to all the cruelty, hatred and anger in the world

Others may be heedless and confused, but I will try my best not to add even the smallest amount to all the heedlessness and confusion in the world"

Rather than allowing all the unwholesome things in the world around us to make us feel fearful and depressed we can use them as an encouragement to goodness.

The Buddha taught that certain mental states rob the mind of its peace and clarity, and obscure the true nature of things. He called these states 'kilesa', usually translated as 'defilement'.

However, although this word may be quite easily grasped as a concept it is only truly understood when the mind has experienced the non-defiled state of samādhi

Just as we can only fully understand the meaning of 'dirty' when we have had an experience of 'clean', so we can only realise how mental states can defile the mind when we have an experience of calm and clarity to compare it to.

Seeing clearly the effect that defilements have on our mind, and how much suffering they cause us, enthusiasm for practice arises naturally.

Just as a dew drop on the tip of a blade of grass will quickly vanish when the sun rises, even so is human life like a dew drop.

Just as a line drawn on water will quickly disappear, even so is human life like a line drawn on water. Just as a mountain stream flowing swiftly will not stand still even for a single instant of time, even so is human life like a mountain stream.

Reflecting on the truth of impermanence in this way inspires within us a sense of urgency. It is only through practising the Dhamma that we can give our life genuine meaning and purpose.

The Buddha taught that wise people understand what is essential in life and what is inessential. They give attention to the essential and spend as little time as possible on the inessential.

Foolish people, on the other hand, misconceive the essential as inessential and the inessential as essential. They disparage meditation, for example, as unessential and a waste of time. They consider the time and money they spend on trivial pursuits to be necessary to their well-being. The first step on the Buddha's path to liberation does not begin with a leap of faith. It begins when we start to ask sincere questions about life: 'What is essential?', 'What is inessential?'

The more intense our emotions the bigger the difference between time as we experience it and time as measured by a clock.
When we are suffering a single minute can seem like an hour.
When we are happy an hour can seem like a minute.
Many lay Buddhists make merit in order to gain rebirth in a heaven realm.
The life-span of beings in heaven realms is said to be many millions of years long.
But that is clock time. In the experience of a heavenly being it can feel like a very short time indeed.
Seeking rebirth in a heaven realm by doing good deeds is not wrong exactly, but it is short-sighted.
When our time in heaven expires the real work of abandoning defilements remains.
Heaven is just a very pleasant holiday destination.

The Buddha taught that those who refrain from taking life, from taking what is not given, from sexual misconduct, from false speech, and from intoxicants, give to an immeasurable number of beings freedom from fear, enmity and affliction. As a result they in their turn will enjoy immeasurable freedom from fear, enmity and affliction.

Precepts are not commandments. In Buddhist teachings there is no belief in a supernatural power who rewards the good and punishes the bad. Refraining from the five kinds of bad kamma listed above comes naturally to one who wholeheartedy cultivates wisdom and compassion.

Being right about something is not the end of the matter. It is also important how you deal with that sense of being right so that it does not bite you. In particular, observe how it makes you feel about people who are wrong and how you treat them.

If you are not mindful, being right may cause you almost as many problems as being wrong.

The Buddha taught that the desire to boast or manipulate people's perceptions of us is a mental defilement. Today, social media has given a huge boost to boasting. Referring to boasting as 'sharing' does not necessarily mean that it is no longer boasting. Nor does adding a humble comment to a boast.

Intention is all. If you feel a need to edit a photograph of yourself to take away skin blemishes, to make you look thinner or more attractive, investigate the reason why.

Mindfulness does not just mean being in the present moment; it means being aware of whether our intentions are wholesome or unwholesome. Then making the effort to abandon the unwholesome and cultivate the wholesome.

Meditation gives you perspective.

Sometimes as your mind becomes calm, you suddenly realise that a problem you have been worrying about so much is just a very small thing. Other times you realise that a small problem you have been ignoring for some time is, potentially, very serious, and needs seeing to straight away.

Meditation helps you to let go of things that you need to let go. It helps you deal with the things that you need to deal with.

The flame of a candle exposed to the wind is unsteady.

It is not possible to use its light to work by The mind is like a candle flame.

Only when it is protected from the winds of agitated thought and negative emotion, does it provide a light bright and still enough to enable the work of wisdom.

Accepting the truth of impermanence and directly experiencing the truth of impermanence are two different things. Accepting the truth of impermanence does not make people more moral or peaceful or wise. Experiencing the truth of impermanence does.

So many of our mistaken assumptions about ourselves are based upon a lack of insight into impermanence. With the arising of insight, old certainties and attachments fall away. Impermanence is concealed by continuity. Impermanence is revealed through the observation of the arising and passing away of phenomena.

The bad news first:
Our minds are full of defilements that cause us suffering and prevent us from realizing true happiness.

And now the good news:
There is no defilement in the human mind that can withstand the power of the Dhamma.

Having heard the news, do the work.
Practise the Dhamma.
Nobody else can do it for you.

It is not difficult beginning a relationship;
it is difficult sustaining the commitment to keep
nourishing it.

It is not difficult being aware of the beginning of a breath,
it is difficult sustaining the mindfulness to remain with it.
It is not difficult becoming inspired by the Dhamma;
it is difficult sustaining that inspiration through all of
life's ups and downs.

It is through working through difficult things
with patience, kindness and a humble heart
that we grow in goodness and wisdom.

Some people believe in eternal heaven and eternal hell. Some people believe that the death of the body is the end of everything. Some people believe that it is better not to think about death and its meaning at all.

The Buddha taught that the more we understand causality, and the more we understand the nature of our body and mind, the more that beliefs in annihilation and eternity dissolve. Look closely within and the Middle Way of the Buddha will slowly emerge.

Theravādan Buddhists believe that the Buddha was born, enlightened and passed away on the full moon day of May. This day is known as Visākha Pūjā (or Vesak) and is commemorated around the world. In Thailand, after the moon has risen, lay Buddhists join monks and nuns in candlelight circumnambulations around stūpas or Buddha statues in monasteries.

The Buddha grew up in luxurious surroundings. He left all comfort behind him in order to search for the truth. He spent years practising the most severe austerities before realizing that asceticism could not burn away the deepest defilements in the human heart.

On the night of the full moon of May, 2560 years ago, as he meditated under a bodhi-tree, the Buddha discovered the Middle Way between indulgence of the senses and blind asceticism. He proved through his own efforts that human beings have within them the potential to transcend all suffering. He spent the rest of his life teaching the path to liberation with wisdom and compassion.

Homage to the Buddha, the Blessed One, the Fully Enlightened One!

Merit (puñña) refers to purifying acts of body, speech and mind. Merit is created by giving, by keeping precepts and by spiritual cultivation. In Buddhist cultures most emphasis has usually been placed on the first of these three.

But on one occasion the Buddha said that even as the radiance of all the stars in the sky does not equal one small part of the moon's radiance, so the liberation of the mind by loving-kindness surpasses all other meritorious activities and 'shines forth, bright and brilliant.

Ajahn Cha once commented on the reasons he believed people who had high academic qualifications were often hard to teach. He said it was what happened when people studied to accumulate knowledge rather than to remove defilements and ignorance about life itself

"What they don't realize is that if they have a batchelors degree, then so do their defilements; if they have a masters degree, then their defilements have got one too; and if they have a doctorate, their defilements do also."

We have to be different things to different people— mother, father, brother or sister; friend, colleague, employer, employee. We have roles to play as members of a community and citizens of a country. But all these things that we must be, occupy only one dimension of life.

In meditation, we develop a very direct relationship with our body and mind. We learn to access a new dimension of our being, one which is free of the sense of being anything or anyone. It enriches our perspective on life in the world, just as a picture of three dimensions exceeds that of two. Without this perspective we take everything too seriously; with it, we can live our life with sincerity and integrity, but also with a certain lightness.

Perhaps you have started climbing a mountain from a valley which contains a swiftly flowing river. You will have noticed that when you look down from a spot high upon the mountain, the river now seems to be flowing much more slowly. You are reminded how your perception of movement is conditioned by distance.

Practising mindfulness is like climbing the mountain. The more you do it, the more you feel aware of, but above, the swiftly moving events of life. Everything seems to be moving much more slowly. You have more time to act wisely.

I once went to visit a woman in hospital. She was suffering from cancer and had only a few days left to live. There was no flesh on her limbs but her abdomen was swollen as if she was heavily pregnant. None of the family members in the room could accept that a death was about to occur. The word 'cancer' had never been spoken. The woman herself said that when she recovered, she hoped to become a nun for some time.

I had not been invited to speak bluntly. But I also could not support this charade. I said to the dying woman that it was natural for every sick person to hope to recover. But the Buddha warned us against being complacent.

The wise person does not let her mind dwell only on the outcome she desires. She prepares her mind to accept all possible outcomes: both the one she wishes for and the one she fears. A full recovery would be wonderful. But being wise means being ready for whatever happens. And to do that requires us to practise calming the mind with meditation.

It is fortunate to be able to make a living in a job that is of true benefit to others. One such job is that of the school teacher. Transmitting knowledge is a wonderful thing to do, but even more wonderful is transmitting a love of learning and a love of truth.

Knowledge that is learnt at school may one day become obsolete. But a child who has been equipped with both a joy in learning and the skills to learn, will always be ready to thrive, no matter in what environment they find themselves, and no matter how the world changes. School teachers who help to inspire these qualities in their students make great merit.

The Buddha once compared teaching students of Dhamma to training horses. He said that some horses run at the mere shadow of the whip, and some when they feel the whip touch their skin. Some horses only run when they feel the whip bite painfully into their skin, and the worst ones, only when the whip cuts to the bone.

If we are mindful and awake to all that the world is teaching us we can be like the best horse or, at least, the second. What we should avoid is being the worst kind of horse: only turning to Dhamma with any sincerity when we experience some deep pain in our lives.

Meditation is not about getting something. It's about learning how to face up to the present moment in the wisest possible way. One day you may be learning about peaceful states of mind, and on another day you may be learning about unpeaceful states of mind. It's certainly more enjoyable to learn about peaceful states of mind, but not necessarily any more beneficial.

Some people say they are too agitated to meditate. That is like saying that you are too sick to take medicine.

Learning how to sustain attention on the meditation object depends not only on refusing to indulge in distracting thoughts, but also on developing positive feelings for the object itself. If you can appreciate the simplicity and subtlety of the breath so much that you are no longer searching for other mental states to entertain you, then you are learning the art of contentment.

If you can be content with the sensation of the breath, then you can be content with your possessions in the material world. Being content means being conscious of the value of what we have right now.

Pain and suffering are not the same thing. Mental suffering is only experienced when there is resistance to pain. But this does not mean, however, that we should always accept the pain. Although some pain is unavoidable, some is not. Pain can be a signal that there is a physical problem that needs attending to. If a task can be accomplished without physical pain, then so much the better. But if a certain amount of physical discomfort is inevitable in accomplishing a task, then our effort should be to prevent the symptoms of resistance—anxiety, fear, anger and the craving for the pain to go away—from obstructing our progress.

A king was determined to invade a neighbouring country, although his prime minister thought that the plan was unwise. Every morning the prime minister walked around the garden beneath the king's window with a catapult. Finally, the king became aware of his presence and asked him what he was doing.

The prime minister said 'Your Majesty, there is a cricket on a tree branch drinking the dew with great enjoyment. It does not see the praying mantis behind it ready to pounce. For its part, the praying mantis does not notice the sparrow ready to attack it. And the sparrow does not see the man with the catapult taking aim. Three beings so keen to obtain the object of their desire that they are heedless of their own safety.
The king cancelled his plan of invasion.

If plants start to wither, it means they need to be watered. If life seems dreary and depressing, it means that the mind needs to be watered.

The mind is watered by goodness. The wish to help others, the practice of mindfulness and the letting go of attachment to negative thoughts, all help the mind to flourish.

It is not easy to keep plants well-watered throughout the year.

It is not easy to keep the mind constantly well-watered.

But in both cases – and especially the second – it is truly worth it.

Humility is not a matter of posture or tone of voice. If people bow their heads and speak with great deference, or speak critically of themselves, it does not mean that they are being humble. The outer forms of humility can be faked and self-disparagement is often a form of conceit.

Genuine humility grows through the lessening of attachment to views and opinions. Humility flourishes when we are not so concerned with appearing in a certain way to those around us, and when we don't consider that making mistakes is a cause for humiliation. Humility arises when the love of truth is stronger than the love of self.

In all endeavours, the beginning and the end have an especial importance. We should thus put effort into making sure that the beginning and end of every day should be spent in meditation. To help achieve this aim it is a good idea to make a resolution not to look at your phone or any other kind of screen for the last hour before you go to bed, or the first hour after you wake up. Communication with others is not a bad thing, but it is harmful if it prevents you communicating with yourself.

With the exception of the few people who have developed psychic powers, it is not possible to know exactly what is going on in anybody elses mind. We can never truly know another person's mind, even if that person is a member of our own family. We can guess, infer, empathise — often accurately — but it is not the same as knowing. Humbly reminding ourselves that we do not truly know another person's mind is important because it means that we don't take that person for granted.

We don't allow our ideas of who they are to become rigid. This is compassionate, because it is already difficult for people to make positive changes in their life. It becomes even more difficult if those around them hold on to fixed ideas about who they are.

The Buddha said that sometimes there is the sound of thunder in the sky, but no rain falls. This is like the case of someone who has read a lot and can speak convincingly on the Dhamma, but has no true insight into the Four Noble Truths. Some people, on the other hand, have gained insight into the Four Noble Truths, but have read little and cannot speak well. Sometimes there is no thunder, but rain falls and refreshes the parched earth.

We can learn whether a teacher is trustworthy, not by how self-confident and articulate they appear, but by the extent to which they show a consistent freedom from greed, hatred and delusion.

Whatever particular thing we are anxious about or afraid of, the experience of anxiety or fear itself remains constant: a pattern of physical and mental phenomena arising and passing away in the present moment

Move your attention from the trigger of the emotion and the content of your thoughts, and look at the experience of the emotion. Examine it with an even, curious awareness. Be especially observant of the physical sensations. Before long the emotion will dissolve. After it has dissolved observe the peace of cessation.

The Buddha said that people who do not train their minds are like those who live in a house with holes in the roof. They can get so used to good weather that they see no point in spending time and effort on repairing the roof. When the rain comes, it leaks into their house and causes great damage.

The value of training the mind may not be so apparent when everything is going well in our lives, but it becomes very clear when we are hit by a storm of difficult experiences. Wise people seek to prepare themselves for all possibilities. They see the value and dangers in positive thinking. True security comes with constant practice of the Buddha's path.

The ideas we have about who we are, are bound up with our feelings towards those around us. The sense of being a solid autonomous self comes and goes. Sometimes – if we feel angry or jealous or embarassed for example – it can be very strong. At other times, when we feel safe and relaxed, it can be very weak. When the mind has been calmed through meditation the sense of being an isolated self can disappear altogether.

One of the most important skills for the meditator to develop is that of observation. By observing how the sense of who we are changes according to causes and conditions, we can learn profound lessons about the meaning of not-self.

The Buddha said that forbearance is the greatest incinerator of defilements. There can be no development in Dhamma practice without it. Forbearance means making peace with the unpleasant things that, right now cannot be changed. Allowing ourselves to be irritated by heat and cold, and even mild levels of hunger and thirst means that we are far from the path. If we lose our temper when we can't get what we want or can't get rid of what we don't want, we are acting like a child.

Breathing in and breathing out calmly, we should reflect that without patience we create bad kamma that will bear fruit in the future in far more suffering than the present discomfort provides. Having practised forbearance with all the small irritations of life, meeting big challenges like severe physical pain, we are well-prepared. Letting go of the anger, resistance and self-pity that can arise when we meet the unpleasant gives great strength to the mind, and great joy.

A great master once made a comparison between dogs and lions. He said that if someone were to throw a rock at a dog, the dog would immediately attack the rock. However, if they were foolish enough to throw a rock at a lion, the lion would ignore the rock and attack the thrower.

When encountering an upsetting situation most peoples minds react like the dog: they immediately become obsessed by whatever arises in their mind at that moment – be it fear, anger or confusion. Meditators, however, are like lions.

They are able to see beyond the immediate impact and understand the context and the causes and conditions of the problem; then they are able to deal with it wisely.

On one occasion a brahmin went to see the Buddha and abused him with rude, harsh words. When he had finished speaking, the Buddha asked the brahmin whether friends and relatives ever came to visit him at his house. He replied that they did. The Buddha then asked if he had food prepared for his guests and the brahmin replied that he did. And then the Buddha asked:

"If they don't accept the food from you, then to whom does it belong?"

"Then it still belongs to me"

"So too, brahmin, I do not abuse anybody, do not scold anyone, do not condemn anyone. I refuse to accept from you the abuse and the scolding and the condemnation you have given me today. It still belongs to you, brahmin."

We cannot prevent people offering us abuse. But we can refuse to accept it by remaining calm and not getting drawn into their anger, or returning their abuse.

In the mid-1970s, before I became a monk, I spent a year in India. Many of the Westerners I met there were interested in hallucinogenic drugs as a means to realize higher states of consciousness. For many years, a German Buddhist teacher, Lama Govinda, lived in the Himalayas, near Almora. One day, a Western traveller asked him:

"What do you think about mind-expanding drugs?"

Lama Govinda gave a brilliant reply

"If your mind is ignorant, the only result will be expanded ignorance".

Buddhism is not about gaining special states of mind. It is about finding freedom from ignorance.

Kindness impresses and inspires us when clearly revealed in the actions and speech of a kind person.

Integrity impresses and inspires us when clearly revealed in the actions and speech of a person of true integrity.

Nobility impresses and inspires us when clearly revealed in the actions and speech of a noble-hearted person.

Generosity impresses and inspires us when clearly revealed in the actions and speech of a generous and unselfish person.

Open-mindedness impresses and inspires us when clearly revealed in the actions and speech of a flexible and open-minded person.

Forbearance impresses and inspires us when clearly revealed in the actions and speech of a person of great patience and forbearance.

Tirelessness impresses and inspires us when clearly revealed in the actions and speech of a person tirelessly devoted to the welfare of all.

Humaneness impresses and inspires us when clearly revealed in the actions and speech of a humane and compassionate person.

Attentiveness impresses and inspires us when clearly revealed in the actions and speech of one constantly attentive to the needs of others.

Intelligence impresses and inspires us when clearly revealed in the actions and speech of one constantly probing the causes of progress and decline.

Sincerity impresses and inspires us when clearly revealed in the actions and speech of one who puts his whole life on the line for all that he believes in.

It can be a shock to realise how difficult it is to define common words that we have been using since we were children. For example, what exactly does the word 'good' mean?

"The word 'good' can only be understood when we have a clear idea of 'best'. The good is what takes us closer to the best. Given that every philosophy and religion has a different idea of 'best' it follows that although they all use the word 'good' they do not necessarily refer to the same thing.

In Buddhism, the best manifests as the perfection of wisdom, compassion and purity of heart. Acting to promote wisdom, compassion and purity of heart in ourselves and in others is our understanding of goodness.

The Buddha taught us to be both content and discontent. He taught us to be content with the amount and quality of material possessions that best support our practice of Dhamma. We should not allow the accumulation of wealth to distract us from our spiritual goals.

At the same time, the Buddha taught us to feel discontent with regard to the virtuous qualities that we have developed. We should remember that none of them are fixed in our mind; they can all still decline and disappear. We should keep pushing onwards in order to take full advantage of this precious human birth.

One of my father's favourite sayings was, 'If a job is worth doing, it is worth doing well.' In other words, once you have made a commitment, you should apply yourself to it to the best of your ability, not in a shoddy, half-hearted manner.

In my own life, I have discovered another truth: 'If a job is worth doing, it is worth doing badly.' In other words, don't avoid doing things worth doing simply because you won't be able to do them very well at first. Be willing and humble enough to start doing something badly and learn from your mistakes. Don't worry about making a fool of yourself. One of the reasons I learnt the Thai language so quickly was that I didn't mind when people laughed at my mistakes.

When we look closely at the defilements that we are still unable to abandon, we find that there is always something about them that we enjoy and don't want to let go of.

It is only when we recognise the pleasurable sensations and sense of self that defilements give us, and are willing to renounce them, that inner freedom can be experienced.

Ajahn Jayasaro

Born in England in 1958.

Ajahn Jayasaro joined Ajahn Sumedho's community for the Rains Retreat as an anagarika in 1978.

In November 1980 he ordained as a Buddhist monk at Wat Nong Pah Pong, Ubon Ratchathani Province, Thailand with **Venerable Ajahn Chah** as his preceptor.

From 1997 until 2002 Ajahn Jayasaro was the Abbot of Wat Pah Nanachat.

He is now living alone in a hermitage at the foot of Kow Yai mountains in the northeast and offers dhamma teachings at Bahn Boon, Rai Thawsi on a regular basis.

Panyaprateep Foundation

Panyaprateep Foundation is a non-profit organization set up in 2008 by the founders, administrators, teachers and friends of Thawsi Buddhist Wisdom School community in Bangkok. On the 1st April 2008 it was officially registered by the Ministry of Interior with Registration Number of Kor Thor 1405. Since 2009 Panyaprateep Foundation has been instrumental in the establishment and support of Panyaprateep Buddhist Wisdom Boarding School, which is situated in the district of Pak Chong, Nakhon Ratchasima.

Objectives of Panyaprateep Foundation

1) To support the development of Buddhist education based on the Buddhist principle of the integrated Three-Fold Training of conduct, emotional well-being and wisdom *(sīla samādhi and paññā)*.

2) To propagate Buddhist wisdom and developmental principles through organization of retreat programs, training workshops and through the dissemination of Dhamma media such as books, and through other social media.

3) To create understanding of humanity's relationship to the natural world, to promote eco-friendly learning activities, and renewable energy for sustainable development, and a way of life based on His Majesty King Bhumibol Ajdulyadej's Philosophy of Sufficiency Economy.

Organizational Structure of Panyaprateep Foundation

Members of the Executive Committee

Phra Ajahn Jayasaro	Chairman of the Advisory Board
Assoc. Prof. Prida Tasanapradit, M.D.	Chairman of Committee
Dr.Witit Rachatatanun	Vice Chairman
Mrs. Srivara Issara	Member
Mrs. Busarin Ransewa	Member
Ms. Patchana Mahapan	Member
Ms. Apapatra Chaiprasit	Member
Ms. Lawan Sapapyart	Member
Ms. Siriporn Leabchant	Member
Mrs. Lertluk Thamawuit	Member
Mrs. Jurarat Intharamaha	Member
Mr. Wichet Phothiwisutwathee	Member
Mrs. Pakkawadee Svasti Xuto	Member and Treasurer
Mrs. Bupaswat Rachatatanun	Member and Secretary General

The Chief Spiritual Advisor of the Foundation is Venerable Ajahn Jayasaro, a monk disciple of Ajahn Chah of the Thai Forest Tradition, and leading figure in the Buddhist education movement. The Foundation is also honoured to have Assoc. Prof. Prida Tasanapradit, M.D. as Chairman of the Executive Committee. Furthermore, the Foundation has sought and received the kind blessing and pledges of support from a number of distinguished experts in diverse fields to help as advisors.

To date the Foundation has supported the consistent growth of Panyaprateep School to serve as a prototype of Buddhist wisdom education and to share the learning experiences with society at large. Furthermore, dhamma books In Thai and English are published for free distribution with support of the Foundation.