Spiritual Tips *for* Meditators

Luangpor Khamkhian Suvanno
Phra Paisal Visalo

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Preface

Human is not born to suffer only. Though suffering is inherent in every being, each of us has potential to be free from suffering. Aging, sickness, bereavement, dissatisfaction, and death cannot inflict suffering to us if we realize the true nature of reality.

Life reveals to us the true nature of reality every moment. But we are always indifferent to it since we never spare time watching our mind at all. Life gives us tremendous amount of time whereas nature gives us the tool to monitor our mind. Unfortunately, we never make the best use of what we possess.

However, suffering that always torments our mind keeps urging us to find the way out of it. After repeated failures, we will realize that the key to freedom from suffering, Sati – Panna (mindfulness and wisdom), is already inherent in our mind; it cannot be found through prosperity, fame, or power.

Sati is a tool for inspecting the mind; panna enables us to realize the truth. Mindfulness and wisdom are capable of elevating us from suffering. The only requirement is: We have to spare time and take effort in developing mindfulness and wisdom.

Mindfulness meditation is the essential way to develop our capacity toward freedom from suffering, where aging, sickness and death no longer do harm to us. This way was delivered by the Buddha to human beings for more than 2,500 years. Though arcane, it is timeless and universal, suitable for every era and everyone, regardless of nation, religion and culture.

This book is the collection of lectures by both of us, addressed to American audience at Chuang Yen Monastery during June and July last year, with the cordial invitation of the Buddhist Association of the United States. We are grateful to the Buddhist Association of the United States and Chuang Yen Monastery for rendering us opportunity to lead meditation courses in the United States and meet a lot of committed practitioners.

Our special thanks go to Dwight Chien who coordinated this project and never failed to keep us comfortable during the two months of our stay in New York. We also benefited a lot from supports of many people especially monks and nuns in Chuang Yen Monastery and Yen Ming, to name but a few, to whose generosity we are grateful.

During the process of publishing this book, a lot of contributions have been made by Susan Chen, Nancy Steckel, Richard Baska, and Emily Chiang; we would like to thank all of them.

Luangpor Khamkhian Suvanno

Phra Paisal Visalo

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Biography of
Luangpor Khamkhian Suvanno
& Phra Paisal Visalo

Luangpor Khamkhian, the disciple of Luangpor Teean who was the founder of Sati Meditation, has been a monk for more than thirty years, and practiced Sati Meditation before becoming a monk. The temple he is staying now is a forest monastery. There are three monasteries in the same area that Luangpor takes care of. He established meditation centers there twenty years ago. Since that area was poor and is still poor today, he not only teaches meditation but also encourages community development, helping people there. During the past five years, he has tried to emphasize the meditation aspect of activities. He gives Dhamma talks and meditation instructions not only in the regional temples but also around the country. In fact, he is one of the most sought after masters.

He was here teaching Sati Meditation three years ago; this is the second time that he has come back to teach meditation. As for me, I have never been to the United States, and have been studying Sati Meditation for fourteen years, since the beginning of my monkhood. I am now the abbot of one of Luangpor's temples.

Phra Paisal Visalo

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SPIRITUAL TIPS FOR MEDITATORS

Part ONE

By
Luangpor Khamkhian Suvanno

The Path of Mindfulness

Now I am going to teach you the way to meditate. Please relax and feel comfortable because what I am going to teach you is based on something you already have in your mind. The teaching that I am going to instruct you in is based on something which is real and genuine, the truth. And the truth cannot be deceived. It cannot be deceived by neither the master nor the students. The master cannot deceive the student and the student cannot deceive the master once either of them has realized or understands the truth. This is a technique that can be understood by everybody.

All of us have mind and body. We also have mindfulness. Mindfulness is a quality of mind that we can cultivate and develop, but it is already in our minds. Once we are mindful or once we are awaken to mindfulness, all of us are the same; but if we do not have mindfulness or if we are not mindful, we are different.

Meditating, especially developing mindfulness, does not require special time designated specifically for this technique. It can be practiced all the time in our daily lives. It dose not demand special time, mainly because

mindfulness is already in our minds. It can be developed through our daily activities. If we practice properly, we will feel that our lives are normal.

We cannot practice for others but have to practice for ourselves. We cannot learn from others but have to learn from direct experience. We have to learn by realizing the truth in our minds. The meditation cannot be achieved from memorizing texts or reading books. We have to experience the reality in ourselves. For example, when we think, we have to see, observe, and experience the reality of thoughts, how they arise and how they fade away. These can be learned through direct experience, not through reading books or memorizing texts. What I am trying to convey is what I have realized from direct experience, not from analytical thoughts or knowledge of texts. This realization is based on direct experience that everybody can achieve or realize for himself.

When we practice, we practice on what we already have. We have body and mind. We practice by using our body as an object, our body's movement. When our body moves, when our hand moves, we should just be aware. The hand is real, the body is real, and our awareness of them is real and can be cultivated. The more we practice, the more awareness we accumulate. This way of practicing asks us to accumulate awareness until it becomes the dominant quality of our minds. Once everybody has total awareness, everybody will be the same, the same in the sense that their lives are normal. But if we do not have awareness, we behave differently out of hatred, greed, and delusion, which disrupts our lives so that we contradict each other, preventing harmony and creating disunity. So, the point is how to cultivate awareness. The key to Buddhist meditation is cultivating awareness and I am going to instruct you how. Once we understand and practice by ourselves, we will know ourselves better and live our lives properly. Now I will demonstrate.

Everybody, please place your palms on your thighs, sit comfortably, and open your eyes. First turn your right hand onto its edge from your thigh, raise it to the height of your chest, and move it to your abdomen. Turn your left hand from your thigh, raise it to height of your chest, and move it to your abdomen. Move your right hand to your chest, move it out, lower it to your thigh, and turn it down. Raise your left hand to your chest, turn it out, lower it, and turn it down. Again, ….

Please try to be aware of every movement, aware, not focused. Feel, feel the sensation of your body. Just make it natural. Just feel it. That is the way to develop awareness naturally. Sometimes thoughts will sneak into our minds; just open yourself up to them but don't follow them. Once we are aware of our thoughts, we return to our body, to the movement of our hands. This method does not encourage one to stop thinking but just to be aware of it. In fact, we cannot stop thinking because it is the nature of our mind to think. We should be open to all kinds of thoughts, but do not follow them or repress them. Just be aware. With awareness, we will be firm and not react to our minds, either positively or negatively.

This is the introduction. I would like you to try, to practice, to feel yourselves and see how it affects your mind. When you place your hand on your thigh, do you know where your hand is? Once you know where your hand is, you have already cultivated knowingness, that is to know, to feel where your hand is. And the practice of mindfulness is based on this awareness. When you turn your hand on your thigh, do you know the position of your hand? You know where your hand is, right? Raise your hand. Is it on your thigh? Where is it? Who knows the position of your hand? You or other people? Can anybody know for you? Is it only you that can be aware of where your hand is? Know, know, know, be aware, be aware, be aware, ….

Do not force your mind to focus or concentrate on every minute of your movements; just feel every step intervally, and don't focus your mind to feel like a straight line of feeling. That's not the right way. The only thing you have to do is be aware. Don't analyze or try to reason what you are going to do or why you are having such thoughts. Don't analyze or rationalize any of your thoughts. Do not make judgments, whether this thought is good or not, just be open to it, be aware of it, with no blame, no repression, and no stopping, just be receptive to the thoughts. This will enable awareness to develop quickly.

Keep practicing, keep doing, and keep being aware of your body's movement. It does not need to be the movement of your hand but can be the movement of your breath. When you breathe in and breathe out, these are also your body's movements. When you walk, try to be aware of your walk. Be aware of whatever your movement is. Be aware of every position, and whatever you do try to be aware of only one posture. When you walk, just be aware of your walking; do not be aware of your breath. But if you want to be aware of your breath, that's okay as long as you choose only one object. Do not use too many objects or they will confuse you. The point is that whatever thoughts arise, just be aware, and come back to your body's movement. Do not be caught up in your thinking process or your thoughts. If you feel tired or tense after sitting for a longtime, change your posture. While you change your posture, please be mindful; don't change it hastily out of impulse or out of unmindful ness.

During your walking meditation, you can either fold your arms across your chest or clasp your hands behind your back. Keep your hands properly; it will enable you to walk slowly with mindfulness. About eight to twelve paces of walking will do for the meditation. Do not walk for too long a length or your mind will be easily distracted. If you walk at my speed, in one hour you will walk four thousand paces. If you know every pace, you already have four

thousand units of knowingness in one hour. It will accumulate and can change the quality of your mind. Anyway, if you become distracted or you forget and become unmindful when you walk or move your hands, that's okay. Do not blame yourself or feel unhappy when this happens. Just let it go and start again. When a thought disturbs your mind, let it be. Do not try to repress or suppress it. Just feel open to it. It will fade away automatically. This is the nature of the mind that we can realize through meditation.

Now, let's try to experience it ourselves. After practicing for an hour, you may come back and we will have a question and answer session for thirty minutes.

How was your practice? When you felt distracted or caught up in your mind, did you see the difference between them? Did you realize when you were caught up in your thoughts? Did you see the difference when you came back to your body's movement or became aware of the movement of your hands or walking? Once you did that, did you see that the thoughts just ceased or passed away?

When you are caught up in your thoughts or overwhelmed by emotions, you may forget to move your hand or you may move it but have no full awareness of your body. That's okay, but try to return to your hand's movement or to your walk. Once you are aware of your body's movement, you are already a practitioner. A Dhamma practitioner develops awareness; this is the only duty of the practitioner.

The same goes for feeling. If you feel tense, physical pain, or tired, do not be overwhelmed by the unpleasant feelings. Just come back to your body's movement or just be aware and see the painful feelings. In other words, don't become lost, caught up in or overwhelmed by these unpleasant feelings, but be aware. Awareness will enable your mind and your life to go ahead without being

interrupted by thoughts or feelings or any kind of disturbance. Thoughts will arise, feelings will disturb you, but if you have total awareness, you can go ahead without being stopped or blocked by these hindrance. You will go ahead; go straight ahead.

For beginners, just cultivating awareness is enough. Do not try to achieve or gain anything. Do not expect any realization, any insight, or wisdom from the practice. Just awareness is enough for you at the present stage and it will enable you to go ahead without any problems or difficulties. For the beginners, you may not sit longer if you wish, and the awareness may develop slowly, not smoothly. That's okay. Just try to keep practicing, and this will enable mindfulness or awareness to develop. Do not feel bad when you feel you are caught up in your thoughts or in pleasant or unpleasant feelings, or you become forgetful of the practice. That's okay. Do not blame yourself. Do not feel depressed. Just come back to the practice; come back to be aware of your body's movement.

When you keep practice, you keep accumulating awareness. You will begin to see, to realize, the nature of your mind. You will see that thought are one thing and mindfulness is another. The thoughts or feelings are not you, not yours, not me, nor mine. Previously, you may have thought that the thoughts are your thoughts, but in fact, they are not your thoughts. The thoughts are just there, but they are not yours. And this you can see, because of mindfulness. Mindfulness will separate you from the thought so you can observe the thought without being identified with it or take it to be you or yours.

In the sutra, the Buddha advises us to contemplate, to be aware of body, feelings, and mind or the thoughts. These three aspects - - body, feeling, and thoughts - - are already with us; they are not something outside of us. We can use them for our spiritual well being. In the past, when we wanted to stand up, we stood up instantly out of habit.

But if we practice and develop mindfulness, before standing up, we will be aware of the desire to stand up. Thus we will stand up mindfully. We can apply this approach or this attitude to whatever activity we do, and our lives will be on the path to mindfulness.

Meditation's priority is to develop awareness first. It is the crucial factor that needs to be developed during the practice. This is important because we are already good at analytical thinking. But we have to practice another quality of the mind, awareness. It will lead us to a realization through direct experience that cannot be achieved through thoughts or the analytical mind.

Any questions? If you want to ask, please ask based upon the experience that you have already had from your practice in the past few hours, do not ask through the analytical mind.

Q: The mind that gives rise to thought, the mind that's mindful, and the mind that is aware, are these minds the same?

A: Practically speaking, you can see the three. You can see the scattered thoughts, or you can observe the mind. This can happen when you are aware of your body. When you are aware of your body and a thought arises, your mindfulness will come and watch and be aware of your thoughts. You can see the difference; differentiate between your thoughts and mindfulness or awareness. Without being aware of your body's movement first, it is difficult to see the difference between your thoughts and your mind.

Q: When you observe a thought, is the thought in the past?

A: Once you are aware of a random thought, it is in the past; but if you are not aware of it, it is the present. The random or unintentional thought is the kamma, a kind of action, a mental action that can lead to other consequences, either good or bad. If you become aware of it, awareness will halt that mental action, thus getting rid of whatever consequences that might have happened.

Q: Is this practice of using your body as a meditative object for the training of Samadhi?

A: The awareness can lead to calmness; if you are caught up in or dwell on the calmness that is the Samatha, calmness meditation. But if you lift your mind from the calmness and observe the calmness, then it is insight meditation. So it depends on how you deal with calmness. If you dwell in the calmness, it is a calmness meditation; if you observe the calmness, it will lead to insight meditation.

Q: Is this awareness the same as the Buddha's?

A: The awareness mentioned above is the same as the quality of Buddhahood. It will lead to total insight. This kind of practice also includes the *Three Fold Training* - - morality, concentration, and wisdom.

Q: Do you mean that awareness includes *Three Fold Training*?

A: The *Three Fold Training* is not awareness itself, but is based on awareness. You cannot keep precepts without awareness. Awareness will enable you to keep the precepts, *Sila*. And awareness will enable you to develop concentration, *Samadhi*, and to gain insight, *Panna*. We need not waste time developing *Sila*, *Samadhi*, *Panna* by different ways, but go directly to develop awareness, then *Sila*, *Samadhi*, *Panna* will take place. According to the Buddhist Canon, the Buddha said, "Self - awareness is the origin of wisdom, the parent, the source of righteousness.

But unknowingness or unawareness is the source or the parent of all evils."

Q: Nowadays, young children seem to be practicing awareness all the time. Even we, when we are exposed to something new, seem to be more aware. It seems as if we come to this world practicing awareness, then we start thinking, thinking, thinking, then we have the same thoughts over and over and that turns off our awareness. Why is this happening?

A: It is because we have eyes, nose, ears, mouth, and body, the five sensual bases, and mind, the sixth base, to understand the world. We use these six bases to have contact with the world, and this leads us to a lot of concocted mind. We think a lot because we have a lot of contact with the outside world. That's why our minds become busy and keep thinking all the time. We ignore another quality of the mind, awareness. That's why we have to come back again, because we have ignored it for such a long time. We have occupied ourselves with thinking because of our contact with the outside world through the five sensual bases. Awareness will liberate us from all unpleasant events and unfetter our minds. It will liberate us from all hindrances and fetters. I can assure you that awareness will rescue our lives. Regardless of nationality or race, we can be united. Regardless of our differences, we have one thing in common -- awareness. Awareness is in every person. So, I would like to encourage you to develop awareness so that we will go beyond nationality and race.

After the practice, do you feel that you can get in touch with awareness, the awareness in your mind? It is an quality inherent in you that leads you to get in touch with it.

Q: It's very hard to slow my mind down.

A: We are not going to stop the thinking process; we are not going to fight it. If you fight it, you are going to be tired, because it is very difficult. Just to be aware of it, just observe it, and it will pass away on its own. Do not try to get rid of it, if you try to get rid of it, you will feel exhausted.

Sometimes you may find your mind was more scattered during the practice than during your normal daily life. The more you practice, the more your mind is scattered. Sometimes this happens to practitioners, but that's normal. Just be aware of it and ignore it, and try to be aware of your body's movement. The more you keep coming back, the more awareness will accumulate. Just keep coming back. Do not try to fight your thoughts.

June 1, 1997

Cultivating Awareness

The Buddha said that there are five hindrances to meditation, the first is drowsiness, the second is agitation or restlessness, the third is doubt, the fourth is sensual desire, and the last is ill will, hatred, or irritation. Doubt means that one feels uncertain whether the practice is right or wrong so he just stays on the edge and cannot commit himself to any kind of practice.

You may encounter any of the five hindrances. That's all right; it's even beneficial. Try to observe the hindrance rather than following it or being overwhelmed by it. To observe is to keep your mind from identifying with these five hindrances. For example, when you feel sleepy, instead of lying down and following the drowsiness, just try to observe it and the awareness will lift your mind from being drowsy; thus you can learn how to interact with restlessness, or with agitation. They are not bad. They can teach. Yet, there are people who, with total awareness in their minds, can go straight through their practice without being caught up in or dwelling on the five hindrances.

Awareness not only helps us overcome the five hindrances but will also lead us beyond delusion to insight,

or wisdom. When one is unmindful, unaware, or becomes caught up in one's thoughts, one cannot see things clearly and is overwhelmed by delusion. Yet once one becomes aware or free from the five hindrances, one can go further to experience insight. Because one accumulates awareness all the time and awareness enables one to see things as they are, not distorted by bias or scattered thoughts, so that one can achieve insight.

The insight that can be experienced from this method of meditation is the insight into the body and mind. You can see that the sense of us or me, in fact, is only the combination of body and mind. You will understand the nature of *Rupa*, the form or body, and *Nama*, the mind. You will see how they interact with each other. With this insight you will have a clear understanding that goes beyond the concept of me and mine, just body and mind, not the sense of self. With the insight into body and mind, you will know and be able to differentiate between thoughts and awareness. So far, you cannot differentiate between these two because they come together, but if you have insight from awareness, the thoughts and the one who thinks or observes can be differentiated.

Such realization or such direct experience, is what we call wisdom, because it liberates us from hindrances and suffering. It is wisdom and at the same time it is Magga - - the path. It is both the path and the end, the wisdom. If you practice properly, you will see that at the beginning it is mindfulness, in the middle it is mindfulness, and at the end it is also mindfulness. It is both means and end, path and wisdom.

What I just said is quite ahead of you. It is a state that you may not have experienced yet but I wanted to inform you of what you are going to realize if you practice properly and continuously. Please try to concern yourselves with what you are practicing now. Just be aware, and once you keep practicing, results will come on their own without

any attempt on your part. Therefore, put your effort into the practice.

Awareness from this practice will get rid of delusion. The more you are aware, the less you are unaware. Unawareness is identical to delusion or ignorance. If you accumulate awareness through this method, it will form a solid base for keeping moral precepts, for concentration, and for wisdom. You will live your life morally once you have full awareness; at the same time, you will also have calmness or concentration once you are fully aware of what you are doing; meanwhile, insight can take place with awareness. Thus, awareness can lead us to the totality of life, the totality of education or training.

Awareness or mindfulness enables us to awaken. An enlightened one is one who has total awareness, total mindfulness. Buddha said many times that the Arahant, the enlightened one, is one who has full mindfulness and awareness in every moment of his life. His experience is like traveling in a freeway on which he can move ahead without any obstructions. Mindfulness is like this; you are not caught up in any thoughts, but move straight ahead in your life.

You can learn a lot from this practice. You can understand a lot of things in Luangpor Teean's mind. It is as if your life is the texts; your practice is the texts and you can gain a lot of knowledge from it. Your experience is the source of knowledge that will enrich you. I would like to persuade you to see for yourself. Try to see it, experience it, and it is within your capability to understand it. I would like to encourage you to learn more and more from the practice. This is not some kind of propaganda or an advertisement, but just an encouragement.

Practice like this is sort of forming a new habit, a new habit of awareness. Right now, we have the habit of unawareness, of doing things out of habit without

awareness; but if we accumulate awareness, a new habit will be formed and whatever we do, after we practice properly, we will be aware of our daily movements. But if we do not practice we will easily fall back to delusion, to our forgetful habits. So, please try to accumulate awareness and try to be mindful.

Another point that I would like to emphasize is that awareness is not a quality confined to myself or monopolized by anyone. It's a quality inherent in all of you. You are all capable of increasing and developing your mindfulness, not only in this room but also in your daily lives. That's all I would like to share with you. The only thing you should do is to realize it yourselves. What I talked about is not for you to memorize but for you to experience yourselves through practice. Both of us will stay here for more than a month. Should you have any problems, please come and talk with us.

Q: Awareness is not limited to our hand's movements only, right? Can it be expanded to things like scratching itches?

A: That's right. Whatever you do, whether coarse or subtle, breathing or swallowing saliva, or even when you just raise your hand to get something, be mindful. Just be aware of whatever you are doing. That's the proper way to practice.

Q: If one moves without awareness, is that ignorance?

A: Yes, that is a kind of ignorance. There are many kinds of ignorance. The most fundamental ignorance is of the things that cause suffering to you, whatever kind of thoughts or understanding that troubles you or creates suffering for you.

Q: The Buddha's awareness is the same awareness that we are talking about except his awareness is continuous, right?

A: Yes, it is the same, but the awareness of the Buddha is not only continuous but is also awareness in its totality, awareness that replaces ignorance to the extent that there is no residual of ignorance left. But for us, we still have ignorance, our awareness still broken.

Q: What is the difference between the awareness of Sotapanna, Sakidagami, Anagami, and Arahant?

A: The awareness of these four enlightened beings are different in terms of degree and also in terms of quality. The first stage of enlightened being, Sotapanna, has awareness that can get rid of the strong sense of self and uncertainty. The second stage of enlightened one, Sakidagami, can eradicate sensual desire and repulsion almost completely. For the Anagami, sensual desire and repulsion are eliminated completely. It is the different degrees of awareness that leads to different qualities. It is as though we are climbing up a ladder. In the first stage of enlightenment the awareness is less powerful than that of the Arahant or the last stage of enlightenment.

For example, when we get angry at something, we will think about it over and over again. But for the enlightened one, especially the third one - - Anagami, once anger occurs, it just happens and he can let go of it. It just occurs one time and then he goes beyond the anger. Anger is eradicated by total awareness, or wisdom. It's like a heated iron; once we touch it, we should feel the heat and never touch it again. For the enlightened one, anger is like a hot iron; once he touches it, he is aware of the heat from his anger and will never return to and identify with it again. But ordinary people, not aware that anger is like a heated

iron, just touch it over and over again without realizing that it is very harmful.

The awareness that I mentioned is the awareness that can enable us to see no-self in the body, no-self in feelings, no-self in emotions, no-self in thoughts. It is the awareness that can liberate us from suffering. Please do not just accept what I told you; see it for yourselves and practice until you can know it for yourselves. Then nobody can deceive you; nobody can mislead you, because you have already experienced it. What we should do is pay respect to the Dhamma, the highest refuge. You should not pay highest respect to me or to anybody else but to the Dhamma that is already in everybody. Please pay respect to the Dhamma in ourselves. Be aware at every moment. When you go home, try to maintain your awareness at all times.

June 1, 1997

Knowing Yourself

As I told you earlier, all of us are friends even thought we have just met here because we have been friends since our birth into this world. In Buddhism, “friend” has a broad meaning. All of us are friends because we are sentient beings. We all share the cyclic existence; all of us share birth, decay, aging, and, finally death as human beings. That is why we are all friends.

Another thing that we have in common is that each of us has body and mind. Each of us has common characteristics. We all have six senses fields, we all have feelings, we all have emotions, and all of our mental activities and our physical bodies are subject to the same characteristics - - impermanence, suffering, and no real self, no permanent self. These are the three common characteristics that all of us share.

But there is something that makes us different from each other. That is our mental formations. We have different ideas, we have different opinions, we respond to our surroundings in different ways. It is our mental formations that makes us different from each other.

However, these mental formations can be transformed, making us one, the same as a person.

Previously, I said to many of us here that, despite our different characteristics, although there are various kinds of people, we can be the same if we have mindfulness. If mindfulness prevails in our lives, we will be the same, but it will be different if unawareness or unmindfulness prevail because they make us behave differently and perversely.

Anyway, I would like everyone here to feel comfortable when you are listening to Dhamma. You should feel comfortable because I am going to speak about what you already have: mindfulness, calmness, clear comprehension, and self awareness. All of these qualities are already present in your mind. I would like to take this opportunity to share my experience of how to be one with the Dhamma, to apply and integrate Dhamma, or the truth, into our lives.

Three years ago, when I first came here, a Western student asked me, “What brings you here? What do you know? What knowledge do you bring with yourself?” I replied that the only knowledge that I have is knowledge of myself, “I just know myself.” So, he asked, “What do you mean by knowing yourself?” Instead of giving him the answer, I demonstrated by turning my hand on my thigh and resting it there. Then I asked, “Have you ever been aware of yourself while you rest your hand continuously for seven days? Have you ever had that experience of knowing yourself, of being aware of yourself for seven days?” He said, “No, I cannot do that; I do not have such experience.” So I persuaded him to try cultivating awareness with the practice of raising the hand, *Dynamic* or *Sati Meditation*. Later, he had a glimpse of awareness, of knowing himself. Can you follow me? Am I difficult to understand? After practicing like this for one or two hours, the Western student came to see me and shook my hand, saying, “Oh!

You are the one that I have been longing to find for many years."

Knowing yourself is necessary because if you do not know yourself you will be overcome by grief, selfishness, anxiety, ill-will, and irritation. But once you are aware of yourself, you will be free from these sufferings. What we should learn and cultivate is the experience or state of mind that can liberate us from suffering so that we can live without suffering. This is what I try to learn. I do not know how to make money or how to increase my pride; I do not search for honor or seek admiration. What I try to learn is the way out of suffering.

The experience I mentioned is what we call Dhamma, or the truth. It is the truth that frees us from pain or affliction. It is the Dhamma that leads us to enlightenment, to be totally awakened. The truth, or Dhamma, is what makes one a Buddha. It is an experience can be shared not only by monks, but by every one. This insight into nature brings us all into the oneness, to be the same.

What I tell you is not speculation, but from experience developed by following the path of the Buddha. It is what the Buddha has already said. It is the outcome of the practice that the Buddha developed, "The Four Foundations of Mindfulness." That is, to be mindful of body, of feelings, of mental formations, thoughts or emotions, and of all existence in nature.

Q: Can people who have jobs that require a lot of concentration, such as scientists, maintain awareness while concentrating on what they are doing?

A: It is possible to have both concentration at work and awareness of what we are doing. In fact,

concentration and awareness should go together. You cannot concentrate if you are not aware of your thoughts or of distractions. Once we are mindful, once we are aware of the distractions, we can concentrate because we are able to remove the distractions. Not only does mindfulness help us to concentrate on what we are doing, it also helps us to use our intelligence more effectively.

Mindfulness is like the master who tells how to use our intelligence properly. If you do not have mindfulness, or if your mindfulness is very weak, it is not easy to use the intelligence and information that you already have in a beneficial way. Mindfulness is like the software that tells us how to retrieve the information for this purpose. In Thailand, we compare mindfulness to the captain who controls and guides the ship and intelligence to the engine. So the captain controls the engine in the same way that mindfulness controls intelligence to make the most use of it. So the answer to your question is two fold: Mindfulness and awareness are both important, they enable us to concentrate and to use our heads, or our intelligence, properly in a beneficial way.

Q: When I have a lot of problems, I seem to lose awareness of my body. Is that okay?

A: It is normal that at that moment you cannot be aware of your body, but you still have to be aware of the thoughts in your mind. It is okay, because awareness means being aware of both your mind and your body. For those who have to think, it is at that moment that they should be aware of their thoughts but it is not necessary to be aware of their bodies.

Q: When I am reading, I am not aware of anything else. Is that also a form of meditation?

A: Yes, it is a form of meditation if you hear the noises around you but do not pay attention. If you

concentrate on reading, but are aware once you feel something strange outside and you can turn your attention from your reading to the outside, it is a form of meditation. But, if you concentrate and try to cut yourself off from your surroundings, then, it is not mindfulness meditation.

Q: Are mindfulness and awareness the same thing?

A: Technically speaking, they are not the same but work together very closely. Mindfulness means Sati in Pali. Awareness means Sampajjanna. But Sati and Sampajjanna are very close; they are twins. In Thailand we call both Sati and Sampajjanna mindfulness. Practically, they are synonyms but technically, they are different.

Q: Can you explain the difference?

A: Sati, or mindfulness, means recollection or calling to mind. Awareness means you know clearly what is going on in your body and mind. They have to be together. Once you collect your mind on some particular moment or movement, you already have the clarity of that movement and of yourself. They go together. Awareness is the consequence of mindfulness.

Mindfulness and awareness are the crown, or the peak, of all Dhamma, or all teachings. If we are mindful, if we are aware of ourselves, it is not possible for us to break morality, or Sila. Once we are mindful, we are free from distraction, and concentration arises. This is Samadhi. With awareness, our minds become clear; with such clarity, insight will arise. This is Panna. These three are the totality of Buddhist teaching. We call it the Three Fold Training - - training in higher morality, in higher concentration, and in higher wisdom. That is why mindfulness and awareness are called the crown of the Buddha's teachings. It is the teaching as a whole. With mindfulness and awareness, Samatha and Vipassana are

possible. Samatha means calmness meditation; Vipassana means insight meditation. These two types of meditation are possible with mindfulness and awareness.

Q: The atmosphere was so dynamic, going from one thing to another, acquiring one thing and then another, another,…. It is desire; get, get, get, achieve, achieve, achieve…., I had to leave. I found I was more centered when I reached home than I was at the monastery. Yet, the monastery is based on experience and wisdom and it is this atmosphere the Buddha wants. I cannot explain why this is valid. I came two years ago to Chung Yen. There was the lake and the little pagoda but no statues, and today I come here and find size and quantity, I find a disturbance that was not here before. I am having a hard time placing myself in a peaceful relation to these. Can you comment on this?

A: There are four aspects of Buddhism. The first is the teaching or state of mind that can be realized through the practice. Second is the tradition, customs, conventions, or rituals. Third is the material aspects, like buildings, temples, halls. The fourth aspect is the personnel, monks, nuns, laypersons. I try to emphasize the first aspect of Buddhism, that is the teaching or the experience that can be realized through the teaching. We should concentrate on this aspect. Do not pay much attention to the rest, the rituals, the buildings, or the personnel. If we focus on the teachings and the experience that can be developed from the practice, we will realize ourselves. So, I suggest you do not pay too much attention to the other three aspects or they will disturb your mind.

It also happens in Thailand. There is much contradiction between teaching and practice, between the teachings and the monks themselves. Sometimes monks behave themselves badly, but this does not mean that you should ignore the Dhamma, the teachings. We have to separate the teachings and the personnel, the buildings,

and the rituals. Sometimes the rituals contradict the teachings. Sometime, monks are self centered, practicing meditation without concern for the world. If we engage ourselves in these kinds of arguments we cannot find peace. So, just keep practicing and try to put the teachings into practice.

This does not mean that if one individual practices properly the rest will follow. No, I only suggest that we start with ourselves. If we expect other people to start, if we expect other people will start without beginning with ourselves, then nothing will happen. Let us start with ourselves and then pay attention to the rest.

I would like to share my experiences of when I was a young monk, just a beginner, starting to practice Sati Meditation thirty years ago. The other monks, my friends, were not serious about the practice. They preferred chatting all the time, and many monks tried to engage me in their conversation. Many things around me were quite irritating, quite annoying. But I decided that I would not pay attention to my surroundings. I behaved myself properly and paid attention only to myself. If I engaged with my surroundings, with my fellow monks, I would not progress in the practice. So I just tried to concentrate on myself and ignore whatever was happening in the monastery. I started with myself first to make progress.

But the most important hindrance is internal disturbances, not external ones. Previously, prior to coming to practice this method of meditation, I had practiced the calmness meditation, using my breath as the object of meditation to bring me calmness, a kind of trance and absorption. But when I started practicing Sati Meditation thirty years ago, I doubted this method because it never gave me calmness. I was not sure whether I should pursue this method or not. There was a kind of irritation, annoyance, and uncertainty in my mind which kept me from practicing Sati Meditation earnestly and this hindrance

was more serious than any external annoyances. But once I made up my mind that I would practice Sati meditation without questioning, without reasoning, just experiencing directly with mindfulness, I felt that progress in the meditation had been made. So I would like to suggest you be aware of and concerned with the internal hindrances that are more irritating than any external disturbances.

To practice meditation, we have to be prepared to face a lot of problems. Before Buddha became enlightened, there were a lot of devils, or Maras. Mara is the deity which tries to subvert or undermine enlightenment. The army of Mara tried to disturb Buddha, to persuade him to stop practicing, even threatening the Buddha. A lot of warriors, a lot of Maras, came to try to overcome the Buddha. But with the strong determination, with the earnest attempt and strong will of the Buddha, he overcame the army of the Mara. So, I would like to encourage you to be prepared, to be determined to overcome all obstacles that you might face during the practice.

Q: You talked about the internal disturbances. Could you tell the nature of them and how to control them? Can we be without any thoughts for a minute or even a second? Thoughts are what cause internal disturbances. How can you control them?

A: Try to be mindful, try to be alert and awake; don't follow or be carried away by our internal disturbances. For example, if you feel sleepy or drowsy, do not follow the drowsiness or be carried away by drowsiness. Stand up or rinse your face with water or try to be skillful. Create or invent a method that will enable you to be alert and awake. For instance, when you are sleepy, visualize the illumination of the sky, picturing a radiant sky. This will enable you to awake from drowsiness.

Drowsiness is the first hindrance, or Nivarana in Pali. Nivarana means hindrances that keep you from progressing in the path of enlightenment. Besides drowsiness there are also irritation, restlessness, sensual desire, and ill-will. These are the five hindrances that disturb you and you should be prepared to deal with them. But first of all you should realize that you are able to put an end to the hindrances. They will not haunt you permanently. With this hope you can encourage yourself to not to fall under their control.

These unwholesome qualities can be transformed. Irritation, drowsiness, restlessness, and annoyance, can be transformed by mindfulness. Drowsiness can be transformed into awakening; laziness can be transformed into diligence; irritation can be transformed into peace. It is in our capacity to do that. But if you are skillful and learn how to encounter these unwholesome qualities with mindfulness, you will realize that all of these disturbing qualities can bring us wisdom. They can be our teachers. Drowsiness can teach us to be more intelligent. Irritation can teach us to be wiser. These can be accomplished by cultivating mindfulness. Do you want to try? Tomorrow we will start a seven day retreat. I will take care of you if you would like to try, and I will not mislead you. I assure you that I will lead you down the right path.

Q: Why do you call it Sati Meditation? It is supposed to be very calm and quiet.

A: There are two kinds of meditation. Calmness meditation is one but there is another kind of meditation that asks us to pay attention to awareness. What I teach is to encourage one to pay attention to awareness of the body's movements, taking bodily movement as the object of meditation to train one to be mindful. To pay attention or be aware of whatever movement you are making, whether you are standing or walking, pay attention. You are mindful of that present movement; it is the object of meditation. It

is called Sati Meditation because it uses the body's movement as the object of meditation. It is called Sati because we do not sit in stillness, but create bodily postures as the object of meditation.

Driving can be a form of meditation. Reading is also a form of meditation if you read properly. Sewing is too, as when I try to sew my robe for nine days. Meditation is to pay attention to one thing with full awareness. Meditation is not necessarily closing your eyes and crossing your legs.

Q: You said mental awareness of bodily motions was important. What if you are aware of something around you?

A: In this practice, we are aware of our body's movement. This is the main posture, the main activity. But we are also ready to be aware of other things, either in our minds or outside in our surroundings. For example, when I am practicing, if a friend comes to ask for a needle to sew his clothes, I am ready to give him the needle while still keeping with the practice without talking to him. I just stand up and find the needle for him. After giving him the needle, I return to my practice. It means that I am ready to respond or to be aware of anything that occurs to me internally or externally. I do not cut myself off from my surroundings but am ready to hear the noises; if there is nothing special I just pay attention to my bodily movement.

Q: You are also a social worker. Do you teach Sati Meditation to the people you serve and how effective is it in helping them?

A: I teach many who are receptive to my teachings, but there are still a lot who do not practice what I try to teach because they are busy, occupied with their careers. Most of them are busy farmers with no opportunity to practice. I myself have to preserve the forest by my

temple, keeping the illegal loggers away. Sometimes I try to teach them meditation too but it is not easy.

Drug addiction is also a problem in my village. I try to recruit the young villagers who are addicted to drugs to enter the monkhood and train them for a month. They are okay when they are monks, but when they disrobe they become addicted again. I do not know how to help them. Thai villages are transforming. A lot of modern illnesses and problems are arising on the village level. Not only poverty which is the last problem. The new problems are drugs, divorce, the breakdown of the family and the rise of single parent families. These kinds of problems are spreading even in the villages. Our village is quite remote but still has such problems. Now, only the old and the children are in the villages. The young people, both men and women, have gone to the city. The village is going to break down. Community life is breaking down.

I hope that America will be the center of Buddhism in the future. Is that too optimistic? But it is possible, because the American people are intelligent and earnest in their practice of Buddhism.

Q: Can Luangpor elaborate more? Why will America be the center of Buddhism in the future?

A: American people are intelligent. They also take meditation seriously compared to the villagers. For example, in my area, the villagers have to go out to the fields really early in the morning, cutting the sugar cane, so they have no time to visit the temple. They are busy all the time. But here, many of you live far away but can still spare the time to come here to practice meditation, while my villagers living next door to the temple have never showed up.

June 8, 1997

Realizing the True Nature

This is a good opportunity for all of us here to practice in order to understand and realize the true nature of ourselves and the true nature of reality. There are a lot of people that cannot spare the time to practice here, but all of us here are committed to the practice. So, from now on, I would like to give meditation instructions.

In the time of the Buddha, we did not have a tag that says, “Silent Meditation” to refrain from conversing with others. But it is in accordance with the principle that the Buddha established that it is good for one to not see, hear, or talk while he is practicing meditation. If we have to speak, we should speak mindfully; if we have to see, we should see mindfully; if we have to hear, we should hear mindfully.

We come here to practice meditation, to cultivate mindfulness. Mindfulness is already a quality of our mind. Practicing meditation to cultivate mindfulness, we encounter a lot of obstacles, a lot of disturbances both in our minds and from the outside. So we should learn how to cope with them skillfully. For example, when you practice, you may feel pain, be tense, or tired after sitting for a long

time; you need to change your posture, changing your position from sitting to standing or walking. But before standing up, you should remind yourself to stand up mindfully. Do not stand up out of habit or stand up unconsciously, but do it mindfully, with full awareness. This is the technique that I would like to share with you.

Try to allow mindfulness to guide our behavior. When we are tired of walking and would like to sit, we should be aware of the desire to sit. The desire to sit and the awareness of it are different. With awareness, we can see our desire, our need to sit. Once we can see clearly, we are aware of our desire to sit, then we start to sit. This is how we use mindfulness to lead or guide our behavior. Do not be overwhelmed by feelings of pain, tension, or physical strain.

Try to resist our habitual tendencies, because our habitual tendencies will lead us to delusion, to forgetfulness, and to ignorance. It is tempting to abandon our practice, so we have to resist, to go against the stream of habit. For example, before the Buddha's enlightenment, he sat near a stream and was determined to practice to the end until he reached enlightenment. Since he was not sure whether he would achieve enlightenment or not, he put a plate on the stream to see whether it could go against the stream or not. If it could go against the stream that would mean he would achieve enlightenment, and he found that the plate could go against the stream. This is analogous to his determination to resist the habitual tendencies which led him to enlightenment. So, I would like you to try to follow his path, to always be aware. Be constantly aware of your body's movements. When you raise or move your hand, keep being aware of your body's movement. Do not let yourself stuck on anything else; be it high or low, pleasant or painful. Just be aware of your body's movements.

For beginners, I would like to suggest you meditate in two postures, sitting and walking, sitting and moving your hands in a rhythmic pattern. But, if you want to try to meditate with breathing and you feel that it can develop your mindfulness, that is fine. However, I would like you to practice in only two postures. Try not to use the lying posture because it is not good for mindfulness.

Also, in daily life, keep practicing mindfulness when you are changing your posture. For example, when you go to the Dinning Hall or to the toilet, be mindful in every posture, in every movement you make, whether it be in this room or outside. Avoid judging whether this is right or wrong, or keeping asking yourself, “Am I doing this correctly?” Try to avoid the sense of right or wrong. Keep practicing, simply practice. Do not be anxious. Avoid skeptical doubts. Just keep practicing and try to be aware of what you are doing. That is all. It is not too complicated.

For beginners, avoid worrying about the method, because it will obstruct your practice. Just go ahead and practice and you will learn from your experiences. Otherwise, you will keep questioning yourselves and halt your practice.

If you have questions, feel unsure, or feel doubt about the practice, come to see me; do not ask other people. Do not worry about right or wrong; do not keep asking yourself whether you are practicing right or wrong. Your direct experience will tell you. The truth will reveal itself. When you practice, you become aware of mind and body. The insight into your mind and body, the insight into the nature of mind and body, will tell you without your asking yourself whether this is right or wrong. Let the direct experience tell you.

Q: What is awareness?

A: Awareness is to be aware of the sensations of the body, to be aware of what you are doing at the present moment, whether it be eating or some particular meditation object that you choose, such as breathing. If you choose breathing as the object of meditation, you become aware of that. That is the awareness that I mentioned. Just be aware of the whole process, not the details.

Place your hand on your thigh. Are you aware of it? Right hand up. Are you aware? Just be aware that your hand is on your thigh; that is okay. Then, raise it up and move it to your abdomen. Turn up your left hand. Be aware. Raise it up and move it to your abdomen. Move your right hand to your chest. Turn it out and lower it to your thigh, and turn it down. Raise your left hand to your chest; turn it out; lower it; turn it down. Again…. Are you really aware of the movement of your hand? Do you just think that you are aware or do you really experience the awareness? Now, pay attention to your breathing; inhale, exhale, …. Can you feel the sensation at the tip of your nose or at your abdomen?

Q: Can one observes the tip of his nose and abdomen at the same time?

A: You have to choose.

How is your awareness? It dose not matter what object you are going to be aware of. You can move or shake your fingers and use them as the object of your awareness. It is the same awareness. You can apply it to other positions or other postures, try whatever gives you clear awareness.

Sometimes you may feel doubts, and the awareness is not clear after practicing for a length of time. You may need to change your posture, to raise your hand,

to touch your body, or to breathe, changing your object of meditation to breathing. Just be aware when you are changing your posture, so you feel the new sensation. But this is only temporary. Afterward, you will resume your main posture, sitting or walking.

After repeating it, you may feel drowsy because of the repetition. You become sleepy. You need to change and then resume the main posture. It is a technique to awaken yourself so that you can have clear awareness. Awareness becomes clearer and clearer with your alertness. It is enjoyable if you try to use variations, try to initiate, invent, or apply many things to yourselves to solve your problems. You will enjoy this and be at ease. Easy! My master sometimes changed to the posture of paying respect to be alert, to awaken himself.

As for walking meditation, try to either fold your arms across your chest or clasp your hands behind your back, and walk not too slowly and not too quickly, about eight to twelve steps. Do not gaze too far. Do not lower your head too much. Just stare at the floor about two meters from your feet. If you gaze too far, you will be distracted, but if you lower your head too much, you will feel tense.

Feel free to choose any posture you like, but try to spend a length of time with the posture you choose. Do not keep on moving or changing all the time. When you feel tired with a posture, do not change it suddenly. Try to delay, to go beyond the time limit; try to go a little bit further. If you feel tired and you change postures right away, that is not good. Try to go further to strengthen your will, your mind, your determination, and your body.

When you move your hand keep your eyes open. Do not close them. You may feel sleepy if you close your eyes. I do not have a problem when I practice with closed eyes because I do not feel drowsy. The first hindrance is

sleepiness or drowsiness, and you may be stuck in the calmness. You will feel attached to the calmness from meditation and it will give you nothing but calmness, no insight, no clarity of mind. So do not become stuck in the calmness. When you repeat your practice and do not have many distractions, it is easy to be calm and then become attached to it and then stuck in it.

Feel relaxed when you walk or raise your hand. Do not be tense or try to achieve anything, otherwise you will become tense or worried whether the practice is right or wrong. You will be distracted. Just feel relaxed and do it with ease. If you feel relaxed, you can overcome a lot of difficulties. In Thai, there is a saying that says, “Face the tiger with a calm and cool mind.” So do not take it seriously; do not try to get it right. It is okay if your mind wanders or is carried away. That is okay. Start again.

There was a story of a Zen monk. A woman was pregnant out of wedlock and her parents asked her who the father of the baby was. The lady, since she did not want to disclose the identity of the baby’s father, said that a Zen monk in the local temple was the father. So the parents went to the temple and cursed him. The monk just replied, “Is that so?” He never replied more than that. Later, the baby was born. The parents took the baby to him since he had to be responsible for the baby. The monk just said, “Is that so?” He never complained or denied the accusation. He just took care of the child. But later on, the lady felt guilty that she had caused a lot of trouble for the monk, so she confessed to her parents who the real father of the baby was. The parents felt bad that they had treated the monk very badly. So they went to the temple and asked for forgiveness. But the Zen monk just replied, “Is that so?” This is a stable mind. The mind that keeps constant never changes. Whatever situation it is, be it good or bad, the mind is still the same, the behavior is still the same. That is all for tonight.

June 8, 1997

The Balance of the Mind

You have to bear in mind that words or language have their limitations; they cannot express or convey all conditions of mind, but you can see for yourself what happens to your mind during the practice. We try to cultivate awareness of our body's movements. To do that we have to keep our minds in balance. If our minds turn outward, that is they are distracted by external conditions or overwhelmed by stimulated thoughts, we cannot have clear awareness. At the same time, if our minds turn too much inward, we are easily tense because we focus too much on trying to stop our thinking. This will not enable us to have clear awareness either. Turning too much outward or inward is not good for us, so we should try to keep our minds in balance, neither carried away by thoughts nor trying to stop thinking.

When I was a young monk practicing with Luangpor Teean, I practiced in a small cottage with closed windows and closed door. Luangpor Teean came to see me. He stood outside my cottage and asked me from outside, "Can you see me?" I replied, "I can not see you." "Why?" He asked. "Because I am in the cottage and you are outside," I replied. Luangpor Teean then asked, "How can you see

me?" I replied, "I have to open the door so that I can see you." So, Luangpor Teean asked me to open the door. When I opened the door, he asked me to stand at the threshold and then asked me, "Can you see me?" I said, "Yes." "So, you can see outside of your cottage." "Yes," I replied. He asked, "Can you see inside your cottage?" I said, "Yes." So, Luangpor Teean emphasized, "You should practice like this that you can see both outside and inside, not to practice with the closed mind that you can not see anything but inside yourself. This is not a good practice. You should practice with a mind that can see outside and inside." This is what he taught me.

Luangpor Teean's instruction will be fruitful if we do not only reflect it but try to follow or bring it into practice. If we just speculate on he taught, it is useless. We have to bring it into practice and see for ourselves how it works. The point that Luangpor Teean emphasized is to keep our mind in the middle, not too much outward nor too much inward. The only way to do that is to feel, to stay on the bases of awareness. In order to have clear awareness, we have to keep our minds in balance, neither falling into distractions nor forcing our minds to concentrate or putting much focus on any one point of the body. To be aware is to see, to notice the heat, to notice the cold, to notice pleasure, to notice pain, to be aware when our minds become high, and also to be aware when our minds become low; not to fall or be overwhelmed by each opposite of our mental states. Just let go of high and low, heat and cold; keep your mind unaffected by them. This is the middle way. This is the path that the Buddha described - - the middle way.

Those who force the mind to concentrate on the body's movement or try to stop thinking are what he described as, *trying to turn inward*. That is, trying to stop thinking or trying to force the mind to focus on a particular point of the body's movement. It is easy to get physical problems doing that; you may find it difficult to breathe or

feel your chest tense. In this situation, it will be more fruitful to turn our minds outward, to our surroundings. For example, for anyone who has such symptoms or is tense because of an overly inward oriented mind, I would try to persuade that person to notice his or her surroundings. That is to turn their minds outward so that it will be in balance. In this case, outward orientation or outward attention is useful. It is not bad all the time; it can be useful if we are to solve the problems of balancing our minds.

A few years ago, there was a case in Thailand where a villager, who was very earnest in the practice, took his practice very seriously to the point of where his hands became so stiff he could not move them. He did not show up for the morning chanting session which started around four o'clock and I did not see him in the Dinning Hall at breakfast time either. I wanted to see what happened, so I went to see him at his cottage after breakfast and found him sitting with his hands stuck to his abdomen. Once he saw me, he asked for my help. He said that his hands had been stuck like that since three o'clock in the morning and that it had already been six hours since he could not move. He said he asked for help, gave blessings to the sentient beings, but it did not help. I know that his mind was turned too far inward. So, I tried to speak with him to push his mind outward, to involve him in outward conversation. I had a conversation with him in order to let his mind out of that situation. I asked him, "How many children do you have?" He replied, "Three." So I asked, "Do you miss your children?" He said, "Yes." "How are you planning to help your children when they grow up?" I asked. He started telling me his plan for helping his children. Unconsciously, his hands fell down, and he did not even realize it, still talking, replying to me. A few minutes later, he found that, oh, his hands fell down. It happened because his mind became interested in something outside, his mind became balanced, and the problem of his hands was solved by

itself. This is an example of how problems can be solved if we try to keep our minds in balance.

So, please take advantage of whatever happens to you, whether it be distraction, tension, or repression. Do not feel it is useless. When you feel distraction, it is useful if you try to learn from it. You can learn a lot from whatever happens to you. So, make the best use of it, do not feel bad when your mind is carried away by thoughts or feels scattered. It can reflect a lot about yourself and the nature of your mind if you pay attention to it.

Take it easy; feel relaxed when you practice. For me, I have no problem sitting or walking for a long time without being tired because I feel relaxed and I take it easy. Whatever happens to you, do not become fussy or frustrated. When you lose awareness or when you become stuck in your thoughts or in your thinking process, do not be fussy about it. Just feel that it is all right and then come back to the awareness. With this kind of attitude you will feel comfortable and will get through any kind of problem. You may face not only tension or frustration but also drowsiness or anxiety. But if you take it easy with the effort, with the attempt to resist these tendencies, you will overcome all of them.

Any questions?

Q: You just mentioned that when you reflect you can understand more about yourself, but during the practice, aren't we supposed to not think and just be aware?

A: Yes, at this time you need not to investigate. Just be aware of it; just see it; that is enough. You will finally understand the thoughts so you need not investigate. Just being aware of them is enough. I would like to add that once you have a better understanding of yourself and your

mind, you should be careful not to fall into the trap of knowledge. Just knowing that you know is enough. If you become excited with your knowledge, it can distract you or obstruct you from being aware of your body.

Q: Does the knowledge obstruct because you are thinking too much?

A: It is a trap. It obstructs the practice because when you know more and more you become fascinated by knowledge. When you know more and more, you tend to follow the flow of the knowledge and then you lose the practice of awareness.

There is a possibility that insight will arise within your mind, wisdom or insight into the nature of body and mind. You will have an understanding about wholesome, unwholesome, sin, and merit. You will understand the three common characteristics - - impermanence, suffering, and no self. You will realize that you can be a monk in essence though you are a layperson. Some monks, after practicing and achieving such insight, exclaim that, “This is the first time that I feel as though I am a real monk. Just today I became a monk.” Despite the fact that they had been ordained for many years, they felt that they were not monks until then.

Q: Someone else suggested that and I have tried it a couple times. After you practice a long time, you feel very well and calm. That is a good time to think about what you want to do in the future, because your mind is very clear at that point.

A: There is no problem if you know when to finish. There are some artists who use meditation to calm the mind in order to paint. But I would like to say that meditation is not only for work, or solving practical problems. You should aim beyond that; to remove suffering. We should use meditation for a higher purpose

than solving the practical problems of daily life. Just keep this in mind so that we can make the most of it.

Do not try to achieve anything. Do not try to achieve supernatural powers, or want to be better than other people, to compete with other people, or to have a special mystical power. Do not have such an attitude or it will obstruct the practice.

I would like to give another example. One monk in Thailand had achieved a lot before his entrance to the monkhood. He was a member of parliament; he had achieved everything he wanted to achieve. So his mind was achievement oriented and when he became a monk, he still had this attitude. When he practiced, he tried to achieve spiritual power; he tried to attain insight, the higher wisdom. He drove himself to practice a lot until his mind became out of balance. When he met me, he asked me, "Do you see that my robe is full of lotus? I am not an ordinary monk now." I took this monk out of the temple and tried to help him become normal. I took him to see the flowers, the trees, talked to him and made him forget the practice for a while so that he became relaxed and felt better.

But do not worry that you will be like him. I can assure you that I will take you to the right path. If you stay firm in your awareness and don't expect anything more than awareness, you will be all right.

Q: Was he practicing with Luangpor or with someone else?

A: With another master; he was just visiting the temple. After a brief chat, I knew that the monk had a problem.

Q: It is interesting that this monk would trust Luangpor. If they do not trust, the problem cannot be solved.

A: It has nothing to do with trust. Because if we have the means to solve the problem we just talk with him personally, and if we know how to help him get out of the trap that he is falling into, then we can help. In fact, this problem can be solved by itself but it takes time, probably ten days if nobody helped him.

Q: I think maybe I am too inward in my practice because when he told his interesting story I realized that all the tension in my back was leaving. After I went outward and listened to his story, I started to forget all about the pain. I still have a congested head, but I can see now that my back tension is releasing.

A: It is okay. Whatever happens, do not be worried. You should learn how to solve the problem yourself. For example, when you become tense, try to look outward, see your surroundings and pay attention to them. This will help balance your mind.

Q: I have noticed that when I go outside to walk around the pond I feel more relaxed then I do in here. When I work in here, I feel more tense. When I work out there, it feels lighter to me.

A: Do not worry about whether your practice is right or wrong, do not try to achieve the right practice, just keep your mind relaxed and feel comfortable, going beyond anxiety or desire.

Q: Luangpor mentioned earlier that hindrances can be helpful, so sleepiness or things like that can be helpful, we just need to resist them. I am just thinking, for example, that today I feel drowsy, and I have been staying with it. I am just thinking that maybe it is helpful sometimes to just go take a nap. When you wake up you feel refreshed, then you can practice better instead of trying to stay with it for a long time.

A: If your body needs rest or feels physically tired, taking a nap is all right. Even the Buddha suggested you do that if your body needs it. But we should not take a nap on every occasion, just special occasions. If you take a nap every time you feel drowsy, you will not go anywhere.

Q: In Sati Meditation, we use our body's movement as the object of meditation. While doing the practice, there are other sensations of the body taking place, such as the stomach growling, legs going numb or coughing, etc. Where do we place awareness?

A: When you cough, do it mindfully. When you feel tense or when you feel tired or have physical pain, sometimes it is not good to resist it. You have to reduce that pain by changing your position from sitting to walking, etc. You have to learn how to reduce this kind of suffering; it also depends on the case. For example, when you feel pain at your neck, you are aware of it, but you should not concentrate on or pay attention to it. You should just continue the awareness of your hand's movement. But if you feel tired and your body needs to relax then you should change postures, or if you have gas in your stomach the gas should be released mindfully.

Q: Can you define mindfully please?

A: You are aware of it. Mindfulness and awareness are interchangeable. Practically speaking, they are the same, concomitant, twins. So, to be mindful is to be aware of that particular thing.

Q: But when you talk about awareness, you are talking about your senses, right? What you feel, what you taste, what you hear, what you see, that is all part of awareness, right?

A: Yes. Knowing what you see and what you hear is awareness. But for the practice, you just pay attention to

the object of meditation, like the body's movement. Once, while I was practicing sitting meditation, a big snake moved towards me and it seemed to me that it did not realize that I was in front of it. So, I tried to stop it and make it aware that there was a person in front of it. I threw a matchbox in front of it and it raised its head once it realized that there was something in front it. Once I knew it was a cobra, I tried to protect myself without fear, without nervousness or anxiety. Since at that moment I knew I should not move hastily, I did it mindfully, grasping my robe to protect myself, I prevented the cobra from biting me.

June 9, 1997

The Three-Fold Training

We have to study ourselves to gain a better understanding of ourselves; otherwise, we will become the victim of suffering. Suffering will become our master, and control our minds. If we know ourselves, we become our own masters and can live our lives accordingly.

Within ourselves, there is both heaven and hell, merit and evil. Our mind can be the source of happiness or the source of suffering; pleasure and pain are inside ourselves, as are all states of mind. If we know ourselves better, we will learn how to make our lives happy and free from suffering.

There is no better way to understand ourselves, to work and see ourselves internally, than practicing meditation. But normally people are not much interested in meditation. Buddhadasa, a great monk in Thailand who passed away recently, once said that people tend to respect monks, but they never listen to them or put their teachings into practice.

Mindfulness meditation is the short cut to the heart of the nature of our minds and bodies. It will lead us

straight to the core of reality that is the body and mind. There is no way for us to gain a better understanding about mind than mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness helps us attain wisdom, or insight, into body and mind. It helps us to be clear and remove any doubts we may have about ourselves. During the practice, you may ask yourself, “What am I doing? Why did I come here? What is the purpose of meditation? Will it work for me?” Or you may ask yourself, “Is there heaven or hell?” These are all questions that I asked myself thirty years ago when I was still a layman. When I met Luangpor Teean, my master, he persuaded me to practice with him. He said that, “All of these questions will be answered if you practice with me.”

What we are doing here is trying to follow the path of the Buddha. The Buddha once said that all of us are subject to suffering. We have suffering in front of us. It has penetrated into the deepest core of our existence. Suffering dominates our lives so we should be aware of it and try to find the way out of it. We come here to practice meditation in order to get rid of suffering.

This method of practice enables us to see the reality of body and mind, to see how suffering is created. It is created from our attachments to body and mind. We are attached to anger or the many kinds of emotions despite the fact that there is no real self in those emotions. That state of mind has no substantial reality. But we still cling to it which leads to suffering.

Mindfulness enables us to see clearly that our attachments create suffering and misery. It helps us see the body as it is - - a combination of various factors. The fundamental elements that comprise the body are earth, fire, water, and wind. We can see clearly how these four fundamental elements make up the body. We can see clearly that the body is not self. There is no self in the body. It is just the combination of these four fundamental elements. Meditation will also enable us to see the nature

and conditions of the body. All questions about the body will be solved and we will not have any questions anymore about it.

The same goes for the mind; we will understand the mind with mindfulness. There are thousands of different mental activities of the mind mentioned in the Tripitaka, or the Buddhist Canon. These can be understood by us if our mindfulness is developed enough.

During your practice, a lot of thoughts arise in your mind and you may often be disturbed by them. Once you know yourself clearly, you will see that suffering is caused by your attachment to thoughts and emotions. When we hear a noise, we react to it, we are attached to it, and we make judgments about it; the noise is good, the noise is bad. Whatever we see, whatever we have contact with, we always react to it and make judgments; good or bad, pleasure or displeasure, satisfactory or dissatisfactory. We are not aware that we should not be attached to these objects because they have no self, it is just a thought, not the self, and we should not make it personal. There is no person in that thought but because of our ignorance we grasp it and take it to be a person or make it personal by attaching ourselves to it.

Mindfulness meditation helps us to see, to go beyond convention. Conventions are not the ultimate reality. They are what we assume them to be. You assume that this is good, that this is bad, I am the monk, you are the layperson, this is Kuan Yin Budhisattva, etc. We are attached to convention and this makes us suffer. If we see the ultimate reality, we will see and understand that convention is just what we agree upon together. With this insight, with this understanding of conventional reality, suffering has no basis of existence. Suffering exists because we are attached to conventional reality. Once we have insight into conventional reality and understand that it is not the ultimate reality, suffering cannot be sustained. This

is the ultimate insight that we can attain if we develop enough mindfulness.

The practice covers the whole aspects of the training according to Buddhism. According to Buddhism there are three aspects of the training we call the Three Fold Training: training in higher morality, training in higher concentration, and training in higher wisdom. When you practice and develop awareness, the awareness will keep you moral; because if you have awareness, you will not be inclined or tempted to conduct evil. Awareness will enable you to be calm and have a peaceful mind. And, obviously, awareness will bring you to wisdom, to have insight into the nature of reality. You can see that whatever object we have contact with, there is no real self, no independent or substantial self that we can attach to. This will enable us to see reality as it is, to see how impermanent it is, to see how suffering it is, to see that there is not a self that we can attach ourselves to. Everything will be seen under this framework as being impermanent, suffering, and no-self. We see what is subject to impermanence, what is subject to suffering, what is subject to no-self. We let it be as it is. We are not attached to it. These are the insights that we can gain from the practice.

With the insights I mentioned to you, our lives will not be harmful to either other people or to ourselves because there will be no base for hatred, greed, or delusion to exist. We know that there is no permanent self for us to attach to so we will feel free, we will feel independent because we have nothing to be worried about. I can assure you that this practice is the way to the noble path, to a noble being, to a noble life. It will lead to the truth that can be shared by everybody, realized by everybody. It cannot be deceived or distorted because it is already inherent in all of us.

There is a saying in Thailand that morality will bring us happiness, a peaceful life, and enlightenment. The

morality that I mentioned can be achieved by being mindful, by cultivating mindfulness, and it can be assured by the practice that I suggest and instruct you in. Anyway, what I teach is from experience. What I say now may repeat what I said before. It may not flow vertically or continuously, but it is the experience that comes from my heart and can be shared by anybody who practices.

Enlightenment means there is no self to suffer; the self vanishes so there is no base for suffering to exist. We do not need to act out of desire for enlightenment. We just practice, simply practice, and realization will come to us naturally because we carry out our actions. We make the cause and the outcome will take place independent of our desire. Enlightenment has to take place because we have created its cause. According to the law of causality, once we do this, that will happen whether you like it or not. So, you just practice. Action is called, *Kamma*. If you do it this way it will lead to the result which is independent of our desires. It just happens. Enlightenment that is not experienced by us is just convention, just a concept even if you call it by other names, no suffering or freedom.

Anyway, the point is that we just try to reach the state of no self where there is no suffering. If there is self, suffering can happen. If there is no self, suffering cannot be sustained. It is not desire because enlightenment is already in ourselves; hell and heaven are already in ourselves; everything is in ourselves including enlightenment and the path. So it is not something out there to be desired or grasped. You need not think about it. You can realize it if you practice enough. For example, does anger last? No. Have you ever acted out of anger? Yes! When you get angry and you fight back, anger fades away and is replaced by sympathy or guilt. So, you can see that anger has vanished and was transformed into other kinds of emotions.

The same also applies to suffering. In fact, it does not last long unless we attach ourselves to it. If we are not

attached to suffering, it will dissipate. This can happen if we have insight. Whatever we encounter, we will understand that it is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and no-self. We will discard it easily without attaching to it. We let it go like garbage. There are many kinds of garbage, paper, plastic, recyclable or non-recyclable. We throw the garbage out according to its category. The same applies to whatever experiences we have. Once we make contact with any kind of object, we let it go. We discard it according to its nature - - this is impermanent, this is suffering, or this is no self. All experiences can be perceived into three characteristics and we just let them go according to their nature.

If we live our lives this way, our lives become holy, pure, clean, and free from defilement. It is as if nothing can make us impure. This holy life will make everyone a monk. Everybody here can be a monk, it is a state of mind, a state of pure holy life. In the Buddha's time, there were many established lay people that could be called monks or a Noble One because they were free from suffering.

All teachings of the Buddha are centered on these three: impermanent, unsatisfactory, and no self. In the first sermon of the Buddha, he asked the five ascetics who would become the first group of noble beings, "Is there anything permanent?" They replied, "No." "Everything is impermanent," Buddha asked, "What is impermanent is suffering, isn't it?" They replied, "Yes, what is impermanent is suffering, or the causes of suffering." "So, whatever is subject to suffering is without self, isn't it?" he asked. "Yes," they replied. So, once the five ascetics understood that everything is no self, they were enlightened. So, this is the key teaching of the Buddha, the three common characteristics. Very few people teach this doctrine. It was fortunate for me that Luangpor Teean taught me about this reality.

Cyclic existence is in the present moment; it happens in this life; it is not the bardo or the next life. Our

present life is governed by the cyclic existence. Take the smoker for instance. The cyclic existence is composed of three factors - - defilement, action or conduct, and consequence or result. The smoker has a desire to smoke, and once they smoke there is addiction, and addiction leads to desire to smoke more, and it becomes a cycle - - desire, smoke, addiction, desire, smoke, addiction. This is the cyclic existence. This cycle can be broken if the smoker rejects or abandons this habit. No smoke, no addiction, no desire, …. This finally leads to enlightenment. Once the cycle is broken, Nibbana can be realized. Because there is no desire, no action arises. Once there is no action, no desire, and no addiction take place, everything becomes normal, becomes cool. Nibbana is the state of coolness.

June 10, 1997

Seeing the Mind

We are now following in the footsteps of the Buddha. What we are doing now is practicing what the Buddha instructed us in that is training ourselves to be aware of body, feeling, thoughts, and mind objects. But we should learn how to do it properly, otherwise we may suffer because of the feelings, thoughts, or mind objects that arise.

Our practice may be delayed or obstructed by a lot of things, such as thoughts. In fact, what we should do is just be aware of them, but sometimes we act upon them, and thus another kind of thoughts arises. It is a kind of dual or two layers of thoughts; we act upon creating more thoughts. It is not the primary thoughts that create suffering for us, but the secondary thoughts. This reaction or response to thoughts makes us unhappy and will delay our practice. So, please avoid reacting to thoughts, just be aware of them, and then let them go.

In Thai, meditation practice is called, “Patibat.” “Pati” means to return. What we are doing now is returning, bringing our minds back home. We tend to be driven by emotions, thoughts, feelings, and elemental conditions.

They drive our minds away from home. So, we have to bring our minds back home. This means we have to resist, to go against the stream of habit, go against the stream of thoughts or emotions. Normally, we tend to follow our thoughts, but now we try to resist them, to go against habit, and return to awareness. Awareness is our home. We have to turn our minds back to awareness, to bring our minds back home. Awareness is the point of reference; it is like a pillar that we have to grasp firmly in order to return and not be driven by any kind of mental conditions.

Mindfulness meditation covers two kinds of meditation, namely, calmness meditation and insight meditation. The point is to be aware of the body and to be aware of the mind, to be aware of feelings, thoughts, and mind objects. It does not mean that you have to stop your thoughts, just see them, simply know them. When you think or when thoughts arise, just be aware of them; whatever, whenever thoughts arise, just be aware of them no matter how often they arise. It does not matter if you have a lot of thoughts, but the point is that once one arises you are aware of it. If you have one hundred thoughts, you should be aware of all one hundred of them. It is not how rarely or how frequently you think, but how often you can be aware. This is what we call, *Self-Awareness*, to be aware of our own thoughts. This is what Luangpor Teean emphasized. Do not be worried if you have a lot of thoughts. What you should do is be aware of whatever or whenever thoughts arise, that is all. That is the practice.

If we want to attain calmness or peace, we may try to stop our thoughts or stop the thinking process; this will lead us to the calmness meditation. It will bring us only calmness and peace to our mind. This practice is like putting a stone on top of grass. The grass cannot grow. But once you move the stone, the grass will grow again. So, this kind of calmness meditation is beneficial only when you practice it; when you stop practicing it your mind will be the same as before. So, we are not going to do that.

What we are going to do is not to stop thinking but to be aware of it, to be familiar with our thoughts. The more we are aware of our thoughts the more we are familiar with them. We will be so familiar with them that we can point our finger at them and tell them that we will not be their victims again. We will not follow them again. This is what we are trying to do, to understand our thoughts clearly and directly, knowing that they are only the concocted or compounded beings that deceive us. But once we know this clearly, they cannot deceive us anymore, and we become their masters. We will understand that thoughts are not self; they are just the result of the concocting mind.

Many practitioners or meditaters may at one point be overwhelmed by various kinds of thoughts. It is like an army of thoughts is bombarding your mind. You may encounter this experience. You may feel bad, but if you keep being aware of whatever thoughts that arise, at a certain point you will suddenly become face to face with the thought. You will see clearly that it is not self, that it is not yours. The thought is there, but we do not make it personal anymore. It is not me and mine, it is not my thought, the thought is not me, it is out there, and we are not going to identify with it anymore. At that point, the thought will have no foundation to stand on to exist. It will vanish; it will dissolve. All thoughts will be dissolved instantly. This is what I call, *Victory of the Practitioner*. I experienced this kind of victory and there is nothing else except this kind of victory. I cannot explain more than this but to ask you not to be discouraged by being bombarded by a lot of thoughts. Keep firm, stay with the awareness, with the knowingness, and then you may be able to overcome it.

If you follow my instruction and are aware of body, mind, feeling, and mind objects, all of you will go straight to the target, to the end. So, keep knowing these four aspects of reality. You will gradually understand the nature of these realities, and you will be able to realize that once

you hear a sound it is just a sound you hear, once you see a form or an object you just see it, no more than that. So, the body, feeling, mind, or mind objects will not be able to trap you. You will not be subjected to their influence anymore, and you will be able to see these four aspects, these four kinds of realities, the way they are. There is no more than that.

Take feeling, for example, if you are not aware of it, once one arises, it will not be just a feeling. It will be more than that. You will judge this feeling. Is it good? Is it bad? A lot of convention, a lot of values will come into play because you are not aware of the feelings. This is good; this is bad; this is desirable; this is undesirable. So, many kinds of values and judgments come into play and there will be no end. The same is true of mind or thoughts. If you are not aware of them, you become judgmental and will go on and on, endlessly. So, just be aware of them and they will be finished; it will be ended. Feeling will be just feeling, emotions will be just emotions, and mind objects will just be mind objects, and no more than that if you are aware of them.

So stay firm, stay only with awareness, and do not push yourself too hard. Just feel free and do not be worried. If you cannot do it, if you cannot be aware of it, that is okay. Do not feel bad for yourself, do not feel regret, “Oh! I made a mistake,” no, just forget it, just go ahead with your practice. Eventually you will realize the truth through awareness. With awareness the truth will reveal itself. The truth of feeling, the truth of mind, the truth of mind objects, and the truth of body will reveal themselves without your memorizing from texts. These truths cannot be memorized but it is in your capacity to realize them.

From my personal interview, all of you have already experienced what is in yourselves. You did not experience something in your imagination. What you explained to me during the past few days is what you have experienced. It

is inside yourselves; it is useful. Do not discard it. If you know how to see it properly, it may not be mindfulness that you wish for but it is still useful for you to use it, for you to understand it. So, just try to learn from it, and it will give you insight or wisdom. What we have experienced so far is not beyond the realm of body and mind. This is the physical body, and feelings, thoughts and mind objects are in the realm of the mind. So you did not experience something out there. It is already in your body and mind. Try to make use of it skillfully.

Luangpor Teean told me that the training of the mind is to see the mind, to look into it, not to seek for calmness of mind. Just see it, just be aware of it, and you will have proper mental training. Since your experience is not beyond body and mind, you do not experience something out there. You experience what is already in yourselves. So, just feel free, feel relaxed and know that you have done nothing wrong. But if you see the image of hell or heaven out there, if you smell odor out there, if you see a vision of angels or a deity out there, you are traversing the wrong path. Please come back. Just try to see, be aware of what is already in your body and mind. That is all. Do not look beyond that.

What you have already done may be called meditation, observing the precepts, or earning merit. The meditation you practiced has already covered what I just mentioned. When you practice meditation here, your mind becomes normal, that is Sila, or morality. It means normal, normal in conduct, normal in deeds. If you feel calm and peaceful, that is wholesomeness, or *Kusala*. If you know how to be free from your thoughts, that is wisdom; even if you suffer because of them, as long as you learn from them, you have gained wisdom. It is knowledge. It is not necessarily negative. When you practice you do not do anything harmful to yourself nor to anybody, which means you have already kept the precepts, observed morality. So,

morality, concentration, wisdom, wholesomeness or merit, have already been developed from your practice.

Please learn how to transform undesirable thoughts and whatever suffering you may experience. Do not let thoughts make you suffer. Try to adjust your mind, try to change it to be wholesome and happy. You have to learn by yourself to solve your own problems, and if you keep solving your problems you will have what we call wisdom. You will learn that you are your own master, you will know that your own self is your refuge, and this is the ultimate truth that everybody should understand. There is no refuge other than oneself.

Any questions?

Q: Whenever there is a thought, you suffer because you develop more thoughts. Thoughts that stem from intentional thoughts are okay. I think. For example, if during the practice, you have a thought and know that you cannot improve yourself based on it, then you come up with something of how you want to improve it ..

A: Yes, if it is a skillful thought, it will lead to wisdom. We should learn from thoughts without suppressing them, that is what we call wisdom or insight. Wisdom can be obtained when body and mind are free of disturbance. Now, we are already here, and our bodies are far away from annoyance or disturbance. If our minds still think about this and that all the time, about sensual pleasure, about sensual happiness, the Buddha compared this situation to a log that is on the shore but is still wet. You cannot make fire with this wood. But if you are here, your body is in a place of solitude, and your mind is also calm and not engaged in sensual pleasure or distraction, you are like wood that has already dried and can be lit. This means that one will be able to be liberated because body and mind go together.

The person who does not practice will keep thinking about the experiences of the past. But if we practice, our minds will be in order; they will keep knowing the present moment. And this mental attitude of knowing oneself, or knowing one's thoughts, will give the wisdom that the mind itself reveals, the truth that is manifested in mind. So, such practice will give rise to the wisdom that the Buddha suggested and praised.

We are able to develop or attain a state of wholesomeness in the same manner that the Buddha did. We are able to abandon the unwholesomeness and the suffering that the Buddha was able to. What the Buddha attained is not something beyond our capacity. We can also achieve his compassion, his wisdom, and his purity. So, do not think that the Buddha's qualities are something out there. It is already in our capacity to develop them if we practice constantly. If we practice hard enough, his compassion, his wisdom, and his purity will be shared by us.

Mindfulness meditation leads everybody to the same goal, just like Route 301 led everybody here. Anybody who practices mindfulness meditation will realize the same thing, the same wisdom. It dose not mean that the Buddha knows one way and the Noble Beings know something different. They know the same thing because they use the same road. Mindfulness meditation is the most important road to liberation.

What we have practiced now is not a waste of time. Even though you have not attained wisdom yet what you have done will produce results. You are going to create a Kamma, or conduct, that produces results. For example, when you raise your hand you become aware of it, such awareness will not vanish. It will accumulate and it will enable you to attain something. So, keep practicing even if you do not gain insight during this seven day retreat. That

is okay; just never mind. Please continue your practice after the retreat, and it will certainly produce results.

Q: Could anyone reach liberation during this life time? Does it depend on the amount of effort you put in the practice? Is it hindered by the Sankhara that you have accumulated?

A: Yes. It is possible for a person to achieve liberation if one practices the Dhamma or the teaching that the Buddha suggested. That is to develop or train in a higher morality, in higher concentration, and in higher wisdom. We are capable of reaching that point. It is not necessarily obstructed or hindered by past actions. If we practice in the present life, we are able to liberate ourselves. I would like to ask you, "Is there tomorrow?"

The teaching of the Buddha is full of marvelous characteristics. It is what the Buddha practiced by himself, and it is beyond time. It can produce results beyond the limitations of time. It is what one can realize by oneself and it can be achieved by anybody with no limitation, and only the practitioner will realize it. You cannot practice it for other people. This is what the Buddha said.

There is tomorrow, but we do not know what the chances are for tomorrow and we cannot do anything about tomorrow. What we can do is today. The past, or yesterday, is already gone and we cannot do anything for the past; what we did in the past is already in the past, we cannot do anything else now. So only today can we do something. Please try to make an effort to improve today. Do not pay much attention to tomorrow or to yesterday.

Q: Can we teach what we have learned to other people?

A: We teach and we share what we already have. If we are compassionate enough, we teach compassion. If we are

kind enough, we teach kindness. So you share what you have already attained or teach it to other people. There are many things that we may not have achieved yet, but we are able to do that. For example, we may not have read a book but we can still give it to other people. It is like food that we do not eat but share with other people; we do not benefit from it but we can give the benefit to other people. We just try to help as much as we can. If we find children in trouble we should try to help them as much as we can.

There are many levels of Dhamma. If you live your life according to the moral precepts, you do not harm anybody, you do not kill, you observe the five precepts, you have already attained some level of Dhamma. So you can teach if you behave properly. But for the higher levels of Dhamma, one has to attain some level of insight in order to teach other people, but in reality nobody can teach anyone; we can only teach ourselves.

Q: I have a question on seeing thoughts. Over the years, I have been practicing, worrying over the quality of thoughts. Thoughts can be strong and there may be many thoughts comimg. I am wondering, if, over time, as I keep practicing, will the nature of my thoughts change so they are not as strong, not as quick, or will you just see the thoughts and they will improve?

A: Yes. The unintentional thoughts or undesirable thoughts that cause suffering will change. Their nature will change if you keep looking at them and at the same time you may be more adapt at looking and seeing. Your capacity to look and the nature of thoughts will both change, and your unintentional thoughts will improve. Everything is subject to change, even hatred, greed, and delusion will change if there are sufficient factors to produce the change. It is the law of nature that everything is subject to change, because everything depends on various factors.

Luangpor Teean once made an analogy of the state of enlightened mind. An enlightened mind will not hold on to or attach to sensual pleasure, or anything that causes suffering. You just let it pass; let go of it. But if you are an ordinary person, you just grasp this greed, hatred, or sensual pleasure. Even if this is the anger which causes suffering, we still grasp it, and we enjoy it, enjoy getting angry. So, this is the mind of general people who never practice; they cling to happiness and suffering. People do not turn away from suffering, they cling to it and do not let it go.

I ran a summer camp. The small novices had a quarrel and wanted to fight with each other. I tried to keep them from kicking and striking each other, but they still wanted to punch each other. They wanted to preserve the anger, they clung to it and would not let it go. So, this is the state of ordinary minds, of ordinary people.

When the eyes of the enlightened one make contact with a form, a visual object, to see is just to see, there is no clinging to the form or to the visual object, it just falls down and suffering cannot exist. There is no attachment to the eyes or to the mind. But for ordinary minds, once the contact has been made, they cling to the noise, to the object, and cannot let them go.

In fact, Luangpor Teean compares it to clay. If you throw it at a wall and it sticks, it is like an ordinary mind, you cannot let it go. You just think about it over and over, and you become happy or suffer. But for the enlightened mind, it is like dried soil, you throw it and it never sticks to the wall but just falls down. You just see it but nothing happens.

Q: Is appreciation of beauty a judgment?

A: That this is beautiful or this is ugly is just convention. The mind of the enlightened one is like the leaf

of the lotus that cannot be stained by water, not even a drop. The enlightened beings live in the world but cannot be stained or polluted by the world. They do not cling to the world. They are beyond the world, but they live in the world. The lotus grows out of the dirty mud, but it will never be polluted or stained by the mud. It is very beautiful. This is the mind of the enlightened one.

Q: Why is happiness a suffering? Is it because it is unstable?

A: If it is general happiness, it is suffering because it is subject to change. It is just convention. But supreme happiness, liberation or enlightenment, is different; no happiness is greater than enlightenment.

June 12, 1997

Foundations of Mindfulness

Please pay attention. We have been following the instructions that the Buddha gave in the Sutra called "*Satipatthana*," or the sutra about *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness* which covers all human activities. Human lives or human ways of conduct can be divided into four: the realm of body, the realm of feeling, the realm of thought, and the realm of mind objects. There are a lot of details concerning these four aspects of a human being. Our bodies have experienced a lot of things, we have felt a lot of feelings, encountered various kinds of thoughts, and faced a lot of mind objects or mental impressions.

No matter what happens to the body or to the physical form, with mindfulness we can understand the fundamental truth or the fundamental nature that underlies the activities of the body. Mindfulness gives us insight into the nature of the body. The underlying nature, the fundamental law, that governs the physical realm is what we call, the *Three Common Characteristics* - - impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and no self.

Feelings are also subject to the *Three Common Characteristics*. Every kind of feeling, whether it results

from contact with the eyes, with the ears, with the nose, with the tongue, with body, or with mind, is subject to these *Three Common Characteristics*. Ultimately, feelings have no self. We cannot take them to be a self or a person.

If we do not understand the reality of feelings, we will be their slave. We will try to struggle for the pleasant feelings; we will try our best to protect whatever can give us pleasant feelings. A lot of people are busy possessing objects that provide them with pleasant feelings, but they will ultimately find that they cannot keep them all the time. They are subject to change, to vanish.

The Buddha always stresses that a feeling is not self, it is not the person, it is not the individual, so do not take it to be a person or self. Worldly beings who do not practice cannot understand what the Buddha said, but we will be able to understand if we practice hard enough. During the past few days we have been here, we may not have attained this insight yet, but it is within our capacity to see, to understand, and to have insight into the nature of feelings.

We should understand mind or mental formations, too. Thoughts, or mental impressions, are very important because if we are not aware of our thoughts they will give rise to anger, hatred, and delusion. They will give rise to pleasure, pain, sorrow, happiness, and a lot of conventions. Law, rules, regulations, and all sorts of things will come into play and your thoughts will proliferate without end. Thus we should learn to understand the thinking process.

Can we see thoughts? Can we know the thoughts that arise in our minds? Do we follow the thoughts or do we just know them, just be aware of them? Do we suffer because of thoughts or do they make us happy? Can we see how thoughts are not self? Are we able to see them as void or empty of self? If we understand and see the thoughts that arise in our minds, thoughts are no big deal. We will

become their master. But if we do not know the thoughts in our minds, they will control our lives, they will be our masters.

To practice mindfulness meditation, we start by cultivating awareness of our bodies. We start at this point and then we become aware of feelings. Once we are confident enough to be aware of body and feelings, we will then go to the next step of being aware of our thoughts. We cannot jump directly to awareness of our thoughts because we need to be skillful enough or it will cause us trouble. Our mindfulness should be cultivated and it has to start from an awareness of the body and our feelings. Once our mindfulness is developed enough, we will proceed further to train ourselves to be aware of our minds. We have to know the former step thoroughly first. If we ignore the awareness of the body and jump to the step of mental awareness, we will become easily lost in our thoughts.

To handle our thoughts and mental impressions, we need to know their weak points. It is as thought we are going to handle a snake. Snakes are harmful, but the skillful person who knows their weak point can capture them without getting hurt. It is like handling an elephant. Elephants are very big and strong, much stronger than human beings, but if we know their weak point we can capture and harness them. Whatever strength it has, however powerful it is, it dose not matter because we know how to handle it. The same goes for our relationship with our minds and our thoughts. We have to know the weak point of our thoughts, then we will understand and will be able to handle them. We should know what their source is and how they are conditioned. With this knowledge, thoughts will not be harmful anymore.

Keep knowing your body and mind. Stay only with the knowing, and do not do other than this. Stay firmly with knowing, and knowingness will bring about a change to your mind. We need not do anything to the mind or even

the thoughts, but just pay attention to our awareness, the knowingness. Luangpor Teean compared unintentional thoughts to a rat and mindfulness to a cat. For ordinary people, the rat is very big while mindfulness is very small, the cat is very small. If you want the cat to get rid of the rat, you have to feed the cat properly so that it will grow bigger and bigger until it can catch the rat. So what is the food for the cat, or mindfulness? We have to feed mindfulness with endurance, with diligence, and with constant effort to cultivate our mindfulness. They will develop our mindfulness, and mindfulness will do its duty on its own, handling, replacing, or removing the thoughts from our minds. We do not need to do anything with the thoughts. Just allow your mindfulness to grow and mindfulness will do its job. So, try to be firm on this principle. Does it sound difficult?

Now let's talk about the fourth category, mind objects. There are two kinds of mind objects. One belongs to the realm of wholesomeness, and the other, unwholesomeness. Wholesomeness will enable us to be skillful, to be wise, and to be intelligent; it keeps our minds normal, stable, and unmoved by pleasure or pain. The unwholesomeness mind object, the second kind of mind object, always brings trouble to us, it creates a lot of suffering, and it turns ones mind to hell, to be animal like, or to be a ghost. So, this is what we should be aware of.

If we understand these four aspects of reality - - body, feeling, thoughts, and mind objects - - we have already covered all aspects of a human being, and our study is completed. So try to be familiar with these four realms of our lives and learn to cultivate awareness of body and mind, of thought, and of mind objects. Once we finish such study, our minds will become the noble life, the life that is harmful neither to ourselves nor to other people. It is called, "Noble." Noble means harmless.

Do not become stuck in doubt, in uncertainty. I can assure you that all kinds of sufferings, defilement, and unwholesomeness are born out of our ignorance of the nature of body and mind and strengthened by it. Once we have attained insight into body, feeling, mind, and mind objects, these four aspects, our lives should be liberated. What I have learned, and have not learned much, I learned about these four aspects of life or reality. And, Luangpor Teean did not teach much, he only taught these. Once I understand these, I no longer need the master. I no longer search for or seek any master. My study has been finished, my search finished, and now I do not need master anymore.

Now I have no fear at all. I have confidence in myself because I do not teach for fame, for wealth, for material gain, or for any reward. I just want to help people to understand themselves and to realize the truth. What I have said are just words, but it is not what I have memorized from any texts. I have not much learning, but what I share with you is from my direct experience, from my own realizations. That is why I am confident speaking and sharing with you. That is all.

Please regard all of us as brothers and sisters. The Buddha is the father; Dhamma is the mother; and Sangha is the brothers and sisters.

Q: How does one know it is time for him to tackle with thoughts?

A: You are ready to see the thoughts once you can know a thought, when a thought arises and you are aware of it, and you are not dragged by thoughts. If you are still being dragged by thoughts, leave them behind and just pay attention to body and feeling. It is like learning a language. In the beginning, we have to learn from a teacher and the

teacher has to start from A, B, C, D. A, B, C, D, or the language, is still something out there, but once we internalize it, we become one with the language, and we are skillful enough to use the language. The same is true of the practice, we need to practice until we become confident enough that it becomes our habit. When a thought arises, you are immediately aware of it and can handle it properly. The more we are confident, the more we are able to handle or to control our minds. Finally, awareness will lead us out of suffering.

If we still become lost in our thoughts and are still moved by them, still get happy or suffer because of them, it is not time yet. Anyway, for beginners, the first step of practice is not to keep knowing the thoughts. Please be aware of the body first. Once you are competent enough, it is okay to go ahead to the next step of mental awareness.

Q: How do you get rid of drowsiness during the practice?

A: It is natural to get drowsy. Everybody has to face this problem and overcome it. Otherwise, it will become an obstacle to the progress of meditation. Drowsiness is caused by the laziness of your mind. We should activate it. Try to give our mind a job to do. Pay attention to external things so that it becomes activated again, or change your posture, or feel the vibration of your body. When I started the practice, I kept a bucket of water near me. When I felt drowsy, I used the water to wake me up; when it didn't work, I just put my head into the bucket to wake myself up. Do not close your eyes. Do not yawn; close your mouth and resist yawning. Make your movements stronger, smile, refresh yourself, and feel confident and courageous; defeat it and subdue it.

There are five hindrances that obstruct us from making progress in our spiritual activities. The first one is drowsiness, the second is restlessness or agitation, the

third is doubt, the fourth is sensual desire, and the last is ill-will or hatred.

Drowsiness is like indolence; restlessness is like mischief, naughty, or stubborn; doubt has a nature of no self-determination or no resolution. These are the three dominant qualities of the mind during our progress. What the Buddha said is already in ourselves, he taught our reality.

Q: On the conventional level, we have a saying, “Follow your heart, not your mind”….

A: It is the wholesomeness in our mind and in our hearts that tell us what we should do. We should transform anger to compassion, suffering to happiness, and agitation to peacefulness. It is wisdom that tells us what to do. If we know this is good or this is bad, if we know this is harmful or this is not, we do what is good and unharmful. I do not know whether you call it heart or mind. Just follow it.

Q: Just follow it and act on it? So it will not create any cause and effect?

A: Oh, sure, if it is a good cause, if one is mindful, if it is not harmful to oneself and others, it is a good Kamma. If it is harmful to oneself and to others, that is a bad Kamma, a bad deed.

Q: Should we just follow the middle path if we are not sure whether it is a good cause or not? Just sort of ignore it and not act upon it?

A: Don’t worry whether it is from mind or from heart. If you know it is harmful, avoid it; if it is good, act on it. We do not know, and we do not have such an expression in Thai, at least not one that is popular among the Buddhist monks. We often follow the heart and create a lot of problems. It is a different cultural orientation.

Q: How does mindfulness work?

A: You will realize it after you see it very often. You will realize, “Oh! It is like this.” It is a matter of how frequently you see it. Avoid thinking, analyzing, or reasoning. Watch your body until your mindfulness is developed enough, and your mindfulness will be like a fire alarm, a smoke detector. The smoke detector never watches or keeps looking for smoke, but once it detects even a small amount of smoke the alarm goes off. Mindfulness is like that. You will be aware of even a small portion of thought that arises automatically, without intention. So allow mindfulness to work on its own, do not order it or command it. Mindfulness works like that.

Q: Can you comment on psychic power, miracle, or new age?

A: If it happens and you become attached to it, there is the problem, but if you just see it and let it go, or if you are just aware of it, that is good. But normally people are attached to it. They want something special, but psychic power is not the real miracle. The real miracle, according to the Buddha, is the ability to be aware. When you sit and know that you are sitting, that is the supreme miracle according to the Buddha. Psychic power is the result of concentration not awareness. If you have strong concentration then your mind becomes powerful. Monks or people who practice mindfulness meditation seldom attain this power, but it is a short cut to enlightenment because you are unlikely to be distracted by psychic power, so you go ahead. Otherwise, you see flowers, you see shopping centers, you make visits, and then progress is delayed but the delay is enjoyable. As for new age, do not pay attention to things out there. They are just technology. If you enjoy technology, such as computers, it may seem like progress to you and you may enjoy spending whole day with the computer. You are better in term of power over technology,

but you are not any wiser than other people. Technomania, the same mentality for those who are interested in psychic power in Buddhism, leads to suffering.

June 13, 1997

Life time Practice

We have already studied the sacred Buddhist texts, especially the text on *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness*. We practice through our experience, which is in reality the sacred text that is already in ourselves. With our practice, we have investigated into the text which is the experience in ourselves. We have investigated or trained ourselves to be aware of body, feeling, mind or thoughts, and mind objects, the key points in this sacred Buddhist text. How can we see them? We see these four phenomena through mindfulness. With mindfulness, we are able to understand the reality of these four aspects.

We have to cultivate mindfulness or awareness in order to see these four aspects of reality, otherwise, we cannot have understanding. We cannot know body, feeling, thoughts, and mind objects with intellect, nor through reasoning or analytical mind. The only way is to realize, to experience ourselves, then the realization will arise. We have explored the realms of the body, feelings, mind, and mind objects. In fact, there are many details in the realms of body, feeling, thoughts, and mind objects. The more we practice, the more we experience the reality of these four realms, the more we are familiar with the sacred Buddhist

text. Keep trying. Keep practicing so that you will be familiar with awareness and gain an understanding of the nature of body and mind, of the condition of body, and of the activities of body and mind. You will achieve insight into body and mind and will have a thorough understanding of body and mind. If you reach that point, you will have already finished the study of this text, this sutra, and you will be able to handle feelings properly.

Feelings are everywhere, but I would like you to be stable like stones. Stones are here, stones are there, stones are everywhere, in Thailand, and in America. Stones are the symbol of stability, of constancy, of normality. So, if you handle feelings properly and know not to be moved by whatever feeling it may be or whatever feeling you may experience, your mind will be normal and constant, not getting high or low because of feelings, pleasant or unpleasant. If we do not know the nature of feelings clearly, we are going to be their servants. We will run after feelings, struggles for pleasant feelings and run away from unpleasant ones. Feelings, especially pleasant feelings, can lead to war. They bring a lot of consequences; our lives will be dependent on pursuing pleasant feelings. That is why suffering arises. So, please understand feelings properly.

Everyone has body and mind, and we have to stay with body and mind. We also all share the same feelings and mental impressions. They are present in all of us. If we understand body, mind, feelings, mental impressions, and mind objects, we will understand each other; we will realize that everybody is one, the same. So this sacred text can be applied universally. The Buddha has already laid out the formula to understand human beings, to understand ourselves. So, please try to learn this sutra, this text, through our practice in cultivating awareness and mindfulness. If we know this reality thoroughly, completely, our search for the meaning of life is complete. We have already graduated, there will be no need to study anymore.

We get high or low, depressed or happy, feel pleasure or pain. We are up and down because of feelings or emotions, because we take them to be substantial, to be a person. We make them personal because we do not understand the real nature of these mental impressions. Somebody may feel, during the practice, that they are tired. But if you understand mental impressions clearly, you would rather say, “Tiredness is present in me,” not, “I am tired.” We do not take tiredness to be ourselves or to be a person.

So please develop an observer in your mind, within yourself. Just see the feeling, acknowledge it, notice it, don’t identify with it, and you will learn how to be free of it. So, keep looking into yourself, keep observing, keep seeing, and you will be free, will see, will understand its real nature. If you see it frequently, the truth of body and mind will reveal itself for us to see. Actually, the truth reveals itself at every moment, but since we do not know how to see it, we miss it. There are a lot of consequences of not understanding the truth of body and mind. Defilement, anger, hatred, delusion, selfishness, and suffering are all results of our inability to see body and mind properly. So, it is very important to learn seeing body and mind, to be aware of body and mind.

Thought, or the thinking process, influences our speech and our conduct. Thus produces a lot of consequences and affect people in various ways, from one person to another, forming chain reactions. So, simply put, thoughts can produce a lot of consequences. But if we see the thoughts and understand their nature, they will not have as much influence or consequences. Unintentional thoughts cannot last if you see them, if you are aware of them they are not substantial. Once we are aware of them, they just fade away; so do not think they are substantial. Just be aware of them. They cannot produce consequences.

A thought has no end, it is always concocting reality. If we do not know the way of the thought it will start another one and another, without end. There is a story of a dog in a monastery. Sitting under the staircase, the dog saw a monk returning from the alms round with food. It thought the monk very lucky because he could get food easily. After finishing his breakfast, the monk gave the leftovers to the dog. The dog had the idea that being a dog is even better; it can have food easily without having to go through the village. But after a while, a monastery boy beat the dog and the dog changed its mind, “I would like to be the boy because he can beat the dog; he is superior to the dog.” After the boy went to sleep, a fly buzzed over him and the boy made a fuss trying to get rid of the fly without success. So, the dog thought being a fly would be better because he could disturb the boy and the boy would not be able to get rid of it. A while later, though, the fly flew to the dog’s mouth, so the dog just stretched his tongue out and caught the fly. He finally realized that to be a dog is better because he could overcome the fly. This is the concocting mind, the power of compounded thinking without end. We change our minds all the time.

In a thought itself, there is truth, the truth of the thought, the cause of suffering as well as the cause of happiness, the truth of the way, the suffering, and the way out of suffering, the truth of attachment and the truth of detachment. Thought is not a self; it is subject to condition. You have to understand that thoughts are created by conditional factors. They cannot exist alone. So we have to understand the conditions that produce the thoughts. All kinds of truths about suffering and the cessation of suffering can be learned, can be known within the truth itself. Truth is not a self. It is a condition. You have to understand.

The Buddha said to Sariputra that things and existence are produced by causes. They are governed by the law of causality. If you want to extinguish this, you

have to get rid of that, because that is the cause of this. This is the law of causality, the law of dependent-origination. So, if thoughts are subject to this law, they have causes and sources. If we want to get rid of an undesirable thought, we need not suppress it or eliminate it but we should trace it back to where it came from, and then deal with it. Buddha achieved victory because he knew how to deal with the cause of suffering. So, to understand the underlying cause of thoughts, we need to develop awareness. Our awareness should be totally developed, full awareness.

The way that the Buddha mentioned in many sermons, including the first sermon, was formalized and laid out in the text of *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness*. The way that he mentioned is important. If you follow that way, you will learn how to realize the truth properly.

The nature of all existence is subject to impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and no-self. If you do not understand this, you will get high in pleasant feelings and get low in unpleasant feelings. Life cannot always be pleasant; you will sometimes suffer. Our minds are moved up and down. But if we know all objects, all feelings, and do not take them to be substantial, do not identify ourselves with them, they can neither harm us nor disturb our minds. This is what I would like to stress.

The retreat is not over as long as we have breath or are alive. We need to practice as long as body and mind exist with us. As long as we still have feelings and emotions, we need to continue our practice. To give you an idea that we are not alone, anything happens to us, noise, voice, people, sight and sound, taste and smell, from surroundings, have involved our lives. We have to learn to deal with all sorts of things properly so that we will not suffer.

June 14, 1997

Buddhist Meditation in a Nutshell

I would like to talk about the problems of meditation. They are problems that we all share - - drowsiness, pain, tiredness, and exhaustion. These problems are quite normal for the practitioner. We have all experienced the same kind of problems. The only duty we have is to be mindful in every moment and in every situation. Whether you are drowsy, tired, or feel pain, try to be mindful in that situation, meaning you are not disturbed by these problems. Do not regard them as obstacles, but take them as experiences that enrich your practice. Because skillful practitioners have to learn how to deal with various kinds of experiences.

Do not try to find answers in the intellect or in your brain, or try to investigate into the thoughts, or make reasons for what you have experienced. Just feel. Just be stay aware. The practice of awareness will bring you insight or wisdom. It is the wisdom that is not the result of intellect or rationalization but of repeated practice. This kind of wisdom enables you to understand the nature of reality. And the practitioner who concentrates on this kind of practice will obtain wisdom in return. This is what we call

wisdom resulting from practice, not from intellect or from memorization.

There are four kinds of objects that you should be aware of. The first is the *body*. The second is the *feeling* or sensation; coldness, heat, happiness, suffering, these are all in the realm of sensation. The third is *thoughts*; and the fourth kind of object is what we call - - *Mind Objects*. Mind objects mean the states of the mind or mental qualities. They include five hindrances (sensual desire, ill-will, sloth, anxiety and doubt) and seven factors of enlightenment (mindfulness, truth-investigation, effort, zest, calmness, concentration and equanimity). Be it a wholesome or unwholesome object, just be aware of it.

So train yourself to be aware of these four objects over and over. If you are not mindful, the body will bring you suffering and a lot of problems, feelings will create a lot of problems for you, as will thoughts and mind objects. So, it is crucial for us to be mindful with respect to body, feelings, mind, and the mind object. And this will give you insight. The more you are aware, the closer you are to insight. That is why we call this practice "*Insight Meditation*", the meditation that brings you insight.

The first level of the enlightened one is called "*Sotapanna*." It means one who has entered the stream of enlightenment. The first level of the enlightened one is one who is free from or lets go of the first three fetters. The first one is a false view of person or false view of self. It means the view that this body belongs to me. This body is me; this body is myself. You take this body as me or mine, or take me as being in the body, or take body as being in myself. You take this body as substantial. But, if you attain insight into body and mind from this method of meditation, you can liberate yourself from this false view of self. The second fetter is uncertainty, skeptical doubt. Once you have realized the true nature of body and mind, you achieve insight, or wisdom, and you have no doubts about the

practice or about the proper way of meditating. The third fetter is attachment to form, to rituals, to legalities, or to the rules. This practice is good, is correct; that practice is not good, not correct. This rule is okay; that rule is not okay. This etiquette is good; that etiquette is bad. These are what we call attachment to the rules and rituals. If we see the true nature of all things clearly and achieve insight of the true nature of all things, we will be able to go beyond this concept of right or wrong.

The objective of insight meditation is not to gain psychic power of telepathy, to penetrate anyone's mind, to fly in the air, or to go underground. Those are not the objects of meditation. The objective of Buddhist meditation is to have total awareness of body, of feelings, of mind, and of mind objects. Such awareness will give rise to insight. The first step of insight is the insight into body and mind. With this insight you know without doubt what body is, what mind is, what the nature of body is, what the nature of mind is, what the disease of body is, what the disease of mind is, what causes suffering to the body, what causes suffering to the mind. This is the insight into body and mind. And once you achieve this insight, your practice will go on to the next step of the practice, learning to be aware of thoughts.

In the beginning, as I suggested a few days ago, you should just be aware of your body. Do not mind your thoughts. Just leave whatever thoughts arise behind. But once you get insight into body and mind, you have to practice the second stage of being aware of your thoughts. Yet, to be aware of your thoughts dose not mean that you have to investigate them. Just see them, register them, and then turn your attention to the practice of body movement. Do not bargain or negotiate with your thoughts, not try to find the motive or reason behind them; do not ask yourself why you have such thoughts, why your thoughts are unwholesome. Not at all. Just be aware of them and come back to the practice.

From this second step of practice, another kind of insight will take place. With this insight, you can go straight. The truth will reveal itself and you will see things clearly without using analytical thinking. You just see it and understand it. So, it is as if you go straight without interruption. Once you achieve a certain kind of insight, you will be able to look back and see what you have already passed. I would compare it with my walk here from the pond. I just go straight from the pond to this hall, and when I turn back I can clearly see everything that I have passed. This is the state of the mind that gets you insight.

Is it difficult to understand? This practice which develops mindfulness is the practice that includes all kinds of training. In Buddhism we have three kinds of training, we call it "*Three Fold Training*," training in higher *morality*, training in higher *concentration*, training in higher *wisdom*. With this practice you will go through the *Three Fold Training* because with mindfulness you observe morality; mindfulness also gives rise to concentration, and later wisdom arises from the practice. Once you achieve the insight that I mentioned, you will have no doubts about evil or goodness, and you will have no doubt about religion, what Buddhism is. You will have no doubts because it is clear to you and there is no need to ask yourself what you have achieved. It is as if you take breakfast or lunch. Once you are full, you know you are full. You do not need more food. It is a realization nobody needs to confirm for you. You can confirm it for yourself.

It is all right or good for you to experience drowsiness, frustration, and anxiety, because they help you learn. They come for you to see them and the more you see them the more you will understand, just as the more often I see you the more I know you. I cannot mistake anybody for you. Once these mental qualities appear to you do not be lost in them. Try to see them, do not identify with them, but see them, observe them. And the more you see

them the less likely they are to disturb you. They will gradually fade away.

July 8, 1997

Insight Meditation

It's time to give a talk to complement your practice. We are practicing meditation to develop mindfulness according to the system that the Buddha developed. This system of practice was not invented by Luangpor Teean or by anybody else, but was developed thousands of years ago by the Buddha; it is called "*Insight Meditation*" or "*Vipassana Meditation*." It is different from the calmness meditation that was developed even before the time of the Buddha.

The primary aim is to develop insight through mindfulness. The mindfulness that we experience or have already developed is the same mindfulness that the Buddha experienced. And the body that we are going to be aware of is not different from the one that the Buddha used as an object of meditation. The feelings or the sensations that we need to be aware of are also the same that the Buddha meditated on. And all the hindrances that we encounter; be it anxiety, uncertainty, indolence, anger or sensual desire, are also the same that the Buddha faced and overcame. So, what we do is not far from what the Buddha did or experienced.

There are two objects that we have to be aware of, body and mind. That which moves is body. The hand's movement is the body's movement. That which receives sense impressions or that which think is the mind. The primary objective is to enable us to be aware of the body in the beginning. This practice enables us to be aware of every moment, every movement we make, either in our daily lives or in the formal practice as we are doing now. Sometimes we take this body as mine. We take our thoughts to be my thoughts, to be myself, or to belong to myself. These are misperceptions, or false views. We should take the body as body, mind as the mind and nothing beyond that.

The body follows the laws of nature. It has its own nature. The body is also subject to change. It has feelings. Do not take feelings or physical sensations as self or as substantial. They are just the condition of the body, just the feeling of the body. The same applies to the mind. There are many kinds of mental states - - anger, drowsiness, anxiety, happiness, suffering, etc. These are not the real nature of the mind. They are just the activities of the mind or the conditions of the mind. The nature of the mind itself is peaceful and radiant. Again, do not take the negative emotions as the nature of mind. They are just the conditions of the mind. Please differentiate between these two aspects - - nature and conditions or activities.

If you have this understanding, the understanding of the nature and conditions of body and mind, you have already achieved insight into the reality of body and mind. When we develop mindfulness, it enables us to see and to be aware of body as body, feeling as feeling, mind as mind, and do not take them to be selves, to be ourselves, to be me, or to be mine. When anger, anxiety, or suffering arises, please see them as they really are. Recognize that suffering is present in me but I am not suffering; anger is present in me but I am not angry; drowsiness arises in me but I am not drowsy. Try to see or to be aware like this. Do

not take any emotion as yourself or belonging to you. Just take it or see it as it is. That is the proper attitude to have.

When you practice mindfulness to a certain point, you will have this insight into body and mind and the truth of body and mind will reveal itself. What is the nature of body? What is the nature of mind? What is the suffering of body? What is the suffering of mind? What is the cause of physical suffering? What is the cause of mental suffering? These are the truths that will reveal themselves when you attain a certain level of insight and these will reduce your suffering.

You have to look. You have to be aware. Then, insight will occur. If you are lost in thoughts or emotions you cannot see, cannot understand the nature of mind. If you take this body as self or as belonging to you, you will not be able to understand the real nature of your body. So please keep knowing, and being aware of whatever happens to your mind and body. Do not identify yourself with thoughts, feelings, or emotions. Just see them. When you are aware, you will realize that the mind is impermanent, it is subject to suffering and it is not self. The same goes for the body. The body is impermanent, it is subject to suffering and it is not self. These are the insights, the results of awareness.

Can you understand? The noise disturbs us but sound is just sound! Do not bother with it! Don't be disturbed by noise! Just accept it! That's the way it is. Do not let it have an effect on you. The state of awareness is very important. It is the path. It is the fundamental of holy life. It is the whole of the training. In Buddhism we have three aspects of training, or *Three Fold Training* - - training in higher morality, *Sila*; training in higher concentration, *Samadhi*; training in higher wisdom, *Panna*. If you practice mindfulness, you have already undergone this *Three Fold Training*.

Awareness enables you to be free from thoughts, free from mental states. It enables you to let go of these elements. And if you achieve the full awareness you will be free from birth, aging, sickness, and death. You will no longer be disturbed by them. Mindfulness is the instrument to get rid of attachment, to let go of attachment - - attachment to body or form, attachment to feelings, attachment to perceptions, attachment to mental volition, or attachment to consciousness. These five kinds of attachment, or attachment of five aggregates, will be dissolved by the power of awareness. The Buddha once said that attachment to the five aggregates - - form, feeling, perception, mental volition, and consciousness - - is suffering. It is the cause of suffering. So if you are able to let go of the attachment to the five aggregates, suffering cannot exist. That's why the Buddha calls it *The Supreme Victory*, the victory of letting go of these attachments.

For this to be possible, you need to have full awareness, total mindfulness, which will enable you to see the way things really are, and to understand the nature and the conditions of things. The nature of things is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and no-self. The conditions of things are subject to change. Pleasant, unpleasant, agreeable, disagreeable, content, or discontent, these are the conditions of things that keep changing. They are not reality.

What I told you is the truth, the Dhamma; it is not a fiction or an invention. And this state of insight is not beyond your reach. It is in your capacity to attain the truth, to realize the truth. Keep practicing! Develop awareness as much as possible. Do not waste your time on thoughts or on the thinking process. Just practice. Do not dwell on your thoughts. That's all for today.

July 9, 1997

A Handful of Buddhism

We are learning to practice meditation. The purpose of meditation is to develop awareness and mindfulness. The more we exercise awareness the more we develop it. It will become present in our bodies and our minds will become familiar with our bodies because of mindfulness. Try to make your mind familiar with your body so that it will be with your body.

People are differentiated by their actions - - Kamma. Kamma is the determining factor that differentiates all of us. If we practice mindfulness, it is the action that can determine our lives and have an effect on us. Keep practicing mindfulness. If we practice enough and properly, it already includes the training in higher morality, the training in higher concentration, and the training in higher wisdom, or what we call, the *Three Fold Training*.

There are many things that keep us from being aware, and keep us from knowing. There are sensations, or feelings. If we are caught up in feelings, our mind is turned from ourselves or from the body and we do not experience awareness. Unintentional thoughts also keep us from being aware. Be they good thoughts or bad thoughts, if we are

distracted by them, awareness disappears and we cannot create the desirable Kamma of practicing awareness. So try to turn your mind away from those feelings and thoughts. Do not become distracted or disturbed by them. If you become aware and keep knowing your body, you will realize later that the unintentional thoughts are like the garbage. They are undesirable and we are no longer tempted by them as before.

We do not refuse or reject feelings or thoughts, but we are not to be caught up in any of them. Mindfulness enables us to be aware of these feelings and thoughts and mindfulness enables us to bring the mind back to the body's movement. We keep knowing, keep being aware, and keep returning our attention to our bodies, rather than being lost in our feelings, emotions, or thoughts. These will give rise to insight. We will see clearly that the unintentional thoughts are garbage that can not trick us any more. Formerly we may have enjoyed thinking the thoughts, falling into them, getting caught up in them. But once we see them as garbage, we feel ashamed of ourselves and we no longer want to bother with them. This is the insight that you can achieve from thoughts themselves; they give you this lesson.

When thoughts arise, just be aware of them. And I myself, as I told you yesterday, have been caught up in thoughts for many years, never aware of how they determined my life. But one day I was suddenly aware, I suddenly understood. I suddenly bumped into a thought, saw it face to face, and finally overcame it. My thoughts could not tempt me or trick me anymore. This was the decisive victory. Before that, I was the slave of my thoughts which concocted greed, hatred, and delusion. With thoughts, greed, hatred, and delusion arise. A lot of thoughts become the consequence of those defilements. Once I understood and saw the thought clearly, I became its master. The thoughts cannot be my master anymore. This is the insight, the result of accumulated awareness.

The four categories - - body, feelings, mind or thoughts, and mind objects - - keep coming into our lives. We experience all of them. During practice, they keep coming, keep arising, and keep disturbing our minds. We do not know how to deal with them because we do not have enough mindfulness. But if our mindfulness is strong enough, they just come for us to learn and see their nature clearly, to see that they are temporary states of mind. There are two kinds of nature: the nature of body and mind, and the conditional state of body and mind. These are the two aspects of body and mind that we can realize, that we can understand. Later we can see where thoughts come from. Where are they? What is their source or origin? What is their stronghold? We can know it all. We will also be able to know the three characteristics: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and no-self. We will know what they are, and we see everything in terms of them. This insight is possible because of the mindfulness that we keep developing.

Everything that we experience can be put into two realms - - body and mind. It is all related to these two realms, body and mind, and no more than that. When we are aware of the body and mind, we can see the two aspects that I mentioned earlier - - the true nature of body and mind, and the conditional or the temporary state of body and mind. For example, feelings, whatever they are, heat or cold, pleasure or pain, happiness or suffering, these are not the true nature of body and mind. They are just the temporary states or conditions that keep changing. This reality or insight will reveal itself. These are the insights that keep coming to the mind.

Be attentive to your practice. Do not bother with the practice of other people, looking to see how they practice, or how long they practice, or how well they practice. Don’t worry about whether you yourself are practicing rightly or wrongly. Just keep knowing. Just

maintain awareness. Just stay mindful. All your problems will be solved on their own. After you have progressed to a certain extent, you will find that many problems just disappear on their own, like drowsiness or scattered thoughts, etc. Mindfulness is the only fundamental of the practice. Just stay firm with mindfulness or awareness. There is no more than that. With mindfulness, the factors in *Co-dependent Origination* can come to their end. When you have contact with the world and have feelings, they will not produce defilement or any consequences. They just stop there if you have mindfulness. But if you do not have mindfulness, they will produce other factors. So just let the progress of *Co-dependent Origination* stop at the stage of feeling and there will be nothing more.

Once insight into body and mind arises, delusions appear and the truth will reveal itself. After you have insight into body and mind, another insight will result, the understanding of conventional reality and the ultimate truth. With that, greed, hatred and delusion are reduced. You achieve insight into the three common characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and no-self. Again this will reduce greed, hatred, and delusion dramatically. These are the results of the practice. They are the insights that will occur on their own. That's why I always say that the practice of mindfulness is the perfect formula of meditation. It is perfect in every step, every stage of the practice. There is no more than that.

All virtues, all teachings are included in the practice of mindfulness. Be it training in higher morality, training in higher concentration, training in higher wisdom, compassion, loving kindness, generosity, endurance, etc. These are all virtues that you have already practiced through mindfulness meditation. In fact, the key teachings or the key virtues, according to Buddhism, are just a few, just a handful!

July 11, 1997

Letting Go

What we are doing now is following our master, the supreme master, the Buddha, who developed this meditation a long time ago. He used his body and mind as the text or scripture for study, studying the Dhamma through cultivating awareness of the body and mind. Apart from the body, we should also be aware of feelings, thoughts, and mind objects. Mind and body are like a sutra that covers a lot of subjects, a lot of knowledge that we should know. We are able to learn about heaven, hell, happiness, suffering, morality, concentration, and wisdom from our body and mind through awareness cultivation. The causes of disturbances and problems in this world are in the realm of body and mind. On the other hand, the cause of peacefulness and happiness can also be found in the realm of body and mind. I need not explain more about this, but I would like to talk about the practice.

The practice can be done by cultivating awareness of the body. Please try whatever techniques that can be used for awareness cultivation. Actually, what Luangpor Teean taught is very up to date, never obsolete, very modernized, and suitable for the modern age. This method is a universal one because everybody has body and mind.

All of us have the same properties, regardless of nationality, language, race, gender, etc.; we all have the same properties of body and mind. Just try to breathe in and breathe out with awareness. When you breathe in, be aware of that in breath; when you breathe out, be aware of that out breath. And we will become one. Breathe in and breathe out. Let's try breathing in and breathing out. If we have awareness, all of us will become one. Otherwise, we are different people; behaving differently in our own way. Awareness, mindfulness, or the breath, are all things we already have, so they are not difficult to practice. The awareness of breath and the awareness of the body's movement are the same.

So how can we achieve awareness? Nothing can keep us from cultivating awareness. The only factor is ourselves. If we practice, awareness can be developed; it depends on us. We have already done many things - - chantings, devotions, offerings, performing merits, studying scriptures, etc. Another thing that we should do is practice meditation. What Chuang Yen Monastery has done is to follow the path of the Buddha, encouraging people to practice meditation. Although not many people are interested, it is a good activity. Other Buddhist practices such as offering food to the monks, offering materials to the temples, observing the precepts, or studying the texts, are not lacking in society. What we lack is awareness.

We have problems regarding the body and mind. We suffer because of body and mind. Greed, hatred, and delusion arise because we do not know how to deal with body and mind properly. For example, delusion occurs when the eyes or ears make contact with a sight or sound and we are not aware. When you have awareness, forgetfulness and delusion just disappear. They are opposites; when awareness arises, the forgetfulness cannot stand. It just disappears. I would like to ask all of us, "Which, up till now in our lives, has been more powerful, awareness or forgetfulness?"

It is not difficult for awareness to arise if we start counting on ourselves. Buddhism starts from the individual, transforming the individual first. You need not change the environment or to ask the environment to change at the outset. So if you keep cultivating awareness, you will find the answers to your problems by yourself. The truth about body and mind will no longer exist.

I would like to speak briefly for your benefit. We need to let go of everything regarding the mind. Regarding the body, we should learn how to reduce physical suffering and treat it properly. In other words, mental suffering can be reduced by letting go, but physical or bodily suffering has to be reduced by treatment. For instance, when it is hot you have to stay in the shelter and so on because it is the physical suffering, but if it is mental suffering, you have to let it go.

I would just like to encourage you to practice. This temple is a suitable place for teaching and practicing meditation. I like this place very much. We can practice or walk without mosquitoes. In my temple in Thailand, when I moved hand, I have to keep the mosquitoes away, but here it's very easy. So it is a suitable place that provides a good environment for practice. I do not know whether you benefit from this place or not, but I myself benefit a lot. My health is much better and I also have good ideas. Three years ago, I had interesting ideas, and I put the talks into a small booklet about the Dhamma.

Since my talk has to be translated, it can't be continual because I have to pause for the translation. So I only say about fifty percent of what I would like to. If I were to speak in my dialect I could continue my talk more easily, but that's okay, do not take it seriously. It's better to have a question and answer session. I have to go tomorrow, so this is your last chance.

Q: What should I do when I have no thought during the practice, and what should I do when I am aware of my body's movements but all kinds of thoughts arise simultaneously?

A: What you should do is be aware of the thoughts that arise, that's all. When no thoughts arise, just be aware of your body's movements. When I practice, sometimes I lose my sense of self, but when it seems that I myself have disappeared, I just touch myself to regain my sense of self.

Q: With awareness, one may attain the state of no self or even reach the level of Arahant. Is the eradication of the ten fetters that an Arahant should achieve before he reaches enlightenment also possible through awareness?

A: Awareness gives rise to higher morality, higher concentration, and higher wisdom. So, the *Three Fold Training* is already incorporated in the act of awareness. It depends on how much awareness we have. If the awareness is strong, it can get rid of the fetters one by one. So it depends on how strong the awareness is. The more powerful it is, the more likely it is that it can overcome or dissolve the fetters.

Q: How do we enhance the changing conditions of our bodies and minds with awareness during our practice? For instance what do we do if the mind becomes neutral.

A: A neutral state of the mind means that the mind is ready to be happy or suffer. Just be aware of that neutral state. If it transforms into a pleasant feeling, just be aware of it; if it becomes an unpleasant feeling, just be aware of it. At the same time, if there is no thought, just recognize that there is no thought. When a thought arises, just be aware of it. You need not do anything with your mind or

make it move from that state. Just practice and be aware of your body's movements, that's all.

Q: Is there any difference between the awareness that we are developing and the awareness of the Buddha?

A: They are the same. If you develop awareness to a certain point, your mind will be at the level of sustained observance, constant awareness. It is a sustained awareness; keep seeing and keep knowing all the time. This state of sustained awareness will include morality, concentration, and wisdom, and it will also enable you to see the cause of suffering. This state of awareness will lead to the cessation of suffering. So, this is the state of Buddhahood. The awareness of the Buddha is the awareness that enabled him to see *the Four Noble Truths* – suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path to the cessation of suffering. If you achieve this state of sustained awareness, the practice is over; you have already reached the end of the practice.

I would like to encourage you to practice and train yourself to deal with mind and body properly. For example, when anger arises in your mind, just know it. Just be aware of it. Do not become lost in it or identify with it. The same applies to sufferings and even happiness. Just see it, be aware of it, do not get caught up in it. This will enable you to transcend the world. You will still live in the world and interact with people, but you will be above the influence of the world.

Q: Is it all right to use wisdom to penetrate greed that comes on very strong and repeatedly instead of just being aware of it as Luangpor suggested?

A: It is all right for you to penetrate it like that. In fact, awareness itself can be transformed into an act of penetration. If you penetrate, you can see how impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless greed is. Yes, it

is all right. Greed is the desire to have more. If you work and get seven dollars an hour, you want more, ten dollars or fifteen dollars. That is greed. But if you work and get money in return, say seven dollars, and just concentrate on the work you do that is not greed. Greed is a desire that arises in the mind, not the act of working to earn your living.

July 12, 1997

An outline of the Insight

I am just repeating an old story because this is the old path that the Buddha walked a long time ago. It is the single path, the supreme path, that we should walk for our well being. That which finds the path is mindfulness. Mindfulness will tell you the right path. It is the mental eye that sheds light for you while you are traveling on the path, and it will tell you whether you are walking on the right path.

In fact, mindfulness is not out of the realm of body and mind. The more we are aware, the more we are able to understand the body and mind. After we are aware of the body and mind over and over, we will have insight into them. Previously, you took body and mind as yourself, as belonging to you, but once you have insight into body and mind, you see them as they really are.

We use mindfulness or awareness as the eyes for us to look into the body and mind, and the truth will manifest itself. This will enable us to understand the nature of body and mind, to see and understand why the body and mind do good or bad, to understand the sickness or the suffering of body and mind, and to see the conditions or the factors

that give rise to these sufferings. It also enables us to understand the activities, the temporary state or conditions, of body and mind. These truths will manifest themselves to us. Insights occurs to us like a door that is opened. Once it is opened, we can look and see inside, and everything inside is clear to us.

So, when we have insight into body and mind, the truth of body and mind will be apparent. We will see the sufferings of body and mind and we are interested to see what else come after them. We keep seeing, and keep knowing the truth regarding body and mind, step by step. The truth just goes, and we just follow it as it opens or manifests itself to us one by one. It is like when we study and have an understanding of the subject, the understanding keeps increasing because one leads to another. Insight is like that, it expresses or manifests itself, and we just follow it.

Our body is not ours. It is beyond our control, nobody can control it, and no one can be its master. It just goes on its natural way; we cannot control it. And you will see clearly if you look closely. You will be aware that feelings and sensations are constantly arising. There are feelings and sensations at every moment. Please do not think that feelings just happen when you feel tired or exhausted. They occur all the time and happen every moment. They arise and cease, arise and cease, continually. The continuity of sensation is like a flow.

In fact, we have already suffered enough from this continuity. Moreover, we still bring other sufferings into our minds. We suffer when we are subject to old age, sickness, or death, when we experience the undesirable, when we depart from the desirable or beloved ones, or when we cannot fulfill our wishes or cannot reach our expectation. These are all conditions of life that we grasp because of our ignorance which gives rise to more suffering. But once we

know the truth, the reality, these phenomena cannot affect us. Once we know, we just let go.

The knowledge which results from meditation is not just knowledge because it also transforms our lives. When we look into it, we realize the truth, the truth that is inherent in body and mind. And it just manifests itself. When the truth of body and mind is realized, our minds are transformed and our perceptions changed. When you see suffering, it manifests its reality, its nature. So, once we are aware of it, suffering is transformed into happiness and ignorance is transformed into wisdom. Furthermore, we will understand the truth of goodness and religion. What is religion? What is the teaching? What is the truth? These are the insights we will have at this stage of practice.

The insight that I mentioned is the first stage of insight, called *Insight into Body and Mind*, or *Reality Regarding Body and Mind*. We will know once we have such insight. Luangpor Teean suggests that after we achieve such insight we go a step further. In this step, we speed up our practice, moving our hand more quickly or walking faster. At this time, since we already have mindfulness we don't need to create it. It is already in us. This time you use mindfulness to look into your body, your mind, your thoughts, and your emotions. This is what we call *The Stage of Mental Practice*, that is we emphasize looking at our thoughts.

And this state of mental observation is the state that keeps our mind calm because once we see the thoughts we are not shaken, disturbed, or annoyed by them. We just stay in the state of purity, or pure mind, because our minds are constant and not disturbed by any thoughts. We call this stage, since the mind is normal, the state of Sila (morality), the perfection of Sila, because Sila in Pali means constant, or normal. Since our mind is not disturbed, shaken, or moved by any thoughts, it is called concentration. And since the insight enables us to see what

is right and what is wrong, this is wisdom. At this stage we have achieved the *Three Fold Training*. And this *Three Fold Training* can eradicate defilement.

If the mind is calm, it is like still water. It's good. If the mind is shaken or disturbed by thoughts, it's comparable to rippling water. Calmness and irritation are both states of mind. The water is not the waves; the waves are not the water. A wave is just the condition or a temporary state of the water, not its real nature. The same applies to mind. Anger is not mind. It's just a condition of mind, a temporary state. Some people mistake anger as mind or take anger as self; once anger arises, these people become lost in their thoughts saying to themselves, "If I can express my anger, I would not regret it even if I have to die." They become lost in the anger, taking it to be self.

During your practice, you may experience drowsiness or sometimes have no thoughts at all. These are just temporary states of mind that arise and then disappear, passing through our minds and then fading away. If we stay aware and keep looking, keep being aware of our thoughts, we will see that these are just temporary states of mind and we will be able to differentiate between objects and their temporary states. When we hear the noise of a drum, or the noise of a machine, these are objects. But when they disturb our minds, such disturbance is a temporary state of mind or mental condition. So just keep practicing awareness and it will enable you to see the nature of objects and the reality of the temporary states of things, of objects, of body and mind.

In fact, there are more details than that, but I just want to give you a sketch or outline of the insight that will occur in this second stage of the practice. Those who achieve this stage may experience joy, bliss or rapture since one is single minded. I just want you to understand this stage so you won't be careless. One monk, after being absorbed in the bliss of this stage, thought that he would

not be attacked by the snakes in the forest. So he just walked to his cottage in the forest at night without using torch light because he believed that the cobras numerous in his temple would not bite him. He was wrong. Do not be lost in that pleasant feeling or quality. In this second stage of insight, as I told you, you will be able to see and understand conventional reality or conventional truth, objects, and the temporary state of objects. The objects that I mentioned are both internal and external. The internal objects are the eyes, ears, tongue, nose, body, and mind; the external objects are signs or forms, noise or sound, taste, odor, touch, and mind objects. You will understand that whatever happens to these objects are just their temporary states, not their real nature.

So, once you know that, you will have an understanding of reality. Whatever happens to you, insight, or the truth, will tell you what to do. Whatever obstacles or difficulties you may experience in your life or in your mind, even if they are hindrances or negative feelings in your mind, the insight into body and mind will rush to help you, and you will get over them, overcoming them easily. You will go straight through them. The second stage of insight, the differentiation between objects and the temporary states of objects will rush to help you; the insight into the three common characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and no-self, will also accompany you and come to your rescue. That's how you can go through your problems without many difficulties.

Awareness enables us to see good and bad, to see happiness and suffering, to see calmness and drowsiness. Once you see it, just see it. Do not get into it or identify with it. I would like to put awareness into a nutshell and give it to all of you so that you can apply it to your daily lives. Awareness itself is enough. It is the essence or the heart of the practice and it will enable you to be born of the Dhamma, to be born of the truth. You can be a monk on your own. In our chanting, there is a word in Pali –

Saddhammasho. Saddhammasho means that the monks, or the Sangha, are born of the Dhamma, of the realization of the truth. So, if you have realized the truth and your life is born of the truth, you are already a monk or a part of the Sangha, the noble community. Awareness is the only fundamental for the practice that we can rely upon.

In the beginning, we start our practice with mindfulness; in the middle or in the process, we depend on mindfulness or awareness; in the end, the goal or the destination is still mindfulness. So, mindfulness is not only the path but also the goal. Mindfulness shows us the path, the proper path, to live our lives. And this enables our minds to be transformed, or born of the Dhamma. That is why I say you can be a monk, a Bhikkhu, a real Bhikkhu, not just one in uniform. If you look at the time of the Buddha, a lot of his disciples became enlightened first, or in my words became monks first, and then were ordained by the Buddha. Almost half of the great disciples of the Buddha attained enlightenment before receiving ordination. That's why I said that we can be monks if our minds are born of Dhamma, or if our minds are supported or sustained by Dhamma. You need not have a robe like me to be a monk or a Bhikkhu.

It is normal that awareness at this stage can be regressive. But once you arrive at a certain stage, it will stay unchanged. At this stage, you have to continue your training until you arrive at the stage where you need not train yourself anymore. Asekha means the state of mind that requires no further training. Those who arrive at the state of Asekha, the state of mind that requires no more training, have reached the state of Arahant. What Luangpor is chanting are the verses that the Buddha preached to his mother in heaven. That's all for now. I would like to say good-bye to all of you.

July 13, 1997

SPIRITUAL TIPS FOR MEDITATORS

Part TWO

By
Phra Paisal Visalo

Means and Ends of Meditation

Since I would like you to take this opportunity to listen and learn from Luangpor Khamkhian, I will not take much time. I will just speak a little bit to comply with his request. Later, you can request him to share more or answer your questions.

I think what Luangpor Khamkhian said is fundamental to the Buddhist teachings. He stresses mindfulness. It is very important to practice mindfulness, for it is the heart of Buddhist meditation. When speaking about meditation, we have to bear in mind that there are many kinds of meditation, both formal and informal. In fact, meditation is not an exotic method that has to be imported from the East. Meditation is what we have already experienced, what we have already practiced, whether we are aware of it or not. When you see nature, when you look quietly into yourself, when you reflect on your life, that is meditation. When you try to follow your breath with an expectation of calmness, that is meditation. Meditation can be practiced through drawing, painting, or music. So meditation is what we have already experienced to a certain extent. But, to

make our meditation beneficial, fruitful, and worthy of our attempts and the time we spend, the shortest way, according to Buddhism, is to cultivate mindfulness. That is, meditation with awareness.

Awareness is the means and end of meditation and nothing else. For some people, meditation is the way to calmness; but for the Buddha, calmness should only be the by-product of meditation. It is the reward that we gain from our practice. Yet, we also want to have total self-awareness. Self-awareness, or knowing oneself, is very important, as Luangpor mentioned earlier. According to the Buddha, to know oneself is to liberate our minds from suffering. We are overcome by grief or sorrow and suffer because we are not aware of ourselves. If we become aware, we can see clearly that we are carried away by greed, by anger, by anxiety. Once we become aware of ourselves, mindfulness is established. Once mindfulness is established, it is not easy for sorrow, anger, ill will, or greed to sneak into our minds. Guarding our minds with mindfulness is the secret of removing suffering.

Normally, we are not aware of this truth, but if you reflect on yourself, you will realize that the best way to clear your mind from suffering is to make your mind neutral, to maintain your mind in the middle. If we let our minds be subject to feelings of being pleased or displeased, like or dislike, rejection or attachment, our minds will never experience calmness or clarity. With mindfulness, calmness and clarity are possible. So with the formal practice of the Buddha, we can learn how to cultivate mindfulness enabling us to be free from being all sorts of fire. The Buddha speaks about fire. There are three kinds of fire that burn us at every moment, every day, every hour, every minute: the fire of greed, the fire of hatred, and the fire of ignorance. The fire of greed or the fire of desire, be it sensual desire or desire for becoming, always burns our mind and that make us feel as thought we are lacking.

It is quite strange that the sense of lacking is prevalent in Western societies. Despite the material richness, despite the abundance, people are overwhelmed by the sense of lack. They may have a lot of things in their houses, they may have a lot of money in their bank accounts, they may have success in their careers, but people still feel that they lack something. That is why they try to gain more and more, consciously or unconsciously.

Mindfulness is very effective at stimulating the knowing element in our minds, the conscious element in our minds. It not only helps us to be awake but also brings calmness, which leads to clarity. And once our minds become clear, insight into the nature of mind is possible. That is why mindfulness is very important.

June 8, 1997

The Art of Meditation

You may have noticed the relationship between body and mind during your practice. They affect each other and we should make the best of them for our practice. You may have observed that when you are upset or mentally tense, your breath may become shallow or you may have chest or leg pain. If you understand this relationship, you can learn how to relax your mind by controlling certain parts of your body, for example, breathing deeply can help you relax.

If you want to gain or to attain a desirable of mind, you cannot force the mind directly, but you can condition it by making your body more conductive to this state of mind. The mind is uncontrollable but it can be conditioned indirectly by either the body or external surroundings. For example, if you are in this room, you may feel drowsy, but if you go outside, you are refreshed because of the open air, the open space. The drowsiness disappears. That is the relationship between external surroundings and the mind. Use this knowledge of the relationship to the benefit of your mind.

If you sit up right during sitting meditation, for example, it is easier for the mind to collect, to concentrate,

and to be calm, but if you lean against a wall, you may be sleepy. If you feel very tense, lying down will be helpful, but if you feel normal, lying down will make you sleepy. This is the relationship between body and mind. Please learn how to take advantage of this relationship to improve your practice.

During walking meditation, for example, if you feel distracted or your mind becomes busy and wonders without end, walking more slowly can slow your mind. Your mind will be less distracted. The speed of your walk can affect your mind. If you feel tense because of your inward attitude, your mind turns to look inward, stopping the thinking process. In this case walking faster can help to release the tension. The position of your head also affects your mind. As I told you a few days ago, if you lower your head too much, tension tends to arise because your mind is turning inward. But, if you walk and have an indefinite gaze outward, your mind wanders easily and can be easily distracted. So, positioning your head appropriately will moderate your mind.

You have to find the speed that is appropriate for you, not too fast, not too slow. This is an art. Meditation becomes an art because you have to find the balance on your own. If you walk too slowly, your mind becomes tense because it looks inward and concentrate too much on the body and on the thinking process, so you have to speed up. There are two extremes. One is to wander a lot distractedly, and the other extreme is to take it very seriously, to push oneself very hard, trying to stop or to suppress the thought. The one just follows the thoughts; the other wants to stop the thoughts. These are the two extremes. In this practice, we neither stop nor follow the thoughts. But how? This is the point of balance.

I myself have to adapt. When I feel tense in my legs, I walk slowly. If I walk any faster, I cannot get through the seven days retreat. Normally, I do not practice the

intensive retreat for the whole week, just for a whole day; the rest of the week I do it indirectly and then I may do something else. But to practice seven days, we have to learn how to do it without being exhausted. It is like marathon walking. If you push yourself very hard at the first kilometer or on the first day, the rest of the days will be disastrous. You have to know how to save your energy so you can go through the whole retreat or marathon.

There is no one standard or formula for everybody. You have to find your own way. If you feel tense, it is better for you to look far to relax. When I first practiced, I look inward so much during the first three weeks that I developed a lot of problems. I could not raise my hands or sleep because I tried to suppress my thoughts. I had to cure myself. To turn my mind outward, I had to look at a specific point during my walking meditation for almost three weeks before I felt better. I think for me to look forward, to look far, is good in that situation, but after that I have never used the method again. Now I just look down on the floor but not too much. Luangpor just said, “Feel relaxed, and just be aware,” but I did not know how to apply his teaching to my situation.

I think what Luangpor said about the balance is very important. To be aware is to be on the middle ground between following your thoughts and suppressing them. I like to compare awareness to an egg. If you hold an egg tightly, it will break, but if you do not hold it, it will fall. So, you need to hold the egg firmly but not too tightly. For awareness to be possible, you have to handle gently, as if you are holding an egg. If you force your mind to concentrate, to stop thinking, to achieve something better, or whatever, you are going to crush the egg. But if you feel completely relaxed and do not take it seriously, it is like dropping the egg.

So, in this method of practice, just hold your mind gently. It is how to do this that is the problem. Nobody can

tell you. You have to know how to gauge and how to adapt your mind. It is like riding a bicycle; you have to hold your body in balance. If you are stiff, holding the handles of the bicycle very tightly, your whole body becomes tense and you will fall. So, bicycle riding is the art of keeping your body as well as your mind in balance. The same goes for meditating. You have to hold your mind in balance, neither too relaxed nor too tense. How to reach this point is the art of the meditater, and this is the problem. When I first practiced, I found it difficult to reach this point because normally we tend to be at one of the extremes, either forcing ourselves or just letting things loose.

For the practitioner to arrive this point, one needs to have experience with oneself and learn by oneself. If you arrive this way and know what the middle ground is between the two extremes, you will find it easy to practice without tension. You will be able to work the whole day without a problem; at the same time, you will be able to effectively handle undesirable thoughts. Previously, when we had distracted thoughts or a scattered mind, we responded to in one of two ways, either following it or suppressing it. But if we know the middle way, we will find that just acknowledging our mental condition, just noticing the thought that arises, it will disappear or fade away without our having to make an attempt to suppress it.

In order to reach this point, our attitude is very important. If we want to achieve calmness, to develop mindfulness, or to gain something, we tend to suppress our thoughts. We do not want to be distracted so we try by all means to stop distractions, thus bringing ourselves lots of problems, mentally and physically. So, just take it easy. Attitude is very important. To take it easy does not mean that you do not make any effort, but rather, practicing the whole day and making lots of attempts. The point is how to make such attempts without having anything to gain. You came here and you must have been motivated by some expectations. But once you start working, once you start

raising your hands, you have to ignore whatever brings you here. If you want something during your practice, that means your mind is in the future not in the present. To practice here is to make our minds present here and now. Mindfulness is the presence of mind. To live your life mindfully means you have to make your mind present in everything you do. When you are watching, your mind is there. When you are walking, your mind is there. When you are taking a bath, your mind is there. That is mindfulness, or the presence of mind.

You may wonder how to practice mindfulness while asleep. It depends on how you cultivate mindfulness when you are awake. If you are mindful most of the day, it will take care of itself during your sleep. You will learn that your dreams can be affected by mindfulness. Even consciousness plays a role in your dreams to a certain extent. They are not totally unconscious. They depend on the mindfulness that you have already developed. So, just take care during your waking hours, because it is the period of the day that we can control.

It took me about a month to find the middle ground, but I am a bad example. Many people spend about a week to find it. For me, I feel that tension is the indicator of whether I am practicing right or wrong. If I am tense, it means I am practicing the wrong way. After one month, I was aware of my thoughts very quickly which was a surprising experience for me. Sometimes, even now after being a monk for more than ten years, I practice and I feel tense, which means I am too serious so I know I have to relax my mind a little bit. I still get tense from time to time, not always at the balanced state, but at least I know how much I have to relax to reach the middle ground. It will be a point you are familiar with. You may get tense but when you feel relaxed to a certain point, you will know that this is the middle ground for you. You have to find it yourself. Nobody can tell you where it is.

There are many indicators for us to be sure whether we have developed enough awareness or not. Sometimes one has a lot of distractions. The mind can become busy, but if you acknowledge the thought very quickly and notice when it occurs, you are aware. Also, to be aware does not mean that you have to be calm. In some situations, the mind is supposed to perform its functions and it is difficult to be calm. As long as you notice that your mind is distracted it is all right. That is why Luangpor said, "Do not try to be undistracted; but once you are distracted, you are aware; once your mind goes out, you are aware." The point is your awareness of your state of mind and knowing it quickly.

For a lot of people, meditation time is only the time when they sit cross-legged and close their eyes. Afterwards, they go to work, and cannot think of meditation. Meditation is limited to the room, in the morning and in the evening. But for us, the meditation zone means trying to make the whole day, or a certain period of the day, a time for meditation even though you do not close your eyes and are still at work. It should start at a portion of the day, and then enlarge its zone. The more you are aware of every moment the more meditation is a part of your daily life. It does not mean that only the time inside a meditation hall is meditation, and the rest is not. It should start from the meditation room and then enlarge to your whole life.

Enlarge the zone in time first and then enlarge it in space as well; try to integrate meditation into your daily activities. Try to use the movement of your body as meditation objects all the time, and try not to stay still. On the car or the bus, rub your fingers. Try to have some parts of your body moving and use the movement of your body. If you can use your breath as meditation object, you have a refined, sensitive mind. Yes, you can do that, too. Luangpor suggests using the blinking of your eyes or the swallowing of your saliva. Breathing is useful because you do it all the

time, especially at night when lying in bed. But while typing it may be difficult to be aware of your breath, so just be aware of the typing itself as the object of meditation. When you take a bath, the movement of your body is the object of meditation. So we are never short of an object of meditation except when we are sleeping. That is the benefit of Sati Meditation; you have an object all the time.

We need to have a physical object for meditation all the time, and our body is better. Your mind should be aware of your body's movement. Once a thought arises, your mind goes to the thought, acknowledges it, and then returns. So you have a home. Meditation provides you with a home that is the object of meditation and your mind stays with it. The movement of your body is the present moment. To be mindful is to be present in the present moment, so we try to provide a present moment for the mind, the body's movement. When you become distracted by a thought, that is the present moment too, so the mind should be mindful, but since the thought is undesirable we just let it go and come back to another present moment, your body's movement. It is okay to shift awareness from one type of your body's movement to another frequently if you are skillful. If you are an adapt practitioner, it is not difficult to shift. Try not to practice only two postures because if you practice only walking and sitting, you may find it difficult when you want to be aware of additional activities. You will not be adept enough to apply mindfulness to that activity because you have only been using rhythmic meditation and walking meditation all the time. So, you have to be adapt, to be skillful, to apply mindfulness to every area of life.

For example, in a normal situation, I would use the rubbing of my fingers as an object but, if I am tired, I can concentrate on my breath because it will turn my attention away from the tiredness of my fingers. It is the same with walking; if I walk or climb up a mountain, at a certain point, I shift my awareness to the breath because my legs

feel tired. This is the way to release tension. You can shift from one to another. In Thai, we called it a toy or hobby, we change from our routine to a hobby, and then we change back again. To make meditation more entertaining, we find something strange, something special, something new to play with, and then after we feel we have had enough, we return to the main posture. Please try to apply mindfulness to another postures or activities, not only in daily life but in the retreat, too. When I practiced with Luangpor Teean, sometimes he asked me to clean the floor. He gave me a broom and asked me to be aware when I was doing that job. He wanted me to not stick to the two main postures. During the first few minutes, I felt disturbed, unable to be mindful of the work, because I had limited my activities to only two postures and did not know how to apply mindfulness to that work. But later I knew. In Luangpor's retreat, he also likes people to stay with sitting and walking, but he will provide you with some work to do like cleaning the toilet because he wants us to be skillful in every activity; otherwise you will not be able to apply it to other activities after the retreat.

July 9, 1997

The Middle Ground

As you already know, we are training our mind to reach the middle ground that is between the outward oriented mind and the inward oriented mind. Do not try to turn your mind too much outward or too much inward, to follow your thoughts or to stop them. The middle ground also means trying to avoid being lazy due to being too relaxed or being strained due to too much tension.

It also means that we have to avoid the two extremes of indulging in pleasure and indulging in pain. What does it mean by that, indulging in pain or indulging in pleasure? It means that when you recall a good memory or refreshing images you get high, and when you recall unpleasant feelings in the past, a bad memory, you get low. If you are moved like that, that means you are already indulging in pleasure or pain. If you are stuck in the pleasant feeling that means you are indulging in pleasure, which is one extreme. If you get low or become angry because of your thoughts about somebody that you have bad experiences with, you become dragged down by such thoughts or memories, or if you feel upset because of dissatisfaction with your practice, means that you are indulging in pain.

So, to avoid these two extremes means try to keep your mind normal, stable, and unmoved by pleasant or unpleasant feelings, good or bad thoughts, good or bad mental experiences. So, you see that the term *middle ground* means balanced. It has a broad meaning. It means that you do not follow the thought or suppress the thought, turn your mind too much outward or too much inward, be lazy or push yourself too hard, or indulge in pleasure or in pain.

It is the art of meditation to keep our minds in balance, to reach the middle ground. You may feel it is very difficult to attain this state of mind even though you have come closer to it. Sometimes, you have already attained that balance, but you may be dissatisfied with it. You do not realize that you have already arrived at the middle ground, so you push yourself harder and go beyond that point, moving towards another extreme. Sometimes, your mind is too much inward so you try to relax, but you relax so much that you pass the state of balance, wasting a lot of time. Sometimes, you do not think this is the point that you need to attain. You think, “Oh! This is not the state of awareness because so many thoughts are still coming up, so I have to push myself harder.” You are not satisfied with that state of mind simply because you have some expectation, so you keep passing the state of balanced mind without realizing that you have already experienced it.

I think expectations are sometimes illusory. They are dangerous because they can deceive us, so we have to be very careful. We have some expectation about awareness, so we have already adjusted our mind to the expected state of awareness. Since we do not feel the calmness that we expected and we feel thoughts still arising, we keep ignoring this state of balanced mind. I am sure that you have already experienced the state of awareness, the state of balanced mind, even though you may not realize it. So try again that you may find it and have confidence in it.

Another point that I would like to mention is that, aside from keeping our mind in balance between the two extremes, we also need another art, the art of reconciling two opposing values. We face conflicts in our daily lives between freedom and discipline, between diligence and concentration. If you are too diligent, your mind becomes distracted, but if you concentrate too much, you tend to be lazy. The point is how to reconcile these two opposing values. Right and duty are another pair of values that we have to reconcile. Individualism and communalism are also two opposing values that we have to reconcile or our lives will suffer.

We also face the same dilemma in meditation practice. It may be even more difficult than what I have already mentioned. One is to take it easy but to try hard. Luangpor always stresses this, “Relax! Take it easy, but try hard.” Take it easy but keep trying all day. It is quite contradictory, but you have to reconcile these two or you cannot make progress. Luangpor Teean always said, “Take it easy, but seriously.” Luangpor Teean, unlike Luangpor Khamkhian, would give you only a five minute talk. At his interview, which lasted less than five minutes, he kept saying we should take it easy but seriously or take it easy but do it all day. I was quite confused then, but now I understand what he meant. I think this is the kind of training that is very useful for our daily lives because it is the art of working happily and more effectively. To be happy and to be effective is a pair of values that may seem to oppose each other but that can be reconciled.

During the practice, you have to learn not to expect anything, to just work. If there is too much distraction, that is okay. If you suffer, that is okay. If you are frustrated, that is okay. You have to learn this attitude, because if you want to gain something, to attain calmness, to be aware of your thoughts as quickly as possible, you will be inclined to keep turning your mind inward trying to suppress your

thoughts. You will keep watching your thoughts all the time and end up ignoring the awareness of your body.

Luangpor always emphasizes that we should grasp our awareness of the body and ignore our thoughts first. But normally, in my experience, I seldom remembered this instruction. I tried to stop my thoughts, to suppress them, because I wanted to win. I did not have much time, so I wanted to attain the result as soon as possible and I got stuck. After three weeks, I could not practice anymore. I could not do the hand postures because once I moved my hands, after only a few minutes, I got a headache and I suffered. With a headache and a lot of pain, I could not sleep. I made a vow to practice with Luangpor Teean for one month, and three weeks had already passed with only one week left. Feeling hopeless, I decided that I would leave the temple after I finished that week. So I just walked without any expectations, just waiting for my time to finish. I just kept walking because I could not do anything else. That week was very good for me because once I did not have any expectations, did not have any hopes, and just walked to waste the time, just trying to ease my tension to turn my mind from inward to outward, I felt that mindfulness suddenly developed a lot because I did not mind anymore.

June 11, 1997

Practice Independently

The *truth*, I think, you have to see it. You have to see the truth for yourself. If I tell you, it will not be your truth but an academic or indirect experience. I suggest you not use your intellect to find the truth but direct experience; you must realize it by yourself.

Sati, or *Mindfulness*, is a capacity of mind to recall. When you walk in meditation, you think about your work next month; the body walks but the mind goes somewhere else. Then, you recall that you are supposed to be mindful while walking. That is *Mindfulness*.

When your mind comes back to walk, you feel the sensation of walking and have clear comprehension. That is *Awareness*. It is very important for us to try to experience awareness directly. It is also a capacity of the mind. One can not experience awareness through thought or the intellect for it is beyond the realm of intellect. You have to experience it directly with your feelings. We use a lot of thought, a lot of intellect, but rarely the faculty of feelings or awareness. When you want to touch something, you have to touch it with the hand, not the glove. Intellectualizing awareness is like touching something

through gloves; it is not awareness, not a direct touching with your mind.

I would like to recommend you to practice independently. Independent of what? First, be independent of time. When you walk or practice, do not worry about the time. Some practitioners set the time, saying they will walk or sit for one hour. Then they set the clock in front of them. This will make hell out of their practice because they are concerned about the time, whether they have completed the hour or not. Even with thirty minutes left, they still worry. They are anxious about when they will reach the hour. Do not worry about the time or the clock; practice without any references, allowing your mind to get in touch with mindfulness or awareness.

Sometimes you are also concerned about other people. Why does this person walk so quickly? Why does she walk so slowly? If you keep asking and comparing yourself with other people, you will not be sure whether it is good for you to walk slowly or quickly. That is why you should practice independently, unconcerned with other people. You have to find your own way, the suitable speed or suitable pace for yourself. Everybody has his or her own way of practice. Please ignore what the other people do; just be concerned with yourself..

Another thing that may cause you anxiety is the notion of awareness, or the concept of mindfulness. You have some idea about awareness or mindfulness. When your experience does not fit with that notion or idea, you feel unhappy, you feel uncertain, you feel unsure about the practice. Please forget whatever notions you may have about mindfulness or awareness, even words by the master, or the teachers. The master said that awareness is like this, and mindfulness is like that. You become attached to these words. When your experience does not fit with these words or ideas, you feel unhappy. When I first practiced, I was confused. Somebody said you have to be

aware like this, but the other master said you have to be aware like that. I was bewildered. Which one is the real awareness? It is difficult to explain what awareness is like. You can not convey awareness by words, but have to know it from your experiences. This is true even of color – when you see this robe, you know exactly what color it is, but to express it out loud people use different words. Somebody says this is yellow, but others claim it is orange. Different people use different expressions even for the same thing. Please ignore these references.

The fourth thing to be independent of is the previous results that you may have obtained. Yesterday, you experienced calmness, you achieved wonderful practice, and then you want your practice right now to be the same. That is another kind of reference that you should avoid. If you have such references or if you are concerned with past results, you may be unhappy. They will never fit with one another. Ignore the results of the past and start again at the present moment. *Practice independently*, independent of previous results. It is already the past; let us ignore it. However good your experience was, be it calmness or tranquility, do not try to repeat it again or you will be disappointed. Why? Because you have some expectation, and expectation makes your mind out of balance. To practice like this, balance is crucial. You have to keep your mind in balance. Desire or expectation tends to push your mind out of balance. Therefore, forget whatever happened to you, even your expectations.

Be careful with expectation! When you expect something, you have preconceived notions about it. If experience does not conform with that idea, you reject the experience. There is a story that is very instructive. An individual on a sinking boat prayed to God for help. Being very devout and sincere, he sincerely believed that God would help those who have faith in Him. During his prayer, a life-boat came by and asked him to join. He said: “No, I believe God will help me, because he never ignores those

who have faith in Him." So, the life-boat left him behind. One hour later, the sea level was already at his chest. A fisher's boat came. He said: "No! God will help me." Another hour later, the sea level was already up to his neck. A patrol boat came. He replied again: "No." So, he drowned and went to heaven because he was a good person. When he met God, he asked: "God, why did you forsake me? I prayed for you even at the time of crisis!" God replied: "You fool! I sent three boats to help you. Why didn't you take the boat?" The man expected a miracle. In reality, no miracles happen. God's action is not miracle; He works through ordinary events. So, with expectation, the person tried to reject even the help of God.

Do not be too concerned with expectations or you will reject the experience that you have already achieved. Just work independently of expectation, and try to get in touch with real awareness through direct experience. When you get a result, it will be the true outcome of your practice. Do not bother with miracles or preconceived expectations.

Q: How can you forget everything and not have any expectations or references?

A: It can be done through repetition. In the first hour it may not be easy to forget, but if you practice more and more, you will feel in harmony with the practice, and then this notion will pass away. Nevertheless, you have to do it repeatedly, over and over again. Then, a new kind of habit will develop, the habit of letting go and forgetting expectations.

Q: That is very, very hard!

A: It is possible, if you try to be at the present moment. I found that when I feel in harmony with the practice, I do not care about the rest. To be in harmony with the practice

takes time, but it is possible. We call it – To be at the present moment. When you have developed that habit of being at the present moment, you will be less distracted by expectations, by time or schedules, by other people's practice.

Q: Are you suggesting that we totally ignore previous experience on how to get there?

A: I suggest you do that when you start the practice. However, when you finish, you may review and think about which one is the way. During the practice, try to be at the present moment; otherwise, your previous results will distract you from the practice.

Q: When we start the practice again, we will take reference of the previous experience, right? Then, how can you practice independently?

A: A kind of habit will develop within you.

Q: Right, I see what you mean, inherit a habit from the previous practice instead of knowledge.

A: Yes! It has already happened to you, because all of you have been practicing for a long time. You have inherited some habits or some tendencies. That is the most important, more important than something in your mind.

Q: Not to be guided by thought, but by your natural movement or habit.

A: Yes! This is what we call "*Adept*" or "*Skillful*"; you become more skillful. Take swimming for example. Thinking, or recalling the instructions, does not help you much when you are swimming. You have to be at the very present moment. Whatever you do will become a tendency or habit in you. Once you know how to swim, it becomes your second nature. It becomes a part of you. No matter

how much time has passed, maybe ten years, you still know how to swim because it has become your nature. I think Mindfulness or practice is like that. Once you know how to adapt your mind to be aware of the present moment, it becomes your nature. You may give up the practice for a while, then come back. In the beginning it is difficult, but after you practice for a few minutes it will come back.

Which I call "*Habit*." I myself, when I practice, never think much of the results. I think only that this will form a new habit. Once the habit has developed, it is easier to practice. This is how you train children to take a bath or to brush their teeth. At first, they refuse, but you just push them to brush their teeth. It becomes their nature and they will go to the bathroom to brush their teeth on their own. Mindfulness is like that. In the beginning, your mind follows the thoughts and never comes back. Then, you call it back. Second time, it goes again, following the thoughts and comes back. The third time, it comes back quickly, faster, but still takes a long time. Then, you call it back all the time, many times; it returns faster and faster. The unintentional thought will become shorter and shorter. In the beginning, it is like a train of thoughts with twelve cars of thoughts; after practicing for a few days, it becomes ten cars. The train of thoughts becomes shorter, shorter, and shorter. Then, only one car of thoughts, because your mind becomes faster. It is the habit of the mind to come back faster. This is what mindfulness is. You need not to stop the thoughts. Your mind will come back on its own.

July 8, 1997

Harmony Within

Meditation practice is to train ourselves to be in harmony with ourselves, or to be in harmony with the present moment. To be in harmony with the present moment has a broad meaning. It means that we have to be content with what we have, with what we are doing, and also with what we are at the present moment. To go deeper than that, it means to be content, accepting the thoughts or emotions that we have at the present moment.

To accept does not mean that you are lost, or follow the thoughts. That is not acceptance. Accepting means keeping our mind normal, not reaching to the thoughts whatever they may be. This is the only way to free our mind from all kinds of thoughts or emotions. Whether they are positive or negative thoughts, pleasant or unpleasant emotions, agreeable or disagreeable feelings, just observe them and learn to come to terms with them.

People, in general, are likely to react to the thoughts or emotions that they have. To be precise, they are not reacting, but attached, or clinging, to the emotions or thoughts that arise, even unpleasant feelings. It may sound strange, but we do cling to unpleasant feelings or emotions.

You may have noticed that when we experience anger we never try to let it go. We keep recalling the incident that causes us anger and keep reminding ourselves about the behavior of that person that upset us. We cling to that negative emotion or experience and never try to let go of it. We may want to, but we never try. We just cling to it, grasping the anger, the anxiety or whatever. Thus we cannot sleep at night because we keep thinking about this and that despite the fact that they are unpleasant feelings, emotions, events or experiences. That is why I say "*We cling to it*". We do not accept it the way it is, but cling to it. That is what the Buddha called "*Indulging in Pain*" or "*Indulging in Suffering*". In the first sermon of the Buddha, he mentioned two extremes, *indulging in pain* and *indulging in pleasure*. Buddha advised us to avoid these two extremes.

To indulge in pain does not mean that we torture ourselves as the Buddha did when he tried to attain enlightenment through ascetic behavior. He refused food and slept on nails. That is indulging in pain, but all of us never do that. Still, we indulge in another kind of pain, mental pain. When anger arises, we are lost in anger. When anxiety arises, we are caught up in anxiety. We grasp it, grasping anger, clinging to anxiety. This is indulging in pain. We have already fallen into the extremes that the Buddha suggest we avoid.

The same applies to indulging in pleasure. Normally, people think that to indulge in pleasure means indulging in sensual pleasure like a playboy: to have new spouses, to enjoy themselves in the casinos, theaters, night clubs, etc. Yet, you have already experienced indulging in pleasure mentally. When pleasant feelings arise in your mind you cling to them and enjoy them, do you not? We are always caught up in the agreeable emotions and feel content with them. This is indulging in pleasure, another extreme that the Buddha instructed us to avoid.

You may have realized that you have already indulged in those extremes during your practice. That is not the middle way that the Buddha suggest we traverse. The middle way, in this sense, means not losing yourself in either painful or pleasant experience, be it calmness, happiness, suffering, anger, or anxiety. Do not become lost in those feelings or emotions. Just accept them as they are. When pleasant feelings or good thoughts arise in your mind, you tend to follow it, do you not? When you encounter unpleasant feelings you want to suppress them, do you not? But that is not an act of acceptance. To accept means to observe, to see, to recognize, and to let go of it. This is the only way to be free from all kinds of feelings or thoughts.

I would like to urge you to learn how to come to terms with all kinds of thoughts and emotions that arise. You will find that once you accept them, once you observe them, they will gradually pass away. This is the best way to let go of them, the best way to liberate ourselves from them, the best way to get rid of them. Not to stop them, but to observe them, and they will gradually be dissolved. This is the middle way that the Buddha suggests: *to indulge neither in pain nor in pleasure*. Not only in the physical or sensual aspects but also in the more delicate mental aspect. This is the aspect or level that people always fall into without realizing that it is not the middle way the Buddha suggests.

Is it clear to you? Just to elaborate what Luangpor said: “To see, but not to identify with it.” If you identify with it you have already indulged in both pleasure and pain. Just see it as it is, as it really is; do not be overjoyed or upset by pleasant or unpleasant feelings. This will keep our minds stable. That is what we call accepting the way we are in the present moment and being in harmony with the present moment. That’s all for this morning.

Thoughts always trick you or make a fool of you. They need your attention, as a child always asks for his mother's attention. They are very clever and have many tricks to fool you, to draw your attention. Persuading you, the thoughts says: "Come! Come talk with me! Come join me! Come interact with me!"

In the beginning, you may think that you know their tricks, but their tricks are endless. When I practice, I say to the thoughts: "No, I will not interact with you! Whatever thoughts arise I will turn my back on you." Yet, they have many new tricks to make a fool of me. Sometimes they ask: "Hey! Why don't we think about the Dhamma? Investigating Dhamma is good, isn't it?" So I jump into the thoughts, and later realize: "Oh! I fell into your trap again." That's all right. You should try to have strong will. Sometimes you have very beautiful and excellent ideas. You may think about the glorious past, a beautiful moment in the past, or somebody whom you would like to talk with. The thoughts will try to persuade you to interact with them, but you should have strong determination to resist their temptation.

In the beginning, it may be difficult. With the support from mindfulness, with the strength of mindfulness, you will feel it increasingly easier to ignore the call or temptation of the thoughts. Later, you will find that it becomes your natural response because, after a period of practice, the temptations of the thoughts become less enticing and less powerful.

Why do they become less powerful? Because the thoughts become shorter and shorter. In the beginning the thoughts are long, like a train of thoughts. Gradually, the thoughts become shorter, shorter and shorter. The shorter a thought is, the less powerful it is. That is why you will find it increasingly easier to turn your back on them and accept them the way they are. Once a thought arises, do not bother with it. Just see it and say to yourself: "That's

the way it is." Whatever the thoughts or feelings arise, be they good or bad, wholesome or unwholesome, just see them without being disturbed or annoyed by them.

Yet, in the beginning, you may feel upset with yourself, because you never realized that bad thoughts or evil ideas could arise in you. Some desire will come up, and you will have never realized that you could have such bad ideas, such evil thoughts. But, it will arise. If you are mindful enough, you will accept it. That's the way it is. Gradually the equanimity arises.

So I suggest you maintain the attitude of acceptance. Whatever ideas, whatever thoughts, whatever emotions occur in your mind, just try to keep them normal and have no preferences – like or dislike, appreciation or aversion. Try to avoid these two extremes, and just accept them the way they are. This is the second mantra I would like to present to you – "That's the way it is." The bad thoughts that arise, the evil ideas that arise, are beyond your control. So, just accept them as natural, as normal. That's the way it is. Thus develop the indiscriminative mind.

The ordinary mind tends to be judgmental. It always judges – this is good, that is bad; this idea is good, that idea is bad; I like this idea, I do not like that idea; I am content with these emotions, I am not content with those emotions. With a discriminating mind you will never experience peacefulness. Your mind will go up and down, up and down, because of such preferences or such judgmental mind.

The way to attain peace is to develop the indiscriminative mind. Have no preferences or judgment, and see everything as it really is. Accept it as the natural process that occurs to your mind. They are just visitors, coming and going. No matter how good or bad the idea is, any kind of idea, just let it come and go, appear and disappear. Do not be bothered with it. Just see it, take note

of it, and then come back, returning your attention to the body's movement.

In brief, try to resist the temptations of the thoughts. They need your attention because that's the only way they can sustain themselves. Unless you give them your attention, they can not survive. They can exist only with your support. If you do not pay attention to them, they will just pass away. This is the best way to handle the emotions. Do not suppress them, stop thinking, nor force your mind to drop these thoughts. Just say to yourself: "When the thoughts arise, that's the way it is."

July 9, 1997

Calmness and Insight

There are two words that Luangpor always mentions, mindfulness and awareness. Both are like twins. They are interchangeable, help each other, and always come together. Mindfulness is that which recalls. For example, you are moving your hands, but you forget that you are doing it because your mind is distracted. Then, you remember that you should be attentive to your hand movement. That capacity to recall is mindfulness. Mindfulness recalls and brings your mind back to the action of your hands.

When your mind is attentive to your hands, or to any activity, you become aware of your body, aware of yourself. This is awareness. Once you are aware of any activity, you know what should be done as far as that activity is concerned. This is clear comprehension, another function of awareness. When you are aware of an object and attentive to it, your mind becomes increasingly collected and composed, thus enhancing concentration.

Awareness also gives rise to and strengthens mindfulness. Sometimes, while you are supposed to be aware of your body's movement, your mind becomes

distracted. Awareness of your body's movement sometimes helps your mind to recall that you must be mindful of your body, and that's why it can help to bring your mind back. It awakens mindfulness, bringing back the mind. For example, when you are listening to someone's speech, you rub your fingers. You may be distracted by the environment, by your worries or your concerns about something else. Suddenly, you feel the sensation of your fingers and the sensation helps you to remember that you should be listening to the talk. So, mindfulness becomes function and brings your mind back to the talk, to be attentive to it. This is how awareness helps mindfulness to function, or take place.

Mindfulness, awareness, and concentration are closely related. Mindfulness gives rise to awareness; awareness gives rise to concentration; and vice versa. They help each other, enhancing each other. Don't be confused when Luangpor sometimes mentions mindfulness and a few moments later he mentions awareness, or mindfulness and awareness. They are the same. Technically they are not the same, but in practice they work very closely together. Briefly speaking, mindfulness brings the mind back to the activity or meditation object. Once your mind is with the object, you have awareness, you know and you see clearly.

With the functions of mindfulness and awareness as I mentioned, two things will occur. The first is calmness. It arises because you are not distracted by thoughts or by external stimulation. Your mind does not wander around because your mind is attentive to, or tied to, the meditation object. Thoughts may arise in your mind, but they are short and do not disturb you much. You may feel hot, you may feel cold, but it does not give rise to anger or upset you because mindfulness brings you out of the anger or negative qualities and back to the object of meditation. But, if you do not have an object of meditation, your mind can easily be caught in the anger that is the result of unpleasant feelings. So, mindfulness and awareness help

you to let go or be free from the discontentment. That is why calmness and relaxation are possible for the one who has mindfulness.

The second thing that happens when you have mindfulness is wisdom, or clarity of mind. It happens because mindfulness and awareness keep your mind from liking or disliking, from being up or down, from being content or discontent. They keep your mind stable and without bias. If you have preferences, if you are discriminative and like or dislike, you have bias and you cannot see things clearly as they really are. This will not be the case if you have mindfulness. For example, when anger arises, you will not be caught up in it, you will distance yourself from it and see the anger. You do not reject anger, but just see it. You can see how it exists and how it passes away. But, if you get into the anger, you cannot see, and you cannot know the anger. Just as when you are in this Hall, you cannot see what this Hall looks like unless you go outside; only then can you see what the Kuan Yin Hall looks like. You have to be outside so that you can see clearly what or where it is. How can you be outside the anger if you do not have mindfulness? Mindfulness helps you to be outside the thought and see it as really is. That is why Luangpor always emphasizes that: 'You have to see. You should know. You should not be lost in any kind of thoughts, be they good or bad, of pleasure or pain, so that you can see and know. Truth will reveal itself.'

In short, as I mentioned, there are two kinds of results that will take place: calmness and insight, or wisdom. Yet, you should bear in mind that calmness is not the primary aim of this meditation. The primary aim is insight. If you take calmness as the primary objective, it is easy for you to become lost in calmness, and then you can not even see what it is. Just recognize that calmness is like this when it manifests itself and do not be overjoyed with it. Just see that that's the way it is, and then try to

maintain your mind to see, to be clear; keep knowing, keep observing. That's all.

This is just to make a brief distinction between mindfulness and awareness, and to highlight their main functions as well as how they work together. Practically, they have more functions than what I have just mentioned.

July 10, 1997

The Point of Balance

As you may be aware, Luangpor tries to suggest that you not watch your mind or watch your body closely. There are some justifications for that. In our daily life we tend to do a few things at the same time. You should allow your mind to be aware of your whole body rather then only a particular part of it. Otherwise, you may make mistakes in your activities.

For example, when I began my practice, one day, I finished my lunch and had to throw the leftovers into the waste basket. Since I did not know how to practice properly, I forced my mind to concentrate only on my feet while I was walking to the waste basket. When I arrived at the basket, I threw the leftovers into the basket and forgot that not only the leftovers but the fork and spoon were also thrown away. Why? Because I concentrated too much on my feet. I did not allow my mind to be aware of my whole body, to be aware of the act of holding the plate with the leftovers and the fork and spoon. If you force your mind to concentrate only on one part of your body, you limit you awareness to that part and forget the rest.

There is another story of a practitioner who wanted to concentrate on every act of her movement in detail. Before she went to the office she had to get dressed. She concentrated on her act of dressing very consciously and very intensely. When she took the shirt, she concentrated on it. While wearing the shirt, she also concentrated on every movement of the wearing. The same applied to putting on her trousers, her socks, and her shoes. When she went to work, it took more than an hour for her to realize that she forgot to zip her trousers.

It's okay if you walk with too much concentration in a walking meditation; it's not much of a problem because you only have one act. Yet in reality, you have many acts at the same time. You walk and you hold something in your hands. When you drive a car, you have to look at the road, and control the steering and the speed with your hands and legs. These require your total awareness. Focusing your mind on only one particular part of your body will cause problems.

I have spoken only of the physical aspect or the aspect of the body activities so far. This principle also applies to the mental aspect. If you force your mind to watch your mind closely, you tend to block your thoughts. When there is no thought, you do not learn how to let go of it. You should allow thoughts to arise so that you learn how to let go of the thoughts or emotions. If you block your mind, the thoughts cannot arise, and then you do not know how to let go of them when they do arise.

It is important for you to keep your mind in balance, to not watch or concentrate too closely nor to let it loose to all distractions. This will enable your mind to be aware of the mind, to be aware of the body, not only of your hands, but the whole of your body and also its surroundings. This is what we should do when we cross the road, especially the road in this country. You have to be aware of the act of walking, and also of the mind. "Am I absent-minded?" If

you are absent-minded while crossing the road, it is very dangerous. You also need to be aware of your surrounding of the car that is coming. So, you have to be aware of three aspects: body, mind, and your surroundings. One can achieve this only if he keeps his mind in the point of balance, neither watching too closely the mind nor concentrating merely on the body.

For the beginners, do not be confused with what I said. Be aware of your body first. Do not pay much attention to the mind or to the thoughts because you have to go step by step. You may be aware of your surrounding at the same time, of the noise or whatever; just be aware with mindfulness. Do not be disturbed by the noise or by visitors that come to talk to you. Just see them as they really are, accept them as that's the way it is. That's all.

This is what Luangpor Teean instructed Luangpor Khamkhian thirty years ago. Because Luangpor Khamkhian, at that time, was very good at concentrating his mind on the breath only and would cut himself off from his surroundings or any kind of thoughts because he watched closely only the mind. Once, when he was practicing in a closed room with closed windows and a closed door, Luangpor Teean came to interview him. Luangpor Teean did not go into the room but, standing outside the hut, asked: "What are you doing?" Luangpor Khamkhian said: "I am practicing meditation." So Luangpor Teean asked: "Can you see me?" Luangpor Khamkhian replied: "No, I cannot see you." Luangpor Teean then asked: "What does it take for you to see me?" Luangpor Khamkhian replied: "I have to open the door first." So Luangpor Teean asked him to open the door. At once, he opened the door. Standing at the threshold, Luangpor Teean asked: "Now, do you see me?" Luangpor Khamkhian replied: "Yes, now I see you." "Can you see inside (inside the room)?" Luangpor Khamkhian replied: "Yes, I can see inside." "So, now you see both outside and inside, do you not?" Luangpor Khamkhian said: "Yes, I can see both." Luangpor Teean said: "You should

practice like this; do not focus your mind only on the inside." In other words, do not turn inward, but be aware of both the outward and the inward; that is the point of balance.

So, Luangpor Teean suggested Luangpor Khamkhian not block his mind or turn his mind inwardly, but allow his mind to be aware of the outside and of the whole of himself. This is how this practice is different from many other methods. Many methods try to block your mind; you can achieve concentration very easily with those methods. Yet, once you get out of the practice, your mind can easily be disturbed by thoughts because you have not trained yourself in how to deal with them. Since the thoughts have been blocked, you have had no chance to be aware of them and thus learn to let go of them. This is how it is different. I just explained the reason behind Luangpor's suggestions; why not watch closely so that you can develop total awareness during your practice and apply total awareness during your daily life.

July 10, 1997

Reconciliation

There are two fundamentals of practice. The first is to practice with relaxation. The second is to take it seriously. These two fundamentals are very important for the practice. The point is how you can reconcile them. When I first practiced, I felt it very difficult. I felt confused when Luangpor Teean said, “Be at ease, but take it seriously.” He always stressed these words. Literally, he said, in Thai, “Do it playfully, but seriously.” To do it playfully means that you have to be at ease when you practice and to be at ease at the present moment. To take it seriously means you have to continue your practice all day, all week, all month, and all year. This is what he meant. To take it seriously means you have to continue it, neither giving it up nor stopping it.

I think this is the art of the practice, how to reconcile the two opposing values, the two opposing principles. Both principles are good, but on some level they are contradictory. As you may remember, in the first few days, I talked about the middle way. The middle way is the practice that avoids the two extremes. The two extremes are bad, so we have to avoid them. That is the middle way. Yet, at the same time, there are two principles, two values, that are both good, but in opposition to each other. We

have to reconcile them to make them in harmony. These are the arts of the practitioner: One, you have to avoid the two extremes because both are bad and two, you have to harmonize the two values. These two arts are different. Sometimes people are confused, they think the middle way is to mix good and bad, and then divide it in two. That is not the middle way. The middle way is to avoid the two extremes and, at the same time, reconcile the two values, the two principles.

In Buddhism, you will find that this art is very necessary. You have to reconcile faith and wisdom. Those who have too much faith always lack wisdom; those who have wisdom always lack faith, because they always criticize, always doubt, always feel uncertain. So the Buddha taught us to reconcile these two principles; do not miss any of them but combine them in harmony. The same applies to diligence or earnestness and calmness. If you are too diligent, you tend to lack calmness or concentration, but if you develop too much concentration, you tend to be indolent. Again, you have to combine, or reconcile, concentration and diligence.

Now, let us go back to what Luangpor Teean always mentioned, “To practice relaxed, but seriously.” It means that when you practice you should feel that you are taking a rest. When you walk, it is not much different from a morning walk or evening walk in the sense that you do not expect much from such a walk. When you have a morning walk you do not expect much from the walk, do you? That is the attitude that we should apply to the practice. When you take something lightly, you do not worry about it, which enables you to feel joy and be relaxed in doing that work. Since you are not worried with the outcome, your mind can easily get into the balance; since you are not worried about the outcome and also have joy in doing the work, you can do it continually. You are not frightened with the work or become turned off by it.

When children play, they can play all day and all night without being tired because they feel joy and do not expect much from their play. Yet, if you ask them to do their homework, you turn them off because there are a lot of expectations from the teachers, from themselves and from their parents. There are standards against which the outcome has to be compared and this always frightens, or turns off, people. That's why I asked you not to set any standards, any goals, or have any expectations.

Do not set the goal that you will not be distracted in the next ten minutes. You cannot do that; just be concerned with the present moment. If you are worried about the outcome, your mind is already in the future; the outcome is in the realm of the future. If you are concerned only with the cause, the practice, you are already in the present; the cause is what you have to make, and you can only make it in the present moment. If you can have this approach to the walking meditation, or to any kind of meditation, you will find that this approach or attitude is very helpful to your daily life. In daily life, we always have problems with our work; we are very tense and frustrated because we worry so much about the future, the outcome, or the reaction or response of people.

Sometimes we are worried because we want ourselves to reach a goal as soon as possible. When we drive a car, we may feel unhappy because we want our car to reach the destination as early as possible. If you have such thoughts, you cannot drive the car relaxed or with happiness, especially when you are late. You feel upset and frustrated. The desire to reach the destination as soon as possible becomes like a fire that burns your mind. Remind yourself to pay attention to the present moment. It does not help at all if I am worried about being late because it does not make me reach the destination faster or sooner than if I am not worried. The worry itself does not help; it does not change the situation. What you should be concerned about is trying to driving the car properly and as

best as you can because this is the only way that you can arrive at the destination without delay. So in real life you have to be at the present moment and not allow the mind to be occupied by expectations or by the future.

The attitude that causes suffering to a lot of people, especially people of today, is the expectation of getting the result or reaching the destination as soon as possible. When I write a book, if I think that it will take one more year or one more month to finish the job, I feel worried, because it's still a long time and I am tired already. Yet, if I bring my mind back to the work that I am doing at the moment, I feel less worried and concentration takes place easily because being at the present moment brings you calmness and concentration and can enable you to continue your work without much problem. I think we have to learn how to do work without pushing or driving us at the same time. Just do whatever has to be done. If you do it continually, it is certain that work will produce results.

My friend, a Zen monk, spoke about his master. Some of you may have heard of him, Shunryu Suzuki. Shunryu Suzuki is the author of *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. He has a center in San Francisco. When he started the temple in San Francisco thirty years ago, he had to do everything with his own hands. One of his big jobs was to prepare the garden. A Zen garden is composed of rocks, a lot of big rocks. Shunryu Suzuki is not a big person. He is just like Luangpor, but thinner. All day, he had to carry the heavy rocks to his garden and arrange them. His young Western disciple wanted to help but after a few hours, he was tired. "Oh! I can no longer do this." He asked Suzuki, his master, "How could you do this all day?" Suzuki said, "I take a rest all day." When he lifted the rock, he just lifted it without much expectation that he had to carry twenty or thirty rocks a day. He did not set a goal, but just lifted the rock without judgment or expectation. His mind was with the rock and with himself, not anywhere else. He felt relaxed which is why he said that he rested all day and

could continue. He was serious about his rock garden, but he did it relaxed. It's as Luangpor Teean said, "Practice playfully, but take it seriously."

To be at ease enables you to work longer than when you take it seriously. Sometimes you drive a slow car and you can arrive the destination sooner than those who drive at a fast speed. The same is true when you walk up a mountain; those who do not know how to climb a mountain start climbing fast and end up reaching the top later than those who walk slower. The meditation master or the hill tribe people just walk slowly, relaxed all the time, relaxed every step, and they reach the top before those who are serious or walk hastily.

The practice is the same. Just walk; as you walk, simply walk and take a rest every step. You will find that you are not tired after you walked the whole day or the whole week, because you take a rest with every step. Please apply this to your daily life. Not only in the spiritual aspect. Take Suzuki as an example; even in the material or physical world, you need to apply this art, the art of reconciling the two principles – relaxed but seriously. You will find that in the real world this is really important.

Individualism and responsibility to the community are the two principles you have to reconcile. In this country, they stress only individualism, and you have a lot of crime, a lot of drug addiction, etc., because people have lost the sense of communal responsibility. Individualism and responsibility to the community are both important. Right and duty are two opposite values that you should reconcile. The pursuit of happiness and virtues are both values. You cannot discard either of them. If you pursue happiness while ignoring virtues, you create problems for other people. If you are attached too much to virtues, you have no happiness because you are always afraid that you will offend other people and you make yourself tense. Freedom and order are another example. Freedom is good

but order is good too. Yet, if you stress freedom, no order can take place. If you are too much concerned with order or discipline, freedom might be affected.

So you have to reconcile these opposing values. This can be done if you learn this art from the practice. I myself have learnt a lot from the practice. Because this art is very crucial for the practice, if you cannot learn it, it will be very difficult to achieve the practice. Please take this practice as a way to train your mind to have a skillful approach to your life, not only to meditation but to your whole life, to your family, to your work, and also to society as a whole. This is what I would like to offer this morning.

July 11, 1997

Dealing with Expectations

Let me elaborate on expectation's relationship to the practice, just to clarify this morning's talk. When I said that we should not have expectations during the practice, I did not mean that we should suppress or try to stop our expectation. This cannot be done because we come here with expectation, and expectation is inherent in our practice. I just want to say that despite our expectations we should not allow them to bother us during our practice, let ourselves be preoccupied with them, or let them drive our practice. Just realize that, okay, the expectations are there, but there is no more than that.

It should be noted that the progress of spiritual practice is most developed when expectations are at their lowest or we have none at all. For example, after Buddha's death, Ananda tried hard to develop his practice to the level of Arahant, the last level of enlightenment. He had only one day left to finish his practice before the first council was going to start. This was crucial because he was supposed to attend the council, but only the Arahant could attend. There were already four hundred and ninety nine Arahants. The council was waiting for him but he had to meet the requirement of being an Arahant. He had not yet achieved

it, and there were only about twenty hours left. So he tried a lot that whole day, but he still could not achieve the final stage of enlightenment. Finally, at night, he was tired and decided to take a rest by a tree. The moment he leant against tree trunk, at the moment when he felt that he wanted to relax, enlightenment took place. At that moment, his expectation was very low, either because he felt hopeless or because he just wanted to relax. I think the experiences of other enlightened beings are just the same. They get enlightenment or receive intuitive insight when their minds are relaxed and in harmony with the present moment. Some of Luangpor Teean's disciples got insight while they were harvesting the crops, obviously with mindfulness.

This law of enlightenment, or law of intuitive insight, also applies to the world of scientists and the world of daily life. You may have heard of the story about Eureka and Archimedes. He tried to find *the law of density* and he could not find it until the moment he got himself into the bathtub. At that moment, he felt relaxed. After working all day, he just wanted to take a good bath. The moment he submerged himself in the bathtub, he realized *the law of displacement*, which is crucial for the calculation of the density of objects. If you want to know the density of this chair, you put it into water, calculate the volume of the water that overflows, or is displaced, the weight of the water and the weight of this chair, and then you know the density of the chair. So, the word Eureka, or the intuitive knowledge of Archimedes, arose when he had no expectation. The same applies to Newton. He found *the law of gravity* when he was going to relax under the apple tree. An apple fell. He realized the law of gravity. At that time, he had just put aside his research, so his expectations were very low at that moment. You see how intuitive knowledge works. It works when expectations are very low and especially when you are very mindful in that present moment.

So, the point is how you can practice without the drive of expectation, the drive of desire. This is a problem because we are usually driven by desire or expectation. In Buddhism there are two kinds of motivation. The first is desire – desire to get or desire to achieve. The second is zeal – you want to do, or you want to practice. There is a difference between the two. Desire is closely related to craving, and zeal is closely related to wisdom. With zeal, you realize that it is good, so you want to do it. *Zeal* is the desire to do, not the desire to get; not the desire to achieve but the desire to do. Buddhism does not say that you should not want. Yes, you should have wants. You should have the want to do, but not the desire to achieve or the desire to get. So, please learn to use *zeal* as the motivation for your practice. You see with your wisdom that meditation practice is good. It is not to satisfy your ego that you do it, but because it is good for yourself and for others. Then, you start practicing.

Yet, for a lot of people, it is difficult to develop zeal because desire always dominates their minds. That is okay. We have to accept the way it is. We have to accept that we have desires and expectations. But again, once we start walking, once we start moving our hands, it is time to turn our attention to our body's movements and leave our expectations and desires behind. Submerge yourself in the present moment, in the act of walking, in the act of moving. When you get the results of the practice, you will have confidence in the practice, and you will see for yourself, "Oh! This practice is good." You develop zeal because you have seen for yourself the results of the practice. This is how zeal is developed. You see it yourself, with your mind: "Oh! This is good." So you develop the inclination to practice and this time you practice without the drive of expectation. You enjoy doing it, so you just do it. Enjoyment is the result of your zeal. If you enjoy something you do it. You do not mind what will happen. I like it. I enjoy it. So, I do it. There is no more than that.

Find out how you can enjoy the practice. The more you enjoy it the more you will practice it relaxed and at ease, and the more you will get results. The more you get results the more you become confident, and then you will just do it. We do not need the drive of expectation or the drive of desire. I think this is the motivation that people lack. We are taught that only desire can drive people to do things. Actually, there is another motivation that can get us to work. Zeal as a Buddhist motivation is very important, not only in meditation but in any kind of work. This is what I would like to offer you for reflection.

In summary, how should we deal with expectations? First, accept them for what they are. Accept that expectations exist in our minds, but do not let them bother our practice or pay much attention to them. Just be at the present moment with the work you are going to do and do not allow yourself to be driven by expectations. Try to develop the other kind of motivation, zeal. With the right motivation, you will find that results arise not in the future, but at the present moment. Normally, people just wait, wait for the future, wait for the results to come. If you have a positive approach, a positive mind, you will see results and the outcome always comes at the present moment. Please be sensitive to the immediate results that always take place but that we always ignore. As Luangpor always says, once you move your hands, you already get the outcome, the awareness. You need not wait for the future. It has already arisen, but you have to be aware of that. That's why we can be happy at the present moment, because we get results at the present moment. We do not need to wait for the future. It is too risky to wait for the future; the future is uncertain. But, the immediate result is guaranteed by our practice. That's all for this afternoon.

July 11, 1997

Unreliable Thoughts

I am sure that you all have a lot of experience with thoughts and emotions. Some of you may be able to see the thoughts themselves. You may realize that these thoughts, emotions, and feelings are quite *unstable*, which is why they are *uncontrollable* and *unreliable*.

But, despite their instability, thoughts and emotions have a lot of power to tempt us, because they need our attention to sustain themselves. Without our attention, thoughts and emotions just fade away. They need your attention; it is the only requirement for their survival. You know, it is as if thought has a life of its own, despite its instability. It is like a virus that tries to manipulate your cells, drawing support from you. If you are not aware of such nature of thoughts and emotions, you can be easily tempted by them, deceived by them. They try to lure you, saying, “Hey! I am you.” My thoughts call me, saying, “I am Paisal, I am yours, so you should take care of me.”

Sometimes I am tempted to take them to be my belongings, because they are very smart thoughts, very intelligent thoughts. I would like to grasp them, but you have to be careful not to rush and grab them. Do not

believe them so quickly because they are unreliable, especially the unintentional ones. We cannot even believe the good thoughts for they can play tricks on us too if we are not mindful enough.

There is a story about a person who enjoyed drinking and tried to give it up but failed. Every time he passed the bar on his way home he could not resist his desire, the temptation, to go inside and have a drink. He tried to resist many times but failed. One day, he was determined that he would not fail himself anymore so he prayed to the Buddha, to the Dhamma, to the Sangha, and to all the other deities after he finished his job in the office. He felt quite strong after he had asked for help from everyone to increase his will power.

When he approached the bar, the temptation arose, but he tried to deny it, “No, this time no.” But on his first step in front of the bar, a thought arose, “Hey! Why don’t I have a last drink!” “No! No! No! I can’t,” he said to himself. On the second step, “Hey! Okay, not a full cup, only half a cup.” “No,” he said, and he proceeded. The bar was not very big, but those few moments seemed to last a very long time. Then, another thought came up, “OK, one quarter.” “Better not,” said a voice in his mind. Suddenly, his friend in the bar called, “Hey! Come! Come!” Again, he refused. But then he thought, “Hey! It will break the friendship if I refuse his offer.” But, he was still determined not to drink. Thoughts of every rationale you can imagine flashed through his mind. Nevertheless, he finally passed the store. “I’ve done it. I am the winner!” He was suffused with a sense of victory. Suddenly, a thought came up, “Hey! Let’s celebrate the victory!” He then turned back to the bar. Thoughts can trick us. They are very rational and can turn even victory into disaster. We should not believe them but try to see them so we do not fall into their trap. So, mindfulness is very important even in daily life.

Every year many old women would come to see Achan Cha, a big master in northeastern Thailand, and ask his permission for them to stay at the temple because they had quarreled with their husbands. Everybody would say, “I will stay here for life. I will not go back to my house anymore. I am fed up with him. No more. I am disenchanted with the household life. Please allow me to stay and practice with you.” A few days later, the husbands would come, visit them, and ask them to go home. The women who had been determined to stay in the temple for life would change their minds after a small chat and decide to go home.

Even strong, powerful, and quite determined thoughts can disappear, or wear out, after a few days passed. You may have noticed that you have a lot of good thoughts or ideas during the practice, “I want to do this, I want to do that, after I go home I will do this, I will do that.” But if you do not jump into that thought or idea and just see it and ignore it. After a few hours or a few days, you will find that that thought becomes weak and is not as interesting anymore.

When you have a beautiful or great idea, you need to remind yourself, “It is not sure.” This is the third mantra I will give you. Do you remember the first two mantras? “Never mind” and “That’s the way it is.” Now, the third one, “It is not sure,” or “Is that so?” If you reach some conclusion about someone, like, “This guy is very bad, this guy is unfaithful to me, this guy is deceiving me, or this guy is very good, he is very generous,” you should say the mantra to yourself, “Is that so?” or “That is not sure.” If it is a real thought, a real judgment and the right conclusion, it will last. Otherwise, it will waver and weaken.

So try to see thoughts as they really are, *unstable*, *uncontrollable*, and *unreliable*. Unless they are born out of wisdom or mindfulness, they are completely unreliable. This is just the first step of insight into the nature of thoughts.

During the practice, you may reach this understanding and later you will see the deeper characteristics of thoughts and emotions.

Luangpor repeats many times, “They are impermanent. They are unsatisfactory. They are not self.” Even happiness, pleasant feelings, or the bliss from meditation are ultimately unsatisfactory. After you have been absorbed by joy for a while, you will feel that it is not enough. You want more. If you attained the first absorption, in the first few days, you feel very happy. Later, you find that you want more. You want the second absorption. You want more and more; because your level of happiness has increased. You need more happiness to satisfy your new higher standards and expectations. It will never end. But if you are mindful enough and do not fall into the trap of happiness or pleasant feelings, you will feel content. You will have contentment. You will know what self contentment, modesty, and moderation mean. Moderation is possible only for those who have mindfulness. Otherwise, you just need more and more, and it will never end. This is about *unsatisfactory*.

The last characteristic is *selflessness* or *no-self*, which is very important. You may be able to understand this when you see that the thoughts you have are not really yours. If you are mindful enough, you will see that this is not my thought, this is not my emotion. But without mindfulness, you tend to grasp it, taking it as your own. We are likely to take it to be me, to be mine. This is mine; this belongs to myself. This thought is my thought. If you disagree with my thought, you disagree with me. You take it personally. A lot of problems arise because of such disputes. When your friend disagrees with an idea which you take to be yours, to be yourself, you tend to be angry. Since you feel that he or she is questioning you. But, if you take this idea as just an idea presented by you without attachment to it, it does not matter at all if your friend disagrees with your idea.

With your practice, you keep being aware of the thought, you see it come and go, arise and cease, occur and pass away. If you try to grasp or maintain beautiful feelings or pleasant emotions, they will resist your attempt. You will realize that they are uncontrollable and not yours. They cannot be yours. If you have this insight, you will understand why we cannot and should not believe our thoughts because they just come and go, they have no self. This is what Luangpor tries to instruct you, but you do not need to rush or try to have such insight. If you repeatedly take notice of your thoughts, if you know them and are aware of them, the insight will come by itself.

The nature or the characteristic of thoughts and emotions, or all mental states, will be apparent to you. That's why Luangpor says, "The truth will reveal itself." Our job is to obtain or sustain awareness. So just stay aware and the process will lead you to the truth. That's all for this morning.

July 12, 1997

Meditator's Four Friends

According to the Buddha, there are four very good friends who help each other and also are very helpful to us – *Mindfulness* (Sati), *Awareness* (Sampapicanna), *Concentration* (Samadhi), and *Wisdom* (Panna). If you are skillful, you can use these four friends, or these four virtues, to handle a disturbed mind or distracted thoughts.

You have already been introduced to *mindfulness* and *awareness*, and know how to deal with distracted thoughts, that is to be aware and mindful of these thoughts or emotions. Once these thoughts are recognized by our awareness, they just fade away. It is as if you come face to face with a burglar about to steal something from your house. You see him and he becomes frightened and disappears. Or, it is like a dog. Suppose we visit a friend's house and his dog is barking and going to bite us. If we just call out the name of the dog, it will stop. This is how *mindfulness* and *awareness* work together to keep you from being attacked or hurt by distracted thoughts.

Yet, sometimes the burglar is very big and you are very small. You saw him face to face but he just knocked you down. So if the thoughts are very powerful and your

mindfulness is still weak, it is not appropriate for your mindfulness to face such powerful thoughts. It is better for you to turn your back on these thoughts. Just ignore them. This will be helpful for beginners. That's why Luangpor suggests that in the beginning stage you just be aware of your body, and do not pay much attention to your thoughts. Ignore all thoughts, feelings, and emotions and just pay attention to your body.

In some situations, concentration may be necessary for us to handle powerful thoughts or emotions. *Concentration*, in this case, means fixing our mind on something that can turn our attention from distracted thoughts. Normally, object of concentration we prefer is that which is attractive to our mind. For example, if you get angry and want to get rid of the anger, you may find it easy to turn your mind or your attention from anger to music, toys, or whatever gives you pleasure. If you are attentive enough to the object that you have chosen to be attentive to, a few minutes or a few hours later, you will find that the anger has disappeared. Anger, like any emotion or thought, is like fire; it needs fuel. Normally, it is sustained because we ourselves keep adding fuel to the fire so it keeps burning. If we turn our attention to something else, or do not put firewood into the fire, the fire will be extinguished because there is no wood to consume. Yet, in reality, we cannot depend on music or something external to us all the time, because anger can take place anytime, in the subway, or during a conversation. So we need to depend on ourselves, by choosing those we already have as objects for concentration.

That is why the master suggests you use the breath or your body's movement as the object of meditation. When you feel disturbed by thoughts or emotions, you should just turn your mind back to the breath or your body's movement. Gradually, the thoughts or disturbing emotions just disappear. In the beginning, the breath or your body's movement is not powerful enough to attract your mind. It

is less attractive than music, sports, etc. Yet, if you practice enough, your mind will become familiar with the breath or your body's movement, and it can be in harmony or as one with them easily.

The fourth friend is *wisdom*. This has a lot of meaning. When you become distracted by your thoughts and do not know how to deal with them, you may try to bargain with them. You may say to yourself, "Okay, I will talk with you later," or "I will think this thought later, but not now." You negotiate with them. To bargain with the thoughts, saying "after this retreat I will recall you again, but not now," is a technique you can use to reduce the thoughts. Normally, only the advanced practitioner can use wisdom to handle the thoughts, because it is a method that requires one to come face to face with one's thoughts and emotions. If your mindfulness is not powerful enough, your thoughts or emotions will just trap you, or trick you, persuading you to fall into them.

In Thailand, masters have a practice of going into the forest alone. We call it *Tudong*. It means to live as an ascetic in the forest or in the cemetery. A lot of things may happen; fear, the beast, tigers, or elephants can attack the practitioner. Many masters find that the fear or threat from the wild animals is good instrument, good condition, or great situation to pressure them to develop concentration because if they turn their attention from the breath to the beast, they will be overwhelmed by fear. Because they are really afraid of the beast, their minds turn inward, developing concentration a lot. So masters use the threatening situation to force their minds to look inwards. This is a skillful and unusual way of developing concentration and mindfulness.

One master, Achan Cha, tried to look into the fear to investigate it. When the powerful fear arose, he investigated the fear and asked himself, "What are you afraid of?" A voice replied, "I am afraid of death." Then he

asked himself, “If you don’t die today, won’t you still die tomorrow?” “Everybody has to die, today or tomorrow,” he replied. So, he asked again, “Why should I be afraid? Everybody has to die.” This enabled him to face death at that moment with peacefulness. Some masters in that situation just keep asking, “What am I afraid of?” “I am afraid of the tiger.” “Which part of the tiger are you afraid of, the tail, the ears, the eyes, the legs, or the claws?” “No, I am not afraid of the tail, nor the ears, nor the eyes, nor the legs, nor the claws.” “So, what are you afraid of?” “I don’t know.” With such penetration by wisdom, fearful emotions just pass away. They do not use rationalization, but an analytical mind to divide the tiger parts, and they do not feel fearful.

But as Luangpor says, if you have insights into body and mind, into the nature of body and mind, into the temporary state of body and mind, such insights will enable you to go through all problems, distraction, and negative emotions very easily. With a flash of insight you can go right through them; you have no need of questions and answers. If you understand that these mental states are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not self, the thoughts are there but they are not me, they are not mine, you become detached from them and they lose the power to tempt you. This is how wisdom works to solve problems.

This is just a summary of how to use the different means of dealing with the enemies of the mind. We are like warriors; we need to know many kinds of weapons to deal with our enemies. If you only know one weapon, it is not enough to handle different kinds of problems. In fact, a sense of humor can help you too. If you take any given thought too seriously you will get into trouble, but if you make fun of it or have a sense of humor you feel more light hearted. You can laugh at it, as Luangpor always says, “Laugh at your thoughts and tell yourself not to be crazy with them!” That is also helpful. For example when you are disturbed by the noise of building construction, visualize the

face of the man who is doing the job. “Oh, what a poor man!” We will have no hostility toward him, but rather pity him. Please learn how to use various techniques, or virtues, for your own benefit, for your own spiritual practice.

Nevertheless, I am not much worried about the problems that we face because when we have problems, we tend to be careful. It is when we are happy that we tend to be careless and drop our guards like the alcoholic man in the story that I told you earlier. He was very careful when he walked past the bar which is why a lot of temptations could not persuade him to drink. But when he passed the store, he became proud, “Oh! I am the victor. I am the winner.” At that moment, he became less careful, and the desire to drink tricked him, convincing him to go back to the bar.

Please be careful when you achieve some level of spiritual success, when you have insight, or when you attain the well-developed mindfulness. At that moment, you have to be very careful. There is a story that in China, during a talk like this in a temple, there was an earthquake. All the disciples ran away, but the master stayed still in his place, showing no sign of fear. The next day, after the chanting and the dhamma talk, there was question and answer session. One student asked, “What is mindfulness?” The master replied, “Mindfulness is the ability to be calm in time of danger. For example, did you see me? When there was an earthquake, I could stay still and drink water without showing any signs of fear. Did you see me tremble?” “No!” One student answered, “You did not drink water. You drank soy sauce!”

So, please be very careful with pride and conceit. They are very dangerous. Conceit is the last obstacle that only the Arahant can get rid of. Be careful!

July 12, 1997

Meditation in Action

Meditation enables us to be with ourselves, to see ourselves speaks, sometimes silently, sometimes loudly, sometimes frustratedly, and sometimes happily. You can see how silent or how loud your mind is. We need time to converse with ourselves, to see ourselves, because most of the time our attention is turned to our surroundings, to television, to books, to work, or to our families. We do not have much time to be with ourselves despite the fact that we should be our best friends. The practice of meditation is the way to make yourself your own best friend, as much as it can be.

There is another kind of friend, a bad friend, the friend who seems to agree with us all the time, who spoils us without ever resisting or disagreeing with us. This is not a good friend. A good friend is a friend that keeps reminding you of the proper way of living, who keeps reminding you not to be lost in yourself. Mindfulness works like that. It keeps calling your mind not to be spoiled, not to indulge in your thoughts; be they good thoughts or bad thoughts. Those who have mindfulness will be aware of this.

You can observe for yourself how long you have already spoiled your mind. You let it be distracted all the time; you never try to call it back to its proper place. You just follow it, and support it. When your mind gets angry, you follow the anger; when your mind is frustrated, you let it dwell on its frustration. You never recall your mind. Sometimes you may try, but you never have enough strength to call it back, “Hey! Come back. You are indulging in anger. You are lost in anxiety or suffering. Come back!”

Now, with mindfulness, you will be able to be a good friend to yourself. You will be able to call your mind back to its proper place, to the present moment, to the present activity. We are not going to spoil our minds anymore. We will be able to turn our attention to the place where it can experience non suffering, be beyond suffering. You may call it *happiness*, if you like. But if you have insight, you will know that happiness is also a kind of suffering. Suffering is like the head of the snake; happiness is like the tail of the snake. When you touch the tail of the snake it does not bite you instantly, but later, the snake will turn around and bite you. That is why we should go beyond happiness and suffering, a state that can be achieved with mindfulness. Now, we are able to be our best friend, a noble friend, *Galyanamitta*. *Galyanamitta* means noble friend.

It is like this with weeds too. Weeds are undesirable in some respects, but if you arrange them properly and skillfully, they can live peacefully with the flowers and become part of a beautiful garden. Weeds are not useless all the time; in some situations they are very beneficial. They become herbs or decorative plants in the garden. Learn how to arrange the ugliness or the undesirable qualities in your life properly and skillfully, so they can be transformed from harmful to beneficial properties. Anger can be transformed, anxiety can be transformed, jealously can be transformed, hatred can be transformed, but these transformations are not possible if you do not know how to come to terms with them.

So this is how we can be our best friend, to not regard ourselves as the enemy. A lot of people hate themselves. They cannot bear themselves because they find a lot of bad things in themselves. That is the kind of relationship that we should avoid, the kind of experience that we should avoid. Use mindfulness or awareness to accept and use these bad things for both the benefit of your spiritual well being and your daily life. I would like to encourage you to continue the practice after the retreat in whatever way you prefer or is suitable to you.

As you know there are two ways of practice, *formal* and *informal*. You should combine these two ways of practice. In fact, informal practice is very useful. It is very powerful for us, especially for lay people but even for monks, because we spend so much time in our lives informally. Just think, in our life times we spend about seven years altogether in the bathroom. Incredible, but it is true, seven years in our bathroom. If you use seven years for the whole practice, that is wonderful. A retreat of seven days is small compared to the seven years in the bathroom. You meditate in the bathroom; whatever you do, whether it be brushing your teeth, taking a bath, urinating, or excreting, can be the act or form for mindfulness. You can breathe with mindfulness when you are on the toilet, or just rub your fingers. You can improve greatly if you are mindful in the bathroom. Do not belittle it. In fact, the time spent in the bathroom is only a small portion of our lives. We spend much more time on the street or in the office.

Please integrate mindfulness into your daily life. Take every opportunity for mindfulness, even try to choose something as a sign to recall your mind back, for example, the traffic light when you cross the road. Most people prefer the green light and do not like the red one, right? When we face a red light we are disturbed. We want to go through; we do not want to stop at the crossing. Please regard the red light as the sign to stop your distracted thoughts, or to

call your mind back to the breath or to your hands that are holding the steering wheel. Just rub your fingers or follow your breath mindfully with awareness during the red light.

When you hear the telephone ring, do not rush to it suddenly. Wait for a while. For people in primitive countries, for people in villages, it is quite strange that we are so stimulated or sensitive to telephone rings; we just go instinctively. Why are you so reactive to that? You should be mindful of yourself. You should know when to walk to the telephone gracefully. So, let it ring for a few times, then just walk calmly to it, or use it as a sign to call your mind back first. Do not react to it suddenly or hastily.

So you can choose many events in the chaos of your daily life as instruments for your mindfulness; be they noises, sights, odours, or sounds. This is how we apply informal practice to our daily life.

Nevertheless, I would like to suggest you not forget formal practice either. Spare at least a few minutes of your day every day for formal practice. Every day, either after you wake up or before you go to bed, spare at least ten minutes for the formal practice. You can spend half a day every week or one week every year for formal training. The ten minutes in your daily life, or a half day or one day in your week, or the two weeks in a year, will expand the meditation zone from ten minutes to twenty minutes and then to thirty minutes in daily life.

By meditation zone, I refer to the state of mind. For example, if you practice ten minutes in meditation with awareness, the next ten minutes will be dominated by awareness despite your having already stood up and given up the formal training. The influence of awareness covers the time beyond the formal practice. If you keep doing this, it will keep expanding from ten minutes to twenty minutes to thirty minutes. It expands like the radiance of meditation that keeps expanding if you keep practicing. This is what I

call meditation zone in terms of time, in terms of influence, or state of mind.

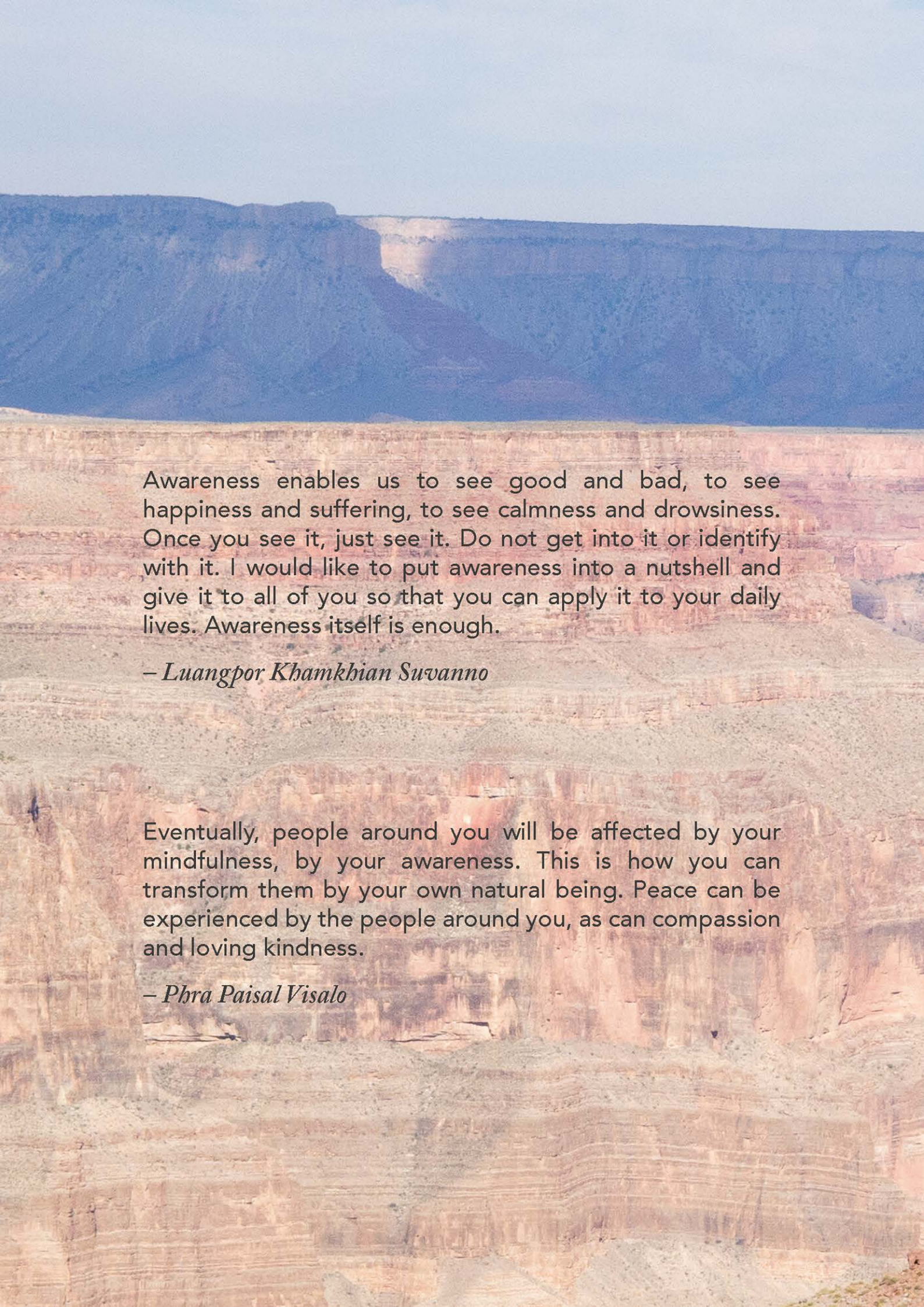
Eventually, people around you will be affected by your mindfulness, by your awareness. This is how you can transform them by your own natural being. Peace can be experienced by the people around you, as can compassion and loving kindness. If you have loving kindness, it will radiate out from you and people will be affected by it. The same is true of mindfulness. It also radiates and affects the people around you positively.

Please, keep reminding yourself to apply the practice to your daily life in suitable and skillful ways. There is no formula for this, but the point is to take advantage of everything, every moment, every event, every occasion for mindfulness. Even the death of somebody you love, even the harsh words you hear, can be transformed to be positive and beneficial for you and other people. Similar to garbage transformed into flowers and food for us to eat. Food we eat and beautiful flowers are grown out of compost, or garbage. Their roots know how to transform garbage or compost into life, into vitality, into beautiful flowers.

Keep practicing, and your mind will come back more and more quickly. You already have mindfulness and awareness in your mind. Please use them over and over. Unlike the body, where if you use a muscle too much it becomes exhausted, mindfulness is not limited by how much you use it. The more you use it the more powerful it becomes. So do not waste it or spare it. Just use it, and it will always come to your mind. I have a small calendar in my pocket, but I always forget that I have it because I seldom look at it. If I use it often, I will easily be reminded that it is in my pocket. When I need to know the date, I just take it from my pocket. But since I seldom use it, I always forget that I have it there. The same goes for mindfulness, you already have it but you always forget it.

The more you use it, the more frequently it comes to your mind. So, please use it as it is, as you already have it. That's all. The good news for you is that this is my last talk for this retreat.

July 13, 1997



Awareness enables us to see good and bad, to see happiness and suffering, to see calmness and drowsiness. Once you see it, just see it. Do not get into it or identify with it. I would like to put awareness into a nutshell and give it to all of you so that you can apply it to your daily lives. Awareness itself is enough.

– *Luangpor Khamkhian Suvanno*

Eventually, people around you will be affected by your mindfulness, by your awareness. This is how you can transform them by your own natural being. Peace can be experienced by the people around you, as can compassion and loving kindness.

– *Phra Paisal Visalo*