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f. Enthusiasm (*adhimokkha*): a strong sense of conviction in your knowledge, believing that, ‘This must be the paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna*’.

g. Exertion (*paggaha*): strong and unwavering persistence that comes from enjoying the object with which the mind is preoccupied.

h. Obsession (*upatṭhāna*): Your train of thought becomes fixed strongly on a single object and runs wild, your powers of mindfulness being strong, but your powers of discernment too weak to pry the mind away from its object.

i. Equanimity (*upekkhā*): The mind is still and unmoving, focused in a very subtle mental notion of equanimity. Not knowing the true nature of its state, the mind relishes and clings to it.

j. Satisfaction (*nikanti*): contentment with the object of your knowledge, leading to assumptions of one sort or another.

These ten phenomena, if you know them for what they are, can form a way along which the mind can stride to the paths and fruitions leading to *nibbāna*. If you fasten on to them, though, they turn into a form of clinging and thus become the enemies of liberating insight. All ten of these corruptions of insight are forms of truth on one level, but if you can’t let go of the truth so that it can follow its own nature, you will never meet the ultimate truth of disbanding (*nirodha*). For the mind to let go, it must use discerning insight to contemplate these phenomena until it sees that they are clearly inconstant, stressful, and not-self. When it sees clearly with no clinging to any of these phenomena, knowledge will arise within the mind that these things are not the path to the goal. Once this awareness arises, the mind enters the next level of purification:

5. Purification through knowledge and vision of what is and is not the path (*maggāmagga-ñāṇadassana-visuddhi*): Now that this realization has arisen, look after that knowing mind to keep it securely in the mental series leading to insight. The discernment of insight will arise in the very next mental moment, forming a stairway to the great benefits of the transcendent, the reward coming from having abandoned the ten corruptions of insight. Liberating insight will arise in the following stages:

## The Nine Stages of Liberating Insight

a. Contemplation of arising and passing away (*udayabbayānupassanā-ñāṇa*): seeing the arising of physical and mental phenomena together with their falling away.

b. Contemplation of dissolution (*bhaṅgānupassanā-ñāṇa*): seeing the falling away of physical and mental phenomena.

c. The appearance of dread (*bhayatūpaṭṭhāna-ñāṇa*): seeing all fabrications (i.e., all physical and mental phenomena) as something to be dreaded, just as when a man sees a deadly cobra lying in his path or an executioner about to behead a criminal who has broken the law.

d. Contemplation of misery (*ādīnavānupassanā-ñāṇa*): seeing all fabrications as a mass of pain and stress, arising only to age, sicken, disband, and die.

e. Contemplation of disgust (*nibbidānupassana-ñāṇa*): viewing all fabrications with a sense of weariness and disenchantment with regard to the cycle of birth, aging, illness, and death through the various way-stations in the round of wandering on; seeing the pain and harm, feeling disdain and estrangement, with no longing to be involved with any fabrications at all. Just as a golden King Swan—who ordinarily delights only in the foothills of Citta Peak and the great Himalayan lakes—would feel nothing but disgust at the idea of bathing in a cesspool at the gate of an outcaste village, in the same way the arising of insight causes a sense of disgust for all fabrications to appear.

f. The desire for freedom (*muñcitukamyatā-ñāṇa*): sensing a desire to escape from all fabrications that appear, just as when a man goes down to bathe in a pool and—meeting a poisonous snake or a crocodile—will aim at nothing but escape.

g. Reflective contemplation (*paṭisaṅkhānupassanā-ñāṇa*): trying to figure out a way to escape from all fabrications that appear, in the same way that a caged quail keeps looking for a way to escape from its cage.

h. Equanimity with regard to fabrications (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*): viewing all fabrications with a sense of indifference, just as a husband and wife might feel indifferent to each other's activities after they have gained a divorce.

i. Knowledge in accordance with the truth (*saccānulomika-ñāṇa*): seeing all fabrications—all five aggregates—in terms of the four noble truths.

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All of these stages of insight are nothing other than the sixth level of purification:

6. Purification through knowledge and vision of the way (*paṭipadā-ñāṇadassana-visuddhi*): At this point, our way is cleared. Just as a man who has

cut all the tree stumps in his path level to the ground can then walk with ease, so it is with knowledge on this level: We have gotten past the corruptions of insight, but the roots—*avijjā*, or unawareness—are still in the ground.

The next step is to develop the mind higher and higher along the lines of liberating insight until you reach the highest plane of the mundane level leading to the noble paths, beginning with the path opening on to the stream to *nibbāna*. This level is termed:

7. Purification of knowledge and vision (*ñāṇadassana-visuddhi*): At this point, devote yourself to developing and reviewing the stages of liberating insight through which you have passed, back and forth, until you become confident in them, so that each stage leads on to the next, from the very beginning all the way to knowledge in accordance with the truth and back, so that your perception in terms of the four noble truths is absolutely clear. If your powers of discernment are relatively weak, you will have to review the series three times in immediate succession before change-of-lineage knowledge (*gotarabhū-ñāṇa*, knowledge of *nibbāna*) will arise as the result. If your powers of discernment are moderate, change-of-lineage knowledge will arise after you have reviewed the series twice in succession. If your powers of discernment are tempered and strong, it will arise after you have reviewed the series once. Thus the sages of the past divided those who reach the first noble path and fruition into three sorts: Those with relatively weak powers of discernment will have to be reborn another seven times; those with moderate powers of discernment will have to be reborn another three or four times; those with quick powers of discernment will have to be reborn only once.

The different speeds at which individuals realize the first path and its fruition are determined by their temperaments and propensities. The slowest class are those who have developed two parts tranquility to one part insight. The intermediate class are those who have developed one part tranquility to one part insight. Those with the quickest and strongest insight are those who have developed one part tranquility to two parts insight. Having developed the beginning parts of the path in different ways—here we are referring only to those parts of the path consisting of tranquility and insight—they see clearly into the four noble truths at different mental moments.

In the end, it all comes down to seeing the five aggregates clearly in terms of the four noble truths. What does it mean to see clearly? And what are the terms of the four noble truths? This can be explained as follows: Start out by fixing your attention on a result and then trace back to its causes. Focus, for instance, on physical and mental phenomena as they arise and pass away in the present. This is the truth of stress (*dukkha-sacca*), as in the Pali phrase,

*nāma-rūpaṃ aniccaṃ,  
nāma-rūpaṃ dukkhaṃ,*

*nāma-rūpaṃ anattā:*

‘All physical and mental phenomena are equally inconstant, stressful, and not-self.’ Fix your attention on their arising and changing, seeing that birth is stressful, aging is stressful, illness and death are stressful; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair are stressful; in short, the five aggregates are stressful. What is the cause? When you trace back to the cause for stress, you’ll find that craving for sensual objects—sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations and ideas—is one cause, termed sensual craving (*kāma-taṇhā*). Then focus in on the mind so as to see the intermediate-level cause and you’ll see that ‘At this moment the mind is straying, wishing that physical and mental phenomena—form, feelings, labels, fabrications, and consciousness—would be in line with its wants.’ This wish is termed craving for becoming (*bhava-taṇhā*). Focus in again on the mind so as to see the subtle cause and you’ll see that, ‘At this moment the mind sways, wishing that physical and mental phenomena wouldn’t change, that they would stay under its control.’ This wish is termed craving for no becoming (*vibhava-taṇhā*), i.e., craving for things to stay constant in line with one’s wishes.

These three forms of craving arise when the mind is deluded. Focus in and investigate that deluded mental state until you can see that it’s inconstant, stressful, and not-self. Tap Craving on his shoulder and call him by name until, embarrassed and ashamed, he wanes from the heart, in line with the teaching: ‘The lack of involvement with that very craving, the release from it, the relinquishing of it, the abandonment of it, the disbanding of it through the lack of any remaining affection: This is the disbanding of stress.’

The mind that switches back and forth between knowing and being deluded is all one and the same mind. Craving lands on it, not allowing it to develop the path and gain true knowledge, just as flocks of birds landing on a tall, unsteady, tapering tree can cause it to shudder and sway and come crashing down. Thus the noble disciples have focused on craving and discarded it, leaving only *nirodha*, disbanding. The act of disbanding can be divided into two—the disbanding of physical and mental phenomena; or into three—the disbanding of sensual craving, craving for becoming, and craving for no becoming; or into four—the disbanding of feelings, labels, fabrications, and consciousness of various things. Add the disbanding of forms to the last list and you have five. We could keep going on and on: If you can let go, everything disbands. What this means simply is that the heart no longer clings to these things, no longer gives them sustenance.

Letting go, however, has two levels: mundane and transcendent. Mundane letting go is only momentary, not once-and-for-all, and so the disbanding that results is only mundane. It’s not yet constant. As for the path of practice, it’s not yet constant either. It’s the noble eightfold path, all right, but on the mundane

level. For example:

1. Mundane right view: You see into stress, its causes, its disbanding, and the path to its disbanding, but your insight isn't yet constant—for although your views are correct, you can't yet let go. This is thus classed as mundane right view.

2. Mundane right resolve: Your resolve is to renounce sensual pleasures, not to feel ill will, and not to cause harm. These three resolves are correct, but they're not yet constant. You haven't yet freed yourself in line with them. This is thus classed as mundane right resolve.

3. Mundane right speech: right speech is of four types—refraining from lies, from divisive tale-bearing, from coarse and abusive speech, and from idle, aimless chatter. You know that these forms of speech are to be avoided, but you still engage in them out of absent-mindedness. This is thus classed as mundane right speech.

4. Mundane right action: Your activities aren't yet constantly right. Sometimes you act uprightly, sometimes not. This is classed as mundane right action.

5. Mundane right livelihood: Your maintenance of right livelihood by way of thought, word, and deed isn't yet constant. In other words, it's not yet absolutely pure—in some ways it is, and in some it isn't. Thus it is termed mundane right livelihood.

6. Mundane right effort: Right effort is of four types—the effort to abandon evil that has already arisen, to avoid evil that hasn't, to give rise to the good that hasn't yet arisen, and to maintain the good that has. Your efforts in these four directions aren't yet really consistent. Sometimes you make the effort and sometimes you don't. This is thus termed mundane right effort.

7. Mundane right mindfulness: Right mindfulness is of four types—being mindful of the body, feelings, the mind, and mental qualities. When you aren't consistent in staying mindful of these frames of reference—sometimes keeping them in mind, sometimes not—your practice is classed as inconstant. This is thus termed mundane right mindfulness.

8. Mundane right concentration: Right concentration is of three sorts—momentary concentration, threshold concentration, and fixed penetration. If these can suppress unskillful mental qualities for only certain periods of time, they're classed as inconstant: sometimes you have them and sometimes you don't. This is thus termed mundane right concentration.

These eight factors can be reduced to three: virtue, concentration, and discernment—i.e., inconstant virtue, inconstant concentration, inconstant discernment—sometimes pure, sometimes blemished. These in turn reduce ultimately to our own thoughts, words, and deeds. We're inconstant in thought, word, and deed, sometimes doing good, sometimes doing evil, sometimes

speaking what is good, sometimes speaking what is evil, sometimes thinking what is good, sometimes thinking what is evil.

When we want to make the path transcendent, we have to bring the principles of virtue, concentration, and discernment to bear on our thoughts, words, and deeds, and then focus on cleansing those thoughts, words, and deeds so that they're in line with the principles of virtue, concentration, and discernment to the point where we attain a purity that is radiant and lasting. Only then can the path become transcendent.

The results of each path, whether mundane or transcendent, follow immediately on the practice of the path, just as your shadow follows immediately upon you.

To return to the discussion of the mundane path: Although the mundane path is said to have eight factors, this eightfold path—as it's put into practice by people in general—forks into two: eight right factors and eight wrong, making a sixteen-fold path. This is why regress is possible. What this comes down to is the fact that virtue, concentration, and discernment aren't in harmony. For example, our virtue may have right view and our concentration wrong view, or our discernment may have right view and our virtue and concentration wrong view. In other words, our words and deeds may be virtuous, but our thoughts—overpowered by the hindrances—may not reach singleness; or the mind may reach stillness, but without being able to let go of its preoccupations with the elements, aggregates, or sense media. Sometimes our discernment may have right view, but we haven't abandoned unvirtuous actions. We know they're harmful and we're able to abstain for a while, but we still can't help reverting to them even though we know better. This is why we say the mundane path has sixteen factors, eight right and eight wrong, sometimes turning this way and sometimes that.

If, however, you really decide to train yourself and then watch over mundane right view so as to keep it right without letting the wrong path interfere—so that your virtue, concentration, and discernment are in harmony—in other words, they all have right view—then this very same mundane path, once it is made constant and consistent, will become transcendent, leading to the stream to *nibbāna*. Once you reach the transcendent level, the path has only eight factors: Your virtue, concentration, and discernment all have right view in terms of your thoughts, words, and deeds. In this way they transcend the mundane level. The mundane level is inconstant: inconsistent, undependable, dishonest with itself. One moment you do good; the next evil. Then after you've regressed, you progress again. If you were to classify people of the mundane level, there are four sorts:

1. Some people have done evil in the past, are doing evil in the present, and



will continue doing evil in the future.

2. Some people have done evil in the past, but are doing good in the present, and aren't willing to abandon their goodness in the future.

3. Some people have done good in the past, are doing good in the present, but will give it up in the future.

4. Some people have done only good in the past, are keeping it up in the present in all their actions—i.e. virtue, concentration, and discernment are constantly with them—and they plan to keep on doing good into the future.

So there's nothing constant about people on the mundane level. They're greedy, they're rich. They do both good and evil. Two hands aren't enough for them; they have to carry their goods on a pole over the shoulder, with one load on the front end and another on the back. Sometimes the back load—the past—is good, but the front load—the future—is evil. Sometimes the front load is good and the back load evil. Sometimes the front and back loads are both evil, but the person in the middle is good. Sometimes all three are good. When we're loaded up like this, we're not balanced. One load is heavy and the other one light. Sometimes we tip over backwards, and sometimes fall flat on our face—back and forth like this, from one level of becoming to the next. This is how it is with virtue, concentration, and discernment on the mundane level. There's no telling where they'll lead you next. So once you've come to your senses, you should start right in keeping careful watch over the mundane path so that you can bring mundane virtue, concentration, and discernment into line with the transcendent.

## *Turning the Mundane Path into the Transcendent Path*

The path of the noble ones—beginning with the path to stream entry—is to take the mundane eightfold path and bring it to bear on the five aggregates—form, feelings, labels, fabrications, and consciousness—or, in short, to bring it to bear on physical and mental phenomena. Focus on these phenomena with the discernment of right view until you see them all in terms of the three characteristics, i.e., until you see all physical and mental phenomena arising and disbanding in the present as inconstant, stressful, and not-self. You see with the eye of intuitive knowledge, the eye of discernment, the eye of cognitive skill, the eye of Dhamma. Your vision is true and correct. It's right view, the path in harmony, with no admixture of wrong view at all. Your vision of physical phenomena is correct in line with virtue, concentration, and discernment; your vision of mental phenomena is correct in line with virtue, concentration, and discernment. Your right view traces things first forward and then back. You have an adamant sword—liberating insight—slashing back and forth. You are engaged in focused investigation: This is what forms the path.

You fix your attention on the noble truths as two: cause and effect. When your mind is absolutely focused and fixed on examining cause and effect, that's the path to stream-entry. Once you have gained clear insight into cause and effect through the power of your discernment, making the heart radiant and bright, destroying whatever mental and physical phenomena are fetters (*saṃyojana*), the opening to *nibbāna* will appear. If your powers of discernment are weak, your mind will then return to its dependence on mental and physical phenomena, but even so, it will no longer be deceived or deluded by them, for it has seen their harm. It will never again dare grab on to the three fetters that it has been holding for so long.

Those who reach this stage have reached the transcendent—the path and fruition of stream entry—and form one class of the noble disciples.

There are nine transcendent qualities—four paths, four fruitions, and one *nibbāna*: the path to stream entry and the fruition of stream entry; the path to once-returning and the fruition of once-returning; the path to non-returning and the fruition of non-returning; the path to arahantship and the fruition of arahantship; all of which come down to the one *nibbāna*, which makes nine. The term *lokuttara dhamma*—transcendent qualities—means superior qualities, special and distinct from mundane qualities, reaching a “world” above and beyond all worlds, destined to go only higher and higher, never to return to anything low.

The word *magga*, or path, refers simply to the way leading to *nibbāna*. It's called the *ariya magga*, the path free from enemies, because it's the path that Death cannot trace. It's called the eightfold path because on the transcendent

level it has abandoned the eight wrong factors of the mundane path, leaving only the eight right: right view and right resolve, which compose right discernment, let us gain insight into physical and mental phenomena that arise and disband in the present in terms of the three characteristics, so that we let go of them completely with no remaining doubts about the Dhamma we have seen. As for right speech, right action, and right livelihood, our words and deeds reach purity, free from the fetter of self-identity view. And as for right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration, we reach the level of mind that is firm and imperturbable. Our thoughts, words, and deeds are free from groping with regard to habits and practices, and are truly in keeping with *nibbāna*, not side-tracking or going slack the way the actions of ordinary people do.

People who have attained the fruit of stream entry have the following characteristics: They have firm conviction in the virtues of the Triple Gem. The quality of generosity and relinquishment is a regular feature in their hearts. They are not complacent and never give rein to the power of delusion. They are firmly and joyfully dedicated to the cause of their own inner purity. They love virtue more than life itself. They have no intention of doing any of the baser forms of evil. Although some residual shoddy qualities may still be remaining in their hearts, they never let these unskillful qualities ever again come to the fore.

The stream they have entered is that leading to *nibbāna*. They have abandoned the three lower fetters once and for all.

1. Self-identity view (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*): They have uprooted the viewpoint that once caused them to identify physical and mental phenomena as being the self.

2. Uncertainty (*vicikicchā*): They have uprooted all doubt and indecision concerning the nature of physical and mental phenomena, and all doubt concerning the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha. If anyone were to come and say that there is no Awakening, that the practice of virtue, concentration, and discernment doesn't lead to the paths, fruitions, or *nibbāna*, they wouldn't believe that person's words, because they have seen for certain, with their own discernment, that the paths and their fruitions are unrelated to time (*akālika*) and can be known only personally, within (*paccattam*).

Their conviction is firm  
and free from indecision.  
Their vision is sure.

3. Groping at habits and practices (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*): They have uprooted all unreasonable beliefs concerning physical and mental phenomena, both within and without. They are no longer groping in their habits, manners, or practices. Everything they do is done with a reason, not out of darkness or ignorance. They are convinced of the principle of *kamma*. Their concern for their own thoughts,

words, and deeds is paramount: Those who do good will meet with good, those who do evil will meet with evil.

People who have reached stream entry have faith in the virtues of the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha that have appeared within them. They are no longer groping in their virtue. Their virtues are pure and free from defilement. They have cut off the three fetters with regard to physical and mental phenomena—right at their own thoughts, words, and deeds—through the practice of virtue, concentration, and discernment acting in concert. What this means is that they have made a focused examination back and forth, over and over, through the power of their own discernment. They have traced the path back and forth, cutting away at the grasses and weeds. One mental moment they trace things forward, and the next moment they trace them back. In other words, they focus on the phenomenon of arising and passing away, and then are able to know through the discernment of liberating insight that there in the midst of physical and mental phenomena exists something that isn't subject to arising and passing away.

The path to stream entry is the act of focusing on physical and mental phenomena, back and forth. When events are traced back and forth—sometimes two times in succession, sometimes three, depending on the power of one's discernment and insight—physical and mental phenomena disband and change-of-lineage knowledge arises in the same instant, enabling one to see the quality within one that isn't subject to arising or passing away. This is the opening onto *nibbāna*, appearing sharp and clear through the power of one's own discernment, bringing with it the fruition of stream entry, the state of being a noble disciple in the Buddha's teaching. One's fetters are absolutely severed, once and for all. Having seen the pain and harm coming from the actions that lead to the realms of deprivation, one is now freed from them and can breathe with ease.

Such people have received a treasure: They have attained transcendent discernment and seen *nibbāna* for sure. They are like a traveler who has seen a palace of gold in the distance: Although he hasn't yet reached it, he is bound to think of it at all times. Stream-enterers have already gone three leagues (*yojana*) on the way, with only seven leagues left to go. Whoever has the chance to see or know such people, help them, or associate with them, is truly fortunate.

There are three classes of stream-enterer: *ekabījin*, those who will be reborn only once more; *kolaṅkola*, those who will be reborn three or four more times; and *sattakkhattu-parama*, those who will be reborn seven more times.

Why are there three? Because the natural propensities of each individual determine the way he or she pursues the path. The first group is comprised of those with a propensity to aversion. They tend to develop insight meditation more than tranquility meditation, reaching Awakening quickly with few of the

mundane skills or powers. The second group is comprised of those with a propensity to passion. This group develops insight and tranquility in equal measure, reaching Awakening at a moderate rate, along with a moderate number of mundane powers and skills. The third group consists of those with a propensity to delusion. They tend to develop tranquility in large measure, with very strong powers in the direction of *jhāna*, before going on to develop insight meditation. They attain Awakening along with a large number of powers and skills. When they reach the transcendent level, they tend to have mastered the three skills, the six forms of intuitive power (*abhiññā*), and the four forms of acumen.

But if these three propensities exist in everyone, why do we now assign them to different individuals? Because the moment you are about to know the truth, you focus on the good and bad features of a particular mental state and attain Awakening then and there. In some cases the state is passion, in some cases aversion, and in some cases delusion. Once you have focused on knowing a particular state and know its truth for what it is, then that truth will place you in a particular class.

Those who reach this stage are headed straight for the higher paths and fruitions culminating in *nibbāna*. People who have attained stream entry have their virtue completely developed. They don't have to worry about virtue any longer. They no longer have to look out for their virtues, for they've been a slave to virtue long enough. From now on the quality of their virtue will look out for them, safeguarding them from the four realms of deprivation. What this means is that their vices have been tamed, and so they no longer have to worry about keeping them in line. They still have to work at concentration and discernment, though. They've wiped out the cruder forms of unskillful behavior, but the medium and subtle forms—which are to be wiped out by the higher paths, beginning with the path to once-returning—still remain.

## *The Path to Once-Returning*

The path to once-returning takes the fruition of stream entry as its basis. In other words, those who are to attain the state of once-returning bring their previous activity in making the mundane path transcendent to bear on the five aggregates, reducing the aggregates to two classes—physical phenomena and mental phenomena—and then making a focused investigation of both through the power of intuition or liberating insight in this manner:

Right view: They contemplate physical and mental phenomena until they see them clearly as inconstant, stressful, and not-self. Once they see clearly, they become uncomplacent. They set their thoughts on doing away with desire for physical and mental phenomena. They want to withdraw themselves from these things because they have seen their harm. This is right resolve.

Right speech on this level refers to the inner verbal fabrication of *vitakka* and *vicāra*, thinking and evaluating, searching rightly for the causes and conditions of physical and mental phenomena. (As for external speech, that was made pure with the attainment of stream entry, so there is no need to mention it on this level.)

Right action on this level is nothing other than the activity of focusing on physical and mental phenomena so as to give rise to tranquility and insight.

Right livelihood here refers to the act of choosing, say, a physical phenomenon as an object for the mind's activity—this is termed *vitakka*—and then examining and evaluating it—this is *vicāra*—with discernment. Once you learn its truth, this leads to mental pleasure. Your focused examination of physical and mental phenomena is right, and the state of your mind is right. This thus counts as right livelihood.

Right effort refers to the effort of focusing and examining for the sake of shedding your preoccupations—physical and mental phenomena—through the power of the corresponding level of liberating insight, making the appropriate effort without being complacent.

Right mindfulness means being mindful of the behavior of physical and mental phenomena as they arise and disband, without getting distracted, at the same time maintaining alertness—in short, being mindful and alert with regard to your body and mind in all your activities, taking the body in and of itself and the mind in and of itself as your frames of reference in a way that leads directly to concentration.

Right concentration here refers to the mind's being focused exclusively and steadily on physical and mental phenomena, not fixing its attention on anything else. Its activity centers constantly on a single preoccupation, which it examines

in terms of liberating insight. This type of concentration, termed *appanā citta*, the fixed mind, differs in no way at all from the activity of discernment, searching for the causes and conditions of physical and mental phenomena in terms of *saccānulomika-ñāṇa*, knowledge in accordance with the four noble truths.

When all aspects of the noble path are right, in terms of bodily, verbal, and mental fabrication, the entire path converges in a single mental instant. Focus the mind in that instant and see the truth of physical and mental phenomena. Physical and mental phenomena will disband and won't appear as a focal point for the mind. The mind will escape from its shackles as thoughts of passion, aversion, and delusion disappear. But only three fetters have been broken, just as in stream entry. Passion, aversion, and delusion have merely been weakened.

This is the fruition of once-returning. Those who reach this level are destined to be reborn only once more. They have completely developed virtue and one aspect of concentration, but they still have to work on the higher aspects of concentration, along with the higher aspects of discernment, because these have been only partially developed. Discernment is still weak. It has cut away only the twigs and branches, while the roots are still intact. Still, people who have reached this level have seen *nibbāna* appear close at hand.

## *The Path to Non-Returning*

The path to non-returning takes the fruition of once-returning as its basis. In other words, those who are to attain the state of non-returning gather all eight factors of the noble path and bring them to bear on physical and mental phenomena as before. They then make a focused examination in terms of the discernment of liberating insight. What this means is that right view and right resolve are brought together at the same point and applied to physical and mental phenomena so as to see such phenomena in terms of the three characteristics. This is termed right discernment.

Right speech, right action, and right livelihood are brought together at the same point: The mind's normal state is now that of being focused at the level of physical and mental phenomena. The activity on this level is reduced to two sorts: "bodily action," i.e., the act of focusing the mind on the behavior of physical phenomena; and "speech," the mind's inner dialogue, directed thought and evaluation (*vitakka, vicāra*) focused on the behavior of fabrications. Bodily activity is in a state of normalcy; mental activity is in a state of normalcy: Thus we can say that heightened virtue (*adhisīla*) has been established.

As for right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration: The mind makes a persistent, unwavering examination of physical and mental phenomena, resolutely intent on them as its single preoccupation. Once the qualities of virtue, concentration, and discernment are gathered together and brought to bear on physical and mental phenomena, use the power of discernment to make a focused examination back and forth: This is termed the path to non-returning. When physical and mental phenomena disband and disperse from the primal heart, the fourth and fifth fetters—*kāma-rāga*, passion and delight for physical and mental phenomena caused by the power of sensual defilement; and *paṭigha*, mental irritability and resistance caused by aversion for physical and mental phenomena—are absolutely abandoned. Once these two qualities have been shed from the heart through the discernment of liberating insight, this is termed the fruition of non-returning. Non-returners have thus put behind them once and for all the rocky, five-league trail composed of self-identity view, uncertainty, groping at habits and practices, sensual passion, and irritation. Never again will they have to be reborn in any of the sensual worlds.

Forsaking these things forever,  
they savor the fruit of non-returning,  
earning the title, "noble one."

According to the Canon, non-returners are of five sorts. After they pass away from the human world, they will appear in the five Pure Abodes, the highest of



the Brahmā worlds, there to attain the path and fruition of arahantship, never again to return to the sensual plane. Non-returners have only a little work left to do. Their virtue is completely developed into heightened virtue (*adhisīla*); their training in concentration is also complete, so that they no longer have to work at it. The only thing left for them to develop is discernment. Everything else they simply maintain. They are noble disciples who are genuinely close to *nibbāna*.

## The Path to Arahantship

The path to arahantship takes the fruition of non-returning as its basis. In other words, those who are to become arahants gather all eight factors of the noble path and bring them to bear as before on physical and mental phenomena, but now they deal with a level of these phenomena more subtle than before, converged into a single point. Once these people have gathered the factors of the path at the level of physical and mental phenomena, they make a focused examination, back and forth, using the discernment of liberating insight, bringing this subtler level of physical and mental phenomena into a single point as stress, the cause of stress, the path, and disbanding, all four noble truths gathered into one. They focus on seeing how stress is one with the cause of stress, how the cause of stress is one with the path, how the path is one with the disbanding of stress. Once they have seen things rightly in this way, they make an investigation in terms of the three characteristics:

*nāma-rūpaṃ aniccaṃ,  
nāma-rūpaṃ dukkhaṃ,  
nāma-rūpaṃ anattā:*

“Physical and mental phenomena are inconstant, physical and mental phenomena are stressful, physical and mental phenomena are not-self.” To investigate in this way is termed the path to arahantship.

Once clear insight arises right at the heart, physical and mental phenomena disband simultaneously with right view, and in that instant one reaches the ultimate quality—the Unconditioned—that knows no arising or passing away. The ten fetters are shattered without leaving a trace. Starting with the sixth fetter, these are:

6. Passion for form (*rūpa-rāga*): attachment to the sense of form; contentment, for example, with the objects that can act as the basis of *rūpa jhāna*.
7. Passion for formless phenomena (*arūpa-rāga*): attachment to non-physical phenomena: contentment, for example, with feelings and moods of pleasure and well-being that one has previously experienced.
8. Conceit (*māna*): construing oneself to be this or that. Arahants have put such assumptions aside. (They don't assume themselves.)
9. Restlessness (*uddhacca*): obsessive, excessive thinking.
10. Unawareness (*avijjā*): delusion, dullness, ignorance, immersed in physical and mental phenomena.

All ten of these fetters have been dispersed from the heart of an arahant.

To make a focused investigation using the power of one's discernment, seeing the disbanding and dissolution of physical and mental phenomena in the same terms as all fabricated things, i.e.,

*sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā,  
sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā,  
sabbe dhammā anattā:*

“All fabrications (physical and mental phenomena) are inconstant, all fabrications are stressful, all phenomena (physical and mental phenomena) are not-self;” to focus on these things as the basic danger in all three levels of becoming; to see the three levels of becoming as masses of burning embers, incinerating all those who are engrossed in them; to bring virtue, concentration, and discernment together to bear in this way exclusively on physical and mental phenomena: This is the path to arahantship. And at that very moment physical and mental phenomena disband along with the noble path—i.e., right view—and the ten fetters are shattered: This is the fruition of arahantship.

The tasks of virtue, concentration, and discernment are completed, the teachings of the Lord Buddha fulfilled. There is no longer any attachment to the paths or their fruitions, nor is there any attachment to the Unconditioned. All that remains is what is there on its own: disbanding. That is to say, mental states involved with the five aggregates have disbanded; mental states involved with virtue, concentration, and discernment have disbanded—because when virtue, concentration, and discernment converge on the level of physical and mental phenomena the first time, the first noble attainment is reached; the second time, the second attainment is reached; the third time, the third; and the fourth time, the fourth. When the qualities of virtue, concentration, and discernment are brought together in fully mature form, the mind is released from physical and mental phenomena through the power of discernment, in line with the teaching,

*paññāya paribhāvitaṃ cittaṃ  
sammadeva āsavehi vimuccati:*

“When the mind has been matured through discernment, it gains complete release from all mental effluents.” The mind is able to let go of physical and mental phenomena. Physical and mental phenomena are not the mind; the mind isn't physical and mental phenomena. The mind isn't virtue, concentration, and discernment.

*sabbe dhammā anattā:*

The mind doesn't identify any quality as itself, or itself as any of these qualities. It simply is—deathlessness. This is called disbanding because passion, aversion, and delusion have disbanded completely. There is no more becoming

for the mind, no more birth, no more involvement with the elements, aggregates, and sense media, and—unlike ordinary run-of-the-mill people—no longer any intoxication with any of these things. As a passage in the Canon puts it:

*mada-nimmadano*—no longer intoxicated with the three levels of becoming;  
*pipāsa-vinayo*—no longer thirsting for sensual pleasures;  
*ālaya-samugghāto*—involvement with the aggregates has been uprooted, leaving the aggregates free to follow their own natural state;  
*vaṭṭupacchedo*—the cycle through the three levels of becoming has been cut absolutely;  
*taṇhakkhayo*—craving is done with;  
*virāgo*—passion is done with;  
*nirodho*—unawareness has disbanded without leaving a trace;  
*nibbāna*—the mind is freed from its shackles and bonds.

The Deathless is reached. Birth, aging, illness, and death are eliminated. Ultimate, unchanging ease is attained. The aggregates disband without leaving a trace, in line with the synopsis of dependent origination: “Simply with the disbanding of this unawareness—with no trace of remaining passion—fabrications disband ... consciousness (at the six senses) disbands... physical and mental phenomena disband... the six sense media disband... sensory contacts disband... the three kinds of feeling disband... the three kinds of craving disband... the four kinds of clinging disband... becoming disbands... birth disbands... aging, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair all disband and no longer appear as stress.”

The mind is Dhamma, released from effluents, because it has gained insight into all fabrications. It is totally released from all unawareness, craving, and clinging, and has cut all ten fetters. This is the fruition of arahantship. Those who have reached this level have completed the religion. They have no more defilements or cravings; no one has anything further to teach them. Even the Buddha himself doesn't have it within his power to formulate any further instructions for them. This is why they are said to have completed the religion. If you were to describe their virtues, they would be infinite.

(What I have said here has some of my own views intermingled, so use your discernment to evaluate it.)

People who have reached the fruit of arahantship are classified into four groups:

1. *Sukha-vipassako*: those who have gained “dry” release through the power of insight, having developed the bare minimum of concentration

before attaining the knowledge that does away with mental effluents (*āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*) and gaining release. They have no other powers or skills.

2. *Tevijjo*: those who have attained the three skills—
  - a. *Pubbenivāsānussati-ñāṇa*: the ability to remember their own past lives.
  - b. *Cutūpapāta-ñāṇa*: the ability to see living beings as they pass from death to rebirth.
  - c. *Āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*: the knowledge that does away with the effluents of defilement.
3. *Chalābhiñño*: those who have attained the six intuitive powers—
  - a. *Iddhividhi*: the ability to display supernormal powers.
  - b. *Dibba-sota*: clairaudience.
  - c. *Cetopariya-ñāṇa*: the ability to know the thoughts of others.
  - d. *Pubbenivāsānussati-ñāṇa*: the ability to remember previous lives.
  - e. *Dibba-cakkhu*: clairvoyance.
  - f. *Āsavakkhaya-ñāṇa*: The ability to do away with mental effluents.
4. *Paṭisambhidappatto*: those who have mastered the four forms of acumen—
  - a. *Attha-paṭisambhidā*: acumen with regard to meaning.
  - b. *Dhamma-paṭisambhidā*: acumen with regard to mental qualities.
  - c. *Nirutti-paṭisambhidā*: acumen with regard to linguistic conventions.
  - d. *Paṭibhāṇa-paṭisambhidā*: acumen with regard to expression.

These are the different classes of arahants. It's not the case that they are all alike. Those who have attained release through dry insight have developed insight meditation more than tranquility. Those who attain the three skills have developed tranquility and insight in equal measure. Those who attain the six intuitive powers have developed two parts tranquility to one part insight. Those who attain the four forms of acumen have developed three parts tranquility to one part insight. This is why they differ from one another. (Tranquility here refers to the eight levels of *jhāna*). If you want detailed discussions of these various attainments, see the discussions of the three skills, the eight skills, and the four forms of acumen given after the section on *jhāna*. The skills mentioned on this level, though, are all transcendent, and are completely apart from the corresponding mundane skills.

## *Saṅgaha-Diṭṭhi*

Now I would like to describe the virtues of the arahants, those who have clearly known the world and have abandoned the world once and for all. Though their aggregates (physical and mental activities) may still appear to the world, they are pure aggregates, absolutely free from both good and evil, because the mind doesn't claim possession of them. The mind is released from the behavior of the aggregates. The ten fetters have been disbanded completely and no longer entangle the heart, which is why this state is called *nibbāna*: liberation. The mind is radiant and clear; passion, aversion, and delusion can no longer cloud it. It has reached the radiance of the primal nature of the heart, to which nothing else can compare.

Once this radiance is realized, it obliterates the radiance of all three levels of the world, so that no state of becoming appears at all. As long as the mind has yet to gain release from defilement, it is bound to regard the three worlds of becoming as radiant and pleasurable. Once the mind reaches stream entry, the radiance of the three levels of the world begins to darken and dim. When it reaches the level of once-returning, that radiance appears even dimmer; and on the level of non-returning, it appears dimmer yet, although it is still there. When arahantship is reached, the radiance of the three levels of the world is so dim that it has virtually vanished. When virtue, concentration, and discernment are gathered at the mind, and unawareness disbands along with the higher levels of the noble path, the world doesn't appear at all. You can't tell what features, colors, or shapes it has, or even where it is. There is only the pure brilliance of *nibbāna*. All the worlds are dissolved in the moments of the path and fruition of arahantship. This brilliance is something always truly there, but we don't see it because of our own darkness and delusion.

This very brilliance, though, can obliterate the darkness of the world so that only *nibbāna* will appear. The radiance of *nibbāna* obliterates the radiance of the world just as the light of the sun, which illumines the world of human beings and common animals, and which—when it spreads its full radiance—obliterates the light of the stars appearing in the sky at night. Another comparison is the light of the candle, which in the darkness appears bright to our eyes: If a burning kerosene lantern is brought near the candle, the candle's light will appear to dim. If the lantern's light is really brilliant, the light of the candle won't even appear. If we aren't observant, we may think that the candle isn't shedding any light at all, but actually it's giving off as much light as before, only now no one pays it any attention. So it is with the mind that has reached radiant *nibbāna*, which obliterates the light of the sun and moon, and wipes from the heart the glittering appeal of heaven and the Brahmā worlds. This is why *nibbāna* is said to be zero or

empty: None of the three worlds appears as a preoccupation of the heart; the heart no longer entangles itself. It zeroes itself from the world, i.e., it no longer takes part in birth, aging, illness, and death.

*Nibbāna* is something genuine and unchanging. It knows nothing of deterioration. It always stays as it is. As long as there is birth, aging, illness, and death, there will always be *nibbāna*, because birthlessness comes from birth, and deathlessness lies buried in the very midst of dying. The problem, then, lies with those who don't lay the groundwork for realizing *nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* doesn't vacillate back and forth, but most people who practice virtue, concentration, and discernment do. Just like a man who is going to walk to a city but, when he gets halfway there, turns back; he goes again and then turns back again. Normally he should reach the city in thirty days, but if he walks back and forth like this even for three years, he'll never get there. And when he doesn't reach the city, if he were then to go telling people that it doesn't exist, he would be making a serious mistake.

So it is with people who practice virtue, concentration, and discernment in half measures, back and forth, and—when they don't gain Awakening—go telling others that *nibbāna* is null and void, that it no longer exists because the Buddha took it with him a long time ago when he died. This is very wrong. We can make a comparison with a field where our parents have raised rice and always gotten a good crop. If they die, and our own laziness fills their place so that we don't do the work, we're bound to go hungry. And once we're hungry, can we then say that our parents took the rice or the field with them? In the same way, *nibbāna* is there, but if we don't assemble the causes for realizing it and then go denying its existence, you can imagine for yourself how much harm we're doing.

If we haven't yet reached or realized *nibbāna*, there's nothing extraordinary about it. But once we have actually come close to *nibbāna*, the world will appear as if full of vipers and masses of fire. The palaces and mansions of heavenly beings, if you can see them, will look like the hovels of outcastes. You won't be attracted to living in them, because you've already known *nibbāna*.

*Nibbāna* is nothing else but this ordinary heart, freed from all the effluents of defilement so that it reaches its primal nature. The primal nature of the heart is something that doesn't take birth, age, grow ill, or die. What takes birth is the act of falling for preoccupations. The heart's nature is clear and shining, but unawareness keeps it clouded and opaque. Yet even on the physical level—to say nothing of the heart—if someone were to come along and say that the water in the ocean is clear by nature, that a person with any intelligence could see the ocean floor, you'd have a hard time trying to find anyone to believe him. But what he says is true. There are plenty of reasons why we can't see the ocean floor—the dust and minute particles floating in the water, the wind and the sea creatures that interact with the water—but if you could get someone to eliminate

these factors so that there would be nothing but the nature of the water, it would be crystal clear. You could tell at a glance how deep or shallow the ocean was without having to waste your time diving and groping around. So it is with the heart: If our hearts are still ignorant, we shouldn't go groping elsewhere for *nibbāna*. Only if we cleanse our own hearts will we be able to see it.

People who meditate are by and large extremely prone to conjecture and speculation, judging *nibbāna* to be like this or that, but actually there's nothing especially deep, dark, or mysterious about it. What makes *nibbāna* seem mysterious is our own lack of discernment. *Nibbāna* is always present, along with the world. As long as the world exists, there will always be *nibbāna*. But if no one explores the truth of *nibbāna*, it will appear mysterious and far away. And once we give rise to our own misunderstandings, we're bound to start using concepts and fabrications to come up with ideas that *nibbāna* is like this or like that. We may decide that *nibbāna* is extinguished; that *nibbāna* is null and void; that *nibbāna* has no birth, aging, illness, or death; that *nibbāna* is the self; or that *nibbāna* is not-self. Actually, each of these expressions is neither right nor wrong. Right and wrong belong to the person speaking, because *nibbāna* is something released, untouched by supposing. No matter what anyone may call it, it simply stays as it is. If we were to call it heaven or a Brahmā world, it wouldn't object, just as we suppose names for "sun" and "moon": If we were to call them stars or clouds or worlds or jewels, whatever they really are stays as it is; they aren't transformed by our words. At the same time, they themselves don't announce that they are sun or moon or anything. They are *ṭhiti-dhamma*—they simply are what they are.

So it is with the pure heart that we call *nibbāna*. No matter what we call it, it simply stays as it is. Thus we say that with *nibbāna* there's no right and no wrong. Right and wrong belong to the person speaking. People who don't know the truth drag out their right and wrong to talk about. *Nibbāna* is something known exclusively through the heart. Words and deeds aren't involved. Our talking is merely a matter of the path. The result, once attained, is something completely apart. We thus call it release (*vimutti*) because it's released from supposing, attaining a nature that is pure heartwood: the heart that neither spins forward nor back, the heart that attains a quality that doesn't develop or deteriorate, come or go. It stays as it is—what we suppose as *ṭhiti-dhamma*, free from the germs of defilement—our very own heart, as it reaches the heart's primal nature.

Actually, the heart is pure by nature, but various moods and objects—various preoccupations—are mixed up with it. Once these preoccupations are cleaned out, there you are: *nibbāna*. To awaken to *nibbāna* is nothing other than knowing how this one heart takes its preoccupations as itself. The heart by nature is one, but if it hasn't been trained by discernment, it tends to go streaming toward



preoccupations, both within and without, and then we say that this state of mind differs from that state of mind, and so they begin to multiply until they're so many that we give up trying to look after them all. They seem many because we count each preoccupation as a state of the mind itself. The problem is that we listen to the teachings of the ancient philosophers without understanding their meaning, and so think that the mind is many. To understand how the mind is one but has many names, take a simple comparison: Suppose a person has many jobs. Sometimes he sells, so he's called a merchant. If he also grows rice, he's called a farmer. If he works for the King, he's called a government official. If he acquires rank, he's called by his rank. Actually he's only one person, and none of his titles are wrong. They've been given to him simply in line with the jobs he does. But anyone who didn't understand would think that this man was an awful lot of people.

Another comparison: When a person is born, we call it a baby. When it gets older, we call it a child. When it gets still older, we call it a young man or a young lady, and when its hair gets gray and its teeth break, we call it Grandma or Gramps. What gives rise to all these names? One and the same person. So it is with the mind that is supposed to be many. We don't understand what the words are supposed to mean, so we go groping around after our own shadows. When this is the case, we find it hard to practice. We don't understand the states of mind that have been supposed into being, and so don't see the mind that is released from supposing.

When the mind is said to have many states, this is what is meant: Sometimes the mind takes on passion; this is called *sarāga-citta*, a passionate mind. Sometimes it takes on irritation and aversion; this is called *sadosa-citta*, an angry mind. Sometimes it takes on a deluded state as itself; this is called *samoha-citta*, a deluded mind. These states are all on the bad side, and are termed *akusala-citta*, unskillful mental states. As for the good side: *vītarāga-citta*, the mind has reached satisfaction and so its desires fade; *vītadosa-citta*, the mind has had enough and so its anger and ill will disappears; *vītamoha-citta*, the mind is bright and so withdraws from its dullness, just as the sun or moon withdraws from an eclipse and is bright and clear. These are termed *kusala-citta*, skillful mental states.

Some people at this point think that these six mind states are six minds. The true nature of the mind, though, is one. To count six minds is to count the preoccupations; the primal mind is radiant. We take a few things to be many and so end up poor, just as when a foolish or poor person thinks that a thousand baht is a lot of money. An intelligent or rich person, though, realizes that it's just a little: You can spend it all in two days. A fool, however, would think that a thousand baht would make him rich and so he'll have to continue being poor. So it is if we see our one mind as many: We'll have to be poor because we'll be at our wits' end trying to train it.

The nature of the mind that's clear and one is like clean, clear water mixed with different colors in different bottles. We may call it red water, yellow water, green water, etc., but the water itself is still clear as it always was. If a fool comes along and falls for the colors, he wants to taste them all. He may drink five bottles, but they'll all be just like the first. If he knows beforehand that it's all the same water, he won't feel any desire to waste his time drinking this or that bottle. All he has to do is taste one bottle and that'll be enough. So it is with the mind: If we realize that the mind is in charge and is the determining factor in all things skillful and unskillful and in the paths and fruitions leading to *nibbāna*, we won't feel any desire to go saying that the mind is like this or like that. The mind seems to be many because it gets entangled in various preoccupations, and when these preoccupations dye the mind, we count them as our own mind.

The pure nature of the heart and mind is like the sun, which shines every day without fail throughout the year but is concealed by clouds during the rainy season. Those who don't know its nature then say that the sun isn't shining. This is wrong. Their vision can't penetrate the clouds and so they find fault with the sun. They suppose that the darkness of the clouds belongs to the sun, get stuck on their own supposings, and so don't reach the truth. The true nature of the sun is always bright, no matter what the season. If you don't believe me, ask an airplane pilot. If you go up past the clouds in an airplane on a dark rainy day, you'll know whether the sun is in fact dark or shining.

So it is with the mind: No matter how it may be behaving, its nature is one—radiant and clear. If we lack discernment and skill, we let various preoccupations come flowing into the mind, which lead it to act—sometimes skillfully and sometimes not—and then we designate the mind according to its behavior.

Because there is one mind, it can have only one preoccupation. And if it has only one preoccupation, then there shouldn't be too much difficulty in practicing so as to know its truth. Even though the mind may seem to have many preoccupations, they don't come all at once in a single instant. They have to pass by one at a time. A good mood enters as a bad one leaves; pleasure enters, pain leaves; ingenuity enters, stupidity, leaves; darkness enters, brightness leaves. They keep trading places without let-up. Mental moments, though, are extremely fast. If we aren't discerning, we won't be able to know our own preoccupations. Only after they've flared up and spread to affect our words and deeds are we usually aware of them.

Normally this one mind is very fast. Just as when we turn on a light: If we don't look carefully, the light seems to appear, and the darkness to disperse, the very instant we turn on the switch. This one mind, when it changes preoccupations, is that fast. This one mind is what leads to various states of being because our preoccupations get into the act so that we're entangled and snared.

It's not the case that one person will have many minds. Say that a person goes to heaven: He goes just to heaven. Even if he is to go on to other levels of becoming, he has to pass away from heaven first. It's not the case that he'll go to heaven, hell, the Māra worlds, and the Brahmā worlds all at the same time. This goes to show that the mind is one. Only its thoughts and preoccupations change.

The preoccupations of the mind come down simply to physical and mental phenomena that change, causing the mind to experience birth in various states of becoming. Because the mind lacks discernment and doesn't know the true nature of its preoccupations, it gropes about, experiencing death and rebirth in the four modes of generation (*yoni*). If the mind has the discernment to know its preoccupations and let go of them all without trace, leaving only the primal nature of the heart that doesn't fall for any preoccupation on the levels of sensuality, form, or formlessness, it will be able to gain release from suffering and stress. "Once the mind is fully matured by means of virtue, concentration and discernment, it gains complete release from the effluents of defilement."

*Khandha-kāmo*—desire for the five aggregates is over and done with. *Bhava-kāmo*—desire for the three levels of becoming (the sensual plane, the plane of form, and the plane of formlessness) disbands and disperses. The three levels of becoming are essentially only two: the aggregate of physical phenomena, which includes the properties of earth, water, fire, and wind; and the aggregates of mental phenomena, which include feelings, perceptions, fabrications, and consciousness—in short, the phenomena that appear in the body and heart or, if you will, the body and mind. Physical phenomena are those that can be seen with the eye. Mental phenomena are those that can't be seen with the eye but can be sensed only through the heart and mind. Once we can boil these things down and then separate them out again, we'll come to see the truth of the aggregates: *They* are stress, *they* are the cause of stress, *they* are the path. Once we understand them correctly, we can deal with them properly. Whether they arise, fade, or vanish, we won't—if we have any discernment—latch on to them with any false assumptions. The mind will let go. It will simply know, neutral and undisturbed. It won't feel any need to worry about the conditions or behavior of the aggregates, because it sees that the aggregates can't be straightened out. Even the Buddha didn't straighten out the aggregates. He simply let them go, in line with their own true nature.

The heart is what creates the substance of the aggregates. If you try to straighten out the creations, you'll never be done with them. If you straighten out the creator, you'll have the job finished in no time. When the heart is clouded with darkness and delusion, it creates aggregates or physical and mental phenomena as its products, to the point where the birth, aging, illness, and death of the aggregates become absolutely incurable—unless we have the wisdom to leave them alone in line with their own true nature. In other words, we shouldn't

latch on to them.

This is illustrated in the Canon, where the Buddha says in some passages that he is free from birth, aging, illness, and death. If we read further, though, we'll notice that his body grew old, ill and then died; his mental activity ended. What this shows, however, is that the aggregates should be left alone. Whatever their true nature may be, don't try to resist it or go against it. Keep your mind neutral and aware. Don't go latching on to the various preoccupations that arise, age, grow ill, and vanish, as pertaining to your self. If you can do this, you're practicing correctly. Aim only at the purity of the one heart that doesn't die.

The heart clouded with dullness and darkness lacks a firm base and so drifts along, taking after the aggregates. When they take birth, it thinks that it's born along with them; when they age, it thinks that it's aged along with them; when they grow ill and disband, it gets mixed up along with them and so experiences stress and pain, its punishment for drifting along in the wake of its supposings.

If the mind doesn't drift in this way, there is simply the disbanding of stress. The cause of stress and the path disband as well, leaving only the nature that doesn't die: *buddha*, a mind that has bloomed and awakened. For the mind to bloom, it needs the fertilizer of virtue and concentration. For it to awaken and come to its senses, it needs discernment. The fertilizer of concentration is composed of the exercises of tranquility and insight meditation. The mind then gains all-around discernment with regard to the aggregates—seeing the pain and harm they bring—and so shakes itself free and keeps its distance, which is why the term "arahant" is also translated as "one who is distant." In other words, the mind has had enough. It has had its fill. It's no longer flammable, i.e., it offers no fuel to the fires of passion, aversion, and delusion, which are now dispersed once and for all through the power of transcendent discernment.

This is the supreme *nibbāna*. Birth has been absolutely destroyed, but *nibbāna* isn't annihilation. *Nibbāna* is the name for what still remains: the primal heart. So why isn't it called the heart? Because it's now a heart with no preoccupations. Just as with the names we suppose for "tree" and "steel": If the tree is cut, they call it "lumber." If it's made into a house, they call it "home." If it's made into a place to sit, they call it a "chair." You never see anyone who would still call it a "tree." The same with steel: Once it's been made into a car or a knife, we call it a "car" or a "knife." You never see anyone who would still call it a "steel." But even though they don't call it a steel, the steel is still there. It hasn't run off anywhere. It's still steel just as it always was.

So it is with the heart when the expert craftsman, discernment, has finished training it: We call it *nibbāna*. We don't call it by its old name. When we no longer call it the "heart," some people think that the heart vanishes, but actually it's simply the primal heart that we call *nibbāna*. Or, again it's simply the heart

released, untouched by supposing. No matter what anyone may call it, it simply stays as it is. It doesn't take on anyone's suppositions at all. Just as when we correctly suppose a diamond to be a diamond: No matter what anyone may call it, its real nature stays as it is. It doesn't advertise itself as a diamond. It simply is what it is. The same with the heart: Once it gains release, it doesn't suppose itself to be this or that. It's still there. It hasn't been annihilated. Just as when we call a diamond a diamond, it's there; and when we don't call it anything, it's still there—it hasn't vanished or disappeared—so it is with the heart that is *nibbāna*: It's there. If we call it a sun, a moon, heaven, a Māra world, a Brahmā world, earth, water, wind, fire, woman, man, or anything at all, it's still there, just as before. It hasn't changed in any way. It stays as it is: one heart, one Dhamma, no longer taking in the germs of defilement.

This is why the truest name to suppose for it is release. What we call heart, mind, intellect, form, feeling, labels, mental fabrications, consciousness: All these are true as far as supposing goes. Wherever supposing is, there release can be found. Take a blatant example: the five aggregates. If you look at their true nature, you'll see that they've never said, "Look. We're aggregates," or "Look. We're the heart." So it is with the heart that's *nibbāna*, that has reached *nibbāna*: It won't proclaim itself as this or that, which is why we suppose it to be release. Once someone has truly reached release, that's the end of speaking.

The mouth is closed,  
closed—the world, the ocean of wandering on,  
fabrications, this mass of suffering and stress—  
leaving, yes, the highest, most exalted ease,  
free from birth, aging,  
illness, and death.

This is called *nirāmisa-sukha*, pleasure not of the flesh. Pleasures of the flesh are dependent on defilement, craving, conceits, and views, and are unable to let go of the elements, aggregates, and sense media. As these pleasures of the flesh ripen, they can bring pain, just as ripe fruit or cooked rice are near to turning rotten and moldy, or as ripening bananas cause their tree to come crashing down so that only birds and crows will eat them. So it is with the heart: When it enters into its various preoccupations and takes them as belonging to itself, it's bound for pain and suffering. Just as when an unwary traveler leaves the road to enter the shade of a bael tree with ripening fruits: If the wind blows, the ripe fruits are bound to drop on his head, giving him nothing but pain; so it is with the heart: If it doesn't have a Dhamma to give it shelter, it's bound to be beaten and trampled by suffering and pain. (The wind blowing through the bael tree stands for the eight ways of the world (*loka-dhamma*). The bael tree stands for the body, and the branches for the senses. The fruits are visual objects, sounds, smells, tastes,

tactile sensations, and ideas, which drop on the heart stupid enough to sit preoccupied with this mass of elements, aggregates and sense media.)

People of wisdom are those who search for the highest form of pleasure—free from defilement, craving, conceits, and views—by cleansing the heart of all its bad preoccupations. This is the deathless *nibbāna*, which the Buddha praised:

*nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ:*  
*Nibbāna* is the ultimate ease.

*nibbānaṃ paramaṃ suññaṃ:*  
*Nibbāna* is the ultimate emptiness (i.e., empty of defilement; free from preoccupations; uninvolved with elements, aggregates, sense media, passion, aversion, and delusion; free from the lineage of unawareness and craving: This is the way in which *nibbāna* is “empty,” not the way ordinary people conceive it).

*nibbānaṃ paramaṃ vadanti buddhā:*  
Those who know say that *nibbāna* is the ultimate.

*taṇhāya vipphānena nibbānaṃ iti vuccati:*  
Because of the complete abandonment of craving, it is called *nibbāna*.

*akiñcanaṃ anādānaṃ etaṃ dīpaṃ anāparaṃ*  
*nibbānaṃ iti naṃ brūmi jarā-maccu-parikkhayaṃ*  
Free from entanglements, free from attachments (that fasten and bind), there is no better island than this. It is called *nibbāna*, the absolute end of aging and death.

*nibbānaṃ yogakkhemaṃ anuttaraṃ:*  
*Nibbāna* is the unexcelled relief from the yoke (of preoccupations).

*etaṃ santaṃ etaṃ paṇītaṃ yadidaṃ sabba-saṅkhāra-samatho sabbūpadhi-*  
*paṭinissaggo taṇhakkhaya virāgo nirodho nibbānaṃ:*

This is peace (from the coupling of preoccupations), this is exquisite: i.e., the stilling of all fabrications, the relinquishment of all mental paraphernalia, the ending of craving, the fading of passion (for attractions), disbanding (of the darkness of unawareness), *nibbāna*.

We who say we are Buddhists, who believe in the teachings of the Lord Buddha—theory, practice, attainment, paths, fruitions, and *nibbāna*—should search for techniques to rectify our hearts through the practice of tranquility and insight meditation, at the same time nurturing:

*conviction*—in the theory, practice, and attainment taught by the Buddha;  
*persistence*—in persevering with virtue, concentration, and discernment until they are complete;

*mindfulness*—so as not to be complacent or careless in virtue, concentration, and discernment;

*concentration*—so as to make the mind resolute and firm, giving rise to *discernment* right within our hearts.

The discernment that comes from the six teachers—i.e., from the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and ideation—is inconstant and may leave us free to do evil again. But the discernment that comes from a mind centered in concentration is capable of doing away with the defilements lying within. So by all means we should show respect for the virtues of the Triple Gem by putting them into practice so that we can taste the nourishment of the Buddha's teachings. Don't be like the ladle that mingles with the curry but never knows the curry's taste. We've mingled ourselves with Buddhism, so we should learn its taste. Don't be like the frog sitting among the lotuses who never gets to know their scent. It sits there pissing, its eyes all bright and wide open. A bee comes past and it jumps—Kroam!—into the water: stupid, even though its eyes are open. We human beings can really be ignorant, even when we know better.



We have discussed the wisdom that comes from meditation, from the beginning to the end of the exercises of tranquility and insight.

*uttamanī:*

These exercises are superlative and supreme strategies for lifting yourself across the ocean of the world, the swirling flood of rebirth.

*sammā-paṭirasassādam paṭṭhayante:*

You who are wisely intent on the savor of right attainment, who desire the happiness of *nibbāna*, should devote yourselves to the practices mentioned above. Don't let yourselves grow weary, don't let yourselves be faint in the practice of these two forms of meditation.

They are ornaments,

the highest adornment for the heirs of the Buddha's teaching, and are truly worthy of constant practice.

They will form an island,

a shore, a refuge and a home for you. Even if you aren't yet in a position to break through to the paths and fruitions leading to *nibbāna* in this lifetime, they

will form habits and conditions leading to progress in the future, or may help you escape the torments of the realms of deprivation; they will lead you to mundane happiness and relief from the dread of sorrow. But if your perfections are fully developed, you will gain

the heartwood of release—

release from the five temptations of mortality (Māra), release from the range of birth, aging, illness, and death, reaching *nibbāna*, following the custom of the noble ones.

May people of judgment consider carefully all that has been written here.

In conclusion, may all those who read this, take it to heart and put it into practice meet only with happiness and joy, free from danger and fear. May you grow day and night in the practice of the Buddha's teachings, in peace and well-being.

*saṅgaha-ditṭhi:*

Views have been included  
without alluding to any claims.

*Phra Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo*

THE FOREST TEMPLE  
SHRIMP CANAL  
CHANTHABURI



## Glossary

This glossary contains Pali terms that aren't translated when they first appear in the translations, as well as terms that require further background explanation even when they are. *Dhātu* in particular is discussed at length because an acquaintance with traditional Thai physics is needed to understand a number of similes given in Ajaan Lee's writings, even though they don't explicitly refer to the term.

Some Pali terms carry a weight of associations that can't be borne by single English equivalents. In some such cases, where the terms form the connecting thread in the discussion (e.g., *sammati*, *ārammaṇa*), I have used a single equivalent throughout the translations, and have given a variety of readings here which—if the reader feels inclined—can be read into the translation in place of the equivalents used. In other cases (e.g., *nirodha*) I have used a number of different equivalents in the text, as called for by the context, all of which have been gathered here so that the reader will see that they are meant to be related.

In choosing English equivalents for the Pali terms used in this book, I have been guided primarily by the meanings Ajaan Lee himself gives to those terms—either directly, through the way he explains and defines them; or indirectly, through the way he uses them. Some of these meanings differ from those generally accepted at present, in which cases it is up to the reader to discover which interpretations are best by experimenting to see which are most useful in practice.

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***abhiññā***: Intuitive powers that come from the practice of concentration: the ability to display psychic powers, clairvoyance, clairaudience, the ability to know the thoughts of others, recollection of past lifetimes, and the knowledge that does away with mental effluents (see *āsava*).

***anattā***: Not-self.

***anicca(ṁ)***: Inconstant, unstable, impermanent.

***anussati***: Recollection as a meditation exercise. Strictly speaking, there are seven themes recommended for recollection: the virtues of the Buddha, of the Dhamma, and of the Saṅgha; moral virtue; generosity; the qualities that lead to rebirth as a heavenly being; and the peace of nibbāna. (This last topic is for those who have already experienced a glimpse of nibbāna, but have not yet attained arahantship.) In addition, the following practices are also sometimes classed as “*anussati*”: mindfulness of death, mindfulness of breathing, and mindfulness immersed in the body.

***apāya-bhūmi***: Realm of deprivation; the four lower states of existence: rebirth

in hell, as a hungry shade, as an angry demon, or as a common animal. In Buddhism, none of these states are regarded as eternal conditions.

**arahant:** A person who has abandoned all ten of the fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth (see *saṅyojana*), whose heart is free of mental effluents (see *āsava*), and is thus not destined for future rebirth. As this word bears a resemblance to the Pali word for “distant” (*ara*), it is sometimes translated as “one far from evil.” An epithet for the Buddha and the highest of his noble disciples.

**ārammaṇa:** Preoccupation; object or issue of the mind or will; anything the mind takes as a theme or prop for its activity.

**āsava:** Mental effluent or fermentation—sensuality, becoming, views, and unawareness.

**avijjā:** Unawareness; ignorance; counterfeit knowledge; not seeing things in terms of the four noble truths.

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

**brahmā:** “Great One”—an inhabitant of the heavens of form or formlessness.

**buddho (buddha):** Awake; enlightened.

**dhamma (dharma):** Event; phenomenon; the way things are experienced in and of themselves; the basic principles underlying their behavior. Also, principles of behavior that human beings should follow so as to fit in with the right natural order of things; qualities of mind they should develop so as to realize the quality of deathlessness (*amata dhamma*). By extension, “dhamma” is used to refer also to any doctrine that teaches such things. Thus the Dhamma of the Buddha refers to his teachings, their practice, and to the direct experience of the quality of nibbāna at which they are aimed.

**dhātu:** Element; property; potential. In the Pali Canon this word occurs primarily in discussions of the causes of activity, in which it forms the ultimate precondition underlying the causal chain leading to the activity in question. The arousal or irritation of the *dhātu* is what causes the activity to take place. Thus on the psychological level, the properties of sensuality, anger, or delusion in a person’s mind are the basic conditions underlying unskillful action on his or her part. On the level of nature at large, phenomena such as windstorms, fires, floods, and earthquakes are explained as resulting from the arousal of the properties of wind, fire, and water. Such disorders cease when the disturbed property grows calm. Thus, for instance, when the fire property runs out of sustenance to cling to, it grows calm and the individual fire goes out. On the level of the human body, diseases are explained as resulting from the aggravation of any of these properties, all of which permeate the entire body. For example, in Thai medicine, belching, fainting, cramps, convulsions, and paralysis are

associated with disorders of the internal wind element.

All of this explanation may make the notion of *dhātu* seem rather foreign, but when used as an object of meditation, the four physical *dhātu* are simply a way of viewing the body in impersonal, purely physical terms. They are experienced as the elementary sensations and potentials—warmth, movement, etc.—that permeate and make up the internal sense of the body (see *rūpa*). Thus the meditation exercise of spreading the breath throughout the body is simply the feeling of linking the sensations of the in-and-out breath with the subtle sense of motion that permeates the body at all times. The six *dhātu*—the four physical *dhātu* plus space and consciousness—constitute the elementary properties or potentials that underlie the experience of physical and mental phenomena.

***dukkha(ri)***: Stress; suffering; pain; discontent.

***jhāna***: Meditative absorption in a single object, notion or sensation (see *rūpa*).

***kamma (karma)***: Intentional acts that result in states of being and birth. The law of kamma is the principle that a person's own intentional acts influence the good and evil that he or she meets with.

***kasīṇa***: An object stared at with the purpose of fixing an image of it in one's consciousness and then manipulating the image to make it fill the totality of one's awareness.

***khandha***: Component parts of sensory perception; physical and mental phenomena as they are directly experienced: *rūpa* (see below); *vedanā*—feelings of pleasure, pain, or neither pleasure nor pain that result from the mind's interaction with its objects; *saññā*—labels, concepts, perceptions; *saṅkhāra* (see below); and *viññāṇa*—consciousness, the act of noticing sense data and ideas as they occur.

***lokadhamma***: Worldly phenomena—gain, loss, status, loss of status, praise, criticism, pleasure, and pain.

***māra***: Temptation; mortality. The five forms in which temptation appears, deflecting the practitioner from the path, are as: defilement, the vicissitudes of the *khandhas*, fear of death, habitual urges & tendencies, and as deities.

***nibbāna (nirvāṇa)***: Liberation; the unbinding of the mind from greed, anger, and delusion, from physical sensations and mental acts. As the term is used to refer also to the extinguishing of a fire, it carries connotations of stilling, cooling, and peace. (According to the physics taught at the time of the Buddha, the property of fire exists in a latent state to a greater or lesser degree in all objects. When activated, it seizes and sticks to its fuel. When extinguished, it is "unbound.")

***nimitta***: Mental sign or image; theme of concentration. *Uggaha nimitta* refers to any image that arises in the course of meditation. *Paṭibhāga nimitta* refers to the mental manipulation of the image.

**nirodha:** Disbanding; cessation; dispersal; stopping (of stress and its causes).

**paññā:** Discernment; wisdom.

**rūpa:** The basic meaning of this word is “appearance” or “form.” It is used, however, in a number of different contexts, taking on different shades of meaning in each. In lists of the objects of the senses, it is given as the object of the sense of sight. As one of the *khandhas*, it refers to physical phenomena or sensations (visible appearance or form being the defining characteristics of what is physical). This is also the meaning it carries when opposed to *nāma*, or mental phenomena. The act of focusing on the level of physical and mental phenomena (literally, form and name) means focusing on the primary sensation of such phenomena in and of themselves, before the mind elaborates them further. In the list, “*kāma, rūpa, arūpa*”—the types of object that the mind can take as its preoccupation and the states of becoming that result—*kāma* refers to images derived from the external senses, *rūpa* to the internal sense of the form of the body, and *arūpa* to strictly mental phenomena. This last sense of *rūpa* is also what is meant in the term “*rūpa jhāna*.”

**samādhi:** Concentration; the act of centering the mind on a single object.

**sammatti:** In Thai, the primary meaning of this word is “supposing,” which is how it is translated here, but it also conveys the meaning of convention (i.e., usages which are commonly designated or agreed upon), make-believe, and conjuring into being with the mind.

**saṅkhāra:** Fabrication—any force or factor that fabricates things, the process of fabrication, and any fabricated thing that results; anything conditioned, compounded, or fashioned by nature, whether on the physical or the mental level. In some contexts this word is used as a blanket term for all five *khandhas*. As the fourth *khandha*, it refers specifically to the fabrication of urges, thoughts, etc., within the mind.

**saṅyojana:** Fetters that bind the mind to the cycle of rebirth—self-identity views, uncertainty, grasping at habits & practices; sensual passion, irritability; passion for form, passion for formless phenomena, conceit, restlessness, and unawareness.

**sati:** Mindfulness; the ability to keep something in mind; powers of reference and retention.

**satipaṭṭhāna:** Frame of reference; establishing of mindfulness—body, feelings, mind, and mental qualities, viewed in and of themselves.

**upādāna:** Clinging; attachment; sustenance for becoming and birth—clinging to sensuality, to views, to habits & practices, and to theories of the self.

**uposatha:** Observance day, corresponding to the phases of the moon, on which Buddhist laypeople gather to listen to the Dhamma and observe the eight precepts.

**vicāra:** Evaluation; investigation. A factor of *rūpa jhāna*.

**vimutti:** Release; freedom from the suppositions and fabrications of the mind.

**vipassanā:** Liberating insight; clear intuitive understanding of how physical and mental phenomena are caused and experienced, seeing them as they are, in and of themselves, arising and passing away: inconstant, stressful, and not-self.

**vitakka:** Thinking about an object; keeping an object in mind. A factor of *rūpa jhāna*.

**yoni:** Mode of generation. In the Pali Canon, four modes of generation are listed: birth from a womb, birth from an egg, birth from moisture, and spontaneous appearance (this last refers to the birth of heavenly beings).



If anything in this translation is inaccurate or misleading, I ask forgiveness of the author and reader for having unwittingly stood in their way. As for whatever may be accurate, I hope the reader will make the best use of it, translating it a few steps further, into the heart, so as to attain the truth at which it points.

*The translator*

*Sabbe sattā sadā hontu  
Avera sukha-jīvino  
Kataṃ puñña-phalaṃ mayhaṃ  
Sabbe bhāgī bhavantu te*

May all beings always live happily,  
free from animosity.

May all share in the blessings  
springing from the good I have done.

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