

## 5 DETACHMENT

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When we discuss the teachings of Buddhism we talk a lot about attachments. This is a word that is often misunderstood and misused by many Buddhists. If we don't understand what the word means we can get into a lot of trouble and experience confusion. The opposite of attachment is easier to understand it is called 'letting go'. We always know when letting go is happening because things disappear. We don't know when attachment happens because most of the time we can't see it. The nature of delusion, the core problem of human beings, is to blind us. Delusion or illusion if you like, is called *avijjā* in Pāli and that delusion and lack of enlightenment is something that we can't see. It's a blind spot inside us, but we don't know we are blind!

### **The Road to Suffering**

The big problem of *avijjā* or delusion is that a person who is deluded always thinks they are right. That is the reason there are so many different ideas and opinions in this world. We can't see that that is not the correct way to look at things. However, there is one way that we can find out what delusion is. Delusion is that which leads to suffering. It's that which leads to problems and difficulties. Wisdom is that which leads to the end of suffering and difficulties. In the same way, attachment – which is the result of delusion – is that which causes suffering, pain and difficulty in our lives. It's detachment and letting go that frees us and leads to us to happiness, peace and contentment. This is the best way to understand the meaning of these terms. If whatever is happening in our life is causing suffering or discomfort, it's because of a lack of contentment; contentment, which is there for the taking. It means that we're not seeing something. We need to have at least enough wisdom and faith to challenge ourselves.

So often, it's the sense of self, the sense of ego, the sense of pride born of that ego; which feeds the delusion, 'I can't be wrong, I'm right.' 'No one else understands, only me.' It's one's 'self' that feeds the attachments. 'This is right.' 'This is what I want to do.' 'This is the correct way.' 'This is the right idea.' This delusion is attachment to views. So often we just can't see that, because we think we have the

right view. It's very hard for a human being to know they are wrong, in fact no one thinks they are wrong. We all think we are right. That's the problem! Even though, in a monastery, there can be thirty different people, everyone thinks they know the Dhamma. But everyone can't know the Dhamma if they've all got different ideas.

This is where one needs a bit of humility, a bit of faith or confidence in the teachings of the Buddha. Fortunately the teachings of the Buddha are very clear. They have been well preserved and are reasonably well translated. So we can actually look at those teachings for ourselves. But even here, we've got to be very careful because of the way delusion works. We can read into some of those teachings things that aren't even there in the translations. For example, attachment! We shouldn't be attached. We shouldn't even be attached to meditation. We shouldn't be attached to being a monk. We shouldn't be attached to anything. We shouldn't be attached to eating or not eating. We shouldn't even be attached to sleeping. So if that's the case, don't sleep tonight. This gets ridiculous and stupid, doesn't it? However, people can read into it whatever they wish. Some lay Buddhists even say they shouldn't be attached to the precepts. But they don't say they shouldn't be attached to their wives and children, to their coffee or whatever else it is that serves their sensory gratification. They are just using attachment to fulfil their sensory desires and to criticise others who challenge them. They are just using their sensory desires in an unfair way grounded in delusion and aimed to protect their comfort, aimed to protect the cravings and attachments that are binding them to this world of *samsāra*.

If you want to check out these teachings of the Buddha, you need to have intellectual honesty, or at least a sense of integrity, to be able to see these teachings for what they are. You have to see the whole of the teachings – not just some parts – without adding anything to them or taking anything away. Don't just choose some very obscure passages that support your ideas. Don't read so much into one or two hard to translate obscure passages and ignore the very great mass of very clear and very precise, repeated teachings, which you find throughout the Buddhist Scriptures. At least that much should give you a sense of understanding what the Buddha actually taught. For those of you who have gone so far as to become monks, you should have confidence and faith in what the Buddha taught, and you should have some confidence and faith in those monks who have been practising for much longer than

you. That's the reason we have *nissaya*, support, or depending upon another. That's so important in the practice, because we cannot just depend upon ourselves.

### **Personal Views**

We cannot become Enlightened all by ourselves. Only a Buddha can do that. For that reason we need the help of other people. We can see how this is so, because everyone has their own ideas and we cling to those ideas tenaciously. We argue with the teacher. We even argue with the Buddha, because everyone else is wrong except us. 'I'm the only one who really understands!' It's important to understand that unless you've had an experience of Enlightenment, unless you are a Stream Winner; unless you are an *Ariya*, you should always take it as a given that you are still deluded. If one is a *puthujjana*, an ordinary person, then *avijjā* is still there and one hasn't yet seen the Dhamma. There is still something missing. So, one should have the humility to trust the teachings of the Buddha, the real Dhamma. That's the only way we can have a hope of overcoming the attachments to our own personal views.

That attachment to one's own personal views is probably one of the strongest, fiercest, most tenacious, and most *dukkha* producing of all the attachments. Attachment to views stops one from even getting on the path leading to the ending of suffering. People in this world are often so convinced of their own views that they never challenge them at all. This creates so much suffering for themselves and others! Sometimes we can see exactly what people are doing. As the Buddha said in a simile that he gave, we see them acting like a man walking on a path leading into a pit of burning coals. If he keeps on walking in that direction you know he will end up in the blazing pit of coals, causing suffering or even death. You can tell him not to go in that direction, to go in another direction instead, but he just won't listen. He won't change his view that this is the right way to go. I know this is a big problem with human beings. It's caused either through a lack of wisdom or a lack of faith.

Wisdom and faith are two of the five *indriyas*, spiritual qualities that are also spiritual powers. Sometimes they are translated as controlling faculties because they are so important on the path to Enlightenment. The five *indriyas* are: faith, energy, mindfulness, *samādhi* and wisdom. If one hasn't enough of these qualities one will

always be on the wrong path, and one won't be even getting close to *Nibbāna*. One won't even be getting close to the door through which these great insight experiences can be found. It is going in the wrong direction altogether! If one hasn't got wisdom one needs to have a lot of faith. The trouble is most people already think they've got lots of wisdom, and that leads them to think they don't need faith. They 'think' and that's the problem.

One knows one has wisdom if the path is developing. One needs not just the ability to keep virtuous conduct, the ability to restrain the mind, and the ability to calm the mind, but also the ability to eradicate the five hindrances, the ability to get into a *jhāna*, and the ability to be equanimous and have clear insights coming up throughout the day. All of these things are signs that your wisdom is developing and the path is manifesting. If those things aren't happening it means our wisdom isn't strong enough, '*natthi jhānam apaññassa, paññā natthi ajhāyato*' (Dhp 372), '*there is no jhāna in one who lacks wisdom, nor is there wisdom in one who lacks jhāna*'. These two depend upon each other. So don't think that you are wise if you can't get into deep meditation.

There is no wisdom without *jhāna*. That humbles one. It humbles one to say, "Look, there are things in here that I just don't understand, that I just don't see. Maybe I have to trust someone else. Maybe I really can trust the teacher and have faith in him. At the very least I can trust what the Buddha said in the *suttas*". The clear teachings that we see in the *suttas* show us what we should be doing to overcome our attachments. The attachments that we have are the attachments to our views, attachments to the sensory world of the five senses, attachments to our business or to our projects, attachments to our thoughts and attachments to our emotions. All these attachments have to be let go of and abandoned.

### **Uncovering the Attachments**

The practise of abandoning the attachments is what we do when we sit or walk in meditation, and also when we do anything else in this monastery. My training as a young monk in Thailand was all about uncovering the attachments that I had. I could see the coarser attachments, so I could abandon them and let them go because I could

see that they were causing suffering. When Ajahn Chah was building the main hall at Wat Pa Pong, where all the monks training under Ajahn Chah were ordained – some monks here were ordained in that hall at Wat Pa Pong – I was staying at Wat Pah Nanachat. But because they needed more workers to help at Wat Pah Pong we were all called over there for a week. There was a big mound of earth raised by the monks, on which the ordination hall was going to be built. No earth moving machinery was available so all the work was done with what they call ‘bungies’, hoes and wheel barrows.

After making the mound there was a lot of earth left over, and because it was an eyesore Ajahn Chah told us to move it around to the side. We spent a couple of days moving it to the side. Not just for one or two hours, but from when the meal finished at about nine o’clock in the morning – with hardly time to brush your teeth – just moving wheel barrows until nine thirty or ten o’clock at night. Because we had faith in Ajahn Chah we did that. When it got dark the kerosene lanterns were brought out so that we could see where we were going. We worked until ten o’clock at night and then we had showers in cold water and rested. It took two or three days to move the earth. When it was finished Ajahn Chah went off to another monastery for a few days, and Ajahn Liam the second monk – he is now the abbot at Wat Pa Pong – came along and said, “No, that’s not in the right place. Move the earth”. Again we worked long hours for two or three days, moving that big pile of earth to another place. You can imagine how we felt as Westerners when Ajahn Chah came back after three days and said, “What did you move it over there for, I told you to move it over here?” So, we had to move it all back again.

That was really a wonderful experience, because it actually taught me something. It taught me that I could suffer if I wanted to, or I could just accept it out of faith in Ajahn Chah. I could say, “These Thai monks are stupid! Why can’t they understand or make a decision? This is a stupid way of doing things! Why can’t they decide where to put the earth? I never became a monk to shift earth for twelve hours a day”. That’s what I went to university to escape. I thought that if you go to university you don’t have to do that sort of work any more. You can just spend your time telling others what to do. I even thought that when you become an abbot you are the boss and you don’t have to work so hard. What a joke! What it taught me to say was,

“Look, if this is causing suffering, if it’s *dukkha* to have to move all this earth, it’s not the earth that is the cause of the suffering. It’s not Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Liam, who are the cause of suffering. It must be some delusions, some attachments or some craving inside me that is the cause of the suffering”. This is what Ajahn Chah kept on pointing at. The first noble truth is that *dukkha* is not caused by work. *Dukkha* is not caused by mosquitoes. *Dukkha* is not caused by heat or by cold. *Dukkha* is caused by craving. That’s the fundamental teaching of the Buddha. That taught me to look for the cause of suffering elsewhere, not in the externals, but in ‘me’, in ‘my attitude’, in ‘my craving’, in ‘my attachment’, in ‘my delusions’.

Some people just lost it altogether and said, “Well, if this is monastic life, it’s not for me”. They looked at monastic life as being the cause of suffering or the work as being the cause of suffering or the hierarchy as being the cause of suffering. Everyone in this monastery should know the delusion of that view. We learnt something through that experience. We learnt that if something causes suffering, there must be a wrong attitude. I looked at some of the other monks and they were very happy to move that earth. They weren’t just monks who liked working; some of them were great meditators. People like Ajahn Liam could work all day and meditate all night. I sometimes wondered how they could do this, but they could do it and they did do it. You read in the *suttas* about monks working. That is all part of our duties. This is how we realise that it’s not the work that is suffering, it is ones attachment to something. It is one’s craving for something and one’s delusion that is the cause of suffering.

The Dhamma talk, the chanting, the mood or whatever else it is – these aren’t the cause of suffering. In fact, in the whole of *saṃsāra*, this monastery is probably one of the most comfortable places to exist. As far as external situations are concerned, you have very little to be concerned or worried about. You have very few problems to deal with and it’s so comfortable in this monastery. Where else in the world can you live like this. There were days, a long while ago, when you could live on the dole, but now I am told you have to work at the very minimum seventeen hours per week to get the dole. Here you only have to work ten hours to get your food. That’s almost half and that’s not counting the retreats and every thing else we do.

If there is any suffering caused by the monastic life style, it's due to your attachments, to the craving inside you. You should look at that, and find out what it is. You know you have gained some insight and uncovered that attachment and wrong view if you can work and be peaceful. But if you cannot work and be peaceful, if you cannot move earth all day and be peaceful, you will never be free from suffering. If you can live in this monastery or any other monastery, and it's just the same for you, then you understand something about the nature of the mind, the nature of freedom, the nature of attachments and the nature of letting go. Whatever food you eat, whatever you're called upon to do, it doesn't matter.

### **Give This Moment Joy**

There is a teaching in the *suttas* where a monk says, "It's too hot to meditate". "It's too cold to meditate." "It's too early to meditate." "It's too late to meditate." Monks like that will never gain liberation from suffering. Whether it's hot, whether it's cold, whether it's late, doesn't matter, just meditate now. Whether I'm tired or whether I'm energetic, it doesn't matter, just now I'm meditating. This is how I was trained and it is a training that I'd like to share with you, so that you will be able to develop a mind that is independent of the external situations and circumstances. A mind that really can 'let go' of the world and 'let go' of the body. That's why the great forest teachers – the ones who are Enlightened and give teachings to create other Enlightened monks – always emphasise meditation on the body, mindfulness on the body. Separate the mind from all those bodily feelings that can so easily create tiredness, pain, heat, cold or sometimes even comfort. See these feelings as they are, a play on that world outside.

If one is too attached to the body, then when it's hot the mind is hot too. When it's cold the mind is just freezing. When you're tired the mind is tired. When you're energetic the mind is restless. Sometimes there is just too much of a connection between the body and the mind and so when the world swings one way the mind swings with it. We cannot control the world outside. We've been trying to do that for years. I thought that if I were the abbot of a monastery I could control the situation in the monastery. I can't! I admit to you in all honesty that the monastery is out of control. One can guide it, one can incline it in a certain direction, but basically it's

out of control. The monastery goes its own way according to the Dhamma. We understand that we cannot control the outside world. We can't even control our own bodies, let alone the monastery or other people's bodies. But we can 'let go'. Can you control your own body and get rid of all the aches and the pains? You can't do that. But often because of our delusion and our attachments, because we think we possess this body and this world, we get in there and try to control, change, and manipulate things. We are always thinking of ways to get our own way. That's the cause of suffering in this monastery. Take it as it is, especially until you get peace in your mind. At this moment why can't you accept it as it is?

The moment is here. It's come. You can't change it. Maybe the next moment might be different, but this moment is just like this. This is why the whole path of Buddhism is to 'let go' of trying to change this moment and instead develop a sense of contentment. In other words, let this moment be. The only way you can let the moment be and not try and change it and control it is to find joy in the monastic life. Find joy in your duties. The only way I can carry on talking like this is to actually put happiness into it, to give it meaning, to give it value. The only way I can work so hard, is to give my work value and meaning, to give it joy. That's the only way I can meditate, by giving this moment joy and energy. This is a practice that I have been doing for many years. Realising that I cannot do just what I want to do, I do what I have to do. I make that happy, I give that joy. I invest joy in whatever I am doing. That's been a training – not something that I was born with, but something that I have trained myself to do.

Give joy to whatever you have to do, whether it's moving bricks or it's pushing a wheel barrow, giving a talk or talking to some foolish person who rings up late at night; whatever it is put joy into it. Because that joy goes straight against the fault finding mind, the controlling mind, the negative mind that causes so much attachment and so much suffering. Whatever we're doing, when we develop joy in the mind we're going in the opposite direction to habit. It's so easy to follow our habits of mind and get upset, get depressed or give in to tiredness.

I am reminded of Ajahn Chah with the presence here of Ajahn Anek, one of Ajahn Chah's senior disciples. To just listen to him talk in Thai brings back all the old

memories of Ajahn Chah's teaching. Ajahn Chah said, "Don't follow the moods in your mind. If a mood comes up don't get involved in it. Don't follow. Don't build it up. Don't get attached to it". In other words just let it burn itself out.

We might have anger, but at least we're not going to push that wheel barrow along and build the anger up. If we get tired, that is just bodily tired, that's all. If we get depressed don't sink into that depression. It's just a pit and it gives us so much suffering. Don't get into that depression; instead put joy into the mind. Don't believe in those moods. When we believe in those moods we get attached to them; we believe we are upset. We believe we're tired or depressed. Who is upset, who is tired and who is depressed? Once we can actually detach from these moods they don't occur. Once there is not an 'I', how can there be someone who is upset, someone who is depressed or someone who is angry?

### **Let Go of the Past and the Future**

In Buddhism attachment is where we identify with these states, where we make a 'self' out of them and become them. This is how they find a foothold inside of us. We can see all these things like physical tiredness; it's just the body, that's all. That's why the forest masters told us to just reflect upon the body. Tiredness is part of having a body. The older we get the more tired we get. It is just a natural process. The energy that we have when we're young is going to go. We are never going to have that 'oomph' when we get into our fifties and we're only going to drag ourselves around when we are in our seventies. That's just the nature of this body. We have to get used to it. We can't fight it or control it. What we can do is realise that it's just the body being tired.

Sometimes when I go back to my hut at night my body is so tired. I've been running around all day doing things for people, and then I remember that teaching of the Buddha – I have great faith in the Buddha's teachings – 'Even though the body is sick, the mind doesn't need to be sick. Even though the body is tired, the mind doesn't need to be tired'. These are very powerful teachings! Teachings like these are great, because we are often tired physically but not mentally. That is how we can cheer ourselves up. Separate the mind from the body and even though the body is hurting, we just let it go, and follow the Buddha's teachings on meditation. Let go of

the past and the future, and we're just left with the present moment. Let go of the inner conversation. That inner conversation is the worst thing we're attached to. We think ourselves into so much suffering!

It would be a wonderful thing if we could just shut up inside and stop all of that 'proliferation of thoughts and ideas'. The problem is we trust our thinking. We think it's **so** valuable. Because we trust the views that are built up from our thoughts, we get into so much difficulty and strife. If you want to believe in something believe in silence. If you want to be attached to anything, be attached to that silence in the mind. Seek that out and make it a friend. *All lies are in words, all truth is in silence.* So we can see that if we listen to words they're basically lies: it's not quite truth, it's not quite reality, it's not quite accuracy, it is one stage removed from truth. We believe all those lies again and again and again. How much suffering has that caused us? We don't gain insight through thinking, we just gain headaches. We just gain suffering. We just gain arguments. We just gain confusion and depression. That's all we gain though thinking.

Follow the Buddha's advice and be quiet, be calm. The Buddhist word for a wise person is an *Arahant*, a *santa muni*, a silent sage. There is wisdom in that silence. That's where we can start hearing the world, seeing the world, feeling the world, knowing what's going on. So you are wise if you are pushing wheel barrows with a silent mind. Then it's easy. That reminds me of when I was a student. I don't know how I got involved because I was never very athletic, but going to a place like Cambridge they roped me into the boat club. So for at least one year I was rowing in a boat along the river. It was a crazy way to spend an afternoon because it was really hard work. I thought, 'It's just rowing on a nice afternoon in the sunshine. It doesn't matter how fast we go as long as we enjoy ourselves'. That was not what the coach thought. The coach wanted us to go fast and beat the other teams. I remember once during a race rowing as hard as I could and feeling a lot of physical pain. The coach shouted at me, "You're scowling; smile and it won't hurt so much". It was true. I followed his advice and even though I was in pain, I put a smile on my face and half the pain disappeared. I was able row on quite fast. It's the same with whatever we're doing in life. We can put happiness into it or we can put pain into it.

From our external experiences thoughts arise and proliferate and we can create this whole mass of suffering over what we are doing, or we can just shut up. As we shut up we become more peaceful. We realise this is just a physical body, sometimes it hurts, sometimes it's a pleasure, sometimes it's comfortable, sometimes it's a discomfort. We can't control it at all. Wherever we go in the world, however wealthy or powerful we are, it's always the same. Now it's pleasurable, now it's painful. Now it's comfortable, now it's uncomfortable. Now we hear something nice that we like to hear, now we hear something that we don't like to hear. Now we see beauty, now you see ugliness. Now we taste something that is delicious, now we taste something that is awful. That's life, sensory experience. If we start thinking about that and try to find ways and means to get what we like – only the nice and pleasurable, only the delicious food, only the monastery we like – we find we can't do that. It's impossible. We'd be running around the whole world forever. Ajahn Chah used to say that we're searching for the tortoise with the moustache. Tortoises don't have moustaches! That's why pleasure in the physical world won't be found. I'm talking about permanent pleasure, permanent satisfaction. We only have moments of happiness.

If something is causing you suffering, it must be wrong attitude or wrong understanding. You're looking at things in the incorrect way. You're not letting go. The whole purpose of this practice is to let go of the world of the body and the five senses. That means not just *your* physical body, but all physical bodies – the monastery, the country, and the whole world. Letting go of that means being able to close your eyes and just be silent. Not allowing the experiences of the day to echo in your meditation. The ability to let go of the past is such a fundamental aspect of this meditation. Do you understand how you carry the past into the present moment when you try to meditate? How difficult that makes the meditation. There is no good reason to carry the past into the present. We don't have to do that, its attachment that's all. Its stupidity! The past is gone, finished, done with. We can't change it.

Very often we look at the past with biased opinions. We seek out what happened in the past according to the emotions that are present in the mind now. If we're feeling happy, great, we look at all the good things that happened today. If we're in a bad mood we look at all the bad things that happened today. The best way is not to look

at all. Who can trust memory? In meditation, it doesn't matter what we've just been doing. If someone's argued with us or called us stupid, or someone on the phone has been talking foolish nonsense for a long time, just let that go. The next moment it's gone. The only way to meditate is by letting go and freeing yourself from the past. Do that at least while you're staying at this monastery. Get that degree of insight and that degree of ability to cut off the past, even what happened a moment ago.

Sometimes when I begin to meditate I haven't got my wisdom faculty turned on, so the first part of the meditation is hopeless. I'm thinking about the monastery or worrying about this or that. But I always remember that at any moment in the meditation I can turn it around and turn a hopeless meditation into a brilliant meditation by just letting go of the past. When I first began to meditate, if I started with a rotten meditation I'd worry about it, and it would carry on right through the whole hour. I would carry the mistakes of the past into the present all the time, thinking, 'This is a rotten meditation', or 'I can't meditate. Why isn't it working well?' But the point was not 'Why isn't it working well': I came to realise that I was just lingering on attachments to the past. This is why we have to learn how to let go of the past if we want to be free, if we want to be at peace, if we want to develop meditation, especially deep states of meditation.

### **Give It Everything You've Got**

I trained myself and I want you to train yourselves, so that at any moment you can just turn to the 'present moment' to be completely free, even if you have great pain, unsatisfactoriness, or difficulties. If you can be just there in the present moment then you find that you are completely free of everything that has happened. You don't even recall it; you've cut the mind off from what's happened in the past. It doesn't matter if you've been wheel-barrowing earth for six or seven days for a reason you just cannot understand. It doesn't matter what you have been doing. The wheel-barrow that you are wheeling now is all that's important. Don't go about saying, "Why am I doing this. This isn't what I became a monk for!" You realise that is just causing you suffering. Let go of all of the past and stay in the present moment. I let go of all the business that I see on my desk as I close my eyes before meditating, I don't even worry about it. I'm only a part time abbot. It's true. When I do my work I'm an abbot. When I close my eyes, I'm not an abbot; I'm a meditator in this present

moment. That's the way I survive and that's the way you have to survive. You've all got projects and things you have to do – difficulties, responsibilities and pain in the body – but follow this advice and let go of the past and the future. Dwell in the present moment because that is the only place you can get some quietness.

It doesn't matter about all the mistakes you've made, all the errors you've made. They are only problems and difficulties if you keep hanging on to them. Let them go! Some people say you can't do that unless you believe you can do it. But *you* can do it! Even Āṅgulimāla (MN 86) with all his bad *kamma* became Enlightened in a very short time. The only people who can't let go are people who have killed their mother or father in this life. When you realise you can just let go in this way, you understand how to meditate. You let go of your attachments to the past, you let go of your attachment to this body. If you can do this, then you know you are getting somewhere on this path. *You can do this!*

If you can't do this yet, then you have more training to do. You don't have to go somewhere else to do it. Everywhere else is basically the same as here. You have to do this now, here in this moment. There comes a time when you just stand your ground and say, "Māra, I'm not going to follow your tricks anymore! This is where I'm going to stand and do battle". Just do as the Buddha said: let go of the past and the future, let go of the thinking mind, be silent and watch the breath. Just be with every breath. "Why can't I do that all the time?" We make things so hard and complex and complicated. It's easy to watch the breath if you can let go of the past and the future. Let go of the thinking mind. Let go of controlling. Don't do it your way, do it in the Buddha's way. Just watch the breath. We can watch the breath in this moment. That's all we need to do. It's just a case of having the right attitude of detachment. It's easy then to watch the breath.

The success of years of meditation is a sign of how much you have detached from the world. If you can't meditate it's because there is some craving, some attachment there. Put enjoyment into the breath in the same way as you put enjoyment into sweeping up leaves. As Ajahn Chah used to say, "Give it everything you've got no matter what you're doing". Brushing your teeth give it everything you've got, make it a very good job. Pushing the wheel-barrow, make it a beautiful job. Do the best you

can. Give it full attention every moment, that's how you watch the breath. Give yourself completely to the breath. Complete surrender to the breath. It doesn't matter what your body is doing, how early or how late it is, how hot or how cold it is, just be with the breath for a few moments. If you can do this and follow the instructions, you will find it is the easiest thing in the world to watch the breath. It's easy if you are detached, if you can let go. So find that way of letting go, train yourself to let go. When you're watching the breath it's the last part of the body that you're still attached to. And if you continue just watching the breath, being with the breath, the mind becomes so bright, so beautiful and it becomes apparent that it's a natural process.

### **In the Footsteps of the Buddha**

Enjoy the meditation and the meditation becomes fun. That's because you are beginning to let go of the world. The longer you can let go of the world the more that enjoyment and pleasure increases. Meditate for five minutes, it feels good. I'm talking about real meditation, watching the breath, not messing around and thinking. If you can watch the breath for five minutes at ease in the moment, just being with the breath, not controlling, it becomes peaceful, and if you can continue that for an hour it becomes very delightful. The longer you maintain the attention on the breath, the more the mind grows in happiness, grows in energy, grows in contentment. It's the build up of *samādhi* that's all. As you build up that *samādhi* on the breath, bliss takes over. If you're patient enough, don't interfere and don't try and control it, it becomes the 'beautiful breath'.

The 'beautiful breath' is just the nature of the breath at this particular stage. If you can get to this stage it means you've detached from so much. You've detached from the world long enough, let go of the world long enough, for the mind to start to brighten up the consciousness. What happens next is that, from that brightness, as it grows more and more and more into the 'beautiful breath', the breath disappears. You're just left with the 'beautiful' and the beautiful turns into a beautiful *nimmitta*, which is the reflection of the mind. That shows that you've let go of even more. It's a sign of detachment from the world, a sign of letting go, a sign that wisdom is starting to manifest. If you can go into that *nimmitta* you can also go into a *jhāna*. You are re-experiencing the footsteps of the Buddha. These are the signs of letting

go, it's called *nekkhamma sukha*, because it is the happiness born of renunciation. Renunciation is just another word for letting go.

If you can't go into a *nimmitta* or a *jhāna* that means that you still have a lot more 'letting go' to do. It means there are still attachments and delusions there. You still haven't seen what needs to be done or how to do it. So be humble, don't be proud, and don't follow your own ideas. If you can't get into these deep states it means there is something you haven't seen yet. See if you can do some more 'letting go', some more renunciation. Have trust in the practice of the forest teachers, these are the people who do become Enlightened, who do get *samādhi*, who do get *jhānas*. This is the path for overcoming the attachments. Only after you have entered into those *jhānas* and emerged have you got the basic data, the experience of pure mind and the experience of seeing things cease. Only then have you got the opportunity and chance to really see the three characteristics. You have to achieve those *jhānas* for yourself!

Without these experiences you haven't yet learned enough to see *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*. That is why you need to have these experiences sooner or later. Only when you've 'let go' that much, can you really understand what 'letting go' is. If you haven't been able to get into *jhānas* yet it means you still have attachments. You haven't seen, let alone untied the attachments. There are still cravings, and there are still illusions. Illusions are overcome by seeing how everything works through a widening perspective, through seeing things from a different standpoint. That's the whole point of the *jhānas*, they give you a different perspective, a different standpoint, a place from which to look upon the world with such obvious clarity and see *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*. You can't see them without that experience. People look in the *suttas* to try and find ways of getting around this but they always end with the last factor of the Eightfold Path, which is the four *jhānas*. That's not just said once in the *suttas*, it's said many, many times. You just have to do this!

So don't be proud, don't be stubborn, just give yourself up to the teaching of the Buddha, to the Eightfold Path. Don't think too much. Don't try and work it all out intellectually. Just unbind (let go) of yourself, and get some silence in the mind. Don't waste the opportunities you have. It doesn't matter what you have been doing

in the morning, afternoon or evening, when you're meditating don't let the past hinder your progress. That's the only way to release yourself. Once you can do these things you will see the Dhamma for yourself. It's not just theory, it's also experiences. You know what attachment is because you can detach yourself. You can experience it as a process, not just as an idea. You know what letting go is because you've experienced it. You know what freedom is because you've experienced that freedom. You know what the Buddha's mind is like, because you have experienced the same thing. You know how this whole process works. You've let go of so much that there is only a tiny bit more to let go of. If you can't let go of that last bit, at least you've let go of so much that you should at least be an *Anāgāmi*.

We need more of those kinds of monks in the world. We don't need more monks building monasteries. We don't need more monks writing books or translating books. We need more monks who can give talks from their own experiences. We need more monks who are *Ariyas*. We need more monks who are Stream Winners, more monks who are *Arahants*, more monks who have experienced *jhānas*. We need more monks who can walk in the footsteps of the great monks of old, who can say that they've experienced what Venerable Sāriputta, what Venerable Moggallāna, what Venerable Kassapa, what Venerable Ānanda, and what Venerable Anuruddha experienced. This Buddhism is not just an historical point of interest; it is alive with the re-experiencing of all the facets of the Dhamma. So let go of your attachments, have confidence and faith. It can be done!

There was a novice who saw a man training an elephant and he thought, 'If a man can train a wild elephant, surely I can train my mind'. You're much smaller than an elephant and you're not as stubborn as a wild elephant. So if a man can train a wild elephant to do whatever he wants, surely you can train your own mind? To train your mind don't give in to it, don't follow its moods and don't follow its stupidity. Just train the mind. Don't go with the stream of your ideas, and thoughts, and delusions. Go against that stream. Be rebellious against your instincts and cravings.

If someone says, "You can't do this", I say, "Why?" When I was a kid if someone put a sign on a park bench saying 'Don't Touch', I would touch it out of spite. It didn't

matter if I got paint on my hand or I got into trouble. Using that rebelliousness in the Dhamma, if I'm too tired to meditate, I check it out anyway.

One of my most interesting meditations was when I had typhus fever. You're not supposed to be able get into deep meditation when you have typhus fever because you have no energy at all. This was in the hospital in Ubon, Thailand, twenty-four years ago. The first day I was there, at six o'clock in the afternoon the nurse disappeared. I asked the monk next to me, "When is the night nurse coming on?" – "Night nurse?" he said, "There is no night nurse. If you die at night that's bad luck; there is only a nurse during the daytime". I don't know if you could really call them nurses, they were really tough and not at all sensitive.

I remember having to go to the toilet. There were no bed pans: I had to lurch from one bed to the next one and then hold on until I got enough energy to lurch to the next bed. I had to hold on because I had no strength at all, and my head was dizzy. When I finally got to the toilet I stayed there as long as possible to make sure that everything was out, because I didn't want to go through that experience again for a few hours. I was very weak and no one was helping me. I remember feeling so rotten and terrible, so weak and so sick and so depressed, after being in hospital for a couple of weeks with typhus fever. There was no care of any sort. And then I got so rebellious! I thought, 'So what! I'm going to watch my breath'. Now you're not supposed to be able to do that, it's supposed to be impossible when you're so sick. But I just watched my breath and got into a nice deep meditation. It was wonderful; it was the best part of being in hospital, the best part of the typhus fever. Being able to meditate and get into deep meditation, just getting 'blissed out' in that way was great.

That experience taught me how much the body lies. The body said, 'You can't meditate now', but I called its bluff. Sometimes I could even meditate when in great pain. You can do it if you believe you can. It's always been a part of my practice to be completely rebellious. When someone tells me I can't, I ask, "Why not?"

Hopefully this will be an encouragement to each one of you. If it's late, it doesn't matter. If you feel tired and so sleepy, it doesn't matter. If you're really sick, it doesn't matter. Just go against the stream, go against the accepted ideas, and liberate

yourself from all that's happened in the past. The last moment I was tired, but what about this moment. This is how you can practise, how you can let go of attachments, how you can free yourself, and how you can discover the wonder and supremacy of the mind. The mind is the forerunner of all things. It's the most powerful of all things. You create your own suffering. You can create your own liberation. So it's all up to you!