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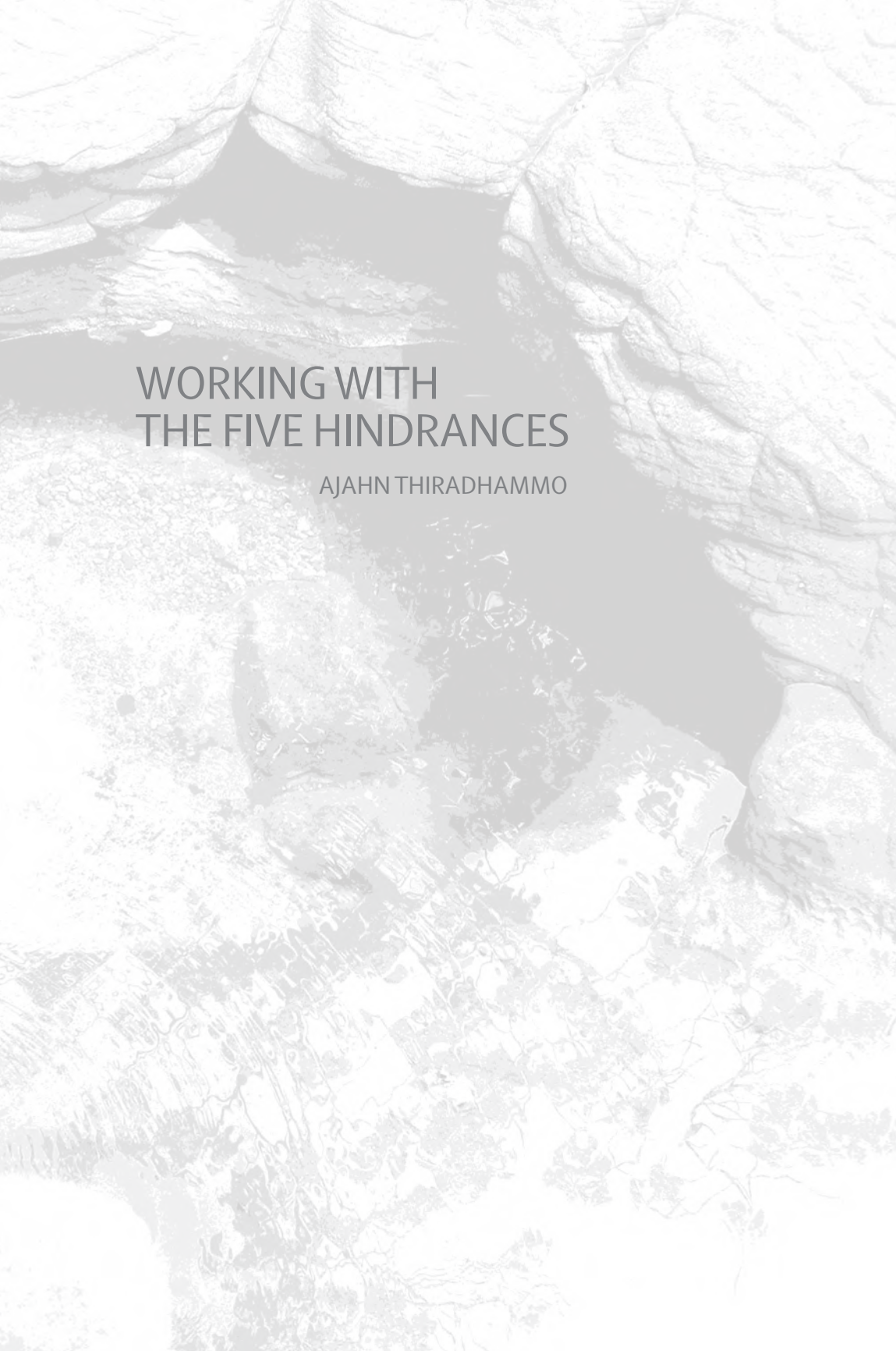

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Working with the Five Hindrances
by Ajahn Thiradhammo

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLDEGEMENTS

The original source for this book is a series of talks given at Bodhinyanarama Monastery, Wellington, New Zealand. Various interested people in Vancouver and Victoria, British Columbia, transcribed these talks, and I undertook the task of moulding them into a more coherent literal form. My wandering life-style did not lend itself well to doing serious writing, so the project has taken nearly two years to complete.

In the course of editing the talks, it became clear to me that the project would benefit greatly by giving a more thorough treatment to the topics than was originally possible in the original forty-minute talks. Especially useful would be a more systematic presentation, based upon a closer investigation of these themes as explained in the Pali Canon. Thus major portions of the original transcripts have been re-arranged and re-written. Since there is not a lot of detailed explanation of the Hindrances in the Pali Canon, I have often made reference to *The Path of Purification*, the English translation of the *Visuddhimagga* by Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa. Although this was composed some nine centuries after the Buddha, it is claimed to be based on the earlier commentaries, some of which may date from the time of the Buddha (PP.xviii).

My intention was not to prepare a definitive manual on resolving the Hindrances, but rather to gather together relevant material from the Pali Canon and post-Canonical literature, and provide some practical advice from my own and others' experience. I see this as an ongoing 'Hindrances Manual', with which interested people can start and then perhaps add to it in future. Each generation needs to find ways to deal with its own particular constellation of Hindrances, and maybe new ones as well (the next generation will have to deal with the Hindrances from technology). Thus it may be most useful to read the first two chapters introducing the theme and supportive conditions, and then go on to the hindrance which is most pressing for you at present.

Most books on mindfulness have information about the Hindrances, some very little and some quite extensive. Venerable Soma Thera has translated the Discourse on Mindfulness together with the Commentary, which contains explanations of the Hindrances. Venerable Nyanaponika Thera prepared a collection of relevant passages from the Pali Canon on the Hindrances called 'The Five Mental Hindrances'. Bhikkhu Analayo (2012) has published a collection of his articles which include detailed analysis of the Hindrances as presented in the Canon. And most recently Joseph Goldstein has published a comprehensive book on mindfulness, with a thorough presentation of the Hindrances.

In order to present the Hindrances in a comprehensive way, I have followed the scheme suggested in the Attendings with Mindfulness of knowing the hindrance, knowing its cause, knowing its cessation and knowing what prevents it arising in future. Since the last topic is similar for each hindrance in terms of its being transcended at different stages of awakening, I have presented it in a concluding chapter, 'Beyond the Hindrances'. I have added a meditation in each chapter on a hindrance, so that this investigation of them is more than just an intellectual exercise.

Most key terms are followed by their Pali form, as some translations may differ. For those interested in reading the original passages, references are given by text, chapter and page, or entire discourse

(*sutta*), according to the Pali Text Society's Pali editions. All Pali translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

The publication of this book is the product of many people's efforts. I wish to express my appreciation to the diligent transcribers of these talks: Brock Brown, June Fukushima, Piriya Nowak, Liam Perdue, Eric Bedard, Grant Smith and Theresa Aspol. My intrepid editor, Jayasiri, has patiently kept up the editing through numerous re-writes. Ajahn Munindo supported and assisted in many ways. Anumodana for the sponsoring of the typesetting and layout by Nat, George and Yui Thanchaipat, in memory of her sister, Patoom Noyer. Many thanks to Venerable Nyanatusita for permission to use quotations from the *The Path of Purification* published by the Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka, and to Ajahn Chandapalo and Ajahn Karuniko for reading through the manuscript. And once again, Anumodana to the Kataññutta Group of Malaysia, Singapore and Australia for their continuing generosity in printing.

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ABBREVIATIONS

A	*Aṅguttara Nikāya*
Bud. Dict.	*Buddhist Dictionary*
CDB	*The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṁyutta Nikāya*, by Bhikkhu Bodhi
D	*Dīgha Nikāya*
Dhp.	*Dhammapada*
GDB	*Great Disciples of the Buddha*, by Nyanaponika Thera and Hellmuth Hecker
LDB	*The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya*, by Maurice Walshe
M	*Majjhima Nikāya*
MLDB	*The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya, by Bhikkhu Ñāṇ*amoli & Bhikkhu Bodhi
NDB	*The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, by Bhikkhu Bodhi
PED	*Pali-English Dictionary*, Rhys Davids, T. W. and Stede, W.
PP	*The Path of Purification, English translation by Bhikkhu Ñāṇ*amoli
S	*Saṁyutta Nikāya*

INTRODUCTION

The theme of this book is working with the Five (Mental) Hindrances (*nīvarana*). It is thus perhaps mainly a book for people with some experience of meditation who have encountered these Hindrances, obstructions, disturbances to some degree, and who are interested in knowing how to work with them.

These Hindrances often arise in the course of daily life and, in the Buddhist context, feature very prominently in the practice of meditation or mental development, albeit in a negative sense. Thus in order to support a peaceful life and the steady deepening of meditation, some work on the Hindrances can be very helpful. Perhaps you have not come across all of them so far, but just give it some time! They are mental Hindrances in the practical sense that they hinder the development of the mind; they distract and disturb it and they can even possess or obsess it. They prevent the mind from being in a state which is conducive to deeper concentration, to clearer seeing, to the realization of truth. When developing meditation, even using such noble themes as the Four Divine Abidings,[1] most people inevitably come face to face with the practical realities of our ordinary human condition as exemplified by these mental Hindrances.

The Hindrances are referred to in a number of contexts in the

[1] The four Divine Abidings are friendliness/loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity.

scriptures. They are called 'obstructions, hindrances, overwhelmers of the mind, overpowerers of wisdom' (S.V,96). They 'produce blindness, cause lack of vision and ignorance, obstruct wisdom, associate with distress and are not conducive to awakening (nibbāna)' (S.V,97). When the mind is obsessed with the five Hindrances one 'does not understand or see as it really is the welfare of oneself, the welfare of others or the welfare of both' (A.III,230f), one 'cannot know or see things as they really are' (M.I,323), and they cause a lack of knowledge and vision (S.V,127). If one meditates with the mind obsessed with the Hindrances, one 'mis-meditates', which is not a form of meditation the Buddha praises (M.III,13f). In a well-known simile the Buddha compares the Hindrances to the impurities of gold. Once the gold is cleansed of its impurities it becomes properly workable. Similarly, the mind free of these Hindrances is then 'malleable, workable, bright, pliable and properly concentrated for the eradication of the outflows of selfhood.' (A.III,16f). One who understands that the Hindrances are defilements and abandons them is said to be 'a noble disciple of great wisdom, of wide wisdom, who knows the field, one complete in wisdom.' (A.II,67). When the Hindrances are abandoned one may 'realize a superhuman excellence in knowledge and vision characteristic of the noble ones', just as when a river is flowing with a strong current and someone blocks the irrigation channels, so the current is not dispersed and the river continues to run strong and far (A.III,64). When these Hindrances are eliminated it is as if one is free from debt, recovered from illness, released from prison, emancipated from slavery and has reached a place of safety (D.I,73).

The Hindrances can also be a great source of self-knowledge, of learning about the nature of self from which they originate. Human beings are prone to a great variety of mental defilements and afflictions. Gaining some understanding on how to work through these Hindrances will go a long way towards helping to work through the other obstructions as well. If we investigate these Hindrances down to their source in selfhood, we can discover the root cause of suffering which, once released, results in the liberation of awakening.

THE FIVE HINDRANCES

The first hindrance is desire for sensual pleasure. It is that attitude of reaching out for sense stimulation: wanting, longing for, desiring it. It covers the whole range of sense impressions through eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and the mind as the sixth sense. These are the source of all our impressions of the world, and through them there is the possibility for desire, longing, wanting and attraction to arise. While these usually focus on pleasant experience, the hindrance can also apply to any type of experience for the sake of contacting sense impressions.

The second hindrance is ill-will or any kind of pushing away of experience: resistance, irritation, aversion, etc. This is usually a response to unpleasant experience, but can also occur as a result of any sense impression, especially if it is unexpected, unknown or unwelcome.

The third is usually translated as 'sloth and torpor', but is that really clear or maybe just Buddhist jargon? According to *The Path of Purification* (PP, 530), the first term means 'lack of driving power'. Perhaps it is better to say 'lethargy', not having vigour or lacking energy. The term for 'torpor' means 'unwieldiness'. This usually manifests as laziness or sleepiness, drowsiness, dullness of mind. Thus perhaps a clearer definition would be 'lethargy and drowsiness'.

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The fourth also has two aspects to it, restlessness and remorse. Restlessness is easily understandable: a body and/or mind overcharged with energy, resulting in agitation. The second part,

remorse, can also be translated as 'worry' or 'scruples'. This means that it is more to do with the arising of remorse from thinking about or worrying about one's unskilful actions. And this can also lead to restlessness. It is hard to sit still when you are mentally going through all your mistakes, it can cause you to jump around: 'I can't stand this anymore, I have to get out of here!'

The fifth hindrance is doubt, which can manifest in a variety of forms. It can be sceptical doubt, uncertainty, perplexity, specifically with regard to the teachings or the training, or even self-doubt about one's ability to do the practice: 'What is the purpose of this? Can I do this? Is it going to be useful? Will it work?' It can also be a state of confusion, worry or indecision. It causes wavering and vacillation, and at the extreme it paralyzes us, preventing us from initiating any activity.

Some people might like to add a sixth hindrance. Something which can hinder many people from developing meditation is fear or anxiety. However, I would put fear under the hindrance of doubt, since we usually fear what we do not know. Once we know what we fear, even when we just know fear itself, there is the possibility that it can be resolved. Some people might put fear under the ill-will hindrance, but my experience is that ill-will or aversion is usually a reaction to fear rather than its cause. Of course, one could also fear one's aversion.

WHY FIVE?

We could, of course, elaborate a list of more than five such Hindrances, as there are quite a variety of different mental distractions or disturbances. One discourse lists forty-four qualities which a monk should 'efface' (M. *sutta* 8); another mentions sixteen qualities which make a monk difficult to admonish (M. sutta 15); and another quite similar list mentions the sixteen qualities which defile the mind (M. *sutta* 7; cf. A.I,299, etc.) The commonest set is the three roots of unskilful action: greed (lust), aversion and delusion. The most fundamental mental obstruction is ignorance,

which the Buddha said is caused by the five Hindrances, which are in turn caused by the three kinds of misconduct through body, speech and mind (A.I,113f).

So why did the Buddha highlight these five in particular? Well, in practical terms, five is a reasonably manageable number of concepts. When you are in the forest meditating and you don't have a book (or the book's been eaten by termites), you can probably remember these five categories, maybe by looking at the fingers of your hand and going through the list. Also, this group of five encompasses most of the range of disturbances we may come across in spiritual practice, especially if we generalize them in terms of basic human tendencies or how we usually relate to experience. Maybe we sometimes have to deal with different kinds of specific disturbances, but basically we can probably fit most of our experience of disturbances into these five Hindrances if we look at the energy dynamic of each of them: reaching out, pushing away, collapse, over-activation and vacillation. For example, if we are disturbed by envy or jealousy, we can assess its energy dynamic (a kind of pushing away) to find an associated hindrance (ill-will) and gain some understanding of how to work with it. Similarly if the disturbances are of a general nature, distractedness, discouragement, etc., and there is no obvious cause (distracted by sensual desires, discouraged because we lost our temper), we can access their energy dynamic and may find it helpful to apply some of the skilful means of the closest equivalent hindrance. Of course, each specific mental obstruction and each particular nuance of a hindrance will need to be worked on with its own unique means. However, when we have experience of working skilfully with the coarser Hindrances, it is possible to apply this wisdom to help with working on more subtle aspects of mind.

CALM MEDITATION

The Five Hindrances are mentioned most frequently in the context of developing Calm Meditation (*samatha kammaṭṭhāna*), especially the deeper levels of concentration leading to the absorptions

(*jhāna*). The absorptions can only be experienced when these Hindrances are at least temporarily suspended. This would usually involve some degree of working through them, particularly in their coarse levels, and then using the power of concentration to override their effects.

These absorptions are usually mentioned in the context of the monastic training, so the meditator would already have established a wholesome foundation by maintaining a high standard of morality, practising restraint of the senses and living a simple and contented lifestyle. These particular practices would give valuable support for reducing the effects of some of the Hindrances. The practice of Calm Meditation involves the sustained and dedicated focusing of attention upon a meditation object. Thus one does not pay attention to distractions or disturbances, with the result that the mind becomes single-minded upon the meditation object and the Hindrances are suppressed through not attending to them.

> *Giving up worldly desires, he abides with a mind freed from worldly desires, his mind is cleansed of them. Giving up ill-will and hatred ... friendly and compassionate to all living beings, his mind is cleansed of ill-will and hatred. Giving up lethargy and drowsiness ... perceiving light, mindful and clearly knowing, his mind is cleansed of lethargy and drowsiness. Giving up restlessness and remorse ... with an inwardly calm heart, his mind is cleansed of restlessness and remorse. Giving up doubt, he abides having overcome doubt, without uncertainty as to wholesome things, his mind is cleansed of doubt.*
>
> *...*
>
> *When he sees that these five Hindrances have been given up, gladness arises, greatly gladdened rapture arises, rapturous his body is calmed, with a calm body he feels happiness, with happiness his mind is concentrated.*
>
> *Being thus aloof from sensuality, aloof from unskilful conditions, he enters and abides in the first absorption, which is accompanied by initial and sustained application of mind,*

and with rapture and happiness born of seclusion. And with this rapture and happiness born of seclusion, he fills, suffuses, overflows and pervades his entire body so that there is no part which is not untouched by this rapture and happiness born of seclusion ...

Again, with the cessation of initial and sustained application of mind, he enters and abides in the second absorption, inwardly tranquillized, one-pointed, without initial and sustained application of mind, and with rapture and happiness born of concentration. And with this rapture and happiness born of concentration, he fills, suffuses, overflows and pervades his entire body so that there is no part which is not untouched by this rapture and happiness born of concentration ...

Again, with the fading out of joy he abides with equanimity, mindful and clearly comprehending, experiencing bodily pleasure; he enters and abides in the third absorption, of which the noble ones say, 'Being equanimous and mindful is a pleasurable abiding.' And with this [bodily] pleasure without rapture, he fills, suffuses, overflows and pervades his entire body so that there is no part which is not untouched by this [bodily] pleasure without rapture ...

Again, with the giving up of pleasure and pain, and with the previous passing away of ease and dis-ease, he enters and abides in the fourth absorption, which is neither painful nor pleasant, with mindfulness purified by equanimity. And he sits suffusing his body with the mind purified and cleansed, so that there is no part which is not untouched by this purified and cleansed mind. (D.I,71f)

The quotation above explains the experience of the four increasingly deeper levels of concentration called the absorptions (*jhāna*) and the various factors which characterize each particular absorption. As mentioned previously, all the Hindrances are suspended while in the absorptions. However, once one has withdrawn from the absorption they re-emerge, although perhaps temporarily attenuated through the lingering effects of concentration. The

benefit of developing concentration is to create a calm, clear mental environment where things can be seen as they really are, including the Hindrances. With exceptional clarity of mind the ultimate truth of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and not-self is realized and all defilements of mind, including the Hindrances, are permanently uprooted. This process is usually a matter of degrees, the various Hindrances being resolved gradually at the different stages of awakening (see last chapter for details).

ATTENDINGS WITH MINDFULNESS

In the development of the Four Attendings with Mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) the Hindrances are mentioned in a very different way. Thus we are instructed to make a thorough investigation of these five Hindrances in order to understand what they are, how they arise, how they cease and how they may be prevented from arising in future. That is, we are encouraged to do some serious work with them until they are resolved.

> *And how, bhikkhus, does one in regard to phenomena abide contemplating phenomena? Here, bhikkhus, in regard to phenomena one abides contemplating phenomena in respect of the Five Hindrances. How?*
>
> *Here, if sensual desire is present within, one knows, 'sensual desire is present within'. If sensual desire is not present within, one knows, 'sensual desire is not present within'. And one knows how unarisen sensual desire can arise, how arisen sensual desire can be abandoned, and how abandoned sensual desire will not arise in future.*
>
> *Again, if ill-will is present ... lethargy and drowsiness ... restlessness and remorse ... doubt is present within, one knows, 'doubt is present within'. If doubt is not present within, one knows, 'doubt is not present within'. And one knows how unarisen doubt can arise, how arisen doubt can be abandoned, and how abandoned doubt will not arise in future.*

> *In this way, with regard to phenomena one abides contemplating phenomena internally, or one abides contemplating phenomena externally, or one abides contemplating phenomena both internally and externally. One abides contemplating the nature of arising in phenomena, or one abides contemplating the nature of passing away in phenomena, or one abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in phenomena. Or mindfulness that 'there are phenomena' is established to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and right mindfulness. One abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world.* (M.I,60)

The development of the Four Attendings with Mindfulness follows a progression. First there is awareness of body, then of feelings, then of conditions of mind. Through this progression we develop an increasing strength and subtlety of awareness. Bodily sensations are fairly tangible, the three feeling tones are reasonably discernible, and then sixteen conditions of mind are specifically mentioned. In general, then, it requires a significant increase in awareness to have clarity with regard to the great diversity of conditions of mind, not to mention their fluidity and rapidity of change. Then we come to the fourth theme of the Attendings with Mindfulness: development of awareness of specific phenomena (*dhamma*), under five categories, one of which is the Five Hindrances. This comes at an advanced stage in the progression of developing mindfulness.

If your mind is obsessed with desire or ill will, or overcome with sleepiness, restlessness or doubt, it's hard to be clearly aware of these phenomena. That's why it's important to have a very good foundation in mindfulness by first developing awareness of body, feelings and conditions of mind. Ideally you will then be able to get a clearer perspective on the Hindrances. Trying to be aware of them at the very beginning of practice, it is easy to be pulled into them or caught in doubt about them: 'What am I actually looking at?' However, if you have a very good grounding in awareness of the body, you can always relate back to it, or cross-reference it: 'What is the condition of the body? Is it lacking in energy? Or

has it got too much energy?' Through the body you are able to recognize: 'Oh, there is lethargy', or 'there is restlessness'. Thus you can generate greater awareness of the Hindrances through awareness of their expression in the condition of the body.

Of course, developing mindfulness in a systematic progression is the general ideal. However, in real life we are usually assailed by the Hindrances in a variety of forms and intensities during the process of developing mindfulness and concentration. This is mostly in their undifferentiated form, as wandering, distracting, disturbing thoughts, memories or fantasies. Initially we then try to sustain some continuity of focused attention and awareness of the meditation object, for example, mindfulness of the breath, as the principal intention. If some of the Hindrances do seriously distract us from the meditation object, perhaps some of the exercises described in the following pages may be helpful for reducing their impact. However, it is generally difficult to engage in an objective and thorough investigation of them until some degree of concentrated collectedness and mindful clarity has been established.

FOUR MODES OF AWARENESS

In the development of mindfulness we are instructed to be aware of the Hindrances in four modes: knowing them, knowing how they arise, knowing how they cease and knowing what prevents their arising in future. The first level of development is to be aware of them. Can you be aware of the distractions of mind which take you away from the breathing? Does the mind just fall flat? You take up the breathing and then you drift off it. Or you are pulled away by a desiring thought, or there is some ill-will or aversion: 'I said that to somebody and they said that to me'; now it's rebounding through your mind. Maybe 'righteous anger' arises and an old story starts up again. One of the hardest situations, of course, is when the mind is dull and sleepy. Then it is hard to see through the sleepiness. You are in the cloud already; how do you see the cloud when you are in it? Being able to clearly observe the many

different distractions which take us away from the breathing already requires a certain degree of mindfulness.

The second level of development is to observe what causes the Hindrances to arise, what initiates them, what are the conditions behind them. This requires us to be able to recognize the Hindrances, and have some degree of mental calm and non-reactive awareness in order to investigate them. The Hindrances have different nuances and degrees of intensity. For example, I can observe a dozen different kinds of sleepiness, there's not just one. However, in the beginning we try to gather them together into general categories under one heading to observe where they come from, what initiates or causes them to arise.

My experience is that being aware of a phenomenon helps to objectify it, though there are still subtle levels of subjective reference: 'This is my state of mind, this arises from me, this is my hindrance', etc. Whereas observing the cause of this phenomenon enables a significant opening up to impersonality, as we become more aware of the non-personal conditioning factors operating in the background, even without 'my' personal approval. It was the Buddha's insight into the causally-conditioned nature of reality which was the key element in his awakening.

The third level is to know what causes the Hindrances to cease. Once they've arisen, what leads to their cessation, how are we free of them? Sometimes you can be sitting in a drowsy state, but then it just fades away. Well how did that happen? Maybe that cup of coffee just kicked in. But maybe you did something in particular which caused the drowsiness to clear. What were you just thinking? Maybe some inspiring thought arose in your mind and cleared the sleepiness or dullness out of it. Inspiration can do that. But maybe that doesn't work all the time. Maybe it just works for some kinds of sleepiness or dullness of the mind, but not others.

The fourth level of development is how the Hindrances are prevented from arising in the future. Of course, this will require more than just mindfully observing. We gain some experiential understanding through knowing the nature of the Hindrances,

from knowing how they arise and cease, and then we work through them using some of the methods outlined in this book. And this will very likely require some significant change in our behaviour and understanding of our self, before we are able to experience total freedom from the Hindrances.

RELATING TO HINDRANCES

There are three basic ways to deal with the Hindrances. The first one, which is usually the familiar one for most people, is to try to get rid of them. Who wants a hindrance anyway? We want to be free of them, right.

The second way to deal with them is temporary suppression, either unskilfully through repression or skilfully through developing states of deep concentration. This, however, is only a temporary respite. When the Hindrances subside the mind is in a very bright, concentrated and energized state, but when you eventually come out of concentration they are still there. They haven't gone, they've just been temporarily taking a holiday. It's like your troublesome neighbour going away for some time, but then returning home again.

The third way is to clearly and wisely acknowledge the Hindrances as impermanent, causally-conditioned phenomena. We then investigate to remove the initiating causes and the Hindrances cease. In this way they are finally resolved. In essence they are aspects of our selfhood created by ignorance and grasping. Our investigation reveals the nature of selfhood and the processes creating selfhood. We can then release, relinquish, let go of these processes and are finally liberated from the entanglements of selfhood. The theme of this book is working skilfully with the Hindrances for final liberation. It is not about simply getting rid of them or only temporarily suppressing them, but about working with them in order to realize the truth of what self is and freedom from self is.

Most of us probably still have conditioned into our minds (I still have

it in the back of my mind, too) that working with the Hindrances is just another means of getting rid of them. That's due to the pervasive activity of selfhood. Basically, if you are trying to get rid of the Hindrances, don't bother. It not only makes the practice a lot more complicated by distorting the basic Hindrances, but it can be detrimental in the long term. In our eagerness to get rid of the Hindrances we usually succumb to suppression or avoidance strategies, further compounding grasping and ignorance. One of the most insidious strategies is 'spiritual bypassing',[2] where for the sake of spiritual progress we bypass painful issues, often through the use of spiritual practices. However, since the Hindrances are not completely resolved, just temporarily out of awareness, they will eventually return, usually in some disguised form, for example, as psychosomatic symptoms.

The Hindrances are different aspects of our self-identity. They are five symptoms of grasping at aspects of selfhood, conditioned by ignorance and craving. Or, speaking simply, they are five ways in which our self expresses itself negatively; it also expresses itself by their opposites, that is, through generosity, loving-kindness, energy, tranquillity and confidence. However, unless actively identified with, these positive self-expressions tend to reduce grasping of selfhood; they are actions of selflessness. The negative ones, since we are usually reluctant to recognize them, lurk insidiously in the background, quietly sustaining selfhood. People's tendencies are such that they may have a very strong sense of self-expression in desire realms, or in aversion realms, or in dullness, or whatever. So if we are able to bring clarity and awareness to these expressions of the self, we learn some valuable and even profound things about our self, about the nature of grasping, ignorance and craving, and the process of identification. If you like, we are now transforming these so-called Hindrances into the wisdom of knowing how self is constituted and, in the process, what is beyond self.

At the ultimate level there is no permanent self which has Hindrances to be got rid of; there are only self-supporting processes which we grasp and identify as being ours. So trying to

[2] A term coined by John Welwood; see book by Masters.

destroy certain aspects of self-identity just results in subverting them into other aspects of self-identity, because grasping at an illusory self is still functioning. For example, if you try to get rid of your desires you become a control freak. You try to get rid of aversion and you become depressed. You struggle to get rid of lethargy and drowsiness, and you're despairingly exhausted - the mind was already lacking energy and trying to fight your way through it exhausts you further. You try to get rid of restlessness and you have anxiety attacks. You try to get rid of your doubt and become a raging fundamentalist.

However, if we can skilfully engage and work wisely with the Hindrances they can be transformed into increasing self awareness, self knowledge and self liberation. For example, the hindrance of doubt can be transformed into reflective thought. Rather than just doubting everything, you can investigate these doubts to determine what is worth considering and what is not. At its extreme doubt can just paralyze you, but if you can engage skilfully with doubt it can become enquiry: 'What's going on here? Who is doubting anyway?' Then there's an opening for investigating and finding out what's really going on. Likewise with all the other Hindrances; when they can be transformed with wisdom, they are actually reconstituted as valuable spiritual qualities.

Of course, in the process we also relinquish those aspects of selfhood which nurture the Hindrances. What aspect of selfhood are we grasping which results in this form of hindrance? For example, if you keep having anger arising from a feeling that you have been wronged by someone, maybe you need to surrender the conceit that 'I' have been wronged. Right and wrong are sometimes quite subjective, which 'I' is still grasping the thought of being wronged? Until we are awakened we are still functioning from the realm of the ego. The precious ego really wants to get rid of all these nasty things. It's humiliating for your ego to accept: 'I've got Hindrances', whereas it's a real pat on the back for it to say: 'I haven't got any Hindrances, I just chased them all out.' The ego wants to triumph over them and come out the better for it. But ultimately that's never going to work, since it is still playing

ego's game.

Unfortunately, however, it can seem to be working. You chase out your aversion, but you end up with depression. In fact you are probably depressed about your aversion, which has just gone underground; as the saying goes: 'Sad is mad'. So it seems as if you don't have any aversion anymore, and perhaps depression is more socially acceptable these days than aversion, anger and aggression. But it's not going to work in the long term, it's still aversion incognito and has not been fully resolved. We have to be very vigilant and reflective, because that sense of self goes on functioning in the background with its dominant attitude of conquering the Hindrances and coming out on top as a bigger and better self.

It takes some degree of openness, stability and clarity of mind to be able to see the Hindrances clearly, because our self has identified with them as being ourself, our point of reference, our stable, familiar self: 'These are my desires and my aversion, and the rest of these things.' That's just how the self has formed itself, that's how self-identity is created in the first place, and these Hindrances reveal what is being grasped at to keep nourishing that self-identity.

When we are able to get some perspective on the various Hindrances, we have the possibility to go through and beyond them. In a sense they are still there in a certain form, but our relationship to them changes. For example, by being aware of sensual desire and understanding its effects, we are less likely to give energy to it and it stops feeding certain aspects of our old selfhood. Knowing that sensual desire is an expression of selfhood, its view of reality, its particular form of 'thirst', its way of grasping, etc., allows a more open 'enquiring space', suitable for insight to arise in its place.

Another benefit of investigating the Hindrances is that we begin to see these aspects of our being more as flowing, impersonally-conditioned forces and less as static objects. The word 'hindrance' denotes 'thingness'. It seems I can take that 'thing' out of my mind:

'I'll take sensual desire out of this part, aversion out of that part.' This is usually how we relate to things. However, when we become more aware of the Hindrances as personal experiences, we come to see them as energies, as attitudes, as forces within us. So to be able to work with them skilfully we need to be a lot more flexible in our approach.

A good example is becoming more aware of sensual desire. The word 'desire' already implies a certain amount of energy. Desire equals energy. However, most people focus on the object of desire, the something it is fixed on: 'I desire that thing'. Then things change and desire looks around for something else to latch on to. Watch out -- desire is on the loose! However, when you can tune into that desire energy, you can transform it into something more skilful. It can be turned into a more positive energy, possibly into right energy, right effort or desire for spiritual practice (*dhammachanda*). When we become more open to the Hindrances at the energy level, we begin to see them quite differently. They become more fluid, open forces and energies, which can be transformed. What before were Hindrances, something to be concerned or disturbed about, are now fertilizer for wisdom. The way to awakening is through the Hindrances, not by fighting against them. We are awakened to them as they really are, rather than seeing them as the self would have us believe. That's what awakening to the real truth of reality is – seeing things as they really are, free from self's delusions.

AWARENESS OF HINDRANCES

So at a certain stage in the development of meditation on the breathing we turn the meditation practice around and become more aware of what the distractions are. Can you watch your mind when it's not on the breathing? We all want to watch when the mind is peacefully on the breathing. But can you also be aware when it's wandered off the breath, aware of where it goes and what else it engages with? That usually requires a lot more flexibility and greater development of awareness. Once developed, awareness can then penetrate into the underlying structures of the various

distracting Hindrances. What is their source? What causes them to disappear? And how do we have to change our attitude, change our way of relating to reality, so they aren't going to come up again, so they will no longer keep sustaining this sense of self in those particular negative, distracting ways? If we can be free of that hindered self-identity, awakening is there. It's not a matter of 'getting' awakening; it's a matter of clearing out the debris to allow awakening to manifest of its own accord.

The most obvious expressions of selfhood are through sensual desire, ill-will, lethargy, restlessness and doubt, so this is where we can discover its secrets and uproot its strategies. Thus what before were called Hindrances are really precious jewels when transformed into a source of wisdom. They are a basis for knowing the nature and expressions of selfhood. This is the most valuable knowledge we can have, and one which can lead to ultimate liberation from the tyranny of selfhood and its troublesome Hindrances.

It is unfortunate that sometimes when we hear about our gross defilements of greed, aversion and delusion, they can seem so overwhelming and/or abstract that all we can do is yawn, smile knowingly and get on with life as usual. However, when we are serious about spiritual development, and especially in the practical exercises of developing mental calm and clarity, we come face to face with these direct and obvious expressions of selfhood in all their coarseness, rawness and discomfort – the true fertilizer for liberating wisdom. Here the Buddha has given us a most inspiring context for spiritual practice. In one of his teachings he said: 'Brightly shining, luminous is this mind and it is freed of stains which visit.' (A.I,10) That is, even though we usually give special attention to the mental obstructions, Hindrances and defilements, these are not the true nature of mind. Its true nature is radiance.

CREATIVE SKILFUL MEANS

Once we have had some experience of working with the Hindrances

using the basic methods and techniques, there are occasions when we have to be creative in our own particular way with our own individual form of Hindrances. As Ajahn Tong Rat, one of Ajahn Chah's teachers, is quoted as saying: 'If defilements come too low, jump; if they come too high, duck.' The teachers in the Thai Forest Tradition often mention using 'skilful means' (*upāya*; Thai: oo*by*) in the development of meditation. With regard to 'skilful means', Ajahn Chah's guidance was: 'If it works, use it'. This of course implies our actively testing out whether something really does work or not. And sometimes a skilful method may only work for a limited time, since the ego is very clever at appropriating everything for its own self-preserving agenda. So we have to keep one step ahead of it, continually pulling out the rug from under its attempts to appropriate any skilful means which may threaten its existence.

The Buddha has given us many profound and beneficial tools for working with the mind and all its activities, but sometimes we have to 'personalize' them or adapt them to our own unique mental environment. While, generally speaking, all human beings have similar minds and mental states, at the more subtle level we are all quite unique mental configurations. We are the only ones who can truly know our own mind, so we are the only ones who can truly know how to work with it.

While making use of the rich heritage of skilful means from the Buddha and other teachers, as well as our own specialized ones, it is most important to keep in mind not to use them as simply an antidote to the Hindrances. The real point of spiritual practice is to release the grasping at selfhood which the Hindrances express, not to simply counteract them. Certainly some reduction in their effect may be necessary initially, in order to experience a level of calm and clarity which is able to investigate them with some thoroughness. However, the Hindrances are symptoms of grasping, ignorance and craving, and this requires the holistic medicine of wisdom and relinquishment, rather than merely temporary relief of the symptoms. Skilful means are for the benefit of investigating the Hindrances in order to completely know them, what causes

them, how they cease and how they are totally resolved. The only true antidote is awakening to the ultimate nature of reality as it truly is.

EVERYDAY HINDRANCES

Once we have some knowledge about the Hindrances and have established some degree of collectedness and mindfulness, it is important to try to be more aware of them as they are happening. Maybe we aren't bothered much by them when we sit in the more controlled environment of meditation, especially if we are good at the technique of keeping the attention on the meditation object. But it can be helpful to take this theme into your everyday life and see what your hindrance of the week is. Here's a little bit of homework: see if you can observe what particular hindrance(s) arise(s) in the course of the day and trip(s) you up. This can become a highly relevant source of investigation or study. These things not only cause a lack of awakening, but also obstruct a peaceful, happy life, so the sooner we can learn to free ourselves from their disturbing influence, the more smoothly our life will flow, and the more quickly awakening will happen.

A meditation teacher in Switzerland often led a very popular form of retreat in various cities. It began with a weekend session and continued as an everyday life retreat, with people going to work during the day and gathering for a session in the evenings. Often it was based upon a particular theme, such as right speech or continuity of mindfulness throughout the day. Many people found this form of retreat very helpful, and some of them had some very important insights. Although most people had already done a number of formal retreats, this was something quite different, bringing more collectedness and clarity to their everyday life situation. Everyday life is where we usually have to deal with things as they really happen, and that's where we spend most of our time. You can only be on retreat for so many days in the year; the other 350 or so days you are back in

ordinary life. So to bring some more collectedness and clarity to the ordinary areas of our life is much more useful in the long term.

So hopefully you can do your homework and try to recognize these Hindrances in the course of ordinary life. This will have practical relevance rather than being just an exercise in intellectual enquiry.

SUPPORTIVE CONDITIONS

Some very important groundwork can give us precious support for working skilfully with the various Hindrances. Many people simply throw themselves into meditation, usually hoping for a quick fix, with little preparation, only slight knowledge of the context or consequences and lack of awareness of the possible dangers. Firstly, meditation should not be undertaken by anyone with any psychological imbalance. Concentration exercises can focus and empower the mind, but they can also empower mental disturbances. Also, while the tranquillity and peacefulness of mind generated by meditation can be very soothing and healing, they can also allow unconscious material to rise into consciousness. But there are various activities, practices, attitudes and knowledge which are extremely useful for providing supportive conditions in which the spiritual exercises can bear the most beneficial fruit.

The three bases of skilful action, the foundation of Buddhist practice, are generosity, morality and meditation. Though they are different, they all work together in order to round out our spiritual practice so that it penetrates all areas of selfhood. Traditionally generosity has been the main practice for most Buddhist laypeople. They come to the monastery and go to great lengths to make offerings; some may stay to undertake the Precepts, but

most go home before the meditation begins. They have created a supportive and conducive environment for mental development, but then leave out the final step, although these three ways of skilful practice should really all be integrated together.

GENEROSITY

Generosity is the primary foundation of Buddhist practice. Outwardly people give things, they make offerings, but this act is ultimately based on the giving up of the self, about letting go of self-identity. It starts off practically, as making gestures by giving things we would normally think belong to us: my food, my possessions or my money. However, behind this is the attitude of giving up ourselves in little ways. This helps to create a generosity of heart, an openness, a releasing of the heart, an undoing of self-identity. Through generosity we learn how to let go.[1] This is an especially essential practice in the present time, when so much emphasis is on getting, gaining, attaining, possessing; all revolving round the self. Generous people are less preoccupied with themselves and are thus more empathic and receptive to other people's needs. They tend to be more friendly and hospitable, as well as more confident, easy-going and relaxed. Some of these qualities the Buddha recognized as benefits of generosity (A.III,39;IV, 79f), and they are all very supportive of spiritual practice.

Generosity is an especially important attitude when dealing with the Hindrances. You have to give up a certain amount of pride to even acknowledge that you have them. It's pretty humbling to acknowledge your desire, ill-will, lethargy, remorse and perplexity. But if you have generosity of heart, it allows you to open to these aspects of self. They are those unattractive aspects of our being which pride and conceit, holding on to a wonderful self-image, refuse to accept: 'No, no, I'm not like that. This is not how I am.' Usually we like to hold on to our 'wonderful self', but with well-practised generosity we can let go of these rigid views of the self, and maybe acknowledge our not-so-wonderful self as well.

It takes a good grounding in this practice of generosity to be able

[1] See Analayo (2012, p.266ff) for a detailed explanation of 'letting go' (*vossagga*).

to access the Hindrances and to be able to relinquish, release and let them go as well. Some people take up meditation and lapse into sleepiness. Someone may mention their nodding to them, but they deny it: 'Me nod - are you kidding? Me have a hindrance? I'm a meditator!' You can say: 'I saw you', but they answer: 'No, no, not me.' They just don't have the generosity of heart to open to their limitations. These Hindrances are an intimate part of ourselves, expressions of some of the more unpleasant aspects of ourselves, but that's how our self expresses itself. It has an investment in keeping our self-identity that way, in preserving itself. Thus having more grounding in generosity can provide more openness of heart and allow us to access these less wonderful and more hidden aspects of ourselves.

MORALITY

Secondly, a good grounding in morality is an essential support for working with the Hindrances. It requires quite a bit of generosity to give up my old ways of doing things, to give up my old compulsions, my old habits. I have to learn to give them up in order to keep to the selfless guidelines of the Precepts. The word *sīla*, which we normally translate as 'morality', literally means 'habit'. Practising morality means giving up those old habits and trying to cultivate more skilful ones: skilful ways of speaking and behaving in relating to the world. This means that basically, rather than relating from the perspective of selfishness, what's good for me, we learn to behave more from selflessness. Instead of killing somebody because they offended you, allowing them to live requires letting go of your selfish reactions, stepping outside your ideas of your own self-importance and what you consider to be right; and also allowing those people to have a place in your heart as part of the selfless universe.

Moral precepts can also provide a wholesome, stable and safe container within which to work skilfully with the Hindrances. For example, when working with the Hindrances of sensual desire and ill-will it is especially useful to be able to acknowledge them

without acting them out. If we aren't well-grounded in skilful behaviour, we may try to open to some of the generating forces of desire or ill-will and maybe trigger off untamed greed or fury. We may lose control or be taken over by these volatile energies, which can spill out into unskilful action if it isn't contained within the Precepts. The Precepts give us guidelines for skilful living, but acting out our selfish compulsions and moods is usually not very skilful, either for those around us or for ourselves, because acting them out can reinforce those old habits. The Precepts are a reminder of skilful areas in which to contain our conduct and personal energies, physically and mentally.

Also, practising to follow the Precepts enables us to develop a high degree of clarity and integrity. Most people keep within the bounds of the socially-accepted standards of morality. However, refining them down requires us to observe our behaviour and speech more carefully and to be quite truthful with ourselves, so as to know exactly where we are in relation to the standards. Feigning to be more moral than we are is not only pretentious but delusional. How are we going to be honest about our hindrances to spiritual development if we cannot be honest about our actions and speech, which many others can plainly see and hear?

THE REFUGES

The formula for undertaking the Precepts begins with the affirmation of going for refuge to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, the Three Refuges. For most Buddhists this is understood as looking to the historical Buddha, his Teaching and the contemporary monastic Sangha as their spiritual guide or example. The main purpose is to have some noble image or quality which is beyond oneself, by which one can be guided or which one takes as an ideal to emulate.

Particularly in meditation practice where much time is spent on inner work, there is the danger of becoming too 'self-absorbed', and when difficulties arise we only have ourselves to turn to. Although the Buddha did very much emphasize the need for us to

do the work ourselves, he also pointed out the value of spiritual friends and external support. Thus having some noble principle to refer to can help to lighten the burden of carrying on. Sitting in meditation observing your own hindrances for hours each day can end up being quite depressing. However, to acknowledge that the Buddha himself faced similar, if not worse challenges, may help us to get a better perspective on our own problems. Sometimes when our mind is pulled down by negativity, just to acknowledge that the truth of Dhamma is always present could provide us with a little bit more patience to allow the negativity to pass away. And although we are each doing our own practice, it can useful to recognize that there is a community of spiritual practitioners, the Sangha, who are also engaged in practice, even though we may not see them. We are not in this alone, but are part of the history of 2,600 years of spiritual struggle.

For people unfamiliar with Buddhist culture it can perhaps be helpful to envision the Refuges as wisdom, truth and commitment. Or use whatever is helpful for inspiration, encouragement or as a helpful guide.

MEDITATION

The third support for working skilfully with the Hindrances is, of course, meditation practice itself. The Buddha taught meditation as Calm and Insight Meditation. These are thus two different contexts in which to work with the Hindrances. The practice of Calm Meditation relies more on the development of concentration exercises. To be able to experience the deeper levels of concentration, it is necessary to disengage oneself from the influence of the Hindrances. With the support of generosity, morality and some wisdom we may reduce the effects of some of them, and then the resolute development of focused attention or concentration can lead to their temporary suspension and a blissful absorption upon the meditation object. With the support of a calm, collected mind, Insight Meditation directly engages in a thorough investigation of the Hindrances, their cause, cessation

and resolution. As Ajahn Chah taught: 'The deeper the Calm, the deeper the Insight.'

FRIENDLINESS MEDITATION

A meditation practice which can be particularly helpful in accessing the Hindrances is the practice of friendliness meditation (*mettābhavana*). For most people even the concept of 'hindrance' has negative connotations which generate an attitude of aversion and rejection. However, it is necessary to get to know the Hindrances intimately in order to work with them in a wise way. In practice this means learning to 'be-friend' them, to be more friendly and receptive to them.

Friendliness meditation is especially recommended for the hindrance of ill-will (see the chapter on Ill-Will for detailed instructions on the practice). However, it is actually beneficial for all the Hindrances or any negative, difficult or painful experience. The development of friendliness meditation is usually presented in the context of Calm Meditation, where it is cultivated to the level of absorption. For the purpose of Insight Meditation it is more useful to work at creating a general attitude of friendliness. The development of friendliness meditation is similar to establishing a friendship. We start with an attitude of being friendly, perhaps reinforced with a thought of well-wishing. A friend is someone you know well, are familiar with and can thus feel relaxed and at ease with. This attitude allows us to come closer to the Hindrances, be more open with them and get to know them more intimately. Many of us are usually not very relaxed with them. We may have an unpleasant history with them, see them as evil or troublesome, be frightened of them, etc. If we are not at ease with them, how are we ever going to get to know them? Thus actively practising friendliness can assist in creating a new friendship with them. We know, of course, that it is always a new relationship anyway, since everything is constantly changing. So how about establishing a relationship based upon friendliness, and seeing how it goes?

The practice of friendliness can be especially helpful for breaking

through our habitual negative attitudes and experiencing aspects of our being in a new light. At the very least we won't judge these Hindrances so negatively, but perhaps begin to see them more positively as something to learn about, and maybe even as a source of insight into the nature of our self. Instead of hating our ill-will, with a more friendly approach (and perhaps some sensitive dialogue) we might discover what self-satisfying need it is serving, and then be able to unravel this part of the self complex.

A wise and stable grounding within generosity, morality, and meditation enables us to access some of those aspects of our being to which we normally aren't so open or friendly. We could say that developing awareness of the Hindrances is an opening to this forgotten side, the more hidden side of our being. The irony is that only by opening to them can we actually go through them. If we don't access them, if we aren't aware of them, they are literally 'in' us. We unconsciously identify with them as being our very self, grasping them so that they are alive inside us. But when we become aware of them, it's as if we take them out of ourselves by being conscious of them as objects rather than subjects: 'Oh, there is aversion, there is desire. Hello.' Instead of their being buried within ourselves and manifesting unconsciously, our awareness of them can de-subjectify them. They're out in the open now. You are now the knower of them, rather than the 'do-er' or the 'be-er' of them.

APPROPRIATE ATTENTION

One skilful mental quality which the Buddha specifically mentioned as fundamentally important in working with the Hindrances is appropriate attention (*yoniso manasikāra:* S.V. 64f; A.I,3f). While it is not mentioned in the standard categories of teachings (since it is somewhat of a technical term), the Buddha emphasized it as a very significant factor in the mental training of meditation. Thus appropriate attention is the key factor in resolving each of the Hindrances, and its opposite, inappropriate attention, is instrumental in their arising and increasing.

Bhikkhu Analayo (2012: pp 193-205) has made a thorough study of the term '*yoniso manasikāra*' as it is used in the Pali Canon. He has distinguished three aspects of the qualifying term '*yoniso*': thorough, appropriate and wise. Thus it has a range of nuances in different contexts. I have chosen to use 'appropriate', although the other nuances may also apply.

Attention (*manasikāra)* is a mental function which is present in any act of consciousness. What we attend to and how we attend have a strong effect upon the mind. Unfortunately, the attention of unawakened beings still under the distorting influence of greed, aversion and delusion is biased in an inappropriate way, which then invariably perpetuates the distortions. Most of us already know the effects of inappropriate application of attention, for example when we are caught in fantasizing about sensual attractions. Observe how this further nourishes sensual desire. Thus both too frequent attention and too narrow attention, not seeing the object from other angles, can be unskilful. If we can shift our attention wisely by seeing the fantasy as fundamentally just a perception, we can notice what mental state this can engender. That is, wisely attending to an object in terms of understanding its nature can have a transforming effect.

The Commentaries explain inappropriate attention as similar to the 'distortions' (*vipallāsa*), that is, seeing the impermanent (*anicca*) as permanent, unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) as pleasant, non-self (*anattā*) as self and the unattractive (*asubha*) as attractive.[2] This is, of course, the usual way in which unawakened beings view reality. The Pali Canon, however, explains inappropriate attention in a more practical way specific to each of the Hindrances. For example, sensual desire is nourished through giving attention to the attractive aspect of an object (literally, the 'image of the attractive'). Thus developing appropriate attention requires some re-training of the fundamental way in which we relate to reality.

DEALING WITH DISTRACTING THOUGHTS

When working with the Hindrances it might also be helpful to

[2] CDB, p. 1900, note 54; NDB, p. 1593, note 23.

keep in mind the Buddha's guidelines for dealing with distracting thoughts, taking into account of course the particular context in which we are working, either Calm Meditation or Insight Meditation. In one specific discourse (M. *sutta* 20; I,118f) the Buddha gave five methods for dealing with 'unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, aversion and delusion' which persistently distract one from the meditation object:

The first method is to attend to a more wholesome topic so the mind may become 'internally steadied, quieted, brought to singleness and concentrated.' If this does not work, one should examine the disadvantage in those unwholesome thoughts. If the unwholesome thoughts continue to persist one should try to ignore them, just as one would close one's eyes or look away to avoid seeing some visible object. The fourth method is to 'calm the thought-construct',[3] just as someone who is walking fast would slow down, stand or sit, gradually assuming a more subtle posture. And the final method is to deliberately chase out the unwholesome thoughts, just as a strong man would constrain a weaker one. Of course, different thoughts require different methods, so it is important to apply each method with circumspection.

My own method in dealing with distracting thoughts is that, when one arises, I first just notice it and then go back to the meditation object. If it continues to arise I look at it more closely to determine what particular kind of distraction it is, then return attention to the meditation object. If the thought persists I observe whether there is any response in the body and try to experientially investigate further: 'What is its cause? Is this familiar or is it something new? What is it trying to say?' If the distracting thought continues to arise, it is likely to have quite a bit of energy or history to it; that is, it is very likely only the effect of a more detailed and complex causal sequence, and may require a more thorough experiential investigation. I then consider how calm the mind is. If the mind is not calmly collected enough it will easily be pulled into the distractions, and any attempt at investigation will remain on a

[3] Taking the Pali word *saṅkhāra* (literally 'making together') as 'construct', or what constructs, forms the thought. The Commentary, quoted by Bhikkhu Bodhi (MLDB n.242), takes *saṅkhāra* to be 'cause' and interprets as 'stopping the cause of the thought' by enquiring into its cause.

superficial, intellectual level. Thus, is the mind calm enough to investigate this phenomenon non-judgementally? Try it out. If the mind gets pulled in, shaken up or disturbed, it is perhaps better to first increase the level of calm collectedness. If the distraction is overwhelming, this may mean temporarily suspending the meditation exercise by changing postures or even engaging in some other mindful activity until one feels ready to re-engage once again.

With mental phenomena it is generally helpful to bring awareness to the body and, sometimes, feeling tones, to check what the response is. The body is more tangible and slower to change than fleeting, volatile mental activity, and so perhaps easier to access. Also this helps to fill out the picture of the particular experience, mentally (emotionally) and physically. Likewise, for physical phenomena it is helpful to observe the condition of mind and feeling tones, as well as moods, emotions and even images, impressions or associations.

Also, by initially observing the characteristics of a phenomenon, we can determine whether it is energizing or debilitating. It is generally useful to calm energizing phenomena and energize debilitating ones. The best way to calm them is through the exercises of Calm Meditation, though sometimes other methods are needed, particularly for the body, for which there are various kinds of breathing exercises, and body awareness and relaxation exercises such as yoga or Tai Chi. Studying, investigating and reciting Dhamma teachings can be mentally energizing, and there are many ways to energize the body. Sometimes general physical energizing is helpful, while at other times energizing specific parts of the body which manifest symptoms of numbness, frozenness or immobility is needed. There are also ways to energize gently, for example, certain yoga postures, and ways to energize vigorously. Even if one feels tired afterwards, they may still be useful for getting the blood circulating or shifting energy.

MEMORIES, VISIONS AND UNUSUAL EXPERIENCES

In the course of the meditative process we may come across experiences other than the five Hindrances. For example, obsessive memories which cause distraction from the meditation exercises may arise. While they may appear not to relate directly to any particular hindrance, they may be a hindrance or other defilement in disguise which we are not yet able to recognize. Generally speaking, if something keeps on arising in the mind, this usually means that the self has some special investment in it or it contains some important significance. When the mental environment is suitable it can be very useful to investigate it further, and hopefully it may reveal its true meaning.

One memory which kept recurring for me was of the time when I was working in a factory as a summer job to pay for university. Most of the time the students were given the lowest job on the seniority scale, requiring the least experience. However, one time I was promoted to a more senior position on the assembly line, but due to a misjudgement on my part a problem arose which caused the assembly line to be temporarily obstructed. This incident seemed fairly innocuous, and yet it frequently appeared during my meditation in Thailand. Finally I decided to have a closer look at what this was about and began to investigate its various aspects. After some time it suddenly hit me that the real message in this story was about my arrogance. As soon as I saw this, I literally felt as if someone had punched me in the heart, I felt a real physical jolt. My thinking was: 'Arrogance? No, not me, I'm the most humble person on the planet!' However, the message from this meditative insight was otherwise, and I had more trust in that. The problem was due to my arrogance in thinking I was so intelligent because of my university education, compared to almost all the factory workers, who were not well-educated. Once I could integrate this painful insight the memory faded away and no longer intruded into meditation.

Sometimes during meditation other phenomena may arise: for example, different images, visions, lights or strange sounds may

suddenly arise and persist for a time. Some of these phenomena are due to the effects of increased concentration and awareness: we are more aware of sense impressions and they are amplified by concentration. Others are due to distortions in our so-called 'normal' perceptions. When we are in a quiet environment with eyes closed for periods of time, our usual everyday perceptions are not reinforced and different types of perception are picked up. If you do feel disoriented or seriously disturbed by phenomena such as these, it is best to open the eyes, bring attention to the body, and generally try to ground yourself in the here-and-now present reality. If they are very extreme it is good to engage in some very grounding physical activity: raking leaves, sweeping, gardening, talking to people, etc.

The first year I was in Thailand I had a hut near a waterfall. This was fine in the dry season; however, when the monsoon came the falling water became very loud and turned into music! It became so dominant that I literally couldn't hear myself think. It caused me to be quite disoriented, since I couldn't tell whether the music came from the falling water or from my own mind. Eventually I had to move to a quieter hut.

A common experience for people who do intensive meditation is unusual bodily sensations. Some of these too are due to perceptual distortions; however, some may also be due to physical discomfort or health problems, or be psychosomatic. Thus it may be good to consider some of these sensations carefully. The body does take some time to adjust to a cross-legged sitting posture and perhaps changes in diet or routine. However, if symptoms persist it may be worth consulting a health professional. Sometimes we may have an underlying health problem which is not obvious in our usual active lifestyle; other times it is just the body's natural processes of adjusting to another mode of living. It can be helpful to know something about basic anatomy, in order to understand better what goes on in the body. When I first started to do long sittings I was bothered by my leg 'falling asleep'. I thought this was due to constricted blood circulation and was worried that it would cause serious damage. I imagined getting up one day and my leg falling

off! Fortuitously, a doctor came to stay at the monastery and I was able to ask him about it. He said that it wasn't due to constricted blood flow, but rather to a constricted nerve. I asked him if there would be any long-term damage, to which he responded: 'Maybe, if you sit for five or six hours'.

The best advice on dealing with unusual experiences in meditation is what I received from Ajahn Chah. Because they are unusual we normally become interested in knowing what they mean: is this a sign of progress? And some teachers take an interest in visions and try to interpret them. However, taking interest in them is a subtle form of grasping which will prolong and perhaps even encourage them, until we are 'stuck' on them. Ajahn Chah said: 'They are *sabhāva-dhamma* (natural phenomena) which arise normally in the course of meditation. Don't take them too seriously, observe them objectively, and go back to the meditation object.' By not being so preoccupied with them we come to view them with less interest and they cease to attract our attention. Some will then simply fade away through our lack of interest, and some may begin to unravel and reveal their real meaning.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS

While too much theory can get in the way of direct experience, having at least some knowledge of the Buddha's teachings can give us a context for our experiences. Sometimes they can help explain some of our meditative experiences; other times they can show us the right direction to go in or where we are off-track. Knowing the basic Buddhist teachings can also help us to negotiate the wide range of practices which go by the name of Buddhist meditation. Many techniques and styles of practice, while they may have at least short-term benefits, are often personal or cultural adaptations of core Buddhist practices, suited to specific personality types or cultural conditions. Some of the practices taught in Asia, for example, are suited to the more devotional temperament of Asian Buddhists. Other methods can be very goal-oriented, perhaps appropriate for the 'enlightenment-after-a-few-lifetimes-in-

heaven' attitude, but can be unfortunately co-opted into an overly-ambitious, reward-seeking attitude of 'enlightenment now'. If we know the basic teachings these approaches are founded upon, we can adjust our application of them to suit the situation.

I went to Thailand to find a suitable environment in which to do a meditation retreat. After much planning and anticipation, when I finally arrived there I threw myself into intensive practice, becoming preoccupied with mental tranquillity. However, when after three months the tranquillity disappeared due to illness, I was ready to return home. Fortunately, a book I read reminded me that the Eightfold Path has three parts: morality, meditation and wisdom. So how could I find out about this wisdom part? Since the western monk staying at the monastery could no longer answer my questions and I could not speak Thai well enough to converse with the Thai monks, I was basically on my own. By chance, I found in the monastery library *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* by Nyanaponika Thera, a translation and explanation of the Discourse on the Attendings with Mindfulness. The library also had copies of the English translations of most of the Pali Canon. These texts became my 'teachers' for several years before I went to stay with Ajahn Chah.

An important teaching to know about is the Buddha's presentation of the principle of ethical cause and effect or *kamma-vipāka*. The Buddha affirmed the universal principle that intentional actions have the potential to give related results, so in general, wholesome actions give wholesome results, although it is sometimes difficult to see this directly. Thus the wholesome actions of generosity, morality and meditation will ultimately bear fruit. Until we see the results for ourselves, we may just have to trust in this principle and patiently continue our efforts. This principle is now finding support from modern research on brain neuroplasticity.[4]

The most important teaching is the Four Noble Truths, the teaching unique to the Buddha: unsatisfactoriness, its cause, its cessation and the path to its cessation. We are all programmed to avoid unsatisfactoriness, suffering, pain, as much as possible,

yet what the Buddha is reminding us is that every human being experiences unsatisfactoriness in some form or other. And we are never going to be free of it through avoidance; only by clearly understanding and uprooting its cause will we ever be free of it. How often do we forget this simple yet profound teaching?

Another useful teaching to know concerns the Five Groups of Grasping (*khandha*). These are the five basic groups, parts, aspects which make up a human being: the physical body, feelings, perception, mental processes and consciousness. If you investigate what you take to be yourself, these are the five basic ingredients. The Buddha referred to them often, for example, in terms of how we create self-identity, in terms of sense processes, in terms of conditional causality, etc. Though they may require some study and analysis, it is important to get to know and be able to recognize them. Otherwise most people take the easy way and just say 'I', and then end up with some confused soul theory rather than being able to observe the impersonal conditioning processes that constitute this 'I'.

UNDERSTANDING SENSE PERCEPTION

Awareness of the sense realm, understanding of how sense perception occurs, is one of the themes outlined in the development of mindfulness. And it is a very significant one because that's our interface with reality, the interaction between our subjective world and the objective world. If we understand how this process functions, we can understand how we create our world through the senses, sense consciousness, perception and thought.

> *Friends, in dependence upon the eye and form, there is the arising of eye consciousness, the meeting of the three is contact. With contact as condition there is feeling; what one feels, that one perceives; what one perceives, that one thinks about; what one thinks about, that one conceptually proliferates about. With what one conceptually proliferates about as source, proliferating perceptions and deliberations*[5] *assail a person with regard to past, present and future forms made conscious through the eye ... [and*

[4] See Hanson, and for a more general and quite amazing overview see Doidge; for a more technical Buddhist approach see Schwartz.

the other senses] (M.I,111f).

An understanding of Buddhist psychology begins with the six sense organs – eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and the mind as the sixth sense. Then there are the sense objects: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, bodily sensations or 'touches' (through the skin and also within the body) and mental objects (thoughts, ideas, images, etc.). The third element is contact. The sense organ needs to contact the sense object, otherwise nothing happens. For example, I can't see a Buddha image if it's behind me, so though it's still there it doesn't exist for me. As long as you see it and tell me about it, I can have a mental sense contact, but I have no visual contact with it. And it's not creaking or breathing, so I can't hear it, not to mention smell it, taste it or touch it. I can only have a mental image of it if you tell me it's there.

When the sense organ contacts the sense object, there is sense consciousness. Or in formal Buddhist terminology, contact is defined as the coming together of sense organ, sense object and consciousness; that is, when there is consciousness, one knows that contact has occurred. In Buddhism consciousness is just the very basic impression that something is there. The word for consciousness in the Pali language is *viññāṇa,* from the root '*vi + jñā*. The word *jñā* means 'knowledge' and '*vi*' denotes separation; thus viññāṇa is a 'separating knowledge', or a bare acknowledging that there is a sense impression. If the impression is strong enough there arises feeling tone (*vedanā*), which registers it as either approachable (pleasant), threatening (unpleasant) or OK (neutral). Following on there is *saññā*, another kind of knowledge, from the root *saṃ + jñā*. The '*sa(ṃ)*' part of the word denotes 'together', so it's a combining or associative knowledge, usually translated as 'perception' or 'cognition'. This involves some degree of memory to provide a reference for the associative knowledge to recognize the sense impression and give it a name. For example, the eye contacts an object in front of me, and consciousness acknowledges: 'Hey, there's something there.' Then perception cognizes: 'Oh, it looks

[4] *papañcasaññāsankhā*'; Bhikkhu Bodhi (MLDB p.112) translates as: 'perceptions and notions (born of) mental proliferation.' For more on the perceptual and conceptual processes, see Bhikkhu Bodhi's brilliant introduction to the Discourse on the Root of Existence.

like a clock.' Perception frequently leads to thinking about what we perceive: 'Is it still working?' Then conceptual proliferations begin to take over: 'I wonder how old it is?' and possibly spin out of control: 'Was it made in Japan? Or China? Or maybe Thailand?'

The process is very unreliable, and anywhere along it there can be a hiccup. Maybe it occurs at the sense organ. For example, perhaps my eyes are not so good -- if I take my glasses off I can still see, but not very clearly. Or maybe it is the object; maybe somebody is playing tricks and has turned it upside down, so that all I see is some kind of weird shape. There's no recognizable perception. 'What is that?' There's consciousness that something is there, but I can't perceive what it is until I can see it at the right angle, or if I'm very clever. But the main point in this sense process is that anywhere along the line something can go wrong. Perception is very unreliable; to get to the level of a correct perception is very difficult. Your sense organ may be defective, the sense object may be something you don't know, consciousness may not be registering. And perception may be misperception. We all know about distortions of perception.

We must also factor in the distortions (*vipallāsa*) of truth to which the unawakened mind is subject. Our perceptions are filtered through our conditioning, which also includes our own particular defilements. Fundamentally we are 'hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving', which prevents us from seeing the way things really are (*yathābūtā*). Through developing more awareness of the sense sphere, we begin to see more clearly how the perceptual process functions and how the Hindrances, unwholesome qualities and defilements are generated. Ultimately, seeing clearly how impermanent, unsatisfactory and impersonal the senses and sense objects are (S.IV,1-6), as are the consciousness, contact and feeling arising there from, (S.IV,26-28), leads to disenchantment, dispassion and final liberation.

DEVELOPING THE SEVEN FACTORS OF AWAKENING

At several places in the scriptures the Five Hindrances are directly

contrasted with the Seven Factors of Awakening (S.V,63f;92f;102f). Some of these factors directly counter a hindrance; for example, investigation of phenomena is the solution for doubt (S.V,106), and concentration counters sensual lust (A.I,61). For other Hindrances groups of factors are helpful. Thus for lethargy and sleepiness the three energizing factors of investigation of phenomena, energy and rapture are beneficial, whereas for restlessness the three calming factors of tranquillity, concentration and equanimity are of benefit (S.V,112f). Mindfulness, of course, is fundamental to recognizing the Hindrances, as well as their cause and cessation.

UNDERSTANDING THE UNDERLYING DISPOSITIONS

The Buddha recognized various obstructions to the realization of truth. One of the most primal ones is referred to as the 'underlying dispositions' (*anusaya*), sometimes translated as 'underlying tendencies' or 'latent tendencies'. Although various qualities are referred to as underlying dispositions, the standard list comprises seven: sensual lust (*kāmarāgā*), aversion/repugnance (*paṭigha*), views (*diṭṭhi*), doubt (*vicikicchā*), conceit (*māna*), lust for existence (*bhavarāgā*) and ignorance (*avijjā*) (D.III,254).

In one place in the Pali Canon (M.I,433) the Buddha, referring to the five lower fetters: identity view, doubt, clinging to rites, sensual lust and ill-will, said that even a young infant (without a self-consciousness) has these underlying dispositions within it. Thus we are 'impersonally predisposed' to these unskilful qualities, and the frightening aspect is that if we do not do something about them they will tend to increase, particularly under the influence of inappropriate attention. Three of the Hindrances are also underlying dispositions.

GOOD FRIENDSHIP

Good friendship is especially beneficial in working with the Hindrances, as well as at all stages of spiritual practice. When the mind is afflicted with the Hindrances it is a suitable occasion to

visit a person who has 'developed the mind', so they can teach how to abandon them (A.III,317f). An experienced good friend can offer well-attuned guidance and sage advice and be a beneficial example. All good friends can give support and encouragement, lend a welcome ear or give a pat on the back or a hug. Without an empathetic friend, facing the challenges of spiritual work, especially when you are on the uphill side, can be pretty dreary and cheerless. However, just knowing that there are others in this endeavour as well can be very heartening and uplifting. The Buddha stated that 'noble friendship' was the whole of the spiritual life (S.V,2f), and went to great lengths to establish a well-functioning monastic community where spiritual friends shared the communal duties as well as their wisdom and experience.

Having good friends is mentioned often in the scriptures in various contexts. For example, good friends are the cause for the development of the four supports for awakening:

> 1) one will be virtuous, *'he abides restrained by the restraint of the Pāṭimokkha, perfect in conduct and resort, realizing the danger in the slightest fault; having accepted the training rules he trains in them'*; 2) *'one will get to hear easily, without difficulty or trouble, talk about the austere life beneficial for opening the heart/mind, talk on desiring little, on contentment, on seclusion, on non-association, on rousing energy, on morality, on concentration, on wisdom, on liberation, on knowledge and vision of liberation'*; 3) one *'will be firm in energy for giving up of unwholesome qualities and acquiring wholesome ones: steadfast, of strong effort, not shirking the responsibility of wholesome qualities'*; 4) one *'will be wise, endowed with the wisdom that knows arising and passing, is noble, penetrating and leads to the ending of suffering'* (A.IV,352f).

When it comes to trust in a teacher, the Buddha gave some helpful guidelines. It is by living with someone that one comes to know their virtue. It is by dealing with someone that their honesty comes to be known; through adversities their fortitude is known and by discussion with them their wisdom is known. All this is

only known after a long time and by someone who is attentive and wise (A.II,187f). This hopefully reminds us not to be too hasty in our judgements of people who could possibly be helpful on the spiritual path. Also, if we are open and humble enough, we could receive useful guidance from anyone. The spiritual community contains a wide variety of personalities with different strengths and weaknesses, and sometimes those to whom we feel the most resistance may provide some insightful reflections for us.

SUITABLE TALK

There are two main sources of suitable talk, conversation with others and listening to Dhamma teachings. These days other means of communication could also fulfil the same purpose as suitable talk, for example, reading, videos, online texts, etc. In fact there are currently so many sources of information that the main concern is what is truly suitable. The Buddha referred to several standards. The first one is talk which one can receive from the good friend as detailed in 2) above, which is 'beneficial to open the heart/mind'. The second standard is that:

> *... when the sayings of poets, mere poetry, with beautiful words and expressions, profane, spoken by disciples, are being recited, they do not wish to listen, to lend an ear, to apply their minds to understand them, and they do not think to study and learn them. But when those teachings spoken by the Tathāgata, profound, profound in benefit, supermundane, connected with emptiness, are being recited, they will wish to listen, to lend an ear, to apply their minds to understand them, and they will think to study and learn them. And, having learned those teachings, they will question each other and investigate, "How is this? What is the meaning of this?" They uncover what is obscure, make clear what is unclear and dispel perplexity about various perplexing things.'* (A.III,73)

The benefits of listening to Dhamma teachings by 'giving one's mind to finding the essence, focusing [the] whole mind on it, listening attentively' are that at that time the Hindrances are

absent (due mainly to the power of concentration), while the Factors of Awakening are present (S.V,95). Also, one hears what one has not heard, one clarifies what has been heard, one removes uncertainty (*kaṅkhā*), one straightens one's views and the mind becomes clear (A.III,248).

FAITH/TRUST

In working with the Hindrances, one of the most helpful supporting qualities is faith or trust. This is two-fold: trust in ourselves and trust in the teachings. If we lack either of these, we don't have the incentive to try to find a solution to the Hindrances. Trust is one of the spiritual powers (and faculties), together with mindfulness, energy, concentration and wisdom. The commentarial literature details the method of 'balancing the faculties', with trust being balanced by wisdom. Wisdom in its initial form is knowledge or understanding, which should be balanced with the trust that there is more to learn, there is still much which we have not understood. Over-reliance on wisdom can lead to knowledge-conceit, while over-reliance on faith can lead to blindly believing anything. A careful balance knows what is worth trusting in.

Trust can also be the source of many positive qualities. In one important discourse trust is said to be the cause for gladness, leading to rapture, tranquillity, happiness, concentration, knowledge and vision of things as they really are, disenchantment, dispassion and liberation, liberation being a condition for knowledge of the ending of the outflows of selfhood (S.II,32). Thus trust in what is at least beneficial can be like a magnet for many positive qualities which may have been obscured by the inertia of doubt.

HUMOUR

A sense of humour, meaning that we can laugh at ourselves, goes a long way to lightening our tread on the spiritual path. Sometimes when we are caught in the turmoil of thought, if we can shift our consciousness to being the observer of this situation we can have

a good laugh – the games the mind gets up to seem so absurd. Sometimes we can catch ourselves obsessing over all sorts of passing issues which a light-hearted attitude and some patience will eventually remedy.

PATIENT PERSERVERANCE AND COMMITMENT

The quiet qualities of patience, continuity and commitment give us a different kind of energy. It's not the instantaneous charge of willpower, but that daily, 'sticking with it' staying power of the long-term view that keeps us going through thick and thin. It takes considerable perseverance and continuity to pursue meditation exercises when your mind has not been developed and is in the grip of a hindrance, or all five. And it may be helpful to know that human beings have a 'negativity bias' which tends to focus on the problems rather than the successes.[6] Thus the difficulties of life often seem disproportionately larger than they actually are. Some patience with them may allow time for a reality check to gauge their real stature.

It's not a matter of succeeding all the time, but if we fail we keep going. Whatever happens, practice keeps going steadily, patiently. Getting familiar or noticeable results will work for a while, but not forever. However, continuity of practice draws in everything; all experiences are ploughed in to fertilize the life ground of practice. Commitment allows us to keep looking at both inspiration and non-inspiration, success and failure, the ups and the downs. All of these can be brought into the picture now; truth includes everything. It's very interesting to notice what doesn't energize us or how we lose energy. When energy is there, fine, plug into that. When it fades away we have something else to plug into, our commitment to follow through to the truth.

Commitment doesn't always have to have a capital 'C'. It can also be a practical determination, for example, for a certain period

[6] Hanson, pp.40f. 'Your brain is like Velcro for negative experiences and Teflon for positive ones – even though most of your experiences are probably neutral or positive.' p. 41. For people especially prone to strong emotional reactions, it may be helpful to study Chapter 5 in his book on methods to 'cool the fires'.

of time. The Hindrances can be very energy-depleting, whereas if we can determine to 'give it a go' for a week, a month, a year or whatever, we can possibly suspend the doubt and channel that energy directly into practice. When the time determined ends we can re-evaluate the situation and maybe re-determine another period. This is actually a very effective method, especially for spiritual practice. We have concepts about practice, but they are usually not quite in tune with the reality of it. Depending exclusively on those concepts will only lead to disappointment and disillusionment. However, we can accommodate the concept temporarily while we gain some direct experience, and then periodically integrate the new experience with the old concept and gradually arrive at a wiser understanding.

Some of our unskilful habits have been nourished for a long time, so they aren't going to dissolve overnight. Maybe we can resolve them in certain forms, but later they may return in another form, in a different package, in a more subtle or refined way. I think one of the limitations of our modern society is that people don't put enough patience and commitment into their practice. We are so much of an instant society, we want results immediately. However, the result of working with the Hindrances is not simply getting rid of them, but rather the careful and detailed study of them, in order to arrive at the subtle wisdom of knowing how they support self-identification.

SENSUAL DESIRE

> *Just as, brahmin, if there is a pot of water mixed with orange, yellow, indigo or crimson dye, and a man with good sight should consider his own facial image in it, he could not recognize nor see it as it really is. So too when someone abides with their mind pervaded with sensual lust, overcome with sensual lust...*

The first of the Five Hindrances is sensual desire. I wonder why the Buddha started with a hot topic like that? He could perhaps have started more coolly with one like doubt. I don't wish to second-guess the Buddha, but my answer would be that the topic of sensual desire is the most important one in spiritual practice. Basically, it is preoccupation with desires of the sensual realm which distracts us from accessing the more subtle spiritual experiences. Also, sensual desire is the only hindrance which comes close to being pleasant, although Hanson (2009, p.39) points out its inherent suffering. Pursuing sensual desires, as long as it is done legally, is not criticized by society, in fact, the satisfying of sensual desires is the principal goal in life for many people.

I think I should be a little careful of what I say here, in order to be able to explain sensual desire without stirring up the reader's desires; that is, to make sense of sensual desire without the desires.

And that is really the chief issue regarding sensual desire, since we all have sensual impressions of various kinds and in varying degrees in the course of ordinary life. How can we relate to them without their becoming a hindrance, obsession or addiction? Also, I would say that for many people it is often quite difficult to engage with the subject, due to our ambiguous love-hate relationship with sensual desires. On the one hand, we all love the enjoyment of sensory gratification. Many of us also know the frustration and disappointment which are the other side of the story of pursuing sensual desires, and we usually hate to be a slave to them. However, it is necessary to understand these very influential forces in our life, otherwise we can be continually hijacked by them.

The Buddha had a very specific perspective on sensual desire. The Pali term used is *kāma-chanda. Kāma* literally means 'sensual pleasure' or 'sensuality'. The best translation of *chanda* is 'desire', but it also has the meaning of 'wanting, wishing, intention, will'. In various places in the teachings the more dynamic cousin of desire, *rāga*, 'lust' or 'passion' replaces it. Thus lust for sense pleasures (*kāmarāga*) is the fourth of the ten fetters (*saṃyojana*) binding beings to the cycles of rebirth, and the first of the 'underlying dispositions' (*anusaya*). The term *kāma-chanda* would more correctly mean 'desire for sensual pleasure', often shortened to 'sensual desire'. So there are two parts to this topic, sensual pleasures and the desire or lust which can arise with regard to them.

MEDITATION

Sit in a comfortable position in a quiet, undisturbed place.

Place your attention on the breathing for a few minutes to collect and settle the mind.

When suitable, bring up in your mind an image of something desirable relating to any of the senses. (It is best to consider something just mildly desirable which you could obtain without too much difficulty, e.g. a hot relaxing shower, a bowl of your favourite ice cream, the sound of your

favourite song, etc.)

For the moment set aside the object and try just to be aware of that wanting, desiring, longing.

How is it expressed? Is it strong, steady, pulsing, flowing, etc.?

Where in the body do you perceive it? What are its bodily expressions?

What are the feeling tones?

Do you notice any other mental conditions, for example, judgements, reactions, associations?

What are the feeling tones of those?

When suitable, bring your attention back to the breathing.

Open your eyes and relax the posture.

SENSUAL PLEASURE

Sensual pleasure is mentioned in many contexts in the Buddha's teaching. It is the first of the four objects of grasping (*upādāna*), the three 'thirsts' (*tanhā*), the four 'floods' (*ogha*), the four 'outflows' (*āsava*), the four 'bonds' (*yoga*), and the three 'longings' (*esanā*). It is one of the three wrong thoughts (*micchā vitakka*), and as a practice it is one of the extremes to be avoided in following the Middle Way. Although it refers to any form of sensual pleasure, sexual pleasure is always implied, and often sexual intercourse is specifically meant. For example, the third of the Five Precepts is almost always translated as refraining from sexual misconduct (*kāmesu micchācāra*), explained as refraining from inappropriate sexual intercourse (e.g. at M.I,286; III,46).

The most common reference to sense pleasures is to the five physical sense objects, the five 'strands of sensual pleasure' (*kāmaguṇā)*: sights, sounds, odours, tastes and sensations that are 'agreeable, enjoyable, pleasing, likeable, accompanied by pleasure, enticing.' At several places in the Pali Canon (e.g., M.I,181;274;347) covetousness (*abhijjhā)* is used in place of sensual

desire with reference to the Five Hindrances. Covetousness, which is synonymous with greed (*lobha*), would imply a broadening of the topic to also encompass mental objects. This would then include greed for ideas, concepts and self-images (fame, wealth, health, etc.), giving rise to views and opinions about self ('ego pleasure') which frequently manifest as a serious hindrance for some people (cf. S.IV,22f;65f).

The Buddha had a very specific and particular view regarding sensual pleasures. While acknowledging that they do give the gratification of happiness and well-being (*sukha somanassa*), he gave many teachings explaining the limitations and dangers of following them (M.I,86f), using some striking similes to illustrate his point (e.g. M.I,132). The main reason for this is that whatever one 'frequently ponders on or thinks over, that becomes the inclination of the mind' (M.I,116). Thus thinking much about sensual pleasures eventually habituates the mind to thinking that way consistently. Also, it is impossible to engage in sensual pleasures without having 'sensual enjoyment, perceptions of sensual pleasure and thoughts of sensual pleasure.' That is, sensual pleasure tends to overwhelm the mind (M.I,133). On the other hand, the Buddha, perhaps aware that human beings are instinctively beings of pleasure, praised and encouraged the experience of spiritual happiness. For example, two of the exercises for developing meditation on breathing specifically mention training the mind to follow the breath while experiencing rapture and bliss (*pīti sukha*; M.III,82-3).

When the Buddha-to-be was on his spiritual quest before his awakening, he reflected that thoughts of sensual pleasure led to his own and others affliction, 'obstructs wisdom, is associated with distress, and is not conducive to nibbāna' (M.I,115). He contrasted this with renunciation (*nekkhamma*) which he realized has the opposite effects and 'is conducive to nibbāna.' He had a similar realization regarding thoughts of ill-will and harming and their opposites.[1] With these three kinds of skilful thoughts as the basis, he was able to develop the increasingly refined states of concentration (*jhāna*) which he experienced as resulting in a happiness far superior

[1] The three 'thoughts' of renunciation, non-ill-will and harmlessness were formulated as Right Attitude (*samma sankappa*) in the Noble Eightfold Path.

to sensual pleasure (S.IV,226f). He referred to this as 'the bliss of renunciation, the bliss of seclusion, the bliss of calming, the bliss of awakening' (M.III,233;I, 454), which should be pursued and is not to be feared. When one has experienced the bliss and rapture from *jhāna*, infatuation with worldly sensual pleasures is broken (M.I,91).

However, states of *jhāna* are only a temporary respite from the attraction of sensual pleasures. The Buddha did, though, discover a complete 'escape' from sensual pleasures. This is the 'putting away and giving up of desire and lust for sensual pleasures' (M.I,87), which occurs at the third of the four levels of awakening. In brief, the Buddha teaches that the way to experience the escape from sensual desires is to understand 'as they really are' (*yathābūtā*) the origin and passing away, and the gratification, danger and escape,[2] regarding sensual pleasures. This is called 'the severance of the bond of sensuality' (A.II,11). Thus when one truly understands how unreliable and ultimately unsatisfying pleasures of the senses really are, desire and lust for them completely cease.

The key to ultimate freedom from sensuality is understanding it 'as it really is', that is, to the level of ultimate truth. However, it is really a matter of degrees. Understanding a little allows a little respite from sensuality, and the deeper the understanding, the more complete the freedom. As most of us can probably appreciate, this 'escape' is easier said than done. The complete ending of sensual desire is a very advanced level of awakening, so there is no need to worry about it too much. In fact, I would say that we need a certain degree of 'sensual pleasure' in the form of comfort in order to continue to live and pursue spiritual practice. If the body is uncomfortable we have a natural desire to relieve its discomfort or pain, or we succumb to ill-will and/or restlessness, two of the other Hindrances. The mind needs to experience a certain degree of safety and security before it can be non-defensive and open to new reflections or contemplations. We can, of course, sometimes move outside our comfort zone to some degree, although it is often hard to differentiate between what we need and what we want. Am I obsessing about food because the body is malnourished, or

[2] This threefold formula of gratification, danger and escape is a common expression in the scriptures: the world – A.I, 258; *khandhas* – S.III,28f;62f;102f; six-senses – S.IV,7; feeling – S.IV,220.

am I bored or lonely? How much are we furnishing our needs and how much are we nourishing our unsatiated desires? It should be emphasized that sensual pleasures in themselves are not hindrances, fetters or underlying dispositions; it is the desire or lust for them that becomes a hindrance, fetter or underlying disposition.

The key element in sensual pleasure is the pleasant feeling, the 'happiness and well-being' (*sukha somanassa*), which it induces. Pleasant feeling allows a relaxing and even melting away of self-reference with its stress and anxiety; people 'lose themselves' in pleasant feelings. In contrast unpleasant feeling pressures the self to find relief from the perceived threat to its existence; just listen to how loudly the self screams when in pain. Notice what you do when you are emotionally uncomfortable: turn on some pleasing music, watch a movie, look for something to eat, etc.; that is, try to escape into some form of sensual pleasure.

SEXUAL PLEASURE

Of all the sensory pleasures, sexual pleasure is the strongest and most complex. It is complex in that it often involves all the senses in various ways, and has a biological aspect to it as well. The desire for sexual pleasure is the specific sensual desire which causes most people the most problems throughout most of their lives. Indeed, the meditation subject which is recommended for dealing with sensual desire is specifically for dealing with sexual desire. Sexuality is probably the most complicated and controversial human behaviour. Its biological function for procreation has been superseded by the desire for sensual pleasure from sex. It has also become intertwined with many self issues, such as identity, self-worth, power, love, etc. When we add to this the diverse socio-cultural views on and endless opinions of the role of sexuality in psychological and spiritual health, we have a very loaded topic.

In various contemplative spiritual traditions it was held that refraining from sexual activity was necessary in order to channel the energy into spiritual practice. In one well-known discourse the

Buddha severely rebuked a monk who held the pernicious view that engaging in sensual (i.e., sexual) pleasures was not an obstacle to spiritual life (M. *sutta* 22). In contrast to a life of sensuality, the Buddha encouraged the principle of renunciation (*nekkhamma*), a fundamentally different attitude from that of the world. Without wishing to sound too simplistic, the average person usually aspires to find happiness in pleasures of the senses. The renunciant foregoes this 'worldly' happiness in order to experience spiritual happiness and, ultimately, complete liberation from craving and grasping the sensory world. Most specifically, this means foregoing the pleasures of sex for a life of celibacy. As well as helping to release one's attraction to temporal sensual pleasures, this also avoids the complications of the home life of supporting a spouse and possibly children. Unlike the drives for nourishment and sleep, which if not satisfied will lead to death, satisfying the sex drive is optional. It is very humbling to acknowledge that much of our sexual desire and its related behaviour are just reactions to hormones pulsing through the bloodstream, as there is a very strong biological element to sexuality.

In one discourse the Buddha explained the causal dynamics of sexual attraction (A.IV,57). Females or males think about their own femininity or masculinity and its various attributes. They are excited by this and enjoy it. They then think about the opposite gender and its various attributes. They become excited by and find enjoyment in that. Thus excited, they seek union with the opposite gender, and thus are unable to transcend femininity or masculinity. However, if one does not delight in one's own gender, one can become disconnected from the opposite gender, and thus one is able to transcend gender identity entirely, and at the same time reduce sexual desires. I once met a Cambodian woman who had been diligently practising meditation on the unattractive aspects of the body and joyfully exclaimed that now she was free of being a woman.

DESIRE

Desire is a very slippery subject, mainly because it is an energy rather than a thing in itself. In effect desire is morally neutral and is coloured by the object which is desired. It can have a negative connotation, for example in this context as desire for sensual pleasure. But the word *chanda* is also used in a positive sense, for example, in the factors for cultivating psychic powers (*iddhipāda*). It is also desire which brings us to spiritual practice or having an interest in working on the Hindrances. Desire is thus just the driver which goes wherever the passenger directs it.

To get to know desire directly, try the exercise of going through the senses and observing whether there's any kind of desire response: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking. I tried this while sitting in meditation and noticed quite a lot of desire arising and passing. It seems to be there all the time. Well, perhaps not all the time, I do sleep sometimes (but even then I desire a soft pillow and a sound sleep). It does seem, though, that there's a lot of desire going on continuously, but with a difference of degree. Much of the desire I had was not seriously distracting. I was a bit uncomfortable sitting, so there was some distracting desire for a more comfortable posture, especially since my leg went numb. Then there were a few distracting thoughts, but not too many. There was the smell of incense, but no sights with my eyes closed. Sounds? Nothing major. Taste? No, I'd already had some sweets! However, in general there was some desire of various kinds and degrees arising from the bodily sensations and thoughts.

Desires can be disturbances and distractions, and can really drag you in, spin you around and spit you out, too. But there's also positive desire. There is desire, wanting, intending something beneficial, good or positive. During my meditation sitting there was also desire to bring attention back to the breathing. There was desire for a comfortable posture so that the mind could settle. So what charges your desire? Some people's desire goes to sensual pleasure; they desire to have their desire for sensual pleasure completely fulfilled or satisfied. That can be their main purpose in

life. Or the desire can be for spiritual practice. Desire for sensual pleasure is *kāma chanda*, but desire for spiritual practice is called *dhamma chanda.* It's still desire, the same word (*chanda)* is used, but the object of that desire is quite different from desire for sensual pleasures; it is desire for *Dhamma*, for spiritual practice.

We could say that some form of desire is intrinsic to life. We all have and need the desire to exist in order to live. Desire (*chanda* as intention or will) is a central aspect of our sense of self which creates skilful or unskilful action (*kamma*). It is one stage of a continuum of energetic processes which starts with liking, moves into desire and then, if it gains strength, can become lust (*rāga*) and thirst or craving (*tanhā*). And desire is there in some form until final awakening - two of the last five fetters (*samyojana*) are lust for material and immaterial existence (*rūpa* and *arūpa rāga*). Through the seeing of things as they really are, desire ceases in the awakened being, since the objects of desire are understood to be ultimately impermanent, unsatisfactory and impersonal. It's thus very important to become more aware of what this desire activity really is and its relationship to the possible objects of that desire activity.

In the context of the Five Hindrances sensual desire can be an obstacle, a disturbance or a distraction from being able to focus attention on the breathing, or to contemplate, investigate Dhamma. We have the desire, the *chanda*, the interest and the intention to practise *Dhamma*, but then sensual desires come in and pull us away, and the various desires become mixed up.

CAUSES

UNDERLYING DISPOSITIONS

The Buddha taught that lust for sensual pleasure is one of the underlying dispositions (*anusaya*), which even a young infant 'who does not even have sensual pleasure' has within (M.I,232f). When that quality has become steadfast and unsubdued, it becomes one

of the fetters obstructing the realization of awakening. Thus if we are not aware of this predisposition to desire for sensual pleasure and do not work on it, it will continue to be unconsciously active in our life and very likely be the source of much distress and mental disturbance.

INAPPROPRIATE ATTENTION

In one of the scriptures (AN.I,3) the Buddha is quoted as saying that he does not see anything which causes the arising and increase of sensual desire so directly as 'inappropriate attention' to the 'sign of the beautiful'[3]. Basically this is giving excessive and unwise attention to attractive perceptions, which then dominate the mind, leading to the desire to enjoy them and hold on to them for further enjoyment.

Reality is the way it is, but we subjectively divide it into what is attractive and unattractive, with various gradations in between. As explained in the previous chapter, in the Buddha's analysis of the act of perception, feeling comes before perception. What we call attractive is thus what gives us pleasant feeling, and the unattractive is what produces unpleasant feeling. Most people prefer what is attractive or beautiful (that is, gives the most pleasant feeling), and we seek this out and give special attention to it. However, that is in fact a distortion of perception. Reality is not exclusively beautiful or pleasurable. There is beauty but, sad to say, there is also much that is not beautiful, either downright ugly or just not attractive. It is one of the paradoxes of human life that in the course of ego development we subjectively distinguish what is pleasurable and attractive to us, and then we become obsessively attracted to it.

One of the duties of self is to provide us with as much pleasant feeling as possible. If the self is not providing us with enough pleasant feeling or is allowing too much unpleasant feeling to arise, it is failing in its primary duty and we wish we had a more efficient self. Of course, in the end this is fundamentally an existential

[3] The Pali word *subha* literally means 'beautiful'; however, for the sake of relating it to all the senses I have translated it as 'attractive'. This also makes for more elegant English when referring to its opposite as 'unattractive' rather than 'unbeautiful'.

issue; that is, if I wasn't getting at least some pleasure out of life, I wouldn't continue to live. If all your sights, sounds, smells, tastes, sensations and thoughts were just miserable, would you want to continue living? I'd go and try somewhere else, exit this world and try for a better rebirth in some other place. So the reason why we are attracted to, desire and grasp at pleasurable experiences is this old habit of self. It keeps seeking pleasant feelings and pleasurable experiences. Just on the visual level, most of us only want to see pleasingly beautiful, attractive things. You don't usually go around looking especially at dog excrement, smelly trash or other ugly things. Usually you look for the beautiful things. You walk around the world wanting to see beautiful sights and attractive things. This is the nature of our sense of self. We should know that our desire for sensual pleasure from attractive things is fundamentally a desire for pleasurable feeling tone. Maybe there is a better way to achieve this?

LACK OF FULFILMENT

In a practical sense I would say that desire for sensual pleasure arises from a lack of fulfilment or a sense of incompleteness, which manifests as various forms of unhappiness or dis-ease. Someone who is emotionally/spiritually unfulfilled tries to fill the vacuum with sensory stimulation, or uses sensory stimulation as a distraction from painful unhappiness (S.IV,208), the basis of the addictive personality. The energetic movement of sensual desires reaches out through the senses for satisfaction and fulfilment. However, since self is an artificial creation and not an ultimate reality, it can never be fulfilled or complete. All such attempts only lead to further frustration and disappointment. This is the unsatisfactoriness, the incompleteness (*dukkha)* which the Buddha taught as intrinsic to the unawakened being.

When you are experiencing some dissatisfaction, perhaps you may notice what associated thoughts arise. Recently on a retreat, as I sat in a gloomy cave during a prolonged period of grey, overcast sky, I noticed that the mind was also becoming gloomy. And I

noticed that as the gloomy mood increased, thoughts of food also increased. Since I was well-fed and not suffering malnutrition, I realized that the thoughts of the pleasure of food were a compensation for or distraction from the gloomy mood. This also helped to provide a cross-reference. So in this case the way to resolve the desire for food pleasure was to resolve the gloomy mood, which simply meant rousing some energy to climb up a pathway to a sunny plateau.

CESSATION

Through clear awareness of sensual desires and the investigation and understanding of their causes, some forms of sensual desire may cease or at least be reduced. However, this condition is very deeply rooted, primal or fundamental to our sense of being. Thus freeing ourselves from its powerful influence will require some concerted effort at a meditative re-alignment of our approach to reality. The main cause of the arising of desire for sensual pleasures is inappropriate attention to the attractive appearance of things. The way to be free from this tendency is to change our perspective; that is, to give appropriate attention to the unattractive aspects of reality. Firstly, we need to know what particular aspect of the sensual realm is attractive and stirring up desire. Then we need to find a skilful way to bring attention to its unattractive, unappealing side, in order to get a reality check. Take the example of being attracted to an item of clothing. It looks nice right now, but how will it look after being worn a few times? How often will you use it? How long will it be in fashion? Most things are actually not as attractive as they first appear, something which some wise reflection can hopefully reveal.

For many people the hardest and most enduring desire is sexual desire, so to deal with this phenomenon, some effort to contemplate its unattractive side needs to be made. In the Theravāda tradition this is facilitated by developing meditations on *asubha* or the unattractive aspects of the body.[4]

THE THIRTY-TWO PARTS OF THE BODY

The first series of exercises for the development of mindfulness concerns body awareness, and one of them is awareness of thirty-two parts of the body, from the hair of the head, to internal organs, to bodily fluids such as blood and tears (see Appendix 1 for the full list). Not only does this allow us to see our own body more clearly, directly and truthfully, but it is also specifically useful when sexual desire arises, usually because of attraction to (particular parts of) someone's body, often fantasized or idealized to some degree. I'm sure you wouldn't fall in love with somebody's liver, for example - or at least, it would probably be a bit harder: 'She has a beautiful facial appearance, but I don't know how beautiful her liver is.' Because of this tendency to look only at the beautiful, we normally miss the other aspects of the body; we don't get the whole picture, especially of the so-called unbeautiful, unattractive parts. If we develop this meditation exercise, it gives us the possibility to achieve a more balanced view of the real nature of the body, which in essence is not really so attractive.

The first five parts of the body in this list are given as a meditation theme in the ordination ceremony for all candidates to the celibate monastic life, who are advised by the teacher to review these themes regularly as an aid to dealing with sexual desire. Thus initially we make some effort to become familiar with these parts of the body so that when certain stimuli arise they may be supplanted by the new perceptions. A story is related in *The Path of Purification* of a monk walking for alms while developing the meditation on the perception of bones. A woman passing by laughed at him, and as he looked up he saw her 'teeth-bones', which then became a powerful image initiating absorption concentration and insight leading to full awakening. When asked by the woman's husband following behind her if he had seen a woman, he replied that he

[4] A Referred to at A.I,4 and S.V,105 as 'image of the unattractive' (*asubhanimitta*), which the Commentary defines as the ten forms of the decaying corpse (cf. NDB, p.1593, n.29). At A.V,110 the 'perception of the unattractive' (*asubhasaññā*) is defined as the thirty-two parts of the body. At A.III,323f the meditation on the thirty-two parts is said to lead to the giving up of sensual lust, while the meditation on decaying corpses is said to lead to the uprooting of the conceit 'I am'.

only saw a 'group of bones' passing (PP. 21-2).

Rather than making this meditation too complicated or abstract, it can be more useful to try to integrate it into our daily life. Thus when combing your hair in the morning, bring up the perception of 'hair of the head'; when applying cosmetics or medicine to the skin one can relate to the perception of 'skin'. In one monastery where I stayed for some time I was able to contemplate the nature of teeth each time I brushed them before the mirror. On a few occasions this gave rise to a clear insight of non-personal teeth with no owner.

One side effect of developing this meditation is awareness of the composite nature of body. We normally relate to the body as one harmonious interconnected organism. However, in essence it is really an amazing combination of innumerable interdependent parts, each a uniquely complex and intimately constructed entity. It is actually quite miraculous that they can keep working and cooperating to make a human body survive. When broken down into its individual parts, where in essence is body?

THE DECAYING BODY

The other exercise in the development of the unattractive meditations is on the body in various stages of decay. However, in most countries it's hard to observe this directly these days, so you may have to use your imagination, or maybe look in a book. In the Buddha's time bodies were often just put in a charnel ground outside the village, and so there was the possibility to observe them in various stages of natural decay or as food for scavengers. These days in Thailand some of the meditation monasteries may have a skeleton displayed in the meditation hall for people to contemplate the nature of the body. Most people, of course, want nothing to do with it. But that's just our cultural heritage. That's the way this body will be going eventually, maybe not specifically in the charnel ground, but to death and decay in some form.

Another less dramatic way to contemplate the body in stages of

decay is to check the internet for pictures of various ailments to which the body is susceptible. Recently I had a skin ailment, and thinking to find some cure I looked on the internet for information. One website had photos and explanations of forty different skin ailments. After consulting the list and seeing all the horrible illnesses of the skin, I realized that my ailment was very minor. It did, however, provide some vivid images of some of the horrible things that can happen to the body.

Ideally developing this meditation helps us to get a truer perspective on this body. We often keep looking at it as something which is always young and beautiful, and is going to persist indefinitely, and any little ache or pain frightens us. But with more understanding we comprehend fully that it is heading for decay. The minute we're born we're moving towards decay, the body's decaying all the time. I've lost a few teeth already, seen a few grey hairs, noticed a few wrinkles. But we don't want to look at that, do we? We don't want to look at the true nature of the body as it's edging towards decay. However, the truth is that it's not just born but also passing away. By understanding this we can have a more peaceful, harmonious and complete view of the body, which helps us reach a truer perception and understanding of our own body. Thus when sexual desire arises it can help us to relate more wisely to other peoples' bodies too. When we are sexually aroused the other body is really attractive and exceptionally beautiful. But first thing in the morning before taking a shower, how beautiful is it? That's also how the body is.

I would like to mention the need to be careful in developing these two meditations. I know various people who have tried them, but I think that unfortunately what they tried to do was use them as antidotes for sexual desire. In fact, sometimes the translation is not the meditation on the 'unattractiveness' but the meditation on the 'loathsomeness' or 'repulsiveness' of the body. So if somebody has lots of lust or sexual desire, they say: 'Oh, I've got to bring some repulsiveness into this.' And then they use these meditations, not to see the body more clearly and truthfully, but to try to counteract their lust or desire. This usually results in suppressing or denying

the beautiful through imposing an artificial conceptual image of something disgusting or repulsive (called 'reaction formation' in psychology). But that's not really going to work. It's just like putting a chocolate coating on a mud cake (or vice versa). You're distorting it rather than seeing it more truthfully in order to come to a balanced view. The beautiful exists, but reality isn't only beautiful. There's also the unbeautiful; there are two sides. If we use these meditations to balance our perceptions, we get a much more complete, truthful, honest view of beauty and ugliness, rather than conceptually distorting them. Imposing the repulsive on the beautiful may work for a little while, but then the beautiful starts seeping out again and we don't know how to handle it, because our approach is based upon another misperception. We are not seeing more clearly the way things are, but just further distorting our way of looking at reality.

However, with a skilful approach it would be useful to practise these meditations sometimes. They aren't really encouraged much in the West, and personally I don't often talk about them in public, because they require a wise understanding of their usefulness and the right context for their development. Since they are subjects which run counter to our usual way of perceiving, it is most important to examine these themes within one's own body. Also, if one wishes to pursue them seriously, always seek the guidance of an experienced teacher due to the danger of perceptual distortions. Our whole society is so obsessively focused on beauty and attractiveness that most people cannot understand the value of meditating on the unattractive, or on the ageing, sickness, death and decay of the body. In Thailand there's a much more realistic and relaxed attitude towards old age and death. In the West, if somebody starts to get old: 'Quick, rush them away to an old folks' home.' And as soon as somebody dies: 'Quick, put them in the coffin and hide them away.' Cosmetics are even put on corpses so they look alive, or at least look beautiful in death. But in the process we're covering up the real nature of the body, life and death, ageing and sickness. We're actually hiding from these truths. Then, when old age, sickness or death eventually happens

to us, we're surprised and shocked, because we don't know how to handle them. We aren't familiar with them because they've been hidden away from us.

While these meditations are specifically meant to deal with sexual desires, sexuality is a very complex issue. There are biological as well as emotional aspects to it. Thus when sexual desire arises, the first question should be whether it is mainly physically or mentally based. In most cases it is simply hormonal. If it seems to be predominantly a physical desire, and we remove ourselves from the stimulus and have patience, the hormones will eventually wash through the bloodstream. If the desire is very strong, perhaps some physical activity will help to flush the hormones out of the bloodstream, as well as helping to focus the mind on some more skilful activity rather than allowing it to fantasize. When Ajahn Tong Rat was disturbed by strong sexual desire he went out and chopped firewood.

If the sexual desire seems to have more of a mental/emotional aspect to it, try to investigate what its source is. Are we bored or listless? Maybe sexual desire arises to energize us, although perhaps this is not the best sort of energy. Are we frightened or anxious, so that sexual desire becomes a comforting sensation? Is this an old familiar story? And where does it lead?

So one way to deal with sexual desire is the development of the meditations on the unattractive aspects of the body. We need to put some effort into this, as it usually doesn't come very easily to us. And as I mentioned, be a little careful how you approach it - not as a means to suppress the beautiful or counteract sexual desire, but to give a much more balanced perception of the reality of the body.

THE FOUR ELEMENTS

When there is sensual desire for other things, a very useful reflection is upon the four elemental qualities (*dhātu*) of earth, fire, water and air. They represent hardness or solidity, heat and

maturation, cohesion and binding, and distension and mobility. All materiality is composed in varying degrees of these four elements. Thus if we observe the mind obsessing about food, for example, reflecting that it is just the four elemental qualities may help to alleviate the longing. That piece of chocolate cake is actually just a combination of earth, fire, water and air, albeit in a tasty form. Reducing it to its elemental qualities can perhaps reduce the usually inflated taste fantasy – how tasty is earth or fire? Not only does this reflection help to reduce the desire for the object, it can also be a source of clearer insight into the truth of impersonality; this body too is just an impersonal composite of earth, fire, water and air.

THE SENSE REALM

You may recall (see above) that the Buddha taught that the 'escape from sensual desires' was to clearly understand their origin. Since sensual desires depend on the senses, developing awareness of the perceptual process as it occurs through the senses is a most important way to understand how desire for sense impressions arises. It is useful to know the process intellectually, in order to be able to observe more clearly the series of processes which occur, mostly exceedingly quickly. Of course, it is most useful to be able to observe the process directly, as there can be many nuances. Sense perceptions happen in the course of ordinary life, but one of the first things we observe is how much perception is merely functional, that is, occurs as a means of registering impressions; and how much is added on through our own subjective involvement, our own liking and disliking, wanting or rejecting. Some sense impressions may trigger memories, emotions, reactions, and these become mental impressions which trigger off more reactions.

The second thing we observe about sense perceptions is how different, varied and changeable they are. We can look at the same scene more than once and have quite different impressions of it. Is it really the same scene? Or the same eye that sees, or mind which perceives? If we understand that the senses and sense

perceptions are unreliable, why are we desiring them? It's as if we sometimes desire a mirage. Some of the things that we perceive are just fantasies or illusions. If we can understand more clearly the nature of these senses, not just intellectually, but by actually seeing clearly how distorted perceptions can be, we may realize that in fact we're desiring stuff which is very unreliable - so it is foolish to keep pursuing it.

FEELING TONES

As mentioned above, in the process of sense consciousness feeling tones (*vedanā*) also arise. Awareness of feeling tones is the second theme of which to develop awareness in the development of mindfulness. Feeling tones are the basic emotional tone of our experience as pleasant, unpleasant or neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant (i.e. neutral). The main thing we learn from this awareness is how insubstantial and changeable these feeling tones actually are. Sensual pleasures are pursued for the purpose of experiencing pleasant feeling. However, when we clearly see how fleeting and tenuous pleasant feeling really is, this endeavour becomes meaningless and inane (cf. S.IV,211f). Often you could more usefully employ your time in chasing the wind.

> *But this body is impermanent, conditioned, causally arisen. So for this body which is impermanent, conditioned, causally arisen, when pleasant feeling causally arises, how could it be permanent? Thus one abides in regard to the body and pleasant feeling contemplating impermanence, contemplating decay, contemplating fading away, contemplating cessation, contemplating giving up. Thus abiding, the underlying disposition to lust for the body and pleasant feeling is given up ...* [similarly for unpleasant feeling and the underlying disposition to aversion, neutral feeling and the underlying disposition to ignorance] (S.IV,211f).

Another aspect of this clearer understanding of the nature of feeling tones is that you see they are fundamentally a subjective experience – they arise within your own mind, not from things

outside. Thus the best place to look for pleasant feeling is in your own mind, and this is what spiritual practices, especially the development of meditation, help to facilitate (cf. S.IV,225f). Also, it is feeling tones which condition the arising of desire. If a sense impression gives rise to pleasant feeling, desire to maintain the pleasant feeling through prolonging that sense impression usually arises. We can clearly see how desire for sense pleasure is turned on and off depending upon whether the sense impression is attractive or unattractive. Thus we know the origin of desire for sense pleasures.

DESIRE AS ENERGY

As we more clearly understand the conditioned nature of desire, we can see how energizing it can be. Perhaps everything appears grey and dull when you look around, but then you see some especially attractive sight such as spectacular clematis flowers: 'Oh, aren't they beautiful!' Your whole mood changes and maybe desire arises, either to sustain that stimulating perception or to possess those flowers. Some people get a lot of stimulation out of sense contact. But if we see desire more clearly and objectively as separate from the object of the desire, as just an energy, we can get a wiser perspective on how it arises, what its effect is and what we can do about it. This requires some degree of understanding and stability within meditation practice. And then we can begin to use this energy.

A very practical example is when sexual desire arises. You may know something about the chakra system from Hinduism, of eight psychic energy centres in the body. Sexuality is said to be centred in the lower chakras. If you can separate the desire energy from its source in sexuality, you can then re-direct it. Very simply, the energy can be moved from the lower chakras to the higher chakras, up from the sexual centre to the heart centre, for example. This is one means of literally raising our level of consciousness; we become conscious of that energy in the heart rather than in the genital area. Even if we aren't able to follow this procedure so directly,

there are other things we can do to shift the energy once we can distinguish it from its source. Sometimes simple things such as changing our posture can be helpful. Desire is triggered by sense stimulation and then locks on to it. If we change the environment in which that stimulation occurred, the desire energy may still be there, but the link to the source is broken and can perhaps be re-established in a more useful way. For example, if there is strong physical sexual desire, engaging in mental contemplation or verbal discussion, or going into a place like a meditation hall or shrine room, can create a more skilful context and cause a shift in energies.

There are, of course, quite a few stories that have to do with ways in which people actually work with some of these things. One of the meditation masters in Thailand was visiting Bangkok and happened to notice a very attractive woman. Suddenly sexual desire arose in him. So he immediately went into the meditation hall and sat there for three days, meditating most of the time. He didn't eat, just meditated, meditated, meditated. Maybe this is an example of transforming that sexual energy through meditation practice. Within the meditation hall he had a supportive environment, with the Buddha image in front of him, and he succeeded in at least subduing the overpowering sexual desire and became one of the most famous meditation masters in Thailand. Apparently, in his meditation he had the insight that this woman had been his wife in a former life, so there was still a strong 'kammic connection'.

I think the Buddha understood this process of transforming energy, because one of the explicit pieces of advice he gave monks is that if they noticed they were sexually attracted to a woman, they should try to see her as their mother, sister or daughter.[5] This creates a different kind of relationship. Maybe you've heard of the definitions of love in classical Greece, where three kinds of love are distinguished: *eros, philos, agape*. In English we just say 'love', but often when people say they've fallen in love it's more likely they have 'fallen in sexuality'. In classical Greek, however, there is a distinct separation. There's erotic love or *eros*, and there's also *philos*, the love for family, for friends, for comrades. This is

[5]Quoted by Venerable Pindola Bhāradvāja to King Udena, but not found as a direct saying of the Buddha, cf. CDB, p.1416, n.119.

quite a different kind of love. And then there is *agape*, the love of the divine, or spiritual love.[6] When we understand that there are these different kinds of love, how we direct our energy is very significant. Sometimes a feeling of love arises from a close friendship, but then maybe it moves down to the *eros* level of the lower chakras, whereas if we understand what the processes are, we could raise it up to *agape* or spiritual love.

Our consciousness has normally been trained to observe objects or things rather than processes or flowing energies. So how do we deal with the way energy moves? What often happens is that it fixes on something. For example, desire energy arises, and before you know it, it focuses on a person who becomes the 'object of your desire'. You may be just relaxing when a memory comes up, triggering desire, but then somebody walks by and before you know it, you fall in love with them. You dump your desire on the first object that comes along because you can't handle this volatile energy of desire. We are so used to dealing with objects that we don't know what to do with volatile energies; they are 'too hot to handle'.

Through the development of awareness of bodily sensations, feeling tones and conditions of mind as outlined in the exercises for the Attendings with Mindfulness, we come to see these experiences as flowing processes. In the same way, we see desire as flowing or pulsating energy. Desire is a condition of the mind, an aspect of the constant flow of mental activity. It grows stronger or weaker, but it flows continuously. If you can observe these changing conditions of mind clearly, you begin to see processes rather than always fixing on objects and things. So when we begin to recognize what desire is as a particular energy, we can transform it into a more beneficial energy. For example, sexual desire can be transformed into compassion, an energy of the heart. Most people don't understand their energies and thus have no control over them. So they have to repress or deny the uncomfortable ones, such as their sexual urges, but they eventually begin to leak out, and before long become displaced or projected in unforeseen or unskilful forms. Similarly with anger: people suppress their

[6]This word was used by the early Christians to refer to the love of God. cf. Wikipedia: '*Agape*'.

anger energy until some likely victim comes along and then they dump it on them. Through clearly seeing the processive nature of experience, we can learn how to engage skilfully with emotional energies in order to transform them; otherwise we end up being unknowingly controlled by them.

FURTHER SUPPORTIVE PRACTICES

A number of supportive practices are mentioned throughout the scriptures. Three of the formal training practices are: 'guarding the doors of the senses' (*indriya guttadvāra*) or 'sense restraint' (*indriya saṃvara*); moderation in eating and wakefulness (cf. S.IV,103f).

Setting a guard at the sense doors and 'not being led by images [of beauty or repulsiveness] or the detailed features' of sense objects prevents 'evil, unwholesome states of covetousness and displeasure from streaming in.' When I was on retreat recently I occasionally heard some world news, and it was really painful - I should have had my sense doors better guarded. I contemplated whether that pain was something I should investigate, but what can I do about world events? It was just painful to hear about all the troubles in the world. Maybe at certain times we could open the sense doors and take a peek, but sometimes this can be quite psychically distressing. Sometimes you have to be quite careful how much you open your sense doors. If you put awareness there, you have a certain amount of control over how much to allow in to your senses. And sense impingement does have a considerably influential force to it.

The second training, especially useful with regard to sexual desire, is moderation in eating. Food is to be eaten only to nourish a healthy body in order to live the spiritual life, and to eliminate the sensation of hunger. In special situations, if you are really obsessed and overwhelmed with lust, just stop eating for a day and sexual desire will change to food desire, which is safer! There's a sort of hierarchy of needs and food takes priority over sex. If you're hungry you probably aren't interested in sex. However, as a general principle, excessive eating or eating particularly rich

foods can stimulate sexual appetite as well. Thus moderation in the amount and type of food can be a helpful principle to follow.

The third training is to develop wakefulness or vigilance. Formally this is by engaging in walking and sitting meditation continuously throughout the day and night 'to purify the mind from obstructive states', allowing rest only during the middle four hours of the night (10pm - 2am). As many people have experienced, engaging in periods of intense formal meditation practice can have a profound effect on calming and clearing the mind, and can sometimes give rise to deeper insights into some of the background attitudes which underlie much of our behaviour. Although four hours' sleep is specifically mentioned, perhaps a more reasonable principle is to know just how much sleep is necessary to rejuvenate body and mind at any particular time. During a mostly sedentary meditation retreat perhaps four hours are sufficient, but when doing heavy physical work or during intense mental activity, the body and mind may need more time to recover.

A fourth supportive practice is contentment, learning to be content with whatever we have. Sensually pleasing things are endless; when do we say: 'Enough'? Although modern consumer society is constantly saying: 'More is better', we may begin to appreciate the peace of mind that contentment can engender. Perhaps a helpful reminder is: how much do you really need and how much is wanting? The less one has, the easier it is to take care of it, to find what you need and to keep track of it.

SUMMARY

So there are different ways to approach sensual desires. First of all there are sense pleasures which are based upon sense impressions. Thus we try to understand the sense impressions themselves – seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking. We begin to become more aware of these sensory processes. Today, for example, for some reason my eyes were a bit funny. I just wasn't seeing very straight. I think I'd been looking through the camera at too many clematis flowers. So I know that the eyes are very

unreliable. And what I was seeing, the consciousness, feeling and perception, was very unreliable too. Thus our perception of what is beautiful and pleasurable is conditioned by unreliable data. Certainly there are attractive sense impressions, but they are just impressions. Through understanding this more directly, we withdraw from dependence upon the senses and the perceptual process. None of our senses are very reliable, so how can we ever satisfy something which is so unreliable and impermanent?

Secondly, there is desire itself. Desire separated from its object is something quite different from what we usually experience. But watch out! You might be hit by this free-floating desire, this desire as energy. However, through meditation practice you can develop the concentration, the understanding, the ability to direct it. Where do you want to direct this desire now? Toward sensual desires or Dhamma desires? We have a certain amount of control over desire once we see the processes which are actually working there. It's a matter of being able to become more aware of the real nature of sensual desires, and what turns them on and off. If we can observe desire mindfully, we can investigate it wisely: 'What kind of desire? Desire for what?' This is where we learn about this self which has particular kinds of desires for this and that. Then we can look beyond the objects: food, sex, intoxication, whatever, what's behind them? We can see the becoming or existential realm where self is seeking to form, to come into being, to come into existence, to cohere as an entity. There is this urge for selfhood to express itself, and it comes out in sensual desire, or aversion, or sleepiness, or restlessness, or doubt. It seeks to take a particular form. When we look beyond the forms we get back to the processes, the forces, the energies behind them. The Buddha called this craving, grasping, becoming. And this is where we can put an end to the nourishing of selfhood, when the sense of self does not cohere any more as I, 'me' or 'mine', but is still functioning as a reference for consciousness.

The investigation of and working with the hindrance of sensual desires is a particularly fruitful endeavour since, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, it is a key element in many

areas of the Buddha's teachings. Through understanding sensual desires we come to a clearer understanding of thirst or craving (*tanhā*), grasping (*upādāna*), the outflows (*āsava*), the underlying dispositions (*anusaya*) and the feeling tones (*vedanā*) which condition thirst and the desire for sensual pleasures. These are the keys to realization of the cessation of all desires and all suffering.

ILL-WILL

> *Just as, brahmin, if there is a pot of water heated over a fire, bubbling and boiling, and a man with good sight should consider his own facial image in it, he could not recognize nor see it as it really is. So too when someone abides with their mind pervaded by ill-will, overcome with ill-will ...*

The second hindrance is ill-will (*vyāpāda* or *byāpāda*), which also means 'desire to injure, malevolence'. In general, we might say that ill-will is one expression of the 'rejection syndrome', which manifests in a variety of ways: for example, dislike, annoyance, irritation, resentment, aversion, anger, hostility, hate, rage. Everyone has their own habitual mode of expression of ill-will, and different situations may trigger particular modes of expression. Ill-will is self's primal defence reaction to any perceived threat of possible pain or harm. Thus, since every sentient being experiences pain to some degree, most people have a long, intimate and convoluted relationship with ill-will in its various guises.

Ill-will is one of the wrong thoughts (*miccha vitakka*) and wrong ways of action (*kammapatha*; A.X,174) which are not in accordance with Dhamma (M.I,286). It is one of the qualities which defile the mind and lead to an unhappy existence (M.I,36f;281). It is the mind of ill-will which wishes beings to be slain or slaughtered (M.I,287)

and, if acted upon, leads to the result of rebirth in either a hell realm or, if in the human realm: a) a short life due to killing living beings, b) sickliness due to injuring living beings, or c) ugliness for those who are 'of an angry and irritable character' (M.III, 204). Angry despair is one of the four perils of the religious life causing a monk to disrobe (M.I,460; A.II,125). A monk who is angry and revengeful may cause a dispute in the Sangha which would be for the 'harm and unhappiness of many' (M.II,246). If a monk is prone to anger it does not lead to 'affection, respect, esteem, accord or unity (A.V,165). There are also a number of variations on ill-will such as self-hatred and 'righteous anger'.

At M.III,245 ill-will is mentioned together with malice (*āghatā*) and hate (*sampadosa*) with reference to the allaying of aversion (*dosa*), one of the roots of unskilfulness (M.I,47). As repulsion (*paṭigha*) it is the second of the underlying dispositions.

MEDITATION

Sit in a comfortable position in a quiet, undisturbed place.

Place your attention on the breathing for a few minutes to collect and settle the mind.

When suitable, bring up in your mind an image, thought or memory of something causing irritation, annoyance or mild aversion. (It is best to consider something just mildly irritating, preferably not involving a person or something which is a long-standing issue).

For the moment set aside the object or the story about it, and try just to be aware of that emotion of irritation, annoyance or mild aversion.

How is it? What are its characteristics: is it clear, steady, throbbing, heating, etc?

Where in the body do you perceive it? What are the bodily expressions?

What are the feeling tones?

Do you notice any other mental conditions, for example, reactions?

What are the feeling tones of those?

Can you observe what causes this irritation?

Bring your attention back to the breathing. How is the breathing at this time?

Now, with the out-breath, release, relax and let go of any residual sensations or moods, let them float away on the out-breath.

When suitable, you can open your eyes and relax the posture.

CAUSE

Ill-will, replacing the standard term repulsion (*paṭigha*),[1] was understood by the Buddha to be one of the underlying dispositions (*anusaya*) which even young infants have within them (M.I,433).

Formally speaking, the nutriment for the arising and increase of ill-will [and aversion (*dosa*) (A.I,201)] is inappropriate attention to the 'image of the repulsive' (*paṭigha*) (S.V,65). What we define as repulsive is whatever sense impression gives rise to unpleasant feeling tone (S.IV,208). Thus fundamentally the cause of ill-will is the experience of unpleasant or painful feeling, either physically or mentally based. And the unawakened being, unable to give appropriate or wise attention to painful feeling, experiences two kinds of painful feeling: a physical one and a mental/emotional one (S.IV,208). That is, there is the initial pain, and then the emotional pain of resisting, resenting and hating it (and perhaps further pain through feeling guilty about it or struggling to get away from it, etc.). Thus ill-will is a symptom that self is 'hurt', that is, experiencing pain (whether real or imagined), and is usually just one factor in a causal sequence.

The energy dynamic is twofold. First there is a recoil or contraction from the unpleasant feeling. We defensively contract or draw ourselves within, physically, emotionally, psychically. This is at least partly an instinctive response to a perceived threat, as evidenced by the extreme paralysis complex of trauma victims. Some people remain locked in this numbed, energy-depleting

[1] *Paṭigha*, literally 'striking against'; PED translates as 'repugnance, repulsion, aversion'.

state (it requires a lot of energy to hold the contraction), which appears as if nothing has happened. If the stimulus persists, however, most people are propelled to react with rejection or pushing away in an attempt to escape. Some people can keep this withdrawn contraction going for some time (perhaps simmering along as resentment), until one day it explodes. As we say, people 'blow their top', or 'explode in anger'. And this is how most people see ill-will; as an outburst of anger or display of rage. Basically it is that contracted energy seeking an outlet. And, of course, unawakened beings usually see the source as outside themselves: 'You make me angry', rather than: 'When you say that it triggers anger in me.'

Often there is a complex causal relationship involved which is quite hard to decipher: what is that trigger which is somehow activated? Most of what we call pain is really the old habit of contraction or resistance to possible hurt based upon past experiences. We have a 'negativity bias' with a long memory, which exaggerates the intensity and effects of pain while predisposing us to be anxiously vigilant for any future pain. It's important to recognize this, because unless we get back to the source we are never really going to succeed in resolving this hindrance. Of course, a substantial degree of patience and perseverance is required to undo the habitual pain contraction underpinning ill-will, as this goes against all the ego conditioning we have cultivated during a lifetime.

Ill-will often locks into an 'aversion circuit' which spins off a variety and intensity of ill-will reactions: there is an ill-will reaction to the unpleasant feeling, towards the resulting contraction, towards what appears to be the cause of the contraction. Then there is ill-will towards the experience of ill-will, since that is also unpleasant. Perhaps guilt arises about having ill-will, which is also unpleasant and generates more ill-will. Thus the proliferation of ill-will may spiral out of control, and before we know it we are in a maniacal rage, perhaps triggered by some absurdly minor incident. Unfortunately, all too often the end-point is pinning the blame or dumping the hatred onto something (object, person,

group, ideology, etc.) and then seeking its removal, elimination, extermination. In truth the root cause is our own inability to understand the nature of unpleasant feeling tones and the ill-will reaction within ourselves.

You may imagine that if you dump your ill-will on somebody or something, it will be a relief to displace this disturbing energy. But the first mistake is that this is also very deluded because it denies responsibility: 'It's not my fault, it must be their fault.' (And often the relief we feel from the discharged energy is taken as proof that the source is out there). Thus we can never get to the root cause within ourselves. The second mistake is that since most of us find it hard to relate skilfully to this volatile energy of ill-will, we tend to conceptualize it and find some excuse for it; hence the familiar righteous anger: 'They hurt me, I must get even', or 'They deserve it', or 'I have to see that the law of *kamma* is fulfilled.' That's 'Buddhist' righteous indignation: ill-will with a little coating of 'virtue' on it.

However, if we take responsibility for our ill-will reaction and don't displace it or conceptualize it, with the support of mindfulness and collectedness we may be able to tune into this powerful energy. There is a lot of energy trapped in the pain-contraction. That impending explosion can be tapped into as a source of potential energy for use in daily life and spiritual practice. Also, since ill-will is a survival strategy of self, if we can follow this reaction syndrome back to its source we will arrive at the heart of self-making (*ahaṃkāra*).

SELF-HATRED AND 'RIGHTEOUS ANGER'

Two modifications of ill-will which are quite prominent these days are self-hatred and righteous anger. Self-hatred is internalized ill-will, which, while socially less reprehensible, is still not very skilful. Like self-doubt (and its shadow, narcissism), it has gained in prominence with the increase in the promotion of self-image and excessive thinking about self. However, this can be destructive and may lead to tragic consequences. Its dynamic is quite absurd:

there is one sense of self which hates another sense of self. How did this come about? We all have aspects of our relative self which we are not proud of and maybe even dislike: who loves their hindrances? However, some people have a very harsh inner critic which often has a familiar voice: parent, sibling, teacher, spouse. Self-hate can also be a fairly complex interaction of guilt, blame, recrimination, etc. between the various 'selfs'.

Righteous anger is a somewhat difficult emotion, since it appears to be a good thing or even virtuous. However, even though there is a 'rightness' about it, anger is not a skilful mental state. Just see how it 'feels' or how it affects your actions and speech. We have some perception of injustice or unrighteous behaviour, and feel a noble sense that something must be done about it. The anger arises because what we perceive is repulsive to us. However, are our perceptions correct? Does this trigger some hurt within us? Is it fuelled by frustration? When the Dalai Lama was asked at a conference of Buddhist teachers: 'What can we do about the situation in Tibet?', he surprisingly, but very wisely, said: 'Keep informed.' Too often we receive a snippet of well-polished propaganda which ignites passionate indignation to such a degree that it clouds wise reflection. Coming across a righteous fool is very disorienting; you don't know whether to have compassion for them or their cause. It is indeed good to support what is right, but bringing in anger can often make it wrong.

CESSATION

MINDFULNESS

The first stage of of working with ill-will is to be clearly mindful of this condition of mind. This is very important, since we are usually very eager to avoid it, change it or in some way get away from it. However, if we don't clearly understand what ill-will and all its permutations and machinations are, we are not able to work through them with any degree of honesty and true knowing. In

the discourse on the Attendings with Mindfulness (M. *sutta* 10; D. *sutta* 22) we are instructed to be aware of the conditions of mind of both aversion (*dosa*) and ill-will. This may sound quite easy, but since this condition of mind is unpleasant in itself and arises due to unpleasant feeling tone, being aware of it is usually easier said than done. If we also factor in a lifetime of avoidance reaction and resistance to ill-will, we can appreciate the necessity of making a concerted effort to establish clear mindfulness around this topic. The power of mindfulness, once sufficiently established, can create an objectifying of this volatile emotion, so that we can non-judgementally, non-reactively observe the bare facts of its manifestation. Also, when mindfulness is reasonably well-established we are able to observe the beginning stages of ill-will before it becomes too empowered. We are vigilant about the initiating causes and can skilfully deal with them before they ignite the aversion circuit.

The most helpful method is to be mindful of the the bodily sensations associated with ill-will, in particular the physical contraction. While still mostly unpleasant, they are at least more tangible and stable than the mental expressions. Once we become more familiar with these sensations, we can use them as a base from which to observe some of the more ephemeral mental expressions, for example, avoidance. Perhaps you can notice that when there is awareness of pain, the mind tends to look somewhere else. It can be quite hard to keep the awareness on the pain. However, try to objectively investigate this unpleasant feeling tone and its ill-will response. This attitude can help us shift our relationship from being the subject of the pain to the observer of the pain.

One of the simplest ways of resolving ill-will is simply to be aware of what it does to you, physically and mentally. How does it 'feel' to have ill-will? Take a look in the mirror. How do you behave when you have ill-will? What do you say? What is your body language? Is it pleasant?

A special type of practice, which may require a sufficient degree of mindfulness, is to try to separate the energy of ill-will/

aversion from the object. As you are probably well aware, there is considerable energy in the aversion reaction and, while there may be some specific trigger for it, most of the energy really comes from the back log of unresolved hurt we are holding. The triggering object is often not the real issue, but only the trigger. With more awareness of the conditioned nature of the aversion reaction we can perhaps focus less on the object of ill-will and investigate the energy of it. It has its particular forms and expressions, but where is it really coming from? And sometimes we may be able to tune into it and direct it in a more skilful way.

FRIENDLINESS

Once we have established some degree of clear mindfulness of the ill-will complex, we can support this mindfulness and investigation with the development of friendliness. Most references to the development of friendliness meditation are in the context of Calm Meditation, where it is developed to the stage of absorption. However, developing an open attitude of friendliness, perhaps deepened and stabilized by concentration, is also beneficial in the context of Insight Meditation. Since the cause of ill-will as repulsion is one of the deeply rooted underlying dispositions, it will require a significant change in our way of relating to reality to completely resolve the hindrance. Thus the Buddha prescribed and encouraged the development of the meditation on friendliness or 'loving-kindness' (*mettā*). Rather than allowing the underlying disposition of ill-will to arise and increase, meditation on friendliness creates an attitude of good-will through generating thoughts of well-being rather than ill-being. For example, by bringing up friendliness towards ill-will and the hurt which conditions it, we interrupt the 'aversion-circuit' and suspend the generating of further ill-will.

The meditation on friendliness is one of the four 'Divine Abidings' (*brahma vihāra;* cf. D.I,250), the other three being compassion (*karuṇā*), empathetic joy (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*). When practised properly this meditation on friendliness, through

accessing the power of good-will, can have a powerful and profound effect upon the mind and body, especially with regard to all forms of unpleasant experiences. Friendliness is one of those universal spiritual qualities which can be helpful in all aspects of life and with all types of experiences. Perhaps I should mention that developing this meditation is not merely some form of 'anger management' - whenever I feel anger I pull out the friendliness pill. Properly developed, the meditation can lead to the complete giving up of ill-will in all its forms, as it works to undermine our underlying disposition to react with ill-will to what we see as repulsive. We fundamentally change our way of relating to reality.

In Theravada Buddhist countries friendliness is the second most popular meditation subject after meditation on breathing. There are, however, a variety of ways of practising and means of accessing it. As mentioned above, most commonly it is practised as a form of Calm Meditation, which can result in the attainment of the third absorption. This is the radiating of friendliness progressively to various classes of beings, or spreading it to the ten cardinal directions, 'abundant, exalted, immeasurable'[2]. Detailed instructions for this meditation are given in *The Path of Purification*, Chapter 9.

Friendliness meditation is also especially useful in the context of Insight Meditation, where it offers valuable support for bringing mindfulness into painful and ignored areas of our being. Insight Meditation is seeing clearly the truth of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and impersonality in all aspects of our life. However, most people have an inherent block against seeing the unpleasant side of life unless they are forced to do so. The third subject of the Attendings with Mindfulness is conditions or states of mind. Here being aware of ill-will is specifically mentioned (as well as other states of mind, both positive and negative). But many people are particularly averse to observing negative states of mind, as they don't have the tools to relate to them in a skilful way. So you can see ill-will, but now what? Thus just to be able to recognize, acknowledge or observe the emotion of ill-will can be quite an accomplishment for some people, especially if they have ill-will as a challenging personality trait.

[2] Cf. Analayo (2012) pp.289-91.

Bringing friendliness into the picture can not only soften and lighten the negative emotions, but also enables coming closer to them and thus seeing them more clearly. Through relating with friendliness to the unpleasant we can learn to be non-judgementally receptive to so-called unpleasant experiences. They are only 'unpleasant' because we have subjectively defined them as unpleasant due to our own negative relationship to them. We each have our own accumulation of unpleasant experiences, although some are also quite universal. By developing friendliness rather than hostility to them, our relationship with them can change from negative to neutral (just a feeling) and, possibly, to positive (that is, they may become very interesting to study).

Although most references to the practice of friendliness emphasize spreading well-being to other beings 'throughout the entire world', the exercise begins by generating thoughts of well-being towards our self and all its various expressions. If one is not sincerely friendly towards oneself there is no genuine friendliness to share with others, and friendliness remains only a high-minded ideal. We begin by contacting a familiar sense of well-being within ourselves, and then expand it into more challenging areas of our life. We are in essence learning to gradually open a 'heart of friendliness' to the various forms of pain which condition ill-will. Thus the key to successful practice is to keep the personal connection to well-being 'charged up' to such a degree that it overflows into the world around us. Initially this may not be noticeable, but eventually one can actively generate 'universal well-being'.

I heard about this practice of friendliness when I was meditating in Thailand many years ago and thought I must practise it, as it was obviously a very important meditation subject. And of course, there were lots of things to learn to be friendly to – mosquitoes, heat, spicy food, rising early, etc. So I tried to practise friendliness meditation. The instructions were to bring up friendliness and radiate it to the ten directions: right and left, front and back, this way and that way, up and down and all around. By the time I'd finished I was so dizzy that I had to lie down, and it didn't

quite work. I grew more and more frustrated, and so gave it up for a while. Some years later I tried to practise it again, and then realized that I had been so idealistic in spreading friendliness all over the world that I had forgotten to develop it within myself first. However, if you don't have any friendliness for yourself to start with, it's like using your flashlight without a battery in it. You can carry it around with you but there's no power in it, so it's not going to be effective. Some people might think that it's very selfish to be friendly to yourself, but really that's where your home base is. It's 'me' trying to be friendly to the world. If that 'me' does not know friendliness, then friendliness hasn't any power.

It may be helpful to keep in mind that we don't need to especially like or 'love' unpleasant experiences (otherwise we would be practising masochism rather than Buddhism). We don't have to like someone in order to be friendly to them. Personally, I think that the translation of 'loving-kindness' often imposes over-grand expectations upon the practice. I do not find it too difficult to relate with friendliness towards myself, but relating with 'loving-kindness' is still on the idealistic side of reality. Also, the word 'love' has the connotation of 'affection', and thus 'desire', which the meditation on friendliness is trying to avoid.

One of the teachings I received from Christianity when I was young was: 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. However, I had a 'crisis of faith' when I realized that in truth I did not love my neighbour or myself, so obviously I couldn't be a Christian. When I studied Buddhism I learned that the teaching really was: 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself', and that the way to do it was to learn to accept or appreciate yourself through the practice of friendliness. I mentioned this at a conference mostly attended by Christians, and one of the people there was awestruck. 'I didn't know that was how it's practised,' he said. If we have not established friendliness within ourselves, loving-kindness is impractically idealistic and never quite works (and often comes across as hypocritical, that is, talking about love but not authentically practising it).

This practice is a fundamentally different approach from our habitual reaction to pain. We have an 'underlying disposition' (*anusaya*) to react to pain with ill-will, but now we are trying to respond to it with good-will. For many people this may sound absurd, since pain is not something to be friendly to, but to be resisted, chased away or conquered. However, one of the Buddha's most poignant insights was that: 'Hatred (*vera*) does not cease by hatred, but only by non-hatred' (Dhp. 5).

FRIENDLINESS: THE PRACTICE

We begin the exercise by retiring to a suitable (i.e. quiet) place and taking up a comfortable posture. We then initiate thoughts of well-being, whichever ones are relevant or meaningful, such as those in the Reflections on Universal Well-Being:

> *May I abide in well-being, in freedom from affliction, in freedom from hostility, in freedom from ill-will, in freedom from anxiety, and may I maintain well-being in myself.*

Of course, it can be reasonably easy to bring up such thoughts, but developing the corresponding attitude or heart-felt sense of those words can be much more difficult. A very helpful way to shift well-being from thought to direct experience is to move attention from the thought centre in the head to the 'feeling' centre in the heart, and deeply sense well-being in whatever way you can. How do you experience it? Physically? Emotionally? Mentally? Perhaps you may need to recall a memory or imagine some situation which you find very comforting or conducive to well-being; whatever helps you connect directly with an experience of well-being.

Once you have connected with that personal experience of well-being, even if initially it is imagined, see if you can keep it nourished and charged up in your heart. One common way is to sense it being re-charged as you breathe in; as the chest rises on inhalation you sense well-being flowing into the heart. Allow it to fill your heart and radiate throughout the body, touching every corner and cell of your being.

With sustained practice you can become reasonably proficient in generating and maintaining this experience of well-being. Then you try to extend it towards whatever experiences mindfulness observes as unpleasant, or which cause resistance, tension or tightness. May that part of 'me' which feels that unpleasantness be well and free of suffering. You can send well-being into aches and pains in the body, allowing it to seep into those places and melt away the contractions and tensions. You can share this well-being with uncomfortable moods or emotions. Breathe well-being into them, welcome them, embrace them with friendliness. Over the years I have found that different approaches work for different people at different times. We all have a long and complex relationship with pain and ill-will, and have experienced pain traumas in a variety of ways throughout our lives. Thus different methods, attitudes and responses may need to be engaged for different kinds of hurt and ill-will reactions at different stages of practice. Ill-will can manifest in a variety of guises, some quite active and others more subdued. Some forms of hurt coalesce at specific places in the body, like the heart or throat. Other types of hurt are more diffuse, while yet others may exist only at the deep physical level. Some forms of ill-will can be identified clearly, while others are entirely energetic and non-conceptual.

Generally it is simpler (and sometimes easier) to practise friendliness to the painful sensations in parts of the body, as these manifest more tangibly in specific places. I say 'sometimes easier' because some areas of the body may be so frozen in contraction that there is no obvious sensation to relate to. If one is aware of this, that frozenness or numbness may be observed and friendliness applied to it more proactively. Other sensations may be psychosomatic expressions of highly-charged emotional pain, and thus we can be misled if we dwell too much on the physical level only. Some cross-referencing between physical sensations and emotional/mental responses is worthwhile. I have also found it useful to alternate between a more systematic, rational 'left-brain' approach (supported by theory), and 'right-brain' guided imagery, sound or movement. For example, we know that friendliness can

be beneficial for releasing tensions in the body, and so we can keep systematically relaxing into friendliness. However, sometimes this no longer has any effect. If we can then imagine friendliness as a warm golden light shining into those tensions, or breathe into them with friendliness, we may find this more effective. It may be that the self has caught on to our earlier technique and no longer cooperates, or we have moved into areas of subtlety which the rational brain cannot touch, i.e. the non-conceptual area of experience.

The skill in practice is to not merely stay in the head and magnanimously direct thoughts of well-being into painful experiences, but rather to melt whole-heartedly into them; to step out of our pompous egoistic attitude of controlling or dismissing pain and learn to humbly surrender into it. Most pain is actually self-contraction, the threatened self throwing up a wall of contracted defensiveness which is also painful and contracted, thus generating further pain and contraction. Friendliness is like arranging a peace conference, providing a safe environment in which to open up the defences to reveal that the real cause of the pain contraction is grasping an illusory self. Through the friendly study of this pain we can learn a lot about the self and its defence strategies.

However, we should never underestimate the cleverness of the self in trying to co-opt the practice for its own ends. Even though defensiveness is painful, the self does not want to give up this familiar habit, its primal survival strategy. Thus we should proceed gently in the true spirit of friendliness, gradually winning self's confidence and trust: 'Yes, this does feel good', but without being too idealistic: 'I'm going to conquer my ill-will with friendliness.' In this way we cultivate friendliness from the base of a trusting relationship, rather than from a mercenary relationship of using friendliness to get what we want. So rather than initially launching into friendliness towards all our unpleasant experiences, we can begin with a gentle receptiveness or non-judgemental openness: 'Yes, this is what is.' Next we could try to be more hospitable and accommodating: 'Yes, you are also part of my experience.' Then we

may try different modes of friendliness: 'Hello, please come in and take a seat. Is there anything I can do for you?' Eventually we can proceed to cultivating a deepening friendship with the unpleasant: 'How are you feeling? Have you got anything to tell me, comment on or advise?' Ultimately friendliness can be developed into an unconditioned, unbounded receptiveness.

The result of this approach is that the unpleasant is disarmed and we begin to trust the process more. At the same time the medicine of friendliness heals the wounds of old pain traumas, so that what we define as 'unpleasant' can be unconditionally received with mindfulness and wisdom. Internally this is a progression towards attenuating self-reference. Self lets down its guard, possibly to such a degree that it is 'out of a job' and no longer necessary for defence.

FRIENDLINESS EXTENDED

The formal instructions on the development of friendliness continue through extending it to a wider circle of beings. We create our own ill-will, but sometimes we may also be a dumping ground for the ill-will of others. Also, once we have seen the damage we cause ourselves through being enslaved by ill-will, we have compassion for others whom we see enslaved by it. When we experience other people's ill-will we hear their pain, and are inclined to share the well-being we can experience with other sentient beings. We begin with someone with whom it is easy to share well-being, such as someone to whom we feel grateful. Once we are able to do this with some proficiency and wish to develop it further, we can gradually progress to sharing well-being with close friends, then a neutral person, and finally a person we dislike. (Initially thoughts of well-being should not be directed towards someone to whom we may be sexually attracted or towards a dead person). We can bring up thoughts of well-being for that person as we did towards ourselves:

'May everyone abide in well-being, in freedom from hostility,

in freedom from ill-will, in freedom from anxiety, and may they maintain well-being in themselves. May all beings be released from all suffering, and may they not be parted from the good fortune they have attained.

MEETING RESISTANCE

Since ill-will manifests in a vast variety of ways, it is inevitable that we will meet resistance to cultivating friendliness, either towards certain aspects of our self or, more likely, towards someone or something we dislike. When this happens, the scriptures offer a number of practices or ways of considering the situation so as to help understand, get another angle on or give some support to friendliness, and hopefully clear the way for deeper practice. The author of *The Path of Purification* collected together a number of methods to help resolve this (PP. 324-332):

1) Develop friendliness to the level of absorption and then apply it to that difficulty. More simply, develop more concentration and mindfulness as a support for friendliness;

2) Reflect upon the Buddha's teaching in the Simile of the Saw discourse (M.I,129), where he says that even if being carved limb from limb, anyone who harbours ill-will towards his tormentors is not following his teaching ;

3) Reflect upon the Buddha's teaching at S.I,162:

Repaying an angry person with anger
Is worse than being angry first.
By not repaying an angry person with anger,
One wins a hard-won fight.
The welfare of both is promoted,
Of self and other,
Knowing another's rage,
Mindfully remaining composed.

4) Reflect upon the Buddha's teaching at A.IV,94 on the seven things helpful to an enemy when one is angry: one is ugly, in pain, has no good fortune, is not wealthy, is not famous, has no friends

and is reborn in an unhappy state;

5) Reflect upon the Buddha's teaching at A.II,95 comparing an angry person to a useless log burnt at both ends and fouled in the middle;

6) Reflect on the good qualities of the difficult person as at A.III,186-90, i.e. bodily action, speech or meditative attainment, or all three; if there is no such good quality, have compassion for them so they will not be reborn in a plane of misery;

7) Reflect on the harm you are causing yourself by harbouring anger (cf. verses at PP. 326-7);

8) Reflect upon the ownership of *kamma*: *All beings are the owners of their action and inherit its results. Their future is born from such action, companion to such action and its results will be their home. All actions with intention, be they skilful or harmful, of such acts they will be the heir*s (A.III.186); a) the anger you harbour is your own unskilful *kamma*, comparable to someone 'who wants to hit another and picks up a glowing ember or excrement in his hand, and so first burns himself or makes himself stink' (PP. 327); b) the other person's actions will bear their own fruit, without our needing to intervene;

9) Review the previous lives of the Buddha-to-be (stories detailed at PP. 328f);

10) Review the teaching that due to the continuity of rebirths it is hard to find someone who has not been your mother, father, sister, brother, etc., and thus it is not suitable to harbour ill-will towards them (S.II,189f);

11) Review the eleven advantages of friendliness: comfortable sleep; comfortable waking; no bad dreams; being dear to humans; being dear to non-humans; being guarded by deities; not being affected by fire, poison or weapons; the mind is easily concentrated; a serene expression on the face; dying unconfused; rebirth at least in the Brahma-worlds if no higher attainment (A.V,342);

12) Reflect on the elements: 'What are you angry with in that

person: hair of the head, hair of the body, etc.? Or it is one of the four material elements of earth, fire, water or air? Or one of the five groups of grasping, or six sense bases, etc.? Thus like 'a painting on the air', ill-will can find no foothold;

13) Give a gift to the difficult person.

Several other means are mentioned in the scriptures. Five ways to remove malice towards someone are to: a) develop friendliness towards them, b) develop compassion towards them, c) develop equanimity towards them, d) pay no attention to them, e) review ownership of one's own *kamma* (A.III,185f).

Ten ways of removing malice are: 1) Reviewing that someone has acted for your harm, you conclude that nothing can be done about it; 2) and 3) Reviewing that someone is acting or will act for your harm, you conclude that nothing can be done about it; 4)-6) Reviewing that someone has acted, is acting or will act for the harm of someone dear to you, you conclude that nothing can be done about it; 7)-9) Reviewing that someone has acted, is acting, will act for the benefit of someone displeasing to you, you conclude that nothing can be done about it; 10) you do not give in to irrational anger (A.V,150-1).

Perhaps similar to 13) above, but much more direct, is practising forgiveness towards yourself and the difficulty or difficult person. It is important in this practice to include yourself, as any 'difficulty' is a result of the inter-dependence of self and other. Also, it is helpful to involve as much of your being as possible, either by addressing the difficulty or difficult person directly, or by involving body, speech and mind as fully as possible, perhaps through some ritual act.

A specialized practice for very challenging difficulties is to bring up a memory, an image or the physical sensation of the difficult experience into the calm, clear mind. For example, if you can contact a peaceful state of mind, particularly during a period of formal meditation, use that skilful state of mind as a background and actively bring the difficult experience into consciousness. Try

to hold that experience and contemplate it from a variety of angles. If it starts to gain strength or triggers off reactions, put it down and go back to the principal meditation object again. The idea behind this practice is that we usually resist unpleasant experiences as much as possible, until they finally force themselves into our consciousness at a time when we are weak and vulnerable, and thus we feel overwhelmed and overpowered by them, or out of control and frightened of them. By intentionally bringing them up into an empowered, peaceful state of mind, we not only experience them in an entirely new way, but also cultivate more confidence in being able to deal with them more skilfully .

At a certain time in my practice I began having experiences of being taken over by irrational fear. Of course my usual reaction is to analyze, so I asked: 'Where did this come from? What is the cause of this?' However, even the most sophisticated answer did not resolve the fear. I then realized that it was irrational fear which seemed to arise at any time of the day or night. Just observing the physical reactions was very helpful for not letting it get totally out of control and end in paralyzing panic. I was living at Chithurst Monastery in England at the time, and every evening the community of fifteen monastics and five to ten laypeople would meet in the beautiful, quiet and comfortable shrine room for evening puja. The physical and spiritual atmosphere was very conducive to peaceful meditation. However, this fear was never far away, so I began to invite it into the meditation space, and then the experience was quite different. The fear was still there, but now that it was held in a field of well-being, it was no longer so frightening. I could then see it as just another mental state, albeit not at all pleasant or likeable, but just another state of mind. Then when the fear arose on other occasions it was no longer so difficult and I didn't build up further problems through reacting unskilfully to it. Through my not reacting unskilfully and thus being able to respond with more non-judgemental awareness, the fear began to lose strength, and gradually faded into the background as just another state of mind arising and passing away. Fear is still there sometimes, but it is no longer empowered by negative reactivity.

WHEN FRIENDLINESS FAILS

It is not uncommon sometimes for friendliness to not seem to work. Either we cannot connect with it or it does not flow naturally. We may feel discouraged: 'That's the medicine the Buddha gave but it doesn't work.' My experience is that it does not work for one of two reasons: we are not applying it in the right place or we're not applying it in the right way. For example, somebody says something to you which you take to be an insult, and you find yourself steaming with anger. Then as a devout Buddhist, you immediately apply friendliness meditation to the person who has insulted you: 'May they be well. May they be free from suffering.' (Obviously they need friendliness, since they are so imperfect as to have insulted you!) But they walk away and you're left with your own disturbance. Although you've sent friendliness to them, the turmoil is still going around in your mind. The technique doesn't seem to be working! So maybe we have to do some homework.

The first place to bring friendliness is your own anger, not as an antidote to it but to provide some non-afflictive space around it in order to see the bigger, non-contracted picture more clearly. If you can look mindfully at what is going on, perhaps you begin to see things differently. What really happened? Perhaps you heard wrongly? Perhaps it wasn't the other person's fault? Your own confusion and self-doubt are stirred up. Aha! Maybe the real cause of the upset is your own personal history of self-doubt. You heard them call you an idiot and it touched a sore spot. If they'd called you an oaf or some other name it would be no problem. But calling you an idiot triggers all your insecurities around your intelligence and stirs up some deep uncertainties in yourself. What is this aspect of yourself which is being so annoyed or irritated?

Within yourself is where friendliness can be most beneficial and effective. However, often that is the last place we look. We are often very quick to deflect the cause of pain outside ourselves. Ajahn Chah would constantly emphasize 'bringing it back inside', to keep looking at the source within ourselves. Or as the saying goes: 'When you point your finger at someone, notice that three

fingers point back at you.' Of course, the self is instinctively defensive; however, now that we have more mindfulness and wisdom, we know these activities of self better and don't fall for them so easily. Thus the first place to apply friendliness is to your own self-reactions. This short-circuits the reactive syndrome and can then allow an opening up to the causal processes involved in self-making.

As with the meditations on the unattractive aspects of the body, I would say that we need to be quite careful of our attitude when we develop this meditation. A common tendency is to use friendliness as a support for the self rather than as a means to surrender the self-reference. For example, we may use friendliness as a virtuous spiritual weapon or antidote to cover up the self-supporting habit of ill-will. We may sit on our spiritual throne and in our generous high-mindedness radiate friendliness at all the evil in the world. But the self is defended by ill-will towards threatening, unpleasant experiences. Thus in order to develop good-will sincerely, we need to come off the spiritual throne of selfhood and surrender our defensiveness. Rather than nourishing the ego defence of ill-will, we open our hearts to the selfless nature of pain. Pain is actually an impersonal causal reaction, not your personal problem. Sorry, you can't even build a self around that one! In fact the practice is ultimately about giving up our ego-preserving habits through a total surrender to the absolute truth of suffering.

Energetically, friendliness is a receptive expansiveness. In order to develop it we need to literally 'come out of ourselves', to open up to the unpleasant experience as it is, beyond liking or disliking. As we come out of ourselves with friendliness, we surrender our old way of relating to that experience: we the subject, change and pain, the object, also changes. If we continue to develop friendliness, the subject-object relationship becomes more rarefied, being replaced by the quality of expansive friendliness until it can ultimately transcend the dualistic subject-object relationship completely: no subject, no object, no self, no other. This is also known as unbounded, unconditional love.

Mindfulness says: 'There is some pain there.' The self says: 'Yes, but I don't like it.' M: 'But it is there.' S: 'OK, I can acknowledge that.' M: 'Hey, there's more to this pain than meets the eye. And it's very interesting.' S: 'Really?' M: 'Yes, take a look.' S: 'How do I do that?' M: 'Relax your defensiveness, be more friendly and it will start to show itself.' S: 'Hey, it is interesting, and this friendliness is not too bad. Actually, it's quite nice. And I notice that what I thought was painful is not as extreme as I first imagined.'

At one retreat I gave in Switzerland a woman was sitting in some sort of hospital chair. I had just arrived at the venue and did not know her or her condition. However, after the introductory talk I asked if there were any questions and she responded quite emotionally: 'What do you do about pain?' She continued: 'I have osteoporosis and am in constant pain. I wake in pain, I eat in pain, I go to sleep in pain. Do you have any suggestions about what to do with it?' I was at first quite taken aback by her emotional confession and, perhaps simplistically, replied: 'Practise friendliness towards the pain.' She aggressively shot back: 'How can I be friendly to pain?' All I could answer was: 'Have you got any choice?' At this she was silent, but looked thoughtful. I think I might have added that the retreat was a good opportunity to give it a try.

I was not quite sure how she would respond to this teaching. However, she came to all the sessions and seemed to be quite relaxed and comfortable. By the second day she was looking quite radiant, so I was curious about her experience. After the evening talk I asked her how the practice was going. She quite joyfully responded: 'It works! The pain has not gone away but now I don't fight it and can be more peaceful with it.'

IMPERMANENCE OF UNPLEASANT FEELING TONE

Like the hindrance of sensual desire, the hindrance of ill-will has feeling tone as its source. Thus a wise understanding of the nature of feeling tone as impermanent and dependently conditioned reduces the tendency to give in to the ill-will reaction; or, if we are already caught in ill-will, can alleviate its intensity through

knowing that it is not a 'thing in itself' but rather just 'a feeling', an effect of experiencing pain.

In Buddhist psychology pain is in the mind, and changing our state of mind changes the quality of the pain. A systematic contemplation when a painful bodily feeling arises is to reflect that the feeling is dependent upon the body and is impermanent:

> *'He abides contemplating impermanence in the body and in painful feeling; he abides contemplating decaying, contemplating fading away, contemplating cessation, contemplating giving up. As he dwells thus, the underlying disposition to ill-will with regard to the body and painful feeling is given up by him* (S.IV,212)'.

Similarly, when a painful mental feeling arises, reflect on just how changeable and fleeting this unpleasant feeling tone and the mood of ill-will really are, if we don't react negatively to them. Instead of contracting around the pain, if we can observe it with more friendliness we may notice that in fact this physical or mental pain is very fluid: it fluctuates in intensity, it mingles with other feelings and moods, it ebbs and flows with bodily and mental conditions. We see directly that feelings are very insubstantial and thus unreliable for building reactions upon. By seeing in this way we can undermine the habit of the ill-will reaction. What are we angry with: an impermanent painful feeling tone? Not very reliable, is it?

'UNPACKING' THE PAIN ILL-WILL CAUSAL SEQUENCE

One time during our three-month winter retreat at Dhammapala Monastery in Switzerland, we had a fresh overnight snowfall and the day dawned bright and sunny. It was one of those picture-postcard scenes in the Swiss Alps. I felt I needed to photograph it before the snow melted. The best shot of the snow-covered monastery and surrounding hills was from across the fields, and the easiest way to get there was to follow the groomed ski track. However, it is seriously frowned upon to walk on a track which is

meant only for skiers. I knew this, but thought that I would only be using it for ten minutes and no one would be bothered. So I set off along the ski track, and just as I was preparing to take a photograph, a skier came along and aggressively berated me for walking on the ski track. I was somewhat ashamed for being caught out, but also keen to get the photograph, so I tried to explain my situation. However, he had no sympathy for me and continued his verbal attack. I eventually retreated and returned to my room, anger quietly simmering.

It seemed to be a relatively minor incident, but the next day I still felt the simmering anger and indignation throbbing in my chest. I tried a few rationalizations to dismiss the lingering effects, but to little avail. On the third day the effects were still there, seemingly as fresh as on the day of the incident. Since we were in the middle of our winter retreat, this disturbing event cast a shadow over the peace and quiet which are the primary benefits of retreat. However, it did occur to me that as this anger continued to persist even though the situation was seemingly quite minor, maybe there was actually more going on than appeared, so I began to pay particular attention to the physical sensation churning in my chest. Although not pleasant, it was in effect quite interesting. I kept observing this sensation, and since it was fairly obvious my attention remained there quite consistently.

As I was observing the sensation a few days later, it suddenly dawned on me that this was not actually anger, but rather resentment. This insight sent a wave of relaxing energy through the body, and a flood of memories, images and thoughts washed through the mind, revealing a long and sordid history of resentment. The sensations in the chest lightened and broadened out, but continued to resonate. I continued to observe this new type of sensation, and gradually the mental activity slowed down and a renewed clarity of mind appeared. Then just as suddenly as before, I had the realization that this was not actually resentment, but frustration. Once again a wave of relaxation washed through the body, and a cascade of memories of a long history of frustration flooded through the mind. At the same time the sensation centred

in the chest became more diffuse and less impacted.

I continued this experiential enquiry into the sensations for several more days, and once again the experience shifted, this time into a fear reaction. (I knew that if there is fear, awareness must be very close to the root of self-identity). I could distinguish two kinds of fear. One was fear of the energy latent in anger, and the second was an amorphous fear of non-being. The sensations in the body were now diffused throughout the torso. I continued to observe the physical sensations and the fear pulsing throughout body and mind. And then the fear dropped away, and there was just free-flowing energy pulsing through the body. When I tried to grasp it the fear came back, overshadowing the free-flowing, selfless energy. Just allowing it to be, without any grasping, was blissful and boundless.

We understand that ill-will is an effect in a cause-effect relationship, so once you are aware of ill-will, investigate its details. How does it manifest: active or passive, confined or diffuse, compacted or pervasive? When we are more clear about its nature we enquire what the cause is, that is, what sort of pain or hurt is behind it. Firstly, is it mostly physical or mental, or both? What aspect of the self is feeling hurt right now? Often it is easier to investigate the physical expressions of ill-will overtly and subtly, externally and internally. For example, try to access the contraction -- how do you relate to a contraction? If you have a muscle contraction, you have to relax it in order to release it. Some of these contractions may be really locked and knotted. They may need activation: give them a shake, get some blood circulating. Maybe some contractions need energizing, stretching or discharging. Others may be frozen contractions which need warming up with some tender loving care and attention. Breathe warm friendliness into them. The main point is to find the right place to contact: the physical contraction, the mood, the attitude.

If you pursue this enquiry you will learn a lot about yourself. It's quite humbling, and also quite absurd sometimes when you see all the little things you can get upset about. Of course, if you

understand what this word 'hurt' means, you will realize that we have a long history of hurt and disappointment, and most of it remains 'unprocessed', seeds for ill-will lying dormant in the psyche, ready to burst into life with the right stimulus. To be able to unpack this stuff requires real openness of heart, real sincerity. Often it is much easier to react with righteous indignation and say: 'Life is tough. You just have to grin and bear it.' However, this doesn't in any way shift the potential for aversion or anger to come bursting onto the scene. It's only by going into it, through seeing the conditioned dynamics of the process, that it opens up from the inside out: what aspect of 'you' is it that is being hurt? Only by ultimately realizing the selflessness at the very core of our being does it begin to resolve. There's still hurt, but no person being hurt. We aren't taking it personally. There's a body, there are feelings, perception, mental activity, consciousness, but there's no person being hurt. So why get angry about it?

In the explanation of the practice of friendliness in *The Path of Purification,* a question is posed regarding the results of very advanced development. You are sitting with your best friend, a neutral person and your worst enemy (this is very hypothetical), and bandits come along and say: 'We need to kill somebody for a sacrifice. You choose who it is.' Do you choose yourself, your best friend, the neutral person or your worst enemy? Which person would you choose for the sacrifice? It's not the person you might think, because friendliness transforms our whole relationship to reality, it dissolves all boundaries. We step outside our usual way of looking at reality as me and other, as subject and object. Practise friendliness meditation all week and you may get the answer to this question.[3]

SELF-HATRED AND RIGHTEOUS ANGER

It is very important to be able to distinguish the particular condition of self-hatred from all the related reactions such as

[3] 'But it is when he does not see a single one among the four people to be given to the bandits and he directs his mind impartially towards himself and towards these three people that he has broken down the barriers.' PP.333.

guilt, depression, self-blame, remorse, etc. Then try to separate the self from the hate. Once we have some real clarity we can work on both aspects just as for other forms of ill-will, with increasing friendliness and investigation. Firstly, what is being hated, what aspect of self is disliked? Then, is it possible for the different 'selfs' to communicate with a bit more friendliness? Perhaps we can learn to be more tolerant or less critical of our imperfections. Investigate the nature of selfhood to understand its conditioned and fundamentally unsubstantial reality (explained further under self-doubt in the chapter on Doubt). Some degree of moderate self-criticism can be useful for deeper enquiry: why do I act in this particular way? Maybe this is the motivation for working with the Hindrances?

In working through righteous anger, which is often a conditioned reaction, it is important to be able to separate the sense of righteousness from the anger. We need to acknowledge that anger is not a skilful response, but what to do about the sense of righteousness, how to honour it? Can we open it up to connect with the universal rightness of the situation which will include everyone and everything? The anger shows that there is some energy in this situation. Can that energy be converted or transformed into something else? Can we discover a more skilful channel for that energy, doing something positive and empowering? As Gandhi said: 'Rather than complain about the dark, better to make a light.'

GOOD FRIENDSHIP AND SUITABLE CONVERSATION

Although discussed in detail in a previous chapter, it is worth emphasizing again that having good friends to encourage, support and discuss with is particularly important, because dealing with the powerful negative energies of ill-will can sometimes be very disturbing and challenging. We all have a long and convoluted history of pain and ill-will reaction, some people a lot more than others. When we start to unravel this history we may be surprised by what we discover, and occasionally it can be quite disorienting: who am I really, this energetic ill-will reaction or that embracing

friendliness?

Suitable conversation is very significant with regard to ill-will, as off-hand critical remarks, malicious gossip or unkind comparisons can often trigger the underlying disposition of ill-will into action, bubbling to the surface or erupting into consciousness. This is an ideal to aspire to, mentioned in the Discourse on Friendliness:[4]

> *Let none deceive another, or despise any being in any state. Let none through anger or ill-will wish harm upon another. Even as a mother protects with her life her child, her only child, so with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings.*

SUMMARY

Initially we need to be mindful when there is ill will. For some people that is already quite a big step. How easy is it for you to acknowledge your ill-will? Of course, it's quite normal, even instinctive, to be defensive. We acknowledge ill-will and then, with some collectedness and clarity, we follow it back to the unpleasant feeling tone. What aspect of my self is being hurt? Maybe it's some aspect of my pride that is being hurt right now. That's why I'm feeling irritated. Well, is that something to be encouraged, to preserve and hang on to?

Developing friendliness is a practice which can alter our whole attitude to reality; it opens our hearts to all aspects of life in an entirely new way. It's not just opening our hearts to the things we like, but also to the things we were pushing away, denying, rejecting. The ultimate test of opening the heart, as one teacher has suggested, is to be able to: 'Keep your heart open in hell.'[5] It's very easy to keep your heart open in heaven, and you have to work at keeping your heart open in the human realm. But the real test is keeping your heart open when you're in hell. When you expose

[4] *Sutta Nipāta* 1.8. Also in the chanting book at most monasteries.

[5] Stephen Levine, *Healing into Life and Death*; Gateway Books, Bath, 1989: p. 90 with reference to the Forgiveness Meditation, and p. 106 with reference to the Grief Meditation. This book contains many specialized meditations which may be helpful for people who find that they can benefit from forms of meditation other than that on Friendliness. Particularly relevant is Chapter 20 on anger and other 'heavy emotional states', with a guided meditation.

the hidden hurt in your heart, we say that psychologically you're in hell. Can you keep your heart open then, keep the friendliness flowing?

If you can keep up with it, keep working at it, developing it, life's unpleasantness can become transformed. Maybe some day you will be amazed that you don't become so overwhelmed by ill-will; you don't get so irritated, so angry at things. Those emotions seem to have just faded away, or at least are much reduced. You notice a shift in your attitude to difficult things. Sometimes it's hard to see; maybe only afterwards do you notice: 'Hey, I don't get so upset any more. I don't get so frustrated. I don't get so resentful.' However, don't be surprised if the attitude changes. Sometimes we can be in a very up-beat mood and friendliness begins to really flow for us. At other times the mood shifts and it's really hard work. Life can give us a lot of homework.

We can cultivate friendliness just as a mother relates to her only child. It's like an instinct which we all have within us. We just have to access it more often. So hopefully, if we continue to cultivate it, we will transform those old attitudes from defensiveness and rejecting pain to more openness and friendliness, and be able to clear out our attic of unprocessed pain. Eventually we may be able (sometimes) to arrive at unconditional love. And some people say that unconditional love is the same as awakening. When there is no self blocking the way, that is when boundless love can really function. Non-self is unconditional truth.

It starts off in small ways: just being able to be more friendly to ill-will and our particular hurts that trigger it, physical, emotional, mental. But as we begin to understand how this process is working, it becomes transformed into a whole new attitude. We can never defend the self. We can try all we want, but we can never defend it because it is a non-existent thing. It does not exist in essence. It's like defending a shadow. Have you ever tried to defend your shadow? So we start with self's ill-will reaction to pain, opening it up with friendliness. Once we begin to see it working, we have confidence that there is a more skilful way of being, and those

old habits become increasingly transformed into receptive expansiveness towards an ever-broadening reality.

LETHARGY AND DROWSINESS

> *Just as, brahmin, if there is a pot of water covered with algae and water plants, and a man with good sight should consider his own facial image in it, he could not recognize nor see it as it really is. So too when someone abides with their mind pervaded by lethargy and drowsiness, overcome with lethargy and drowsiness ...*

The third hindrance is a double one, *thīna-middha*, often translated as 'sloth and torpor'. According to *The Path of Purification* (PP.530) the first term, *thīna,* literally 'stiffness', means 'paralysis due to lack of urgency, and loss of vigour'. It has 'the characteristic of lack of driving power. Its function is to remove energy. It is manifested as subsiding.' The term *middha* means 'torpor' or 'sluggishness'. 'It has the characteristic of unwieldiness. Its function is to smother. It is manifested as laziness, or it is manifested as nodding and sleep.' Thus perhaps a clearer definition of the two terms would be 'lethargy and drowsiness'.

There are, of course, a variety of ways in which lethargy and drowsiness can be expressed, physically, mentally or spiritually. Sometimes they may be based or manifested more physically, the body lacking strength or vigour so that it is difficult to get it to move or even sit upright. The body can seem to be made of jelly, not have fixed boundaries or have amorphous sensations. At other

times the mental aspect may predominate. The mind seems to have no stability or not respond to directions. We experience it as being in a fog or a dream state, or sinking in a mud pool. If lethargy and drowsiness do not have an obvious physical or mental source, they are usually a type of spiritual lethargy.

Lethargy and drowsiness are basically a lack of energy, and the fundamental dynamic is firstly deflation (of energy), followed by collapse. It is thus helpful to be able to distinguish this deflation process: firstly, so as to be able to recognize it before it becomes excessive or habitual; secondly, so that we can determine what is causing this loss of energy; and thirdly, to investigate whether and how this deflation may be reversed. If lethargy and drowsiness become too advanced, it is very hard to have any energy available to investigate them. It's a lot easier to top up the fuel tank in your car before it is totally empty and you are stranded on the highway.

MEDITATION

Sit or stand in a quiet, undisturbed place.

Bring attention to the breathing to focus and settle the mind.

Try to relax the body as fully as possible. It may be helpful to droop the shoulders and head as if you are completely exhausted.

Try to observe this lack of energy. How does it manifest in the body? Are there particular parts of the body where it is most pronounced?

What is the feeling tone?

Close your eyes or soften or defocus your gaze. Allow the mind to sink into a sleepy state with no control over thought. Can you abide in this state with just enough awareness to observe it?

Is there some relation to the condition of the body?

Can you observe the feeling tone?

Bring attention back to the breathing. How is the breathing at this time?

Open your eyes and adjust your posture.

CAUSE

Lethargy and drowsiness are a lack of energy of some kind and may be due to a variety of causes. Sometimes we do not have much energy available, for example after illness or disturbed sleep. Sometimes we do not have the right kind of energy; for example, we may have energy for physical activity, but when we stop the activity and try to sit quietly, the energy stops as well. Or we initially have energy, but then somehow it dissipates and we lose it. Mind and body are interrelated, so lacking energy in body can influence the energy level of the mind, and vice versa.

PHYSICAL ENERGY

The two main ways in which we lose physical energy are over-exertion and under-exertion. We can have some degree of energy but then drain it by excessive effort, overdoing it, trying too hard, straining or stretching our limits. The other way in which we lose energy is by not exercising the body or keeping it properly nourished, so we don't have the right conditions to sustain effort. In life and in spiritual practice we need a certain amount of physical stamina. The Five Factors for Striving include 'freedom from illness and affliction, and having a good digestion that is able to bear the strain of striving', together with faith, honesty, energy and wisdom (M.I,128). The monastic life which the Buddha recommended requires a reasonable standard of health and physical fitness in order to wander for alms-food and reside in remote and simple lodgings. The Thai Forest tradition emphasizes a lot of physical activity through walking for alms-food, sweeping and cleaning the monastery, and encourages walking meditation, which all help to maintain a strong and healthy body.

In certain situations some people may have quite a lot of dullness or sleepiness without realizing that it is due to a physical ailment. I know one monk who had a tiredness problem, and when he saw a doctor in the West he was diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. He thought he had a defilement when in fact he had a physical ailment. So now he takes some medicine, some extra

protein, manages his diet and can handle it better.

MENTAL ENERGY

Mental energy is often strongly influenced by physical energy. However, it also has its own sources. Some people are so active mentally that when they try to calm their mental activity in meditation the mind switches off and goes to sleep. They may be unconsciously mentally drained through excessive mental exertion, or have kept themselves awake through mental activity. I've met a number of very intelligent people who have had serious sleepiness problems when they tried to practise meditation. They could be energetically travelling all over the world in their thoughts and memories, but when they sit down to meditate with the monotonous breathing, they merely catch up on sleep. Sometimes this may have been due to a disconnection from physicality. So much attention was focused on the active mind that they were disassociated from the body and breathing, and thus unable to focus clearly on it.

THE TRANQUILLITY TRAP

Some people also fall into what I call the tranquillity trap. They think that meditation is all about tranquillity, so they do lots of sitting meditation and follow a quiet, peaceful lifestyle. They may even eat less and be less active. They notice that when the body calms down the mind calms down, and when they see some results they adopt this as a habit. However, often the mind calms down not because of some positive development of concentration, but rather because of lack of stimulation. When the mind is undisturbed by the body it seems to be calm. But while the mind may be tranquil, it is often also lacking in clarity or energy. This kind of calm is closer to lethargy than to vibrant tranquillity. Also, there is the danger that the body may start to break down due to lack of exercise or attention, or proper care.

That is what happened to me when I began meditation in Thailand. I originally went there to find a suitable environment in which to do a meditation retreat. I had learned meditation in Sri Lanka, but on returning to university in Vancouver had much difficulty continuing the practice. A number of us students lived together in a large house, so there were constant music (my next-door neighbour was a rock musician!), stimulating discussions and socializing. I decided to take a year out from study and do an intensive meditation retreat in Thailand to get my practice back on line. When I finally arrived there after nearly six months of travel through Europe, the Middle East and India, I was eager, even desperate, to get on with meditation. I threw myself into an intensive schedule of walking and sitting for 16 hours a day. After some initial difficulty settling, I soon began to experience some peaceful states of mind. I was so obsessed with meditating that I barely ate and got little exercise other than slow walking meditation. However, after about three months of this my health suddenly collapsed, and with it my tranquillity collapsed as well. I found myself lying on the bed exhausted, with a flood of thoughts, memories and emotions cascading thorough my mind.

Looking at my situation, the first thought was: 'This meditation does not work. I'm wasting my time, better pack up and go home.' Soon after thinking this, however, I picked up a book and the first thing I read was: 'The Eightfold Path comprises three parts: morality, meditation and wisdom.' Oh, yes, wisdom. What was this wisdom part? Wisdom is understanding how the mind creates problems, not merely tranquillizing them away (as I had been doing). I suddenly had an entirely new perspective on my situation. Although my illness was an obstacle to tranquillity, it was actually a source of great wisdom. The first important lesson was that tranquillity is a conditioned and very impermanent experience. The second lesson was that I needed to study these mental disturbances in order to find out how they were created in the first place. And that required a healthy body and mind.

In the Pali Canon (A.I,3) the fundamental causes of lethargy and drowsiness are said to be 'discontent (*arati*), weariness (*tandī*),

laziness (*vijambhitā*), drowsiness after meals (*bhattasammado*) and sluggishness of mind (*cetaso ca līnattam*).'

DISCONTENT OR RESISTANCE

Of course, if we are discontented about something we are usually not inclined to put too much energy into it. Thus if one has resistance to meditation or even a lack of interest in it, this can cause a decline in energy. This can often be quite unconscious. For example, some people know that they should meditate, that it is good for them, but then it becomes another excruciating task they feel compelled to perform. This attitude is generally not very conducive to an energetic approach. Sometimes, especially if awareness is close to revealing painful or uncomfortable aspects of self, some form of resistance may slip in to short-circuit the process. At other times we may inadvertently cultivate a negative or rejecting attitude, for example, when people misunderstand the teaching on 'letting go' and practise it as 'pushing away', or practise 'non-attachment' through rejection.

In my first year meditating in Thailand I developed a sleepiness problem during meditation. At first I thought it might be the usual suspects: tropical heat, physical fatigue, dullness of mind, etc. However, I tried various techniques such as sitting at times when I would normally be wide-awake, sitting in the open air, even taking caffeine before sitting, but the situation grew worse. It became so extreme that I would sit down and almost immediately become unconscious. I could sit for an hour like this, and, when I woke up, had no idea where I had been or what had happened. I realized that this was quite a serious problem and so arranged to go to a meditation centre to get some guidance. When I told the teacher there about this sleepiness problem he just said: 'Oh, be mindful of sleepiness.' I did not find this very helpful; however, I was there in the meditation centre with nothing else to do but watch sleepiness for three months! And it was very interesting.

In the first month I noticed that what I experienced was not actually just sleepiness, but rather that neutral feeling tone was

conditioning sleepiness. In the second month I realized that conditioning the neutral feeling tone was indifference. I then saw the causal sequence which I had created. While meditating alone in the monastery in north Thailand I had been disturbed by what I defined as worrying thoughts. I was living in Thailand and didn't have any plans: 'What am I going to do? Should I stay? Should I go?' When I looked in *The Path of Purification,* it said that the cure for worry was the meditation on equanimity; so I attempted to develop equanimity, but actually created indifference, the corrupted cousin of equanimity. At least I didn't have any worries, but after a while the sleepiness became so bad that it gave rise to worries of a different kind. Thus whenever I meditated I would assume the attitude of indifference, which is a turning off from experience, and this conditioned neutral feeling tone, which conditioned sleepiness. What turned this around was being mindful of the conditioned process of sleepiness, which was really taking an investigative interest in it. Indifference created a dismissive attitude, which caused a disinterested, neutral feeling tone undermining any energy, and resulted in sleepiness. The lesson here was that sleepiness has a cause, and being liberated from it requires us to follow it back to the source.

WEARINESS AND LAZINESS

Most people have experienced these at some time in their lives, maybe even often. However, generally they have some temporary cause and will pass. Usually when they are present it is not an appropriate time to try to meditate. Either allow the condition to pass or, if possible, find some other more active type of exercise such as walking. If either condition persists it may be useful to look into its causes, which may be a physical problem or possibly psychosomatic. It could be due to boredom, depression or unresolved grief. Laziness can also have many permutations. Some people may appear lazy, but their issue is really lack of initiative. Once they get some guidance or direction they can be very diligent. Others can be quietly energetic to plan the easiest

solution but not demonstrative in the doing, while others value quality (of practice) over quantity.

DROWSINESS AFTER MEALS AND SLUGGISHNESS OF MIND

Many people can relate to the experience of drowsiness after meals, particularly if one has eaten too much or it is a hot afternoon. Some drowsiness is fairly usual after eating, but may be compounded if one is then sedentary or inactive. Sluggishness of mind is probably also familiar to many people at some time, maybe especially first thing in the morning before coffee. This can have a physical aspect to it; for example, some particular foods are hard to digest. It may also be specifically mental due to disappointment, disinterest or a lack of inspiration.

LACK OF MOTIVATION

One source of lethargy is a lack of motivation or loss of purpose coming from not finding any joy in spiritual practice. If we are not getting any results from our efforts, we incline towards dissatisfaction and boredom. There are a few different causes of that too. One I call the spiritual doldrums. This is the stage when it seems as if our practice dries up. Usually this is more marked for people who are fairly new to the practice. The reason they keep practising is because they get some benefit from it. I don't think it's just the fragrant incense that inspires them. They get results and they want more: hopefully it's insights and not just lights. Sometimes it is simply the newness of the practice, the interest, the fascination of discovering your inner world. But after a while you may notice that the benefits appear to diminish. Maybe even the insights stop happening, or the enthusiasm or interest dries up.

When we first take up a spiritual practice it is all quite new to

us. But as we become more familiar with it, it becomes quite normal to be more awake, concentrated and peaceful in everyday life. It becomes our ordinary way of being rather than something especially spiritual. It can thus seem that nothing special is happening; the honeymoon is over and the doldrums have set in. But this may actually be a positive sign that spiritual practice is internalizing and normalizing within everyday life. As someone said: 'When you light a match in the dark it appears very bright. When you light it in the daylight it is hardly noticeable.'

This is somewhat similar to living in a new country. In the beginning it is all very exciting. There are different kinds of food and different cultural activities. However, after a while life there becomes quite ordinary. Then our appreciation for this new environment changes. It shifts to a different level. Rather than just appreciating the outward expressions, the food, the sights and sounds, you experience something else. When I was first staying in Thailand, for example, I found it fascinating. The Thais make all kinds of very interesting and tasty food. Later I became more familiar with it and it seemed quite ordinary. Then I began to appreciate something else about the Thai culture: the Thais' ability to go with the flow of life a lot more than Westerners. I had frequent reminders that everything is *my nay*, uncertain. This was quite different from my familiar Western values. Previously I had everything planned ahead, well-organized, the year's calendar filled with activities. But Thai people would say, 'Oh, never mind. We'll see what happens!' However, the other side of it was that they would say they'd come today but then they wouldn't turn up: 'It's uncertain whether I come today or tomorrow!' Nonetheless, there was a certain charm and good-naturedness to this. And it was very helpful for Buddhist spiritual practice, because they were not just talking about uncertainty and impermanence; they were living it, living with uncertainty every day of their lives. Maybe it would happen, maybe it wouldn't. Whereas people in the West become anxious, frustrated and angry if something planned doesn't happen. With my Western conditioning I'd get really frustrated when things didn't work out, and then I would be reminded:

'uncertain', and the frustration could just dissolve: 'Oh yes, right. The reality of things is really uncertain. It's my own problem that I am putting this fixedness on things, wanting them to work this way because that makes me feel secure and in control.'

MOTIVATION FULFILLED

Another possible cause of lethargy is that whatever motivated us to come to spiritual practice has been resolved. I have met a number of people who came to spiritual practice with particular difficulties or problems, and through the practice of meditation these problems were resolved. Then they wondered: 'OK, now what? What next?' Without some disturbing issue to work on or prod them further into spiritual practice, they would lose interest and motivation, and lapse into spiritual lethargy. Unless their practice went to a deeper level and they obtained some fresh spiritual nourishment, they usually didn't continue with it.

LOSS OF EXPECTATION

At other times the doldrums may set in because we had certain expectations which are not being fulfilled. Some people come to spiritual practice because of false promises: 'When am I going to levitate?' I remember hearing about that one. I am sure we all have expectations of some kind, but eventually we reach a point where we realize they aren't being fulfilled, so we can become disillusioned: 'It's not happening like it's supposed to', or: 'It's not like what the book said.' With disillusionment our energy becomes diffused or dissipates, replaced by spiritual lethargy. Unless we recognize this process and re-evaluate our expectations, we may soon be marooned in despair.

Interestingly, many years ago in Thailand a psychologist did a study on some of the monks. He had been a monk for a short time with Ajahn Chah and decided to do some psychology tests on the Western monks. Thus I once filled out the Minnesota Multiphase Personality Inventory. He was supposed to give us a series of tests

over a period of time, to see our progress (or regress) in personality development, I think. However, he didn't finish his project. Anyway, one of the results of his research was that he found that the people who came to Thailand with the most fixed idea of what they wanted to get were the ones who left the soonest. The ones who stayed the longest were the ones who came to Thailand only provisionally: 'I will stay for a month or two, and see how it goes.' They usually stayed another two months, and then another two months, and then twenty years passed. You would perhaps think that it would be the other way around. You might expect that the ones who came with the most commitment to be monks for the rest of their lives would have stayed the longest, while those who were just passing by to spend two months meditating in warm Thailand during the Canadian winter would have left sooner. But he found that it was the opposite, the reason being that the ones who had short-term plans could re-configure their plans according to how the practice was going. They could reflect: 'Is it working? Is it useful for me? Yes, it seems to be going OK, so I will stay another two months.' But the ones who had fixed expectations found that when they got to very culturally different Thailand, the reality didn't match up to their expectations.

I heard of one man from Chicago who planned to go to Thailand and become a holy monk forever. He flew to Thailand and two weeks later he left: the dogs were too noisy for him! He never imagined the dogs barking all night in Bangkok. He thought he'd go to Thailand to a peaceful Buddhist temple where everybody was peaceful and Buddhist, but the dogs were barking all night and nearly drove him crazy. I thought that Chicago wasn't actually all that quiet. I guess he got used to the Chicago Transit Authority train clanging around at all hours, but the dogs weren't barking. Somebody else who came to Thailand hadn't anticipated all the mosquitoes and bugs. It really shocked them. They came from England where there are hardly any pesky bugs, maybe a few flies. In Thailand you have to live with mosquitoes and ants feeding on you. So the point is that if we have very fixed expectations, it is hard to change, to adjust, to adapt to what is actually happening.

Our expectations are not fulfilled, and this can of course lead to disillusionment, lethargy and possibly despair. It can also propel us into other Hindrances such as restlessness and doubt.

SPIRITUAL DROUGHT

A further cause of the doldrums may be a spiritual drought due to our being stuck in a spiritual rut. Some of the spiritual qualities, especially the calming ones such as concentration, tranquillity and equanimity, benefit from a steady and regular effort at cultivation. However, sometimes this can lapse into a habitual, ritualistic attitude which becomes perfunctory, without vitality. We just go through the motions but are often not really present with them. This results in a dumbing down or numbing out of spiritual practice, with a loss of energy and creeping lethargy. At other times we may religiously keep practising some technique, either one which some teacher has suggested, one from which we have previously had results or one which we like because we think it is good for us. After some time this can also change into a lifeless, energy-depleting ritual which numbs us into spiritual complacency-cum-lethargy. Our noble spiritual aspirations are worn out and drained of vitality, and we are left high and dry with empty rites and rituals.

CESSATION

Lethargy and drowsiness can cease through increasing energy. Most specifically, this is referred to as 'the element of inception (*ārambhadhātu*), the element of persistence, (*nikkamadhātu*), the element of exertion (*parakkamadhātu*)' (A.I,4). The Commentary on

[1] NDB,1595 note 33. Eleven ways of arousing the energy factor of awakening: 1) reviewing fearfulness in the Realms of Misery, 2) seeing the benefits of attainments from energy, 3) reflecting that one is on the path taken by the Buddhas, Silent Buddhas and Great Disciples, not by those who are idlers, 4) honouring the gift of alms through the fruit of practice, 5) reflecting on the greatness of the Master, who praises the energetic, 6) reflecting on the greatness of the Dhamma heritage, 7) removing lethargy and drowsiness through a) perception of light, b) change of postures, c) frequenting open air, 8) avoiding idle people, 9) associating with energetic people, 10) reviewing Right Effort, 11) resolution on energy (PP,137; cf. CDB,1907 note 87).

the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* defines these as 'three successively powerful degrees of energy.'[1] Frequently giving appropriate attention to these three degrees of energy is mentioned as the de-nourishment of lethargy and drowsiness (S.V,105) and the nutriment for the arising and fulfilment of the energy factor of awakening (S.V,104).

The Pali Canon also states that when the mind is 'sluggish' (*linam*) it is appropriate to develop the three energizing Factors of Awakening: investigation of phenomena, energy and rapture (S.V,113). Since developing energy is the main principle, it may be best to consider it first.

ENERGY AND EFFORT

There are many kinds of energy, so it would be useful to know what the Buddha referred to as energy. Sometimes he gave a general encouragement:

> *'Bhikkhus, the lazy person abides in suffering, full of evil, unwholesome states and great is the welfare which he wastes. The energetic person abides in well-being, separated from evil, unwholesome states and great is the welfare he supplements. ... Therefore bhikkhus, rouse energy for the attainment of the not yet attained, the acquiring of the not yet acquired, the realization of the not yet-realized ...'* (S.II,29)

The most frequent reference the Buddha made to cultivating energy is in relation to striving to give up unwholesome qualities and cultivate wholesome ones:

> *'Then again, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu has aroused energy for the giving up of unwholesome qualities and acquiring wholesome qualities; steadfast, strong in exertion, not putting down the burden of acquiring wholesome qualities.'* (A.IV,352;V,24;90)

At A.I,12 arousal of energy is said to be the single most useful thing for the arising of wholesome states and the decline of unwholesome states. This was formalized into the factor of Right Effort (*sammā vāyāma*) in the Eightfold Path or the Four Right

Strivings (*sammappadhāna*). It is generating the desire (*chanda*) for the non-arising of evil unwholesome states; for the giving up of arisen evil unwholesome states; for the arising of wholesome states; for the continuance, development and fulfilment of arisen wholesome states. (S.V,9;244)

The Buddha's strongest encouragement for cultivating energy was the determination he proclaimed shortly before awakening and which he suggested to both monastics and laity:

'Surely, let skin, sinews and bones remain, let flesh and blood dry up in the body, whatever can be attained by human strength, human energy, human exertion, I will not relax my energy until I have attained it.' (A.I,50; IV,190; S.II,28;276; M.I,481)

WILLPOWER

For many people one of the most common ways of cultivating energy is willpower. Some people are very good at generating willpower; they are very wilful and have a lot of drive in life. Behind this drive is the will, and will is actually an extension of ego. Who's doing the willing? 'I' am willing the doing, 'me' ordering the body about: 'Sit there, do this, do that!' And the basic characteristic of ego is that it always wants to get its own way. Thus it is narrow-mindedly focused on some ego-supporting goal, such as, 'I want to get enlightened' (in spite of the fact that enlightenment is egoless!)

So here is a source of energy, but it has a false face to it: it's energy powered by ego. It will get you through difficulty and we can use it in emergencies. However, spiritual practice is about seeing through the illusion of ego, rather than becoming dependent upon it or nourishing it. We must accept that it works sometimes, but ultimately it's a false power. Thus it is important to be able to recognize when we're depending upon willpower and learn to relax it. We do this by not being so obsessive about success or control, which are the goals of willpower. It manifests as a stubborn rigidity and lack of flexibility. Sometimes we can use it to

push through hardships, but be careful not to become addicted to it or caught in it as the ultimate source of power. What do we want to succeed at: truth or attainment? What do we want to control?

LIFE POWER

When we are more aware of the energy in the body and mind, perhaps we can recognize a different kind of power. When we are not dominated by willpower there is still life power, a fundamental life force. For example, we can't stop breathing. You can wilfully hold your breath for a while but you cannot stop breathing. Breathing is an instinct which we all recognize to some degree in our lives. This is the instinct for survival, a very fundamental drive to survive. Most of the time it is very mixed up with the ego, so it's hard to distinguish. But if you can put aside the ego part of it, the willpower part of it, you can recognize that there is another kind of power in the background, and you can give it more emphasis. This is the energy that has steadiness and continuity to it. Willpower is something we turn on and off at will and is hard to sustain for any length of time, as it is an artificial energy. Life power, however, continues throughout life at a life-sustaining pace.

INTENTIONALITY

Much more beneficial than willpower is the factor of intentionality. Thus rather than lock into self-directed willpower, we set up the skilful intention to practise founded upon life power. This gives us direction and motivation without the rigidity of willpower. Intention is more open-ended and able to tune into other factors, such as the present moment strength of the body, the condition of the mind and the external situation. It is like a background manager rallying the various physical and mental factors and guiding them forward. Thus for example, when you are sitting in meditation, set up the intention to sit and then try to determine just the right amount of effort required to sustain the body sitting upright. Be careful not to strain, push or force; use just enough

exertion to keep the body from collapsing. That careful balance of 'just enough', carefully herded by skilful intention, is not as obvious as wilful effort, but it can be maintained for much longer. Right Aspiration or Intention as a factor in the Eightfold Path is the intention for renunciation, non-ill-will and harmlessness, factors which undermine the coercive ambition of willpower.

AWAKENING FACTOR OF INVESTIGATION OF PHENOMENA

The awakening factor of investigation of phenomena follows on from mindfulness. What precisely are these phenomena? In essence, we are trying to get out of the 'paralyzing' and 'smothering' effect of lethargy and drowsiness by changing our perspective from being enveloped in them to being the knowing of them. Once we can clearly distinguish lethargy and drowsiness in their various forms and intensities, we can make a thorough investigation of them. How and when do they arise? This process can bring some energy into the mind through: a) arousing energy to investigate, b) changing our consciousness to be the investigator, c) creating some 'excitement' from insight into the causes.

One of the practical ways to develop investigation is through generating exploratory interest in spiritual practice. It is very beneficial to approach meditation practice with an attitude of exploring body and mind, rather than having some preconceived plan of what spiritual practice should be like: 'I'll get rid of the Five Hindrances, develop the Seven Factors of Awakening, and I'll realize stream entry!' Spiritual practice never lives up to our self-imposed expectations, and holding those expectations usually results in disappointment, discouragement and loss of energy. However, if we can turn our disappointment into taking interest in what processes we are going through, we can generate another source of energy. We can break through the old stifling, numbing habits with an investigative enquiry: 'Hey, what's going on here?' Meditative investigation is a tool for exploring body and mind in order to discover the truth of the way things are.

We can do this even with a common meditation object like the breathing. What if you take an extra interest in it, and rather than relate to it as some perfunctory exercise we do, start to investigate it more carefully: 'What is this breathing process?' There is a profound dynamic experience going on there, not just a repetitive concept of breathing: the breath comes into the body, it inflates; a moment of pause — the breath goes out. As we reach more clarity about what this process is, it can even be very exciting. Imagine breathing being exciting - maybe for the first few breaths, and then memory freezes it. But if you can actually stay with the immediacy of breathing, every breath is totally new. You never breathe the same breath twice, or you might asphyxiate! You notice that the way the breath changes depends on the state of your mind, on the state of your body. You can become more and more interested in how the body affects the mind, how the mind affects the breathing, and it becomes a really absorbing process if there is some interest in it. And this can generate energy. We're actually turning watching the breath into something we are studying or investigating, rather than something we are just religiously doing.

We can thus apply this attitude to exploring the nature of lethargy and drowsiness, their cause and their cessation. Of course, the trick is to begin this investigative process before one gets totally engulfed in them. This is hopefully what mindfulness can reveal and allow us the space to explore. There's a certain exhilaration in exploring something to really find the truth about it.

AWAKENING FACTOR OF RAPTURE

Formally speaking, rapture (*pīti*) is one of the qualities of the meditative absorptions. However, lesser forms of rapture, bliss or joy may arise from either inspiration, insight into the teachings or some forms of concentration. *The Path of Purification* (PP.149), translating it as 'happiness' distinguishes five kinds from 'minor' to 'pervasive', with the fourth 'uplifting', capable of causing levitation! The 'pervasive' variety is a factor of absorption.

One of the most common sources of spiritual energy for many

Buddhists is inspiration, which usually comes from their devotion and faith. Some people gain inspiration from the example of the Buddha or their own spiritual teacher. Some are inspired by the truth of the Buddha's teaching or their own insights into Dhamma. Others gain inspiration from the Sangha or community of practitioners, either the lineage of previous awakened disciples or those diligently practising today. The Pali Canon mentions the rapture that comes from the meditative recollection of the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, one's own virtuous behaviour, one's own generosity and the celestial beings. At the time of devoted recollection the unwholesome qualities of lust, aversion and delusion do not obsess the mind, as it is 'straight' and focused on the theme. From this gladness arises, followed by rapture, tranquillity, happiness and concentration (A.V,329f).

Personally, I distinguish two kinds of inspiration: one which inclines toward encouragement and one which inclines towards admiration or worship. Take, for example, the life of the Buddha. If we view it, interpret it, understand it in one particular way, it can hopefully lead to encouragement. From a historical perspective, there was this person who lived 2,600 years ago, a human being just like you and I, who through his own spiritual striving could realize awakening. Isn't that encouraging? Well, maybe we have a long way to go, but at least it is encouraging to know that a human being like you and me can also become enlightened.

However, we can also view it in a different way, for example, in terms of the miracles surrounding the Buddha's birth, the auspicious dreams his mother had before he was born and all his special physical characteristics and mental qualities. Then the most we can do is admire, maybe worship him: 'I'm down here on the ground and he's up there in enlightenment.' This might even discourage you or put you off Buddhist practice: 'Well it's impossible for me; this guy is a superhuman being'. This, unfortunately, is how some people think: they put the Buddha on such a high pedestal that he becomes out of reach. However, for some people it can still be inspiring that there is a spiritual hero, and through their devotion they can develop various wholesome

qualities. While it is, of course, not easy to become a self-awakened Buddha, it is still possible to become a fully-awakened Arahant if we follow his teachings. Also, it can be helpful to keep in mind that coming across the teachings of a Buddha is very rare, so we should not waste this opportunity, as it may not occur again any time soon.

The energy of inspiration can sometimes be unstable or temperamental, and without a firm foundation can easily change. I've seen people come to the monastery very inspired to be monks, happily ever after. That kind of inspiration does lift people up, their eyes are wide-open and they become very energized. But it's often only one part of themselves which is inspired. When things get difficult the shallow inspiration fails, they can't keep it up. They can't keep inspiration charged when they are no longer impressed with the life, or they are not succeeding, or not the centre of attention or always being encouraged. Or their inspiration is based on superficial curiosity, and once they get into the daily grind it starts to fade away. As one monk said: 'The real source of success in the spiritual life is not inspiration, but desperation!' Not quite so inspiring, is it? It all depends upon how grounded in reality one's inspiration is.

After three years as a monk I lost my inspiration. My practice had 'plateaued' and no new insights were forthcoming. However, I was quite fortunate to then meet Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Sumedho, whom I saw as living examples of the fruit of practice. My inspiration for the monastic life was re-ignited, but after nine years it again faded away. But then I moved to live in the monasteries in England and had a different set of challenges to keep me going. However, after around fifteen years inspiration again waned. But I was quite canny and had anticipated such a time. I had read the main Buddhist scriptures a couple of times and that was inspirational. But there was one of the scriptures I didn't read; I put it aside for special emergencies. That was a good thing.

The book I kept aside for my monastic emergency was the poems of the enlightened monks and nuns, the *Theragāthā* and *Therigāthā*. These are all the success stories of the monks and nuns in the

Buddha's time who realized full awakening. So when I lost my own inspiration I opened these texts and read these profound stories of different people and the dedicated ways in which they practised. And they all succeeded, they all realized enlightenment. One of the valuable lessons from this collection of spiritual poetry was the fact that insight into Dhamma can happen at any time. One nun, for example, was diligent but couldn't realize awakening. Then one night she entered her hut to rest, and as she extinguished her lamp her mind was liberated. *Nibbāna* means 'to extinguish, to go out'. As the lamp was extinguished, so her grasping of ego was extinguished. She uttered this poem of her awakening experience and it was recorded in the scriptures.[2]

> *Tending field with plough and whip, sowing seeds in the earth, nourishing wife and children, the young man enjoys wealth.*
>
> *Why do I, complete in moral conduct, following the teacher's doctrine, not acquire nibbāna? I am not indolent or proud.*
>
> *I washed my feet and watch the water. I see the wash-water flow down the slope.*
>
> *Thereupon my mind concentrates, as training a noble horse.*
>
> *Taking a lamp I entered my dwelling; I considered the couch, then sat on the bed.*
>
> *Taking the pin, I drew down the wick.*
>
> *The extinguishing of the lamp — the liberation of the mind!*

Another valuable lesson from reading these accounts was learning the diverse ways in which people practised. Some of them were already at a very advanced level of spiritual maturity, and only needed a short teaching from the Buddha or some initial instructions from a disciple to realize the truth. Others had experienced severe emotional trauma and sought refuge in the teachings, and were thus very motivated by their suffering. Yet others struggled for many years before they had a breakthrough. Some of these stories may prefigure our own path of practice, or inspire us to continue because our own problems seem paltry in

[2] Bhikkhuni Paṭācārā, *Therigāthā* 112-116. Her tragic story of losing children, husband, parents and brother is told in GDB, 336f.

comparison.

Another means of arousing rapture is to consciously cultivate it. One of the exercises in the discourse on mindfulness of breathing (M. *sutta* 118) is to breathe in experiencing rapture. Rather than wait for it to arise, we can make an effort to generate it ourselves. A more simple method is to cultivate a joyful attitude to meditation. Find ways to make it into an enjoyable experience. One suggestion I give to people who are practising on their own is to meditate only as long as it is enjoyable. Some people prefer to sit by the clock and perhaps spend the last ten to fifteen minutes enduring pain or discomfort. If we continue in this way the discomfort will create resistance, tension and displeasure, and maybe the only way out is to fall asleep! If you enjoy meditating, it will create enjoyment.

OTHER WAYS TO ROUSE ENERGY

A SENSE OF URGENCY

A particular source of energy and motivation for spiritual practice is translated literally as 'a sense of urgency', the Pali word *saṃvega*. This means to be spiritually stimulated, aroused, moved, usually by some existential crisis. Many people are stirred by a sense of urgency when they have a life crisis such as a serious illness, or the death or illness of someone close to them. However, then they are often so distraught that their spiritual energy is paralyzed. Thus it can be useful to review the dangers of being born and the inevitability of ageing, sickness and death as a special meditative theme while we still have energy for reflective practice. It is easy to practise when you are young and have healthy knees. As you get older it is harder to practise, not just physically but also mentally. We may not always be healthy and the mind may not be so agile. Most of us need a certain amount of physical strength and fitness, and to be free of diseases, in order to practise. You could say: 'Well, ideally I can practise anywhere, even when I'm sick.' But try it - it's not so easy. What about when there are difficult situations, such as

the news of a financial meltdown? Could you meditate then, when the stock markets are crashing down around you? Or how about your own life situation? I like comfortable conditions like warmth and enough food to be able to meditate. And yet those conditions can change.

Three of the other 'grounds for *saṃvega*' which are meaningful to Buddhists are reviewing the suffering in the hell realms, the suffering which we have (presumably) undergone in past rebirths and the (possible) suffering we will undergo in future rebirths if we are not diligent enough in this life. The last source of urgency is reviewing the suffering deriving in the present life from maintaining this frail body (PP.140; cf. A.II,115f). Special mention is made of developing the perception of a skeleton as a means to arouse a sense of urgency (S.V,130).

The Buddha outlined the 'five favourable occasions for striving': 1) being young, 2) being in good health, 3) abundant alms-food, 4) harmony in society, 5) when the Sangha is in concord without disputes (A.III,67). We have limited time, we have limited energy. Wise reflection on this can give us a little more impulse to practise. We had better put our time to good use. Minutes are ticking by, we've only got these sixty, seventy, eighty years to get enlightened. Quick, we've got to hurry!

MINDFULNESS OF DEATH

It can also be helpful to develop to some degree the meditation on death. I don't usually recommend this theme in public, since people relate to death in many different ways. For some people with unresolved grief it can be a source of renewed trauma. For others it can be one of the ways to generate energy or encourage more diligence in spiritual practice. If you find that you need that kind of stronger practice, it can be useful to contemplate regularly that death can come at any time. We just go on assuming that we're going to continue living until one day we don't; one day we're surprised, and then it's too late!

In one discourse (A.III,304f), the Buddha encourages the monks to contemplate death because it is of 'great fruit and benefit'. He then asks if anyone contemplates death and one of the monks says: 'Oh yes, I think, "May I live just for a day and a night."' Another monk says: 'I think, "May I live long enough to finish my alms-food."' Another one says: 'I think, "May I live just the length of time to chew and swallow a single mouthful of food."' Finally one of them says: 'I think, "May I live just long enough to breathe in or breathe out."'The Buddha says that the last two monks live heedfully and develop mindfulness of death keenly. We usually are not aware of it, but death can come at any time, it can be so immediate. Thus when we understand that if we doze off while meditating we might not wake up, we may generate a renewed respect for diligence.

SUFFERING

Whether we acknowledge it or not, suffering can be a source of energy. But we need to be careful how we approach it, because too much suffering can be exhausting and discourage us. To have constant pain, distress, disappointment, tribulation, can be very debilitating. On the other hand, if there is some stress, some discomfort, it inspires us to look for a solution. In one scripture the Buddha said that suffering either leads to confusion or to search (A.III,416). Some people just get confused by it, they become bewildered by what's happening: 'I shouldn't be this way, I don't want it to be this way.' Maybe they waste energy in the struggle to conquer it. Others may stop and reflect: 'I need to find a solution for this.' Rather than try to deny it, ignore it or suppress it, they try to find a way out of suffering. It gives them extra energy to reflect, to contemplate their life situation and search for a spiritual solution. Without this spur we can simply drift along intoxicated by complacency.

MODERATION

I've met some people who were very inspired and really serious

about spiritual practice, and put a lot of energy into it. But often there is an over-emphasis on doing, on trying to get somewhere, attain something. Maybe this is helpful at the very beginning, like the enthusiasm of young people with lots of energy. But I would caution them: 'Watch out; you might burn out!' If you just keep emphasizing the energy part, you're going to burn out. Better to rein it in, to temper it, to create some kind of moderating influence over it. Sometimes this means that we may have to relinquish the driving energy and relax more, or even to experience how we get by when there isn't any energy. Sometimes energy makes us very focused on one thing, so that we become obsessed with it. We can get really high on energy, but eventually it will top out. We all know how it is when we're in really good health and everything is going well: when you've just had a good cup of coffee, you can meditate all night. But what about the next day, and the one after? Remember the middle way?

A very insightful story in the Pali Canon illustrates the importance of balancing energy (A.III,374f). Venerable Sona was exceptionally diligent in his striving, but was unable to realize any benefit and thought about returning to lay life. Recognizing his great potential, the Buddha gave him a teaching. He questioned him on his experience in lay life with a lute. Sona confirmed that only when the strings were properly tuned, neither too taut nor too slack, was the lute suitable for playing. The Buddha responded that similarly, in spiritual practice, only when energy is properly tuned does it work. With this personal teaching Venerable Sona was soon able to balance his energy and realize full awakening.

Elsewhere (A.I,257f) it is advised, when developing the 'higher mind', to alternate between attending to the three qualities of concentration, exertion and equanimity. If applying only concentration, the mind tends to laziness; if applying only exertion, the mind tends to restlessness; and if applying only equanimity, the mind may not become properly concentrated for final liberation.

[3] The Commentary on the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* says that he had energetically practised walking meditation for seven days (NDB,1783 note 1548; cf. GDB,77f).

DROWSINESS DURING MEDITATION

There is a discourse (A.IV,85f) in which the Buddha specifically addresses the theme of drowsiness during meditation. The Buddha's left-hand disciple was Venerable Moggallāna, and one day the Buddha, with the 'divine eye', notices he is nodding off in the forest while trying to meditate.[3] The Buddha comes to him (by means of psychic power) and gives him a very important discourse, a teaching in which he lists eight ways to deal with sleepiness.

The first one is to not give attention to whatever is causing drowsiness. This could be a meditation object which is especially tranquillizing or some suppressive-type attitude.

The second one is to reflect upon, investigate and carefully consider the Buddha's teachings. This is a way to stimulate the mind skilfully. We think of meditation as trying to quieten the mind, but sometimes the mind needs energizing; we need to apply mental activity to something skilful such as reflecting upon Dhamma.

The third one is to recite the Dhamma. Technically, this requires, as in the Buddha's time, having learned passages by heart so that one can recite them out loud. Particularly useful are inspirational passages, for example, the Three Refuges in English. If you have not learned the teachings by heart, perhaps you could read some of the teachings. One contemporary teacher who encourages all-night practice alternates periods of sitting and walking meditation with repetitive hour-long recitations which people have found very energizing.

The fourth way when you notice you're nodding off and too dull to study or reflect upon the Dhamma, is to 'pull both ears' and massage the limbs. One of my methods when I am sitting and feel tired or sleepy is to quietly massage my fingers. This is a type of reflexology. If you massage your fingers you can stimulate the whole body. If I do it quietly nobody even notices, yet it can have quite a strong effect on increasing circulation and stimulating energy.

The fifth method is to get up from your seat, splash water on your face and stare up at the bright stars. We might, say, go outside to get some fresh air, or maybe do some stretching.

When you return to sitting meditation and drowsiness has still not gone, the sixth method, maybe not quite so easy, is to develop the perception of light. There are some meditation exercises dealing with creating light in the mind so that night is as light as day.[4] I wouldn't recommend this, though, because it is hard to put the light out! One monk I knew in Thailand was on a long intensive retreat and had a problem with sleepiness. His teacher told him about this meditation of developing light and he developed it so that there was light in his mind continuously. He could close his eyes and the light was always on. But then he couldn't get to sleep! He told his teacher about this new problem and was advised: 'Well, now you have to learn how to put the light out!' So for the next couple of days he had to sit there, close his eyes and put the light out. Then he was able to sleep again. An easier and safer method is to open your eyes when you feel sleepy. You can open them just enough to allow in enough light to counter drowsiness, without looking around or focusing on any object. Try blinking vigorously for a few minutes, or do some eye-stretching.

If sleepiness still does not subside, the seventh suggestion is to get up and do walking meditation 'with faculties contained and mind collected'. This can physically generate more energy. Your eyes are open and you need to be more attentive. It is much harder to doze off when you're walking. But it can happen; be careful! There are also a few ways to modify this. One can adjust the speed of the walk and the length of the path. For some people vigorous walking can be invigorating, while for others it is exhausting. To increase alertness, some people benefit from a short walking path which means they must often stop and turn. Other people find a short path disturbing, as they are not able to reach a comfortable

[4] The Commentary on the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* gives the instructions of giving attention to daylight, sometimes closing the eyes and sometimes opening them. When the light appears (in the mind) whether his eyes are open or closed, he is successful at creating the perception of light. cf. CDB,1946 note 273. However, Analayo (2012 p.68), referring to D.III,223, suggests that the 'perception of light' could mean 'mental clarity'.

rhythm for concentration. It can also be useful to experiment: alternating the speed, taking very long steps, walking backwards, walking on a narrow or darkened path, walking beside a body of water or the sea, walking up and down a hill, etc. - whatever helps reduce drowsiness.

And finally, if all else fails, the eighth method is to lie down on your right side intending to wake up as soon as you are conscious again. Have a rest, but don't oversleep, and get up as soon as you awaken. Perhaps you are tired because the body is physically exhausted. Maybe the mind is exhausted. Then you need to rest. Everyone needs to find out for themselves how much sleep they need. Someone once asked Ajahn Chah: 'How long should I sleep?' References in the scriptures indicate that the Buddha slept only four hours a night, so some teachers take that quite literally, and on some retreats you take a vow to sleep only four hours. Ajahn Chah answered: 'I don't know what you need. Find out for yourself.' You are the best judge of knowing how much sleep you need. Some people may use lots of physical energy and perhaps need more rest. Others may have an active mind and need more mental rest. Rather than struggle with four hours' sleep for the rest of your life, it's more important to know your own mind. Even if you sleep ten hours a night, at least you know. And as you bring that knowing quality into your mind, the mind becomes clearer and you may find that you need less sleep. Your mind is becoming clearer through your own knowing about yourself. This is different from seeking the answer from outside yourself.

It might be helpful to add here a ninth method which some of the Thai Forest teachers used to deal with drowsiness. This is a rather extreme method which I personally would not recommend, as it could result in injury or even death. However, maybe some people might wish to try a modified version of it. The method used was to sit on the edge of a cliff or large rock, so that anyone who nodded seriously would be very likely to fall over the edge. Of course, we only have reports from those who were successful with this method! The theory is that one can get an extra charge of energy from the survival instinct to chase drowsiness away.

Another, safer version of this was to sit on a very unstable raised platform, so that any nodding tipped you off for a rude awakening! Perhaps a modern version would be to sit on the edge of a chair or a slightly raised platform, or beside a pool or pond of cold water (somewhere where you will not suffer injury), just to test whether this method has any effect for you or not. For some people, perhaps doing sitting meditation in the open air, where there is a lot more stimulation through temperature changes, wind, insects and noises, may be a source of generating some further degree of wakefulness. This is one of the standard methods mentioned in the Commentaries on the Pali Canon (cf. NDB,1595 note 34).

SPECIFIC METHODS

Sometimes working through lethargy and drowsiness requires the development of particular skilful means or the use of specific techniques to deal with your particular brand of them. Mindfulness should always be leading, but we can also be creative and give an ear to intuition.

One of the causes of lethargy and drowsiness mentioned in the scriptures is 'drowsiness after meals'. As mentioned in the chapter on sensual desires, the practice of 'moderation in eating' is of great help for this. The Commentary on the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* explains it as stopping eating when there is still room for four or five mouthfuls of food (NDB,1595n.34). Also, engaging soon after the meal in walking meditation or some other form of activity such as sweeping or cleaning the lodging, may be beneficial for increasing energy as well as helping digestion.

Another cause of lethargy and drowsiness mentioned is 'sluggishness of mind'. Firstly, it is helpful to distinguish whether this has a physical basis to it or not. It may be caused by changes in weather, particularly hot weather. I noticed during the particularly hot, humid afternoons in Thailand that my mind was very sluggish. This was such a common experience that I referred to it as the 'tropical slump', and the only effective method for dealing with it was to do more walking meditation and have a

caffeine drink! Sometimes it may also be due to some digestive upset or sleep disturbance.

One of the common ailments encountered by meditators, especially in situations of long intensive retreats, is kidney troubles due to many hours of sitting. Sitting for hours can cause tension in the lower back and compression in the kidneys, so one of my monk friends, who was part-Chinese, told me about the Chinese water cure. This is to drink five glasses of distilled water first thing in the morning to flush out the kidneys. (If you ever try it, be careful to be somewhere where you can easily find a toilet). The theory was to flush the kidneys; however, I found it had another effect. The digestive system has to process all that water, so the circulation speeds up. I drank all that water first thing in the morning and felt as if I had drunk a strong cup of coffee. I was 'buzzed out', but very peacefully, and didn't fall asleep again (partly because I had to go to the toilet every fifteen minutes). The paper my monk friend gave me on it claimed it cured many diseases by flushing out the toxins in the kidneys. While five glasses is the optimum specified, I suggest you should experiment to find what is suitable for you.

At other times sluggishness of mind may have more of a mental basis to it. Perhaps we have had a period of emotional distress or experience disturbing memories. Maybe we are under a cloud of disinterestedness, or feeling dispirited or depressed. The main method of dealing with this sluggish mind (as mentioned above) is to develop the more energetic of the Factors of Awakening: investigation of dhamma, energy and rapture (S.V,113).

THE SPIRITUAL DOLDRUMS

The doldrums can be a cause for spiritual lethargy, but they could also be a positive sign indicating that the practice is really working. It can seem as if nothing is really happening if we're still caught up in the spiritual materialism of ego values and waiting for some spiritual pay-off. However, when the practice begins to work, it is working outside the normal framework of ego and its rewards. It's working behind the scenes at selflessness, undermining those

ego-values or unhooking our selves from them. We no longer need a spiritual pay-off for the ego, we have seen through its game. So rather than worrying that there is no progress in practice because we don't see obvious results, we appreciate that the practice has now actually progressed to a more refined level, where the doldrums are in fact an expression of more tranquillity and subtlety in our practice. This may require us to reassess our priorities in spiritual practice: stimulating rewards or deeper peace? Or we may give more attention to the internal processes rather than external benefits.

If we recognize that the doldrums may be due to our rigidity in following some technique, maybe we need to be more creative. The purpose of techniques is to help develop spiritual qualities. So what other ways can we use to develop them? Ajahn Chah never adhered to any specific techniques. He taught that there are all manner of skilful means (*upāya*) to use for the great variety of unskilful mind states. His watchword was: 'If it works, use it.' Thus by not adhering to any particular techniques, we can use them all as and when they are necessary. I think he knew how clever the self was at requisitioning anything to defend itself, even spiritual techniques. Also, even if we have had success with some technique, it will usually not work indefinitely because the nature of self changes. We need to keep one step ahead of the cunning ego.

CHANGING ROUTINES

One way to keep ahead of the ego is to keep changing the form of practice. Ajahn Chah was a master at changing routines. Just when people got used or habituated to some monastery routine, he would change it. The self likes habit, it hides behind familiar routines. So sometimes upsetting routines can help to shift blocked energy and shake us out of dullness or lethargy. Instead of hunkering down with your usual staid routine, try going for a long mindful walk and see how that affects your energy level.

One time in my hut in Thailand I was struggling with meditation on

a hot afternoon, not very successfully. I thought I would just step outside to get some fresh air. I sat down on the concrete walkway and leaned against the wall. As I sat there I noticed the patterns of sunlight on the ground, the leaves gently fluttering in the breeze, the insects parading past, and I noticed that the mind was very quiet and wide-awake! I sat there for about an hour experiencing a level of peace I had not attained after hours of formal meditation practice.

Another especially important and helpful approach to practice is to always bring mindful presence of mind to whatever we are doing, particularly our regular practice. I usually recommend that people observe the condition of body and mind at the beginning of every session of formal practice. What is the bodily and mental condition we are with at this moment? Once we are clearly aware of the immediate conditions, we can adjust our approach to practice accordingly to suit the situation in the here and now. Usually people take up their regular practice in some fixed methodical way, and then struggle to get it to fit with the present moment reality – and then they wonder why they are fatigued or why they fall asleep when they are just mindlessly following some dead routine.

DEPENDENCY ON THINKING

Dealing with lethargy and drowsiness for those people who have cultivated the habit of depending upon thinking to keep themselves awake requires a change of attitude to how we relate to our thinking. On one of our three-month retreats in Switzerland a couple of people came to stay at the monastery. I gave them a few instructions on mindfulness of breathing, and after a couple of weeks I said: 'OK, now let go of the breathing and just observe the states of mind.' One of the retreatants was confused. He told me he couldn't watch his mind. He was a reflective person and remembered that his first teaching on meditation was: 'Meditation is not thinking', so he'd been trying for five years not to think. Imagine that! Now he had two thoughts: the thoughts in the mind

and the thought to not think them. He was chasing his thoughts around in his head, and it usually took him about a month of intensive practice before he was able to stop thinking. But then he couldn't observe thinking or other states of mind because he had suppressed them. Then at the end of the retreat when he went back to ordinary life, the thinking programme started again, and his mind was out of control. The thoughts were thinking him again, and he usually fell into a deep depression.

To be able to observe the thinking process creates a different relationship with our thoughts. Rather than wasting energy trying to stop them, when we can observe them they sometimes stop by themselves. Maybe they've got a bit of momentum from all our old habits, but if we don't keep encouraging them or trying to suppress them, they'll eventually quieten down. We're not feeding energy to the thoughts, but putting energy into mindfully observing and knowing the thoughts.

Similarly, some people have cultivated the habit of always trying to control their thoughts as their fundamental mode of functioning in life. There are all sorts of thoughts going on in the mind and you need to have some degree of control over them or they might drive you crazy sometimes, but it can be an exhausting struggle. This is often preceded by an insidious judging mind constantly commenting: 'That's an inspired thought, that's a stupid thought.' Meditation practice is shifting the energy to observing what's going on in the mind rather than trying to control it. However, it's not going to happen overnight. It's a matter of de-energizing our habitual way of relating to thinking and energizing the new way of observing it. This takes some clear awareness of the mental habits of judgementalism and controlling. It took me a long time (and I'm still working on it) to be able to experience a non-judgemental awareness. I had a very strong habit of a judgemental mind, with the added complication that it was masquerading as a virtue. Of course, it is necessary to distinguish good from bad and then judge which is best for us, but most of the time it was someone else telling me what was best for me, rather than clear awareness and experiential wisdom. However, the more we can give energy

to observing this mental process, the more it fades away or takes a back seat.

If you are able to observe the kind of thoughts occurring just before drowsiness sets in, you may recognize them as trying to deny or ignore something, or trying to resist, refuse or push something away. You have created a suppressive or denying state of mind. And the usual way for the mind, the psyche to deal with that is to fall asleep. If you notice this tendency, you need to do something about that underlying attitude. So it is helpful to be clear about your intentionality in practice. In the Eightfold Path, the factor of Right Aspiration is the intention for renunciation, non-ill-will and harmlessness. Is denial renunciation? Is pushing away harmlessness?

If you have over-emphasized or over-energized mental activity, it can be very helpful to try to shift awareness to the body. Investigate the sensations in the body, rather than looking at your thoughts whirling around. Try to broaden out awareness through the practice of mindfulness of bodily sensations, so you aren't just dependent on staying awake by thinking, but expanding your repertoire of what the mind is aware of. In this way you can ground some of the excess mental energy in the body and come to a more even balance of energy in body and mind. You may notice that this has a beneficial effect for dealing with extremes of lethargy and drowsiness, or at least you are better able to shift energy between the physical and mental, depending upon which is more helpful.

WISDOM

Of course, ultimately the greatest resource for dealing with lethargy and drowsiness is wisdom. It is helpful, even skilful, to have a discerning faculty of mind. Wisdom is knowing what is skilful and what is unskilful. But to really know this deeply you need to know both sides. Usually we don't want to look at the bad stuff; we judgementally don't want to see it, we suppress it, ignore it, we look only at the good stuff. But then we never get to understand how the mind really works. Are you able to be clearly

mindful of and investigate lethargy and drowsiness? Perhaps some friendliness may be helpful.

Wisdom evolves through several stages, from knowledge, to understanding, to ultimate wisdom in the sense of truly knowing the nature of self. Initially then, we gain some knowledge about lethargy and drowsiness: that they exist, are caused by a lack of energy and can cease through generating more energy. We are more vigilant about their arising, so they do not become too firmly entrenched. Then we gain some understanding of the various tools to use in dealing with them. We understand the benefits and value of energy as one of the Five Spiritual Powers and one of the Seven Factors of Awakening. Through continued experience all these things come together. We begin to understand the nature of energy, how the body works, how the mind works, how lethargy and drowsiness are created by self and its self-supporting antics.

SUMMARY

Lethargy and drowsiness are a very common experience for most people who try to develop meditation. They may be more of an issue for people from countries in cooler climates, who are used to a fair amount of activity and then take up the more passive exercise of sitting meditation. However, while the specific experience can be unpleasant and frustrating, in essence it comes down to developing a more balanced relationship with bodily and mental energy. Rather than struggling with the hindrance of lethargy and drowsiness, it can be more beneficial and interesting to investigate the nature of human energy. Where does it come from? How is it depleted? How can it be revitalized?

Many times it is precisely that attitude of trying to get rid of lethargy or drowsiness which makes us tired. Trying to get rid of something can be exhausting. But if we are able to stop and reflect: 'What's happening in this body and mind?', this can bring more clarity and energy into the practice. Investigating what the true nature of things is can be exhilarating and energizing, and can lead to liberation through wisdom. So hopefully we can work with

this hindrance in a skilful way to find a deeper source of energy within, not depending just on willpower or inspiration, but from the source of ultimate wisdom.

RESTLESSNESS AND REMORSE

> *Just as, brahmin, if there is a pot of water stirred by the wind, agitated, swirling, producing wavelets, and a man with good sight should consider his own facial image in it, he could not recognize nor see it as it really is. So too when someone abides with their mind pervaded by restlessness and remorse, overcome by restlessness and remorse ...*

The fourth of the Hindrances also has two aspects to it: restlessness (*uddhacca)* and remorse or worry (*kukkucca)*. *Uddhacca* means 'restlessness, agitation, excitement, distraction'. *The Path of Purification* (PP.530) further explains: 'It has the characteristic of disquiet, like water whipped by the wind. Its function is unsteadiness, like a flag or banner whipped by the wind. It is manifested as turmoil, like ashes flung up by pelting with stones...' *Kukkucca* means 'remorse, scruple, worry'. *The Path of Purification* (PP.532) explains it as follows: 'It has subsequent regret as its characteristic. Its function is to sorrow about what has and what has not been done. It is manifested as remorse. Its proximate cause is what has and what has not been done. It should be regarded as slavery.'

Restlessness is basically an over-energized state, the opposite of lethargy, and can similarly manifest physically, mentally or

spiritually. Physical restlessness can have a serious impact on the mind, while spiritual restlessness permeates our life until full awakening.

Remorse is regret, sorrow or worry about 'what has and what has not been done', that is, excessive worry over past faults. Most translators have used the word 'worry', but since this is specific worry about misconduct, it seems suitable to use 'remorse' in this instance, and explain worry in its wider connotations as a form of doubt in the following chapter. While it is a common experience to feel remorse over faults, mistakes or offences, obsessive concern about them can cause an endless round of self-disparaging or self-recriminative thoughts or internal discussions. Remorse thus sometimes stimulates restlessness, and restlessness can sometimes trigger remorse. There are also distinct differences between them.

MEDITATION

Sit or stand in a quiet, undisturbed place.

Bring your attention to the sensation of breathing to collect and settle the mind.

Bring up into the mind the theme of restlessness. Can you contact some experience of this, either physically, mentally or spiritually? If not, try physically tensing up the body until you feel literally like 'jumping out of your skin'. Or try twitching the body as if there is a charge of energy pulsing through it.

What is the overall sensation?

What is the main feeling tone: pleasant, unpleasant or neutral?

Mentally try to bring up an experience of unsettled mind, for example, when you have too many things to think about at once. Can you recognize that?

What is the feeling tone in relation to that state of mind?

As a means of experiencing spiritual restlessness, perhaps try to acknowledge all the various forms of 'I' which you can recognize: the 'I' of

liking and disliking, the 'I' of wanting and not wanting, etc.

What is the feeling tone of that experience?

In order to experience remorse, perhaps try to bring up a memory of some minor regret (something manageable) you have regarding something you have said or done.

Rather than allow this to reverberate in the mind, see if you can open to the direct experience of remorse itself, beyond the 'should' and 'shouldn't'.

Observe the sensations that this may trigger in the body. Where are they located? Try to be fully present with them.

What is the feeling tone?

Return your attention to the sensation of breathing. How is the breath at this time?

When it seems suitable, open your eyes and relax your posture.

CAUSE

The Pali Canon says that the primary cause of restlessness and remorse is frequently giving inappropriate attention to unsettledness of mind (*avūpasantacittassa*) (S.V,103; cf. A.I,3). And there may be numerous causes of an unsettled mind. Any of the other Hindrances could cause an unsettled mind, so if you recognize any of them as the initiating cause, your attention should be directed to dealing with that hindrance first. If it is difficult to determine the underlying cause, then deal directly with restlessness and remorse.

One practical cause of restlessness is giving too much emphasis to exertion (*paggahana*) and not enough to concentration (A.I,257f; cf. A.III,375). *The Path of Purification* (PP.135) has several paragraphs on 'maintaining balanced faculties', which relates to balancing the Five Faculties of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom (cf. S.V,193f). It states that: 'Agitation [restlessness] overpowers one strong in energy and weak in concentration, since energy favours agitation.' It also says that mindfulness is most

important, since it 'protects the mind from lapsing into agitation [restlessness] through faith, energy and understanding [wisdom], which favour agitation, and from lapsing into idleness through concentration, which favours idleness' (PP.136).

ENERGY AND WILLPOWER

Any form of excessive energy, physical or mental, can result in restlessness. Since it is the opposite of lethargy, sometimes the remedy of developing energy for dealing with lethargy can overshoot and lead to restlessness. At other times we may inadvertently over-stimulate energy. Some physical exercises such as yoga or tai chi, which can be helpful for generating energy, can also result in over-generation of energy, causing restlessness. Personally, I find that doing yoga exercises in the evening is too stimulating for meditation (and sometimes sleep). At other times exciting discussion, emotionally stirring reading, not to mention television and computers, can trigger off the restlessness syndrome, which is then not easy to calm.

One of the most insidious sources of restlessness is willpower. I explained willpower in the last chapter as one limited way to deal with lethargy and drowsiness. How then does it lead to restlessness? Basically, this is caused by over-charged or over-stimulated willpower, which is in essence an artificial form of energy with serious side-effects. Willpower is generated and directed by ego-supporting, goal-oriented concepts. The ego has a concept of what it wants and directs willpower to get it. The first problem with willpower is that it is concept-bound and thus out of harmony with reality. We end up chasing a concept which doesn't match up with what is happening, and the end result is disappointment and restless dissatisfaction. The second problem is that willpower is rigidly goal-oriented, and when the goal is (inevitably) not reached, we again arrive at disappointment and restless dissatisfaction. The third problem is that willpower is ego-supporting, so we either remain at the ego level of practice (frustrated and restless) or, if the practice goes well, we thus upset

the ego and once again arrive at disappointment and restless dissatisfaction.

However, you can recognize that willpower is dominating by noticing how much 'I' is in the story: 'I need more meditation, I need more concentration, I ... I ... I ...'. You become more tense physically and the mind increases in rigidity. Even a small amount of tension over a period of time intensifies inflexibility. When your body tenses up, your mind tenses up, and this can cause a restless body and restless mind.

FAITH AND WISDOM

Faith is said to be a cause of restlessness. If one has too much faith there is a tendency to become very excited and zealous about the teachings, and then it is difficult to investigate them calmly. Also, this can sometimes spill over into the external world, so that one wants to proclaim this marvellous truth to everyone or try to convert others to it - the 'missionary zeal complex'. In Buddhism there is the phenomenon known as being 'Dhamma-crazy'. Someone can become so inspired by insights into Dhamma that they obsessively try to teach others, regardless of whether time and place are suitable or anyone is interested in listening. Rather than carefully and calmly trying to integrate these insights into one's being, energy bubbles out to confirm the insights through other people's acceptance. Often the insights then bubble away as well, as the energy which should go into integrating the insights internally is dissipated externally.

Wisdom is also mentioned as causing restlessness, but this is just initial wisdom in the form of knowledge. Knowing conceptually what the results of practice are can make us restless to obtain those (seemingly easy) results, and this then gets in the way of the real experience. Also, having some special knowledge makes us feel special as well, which can be very energizing. We 'know all about it' and want to prove our knowledgeable abilities or refute others with them.

LACK OF MOTIVATION, LOSS OF EXPECTATION, THE DOLDRUMS

Just as with lethargy, restlessness is sometimes caused by a lack of motivation, loss of expectations or 'the doldrums'. If we are not finding any more joy or getting any results in spiritual practice, this can lead to spiritual restlessness in the sense of: 'This isn't working, maybe I should look for something else. Maybe I should take up spiritual badminton on a Sunday night instead of meditating?' This is usually a result of impatience and insufficient knowledge of the dynamic unfolding of the meditative process. Ajahn Chah often gave the analogy of the impatient rice farmer who, wondering why the rice was not growing faster, frequently tore up the rice plants to check the roots! At other times we may have our mundane expectations fulfilled; some problems have been resolved, our stress levels have lowered and we are feeling more grounded. However, perhaps some deeper spiritual yearnings have not yet been satisfied and we become restless due to an unarticulated 'spiritual itch'. If we can channel this energy into spiritual enquiry, perhaps we can move deeper into spiritual discovery.

DOUBT

Doubt, uncertainty and confusion can themselves be a volatile source of restlessness. Intellectually, doubt normally results in mental paralysis, but if it wells up as frustrated stuckness it can result in restlessness to find a way out. Doubt can take many forms and can also lead to remorse in the form of excessive worry.

SUFFERING

In the last chapter I mentioned that suffering can be a cause of energy. We have to be a little circumspect in how we use it, though, because sometimes it can result in restlessness. While suffering can shake us out of complacent lethargy, it can sometimes be so unpleasant that the self is prone to distract us with restlessness or

other Hindrances. Perhaps when you are sitting in meditation the body becomes uncomfortable, and then the mind becomes restless due to the discomfort. Some people may think that the longer one sits, the better the meditation. They may not have understood that the purpose of sitting meditation is to calm the mind, not to restlessly endure discomfort. Perhaps it is unconscious mental suffering which is causing restlessness, yet we struggle with or endure the restlessness rather than investigate what's behind it.

Once I was in a small monastery in Northern Thailand. It was quite a pleasant place in a quiet valley. I had a little grass-roofed hut with a walking path, and there was sufficient alms-food. I was staying there for a few days doing walking and sitting meditation. However, the mind would not calm down. The thoughts just kept coming and coming: blah... blah... blah! I began to wonder what was happening. I couldn't fault the weather, the food or the lodging. I was running out of excuses, so maybe the problem was ghosts?[1] Anyway, I was on a monastic wandering tour, so I moved to another place and meditation was better. Later I moved to another place which was on a hill under a huge banyan tree, with a spectacular view down the valley and over the tree-clad mountains. I said to myself: 'I can't meditate here, I'll be looking at the view all the time.' However, after being there only a few hours the mind became very quiet. And then I had an insight into why my mind does not go quiet in some places as it does in others: because it needs some open space in order to feel relaxed and at ease. When I was doing walking meditation in the pleasant valley, there was a feeling of being closed in. The mind felt uncomfortable, oppressed or hemmed in and thus gave rise to a restless chain of thoughts. However, on the hill-top with a lot of open space, the mind felt relaxed and expansive. That's why my usual choice of hut is way up on a hill. I am still unsure of the underlying reasons; I like to think this is due to personal temperament. However, the

[1] Buddhist cosmology recognizes various realms other than the human. Thais are familiar with these and thus many believe that the world is populated by other entities, particularly ghosts (*peta*) and celestials (*deva*). Some of these entities are assumed to influence events in the human realm, ghosts generally for the worse, i.e., illnesses, hauntings, etc. These effects can sometimes be alleviated through offering merit to them, e.g. the water-pouring ceremony.

important point is to use the awareness of restlessness to follow it back to the cause.

RESTLESS TEMPERAMENT AND TRAUMA

Some people have a naturally restless temperament. Perhaps they have trained themselves for one reason or another to be endlessly busy - the Protestant work ethic on steroids. Or it may be due to excessive curiosity or interest in many things, owing to a very active mind or a pre-conditioned habit. Some people with a sharp mind suffer from impatience, they know what should be done but the body is slow to do it. For others restlessness may be some sort of displacement activity for an underlying emotional problem or trauma.

FEAR

Fear is the self's primary defence and thus may cause any of the Hindrances, especially ill-will, restlessness and remorse, and doubt. Personally I would say that the fundamental cause of fear is not knowing, and so would include it under the hindrance of Doubt (see next chapter).

Existential fear may be at the root of some kinds of (spiritual) restlessness and remorse; the self feels threatened and reacts with remorseful thoughts and restlessness. And since self is not an ultimate reality, it is always prone to fear. This may manifest sometimes when we are alone or on occasions when the mind falls silent. Then our familiar ego-references to people or recognizable thoughts are absent, and so self throws up restless existential angst to fill in the blank.

HUMILIATION, CONTENTIOUS SPEECH AND SPIRITUAL ATTAINMENTS

The scriptures specifically mention other sources of restlessness.

The specific situation where a monk or nun does not receive sufficient offerings leads to humiliation; humiliated, one is restless; restless, one has no restraint; without restraint, the mind is far from concentration. If one engages in contentious speech there will be much talking, and from much talk one becomes restless (A.IV,87). Sometimes even positive spiritual qualities can be a source of restlessness. The Pali Canon relates the story of Venerable Anuruddha seeking advice from Venerable Sāriputta. He describes his spiritual attainments:

> *... with the purified divine vision surpassing that of humans I can examine the thousandfold world-system, strenuous and active is my energy, ready and unconfused is mindfulness, calm and unexcited is the body, composed and focused is the mind. Yet my mind is not liberated from the outflows without grasping.'*

Venerable Sāriputta answers him:

> *What, friend Anuruddha, for you is 'with the purified divine vision surpassing that of humans I can examine the thousandfold world-system', this is your conceit. What for you is 'strenuous and active is my energy, ready and unconfused is mindfulness, calm and unexcited is the body, composed and focused is the mind', is restlessness. What for you is 'yet my mind is not liberated from the outflows without grasping', is remorse. It would be well, friend Anuruddha, if you gave up these three conditions, did not give attention to them and focused your mind on the deathless element'* (A.I,282).

By following this advice Venerable Anuruddha soon became an *arahant*. The 'deathless element' is defined as reflecting: 'This is peaceful, this is sublime, that is, the stilling of all activities (*saṅkhāra*), the relinquishing of all basis of rebirth (*upadhi*), the withering of craving, dispassion, cessation, *nibbāna*.' (A.IV,423).

STIMULUS HUNGER

An unsettled mind leading to restlessness may be the result of what may generally be called 'stimulus hunger'[2], especially during periods

[2] Term borrowed from Eric Berne's 'Six Hungers'. For more remedies see Hanson (2011), disc 3.

of intensive retreat when the amount of sensory stimulation is severely reduced. The mind, normally accustomed to a certain level of stimulation, 'hungers' for more. If this fundamental need is not met the mind seeks for stimulation in other ways such as recalling memories, planning ahead or looking outside for distractions.

REMORSE

It is quite natural to feel remorse over some unskilful action, speech or thought. Complications arise, however, when we either refuse to acknowledge them, are unsure or unaware of them, or are prone to the guilt complex. This last can be especially dominant if one has a tendency to self-criticism, self-disparagement or self-punishment. Some people are particularly susceptible to thoughts of unworthiness or perpetual guilt. In the Buddha's time this tendency, in a good sense, was quite frequent in matters of Vināya discipline and self-reproach, leading to monks refining their conduct or asking forgiveness for faults (A.I,237).

Remorse is sometimes traceable to a specific source, but can also sometimes be rather vague, unspecific remorse or doubting remorse about what may or may not have happened. What are we actually remorseful about? Then again, maybe those remorseful thoughts coming up are not the real issue. Are they just generated by our old guilt complex? Are they an attempt by the self to displace the real focus of attention? What's really going on?

CESSATION

CALMNESS OF MIND

The formal remedy for restlessness and remorse is frequently giving appropriate attention to calmness (*vūpasamo*) of mind (S.V,106). Relatively speaking, calmness of mind can arise at any time. If restlessness is persistent, we may have to seek out situations which are conducive to creating calm-mindedness, such as a calming

environment, peaceful people or relaxing activities. Of course, in the context of meditation the most direct way to experience calmness of mind is through the development of concentration (A.III,449). The explanation of the Five Faculties mentions that since 'energy favours restlessness', it is recommended to balance energy with concentration (as above, PP.135). Concentration in the technical sense means the focusing of attention in order to reach the meditative absorptions. However, restlessness of mind is a hindrance to meditative absorption. How then do they work together? If we define concentration in its widest context as 'gathering in' or 'collecting in', we can apply it to the channelling of energy in this case. Understanding it in that way, we can acknowledge restlessness not as a hindrance, but as a source of extra energy. The dilemma is how to channel it in an effective way. This requires some degree of understanding and awareness of the dynamics of energy, because if we don't handle it in the right way, it spills over into restlessness and we become overwhelmed by it, or if we stifle it too much we end up with lethargy. How much can we actually steward this energy of restlessness?

The body and mind are inter-related, so sometimes when you have mental restlessness it is helpful to channel that energy into the body, rather than sitting with the mind flying all over the place. If you do walking meditation or some meditative physical exercise, you can channel that restless mental energy into meditative bodily activity, into concentration and awareness. Hopefully this is not just displacement activity. If necessary, when you have too much energy you can run around the block first or do something similar. Maybe that is temporary displacement activity, but at least it is healthy. Once the energy level is manageable you can put your energy and attention into a meditative physical activity, and sometimes that can settle the mind.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Other activities for channelling restless energy are some of the recitations or devotional exercises. Some people have a very busy

lifestyle and they want to sit in meditation to quieten the mind. I have met several people with fairly stressful jobs who asked me what to do about the whirling mind and twitching body when they tried to sit after work. To take an example from our evening pūjā: we mindfully enter the room and first do the physical exercise of bowing. Done mindfully and carefully, this can be a body awareness meditation. Then we do the chanting recitation, which is a verbal meditation exercise and helps to focus the mind through the verbal expression of chanting, even if we don't know what the words mean. Part of the effect is the monotonal rhythm and frequent repetition, which channel our energy into the body without stirring up our mind with meanings. And then we take up the composed sitting position. So there's a stepping down from the physical bowing, to the verbal chanting, to the mental calming in composed sitting. Whereas if you come from a busy life situation and immediately sit down with your mind still whirling, your body is probably still jumping around too. But if you can slowly ease into the sitting, you can re-channel some of that restless energy in a more skilful way.

It is very common for many traditional Buddhists to begin their meditation with some devotional chanting. Most of these chants are recitations of the Buddha's teachings, which can not only help focus the mind, but also inspire, uplift or tune it to skilful states. Especially useful are recitations of the refuges in Buddha-wisdom, Dhamma-truth, Sangha-compassionate community, or the Buddha's words on loving-kindness, the *Karaṇiya Mettā Sutta*. Otherwise, perhaps a short reading of some relevant spiritual texts can help to settle the mind into a more meditative attitude. This can be one way of shifting the mental energy from the conceptual 'left-brain' mode to the more meditatively-inclined 'right-brain' mode. Also beneficial would be some mindful activity such as cleaning the meditation place, or if there is a shrine, cleaning and arranging it with flowers, and lighting incense and candles. Basically, any bodily action, speech or thought which can help to calm, settle and centre the mind can be used as a support for calming, peaceful spiritual practice.

FACTORS OF AWAKENING, TRANQUILLITY, CONCENTRATION AND EQUANIMITY

When the mind is in an agitated, restless state, it is suitable to develop the three calming Factors of Awakening, tranquillity, concentration and equanimity (S.V,114). The nutriment for tranquillity is frequently giving appropriate attention to tranquillity of body and tranquillity of mind (S.V,104). The nutriment for concentration is frequently giving appropriate attention to the attribute of calm and the attribute of non-distraction (S.V,105), and the nutriment for equanimity is frequently giving appropriate attention to things that are the basis for equanimity (S.V,105).

Tranquillity is the most diverse of the Factors, in that it has a bodily and a mental aspect to it. So if we are channelling restless energy into the body, giving more emphasis to this quality could be beneficial. *The Path of Purification* mentions a number of other factors to consider in developing tranquillity. They include physical factors such as having nutritious food, a congenial climate and maintaining a suitable posture, as well as other factors such as moderation, avoiding restless people, associating with calm people and resolution for tranquillity (PP.139; cf. CDB,1907n.89).

Developing concentration is, of course, the most direct way to deal with restlessness and worry. However, it is also the quality most opposite to restlessness, so it is best approached more indirectly; for example, as mentioned above, by channelling restless energy into concentration-enhancing physical exercises. At other times, developing some degree of concentration on a meditation object helps to turn attention away from restlessness and remorse or their causes, or to undermine the habits of distractedness or discursive thought. Instead of being taken over by these disturbing influences, we learn to disengage and gently and patiently bring attention back to the meditation object. Thus we can 'frequently give appropriate attention' to the attribute of calm, and possibly gradually ease the mind into a less restless state. As we gain confidence in the process it begins to gather momentum and these Hindrances have less and less power.

The third of the calming factors of awakening is equanimity. This is the most refined of the meditative qualities, so one needs to be vigilant and not let it slip into indifference, disinterest or unconcern. True equanimity is being calm in the midst of disturbance, peaceful in turmoil, composed within chaos. Thus if we are able to maintain equanimity when there is restlessness, we no longer feed the restlessness and it begins to be replaced by equanimity. The Commentary on the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (PP.139; cf. CDB,1908n.91) also lists other supports for equanimity, such as neutrality or impartiality towards living beings and all conditioned phenomena (*saṅkhāra*), and associating with people who are similarly inclined.

THE DOLDRUMS

The restlessness that comes from the doldrums could be a positive sign indicating that the practice is taking effect, that it is becoming more naturalized in our being and integrated into daily life. Restlessness could be the by-product of this shifting of meditative values from the external to the internal. Ideally, practice has shifted closer to selflessness, or at least beyond the need to keep feeding ego with rewards of better results. Again, of course, we have to be careful; maybe it is just the 'lethargy doldrums' or the 'lost the path doldrums'. However, if we trace the source of restlessness to this 'doldrums syndrome', with a certain amount of patience and continuity in the practice, and being careful not to give in to reactions about it, it will usually pass, and our practice will be functioning at a much more integrated and deeper level. If not, better consult a teacher!

RESTLESS TEMPERAMENT AND TRAUMA

We can change some of our restless habits through giving more emphasis to calming the body and mind. Of course, we need to be careful to work with them in a skilful way, for example, by not co-opting willpower to enforce calm habits. It can be helpful to

know that we don't need to be endlessly busy, and that calmness of body and mind are actually more beneficial in many ways. Learning to relax and put things down rather than endlessly doing may require some consistent effort, but the effort is well-invested. The body is much slower to act than the body, so settling restless mental energy on physical activity can help to anchor it. We need to learn to be more patient with the fumbling body, allowing it to function in its own time.

Sometimes restlessness may be a symptom of the fact that there is something very unpleasant which we don't want to see, for example, some underlying insecurity. So we keep distracting ourselves from it, thinking that as long as we keep our mind restlessly busy, we won't see it. It is thus important to approach the symptom carefully and slowly. Fortunately, the main emphasis in dealing with restlessness and remorse is on developing the calming qualities of tranquillity, concentration and equanimity. Unfortunately, preliminary concentration itself can latch on to anything, including restlessness. Thus it is very important to maintain a close connection to the other two calming qualities of tranquillity and equanimity, to provide a guiding influence.

STIMULUS HUNGER

If we observe that restlessness is due to stimulus hunger, there are several helpful methods. Firstly, it may be beneficial to reassure oneself that there are no threatening stimuli through developing a safe environment physically, emotionally and psychically. One can do this conceptually through affirming the safety and benevolence of the place one is in. You can bring up thoughts of friendliness, harmlessness and compassion, or if necessary surround oneself with a 'field' of benevolent, caring and supportive energy. Secondly, one can try to increase the stimulation through refining mindfulness and investigation of the meditation object. Try to observe it more closely and intimately, or experiment with observing it from different perspectives: very precisely, more broadly, especially attentive to the beginning or the end, etc.

Thirdly, you can try to accustom the mind to reduced stimulation through enjoyment of tranquillity, equanimity and peacefulness.

CESSATION OF REMORSE

Freedom from remorse (*avippaṭsāra*) results from maintaining wholesome moral conduct (*sīla*), and the benefit of non-remorse is gladness (*pāmojja*), leading through a series of beneficial qualities to full liberation (A.V,1). In the Buddha's teaching it is recognized that acknowledging one's faults and making appropriate amends is very beneficial (S.II,128). It is very helpful psychologically to be able to bring the apparent causes of remorse into full consciousness and absolve them or atone for them. This allows a clearing of our conscience and calming of the related disturbing thoughts.

KNOWLEDGE AND INVESTIGATING

The Commentary on the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*[3] says that knowledge is one of the main means of resolving restlessness and remorse. It specifically mentions the factors of knowing the Buddha's teachings well and being familiar with the monastic discipline (*Vināya*), as well as being able to ask questions, and associating with and questioning experienced practitioners from whom one can receive teachings. This is especially relevant for remorse, in that we can know if our behaviour really is worthy of remorse through referencing it to the Precepts. Then we can consciously follow the procedures on how to remedy any faults. Having sufficient knowledge also helps to easily resolve the restlessness caused by doubt and impatience.

Sometimes just mindfully recognizing restlessness or remorse allows some resolution. We can simply step out of the restlessness or remorse syndrome, let it go, drop it, put it down. Or we can at least relax with it when we see it in the right context: 'Oh, yes, it's just restlessness.' At other times, once we are mindful of restlessness or remorse, we can investigate their cause and this may provide some degree of resolution. We might observe that

[3] NDB,1595n.36; cf. CDB,1909n.96.

actually restlessness is not the real issue, that it is just a reaction to doubt. Then the investigation opens up to encompass doubt. If it is difficult to expand the investigation, maybe some preliminary calming of restlessness can help to highlight, expose or isolate the initial doubt, so as to allow easier or deeper investigation.

We should also be aware that in the right context, some forms of restlessness can be beneficial. If our practice lapses into complacency, some restless despondency may be a spur to rouse us out of it. Similarly, remorse can be helpful if we relate to it in a skilful way. It can keep us on our moral toes. It's a kind of wholesome fear response: 'Is this action, speech or thought appropriate?' But then it's necessary to identify the point where this approach becomes excessive.

SUMMARY

Restlessness is an over-energized state which may be due to various causes, physical, mental or spiritual. The primary cause is unsettledness of mind, which itself may be due to other causes. If we don't observe any obvious background causes, for example, any of the other energizing Hindrances, we can gradually undermine the predominance of restlessness through giving concerted emphasis to the calming qualities of concentration, tranquillity and equanimity. Sometimes as we calm certain forms or levels of restlessness we may expose some deeper underlying causes, which mindfulness and investigation may help resolve. Restlessness is one of the most persistent of the Hindrances which is only completely resolved at full awakening.

Remorse is excessive worrying or self-recriminating thoughts about unskilful action, speech or thought which we may or may not have committed. Through dedication to moral conduct we can prevent the further arising of remorse, and through making amends for previous unskilful conduct we can eventually remove the causes of remorseful thoughts and worries.

DOUBT

> *Just as, brahmin, if there is a pot of water that is stirred up, turbid and muddy, placed in the dark, and a man with good sight should consider his own facial image in it, he could not recognize nor see it as it really is. So too when someone abides with their mind pervaded by doubt, overcome with doubt ...*

The last hindrance of the Five Hindrances is doubt (*vicikicchā*), also translated as perplexity or uncertainty. Doubt is a form of not knowing and thus closely related to delusion (*moha*) and ignorance (*avijjā*), and is expressed in a number of different ways. The doubt which is the main concern of the Pali Canon is sceptical doubt, in particular not being convinced about the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha and the training, but also including other themes. At the present time, however, especially with the preponderance of thinking, doubt manifests in a variety of different forms, such as self-doubt, confusion, worry and indecision, and in a particular form as fear or anxiety. This chapter is therefore more expanded than those on the other Hindrances, to include these other forms of doubt. Those who are not interested in these other forms can just follow the discussion under the heading of sceptical doubt.

Doubt is listed as one of the seven underlying dispositions (*anusaya*) which even a young infant has (A.IV,9; M.I,111), as

well as one of the ten fetters (*saṃyojana*) (A.V,17). Its dynamic is wavering and uncertainty, leading to indecisiveness and, at the extreme, mental inertia or paralysis. Numerous things can give rise to doubt; everyone has their own special list. If we frequently give inappropriate attention to them, that only increases and compounds doubt. Thus for example, a common topic of speculation for many people is what will happen in the future, but it's easy to see how you can become overwhelmed with doubt, uncertainty and confusion about that.

MEDITATION

Sit or stand somewhere in a quiet, undisturbed place.

Bring your attention to the breathing to collect and calm the mind.

When suitable, consciously bring up the thought, 'What will happen tomorrow?', and rather than try to think of some answer, see if you can be with the experience of not knowing, uncertainty, doubt, maybe even confusion, worry or fear which this question may elicit.

Be aware of the sensations in the body. Is there some specific place where the sensations are especially strong: heart, belly, neck, face, hands?

What is the feeling tone associated with those sensations: pleasant, unpleasant, neutral?

Observe the mental experience. Can you be aware of the experience of not knowing or confusion, or whatever it is? Or do you observe the mind furiously trying to fill in the blank, distract you from this state or refuse to allow this state of not knowing to manifest?

Are you able to peacefully observe whatever is going on in the mind?

What is the feeling tone associated with this experience?

Return to the breathing. How is the breathing at this time?

Now relax your posture and open your eyes.

SCEPTICAL DOUBT/PERPLEXITY

Sceptical doubt is uncertainty, not fully knowing or not being confident about certain teachings or experiences. This may be with regard to specific things such as the Buddha's teachings or one's own experiences, or it may be of a less specific nature, such as not being sure or fully convinced about something, or about the context or meaning of things. In several places the Pali Canon (A.III,248f; M,I.101f) mentions the situation in which a monk has 'uncertainty and doubt, is not convinced or reassured' about the Teacher, the Dhamma, the Sangha and the training, and is 'angry and displeased with his fellow monks.' Thus his mind does not incline to ardour, devotion, perseverance or exertion. These are called the Five Mental Barrennesses.

There are various ways in which we may have doubt about the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, depending upon our understanding of these concepts. Perhaps from a religious point of view we doubt whether they are truly the 'Three Jewels' in which we take refuge. On the other hand, if we see them as representing wisdom, truth and virtue, perhaps doubt does not arise. If we doubt the entire training, this of course undermines our commitment to and energy for practice, which then limits our ability to experience the truth of the Buddha's teachings and realize the overcoming of doubt. If we maintain doubts about certain aspects of the training, this may lead to an incomplete, imbalanced or superficial understanding; for example, appreciating the logical explanations of the teachings, but harbouring doubts about the value of meditation.

SELF DOUBT

One presentation of the hindrance of doubt (S.V,110) mentions two kinds, internal and external. Unfortunately, this is not further explained, but the Commentary on the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* suggests, somewhat abstractly, I think, that 'internal doubt' is doubt about whether one's own groups of grasping (*khandha*) are impermanent, etc., and 'external doubt' is doubt about the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, the training, the past, the present,

the future and conditional causality (CDB,1910 note 99). I would suggest that 'internal doubt' could refer to self-doubt, which may be of a relative or existential nature. Relative self-doubt is doubting about one's abilities to practise or gain some benefit from practice, or doubting whether one's own experiences are indeed real, valid or right. Existential self-doubt is doubting the very nature of one's self: who am I? What am I? Doubting whether one's experiences are real is a serious form of doubt which can undermine any confidence or trust. Existential self-doubt can lead into an endless internal discussion covering the many forms of self-views.

A lot of us suffer from self-doubt, or, to be more psychological, lack of confidence: 'Can I do it?' Self-criticism, self-judgement, self-disparagement is a psychological epidemic in Western societies, compounded by social competitiveness: every race has only one winner and the rest of us are losers. It's in the background all the time and manifests in spiritual practice. How many times have you heard yourself say: 'I'm not good enough for this, I can't do this', or heard Buddhists say: 'Oh, my *kamma's* run out. I haven't enough good *kamma* to do it'?

CONFUSION

A somewhat indistinct form of doubt is confusion. This may be specific, for example, being confused about certain teachings or areas of experience. Or it may manifest as unspecific confusion, such as having confusion as a general state of being. This could be in the form of having a busy, distracted mind, being somewhat 'woolly-minded' or imprecise in how we think, or not being clear about what we are doing or should be doing.

WORRY AND INDECISION

Worry is persistent doubt about what might be, could be or should be, in a negative context (if it is positive it is called fantasizing). Some people may be of a fearful, suspicious or pessimistic

temperament, which induces worry as a means of appeasing fears or suspicions, thwarting possible threats or preparing for impending problems. Unfortunately, this never really works, as most of these possibilities are usually the result of an over-active imagination rather than fact. And when we do meet difficulties, our mind is so frazzled by worry that we don't have the mental capacity to deal with them efficiently

Closely associated with worry is indecision, the inability to decide on a course of action or a direction to take. A certain degree of circumspection is useful and even valuable, rather than rushing ahead impulsively. However, if this results in paralyzing indecision it goes too far.

FEAR/ANXIETY

Fear is the most primal form of doubt, since fear arises from not knowing. One of the main things we do not know is the nature of fear itself. Fear in some form is a common experience for everybody. Some of us have our specific fears, for example, of the dark, of snakes, of falling sick with some horrible illness, etc. At other times fear is triggered by the unexpected, such as when someone startles us. And then there are the conditioned fears associated with our self-reference: loss of face, humiliation, embarrassment, and the existential fears of not knowing who we are, where we came from and where are we going.

CAUSES

Two related causes for doubt are given in the Pali Canon: inappropriate attention (A.I,4) and frequently giving inappropriate attention to things that cause doubt (S.V,103).

As mentioned above, inappropriate attention is the cause of many unskilful things. Particularly with regard to doubt, it is the cause of the arising of and increase in delusion (A.I,201) and (the outflow of) ignorance (M.I,7), the arising of and increase in wrong views (A.I,31) and the arising of various speculative views (M.I,8).

SCEPTICAL DOUBT

The main source of doubt for many people today is giving inappropriate attention to thinking, speculating or analyzing. Most of us have been educated to believe that clever thinking will yield all the answers. However, in the Buddha's teaching thinking can be the cause of many problems. When the sense organ contacts a sense object there is sense consciousness, then feeling:

> *... what one feels, that one perceives; what one perceives, that one thinks about; what one thinks about, that one conceptually proliferates about. With what one conceptually proliferates as source, proliferating perceptions and deliberations assail a person with regard to past, present and future forms made conscious through the eye ....*[and the other senses] (M.I,111f).

This passage explains that once the mind starts to proliferate conceptually, one is taken over by those proliferations. When we become enamoured of thought it is hard to turn it off. Thought can never entirely encompass reality, however, since it is based upon abstract concepts and ideas about reality. At best it can only approximate to it (see below).

Sceptical doubt is a form of not knowing, so if we attempt to know in the wrong way we only increase doubt. The three main ways in which this happens are: 1) trying to know by the wrong mode of enquiry, 2) trying to know about the wrong topic, 3) trying to know by the wrong assumptions. A fourth source of doubt is having wrong view(s) or holding onto a fixed view.

THE WRONG MODE OF ENQUIRY

This means that we enquire or investigate from one mode of understanding, whereas the answer lies within a different mode of understanding. This is most specifically expressed by the Buddhist designation of three modes of understanding: thinking (*cintā-mayā-paññā*), learning (*suta-mayā-paññā*) and experiential realization through meditation (*bhāvanā-mayā-paññā*)(D.III,219). Thinking and learning are types of understanding filtered through

self-interpretations. Only through the process of quieting self-interpretations through meditation are we able to see beyond the limitations imposed by self-interpretation. Thus the most complete form of knowing is through personal experiential realization. Some people are very gifted thinkers and are able to articulate their thoughts in such a way as to appear very convincing to themselves and others. However, if these views are too satisfyingly convincing or do not include the unconditioned, if they encourage acceptance rather than pointing to direct realization for oneself, chances are that they are only an intellectually well-polished belief system, rather than coming from direct realization.

Over-reliance upon thinking inevitably results in doubt, since one never knows completely - although some people think they know, rather than knowing that they think. A practical example is trying to understand bodily sensations or emotions through conceptual thought. A sensation or emotion is not a thought, and thus can only be truly understood through direct awareness of it in its own mode of experience. If you want to know: 'How is my body doing?' and you use thought, you only get: 'What do I think my body is doing?' You have to go to the physical level, directly to the body, to get the real answer. The extreme case is mixing up the two levels of truth, conventional and ultimate. Thus someone asks, 'If everything is not self [ultimate truth], who [conventional truth] gets enlightened?' Knowing the conventional meaning of the word 'enlightened' is not the same as having an ultimate direct experience of it.

Understanding through learning can broaden our horizons and bring information which our self-contained thinking would not encounter. However, this is still a limited form of understanding, as it remains self-interpreted and concept-based, even though it may include other people's interpretations and concepts as well. An over-reliance upon learning can result in intellectual conceit, to the degree that we believe (and convince others) that we really know all the answers, rather than humbly acknowledging that we only have answers we have learned. By trying to establish a definitive answer through concepts, we often end up having to

hold on to fixed views and then try to defend them: 'This is right and all else is wrong'.

After I had spent several years at Wat Pah Nanachat I was determined to find out who the 'real' Ajahn Chah was. What was his core teaching? What was his profound insight into Dhamma? I made a serious effort to learn the Thai language so that I could speak with him directly and learn his secrets (and especially to understand his jokes). However, I was confused sometimes because he was quite inconsistent in how he answered people's questions. I assumed that since he was a great Buddhist teacher, there would be some kind of enlightened or wise coherence to his teaching. But when I was listening to him he would answer the same question differently each time; there was no pattern to it, no consistency. I began to have my doubts about him. And then one day as I listened to him, I suddenly realized there was no fixed entity who was Ajahn Chah. He was not somebody who had a fixed teaching he held on to. There was just a totally present being, responding mindfully and wisely to the situations that arose. One person came along and asked a question from their particular experience, and he could receive them just where they were coming from and respond with exactly what they needed. Somebody else came along and asked a similar question from their own experience, and he could respond intimately to them too. And so the answers were very different, but in terms of the context they were usually surprisingly astute, because he had the mindfulness and concentration to receive people just as they were. He also knew people very deeply; sometimes it was so amazing that people thought he could read their minds. However, I think it was more due to the fact that he thoroughly knew his own mind. Understanding our own greed, aversion, delusion, we can understand the greed, aversion, delusion of everyone else too.

DOUBT AND BELIEF

A source of confusion for those from the Judeo-Christian tradition is thinking that the opposite of doubt is belief: doubt is bad and

evil, so just believe what you are told. Filtered through Cartesian dualism, this becomes a rigid either/or choice between damning doubt or saving belief. Buddhist tradition, however, recognizes doubt as a common experience for most people. We are encouraged to acknowledge it, and with some reasonable degree of trust or faith in the teachings, backed up by the Buddha's logical explanation, we test them out in order to see the truth for ourselves. In fact the Buddha discouraged believing too easily, as he quite emphatically explained to the Kalama people in north India:

> *Now look, Kalamas, do not be led by oral sayings or tradition or hearsay; nor by the authority of scriptures; nor by reasoning or inference; nor by reasoned reflection; nor by accepting a view after pondering; nor by conformity; nor because you respect this teacher.*
>
> *When, Kalamas, you know yourselves: 'These things are unskilful, these things are blameworthy, these things are censured by the wise, these things, if undertaken, lead to harm and suffering'; then abandon them.*
>
> *What do you think, Kalamas, when greed ... aversion ... delusion arises in a person, does it arise to their welfare or harm?*
>
> *To their harm, Venerable Sir.*
>
> *...*
>
> *When, Kalamas, you know yourselves, 'These things are skilful, these things are blameless, these things are praised by the wise, these things, when undertaken, lead to welfare and happiness'; then abide with them.*
>
> *What do you think, Kalamas, when non-greed ... non-aversion ... non-delusion arises in a person, does it arise to their welfare or harm?*
>
> *To their welfare, Venerable Sir.* (A.I,188f)

TRYING TO KNOW THE WRONG TOPIC

We usually presume that we can know virtually everything. However, there are some topics, themes or aspects of reality where we have only a limited ability to know. If we insist upon knowing more, we are then subject to doubt caused by reaching the limits of our abilities. The Buddha mentioned four topics which he termed 'inconceivables' or 'not to be known by conceptual thought' (*acinteyya*): 1) the sphere of a Buddha, 2) the domain of the meditative absorptions, 3) the results of intentional actions (*kamma-vipāka*), and 4) speculation about the nature of the world. If one tries to find a definite solution to queries about any of these themes, one only increases in doubt and uncertainty, or ends up grasping some incorrect view.

When referring to 'inconceivable' topics, some people might add a fifth, that of rebirth (perhaps included under 3)). Unless one has special abilities or has developed meditation to a level where psychic abilities are possible, the topic of rebirth is primarily a matter of belief, faith or trust. It is very hard to prove by logical reasoning, although some people have reached a conclusion of its truth through personal experiences.[2]

There were also ten questions which the Buddha refused to answer. These were referred to as the 'indeterminants' (*avyākata*) and seem to be a standard set of questions for establishing what type of philosophy a teacher adhered to. They cover the following topics: 1)-4) Is the world eternal or not?; Is the world infinite or not?; 5)-6) Is the life-force (*jīva*) the same as the body or not?; 7)-10) Does the Tathāgata (the Buddha) (a) exist, (b) not exist, (c) both exist and not exist. (d) neither exist nor not exist, after death?[3]

The Buddha said that resorting to any of these speculative views:

> *... is to enter the thicket of views, the wilderness of views, the agitation of views, the writhing of views, the fetter of views. It is connected with suffering, with vexation, turmoil and distress.*

[2] Some books relating to rebirth are: 1) *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Rebirth* by Dr. Ian Stevenson, 2) *Many Lives, Many Masters* by Brian Weiss, 3) *Past Lives Therapy* by Dr. Morris Netherton.

[3] D.I,188f; see LDB, p.554, n.219 for more details.

> *It does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to calming, to direct knowledge, to awakening or to nibbāna.* (M.I,486)

TRYING TO KNOW BY THE WRONG ASSUMPTIONS/ ASKING THE WRONG QUESTION

Asking the wrong question is usually caused by having inappropriate assumptions. The Buddha pointed out that due to ignorance, we do not see the way things really are. Some common assumptions were formulated into four 'distortions' (*vipallāsa*) of either perception, thought (*citta*) or views: what is impermanent is permanent, what is unsatisfactory is pleasant, what is non-self is self and what is unattractive is attractive (A.II,52). Thus as unenlightened beings, our basic assumptions are based on permanence, happiness, self and attraction, whereas the truth of reality is exactly the opposite. If we hold on to these wrong assumptions, we invariably become confused and perhaps doubt our own perceptions.

The most common example of this is with regard to the usual assumption that we are or have a permanent self or soul. Thus once when the Buddha was explaining the series of factors of conditional causality, one monk would frequently interrupt with the question: 'Who is it?' - for example: 'Who is it that feels?' 'Who is it that craves?' The Buddha responded that these were not valid questions, as he was not referring to a subject, but rather explaining the causal factors arising sequentially. Thus contact causes feeling, feeling causes craving, etc. (S.II,14). Obviously the questioning monk kept assuming that there was a subject, person, self who was doing the action, whereas the Buddha understood that there were only impersonal factors interacting.

Another of the reasons why the Buddha refused to answer the indeterminate questions (see above) was that the questioner was asking from the wrong assumptions. Thus for example, most people understand the world to be the external world. However, the Buddha defined the world internally:

> *Rather, it is in this fathom-long body, endowed with perception and mind, that I make known the world, the arising of the world, the cessation of the world and the way to the cessation of the world.* (S.I,62)

Or when they asked about whether the Buddha exists after death, they were understanding that the Buddha was some particular entity. However, the Buddha said that he was beyond the usual designation of humans and thus 'immeasurable' (M.I,489). He illustrated this through the example of a fire going out through lack of fuel. 'When the fire was extinguished, to which direction did it go?' he asked. 'That question does not apply', was the answer, 'since the fire was simply extinguished.' Likewise, an awakened being has extinguished the fuel for future existence.

BRINGING WORLDLY ASSUMPTIONS TO SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

When we take up spiritual practice we usually bring along our worldly values and judgements. To a limited degree these are also valid in the spiritual realm; however, sometimes they no longer apply or are only partially valid. Of course, many people take up spiritual practice because of some worldly issue: reducing stress, resolving some emotional problem or in order to discover truth, etc. And while meditation can have some beneficial effects, often the real benefits are given to us by indirect and occasionally unexpected means. For example, someone may take up meditation to reduce their stress level. However, after some practice they may notice that their stress level has increased and give up meditation with the view that it has no benefit. In fact the real benefit of their meditation was to expose their stress-causing attitude, their compulsion to always succeed or their obsessive fear of failure, which they unfortunately were unable to acknowledge.

Worldly or mundane (*lokiya*) values are distinguished from the spiritual or supermundane (*lokuttara*) values, although we should be careful not to see them as opposites. The worldly

values are enfolded in the spiritual values and are still applicable on the relative level of truth. Spiritual values are universal, encompassing the worldly but also the 'non-worldly'. Some people tend to separate these two levels of truth, with unfortunate and unexpected results. That is, when they become 'spiritual' they incline to disembodiment, dismissing the material realm as non-spiritual or beneath them: they are on some higher plane. This can also, unfortunately, become an excuse for strange, outrageous or even immoral behaviour, since they are in another realm where the mundane rules do not apply.

The worldly values are formally expressed as the Eight Worldly Conditions (*loka-dhamma*): gain and loss, fame and disgrace, praise and blame, happiness and suffering (A.IV,157f). These invariably sneak in or spill over into spiritual practice and can lead us to a plateau of confusion and uncertainty: am I getting anywhere? Am I happier? For example, one of the sources of doubt to be wary of is the 'progress trap'. After a period of practice we ask the familiar question: 'What have I gained?' However, maybe we are asking the wrong question. Firstly, when we conceive of gain we are usually thinking in terms of certain concepts of what we should gain, whereas the meditative process is learning to experience reality as it really is, beyond concepts. Secondly, asking what we have gained is an ego question, that is, what has my ego gained, which of course is how we would normally think in the worldly sense. Another aspect of this is trying too hard to get results. This usually means that we have strong expectations which we wilfully want fulfilled. And where there is expectation there will be disappointment, often followed by doubt and despair.[4]

WRONG VIEW(S) OR HOLDING ON TO A FIXED VIEW

If we have a wrong view regarding spiritual practice as expressed by the Buddha, we will be unable to establish the correct basis for an effective practice to transcend all doubts, since Right View is

[4] 'New meditators are overly eager for results. They are full of enormous and inflated expectations. They jump right in and expect incredible results in no time flat. They push. They tense. They sweat and strain, and it is all so terribly, terribly grim and solemn.' Bhante Gunaratana, pp. 109ff.

the initiating factor for the arising of all the other factors of the Eightfold Path (M.III,76). It may seem surprising that doubt could result from holding on to a particular view. However, holding on to a view makes it difficult to receive feedback (M.I,97), makes one disagreeable (M.I,98) and may lead to disputes (M.II,246), conditions which do not conduce to being able to investigate the causes of doubt. Also, we may either face challenges to our views or perhaps come across new information which threatens them, and if we are inflexible in our views we are then vulnerable to doubting it.

When I was young I never had any experiences of or even heard references to ghosts, except at Halloween. However, when I was living in Thailand people often talked about ghosts. Initially I dismissed this as foolish superstition. Then when I was living at Wat Pah Nanachat, situated in a cremation ground, I heard about unusual experiences from some of the Westerners who stayed there and this caused doubt to arise. I eventually had a change of view. Firstly, I realized that it was very arrogant of me to assume that my view was right and other people's view was wrong. Secondly, I realized that maybe, just maybe, I really did not know the truth about ghosts. I then began to be less rigid in my views about ghosts and, rather than doubt, to just say 'maybe'. And then I had my own unusual experiences!

HOLDING VIEWS TO PREVENT DOUBT

Holding a fixed view is often a direct result of doubt. When faced with doubt, many people will quickly grasp a view to provide them with some stability or reassurance. This is frequently the basis of fundamentalism, either to replace doubt with a firm belief system, or to avoid the tensions of wrestling with wavering and uncertainty by affirming an over-simplistic view of right and wrong. One unfortunate result of this is that one is unable to recognize the inherent doubt and thus undertake the work towards resolving it through investigation. The worst form of this is holding wrong views. Even if one has some form of valid spiritual experience, one

can draw the wrong conclusions and try to validate them through a wrong view of reality.

DOUBT DUE TO IGNORANCE

A specific cause of doubt is not practising the training as outlined by the Buddha. We may start off with some degree of trust in the teachings and expectation of results. However, unless we carry through with the training we won't see the results. Most particularly this refers to the formal training of guarding the sense doors, moderation in eating, wakefulness (see chapter on sensual desire), having insight into wholesome qualities and developing supports for awakening (A.III,70f).

In Buddhist psychology perplexity and doubt (about true Dhamma) are considered to be mental processes (*sankhāra*). They are conditioned by sense contact, which is based upon ignorance ('ignorance-contact'), which conditions feeling and craving (in the sequence of conditional causality) (S.III,99). This implies that unless we have some understanding with regard to the nature of sense impressions and perception, it is inevitable that doubt will arise. It is usually twofold, doubt about what is happening and doubt about its effects of causing various reactive moods: 'Why am I doubting? Because I don't know that doubt is caused by not knowing.'

SELF-DOUBT

The root cause of self-doubt is, of course, thinking about your sense of self. Most of the time the two kinds of self-doubt, relative and existential, intermingle; the relative 'what am I?' gets mixed up with the existential 'who am I?' The natural outcome is to doubt oneself, since what ultimately is that 'self'? For most people their relative sense of themselves is generally known as a lifetime's accumulation of self-referenced experiences, some pleasant, some painful and most neutral. Unfortunately, because of our 'negativity bias' we are more prone to recall our painful failures,

and thus are often over-critical of our abilities. Some of this is wise circumspection so that we don't over-stretch ourselves. However, some is personal conditioning through education, socialization or memories of the horrors of failing: we are never quite good enough.

Unfortunately, focusing on 'my self' is very much emphasized in modern society, where self-image is so important and people are bombarded by so many conflicting views, models, examples and choices of how we should be, could be, might be, had better be. Then with our over-emphasis on thinking we approach everything with conceptual idealism, and wonder why we never quite measure up to the mark; why the reality never quite matches the expectation: 'Why aren't I one of the beautiful people?'

The cause of existential self-doubt is not understanding how the sense of a self or self-identity is created in the first place. In the Buddha's understanding even a young infant has an underlying disposition to identity view, which takes form through ignorant grasping of any of the five groups (*khandhas)*: physicality, feeling, perception, mental processes or consciousness. The fact is that a human being has sense impressions; for example, there is seeing. The fiction begins when the maturing infant, due to the predisposition, one day thinks: 'Oh, I am seeing'. Then, with the arising of a subject, an objective world comes into focus: 'I am seeing food.' This is usually followed by: 'I want food' and 'If I cry I get food.' However, then the story becomes complicated, since sometimes the crying is rewarded and sometimes it is punished, so self-doubt arises: 'Should I cry, or go hungry?'

The fact of the fiction is that there really is nothing (no 'thing') which we can pin down as 'I'. The real fact is that what is doing the seeing is a dynamically changing collection of various physical and mental processes: physical eye, physical forms and colours; mental processes: attention, awareness, choice, moods and emotions; and perceptual processes: memory, cognition, etc. However, due to lack of understanding and mindfulness most people just say 'I'. Then when the mood changes or there's a lapse in memory, they

are confused: what 'I' is this?

Views of self-identity (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*) are technically explained as any of twenty varieties, that is, any of four modes relating to the five groups: the groups are the self; the self possesses the groups; the groups are part of the self; the self is within the groups. In order to relate to 'our self', we have probably already unconsciously internalized some mode of identity, for example: 'I have consciousness as my true self'. This identification process is reinforced by the three basic conceits which we often come across in social interactions: I am superior, I am inferior, I am equal. Or it plays itself out more philosophically in any of the sixteen forms of self-doubt (S.II,26-7; M.I,8). Five of these are to do with the past: 'Was I ... Was I not ... What was I ... How was I ... Having been what, what did I become in the past?'; five likewise to do with the future: 'Will I be ... Will I not be ... What will I be ... How will I be ... Having been what, what will I become in the future?'; and six to do with the present: 'Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where will it go?' Once a self-identity becomes confirmed it spins out endless stories about itself, never realizing that this is actually a work of fiction. And, since in a work of fiction anything is possible, there is plenty of room for self-doubt.

CONFUSION

Confusion is sometimes due to certain unskilful habits we have accumulated. For example, not being well-organized externally can affect our internal state of mind: not having our physical environment organized can cause mental disorganization. At other times it may be due to different forms of being overwhelmed: 1) not having a good sense of time and place, causing confusion of temporality, 2) trying to do too many things at once, or multi-tasking (and thus not being clear about any of them), 3) not being able to prioritize (so that everything calls for our limited attention), 4) procrastination (continually putting things off which then crowd the mind), 5) accumulating too many things (possessions, views, ideas, plans, etc.), which then compete for our

attention.

Confusion can also result from wanting to know completely or absolutely. I was taught that knowing all the answers was the key to success. It took me a while to realize that it is impossible to know all the answers all the time. Trying to always know just resulted in confusion.

WORRY

While remorse (as in the previous hindrance) can be a source of haunting worry, there are also many other causes of worry. Since life is very uncertain and always changing, we could worry about virtually anything: 'What if there is a bus strike tomorrow? What if there is an earthquake?' Sometimes this is just a conditioned habit we have developed. Sometimes we are too perfectionist or over-responsible and must have everything planned ahead of time. Occasionally there may also be some underlying fear of failure or making a mistake.

Some years ago I was invited by Ajahn Sumedho on a retreat high in the Sierre Nevada mountains in the south of Spain. At that time I was the second monk at Chithurst Monastery in England. The second monk is the manager of the monastery, in order to leave the senior monk free to do the teaching. When the retreat began I observed what seemed like a big black cloud in my head. I thought it might be due to the high altitude or change in diet, but it persisted. Finally, on the afternoon of the third day I was on the walking path and brought my attention to this cloud in my head. What was it? As I was investigating it I suddenly realized it was actually worry. And as soon as I could recognize it as worry, the cloud in my head dispersed and the sun immediately shone more brightly.

What I saw was my worry about the monastery back in England. It was really quite absurd: here I was in Spain worrying about the monastery in England! And I was in a remote place in the mountains, with no telephone or other communication. I couldn't

even call and ask: 'Is everything going well over there?' My responsibility demon had followed me to Spain. It was ridiculous, like some perverse joke while I was having a meditative holiday in the sunshine. So I had a good laugh at it. However, it did give me a clearer understanding of how these responsibilities had become excessive and were now haunting me by creating a big black cloud in my head, even though I was far away. Just by being aware of that, the worry fell away. For the rest of the time in Spain I never thought about the monastery again (which was maybe being irresponsible), and the big black cloud never returned. This experience also gave me some incentive to become more aware of my 'responsibility demon' by initiating a friendly dialogue with it: 'How are you today? Do you have anything to tell me?'

INDECISION

Often indecision is caused by simply thinking too much, or worrying about every detail or every possible consequence. This leaves us hanging between numerous possibilities, unable to decide on any of them. Sometimes there may be a certain degree of fear involved, for example fear of mistakes, or failure, or of being criticized, etc. Two things which cause me to be indecisive are needing to reflect on the wider implications of a decision and, since everything is constantly changing, wondering what are the chances of my plan actually happening. While it is usually beneficial to not be compulsive and rush into a hasty decision, too much hesitation can also be an obstacle to moving ahead.

FEAR/ANXIETY

Fear is one of those debilitating, energy-dissipating, contagious emotions which is so unpleasant that we strenuously avoid it. But then we never come to really understand it. Also, it is often quite undifferentiated and hard to objectify (what is its real source?), so that we can be easily spun into a fear cycle or panic attack.

Generally there are two main types of fear reactions which are closely related: an instinctive reflex against any threat to our sense of 'my self', and an existential reaction by the self to any threat to its integrity. Some instinctive fear is natural and some conditioned, just a habit we have developed, especially for people who have had a very fearful or unstable life. They may have a big backlog of fear trauma.

Existentially, as long as we grasp a self we are going to have fear. Self is a functional illusion, not an ultimate reality, so it's afraid to be exposed as a phoney. Thus it throws up the distraction of fear or other smoke-screens: 'Worry about that. Don't look so closely at me, worry about what will happen tomorrow.' It wants to shift our attention to something over there, rather than look at the real issue here in our own mind. Experiencing fear could mean we are close to the core of self, and self is throwing up warning signals. So all kinds of fear relate to self-defence of some kind. There is, of course, a necessity to preserve some integrity of self. For example, the body needs to have some kind of fear or worry with regard to maintaining its physical health. At one level we are all latent hypochondriacs. So fear is instinctive in life, but we have to know what the limit of it is. When does it become excessive and begin to haunt us? There is a saying in English: there is nothing to fear but fear itself. However, if most of us look at a fear, we become frightened of it; and then we become frightened about the fear about the fear, and it becomes panic.

CESSATION

Formally, two ways lead to the cessation of doubt: appropriate attention (A.I,5) and frequently giving appropriate attention to wholesome and unwholesome states, blameable and unblameable states, inferior and superior states or dark and bright states (S.V,106). The second of these ways is also explained as the nutriment for investigation of phenomena (*dhamma-vicaya*), one of the Seven Factors of Awakening[5] (S.V,104). Thus the main way to resolve doubt is to investigate the very nature of doubt itself,

and one way to start is to distinguish what form of doubt it is.

Developing appropriate attention is, of course, helpful at any time. With regard to doubt, it can help to shift the focus from the reactions to doubt to observing the nature of doubt itself and its basic causes. Appropriate attention to wholesome and unwholesome states, etc. points us in the right direction to what is especially relevant to resolving doubt. The experience of doubt is like being at a total standstill, not knowing which way to turn. If we are not completely paralyzed or caught in enervating despair, considering what is wholesome or beneficial can be a way of starting to move out of the quandary. Even though our doubt may not be completely resolved, taking a step in a blameless direction can give us a new perspective.

SCEPTICAL DOUBT

One of the most helpful ways of dealing with sceptical doubt is learning about the topic one has doubt about, either by asking questions of learned persons or by systematic study. The Commentary on the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (CDB,1909 n.97) mentions three of the six ways of dealing with doubt as: 1) much learning, 2) investigation, 3) familiarity with monastic discipline (*Vināya*).

If there are doubts with regard to the Buddha, one must rely quite a bit on trust, since he passed away long ago. Some study of his life and his everyday interactions with the people of his time, especially as presented in the Pali Canon, can sometimes be quite helpful for resolving some forms of doubt. With regard to the Dhamma, the Buddha laid down various principles which may at first require some degree of trust, but should then be investigated in order to be realized directly by oneself. The most important principle of Dhamma which the Buddha confirmed and designated was right view (M.I,288; III,72; A.I,269).

[5] The Commentary on the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* gives seven more conditions for developing investigation of phenomena interrogation (about meaning of aggregates, elements, sense bases, etc.), 2) personal cleanliness, 3) balancing the faculties (cf. PP.135-36), 4) reflecting upon the sphere of deep knowledge, 5) avoiding unwise people, 6) associating with wise people, 7) right resolution (CDB,1907n.86): 1).

RIGHT VIEW

The main import of right view is that everything arises and ceases according to the principle of conditional causality, and that our intentional actions (*kamma*) have an effect (*vipāka*) upon this principle. Right view is also understanding what is wholesome and unwholesome, and their roots (M.I,46f.), and what are wrong and right view, intention, speech, action and livelihood. This then also supports right effort and right mindfulness, all factors of the Eightfold Path (M.III,71ff).

The Buddha was sometimes pragmatic in his explanation of right view. For example, in one discourse (M. *sutta* 60) he outlines various wrong and right views, and then very carefully and methodically explains why it is better to live one's life in accordance with the right view, whether or not one believes it to be true: for example, one is praised now and (if there is another world) one attains a favourable rebirth.[6]

Right view is sometimes explained in the context of supermundane reality as understanding the Four Noble Truths (M.I,48;III,251); as fully understanding that the five groups of grasping (*khandhas*) are impermanent (S.III,51-2); or as seeing the six-fold sense sphere, contact, consciousness and feeling as they really are (M.III,288ff.).

Right view arises from either of two conditions: learning (literally, the 'voice of another')[7] or appropriate attention, and when it is supported by the five factors of virtue, learning, discussion, calm and insight, results in deliverance of mind (M.I,294).

CONDITIONAL CAUSALITY

Conditional causality is one of the unique teachings of the Buddha and the key to understanding his profound insights. Not understanding conditional causality is the main reason why

[6] For a more detailed summary see MLDB note 621.

[7] *Parato ghosa*: in the Buddha's time there were no books available, so the only means of learning the teachings was by hearing them from another person. Today learning by hearing is supplemented by other means.

people have difficulty understanding the Buddha's teaching on non-self and the effects of *kamma-vipāka* (action and result). Most people assume that there must be some permanent self or soul which persists at least through a lifetime. However, it doesn't take too much reflection to notice that you are not exactly the same self as you were some years ago. There seems to be some continuity, but observing more attentively, you may see that you are not quite so permanent as you assumed.[8] Most unawakened beings, however, insist upon, look for and confirm a permanent self or soul, and then take up the eternalist view (the fixed entity persists after death) or the annihilationist view (the fixed entity is extinguished at death).

> *Kaccāna, the world usually depends upon the duality of 'existence' and 'non- existence'. But for those who see with perfect realization the truth of the arising of the world, there is not for them any 'non-existence' in the world. And for those who see, with perfect realization, the truth of the passing away of the world, there is not for them any 'existence' in the world.*
>
> *Kaccāna, this world is mostly blinded by attachment, grasping and adherence. But those who do not obtain or take hold of that attachment and grasping, that obstinacy, adherence and latent tendency, do not take a stand upon 'my self'.*[9] *They have no doubt or uncertainty that what arises is only dukkha arising, what ceases is only dukkha ceasing, and their knowledge is independent of others. In this way, Kaccāna, there is right view.*
>
> *'All exists' is one extreme; 'All does not exist' is the second extreme. Not going to either extreme, the Tathāgata expounds a teaching in the middle: With ignorance as condition, formative processes come to be; with formative processes as condition, consciousness ... Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering* (S.II,17, abridged).

The Buddha awoke to the truth that there is no permanent abiding entity, self or soul, but only various continuously changing

[8] For an overview of the changeable nature of memory see John Kotre's book.

[9] I have been guided in this translation by Bhikkhu Bodhi, CDB p.736, note 32. See also his note 29, page 734 regarding 'existence' and 'non-existence'.

physical and mental processes appearing to be stable through causal action and result (*kamma-vipāka*). The principle of *kamma-vipāka* is ethical conditional causality, cause and effect applied to the realm of human behaviour. Actions have the potential to give results, depending upon the intensity of the action. The Buddha defined *kamma* as intentional or willed action, and since will is one of the primary elements of selfhood, the potential result will thus contain a seed of that selfhood. Thus unskilful or selfish actions result in continued unskilful self-ishness as a natural causal process. Skilful actions which incline to selflessness can give a result which reduces selfhood.

Some people think that we must reap the results of all our actions, but if this were the case we could never be liberated, since our actions are continuous. Fortunately, skilful actions can lessen the results and even cancel the potential results of previous action, leading to the complete cessation of suffering (A.I,249f). Thus our skilful actions to work through the Hindrances can reduce their strength so that we will not have to suffer their effects in future.

Doubt about conditional causality is initially a normal response, since the Buddha said that this teaching was very deep and profound (S.II,92). On a relative level most of us do accept the principle of cause and effect to some degree. That's why you get up and go to work on Monday morning (cause) in order to earn your salary (effect). However, this also has many conditions: you must be on time, you must clock in, you must do a proper job, etc. If any of these conditions are not fulfilled, no effect (salary) is forthcoming. Are you able to observe the cause and effect relationships running through your behaviour? Perhaps you can observe some general principles, but it's often hard to see all the direct causal relations. If we add to this the fact that often there are multiple conditions interacting, and that the quality of the mind has a major influence on the effect, we can acknowledge just how profound this teaching really is.

THE WRONG MODE OF ENQUIRY

Since one of the main causes of doubt is over-reliance on thinking in terms of concepts and ideas, it is very helpful to become more mindful of the thinking process and be able to distinguish when we are pursuing concepts rather than direct experience. The Buddha used 'reflective thought' or 'contemplative thought' to help him investigate the nature of reality. However, this was on a basis of highly-developed and stable concentration (which reduces and even temporarily eliminates discursive thought), in order to penetrate beyond the realm of self-supporting concepts to the selfless truth, thus arriving at direct realization (*bhāvanā-mayā-paññā*).

In the process of resolving doubt, it is useful to distinguish what mode of understanding will resolve which particular form of doubt. Some doubts may be resolved by some degree of careful thought, some by learning, while others may require some deeper development of meditation. These days there is much information available, sometimes too much. I thought it would be interesting to research Buddhist meditation on the internet – 12.3 million entries, and then I really had doubt about which one might be right. The one at the very top was Wikipedia. The second one was very smoothly written, and the author was only indicated after reading the entire article. However, then I had more doubts, since it was from a rather controversial organization. Thus when you try to answer one question, more questions sometimes arise, the usual way we work through the doubting process, peeling back the various levels of doubt. Through the experience, though, we ideally develop a more discerning attitude and are able to distinguish the information from the propaganda. One useful principle is to get as close to the original source as possible, such as consulting the Buddhist scriptures directly or consulting someone who has personal experience.

Sometimes the meditation tradition can come across as anti-book or anti-intellectual. Some people think: 'Oh no, I won't look at the book, I'll just sit and meditate on this.' Since they think meditation is the opposite of mental activity, they do not want to pollute

their spiritual practice with discursive thought! But they become more and more confused, more and more paralyzed with doubt. Some people say: 'I've got to solve this for myself, nobody else can answer this for me, I must find the real truth within myself.' This is true to a certain degree; however, it also cuts off the possibility to obtain some useful direction.

If we really feel confused, the way out of confusion is to achieve some clarity, and there are a great variety of ways to do this: information, advice, suggestions. Look around, find out what's possible. Even if it doesn't really address the direct problem, it may at least give us some new opening to work with confusion in a more flexible way. Eventually doubt can then become a source of deeper enquiry. The opposite of this is when people avoid any doubt altogether by searching around for some easily satisfying answer. The result can be a conglomerate of do-it-yourself spiritual clichés, borrowed wisdom and feel-good philosophy which never really address the fundamental issue of: 'Who is asking the question? Who is seeking the truth? Who is the knower?' Easy answers strangle the spiritual quest.

THE WRONG TOPIC

As we probably realize by now, some speculations will not reach a conclusion and we will be in doubt about them all our lives. It is thus important to know which sources of doubt are worth working on, which can be subject to some resolution and which cannot.

On a certain occasion the Buddha was staying in a forest and took up a handful of leaves. He asked the monks (*bhikkhus*) which they thought were more numerous, the leaves in his hand or those in the forest. When they replied that the leaves in the forest were more numerous, the Buddha responded:

> *Even so, bhikkhus, those things I have known directly are numerous, while those I have taught are few. And why, bhikkhus, have I not taught them? Because they are not beneficial, not relevant to the basis of the spiritual life, and do not lead to*

> *disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to calm, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to nibbāna. Therefore I have not taught them.*
>
> *And what, bhikkhus, have I taught? I have taught, 'This is dukkha'; I have taught, 'This is the origin of dukkha'; I have taught, 'This is the cessation of dukkha'; I have taught, 'This is the path leading to the cessation of dukkha'. And why, bhikkhus, have I taught this? Because this is beneficial, relevant to the basis of the spiritual life, and leads to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to calm, to direct knowledge, to awakening, to nibbāna. Therefore I have taught this.* (S.V,438)

Of course, some people today are often quite well educated and have more knowledge about a wide range of topics. Some knowledge such as psychology may have relevance for spiritual practice, and some, like some science, may be related to Buddhist topics. While some knowledge of these topics can be useful for cross-referencing and helping to relate spiritual or Buddhist themes to wider areas of our life, one also needs to be careful with the language and the cross-comparisons, as they may not specifically relate in detail. One example is the use of the term 'self' to define the Pali term '*attā*'. For most people 'self' refers particularly to the conventional self or personality, whereas '*attā*' had the stronger connotation of 'soul', as well as including the conventional self. It was the *attā* that was believed to transmigrate from life to life, whereas at death most of the attributes of the conventional self were left behind. This also adds to the confusion regarding the teaching on non-self. If psychologists hear the term 'non-self', they usually hear 'no self', which to them is equivalent to psychosis: 'What, Buddhists are teaching people to be psychotic, to lose their self?' No, what the Buddha is saying is to not obsessively grasp at changing bodily and mental processes as a permanent self-entity. We should also be clear that the Buddha never said: 'There is no self.' What he said was, 'All things are non-self', that is, everything has the non-self-like characteristic; even our sense of self has ultimately a non-self-like, impersonal characteristic when you examine it thoroughly. Saying that there is no self would be mistaken for the

annihilationist view.

THE WRONG ASSUMPTIONS/ASKING THE WRONG QUESTION

DISTORTIONS

Knowing that our view of the world is subject to distortion allows us not to take it so seriously: it's just a perception. Of course, this is the only perception we have to work with, so we do not reject it entirely either. If we notice that we are confused about some experience, perhaps we can reflect that possibly we may have a distorted perception of it, and that it is ultimately impermanent, unsatisfactory and non-self. One of Ajahn Chah's examples was of a broken glass. After it has broken people will remember that everything is impermanent, partly to allay the disappointment. He said, however, that if you really understand impermanence you should relate to that glass as if it were already broken. Then when it does break you are not surprised, but relieved: 'Oh, finally it is revealing its true nature as impermanent!' The Buddha encouraged investigation of the processes which give rise in an 'uninstructed worldling' to grasping a self. Thus rather than ask: 'Who am I?', it would be more useful to enquire: 'What makes up this sense of I?'

WORLDLY VALUES

Knowing the Eight Worldly Conditions not only helps us to notice when we get caught in them, but is also helpful for allowing us to see beyond them: they are only passing conditions. Spiritual practice can encompass the whole spectrum of experiences, positive and negative. The worldly approach to spiritual practice is to get something out of it. Spiritual values often do not fit into the usual categories of desirable experiences, or are their direct opposite. The Buddha gave the following summary:

> *The things of which you know - these things lead to dispassion, not to passion; to detachment, not to attachment; to diminution, not to accumulation; to wanting little, not to wanting much; to being easily satisfied, not to being hard to satisfy; to seclusion, not to socializing; to putting forth energy, not to indolence; to frugality, not to luxury - of them you should surely know that they belong to the Teaching, to the Training, to the Teacher's instruction* (A.IV,280).

How many of these spiritual values are surprising to you? If I turn around the usual worldly question: 'What have I gained?' to ask: 'What have I given up?', I have a completely different perspective on experience. To answer that question we must look outside the limitations of concepts, to another dimension of our being where we usually do not look. It points to the non-self, the non-ego, selflessness. And the answer usually comes out as positive, because, through spiritual practice the ego has usually given up some of its greed, aversion and delusion. As a spiritual question, what we've given up, what we've let go of, what we have freed ourself from, is more important. And the usual positive answer leads to encouragement to continue the practice since we see some beneficial results.

Bringing our expectations to spiritual practice will result in disappointment. Buddhist meditation is learning to see things as they really are, so if we can be more receptive to whatever arises in our experience, we are never disappointed. Rather than being blinkered by expectation, we bring it into awareness – yes, very interesting. Why am I being led around by expectations?

FOUR WAYS OF ANSWERING

There are four ways in which a question may be answered: 1) directly, 2) after being analyzed, 3) by asking a counter-question, 4) by being set aside (A.II,46; D.III,229 cf. A.I,197f). Sometimes the Buddha did not answer someone's question because he perceived that they would not comprehend his response. For example, one

time the wandering ascetic Vacchagotta visited the Buddha and asked:

> *How is it, master Gotama, does self exist?'*
>
> *When this was said the Revered One was silent. 'But then, master Gotama, does self not exist?' For a second time the Revered One was silent. Then the wandering ascetic Vacchagotta got up from his seat and went away. Now, not long after he had gone, the Venerable Ānanda asked the Revered One: 'How is it, sir, that when the Revered One was asked a question by the wandering ascetic Vacchagotta, he did not answer?'*
>
> *'If, Ānanda, when asked by the wandering ascetic Vacchagotta: "Does self exist?", I had replied: "Self exists", would that have been in conformity with the understanding that all things are non-self? If, when asked by the wandering ascetic Vacchagotta: "Does self not exist?", I had replied: "Self does not exist", then, Ānanda, the bewildered Vacchagotta would be even more bewildered, thinking: "Formerly, I surely had a self, but now I have not!"'* (S.IV,400ff.)

Thus when we are seeking some resolution to doubts, it is important to phrase the question in the right way. Also, I have observed that sometimes when we clearly know what it is we are asking, the answer is often revealed. It is as if it was previously obscured by an imprecise question coming from an unclear mind.

WRONG VIEW(S) OR FIXED VIEW

We all have views on things; however, it can be more skilful to relate to them with a degree of fluidity, just like going for a drive in the countryside and viewing the passing scenery. At this time and place we have this particular view on reality, and at another time and place we have a different view. Do you know what your views are? We have our views on politics and worldly affairs. We have views about life: is the cup half full or half empty? And most specifically, we have views about our self (detailed above under

Self-Doubt), are you clear about them? Do you know that they are only ways of viewing? Through recognizing the liabilities of wrong views and the obstruction of fixed views, we may gradually release our dependence upon views and abide more peacefully with the viewing.

A significant point which the Buddha emphasized in one discussion (M.I,485) was that he had given up holding speculative views because he had seen directly the arising and passing away of the five groups of grasping. That is, through direct realization one no longer needs a view because one knows the truth.

SELF DOUBT

Investigating self-doubt can be a very useful exercise. It can not only reveal some of our self-conditioned habits and attitudes, but may also allow an insightful perspective on the very nature of selfhood. Thus it is very useful to become more aware of what the nature of one's self-doubt really is. As mentioned above, often relative self-doubts and existential ones become intermingled, so it is important to be able to distinguish them. Some degree of relative self-doubt can be released through recognizing old conditioned habits. Existential self-doubt can be resolved through a meditative investigation of the self-identity process, which is entering some quite primal territory. Once we are able to see just how the sense of a self is causally conditioned, all such unrealistic thoughts cease (S.II,26). As the Buddha said:

> *I am' is a conceiving; 'I am this' is a conceiving; 'I will be' is a conceiving ... When the sage has gone beyond all conceivings, he is called 'at peace'. The sage at peace is not born, does not age, is not agitated, is not obstructed'* (M.III,246; abridged).

Basically, the more clearly we are able to see the process of 'I-making', the less we grasp at it as being some substantial entity. This is not a process of 'getting rid of self', but one of releasing our obsessive grasping and allowing the self-referencing process to flow in the conventional sense: 'I' still feel, but the 'I' reference

changes with the feeling.

Some self-doubt is valuable. If you have doubt about whether you are benefiting from the practice, maybe you need to enquire: 'Is this really working for me? Is this good for me? Is this useful for me?' If we just have occasional glimpses of increased understanding, or there is no significant change in our behaviour or attitude, perhaps it is worth re-evaluating our practice. Is this type of practice suitable to my temperament? Is my approach to practice correct or appropriate? Some people doggedly plod along with a spiritual technique, hoping that it will eventually give some results. While some techniques do have intrinsic effects, the real value in them is to increase our self-awareness. What is happening in body and mind? Am I getting caught in the spiritual success game, trying to perfect this technique with an increase in spiritual pride, stress and fear of failure? Or am I able to explore the ego-activity spinning off from the challenges of pursuing this spiritual discipline?

CONFUSION

If we recognize confusion as a common experience, it is helpful to get some perspective on its causes. What triggers it off? How does it arise? Is it about something specific or is it a general condition of mind? Of most benefit, of course, is to focus and clear the mind through meditation. When you acknowledge confusion, try to do some meditation on the breath or walking meditation. Even a small amount can help to undermine the tendency to confusion, which otherwise tends to compound itself: confused about confusion.

Another helpful thing is to simplify your life. Simplify and organize your living and working places in order to have a clean and orderly environment around you. Try to focus on doing one thing at a time, and finish it before moving on to the next thing. Be more disciplined about how much you take on and try to maintain some continuity with your schedule. It is very helpful to be more clear and compassionate about what your priorities are. If we

observe the tendency to try to know completely we can then learn to be satisfied with uncertainty, partial knowledge or temporary knowledge, which is a much more realistic way of knowing.

WORRY

What am I really worrying about? If we can observe the nature of worry, recognize what the symptoms are and see how it is triggered off, we may begin to acknowledge it as an unwholesome conditioned process, just an old habit. Take it to its extreme and it becomes absurd, so you can laugh at it. Especially if we can open to the unpleasantness of it, we naturally learn to let it go, to de-condition this habit tendency. Personally, I was a real worrier, as I had been educated to always have everything planned out before hand. However, when I finally realized that this was impossible in a continuously changing world and only making me more anxious, I then re-educated myself to drop it and go with the flow much more. Sometimes worry may arise again, but now we have a new relationship to it, based upon clear seeing and wisdom.

INDECISION

In fact we can never be certain about every consequence. Once we have weighed up certain courses of action, it may be worth at least trying out the most favourable one to test the water. In this way it changes from a mental concept to a concrete action, and we may get another perspective on it. As it is said: 'The path up the mountain begins with one step.' Rather than being too perfectionistic, it may be more useful to aim for merely a reasonable decision or a well-considered action, and be humble enough to learn from our mistakes. If we are really unable to decide, we could just follow our usual course. Then perhaps necessity will decide for us. Sometimes the feeling of having to make a decision is based upon some not very skilful cause such as restlessness, boredom, etc. If we stick with what we are doing, it will eventually pass.

FEAR/ANXIETY

To get a grip on fear and anxiety, it can be helpful to try to observe the fear process as an objective observer or interested investigator. For me the most obvious way is to look at the fear reaction in the body. The body is slower to change than the mind and expresses emotion in a much more tangible way. Thus when fear arises we can bring awareness to the physical sensations which are reasonably obvious: the heart racing, heat rising in the face, muscles tensing, whatever; there is some tangible expression of fear to be clearly observed. If I go directly to the emotion of fear, very easily a vortex of increasing reactions to the reactions to the reactions can arise, and soon I am having a panic attack or even heart failure. However, being an observer of the physical expression of fear can allow us to be aware of it without being caught in it. Of course, it doesn't happen that easily all the time, since most of us have a long relationship with many different forms of fear. The principle is to try to access it to some degree, without being overwhelmed by it. If we are overwhelmed we are just thrown into more traumatic reactions to it. We can end up re-traumatized, reaffirming the old fear syndrome. However, if we can keep some access to it, for example through its physical effects, we can achieve a more objective perspective on the nature of the fear syndrome. This doesn't mean that one becomes fearless, but being able to observe fear less fearfully gives us more confidence to actually work with it, and not be chased around by it all the time.

GOOD FRIENDS/TEACHERS (SANGHA)

Some kinds of doubts, although not resolved, can at least be alleviated by people who can give suggestions, direction in the practice or encouragement. Of course, it is especially meaningful if they are people with whom you feel some deep affinity, or who can significantly empathize with your particular issues. Some teachers may just respond: 'You need more mindfulness', while you sense that others have been through somewhat similar situations and can respond from personal experience.

An experienced teacher like Ajahn Chah was especially gifted at guiding many different people, including Westerners. When I was with Ajahn Chah I thought: 'It would be very nice if he would tell me I was doing well.' But he was a very skilled teacher, so he wouldn't fall for that one. If somebody was really lost in doubt or totally confused, he would encourage them: 'Yes, you're doing well, keep going.' But if somebody had some stability in the practice and came to ask Ajahn Chah: 'How am I doing?' he would answer: 'I don't know, how are you doing?' He would encourage you to look at yourself, check out your own experience, check out your own mind. He would even make jokes about teachers who gave interviews to students: 'If you don't know your mind yourself, how do you expect the teacher to know your mind?' At first I found it very hard to 'interview myself' or try to objectively evaluate my own experiences, especially after spending so many years as a student being evaluated by others. However, setting up this 'self-knowing' and gaining confidence in it are key elements in being able to fine-tune practice to one's own unique path.

So we can learn to ask ourselves how we are doing, or at least, how we think we are doing, and then try to get a reality check from someone more experienced. Sometimes our perceptions of our self can be inflated. Of course, being with Ajahn Chah it was hard to be inflated – he was a really good deflater. Otherwise, it is valuable to have a good friend who can give some honest feedback. During a visit to Wat Pah Nanachat I had a talk with Ajahn Sumedho, and basically he answered my three-year backlog of questions in about thirty minutes (some answers I already 'knew' but needed confirmation for them). I then realized the benefit of having an experienced teacher to give some direction to our efforts, although we each still need to do the practice. One of the major causes of meditators going astray is not having a guide, good friends or other sources of getting feedback on one's spiritual practice. When we are in the rarefied territory of spiritual exploration, it is easy to think that we are quite unique and special.

DON'T KNOW

Some doubts may not be answered very easily. We may need to put advice into practice in order to see for ourselves. Ajahn Chah once said: 'I can't give you any wisdom, I can only give you patience.' That is, he could give us the encouragement to be persevering in the practice until we arrived at our own wisdom of clearly seeing the way things are. This would require some consistency in our investigation, as well as some reality-checking and cross-checking. And sometimes it is more peacefully honest to acknowledge that we just do not know. One of Ajahn Chah's most frequent teachings was: 'It's uncertain' (Thai: *my nay*). Since everything is ultimately changing and impermanent, it manifests as being uncertain and unreliable. Can you abide with that? What does not knowing feel like? Often, usually more often than we realize, we really do not know. But we can know that we do not know, and that is a form of knowing. We still have awareness of bodily sensations, feeling tones, conditions of mind in the present moment, and maybe some interest in knowing in knowing's own time. The benefit of this is that when we know we do not know we can find out, we can search and investigate. If we think we know or pretend we know, this is not only fooling ourselves, but also means we cease from looking further.

DOUBT AS ENQUIRY

If we thoroughly investigate the nature of doubt, we could transform it into really deep enquiry. Rather than being caught in the doubt: 'Is the Buddha enlightened?', you could turn it around and ask: 'Who's asking that question?' And this could lead to a much more meaningful spiritual investigation. You ask the question; then, rather than answering it, you follow the mind deeper into the inner silence. If you look at yourself within that context of: 'Who is asking the question?', you might see a deeper level of self. For example, you might see insecurity, the aspect of ego that wants to be re-assured, that needs propping up, that needs continued encouragement by having it confirmed that: 'Yes,

the Buddha is enlightened.' And that's what's important to see, when you can open to seeing it. Whether or not you get the answer to your initial question isn't really important. What is important is that it can lead us into a deeper enquiry, into the root of the self who is asking this question. Whether the Buddha is enlightened or not will not make me enlightened. The answer could give me encouragement, it could maybe give me direction, but it's not the real issue. The really important issue is what's happening inside yourself when doubt comes up.

Some teachers teach about actually encouraging doubt. When you really go into doubt, you get down to the sources of the fundamental roots of self: Who is doubting? Who wants to know? If we are mindful of doubt, we may sometimes notice that the mind is open and receptive to looking further, beyond the doubt to the doubter itself, and possibly to the ultimate pure, unobscured knowing. Self wants to at least appear to know in order to stay in control, and can create all kinds of illusions and delusions to give the impression that it knows, or thinks it knows, or assumes it knows. At the heart of it we don't really know. If all of life is fundamentally impermanent, how do you know anything, other than that things are all constantly changing?

We begin to realize what real knowing is: knowing the ultimate truth. It's not necessarily knowing all the details. It's knowing what the real essence of everything is. Ajahn Chah said that rather than knowing all the trees in the forest, if you just know what one tree ultimately is, then you know all the other trees. You know this one tree is impermanent, unsatisfactory and non-self. If you know that, you know all trees are ultimately the same. That's all you have to know. But most of us have been trained to look outside at all the diversity, rather than looking inside at the source. So perhaps we can use doubt to bring us back to the source, bring it home to where it's really coming from, where the real questions are being asked.

SUMMARY

Doubt as understood in the Pali Canon is basically doubt about Buddhism: the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha and the training. In the present time, however, with so much emphasis upon conceptual thought, a number of other forms of doubt have arisen. I have designated these as self-doubt, confusion, worry, indecision and fear-anxiety. Some doubts concern specific topics, which can then be researched and possibly some resolution achieved. Some arise due to 'looking in the wrong direction' or applying an incorrect method of resolution. Some of these are: 1) not using the right mode of understanding, either thinking, learning or meditative realization, 2) trying to know about that which is unknowable, for example, where an enlightened person goes after death, 3) enquiring from false assumptions: who gets enlightened? Some doubts arise due to our holding onto wrong views or rigid views, which then clash with new knowledge and throw us into uncertainty.

The principal way to resolve doubt is by investigation. We mindfully observe the nature of doubt to know its particular form. Some forms, like confusion, worry or enquiring only from an intellectual mode may be due to old habits feeding this tendency. Other forms may be due to serious enquiry into truth and may require some meditative development, perhaps with the support of a wise teacher or experienced friend. A form like self-doubt may require some review of habits, as well as study of the underlying dynamics of I-making.

Ideally, if we don't become paralyzed with doubt it can be transformed into reflective enquiry: 'Who is asking the question?' Rather than having the question answered and leaving space for another question, we can look into the silence of the mind at a deeper level of self, possibly to the source of self. This is how we can transform a hindrance into a helper. One of the questions Ajahn Chah posed was: 'If you can't go forward, and you can't go back, and you can't stand still, where do you go?'

BEYOND THE HINDRANCES

As we are well aware by now, these Hindrances are intrinsic aspects of self which are not so easy to relinquish. It generally requires some resolute effort to reduce their influence in our lives. Sometimes they are not manifest, but as long as they are not fully resolved they may arise at any time and give cause for some disturbances in our lives, maybe completely overwhelming us. Similarly with meditation: the Hindrances may not be obviously present on some occasions, while at other times our meditation practice is seriously disrupted by them.

Realizing the tenacious nature of these Hindrances, the Buddha provided some very thorough and radical advice on how to deal with them. Even some initial application of these teachings can be beneficial for reducing their effects. Cultivating appropriate attention can have a significant influence on how we perceive reality and our associated reactions to it. If our attention is continuously inappropriate, we are continuously mis-perceiving sense impressions and basically compounding ignorance.

Spending some time during meditation developing the themes of unattractiveness of the body and friendliness is like maintaining mental fitness for times when the Hindrances of sensual desire or ill-will may suddenly arise. Firstly, we gain some experience and

proficiency in using them, rather than just knowing the theory or the formula for recitation. Secondly, we don't lose connection with them and thus they can become an integral part of our spiritual practice, as these expressions of selfhood are prevalent in some form or other.

In the process of increasing awareness of conditions of mind, we come to appreciate the benefits of the Factors of Awakening and increase their prominence in our life. Simultaneously, we may begin to notice an attenuation of the various Hindrances. This process is usually a matter of degree, and though with sustained effort they may weaken in strength and intensity, they are only completely resolved at the different stages of awakening. Although these stages are designated according to the fetter(s) which are exhausted or diminished, there is a close connection between the Hindrances and some of the fetters, with some slight adjustment in terms (see Appendix 2). Thus instead of the hindrance terms of sensual desire and ill-will, the fetters refer to sensual lust and repulsion.

STREAM-ENTRY

The first stage of awakening is referred to as stream-entry *(sotāpanna).* This is characterized as a major insight into the impermanent and conditioned nature of phenomena, as exemplified in the teaching on the Four Noble Truths. A standard description is:

> *When the Revered One knew that Yasa, the young man of good family, was of ready mind, receptive mind, free from obstruction, exultant, gladdened, then he made known the condensed teaching of the Buddhas: dukkha, its arising, its cessation and the path. And just as a clean cloth without stain would properly take dye, even so as Yasa sat there the pure, stainless vision of Dhamma arose, that is: 'Whatever phenomena arise, all that is subject to cessation.'* (Vin.I,15)

This significant insight causes a major shift in one's understanding of reality and results in a radical change in consciousness. The

insight into impermanence and causal conditioning reveals impersonality or the non-self characteristic of phenomena, so that the fetter of identity view (*sakkāya diṭṭhi*) is relinquished. Having realized the conditioned nature of all phenomena, the fetter of holding to rites and rituals (*sīlabbataparāmāsa*) is abandoned. And through directly experiencing the truth of the Buddha's teaching, the fetter/hindrance of doubt is abandoned and one gains complete confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. This is a very significant and important breakthrough in understanding the Buddha's teaching. The term 'stream-entry' means that one is now in the stream flowing to nibbāna, as one's understanding is such that there is no longer any 'going back' to states of serious ignorance which would cause rebirth in the 'states of woe': hell realm, animal realm, hungry ghost realm (A.II,238). Three kinds of stream-enterer are mentioned: one is reborn among humans or celestials (*deva*) up to seven more times; one is reborn among humans of 'good family' two or three times; one is reborn only once more among humans (A.I,233).

The four results of stream-entry are complete confidence in the Buddha, in the Dhamma and in the Sangha, and maintaining the Five Precepts:

> *Endowed with morality which is agreeable to the noble ones, unbroken, flawless, spotless, freeing, praised by the wise, untarnished, conducive to concentration* (A.V,183f).

On several occasions the Buddha altered this standard list by substituting generosity for the Precepts. On those occasions he was addressing specific individuals[1] who he perhaps knew were already well-established in the Precepts, but who could benefit from developing generosity. Another alteration was made in the case of Anāthapiṇḍika, where the extra factor, the 'noble method', is clearly seen and thoroughly understood with wisdom, this being the formula for conditional causality (A.V,184). This may also have been a specific teaching for the already devoted, virtuous and generous lay supporter whose progress on the path could benefit from deeper insight into this topic.

[1] Isidatta and Purāna at S.V,348f and Kāḷigodhā at S.V,398f.

The six benefits of realizing stream-entry are: 1) one is certain in true Dhamma, 2) one does not decline, 3) one's suffering is limited, 4) one possesses uncommon knowledge, and 5) one has clearly seen cause and 6) things arising from cause (A.III,441).

Sceptical doubt as a hindrance is overcome at stream-entry. With the profound insight of the vision of Dhamma or opening of the Dhamma eye (sometimes called the 'breakthrough [*abisamaya*] to Dhamma', S.II,133f), the stream-enterer has gone beyond doubt about the teaching (Dhamma), and also gains complete confidence in the Buddha and the Sangha. There is, however, still ignorance until the stage of arahantship. Thus there may be a residue of other forms of doubt. One passage in fact says that the final escape from the dart of doubt and uncertainty is uprooting the conceit 'I am' (A.III,292). Since conceit is only fully transcended at arahantship, this would imply that some doubt and uncertainty are still present until final liberation. Elsewhere it is also implied that only the *arahant* has arrived at complete confidence in the Triple Gem (M.I,184), and thus totally transcended doubt.

ONCE-RETURN

The next stage of the awakening process is called 'once-return' (*sakadāgāmi*). While the realization resulting in stream entry is dramatic, the transition to the next stage is noticeably subtle. It differs from stream-entry only as having diminished lust, aversion and delusion (*rāga-dosa-moha*).

> *With the exhaustion of the three fetters [same as stream-enterer] and the diminishing of lust, aversion and delusion, they are a once-returner, coming back to this world only once before making an end of suffering.* (A.I,233)

Exactly how this is accomplished is not explained further. As with the stream-enterer, once-returners fulfil morality, but only develop concentration and wisdom to a moderate degree (A.I,233).

NON-RETURN

In the third stage, called 'non-return' (*anāgāmi*), the 'five lower fetters' are exhausted; that is, the same three as for the stream-enterer, plus sensual lust and repulsion or the Hindrances of sensual desire and ill-will, together with remorse (PP. 802) are transcended. Five gradations of non-returner are distinguished (A.IV,70f).[2] They are referred to as being 'spontaneously reborn' [in one of the higher heavens] and, without returning [to human birth], attain final awakening (D.I,156).

ARAHANT

The last stage of awakening is called the *arahant*, literally, 'the worthy one'.

> *With the destruction of the outflows, he realizes for himself with special knowledge, in this life, the liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom which is without the outflows, and thus he abides calmed.* (A.I,234)

With the realization of this state all ten of the fetters are destroyed and the Hindrances of lethargy and drowsiness and restlessness are eliminated. This realization is mostly described with reference to the 'destruction of the outflows' of sensuality,[3] existence, views and ignorance, which have a correlation with the fetters (see Appendix 2). An *arahant* is also defined as *'free of the outflows, having completed the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, attained his own welfare, completely exhausted the fetters of existence, having perfectly understood liberation'* (A.IV,369f). At this stage, with all defilements of the mind totally eliminated, *arahants* are referred to as 'beyond training' (*asekha*), as they have completed the training in morality, concentration and wisdom (A.I,234).

> *Then the Venerable Anuruddha, dwelling alone, withdrawn, vigilant, ardent, resolute, in no long time understood Dhamma for himself with direct knowledge, and knowing for himself, entered*

[2] For further details see Bhikkhu Bodhi's note in CDB, 1902 n.65.

[3] While lust for sensuality of the sense realm is exhausted by the non-returner, two of the last five fetters exhausted by the *arahant* are lust for the fine material realm (*rūpa rāga*) and lust for the immaterial realm (*arūpa rāga*).

> *on and abode in that unsurpassed culmination of the religious life for which a man of good family rightly goes forth from home life to homelessness. And he knew: 'Exhausted is birth, fulfilled is the religious life, what is done is done, there is no more future life.' And Venerable Anuruddha became one of the arahants.* (A.I,282)

The *arahant* is incapable of killing, stealing, sexual intercourse, lying, storing things for enjoyment, disavowing the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha and the training, and following a wrong course through desire, aversion, delusion or fear (A.IV,370f). At least four types of *arahant* are designated: those who possess the triple knowledge (*te-vijja*), those who possess the six kinds of psychic powers (*abhiññā*), those who are 'liberated-both-ways' and those who are liberated by wisdom (S.I,191). The one liberated-both-ways is said to be able to 'attain with the body and abide in those liberations[4] which are peaceful, beyond forms, immaterial, and his outflows are exhausted through seeing with wisdom' (M.I,477). 'Liberated by wisdom' means that they are not able to attain the 'immaterial liberations' but the outflows are exhausted. This would include the so-called 'dry vision' or 'dry insight' (*sukkha-vipassaka*) *arahant*, whom the commentarial tradition interprets as not having attained the absorptions.[5] It seems that the majority of *arahants* were of the 'liberated by wisdom' type, as one discourse mentions that of 500 *arahants* present there were sixty each of the first three types and thus 320 liberated by wisdom (S.I,191).

Generally speaking, if we develop the meditation exercises which are prescribed for the various Hindrances and integrate the supportive practices into our lives, we may notice that we are less 'hindered' by the Hindrances in both our spiritual practice and our ordinary life. Ideally, the Hindrances can be attenuated until they no longer hinder the development of absorption concentration, which further deepens penetrating insight. As insight into the

[4] This would imply that they are at least able to access the formless absorptions (*arūpa-jhāna*), four absorptions using a 'formless' object for concentration: boundless space, boundless consciousness, sphere of nothingness, sphere of neither-perception-nor-non-perception.

[5] However, see Bhikkhu Bodhi's note in CDB, p.785, note 210, and Analayo (2012) pp.252f.

impermanence, unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and impersonality of all conditioned phenomena deepens, one begins to experience increasing disenchantment (*nibbīda*), then dispassion (*virāga*) and finally liberation (*vimutti*) (S.IV,24f).

> *Monks, physicality ... feeling ... perception ... mental processes ... consciousness is impermanent; what is impermanent is dukkha; what is dukkha is non-self; what is non-self should be seen as it really is by right wisdom as: 'This is not mine, this is not what I am, this is not my self.' Thus, seeing as it really is by right wisdom, the mind becomes dispassionate and is liberated from the outflows without grasping. If a monk's mind has become dispassionate towards the physicality element ... feeling ... perception ... mental processes ... consciousness element, it is liberated from the outflows without grasping. Being liberated, it is steadfast; being steadfast, it is content; being content, it is not agitated; not being agitated, he personally realizes nibbāna. He clearly knows: 'Exhausted is birth, the religious life is complete, what had to be done is done, there is no more of this present state'* (S.III,45).

> *So transient is everything, bhikkhus; so unstable is everything, bhikkhus; so uncomforting is everything, bhikkhus; so much so that it is suitable for you to be disenchanted with all conditioned things, to be dispassionate towards them, to be liberated from them* (S.II,191).

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SELECTED GLOSSARY

Since most key terms are followed by their Pali forms I have not included every single term. I have also cross-referenced some common terms from English to Pali. For detailed explanations see the Buddhist Dictionary or PED for more technical information. Alternative translations are in square brackets.

Abhiññā: six kinds of psychic or supernormal powers: 1) superhuman abilities, i.e. walking on water, flying through the air, etc., 2) 'divine hearing', 3) mind-reading, 4) 'divine seeing': seeing the arising and passing of beings according to their *kamma*, 5) recollecting one's former existences, 6) exhaustion of the outflows.

Abhijjhā: covetousness.

Absorptions: *jhāna.*

Acinteyya: inconceivable, not to be known by conceptual thought: 1) the sphere of a Buddha, 2) the domain of the meditative absorptions, 3) the results of intentional actions (*kamma-vipāka*), and 4) speculation about the nature of the world.

Anāgāmi: non-returner, the third stage of awakening.

Anatta: non-self, impersonality; one of the Three Characteristics.

Anicca: impermanence.

Arahant: the 'worthy one', the fourth and final stage of Awakening.

Ārambhadhātu: element of inception; one of the three forms of energetic exertion, together with *nikkamadhātu* (the element of persistence) and *parakkamadhātu* (the element of exertion).

Āsava: outflows (of selfhood): sense desire, becoming, ignorance and (wrong) views. [Taints, corruptions, influxes, pollutions].

Asubha: 'unbeautiful', unattractive [loathsome, foul].

Attā: self.

Attendings with Mindfulness: *satipaṭṭhāna* [Foundations of Mindfulness].

Avijjā: ignorance.

Avyākata: indeterminants, unanswered questions.

Awakening, four stages of: stream-entry, once-return, non-return and arahant, delineated by the 'fetters' which have been eliminated or reduced: see Appendix 2.

Basis of rebirth: *upadhi* : four sources - sensual pleasures, five groups of grasping, defilements, *kamma*. [Attachment, acquisitions].

Bhavarāgā: lust for existence.

Bhikkhu: monk, literally 'alms mendicant'.

Brahma vihāra: four Divine Abidings; friendliness *(mettā),* compassion *(karunā),* empathetic joy *(muditā)* and equanimity *(upekkhā).*

Calm Meditation: *samatha kammathāna* – meditation practice with a strong emphasis on concentration in order to attain absorption.

Cintā-mayā-paññā: understanding from thinking; one of the three modes of understanding, together with *suta-mayā-paññā* (understanding from learning) and *bhāvanā-mayā-paññā* (experiential realization through meditation).

Concentration: *samādhi.*

Conceptual proliferation: *papañca*.

Conditional Causality: *paticca-samuppāda* – the Buddha's teaching that all conditioned things arise from a cause and cease with the cessation of the cause; usually formally presented as twelve links. [Dependent origination].

Consciousness: *viññāna* – one of the basic functions of mind; usually defined in relation to the six senses.

Deva: literally 'radiant'; celestial being, god, deity.

Dhamma: a) with capital 'D', the Buddha's teaching, b) with small 'd', phenomena, things.

Dhammachanda: desire for Dhamma.

Dhamma-vicaya: investigation of phenomena.

Dhātu: four physical elements of earth, fire, water and air.

Disenchantment: *nibbidā* [Revulsion].

Dispassion: *virāga.*

Diṭṭhi: view, usually in sense of 'wrong view'.

Dosa: aversion.

Dukkha: 1) pain, dis-ease, suffering, 2) unsatisfactoriness, imperfection, incompleteness.

Esanā: 'longings'; three - sensuality, existence, spiritual life.

Factors of Awakening, the Seven: mindfulness, investigation of *dhamma*, energy, joy, tranquillity, concentration and equanimity.

Feeling (tones): *vedanā.*

Fetter: *samyojana.*

Five Groups of Grasping: *pañcupādānakkhandha* or *khandha* – physical form, feelings, perceptions, mental processes, consciousness.

Five Hindrances: sensual desire, ill-will, lethargy and drowsiness, restlessness and remorse, doubt.

Five Precepts: refraining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and intoxication; the basic moral standard for a Buddhist.

Four Noble Truths: *ariya sacca – dukkha*, origin of *dukkha*, cessation of *dukkha* and path to cessation of *dukkha*.

Grasping: *upādāna.*

Iddhipāda: roads to psychic powers (see *Abhiññā).*

Ignorance: *avijjā.*

Impermanence: *anicca.*

Impersonality: *anattā.*

Indriya guttadvāra: guarding the doors of the senses or 'sense restraint' (*indriya saṃvara*).

Jhāna – four stages of increasingly deeper concentration, see Introduction.

Kāma: sense pleasures, sensuality; as *Kāmabhava or Kāmaloka* it also denotes the Sensuous Realm of existence, the other two realms being the Fine-material Realm (*rūpa*) and the Immaterial Realm (*arūpa)*; for details see Bud. Dict. *'loka'.*

Kāma-chanda: desire for sensual pleasure.

Kāmaguṇā: the five 'strands of sensual pleasure'.

Kāmarāgā: lust for sensual pleasure.

Kāmesu micchācāra: inappropriate sensual/sexual conduct.

Kamma: intentional action which has the potential to produce a result (*vipāka*).

Kammapatha: ten wrong ways of action – killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, slander, harsh speech, foolish speech, covetousness, ill-will, wrong views.

Karaṇiya Mettā Sutta: the discourse on Loving-Kindness or Friendliness.

Kataññuta: gratitude, most particularly to one's parents.

Khandha: the five groups of grasping – physical form, feelings, perceptions, mental processes, consciousness. [Aggregates].

Lethargy and drowsiness: *thīna-middha* [Sloth and torpor].

Loka-dhamma: the eight worldly conditions – gain and loss, fame and disgrace, praise and blame, happiness and suffering (A.IV,157f).

Lokiya: worldly.

Lokuttara: supermundane.

Mental processes: *saṅkhāra;* as one of the groups of grasping its most prominent activity is intention, will, volition.

Mettābhavana: friendliness meditation.

Micchā vitakka: three wrong thoughts – sensuality, ill-will, harming.

Nekkhamma: renunciation, relinquishment.

Nibbāna: the ultimate 'goal' of Buddhist practice, the cessation of greed, aversion and delusion.

Nīvarana: Hindrances.

Ogha: 'flood', four – same as 'outflows'.

Outflows (of selfhood): *āsava*, four – ignorance, sense desire, for existence, views.

Paticca-samuppāda: Conditional Causality. [Dependent Origination].

Paṭigha: repulsion, one of the underlying dispositions [aversion, repugnance].

Pīti: rapture, a Factor of Awakening and of absorption.

Puja: devotional observances, evening and morning chanting.

Rebirth: *punabbhava.* (literally 're-becoming').

Restlessness and remorse: *uddhacca-kukkucca.*

Sabhāva-dhamma: natural phenomena.

Sakadāgāmi: once-returner, the second stage of awakening.

Sakkāya-diṭṭhi: identity view, one of the fetters.

Sammā vāyāma: Right Effort, sixth factor of the Eightfold Path, same as *Sammappadhāna:* Four Right Strivings – avoid unwholesome states, remove unwholesome states, develop wholesome states, maintain wholesome states.

Saṁvega: spiritual agitation or anxiety at becoming aware of the fragile human condition.

Saṃyojana: fetters, ten – see Appendix 2

Saṅkhāra – 'making together', 1) as a *khandha*: mental processes: various mental qualities, the main one being intention, will or volition, 2) as a factor of Conditional Causality: formative mental process, habitual tendencies conditioning consciousness, 3) conditioned phenomena.

Saññā: 'associative knowledge', perception, cognition.

Sīla: skilful conduct, morality, virtue.

Six internal and external sense-spheres; sixfold sense bases: *salāyatana* – six sense organs and six sense objects, the mind and mental objects being the sixth.

Sotāpanna: stream-enterer, the first stage of awakening.

Spiritual Faculties and Powers: faith, wisdom, energy, concentration and mindfulness.

S*ukha somanassa:* happiness and well-being.

Tanhā: thirst, three kinds - sensuality, for existence and for non-existence. [Craving].

Te-vijja: Three Knowledges – 1) recollection of one's former existences, 2) 'divine seeing' – seeing the arising and passing of other beings according to their *kamma*, 3) exhaustion of the outflows.

Thīna-middha: lethargy and drowsiness.

Three Characteristics: *tilakkhana* - the 'characteristics' of all

conditioned things: impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and impersonality.

Three Knowledges: *Te-vijja* – remembrance of one's former rebirths; 'divine seeing': seeing the arising and passing of beings according to their *kamma*; exhaustion of the outflows.

Triple Gem: *tiratana* – Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha; also called the Three Refuges.

Uddhacca-kukkucca: restlessness and remorse/worry. [flurry and worry, restlessness and worry].

Underlying dispositions: *anusaya* - seven kinds: lust, aversion, views, doubt, conceit, lust for existence, ignorance. [Underlying tendencies].

Unsatisfactoriness: *dukkha* in its existential manifestation.

Upādāna: grasping, four forms: sensuality, views, rules and rituals, personality belief. [Clinging].

Upadhi: basis for rebirth.

Upāya: skilful means.

Vedanā: feeling tone.

Vicikicchā: doubt.

Vimutti: liberation.

Vinaya (Pitaka): the collection of the disciplinary rules and procedures for monastics.

Viññāna: consciousness.

Vipallāsa: distortions, four, either of perception, thought or view – regarding a) what is impermanent as permanent, b) what is unsatisfactory as pleasant, c) what is non-self as self, d) what is unattractive as beautiful.

Vipassanā: insight.

Vipassanā kammathāna – meditation practice with a strong emphasis on mindfulness and investigation, in order to see

directly the Three Characteristics of impermanence, *dukkha* and impersonality.

Vyāpāda or *byāpāda*: ill-will.

Worthy One: *arahant*, one of the titles of the Buddha and all those who are fully awakened.

Yathābūtā: as it really is.

Yoga: bonds, same as four outflows.

Yoniso manasikāra: thorough, appropriate and wise attention.

APPENDIX 1

THIRTY-TWO PARTS OF THE BODY

Atthi imasamim kāye	In this body there are:
kesā	Hair of the head
lomā	Hair of the body
nakkhā	Nails
dantā	Teeth
taco	Skin
maṃsaṃ	Flesh
nahārū	Sinews
aṭṭhī	Bones
aṭṭhimiñjaṃ	Bone marrow
vakkaṃ	Kidneys
hadayaṃ	Heart
yakanaṃ	Liver

kilomakaṃ	Membranes
pihakaṃ	Spleen
papphāsaṃ	Lungs
antaṃ	Bowels
antaguṇaṃ	Entrails
udariyaṃ	Undigested food
karīsaṃ	Excrement
pittaṃ	Bile
semhaṃ	Phlegm
pubbo	Pus
litaṃ	Blood
sedo	Sweat
medo	Fat
assu	Tears
vasā	Grease
kheḷo	Spittle
siṇghānikā	Mucus
lasikā	Oil of the joints
muttaṃ	Urine
matthaluṇgan'ti	Brain

Evam-ayaṃ me kāyo uddhaṃ,	This then which is my body,
Pādatalā adho kesamatthakā,	from the soles of the feet up and down from the crown of the head,
tacapariyanto pūro nānappakārassa asucino.	is a sealed bag of skin filled with unattractive things.

APPENDIX 2

Outflows	Grasping	Hindrances	Dispositions	Fetters
Sensuality	Sensuality	Sensual desire	Sensual lust	+Sensual lust
		Ill-will	Repulsion	+Ill-will
View	View		View	+Identity view
		Doubt	Doubt	+Doubt
	Rites & Rituals			+Holding to Rites
Existence			Lust for Existence	Lust for Fine - Material Realm
		*Lethargy		Lust for Immaterial Realm
	Self view		Conceit	Conceit
		Restlessness		Restlessness
Ignorance			Ignorance	Ignorance

*No correlation
+ Five Lower Fetters

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ajahn Thiradhammo was born near Vancouver, Canada in 1949. He interrupted his engineering studies in 1969 for travel to Europe, the Middle East and overland to south Asia, where he did a one-month intensive meditation retreat at Kandaboda Meditation Centre, Sri Lanka. After another year of studies he decided to do a one-month retreat in Thailand, but stayed for nine years, becoming a novice in 1973 and a monk in 1974 at Wat Meung Man, Chiang Mai. In 1975 he visited Wat Pah Pong and the newly-founded Wat Pah Nanachat, and took up residence there until 1982 when he came to Chithurst Monastery, UK. From November 1984 until May 1987 he was abbot of Harnham Monastery, Northumberland, and in May 1988 was founding abbot of Dhammapala Monastery, Switzerland. In 2005 he took up the abbotship of Bodhinyanarama Monastery, Wellington, New Zealand and in 2012 retired from abbotships. He is presently of no fixed abode.

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