

*Not
for
Sure*

TWO DHAMMA TALKS

*Venerable
Ajahn Chah*

TRANSLATED FROM THE THAI BY

THANISSARO BHIKKHU

for free distribution

NOTE

*The translation of "Still, Flowing Water" offered here
is based on an entirely new transcription
of the Thai original.*

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The Sangha, Wat Pah Nanachat
Warin Chamraab, Ubon Ratchathani 34310, Thailand

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Still, Flowing Water

OKAY, EVERYONE, BE INTENT. PAY ATTENTION. Even though you're sitting near one another, don't let your mind focus on this person or that. It's as if you're sitting alone on a mountain or in a forest somewhere, all by yourself. You're sitting. What do you have sitting here right now? Just body and mind, that's all. Body and mind. Only these two things. What you have sitting here right now is the body and the mind. Everything sitting in this physical lump here is "body." "Mind" is what thinks, what receives and is aware of preoccupations in the present. Or you can call these two things *nāma* and *rūpa*. *Nāma* means anything that has no *rūpa*, or form. Any thinking about anything at all, or every kind of sensation, is called *nāma*—things like feelings, perceptions, thought-fabrications, and consciousness. "Feeling," for instance, means what's aware of pleasure or pain. It doesn't have any substance. These things are *nāma*. When the eye sees forms, those forms are called *rūpa*. The awareness of forms is called *nāma*. Together they're called *nāma-dhamma* and *rūpa-dhamma*—mental phenomena and physical phenomena—or simply body and mind.

Everything that comes out of these two things is a disturbance in many ways, in line with each particular phenomenon. So if you want peace, all you have to know is *rūpa* and *nāma*, or body and mind. That's enough. But the mind as it is right here is still untrained. It's dirty. Unclean. It's not the primal mind. We have to train it by making it still from time to time.

So today, while I'm giving you this advice, don't be irritated by it. You don't have to be irritated. You have to increase the knowledge in your mind.

Suppose that you're sitting in concentration. Concentration isn't just a matter of sitting. When you walk, you can also be in concentration. Some people think that concentration means sitting, but the truth of the matter is that standing, sitting, walking, and lying down are part of the practice, too. You can practice concentration at any time. Concentration literally means, "firm intent." At normalcy, without forgetting. For example, each of you has come from your home here to DiamondLight Cave Mountain. Each of you has come away from your home. But in reality, your mind is already in your home, your resting place. It goes with you everywhere. Wherever it has to end up, that's your home.

Practicing concentration isn't a matter of imprisoning the mind. Some people think, "To practice concentration, I have to go look for some peace, to sit without any issues arising at all. I want to sit in total silence." But that's a dead person, not a living one. To practice concentration is to give rise to knowledge, to give rise to discernment.

Concentration is a firm intent, focused on a single preoccupation. What kind of object is a single preoccupation? The correct preoccupation. Ordinarily we sit to make the mind totally silent. Some people really suffer over this—especially

high school and university students. They come to me and say, "I try to sit in concentration, but my mind won't stay put. First it runs off one place, then it runs off somewhere else. I don't know how to make it stop and stay put." But this is not the sort of thing you can stop. When you say that it's running back and forth, it's not really running. There's simply a sensation that arises right here. It doesn't run back and forth. People complain, "It runs off and I pull it back again, pull it back here; then it walks off over there again and I pull it back..." So they just sit there pulling like this.

They think their mind's running around, but actually the only things that run are our impressions. For example, look at this hall here: "Wow," you say, "it's awfully big!" But the hall isn't what's big, just our impression of it, that's all. This hall isn't big. It's just the size it is. It's neither big nor small, but we run around after our thoughts and impressions of things.

Meditating to find peace: You have to understand what this word "peace" is. If you don't understand it, you won't be peaceful. For example, suppose that today you walked here from wherever and brought along a pen—one that you love, an expensive one that cost 500 or 1000 baht. And suppose that on your way here you happened to put the pen someplace—say, in your front pocket—but later you took it out and put it in your back pocket. Now when you feel for it in your front pocket: It's not there! You panic. You panic because you don't see the truth of the matter. You get all upset. Standing, walking, coming and going, you can't stop worrying, thinking that your pen is lost. But actually it isn't lost. It's in your back pocket. It isn't lost. But because you think that it's lost, you suffer because of your wrong thinking. This wrong thinking is suffering. So you worry: "What a shame! What a shame! I've only had this pen for a few days and now it's lost."

But then you remember, "Oh, of course! When I went to bathe, I put the pen in my back pocket." As soon as you remember this, you feel better already, even without seeing your pen. See that? You're happy already; you've stopped worrying about your pen. You're sure about it now. As you walk along, you run your hand over your back pocket: "There it is." Your mind was lying to you. Your pen wasn't lost, but the mind lied to you that it was. You suffered because you didn't know. The mind was naturally worried. But now when you see the pen and you're sure about it, your worries calm down.

This sort of peace and calm comes from seeing the cause of the problem: *samudaya*, the cause of suffering. You were suffering, and the *samudaya* was the cause giving rise to that suffering. As soon as you're sure that the pen is in your back pocket, there's *nirodha*, the disbanding of suffering.

It's because of this sort of thing that the mind is always fooled, which is why the Buddha taught us that we have to contemplate to find peace. When we make the mind peaceful through concentration, it's simply the calming of the mind, not the calming of the defilements. It's not the calming of defilements at all. You're just sitting on top of your defilements to calm them, like a rock sitting on the grass. As soon as grass starts growing, you put a rock on top of it. The grass stops because the rock is sitting on top of it. In three, four, five days, six days, seven days you lift up the rock, and the grass starts growing again. That means

that the grass didn't really die. It was just suppressed. The same with sitting in concentration: The mind is calmed, but the defilements aren't calmed. This is why concentration isn't for sure. To find real peace you have to contemplate. Concentration is one kind of peace, like the rock sitting on the grass. You can leave it there many days but when you pick it up, the grass starts growing again. That's only temporary peace. Temporary peace.

The peace of discernment is like never lifting up the rock, just leaving it there where it is. The grass can't possibly grow again. That's genuine peace, the calming of the defilements for sure. That's discernment.

We speak of discernment and concentration as separate things, but actually they're one and the same thing. Discernment is just the movement of concentration, that's all. They come from the same mind but they come out separately, with different characteristics, like this mango here. This mango is small, but then it grows larger, then it's ripe, and then it's rotten. It's all the same mango. They're not different ones. When it's small, it's this mango. When it's large, it's this mango. When it's ripe, it's this mango. Only its characteristics change. But it's still the same mango. So don't jump to the conclusion that you're already practicing the Dhamma correctly, that when you practice the Dhamma, one condition is called concentration, another condition is called discernment. Actually, virtue, concentration, and discernment are all the same thing, not different things, just like the one mango. When it's small, it's that same mango. When it's large, it's that same mango. When it's ripe, it's that same mango. It just simply changes its characteristics, and so we keep running, running, running, running after them.

Actually, in practicing the Dhamma, whatever happens, you have to start from the mind. Begin with the mind. Do you know what your mind is? What is your mind like? Where is it? You're all speechless. Where the mind is, what it's like, nobody knows. *[Laughs]* You don't know anything about it at all. You don't know. All you know is that you want to go over here or over there, the mind feels happy or sad, but the mind itself you can't know. What is the mind? *The mind isn't "is" anything.* What would it "is"? We've come up with the supposition that whatever receives preoccupations—good preoccupations, bad preoccupations, whatever—we call "heart" or "mind." Like the owner of a house: Whoever receives the guests is the owner of the house. The guests can't receive the owner. The owner has to stay put at home. When guests come to see him, he has to receive them. So who receives preoccupations? Who lets go of preoccupations? Who knows anything? *[Laughs]* That's what we call "mind." But we don't understand it, so we talk, veering off course this way and that: "What is the mind? What is the heart?" We get things way too confused. Don't analyze it so much. What is it that receives preoccupations? Some preoccupations don't satisfy it, and so it doesn't like them. Some preoccupations it likes and some it doesn't. Who is that—who likes and doesn't like? Is there something there? Yes. What's it like? We don't know. Understand? That thing... That thing is what we call the "mind." Don't go looking far away.

Some people have to keep thinking: "What is the mind? What is the heart?"—all kinds of things, keeping at it, back and forth until they go crazy. They don't

understand anything. You don't have to think that far. Simply ask yourself, "What do you have in yourself?" There are *rūpa* and *nāma*; or there's a body and there's a mind. That's enough.

Some people ask, "I've heard that the Buddha knew everything. Well, if he knew everything..." They practice the Dhamma and start arguing: "How many roots does a tree have?" The Buddha answers that it has taproots and rootlets. "But how many rootlets does it have?" That shows they're crazy, right? They want an answer about the rootlets: "How many rootlets are there? How many taproots are there?" Why do they ask? "Well, the Buddha knew everything, didn't he? He'd have to know, all the way to the rootlets." Who would be crazy enough to count them? Do you think the Buddha would be stupid like that? He'd say that there are rootlets and taproots, and that would be enough.

It's like cutting our way through the forest. If we felt we had to cut down every tree, all the big trees and all the small trees, we'd be getting out of hand. Would we have to uproot them all in order to get through the forest? We'd cut back just the ones needed to open our way. That's enough. Why would we have to level every tree?

However many rootlets this tree has doesn't matter. Just knowing that it has rootlets, and that it depends on big roots and little rootlets: That's enough, don't you think? It's enough. The Buddha said that it's enough. He doesn't want us to go counting the rootlets of trees. It'd be a waste of time. What purpose would counting them serve? The tree lives because of its roots: That's enough. But some people aren't satisfied. "That can't be the case. The Buddha knew everything." If you had to count all the rootlets, you'd go crazy, that's all. So don't understand things in that way.

In our practice, whether you call it concentration or *vipassanā* (insight) doesn't matter. Let's just call it practicing the Dhamma, that's enough. But you have to start this practice beginning with your own mind. What is the mind? The mind is what receives preoccupations. When it makes contact with this preoccupation, it's happy. When it makes contact with that preoccupation, it's sad. The thing that receives preoccupations leads us to happiness and suffering, right and wrong, but it isn't a thing. We suppose it to be a thing, but it's really only *nāma-dhamma*. Is goodness a thing? Is evil a thing? Is happiness a thing? Is suffering a thing? You can't see that they are. Are they round or square? How short? How long? Do you know? They're *nāma-dhamma*. They can't be compared to things—but we know that they're there. This is what's meant by *nāma*. Both *rūpa* and *nāma* go together; they depend on each other. So we're taught to use *nāma* to contemplate *rūpa*; use the heart to contemplate the body. Just these two things.

So we're told to begin the practice with the mind: calming the mind; making it aware. If the mind is aware, it'll be at peace. Some people don't go for awareness. They just want to have peace to the point where there's nothing, where they aren't aware of anything. But what could you do without this knower? What could you depend on? It's not short; it's not long; it's not wrong; it's not right. But people these days keep studying, looking to understand rightness and wrongness, goodness and evil, *but they don't know neither-rightness-nor-wrongness*. All they're looking to know is what's right and wrong: "I'm going

to take only what's right. I won't take what's wrong. Why should I?" If you try to take only what's right, soon it'll go wrong. *It's right for the sake of wrong.* People keep searching for rightness and wrongness, but they don't try to find what's neither-rightness-nor-wrongness. They keep searching for merit, and all they know is merit and evil, so they study them, but they don't study further over there—where there's neither merit nor evil. They're ignorant of it. All they want are issues of long and short, but the issue of neither long nor short, they don't study. They study just the issues of good and bad: "I'm practicing to take what's good. I don't want bad." You want good and don't want bad, but when there's no bad, there's no good, either. What then?

This knife placed here: It has the edge of its blade, it has the back of its blade, it has its handle—all of its parts. When you lift it up, can you lift just the edge of the blade? Can you pick up just the back of the blade? Just the handle? The handle is the handle of the knife. The back of the blade is the back of the knife's blade. The edge of the blade is the edge of the knife's blade. When you pick up the knife, you also pick up its handle, the back of its blade, and the edge of its blade. Could it split off just the edge of its blade for you?

This is an example. You try to separate out just what's good, but what's bad comes along with it. You want just what's good and to throw away what's bad. You don't learn about what's neither good nor bad, even though it's right there. When that's the case, you won't come to the end of things. When you take what's good, what's bad comes along with it. They keep coming together. If you want pleasure, pain comes along with it. They're connected.

So when you practice the Dhamma to take just the good and not the bad, it's the Dhamma of children, Dhamma for children to toy around with. Sure, if you want, you can take just this much, but if you grab onto what's good, what's bad will follow. The end of this path gets all cluttered up.

To put it in simple terms: You have children. Now suppose you want to have them only when you love them, and not when you hate them. If that were the case, nobody would have any children. With these two things, if you take the love, hatred will come running in its wake.

So when you set your heart on practicing the Dhamma, use discernment. Use discernment, for these things come along with each other. Study what's good and what's bad, just to see what good is like, what bad is like. Study these things in as much detail as you can. Now, when you're familiar with good and bad, what will you take? "I'll take the good, but not the bad." See that? If you take the good, bad comes running in its wake. You don't study about how to know what's neither good nor bad. The issue that would bring things to an end, you don't study.

"I'm going to be like this," "I'm going to be like that"—but "I'm not going to be anything because there isn't any me": This we don't study. All we want to take is goodness. If we get goodness, goodness, goodness, we don't understand it. We get drunk with goodness. If things get too good, they're not good anymore. They go bad, and so we keep running back and forth like this. We don't get anywhere at all.

We come to a peaceful place to rest and recover, to make the mind peaceful, so as to become familiar with what receives preoccupations, to see what it is. That's why we're told to start with the mind, to start with the knower. Train this mind to be pure. How pure? You can't stop with just pure enough to be good. To be really pure, the mind has to be above and beyond both good and evil, and then pure above and beyond pure. Done. Only then are things over and done.

So when we practice sitting in concentration, it's just temporary peace. Temporary peace. When it's peaceful, issues arise. If there's an issue, there's what knows the issue. There's what investigates the case, interrogates, follows up, passes judgment. If the mind is simply blank, then nothing happens. Some people teach you to imprison the mind, to really imprison it, thinking that that sort of peace is the genuine practice for sure. Peaceful. But peace in the mind is not peaceful in that way. It's peace *apart* from pleasure and *apart* from pain. Before, I wanted just the pleasure and didn't want pain. But as I kept following along in that way, I came to realize, "Oh. Taking just the pleasure turns out to be uncomfortable, too, for these things come along with each other." Only when I was able to make it so that there was no pleasure and no pain in the heart: That's when it was really at peace.

This is a subject that people hardly ever study, hardly ever understand. They want what's right, but won't take what's wrong. And so they can't get to what has neither right nor wrong. They don't know why they'd study it. They study to know what's right and what's wrong just to take what's right and not what's wrong—so they keep following one another. It's like this knife: "I want to lift up just its blade, but the back of the blade will have to come along as well." Learn to think in this way. Wherever there are causes, things can arise again. They won't stop.

To train the mind in the right way, to make it bright, to develop discernment: Don't think you can do it by sitting and making it just still. That's the rock sitting on the grass. It's drunk. Some people get drunk on it. Actually, you can stand in concentration, sit in concentration, walk in concentration, and lie down in concentration. People jump to the conclusion that concentration is sitting. That's just a name for concentration, but really, if the mind has concentration, walking is concentration, sitting is concentration—concentration with the walking, concentration with the sitting, the standing, the lying down. That's the practice.

Some people complain, "I can't meditate. I get fed up. Whenever I sit down I think of this and that, I think of my house and my family. I can't do it. I've got too much bad *kamma*. I should let my bad *kamma* run out first and then come back and try meditating." Go ahead, just try it. Try waiting until your bad *kamma* runs out.

This is how we think. Why do we think like this? That's what we're studying. As soon as we sit, the mind goes way over there. We track it down and bring it back—and then it goes off again. This is how we study. But most of us skip class. We don't want to study our lessons. We're like a student who skips class, who doesn't want to study his lessons. When the mind isn't peaceful, we don't want to sit. "I don't want that. It's irritating." But that's study. We're truant. We don't want to see the mind when it's happy; we don't want to see it when it's suffering.

We don't want to see it change—but *then what will we ever know? Will we ever know?* You have to stay with the changing like this. Get acquainted with this: "Oh, the mind is like this. One moment it thinks of that; the next moment it thinks of this. That's its ordinary nature." So know it. Know when it thinks. Know when its thoughts are good, when they're bad, when they're right and wrong. Know what it's like. When we know the affairs of the mind, then even if we're simply sitting, thinking about this or that, the mind is still in concentration. If we know what it's up to, we don't get irritated or distracted.

Let me give you an example. Suppose you have a pet monkey at home. My monastery has a pet monkey, too. When you're home and have a pet monkey, the monkey doesn't sit still. Now it grabs this; now it goes there—all kinds of things. That's how monkeys are. Now you come to my monastery. I have a monkey here too, and this monkey doesn't sit still either. Now it grabs this; now it goes there, but it doesn't irritate you, does it? Why? Because you've already had a pet monkey. You're familiar with monkeys. "My monkey at home is just like this monkey here. Staying at your monastery is just like staying at home. It's the same monkey." If you know just one monkey, then no matter how many provinces you go to, you see the same monkey, and it doesn't irritate you, right? That's someone who understands monkeys.

If we understand monkeys then we won't become monkeys. If you don't understand monkeys, then as soon as you see a monkey, you become a monkey yourself, right? When you see it taking this and grabbing that, "Oh!" You're irritated. You're upset at this monkey. That's someone who doesn't understand monkeys. Someone who understands monkeys sees the monkey at home and thinks, "It's the same monkey. The monkey at DiamondLight Cave Monastery is just like this." So why should they irritate you? You understand what monkeys are like, and that's enough. You can be at peace. At peace. If the monkey jumps in front of you and behind you, you can be at your ease. You're not irritated by the monkey. Why? Because you understand monkeys—so you don't become a monkey. If you don't understand monkeys, you get irritated. When you get irritated, you become a monkey—understand? This is how things grow calm.

We have to know preoccupations, observe preoccupations. Some we like; some we don't, but so what? That's their business. That's what they're like—just like monkeys. All monkeys are the same monkey. We understand preoccupations, what their conditions are. Some we like; some we don't. That's what they're like. We have to get familiar with them. When you're familiar with them, let them go: "Oh. Preoccupations aren't for sure. They're all inconstant, stressful, and not-self." We keep looking at them in that way. If they're irritated, if they wiggle around, just watch them—and they're no big deal. Wherever you sit, when preoccupations pop up via the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, or mind, you see, "Hmm. They're no big deal." It's like watching monkeys. This monkey is just like the monkey at home. It's no big deal. Then we can be at peace.

When preoccupations arise, get familiar with them. Why run after them? Preoccupations are not for sure. Now they're this way; now they're that way. Sometimes they go back to what they were before. They exist through change. *And all of us here exist through change.* As when you breathe: Sometimes the breath

goes out; sometimes it comes back in. It changes like this. You live here through change. Try only breathing in, without breathing out: Can you do that? How many minutes would you last? Or try just breathing out without breathing in. If there were no change, could you survive? You couldn't survive at all. You need to have both the in-breath and the out-breath like this. When you walk to the monastery, if you just held your breath all the way from home, you'd be dead by now. You wouldn't have made it. So understand this.

The same with preoccupations: They have to be there. If they weren't there, you couldn't develop any discernment. If there were no wrong, there could be no right. You have to be right first before you can see what's wrong. Or you have to be wrong first before you can be right. That's the way things normally are. That's how you gain discernment. The more preoccupations you see, the better—especially if you're a high school or university student.

But here, if you don't like preoccupations, you don't want to deal with them, you don't want to watch them. That's called being a student who skips class, who doesn't want to learn or to listen to what the teacher is teaching. These preoccupations are teaching us. When we know preoccupations in this way, we're practicing Dhamma. We're at peace. We see that preoccupations are no big deal. That's what they're like. It's like seeing monkeys. The monkey at home doesn't irritate you. When you see the monkey here it doesn't irritate you—because you understand monkeys, right? You can be at ease.

It's the same with the practice of Dhamma. This is what the Dhamma is like. It's nothing very far away. It's right with you. The Dhamma isn't about divine beings or anything like that. It's simply about what you're doing, what you're doing right now. Your issues are all issues of the Dhamma. If you look at books, they have your issues written down in them, but you won't understand them. The issues of the Dhamma are all your issues. So contemplate yourself. Sometimes there's happiness, sometimes suffering, sometimes comfort, sometimes irritation; sometimes you love that person, sometimes you hate this person. This is Dhamma, right?

To know this Dhamma, you have to read your preoccupations. Only when you're familiar with them can you let them go, seeing that they're not for sure. That way you can be at ease. When something comes flashing up: "Hmm. This isn't for sure." Then your preoccupations change. Pain arises and something comes flashing up: "This isn't for sure." You can be at your ease, in the same way that you can be at ease when seeing the monkey in your home, and then the monkey at DiamondLight Cave Mountain, for they're the same monkey. You can be at your ease. You won't have any doubts. If you're familiar with preoccupations, you're familiar with the Dhamma. You can let go of preoccupations. You see that there's nothing for sure about preoccupations in any way at all. Have you ever been happy? Have you ever been sad? You don't have to answer, I can answer for you: "Yes." Are these things for sure? "No." This way you know the thing that's all one and the same—that they're not for sure.

This is the Buddha. The Buddha is the Dhamma. The Dhamma is what's not for sure. *Whoever sees that things aren't for sure, sees for sure that that's the way they are.* The way they are doesn't change. But why are they that way? That's what the

Dhamma is like. And that's what the Buddha is like. The Buddha is the Dhamma. The Dhamma is the Buddha. Whoever sees the Dhamma, sees the Buddha; whoever sees the Buddha, sees the Dhamma. If you know inconstancy, not-for-sure-ness, you'll let things go of your own accord. You won't grasp onto them.

Suppose you get a glass. You say, "This is mine, and it isn't broken. Look after it well, okay? Don't break my glass, okay?" But can you prevent something breakable from breaking? If it doesn't break now, it'll break later on. If you don't break it, someone else will break it. If someone else doesn't break it, a chicken will break it! The Buddha says to accept this. When he uses this good glass, he penetrates all the way to seeing that this glass is already broken. *He sees this glass that isn't broken, and has us know that it's already broken.* Whenever you pick up the glass, he has you say, "This glass is already broken." Drink from it and put it down: He tells you that it's already broken. Right? The Buddha's understanding was like this. He saw the broken glass in the unbroken one. *Why did he know that it was broken? Because it isn't broken.* That's how he knew it as broken. "Whenever its time is up, it'll break": He developed this attitude and kept on using the glass. One day it slipped out of his hand: "Smash!" No problem. Why no problem? "Because I saw it as broken before it broke." See?

But you say, "My glass is so expensive. Don't ever let it break." Later on the dog breaks it: "Hmm. What if I killed this dog?" If your child breaks it, you hate your child. You're that way with whatever breaks it—because you've dammed yourself up so that the water can't flow. You've made a dam without a spillway. You just dam things up without a spillway, so the only thing the dam can do is burst, right? When you make a dam, you have to make a spillway, too. When the water rises this far, it can flow off to the side. When it's full to the brim, it can flow out that way, right? You need a spillway. The Buddha saw inconstancy, and that's the way things are. He already saw that they're inconstant. When you see things this way, you can be at peace.

That, in short, is the practice of the Dhamma.

So I've learned to hold that whether standing, walking, sitting, or lying down, I keep on practicing, using mindfulness to watch over and protect the mind. That's concentration. Discernment is concentration; concentration is discernment. You can say that they're both the same thing. They differ only in their characteristics.

We see that when things are inconstant, they're stressful. If we really see inconstancy, which means that things aren't for sure, when we penetrate to see clearly that things aren't for sure, *then what we see is for sure.* Sure in what way? Sure that that's the way they are. They don't change into any other way. Understand? When you know just this much, you know the Buddha. You've bowed down to him. You've bowed down to his Dhamma. Take this principle and mull it over.

As long as you don't abandon the Buddha, you won't suffer. As soon as you abandon him, you'll suffer immediately. You'll suffer as soon as you abandon the principles of inconstancy, stress, and not-self. Understand things in this way.

If you can practice just this much, I feel that it's enough. Suffering won't arise, or if it does arise you can disband it easily. And that will be a cause for suffering not to arise in the future. That's where things finish, at the point where suffering doesn't arise. Why doesn't it arise? It's not there because we've put an end to the cause of suffering, or *samudaya*.

With the cause of suffering, things are ready to break. When they break, suffering arises right away, right? When you know that this is the cause that gives rise to suffering, you have to contemplate it—that it's not for sure. It's not for sure. It's the cause of suffering. When things break—pop!—destroy the cause that would give rise to suffering. All *dhammas* arise from causes. When they disband, it's because we've disbanded these causes.

If suffering arises because this glass breaks—you get angry, you suffer—tell yourself that this glass was already broken. The cause of suffering will disband. It'll no longer be there. As soon as the glass breaks, you've seen that it was broken already. The breaking happens after you saw it—*which means that it's not breaking*. There's no suffering. When there's no suffering, that's *nirodha*—cessation, disbanding. Suffering disbands because you've disbanded the cause of suffering.

This is all there is. There's not much at all. This is all there is, so contemplate it. But don't stray away from the three basic things: body, speech, and mind. Keep working away right here. Contemplate on in. Everything is right here, starting with your own heart and mind. In simple terms, you should all have the five precepts as your foundation. You don't have to go study the Pali Canon. The five precepts are a matter of your body and mind, so watch your five precepts. Keep working at them always. Do this with care. At first you'll make mistakes. When you realize it, stop, come back, and start over again. Maybe you'll go astray and make another mistake. Call yourself back, each and every time, each and every time.

Your mindfulness will reach a higher frequency, like water poured from a kettle. If we tilt the kettle just a little to let the water flow out in drops—*glug ... glug ... glug*—there are breaks in the flow. If we tilt the kettle a little bit more, the water goes *glug-glug-glug*. If we tilt the kettle even further, the glugs disappear. The water turns into a steady stream. There are no more drops. Where did they go? They didn't go anywhere. They've turned into a steady stream of water. They're so frequent that they're beyond frequency. They meld into one another, right? That's how they're a stream of water.

The Dhamma is just like this, choosing analogies for you to listen to, because the Dhamma doesn't have anything. Does it have a color? Is it round? Does it have corners? Is it short? There's no way to get acquainted with it except through comparisons like this. If you understand this, you understand the Dhamma. That's the way it is.

Don't think that the Dhamma lies far away from you. It lies right with you; it's about you. Take a look. Now happy, now sad, now satisfied, now dissatisfied, now angry at this person, now hating that person: It's all Dhamma.

See yourself in this way. What's trying to give rise to suffering? When you've done something that causes suffering, turn around and undo it. Turn around and

undo it. You haven't seen it clearly. When you see it clearly, there's no more suffering. The cause has been disbanded. Once you've killed the cause of suffering, there are no more conditions for it to arise, so suffering can't arise. If suffering is still arising, if you don't really know it; you have to endure it: That's not yet right on target with it. Look at it in really simple terms. That's how I look at it. See where you're still wrong. It's embarrassing to look at that. Whenever there's too much suffering, right there you're wrong. Whenever you're so happy that the mind starts swelling up—there: Wrong again! Whichever side it comes from doesn't matter. Bring everything together to the point that it's wrong. Keep exploring.

If you practice like this, you'll be mindful whether you're standing, walking, sitting, or lying down, coming or going, whatever you're doing. If you're always mindful and alert, if you're aware, you're sure to know right and wrong, happiness and sadness. You'll be familiar with everything. When you're familiar with these things, you'll know how to undo them so that there won't be any suffering. You won't let there be suffering.

So long as the mind feels pleasure and pain, it's drunk. Even while practicing the Dhamma, it's drunk, you know. People can get drunk eating rice—there's no need to drink alcohol. If you eat a lot of rice, you can get drunk—drunk on rice. The same with the Dhamma: Don't get drunk on it. When people are drunk on the Dhamma, they don't stop. They keep on talking. If they see anybody coming, they want to grab him by the arm and give him a sermon on the Dhamma. That's a sign that they're drunk on Dhamma. They go after everybody: "I want to teach that person; I want to do this person a favor by teaching him the Dhamma"—and so they do a favor to the entire country by teaching the Dhamma. That's a sign of drunkenness. Being drunk on the Dhamma is no different from being drunk on alcohol. They're really similar. Don't go there. You have to look carefully, again and again, for sometimes something is Dhamma, but it's drunk. That's not right.

When studying concentration, I have people study concentration like this. When it's time to sit in meditation, then sit enough so that you're good at it. That's not wrong. But you have to know that concentration isn't just sitting like this. You have to let the mind spread out to encounter different things. When you're aware of something, contemplate it. When you're aware of something, contemplate it. Contemplate to know what? Contemplate to see, "Oh. That's inconstant. Stressful. Not-self. Not for sure." Everything is not for sure, let me tell you. Not for sure.

"This is so beautiful, I really like it." That's not for sure.

"I don't like this at all." Tell it: "This, too, is not for sure." Right? Absolutely. No mistake. But that's not how you go about it. "That's what I want. It's right for sure." You've gone off the track already. Don't. However much you like something doesn't matter. You have to adjust the mind. Tell it: "It's not for sure."

When we eat some kinds of food, we think, "Wow. That's awfully delicious. I really like that." There will be that feeling in the heart, but you have to make a protest: "It's not for sure." Do you want to test how it's not for sure? Take your favorite food, something you like for sure every time, and eat it every day. Every, every, every single day, okay? Eventually you'll complain, "This doesn't taste so

good anymore." It's not for sure. You'll think, "Actually I prefer that kind of food." Then eat *that* every day. It's not for sure either! Everything has to go from one thing to the next, just like breathing in and out. We have to breathe in and breathe out. We exist through change. Everything exists through change like this.

These things are found right with us, nowhere else. If we no longer have any doubts, then we can sit in comfort, stand in comfort. Concentration isn't just sitting. Some people sit until they fall into a stupor. They might as well be dead. You can't tell whether they're going north or south. Don't hold onto it that far. If you feel fairly sleepy, then walk. Change your posture. Use your discernment. If you're totally sleepy, then lie down. As soon as you wake up, get right up and continue your efforts. Don't let yourself get drunk. If you're a meditator, you have to practice like this. Have reasons for what you do. Know. Know all around. Discernment means knowing all around. You can't *not* know all around. You can't just know one side of things. You have to know all around, in a full circle like this. That's knowing all around. Whatever side things come from, whatever stance they take, you're ready to take them on and fight them off.

When you live in this way, what will you do? What will happen to you? When you live in this way, you contemplate. Whatever your thought fabrications are like, you're ready for them. Whenever they come—whether you're standing, walking, sitting, or lying down—you're ready to take them on. That's how it feels. Whenever fabrications move, you take them on. You have to take a stance like this—and you won't have to cry, you know. You'll be at peace. Don't settle for pleasure, okay? Don't settle for pleasure, for soon it'll disappear. Go for peace, with no need for pleasure, no need for pain. That's what it means to be at peace. Go all the way. Take on issues that are heavier and heavier in this way so as to know them through and through.

Start knowing from your own mind and body. See them as inconstant. They're not for sure, neither body nor mind. The same goes for everything. It's not for sure. Keep this in mind when you think food is so delicious. You have to tell yourself: "It's not for sure!" *You have to punch your likes first. Don't let them punch you first.* You have to punch them right away, right? You have to punch them first. Whatever the mind likes, tell it, "It's not for sure." Punch it first. But usually you just let these things punch you every time, every time. If you don't like something: "I don't like this. I don't like seeing this suffer"—it's punched you. If you like something: "I like this"—it's punched you every time. You don't punch it at all. You have to understand in this way. Whenever you like anything, say in your heart, "This isn't for sure." Whenever you don't like something, tell yourself, "Hmm. This isn't for sure." Keep at this every day, and you'll see the Dhamma for sure. That's how it has to be.

Practice in all postures: standing, walking, sitting, lying down. You can feel anger in any action, right? Walking you can feel anger, sitting you can feel anger, lying down you can feel anger. You can feel desire with every moment. Sometimes you feel desire while lying down, desire while running, desire while sitting. This is why you have to practice in all four postures—standing, walking, sitting, lying down—consistently, without any front or back. Put it in those

terms, as when they say that someone is speaking without any front or back. Keep at it like this. Only then can you know all around.

When you sit to get the mind to settle down and be peaceful: “Oops.” That issue comes running in. Tell yourself: “Not for sure.” Before it’s finished, another one comes running in. And then another one. You start itching all over, and then you’re gone. What you have to do is that, when they come running in like this, you tell yourself, “It’s not for sure.” Whatever comes in doesn’t matter. When it comes, “Oh. This is not for sure.” You have to keep punching them like this, hitting them first like this.

This is called knowing their weak point. This is important. If you know that all things aren’t for sure, then all the thinking in your heart will gradually unravel, gradually unravel, *for you’ve seen that that’s what’s sure about it*. With some things, you’ll feel really disgusted, but whatever, see that they’re not for sure. You’ve experienced them before—many, many times before. “Hmm. Whatever, it’s no big deal.” On a later day you contemplate it: “No big deal.” That’s all there is to it. This thing is no big deal. That thing is no big deal. You can meditate on a single phrase: “No big deal.” Whatever arises, you go, “No big deal.” Admonish yourself just that much, and it should be enough.

And what else would you look for? Where exactly would you look for the Dhamma? “Oh. I have to look for the Dhamma in books.” People go looking in books for the Dhamma who knows where, but it arises right here. If you look for it over there, will you see it? Look for it here. If there’s suffering today, look at it to see why there’s suffering, and you’ll see it right here. “It’s because my glass is broken: That’s why I’m suffering.” Look right here, and you’ll see: “Oh.” Or, “I’m suffering today because my wife said something I couldn’t stand.” The cause is right here. “Oh. That’s not for sure.” Kill it. With everything, keep setting fire to it like that. Keep walking ahead of it. So far you’ve been walking behind it. These things lie with you. They’re nowhere else. If you can sense things in this way, you’ll be at peace. At peace. Wherever you go, your mind will be at peace.

But to say it’s at peace is not quite right.

Have you ever seen flowing water? Flowing water: Have you ever seen it? Have you ever seen still water? If your mind is peaceful, it’s kind of like still, flowing water. Have you ever seen still, flowing water? *[Laughs]* There! You’ve only seen still water and flowing water. You’ve never seen still, flowing water. Right there, right where your thinking can’t take you: where the mind is still but can develop discernment. When you look at your mind, it’ll be kind of like flowing water, and yet it’s still. It looks like it’s still, it looks like it’s flowing, so it’s called still, flowing water. That’s what it’s like. That’s where discernment can arise.

So give it a try.

Suppositions & Release

ALL THE THINGS IN THE WORLD are suppositions that we've supposed into being. Once we've supposed them, we fall for our own supposings, so nobody lets them go. They turn into views and pride, into attachment. This attachment is something that never ends. It's an affair of *samsāra* that flows without respite, with no way of coming to closure. But if we really know our suppositions, we'll know release. If we really know release, we'll know our suppositions. That's when you know the Dhamma that can come to closure.

Take people, for instance. When we start out, we're born without names. The fact that we have names comes from their being supposed into being. I've thought about this and seen that if you don't really know suppositions, they can cause a lot of harm. Actually, suppositions are simply things for us to use. If we understand what they're for, that's enough. Know that if we didn't have suppositions, there'd be nothing we could say to one another, no language to use with one another.

When I went abroad, I saw Westerners sitting in meditation in row after row. When they got up after sitting, men and women together, sometimes they'd go and touch one another on the head, one person after another! When I saw this I thought, "Hmm, if we set up a supposition anywhere and cling to it, it gives rise to defilements right there." If we're willing to let go of our suppositions, we can be at peace.

Like the generals and colonels, men of rank and position, who come to see me. When they come they say, "Oh, please touch my head": That shows that they're willing, so there's nothing wrong with it. You can rub their heads and they're even glad you did it. But if you tried rubbing their heads in the middle of the street—if you don't think there'd be trouble, just try it and see! This is because of clinging. So I've seen that letting go is really comfortable. When they agree to having their heads touched, they've supposed that there's nothing wrong with it. And there is nothing wrong with it, just like rubbing a head of cabbage or a head of lettuce. But if you rubbed their heads in the middle of the road—no way! For sure.

It's all a matter of willingness—accepting, giving up, letting go. When you can do this, things are light. Wherever you're clinging, there's becoming right there, birth right there, poison and danger right there. The Buddha taught about suppositions and he taught to undo suppositions in the right way, to turn them into release. Don't cling to them.

The things that arise in the world are all suppositions. That's how they come into being. When they've arisen and been supposed, we shouldn't fall for them, for that leads to suffering. The affairs of supposition and convention are extremely important. Whoever can let them go is free from suffering.

But they're an activity of this world of ours. Take Boonmaa, for instance. He's the District Commissioner. His old friend, Saengchai, isn't a district commissioner, but they've been friends from way back. Now that Boonmaa has been appointed district commissioner, there's a supposition right there, but you have to know how to use it in an appropriate way, because we still live in the world. If Saengchai goes to the district offices and pats Boonmaa on the head, it's not right. Even if Saengchai thinks about all the old times when they worked together as traveling tailors and about that time they almost died, it's still not right for him to go playing around with Boonmaa's head in front of other people. You have to show a little respect and act in line with our social suppositions. Only then can we live together in peace. No matter how long you've been friends, he's now the district commissioner. You have to show him some deference.

When he leaves the district offices and goes home, that's when you can pat him on the head. It's still the district commissioner's head you're patting, but if you were to do it in the government offices in front of a lot of people, it'd be wrong for sure. This is called showing respect. If you know how to use suppositions in this way, they serve a purpose. No matter how long you've been close friends, if you touch him on the head in front of a lot of people, he's sure to get angry—after all, he's now the district commissioner. This is all there is to our behavior in the world: You need a sense of time and place, and of the people you're with.

So we're taught to be intelligent, to have a sense of suppositions and a sense of release. Understand them when you use them. If you use them properly, there's no problem. If you don't use them properly, it's offensive. What does it offend? *It offends people's defilements, that's all*—because people live with defilement. There are suppositions you have to follow with certain groups, certain people, at certain times and places. If you follow them appropriately, you can be said to be smart. You have to know where these things come from and how far they lead. We have to live with suppositions, but we suffer when we cling to them. If you understand suppositions simply as suppositions and explore them until you come to release, there are no problems.

As I've often said, before we were laymen and now we're monks. Before we were supposed to be laymen but now, having gone through the ordination chant, we're supposed to be monks. But we're monks on the level of supposition, not genuine monks, not monks on the level of release. If we practice so that our minds are released from all their fermentations (*āsava*) step by step, as stream-winners, once-returners, non-returners, all the way to arahantship, then all our defilements will be abandoned. Even when we say that someone is an arahant, that's just a supposition—but he's a genuine monk.

In the beginning we start with suppositions like this. In the ordination ceremony they agree to call you a "monk," but does that mean you suddenly abandon your defilements? No. It's like salt. Suppose you take a fistful of sand and say, "Let's suppose this is salt." Is it salt? Yes, but it's salt only on the level of supposing. It's not genuine salt. If you were to put it into a curry, it wouldn't

serve your purpose. If you were to argue that it's genuine salt, the answer would have to be No. That's what's meant by supposition.

Why do we make this supposition? Because there's no salt there. There's only sand. If you suppose sand to be salt, it'd be salt for you, on the level of supposing. But it's not genuine salt, *for it's not salty*. It won't serve any purpose—or it can serve *some* purposes on the level of supposing, but not on the level of release.

The word “release”: It's a supposition to call it that, but what release actually is, lies beyond supposition. It's released from suppositions—but we still make a supposition to say it's “release” like this. Can we live without suppositions? No. If we didn't have suppositions, we wouldn't know how to talk with one another. We wouldn't know where things come from and how far they go. We wouldn't have any language to speak with one another.

So suppositions have their purposes—the purposes we're supposed to use them for. For example, people have different names, even though they're all people just the same. If we didn't have names, you wouldn't know how to call the person you wanted. For instance, if you wanted to call a certain person in a crowd and said, “Person! Person!” that would be useless. No one would answer, because they're all “person.” But if you called, “Jan! Come here!” then Jan would come. The others wouldn't have to. This is how suppositions serve a purpose. Things get accomplished. So there are ways for us to train ourselves that arise from suppositions.

If we know both supposition and release in the proper way, we can get along. Suppositions have their uses, but in reality there isn't anything there. There isn't even a person there! There's just a set of natural conditions, born of their causal factors. They develop in dependence on their causal factors, stay for a while, and before long they fall apart. You can't stop that from happening. You can't really control it. That's all there is. It's just a supposition, but without suppositions we'd have nothing to say: no names, no practice, no work, no language. Suppositions and conventions are established to give us a language, to make things convenient, that's all.

Take money, for example. In the past there wasn't any paper money. Paper was just paper, without any value. Then people decided that silver money was hard to store, so they turned paper into money. And so it serves as money. Maybe someday in the future a new king will arise who doesn't like paper money. He'll have us use wax droppings instead—take sealing wax, melt it, stamp it into lumps, and suppose it to be money. We'll be using wax droppings all over the country, getting into debt all because of wax droppings. Let alone wax droppings, we could take chicken droppings and turn them into money! It could happen. All our chicken droppings would be cash. We'd be fighting and killing one another over chicken droppings.

Even when they propose new forms for things, if everybody agrees to the new supposition, it works. As for the silver we started out with, nobody really knows what it is. The ore we call silver: Is it really silver? Nobody knows. Somebody saw what it was like, came up with the supposition of “silver,” and that's what it was. That's all there is to the affairs of the world. We suppose

something into being, and that's what it is—because these things depend on our suppositions. But to turn these things into release, to get people to know genuine release: That's hard.

Our homes, our money, our possessions, our family, our children, our relatives are ours simply on the level of supposition. But actually, on the level of the Dhamma, they're not really ours. We don't like to hear this, but that's the way they actually are. If we don't have any suppositions around them, they have no value. Or if we suppose them to have no value, they have no value. But if we suppose them to have value, they do have value. This is the way things are. These suppositions are good if we know how to use them. So learn how to use them.

Even this body of ours isn't really us. That's a supposition. If you try to find a genuine self within it, you can't. There are just elements that are born, continue for a while, and then die. Everything is like this. There's no real, true substance to it, but it's proper that we have to use it.

For example, what do we need to stay alive? We need food. If our life depends on food as its nourishment, as a support we need to use, then we should use it to achieve its purpose for our survival, in the same way the Buddha taught new monks. Right from the very beginning, he taught the four supports: clothing, food, shelter, medicine. He taught that we should contemplate these things. If we don't contemplate them in the morning, we should contemplate them in the evening after we've used them.

Why does he have us contemplate them so often? To realize that they're four supports to maintain our body. As long as we're alive we can't escape these things. "You'll use these things all your life," he said, "but don't fall for them. Don't fall for them. They're nothing more than this; they give us nothing more than this."

If we lacked any one of these things, we couldn't meditate, couldn't chant, couldn't contemplate. For the time being, we have to depend on these things, but don't get attached to them. Don't fall for the supposition that they're yours. They're supports for keeping you alive. When the time comes, you'll have to give them up. In the meantime, though, even though the idea that they're yours is just a supposition, you have to take care of them. If you don't take care of them, you suffer. Like a cup, for instance. Someday in the future the cup will have to break. If it breaks, no big deal—but as long as you're alive you should take good care of it because it's your utensil. If it breaks, you'll be inconvenienced. If it's going to break, let it break in a way that can't be helped.

The same goes for the four supports that we're taught to contemplate. They're requisites for those who've gone forth. Understand them but don't cling to them to the point where the clinging becomes a big lump of craving and defilement in the heart and makes you suffer. Use them just for the purpose of keeping alive, and that's enough.

Suppositions and release are related like this continually. Even though we use suppositions, don't place your trust in their being true. They're true only on the level of supposing. If you cling to them, suffering will arise because you don't understand them in line with what they really are.

The same holds for issues of right and wrong. Some people see wrong as right and right as wrong, but *whose* right and wrong they are, nobody knows. Different people make different suppositions about what's right and wrong with every issue, so be aware. The Buddha was afraid that it would lead to suffering if we got into arguments, because issues of this sort never come to closure. One person says, "right," another says, "wrong." One says "wrong," another says "right." But actually we don't really know right and wrong at all. All we need is to learn how to use them for our comfort, so that we can put them to work in a proper way. Don't let them harm you or harm others. Keep things neutral in this way. That serves our purposes.

In short, both suppositions and release are simply dhammas. One is higher than the other, but they're synonyms. There's no way we can guarantee for sure that this has to be this, or that has to be that, so the Buddha said to just put it down as "not for sure." No matter how much you like something, know that it's not for sure. No matter how much you dislike something, understand that it's not for sure. And these things really *aren't* for sure. Keep practicing until they're dhammas.

Past, present, and future: Make them all an affair of Dhamma practice. And it comes to closure at the point where there's nothing more. You've let go. You've put down your burden. Everything ends.

I'll give you an analogy. One person asks, "Why is the flag flapping? It must be because there's wind." Another person says, "It's flapping because there's a flag." This sort of thing never comes to an end, like the old riddle, "Which came first, the chicken or the egg?" This never comes to an end. It just keeps spinning around in its circles.

All these things are simply suppositions. They arise from our supposing. So you have to understand suppositions and conventions. If you understand these things, you'll understand inconstancy, stress, and not-self. This is a theme that leads straight to nibbāna.

Training and teaching people to understand is really hard, you know. Some people have their opinions. You tell them something and they say No. No matter how much you tell them the truth, they say No. "I'll take what's right for me; you take what's right for you." There's no end to this. Even if it makes them suffer, they still won't let go.

I've told you before about the four men who go into the forest. They hear a chicken crowing, "Ekkk-i-ekk-ekkkk!" One of them comes up with the question, "Who says that's a rooster crowing? Who says it's a hen?" For the fun of it, three of them put their heads together and say it's a hen. The other one says it's a rooster. They argue back and forth like this without stopping. Three of them say it's a hen, and only one of them says it's a rooster. "How could a hen crow like that?" he asks. "Well, it's got a mouth, doesn't it?" they reply. The one person argues until he's in tears. Actually, it was a rooster crowing, in line with our standard suppositions, but the one person had to argue until he was in tears, he was so upset. Yet on the ultimate level they were all wrong.

The words "rooster" and "hen" are just suppositions. If you asked the chicken, "Are you a rooster?" it wouldn't answer. If you asked, "Are you a hen?"

it wouldn't give any explanation. But we have our conventions: These features are the features of a rooster; these features, the features of a hen. The rooster's crow is like this; a hen's squawk is like that. These are suppositions that are stuck in our world. But in truth there's no rooster, no hen. To speak on the level of the world's suppositions, the one person was right, but to argue until you're in tears doesn't serve any purpose at all. That's all there is to it.

So the Buddha taught not to cling to things. If we don't cling to things, how can we practice? We practice *because* of not-clinging. To bring your discernment in here is hard. This is why it's hard not to cling. You need to use sharp discernment to contemplate this. Only then will you get anywhere.

When you think about it, for the sake of relieving suffering, it doesn't depend on whether you have a lot of things or a little. Whether you're happy or sad, content or discontent, it starts from your discernment. To go beyond suffering depends on discernment, seeing things in line with their truth.

The Buddha taught us to train ourselves, to contemplate, to meditate. "Meditation" means undoing these problems correctly in line with their issues. And their issues are these: the issues of birth, aging, illness, and death. These are common, ordinary things—really common and ordinary. This is why he has us contemplate them continually. He has us meditate on birth, aging, illness, and death. Some people don't understand why we have to contemplate them. "Birth? We already know we're born," they say. "Death? We already know we'll die." That's the point. They're such ordinary issues—so true.

A person who investigates these things again and again will see. When you see, you can gradually undo these problems. Although you may still have some clinging, if you have the discernment to see that these things are ordinary, you'll be able to relieve suffering. This is why we practice for the sake of undoing suffering.

The basic principles of the Buddha's teaching aren't much: just the issues of suffering arising and suffering passing away. That's why these things are called noble truths. If you don't know them, you suffer. If you argue from pride and opinions, there's no end to it. To get the mind to relieve its suffering and be at ease, you have to contemplate what's happened in the past, what's in the present, what's going to be in the future. Things like birth, aging, illness, and death: What can you do not to be worried about them? There will be *some* worries, but if you can learn to understand them for what they are, suffering will gradually lessen, because you don't hug it to your chest.