Introduction to Basic Buddhist Practice

prepared by

THE COUNCIL OF THAI BHIKKHUS IN THE U. S. A.

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Preface

Buddhist studies and meditation practice is very popular and attractive in Western society today. This subject has been introduced in courses of studies of high schools, collages and universities campuses classes for the eastern studies. Many students in these education institutions follow the way they have learned from the classes and practice at home without teachers or proper guide. To day more and more well trained teacher in the West set up many Buddhist Communities and meditation Centers available to them. But there are many Asian immigrants who settled down in the United States of America could not have sufficient reading materials for their children to study and learn to enable them to understand valuable and worthy tradition, Buddhist value. To maintain and promote this tradition, the Special Committee try to get this book entitled " Introduction to Basic Buddhist Practice " is completed.

As a chair of the Committee, I sincerely thank to my colleagues who devote their times and energy to contribute their work. Without their times and generous hearts this work could not be done.

Buddhist studies and meditation practice is very important for the people in all parts of the world especially for Westerners in the 21st century. The people are running with materialism and following their desire making them rush and fight with time and labor, which creates a corruption, problems and resulting suffering to human society. Science and technology is not the end of life, this human creation is now influencing the human mind. It becomes a master of human beings instead of slavery. People today have no time to look back to themselves, how they are, and who they are? What they are doing and for whom? To be born as a human being

is rare, people are not aware of this, they are running and running never slowing down to stop and rest.

Since I came to Vipassan©Meditation Center in Chicago, known as Wat Dhammaram, Thai Buddhist Temple of Chicago in 1986, I have been working with English speaking friends in the area. Whenever I went out to give meditation instruction to my American friends they asked me for a hand book of meditation practice that I did not have at that time. I wrote an article on Meditation Instruction and practice both in Thai and in English, after that I found it is helpful for them to understand the simple way of meditation. In 1996-1997, I moved to Warren, Michigan to establish a meditation and community center in that area and I got it printed in the booklet form. Since then it has been reprinted many times by Wat Thai Washington, D.C., and Wat Pa Santidham, Virginia.

The Midwest Buddhist Meditation Center reprinted it three times and this is the sixth printing. This book has not only been reprinted for The Parliament of World Religions 2004, which was held in Barcelona, Spain, July 7-13, 2004, but also for the using of our friends who are interested in Meditation practice in general. I would like to thank all my friends who help in many ways in the printing of this book.

I thank Mrs. Sheila Duke leader and sponsor of meditation group of Windsor, Ontario, Canada, for her neat editing throughout this handbook.

The Committee try to get this book entitled “Introduction to Basic Buddhist Practice” is completed. As a chair of the Committee, I sincerely thank to my colleagues who devote their times and energy to contribute their work. Without their times and generous hearts this work could not be done.

Finally my personal sincere thank is duce to Venerable Dr. Thanat Inthisan, secretary of the Committee, who took care of type-

setting, art work, and design of this book, his time, labor, and energy. I owe thanks to him.

Special thank to Venerable Phramaha Somboon Summapunyo who coordinates with printing company and taking care of printing work in Thailand as you see in your hands.

Hopefully this book may be proved beneficial and useful not only for the Asian young Buddhist communities in North America, but also for those our local friends as well. I personally hope that this book will help the leaders of communities to be able to teach their members in a proper direction and the points needed to be understood specially our friends from other traditions may get clear understanding on basic teaching of the Buddha. Because there are some religious leaders mentioned that Buddhism is a part of Hinduism, this is wrong, Buddhism opposed Hindu believe especially about cast system and Buddhism do not believe in God, Bhaghavan, or creator of all creatures as Hindu people believe. A person will be god or bad depend on the cast he or she born to, but Buddhism believe in action you will be good or bad depend on your action not by cast, this is very clear.

Further more, our young generation may learn about the updating of Buddhist teachings which will be fit for the modern science and technology as *Albert Einstein said once "If there is any religion that could cope with the modern scientific needs, it would be Buddhism."*

May clear understanding about Buddhism be born in the minds of all human being. May peaceful family life and happiness be developed in our society. May peace prevail on earth.

C. Phangcham
2-9-08

Acknowledgment

Buddhist communities in the West are growing in numbers as Buddhism itself became attractive to those who are intelligent and open minded. We find Buddhist communities in every State in the USA, the communities that built by immigrant and local practitioners. In some areas there are few Monks serving people, they do not have sufficient reading materials for study especially for the younger ones. Their parent can not communicate with them in the understandable means, they get going with their young friends learning some things different when they come homes their parents want them to behave in their own tradition, but they do not care, the confuse appears, and conflict occurs, then they have problem in the same family. Anyway, some are good they get along with each other well and we are happy with them, but some not we feel sympathize for them too.

In the Western society, especially in the United States of America, as mentioned above, we do not have sufficient reading materials for Buddhist groups especially Buddhist ceremonies and festivals. Therefore, the Council of Thai Bhikkhus in the USA decided to help solving this problem in the communities and provide them the Buddhist handbooks. For this purpose the Council set up the special committees, as names listed below, to produce this handbook as our need, we tried our best to get it done as you have in your hands today.

Any tradition has its own value especially Buddhist tradition, the tradition of loving kindness and compassion, tradition of peace and non-violence which is worthy to be maintained and generated to the young generation in all parts of the world for the

benefits of human kinds. We hope that this book may be proved useful and beneficial for our new Monks coming from over sea to serve our communities here, and our young generation living in the United States of America.

Our brothers and sisters, who fled from their home lands and settled down in the West, learned new culture for their ways of life. Some forget their own culture and adopted a new one, and causing many problems for their lives and facing family broken problems, drugs and criminal problems today.

The young ones could not understand their own languages and traditions. They are not following the ways their parents do. They, therefore, created family and criminal problems in all parts of the country. I do experience when I go to different states as interpreter in the courts for these communities.

I was thinking about this problem for many years when I came to Chicago, Illinois and served there for ten years. How can I do some things to help in solving this problem for the Asian and south East Asian people living in the North America today.

As a chair of the committees I sincerely would like to thank to my colleagues who devote their times and energy to contribute their work without their times and generous hearts this work could not be done. My personally sincerely thanks to Venerable Dr. Thanath Inthisan, the secretary of the committees who taken care of tip-setting, arts work and design of this book, his time, labor and energy.

Hopefully this book may be proved to be beneficial and useful for not only Asian families living in the North America, but also for those our local friends as well. I personally hope that this presentation will help our parents to take care of their children

and lead them in the proper direction. The young people can learnabout our ancient Buddhist practice, enable them to understand and know this is precious teaching for human life and all living beings. Finally our young generation may find updating of Buddhist teachings to make known to people for benefits of many and to sustain our society. Peace and happy family life would be expected.

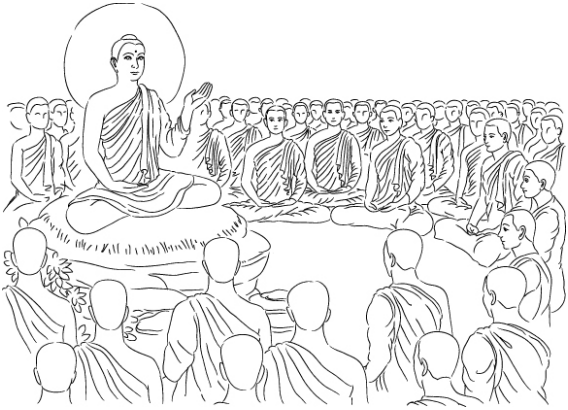
May peaceful family life and happiness be developed in our society. May peace prevail on earth.

C. Phangcham, Ph.D.
MBMC, Michigan
3-7-08

An Introduction to the Concepts and Practice of Theravada Buddhism

"Let go of the past! / Let go of the future! /
In the present, let go!"

—*The Dhammapada*, 348
(Glenn Wallis translation).



I. Outline: Concept and Practice

This essay is an introduction to the basic concepts and practices of Buddhism. It represents one attempt to begin to come to terms with the meaning and significance of this religion. Buddhism can be divided into two major branches, Theravada and Mahayana.[1] Generally speaking, Theravada is the Buddhism of Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar (formerly Burma), and Thailand; Mahayana the Buddhism of China, Tibet, Nepal, Taiwan, Japan,

Korea, and Vietnam. The perspective for what follows is Theravada Buddhism, specifically, Thai Theravada Buddhism.

The essay is divided into two main sections. The first considers some key concepts of Theravada Buddhism for the purpose of trying to gain some understanding of them. For the sake of context, this section is prefaced with a sketch of the life of the Buddha. The second discusses Theravada Buddhist practice under the rubrics of generosity (*d na*), morality (*s la*), and concentration (*sam dhi*).[2] The purpose of this section is to help understand not only the meaning of Buddhist practice in general but also that of various religious activities. The part on generosity considers the meaning of the word and the place of *d na* in Buddhist practice; making merit and ways of doing so, including chanting; the broader context of holy days, rituals, and ceremonies; and showing reverence. The part on morality, in the main, presents the precepts that apply to lay people and to the monks. The part on concentration, lastly, is concerned with the meaning of the term and with concentration meditation. Generosity, morality, and concentration, then, are viewed as aspects of a life of meditation. The essay concludes with a consideration of the meaning of Theravada Buddhist practice.

II. Life of the Buddha

Before the discussion of some key Theravada concepts, the life of the Buddha will be briefly outlined. A few preliminary remarks must be made first, though, about two topics:

1) Dating. In the Theravada tradition, the Buddha lived from 624 to 544 B.C. (More frequently in scholarly works, his dates are given as 563 to 483 B.C.) The so-called Buddhist Era (B.E.) is dated by Thai Buddhists from the anniversary of his death. So 2007 A.D. is 2550 B.E. (544 B.C., the date of his death, plus one year to the anniversary date, 543 B.C., plus 2007 years since the birth of Christ, equals 2550).[3]

2) Theravada Scriptures. The P©li Canon is about eleven times the size of the Christian Bible.[4] It is called the *Tipitaka* (Sanskrit, *Tripitaka*), literally, the "three baskets," three collections of works: *Vinaya Pitaka* (rules and regulations for monks and nuns), *Sutta Pitaka* (essentially the Buddha's discourses, suttas[5]), and *Abhidhamma Pitaka* (academic teachings and explanations).[6] The Scriptures were transferred orally from generation to generation by the monks for hundreds of years before being written down.[7] Of the three collections, the one that is most pertinent for someone new to Buddhism is the *Sutta Pitaka*, divided, in turn, into four large works and one lesser collection. The four works are the *D gha Nik ya* (*Long Discourses*), *Majjhima Nik ya* (*Middle Length Discourses*), *Samyutta Nik ya* (*Connected Discourses*), and Anguttara *Nik ya* (*Numerical Sayings*). The lesser collection is the *Khuddaka Nik ya* (*Minor Works*), of which the most famous books are the *Dhammapada* and *The Sutta-Nip ta*.[8] The beginning student of Buddhism, faced with the staggering size of the *Sutta Pitaka*, should consider reading, first, the beautiful *Dhammapada*, a kind of manual of ethics set in the form of 423 verses, or *The Sutta-Nip ta*, also a sort of book of ethics mixing prose and poetry, then the *D gha Nik ya*, a manageable volume of thirty-four discourses in three sections dealing with the life of the Buddha and important teachings. The P©li suttas should not be confused with those of the Mahayana tradition.[9]

As regards the life of the Buddha, then, Siddhattha Gotama, the Bodhisatta, Buddha-to-be,[10] lived in what is now Nepal and Northern India.[11] He was born in Lumbini Park in present-day Nepal near the ancient town of Kapilavastu. His father was King Suddhodana of the Shakya dynasty of the Kshatriya caste of ancient India. Kapilavastu was the capital city of his kingdom. The Buddha's mother, Queen Maya Devi, was on her way to her hometown, Devadaha, when she stopped at Lumbini, a beautiful garden belonging to both the Shakya and the Koliya clans, and gave birth to him on the fifteenth day of the sixth lunar month.[12]

Siddhattha grew up in the court and lived a life of luxury. At the age of sixteen he married Yashodhara, and they eventually had a son, Rahula. By the time the prince was twenty-nine, however, he had become disenchanted with the sheltered life of physical comfort he was leading at the court. Outside the palace, seeing someone suffering from sickness and someone dying of old age, he realized that suffering and death were part of the human condition. He also saw a peaceful wandering ascetic. Siddhattha decided to renounce his life of luxury and search for an answer to the problem of suffering and death as a homeless ascetic. For six years he lived in extreme self-mortification near the locality of Uruvela in the kingdom of Magadha, India, together with five other ascetics.[13] He eventually came to understand there was nothing wrong with living a "middle" way of life, a way between the extremes of luxury and severe asceticism. His five companions abandoned him because they thought he had chosen to live a life of luxury.

Siddhattha went to the banks of the Neranjara River near the village of Gaya to meditate under a bodhi tree.[14] It was here in 595 B.C. that he achieved Enlightenment (Nirv©na, Nibb©na[15]) and became the Buddha, the "Enlightened One," the "Awakened One," the Tath©gata, the Arahant.[16] He realized that by putting a stop to attachment to feelings of pleasure and displeasure leading to the emergence of the state of suffering, liberation could be attained. The place of his Enlightenment eventually became known as Bodh Gaya.

Once the Buddha-to-be had achieved Enlightenment, he was not inclined to share the Dhamma[17] with others because of its difficulty. However, according to the Scriptures, he was persuaded by the Brahm© Sahampati[18] that it was important to spread the teaching for the benefit of others. He set off for Sarnath, the deer park at Varanasi, to see the five ascetics who had helped him. The Buddha preached his first sermon, or discourse, "Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Dhamma," to the ascetics, who converted to bhikkhus, the first members of his newly founded Sangha, the order

of the monks.[19] In this way the Triple Gem came to be: the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. The first sermon concerned the Middle Way (the Noble Eightfold Path) and the Four Noble Truths. During the remaining forty-five years of his life, the Buddha spent his time wandering through the countryside and into the cities and villages of ancient north-central India teaching the Dhamma. He died at the age of eighty in 544 B.C. in the little city of Kusinara. His body was cremated, and the relics were divided among eight cities.[20] Stupas[21] were built to contain the relics.

III. Key Concepts of Theravada Buddhism

A brief sketch of the Buddha's life having been given, the first section of this essay considers some key Theravada concepts.[22] Theravada Buddhism itself, to say nothing about all the other schools, presents a complicated system of teachings. The following is nothing more than an overview of a few key concepts in an attempt to gain some understanding of them[23]:

1) *The Four Noble Truths (Ariya-Sacca) and the Noble Eightfold Path (Ariya-Magga)*.[24] The teaching of the Four Noble Truths lies at the heart of Buddhism. The first of these truths is the noble truth of suffering (*dukkha)*. Suffering includes all those things troublesome to a human being: for example, aging, illness, death, experiencing what is displeasurable, experiencing the end of something pleasurable, and

failing to get what one desires. Suffering stems from the general unsatisfactory and transitory character of everything in human experience. Anything in sense experience to which we cling results in suffering. If we observe how the problems in our daily lives arise, we can see how these bring about *dukkha*. We come to realize that everything experienced is subject to instability, decay, and change. The second noble truth is the noble truth of the origin of suffering (*dukkhasamudaya*). It is craving that causes the emergence of the state of suffering. Craving is for sensual pleasures, for existence, and even in some cases for extermination. It is the result of ignorance, one of the fetters, and brings about hatred, violence, and destruction.[25] This does not mean that craving is some kind of "first cause," since for the Buddha all things are conditioned and interdependent. The third noble truth is the truth of the cessation of suffering (*dukkhanirodha*). Cessation of suffering comes with the cessation of craving, with the abandonment of it, with freedom from it. With freedom from craving comes freedom from all the defilements. The last of the truths about which the Buddha preached is the truth concerning the way leading to the cessation of suffering (*dukkhanirodhag min patipad*). This is the Noble Eightfold Path, the Middle Way.

The Noble Eightfold Path lies between the extremes of severe self-mortification, on the one hand, and a life of luxury, on the other. This path includes right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

If we are going to do anything to improve our lives, we first have to understand the situation. We must get a clear view of the way things are. In other words, we must have right understanding (*samm -ditthi*). Right understanding includes the religious beliefs of ordinary people (relative truth); an understanding of the Four Noble Truths; the realization that all nature is subject to impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and no-self (*anatt*); and an understanding of Dependent Origination.[26]

Secondly, right thought (*samm -sankappa*) means that our minds are free from sensuality, hatred, and violence, and that we live lives

of renunciation, loving-kindness, and nonviolence. Unwholesome thoughts result in the inability to think or act properly and bring suffering into our lives.

Thirdly, if we want to advance on the path to Enlightenment, we must avoid "negative" speech in all its forms. We must use right speech (*samm -v c*). "Negative" speech includes all the following: lying, backstabbing, unkind words, inflammatory language, idle gossip, and prejudicial remarks. "Positive" speech is truthful, kind, appropriate, and helpful to other people.

Fourthly, right action (*samm -kammanta*) means observing the Five Precepts, the basic principles of Buddhism. These are to refrain from destroying living things, to refrain from taking anything that is not given, to refrain from sexual misconduct, to refrain from false speech, and to refrain from anything causing intoxication or inattention. If we observe these precepts, we will not bring harm upon either ourselves or other living things.

Fifthly, right livelihood (*samm - j va*) is living our lives in the proper way. This means, for one thing, not earning a livelihood through such means as selling drugs, trading in guns, or usury. It also includes such things as taking care of our bodies by getting some exercise and eating properly, and not squandering our personal possessions. We have responsibilities to ourselves as well as to other people.

Sixthly, in whatever activity we are engaged, for example, at work or at school, we should attempt to perform it to the best of our ability. This means that we make the right effort (*samm ı v y ma*). Right effort includes making the attempt to eliminate whatever unwholesomeness already exists in the mind, preventing any new unwholesomeness from arising, endeavoring to foster the development of good qualities in our minds, and fostering the growth of those good qualities we already have.

Seventhly, having a sense of an awareness of what we are thinking and doing so that we prevent all forms of unwholesomeness from entering our lives and so we remain true to the Noble Eightfold

Path is called right mindfulness (*samm -sati*). Right mindfulness includes such simple matters as paying close attention to our studying when we are studying and to our jobs when we are working to make our activities as effective as possible. Right mindfulness is important in meditation because it enables us to pay attention to what is happening. In general, it helps ensure that suffering does not arise in our lives because of the way we are conducting ourselves.

Eighthly, right concentration (*samm -sam dhi*) is the focusing of our minds. If we focus on what we are doing, whatever it is, our activity will be efficacious. When we focus our minds in meditation, we come to appreciate the impermanence of everything and eventually realize Enlightenment.

The steps of the Noble Eightfold Path are not to be taken consecutively; each stop along the way is to be developed simultaneously. All together the eight steps fall under the three essentials of the Buddhist training regimen: morality (right speech, right action, right livelihood), concentration (right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration), and wisdom (right understanding, right thought).

2) *The Five Aggregates*. For Theravada Buddhism, the totality of human experience,

the totality of the "inner"and"outer" world as manifest to a human being, is understood in terms of the five aggregates (*khandhas*, *heaps*), categories of the various aspects of experience.[27] The aggregates are classifications for the world as it appears. They define Nature, taken in the broadest sense of the word.[28]

The five aggregates are form (*r pa*), feeling (*vedan *), perception (*sa *), conception *sankh ra*), and consciousness (*vi na*). The form is the experienced object of one of the sense organs. The six sense organs and their corresponding forms are the following: eye and visual form, ear and sound, nose and odor, tongue and taste, body and tangible object, and mind and mental object. The mind (not the same as the brain) is considered one of the sense organs. Feeling, for example a feeling of pleasure or

displeasure, is a physical sensation. Perception does not mean sense awareness of something but rather the memory of a sense object, of a particular visible form, sound, odor, taste, tangible object, or mental object. Conception is an idea or opinion about a form or forms that indicates an interaction with the world of raw experience. Consciousness, finally, is the aspect of knowing. All the other aggregates function in terms of consciousness: there is knowing the form, knowing the feeling, knowing the perception, and knowing the conception.

The arising of the world in accordance with the five aggregates can be summarized by the following diagram:[29]

The Arising of the World in Accordance with the Five Aggregates

Interaction of	)	) Feeling
Sense Organ	)	)
and Form	) ’! Contact ’!	) Perception
(Memory)	)	)
	)	) Conception
(Idea, Opinion)		

Consciousness

So when the sense organ and form interact, and consciousness of the form is present, contact (*phassa*) occurs. When there is contact, the form has meaning. Form arises. Then feeling, perception, and conception can arise. Consciousness is the foundation for the other aggregates. For example, my ear picks up the sound (form) of a bird singing, and, there being consciousness of the sound, contact occurs. The sound makes me feel happy

(feeling). I remember a similar sound (perception) I heard the day before. I form the opinion (conception) that I am hearing the same kind of bird singing today that I heard yesterday. I am conscious of the sound, my feeling, the memory of yesterday's sound, as well as my opinion of today (consciousness).

The aggregates are categories for classifying experience. One experiences a specific color, say light blue, or a specific sound, a loud screech, and one classifies these as forms. "Form" (the classifier) has no real existence except as an object in the mind. The same holds true for feelings, perceptions, and conceptions. All these are specific objects of consciousness. "Consciousness" (the classifier), too, exists only as an object in individual minds with particular consciousnesses. Furthermore, one experiences only one specific instance of an aggregate at a time. For example, one does not experience happiness and sadness at the same time when seeing a certain form. In this sense, *aggregate* is a bit of a misnomer, since the "aggregate" (e.g., a feeling of happiness) is really a *particular* reality, not a collection of things. One does not experience the "heap" of all sounds, for instance, just one at a time (or *one* cacophony of sounds at a time).[30]

3) *Suffering, No-Self, Impermanence*.[31] The world of human experience, classified in

terms of the five aggregates, has three characteristics of existence: impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and no-self (*anatt*). First, all things in the world continuously arise and, soon enough, pass away. The world of experience is in a state of constant flux. "All things change."[32] Sense forms continuously arise and then disappear. They are joined by various feelings, perceptions, and conceptions, all of which continuously arise and then disappear. All these things within our inner and outer world of experience, fleeting as they are, are conditioned.[33] All conditioned things, all *sankh r* , furthermore, continuously condition other such conditioned things, etc. "Sankhara [here in the verb form] means 'to form, to compound, to concoct, to condition,' that is, all the

myriad things are constantly conditioning new things. This is a characteristic or activity of phenomenal things . . . Sankhara is this continuous activity of formation."[34] Rocks and trees and human beings and everything in between are subject to this constant process of formation and disintegration. Rocks are formed, and then get exposed to water or the elements and erode over time. Trees in temperate climates bud and flower in the spring, continue to grow during the summer, lose their leaves in the fall, and stand dormant in the winter. Human beings are subject to a constant conditioning of forms, feelings, perceptions, and conceptions. All this endless conditioned coming and going, day in and day out, year in and year out, eons upon eons, is *annica*, impermanence, the first characteristic of existence.

The second characteristic of existence is no-self, lack of self, *anatt* . If we look hard enough at the world classified in terms of the five aggregates, we do not find a self anywhere. There are discrete forms (e.g., red, screeching, putrid, salty, hot, and freedom), discrete feelings (pleasure, displeasure, sadness, delight, etc.), discrete perceptions (e.g., red, screeching, putrid, salty, hot, and freedom), and discrete conceptions (e.g., opinions about red things, screeching things, putrid things, salty things, hot things, and freedom). There is no perduring self, ego, person, individual, or soul. There are only distinct instances of the five aggregates. For the Theravada Buddhist the experience of the world is fragmented and does not add up to any kind of self. No self gets constituted in this experience.[35]

Consider the issue from another perspective: I am not the same person I was yesterday, last week, last month, last year, five years ago, twenty years ago. Yesterday I was upset about my job, but today I am happily working; last week I knew nothing about nanotechnology, but this week I have some knowledge about the subject because I read a book about it; last month I had a bad habit of eating too many donuts, but this month I have eliminated donuts from my diet and added fruit; last year I was a Jeffersonian Republican, but this year I have become disenchanted with the whole political process; five years ago

I believed in the tenets of Roman Catholicism, but today I am a Buddhist; and twenty years ago I was a student at the university, but today I am a Government worker. Who exactly am I? No *one* person. No-one, no-body in particular. Nobody, really.[36]

The third characteristic of existence is suffering, *dukkha*. Recall that suffering is unsatisfactoriness in the broad sense: it stems from all those experiences troublesome to a human being, for example, aging, illness, death, experiencing what is displeasurable, experiencing the end of something pleasurable, and failing to get what one desires. Suffering is being upset about something in the broadest sense of the word *upset*. Suffering arises because one tries to assert a self into a world characterized as impermanent, tries to fabricate a self where one could not possibly exist. If one attempts to insert a self into the world of flux, dissatisfaction of some sort will always be the result because the world does not "stand still" long enough for one to really be anything or have anything. Nothing is worth having or being,[37] and if one tries to make it otherwise, he suffers. If one identifies himself with his job (as many Americans do) and then loses his job, who is he? If one has a beautiful home in the suburbs and it burns to the ground, what does he have? Feelings, knowledge, habits, beliefs, and occupations change over time because impermanence is a characteristic of existence, and to try to make it otherwise brings suffering. Suffering in some form always results when one tries to insert an "I" or "mine" into the world.

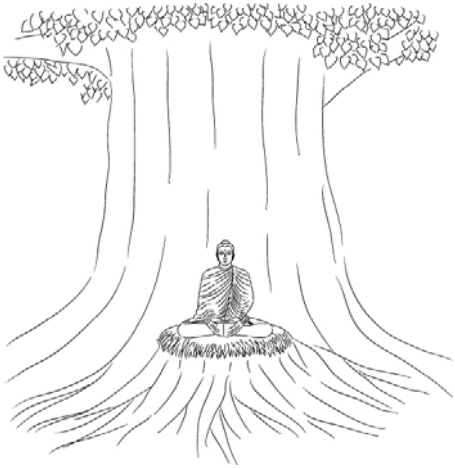
4) *Enlightenment* (Nibb©na). One gets the impression that though some Buddhists talk about Enlightenment, they do not seem to be able to present a clear idea of what it is. Part of the problem may be the ineffability of Enlightenment. It is difficult to put into words. Furthermore, talking about it, reflecting upon it, is not the same as the immediate experience of it. We speak of it as a state of mind, but Enlightenment is not really such. Enlightenment appears when the mind is ready. It is not something the mind can manipulate like some ordinary mental object, and it is not some sort of regular worldly experience the mind can produce of its

own accord. Neither is it some "thing" to be found in the world of human experience. Yet it is not some other-worldly entity available to only a few under special circumstances. It is attainable here and now to a greater or lesser degree by every human being in his or her daily life.[38]

What is Enlightenment? It is the unchanging, unconditioned reality "existing" "outside" the conditioned world of s*ankh r* , the endless, unconditioned coming and going that is *annica*, impermanence. Enlightenment is a reality available through the experience of a world devoid of the "I" and "mine," which bring the state of suffering. Enlightenment is the realization of no-suffering (*niroda*). It manifests itself in the experience of emptiness, or voidness (*su at*).[39] Eliminating the "I" and "mine" brings voidness into our lives. Enlightenment comes as a result of the experience of a Nature void of "I" and "mine." The self ceases to exist insofar as the mind is void, and Nature, in turn, is recognized for the voidness that it is.[40] Enlightenment means "stepping back" to a selfless "center," while Nature (the mental and the physical) is held in suspension. It means being centered, on center, not off center; the center, however, is voidness. It is collapsing the dichotomy between an inner world and an outer world in a Pure Nature.[41] Enlightenment entails stopping short of attaching to feelings of pleasure or displeasure that arise in life, thereby eliminating clinging to anything in the world. It is not attaching to the five aggregates.[42] In Enlightenment one "floats along" a stream of experiences devoid of an inner-worldly or outer-worldly self. One experiences a world beyond positive and negative, etc., even beyond good and evil. One watches a self-less world go by without taking it seriously or getting upset about it. Enlightenment is not just recognizing Nature for what it is (direct *knowledge*), but also "at the same time" experiencing this Nature in a "noble" fashion ("ethics"). It means remaining cool, calm, and collected (centered, on center), not hot and bothered in a world of "I" and "mine" (off

center). Enlightenment is returning to the original mind, the mind prior to defilements such as greed and anger:

The Original Mind is "free," "void," "luminous," and "non-suffering." ***The Buddha*** discovered that the **void mind** is the **"Middle Mind,"** appearing as the basic mind at all times. *He* then stated, **"The Original Mind is luminous; it is tarnished due to the presence of visiting defilement. The Original Mind is luminous; it is un-tarnished due to the absence of visiting defilement."**[43]



There are "definitions" of Enlightenment. A good "definition" of Enlightenment (Nibb©na) is the one given in the *Pali-English Dictionary*:

Nibb©na is purely and solely an *ethical* state, to be reached in this birth by ethical

practices, contemplation and insight. It is therefore not transcendental. The first and most important way to reach N[ibb©na] is by means of the eightfold Path, and all expressions which deal with the realization of emancipation from lust, hatred and illusion apply to *practical* habits and not to speculative thought."[44]

A much better "definition" of *Nibb na* is the following:

Coolness, quenching: the Absolute, the Supreme, the Ultimate Reality in Buddhism; the "goal" of Buddhist practice, and the highest potential of humanity. *Nibb na* manifests when the fires of defilement, attachment, selfishness, and *dukkha* are cooled. When they are permanently cooled, *nibb na* manifests perfectly, totally, timelessly. Not a place, for *nibb na* is beyond existence and non-existence, not even a state of mind, for nibb©na [sic] is neither mental nor physical, but a *dhamma* ["thing," reality] the mind can realize and experience. *Nibb na* is to be realized in this life. In Pali, the root of *nibb na* has verb forms meaning "to cool, to quench, to extinguish."[45]

The English language contains several idioms that, taken together, help the Westerner understand the meaning of Enlightenment: a) "Be all right." Be an "all right" kind of person. Live the right way by following the Noble Eightfold Path. This path is the only way of reaching freedom from suffering: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.[46] b) "Stop monkeying around." Our "monkey minds" are constantly jumping from one troublesome idea to another, and we have to settle down, get serious, and grow up.[4747] SeeAjahn Sumano Bhikkhu and Emily Popp's *Meeting the Monkey Halfway*. *Monkey around* means *to act in a silly or playful way in the sense of acting like a child; to fool around, horse around, play around, or mess around*. (It also has a second meaning of *trying to fix something, especially*

without success.) *Monkey business* means *acting badly, dishonestly, or illegally*; or *causing trouble*.

c) "Cool off." "Play it cool." Be cool and calm, not hot and bothered. Don't let the defilements of greed, hatred, and delusion get hold of you and make you hot. d) "Be a nobody." Return to the original mind, which is void. The voidness of Enlightenment means that no one clings to anything as being mine. There is no self; there is only nature, and nature is empty.[48] e) "Take it easy." Don't put any stock in the world of the senses—a comfortable life, a lot of money, the pleasures of sex, the approval of your friends. Don't put any stock in yourself—your wants and needs, your personal opinions, your goals and dreams. The self is not real: no one is there. Rest in the emptiness of Enlightenment, which makes all life easy.[49] Don't take anything in the world seriously as things goes by. Easy come, easy go. Easy does it.[50] f) "Take things as they come." Don't take your plans seriously, and don't worry about the future. Don't take things too seriously; learn how to take them or leave them. When you take things as they come, take things *as they are*. That is, don't add anything to them; take them "merely as": put a stop to the "I" and "mine," which bring suffering, by not allowing feelings of pleasure or displeasure to arise in the first place when you are conscious of sense objects.[51] g) "Get real." Be a "realist." Don't be a pessimist, but don't be an optimist either; just let things happen. Don't expect bad things to happen to you, but don't expect good things, either. Don't have a "positive attitude"![52] Don't have *any* expectations, just accept what happens.

5) *Dependent Origination*. Enlightenment is the realization of no-suffering. However, how does this state of suffering come about in the first place? The idea of Dependent Origination provides the explanation for the emergence of the state of suffering.

Dependent Origination, sometimes called Conditioned Genesis (*paticca-samupp da* in the P©li), is a difficult concept. It has traditionally been presented in the secondary literature in

conjunction with the idea of the "wheel of existence" (*sams ra*), the endless cycle of rebirth to which suffering human beings are subjected. One of the key discourses in the *D gha Nik ya*, e.g., is devoted to Dependent Origination ("*Mah nid na Sutta*: The Great Discourse on Origination"), and the subject is discussed in another ("*Mah pad na Sutta*: The Great Discourse on the Lineage").[53] Buddhad©sa Bhikkhu wrote a book about the topic.[54] Payutto wrote extensively about it in his great book.[55] Varasak Varadhammo devoted forty-six pages to the subject.[56]

The law of Dependent Origination is a law describing a causal situation. As such, this law presupposes the universal law regarding causal situations. Dependent Origination must be understood in terms of the more fundamental Buddhist law of conditionality (*idappaccayat *), the supreme law of cause and effect, the law of Nature. This law, simply put, is as follows: "'**Depending on This, arises This**. / **If this does not exist, then this does not exist**.'"[57] In other words, if a certain set of conditions ("causes") exist, there will be a determined result (effect). Causality here is to be taken in the sense of a condition responsible for the existence of something, not in the sense of a cause producing an effect in a linear time frame.[58] For example, you are currently reading (the result/effect) this "Introduction" because someone wrote it in the first place, you are interested in Buddhism or someone asked you to read it, you got a copy or it was given to you, you are not blind, if you are reading at night the electric light in your room works, you have some leisure time, reading about Buddhism is not forbidden by the government, etc. (the conditions/causes). For Buddhism all things in the world of nature or in the world of human endeavor are conditioned in this fashion.

For the purposes of this essay, then, the complexity of the subject matter notwithstanding, suffice it to say Dependent Origination, as the law for the emergence of the state of suffering, can be depicted by the following:

The Emergence of the State of Suffering

Contact '! Feeling '! Desire '! Attachment '! Being '! Birth '! Old Age '! Death[59]

The emergence of the state of suffering begins with contact (*phassa*), the coming together of sense object, sense organ, and sense consciousness, e.g., visible object, eye, and eye consciousness, as in the consideration of the five aggregates above. Contact results in, or develops into, feeling (*vedan*). If the process is continued, feeling results in desire, or craving (*tanh*). Desire, in turn, results in attachment, or clinging (*up d na*), attachment results in being (*bhava*), being results in birth (*j ti*), birth results in old age (*jar*), and old age results in death (*marana*). Such is the conditioned sequence involving the birth, "aging," and death of the state of suffering (*dukkha*). Following the death of this state, the mind returns to its original condition of neutrality and voidness. What is more, this is how the fiction of the suffering "self" comes about, the "I" and "mine," and this is how it passes away.

For example, a successful athlete making a lot of money sees an expensive luxury automobile in the dealership showroom. Other senses may get involved: he touches the fine leather seats; his nose takes in the smell of a new car. Here contact leads to a feeling of pleasure. Feeling leads to a desire to possess the automobile. Desire leads to attachment. The man thinks the car is something he just has to have; he can not live without it. Perhaps feelings repeatedly get generated, leading to greater desire and attachment. Attachment, in turn, leads to being, in this case the reality of greed. The reality (being) of greed means that there has been the birth of this defilement. Being, that is, leads to (entails) birth. Because of the athlete's repeated sensual experiences (perhaps seeing other expensive cars), his greed may intensify since it is being repeatedly produced. He may end up purchasing a whole fleet of useless luxury vehicles. In each case of its arising, the greed "gets old" and passes away. The mind returns to its original neutral state: perhaps the man gets preoccupied with training for his sport and

forgets about his cars. This description accounts for the origin of suffering in the athlete's life. Because of his greed, he peoples the world with the "I" and "mine" ("I" have luxury cars; these are "mine"). He gets overly concerned in a self-ish way about what belongs to him. His actions bring suffering (dissatisfaction and uneasiness of all sorts): the man worries excessively about his cars; he has to make sure he hires someone to clean and maintain them; he is burdened with paying more money for insurance; he worries about damage to his cars or theft of them, etc.

It is important to emphasize that birth in Dependent Origination, as described, is not the birth of a person from his mother's womb, just as it is not the rebirth of an individual in the cycle (*sams ra*) of rebirths. It is, rather, the "birth" of a suffering state of body and mind—a birth that occurs repeatedly as the world is experienced during the course of a day. Furthermore, just as there are repeated births, there are repeated deaths. This is the type of birth that presents a problem for us.[60] This is the type of birth that brings our own hell of suffering while we are on earth. In accordance with the law of Dependent Origination, the law of conditionality as it applies to the origin of suffering, the state of suffering necessarily emerges following feelings of pleasure or displeasure, and clinging.

The origin of suffering, then, can be further depicted by the following diagram, which links the process of Dependent Origination and the arising of the world in accordance with the five aggregates by combining the previous two diagrams (regarding the five aggregates, and the emergence of the suffering state):

The Emergence of the State of Suffering: A Reprise
(Dependent Origination and the Five Aggregates)

Desire '! Attachment '! Being '! Birth '! Old Age '! Death
Interaction of)) Feeling Sense Organ))
and Form) '! Contact '!) Perception)

))
))) Conception) Consciousness

Feeling has been described as arising with form upon contact. However, as the diagram above indicates, feeling may arise not only with a form, but also with a perception or with a conception.[61] So form (through contact) develops into feeling, which develops into desire, which develops into attachment, which develops into being, which develops into birth, which develops into old age, which develops into death. Similarly, perception develops into feeling, which develops into desire, which develops into attachment, etc. Furthermore, conception does the same. If one attaches to the feeling, whatever its origin, then suffering arises through the process of Dependent Origination.

For example, if one sees a sexually attractive woman, form leads to a feeling of pleasure, feeling leads to desire for her, desire leads to attachment (one cannot get the thought of her out of his mind), attachment leads to the being of lust for the woman, being leads to the birth of lust, birth leads to old age as thinking about her diminishes, and old age leads to death as the mind returns to its neutral state. Lusting for a woman one cannot have (or should not have) is a state of suffering. Similarly, the *perception* (memory) of the woman can lead to feeling as one relives his encounter with her, feeling leads to desire, desire leads to attachment, attachment leads to being, being leads to the birth of lust as one lusts for the woman once again, birth leads to old age, and old age leads to death. Lastly, the conception of (opinion about) an attractive woman (for example, one thinks she is making advances to him and wants him to reciprocate, when she is really just being friendly) can lead to the feeling of pleasure, feeling leads to desire, etc.

The cessation of suffering is achieved by not attaching to the feeling, wherever it arises. It is achieved by putting a stop to the feeling should it arise:

For the average person, it is extremely difficult to prevent phassa [contact] from developing into vedana [feeling]. As soon as there is sense-contact, the feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction always follow on immediately. It doesn't stop at phassa because there has never been any training in Dhamma. But there is still a way to save oneself; namely, when vedana has already developed, when there are already feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction, *to stop it right there*. Let feeling remain as merely feeling and pass away. Don't allow it to go on and become tanha [craving], wanting this and that in response to the satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Because, if there is satisfaction, then there will be desire, craving, indulgence, possessiveness, envy, etc., in consequence. Once there is dissatisfaction, then there is the desire to beat to death, to devastate, and kill. If there are these sorts of desires in the mind, it means that vedana has already developed into tanha. If so, you must suffer the spiritual disease of Dukkha and nobody can help . . . The Buddha said that even He cannot help. He has no power over the laws of nature . . .[62]

The five aggregates with attachment to feeling, however it arises, bring suffering.[63] The five aggregates with no attachment to feeling, however it arises, bring the cessation of suffering (*nirodha*), i.e., Enlightenment (Nibb©na). The purpose of the Buddhist way of life is to put an end to the mental kind of birth that leads to the state of suffering. This means ceasing to be involved with the "I" and "mine," with the self, or ego. So one has two options for living his life, i.e., either living life "on course" by not attaching to the five aggregates, or living "off course" by attaching to them:

Option One: Non-Attachment to the Aggregates

Life "On Course": "Watching the World Go By" (*Nirodha*/*Nibb na*)

[Form $_{1,2,3,4\ldots}$ Feeling $_{1,2,3,4,\ldots}$ Perception $_{1,2,3,4,}$ … Conception $_{1,2,3,4,\ldots}$]

Option Two: Attachment to the Aggregates

Life "Off Course": "Getting Mixed-Up with the World" (*Dukkha*)

$$\underset{\text{Form}}{\text{Self}_1}_{1,2,3,4\ldots}\ \underset{\text{Feeling}}{\text{Self}_2}_{1,2,3,4,\ldots}\ \underset{\text{Perception}}{\text{Self}_3}_{1,2,3,4,}\ \ldots\ \underset{\text{Conception}}{\text{Self}_4}_{1,2,3,4,\ldots}\ \text{Self}_{\ldots}$$

Living the first option, one "(square) brackets" the world ("[forms, feelings, perceptions, and conceptions]"): Nature is held in suspension. One does not regret anything in the past, nor does he look forward to anything in the future. He just lets the world go by. Living the second option, one peoples the world with the "I" and "mine," the self in a state of suffering.

6)Rebirth. In India at the time of the Buddha, the idea of a transmigration of a soul from one body to another was popular. Additionally, the notion of *karma* (*action* in Sanskrit) meant that the deeds of a person in one lifetime determined his existence in future lifetimes. These two beliefs, transmigration of souls and *karma*, provided an explanation for why some people were punished in the present life for what seemed to be no reason: they had committed wicked deeds in previous lives.

Buddhism, then, though denying the existence of a soul, has traditionally been presented in terms of a belief in rebirth. For instance, Walpola Rahula says, "When this physical body is no more capable of functioning, energies do not die with it, but continue to take some other shape or form, which we call another life."[64] In this case some explanation is needed as regards the tenability of rebirth, since there is no self that lives on after death.[65] Rahula argues that the death of one person and the birth of this same person somewhere else is nothing more than the same continuous series of "thought-moments," the last "thought-moment"

of the dying person conditioning the first "thought-moment" of the same person reborn.[66] Such continuity is certainly logically possible. The five aggregates of the next life, so to speak, take over where those of the previous life ended. To Westerners by and large, however, such ideas seen alien, and contrary to ordinary experience.[6767] This has not been true for all Westerners, however. Cf. Humphreys, *Buddhism; An Introduction and Guide*, pp. 103-05. Cf., also, the discussion in Christmas Humphries, *Karma and Rebirth* (London: Curzon Press,1983),pp.86-91. For a comprehensive presentation of texts on reincarnation throughout the ages, see *Reincarnation in World Thought*, compiled and ed. by Joseph Head and S. L. Cranston (New York: Julian Press, 1967).

More importantly, however, this talk about rebirth does seem at odds with the Buddha's own intentions. One cannot help but think that discussions about continuity of "thought-moments" at the death/birth of human beings are the kind of speculation the Buddha disavowed. In fact, in the "*Bramaj la Sutta: The Supreme Net*; What the Teaching Is Not," the Buddha includes the question of whether the self exists after death and, if so, how, among the topics with which he is not concerned.[68] The Buddha wished to focus all his attention on the problem of suffering (*dukkha*) and how to eliminate suffering. Thus Buddhad©sa Bhikkhu says in no uncertain terms, "These questions [regarding rebirth] are not aimed at the extinction of Dukkha. That being so they are not Buddhist teaching and they are not connected with it."[69]

It may be helpful to put the notion of rebirth within the context of religious toleration. In this regard we affirm that in approaching religious beliefs different from our own, we emphasize what is common, and we respect what is not. Our interpretations of varying beliefs within a sect or of beliefs of other religions underscore the fundamental unity at the basis of all faiths. Where differences exist, we never belittle the beliefs of others, for these beliefs help them lead good lives. Though the Buddha, then, we might say, was concerned strictly with the problem of suffering, he did not deny

beliefs in the rebirth of the soul or in the wheel of rebirth if such helped people do good.[70] "The Wheel of Birth [*sams ra* as the cycle of rebirths] of the physical body (which people believed long before ***The Buddha*** appeared in the world) cannot be proved here and now. However, . . if this belief encourages the people to do good, at this level, Buddhism would never deny such a belief."[71] Such beliefs are true as far as they go: they belong within the domain of relative truth.[72]

7) *Kamma*. As regards *kamma* (P©li for *karma*), then, traditionally in Theravada Buddhism this is understood as a person's wholesome or unwholesome volitional actions (more accurately, volitions) shaping the outcome of his present life as well as of his future ones. In this sense it goes hand in hand with the idea of rebirth. *Kamma* is not the result of an action (that is called *vip ka*), just as it is not some kind of fate hanging over a person's life. Previous *kamma* does not cause present kamma.[73]

However, *kamma* is more properly articulated in terms of the law of Nature in the present world. "**The Law of *Karma*** is nothing other than the Law of Nature [*Idappaccayat*] expressed in terms of action."[74] In other words, given this and this, this and this is the result. If this and this is not given, the result is something else. The law of *kamma* as the law of action applies to everything in the world, i.e., to natural phenomena, to human beings, and to society

as a whole. As regards natural phenomena, e.g., the planets follow certain elliptical orbits around the sun (cf. "actions") because of the law of gravity. House plants, again, will dry up if someone does not water them. The law of *kamma* applies to human beings in terms of the bodily, the mental, and the spiritual. For instance, if one eats too many chocolate donuts, he gets fat (the bodily factor). If the student does not study for the calculus examination, he probably does not pass (the mental factor). If the lay Buddhist practices concentration meditation at the end of a stressful day at work, he probably calms his frayed nerves (the mental factor, again). Moreover, if a person attaches to feelings of pleasure or displeasure, the result is a state of suffering (the spiritual factor). The law of *kamma* regarding the spiritual dimension states, "**Action motivated by defilement or ignorant intention, causes suffering; Action motivated by mindfulness and Wisdom does not.**"[75] The law of *kamma*, finally, also applies to society as a whole. Simply put, the law of action in this case means: do good, get good; do bad, get bad (the Thai ©©©©©©©©©©©©©, *thahm dee, dai dee*). For example, if a society condones violence and explicit sex on television and in the movies, the result is the undermining of social values.

"Do good get good, do bad get bad" as a karmic principle, nonetheless, does not mean that in every case good people are subsequently rewarded and the evil are punished. Such thinking is na©ve. The law of conditionality does not work this way. It does mean that, according to the law of *karma* for *society's* welfare, the good or bad we do reverberates for the benefit of or the damage to society as a whole: "There are immediate effects on the society and the person's external circumstances. The welfare or decline of a society is thus dependent upon the good and bad actions of each of its members."[76] The good that we do lives on after us for the betterment of all. Yet so does the evil live on for the detriment of all. Virginia Polytechnic Institute, the state of Virginia, and the United States of America, for example, will never be quite the

same after the killings of faculty members and students there by the mass murderer on April 16, 2007. However, in terms of the *individual*, "Do good, get good, do bad, get bad" does not always apply: it all depends on the law of conditionality. For instance, the bank robber does not always suffer incarceration. If he is clever enough, he may elude capture by the police. Also, the person who does good deeds does not always receive good in return. For instance, if this person happens to live in a bad neighborhood, the law of conditionality being what it is, he may very well be the victim of a violent crime. Yet if conditions in the neighborhood improve and incidents of crime decrease, the person who does good will more likely get good in kind. This is the law of conditionality.[77]

Articulating *kamma* in terms of the law of Nature (or in terms of the maxim, "Do good, get good, do bad, get bad") does not really get to the heart of the matter, however. The Buddha asks,

> And what, monks, is kamma that is neither dark ["bad"] nor bright ["good"], with neither dark nor bright results, which leads to the destruction of kamma? The volition to abandon the dark kamma with dark results, and to abandon the bright kamma with bright results, and to abandon the dark and bright kamma with dark and bright results—this is called the kamma that is neither dark nor bright, with neither dark nor bright results, which leads to the destruction of kamma.[78]

Three things should be noted here. First, *kamma* for the Buddha means more than it is taken to mean traditionally. There is a *third* kind of *kamma* that is *kamma* in the truest sense. Besides the "bad" and the "good" *kamma,* there is a kind that goes beyond both of these. It is non-preferential: it goes beyond good and evil. It does not put any stock in good actions; it does not put any stock in bad actions. "Good" *kamma* does not ensure liberation; it is not enough. Something more is needed. ". . . [M]erely producing good kamma does not extinguish mental suffering completely and absolutely, because one goes right on being infatuated by and

grasping at good *kamma*."[79] Secondly, it is possible to *kill* both "bad" *kamma* as well as good *kamma*. So neither the "good" nor the "bad" has any further control. One has reached a point where the intentional acts he is producing are not really intentional acts (the first two kinds of *kamma*) any more. He is "watching the world go by" without being caught up in it (the "third" kind of *kamma*). Lastly, the "third" kind of *kamma* is the ending of the defilements; it is the Noble Eightfold Path.[80] It is the eradication of the state of suffering. The "third" kind of kamma, the destruction of the other two, is nothing other than Nibban© itself. "**The ending of *kamma* is the same thing as Nibb na . . . / Nibb na is freedom from *kamma* and its results**."[81]

8) *Tathat , Suchness/Thusness***.** The term, *tathat* , is not a common one in Theravada Buddhism, though it is well developed in the Mahayana tradition.[82] Actually, the word appears just one time in the P©li canon, in the *Points of Controvery* (*Kath -Vatthu*) in the *Abhidhamma Pitaka*.[83] Here the five aggregates taken together are described as the "thusness" of all things. However, because the word assumes great significance in the writings of Buddhad©sa Bhikkhu and, more importantly, because it is a term rich in meaning that helps us understand the reality of the world as it appear to us, it is considered here.

Buddhad©sa Bhikkhu describes *tathat* as follows:

. . . [T]athata (suchness, thusness). "Merely thus," "just such": everything is such as it is and in no way different from that thusness. This is called "tathata." When tathata is seen, the three characteristics of anicca, dukkha, and anatta are seen, sunnata is seen, and idappaccayata is seen. Tathata is the summary of them all—merely thus, only thus, not-otherness. There is nothing better than this, more than this, other than this, thusness. To intuitively realize tathata is to see the truth of all things, to see the reality of the things which have deceived us. The things which delude us are all the things which cause discrimination and duality to arise in us; good-evil, happiness-sadness, win-lose, love-hate, etc. There

are many pairs of opposites in this world. By not seeing tathata, we allow these things to trick us into believing in duality: this-that, liking-disliking, hot-cold, male-female, defiled, enlightened. This delusion causes our problems. Trapped in these oppositions, we can't see the truth of things.[84]

Tathat , in other words, is the world as it really is—impermanent, bringing suffering if one attaches to it, de-void of a self, conditioned as it is, beyond all self-ish dualities—doing what it does, such as that is, whether one likes it or not. It is voidness: try as one will to insert an "I," a self, into the world, there is in actuality no such entity there, the world being merely thus. *Tathat* is the law of conditionality: ". . . 'Tathat© is Idappaccayat©,' The Law of Nature, the Law of Conditionality, which means 'Depending on This, arises This.'"[85] *Tathat* is the givenness of the world, this world, thus and so, such as it is, like it or not.[86] Suchness is what there is, so we just deal with it, and we do not fight with it. There is no better than this, no other than this. *Tathat* means that the real world encompasses in a non-preferential fashion all the oppositions one attributes to things in ordinary life. Such oppositions are not really real: clinging to duality is delusional. Again, there is no better than this, no other than this.

Suchness means that what is real is non-duality. Indifference to duality means that Nature does not differentiate even between "inspirational," "monistic" "perception[s]" such as the one God or Buddha-Nature or such like, and those which are not.[87] The one God, for instance, as transcendent, is still involved in a duality: the transcendent versus the non-transcendent. This is opting for ("liking") one perceived thing over others.[88]

One can say, furthermore, that in the voidness of Enlightenment, fully achieved, even the duality of a self and a world, of mind and body, of an inner and an outer, has been collapsed in a "Pure Nature" of a different sort. "The body and mind have now become '**Pure Nature**' (for no '**Att** ,' 'person,' 'individual entity,' or 'I,' remains . . .)."[89] Nature such as it really is, is in a suspended state

both de-void of the "I" and "mine" and indifferent to all oppositions, or dualities, even the one between mind and body. Furthermore, total liberation from the self means total dedication to others, for there is no longer any self-other duality. "Every action or gesture is solely for the benefit of others; for that of all things. This is called Supreme Compassion, ***Karun*** , realizing the **State of Permanent Voidness, Su at** ."[90] There is actually nothing solitary about Enlightenment, for that is where, in a compassionate embrace, one finds all the rest of humanity.[91]

One's attitude toward a world summed up as *tathat* is that of acceptance and detachment, as well as of simply doing what needs to be done. One does not react to the world and do battle with it; he simply accepts it for what it is. One lets go of the world. He does not get mixed up with it, does not attach to the five aggregates. One does not place compulsive demands either upon himself or upon other people ("I should do this," "I should improve in that respect," "You must take care of this," etc.). The attitude toward the world is that of accepting observance: one "notes" what is happening, "notices" events as they occur, and "witnesses" changes in the body and in the mind.[92] In no case does one "pick a fight" with the world; he simply lets what would be undesirable things leave by themselves. If one ignores them, they will go away.

Then, too, one remains detached from a world in which he has no home of any kind. Every human being is in a fundamental sense *absolutely homeless*, whether he is cognizant of this fact or not. The homeless man on the grate knows he is homeless. The monk meditating in his hut in the forest knows he is homeless. The rich man in his comfortable house in the suburbs may not realize he is homeless, but he certainly is. There is no refuge for anyone either in the physical world (a comfortable house, a secure job, good health, etc.) or in the mental (one's trusted opinions, his goals and dream, his knowledge). The only refuge is the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha.[93] Anything else is a "prison" and not a home.[94] Such is the meaning of *tathat* , the "way things are":

No matter which way it goes, we adapt, to life, to time and place, rather than make demands. Whatever way it goes, is the way it is . . . We are not here to become anything or to get rid of anything, to change anything or to make anything for ourselves, or to demand anything, but to awaken more and more, to reflect, observe and know the Dhamma . . . This life-span is a transition we're involved in, this is a journey through the sensory realm and there are no nests, no homes, no abiding in this sensory realm. It's all very impermanent, subject to disruption and change at any moment. That is its nature.

That's the way it is. There is nothing depressing about that if you no longer make the demand for security in it.[95]

Tathat , the truth of all things, also implies that one does what needs to be done, in two senses. First, one does what needs to be done in the sense that one does what comes along that is a task to be performed, like the task or not. This means that one accommodates the needs and wants of other people, though they might not seem as important as his own special endeavors. For example, one takes his wife to the grocery store when asked, even if he is in the middle of what he considers a more important project of his own (it is really not more important). Going to the grocery store is a job that needs to be done, i.e. one has to take care of it. There is no preference here. There is a job to be done, and one does it; it is as simple as that. Secondly, one does what needs to be done means that one does what *must* be done in accordance with the law of Nature (*Idappaccayat*) if one is to avoid the arising of the suffering state and to achieve Enlightenment. Granted it is better *not* to suffer than to suffer (would anyone argue against that?), one does the things one must do to keep suffering out of one's life and maintain a state of no-suffering. For example, one does not attach to feelings of displeasure when his wife is late coming out of the grocery store because, the law of Nature being what it is, such feelings lead to the defilement of anger, and anger brings suffering. Such is the law of Nature, the law of Dependent

Origination, and one must abide by this law to avoid suffering and to achieve Enlightenment. One must do this because that is the way it is.

Tathat , lastly, is the Buddhist "solution" to the problem of evil in the world, the problem of innocent people suffering. Granted there are really only this body and this mind in this life, why is it that some good people are inflicted with so much suffering for no apparent reason? For instance, why do tsunamis indiscriminately wipe out entire villages, killing the good people as well as the bad? Why did innocent people get killed at Virginia Tech for no sensible reason? The solution to the problem seems to be that there is no solution other than to say that the world is such as it is: *tathat* . The world is as it is, take it or leave it, like it or not. This is not much of an answer, but there is really nothing more that can be said about it. The world *does* as the world *is* (inverting the familiar juxtaposition of *is* and *does*); there is nothing more we can add. So we accept the world for what it is without reservation. In many cases this is easier said than done, but we really do not have a choice. However, if we accept the world for what it is and do not get upset about it, we can find peace—and freedom.[9696]
The question can be raised: Is *tathat* teleological? In other words, is the *tathat* , suchness/thusness, of the world characterized by some kind of purpose or plan? Granted that there is "good" or "bad" *kamma*, i.e., the law of Nature as it applies to human action (cf. the section on *kamma* above). Granted, more specifically, that there is "good" or "bad" *kamma* as the law of Nature as it applies to society as a whole ("Do good, get good; do bad, get bad") (cf. above). Above and beyond the working of Nature as *kamma*, though, does Nature of itself, such as it is, also work *purposefully*? Is conditionality (*idappaccayat* also, in some way, teleology? Does Nature, in some sense, "plan things out"?
9) *Relative and Ultimate Truth (Levels of Truth)*. For Theravada Buddhism there are two kinds of truth, two levels of truth so to speak: relative truth and ultimate truth. Relative truth,

the truth of ordinary life, presents a world of individuals, of persons, living their lives in society in terms of opposites such as honor and dishonor, right and wrong, and good and evil.[97] *Relative truth is true as far as it goes, but it goes only so far.* Ultimate truth, on the other hand, presents the world as it really is, bereft of persons, a world of conditioned "things," *sankh r* , where sense forms continuously arise and then disappear, where feelings, perceptions, and conceptions all continuously arise and then disappear. Ultimate truth is the truth of the law of conditionality (*idappaccayat*), more specifically, the law of Dependent Origination (*paticca-samupp da*), the law of Nature as regards the origin and elimination of suffering, where there is no talk about a self at all.[98]

Language reflects the fact that there are two kinds of truth.[99] In the language of relative truth, everyday language, for example, *Dhamma* is the books of Scripture or the spoken words of the Scripture, *Nibb na* is some kind of wonderful place to which people go, *M ra* is a terrible monster (cf. Satan, the Devil, in the Catholic Church), *birth* is the physical coming into the world of a human being from his mother's womb, *death* is the end of a person's life, *God* is a supreme celestial being who created the world and governs it, *hell* is a place underground where the wicked end up to be punished, *heaven* is the place above in the clouds where the good are rewarded, *emptiness* is the absence of content, *kamma* is bad luck for wicked deeds done ("What goes around comes around"), *female* and *male* refer to the two sexes, *marriage* is a ceremony in accordance with certain customs, and *laughter* is the kind of loud guffawing humans exhibit when a comedian performing on stage tells a good joke.

The language of ultimate truth, Dhamma language, however, is different. *Nibb na* is the extinction of suffering, emptiness of the "I" and "mine" with the world in a state of suspension. *M ra* is any state of mind that hinders progress toward the cessation of suffering. *Birth* is the emergence of the idea of "I," the ego, the appearance of a suffering state of mind in accordance with the law

of Dependent Origination. *Death*, on the other hand, is the cessation of a suffering state of mind. *Dhamma* is interpreted as having four meanings: i) Nature itself (the totality of the world of human experience, including objects of the mind, feelings, and all external phenomena; it can be classified in terms of the five aggregates); ii) the law of Nature understood as the law of conditionality (*idappaccayat* , "**Depending on This, arises This**"), more specifically, the law of Dependent Origination, *paticca-samupp da*, the form of the law of Nature related to the origin and elimination of suffering; iii) duty that must be performed to accord with the law of Nature; and iv) the benefit gained from performing one's duty in accordance with the law of Nature.[100] *God* is the law of Nature, Dhamma in the second sense, the non-personal law of conditionality "governing" the emergence and disappearance of all "things" in the perpetual flow. *Hell* is anxiety (the Thai ◌◌◌◌◌◌◌◌◌◌, *khwaamraawnjai*, literally "mind-heat"), which burns like fire.[101] We are our own hell here and now when we people the world with the "I" and the "mine" and so bring suffering into our lives. *Heaven* is the state of freedom from any disturbance from sensual objects. *Emptiness*, (*su at*), means the world's voidness of ideas of "I," "mine," and "me." *Kamma* is, first, the law of Nature understood in terms of action, more precisely, it is watching the world go by without being caught up in it (the third kind of *kamma*). *Male* and *female*, in Dhamma language, entail a sharing of duties, including the duty of reproduction until the human race realizes Enlightenment.[102] *Marriage* is a special union between two people working together to eliminate suffering from their lives, and contributing mutually to the common good of all those with whom they are involved. This special, holy kind of relationship is directed by "real love."[103] In a marriage of this sort the two partners are not particularly concerned about sex.[104] "*Laughter*," finally, is the reaction of the "noble ones,"[105] those on the path to Enlightenment, to the impermanent, unsatisfactory, devoid-of-self world of human experience. This kind of laughter,

based on insight into the nature of the world, is discerning amusement at the cravings which now leave the noble ones unaffected. This kind of laughter is sitting back and watching Nature's show without taking it too seriously.

10) *Theravada Buddhism as Atheism, and the Natural Law (God) as the Foundation of Morality*. There is no personal God in Theravada Buddhism. To this extent it may be characterized as atheism. Granted, good and loving Buddhists pray to Buddha for help with their problems.[106] They believe in the efficaciousness of such prayers. They live in accordance with relative truth. One does not belittle these people, because their beliefs help them lead moral lives. The Buddha would not belittle them. Despite prayers to him, however, the Buddha is not God. Though he was a very holy and very insightful human being, he was a human being who died over two thousand five hundred years ago. He lives on in the great legacy of his teachings and in the order of the monks that helps preserve these teachings for successive generations. Theravada Buddhists, in terms of ultimate truth, look carefully at the totality of the world of human experience, and they do not see evidence of a personal God operating within it. They see themselves left to their own devices. What is more, as we have seen, indifference to opposites in a duality makes any privileged perception of such a God an impossibility.[107]

Theravada Buddhists do not see a personal God operating anywhere in the world. This kind of atheism, however, does not imply a lack of moral scruples. The absence of a personal God governing the universe and serving as a foundation for morality, furthermore, does not necessarily imply that there is no basis for morality at all, and that individuals can do whatever they want.[108] It does not change the fact that suffering exists in the world in all its various forms, and something has to be done about it.[109] It does not change the fact that it is better not to suffer than to suffer. It does not change the fact that all evidence indicates there is a law of Nature, the law of conditionality, which implies that if certain

courses of action are taken, suffering in the world can be reduced and, perhaps, eventually eliminated.

One can say that for Theravada Buddhism the lawfulness of the world is God, and it is this lawfulness that affords a foundation for morality. *Dhamma*, we have seen, means four things: Nature itself, the law of Nature, duty in accordance with the law of Nature, and the benefits deriving from doing one's duty in accordance with the law of Nature. The second and third of these meanings of *Dhamma* are especially significant. If *Dhamma* according to the second meaning is the law of Nature, another word for this law is *God*. The Buddhist God ". . . is the **'Supreme Thing'** which is *Dhamma*, **the Law of Nature**, or **'The Cause,' the Law of Conditionality**, *Idappaccayat* : / **'Depending on This, arises This.' / Thus, The Law of Nature is the *God* in Buddhism, a non-personal God**."[110] If the third sense of *Dhamma*, moreover, is a duty to be done in accordance with the law of Nature (if one wants to achieve this, he has to do this, the law being what it is), this means, as regards moral action, that the lawfulness of the world affords a foundation for morality. Every human being has a duty to perform in accordance with the law of Nature to promote the well-being of all human beings if we are going to live together peacefully and productively. Furthermore, if *Dhamma* is duty to be done in accordance with the law of Nature, every human being has a duty to perform if suffering is to be eliminated in his own life and in the lives of others (who is going to argue that suffering should be maintained or increased?):

. . . Suffering arises or does not arise in accordance with the Law of Nature . . . /

. . . *Paticca-Samupp da*, the Law of Dependent Origination, which explains how suffering arises or does not arise is the *principle of practice* for the survival of the Spiritual Factor.[111]

. . . In order to perform the appropriate duties toward [all persons with whom we associate], it is necessary to apply the principles of Sublime Living, including Loving-Kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy, Equanimity, the Noble Eightfold

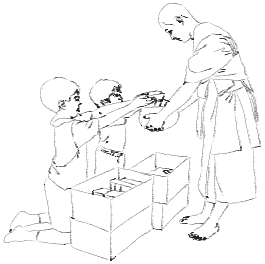
Path, and so on. As the result of this action, we can now live happily and harmoniously within society. Each of these principles is *evolved from and in accordance with* the Law of Nature, the Law of Conditionality, *Idappaccayat* .[112]

So why should one be moral? The fact of the law of Nature implies duty. There is no dichotomy here between "is" and "ought," between fact and value. The world is intrinsically moral because evidence indicates it is in fact lawful. Value is intrinsic to the fabric of the world; it is not necessary to add it. If one wants the law to work for him (and why would any sensible person not?), he has to do his duty. Otherwise, one suffers the consequences. These are the facts.[113]

IV. Theravada Buddhist Practice

The previous discussion of some key concepts of Theravada Buddhism has been necessarily brief. It represents an attempt to come to terms with the Buddhist ideas of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path; the five aggregates; suffering, no-self, and impermanence; Enlightenment; Dependent Origination; rebirth; *kamma*; *tathat* ; relative and ultimate truth; and Buddhism as atheism, and the Natural law (God) as the foundation of morality. The intent has been to try to gain some understanding of the concepts of Buddhism.

The second section of this essay considers Buddhist practice, specifically, Thai Theravada practice. It is divided into three main parts discussing practice in terms of generosity, morality, and concentration (*d na*, *s la*, and *sam dhi*). The section is to help us understand the meaning of Buddhist practice in terms of these three rubrics. What is more, it is to help gain some understanding of the ongoing religious activities at a Thai Buddhist temple, a *wat* (©©©).[114] This is a general consideration of Buddhist practice in order to understand its significance, not a comprehensive treatment. The discussion of practice should be viewed within the context of the concepts of Buddhism already considered.



A. Generosity

This part of the essay considers the meaning of generosity and how it fits into Buddhist practice; making merit and ways of doing so, including chanting; the broader context of holy days, rituals, and ceremonies; and showing reverence.

1) *Generosity (D na).* In the "*Lakkhana Sutta*: The Marks of a Great Man," the Buddha speaks of the "four bases of sympathy [*sangaha-vatthu*]: generosity [*d na*], pleasing speech, beneficial conduct and impartiality," later describing generosity in terms of "giving" and "helpful acts."[115] Payutto formalizes the Buddha's teaching here in terms of what it means to be a beneficent member of society, defining *d na* as "giving, generosity, charity: it includes both the giving of material goods and wealth and the giving of knowledge and learning."[116] Varasak Varadhammo defines the word as follows:

> . . . D©na translates as giving, charity, benevolence, or liberality . . . / . . . When we
> practice the act of giving or charity, our mind feels clean and light, free from burdens
> . . . / ***D na*** may also be translated to mean sacrifice, relinquishment, or giving-up
> some undesirable thing which causes the mind into committing evil or unwholesome
> acts leading to violence toward both ourselves and others. / ***D na*** is the foundation for
> unselfishness, and of the altruistic mind suitable for higher practice.[117]

person's wholesome or unwholesome volitional actions (i.e., volitions) shaping the outcome of his present life as well as of his future ones. Morally good, skillful, wholesome (*kusala*), actions comprise "good" *kamma* affecting the future in a beneficial fashion. The popular term for wholesome action ("good" *kamma*) is *merit* (in P©li, *pu a*).[122] Making merit is performing skillful actions that will shape the outcome of one's present life and future lives in a positive way. It is, roughly speaking, doing good deeds

Making merit is the religious activity most practiced by lay Thai Buddhists. Meditation practice seems secondary to making merit, and the study of the Scriptures is of even lesser import. (Christian churches, especially the non-Catholic ones, have their Bible study groups, but there is really nothing of this sort in Thai Buddhist temples. The focus is more on learning from Dhamma talks and, to a lesser extent, Dhamma books.)

What is the real significance of making merit? Making merit can become what to the Westerner looks like a kind of spiritual "savings account." One tries to build up his account by performing meritorious deeds. Even if the deeds are unselfish insofar as they are done for the benefit of others with no expectation of anything in return, they are nonetheless done to gain merit for oneself for the benefit of one's present life and of his future lives. For some Thai Buddhists this is as far as it goes.

Looked at another way, though, making merit, if done with the interests of others at heart, the interests of society at large, works for the betterment of all. According to the law of *kamma* for society's welfare (the law of Nature as applied to good or bad actions), the good deeds we do reverberate for the benefit of society as a whole (cf. the discussion in section 7 above). In this sense making merit assumes a great significance. Meritorious actions benefit members of society, often in ways not at all evident. (Unmeritorious actions have the opposite effect.) For example, a teacher truly dedicated to the welfare of the students can have a beneficent effect upon countless lives for years to come. Moreover,

the good effect is not just the knowledge the students acquire that they may use in their careers. More important is the possible effect upon the character development of the students because of the teacher's example of a good life dedicated to service for others. Even such a simple merit-making act as preparing food for the monks can bring great benefits later on. One is helping support the institution of the Sangha, whose members can effect great changes in the very fabric of society through the propagation of the Buddhist religion.

Making merit, furthermore, whatever the intent, *is truthful*, truthful within the realm of relative truth. It is true as far it goes. It is important as far as it goes. Merit making helps individuals lead good lives. It also helps them lead lives of benefit to others. It promotes the well-being of society as a whole. For these reasons one should not make light of it. It serves a purpose within the whole spiritual framework.

Examples of making merit include but are not limited to the following: meditating; participating in meditation retreats; listening to Dhamma talks; helping others, especially lay people and monks at the temple; making offerings to the monks, especially food or robes; donating money for the upkeep of the temple or for the construction of a temple facility; offering merit to others, e.g., relatives who have passed away; teaching the Dhamma; writing articles about the Dhamma for the temple newsletter; following the Five Precepts; chanting; participating in religious ceremonies at the temple on a holy day, and following the Eight Precepts on such a day; becoming a monk for a period of time, or having a son become a monk; becoming a novice; showing reverence to others; improving the wholesomeness of one's mind; and being happy about the meritorious deeds of others.

Two merit-making activities should be given special consideration here.[123] They are the two in which the Thai faithful are most likely to participate at the temple. The first is offering food to the monks. This activity may occur during an alms walk

(©©©©©©, *bin ta baat*, collect food), or in conjunction with any breakfast or lunch prepared for the monks at the temple. The alms walk takes place just before lunch on holy days and holidays (celebrated on Sundays), and at 7:00 in the morning the first and last Sunday not a holy day in any given month. (It takes place at 7:00 a.m. every Sunday during the Lenten season.) Weather permitting, the alms walk is outdoors next to the temple hall. On holy days, if desired, baskets of prepackaged food are available at the temple for a donation for distribution to the monks during the walk. Otherwise, the faithful bring food prepared at home, fruit, purchased items, bottled water, etc. Some of the faithful, following tradition, spoon cooked rice into the monks' bowls. Before the walk begins, one of the monks has the faithful recite a prayer of offering in which they say their gifts of generosity were obtained in a virtuous fashion ("wholesome *d na*"). After the alms walk, the monks eat their meal. At the end of the meal the abbot or, in his absence, a senior monk gives a short talk, and then the monks chant a blessing. The lay faithful eat at the completion of the blessing.

Offering food to the monks also occurs in conjunction with any meal prepared for them at the temple. Breakfast is at 7:00 a.m. every morning, immediately following the morning chanting, and lunch is at 11:00 a.m. (Lunch, in accordance with the *Vinaya*, must be finished before noon.) The monks do not eat between lunch and breakfast the next day, except for beverages and soft snacks that can be consumed without chewing. Typically, lay volunteers either bring food to the temple for the meal or prepare it in the temple kitchen. As the monks seat themselves in the dining room (in order of seniority, with the abbot at the head), members of the laity formally offer the food to them by touching each dish with both hands as the monk touches it also. Because no physical contact between women and the monks is allowed, woman offer food by setting it upon a napkin or cloth placed by the monk. The monks do not eat until the food is formally offered. Once the dish is offered, it is not touched by the lay person again until the monk

has finished. If it is touched, the monk will not take any more food from that dish. The lay people do not eat at the same table with the monks. However, they may converse informally with them while they are eating. Once the monks have finished eating, everything is removed from the table. (The monks eat only what they are offered when it is offered; once finished, nothing of the meal belongs to them.) At the end of the meal, the faithful who have been helped prepare it or are in the vicinity enter the dining room and pay homage to the monks. Then, while the monks chant a blessing, the lay people pour water into a specially designed bowl for the benefit of the living and the dead as they choose. The idea is that the merit gained by the faithful attending and by the presence of the monks is shared with other living and dead people. If one of the members of the temple has a birthday, gifts, e.g., flowers and donations of money, may be offered to the monks at the end of breakfast. At the completion of the monks' meal, the lay faithful, sharing what has been prepared, eat theirs.

The second merit-making activity most typically performed by the laity at the temple is participation in the morning or evening chanting done by the monks. The monks chant twice every day for about forty-five minutes to an hour each time, at 6:00 in the morning and 6:00 in the evening. The chanting occurs in the main hall of the temple, the ordination hall, in front of the Buddha image. Chanting is a musical recitation in P©li of texts based in great measure on the Canon. The abbot of the temple leads the chants. For Roman Catholics familiar with the traditional Latin "high" Mass, Theravada chanting is a little reminiscent of the priest's singing the "Ordinary" liturgical text.

Chanting in the Theravada tradition is making merit, but its importance by no means stops there. It has great significance not only for the monks but also for the laity for a variety of reasons.[124] For one thing, chanting is a vehicle for bringing the teachings of the Buddha to mind. It provides a link to one's Buddhist roots. It refocuses the mind at the beginning and the end of each day on

what is really important: commitment to Buddhist practice. Chanting has a positive effect on the mind because of the truthfulness of its words. It dispels wicked thoughts from the mind. Moreover, the repetitive nature of chanting reinforces this positive effect. The Buddha taught chanting as a direct route toward Enlightenment. The calming effect chanting has upon the troubled mind makes it similar in this regard to concentration meditation. Chanting together creates and reinforces the sense of a community of individuals working in unison to achieve the same spiritual ends. Chanting is also so important because it is one way of paying respect to the Triple Gem, the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha.

3) *The Cycle of Buddhist Observance Days*. Any discussion of Thai Theravada religious practice, especially *d na* and merit-making, should be considered against the backdrop of the yearly cycle of holy days and holidays. These, in particular, for the average lay person, are days when acts of generosity are performed, when making merit is done. The following is a brief outline of the observance days, in which the significant holy days are so noted:[125]

a) New Year's (January). Buddhism is not averse to adapting to the customs of other countries. This is the case regarding the celebration of Western New Year's. January 1st is the official New Year in Thailand, but most people still celebrate the beginning of the year on the traditional day in April. At the Wat Thai Washington D.C. at 11:00 p.m. on New Year's Eve, there is a religious ceremony in the ordination hall during which the abbot blesses lustral water. Bottles of holy water are distributed to the faithful.

b) Magha Puja Day (February). This is a significant holy day on the full moon, day of the third lunar month. It is one of three important holy days commemorating events in the life of the Buddha. The other two are Visakha Puja Day and Asalha Puja Day. (*P j* is P©li for *respect*, *honor*, or *homage*: these are special days of homage to the Buddha.) Magha Puja day falls on one of the Uposatha days.[126] Magha Puja Day is a remembrance of the Fourfold Assembly (four coincidences occurred at an assembly of monks):

i) 1250 monks gathered, all of whom had reached Enlightenment; ii) all had been ordained by the Buddha; iii) they happened to gather without being called together; and iv) all this occurred on the full moon day of the third lunar month.

c) Thet Mahachat (March). Thet Mahachat is the "Telling of the Great Birth Story."[127] On this day the "Vessantara-J©taka" is retold. This is the story of the Buddha's previous life as Vessantara, who was famous for his *d na*.

d) Songkran, Thai New Year's (April). Songkran is the traditional Thai New Year's. This is the biggest festival day of the year at the Wat Thai D.C. It is a day of pouring water, sometimes in the form of mischief-making (spraying people with water), at other times in the form of merit-making (pouring water over the hands of one's elders to show them respect).

e) Visakha Puja Day (May). This is another important holy day, an Uposatha day,recalling an event in the life of the Buddha. This day occurs on the full moon day of the sixth lunar month. Viaskha Puja Day commemorates three things: the birth of the Buddha, his Enlightenment, and his passing away. All three events are said to have occurred on the same day of the year.

f) Salakapat (June). Salakapat is a special day of offering gifts to the monks. It hearkens back to the period in history when a raffle system was devised to ensure that in hard times the monks were able to receive food.

g) Asalha Puja Day; Khao Phansa (July). Asalha Puijha Day is the third important holy day occurring on an Uposatha day that commemorates an event in the Buddha's life. It falls on the full moon day of the eighth lunar month. This day is a remembrance of the Buddha's first discourse to the five ascetics, the day on which the order of the monks was established. So the day is also called Dhamma Day or Sangha Day. The faithful carry gifts into the ordination hall for presentation to the monks during the ceremony. The first day after the full moon day of the eighth lunar month is Khao Phansa, the beginning of the Buddhist Lent, the traditional

rainy season in Asia when monks are confined to one temple. The practice goes back to the time of the Buddha, when monks stayed in one place because of the difficulty of traveling and because of the danger of trampling upon the crops growing in the fields. *Phansa* means rainy season (in P©li, *vassa*). Traditionally this is also the season when Thai sons become monks for a period of time.

h) Queen's birthday, Mother's Day (August). Thais honor the birthday of Her Majesty Queen Sirikit of Thailand. Out of respect to the Queen, the "First Mother" of the nation, the day is also a day of honoring all mothers. There is a moving ceremony in the afternoon in the ordination hall during which children honor their mothers.

i) Sart Day, Memorial Day (September). This holiday is a day of remembrance of relatives who have passed away. It is a traditional festival day at the Wat Thai D.C., second only to Songkran.

j) Ok Phansa (October). This day, on the full moon day of the eleventh lunar month, marks the end of the Lenten season.

k) Kathina; Loy Krathong (November). The Katina observance (also, Tod Kratin) lasts for thirty days, from Ok Phansa on through to the full moon day of the twelfth lunar month, Katina Day. This holy day is an important merit-making event involving the offering of robes to the monks in a special ceremony. The *kathina* (P©li) is the rough cotton cloth used to make the monks' robes. Loy Krathong is a popular holiday during which beautiful lotus-shaped vessels with lighted candles are floated across the waterways for good luck. *Krathong* is the name of the vessel.

l) King's Birthday (December). At the beginning of December Thais celebrate the birthday of their beloved King Bhumibol, Rama IX.

4) *Rituals*. Equally difficult to understand for the unitiated, besides the yearly cycle of Buddhist observance days, are the various rituals that are performed on these days and throughout the

year at a Thai temple. These rituals help make the Buddhist religion real for ordinary lay people. They are the symbolic expressions of their religion in the "language" of relative truth. These rituals are involved in merit-making activities.[128] They include the following:

a) Pouring water into a specially designed bowl. This ritual has already been mentioned above in conjunction with the description of offering food to the monks. It is calling a blessing upon and sharing merit with the living and the dead. It is also performed during the brief memorial service held in the ordination hall at the anniversary of a relative's death. During the ritual a person associated with the one pouring, e.g., a spouse, touches the person pouring as a sign of sharing in the merit-making. Afterwards the water is taken outside and poured out under a tree.

b) Pouring water over images or someone's hands. Pouring water over a Buddha image is a way of showing respect and asking for a blessing. Similarly, pouring water over the hands of an elderly person on the occasion of a birthday or on Songkran is also a way of showing respect and asking for a blessing. The same holds true when water is poured over the hands of the abbot on his birthday. Furthermore, pouring water over the hands of the bride and groom during the wedding ceremony represents a blessing for the couple and a wish for good luck.

c) Using lustral water. When the abbot sprinkles individuals with holy water from a container near his place in the ordination hall, he is giving his blessing. This practice hearkens back to an event in the live of the Buddha. When the city of Ves©l© was beset with a drought and a plague, the Buddha recited the *Ratana Sutta* ("Jewel Sutta") and sent his disciple ©nanda around the city to bless its walls.[129] On New Year's Eve (December 31) the abbot blesses lustral water in a large bowl. At the end of the ceremony just after midnight, bottles of holy water are distributed to the faithful. This water may be taken home and sprinkled as a blessing, it may be drunk for good health, etc.

d) Leaving a tray of small dishes of food at the Buddha image. In conjunction with the monks' lunch, a tray of food may be placed in front of the Buddha image, to be removed at the end of the meal. This practice makes the faithful feel that the Buddha is a participant in the meal. The food on the tray, considered blessed, may be eaten by some.

e) Paying homage with candles and incense to a Buddha image. Visitors to the temple may pay homage to the Buddha image or the image of a holy monk by placing burning candles and incense sticks in front of it after saying a prayer for blessings for themselves or their relatives.

f) Applying gold foil to a Buddha image. Small squares of gold leaf from little "booklets" are sometimes placed on a Buddha image because it is considered appropriate that such an image be beautifully decorated. The participant in the ritual believes that certain benefits will result (e.g., gold leaf applied to the head will bring wisdom, to the chest by the heart health and kindness, etc.). Applying the gold leaf is also thought to provide relief from bodily ailments.

g) Using the sacred cord. During the commemoration in the ordination hall of a deceased relative, a narrow cloth may be folded out upon which the offerings to the monks are placed. The cloth is connected to a picture of the deceased by a white sacred cord (*sai sin*). The deceased person shares in the merit made in the ceremony. The use of the cord and the cloth is also a kind of reminder that everyone faces death sooner or later. The cord is supposed to be a symbol of the discourses of the Buddha. In ceremonies conducted outside the temple, the cord may be placed around the perimeter to mark off the holy place. When a new Buddha image is consecrated, the cord is run from the image to the monks. The power of the special chants of the monks is imparted to the image.

h) Offering of household necessities to the monks. On special occasions, e.g., the birthday of a member of the temple, gifts such as household items may be offered to a monk in the *viharn* (P©li,

vih ra), the "chapel" with the Buddha images. The monk chants a blessing in conjunction with receiving the gifts.

i) Offering of robes to the monks. On Katina Day gifts of robes are traditionally

offered to the monks as part of the afternoon ceremony in the ordination hall.

j) Offering of a "money tree" to the monks. Originally part of the Katina Day celebration but now also included on other observance days such as Salakapat, a "money tree" is a small tree with donated paper money attached. The trees are presented to the monks during the ceremony.

k) Formal reading from the Scriptures. During the Lenten season on Sundays before breakfast there may be a formal reading of a Scriptural passage by one of the monks seated before the assembled monks and faithful. For example, there might be readings regarding the perfections (*p ramit*) of the Buddha in his previous lives.

l) Circumambulating three times around the ordination hall. A triple circumambulation is, literally, walking around (circum-ambulate) something clockwise three times, e. g., an image, a building, even a mountain, in order to show respect. In most cases it is walking around the perimeter of the *bot* just outside the eight stone "leaf" markers (*bai sema*) that designate the holy ground. The walking is done three times in veneration of the Triple Gem. It is, for example, part of the Magha Puja Day celebration as well as of the Visaka Puja Day one.

m) Processing around the ordination hall with lighted candles. In conjunction with a circumambulation, lighted candles may be carried. Such occurs, for example, in the evening in celebration of Visakha Puja. On Asalha Puja day in the afternoon, lighted candles and incense sticks are carried around the temple building. At the conclusion the walk, these are placed at the base of the steps leading to the ordination hall. On Asalha Puja Day in the morning, a large candle surrounded by flowers sitting on a platform is carried three times around the temple grounds, while some of the faithful dance

to singing and the beating of drums. On the same day the faithful, one by one, pour melted wax into forms to make candles. While pouring the wax they recite to themselves blessings for loved ones.

n) Displaying and venerating relics. Occasionally relics of the Buddha or holy monks are placed on display at a temple for the veneration of the faithful. These are believed to have special powers.

o) Tying a cord around the wrist. On special occasions, e.g., his birthday, the abbot ties a cord (*sai sin*), a white string, really, with a large knot in it, around the wrists of the faithful who so desire. The abbot is expressing his best wishes for the individual. The cord, a talisman, is meant to bring good luck to the wearer.

p) Wearing amulets. The wearing of amulets (medals with images of the Buddha or holy monks, pictures of the abbot, small stone images, all enclosed in plastic and gold cases) is popular with Thais. Sometimes such amulets are distributed by the abbot on a special occasion like his birthday. While a talisman is to bring good luck, people believe that an amulet will protect them from misfortune. While such beliefs sometimes tend toward animism, such need not be the case. Amulets can also be a useful reminder of the truths of the Buddha.

q) Using ceremonial fans. Ceremonial "fans" are sometimes used by the monks during merit-making events in the ordination hall. The fans indicate religious rank. In the time of the Buddha, fans served a real purpose as well as a symbolic one. Disciples took turns fanning their teachers to help them stay cool as well as to show them respect and appreciation.[130]

5) *Special Religious Ceremonies*. To complete the previous discussion of Theravada Buddhist observance days and rituals, brief mention should be made of some special ceremonies that play an important role in the ordinary religious life of believers. These can be additional occasions for merit-making.

a) Ordination. Ordaining as a monk for a period of time is a common practice for Thai men. It frequently occurs during the Lenten season, when it is customary for special Dhamma lessons to be given at the temple. Sometimes a man becomes a monk at a special time in his life, e.g., his sixtieth birthday, in thanksgiving for a special favor received like recovery from sickness, etc. The heads of the candidates are shaved the afternoon before, with monks and laity participating in the cutting of the hair. The ceremony itself begins in a rather festive fashion with a triple circumambulation of the temple, at the conclusion of which coins wrapped in foil or colored cellophane are tossed from the top of the temple steps by the future monk(s) to the laity below for good luck. Tossing the coins is a way of making merit for the candidates; catching the coins is good luck for the lay people. As the ceremony continues in the ordination hall, the candidates request the "Going-forth" (*pabbajj* , admission into the Buddha's order of monks).[131] If a boy accepts the monastic life for a period of time, he is called a novice, or *nayn*. He need keep only ten of the monastic rules instead of the usual two hundred twenty-seven (see the section on "Morality" below). Novices, usually under the age of twenty, may follow the monastic life for a period of weeks or months. Boys frequently become novices during the Lenten season. Thailand does not have an established lineage of Theravada nuns, bhikkhuni. (Myanmar and Sri Lanka do.) Women may become *naang chee*, or *mai chee*, non-ordained "religious" persons still actually part of the laity, either permanently or for a period of time to mark a special occasion (a sixtieth birthday, e.g.). They shave their heads like monks but dress in white. They observe the Eight or the Ten Precepts, not the large number ordained nuns do (cf. "Morality" below).

b) Marriage. The bride and the groom offer food to the monks on their wedding day. The ceremony itself involves the *mongkon* (literally, *auspicious*). This is a looped piece of white yarn placed

around the head of both the bride and groom and connected by a *sai sin*. It is a symbol of the marriage pact. The pouring of water over the hands of the bride and the groom for good luck has already been mentioned above.

c) Funeral. The ceremony takes place at the funeral home with the available monks present. There may be a cremation in conjunction with the ceremony. Memorial services are subsequently held at the temple at specific intervals of time to commemorate the passing away of the loved one (cf. the consideration of the "sacred cord" above). .

d) "Hair-cutting" ceremony. A new baby is brought to the temple and blessed by the abbot in a special "hair-cutting" ceremony in the ordination hall. Cords may be tied around the wrists of some family members for good luck.

e) Blessing of a new businesses or home. The monks travel to a new business, e.g., a restaurant, or to someone's new home and bless it in a special ceremony that involves offering food to the monks.

f) "Wai Khruu." *Wai khruu*, literally, means *greeting the teacher*. This is a ceremony at which students pay respect to their teachers and present them with flowers. Recall that as regards the performance of duties in the six directions (the discussion of *d na* above), teachers are ranked immediately after spouses and children as those benefiting us to whom we should act properly. Teachers are like second parents. During the ceremony the teachers remove "cords" from a special miniature "tree" and tie them for luck around the wrists of the students.[132] This kind of ceremony involving cords is traditional at the beginning of a new project.

6) Showing Reverence. This discussion of making merit and the occasions on which it is done concludes with a short consideration of showing reverence. First, a few words must be said about greetings. In general, Thais greet one another with a *wai*, a prayer-like gesture in which the hands are folded at the chest or higher. This gesture is not only a form of greeting but also

a way of showing respect. The greater the respect intended, the higher the hands are raised. If a Thai greets a Westerner with a *wai*, the Westerner should reciprocate, unless the greeting is from a child. Monks, too, may be greeted with the *wai*. They are addressed as "Phra," or "Mahaphra," depending upon rank, e.g. "Phra Doochai"; or "Venerable," e.g., "Venerable Samriti." A monk with seniority who is a respected spiritual leader or teacher may be called "Ajahn" (*teacher*), e.g., "Ajahn Thanat." Monks are not greeted with the customary *sa wat dee khrap*, etc., but rather with *na ma sa gaan*. An older monk, the elder abbot of the temple, for example, may be referred to a "Luang Phaw."

There is, furthermore, a special way of "greeting" the Buddha image in the ordination hall or the *viharn*. One sits on one's calves in front of the image. Respect for the image is then expressed by the *anjali* hand gesture: hands are first placed together at the chest, fingers pointed upward, raised to the forehead, then returned to the chest. The head is then bowed to the floor, hands touching the floor at either side of the head. Once one's posture is again upright, the *anjali* and the bowing are repeated two more times. This triple prostration (cf. *graap*, Thai, *prostrate*) is in honor of the Triple Gem. When one leaves the hall or *viharn*, the same form of homage is repeated. The three prostrations may be performed to honor the assembled monks as well, e.g., at the beginning and end of the blessing given by them at the conclusion of a meal.

Proper decorum is always required at the *wat*. Shoes should be removed before entering any area with a Buddha image, and most of the other rooms within the temple complex (dining room, office, library, classrooms, etc). (A good rule of thumb is to remove the shoes anywhere where people are apt to sit on the floor.) For Thais it is taboo for someone to point his feet at another, push something with his feet, or point with the feet. So when sitting in the presence of a Buddha image or of the monks, feet should be pointed away. The best approach is to adopt the "mermaid" position and sit with the legs folded back at the side. In the ordination hall approaching the image on one's knees or ducking somewhat shows respect. It is important to always show it honor. Approaching the monks at their level shows respect: one should not "loom" above them. For instance, if a monk is seated eating or working, one

It is important to note two things regarding the Five Precepts. First, they should not be viewed as commandments prohibiting us from certain actions ("Thou shalt not kill," etc.). In other words, the sense of them is not quite the same as that of the Ten Commandments in the Judeo-Christian tradition. They should be understood more as guidelines for conduct which, if followed, help produce a society free of problems.[135] In this regard they are really like exemplifications of the law of *kamma* for the welfare of society (cf. the discussion above). If we follow the precepts, we benefit society as a whole. This is making merit in the more proper sense of the word (cf. above: making merit as the law of *kamma* for society as a whole). We *want* to follow the precepts, not because we fear being punished by the Almighty if we do not, but because we understand that good effects that will result from observing them. Secondly, the non-prohibitive nature of the Five Precepts also means that they are positive in meaning. "Keeping *s la* [following the precepts] means not only to avoid harming others but also to actually help and encourage them."[136] Accordingly, the first precept implies spreading loving-kindness toward all living things, the second being honest in one's dealings and respecting the rights of others, the third exercising moderation in one's sexual activities, the fourth being honest in speech, and the fifth being moderate in the use of intoxicants and, if possible, improving the clarity of the mind by avoiding them entirely.

In Theravada Buddhism there are five, eight, ten, or two hundred twenty-seven rules governing moral behavior. The Eight Precepts are followed by lay Buddhists at times of special meditation practice and on holy days.[137] They consist of the Five Precepts plus three additional ones: refraining from eating after noon; refraining from dancing, singing, music, and various forms of entertainment, as well as from using perfumes or scents; and refraining from using such things as high or luxurious couches. Furthermore, the third of the Five Precepts is expanded to exclude abstinence from all sexual activity.

The Ten Precepts are followed by novice monks and novice nuns (and *naang chee*). They are similar to the Eight Precepts, but the seventh (regarding entertainment) is divided into two, and a tenth regarding handling money is added. So precepts five through ten are the following: refraining from eating after noon; refraining from dancing, singing, music, and various forms of entertainment; refraining from using perfumes or scents; refraining from using such things as high or luxurious couches; and refraining from accepting money.

The two hundred twenty-seven rules of the *P timokkha*, the monk's code of discipline, are followed by a fully ordained monk (bhikkhu). These rules cover eight categories: expulsion from the Sangha, initial and subsequent meetings of the Sangha, indefinite matters, forfeiture and confession, confession, acknowledgement, training, and the settling of disputes.[138]

C. Concentration

Regarding Theravada practice, then, generosity (*d na*), in general terms, was seen to be any act of unselfish giving of one's time or resources for the benefit of others. Morality (*s la*) meant following the precepts, perceived as positive guidelines. Concentration (*sam dhi*), then, the third aspect of practice to be considered here, is the state of mind of being firmly, pointedly fixed on a single thing.

When this fixing of the mind is done in a morally good, skillful, wholesome (*kusala*) way, it is called right concentration, one of the steps of the Noble Eightfold Way, as seen at the beginning of this essay. (*Concentration* means *right concentration* unless specified as the unwholesome kind.)

In Buddhist practice concentration is frequently understood within the context of concentration meditation (*sam dhi bh van* , i.e., the mental development of concentration).[139] This type of meditation is the one to which the newcomer will be introduced in his first meditation class at a Theravada temple. It will probably be in the form of both sitting and walking meditation. In sitting meditation, the mind is focused on the breath as one breathes in and out. In walking meditation, the mind focuses on the various aspects of the motion involved in walking, e.g., standing, lifting, moving, placing, etc. One purpose of concentration meditation is to calm the body and the mind, to development tranquility. For example, it helps rid the mind of the agitations and frustrations that arise in the workaday world. Concentration makes the mind pure, stable, alert, and active.[140]

D. Generosity, Morality, and Concentration Revisited: Meditative Life

Generosity (*d na*), morality (*s la*), and concentration (*sam dhi*), considered above as rather distinct elements of Theravada practice, can be viewed as aspects of what might be called meditative life.[141] One might say this is their real function. Meditative life is *vipassan* , insight meditation, lived every moment of every day:

> . . . [T]here must still be the knowing—an evenness and continuity of *sati* [mindfulness]. It isn't that you meditate only in the sitting posture, *sam dhi* means having a mind that is firmly concentrated. As you are walking you must make your mind firm and steady, and maintain this steadiness of mind consistently in all activities and at all times having *sati* and *sampaja* [clear

knowing]. Not only when you are sitting, but when you are walking, in a car or wherever, if your eyes see a form or your ears hear a sound, you must maintain the knowing. If there is a sense of attraction or repulsion towards anything in the mind, then maintain the knowing of such mental states. They are all uncertain . . . / . . . Contemplate continuously. Just in seeing a tree surrounded by fallen leaves when you are walking, this is a sign of impermanence as well. We are the same as those leaves, once old age arrives we just shrivel up and pass away. All people are the same. This is called raising the mind to the level of *vipassan* ; you are contemplating like this continuously. *Sati* will be maintained evenly and consistently whether you are standing, walking, sitting or lying down. *When you are closely following and checking the mind at all times, this is called practicing meditation in the right way.*[142]

The practice of Buddhism is *vipassan* meditation as a continuous activity. Meditation is not a scheduled event that takes place at the temple once a week; it is a way of conducting one's life day in and day out. Insight meditation is an ongoing exercise. *Vipassan* is realizing the impermanence of everything in the world—as well as the lack of self, and the dissatisfaction (suffering) that arises with regard to worldly things. It is clearly knowing the attractions and repulsions that operate in the mind, understanding from where they come and the results they bring. It is realizing that everything experienced is "uncertain." In other words, nothing in the world is "for sure"; there are "no guarantees." You cannot count on anything; you cannot put your stock in anything. If you try, you will suffer: that is what the evidence indicates. You must let go. Insight meditation is keeping a constant check on the mind to see where suffering arises and where the defilements lurk. It is determining where corrections in conduct are to be made so suffering can be eliminated. It is the "path [*patipad*] to progress."[143] It is the way to Enlightenment.

Generosity, morality, and concentration (*d na*, *s la*, and *sam dhi*), then, are not the practice as such; they are aspects of it. They are conditions for it to exist. *D na*, generosity, first of all, is one of the "tools or aids to the practice of meditation."[144] Here this means that *d na* helps prepare the mind for meditation. If does this by helping eliminate greed, which hinders "mental purity": "*D na* means giving. If people are selfish they don't feel at ease, it leads to a sense of discomfort and yet people tend to be very selfish without realizing how it affects them."[145] *D na* is getting the focus off yourself and onto other people. "It is one of the causes that will help in cleansing the mind from defilement and you should reflect on this and develop it as an aspect of your practice."[146] *Sila*, morality, too, is a part of the practice of meditation. At a minimum, maintaining the Five Precepts is a requisite. "*Sila* will watch over the Dhamma and allow it to flourish and grow in the same way as a mother and father look after their child."[147] If you follow the precepts, in other words, the law of Nature will work for you in your practice. S*am dhi*, concentration, lastly, is a method for calming the body and the mind. It is also, however, a partner with *vipassan* in the meditative life: "It is quite simple. Concentration (samatha [same as s*am dh*, with the emphasis on *tranquility*]) and wisdom (vipassana) work together. First the mind becomes still by holding on to a meditation object. It is quiet only while you are sitting with your eyes closed. This is samatha and eventually this sam©dhi-base is the cause for wisdom or vipassana to arise. Then the mind is still whether you sit with your eyes closed or walk around in a busy city."[148]

V. Conclusion: The Preeminence and Simplicity of Practice

This essay presented an overview of the concepts and practice of Thai Theravada Buddhism. The section on concepts considered the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path; the five aggregates; suffering, no-self, and impermanence; Enlightenment; Dependent Origination; rebirth; *kamma*; *tathat* ; relative and ultimate truth;

and Buddhism as atheism, and the Natural law (God) as the foundation of morality. The section on practice discussed generosity and making merit, including observance days, rituals, and special ceremonies; morality (the precepts); concentration and concentration meditation; and generosity, morality, and concentration within the context of the meditative life.

The essay concludes with a short consideration of the meaning of practice. First, Theravada Buddhism, is, fundamentally, a matter of practice, not of theory. You do not have to spend a great deal of time studying the Canon. You do not have to read a lot of Dhamma books. (That does not mean there is anything wrong with doing these things, but they are not enough.) You have to look within and study what you see there:

> . . . [T]he whole Dhamma is to be found within the body and the mind. Learn here. Don't learn in a school, in a cave, in a forest, on a mountain, or in a monastery. Those places are outside us. Build a school inside, build a university within the body. Then examine, study, investigate, research, scout around, find out the truth about how the world arises, how it comes to be a source of suffering, how there may be complete extinction of the world (that is, extinction of suffering), and how to work towards attaining that complete extinction.[149] This really means living the meditative life. If you read about the Dhamma or someone tells you about it, what you have read or heard is actually just hearsay until you have evidence of it based on *vipassan* practice.

Secondly, if Theravada Buddhism is a matter of practice, the practice is ultimately rather simple. Buddhist practice is fundamentally concerned with suffering and no-suffering, with how suffering arises and how to eliminate it. All other issues are of lesser import. If you are able to put a stop to attachment to feelings when they arise, and thereby prevent the emergence of the suffering state, that is actually quite enough. Or if you are able to consider the seen as just the seen, the heard as just the heard, the imagined as just the imagined, etc.,[150] that is actually quite enough. Or if you are able to hold Nature in suspension and avoid peopling the world with "I "and "mine," that is actually quite enough. Or if you are able to do nothing more than "[g]ive up clinging to love and hate,

The Buddhist Way of Life: An Analysis of *D na*, Generosity

The Buddhist way of life consists of three steps, or three parts, according to the training from the beginning to the end of life, or from the lower level to the higher one. Buddhist scholars have no problem understanding these three levels of training, but for our friends in general, they are not so easy to understand. It is important to make sure our young generation and all our friends get a correct and clear understanding so all benefit. The Council of Thai Bhikkhus in the U. S. A. in a special committee chaired by Venerable Dr. Chuen Phangcham worked out a handbook of Buddhism entitled *Introduction to Basic Buddhist Practice*. This practice consists of generosity, morality, and mind training (*d na*, *s la*, and *bh van*). This basic training is for lay people, or householders. There is also other training for monastics known as *s la*, *sam dhi*, and *pa .*

Here we will consider training for householders, going from the lower level to the higher one. *D na*/*thahm* (©©) means generosity, or giving things to those who are in need. Giving good suggestions, good guidance, is also called *d na*. *D na* is one of the ten perfections observed by the Buddha-to-be, born as *Vesantara Bodhisatatta*. He observed this perfection for his whole life. Providing housing, food, medicine, and clothing to those who are in need is called *d na*. We have to be trained in generosity, knowing the worth and benefits of *d na*, giving without thinking of getting in return. We give to help, to support, and to promote the welfare of others.

For example, we give scholarships to students who can not support themselves because of their economic situations to help them pursue their educations and get good jobs. In this way they

can earn better livelihoods and be better citizens. This is giving to help and to support. Giving food to those who are hungry is giving life to others. Other forms of giving are donating organs to patients who are in need in hospitals, or providing labor to help our friends and neighbors in their construction or repair work. These gifts come from hearts full of generosity and kindness.

D na is one of four virtues of householders:

1. To give something to someone who is in need (*d na*)
2. To use kind and righteous speech (*piyav c*)
3. To share and participate with others, to be consistent and impartial toward all people (*sam nattat*)
4. To act in such a way as to benefit others, to give a helping hand to others (*atthacariy*)

These virtues are sometimes called the virtues for a harmonious life, a harmonious community. They are sources of happiness and peace.

As an example, a meditation student in Chicago learned these virtues and applied them in her daily life. One day at lunchtime she came down to the dining room to have lunch. She wanted to share with her friends the food that she brought with her from home. Her friends, however, refused her offer, saying they had their own money to buy lunch. She said, "I know you have, but I would like to share with you what I have." They expressed surprise, but she explained to them what she had learned and practiced at the Thai

Buddhist Temple in Chicago, the Wat Dhammaram. This woman's sharing of food was a sharing from her heart.

Generosity means having a generous mind. With a generous mind, giving or sharing appears; when sharing appears, happiness occurs; when happiness occurs, then life exists, then the world of human beings continues. This virtue of generosity is a basic principle in Buddhism. We have to go further to have moral training and meditation in order to experience the highest wisdom in life. Moral principles in Buddhism are known as *sila*. After training in morality, there are mind training (training in concentration) and wisdom training.

Then, too, the best gift is the gift of Dhamma, a gift of teaching helping learners to know what is proper and what is improper, what should be pursued and what should be avoided. This is the gift of wisdom. Finally the "best of the best" gifts is forgiveness, which is hard to give.

Buddhism provides the natural way for realizing our humanity and for benefiting humankind. The question is: why does Buddhism put training in *d na*, or generosity, first? The answer is because we learn how to be selfish from the beginning of our lives. We learn from our families and from society as a whole, especially in terms of the competitive spirit that society promotes. In this way jealousy and envy have a chance to play their roles in the minds of human beings, causing violence in our society. We need to understand the danger of unwholesome selfishness. When we understood it, we can reduce and eliminate it our minds to open the door to generosity, which brings loving-kindness with it.

Asian Buddhists generally like to offer food to novices and the monks in the morning and at lunch. When the monks need material support, people provide them such things as a residence, robes, food, and medicine. When a friend or neighbor needs help in building a house in the village, people volunteer. All these are ways of expressing loving-kindness. The world situation today does not encourage volunteer work. People focus on material

comfort that they fight with one another to achieve but which they never truly acquire. They do not learn the truth of the matter here. The Buddha taught the common way of life, to be happy with what we have as we live in accordance with right livelihood. *D na*, generosity, as practiced in Buddhism, is giving without thinking of getting something in return, of getting a reward. It means to share, to help, to support, and to promote the best interests of others.

According to the ten perfections, *d na* can be classified into three levels as follows:

1. *D na p ramit* : giving in general
2. *D na upap ramit* : giving of the Dhamma
3. *D na paramattha p ramit* : giving of life

In the first place, as discussed above, regarding giving in general, we give things to those who are in need, whether food, clothing, shelter, medicine. This giving might be to particular individuals or it might be in some form of giving to the public as a whole. Secondly, the giving of the Dhamma is done by the monks, who give supervision, guidance, and the teachings of Buddhism. In general *dhammad na* excels all other gifts ("Sabba d©nang dhamma danang jin©ti"). Thirdly, *d na* can mean *the giving of life*. This giving of life is difficult to do. Our parents give us life and take care of us. They bring us up and give us our basic training before they send us to school to learn the arts and sciences. They sustain us physically, mentally, and spiritually. Furthermore, people donate organs to those in need in hospitals. This is also difficult to do. We donate blood as well. These activities are also life-giving, *d na paramattha p ramit* . What is more, bringing someone from the hell of evil thoughts and deeds, and showing them the way to a heaven here and now is also called giving life to others. Whenever we are giving and helping people to survive, we are exhibiting *d na parmattha p ramit* .

The Buddha said:

"Sabba d nang dhamma d namg jin ti"
("The gift of Dhamma excels all gifts").

Why is it so? Because when people listen to a Dhamma talk, for example, they learn what should be done and what should not be done; they learn what righteous action is. They know the way to discipline themselves because of the Dhamma talk. They know the way to observe five Precepts, the benefits of generosity and kindness, the practice of meditation to purify their minds. All this results from Dhamma talks. Therefore, giving Dhamma talks, as the monks do, giving the gift of the Dhamma, excels all gifts.

As far as the giving of the Dhamma is concerned, there is a Buddhist organization that exemplifies this kind of giving in a special way. The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation of Taiwan prints Buddhist books to distribute to Buddhist and non-Buddhist communities in all part of the world. This is an exceptional Buddhist organization, a preeminent *d na* organization. If the Thai Sangha and the Thai Government followed the example of this Corporate Body, the truth of Buddhism might better reach our close to four million followers of all sects throughout the world.

Regarding all *d na* practice, furthermore, observing the *pa ca s la*, the Five Precepts, is *mah d na*, the greatest *d na*. When we observe the Five Precepts, we bring about security in all parts of our life: security in family life, security with respect to our property, and security in all aspects of our daily living. This is a great gift, a gift of nonviolence, of caring, of constructive living, of warm family life, of property, of a harmonious society, of a peaceful and happy society. All these things are the gift of *panca s la*, of observing the Five Precepts. Therefore, observing the Five Precepts means giving people all the things they want and need; it means giving loving kindness, compassion, truthfulness, sincerity,

mindfulness, and wisdom to all mankind. This is the gift par excellence.

The three levels of *d na* have been considered. There are also three gates of *d na*:

1. The thing that is given, the gift
2. The giver
3. The receiver

Generally speaking, in Buddhism when we talk about the benefit of giving, of *d na*, it depends on what we give. Whatever we give, it must be righteous or pure, and it must belong to the giver righteously. At the same time we should have *saddh* , or confidence, in the one to whom we are going to give. Is he or she good, honorable, or venerable; holy or enlightened? If so, if the benefit is present, a good result would be expected.

The gate of *d na* as that which is given can be considered as existing in the following two forms:

1. *missad na*: a material gift
2. *Dhammad na*: the gift of wisdom, which excels all other gifts

The gate of *d na* as the receiver of the gift, in turn, can be subdivided as follows:

1. *Sanghad na*: giving things to public institutions such as hospitals, schools, public halls, churches, temples, religious centers and organizations, ashrams, or communities of the monks or nuns.
2. *P tipuggalikad na*: giving something to a specific person, say a monk.

Of these two kinds of receivers, the first one, *sanghad na*, represents the more auspicious gift. The Buddha said, "Oh monks, householders who offer food to the monks, who are righteous, offer five things, namely, life, good skin, happiness, energy, knowledge, and wisdom."

Of the two forms of the gate of *d na* as that which is given, the Buddha put the greater emphasis upon *dhammad na*. Of these

two forms, *dhammad na* is more important in the life of the Buddhist than ©*missad na* (or *vatthud na*).

Another special kind of *d na* is *k lad na*, what we might call occasional *d na*. We might give something to someone who is going on a trip (a monk, for example), or who is visiting us at our residence. Or we at times give something to help those suffering the effects of flooding, fire, earthquake, or a tsunami. Sometimes we offer new crops or new fruits as gifts to religious persons such as monks, priests, nuns, or novices. These are all instances of occasional *d na*.

We find that *d na* appears in many Dhamma classifications given by the Buddha, for example, in the ten perfections (*d nap rami* together with *s lap rami*, *nekkhammap ramit* , *pa p ramit* , *viriyap ramit* , *khantip ramit* , *saccap ramit* , *athitthanap ramit* , *mettap ramit* , *and upekkhap ramit*), in the three ways of performing virtues (*d namaya* with *s lamaya* and *bh van maya*,) in the three duties of Buddhists (*d na* with *s la* and *bh van*), and in the five gradual *kath s* (*d nakath* together with *s lakath* , *sagghakath* , *kamadinavakath* , and *nekkhamm nisangsakath*).

Thus *d na*, generosity, is a key elements of the practice for Buddhists everywhere in the world—in Asia, in America, in Europe, in Australia, and elsewhere. The Buddhist way of generosity has spread out to our non-Buddhist friends, and they have learned from us. It is gratifying to see the results. People are much too selfish today, fighting to gain more and more material comfort but lacking in mind development. In this way society has become unbalanced, violence has appeared, killing has occurred, and suffering continues. Since generosity, loving-kindness, and forgiveness have decreased in the world, religious leaders have to take it upon themselves to light candles of wisdom to shine in the darkness of selfishness.

Just as a righteous offering as the gift of seeds, when sown in a fertile field and watered by the rain, will grow well and produce a

great yield, in the same way a righteous offering given to those who have right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration, those who have knowledge and wisdom (*vicch caranasampanno*), will yield great results if those who give the gift are observing Five Precepts righteously.

To conclude, then, the benefits of giving for those who always give, who are always generous and kind, are as follows:

1. People love them.
2. Wise people always make friends with them.
3. Their good, kind faces are always evident to all.
4. They are well-known to the public.
5. They are always connected with the householder's Dhamma.
6. After death they are reborn in the heavenly life.*

February 26, 2008

*This essay is based on the following passages from the Buddhist Scriptures:

Tipitaka Volume # 21 Thai Version, *Suttapitaka* # 13 pages 50-51; *Tipitaka* Volume # 23 Thai Version, *Suttapitaka* Volume # 15, pages 89-92, 287-299;

Tipitaka Volume # 22, *Suttapitaka* Volume 14,*Anghuttaranik ya* pages 56-59, pages 486-488; *Tipitaka* Volume # 28 Thai Version, *Suttapitaka Khutthakanik ya Ch taka* Part 2 Volume # 20, pages 447-560.

Morality (S LA)

Morality (S©la), the first stage, includes all the virtues of an honest and considerate person. It has been identified with virtues in general and many admirable qualities have been interpreted in relation to the ideals of purification and restraint as they are realized with the body, speech and mind-deed, word and thought. It is usually understood as referring especially to the five moral precepts, which constitute the layman's definite code of practical ethics

When we take the precepts, we should understand the meaning and the practical application, which would lead to the experience of purifying the mind and of establishing a harmless way of life, a different attitude towards life, seen intelligently and compas-sionately. Having acquired this attitude, these simple precepts when applied daily will diminish the suffering for us and for others. The significance of the precepts is wide in a social context. We should try to keep them at all times.

1. The Five Precepts

We should reflect that the first precept, that of abstaining from violence, including taking life, any and all life, will awaken and increase the sentinent of loving-kindness. It will certainly establish friendiness between man and man, man and women, and man and animals. In this precept is embodied intelligent, all embracing compassion and good-will. It alone could save humanity from destruction.

Then again, the second precept affirms the necessity for fair play. It renounces greed and grasping unfair competition that at any1 cost lead one to acquire and accumulate riches by ruining others, as well as by flagrant thieving. One should not appropriate even a blade of grass. One should not commit any sort of dishonesty: one should, in fact, respect others' rights of property.

The third precept is also of great social importance. It implies self-control and would avoid misusing the sense in any way. It also establishes fidelity in married life and it curbs physical excesses. Health and family life which is the basic unity of human society are safeguarded and in the second place it exercises control within reasonable limits over the libido.

The fourth precept affirms the necessity of care in speech. Who will deny that telling lies leads to corruption of one's own mind and causes hurt to others. Lying and slandering are forms of cheating. Stealing a man's good character may be more harmful than stealing his wallet. When nations fail to keep treaties made with others nations we can understand the social catastrophe of dissimulation. One's actions should be in harmony with one's words.

The fifth precept is the utmost importance, as when this precept is not kept, it becomes easier to break the others. The habit of taking drugs or alcoholic drinks weakens the moral fibre of a man, whereby society at large suffers. Just as the repetition of good actions develops a wholesome character, so the repetition of indulgence in poisons is a social evil.

Not one of the precepts can be broken persistantly without causing social as well as mental harm. Nor should the devotee rest satisfied with the observance of only these five precepts.

These basic training rules are observed by all practicing lay Buddhists. The five precepts are often recited after reciting the formula for taking refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha.

The Five Precepts in P li;

1. P©©©tip©t© verama©© sikkh©-pada?ÿ sam©diy©mi.

I undertake the precept to refrain from harming living beings.

2. Adinn©d©n© verama©© sikkh©-pada?ÿ sam©diy©mi.

I undertake the precept to refrain from taking what is not given.

3. K©mesu micch©c©r© verama©© sikkh©-pada?ÿ sam©diy©mi.

I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual misconduct.

4. Mus©v©d© verama©© sikkh©-pada?ÿ sam©diy©mi.

I undertake the precept to refrain from false speech.

5. Sur©-meraya-majja-pam©da©©h©n© verama©© sikkh©© pada?ÿ sam©diy©mi.

I undertake the precept to refrain from intoxicating drinks and drugs which lead to carelessness.

From time to time, especially on full-moon days and new moon days, he should also observe the eight precepts or ten precepts, thereby taking another step forward the Path.

2. The Eight Precepts.2. The Eight Precepts.

These training rules are observed by laypeople during periods of intensive meditation practice and during uposatha (lunar observance) days. The Eight Precepts are based on the Five Precepts, with the third precept extended to prohibit all sexual activity and an additional three precepts that are especially supportive to meditation practice.

The Eight Precepts;

1. P©©©tip©t© verama©© sikkh©-pada?ÿ sam©diy©mi.

I undertake the precept to refrain from harming living beings.

2. Adinn©d©n© verama©© sikkh©-pada?ÿ sam©diy©mi.

I undertake the precept to refrain from taking what is not given.

3. Abrahmacariy© verama©© sikkh©-pada?ÿ sam©diy©mi.

I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual activity.

4. Mus©v©d© verama©© sikkh©-pada?ÿ sam©diy©mi.

I undertake the precept to refrain from false speech.

5. Sur©-meraya-majja-pam©da©©h©n© verama©© sikkh©-pada?ÿ sam©diy©mi.

I undertake the precept to refrain from intoxicating drinks and drugs which lead to carelessness.

6. Vik©labhojan© verama©© sikkh©-pada?ÿ sam©diy©mi.

I undertake the precept to refrain from eating at the forbidden time (i.e., afternoon).

7. Nacca-g©ta-v©dita-vis©ka-dassana-m©l©-gandha-vilepana-dh©ra©a-ma©©ana vibh©sana©©h©n© verama©© sikkh©© pada?ÿ sam©diy©mi.

I undertake the precept to refrain from dancing, singing, music, going to see entertainments, wearing garlands, using perfumes, and beautifying the body with cosmetics.

8. Ucc©sayana-mah©sayan© verama©© sikkh©-pada?ÿ sam©diy©mi.

I undertake the precept to refrain from lying on a high or luxurious sleeping place.

3. Precepts for the Monks.

In the role of a bhikkhu the aspirant leads a life of voluntary poverty and practise the four kind of Higher Sila of higher morality (S©la-visuddhi) namely;

1. P©timokkha s©la: The fundamental moral code, various rules which a Bhikkhu is expected to observe;
2. Indriya-saÿ ?vara s©la: Morality pertaining to sense-restraint;
3. ©j©va-p©risuddhi s©la: Morality pertaining to purity of livelihood;
4. Paccaya-sannissita s©la: Morality pertaining to the use of the necessaries of life.

In Buddhism, the Patimokkha is the basic Theravada code of monastic discipline, consisting of 227 rules for fully ordained monks (bhikkhus) and 311 for nuns (bhikkhunis). It is contained in the Suttavibhanga, a division of the Vinaya Pitaka. The rules are arranged into sections:

1. P©r©jika: The four parajikas (defeats) are rules entailing expulsion from the sangha for life.
2. Sa©gh©disesa: The thirteen sanghadisesas are rules requiring an initial and subsequent meeting of the sangha (communal meetings).

3. Aniyata: The aniyata are two indefinite rules where a monk is accused of having committed an offence with a woman in a screened (enclosed) or private place by a lay person.

4. Nissagg©ya p©cittiya: The nissaggiya pacittiya are thirty rules entailing "confession with forfeiture."

5. P©cittiya: Pacittiya are rules entailing confession. There are ninety two Pacittiya.

6. P©tidesan©ya: Patidesaniya are violations which must be verbally acknowledged.

7. Sekhiya: There are seventy five sekhiya or rules of training, which are mainly about deportment of a monk.

8. Adhikara©a-samatha: Adhikarana-samatha are seven rules for settlement of legal processes that concern monks only.

Morality within the Noble Eightfold Path.

Right Speech (Samm©v©c©), Right Action (Samm©kammanta), Right Livelihood (Samm©-©j©va). All three of these factors of the Path relate to ethics or morality (S©la), and this is why they have been put together here. We can see this from the definitions of these terms provide in the texts;

Right Speech;

1. Mus©v©d© verama©© : abstention from false speech.

2. Pisu©©ya v©c©ya verama©© : abstention from libel/ slander.

3. Pharus©ya v©c©ya verama©© : abstention from harsh speech.

4. Samphappal©p© verama©© : abstention from vain talk/gossip.

Right action;

1. P©©©tip©t© verama©© : abstention from taking life.

2. Adinn©d©n© verama©© : abstention from taking what is not given.

3. K©mesu micch©c©r© : abstention from sexual misconduct.

Right livelihood;

Meditation (Bhavana)

Meditation Instruction and Practice

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What is Meditation?

In Buddhism the word "Meditation" is translated from the Pali language. The Pali word is "Bhãvnã" which means to develop, to improve, to cultivate mindfulness and awareness, so the mind becomes healthy and strong. Meditation is the way to cultivate the mind so it becomes calm, clear, peaceful, stable, bright, light, and pure.

A concentrated mind can focus clearly on a particular object. Such a mind is developed and purified, when defiling mental obstructions such as hatred, greed, craving, delusion unwholesome thoughts, ignorance, is retired, is released from tension, worry and stress.

Meditation is the way to psychologically train the mind to develop the tool of insight, or Vipassanã enabling meditation practitioners to realize Enlightenment, the highest wisdom for ordinary persons to become complete human beings so that human being can become "noble ones" or ariyapuggala (Pali).
The oldest form of Vipassanã (insight) meditation is taught in the Theravãda tradition of South-East Asia. The development of mindfulness and awareness is the heart of Buddhist meditation. The four Foundations of Mindfulness (The Satipatthana Sutta) were emphasized by the historical Buddha, as follows: "There is one way, O monks, for the purification of human beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of

suffering, grief and pain, for the winning of the noble Path, for realizing Enlightenment, Nibbana, that is to say, the Four Foundations of mindfulness" (Details will be given later in chapters regarding meditation objects.

Meditation is the way to experience peace in one's own mind, a way to experience real happiness. When our mind is peaceful we are free from worries and mental discomfort, and we experience true happiness.

If our mind is not peaceful, then even the most pleasant external conditions will not produce a happy mind. However, if we train our mind to become peaceful we shall be happy at any time, even under the most adverse conditions. Therefore, it is important to train our mind through meditation."

[* File contains invalid data | In-line.JPG *]Meditation can be practiced in many ways to develop the mind and to have the mind relax and become calm. We see in the Western world today many people who practiced meditation by themselves through reading books, without supervisors, teachers, guides or experienced friends to help them.

However, it is beneficial to have a trained meditation teacher to guide you in the correct way of practice. There are forty methods or techniques for tranquility in Buddhist meditation which we do not need to mention in this small booklet. Please read "Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice" by P. Vajirmana Mahathera, 1995.

Meditation can be applied for different purposes. Some apply meditation in the wrong way and for negative purposes, such as mundane magical power, and so on. In short, meditation is the way to purify the mind from hatred, (Pali: Dosa) greed, (Pali:lobha) and ignorance, (Pali : moha) so we can cultivate mindfulness and awareness to see things as they really are. The way things are imperment (Pali :aniccam) hard to maintain or suffering (Pali: dukkham) and out of control, non-self or selflessness (Pali: anatta)

It is very useful and wonderful to learn, study and practise meditation because living without meditation is very dangerous it is like driving a car without a road map and with no direction. Living with meditation is just the opposite, providing all the tools you need to get to your destination.

Why should we train our mind?

The mind is of primary importance, the most important element in human life. All deeds, wholesome or unwholesome, are the result of a mental process. In the DHAMMAPADA the Buddha said, "Mind is the fore runner of all action, mind is chief; mind made are they. If one speak or acts with an evil mind, suffering follows him/her, even as the wheel of the cart" "Mind is the fore runner of all actions, mind is chief, mind made are they. If one speaks or acts with a wholesome mind happiness follows him/her, even as his (her) own shadow."

(Pali: Manopubbam gama dhamma, manosettha manomaya, manasa ce padtuthena bhasati va karoti va.tato nam dukkhamanaveti, cakkam va vahato padam "..manasa ce pasannaena pasati va karoti va tato nam sukkhamanveti chayava anupayini.)

Why should we meditate?

Mind is by nature originally pure. Great extensive spiritual power is all complete within the mind. You may ask yourself what you want to have in your life. The answer would likely be peace and real happiness because what the mind wants is peace and real happiness.

How can we reach that stage where we will have a peaceful mind and happiness? The answer is through the practice of meditation. This is the tool that helps us train our mind to be peaceful and pure. With a peaceful and pure mind we will be able to experience real happiness and the highest wisdom in life.

Meditation is a spiritual training in all the world's religions. Many people talk about peace and happiness in their daily gatherings and meetings. In other words, an individual with a deluded mind cannot find the right way to experience real happiness and peace for himself/herself and others except by cultivating a clear and pure mind. To experience that stage, each person must train their own mind to develop in the proper way. Meditation plays a key role in this matter.

Meditation helps in training and refining the mind, it helps the person who engages in meditation practice to concentrate and to be mindful in daily activities. Everyone benefits from this training. For example, the student needs concentration while doing homework assignments. Administrators need concentration and a clear mind while running their offices. Parents need concentration and a clear mind while doing their work at home, conducting family life in a calm and peaceful way.

Meditation helps everyone at all times to live and work effectively and successfully. Everyone wants to be happy in life. The way to lead oneself to real happiness and have a peaceful life may be different, but without a peaceful, calm and clear mind, real happiness cannot be realized. Meditation can help in this regard.

The Exalted One, the Buddha said "The peaceful mind excels all other happiness." (Pali: natthi santi param sukkham)

What would happen if one worked without right mindfulness and right concentration?

The answer is simple. If one worked without right mindfulness and concentration, work would be ineffective. For example, if one studies without mindfulness and full attention, one cannot remember the subject being studied. Consequently, a poor performance would result. As you can see, there is a role to be played by concentration and mindfulness during study. In the same way, right understanding and insight, as worldly tools, need to be applied before starting any work.

Working without mindfulness and concentration is resulting in more harm than good. The way to apply these tools is to learn how to be aware, moment by moment in our daily activities, that is, to know what we are doing, what we are saying and what we are thinking. Without mindfulness and concentration there is no life. We are on "automatic pilot."

Meditation can be practiced correctly or incorrectly. When practicing meditation in the proper manner, it will be a benefit to meditation practitioner as follow:

Meditation gives us a clear mind and clear comprehension to carry out duties in daily life in a peaceful way, without conflict in the family, at school or in the work place. Meditation helps us to maintain physical health and mental clarity with equanimity, a balance.

Meditation enables us to face all kinds of problems and difficulties in our daily life with confidence. Meditation teaches us to adjust ourselves to bear with the numerous obstacles encountered in life and in the changing modern world.

Meditation helps to conquer mental defilement which pollutes the mind. If you practice meditation, you will learn to

behave like a true human being even though you are upset or disturbed by others.

Meditation helps us to concentrate by sharpening our mental faculties. It frees our mind from all kind of stress, worries, tension, and anxieties. Meditation offers direct mental hygiene to the practitioner. It improves our mental and physical health; it helps develop a sound mind in a sound body.

Meditation helps us cultivate loving-kindness, compassion, inner peace, sympathetic joy and equanimity. It prevents us from attaching to hatred, greed, craving, selfishness, jealousy and all unwholesome or negative thoughts as well as moderating extreme positive mental states.

Meditation, as we teach it, is based on the Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism. Right Concentration, one of the tenets of the Path, can help practitioners realize the law of nature, Enlightenment and the truth. It helps us to go beyond happiness and unhappiness, good and bad, beyond love and hatred. This is absolute freedom and absolute independence.

Meditation helps us to go beyond mundane knowledge. As said by Egerton C. Baptist in his book "Supreme Science of the Buddha" Science can give no assurance herein, but Buddhism can meet the Atomic Challenge because the supra mundane knowledge of Buddhism begins where science leaves off. This is clear enough to anyone who has made a study of Buddhism. For through Buddhist Meditation, the atomic constituents making up matter have been seen and felt, and the sorrow or dissatisfaction of their "arising and passing away" has made itself known with what we call a soul or atma, the illusion of sakkayaditthi (egoism) as it is called in the Buddha's teaching.."

Meditation strengthens the mind enabling it to control human emotion when it is disturbed by negative thoughts and feelings such as jealousy, anger, pride and envy.

How many techniques of meditation are there in the Buddhist tradition?

There are two kinds of meditation (Pali: Bhãvanã) namely: Tranquillity Meditation (Pali: Samatha Bhãvnã) and Insight Meditation (Pali: Vipassanã Bhãvanã)

Tranquillity Meditation or concentration Meditation (Pali: Samadha Bhãvanã) is the way to develop tranquility and serenity in mind. It is a synonym of Samatha (concentration) , that is one-pointed-ness and non-distraction of mind. Tranquillity meditation is the way of developing temporary serenity in the mind. Concentration meditation will help the mind become rested, relaxed and quiet so it may gradually ascend to higher states of concentration or mental bliss. Some meditation practitioners may also apply this technique as a base to insight meditation (Vipassanã Bhãvanã) to understand the real nature of phenomena and to "see things as they really are."

One person may also develop concentration to reach a higher level of mental bliss enlightenment while another may apply this technique as the base for insight meditation.

Insight Meditation, or Vipassanã Bhãvnã as it is called in the Buddhist tradition, aims to free the mind from the distraction of self-centeredness, negativity, and confusion. Seeing life as a constantly changing process, one begins to accept pleasure and pain, fear and joy, and all aspects of life with increasing balance and equanimity. This balanced awareness, grounded in the present moment, leads to stillness and a growing understanding of the nature of life. Out of this seeing, emerges wisdom and compassion.

Insight meditation is available spiritual technique for those who are searching for peace of mind and self-understanding. It is a meditation technique introduced to the world by the Awakened One, Gotama Buddha. This Theravãda Buddhist meditation technique of insight meditation is becoming better known in the

Western world. It is the way to develop mindfulness so we will be aware of who we are and what we are doing, moment to moment.

Only in the present moment can one's awakening mind have insight to eliminate the causes of suffering and frustration in daily life.

Meditation Instruction

Here I would like to share with you the meditation technique I practiced at wat Norng Pah Pong, Ubolrachathani, Thailand.

Ajahn Chah gave this instruction and encouragement to his students to practice in a very simple way. He said, "Sit down. Sit straight and keep your mind alert. See your mind. See your thoughts. See your mind and See your thoughts. When you breathe in say "Bud" When you breathe out say "Dho" See your mind and See your thoughts. See your mind and See your thoughts and let them go."

When I became more mature meditation practitioner one by one, I realized that the technique I had learned from Ajahn Chah helped me to be mindful in daily living in sitting, in standing, in working, in sweeping, in cleaning, in eating, and so on. Ajahn Chah said, "This is Dhamma practice."

I apply this technique in my own practice here in the United States, as well as teach it to those who want to practice meditation with me. The following passage is adapted from the Four Foundations of mindfulness (Pali: Satipatthana Sutta). Be sitting. Be mindful of standing. Be mindful of working. Be mindful of sitting. Be mindful of resting or reclining. Be mindful of eating. Be mindful of drinking. Be mindful of doing or working. Be mindful of speaking. Be mindful of thinking"

I give these suggestions to my friends who come for meditation instruction and guidance at the Vipassanã Meditation

Center in Chicago, Illinois and the Midwest Buddhist Center in Warren, Michigan. The technique is to be mindful in our own being, here and now, to live our life in the present moment. Whatever we do, we are to be aware and mindful of that moment.

We can say that mindfulness in daily life practice is the heart of Buddhist meditation, Dhamma Patipatti. For forty-five years the Buddha spent his time teaching this way of life to people. Before he passed away from the eyes of people he said, in The Maha Parinibbana Suta, "My years are now full ripe; the life span left is short. I will soon have to leave you. You must be earnest. O monks, be mindful and of pure virtue. Whoever untiringly pursues the Teaching will go beyond the cycle of birth and death, and will make an end of suffering. Work diligently. Component things are impermanent.

(*Appamadena Sampadetha Vaya Dhammã Sankhãrã"*)

Sitting Meditation

To start, find a fairly quiet place. Sit down on a chair, the floor, a bench, or a cushion. If you sit on a chair, sit with your back straight and try not to lean on the back of the chair, if you sit on a cushion, cross legged, American-Indian style. Though it is not necessary to assume the full lotus position, some people may be

able to assume this posture or one of its variations. Sit straight; relax your shoulders and head. Relax and straighten your neck. Gaze in front of you, looking toward the floor.

Now place your palms together in a step-by-step manner, mindfully and slowly. Place your palms face down on your knees. With mindfulness, slowly turn your right hand on its side. Move your right hand up a bit and move your hand to the center of your chest and note stopping. Mindfully turn your left palm up on its side. Move your left hand up a bit and move your hand to the center of your chest, noting stopping. Place your palms together. Please pay respect to your parents or guardians, for without them we would not be here. Also pay respect to the great teachers and those enlightened ones, the founders of the great world religions, who brought peace and harmony to society in the past, present and future.

Then move your hand back mindfully and slowly, move the right hand down to the right knee, move the left hand to the left knee slowly. Sit straight. Move the right hand to the abdomen and left hand to the right hand, slowly and mindfully. Hold them together and put them down, palms up on your lap. Feel your body clearly. Then close your eyes softly. Observe deep in-breaths and long out-breaths for four rounds. At this moment you may follow the in-and-out breath as it arises and passes away. You can feel your lungs filling up with the in-breath. When you breathe out you will feel the lungs becoming empty. At this time you will find that you are clearly and mindfully aware of what you are doing. It can be said that "This is the moment of mindfulness".

The Meditation Object

Your mind is now becoming one with the object; it has one-pointed-ness of mind, it is the awakening mind. After four rounds of deep in-breaths and out-breaths, bring your mind back to normal breathing by keeping mindfulness and awareness on the inner side of the nostril, where the air is passing in and passing out. You should feel and be aware of it easily. You may observe this point for about 10 to 15 minutes. You may also move your

Chah further explained that "..meditation means to make the mind peaceful in order to let wisdom arise." (A Taste of Freedom, by Ajahn Chah).

The following four Foundations of Mindfulness are quoted from The Mahasatipatthana Sutta, teachings of the Buddha:

1. Mindfulness of the body (breath. Moment or postures)

2. Mindfulness of feeling (pleasant, unpleasant or neutral sensations)

3. Mindfulness of states of consciousness (mind with or without greed, hatred or delusion); and

4. Mindfulness of mental contents (joy, worry, calm, doubt, restlessness etc.) These may be kept in mind during or walking, standing or reclining meditation, from moment to moment.

Mindfulness of the body (Kãyãnupassanã Satipatthãna)

Mindfulness of the body begins with mindfulness or awareness of breathing. The "Satipatthana Sutta" opens with succinct description of the practice: "Herein, a monk [or meditation practitioner] having gone to the forest, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty place, sits down cross-legged, keeping his body erect and establishing mindfulness in front of him. Ever mindful he breathes in and mindful he breathes out. Breathing in long he understands: "I breathe in long" or breathing out long.

He understands "breathing out long" breathing in short, he understands, "I breathe in short" or breathing out short, he understands "I breathe out short" He trains thus: "I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body (of breathing)": He trains thus: I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body (of breathing): He trains thus "I shall breathe in tranquilizing the bodily formation; he trains thus "I shall breathe out tranquilizing the bodily formation, just as when a skilled potter makes a long turn, he understands: I make short turn"; so too, breathing in long, a Bhikkhu understands: "I breathe in long" ..he trains thus: "I shall breathe out tranquilizing the bodily formation.."

Mindfulness of feelings (Vedan nupassan Satipatth na)

Before you move your hands you must observe and concentrate on the feeling you experience at that moment. You are then observing mindfulness of feeling.

"And how, Bhikkus (monks), do a Bhikhu abide contemplating feeling as feeling? Here, when feeling a pleasant feeling, a Bhikhu understands "I feel (experiencing) a peasant feeling". When he feels (experiencing) a painful feeling, he understands: "I feel painful feeling"; when he feels (experiencing) neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, he understands; "I feel a neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling".

When he feels (experiencing) a worldly pleasant feeling, he understands "I feels a worldly pleasant feeling". When he feels (experiencing) an unworldly pleasant feeling, he understands; "I feels an unworldly pleasant feeling"; when he feels (experiencing) a worldly painful feeling, he understands: "I feel a worldly painful feeling"; when he feels (experiencing) an unworldly feeling: he understands; "I feel an unworldly painful feeling"; when he feels (experiencing) a worldly neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, he understands: "I feel a worldly neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling"; when he feels (experiencing) an unworldly neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, he understands: "I feel an unworldly neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling".

"In this way he abides contemplating feelings as feelings internally, or he abides contemplating feeling as feeling externally, or he abides contemplating feelings as feelings both internally and externally. Or else he abides contemplating their vanishing factors, or he abides contemplating both their arising and vanishing factors. Or else mindfulness that 'There is feeling' simply establishes in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mindfulness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how a Bhikkhu abides contemplating feelings as feeling.

Then insight exists in his mind. This is the state of insight meditation."

When you need to move your body, such as changing your posture, you may move with mindfulness. Be aware of the body moving by moving your mind from the object you have been contemplating to your hands or legs. Never move with mental defilement. When you complete moving, adjust yourself in the same manner that you did before the start of meditation practice by mindfully observing in breathe and out breathe. During the period of moving your body, you may keep your eyes opened or closed.

Mindfulness of States of Consciousness:
Citt nupassan Satipatth na)

"And how, Bhikkhus, does a Bhikkhu abide contemplating mind as mind? Not mine, not self but just a phenomena? Here in this teaching a Bhikkhu understands know in the present moment as [mind rising and falling] mind affected by lust (greed), craving, attach to sense pleasure, either weak or strong, which can produce only unwholesome actions. He understands the mind unaffected by greed. He understands mind affected by hate [also: anger, aversion, fear, sadness, frustration, ill-will]. He understands the mind unaffected by hate or unwholesome thought [mind having loving-kindness friendliness, and good will].

"He understands mind unaffected by delusion [inability to discern right and wrong action, inability to perceive characteristics of impermanence, dissatisfaction, and no self, inability to perceive the Four Noble Truths]. Delusion is associated with doubt, uncertainty, mental restlessness, distraction and confusion.

He understands contracted mind [shrunken, indolent mind lacking interest in anything] as contracted. He understands the developed mind [a type of mind experienced in rarefied states of mental bliss resulting from concentration practice]. When it arises, he understands, when an unwholesome mind [mind generally found in the sensuous world] arises, he understands when a superior

mind [very high states of mental bliss resulting from concentration practices] arises.

He understands when concentrated mind [known only by meditation practitioners who practice a concentration technique] arises. He understands when an unconcentrated [mind without above knowledge] arises. He understands when the mind is temporarily free from defilement [of greed, anger, delusion, conceit, shame and lack of moral dread]. He knows when the mind is not free from defilement.

"In this way he abides contemplating mind as mind internally in oneself, or he abides contemplating mind as mind externally in others, or he abides contemplating mind as just contemplating both internally and externally. Or else he abides contemplating its vanishing factors, or he abides contemplating its arising and vanishing factors, the existence or non-existence of ignorance of the Four Noble Truths, "there is mind' not a soul, self or I is simply established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and mindfulness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world". There is feeling that is simply established, a Bhikkhu abides contemplating mind as mind. This is state of insight meditation.

Mindfulness of Mental Contents:
(Dhamm nupassan Satipatth na)

"And how Bhikkhus, does a Bhikkhu abide contemplating mind-objects? Here a Bhikkhu abides contemplating mind-objects as mind object in the presence of the five hindrances not mine, not I, not self, but just a phenomena. And how does he do so? Here, monks, if sensual desire is present in himself he understands that it is present in me (anyone). If sensual desire is absent in me, and he knows how latent sensual desire comes to arise and he knows how the abandonment of arisen senal desire comes about, and he knows

how the non-arising of the abandoned desire will come about in the future, due to wise attention to releasing craving or sensual gratification.

"If ill-will is present in him, he understands that it is present in me [anyone]. And he knows how the non-arising of the abandoned ill-will [due to the development of loving-kindness] in the future will come about. If sloth and torpor are [present in himself, he understands that they are present in me. And he understands how the non-arising of the abandoned sloth and torpor [of mental dullness is released when energy and exertion is developed] in the future will come about. And he knows when distraction [agitated, restless and unconcentrated] and worry [past actions that one has or has not done] are present in him due to unwise attention to the thing causing distraction and worry. He knows when distraction and worry are not present in himself. He knows how distraction and worry which has not yet arisen comes to arise. He knows how the arisen distraction and worry come to be abandoned. He knows how the abandoned distraction and worry will not arise in the future due to development of calmness of mind. And he knows when doubt or worrying of mind is present in himself. (Such as, is the Buddha really fully enlightened? Does this practice really lead to the cessation of dissatisfaction? Was there a past life? Is there a future life? And so on.)

He knows when doubt or worrying of mind is not present in himself. He knows the wise attention to the perception of impermanence, dissatisfaction, non-self, or to investing the Dhamma teaching is present].

The long Discourses of the Buddha. Digha Nikaya Suttanta Pitaka; Maurice Walshe; pp 335-350; 1995. Also Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha, Majjhima Nikaya; Translated by Bhikkhu Nanamoli and Bhikku Boddhi; pp 145-155. 1995)

Standing Meditation

Change positions when physically tired, but not as soon as you feel an impulse to change. First, know why you want to change – is it physical fatigue, mental restlessness, or laziness? Notice the suffering or unpleasant feeling of the body. Learn to watch openly and mindfully both comfortable and uncomfortable feeling. This is mindfulness of feelling, sensation (Pali: Vedananupassana) both comfortable and uncomfortable.

"Effort in practice is a matter of the mind, not the body. It means constantly being aware what goes on in the mind without following like and dislike as they arise." (A still Forest pool: The insight Meditation of Ajahn Chah compiled and edited by Jack Kornfield and Paul Breiter, 1991).

If you need to stand up, you may do so with mindfulness and awareness by keeping your mind with your body as you move from sitting to standing. When you complete the standing posture, you may stand for two or three minutes, or more, by observing the body both standing and touching, standing and touching, standing and touching. The body is standing and the body is touching the floor. The mind knows "You are standing". Note the feeling of the body from the bottom of your feet to the top of your head, from the

top of your head down to the bottom of your feet, and feel your whole body is standing.

You also can observe standing meditation for a longer period of time by just moving your legs, one by one, a little bit and observe the feeling at the moment as you move.

Whenever you need to move from standing to walking, to turning left or right. Say to yourself "Intending to turn," then "turning, turning, turning." When you complete turning, keep standing for a moment, repeating three times. "Standing, Standing, Standing". Then say to yourself; "Intending to walk," and observe walking meditation for the required time.

Walking Meditation

In general practice, walking meditation is powerful and everyone can do it at any time, outdoors, at home, in the forest, or even on the sidewalk. It is an effective exercise. You may start walking slowly, naturally and mindfully by keeping your mind with your body, moving for one or two or 15 to 25 paces, depending upon the space available. Relax your neck and shoulders. Keep your mind on the moving of your feet as you step from right to left or from left to right. Walk naturally. Focus your eyes down without strain, at a comfortable angle about two or three yards in front of you. You may lightly clasp your hands in front or in the back, mindfully changing hand position when tired.

You may choose walking for fifteen to twenty five minutes

through. Just as the presence of a thief prevents negligence with our possessions, so the reminder of the hindrances should prevent negligence in our concentration.

Before you stop meditation, mentally spread loving-kindness to yourself, your family members, your friends and all living beings in all directions. If this procedure is now clear in your mind, you may start meditation by yourself.

Note

To meditate is to see things as they really are, and to see the nature of things. Things are impermanent, hard to maintain, out of control and always have the potentiality of stress and dissatisfaction.

To meditate is to let the mind be free from clinging to both happy and unhappy feeling, liking, and disliking. Let the mind be free from them, separate from them. Let the mind go back to the nature of mind; free mind, independent mind, balanced mind. This is the mind of the Enlightened Ones, The Buddha or Anu-Buddhas. We all have to cease suffering. Suffering and frustration arise from attachment and clinging; we must learn wholesome detachment and non-clinging so we may have the virtues of loving-kindness, compassion, equanimity and grow in wisdom.

Suffering arises from ignorance but ignorance can be eliminated by making the mind clear, calm and peaceful so wisdom can arise. When wisdom arises, ignorance disappears. When ignorance disappears, the mind no longer clings to criticism, loss, gain, praise, blame, etc. The Buddha is named "Lokavidhu," or the one who knows the truth of the world. When we know the truth of the world, the mind becomes free, light, bright, pure and enlightened.

CHANTING BEFORE MEDITATION PRACTICE

Offering the flowers, incenses, and candle light.

Imina Sakkarena Tang Buddhang Abhipujayama
Imina Sakkarena Tang Buddhang Abhipujayama
Imina Sakkarena Tang Buddhang Abhipujayama

May we offer fragrance of these flowers, incenses, and candle light to the Buddha, to the Dhamma, and to the Sangha.

SALUTATION TO THE TRIPLE GEM

ALL TOGETHER:
TO THE BUDDHA

ARAHAM SAMM©SAMBUDDHO BHAGAV©
BUDDHAM BHAGAVANTAM ABHIV©DEMI

The Exalted One, far from mental defilement, the Perfectly Self-Enlightened One, the Awakened One, I bow down before the Blessed One.

TO THE DHAMMA

SVAKKH©TO BHAGAVAT© DHAMMO
DHAMMAM NAMASS©MI.

The Dhamma, the Law of Nature, the Noble Doctrines, well-expounded by the Blessed One, I bow down before the Dhamma.

TO THE SANGHA

SUPATIPANNO BHAGAVATO SÃVAKASANGHO
SANGHAM NAMÃMI.

The Sangha, the Noble Disciples of the Blessed One, who have practiced well, I bow down before the Sangha.

HOMAGE TO THE BUDDHA THREE TIMES

LEADER:

HANTAMAYAM BUDDHASSA BHAGAVATO
PUBBABHÃ GANAMAKÃRAM KARO MASE.

Let us chant the preliminary passage revering the Buddha, the Blessed One.

NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMÃSAMBUDDHASSA.

Homage to the Blessed One,
far from mental defilement,
the Perfectly Self-Enlightened One,
the Awakened One.

NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMÃ SAMBUDDHASSA.

Homage to the Blessed One,
far from mental defilement,
the Perfectly Self-Enlightened One,
the Awakened One.

NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMÃ SAMBUDDHASSA.

Homage to the Blessed One,
far from mental defilement,

the Perfectly Self-Enlightened One,
the Awakened One.

VIRTUES OF THE TRIPLE GEM

Leader: YOSO-

All together: **TATHÃGATO ARAHAM SAMMÃ SAMBUDDHO, VIJJÃCARANASAMPANNO SUGATOLOKAVIDHU, ANUTTARO PURISADHAMMASSÃRADHI, SATTHÃ DEVAMANUSSÃNAM BUDDHO BHAGAVÃ, YO IMAM LOKAM SADEVAKAM SAMÃRAKAM SABHARMAKAM, SASSAMANABHARMANIM PAJAMSADEVAMANUSSAM SAYAM ABHINNÃ SACCHIKATVÃ PAVEDESI, YO DHAMMAM DESESI ÃDIKALYÃNAM MAJJEKALYÃNAM PARIYOSÃNA KALYÃNAM, SÃTTHANGSAPYANJANAM KEVALAPARIPUNNAM PARISUTTHAM BHARMACARIYAM PAKÃSESI, TAMAHAM BHAGAVANTAM ABHIPUJAYÃMI, TAMAHAM BHAGAVANTAM SIRASÃNAMÃMI.**

(One prostration)

Leader: YOSO

All together: SVAKKHÃTO BHAGAVATÃ DHAMMO, SANDITTHIGO AKÃLIGO EHIPASSIKO, OPANAYIGO PACCATTAM VEDITABBHO VINNUHITI, TAMAHAM DHAMMAM ABHIPUJAYÃMI, TAMAHAM DHAMMAM SIRASÃNAMÃMI.

(One prostration)

Leader: YOSO

All together: SUPATIPANNO BHAGAVATO SÃVAGASANGHO,

UJUPATIPANNO BHAGAVATO SÃVAKASANGHO,

NÃYAPATIPANNO BHAGAVATO SÃVAKASANGHO,

SÃMITIPATIPANNO BHAGAVATO SÃVAKASANGHO,

YADIDAM CATTÃRI PURISAYUGÃNI ATTHA PURISAPUGGALÃ, ESA BHAGAVATO SÃVAKASANGHO, ÃHUNEYYO PÃHUNEYYO DAKKHINEYYO ANJALIKALANIYO, ANUTTARAM PUNNAKKHETTAM LOKASSA.

TAMAHAM SANGHAM ABHIPUJAYÃMI, TAMAHAM SANGHAM SIRASÃNAMÃMI.
(One prostration)

THREE TIMES PROSTRATION

The Exalted One, far from mental defilement, the Perfectly Self-Enlightened One, the Awakened One, I bow down before the Blessed One. (one prostration)

The Dhamma, the Law of Nature, the Noble Doctrines, well-expounded by the Blessed One,

I bow down before the Dhamma. (one prostration)

The Sangha, the Noble Disciples of the Blessed One, who have practiced well,
I bow down before the Sangha. (one prostration)

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After the Meditation Practice

Spread Loving-kindness to all living beings as follow;

Aham avero homi. May I be free from enmity.
Aham abyãpaccho homi. May I be free from ill treatment
Aham anigho homi. May I be free from troubles.
Aham nitukkho homi. May I be free from suffering.
Aham sukhi attãnam pariharãmi.
May I protect my own happiness.
Aham sukhito homi. May I be happy.
Sabbe sattã averã hontu. May all living beings be free from enmity.
Sabbe sattã abyãpacchã hontu. May all living beings be free from ill treatment.
Sabbe sattã anigã hontu. May all living beings be free from troubles.
Sabbe sattã dukkgã pamucantu. May all living beings be free from suffering.
Sabbe sattã sukhi attãnam pariharantu.
May all living beings protect their own happiness.
Sabbe sattã sukhitã hontu. May all living beings be happy.

Then recollect the virtues of our parents and our ancestors, and those that have generated peace, and happiness to the world of human beings in the past and present and do three times prostration. Then chant the following passage;

DUKKHAPPATTÃ CA NIDDUKKHÃ BHAYAPPATTÃ CA NIBHAYÃ SOKAPPATTÃ CA NISSOKÃ HONTU SABBEPI PÃNINO ETÃVATÃ CA AMHEHI SAMPADAM

PUNYASAMPADAM SABBE DEVÃ ANUMODANTU SABBASAMPATTI SITTIYÃ DÃNAM DADANTU SADDHÃYA SILAM RAKKHANTU SABBADÃ BHÃVANÃ BILATÃ HONTU GACCHANTU DEVATÃ GATÃ.

May all living beings: Who are in suffering be free from suffering,
Who are in fear be free from fear,
Who are in sorrow be free from sorrow,
For the sake of all attainment and success
May all heaven rejoice in the extent to which we have gathered a consummation of merit.
May they offer offering with conviction,
May they always maintain the virtues,
May they delight in meditation, may they go to a heavenly destination.

SABBE BUDDHÃ BHALAPPATÃ PACCEKÃ NANCA YANG BALANG ARAHANTÃ NANCA TEJENA RAKKHANG BANDHÃMI SABBASO.

From the strength attained by the Buddhas,
The strength of the individual Buddhas,
By the power of the arahants,
I abind this protection in all directions.

Aware of moving from the seat, if you need to move your cushion do it mindfully.

Note: Aham - Pronounce = Ahang; Attãnam - pronounce = Attãnang

Why are we born?

We are not born merely to pass each day searching for happiness. We are not born to merely seek pleasure and enjoyment, nor are we born for the taste of good food, for lust, or for honor.

We are not born to be slaves to this life. Neither are we born for education, occupation, home or family. We are not born only to grow old, get sick, and die.

If we were born for these things, it would mean that we are born merely to repeat the cycle of birth, sickness, old age and die, to be food for worms. Money and wealth can not save us from this aimless wandering.

But we are born to release ourselves from the chains which bind us. We are born to release ourselves from the bondage of desire.

We are born effect spiritual improvement, to purify our minds as much as we can, and to pass through the darkness of life's delusion.

We are born to stop birth, end suffering, and reach Nibbana, the Enlightenment, free mind, absolute freedom, the perfect peace.

The Importance of Meditation for the Western World

Santidhammo Bhikkhu

Meditation has the power to solve all the problems of the world. Meditation has the power to bring personal happiness to the individual, and to achieve World Peace. The human race is facing tremendous challenges unprecedented in the history of the world. People live in terribly distressful, brutalizing and dehumanizing conditions. Despite "progress" in material wellbeing in modern times, suffering seems to increase.

This short essay does not give a step-by-step teaching on meditation practice, but describes the benefits that practice, both for the individual and the society.

What are we facing?

It is a time of cataclysms: Environmental devastation and global warming; Extinction of species; Population explosion; Clash

of civilizations with wars and genocides; Globalization of militant-materialism and nihilistic hedonism; Out-of-control Technology; Atomic weapons; Fundamentalisms; Human trafficking and slavery. The list could go on.

Young people face the future with anxiety or dread. Many just go numb in denial, or self-medicate with drugs or alcohol, or other intoxications such as shopping.

We now live in the "Post-Modern" age, they say, the "New World Order." It is the end of the world as we know it. Something new is coming. But what kind of world will the future bring? What will be the character of the "New World Order?" Will it be the expansion and intensification of the present world order of greed, anger and hatred, and ignorance? Or will it be a time of peace, security, wellbeing and sustainability? The choice is in our hands. If we keep going on the path we're on, we're going to end up where we're headed. If we want to end up in a different place, then we have to go a different direction.

In meditation, we can have an inward transformation, an awakening, that will help us see new directions, an alternative future to the one we're now facing. Meditators can help show the world a way to meet the challenges bearing down upon us with increasing urgency.

When the Buddha attained awakening under the Bodhi tree, he said he had a shattering realization that greed, hatred, and ignorance is the cause of all the suffering in the world, both personal and collective.

The Buddha said all the suffering of the world arises out of ignorance - not understanding the nature of reality - not seeing clearly. In our ignorance, we cultivate passions of greed and hatred. When greed and hatred are expressed in the organized social realm, greed is manifest as materialist-consumer culture. Hatred becomes manifest as militarism and war. The more desire we have, the faster we will destroy the earth.

Today the world is full of greed, hatred, and ignorance. A "consumer culture" is based on greed, the ever increasing consumption of products. The modern civilizations defines us as "consumers." I looked the word "to consume" up on the dictionary,

and discovered that it means "to utterly destroy" and "to completely annihilate." Are we destroyers? Is our greed - our consumption - destroying the earth? Is our greed and consumption leading us into angry and violent conflicts with other cultures and nations?

Globalization means the rapid and aggressive expansion and intensification of this militaristic consumer culture to every region of the globe. This process has been underway for a long time – the expansion of the "free market" of materialistic consumer culture.

Mahatma Gandhi, almost seventy years ago, pointed out the disaster that would ensue when heartless "modern civilization" was fully realized. "This civilization takes note of neither morality or religion…I have come to the conclusion that immorality is often taught in the name of morality. Civilization seeks to increase bodily comforts and it fails miserably even in doing this. This civilization is irreligion, and it has taken such a hold on the people of [the West] that those who are in it appear to be half mad. They keep up their energy by intoxication. They can hardly be happy in solitude. "There is no end to the victims destroyed in the fire of civilization. Its deadly effect is that people come under its scorching flames believing it to be all good. They become utterly irreligious and, in reality, derive little advantage from [civilization]…When its full effect is realized, we shall see that religious superstition is harmless compared to that of modern civilization…."

We are living in the last days of modern materialism. But what will come next?

I heard a physicist on National Public Radio discussing Werner Heisenberg and quantum theory, and he said the real meaning of quantum theory is that "the age of materialism is over." The old scientific understanding of the world as a machine, or dead matter of natural resources available for our exploitation and consumption is no longer workable. The earth, the universe, is alive and mysterious, and mind pervades the universe. There are many dimensions beyond what we can perceive with the senses.

The second lesson of quantum theory, he said, is that the human person is part of the universe; the human person is not a

detached observer of the material universe. Consciousness and mind are interactive with the material phenomenal universe.

As the Buddha discovered a long time ago, "everything arises from an ocean of mind. All that we are arises from the mind. With the mind we create the world. If we think and act with unskillful mind – full of greed, hatred and ignorance – then suffering will arise in the world. If we thin and act with skillful mind – generosity, compassion and understanding – then happiness will arise in the world."

What kind of world will the future bring? It is up to us to create that world, and meditators can show the way.

What is meditation?

Meditation is mind-culture, the development of the mind. Meditation is the "technology of the mind" – the science of the mind; how to transform the mind from ignorance to wisdom, from suffering to happiness. The Buddhist teaching is about the understanding the nature of the mind and reality. Enlightenment is attainment of wisdom and compassion. Buddhism is the teaching about Awakening of Enlightenment. The aim of Buddhist practice is liberation, happiness, and peace.

At the present time, many Americans, especially young people, have developed a keen interest in the meditation teachings and practices of Buddhism. I am often asked to speak about Buddhism to comparative religion classes at Seattle University or the University of Washington, and the students always have a lot of questions about meditation.

The consumer culture and materialism of the west is not enough to make people happy, as evidenced by the epidemics of drug abuse, mental illness, random violence, gang wars, obsessive-compulsive behaviors, and suicide. Indeed, the countries with the highest standard of living also have the highest suicide rates.
People in the west have become disillusioned with our materialistic consumer lifestyles. Material wellbeing is not enough to bring us happiness. Indeed, our high-tech materialistic-consumer culture has brought us atomic bombs, genocides, terrorism, and environmental

For the past two millennium, Buddhist Pandits and scholars have been of great eastern intellectuals were "looking inward" to understand the nature of the inner-world of the mind, and they have developed a great understanding of the mind-culture. We western people can learn a lot from their experience and teaching.

In deep meditation practice (jhana or zen) we concentrate the mind, and "stop" the mind in stillness, and see deeply into the nature of reality. We see that everything is "empty of self" – as quantum theory shows, that the person is interactive with the flow of conditions of the universe. We see that everything is "impermanent," transient, changing faster than lightening. We see that all things are incomplete and that we must not crave, and "consume" them. This "seeing" is like "waking from a dream," the Buddha said.

We are no longer hypnotized and intoxicated by the universe as it appears to the senses. We are liberated from desire and craving, and great joy and compassion fills the heart.

Meditation practice

Meditation practice is the technology of how to purify the mind from *kilesa* (defilements) that cloud, intoxicate, and defile the mind – mind states such as greed and craving, anger and aversion, restlessness and anxiety, boredom and lethargy, doubts, conceit, opinions, shamelessness.

The natural state of the mind is radiant and joyful. The Buddha said, "The true nature of the mind is clear awareness, but it is defiled by visiting defilements." When the defilements are removed and cleared from the mind, the radiant, clear, joyful nature of the mind shines forth.

In meditation practice, we learn to hold the mind still and allow the defilements to dissolve and settle, like dirt settling in disturbed water. When the defilements are removed from the water, the clear and radiant nature of the water becomes apparent. This process is called *jhana* (concentrated mind or zen) in Buddhism.

The mind becomes progressively more and more unified, clear, and purified as the negative mind states are neutralized and removed from the mind. This process of awakening is very liberating to the mind and heart. The meditator feels great joy as he recognizes the mind being liberated from the harassing and painful mind-states of anger, craving, restlessness, and so on.

The new level of clarity and wisdom also carries over into daily life. The mind is more alert and clam and creative, and the person responds to life with more presence and attention and insightful creativity.

Meditation and Personal Happiness

Meditation has the power to bring us personal happiness. Happiness comes from internal conditions, from within, and not from external conditions outside ourselves. A person can be rich, famous and powerful, and still be very unhappy because happiness does not come from these sources.

Maha Ghosananda, a Cambodian monk, once said, “If we cannot be happy even during difficulties, what good is spiritual practice?” In order to be happy in life, we must find a basis of deep internal happiness that will endure even during times of great difficulty and pain, because, indeed, life will bring us difficulties and pain.

What is happiness? What is the source of happiness? Happiness is a mind which is full of living-kindness, compassion, joy and peace. Happiness is in the mind.

The heart of spiritual practice is the "cherish living beings" – to love and care for and protect and cultivate living beings – human beings and other living things, such as animals, birds, forests and the entire web of life.

Happiness is a heart filled with love and compassion. There is no other happiness. When the heart and mind is filled with love and compassion, there is no place left for pain and unhappy, miserable mind states such as fear and anxiety, hatred and anger, frustration and resentment, envy and jealousy and so on.

Love and hate are like fire and water. Happiness and unhappiness are like fire and water. They cannot exist in the same place at the same time. The joyful cool waters of love and compassion will extinguish the painful fires of anger and other painful mind states.

Meditation practice gives us the tools for developing enlightened mind states of love and compassion and understanding.

We attain happiness and fulfillment because, when we respond to the world with love and compassion, because we are fulfilling the meaning of life. "You exist for the benefit of every living thing," the Dalai Lama said.

When we benefit others, we experience happiness. This is a surprising discovery in a consumer culture, when we have been conditioned to believe that happiness comes from attaining the objects of desire. We have been conditioned to believe that the purposed of life is to "make lots of money," to be successful, famous, and powerful. We have been conditioned to think that happiness comes from enjoying ourselves with sex, pop music, food, vacations and other luxuries and status symbols.

But this is a mistake. This is not the purpose of life, and therefore pursuing these ends will not bring happiness.

The purpose of life is to benefit living beings, to cherish living beings, to nurture and care for and protect life. The more we invest our time, energy, resources into caring for people and other living things, the more meaningful and fulfilling our lives become. We become progressively more and more satisfied, content, and happy.

The external, material conditions of our lives are largely irrelevant to the attainment of happiness.

When it comes time to die, your entire life will pass before you. In a single flash, you will see everything you have ever done or thought. At that time, you will feel remorse for all the time, energy, money and resources that you have spent on your "self" because you will see that the self is now passing away. Your precious life will seem to have been wasted. But every thing you have done for others will be a source of great happiness and joy for you, because you will see that your life was not wasted. Your life was a source of great joy and benefit for living beings, and the benefit will go on forever.

Meditation can help us see what is really important in life, today, and how to respond to life with understanding, day by day.

Meditation and Consumer Culture

We live in a "consumer culture" as I described above. Consumer culture is the realization and actualization of out-of-control greed. All of our lives, we have been conditioned – through the media, entertainment industry, commercials and advertising, the educational system – that we can buy happiness; that if we attain the object of desire, we will be satisfied and happy and content.

But according to Buddhist psychology, the more we feed desire, the stronger it grows and the deeper desire and craving sinks its roots into the heart and mind. Therefore, the more we attain the objects of desire, the more we indulge and gratify the self, the more we actually increase our capacity for suffering. Even a mountain of gold cannot satisfy desire.

But the opposite is also true. The more we neutralize and uproot desire and craving through restraint, self-discipline, and simple living, the more we actually increase our capacity for enjoyment, pleasure, satisfaction, contentment, and happiness.

Consumer culture leads us astray in the wrong direction, because it leads us "out of our minds" into the world of senses and material objects. We become intoxicated, drunken, with hallucinatory dreams of pleasure. Consumer culture conditions us to believe that we can "be somebody" by buying and consuming certain products. Our identity and ego, our "self" can be purchased by consuming Prada sunglasses and shoes, Jaguar or BMW and Mercedes cars, Nike, Louis Viton, Chanel, Calvin Klein, on and on. If we don't consume these products, we are "nobody."

Consumer culture makes us more and more selfish, self-indulgent, self-centered, self-absorbed. And over time, the self becomes imprisoned in a masquerade, a hallucinatory hall of mirrors and images. The social fabric is destroyed, with all of these selfish egos walking around bumping into each others insatiable appetites. People become alienated from one another

and lose the sense of connection and belonging to others in the family and community and the world.

The young people suffering most in this loveless consumer culture, and they often rebel against the heartlessness of the culture in self-destructive or violent ways.

Meditation practice can help the individual cut through the illusions and deceptive messages and heartless conditioning of the culture, and find a deeper realization and meaning.

In the Kalama Sutta, the Buddha taught young people not to believe in anything with blind faith; not to accept the messages and conditioning of the culture around us, even if it seems that everyone else in the world believes a certain doctrine – such as consumerism - to be true. Don't believe what the mass media presents as truth. Don't believe the scholars and pundits and talking-heads and television preachers. But learn how to quiet the mind and look into your own heart, the Buddha said, and your own heart will tell you what is true and good. Your own heart will tell you to "walk this way."

You will know "in your guts" what leads to happiness and benefit, and what does not.

Meditation practice can help us awaken from the ignorant nightmarish illusions of consumer culture, to a more authentic, awakened realization of the true nature of reality.

Meditation and World Peace

The Buddha said that all the suffering in the world arises out of greed, hatred, and ignorance. War is the manifestation of hatred. War is fear, anger and hatred, fully developed. To end war and achieve world peace, we must remove the cause of war – fear, resentment, anger, and hatred in the mind. Meditation practice can help with this.

War is the realization and manifestation of anger and hatred - the unwholesome mind states that the Buddha warned us about.

Nuclear weapons, the arms race, and wars don't just happen accidentally, or inevitably by some predestined forces of nature. Nuclear bombs and other weapons, arose out of the meditations of men's hearts as they sat in rooms watering the seeds of fear and hatred, until the visions of weapons and war appeared in their minds, and then eventually became fully realized.

Likewise, world peace will arise out of the visions of men and women, sitting in quiet rooms, watering the seeds of understanding, compassion and courage, until fear, anger and hatred are dispelled and neutralized. We will see that we cannot kill, bomb and torture our way to peace.

The Buddha said, "In this world, hatred has never been overcome by hatred. Only love can hatred over come. This is the law of the universe, ancient an inexhaustible."

The Buddha taught many methods of relieving the hatred and fear within the mind. The most important of these meditations is *Metta* (loving-kindness) meditation. In Metta meditation, we learn how to loosen the knots of fear, anger, and resentments, until they eventually dissolve. Then we can see that our enemy or opponent is only a human being, exactly the same as us–individuals who only want to be happy and who don't want to suffer.

With the eyes of loving-kindness and compassion, we see the humanity of the so-called enemy. We see their darling little children, their beloved grandmothers and grandfathers, their handsome young sons and graceful daughters. We see them working in their fields and gardens and orchards. We hear them making music and arts and worshiping in their temples. And when we see that they are human beings just like us, we can no longer wish harm against them.

In meditation we find the inner composure and awareness to listen deeply to our enemies, and hear their fears, and grievances. With the understanding gained from insight, we can begin to understand the conditions that have produced the conflict, and see ways to calm the fear, neutralize the angers and resentments, and

address the grievances, and thereby change the conditions that have produced the aggression and war. This is wisdom and compassion in action.

Meditation practice also produces deep insight into the Buddhist philosophy of Conditioned Origination, the conditions that produce phenomenon. We see that everything that happens in the world, is produced by conditions and causes. We learn to pay more attention to the conditions and causes than the simple effects, because if we want to change something, we must change the conditions that produce it. This is what Buddhists mean by the words "wisdom" and "understanding."

If we apply Conditioned Origination to the problems of war, we see that we can look deeply and understand the conditions that produced conflict and war, we can change those conditions and war will not appear. We remove or transform the conditions that produced fear, anger, and hatred in the minds of our enemies. If there is no anger, fear and hatred in their minds, they will have no desire to go to war with us. In fact, they will no longer be our enemies; they will be our friends.

This is the meaning of non-violence that Ghandhi was talking about.

In meditation practice we also gain the insight of "inter-being" that everything is connected. Everything is inter-related. Everything is dependent on everything else. Therefore, other people–even our supposed enemies–are not really separate from us, but are somehow deeply connected to us in a very deep and real way.

It is very important for people in the United States to learn about meditation–how to calm the mind and develop evolved consciousness–Enlightenment. America is the only remaining "Super power" and this country has a huge impact on the entire world. We have a lot of power–economic power, technological power, military power. But as a materialist-consumer culture, we do not have much "wisdom." We do not know how to use this super-power with wisdom, understanding and compassion–to

generate happiness and peace in the world, and relieve the suffering of the world.

If we use this super-power motivated by consumer greed and militaristic aggression, we will only create suffering in the world, for our own citizens and for others. If we use this super-power with understanding altruism and compassion, we can create happiness and world peace. Meditation practice can help American policy makers reduce desire and calm the mind. And the world will be a happier and more peaceful place as a result.

Meditation and the Environment

Perhaps the greatest of all problems now facing the human race is the crisis of the environment, global warming, and climate change.

The Buddha was deeply concerned with nature. "Know the grasses and the trees," the Buddha said. "Know the worms and moths and different sort of ants. Know also the four footed animals small and great. Know the fish which range in the water… the birds that are born along on wing and move through the air."

A cataclysmic crisis is facing the human race, unprecedented in the history of the world, almost beyond anything that can be imagined, if the warning from the worlds leading scientists are true. The younger generation will require great courage and confidence, and profound understanding, compassion and joy to respond to the looming and growing challenge that they are inheriting.

The human race is definitely going to have to go in new directions. Civilized, conventional living has so brutalized the human person that we lost touch with our true nature. In the process of socialization, we do violence to our inner selves in order to adapt to the consumer lifestyle, and survive in the materialist, aggressive, competitive milieu of collective living.

Consumer culture has devastated the natural world, the wilderness, the web-of-life. The human person is debased by

consumer culture, and forgets his true nature. In meditation we return to the wilderness to resist to reconnect with the natural world, and refuse the debasement of this artificially constructed reality of conventional living. In our breathing we discover and awaken to our liberating connection to nature. We break free.

In our own times, many people are trying to break free: anarchists, poets, artists, drag queens, homeless vagrants and bums, environmentalist tree-sitters. They are "outsiders" who are searching for a new way to live in the world. Because consumer culture has condemned the wilderness and nature, and has elevated artifice, money, and materialism to the level of a religion. Consumer culture is morally debased .We're on the wrong path. Consumer culture is obsolete. We need to go in a different direction because this one doesn't work, in fact, it appears to be lethal and terminal.

This materialist/consumer culture–and increasingly the new global economy–is based on the need of a growing economy, endlessly expanding markets, maximum profit. It is damn near lethal. It has uprooted everything in its path: traditional cultures, the environment, religion. Everything must surrender before this insatiable enterprise of moneymaking. But "progress" is destruction. "Development" is destruction.

Meditation is an invitation to an alternative reality in which the inner truth of experience which arises from nature, is more important and satisfying than the outward artificially constructed reality of social convention.

In meditation we have gone out there into "the no-man's land" into the "wilderness." And we may cultivate some insights to offer to the folks in our civilization who are searching for new directions, and new ways to live in harmony and balance with the web of life.

The Buddha said, "In the discipline of living alone it is the silence of solitude that is wisdom. When the solitude becomes a source of pleasure, then it shines in every direction. This is the

sound of meditation of wisdom, of those who let the sense pleasures of materialism go."

"Listen to the sound of the water. Listen to the water running through the chasms and rocks. It is the minor streams that make the loud noise; the great waters flow silently. The hollow resounds and the full is still. We can explain many things with understanding and precision. We can describe the way things are."

In meditation practice, the Buddha taught the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satipatthana Sutta*) in which he said the four fields of meditation are body, feeling, mind, and dhamma. He explained that all meditation begins with the body, which he defined as earth-element, water-element, wind-element, and fire-element–solid, liquid, vapor, and heat.

In mediation practice, we awaken to the reality that the inner-earth and the earth element are not different. The inner liquidity of the body is not different drom the water-element. And also the wind and fire elements. When these elements of fire, water, earth, wind, and mind come together, that is life. Nature is inside of us. We are rooted in nature and are not separate or independent or "above" nature. We are part of the web of life, the community of living beings.

Our wrong view, our ignorance, has harmed nature and is presently resulting in environmental crisis. Meditation can give us a correct understanding, an inward awakening that we are rooted in nature, and the wisdom and joy and compassion that comes with that awakening. Then we will know how to live lives in harmony and balance with the natural world, with forests and all the community of living beings of animals, fish, birds, insects.

Out of the evolved consciousness will arise new technologies of sustainable living. And perhaps we will discover that it is not yet too late to repair some of the damage unenlightened consumer culture has done to the earth.

Note: Good intention, proper concentration, mindfulness, patience, and proper effort are the keys to fulfill in our meditation practice. If these virtues were applied together in harmony the Buddha Dhamma

Conclusion

People who practice meditation preserve and cultivate a holisitic world view that values balance, harmony, interbeing, and integration with the natural world. They see through the illusory world of conventional living in the artificially constructed environment of commerce and consumption and productivity, and discover a more authentic and natural way of living, in harmony with nature.

Often they spend time "meditating in the forest – at the roots of trees" or cliffs and caves, in the wilderness, from the city to solitude in the forest, where they listen to the inner voice of the heart alone.

People who practice meditation develop a more evolved consciousness, and enlightened awareness in which we can see through the illusions of materialistic-capitalist-culture that is rooted in selfishness, greed, competition and violence, and see an alternative way of being in the world.

We see how narrow and circumscribed our so-called civilized life is, how much we pay for the security and luxury. They see that "this is not the way things should be."

In meditation, perhaps, we may cultivate some insights, prophetic visions, regarding this materialist consumer culture, and these insights might have something to offer to the folks in our civilization who are searching for a more satisfying mode of human existence.

We invite our fellow travelers to an alternative reality in which the inner truth of experience which arises from nature, is more important than the outward artificially constructed reality of

social convention. We remind people that this competitive, authoritarian, exploitative, dominance-submission world is obsolete. The human race needs to go in a different direction because this one doesn't work. We can help the world find new possibilities and new directions.

In meditation, we cultivate the mind and heart, and mine the rich depths of the psyche, to access the rich treasures of the heart, and hopefully bring forth some valuable treasures of understanding and compassion to benefit the world.

The true happiness of life comes from the development of inwardness, much more than from wealth and fame and power. The life of tranquility and material simplicity is more rewarding and fulfilling than the life blindly obsessed with impoverished materialist values.

Note: *The basic notion of a toxin as an impure element causing illness or imbalance is well summarized in the verse 239 in Dhammapada Malavagga as follow;*

Gradually, little by little, moment by moment,
The wise person should flush toxins from himself,
As a metal smith cleanses dross from silver.

Drop loving kindness and compassion in your heart
every moment in your life.

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