

# The Essential Practice

## Part I

Dhamma Discourses of

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# What Really Matters

*Sayadaw:* You have taken up moral conduct (*sīla*). Now that you have undertaken to perfect yourselves in the perfection of morality (*sīla-pāramī*), fulfil it to the utmost. Only if you fulfil *sīla* to the utmost will all your aspirations be met. You will be happy now and in the future.

Only the teachings of the Buddha can give you real happiness—in the present and in the remainder of *saṃsāra*.<sup>1</sup> The teachings of the Buddha are enshrined in the Three Collections, or the canonical Tipiṭaka.<sup>2</sup> The Tipiṭaka is very extensive. If we take the essence out of the Tipiṭaka we shall find the thirty-seven Factors of Awakening (*bodhipakkhiyādhammā*)?<sup>3</sup> The essence of the thirty-seven Factors of Awakening is the eight constituents of the Noble Eightfold Path (*maggāṅgas*). The essence of the Noble Eightfold Path is the threefold training (*sikkhā*): higher morality, higher mindfulness, and higher wisdom (*adhisīla, adhicitta, adhipaññā*). The essence of the threefold training is the unique Universal Law (*eko dhammo*).<sup>4</sup>

If your body and mind are under control, as they are now, there can be no roughness of physical or verbal action. This is *adhisīla* or perfect morality.

If *adhisīla* becomes strong, the mind will become peaceful and tranquil and lose its harshness. This is called *adhicitta*.<sup>5</sup>

If *adhicitta* (*samādhi*) becomes strong and the mind stays one-pointed for a long period, then you will realise that in a split second matter arises and dissolves billions and billions of times. If mind (*nāma*) knows matter (*rūpa*), it knows that matter becomes and disintegrates billions and billions of times in the wink of an eye.<sup>6</sup> This knowledge of arising and disintegration is called *adhipaññā*.

Whenever we breathe in or out, the in-coming and the out-going air touches somewhere in or near the nostrils. The sensitive matter (*kāya-pasāda*) registers the touch of air.<sup>7</sup> In this process, the entities touching are matter, and the entity knowing the touch is mind. So do not go around asking others about mind and matter, observe your breathing and you will find out about them for yourselves.

When the air comes in, it will touch. When the air goes out, it will touch. If you know this touch continuously, then wanting (*lobha*), dislike (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*) do not have the opportunity to arise, and the fires of greed, anger, and delusion will subside.

You cannot know the touch of air before it actually occurs. After it has gone, you cannot know it any more. Only while the air moves in or out can you feel the sensation of touch. This we call the present moment.

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<sup>1</sup> The cycle of birth and death that is without discernible beginning, but which ends with the attainment of Nibbāna.

<sup>2</sup> The Three Collections are the Vinaya-piṭaka or monastic discipline; the Sutta-piṭaka or book of discourses; and the Abhidhamma-piṭaka or philosophical treatises.

<sup>3</sup> *Bodhipakkhiya dhamma*. These are thirty-seven aspects of practice taught by the Buddha. They include the four foundations of mindfulness, the four great efforts, the four bases of accomplishment, the five spiritual faculties, the five powers, the seven factors of awakening, and the eight constituents of the Noble Eightfold Path.

<sup>4</sup> Discourses about the Dhamma or the “Universal Law” as explained by the Buddha are given by monks to lay disciples on request. Monks normally give a Dhamma lecture after a meal offered to them, but there are also Dhamma lectures organized for big gatherings and given by famous monks.

<sup>5</sup> *Citta* in Pāli means mind and mental functions. *Adhicitta* here means “concentrated mind,” i.e., *samādhi*.

<sup>6</sup> Matter, according to Buddhism, consists of subatomic particles (*kalāpas*) arising and disintegrating billions and billions of times in the wink of an eye.

<sup>7</sup> *Kāya-pasāda* is the sensitive matter contained in the five physical sense organs that registers light (sight), sound waves, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations.

While we feel the touch of air, we know that there are only mind and matter. We know for ourselves that there is no “I,” no other person, no man and woman, and we realise for ourselves that what the Buddha said is indeed true. We needn’t ask others. While we know in-breath and out-breath, there is no I or *attā*.<sup>8</sup>

When we know this, our view is pure; it is right view. We know in that moment that there is nothing but *nāma* and *rūpa*, mind and matter. We also know that mind and matter are two different entities. If we thus know how to distinguish between *nāma* and *rūpa*, we have attained the ability to distinguish between mind and matter (*nāma-rūpa-pariccheda-ñāṇa*).

If we know the touch of air as and when it occurs, our mind is pure and we get the benefits thereof. Do not think that the benefits you get thus, even in a split second, are few. Do not think that those who meditate do not get any advantages from their practice. Now that you are born in a happy plane and encounter the teachings of a Buddha, you can obtain great benefits. Do not worry about eating and drinking, but make all the effort you can.

*Sayadaw:* Is this present time not auspicious?

*Disciple:* Yes sir, it is.

*Sayadaw:* Yes, indeed! Can’t those good people attain their aspiration to Nibbāna who, with an open mind, receive and practise the teachings of the Buddha, just like the noble people of the past who received the instructions from the Buddha himself?

*Disciple:* Yes sir, they can.

*Sayadaw:* So, how long does the Buddha’s Sāsana (teaching) last?<sup>9</sup>

*Disciple:* For five thousand years, sir.

*Sayadaw:* And now tell me, how many of these five thousand years have passed?

*Disciple:* Sir, about half this time span has gone.

*Sayadaw:* So, how much remains still?

*Disciple:* About two thousand five hundred years, sir.

*Sayadaw:* What is the life span of a human being now?<sup>10</sup>

*Disciple:* About one hundred years, sir.

*Sayadaw:* How old are you?

*Disciple:* I am thirty-seven years old, sir.

*Sayadaw:* So, how much longer do you have to live?

*Disciple:* Sixty-three years, sir.

*Sayadaw:* But can you be sure that you will live that long?

*Disciple:* That I don’t know, sir.

*Sayadaw:* You don’t know yourself how long you are going to live?

*Disciple:* No, sir, it isn’t possible to know this for sure.

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<sup>8</sup> *Attā*, Pāli for “I,” “soul,” “personality,” or any other type of permanent personal entity. Buddhism holds that such an entity does not exist and that the erroneous belief in a self is due to wishful thinking and wrong view of reality. See *Samyutta Nikāya*, III 78, 196.

<sup>9</sup> There is a belief in Buddhist countries that the Buddha’s Teaching (*sāsana*) lasts five thousand years on the human plane and then is lost.

<sup>10</sup> The life span of human beings is believed to change according to the level of morality observed on the human plane. It ranges from an incalculable (*asaṅkheyya*) down to ten years. See: *Dīgha Nikāya*, III 81ff., and Ledi Sayādaw, *Manuals of Buddhism*, pp. 112f., 116f.

*Sayadaw:* But even as we are born we can be sure to have to suffer old age, disease, and death.

*Disciple:* Yes, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Can we request old age, pain, and death to desist for some time, to go away for some time?

*Disciple:* No, sir.

*Sayadaw:* No, they never rest. Can we ask them to stop their work?

*Disciple:* No, sir, we cannot.

*Sayadaw:* In that case we can be certain that we have to die?

*Disciple:* Yes, sir, it is certain that we all have to die.

*Sayadaw:* It is certain that all have to die. What about living?

*Disciple:* We can't be sure how long we have left to live, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Someone whose life span is thirty years dies when the thirty years are up. If your life span is forty or fifty years, you will die when you are forty or fifty years old. Once someone is dead, can we get him back?

*Disciple:* No, sir, we can't.

*Sayadaw:* However many years of your life have passed, they have passed. What is it that you have not accomplished yet?

*Disciple:* The happiness of the Paths and Fruition States, Nibbāna.

*Sayadaw:* Yes, inasmuch as you haven't attained the Paths and Fruition States yet, you have been defeated. Have you used the years that have passed well or have you wasted your time?

*Disciple:* I have wasted my time, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Then do not waste the time that you have got left. This time is there for you to strive steadfastly with energy. You can be sure that you will die, but you can't be sure how much longer you have got to live. Some live very long. Venerable Mahā-Kassapa and Venerable Mahā-Kaccāyana lived to over one hundred years of age. Some live for eighty years. To be able to live that long we have to be full of respect for those who deserve respect, and we have to be very humble. Do you pay respects to your father and mother?

*Disciple:* We do, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Do you pay respects to people who are older than you or of a higher standing than you?

*Disciple:* We do pay respects to people who are older than us or are holding a higher position than we do. Even if someone is just one day older or even just half a day older, we pay respects, sir.

*Sayadaw:* When do you pay respects to them?

*Disciple:* At night, before we go to bed, we pay respects to the Buddha, and at that time we also pay respects to our seniors.

*Sayadaw:* What about other times?

*Disciple:* At other times we do not pay respects, sir.

*Sayadaw:* You say that you pay respects to your seniors after you have paid respects to the Buddha. But do you show respect to those who live with you and to those who are of the same age? If I were to put parcels of money worth \$1000 each along the road for anyone to take, would you fellows take one?

*Disciple:* Of course we would, sir.

*Sayadaw:* And if you found a second one, would you take that too?

*Disciple:* Of course we would, sir.

*Sayadaw:* And if you found a third bundle of bank notes, would you take that as well?

*Disciple:* We would take it, of course, sir.

*Sayadaw:* After having got one, wouldn't you want someone else to have one?

*Disciple:* We wouldn't think that way, sir.

*Sayadaw:* If you happened to be with a friend, would you let him find one bundle of notes thinking, "I shall pretend not to see that one. After all, I have one already"? Would you let him have one or would you grab them all and run for it?

*Disciple:* I would grab all I could get and run for it, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Yes, yes, you fellows are not very pleasant. When it comes to money, you are unable to give to anyone. But then you say that you are respectful and humble just because you pay respects to the Buddha in the evenings. If you cherish thoughts such as, "Why is he better off than I am? Is his understanding greater than mine?," then your mind is still full of pride. If you pay respects to your parents and teachers, to those older, wiser, or of higher standing, without pride, then you will live to more than one hundred years. If you show respect to such people, will you get only \$1000? Will you get only money?

*Disciple:* It will be more than just money.

*Sayadaw:* Yes, indeed! And though you know what really matters, you wouldn't even give \$1000 to someone else, but would rather run and get it for yourselves. When the Buddha, out of compassion, taught the Dhamma, did everybody understand it?

*Disciple:* No, sir, not everyone understood it.

*Sayadaw:* Why is this so?

*Disciple:* Some didn't listen to the Buddha, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Only if you take the teachings of the Buddha for yourselves can you attain *sammā-sambodhi* (Buddhahood), *pacceka-bodhi* (Pacceka-Buddhahood), *aggā-sāvaka-bodhi* (chief-discipleship), *mahā-sāvaka-bodhi* (leading-discipleship), *pakati-sāvaka-bodhi* (Arahatship). If you want to attain one of these forms of awakening, you can. Through the teachings of the Buddha you can attain happiness now, a happiness that will stay with you also in the future.

How long does it take for a paddy seed to sprout?

*Disciple:* Only overnight, sir.

*Sayadaw:* It takes only a day for it to sprout. Now, if you keep the seed, a good quality seed of course, after sprouting and do not plant it, will it grow?

*Disciple:* No, sir, it won't.

*Sayadaw:* Even though you have a good quality seed, if you do not plant it, it will not grow. It is just the same with the teachings of the Buddha; only if you accept them will you understand them. If you learn how to live with the awareness of mind and matter arising, what do you achieve?

*Disciple:* This awareness is called *vijjā* sir.

*Sayadaw:* If one lives without the teachings of the Buddha, what do you call that?

*Disciple:* That is *avijjā*, sir, ignorance.

*Sayadaw:* If you live all your life with *vijjā*, understanding of the Buddha-Dhamma, then where will you go after death?

*Disciple:* To some good existence, sir.

*Sayadaw:* What will happen after a life full of ignorance?

*Disciple:* One will go to the lower realms, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Now, say an old man about seventy years old is paying respects to the Buddha. While doing so, he cannot keep his mind focused on the Dhamma, but he allows it to wander here and there. If this old man dies at that moment, where will he be reborn?

*Disciple:* He will go to the lower worlds, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Really? Think carefully before you answer. He is paying respects to the Buddha, and he is meditating. So, where will he go if he dies at that moment?

*Disciple:* He will go to the lower worlds, sir.

*Sayadaw:* But why?

*Disciple:* Because his mind is wandering all over, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Yes. What are the qualities arising in the mind of a person living in ignorance?

*Disciple:* They are greed (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*).<sup>11</sup>

*Sayadaw:* What is *lobha*?

*Disciple:* *Lobha* is to want something, sir.

*Sayadaw:* *Lobha* includes any liking, being attracted by something, wanting. One who dies with any liking or wanting in his mind is said to be reborn as a ghost.

But what is *dosa*?

*Disciple:* *Dosa* is enmity, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Yes, *dosa* is the cause for your fighting. *Dosa* arises because you do not get what you want and what you get you don't want. Dislike is *dosa*. If you die with dislike in your mind, you are reborn in hell. *Moha* is ignorance about benefits derived from being charitable, being moral and practising meditation. If you die with delusion in your mind, you will be reborn as an animal. Nobody, no god, no deva or brahmā has created body and mind. They are subject to the law of nature, to arising and dissolution, just as the Buddha taught. If a person dies concentrating on the awareness of mind and matter and knowing about arising and dissolution of these, then, according to the teaching of the Buddha, he will be reborn as a man, deva, or brahmā. If someone is going where he wants to go, does he need to ask others for the way?

*Disciple:* No, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Does one have to ask others, "Do I live with knowledge or in ignorance"?

*Disciple:* No, sir.

*Sayadaw:* No. Indeed not. Therefore, work hard to bring the perfections (*pāramī*) you have accumulated in the whole of saṃsāra to fruition. Be steadfast in your effort.

Act as the wise people of the past did after receiving the teachings directly from the Buddha; they worked for Nibbāna. Knowing that you too have been born in a favourable plane of existence, nothing can stop you from working up to the attainment of the eight stages of Nibbāna.

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<sup>11</sup> Greed (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*), and delusion or illusion (*moha*) are the three root causes of all suffering. *Lobha* includes all degrees of wanting, looking forward to, desiring, lust, etc. *Dosa* includes all degrees of aversion from slight aversion to intense hatred. Fear is also part of *dosa* as it contains aversion against the thing feared. *Moha* means delusion about the nature of physical and mental states. When a person does away with *moha*, he recognizes that all states of body and mind are unsatisfactory, impermanent, and devoid of a self or soul.

Practise with strong effort and with steadfastness, and make sure that not even a little time is wasted. Advise and urge others to practise too. Strive with happiness in your heart and when you are successful, be truly happy.

## A Roof That Does Not Leak

*Sayadaw:* The contents of the Tipiṭaka taught by the Buddha are so vast that it is impossible to know all they contain. Only if you are intelligent will you be able to understand clearly what the monks have been teaching you out of great compassion. You have to pay attention only to this.

*Disciple:* Sir, we don't quite understand what you mean by: "You have to pay attention only to this."

*Sayadaw:* Let me try to explain in this way. If you build a house, you put a roof on it, don't you?

*Disciple:* Yes, sir, we cover our houses with roofs.

*Sayadaw:* When you put the roof on you make sure that it is watertight, don't you? If you cover your house well and it rains a little, will the roof leak?

*Disciple:* No, sir, it won't.

*Sayadaw:* And if it rains very hard, will the roof leak?

*Disciple:* No, sir.

*Sayadaw:* And when the sun burns down, will it still give you good shelter?

*Disciple:* It will, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Why is this so? Because your roof is well built. Will you be able to know whether your roof is leaking or not after it rains?

*Disciple:* Yes, sir, when it rains it is easy to find out.

*Sayadaw:* You see, you think that the teachings of the Buddha are vast and varied, but really they are just one single way of escape from suffering. Only if you take up one object of meditation given by the Buddha and pursue it with steadfast effort to the end can you justly claim that your roof is not leaking any more. If your roof is not rain-proof yet, you have to be aware of this. There must be many houses in your neighbourhood and they all have roofs. What are the materials used for roofing?

*Disciple:* There are corrugated iron roofs, there are tiled roofs, there are houses roofed with palm leaves or bamboo.

*Sayadaw:* Yes, of course. Now, if a palm-leaf roof is well built, is it reliable?

*Disciple:* Oh yes, sir, it won't leak.

*Sayadaw:* If a tin roof is well assembled, is it rain proof?

*Disciple:* Yes, sir, it is.

*Sayadaw:* What about a well-made tile roof?

*Disciple:* No rain will come through, sir.

*Sayadaw:* What about bamboo roofs or roofs made out of planks?

*Disciple:* If they are well done, they are watertight, sir.

*Sayadaw:* So, if you take the roofing material you like best and build a good roof, will it give you shelter when it rains and when the sun shines?

*Disciple:* If we build it well, it will not leak, sir.

*Sayadaw:* We are building roofs because we don't want to get wet when it rains, and we want to avoid the scorching sun. The teachings of the Buddha are available now. Take up one of the techniques the Buddha taught, establish steadfast effort and practise. Only if you are steadfast does your practice resemble a roof, and greed, anger, and ignorance cannot leak through. Only if the roof is not leaking can we say that we are sheltered. If the roof is still leaking rain, is this because it is good or is not so good?

*Disciple:* Because it is not so good, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Is it leaking because the palm leaves are not a good roofing material?

*Disciple:* No, sir, palm leaves are a good roofing material.

*Sayadaw:* Or is it because corrugated iron, or tiles, or bamboo, or planks are not suitable as roofing materials?

*Disciple:* No, sir, all these are quite okay.

*Sayadaw:* Then why is the roof leaking?

*Disciple:* Because it isn't well built, sir.

*Sayadaw:* But, of course, the mistake is made now. Is it difficult to repair it?

*Disciple:* If one is skilful, it is quite easy, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Tell me then, if it leaks in a certain place, what do you have to do?

*Disciple:* We have to patch up the leak, sir.

*Sayadaw:* It is just the same in meditation. Now that you exert effort, there is no leak; you are safe. If greed, anger, and ignorance still drip in, in spite of your practising the teachings of the Buddha, you have to be aware of the fact that your roof is not yet rain-proof. You have to know whether the roof you built for your own house is keeping the rain out or not.

*Disciple:* Sir, we have all the roofing materials, but the roof is still leaking. We would like to know the technique of building a good roof.

*Sayadaw:* Don't build a thin, shaky roof; build a thick, strong roof.

*Disciple:* How are we to build a strong roof, sir? While we are sitting here like this, we still have to endure being drenched by the rain.

*Sayadaw:* The wise people of old practised the teachings without allowing their efforts to diminish in any of the four postures,<sup>12</sup> and they kept up such a perfect continuity of awareness that there never was any gap. You too have to practise in this way. The disciples of the Buddha established awareness of the spot and then did not allow their minds to shift to another object. Now, can the rains of greed, anger, and ignorance still affect those who are steadfast?

*Disciple:* No, sir, they can't.

*Sayadaw:* If you establish the same quality of awareness whether sitting, standing, or walking, will the rain still be able to penetrate your protecting roof?

*Disciple:* Sir, please teach us the technique which will give us shelter.

*Sayadaw:* Tell me, all of you are breathing, aren't you?

*Disciple:* Oh yes, sir, all are breathing.

*Sayadaw:* When do you first start breathing?

*Disciple:* Why, when we are born of course, sir.

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<sup>12</sup> The four postures are sitting, standing, lying down, and walking.

*Sayadaw:* Are you breathing when you are sitting?

*Disciple:* Yes, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Are you breathing while you are standing, walking, and working?

*Disciple:* Of course, sir.

*Sayadaw:* When you are very busy and have a lot to do, do you stop breathing, saying, "Sorry, no time to breathe now, too much work!"

*Disciple:* No, sir, we don't.

*Sayadaw:* Are you breathing while asleep?

*Disciple:* Yes, sir, we are.

*Sayadaw:* Then, do you still have to search for this breath?

*Disciple:* No, sir, it's there all the time.

*Sayadaw:* There is no one, big or small, who doesn't know how to breathe. Now, where does this breath touch when you breathe out?

*Disciple:* Somewhere below the nose or above the upper lip, sir.

*Sayadaw:* And when you breathe in?

*Disciple:* At the same spot, sir.

*Sayadaw:* If you pay attention to this small spot and the touch of air as you breathe in and out, can't you be aware of it?

*Disciple:* It is possible, sir.

*Sayadaw:* When you are thus aware, is there still wanting, aversion, ignorance, worry, and anxiety?

*Disciple:* No, sir.

*Sayadaw:* You see, you can come out of suffering immediately. If you follow the teachings of the Buddha, you instantly become happy. If you practise and revere the Dhamma, you remove the suffering of the present moment and also the suffering of the future. If you have confidence in the monks and teachers, this confidence will result in the removal of present and future suffering.

The only way out of suffering is to follow the teachings of the Buddha, and at this moment you are revering the teachings by establishing awareness. Do you still have to go and ask others how the Dhamma, if practised, brings immediate relief from suffering?

*Disciple:* We have experienced it ourselves, so we don't have to go and ask others any more.

*Sayadaw:* If you know for yourselves, is there still doubt and uncertainty?

*Disciple:* No, sir, there isn't.

*Sayadaw:* By keeping your attention at the spot for a short time only, you have understood this much. What will happen if you keep your mind focused for a long time?

*Disciple:* Understanding will become deeper, sir.

*Sayadaw:* If your time were up and you were to die while your attention is focused on the spot, would there be cause for worry?

*Disciple:* There is no need to worry about one's destiny if one dies while the mind is under control.

*Sayadaw:* This frees us from suffering in the round of rebirths, and having discovered this for ourselves, we need not ask others about it. If we establish strong and steadfast effort in accordance with our aspiration for awakening, is there still cause for doubt: "Shall I get it or shall I not?"

*Disciple:* No, sir, we have gone beyond doubt.

*Sayadaw:* So, then you have full confidence in what you are doing and due to your effort the viriya-iddhipāda factor arises. Suppose people come and say to you, “You haven’t got the right thing yet; how could you ever succeed?” Will doubt arise in you?

*Disciple:* No, sir.

*Sayadaw:* You know that though you are certain that you will be able to reach the goal with your practice, other people might tell you that you will not.

*Disciple:* Sir, knowing for oneself, one will not have doubts, whatever people may say.

*Sayadaw:* What if not just a hundred people or a thousand people come to tell you that what you are doing is no good, but say the whole town?

*Disciple:* Even if the whole town comes, no doubt will arise, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Suppose the whole country came to contradict you?

*Disciple:* Even so, sir, there will be no space for doubt to arise, because we realised this happiness for ourselves.

*Sayadaw:* Yes, you know how much effort you have established. But don’t think that your effort is perfect yet. You are only at the beginning. There is still much room for improvement. While you sit, walk, stand, and work it is always possible to be aware of the in-breath and the out-breath, isn’t it?

*Disciple:* Yes, sir.

*Sayadaw:* If you focus your attention on the spot, are you unhappy?

*Disciple:* No, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Does it cost you anything?

*Disciple:* No, sir.

*Sayadaw:* The people, devas and brahmās who received the teachings after the Buddha’s awakening practised continuously, and therefore their respective aspirations for awakening were fulfilled.

What the Buddha taught is enshrined in the Tipiṭaka. If you keep your attention focused on the spot and on the in-breath and the out-breath, the whole of the Tipiṭaka is there.

*Disciple:* We don’t quite understand this, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Oh dear. Why shouldn’t you understand this? Of course, you understand.

*Disciple:* But we would like to be certain that we understand this in detail, sir.

*Sayadaw:* You have understood already. Have you checked whether all of the Buddha’s teaching is contained in this awareness?

*Disciple:* But, sir, our awareness is not deep enough to check this.

*Sayadaw:* But you can talk about the Buddha’s discourses, the monks’ rules, and Abhidhamma philosophy.

*Disciple:* When we discuss these, we just talk without really knowing.

*Sayadaw:* Talking into the blue. Now, if you keep your attention at this spot, can you tell me whether the whole of the teaching is present there?

*Disciple:* We don’t know, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Are you not telling me because you are tired?

*Disciple:* No, sir, we aren’t tired. We would like to answer.

*Sayadaw:* If we want to make an end to suffering we have to observe the behaviour of mind and matter. Everyone says this. Matter is composed of eight basic elements. There are fifty-three mental concomitants.<sup>22</sup> All of you can tell me this off the top of your head.

You are intelligent. When others discuss the teachings you correct them and tell them where they went wrong and where they left something out. You refute them and criticise them. You are debating like this, aren't you?

We said just now that the thing that doesn't know is matter and the entity that knows is mind. These two entities must be evident to you. Under which of the two comes the spot below the nose; is it mind or matter?

*Disciple:* I think that the spot is matter, sir. The kāya-pasāda (sensitive matter) through which we feel touch sensation is rūpa. But those who study Abhidhamma philosophy tell us that we are just concepts (paññatti) and that the spot too is but a concept, sir.... When we have debates with people who are proficient in the Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha<sup>23</sup> we become angry and agitated and get little merit.

*Sayadaw:* If you can't keep your attention on the spot, you will of course get involved in discussions.

*Disciple:* But, sir, if we don't answer, we have to admit defeat.

*Sayadaw:* Tell me, what do you have to do when you are hungry?

*Disciple:* We have to eat rice, sir.

*Sayadaw:* What about monks, what do you have to give them to still their hunger?

*Disciple:* We have to give them oblation rice,<sup>24</sup> sir.

*Sayadaw:* Are the oblation rice they eat and the rice you eat two completely different things?

*Disciple:* They aren't different, sir. In order to show respect to the monks we call their rice "oblation rice", but it is the same as we eat.

*Sayadaw:* So, whether we call it "rice" or "oblation rice," it will satisfy our hunger.

*Disciple:* Yes, sir, both fill the stomach.

*Sayadaw:* Now what about the nose, the spot? You can call it by its conventional name, or you can talk about sensitive matter. It's just the same as with rice and oblation rice. Is it worth arguing about?

*Disciple:* No, sir, there is no need for long discussions.

*Sayadaw:* Having understood this, will you stop arguing, or will you carry on with your debates?

*Disciple:* No, sir, we shall not debate, but those Abhidhamma students will.

*Sayadaw:* In that case you just don't take part in the discussion of such issues. You have known all along that rice and oblation rice are the same, but we have to talk about it so that you understand. Now, what do we call the entity that is aware?

*Disciple:* It is called mind, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Only if you have gained such control over your mind that it doesn't jump from one object to another are you able to distinguish clearly between mind (*nāma*) and matter (*rūpa*).

*Disciple:* Yes, sir, now we are able to distinguish between mind and matter.

*Sayadaw:* Is this knowledge of mind and matter you have gained called understanding (*vijjā*) or ignorance (*avijjā*)?

*Disciple:* It is understanding, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Is there still ignorance present when you are able to distinguish clearly between mind and matter?

*Disciple:* No, sir, ignorance has run away.

*Sayadaw:* When you concentrate at the spot there is understanding, and ignorance has been banned. Now, if we continue to concentrate on the spot, will ignorance spring back up again?

*Disciple:* No, sir, it won't.

*Sayadaw:* Yes, you see, you have to establish understanding in this way. You have found it now; don't allow it to escape again. Can you again suddenly be overpowered by delusion if your understanding keeps growing moment by moment? Do good people still have to moan and complain, saying that it is difficult to get rid of ignorance once they have been given the teachings of the Buddha, which are the tools to overcome and defeat ignorance?

*Disciple:* No, sir, they shouldn't complain. All they need to do is to put forth effort.

*Sayadaw:* So, you realise that all the Buddha taught is contained in this meditation. If you put forth effort, establish yourselves in perfect effort, then you will reach full understanding. You told me that many types of material are suitable to build a good roof. Not only a tin roof or a palm leaf roof are safe; you can choose from many different materials. I think you have collected quite a variety of good roofing materials. Now you have to build a roof that really protects you against rain. Once you have built a good shelter, you won't get wet, and you won't have to suffer the heat of the sun anymore. If you build your shelter in the jungle, will it be good?

*Disciple:* Yes, sir, it will.

*Sayadaw:* If you build your roof in a city?

*Disciple:* It will be safe, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Does it make any difference whether you build your shelter in this country or in any other country?

*Disciple:* Sir, it will give shelter here and there.

*Sayadaw:* Are you happy if you're drenched by rain or if you have to live under the scorching sun?

*Disciple:* No, sir, I would be unhappy.

*Sayadaw:* In that case, put forth full effort so that you won't have to suffer sun and rain ever again.

## The Flight of an Arrow

*Sayadaw:* You have taken sila. Having taken sila, practise it. Only if you fulfil the perfection of morality completely can you be successful in attaining all the various aspirations for awakening without exception.

Now that you have understood that you have been born at an auspicious time and into a good existence, take up the practice of the teachings of the Buddha with all your strength and establish yourselves in them. The noble disciples of the Teacher practised without slackening in their effort and were mindful in all the four postures of the body, without ever resting. They worked with steadfastness, and they all attained the goal they desired. You too should take up this practice with this strong will to reach your goal.

What is this practice without break or rest to be compared to? It is like the flight of an arrow. If we shoot an arrow with a bow, we take aim according to our desire. Now tell me, does the arrow at times slow down and then speed up again after we shoot it? Does it at times take rest and then again proceed toward the target?

*Disciple:* Sir, it flies fast and at a steady speed.

*Sayadaw:* And when does it stop?

*Disciple:* It stops only when it hits the target, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Yes, only when it hits its aim, its target, does it stop. In just the same way did the direct disciples of the Buddha strive to attain the goal they had taken as their target. Moving at a steady pace without a break, without interruption, they finally attained that type of awakening (*bodhi*) they desired in their hearts.

Of course, there are various types of awakening. All of them can be attained if you work without resting. If you work for *sammā-sam-bodhi* (Buddhahood), you have to work continuously. If you work for *pacceka-bodhi* (Non-teaching Buddhahood), you have to keep up the continuity of practice. If you aim for *sāvaka-bodhi* (Arahatship), you have to practise steadily, just as an arrow flies steadily. If you practise with steadfastness you will be able to attain your goal.

Though you practise without interruption, you will not get tired or exhausted. As you take up the teachings of the Buddha, incomparable happiness will come to you.

Some people think that the Buddha taught many different things. You all remember some parts of the holy scriptures as the monks out of great compassion taught them to you. At times you may think, "The teachings of the Buddha are so vast and manifold. I can't follow and understand all this and therefore I can't attain my goal." Or some people say, "What is true for oneself one can only know oneself." Or others, "I can't work because I can't feel the breath yet." Now tell me what is your excuse?

*Disciple:* Saying that we have to make a living to maintain our body, we postpone meditation from the morning to the evening and from the evening to the morning. In this way we keep delaying the work of putting forth effort.

*Sayadaw:* And what else do people tend to say?

*Disciple:* Some say they can't meditate because of old age and some are afraid that it will make them ill.

*Sayadaw:* What do those say who are still young?

*Disciple:* That they can't meditate because they have to study. While they are young and healthy they want to enjoy themselves.

*Sayadaw:* And if you are unwell and ill?

*Disciple:* Then, sir, we worry. We call the doctor and think about medicine, but we still don't practise.

*Sayadaw:* And when you have recovered?

*Disciple:* We somehow manage to postpone meditation day by day and let time pass.

*Sayadaw:* But you do actually want to attain happiness, don't you?

*Disciple:* Yes, sir.

*Sayadaw:* So, if you really want it, why then postpone striving for it?

*Disciple:* I don't want it really, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Does this apply to you only or to all of you here?

*Disciple:* There must be some in this audience who really aspire to attain happiness and others like me who are not so serious about it.

*Sayadaw:* If you put forth effort as you are doing now, you will of course get it. But thoughts and doubts may come up in your minds, "Will I have to suffer? Will this practice be trying?" You have already acquired some knowledge of the Buddha's teachings according to your individual capabilities. Thinking about these, however, will slow down your progress. So listen well to the teachings now and practise. If you practise, you will arrive at your goal, and the reality of it may or may not correspond with your thoughts about it.

Only when you know for yourselves will you also know that your thoughts and speculations about the goal were not correct. All of you know from Dhamma lectures<sup>25</sup> that if you follow the teachings of the Buddha, you will get great happiness in the present and in the future. In fact, you are all preachers of the Dhamma yourselves. Don't you think that thinking and speculating will slow your progress down? If you think and analyse, will every thought be correct?

*Disciple:* No, sir.

*Sayadaw:* If you establish your goal as I told you and keep thinking about wanting to attain it, will this help?

*Disciple:* No, sir.

*Sayadaw:* So, will you continue to think and ponder?

*Disciple:* If we analyse and think all the time we shall go the wrong way, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Once we start thinking there will be very many thoughts. Will much of what we think be of use to us?

*Disciple:* It is difficult to think useful thoughts. Thoughts often become quite useless and misleading.

*Sayadaw:* The community of noble monks has expounded the teachings which are real and true to you and still your thoughts are apt to mislead you. How is this possible?

But tell me, where are you from?... You are from Kemmendine. Your house must have a garden and a fence around it.

*Disciple:* Yes, sir, this is correct.

*Sayadaw:* On which side of the compound is the gate?

*Disciple:* I have one gate opening to the south and one opening to the north, sir.

*Sayadaw:* How many storeys does your house have?

*Disciple:* It is a single storey house, sir.

*Sayadaw:* On which side do you have your door?

*Disciple:* There are two doors, sir, one in the west wall and one in the south wall.

*Sayadaw:* So, now we know that you live in Kemmendine, that you have a fence around your garden with gates to the north and south. Your house is a one storey building and has two doors facing south and west respectively. You see, because you told me, I know everything about your place. Now my knowledge and your knowledge about your house are about the same, aren't they?

*Disciple:* They cannot be, sir.

*Sayadaw:* But why? You know your village, your garden, and your house; you told me that you live in Kemmendine; and you described your garden and your house to me as you know them. Therefore I know your village, your garden, and your house. I know the reality about it, as you do.

*Disciple:* You don't know it in the same way I know it, sir.

*Sayadaw:* My dear friend, why should what I know be different from what you know? Just ask me where you live and I shall reply that you live in Kemmendine. Furthermore, I know about your garden and house just as you do. What is there that you can tell me that I don't know already?

*Disciple:* Even if I told you the house number and the street, you wouldn't be able to find the house, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Tell me then what you know more about this matter than I do.

*Disciple:* I can't tell you more about it, sir, but I know more because I have actually been there.

*Sayadaw:* In that case I shall think about it and figure out where Kemmendine is.

*Disciple:* You can't find out by thinking about it, sir.

*Sayadaw:* I shall think a lot and for a long time. Some of it is bound to be right. I will think about a house in Kemmendine with two gates, two doors, one storey. Will some of my findings about your house be correct?

*Disciple:* I don't think so, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Is it that difficult then? Well, I'll think in many different ways; some of it will turn out right. I shall ponder over this problem for about one year. Will I find the answer then?

*Disciple:* If you just think about it, sir, you won't find it. But if you come and look, you will really know for yourself.

*Sayadaw:* Now, what if I were to think about it really deeply for about forty or fifty years? Or ... better, if I don't just think but also talk about it. Will I come to know it then?

*Disciple:* Even if you think and talk about it, sir, you will never get there.

*Sayadaw:* Then please tell me where Kemmendine is.

*Disciple:* From here you would have to walk towards the south-west.

*Sayadaw:* So, if I walk in a southwesterly direction, will I get there?

*Disciple:* Yes, sir, you will, but you will still not find my house.

*Sayadaw:* Well I'll begin now. I'll think very deeply and at the same time I'll recite (your instructions and descriptions). In this way I'll come to know.

*Disciple:* No, sir, I don't think so.

*Sayadaw:* You tell me that you know all this about your house, but if I repeat what I know from you, then you tell me that I am talking into the blue. I cannot bear this.

*Disciple:* Sir, you simply repeat what you heard, but you don't actually know.

*Sayadaw:* So, all I say about this house is correct, but he claims that I still don't know it the way he does. I don't know whether this is true ... But now if I were to think about it deeply and recite my thoughts, would there still be a difference in understanding? Or if I were to recite all you said day and night, would it still not be possible for me to really know?

*Disciple:* Sir, you would still not know it in the same way you would if you went there yourself.

*Sayadaw:* Before you told me about your house I didn't know anything about it, but now I know something.

*Disciple:* Yes, sir, this is true, but if you came to see it you would know everything about it.

*Sayadaw:* Tell me, if I were to walk according to your directions, would I arrive at your house?

*Disciple:* Yes, sir.

*Sayadaw:* And if I didn't know the house number?

*Disciple:* You would wander aimlessly, sir.

*Sayadaw:* And if you go there?

*Disciple:* I head straight for my house, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Will you worry about how to get there and whether you are on the right road?

*Disciple:* If you come with me, sir, you can't get lost, because I have been there before.

*Sayadaw:* The Buddha taught what he had realised for himself. Now, all of you are able to accept good advice. The Buddha's teachings are vast. There is the Suttanta, the Vinaya, and the Abhidhamma. You need not study all these. Choose one object of meditation, one technique that suits you, and then work with firm determination. Once you have established yourselves in this way and arrive at the goal, you will understand deeply and completely.

But even now, before I finish speaking, you do get some understanding. This immediate understanding is called *akāliko*,<sup>26</sup> immediate understanding.

Our teachers and parents, who instruct us out of great compassion and love, tell us: "Learn this and that ...," and when we go to bed at night they call us and say: "Why didn't you pay respects to the Buddha before going to bed? Come, pay respects." If we don't follow their instructions, they may even have to beat us. They have to do this even though they don't wish to do it. Through their help these resistances in us are overcome. But, of course, we get immediate knowledge of the Buddha-Dhamma only if we are interested in it ourselves. When does it actually become *akāliko*, immediate?

*Disciple:* Only when we really find the Dhamma, sir.

*Sayadaw:* And when will we really find the Dhamma?

*Disciple:* After having worked for it, sir.

*Sayadaw:* At what particular time do we have to practise in order to be successful?

*Disciple:* The hour of the day or night is of no importance. If we practise and then reach the goal we shall gain immediate knowledge, sir.

*Sayadaw:* It is very easy. You have received the teachings of the Buddha. All you have to do is to make efforts in the same way that the disciples of the Buddha did. It is easy. This is not my own knowledge. I too have learned the teachings of the Buddha and I am passing them on to you. All of you are very intelligent and bright. What I am telling you, you know already. Why do you think the Buddha taught the Dhamma?

*Disciple:* He taught people to be continuously aware of mind and matter.

*Sayadaw:* He taught so that people who desire to attain the goal may be able to do so. He taught because he wished them to be able to travel on the path. But some of you may say that this is not a good time to practise. The mind is not settled with all this coming and going of people. "We shall meditate when the mind is tranquil," you may decide. And if the mind becomes tranquil after some time, what will happen?

*Disciple:* When the mind is calm, we will go to sleep, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Oh really, and this you call meditation?

*Disciple:* Sir, we are only perfect in talking about meditation.

*Sayadaw:* And then, when you have a bad conscience about not having practised and decide to go to a meditation centre, what do you take along?

*Disciple:* We take food with us, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Tell me, after having taken the precepts, do you stuff yourselves?

*Disciple:* Yes, sir. The ladies offer food, and we just eat. We start early, and then we continue eating right up until twelve noon.<sup>13</sup>

*Sayadaw:* Do you eat more than on ordinary days?

*Disciple:* Oh yes, sir, much more.

*Sayadaw:* Tell me now, do you stop eating at noon?

*Disciple:* Well, you see, sir, some say that even then it is all right to continue eating. Once one stops, then one can't start again after twelve noon, but if I started before noon I can continue eating even after midday. So I've heard.

*Sayadaw:* What about you? Do you carry on eating?

*Disciple:* I continue eating even while we are talking like this, sir.

*Sayadaw:* And what do you do after you have finished eating?

*Disciple:* Then my stomach is full, sir, so I lie down flat on my back.

*Sayadaw:* And then?

*Disciple:* Then I sleep, sir.

*Sayadaw:* And when do you wake up again?

*Disciple:* At about 3.00 or 4.00 p.m., sir.

*Sayadaw:* Do you meditate then, being fully awake and alert?

*Disciple:* No, sir, then I ask for some juice and lemonade.<sup>27</sup>

*Sayadaw:* Do you drink a lot or just a little?

*Disciple:* I drink to the full, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Even if you drink a lot, some will be left over. Do you share that with others?

*Disciple:* No, sir, I drink it all myself because I like to keep it for myself.

*Sayadaw:* But do you feel good if you drink too much?

*Disciple:* No, sir, not very good.

*Sayadaw:* Tell me, do you meditate then?

*Disciple:* Well, sir, as I don't feel very well I have to lie down.

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<sup>13</sup> The sixth precept forbids the consumption of solid food including milk after twelve noon.

*Sayadaw:* And then what happens?

*Disciple:* I sleep again, sir.

*Sayadaw:* And when do you get up?

*Disciple:* The following morning, sir, when the sun rises. I say to myself, "Well, look, the sun has risen," and I get up and have breakfast.

*Sayadaw:* Now tell me, if you don't attain Nibbāna, do you think that it is because there is no such person as a fully awakened Buddha and that Nibbāna doesn't exist?

*Disciple:* No, sir, it's because I eat too much.

*Sayadaw:* Well, you do make some efforts, but this greed is still a little strong, I think. Tell me, when you start to meditate and someone whispers near your ear, do you hear it or not?

*Disciple:* If the concentration is not so good, we prick up our ears and listen to what is being whispered, sir.

*Sayadaw:* When you hear this whispering, do you accept it and respect the people who are whispering?

*Disciple:* Sir, when the determination to meditate is strong, then I do get angry at the people who are whispering.

*Sayadaw:* Meditators get angry?

*Disciple:* If people come and whisper in the place where I'm meditating, of course I will get angry, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Is it skilful to get angry and think, "Do they have to whisper here? Where is this chap from anyway? Who is he?" Will a meditator who reacts in this way attain his goal quicker? If he becomes angry and then dies, where will he be reborn?

*Disciple:* He will be reborn in the lower worlds, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Even if he is observing the eight Uposatha precepts?

*Disciple:* If he becomes angry, he will go to the lower worlds even then, sir.

*Sayadaw:* How should we approach the problem of being disturbed by whispers while we are meditating? We should reflect in the following way: "I have come here to meditate. My fellow meditators are whispering and I hear them. If the others find out that I pay attention to whispers, I will feel ashamed because all will know then that I don't make sufficient effort. I shall make more effort." We should be grateful to the people who show us through their whispering that our effort isn't sufficient. If your effort is good, your concentration will be good, and you won't hear anything. Being grateful, you should hope that these people continue talking, and you should continue to meditate. There is no need to go up to them and actually say, "Thank you." Simply continue to meditate, and as your awareness of the object of meditation becomes continuous, you don't hear disturbances any more. Would you hear people if they spoke quite loudly?

*Disciple:* If they spoke loudly, I think I would hear them, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Again we have to be grateful. "They are telling me to improve my efforts." Being grateful to those people, I steady my mind and focus on the spot again. To meditate means to be so closely aware of the object that it never escapes our attention.

*Disciple:* Please, sir, explain to us how to be so closely aware of the object.

*Sayadaw:* You just have to keep your attention fully collected, concentrated on the spot. All of you have been breathing ever since the moment you were born. Can you feel where the air touches as you breathe in and out?

*Disciple:* Sir, for me the touch sensation is most evident under the right nostril.

*Sayadaw:* Not in two places?

*Disciple:* No, sir, only in one place.

*Sayadaw:* Yes, it touches at this small spot when you breathe in and when you breathe out. Tell me, does it enter with intervals or is it a continuous flow?

*Disciple:* There are intervals, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Is it the stream of air that is interrupted or the awareness of it? Is the touch of air continuous while you breathe in and out?

*Disciple:* It is uninterrupted, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Then you have to know this flow of air without interruption. Don't look elsewhere. Just know this touch of the breath. If you can't feel it, then try touching the spot of contact with your finger. When you know the sensation of touch, then take your finger away and stay with the awareness of touch-feeling at the spot. You have to become aware of the touch of air which is continuous as being continuous. If you are aware of this spot without a gap in the continuity of awareness, will you still hear whispers?

*Disciple:* No, sir, I don't think so.

*Sayadaw:* If the attention is firmly and steadfastly anchored at this spot, will you hear loud voices?

*Disciple:* No, sir.

*Sayadaw:* You know this spot below the nose above the upper lip so exclusively that you don't hear sounds any more. Is this spot matter (*rūpa*) or mind (*nāma*)?

*Disciple:* It is matter, sir.

*Sayadaw:* And the entity that knows it, that which is aware, what is it?

*Disciple:* That is mind, sir.

*Sayadaw:* So, if you are aware of the spot without interruption, you are continuously aware of mind and matter, are you not?

*Disciple:* Yes, sir, this is true, sir.

*Sayadaw:* If you are aware of mind and matter in this way, you know that there is no self, there is no man, there is no woman, there are no human beings or devas or brahmās? This is what the Buddha taught. If we are aware of mind and matter, do we still think in terms of human beings, devas, and brahmās?

*Disciple:* No, sir, we don't.

*Sayadaw:* Is it easy to be thus aware?

*Disciple:* Yes, sir, it is easy.

*Sayadaw:* This is knowing things as they are. Mind and matter arise without interruption. They arise and then disintegrate. How many times do they disintegrate in a flash of lightning?

*Disciple:* I have heard that they disintegrate one hundred billion times in the wink of an eye, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Tell me then, how can you count to one hundred billion in the wink of an eye?

*Disciple:* I can't, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Suppose you were given one hundred billion gold coins and would have to count them, how long would it take you?

*Disciple:* I think it would take about a month, sir. Even if I were to count greedily day and night, it would take about that long.

*Sayadaw:* The peerless Buddha penetrated all this with his own super-knowledge and then was able to teach it. But what can we know for ourselves? We can know mind and matter

simultaneously. And what will we get from this awareness? We will be able to understand the characteristic of their behaviour. You needn't do anything special. Just practise as you are practising now. Keep your attention focused on the spot and as you gain the ability to keep your attention with the awareness of breathing and the spot, mind and matter will talk to you.

*Disciple:* Do we have to think of *anicca* (impermanence) when one in-breath comes to an end, sir?

*Sayadaw:* It is good if you think of *anicca* as a breath comes to an end. If you know *anicca* in this way, will you be able to attain Nibbāna?

*Disciple:* Not yet, sir.

*Sayadaw:* So if you can't get Nibbāna yet, keep concentrating on the spot and you will come to know.

*Disciple:* What do we have to know as being impermanent, sir?

*Sayadaw:* You say that sugar is sweet, don't you? But if I have never before tasted sugar, how are you going to explain sweetness to me?

*Disciple:* It is much better than even palm sugar, sir, but we can't explain it so that you will really know.

*Sayadaw:* But you have tasted it, so why can't you tell me about it?

*Disciple:* Well, sir, sugar looks like salt, but ants don't go for salt while they do like sugar. But this won't help you very much, sir. You have to taste it, sir.

*Sayadaw:* So salt and sugar look similar. Now, if I eat some salt, calling it sugar, will I taste sugar?

*Disciple:* No, sir, salt will remain salty.

*Sayadaw:* In that case I'll think that sugar is salty.

*Disciple:* This is just the same as us not knowing how to recognise impermanence, sir.

*Sayadaw:* When we talk about the outer appearance of sugar, there are many possibilities of mistaking something else for sugar. Only if you explain the taste of sugar properly can I understand.

*Disciple:* We would like to advise you to eat some sugar, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Will you have to sit next to me while I'm eating it and say, "It is sweet, it is sweet ..."?

*Disciple:* If I recited this, it would just bother you, and it isn't necessary to do this for sugar to be sweet. As soon as you put sugar into your mouth, you will be able to taste its sweetness, sir.

*Sayadaw:* But let's say there is a jungle bhikkhu who wants to taste sugar. Will the sugar think: "This is a jungle bhikkhu. I won't be fully sweet for him. I shall be only half as sweet for him as I am for people in towns"?

*Disciple:* Sugar isn't partial, sir; it is as sweet for one as for the other.

*Sayadaw:* It is just the same with the awareness of mind and matter. If you keep up this awareness you will taste the Dhamma immediately, just as you taste sweetness when you eat sugar. Is it possible that you still mistake salt for sugar? You go to the market so many times, and you can easily distinguish between salt and sugar. You are not going to buy salt for sugar. The peerless Buddha penetrated the truth and really knew it. He can distinguish between what is liberation and what is suffering, and therefore he gave this liberation to human beings, devas, and brahmās alike. He just asked them to "eat." Just eat, it's real. Will you remain here without eating, afraid that it could turn out not to be true liberation?

*Disciple:* We haven't reached that point yet, sir. We are just listening to your words.

*Sayadaw:* Eat as I told you. You will not go wrong. And why can't you go wrong? Because mind and matter are actually arising and disintegrating continuously.

Why should you concentrate on the spot, though you don't know liberation yet? If you don't eat something, will you ever know what it tastes like? You know a lot about the Dhamma. You know about *nāma* and *rūpa*; you know what the Suttas are and you know about the Vinaya and the Abhidhamma. You know this is samatha, this is vipassanā.

*Disciple:* But, sir, all this is mixed up in our head like a giant hodgepodge.

*Sayadaw:* Let it be a mix up. Pay attention to this spot only, as I taught you. Later this mix up will be disentangled, everything will fall into place. If we go east we will get to a place in the east; if we go west we will arrive at a place in the west. The spot is like a vehicle. If you want to go to Mandalay, you have to board a train to Mandalay and stay on it. The spot is like the train; don't leave it. Keep your attention focused on it very closely. This is all I have to say. There is nothing to be said apart from this.

Do you know the eight constituents of the Noble Eightfold Path? How do you think they apply to this practice of concentrating on the spot?

*Disciple:* If one concentrates on the spot with right concentration then one attains the knowledge of right view, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Are the other elements of the Noble Eightfold Path pertinent to this practice?

*Disciple:* Sir, the eight constituents of the Noble Eightfold Path are:<sup>28</sup> (1) right view, (2) right thought, (3) right speech, (4) right action, (5) right livelihood, (6) right effort, (7) right mindfulness, (8) right concentration. When our mind is fixed on the spot, we don't think unskillful thoughts in any way. Therefore right thought is there, sir. As we are not talking at all, we don't speak lies and therefore there is right speech. As awareness of breathing is a good action, right action is included in this practice. There is right livelihood too, as we are not trying to make a living by deceiving others, sir. We are putting our entire effort into keeping our attention on the spot, so there is right effort. Because we focus our attention on the breath without letting go, we have right mindfulness, and as the attention remains at the spot without wandering here and there, we have attained right concentration.

*Sayadaw:* So, do you think this is like a boat or a train?

*Disciple:* Yes, sir, it is like a boat, a train, or a cart or car that takes a person to his goal.

*Sayadaw:* Do not leave this vehicle, do you understand? Keep your attention firmly focused here, on the spot, and never leave this spot. In this way you will reach your goal.

Sometimes you may become impatient travelling on the train to Mandalay and think, "I want to go to Mandalay, but is this train really going there or is it going to Rangoon?" If this happens, will you get off? Don't! Continue on your journey and you will see that you will eventually arrive in Mandalay.

If you get fed up and bored, don't leave the train. When you are enjoying yourselves, don't get down. When you are ill, stay on the train, and stay also when you are strong and healthy. When you have plenty of company, stay. When you are all alone, don't leave. When people say unpleasant things to you, persist, and when they speak to you respectfully, don't get off your train. What would you do if people were to hit you because they don't like you?

*Disciple:* Sir, I think I would run away.

*Sayadaw:* Just keep your attention on the spot. Even if robbers hit you, they can't strike down this awareness.

*Disciple:* True, sir, but I think this awareness would go if they struck me.

*Sayadaw:* Not necessarily. Our Bodhisatta, in one of his lives, became the king of monkeys.<sup>29</sup> One day he found a brahman who had fallen down a precipice in the jungle and was helpless and certainly going to die down there. This brahman was lamenting his fate and crying, “Oh poor me, I have fallen into a chasm a hundred yards deep. I shall certainly die down here. Oh poor me, oh, oh, oh... My relatives and friends, my wife and children, don’t know about my misfortune. Nobody is here to help me. Oh, oh ...,” and he cried.

Now, noble beings are always concerned with the welfare of all beings, without exception. And as the Bodhisatta was such a noble being, he who was then the monkey king felt pity for the brahman in the same way he would have felt pity for his own children. And so he climbed down the precipice and went up to the brahman. “Do not fear, do not despair, I won’t let you die. I shall take you back to the place you want to go,” he said to the brahman to reassure him and to cheer him up. And he meant it too. But he wasn’t ready yet to put him on his shoulders and carry him up the rocks, because he was afraid that he might fall and that the brahman might be hurt. He took a big rock of about the same weight as the brahman, put it on one shoulder and tried to carry it up the precipice, jumping from rock to rock. Only after having passed this test did he carefully take the brahman on his shoulders and climbed back up jumping from one boulder to the next.

After this great effort, the monkey king was exhausted. He was happy while performing this good action, but he was still happier when he had accomplished it and had saved a life. He was confident that the brahman he had saved from certain death was trustworthy, and said, “After carrying you up, I am a little tired. Please keep watch for a while so that I can rest.” Then he placed his head in the brahman’s lap thinking himself well protected from all the dangers of the jungle. But while the king of the monkeys slept, the brahman thought, “I shall go back home soon, but I have nothing to give to my wife and children. I shall kill this big monkey and give his flesh to them as a gift.” He took the rock the Bodhisatta had carried up for the test-run and dealt the Bodhisatta’s head a deadly blow. He didn’t do this hesitatingly, feeling sorry for his saviour, but he hit him hard, so as to kill him with the first blow.

When the Bodhisatta felt the pain of the blow, he quickly climbed the next tree, and he asked himself who or what had attacked him. He then saw that there was no enemy around, but that the brahman himself had tried to kill him. He thought to himself: “Yes, there are people like this in the world too.” As the Bodhisatta was thinking this, the brahman started lamenting again, exclaiming that he was lost in this big jungle and that he would perish after all. But the monkey king said to him, speaking from the tree, “Don’t worry; don’t be afraid. I have promised to take you back to your home and I shall not break this promise. I shall take you home. I can’t carry you on my shoulder any more, but as you opened my skull, there is blood dripping to the ground continuously. Just follow the track of blood I shall make for you from up in the trees.”

This is how the Bodhisatta acted. He took all this on himself because his goal was Omniscience, Buddhahood. He worked on all the ten pāramīs.

Did the Bodhisatta turn away from accomplishing the good deed he had undertaken to complete because he was afraid that the man who had attempted to take his life might again try to kill him? Did he abandon him in the jungle?

*Disciple:* No, sir, the Bodhisatta led the brahman home with great loving kindness, in order to perfect his pāramīs.

*Sayadaw:* You see, if one aspires to omniscient Buddhahood, one has to fulfil the perfections, the ten pāramīs in this way, without ever taking a break, without ever resting. Otherwise one can’t attain Buddhahood. Do you understand? One never rests, one never becomes lax, but works on the ten perfections all the time.

You told me only a moment ago that you couldn't keep up your awareness if robbers attacked you and tried to kill you?

*Disciple:* I couldn't keep it up as yet, sir.

*Sayadaw:* But you are aspiring to awakening, aren't you?

*Disciple:* Yes, sir, I am.

*Sayadaw:* If you want it you can achieve it. If you keep your attention focused as I taught you, you will get much out of it, even if people should hit you, pound you, and destroy you. Have you heard the story of Tissa Thera?<sup>30</sup>

*Disciple:* No, sir, I haven't.

*Sayadaw:* Tissa Thera received the teachings of the Buddha and appreciating their value he thought: "Now I can't continue living in this grand style." So he gave all his possessions to his younger brother. He became a monk and went to live and meditate in the jungle with his begging bowl and his set of three robes.

Now his brother's wife thought: "It is very enjoyable to possess all the riches of my husband's older brother. If he remains a monk we shall have these riches for the rest of our life. But maybe he will not attain awakening, and then he may possibly return to lay life. So, I had best have him killed." And she gave money to some robbers and said to them, "Go and kill Tissa Thera. I shall give you more money after you have completed the job."

So, the robbers went to the forest where Tissa Thera lived and grabbed him. He said, "I don't possess anything, but if you want to take my bowl and my robes, please do so."

"We only want to kill you," the robbers replied. "Your brother's wife gave us money to kill you, and she will give us more still after we have completed the job. That is why we have to kill you."

Tissa Thera thought, "I am not emancipated from suffering yet," and he felt ashamed of himself. He said to the robbers, "Yes, yes, you have to kill me, but please give me until dawn and then only make an end to my life."

The bandits replied, "Everyone is afraid of death, and if this monk escapes, we shall not get our money."

"You don't trust me?" Tissa Thera asked. "Well, I shall make you trust me." And he took a rock and smashed both his legs. Then he said, "Now I can't run away any more, so please don't kill me until dawn."

Though the robbers were very rough people, due to the loving kindness of Tissa Thera they felt compassion and decided to let him live until daybreak.

Tissa Thera admonished himself: "Venerable Tissa, there is not much time left, dawn is close. Put forth effort!" He put forth strong effort in the practice of the Buddha's teachings, and as he worked with a steady mind, dawn arrived. As the sun rose, he fulfilled his aspiration and attained happiness. "I have attained release from the cycle of birth and death!" he rejoiced. He then woke the robbers and said, "The day has dawned, rise and come!" And he was full of joy. Now, was Tissa Thera a real disciple of the Buddha, an Arahant?

*Disciple:* Yes, sir, he was.

*Sayadaw:* Who has faster development do you think, someone who meditates with both legs broken, or someone who meditates as you do?

*Disciple:* Sir, I would prefer to meditate without first breaking my legs.

*Sayadaw:* Tissa Thera got it before dawn even with both his legs broken. Will you get it before the day breaks?

*Disciple:* I don't think that I could get it, sir. It will take me longer than that. We take it easy, sir. If one doesn't have to break one's legs, effort is less, and progress therefore slower.

*Sayadaw:* In that case, you are not so eager to attain your goal quickly?

*Disciple:* Sir, we like to go slowly, slowly.

*Sayadaw:* Well, then maybe you should break your legs and then meditate.

*Disciple:* I don't have the courage to do that, sir. I say that I aspire to Nibbāna, but in my mind I am still fearful. I don't have the strength to accept being killed after breaking my own legs.

*Sayadaw:* In that case, work just the same, but without breaking your legs.

*Disciple:* We shall work hard in the way you taught us, sir. We are emulating Visākha and Anāthapiṇḍika, sir.<sup>31</sup> It says in the scriptures that they are enjoying a good life in the deva planes now and we would like to have that same type of enjoyment also, sir.

*Sayadaw:* They are enjoying a good life after having attained a lot. But you have not attained to the same stage yet, have you? Are you really doing as they did? Anāthapiṇḍika went to Rājagaha as a banker on business. Only when he reached there did he come to know that a Buddha had arisen in the world. He didn't go to Rājagaha to meditate or to pay respects to the Buddha. But when he was told about the Buddha, he went to him immediately, in the middle of the night. He had to leave the city walls to go to the place where the Buddha resided. When he stood before the Buddha, he attained what he had aspired for. If someone drops everything and hurries to the Buddha in the middle of the night, is the effort of that person great or small? Do you think he ever let go of the Buddha as the object of his mind while on the way to him?

*Disciple:* No, sir, he didn't.

*Sayadaw:* Now, tell me about yourselves.

*Disciple:* We lose the awareness of the object while we walk, or while we think and so on, sir.

*Sayadaw:* If you want to become like Anāthapiṇḍika, you have to strive as he strove.

*Disciple:* Anāthapiṇḍika had to go through a cemetery<sup>32</sup> on his way to the Buddha, sir. That much we can do too, sir.

*Sayadaw:* It is said that Anāthapiṇḍika began his meditation in the first watch of the night and attained stream-entry (*sotāpatti-magga-phala*)<sup>33</sup> when the day broke. But if you can't get it by daybreak, never mind. It is good enough if you can get it by the time the sun has risen and it is light. Tell me, will you work so that you can attain the goal by tomorrow?

*Disciple:* Sir, we too shall go through a cemetery to come to your monastery and in this way we shall emulate Anāthapiṇḍika.

*Sayadaw:* Did he allow the continuity of awareness to be interrupted?

*Disciple:* He didn't, sir, but we are doing the same as he did only as far as the way is concerned.

*Sayadaw:* If you really want to become like Anāthapiṇḍika, you have to work. If you work, you can fulfil your aspiration. If you don't work, you won't achieve anything. Is it not possible for you to concentrate on the spot where the air touches?

*Disciple:* It is possible, sir.

*Sayadaw:* To become like Anāthapiṇḍika you have to practise as I taught you. Will you tell me tomorrow that you attained your goal?

*Disciple:* I shall tell you that I haven't attained it yet, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Do you know how much Anāthapiṇḍika did after he had attained the first stage of awakening? He thought, “This is incomparable! My king, my people, my relatives, my sons and daughters, the city dwellers and country folk, all of them have not yet heard that a Buddha has arisen. I want them to experience the same bliss I have experienced. Now, how can I accomplish this? I have to invite the Buddha and make him stay for some time in my city, Sāvattī, and all can go and meet him. The Buddha, out of great compassion, will teach them, and at the end of the teaching human beings and gods alike will attain the bliss I have attained.”

Anāthapiṇḍika understood the ultimate truth, and he knew the reason he understood it. He invited the Buddha in order to help others to understand too. He had rest houses built every ten miles along the road from Rājagaha to his native city. In Sāvattī he built the Jetavana monastery for the Buddha, and he arranged everything in such a way that there was a place for everyone. He provided everything, giving to all, from beggar to the king. Thanks to Anāthapiṇḍika’s arrangements, the people who met the Buddha on his journey to Sāvattī gained benefits also. During the Buddha’s journey, many people, devas, and brahmās attained what they had aspired to. How many do you think were those who benefited?

*Disciple:* We don’t know, sir.

*Sayadaw:* How many human beings, how many celestial beings attained Nibbāna then?

*Disciple:* A great many, sir.

*Sayadaw:* How many beings fulfilled their aspiration in the wink of an eye? It was 180 millions of brahmās and one *asaṅkheyyā*<sup>4</sup> of devas. How many beings attained awakening as time went by?

*Disciple:* They must be innumerable, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Anāthapiṇḍika continued to support the teaching of the Buddha and due to his effort many attained the Deathless. Understanding this, you have to make a lot of effort to attain your goal by tomorrow. Will you do this?

*Disciple:* Do not think too highly of me, sir. I don’t think I am able to get it by tomorrow.

*Sayadaw:* You are hungry and your wife offers you food, but still you don’t eat?

*Disciple:* When it comes to food, I will even force my way to the table, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Do you eat even though you don’t want to eat or because you want to eat?

*Disciple:* Because I want to eat, sir.

*Sayadaw:* For how long is your hunger appeased if you eat once?

*Disciple:* For about half a day, sir.

*Sayadaw:* For how long will your hunger be stilled if you eat the way Anāthapiṇḍika ate?

*Disciple:* For the remainder of the cycle of birth and death, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Tell me, what is the best for you? The food your wife offers you and that keeps you satisfied for half a day, or what the Buddha offers you that keeps you satisfied for the remainder of the cycle of birth and death?

*Disciple:* I have to answer that what the Buddha offers is best for me, sir.

*Sayadaw:* You eat what your wife offers you. What then do you do with the food the Buddha offers?

*Disciple:* I’m hesitant about that, sir. That’s why I don’t approve of myself, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Good, good. Work hard. You put so much effort into doing all these other things because you don’t view mind and matter properly. But you do feel respect for the Buddha.

Having decided to meditate, meditate. As you meditate you may find that your limbs ache and become stiff. Now, don't think: "Why do I get this pain? Is it dangerous?" But make a resolve: "Let it be dangerous! If I have to die, so be it. I have died in the past too." How many times have you died, do you think?

*Disciple:* Innumerable times, sir.

*Sayadaw:* Tell me, have you ever died while you were meditating?

*Disciple:* No, sir, I have died while being unskilful only. That is why I am still so agitated.

*Sayadaw:* So, if we have to die, how should we look at it? "I have never died so far while meditating. I shall not wait until dawn. Let me even die right now, so that I can get the experience of dying while meditating." You should think in this way. If you die while meditating, will you become miserable?

*Disciple:* No, sir.

*Sayadaw:* If you live a life of laziness and sloth, will you become happy?

*Disciple:* No, sir. I shall continue going round in the cycle of birth and death, saṃsāra, sir.

*Sayadaw:* "I have never, in the whole of saṃsāra, had stiff and aching limbs because of meditation. It is good if I experience these troubles now." Thus should you look at your pains. Even though your limbs ache, do not give up. Know that wise people of the past have walked on the same path. You have to work. If you only talk about putting forth effort, you will not attain anything. Only if you meditate can you come to understand. Now you are probably thinking: "We want to meditate, but this venerable monk is talking for a long time." So, focus your mind now as the Buddha taught you to, and meditate with firm effort and perseverance.

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