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Bearing with Life

by Ajahn Sucitto

There are three stages of developing *pāramī* (perfections): the initiating stage, when you build your boat of right intention; the gathering stage of meeting the flood, when you hit the white water of negativity, seductive reasoning, wild impulses and doubt; and then the completion stage in which your boat comes through, bigger, deeper and having jettisoned some unnecessary cargo. This process is very clear with the perfection of *khanti*—patience, forbearance or acceptance. This one really moves through the white water.

The Buddha famously declared *khanti* to be the supreme purification practice. He was playing on the Vedic term *tapas*, which signifies the taking on of an austere or ascetic practice such as fasting or mortifying the body in order to cleanse the mind of passions and attachments. But the Buddha pointed not to physical asceticism—which he frequently spoke against—but of the restraint of holding the heart still in the presence of its suffering until it lets go of the ways in which it creates that suffering. That is, the mind/heart (*citta*) habitually creates suffering and stress through reacting to, holding onto or getting caught up with what life throws at us. All the perfections contribute to the lessening or dismantling of that *dukkha*, but the specific quality of patience is to carry the heart through the turbulence of existence so that it no longer shakes, sinks or lashes out.

One of the traditional chanted recitations in Buddhism refers to the Buddha's own confrontation with the demon host of Māra: 'The Buddha overcame Māra through practising *khanti*.' He overcame the forces of delusion, anger, fear, aversion and greed through practising patience, not through blaming anyone, ignoring those forces or running away from them. So when you're stuck in a traffic jam, anxious for resolution to a crisis or beset with a migraine, it's good to remember that the Buddha was here too and found a way through. In an age where one is encouraged not to wait but to go faster, not to accept but to be more demanding, this *pāramī* may be the one you use most frequently to cross the floods.

Acceptance Without Expectation

Patience deals with checking emotional reactions, but it's not a denial of emotional intelligence. Patience has the gut-knowledge that recognizes that a problem or a pain is not something to run away from, get flustered by or be self-pitying about. It has the wisdom to know that we have to prioritize the steps through which we can resolve suffering. It's true that it may be possible to find an alternative route to the destination; it may well be that more negotiations are needed to resolve the problem; it may be that there's a medicine that will ease the pain. But the first thing to do is to not react—to not rage, despair or mentally proliferate. Our first effort is to draw a line around the suffering, take a step back and know 'that's that.' Then there's the effort to recollect that we can be free of the suffering; that we can let go; we don't have to take suffering in and adopt it as final, real and solid. After that initial recollection we have the encouragement to investigate, and then to draw out the hook that snags our hearts on the rough stuff of life.

All this takes patience. Patience holds us present with the suffering in a spacious way, encouraging the mind to open. And an open mind both feels more peaceful in itself, and more readily sees into the cause of its suffering.

Patience is not a numbing resignation to the difficulties of life; it doesn't mean that suffering is all right. It doesn't mean shrugging things off and not looking to improve our behaviour. Nor does it mean putting up with something until it goes away. The practice of patience means bearing with *dukkha* without the expectation that it will go away. In its perfection, patience means giving up any kind of deadline, so the mind is serene and equanimous. But if the patience isn't pure yet (and it takes time to develop patience!), the mind still feels pushy or defensive. Impure patience is the attitude: 'Just hold on and eventually things will get better; I'll get my own way in the end if I'm patient enough.' This approach can temporarily block or blunt the edge of suffering, but it doesn't deal with the resistance or the desire that is suffering's root.

Pure patience is the kind of acceptance that acknowledges the presence of something without adding anything to it or covering it up. It is supported by the insight that when one's mind stops fidgeting, whining and blaming, then suffering can be understood. It is this suffering that stirs up hatred and greed and despair, and it is through practising the Dhamma, or Way, of liberation that its energy and emotional current can be stopped. Reactivity isn't the truth of the mind; it's a conditioned reflex, and it's not self. Because of that, suffering can be undone, and when it is, the mind is free.

Therefore, all conditioned reflexes have to be understood as unreliable and dependent on causes and conditions. They're not to be adopted as real and solid. Yet they do happen! Although we can intellectually understand that holding on, expecting things to be satisfying or feeling cheated are immature responses, in order to undo these attitudes we must first be patient with them. Rather than adopt more miserable reactions—'Why isn't it working? Why did you let me down? I shouldn't complain. Why is it like this?'—the practice is to bear with the waves of turbulence. The world, including our own bodies and emotions, is unsatisfying and a bit of a mess. But the practice does urge us to cross over it all. And this requires us to grow stronger and broader rather than hide or run away. Then the process of bearing with the suffering is not a punishment but a voyage of growth.

I remember my mother telling me of a woman she used to visit. This woman was over ninety years old, had been very poor when she was young and lived in an agricultural district in Cambridgeshire. There are many stories of agricultural workers going out into the cold Cambridgeshire fields, picking vegetables in November, in the cold mud. This kind of work ruined her feet and she developed terrible rheumatism. Even as a young person she was quite hampered by it because she didn't have enough money to buy shoes. This must have been around 1910 or perhaps even earlier. My mother didn't meet this old lady until she was already ninety, when she was crippled and had intense pain. All the bones of her body were painful and her feet were ruined. And yet this woman was a tremendously and totally sweet, loving light. This was a great inspiration to my mother because the old woman had eventually learnt to be patient with this pain. And as the patience purified her of the mental suffering, she also became radiant.

The World and Its Winds

We all have to be with some kind of physical burden, or limitation, although for most of us it is not that bad. We

may just need to wriggle, scratch, switch on some gadget or take a few pills. But the suffering that can be relinquished arises dependent on causes and conditions: on attitudes and assumptions that things should go our way, that life should be comfortable, that bodies shouldn't experience pain and that society should be fair and peaceful. We look for conditioned phenomena to be satisfying, conclusive, reasonable, productive and so on. But taken as a whole over a period of time, they aren't. So we cause ourselves and others suffering when we expect them to be so.

Now of course, we can organize and create supportive conditions such as health and education and laws, but those conditions have to be constructed and maintained; they're not a given norm. It's also noticeable that even as human beings improve the conditions and circumstances of their environment, suffering doesn't abate: anxiety and depression are now the number one disease of the developed world. Here we find the widespread pain of being driven to attain material goals that are never fulfilled or fulfilling, and the anxiety of competitive pressure and loneliness. Some of the chief sources of this emotional pain are called the 'worldly winds': the gusts of praise and blame, gain and loss, fame and ignominy, happiness and unhappiness. These impressions trigger demand, anxiety and despond wherein we never feel good enough where and how we are. And like winds, they can blow through the heart at gale force and throw us completely off balance.

Take for example enjoying fame versus being ignored. When you are famous and the centre of attention, you feel magically empowered: 'Here I am. It's wonderful. Everybody has been waiting for me.' Then there's the opposite, being ignored: 'Who? Do you want something?' You are just a number in the crowd, and you think, 'Nobody cares; I don't count.' People will struggle and strive to be famous—to eat the most beans in a contest, to dive over Niagara Falls in a barrel, and other such life-threatening feats—the *Guinness Book of Records* is full of them. And at the other extreme, we can get lonely and depressed if we don't get positive attention; when we're ignored, our lives become miserable—most of the blues is about that. But if you clamour after fame or get stuck in an impression of having been overlooked, you go nuts. Take another pair: how powerful the experience of praise and blame can be! We can hunger for compliments or a little crumb of approval now and then, 'Well, you're not so bad.' Then you can feel jealous if somebody else is getting huge amounts of it, and you are standing by the door, hardly noticed.

As for blame, how we wriggle and contort to try to avoid it! We aspire to being liked, and we work at it, but still somebody doesn't like us. Or maybe we blame ourselves. So we try to do what's right and fair, yet somebody misunderstands or is offended, and we get blamed. We are careful to be polite: 'I must remember she's a little sensitive about that. I mustn't forget this, in case I get blamed. I want to make sure that I understand everyone's perspectives and that everyone agrees on this point.' Doing this can make you so nervous that you slip up ... then the blame hits you, 'You're an insensitive, callous pig. How could you say that?' Then you're writhing on the point of the arrow of suffering.

The Buddha made a very helpful summary of blame: '*They blame one who remains silent, they blame one who speaks much, they blame one who speaks in moderation. There is no one in this world who is not blamed*' (Dhp. 227). That applied to him, too, for the Buddha was blamed many times. So when we know it's inevitable we can just focus on doing our best, all the time keeping our wisdom-ear cocked for the mind's yearning for approval and its dread of disapproval. Once the mind starts to even anticipate being blamed, a flurry enters into it. And when the blaming begins ... our mind may try to come up with a rational explanation for whatever it was we're being blamed for. Or maybe we try apologising. Or we retort, 'You're just as bad.' We flounder in these ways, rather than simply feeling where the blame is digging in and then drawing a line around it: 'This is painful mental feeling.' It's a trigger, so we need to be extremely patient with that feeling. Patience can't just be idealised; it has to be learned by feeling a painful feeling and no longer reacting. It's a humbling lesson: to feel the pain, be patient with it and learn something about letting it pass through.

With fame and praise, the sting is manipulateness, intoxication and self-inflation. People do deals or compromise their integrity in order to be winners: athletes cheat at games, or people try to fix their bodies with obsessive dieting or cosmetic surgery. All this suffering and loss of dignity for the glow of attention! And how long is a fame or praise addict satisfied before wanting another hit? If you crave that rush of positive attention, get it, feed and rely on it—you inflate and crash. On the other hand if you hang on to blame, become a victim and make a self out of it—you bury your heart in despair. And if you try to avoid these, you'll be running forever.

So can you focus simply on the impression in the heart and not shrug it off, not fight back, not go under? An impression is an impression. Don't rely on it, don't

adopt it, don't try to avoid it. Instead, understand it for what it is. Then you can see the truth about someone blaming you. Have you made a mistake? Is there something you can learn from this? And you can see the truth about someone praising you. How much good will fame do for you? Doesn't it deprive you of privacy? And that surge that you feel from gain ... doesn't it make you vulnerable to loss? These winds are there to teach you patience. Even your neediness and despair aren't reliable, so be patient; focus on how patience feels and value it. Then you can acknowledge specific mistakes you've made without taking on the sense of being a failure. And you can experience others' gratitude or praise with a sense of gladness that they have received something of benefit. You don't have to own it.

Learning the True Response

For an achievement that will provide long-lasting nourishment, we have to develop a response to unsatisfactoriness, *dukkha*. The Buddha's encouragement was that *dukkha* must be understood. The unsatisfactory, inconclusive, never-quite-fitting, thingsgoing-wrong, unstable quality has to be understood in order to realize the place where it ceases. And in order to understand, we have to 'stand under' that unsatisfactoriness. We don't pole-vault over it to the nice bit on the other shore. Instead, we stand under it as it cascades over us. When there is a complete standing-under, we feel the quality of that flood. You look to where things touch you, where things are felt. You look at physical pain and what that does to you. You see how first of all you wriggle a bit to find a way to soften it; then you begin to get a little annoyed by it; then you get very annoyed by it. Or you remember some harsh words that have been placed at your door. You think, 'It's not fair this is happening to me; not fair that it's going on for so long.' Then you think, 'Oh, give up.' But still it hasn't gone. It didn't go because you haven't really given up; you were waiting for it to end, so you've only given up ninety percent. Eventually, it pushes you into a corner, and the only thing you can do is accept its presence and work on your reactions.

I learnt this pretty early on in my monastic life. I was living in a monastery that had a section in it for intensive meditation practice, while the rest of the community was involved with the sort of things that a lot of Asian monasteries take on: servicing the lay community, performing ceremonies, offering classes to children, maintaining the property. The meditation area was kept apart; but of course from time to time when there was a big occasion, the sound of the public address

system could be heard clearly. This was all reasonable enough, but the mind isn't always about being reasonable. So I'd get irritated by these disturbances. My concentration was so fragile that I couldn't maintain my meditation topic in the presence of noise. Even the croaking of the local frogs would bother me.

Well it so happened that at one time, the monastery had a very big celebration: an ordination hall was being opened, and for this occasion, ninety-nine men were undertaking temporary ordination over a period of eleven days. As the rule is that three is the maximum number that can be ordained together at any one time, this meant thirty-three ordination ceremonies, all of which required the presence of the entire resident male community. Actually, because of some judicial procedure, each of us only had to go to half that number. Nevertheless, while allowing for meal breaks and so on, this meant that for several days there were ceremonies round the clock, day and night. I'd be in my hut until there was a knock on the door, then off to an ordination, get back for an hour or two, then off again.

The environment was steeped in sound: the sound of the loudspeaker celebrating donations by naming each individual donor and how much they'd given; the sound of chanting; Dhamma talks; announcements; and the sound from any of the four film shows that were playing in the monastery grounds. There was no way that I could block it out. But wonderfully enough the sound was more continual and implacable than the complaining and the resistance of my mind. Eventually after a few days of turmoil, the mind gave up and just bathed in the sound; and with that, the sound stopped stirring my heart. It was amazing to feel a sense of silence and space in the midst of so much noise. And I think my mind learned

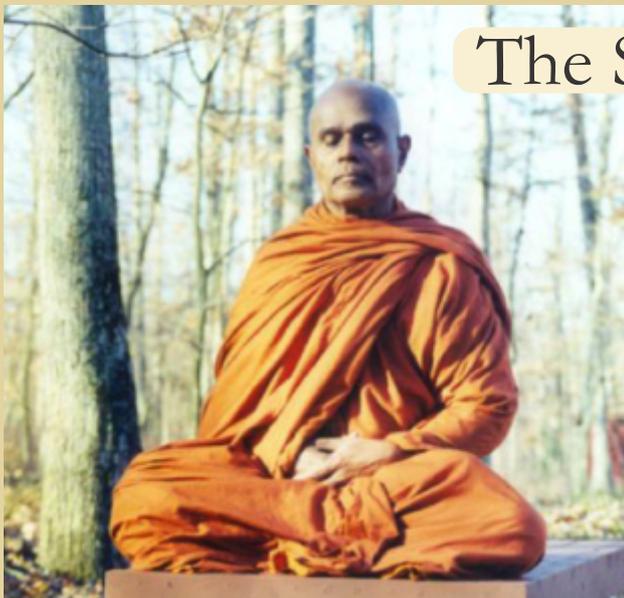
something important, because sound has never been a problem since. I now know that the wise response to disturbance is to make it the object of meditation.

In that full allowing of conditions to be what they are, we stabilize our hearts and find peace. It's like putting a boat into water. We make an ark of truth: 'Conditions are like this,' and in that truth, we don't adopt the conditions as our own. This is important: you can't drain the sea, but you don't have to drown.

Why we feel overwhelmed, as if we're drowning, is because the heart is 'leaky.' When it isn't secure, perceptions and feelings flood in and cause it to sink. But even then it's just mind-stuff—no sights, sounds, physical pains or harsh words, just the impressions of those. It is these impressions that mount up to a sense of overwhelm and alienation. And the heart can recycle them for years, even when their apparent external source has long disappeared.

These perceptions, moods and reactions arise dependent on the mind's expectations, fragility or aims. We have to learn deeply that the approval of others, the success in our career, and the presence of what we love are not to be taken as given, not to be adopted as mine. This adopting of conditions is what knocks holes in our boat. But when these conditions can be held in the truth of their nature, the mind lets go and senses a freedom that doesn't depend on supports. Gain, loss, praise, blame—you don't have to go under. You can wear out the reflex of hanging on to the world. But for this you have to be very patient.

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The Secret of Breathing

by Bhante Gunaratana

There is something very simple and practical, and yet something that most of us pay little attention to. It is the secret of breathing; the truth that is hidden within the breath. Although we have been breathing all our life, very few of us give much consideration to the breath and discover the truth it can reveal.

When we pay attention to the breath in our meditation practice, what do we become aware of? We may first note that the breath is always coming and going. Second, we may also notice that sometimes the breath has varying qualities, such as being short, long,

shallow, or deep. Beyond that, very few of us go into any detailed understanding or examination of the breath. I want to take a deeper look tonight, in order to note some things that we perhaps have not paid attention to before. We can all observe these deeper aspects of breathing, but until we pay attention to them they don't seem to exist. The Buddha said that all phenomena exist for us only when we pay attention to them. Attention brings out hidden secrets.

We can find the entire truth of suffering within breathing. Even if you have no other practice, breathing itself can be enough to awaken you to the reality of suffering. You may ask: "How can that be? How can there be any suffering in a simple and automatic act like breathing?"

Let us look deeper. To begin with, I would like to ask you to stop breathing for ten minutes! None of us can do that. Now let's consider the breathing process in more detail. As you breathe in and breathe out, simply give your full attention to the breath. Do you notice that when you breathe in, you experience a subtle satisfaction? What is happening? If the lungs don't have air, we become anxious. This anxiety message goes to the brain. The parasympathetic nerves immediately give a message to the lungs to pull in air as quickly as possible.

But why does this anxiety arise? Because we have a strong desire to survive, a desire to exist. That desire cannot be assigned to any one place in our brain or in our body. Desire permeates our body and mind. Every cell in our body possesses desire. Every cell has the desire to survive, and they all cooperate to give this message to the lungs and to the brain, because every cell depends upon oxygen. When there is no available oxygen the cells become agitated. This agitation is transmitted to the brain and then to the lungs: breathe!

So you can see that desire is built into us. Even at the moment of birth, we have desire. When we look at a baby we might be inclined to say, "Look at this sweet baby. So innocent!" Although they are indeed innocent, they also have an enormous amount of greed. They can't express this greed in words, but their crying can, and it will attract everybody's attention. Although a baby doesn't plan to be desirous, when it feels a need, such as hunger, desire arises. Even the bodies of tiny babies have many trillions of cells and they all want to be fed. We are born with this desire, this greed. That is why the Buddha said that our very coming into existence is suffering; that our very birth is suffering.

Therefore even our breathing can be seen to be guided by and dependent upon desire—however subtle it may be. So when we breathe in, we fulfil this subtle

desire. It is mostly a subconscious desire. In contrast, if you were not to breathe for maybe two minutes, you would experience much agitation, and even fear. You would then become consciously anxious. This anxiety—whether subconscious or conscious—is dukkha. It is suffering.

Subtle Suffering

Suffering has many different levels. The subconscious anxiety associated with breathing is a very subtle level of suffering. We don't always have to experience great suffering, such as sickness and disease, to understand it. Every one of us experiences the subtle anxiety, the subtle suffering, associated with breathing.

So when we breathe in, that anxiety slowly fades away. We then experience a certain amount of satisfaction and comfort; along with a feeling of security and even a certain amount of happiness. It is not a great deal of happiness, but we feel a small sense of satisfaction, proportional to the subtle anxiety we just subconsciously felt, before breathing in.

Then, after we have mindfully breathed in, we note, as the lungs become full of the breath that just gave us satisfaction, it now brings us dissatisfaction. Why is this? When the lungs become full, we cannot hold the breath for long—maybe a minute, at best, two minutes. As we hold the breath, we feel an uncomfortable pressure in our lungs.

What is happening inside? As soon as air goes into our lungs, blood cells absorb its oxygen. They go through our system, exchanging carbon dioxide for the oxygen. Now, there is carbon dioxide in our lungs and we need fresh air. The lungs cannot hold this old air for very long, before they send a message to the brain, and the brain sends out a corresponding message, "Push it out! Push it out!" If the lungs hold that breath for very long, we can begin to feel great anxiety.

Thus, the same breath that once gave us pleasure, now gives us an unpleasant pressure in the next moment. That is also suffering. That is unsatisfactoriness. As we breathe in we get satisfaction. But that breath itself is then growing old, and as it does, it has to die. Every moment of any existence brings a new moment, causing the previous moment to become old and decayed. This happens to our body, our cells, and even our breath.

So, we alternatively experience satisfaction and then dissatisfaction as we breathe in and as we breathe out, because we have desire. The source of this desire is not lodged in our brain, but is in every cell of our body. It is desire that causes us to bring air in; it is desire that forces us to push air out. It is desire that makes us glad; it

is desire that makes us sad. So, within desire itself there is a moment of sadness and a moment of gladness.

When we pay mindful attention, we discover various truths. One truth is that we always have greed. Another truth is that there is always unsatisfactoriness. There is yet another truth: what we have called ageing. But another name for it is *anicca*, impermanence. Because of impermanence, these feelings of gladness and sadness arise. It is because of impermanence that we have the desire to breathe in and breathe out. First, we breathe in, and since the breath is impermanent, we have to breathe again. The nature of impermanence is to force something to be repeated. When something happens it doesn't last long; it disappears and we have to repeat it again and again and again.

When we mindfully watch the breath, we come to realize that there is nothing in life we do only once. Impermanence causes things endlessly to be repeated. But you might raise the question: "What about birth? What about death? They aren't repeated." The fact is that birth does not happen to us only once. Death does not happen only once. We can even see that as we observe our breathing. Birth takes place every time we breathe in. Death takes place every time we breathe out.

There are three types of death that we can experience. The first is called 'momentary death'. It's the type of death that happens to the breath. Momentary death also happens to the cells in our body. Every cell has a momentary death and a momentary birth.

The second type of death—that we all understand—is called 'conventional death'. Understanding the secret of the truth of breathing and experiencing its momentary death helps us to face conventional death. When we deeply watch anything (in this case, the breath) we see that every moment is changing. There is nothing there for us to hold on to. It's all changing. When we see this truth, we come to understand that conventional death is nothing more than this temporary, momentary death. When we breathe in, we don't really know if we will die at that moment. Similarly, when we breathe out we might not be able to breathe in again. Momentary death is so natural, so real, so quick—it is happening to us all the time. If we keep our mind on this, and we understand the truth of it, then when conventional death approaches, we won't be afraid of it.

Conventional death is just going to be followed by another conventional birth. Of course, as Buddhists practitioners our ultimate goal is never to be born again. Instead, we seek to die an eternal death—the third type of death. Ultimately, we seek to bring the repetition of momentary death and conventional death to an end.

Craving, greed, and desire must cease. Yet as long as we feel desire, whether we do something wholesome or unwholesome, unsatisfactoriness and suffering occur—and momentary death reoccurs.

So we can see that we have all of these lessons hidden in the breathing process. The main two points I want to emphasize is that there is desire, and thus there is suffering caused by this desire.

An End to Suffering

We can also see the end of suffering, and the end of the cause of suffering, in the breathing process. We see this as we mindfully watch the arising of the desire to breathe in—we just let this breath come in without desiring it. Sometimes people will think they can't avoid desire, saying: "But I have to breathe deeply. I have to control my breath. That's a natural desire." That is not true. When we simply let the breath come in and go out, we can watch it, detached, without desiring anything. When we simply watch the breath as it comes and goes, we can experience durable satisfaction.

This lack of desire is true peace. Non-craving, even for the slightest thing, is an experience of peace. Real peace is the cessation of all *saṅkhāras* (something that exists dependent upon something else). The breath itself is a *saṅkhāra*. The cessation of this *saṅkhāra* (not grasping) is peace. All grasping is abandoned. When we breathe in and out, if we feel a desire, we abandon it.

The underlying tendency of a pleasant feeling is desire. The underlying tendency of an unpleasant feeling is rejection, resentment, or anger. The underlying tendency of a neutral feeling is confusion. Of course, not all pleasant feeling has the underlying tendency of desire, not all unpleasant feeling has the underlying tendency of hatred, and not all neutral feeling has the underlying tendency of confusion. How can we have a pleasant feeling without it being associated with desire?

When greed ceases and when grasping ceases, peace will then arise. That peaceful feeling is a pleasant feeling since within that peaceful feeling there is no desire as an underlying tendency. This is what is called happiness without desire or greed. It is spiritual happiness.

Similarly, we can have spiritually unpleasant feelings, without hatred being experienced as an underlying tendency. For example, when we focus our mind on our breath, we can come to see impermanence, desire, letting go of our greed, etc. This may happen for an extended period of time, yet we still may not achieve the expected peace. If this happens, we may find we have the unpleasant feelings of not attaining peace arise, but

without the hatred. So the meditator understands: “Instead of getting upset and disappointed, I must make more effort.” This experience can be an encouragement for the meditator to practise more vigorously, rather than getting upset. That is why it is called an unpleasant feeling without hatred as an underlying tendency. It is a useful unpleasantness which urges us on.

Glimpsing Right Understanding

If we diligently continue to follow this practice, we may find we momentarily experience the cessation of greed, hatred and delusion. This brings us a feeling of tremendous peace. It is a momentary cessation of suffering. Temporarily, we experience the bliss of Nibbāna, just for a fraction of a second—giving us an indication, a taste of what Nibbāna is like. For every moment that we let go of our desire, our greed, the craving to breathe, we experience the momentary bliss of Nibbāna.

We can see that by simply focusing the mind on the breath, we are on the path leading to the attainment of Nibbāna. This practice can encompass the complete Noble Eightfold Path leading to liberation. How can this be? I’m not going to go into the complete list at this time, but we might look briefly at number one on that path: right understanding. When we understand this whole process of breathing, exactly as it is, we are developing right understanding. That is, we understand this is what is called suffering, in this tiny example of breathing. The cause of suffering is this little bit of greed that we have. And the end of suffering is that little peace we experience when we let go of greed. That understanding, that insight, is right understanding. We can see this in the breath itself. Simply while breathing and being mindful of it, we can gain a glimpse of it.

While on the Noble Eightfold Path, you don’t always practise each step in the order they are listed. You practise each element as required. For example, we have a tendency to neatly arrange our kitchen utensils. The measuring spoon is in its place, ladles are in their place, pans in theirs. We’ve arranged everything nicely, even beautifully. But when we begin to cook, we don’t necessarily use the utensils in the order in which they’re arranged. We grab whatever is necessary and use it. Similarly, for the Noble Eightfold Path, the Buddha has ordered its spiritual utensils in a beautiful way. Step by step, he explains right understanding, thinking, speech, and so forth. But we may practise them in a different order as the opportunity and need presents itself.

So, here is another example of the larger path being contained within the simple activity of watching the breathing process. When we follow the path, we

might begin with understanding (the first listed step), but we will use whatever factor is necessary at the moment. For example, while engaging in this practice of mindfulness of breathing, we may begin with understanding, but as we work at it, we could become drowsy. Then it’s necessary to use right effort. Then we might become agitated. So we must regain our balance with right concentration. So we bring to our practice whichever Noble Eightfold Path factor is necessary.

And so, as we focus the mind on the breath, giving it total, undivided attention, many things unfold all by themselves. As we engage in this practice, our understanding and our mindfulness keep growing, evolving, unfolding. It is a wonderful way to glimpse the truth of existence.

Obituaries

Venerable Acharya Buddharakkhita passed away in Bangalore on 23rd September 2013 at the ripe age of 90. Besides his unrelenting efforts to establish Theravada Buddhism in India, building monasteries and ordaining monks, Acharya Buddharakkhita wrote many books, several of which were published by the Buddhist Publication Society. His translation of the Dhammapada and *Metta the Philosophy & Practice of Universal Love* are popular BPS titles.

Less than a week later, on the 29th of September, another great Indian Buddhist missionary of Buddhism, Acharya Shri Satya Narayan Goenka, passed away in Mumbai, also at the age of 90. His great talent for making Buddhist insight meditation attractive to a wide public has been very successful. Goenkaji established Vipassana meditation centres throughout the world and introduced innumerable people to Buddhism, many of whom remain dedicated meditators.

May the acharyas attain Nibbāna!

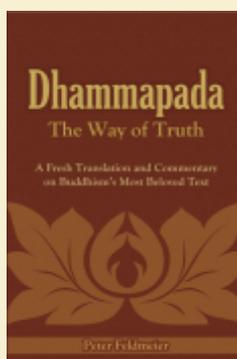
On the 8th of August Cynthia Thatcher, author of *Just Seeing*, a popular book on meditation published by the BPS, passed away in the USA at the age of 47. Cynthia, who suffered from a painful nervous system disease for several years, peacefully passed away while her mother was reading to her from a Dhamma book. She was a keen practitioner of insight (*vipassana*) meditation. Before she got ill, she went to Thailand several times to do meditation retreats with her teacher Ajahn Sobhin Namto. A few months before she passed away she wrote to a friend that she got interested in Buddhist meditation as a college student, when she opened a book on Buddhism that she found in the college library: “At the word ‘nonself’ I felt as if I’d been struck

by lightning. The feeling came that nonself was something I had always known to be true, in some vague way in the back of my mind, but had never been able to articulate or bring into focus. The idea seemed very familiar, like remembering something I'd forgotten long ago or coming home after many years in a foreign place. From that moment onward I felt that this was it for me. There was no question or hesitation. I took the book home and began practicing meditation from the instructions the next day. I remember sitting on the roof of our communal house at night, trying to meditate, not knowing what I was doing. But I didn't care. I never worried that I might be doing it wrong. I regarded it as a grand experiment. Here was something practical I could do instead of endless thinking and reasoning. I just

wanted to investigate, to find out what was real. Even though I had no idea what 'reality' was, I had strong faith that somehow meditation would lead me to it. ... from the night I found that book in the library so many years ago, there's never been a moment in which I doubted that this is the correct path for me and that these are true teachings." Due to her understanding of the Dhamma, Cynthia was not afraid of death: "If I could have less pain I would not mind living longer. But if things had to remain as they are now, I would absolutely prefer to die. I am looking forward to dying, because I do believe in kamma and I believe that the result of the little bit of merit I may have made in this lifetime will lead to a better rebirth."

May she attain Nibbāna!

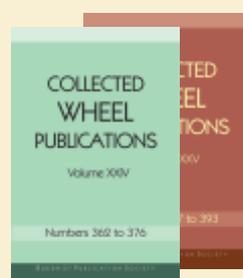
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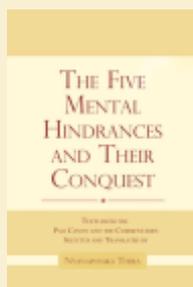


Collected Wheel Publications 24 & 25 Various authors

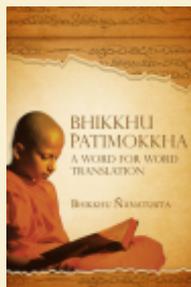
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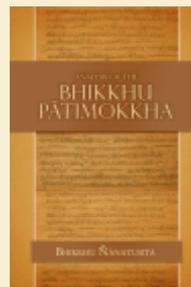
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