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URGENCY OF PRACTICE

A Discourse by Venerable Mankadawala Sudassana, Sri Lanka

How many of us want suffering? No one wants suffering. Unfortunately, even though none of us want suffering, most of us do not know what needs to be done to reduce or eliminate suffering. Even though we may have a conceptual understanding of the Four Noble Truths, most of us accumulate wealth and possessions, and seek sense pleasures, thinking, “This will reduce suffering and lead to happiness.” However, the cause of suffering is not the lack of material wealth and comforts. If it were, then we could avoid suffering in this manner. Even though we may have comfortable homes, vehicles, good obedient children and many possessions, we still face suffering. We still cannot escape from old age, sickness, separation and death. We do not see that all that we accumulate and cling to, as pleasurable and belonging to me, eventually leads to suffering.

It is not by accumulating wealth and possessions that we eliminate suffering. It is by listening to the Dhamma and being inspired to practice the proper way that we eliminate suffering. By means of four stories I will illustrate urgency of practice.

Importance of a Good Dhamma Friend

The first story took place a very long time ago at the time of the Kassapa Buddha. The Bodhisatta was born into the Brahmin caste as a young man by the name of Jotipāla. His best friend from childhood was a young man of low cast named Ghaṭikāra. The two were inseparable friends and loyal to each other. Unbeknown to Jotipāla, Ghaṭikāra, inspired by the teachings of the Kassapa Buddha, had practiced and realized the noble state of Non-returner (*anāgāmi*). Ghaṭikāra invited Jotipāla to listen to the Dhamma of the Kassapa Buddha, however, Jotipāla was not interested and did not want to go. Ghaṭikāra then suggested to go and bathe in the river instead. The playful Jotipāla agreed.

While they were bathing and playing in the water, Ghaṭikāra caught hold of Jotipāla by his long hair and ducked him underwater. Then saying he would not let him go unless Jotipāla agreed to hear the teaching of the Kassapa Buddha, he firmly held his head under water.

Realizing that there must be a very strong reason for his loyal friend to make such a strong request, Jotipāla agreed. At that time it was unheard of for a low cast person to touch a high cast person. To behave in such a disrespectful manner was an outrage. Jotipāla, who knew his friend well, did not get angry or offended. Instead, understanding that there must be a very important reason for his friend's disrespectful and dangerous behaviour, he agreed to go.

Jotipāla was immediately inspired by the teachings of the Kassapa Buddha and wanted to ordain as a monk. He asked Ghaṭikāra why he was not ordaining under the Kassapa Buddha. When Ghaṭikāra explained that he had to take care of his elderly blind parents, Jotipāla decided to join the Order by himself. Studying and grasping the teachings quickly, Venerable Jotipāla became a great teacher and asset in the dispensation of the Kassapa Buddha. It is said that it was as if a second Buddha had appeared in this era.

Thus you can see how a person who was not interested in the Dhamma changed and became an asset to the Buddha Sāsana through association with a good Dhamma friend (*kalyānamitta*). A Dhamma friend is rare and essential for spiritual growth. When you find an inspiring Dhamma friend you like the Venerable Sudassana, you should not delay. You should use every opportunity to further your knowledge and practice with him.

Inspired to Practice

There are many types of people in the world. The Buddha said that there are some people who will use their wealth or sell their possessions and get money to look after their limbs. For example, a person who has to replace a kidney may sell his property and obtain the money required to get a new kidney. Some people give up parts of their limbs to save their life. For example, some amputate their legs that are infected with gangrene so that they can live. “A great man” the Buddha said, “gives up wealth, limbs, and his life for liberation.” The second story is about such a great man.

Many years ago in Sri Lanka, there lived two wealthy parents who had two sons. When the two sons

had grown up, the elderly parents divided their wealth equally between the children and handed over the management of their land to their sons. Shortly after this, the parents passed away. The older son, Tissa, was a very thoughtful and reflective person. He saw devotees walk past his house daily with flowers and lamps, and curious to see why they were going every evening to the temple, decided to join them. The younger brother got married.

Before long, inspired by the Buddha's teachings, Tissa decided to ordain. He approached the Buddhist monks and requested ordination. The monks asked Tissa if he had got permission to ordain from his loved ones. Tissa informed the monks that he only had a younger brother as he was not married and his parents had passed away. Then the monks asked Tissa to get permission from his younger brother, his only remaining relative.

Tissa's younger brother, who was very fond of him, started to lament and cry. Saying that he no longer had a mother or father and his brother was now everything to him, he offered his share of the wealth to his older brother to encourage Tissa to remain in the lay life. Tissa, however, who had understood the inevitable separations and sufferings in life had made up his mind to ordain. Offering to give all his wealth to his younger brother, Tissa reasoned and pleaded with him and obtained permission to ordain. Then, wearing rag robes and taking a begging bowl, Tissa ordained and went to the forest to meditate in a cave.

The younger brother and his wife were now very wealthy landowners. The wife was enjoying the immense wealth and was overcome by greed. After some time she thought, "If our elder brother changes his mind, disrobes and comes back, his share of the wealth would need to be given back to him." To prevent this, she secretly called some assassins, gave them a large sum of money and told them to kill the Venerable Tissa. She gave them the directions to the forest cave and promised them an even larger sum of money when the crime was completed.

Taking the money, the assassins set out to kill Venerable Tissa. As they approached the cave, the Venerable monk greeted them and asked why they had come. The assassins informed the monk that they had come to kill him. As he had harmed no one, the innocent monk asked as to why they wanted to kill him. The assassins answered that they had already got a large sum of money and would get even more when the job of killing him was done.

Venerable Tissa, who realized the dangers of this samsaric journey and the opportunity he had to practice, then asked the assassins to grant him just one more day. The assassins laughed, saying that they were not fools and that he was a cunning old monk who

would run away the moment they set him free. Drawing their swords they surrounded Venerable Tissa and prepared to kill him.

The Venerable Tissa then picked up a large rock with difficulty, raised it high above his head, and dropped it on his feet to break them and show the robbers that he would not run away. He broke the bones of his feet for the sake of the practising the Buddha's Teaching. Understanding the dangers of this samsaric journey, he reflected: "Many times in this samsaric journey have I broken my feet by falling and striking tree roots and stubs. Many a time have I died of accidents and fatal injuries. Understanding the dangers of remaining in saṃsāra even for one more birth, I sacrifice my feet and life to attain release from suffering." The assassins realized the purity of mind of the Venerable monk and left him.

Venerable Tissa could no longer practice walking meditation. The pain in his feet was excruciating. Meditating on the pain, with effort and immense confidence in the Buddha Dhamma, the Venerable Tissa attained liberation from all mental bondages and became an arahant.

Persons such as Venerable Tissa who are inspired and have confidence in the Buddha Dhamma are rare. The Venerable Tissa had the wisdom to understand the dangers of this samsaric journey. If we could see the suffering we have faced in the past we may, like the Venerable Tissa, have the courage and confidence to make similar sacrifices. But the sufferings of our past are veiled in ignorance. Venerable Tissa was indeed a great man for he gave up his wealth, limbs and life for liberation.

This samsaric journey is very long and dangerous. The Buddha said that we have cried more tears over the death of our loved ones than the waters of the four great oceans. We have taken animal birth and shed more blood dying than the waters of the four great oceans. In fact we have taken animal birth more times than we have taken human birth. People think that this is an exaggeration. But the Buddha does not tell lies or exaggerate to encourage us on the path. We do not have the courage and determination of the Venerable Tissa because we have not as yet seen or understood the dangers of saṃsāra.

Dangers of Wrong view

The third story is about a wealthy couple that had three children. They had two sons and a daughter. The parents were foolish and had wrong views. The father was a farmer who was so attached to his fields that it was all that he did. His whole life was farming and accumulating wealth. The mother was busy in keeping a beautiful house and was totally involved in household tasks. The daughter was enraptured by her beauty and

the beauty of the gardens and lake they owned. The younger brother, like the father, was only bent on accumulating wealth. Only the older brother was different; he was inspired by the teachings of the Buddha and followed them.

Before long the older brother ordained as a Buddhist monk, he meditated with great effort and became an arahant. Despite the fact that they had a great arahant as a son and a brother, none in the family gave any alms to their kinsman. They continued accumulating wealth and taking care of the needs and comforts of each other. As they were all like-minded they got on well with each other, and were very attached to each other. Their household revolved around their own personal needs, wealth and comfort. The years passed and the family continued accumulating wealth. After some years the parents died of old age and shortly after the sister died of a grave sickness. The younger brother inherited the family wealth and lived in comfort, but did not change his ways.

One day the younger brother had killed a large pig that had wandered into his field and was taking it home to cook when he met his older brother on his alms round. Thinking that he had a lot of meat just for himself, he invited his brother to his house for alms. The monk accepted his younger brother's invitation but asked him not to cut up the pig until he came to his house. The younger brother, thinking that he would cut and serve a freshly cooked meal, agreed. He then rushed back home to prepare a seat and await his older brother.

The monk arrived at their ancestral home and requested the younger brother to cut open the stomach of the pig carefully. He said that inside the pig's stomach there would be large snake. Indeed there was a snake. He then requested his brother to cut open the stomach of the snake, where there would be a partially digested large frog, and there was. The monk then asked his younger brother if he knew who the pig, snake and frog were. When his brother replied that he did not know, the monk told him that the pig was his former father, the snake his mother and the frog his sister. He then urged him to change his ways, and practice the teachings of the Buddha. The younger brother, who loved and missed his parents and sister, was moved by the bad karmic results of their wrong views and selfish ways of life. He changed his ways by following the advice and teachings of his older brother.

We should not delay and sacrifice our practice of the Dhamma because of children, parents and others. Understand that however much we love our children that we do not own them. We cannot control their lives by saying that they are "mine." How can we, when we cannot even control our own life as "me" and "mine"? After death, those whom we loved so much may take

birth as animals and even serve as food for each other. We may even take rebirth as enemies—so dangerous is this samsaric journey.

We now live in a Buddha-era, a fortunate, opportune era where the Buddha's Teachings are taught and can be realized. If we are not practicing because of children or wealth, even though we obtained human birth in a Buddha-era, then this is a lost opportunity. As we grow older and have fulfilled our obligations towards our children you should understand the dangers of this samsaric journey and let go.

How can we say "I have children and wealth" and think that we will not face suffering? Can we control this body that we call "mine" and prevent it from sickness and old age? Can we prevent it from becoming a corpse and oozing pus and fluids at death? Why then are we content saying that we have children and wealth? Why are we heedless when we can see others age and die all around us?

When our neighbour's house is robbed we watch over and protect our house by staying up all night. We lock the doors and install an alarm system. But when we see others growing old and dying we take no notice. We do not see that we too have aged. We think, "Death is not for me it is for others. I still have time." We are not afraid, but when we die we have to give up all our possessions, even more so than what was robbed from our neighbour's house. Death robs us off all your possessions, but still we are without fear. It is our defilements that give us this false sense of courage. It is delusion that makes us feel that it will not happen to us. No one knows when it is time for us to go.

We cannot win freedom from suffering by letting the mind do whatever it wants. If it is children and accumulation of wealth that we think brings freedom from suffering, then this is a wrong view. This body will eventually fall sick and get old. When we come to old age, no one will come to save us. Even if the children love us, they cannot take away our old age and give us back your good health and youth. Can they take some of our pain? Why are we so foolish?

So take care of yourself. You have done so much for others, now it is time to think of yourself. Understand the nature of this life with wisdom. You do not understand the value of the Dhamma. You practice not because "the Buddha said so" or "the Venerable monk said so." Question and see if you can enjoy your possessions forever. If you can get at least this much in the next birth of this samsaric journey, then that is fine, but it may not happen like this. When you listen to the Dhamma, you agree, but later when you go home you forget. Do not delay like the crow did in the following story.

Do not Delay

The fourth story happened in a forest in the Himalayas where a large elephant had died. Heavy rains lasting for many days resulted in a flood that swept away the carcass of the elephant into the Ganges River. A greedy crow saw the carcass that was slowly floating down the river. It perched on the elephant and tore at its flesh. After satisfying his hunger, he drank some water from the river. He ate and drank, and ate and drank. What more did he want? All he needed was right here. The crow decided to live on the elephant carcass and not fly around seeking food anymore. Even though the crow thought that he was not going any place, the carcass was slowly floating downriver and eventually reached the sea. And it was taking the greedy crow with it even though he thought that he was stationary. Before long he was far out in the sea.

The greedy crow was so busy eating that it took him a long time to realize that only a small piece of the carcass was left. Realizing that he would have to look for food elsewhere, he flew up, but could see any land. He was too far out in the sea, too far away from any land. He flew this way and that way, looking around in vain. Exhausted, he wanted to fly back towards the elephant carcass, but it was gone. The bit that was left had been eaten by hungry sharks. Exhausted the crow fell into the sea and was immediately eaten by a shark.

Many of us are like the greedy crow. Of course we have to eat to live. If the crow ate in moderation and left the carcass before it reached the sea he would have survived, but he remained attached to the carcass until it was too late. Thinking, “Who is the fool who will give up a good thing,” the greedy crow clung to the elephant until it was too late. We too often cling to our wealth, children, and possessions until it is too late. When we see the dangers of old age and sickness, we already have reached the point of no return. Unbeknown to us we have grown old. We cannot hear any more and we cannot see well. Our concentration and energy are weak. Do not wait until it is too late like the crow. Realize that we are slowly moving towards the deep sea of old age, sickness and death. Don't forget that in the end, when we die, even the wealth and children have to be left behind. Let go and practice when you still have good health and energy.

The Cause of Suffering

We cannot see and understand this urgency because of ignorance. Very rare is the person who has the wisdom to understand this urgency. Very rare indeed is a Buddha-era. If in this life-time we can come to a stable state and become a stream-enterer (*sotāpanna*) we have not wasted this opportunity. Remaining in *samsāra* is suffering and we all want relief from suffering. We have

all faced sickness and separation from those we love. But we have tried to reduce suffering by accumulating wealth and sense pleasures. It is time now to understand the real cause of suffering. Then we will realize that accumulating wealth and sense pleasures is not going to eliminate suffering.

When it is raining and the roof leaks, we know what to do. We know that the roof needs to be fixed. What happens if we cover the roof without first locating the hole? We may then cover the wrong place. This is what most of us do in life. We do not want suffering, but without finding the cause of suffering, we find the solution. Then we wonder why we still have suffering. Wealth, possessions and children are not the solution to suffering. They are not the solution because they are not the cause of suffering. We have to first understand the cause then we can come up with the solution. Similarly, we have to first find the hole, then we can cover the leaky roof.

To illustrate the cause of suffering and how suffering arises I will give an simile based on the Mahānidāna Sutta in the Dīgha Nikāya. You must remember this simile and always keep it in mind. Then you will not be confused into thinking that the solution to suffering is the accumulation of wealth and the enjoyment of sense pleasures.

Let us imagine that you find a beautiful gem stone and have it valued. You are thrilled to find that your gem is worth millions of dollars. The moment you know of the value of the gem the quality of your mind changes. Craving (*tanhā*) in the form of strong liking arises. You did not have to make yourself like it; desire and attachment for the gem arose in your mind automatically. Next you take pride in ownership, “This valuable gem is mine.” Then craving turns to grasping (*upādāna*). This too arises in the mind automatically.

Then fear arises in the mind. Thoughts of protection follow. You start to look for places to hide the gem. You hide it in the closet, under the mattress or even in the chilli or flour bowl. It's got to be some place a thief will never look. Now even leaving the house is stressful. You are even watchful and suspicious when your neighbour visits. You are afraid that someone will steal your precious gem. But it does not stop there: You buy a gun, sword or pole to protect the gem. You think, “This is my gem and it is worth millions.” If any one comes to steal it you most certainly will shoot or strike them. Liking turned to grasping and fear. Now your normally gentle and harmless mind is gross and ruthless. You are even planning how you would yell and kill the thief who may come to steal it.

From the day you found the gem, the quality of your mind changed. First strong liking, then grasping, then fear of theft, and finally even thoughts of ill-will and hatred have entered your mind. All of these changes arose in

your mind because you found a valuable gem. You are now even ready to kill to safeguard your gem. See how your mind has got polluted!

Now just imagine what would happen if you would lose your precious gem. You may weep and lament, you may even faint and get furiously angry at the thief. You may even start planning the thief's punishment when he is caught.

What do you think will happen if you die in this state of mind? If you die in this state of anger and strong attachment you may even take rebirth as a hungry ghost, a *peta*. What have you done? You have lost your freedom because you are afraid to leave the house you suffer in this life protecting it and if you lose it you suffer in both this life and the next by grieving after it. Now it does not matter if you have the gem or you lose the gem. In either case you suffer. What if you had a thousand valuable gems? How much will you suffer then? Is it then not suffering that you have protected as a valuable gem?

We are like a moth that flies into a candle flame because it is attracted by the light and warmth. It does not have the wisdom to realize that its seeming source of pleasure is actually suffering until it is too late and it burns in the flame. The moth does not want suffering but it is attracted to the flame that burns it and causes it suffering. We are like this too. We do not like suffering, but we are attracted to the “gem” that causes suffering both in this life and the next. Just like the ignorant little moth, we do not have the wisdom to see that our source of pleasure eventually results in suffering.

The Cessation of Craving

Let us now see what happens if you decide to sell the gem. The first merchant examines the gem and says it is a worthless gem. Yelling at him and accusing him of cheating, you leave in anger. Another merchant confirms the fact that it is just a worthless glass stone. What then happens to your liking and grasping of the gem? They disappear. The quality of your mind changes automatically. There is no liking, no grasping, no fear, no ill-will, anger and hatred. Yet it is still the same object. The only thing that has changed is your view. Your view of the gem has changed from wrong view to right view.

When someone lies and tells you that the gem is worth a million dollars, the quality of your mind changes. For as long as you view it as a valuable gem you will suffer. Whether you have the gem in your possession or lose it you will suffer. This is what happens when you have wrong view. If you see the object of suffering, the “gem,” as pleasure and happiness, then craving, grasping, fear, ill-will, anger and hatred, all of which lead to suffering, will arise. They will arise automatically. When you have right view

and see the “gem” for what it really is, there is no more suffering. The release from suffering is instantaneous. The change in mind happens automatically.

We see this world—our house, cars and wealth, etc.—as “mine” and become attached to it because we see it as pleasurable. Due to delusion and ignorance we do not see things as they really are. All that we cling to and grasp are sources of suffering. All sense pleasures are sources of suffering. When we have right view and see the “gem” as it really is, there is freedom from suffering. The suffering just falls away. We no longer attach and grasp the gem.

When we see the world as permanent, self and pleasurable, this is a wrong view that leads to craving, grasping, fear and suffering. When we see that the world is impermanent, suffering and not self—this is right view. When we see things the way they are, then there is no suffering. Craving, grasping fear and suffering just disappear automatically. There is more suffering in this life and the next.

Suffering disappears just as it disappeared when you realized that the gem was worthless. This is what we need to strive towards. We need to strive towards right view—seeing things as they really are.

We cannot pray or wish for right view. We have to develop it though developing insight through meditation. A rock sinks when thrown into water. It will not float just because we pray for it to float. It is the nature of the rock to sink in water. In the same way, all phenomena are impermanent, not self and difficult to bear. This is the nature of all things. We cannot change it through wishing and praying. We have to see it for yourself. We have to develop insight and right view and see it the way it is. When we do, craving, grasping, fear and suffering will automatically fall away.

A Balanced Life

People see suffering as arising from outside of ourselves. This is wrong view. As a Buddhist lay person you have to earn money, you have to have a house to live in, and you must strive towards having the basics required for a comfortable life. Nobody is saying that a lay person should not do so, but you should not live to work. You should work to live.

You collect money build houses, buy cars and have children, but you must also make sure that you balance this side of your life with spiritual growth. This is how you can avoid suffering. You cannot be free from suffering by accumulating huge amounts of wealth and strong attachments and grasping. You have to let go before it is too late.

Do you know the story of the man who cleans drains? There once was a dedicated drain cleaner. He cleaned drains and made a living to support his family. He was good in his work and well respected for the

quality of his work. In the evenings he planned his next day's route and cleaning of drains. He wanted to make sure that he did his job well and nothing went wrong. He who started out cleaning drains to live now was living to clean drains. Do not become like the drain cleaner. Instead lead a balanced life.

The purpose of life is freedom from suffering. No one wants suffering. To achieve freedom from suffering you must develop right view and see things as they are. You must see the "gem" as a worthless glass stone. Then you will automatically let go and craving, grasping fear and suffering will fall away. At least in the evenings and night you should be striving for freedom from suffering. If you don't do this, then you are not a true Buddhist.

Do not spend the evenings enjoying sense-pleasures and accumulating wealth, thinking that this is

the way to freedom from suffering. Due to this wrong view you are still traversing in this samsaric journey. This is a Buddha-era and a fortunate time. So use this opportunity to strive for freedom from suffering in the right way. In this birth at least work towards the stable state of stream-entry. Being a stream-enterer, you will not fall away and take birth in an unhappy plane.

Buddhas come into this world to guide those who meditate and strive for right view. If you see the enjoyment of sense-pleasures as right view then you cannot come out of suffering. Use this opportunity to see things as they really are—as impermanent, suffering and not self—then you will escape from suffering.

Translated from the Sinhala language audio recording by Radhika Abeyskera, Canada.

The Four Protective Meditations

Punṇadhammo Bhikkhu

As anyone who has done a retreat knows, the mind is a difficult beast to tame. During the course of a session, it is inevitable that various difficulties will arise. These can take many forms; boredom, pain, desire and restlessness are among the most familiar. If the yogin doesn't have skillful means for dealing with these states, they can lead to such discontent as to force an early end to the session. Leaving a retreat early because of such mind states is to be defeated by the defilements.

Meditation is a skill, and like any other skill part of the learning process involves mastering various techniques. Dealing with negative mind-states requires the judicious use of specific practises, just as medical skill requires the use of specific medicines for various ailments of the body. To this end, a meditator should develop a repertoire of secondary practises to supplement the primary exercise. One special family of such meditations are called the "Four Protective Meditations."

They are given this name because they guard the mind against the arising of negativity. To continue the medical analogy, these are preventative medicine. In this regard, the recommendation is to do some of each exercise on the first day of a retreat, or before beginning a period of insight work. They plant seeds in the mind that will help later on. A brief word about each;

1. Loving-Kindness

The sign of this meditation is an emotional state, an open-hearted acceptance and feeling of goodwill towards all sentient beings. The traditional formula is the wish that "all beings be well and happy." It can be developed in a variety of ways, but the method most suitable in the context of protective meditation is the method of general pervasion. This refers to the spreading of loving-kindness out into the universe in increasing circles, beginning with love extended towards yourself, then out towards all beings in the room, in the locality, the province, the country etc. through to all beings on the planet earth and then out into the greater universe.

The initial stage of extending loving-kindness toward yourself is absolutely crucial. Many people these days have negative self-images and find it difficult to really love themselves, so it may take work to raise the feeling. Don't be concerned that this may be "selfish." It isn't. You cannot love anyone else in depth unless you love yourself, and conversely, if you do manage to arouse genuine loving-kindness toward yourself, you will be unable to withhold it from others. It will spontaneously overflow.

Remember from the outset that the wish is "may this being (or all beings) be well and happy." It has nothing to do with approval or liking. This is important because to be effective loving-kindness must be universal. The meditator must learn to love all beings without discrimination between the near and far, the liked and disliked, the good and evil or any other pair of dualities. The liberating effect comes from the boundlessness of the meditation.

2. Contemplation of the Buddha

The second protective meditation is the contemplation of the Buddha. This is both a devotional and an inspirational practise. The meditator should make himself familiar with the attributes of the Buddha and contemplate them. This can be combined with a puja.

Some preliminary research to gain knowledge of the Buddha's attributes is essential. The traditional method is to work through the list given in the chant beginning with Itipi so... Here is a bare-bones translation: 1. *Arāham*—Perfect One, Arahant; 2. *Sammāsambuddho*—Perfectly Enlightened by His Own Effort; 3. *Vijjācaraṇa-sampanno*—Perfect in Knowledge and Conduct; 4. *Sugato*—The Fortunate One; 5. *Lokavidu*—Knower of the Worlds; 6. *Anuttaro Purisadammasārathi*—Unsurpassed Trainer of the Untrained; 7. *Satthā Devamanussānaṃ*—The Teacher of Gods and Humans; 8. *Buddho*—Awake; 9. *Bhagavā*—The Blessed One.

The meditator goes through the list, using creative imagination to visualize what a Buddha would be like. This should be combined with visualization of the Buddha. The idea is to imagine what it would mean for someone to be completely purified and awake. The practise is best done in front of a shrine, using a Buddha image as a point of reference.

3. Meditation on Foulness

The third contemplation is one that is not as widely practised as it ought to be. This is the meditation on the body, focussing on the “unlovely” aspect. The traditional method is to visualize the corruption of a dead body. In the East, real corpses are still occasionally used for this purpose. The monk will sit by the corpse in the open air, preferably at night. If a corpse in its natural state has been seen and contemplated, it can be stored in the mind as a memory image for later use. Photographs can also be used, and often are. You do however, lose the effect of the smell. It is also possible to simply use one's imagination. One method is to visualize a corpse decaying through stages. The suttas list the following stages:

1. a corpse cast away in a charnel ground—one day, two days, three days dead—bloated, livid, and festering;
2. a corpse picked at by crows, vultures, and hawks, by dogs, hyenas, and various other creatures;
3. a skeleton smeared with flesh and blood, connected with tendons;
4. a fleshless skeleton smeared with blood, connected with tendons;
5. a skeleton without flesh or blood, connected with tendons;
6. bones detached from their tendons, scattered in all directions; here a hand bone, there a foot bone, here a shin bone, there a thigh bone, here a hip bone, there a back bone, here a rib, there a chest bone, here a shoulder bone, there a neck bone, here a jaw bone, there a tooth, here a skull;
7. The bones whitened, somewhat like the color of shells;
8. The bones piled up, more than a year old;
9. The bones decomposed into a powder.

One very effective variation is to start with the image of your own body freshly dead and to go through these stages, continuing the decomposition until—poof—nothing at all is left. This is to go from a shocking, almost violent image through increasing peacefulness to emptiness.

4. Meditation on Death

This is not the same as the above. This is a contemplation on impermanence. The meditator is trying to face the stark reality that she will die. One method is to think of beings known to one who have already died and to raise the thought; “just as this one died and is no more, so I too will not escape that fate.” If this method is used, the yogin should be very careful not to dwell on the death of loved ones which will lead to sorrow or regret. Instead, neutral beings should be used. Think of people you once knew who are now gone and realize this is a universal fate.

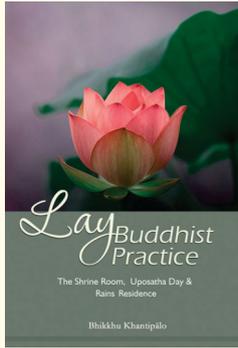
The *Visuddhimagga* also gives a more detailed method with a list of eight separate aspects to contemplate.

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These four meditations protect the mind of the meditator in a very profound way. If these four contemplations, two joyful and two sobering, are taken into the depth then many painful negativities can be avoided. The meditation on loving-kindness opens the mind to a joyous acceptance and prevents the arising of the painful states based on ill-will, such as anger, self-criticism etc. The meditation on the qualities of the Buddha fills the mind with light and bliss and overcomes a host of negativities. The meditation on foulness allows a perception of the seed of corruption inherent in all flesh, and thereby helps to prevent discontent arising through sensual desire. Finally, the meditation on death should arouse a sense of urgency and prevent the arising of sloth and boredom.

These benefits, however, as important as they are, are not the whole of the story. The paragraph above deals with the protections strictly from a psychological viewpoint. There is another side to the protections. It is taught that they will establish harmonious relations with the unseen beings, protecting one from ghosts and other malevolent entities, at the same time attracting the help and protection of the devas. To this end, the first two are especially powerful and in particular the meditator should not neglect to extend loving-kindness to the devas of heaven and earth. This is the literally protective aspect of these meditations.

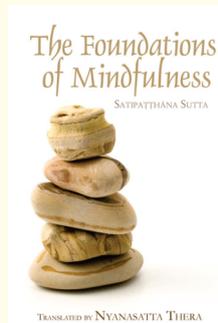
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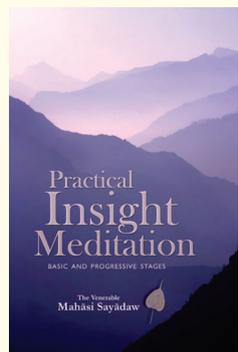
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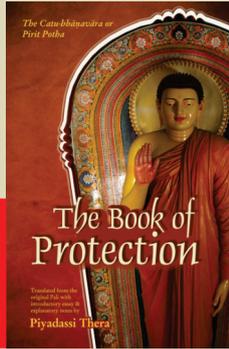
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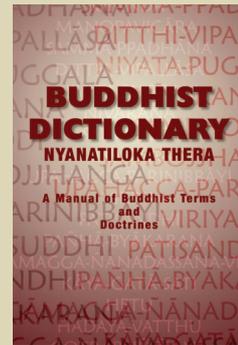
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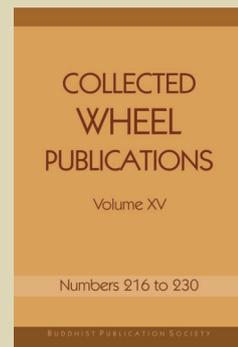
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