

GOING AGAINST THE FLOW

four talks by
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Mindfulness like the Pilings of a Dam
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November 6, 1970

Discussing the practice is more useful than discussing anything else because it gives rise to insight. If we follow the practice step by step we can //read// ourselves, continually deciphering things within us. As you read yourself through probing and investigating the harm and suffering caused by defilement, craving, and attachment, there will be times when you come to true knowledge, enabling you to grow dispassionate and let go. The mind will then immediately grow still, with none of the mental concoctions that used to have the run of the place through your lack of self-investigation.

The principles of self-investigation are our most important tools. We have to make a concerted effort to master them at all times, with special emphasis on using mindfulness to focus on the mind and bring it to centered concentration. If we don't focus on keeping the mind centered or neutral as its basic stance, it will wander off in various ways in pursuit of preoccupations or sensory contacts, giving rise to turmoil and restlessness. But when we practice restraint over the sensory doors by maintaining continuous mindfulness in the heart, it's like driving in the pilings for a dam. If you've ever seen the pilings for a dam, you'll know that they're driven deep, deep into the ground so that they're absolutely firm and immovable. But if you drive them into mud, they're easily swayed by the slightest contact. This should give us an idea of how firm our mindfulness should be in supervising the mind to make it stable, able to withstand sensory contact without liking or disliking its objects.

The firmness of your mindfulness is something you have to maintain continuously in your every activity, with every in-and-out breath. The mind will stop being scattered in search for preoccupations. If you don't manage this, then the mind will get stirred up whenever there's sensory contact, like a rudderless ship going wherever the wind and waves will take it. This is why you need mindfulness to guard the mind at every moment. If you can make mindfulness constant, in every activity, the mind will be continuously neutral, ready to probe and investigate for insight.

As a first step in driving in the pilings for our dam -- in other words, in making mindfulness firm -- we have to focus on neutrality as our basic stance. There's nothing you have to think about. Simply make the mind solid in its neutrality. If you can do this continuously, that's when you'll have a true standard for your investigation, because the mind will have gathered into concentration. But this concentration is something you have to watch over carefully to make sure it's not just oblivious indifference. Make the mind firmly established and centered so that it doesn't get absentminded or distracted as you sit in meditation. Sit straight, maintain steady mindfulness, and there's nothing else you have to do. Keep the mind firm and neutral, not thinking of anything at all. Make sure this stability stays continuous. When anything pops up, no matter how, keep the mind neutral. For example, if there's a feeling of pleasure or pain, don't focus on the feeling. Simply focus on the stability of the mind -- and there will be a sense of neutrality in that stability.

If you're careful not to let the mind get absentminded or

distracted, its concentration will become continuous. For example, if you're going to sit for an hour of meditation, focus on centering the mind like this for the first half hour and then make sure it doesn't wander off anywhere until the hour is up. If you change positions, it's simply an outer change in the body, while the mind is still firmly centered and neutral each moment you're standing, sitting, lying down, or whatever.

Mindfulness is the key factor in all of this, keeping the mind from concocting thoughts or labeling things. //Everything has to stop//. Keep this foundation snug and stable with every in-and-out breath. Then you can relax your focus on the breath, while keeping the mind in the same state of neutrality. Relax your heavy focus so that it feels just right with the breath. The mind will be able to stay in this state for the entire hour, free from any thoughts that might wander off the path. Then keep an eye out to see that no matter what you do or say, the mind stays solidly in its normal state of inward knowing.

If the mind is stable within itself, you're protected on all sides. When sensory contacts come, you stay focused on being aware of your mental stability. Even if there are any momentary slips in your mindfulness, you get right back to the stability of the mind. Other than that, there's nothing you have to do. The mind will let go without you're having to do anything else. The way you used to like this, hate that, turn left here, turn right there, won't be able to happen. The mind will stay neutral, equanimous, just right. If mindfulness lapses, you get right back to your focus, recognizing when the mind is centered and neutral toward its objects and then keeping it that way.

The pilings for the dam of mindfulness have to be driven in so that they're solid and secure with your every activity. Keep working at this no matter what you're doing. If you can train the mind so that stability is its basic stance, it won't get into mischief. It won't cause you any trouble. It won't concoct thoughts. It will be quiet. Once it's quiet and centered, it'll grow more refined and probe in to penetrate within itself, to know its own state of concentration from within.

As for sensory contacts, those are things outside -- appearing only to disappear -- so it's not interested. This can make cravings disband. Even when we change positions as pains arise in the body, the mind in that moment is stable, focused not on the pains but on its own stability. When you change positions, there will be physical and mental reactions as the circulation improves and pleasant feelings arise in place of the pains, but the mind won't get snagged on either the pleasure or the pain. It will simply stay stable: centered and firm in its neutrality. This stability can easily help you abandon the cravings that lie latent in connection with all feelings. But if you don't keep the mind centered in advance like this, craving will create issues, provoking the mind into a turmoil, wanting to change things so as to get this or that kind of happiness.

If we practice in this way repeatedly, hammering at this point over and over again, it's like driving pilings into the ground. The deeper we can drive them, the more immovable they'll be. That's when you'll be able to withstand sensory contacts. Otherwise, the mind will start

boiling over with its thought concoctions in pursuit of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. Sometimes it keeps concocting the same old senseless issues over and over again. This is because the pilings of mindfulness aren't yet firmly in place. The way we've been stumbling through life is due to the fact that we haven't really practiced to the point where mindfulness is continuous enough to make the mind firmly centered and neutral. So we have to make our dam of mindfulness solid and secure.

This centeredness of mind is something we should develop with every activity, with every in-and-out breath. This way we'll be able to see through our illusions, all the way into the truths of inconstancy and not-self. Otherwise, the mind will go straying off here and there like a mischievous monkey -- yet even monkeys can be caught and trained to perform tricks. In the same way, the mind is something that can be trained, but if you don't tie it to the post of mindfulness and give it a taste of the stick, it'll be very hard to tame.

When training the mind, you shouldn't force it too much, nor can you simply let it go its habitual ways. You have to test yourself to see what gets results. If you don't get your mindfulness focused, it'll quickly go running out after preoccupations or easily waver under the impact of its objects. When people let their minds simply drift along with the flow of things, it's because they haven't established mindfulness as a solid stance. When this is the case, they can't stop. They can't grow still. They can't be free. This is why we have to start out by driving in the pilings for our dam so that they're good and solid, keeping the mind stable and centered whether we're sitting, standing, walking, or lying down. This stability will then be able to withstand everything. Your mindfulness will stay with its foundation, just like a monkey tied to a post: It can't run off or get into mischief. It can only circle the post to which its leash is tied.

Keep training the mind until it's tame enough to settle down and investigate things, for if it's still scattered about, it's of no use at all. You have to train it until it's familiar with what inner stability is like, for your own instability and lack of commitment in training it is what allows it to get all entangled with thought-concoctions, with things that arise and then pass away. You have to get it to stop. Why is it so mischievous? Why is it so scattered? Why does it keep wandering off? Get in under control! Get it to stop, to settle down and grow centered!

At this stage you all have practiced enough to gain at least a taste of centered concentration. The next step is to use mindfulness to maintain it in your every activity, so that even if there are any distractions, they last only for a moment and don't turn into long issues. Keep driving in the pilings until they're solid every time there's an impact from external objects, or so that the mental concoctions that go straying out from within are all brought to stillness in every way.

This training isn't really all that hard. The important point is that, whichever of the many meditation subjects you choose, you stay mindful and aware of the mind state that's centered and neutral. If,

when the mind goes straying out after objects, you keep bringing it back to its centeredness over and over again, the mind will eventually be able to stay firmly in its stance. In other words, its mindfulness will become constant, ready to probe and investigate, //because when the mind really settles down, it gains the power to read the facts within itself clearly//. If it's not centered, it can jumble everything up to fool you, switching from this issue to that, from this role to that; but if it's centered, it can disband everything -- all defilements, cravings, and attachments -- on every side.

So what this practice comes down to is how much effort and persistence you put into getting the mind firmly centered. Once it's firm, then when there arise all the sufferings and defilements that would otherwise get it soiled and worked up, it can withstand them just as the pilings of a dam can withstand windstorms without budging. You have to be clearly aware of this state of mind so that you won't go out liking this or hating that. This state will then become your point of departure for probing and investigating so as to gain the insight that sees clearly all the way through -- but you have to make sure that this centeredness is continuous. Then you won't have to think about anything. Simply look right in, deeply and subtly.

The important point is that you get rid of absentmindedness and distractions. This in itself gets rid of a lot of delusion and ignorance, and leaves no opening for craving to create any issues that will stir up the mind and set it wandering. This is because we've established our stance in advance. Even if we lose our normal balance a little bit, we get right back to focusing on the stability of our concentration. If we keep at this over and over again, the stability of the mind with its continuous mindfulness will enable us to probe into the truths of inconstancy, stress, and not-self.

In the beginning, though, you don't have to do any probing. It's better simply to focus on the stability of your stance, for if you start probing when the mind isn't really centered and stable, you'll end up scattered. So focus on making centeredness the basic level of the mind and then start probing in deeper and deeper. This will lead to insights that grow more and more telling and profound, bringing the mind to a state of freedom within itself, or to a state where it is no longer hassled by defilement.

This in itself will bring about true mastery over the sense doors. At first, when we started out, we weren't able to exercise any real restraint over the eyes and ears, but once the mind becomes firmly centered, then the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and body are automatically brought under control. If there's no mindfulness and concentration, you can't keep your eyes under control, because the mind will want to use them to look and to see, it will want to use the ears to listen to all kinds of things. So instead of exercising restraint outside, at the senses, we exercise it inside, right at the mind, making the mind firmly centered and neutral at all times. Regardless of whether you're talking or whatever, the mind's focus stays in place. Once you can do this, you'll regard the objects of the senses as meaningless. You won't have to take issue with things, thinking, "This is good, I like it. This is bad, I don't like it. This is pretty; that's ugly." The same holds true with the sounds you hear. You won't take issue with them. You focus instead on the

neutral, uninvolved centeredness of the mind. This is the basic foundation for neutrality.

When you can do this, everything becomes neutral. When the eye sees a form, it's neutral. When the ear hears a sound, it's neutral -- the mind is neutral, the sound is neutral, //everything is all neutral// -- because we've closed five of the six sense doors and then settled ourselves in neutrality right at the mind. This takes care of everything. Whatever the eye may see, the ear may hear, the nose may smell, the tongue may taste, or the body may touch, the mind doesn't take issue with anything at all. It stays centered, neutral, and impartial. Take just this much and give it a try.

For the next seven days I want you to make a special point of focusing mindfulness right at the mind, for this is the end of the rainy season, the period when the lotus and water lily bloom after the end of the Rains Retreat. In the Buddha's time he would have the senior monks train the new monks throughout the Rains Retreat and then meet with him when the lotuses bloom. I've mentioned this before and I want to mention it again as a way of encouraging you to develop a stable foundation for the mind. If its stability is continuous, then it too will have to bloom -- to bloom because it's not burned, disturbed, or provoked by the defilements. So make a special effort during the next seven days to see how you can manage to observe and investigate the centered, neutral state of mind continuously at all times. Of course, if you fall asleep, you fall asleep; but even then, when you lie down to sleep, try to observe how you can keep the mind centered and neutral at all times until you doze off. When you wake up, the movements of the mind will still remain in that centered, neutral state. Give it a try, so that your mind will be able to grow calm and peaceful, disbanding its defilements, cravings, sufferings -- everything. Then notice to see whether or not it's beginning to bloom.

The sense of refreshment bathing the mind that comes as part of the peace of mind undisturbed by defilement will arise of its own accord without your having to do anything aside from keeping the mind stable and centered. This is your guarantee: If the mind is really stable in its concentration, the defilements won't be able to burn it or mess with it. In other words, desire won't be able to provoke it. When concentration is stable, the fires of passion, aversion, and delusion won't be able to burn it. Try to see within yourself how the stability of the mind can withstand these things, disbanding the stress, putting out the flames. But you'll have to be earnest in practicing, in making an effort to keep mindfulness truly continuous. This isn't something to play at. You can't let yourself be weak, for if you're weak you won't be able to withstand anything. You'll simply follow the provocations of defilement and craving.

//The practice is a matter of stopping// so that the mind can settle down and stand fast. It's not a matter of getting into mischief, wandering around to look and listen and get involved in issues. Try to keep the mind stable; in all your activities -- eating, defecating, whatever -- keep the mind centered within. If you know the state of the mind when it's centered, immovable, no longer wavering, no longer weak, then the basic level of the mind will be free and empty -- empty of the things that would burn it, empty because there's no attachment.

This is what enables you to ferret out the stability of the mind at every moment. It protects you from all sorts of things. All attachment to self, "me," and "them" is totally wiped out, cut away. The mind is entirely centered. If you can keep this state stable for the entire seven days, it will enable you to reach insight all on your own.

So I ask each of you to see whether or not you'll be able to make it all the way. Check to see how you're doing each day. And make sure you check things carefully. Don't let yourself be lax, sometimes stable, sometimes not. Get so that the mind is absolutely solid. Don't let yourself be weak. You have to be genuine in what you do if you want to reach the genuine extinguishing of suffering and stress. If you're not genuine, you'll end up letting yourself weaken in the face of the provocation of wanting this or wanting that, doing this or doing that, whatever, in the same way that you've been enslaved to desire, agitated by desire for who knows how long.

Your everyday life is where you can test yourself -- so get back to the battlefield! Take a firm stance in neutrality. Then the objects that come into contact with the mind will be neutral; the mind itself will feel centered in neutrality. There will be nothing to take issue with in terms of good or bad or whatever. Everything will come to a halt in neutrality -- because things in themselves aren't good or bad or self or whatever, simply that the mind has gone and made issues out of them.

So keep looking inward until you see the mind's neutrality and freedom from "self" continuously, and then you'll see how the lotus comes to bloom. If it hasn't bloomed yet, that's because it's withering and dry in the heat of the defilements, cravings, and attachments smoldering in the mind -- things we'll have to learn to ferret out until we can disband them. If we don't, the lotus will wither away, its petals falling to the ground and simply rotting there. So make an effort to keep the lotus of the mind stable until it blooms. Don't wonder about what will happen as it blooms. Just keep it stable and make sure it isn't burned by the defilements.

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The Battle Within  
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November 13, 1970

Today we are meeting as usual.

From what I've seen of your reports on your special development of mindfulness to read the facts within yourselves, some of you have really benefited in terms of penetrating in to read what's going on inside, and you've come out with correct understanding. So now I'd

like to give you a further piece of advice: In developing mindfulness as a foundation for probing in to know the truth within yourself, you have to apply a level of effort and persistence appropriate to the task. This is because, as we all know, the mind is cloaked in defilements and mental effluents. If we don't train it and force it, it'll turn weak and lax. It won't have any strength. You have to make your persistence more and more constant so that your probing and investigating will be able to see all the way through to clear insight.

Clear insight doesn't come from thinking and speculating. It comes from investigating the mind while it's gathered into an adequate level of calm and stability. You look deeply into every aspect of the mind when it's neutral and calm, free from thought-formations or likes and dislikes for its preoccupations. You have to work at maintaining this state and at the same time probe deeply into it, because superficial knowledge isn't true knowledge. As long as you haven't probed deeply into the mind, you don't really know anything. The mind is simply calm on an external level, and your reading of the aspects of the wanderings of the mind under the influence of defilement, craving, and attachment isn't yet clear.

So you have to try to peer into yourself until you reach a level of awareness that can maintain its balance and let you contemplate your way to sharper understanding. If you don't contemplate so as to give rise to true knowledge, your mindfulness will stay just on the surface.

The same principle holds with contemplating the body. You have to probe deeply into the ways in which the body is repulsive and composed of physical elements. This is what it means to //read// the body so as to understand it, so that you can explore yourself in all your activities. This way you prevent your mind from straying off the path and keep it focused on seeing how it can burn away the defilements as they arise -- which is very delicate work.

Being uncomplacent, not letting yourself get distracted by outside things, is what will make the practice go smoothly. It will enable you to examine the germs in the mind in a skillful way so that you can eliminate the subtlest ones: ignorance and delusion. Normally, we aren't fully aware of even the blatant germs, but now that the blatant ones are inactivated because of the mind's solid focus, we can look into the more profound areas to catch sight of the deceits of craving and defilements in whatever way they move into action. We watch them, know them, and are in a position to abandon them as soon as they wander off in search of sights, sounds, smells, and delicious flavors. Whether they're looking for good physical flavors -- bodily pleasure -- or good mental flavors, we have to know them from all sides, even though they're not easy to know because of all the many desires we feel for physical pleasure. And on top of that, there are the desires for happiness embued with pleasurable feelings, perceptions that carry pleasurable feelings, thought-formations that carry pleasurable feelings, and consciousness that carries pleasurable feelings. All of these are nothing but desires for illusions, for things that deceive us into getting engrossed and distracted. As a result, it isn't easy for us to understand much of anything at all.

These are subtle matters and they all come under the term, "sensual craving" -- the desire, lust, and love that provoke the mind into wandering out in search of the enjoyment it remembers from past sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. Even though these things may have happened long ago, our perceptions bring them back to deceive us with ideas of their being good or bad. Once we latch onto them, they make the mind unsettled and defiled.

So it isn't easy to examine and understand all the various germs within the mind. The external things we're able to know and let go of are only the minor players. The important ones have gathered together to take charge in the mind and won't budge no matter how you try to chase them out. They're stubborn and determined to stay in charge. If you take them on when your mindfulness and discernment aren't equal to the fight, you'll end up losing your inner calm.

So you have to make sure that you don't push the practice too much, without at the same time letting it grow too slack. Find the Middle Way that's just right. While you're practicing in this way, you'll be able to observe what the mind is like when it has mindfulness and discernment in charge, and then you make the effort to //maintain// that state and keep it constant. That's when the mind will have the opportunity to stop and be still, stable and centered for long periods of time until it's used to being that way.

Now, there are some areas where we have to force the mind and be strict with it. If we're weak and lax, there's no way we can succeed, for we've given in to our own wants for so long already. If we keep giving in to them, it will become even more of a habit. So you have to use force -- the force of your will and the force of your mindfulness and discernment. Even if you get to the point where you have to put your life on the line, you've got to be willing. When the time comes for you really to be serious, you've got to hold out until you come out winning. If you don't win, you don't give up. Sometimes you have to make a vow as a way of forcing yourself to overcome your stubborn desires for physical pleasure that tempt you and lead you astray.

If you're weak and settle for whatever pleasure comes in the immediate present, then when desire comes in the immediate present you fall right for it. If you give in to your wants often in this way, it'll become habitual, for defilement is always looking for the chance to tempt you, to incite you. As when we try to give up an addiction to betel, cigarettes, or meat: It's hard to do because craving is always tempting us. "Take just a little," it says. "Just a taste. It doesn't matter." Craving knows how to fool us, the way a fish is fooled into getting caught on a hook by the bait surrounding the hook, screwing up its courage enough to take just a little, and then a little more, and then a little more until it's sure to get snagged. The demons of defilement have us surrounded on all sides. Once we fall for their delicious flavors, we're sure to get snagged on the hook. No matter how much we struggle and squirm, we can't get free.

You have to realize that gaining victory over your enemies -- the cravings and defilements in the heart -- is no small matter, no casual affair. You can't let yourself be weak or lax, but you also have to gauge your strength, for you have to figure out how to apply your

efforts at abandoning and destroying to weaken the defilements and cravings that have had the power of demons overwhelming the mind for so long. It's not the case that you have to battle to the brink of death in every area. With some things -- such as giving up addictions -- you can mount a full-scale campaign and come out winning without killing yourself in the process. But with other things, more subtle and deep, you have to be more perceptive so as to figure out how to overcome them over the long haul, digging up their roots so that they gradually weaken to the point where your mindfulness and discernment can rise above them. If there are any areas where you're still losing out, you have to take stock of your sensitivities to figure out why. Otherwise, you'll keep losing out, for when the defilements really want something, they trample all over your mindfulness and discernment in their determination to get what they're after: "That's what I want. I don't care what anyone says." They really are that stubborn! So it's no small matter, figuring out how to bring them under control. It's like running into an enemy or a wild beast rushing in to devour you. What are you going to do?

When the defilements arise right before your eyes, you have to be wary. Suppose that you're perfectly aware, and all of a sudden they spring up and confront you: What kind of mindfulness and discernment are you going to use to disband them, to realize that, "These are the hordes of Mara, come to burn and eat me. How am I going to get rid of them?" In other words, how are you going to find a skillful way of contemplating them so as to destroy them right then and there?

We have to do this regardless of whether we're being confronted with physical and mental pain or physical and mental pleasure. Actually, pleasure is more treacherous than pain because it's hard to fathom and easy to fall for. As for pain, no one falls for it because it's so uncomfortable. So how are we going to contemplate so as to let go of //both// the pleasure //and// the pain? This is the problem we're faced with at every moment. It's not the case that when we practice we accept only the pleasure and stop when we run into pain. That's not the case at all. We have to learn how to read //both// sides, to see that the pain is inconstant and stressful, and that the pleasure is inconstant and stressful, too. We have to penetrate clear through these things. Otherwise, we'll be deluded by the deceits of the cravings that want pleasure, whether it's physical pleasure or whatever. Our every activity -- sitting, standing, walking, lying down -- is really for the sake of pleasure, isn't it?

This is why there are so many, many ways in which we're deluded with pleasure. Whatever we do, we do for the sake of pleasure without realizing how deeply we've mired ourselves in suffering and stress. When we contemplate inconstancy, stress, and not-selfness, we don't get anywhere in our contemplation because we haven't seen through pleasure. We still think that it's a good thing. We have to probe into the fact that there's no real ease to physical or mental pleasure. It's all stress. When you can see it from this angle, that's when you'll come to understand inconstancy.

Then once the mind isn't focused on wanting pleasure all the time, its stresses and pains will lighten. It will be able to see them as something common and normal, to see that if you try to change the pains to find ease, there's no ease to be found. In this way, you

won't be overly concerned with trying to change the pains, for you'll see that there's no pleasure or ease to the aggregates, that they give nothing but stress and pain. As in the Buddha's teachings we chant every day: "Form is stressful, feeling, perception, thought-formations, and consciousness are all stressful." //The problem is that we haven't investigated into the truth of our own form, feelings, perceptions, thought-formations, and consciousness//. Our insight isn't yet penetrating because we haven't looked from the angle of true knowing. And so we get deluded and lost here and there in our search for pleasure, finding nothing but pain and yet mistaking it for pleasure. This shows that we still haven't opened our ears and eyes; we still don't know the truth. Once we do know the truth, though, the mind will be more inclined to grow still and calm than to go wandering off. The reason it goes wandering off is because it's looking for pleasure, but once it realizes there's no real pleasure to be found in that way, it settles down and grows still.

All the cravings that provoke and unsettle the mind come down to nothing but the desire for pleasure. So we have to contemplate so as to see that the aggregates have no pleasure to offer, that they're stressful in line with their nature. They're not us or ours. Take them apart and have a good look at them, starting with the body. Analyze the body down to its elements so that the mind won't keep latching onto it as "me" or "mine." You have to do this over and over again until you really understand.

It's the same as when we chant the passage for //Recollection while Using the Requisites// -- food, clothing, shelter, and medicine -- every day. We do this so as to gain real understanding. If we don't do this every day, we forget and get deluded into loving and worrying about the body as "my body," "my self." No matter how much we keep latching onto it over and over again, it's not easy for us to realize what we're doing, even though we have the Buddha's teachings available, explaining these things in every way. Or we may have contemplated to some extent, but we haven't seen things clearly. We've seen only vague impressions and then flitted off oblivious without having probed in to see all the way through. This is because the mind isn't firmly centered. It isn't still. It keeps wandering off to find things to think about and get itself all agitated. This way it can't really get to know anything at all. All it knows are a few little perceptions. This is the way it has been for who knows how many years now. It's as if our vision has been clouded by spots that we haven't yet removed from our eyes.

Those who aren't interested in exploring, who don't make an effort to get to the facts, don't wonder about anything at all. They're free from doubt, all right, but it's because their doubts have been smothered by delusion. If we start exploring and contemplating, we'll have to wonder about the things we don't yet know: "What's this? What does it mean? How can I get rid of it?" These are questions that lead us to explore. If we don't explore, it's because we don't have any intelligence. Or we may gain a few little insights, but we let them pass so that we never explore deeply into the basic principles of the practice. What little we //do// know doesn't go anywhere, doesn't penetrate into the Noble Truths, because our mindfulness and discernment run out of strength. Our persistence isn't resilient enough, isn't brave enough. We don't dare look deeply

inside ourselves.

//To go by our own estimates of how far is enough in the practice is to lie to ourselves//. It keeps us from gaining release from suffering and stress. If you happen to come up with a few insights, don't go bragging about them, or else you'll end up deceiving yourself in countless ways. Those who really know, even when they //have// attained the various stages of insight, are heedful to keep on exploring. They don't get stuck on this stage or that. Even when their insights are correct they don't stop right there and start bragging, for that's the way of a fool.

Intelligent people, even though they see things clearly, always keep an eye out for the enemies lying in wait for them on the deeper, more subtle levels ahead. They have to keep penetrating further and further in. They have no sense that this or that level is plenty enough -- for how can it be enough? The defilements are still burning away, so how can you brag? Even though your knowledge may be true, how can you be complacent when your mind has yet to establish a foundation for itself?

As you investigate with mindfulness and discernment, complacency is the major problem. You have to be uncomplacent in the practice if you want to keep up with the fact that life is ebbing away, ebbing with every moment. And how should you live so that you can be said to be uncomplacent? This is an extremely important question, for if you're not alive to it, then no matter how many days or months you practice meditation or restraint of the senses, it's simply a temporary exercise. When you're done, you get back to your same old turmoil as before.

And watch out for your mouth. You'll have trouble not bragging, for the defilements will provoke you into speaking. They want to speak, they want to brag, they won't let you stay silent.

If you force yourself in the practice without understanding its true aims, you end up deceiving yourself and go around telling people, "I practiced in silence for so many days, so many months." This is deceiving yourself and others as well. The truth of the matter is that you're still a slave to stupidity, obeying the many levels of defilement and craving within yourself without realizing the fact. If someone praises you, you really prick up your ears, wag your tail and, instead of explaining the harm of the defilements and craving you were able to find within yourself, you simply want to brag.

So the practice of the Dhamma isn't something that you can just muddle your way through. It's something you have to do with your intelligence fully alert -- for when you contemplate in a circumspect way, you'll see that there's nothing worth getting engrossed in, that everything -- both inside and out -- is nothing but an illusion. It's like being adrift, alone in the middle of the ocean with no island or shore in sight. Can you afford just to sit back and relax or make a temporary effort and then brag about it? Of course not! As your investigation penetrates within to ever more subtle levels of the mind, you'll have to become more and more calm and reserved, in the same way that people become more and more circumspect as they grow from children to teenagers and into adults. Your mindfulness and

discernment have to keep getting more and more mature in order to understand the right and wrong, the true and false, in whatever arises: That's what will enable you to let go and gain release. And that's what will make your life in the true practice of the Dhamma go smoothly. Otherwise, you'll fool yourself into boasting of how many years you practiced meditation and will eventually find yourself worse off than before, with defilement flaring up in a big way. If this is the way you go, you'll end up tumbling head over heels into fire -- for when you raise your head in pride, you run into the flames already burning within yourself.

//To practice means to use the fire of mindfulness and discernment as a counter-fire to put out the blaze of the defilements//, because the heart and mind are burning with defilement, and when we use the fire of mindfulness and discernment to put out the fire of defilement, the mind can cool down. Do this by being increasingly honest with yourself, without leaving an opening for defilement and craving to insinuate their way into control. You have to be alert. Circumspect. Wise to them. Don't fall for them! If you fall for whatever rationale they come up with, it means that your mindfulness and discernment are still weak. They lead you away by the nose, burning you with their fire right before your very eyes, and yet you're still able to open your mouth to brag!

So turn around and take stock of everything within yourself, take stock of every aspect, because right and wrong, true and false, are all within you. You can't go finding them outside. The damaging things people say about you are nothing compared to the damage caused inside you when defilement burns you and your feeling of "me" and "mine" raises its head.

If you don't honestly come to your senses, there's no way your practice of the Dhamma can gain you release from the great mass of suffering and stress. You may be able to gain a little knowledge and let go of a few things, but the roots of the problem will still lie buried deep down. So you have to dig them out. You can't relax after little bouts of emptiness and equanimity. That won't accomplish anything, because the defilements and mental effluents lie deep in the personality, and so you have to use mindfulness and discernment to penetrate deep down to make a precise and thorough examination. Only then will you get results. Otherwise, if you stay only on the blatant level, you can practice until your body lies rotting in its coffin, but you won't have changed any of your basic habits.

Those who are scrupulous by nature, who know how to contemplate their own flaws, will keep on the alert for any signs of pride within themselves. They'll try to control and destroy conceit on every side and won't allow it to swell. The methods we need to use in the practice for examining and destroying the germs within the mind aren't easy to master. For those who don't contemplate themselves thoroughly, the practice may actually only increase their pride, their bragging, their desire to go teaching others. But if we turn within and discern the deceits and conceits of self, a profound feeling of disenchantment and dismay arises, causing us to pity ourselves for our own stupidity, for the amount to which we've deluded ourselves all along, and for how much effort we'll still need to put into the practice.

So however great the pain and anguish, however many tears bathe your cheeks, persevere! The practice isn't simply a matter of looking for mental and physical pleasure. "Let tears bathe my cheeks, but I'll keep on with my striving at the holy life as long as I live!" That's the way it has to be! Don't quit at the first small difficulty with the thought, "It's a waste of time. I'd do better to follow my cravings and defilements." You can't think like that! You have to take the exact opposite stance: "When they tempt me to grab this, take a lot of that -- I won't! However fantastic the object may be, I won't take the bait." Make a firm declaration! This is the only way to get results. Otherwise, you'll never work yourself free, for the defilements have all sorts of tricks up their sleeves. If you get wise to one trick, they simply change to another, and then another.

If we're not observant to see how much we've been deceived by the defilements in all sorts of ways, we won't come to know the truth within ourselves. Other people may fool us now and then, but the defilements fool us all of the time. We fall for them and follow them hook, line, and sinker. Our trust in the Lord Buddha is nothing compared to our trust in them. We're disciples of the demons of craving, letting them lead us ever deeper into their jungle.

If we don't contemplate to see this for ourselves, we're lost in that jungle charnel ground where the demons keep roasting us to make us squirm with desires and every form of distress. Even though you have come to stay in a place with few disturbances, these demons still manage to tempt and draw you away. Just notice how the saliva flows when you come across anything delicious! //So you have to decide to be either a warrior or a loser//. The practice requires that you do battle with defilements and cravings. Always be on your guard, whatever the approach they take to seduce and deceive you. Other people can't come in to lead you away, but these demons of your own defilements can, because you're willing to trust them, to be their slave. You have to contemplate yourself carefully so that you're no longer enslaved to them and can reach total freedom within yourself. Make an effort to develop your mindfulness and discernment so as to gain clear insight and then let go until suffering and stress disband in every way!

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All Things Are Unworthy Of Attachment

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November 21, 1970

Today's our day to discuss the practice.

It's very beneficial that we have practiced the Dhamma by contemplating ourselves step by step and have -- to some extent -- come to know the truth. This is because each person has to find the truth within: the truths of stress, its cause, and the path leading

to its disbanding. If we don't know these things, we fall into the same sufferings as the rest of the world. We may have come to live in a Dhamma center, yet if we don't know these truths we don't benefit from staying here. The only way we differ from living at home is that we're observing the precepts. If we don't want to be deluded in our practice, these truths are things we have to know. Otherwise, we get deluded into looking for our fun in the stresses and sufferings offered by the world.

Our practice is to contemplate until we understand stress and its cause, in other words, the defilements that have power and authority in the heart and mind. It's only because we have this practice that we can disband these defilements, that we can disband stress every day and at all times. This is something really marvelous. Those who don't practice don't have a clue, even though they live enveloped by defilements and stress. They simply get led around by the nose into more and more suffering, and yet none of them realize what's going on. If we don't make contact with the Dhamma, if we don't practice, we go through birth and death simply to create //kamma// with one another and to keep whirling around in suffering and stress.

We have to contemplate until we really //see// stress: That's when we'll become uncomplacent and try to disband it or to gain release from it. The practice is thus a matter of struggling to gain victory over stress and suffering with better and better results each time. Whatever mistakes we make in whatever way, we have to try not to make them again. And we have to contemplate the harm and suffering caused by the more subtle defilements, cravings, and attachments within us. This is why we have to probe into the deeper, more profound parts of the heart -- for if we stay only on the superficial levels of emptiness in the mind, we won't gain any profound knowledge at all.

So we train the mind to be mindful and firmly centered, and to fix its focus on looking within, knowing within. Don't let it get distracted outside. When it focuses within, it will come to know the truth: the truth of stress and of the causes of stress -- defilement, craving, and attachment -- as they arise. It will see what they're like and how to probe inward to disband them

When all is said and done, the practice comes down to one issue, because it focuses exclusively on one thing: stress together with its cause. This is the central issue in human life -- even animals are in the same predicament -- but our ignorance deludes us into latching onto all kinds of things. This is because of our misunderstandings or wrong views. If we gain Right View, we see things correctly. Whenever we see stress, we see its truth. When we see the cause of stress, we see its truth. We both know and see because we've focused on it. //If you don't focus on stress, you won't know it; but as soon as you focus on it, you will//. It's because the mind hasn't focused here that it wanders out oblivious, chasing after its preoccupations.

When we try to focus it down, it struggles and resists because it's used to wandering. But if we keep focusing it again and again, more and more frequently until we get a sense of how to bring it under control, then the task ultimately becomes easier because the mind no longer struggles to chase after its preoccupations as it did before. No matter how much it resists when we start training it, eventually

we're sure to bring it under our control, getting it to settle down and be still. If it doesn't settle down, you have to contemplate it. You have to show it that you mean business. This is because defilement and craving are very strong. You can't be weak when dealing with them. You have to be brave, to have a fight-to-the-death attitude, and to keep sustaining your efforts. If you're concerned only with finding comfort and pleasure, the day will never come when you'll gain release. You'll have to continue staying under their power.

Their power envelops everything in our character, making it very difficult for us to find out the truth about ourselves. What we do know is just a smattering, and so we play truant, abandoning the task, and end up seeing that the practice of the Dhamma isn't really important. Thus we don't bother to be strict with ourselves, and instead involve ourselves in all kinds of things, for that's the path the defilements keep pointing out to us. We grope along weakly, making it harder and harder to see stress clearly because we keep giving in to the defilements and taking their bait. When they complain about the slightest discomfort, we quickly pander to them and take the bait again. It's because we're so addicted to the bait that we don't appreciate either the power of craving -- as it wanders out after sights, sounds, smells, tastes, etc. -- or the harm it causes in making us scattered and restless, unable to stay still and contemplate ourselves. It's always finding things for us to do, to think about, making ourselves suffer, and yet we remain blind to the fact.

Now that we've come to practice the Dhamma, we begin to have a sense of what's going on. For this reason, whoever practices without being complacent will find that defilement and stress will have to grow lighter and lighter, step by step. The areas where we used to be defeated, we now come out victorious. Where we used to be burned by the defilements, we now have the mindfulness and discernment to burn //them// instead. Only when we stop groping around and really come to our senses will we realize the benefits of the Dhamma, the importance of the practice. Then there is no way that we can abandon the practice, for something inside us keeps forcing us to stay with it. We've seen that if we don't practice to disband defilement and stress, the stress of the defilements will keep piling up. This is why we have to stay with the practice to our last breath.

You have to be firm in not letting yourself be weak and easily led astray. Those who are mindful and discerning will naturally act in this way; those who aren't will keep on following their defilements, ending up back where they were when they hadn't yet started practicing to gain release from stress. They may keep on practicing, but it's hard to tell what they're practicing for -- mostly for more stress. This shows that they're still groping around -- and when they grope around in this way, they start criticizing the practice as useless and bad.

When a person submits readily to defilement and craving, there's no way she can practice, for if you're going to practice, there are a lot of things you have to struggle with and endure. It's like paddling a boat against the stream -- you have to use strength if you want to make any headway. It's not easy to go against the stream of the defilements, because they are always ready to pull you down to a lower

level. If you aren't mindful and discerning, if you don't use the Lord Buddha's Dhamma to examine yourself, your strength will fail you, for if you have only a little mindfulness and discernment in the face of a lot of defilements, they'll make you vacillate. And if you're living with sweet-talking sycophants, you'll go even further off the path, involved with all sorts of things and oblivious to the practice.

To practice the Dhamma, then, is to go //against// the flow, to go upstream against suffering and stress, because suffering and stress are the main problems. If you don't really contemplate stress, your practice will go nowhere. Stress is where you start, and then you try to trace out its root cause. You have to use your discernment to track down exactly where stress originates, for stress is a result. Once you see the result, you have to track down the cause. Those who are mindful and discerning are never complacent. Whenever stress arises they're sure to search out its causes so that they can eliminate them. This sort of investigation can proceed on many levels, from the coarse to the refined, and requires that you seek advice so that you don't stumble. Otherwise, you may think you can figure it all out in your head -- which won't work at all!

The basic Dhamma principles that the Lord Buddha proclaimed for us to use in our contemplation are many, but there's no need to learn them all. Just focusing on some of the more important ones, such as the five aggregates or name and form, will be very useful. But you need to keep making a thorough, all-round examination, not just an occasional probe, so that a feeling of dispassion and disengagement arises and loosens the grip of desire. Use mindfulness to keep constant and close supervision over the senses, and that mindfulness will come to be more present than your tendency to drift off elsewhere. Regardless of what you're doing, saying, or thinking, be on the lookout for whatever will make you slip, for if you're tenacious in sustaining mindfulness, that's how all your stresses and sufferings can be disbanded.

So keep at this. If you fall down 100 times, get back up 100 times and resume your stance. The reason mindfulness and discernment are slow to develop is because you're not really sensitive to yourself. The greater your sensitivity, the stronger your mindfulness and discernment will become. As the Lord Buddha said, "//Bhavita bahulikata//" -- which means, "Develop and maximize" -- i.e., make the most of your mindfulness.

The way your practice has developed through contemplating and supervising the mind throughout your daily life has already shown its rewards to some extent, so keep stepping up your efforts. Don't let yourself grow weak or lax. You've finally got this opportunity: Can you afford to be complacent? Your life is steadily ebbing away, so you have to compensate by building up more and more mindfulness and discernment until you become mature in the Dhamma. Otherwise, your defilements will remain many and your discernment crude. The older you grow, the more you have to watch out -- for we know what happens to old people everywhere.

So seize the moment to develop the faculties of conviction, persistence, mindfulness, concentration, and discernment in a balanced way. Keep contemplating and probing, and you'll protect yourself from

wandering out after the world. No matter who tempts you to go with them, you can be sure within yourself that you won't go following them because you no longer have to go believing anyone else or hoping for the baits of the world -- //because the baits of the world are poison. The Dhamma has to be the refuge and light of your life//. Once you have this degree of conviction in yourself, you can't help but stride forward without slipping back; but if you waver and wander, unsure of whether or not to keep practicing the Dhamma, watch out: You're sure to get pulled over the cliff and into the pit of fire.

If you aren't free within yourself, you get pulled at from all sides because the world is full of things that keep pulling at you. But those who have the intelligence not to be gullible will see the stress and harm of those things distinctly for themselves. For this reason they're not headed for anything low; they won't have to keep suffering in the world. They feel dispassion. They lose their taste for all the various baits and lures the world has to offer.

The practice of the Dhamma is what allows us to shake off whatever attractive things used to delude us into holding on. Realize that it won't be long before we die -- we won't be here much longer! -- so even if anyone offers us incredible wealth, why should we want it? Who could really own it? Who could really control it?

If you can read yourself in this matter, you come to a feeling of dispassion. Disenchantment. You lose your taste for all the lures of the world. You no longer hold them in esteem. If you make use of them, it's for the sake of the benefits they give in terms of the Dhamma, but your disenchantment stays continuous. Even the name and form you've been regarding as "me" and "mine" have been wearing down and falling apart continually. As for the defilements, they're still lying in wait to burn you. So how can you afford to be oblivious? First there's the suffering and stress of the five aggregates, and on top of that there's the suffering and stress caused by defilement, craving, and attachment, stabbing you, slapping you, beating you.

The more you practice and contemplate, the more you become sensitive to this on deeper and deeper levels, and your interest in blatant things outside -- good and bad people, good and bad things -- gets swept away. You don't have to concern yourself with them, for you're concerned solely with penetrating yourself within, destroying your pride and conceit. Outside affairs aren't important. What's important is how clearly you can see the truth inside until the brightness appears.

The brightness that comes from seeing the truth isn't at all like the light we see outside. Once you really know it, you see that it's indescribable, for it's something entirely personal. It cleans everything out of the heart and mind in line with the strength of our mindfulness and discernment. It's what sweeps and cleans and clears and lets go and disbands things inside. But if we don't have mindfulness and discernment as our means of knowing, contemplating, and letting go, everything inside is dark on all sides. And not only dark, but also full of fire whose poisonous fuel keeps burning away. What could be more terrifying than the fuel burning inside us? Even though it's invisible, it flares up every time there's sensory contact.

The bombs they drop on people to wipe them all out aren't really all that dangerous, for you can die only once per lifetime. But the three bombs of passion, aversion, and delusion keep ripping the heart apart countless times. Normally we don't realize how serious the damage is, but when we come to practice the Dhamma we can take stock of the situation, seeing what it's like when sensory contact comes, at what moments the burning heat of defilement and craving arises, and why they're all so very quick.

When you contemplate how to disband suffering and defilement, you need the proper tools and have to make the effort without being complacent. The fact that we've come to practice out here without any involvements or worldly responsibilities helps speed up the practice. It's extremely beneficial in helping us to examine our inner diseases in detail and to disband suffering and stress continually in line with our mindfulness and discernment. Our burdens grow lighter and we come to realize how much our practice of the Dhamma is progressing in the direction of the cessation of suffering.

Those who don't have the time to come and rest here or to really stop, get carried away with all kinds of distractions. They may say, "I can practice anywhere," but it's just words. The fact of the matter is that their practice is to follow the defilements until their heads are spinning, and yet they can still boast that they can practice anywhere! Their mouths are not in line with their minds, and their minds -- burned and beaten by defilement, craving, and attachment -- don't realize their situation. They're like worms that live in filth and are happy to stay and die right there in the filth.

People with any mindfulness and discernment feel disgust at the filth of the defilements in the mind. The more they practice, the more sensitive they become, the more their revulsion grows. Before, when our mindfulness and discernment were still crude, we didn't feel this at all. We were happy to play around in the filth within ourselves. But now that we've come to practice, to contemplate from the blatant to the more subtle levels, we sense more and more how disgusting the filth really is. There's nothing to it that's worth falling for at all, because it's all inconstancy, stress, and not-self.

So what's there to want out of life? Those who are ignorant say that we're born to gain wealth and be millionaires, but that kind of life is like falling into hell! If you understand the practice of the Dhamma in the Buddha's footsteps, you realize that nothing is worth having, nothing is worth getting involved with, everything has to be let go.

Those who still latch onto the body, feeling, perceptions, thought-formations, and consciousness as self need to contemplate until they see that the body is stressful, feelings are stressful, perceptions are stressful, thought-formations are stressful, consciousness is stressful -- in short, name is stressful and so is form, or in even plainer terms, the body is stressful and so is the mind. //You have to focus on stress//. Once you see it thoroughly, from the blatant to the subtle levels, you'll be able to rise above pleasure and pain because you've let them go. But if you have yet to

fully understand stress, you'll still yearn for pleasure -- and the more you yearn, the more you suffer.

This holds too for the pleasure that comes when the mind is tranquil. If you let yourself get stuck on it, you're like a person addicted to a drug: Once there's the desire, you take the drug and think yourself happy. But as for how much suffering the repeated desire causes, you don't have the intelligence to see it. All you see is that if you take the drug whenever you want, you're okay.

When people can't shake off their addictions, this is why. They get stuck on the sense of pleasure that comes when they take the drug. They're ingesting sensuality and they keep on wanting more, for only when they ingest more will their hunger subside. But soon it comes back again, so they'll want still more. They keep on ingesting sensuality, stirring up the mind, but don't see that there's any harm or suffering involved. Instead, they say they're happy. When the longing gets really intense, it feels really good to satisfy it. That's what they say. People who have heavy defilements and crude discernment don't see that desire and longing are suffering, and so they don't know how to do away with them. As soon as they take what they want, the desire goes away. Then it comes back again, so they take some more. It comes back again and they take still more -- over and over like this, so blind that they don't realize anything at all.

People of intelligence, though, contemplate: "Why is there desire and why do I have to satisfy it? And when it comes back, why do I have to keep satisfying it over and over again?" //Once they realize that the desire in and of itself is what they have to attack//, that by disbanding this one thing they won't feel any disturbance and will never have to suffer from desire again, //that's when they really can gain release from suffering and stress//. But for the most part we don't see things from this angle because we still take our pleasure in consuming things. This is why it's hard for us to practice to abandon desire. All we know is how to feed on the bait, so we don't dare try giving it up -- as when people who are addicted to meat-eating are afraid to become vegetarians. Why? Because they're still attached to flavor, still slaves to desire.

If you can't let go of even these blatant things, how can you ever hope to abandon the damp and fermenting desires within you that are so much harder to detect? You still take the most blatant baits. When desire whispers and pleads with you, there you go -- pandering to it as quickly as possible. You don't notice how much this tires you out, don't realize that this is the source of the most vicious sufferings that deceive all living beings into falling under its power. Even though the Buddha's teachings reveal the easiest way to use our discernment to contemplate cause and effect in this area, we don't make the effort to contemplate and instead keep swallowing the bait. We get our pleasure and that's all we want, going with the flow of defilement and craving.

Our practice here is to go //against// the flow of every sort of desire and wandering of the mind. It means self-restraint and training in many, many areas: as, for instance, when sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations arise and deceive us into liking something and then, a moment later, tiring of it and wanting something

else. We get so thoroughly deceived that we end up running frantically all over the place.

The virulent diseases in the mind are more than many. If you don't know how to deal with them, you'll remain under Mara's power. Those who have truly seen stress and suffering will be willing to put their lives on the line in their effort to work free, in the same way the Buddha was willing to put his life on the line in order to gain freedom from suffering and release from the world. He wasn't out after personal comfort at all. Each Buddha-to-be has had to undergo suffering in the world for his own sake and that of others. Each has had to relinquish all of his vast wealth instead of using it for his comfort. So the practice is one of struggle and endurance. Whoever struggles and endures will gain victory -- and no other victory can match it. //Gaining control over the defilements is the ultimate victory//. Whatever you contemplate, you can let go: That's the ultimate victory.

So please keep at the effort. You can't let yourself relax after each little victory. The more you keep being victorious, the stronger, more daring, and more resilient your mindfulness and discernment will become in every area, examining everything regardless of whether it comes in by way of the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, or mind.

The more you examine yourself, the sharper your mindfulness and discernment will become, understanding how to disband things and let them go. As soon as there's attachment, you'll see the suffering and stress -- just as when you touch fire, feel the heat, and immediately let go. This is why the practice of the Dhamma is of supreme worth. It's not just a game you play around with -- for the defilements have a great deal of power that's hard to overcome. But if you make the effort to overcome them, they'll weaken as mindfulness and discernment grow stronger. This is when you can say that you're making progress in the Dhamma: when you can disband your own suffering and stress.

So try to go all the way while you still have the breath to breathe. The Buddha said, "Make an effort to attain the as-yet-unattained, reach the as-yet-unreached, realize the as-yet-unrealized." He didn't want us to be weak and vacillating, always making excuses for ourselves, because now that we've ordained we've already made an important sacrifice. In the Buddha's time, no matter where the monks and nuns came from -- from royal, wealthy, or ordinary backgrounds -- once they had left their homes they cut their family ties and entered the Lord Buddha's lineage without ever returning. To return to the home life, he said, was to become a person of no worth. His only concern was to keep pulling people out, pulling them out of suffering and stress. If we want to escape, we have to follow his example, cutting away worry and concern for our family and relatives by entering his lineage. To live and practice under his discipline is truly the supreme refuge, the supreme way.

Those who follow the principles of the Dhamma-Vinaya -- even though they may have managed only an occasional taste of its peace without yet reaching the paths and their fruitions -- pledge their lives to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. They realize that nothing else they can reach will lead to freedom from suffering, but if they reach this

one refuge, they'll gain total release. Those whose mindfulness and discernment are deep, far-seeing, and meticulous will cross over to the further shore. They've lived long enough on this shore and have had all the suffering they can bear. They've circled around in birth and death countless times. So now they realize that they have to go to the further shore and so they make a relentless effort to let go of their sense of self.

There's nothing distant about the further shore, but to get there you first have to give up your sense of self in the five aggregates by investigating to see them all as stress, to see that none of them are "me" or "mine." Focus on this one theme: not clinging. The Lord Buddha once spoke of the past as below, the future as above, and the present as in the middle. He also said that unskillful qualities are below, skillful qualities above, and neutral ones in the middle. To each of them, he said, "Don't cling to it." Even //nibbana//, the further shore, shouldn't be clung to. //See how far we're going to be released through not-clinging!// Any of you who can't comprehend that even //nibbana// isn't to be clung to should consider the standard teaching that tells us not to cling, that we have to let go: "All things are unworthy of attachment." This is the ultimate summary of all that the Buddha taught.

All phenomena, whether compounded or un-compounded, fall under the phrase, "//Sabbe dhamma anatta// -- All things are not-self." They're all unworthy of attachment. This summarizes everything, including our investigation to see the truth of the world and of the Dhamma, to see things clearly with our mindfulness and discernment, penetrating through the compounded to the un-compounded, or through the worldly to the transcendent, all of which has to be done by looking within, not without.

And if we want to see the real essence of the Dhamma, we have to look deeply, profoundly. Then it's simply a matter of letting go all along the way. We see all the way in and let go of everything. The theme of //not clinging// covers everything from beginning to end. If our practice is to go correctly, it's because we look with mindfulness and discernment to penetrate everything, not getting stuck on any form, feeling, perception, thought-formation, or consciousness at all.

The Buddha taught about how ignorance -- not knowing form, delusion with form -- leads to craving, the mental act that arises at the mind and agitates it, leading to the //kamma// by which we try to get what we crave. When you understand this, you can practice correctly, for you know that you have to disband the craving. The reason we contemplate the body and mind over and over again is so that we won't feel desire for anything outside, won't get engrossed in anything outside. The more you contemplate, the more things outside seem pitiful and not worth getting engrossed in at all. The reason you were engrossed and excited was because you didn't know. And so you raved about people and things and made a lot of fuss, talking about worldly matters: "This is good, that's bad, she's good, he's bad." The mind got all scattered in worldly affairs -- and so how could you examine the diseases within your own mind?

The Buddha answered Mogharaja's question -- "In what way does one view the world so that the king of death does not see one?" -- by

telling him to see the world as empty, as devoid of self. We have to strip away conventions, such as "person" and "being," and all designations such as elements, aggregates, and sense media. Once we know how to strip away conventions and designations, there's nothing we need to hold onto. What's left is the Deathless. The transcendent. //Nibbana//. There are many names for it, but they're all one and the same thing. When you strip away all worldly things, what's left is the transcendent. When you strip away all compounded things, what's left is the un compounded, the true Dhamma.

So consider for yourself whether or not this is worth attaining. If we stay in the world, we have to go through repeated births and deaths in the three levels of existence: sensuality, form, and formlessness. But on that further shore there's no birth, no death. It's beyond the reach of the King of Mortality. But because we don't know the further shore, we want to keep on being reborn on this shore with its innumerable repeated sufferings.

Once you comprehend suffering and stress, though, there's nowhere else you want to turn: You head straight for the further shore, the shore with no birth or death, the shore where defilement and craving disband once and for all. Your practice thus goes straight to the cessation of suffering and defilement, to clear penetration of the Common Characteristics of inconstancy, stress, and not-selfness in the aggregates. People with mindfulness and discernment focus their contemplation in the direction of absolute disbanding, for if their disbanding isn't absolute, they'll have to be reborn again in suffering and stress. So keep disbanding attachments, keep letting go, contemplating inconstancy, stress, and not-selfness and relinquishing them. This is the right path for sure.

Isn't this something worth knowing and training for? It's not all that mysterious or far away, you know. It's something that anyone -- man or woman -- can realize, something we can all train in. We can develop virtue, can make the mind quiet, and can use our mindfulness and discernment to contemplate. So isn't this really worth practicing?

Stupid people like to say no. They say they can't do it: They can't observe the precepts, can't make the mind quiet. The best thing in life -- the practice for release from suffering and stress -- and yet they reject it. Instead, they rush around in a turmoil, competing with one another, bragging to one another, and then end up rotting in their coffins. Exactly what is appealing about all that?

We've gone astray for far too long already, our lives almost gone after how many decades. Now we've come here to turn ourselves around. No matter how old you are, the air you breathe isn't just for your convenience and comfort, but for you to learn about suffering and stress. That way you'll be able to disband it. Don't imagine that your family and relatives are essential to you. You are alone. You came alone and you'll go alone. This holds true for each of us. //Only when there's no self to go//: That's when you penetrate to the Dhamma. If there is still a self to be born, then you're stuck in the cycle of suffering and stress. So isn't it worthwhile to strive for release? After all, it's something each of us has to find for him or herself.

Those who trust in the Lord Buddha will all have to follow this way. To trust the defilements is to throw yourself down in the mire -- and there who will you be able to brag to, aside from your own sufferings? The knowledge that leads to dispassion and disenchantment is what counts as true knowledge. But if your knowledge leads you to hold on, then you're a disciple of Mara. You still find things very delicious. You may say that you're disenchanted, but the mind isn't disenchanted at all. It still wants to take this, to get that, to stay right here.

Whoever can keep reading the truth within her own mind, deeper and deeper, will be able to go all the way through, wiping out stupidity and delusion each step along the way. Where you used to be deluded, you've now begun to come to your senses. Where you used to brag, you now realize how very stupid you were -- and that you'll have to keep on correcting your stupidity.

Reading yourself, contemplating yourself, you see new angles, you gain more precise self-knowledge each step along the way. It's not a question of being expert about things outside. You see how what's inside is really inconstant, really stressful, really not-self. The way you used to fall for things and latch onto them was because of your blindness, because you didn't understand. So who can you blame? Your own stupidity, that's who -- because it wanted to brag about how much it knew.

Now you know that you've still got a lot of stupidity left and that you'll have to get rid of it before you die. Every day that you still have breath left to breathe, you'll use it to wipe out your stupidity rather than to get this or be that or to dance around. The ones who dance around are possessed by spirits: the demons of defilement making them crazy and deluded, wanting to get this and be that and dance all over the place. But if you focus your attention in on yourself, then your pride, your conceit, your desires to stand out will shrink out of sight, never daring to show their faces for the rest of your life, for you realize that the more you brag, the more you suffer.

So the essence of the practice is to turn around and focus inside. The more you can wash away these things, the more empty and free the mind will be: This is its own reward. If you connive with your conceits, you'll destroy whatever virtue you have, but if you can drive these demons away, virtuous influences will come and stay with you. If the demons are still there, the virtuous ones won't be able to stay. They can't get along at all. If you let yourself get entangled in turmoil, it's an affair of the demons. If you're empty and free, it's an affair of cleanliness and peace -- an affair of the virtuous influences.

So go and check to see how many of these demons you've been able to sweep away. Are they thinning out? When they make an appearance, point them right in the face and call them what they are: demons and devils, come to eat your heart and drink your blood. You've let them eat you before, but now you've finally come to your senses and can drive them away. That will put an end to your troubles, or at least help your sufferings grow lighter. Your sense of self will start to shrivel away. Before, it was big, fat, and powerful, but now its

power is gone. Your pride and conceit have grown thin and weak. It's as when a person has been bitten by a rabid dog: They give him a serum made from rabid dogs to drive out the disease. The same holds here: If we can recognize these things, they disband. The mind is then empty and at peace, for this one thing -- the theme of not clinging -- can disband suffering and stress with every moment.

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Simply Stop Right Here

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November 28, 1970

Today we have gathered for our regular meeting.

The way we've been contemplating to the point of giving rise to knowledge through genuine mindfulness and discernment makes us realize how this is a process of disbanding suffering and defilement. Whenever mindfulness lapses and we latch on to anything, our practice of reading ourselves step by step will enable us to realize the situation easily. This helps us keep the mind under control and does a world of good. Still, it's not enough, for the affairs of suffering and defilement are paramount issues buried deep in the character. We thus have to contemplate and examine things within ourselves.

Looking outside is something we're already used to: Whenever we know things outside, the mind is in a turmoil instead of being empty and at peace. This is something we can all be aware of. And this is why we have to maintain the mind in its state of neutrality or mindful centeredness. We then notice from our experience in the practice: What state have we been able to maintain the mind in? Is our mindfulness continuous throughout all our activities? These are things we all have to notice, using our own powers of observation. When the mind deviates from its foundation because of mental fabrications, thinking up all sorts of turmoil for itself as it's used to doing, what can we do to make it settle down and grow still? If it doesn't grow still, it gets involved in nothing but stress: wandering around thinking, imagining, taking on all sorts of things. //That's// stress. You have to keep reading these things at all times, seeing clearly the ways in which they're inconstant, changing, and stressful.

Now, if you understand the nature of arising and passing away by turning inward to watch the arising and passing away within yourself, you realize that it's neither good nor bad nor anything of the sort. It's simply a natural process of arising, persisting, and passing away. Try to see deeply into this, and you'll be sweeping the mind clean, just as when you constantly sweep out your house: If anything then comes to make it dirty, you'll be able to detect it. So with every moment, we have to sweep out whatever arises, persists, and then passes away. Let it all pass away, without latching on or clinging to anything. Try to make the mind aware of this state of unattachment within itself: If it doesn't latch on to anything, doesn't cling to

anything, there's no commotion in it. It's empty and at peace.

This state of awareness is //so// worth knowing, for it doesn't require that you know a lot of things at all. You simply have to contemplate so as to see the inconstancy of form, feelings, perceptions, thought-formations, and consciousness. Or you can contemplate whatever preoccupies the mind as it continually changes -- arising and passing away -- with every moment. This is something you have to contemplate until you really //know// it. Otherwise, you'll fall for your preoccupations in line with the way you label sensory contacts. If you don't fall for sensory contacts arising in the present, you fall for your memories or thought-formations. This is why you have to train the mind to stay firmly centered in neutrality without latching onto anything at all. //If you can maintain this one stance continuously, you'll be sweeping everything out of the mind//, disbanding its suffering and stress in the immediate present with each and every moment.

Everything arises and then passes away, arises and then passes away -- everything. Don't grasp hold of anything, thinking that it's good or bad or taking it as your self. Stop all your discursive thinking and mental fabrications. When you can maintain this state of awareness, the mind will calm down on its own, will naturally become empty and free. If any thoughts arise, see that they just come and go, so don't latch onto them. When you can read the aspects of the mind that arise and pass away, there's not much else to do: Just keep watching and letting go within yourself, and there will be no remaining long, drawn-out trains of thought about past or future. They all stop right at the arising and passing away.

When you really see the present with its arisings and passings away, there are no great issues. Whatever you think about will all pass away, //but if you can't notice its passing away, you'll grasp at whatever comes up//, and then everything will become a turmoil of ceaseless imaginings. So you have to cut off these connected thought-formations that keep flowing like a stream of water. Establish your mindfulness and, once it's established, simply fix your whole attention on the mind. Then you'll be able to still the flow of thought-formations that had you distracted. You can do this at any time, and the mind will always grow still to become empty, unentangled, unattached. Then keep watch over the normalcy of the mind again and again whenever it gets engrossed and starts spinning out long, drawn out thought-formations. As soon as you're aware, let them stop. As soon as you're aware, let them stop, and things will disband right there. Whatever the issue, disband it immediately. Practice like this until you become skilled at it, and the mind won't get involved in distractions.

It's like driving a car: When you want to stop, just slam on the brakes and you stop immediately. The same principle works with the mind. You'll notice that, no matter when, as soon as there's mindfulness, it stops and grows still. In other words, when mindfulness is firmly centered, then no matter what happens, as soon as you're mindfully aware of it, the mind stops, disengages, and is free. This is a really simple method: stopping as soon as you're mindful. Any other approach is just too slow to cope. This method of examining yourself, knowing yourself, is very worth knowing because

anyone can apply it at any time. Even right here while I'm speaking and you're listening, just focus your attention right at the mind as it's normal in the present. This is an excellent way of knowing your own mind.

Before we knew anything about all this, we let the mind go chasing after any thoughts that occurred to it, taking up a new thought as soon as it was finished with an old one, spinning its webs to trap us in all kinds of complications. Whatever meditation techniques we tried weren't really able to stop our distraction. So don't underestimate this method as being too simple. Train yourself to be on top of any objects that make contact or any opinions that intrude on your awareness. When pride and opinions come pouring out, cry, "Stop! Let me finish first!" This method of calling a halt can really still the defilements immediately, even when they're like two people interrupting each other to speak, the conceit or sense of "self" on one side immediately raising objections before the other side has even finished. Or you might say it's like suddenly running into a dangerous beast -- a tiger or poisonous snake -- with no means of escape. All you can do is simply stop, totally still, and spread thoughts of loving-kindness.

The same holds true here: You simply stop, and that cuts the strength of the defilement or any sense of self that's made a sudden appearance. We have to stop the defilements in their tracks, for if we don't, they'll grow strong and keep intensifying. So we have to stop them right from the first. Resist them right from the first. This way your mindfulness will get used to dealing with them. As soon as you say, "Stop!", things stop immediately. The defilements will grow obedient and won't dare push you around in any way.

If you're going to sit for an hour, make sure that you're mindful right at the mind the whole time. Don't just aim at the pleasure of tranquility. Sit and watch the sensations within the mind to see how it's centered. Don't concern yourself with any cravings or feelings that arise. Even if pain arises, in whatever way, don't pay it any attention. Keep being mindful of the centered normalcy of the mind at all times. The mind won't stray off to any pleasures or pains, but will let go of them all, seeing the pains as an affair of the aggregates, because the aggregates are inconstant. Feelings are inconstant. The body's inconstant. That's the way they have to be.

When a pleasant feeling arises, the craving that wants pleasure is contented with it and wants to stay with that pleasure as long as possible. But when there's pain, it acts in an entirely opposite way, because pain hurts. When pains arise as we sit for long periods of time, the mind gets agitated because craving pushes for a change. It wants us to adjust things in this way or that. //We have to train ourselves to disband the craving instead//. If pains grow strong in the body, we have to practice staying at equanimity by realizing that they're the pains of the aggregates -- and not our pain -- until the mind is no longer agitated and can return to a normal state of equanimity.

Even if the equanimity isn't complete, don't worry about it. Simply make sure that the mind doesn't struggle to change the situation. Keep disbanding the struggling, the craving. If the pain is so

unbearable that you have to change positions, don't make the change while the mind is really worked up. Keep sitting still, watch how far the pain goes, and change positions only when the right moment comes. Then as you stretch out your leg, make sure that the mind is still centered, still at equanimity. Stay that way for about five minutes, and the fierce pain will go away. But watch out: When a pleasant feeling replaces the pain, the mind will like it. So you have to use mindfulness to keep the mind neutral and at equanimity.

Practice this in all your activities, because the mind tends to get engrossed with pleasant feelings. It can even get engrossed with neutral feelings. So you have to keep your mindfulness firmly established, knowing feelings for what they really are: inconstant and stressful, with no real pleasure to them at all. Contemplate pleasant feelings to see them as nothing but stress. You have to keep doing this at all times. Don't get infatuated with pleasant feelings, for if you do, you fall into more suffering and stress, because craving wants nothing but pleasure even though the aggregates have no pleasure to offer. The physical and mental aggregates are all stressful. If the mind can rise above pleasure, above pain, above feeling, //right there is where it gains release//. Please understand this: It's release from feeling. If the mind hasn't yet gained release from feeling -- if it still wants pleasure, is still attached to pleasure and pain -- then try to notice the state of mind at the moments when it's neutral toward feeling. That will enable it to gain release from suffering and stress.

So we have to practice a lot with feelings of physical pain and, at the same time, to make an effort to comprehend pleasant feelings as well, for the pleasant feelings connected with the subtle defilements of passion and craving are things we don't really understand. We think that they're true pleasure, which makes us want them. This wanting is craving -- and the Buddha tells us to abandon craving and passion for name and form. "Passion" here means wanting to get nothing but pleasure and then becoming entangled in liking or disliking what results. It means that we're entangled in the delicious flavors of feelings, regardless of whether they're physical feelings or mental ones.

We should come to realize that when a feeling of physical pain gets very strong, we //can// handle it by using mindfulness to keep the mind from struggling. Then, even if there's a great deal of physical pain, we can let go. Even though the body may be agitated, the mind isn't agitated along with it. But to do this, you first have to practice separating feelings from the mind while you're still strong and healthy.

As for the feelings that come with desire, if we accumulate them they lead to even greater suffering. So don't think of them as being easeful or comfortable, because that's delusion. You have to keep track of how feelings -- no matter what the sort -- are all inconstant, stressful and not-self. If you can let go of feeling, you'll become disenchanted with form, feelings, perceptions, thought-formations, and consciousness that carry feelings of pleasure. But if you don't contemplate these things, you'll stay infatuated with them.

So try noticing when the mind is in this infatuated state. Is it empty and at peace? If it's attached, you'll see that it's dirty and defiled because it's deluded into clinging. As soon as there's pain, it grows all agitated. If the mind is addicted to the three kinds of feeling -- pleasant, painful, and neither pleasant nor painful -- it has to endure suffering and stress. We have to see the inconstancy, stressfulness, and not-selfness of the body and mind so that we won't cling: We won't cling whether we look outside or in. We'll be empty -- empty because of our lack of attachment. We'll know that the mind isn't suffering from stress. The more deeply we look inside, the more we'll see that the mind is truly empty of attachment.

This is how we gain release from suffering and stress. It's the simplest way to gain release, but if we don't really understand, it's the hardest. Thus you absolutely have to keep working at letting go. The moment the mind latches onto anything, make it let go. And then notice to see that when you tell the mind to let go, it does let go. When you tell it to stop, it stops. When you tell it to be empty, it's really and truly empty.

This method of watching the mind is extremely useful, but we're rarely interested in contemplating to the point of becoming adept and resourceful at disbanding our own sufferings. We practice in a leisurely, casual way, and don't know which points we should correct, where we should disband things, what we should let go of. And so we keep circling around with suffering and attachment.

We have to figure out how to find our opportunity to disband suffering with every moment. We can't just live, sleep, and eat at our ease. We need to find ways to examine and contemplate all things, using our mindfulness and discernment to see their emptiness of "self." Only then will we be able to loosen our attachments. If we don't know with real mindfulness and discernment, our practice won't be able to lead us out of suffering and stress at all.

Every defilement -- each one in the list of sixteen -- is hard to abandon. Still, they don't arise all sixteen at once, but only one at a time. If you know the features of their arising, you can let them go. The first step is to recognize their faces clearly, because you have to realize that they're burning hot every time they arise. If they have you sad or upset, it's easy to know them. If they have you happy, they're harder to detect. So you first have to learn to recognize the mind at normalcy, keeping your words and deeds at normalcy, too. "Normalcy" here means being free of liking and disliking. It's a question of purity in virtue -- just as when we practice restraint of the senses. Normalcy is the basic foundation. If the mind isn't at normalcy -- if it likes this or dislikes that -- that means your restraint of the senses isn't pure. For instance, when you see a sight with the eye or hear a sound with the ear, you don't get upset as long as no real pains arise, but if you get distracted and absentminded as the pains get more and more earnest, your precepts will suffer, and you'll end up all agitated.

So don't underestimate even the smallest things. Use your mindfulness and discernment to disband things, to destroy them, and to keep working at your investigation. Then, even if serious events happen, you'll be able to let go of them. If your attachments are

heavy, you'll be able to let go of them. If they're many, you'll be able to thin them out.

The same holds true with intermediate defilements: the five Hindrances. Any liking for sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations is the Hindrance of sensual desire. If you don't like what you see, hear, etc., that's the Hindrance of ill will. These Hindrances of liking and disliking defile the mind, making it agitated and scattered, unable to grow calm. Try observing the mind when it's dominated by the five Hindrances to see whether or not it's in a state of suffering. Do you recognize these intermediate defilements when they enshroud your mind?

The Hindrance of sensual desire is like a dye that clouds clear water, making it murky -- and when the mind is murky, it's suffering. Ill will as a Hindrance is irritability and dissatisfaction, and the Hindrance of sloth and torpor is a state of drowsiness and lethargy -- a condition of refusing to deal with anything at all, burying yourself in sleep and lazy forgetfulness. All the Hindrances, including the final pair -- restlessness & anxiety and uncertainty -- cloak the mind in darkness. This is why you need to be resilient in fighting them off at every moment and in investigating them so that you can weaken and eliminate every form of defilement -- from the gross to the middling and on to the subtle -- from the mind.

The practice of the Dhamma is very delicate work, requiring that you use all your mindfulness and discernment in probing and comprehending the body and mind. When you look into the body, try to see the truth of how it's inconstant, stressful, and nothing more than physical elements. If you don't contemplate in this way, your practice will simply grope around and won't be able to release you from suffering and stress -- for the sufferings caused by the defilements concocting things in the mind are more than many. The mind is full of all kinds of tricks. Sometimes you may gain some insight through mindfulness and discernment -- becoming bright, empty, and at peace -- only to find the defilements slipping in to spoil things, cloaking the mind in total darkness once more, so that you get distracted and can't know anything clearly.

We each have to find special strategies in reading ourselves so that we don't get lost in distractions. Desire is a big troublemaker here, and so is distraction. Torpor and lethargy -- //all// the Hindrances -- are enemies blocking your way. The fact that you haven't seen anything all the way through is because these characters are blocking your way and have you surrounded. You have to find a way to destroy them using //apt attention//, i.e., a skillful way of making use of the mind. You have to dig down and explore, contemplating to see how these things arise, how they pass away, and what exactly is inconstant, stressful, and not-self. These are questions you have to keep asking yourself so that the mind will really come to know. When you really know inconstancy, you're sure to let go of defilement, craving, and attachment, or at least be able to weaken and thin them out. It's like having a broom in your hand. Whenever attachment arises, you sweep it away until the mind can no longer grow attached to anything, for there's nothing left for it to be attached to. You've seen that everything is inconstant, so what's there to latch onto?

When you're persistent in contemplating to see your inconstancy, stress and not-selfness, the mind feels ease because you've loosened your attachments. This is the marvel of the Dhamma: an ease of body and mind completely free from entanglement in the defilements. It's truly special. Before, the ignorance obscuring the mind caused you wander about spellbound by sights, sounds, and so forth, so that defilement, craving, and attachment had you under their power. But now, mindfulness and discernment break the spell by seeing that there's no self to these things, nothing real to them at all. They simply arise and pass away with every moment. There's not the least little bit of "me" or "mine" to them at all. Once we really know with mindfulness and discernment, we sweep everything clean, leaving nothing but pure Dhamma with no sense of self at all. We see nothing but inconstancy, stress, and not-selfness, with no pleasure or pain.

The Lord Buddha taught, "//Sabbe dhamma anatta// -- All things are not-self." Both the compounded and the uncompounded -- which is //nibbana//, the transcendent -- are not-self. There's just Dhamma. //This is very important//. There's no sense of self there, but what //is// there, is Dhamma. This isn't the extinction taught by the wrong view of annihilationism; it's the extinction of all attachment to "me" and "mine." All that remains is Deathlessness -- the undying Dhamma, the undying property -- free from birth, ageing, illness, and death. Everything still remains as it was, it hasn't been annihilated anywhere; the only things annihilated are the defilements together with all suffering and stress. It's called "//sunno//" -- empty -- because it's empty of the label of self. //This Deathlessness is the true marvel the Buddha discovered and taught to awaken us//.

This is why it's so worth looking in to penetrate clear through the inconstancy, stress, and not-selfness of the five aggregates, for what then remains is the natural Dhamma free from birth, ageing, illness, and death. It's called Unbinding, Emptiness, the Unconditioned: These names all mean the same thing. They're simply conventional designations that also have to be let go so that you can dwell in the aspect of mind devoid of any sense of self.

So the paths, fruitions, and //nibbana// are not something to hope for in a future life by developing a vast heap of perfections. Some people like to point out that the Lord Buddha had to accumulate so many, many virtues -- but what about you? You don't consider how many lives have passed while you still have yet to attain the goal, all because of your stupidity in continually finding excuses for yourself.

The basic principles that the Lord Buddha taught -- such as the four foundations of mindfulness, the four Noble Truths, the three characteristics of inconstancy, stress, and not-selfness -- are right here inside you, so probe on in to contemplate them until you know them. Defilement, craving, and attachment are right here inside you, too, so contemplate them until you gain true insight. Then you'll be able to let them go, no longer latching onto them as really being "me" or "mine." This way you'll gain release from suffering and stress within yourself.

Don't keep excusing yourself by relying, for instance, on the miraculous powers of some object or waiting to build up the

perfections. Don't think in those terms. Think instead of what the defilements are like right here and now: Is it better to disband them or to fall in with them? If you fall in with them, is there suffering and stress? You have to find out the truth within yourself so as to get rid of your stupidity and delusion in thinking that this bodily frame of suffering is really happiness.

We're all stuck in this delusion because we don't open our eyes. This is why we have to keep discussing these issues, giving advice and digging out the truth so that you'll give rise to the mindfulness and discernment that will enable you to know yourself. The fact that you've begun to see things, to acknowledge the defilements and stress within yourself to at least some extent, is very beneficial. It's better that we talk about these things than about anything else, so that we'll gain knowledge about suffering and its cause, about how to contemplate body, feelings, mind, and mental qualities so as to disband our suffering and stress. This way we can reduce our sufferings because we'll be letting go of the defilements that scorch the mind and get it agitated. Our mindfulness and discernment will gradually be able to eliminate the defilements and cravings from the heart.

This practice of ours, if we really do it and really come to know, will really reduce our sufferings. This will attract others to follow our example. We won't have to advertise, for they'll have to notice. We don't have to brag about what level we've attained or what degrees we've earned. We don't have any of that here, for all we talk about is suffering, stress, the defilements, not-self. If we know with real mindfulness and discernment, we can scrape away our defilements, cravings, and attachments, and the good results will be right there inside us.

So now that we have this opportunity, we should make a concerted effort for the sake of our own progress. Don't let your life pass under the influence of defilement, craving, and attachment. Make an effort to correct yourself in this area every day, every moment, and you're sure to progress in your practice of destroying your defilements and disbanding your suffering and stress at all times. This business of sacrificing defilements or sacrificing your sense of self is very important because it gives rewards -- peace, normalcy, freedom with every moment -- //right here in the heart//. The practice is thus something really worthy of interest. If you're not interested in the practice of searching out and destroying the diseases of defilement, of your own suffering and stress, you'll have to stay stuck there in repeated suffering along with every other ignorant person in the world.

When Mara -- temptation -- tried to stop the Buddha's efforts by telling him that within seven days he would become a Universal Emperor, the Buddha answered, "I know already! Don't try to deceive me or tempt me." Because the Buddha had the ability to know such things instantly for himself, Mara was continually defeated. But what about you? Are you a disciple of the Lord Buddha or of Mara? Whenever temptation appears -- there you go, following him hook, line, and sinker, with no sense of weariness or dispassion at all. If we're really disciples of the Buddha we have to go //against// the flow of defilement, craving, and attachment, establishing ourselves in good

qualities -- beginning with morality, which forms the ideal principle for protecting ourselves. Then we can gain release from suffering by working from the level of the precepts on to mental calm and then using discernment to see inconstancy, stress, and not-self. This is a high level of discernment, you know: the discernment that penetrates not-self.

At any rate, the important point is that you not believe your defilements. Even though you may still have the effluents of ignorance or craving in your mind, always keep making use of mindfulness and discernment as your means of knowing, letting go, scrubbing things clean. When these effluents come to tempt you, simply stop. Let go. Refuse to go along with them. If you believe them when they tell you to latch onto things, you'll simply continue being burned and agitated by desire. But if you don't go along with them, the desires in the mind will gradually loosen, subside, and eventually cease.

So in training the mind, you have to take desire as your battlefield in the same way you would in treating an addiction: If you aren't intent on defeating it, there's no way you can escape being a slave to it repeatedly. We have to use mindfulness as a protective shield and discernment as our weapon to cut through and destroy our desires. That way our practice will result in steady progress, enabling us to keep abreast of defilement, craving and attachment with more and more precision.

If, in your practice, you can read and decipher the mind, you'll find your escape route, following the footsteps of the Noble Ones. But as long as you don't see it, you'll think that there are no paths, no fruitions, no //nibbana//. //Only when you can disband the defilements will you know//. You really have to be able to disband them in order to know for yourself that the paths, fruitions, and //nibbana// really exist and really can disband suffering and stress. This is something you have to know for yourself. It's timeless: No matter what the time or season, whenever you have the mindfulness to stop and let go, there's no suffering. As you learn to do this over and over, more and more frequently, the defilements grow weaker and weaker. This is why it's //ehipassiko// -- something you can invite other people to come and see, for all people who do this can disband defilement and suffering. If they contemplate until they see inconstancy, stress, and not-self, they'll no longer have any attachments, and their minds will become Dhamma, will become free.

There's no need to get all excited about anyone outside -- spirit entities or whatever -- because success in the practice lies right here in the heart. Look into it until you penetrate clearly all the way through yourself, sweep away all your attachments, and then you'll have this "ehipassiko" within you. "Come and see! Come and see!" But if there's still any defilement, then it's, "Come and see! Come and see the defilements burning me!" It can work both ways, you know. If you disband the defilements, let go, and come to a stop, then it's, "Come and see how the defilements are gone, how the mind is empty right here and now!" This is something anyone can know, something you can know thoroughly for yourself with no great difficulty.

Turning to look into the mind isn't all that difficult, you know.

You don't have to travel far to do it. You can watch it at any time, in any posture. True things and false are all there within you, but if you don't study yourself within, you won't know them -- for you spend all your time studying outside, the things of the world that worldly people study. If you want to study the Dhamma, you have to turn around and come inside, watching right at the body, at feelings, at the mind, at mental qualities, until you know the truth that the body isn't you or yours; it's inconstant, stressful, and not-self. Feelings are inconstant, stressful, and not-self. The mind is inconstant, stressful, and not-self as well. Then look at the Dhamma of mental qualities: They're inconstant and stressful. They arise, persist, and pass away. If you don't latch on and can become free from any sense of self right here at mental qualities, the mind becomes free.

If you understand correctly, the mind is really easy to deal with. If you don't, it's the exact opposite. Like pushing a light switch: If you hit the "on" button, the light is immediately bright. With the "off" button, it's immediately dark. The same holds true with the mind. If your knowledge is wrong, it's dark. If your knowledge is right, it's bright. Then look to see if there's anything worth clinging to. If you really look, you'll see that there isn't, for all the things you can cling to are suffering and stress -- affairs of ignorance, speculation, day-dreaming, taking issue with things, self, people, useless chatter, endless news reports. But if you focus on probing into the mind, there's nothing -- nothing but letting go to be empty and free. This is where the Dhamma arises easily -- as easily as defilements arise on the other side, simply that you're now looking from a different angle and have the choice: Do you want the dark angle or the bright? Should you stop or keep running? Should you be empty or entangled? It's yours to decide within you.

The Dhamma is something marvelous and amazing. If you start out with right understanding, you can understand all the way through. If you get snagged at any point, you can examine and contemplate things to see where you're still attached. Keep cross-examining back and forth, and then all will become clear.

We're already good at following the knowledge of defilement and craving, so now we have to follow the knowledge of mindfulness and discernment instead. Keep cross-examining the defilements. Don't submit to them easily. You have to resist their power and refuse to fall in with them. That's when you'll really come to know. When you really know, everything stops. Craving stops, your wanderings stop, likes, hatreds -- this knowledge sweeps everything away. But if you don't know, you keep gathering things up until you're thoroughly embroiled: arranging this, adjusting that, wanting this and that, letting your sense of self rear its ugly head.

Think of it like this: You're a huge playhouse showing a true-to-life drama whose hero, heroine, and villains -- which are conventional suppositions -- are entirely within you. If you strip away all conventional suppositions and designations, what you have left is nothing but Dhamma: freedom, emptiness. And simply being free and empty of any sense of self is enough to bring the whole show to an end.

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