

The background of the cover is a dark, almost black, space filled with intricate, glowing patterns of light. These patterns consist of numerous overlapping, circular and spiral-like trails in shades of vibrant green and deep purple. The trails vary in thickness and brightness, creating a sense of depth and movement, as if capturing the paths of light particles or energy. The overall effect is ethereal and dynamic, contrasting sharply with the solid black background.

‘JUST ONE MORE...’

APPRECIATIVE JOY

JEALOUSY
SELFISH DESIRE
AND

THE BUDDHA'S TEACHING ON
THE CYCLES OF ADDICTION


AJAHN AMARO

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AMARAVATI
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PREFACE

This small book is the third in a series of four, consisting of reflections and practices related to the ‘sublime abiding places for the heart’ – the four *brahma-vihāras*, in Buddhist parlance. These qualities are also known as ‘the four immeasurables’ on account of their boundless nature.

The vision for the series is to explore these sublime abidings via the somewhat oblique approach of looking at what counters or muddies their activity. The four *brahma-vihāras* are listed in the Buddhist scriptures as:

Mettā – loving-kindness, benevolence, radical acceptance, non-aversion.

Karuṇā – compassion, empathy, appreciation of the suffering of others.

Muditā – sympathetic or altruistic joy, gladness at the good fortune of others.

Upekkhā – equanimity, caring even-mindedness, serenity amid all turbulence.

In this third book we will be investigating *muditā* through the lens of self-centred desire and its relationship to dissatisfaction; how the quest to fulfil personal cravings leads not to joy but rather to pain-haunted addictions; how joy, instead, comes from unselfishness, giving and consciously delighting in the blessings that others have; how those blessings of others need not feed a sense of lack or unworthiness in us but rather, marvellously and mysteriously, be a contributor to our own well-being.

The principle framework the Buddha used to describe the addictive process and its cyclical nature is known as ‘Dependent Origination’ so this will be used as the matrix around which these reflections on craving, suffering and altruistic joy are

formed. The other three books in the series similarly explore the remaining *brahma-vihāras* through aspects of mind and behaviour that oppose or confuse them.

The material published in this book is mostly based on Dhamma talks given at a ten-day retreat at Amaravati, in July, 2013. As with all such retreats, and as with all teachings offered in the Buddhist tradition, the words here are presented for the reader's contemplation rather than being intended to be taken as absolute truths. Those who pick this book up and read it are therefore encouraged to consider whether these principles and practices feel true to life and, if they do, to try them out and see if they bring benefit. Do they help you to work more easily with your own array of addictions, both those of a coarse or a refined nature, and thereby free the heart from them? Do they lead you to a recognition of the balance of the Middle Way? Do they help you to find joy in the world, freeing the heart from the confines of envy and jealousy?

If so, that is to be delighted in. If, however, these words don't help you, then may you discover other wholesome ways of finding true satisfaction and joy.

DEPENDENT ORIGINATION

*Avijjā-paccayā saṅkhārā,
Saṅkhāra-paccayā viññāṇaṃ,
Viññāṇa-paccayā nāma-rūpaṃ,
Nāma-rūpa-paccayā saḷāyatanaṃ,
Saḷāyatana-paccayā phassa,
Phassa-paccayā vedanā,
Vedanā-paccayā taṇhā,
Taṇhā-paccayā upādānaṃ,
Upādāna-paccayā bhavo,
Bhava-paccayā jāti,
Jāti-paccayā jarā-maraṇaṃ soka-parideva-dukkha-
domanass'upāyāsā sambhavanti.
Evam-etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo hoti.*

With ignorance as condition, formations come to be.
With formations as condition, consciousness comes to be.
With consciousness as condition, materiality-mentality comes to be.
With materiality-mentality as condition, the six sense-spheres come to be.
With the six sense-spheres as condition, contact comes to be.
With contact as condition, feeling comes to be.
With feeling as condition, craving comes to be.
With craving as condition, clinging comes to be.
With clinging as condition, becoming comes to be.
With becoming as condition, birth comes to be.
With birth as condition, then old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair all come into being.
Such is the origination of this entire mass of suffering.

(S 12.41; A 10.92)

THE CYCLES OF ADDICTION

When the mind gets caught in the feeling of pleasure, there is the tendency to want more of it. Or, when the mind experiences an unpleasant, painful feeling, it wants to get away from it. This is what is called the bridge between 'feeling' and 'craving'. This is the key point in the addictive process because this is where the trouble really starts: where the feeling of 'like' transforms into 'I want' and the feeling of 'dislike' turns into 'I can't stand' or 'I can't bear it.'

When the mind grasps at the feeling of like or dislike and follows that craving, the attention very quickly gets drawn into that and the universe shrinks to the single desired object

that we're craving for. All the rest of the world gets screened out. We are taking hold of that object and investing our sense of hope, ownership, our sense of identity in it; this is the case regardless of whether it is a sense-object – what we see, hear, smell, touch or taste – or something more subtle like a mind-state or a memory. In that absorption, we are creating a commitment to that, an identification with that. That becomes the most important thing for us. This is *bhava*, becoming, which leads to *jati*, birth, a full absorption into the thing that we're chasing after or resenting.

That commitment, that full absorption, then naturally leads to the experience of alienation, of insecurity, incompleteness; there is disappointment that that desired object was pleasant for a moment but then after a while it ceased to satisfy us: in short, there is *dukkha*.

That experience of *dukkha*, in turn, supports and conditions a cyclical process, because if the mind absorbs into that feeling of regret, disappointment, even self-hatred, if that's not seen clearly, if we're not fully cognizing how the whole picture is, then that feeds *avijjā* – the quality of ignorance. It makes us less mindful, we see less clearly and so that then creates a set of conditions whereby we're more easily pulled into the next wave of that which is attractive, that which is irritating, that which we are habituated to. We thus find ourselves repeating the same habits, getting lost in the same patterns over and over again.

This is how we use the word 'ignorance' in Buddhist psychology. It doesn't mean lacking the pertinent facts about some issue, a want of knowledge, as it does in regular English usage; instead it means 'unawareness', 'unmindfulness', 'nescience' or 'not seeing things clearly'.

In that process, the moment of maximum thrill is when we're chasing after a desired object, when we know we're going to get it, but we haven't got it quite yet. This is what we call 'becoming' – *bhava*. This is very useful to understand because, surprisingly, what we get addicted to is not getting what we want but it's that moment when we know for sure that we are going to get it. As it says in 'The House at Pooh Corner' by AA Milne:

'What do you like doing best in the world, Pooh?'

'Well,' said Pooh, 'what I like best –' and then he had to stop and think. Because although Eating Honey was a very good thing to do, there was a moment just before you began to eat it which was better than when you were, but he didn't know what it was called.

We absorb into that promise, in that becoming. But as soon as we get what we want, we're already disappointed. The thrill is in that promise.

When we've acquired what we've wanted, or we've had a good rant at the things we were annoyed at, we then experience that ache of incompleteness, disappointment for the fading thrill or self-criticism for having got lost in that unsatisfying process again. At that point something in the mind begins hunting for something to help us get away from that lonely, incomplete, fragmented, unsatisfied feeling and it remembers the last time that we felt good; so... where does it go? At a cellular level it is reminded of that previous gratification so it inclines toward repeating that moment of becoming – the promise of feeling **that** again. So the mind is tricked and conditioned by the effect of the last time we felt good and it's drawn back to repeat that same pattern.

This is how the process configures itself, irrespective of whether the object of desire is a more expensive Rolex watch than the other person, a new boyfriend, a place in a retirement home, reaching fourth *jhāna* and getting to be the most

impressive meditator, a pipe of crack or getting your paper on ‘The Nature of the Tathāgata’ published – the map the Buddha provided applies to every self-centered desire. And the same is true for all those negative desires too: wanting to get away from your awful neighbours; wanting to get rid of anger and jealousy; vowing with gritted teeth never to be born again... if it’s coming from the place of self-view, the result will be *dukkha* and more turns on the sorry-go-round.

Part of our mind is saying ‘This is ridiculous, it didn’t work last time either, so why am I doing this again!?’ but it’s not a rational process. In order to learn how the rebirth pattern works we have to get familiar with the non-rational aspects of our being, the instinctual attractions and aversions and compulsions that come from the reptile brain: feelings of craving, aversion, fear, feelings about territory, etc. It’s important to use our meditation to explore and understand that instinctual and

reactive, non-conceptual area of our being; we need to see into its mechanisms, its workings and then through that seeing, to help set the heart free from that.

DESIRE IS A LIAR

When the mind says: ‘I *must* have...’ or: ‘She’s got one, I *need* one of those too’ or: ‘I’ve got to have a better one than *him*,’ we shouldn’t consider that it’s telling the truth. It’s an impulse that the mind is coming up with, certainly, but we don’t have to go along with it. If we learn to watch that impulse and recognize that it’s a lie, we will not get caught in it; then we won’t create the feeling of disappointment or lack, and we will find that we are much more content and happy with the way things are. Even if we don’t get what we want, we will realize that nothing is missing.

We can learn to use the structures and the limits of a retreat, a monastic life or those that are part of lay life,

as a good opportunity to explore these themes, to look at the mind's habit of chasing after a desire or an aversion. We can make an effort to not follow the craving but to know: 'This is a feeling; this is a very potent feeling perhaps, it's very strong, but it is just a feeling.' The mind might make a strong case: 'I can't stand this! 'I've got to get away from...' or 'I've got to have some!' but we can learn to know that as a movement, a wave, a feeling in the heart and to know that that craving, that desire, is a lie. It's not the truth, it's not the whole story; it's merely a mental impulse.

When we are able to recognize that: 'This is a feeling of liking and the mind is trying to run away with it' or: 'This is a feeling of disliking and the mind is trying to run away with it,' at that very moment we're looking at the bridge between feeling and craving. That is the most helpful place to bring our attention. We are coming to the bridge and choosing not to

cross it. We can recognize that: 'Yes, this is a strong feeling; this is very compelling but I don't have to cross this bridge.' That's a tremendous power we have, the freedom to make that choice. And essentially this is how we can liberate ourselves from the cycles of rebirth, the cycles of addiction. We can train our minds to recognize that we have a choice to not cross that bridge, to not let the mind get absorbed into craving, clinging and becoming and then to experience directly the freedom and peacefulness, the joyfulness that comes from living unselfishly.

FEELING CONDITIONS CRAVING

Dependent Origination is the fine analysis of how we get from the Second Noble Truth to the First Noble Truth. Even before *taṇhā* ('craving' – literally 'thirst'), it's describing how that experience of craving appears. It all starts off with *avijjā*, not seeing clearly.

The first section, *avijjā paccaya saṅkhāra*, is describing that when the mind loses its clarity of awareness, then that creates the seed or the beginning of a subject-object division. Ajahn Sumedho translates this link in a very simple way: 'Ignorance complicates everything.' When there is a clear awareness, when there is *vijjā*, then that awareness is, to a great extent, subjectless and

objectless. There is an alertness to the present yet there isn't the sense of a division between a knower and a known, (a 'me', for example, watching 'that thought') there is simply hearing, feeling, smelling, tasting, touching. There is an integration of experience. In that letting go of subject and object, there's a simplicity, a spaciousness, a great peacefulness. The mind is alert, it's bright, it's energized. It's not dissociated from the world of the senses: the body carries on, our normal everyday activities continue but they're held in a different way. There is a quality of attunement to the time, the place, the situation. *Avijjā paccaya saṅkhāra* is describing the drift from that quality of clear awareness, when it's not the pure simplicity of hearing or feeling or sensing but rather 'I'm tasting,' 'I'm hearing,' 'I'm feeling' (for example see the Buddha's words at S 22.59, S 22.89 & Ud 1.10). In short, there's the assumption of the reality of a solid 'me' in here and a separate 'world' out there.

The process gathers momentum after the drift has occurred; there is *saṅkhāra paccaya viññāṇa*, *viññāṇa paccaya nāma-rūpa*, *nāma-rūpa paccaya saḷāyatana*, *saḷāyatana paccaya phassa*, *phassa paccaya vedanā*. So from *saṅkhāra* being the first subtle division into subject and object, it rapidly concretizes until the mind is absorbed into sense-contact and feeling. That process happens very very quickly: as awareness gets blurred, our mindfulness drifts, then in a flash there are the six senses and contact and feeling: ‘I don’t like’ or ‘I do like.’

Then you get to the key link: *vedanā paccaya taṇhā*. Up to this point we’re simply experiencing the world of the senses, thoughts and feelings; there is still an innocence, a clarity that is possible at this stage, a strong element of mindfulness. There’s still the capacity to be aware of the experience of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking, of like and dislike, without confusion about it. Even though there will likely be a

subtle sense of ‘me the experiencer’ and ‘that out there being experienced,’ that can still be known and understood with a great degree of detachment, non-entanglement, clarity. When the bridge is crossed from ‘I like’ to ‘I want’ then the capacity to be mindful, to not be caught up and entangled, diminishes rapidly. At that point, the world starts to shrink because the attention goes to ‘I want that.’ This is where the trouble really begins. This is why, in the teaching of the Four Noble Truths, the Buddha says that *taṇhā* is the cause of *dukkha*. When the bridge is crossed, when something in the mind says: ‘I want to negotiate ... I don’t like this; it shouldn’t be this way ... This isn’t fair! Why me?!’ or ‘This is great, I’ve got to have it, I want to keep it ... How can I hang on to this? This is mine and no one is going to take it away from me,’ this is where the heart is thrown into a state of disharmony, discord, where the *dukkha* really begins.

CRAVING UPSETS THE BALANCE

This dynamic is what brings us into a state of conflict with the reality of life. When we buy into ‘I want more, just one more; I want to keep this, this is really great,’ then at that moment we believe the promise that ‘If I had just one more, then I would be happy.’ We’re feeling we’re incomplete but if we get one more drink or one more piece of cake or one more profound meditation experience, then we’re going to be happy and satisfied. Whether the object of addiction is coarse or subtle, wholesome or unwholesome, it works in exactly the same way. We are pulled by that ‘just one more’ promise.

A good image to describe the process is that of getting on a train. From *avijjā* up to *vedanā*, that's like arriving at the station and getting on to the train. The train isn't moving yet. So when we're at the realm of feeling we can taste the pleasantness of getting the meditation experience that we wanted, being praised or suchlike. Once the change has gone from 'I like' to 'I want' (*taṇhā*), then the train is starting to move. As we know, trains tend to pick up speed fairly rapidly. Craving conditions clinging, clinging conditions becoming, becoming conditions birth. We can imagine that, as the train steadily increases speed, if the train has only just started to move, we could still jump off without causing ourselves too much harm. When we recognize the 'I want' or the 'Just one more' feeling, then we can get off at this point without too much difficulty. But once it's moved into 'clinging' and the mind is committing itself into 'Yes, I'm going to pursue it!' then the train is picking up speed so it's going to be a pretty uncomfortable if we get off at this

point. By the time we've got to 'becoming,' we're pretty much out of the station and it's going to be a nasty tumble when we land. Once the becoming has changed to birth, that's the point of no return. Then the situation has to be followed through and lived to its completion. After 'birth' has happened the thrill has already passed and there are the implications of having followed that impulse, the *dukkha* that follows: self-criticism, disappointment and every kind of grief. That moment of thrill is no longer filling the universe. Starting from craving, the mind is narrowing and narrowing until the point of 'becoming,' the chief moment of thrill. Once we've already got what we wanted, then the universe starts to get bigger again and we realize that there are other things that come with it – the bill, the responsibility, the jealousy of others who did not get the prize, the painful realization that our heart has shrunk to be 'two sizes too small'. It's a rude awakening at that point. I realize modern-day trains are harder to jump off but I'm sure you get the point.

The more we're able to recognize that once the mind has followed such an impulse it gets harder and harder to let go, the more that encourages us to pay very close attention to the issue of getting on the train – that is to say, how the realm of feeling works and how feeling transforms into craving. As we're developing a consistent, comprehensive mindfulness around feeling, we are training ourselves not to believe those promises, not to believe that 'Because it's a pleasant feeling, then more of it would be better' or 'If this is followed, then I would be happy.' There is the capacity to know 'this is a pleasant feeling,' 'here is the sound of a promise.' We don't have to hate the train; we don't have to fear it. We recognize that we have the power, the capacity to know that it's there and to not climb on board. The more that we're able to bring attention and clarity to the feeling of liking, the feeling of disliking, and to know them simply as that, as natural mental processes, mental formations, then we find a freedom in our lives that is never

present if we have habituated ourselves to chase after what is pleasant and to push away what is unpleasant. We're learning to respond and to relate to the realm of feeling with a different attitude. In that change of attitude, we find tremendous freedom, a rich quality of peacefulness. The heart is no longer just reacting and we're able to respond to life: if something is useful and appropriate then we can do that; if we recognize it as being harmful and obstructive, we can leave it alone.

One of the natural outcomes of this increased freedom is the shift in attitude towards others. If the mind was once inclined towards resentment of the success of others, and the driving force of many of our desires was from seeing what they had and wanting the same, now the mind is more able to appreciate and consciously enjoy the happiness of others. We might not think of ourselves as particularly envious or jealous, nevertheless it is rare to be glad when the other person gets the green light and we have to wait; that someone else gets the parking space

while we have to keep hunting for one; that someone else got the spot on the retreat with Luang Por Sumedho while you are #114 on the waiting list...

Muditā – altruistic, appreciative joy, gladness at the good fortune of others – is a rare and precious quality. It is the very antithesis of *taṇhā* – the desire to get something for *me* – and the curmudgeonly attitudes of the jaded cynic. When feelings of like or dislike are fully understood and not followed blindly, the heart is free to expand in the blossoming of *muditā*, as well as the other *brahma-vihāras*. It is discovered that there are causes for joy all around us. Why should we not delight in a dog wrestling a stick, in an athlete triumphing over all obstacles, in someone else having the most impressive meditation posture?

A number of years ago, when I lived in America, I met the Rev. James Jelinek; he was the minister of the church we used to rent for our gatherings in San Francisco. He offered me lunch one day and during this he told me a story about how he'd

recently applied to become the Bishop of Carmel. He had made it into the group of the last three candidates but then was not chosen. He told me how he went away from that experience somewhat resentful and upset, grumbling and full of reasonable indignations. He clearly never spared a thought for the minister who got the promotion and the job. And then... to his surprise, I think it was about six weeks later, he said he woke up one morning and realized: 'I was not really ready for that post. The best person for the role was actually the one they gave the job to.' He was surprised at how clear it was to him. His envy and resentment fell away and he realized he was feeling glad for the people of Carmel. They got the best one. Incidentally, a PS to this story is that, three years later, he became the Bishop of Minnesota.

There are reasons to be glad and grateful all around us, if we would only look.

WHAT CAUSES THE ADDICTIVE CYCLE?

The addictive process is connected to what we do when we meet with *dukkha*. It's mysterious how this works. When we have followed through on a desire (whether it's a sense object, having a good rant, seeking approval or affection, being a successful meditator or whatever), then we experience this painful, difficult quality of *dukkha*: unhappiness, regret, feelings of incompleteness, criticism. Then the rational mind may think:

'Why would you want to do that again?' When we arrive at that experience of *dukkha* we might even be feeling: 'This is awful; this is pointless; this is really harmful: physically, emotionally, socially; this is why I said I wasn't going to do this again; I hate

this; I need to get free of this; I'd never want to do this to myself ever again.' This is the rational mind, the voice of reason and clarity speaking. So how is it that we find ourselves pursuing the same pattern of desire, often just a short while later?

It seems to work this way because we're not clear about the experience of *dukkha*. It's painful. We feel rattled, we're unsettled, we're adrift, we're lonely, we're insecure, a wounded fragment. There's a lot of 'me' and 'mine' in that which is not being seen clearly.

The voice of reason is not the voice that has the power in all situations. This voice of reason, the voice of wisdom, is the voice of the neo-cortex, the super-ego, the clear rational thinker. But what's driving the force of craving and compulsion is the non-conceptual, reactive reptile brain, the limbic system: 'Me. I want. Get out of here. That's mine'; it's that non-verbal, hormonal, reactive impulse towards sexual gratification,

towards ownership of property, fear of threats towards us, aggression, competition, or getting revenge on those who've hurt us. That instinctual aspect of our being is what's driving the wheel of becoming and that's what causes the same patterns to repeat themselves. The thinking mind might be brought in to provide some kind of back-up, to justify our actions, but the impulse, the driving force of it is more this non-conceptual, reactive element of our nature.

The reason we get drawn into repeating the same patterns over and over again is because we're in that state of *dukkha*. We're feeling insecure, lonely, incomplete, there is a sense of 'I' that is not satisfied, it's looking for something to make it feel good, secure, happy, protected, complete and in that mix of wanting to 'make me feel good' the mind inclines towards 'what is the thing that made me feel good last time?' And when we last felt that feeling of gratification was when we had that last drink, or pastry, or rant... And so, against all reason, the attention

moves towards recreating that situation, to get that feeling of gratification once again. It finds a way through.

We are drawn back to not just our loves and hates but also to that which is familiar to us, because they are the ruts that we follow, the things that the mind is conditioned to, whether they are wholesome, unwholesome or neutral. Such ruts can be something that is directly destructive or it could be more subtle: the habituation to being a woman, or being French, our affiliation of being a Theravada Buddhist, our identification with our social roles, our position in society. As the Buddha put it:

Whatever one frequently thinks and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of one's mind.

Dvedhāvitakka Sutta ('Two Kinds of Thought') M 19.6

Even if the things that the mind is habituated to are powerful and long-lasting, it's important to recognize that we have the capacity to free the heart from them, no matter how

strong or deeply rooted they might be, because these habituations, these identities, these addictions are not who and what we are. It's important to see that the teachings on *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā* are ways of exploring that and see for ourselves whether that's true. When we develop the insight into *anattā* then we're awakening that realization, that clear seeing within the heart that knows that there is no thing that can truly and realistically be who and what we are.

Experience tells us all that we can't make a habit go away just by hearing that 'Everything is not-self.' That's just the thinking, rational mind that is seeing that. Rather it takes a moment-by-moment application of genuine mindfulness and wisdom, a training of the mind to look directly and clearly at the experience over and over again, awakening that insight that this addiction is not who and what we are, but simply a powerful impulse, a powerful habit of identification. We

don't try to make ourselves believe that solely by hanging on to a hope but instead by vitalizing and strengthening clear understanding, direct seeing. We can choose to let that insight have its voice rather than believing the habitual judgments of the mind that say, 'I'm a hopeless victim. There's no way I can get out of this.' As human beings, we are never a victim. We have tremendous resources, we have capacities, we can make choices. But part of us enjoys being carried along, even enjoys being a victim. Until we really know the pain of attachment, we won't let go. Reason won't cause us to let go. Good advice from our friends won't cause us to let go.

The Buddha said that suffering ripens in one of two ways: either in further suffering or it ripens in search: 'There must be a way out of this' (A 6.63). Furthermore, when that *dukkha* is being reflected upon in this way, it can give rise to faith – the faith and

confidence that there's got to be an alternative, that the heart can be freed from this. In a discourse called 'The Proximate Cause,' also known as 'Transcendental Dependent Origination' (S 12.23) the Buddha asks, 'And what is the proximate cause for faith? It should be said: suffering.' He then goes on to describe how that faith then gives rise to gladness, rapture, tranquillity, contentment, concentration, insight into the way things are, and ultimately to liberation.

Just as, when rain pours down in thick droplets on a mountain top, the water flows down along the slopes and fills the clefts, gullies and creeks; these being full, fill up the pools; these being full, fill up the lakes; these being full, fill up the streams; these being full, fill up the rivers; and these being full, fill up the great ocean; so too, with ignorance as proximate cause, formations come to be; with formations as proximate cause ... suffering ... faith ... gladness ... contentment ... concentration ... insight into the

way things are ... with liberation as proximate cause, the knowledge of transcendence.

When we are feeling that restless, distressed, lonely, incomplete feeling, rather than seeking to get away from that or fill up that space with something that's pleasing, instead, the encouragement is to let it in, to let the results of that action, of that attitude be fully known. That opening to the painfulness of it is found to be what helps the habit to be broken, what helps the causes of the habits to dissolve and what strengthens the wisdom faculty – that clarity of mind that intuits 'I don't have to be caught up in this.'

Habits are hard to break. Maybe we are able to see: 'Yes, this is destructive, this is painful. Yes, there is a way out of it. Yes, I can see that this is possible' but yet there is a lot of momentum there. It might also be that we don't recognize how these patterns work. But what we can do is to substitute a more

harmless or wholesome obsession for a more destructive one. This is not a sign of weakness but it's more a pragmatic way to gradually free the heart from any kind of compulsiveness. With this less harmful substitute we are able to find a sense of contentment. Just giving ourselves the space to leave aside the usual obsession and to substitute it with something much more benign, we can learn and notice, 'Oh, look! Actually, this is fine. I'm quite content with this instead. I didn't really need that other stuff. Nothing is missing.' We can find ways of creating some kind of diversion so that we're still giving the impulsive craving something to chew on but we're making our 'chews' less and less harmful. The Buddha, in making a similar point about substituting an unwholesome object with one that was more wholesome, compared it to: 'A carpenter knocking out a large peg with a small peg' (M20.3); and, in the same *sutta*:

Just as a man walking fast might consider, 'Why am I walking fast? What if I walk slowly?' ... then , 'Why am I

walking slowly? What if I stand?’ ... ‘Why am I standing? What if I sit?’ ... ‘Why am I sitting? What if I lie down?’ ... By doing so he would substitute for each grosser posture one that was subtler.

Vitakkasaṅṭhāna Sutta (‘The Removal of Distracting Thoughts’) M20.6

Friends of ours in Alcoholics Anonymous tell me that they drink a considerable amount of coffee and often smoke a lot; caffeine and nicotine are acknowledged as harmful indeed but they don’t have the massively destructive behavioural effects that alcohol brings with it.

And then there’s a story I heard Peter Cook once tell about his time at Cambridge. When Lenny Bruce was invited to England by Peter Cook, on behalf of the Cambridge University Footlights Revue, on arrival his hosts, eager to please, asked if there was

anything they could provide him with to make his stay more comfortable. To Peter Cook's horror, he casually replied, 'Some heroin would be nice.' After a desperate scramble through a very limited range of possibilities, a while later Peter Cook apologetically told him, 'Sorry, Mr Bruce, we tried very hard but...'. 'Never mind,' his guest laconically reassured him, 'just some chocolate cake will be fine.'

It's a neat story but in telling it I don't wish to trivialize such addictions; it is fully acknowledged that sometimes such substitutions are easy while at other times they are very difficult.

THE TWO KINDS OF DESIRE

It should not be presumed that every single kind of desire, or way of directing the mind towards an object or a goal, is intrinsically unwholesome. It's specifically *taṇhā* that is the cause of *dukkha*. The best translation for *taṇhā* is 'craving', rather than 'desire'; because you can't really have a skilful craving. When the mind is in a state of craving, we've lost it, we haven't got a quality of composure. There's an agitated, unmindful, imbalanced and self-centred element within that.

The Pali word for desire with the broadest meaning is *chanda*. There are unskilful kinds of *chanda*, like *kāmacchanda*, sense desire, and there are skilful *chanda*, like *Dhamma-chanda*, desire

for the Dhamma. This quality of *chanda* is a prerequisite for any kind of spiritual development, for any kind of effort that we make to be successful.

To achieve anything, whether it is wholesome, unwholesome or neutral, ‘the four bases of success’ need to be present. The first of these is *chanda*: interest, enthusiasm, zeal. It’s that attribute of mind which goes to an object and picks it up. The second quality is *viriya*, energy. After having aroused the interest to carry out some task, there needs to be the application of energy and effort to actually do something. The third one is *citta*, which in this respect means thinking, consideration. We need to think about what is it that we want to do, what’s the best way to go about it, what’s needed. The fourth one is *vimaṃsā*, which means reviewing, looking at the results of what we just did.

It’s very important to get to know the difference between *taṇhā*, the agitated, self-centred craving, and *chanda*, the capacity

that we have to direct the mind towards a goal. What makes it confusing is that *bhava-taṇhā* and *vibhava-taṇhā* can latch on to extremely wholesome objects (for example, to become concentrated or enlightened, to get rid of lust, anger, laziness, etc.) so they can look very much like following the instructions of the Buddha. *Taṇhā* and *chanda* are like the left hand and the right hand: on one level they are exactly like each other but in another sense they are completely opposite. To be able to differentiate these two kinds of desire, we need to look at the attitude within the heart.

The key difference is that when there is *bhava*, ‘becoming’, when there is an attitude conducive to creating more alienation, suffering and difficulty, there’s always a self-centered element, *sakkāya-ditṭhi*, this kind of narcissistic focus on ‘me’ and ‘mine’: ‘I want to get concentrated, I want to have insight... for the benefit of all beings, I need to get rid of my chattering mind

and my anger’; or even, as the Buddha characterizes it in one teaching: ‘I am at peace, I have realized *Nibbāna*, I am without clinging’ (M 102.24). It’s all threaded through with ‘I’ and ‘me’ and ‘mine’. On one level that might be true, maybe anger is a common feeling, maybe the mind has strong habits of chattering away, but the way that this is being held is that there is a ‘me’ here who possesses these issues, who needs to get rid of *this* stuff and get hold of *that* stuff and then there will be a ‘me’ who’s got everything together. So the self-view is pervading the attitude and, as long as it’s there, then the result is going to be painful. Luang Por Sumedho used to summarize this very simply: ‘If it begins with self-view, the result is *dukkha*, suffering. If it begins with Right View and wisdom, then the result is *Nibbāna*.’

When the desire is wholesome, in tune with reality, then we are practising the four qualities of Right Effort. The first one is *saṃvara*: restraining the unwholesome from arising. The second one is *pahāna*: letting go of the unwholesome which has

already arisen. The third one is *bhāvanā*: consciously bringing the wholesome into being. The fourth one is *anurakkhaṇa*: protecting, cherishing, maintaining the wholesome qualities which have arisen. Right Effort is established and cultivated without any kind of self-view. It's motivated and guided by mindfulness and wisdom.

We don't have to be afraid to give the mind direction. When a choice is guided by mindfulness and wisdom, that will be conducive towards peacefulness and clarity, it's not a disturbance. Peace is not passivity or an absence of activity. Rather, it comes from the attunement of the heart to Dhamma. We can make choices, we can do things, be engaged with people, look after our responsibilities, take initiative and not have that being felt as something disturbing. There's a strong cultural conditioning of 'if I've got to do something, it's a bother' and 'when I don't have to do anything, that's great and then I can have peace.' There is a societally sanctioned praising

of switching off and not doing, not feeling, a zombie-like existence we call 'peace', a sort of nullified disengagement. If that's our view of real peace, then anything that we have to do, or that is seen as activity or work, will be held as disturbing the peace. But if we shift the attitude and see that real peace comes from Right View, from letting go of self-centered thinking and attitudes, then we can experience the quality of spaciousness, clarity, and peacefulness in the midst of engagement. We're not waiting for the absence of activity, stimulation or responsibility.

If we learn to make effort without all the I-making and mine-making (*ahaṃkāra* and *mamaṃkāra* in Pali), then life becomes a lot easier. We find ourselves unburdened and able to take care of the different aspects of what we need to do with a much lighter and more spacious attitude. We are not creating the emotional stress of always wanting success and fearing failure. Whatever the outcome of our actions, we learn from it without taking it personally and from there we take the

next step forward. Judgements like ‘this is a failure’ or ‘this is a success’ are not reliable. We can see a success as something good, and then realize how sour and difficult that can turn; similarly something that’s bitter and painful, how helpful and beneficial that can turn out to be. When we allow that into the heart, then there’s a responsiveness, a sense of freshness that we bring to each moment.

This shift also affects the way we relate to the success and failure of others; we can be warmed by the sunny glow of *muditā* for their success but we know that the sweetness of that event will not be the whole story. Similarly, when we feel the tender brightness of *karuṇā*, compassion, for another’s failure, that attitude will be grounded in the knowledge that such a loss can not be absolute.

When we reflect on *anattā* to explore the process of making a choice, we can see that there isn’t any self in there. It can seem

that there is, when there's attachment and identification, but when that's let go of and there's a clear and unbiased exploring of what's experienced, then we see that what's guiding our actions and choices is attunement to the present, mindfulness and wisdom. If this is the way the mind is guided then we do not claim success when things go well or claim failure when things go poorly. We're able to live in a much more fluid and easeful way. We can let the way that we live and the way we respond to people and to situations be as natural and uncomplicated as the body breathing.

There will be for each of us specific kinds of situations where our attention gets most easily swept away, where the habits of identification are very strong, the deeply rooted compulsions of our minds. We can use meditation to help explore and understand the depth of that attachment, that identification, and train ourselves to let it go through using the mindfulness of the body. Instead of getting lost in the story or in the object

of our emotion, we can bring attention to the body, notice and fully receive the related sensations and consciously relax. Even if the stories feeding those compulsions are complicated, the sensations of the body are very simple and when we fully accept these physical sensations, we also accept the related patterns of attachment within us. And that acceptance helps the mind in loosening its identification with them.

KNOWING EMOTIONS WITHIN THE BODY

When we get lost in the object of an emotion, whether it's irritation or desire or fear or jealousy, then it's very hard to establish any kind of clarity. The most helpful thing to do then, to get to know an emotion and to not get carried away by its compelling quality, is to develop mindfulness of the physical sensations that go along with it.

When we notice that the mind is getting pulled by some particular emotion or some kind of outflow (one of the *āsavas*), there is a physical element that we are able to perceive quite distinctly and the trick is to deliberately take the attention off the object that's annoying or frightening or exciting and to bring it into the body and to explore: where do I feel that

anger, where do I feel that jealousy, that desire? How does it sit in the body? What is its texture? Is it a tightness in the lungs? Is it a knot in the belly? Is it a sharp knife between the shoulder blades? Is it a constriction in the throat? Is it a vibration through the whole system? How is it? Where is it?

When we bring the attention to the physical sensations that occur with an emotion, then it's a lot simpler because we're not caught into the stories of what we should do or shouldn't do, or how things should be... whatever the particular details of the circumstance are. Rather, there's an almost monosyllabic language that the body speaks. It's very simple, very direct, very uncomplicated. When we get caught up in the stories, in the emotionally charged tales, it gets very complicated very quickly. When we bring attention into the body and know the feeling that goes with any emotion, then we are able to acknowledge it, to accept it, to know it in a complete and

unbiased way as a natural force. We're able to not get entangled, not get so caught up in that emotion and then no longer take it so personally. We are able to discern: 'Is it a wholesome emotion or an unwholesome emotion? Is it something that if it's followed it's going to lead to difficulty and harm or is it going to lead to benefit? Is it benign?' We're much more able to sustain a clarity around it.

If we have a strong tendency to go toward a particular emotion, whether it's negativity, greed, jealousy, self-hatred, anger or whatever, we can deliberately explore that. For example, with anxiety: at every morning sitting, we can set a clear and conscious intention: 'Today, whenever my mind moves towards anxiety, whether it's coarse or fine, serious or trivial, I will make the effort to take the attention off the object of anxiety and bring it into the body, notice the feelings and consciously relax, using the out-breaths.'

We can also use the formal meditation to get to know this specific reactive pattern. We first let the mind be as quiet and spacious as possible and then we deliberately drop a memory or a thought or a person's name that we're particularly averse to or obsessed with in order to trigger that emotion. When the emotion is felt, we take the attention off the stories and we bring it into the body: 'What does jealousy/anger/desire feel like? Where is it? What's its texture?'

The most difficult element of this practice is to leave the story alone and to go directly to the physical quality of it. But if we do, then the more we receive it and accept it, the more we also accept, to some degree, the habits, the reactive patterns, the deeply rooted identifications that have caused that emotion in the first place. And to the degree to which we can accept it and receive it and know it just as it is, simply as an attribute of nature, then to that degree, we're able to integrate it and to no longer be caught up and carried away by it.

So we allow it in, let it be known in the body, let it be sustained for a few minutes, and then consciously let it go, using the out-breaths to relax the body and to release that reactive pattern. It can take ten seconds to trigger the emotion and 45 minutes for it to fade, but it's important to stay with it and to let it work through the system until it has faded away and the mind is relaxed and has returned to that spacious and open quality that you started from.

In that contemplative process there has been a receiving of the entire cycle: we've watched that feeling come into being, do its thing and then fade away. And in being attentive to that, we've also generated an attitude of acceptance for the whole cycle. So we were able to see that this feeling came out of nothing and went back into nothing. When we work with that in the safety and quietness of our meditation space, we are learning that skill in a very benign environment. Then, when that same emotion is triggered in a living situation, on a fundamental

level we know what this is, we know this cycle, we know where this goes: ‘This is one of those patterns, I don’t have to be drawn into this, I don’t have to get obsessed or caught up or excited or intimidated by this.’

This is an extraordinary helpful skill to develop and employ, because in the flow of our daily lives there are emotions being triggered on a regular basis, as we all well know. We are all drawn into difficult situations and compulsive behaviours of one kind or another, and we can easily feel that we have no ability to get perspective on them.

This practice works equally effectively with more subtle emotions (less sharp-edged or distinct but in a way equally strong), like the feelings of doubt, or depression, or being stuck. It might not feel like it’s an emotion at all. It might feel more like a kind of deadness, dullness, a heavy, oppressive or depressive state. Sometimes we can not even name the emotion – we are

trying to hold our world still because inside there's a turbulent confusion of negative states – but it's an emotion nonetheless.

That which knows 'this feeling is like this' is not caught in the feeling. Even if that feeling might still be there, it might be very powerful and convincing, at that moment we're awakening the intuition that: 'This is a feeling, this is something that has a beginning and an end. It's not something that's absolutely real and solid. It's not completely who and what I am.'

If we develop this kind of practice and cultivate this way of handling emotional states, whether they're coarse or subtle, whether they're sharp-edged and active or whether they are inclining us towards depressive or heavy states, when we're able to know them and receive them, then they're realized to be patterns of a natural order. We are then far more able to take them less personally. Rather than thinking of them as 'my problem' or 'this is what I am,' there's a shifting of perspective

so that we're able to see that this is just one of the things that we can experience as a human being. And in that shifting of perspective, the heart is more able to relate compassionately towards ourselves and what we're experiencing and thereby much more compassionately to others too. When we have a compassionate attitude to the way things are, then at that very moment we are creating the causes for letting those habits end. We're not feeding or recreating them. There is a freedom from the addiction – what a joy!

GUIDED MEDITATION

Take a moment to notice how you feel, the effects of your day so far: what you have thought, felt, what you've heard and seen, and the feelings in the body.

Take a moment to simply attend, look at them, feel and notice them.

Are you excited? Bored? Warm? Cool? Depressed? Inspired? Full of mixed feelings? Whatever it might be, notice that:

'Right now it's like this. The body feels like this. The mind feels like this.'

Let the body settle and invite the spine to straighten. Invite the body to sit in an energized, upright way. Allow the spine to grow to its full natural extension.

Let the body settle and then centre the attention upon the breathing.

Allow the attention to settle on the feeling of the breath. Use that rhythm, that pattern of feeling, as a central point, a focal point for attention. When the mind wanders, follow it back; come back to the central point, the simplicity of this present reality.

When you feel the mind is settled and there's a quality of poise and some ease, deliberately bring to mind a desire with an emotional charge to it. It can be a desire to get or get rid of. Try not to go into a big story; simply bring the attention to that imagined event. Bring it to mind. Let that emotion be triggered, fully born into consciousness.

After that feeling of desire, clinging has been triggered and has got underway, see if you can find it in the body. What's the

physical counterpart to that craving? Where do you feel that? For myself it's usually a tightening in the chest and throat but these things are different for everyone.

If you're able to find such a feeling, in the belly, the throat, the shoulders, wherever it might be, bring the attention to it. Let the attention settle there, hold that feeling as fully as you can in awareness. Don't try to get rid of it, change it, buy into it or push it away. Know the feeling – that: 'It's like this.'

As you let the feeling be fully known, bringing awareness to it, then with the rhythm of the breath let yourself relax your attitude toward that feeling, let go of it, particularly using the out-breath to help carry it away. So the feeling is naturally eroding, it's washing through you, not by trying to 'get rid of' it, but just like the waves of the sea slowly washing away a

sandcastle, lapping in with each breath, washing around that feeling and slowly carrying it away, back to the ocean.

Let the attention rest with that feeling in the body. If the mind gets lost in stories again, replaying a choice fantasy you just invented, again let the out-breath carry that away and come back to that feeling: the tightness in the belly, the tension in the throat, wherever you might feel it. Consciously leave the words aside. Keep the attention with the simplicity, the directness of the physical feeling; stay with that, being open, patient, relaxed with it, letting it slowly, gently fade away, however long it takes. Stay with it.

Keep letting the out-breath have its effects, gently, steadily supporting the quality of release, relinquishment, relaxation. Stay with this until the body is fully relaxed, until you've completely let go of that sensation, that craving, its effects

washed utterly away. Once it's gone, sustain the attention on that absence. How does it feel with that tension gone, the body in a state of ease, relaxation?

We've watched that mood, that emotion born from nothing, born from the arousal of a memory, burst into being, rise up, flower and fade away; the flowers bloom and fade, the fruits fall, the leaves drop, sink back into the earth, and then it's all gone. It comes out of nothing and returns to nothing.

We've watched that whole cycle of experience come into being, do its thing and fade away. And, throughout the whole process there's been this quality of knowing, caring, careful attention, and noticing, feeling this quality of spaciousness.

In the open space of the mind we can once again invite that same cycle of feeling, bring up another fantasy of getting or destroying, or the same one. Again, keep it as non-conceptual, as non-verbal as possible. You don't need any more of a trigger than that. And let the whole process run again, bringing that

great desire to mind – ‘I gotta have it!’ – and immediately going to the feeling in the body, whatever it might be. Notice where you feel it. Train the mind to stay with it in its simplicity. Feel it, know it and be with it throughout its cycle.

Sometimes the cycle of feeling can go through its turnings very swiftly. A thought gets triggered and there’s a flush of emotion: ‘That should be *me!*’ ‘Wow. Look at *that.*’ And then there’s recognition: ‘Stop! Look. Feel this...’

And in a couple of breaths it’s gone. Completely finished.

See how the pattern works for you, become familiar with it and learn the skill of non-entanglement, not clinging, letting go, releasing.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question: Semantically, ‘staying’ with a feeling and ‘clinging to’ a feeling appear to be the same thing. But I wonder if you would inform us about the differentiation between the two and how we deal with that.

Answer: That’s a good question. One of the most often quoted explanations involves a big rock outside the ordination hall at Wat Pah Pong. Once someone asked Luang Por Chah about clinging and holding on, and he said:

‘See that rock?’

‘Yes.’

‘Is that rock heavy?’

‘Yes. It’s a huge rock. Of course it’s heavy.’

‘Not if you don’t try to pick it up.’

You can stand right next to the rock, you can sit on top of the rock, you can be wholly with it; but unless you try to pick it up it's not heavy. If the quality of awareness is really refined, there can be a knowing: 'This is an intense craving. I feel like I absolutely have to follow it,' or 'This is rage. I feel aversion and destructive anger,' but without becoming caught up in the emotion. The same applies to somebody else's intense feeling; it's a big emotion, but we're not sharing it.

Easy to say, difficult to do.

Question: How does sympathetic joy relate to expressing enthusiasm for somebody's enthusiasm? From time to time I get invited to share someone's enthusiasm for some special thing even though I'm really not interested in it. It's awkward. But how does sympathetic joy relate to this?

Answer: With mindfulness. It's like when a little two-year-old comes rushing up to you with a picture they've drawn; and they say: 'Look what I drawd!' You accept their enthusiasm and excitement, but you yourself are not excited. You don't have to be hypocritical; you can be joyful simply for their joy. They might have thought they'd drawn a beautiful horse. You don't really see the horse there and it wasn't your drawing. You can certainly empathize with their feeling, but you're not excited in the same way. Also, with the *brahma-vihāras* it's often not a matter of choosing. It's not a theoretical choice: three units of *muditā* and one and a half of *karuṇā*, and a handful of *mettā* tossed in. It's much more of an intuitive process. So sometimes when someone is excited or enthusiastic, it can feel appropriate to express the *muditā* that may arise. But another time you may appreciate that they're excited and you're happy for them,

but it doesn't form into any kind of expression. It's important to be true to your own feeling, and that can only really come from mindfulness. If you think: 'I should always be happy with other people's happiness, and I should always express it like this,' that can make life very uncomfortable and complicated. It's more a matter of drawing upon the quality of a mindful attunement to the moment.

It may be appropriate to speak up and express approval, or disapproval, and say what you're feeling. When someone's really angry with you or upset about something, sometimes the most helpful thing can be to say: 'You're really upset, aren't you?' Not from a patronizing point of view, but showing that though you're not upset yourself, you recognize that they're really angry and you care about that.

Another significant element of this area concerns that gnarly subject of 'the right thing' – while at one moment a comment

might be absolutely the perfect thing to say, a moment later it might come across as the most condescending and irritating remark. We have to learn to attune to what's appropriate in the moment. One moment the right thing to do may just be to be quiet and still, and not to try and fix things. The next moment it might be to say: 'Well this is a tense moment, isn't it!' And that might transform the moment in a beautiful way, though if you'd said it two seconds earlier, you'd just have created more tension.

A lot of this is to do with a development of genuine mindfulness and a readiness to let go of our own programme. Often we're 'preoccupied'. That's a very good word for it. We're 'occupied' already. We're not empty; we're occupied, so that when we meet a situation we've already got an agenda for handling it. Instead we need to let ourselves be more empty. When we encounter someone's grief, sometimes the most difficult thing to do is just to be with it. We need to be empty so as to receive

that person's sadness, rather than filling up the space with our own pre-conditioned clever ideas or our own agenda.

When Ram Dass's stepmother was close to death he was by her bedside, giving her lengthy guidance to follow her breath and then, if the inner light arose, to let go and open herself to the light, and suchlike. He went on like this for an hour or so. Finally, he paused for breath, and she turned towards him from her bed and said: 'Ram Dass, be quiet.' As he said himself, he was not comfortable with that space, so he was filling it up with his own programme of 'I'm the death and dying expert, and I should teach my stepmother how to die.' Then he realized: 'Oh, she's got something to teach me.'

Question: What about the feeling of loneliness when you're guarded – because I think that mindfulness has a certain element of being on guard in order not to be sucked into

something – or the fear of loneliness that comes from not having that empathetic connection? Another one I have trouble with is feeling I *should* have *muditā* for someone when what I really feel is: ‘But I want one too!’ Can you speak about some other kinds of empathy that might address the loneliness, or some other kind of practice that addresses these issues?

Answer: There are a few different things involved in your question but I’d say the response is the same to all of them. Even with feelings like loneliness, and jealousy what I would suggest is finding it in your body. Where is that lonely feeling? And we can make friends with it? Loneliness is an uncomfortable feeling, an ache in the heart, but we can bring the quality of attention, openness, to that ache of loneliness as well.

The big mistake we often make is to feel we have to climb over this negative feeling (jealousy, loneliness, fear) to get to that good place on the other side (sympathetic joy, wholeness, security). The irony is that by opening the heart to the felt

presence of those very ‘negatives’ we are acting based on a full acceptance of the way things are, which creates the causes for the realization of all those ‘positives’.

Mindfulness is a single word, but it can mean a lot of different things to different people. So being on guard and thinking: ‘I’ve not to let my mind escape to any of these little outlets, these escape hatches. I’ve got to keep track, otherwise it’s going to run away’ is a fearful relationship to mindfulness. If you recognize and know in the body the texture of that fearful attitude, that awareness should spur a natural relaxation. Then you can let the mindfulness be more a quality of total acceptance – loving everything.

GUIDED MEDITATION

Begin the meditation in the same way as the previous Guided Meditation.

Allow the attention to settle on the feeling of the breath. Use that rhythm as a central point, a focus for attention. When the mind wanders, follow it back; come back to the central point, the simplicity of this present reality.

When you feel the mind is settled and there's a quality of poise and some ease, deliberately bring to mind a desire, a fantasy with an emotional charge to it. It can be a desire to get or get rid of.

Unlike last time, for this exercise follow the string of thoughts and associations to see where the story ends up. Be imaginative:

‘... and once I’ve got the Double First Class degree at Oxford then ... And then ... And then ... And then ... And then ...?’

‘... once I’ve got those neighbours slammed with an ASBO ... And then ... And then ... And then ...?’

‘... and once we’re married ... then she ... And then ... And then ... And then ...?’

‘... once I’ve become a nun ... And then ... And then ... And then ... And then ...?’

‘... once I’ve got out of the monastery ... And then we ... And then ... And then ... And then ...?’

‘... and then after that he will ... And then we ... And then ... And then ... And then ... And then ...?’

‘... that’s my favourite! If they could cook it here just like at

that restaurant in Bali, then ... And then ... And then ... And then ... And then ... And then ...?

This is an investigation into ‘gratification, enjoyment’ (*assāda*) and ‘liability, the downside’ (*ādīnava*). You find, through following through any string of associations from a desire, through such deliberate conceptual proliferation, you see where it goes.

When we mindfully walk through the likely results having got what we wanted, what do we find...?

‘Do we really want *that*?’ / ‘Oh yes of course, then I’d have to find a job’ / ‘and you get the family with her’ / ‘and if I ate that every day...’ See where it goes. See for yourself; with the sweetness of *assāda*... comes the bitterness of *ādīnava*.

Or maybe not... look for yourself.

Once you reach that cool, sober quality of *ādīnava*, what do you do? Stay with it. Let that cool dispassionate quality then feed

the inclination to let go – this is ‘release’ (*nissaraṇa*).

Stay with that simple recognition of freedom. Feel its tone, its beauty, its spaciousness, its brightness.

Go back to the breath. Re-establish attention in the present.

DEPENDENT CESSATION

*Avijjāya tveva asesā-virāga-nirodhā
Saṅkhāra-nirodho,
Saṅkhāra-nirodhā viññāṇa-nirodho,
Viññāṇa-nirodhā nāma-rūpa-nirodho,
Nāma-rūpa-nirodhā saḷāyatana-nirodho,
Saḷāyatana-nirodhā phassa-nirodho,
Phassa-nirodhā vedanā-nirodho,
Vedanā-nirodhā taṇhā-nirodho,
Taṇhā-nirodhā upādāna-nirodho,
Upādāna-nirodhā bhava-nirodho,
Bhava-nirodhā jāti-nirodho,
Jāti-nirodhā jarā-maraṇaṃ soka-parideva-dukkha-
domanass'upāyāsā nirujjhanti.
Evam-etassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa nirodho hoti.*

Now, with the remainderless fading, cessation or absence of that very ignorance comes the cessation, the non-arising of formations.

With the cessation of formations comes the cessation, the non-arising of consciousness.

With the cessation of consciousness comes the cessation, the non-arising of materiality-mentality.

With the cessation of materiality-mentality comes the cessation, the non-arising of the six sense-spheres.

With the cessation of the six sense-spheres comes the cessation, the non-arising of contact.

With the cessation of contact comes the cessation, the non-arising of feeling.

With the cessation of feeling comes the cessation, the non-arising of craving.

With the cessation of craving comes the cessation, the non-arising of clinging.

With the cessation of clinging comes the cessation, the non-arising of becoming.

With the cessation of becoming comes the cessation, the non-arising of birth.

With the cessation of birth, then old age and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair all cease – they do not arise.

Such is the cessation of this entire mass of suffering.

(S 12.41, A 10.92)

NON-ARISING

Sam̐sāra means ‘endless wandering,’ going around and around, repeating the same patterns; it’s the cycle of birth and death, the cycle of addictions. The philosopher George Santayana famously said, ‘Those who do not learn from the past are condemned to repeat it.’

The experience of *dukkha* itself can be an exit point from the cycle of addiction. As mentioned (above, p 39), when we experience *dukkha* it can ripen in two ways. One is in further *dukkha*: when we experience dissatisfaction, discontent, loneliness, alienation, it simply makes us hungry for another hit of our drug of choice (whether it’s nicotine, praise, truffles or *jhānas*) to take us away from the discomfort. Or, if there is sufficient *pāramitā*, wisdom and world-weariness (*saṃvega* in

Pali), it awakens the question: ‘What’s the way out of this? I’ve been repeating this pattern for so long, what’s the way out? There *must* be a way out.’ The experience of *dukkha* then awakens faith rather than conditioning more ignorance and more rebirths. This is known as ‘Transcendent Dependent Arising’. Then faith leads to the quality of delight, leading to physical and mental ease and contentment, leading to *samādhi*, and to insight and to liberation. As we have seen, the most accessible exit point from the addictive cycle is the link between feeling and craving. Another exit point is to not start the cycle at all. *Nirodha* can mean ‘cessation’, that is to say the ending of a thing that has begun, but it can also mean ‘checking’, ‘restraining’ or ‘non-arising’. So with the non-arising of ignorance (i.e. when there is knowing, awakened awareness), then *saṅkhāra* does not arise, and so forth...

Moment by moment we are not experiencing an objective world; rather we’re experiencing our mind’s *representation*

of the world. What is the world? The Buddha answered: ‘The eye is the world, the ear is the world, the nose is the world, the tongue is the world, the body is the world, the mind is the world’ (S 35.116). It’s not saying that the whole world is just a dream but it’s saying that our version, our experience of the world (therefore the only ‘world’ we can know) is conjured into being through the activity of our senses and our human minds. Thus, when we talk about *nirodha*, the cessation of things, when there is no ignorance, what is ceasing is the substantiality of division between a subject and an object. The feeling arising from sense-contact happens in the mind. That can be experienced without the view of a subject/object division.

It has a radical effect on our attitude, when we shift our perspective and recollect that the whole world is happening in the mind. That gives a broader context to experience and imbues it with a quality of non-entanglement. The heart can’t get so wrapped-up in every experience, in likes

and dislikes, when we're recognizing: 'It's merely hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, touching. That's what's happening here.' As the Buddha says in his teaching to Bāhiya:

In the seen, there is only the seen, in the heard, there is only the heard, in the sensed only the sensed, in the cognized only the cognized.

Since, Bāhiya, there is for you in the seen, only the seen, in the heard, only the heard, in the sensed only the sensed, in the cognized only the cognized, and you see that there is no thing *here*, you will therefore see that indeed there is no thing *there*.

And as you see that there is no thing *there*, you will see that you therefore can not be located either in the world of *this*, or in the world of *that*, nor in any place between the two. This alone is the end of suffering.

Bāhiya Sutta, Ud 1.10

This is an exit point from the cycle because if we're able to establish the heart in *vijjā*, in awakened awareness, then the whole pattern does not take off, we're not imbuing the felt sense of this moment with the 'me' here and 'the world' out there. When we see something that we like, we know, 'This is seeing; this is liking'; and when we see something that we dislike, 'This is disliking.' There is a knowing that this is part of a flow of perception, and that's all. It can't have an owner, it's just patterns of nature arising and ceasing, doing their thing.

In that clarity, that non-entanglement, there's a supremely easeful participation, a profound attunement and a harmony with life and its present conditions; rather than the kind of dissociated numbness in relation to the world that can come from wrongly grasping the principle of 'watching the mind' or trying to 'be an unattached observer'. In a mysterious way, when there's is a complete letting go of the world, its partner is a simultaneous attunement to the world. To sustain the quality of *vijjā*, of awakened awareness is, however, a more demanding

exit point. It's not easy to do because the habits of attachment and entanglement are very profound, but it certainly is doable.

With practice, we see more and more clearly the blessings that come from establishing that quality of awareness, that 'unentangled knowing', and how we can restrain the compulsions and the habitual attachments from arising. The more fully and firmly that quality of awareness is established, then the easier it is to not get into trouble, to not create the situations where we are causing confusion and difficulty for ourselves and consequently for the people around us. This is 'Dependent Cessation', a process which describes in detail the journey from Noble Truth #1 (the experience of *dukkha*) to Noble Truth #3 (the cessation or checking of *dukkha*).

We can bring our attention to this task; in this moment, to watch *dukkha* as it arises, to watch *dukkha* as it ceases and to

know how that works. If we give attention to that and if that's understood, if that's developed as a skill, then all the rest is extra. Using the analogy of playing in an orchestra: simply to be able to know how to play our instrument, to know the piece of music, to be able to discern if we're going too fast or too slow or if we're too sharp or too flat and to know when things are in harmony – that's all we need to know. If we pay attention to that particular task, then we learn how to do it well. Our attention isn't getting scattered over unnecessary things. We find we are able to play harmoniously and we realize that this was everything that was needed.

The teaching of Dependent Origination maps out the arising of *dukkha*, how that disharmony appears, how we get out of tune with the rest of the orchestra and then how we can harmonize. In a sense this is all we really need to know: how

to play in tune, how to bring our life into harmony with the world around us, with our own physical being, with our own past conditioning, the people that we live with and with the world around us.

That's all we need to do – this is the ‘handful of leaves’ that the Buddha referred to as all we *really* need to know (S 56.31). There are infinite numbers of other things that *can* be known – those are all the other leaves in the forest – but what is of central importance is this capacity we have to be in balance with nature and to free the heart from all its restrictive dependencies. This quintessential balancing comes about through training the heart not to cling – and the blessings of this transformation are the highest. As the Buddha put it when he spoke to Sakka:

When a person has heard that ‘nothing whatsoever should be clung to,’ they directly know everything; having directly known everything, they fully understand everything;

having fully understood everything, whatever feeling they feel ... they abide contemplating impermanence, fading, cessation and the relinquishment of those feelings. Contemplating thus, they do not cling to anything in the world. When they do not cling, they are not agitated. When they are not agitated, they personally attain *Nibbāna*.

Cūḷataṇhāsankhaya Sutta ('The Shorter Discourse on the Destruction of Craving') M 37.3

Lastly, if we bring this attunement to every dimension of our experience, it's not just a blessing to us; it becomes a blessing to everybody that we share this life with. The heart established in *vijjā* naturally responds to all situations via the four *brahmvihāras*. Freed from the confines of self-centred desires, *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā* and *upekkhā* all arise on their own, in response to the needs of each moment.

‘JUST ONE MORE...’

BY AJAHN AMARO

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