

The background of the book cover is a photograph of a pond. The water is a clear, bright blue. Numerous lily pads are scattered across the surface, some showing vibrant yellow and orange autumn colors, while others are green. Tall, thin reeds or grasses grow from the water, their dark green stalks reaching upwards. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

# A Still Forest Pool

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The Insight Meditation of  
Achaan Chah

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*compiled by*  
Jack Kornfield & Paul Breiter

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Forest  
Pool



*Achaan Chah*

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~~Dedicated with deepest gratitude to the Venerable Achaan Chah Subato, our teacher, guide, and friend, to his many devoted students and disciples, especially Achaan Sumedho, to his teachers Achaan Tong Rath and Achaan Mun, and to the teachers before them, the lineage of centuries of those in the forest who realized through their simplicity and genuine practice the freedom and joy in the teachings of the Buddha. And dedicated to our parents, for their care and support along our way.~~

~~Try to be mindful, and let things take their natural course. Then your mind will become still in any surroundings, like a clear forest pool. All kinds of wonderful, rare animals will come to drink at the pool, and you will clearly see the nature of all things. You will see many strange and wonderful things come and go, but you will be still. This is the happiness of the Buddha.~~

Achaan Chah

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# Foreword

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It is a pleasure to write this foreword to the book of my Dharma friend, Achaan Chah.

Our world is at a very interesting age. In the West, people are studying yoga, karate, meditation—Eastern things. In the East, people are studying science, business, Western art and philosophy—Western things. This is now the time when Yin and Yang are changing very quickly. So if you are holding on to any idea—of what is Eastern, what is Western, how things are, how things ought to be—holding any idea, any opinion at all, then you will have a problem; you cannot connect with this world. But, if you lay it all down, all your ideas, all opinions, then the truth is right in front of your eyes: the sky is blue, the tree is green, sugar is sweet, salt is salty. The dog is barking, woof! woof! The rooster is crowing, cockle-doodle-doo! Then, when you're hungry, just eating, when you're tired, just sleeping is possible. A hungry person comes, you can give him food. A thirsty person comes, you can give him something to drink. That's all! That's enough! That is Buddhism—nothing at all.

Achaan Chah says, “People are like buffalo—unless they are tied down firmly by all four legs, they will not allow themselves to be given any medicine.... In the same way, most of us must be totally bound up in suffering before we will let go and give up our delusions. If we can still writhe away, we will not yet give in. A few people can understand the Dharma when they hear it taught and explained by a teacher. But life must teach most of us all the way to the end.” That is very wonderful speech, just correct!

Achaan Chah once walked by some students at the Insight Meditation Center who were doing slow walking meditation on the lawns. He remarked that the meditation center looked like a mental hospital for the diseases of the worldly mind. All afternoon, as he wandered past students, he would call out to them, “Get well soon. I hope you get well soon.” That is also very wonderful.

He says, “Hey, listen. There's no one here, just this. No owner, no one to be old, to be young, to be good or bad, weak or strong.... No one born and no one to die.... When we carry a burden, it's heavy. When there's no one to carry it, there's not a problem in the world.” That is the True Way.

Achaan Chah tells one good Zen story. “In the Zen koan of the flag in the wind, two persons are watching a flag: one says it is the wind that moves, the other says it is the flag. They can argue forever, take sticks and fight it out, all to no avail. It is the mind that moves.” That is correct. But very important, if there is no mind, then no problem. If you have mind, you have a problem. So where do minds come from? Who made that?

Great Master Achaan Chah has already given you the Great Way, Truth and Correct Life. I hope you find your true way from this book, get Enlightenment, save all beings from suffering.

ZEN MASTER SEUNG SAH  
Providence Zen Center

# Introduction

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Suppose you were to go to Asia in the 1980s in search of living teachings of the Buddha, to discover there are still monks and nuns practicing a life of simplicity and meditation, supported by alms-fooding and dwelling in the forest. Perhaps you had read descriptions of the Buddha himself wandering with his monks in the forests of India, inviting men and women of good families to join him in cultivating wisdom and universal compassion, inviting them to live the simple life of a mendicant, to dedicate themselves to inner calm and awareness. Would you find this way of life alive today, twenty-five centuries later? And would its teachings still be applicable and relevant for our modern society, or modern minds?

You would land at a modern airport near Bangkok or Colombo or Rangoon. In your taxi you would drive through Asian city streets, passing cars, crowded busses, sidewalk vendors of tropical fruit. Every few blocks you would see the golden pagoda or spire of an urban Buddhist temple. But these are not the temples you have come to search for. They contain monks and nuns who study the ancient texts, who can chant and preach, and from this they teach. But to find the simple life of dwelling in the forest, the meditative living with robe and bowl, as old as the Buddha himself, you would have to leave the cities and their temples far behind. If it were Thailand, the country with the greatest number of monasteries and monks, you would board the train at busy Haulm-pong station, leaving early in the morning for the provinces of the far south or northeast.

The first hour's journey would take you clear of the urban sprawl, beyond the houses, businesses, and shanties backed up along the railway track. Vast plains of central Thailand would roll by, the green rice bowl of Southeast Asia. Mile after mile of paddy fields, checkerboarded into lots by small dikes between fields and rhythmically divided by canals and waterways. On the horizon of this sea of rice, every few miles in four or five directions you would see islands—dense clusters of palm and banana trees. If your train rolled close enough to one of these palm islands, you would see the glint of an orange-roofed monastery and cluster of wooden houses on stilts that make up a Southeast Asian village.

Every settled village, whether with five hundred or two thousand residents, has at least one monastery. It serves as the place for prayer, for ceremony, as the meeting hall, and for many years ago also served as the village school. Here is the place where most young men of the village will ordain at age twenty, for one year or three months, to learn enough of the ways of the Buddha to “ripen” into mature members of their society. The monastery is probably run by a few older, simple, and well-meaning monks who have studied some of the classic texts and know enough of ceremonies and of the basic teachings to serve as village priests. This monastery is an integral and beautiful part of village life, but it is not the temple you have come to search for.

Your train heads north toward the ancient capitol of Auddhaya, filled with the ruins of magnificent temples and broken palaces that were sacked centuries ago in the periodic wars with neighboring kingdoms. The spirit of these magnificent ruins remains in the enormous stone Buddha images, imperturbably weathering the centuries.

Now your train turns east for the long journey toward the Lao border, across the reaches of the Korat Plateau. Hour after hour the land passes. Still you see rice paddies and villages, but they gradually become sparser and poorer. The canals and lush gardens of Central Thai villages, mango trees, and tropical greenery turn into a simpler landscape. Houses are smaller. Village monasteries

still gleam, but they too are smaller and simpler. Here an older, more self-sufficient way of life preserved. ~~You can see women weaving handloomed blankets on their porches, while rice farmers work and children tend the water buffalo in wet gullies alongside the railroad tracks.~~

The rural countryside in these lesser developed provinces holds much of what remains of the tradition of forest monks and nuns. It still has regions of forest and jungle, small thickly covered mountains, and unsettled borderlands. And for many centuries it has supported forest monks and monasteries dedicated to the preservation and realization of the enlightenment of the Buddha. For the most part these monks do not function as village priests, nor do they teach school, nor study and preserve the language of the ancient written scriptures. Their intent is to live fully and realize in their own hearts and minds the insight and inner peace taught by the Buddha.

If you left the train and made your way by bus or hired car down some dirt road to such a monastery, one of dozens in northeast Thailand, what would you find? Would the teachings and way of practice be relevant in the 1980s? Would the insight and awareness training address the needs of one coming from a modern and complex society?

You would discover that many Westerners had come before you. Since 1965 hundreds of Europeans and Americans like you have come to visit and learn in the forest. Some came to study for short periods and then returned home to integrate what they learned into their household life. Some came to train more thoroughly as monks for one, two, or more years and then return home. Another group found life in the forest to be a rich and compelling way to live, and these remain in monasteries to this day.

For each of these groups the teachings have spoken directly to their hearts and minds, offering them a wise and conscious way to live. At first the way may seem almost easy, deceptively simple. But upon attempting to put the Buddha's way into practice, one discovers that it is not so easy. Yet, despite the effort it takes, these people feel that nothing could be more valuable than to discover the Dharma or truth in one's own life.

From the moment of your entry into a forest monastery like Wat Ba Pong, the spirit of practice is evident. There is the stillness of trees rustling and the quiet movement of monks doing chores and mindful walking meditation. The whole monastery is spread over a hundred acres, divided into two sections for monks and nuns. The simple unadorned cottages are individually nestled in small forest clearings so that there are trees and silent paths between them. In the central area of the Wat are the main teaching hall, dining area, and chapel for ordination. The whole forest setting supports the atmosphere of simplicity and renunciation. You feel that you have finally arrived.

The monks who live in those monasteries have chosen to follow this uncomplicated and disciplined way of practice called *dhudanga*. The tradition of forest monks who voluntarily choose to follow this more austere way of life dates back to the Buddha, who allowed a supplementary code of thirteen special precepts, limiting the robes, food, and dwellings of monks. At the heart of this life style are few possessions, much meditation, and a once-daily round of alms-food begging. This way of life spread with the rest of Buddhism into the thick forests of Burma, Thailand, and Laos, places filled with caves and wild terrain, ideal for such intensive practice. These ascetic monks have traditionally been wanderers, living singly or in small groups, moving from one rural area to another, and using handmade cloth umbrella tents hung from trees as their temporary abode. Practical Dharma teachings from one of the greatest forest monasteries, Wat Ba Pong, and its master Achaan Chah have been translated and compiled and are offered to the West in this book.

Achaan Chah and his teachers, Achaan Tong Rath and Achaan Mun, themselves spent many years walking and meditating in these forests to develop their practice. From them and other forest teachers

has come a legacy of immediate and powerful Dharma teachings, directed not toward ritual Buddhism or scholastic learning, but toward those who wish to purify their hearts and vision by actually living the teachings of the Buddha.

As great masters emerged in this forest tradition, laypersons and monks sought them out for teaching advice. Often, to make themselves available, these teachers would stop wandering and settle in a particular forest area where a *dhudanga* monastery would grow up around them. As population pressures have increased in this century, fewer forest areas are left for wanderers, and these forest monastery preserves of past and current masters are becoming the dwelling place of most ascetic and practice-oriented monks.

Wat Ba Pong monastery developed when Achaan Chah, after years of travel and meditation study, returned to settle in a thick forest grove near the village of his birth. The grove, uninhabited by humans, was known as a place of cobras, tigers, and ghosts—the perfect location for a forest monastery according to Achaan Chah. Around him a large monastery grew up.

From its beginnings as a few thatched huts in the forest, Wat Ba Pong has developed into one of the largest and best-run monasteries in Thailand. As Achaan Chah's skill and fame as a teacher have become widespread, the number of visitors and devotees has rapidly increased. In response to requests from devotees throughout Thailand, over fifty branch monasteries under the guidance of abbots trained by Achaan Chah have also been opened, including one near Wat Ba Pong especially designed for the many Western students who have come to seek Achaan Chah's guidance in the teachings. In recent years several branch monasteries and associated centers have been opened in Western countries as well, most notably the large forest Wat at Chithurst, England, run by Abbot Sumedho, Achaan Chah's Senior Western disciple.

Achaan Chah's teachings contain what has been called “the heart of Buddhist meditation,” the direct and simple practices of calming the heart and opening the mind to true insight. This way of mindfulness or insight meditation has become a rapidly growing form of Buddhist practice in the West. Taught by monks and laypeople who have themselves studied in forest monasteries or intensive retreat centers, it provides a universal and direct way of training our bodies, our hearts, and our minds. It can teach us how to deal with greed and fear and sorrow and how to learn a path of patience, wisdom, and selfless compassion. This book is meant to provide guidance and counsel for those who wish to practice.

Achaan Chah's own practice started early in life and developed through years of wandering and austerities under the guidance of several great forest masters. He laughingly recalls how, even as a child, he wanted to play monk when the other children played house and would come to them with a make-believe begging bowl asking for candy and sweets. But his own practice was difficult, he relates, and the qualities of patience and endurance he developed are central to the teachings he gives his own disciples. A great inspiration for Achaan Chah as a young monk came from sitting at his father's sickbed during the last days and weeks of his father's life, directly facing the fact of decay and death. “When we don't understand death,” Achaan Chah teaches, “life can be very confusing.”

Because of this experience, Achaan Chah was strongly motivated in his practice to discover the causes of our worldly suffering and the source of peace and freedom taught by the Buddha. By his own account, he held nothing back, giving up everything for the Dharma, the truth. He encountered much hardship and suffering, including doubts of all kinds as well as physical illness and pain. Yet he stayed in the forest and sat—sat and watched—and, even though there were days when he could do nothing but cry, he brought what he calls a quality of daring to his practice. Out of this daring eventually grew wisdom, a joyful spirit, and an uncanny ability to help others.

Given spontaneously in the Thai and Lao languages, the teachings in this book reflect this joyful spirit of practice. Their flavor is clearly monastic, oriented to the community of men who have renounced the household life to join Achaan Chah in the forest. Hence frequent reference is made to *he* rather than *he or she*, and the emphasis is on the monks (an active community of forest nuns also exists) rather than laypersons. Yet the quality of the Dharma expressed here is immediate and universal, appropriate to each of us. Achaan Chah addresses the basic human problems of greed, fear, hatred, and delusion, insisting that we become aware of these states and of the real suffering that they cause in our lives and in our world. This teaching, the Four Noble Truths, is the first given by the Buddha and describes suffering, its cause, and the path to its end.

See how attachment causes suffering, Achaan Chah declares over and over. Study it in your own experience. See the ever-changing nature of sight, sound, perception, feeling, and thought. Understanding the impermanent, insecure, selfless nature of life is Achaan Chah's message to us, for only when we see and accept all three characteristics can we live in peace. The forest tradition works directly with our understanding of and our resistance to these truths, with our fears and anger and desires. Achaan Chah tells us to confront our defilements and to use the tools of renunciation, perseverance, and awareness to overcome them. He urges us to learn not to be lost in our moods and anxieties but to train ourselves instead to see clearly and directly the true nature of mind and the world.

Inspiration comes from Achaan Chah's clarity and joy and the directness of his ways of practice in the forest. To be around him awakens in one the spirit of inquiry, humor, wonderment, understanding, and a deep sense of inner peace. If these pages capture a bit of that spirit in their instructions and tales of the forest life and inspire you to further practice, then their purpose is well served.

So listen to Achaan Chah carefully and take him to heart, for he teaches practice, not theory, and human happiness and freedom are his concerns. In the early years when Wat Ba Pong was starting to attract many visitors, a series of signs was posted along the entry path. "You there, coming to visit?" the first one said, "be quiet! We're trying to meditate." Another stated simply, "To practice Dharma and realize truth is the only thing of value in this life. Isn't it time to begin?" In this spirit, Achaan Chah speaks to us directly, inviting us to quiet our hearts and investigate the truth of life. Isn't it time that we begin?

\*Dharma is a Buddhist expression which connotes the Buddha's teachings about universal law, its workings, and how it relates to us. See the Glossary for an explanation of Buddhist terms.

# PART I

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## Understanding the Buddha's Teachings



Achaan Chah asks us to begin our practice simply and directly with the understanding that the Buddha's truths of suffering and liberation can be seen and experienced right here, within our own bodies, hearts, and minds. The eightfold path,\* he tells us, is not to be found in books or scriptures but can be discovered in the workings of our own sense perceptions, our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind. To study these in an immediate and wakeful way and cultivate mindfulness is the path of insight prescribed by the Buddha. It has been kept alive and followed by those monks, nuns, and laypeople inspired to devote themselves to practice in the centuries since.

Achaan Chah speaks as a contemporary living representative of this ancient teaching. His wisdom and mastery have not come through study or tradition but are born of his years of practice, his diligent effort to employ meditation to calm the heart and awaken the mind. His own practice was inspired and guided by the wisdom of several great forest masters a generation before him. And he invites us to follow their example and his.

Look at what makes up your world—the six senses, the processes of body and mind. These processes will become clear through examination and an ongoing training of attention. As you observe note how fleeting and impermanent are each of the sense objects which appear. You will see the conditioned tendency to grasp or to resist these changing objects. Here, teaches Achaan Chah, is the place to learn a new way, the path of balance, the Middle Path.

Achaan Chah urges us to work with our practice, not as an ideal, but in our everyday life situation. It is here that we develop strength to overcome our difficulties and a constancy and greatness of heart. It is here, he says, in each moment that we can step out of our struggle with life and find the inner meaning of right understanding and with it the peace of the Buddha.



# The Simple Path

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Traditionally the Eightfold Path is taught with eight steps such as Right Understanding, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration, and so forth. But the true Eightfold Path is within us—two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, a tongue, and a body. These eight doors are our entire Path and the mind is the one that walks on the Path. Know these doors, examine them, and all the dharmas will be revealed.

The heart of the path is so simple. No need for long explanations. Give up clinging to love and hate. Just rest with things as they are. That is all I do in my own practice.

Do not try to become anything. Do not make yourself into anything. Do not be a meditator. Do not become enlightened. When you sit, let it be. When you walk, let it be. Grasp at nothing. Resist nothing.

Of course, there are dozens of meditation techniques to develop samadhi and many kinds of vipassana. But it all comes back to this—just let it all be. Step over here where it is cool, out of the battle.

Why not give it a try? Do you dare?

# The Middle Way

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The Buddha does not want us to follow the double path—desire and indulgence on the one hand and fear and aversion on the other. Just be aware of pleasure, he teaches. Anger, fear, dissatisfaction are not the path of the yogi but the path of worldly people. The tranquil person walks the Middle Path of right practice, leaving grasping on the left and fear and aversion on the right.

One who undertakes the path of practice must follow this Middle Way: “I will not take interest in pleasure or pain. I will lay them down.” But, of course, it is hard at first. It is as though we are being kicked on both sides. Like a cowbell or a pendulum, we are knocked back and forth.

When Buddha preached his first sermon, he discoursed on these two extremes because this is where attachment lies. The desire for happiness kicks from one side; suffering and dissatisfaction kick from the other. These two are always besieging us. But when you walk the Middle Path, you put them both down.

Don't you see? If you follow these extremes, you will simply strike out when you are angry and grab for what attracts you, without the slightest patience or forbearance. How long can you go on being trapped in this way? Consider it: if you like something, you follow after it when liking arises, yet it is just drawing you on to seek suffering. This mind of desire is really clever. Where will it lead you next?

The Buddha teaches us to keep laying down the extremes. This is the path of right practice, the path leading out of birth and becoming. On this path, there is neither pleasure nor pain, neither good nor evil. Alas, the mass of humans filled with desiring just strive for pleasure and always bypass the middle, missing the Path of the Excellent One, the path of the seeker of truth. Attached to birth and becoming, happiness and suffering, good and evil, the one who does not travel this Middle Path cannot become a wise one, cannot find liberation. Our Path is straight, the path of tranquility and pure awareness, calmed of both elation and sorrow. If your heart is like this, you can stop asking other people for guidance.

You will see that when the heart / mind is unattached, it is abiding in its normal state. When it stirs from the normal because of various thoughts and feelings, the process of thought construction takes place, in which illusions are created. Learn to see through this process. When the mind has stirred from normal, it leads away from right practice to one of the extremes of indulgence or aversion, thereby creating more illusion, more thought construction. Good or bad only arises in your mind. If you keep a watch on your mind, studying this one topic your whole life, I guarantee that you will never be bored.

# Ending Doubt

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Many people who have studied on a university level and attained graduate degrees and worldly success find that their lives are still lacking. Though they think high thoughts and are intellectual sophisticated, their hearts are still filled with pettiness and doubt. The vulture flies high, but what does it feed on?

Dharma is understanding that goes beyond the conditioned, compounded, limited understanding of worldly science. Of course, worldly wisdom can be used to good purpose, but progress in worldly wisdom can cause deterioration in religion and moral values. The important thing is to develop supermundane wisdom that can use such technology while remaining detached from it.

It is necessary to teach the basics first—basic morality, seeing the transitoriness of life, the facts of aging and death. Here is where we must begin. Before you drive a car or ride a bicycle, you must learn to walk. Later, you may ride in an airplane or travel around the world in the blink of an eye.

Outward, scriptural study is not important. Of course, the Dharma books are correct, but they are not right. They cannot give you right understanding. To see the word *hatred* in print is not the same as experiencing anger, just as hearing a person's name is different from meeting him. Only experiencing for yourself can give you true faith.

There are two kinds of faith. One is a kind of blind trust in the Buddha, the teachings, the master, which often leads one to begin practice or to ordain. The second is true faith—certain, unshakable—which arises from knowing within oneself. Though one still has other defilements to overcome, seeing clearly all things within oneself makes it possible to put an end to doubt, to attain this certainty in one's practice.

# Go Beyond Words:

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## See for Yourself

In my own practice, I did not know or study much. I took the straightforward teachings the Buddha gave and simply began to study my own mind according to nature. When you practice, observe yourself. Then gradually knowledge and vision will arise of themselves. If you sit in meditation and want it to be this way or that, you had better stop right there. Do not bring ideals or expectations to your practice. Take your studies, your opinions, and store them away.

You must go beyond all words, all symbols, all plans for your practice. Then you can see for yourself the truth, arising right here. If you do not turn inward, you will never know reality. I took the first few years of formal Dharma text study, and when I had the opportunity, I went to hear various scholars and masters teach, until such study became more of a hindrance than a help. I did not know how to listen to their sermons because I had not looked within.

The great meditation masters spoke about the truth within oneself. Practicing, I began to realize that it existed in my own mind as well. After a long time, I realized that these teachers have really seen the truth and that if we follow their path, we will encounter everything they have spoken about. Then we will be able to say, "Yes, they were right. What else could there be? Just this." When I practiced diligently, realization unfolded like that.

If you are interested in Dharma, just give up, just let go. Merely thinking about practice is like pouncing on the shadow and missing the substance. You need not study much. If you follow the basics and practice accordingly, you will see the Dharma for yourself. There must be more than merely hearing the words. Speak just with yourself, observe your own mind. If you cut off this verbal thinking mind, you will have a true standard for judging. Otherwise, your understanding will not penetrate deeply. Practice in this way and the rest will follow.

# Buddhist Psychology

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One day, a famous woman lecturer on Buddhist metaphysics came to see Achaan Chah. This woman gave periodic teachings in Bangkok on the abhidharma and complex Buddhist psychology. In talking to Achaan Chah, she detailed how important it was for people to understand Buddhist psychology and how much her students benefited from their study with her. She asked him whether he agreed with the importance of such understanding.

“Yes, very important”, he agreed.

Delighted, she further questioned whether he had his own students learn abhidharma.

“Oh, yes, of course.”

And where, she asked, did he recommend they start, which books and studies were best?

“Only here,” he said, pointing to his heart, “only here.”

# Study and Experiencing

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Let us talk about the difference between studying Dharma ideas and applying them in practice. True Dharma study has only one purpose—to find a way out of the unsatisfactoriness of our lives and achieve happiness and peace for ourselves and all beings. Our suffering has causes for its arising and a place to abide. Let us understand this process. When the heart is still, it is in its normal condition; when the mind moves, thought is constructed. Happiness and sorrow are part of this movement of the mind, this thought construction. So also is restlessness, the desire to go here and there. If you do not understand such movement, you will chase after thought constructions and be at their mercy.

Therefore, the Buddha taught us to contemplate the movements of the mind. Watching the mind move, we can see its basic characteristics: endless flux, unsatisfactoriness, and emptiness. You should be aware of and contemplate these mental phenomena. In this way, you can learn about the process of dependent origination. The Buddha taught that ignorance is the cause of the arising of all worldly phenomena and of our volitions. Volition gives rise to consciousness, and consciousness in turn gives rise to mind and body. This is the process of dependent origination.

When we first study Buddhism, these traditional teachings may appear to make sense to us. But when the process is actually occurring within us, those who have only read about it cannot follow fast enough. Like a fruit falling from a tree, each link in the chain falls so fast that such people cannot tell what branches it has passed. When pleasurable sense contact takes place, for example, they are carried away by the sensation and are unable to notice how it happened.

Of course, the systematic outline of the process in the texts is accurate, but the experience is beyond textual study. Study does not tell you that *this* is the experience of ignorance arising, *this* is how volition feels, *this* is a particular kind of consciousness, *this* is the feeling of the different elements of body and mind. When you let go of a tree limb and fall to the ground, you do not go into detail about how many feet and inches you fell; you just hit the ground and experience the pain. No book can describe that.

Formal Dharma study is systematic and refined, but reality does not follow a single track. Therefore, we must attest to what arises from the one who knows, from our deepest wisdom. When our innate wisdom, the one who knows, experiences the truth of the heart / mind, it will be clear that the mind is not our self. Not belonging to us, not I, not mine, all of it must be dropped. As to our learning the names of all the elements of mind and consciousness, the Buddha did not want us to become attached to the words. He just wanted us to see that all this is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and empty of self. He taught only to let go. When these things arise, be aware of them, know them. Only a mind that can do this is properly trained.

When the mind is stirred up, the various mental formations, thought constructions, and reactions start arising from it, building and proliferating continually. Just let them be, the good as well as the bad. The Buddha said simply, “Give them up.” But for us, it is necessary to study our own minds to know how it is possible to give them up.

If we look at the model of the elements of mind, we see that it follows a natural sequence: mental factors are thus, consciousness arises and passes like this, and so forth. We can see in our own practice that when we have right understanding and awareness, then right thought, right speech, right action, and right livelihood automatically follow. Different mental elements arise from that very one who knows. The one who knows is like a lamp. If understanding is right, thought and all the other factors will be right as well, like the light emanating from the lamp. As we watch with awareness, right

understanding grows.

When we examine all that we call mind, we see only a conglomeration of mental elements, not self. Then where can we stand? Feeling, memory, all the five aggregates of mind and body are shifting like leaves in the wind. We can discover this through meditation.

Meditation is like a single log of wood. Insight and investigation are one end of the log; calm and concentration are the other end. If you lift up the whole log, both sides come up at once. Which is concentration and which is insight? Just this mind.

You cannot really separate concentration, inner tranquility, and insight. They are just as a mango that is first green and sour, then yellow and sweet, but not two different fruits. One grows into the other; without the first, we would never have the second. Such terms are only conventions for teaching. We should not be attached to the language. The only source of true knowledge is to see what is within ourself. Only this kind of study has an end and is the study of real value.

The calmness of the mind at the beginning stage of concentration arises from the simple practice of one-pointedness. But when this calm departs, we suffer because we have become attached to it. The attainment of tranquillity is not yet the end, according to the Buddha. Becoming and suffering still exist.

Thus, the Buddha took this concentration, this tranquillity, and contemplated further. He searched out the truth of the matter until he was no longer attached to tranquillity. Tranquillity is just another relative reality, one of numerous mental formations, only a stage on the path. If you are attached to it, you will find yourself still stuck in birth and becoming, based on your pleasure in tranquillity. When tranquillity ceases, agitation will begin and you will be attached even more.

The Buddha went on to examine becoming and birth to see where they arise. As he did not yet know the truth of the matter, he used his mind to contemplate further, to investigate all the mental elements that arose. Whether tranquil or not, he continued to penetrate, to examine further, until he finally realized that all that he saw, all the five aggregates of body and mind, were like a red-hot iron ball. When it is red-hot all over, where can you find a cool spot to touch? The same is true of the five aggregates—to grasp any part causes pain. Therefore, you should not get attached even to tranquillity or concentration; you should not say that peace or tranquillity is you or yours. To do so just creates the painful illusion of self, the world of attachment and delusion, another red-hot iron ball.

In our practice, our tendency is to grasp, to take experiences as me and mine. If you think, “I am calm, I am agitated, I am good or bad, I am happy or unhappy,” this clinging causes more becoming and birth. When happiness ends, suffering appears; when suffering ends, happiness appears. You will see yourself unceasingly vacillating between heaven and hell. The Buddha saw that the condition of his mind was thus, and he knew, because of this birth and becoming, his liberation was not yet complete. So he took up these elements of experience and contemplated their true nature. Because of grasping, birth and death exist. Becoming glad is birth; becoming dejected is death. Having died, we are then born; having been born, we die. This birth and death from one moment to the next is like the endless spinning of a wheel.

The Buddha saw that whatever the mind gives rise to are just transitory, conditioned phenomena which are really empty. When this dawned on him, he let go, gave up, and found an end to suffering. You too must understand these matters according to the truth. When you know things as they are, you will see that these elements of mind are a deception, in keeping with the Buddha's teaching that the mind has nothing, does not arise, is not born, and does not die with anyone. It is free, shining and resplendent, with nothing to occupy it. The mind becomes occupied only because it misunderstands and is deluded by these conditioned phenomena, this false sense of self.

Therefore, the Buddha had us look at our minds. What exists in the beginning? Truly, not anything. ~~This emptiness does not arise and die with phenomena. When it contacts something good, it does not become good; when it contacts something bad, it does not become bad. The pure mind knows the objects clearly, knows that they are not substantial.~~

When the mind of the meditator abides like this, no doubt exists. Is there becoming? Is there birth? We need not ask anyone. Having examined the elements of mind, the Buddha let them go and became merely one who was aware of them. He just watched with equanimity. Conditions leading to birth do not exist for him. With his complete knowledge, he called them all impermanent, unsatisfactory, empty of self. Therefore, he became the one who knows with certainty. The one who knows sees according to this truth and does not become happy or sad according to changing conditions. This is true peace, free of birth, aging, sickness, and death, not dependent on causes, results, or conditions beyond happiness and suffering, above good and evil. Nothing can be spoken about it. No conditions promote it any longer.

Therefore, develop samadhi, calm and insight; learn to make them arise in your mind and really understand them. Otherwise, you will know only the words of Buddhism and with the best intentions, go around merely describing the characteristics of existence. You may be clever, but when things arise in your mind, will you follow them? When you come into contact with something you like, will you immediately become attached? Can you let go of it? When unpleasant experiences arise, does the one who knows hold that dislike in his mind, or does he let go? If you see things that you dislike and still hold on to or condemn them, you should reconsider—this is not yet correct, not yet the supreme. If you observe your mind in this way, you will truly know for yourself.

I did not practice using textbook terms; I just looked at this one who knows. If it hates someone, question why. If it loves someone, question why. Probing all arising back to its origin, you can solve the problem of clinging and hating and get them to leave you alone. Everything comes back to arising from the one who knows. But repeated practice is crucial.



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