

VEN. AJAAN MUN BHŪRIDATTO

Arahants of no matter what sort reach both release through concentration and release through discernment, free from effluents in the present. No distinctions are made, saying that this or that group reaches release only through concentration or only through discernment. The explanation given by the Commentators—that release through concentration pertains to those arahants who develop concentration first, while release through discernment pertains to the ‘dry insight’ arahants, who develop insight exclusively without having first developed concentration—runs counter to the path. The eightfold path includes both Right View and Right Concentration. A person who is to gain release has to develop all eight factors of the path. Otherwise he or she won’t be able to gain release. The threefold training includes both concentration and discernment. A person who is to attain knowledge of the ending of effluents has to develop all three parts of the threefold training completely.

This is why we say that arahants of every sort have to reach both release through concentration and release through discernment. — *The Heart Released*

The four noble truths—suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the path to its cessation—are activities in that each truth has an aspect that has to be done: Suffering has to be understood, its cause abandoned, its cessation made clear, and the path to its cessation developed. All of these are aspects that have to be done—and if they have to be done, they must be activities. So we can conclude that all four truths are activities. This is in keeping with the first verse quoted above, which speaks of the four truths as feet, stair treads, or steps that must be taken for the task to be finished. What follows is thus termed activityless-ness—like writing the numerals 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0, then erasing 1-9, leaving just 0, and not writing anything more. What is left is read as ‘zero,’ but it doesn’t have any value at all. You can’t use it to add, subtract, multiply, or divide with any other numerals, yet at the same time you can’t say that it doesn’t exist, for there it is: 0 (zero).

This is like the discernment that knows all around, because it destroys the activity of supposing. In other words, it erases supposing completely and doesn’t become involved with or hold on to any supposings at all. With the words ‘erasing’ or ‘destroying’ the activity of supposing, the question arises, ‘When supposing is entirely destroyed, where will we stay?’ The answer is that we will stay in a place that isn’t supposed: right there with activityless-ness. — *The Heart Released*

So the earnest meditator comes to analyze things down in line with their inherent nature, seeing that,

sabbe saṅkhārā aniccā, sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā:

Acts of mental fabrication—the conditions of the mind—are what’s inconstant. The world of living beings is constant: It is simply the way it is. Analyze these things in terms of the four noble truths as a way of rectifying the

conditions of the mind, so that you can see for certain, in your own right, that these conditions of the mind are inconstant and stressful. And the fact that you haven't seen in your own right that they are inconstant and stressful is why you have fallen for mental fabrications. When you truly see this, it will rectify the conditions of the mind. The realization will come to you,

saṅkhārā sassatā n'atthi:

'There are no mental fabrications that are permanent and lasting.' Mental fabrications are simply conditions of the mind, like mirages. As for living beings, they have been a constant feature of the world all along. When you know both sides—i.e., that living beings are simply the way they are, and that mental fabrications are simply a condition of the mind that supposes them—then *thītibhūtaṃ*, the primal mind that has no conditions, can gain release.

As for the teaching that all phenomena or regularities of behavior are not-self: How could they be the self? Their business is simply to arise the way they do. Thus the Buddha taught,

sabbe dhammā anattā:

'All phenomena are not-self.' We as earnest meditators should investigate things to see them clearly in this way, until the mind is made to converge, enabling us to see truly and vividly along these lines in our own right, at the same time giving rise to the knowledge that accompanies this vision. This is what is meant by *vuṭṭhāna-gaṃinī vipassanā* (clear insight leading to emergence). We should work at this stage until it is mastered, until we see truly and clearly, along with the full convergence of the mind and its concurrent knowledge, converging against the current, curing the latent tendencies, turning supposing into release; or until we converge on the primal mind that is simply the way it is, to the point where it's absolutely clear, with the concurrent knowledge,

Khiṇā jāti nāṇaṃ hoti:

'There is the knowledge of no more birth.'

This stage is not an assumption or a supposing. It isn't anything fabricated or conjectured into being, nor is it anything that can be obtained by wanting. It's something that appears, is, and knows entirely of its own accord. Intense, relentless practice in which we analyze things shrewdly on our own is what will cause it to appear of its own accord. — *The Heart Released*

VEN. AJAAN LEE DHAMMADHARO

Staying with Ajaan Mun was very good for me, but also very hard. I had to be willing to learn everything anew... Some days he'd be cross with me, saying that I was messy, that I never put anything in the right place—but he'd never tell me what the right places were... To be able to stay with him any length of time, you had to be very observant and very circumspect. You couldn't leave footprints on the floor, you couldn't make noise when you swallowed water or opened the windows or doors. There had to be a science to everything you did—hanging out

robes... arranging bedding, everything. Otherwise, he'd drive you out, even in the middle of the Rains Retreat. Even then, you'd just have to take it and try to use your powers of observation.

In other matters, such as sitting and walking meditation, he trained me in every way, to my complete satisfaction. But I was able to keep up with him at best only about 60 percent of the time. — *The Autobiography of Phra Ajaan Lee*

The word 'mind' covers three aspects:

- (1) The primal nature of the mind.
- (2) Mental states.
- (3) Mental states in interaction with their objects.

The primal nature of the mind is a nature that simply knows. The current that thinks and streams out from knowing to various objects is a mental state. When this current connects with its objects and falls for them, it becomes a defilement, darkening the mind: This is a mental state in interaction. Mental states, by themselves and in interaction, whether good or evil, have to arise, have to disband, have to dissolve away by their very nature. The source of both these sorts of mental states is the primal nature of the mind, which neither arises nor disbands. It is a fixed phenomenon (*thiti-dhamma*), always in place....

To know how to separate mental states from their objects, knowing the primal nature of the mind, knowing the current or force of the mind that flows to its objects; separating the objects, the current of mind that flows, and the primal nature of the mind: To be able to know in this way deserves to be called 'knowledge of the ending of mental effluents.' The objects or preoccupations of the mind are the effluent of sensuality. The current that flows is the effluent of a state of becoming. Not knowing the nature of the mind is the effluent of ignorance.

If we were to express this in terms of the four noble truths, we would have to do so as follows: The objects or preoccupations of the mind are the truth of stress (*dukkha-sacca*). The current of the mind that flows into and falls for its objects is the truth of the cause of stress (*samudaya-sacca*). The mental state that penetrates in to see clearly the truth of all objects, the current of the mind, and the primal nature of the mind, is called the mental moment that forms the Path (*magga-citta*). To let go of the objects, the mental current, and the nature of the mind, without any sense of attachment, is the truth of the disbanding of stress (*nirodha-sacca*). —*Frames of Reference*

What does discernment come from? You might compare it with learning to become a potter, a tailor, or a basket weaver. The teacher will start out by telling you how to make a pot, sew a shirt or a pair of pants, or weave different patterns, but the proportions and beauty of the object you make will have to depend on your own powers of observation. Suppose you weave a basket and then take a good look at its proportions, to see if it's too short or too tall. If it's too short, weave another one, a little taller, and then take a good look at it to see if there's anything that still needs improving, to see if it's too thin or too fat. Then weave

another one, better-looking than the last. Keep this up until you have one that's as beautiful and well-proportioned as possible, one with nothing to criticize from any angle. This last basket you can take as your standard. You can now set yourself up in business.

What you've done is to learn from your own actions. As for your previous efforts, you needn't concern yourself with them any longer. Throw them out. This is a sense of discernment that arises of its own accord, an ingenuity and sense of judgment that come not from anything your teachers have taught you, but from observing and evaluating on your own the object that you yourself have made.

The same holds true in practicing meditation. For discernment to arise, you have to be observant as you keep track of the breath and to gain a sense of how to adjust and improve it so that it's well-proportioned throughout the body—to the point where it flows evenly without faltering, so that it's comfortable in slow and out slow, in fast and out fast, long, short, heavy, or refined. Get so that both the in-breath and the out-breath are comfortable no matter what way you breathe, so that—no matter when—you immediately feel a sense of ease the moment you focus on the breath. When you can do this, physical results will appear: a sense of ease and lightness, open and spacious. The body will be strong, the breath and blood will flow unobstructed and won't form an opening for disease to step in. The body will be healthy and awake.

As for the mind, when mindfulness and alertness are the causes, a still mind is the result. When negligence is the cause, a mind distracted and restless is the result. So we must try to make the causes good, in order to give rise to the good results we've referred to. If we use our powers of observation and evaluation in caring for the breath, and are constantly correcting and improving it, we'll develop awareness on our own, the fruit of having developed our concentration higher step by step. — *"Observe & Evaluate"*

(1) Ill will (*byāpāda*) lies at the essence of killing (*pāṇātipāta*), for it causes us to destroy our own goodness and that of others – and when our mind can kill off our own goodness, what's to keep us from killing other people and animals as well?

(2) Restlessness (*uddhacca*) lies at the essence of taking what isn't given (*adinnādāna*). The mind wanders about, taking hold of other people's affairs, sometimes their good points, sometimes their bad. To fasten onto their good points isn't too serious, for it can give us at least *some* nourishment. As long as we're going to steal other people's business and make it our own, we might as well take their silver and gold. Their bad points, though, are like trash they've thrown away – scraps and bones with nothing of any substance – and yet even so we let the mind feed on them. When we know that other people are possessive of their bad points and guard them well and yet we still take hold of these things to think about, it should be classed as a form of taking what isn't given.

(3) Sensual desires (*kāmachanda*) lie at the essence of sensual misconduct. The mind feels an attraction for sensual objects – thoughts of past or future

sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or tactile sensations – or for sensual defilements – passion, aversion, or delusion – to the point where we forget ourselves. Mental states such as these can be said to overstep the bounds of propriety in sensual matters.

(4) Doubt (*vicikicchā*) lies at the essence of lying. In other words, our minds are unsure, with nothing reliable or true to them. We have no firm principles and so drift along under the influence of all kinds of thoughts and preoccupations.

(5) Drowsiness (*thīna-middha*) is intoxication – discouragement, dullness, forgetfulness, with no mindfulness or restraint watching over the mind. This is what it means to be drugged or drunk. — *The Path to Peace & Freedom for the Mind*

As for the highest level of virtue—inner virtue—this means giving rise to Right Concentration within the mind:

(1) On this level, ‘not killing’ means not killing off your goodness. For instance, if bad thoughts arise and you aren’t careful to wipe them out, their evil will come pouring in and your goodness will have to die. This is because your mind is still caught up on good and evil. Sometimes you use good to kill evil. Sometimes you use evil to kill good: This is called killing yourself.

(2) ‘Stealing’ on this level refers to the way the mind likes to take the good and bad points of other people to think about. This sort of mind is a thief—because we’ve never once asked other people whether they’re possessive of their good and bad points or are willing to share them with us. For the most part, what we take is their old dried up garbage. In other words, we like to focus on their bad points. Even though they may have good points, we don’t let ourselves see them. We take our own opinions as our guide and as a result we end up as fools without realizing it.

(3) ‘Illicit sensuality’ on this level refers to the state of mind that is stuck on sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and ideas, or that lies fermenting in greed, anger, and delusion. In other words, the mind is impure and is always involved with sensual objects and moods.

(4) ‘Lying’ on this level means not being true. How are we not true? We come to the monastery but our minds are at home. We listen to the sermon but our hearts are thinking of something else. Our bodies may be sitting in the meditation position, just like the Buddha, but our minds are roaming around through all sorts of thoughts, gnawing on the past, nibbling at the future, not finding any meat at all. This is called lying to yourself and to others as well. How is it lying to others? Suppose you go home and someone asks, ‘Where did you go today?’ and you answer, ‘I went to the monastery to listen to a sermon.’ Actually, your body came, but you didn’t come. Your body listened, but you didn’t listen. This has to be classed as a kind of lying.

(5) ‘Intoxication’ on this level refers to delusion and absentmindedness. If we’re going to contemplate body, feelings, mind, and mental qualities, our minds have to be still and really focused on these things. But if we’re absentminded and forgetful, our minds go down the wrong path, weaving in and out, back and forth like a drunkard. Sometimes we end up falling down in a stupor and lying there on the side of the road. Nothing good will come of it. — *“First Things First”*

In dealing with the frames of reference, mere mindfulness isn't enough. When it's not enough, and yet you keep being mindful of the body, you will give rise only to feelings of pleasure and displeasure, because the duty of mindfulness is simply to keep remembering or referring to an object. So in developing the frames of reference, you have to know your tools for remembering—

1. *Sati*: mindfulness; powers of reference.
2. *Sampajañña*: alertness. This has to be firmly in place at the mind before sending mindfulness out to refer to its object—such as the body—and then bringing it back inwards to refer to the heart.
3. *Ātappa*: ardency; focused investigation, analyzing the object into its various aspects.

This can be illustrated as follows: The body is like a sawmill. The mind is like a drive shaft. Alertness is the pulley that spins around the drive shaft in one spot. Mindfulness is the belt that ties the mind to its object, not letting it slip away to other objects. Ardency—focused investigation—is the saw blade that keeps cutting the logs into pieces so that they can be of use. These three qualities must always be present for your practice of centering the mind to succeed. — *Frames of Reference*

1. The first jhāna has five factors: (a) Directed thought (*vitakka*): Think of the breath until you can recognize it clearly without getting distracted. (b) Singleness of preoccupation (*ekaggatārammaṇa*): Keep the mind with the breath. Don't let it stray after other objects. Watch over your thoughts so that they deal only with the breath to the point where the breath becomes comfortable. (The mind becomes one, at rest with the breath.) (c) Evaluation (*vicāra*): Gain a sense of how to let this comfortable breath sensation spread and coordinate with the other breath sensations in the body. Let these breath sensations spread until they all merge. Once the body has been soothed by the breath, feelings of pain will grow calm. The body will be filled with good breath energy. (The mind is focused exclusively on issues connected with the breath.)

These three qualities must be brought together to bear on the same stream of breathing for the first jhāna to arise. This stream of breathing can then take you all the way to the fourth jhāna.

Directed thought, singleness of preoccupation, and evaluation act as the causes. When the causes are fully ripe, results will appear—(d) rapture (*pīti*): a compelling sense of fullness and refreshment for body and mind, going straight to the heart, independent of all else. (e) Pleasure (*sukha*): physical ease arising from the body's being still and unperturbed (*kāya-passaddhi*); mental contentment arising from the mind's being at ease on its own: unperturbed, serene, and exultant (*citta-passaddhi*).

Rapture and pleasure are the results. The factors of the first jhāna thus come down simply to two sorts: causes and results.

As rapture and pleasure grow stronger, the breath grows subtler. The longer you stay focused and absorbed, the more powerful the results become. This

enables you to set directed thought and evaluation (the preliminary ground-clearing) aside, and—relying completely on a single factor, singleness of preoccupation—you enter the second jhāna (*magga-citta*, *phala-citta*).

2. The second jhāna has three factors: rapture, pleasure and singleness of preoccupation (*magga-citta*). This refers to the state of mind that has tasted the results coming from the first jhāna. Once you have entered the second level, rapture and pleasure become stronger because they rely on a single cause, singleness of preoccupation, which looks after the work from here on in: focusing on the breath so that it becomes more and more refined, keeping steady and still with a sense of refreshment and ease for both body and mind. The mind is even more stable and intent than before. As you continue focusing, rapture and pleasure become stronger and begin to expand and contract. Continue focusing on the breath, moving the mind deeper to a more subtle level to escape the motions of rapture and pleasure, and you enter the third jhāna.

3. The third jhāna has two factors: pleasure and singleness of preoccupation. The body is quiet: motionless and solitary. No feelings of pain arise to disturb it. The mind is solitary and still. The breath is refined, free-flowing, and broad. A radiance—white like cotton wool—pervades the entire body, stilling all feelings of physical and mental discomfort. Keep focused on looking after nothing but the broad, refined breath. The mind is free: No thoughts of past or future disturb it. The mind stands out on its own. The four properties—earth, water, fire, and wind—are in harmony throughout the body. You could almost say that they're pure throughout the entire body, because the breath has the strength to control and take good care of the other properties, keeping them harmonious and coordinated. Mindfulness is coupled with singleness of preoccupation, which acts as the cause. The breath fills the body. Mindfulness fills the body.

Focus on in. The mind is bright and powerful, the body is light. Feelings of pleasure are still. Your sense of the body feels steady and even, with no slips or gaps in your awareness, so you can let go of your sense of pleasure. The manifestations of pleasure grow still, because the four properties are balanced and free from motion. Singleness of preoccupation, the cause, has the strength to focus more heavily down, taking you to the fourth jhāna.

4. The fourth jhāna has two factors: equanimity (*upekkhā*) and singleness of preoccupation, or mindfulness. Equanimity and singleness of preoccupation in the fourth jhāna are powerfully focused—solid, stable, and sure. The breath element is absolutely quiet, free from ripples and gaps. The mind, neutral and still, lets go of all preoccupations with past and future. The breath, which forms the present, is still, like the ocean or air when they are free from currents or waves. You can know distant sights and sounds because the breath is even and unwavering, and so acts like a movie screen, giving a clear reflection of whatever is projected onto it. Knowledge arises in the mind: You know but stay neutral and still. The mind is neutral and still; the breath, neutral and still; past, present and future are all neutral and still. This is true singleness of preoccupation, focused on the unperturbed stillness of the breath. All parts of the breath in the body connect so that you can breathe through every pore. You don't have to breathe through the nostrils because the in-and-out breath and the other aspects

of the breath in the body form a single, unified whole. All aspects of the breath energy are even and full. The four properties all have the same characteristics. The mind is completely still. — *Keeping the Breath in Mind*

When the mind gives rise to directed thought and evaluation, you have both concentration and discernment. Directed thought and singleness of preoccupation fall under the heading of concentration; evaluation, under the heading of discernment. — *“Knowledge”*

Some people say that tranquility meditation and insight meditation are two separate things—but how can that be true? Tranquility meditation is ‘stopping,’ insight meditation is ‘thinking’ that leads to clear knowledge. When there’s clear knowledge, the mind stops still and stays put. They’re all part of the same thing.

Knowing has to come from stopping. If you don’t stop, how can you know? For instance, if you’re sitting in a car or a boat that is traveling fast and you try to look at the people or things passing by right next to you along the way, you can’t see clearly who’s who or what’s what. But if you stop still in one place, you’ll be able to see things clearly.

Or even closer to home: When we speak, there has to be a pause between each phrase. If you tried to talk without any pauses at all, would anyone be able to understand what you said?

This is why we first have to make the mind stop to be quiet and still. When the mind stays still in a state of normalcy, concentration arises and discernment follows. This is something you have to work at and do for yourself. Don’t simply believe what others say. *Get so that you know ‘Oh! Oh! Oh!’ from within, and not just ‘Oh? Oh? Oh?’ from what people say.* Don’t take the good things they say and stick them in your heart. You have to make these things your own by getting them to arise from within you. Spending one dollar of your own money is better than spending 100 dollars you’ve borrowed from someone else. If you use borrowed money, you have to worry because you’re in debt. If you use your own money, there’s nothing to worry about. — *“Stop & Think”*

One day he said, ‘I never dreamed that sitting in *samādhi* would be so beneficial, but there’s one thing that has me bothered. To make the mind still and bring it down to its basic resting level (*bhavaṅga*): Isn’t this the essence of becoming and birth?’

‘That’s what *samādhi* is,’ I told him, ‘becoming and birth.’

‘But the Dhamma we’re taught to practice is for the sake of doing away with becoming and birth. So what are we doing giving rise to more becoming and birth?’

‘If you don’t make the mind take on becoming, it won’t give rise to knowledge, because knowledge has to come from becoming if it’s going to do away with becoming. This is becoming on a small scale—*uppatika bhava*—which lasts for a single mental moment. The same holds true with birth. To make the mind still so that *samādhi* arises for a long mental moment is birth. Say we sit in concentration for a long time until the mind gives rise to the five factors of *jhāna*:

That's birth. If you don't do this with your mind, it won't give rise to any knowledge of its own. And when knowledge can't arise, how will you be able to let go of ignorance? It'd be very hard.

'As I see it,' I went on, 'most students of the Dhamma really misconstrue things. Whatever comes springing up, they try to cut it down and wipe it out. To me, this seems wrong. It's like people who eat eggs. Some people don't know what a chicken is like: This is ignorance. As soon as they get hold of an egg, they crack it open and eat it. But say they know how to incubate eggs. They get ten eggs, eat five of them, and incubate the rest. While the eggs are incubating, that's "becoming." When the baby chicks come out of their shells, that's "birth." If all five chicks survive, then as the years pass it seems to me that the person who once had to buy eggs will start benefiting from his chickens. He'll have eggs to eat without having to pay for them. And if he has more than he can eat, he can set himself up in business, selling them. In the end he'll be able to release himself from poverty.

'So it is with practicing *samādhi*: If you're going to release yourself from becoming, you first have to go live in becoming. If you're going to release yourself from birth, you'll have to know all about your own birth.' — *The Autobiography*

By and large, we tend to be interested only in discernment and release. At the drop of a hat, we want to start right in with the teachings on stress, inconstancy, and not-self—and when this is the case, we'll never get anywhere. Before the Buddha taught that things are inconstant, he had worked at knowing them until they revealed their constancy. Before teaching that things are stressful, he had turned that stress into pleasure and ease. And before teaching that things are not-self, he had turned what is not-self into a self, and so was able to see what is constant and true, lying hidden in what is inconstant, stressful, and not-self. He then gathered all of these qualities into one. He gathered all that is inconstant, stressful, and not-self into one and the same thing: fabrications (*saṅkhāra*) viewed in terms of the world—a single class, equal everywhere throughout the world. As for what's constant, pleasant, and self, this was another class: fabrications viewed in terms of the Dhamma. And then he let go of both classes, without getting caught up on 'constant' or 'inconstant,' 'stress' or 'ease,' 'self' or 'not-self.' This is why we can say he attained release, purity, and Liberation, for he had no need to latch onto fabrications—whether of the world or of the Dhamma—in any way at all. — *Keeping the Breath in Mind*

When the mind reaches a stage of readiness, insight will arise in a single mental instant, and everything will become clear: properties, aggregates, and the sense media. We'll know, on the one hand, what's inconstant (*aniccam*), stressful (*dukkham*), and not-self (*anattā*); and on the other hand, what's uncommon, i.e., *niccam* – what's constant and true; *sukham* – true happiness, termed *nirāmisasukha*; and *attā* – the self. The eye of the mind can know both sides and let go both ways. It's attached neither to what's inconstant, stressful, and not-self; nor

to what's constant (*niccaṃ*), good (*sukhaṃ*), and right (*attā*). It can let these things go, in line with their true nature.

The knowledge that comes from discernment, cognitive skill, and intuitive insight, it can let go as well. It isn't attached to views – for there's yet another, separate sort of reality that has no 'this' or 'that.' In other words, it doesn't have the view or conceit that 'I am.' It lets go of the assumptions that, 'That's the self,' 'That's not-self,' 'That's constant,' 'That's inconstant,' 'That arises,' 'That doesn't arise.' It can let go of these things completely. *That's* the Dhamma, and yet it doesn't hold onto the Dhamma, which is why we say that the Dhamma is not-self. It also doesn't hold on to the view that says, 'not-self.' It lets go of views, causes, and effects, and isn't attached to anything at all dealing with wordings or meanings, suppositions or practices. — *The Path to Peace & Freedom for the Mind*

This is where we can relax. They can say inconstant, but it's just what they say. They can say stress, but it's just what they say. They can say not-self, but it's just what they say. Whatever they say, that's the way it is. It's true for them, and they're completely right—but completely wrong. As for us, only if we can get ourselves beyond right and wrong will we be doing fine. Roads are built for people to walk on, but dogs and cats can walk on them as well. Sane people and crazy people will use the roads. They didn't build the roads for crazy people, but crazy people have every right to use them. As for the precepts, even fools and idiots can observe them. The same with concentration: Crazy or sane, they can come and sit. And discernment: We all have the right to come and talk our heads off, but it's simply a question of being right or wrong.

None of the valuables of the mundane world give any real pleasure. They're nothing but stress. They're good as far as the world is concerned, but *nibbāna* doesn't have any need for them. Right views and wrong views are an affair of the world. *Nibbāna* doesn't have any right views or wrong views. For this reason, whatever is a wrong view, we should abandon. Whatever is a right view, we should develop—until the day it can fall from our grasp. That's when we can be at our ease. — *"The Truth & Its Shadows"*

To purify the heart, we have to disentangle our attachments to self, to the body, to mental phenomena, and to all the objects that come passing in through the senses. Keep the mind intent on concentration. Keep it one at all times. Don't let it become two, three, four, five, etc., because once you've made the mind one, it's easy to make it zero. Simply cut off the little 'head' and pull the two ends together. But if you let the mind become many, making it zero is a long, difficult job.

And another thing: If you put the zero after other numbers, they become ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, hundreds, thousands, on to infinity. But if you put the zero's first, even if you have ten thousand of them, they don't count. So it is with the heart: Once we've turned it from one to zero and put the zero first, then other people can praise or criticize us as they like but it won't count. Good doesn't count, bad doesn't count. This is something that can't be written, can't be read, that we can understand only for ourselves.

When there's no more counting like this, the heart attains purity and the highest happiness, as in the Pāli stanza,

*nibbānaṃ paramaṃ suññaṃ
nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ,*

which means, 'Nibbāna is the ultimate emptiness, void, zero. Nibbāna is the ultimate ease.'

This is why we're taught to make the mind one at all times—so that we can easily erase it into zero. Once we can make it zero, we're bound to loosen our attachments to all things. Our heart will reach purity—which is nibbāna. — *Point Zero*

VEN. AJAAN MAHABOOWA ÑĀṄASAMPANNO

Ven. Ajaan Mun was very astute both in external and in internal matters. On the external level, he wouldn't be willing to disclose things too readily. Sometimes, after listening to him, you'd have to take two or three days to figure out what he meant. This, at least, was the way things were for me. Whether or not this was the way they were for my fellow students, I never had the chance to find out. But as for me, I'd use all my strength to ponder anything he might say that seemed to suggest an approach to the practice, and sometimes after three days of pondering the riddle of his words I still couldn't make heads or tails of it. I'd have to go and tell him, 'What you said the other day: I've been pondering it for three days and still can't understand what you meant. I don't know where to grab hold of it so that I can put it to use, or how much meaning your words had.'

He'd smile a bit and say, 'Oh? So there's someone actually pondering what I say?'

So I'd answer, 'I'm pondering, but pondering out of stupidity, not with any intelligence.'

He'd then respond a little by saying, 'We all have to start out by being stupid. No one has ever brought intelligence or wealth along at birth. Only after we set our mind on learning and pondering things persistently can we become intelligent and astute to the point where we can gain wealth and status, and can have other people depend on us. The same holds true with the Dhamma. No one has ever been a millionaire in the Dhamma or an arahant at birth.'

That's all he would say. He wouldn't disclose what the right way would be to interpret the teaching that had preoccupied me for two or three days running. It was only later that I realized why he wouldn't disclose this. *If he had disclosed it, he would have been encouraging my stupidity.* If we get used simply to having things handed to us ready-made from other people, without producing anything with our own intelligence, then when the time comes where we're in a tight spot and can't depend on anything ready-made from other people, we're sure to go under if we can't think of a way to help ourselves. This is probably what he was thinking, which is why he wouldn't solve this sort of problem when I'd ask him....

After Ven. Ajaan Mun's death, I went to bow down at his feet and then sat there reflecting with dismay for almost two hours, my tears flowing into a pool at his feet. At the same time, I was pondering in my heart the Dhamma and the teachings he had been so kind to give me during the eight years I had lived with him. Living together for such a long time as this, even a husband and wife or parents and children who love one another deeply are bound to have some problems or resentments from time to time. But between Ven. Ajaan Mun and the students who had come to depend on his sheltering influence for such a long time, there had never been any issues at all. The longer I had stayed with him, the more I had felt an unlimited love and respect for him. And now he had left me and all my well-intentioned fellow students. *Aniccā vata saṅkhārā*: Fabrications—how inconstant they are! His body lay still, looking noble and more precious than my life, which I would have readily given up for his sake out of my love for him. My body was also still as I sat there, but my mind was in agitation from a sense of despair and my loss of his sheltering influence. Both bodies were subject to the same principle of the Dhamma—inconstancy—and followed the teaching that says, '*uppajjitvā nirujjhanti*': Having been born, they are bound to die. There's no other way it could be.

But as for Ven. Ajaan Mun, he had taken a path different from that of suppositions, in line with the teaching, '*tesaṃ vūpasamo sukho*': In their stilling is ease. He had died in this lifetime, lying still for just this brief span of time so that his students could reflect with resignation on the Dhamma, but from now on he would never be reborn to be a source for his students' tears again. His mind had now separated from becoming and birth in the same way that a rock split into two pieces can never be truly rejoined.

So I sat there, reflecting with despair. The problems in my heart that I had once unburdened with him: With whom would I unburden them now? There was no longer anyone who could unburden and erase my problems the way he had. I was left to fend for myself. It was as if he had been a doctor who had cured my illnesses countless times and who was the one person with whom I had entrusted my life—and now the doctor who had given me life was gone. I'd have to become a beast of the forest, for I had no more medicine to treat my inner diseases.

While I was sitting there, reminiscing sadly about him with love, respect, and despair, I came to a number of realizations. How had he taught me while he was still alive? Those were the points I'd have to take as my teachers. What was the point he had stressed repeatedly? '*Don't ever stray from your foundation, namely "what knows" within the heart. Whenever the mind comes to any unusual knowledge or realizations that could become detrimental, if you aren't able to investigate your way past that sort of knowledge, then turn the mind back within itself and, no matter what, no damage will be done.*' That was what he had taught, so I took hold of that point and continued to apply it in my own practice to the full extent of my ability. — "*To Be an Inner Millionaire*"

When I couldn't find a safe spot in which to place the mind, mindfulness and discernment dug down into the pain, searching for the spot where the pain was

greatest. Wherever the pain was greatest, mindfulness and discernment would investigate and explore right there by ferreting out the pain so as to see clearly, 'Where does this feeling come from? Who is pained?' When they asked each part of the body, each of them remained in keeping with its nature. The skin was skin, the flesh was flesh, the tendons were tendons, and so forth. They had been that way from the day of birth, but they hadn't been painful all along from the day of birth in the same way that they had been flesh and skin from the day of birth. 'The pain has been arising and vanishing at intervals. It hasn't been lasting like these parts of the body.'

I focused on down. 'Each part of the body that's a physical form is a reality. Whatever is a reality stays that way. Right now where is the feeling arising? If we say that all these things are painful, why is there one point where it's really severe?' So I separated things out. At this point, mindfulness and discernment couldn't slip away anywhere else. They had to run along the areas that hurt, whirling around themselves, separating the feeling from the body, observing the body, observing the feeling, and observing the mind: These three are the important principles.

The mind seemed comfortable. No matter how much pain was arising, the mind wasn't writhing or suffering or anything. But the pain in the body was clearly very strong. The nature of pain and of whatever defilements we have is that they join together. Otherwise the mind won't be troubled or affected by the physical pain that's really severe at that moment. So discernment kept digging down until the body, the feeling, and the mind were all clear, each in line with its individual truth.

The mind was what labeled the feeling as being this or that: This I could see clearly. As soon as this was really clear in this way, the feeling disappeared in a flash. At that moment, the body was simply the body in line with its reality. The feeling was simply a feeling and it disappeared in a flash into the mind. It didn't go anywhere else. *As soon as the feeling disappeared into the mind, the mind knew that the pain had vanished.* The pain had vanished as if it had been snapped off and thrown away.

In addition, the body disappeared from my sense of awareness. At that moment, the body didn't exist in my awareness at all. All that was left was simple awareness, because there was only one thing—awareness—and it was simply aware. That's all. The mind was so refined that you could hardly describe it. It simply knew, because it was extremely delicate and refined within itself. The body had completely disappeared. Feelings had disappeared. No physical feelings were left at all. The body sitting right there in meditation had disappeared from my awareness.

All that was left was 'simple knowingness,' without any thoughts being fashioned about this or that. At that point, the mind wasn't forming any thoughts at all. When it doesn't form thoughts, we say that nothing at all makes the slightest move. The mind is fixed—firmly fixed in its own solitude. It's a mind in its simple form, on the level of a mind centered in stillness—*but mind you, this doesn't mean that there was no ignorance.*

Ignorance had infiltrated right there, because the mind hadn't withdrawn from ignorance. The mind and ignorance were quiet together because ignorance didn't get out to work. When discernment has it surrounded, ignorance shrinks in and hides out, quiet in the heart, like the sediment in the bottom of a water jar. — *“At the End of One's Rope”*

When I retreated from that state, I renewed my investigation, but when I used the strategies I had used before, I didn't get any results, because they were now allusions to the past. *I had to come up with new strategies to keep up with the events of the moment.* The mind then settled down again....

I contemplated unattractiveness until no physical desire appeared at all. It gradually faded away, all on its own, without giving any reason at any specific time or place. It didn't give me any assurance that lust or passion for the male or female body had disappeared at this or that point in time and place, so I had to deliberate again. I wouldn't go along with this simple fading away on its own. That is, my mind wouldn't accept it. If lust had been wiped out at any particular point, there should have been some sort of indication, so that I could know clearly that it was all gone for this or that reason, at this or that moment, this or that place. It should have had its moment....

I now had to turn around and take a new approach. If physical desire had ended without leaving a trace at a particular moment, using a particular strategy, why hadn't there been a clear indication? I turned around and contemplated another way. I brought attractiveness in to force out the unattractiveness—the pile of bones—covering it with skin to make it beautiful. I had to force the mind, you know. Otherwise it would immediately break through to unattractiveness, because it was so adept that way. I forced the mind to visualize the bones covered with skin so that they'd be beautiful, and then had that beautiful body cling right to mine. That was how I contemplated. I'd do walking meditation visualizing the beauty of that body clinging to mine, clinging right to mine as I walked back and forth. So. How much time would it take? If there was any desire still left, it would have to show. If not, then let me know that it was gone.

After about 9 or 10 p.m. the night of the fourth day, there was a flickering, as if the mind was going to feel lust for that beautiful body that had been clinging to me constantly during that period. It was a peculiar sort of flickering. Mindfulness was alert to it, because mindfulness was there all the time. As soon as the flickering appeared, I kept encouraging it. 'See that flickering? We've caught the criminal who has been in hiding. See? So how can it be gone? If it's gone, why does it have to behave like this?' I focused in on it. That flickering was simply a condition of the mind that appeared only slightly, with no effect on the body at all. It was inside the mind. When I encouraged it, it would flicker again, which proved that it wasn't all gone.

So now that it wasn't all gone, what was I supposed to do? ...

I finally came to the truth when I was sitting visualizing an image of unattractiveness right in front of me. The mind focused on unattractiveness standing still right there. I wouldn't let it move or change in any way. I had it stay right there like that. If it was an image of bones wrapped in skin or a pile of

bones with the skin removed, I had it stay right there in front of me. The mind stared right at it, with mindfulness focused, waiting to learn the truth from that image of unattractiveness, to see what it would do, how this pile of unattractiveness would move or change....

As I kept focusing in, the image of unattractiveness standing there before me was gradually sucked into the mind, absorbed into the mind, so that I finally realized that unattractiveness was a matter of the mind itself. The state of mind that had fixed on the idea of unattractiveness sucked it in—*which meant that attractiveness and unattractiveness were simply a matter of the mind deceiving itself.*

The mind then let go in a flash. It let go of external unattractiveness. It understood now because it had made the break. 'This is how it's supposed to be. It's been simply a matter of the mind painting pictures to deceive itself, getting excited over its shadows. Those external things aren't passion, aversion, and delusion. The *mind* is what has passion, aversion, and delusion.' As soon as the mind knew this clearly, it extricated itself from external affairs and came inward. As soon as the mind would 'blip' outward, it knew that these inner affairs were displaying themselves. So now the image of unattractiveness appeared exclusively within the mind.

I then focused and investigated within the mind. But now it wasn't a matter of that sort of passion. It was something very different. The affairs of worldly passion now were all gone. The mind understood clearly that things had to make the break that way. It had passed its verdict. It had understood. — *An Heir to the Dhamma*

The 'original mind' means the original mind of the round in which the mind finds itself spinning around and about, as in the Buddha's saying, 'Monks, the original mind is radiant'—notice that—'but because of the admixture of defilements' or 'because of the defilements that come passing through, it becomes darkened.'

The original mind here refers to the origin of suppositions, not to the origin of purity. The Buddha uses the term '*pabhassaram*'—'*pabhassaram-idam cittam bhikkhave*'—which means radiant. It doesn't mean pure. The way he puts it is absolutely right. There is no way you can fault it. Had he said that the original mind is pure, you could immediately take issue: 'If the mind is pure, why is it born? Those who have purified their minds are never reborn. If the mind is already pure, why purify it?' Right here is where you could take issue. What reason would there be to purify it? If the mind is radiant, you can purify it because its radiance is ignorance incarnate, and nothing else. Meditators will see clearly for themselves the moment the mind passes from radiance to mental release: Radiance will no longer appear. Right here is the point where meditators clearly know this, and it's the point that lets them argue—because the truth has to be found true in the individual heart. Once a person knows, he or she can't help but speak with full assurance. — "*The Radiant Mind is Ignorance*"

I stood there contemplating for a moment, when a kind of realization appeared: *'If there is a point or a center of the knower anywhere, that is the essence of becoming.'* That's what it said, and I was bewildered.

Actually, the word 'point' referred to that point of the knower. If I had understood this problem in terms of the truth that appeared to warn me, things would have been able to disband right then and there. But instead of understanding, I was bewildered—because it was something I had never before known or seen. If there was a point, it would be the point of the knower. If there was a center, it would mean the center of the knower. Where was it? *There in that knowing mind.* That was the essence of a becoming. The statement that appeared in the mind already said so clearly. There was nothing at all wrong about it, but I was simply bewildered—'What is this?'—so for the time being I didn't get any benefit from it at all. I let more than three months pass by in vain, even though the problem was still weighing on the mind. I couldn't set it down....

Ultimately, there was no escaping it: I had to see that this state of mind was nothing to be trusted, so I came to reflect, 'Why is it that this state of mind can be so changeable? Now it's defiled, now it's radiant, now it's easeful, now it's stressful. It's not always constant and true. Why is it that a mind as refined as this can still show such a variety of conditions?'

As soon as mindfulness and discernment had turned to take an interest in investigating this state of mind, a totally unexpected realization sprang up within the mind: *'Defilement, radiance, ease, and stress: These are all suppositions. They're all anattā—not-self.'*

That was enough. Mindfulness and discernment realized that that state of mind immersed in ignorance was a supposition that should simply be let go. It shouldn't be held to. A moment after this realization arose to warn mindfulness and discernment, which were acting as the sentinels at that moment, it was as if the mind, mindfulness, and discernment each became impartial and impassive, not stirring themselves to perform any duty at all. At that moment the mind was neutral, not focused on anything, not alluding absentmindedly to anything anywhere. Discernment didn't do any work. Mindfulness was alert in its normal way, without being focused on anything.

That moment—when the mind, mindfulness, and discernment were each impassive and impartial—was the moment when the cosmos in the mind over which ignorance held sway trembled and quaked. Ignorance was thrown down from its throne on the heart. In its place, the pure mind appeared at the same moment that ignorance was toppled, smashed, and eradicated through the power of triumphant mindfulness and discernment. — An Heir to the Dhamma

There are discussions in the media concerning the Buddha's teachings on the issue of nibbāna, so people have come to ask whether nibbāna is self or not-self. That's the question.

Nibbāna is nibbāna. That's the answer....

If you're going to contemplate for the sake of reaching nibbāna, you have to follow the path of the three characteristics. In other words, you have to contemplate stress, inconstancy, not-self, and self. "Self" is the heap where all the

defilements hide out. You have to remove all senses of self before the mind can gain the release of nibbāna. So nibbāna is nibbāna, and nothing else. It can't be either self or not-self—because issues of self and not-self are the path we follow for the sake of nibbāna.

It's like climbing the stairs up to our house: the first step, the second step, all the way up to the last step of the stairs. Then we step into the house. Once you're in the house, the stairs are the stairs, and the house is the house. You can't say that the stairs and the house are one and the same thing. The same holds true with "self" and the three characteristics. They're the stairs that lead us to the paths, fruitions, and nibbāna. When you've gotten past them and let them go, the mind enters nibbāna—in the same way as when we've entered the house, we're no longer concerned with the stairs. The stairs don't turn into the house, and the house doesn't turn into the stairs. The house is the house, and the stairs are the stairs....

Inconstancy, stress, and not-self: These are called the three characteristics, understand? We contemplate these things for the sake of nibbāna. We have to follow the path of inconstancy, stress, and not-self. When we've contemplated them from all angles, we let go, let go. When we've reached the level of not-self in full measure, we let go of not-self—and in that instant we reach nibbāna. So why would not-self be nibbāna? If not-self were nibbāna, then nibbāna would fall under the three characteristics, understand? That's why I said that nibbāna can't be anything else. As for "self," that belongs to the realm of suppositions. "Self" is a form of clinging. So how could "self" be nibbāna?

As the Buddha said: *"suññato lokam avekkhassu mogharāja sadā sato"* and *"attāniditthi uhacca evam maccuttaro siyā, evam lokam avekkhantaṃ maccurāja na passati,"* which means, "Mogharāja, view the world as empty—always mindful to have removed any view about self. This way one is above & beyond death. This is how one views the world so as not to be seen by Death's king." Removing views about self is part of the path. See? The Buddha has us remove views about self, so how could self be nibbāna? Think things through. Inconstancy, stress, and not-self are the path we follow to reach nibbāna. Our sense of self is a form of clinging. We have to contemplate self so that we can get past it. Only then will we reach nibbāna. So why would nibbāna be either self or not-self? Think things through....

Nibbāna has to be nibbāna. It can't be anything else. If you try to add self or not-self to it, you're plastering nibbāna with urine and excrement—that's what you're doing.... — *"Nibbāna is Nibbāna"*