

Beautiful Flame

Talks from Pemasiri Thera

Chapter 1 Making Iron into Steel

What does a healthy relationship with a teacher look like?

These days in Sri Lanka and abroad, relationships between teachers and yogis is a fashion, a world created around themselves. I have little regard for teachers and yogis of today. And today's teachers have a lot of māna. I never saw māna in my teachers.

A teacher should be able to teach according to what is asked of them. I don't mean yogis who sit an hour or two a day. Yogis who honestly train many hours a day, maybe twenty hours. A yogi who trains in this way comes daily to ask questions from the teacher, and the teacher should be able to communicate with the yogi in a pleasant way and teach what the yogi wants to know. On a daily basis.

And usually, two or three minutes is enough to get across the main points of what needs to be taught. When the yogi comes like that, the teacher knows what is going on with the yogi. The teacher knows the yogi's state of training. The teacher knows what happened the previous day, what is happening that day and what is going to happen the following day. The teacher has a good idea of all that. When the yogi sees this, he or she gets more confidence in the teacher.

A yogi who trains intensively is allowed to approach the teacher at any time of the day or night. He or she comes to ask questions and discuss problems. This doesn't necessarily mean in a formal interview setting. Sometimes while walking about the premises or waiting for the bath, a discussion takes place. Or while doing any other work. That's how the teaching is done.

Even while on a journey with a group, they might discuss the yogi's practice. Of course, everyone in the group would be yogis. Otherwise, the teacher won't speak about the yogi's practice. Not that teacher and yogi speak for hours on the same topic. When a question on practice arises during casual discussion, the teacher and yogi discuss the question in same casual way.

Practice is the yogi's life. It becomes part of his or her daily activities. Practice is not treated differently in any way. For example, each morning, you sweep around your kuṭi. Even though sweeping, you're to remain a yogi in training. All activities are done as a yogi in training.

There are no teachers who teach in this way.

You.

And there are no yogis who train twenty hours a day. Today's yogis speak of meditation. They hold the view that meditation is an activity separate from all other activities of their lives. Only after separating themselves from everything and everyone, they meditate. These yogis cannot do the practice while doing everyday activities. After strenuous physical work, they do not finish work and sit and get into the practice. No. Before sitting, they must make an elaborate preparation, just for sitting. They're not integrating their practices into daily activities. Today's yogis see meditation in this way.

Was there a conscious decision to be a teacher?

No. I never set out with the goal to be a teacher. It was a series of ordinary events. Days after my bhikkhu ordination, Sumathipāla Na Himi asked me to start teaching. With the useless, he asked for help. That kind! Many of the elderly, like those men and women here today, are strongly immersed in views. Unteachable. Anyone not able to train, he asked me to teach. The extremely old and frail. Those near death. Or those with disabilities. Can't hear. Can't see. I took this whole lot to a faraway place in the centre and spoke very loud to them. I shouted teachings! People in the area wondered if there was an argument going on.

I was twenty at the time, and had to report back to Sumathipāla Na Himi. He asked, "Did you teach these people?" Invariably, I had to say, "Yes." Some of these people understood teachings, but hearing was a problem. Occasionally, a yogi of seventy or eighty years or more turned out to be inspiring, had deep understanding, and trained like a twenty-year-old.

Please explain.

I remember one elderly man who exerted a lot of effort and gained strong concentration. He had a positive influence on the much younger yogis. When young yogis saw this old man training properly, the young yogis were energized. I got a clear insight. This elderly man wasn't strongly immersed in views or clinging to any system, and consequently teachable. He was easy to teach. He was also the exception, and the opposite of my father. With many strongly held views, my father — impossible.

There was also an old woman from Ambalangoda whose occupation was crushing coconut husks. This is hard work, and in her advanced age was bent in two with the work. She had no formal education. Very poor. Working in the hot sun, she had become black. It was with great pleasure that I taught her. Still, now more than fifty years later, thinking of this elderly woman's practice brings me joy. She was about seventy years of age. She could hear alright. Whatever teachings I gave, she understood quickly, and progressed. She progressed very quickly. Her grandchildren started coming for teachings when I was in Colombo.

You can't reject people thinking they are too old or too weak or too poor. Or not educated. Many good yogis do not know the suttas. They don't know Abhidhamma. Some don't even know how to read or write. These are not obstructions to progress. They may have never looked at a book on meditation. This old woman from Ambalangoda was very quick to grasp, despite her hard life.

With lots of experience teaching the elderly, I saw potential and introduced her to Sumathipāla Na Himi. He told her to come every day, and was also pleased with her progress. She didn't even have proper white clothes. We provided her with proper clothing. Rarely do you come across somebody like this.

What are you trying to say?

There's a difference in knowledge and wisdom among people. Our Ambalangoda grandmother had a good degree of wisdom. Also in the Buddha's time, many ordinary men and women of all ages were wise. They went about the training and progressed.

So it was, from those first days as a bhikkhu, I was teaching. It was a natural consequence of the situation at Kanduboda. Not that I wanted to be a teacher or be anything at all. While being with my teacher, it happened naturally. I started teaching.

Yogis from almost all walks of life stayed at Kanduboda Meditation Centre. Some were extremely poor uneducated farmers. Some, university professors. Yogis from across the social spectrum were there. While

Sumathipāla Na Himi spoke with them, I listened. And with this happening daily, I got used to Sumathipāla Na Himi's way of teaching. It became part of my life.

I won't be training any twenty hours a day. How important is a teacher?

A teacher is important. When teachings work to the maximum, yogis attain path knowledge. Many people in the Buddha's time simply heard teachings and immediately attained path. The teachings of the Buddha are found in countless books and yogis use books for the preliminary stages of training. To go beyond preliminaries, it is essential for yogis to study with a good teacher.

Where are the good teachers?

There are good teachers to be found. Many teachers have a thorough knowledge and grammar of the suttas. By repeating what the Buddha said, they teach in a general and clear way about what is good and what is bad. There are also teachers who understand subtle aspects of dhamma, and go beyond repeating suttas. It's not exactly temple teachings. With sensitivity, they take the necessary time to assess each yogi's unique character and tailor teachings correctly.

A yogi working with these two types of teachers learns in a broad and useful way a great deal about reducing hindrances and defilements. Learns about developing spiritual faculties. These two types of teachers are common enough and easily found. Teachers of a third type, who recognize a yogi's nimitta and respond to it in the best possible way, are of course rare. These teachers know the yogi's precise level of practice and give the most worthwhile teachings.

A tree bearing fruit, you can throw stones at it. The stone may strike and something may fall, but it may not strike.

Is there a training program for teachers?

I did this work for twenty-five years with Sumathipāla Na Himi. For the first three of those twenty-five, I listened to his teachings to the good yogis. I only listened to their discussions. The yogis did not see me and I did not see them, nor did I say a word of teachings. I stayed completely out of sight behind a curtain or wall or other object; this primarily to avoid distractions to the yogis. Sitting nearby in this way, I took in whatever was discussed between Sumathipāla Na Himi and his many excellent yogis. These were not useless yogis. They were teachable.

After three years of listening to Sumathipāla Na Himi teaching yogis, I was allowed, under his supervision, to give a few basic teachings. Sumathipāla Na Himi and I interviewed yogis together. Initially, I was hidden and only listened to discussions between Sumathipāla Na Himi and a yogi. In this next stage, I gave basic teachings with Sumathipāla Na Himi nearby. Once Sumathipāla Na Himi approved of my teaching abilities, soon afterwards, I was allowed without supervision to teach the yogi every fourth or fifth day. Sumathipāla Na Himi had that day off.

It's not that I only taught one yogi every fourth or fifth day. On any given day, there were roughly one hundred yogis staying at the Kanduboda Meditation Centre. Though I taught the same yogi once every four or five days, each day I taught twenty-five yogis out of that one hundred lot. I taught yogis every day, and taught the same yogi every fourth or fifth day. The yogi saw me on that fourth day rather than seeing Sumathipāla Na Himi.

In due course, this is after four to five years of teaching yogis every fourth or fifth day of their practices, I was allowed to teach yogis every second day of their practices. Sumathipāla Na Himi taught the yogi one day and I taught the same yogi the next day. Sometimes he taught for one day and I taught for the following two days.

Time passed. Sumathipāla Na Himi taught the yogi for his one day and I began teaching for the next four days in a row. Then this sharing of teachings became one day with Sumathipāla Na Himi and ten days with me.

After awhile, it made no difference whether Sumathipāla Na Himi or I taught the yogi. The ratio between us was threadbare. Separation blurred. When Sumathipāla Na Himi was free, he taught the yogi. When I was free, I taught the yogi. Training has to come to that level. Eventually, Sumathipāla Na Himi completely stopped teaching my yogis and let me go on my own. It has to progress in this way.

Teachers who learn in this way should be able to tell you something! You can find out. They might tell you success stories. They will likely enjoy talking about their own teachers. Many teachers trace their lineage back to the Buddha. If teachers have only seen a few yogis, then it's impossible to say. And if teachers, however advanced they appear, are holding onto activities outside the Buddha-Dhamma, say constantly appearing on TV, then it's difficult to have confidence in them as good teachers. Once in awhile, good teachers may do something on TV.

It takes years to learn the subtleties of teaching. During my time with Sumathipāla Na Himi, I was often at a loss as to why his teachings to one yogi were completely different from his teachings to a seemingly identical second yogi. Important questions about the training I did not ask straightaway. When Sumathipāla Na Himi was relaxed and free, I asked him to explain contradictory teachings. I waited for the appropriate time.

I once asked, "Both yogis are experiencing pain. Why are you teaching them differently?" Sumathipāla Na Himi said, "Correct, I told the first yogi to note painful feelings, the vedanā, and told the second yogi to avoid noting painful feelings." I asked, "Why?" Sumathipāla Na Himi said, "For this first yogi, right from her birth, due to her character, she can grow with vedanā-nupassanā. Whereas, this second yogi would probably start clinging to vedanā. For her, I didn't recommend vedanā-nupassanā."

Do you have success stories of yogis?

Though I may or may not see defilements, I do not come to conclusions about attainment because the yogi who discovers my conclusions stops training. I may be able to lead the yogi to the point of seeing. It's possible to lead most yogis to that point.

I can tell you about one yogi whose practice was advanced. He ordained temporarily. For three months, he was there as a monk. With rains retreat approaching, he went to his mother and asked to stay on as a monk for the following three months. The mother said, "Yes. Okay. I'll wait another three months. Come back." The day after obtaining permission, he died. There are things like that. He died suddenly. Sometimes advanced minds are also born here. Created in this world.

Are the yogis here training properly?

I know monks, nuns and yogis who trained in samatha, vipassanā, and both samatha and vipassanā. In kaṣiṇa, there are those who suppressed hindrances and went up to various levels. They trained in a sign. In vipassanā, up to the peak level others went — that is saṅkhāra-upekkhā. There are also those here who trained in both together, samatha and vipassanā, to the same level. In monks, nuns and yogis that continue to train, their practices grow. They should all continuously train.

When monks, nuns and yogis don't continuously train, they get stuck at that point. It could be the yogis find problems in their lay lives. They come to a point in their practices and stagnate. There are also monks, maybe not many monks, who have come to a peak level, and yet I cannot see their view is either straightened out or pure. They are also stuck. Even though their hindrances are suppressed in vipassanā up to saṅkhāra-upekkhā, some are doing rituals and horoscopes. A monk who is doing those things has not straightened out his view.

Although saṅkhāra-upekkhā is a certain level of progress, for many there is no going beyond that level. When a teacher is doing rituals and horoscopes, I can't say for sure he or she can teach properly. I cannot say anything definite about the teacher's ability to do it, to know the yogi is like this or that, and I would not recommend yogis study with this teacher. He or she can continue to train.

How to know a yogi?

A teacher does not judge internal by external. Some yogis are restrained. They just look at the ground, and don't look around. They walk silently. These external signs do not reflect the internal. Eating slowly, and breathing slowly, from those the teacher cannot judge. Some yogis eat fast and are advanced in terms of defilements. By the external, it's difficult to judge a yogi's spiritual attainment. It takes a long time to make associations, and know the yogi.

Since arriving at Lanka Vipassanā ten years ago, I've worked closely with yogis who train properly. I never saw any defect in these good yogis, and I'm sometimes confident they have seen various things and attained path knowledges. However, even with good yogis, I never come to conclusions about attainments. I don't know. They may have attained. I'm not saying they haven't. Only saying I don't think in that way.

Why?

There are causes and conditions at work. Though a defect didn't arise in those ten years, when suitable causes and conditions come together, a defect may arise. So, I cannot know for sure even about good yogis. I cannot unequivocally declare a yogi has attained to path knowledge. Yogis who attain eventually come to realize they are free of this and that. When I speak in this way, do you feel depressed?

No. No. It's a relief.

A yogi training in vipassanā to the peak level of saṅkhāra-upekkhā is comparable to heating a piece of iron to the point it is red hot. The colour of blood. And as long as the yogi is experiencing saṅkhāra-upekkhā, it's very good. The hindrances are suppressed.

Attaining to path knowledge is like making iron into steel. That piece of iron needs certain conditions and needs to undergo a process. Its elemental structure changes. The yogi needs to clearly see tilakkhaṇa.

Adding carbon is part of the process.

If the elemental structure of the iron doesn't change, it is again iron when it cools down. Just heating a piece of iron to a high temperature does not make it steel. If the yogi doesn't see tilakkhaṇa, doesn't break through and leap the gap, he or she hasn't fundamentally changed. Experiencing saṅkhāra-upekkhā is not the attaining to path knowledge.

Teachers get fooled. There comes a time in a good vipassanā yogi's saṅkhāra-upekkhā practice when it appears he or she has attained to sotāpatti. Due to good sati, samādhi, viriya or thīna-middha, the yogi experiences a

state similar to having attained. His or her teacher concludes, “Attainment has happened. This a moment of path knowledge!”

Because of similarity in states of practice, teachers make mistakes. The state arising from clearly seeing tilakkhaṇa is path knowledge. The state arising from sati, samādhi, viriya or thīna-middha is not path knowledge. One state is correct and real. The other, incorrect. Yes, the yogi may have attained.

Heating iron to an extremely high temperature doesn't make steel. If the piece of iron doesn't change, then it's the same old piece of iron when it cools down. The peak level for vipassanā is saṅkhāra-upekkhā. Some monks, nuns and yogis remain at this high level of purity for years and years. They look advanced. It's a suppression of hindrances and defilements. If not overcome, hindrances and defilements tend to arise when suitable causes and conditions come together. It's for these reasons I never come to conclusions about attainments.

Therawan Saranai. Suwapath Weava.

1998 Lanka Vipassanā International Meditation Centre

Their past (kamma) is spent, their new (kamma) no more arises, their mind to future becoming is unattached. Their germ (of rebirth-consciousness) has died, they have no more desire for re-living. Those wise men fade out (of existence) as the flame of this lamp (which has just faded away). This precious jewel is the Sangha. By this (asseveration of the) truth may there be happiness.

Ratana Sutta (Piyadassi Thera translation)

Chapter 2 Beautiful Flame

What is nibbāna?

Nibbāna is the blowing out of defilements. Or if you prefer, it's busting the dam of taṇhā.

Nibbāna is the highest goal of the Buddha's teachings. What he taught as nibbāna differs significantly from what many other teachers taught as nibbāna and differs significantly from the highest goals of all other religious traditions.

The word nibbāna was in use 6,000 years before the Buddha's enlightenment. People understood nibbāna in various ways. Some understood it to be a plane of existence, or a world, where gods and other beings live in peace for all eternity. Various teachers taught nibbāna in various ways. In the Upanishads, you find teachings similar to the Buddha's teachings on nibbāna. These teachings are incomplete because they were given by Pacceka-Buddhas who were unable to describe nibbāna as well as a fully enlightened Buddha. There is no complete description of nibbāna in the Upanishads.

The Buddha isn't talking about another kind of world. Nibbāna is reached through our present lives in this world. It is not necessary to talk about nibbāna as something we hope to attain in our future lives. In us, there are akusala along with kusala. We need to recognize our akusala and kusala. The practice is not initially about overcoming akusala. First, we recognize akusala. And then, only after clearly recognizing akusala, the overcoming of the akusala occurs. Even our kusala must be first recognized. And then, once recognized properly, the kusala is also overcome!

Both akusala and kusala have results, vipāka. The vipāka of akusala is punnabhava in a woeful state, duggati. The vipāka of kusala is punnabhava in a happy state, sugati. And punnabhava, this rebecoming or rebirth, is not happening in a future life — this result is happening in our current lives. Whether it's akusala or kusala, we are creating births in woeful and happy states now.

During those times akusala is overcome and no longer in our mental streams, punnabhava in the duggati is brought to an end. However, kusala continues, which means punnabhava in the sugati continues. We must also overcome kusala. If at any time in our mental streams, we overcome both akusala and kusala, then punnabhava based on these two streams is brought to an end, and we have a glimpse of nibbāna. If that state arises in our minds, at that moment, we see how nibbāna differs from the teachings of other religions.

Religions arise in this world because of fear. Schools of philosophy arise because of doubt. Free from fear and doubt, not allowed to fall to a lower level, that state of mind searches for nibbāna. While maintaining that mental state, we recognize the akusala of the five hindrances, nivarana, and recognize the kusala of the five spiritual faculties, the indriya-dhammas. At any point, with energy of hindrances destroyed and energy of spiritual faculties employed, our minds incline towards nibbāna. Nibbāna does not belong with religion and philosophy — it's dhamma.

Nature?

Yes, yes. To enter nature, dhamma, we have the Noble Eightfold Path, which condensed is the five spiritual faculties — saddhā, viriya, sati, samādhi, paññā. More condensed, it's the three trainings — sīla, samādhi, paññā. With sīla, our distractedness decreases. With sīla, our tranquility and concentration increases. The tranquil and concentrated mind sees the true nature of the world. It's possible, in this life, to get to nibbāna. Nibbāna is not something created in our minds.

Through practical training, through gradually removing akusala and kusala from our minds, we enter dhamma. Overcoming both akusala and kusala opens our minds to nibbāna. At the beginning, in same way as using one poison to overcome another poison, we use kusala to overcome akusala. We use spiritual faculties to overcome hindrances, in the beginning.

The Buddha in the Ratana Sutta uses the simile of a lamp. Sometimes, the lamp's flame fades out. Where did the flame go? Did it enter the atmosphere, or did it go with the wind? And why did the flame fade out? Did the lamp run out of oil, or did the wick burn out? The lamp's oil is akusala, the wick is kusala, and the flame is punnabhava.

At times the wind blows out the flame, as was the case for the ascetic Bahiya. The Buddha only needed to tell Bahiya, "In the seeing, there is the seeing." Bahiya had a keen and subtle wisdom. When such a level of wisdom arises, attaining to nibbāna happens fast. I am also making a lot of effort, but not there yet! So, that's a description of nibbāna, in a short and easy way. Nibbāna blows out defilements.

To look for nibbāna, we develop sati. A great many teachers assume paying attention to thoughts and actions to be sati. I also stress the importance of paying attention. For example, I turn my attention to this eraser. I pay attention to picking it up, moving it over here, and then setting it down. A teacher might tell the yogi to pay close attention to washing the body, brushing the teeth, putting on clothes, combing the hair, etc. This is taught as sati.

In my first days of training I had to hear from others I was lacking in sati. I went for a bath and forgot my bar of soap. I was scolded, "You have no sati." So, next day, I made the firm determination, "I will pay attention to everything. Even the blinking of my eyes. I will not blink without complete attention to the blinking of my eyes." Trying hard, I was aware of a hair on my arm moving in the wind. I was aware of subtle sensations in my body. Still I was told, "You have no sati!"

Because we're talking of my training all those many years ago, a heightened level of attention arises in me. I am aware of the movements of my body. Right now, for these few moments, it arises in me again. The yogi has to train to a high level of attention at some point in his or her practice to overcome habits acquired from family and friends, school, and society.

I could not accept that simply paying attention was sati. I trained in methods of Mahasi Sayadaw for twelve years, and then methods of Webu Sayadaw and Goenka for about six years. Sati was no clearer to me.

Is sati the paying attention to everything?

No! That's not sati! Though paying attention to seemingly everything and anything is taught as sati, paying attention is manasikāra. It's a common mistake. I also taught manasikāra to be the sati when I first started teaching. It took me a long time to understand what is sati.

Manasikāra directs the mind at objects. It does the switching between objects. Say the mind's object is a sound, and the mind's next object is a sight. It's manasikāra that directs the mind to the sound, and it's manasikāra that directs the mind to the sight. It switches the mind from sound to sight.

If manasikāra is not sati, then what is the sati?

Manasikāra directs my mind to this eraser. Manasikāra is there in my picking up the eraser and moving it.

Sati means having no abhijjā or domanassa. If I pick up the eraser and move it without any abhijjā or domanassa coming in, then I am performing those actions with sati. In all four satipatthānas, freedom from abhijjā and domanassa is mentioned. Sati means having no expectations whatsoever. The good yogi recognizes abhijjā and domanassa.

I give dhamma talks with manasikāra. I want something good to come from these talks, which is abhijjā. And annoyance arises when things don't go as they should, which is domanassa. If I could give a talk without abhijjā and domanassa, I would be giving it with sati.

Actions can be a mix of manasikāra and sati. I again turn the focus of my mind towards this eraser. Manasikāra is in operation. I want to pick it up. I then pick up the eraser with manasikāra. I am now moving the eraser, but am doing so without abhijjā or domanassa. Sati is briefly in operation. I'm setting the eraser down on the floor. More of the manasikāra there.

Manasikāra helps sati to arise, and helps sati to continue. When a yogi trains properly for a few days, it all starts working in harmony. Manasikāra and sati come together as yoniso-manasikāra. Yoniso-manasikāra overcomes those habits the yogi learned in his or her present life. It is taught to get rid of the asaya-dhammas. Over a period of time, the yogi sees certain phenomena connected to the object. Sees the nature of things.

And then it's sati based on sati. Sati and sati and sati. One moment of sati after another moment of sati. Manasikāra is removed from the mind and paññā arises. Instead of manasikāra and sati working together as yoniso-manasikāra, it is sati and paññā working together as sati-sampajañña. Of the fifty-two mental factors, sati and paññā are the only factors never influenced by avijjā. All others, even kusala, are influenced by avijjā.

Once sati and paññā become automatic, the yogi's mind is protected. Upādāna does not arise. The yogi overcomes habits coming from past lives, shatters the tendency to punnabhava, and inclines to nibbāna!

Thank you.

Theruwān Sarānai. Suwāpath Weava.

2004 Sumāthipāla Na Himi Senasun Arāna

Freed from hatred and ill-will, whether standing or walking, seated or lying down, free from drowsiness, one should sustain this recollection — this is said to be the sublime abiding.

Karaniya Metta Sutta

Chapter 3 Hurricane Katrina

After sitting in meditation, I've started sending mettā to people who bring out the worst in me, but this isn't working all that well. I'm still angry with them.

Take this an example. You can send mettā towards external objects of the world, "May my fellow yogi Harry be well, happy and peaceful. May he be free from suffering." You spread this mind around to various people, and in several directions. While you are going along doing mettā in this way, Harry steps on your spectacles, and you scold him! This is the way you're training in mettā, which is not at all practical — your mettā isn't developing in a proper way. What the Buddha taught as mettā must be developed within yourself towards yourself.

I thought directing mettā towards others was the correct way to go.

That is where you are going wrong. Now, with anger cooking over the broken glasses, you develop mettā internally, "May I be well. May I have no angry thoughts towards Harry." I am not saying you have any angry thoughts towards Harry! This is an example. And you carry on in this way, "In my mind, may I be at peace with Harry." Mettā must be developed for yourself.

Why do teachers tell yogis to direct mettā externally?

Until the yogi's mind gets tranquilized, it is okay for him or her to do mettā towards external objects. Some yogis train in mettā towards the external for years, and that could very well be okay. How long the yogi uses mettā as a samatha object depends on the individual yogi. If a yogi trains externally beyond the suitable period, then mettā as the object becomes repulsive to his or her mind, and the practice becomes difficult.

True mettā connects with nekkhama. When it doesn't, the yogi experiences difficulties. Mettā is more than saying, "May all beings be well, happy and peaceful." Nekkhamā is necessary.

Religions have led from the front with mettā, and with karunā. People far and wide from all religious traditions help the sick and the poor. They help with counseling and charity work. Hurricane Katrina with winds of 250 kilometers per hour hit New Orleans today. A few used the disaster to steal, which is the natural way of the world. Others assisted those in serious trouble. Due to religious beliefs, masses of people around the globe involve themselves in the work of serving others. And of course, there are innumerable people who, without any religious convictions whatsoever, help others. When anyone, whether religious or non-religious, helps another, the good thoughts of mettā and karunā develop, and a tranquility arises.

Sammā-saṅkappa of the Eightfold Path is nekkhama, avihiṃsā, and avyāpāda. It's this nekkhama that sets the Buddha-Dhamma apart from all other religious traditions. A person's good thoughts of mettā and karunā while helping others may or may not have come to the level of sammā-saṅkappa. For thoughts of mettā and karunā to

be sammā-saṅkappa, the nekkhama is necessary, and that means helping others without expecting anything in return.

Is mettā a means to an end?

Mettā and karunā are essential in the world. With kindness and compassion, the yogi trains externally in samatha, internally in vipassanā, and externally together with internally in samatha-vipassanā. He or she initially trains for tranquility, and later trains for path knowledges. As a follower of the Buddha-Dhamma, your motivation should be to get free of saṃsāra, to break away from decay and death. About that, no one from other religious traditions has spoken. Only the Buddha spoke about attaining path knowledges, overcoming completely, and breaking bonds of saṃsāra.

In the external practice, when spreading mettā and helping others, the yogi suppresses nīvaraṇas, though doesn't destroy them. It's possible for doubt and envy to arise, which is not to say the yogi shouldn't train externally. Training externally in mettā as well as karunā is a must. We help others to the best of our abilities. The Buddha, known as The One of Great Compassion, devoted his whole life to helping others. He frequently walked many kilometers to teach.

Be cautious. There are enough people, especially among monastics and yogis, who make the mistake of focusing entirely on internal and disregard external. They are only concerned with themselves and their own work, and don't care what happens to others around them. These people will never develop, as they are going about things backwards. Their internal practices haven't come about through external practices.

The yogi who is training correctly begins with external practices of mettā and karunā, and then moves onto internal practices of mettā and karunā. It's the performing of these external practices that leads the yogi into internal practices. Not the other way around. Only after first having gone through externally does the yogi switch to going through internally.

In the internal practice, the yogi develops mettā and karunā for himself or herself, and goes beyond a mere suppression of nīvaraṇas. Having come to know nīvaraṇas through vipassanā, he or she wants to stay away from a tendency towards them. While not sammā, as nīvaraṇas can arise again later, this yogi achieves a measure of nekkhama. He or she gradually comes around to the idea of using kindness and compassion to overcome nīvaraṇas once and for all. The yogi aims for path knowledge.

During this time of training internally, before attaining to a path knowledge, the yogi realizes there is some truth in these practices, and wants to share his or her understanding with others. He or she may very well, not for financial benefit, start teaching or writing books.

There is a back and forth between external and internal practices. The external leads to the internal, which leads back again to the external. The yogi's understanding of the nature of things continues to develop through both external and internal practices. While not yet at the level of path knowledge, the yogi's nekkhama, mettā, and karunā are arising to a significant degree.

After attainment to path knowledge, out of a nekkhama attained internally, the results are seen externally — the true mettā and karunā towards others arises. They don't arise in those who haven't attained.

I've written a few books.

You are giving these books away for free. That's useless. It is better to sell them. I'm not saying you have no mettā or karunā or nekkhama. But when books are given away for free, people don't appreciate them. They'll take your book and throw it in a corner. Sell your books and donate the money to an old age home!

When external and internal mettā and karunā come to perfection, the yogi attains to the first path knowledge. He or she destroys, never to arise again, the nīvaraṇa of vicikicchā. The Eightfold Path is fulfilled. The sense of self, the envy, the avarice and miserliness are all destroyed at first path. This yogi's good thoughts of mettā and karunā have come to the nekkhama level of sammā-saṅkappa.

I will try not to have any anger in my mind. Can I substitute envy for anger?

Yes! Not only anger, you train in this way for everything akusala. Use it for your envy, greed, hatred. You may think, "May I have no anger towards Harry." And then without anger, you steal his money! The results, for you and Harry, won't be there. You and Harry both have wrong views and greed, and fight with each other. Harry makes you angry. And you make Harry angry.

Alright, to cancel my anger, I send mettā to Harry.

No. It is impossible for you to straightaway send mettā to an angry person. That won't work, as you don't have enough mettā. You'll still fight with Harry.

Within yourself, you develop mettā by itself. Start by bringing up feelings of affection for your mother and father, and then cultivate those feelings, those thoughts of mettā, within yourself. Make those feelings and thoughts grow. Once mettā is well developed within yourself, you can direct it to others, "May Harry have similar thoughts of mettā. May Harry also be free from anger." You need to focus more on yourself, right now, before focusing on the Harrys of this world.

I'm talking about how to act towards angry people. When you have mettā, your intention is to help them overcome wrong views and greed. You pass along relevant teachings to the irritable and annoyed. When you have true mettā, you can associate with anyone.

When do I direct mettā to someone who makes me angry?

Slow down. You can't go too fast on this path. We all need to train externally and internally for quite some time.

Let's say your craving towards an object, your spectacles, is at one hundred percent. Somehow, you reduce craving towards the spectacles by ninety-eight percent; only two percent of craving remains. Then you think, "I am very happy that my craving has been largely reduced. It would be wonderful if Harry had similar thoughts of happiness in his mind. Harry would surely be pleased with himself if he too reduced his craving."

This is the way to train in mettā towards others. And not to say, "May Harry be well. May Harry be happy. May Harry be peaceful." No. No. Not in that way.

Or your anger towards Harry is one hundred percent. All interactions with Harry are troublesome. Through the training, you reduce anger by fifty percent. Again, you are pleased, as relations with Harry no longer bring out anger, and life is much smoother for both of you.

You know that anger, greed, and jealousy are some of life's most unpleasant experiences. To be well, you must somehow be without anger, greed, and jealousy. Train in mettā, and share your knowledge with others who can develop.

I can't give my fellow yogis what I don't have.

Mettā is one of the four Brahma Viharas, and all four are interconnected. As goes development of one Brahma Vihara, so goes development of the other three. Where mettā arises, karunā, mudita and upekkha naturally arise.

As a friend, I want what's best for you. Though declaring you don't have mettā, I know mettā is to a certain extent arising in you, and that makes me happy. I see you helping others. My happiness isn't arising out of a pride in teaching you. I'm not taking credit in any way for changing you for the better. I'm simply happy that you're developing mettā, and mettā is good for you.

There is no correlation between my mettā and your mettā. I can send thoughts of mettā to you all day long and it won't make any difference whatsoever to the mettā that is arising in you. I can't give you mettā, as it's an internal quality. It's you, within yourself, who is developing mettā. I can't make you or anyone else happy!

Does the practice of mettā give psychic powers?

Super-normal abilities, abhiññās, are useless. I know they are useless. Mettā is useful in life. Mettā isn't developed to have abhiññās. It's developed to attain freedom from saṅkhāras and saṃsāra. In the Karaniya Mettā Sutta, the Buddha speaks of never taking birth again in a human womb, which means attainment to Anagami.² When you train well, abhiññās may arise as a byproduct. Don't value them, as they won't help you break free of saṃsāra. Even powers to heal the sick are useless. Mettā has one and only one purpose.

Direct your efforts towards healing the sicknesses of saṃsāra — greed, anger, envy, revenge, and one-upmanship. The Buddha said, "Take a purgative for wrong views and wrong thoughts. Send them down the toilet. Vomit out defilements." He used those words. The Buddha said, "I give medicine both for purging and vomiting." The purging of wrong views and wrong thoughts is the attaining to stream-entry. The vomiting of all defilements is the attaining to arahatship.

Do I need jhāna?

I would be pleased if you attain a jhāna from mettā. Yogis with jhāna-samāpatti think in a free and distinct way. They're not interested in abhiññās.

Almost all yogis training in vipassanā, or in samatha, over a lengthy period will experience major difficulties. This is not a sign of weakness in the yogi. Even when the five spiritual faculties are well developed, serious difficulties can arise from causes connected to kamma, and causes not connected to kamma.

Recognizing these key places, the teacher knows it's necessary to put a stop to the yogi's training in the primary kamathana. And then, considering the yogi and the nature of the difficulties taking effect, the teacher starts the yogi on a temporary training in a supportive practice, such as Buddha-nussati, mettā-nussati, asubha-nussati or marana-nussati. Teachers most often get their yogis onto Buddha-nussati and mettā-nussati.

Mettā is a central practice that is taught on a variety of occasions. When a past kamma is exerting a nasty influence, the teacher might tell the yogi to train in mettā to deflect this past kamma. And in those places where the yogi starts going astray, the teacher urges the yogi to use mettā to get back on track. Then there are many types of difficulties that arise from causes not connected to kamma. When the yogi's mind is gross and hard, the

teacher turns the yogi towards mettā. Sometimes at the very beginning of a yogi's training, the teacher encourages the yogi to work with mettā to make a sense of ease arise. According to the appropriateness of the moment, mettā is taught.

There are also times when mettā is taught as the primary kamathana and not as a secondary, temporary, supportive practice. For example, to the yogi who likes to attain jhāna, the teacher may get him or her to focus entirely on mettā. The yogi stops his or her normal vipassanā practice and takes up mettā fulltime day and night. It's quick and easy to make states of jhāna arise with mettā as the kamathana. However, the mastering of jhāna, the gaining of jhāna-samāpatti, builds gradually. It cannot be pulled off in a year or two. The yogi who makes jhāna arise through mettā tries, without craving or aversion, to make others attain such states.

From ancient times to present day, along the lineage of teachers, methods of training in supportive practices have been passed down to us. You can find many suttas where Venerables Sāriputta and Anuruddha talk at length of using mettā as a support. Any yogi who follows the Buddha-Dhamma one hundred percent, or even fifty percent, should have trained in mettā at some point. Mettā is a great help to vipassanā. It keeps the yogi progressing and prevents a fall into delusion.

How am I doing?

Instead of doing what I ask, you sometimes go your own way and progress stops. You have lots of opinions about what's best for yourself. You are not alone. There are yogis who only want to do the vipassanā portion of the Satipaṭṭhāna, and don't want to do any of the supportive practices. And there are yogis who only want to do the samatha portion. Yogis don't know what's best for them. Their teachers know. When yogis do their own practices, and not what the teacher asks them to do, again, progress won't happen.

Any yogi who continuously trains over a lengthy period without supportive practices, such as mettā, is deceiving himself or herself. Though the yogi won't likely notice, he or she starts going astray. His or her mind becomes gross and coarse. It's impossible to progress properly when training in this way.

The teachers that are popular in Sri Lanka these days tend not to place much importance on supportive practices. They insist on doing vipassanā, only vipassanā, and nothing but vipassanā. Go meet these teachers and their yogis. You will see there is not much success in vipassanā or in mettā. Doing nothing but vipassanā is a new method of meditation. It's not Buddha-Dhamma.

I'm working on not being too angry with myself.

Yes, you must do that! While being angry with yourself, how is it possible to disperse another person's anger? I told you a little bit about training internally. You should be able to recognize the places where this anger towards yourself arises. Recognize the objects that make you angry.

I know people who were born in anger. I say a few words, and they see something wrong. If I happen to glance at them, they get upset. They're always angry. This type of man or woman needs to realize, "I have been born with anger. I must do something about it." Otherwise, if this man or woman fails to understand and manage anger, he or she finds it impossible to live in society. Sometimes, an intensely angry person ruins his or her own life, and the lives of others. Angry people destroy lives.

I'm not interested in helping angry people, or in dispersing their anger.

There are yogis here at our meditation centre who are angry. Most everyone avoids them. Fewer still are interested in helping them. Living with angry yogis is an opportunity. Don't avoid them. When you carry on,

it's possible to develop mettā. Try, and this needs patience, to help them. When enough time is taken, you see many are blind to their anger. You can develop karunā. Patience. It's the highest austerity.

Patience has never been my strong point.

If you want to be an arahat, you must be patient!

What about self-hatred?

There are two types of anger — with and without cause. The anger towards yourself is without cause. It serves no purpose. It's pointless.

When I was a kid, there was a park where I flew kites with other kids. We were all ten to twelve years of age. Somedays, with our kites sent to the sky, we tied their strings to a branch of a tree, and went for a swim in a nearby stream. We tossed our clothes over a branch, and jumped in. It was a good-sized stream. We stayed in the water, never returning to shore, for a couple of hours. We swam and swam, and played catch and other games. We swam underwater. It was lots of fun.

There was an old man who was also often in the park. He was there to collect grass for his cow, and sometimes we helped him gather the grass. One day, while we were swimming, he was as usual cutting grass with his scythe and filling his gunny sack. He was packing the grass down into the sack with his foot, and the sack ripped slightly. His foot went into the rip. And because the grass was firmly packed down, he couldn't get his foot out. We stopped swimming and went over to help him.

Though we were just trying to help get his foot out of the gunny sack, and weren't the cause of this happening, the old man was angry at everything. After getting his foot out of the sack, he cut, stabbed, and attacked the sack with his scythe. He sliced the sack from end to end. We were scared by his behaviour, and moved a safe distance away. We didn't want to be too close to him.

The old man still needed grass for his cow, and that meant repairing the gunny sack. He tore a strand from a coconut tree frond, and then using this strand, in the same way as using thread, stitched up the sack. Merely because he lost his temper, he had to spend a lot of time and effort to repair the sack.

He filled the gunny sack again with grass, and still angry headed for home. The old man didn't get far. His path to home took him along a small bund across a flooded paddy field. At the spot where he had to hop over a water outlet, he slipped and fell into the muddy water. The sack of grass fell high and dry on the path. The sack didn't fall into the water. The cow's grass was safe and sound. All because of anger the old man slipped and fell.

Falling into the water made him furious. Once out, he stamped and kicked the bund. He made a mess of the whole muddy area around the outlet, and then threw the sack of grass into the water! On that day, the cow didn't get any grass.

I wondered, "Why should this man get so angry? None of us were laughing at him. We were scared." From that day forth, we avoided the old man, and never again tried to help him with gathering grass.

Another time, this old man was on his way to the bathing well, and not paying attention to where he was going, walked straight into a betel palm tree. He picked himself up, and punched the tree! He then marched all the way home, picked up his axe, and marched all the way back to the tree. The old man chopped down the tree! It was the old man who had walked into the tree. The tree didn't walk into him, but he chopped down the tree nevertheless. Because he was old, no one said anything.

This old man is getting angry at his own actions. It's anger that serves no purpose. It's pointless, and is arising without a cause.

How can anger arise without a cause?

A mind gets distorted in a variety of ways. Some sort of sign arose in the old man's mind, and he got angry with that sign. It's a sickness of mind, a distortion, which is arising. There are monastics and yogis living in our centre who have this sickness. They're always in anger without reason, and people are afraid to associate with them.

Some of your monks and yogis scare the hell out of me.

Anger and fear are closely related akusala experiences — like pointless anger, pointless fear arises. As much and as often as possible, see anger and fear as negative, and necessary to overcome.

Mettā overcomes anger and fear. Start by understanding your anger. Spot anger when it arises, and look into it, "What is this thing called anger?" Above all, examine, "How is it arising right now? And why is it arising?" With patience, you will gradually develop the ability to recognize the objects that make you angry. You must at the very least start identifying places where anger arises.

To remove it, you say, "May there be no anger arising in my mind for whatever reason or cause." For example, recognizing contact with Harry is problematic, you say, "May I have no angry thoughts towards Harry." — that's how you begin.

And if I don't bother training in mettā?

You're lost. This process of reacting in a negative way only increases.

Food was an object of anger in my early childhood. There were times mother wanted me to eat something that I found tasteless. I'd get mad and refused to eat it. And there were times mother didn't want me to eat something that I did find tasty, and again I'd get mad. If I was sick, she might have said, "It is not good to eat pineapples." And since I liked pineapples, I'd be upset. As a young child, I wasn't trying to understand anger.

Physical illness is an object of anger for some people. I'm not happy with my declining health. Sometimes, when we try to help sick people, they get angry. My diabetes is not a secret. When someone with no medical training offers advice about treating diabetes, my patience is tested. And if he or she goes on and on, I run out of patience, and get angry. In the same way anger arose with certain types of food when I was a child, anger arises these days with certain types of advice!

For there to be mettā, there needs to be intelligence and patience. Though the advice I'm getting is at times troublesome, and almost always puts me in a bad mood, I make time for those who offer advice, as they say these things out of concern. They have karunā.

We are all born with physical illnesses. A doctor manages my diabetes. It's not my concern. She prescribes suitable medicines, and dictates my diet. I try to let her take care of this condition. With sickness as everyone's inheritance, do I, or does anyone, have the right to be angry when falling sick? No. It's because we haven't realized the true nature of things that anger towards sickness arises.

What about cultivating joy to cancel anger?

That's the reason for mettā. This process of reacting in a negative way to the world, with all its pointless anger and fear and dukkha, needs to be brought to an end, and then and there the joy arises.

During my early teenage years, thirteen through fifteen, my elder sister's husband and his brother regularly held music classes for children in their home. So much music was played there. Not only did the children enjoy learning and playing music, their parents and many adults in the neighbourhood also took great pleasure in listening to the music.

Not everyone was thrilled. I used to visit a grandmother who lived nearby. Hearing these young boys and girls enjoying themselves always made her very angry. I asked, "Why don't you beat them up?" She'd smile. That's how I used to be with her. I'd say, "Maybe you should kill those kids!" We laughed. She liked me a lot. "Well," said grandmother, "why don't you throw a stone or two at them?" Of course, I couldn't do anything of the kind, as I would be in trouble with my mother.

Everything has two sides. The grandmother feels anger. The children, parents, and other adults all feel joy. We must approach these sorts of circumstances in a balanced way. The grandmother said music disturbs her sīla. One of the eight precepts is the refraining from music and entertainment, but the children didn't know they were disturbing grandmother's sīla. They didn't even know she was angry at them. And my elder sister's husband and his brother weren't teaching music to annoy the grandmother.

Who needs the mettā? To whom should we direct our mettā?

The kids are alright, and not doing anything wrong. It's the grandmother who needs to learn about mettā.

Do you really think this grandmother wants to learn mettā? I don't think so. It would've been difficult for me to say, "These are just children playing music. Please don't be angry." And she'd have run me off if I'd dared advise, "Anger is not a good quality to have. One day, you will die and these angry thoughts might come up at the moment of death." Those ideas would have been impossible to put into her mind.

You want to talk about joy. The grandmother was full of joy when the music teachers died, and the classes were finally over!

Some people are totally immersed in an angry, dosa, type of personality. Others have an intelligent, buddhi, personality. There are dozens of diverse personalities. Those with a mix of angry and intelligent can be taught mettā. Yes, they lose their temper sometimes. However, because these people are knowledgeable and have a logical method of analyzing, they realize the passing away of the object. They immediately see the effects, know something is wrong, and elect to overcome this anger by training in mettā. And that's an admirable quality of intelligent people.

Mettā is good for everyone.

Not every person who gets angry can be taught mettā. For some, like that old man who attacked the gunny sack and this grandmother, anger is a mental condition. It's their personality. They're always in dosa. To their ears, it's poison to hear, "May he be well, happy and peaceful. May he be free from suffering." A few words about mettā makes them angry. Makes things worse; more anger arises. There's no way to teach them the mettā of sammā-saṅkappa.

How to live with angry people?

It's difficult. You must be careful when meeting an angry person to talk in a way that doesn't upset him or her. For example, let's say the angry yogi we called Harry has the flu with all its typical aches, pains, and fevers. Physical illness often aggravates anger. You would never say, "Harry, you are really sick and weak with this flu. To get better, you should eat properly. And you should stop with this anger, as it's preventing proper digestion and getting better." If you were foolish enough to suggest such things to Harry, though they be true, he would get even angrier.

For mettā to grow, be clever, and somehow find the tolerance within to be without anger and without fighting. If you get angry every time you cross paths an angry person, that is not going to help the situation, and your development won't take place.

Do these yogis get angry when training in mettā?

No. They are not training. It's good to have a few angry yogis in our community, as they provoke our defilements. I like angry people!

That's a gloomy scenario. Perhaps I can help.

Because of feeling sorry, your mettā, karunā and patience grow. Anger is a sickness. Only at the time angry people experience a strong blow do they come out of this sickness somewhat. Their lives must come to the point where they can't help themselves and no one is there to help them. When finding themselves in a situation like that, say facing death, then and only then do they begin to realize a little bit.

As for helping, be cautious, for today's society is against anyone helping another one hundred percent. There's no way people will let you train in too great a degree in mettā and karunā. You can perform acts of kindness and compassion at fifteen to twenty percent of what's possible. That degree will be tolerated. If you go beyond twenty percent, for example help at twenty-five percent of what you can do, rejection is the norm, "You are crazy." Acts of kindness bring suspicion, "Why are you behaving like this?" and "You must be up to something." People mock you, "Why so much mettā and karunā?"

How is it that people are suspicious?

The average person's understanding of mettā and karunā is rudimentary. They're not thinking at the same level. If you try to apply a higher mettā and karunā, he or she simply can't appreciate your way of thinking, and takes the help in a wrong way. Acts of kindness and compassion are generally misunderstood.

There are yogis here who say they're meditating. And yet, if I propose doing mettā for Prabacheran, leader of the Tigers in the North, they would judge me harshly. It is unbearable for them to say, "May Prabacheran be free from sickness." Could these yogis offer food and medicine to the leader of a terrorist group? No, they could not.

Prabacheran is an occasion for mettā, as it is only in his current birth that he is fighting and killing. In the workings of kamma-phala, there is no saying where he will end up in his next birth. He will definitely be in a lower state. We must have a lot of karunā, to teach him well and give him the comfort of dana.

In recent times, Creon stands out as a yogi who had true mettā and karunā. He asked me to go with him to Jaffna! Creon said to me, "You talk big about mettā, but you don't have enough mettā to give a large dana to Prabacheran and his Tigers." You knew Creon.

A fine young man. He died last year while studying at the University of Toronto.

At any rate, to develop mettā and karunā, it's absolutely necessary to understand anger. And when lots of effort is put in, you'll see mainly aversion and dissatisfaction arising in your mind. Harry's behaviour is bad, according to your judgement, and then a dislike towards Harry arises. You don't want to walk down to the dana sala with him. You wish Harry would soon leave the meditation centre, and never return. In these moments when the anger, aversion, or dissatisfaction is arising, you need to look closely at your own mind and see what's lacking.

Harry is a human being who was born with greed, hatred and delu*sion, and you are also a human who was born with greed, hatred and delusion. You can't say, "Oh, Harry was born with lobha, dosa, and moha, but I wasn't born with lobha, dosa, and moha." It's impossible to say that. Acting intelligently means kindness and compassion. You start to realize, "Both Harry and I were born with greed, hatred and delusion, and both of us have our weaknesses. There is no need for any repulsion to arise in me for Harry's weaknesses." In this way, you become well.

And when I am under attack from an angry yogi? It all seems hopeless. No escape.

Ha! There are teachers who say, "If you get angry with someone, then finish it off. Tell the other person exactly what's on your mind. Fight anger with anger." Indulging in anger is not the correct practice.

As an alternative, find it within to see your anger and to realize something is amiss. Don't look at another person's behaviour. Look at your own mind. Realize, "Anger is a saṃyojana that lengthens everybody's journey in saṃsāra." Think, "Anger is an akusala quality. It is not good for me and not good for those around me."

The Buddha spoke of destroying anger completely, and breaking the bonds of saṃsāra. We all must work relentlessly, with the necessary wisdom, and the patience, at overcoming anger...

May you be well, happy and peaceful!

Theruwān Saranai. Suwapath Weava.

August 21st & 22nd 2007 Sumathipāla Na Himi Senasun Arana

Those ascetics and brahmins, Assaji, who regard concentration as the essence and identify concentration with asceticism, failing to obtain concentration, might think, 'Let us not fall away!'

Assaji Sutta

Chapter 4 If samādhi is there, then well and good

Today, I will talk about paying attention, the *manasikāra*, to dhamma. Dhamma, or nature, is of two types — non-sentient and sentient. Non-sentient dhamma includes trees, rocks, mountains, cliffs, sand dunes and rivers etc. Some types of non-sentient dhamma have life in them, and yet are not sentient. Then we speak of galaxies and worlds. There is the solar system — it's a natural process, all part of dhamma.

Depending on the environment in different locations, there are divergences in material substances of nature and differences in beings. Trees, say in Sri Lanka, that grow upcountry in Nuwara Eliya differ from trees that grow here at our lower elevation in Kanduboda. What grows in India doesn't grow here. Depending on environment, the material phenomena of nature changes. Depending on the location of worlds, there are also differences. What grows in another world doesn't grow here in our world. What grows in other countries won't grow here. The people of ancient times thought a god created all this of our world. Even now, this is a view held by many.

Nature, however, arises based on causes and conditions. In dependence upon the way causes and conditions come together, trees and mountains are formed. The other day I saw a television program about a species of chameleon. It is white, very long and eats only once every ten years. Slovenian yogi Tamara said this chameleon is endemic to Slovenia, while others said the chameleon is native to other countries. This chameleon lives in caves. Depending on the ambient air temperature, it sometimes lays eggs and sometimes delivers live births. The difference is based on just a small variation in the temperature of its environment. Generally, in our understanding of the nature, animals that lay eggs don't deliver live births. But depending on temperature, this chameleon sometimes lays eggs and sometimes delivers live births. There are causes and conditions operating that apply to both sentient and non-sentient nature.

The Buddha talks about nature in the worlds of all living beings, and not only humans. The laws that apply to living beings are similar to the laws that apply to trees. In humans, depending on their native country, there are differences in skin colour, language, etc. There are innumerable variances. We are in a warm country, and our skin colour differs from those who live in cold countries. These are superficial differences. Yet, man remains man. And what does man use? It's the things of nature, isn't it? Food and drink — these are things of nature. These days, man brings nature close to him. In ancient times, man lived where nature was located. There is a difference between these days and ancient times. Now, we bring nature into our homes. We have water taps right inside our homes. Nature has been brought closer.

By paying attention to sentient nature, we discover sentient nature. To find out what is the nature, we must train our minds properly. We use our nature to understand nature. It's called *jhāna*. Better not to talk about *jhāna* too much though! So, how to bring nature close to us? There is inhalation and exhalation. We cannot live without natural inhalation and exhalation. Then what are called foods are the great elements, aren't they? Hardness, liquidity, temperature, vitamins, etc. — these are the characteristics of food. Again, in the case of food, we have brought nature close to us. Inhalation and exhalation; this is natural. The Buddha near the Bodhi didn't use anything new. He directed his mind at the functioning of the natural process of breathing. That's all natural phenomena. We must see what is there in the way it is actually there. The Buddha started by observing inhalation and exhalation. We are speaking about paying attention, *manasikāra*.

Inhalation and exhalation is part of nature. Then we also have feelings of pain and pleasure. Feeling is based on the nature of the heat element. Dependent on harmonious or disharmonious sense of bodily contact — heat is one of the Great Elements. When the temperature increases in one spot, then pain increases in that spot, and it is a disharmonious bodily contact. When the excess heat is absent, then it's a harmonious bodily contact. Our dislike is directed towards the nature.

In this case, has our dislike arisen towards sentient nature or towards non-sentient nature?

You must answer that question. I don't know.

In our example, there is sentient nature and non-sentient nature out of harmony with the form. Then from disharmony, a new reaction occurs. A feeling. There's a difference. It's a feeling now. If there is only a feeling, without directing it at nature, then that's okay. We must know our feeling is one thing and know nature is another thing. There is a distinct difference. They are separate. Typically, we don't know that our feeling is one thing and nature another, which is why we require this attention.

Why again do we need attention?

Attention, manasikāra, is a natural phenomenon that we all possess. Say we experience heat and a sense of burning in our bodies. These are variations in the heat element. If we wait long enough, then we won't feel that heat and burning, or feel anything. We use attention to recognize the feeling of heat and recognize nature. Let the feeling of heat be the feeling of heat. And let nature be nature. We grasp The Great Elements of nature as me and mine. Through attention, we see that we are just The Great Elements. Through attention, we see our grasping of the elements of nature as me and mine. We are both part of nature and separate from nature. Thus, we must use nature to discover nature. Understanding is one thing. Continuing to live with nature is another thing.

And why is that?

It's not possible otherwise. We live in the world as it is. It's okay to know nature, that nature is like this or like that. However, wrong views may arise. Say views about Dhamma Kaya. We can go on this path knowing nature and also end up going down a wrong path. Why? Errors arise when either we say that nature arose without causes and conditions or when we attribute all of nature to a creator. In this way, we fall into wrong views. We need to take care not to let this happen. So, one view is that there are no causes and no conditions — that things arise from nothing. For example, thinking that human beings just arise. A human being doesn't just arise without causes. There are these sorts of wrong views. Spontaneous birth, opapatika, doesn't mean a being arises without causes. Spontaneous birth is one thing. A causeless birth is another.

By accepting causeless birth, we are falling into the view of adicca-samuppanan, fortuitous arising, meaning things arise without causes and conditions. That view is outside the Buddha-Dhamma. Or, a second view we can fall into is the view of creation by a creator. We don't accept these two views. Rather, we accept that the things here in our world have arisen through causes and conditions. A being arises when the necessary causes and conditions combine. Heat arises when the necessary antecedent phenomena combine. Hardness arises when the necessary material phenomena combine. It's in this way that there are differences.

Yes, there are these niyamas, natural orders of things. But it doesn't matter, let nature remain where it's at. There's nothing else we can do. We must learn to accept the natural orders of things. It's good to understand nature, as we live in it. We don't create a self out of nature, and we don't desire nature to be this or that way. To understand nature, it's useful to understand attention.

And what is attention?

Attention, manasikāra, switches the mind from one object to another object. Now, while giving this Dhamma talk, my mind was somewhere else. However, I had also kept attention on what I was about to tell you. You didn't notice which object had my attention. Did you? Those who brought today's noon dana walked past a moment ago. I had switched the attention in my mind towards that object. Now you know which object had my attention. Over there, on the far side of room. I said to them, "I'm coming. Leave it there."

See how the mind works? You may have thought my mind's attention was directed towards the film crew. It wasn't. Yes, that's how attention, manasikāra, works. Attention directs the mind towards one object and then directs the mind towards another object, and then another. Attention merely switches the mind from one object to another object. We try to note this switching of the mind, that first the mind goes here and then the mind goes there. Nevertheless, it is impossible to note all one hundred percent of the objects that have our attention. We can do a little.

I'm not following.

We note that we are paying attention to some objects, and then miss noting that we are paying attention to other objects. There is a gap. Sometimes there isn't a gap between the noting of objects that have our attention, and sometimes there is a gap. To the best of our abilities, we note objects in this way. If we can note fifty percent of the objects that have our attention, that's very good. Attention, manasikāra, is neither good nor bad. This switching of the mind towards an object isn't inherently good or bad. Manasikāra merely switches the mind to the Great Elements, and this isn't the good or bad part. Nonetheless, the knowing of this switching of the mind is something good.

There are two ways of noting the objects of our attention. There is the noting of objects in a wholesome and useful way. And there is the noting in an unwholesome and useless way, which means thinking this or that object is a bother and so on. Two different ways of noting exist in life.

My mind cannot focus on giving a proper dhamma talk!

I'll talk to the people who brought the dana.

Yoniso-manasikāra, the rightly directed attention, is when we transform manasikāra towards the wholesome. We turn our minds towards what is wholesome; that is one way. Or we turn towards the unwholesome. We don't have to work at turning towards the unwholesome, now do we?

Yes, no. Not sure.

Wrong attention is ayoniso-manasikāra. Attention is used during both our wholesome and unwholesome activities. It's okay if we pay attention to nature, as long as it's not in a way that makes it unwholesome. When we pay attention in an unwholesome way, it's not good. Attention is necessary for us. When we let our attention function in a way that it does instinctively, then our attention always tends towards the unwholesome and we want to possess these objects and so on and so forth.

To shift manasikāra towards the wholesome, we note the objects of nature without being led astray by these objects, which means developing our understanding of them. For example, when our attention is directed towards our bodies, we understand the materiality of our bodies. We also understand, because of this materiality of our bodies, pains and other feelings will arise. Understanding the materiality of our bodies is one aspect of nature. Understanding that pains and other feelings arise because of this materiality is a second aspect of nature.

So, in this wholesome way, we understand these two aspects of nature, and are not led astray. Yoniso-manasikāra.

By developing our minds, we can move near to nature or move far away from it. We can either decrease the gap between us and nature or increase this gap. We can also choose to be outside of nature altogether. There are these differences. With developed minds, we are working with nature or working against nature. Inside or outside of nature. Internal. External. We can have power over nature and control it. And that is what is known as abhiññās, the psychic powers — to have control over nature.

In the last few years, many books have been published on the nature of samādhi, jhāna, and abhiññās. Most of these books are without a sound basis. The authors are making unsubstantiated claims, and I cannot accept these books. If a book on samādhi, jhāna, and abhiññās has a proper basis and its author's claims are substantiated, then I will accept the book. So far, I have accepted few books. Maybe I am wrong. I don't think so! If an author can correct my opinion about his or her book, then I will accept what he or she claims. However, I must be convinced in debate. The author must be able to debate based on personal and practical experience, and not on research and book knowledge.

In a life, whatever there is of samādhi, jhāna, and abhiññās should be personally experienced. There exists no citt'ekaggatā or samatha which is not practical. If it's only words, only book knowledge, then it is of no use. Someone recently described what is jhāna to many of you. He should have shown by his personal and practical experience that this and that is the nature of jhāna, and then I would have also accepted what he said. Not otherwise.

The Buddha never advised accepting just because someone tells us so. Simply because I say something, you don't have to accept it. You must also try it out. To say the ocean is deep won't do. Or for that matter, to say the ocean is shallow. We step into the ocean, learn how to swim, and get into it. Or else, to say the ocean is salty. You and I must taste the ocean. That's the way it is. Without experience, it won't do. We experience going inside, bringing nature near to us. Or we experience staying outside, and move away from nature. Inside and outside. Near and far. That's the only way.

You mentioned citt'ekaggatā.

Citt'ekaggatā, the one-pointedness of mind, has various manifestations, and develops through the practice of manasikāra, attention. One-pointedness of mind arises in children. Even a young child has citt'ekaggatā. For example, when studying the alphabet in school, a child repeatedly directs his or her attention to the letter "A". The child's mind remains with the letter for a time. In other words, one-pointedness arises in connection with the letter "A", and he or she learns the letter. The child then repeatedly directs his or her attention to the letter "B", citt'ekaggatā again arises this time in connection with the letter "B", and he or she learns that the letter "B" is like this. The young child never needs to study the letters "A" and "B" again. Those letters are imprinted on his or her mind, and the child starts learning whole words. And that's the nature of citt'ekaggatā.

I learned my ABCs quickly, and on my own. Seeing the letters once or twice was enough to learn them, and then I'd act up in class. I didn't want to be taught, which was a problem for the teacher who wanted to teach me. When I correctly recited the letters of the alphabet, my teacher didn't like it.

A hunter has one-pointedness.

Yes, what you say is true. A hunter does have one-pointedness of mind. A hunter has a lot of citt'ekaggatā. Car drivers have it too. Marksmen. Thieves. They have all developed good attention and can maintain one-pointedness, but it is not wholesome. Even if one-pointedness becomes samatha, it's still not wholesome. Lots

of children have strong one-pointedness, when their minds are collected for longer periods of time during their studies. When studying, I had strong one-pointedness. I wasn't aware of someone walking past just beside me. I didn't notice sounds. This was not any form of jhāna or samādhi. My one-pointedness was simply more in my studies and less in external objects. My mind disregarded all external objects, until my sister shouted at me! And that was a shock. My body jerked.

Why?

One-pointedness was shattered towards that object. No talk of wholesome or unwholesome there. Saints and sinners and everyone in between — all have this type of one-pointedness. Animals also have it.

Citt'ekaggatā has two sides — wholesome and unwholesome. When considering the wholesome side of one-pointedness, we talk big. Many people at our meditation centre participate in pūjās, offer flowers and so on. By directing attention towards these activities, their one-pointedness increases and sometimes they even lose track of time. They are developing their one-pointedness of mind towards these objects and arriving at a type of samādhi. Their minds are calmed down to a certain level. Samatha is a greater degree of this calming down.

Why do you sometimes say samatha and other times samādhi?

From various samatha practices, people get into samādhi, and this is samatha-samādhi, as opposed to vipassanā-samādhi. Samatha means some level of tranquility arises in the mind. Samādhi is short for the samatha-samādhi.

We have external nature. And what exists in this external nature are the objects for our eyes, ears and other senses. For example, the trees, humans, artificial objects and natural objects. Sounds natural, and sounds manmade too. In samādhi, there is a reduction in our attention towards external objects of nature — maybe a fifty or twenty-five percent reduction. If there is a reduction by twenty-five percent, then that's excellent. There are these external objects. They exist. It's okay that we see them or hear them or smell them or touch them. What's most important is knowing how much craving and aversion we have towards these external objects. Not the knowing of the objects, but knowing the intentions towards them, our mode of relating to these objects. Are the intentions tainted with lots of craving and aversion? Knowing our intentions in this way is essential. We know the nature of our hindrances — kāma-cchanda, vyāpāda, etc...

There are yogis in our community who are pleased with their samādhi, and yet others find it difficult to associate with them. A word or two is enough, and they get angry and worked up, saying their samādhi is destroyed.

How can a few words disrupt a yogi's samādhi?

Yes, that's a strange kind of samādhi. We can joke that the Buddha was a rock! It is not like that. These days, samādhi means being a rock, and nothing else, which is where many yogis go astray. I'm not only saying this, that it's not a true attainment. It's more of a mental illness.

I lived in India for a time. The police suspected me of stealing money and put me in jail. Their suspicions were groundless, and I was released soon afterwards. I also associated with Jains, and that's when I considered throwing away my robes, living like these Jains and practising vipassanā. Life would have been easy because no one would have disturbed me. I know Hindu practices, because of my lengthy stay in India. In Calcutta, there was Atti Swami, the Bone Swami, whose garment was made of bones. He ate his food from a human skull. And there was Jala Swami, the water Swami, who lived in a pond. And another, well, you couldn't approach him, as he would spit at you! All these swamis were considered attainers of jhāna. So, such yogis there were in India,

and here too in Sri Lanka we have the same. Those who go to India from here, I tell them they will meet mostly pot-heads and lunatics. However, amongst these, there are a few genuine practitioners.

Far too many authors claim a yogi's mind is tight and a rock in jhāna. That is not jhāna. If you talk with the yogi who trains in this way, it's an argument. Small incidents get blown out of proportion. Restlessness arises. To truly find jhāna, the yogi must, as in the Satipaṭṭhāna, go about his or her practice without craving and aversion. The attainer of jhāna is not interested in arguing. There is a reduction in restlessness. I don't say a yogi must remove himself or herself from everybody to practice properly. I am only saying that when training properly, the hindrances are reduced.

What's the difference between the yogi who has jhāna, and the rest of us?

Good question! There's a big difference. The yogi with jhāna-samāpatti is not led astray by objects of nature. Samāpatti is a stronger state, more than only experiencing jhāna. The yogi trains in the first jhāna for example, and then develops the ability to remain in the first jhāna for a long time. Similarly, with any jhāna, the yogi can enter at will and remain for an extended duration.

Without eradication of defilements, without path, isn't the yogi back to a normal state of mind when not in jhāna?

In a worldly state, the jhāna is a worldly attainment. There is mind at the level of sensuality, and mind not at the level of sensuality. Here, mind is still worldly. To enter jhāna, the yogi moves away from sensuality, and into the neighbourhood of jhāna, upacāra-samādhī. The yogi with jhāna-samāpatti maintains his or her life mostly at the level of upacāra. Vitakka is towards wholesome objects. Though the yogi lives in the world, his or her mind isn't at the sensual level. Life is lived at the level of upacāra. There is a difference. Yes, it is somewhat involved with sensuality, the kāma-vacāra, but it is not one hundred percent sensuality. This is stated in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. Thoughts of the sensual plane are in the neighbourhood of jhāna.

Since this mind of upacāra-samādhī, either immediately before entering or immediately after exiting jhāna, is noticeably different from the mind of a normal daily life, it is often mistaken for jhāna. Bhavanga, where mind is in a deep sleep, is also mistaken for jhāna. Whether bhavanga lasts for a second or two, or lasts for half a day, bhavanga has a sense of comfort. It is this sense of comfort that yogis sometimes claim to be jhāna, and this is where their mistake lies. I don't give any credence to it. Whoever wants to write about jhāna can do so as they like.

Is anyone attaining jhāna?

There are yogis who attain to jhāna, and there are those who attain to psychic powers. Rarely is a yogi with true psychic powers to be found. An attainer of jhāna, wherever he or she is found, is good. I of course, cannot! In my youth, I considered jhāna to be good, and I had the potential. The body and mind could be applied towards these practices. Now, of course, I don't want jhāna. Path and fruit, I also don't want. Although, I do consider nibbāna to be something good. I don't know whether how I think is right or wrong.

And why not jhāna?

Because I cannot maintain that comfort. Yes, there is a comfort in jhāna. Otherwise it wouldn't be called a pleasurable abiding. Jhāna is difficult to maintain. All of one's effort is needed for it, and these days I cannot maintain the needed effort. I know I cannot. Samādhī is useful. For samatha, jhāna is useful. Jinna, please hand me the Saṃyutta Nikāya.

To Venerable Assaji, the Buddha had a few things to say about samādhi. I discussed this sutta³ from the Saṃyutta Nikāya with a good Sri Lankan yogi, and he never again spoke to me about jhāna, not until his death. We spoke of other things. Never about jhāna.

In his final days of life, Assaji is sick, in pain, and needs an attendant. Assaji asks his attendant to worship the Buddha in his name and inform the Buddha about his failing health and suffering. The attendant asks the Buddha, out of compassion, to visit Assaji. By his silence, the Buddha consents, and in the evening, gets up from his samāpatti. The samāpatti being referred to here is likely the arahat's fruition attainment, phala-samāpatti.

Assaji sees the Buddha coming and tries to get up from his bed. The Buddha seeing this says, "Do not get up Assaji. I will sit on the seat which has been provided." The Buddha asks, "How are you bearing up? Is your sickness subsiding or getting worse?" Assaji replies, "It is seen to be getting worse Venerable sir." Buddha asks, "What is bothering you Assaji? Is there anything causing you agitation?" Assaji replies, "Very little sir. Just a little agitation." Buddha asks, "Is it remorse caused by a defect in sīla?" Assaji replies, "No sir. Nothing to do with sīla." Buddha asks, "Then what is the cause Assaji?" Assaji replies, "Earlier when I came down with sickness, I was able to tranquilize the breath and abide in it. Now, I am unable to do so. I cannot attain to that samādhi anymore."

Assaji says he cannot attain to that samādhi anymore. Then, what is there to say of us? I have diabetes, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure. And on top of all that, I contracted the Chikun Gunya flu. So, would I be able to maintain samādhi?

The Buddha tells Assaji, "Those ascetics and Brahmins who consider samādhi as important may accept this. Were my teachings meant for the attaining of samādhi? There are those who make samādhi the essence of their practice. If such people said so after losing samādhi, it would be understandable."

The Buddha didn't teach his students to make samādhi, jhānas, the goal of their spiritual practices. If samādhi is there, then well and good. If not, then let it be.

The Buddha asks, "And Assaji, what did I teach you? Is form permanent or is form impermanent?" Assaji replies, "Impermanent." Buddha asks, "And what did I teach about feelings, perceptions, formations, and consciousness? Are these permanent or impermanent?" Assaji replies, "Impermanent."

Assaji then gave up aspiring to samādhi, directed his mind to the three characteristics, and his mind reached arahatship.

How does this apply to me?

The mind doesn't stick with the feeling. The mind doesn't sink into feeling. There is feeling, but you don't get into the feeling. There is perception, but you don't get into the perception. You know feeling as feeling, and know perception as perception. There is nothing for you to be in conflict with. Whether it's a pleasant feeling or pleasant perception, then it's just feeling, and just perception. At the time of death, Assaji knows his eyes, ears, and nose will also die. He knows these are his last few thoughts, and he knows them. Then he knows this is the last moment.

In my life, I have only seen two people who had such deaths. The first was my senior brother in the Sangha, Dhammadassi. Before ordaining with my teacher, he was a pilot. Dhammadassi, minutes before dying, said, "Pemasiri, I have something to give you. Hold out your hand." I held out my hand. He made a gesture, as if to give me something. He tapped my hand and said, "One." Tapped my hand again and said, "Two." Then he

tapped me a third and fourth time. I asked, “What are these four?” Dhammadassi said, “The Four Satipatṭhānas. That’s enough.” Then he closed his eyes and it was finished. He said, “This will be my last thought.” And that was the end. He died.

Who was the second person?

Sumathipāla Na Himi. When dying, my teacher said, “Pemasiri, look after this place. I will leave you now.”

If mind is developed to this level, to die in this way, then what reason is there for me to look for other teachers? I don’t need more teachings about jhāna and bhāvanā from anyone else. If the oil of a lamp is pure and its wick is clean and pure, then the flame appears beautiful. Our views should be purified. If at any time, the oil is over, the flame will go out, even if the lamp is good. When time is over and pain is over, the flame of life diminishes. You are not going to see nibbāna in the next life. Your jhāna and samādhi are for this life, not the next life.

Theruwān Saranai

We have a bit more time.

When we move away from understanding nature, there is no sense of nāma-rūpa. We talk in terms of me and mine, and have conflicts and get angry over objects. When we understand nature, nāma-rūpa, and know these are only things in life, there is no need for conflicts or anger. Physical property, vehicles, children, or books cannot be carried with us in saṃsāra. If I lose my copy of the Saṃyutta Nikāya, what would happen? What if someone steals this book? What happens?

Nāma-rūpa has separated. Should I hope the thief breaks his arm? Isn’t that the way of society? I learned many a good things from Sumathipāla Na Himi. He had been using a good quality pen for many years and someone stole it. I asked, “What do you think of losing your pen?” He said, “It is lost. What more is there to say?” I asked, “Don’t you want to know who stole your pen?” He said, “Then I would have to think the pen is mine.” I received my answer.

A monk, who stayed at the Kanduboda Meditation Centre in its early days, stole some Buddha relics. He had worshipped the relics and then stole them. When I asked about this theft, Sumathipāla Na Himi said, “He’s taken the relics because he wants to continue worshipping them.” I learned from my teacher there was nothing more to think about the theft of the relics. I learned that these teachers were excellent; their minds were firm. They knew the distinctions in nāma-rūpa. There was no identification with me or mine. There was no identification with any object, be it a pen or relics. They realized these objects are impermanent.

Last week, our centre’s vehicle was involved in an accident. I only asked if the passengers were safe. What more was there to ask? I broke my leg when I was child. I said to my family, “My leg is broken.” There was no need to talk about how I broke my leg, or who broke it.

Do I need samādhi?

Yes. Samādhi is not just a topic for discussion. It is needed to suppress hindrances.

May you all be happy! Theruwān Saranai. Suwapath Weava.

2010 Sumathipāla Na Himi Senasun Arana

Ended the old, there is no new taking birth. dispassioned their minds toward further becoming, they, with no seed, no desire for growth, the prudent, go out like this flame. This, too, is an exquisite treasure in the Sangha. By this truth may there be well-being.

Ratana Sutta (Thanissaro Bhikkhu translation)

Chapter 5 Let it burn

What is amata? Deathlessness?

Your word deathlessness does not belong in the Buddha's teachings. In a Buddhist context, yes, there is the Pali word amata, which is synonymous with nibbāna. Amata is not deathlessness. This term amata cannot be accurately translated into English, or Sinhala, or any other language. I feel quite helpless to explain its meaning. The question is fine. Yet difficult to answer. You must ask your question of someone who has gone into nibbāna. I have no idea of getting into nibbāna. And so, how can I teach amata and nibbāna? How can I tell you? Let's discuss this. Amata means there's no further rebirth.

Do amata and nibbāna happen at death?

That idea is wrong. Amata equates to nibbāna. Nibbāna is not something you attain after death. It occurs in a human while he or she is alive. Nibbāna is usually mistranslated. Most texts interpret it in a wrong way. Until the state of nibbāna arises in us, death keeps occurring in our lives. The state of nibbāna happens in a person who is living. Many people do declare, "You get into the state of nibbāna after death." This is wrong. It is a view leading into a religion, or a philosophy. How long did the Buddha live? What was his age when he passed away?

Eighty.

What happened to the Buddha in his eighties?

He went into parinibbāna.

What's wrong with saying the Buddha died? Why do you feel the need to use the word parinibbāna? Let's say Devadatta, or Venerable Sāriputta. What happened to them? Or when one of our relatives dies, or someone close to us deceases? Often, when people say the Buddha attained parinibbāna, they are merely replacing the word death for the word parinibbāna. Even with the Buddha, it's fine to use the word death because he attained parinibbāna when he was thirty-five.

If not entering nibbāna after death, what does parinibbāna stand for?

Parinibbāna means coming to an end in a systematic way. You come to an end. You finish it off in a very methodical way. All of us have thoughts arising out of anger and jealousy. When others are talking, we tend to listen to see what they are saying. Not to appreciate what they're talking about. We judge what is said. Watching a yogi eating breakfast, we think, "Look at him. Even though a yogi, look at the way he's eating." Nibbāna means these formations have totally stopped.

To systematically eradicate these, we need sīla, samādhi and paññā. From hereafter, I won't ask you to engage in bhāvanā. I am only going to ask you to be. Just be. Practise just be. Don't meditate! Just be. You don't even have to practise manasikāra. You needn't do yoniso-manasikāra. Wisdom also not required. Let go of mindfulness. Just be. Starting immediately, for one week — just be. And at the end of the week, report what

you feel. Just be. Do nothing. And when I say do nothing, and just be, I don't mean stop working, or relax from doing whatever activities of daily living you should be doing.

To just be is the most arduous task in life. Just be — it's so difficult. You can't be occupying your mind with thoughts of this, that or the other. You are not thinking about what someone else has done. Instead of forever finding objects outside yourself, when one day you just be, that is the most enjoyable state, and you have the potential to finish it all off.

{Phone rings}

It's a real bother when relations call from home. I can't get into just be, as they tell me things I need to think about. They asked me to arrange a pūjā, which means much of my time will be used for that event. I get various thoughts arising, "I have to tell someone about the pūjā." This type of thought is not all that harmful.

When I am with you and others here at the centre, it's difficult for me to just be. For example, I have thoughts about one of our Czech monks, "He is walking too fast. I wonder why he is doing that? I must scold him again." These types of thoughts are harmful. Or seeing a recently arrived yogi talking, I think, "He is supposed to be meditating. Now he is talking."

Practising just be, there comes a time you see jealousy, hatred, wickedness, lust, delusion, craving. These thoughts are arising, and you become aware of them. And you know their causes. It's possible. You can see your anger, and all sorts of hindrances coming up. Sitting in the meditation hall or wherever, just be. No need for heroic effort, to be strenuously suppressing hindrances and trying to eradicate them. Or to be generating concentration. Just be. This is not easy. You must learn to cope with whatever comes up in your just be.

Ajahn Chah, Mahasi, Goenka, etc. — many different methods of meditation are good. However, whatever the method, you only make progress with it for ten or fifteen days or for a maximum of one month. In most methods, the hindrances get suppressed. And when hindrances are suppressed, you feel good. This is all that happens. Follow all various methods of meditation. It is worthwhile to have a go at them. Then afterwards, just be. Finally, in the end, sit down, and learn to just be.

There are stories in the Sutta Nipāta of the future Buddha living as a yogi near the River Naranja. He is on a journey to discover what is meant by atma. You know the story. He is sitting under the Bodhi Tree. It's a difficult journey, and the future Buddha knows he is on a difficult journey. Though having left home, parted with everything, he's still thinking of home. He's affected by memories of wife Yasodhara, son Rahula, and the home life. It's not at all an easy time for him.

The future Buddha is making effort and trying to arouse energy. He is practising Dhammacariya throughout. Dhammacariya means wholesome living. It is this wholesome living that is giving him the chance to arouse energy.

He realizes, "When alone, I am living with anusayas. I'm thinking about others and being with them. Living in those thoughts, within my mind, feelings arise." Anusayas are our sleeping mental tendencies. Not nice things. The future Buddha realizes, "All my difficulties are due to sensuality, kāma-cchanda, lust. If I let go of all I have, these thoughts will not come into my mind, and then I can just be." He makes more effort, arouses more energy, and lives without those qualities of mind.

I left home.

You think you let go of the home life. All of us at this meditation centre believe we're here, and not at home. Even the future Buddha found it awfully difficult to let go of the home life. What to say of us? We have come to try to be here. We're only trying to do that. For the most part, when alone, we are living with whatever is in our minds, and it is the thoughts of home that are generally in our minds.

Once settled down a bit, the yogis here at our centre focus on the method given to them. They might be watching the rise and fall, the breath, or sensations. And then because of the method, external thoughts are prevented from coming into their minds. With outside thoughts thus suppressed, yogis feel enjoyment. And when this experience of joy is new and intense, they with over the top respect tell me, "I am so grateful for all you did! I am now okay. My mind is in such a good state, and I'm really happy about that. Thank you ever so much."

This is not what yogis should be doing. They have not recognized their anusayas — their unwholesome tendencies. If they were to recognize their anusayas, that would be a scary situation.

When you're sitting in the hall or kuti, take a notebook and write down anusayas that come to mind. You're not to do anything else. Just be. This is a good exercise. Don't try suppressing anusayas. And don't try to make them your object either. Don't sit there working with any object of meditation. Let's say you had been focusing on the breath as your object of meditation. Do not note the inhalation and exhalation. Just be. And truly see your anusayas.

Please clarify.

Sitting in the hall with just be, you hear a noise, and think, "The yogi sitting beside me is making this noise. He is making far too much noise." Anusaya. Or an opinion comes up, "I can hear a Czech monk talking. He should be quieter." Again, anusayas. Then a view arises, "The Canadian is yet again yakking with Bhante Vayama, and disturbing my meditation." All unwholesome tendencies. Write these down in the notebook.

Or, only as an example, this time with conceit you're meditating in the kuti, "I have good samādhi. I note inhalation and exhalation very well, and observe rising and falling very well. I am aware of sensations. I am a good meditator."

Philip stays in the kuti beside you, and is talking with Evelyn. You think, "When will they stop talking? It doesn't look like they're going to stop anytime soon. I must go and tell them to stop." At this point, with lots of attention, you know, "I feel like getting up. I'm getting up. I am getting up. Left. Right. I'm now moving my left foot forward. The left foot is moving slowly forward. The right foot. It's moving forward." You attentively in this way moment-by-moment get up from sitting and walk over to Philip's kuti. Then, with awareness, you scold, "Philip! Evelyn! Why are you talking so much? Can't you see I'm meditating?"

And what's wrong?

You haven't done anything. It is all empty. What you were asked to let go of has not happened. You have only been living with external objects. After scolding these yogis, you return to your kuti and sit down to meditate. Before observing sensations, you send mettā to your neighbours, "Let them be well and happy. Let them be peaceful. May Philip and Evelyn be peaceful and happy. Let them be happy. May they be well and happy." And so, forgetting the disturbance, you focus on your sensations. You start again. See this as an example.

One of the Czech monks does enjoy talking. It would help everyone if he was quieter.

Yes, there is a Czech monk who is occasionally a little noisy. However, in the context of anusayas, can you see what is happening here?

This example hits a little too close for comfort.

I'm almost finished. You see the Czech monk walking by your kuti. He is walking quite fast, and you think, "I don't know what to do with this monk. Once again, my meditation train is broken. Pemasiri Thera should stop him from behaving in this way. I will talk to Pemasiri Thera."

After worshipping me ever so respectfully, you say, "Bhante, please excuse me. I need to talk to you. Yesterday I kept quiet, but today I must tell you the Czech monk is disturbing my meditation. Please tell him to stop walking fast and making so much noise. I hope at least you will touch on this matter with him." Then I say to you, "Yes. Yes. Of course, you are right. I will tell him from hereafter he should walk slower and be quieter."

What do I take from this story?

Can't you somehow see how valuable it is to just be? There wasn't, in this example, even one moment when you were able to just be. You spent the entire day thinking about how fast our Czech monk was walking! You needn't look into the behaviour of others. Forget about him talking, and walking fast.

I have done retreats in the Ajahn Chah, Mahasi and Goenka traditions. The teachers at these retreats enforced many rules of conduct.

In the big meditation centres, teachers must be strict.

You said hindrances are only suppressed in many methods of meditation. Is to just be such a distinct way?

This is my experience of different methods of meditation. And I practised the Mahasi method for a dozen years, and the Goenka method for about six years. I have experience.

George is staying with us these days. Up until recently, he was staying next door in a room in the foreigner's block at the original Kanduboda Meditation Centre. The yogi in the adjacent room broke a plate. George got disturbed and complained to the other yogi, which troubled George even more. He paid me a visit, and asked what to do. I told him, "That's okay. Why don't you go back to the old Kanduboda Meditation Centre, collect your belongings, and move in here? Come stay with us!" George stayed on for the following week at the old centre. When George returned here, he had some of his possessions. Not everything. I said, "George, this is not enough. Why don't you go back next door and collect the rest of your belongings?" George agreed, and promised to return as soon as possible. As you see, George is now staying with us, and has settled down his mind. He is able to just be.

What happened to George when he first started meditating happens to all of us. It's these akusala ways of behaviour we have to let go of. We must stop finding objects outside ourselves. We must empty our minds of so many things, and it's only at that point wisdom arises. For sure, it's difficult to let go. Nevertheless, somehow, we make the effort to let go, and when this happens it's easy to live with others.

I was born alone. I came into this world alone. Only later on did I start focusing on others and connecting with them. At the last moment, at the dying moment, I have to do that by myself. It is between these two moments of birth and death that I am meeting people, recognizing them, and getting into conflicts. These are the places where aversion arises. And it only happens with people I know. There are people you and I don't know anything about. Does anything arise with the people you've never met?

No.

There are millions of people in the world. The number of people you don't know is far greater than the number of people you know. Is there any form of attachment to all these people you don't know?

Nope.

It's always with the people we know that the craving and aversion arise. Why can't you be with the people you know in the same way you are with these millions of people you don't know?

Not sure.

Let's think about this. We might go mad! Say you live with your child in the village of Delgoda. This daughter or son is the nearest and dearest person in the world to you. A servant also lives in your household. You come into contact with these two more so than with anyone else. You notice this. Then a family moves into Delgoda. You don't know anything about them, save they came from somewhere else. They're not originally from Delgoda. Since you can't just be, you wonder, "Who are these newcomers? Are they good people? Or bad? Maybe they're connected to the LTTE." You get assorted thoughts about these newcomers.

Another example. A newly arrived yogi moves into the kuti next to yours. As you don't know he is only staying for one day, worry arises, "Will he become a problem?" You speculate on whether or not this new yogi will eventually become a disturbance. These types of thoughts come all too often into our minds, and are a hindrance.

Parinibbāna is the culmination of systematically eradicating all akusala thoughts. Methodically, at the age of thirty-five, the Buddha put an end to acting in unwholesome ways. After attaining to parinibbāna, he lived with others for the following forty-five years, though not in the sense of taking external objects as his business. He taught Dhamma. He taught Sikkhā. Sīla. The Satipaṭṭhāna.

The Buddha's teachings help us continue on this journey. We need these lessons. They explain how to live in harmony with others. Not how to break from others. We can easily live with other people. In that state without external objects, the mind is pure, and simple for wisdom to arise. It was to this end the Buddha taught Dhamma.

No matter how much I try to follow the training, it doesn't seem I'm getting there.

A thought arose this morning, "I feel like going to the dining hall." Then another thought came along, "I don't want to go to the dining hall." This was followed with, "I might help Sugath." A worker then told me the office needs 6,000 rupees to cover the cost of 1000 bananas. Bananas are grown in the garden on the property of this meditation centre, and they're grown without pesticides. These bananas are regularly used for dana. I asked the worker, "Why does the centre have to buy so many bananas?" He said, "A man organizing a dana for Vesak asked kitchen staff to pick up these bananas. The dana is not for our centre. It's for a different place." I asked the worker, "Is it possible to buy 1000 bananas from the local market?" That's all I asked. The worker went off somewhere. Our conversation ended.

The same worker returned a little later. He was happy, "There's now no need to buy bananas from outside! We plucked about 1000 bananas from the garden, and can if necessary pluck more than 3000 bananas." I told the worker, "Give those 1000 bananas to the man organizing the dana." This transaction is complete.

In due course the organizer arrived with his 1000 bananas. There are now too many bananas! This man brought high priced bananas. And they are tiny. Their weight comes from the stems, and sellers in the market make excessive profits. They're expensive. I was then informed it was a long time ago when the man asked staff to pick up bananas, and I am of the opinion the centre shouldn't be incurring this cost. Who then will pay for these bananas? In the end, I accepted the centre paying out the 6,000 rupees.

This is an example of how we come into conflict with others. We could get into a really good fight. Even you might choose to hold onto this incident, and start living with it. If we allow the holding onto any object to happen, perhaps get into events surrounding the bananas, there is no extinguishing the flames in our minds. There will be fire. It's marvelous when fires are burning! I yell, "This fire should teach you a lesson. In the future, don't behave in this manner." Getting involved in these situations is useless. It's of no use. Who did what with the bananas is an empty object.

This afternoon, a good number of us watched a film about the life of the Buddha. Two people didn't like the film, "Look here Pemasiri. This film is inappropriate. It's no good what you're doing." Their fires were scorching. I said, "This is no more than a film and there is nothing for you to come into conflict with. It's a made-up story." As I didn't tell them to watch the film, they had no reason to complain. I only showed it. Had I insisted that these two watch then it would have been okay for them to get angry.

All these anusayas are within us, and arise without an object. It's when an anusaya comes up that we find the object to put the anusaya into action.

What you say is puzzling, and perhaps useful. It reminds me of the chicken and egg causality question. Which comes first? Sense contact with the object, or the arising of the anusaya? It's not clear which of these two events is the cause and which is the effect. Does my kāma-cchanda and vyāpāda come first or second?

Anusaya means sleeping. Lying dormant. It is an unwholesome tendency at rest within us. From time-to-time, one of the anusayas sleeping in our minds wakes up. There are conditions at work for the arousing of an anusaya.

Parinibbāna means there is nothing left to rouse. All the anusaya fires have been systematically and thoroughly extinguished. The future Buddha worked hard on himself for a long time. As declared in the Ratana Sutta, at the age of thirty-five, he totally destroyed his fires and attained. We too should get rid of these akusala tendencies sleeping in our minds.

The Buddha in the Ratana Sutta compares quenching a lamp's flame to attaining to parinibbāna. You sometimes help set out coconut oil lamps around the Bodhi Tree. All lamps for the pūjā have flames, and are burning away. And then one of them always goes out. There's still oil in this lamp, and its wick is fine. Nevertheless, this lamp is no longer burning. Its flame somehow went out. A breeze may have blown it out. If there are no obstacles, the lamps with plenty of oil and wicks in good shape continue to burn.

The lamps are beautiful. What are the obstacles?

Similar to delighting in the fires of lamps around the Bodhi Tree, we delight in our inner fires. Do we try to extinguish these fires within us? No. We make no attempt at all to restrain anusayas from arising.

Back to amata, what's the difference between parinibbāna and death? What is death?

Parinibbāna and death are entirely different. Death means we were born. It is conception in the womb, and what was conceived dies. Therefore, the Buddha also died in this way. But without fires, there's no question of him being born elsewhere. Death is not an end. Parinibbāna is the end. Is there any need for us to attain this?

I can't say.

Every day people with wildfires burning out of control feel the need to visit me.

And what follows?

I put a little more oil in their lamps, and I pull on their wicks! I found this to be most effective, as their fires burn all the more intensely! I endorse each and every one of their views and protests. The next day, or whenever we meet again, they always say, "Venerable. You are very clever!" For those who carry on in this manner, intransigent and grumbling, fires never go out. All these objects come up because they are not extinguishing fires. Nor are we. Our fires are all-consuming. Even though we say it's bad to let these fires burn, that isn't happening. It's all there in cittānupassanā. Whatever object arises in our minds, we must just see it. And let it be.

Do I let go, as in the Ajahn Chah tradition?

No. It's not let go, as taught by Ajahn Chah. You recognize the object. Recognize is the word here. And see what arises in your mind with proper perception. Do not connect one object of mind with any other object. Finish it off at the point it arises. And when practising in this way, in time, you extinguish the flames. Fires need fuel. Without fuel, they go out.

These vipassanā stories are also found in Zen. Upon hearing, good yogis sometimes, suddenly, gain insight into the workings of their minds. A relevant story puts out fires.

My fires are burning.

The way we are at the moment, fires never go out. I too am adding oil to my lamp, and making subtle adjustments to the wick. If I were ever to stop adding oil, completely rip out the wick, then throw away the lamp — most everyone would be angry with me. They would leave me.

I'm still not sure about this death business.

It is a good question. That's okay. Don't worry. Let death occur. In this lifetime, when you come to the point where there is no death, you come into the state of parinibbāna. In this life. I repeat. Parinibbāna is not for the next birth. It is for this life itself. You should be able to do it in this life. Come to the point where you do not die.

Sounds difficult.

It is difficult. You might die right now! One way or another, make the effort to attain to parinibbāna before dying.

Instead of a lamp, say your body is a chunk of wood. This wood is here, and it's burning, precisely because previous fires were not extinguished.

Why is my body here?

You are going to die one day. Your body will be thrown away in much the same way an old piece of wood is thrown away. And if you don't put out the fires, more wood is going to start burning somewhere. There is another place where flames will come up. However, if you do put out the fires, when your wood is thrown away at death, there is nothing to light up.

Imagine this chunk of wood is burning away. It's on fire. There are flames. Now imagine another piece of wood leaning against the first piece. As the first piece of wood burns off and finishes, the second piece catches fire. There's a third chunk of firewood. It is close to the second, but kept a little distance away. There is a space between second and third pieces. Since there's no connection between second and third, the third piece doesn't catch fire. This gap is where the fire goes out.

When pieces of firewood are connected, they can still burn. But after a gap, there's no burning. The more connections made between pieces of wood, the greater the fire.

This is what we're doing. We're always connecting pieces of wood. I am looking for firewood from morning until night! I've found countless pieces of firewood, connected them into a series, and they are all burning. I don't want anyone to come along and create a gap in the series because I want to keep it burning. This is an example from the Buddha.

I too should keep a little distance away, and mind my own business.

It's okay. The piece of wood that is burning at the moment — let it burn. We must let it be. Just be with the wood that is already ablaze. Let it be on fire. But the next piece? Do not connect it. Push it away. If you are able to do that, the wood presently on fire will burn itself out, and finish. And there's nothing more to catch fire.

This is a nice simple example.

It's a very simple example. Easy for us to understand when seeing things in this way.

Smokey Bear says, "Only you can prevent forest fires."

There's something to what you say. I can draw on it.

Smokey is a cartoon character used in U.S. Forest Service advertisements.

I am now using what you said for firewood. I lean it against the wood already on fire. The moment my first pieces of wood finish their burn, this additional piece, what I have taken up with you, starts burning. And when that finishes, I find another piece of firewood, and keep it next to the fire. It also catches.

Somebody makes a remark. What I hear of something from somewhere, I take on as yet another chunk of firewood. It might be views from a yogi. These also make for good firewood. I rest them against other pieces of wood that are, as we speak, on fire. People tell me stories.

How do you cope?

I generally take a short rest in my room after lunch. I close the door and lay down on my bed for awhile. A man called out to me today while I was resting, "Venerable. Venerable Pemasiri Thera." I called back, "Who are you? What do you want? Why are you calling?" No answer. I said, "Open the door!" The man did not open the door. I got up, and opened the door. Nobody there. What to say now? Two workers were resting nearby on the

veranda, and I asked them about this man. One worker said, “We didn’t call you. And there hasn’t been anyone visit in the past hour.” I feel somebody did come and did call me. There were two workers. The second worker also said. “No. Nobody was here.” Since both workers maintained that not one person had dropped by, I accepted the situation. I had to accept.

What am I to think? I feel someone came to my door and called out my name. This was not a dream, which is why I asked the man to open the door. No answer. I felt these events to be real. I got up, went to the door and opened it. No one was there. And I asked those workers about my visitor, and both insisted nobody visited. This is an occasion where I can start a fire. What did you understand?

I don’t know what happened.

An earlier object may have come into my mind. I also cannot explain it.

Theruwan Saranai.

Recording Title ~ 110516_001

May 16th, 2011 Sumathipāla Na Himi Senasun Arana

"Of course you are uncertain, Kalamas. Of course you are in doubt. When there are reasons for doubt, uncertainty is born. So in this case, Kalamas, don't go by reports, by legends, by traditions, by scripture, by logical conjecture, by inference, by analogies, by agreement through pondering views, by probability, or by the thought, 'This contemplative is our teacher.' When you know for yourselves that, 'These qualities are unskillful; these qualities are blameworthy; these qualities are criticized by the wise; these qualities, when adopted & carried out, lead to harm & to suffering' — then you should abandon them."

The Kalamas Sutta

Chapter 6 Abhiññās

I recently read a book on the American psychic Edgar Cayce. Can you explain his power of clairvoyance to heal the sick?

Super-normal abilities, abhiññās, have nothing to do with Buddha-Dhamma. Well before Buddha, there were people with abhiññās. These days, we find many deformed men and women with super abilities. There are animals with abhiññās. Stories of people and animals with abhiññās are big news. If you consider abhiññās as great, you don't know Buddha-Dhamma.

People are born with these abilities. A young boy in my village, who in his day-to-day life was a fool, could accurately predict the future. He didn't go to school, or complete any formal education. Yet, he would say in detail on such and such day this and that would happen. Nobody took him seriously. When the mentally or physically disabled speak of such things, no one believes them. Nonetheless, this foolish young boy correctly predicted the future. He was always right.

On Sumathipāla Na Himi's visits to a senior monk at the Gampola Temple, he came to know a blind man with an extremely high level of abhiññā. And though blind from birth, this man helped around the temple. He drew water from the well for washing and bathing. Gampola is upcountry and wells are deep. Drawing water from a deep well is hard work.

This blind man was also a teacher. In traditional temple education, in Pirivena schooling, the Pandita level is equivalent to a university degree. He had learned enough Dhamma to teach one level below Pandita. He was strict, and wouldn't tolerate students making a mistake with a single letter in their essays. The full stop of a period had to be in the right place.

There are enough blind people preparing horoscopes. Based on time of birth, they predict the person's future. This man's predictions were exceptional. To test the blind man's ability, a shrewd villager of the Potavil area asked the blind man to prepare a horoscope for a newborn from his village. Instead of giving the blind man the mother's piece of paper with the birth time of her newborn, he gave the blind man a piece of paper with the birth time of some puppies.

The blind man said, "It's impossible for a human child to be born at this time. It has to be a four-legged animal, say a puppy. It can't be a human baby." After two days, the villager gave the blind man the correct time, who then said, "Yes, this is a male child, and ...". The blind man then told the villager of the newborn's previous lives. Nobody believed him. He also applied his super abilities of seeing to the comings and goings of visitors to the temple. And he correctly identified people who were beyond the normal range of sight. Those met on the street, he greeted by name.

As a young boy, I had the ability to see what was on the other side of a wall. One day, I told my sister something like, “The man working behind this building is tall and dark and wearing a red checkered sarong.” After confirming this was indeed the case, my sister said, “You liar. You must have looked first!” Back at home, I was warned, “Don’t say anything to anyone of these experiences.” I was afraid of being severely punished and stopped sharing out of the ordinary experiences.

And then there was the time, similarly beyond the normal range of sight, I knew an enraged elephant was charging towards the place where I was staying. I knew it was going down a hill and felt it would definitely end up at that place. I warned the others. And this dangerous animal soon arrived.

It’s too bad I didn’t meet the blind man.

You wouldn’t want to meet him. So bad in his behaviour you wouldn’t be keeping to the five precepts. At the same time as having abhiññās he was committing countless immoral acts.

He set fire to a house in the Potavil area, which is a rough area full of hills. To get to the house, he had to hike up and down several steep hills. It is difficult hiking for sighted people. And he managed to burn the house to the ground in a way he wouldn’t get caught. I am quite sure he is the one who set fire to the house. This is a high level of abhiññā. Edgar Cayce’s abilities are modest when compared to this man’s abilities.

How can a man living an immoral life have powerful abilities?

I also wondered how he could keep these abhiññās. He may have been complete, had all faculties intact, in the early stages of developing in his mother’s womb. And then sometime while still in the womb, he lost the faculty of sight.

Sumathipāla Na Himi told the blind man, “Stop doing bad. Do not do immoral things.” The blind man had been using black magic. During the latter part of life, he lived in a temple in Nugegoda. I met him at Sumathipāla Na Himi’s funeral. He was crying. Write about this man’s life and his abilities, and you will have a best seller!

Many Sri Lankans value what is written in English more than what is written in Sinhala. So, when English language books on abhiññās are published, Sri Lankans are impressed and start talking about them. Amongst our monks, books on abhiññās are found. They are discussing the various types of abhiññās, and arguing. I feel sorry for them. They are acting like fools. With Buddha-Dhamma in mind, abhiññās are of no value whatsoever.

Now a story about a blind man who was good, and didn’t do anything immoral. In the days of my youth, father ran a grocery shop in our village, and one of his workers was this good blind man. He could be trusted to protect the shop’s inventory as well as any worker with sound eyesight. He knew exactly who walked into the shop. Could have been a child or an elderly person or whoever, he wouldn’t let them touch anything without his permission. During the New Year’s season, when father sold sky-rockets and crackers, this blind man knew when a child had quietly entered the shop and was thinking to steal a few of them. He was like one of those bloodhounds searching for drugs at airports. Though its eyesight is poor, the bloodhound has a remarkable sense of smell.

One day while the blind man was alone, a man entered the shop and asked to borrow fifty rupees. Our blind man knew it was the blacksmith. Fifty rupees was a considerable sum of money in those days, equivalent to five thousand of today’s rupees. The blind man gave the blacksmith fifty rupees, and asked, “When will you return the money?” The blacksmith said, “What are you talking about? I didn’t borrow any money.”

When father returned, the blind man said, “The blacksmith was in the shop today and borrowed fifty rupees. He now denies borrowing the money. I am absolutely sure it was the blacksmith.” Father said, “Look, forget it. If he denies it, what can we do?” The blind man said, “No. No. No. I will definitely get that money.”

A few days later the blacksmith walked again into the shop, and in front of father the blind man said, “Didn’t you borrow fifty rupees the other day?” The blacksmith said, “No. You didn’t give me any money.” The blind man said, “Fine. If you won’t return the money, I will visit your smithy tomorrow night and take your anvil.” The blacksmith took the threat seriously. He went home to his smithy, put some planks on top of the anvil, and the following night slept there on his bed of planks.

The blind man kept his promise to visit the smithy. And in spite of the blacksmith sleeping on top of the anvil, the blind man raised the bed of planks, probably using coconut husks on either side of the anvil, and ever so gently removed the anvil. The blacksmith didn’t feel any disturbance. He didn’t wake up. The blind man took the anvil away in a gunny sack. And he then dropped the anvil into a deep hole, covered it with more coconut husks, and planted a banana plant on top. The blacksmith awoke following morning to a missing anvil!

The blacksmith was angry. He went to father’s shop, and demanded, “Where is my anvil?” The blind man, feigning innocence, said, “What are you talking about? I didn’t visit your smithy.” Then added, “I am blind. How could a blind man take your anvil, and in the night too? Do what you like. Report me to the police.” The blacksmith went home.

On the day the blacksmith returned to the shop both father and the blind man were working. The blacksmith said to father, “Yes, I took the money and here is your fifty rupees. Please tell your blind man to return my anvil.” The blind man said, “No. I can’t trust you. Put the fifty rupees into his hand. Once the money in the hand of my boss, I will tell you the location of your anvil.” Only after the blacksmith had put the fifty rupees into father’s hand, the blind man said, “I buried your anvil over there, underneath that banana plant.”

I wouldn’t be able to take the anvil.

This is a super-normal ability. People with sound eyesight would find it near impossible to take this anvil.

The blind man’s abhiññās were due to the kamma with which he was born. If he had sound eyesight, I don’t think he would have had abhiññās. Same for the boy who generally behaved in a foolish way. If he had been a typical boy, it’s unlikely he could have predicted the future. There are stories in the commentaries⁴ of the wealthy householders Ananda, Citta, and Sodaya. After their deaths, all three took downward births — Sodaya was born as a dog; Ananda and Citta were born as humans with deformities. All three took downward births, and all three had abhiññās. Kamma is simply there.

Dogs generally have abhiññās. Fifteen years ago, a little boy stayed for two weeks with the owners of the home across the road from the old Kanduboda meditation centre. During the little boy’s brief stay, the owners took in a puppy and the little boy fed and played with it. The little boy was sent away from that home for some reason, and the puppy stayed. That little boy is now a young man, and I met him recently at a funeral.

The young man said, “I returned to the home across the road, and the dog remembered me! My little puppy is now an old dog. He jumped into my lap, and licked and nuzzled. We were so happy to see each other.”

It was fifteen years since the puppy lived briefly with the little boy, and now as an old dog it immediately recognized the young man. The dog showed gratitude, love and affection for the man. It revealed joy. To recognize someone after such a long time is a super ability. If you develop this ability, you will be better than Edgar Cayce.

Edgar Cayce could sleep on a book, and remember its contents in the morning.

Those who fully develop that abhiññā needn't sleep on the book. I knew a man living at the Pokunuwita Hermitage who quickly and effortlessly absorbed the contents of books by looking at them. All the Dhamma in Rerukane Chandavimala's books, this man quickly absorbed.

Until the age of twelve, I too could absorb the contents of a book by looking at it. I did not have to sleep on the book, nor did I need to read it. Though warned not to say anything to anyone about these sorts of experiences, I showed this ability to siblings, and was severely scolded, "You know what's in this book because you studied this book. Don't lie about studying." After twelve years of age, I lost the ability to absorb books by looking at them.

The ability, however, to easily absorb what I read continued for another twenty years. Over by our pond, there is a rock outcrop where monks during Sumathipāla Na Himi's time got together to study. The closest kuṭis, at that time, were over by our new stupa and down by the new office. Sitting on this rock far away from kuṭis we didn't disturb anyone with our reciting of verses and chanting of gathas.

Around the time of my bhikkhu ordination, we were asked to memorize the Dhammapada. I would glance for a few minutes in the early morning at twenty-five verses and then carry on with my daily cleaning and raking and other duties. I memorized verses quickly and without effort. My fellow monks had a different kamma. They took a lot of time and effort to memorize verses.

We got together at the end of the day to recite verses. Many of the monks recited two or three verses. I recited twenty-five. The monks who had with great effort memorized two or three verses did not like that I had easily memorized twenty-five. They were angry and found fault, "You don't show that you're studying, but you remember everything."

Why do some people have super-normal abilities?

Due to past kamma, people are born with super-normal abilities. I remembered those verses because of my mind. Plain and simple. I had that ability because of my birth. It's kamma. If I had a conceit, "I have a superior ability to memorize. I don't need to learn from anybody." — what a serious disadvantage that would be.

I put my good memory to use on the Buddha's teachings. My memory was so good I was being constantly asked what the Buddha said about this or that. I'd be asked where to find something in the suttas, and was able to tell them exactly where to find it. If you were endowed with a similar good memory, you would not be sitting in class with me. You'd be sitting in the clouds!

My good memory led to problems for teachers. In Venerable Sīvalī's class, I expressed ideas at a level of understanding beyond the level of other students. Venerable Sīvalī, wanting all students to learn, sometimes took me by the hand, and put me at the back of the classroom. "You stay here until class is finished." There were times he said, "It's better you don't attend today. When you're here, other students don't get a chance to gain." With fellow students suffering when I attended class I often stayed away, and instead grasped the subject material on my own. Or I went to Venerable Iriyagama Punnarama, another senior monk living at Kanduboda, who taught me separately.

I lost the ability to easily memorize at about thirty years of age. Super-normal abilities are due to the power of kamma with which we are born. They are nothing to be proud of. Do you remember the woman from Lebanon?

Fida. She knows many languages.

When Fida first came to Sri Lanka, she knew eight different languages. Second time, she knew twenty. And the third time, twenty-five including Sinhala. It is not that Fida merely speaks the language, or says a few words. She knows those twenty-five languages with complete grammar, which is an unimaginable super ability. She teaches languages in a French university. I asked, “How did you get this ability?” Fida said, “I don’t know. I think it was due to kamma.” That is how she answered. She only needs to see the alphabet of a language.

After the tsunami Fida called from France to ask me about the people she knew in Sri Lanka. She mentioned all their names, which was difficult because I couldn’t remember those people! She considered ordaining as a ten-precept nun. I said, “Don’t worry about ordaining. You continue teaching.” She persuaded her mother and elder sister to study the Buddha-Dhamma.

What about people who remember their past lives?

The ability to remember past lives comes through either Jaathis Marana or Pubbe Nivasanussathi.

Jaathis Marana is a common ability that people, often the deaf and blind, as well as animals get from their births. For its first few months or years of life a child might have memories of previous lives, and then later on lose that ability. Sodaya, the wealthy householder I mentioned before, had Jaathis Marana in his subsequent life as a dog, as did the wealthy householder Ananda in his following life as a human with deformities.

Pubbe Nivasanussathi is a rare ability that people get through wisdom. Arahats, and those who develop jhānas and get into abhiññās, see their previous lives. Unlike Jaathis Marana, once developed, this super-normal ability isn’t easily lost.

In childhood, Sri Lankan Dhamma-Ruwan remembered living in the city of Anuradhapura during ancient times. He would point out the spot where his kuṭi was located, which was apparently next to Venerable Buddhagosa’s kuṭi. Dhamma-Ruwan, as a child, chanted from memory the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta, and many other suttas. He remembered all those suttas when he was a young child and without any support whatsoever chanted them in the old Sinhala style.

There are videos of Dhamma-Ruwan on YouTube.

Dhamma-Ruwan also remembered being a man called Naviya, who lived at the time of the Buddha’s cremation in Kusinara. Dhamma-Ruwan is now an adult working as a tour guide in Kandy, and has forgotten everything about previous lives.

Edgar Cayce had psychic powers for decades.

I’m a bit suspicious of stories about people with abhiññās. I accept children having the ability to remember past lives and then losing that ability when they are a bit older. And I don’t doubt that Edgar Cayce had Jaathis Marana for decades, which is a much longer time than the children who have this ability for a few months or a few years. Edgar Cayce was special in that way. There is some truth in these stories of children and people like Edgar Cayce.

However, when stories about people with super-normal abilities go public in books or on the Internet, the abilities are exaggerated and embellished. For example, if an older child, way beyond his or her first few months or years of life, is remembering details of past lives, I start wondering about the story. I suspect adults are coaching the child. Suspicion is my problem, possibly an illness inside of me. Buddha told the Kalamas,

“Don’t accept anything unless you know it for yourself.” I feel like throwing away most of these stories about people with super-normal abilities.

What do I need to take to my heart from these stories?

Due to the nature of kamma committed, various types of beings — men and women with deformities, men and women without deformities, animals, fools, the blind, the deaf, the mentally or physically disabled, dogs, children, etc. — are born with a variety of abhiññās. Take to heart that this is how the kamma acts on different beings, and take that these super normal abilities are not great achievements. They’re not for envy nor for conceit.

In the days of ancient Burma a layman, by the name of Abhiññā Upasaka, often helped with the construction of large temples. Abhiññā Upasaka had the super-normal ability to move the heavy stone blocks used in the new temples. He also had the ability to travel from Rangoon to Mandalay in a few minutes. Once again, note that his super abilities were due to the very powerful kamma he had committed in the past. Nowadays, we don’t find such people.

I have spoken enough about this topic.

Theruwān Saranai. Suwapath Weava.

2013 Sumathipāla Na Himi Senasun Arana

¹ Aṅguttara Nikāya v. 159 Udayi Sutta about Udayin

<http://www.accesstoinight.org/canon/anguttara/an5-159.html>

² By not holding to fixed views, the pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision, being freed from all sense desires, is not born again into this world.

³ SN 22.88

⁴ You can also find their stories in the Salayatana Saṃyutta of the Saṃyutta Nikāya.