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—Ajahn Amaro, abbot of Abhayagiri Monastery

Beyond Mindfulness

I N P L A I N E N G L I S H



an introductory guide to
DEEPER STATES OF MEDITATION

Bhante Henepola Gunaratana
author of *Mindfulness in Plain English*

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**BEYOND MINDFULNESS
IN PLAIN ENGLISH**

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Beyond Mindfulness

I N P L A I N E N G L I S H

*an introductory guide to
deeper states of meditation*

Bhante Henepola Gunaratana

edited by John Peddicord



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Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| <i>Preface</i> | vii |
| 1 The Concentration Path | 1 |
| 2 Concentration and the Jhanas | 11 |
| 3 Getting Ready for Jhana Meditation | 23 |
| 4 Wishing the Best for Yourself and Others | 41 |
| 5 Breath Meditation | 59 |
| 6 Why Can't We Concentrate Strongly Right Now? | 69 |
| 7 The Purpose of Practice | 85 |
| 8 The Jhana States | 103 |
| 9 Access Concentration | 111 |
| 10 The First Jhana | 121 |
| 11 The Second and Third Jhanas | 141 |
| 12 The Fourth Jhana | 153 |
| 13 The Immaterial Jhanas | 169 |
| 14 The Supramundane Jhanas | 179 |
| | |
| <i>Glossary</i> | 189 |
| <i>Further and Recommended Reading</i> | 205 |
| <i>Index</i> | 207 |
| <i>About the Author</i> | 219 |
| <i>About Wisdom Publications</i> | 221 |



Preface

Many teachers brought insight meditation, *vipassana*, to the West in the 1970s, and it proved to become very popular. A part of *vipassana* is the “mindfulness” practice that has come to such prominence today. In the 1980s, many students wanted to read a clear introduction to the practice, but most of the books they could find tended to be scholarly and not very accessible to laypeople. And thus, I wrote *Mindfulness in Plain English*, a how-to book on mindfulness technique and its underlying principles. That book, like this one, was written for ordinary people in straightforward language.

While the words *mindfulness* and even *vipassana* have grown increasingly common and the practice itself has received lots of attention, deep concentration meditation, *shamatha*, seems to have received less. In fact, it was widely considered a kind of meditators’ Olympics, a pursuit suited only to extraordinary beings who lived in caves or monasteries, far beyond the ken of “normal people,” folks with busy daily lives.

In the first decade of this century, interest seems to be turning toward the concentration path. And that is a good thing, because it is truly a parallel yet complementary path to insight meditation, to mindfulness. The two are intertwined and support one another. Over the last two millennia, these two paths were codified and refined as parallel paths for a very good reason: they both work, and they work

best together. In fact, the two are really one. In truth, the Buddha did not teach shamatha and vipassana as separate systems. The Buddha gave us one meditation path, one set of tools for becoming free from suffering.

This book is intended to serve as a clearly comprehensible meditators' handbook, laying out the path of concentration meditation in a fashion as close to step-by-step as possible. Also, this book assumes you have read *Mindfulness In Plain English* or something similar, that you have begun to cultivate a mindfulness practice, and that you are now ready to take the next step—beyond mindfulness.

One note about the structure of this book: throughout it (and especially where talking in detail about the jhanas), I have offered a number of quotations from the canon of Pali suttas, our best record of what it is the Buddha himself taught. Since this is not an academic work, we have not used endnotes. Nonetheless, I'd like to acknowledge the many fine translators whose work I've drawn on in this volume: Bhikkhu Bodhi, Nyanaponika Maha Thera, Bhikkhu Nanamoli, John D. Ireland, and Gil Fronsdal. Additional there are a few translations which are my own, and several that come from the *Visuddhimagga* by Buddhaghosa, translated by Bhikkhu Nanamoli.

And one final note: one of the essential parts of any study is the meaning of the basic terms. There is an extensive and detailed glossary of terms at the back of the book. Please make use of this glossary as you read. Indeed, you can get a very fine review of the material in this book just by reading the glossary.

I am profoundly grateful to John Peddicord for the generous gifts of his time and patience. This book, like *Mindfulness in Plain English*, could not have come into being without his extensive hard work in its development.

I am also thankful to Josh Bartok of Wisdom Publications for making many valuable suggestions to complete the work. Others who contributed their time and effort include Barry Boyce, Brenda Rosen, Fran Oropeza, Bhante Rahula, Bhante Buddharakita, and Bikkhuni Sobhana. I am grateful to all of you.

Bhante Henepola Gunaratana

CHAPTER 1



The Concentration Path

HOW MUCH FAITH DO YOU NEED?

Though Buddhism is quite different from most religions, and is in some ways more akin to a kind of practical philosophy, the practices and teachings we will be exploring do come from a religious context, namely from Theravadan Buddhism. All you need to do is render the hindrances dormant. All religion depends on some kind of faith, which at heart is nothing more than the willingness to accept provisionally something without yet having proved or verified it for oneself. And this is true with this material as well. But you don't have to be a Buddhist, in any religious sense whatsoever, to gain absorption concentration. Anybody can do it.

So, how much faith do you need? Do you need to convert to Buddhism? Do you need to abandon the tradition in which you were raised or the ideals to which you have deep commitment? Do you need to cast aside anything that your intellect or understanding of the world tells you is true?

Absolutely not. You can retain your current frame of reference and accept only what you are prepared to accept, a piece at time, and only what you in fact find helpful. Yet you do need *some* faith.

You need the same kind of faith that you need to read a good novel

or conduct a scientific experiment. You need “a willing suspension of disbelief.” I invite you to, as an experiment, put any automatic rejection you may have on hold long enough to see if this path works for you, to see if you yourself can verify what generations of people just like you have verified for millennia.

That temporary suspension of disbelief is all you need here—but even that is not easy. Our conditioned preconceptions are deep and often unconscious. We frequently find ourselves rejecting something without really inspecting that judgment, without even knowing that we have made a judgment. And indeed, this is one of the beauties of the concentration path that we’ll be exploring together. It trains us to look at our own minds, to know when we are judging and simply reacting. Then we can decide how much of that instantaneous reaction we wish to accept. You are completely in control of that process.

There is, of course, a snag. You need to be able to suspend your disbelief deeply enough and long enough to give concentration meditation a real, honest, best-effort try, and the deep results are not instantaneous. Do not expect that you can give this a half-hearted effort and two weeks later the heavens will open and the golden sunbeam of inspiration will pour down upon your head. This will almost certainly lead to disappointment.

We are dealing with the deepest forces in the mind, and epiphany is seldom immediate.

WHY DEEP CONCENTRATION IS IMPORTANT

There is no concentration without wisdom, no wisdom without concentration. One who has both concentration and wisdom is close to peace and emancipation.

The wisdom referred to in this passage is of two varieties. First, there is ordinary wisdom, the kind that can be expressed in words, the kind we know with our ordinary minds. Then there is the wisdom of knowing things at the deepest level, a knowing beyond words and concepts. This book presents you with wisdom of the first kind so that you can seek and find the higher wisdom on your own.

To seek this deep understanding we must quest into the basic nature of the mind itself. In the following passage from the Pali scriptures, the Buddha speaks to his primary disciples and explains the nature of the mind, what makes it ill, and what we have to do to correct that.

This mind, O monks, is luminous, but it is corrupted by adventitious defilements. The uninstructed worldling does not understand this as it really is. Therefore, for him, there is no mental development.

This mind, O monks, is luminous, but it is free from adventitious defilements. The instructed noble disciple understands this as it really is. Therefore, for him, there is mental development.

In this passage, “*This mind*” is mentioned twice, once for the “uninstructed worldling” and once for the “instructed noble disciple.” Yet whether we are ordinary people or advanced meditators, we all have the same kind of mind. The deep mind is constant and luminous, but its light is not light as we ordinarily understand it. The mind, by its very nature, is not dark, murky, or turbulent. In its essential character, it has light; it is bright, filled with a shining, open, non-conceptual intelligence and a deep tranquility.

But all of us have something that keeps it from shining properly. A few of us succeed in removing what is referred to above as

“adventitious defilements”—obscurations not inherent to the mind’s true nature—and gain “mental development.” In the sutta above, “mental development” refers to the deep concentration described in this book. Buddha says that the mind is luminous, but that uninstructed people do not know this. They do not know it, in short, because they do not practice concentration, and they do not practice concentration because they do not know that there is a pure and luminous mind to be experienced.

To achieve concentration we must remove something, and the class of things we must remove are called “defilements.” A “defilement” is a corruption, an adulteration, or a contaminant. It is something that muddies the mind. But it is also like a kind of mental toxin. It makes the mind sick. It gives rise to much suffering. But fortunately, these defilements are “adventitious,” added from the outside, not part of the deep mind’s basic structure.

So: these “adventitious defilements” are qualities of mind we must remove. To attain the benefits of mental development, we must learn what they are and how to get rid of them. This removal operates by cultivating mindfulness and leads to seeing the “luminous” character of the mind.

Sounds interesting, right?

It is.

Sounds like something good to do, right?

It is.

But it is tricky. There are lots of pitfalls along the way and there is plenty to know. But you’re holding the right book!

FOLLOWING THE BUDDHA’S EXAMPLE

After his enlightenment, the Buddha went to Banares and delivered his first discourse to a group of disciples known as the Five Ascetics.

These men knew him well. Indeed, they had been practicing self-mortification with him for six long years—until the Buddha realized the shortcoming of the ascetic path and set out toward the Middle Way. As he approached the Five Ascetics, they did not pay him any special respect. They simply called him “friend,” just as they had when he was one of them. They did not think he was anybody special. They did not know that he had attained enlightenment.

The Buddha told them of his attainments and that they might now learn from him; he told them outright that he had, in fact, attained enlightenment. They did not believe him. Seeing their skepticism, the Buddha asked them a question:

“Bhikkhus, have I ever said to you before that I had attained enlightenment?” “No, sir.” “So long bhikkhus, as my knowledge and vision of these Four Noble Truths, as they really are, in their three phases and twelve aspects, was not thoroughly purified, I did not claim to have awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment.”

The Buddha was forthright. He knew who he was and what had happened to him. *The Four Noble Truths* are the cornerstone of all his teaching. Each is understood and practiced in three phases. That constitutes what are called the twelve aspects. The three phases are theory, practice, and realization. You must first understand something as a *theory*. Then you put it into *practice* so that you actually experience it taking place. Then you *realize*, that is to say “make real,” the result. That is the process by which one verifies a theory as reality. In this usage, the word *realization* means both “understanding” and “final attainment.”

The Buddha employed this three-phase method when he uncovered the Four Noble Truths:

The First Noble Truth is that suffering exists. The Buddha knew that suffering was real before he saw it deeply. That is the theory. Actually experiencing the nature of suffering was the Buddha's practice. From his own meditation practice he came to know that suffering is real life and that it should be understood. The Buddha experienced suffering at all conceivable levels. And he learned how to work to overcome it. Finally, the Buddha's realization became perfected. He knew he could end his suffering—and he did it.

The Second Noble Truth is that suffering has a specific cause. The Buddha understood the causes of suffering, exactly as they are, as a theory. His prior practice had led him to this intellectual understanding, but he had not yet realized it fully, experientially. When he did, the Buddha understood that the cause of suffering can be eliminated by eradicating its causes, by ripping it out by the roots. That was the Buddha's practice. He actually did what he said should be done. He attacked the issue at its fundamental layer by eradicating the underlying causes. When he eliminated the causes of suffering fully, the Buddha gained his freedom. That constituted his realization.

The Third Noble Truth is that suffering actually does cease. In theory, the Buddha knew that there is an end to suffering somewhere. As he put this theory into *practice*, he understood that the end of suffering should be attained. He gained the full result of the cessation of suffering as his realization.

The Fourth Noble Truth is that there is a path that leads to the end of suffering. First the Buddha figured out in theory that the path exists. He figured out the steps he needed to take to gain liberation. He put the theory into practice in his own life. And as a result, he was able to clarify the path to liberation as his realization.

The point here is simple. You need to really understand each point of what you are doing, actually *put each step into practice* and actually personally *see the full results* within your own mind. Nothing less

will do the job—the ultimate job, the job of becoming free from suffering. Yet this kind of liberation requires full commitment, much work and much patience, and taking the process all the way to perfect realization.

The Buddha gave us the Dhamma, his teachings, so that we can practice. He himself gained the knowledge from his own practice. He did not just come up with an idea, rush out and tell it to the world when it was still just a theory. He waited until he had it all, the theory, the practice, and the full realization. The Buddha gave us a beautiful plan, just the way an architect draws a plan for a building. And, just as builders must diligently follow an architect's careful plans in order to bring the building into being, we too must follow the Buddha's plan to bring liberation into being.

The Buddha gave us a really good, detailed plan. You need to follow it exactly. Other people propose other plans—from the Buddha's time right down to the twenty-first century—but they may not work; they have not been tested by generation after generation for two thousand years.

The Buddha's plan even includes a guarantee: If you follow the instructions given in these discourses exactly, you can attain full enlightenment in as few as seven days. If you cannot get rid of all your defilements, you will attain at least the third stage of enlightenment within seven years.

It's like an extended warranty. Of course, there are a few extra clauses and requirements in the contract, a few ways you can, regrettably, void the warranty. In order to for warranty to be valid, you must:

- Have faith and place that faith in the Buddha, who is free from illness and afflictions.
- Have adequate health and be able to bear the strain of striving.

- Be honest and sincere. Show yourself as you actually are to the teacher and your companions in the holy life.
- Be energetic in abandoning unhealthy states of mind and behavior and in undertaking healthy states.
- Be unfaltering, launching your effort with firmness and persevering doggedly in cultivating wholesome states of mind.
- Be wise. Possess wisdom regarding the rising and disappearance of all phenomena that is noble and penetrative and leads to the complete destruction of suffering.

This book will give you the theory, piece by piece, for how to do all those things. The practice and the realization are up to you. The Buddha reached this perfection of realization of the Four Noble Truths and attained enlightenment by combining concentration and mindfulness in perfect balance.

You can do the same.

THE JHANA ROADMAP

Traveling along the concentration path takes practice. We begin right here, in the world as we know it through our physical senses and our conceptual thinking. If you envision the concentration path as a roadmap, you could say that we all start in pretty much the same geographical region, but each in a slightly different location. That is because we are different personalities and we have accumulated different proportions of the “defilements” that need to be removed through our efforts. We start by performing slightly different cleansing actions, putting the accent on whatever is holding us back the most. Then as we go, our paths converge. What we are doing becomes more and more similar until we are traveling pretty much the same road.

The beginning of the path lies in identifying and deactivating a class of things called *hindrances*. They are the gross aspects of our negative mental functioning and we can spot them easily. To do this we attain and move through special meditative states called the *jhanas*. I'll introduce these in more detail in the next chapter, but for our purposes here it's sufficient to note that in the higher jhanas we temporarily neutralize a class of things called the *fetters*. These are the more subtle factors in the mind that give rise to the hindrances.

Once we have temporarily removed the roadblocks, concentration becomes strong. Then we point it at certain very fruitful objects and look for the characteristics of those objects that lead to freedom.

This is not really as much of a 1-2-3 operation as it sounds. In fact we are doing many of these steps together. Success in each area permits further development in the other areas.

Way down the road, ever-strengthening concentration drops us suddenly into a new landscape. The world of the senses and thinking recedes and we experience four successive stages of joy, happiness, and ever-more subtle kinds of experience. These are the *material jhana* states. They are still on the map of our ordinary world, but just barely.

After that come four more stages that have almost nothing whatever to do with the world we know right now, through a mind that has not yet experienced such special meditative states. These are the *immaterial jhanas*. They are pretty much off the map of reality as we experience it now.

After that come states called the *supramundane jhanas*. They are, in an important way, clean off the continent of the familiar.

This is the road we will cover together in coming chapters.

CHAPTER 2



Concentration and the Jhanas

Concentration is a gathering together of all the positive forces of the mind and tightly focusing them into an intense beam. Mastering concentration means learning to aim that beam and keep it directed where we want it. This kind of concentration is strong and energetic, yet gentle, and it does not wander away. Building concentration is primarily a matter of removing certain mental factors that hinder its application. We then learn to point the beam at the right things, the really fruitful things within the mind. When we study these things carefully, they cease to bind us and we become free. Concentration, along with awareness, allows the mind to look at itself, to examine its own workings, to find and dissolve the things that impede its natural flow.

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

We move toward concentration slowly, primarily by weakening certain bothersome factors in the mind and then putting them “in suspension.” These things to be weakened are just little things, really—things like terror and anxiety and rage and greed and shame. Just little habits of the mind that are so deeply embedded we think they are natural, that they belong there, that they are somehow *right*, somehow accurate and appropriate responses to the world. Even

further, we think they *are* us; we believe they are somehow embedded in our basic nature and we *identify* with them.

These kinds of things are the basic ways we live, the only way we know how to perceive the world. And we think we absolutely *need* them to survive in the world, that someone who did not think his way through everything would have to be foolish, that someone who was not driven by emotion would have to be a soulless robot at best, and dead at worst.

But all these obscurations and hindrances are just habits. We can learn about them and learn certain skills that put them to sleep for a while. Then, while the hindrances are sleeping, we wakefully can experience directly the shining, joyous, luminous nature of the basic mind that lies below.

When we have experienced how the mind really is, underneath all the mental junk we carry, we can begin to bring pieces of that luminous calm back into our daily lives. Those pieces allow us to carry further the work of undermining the habits we want to remove. This allows deeper concentration, which allows more bliss to seep into our lives. This in turn allows deeper understanding of the habits, which then weakens them further.

And so it goes. It is an upward spiral into peace and joy and wisdom.

But we have to start *here*, right where we are now.

WHAT ARE THE JHANAS?

The heart of this book is a guide to the jhanas. The jhanas are states of mental function that can be reached through deep concentration meditation. They are beyond the operation of the ordinary, conceptual mind, the mind with which you are reading this book right now. For most of us, this conceptual functioning is all we have ever known

and the only thing we can conceptualize. Right now, it's unlikely we can even imagine what it would be like to be beyond thinking, beyond sensory perception, and beyond our enslavement to emotion. This is because the level of the mind that is trying to do the imagining is made up solely of sensing and thinking and emoting. And that is all we may know. Yet the jhanas lie beyond all that. They are challenging to describe because the only words we know are pinned to these concepts, sense impressions, and emotions that have us mesmerized.

The word *jhana* derives from *jha* (from the Sanskrit *dyai*), meaning to “burn,” “suppress,” or “absorb.” What it means in experience is difficult to express. Generally it is translated into English as “a deeply concentrated meditative state” or “absorptive concentration” or even just “absorption.”

Translating *jhana* as “absorption” can be misleading, however. You can be absorbed in anything—paying your taxes, reading a novel, or plotting revenge, just to name a few such things. But that is not *jhana*. The word “absorption” can also connote that the mind becomes like a rock or a vegetable, without any feeling, awareness, or consciousness. When you are totally absorbed in the subject of your meditation, when you merge with or become one with the subject, you are completely unaware. That too is not *jhana*, at least not what Buddhism considers “right *jhana*.” In right *jhana*, you may be unaware of the outside world, but you are completely aware of what is going on within.

Right *jhana* is a balanced state of mind where numerous wholesome mental factors work together in harmony. In unison, they make the mind calm, relaxed, serene, peaceful, smooth, soft, pliable, bright, and equanimous. In that state of mind, mindfulness, effort, concentration, and understanding are consolidated. All these factors work together as a team.

And since there is no concentration without wisdom, nor wisdom without concentration, jhana plays a very important role in meditation practice.

RIGHT CONCENTRATION AND WRONG CONCENTRATION

Right concentration is awake and aware. Mindfulness and clear comprehension are its hallmarks. The mind may be paying no attention to the exterior world, but it knows exactly what is going on within the state of jhana. It recognizes the wholesome mental factors of jhana, without processing them in words, and it knows what they are and what they mean. Mindfulness is the precursor to right concentration. Jhana comes about through restraint of the hindrances. You must have mindfulness to recognize that a hindrance is present in the mind so that you can overcome it. Mindfulness *before* jhana carries over into mindfulness *within* jhana. In addition to mindfulness, clarity, purity, faith, attention, and equanimity must be present in right concentration.

Wrong concentration is absorption concentration without mindfulness. It is dangerous, because you may become attached to the jhanic state. If you realize that what you are doing is wrong concentration, you should come out of it as quickly as possible. The habit is alluring and deepens easily. It is best not to attain wrong concentration at all.

How do you know your concentration is wrong concentration? One indication is that you lose all feeling. There is still feeling in right jhana. It is subtle, but it is present. You lose all feeling only when you have attained the highest jhana known as the attainment of “cessation of perception and feelings.” Until such time you certainly have feelings and perceptions.

There are false states in which it appears that you have attained

this level. If, when you sit to meditate, your body becomes relaxed and peaceful, you lose the sensation of your breath, you lose the sensations of your body, you cannot hear anything—you should realize that these are sure signs of heading toward sleepiness, not toward the bright wakefulness of jhana. In a moment you will be snoring away, figuratively if not literally too. If you don't feel anything at all, you are not in right concentration.

You can stay in such incorrect absorptions for quite a long time.

Not only Alarakalam has faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. I too have faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom.

The Buddha said this to Alarakalam and repeated it to Uddakaramaputta. These two men were his former teachers. They had faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom, but not the right kind.

What is the difference between the right kind and the wrong kind? His teachers' qualities were not based on right understanding. They had a strong faith in their own tradition. They had faith in joining their soul with the creator. They used their effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom toward realizing this goal. These are goals that promote a further sense of self and therefore more clinging and more suffering. Therefore their faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom are considered to be of the wrong type.

Ordinarily, when the mind is not concentrated or gains wrong concentration, the notion of self arises. The Buddha's former teachers got stuck in this problem. And this was the breaking-away point for the Buddha. He had been going from place to place and from teacher to teacher in search of truth. He ended up with Alarakalam and Uddakaramaputta. Both of them taught him to meditate and gain

the highest immaterial jhana. Fortunately for all us, he decided for himself that more was possible.

These two highly attained meditation teachers could not proceed beyond the highest level of immaterial jhanic concentration into complete liberation. Their concentration did not have right mindfulness or right understanding. They thought what they saw was an entity, a soul, a self, which they thought was eternal, everlasting, imperishable, immutable, and permanent. Right mindfulness would have shown them the truth of selflessness. Concentration without right mindfulness and right understanding is wrong concentration.

CONCENTRATION AND MINDFULNESS

There is an essential relationship between concentration and mindfulness practice. Mindfulness is the prerequisite and the basis of concentration. Concentration is developed and strengthened through “serenity [and] nonconfusion, and mindful reflection upon them.” Stated somewhat simplistically, you develop concentration through mindful reflection within a serene and unconfused state of mind. And what are you mindful of? You are mindful of the state itself, the very fact that it is serene and unconfused. As jhana practice is developed, mindfulness gradually increases.

Mindfulness is used to develop your concentration and it is used within the concentrated states to lead to liberation. The most important results of right concentration are the four mundane jhanas, without which right concentration is not complete. Right effort and right mindfulness join together to allow right concentration to reach completion. It is this kind of right concentration that shows things as they really are.

Once you see things as they really are, you become disenchanted

with the world of suffering and with suffering itself. This disillusionment with suffering thins down desire and some amount of dispassion arises. Withdrawn from passion, the mind is liberated from desire. This leads to experiencing the bliss of emancipation. Right concentration and right mindfulness always grow together. One cannot be separated from the other.

Both concentration and mindfulness must work together to see things as they really are. One without the other is not strong enough to break the shell of ignorance and penetrate the truth. You may start with concentration and gain jhana, and then use the concentration to purify insight or mindfulness to see things as they are. Or, you may start with mindfulness, then gain concentration to purify mindfulness, so that you can use this purified mindfulness to see things as they really are.

CLEAR COMPREHENSION

Clear comprehension means remaining fully awake and conscious in the midst of any activity, everything your body is doing, and everything you are perceiving. It is a turned-within monitoring of everything going on in the mind and body. Clear comprehension requires “bare attention” (“bare” in the sense of stripped down or nothing added over top) to assure that you are mindful of the right things and mindful in the right way. It is a quality-control factor that monitors what is being noticed and how the noticing is taking place.

You must direct this full, clear, bare attention especially to four things: *The purpose of concentration*: You do it for liberation through seeing the *anicca* (pronounced “ah-NI-chah”; impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering), and *anatta* (no-fixed-self/selfless nature) of all we experience (we will explore these three “marks of existence” in much more detail in chapter 7). You make mindful effort to grasp the

purpose of gaining concentration. You are trying to gain concentration in order to understand things as they really are. You are not doing it for pleasure or mental or psychic power.

The suitability of your concentration practice: Are you carrying out your concentration in the right way, paying attention in a mindful way without greed, hatred, and delusion? Or are you dwelling on unwholesome objects and feeding the hindrances? You make mindful effort to understand that all your preparatory works for gaining concentration should be correct to achieve your goal. Many things are necessary for the practice to succeed and you must make them all work for you.

The domain of concentration: What are you concentrating on? The proper domain of your concentration is the four objects given in the “four foundations of mindfulness”—specifically, mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of feelings, mindfulness of consciousness, and mindfulness of mental objects. You will learn more about these points in chapter 10. Your domain in gaining concentration is the particular subject of meditation that you have selected to focus your mind upon until finally the mind gains concentration.

The non-delusion of right concentration as opposed to wrong concentration: Are you actually seeing what is there—impermanence, suffering, and selflessness? Is your attention bright, alert, and penetrating the veils of illusion? Or are you seeing what appear to be solid, enduring things with the potential to make you permanently happy or sad?

In truth, the value of clear comprehension goes beyond just the jhanas, you must bring clear comprehension to everything you do. Eat mindfully with clear comprehension; drink, walk, sit, lie down, and answer the call of nature the same way. Mindfully and with clear comprehension, wear your clothes, work, drive and attend to traffic safety,

talk, be silent, write, cook, wash dishes. Do it all completely awake to the doing. Try to know everything going on in the mind and body.

These activities, performed with mindfulness and clear comprehension, prepare your mind to attain jhana. When you are truly ready, you attain it without difficulty.

THE BENEFITS OF JHANA

Some teachers say that the jhanas are unnecessary, perhaps that they are rather like playthings for advanced meditators. It may be technically true that some can attain final release from craving, delusion, and suffering without jhanic meditation, but there are many benefits to achieving the jhanas.

First, there is the incredible peace and joy you experience. That feeling is wonderful in itself, and you also bring some of that back with you into your daily life. The vast calm of the jhanas begins to pervade your daily existence.

Even more important is their encouragement to the rest of your practice. The jhanas taste like liberation, a total freedom from all the mental and emotional woes that plague us. But the jhanas themselves are *not* that total freedom; they are temporary states that eventually end, and when they do then your normal world and the suffering-causing way you relate to it creeps back in. But still, they give you the absolute assurance that more is possible, that *your* mind too holds the seeds of complete freedom; through the jhanas you can be assured experientially that liberation is not just a theory, it is not something that could maybe happen to other people but never happen to *you*. In this way, attaining the jhanas gives you incredible energy and encouragement for your practice.

The jhanas teach you the true, strong concentration that is essential for vipassana, the path of insight meditation. The jhanas,

especially the fourth jhana (which we will explore in detail in chapter 12), can be used to see impermanence, suffering, and selflessness. Seeing this true nature of reality is the goal of meditation and the jhanas can be used in the service of that goal.

THE POTENTIAL PITFALLS OF JHANA

It's important to know that there are, in fact, certain “dangers” associated with incorrect practice of the jhanas, and a prudent person should be fully informed of the hazards and take them seriously. Here are the two main dangers:

A practitioner of jhana can get “trapped” in jhanic ecstasy.

A practitioner of jhana can build pride around the attainment.

These must be taken seriously. The ego can pervert and co-opt *anything*—even the Buddha's path to liberation—to its own selfish purposes.

Ecstasy is the prime goal of many non-Buddhist contemplative systems. You concentrate on something—an image, a scripture, a sacred stone—and you flow into it. The barrier between self and other dissolves and you become one with your object of contemplation. The result is ecstasy. Then the meditation ends and you are back to the same old you, in your same old life, and same old struggles. That hurts. So you do it again. And again. And again and again and again.

Buddhist meditation is aimed at a goal beyond that—a piercing into the truth of your own existence that dispels the illusion and gives you total, permanent freedom. It is a bit like a railroad track. There is a well-defined track that leads to full emancipation. Incorrect jhana, jhana without mindfulness, can lure you off the track and into a dead-end cul-de-sac. The challenge comes from the fact that this cul-de-sac is in a very attractive location. You can sit there

forever enjoying the view. After all, what could possibly be better than profound ecstasy? The answer, of course, is a lasting liberation that frees you from all suffering, not just for the brief period you are maintaining your ecstatic state.

The second danger is also perilous. The jhana states are rare accomplishments. When we attain them we begin to conceptualize ourselves as very special people. “Ah, look how well I am doing! I am becoming a really advanced meditator. Those other people cannot do this. I am *special*. I am Becoming Enlightened!” Some of this may, in fact, be true to a greater or lesser degree. You *are* special. And you *are* becoming an advanced meditator. You are also falling into an ego trap that will stall your progress and create discouragement for everyone around you.

You must take these cautions seriously! The ego is subtle and clever. You can fall into these traps without knowing you are doing so. You can engage in these harmful ways of being with the full conviction that you are *not* doing so!

This is where the teacher enters the picture, someone who has walked the full path her- or himself, and can shepherd the process and keep you from fooling yourself too badly. The value of a true teacher, especially in the middle and later stages of jhana practice, cannot be overstated.

Do please seek one out.

CHAPTER 3



Getting Ready for Jhana Meditation

The Pali literature mentions certain preliminaries for meditation—though in an important way they should not be considered preliminary at all. For most of us this will be our fulltime occupation for quite some time to come.

Our ability to concentrate is hindered at present because our minds are filled with distractions. They are so common and so constant that we think this condition is normal, that it is the way we really are. We think that it is just “the human condition” and that nothing can be done about it. Yet, although it is the current condition of most human minds, it can be changed. A great number of marvelous minds have done it, and they have laid out a series of principles and steps by which we can do it too.

You cannot attain jhana without peace of mind. You cannot have peace without a calm and settled life. You must pave the way with decent behavior and a certain degree of non-involvement in the hectic and alluring things all around you. In this chapter, we'll explore the way to live the kind of settled life that can be a foundation for jhana practice.

MORALITY

The first preliminary is practicing morality. This is the most steady and durable foundation for Buddhist spiritual practice. But Buddhist morality does not mean following rules blindly; there are not a series of *Thou Shalt Nots*. Even so with understanding and determination, you must follow moral and ethical principles. Determination alone does not produce jhana—although you absolutely do need determination to remove obstacles while preparing for the attainment of jhana.

You must apply a *fourfold effort* to get rid of unwholesome habitual practices that hamper your attainment of jhana: With unremitting mindful effort, you try to prevent the formation of any harmful habits that are not currently present. You make the same kind of effort to overcome the unhealthy, harmful habits you already have. You cultivate new, beneficial, wholesome habits that you don't yet have. With the same firm determination, you maintain these new positive habits and perfect them.

Gradually, you build momentum with wholesome thoughts, words, and deeds. When you are mindful and really make an effort to build this momentum, the mind turns naturally toward peace. You find yourself looking for a suitable place and time to develop jhana. You seek out the right posture, subject, and environment.

When you begin the jhana meditation practice, you avoid anything not conducive to gaining concentration. On the cushion, you avoid the hindrances, the reactions that would pull you away from your meditation subject. Off the cushion, you practice the same skills by avoiding the thoughts, words, and deeds that perpetuate the hindrances.

The simplest and most basic moral practice for laypeople is the five precepts. You have to enact two sides of each precept.

One side is to abstain from: killing; taking anything that is not

freely given; engaging in any misconduct with regard to sense pleasures; speaking falsely; taking intoxicants.

The other side is to practice the seven forms of virtuous conduct: friendliness; compassion; generosity; truthfulness; appreciative joy (taking joy in others' good fortune and good qualities); maintaining a sober state of mind; equanimity.

You must apply energy to beginning your program, continuing it and never giving up. You cannot attain jhana without a sense of peace and contentment with your life as it is. Striving to make your life radically other than it actually and presently is will interfere with steady movement toward jhana. Such striving is a form of living for the imagined future; jhana grows out of living in the now. You have to find your present conditions suitable and sufficient or you will always be yearning. You must be content with your food, clothing, and lodging. You need to find contentment in all the situations that arise in your life.

Meditators find from their own experience that, when they practice meditation following moral and ethical principles, their greed, hatred, and delusion slowly diminish. As your meditation makes progress, you see the advantage of morality. Seeing this result, you do not become proud and praise yourself or disparage others. With a humble and impartial mind, you simply recognize that a clean mind—with mindfulness, friendliness, appreciative joy, and equanimity—does make progress in gaining concentration more easily than a mind that is unclean, impure, biased, unsteady, and disturbed.

CONTENTMENT

Contentment means not becoming too greedy for food, clothing, shelter, medicine, or anything else beyond all your other basic requisites. The life of one who is content is very easy. The practice of

meditation also becomes easy. This Dhamma practice, the practice of jhanas, is for one who is content, not one who is fundamentally discontent.

Practicing mindfulness with clear comprehension makes the mind fully engaged in all the activities you do. You practice mindfulness and clear comprehension while walking forward, backward, looking around, standing, sitting, wearing clothes, and any other mental and physical activities. Everything is included—every action, every thought. Then there is no room in the mind to think of acquiring any material thing or situation. The mind withdraws from the very thought of obtaining something. This is contentment. You need nothing more than the moment provides.

Contentment is being satisfied with wholesome thoughts, words, and deeds. You are content with your friends, relatives, and family members. You are content with your food and eat moderately. You are content with your clothes. You acquire them and wear them moderately. You do everything moderately without being greedy, hateful, or confused. One who is full of contentment feels full all the time. One who is discontented feels something is missing all the time.

One day Mahapajapati Gotami, the Buddha's stepmother, asked him to give her some very brief instruction on Dhamma. One of the things he taught was to cultivate contentment:

Contentment is the highest wealth. What use is there for a well if there is water everywhere? When craving's root is severed, what should one go about seeking?

RESTRAINING THE SENSES

Observing moral and ethical principles is essential for the successful practice of jhana. This includes restraining the senses.

You should restrain your senses and avoid unwholesome food, unwholesome speech, and unwholesome activities. Restraint of the senses does not mean shutting your eyes when visual objects are present in front of you, or plugging your ears when you hear something. It does not require pinching your nose when there is something to smell. You can still taste your food and touch physical objects.

If shutting off the senses to prevent perceiving any sensory object made a mind clean and pure, then the blind and deaf would have clean and pure minds all the time! Unfortunately, this is not so. We are all human.

In this context, restraint means that, when sensory objects present themselves to your senses, you should focus in a certain way. As a diligent meditator, when you meet a person, do not focus the mind with distorted perception on the general signs of gender, or on the detailed signs of color, height, eyes, ears, nose, lips, hair, legs, or hands. Do not use the mind to enhance or fasten on the person's movements, the sound of the voice, the way the person speaks, looks, or walks.

There are beautiful things all around, beautiful visual objects, sweet sounds, sweet smells, delicious tastes, delightful touches, and compelling thoughts. They are the objects of craving. Our six senses are like hungry animals. They always look for something outside us to consume.

So what do you do instead? You pay mindful attention to your own body and simply mentally note the arising of sense contact. The existence of objects in the world does not cause craving to arise in your mind until you encounter them and reflect on them in an unwise manner.

Craving is one of the most powerful of the unwholesome forces of the mind. It is nourished by the injudicious consideration of these objects. The principal cause of suffering is craving. Once craving is

eliminated, much suffering will be eliminated. Still more suffering will be eliminated once ignorance is eliminated. Both craving and ignorance are equally powerful defilements that cause suffering.

In the famous teaching called the “Fire Sermon,” the Buddha likens craving to fire. All our senses are on fire, burning with the flames of craving. When one starts meditation, one begins by overcoming covetousness and disappointment. There is a difference between covetousness and greed or desire. With greed and desire, we want things for ourselves. In covetousness, if others have something, we think we should have it.

We begin the practice by overcoming this envious craving and our disappointment in what the world gives us. Here “the world” means our *internal* world. We watch the mind attempting to glue onto something or hold on to something, and we keep that in mindful reflection until it fades away.

SECLUSION

A suitable place for the practice of jhana meditation is strongly recommended. Since we cannot find a place without any noise at all we should find a place with very little noise, with very little sound, and by and large with an absence of human beings, suitable to hide away from human beings and conducive for the practice of solitude.

For jhana practice—for the periods of time you set aside to really do this work—it is very important to leave behind all work, all people, all meetings, all working on new construction or repairing old buildings, all office work, and all family concerns. In other words, all your normal worries and unease. This is physical separation and it is essential. And this the value of a retreat, of physical seclusion.

You need mental seclusion too. Don’t carry all your mental baggage with you on retreat. Don’t bring your work, your office, mental

games, business plans, internal wars and fights with you when you go away. Say goodbye to all of them for a while. Tell them, kindly but firmly, “Don’t trouble me now. I will take care of you later on. I know you will be there when I come back.”

Another form of seclusion separation is called *liberation from attachment*. This is a real luxury. Gone to a solitary place, you must also separate from the very habit of grasping and clinging. Only then is jhana attainment possible. This kind of mental seclusion is pretty difficult to achieve but absolutely necessary to attain jhana. However, the benefits are enormous. When you don’t put energy into thinking about the things that seem so very important, they do gradually disappear from your mind. On the other hand, whatever you often do with your mind, whatever you think about frequently and mentally grab on to, stays in the mind, coming back again and again.

In order to give your mind a little rest, you need to “forget” things deliberately from time to time. This is like draining all the energy from your batteries in order to fully recharge them. When you drain all the energy from the battery of your electronic device and recharge it, the battery lasts longer. Give some rest to your mind. Cease to think about all those duties and responsibilities for a little while. Give the mind full rest by not thinking about anything. When you practice jhana, the mind becomes fresh, clean, pure, and strong. Then you can use that mind to practice vipassana even better. And to take care of your life even more skillfully.

You don’t have to go to a cave to attain seclusion. You can do it in a group if all the group members agree to create the physical atmosphere that promotes the state. This is exactly what we do when we attend a retreat. But you don’t even need to do that.

You might, for instance, set up a place and time where you can be alone, silent, and undisturbed for at least one hour, a place that is like your own private cave or retreat center. Maybe it is just a closet or a

corner of your bedroom. It does not need to be fancy or ornate. It just needs to be somewhere special, withdrawn from the world. It is someplace that you reserve for meditation only, someplace where you can drop everything you are carrying and just do your practice.

A little altar with a statue of the Buddha and some candles is very common, though, of course, not essential. A little bell to start and end your sessions is nice. It can be ornate or starkly simple. Use whatever really reminds you of your own dedication to the practice.

Be prepared to sit solidly for at least an hour. Even if pain arises, try not to move.

Somebody who is really serious in the practice of jhana meditation should make an effort to practice every single day, several times a day. You cannot gain jhana while driving (nor should you try!), or while working in your office, attending meetings, or attending a dinner party. You need a quiet time and a quiet place with reasonably comfortable sitting. The only thing that produces that degree of comfort is consistent, frequent practice.

MINDFUL REFLECTION

Before the mind is purified, there are unwholesome tendencies underlying the mind; therefore, greed, hatred, or delusion can arise. You see a form, hear a sound, smell a smell, taste food or drink, and there is an emotional reaction deep in the mind. You touch a tangible object, and there is a reaction. When you even think of some previously conceived image of one of these objects, craving, hatred, or delusion usually arise.

These sensory objects are neither beautiful nor ugly in their own nature. They are simply neutral sensory objects. But when you perceive something with the notion that it is pleasant, yearning arises. If you perceive something with the notion that it is ugly, resentment

arises. If your mind is deluded by something's presence, delusion dominates the mind.

Suppose you wear colored glasses and look at objects. You see them according to the color of the lenses you are wearing. If you wear blue lenses, for instance, you see objects as blue. Instead simply look at each arising phenomenon with no lenses at all. Just be mindful of the fact that you have just seen an impermanent object, that you heard a voice, smelled a scent, or saw the movement of a person. Having completed this mindful awareness of the sensory object, you return to your subject of meditation. You should be mindful of what is seen purely as something seen, and what is heard only as something heard. You must simply note anything smelled purely as an instance of smelling, something tasted only as a pure tasting sensation. Something touched is experienced as just a touching. Thoughts and concepts are perceived as just mental objects perceived.

See objects, hear sounds, smell smells, taste food and drink, touch tangible things, and think thoughts *mindfully*, with mindful reflection. Mindful reflection means reflecting on something without greed, hatred, and delusion. It means relating to your environment without notions of "I," "me," and "mine." It means thinking about what is happening without thoughts like, "I am this way or that way," "I love or hate or care nothing about this or that."

When seeing an object, mindfully reflect that it arises depending on a particular sense and a particular object. When the eye, for instance, meets the object you are looking at, there is contact. Then there is a split-second of pure wordless recognition and a particular type of consciousness arises. Depending on the combination of these three—senses, consciousness, and contact—other things arise: feeling, perception, deciding, and thinking.

Then come concepts, labeling, feeling, thought, craving, and detailed thinking. Then comes deliberation or perhaps more elaborate

thinking. All of this arises spontaneously and in progression. Most of it is without any conscious will on your part. But all of these are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless. Because they are impermanent, they have already vanished before you blink your eyes, before you can take a single inhalation or exhalation.

Seeing these things is called mindful reflection. When your concentration becomes pure, sharp, clear, and steady, it can penetrate all these veils of distortion and show you things as they really are.

Then the mind opens to penetrate reality more deeply.

PRACTICING THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

Undisciplined meditators find it very difficult to gain concentration. Discipline, or *shila*, both physical and mental, is absolutely necessary. All those who have attained jhana have practiced shila. There are two sets of disciplinary rules of conduct. One is for the monastic community and the other is for the lay community. The monastic rules are relatively difficult for laypeople to practice. For this reason the Buddha has recommended a stepped-down version for them. It is outlined in the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Noble Eightfold Path constitutes the backbone of how we need to train ourselves in order to attain liberation. The eight steps create the container within which meditation can do its job. The eight steps can be divided into three overarching categories—moral conduct, right concentration, and wisdom. Jhana is included in the concentration group. The eight steps of the Noble Eightfold Path must all be in place in your life in order to create the peaceful, settled atmosphere you need to cultivate jhana.

RIGHT VIEW. Jhana must be pursued and practiced within the context of an overall understanding of what the Buddhist path

is all about. Without that view, use of jhana can foster the purposes of ego, rather than eroding them. All use of jhana must be liberation-oriented and supported by mindfulness.

RIGHT RESOLVE. If you do not have firm and clear intentions of what you should be doing and why, you will accomplish nothing or get the wrong result. Three types of right resolve are considered essential. They are the intentions *toward* renunciation (letting go) and *away from* ill will and harm.

RIGHT SPEECH. You need to set up habits of speech conducive to your practice. Speaking is important. Every word you say colors your mind. Things like lying and frittering away your time talking about trifles will not help you at all. And moreover, speech can reinforce habits of mind: speaking coarsely and unkindly, for instance, actually strengthens the hindrances of anger and aversion.

RIGHT ACTION. What we do comes back to us. What we put out into the world creates the emotional environment in which we live. Robbing a bank is clearly not conducive to the depth of calm and tranquility necessary to achieve jhana. Even eating your neighbor's apple agitates the mind. Tiny misdeeds accumulate to create enough tension in the mind to keep you from the goal.

RIGHT LIVELIHOOD. Making your living as a thief or a drug dealer obviously does not promote peace, but those are only gross examples. Even small, dubious business practices disturb the mind. Does your job harm someone or something, even indirectly? You either carry the tension and guilt of your

deeds or you deaden yourself to them. Neither will allow you to achieve jhana. Bringing care and consideration to the means by which you make your livelihood is essential.

RIGHT EFFORT. Obtaining jhana is not easy. We have to make certain efforts to create the conditions that allow it to manifest. We must honestly generate an aspiration to achieve it or it won't happen. Then we have to actually try. Then, once we have it, we have to foster it, preserve it, and maintain it. This is a matter of genuine intention and doing some real work.

RIGHT MINDFULNESS. Mindfulness cannot become strong without concentration. Concentration cannot become strong without mindfulness. To achieve jhana we keep the hindrances dormant. It is mindfulness that notices the nature of the content of each moment of hindrance so that we can surmount it.

RIGHT CONCENTRATION. Right concentration is using the mind in the direction of jhana. You don't need to succeed at that in order to make progress on the Path, but the benefits of doing so are considerable.

Anyone who is interested in practicing meditation to attain jhana should, without exception, practice these ethical principles.

But don't wait until your morality is perfect to start the practice for attaining jhana. When you meditate with imperfect morality, soon you will realize that it is very difficult to attain concentration. One hindrance or another gets in your way. Then you make mindful effort to understand and overcome that hindrance. You repeat this trial and error method and one day you will attain jhana. Yet it takes time and patience and the willingness to simply start again each time you slip.

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness, as we have seen, is your first and most important tool for starting to build the foundation of jhana and jhana itself. You must make a mindful effort to understand unwholesome things as unwholesome and wholesome things as wholesome. You must make a mindful effort to overcome the unwholesome and to cultivate every wholesome thought, word, and deed that you can. When you practice jhana, you must make mindful effort to understand what you are doing, to prepare the mind to attain jhana.

All of us from time to time encounter people who “push our buttons.” Without mindfulness, we respond automatically with anger or resentment. With mindfulness, we can watch how our mind responds to certain words and actions. Just as you do on the cushion, you can watch the arising of attachment and aversion. Mindfulness is like a safety net that cushions you against unwholesome action. Mindfulness gives you time. Time gives you choices. Choices, skillfully made, lead to freedom. You don’t have to be swept away by your feeling. You can respond with wisdom and kindness rather than habit and reactivity.

When you engage in your activities mindfully, you realize for yourself that certain thoughts, like greed, hatred, and confusion, trouble your mind and you don’t gain even a little concentration, let alone jhanic concentration. Then, from your own experience, you come to know, “Well, I need a break from all these negative thoughts.” At that point you deliberately begin to cultivate wholesome and positive thoughts.

Since greed and ignorance work as a team to generate suffering, you cannot eliminate suffering without eliminating both greed and ignorance. The Buddha pointed out how the practice of meditation can bring an end to your suffering and allow you to experience the bliss of peace.

If you respond to insults or angry words with mindfulness, you can look closely at the whole situation. Perhaps the person who harmed you was not paying mindful attention to what he or she was saying. Perhaps he or she did not mean to hurt you. The person might have said what he or she said totally innocently or inadvertently. Perhaps you were not in the right mood at the time the words were spoken. Perhaps you did not hear the words clearly or you misunderstood the context.

It is also important to really consider carefully what that person is saying. If you respond with anger, you will not hear the message behind the words. Perhaps that person was pointing out something you needed to hear. Actually listen to what the person is saying and do not get angry while doing so. Anger opens your mouth and seals your ears.

Development of mindfulness helps us relate to others with loving-friendliness. On the cushion, you watch your mind as liking and disliking arise. You teach yourself to relax your mind when such thoughts arise. You learn to see attachment and aversion as momentary states and you learn to let them go. Meditation helps you look at the world in a new light and gives you a way out of anger. The deeper you go in your practice, the more skills you develop. The ultimate use for mindfulness is seeing impermanence in action. Everything else is a stepping-stone toward that goal.

Mindfulness is always present in right jhana or indeed in any wholesome activity. So, all the way along the Path, you should endeavor to do everything with mindfulness. Then it becomes a habit. It becomes simply the way the mind functions most of the time. That way, when you attain jhana, mindfulness will be present in your jhana.

THE FIVE SPIRITUAL FACULTIES

The five spiritual faculties are *mindfulness*, *wisdom*, *energy*, *faith*, and *concentration*. In truth, you cannot practice right concentration by itself in the absence of the other faculties.

When you try to gain *concentration*, hindrances arise. In order to overcome hindrances you must use *mindfulness*. Whatever method you employ to overcome hindrances must be employed with mindfulness to make it work. One such method, the cultivation of loving-friendliness, is explored in the next chapter.

The *energy* factor is needed too. It boosts your practice. When you practice mindfulness and concentration, they work well only if you have adequate energy. Without energy you will be sluggish and lazy. You will not be able to make much progress.

Faith, as we have seen, is also an important factor. You will not have any initiative to practice if you don't have faith in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. In this context this means trusting that someone (the Buddha) has indeed attained what you yourself are trying to attain, that there exists a roadmap (the Dhamma) that will help you attain it, and that there are people (the Sangha) who can guide you and accompany you on the path to liberation.

Wisdom comes into play too. You must be wise enough to really understand why you are launching yourself on this path. What are your real goals? Which ones do you really believe in and which are just something you read in a book or heard from someone else?

All the five spiritual faculties must work together in order for you to proceed smoothly with the practice.

People sometimes ask me to tell them more about what I mean by this word "wisdom." Here is one answer that I give.

As you keep paying total undivided attention to everything you

experience in your body, feelings, perceptions, volitional formations, and consciousness, all you can honestly see with your mental eye is that everything is constantly changing. Certain things you experience are pleasant; certain things are unpleasant; and certain things are neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant. But all of them, without any exception, are constantly changing.

Your ordinary state of mind is not aware of these changes. So, in spite of their changes, your mind, even without your awareness, does three things: clings to the pleasant; rejects the unpleasant; and gets sucked into the neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant.

This last is especially important. This neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant business is tricky. It is ordinary, everyday experience. It is so familiar that you think this neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant state is the experience of your soul or permanent self, the “real me.”

This clinging to the pleasant, rejecting the unpleasant, and confusing the neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant experiences with “reality” is a naturally built-in system.

This clinging, rejecting, and getting confused changes too. With meditation your intuition tells you that this repetition of changing—arising and passing away of all your experiences, this pleasant, unpleasant, and neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant—this is not satisfactory, not a happy situation.

Seeing this frustrating situation, your mind gets tired of all experience, even the pleasant ones. Then your mind lets go of clinging to any pleasant experience; it lets go of any unpleasant experience; it lets go of any neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant experience.

Then you experience peace within yourself. Then your mind becomes free from greed, hate, and delusion. This particular skill, power, or faculty, or the strength of liberating the mind from these three poisons, three weapons, or three kinds of fire is what Buddhists called true wisdom.

Each of the six senses is sometimes called “ocean.” Each ocean is full of dangers of sharks, demons, waves of greed, hatred, and delusion. The clear vision of using them skillfully is wisdom. The Buddha summarizes this like this:

One who has crossed this ocean so hard to cross, with its dangers of sharks, demons, waves, the knowledge-master who has lived the holy life, reached the world’s end, is called one gone beyond.