

PRACTISING IN THE WORLD*

The retreat we have just experienced is over. This evening you will all be going home: back to your monasteries, to other places, to other talks, or to another retreat.

What actually are we doing? How do we make use of all the momentum we've built up on this retreat? The first thing to mention is that you need to be very careful when you leave this retreat, drive home and go out into the world. Sometimes you just don't realize how cool and quiet you have become on a retreat such as this. Everybody here is travelling in the same direction, so we haven't much to compare ourselves with.

Sometimes you think that you haven't really got anywhere on the retreat. But I guarantee you that because of your cool, calm, peaceful perspective, when you go outside these doors and out into the traffic, the noise and the restlessness will seem to be absolute madness.

I encourage people before they drive home, to get into their cars, and drive up and down the small back streets for a few minutes, to accustom themselves to the world again. It's sometimes very hard to respond when someone tries to cut in front of you, or when the traffic lights suddenly change to red, and you have to put your foot on the brake very quickly. Instead of putting your foot on the brake you might just say, "Let go, let go, let go, no control". So please, look after yourselves when you leave; allow yourselves time to actually get yourself back into the world again.

* A talk given to lay people by Ajahn Brahm on 26th April 2003 at the end of a nine day retreat.

Don't be Heedless

I remember the first time I went on a retreat. It was actually many, many years ago, at a quasi-Tibetan monastery in the North of Scotland. I was just meditating and doing my thing. Everyone else in that place was doing the same, so I didn't really notice anything until I left the retreat, and went back to London. It was really shocking how noisy people were, how frantic they were, how loudly they spoke, and how agitatedly they moved. I hadn't realized that I had slowed down so much. So, one of the first things you recognise when you go out into the world is that now you have something to compare yourself with. I guarantee you'll find that you have changed enormously, much more than you would have expected.

Be gentle with yourself when you get back home. It's so easy to throw away all the peace, all the tranquillity, and all the wisdom that you have gained on a retreat such as this. It's such a shame that sometimes we take those qualities for granted. We think that once we develop these wonderful qualities of: stillness, silence, peace, inner contentment, and freedom, they are always going to be there. And because of that we don't actually keep hold of them, we don't guard them. The Four Right Efforts¹ need to be brought to mind. The Fourth Effort is perhaps the most important, as if the Buddha left the best to the last. That Fourth Right Effort is that the meditator strives, puts forth energy, and applies the mind to keep, develop, maintain and help to grow, any wholesome, skilful, thoughts which arise in the mind. You look after them and maintain them, so that they can grow stronger. Sometimes, you do all of the work to keep out the

bad stuff, you do all the work to cultivate, and bring up the good stuff, but as soon as it's there, you get heedless and allow it to disappear.

Because of the laws of impermanence, suffering and non-self, and because of defilements in the world, goodness is a very fragile. It needs to be nurtured and kept safe. Otherwise it can too easily be overcome and lost, just from the destructive forces in the world. We know that with things like peace and kindness, love and freedom, it is so easy for them to get lost in the world because we are heedless. That is why the Buddha said, to not be heedless, to be careful and guard the good states, the kind states, the lovely states, which you have developed.

When you leave this retreat, see if you can guard this very precious jewel that someone has given you. It is very precious. No matter how far you have gone in your meditation, at least you've got somewhere. I guarantee that. I know that. You've gotten a state of peace, a state of freedom. If it's just a taste of freedom – even though that taste of freedom might seem to be only the light at the end of a long tunnel – you've got closer to it than you normally would have. You've seen it for yourself. Yes, there is such a thing as freedom, peace, and contentment, and that's where happiness truly lies. If you cultivate it, if you keep and maintain it as long as possible, then that peace, that freedom, that wisdom inside the heart, will look after you in the lay life.

Our Real Home

In the lay life it's as if you go out there and work very hard, you do all your chores and duties, but you've always got a place to go home to. However, Ajahn Chah said "Our real home is inner peace". Your home is not the house that you live in, or the *Kuti*, which you stay in if you are a monk or *anagārika*. Your true home is inside of yourself. You can see that in your meditation. Sometimes you sit here and go inside your mind, and you're as happy as can be. You don't want anything. You can really rest and relax, and feel comfortable. A home is supposed to be, a place of comfort, a place where you can relax. At home you can let go, you don't have to struggle with the world. There is nothing asked of you or demanded of you; you can just really relax and be at peace. That's what we build our homes for.

Unfortunately many homes are places of strife and struggle, and even worse, of turmoil. They're not real homes. What we mean by the ideal home, the real home, is the refuge of the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*, which we take deep inside of ourselves. A refuge means: a place of peace, a place of freedom from danger, a place of security, a place where there is no measuring anymore. Home is a place where you can just be yourself, be at peace, be at ease, be nothing, just empty and free.

The purpose of meditation is to get you in touch with your real home, the place of stillness inside of you. You realize that your true home is carried around with you all the time. But how do we get in there? The door of your heart is open to you no matter what you do. Freedom, love, compassion, just being still, not controlling, letting go, is the door into that home inside of you. You don't go there by measuring and by judging.

You go there by quietness and not thinking. So you come through the door of your inner home where you can reside at will, at any time.

If you know that home, that place, it means when you do come out of there into the world, where you work hard, strive and struggle for the sake of other beings; at least you've got a place to come back to, a refuge, a home. When we don't have that refuge, that home, we don't know how to escape from the turmoil of life.

In the *suttas*, the Buddha said you should know the gratification, the danger and the escape from these worldly things. You can understand the gratification; you can understand the danger of the worldly ways, but please know how to escape as well. I have taught you the escape; it is going to the inner home. So once you know that inner home and are familiar with it, you can always go back there anytime. It's a place of rest, and the real refuge of the Buddha, *Dhamma* and *Sangha*. One who sees the *Dhamma* sees the Buddha, it's not Gotama the Buddha who passed away in *Nibbāna* thousands of years ago. One sees the *Dhamma* inside one's heart, that state of freedom, that knowing, that awakening, that liberation, which is the real refuge. That's what connects you and all the others to the *Ariyas* in the world; it is the '*Ariya Sangha* inside the heart'. That's why it's a refuge, because it's deep within. You know it's a refuge because whatever you are doing outside in the world, you can always come home and put your feet up as it were. We can come home to have a cup of tea and to really relax in the refuge of our real home.

When you go out of your home every morning – I don't mean your house I mean your inner home – you go out to do your duties and your work. But you know you've always got a place to come back to, a place of rest and peace. This is what we do in the world. I go to Sydney this afternoon. I go to work over there but I take my inner home with me. At any time if you feel tired or stressed, you can go back into your inner home. It's a marvellous resource. Sometimes, as a senior monk, you do a great deal, and you get very tired physically. What you need to do then is just go into your inner home and rest there for awhile. When you come out you can be so bright, so peaceful and so clear.

That's where the *Dhamma* comes from, from the inner home. I remember once, many years ago, I went to Canberra to give some talks. Canberra is a very cold and damp place. Not having been there before, of course, I didn't take all the proper cold weather gear. After only a couple of days I got a terrible cold. The people in Canberra insisted on taking me up to visit a monastery in Bundanoon, just for the day. The people in this monastery insisted on keeping me there until really late, and when they said good bye, they made a whole ceremony of saying good bye. By the time I got back to Canberra where I was supposed to give a talk, I hadn't washed, hadn't shaved, and I only had about a quarter of an hour to drink a cup of tea. I had to give a public talk and I felt absolutely terrible. My eyes were streaming; my nose was running; I was sneezing; I was coughing. I had a very bad cold. But I had to give a talk. I remember starting that talk, and I was absolutely hopeless. I just couldn't keep a train of thought going before I'd sneeze and my eyes would be watering. People felt sorry for me, so I said, "Okay, let's stop the talk and meditate for half an hour". We meditated for half an hour and I went into my inner

home. When I came out afterwards I was told that I gave a really brilliant talk. My nose stopped running. I stopped sneezing. My eyes stopped watering, and I was as happy as could be. That's the resource that you have available no matter what's happening. Sometimes I have to deal with bodily stress, and even worldly stress; but my resource is my inner home. When you go out into the world you have a place, a resource, a refuge. You can use that refuge skilfully.

A Sacred Place

I keep encouraging all Buddhists to have a place in their houses, if not a room, at least a corner of their house, which is their shrine room, their religious room. I sometimes see how big people's bathrooms are. Sometimes they're made of marble, and they have very fancy taps and faucets. What are they used for? People use that place to clean up their bodies!

People also have these amazing kitchens, and lounge rooms, and games rooms, and playrooms, and TV rooms, and dining rooms, and huge, huge bedrooms, with on-suites. But very few houses have got a spiritual room. A room set aside just for the cultivation of *Dhamma* or religious practice. They don't have a spiritual haven in their house, a place where they're not cleaning their bodies, but they are cleaning their minds. They don't have a place where they're not feeding their stomach, but they are feeding their heart. I think that it is so necessary in today's world, to have a meditation room, a shrine room – just a place of peace and silence.

If you really haven't got a room in your house to do that, ask yourself, "Do I need all these other rooms"? Are they really all that important, an office and all that other stuff? Put the office in a corner of your bedroom, and put your meditation room in your office. What is more important to you? But if you haven't got the room, at least use a corner of some quiet room, a quiet space, where you can put your Buddha statue or your pictures, and your *Dhamma* books. Have that as a sacred space in your house, a place where you can go at any time. After a while by sitting there regularly; chanting there, even reading *Dhamma* books there, it builds up power. and becomes a power spot in your house. A place where you can just sit, because the only thing you ever do there is: to meditate, to chant, to read *Dhamma* books, to quieten down. It becomes psychologically empowered as a place of peace.

I've been teaching in this way for many years now, encouraging people to build these places in their houses, or in the corners of their rooms. People have told me amazing stories of what happens when they have these quiet places. Whenever they get uptight, or tense, or have an argument with their wife, or husband, they just retreat into their quiet corner and sit down to meditate for awhile. It saves many marriages, and so much pain. One family told me once, that their young son and daughter were having an argument, a fight. The son hit the daughter, or something, smacked her one, and instead of smacking him back she ran up into her mother's bedroom, and sat in the sacred spot and meditated for a few minutes. The parents where so impressed, because they had never taught her to do this. She just felt that when she was so disappointed, when she was so afraid, when she was so uptight, that that was the place to go. It's marvellous for your family if you

can have a place like that, so that people in your family; if not yourself, your partner or children, will have a place, a refuge, which reminds them of their inner home.

When you have a place in your house that is a sacred place, make sure you don't use it for anything else. Please, respect the sacredness of that area. Don't use it to listen to the radio or CD's or to write books or anything else. *It's a sacred place*, a place for doing nothing, a place of relaxation. Every where else in the world you have to strive, you have to exert control, you have to do your duties, and do the work that is expected of you. You have to endure silly people telling you to do stupid things. But the fact is that when you go to your little corner, you can be at peace there and let go. It's your little monastery, your little refuge, the 'Vultures Peak' in your house, and that helps enormously. This is a bit of skilful advice for you.

Sometimes we can find a suitable place even when we are not in our own house, even when we are at our place of work. I read recently of one person who did a very skilful thing to be able to meditate at work. This particular person couldn't find a place to meditate. He couldn't sit and meditate in his office, because you know what it's like in the world. You are sitting in your office doing nothing, and someone will come up to you and ask for your help. They will not leave you alone, because everyone is busy and they think you are not doing anything, so you must be free. Not free at peace, but free to help them. "You're not doing anything at the moment; can you give us a hand?" They don't realize that doing nothing by meditating is so important and valuable. People don't respect peace in our society; they think it's copping out. That's why busy people tend to

make other people busy because they don't respect peacefulness. So this man decided that every hour on the hour he would close his eyes and meditate for one minute. It couldn't be *exactly* on the hour, because if there were a telephone conversation, or a meeting with a client, or something, he would just postpone it for a while. But in every hour he would always meditate for one minute. He would close his eyes and sit there at his desk, just being still and enjoying present moment awareness, silence and the breath. That's beautiful. He just had one minute of silence and stillness. It worked so well that people walking past seeing him with his eyes closed thought he was thinking about something, or making a decision.

People didn't know what he was doing. Because it was not for that long, they didn't bother him. He had one minute of peace every hour at work. In his office, nobody knew what he was up to, and he got away with it. Just imagine if you went into the office and sat cross-legged in the corner, your boss would come up and say, "We are not paying you to do that, get back on the computer and work." But that didn't happen. He just took one minute of silence in every hour at his desk; so he was continually resting. After fifty-nine minutes of hard work he took a one-minute break to collect himself, and to be still. This man found that he had a lot more mindfulness for the fifty-nine minutes that followed, and so he got much more done. He was more alert; he perceived the problems quicker, he was actually a much better worker after that one minute of silence.

Good Management

Many years ago when I was in Thailand, I was on a domestic flight, from Ubon to Bangkok. I had been given a copy of the Bangkok Post to read, and in the features section there was an article on the Oriental Hotel in Bangkok. This is a very famous hotel. That year they had won a prize, for the best hotel in the world! The people in Thailand were very, very impressed, and pleased by this great award to one of their hotels. So because of that, all sorts of feature articles were being written about the Oriental Hotel.

The writer of this particular feature article interviewed the manager, and asked him, “Why did your hotel win this great prize this year? What is your secret? Tell us some of the things that you did to make your hotel good enough to win an international prize”. One of the things the manager said he did was that every year he sends each one of his staff – from the porters, and cleaners, to the concierge, the cooks, and the managers – to a monastery for one week to meditate. It’s not time taken off their holidays; it’s at the company’s expense. He was then asked why he did that. The interviewer wanted to know whether he was a fundamentalist Buddhist, wanting to convert all of his staff. “No” he said, and went on to explain that it’s just basic good management. The one-week spent in the monastery meditating means that the staff doesn’t take sick leave so often, and they don’t get so upset with each other. There is no conflict in the workforce, and they are also much more sensitive to the needs of the guests who are staying in the hotel. They are just better people; they are happier people. Managing a hotel, you don’t want the people who are working there to be grumpy all the time; you want the guests to

be met with a smile. You want to see the people happy; they work harder as a result. It is basic good management to send your workers to a meditation retreat once every year.

It's a shame I didn't keep a copy of that article. You could have photocopied it and given it to your boss. Then next year, you could come to this retreat on company time. You could say to your boss, "Can you pay the two hundred and thirty dollars please? It's in your interest!" The point of the story was that the hotel manager valued the results of meditation in daily life. He could actually see it in the prize his hotel won that year. He could see it in the greater efficiency, care and sensitivity of his staff. Whatever line of work you're in, when you have that attitude; it gets done more quickly and with more happiness. Whether its: abbot work, *anagārika* work, mother work, husband work, manager work, or washing up dishes work; whatever you do, you find you are a more efficient person.

When you understand things in this way you can see the connections between the meditation life and the work life. Sometimes, there isn't such a big cut off from one to the other. It is as if in your schizophrenic life, now you're a meditator, now you're a frantic worker. You find that you can work more efficiently with a clear peaceful mind, so that makes meditation valuable. You realize its value, not just for Enlightenment, but in actually getting through life. It means that you do more of it.

The Happiness of Meditation

One of the things that I've always stressed about meditation is the happiness of meditation. It's meant to be fun. It *should* be fun. Last night one of the monks told me a story about Ajahn Mun, which I hadn't heard before. Ajahn Mun was a great Thai Meditation Master. A monk who had spent a long time with him, and knew him very well, said that the Ajahn had a great sense of humour, and laughed a lot, it was a great big laugh, an infectious laugh. I never knew that about Ajahn Mun. But it makes a lot of sense, because that's what *Arahants* do, they laugh a lot and they smile a lot. I know this is a bit cheeky but sometimes they are called 'Ha Ha harahants'. I'm going to get into trouble for that, but I don't care. It was lovely to hear that story.

Happiness is an important thing in meditation. If you get happiness in meditation early on in your practise, you will always want to meditate. It's not a case of getting up in the morning and saying, "Oh, I've got to do my meditation now. I must get this out of the way so that I can go to breakfast." You know how it is? You do your half an hour every day just like taking medicine. It's not like that at all. If you really understand what meditation is, you love doing meditation. You just want to do it. Sometimes you have to get your breakfast out of the way to get to your meditation, or you have to get your work out of the way to get to your meditation. It's just you doing it. You sit on your chair, or your stool, or your cushion, and your mind just leaps towards silence. The Buddha said that when the mind leaps, or jumps, to quietness, to stillness, to non-doing, that's a great stage on the path of wisdom, on the path to Enlightenment.

Hopefully I've conditioned many of you strongly enough for you to realize how beautiful that silence is. So that in moments during your day, when you have nothing to do, your mind leaps towards the opportunity for stillness, instead of trying to fill those gaps up with stupid things, pointless things, which are just mindless distractions. It jumps at the chance; it goes into stillness, steadiness, peace and freedom.

This is the sign of a practitioner, someone who is on the path. This is the sign of someone who has sufficient wisdom so that their mind recognizes what's in its own interest. So that in the mornings, or the evenings, the mind just leaps towards your meditation cushion. Your meditation is not medicinal, not some sort of punishment, not some sort of penance, it's something you just want to do. The reason some people don't go to church if they are Christians, is because it's boring, they don't like to go there. They don't leap up because it's Sunday and say, "Let's go to church, let's go there and listen to a good sermon". It has become boring and cold. That's why people have dropped away from the churches in the West. People will also drop away from meditation quickly, and stop meditating unless they get fun out of it.

So developing fun in your meditation at home and here, wherever you are, is the way of continuing that practice. Little by little, as you continue the practice in the world, keep it up for the sake of fun, for the sake of peace, for the sake of a place of freedom. You've no other choice, you just have to. Some people say, and I understand this very well, because it was the same when I was a lay person, that if you don't meditate for one day, it's like not eating. Your heart feels sick, it's got no strength, and you find yourself

getting grumpy, getting angry, because you are not getting that feed of happiness. It doesn't matter if people tell you that you are addicted to meditation. Great! Be addicted to peace, to happiness. Be addicted to freedom, it's a nice thing to be addicted to.

Some people say you should not attach to these things, and they quote the simile of the raft. The Buddha said that the raft was just for crossing the river from one shore to the other, but that you should not cling onto that raft. (MN 22.13) You have to let go of the raft once you've crossed over to the other shore. But of course you should not throw the raft away in the middle of the river! That's what a lot of people do. So attach to this raft, attach to your meditation, attach to your precepts, and attach to goodness.

Understand from this simile the importance of those peaceful states, the importance of goodness. and then you will get the pay off. Recall the moral precepts. Recall the goodness, the generosity, the kindness, and the selflessness, that you have done throughout the year. Then you will get the pay off in your meditation. The pay off is that beautiful mind. You understand that this beautiful mind is why we keep precepts, why we are generous, why we give, why we give of ourselves, why we forgive others, and why we forgive ourselves. It's all part of *Dana*, all part of giving. It's why we practise loving kindness and give people the benefit of the doubt. We give our happiness and share our merits with others. Why do we do this? We do that because we see that it actually makes this mind so beautiful. You feel it in daily life; you have something inside of you that you feel very, very proud of. It's good to feel proud of goodness.

That Which is Worthy of Praise

Goodness is worthy of praise. Good meditation is worthy of praise, and that's why you should praise yourself. Tell yourself how good meditation is, how wonderful it is. Then you will do it again and again. The mind feeds on praise, feeds on joy. Use that as a skilful means to encourage yourself more, and more, and more. We even have a word in Buddhism, *Sādhu, Sādhu, Sādhu*, well done, well done, well done! You have heard that so many times.

Buddhism is into praise, into encouragement, because it works. So worship that which is worthy of worship. Don't praise foolish people; don't praise sports stars, who win cups, or film stars, or whatever. If someone wins a war, don't praise that sort of stuff. *Praise those who are worthy of praise.* It's not worth praising those worldly qualities. If you've become a millionaire, that's not worthy of praise.

What is worthy of praise? The person who has just given flowers to the shrine, or somebody who has worked so hard on the meditation cushion is worthy of praise. Maybe, it was the first time they have been on a retreat, and they have done so well. That's worthy of praise. Someone who has for the very first time maintained a mind in the present moment, even if just for a while during this whole nine day retreat, that's worthy of praise. Praise that which is worthy of praise. Work at that which is truly workable, and then you encourage yourself, and you encourage good qualities in the world. It means that your meditation becomes strong. Goodness becomes strong. Virtue becomes strong. Not only does it mean that your happiness level rises in life, but it also

means that when you come to a meditation retreat, you've done all of the background work. You come into the retreat not just with an empty hand, but with all these great spiritual qualities, with this great spiritual wealth, with all this goodness that you have done.

Practising Virtue

In the deep meditations, especially the stages of *nimittas* and *Jhānas*, your mind becomes powerful, strong and beautiful. But also *nimittas* come up earlier than expected; they burst through the breath simply because they are just too powerful to ignore. But if *nimittas* don't come, or when they come, they are very weak, that may mean that your mind is not pure enough, not strong enough. The mind is not empowered enough by goodness, by virtue, by purity, by strength. When one realises this, one also realises that one doesn't keep the precepts just to go to heaven. One cannot meditate and just forget the precepts as being a 'cultural accretion' to Buddhism. You don't keep the precepts just because it says so in the scriptures, or because a monk says so. You can see first hand, that one of the reasons why you have to keep these precepts is to have success in your meditation.

When you see that connection at first hand, you also see the importance of not only keeping precepts, but also of actually doing the opposite of violating the precepts. The opposite of killing is helping people, saving peoples lives, and helping their pain by looking after them. Compassion is the opposite of killing. The opposite of stealing is generosity, not just, not taking from others, but also giving to others. The opposite of

adultery is faithful commitment, and keeping your promises. The opposite of lying is being truthful, and speaking kindly to each other. Never saying a word you would not like to have said to yourself. And lastly, the opposite of taking alcohol and drugs that cloud the mind is developing mindfulness, and practising meditation, which clears the mind.

Our practise of virtue is not just avoiding that which is bad; it's also putting forth effort, and doing that which is good. It's an active aspect of our lives, supporting: the community, the Buddhist Society, the monastery, our parents, the elderly, or whatever else we can do. We actually go out there and do something rather than thinking, "Look at me, I'm so good, I don't kill, I don't steal, I don't commit adultery, I don't lie, I don't take alcohol and drugs. I don't speak to anybody. I stay in my little home all by myself all day and all night". But that's not good enough! Is it?

Those of you, who have known me for a long time, know just how busy I have been, especially in the first years of building our monastery in Serpentine. That really was hard work, working all day from early in the morning to late at night, and then washing in the cold lake, with the wind as a chill factor as well. We used to work all day and we hardly slept because we slept outside in the wind. We would wake up in the middle of the night and be awake for the rest of the night. On Friday evenings, we used to go to our small City Centre, in North Perth. I looked forward to that very much, because first of all we could have a hot shower for the first time in the week, and wash all the dirt away, and then we could have a proper sleep and catch up.

It was very hard in those days, and sometimes I thought I was sacrificing my meditation. I thought that I was working too hard, and having no time for myself. Whenever we got back in the evening, we just crashed out until four o'clock in the morning, and then we pulled ourselves out of bed for another days work. It was so hard. I thought I was getting nowhere. But the surprise came when I had a week off. When I sat down to meditate I went straight back again to the beautiful *nimittas*, and I had a beautiful meditation. I couldn't really believe it at first. What's going on? I hadn't been meditating for weeks, for months, not really continuously. I had been trying but only getting very sleepy. But as soon as I had the time, I was right back there again. At the time I didn't really understand why.

Why was it so easy to meditate after such a long period of hard work? Of course, it was because I had been building up the virtue, building up the power of the mind. I was being selfless, giving myself up to one of the greatest acts of good *kamma* in the world – building a monastery. It was a huge act of good *kamma*. I was actually helping, and I was giving it all my effort, I was also making huge amounts of good *kamma*. So when I stopped working that beautiful mind was right there, and it just burst into my consciousness.

I realized then, as I've realized many times since, that you don't lose anything by giving to others. It's not as if you lose your energy, you gain more energy. People sometimes say, "Ajahn Brahm worked so hard on the retreat, and gave two talks a day as well as all

the interviews”. If you count how many hours I gave, it is in fact quite a lot of hours. Actually in the workforce, you probably wouldn’t be expected do as much work as this. Nevertheless, I get so much happiness out of it. If you get happiness out of it then it is good *kamma*, and whenever you do stop, you get into a beautiful space. I love doing these retreats. They are my holiday, because I get beautiful meditations. You’ve got the opportunity to brighten up your mind by giving even more.

***Samādhi* Accompanied by Virtue**

Don’t make too much of the distinction between meditation and the life outside. Make the life outside a support for meditation. Keep your precepts, but also do good things as well. Be of service to the community. Then just start watching the breath and you’ll find these beautiful mind states will come up. Such purity! Such inspiration! Wow! This is so nice, where did that come from? It came from all that selflessness, all that giving, all that pure heartedness. The Buddha said that *samādhi* meditation, when it is empowered and accompanied by virtue is a great fruit, a great benefit. You can understand that when virtue is behind your meditation, and the goodness is strong, then wisdom comes from *samādhi*. It’s the practice that is empowered by wisdom, which leads to the destruction of the outflowings of the mind, and the defilements of being, of ignorance and delusion.

Therefore as a practitioner you should practice virtue, Make it complete. You should practise meditation. Make it complete. You should practice wisdom and make it complete for the sake of Enlightenment. But certainly you can see how virtue supports

samādhi. So living in the world you can practise meditation, by practising its supports, by making sure that you're virtuous and good.

That's how you should take what you've learned on this retreat back out into the world. There are always occasions when you can practise virtue. There is always someone in the office, at home, or someone you meet, who will need your time, who you can care for. Don't think that you are neglecting your meditation. What you are doing is building the supports for meditation, building the supports for freedom, building the supports for *Nibbāna*.

The Buddha said that even monks and nuns should not neglect to make merit, to make *puñña*. When I first heard that I was astounded. I thought at that time that merit was just what lay people did. I thought that traditional Buddhism, going to the temples, offering *dāna*, taking the Five Precepts and doing the chanting, was lay people's stuff. But it's monk stuff as well, it's everybody's stuff. It is empowering the mind, and you will find the fruits of it when you do your meditation. On retreats such as this, you see the big picture. You see how all this meditation, all this virtue, leads to wisdom, to insight and how that leads to real freedom. It leads to freedom from the defilements, freedom from the *āsavas*, the outflows of the mind, freedom from rebirth, and the end of *samsāra*.

Whether you are a monk or a lay person, once you see the problem, once you see what is really happening, then you see where truth, happiness and freedom really lie.

There comes a time when you can't ever forget these teachings, a time when you can't really throw them away. They keep coming back up, again and again and again. A person I knew came to the Buddhist Society in the early days and then they left and didn't practise for three or four years. Then they came back again, and said to me, "You know even though I tried, I could not forget these teachings". You can't put them aside. What has happened is that they have been recorded inside of you, as the recognition of a truth, the recognition of real happiness, and of the path to freedom. It's happened to me and it's also happened to many of you in your meditation, which seems so pure, which promises that freedom. You may not be able to put your finger on it and explain it to yourself all that well, but it's real; it's there.

A Moment of Peace

The first time I meditated was amazing! The first ten minutes of it is etched into my mind forever. It was in the Wordsworth Room in Kings College at Cambridge University in England. Even now, I can recall that room, where for the first time I went to do some meditation. I never got into *Jhānas* or anything like that, but it just felt so good. It felt so peaceful, and from that moment on I was hooked. It is strange how this moment of peace rang so many bells inside me, which shows us that, hang on, this *is* the way to peace. It's the purest thing I have ever seen, this is real freedom.

The Buddha said "Taste the freedom". When you have just a small taste of that freedom, it remains in one's mind forever. One has to develop that, and cultivate it until one doesn't only get the taste, one gets the whole meal. And that meal does its job, filling the

mind with wisdom, and giving full and true liberation. So each one of us – whether we are a monk or a lay person – is on that path to *Nibbāna*. We have already gone too far to stop.

When you've tasted some deeper meditation; you've tasted something that far exceeds the power, the bliss and the freedom of anything else in the world. The mind will incline to that. It has to keep going back, sometimes in fits and starts, revisiting the experience. Sometimes getting lost and not finding the way back there. But it won't be able to give up the struggle. It won't be able to give up the task. It will keep inclining towards *Nibbāna*. The experience will change your life style, little by little. You change your life style to fit the path to *Nibbāna*.

You can't find enough opportunities to help people, or to do generous work, and you look upon it as being a privilege not a chore. If you join a committee it's a privilege. If you help the community in some way, you say, "Thank you for asking me, it's a wonderful thing that I can do this for somebody else". You do good acts and you are generous, because it's such a wonderful thing to do.

In Buddhism it is sometimes said that Stream-winners (*Sotāpanna*) have got to be looked after by the *Sangha*. There was the case once of a family in the time of the Buddha, who were supposed to be Stream-winners, they always gave so much to the *Sangha* on alms round. They were quite poor and they didn't have that much to eat themselves. Lay people started criticising the monks, saying, "It's good that you receive these things, but

those people don't have enough to eat themselves". So the Buddha called a meeting and laid down a rule for that sort of situation. The *Sangha* agreed that in those circumstances they should have compassion for the family, and not be allowed to accept so much from them. Sometimes it is like that when you have so much faith. You think it's much better to give your food to the *Sangha*, than to eat it yourself. It's much better to go hungry. "Please take it. I get so much more happiness from giving, I can eat any day, so please give me the chance to make more merit. Please! Please! Please!"

So the monks had to say, "Now hold on, the Buddha said we can't do this, it comes from the Buddha, so we can't argue about that". That's what happens when we really understand what these things are about. Sometimes you've got to restrain people. I'm talking mostly about those people who would give anything; they would give the shirt off their backs, and the food from their plates. Sometimes they even give their lives. Those people may become poor, but their *nimittas* are just something to behold. Wow! Who cares about being hungry when you've got beautiful *nimittas*? Wow! That's really nice. That's purity. This is actually inspirational merit making, and we need to be inspired like that when we get into *Jhānas*.

Inspirational Emotions

Don't be afraid of the inspirational emotions. If you have the chance to go to the Holy Places in India, or to some of the old monasteries in Sri Lanka, Burma or Thailand, get your money's worth. Get in there and cry your eyes out. Get really inspired. Imagine the Buddha sitting there; imagine Ajahn Chah teaching the monks in the forest in the

early days. Just allow the *piti*, the joy, to come up through the whole body and flow right through you. You get so inspired. People don't know these days how to correctly indulge in the positive emotions, of inspiration, joy and faith. They are called powers, controlling faculties, and they are what really make the meditation buzz along. *It's the fast track to Enlightenment.*

So go to those places and get joy, get inspiration. When you read the *suttas*, or you chant, chant with your heart, not just your mouth. Don't worry about what it sounds like 'outside', be concerned with what it sounds like 'inside', and with where it's coming from. It's great to be able to chant and understand the meaning. You get so high, so beautifully high, and that's a pure emotion. So out there in the world, develop pure emotions and inspirations. They can only be good, and they lead to *Nibbāna*.

Summary and Conclusion

So, these are some practices that you can take out into the world. You can do them any old time. *In particular, there is so much opportunity to do the first two stages of meditation: Present Moment Awareness and Silence.* When you are working at your desk, practise present moment awareness, work silently. You will get so much more done. When you are driving your car turn the radio off. Turn the CD off. Don't even listen to a *Dhamma* talk by Ajahn Brahm. Listen to the silence, because all you would hear anyway is Ajahn Brahm telling you to be quiet. Anyone who really understands would say, "Oh that's right", and just turn it off.

There are so many opportunities in life to actually practice present moment awareness, and the mindfulness of silence. There are so many times and opportunities during the day to let go. Even if you are late for work, sometimes you just can't do anything about it; let go. Worrying about it doesn't get you there any faster. See if you can learn to just be at peace in the world, and try to put these suggestions into your practice. Practise non-controlling, letting go. There are so many opportunities in life. Many times there is nothing you can do. There is no way you can get the aircraft to move faster because you are late. You can't go up to the captain and ask him to go faster, you just can't do that in life, that's why you have to let go. We all have to let go of some things in life, so we might as well start now.

You've learnt how to let go of a lot in this meditation retreat. When you go outside, you've learnt the skill of letting go of things that you can't control. You've done that for all of the retreat, so now you can do it. That really helps you in the world outside.

Things you can't do anything about, just let go. If it's your husband, or your wife, if you can't do anything about them, just let them go. If your children are messing around and you can't do much about them, just let them go. Through your practise, you know the skills of letting go.

With children, you can always use the simile of the water buffalo. At one time in Thailand, a man was taking his water buffalo out to the fields to graze. The water buffalo became very excited and ran off. The man tried to stop him. *Just try stopping a water buffalo.* Think how big a water buffalo is. It's huge, and this was just a small Thai

farmer. He held onto the rope. The rope became twisted around his finger and pulled his finger off! He came into the monastery missing half a finger. Obviously, there was blood everywhere, and quite a lot of pain. The abbot took him to the local hospital and got him patched up. The farmer was okay afterwards. But that was a great metaphor which he gave us. The metaphor was that you are foolish to try to stop a water buffalo; it will just pull your fingers off. Your husband, your wife, your children, and sometimes your mind are like a water buffalo. If you try and stop them, what happens is that something is ‘pulled off’, and you get a lot of pain and suffering. What happens if you do let the water buffalo go? The water buffalo only runs about half a kilometre or so down the road. It doesn’t go that far. It stops and settles itself down, and then you can walk gently up to it and pull it back again. It’s stopped, and it’s easy to control. Sometimes that’s what you need to do with husbands, and wives, and kids. They run off, and then they stop and you can pull them in. Often, the mind is like that in meditation; it’s running off into thoughts and fantasies. Let it go. Don’t let it pull your finger off. Once it’s gone a little way down the road, when it’s stopped and it’s had its little bit of fun, okay now bring it back to the silence.

That’s actually a nice simile for your life. You’re learning how to let go. You can do that in your mind. You can also do that with other things in life, and become a much more peaceful person and a much more efficient manager. You can become: a manager of your husband, a manager of your wife, a manager of your kids, a manager of your accounts, a manager of your life. I often say meditation is like a microcosm of the real

world, if you know how to meditate, you know how to live. If you know how to let go and be at peace, you know everything you need to know about living in the world.

You can live a very happy life, a very beautiful life, even if you want to take it that one step further and become Enlightened. You know how to do that too. *It's the same process only intensified.* So that's what you do out there in the world; don't think it's going to be too much of a transition to be outside. It's going to be a jolt to the system but actually you'll learn to adapt. You can be at peace among the peaceful. You can work with the people who are working, and laugh with those who are laughing. You can be sympathetic to those who are crying, and you have all the resources to help and serve in the world.

I mentioned at the beginning of this retreat that there is no difference between *vipassanā* meditation, and *samatha* meditation. Now I'll also add that there is no difference between the *Bodhisatta* way, and the *Arahant* way. All these are just differences which people make because they don't really understand. The best thing that you can do for the whole world, the best gift you can give to others, is to become Enlightened, so that you can have huge compassion and huge resources of wisdom to share with others. You become Enlightened for your own sake, and for the sake of others. There is no difference between these two ways. People make all these differences. So go out there into the world, and for your own sake become Enlightened, and become Enlightened for the sake of others.

That's the path and that's the way. If you haven't got your 'pay cheque yet', don't worry, it is coming. It might come on Saturday. Leave your address and the postman will come sometime.

I hope you have had a very lovely retreat. There are still a few hours to go. So just be alert, the postman might be knocking soon.

¹ The Four Right Efforts are: (1) Not to let an unwholesome thought arise, which has not yet arisen. (2) Not to let an unwholesome thought continue, which has already arisen. (3) To make a wholesome thought arise, which has not yet arisen. (4) To make a wholesome thought continue, which has already arisen.