



AJAHN JITINDRIYA was born in Australia in 1963. While at art college, she became deeply interested in spiritual questions and the investigation of the nature of perception and consciousness. Several years later, she travelled throughout South-East Asia, India and Europe. Living in England in 1987, she became seriously interested in meditation and the teachings of the Buddha. Feeling a strong connection with the Amaravati community and the teachings of Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Sumedho, she took anagarika ordination in 1988. After living and training in the monasteries in England, a desire to spend more time alone developing the formal practice of meditation led her to Abhayagiri Monastery in California.

Cultivating the Perfections

Ajahn Jitindriya

One thing I've begun to realise more and more is just how long this path to enlightenment actually is! Also, just how much effort, patience and persistence is required if one's journey is really going to culminate in the complete ending of all suffering.

During this time, I've drawn deep inspiration from the teachings of the Thai Masters, Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Maha Boowa. What shines through and is so striking in their example is their deep commitment to realising the Truth and their utter strength of mind in applying the practice — relentless determination and sustained effort.

“This is what it's going to take,” I would say to myself at times, to get through the mass of junk the mind can produce. It seems tirelessly able to re-hash the past and invent all sorts of futures — it truly is the greatest deceiver and trickster of all time. But I'm learning that indeed it also takes time to build one's forces against such deeply ingrained habits.

In cultivating this path one needs to develop skills and qualities that will support and strengthen the mind, so it can probe more deeply into itself, withstand greater pressure from the distractions and buoy itself up during

the more dark and difficult times.

The ten *Paramitas*, or Perfections, provide an essential ‘check list’ for my practice as to what attitude or quality of heart may need developing or reinforcing at any particular time. These ten Paramitas are: Generosity, Virtue, Renunciation, Wisdom, Energy, Patience, Honesty, Determination, Kindness, and Equanimity.

The Buddha brought them to perfection in his ‘pre-Buddha’ journeys as a Bodhisatta — the power of such perfections and purity is what gave him the unshakeability and strength to achieve his final goal.

Fortunately for us, it is not necessary to bring these qualities to complete perfection for the gaining of *Nibbana* (as this is the accomplishment of the Bodhisatta destined for Buddhahood) but we still need to cultivate them as far as we can, if the heart is to find its freedom.

When one reaches an ‘impasse’ at certain times in practice, one can consider these qualities... “Do I need to be a little more patient with myself (or others)?”... “Will a little more kindness help dissolve the obstacle or the hardened fear in the heart?”... “Am I maintaining equanimity?”... “Could my *sila* (moral behaviour) be polished up a little?”... perhaps a certain obstacle is teaching one an important lesson in terms of the fruit of wrong action.

Perhaps we need to renounce something, let go of what we can do without, to enable balance and peace to be restored in the mind.

Using mindfulness, investigation and wisdom one

can find a balance for oneself in this way, to lead one through the difficulties, to lead one onward, or further inward.

“Am I really being honest with myself?”... is a good question to pose at the right time, for we never really like to see ourselves in our more negative or ‘unlikeable’ modes. But in fact, ‘seeing clearly’ isn’t just a matter of taking on board more ‘honest’ perceptions of oneself; rather, it is to see that all perceptions of ‘self’, if grasped at and believed in, distort the truth; creating only more deception and *dukkha*.

The Truth is in seeing the essential instability of all of our self-concepts and sensory experience. This is not to reject these things of the conventional realm, but to see them as transitory and totally unreliable; as fickle and as changeable as the weather. Seen in this light, it is clear that such things can never really be satisfying or lead to satisfaction in any way. How can they be what I am?... for when they are challenged in the light of Dhamma, they dissolve and disappear like a frightened phantom!

As we go more deeply into the practice we come upon those views and assumptions that have hidden in the depths of the psyche for who knows how long. They whisper quietly, but are extremely powerful commanders that direct and control much of our lives. These culprits are masters of disguise and take many forms — but they are the roots of ignorance itself.

The continuance of the practice — in whatever

conditions — works to purify the heart, as we come to see more clearly, with mindfulness and acceptance, just the way things are.

In practising to see clearly the nature of our experience as impermanent, unsatisfactory (or stressful), a certain amount of delusion and dukkha drops away naturally. Insight arises. Other areas come into focus where we see that more skill and effort is required to break the shackles; with wisdom we should develop means that can help us to free ourselves.

So the path unfolds. And though I qualified it earlier as being something that is a ‘long’ process, we must also keep remembering that the practice is always a matter of the present moment — that there is no practice outside of the present moment, so in this sense it is not really a matter of time at all — it’s just about being here, responding to whatever arises with wisdom and compassion.

Of course, it is very important for us to have direction, a ‘guiding star’, and to know our map — but always look where you’re walking, or it’s likely that you’ll never get to where you want to go. Neither will you know where you already are!

