

The Way to Nirvana in This Life

Based on personal experience

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www.thai60.com & www.thai60.net

ISBN 978-616-348-887-9

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First edition, February 2014: 4000 copies

Cover design: Horatanachai Printing Ltd., Part.

Published by: Mr. Somchai Cheevapat

Printed at: Three Lada Ltd., Part., 9/1205 Mool1, Sakaengam Road, Samae Dum sub-district, Bang Khun Thian district, Bangkok 10150, Thailand. Tel. 02 462 0303

Preface

Many people believe nirvana or *nibbana* to be a lofty and inaccessible ideal, not obtainable in this life. One has to go through many lifetimes in order to attain it.

Mistaking nirvana to be a difficult thing to achieve and too far out of reach, one feels rather intimidated to think about it or discuss it. One can only hope to attain it in some future life through the accumulation of merit and by making a wish that one may, by the merit thus accrued, attain the path, the fruit and nirvana in the future. Indeed, such was my understanding and practice in the past.

During the Buddha's time, there were many monks who attained the path, the fruit and nirvana in their own lifetime. They studied and

practiced the four noble truths taught by the Buddha in a correct, proper and consistent manner.

Nirvana as shown in the four noble truths can be a subject of simple contents and easy to understand if we study it as a dharma of the present moment. To study it as a dharma of the present moment means to examine the four noble truths as something that can be verified and substantiated by oneself in the present moment. It is regrettable that many people, Buddhists in particular, have lost a golden opportunity to attain nirvana in this life simply because they do not realize that nirvana as taught by the Buddha is indeed the nirvana for this very life.

To attain nirvana in this life, first of all one has to understand the four noble truths and practice the dharma according to the noble eightfold path – correctly, fully and consistently in a proper manner.

For a very long period of time, I used to study and practice the dharma in accordance with traditional beliefs, but once I changed the method of my study and viewed the four noble truths as a dharma for the present moment – this being a study of realities through direct investigation and personal experience as in scientific study and research – I began, as a result, to clearly understand the four noble truths as they truly are.

This book is intended to bring you the Buddha's teaching in such a way as he actually taught it. Indeed, this means the four noble truths, as well as a method of dharma practice that can be evaluated in daily experiences, which will lead to the attainment of nirvana in this very life.

For best results, readers are advised to verify and evaluate for themselves the validity of all facts in each and every sentence of this book without blindly believing the writer. This method will certainly lead to wisdom and the realization of dharma. One will gain a clear

understanding of the four noble truths as they truly are and attain nirvana in this very life according to each and every individual's ability.

To easily get into the contents of this book, it is therefore advisable that one takes time to go through the book word by word, page by page, in an appropriate order without skipping any part of the book as one goes along trying and testing the validity of each sentence all the while.

If one has not yet arrived at a clear and correct understanding, one should read the book repeatedly until a thorough knowledge of the four noble truths is obtained.

Sometimes, a reader may assume that he has clearly understood but he could be wrong. For this reason, the study and the practice of dharma should be made an ongoing lifelong undertaking by all of us.

Having obtained the "know-how" from this book, tried it out in daily life and experienced the result, one should go over the book again, maybe several times, to dig more deeply into details and further increase one's knowledge from the investigation of the dharma.

After the reader has sufficiently understood the abridged and present-moment version of the four noble truths as outlined in this book, he should continue to study a more complete version of the four noble truths to further enhance his confidence in the dharma.

Let the readers be reassured: This book will help you clearly understand the four noble truths as they truly are; it will help you attain nirvana in this very life and in a manner befitting each and every individual's ability according to the causal conditions of each individual.

Ekachai Chulacharitta

February, 2014

Acknowledgements

This book was originally written in Thai. The warm reception it received from the reading public encouraged the author to bring out its English version, despite his health and many engagements. In this connection, the author would like to express his special thanks and appreciation to Dr. Sunthorn Plamintr, himself a long-time practitioner of the dharma, for his kind assistance and encouragement and to Mr. Robert Pitch for patiently going through the first draft of the manuscript and for his valuable suggestions.

May there be peace on earth. And may all attain nirvana.

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Nirvana in This Very Life

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

The term nirvana or *nibbana* as used in the time of the Buddha actually refers to numerous different meanings. But the meaning of nirvana which the Buddha realized and taught to the world is one that all of us should have in our possession. To that end we must learn how to employ our knowledge and understanding of the four noble truths, in an effort to practice the dharma correctly, fully and continually. Such spiritual practice will certainly enable us to attain the bliss of nirvana in a direct, practical and sustainable way.

The Buddha's teaching of the four noble truths is a result of his insight into the dharma. He successfully arrived at this perfect understanding after six long years of strenuous and sustained effort, seeking and investigating the dharma in its absolute totality. We may therefore say that the knowledge of the four noble truths realized by the Buddha is intrinsically scientific – not merely a kind of blind faith or superstitious belief at all.

Such understanding of the four noble truths can be put into good use to develop one's mind so one becomes a "noble person" beginning with the stage of *sotapanna* and progressively culminating in *arahatship*. It also helps one to attain nirvana, which is the end of suffering, in this life.

The four noble truths are described and elaborated on in various ways and in many instances throughout the Tripitaka (the canonical collection of the Buddha's teaching). Accordingly, nirvana should be understood as something that all people could attain in this life. There is no need to wait until the next life. The kind of nirvana presented in this little book is the nirvana which is found in the four noble truths. It is the dharma of the present moment, easy to understand, convenient to practice and capable of an expedient process of evaluation.

When engaging oneself in the study of the four noble truths, the normal course of study one would take invariably begins with the quest for an understanding of suffering (*dukkha*). Then one proceeds to deal with that which causes suffering (*samudaya*), followed by the end of suffering (*nirodha*) and finally the path of practice leading to the end of suffering (*magga*). This well-established sequence is more or less a prototype. However, as this book deals primarily with nirvana, we feel it will not be out of place to begin our discussion with nirvana as the subject of predominant significance. Some may view this arrangement as lacking proper sequential continuity, not strictly following the first-thing-first principle as normally observed. Nevertheless, in our treatment of the subjects of suffering, the cause of suffering and the pathway which leads to the end of suffering, we will deal with them in a proper and traditional order. Hopefully, as we proceed to study them in greater detail the contents of these subjects as well as their mutual relation and relevance will help to bring out a more comprehensive understanding of nirvana as the end of suffering (*nirodha*) making it an even more readily accessible and self-explanatory concept.

Everyone has the right to nirvana

For some people this statement that everyone has the right to nirvana may sound too good to be true. But I stand committed to my assurance that the kind of nirvana that I am presenting here is the one which can be attained in this life; I would like to reassure you that all people in the world, that is to say, people of all nations, religious affiliations, faiths, beliefs, including of course all Buddhists, inherently possess equal rights to experience nirvana in this life itself – at least the temporary kind of nirvana, called in Pali *tadanganibbana* or *tadangavimutti*, as taught by the Buddha, without having to wait for the next life. Invariably, they do have the rights to continually enjoy the “nirvana experience” in the way which is appropriate to causes and conditions of each individual. The most

important requirement in the initial stage for this unique experience is, however, a correct, complete and progressive understanding of the four noble truths and the ability to practice dharma in accordance with the principles of the four noble truths.

Surprisingly, there is a large number of Buddhists who quite unceremoniously throw away their chances for the attainment of the present-life nirvana. They blindly believe other people who keep telling them that nirvana is possible only in the next life or the lives that come after the present one. Some are so gullible that they are even willing to pay in one form or another a handsome amount of money in the hope that they will be reborn in a future life, where they may be able to obtain great wealth, attain a high position, enjoy wide recognition and fame, while being surrounded by loving family members and friends. They want to enjoy all kinds of pleasure and merriment for a long time in that distant future life before they would realize nirvana. This kind of attitude is not in keeping with the Buddha's teaching of the four noble truths.

Importance of the four noble truths for attaining nirvana

The four noble truths deal with "truths" or realities which are "truly noble". They are truths concerning all things and existences. They are truths that are extremely important and very valuable. Therefore they must be learned and understood thoroughly. These noble truths are four in number. They are the truths of suffering, the cause of suffering, the end of suffering and the path of practice leading to the end of suffering.

Although there are only four of them, not many people clearly understand them in exactly the way all these truths really mean. In fact, few people realize the remarkable association of these truths with their own everyday experiences. These people are inclined to depend on other people to tell them what the four noble truths really are.

To study the four noble truths by interpreting the words or searching for the contents of the words in accordance with the conventional linguistic usage as generally accepted by people in these modern times would make it very difficult to penetrate deeply into the real meaning of the four noble truths intended in the dharma language used by the Buddha in his teaching. This dharma language was the language of intense spiritual content, specifically employed by the Buddha in ancient times.

When a person is not quite clear about nirvana in its true meaning as specified by the Buddha, it would be unlikely that he is able to correctly practice the dharma and properly evaluate his own spiritual effort for the attainment of nirvana. As a result, this-very-life nirvana would seem out of reach to him.

We are now living in an age quite far apart from the time of the Buddha. It is therefore necessary that we make an extra effort to rigorously and minutely put the contents of the four noble truths to an appropriate process of investigation and verification. This must be done carefully and correctly by all of us so that we do not need to blindly believe others, including the author of this very book.

This process of investigation and verification will certainly lead to wisdom and self-realization of the dharma. We are likely to experience the dharma as it truly is. Needless to say, such a process is essential for a correct and direct practice of the dharma and will certainly enable us to attain nirvana in this lifetime.

To clearly understand the four noble truths, one must first understand the meaning of the words and their contents regarding the four noble truths as they really are. This also includes one's ability to test and investigate the truths for themselves.

In this spiritual matter, if you simply believe what other people say, who in turn believe in yet other people, that the realization of

nirvana depends on how much merit (good deeds) you had accumulated in previous lives, then it will be quite a long way before you could really see the significance of the four noble truths as realized and taught by the Buddha. Besides, you will hardly have any interest whatsoever to put the four noble truths into your daily dharma practice. Such is your problem. And this problem will naturally prevent you from realizing nirvana in this lifetime.

Here is a word of encouragement. I would like to reassure our readers: You are definitely one of those people who will begin to progressively experience and attain nirvana in this life by studying and practicing the dharma according to the simple methods suggested in this book.

Clear understanding of the noble truths needed for Buddhist nirvana

The meaning of nirvana as taught by the Buddha is totally different from nirvana as understood by people in general or even by the many teachers in other religious traditions or different systems of thought prevalent during his time.

As we all know, the Buddha realized the four noble truths and attained nirvana in his lifetime. Out of compassion, he then went about expounding to and teaching other people the four noble truths so that those who could understand and practice according to his teaching of the four noble truths would likewise attain nirvana in their lifetime – just as he did – proportionate to the capacity of each and every individual according to the causal conditions of each person.

Practitioners of dharma as well as people in general and Buddhists would attain nirvana according to the teaching of the enlightened Buddha only if they possess knowledge of the four noble truths and exert themselves to the fullest of their ability to practice accordingly. Such knowledge and the way of practice must be correct,

complete and consistently sustained before one could attain nirvana of the four noble truths.

Only right understanding of nirvana according to the Buddha's teaching will prove an infallible guide on the path of practice in daily life. It will also help in the process of self-evaluation in one's effort of dharma practice.

If there is no correct knowledge of nirvana as it truly is, then there will be no knowledge of the goal of the spiritual practice, which is none other than nirvana itself. Under such circumstances, self-evaluation will naturally be out of the question and you will not be able to know yourself whether you have attained nirvana or how far and how continually you have experienced nirvana.

When you have studied and practiced in accordance with the principles of the four noble truths, correctly and fully, then you will begin to see by yourself that the attainment of nirvana and proper self-evaluation depend on the knowledge and ability of each individual in this life. It has little to do with the good deeds one did in the previous lives.

Presented in this book is a discussion of the four noble truths, complete with both theoretical and practical approaches as well as some simplified and short versions of the methods applicable to the assessment of your own practice. All this should be sufficient to assist you along the spiritual path – at least to an extent that you would be able to experience a sort of everyday nirvana in this life – provided that certain appropriate causes and conditions are present.

First, let's begin with the present-moment four noble truths

For people in general, myself included, it would be extremely difficult or even impossible to study the type of the four noble truths which involves a multi-lifetime factor without personal faith and belief. That is to say, you simply have to accept it at face value and

you will not be in a position to objectively examine or conclusively prove by yourself any factual data related to the teaching from that perspective at all. Notwithstanding, we should also study the four noble truths from the multi-lifetime approach up to a certain point, if only to satisfy our intellectual curiosity or expand our spiritual horizons. Of course, academics or scholars who take upon themselves the task of preserving words of the dharma recorded in the Tripitaka may very well continue to the best of their ability to cover any and all aspects of the subject from whatever standpoint available.

If we study the four noble truths from a perspective of the dharma in the present moment, it will be quite possible for all of us to personally check and examine all facts and phenomena or compare them with our own life experiences. Needless to say, this is an easier and more direct way to go about it with regard to our dharma studies.

A daily dharma practice will likewise allow us to closely check any factual data from our own experiences – easily and immediately. It is just a matter of paying attention. In the same way, we will benefit from this kind of present-moment spiritual practice in each and every moment of our present life without having to wait until the next birth.

The Buddha always encouraged his disciples to pursue an end of suffering (*dukkha*) in the present life. He emphatically proclaimed, “... that noble person having a mind free from ill-will (bad thought) ... free from malice ... free from defilement (*kilesa*) ... having a pure mind ... he dwells in delightful thoughts being certain that ‘if there be the next world ... after death I shall attain a blissful state in the heavenly abode ... if there be not the next world ... I shall dwell free from suffering, free from ill-will (bad thought), free from malice ... I shall dwell happily in this very life.’” (Quoted in *Buddhadharma* by P. A. Payutto, pages 651-2)

Having appropriately received benefits from the study and practice of the present-moment dharma, one may continue in one’s

spiritual quest to investigate the kind of dharma involving trans-existential phenomena (the previous, present and future life) by putting every available fact through a thorough process of self-verification without having to place one's faith in other people's instruction. Blindly following other people's guidance is not exactly the way of the Buddha's teaching. It may even cause you to lose an opportunity of a lifetime.

The Buddha himself repeatedly urged and encouraged all people, ascetics and followers of all faiths during his time to study and investigate the four noble truths and to practice according to the noble eightfold path in order that they might become enlightened and be free from all suffering in this life, just as he and his many *arahant* disciples were.

As Venerable P. A. Payutto points out (*Buddhadharma*, p. 80), the Buddha even said that any ascetic, Brahmin or follower of any other religion for that matter, who had studied and practiced according to the principles of the four noble truths, would only become a better ascetic, a better Brahmin or a better follower of that particular religion. They would presently benefit to a great extent from their enhanced wisdom and spirituality.

The teaching of the four noble truths is therefore suitable for all kinds of people in the world no matter what their belief systems are. People are naturally different. For example, there are those who believe that the world is permanent or those who believe that the world is impermanent. Some people believe that there are ghosts, deities, fairies, *brahmas*, benevolent spirits and hateful spirits. Some believe that there is a past life as well as a future life. Some believe in karma and the result of karma. Some believe in the existence of different planes of life apart from our own, such as heaven and hell, where sentient beings dwell. There are others who believe in the efficacy of superstitious practices, magic, amulets, etc. There are yet

those who believe in one form of religion or another. And there are people who do not believe at all in any of the things we have just mentioned. All these people are capable of studying and practicing the four noble truths and can still benefit from them.

The reason why the teaching of the four noble truths is suitable and practicable for all kinds of people lies in the fact that this sublime discipline can be instrumental in making those who truly understand and practice them correctly, fully and consistently progress along a noble life, which is free from unwholesome (*akusala*) deeds and full of good deeds, with the mind purified and at peace. They will be free from suffering, having experienced the bliss of nirvana in this very life.

How to put supernatural power to test

If we were to study the four noble truths from the trans-existential standpoint (concerning with previous lives), then we must be able to personally and openly test and prove the related factual data so that we do not have to believe in the verifying process conducted by someone else.

When we hear that a certain individual is capable of performing a supernatural feat such as cognitive insight into someone's previous lives or accurately predicting someone's future, we should not hastily presume that the claim is true or genuine. It would be only prudent if we ourselves could initiate a verifying procedure to find out the veracity of such a claim.

Ascertaining the authenticity of a claim for supernatural power like this is a simple affair. Just place a book, properly closed, in front of the person who claims to possess an ability to recognize past lives and request him to read out a few sentences on any given page of that closed book before him. His claimed exploit of clairvoyance can be proved right then and there.

If his reading is correct, then it can be said that he is indeed in possession of the said power. Such a feat is truly uncommon and worthy of global recognition. So far no one has ever been able to accomplish this simple act.

Truly, to direct the so-called power of “clairvoyance” back into the past of just a few seconds is hardly feasible when that power does not exist. For instance, if you write something down on a piece of paper, like a few words, and request the person who claims to have the supernatural power to read it without looking at the words, he would not be able to read what you have just written. If he is incapable of seeing back into the past of only a few seconds, then looking far back into the more remote existence of an individual’s previous life and describing whatever had happened there would indeed be impossible.

Foreseeing into the future is relatively even more difficult to prove because you are looking into something that has not yet happened. Fortune tellers who predict the future simply employ the instrument of statistics combined with basic psychology in their career. What is predicted may or may not take place because it is more or less a kind of hypothetical speculation based on statistical data from the past.

While you are still alive, if you cannot satisfactorily check or prove the existence of a future life, nor can you prove beyond all doubts that a future life is indeed an ontological reality, then it would be impossible to do it after you are gone. Choosing to wait until the next life could cost you an opportunity to attain nirvana in this life. Such a naive attitude would more or less amount to a kind of careless existence because you are not paying adequate attention to what is truly beneficial in this life itself. You simply base your belief on other people’s words, some of which have been carried down mainly through hearsay and tradition.

Nirvana is attained only through knowledge and ability in dharma practice

Insight into the dharma means a fairly thorough discernment or understanding of the four noble truths and the skill to apply the principles of the four noble truths into practice in an appropriate, complete and consistent manner.

Sifting through *the dharma* is meant meticulously applying mindfulness and insight into the four noble truths, repeatedly scrutinizing them, trying with utmost care and patience to find true solutions to the problems that you may encounter while investigating and contemplating them in order to arrive at the very essence of the four noble truths. This type of exercise will naturally strengthen, increase and enhance your factual data of dharma learning that you have previously stored up in your own memory.

When you employ learning and knowledge straight from your memory and direct them to contemplate the dharma in order to take care of your own thought, this exercise itself will naturally enhance your learning and further strengthen your knowledge and the skill in taking care of your mind.

Taking care of your mind means simply that you know how to keep the mind away from all kinds of evil, directing it to what is good and pure. The mind thus protected and trained will consistently shine forth in its ever-progressive realization of attaining nirvana.

The two foremost spiritual qualities of concentration and mindfulness will be more and more enhanced and augmented every moment throughout the day of practice.

The spiritual path of practice for the attainment of this blissful nirvana requires a certain amount of learning and knowledge as well as the ability to apply the dharma in everyday life. Such spiritual path contributes to the safeguard and protection of the mind from

unwholesome qualities. Likewise, it is instrumental to the weakening of evil tendencies already deep-seated in the mind.

Everyone should therefore be aware of this and ready to study. We should always contemplate the four noble truths and practice according to the noble eightfold path, carefully and constantly assessing our practice on a daily basis. This will help accumulate more knowledge and sharpen our skillful application of the dharma. Needless to say, our memory database will become broadened and expanded and will enable us to combat more effectively against all evil and unwholesomeness of the mind and easily handle any negative experience that results from unwholesome qualities. This practice will lead to nirvana, the experience of which will again depend solely on the principle of cause and effect.

In ancient times, the Buddha often taught the four noble truths in both theory and practice and even evaluated them right then and there. All this was completed in a relatively short time, just in any sort of place or circumstances, for example, under a tree, at the roadside, or on his way to a certain destination. This shows that it is after all not a very difficult dharma subject to understand and apply to our daily life experience.

We are encouraged by the fact that the four noble truths may not be as inscrutable a subject as some people may have imagined. The Buddha himself had categorically reassured his disciples, saying, “Monks, in all the dharma, the four noble truths well proclaimed by me are simple, easily accessible, clear and well defined, with no hidden or disguised teaching.” (*Buddhadharma*, p. 662) Clearly, this is an explicit indication by the Buddha that his dharma is by no means an incomprehensible esoteric formula. On the contrary, it is something which people in general could peruse, probe and prove for themselves.

Conclusion: Treading along the pathway to attain nirvana according to the Buddha's teaching means that we must study the four noble truths and practice correctly, completely and continually in daily life in order to expand the memory database of our spiritual learning. We may consequently utilize this database for a correct, complete and consistent dharma practice.

The study and practice of dharma in daily life as mentioned above will progressively increase our memory database, which in turn will help invigorate our insight into the dharma. We must improve our ability to scrupulously discard what is bad and evil. This practice will further encourage us to do good things and help us free our mind from defilements while purifying it in the process. In this way we will be able to experience nirvana more continually and consistently.

Nirvana in the Four Noble Truths

Before we proceed to study the nature of nirvana taught by the Buddha, we should know the meaning of nirvana as people understand it now. Likewise, we should also know the different forms of nirvana as understood by people in the Buddha's time. This will provide a good basis for a proper understanding as we go along in our effort to earnestly study the form of nirvana intended in the Buddha's teaching of the four noble truths.

General meaning of nirvana

The dictionary of the Royal Thai Academy published in 1999 defines nirvana as the total extinction of defilement and suffering. The term is also used to refer to the death of an *arahant*.

Venerable P. A. Payutto in his *Dictionary of Buddhist Terms* published in 2000 also defines nirvana as the extinction of defilement

and suffering. Another definition is that it is a transcendental state and the ultimate goal in the Buddhist religion.

His Holiness Somdej Phra Nyanasangvorn, the Supreme Patriarch of Thailand, gives us an etymological explanation of the word nirvana in his book *Understanding Nirvana* (p. 31) as follows: “The term *nirvana* consists of the suffix ‘*ni*’ (meaning ‘no, out or without’ and ‘*vana*’ meaning ‘that which binds or ties up; that which impales or pierces through; an arrow’). Put together, *nirvana* in the Sanskrit form or *nibbana* in the Pali means ‘not being tied up,’ ‘not being pierced through’ or ‘without an arrow’. This word *nirvana* was an old expression; it had already been in use before the rise of Buddhism as can be seen in some of the teachings where the Buddha is recorded as saying that some Brahmins considered the body with no diseases and in good health to be nirvana while some others thought that pleasure of the senses was nirvana.”

Venerable Buddhadasa explains the term nirvana in his book *Nirvana for Everyone* (p.3) as follows: “Nirvana means ‘coolness’. When this word is used by ordinary Indian folks in their household, it conveys the meaning of coolness. When it is used in the dharma language within a religious context, it still means coolness – not ordinary coolness, but rather the coolness from the fire of defilement. Whereas in the language of ordinary people, it is the coolness from an extinct flame of fire, spiritually, however, this term specifically refers to coolness of the mind.”

Again in his book *Nirvana Here and Now* (p. 31) Venerable Buddhadasa says, “Nirvana means coolness in the language of ordinary people. Even little children say this. The word coolness may apply to material things, animals and human beings. ... When it is used for material things, it means that those things are cool. For example, when things such as rice or curry are still too hot, they cannot be eaten. When they cool down, someone in the kitchen would

call out to say that they are now ‘nirvana’ and can be eaten. This is nirvana for material things. Some wild animals are very savage and ferocious; after they have been domesticated and trained, they become tame. They are now nirvana. That is to say, they are no longer savage or fierce – not dangerous. In the same way, this word can be applied to man with regard to both his body and mind. When something is made to cool down, then it is nirvana. In the Buddha’s time, people referred to the mind in a state of calm and concentration as having attained nirvana.”

The present author therefore is of the opinion that during the Buddha’s time the word nirvana had considerably different meanings for Indian people in general.

Nirvana as perceived by common people refers to a state of material things which are devoid of heat. It also refers to coolness felt in either human body or mind. But ascetics and religious followers in different traditions would define nirvana in different ways according to their own beliefs or the beliefs of their own groups.

The many forms of interpretation concerning nirvana that we cited above indicate that some expressions in the Pali (or Sanskrit) language, which is the language of ancient India, encompass many different meanings. Therefore it is quite possible that the way people interpret the dharma in modern times may not be the same meaning intended by the Buddha in his teaching.

The Buddha used the word nirvana in a specific way, which is entirely different from the meanings used by other people. And the four noble truths taught by the Buddha remain even today a unique set of instructive principles, unlike any other teachings.

Specific meaning of nirvana taught by the Buddha in the four noble truths

Nirvana taught by the Buddha or nirvana in the four noble truths is identical in every way with *nirodha*, a term found in the third of the four noble truths (*nirodha-ariyasacca*). But when the term nirvana is simply mentioned out of context, not related to the four noble truths, then it may have different other meanings depending on how and by whom it is used. If, however, we want to specifically refer to the Buddhist nirvana, we have to indicate that it is nirvana or *nirodha* of the four noble truths or nirvana which the Buddha has taught to the world.

To promote confidence and conviction in the study of nirvana, let us go to the very source of the Tripitaka. I would like to invite readers to probe carefully into the content of the Buddha's teachings with an aim to verify the factual data through personal practice. Then you may evaluate for yourselves if everything is true and valid as the Buddha has taught us. We must understand all this very clearly and be truly convinced about it.

To keep my presentation reasonably concise, let me clarify something. All the technical terms such as '*dukkha*', '*samudaya*', '*nirodha*' (nirvana) and '*magga*' or their English equivalents found in this book as well as in my other books and public lectures are used in the Buddhist context only. Sometimes, I also put in an additional phrase like 'in the four noble truths' or 'taught by the Buddha' in order to give more emphasis to those terms.

Nirvana taught by the Buddha is like this.

The Buddha spent six long years investigating and analyzing the dharma before he could realize the four noble truths. He did this without help or guidance from any other persons.

As he narrated it, at sunrise soon after his enlightenment he made the following utterance: "House builder (*tanha*), now I have found you. You shall not build any more houses. I have broken all

your ribs. The gables too have been destroyed. My mind has attained nirvana, which is free from *sankhara*. I have gained the end of desire.” Here the image of a house builder is used to represent *tanha* or desire itself. The ribs symbolize greed and anger. And the house gables represent ignorance (*avijja*) in the four noble truths. Nirvana is said to be free from *sankhara* or bad thoughts; it is not subject to any conditionality.

Tanha means desire. This is a strong negative desire to satisfy one’s own thoughts of craving. It is also a moving force behind all unwholesome thoughts. It is unwholesome thoughts or thoughts that lead to unwholesome deeds. It is therefore harmful to oneself and/or others.

We should analytically contemplate on the Buddha’s utterance and carefully scrutinize it to get deeper into its meaning. The Buddha had endeavored to search for the dharma. He had finally found the real cause of suffering. This discovery prompted him to make the above joyous statement. Let us examine some of the more important words in his utterance.

The word “now” means at the present moment. “I have found you” means that the Buddha had discovered the truth. And this truth points to the fact that the house builder, which is desire, would never construct another house. It also means that there could be no more desire ever arising again in his mind. Elaborating further on this, the Buddha said: “I have broken all your ribs,” which means that he was able to destroy all desire, greed and anger from his mind. “The gables too have been destroyed” means: At that moment the Buddha had also completely destroyed all ignorance with regard to the four noble truths, which was indeed the chief cause of all defilements.

He continued to expand on this supreme attainment: “My mind has attained nirvana, which is free from *sankhara*. I have gained the end of desire.” This means his mind had entered nirvana. It is nirvana

which is devoid of *sankhara*. This Pali word *sankhara* actually means that which is conditioned or that which is subject to conditionality. It also means bad thoughts. But many people take it to mean the physical structure of a body. However, in the Buddha's utterance nirvana which is free from *sankhara* does not mean a bodiless nirvana of some sort. *Sankhara* here is something to do with mind or the mental state. It is the mind which is the real focus. "Devoid of *sankhara*" therefore refers to nirvana as a state of complete freedom from unwholesome mental conditioning and bad thoughts. There is never a thought of greed or anger. We know that the Buddha was talking about the non-conditioning of unwholesome thoughts because he continued further to reconfirm: "I have gained the end of desire." This means that he had already eradicated and destroyed all traces of desire from his own mind.

The Buddha's long and arduous quest for the dharma finally led him to the discovery of the four noble truths. He found out that desire was the cause of suffering. And he was able to renounce all desire and cleanse it from his mind, where mindfulness was constantly present. Therefore, there was no conditioning process of any unwholesome thought in his mind – no thoughts of greed or anger. Even ignorance or delusion in the four noble truths was also completely destroyed. This resulted in the attainment of the highest level of spirituality which is nirvana.

Like the Buddha, his *arahant* disciples also attained nirvana through the destruction of greed, anger and ignorance in their mind with regard to the four noble truths. These unwholesome qualities are at the root of all defilements.

The Buddha never entertained unwholesome or evil thoughts. His mind was completely pure and entirely free from desire as well as the suffering that results from bad thoughts. It could be said therefore that his mind attained nirvana continuously.

This current life contains in itself the present moment as well as the past moment and the future moment.

So when we talk about the present moment, it necessarily means the present moment in this very life.

The body of an *arahant* is not different from our bodies in terms of physical structures and components. That is to say, it has to go through old age, sickness and death like anyone else. Likewise, experiences such as separation from the close ones and not having what one needs are bound to take place like in the case of ordinary people. But the mind of an *arahant* is always pure and enlightened; he does not think unwholesome and bad thoughts or act in an unskillful way either through body, speech or mind.

All of us should follow the example of the enlightened ones by trying to practice mindfulness so we may be able to overcome ignorance, which is the chief of all defilements. We should make an effort to study and practice according to the principles of the dharma found in the four noble truths as realized and taught by the Buddha. This is the right way to practice mindfulness and prevent the rise and growth of unwholesome thoughts. It will naturally hold us back from all wrongful actions and deeds. This practice should be constantly maintained to keep the mind ever pure. As a result, one will likewise attain nirvana and continue to dwell in a state of nirvana proportionate to causes and conditions of each individual.

Bad thoughts are unskillful mental states contaminated by greed, anger and desire, having ignorance as their leading derivative source. Ignorance is the principal cause of all suffering. This will be detailed later when dealing with the second of the four noble truths.

People with ignorance (in the four noble truths) still remaining are capable of maintaining mindfulness even if for some fleeting moments. When not thinking evil thoughts, their minds can be said to

be pure – if only for a momentary period of time. Their nirvana during such a serene moment is therefore a kind of temporary nirvana.

With a sustained and reinforced practice, the mind will be free from bad thoughts and dwell continually in a state of purity. This is nirvana. It is a kind of continual nirvana at the present time in this very life.

It is clear that when we talk about continual nirvana at the present moment, we mean specifically that this is by no means a kind of nirvana that continues forever throughout the lifetime. Naturally, it is quite possible that there may be at some point in the present moment certain conditions which make you lose control so you may begin to indulge in bad thoughts.

The Buddha used the term *tanha* (desire) in his teachings because this expression carries a very weighty, lucid and apparent connotation. However, here we will use such expressions as ‘unwholesome thoughts’ or ‘bad thoughts’ to convey all ranges of thoughts connected with greed, anger, lust, aversion or attachment. Sometimes, we just use the word ‘bad’ or ‘evil’ for a stronger emphasis in that particular context.

For the benefit of better comprehension of the four noble truths as they really are, I would like to suggest that readers check and compare the facts with their own experiences, carefully and rationally, by considering and answering the following questions:

The Buddha attained nirvana at a present moment in his own lifetime. Is this correct?

The *arahants* who came in large number to assemble on the Magha Puja Day – or any other *arahants* for that matter – also attained nirvana at a present moment in their own respective lifetime. Is this correct?

Each and every individual should try their level best to attain nirvana at the present moment in this lifetime as did the Buddha and his *arahant* disciples without waiting until the next life. Is this correct?

The answer to all these questions is: Yes.

But if your answer is any different, that does not matter. You may turn back to these questions and think over them again at a later time.

In all of my public lectures to various groups of people, I get the same correct answers everywhere because these are actually invariable facts. They can be openly examined and proved by any individual or any group of people. Occasionally, there are people who give different answers but that is because the questions may not be quite clear to them or maybe they just miss the point.

The state of mind at the moment when it is devoid of unwholesome thoughts does remain pure – without defilements or suffering in any form associated with unwholesome thoughts. This is the state of nirvana taught by the Buddha.

Everyone with the knowledge and ability to practice dharma according to the four noble truths correctly and completely will perceive one's own thought and understand one's own mental state whether nirvana is achieved. This is something we have to know for ourselves. No one else can really see it because it has to do with the thought or mental projection of each individual. All this is related to the normal functioning of the brain.

The state of nirvana is the mental condition at the time when the mind is free from bad thoughts. This is nirvana. Realization of the present-moment nirvana is therefore not restricted by time or place. There is no need to donate any money; no need to be under the

control of a teacher. It is something that takes place in our daily life and is accessible to all people in general.

Nirvana is the extinction of desire.

The Buddha proclaimed the end of suffering in just one sentence, but he expanded on it with six allusions to *tanha* or desire, which is the cause of suffering. Said he, “Monks, this is the end of suffering. It is a complete regurgitation of desire, extinguishment of desire, renunciation of desire, negation of desire, liberation from desire and detachment from desire.” (Quoted in *The Four Noble Truths*, pages 57 and 60 by Wasin Inthasara)

The reason why the Buddha repeatedly elaborated on the meaning of the cessation of suffering for up to six times is because he wanted his audience, whose basic knowledge and perception concerning desire were different from each other, could understand clearly that nirvana or the extinction of suffering was indeed the absence of desire in all its forms. Nirvana is there when the mind does not generate desire or unwholesome thoughts.

It is regrettable that a large number of people do not realize that nirvana according to the four noble truths is in fact the cessation of suffering. It is simply a state of mind at the time when it is free from desire. We may also say that nirvana is there at the moment when our mind is free from unwholesome thoughts.

A detailed description of desire and attachment will be found in the section dealing with the cause of suffering later in this book.

Nirvana is the absence of desire and attachment.

According to the Buddha, nirvana is freedom from desire and attachment. As he put it: “Because of the complete extinction of desire, there is a total release with no residue of desire remaining.

This is nirvana. For the monks who have attained nirvana, there is no attachment or clinging.” (*Buddhadharma*, p. 271)

Consider the Buddha’s saying: “Because of the complete extinction of desire, there is a total release with no residue of desire remaining. This is nirvana.” What he really meant here was this: When desire is entirely removed from the mind or the mind does not think any evil thoughts, one would on that account attain nirvana, which is the cessation of suffering. This is important because ordinary folks always have their minds tied up by the chains of desire and greed, so they are constantly inclined to generate unwholesome thoughts which lead to harmful deeds. Complete extinction of desire with no residue left in the mind therefore means that there will be no more bad thoughts arising in their thinking process at the present moment.

The first sentence in the Buddha’s teaching just cited above confirms one more time that nirvana taught by him is indeed nirvana of the present moment. It has to do only with the immediate moment right now when the mind does not think under the influence of desire or attachment.

Although previous wholesome (*kusala*) or unwholesome actions and happy or unhappy experiences belong to the past, they do provide valuable lessons for the attainment of nirvana at the present moment.

Certainly, the most important point here is the present moment. You should try to practice mindfulness, giving up what is bad and evil, doing what is good and noble and keeping the mind pure and free from stains. This is the way to attain nirvana of the present moment.

The Buddha went on to explain: “For the monks who have attained nirvana, there is no attachment or clinging.” This means that the monks who have successfully achieved nirvana are free from the

stranglehold of unwholesome and negative mental attributes such as greed, anger and attachment or clinging. They are spiritually unfettered and liberated. And no more unwholesome thoughts would befall them.

Attachment arises from the repeated thoughts that hold fast onto something, clinging to whatever one wishes to obtain. It is that which constantly urges you to desire more and more – to crave incessantly – for something that you hanker after. You greedily wish them to come your way or happen according to the way you want. If this continues to plague your mind and your mind is constantly disturbed by it, suffering will follow. Constant greed and attachment lead to constant suffering. This is likely to be harmful to yourself as well as others. Certainly, it is the cause of continuous suffering.

Nirvana taught by the Buddha is also known by the Pali term *nirodha* found in the four noble truths. This is also the state of mind, which is pure, joyous and free from all bad thoughts, attainable at each and every moment in the present time during this very life.

No matter how bad in the past a person may have had a habit of thinking evil thought, speaking evil speech or doing evil deed, he can still learn a valuable lesson from his own past experiences and resolve to change for the better. He should learn to constantly cultivate conscious awareness and remind himself to refrain from thinking evil thought, speaking evil speech or doing evil deed. Well-established awareness will guard against those negativities and guide him instead to think only good thought, speak good speech and do good deed. He should keep this practice going in each and every moment of his daily life.

If one misinterprets words found in the teaching of the four noble truths and nirvana – if his understanding is not in keeping with the Buddha's teaching – this shortcoming could render the study, the practice and the evaluation of one's spiritual endeavor invalid. He

could lose track and what should be easy becomes a very difficult thing.

Nirvana is attained through the middle way.

After the Buddha realized the truth and became enlightened, he went to deliver the first sermon to the five ascetics, who had attended on him during the six long years of his search for truth. There he taught them the middle way, called in Pali *majjhimapatipada*, as the very means to attain nirvana.

The meaning of the Pali word *majjhimapatipada* is given in the *Dictionary of Buddhist Terms* as “the middle way or practice of the middle way. This oft-quoted Pali expression is in fact composed of two words, namely, *majjhima* meaning “middle” and *patipada* meaning “practice.” This should therefore be understood as the practice that leads one onto the life of the middle way.

There are two examples on this practice of the middle way that our readers may consider. They would understand clearly for themselves that the middle way is indeed the principal and direct practice on the spiritual path leading to the eradication of defilements and the attainment of nirvana in this very life.

The first example is found in the Buddha’s own saying, “Greed and anger are evil. The middle way is the practice for the giving up of greed and anger. It is the practice which leads to vision, knowledge, calm, insight, enlightenment and nirvana.”

Let us examine his teaching in this instance and analyze it carefully. The usual format in which the Buddha presented his teaching is quite interesting. You will see that the Buddha would initially introduce the main concept and then went on to deliberate on it sentence by sentence until the main concept was fully explained. Here in this teaching he began by laying down the basic concept that the thought of greed and the thought of anger were evil, which means

according to his teaching that the thought of greed and the thought of anger are something that is primarily negative and detrimental to our spiritual wellbeing.

The natural outcome of our thinking process, which is primarily the cognitive function of our brain, is such that while thinking thoughts of greed, naturally greed will arise and while thinking thoughts of anger, certainly anger will arise. This is the natural order of things. According to Buddhism, greed and anger arise from bad thoughts; they are thoughts which have been conditioned and should never be entertained.

The right way to abandon or overcome greed and anger begins therefore at their very source, namely, our own thoughts. This is done through a process of spiritual practice, which inculcates in our mind constant awareness against all unwholesome thoughts.

We should try to refrain from all evil actions with regard to body, speech and mind by giving up our bad thoughts. It follows therefore that to successfully overcome all unskillful thoughts we must directly deal with our mind. It is the mind that generates thought. This is the most important factor because thought is the leader of all actions associated with body, speech and mind.

In the next sentence, the Buddha further pointed out the main concept: “The middle way is the practice for the giving up of greed and anger.” This means that the principles for a spiritual practice in leading a life of the middle way according to the dharma are the very same principles that prevent and overcome greed and anger as well as help thwart the arising of all other unwholesome thoughts.

He then continued to explain: “It is the practice which leads to vision, knowledge, calm, insight, enlightenment and nirvana.” This means that it is the method of spiritual practice which gives vision or the ability to see the dharma, fully understanding the middle way as it

is and how to conduct one's life along the middle way. This is the main principle for the arising of the 'Eye of Truth,' that is to say, the seeing wisdom and the insight into truth.

The Buddha realized the dharma by himself. He did not have to believe others. And he taught the way of life according to the middle path. This middle way is also a practical principle for 'calm' in the sense that it is based on the concept of nonviolence and peace, not inflicting harm to oneself and/or others. It is also for 'knowledge,' which is derived as a result of such practice. That is why the Buddha's knowledge was complete and perfect to an extent that he was able to thoroughly realize the dharma of the middle path in its entirety. He therefore became perfectly enlightened. The 'enlightenment' is in regard to the noble dharma; it is about realizing the four noble truths.

The attainment of nirvana here refers to the realization of nirvana through the power of his wisdom which in turn enabled him to attain nirvana. The teaching of the Buddha on this extraordinary and unique middle way is an assurance to us that the kind of nirvana he taught was attainable through the practice of mindfulness along the principles of this middle way. This path of practice is wholly devoid of harmful effects to oneself and/or others, being free from the thoughts of greed, anger, desire and attachment as well as other unwholesome thoughts. Every time that we follow the middle way in this manner, we will experience nirvana in our mind.

The second example, I would like to bring up here is again another saying by the Buddha: "This middle way of practice that the Buddha has realized is a practice leading to vision, knowledge, calm, insight, enlightenment and nirvana. It is the way which is free from suffering. This way is truly without malice and hatred."

The first part of this teaching is similar to what is found in the first example. But the important point that I wish to emphasize here

comes in the second sentence. The Buddha continued to elaborate on the state of nirvana which he had taught. This nirvana is free from suffering. The way to nirvana is devoid of malice and hatred. We clearly see that the kind of nirvana taught by him is a state beyond the reach of suffering, uncontaminated by all evils such as malice and hatred. It is freedom from suffering inasmuch as it is freedom from malice with regard to oneself and others. He further defined freedom from malice as freedom from hatred and other defilements – with no thought of greed, anger, desire and attachment. In brief, this state or nirvana is the absence of all unwholesome thoughts.

This second statement is an explicit indication that nirvana realized and taught by the Buddha is the state of mind that is free from desire and attachment or any other unskillful and bad thoughts.

The teaching of the middle way therefore provides a guideline for the practice that leads us along the course of a noble and spiritual lifestyle. We must, however, train ourselves in this middle way by carefully using our own knowledge and ability to practice the dharma. We should scrupulously apply mindfulness against whatever harm that may otherwise befall us and/or others. Likewise, we should make an effort to constantly cultivate wholesome thoughts so our mind becomes progressively purified and enlightened. This is the way to nirvana.

By extension, the middle way is the practice of the dharma in accordance with the noble eightfold path – correctly, completely and continuously. Ideally, this spiritual lifestyle should be made to flow along smoothly through the course of the middle way untarnished and unimpeded by any bad thought.

Conducting one's life along the middle way in both secular (worldly) and spiritual affairs is possible through careful application of wisdom and mindfulness. We must learn to be on our guard against

unwholesome thoughts, which may produce negative effects in our life.

In the Buddha's time, 'Eye of Truth' was an expression found in Pali literature. It refers to the penetrative insight or 'vision' capable of clearly 'seeing' the dharma. This means a clear understanding of the four noble truths as they really are – as if you see them with your own eye.

Some people are afraid to honestly state, "I am beginning to see the dharma," or "I have achieved the eye of truth," because they think that such attainment is too lofty to ever happen to them in this lifetime. They prefer instead to wait until the next life. In fact, the author of this book also had previously thought along that line. But in the Buddha's time, there were a large number of ordinary people just like all of us, who clearly knew and understood the four noble truths correctly and thoroughly to a certain extent. That is to say, there were many people who had begun to see the true dharma or had already obtained the Eye of Truth, thus beginning to be really 'authentic' Buddhists. They had entered into the current stream of nirvana and become the Buddha's *sotapanna* disciples dwelling in infinite delight and joy of the dharma. This is the first of the four stages of spiritual accomplishment.

Below are some of the questions for your exercise. Please do this little exercise by examining and answering them so you may really understand the meaning of greed, desire, anger and attachment and how they are related to your spiritual practice. Here are the questions:

Thoughts of greed, desire, anger, and attachment or any other evil thoughts are negative mental activities that lead to violent and evil acts and are harmful to yourself and/or others. They are a form of extreme thoughts? Is this correct?

It is possible to lead a life along the middle way as taught by the Buddha. This middle way helps prevent the arising of unwholesome thoughts. The practice of such a way of life will result in the attainment of nirvana. Is this correct?

Conscious awareness of a short duration, aimed at preventing evil thoughts from arising, leads to the attainment of the temporary kind of nirvana. Is this correct?

Continued awareness that prevents and impedes the arising of evil thoughts leads to a continued experience of nirvana. Is this correct?

Continued awareness that prevents and impedes the arising of evil thoughts for a consistently extended duration leads to the attainment of nirvana for a consistently extended duration too. Is this correct?

Obviously, to all of these questions, the answer is: Yes.

To gain a little more understanding of the subject now, you should also answer questions on the middle way with regard to the body, followed by questions about the mind, as under:

About the body: Knowledge of the middle way with regard to the body makes us understand and enables us to examine facts concerning the body more easily. For example:

People who sit for a long time are likely to experience discomfort and cause harm for themselves. If they get sick, they also become a burden to themselves and/or others. This is good or bad?

In the same way, there are people who sleep, stand, walk, eat, drink or work too much, to the extent that such excessive activities become harmful for themselves and/or others. Is this good or bad?

Likewise, there are people who sit, sleep stand, walk, eat, drink or work too little to the extent that such behavior of inactivity causes harm to themselves and/or others. Is this good or bad?

Again, it is obvious that the answer to all these questions is: Bad.

When you lead a life of the middle way with no harm caused to yourself and/or others, such is the way to attain nirvana. Is it correct? (You may answer that yourself, of course.)

About the mind: Some people go to the extreme in harboring thoughts of greed, repulsion, desire, aversion, sensuality, displeasure, worry or stress so that it causes harm to themselves and/or others. Obviously, this approach is not in keeping with that of the middle way. Is this kind of mental state good or bad?

The answer is of course: Bad.

The mind is the most crucial ingredient and the most important factor in our life. Therefore taking care of the mind should be of primary concern to all of us. While thinking along the line of the middle way without going to one extreme or another, the mind is bound to be well directed and will not stray into any extreme. Thus the activities of the body and the speech will also be under the control of mindfulness. No suffering would ensue.

All *arahants* lead their life by the principles of the middle way, that is, they do not generate thoughts of avarice, aversion or violence. Their mind continues to be at peace at all times. That is why the mind of an *arahant* is truly pure, untouched by unwholesome elements of any kind. His mind is therefore free from suffering that normally results from unwholesome thoughts. He experiences nirvana at each and every moment all through his life.

Attainment of nirvana can be known instantly.

The Buddha referred to nirvana as “that which is seen by one who has attained the dharma; it is independent of time; it is that which is worth seeing; it is that which should be brought inwards; it is known through personal experience by the wise.” (*Buddhadharma*, p. 230)

This statement by the Buddha clearly confirms that nirvana can be seen by dharma practitioners. It means that nirvana in the four noble truths, which “one who has attained the dharma” or one who has overcome defilements will see or realize by oneself. It is nirvana which can be attained by anyone for himself (*sanditthikanibbana*). Realization of nirvana is something you do with your own thoughts; it has to do with training yourself in mindfulness, which each person must try to do by himself.

“It is independent of time; it is that which is worth seeing.” These two sentences mean that nirvana is not restricted by time. In another word, it is free from all limitations with regard to time. Nirvana is therefore attainable in this very life. There is no need to wait until the next life. As such, it is worth seeing and attaining right now. Anyone may practice the dharma in order to see nirvana and experience it instantaneously. It is possible to see it even at the present moment.

No one has ever been able to go back in time to see nirvana in the past, nor can anyone go forward into the future, which has not yet arrived, to attain nirvana of the future. Therefore nirvana is indeed the state of mind at the present moment when it is free from suffering and all kinds of defilements. It is experienced by one who has seen the dharma according to the four noble truths.

Nirvana, according to the Buddha, is that which “should be brought inwards”. This means that one should practice mindfulness and try to introduce the state of nirvana into one’s mind by contemplating and reflecting on it. The Buddha literally invited

people to practice the dharma and attain nirvana in their present lifetime.

“The wise” according to the Buddha are people who have knowledge and understanding of the four noble truths. It is only the wise who can rightly be said to have the correct perspective of the dharma. They are conversant with the true meaning of nirvana according to the Buddha’s teaching. Such a person is therefore able to correctly evaluate his own attainment of nirvana. And when the Buddha said that nirvana was something to be known through personal experience, what he really meant was that it had to be realized through direct experience only. In this way, the person who has attained nirvana will clearly understand that he has truly achieved the noble state of nirvana.

Attaining nirvana is a matter of personal knowledge because it has to do with the mind. When your mind is purified and free from unwholesome thoughts, nirvana is experienced right there at that moment. Thoughts are activities of the brain. So no one else but you yourself may truly know your own thoughts.

Nirvana taught by the Buddha is therefore not something that we expect to achieve in the next life. On the contrary, it can be experienced at the present moment in our daily life.

The state of nirvana previously experienced is past and gone. The future nirvana has not yet come. The most important is nirvana at the present moment because experiences such as happiness or unhappiness, peace or violence, good or evil, are all primarily concerned with the present moment.

Hopefully this will put our readers a little more at ease knowing clearly that nirvana taught by the Buddha is simply a matter of not thinking unwholesome thoughts at the present moment. This type of

nirvana is really close to us. It is the dharma in daily life. If you diligently develop mindfulness, you will certainly attain nirvana.

You will be heartened and inspired to learn that the Buddha never taught that to attain nirvana you must go out of your way to do things like accumulating merit, giving away your wealth in charity, releasing captured birds and fish, etc. All people including those criminals behind bars, very poor people, very sick people or the dying – even if they can hardly do anything at all – may have as much a good chance as anybody else to attain nirvana if they have sufficiently developed mindfulness that could prevent the arising of unwholesome thoughts in their minds.

To perform a good deed like radiating thoughts of compassion is a good thing to do since it provides an opportunity for appreciative reflection on the good deeds others have done to us or to other persons or to animals and environments. All this may be parts of some rituals, religious culture and traditional practice and may help reduce unwholesome thoughts in our mind; nonetheless it is not quite a direct track with regard to nirvana.

How do we know if we have attained nirvana?

An *arahant* is someone who has completed his own task. He is fully liberated, having eradicated ignorance and all other defilements. He has thoroughly understood the four noble truths. With his complete understanding of the four noble truths, he has walked the path and practiced according to the noble eightfold path, correctly, completely and in a consistent manner. The practice filled him with great effort and he was able to cultivate mindfulness to keep control over his own mind at all times. No unwholesome thoughts would arise in him and he dwells forever in a state of nirvana.

People who have not completely destroyed ignorance cannot therefore control their mind at all times. Unwholesome thoughts are

bound to arise occasionally. Still they may enjoy temporary nirvana (*tadanganibbana*) whenever they have mindfulness to guard against unwholesome thoughts.

Life is impermanent. This is a good reason for everyone to make an earnest effort to study and practice according to the four noble truths throughout his life. If we are able to prevent new unwholesome thoughts from arising and destroy old unwholesome thoughts that have arisen, this will lead to the attainment of nirvana at the present moment. With sustained practice, the duration of such attainment can be kept consistently longer.

To know how consistently you have attained and experienced nirvana, you must first have sufficient knowledge about the Eye of Truth. This is a special kind of vision or insight which clearly sees the four noble truths. It means that your knowledge about the four noble truths should be correct and adequate to serve as the basis for your practice. If there is no such knowledge, it is not possible to evaluate whether you have attained nirvana. At the same time, you must understand your own mind and how continually you are able to maintain mindfulness against unwholesome thoughts.

If the power of your mindfulness is capable of preventing unwholesome thoughts for a short duration, then your attainment of nirvana will be a temporary one.

If the power of your mindfulness is capable of preventing unwholesome thoughts for a long time, then your attainment of nirvana will continue for a long time too.

When teaching about nirvana, the Buddha often stressed the importance of not thinking unwholesome thoughts. That is a reason why prevention of unwholesome thoughts is emphasized again and again throughout our discussion concerning nirvana. Sometimes phrases like ‘thinking wholesome thoughts’ are employed because it

is natural that when we think good thoughts, there will be no room for bad thoughts to arise in our mind.

As for other people's attainment of nirvana, it is not possible that anyone else could divine such a phenomenon. This is purely a matter of the mental state of each individual. It is therefore out of the question whether one could safely predict that certain people have attained nirvana or have become *arahants*. There are, however, some people who do not have any understanding of the four noble truths as they really are, but for some reason have come to consider themselves as *arahants*. That is why it is necessary to study and practice the dharma in earnest – correctly, completely and continually in daily life.

Already up to this point, you may be fairly familiar with the method for checking and verifying various practical facts we have discussed. As a result, you may likewise have a clear understanding of those facts. Please continue to carefully check up everything for yourself whether in worldly or spiritual activities as you have done before. This should be practiced throughout your life so you may remain free from blind faith and superstitious beliefs.

As proof of the benefit of dharma practice, you will be able to check and verify it for yourself when you begin to actually practice the dharma in your daily life. Everything will be fully discussed in this book. Please remember that the dharma practice is a lifelong spiritual commitment. It is both beneficial and joyful.

Conclusion: Nirvana at the present moment in this very life is the highest goal in the study and practice of the dharma.

People with no proper understanding of the four noble truths will certainly lack a correct perspective of the dharma. They would not be able to set the right aim for dharma study and practice. Without sufficient knowledge of the dharma, it is hard to assess their spiritual practice of the dharma.

Nirvana is the state of mind at certain moments when it is pure. This is possible when our mind is free from unwholesome thoughts. The mind at such a moment will be joyously peaceful, untouched by suffering and defilements.

According to the Buddha's teaching, nirvana is attainable through freedom from defilements. We may get to that sublime, supreme state through our knowledge and ability to practice the dharma in accordance with the four noble truths.

Suffering in the Four Noble Truths

The four noble truths consist of suffering (*dukkha*), the cause of suffering, the end of suffering and the path leading to the end of suffering. The subject of suffering comes first in the four noble truths. The English term 'suffering' is often used to translate the Pali word *dukkha*, but it is never the exact equivalent. In fact, there is no exact English equivalent to this simple Pali word. Some other terms frequently used by contemporary writers include dissatisfaction, pain, unsatisfactoriness and misery. For consistency, however, we have decided to use the word 'suffering' to refer to *dukkha*.

As a rule, when people wish to learn about the four noble truths, they would begin with suffering. Then they continue to study the cause of suffering, the end of suffering and the path leading to the end of suffering. That is the normal sequence of the four noble truths. It is perfectly logical and easy to understand. This is mainly because all the four noble truths are sequentially connected.

Suffering in the four noble truths is a problem. It is something we do not want to have happen to us. If it has already happened, then we would want to have it removed. But if we do not know the problem of suffering, we will not be able to prevent it, nor can we remove it altogether.

Everyone therefore needs to learn more about suffering. They should have a proper perspective about suffering as it truly is.

If you are a physician, you should have a correct idea about what went wrong with your patient. If you do not know what sort of illness has got into him or what his problem really is, you will not be able to deal properly with him. Neither can you cure him and make him recover from his illness.

Suffering found in the four noble truths or suffering as taught by the Buddha is quite different from other forms of suffering understood by ordinary people.

Suffering in the four noble truths is really simple. In fact, it is a fairly straightforward subject and easy to understand if we study it as a dharma of the present moment.

Ignorance means the absence of clear knowledge about suffering in the four noble truths. People do not know that there are types of suffering which must be prevented and removed. They do not want to have such knowledge taught in the system of dharma studies and practice. For this reason, the majority of people are not able to have a direct access to nirvana, which is the end of suffering. It is a shame that they are unknowingly caught in this quagmire of suffering on account of the lack of such knowledge.

Please note that when we use the term suffering, we mean only suffering in the four noble truths.

Suffering in the four noble truths

There are two types of suffering. (1) General suffering or suffering as parts of worldly conditions. (2) Suffering in the four noble truths. It is suffering found mentioned in the Buddha's teaching. This type of suffering is related to the dharma.

1. Ordinary suffering is pain or discomfort of body and mind. It refers to dissatisfaction in general. This type of suffering is not connected with unwholesome thoughts.
2. Suffering in the four noble truths means pain or discomfort of body and mind, and dissatisfaction that result from

unwholesome thoughts. They are harmful to oneself and/or others. Therefore this type of suffering is connected specifically with those conditions that result from harmful and unwholesome thoughts.

All people without exception are bound to experience these two types of suffering.

Generally, at the moment when we experience instances of ordinary sufferings, the brain will function as a search machine looking for related information previously stored in the memory database. It focuses on appropriate methods to deal with those general sufferings. Then the brain will select suitable data and incorporate them in your thinking and reasoning process. It will try to find ways and means to remove those general sufferings and make them disappear.

When you experience instances of sufferings in the four noble truths, the brain will again search for information stored in your memory database concerning the four noble truths. It will attempt to fetch out necessary information related to those sufferings. This information will likewise be collaborated so you may find suitable ways and means to remove sufferings which are present at that moment. But if you have no adequate information in your memory database, your brain will not be able to process it. The brain will not understand that you are suffering. So there will be no question of trying to get rid of the suffering. As a result, you will unknowingly remain stuck in those sufferings as explained in the four noble truths.

It is a relatively simple affair to study and understand the four noble truths realized and taught by the Buddha. Suffering explained in his system of teaching dealing with the four noble truths has five characteristics, namely, sorrow, lamentation (crying or moaning), pain (physical suffering), grief and despair (hatred or revenge). They are the five kinds of suffering mentioned in the four noble truths.

If you do not understand clearly these five kinds of suffering in their true nature, you will not be able to prevent or remove suffering

from your life. Attainment of nirvana will become impossible to achieve in this present lifetime.

Therefore these five types of sufferings must be recognized. There are examples related to them that we should consider as follows:

1. *Sorrow*: This is a kind of suffering which deeply touches the very foundation of the mind. It comes, for instance, in the form of strong heartache, distress or sadness as a result of bereavement.
2. *Lamentation (Crying or moaning)*: This includes such strong outpours of unhappy expressions as mourning, wailing, whining and tearful sobbing. Gestures of profound suffering are demonstrative of a very forceful state of great unhappiness. A person who experiences this kind of suffering is bound to express it through words and actions in different ways. It is therefore easy to see this kind of suffering.
3. *Pain (Physical suffering)*: This is a kind of bodily suffering which comes from adverse psychological conditions. Those adverse conditions will eventually result in physical suffering.
4. *Grief*: This is suffering of the mind in which one experiences, for example, losses or deprivations. It is an unhappy mental condition or heartache though not as strong as sorrow.
5. *Despair (Hatred or revenge)*: This kind of suffering is a case of despondency, depression and gloom. It is a rather strong feeling of prolonged desperation in the mind. Despair is suffering within the mind from anger, hatred or revenge.

The first, second and fourth types of sufferings are a result of greed. The third type of sufferings comes from greed and anger. And the fifth kind of sufferings is mainly connected with anger or frustration.

All kinds of suffering in the four noble truths arise at the present moment when the mind is thinking unwholesome thoughts. Suffering

in the past has already gone. If the past sufferings become a problem, it is because you are thinking about them at the present moment. You therefore continue to suffer even now. Suffering in the future has not yet come. If you are suffering because of something in the future, it is because you are thinking at the present moment about the future problem. So you are suffering now – at the present moment.

Nirvana which is the end of suffering is attained when the cause of suffering is removed, that is to say, when you stop thinking unwholesome thoughts at the present moment in life. What we mean by the present moment in life therefore refers to the present moment in this very life.

It is worth noting that there are not many examples mentioned above for each type of suffering. But suffering is a very important matter. More examples may help you to better reflect on the many problems with regard to our personal life, society and the nation. The lack of knowledge in suffering on the part of people in general may prevent them to see the importance of guarding themselves against suffering of the kind found in the four noble truths or removing it from our mind at the present moment even if such removal is the highest goal in the Buddha's teaching.

There is a lack of knowledge about suffering. And not enough stress is given to this matter although it is a subject of great importance. We should know it as it really is before anything else. People are also misled by an emphasis being given to suffering or happiness in the next life, which some teachers say are more important. This may impede people's chances to achieve the end of suffering in this very life.

Even the author of this book used to think in this way. I used to give more importance to sufferings in future lives instead of my sufferings in this very life. This is because at that time I still did not have the right understanding of the dharma. I therefore did not pay attention and check the facts for myself. Consequently, I had to depend on other people's instruction and blindly believed what they were saying.

I came to understand the four noble truths of the present moment only when I was fifty-eight years old despite my long period of study and practice of the dharma. For this reason, I am trying my best to help people in general to prevent and remove this problem of not properly understanding the four noble truths. I have produced different forms of information media for the public. I hope to do this as long as my physical strength permits me.

If someone simply teaches other people and make them believe their words, which they in turn had learned from someone else without first having checked the facts, that sort of teaching may not be completely valid. In extreme cases, it may even cost other people's valuable opportunity or wealth. The teacher himself may risk spreading false instruction or becoming an expert in giving away false teaching.

People who make others believe things that are not true for their own benefit or for the benefit of their group, party or organization become charlatans or fraudulent tricksters. If the future life exists, people who knowingly perform dishonest acts will receive the result of bad deeds which they do in this lifetime. They will receive the bad result after they are gone. Therefore, we should not teach people and make them blindly believe us even if we have checked and verified the facts for ourselves. We should simply point out the way for others by giving them reliable information. Then they may consider and search for facts by themselves. This is the way to avoid any of the mistakes I have just mentioned.

Easy way out of suffering in the four noble truths

To make it a little easier for people in the present time to understand, I would like to summarize at this point the subject of suffering taught by the Buddha. The sufferings he expounded may be classified into three types as follows:

1. Suffering of the mind. This is psychological suffering.
2. Suffering which is explicitly known through outward expression and external appearance.
3. Physical suffering which is related to psychological trauma.

Each of the above types of suffering may be illustrated in different forms. They result in one way or another from unwholesome thoughts. We often observe examples of those types of suffering when they take place at the present time.

More examples will be shown and explained in different forms in order to bring out the problems with regard to individuals, societies and nations. We would like also to point out the need and the benefit for the prevention of suffering and its timely removal, which should be performed at the present moment.

Different forms of suffering in each type are as follows:

The first type of suffering is suffering of the mind. This is a psychological pain or an unhappy feeling which has become exceedingly painful. If this happens to you, it is possible that this could bring harm either to you or to other people. This may take place when you are thinking with anxiety, stress, emotion, fear, dread, worry, gloom, sadness, depression, confusion, dejection, despair, boredom, umbrage, contrition, envy, jealousy, resentment, evil thoughts, ill-will, anger, revenge or grudge. This also includes covetousness, possessiveness, desire for becoming someone, repulsion or desire to get away from something, dislike, displeasure or annoyance about something, etc.

Explanation

Mild anxiety or a little worry not strong enough to bring harm to oneself or others is something normal, which all ordinary people experience. It is the nature of brain function or a normal process of our psychological experience.

Thinking obsessively about something and pondering incessantly over it may cause you to become excessively worried about it. Every time you think about the subject that keeps bothering you, the brain will keep it in your memory database. If you keep worrying about the same subject, your anxiety will increase more and more. This will affect the state of your mind and memory storage.

As your anxiety becomes increasingly more intense, you will feel more and more oppressed in your mind. Suffering in the form of

being oppressed will gradually increase along with it. Such is also the nature of brain function.

If your anxiety continues to rise unabated, it will progressively gather negative strength and force. Ultimately, this will bring harm to you and/or others. Such is suffering in the form of great anxiety, which is found quite often. It is also the source of many other forms of suffering.

A little stress is normal in life. It does not constitute any serious problem to us or others. But if you keep worrying – obsessively worrying – then stress is built up around the subjects that you are worried about. The more you are worried, the more you become stressful – all this in a proportionate degree to your worry.

The stress that keeps increasing can bring harm to you and others around you. This is a form of suffering.

Likewise, a little fear or fear of a mild degree – not to the extent that would cause harm to anyone – is also normal.

When you think fear, there is fear arising in your mind. So if you become obsessively fearful of something and keep thinking about it, fear will keep increasing. Your fear may become intensified on account of such continual obsession. Then it may bring harm to you and/or others. This is suffering in the form of fear.

Therefore while thinking, for example, about some very dreadful incident, which you had experienced in the past, it is likely that you will become very afraid. At that moment there will be suffering in the form of fear.

If you mindfully stop thinking about fear, then fearful thoughts and the suffering which has arisen on account of fear will at once disappear. Naturally, that is how our brain functions.

Anger arises at the time when you think angry thoughts. If you keep getting angry – if you are always resentful for this or that reason – then your anger will just keep increasing. Extended and strengthened through endless repetition of resentful thought processes, anger will turn into formidable thoughts of revenge and

hatred. Now suffering in the form of strong revenge and hatred will ensue in no time.

Suffering in any form that happens to our mind is a result of repeated and excessive thoughts on a particularly subject.

On the contrary, too little anxiety or complete lack of concern may not be good either. It may even be harmful (and detrimental) to your wellbeing as well as that of other people. For example, while you are crossing a busy street, if you are not anxious or concerned at all about your own safety, you certainly risk being hit by a car. Or if you have an obligation to finish some task very quickly, but you do not have any anxiety or concern at all to take care of your work, then your work cannot be finished in time. This may be bad or damaging to you and/or others.

So what is appropriate in all matters may be the right amount, not too little or too much, of everything. This is the middle way of life. The most important principle of the middle way is that you should lead your life in a correct and becoming manner, avoiding the two extremes, of too little and too much of everything. This is the way of not causing harm to yourself as well as to other fellow beings. Your mind will be pure and free from suffering as mentioned in the four noble truths.

All forms of suffering in our mind which we have discussed in the abovementioned examples are a result of desire, which is the cause of suffering, arising through unwholesome thoughts. Every moment when your mind is free from unwholesome thoughts, there will be no suffering in whatever form. We may say that such is a moment of nirvana.

But psychological suffering on a small degree, neither too high nor too low, which does no harm to oneself and/or others, is considered normal for ordinary people. This is a perfectly natural function of the brain.

The second type of suffering is that which is outwardly expressed and can be observed explicitly. This is suffering of the mind which has so increased and become intensified that it is more or

less out of control. When such suffering emerges, you tend to find ways and means to act it out. It is a kind of external release or active expression. This is normally noticeable to other people through your speech or action in different ways depending on how each individual's brain functions. Examples for the apparent manifestation of such suffering include signs of restlessness, weeping, moaning, lamentation, frivolous babbles from distress, confusion, furiousness, frowning, fear, trembling, sadness, aggression, angrily throwing of objects, fraudulent acts, falsification, corruption, defamation of other people, stealing someone else's position or career, forcefully taking people's belongings, physically attacking people or hurting their feeling, hollow flattering, servility, unctuous behavior, prevarication, bribery, abusive speech, evil deeds, inflicting harm to oneself and/or others, undermining social norms and destabilizing the nation in various ways

All these examples of explicit and outward sufferings can be easily seen in our own daily experiences through many different ways just mentioned. These sufferings also result from certain causes, which are unwholesome thoughts or thoughts that are harmful to oneself and/or others.

The third type of physical suffering is related to psychological suffering. It is likewise linked to the nature of brain function. When the brain thinks about a matter of great suffering, it will negatively affect many other organs in various ways and cause them to malfunction. Greater mental suffering is therefore likely to bring greater physical suffering in a proportionate degree.

If mental suffering continues to persist incessantly, then there is all likelihood that some form of physical sickness may begin to develop into a chronic disease.

Prolonged psychological pain may lead to physical suffering in different forms. It is moreover capable of making you chronically sick with either infectious or non-infectious kinds of diseases. Examples of physical ailments include dizziness, headache, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, indigestion, malnutrition, stomachache, abdominal discomfort, stomach ulcer, abdominal distention,

constipation, inflammation of colon, loose bowel movement, diabetes, emaciation or malnutrition, insomnia, exhaustion, aching, muscular pain, arthritis, decreased immune system, cancer, susceptibility to infections, slow recovery process, allergy, fatigue syndrome, hair loss, palpitation, shortness of breath, lightheadedness, fainting, syncope, cardiac pain, arrhythmia, high cholesterol, chest pain, occlusion of arteries, high blood pressure, cerebral aneurysm, paralysis, Alzheimer's disease, menstrual cramps, menstrual irregularity, impotence, etc.

All these examples of physical suffering could stem from psychological trauma in various forms. They are certainly related to unwholesome thoughts, which constitute the cause of suffering.

If you keep cultivating mindfulness, being careful not to think unwholesome thoughts, you will be able to avoid or do away with suffering of all the three categories by yourself because you do understand that suffering arises from unskillful thoughts.

Besides, physical sicknesses may be caused by deficiency of certain chemicals in the brain or brain degeneration, which in turn will cause poor control of man's thinking process. If this happens, bad thoughts and sufferings will arise very easily.

For those people who suffer from physical ailments, they need to take medical treatment for their physical wellbeing and good health. Along with medical treatment and rehabilitation, they also need a kind of spiritual treatment to heal their psychological ailments. Equally needed are medical knowledge and technology as well as spiritual insight and constant mindfulness. This is where knowledge in the four noble truths comes into the picture.

Suffering in the four noble truths is psychological sickness.

Physicians and nurses with a kind and caring heart, imbued with spiritual disposition, would by no means resent patients who have become victims of physical ailments. Whenever the feeling of resentment arises in their mind with regard to their patients, then it can be said that those healthcare personnel themselves have become spiritually sick.

Likewise, people who think bad thoughts, utter abusive words and do bad deeds are spiritually sick. If we lose our temper or hold any grudge against these people, then we ourselves will become spiritually sick like them.

Suffering as found explained in the four noble truths is a kind of suffering that affects our spiritual wellbeing. This constitutes both physical and psychological sufferings which arise from unwholesome thoughts.

When we were born, we did not bring with us any knowledge of the four noble truths. We knew nothing about the dharma. We did not understand suffering, the cause of suffering, the end of suffering and the path leading to the end of suffering. Therefore we keep going around endlessly in this vicious circle of sufferings, not capable of getting away or free ourselves from it.

The Buddha discovered the four noble truths through his own effort, without any external guidance. All other people, however, can learn about suffering in the four noble truths only through the Buddha's teaching.

Regrettably, a vast majority of people do not understand suffering according to the four noble truths. Therefore when suffering arises, they have no idea that they have indeed fallen into this quagmire of suffering. So it never occurs to them that they should try to prevent or remove all sufferings from their life.

To effectively and continually prevent or remove suffering as explained in the four noble truths, we need knowledge and wisdom in both worldly and spiritual affairs. We need to habitually and mindfully apply our knowledge and wisdom into our daily activities.

Sufferings in general or worldly sufferings are those which we experience through body and mind, but they are not those generated by unwholesome thoughts. For example, the pangs of hunger, the needs to empty the bladder and relieve bowels, experience of a foul smell, sickness of the body, etc. are all sufferings everyone has to go through. Naturally, our brains in general are equipped with factual data on this sort of ordinary sufferings. Note how gradually we have

been accumulating the necessary knowledge and “know-how” since our birth and learned proper ways to deal with them. Now we need not learn about them like we do sufferings in the four noble truths.

As a matter of fact, sufferings do have some positive aspects. They remind us to be careful in learning about the problems. They also tell us to try to solve those problems for our own survival as well as for the protection of those lives and properties that are under our responsibility. Proportionately, greater suffering means a stronger reminder for us to take necessary action.

Dharma practice according to the four noble truths will help us avoid or remove suffering of the kind mentioned in the four noble truths. But ordinary sufferings in general are out of this scheme. They are just something which happens in everyone’s life.

When you are very hungry, that is an ordinary suffering. But if you cannot control your own thought about hunger, you may become angry and resentful with regard to the fact that you are hungry. It is possible that this anger or resentment may keep increasing. Now the strong anger may get out of control. This is suffering in the four noble truths, which will only add to your original suffering. If you can control yourself not to think unwholesome thoughts, that is the way to prevent the arising of the said additional suffering.

Conclusion: Suffering according to the Buddha is classified into five categories. I have regrouped and re-categorized them into three main groups.

Here we are going to compare the different forms of suffering found in the Buddha’s teachings. The English equivalents of the Pali words used in his teachings are given here in italics. They will be put along side with my own groupings:

Sorrow, grief and *despair* are three kinds of suffering within psychological framework. They are included in my first category.

Lamentation is a kind of suffering expressed outwardly, which I put in the second category of suffering.

Pain is physical suffering which results from negative psychological conditions. This is my third category.

All forms of suffering connected with the four noble truths are linked to unwholesome thoughts. When you apply mindfulness, which you have cultivated, unwholesome thoughts will effectively be prevented from ever arising. This is an important element which will at once help prevent and remove suffering of the four noble truths. People who have endured great psychological trauma, which causes physical ailments, need to use worldly knowledge and practical wisdom (such as medicines and medical technologies) to deal with the ailments. At the same time, they must also apply mindfulness and wisdom in spiritual field of practice. If they do this, they will certainly have a sound mind in a sound body.

Cause of Suffering in the Four Noble Truths

When a person gets sick whether physically or mentally, if the physician does not know the cause of the sickness, he will not be able to deal with the sickness at its root cause. His efforts at treatment will not therefore yield good results.

Some patients may get well by themselves. Other patients may get well by a natural cure. Nature does have certain power. It may help the patients remove or destroy the cause of their sickness or even some other kind of problems.

People who do not know the cause of suffering will not be able to remove such a cause of suffering in a direct and appropriate manner. So they remain stuck in the quagmire of suffering. Unknowingly, they may even take delight in suffering, believing it to be pleasure.

Everyone should therefore know the cause of suffering in the four noble truths taught by the Buddha. This is a great teaching, correct

and completely in line with reality.

The cause of suffering in the four noble truths is easy to understand if we study it as the truth of the present moment. In this way, it is truly open to all people to publicly check with their own experiences and prove the facts for themselves through practice and evaluation process.

To study and clearly understand the cause of suffering and the end of suffering in a manner that requires the process to span from one life to another is the most difficult thing to accomplish. Such a task is impossible for people in general, including the writer of this book, because none of us are able to openly verify and prove the facts by ourselves.

The supreme chief who takes control of our life

Direct and ongoing attainment of nirvana requires a clear and complete understanding of truth. This is truth about the leading factor of life. We should clearly recognize the chief controller who takes charge of our life.

When we recognize the supreme controller of life and correctly identify him, we may begin to take control of life. We can lead our life in the right direction according to the dharma laid down in the teaching of the four noble truths.

To know and understand the supreme chief of life, we must carefully consider and examine the facts of life. We must find out what they really are.

In order to gain higher insight and understanding, we should learn to reflect deeply on the facts about the body, the mind, thoughts, happiness and peace, suffering and nirvana, etc. For instance, we should understand how all these things are connected or where and how we could control them. We must also understand how we can lead

our life along the noble way so that nirvana may be attained easily, directly and immediately. This can be done by considering and answering all the following questions in order:

Life is consisted of body and mind. Is this correct?

Life has mind as its chief factor. Is this correct?

At the moment when we are harboring a bad thought, we tend to speak bad words and do bad deeds. Our mind will also become dirty, tarnished and filled with suffering. Is this correct?

At the moment when we are nurturing a good thought, we tend to speak good words and do good deeds. Our mind will also become pure, happy and peaceful. Is this correct?

Bad thoughts are therefore the cause of bad actions through body, speech and mind. This will result in the mind being dirty, tarnished and filled with suffering which arises from bad thoughts. Is this correct?

Good thoughts result in the mind being pure, free from suffering, happy and peaceful. All this is due to good thoughts. It is in fact the attainment of nirvana. Is this correct?

Bad thought, bad speech and bad deed are bad actions through body, speech and mind resulting in suffering which arises from bad actions at the present moment. Is this correct?

Good thought, good speech, and good deed are good actions through body, speech and mind resulting in the attainment of nirvana which comes from such good actions at the present moment. Is this correct?

Therefore good actions and bad actions lead to good results and bad results respectively at the present moment. There is no need to wait for them until the next life. Is this correct?

Constant and continual effort to apply mindfulness for the control of our own thoughts so that we may think only good or wholesome thoughts at the present moment will prevent and eliminate suffering which results from all bad thoughts. Naturally, this will lead to more consistent and longer attainment of nirvana. Is this correct?

Therefore all actions through body, speech and mind as well as the way we lead our life – whether good or bad, happy or unhappy – depend on our thoughts. The thought is therefore the chief controller of life. Is this correct?

Constant and continual attainment of nirvana requires constant and continual application of mindfulness to our own thoughts so that no unwholesome thoughts may ever arise at the present moment. Is this correct?

The answer to all these questions is the same: Yes, it is correct. Congratulations, if you answer all of them correctly. It means that now you have come to recognize the chief controller who constantly directs your life.

The thought is therefore the chief controller who directs our life. He may direct it either along a good way or a bad way.

The real cause of evil and suffering, which is related to evil in the four noble truths, takes place at the present moment when bad or unwholesome thoughts are present.

According to Buddhism, the way to prevent or destroy all defilements, which are unwholesome qualities, is possible through the application of mindfulness and wisdom (that is, knowledge and ability in dharma practice) to control our thoughts so that bad thoughts will never arise. This should be practiced continually for the continual attainment of nirvana in accordance with the principle of cause and effect.

Everyone should therefore develop mind-fulness to guard their mind against unwholesome thoughts so they may not do or speak bad things. You should develop mindfulness so you may always think good thoughts or do good things, which will eventually lead to good actions through body, speech and mind. This will in turn result in mental purification just as the Buddha has taught to his *arahant* disciples in a discourse dealing with the principles of dharma practice called *Ovadapatimokkha*.

If all people in this world think only good thoughts and do only good things through body, speech and mind, this will result in greater love, compassion and harmony. Consequently, this will only lead to mutual understanding and more peaceful coexistence.

His Majesty the King of Thailand often makes references to good thoughts and good deeds. Details of his royal addresses may be found abundantly on my website.

The four noble truths taught by the Buddha are based on sound logics and good reasons. They are “noble truths” or completely real facts because they are a result of the full and perfect realization of the dharma, not merely based on blind faith and belief. Everyone should therefore try to examine and verify facts in all matters, whether they are related to worldly or spiritual concerns. In this way, you will get to realize the truth without having to ever blindly believe any other person.

Blindly believing other people may easily cause you to become a victim or an unwitting instrument of some evil designs. It may result even in serious harm to you and/or others. Not blindly believing other people, on the other hand, may prevent you from falling victim to those people or being abused by them.

Many people tend to easily and blindly believe others. We should try to help reduce this problem by spreading the principles of

dharma found in the four noble truths in accordance with the spiritual conditions appropriate to each individual.

Recognizing the roots of unwholesome deeds

Samudaya in the four noble truths constitutes the cause of all unwholesome deeds. It is consisted of greed, anger and ignorance regarding the four noble truths. Ignorance concerning the four noble truths refers to a lack of knowledge in the four noble truths and the inability to prevent greed and anger from arising in one's mind. Greed, anger and ignorance are therefore the root cause of defilements and unwholesome actions.

People in general are apt to make constant references to greed, anger and ignorance without the proper knowledge about their true meaning as defined in the Buddhist teaching.

The meaning of defilements according to the Buddha has some specific connotation quite different from what people in general are used to. It is not the same as what ordinary people normally understand.

Not properly recognizing the meaning of defilements according to the Buddha's teaching is equal to not recognizing the cause of suffering as it truly is. The result therefore is that you will not be able to prevent and eliminate the cause of suffering in a direct manner.

The reason why we must recognize the roots of defilements, namely, greed, anger and ignorance, clearly and in accordance with their true nature is because it is the only way by which we may be able to properly prevent and destroy the roots of defilements completely and in a direct manner.

A person who has completely removed all the roots of defilements at the present moment is indeed an *arahant*.

As a matter of fact, in the past all *arahants* were originally full of defilements just like any ordinary person. The future is still not yet come. The only certain thing is the present moment when they finally become *arahants*. Now they will not suffer from any unwholesome states in this very life. Therefore all of us should be like those *arahants*, that is, we should try to continually attain the end of suffering explained in the four noble truths at the present moment as best as we can.

Clearly recognizing greed as it truly is

To correctly and clearly recognize the meaning of greed mentioned in the four noble truths, we must properly understand the process that really causes greed to arise. This will directly help us prevent and eliminate unwholesome thoughts immediately.

The meaning of greed as generally understood is different from greed in the four noble truths. For this reason, many people understand that greed in the four noble truths is a kind of wish. This way of thinking is something which is quite impossible. People in general need to have some wishes in mind so they may be able to keep their life and property safe and free from danger. An ordinary wish is something that is essential in life.

A person who has no wishes at all is someone whose brain no longer functions. His brain may have been damaged. Otherwise he may have been knocked unconscious; he may have become senseless, sound asleep or already dead.

All people in general have a wish for this thing or that thing. Or they may have a wish to keep their life and property safe and free from danger. This kind of aspiration is quite normal for all human brains. It is good and wholesome if it is a wish to do some good things for themselves and others. But their wishes should not be so obsessive as to cause harm to themselves or others.

To clearly understand the truth concerning greed as it really is in the four noble truths, you should consider the following questions and try to answer them:

Repeatedly and continually having thoughts of greed will only continue to add up more and more greed in your mind. Such thoughts of greed will become progressively stronger and stronger and will come to the point of being harmful to oneself and others. Is this condition wholesome or unwholesome?

Excessive thoughts of greed that bring harm to oneself and/or others are not the middle way. For example, if you excessively desire to get rich, you will have to work too hard and you may fall sick. If you excessively desire a high position, you may try to get it by mudslinging on other people. If you excessively desire to win at all costs, you may resort to violence or you may create much trouble for other people. Is this type of excessive desire wholesome or unwholesome?

Too little desire to the point of harming oneself and/or others is also not the middle way. For example, too little desire for learning may cause damage to the learning process and success in life. Too little desire to work may result in insufficient earning for your livelihood. Too little desire to eat may lead to poor health. Is this kind of too little desire wholesome or unwholesome?

Thoughts of desire at an appropriate level according to the principle of the middle way mean thoughts of desire that do not lead to a harmful effect to oneself and/or others. Are such thoughts wholesome or unwholesome?

All answers to these questions are the same: Such desire is unwholesome, except the last one, which is wholesome.

Now please try again to answer the following questions:

Desire and non-desire constitute an opposite pair. For example, people who desire to become rich have non-desire to become poor. They do not want to become poor. People who desire good health would not desire to have poor health. Is this correct?

Desire to do good deeds is a good and wholesome thought. Is this correct?

Excessive desire to do good deeds, which causes harm to oneself and/or others, is unwhole-some. It is also a form of greed. Is this correct?

Giving donations as a form of charity is a wholesome act. But excessive giving that causes harm to oneself and/or other people is unwholesome. It is also a form of greed. Is this correct?

Desire or non-desire at an appropriate level or in just sufficient degree, not too much or too little, but in accordance with the middle way, which does not bring harm to oneself and/or other people, but helps make one's mind pure, free from suffering, and keep one's life and property safe and free from danger, is wholesome. Is this correct?

Excessive desire or non-desire, or too little of either of them, to the point of being harmful to oneself and/or others is unwholesome. It is also a kind of greed. Is this correct?

Greed arises from thoughts of greed. If there is no thought of greed, then greed will not arise. Is this correct?

When there is greed, the mind will be oppressed and will therefore suffer – the more greed, the greater suffering. Greed will force you to cause harm to yourself and/or others. You will be forced to make an effort to reduce or eliminate suffering which has arisen from your own greed. Is this correct?

To continually be free from greed, we must always be mindful and try to control our thoughts so that continually in our daily life no unwholesome thoughts of greed may arise. Is this correct?

Giving money or other things to poor people so they will vote for you at an election is a wholesome act. Is this correct?

To prevent and eliminate greed, we must depend by and large on supernatural power and on the act of merit-making, such as giving money in charity. Is this correct?

The correct answer to all these questions is yes, except the last two questions. Buying votes is unethical and unwholesome. And to prevent and eliminate all unwholesome thoughts, we must depend on our own wisdom and understanding. We must also practice the dharma in a correct and appropriate way only.

Congratulations, if you have answered them correctly. It means that you have a fair understanding of greed as it really is according to the four noble truths.

I gladly congratulate you on your correct answers. All this is merely my opinion while I am writing this book. Likewise, it holds true even elsewhere when I congratulate you on your correct response.

If you consider such questions again and again and try to answer them, you will increasingly gain a deeper understanding into the realities. As your wisdom and knowledge in the dharma continue to increase, you should repeatedly take those questions up to consider them in order to gain even a deeper understanding. Everything will become clearer and you will have greater confidence in your own understanding of the dharma.

Considering and examining the questions in this way is a simple method of investigation into realities by yourself. It will greatly enhance your understanding of the dharma.

If you are still not confident in your own answers, you may ask these questions to a large group of people and let them help consider and examine them. If all answers are in agreement, it could only mean that they are correct, having been duly proven in public.

Greed in the four noble truths is an excessive desire or a non-desire to the point of being harmful to oneself and/or other people. For example, some people have so much greed that they go about selling fake merchandise. Or they have excessive desire to become rich so that they commit a crime of corruption on a national scale. Politicians may have an excessive desire to defeat their opponents so they may tell lies to the people in their constituencies or even to the whole nation. Or people may have an excessive desire not to be defeated by their opponents, in which case they may have to employ dirty tricks or some other unfair means against their opponents. Some may have an excessive desire not to lose their loved ones to other people, who they fear may try to take them away, so they may decide to use violence against them.

Greed is desire or non-desire which has become excessive to the point of being harmful to oneself and/or others. Such desire or non-desire cannot be a middle way. When I understand the middle way more clearly, I find that too little of desire as well as non-desire up to the point of being harmful to oneself and/or others is not the middle way. On the contrary, it can only be something unwholesome.

Understanding the matter of too little desire or too little non-desire requires the basic knowledge about greed, the middle way and unwholesome actions. All this should be well understood so that a more complete grasp of the subject matter could be achieved.

If we continually and repeatedly try to reduce our excessive thoughts of desire and non-desire, this will cause our desire and non-desire to diminish and become less and less. When desire and non-desire get lessened in this way to the point of being harmful to oneself and/or others, it is unwholesome, not the middle way. It is also a kind of greed. For example, when there is an excessive thought of too little desire to eat food, it may ruin your health. If there is too little thought of abstaining from bad things, you may always think bad thoughts and do bad things.

Thoughts of desire or non-desire at a low level so that no harm is done to oneself and/or other people are not bad things in themselves. And they are not greed. For example, at the moment when hardly any thought of doing bad things is present, you will naturally be inclined to do good things. At the moment when hardly any thought of evading tax is present, you will naturally be inclined to fully pay the tax.

Too much or too little desire or non-desire to the point of being harmful to oneself and/or others is unwholesome. It is an extreme in thought. It is not the middle way according to the Buddha's teaching.

The principle of dharma practice essential for a life of the middle way, which leads to the realization of nirvana, is very simple. That is to say, we should have mindfulness neither to think unwholesome thoughts nor think extreme thoughts. Our thoughts should remain along the middle way. Our desire should be just sufficiently appropriate. It should be maintained in some sufficient amount and at a proper level.

When you have thoughts of desire in an appropriate measure, you will have thoughts of non-desire in an appropriate measure as well. This is simply because desire and non-desire together constitute an opposite pair.

In the same way, thoughts of extreme desire will likely result in thoughts of extreme non-desire as well.

Generally, all creatures in the world tend to lead their life in such a way that is potentially harmful to themselves as well as to other creatures and environments, or even to nature. This seems almost natural to all kinds of living beings. But to lead our life in a noble way, we should try our best to avoid harming others as far as possible. But it is hardly possible to lead one's life completely free from any kind of harm at all. That will be possible only after you are dead and gone. But even a dead body may be a burden to others. Death may be a good way for some people to come to an end of a life filled with affliction and suffering in the present existence. We should therefore willingly and calmly accept death when it comes to us according to appropriate conditions.

Clearly recognizing anger as it truly is

Anger is unwholesome because, when it arises in the mind, it will afflict the mind and make the mind suffer. If it is a kind of forceful or strong anger, it may manifest into unwholesome speech or action.

When the brain is thinking thoughts of anger, at that point anger will arise. On the other hand, when the brain stops thinking thoughts of anger, at that point the anger will stop and/or disappear by itself.

When we receive information through our eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind, our brain will keep such information processed at all times. The result may be pleasant or unpleasant, pleasurable or non-pleasurable, pleasing to the mind or not pleasing to the mind, or even neutral. All this is a good thing because it works out well to keep our life and property safe and free from danger.

Like and dislike, desire and non-desire, greed and anger are all mutually connected. For example, when the eye sees some nutritive food,

the brain will get the information processed. There arises then the understanding that the food should be very essential for good health. Therefore there will be a liking or thought of desire to eat the food, which is beneficial to health. This is not greed because there is no intention to cause harm to anyone. When the eye sees some very dirty-looking food, then there will be an understanding that such dirty food would be very harmful to health. Therefore, at that moment thoughts of dislike, aversion or non-desire for such food will arise. There will be no desire to eat the food. And this is the right way to protect health. This kind of thought is useful. It is neither greed nor anger.

Like or dislike, desire or non-desire, if applied in a useful way without causing harm as in examples cited above, is a good thing felt by ordinary people who desire safety and freedom from danger for their life and property.

To clearly understand anger explained in the four noble truths as it really is, please consider answering the following questions:

The thoughts of like, dislike or displeasure at an appropriate degree, that is to say, at a level that would not cause harm to oneself and/or others, are not anger. Is this correct?

When you see something very dirty in your bedroom, your brain will think thoughts of dislike, displeasure or aversion. Then the brain will think thoughts of removing it from there so that it will not harmfully afflict your health. This will also be for the purpose of protection and safety of your life and property without causing harm to yourself and/or others. It is a normal thing to do for all ordinary people. It is in fact a good thing to do. Is this correct?

When people keep thinking on matters about which they feel dislike, displeasure and aversion – if they keep thinking about them repeatedly again and again – their dislike, displeasure or aversion will continue to grow stronger and stronger. Is this correct?

When dislike, displeasure and aversion become excessive to the point of being harmful to yourself and/or others, it becomes anger. This condition is in fact unwholesome. Is this correct?

Anger arises at the time when there are thoughts of anger. When we stop thinking thoughts of anger, then anger will also stop or disappear. Is this correct?

When there are thoughts of anger, there will be pressure or oppression on the mind as well. This causes much suffering. It is suffering which arises from anger at that moment. All this is an unwholesome condition. Is this correct?

When there are more and more thoughts of anger, the mind becomes more oppressed and will therefore suffer. Under such an oppressive pressure, you will be compelled to have your suffering released through violent speech or action. This will be harmful to yourself and/or other people and may possibly result in the destruction of your own property or even property of other people. Is this correct?

It is the nature of the brain that when there are thoughts of strong desire or thoughts of greed, if such thoughts are not fulfilled or if the desire and greed are not satisfied in some positive way, then thoughts of displeasure or anger will arise as a result. Is this correct?

When there are no thoughts of greed, there will be no thoughts of anger at the same moment. Is this correct?

If you do not want anger to arise, you should not think thoughts of greed. Also you should not continually allow any other unwholesome thoughts to arise. Is this correct?

Whenever people who have accumulated a great deal of unwholesome thoughts of greed and anger in their memory database harbor unwholesome thoughts, more unwholesome thoughts will be

added instantly to that database. And this will continue to remain current in their memory. Is this correct?

Whether the accumulated storage of unwhole-some database will grow bigger or smaller in quantity and strength depends on your thoughts at that particular moment. Is this correct?

To reduce the size of information on unwhole-some database in your memory, you must try to develop mindfulness to continually guard against unwholesome thoughts. Is this correct?

If you let unwholesome thoughts arise, even if for a short period of time, chances are that such unwholesome thoughts may lead to other more forceful unwholesome thoughts. Is this correct?

Some people think unwholesome thoughts for only a few seconds, but it is possible that they may decide to commit some very serious evil action. Is this correct?

Bad or unwholesome experiences that have happened tend to remain fresh in memory for a relatively longer time, but good or wholesome experiences tend to fade from memory much faster so that we cannot remember them very well. Such is the nature of the brain. Is this correct?

When you realize that you are thinking unwholesome thoughts, you should immediately stop that thinking process. You should not continue to think those unwholesome thoughts even for a moment. Is this correct?

Being constantly aware and alert through a continual application of mindfulness so no unwholesome thoughts may arise is therefore an effective practice to prevent and eliminate suffering. Is this correct?

We should also pray for supernatural beings to help us prevent and eliminate unwholesome thoughts as well as suffering, including all other problems. Is this correct?

To all of these questions, the answer is yes, except the last one because prevention and elimination of unwholesome thoughts and actions are only possible through your own wisdom in worldly affairs as well as in spiritual matters, not through wishful prayer.

Congratulations, if you have got your answers right. You have developed great understanding by yourself about anger according to the teaching in the four noble truths and you have verified the facts by yourself and passed an examination on this point. Please don't forget that you have the right to examine the four noble truths all your life.

Anger in the four noble truths refers to the thought of dislike, displeasure or aversion in excessive measure up to the point of being harmful to oneself and/or others. For example, you may experience an excessive dislike when you are subjected to some strong and unjust accusation. You may feel compelled to retaliate with proportionately strong violence. This is harmful to you. If your work is not appreciated but very much looked down upon, you may feel justified in using abusive expressions to vent out your anger. You may also resort to alcoholic drinks to take out the pressure and tension. This is also a kind of harm to yourself as well as others. Or if you become excessively displeased when your son fails an examination, you may wish to punish him and may actually act out your displeasure by beating him. This is again a kind of harm to yourself and/or others.

Anger has many levels. To begin with, it may be merely some thoughts of dislike, displeasure or aversion. But when you continue to repeatedly think those thoughts, your anger will grow stronger and

stronger and transform into a grudge, a rage, a fury, the thoughts of revenge, etc.

When there are thoughts of ill-will, there arises an intention in the mind to take revenge. Thoughts of revenge are thoughts of anger in a forceful and sustained manner. This will lead to a forceful and sustained kind of suffering. Whenever there is an opportunity to vent out or release this suffering, violence may be used immediately.

Thoughts of revenge may be reduced or removed after you have succeeded in taking revenge according to your wishes. For example, if you want to take revenge by killing someone, after you have done as you wanted, the thoughts of revenge in that matter will come to an end. This means that even thoughts of revenge will finally disappear too.

Having well-developed mindfulness to continually guard your mind against unwholesome thoughts will directly and efficiently prevent, reduce or eliminate unwholesome thoughts regarding worldly affairs or spiritual matters. This is the same with regard to greed, anger and grudge as well.

The experience of nirvana according to the four noble truths arises from the functioning process of the brain. All you need is wisdom and understanding in the dharma that would control the brain not to think unwholesome thoughts. Even greed, anger, lust and clinging will not take place in the mind. Your mind will then be pure. It will experience nirvana at all times when it thinks only wholesome thoughts.

Clearly recognizing ignorance as it truly is

Ignorance as generally understood is not ignorance in the four noble truths. For example, we have strong and excessive attachment with regard to food so we tend to eat more than what is good for us. This will affect our body and make for poor health. If we blindly believe advertisements, we become their victims. For example, if we

blindly follow a bad political activist whose mind is filled with bad thoughts, our own mind could also be filled with excessive greed, which may have arisen in response to their rousing speech. Such ignorance may originate from excessive desire or non-desire and continue to grow even more forceful. It may become a kind of strong and sustained greed or attachment based on greed.

Ignorance in the four noble truths as taught by the Buddha is entirely different from ignorance understood by people in general. Most people do not understand the real and correct meaning of ignorance so they do not know the direct way to reduce or remove ignorance. This ignorance is in fact the supreme chief of all bad actions. Many people therefore fall into the vicious circle of unwholesome thoughts and get stuck in the quagmire of suffering which originates from those unwholesome thoughts.

Ignorance in the four noble truths means not really knowing the four noble truths. It also means the inability to practice the dharma according to the noble eightfold path or middle way, correctly, fully and continually. According to the four noble truths, ignorance has the same meaning as delusion.

Please consider answering the following questions so you may correctly understand the meaning of ignorance in the four noble truths.

People who are full of ignorance with regard to the four noble truths are those without knowledge, ability or wisdom concerning the dharma. Therefore they are not able to control their own mind. That is to say, they cannot guard themselves against unwholesome thoughts. Is this correct?

Those people who have knowledge of the four noble truths and ability to practice the dharma according to the noble eightfold path or the middle way correctly and fully will be able to control their mind

well so their mind may think only wholesome thoughts. Is this correct?

Arahants are people who have no ignorance at all. Therefore they are always able to control their own minds not to think unwholesome thoughts. For this reason, they are able to experience nirvana continually. Is this correct?

People who still have ignorance left will not be able to always control their minds not to think unwholesome thoughts. For this reason, they can experience only temporary nirvana. Is this correct?

All people, even *arahants*, should study and review their understanding of the four noble truths and practice the dharma according to the noble eightfold path or the middle way correctly, fully and continually all their life. If we stop, our knowledge or ability to attain nirvana may diminish or even disappear altogether. This is the nature of the brain. And if we are Buddhist, we may cease to be truly Buddhist in the real sense of the word. Is this correct?

The answer to all these questions is yes. Congratulations, if you have correctly answered all questions.

Ignorance in the four noble truths is the supreme chief of all unwholesome actions. Removal of ignorance is therefore the very first priority in the Buddha's teaching. In the time of the Buddha, the main duty of his monk disciples was to reduce and remove their own ignorance and prevent it from recurring. Then they helped spread the Buddha's teaching to people at large and explained to them how to remove ignorance or deal with it in any other way.

In the Buddha's time, people who realized the dharma taught by the Buddha in the four noble truths were able to substantially reduce their own ignorance fairly easily. With strong faith and devotion, they practiced the dharma according to his teaching in the four noble

truths to destroy all the roots of bad actions. They often announced openly that they were Buddhist. Such people were truly Buddhist.

Before being ordained in any form, you should first become a true Buddhist. You should also have faith to commit yourself in the holy life to practice the dharma and to do good things according to the four noble truths. This will be good for your own benefit and for the benefit of other people as well as the nation. Your mind should be pure just like the Buddha's description in the *Ovadapatimokkha*.

If you become ordained for your own selfish interests, not in accordance with the teaching of the four noble truths, it would be a gravely wrongful thing. You may unwittingly create problems for yourself, for other people and for the Buddhist religion.

If we allow “fake” Buddhists in various circles to become leaders of ordinary people in spiritual matters, they may mislead and misdirect people (or even the nation). Those people may develop wrong beliefs and become superstitious. Or they may altogether lose faith in the Buddhist religion.

How greed, anger, ignorance and the cause of suffering are related

If we understand the connection between greed, anger, ignorance and the cause of suffering, we will get to know the supreme chief of defilements. We will be able to destroy the supreme chief of defilements in the most direct way.

Ignorance in the four noble truths is a matter of the brain having no correct database of knowledge and the ability in dharma practice. It is therefore not capable of understanding the dharma. Or it has so little knowledge of the dharma that it is incapable of continually controlling the mind not to think thoughts of greed and anger.

When the mind is thinking thoughts of greed, at that moment greed and various forms of suffering related to greed as defined in the

four noble truths will arise. In the same way, when the mind is thinking thoughts of anger, at that moment anger and various forms of suffering related to anger in the four noble truths will arise.

When we are not thinking unwholesome thoughts, that is, when we have no thoughts of greed or anger, then there will be no greed, anger or various forms of suffering related to greed and anger described in the four noble truths present at that moment.

We may observe that when we have ignorance, there arises an opportunity to think unwholesome thoughts or thoughts of greed and anger. Consequently, there will be a kind of suffering as found explained in the four noble truths. On the other hand, even if there remains some remnant of ignorance, but at the moment when you are not thinking unwholesome thoughts, suffering in the four noble truths will not arise.

Therefore, ignorance can be said to be the supreme chief of unwholesome thoughts, namely the thoughts of greed and anger. Unwholesome thoughts are a direct cause of various kinds of suffering according to the four noble truths.

When you are thinking thoughts of greed but you cannot have the greed in your mind satisfied or you do not get what you desire, you may become angry all of a sudden. That is one of the natural ways of how our brain functions.

To prevent anger from arising, we should not think thoughts of greed. Therefore, guarding your own mind not to think angry thoughts, or not to get angry, is quite a simple matter. That is to say, you must not allow thoughts of greed to arise. You should neither have too much nor too little of desire or non-desire in your mind. And that is all there is.

To prevent greed and anger from arising or to completely destroy them, we must first destroy ignorance. This is done by enhancing the

dharma database in our memory and maximizing the application of our mindfulness and wisdom to continually control our mind not to think unwholesome thoughts.

Ignorance is the supreme chief of unwhole-some thoughts. Therefore complete destruction of ignorance in this very life is tantamount to the eradication of the supreme chief of defilements. With ignorance completely destroyed, no unwhole-some thoughts will ever take place again. As a result, we will be able to attain the end of suffering in this very life.

Arahants are people who have completely destroyed ignorance. They are therefore the people who have true knowledge and wisdom and the ability to dwell in the dharma. Each of them is capable of using their knowledge and wisdom and the ability to continually prevent and destroy all unwholesome thoughts in this very life.

So everyone should study and practice the dharma according to the Buddha's teaching in the four noble truths. They should continue to evaluate their practice all their life to reduce and eliminate ignorance, which is the supreme chief of all defilements. This means that we must make an effort to increase the memory database of our knowledge in the dharma and try to apply them properly.

Clearly recognizing craving and attachment as they truly are

The meaning of craving and attachment as taught in the four noble truths is different from what is generally understood.

If we recognize and understand craving and attachment according to the meaning given by the Buddha, we will also understand and be able to evaluate the attainment of nirvana described in the four noble truths. The Buddha always teaches that it is nirvana because it is free from craving and attachment.

To clearly understand and recognize by yourself the proper meaning of craving and attachment, please consider the following questions and try to answer them accordingly:

If you repeatedly generate thoughts of greed or anger, you will also create more greed or anger. You will have more desire to possess more and more. You may likewise desire to have many things happen according to your greed or anger at that moment. Is this correct?

If you still continue to think repeatedly thoughts of greed or thoughts of anger, this will create more and more thoughts of greed to possess even more and more. You will likewise experience more anger. You may also continue to desire that things happen according to your thoughts of greed or anger. This will therefore result in excessive thoughts of greed, undue ambition or desire to get more and more for yourself. Certainly, you may also want to have things happen on account of your thoughts of greed and anger. Is this correct?

Craving is a matter of unwholesome thoughts. Therefore, there are two kinds of craving, namely, craving based on greed and craving based on anger. Is this correct?

If there are still excessive thoughts of greed or thoughts of anger or if you continue to think thoughts of greed repeatedly, this will continually lead to even more excessive thoughts of greed. Such greed will lead to clinging and attachment. This is a yearning process, a strong desire to have whatever things happen according to your thoughts of greed and anger at that moment. Is this correct?

Thoughts of excessive desire or non-desire about something which arise along with strong and sustained attachment are craving based on greed. Is this correct?

Thoughts of excessive and sustained anger, which turn into strong grudge and hatred, are in fact attachment based on anger. Is this correct?

Attachment is a matter of unwholesome thoughts. Therefore attachment can be based on greed as well as anger. Is this correct?

At the moment you are thinking thoughts of craving, pressure is bound to arise, which will forcefully oppress your mind. For this reason, there will be intense suffering occurring at that moment. Is this correct?

At the moment you are thinking thoughts of attachment, there will be intense suffering continually occurring at that moment. Is this correct?

Thinking unwholesome thoughts is not a practice of the middle way, but an extreme mental activity. The most extreme way is the way of attachment. Next to it is the way of greed. Is this correct?

Greed, anger, craving and attachment are a result of extreme thoughts. This is due to the functioning of the brain at the time it is thinking unwholesome thoughts under the control of ignorance at that very moment. Is this correct?

At the moment that the brain is functioning with mindfulness, not thinking thoughts of greed, anger, craving and attachment, being free from unwholesome thoughts, the mind is free from the kind of suffering which arises out of defilements. Is this correct?

Excessive and continued ignorance in the four noble truths is in fact craving and attachment based on ignorance. Is this correct?

The correct answer to all these questions is yes, except the last question. This is because ignorance in the four noble truths is a matter of not having knowledge and understanding in the dharma in your

memory database. It is not a matter of merely thinking unwholesome thoughts.

Nirvana taught by the Buddha is the condition of the mind at the moment when it is pure because at that moment there is no craving or attachment based either on greed or anger. Generally speaking, this is the moment when the mind is not thinking any unwholesome thoughts at all.

In teaching nirvana as found in the four noble truths, the Buddha gives great emphasis on the prevention and destruction of craving and attachment, which arise from unwholesome thoughts in our daily life. The purpose of such emphasis is to help ordinary people to clearly understand the subject of nirvana without much difficulty. If we correctly recognize craving and attachment that arise in our daily life as they really are, we will easily be able to understand the subject of nirvana. We will attain nirvana and be able to evaluate our attainment of nirvana in daily life without much difficulty.

If we examine this subject more deeply, we will see that being an *arahant* requires that a person entirely destroys the roots of defilements in his mind. Firstly, this is done by destroying the root of ignorance, which is the supreme chief of all defilements. We must study and practice the dharma in daily life to increase knowledge and understanding of the dharma in our memory database and apply such knowledge and understanding to control our mind, which is the supreme chief of life so that the mind does not think thoughts of greed and anger. In this way, craving and attachment will not arise in the mind.

If you practice the dharma and evaluate the result of the dharma practice without first studying the four noble truths correctly and fully, you could be off the right track and may even lose a good opportunity – maybe a lifetime of opportunity – because you may blindly believe those people who have themselves lost their way.

Conclusion

The cause of suffering mentioned in the four noble truths refers to the roots of defilements, namely, greed, anger and ignorance. The ignorance in the four noble truths is the supreme chief for all the causes of suffering and all sorts of defilements.

Because of ignorance or nescience, you will not be able to efficiently develop mindfulness. Therefore you cannot guard your own mind against unwholesome thoughts. As a result, thoughts of greed and thoughts of anger will be bound to arise. When they become intensified, they may turn into strong craving and attachment.

If you make a continued effort to study and practice the dharma in your daily life, it will prevent and destroy ignorance and all bad thoughts such as greed, anger, craving and attachment. This will likewise lead to the end of suffering which results from unwholesome thoughts.

To overcome your own mind according to the Buddha's teaching means to overcome your own unwholesome thoughts. This will help you to always adjust your life in accordance with the middle way under all kinds of circumstances.

The Path Taught by the Buddha

Many people who have not studied the subject of their own thoughts or have not learned how to properly take care of their own thoughts may not understand their thoughts at all. As they do not recognize their own thoughts, they do not understand how to stop their thoughts. This is in fact a matter of concentration practice. They also cannot control their mind, which is achieved through the development of mindfulness. As a result, they are not able to properly

follow the three principles of the Buddha's teaching found in the *Ovadapatimokkha*, namely, refraining from bad actions, doing only what is good and purifying the mind.

If we practice the dharma according to the noble eightfold path (eight factors for dharma training) correctly, fully and continually, we will greatly accumulate knowledge and information on the dharma, which could be stored in our memory database, and increase our ability to use the dharma accordingly. We can use such accumulated knowledge and information to look after our own thoughts and to purify our mind. As a result, our mind will be filled with happiness and a sense of peace. We will realize nirvana without any limitation in terms of time and place. And we need not wait until the next life.

To make dharma practice and its evaluation easy in our daily life, we should clearly understand the practice which leads to the end suffering at least briefly. This practice is known as meditation.

The method of simple daily dharma practice (meditation) has two components, namely:

1. *Mindfulness*. This is the method of insight meditation. It is the way leading to the development of wisdom.
2. *Concentration*. This is the meditation method to focus the mind. It is the way to calm down our thoughts, leading to mental peace and serenity.

To make it simple for daily dharma practice and personal evaluation, we will begin with a discussion on the practice to develop mindfulness, which is the seventh factor in the teaching of the noble eightfold path. Then we will continue with the practice to develop concentration, which is the eighth factor of the noble eightfold path.

1. The development of mindfulness to attain temporary nirvana

The Buddha teaches that the development of mindfulness is the

only direct way to end suffering and attain nirvana. After you have read and practiced the dharma according to the instruction given in this book, you will be able to prove the facts for yourself if such a teaching is really correct and true.

To lead everyday life in accordance with the Buddha's teaching, you should apply mindfulness and wisdom in both worldly affairs and spiritual endeavors while going about all your normal activities. You will be able to perform your duties with greater efficiency, adding to your work effort the dimensions of value, purity, fairness as well as the realization of nirvana.

Every day, people generally spend most of their time paying attention to their various activities. They spend just a small amount of time to relax or rest in concentration. Therefore, development of mindfulness is very important in day-to-day activities in our life. A smaller portion of time is devoted to concentration practice in order to allow our body and our brain a temporary break between work sessions.

Easy shortcut to develop mindfulness

The practice method to develop mindfulness is truly simple, easy, straightforward and not at all complicated.

In each and every moment when you are practicing mindfulness, you will immediately receive the result of the practice. This result is the attainment of nirvana, about which everyone will be able to examine and prove the facts for themselves.

How to practice mindfulness in daily life

There are only three steps in this simple way of mindfulness training. Everyone should indeed try to bring mindfulness continually into all daily activities and this practice can be carried out as follows:

1. *Contemplation of the dharma.* This means an effort to

develop mindfulness by studying and reflecting on the four noble truths. It also includes the regular practice of solving problems, which may arise in our daily life. This will help increase our knowledge and ability in the dharma which is already stored in the memory database of the brain.

2. *Control and restraint of our own thoughts.* This is an effort to cultivate mindfulness by using knowledge and information already stored up in our memory database. Our mind should be under constant control and restraint so that it will not think unwholesome thoughts and will think only wholesome thoughts. In this way, our mind will remain pure continually through our life. At the same time, it will also result in the increase of knowledge and understanding of the dharma in our memory storage.

3. *Use of intellect and wisdom in worldly as well as spiritual concerns.*

You will see that all the principles of mindfulness training, when condensed and compressed for practical purposes in our daily life, are not much at all. It is not surprising therefore that we find the Buddha preaching the four noble truths while he was on the road, under a tree or by the roadside.

To help you understand the principles, the reasons, the problems and the prevention and solution of the problems, I would like to elaborate on the method of mindfulness practice with some useful suggestions. This will help you to remove considerable doubts from your mind and facilitate the training to increase mindfulness to a certain extent.

1. *Contemplation of the dharma*

To correctly, directly and effectively prevent and remove all suffering which arises from unwholesome actions, you should have the basic knowledge in the four noble truths. This knowledge is

derived from the contemplation of the dharma.

Contemplation of the four noble truths through a process of study, reflection and problem-solving effort will help us clearly understand things as they truly are (*vipassana*) without having to blindly believe other people.

Contemplation of the dharma is therefore a kind of truth-finding process, which involves serious examination and verification of the four noble truths in both theory and practice. It also includes a process of careful self-evaluation.

The knowledge and ability you gain from examining and contemplating the dharma will further enrich your brain with additional dharma knowledge and understanding.

Only the knowledge which you have learned and remembered can be used to properly take care of your own thoughts. You will be able to restrain your own thoughts so your mind will never think unwholesome thoughts and will continually think only wholesome thoughts.

2. Control and restraint of our own thoughts

Mindfulness training under this subject may be divided into two sub-topics, namely, (1) training to control thoughts and (2) training to restrain thoughts.

(1) Training to control thoughts

In our daily life, if we want to keep our mind pure and continually free from suffering, we must try to cultivate mindfulness to control our own thoughts so that we may not think unwholesome thoughts. We should, on the other hand, develop a habit of continually thinking only those thoughts that are good and wholesome.

At the time when we are practicing mindfulness, we are bound

to think only good thoughts and consequently be free from unwholesome thoughts as a result. This will lead to wholesome actions through body, speech and mind and we will therefore be free from suffering which naturally arise from all unwholesome actions.

It is the nature of the brain that there are always some kinds of thoughts arising in it. Or it is likely that it will think random thoughts at times about many experiences already stored in memory. Some of these experiences may be good, some may be bad. It may also take the experience at the present moment to think over again and again in various ways. This is the normal way of how the brain functions, which is well and good, because in this way we may keep our life and property safe and free from danger.

People who do not have any thoughts arising in their mind or do not think up any thoughts at all are probably in deep sleep, unconscious or whose brain is severely damaged and does not function.

If some thoughts have arisen and you just keep thinking about them in this and that way not related to whatever you are doing at the moment, such thinking activity would give rise to further wandering thoughts and useless fantasies. It is an unwholesome mental activity causing you to perform your duty with undue lack of efficiency. Potentially, shortcomings or even damages are bound to occur and your work may not attain the same high standard and the same value as it normally should. And your mind may not be pure on account of the unwholesome thoughts.

Therefore when a certain thought arises, which is not related to what you are doing, you should try to stop that thought and return to mindfulness and pay proper attention to the work you are doing.

Sometimes, certain ideas that have arisen are either a matter of urgency or may serve a useful purpose, in which case you may apply

mindfulness and continue to consider such ideas in an appropriate manner.

Wandering thoughts are natural to normal brains. It is not possible to put full control on your thoughts so that such mental activities may not take place at all. This is because they are simply part of brain functions.

On the other hand, if we allow our thoughts to wander all the time, we may become habitually vagarious. This is unwholesome. Therefore when you come to realize that you are now being aimlessly misled by some fantasies, you should immediately stop such mental activities and bring your attention to the work on hand. If you train yourself in this way, before long you will gain the ability to remain habitually mindful; you will always think good thoughts; or such good thoughts will arise automatically. This may be compared to an experienced driver who can drive well. He drives smoothly, effortlessly and without danger.

Arahants are people who have complete knowledge and expertise in the dharma. They are able to refrain from evil action, do good deeds and purify their mind continually according to the Buddha's teaching in the *Ovadapatimokkha*. Everyone should therefore try to think and lead their life like those *arahants*. We should try to attain nirvana as continually as we can through our life.

(2) Training to restrain thoughts

In our daily life, we are bound to receive various kinds of sensory experiences through the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind. This information enables us to perform all kinds of activities, including the protection of our life and property.

At the moment when we are receiving information through sensory experiences, if we do not restrain our thoughts, we will easily be tempted to think unwholesome thoughts. This is especially true at

the moment when you are receiving experiences that tend to stimulate unwholesome thoughts.

The way to practice restraining your thoughts is easy. You may train yourself by attempting to restrain your thoughts while watching a news broadcast or a soap opera on television.

You may begin the training to restrain your thoughts by learning how to command yourself or give yourself an order. First of all, divide your attention into two parts and direct one half of your attention for watching television and the other half to the feeling of your breaths. Be attentive of your inhalation and exhalation as the air passes in and out through your nostrils. It is like the training method for concentration development, in which we apply mindfulness to our breaths. When we breathe in, we know that we are breathing in. When we breathe out, we know that we are breathing out. Our awareness should be gentle, smooth and filled with a sense of relaxation. This will be something that our mind will hold on to; watching television and the breaths. Therefore, our mind will not be totally absorbed in the television program. The attention on the program being watched will partially be reduced by about half.

Dividing part of your attention and directing it towards the awareness of in-breaths and out-breaths in this way will enable you to bring part of the attention to the basis of mindfulness. This will effectively serve to restrain your own thoughts. If a smaller amount of your attention is directed towards your breaths, then the ability to restrain your thoughts will likely become less efficient in a proportionate ratio as well.

If you direct a greater amount of your attention towards your breaths, the restraining power over your thoughts also will likely become more efficient in a proportionate ratio.

If you entirely devote all your mindfulness to the sole breathing

activity, you will attain the complete focus of a totally one-pointed state of mind (*ekaggata*). This will give you some moments of a temporary restful break to the body, the brain and the mind for a certain period of time.

It is the nature of the brain that when it is not occupied with something useful, it tends to wander around to all kinds of events and experiences, including those that are unwholesome. If you always allow the mind to wander in this way, before long you will become an expert at generating many useless and aimless fantasies.

Therefore whenever you are free, you should always practice restraining your mind by directing it to the foundation of mindfulness, which is the in- and out-breaths, suitably proportionate to the condition and the situation at that time.

Every time you are restraining your mind, there will be no unwholesome thoughts arising. The mind is therefore pure and in the state of nirvana at the present moment.

In our daily life, we should always make a continued effort to develop a habit of mental restraint. This is done by keeping mindfulness sustained and fortified in proportionate measures as a basis for the mind in order to continually prevent the arising of unwholesome thoughts.

If we meet someone whose mind is bad or if we are in a bad environment, we may be at a higher risk to think unwholesome thoughts. We should therefore try even more to restrain our own thoughts by maintaining proportionately greater mindfulness as a basis for the mind. In addition, we should also keep reminding ourselves not to think unwholesome thoughts.

When you are crossing a busy and dangerous street or when you are doing something important, which requires much thoughtfulness and care, you should totally pay attention to that activity only. There

is no need here to divide your attention and direct it towards the basis of mindfulness.

When you lie down on your bed to go to sleep, you should continually restrain your thoughts so you will fall asleep fast and deeply. This is done by gently directing your attention towards the basis of mindfulness to calm down the mind so it does not wander around. In addition, you may remind yourself that it is now time to sleep and you should stop thinking about any other things.

If your mind keeps wandering at bedtime, you should gently bring it back to the basis of mindfulness.

Everyone should always make a strong effort to cultivate mindfulness of breathing. They should learn how to direct the mind towards the base of mindfulness in an appropriate proportion in order to restrain the mind so wholesome thoughts may continually arise. This will also result in the attainment of a more sustained kind of nirvana.

An effort to force your attention to abide with the basis of mindfulness at all times, in every second, is not the middle way. It will only lead to tension and suffering in various forms. But we should constantly practice restraining the mind so that this mental restraint becomes a habit, something that you do automatically, in which case we will be ever on guard to firmly and intensely restrain our thoughts at any moment when we receive sensory perceptions that tend to stimulate unwholesome thoughts.

If we lead our life or engage ourselves in all kinds of activities, including the study and practice of the dharma, in a manner which is too tightly restrictive or constrained, we may have physical or mental problems as a result. But if our practice is too lax, we will not get a good result either. Both these methods of practice are not the middle way. They are the two extremes in dharma practice resulting from the

lack of knowledge and information on the dharma. It means that the memory database does not have sufficient dharma knowledge and information stored in it.

3. Use of intellect and wisdom in worldly as well as spiritual concerns

In our daily life, we should perform all our duties for the continued development, stability, happiness and nirvana by applying both secular knowledge, be it knowledge in general or technical knowledge, together with the knowledge and understanding of the dharma, which is in fact the true insight into the four noble truths.

Being without intellectual knowledge and factual information in the dharma in your memory storage or having such knowledge and information without applying them in daily life could be a factor that creates much suffering in various forms for individuals as well as for the society and the nation.

To see clearly the significance of knowledge and understanding in both secular and spiritual concerns, which we should possess and apply both of them in our daily life, I would like to give an example just to illustrate that some serious problems may arise from not developing knowledge and understanding in secular and spiritual concerns in our daily life. For example, in a professional healthcare career, there may be some physicians or nurses who do not develop their knowledge and skills in the medical as well as the spiritual fields. Because they lack necessary technical skill and spiritual understanding as providers of healthcare service, they could ruin the patients' opportunity for healing when they come to seek their service. The patients' condition could even get worse. Or the patients may end up with a higher hospital bill. They may become handicapped or may even die in the process of treatment. This is clearly a case in which patients and their loved ones have to undergo much suffering on account of the concerned healthcare personnel's incompetence. Physicians and nurses who do not improve their

knowledge and skills are therefore not good or reliable professionals. They may be called bad people.

Physicians and nurses whose unwholesome nature is very strong may completely discard the ethical value in their professional career by unfairly overcharging patients beyond the economic capacity of the patients. Some may not pay enough attention to their work. Some come late for their work; some are habitually lazy; some have a habit of leaving before time; some simply stay away from work and pay little attention to their patients; some indulge in their own trivialities while at work or just spend time daydreaming aimlessly. All this can create serious suffering and various problems for the patients as well as their loved ones. Such physicians and nurses are not good professionals at all.

Some bureaucrats, government employees or politicians who earn their livelihood from people's taxes but make no effort to improve their secular and spiritual knowledge and understanding may also cause damage to people in general as well as the government itself. Such people therefore can be said to commit corruption towards people of the whole nation. They commit corruption towards their own country.

In the same way, if all professionals and service providers do not improve their knowledge and skills in both worldly and spiritual fields, there is plenty of opportunity for them to think unwholesome thoughts and do unwholesome deeds. They may become bad people in society as well.

People in high positions, politicians and popular social activists who have no knowledge or understanding of the dharma or who have such knowledge and understanding but never use them along with their secular knowledge and understanding may risk thinking unwholesome thoughts, speaking bad words or doing bad deeds with very serious and far-reaching effects. This may result in various

problems in the nation. For example, there may be serious and widespread corruption or even a permanent split in social and political circles that can never be healed.

It may be very difficult, even impossible, to develop dharma knowledge and understanding for people who have been victimized and subjected to a very high degree of exceedingly severe and violent experiences, especially when those experiences are deeply embedded in their memory database.

What everyone can do is make a determination to increase their secular and spiritual knowledge and information already stored in their memory and develop a habit of always using them in daily life. This will help them perform all activities with greater efficiency and with a continually pure mind. They should help spread the dharma knowledge and information for the benefit of other people in an appropriate manner.

Let's practice cultivating mindfulness in daily life.

For people who have just begun to study and practice the dharma in their daily life, they should command themselves to cultivate mindfulness at least three or four times a day. They should be determined to practice according to the command (auto-suggestion) which they have given to themselves so that this practice will finally become a habit.

When this practice becomes a habit, there is no need to give the order so often but the practice should be kept up so the order remains firmly and freshly imbedded in the memory and does not fade away.

The way to cultivate mindfulness is truly simple. Briefly speaking, you should pay full attention to give yourself an order by mentally saying to yourself like this:

“I will try to nurture this mindfulness to constantly reflect on the

dharma. I will also restrain my mind and control my thoughts so that there will be only wholesome thoughts arising continually all my life.”

This order is a kind of auto-suggestion; it is truly a short way to cultivate mindfulness.

After you have ordered yourself accordingly, you should try to follow that order as consistently as possible. But even this practice should also be maintained along the principle of the middle way.

If you learn to mindfully examine the four noble truths, the knowledge of the dharma in your memory, especially the practical aspect, will be further increased and enhanced. If you train yourself in restraining your own thoughts, your dharma knowledge which is stored in the memory, especially the practical aspect, will also be further increased and enhanced. This will even lead to a better sustained attainment of nirvana.

In controlling your own thoughts, when you realize that you are thinking unwholesome thoughts or you are suffering on account of unwholesome thoughts, you should stop thinking those thoughts at once, at that very second, and redirect your thoughts towards the activities in which you are presently engaged. At the same time you should remind yourself that you will not think such unwholesome thoughts again.

Telling and reminding yourself at all times, when unwholesome thoughts arise, will help you increase knowledge and information about the dharma which are already stored in your memory. This will naturally decrease the unwholesome and increase the wholesome thoughts.

We should do the same even in secular matters. If we do something wrong, we should always advise or remind ourselves not to repeat the mistake.

Suffering in the secular concerns not connected with unwholesome thoughts, for example, suffering from a headache, fever, stomachache, fainting, unfinished task, loss of some belongings, getting hurt physically, etc. should also receive our due attention to alleviate the unpleasant condition by applying both our secular and spiritual kinds of knowledge and wisdom. The secular and the spiritual aspects of the knowledge should always be used together.

It is normal that all people have one problem or another in endlessly different ways and it is beyond us to solve them all. Life and problems are always bound together. If there is a worldly problem, worldly suffering will also arise.

Worldly suffering that takes place each day is nothing serious and it is just a basic and natural problem. Solution for such a problem is achieved by using worldly knowledge and commonsense, which is sometimes rather automatic or instinctive. For example, when we feel tired, we simply change position. When we feel exhausted, we just take a rest. When we are hungry, we go to eat. Or if we are sleepy, we go to sleep. This kind of worldly knowledge or commonsense to solve basic problems in life is already stored in memory since birth.

Suffering connected with spiritual concerns or suffering according to the four noble truths is a problem that must be dealt with through the knowledge and understanding of the dharma. If we can always practice solving this type of problem, it will also become habitual and instinctive.

Naturally, at birth the brain does not have the dharma knowledge in its memory database. It is therefore essential that we consistently study and practice the dharma in our daily life to develop and enhance dharma knowledge in our memory database.

Generally, ordinary people who have serious problems tend to have serious suffering too, both the worldly kind of suffering and the

suffering from the spiritual perspective in the four noble truths. To solve problems of a serious and grave nature, we need to exercise great effort and earnestly employ both the worldly knowledge and the dharma wisdom in a proper and consistent manner.

If, however, we do not have sufficient secular knowledge to solve the various problems at the moment, we should be determined above all else to rely on our own effort by trying more and more to study and search for knowledge that would be needed to solve the problems.

But in all instances of our attempt to solve any ordinary problems, we should also incorporate our dharma knowledge along with those endeavors as well. This will help prevent and remove unwholesome thoughts at the time we are trying to solve the problems. In the process, it will also prevent additional suffering that may arise from unwholesome thoughts.

If we are unable to solve the problems by ourselves, we should consult those who have more knowledge or skill for advice or ask them to help solve the problems. If the problems cannot be solved even then, it will be necessary to go to those with greater knowledge and experience and ask them for further assistance.

Some problems are beyond help and there can be no solution at all. If such is the case, we should accept that they cannot be solved. For instance, there are problems of old age, death and separation from loved ones, etc.

Some problems may have a certain way available for their solution. We should therefore give every problem an all-round consideration with regard to its prevention, control, attenuation or removal in an appropriate manner.

Consultation with people who have little knowledge and skill or asking them to solve problems may lead to even more serious

problems.

We should develop mindfulness and consider it the dharma for our spiritual shelter just like all the *arahants* because even ordinary people have equal rights to enter this spiritual shelter and take a rest there without any restriction with regard to time and place. However, we should appropriately study the four noble truths and practice according to the noble eightfold path – correctly, fully and consistently – to be able to directly enter into this spiritual shelter.

There is no need to wait any further to begin practicing mindfulness according to the method presented here. No need to wait for a proper place or even a teacher. No need to spend money or waste time. It is simply a matter of leading your normal daily life, but you need to make an effort to study and practice the dharma all your life.

When you cultivate mindfulness, you will learn how to filter in all types of experiences and keep only those that are good and useful in your memory database. You will also learn how to filter out bad experiences from your memory database so that you will not happen to use them in your thinking process. This includes the prevention and removal of all unwholesome thoughts as well.

Constantly developing mindfulness will keep the database of your dharma knowledge fresh, updated and enhanced. On the contrary, whenever you neglect the practice, the memory storage of your dharma knowledge will decrease and the ability to control your thoughts will proportionately decrease as well.

The memory storage of dharma knowledge or *vijja* is something which must be developed, maintained and enhance. This is done by constantly making an effort to attentively study and practice the dharma at each present moment every day throughout our life.

Every moment that we are mindful not to allow unwholesome

thoughts to arise, we will also be able to let go of the current unwholesome thoughts. This is equanimity or stillness (*upekkha*) at the moment of mindfulness development, which leads to temporary nirvana. If we continue to practice more and more to stop thinking unwholesome thoughts, the attainment of nirvana will be of a proportionately longer duration.

Finally, when we are used to the practice and feel comfortable enough with the auto-suggestion to cultivate mindfulness as mentioned earlier, we may shorten the command to gently remind ourselves like this: “Think good.” “Think good and do good.” Or “Think good; speak good; do good.”

Conclusion

Cultivation of mindfulness in daily life consists above all of mindfully examining the four noble truths – carefully, correctly, fully and properly – to create the dharma knowledge and factual information in our memory storage. Then we can use the dharma knowledge and information that we have accumulated for the purpose of training our mind in self-restraint. We can also control our mind to think only good thoughts. At the same time, we may consistently use our worldly as well as spiritual wisdom so we may continually think only wholesome thoughts as often as possible. This practice should be kept up until it becomes a habit.

In each and every moment when we are mindful and do not think unwholesome thoughts, we will enter into temporary nirvana through our mindfulness at the present moment. The reason why we mention temporary nirvana here is because no one can cultivate mindfulness at all times without even a short break.

The break for a rest here according to Buddhism refers to concentration development, which we will discuss henceforth.

Please practice cultivating mindfulness in daily life now.

2. Cultivating concentration to attain temporary nirvana

In the Buddha's time, there were forty methods to cultivate concentration. Out of these forty methods, there was only one method that the Buddha discussed in great detail. He himself always used this method. It is the way to gain concentration through mindfulness of breathing.

Now, please learn how to practice concentration by being mindful of your breaths. Once you have thoroughly understood the principles, you may decide to choose whichever technique you like most.

Concentration through mindfulness of breathing means that we should continuously maintain awareness of breathing until concentration is developed. Concentration in the four noble truths has four levels, the highest of which is the fourth *jhana* or the fourth level.

To make our discussion simple and to the point, we may present the fourth *jhana* by the two components, namely:

1. *Ekaggata*. This means being mindful with one single little activity, which is quite simple and light. It is one-pointed focus on a single object. The little activity here means keeping mindfulness fixed to the breaths that pass in and out through the nostrils. This is the easiest and simplest activity which we can do when we are not asleep.
2. *Upekkha*. This means letting go or getting rid of all thoughts about whatever subjects which are on our mind. It is a practice to restrain the thinking process, to hold up thoughts and make them still. This is possible only if we attain the complete focus of mind.

In our practice of concentration, at the moment when we are

attaining complete focus, equanimity will also arise. That is to say, there will be a kind of letting go of all thoughts concerning whatever things on our mind. It is a temporary arrest of all thoughts when the brain and the body will experience some restful moments. The mind becomes pure and peaceful. Because the mind is free from all thoughts, there will be no suffering arising from unwholesome thoughts either. This is temporary nirvana which we attain at the present moment right then and there.

To make the practice even easier, we would like to suggest these two methods as follows:

Method 1: The easiest way to practice concentration. This is the training method to gain concentration through mindfulness of emptiness (*arupajhana*). This is the easiest way and it is suitable for beginners or newcomers. It will give them a sense of comfort and reassurance that concentration practice is not a difficult thing at all. The practice gives immediate results at the time of training itself. Moreover, this method will pave the way for the knowledge and skill found in the second method of concentration training as well.

Method 2: The standard way of concentration practice. This is the training method to gain concentration through mindfulness of the breaths (*rupajhana*). It is the standard way of training prevalent in Thailand and conforms to the description found in the Tripitaka.

The easiest way to practice concentration (Method 1)

Practice this method in a normal sitting position while carrying out your daily routine. You may also practice it while lying down. Choose a safe place because you are going to close your eyes and stop your thoughts while in the training session, which could put you in a vulnerable position and you may have little or no ability to protect yourself from all kinds of danger.

The easiest way to cultivate concentration

Begin this most simple method to cultivate concentration by closing your eyes. This will help your mind to settle and calm down more easily. Be attentive and tell yourself like this: “Try to have mindfulness and abide by emptiness continually (*ekaggata*), which is the only duty before you at this moment. Stop all your thoughts and continue to remain in stillness (*upekkha*).”

Having given the order to yourself, now make an effort to cultivate concentration according to that order until the end of the session which you have set for yourself.

Before you begin to practice cultivating concentration, you should read the explanation on the practice method so you may have the basic information about concentration training in all forms.

Explanation on the easiest method to practice concentration

In the beginning, you may practice for just one to five minutes to develop concentration.

While you are practicing concentration, some thoughts may suddenly arise by themselves concerning all sorts of things. Some are good thoughts, others are bad ones. This is the natural function of a normal brain in an ordinary person.

When a thought suddenly arises, try to maintain mindfulness by not thinking further about that thought or adding any more idea to it. You should not allow your thoughts to run wild while trying to practice concentration, which is in fact a training process to still your thoughts. If you keep thinking while trying to practice concentration, then your mind will be wandering aimlessly. So you will be doing an opposite thing against your own practice.

You should constantly try to maintain mindfulness on the state of emptiness before you. This is the single most important activity now. This is a training method to take control of your own brain to be

aware of emptiness only (*ekaggata*). It will lead on to the thinking process being stopped or to the letting go of all kinds of thoughts altogether (*upekkha*).

Each and every moment that you are mindful of emptiness, the mind will become pure as a result and will experience temporary nirvana according to the appropriate conditions at that moment. We say “temporary nirvana” because naturally no one may forever enter into concentration and remain there all the time without doing any other things at all.

There may be times when wandering or aimless thoughts arise, which is the normal functioning of the brain anyway. Once you regain mindfulness, however, and come to know your own thoughts, you should again try to continually maintain your mindfulness on the state of emptiness.

People who have a habit of indulging in wandering thoughts may need more time than others to cultivate concentration. But even people without such a habit should also make an effort to train themselves in concentration as well.

No matter whether our dharma practice is a good one, all of us should try to study and practice dharma in the four noble truths and practice according to the noble eightfold path for the whole life. All people can do this whether they are Buddhist or not.

While you are training to gain concentration, do not try to rush or push yourself too hard because that would be a very tiring exercise to the brain. Too much attention may increase brain workload, straining the brain to work too intensely and go without a rest. Too little attention on the other hand will not be sufficient to make the practice yield any good results. The middle way means an appropriate amount of mindfulness, which is good for the practice.

After coming out of concentration, you should evaluate your

practice by considering whether or not during the practice session you could maintain mindfulness with emptiness here and there or you could stop your own thinking process.

If you could stop your own thinking process, even if for a few seconds, that would be sufficient to evaluate your concentration practice that at the moment when you focused mindfulness only on emptiness, you were able to stop your own thoughts and let go of all your wandering thoughts while in concentration. The result is that your mind will be pure and free from suffering at that particular moment. The brain and the body will get a good rest. And you will also attain temporary nirvana.

If we make an effort to regularly practice concentration, we will develop an ability to mindfully stop our own thoughts. It is like closing a file containing different kinds of thoughts, quickly and in a continual manner.

From now on, you may begin practicing concentration by maintaining mindfulness with emptiness. It is enough to practice just for a short duration from one to five minutes only. Then you may evaluate your practice. There is no need to repeat the practice for so many times because this practice is merely for the purpose of laying down the basis for concentration.

Please therefore begin the practice by the easiest method now.

After you have tried to train yourself in the technique of concentration by maintaining your attention with emptiness, you should evaluate your practice to see if you were able to stop your own thoughts. You will find that in each and every moment when your attention was solely with emptiness and your thoughts were arrested, no unwholesome thoughts would ever arise. The mind at that moment would be pure and free from suffering. That was a moment of temporary nirvana. At the same time the brain and the body also got a

rest. After you come out from concentration, you will be ready to perform all your duties with greater efficiency.

If you like this method, you may use it in your daily life. Or you may use any method that you prefer provided you properly understand its principles. However, the best method for concentration practice is yet another method. This is the training through mindfulness of your own breaths.

The standard way of concentration practice (Method 2)

The training method of *anapanasati* or awareness of breathing is the standard technique found in the Tripitaka teaching of the Theravada tradition. This is the tradition which is common in Thailand.

The main principles are the same as in the first method, for which we have already provided necessary information. There is, however, a small difference. In this second method, you should constantly maintain awareness with breathing instead of with emptiness. You should feel the breaths going in and out of the nostrils and maintain your awareness of the breaths right there.

You may practice this in a sitting position. Or you may lie down and practice it if that is appropriate to you. If you do the practice sitting up, you may sit on the floor or on a chair but you should sit upright to prevent a backache problem. Sit in a relaxing manner so your brain and body may get relaxed too.

Older people or people who are not used to sit on the floor should use a chair. Preferably, the chair used for this purpose should be the kind equipped with armrests, which could help prevent them from falling over just in case they happen to doze off during a practice session.

The standard way of concentration practice

(Breathing exercise in daily life)

This method of breathing exercise to cultivate concentration refers to the training in which awareness is continuously fixed to one's inhalation and exhalation in order to attain a complete focus of the mind at the entrance of the nostrils. There is this little practical technique of auto-suggestion which requires you to command yourself as follows:

“Try to maintain mindfulness and be absolutely and continuously aware of the breathing sensation when the air passes in and out through the nostrils so the mind will attain complete stillness.”

After you have commanded yourself, continue to practice concentration according to the suggestion until you come to the end of the session.

Before you begin your first practice, you should read the explanation on the method to gain some more confidence in the training.

Explanation on the standard method to practice concentration

The important principle in the practice of this breathing exercise is that while you are breathing in and out, you should continuously maintain constant awareness of the breathing sensation of the air passing in and out through the opening of nostrils. This is the only activity you should pay attention to so that all other thoughts will be stilled and everything else will be discarded from the mind. This is the simplest meaning of concentration in the four noble truths.

If the awareness of the breathing sensation is not strong enough or if you don't feel the in-breaths and the out-breaths very well, you may try to breathe a little more heavily. When the air touches the opening of the nostrils more strongly, the sensation of the air passing

in and out through the opening of the nostrils will be stronger too and you will be able to feel it better. When the awareness is clear enough, you may return to normal breathing.

After you continue to further practice for a length of time, you will find that the awareness of the breaths passing in and out through the nostrils has largely diminished or disappeared altogether. If so, you should again breathe a little more heavily. When the awareness of the breathing sensation has improved, you may again return to normal breathing. After repeating the training process in this way for a few times, you will begin to properly get used to such sensation.

In each and every moment when you are able to solely maintain mindfulness of breathing or being aware of the air passing in and out through the nostrils, you will also be able to stop all thoughts from your mind. This is the highest goal in concentration training. It is a temporary attainment of the highest level or the fourth *jhana* leading to temporary nirvana at the present moment. This is nirvana attainable through concentration practice.

When you are practicing concentration, you should not do any other form of activities because that will be like doing two things at the same time. That is to say, you are maintaining awareness of the breaths as well as dividing your attention for other activities at the same time. For example, while you are paying attention to your breaths, being aware of the sensation of the air passing in and out through the nostrils, part of the attention is also being paid to other activities by counting numbers, mentally repeating “*buddho*” or observing the rising and falling movement of the abdomen while breathing, etc.

Concentration taught by the Buddha means the complete attention being exclusively paid to the breathing activity to keep all kinds of thoughts perfectly still. Therefore, what we should do according to this teaching is be constantly aware of the breaths only.

But if some people want to do other activities at the same time, they may do so by using just a small portion of their brain to do it. One of the primary purposes of concentration is that the brain, the body and the mind may get a good rest supported by mindfulness so that after the restful concentration we may return to all our activities with mindfulness and with greater efficiency.

It is possible that while you are in the state of concentration, you may see various mental images or some forms and figures created by the mind. For example, you may see bright light, images of the past or the future, a lottery number, hell and heaven, or you may experience some smell, a sound, a flavor of some sort, or bodily sensation, including all kinds of daydreams, etc. All this is a matter of mental creation. They are all conditioned by the brain in various different ways. Sometimes, it is just the way our brain reacts and wanders aimlessly. If it is a correct way of concentration training, there must be constant mindfulness of a single object, which is the breathing, so that all kinds of thoughts will be altogether stopped for a certain length of time.

All kinds of thoughts require various past experiences stored in the memory database. Sometimes, formations of thoughts based on such past experiences may somehow agree with something which happens in some later time (the future). This is quite a normal function of the brain.

There are people who think up or imagine hundreds of things in a single day. Sometimes, it so happens that a certain event takes place according to, or in line with, only one of the many hundreds of things that they have thought up or dreamed about in their wandering thoughts and they become exceedingly happy on that account. They may even imagine that they possess special insight to see the future.

Some people have the habit of thinking up all sorts of things and become very good at it. They may even claim to possess clairvoyance,

which of course is not something to believe. Therefore, before we believe anything, we should first prove the facts for ourselves. For example, we may ask such a person to read a book without opening it. If he cannot read it, then what he claims is only his imagination.

Some people claim that they have some special insight and ability to read the mind (or the thought) of other people. This can be proved in this way. First, write down a few things of what you have thought up on a piece of paper and put it in an envelope. This is the evidence that you need to prove the special ability of such a person. Then ask him to read your thoughts that have already been put down on paper. If he can read them, he is truly gifted and a very good person indeed.

Some people claim to have mental power to heal sickness or other kinds of similar power, but that has nothing to do with the four noble truths. It is easy to prove such a claim of special power and ability. Simply ask him to use his mental power to move the smallest object in front of him that can be seen. If he can do it, then his claim is valid and can be believed. It is noteworthy that even people who claim to have those special powers become sick and suffer like all other ordinary people.

The development of concentration taught in the four noble truths is indeed a means of dharma practice to end suffering and attain nirvana (according to the four noble truths) at the moment when concentration is firmly established. But the mental power or miraculous feats in various forms are something people in India claimed to practice during the Buddha's time. They have nothing to do whatsoever with the end of suffering or nirvana in the four noble truths.

People who claim to have great mental power and special abilities to see the future sometimes demonstrate their extraordinary gifts in public. They may even become famous at the international

level and very rich indeed. But there are really no such people up till now. Those who make such a claim of mental power may be just street magicians.

It is now a matter of grave concerns that so many people choose to blindly believe others rather than trying to depend on their own knowledge and wisdom. This is not in keeping with the teaching of the Buddha.

From the life story of the Buddha, we find that when the Buddha was sick, he had to receive treatment from a physician such as Jivaka. This is because the truth realized by the Buddha has something to do with the mind. It concerns psychology or mental health. The Buddha was indeed a great and noble physician of the mind.

The four noble truths is a teaching for the mind and indeed for perfect mental health to protect us against suffering based on unwholesome actions. It gives us a good defense against unwholesome actions and protects us from suffering. It also helps remove suffering and restore the mind from suffering which arises as a result of unwholesome thoughts, making it strong and healthy in this very life. It has nothing to do with superstition, incantation, magical formula, talismans, rites or rituals for good luck or miracle performance.

Concentration development according to the four noble truths has a very clear objective, which is the attainment of the complete focus of mind and mental stillness. This gives the brain and the body a good respite and makes the mind pure and free from unwholesome thoughts as well as from all suffering that results from unwholesome actions. The mind will attain temporary nirvana at the time when concentration is firmly established.

You may now begin practicing concentration by breathing exercise.

How to practice concentration with eyes open

Training to cultivate concentration with eyes open will help you develop the ability to still the mind while receiving sensory experiences and information through the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind.

In our daily life, we can practice stilling the mind with both eyes open while sitting right in front of a television set. We use the same principle of solely maintaining our attention with breathing and letting go of all other thoughts without telling anyone who may be around nearby at the time when you are practicing concentration.

At your workplace, you may also practice concentration with your eyes open as well. You need no earplugs and there is no need to tell your colleagues to remain silent or volume down all the noises. You don't even have to tell them that you are practicing concentration to give your brain a temporary restful break.

While practicing concentration at a place where other people are around, you should not make a show of yourself to let them know that you are practicing concentration. Therefore, you should practice in a sitting position, with open eyes and looking down as if you are reading a book.

After you have tried practicing concentration with eyes wide open, you will see for yourself that you are able to stop your own thoughts temporarily and will likewise attain nirvana temporarily.

In daily life, training to cultivate concentration with eyes open will increase the database of your knowledge and ability to develop concentration. When you need to shut down your thoughts temporarily, you will be able to do it quickly and steadily.

Cultivating mindfulness and concentration according to the methods presented here is the way of training in daily life. It is the

middle way and it will not therefore cause any mental imbalance or insanity.

Most of the people who suffer from mental imbalance or insanity are those who go to the extreme in their practice. They may have engaged themselves in a very intense form of the practice and may have done it for too long at a stretch. If the brain lacks sufficient rest, it may suffer severe fatigue. Their mindfulness becomes very weak, too weak to properly control the thoughts, so they may become mentally imbalanced for some time.

Signs of mental imbalance or insanity may be seen in their speech and action that are out of control. There is no mindfulness here. If we find a person with this kind of problem, we should advise him to discontinue his practice. Probably, it may be necessary to administer certain medication such as a mild tranquilizer to make him calm down and get some sleep. He will recover quickly and easily.

After you come out of concentration, you should evaluate your practice. You should also change position in order to keep yourself in good physical health.

Please proceed to practice concentration with eyes open in front of your TV now.

Conclusion

There is only one form of concentration practice taught by the Buddha, which is found in the Tripitaka. This is the practice through continuously maintaining awareness of the breathing sensation that you feel as the air passes in and out of the nostrils. This is the only point of focus and nothing else. There will be stillness of the mind and no more wandering thoughts. The brain, the body and the mind will get a good respite and as a result the mind will become pure and free from all kinds of suffering that comes from unwholesome thoughts. You will temporarily attain nirvana as well.

After coming out from concentration and changing posture, your brain and body will be ready to perform all sorts of activities with greater efficiency.

3. Dharma practice in daily life to attain nirvana continually

When you are doing your normal routine in daily life, you should use knowledge and ability in your memory database, with regard to both worldly and spiritual concerns. This will help further increase your memory storage of knowledge and ability in the worldly affairs as well as in the dharma. As a result, you will be able to perform your duties with greater efficiency. And the performance of those duties will be a worthy course of action. It will be a pure, praiseworthy and just action.

Using secular and dharma knowledge and ability already stored up in your memory database as you go about your daily routine while leading your normal existence is in itself a kind of dharma practice in everyday life.

If you constantly pay too much attention and unduly force yourself to perform all kinds of activities without a break, your brain and body will suffer from fatigue and consequently your mindfulness will become very weak. Moreover, your mind will become distracted and your thoughts scattered. In this way, you will be easily tempted to think unwholesome thoughts.

Some people get into bad moods or easily lose temper in the afternoon or towards the evening simply because their brains get weary and jaded. Their ability to reason out various matters becomes slower, dulled and easily prone to mistakes. The efficiency to perform various activities may also be reduced.

To keep up your work efficiency and lead a happy life, you should learn to take some rest now and then by entering into concentration and temporarily close all the files containing various thoughts in your brain. This is called stillness in concentration. It needs not take very long – just one to three minutes at a time is sufficient – and after that you should change position to keep your physical health in good shape.

After you have rested and changed position you may return to all your activities, or whatever work you were doing, with attentive mindfulness as usual. Remember to use both your secular and spiritual (dharma) knowledge and ability together at all times.

If the workload is too heavy or the brain is under too much strain, you should rest in concentration and change position more frequently to avoid harmful effect to your health.

If your work is a light one and your brain and body are not weary, then it is not necessary to rest so often.

Dharma practice in daily life consists of the practice of mindfulness (*vipassana*) alternately with the practice of concentration (*samatha*) while we carry on with our everyday chores or activities. These two kinds of practice are called meditation.

Taking care of your own thoughts is really a matter of practicing meditation.

In practicing meditation it does not matter whether you would begin with the practice of mindfulness or concentration. What is important is that you should practice mindfulness (work) alternately with concentration (rest) in daily life until it turns into a habit.

While taking a rest, you should not bring in any work or keep pondering over it unless it is really urgent because that would make part of the brain so engaged go without rest. You should always try to

keep your thoughts well composed by maintaining mindfulness with breathing as the principal base for awareness in an appropriate ratio. This will help prevent wandering thoughts or bad thoughts.

While at work, you should not bring in your household affairs or private matters to the workplace and waste your time thinking about them. You should also not engage yourself in wandering thoughts because you will only waste your time and unnecessarily cause your work efficiency to run low. This is a loss to yourself as well as to your employer. It may even be considered a form of corruption at work as well.

When you are at home, however, you should not bring back work from the office to think about or labor on it, unless of course it is an urgent matter.

When you are in bed, you should sleep well. You should always be fairly attentive at the moment and tell yourself that you must not waste your sleep by thinking about other things because such indulgence would be harmful to yourself. Then you should be mindful about going to sleep. Be gently attentive only of your own breathing, which is the principal basis of mindfulness, just like when you practice concentration, but not as serious and intense. This will prevent you from wandering thoughts and the mind will become pure as it should be. Sleep will come naturally and easily.

If you always practice mindfulness when going to sleep, you will easily and quickly fall asleep.

Late into the night, if you have to get up for the bathroom, you should learn to compose your mind continually by proportionately maintaining mindfulness with breathing. This will prevent you from getting involved in wandering thoughts.

After returning to bed, try to maintain gentle mindfulness with your breathing only, so you may go back to sleep quickly and with ease.

If you happen to get up before time or if your sleep has not yet covered seven or eight hours, you should not get up from bed to do any work. You should continue to go to sleep until you complete the time you have set aside for sleep. It is necessary to allow the brain or the body to sufficiently complete the repairing and rejuvenating process for itself. If you regularly have too little sleep, the brain will degenerate and get weakened faster than usual.

Not allowing enough opportunity for the body to repair and rejuvenate itself is indeed detrimental to your health. It is neither wholesome nor is it the middle way.

If you are not mindful and do not know how to control yourself with regard to eating suitable food and leading a life of the middle way, it could ruin your health in the long run. And it is unwholesome as well.

At home you may practice concentration at any time of the day as you think fit. But you should do it right, neither too much nor too little. Generally, a home session may last anywhere from five to thirty minutes. Simply follow the principle of the middle way. But if you want to practice concentration for a few restful moments, it may be enough to do it from one to three minutes just like at the office.

For mindfulness, you should try to practice the whole day when you are not asleep in bed or when you are not practicing concentration. But you should not overdo it otherwise it may turn stressful and you may feel miserable. The practice should not be too little either. Please remember that the middle way is the best course to follow. If you properly keep practicing it, this will become habitual and automatic.

Development of mindfulness will temporarily lead to the letting go of unwholesome thoughts, hence the temporary attainment of nirvana at the present moment only. This is called stillness in mindfulness. Development of concentration on the other hand will lead to the letting go of all kinds of thoughts, hence the temporary attainment of nirvana at the present moment as well. This is called stillness in concentration.

Only alternate development of mindfulness and concentration in daily life will continually enable us to attain nirvana. How much or how little of the continual attainment of nirvana will depend on causes and conditions at that particular moment.

In our daily life, if we can increasingly achieve a more continual attainment of nirvana, we may indeed take that to be a good success in the dharma study and practice.

Whether you are a monk or a lay person, whether you go to practice the dharma in a cave or at any meditation center, in daily life you should likewise learn how to practice mindfulness alternately with concentration.

I would like to encourage everyone to practice the dharma in their daily life without waiting for a proper day, a proper time, the right place, a perfect teacher or an expert master. Neither do you need to pay any money for the practice. You will derive the greatest benefit all the same from the dharma practice at each and every moment when you are not thinking unwholesome thoughts.

Practicing the dharma continuously at each and every second is an impossible task. What I am stressing now is that you should try to practice continually just to form a good habit. And you should always try to follow the middle way. After a certain length of time in dharma practice, you will find that the rate of unwholesome thoughts will decrease. Sometimes, as soon as some unwholesome thought begins

to arise, you will immediately and instinctively detect it. You will be able to deal with it properly, as you may think fit, according to its causes and conditions.

Have you practiced the noble eightfold path yet?

Because in this book we have to summarize the noble eightfold path (or eight factors of dharma practice) to a great extent and make it very brief and compact, please read the explanation slowly and try to understand it thoroughly so you will clearly see the connection of the different factors in this important teaching.

Generally, people tend to understand that the noble eightfold path is either the middle way or it is the eight ways altogether.

The noble eightfold path realized and taught by the Buddha is a combination of the practical principles consisting of eight factors for dharma practice in daily life. It provides a correct guideline for us to lead a life of the middle way in order to attain the end of suffering (nirvana) at the present moment.

These principles of practice consisting of eight factors, which must be properly and consistently developed, are as follows: Right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration.

While reading about the noble eightfold path, please also give an evaluation on yourself whether you have properly practiced the dharma according to each factor of the eightfold path.

To better understand the noble eightfold path in a proper manner, we need to briefly consider the principles of the dharma practice and collaborate them with our discussion. That is to say, we have to closely examine the very essence of the practical dimension of the dharma. This, of course, refers to the teaching of

Ovadapatimokkha, which contains the three principles: Refraining from evil, doing what is good, and purifying the mind.

From now on, I will use the word ‘evil’ or ‘bad’ instead of ‘unwholesome’ a little more often to make my explanation more compact and easier to understand.

The first factor, which is right view, is also the most important practical principle which must be realized. This factor is very important for a correct perspective of dharma study and practice.

Going the wrong way in dharma practice is indeed a sad thing because it could mean the loss of a lifetime of opportunity. Some people may end up being stuck in a whirlpool of suffering if they unwittingly commit some unwholesome actions. In addition, they may suffer from other harmful losses in many other areas as well.

Right view in the four noble truths is entirely different from right views in general.

Right view here refers to the correct understanding according to the dharma principles of the four noble truths. This is a specific definition of the right view given by the Buddha.

This right view can be cultivated only when you have considerable knowledge in the four noble truths, correctly and fully. Therefore the correct way to develop the first factor in the noble eightfold path is to sufficiently engage in the proper study and practice of the dharma according to the four noble truths to remove all or part of the ignorance, which is considered the chief of all defilements.

If you have sufficient dharma knowledge and information, correctly and completely, of the four noble truths stored in your memory database, your view and understanding of the dharma should consequently be in line with the teaching of the four noble truths. It

may be said that you have now begun to develop the right view. For example, you have come to realize that you should refrain from evil, do whatever is good and purify your own mind to attain nirvana at the present moment.

When you have the right view, you will naturally develop the right thought as a result, which is the second factor of the noble eightfold path. This right thought refers to the thought to prevent or destroy all bad thoughts so that there will be no more bad speech (3rd factor), bad action (4th factor) and wrong livelihood (5th factor).

The development of the first principle of right view will directly lead to the destruction of ignorance. The development of the second principle of right thought will directly lead to the destruction of greed and anger.

The two factors of right view and right thought are therefore the practical principles that lead to the destruction of the three root causes of all defilements, namely, greed, anger and ignorance in the four noble truths. These three are in fact the cause of all unwholesome actions.

The first factor is the most important because it is the supreme chief of all factors in the eightfold path. It is also the first principle of practice that must be cultivated in order to eliminate ignorance in the four noble truths. Ignorance is truly the chief of all defilements.

If you do not have the right view as it really is according to the teaching of the four noble truths, your dharma study and practice may be off the path. This is a very big problem for Buddhists as individuals as well as for the stability of the Buddhist religion at the present time. All concerned people should immediately work hard to solve this problem.

The second factor of the noble eightfold path is the second most important, but it is always connected with the first factor. This is the

principle of practice which must be followed after the right view has been cultivated. The second principle will prevent and destroy greed and anger, which are the supreme chiefs of evil (bad) actions through body, speech and mind. Therefore, these first two factors of the right view and the right thought are an effective instrument for the removal of the roots of defilements, which are greed, anger and ignorance in the four noble truths.

The remaining six factors are plainly an extension of the principles for the dharma practice. There is the factor of abstaining from evil and engaging in good actions through speech, which is called right speech (3rd factor). Then there is the factor of abstaining from evil and engaging in good actions through the body, which is called right action (4th factor). And there is the factor of abstaining from evil and engaging in good livelihood, which is called right livelihood (5th factor). The dharma practice continues with right effort (6th sixth factor), right mindfulness (7th factor) and right concentration (8th factor) in order to destroy all the roots of defilements and prevent all bad actions through body, speech and mind from arising.

Dharma practice according to the second factor therefore involves freedom from the thoughts of greed and anger. This leads to right speech (3rd factor), which is freedom from bad speech; right action (4th factor), which is freedom from bad action; and right livelihood (5th factor), which is freedom from bad livelihood. Those factors from the third to the fifth are principles of practice to refrain from evil actions through speech and body. Those factors from the sixth to the eighth are principles of a more profound nature. They are the principles of practice in order to refrain from evils of the mind, by which we train to avoid thinking bad thoughts. Not thinking bad thoughts will truly result in not doing bad things through body, speech and mind.

If you want to successfully destroy the roots of defilements and remove all evils of the speech, the body and the livelihood, you need to practice right effort by properly studying and practicing the dharma. In addition, you need to practice mindfulness alternately with concentration in your daily life, which will consequently make the mind pure. Such a pure mind will naturally experience nirvana of the present moment.

Not thinking bad thoughts is essential for the overcoming of all evils through body, speech and mind. The key practice here is to avoid doing harm to oneself and/or others. This will indeed result in the purification of the mind and the freedom from suffering. It is equal to doing good deeds for oneself as well as for other people.

If you go back to read about the specific meaning of nirvana taught by the Buddha, you will find that the attainment of nirvana according to the Buddha's teaching is based on the eradication of evil, namely, greed, anger, ignorance, desire and attachment. In other words, it is a matter of not thinking any bad thoughts.

Practicing the dharma according to the noble eightfold path means that you cannot choose to practice only mindfulness or concentration. You must practice all the factors (an entire combination of factors) without exception because all of them are interconnected and inseparable. If you do not practice in its totality, or if you miss out certain factors, then you will not be able to consistently experience nirvana.

I would like to congratulate and further encourage you if you have begun practicing the dharma along the path, which is complete with all the eight factors. You should continue to make the dharma study and practice a lifetime pursuit.

Correct and complete method of meditation is in fact a shortcut version of the dharma practice according to the noble eightfold path.

The eightfold path described in the four noble truths contains all the principles of dharma practice at the present moment.

At the moment when you are continually practicing the dharma correctly and fully by combining all the eight factors together, you will not think unwholesome or bad thoughts. Naturally, you will attain nirvana at each and every moment when no bad thought arises.

The path and the result represented here by the “noble disciples” who have reached the various stages of higher spiritual attainment as well as nirvana are something that should be attained at the present moment. Therefore, everyone should try to attain the path, the result and nirvana in this life. The only direct way for their attainment is to develop the dharma knowledge and wisdom and use them in daily life.

The path, the result of practicing and nirvana are in fact a matter of not doing bad things at the present moment.

The various stages of spiritual attainment realized by the noble disciples, beginning with the attainment of the Eye of Truth (*sotapanna*), make them truly Buddhist. The last of those stages is *arahantship*.

Conclusion

The noble eightfold path consists of eight principles for dharma practice, which are meant to directly destroy ignorance in the four noble truths (1). When ignorance is reduced or completely destroyed, we will be able to prevent and remove greed and anger (2). Then there will be no bad speech (3), bad bodily action (4), and bad livelihood (5). To eliminate all those bad things, a person must alternately practice effort (6), mindfulness (7) and concentration (8) in his daily life. (Figures in parentheses refer to the eight factors of the noble eightfold path.)

Evaluation of daily dharma study and practice

Evaluation of dharma study and practice in daily life can be done easily and will take just seconds.

Evaluation of dharma study and practice in daily life should be done after each concentration practice session because that is when the mind is relatively calm and composed. The last evaluation for the day should be done before going to sleep.

Evaluating your knowledge

Everyone should make an effort to have time in their daily life for both secular and dharma knowledge. They should study all their life to keep up knowledge or increase their knowledge and ability for dharma practice already stored in their memory regarding both worldly and spiritual concerns.

If we stop studying and reviewing our knowledge and ability or if we stop learning how to solve problems, our knowledge and ability already stored up in the brain will fade away or decrease. This is just the nature of the brain. The result of course will be the weakening of our dharma knowledge and our ability to use the dharma efficiently.

We should evaluate whether we have a clear and full understanding of the four noble truths or whether we still have doubt concerning certain subjects in the four noble truths. This will give us some definite guideline for further dharma study and practice.

Generally, people tend to have different perspectives and interpretations. For this reason, we should comparatively study the various views concerning the four noble truths from different teachers. At the same time, we will have an opportunity to examine and prove all the factual data, which will open up a new vision and

further enhance our dharma knowledge and ability. This will consequently increase our confidence in the dharma practice.

Every night before you go to sleep, you should evaluate whether you have sufficiently gained both secular and dharma knowledge for the day. If not, you should remind yourself that you will try to pay more attention on the following day to gain a good amount of knowledge and further build up the good habit.

You should always check yourself if you still have blind faith or superstitious belief in anything. You should also have a good guideline in preventing and removing all superstition from your mind.

Evaluating your ability

The evaluation process will be correct only if you clearly understand the four noble truths as they really are.

Evaluation of dharma knowledge and practice can be done only by oneself. This is all concerned with oneself. It is therefore beyond the ability of other people to know or understand one's ideas and thoughts.

You should evaluate whether you have alternately practiced mindfulness and concentration, including how much or how little of it, in your daily life. If you can see that it is either too much or too little, then you should remind yourself to follow a course of dharma practice along the middle way.

If you are able to take care of your mind, continually keeping it pure through the day according to the teaching of *Ovadapatimokka*, you should feel happy with such a remarkable success. You should continue to maintain that level of ability all your life.

If the evaluation process reveals that at times you still think unwholesome thoughts, you should pay greater attention and keep reminding yourself that you must not think unwholesome thoughts

again but will strive to practice mindfulness so you may avoid thinking unwholesome thoughts in a more sustained and consistent manner.

Beginners of dharma practice should evaluate their effort more often, for example, in the late morning, afternoon, evening and at bedtime. But if you have gained more experience, you need not do it as often; maybe at least once a day before bedtime should suffice. You should evaluate yourself until it becomes a habit.

Part of your daily activities should be the attentive examination of the dharma and its practice. This should be carried out continually all your life. As a Buddhist, if such activities are temporarily halted and not performed, then it will be as if you have also ceased temporarily to be a Buddhist. If such activities are halted forever and not performed at all, then it will be as if you have forever ceased to be a Buddhist too.

Regular evaluation and auto-suggestion will motivate you to constantly study and practice the dharma so you may continue to always experience “continual nirvana” too. It will continue to urge you even more to make greater effort and to pay more attention to this noble practice in your daily life.

Is nirvana in your mind permanent or impermanent?

How consistently you will attain nirvana in the four noble truths depends on how much dharma knowledge and ability you have in your memory and how efficiently and continually you use them to take care of your own thoughts and prevent your mind from thinking bad thoughts.

To enable you to understand for yourself whether nirvana is permanent or impermanent, please consider the following questions and answer them:

The brain is an impermanent organ. It must undergo changes and it will finally perish in accordance with the causal conditions of each individual as taught in the doctrine of the Three Characteristics (impermanence, suffering and soullessness). Is this correct?

If a person's brain is impaired, damaged, ruined, degenerated or malfunctioned, it will also decrease the memory database of his dharma knowledge and ability causing it to decrease in size. This will proportionately lower his ability to look after his own thoughts as well. Is this correct?

If the ability to look after his thoughts is destroyed, a person may not be able to attain nirvana as he used to do. Is this correct?

The answer to all these questions is yes.

If such is the case, it means that the brain is certainly subject to the law of the Three Characteristics. Is nirvana in the mind permanent or impermanent?

Please answer it for yourself.

Attainment of nirvana at the present moment requires that you have correct and adequate secular knowledge and spiritual wisdom, which must be used correctly and adequately too. There is no way that ordinary people could know beforehand if and when such knowledge and wisdom as well as the ability to use them will get declined or depleted because the brain is subject to the law of the Three Characteristics.

Since our life, body and mind is impermanent in this way, we should therefore make an effort to study and practice the dharma so we may get the highest benefit, namely, the attainment of nirvana in this life as continually as possible.

In the Buddha's time, when people listened to the teaching on the four noble truths for the second time, they could generally

evaluate for themselves if they could remove unwholesome thoughts from their minds in accordance with the Buddha's instruction. If they could, they would know for themselves that they had already attained nirvana.

Ananda, the Buddha's closest disciple, repeatedly listened to the four noble truths, so he had a big database of the dharma knowledge in his memory, which enabled him to deeply examine the dharma. But he did not fully use the knowledge to look after his own thoughts, so he could not attain complete nirvana during the Buddha's lifetime.

We have so far presented two types of attainment for nirvana, namely, (1) the temporary (or not continual) attainment, which is easy to understand and requires no further explanation; and (2) the continual attainment, which may seem hard to understand and may cause readers to feel discouraged. When we use the word "continual," we do not mean the eternally continual attainment of nirvana. For this reason, we often define this with a short description to further clarify nirvana. For example, we would sometimes say "you may attain nirvana even more continually." Or sometimes we would say that "the continual attainment of nirvana depends on causes and conditions at that moment." Sometimes, we use no further description at all just to keep the explanation brief and compact.

After you have read this book and understood its contents, you will be able to practice the dharma correctly and in an appropriate manner. You will also be able to evaluate for yourself if your mind is sufficiently pure; or whether you have attained nirvana temporarily. If so, you are already someone who has begun to realize the dharma. Is this correct? Please answer it for yourself.

To gain more confidence, please conduct some kind of self-evaluation now to see if from the morning up to now you did not always have unwholesome thoughts but attained nirvana for the most part. Congratulations, if that was the case.

Such teaching on nirvana clearly demonstrates that nirvana is something very close to us. All people in this world may attain nirvana by studying and practicing the dharma according to the four noble truths, correctly, adequately and properly.

There are many people who believe that nirvana is something very difficult and something to do with the future life. Therefore, to avoid conflict and controversy concerning nirvana in this life, we should not use the word nirvana in our conversation. It would be clear enough if we refer to it as the mind which is pure and free from bad thoughts and suffering.

If you want to evaluate for yourself whether you have attained nirvana or whether you are free from suffering in the four noble truths, you should rely on your knowledge and ability. You should not blindly believe other people's word because no one else will know your own thoughts. On the other hand, you should not predict whether someone else has attained freedom from suffering in the four noble truths because such a thing is a very personal matter.

Conclusion

People in general and all Buddhists in this world should have knowledge of the four noble truths and be able to practice according to the noble eightfold path correctly, completely and continually.

The four noble truths realized and taught by the Buddha consist of the four components which are directly interconnected.

In summary, there are four main points in the four noble truths, namely:

1. *Suffering* in the four noble truths refers to mental discomfort, physical discomfort, including all kinds of sickness which result from bad thoughts only.

2. *Samudaya* in the four noble truths refers to the cause of suffering connected with bad thoughts arising only from the three roots of defilements, which are greed, anger and ignorance in the four noble truths. Of these three, ignorance is the chief. Greed and anger may be intensified and strengthened into the two levels of desire and attachment.

3. *Nirodha* or nirvana in the four noble truths refers to the end of suffering that comes from not thinking unwholesome thoughts at the present moment only. This is the highest goal of the dharma in the four noble truths.

4. *Magga* in the four noble truths means practical principle to prevent and remove the cause of suffering at the present moment only. Briefly speaking, this is the dharma practice according to the noble eightfold path. You may also practice meditation or cultivate mindfulness alternately with concentration in daily routine for all your life.

The teaching of the four noble truths is something meant to help people free themselves from suffering at the present moment. A person must have a database of dharma knowledge and ability in his memory. He must learn how to use it to prevent and stop all unwholesome actions at the present moment. Therefore, this has nothing to do whatsoever with the merit or any other good karma which you did in the past lives.

After reading and practicing according to this book, correctly and properly, you will know for yourself that attainment of nirvana in the four noble truths is a matter of having dharma knowledge and ability and use them to adjust and change your thoughts. You should think only good thoughts continually at the present moment so that it becomes a habit.

The subject of the four noble truths presented in this book consists of the theoretical aspect, the practical aspect and the evaluation technique. It is necessary that we examine and prove all facts for ourselves just like in the case of scientific study and research. The teachings of the four noble truths in this book have nothing to do with blind faith or superstition, but are truly concerned with the pure science of the mind.

Together, let us try to promote world peace!

The Buddha never placed a copyright claim on the doctrine of the four noble truths he had so well expounded. He invited people from all religions to study and practice according to his teaching so they may fully benefit from what he had taught. He never demanded that they change their religions. The teaching of the four noble truths is indeed a spiritual discipline, which shows us the way to abandon evil actions, to do good deeds and to purify our minds. It also encourages peaceful coexistence at the present moment.

After you have duly examined this book and proved for yourself that it really explains the truth and is certainly beneficial, please consider downloading this book in your website or blog. Or you may publish it, if you wish, in accordance with your resources and inclination. Let us widely publicize and spread this invaluable dharma knowledge and make it available in various forms to bring greater benefit to as many people as possible and further create more and more peace in the world. The author reserves no copyright whatsoever on this book.

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