



Blueprint

A Guide to a Harmonious Life

Dhamma Sermon

by

Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapanyo

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Transcribed from
Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapanyo's
Sermon

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Preface

Venerable Ācariya Thoon Khippapanyo (May 20, 1935 – Nov 11, 2008) dedicated his life to the proliferation of Buddha's original teachings. As he had achieved ultimate emancipation as an *arahant* in 1969, Ācariya Thoon spent the remainder of his life teaching the truth (*dhamma*) to practitioners both in Thailand and abroad.

Wat Pa Ban Koh at Udon Thani (in the northeastern region of Thailand), the temple Ācariya Thoon founded in 1975, will continue to serve as a Buddhist landmark for generations of Buddhists to honor and venerate Buddha's teachings and His relics housed in the great pagoda, in the years to come. The temples founded in Ācariya Thoon's name in the metropolitan cities San Francisco, New York, and Hong Kong, as well as the countless *dhamma* retreat centers across Thailand that train in Ācariya Thoon's style of cultivating wisdom (*paññā*) continue to grow exponentially, to this day.

Ācariya Thoon authored over twenty books (including his own autobiography) and produced various forms of media (mp3, VCD, DVD, etc.) so that *dhamma* practitioners from any walk of life could easily access *dhamma*. Ācariya Thoon also gave countless, memorable and life-changing sermons and blessed his followers with his infinite compassion, for which we will forever be indebted.

This sermon, given in 2003 at a temple in Kuan Nieng, in the southern region of Thailand, was selected by Ācariya Thoon's devout followers as a succinct and illuminating sermon that clearly exemplifies Ācariya Thoon's style of *dhamma* practice. Originally printed in Thai for distribution at Ācariya Thoon's cremation ceremony in February 2009, this sermon includes simple tips for cultivating compassion, living harmoniously with others, as well as a straightforward and practical guide for everyday *dhamma* practice.

We here at San Fran Dhammaram Temple have translated this sermon from Thai into English in hopes that English readers may benefit from this sermon as much as Thai practitioners have. Please contact us with any inquiries, including interest in producing more *dhamma* materials.

Venerable Ācariya Thoon teaches the ability to listen and the ability to think. One will not understand anything simply by listening, but by listening to *dhamma* effectively, wisdom will arise. When the understanding of cause and effect according to the universal truth (*saccadhamma*) arises, we define this as the emergence of wisdom (*paññā*). The term *saccadhamma* on its own refers to Buddha's teaching that was proclaimed unto the world so that its citizens would be acquainted with the truth. *Saccadhamma* is defined as the universal truth, which indicates the truth evident in Buddha's instructions during that era.

Buddha taught the truth. From where did those truths stem? The truth that Buddha used to teach people during that era was the truth about human beings. These truths naturally exist within each individual, however we do not realize or understand them. Despite the fact that the truth is right under our noses, we are unable to realize them. That is why Buddha used the truth about people to teach people. Buddha declared that *dhamma*, this truth that people innately possess, is the universal truth.

Buddha separated this truth into three categories:

1. The category related to *anicca*. *Anicca* is a Pali term meaning change or impermanence.
2. *Saccadhamma* is the ultimate truth, and one truth is suffering (*dukkha*). Every single human is born with suffering, namely, suffering of the body and suffering of the mind. Every person possesses it, and everyone accepts it as normal.
3. One other truth that Buddha taught is that related to *anattā*. *Anattā* is something that has ceased existing in its supposed or conventional form. No residue remains. *Anattā* is the cessation of being for every single thing. Regardless of whether or not something is animate, once the end of a certain point is reached, it will cease to exist. For instance, consider a rubber tree common to Thailand. It apparent that some day in the future, this rubber tree will become old and even ancient. It will fall down, rot, and decay. It will revert back to its original elements. This rubber tree will immediately cease to exist in its conventional form. The rubber tree no longer exists. Likewise, our entire bodies are characterized by the four elements. We are like the rubber tree and the rubber tree is like us. Once created, our four elements experience aging. We get older and eventually cease to exist. More specifically,

when we reach the end of our life expectancy, we face death. Our bodies are a truth within themselves – a temporary existence. Once the time comes, our bodies will cease to exist just like the rubber tree.

So, where is the body destined after death? Some are buried, others are placed on a funeral pyre, and some are cremated and become rubbish. While the soul is still in our bodies, we can move to and fro and experience stimuli. This is because our bodies are controlled and complemented by abstract, intangible, mental factors (*nāma*). The mind's mental factors are comprised of feeling (*vedanā*), memory (*saññā*), imagination (*saṅkhāra*), and perception (*viññāṇa*). These four elements are collectively called the conditions of the mind (*citta*).

The perception part of the mind, on its own, is integrated into every part of the body. Without eye-related perception, the eye cannot see anything. Even if it is able to see, it won't recognize anything. The same goes for the ears. If *viññāṇa* is missing from the ears, we will not understand what we have heard. The same condition is evident in a corpse. Perception (*viññāṇa*) via the ears, eyes, nose, tongue, and body have all completely deteriorated. Even though it still has eyes, the corpse cannot perceive or recognize anything. Just having ears does not guarantee that anything can be heard or

understood. This is what is meant by the cessation of existence – once the soul has departed the body. But if the soul still rests within the body, we are alive and capable of doing everything and anything.

The self that we refer to is characterized in two ways. First, there is the self that has the four elements (earth, water, wind, and fire) existing in equilibrium. Second, there is the mind, which depends on the body. Every part of the body must be constructed by the mind. To put it more simply, our bodies are like temporary shelters for our minds. It is as if the mind has built this body. From whence did we come from before becoming a body? Each soul that is born is born purely as a soul. Not a single soul carries along with it bones, tendons, or hair. Only once the soul is born in its mother's womb, will the imagination conjure the four elements into being.

From where do the four elements hail? They come from the elements of our fathers and mothers. A soul that is to be born builds its form from a single drop of sperm. This is precisely where the four elements sprout. Now that we have already been born into this world, we must examine from what exactly we were begotten. We were created from matter subject to aging. Our father and mother aged. Just as our parents aged, we will also age. Just as our parents and grandparents died, as will we.

We were conceived from things that change. Our parents' bodies are impermanent and therefore our bodies are also impermanent. As we were born amidst the suffering of our parents, we also experience suffering. We inherit all conditions of what we are born into. However they are, we will become.

Glance back into your past, into your previous reincarnation – your current life is your past life. Or take a glimpse back at this life's timeline, back to the many years that have passed and all that has elapsed up to the present. Ever since our birth, the natural process of aging has followed. This is just like it is for trees. Once a tree sprouts, it becomes subject to the aging process. Every species of animal that is born is also subject to the natural process of aging. The process of aging cannot be restrained. Despite healthy diets or first-rate food, we will still age. Even with comfortable shelter or sheets made from pure gold, our bodies will still age. This is why we say that we only temporarily rely on our elements and aggregates.

Our minds do not possess an enduring or permanent home. Within these Three Spheres of Existence (Sense Sphere, Form Sphere, Formless Sphere), there does not exist a single permanent home for the mind to rest in. Even if the mind ventures to the Brahma world, that trip is only

temporary. Once the good merit is exhausted and the powers of serene mental absorptions (*jhāna*) and insight (*ñāṇa*) are depleted, another birth is warranted. Even the trip to heaven is fleeting. We will have to depart for another location once our contributing good merit and karmic wholesomeness (*kusala*) has been used up. If we are born as a human, this existence is also brief. Once the time comes, we must die. In yet another case, if we are reborn in the animal realm, regardless of the species of animal, we will live out a temporary existence and eventually die.

This is precisely why our minds and souls do not have any permanent location to call home. Some say the mind wanders aimlessly. How long has this been the case? It has persisted for a time so long that it is utterly incalculable and incomprehensible. In each new rebirth, we age, become ill, and die. In simple terms, once we are born, we find a way to survive and then die. Once born, we encounter suffering and die. That is all there is to it. There's nothing more than this. We are born, make a living, suffer, and die. Every single past reincarnation has been like this. To see what occurred in past lives, look no further than to the present existence. We are born, age, survive, suffer, and die.

So, what is it that we are still trying to get out of this life? We are fooling ourselves about the worldly belongings that we strive to gain with each passing day. In other rebirths, we have lived for the same pursuit. Sometimes we were content, while other times we were disappointed. For the most part, there was discontentment – an unquenchable thirst for worldly possessions. That is why, in our present life, we look ahead to our next reincarnation and aspire to be rich. And in what lifetime was this kind of aspiration ever satisfactorily fulfilled? Not a single reincarnation. Have we gotten all we wished for in this life? No. We still have deficiencies and unfulfilled desires, namely, we aim to be rich, to acquire, to have. Once we are left unsatisfied in this lifetime, we must aim to be gratified in the next life. We say *saddhu* (let it be so, it is well), give to charity, cultivate merit, and observe precepts on certain days. Sometimes we aspire to go to heaven, and at others times to be rich or beautiful in the subsequent life. This is how we trick ourselves into being reborn again.

Despite never having our aspirations fulfilled in any lifetime, we still continue to deceive ourselves. Consider the next time we will be reborn, will that life be like this one? It will be the same in that we will still be born to a mother and father, a life of suffering, an existence that is filled with

change and cessation of existence (*anattā*). Upon being born, our new life will mirror our entire current existence. Nothing will differ. Look at the image of our future life – the future yet to take form, and the past which is already behind us – will they be like our current reincarnation? Absolutely identical. This is how we should examine this portrait of reality. We must know how to teach ourselves that once we are have already been born, no one can really possess any of the world's belongings.

When we say, “this is mine, that is mine, everything that I have acquired is mine” – is this really true? It seems as such because we suppose that things are really ours. However, it is not really true. It is only true in an imaginary sense, true only while we are alive. Once we die, these items that we call belongings will cease to exist. There isn't a single person who is capable of carrying their house, food, possessions, or money along with them. We're only fooling ourselves. Let us re-examine this.

Being born in this world is beneficial for those with intelligence and wisdom (*paññā*). For example, it was beneficial for our Buddha and the many holy, noble individuals (*ariyapuggala*). It was within this world that they all had to cultivate the ten spiritual perfections (*pāramī*), which are whole

and complete human qualities. Once *pāramī* was cultivated, once they practiced mental development, or when they realized the truth and attained holiness as an *ariyapuggala* or even a Buddha – it was a human that did so. It was humans that became noble individuals. As for the perfections they cultivated in order to become an *ariyapuggala* or to become The Enlightened One – how was it earned? Let us contemplate this. Consider the objects of your delusion. People frequently hear monks preach, “shed greed, shed anger, shed delusion.” We have heard this taught for a long time. But what is the method used to eliminate these evils? They don’t usually explain or clarify this. Or perhaps they do not know.

Haven’t most of us heard that the way to abandon greed is to give a lot to charity? This is not the way to vanquish greed. It is merely a way to restrict our penny-pinching. Giving to charity is not the means by which to eliminate greed. Greed is eradicated by wisdom. Some people sit and repeat a meditative phrase in order to feel bliss or at peace and with the hope that greed and anger will disappear without a trace. Meditation is not the way to annihilate greed or anger – it merely suppresses the defilements. It works in restraining feelings such that while meditating, some inklings of greed or anger will not surface. But it is just that – a

restraint. It is not how the defilements are wiped out. To shed these defilements, mindfulness and wisdom must be used to teach the mind. Where does greed exist? It exists in our minds. Where does anger exist? It exists in our minds. Where does delusion exist? It exists in our minds. Our minds are still integrated with greed, anger, and delusion.

In building an understanding of how to eliminate greed, anger and delusion from our minds, let us study the most basic defilement – greed. What is the object of greed? Greed exists in our hearts, in our minds. What is its target? Material possessions. This is as basic as it gets. In terms of the material goods that we desire, we're voracious, insatiable, possessive, and never want to give anything to anyone. Many people do not even want to spend or give to charity because they're afraid of being broke. As such, the landfill of their material possessions creates a stench in their hearts. People don't look out toward the horizon and consider who, out of all of the people born into this world, has been able to carry these worldly belongings along for eternity? No one.

One who has keen mindfulness and wisdom (*sati-paññā*) will convert their money and material belongings into merit and virtue. This exchange is indeed possible. Taking worldly possessions and transforming them into merit and virtue refers to

charity or giving (*dāna*). *Dāna* can refer to sacrificing and donating our belongings to monks or to an orphan. It is also giving to someone in an inferior position to us. This is a means of cultivating the ten meritorious acts (*pāramī*). Let us consider this from the angle of using our wisdom to eliminate greed by teaching ourselves not to be greedy. How do we teach this to ourselves? By contemplating the worldly possessions that we own. We continuously cycle through rebirths on this earth because we are glued to material possessions. We truly believe that they are ours. “My house, my money, my car, my land.” The attachment to these various things lassos us and anchors us to rebirth. We will be reborn into whatever it is our hearts cling to or are involved with. Thus, we must search out what it is we are glued to.

In practicing dhamma, we must let go. Do not cling to any particular thing, believing that it is definitely and without a doubt, a personal belonging. Understand that these possessions are ours only in terms of the worldly conventions for personal belongings. Recognize that the wealth or material possessions we own are only ours for the ephemeral span of our lives. While we are alive they are ours to earn, use, consume, and rely on. They are requisites we depend on day-to-day. Once we die or when our children and grandchildren

inherit our material wealth, will our heirs have any possible way of taking these belongings along with them? They will be unable to do so, just as we are. They will leave the possessions to their children, grandchildren, and other future generations down the ladder. This is why they are possessions of the world.

Let us not follow our greedy impulses to cling to and be deluded by these material possessions. Whatever it is we are attached to, it is precisely that with which we will be reborn. Heaven isn't the final exit on the road to ultimate enlightenment (*nibbāna*). We can aim for heaven first. Buddha repeatedly taught that it is difficult for people to enter heaven. This can be compared to an ox with two horns. How many people are there in the world? Millions and millions. The people who are able to go to heaven are the two horns, while those who cannot go to heaven are the multitude of hairs on the ox. So, now let us reconsider how probable this heaven scenario really is.

Of the people in this era who cultivate merit and give to charities, some practice *dhamma*, some uphold the precepts. People give alms, as if all of the people who participate in charitable giving will enter heaven. Upon death, people invite monks to chant "*kusala matika*" and give alms to the dead in order to send their souls off towards a blissful

abode. As if mothers, fathers, and all other dead people will go to heaven. The people who the dead have left behind are content because they suppose the departed soul has already made it to a heavenly abode. The monks have sent them there. This is what we believe. This is how we understand the reality of life to be. But, this is not reality. These actions only serve as consolation or as a simple way to feel better. We do not know what each dead person is attached to, nor do we know what their views and thoughts are.

However, Buddha did know whether or not someone would go to heaven. He easily understood whether or not a specific person who cultivated tremendous merit, gave a great deal to charity, and built countless pagodas would end up in heaven. Now, it seems as though our theories will follow similarly. However, this doesn't happen for all people. It can happen, but very few cases transpire in this way. True, while we cultivate merit and give alms, we are virtuous. But, the final day when the soul departs the body is of great importance. As they say, the boat will tip over just as it is about to dock.

There is an ancient saying that once we die and the soul departs from the body, a vision of our deeds (*karma*) will appear if we still haven't cut off our rudimentary attachments. Anxieties about

various things, our children or grandchildren, treasures and money still exist. The cultivation of merit is separate from our worries. These two elements exist in one person. When we give to charity our heart is filled with bliss and exhilaration. In the same heart, there simultaneously exists unaddressed attachment, worry, and mourning. So, when we haven't fixed this matter and our souls are exiting our bodies, a vision appears. The *karma* vision or omen (*nimitta*) only emerges for a split second. Thoughts of worry about certain people, money, children and grandchildren will arise. Once the soul departs from the body, the severity of its anxieties and attachments ensures that it is no longer going to heaven as once expected.

Consider the following story. There was a family – a father, a mother, and three children. The eldest and second child were both boys while the youngest was a girl. Of the two boys, the younger one gravitated towards virtuous and meritorious acts. He was pleased with monkhood, so with his parents' permission, he ordained. Once in the saffron robes, he accelerated his *dhamma* practice until he was rid of all defilements and worldly intoxications (*āsāva*), such that he became an *arahant*, or one who has achieved *nibbāna*, final and ultimate emancipation. As for the eldest boy, he

was a scoundrel who did not amount to much. He lived under a cloud of inebriation, engrossed in the consumption of drugs and alcohol just like his friends. To put it simply, he never cared to work or make use of himself. The father was not a temple patron, nor did he venerate any god. He was consumed with his farm and would spend his entire day working on the land. Come rain or shine, he was out in the fields working diligently. His soul was focused on and attached to the land. As for the mother, she would wake up, grab her basket and scythe, and head out to the garden and the forest. She took pleasure in the time spent harvesting various plants, and her heart was entwined with the garden. She was not involved with a temple or any faith. The only thing her soul clung to was the garden. And finally, the youngest of the household, the daughter, was inclined to dressing up. There was a pond in front of the house, and she had encircled it with beautiful trees and flowers. When dusk arrived, she would dress up, strut around the pond, sprinkle fertilizer on the beautiful plants, and take in all the loveliness around her. To put it simply, she was immersed in this pond. A lotus plant took root in this charming pond, and she would sit there, staring at it all day. She could be found here during any time of day or night, nurturing her flowers.

Some time passed, and a deadly disease claimed the lives of the father, mother, and daughter. As the father was dying, he was worried about the fields, so he was reborn as a pig. He was a pot-bellied pig that lived in the fields, nudging the trees and plants. The father was reincarnated as a pig because of his concern for the fields. And what did the mother become? She was reincarnated as a snake, entangled in various plants and slithering to and fro within the garden. She was so enraptured with the garden that she was reborn as a snake. As for the daughter, she was reborn as a frog. Each day, she would hop around the plants she had previously found beautiful. She would hop over to check out one plant and then hop over to another one. Suddenly, it seemed that the past *karma* they had cultivated was about to be revealed. The daughter realized she had died and been reincarnated as a frog and suddenly desired to see the place she had once called home. She wondered about the state of her bed, powder set, perfumes, and hair brushes. She missed her perfumes, make up, and all of the clothing and accessories that she had stored in her bedroom. Although she had desired to revisit her old bedroom, she was unable to leap past the front steps. As such, she continued to hop back and forth around the staircase.

At the same time, the mother's thoughts pointed in the same direction. She thought, "I have been reborn as a snake. Now, where in my house did I hide my money and gold?" She recalled where she had hidden them and wanted to know whether or not they were still there. So she slithered over to the house to check on her treasures. Right as she slithered out of the garden, the snake encountered the frog hopping around about the front steps of the house. Although the frog was her own daughter, the snake couldn't see past the illusion of the frog. All that the snake recognized was that she had come upon a fine piece of food, so she swallowed the frog in its entirety. She had no clue that it was her daughter she had just consumed. Once the snake was finished with the frog, she continued to slither about the house.

Meanwhile, the father had realized he was currently reincarnated as a pot-bellied pig. He also wondered about the state of his house and decided to check on it. The moment the father arrived, he saw the snake by the base of the house. He immediately pounced on the snake and wrestled with it until he managed to ingest it whole. The pig did not have a single inkling that he had just gulped down his own wife. That was all a prior reincarnation. Where they now stood, all notions of

“father,” “mother,” and “younger sister” had already expired.

The rogue, eldest son returned home to collect the inheritance left to him by his parents. As he ventured into the fields, he recognized the markings of a pig left in the dirt. Thus, he prepared his firearm and waited. After consuming the snake, the pig returned to the field, satiated. He resumed his work, pushing dirt to and fro. The son had no idea it was his father who was tending the fields. He dealt the pig one single fatal bullet.

Once the eldest son had shot the pig, he thought of his younger brother, who was a monk. He visited his brother and invited him over for a meal of spicy minced pork salad. However, the younger brother knew very well that his brother had killed their father. He had insight to know that his older brother did this because he mistakenly believed in the illusion of the pig. So when his older brother extended the invitation, he asked him whether or not it was really a pig that had died. The older brother replied in the affirmative. The monk told his older brother that it was not a pig, but in fact, their father. The older brother was confused and persisted in his conviction that it was a pig. Meanwhile, the younger brother insisted that it was their father. They were in need of a method to determine the truth. The monk told his older

brother, “Brother, take a knife and slit open the belly of that pig. Inside you will find a snake. That snake is our mother. Slit open the belly of the snake and you will find a frog. That frog is our little sister.” The perplexed older brother wondered about what his younger brother had just asserted and returned home with reservations. He proceeded to slice open the pig, and consequently discovered the snake. He cut the snake’s belly and encountered the frog. The older brother was taken aback. He suddenly wondered how and why these events came to be.

The reason is that when the mind is attached to or believes in something, it will remain tied to that place. The wealth and magnitude of merit one has cultivated is a separate issue. At the final moment, as the soul is about to exit the body, whatever it is the soul is most worried about becomes crucial. The object of the soul’s greatest concern generates the most intense force. The soul will be immediately reborn there. No degree of merit can defy this force. However, this does not mean that our merit disappears. The strength of merit is simply not great enough. The soul must first be reborn in the place it is most worried about.

Our ancestors commonly believed that those who cultivate a great deal of merit will be reborn in heaven, while those who cultivate a great deal of bad karma will live their next reincarnations in hell. Is this true? Partially. Well, what is used to measure and determine what “a great deal” is? It is determined at the moment the soul is about to leave the body. The direction to which the soul is most inclined or attached is deemed “a great deal,” or most significant. This determination is made during the soul’s final moments in its tangible vessel, as it will be strongly orientated towards its greatest concern and attachment. This is why Buddha stated that those who will go to heaven are comparable to the horns of an ox, while those who cannot make it to heaven are all the tiny hairs on the ox.

People think that cultivating a lot of merit will secure their seat in heaven, but in reality, it is not that simple. The determining factor is not merit, but attachment. For example, if someone is attached to their home, they will not make it as far as heaven for rebirth. Instead, they will be reborn as a hummingbird, a mouse, or a frog in order to hover near the house they strongly clung to. If someone is worried about their cat, they will be reborn as its kitten. Strong concerns about one’s dog will point to a rebirth as its puppy. If someone is worried about their kids or grandkids, they will wait and be

reborn as one of their children. Attachment and bonds are extremely important, and they must be undone. If we are attached to our worldly possessions, we may be reborn as one of the aforementioned animals, lingering around and keeping a close eye on those possessions.

That is why it is said that we should practice so that we do not cling to anything. We should train ourselves to be able to have and obtain things without clinging. As for those things already in our possession, make sure that we fully understand that these things are not truly under our ownership. We must consider that these items are merely for communal and temporary day-to-day usage. Do not become attached to these objects. Drive this message home to your heart. Ask yourself whether or not these items can actually belong to us. They are only ours in conventional terms, but in reality we merely maintain and care for these objects until we die from them.

This kind of contemplation is what is referred to as *bhāvanā*, which means meditation development. The definition of meditation practice has been a topic of contention for years, as people do not understand what meditation is. There are two types of meditation. The first type of meditation, referred to as *samādhi*, is the prohibition of thought. Meditation masters teach students to prohibit all

thought, so that the mind is focused solely on a single meditative phrase. *Ātānānawāga meyya nappaṭikaṅkhe anāgataṅ baccubannaṅ ca yōdhammaṅ tattha tattha vipassati*. “Do not think about the past behind us or the future yet to come. Think only of the present.” *Samādhi* meditation stills the mind by prohibiting thoughts related to events in the past, or events in the future yet to take place. The meditator is to reside in and focus on the present. This type of meditation that focuses on the present state also has two forms. There’s the present in terms of converged focus during meditation, as was already mentioned. Another type of “present” meditation is referred to as *vipassanā bhāvanā*, or insight development. This form of meditation is of the utmost importance, yet most practitioners tend to understand it to mean *samatha bhāvanā*, or concentration or tranquility development. 99.99% of practitioners do not comprehend the principles of insight development. People are commonly instructed to meditate until the mind is serene, at which point wisdom and insight will arise. This persistent misconception is widely promoted. It is taught without a glance at reason or principles of cause and effect. People do not stop to consider whether or not Buddha advocated or taught this kind of meditation while he was alive. Consideration of the historic accounts of the lives of Buddha and the many holy persons (*ariyapuggala*)

during that time is severely lacking and thus, this misconception that wisdom will arise from a mind in a deep tranquil meditative state is consequently widespread.

This misconception that wisdom arises from a serene meditative state was nowhere to be found in Buddhism while Buddha was still alive. Yet somehow, in contemporary times, there are countless volumes of texts written on the basis of this erroneous belief. The notion is simply misleading because wisdom and tranquil meditation are not linked in that manner. To start with, the term insight development (*vipassanā bhāvanā*) should be accurately defined. *Vipassanā* refers to insight or wisdom. What does wisdom mean? Wisdom or insight is essentially defined as thought. Once we break it down to the term “thought,” anyone can use this definition as a foundation for *dhamma* practice. Thought is a concept that is easy to grasp. Wisdom, or *paññā*, is simply the *dhamma* term denoting thought. So, do we know how to think? We all know how to think, but we habitually think in a mundane sense. Our thoughts revolve around surviving day-to-day, making a living, and various worldly affairs. We think about sensual pleasures (*kāmaguṇa*), tangible forms, sounds, scents, tastes, and physical sensations. As we reflect on objects we find pleasing, we are consumed with thoughts of

gratification, greed, anger, and delusion. We fall into the traps of worldly delusion. Inebriated with sensual pleasures and our own thoughts, we constantly advance further on this worldly bearing.

In contrast, absent are thoughts related to *dhamma*. From the moment we wake up, we instantly begin thinking about worldly matters. We use our intelligence in ways that complement and intensify our desires. Though we are thinking, all the thoughts generated are in a worldly sense, further propelling the wheel of rebirth (*samsāra*). With these types of thoughts, we dig ourselves into a hole. It is these kinds of worldly thoughts that have bound us to countless rebirths in this world. We have been fooling ourselves, as we have always believed in the legitimacy our own thoughts.

Thus, we do think. Only, we do not know how to think in a manner that solves our problems. We have never cultivated that mode of thought. Instead, we are adept in generating thoughts that produce conflicts. We create trouble for ourselves as we cultivate erroneous understandings about various issues and tighten the bonds to our multiplying attachments. Consequently, we have never practiced thinking in terms of the truth (*dhamma*). So, let us take the intelligence we already have and change the way it is used in our thought process.

This is illustrated by the metaphor of a pen. With only a single pen, we have written an assortment of stories about the world. Have we ever used this same pen to write about the truth (*dhamma*)? We are unable to write about *dhamma* because we lack the skills to truly grasp what the truth really is. But once we study and understand what *dhamma* is, it is unnecessary to switch pens. The same pen can instantly be used to write about *dhamma*. Likewise, once we form an understanding of *dhamma*, we can use the same resources once used for worldly matters and channel them towards thinking about the truth (*dhamma*).

The worldly thought process referred to earlier can be used to support the creation of insight, or wisdom (*paññā*). Wisdom arises from frequent thought, contemplation, and analysis of reality that adheres to the three common characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*): impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and cessation of existence in supposed form (*anattā*). *Yae dhammā hetu pubbawā tesuṅ hetuṅ tathāgato*. All things that arise from a cause will be extinguished once that cause is extinguished. This is a classic *dhamma* contemplation. Let us build an accurate understanding of how things arise, exist temporarily, and must inevitably deteriorate and cease to be. Everything shares these three common characteristics. There is only a discrepancy

in the time it takes for each thing to cease to be, as this is contingent on the extinction of its cause. Some things arise quickly and are extinguished quickly, while some take a longer time to deteriorate. Regardless, all things must reach their end and cease to exist, as a result of their relative causes.

So let us consider ourselves. We were born, and will we ever cease to be? Definitely. We will die. This is what is meant by *anattā*. Every person, animal, and object that has been born or has arisen will deteriorate until it ultimately ceases to exist. This is a typical way to contemplate the truth about reality.

In another approach, we can consider all the worldly possessions in this world, and how none of them can truly belong to any of us. Whether it is money, assets, or property, none of these worldly goods can be taken along with us on the journey after death. We merely are born, seek out goods, temporarily rely on these assets, and inevitably part ways upon death. When we say people must suffer the loss of things they love, this really applies to every individual. It is crystal clear that we will all die. If we use this reality as a model and practice thinking in terms of other truths on a consistent basis, we will arrive at what is called *yoniso manasikara*, or comprehensive, detailed

understanding. So, let us extract our thoughts and analyze them in terms of whether or not they are consistent with reality. We must identify our thoughts that are misaligned with the truth, so that we can begin to develop comprehensive understanding and consequently eradicate our doubts. It is at this point, when we understand things according to the truth, that we will reach a state of serenity and let go of our attachments. It is in this way that every single one of our thoughts will support the training of our minds.

Since the dawn of our souls, we have subscribed to wrong beliefs and understandings, or *micchādiṭṭhi*. Over the course of countless rebirths, everything has been shaped by our erroneous understandings. These misunderstandings include the perception that the world is lovely or favorable, as well as the view that tangible forms, sounds, scents, tastes, and physical sensations are pleasurable. These notions are precisely why we have been entangled in the world's embrace for so long. Why are we able to think in a way that tempts us to partake of the world's intoxicants with such great ease? And why don't we think in a way that ameliorates our problems, or in a way that warrants our release from the world and the cycle of rebirth? We only tighten our binds to the world with each habitual thought. However, we cannot think

ourselves into loosening those ties. We know how to tie knots, but do not know how to unravel them.

There are two kinds of thought:

The first type of thought is imagination (*saṅkhāra*), which includes imagining, creating, and pretending. These imaginative thoughts create problems as they become the objects of our delusion.

The second type of thought is what we refer to as wisdom or insight (*paññā*). Yet this form of thought, which is used to untangle problems, is never put to practice. Instead, we are well versed in the type of thought that creates problems: imagination (*saṅkhāra*). Let us start practicing the wisdom (*paññā*) form of thought. Take a close look at the world, and develop an understanding of its characteristics. Employ both external as well as personal examples in this study. The truth is everywhere – it can be extracted from a tree, its leaves, or its fruit. Anything and everything can be used to elucidate the truth, because every single being is impermanent (*anicca*). Internalize this concept and apply it to an investigation of our bodies. Our bodies are like that object, or that object is like our bodies. They are similar in the sense that both will deteriorate and eventually cease to exist at the conclusion of their relative lifespan. These

comparisons are the tools used in the thought process in order to loosen the mind's attachments and delusions.

We must develop our thoughts in order to generate wisdom, because thought is the very foundation for wisdom development. People tend to be confused about exactly how wisdom or insight is generated. Some imagine that it is like flipping a light switch, and experiencing a brilliant luminance. This is incorrect. When we refer to the emergence of wisdom or say that insight has arisen, this indicates the generation of an understanding that is aligned with the realities of world. On the basis of thought, wisdom is generated and our doubts dissolve. It is as if we have forgotten something, yet we cannot remember what exactly it is that we have forgotten. After thinking for some time, we eventually can recall and determine where the object is. Once we remember, we are no longer confused.

So, let us develop our wisdom by regularly thinking in a way that is aligned with the truths of the world and the principles of the three common characteristics (*tilakkhaṇa*): impermanence, suffering, cessation of existence in supposed form (*anicca, dukkha, anattā*). We must contemplate external subjects and be able to draw internal parallels, as our bodies and various tangible objects

share the same characteristics. These worldly objects are created, break up, and cease to exist, just like every part of our bodies. This is representative of how we use thought to teach ourselves.

Thoughts of the imagination (*sankhāra*) variety reflect our greed, desires, lust, and our contentment with sensual pleasures. We are already masters of this trend of thought, so let us pivot 180° and now train ourselves to think about the other side of the coin – all these objects of our desire are impermanent. We are fond of permanence and tend to think that transient things are stable and dependable, which is itself an impossible concept. We dream of an eternal existence and fantasize that we will not have to part ways with the things we love. This is not reality. We have refused to accept the truth. Now, we must reprogram ourselves to accept this truth. Buddha taught us to think in order to develop both a perception and an understanding of reality that is consistent with the truth. This is representative of *dhamma* practice characterized by using wisdom to train one's mind.

We must train ourselves habitually and every day, so that we are not attached to anything. As the physical element of our being still exists, it must rely on tangible external resources in order to survive. We must continue to eat in order for our body to survive for the span of its life expectancy.

While we are still alive and well, our body should be utilized to realize the ultimate benefit: cultivating good merit and *karmic* wholesomeness. For example, when we prostrate to monks, we rely on our bodies to physically do so. When we sit in contemplation or do walking meditation, we must also use our bodies to actually sit down or walk. The physical body functions as a support, and as such, we should protect it. We must not use it as a means to commit evil acts, take the life of animals, steal, commit adultery, or abuse alcohol and drugs. Even if our hearts tell us to commit these acts, do not allow the body to physically carry them out. We must resist what our hearts request of us.

We must train our hearts to “defy the current (worldly conventions)” because our hearts mastermind our body’s every action. Do not allow our hearts to order us around, because the company our hearts keep include a gang of desires (*kilesas*) and greed (*tanha*). The chain of command starts with desire ordering the heart, followed by the heart compelling the body to action and forcing us to speak. Speech is another element we must be weary of. Once our desires command our heart to want to say certain things or disparage someone, we must resist this charge. This defiance of our desires is what is described as meditation practice (*bhāvanā*). What this essentially indicates is training ourselves

to act appropriately, both physically and verbally. The terms physically or verbally proper reflect carrying out that which is suitable, not the prohibition of all action or speech. It means speaking in a way that is both proper and appropriate, such that the subsequent harm and negative consequences do not affect us or others. The things that we can do and say should be right, true and just, or *dhamma*. We must learn to distinguish that which is proper from that which is inappropriate, and should use comprehensive analysis as well as rational principles of cause and effect to do so. This *dhamma* topic of the suitability of physical and verbal acts essentially teaches us to protect ourselves from harm.

So, we must gradually try to reform our minds. This transformation cannot be accomplished in one day, but will be achieved through frequent training. While certain thoughts still exist in the mind, we must attempt to resist the orders to act on them, both physically and verbally. Emphasize the carrying out of only action that is grounded in *dhamma* – right action. We must have *dhamma vijaya*, the ability to discern right action, and choose to perform accordingly. A *dhamma* act is one that, once carried out, results in mutual contentment for both us and our peers. In this way, our benefit as well as the benefit of others is accounted for.

Take a husband and wife, for example. While in love as teens, the boyfriend and girlfriend promise each another that they will love one another and will not fight or hurt the other person. Did the teen love birds ever tell each other that once they're married, they must argue often? Did the guy ever tell his girlfriend that if she were to become his wife, he would make sure to frequently abuse, strike, and degrade her? No, this didn't happen, just as we never made these pledges. Instead, they were engrossed in a sweet and charming courtship. We should go back and think about that initial wooing stage, and remind ourselves of the original love we started with. Once married, both husband and wife must exercise compassion and be considerate of one another. Know how to read your mate. This is how we arrive at mutual benefit. Both parties contribute to the success of a relationship, and as such, both must learn to refrain from certain physical and verbal acts. Do not gratify your heart's every command with action. We must develop wisdom to train ourselves habitually so that we realize and understand reality as it is.

Another angle that can be used to teach ourselves is to contemplate our identity, our ego, our notion of "self." Where did this come from? The delusion and illusion of "self," or *attā*. Whenever we compare our egos, there is sure to be

a clash or conflict. Both the wife and husband have egos, just as our friends and all other people have egos. No one yields or submits to another, because of *attā*. Everyone is trying to win. We must find a way to reduce our egos because it is *attā* that is capable of all kinds of action. Various bad karma is committed in the name of *attā*. Our desires (*kilesa*) and greed (*tanhā*) encourage our *attā* to commit heinous acts. Arguments and murder happen because of the belief that we are superior to others. We want others to respect and venerate us without our reciprocating. Or we want a certain person or a group of people to understand us, without our understanding them. This is impossible. We must learn to understand others, too. We should do unto others as we would like to be done unto us. It's unnecessary to figure out the inner workings of others. Instead, must understand ourselves. Give a little kindness. Our heart is the same as theirs. We must look at the big picture. This is how we can have authority over our *attā*.

Another point is that, if we are truly good practitioners, we will be calm, proper, and good listeners, and we will practice yielding to others. We must yield in all issues, in both physical and verbal action, as well as in all our manners. We must know how to yield. If people know how to give way to others, problems would not arise in

society. Conflicts will be missing from the family, as the husband yields to his wife and the wife gives way to her husband. When there is mutual yielding, there will be no clashes. This is everyday *dhamma* practice. Our friends will be happy, and so will we, when we yield to one another. Once we yield to others, it is as if we are friends with everyone. As we wake up every morning, regardless of where we are, we must remind ourselves of the determination to be allies with anyone and everyone. If we can truly realize this, we will not encounter problems with anyone, regardless of location. Wherever we turn will be a friend, a relative, or an ally.

The foundation of meditation practice is being able to train ourselves through various techniques. We have an ego (*attā*) and we should try to reduce it by first, yielding to others and by second, viewing everyone as an ally. Just following these two tenets, our egos (*attā*) will deflate significantly. We will be at peace wherever we find ourselves to be. Remember to exercise caution with speech, so that we do not cause others to suffer as a result of our verbal actions. In the same vein, we must be careful with our actions, so that others do not experience suffering because of them. Do not forget these principles.

Once you get home, take out a piece of paper and write in big block letters a sign that says “At the temple, Venerable Ācariya Thoon taught me four things: 1. Yield to others; 2. Be allies with everyone;” Now who remembers the third tenet? You are charged with figuring this out on your own. I have already revealed the first two principles. The last two precepts were discussed just now, and whoever can remember them should write them down and post them at their home. Do not forget these tenets. Review and think them over, everyday. Eventually, they will penetrate into our hearts and we will eventually realize and see ourselves. We will use our wisdom to train ourselves by reminding ourselves of this doctrine.

I have taught you how to practice meditation (*bhāvanā*) in terms of wisdom. I haven’t even touched on the Four Noble Truths or the Noble Eightfold Path. I’ve only described basic, everyday *dhamma*, so that people can learn to understand and feel compassion for one another. In this way, people will be content and at ease regardless of location. Their family life will be happy and people will love, honor, and respect them. I relayed to you principles for meditation practice in the form of wisdom for you to apply.

Going forward, if anyone has any questions, please don’t hesitate to ask me. As a monk, I may have

more experience in terms of research or practice in Buddhism. You may have a question concerning something that I explained, or even an issue that was not touched on here. Regardless of your inquiry, I will answer it in terms of *dhamma* practice. As for today, I have provided examples of *dhamma* for you to reflect on, as should be suitable for this time.

Thus, it has been stated.

