

Excerpts from An Unentangled Knowing
Teachings of the Thai Buddhist Laywoman
Upasika Kee Nanayon
translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu



AWARE RIGHT AT AWARENESS

November 3, 1975

The mind, if mindfulness and awareness are watching over it, won't meet with any suffering as the result of its actions. If suffering does arise, we'll be immediately aware of it and able to put it out. This is one point of the practice we can work at constantly. And we can test ourselves by seeing how refined and subtle our all-around awareness is inside the mind. Whenever the mind slips away and goes out to receive external sensory

contact: Can it maintain its basic stance of mindfulness or internal awareness? The practice we need to work at in our everyday life is to have constant mindfulness, constant all-around present awareness like this. This is something we work at in every posture: sitting, standing, walking, and lying down. Make sure that your mindfulness stays continuous.

Living in this world—the mental and physical phenomena of these five aggregates—gives us plenty to contemplate. We must try to watch them, to contemplate them, so that we can understand them—because the truths we must learn how to read in this body and mind are here to be read with every moment. We don't have to get wrapped up with any other extraneous themes, because all the themes we need are right here in the body and mind. As long as we can keep the mind constantly aware all around, we can contemplate them.

If you contemplate mental and physical events to see how they arise and disband right in the here and now, and don't get involved with external things—like sights making contact with the eyes, or sounds with the ears—then there really aren't a lot of issues. The mind can be at normalcy, at equilibrium—calm and undisturbed by defilement or the stresses that come from sensory contact. It can look after itself and maintain its balance. You'll come to sense that if you're aware right at awareness in and of itself, without going out to get involved in external things like the mental labels and thoughts that will tend to arise, the mind will see their constant arising and disbanding—and won't be embroiled in anything. This way it can be disengaged, empty, and free. But if it goes out to label things as good or evil, as "me" or "mine," or gets attached to anything, it'll become unsettled and disturbed.

You have to know that if the mind can be still, totally and presently aware, and capable of contemplating with every activity, then blatant forms of suffering and stress will dissolve away. Even if they start to form, you can be alert to them and disperse them immediately. Once you see this actually happening—even in only the beginning stages—it can disperse a lot of the confusion and turmoil in your heart. In other words, don't let yourself dwell on the past or latch onto thoughts of the future. As for the events arising and passing away in the present, you have to leave them alone. Whatever your duties, simply do them as you

If the mind can stay with itself and not go out looking for things to criticize or latch onto, it can maintain a natural form of stillness. So this is something we have to try for in our every activity.

have to—and the mind won't get worked up about anything. It will be able, to at least some extent, to be empty and still.

This one thing is something you have to be very careful

about. You have to see this for yourself: *that if your mindfulness and discernment are constantly in charge, the truths of the arising and disbanding of mental and physical phenomena are always there for you to see, always there for you to know.* If you look at the body, you'll have to see it simply as physical properties. If you look at feelings, you'll have to see them as changing and inconstant: pleasure, pain, neither pleasure nor pain. To see these things is to see the truth within yourself. Don't let yourself get caught up with your external duties. Simply keep watch in this way inside. If your awareness is the sort that lets you read yourself correctly, the mind will be able to stay at normalcy, at equilibrium, at stillness, without any resistance.

If the mind can stay with itself and not go out looking for things to criticize or latch onto, it can maintain a natural form of stillness. So this is something we have to try for in our every activity. Keep your conversations to a minimum, and there won't be a whole lot of issues. Keep watch right at the mind. When you keep watch at the mind and your mindfulness is continuous, your senses can stay restrained.

Being mindful to keep watch in this way is something you have to work at. Try it and see: Can you keep this sort of awareness continuous? What sort of things can still get the mind engaged? What sorts of thoughts and labels of good and bad, me and mine, does it think up? Then look to see if these things arise and disband.

The sensations that arise from external contact and internal contact all have the same sorts of characteristics. You have to look till you can see this. If you know how to look, you'll see it—and the mind will grow calm.

So the point we have to practice in this latter stage doesn't have a whole lot of issues. There's nothing you have to do, nothing you have to label, nothing you have to think a whole lot about. Simply look carefully and contemplate, and in this very lifetime you'll have a chance to be calm and at peace, to know yourself more profoundly within. You'll come to see that the Dhamma is amazing right here in your own heart. Don't go searching for the Dhamma outside, for it lies within. Peace lies within, but we have to contemplate so that we're aware all around—subtly, deep down. If you look just on the surface, you won't understand anything. Even if the mind is at normalcy on the ordinary, everyday level, you won't understand much of anything at all.

You have to contemplate so that you're aware all around

in a skillful way. The word "skillful" is something you can't explain with words, but you can know for yourself when you see the way in which awareness within the heart becomes special,

when you see what this special awareness is about. This is something you can know for yourself.

And there's not really much to it: simply arising, persisting, disbanding. Look until this becomes plain—really, really plain—and everything disappears. All suppositions, all conventional formulations, all those aggregates and properties get swept away, leaving nothing but awareness pure and simple, not involved with anything at all—and there's nothing you have to do to it. Simply stay still and watch, be aware, letting go with every moment.

Simply watching this one thing is enough to do away with all sorts of defilements, all sorts of suffering and stress. If you don't know how to watch it, the mind is sure to get disturbed. It's sure to label things and concoct thoughts. As soon as there's contact at the senses, it'll go looking for things to latch onto, liking and disliking the objects it meets in the present and then getting involved with

the past and future, spinning a web to entangle itself.

If you truly look at each moment in the present, there's really nothing at all. You'll see with every mental moment that things disband, disband, disband—really nothing at all. The important point is that you don't go forming issues out of nothing. The physical elements perform their duties in line with their elementary physical nature. The mental elements keep sensing in line with their own affairs. But our stupidity is what goes looking for issues to cook up, to label, to think about. It goes looking for things to latch onto and then gets the mind into a turmoil. This point is all we really have to see for ourselves. This is the problem we have to solve for ourselves. If things are left to their nature, pure and simple, there's no "us," no "them." This is a singular truth that will arise for us to know and see. There's nothing else we can know or see that can match it in any way. Once you know and see this one thing, it extinguishes all suffering and stress. The mind will be empty and free, with no meanings, no attachments, for anything at all.

This is why looking inward is so special in so many ways. Whatever arises, simply stop still to look at it. Don't get excited by it. If you become excited when any special intuitions arise when the mind is still, you'll get the mind worked up into a turmoil. If you become afraid that this or that will happen, that too will get you in a turmoil. So you have to stop and look, stop and know. The first thing is simply to look. The first thing is simply to know. And don't latch onto what you know—because whatever it is, it's simply a phenomenon that arises and dis-



All suppositions, all conventional formulations, all those aggregates and properties get swept away, leaving nothing but awareness pure and simple, not involved with anything at all—and there's nothing you have to do to it. Simply stay still and watch, be aware, letting go with every moment.

bands, arises and disbands, changing as part of its nature.

So your awareness has to take a firm stance right at the mind in and of itself. In the beginning stages, you have to know that when mindfulness is standing firm, the mind won't be affected by the objects of sensory contact. Keep working at maintaining this stance, holding firm to this stance. If you gain a sense of this for yourself, really knowing and seeing for yourself, your mindfulness will become even more firm. If anything arises in any way at all, you'll be able to let it go—and all the many troubles and turmoils of the mind will dissolve away.

If mindfulness slips and the mind goes out giving meanings to anything, latching onto anything, troubles will arise, so you have to keep checking on this with every moment. There's nothing else that's so worth checking on. You have to keep check on the mind in and of itself, contemplating the mind in and of itself. Or else you can

I started to take my hands and feet out of the meditation posture, but at the moment I had unfolded one leg but had yet to unfold the other, I could see that my mind was like a pendulum swinging more and more slowly, more and more slowly—until it stopped.

contemplate the body in and of itself, feelings in and of themselves, or the phenomenon of arising and disbanding—i.e., the Dhamma—in and of itself. All of these things are themes you can keep track of entirely within yourself. You don't have to keep track of a lot of themes, because having a lot of themes is what will make you restless and distracted. First you'll practice this theme, then you'll practice that, then you'll make comparisons, all of which will keep the mind from growing still.

If you can take your stance at awareness, if you're skilled at looking, the mind can be at peace. You'll know how things arise and disband. First practice keeping awareness right within yourself so that your mindfulness can be firm, without being affected by the objects of sensory contact, so that it won't label things as good or bad, pleasing or displeasing. You have to keep checking to see that when the mind can be at normalcy, centered and neutral as its primary stance, then—whatever it knows or sees—it will be able to contemplate and let go.

The sensations in the mind that we explain at such length are still on the level of labels. Only when there can be awareness right at awareness will you really be able to know that the mind that is aware of awareness in this way doesn't send its knowing outside of this awareness. There are no issues. Nothing can be concocted in the mind when it knows in this way. In other words,

An inward-staying
unentangled knowing,
All outward-going knowing
cast aside.

SABBE DHAMMA ANATTA

July 9, 1971

One night I was sitting in meditation outside in the open air—my back straight as an arrow—firmly determined to make the mind quiet, but even after a long time it wouldn't settle down. So I thought, "I've been working at this for many days now, and yet my mind won't settle down at all. It's time to stop being so determined and to simply be aware of the mind." I started to take my hands and feet out of the meditation posture, but at the moment I had unfolded one leg but had yet to unfold the other, I could see that my mind was like a pendulum swinging more and more slowly, more and more slowly—until it stopped.

Then there arose an awareness that was sustained by itself.

Slowly I put my legs and hands back into position. At the same time, the mind was in a state of awareness absolutely and solidly still, seeing clearly into the elementary phenomena of existence as they arose and disbanded, changing in line with their nature—and also seeing a separate condition inside, with no arising, disbanding, or changing, a condition beyond birth and death: something very difficult to put clearly into words, because it was a realization of the elementary phenomena of nature, completely internal and individual.



After a while I slowly got up and lay down to rest. This state of mind remained there as a stillness that sustained itself deep down inside. Eventually the mind came out of this state and gradually returned to normal.

From this I was able to observe how practice consisting of nothing but fierce desire simply upsets the mind and keeps it from being still. But when one's awareness of the mind is just right, an inner awareness will arise naturally of its own accord. Because of this clear inner awareness, I was able to continue knowing the facts of what's true and false, right and wrong, from that point on, and it enabled me to know that the moment when the mind let go of everything was a clear awareness of the elementary phenomena of nature, because it was an awareness that knew within and saw within of its own accord—not something you can know or see by wanting.

For this reason the Buddha's teaching, "*Sabbe dhamma anatta*—All phenomena are not-self," tells us not to latch onto any of the phenomena of nature, whether conditioned or unconditioned. From that point on I was able to understand things and let go of attachments step by step.

Upasika Kee Nanayon (K. Khao-suan-luang), 1901-1979, was one of the foremost women Dhamma teachers in Thailand. Her teachings continue to be cherished and studied widely.