

The Supreme Attainments

Venerable Ācariya Mahā Boowa's Dhamma Talk given on the 18th of February, 1964

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Now I'm going to describe the gathering place of all things – goodness and evil, happiness and suffering – so that you'll know exactly where they all converge. Tune in your receivers well and you'll come to know that everything converges at the heart.

Darkness lies here. Brightness lies here. Ignorance and delusion, knowledge and wisdom all lie here in the heart. The heart is thus like a single chair on which two people are waiting to sit. If one of them sits down, the other has to stand. But if they share the chair, they each get to sit on separate parts of it. The same is true of the ignorance and wisdom dwelling in the one heart. Even when we're ignorant or deluded, we still have some knowledge. Even when we know, there's still some ignorance infiltrating the heart. This is why we say the heart is like a single chair on which two people are waiting to sit. One heart, but ignorance and knowledge have infiltrated different parts of it. Whichever one is stronger will get to sit there more than the other. The techniques for training the heart and developing every form of goodness and virtue are thus meant to rid the heart of the things that cloud and stain it.

When we're taught about ignorant people or intelligent people, we hear and understand. When we're taught about ordinary run-of-the-mill people and their thick defilements, we know and understand. When we're taught about the Noble Ones (*ariya puggala*), from the first up to the highest levels, we know and understand step by step. Even though we ourselves aren't yet able to be like them, we're curious and want to hear about the goodness they've developed and the path of practice by which they developed it – how they practised so as to attain those level of Dhamma.

In the beginning, the Buddha and his Arahant disciples – those who practised and came to know following in his footsteps – started out as people with defilements just like ours. They differed, though, in that they were unflagging and persistent in developing themselves so as to wash away the dark, obscuring things in their hearts. They kept at their practice steadily, without stopping or abandoning their efforts.

As a result, their hearts – which were being nourished with the good fertiliser of their wise actions – gradually developed step by step until they were able to attain that highest of the supreme attainments, the fruit of Arahantship.

The term “Noble One” means a supreme person – supreme because the Dhamma he or she has attained is supreme. There are four levels: Stream-enterers, Once-returners, Non-returners, and Arahants.

The text say that those who have attained the level of stream-entry have abandoned three fetters: self-identity views, uncertainty and the fondling of precepts and practices. *Self-identity views*, as expressed in terms of the factors of body and mind (*khandhas*), take twenty forms with each of the five *khandhas* acting as a basis for four of the forms. For example you may see the body (your physical body) as your ‘self’, or your ‘self’ as the body, the body as existing in your ‘self’, or your ‘self’ as existing in the body. Altogether these are four. Or you may see feeling as your ‘self’, or your ‘self’ as feeling, feeling as existing in your ‘self’ or your ‘self’ as existing in feeling – another four. In the same way the *khandhas* of memory, thought, and consciousness each form the basis for four forms, which can be inferred from the above examples. In other words, each of the five *khandhas* acts as the basis for four forms of these views. Four times five is twenty forms of self-identity views.

According to the texts, Stream-enterers have abandoned these absolutely, but the practice of ‘Forest Dhamma’¹ differs somewhat in this point. Other than that though, there are no points of disagreement. So I’d like to insert a few of the observations of ‘Forest Dhamma’ here, in hopes that they won’t act as an obstacle to your reading. If you see that they don’t form the path to release in line with the well-taught Dhamma, please let them pass so that they won’t form a hindrance in your heart.

To summarise briefly, people who have absolutely abandoned the twenty forms of self-identity view are those who don’t see the five *khandhas* as their self, their self as the five *khandhas*, the five *khandhas* as existing in their self or their self as existing in the five *khandhas*. Now it would seem perfectly reasonable to say that people of this sort would also no longer be interested in sexual relationships, because sexual relationships are a matter of the five *khandhas* which are the nest of the twenty forms of self-identity view that have yet to be abandoned absolutely.

As for those who have abandoned them absolutely, the physical body no longer has any meaning as an object of sensual desire. Their feel-

¹ Dhamma learned from the practice, rather than from the study of books.

ings no longer indulge in sensual desire. Their memory no longer gives meaning to things for the sake of sensual desire. Their thought and imagination no longer create objects for the sake of sensual desire. Their consciousness no longer acknowledges things for the sake of sensual desire. *In short, their five khandhas no longer function for the sake of sensual desires or for only worldly relationships whatsoever.* Their five *khandhas* must then change their functioning to another level of work that they see is still unfinished. In other words, they are raised to the level of the five subtle fetters: passion for form, passion for formless phenomena, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance.

The ability to absolutely abandon the twenty forms of self-identity view would thus appear to fall to Non-returners, because only on their level is the heart finished with its attachments to sensual desires.

As for Stream-enterers, the way in which they know and let go of these views, as I understand it, is in line with the following analogy: Suppose there is a man travelling deep into the forest who comes across a pond of clear, clean, fresh-tasting water. The water is covered with duckweed, though, so it isn't completely visible. He parts the duckweed and sees that the water looks clear, clean, and inviting. He scoops up a handful of water to taste it, and then he knows that the water in the pond is really fresh. With that, he drinks from the pond in earnest until he has satisfied the thirst he has felt for so long and then continues along his way.

Once he has left, the duckweed moves in to cover the water as before. As for the man, even though he has left, the memory of the water always stays in his mind. Every time he enters the forest he goes straight to pond, parts the duckweed, and scoops up the water to drink it and bathe himself to his heart's content whenever he wants. Even though the water is again completely covered by the duckweed when he goes away, the convictions that are firmly implanted in his heart – that the pond is full of water, that the water is clean and clear, that its taste is absolutely fresh – these convictions will never be erased.

The man in this analogy stands for the earnest meditator who uses wisdom to investigate the various parts of the body until they are fully clear. The *citta*² at that moment lets go of the body, feelings, memory, thought and consciousness and enters a pure stillness of its very own,

² The word *citta* denotes the underlying essence of mind which manifests as feeling, memory, thought and consciousness. The *citta* is central while all of these manifestations are peripheral. It is that fundamental quality of knowing in the heart – the one who knows – upon which everything else is based. Everything we know and experience arises, exists and ceases in the *citta*. Because of this, developing an understanding of the nature of the *citta* is a crucial aspect of Buddhist meditation practice.

with absolutely no connection to the *khandhas*. In that moment, the five *khandhas* don't function in any way at all related to the *citta*. In other words the *citta* and the *khandhas* exist independently because they have been absolutely cut off from one another through the persistent effort of the meditation.

That moment is one in which there arises a sense of wonder and amazement that no experience ever, from the day of our birth or the beginning of our practice, can possibly equal. Yet now we have come to see this marvel appearing right then and there. The *citta* stays in that sense of stillness and ease for a period of time and then withdraws. Once it withdraws it reconnects with the *khandhas* as before, but it remains firmly convinced that the *citta* had reached a realm of radical stillness, that the five *khandhas* (body, feelings, memory, thought and consciousness) were completely cut off from it during that time, and that while it remained in that stillness it experienced an extremely amazing mental state. *These convictions will never be erased.*

Because of these firm, unshakeable convictions, which become fixed in the heart as a result of this experience and which can't be affected by unfounded or unreasonable assertions, we become earnest in resuming our earlier meditation, this time with firm determination and a sense of absorption coming from the magnetic pull that these convictions have in the heart. The *citta* is then able to settle down into stillness and ease, and to rest there for periods of time as before. Even though we can't yet release the heart absolutely from the infiltration of the *khandhas*, we are in no way discouraged from making a persistent effort for the higher levels of the Dhamma, step by step.

As for the qualities of Stream-enterers' hearts, these include unshakeable conviction (*acala-saddhā*) in the results they have clearly seen from their practice and in the higher levels of Dhamma they have yet to know and see; and impartiality (*samānattatā*), free from prejudice and pride with regard to people of any class. Stream-enterers have Dhamma in charge of their hearts. They don't hold to anything over and above what they see as correct in line with the principle of cause and effect. They accept and immediately put into practice the principles of truth and are unwilling to resist or disobey them. No matter what nationality, class, or race individual Stream-enterers may belong to, they are open and impartial to all people in general. They aren't disdainful even toward common animals or people who have behaved wickedly in the past, for they see that all living beings fall into the same lot of having good and bad *kamma* (*karma*). They understand that whatever sort of *kamma* we

have, we must accept it in line with the actions we have performed and the truth of what we have done. If anyone makes assertions that are reasonable and correct, Stream-enterers will immediately take them to heart without making an obstacle out of the speaker's past, race, nationality, or social standing.

If what I have said here is correct, then there would be nothing about a Stream-enterer's searching for a spouse that would be in any way inconsistent with the fact that he or she has yet to abandon absolutely the twenty forms of self-identity views that are the nest of sensual desires. The abandonment of self-identity views is no obstacle to Stream-enterers' having families *because the absolute abandonment of these views lies on an entirely different level.*

I ask that you as meditators take the well-taught Dhamma as your guide and compass and put it into practice until you give rise to knowledge and vision from within yourselves. That knowledge will then become your own personal wealth. This way you will come to know that although your work is on one level, and the work of the Noble Ones on another, the results in both cases are of the same sort. Just as with external work: Whatever the work, the resulting income in each case is money of the same sort. Whether it's a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, or more, you know clearly that the money is the fruit of the work to which you have devoted your efforts. Whatever the amount, it's a source of security to you – better than guessing at the amount of money in someone else's pocket or arguing among yourselves about how much other people have, which serves no purpose either to the winner or to the loser of the argument and reduces the worth of your right to see the Dhamma directly for yourself, a right which was granted by the Buddha as his legacy to those who practice.

Uncertainty – the second fetter – refers to doubts, specifically doubts about whether there is rebirth or annihilation after death. If there is rebirth, will we be reborn on the same level as before? As something else? Can a person be reborn as an animal? Can an animal be reborn as a person? When people and animals die, where do they go? Is there really such a thing as good and bad *kamma*? When *kamma* is made, does it yield results? Is there really life after death? Are there really heavens and hells? Are there really Paths, Fruitions, and Enlightenment (*Nibbāna*)? All of these questions lie in the realm of doubt and uncertainty. Stream-enterers can abandon them because they have seen the basic principles of the truth in the heart that these questions have as their underlying cause.

Concerning the principles of *kamma* and its results, Stream-enterers are convinced of them in a way that is firmly implanted in their hearts and can never be removed. At the same time, they have the same sort of firmly planted conviction in the Buddha's Awakening and in the fact that the Dhamma is well-taught and capable of leading those who practice it to release from all suffering and discontent, step by step.

The principal truth of the laws of nature is that nothing in the world disappears without a trace. There is simply the continual change of every type of formation (*sankhāra*) which is not in its original, elemental form back into those original elements which constitute its own natural state. These basic elements then transform themselves from their original nature back into disguised forms, such as animals and beings. These beings, which are driven by the force of defilement and have differing senses of good and evil, must then be constantly performing good and bad actions (*kamma*). Their good and bad actions can't be erased; and in the same way, the results of their actions – which those who do them will have to experience as pleasure and pain – can't be erased either. Only those who have eliminated all seeds of becoming and birth from their hearts will be done with the problems of birth and death, because the doing of good and evil actions and the experiencing of their good and evil results have as their basic source the seeds of becoming and birth buried deep in the heart. Except in the cases where these seeds are removed, the principles of action or *kamma* lie beyond the power of people to affirm or negate them, in the same way that night and day lie beyond the sway of the events of the world.

The third fetter – *silabbata-parāmāsa* – is usually translated as fondling³ at precepts and practices. This fondling comes from the fact that one's precepts and practices are undependable. To express this with an analogy to sons and daughters, the term '*parāmāsa*' or fondling would apply to sons and daughters who can't be trusted by their parents and who keep causing them worry and suffering. One example would be a daughter who doesn't preserve her honour as a woman and reduces the worth of her sex. She likes to go out and attract men, selling before she buys. She falls for whoever admires her beauty and spends herself freely without a thought for her future value as a wife. Wherever she goes she leads men around on a string, like the strings of fish and crabs they sell in the market, but in the end this *parāmāsa* woman is the one who gets caught up on her own string. A daughter of this sort is called a *parāmāsa* daughter because men all over the place get to fondle her, her parents have to be burdened with scolding and teaching her over

¹⁰ The word 'fondling' in Thai also means to harp on something or be continually worried about it. These meanings come into play in the following explanation.

and over again, and because she likes to engage in selling herself, which is a cause for shame and embarrassment to the family.

As for a son, he can cause worries to his parents in other ways. One example is when he behaves irresponsibly. Instead of going to class at school, he likes to go roaming about looking for women wherever his friends may take him, without letting his parents or teachers know of his whereabouts. He looks for the sort of fun and amusement that is called “sneaking the fruit from the tree before it’s ripe.” After a while the teachers sense that something is up. Because the boy hasn’t shown up for classes a number of days running, they suspect that he’s playing truant at home. When they go to his home and ask his parents, the parents are stunned and answer in surprise, “We thought he was with you. We didn’t pay any attention because we assumed he was at school.” So the issue gets all blown up because neither the parents nor the teachers know what the boy has been up to. The fire he started for his own pleasure and amusement thus spreads to consume both his parents at home and his teachers at school. This causes his parents not just a little pain and distress. For this reason, a son of this sort is called a *parāmāsa* son. His parents have to suffer repeatedly, to scold and teach him repeatedly, with never a moment when they can close their mouths in peace. They have to keep worrying in this way without ever being able to eat or sleep peacefully.

If we were to apply this term to husbands, it would mean a husband who can’t be trusted. His wife is always afraid that he’ll have an affair with another woman whenever he’s out of her sight; that he’ll go hitching up with a woman in the back alleys, and then bring nuclear fission home to burn his wife and children. This is because men in general are opportunists. They like to go out and attract women, talking advantage of any woman who’s heedless and gullible. Men who don’t regard their wives as important tend to be the type who are weak in the face of their sexual appetites. At first they see any bait, any woman, that comes floating along as their chance for a snack, but they forget to think of the fish that dies on the hook because it was attracted by the bait. So they let things follow their own course until they eventually come to ruin. If a man with a wife and family lets himself be ruled by his lusts and desires, he brings about not only his own ruin, but that of his family as well. Any woman with a husband who likes looking for snacks like this ends up with a heart heavier than a whole mountain. She can’t live, eat, or sleep in peace. So a snacking husband like this should be called a *parāmāsa* husband because his wife must swallow tears together with

her food since she is driven to constant suspicions by his behaviour. She can never ever let go and relax.

If we apply this term to wives, it's the same sort of thing – a wife who can't be trusted by her husband. She is as fickle as a monkey and squanders his earnings. She's both his greatest love and his greatest enemy. After going out and searching for snacks at strange hours, like a bat, she comes home to raise a storm with her husband, accusing him of all sorts of things so that she can have an excuse to leave him and go live with her lover. Instead of doing her work as a housewife, she dolls herself up and casts furtive glances here and there, looking for new boyfriends. If things get really bad, she takes the family's money and gives it to her lover to hire someone to get her husband out of the way so that she and her lover can then live together openly. A wife like this should be called a *parāmāsa* wife because she creates endless suffering and misery for her husband's heart. At the same time, she's a threat to his life, waiting to have him done in whenever she can get a chance.

If we apply this term to belongings, it refers to things, such as automobiles, that can't be depended on. Wherever you drive them, there's fear of danger. You have to check the motor every time you take them anywhere and keep taking them to the repair shop. Otherwise you can never tell when or where they'll flip over on you and trap you inside. All of this comes under the term *parāmāsa* or fondling.

If we apply this term to precepts and virtues, it refers to the sort of precepts that stumble and fall because the people who observe them stumble and fall. People like this take their precepts, then break them, then take them again – taking them and breaking them over and over until they themselves aren't sure whether they're observing precepts or not, even though they keep taking them repeatedly. All of this refers to the precepts of ordinary people in general. Today they take the precepts, and not too long from now they'll be taking them again. This is called the fondling of precepts and practices because they fondle their precepts the same way they'd pick at the scab on a wound.

Noble Ones on the level of Stream-Entry, even when they are lay people, are steady and firm in the precepts they observe. They don't have to keep taking them over and over again like people in general because they trust their intentions and maintain their precepts with care. They're not willing to let their precepts be broken or stained through any intentional transgressions. Even if they lead groups of people in the ceremony of taking the precepts, they do it simply as part of their social duties and not with the intention to take the precepts anew to make up

for any breaks or stains in their old precepts. Intentions like this don't exist in Stream-enterers at all.

Once-returners, according to the texts, have reduced the amount of greed, hate and delusion in their hearts. Practical experience doesn't raise any issues about these points, so we needn't discuss them any further.

Non-returners have abandoned five fetters: the three we've already discussed, plus two more – sensual passion and mental irritation. *Sensual passion* deals with the realm of the physical body. According to the observations of 'Forest Dhamma' the twenty forms of self-identity views are the well-spring of sensual passion, so the duty of absolutely abandoning them falls to the Non-returner. This is because people who are to attain the level of Non-returning in full measure must use wisdom to examine the five *khandhas* thoroughly and then pass beyond them with no lingering attachments. In other words, they must be able to examine each part of the body until it appears clearly to the heart both as being filthy and as being unsatisfactory, impermanent, and not-self, to the point where they know clearly that every part of the body is filled with filthiness.

The mental image of the unattractiveness of the body that appears outside the *citta* will then revert exclusively into the inner circle of the *citta*. They will know that attractiveness, which is a matter of the *citta* going out to paint pictures and then lusting for them, and unattractiveness, in which the *citta* goes out to paint pictures and then becomes disgusted with the nature of each part of the body, both converge into one and the same *citta*. In other words, they don't appear outside the *citta* as before. The *citta* fully sees the harm of the pictures it painted outside, and at the same time lets go of external attractiveness and unattractiveness as they relate to the parts of the body it has been investigating. It absolutely withdraws its attachment to the body by passing through the interval where attractiveness and unattractiveness meet, showing no more interest in either of the two. At that instant the issue of sensual passion as related to the body is resolved.

As for *mental irritation*, practical experience doesn't differ from the texts or raise any issues, so we needn't discuss it further.

The fourth level of the supreme attainments is the level of Arahantship. According to the texts, Arahants have abandoned ten fetters: the five lower fetters we have already discussed, plus five more subtle ones – attachment to form, attachment to formless phenomena, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance.

Attachment to form doesn't refer to the form of the male or female body, or of physical objects on the blatant, external level. Instead, it refers to the mental images that appear exclusively within the *citta* – in other words, the images that revert from the outside back into the exclusive circle of the *citta*, as mentioned above. Meditators at this point have to take these images as the *citta*'s preoccupation or as the focal point of the *citta*'s attention. If you were to say that this means that the *citta* is attached to *rūpa-jhāna*, you wouldn't be wrong, because the *citta* on this level has to work at developing its understanding of these internal images so as to become adept in dealing with them, without being further concerned with the body at all. It has to keep at these images until it is skilled enough at creating and destroying them that they can appear and disappear in quick succession. Their appearing and disappearing, though, occurs exclusively with reference to the *citta*, and not with reference to external things as before when the *citta* was concerned with the body.

Even this appearing and disappearing of internal images, when it is subjected to the relentless scrutiny of mindfulness and wisdom, gradually changes. Day by day it becomes faster and faster until the images appear and disappear like flashes of lightning. Finally they are all gone – there are no images left in the heart at all. At the same time, you realise that these images pass away in the same way as all other natural phenomena.

From that point on the *citta* is absolutely empty and clear. Even though the body is still there, it seems to your awareness to be entirely empty, with no image of any sort remaining in the *citta* at all.

Attachment for formless phenomena means taking pleasure in subtle feelings of happiness or *arūpa-jhāna*. The practice doesn't have any issues to raise with this point, so we needn't discuss it further.

Conceit – belief in assumptions of self – is divided into nine sorts. For example, your level of attainment in the practice is lower than someone else's, and you construe it to be lower, higher, or on a par. Your level of attainment is on a par with someone else's, and you construe it to be lower, higher, or on a par. Or your level of attainment is higher than someone else's, and you construe it to be lower, higher, or on a par. All of these assumptions are mistakes if we speak in terms of the highest levels of Dhamma, because construing and assumptions are all matters of defilements. We have to correct this tendency until nothing at all appears as a conceit in the *citta*. That's when we can say that the *citta* is pure, because there is no more of this subtle unruliness left in it.

Restlessness, the ninth fetter, doesn't refer to the sort of agitation and distraction which is common to ordinary people in general. Instead, it refers to the diligence, persistence, and absorption of the Noble Ones in their work on this level as they use their sharp mindfulness and wisdom to dig away in search of the source of the cycle of death and rebirth. The problem is that they aim at finishing their work quickly, in line with their hearts' strong hopes for the realm of release, and so don't pay much attention to questions of moderation or balance in their work.

What this means is that they tend not to let the *citta* rest in the stillness and ease of concentration, because the more they use their wisdom to contemplate, the more clearly they see the way to remove defilements step by step. This makes them so absorbed in their work that they forget to rest their *citta* in the stillness of concentration in order to give their wisdom renewed strength. In fact, they tend to view resting the *citta* in concentration and resting in sleep simply as delays in their work. As a result, the *citta* goes overboard in the pressure and absorption of its investigation. This is another way in which the *citta* goes wrong, and so counts as a mental fetter.

Ignorance (avijjā), the tenth fetter. If we apply this term to living beings in general, let me translate it in a forest monk's way as deluded knowledge, dishonest cleverness, both knowledge and ignorance mixed together so that you can't catch hold of which is which. This is ignorance on the blatant level.

As for ignorance on the subtle level of the higher mental fetters, 'Forest Dhamma' regards it as meaning one thing: *delusion regarding the one citta*. This is because on this level the *citta* is able to know and let go of everything else, but still remains deluded about itself. Thus this fetter is called *avijjā*, that is, incomplete knowing, unclear knowing, knowing with a blind spot still obscuring the *citta*. But when mindfulness and wisdom which have been constantly trained to explore and investigate are sufficient to the task, only then will the *citta* realise that ignorance is simply the *citta's* own delusion about itself.

The moment wisdom penetrates this truth, ignorance vanishes immediately, so that no form of ignorance remains lurking in the *citta* at all. The issues of restlessness, absorption in one's investigation, and conceit concerning the *citta* are resolved in the same instant that ignorance vanishes from the heart, because there is nothing left which can act as a cause for restlessness or conceit of any sort. All of the issues in all three levels of the cosmos have nothing but ignorance – this marvellous and amazing thing – as their sole primary cause, because it is something so intrinsically fascinating and deceptive in such a thorough-going way.

Meditators, who aren't really adept in the area of wisdom will have great difficulty in finding their way out of ignorance, because ignorance in general and ignorance in itself are two very different things. Ignorance in general is a phenomenon that combines both external and internal delusions as a single defilement – similar to a tree, which is a combination of its various parts. As for fundamental ignorance, it's like a tree that has been felled and stripped of its branches. In other words, persistent effort cuts away at it step by step so that it gradually stops running wild through things at large and eventually converges into a single spot – the *citta*. This spot is the point of true ignorance, but at this stage it doesn't have the henchmen and followers it had when it was glorying in its full power.

This true ignorance is a gathering point containing all sorts of hidden, unexpected, and amazing things, in the same way that a tiny piece of bait can be contaminated with enough hidden poison to kill an animal. Of the contaminating factors that lie hidden in ignorance, I can give you only a brief explanation since I can't think of any conventional realities with which to compare them that would be as near as I'd like to what they actually are. Among these contaminations are a radiance of mind so outstanding as to seem to be the finished product; a sense of happiness, springing from the power of the radiance dominating the *citta*, so amazing and wonderful that it seems to transcend the realm of all conventional realities; a sense of power and invulnerability so strong that there seems nothing capable of reaching in to affect it; a cherishing attachment for this phenomenon as if it were pure gold.

Although we don't realise the fact at the time, *these things are the obstacles blocking our progress towards true peace*. Only when we have gotten past them and have looked back in retrospect over the path we have followed will we realise where we went wrong and where we went right. That's when we'll know: "When we reached that point, we got turned around in our tracks or went astray ... When we reached this point we were too attached to the stillness of concentration ... When we reached that point we contemplated too much in the area of wisdom. We didn't maintain a balance between our concentration and wisdom, which is why our work went slowly at these various points." Once we have passed this point, we will be able to review and understand everything in retrospect.

At the same time, once ignorance has vanished, we'll know what it is that gives rise to births and deaths in the future. From this point on we have no more concerns for where we have come from in the past or

where the future will lead us, *because in the present the citta has been severed completely from any connection of any sort with anything whatsoever.*



The Dhamma in this talk has been explained partly in line with the texts and partly in line with the observations of ‘Forest Dhamma’. Wherever there are any errors, I ask the forgiveness of all my readers and listeners, for I’ve been talking in line with the understandings derived from the forest way in which I have been practising. I’m always ready to listen to anyone who is kind enough to make reasonable comments or criticisms.

The various stages in the practice for giving rise to clear happiness and maturity within the heart – that is, training in meditation and other forms of goodness and virtue – are all mutually reinforcing. All things without exception that rate as forms of goodness are mutually reinforcing. We can make a comparison with hot peppers. Although some of them may be small or immature, if they’re mashed into a paste it’s all hot in the same way, so that no matter which part of the paste we taste, there’s no way of telling that the mature peppers are in one part or the immature ones in another. In the same way, all things that rate as forms of goodness, no matter what type of skilful action they come from, will converge into one large measure of inner quality or worth.

For this reason I ask all of you who are fully intent on the Dhamma to put it into practice by modifying your actions in line with your position in life, to conform with the guiding compass of the Dhamma’s path while you are still alive. When you come to the time that we all will have to face, your mind will have a firm basis to hold to and won’t wander off in the wrong direction. It will follow the path of the Dhamma that leads away from suffering and guides you to happiness in whichever level of being your destination will be. The happiness and prosperity you dream of with each mental moment will become your heart’s own wealth in line with its level. There’s no reason to doubt this.

In conclusion, I ask that the qualities of the Triple Gem – the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha – preserve and protect each of you so that you meet with nothing but happiness, both in body and in mind. May whatever you hope for be realised in line with your every aspiration.