

The Core of Happiness

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Preface

As humans, we want to be happy. Happiness is a goal that we share in life. While each of us may have a different view of happiness, the “core of happiness” is the same in each one of us. Happiness is a source of positive and peaceful emotions generated from within the mind. Happiness is an expression of the mind. As is suffering. Both are generated from within the same mental foundation. A healthy, wholesome mind leads to happiness. In the pursuit of happiness, we need to take good care of the mind. Feelings are temporary states or expressions of the mind, but it is the mind that serves as the foundation to happiness. When the mind is at peace, we are also at peace -- even if there are adversities and challenges in our lives. On the other hand, if our mind is restless, we lack the capacity to generate the energy of happiness, even if the events in our lives are going well.

This book represents the author’s efforts to share his experience and perspectives on the world of the inner mind and how to transform sufferings into happiness by practicing mindfulness. The author hopes that it may help the reader on the path of happiness and peace.

Khai Thien

Introduction

The Core of Happiness

Happiness is always available to us. But we cannot reach it if we are not able to activate the core of happiness that exists within us. There are different ways to cultivate happiness.

Two Potential Avenues to Attain Happiness

There are two potential avenues to seek happiness: external and internal. The external path requires an object, event or circumstances from which we can derive happiness. We may believe, for example, that having wealth will resolve our financial hardships and will make us happy. And in the pursuit of this goal, we may devote a lot of time and energy to acquire wealth. If we achieve this goal, we may in fact experience satisfaction and happiness. But with respect to happiness that is derived from an external source, we should be mindful two things: First, our ability to control external circumstances is limited – we have only certain amount of control while the remainder rests with the object of the happiness. Second, happiness that is derived from the outside does not last long due to the impermanent and ever changing nature of life.

The other approach to happiness is to seek it from within. With this approach, we ourselves serve as the foundation of our own happiness and all external objects and circumstances are secondary. What is needed is that we tap into the potential for happiness that already exists within us. It is an endless stream of vitality that will not fade with time, and it is our only true possession in this world.

Four Noble Truths of Happiness

Happiness and suffering are two aspects of human life. To build a life of happiness, we need to understand the nature of suffering. This is why the Buddha, in his teachings of happiness, spoke of the Four Noble Truths: *suffering, the causes of suffering, cessation of suffering, and the path to the cessation of suffering.*

The Four Noble Truths set forth the most important purpose in life, and serve as the path to a true and lasting life of happiness. We cannot attain happiness by running away from suffering; rather, we must look deeply and identify the causes of suffering. Once the true causes of suffering are identified, the door to happiness will open as we will be able to end suffering through wisdom and our own cultivation of the mind. Deep mindfulness about the causes of sufferings is the path to wisdom; it will give us not only the power to end sufferings but also serve as the light of enlightenment, enabling us to see things we have never seen previously. This is an individual realization—a priceless experience that cannot be bestowed upon us by anyone but can only be achieved through our own individual efforts. The Four Noble Truths are indeed the only true path to seek true and lasting happiness.

Four Noble Virtues of Living with Happiness

To live a life of happiness, we need to develop the following four Noble Virtues: loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity.

Loving kindness means to have a good heart. We are at ease when we encounter a person who is good and decent. When we receive a warm greeting or a friendly smile from a friend or even a stranger, we feel comfortable. Loving-kindness is a basic foundation in our relationship and interaction with others – as well as in our own lives. An atmosphere of happiness and peace, whether inside or outside the home, cannot exist without loving-kindness.

Compassion is the understanding, sympathy, and willingness to share and empathize in the sufferings of others as well as of our own. If we do not treat others or ourselves with kindness and compassion, our own lives will be barren. A baby cannot survive and become an adult without the love and care of the mother. Likewise, an old or sick person will not be able to recover if there is no assistance from loved ones or others. Compassion is the fountainhead of life, and it nurtures our lives in the most practical sense. If there is no compassion, happiness cannot exist.

Sympathetic joy is the sincere and genuine happiness that we experience when we celebrate the successes, and happiness of others. Sympathetic joy is critical to cultivating

our own happiness. The joy in witnessing and sharing in others' successes and happiness is the *shared breaths* of happiness between the self and the other. In contrast, envy -- the opposite of sympathetic joy -- often makes us uncomfortable. We normally would sense something uncomfortable inside us when we feel envious of others. Happiness needs the proper environment to be cultivated and to exist. We alone cannot create the proper environment for happiness if there is no sympathy and sharing from others. Indeed, we will lose our own happiness if we cannot be happy with others' success and happiness.

Equanimity is to have the correct view, an accurate perception of reality, seeing something as it truly is, without attachment or aversion. Such a view makes our mind peaceful and at ease. With equanimity, we will not be shaken with changes in life. And we will not become attached to any obsession from causal relations such as gain, loss, praise, blame, pleasure, pain, fame, and disgrace. As such, if there is no equanimity serving as the foundation, happiness will not be strong or last long.

As we cultivate and develop these four virtues, the seeds of suffering will not have the necessary nutrients to grow, and our mind will no longer be subject to external afflictions.

Two Ways to Meditate

There are two basic approaches to meditation that may help us to calm the mind, develop compassion, and attain a deeper understanding about life. The first approach is to meditate on the four foundations of life consisting of the (1) physical body, (2) feelings or emotions, (3) the mind, and (4) the mind's objects. Meditation or mindfulness in this context means to maintain our awareness on the operative current of the physical and mental reality—namely, the body and mind complex—in order to recognize its nature of constant changes, such as birth and death or the rise and fall in each moment of existence. This method of mindfulness will help us to transform our lives in a positive way due to the light of awareness that already exists within us.

The second meditation approach is to be mindful of the breath. This practice helps us to stay in the present. Bringing awareness to the breath and following each inhalation and exhalation of it will help us to focus the mind. By being mindful of breathing, the

mind will reach a state of concentration and tranquility, and be liberated from sufferings from either past memories or illusions of the future, and other similar constant and aimless thoughts. This is the most effective way to cultivate the pure energy and peace for the life of the inner mind. If our mind is peaceful, our life is also peaceful.

Opening the Mind

When we close our mind, it is as if we voluntarily imprison ourselves in a tight and narrow world. While we may want life to happen accordance to our wishes, living in this world means to accept both the positives and the negatives. If we try to avoid the negatives by closing our mind to them, we have made ourselves only more distressed. But if we are willing to accept both the good and the bad as part of life, such an attitude will help us to become more accepting and at peace. When we are ready to accept the bad, it does not necessarily mean that the bad will happen or that when bad things do happen we passively do nothing in response. Rather, with an open and accepting attitude, we strengthen our courage, make our inner peace more robust, and make our mind clearer, which will enhance our ability to make decisions. Further, by living with openness and acceptance, we will be able to perceive things that we have never seen before, and those things may—in one way or another—help us transform our anguishes and sufferings.

The Art of Renewal

Renewal is the art of maintaining and developing our lives in a better and more perfect way. An old car, if not properly maintained, will not continue to run well. Like an old car, life is often filled with many difficult experiences. For this reason, we need to renew our lives so that we can continue to be healthy and live well. But to renew ourselves, we cannot follow the same routine. We need to change the old perspectives, routines, and lifestyle. We need to implement a real change and a renewal of life. In practice, it is not possible to give up an old habit without replacing it with a new one. For example, if we want to change the bad habit of oversleeping, we need to consciously do something different in order to create a new routine, such as going to sleep earlier at

night. The same should be done in the art of renewal. To renew our life, we must change our view, our way of thinking, our attitude —more precisely, our own mind. When our outlook changes, our life will change as well. However, while the physical life can quickly change, it is not as easy to change the mind overnight. This task requires long-term efforts and patience.

Transcending the Boundaries

In the pursuit of happiness, one method is to use the power of the mind—the power of *renunciation*. Renunciation here means letting go, setting free, or releasing all obsessions to which we may be clinging, such as gain, loss, pleasure, pain, praise, blame, fame, and disgrace. If we are able to transcend these obsessions or attachments, our life will exceed the present boundaries that confine our lives. In practicing renunciation, we do not have to exert any extraordinary efforts. We simply need to lessen the attachments in the mind. The life of renunciation is that of a non-dualistic notion that does not need an individual self (ego) in order to be happy and peaceful. For example, in a deep and peaceful sleep, we do not need an ego to be present with us. Nor do we need an ego when we experience a genuine smile or laughter. And, with respect to a heart of warmth and love, there is no need for an ego. For this reason, in order to reach the realm of unbounded happiness, we need to let go of our pettiness and selfishness. We need to let go of the ego.

Interdependence

Everything in this world is inter-dependent upon others to exist. This principle also applies to happiness. We cannot be happy if we are concerned only about ourselves. Throughout life, we need help from others - especially in childhood, old age, and sickness. Just as we need air in order to breathe, happiness also needs to have its environment in order to thrive. The environment for happiness is our own mind; the larger the mind is, the fuller and deeper our happiness becomes. The nature of environment for happiness is our kindness and friendliness towards others. In reality, our happiness will be unsettled if we are not treated in a kind and friendly manner. We need hearts of kindness in order to maintain our own happiness.

Living in Harmony

To have a happy life, we must live in harmony with ourselves, others, and our environments. Disharmony is the root of unhappiness. If our own body lacks harmony or is unbalanced, it will lead to illnesses. In the realm of the mind, harmony is an essential element that produces happiness. Happiness will arise only when harmony exists between feelings and the mind. Feelings and emotions are food to the mind. We are comfortable when the mind is comfortable; however, if the mind is restless, the feeling will—in one way or another—become paralyzed. When we are sad or distracted, we may not be able to appreciate good food. This is not because the food suddenly became tasteless. It is because the mind is in an unhappy and distracted state, which in turn reduces our tasting ability, making it unable to perceive the food's rich flavors. For this reason, happiness is the creation from a life of harmony between emotional feelings and the mind.

Re-discovering Peace and Happiness

At times in life when we find ourselves in a situation of great trouble, which may lead to depression and misery, in such circumstances, it is important that we do something quickly to regenerate a sense of peace and happiness. The quickest way to restore a sense of peace and inner calm in this situation is to perform a good, wholesome deed. The simple act of performing a good, wholesome deed -- no matter how small -- will lead to a sense of happy and inner peace. When we see that our modest action has meaning, we will see that our lives continue to have meaning. This will help to restore self-worth and self-confidence and increase the strength of the inner life. It is important to emphasize that a deed of goodness here is not limited to helping others, but it also could be a simple act of goodness, such cleaning the house, doing yard work, washing the car, or doing laundry. We may be surprised as to the magnitude of the effect when a sense of goodness arises in our mind.

Charity and Service

Charity and service are ways to cultivate happiness. We gain by cultivating a feeling that we have been charitable and generous, and we will feel happier in recognizing that our action is meaningful in the service of others. The effect of charity and service is always doubled -- for both the giver and the receiver. It is a gift to the receiver and contributes to the happiness for the giver. Charity and serving others is the very action of improving oneself, perfecting the value and meaning of one's own life. Therefore, we should be happier in service rather than taking pride in the service we provide to others. A normal person might say, "I serve for the sake of others." But a wise person may say, "I serve others in order to complete my own life."

Appreciation

There are many reasons for us to appreciate the things that enable us to have a life of peace and happiness. But there is also another and deeper purpose behind appreciation. When we express gratitude to a person or acknowledge a virtuous action, we generate notions of wholesomeness within ourselves. To express appreciation is not simply to be thankful for the act, but it also the beginning of a noble path in life. In both the secular and religious life, we should express appreciation and gratitude to our parents, teachers, friends, our country, etc. In the spiritual life, we should express appreciation and gratitude to enlightened individuals who illuminate the path to a life of deep and lasting happiness. The inability to express appreciation results in the inability to recognize and treasure the important values in life. As to our personal happiness, the more we appreciate our lives, the happier we become. That is the value of appreciation.

Perspective of Equality

While each person has a different destiny that is driven based upon each individual's karma, all of us desire happiness. And we are averse to sufferings. There is no difference in our aspiration for happiness relative to aspirations of others. Similarly, others are averse to suffering in the same way that we do. Recognizing this common characteristic in the human condition will help us be more empathetic and understanding

towards others. This is the view of equality as to the human condition; this view will help us overcome feelings of jealousy and aversion. On the path to seeking true happiness, the more balanced our views are, the more open our mind will become. Living with an attitude of equality, we will gain more friends, and our tendency to make distinctions or to discriminate against others will be reduced. Such equality is the nature of life. The more one tries to differentiate or distinguish oneself from others, the lonelier one will be.

One-pointed Concentration, Breathing, and Smile

Concentrating, breathing, and smiling are the key necessities of happiness. When the mind is scattered or distracted, we will not be able to neither generate happiness nor enjoy the happiness state, even though the events in our lives may be going well. The one-pointed concentration focuses the mind, making it focus on one object only. When the mind is concentrated, it will itself create a stream of positive energy, making both body and mind peaceful and happy. However, because the nature of the mind is inherently noisy, it cannot naturally focus by itself. The mind needs to be trained through mindfulness and awareness. Mindfulness of breathing is an effective technique to focus and calm the mind. As we pay attention to the inhaled and exhaled breath, we will be able to make our breathing more tranquil; consequently, our mind becomes calm and pure. Our mind cannot become tranquil if our breaths are erratic and turbulent. Therefore, practicing mindfulness of breathing will help us to gradually generate peace and happiness in the mind. When the mind becomes peaceful and happy, a genuine smile will appear. Smiling will be refreshing and it reduces grief and sadness, and it is a manifestation of happiness and itself the potential of happiness.

In sum, if we activate and strengthen the core of happiness that is within us, we will be able to cultivate and enjoy a happy and complete life.

1. A Definition for Happiness

Is your life filled with painful memories, a sense of hopelessness, and many unfulfilled dreams? Are you searching for a way to escape a life of stress or a life of boredom? Are you tired of waiting for a better life to begin? Do you feel like your life is hitting a dead end? Do you ask yourself why am I getting all the bad breaks? Do you yearn to be happy, even just for a few brief moments, but you don't know how or where to begin?

If you think about such questions, you begin to see your life in an honest way. And you are ready for a renewal. In a situation of despair, your external image, such as your reputation, professional accomplishments, fame, and social status will not be of much comfort to the internal turmoil that you may feel. And deep down, you may realize that you do not need to have such an external façade but by habit, you continue to cling to it.

But why do many of us have a tendency to conceal? One possible answer is that most people are afraid that they may not be well-regarded if they show their true selves, including their weaknesses, to others. They are afraid that the self or the ego that is dressed up in the appearances of success and achievements may be injured if others know the truth about their inner selves. But by living a life that is subject to this fear, our well-being will lose the ability to develop peace and inner calmness from within. Additionally, because of the habit to conceal, originating from the fear from the self, the values and meanings of life are changed, and sincere and earnest emotions are transformed or hidden, and the inner world becomes increasingly complicated. In this state, happiness is not true happiness and sadness is not true sadness; instead, happiness and sadness are intertwined. This is called anxiety. And this anxiety drives us to sink deeper into the habit of concealing our feelings, and for us rely upon the *conventions of*

behavior. But so long as we rely upon such social conventions, our search for true happiness will remain a hazy and unrealized aspiration.

This is the time to search for a definition of happiness -- one that will serve as our *inner light* of spirituality -- to lead us out of the impasses of despair. We do not need to have a complex definition as the meaning of happiness. What is required is for each person to define for himself or herself the most genuine meaning of happiness in their specific circumstances. The closer we bring our lives to the truth, the clearer the way of perceiving *reality* will be. That is the reason we must leave behind all the conventions of behavior and return to the truth of life, genuinely and purely. Accepting the reality of life -- and living a life based on the truth -- is the best way to achieving lasting happiness.

On a deeper level, regardless of one defines happiness, the intrinsic nature of happiness is that it is an inner peace and calmness. It is this inner peace that serves as the foundation for happiness. Regardless of the circumstances, any action or event that brings you a sense of purity and peace of mind, that action is be significant to your life. Since happiness has an indefinite value, it can manifest itself in all aspects of daily activities, both physically and mentally.

On the other hand, even if we possess material wealth, but if we do not have inner peace, we continue to be unhappy individuals. Love, money, fame, power—although each has its value and may provide us with satisfaction—cannot provide us a life of true and enduring happiness. When we are tormented from within, it does not matter that we may be living in a beautiful mansion; indeed, such a mansion (including the financial responsibility with having such a mansion) may become a prison. No beautiful castle can give us happiness if there is no happiness from within. True happiness originates from having inner peace. And inner peace comes from within the mind.

For inner peace to arise, we need to have a light of insight, a wisdom not affected and governed by the self—namely, the “I” and “mine”. If we are mindful as to those moments when we experience true happiness, we see that there is no trace of the self. All that exists in our being at that time is a source of vitality. Those are the moments in which we experience joy by witnessing, for example, a beautiful sunset, the beauty of a

blossoming flower, or a child's innocent laughter. Happiness will appear only when the self is absent. In fact, tranquility and peace in the mind have no relations to the self. Rather, it is the self and its nature to distinguish that disturb the peace and tranquility inside of us. Until we are able to cast aside attachments to the self and live freely in the stream of reality, we cannot attain a true state of peace and tranquility. Once we reach such a state, we will enter the world of true happiness. In that state, no matter how troubled or challenging our external circumstances or lives may be, they cannot take away the peace and tranquility from your inner.

2. Purifying the Mind

In the world of interdependence, each of us leads two lives – a personal, internal life and a community, external life. The two lives are closely related to one another. The material world—or more generally, all that belongs to the physical world—plays an important role in providing us with the basic necessities of life. But the mind controls and governs one’s life. In seeking happiness, we should start with our inner life -- the mind.

The inner life of the mind is complex. The mind is full of desires and ambitions. It contains not only what is required for life and for happiness, but also unnecessary information and negative emotions, which can be referred to as the “pollutants” of the mind. Emotions as sadness, sorrow, anger, envy, hatred, and regret are stored within the mind. Often, events from the past, including those that occurred many years ago, will surface in the mind as if they occurred yesterday. A strong ego -- or said differently, a strong attachment to the self -- is the source for the emergence of such thoughts. This strong attachment to the self acts as a narcotic that leads to endless bouts of affliction to suffering.

As a result of attachment to the self, the mind carries within itself the potential of both light or positive energies and dark energies. In this mixture, the dark energies, such as suffering and sorrow from the past or anxieties for the future, are often dominant. This is why life is often associated with suffering instead of happiness, and why we need to exert great efforts in order to be happy. Meanwhile, suffering seems to be ever present; indeed it seems to be default mode of human life. For example, after you have achieved some great success, you may feel excited and euphoric for a short time. But soon thereafter, you return to your baseline level of living, and you revert back to a state of anxieties and suffering. Face with this reality, what can you do to clean up the pollutants of the mind and to restore it to the original state of purity, full of light energy, so that happiness is available to you?

The most important thing that we can do is *meditation*. *Meditation is the path of mindfulness that helps us to look deeply into the core nature of our inner life*. When we observe the mind deeply, we are able to identify and separate out those things that promote happiness from the pollutants of the mind that cause us to suffer. The mind has an immense storage facility filing away everything without discriminating between the good or the bad – between what makes us happy and what makes us sad. In the mind’s storage facility, the mental element that is strong will dominate the mind stream and will manifest itself through our feelings or bodily actions. A mental element that is weak will remain in a silent mode, such as images or thoughts that appear momentarily in the mind and disappear.

To clean up the pollutants in the mind, the first thing we need to do is to look directly into the world of the inner mind as an objective, unbiased observer in order to clearly identify the pollutants of our mind, namely those things that cause us to worry and have other negative emotions, such as regrets, feelings of self-pity, envy, or embarrassment. After we identify such thoughts, we need to be mindful when such thoughts arise in our mind. And we must not allow ourselves to be drawn into such thoughts to dwell in them. In other words, as soon as such thoughts emerge in our mind, we should cut off the energy of attention to them. The principle of dependent origination teaches that a mental element that does not receive nurturing energy or attention from the mind will gradually weaken and dissipate. It is important that we engage in this exercise diligently. In this process, we should be the observer and not actively resist or oppose the emergence of thoughts and feelings. Being an observer means that we change our position from the passive mode (i.e., assimilating with the thoughts and emotions and allow our mind to be carried by such thoughts) to the active mode (i.e., by simply observing them and allowing them to weaken and dissipate). In other words, instead of passively following the urges of our emotions and uniting with them, we remain objective and simply recognize the emergence of those thoughts and allow them to dissipate. This is what it means to control one’s mind. To be an observer of thoughts and feelings (and thereby be in control of them) require patience and diligent practice, which will help to

purify the mind of the pollutants. If we need to bathe our body every day, so does our mind; the mind needs to be “bathed” (or purify) every day. *To observe the mind of thoughts, feelings, and other mental elements is an essential step because it will create the foundation of peace and happiness as well as strengthen the inner life.* If we continue to chase after our emotional urges, we will continue to be controlled by them, and be a slave to our emotions. In such a state, our mind is like a balloon with a broken string, floating haphazardly and carried wherever the wind blows. Sometimes we are happy and sometimes we are sad – but we are never in control.

Bodily sensations change from moment to moment, such as sensations of hunger, thirst, hot, cold, happy, sad, like, and dislike, and so on. Likewise, the mind changes continually without being able to focus on a specific object – it is aimlessly thinking during the day and aimlessly dreaming at night. At times, we may desire to stop this for just a few moments so that we can rest, but the habitual energy that drives us to engage in aimless thinking prevents this. Indeed, most of our time is consumed and indeed wasted by incoherent thoughts or small fragments of thoughts. Not only is this non-productive thinking, it also strip away our inner peace. If we continuously change the focus of the mind from one thought to the next, our state of mind will become frenzied, and we no longer know what we want to think about. Ironically, many people may believe that this ever changing state of mind constitutes their “true self”. But this incorrect assumption is the source of mental suffering.

Observing the mind stream of thoughts, feelings, and the rise and fall of each thought is a key step in the path to attaining happiness. When we engage in the practice of being aware or mindful of our thoughts, we will be able to separate ourselves from the bondages of our feelings, and we are *neither chasing nor being chased*. We will be able to attain a state of peace and happiness when we no longer merge with our emotions and mind stream of thoughts. When we liberate ourselves from all bondages of emotions and aimless thinking, a new potentiality will open up in our mind stream, and a new source of conscious light will appear as the first rays of enlightenment. It is this light of awakening that will help us to dispel the darkness of sensual desires and obsessions. It will also give

us strength to clean up obsessions from the past, such as sadness, hatred, success and failure as well as alleviate the worries and anxieties of life. This new source of energy is the *light of pure wisdom*, not contaminated and affected by the *sense of self*.

3. Illusion and Awakening

Will observing the world of the inner mind help us become awakened? An unqualified yes. To become awakened will not only alleviate our sufferings but will also liberate us from a life that is based upon false views and ignorance. By having false views about life, we unnecessarily create suffering in our lives. Here, it may be difficult to understand how one can be suffering and at the same time be the source of that suffering. Few people are able to see and escape this absurdity. Buddhist canonical literature provides a story that highlights this point.

There once was a vain man who liked to admire his reflection in the mirror. Over time, he became attached to the image in the mirror. In fact, he considered the image in the mirror to be his true self and forgetting his physical body in the real world. One day, the mirror was shattered, and the man could no longer see the image in the mirror. In a panic, he ran screaming “I’ve lost my head!”

Obviously, the man in the story had a false and nonsensical view about himself. In fact, he may have become insane because he could no longer recognize between what was real and what was not. But if we look deeply at the man’s behavior and compare it to our own, we may be surprised to see certain parallels. Just as the man was attached to an illusion (i.e., his reflection in mirror), we are similarly attached to an illusion -- the *illusion of the self*.

The Buddha taught that the source of suffering comes from the wrong view as to the *personal self*—the “I,” “mine,” and “my self.” We may believe that the self is an eternal and permanent entity, and that life’s goal is to protect this self. But what is the “self”? A simple question, but there is no clear answer. At a practical level, the sense of self is assimilated with the presence of the individual. It is attached to personal thought, emotion, love, ambition, suffering, happiness, etc. (e.g., “I am happy,” “I am sad,” “I am suffering,” “I am offended” or “I yearn for. . .” But this assimilation is simply the personal desire clinging to the self in order to increase the intensity of

emotions and to satisfy the thirst of those emotions. The vain man looks in the mirror to see his image. But he becomes attached to the image, believing the image to be his true self. Similarly, when we are born, we are given a name – a label or identity for convenience. Over time, we increasingly believe that label is our true entity and our true self. And if someone offends that identity, we will defend it, sometimes at all costs. But we should recognize that the identity is merely *a temporary label for a life and a mind-stream that are changing from moment to moment.*

In the world of the inner mind, there is no permanent entity that can be called the *self* or *ego*. Whatever that is associated with the mental life, such as emotions, thoughts, sentiments, or desires, it is always changing. Thoughts simply emerge from the mind-stream that flows endlessly like river. If the *self* is identified with as one with emotions or thoughts, the self also changes. How can something that is a constant state of flux be considered to be permanent or everlasting? For this reason, a belief that the self is a permanent, non-changing entity is an incorrect view. It arises from an illusion that arises from the intersection of human ignorance and desires.

This leads us to the next question – what, if any, is wrong with having this view? When we become attached the self, a stream of dark energy arises in our mind – i.e., unwholesome thoughts, such as craving, jealousy, hatred, arrogance, selfishness, envy, discrimination, etc. Such a dark stream of energy is harmful because it pollutes the mind and takes away the inner happiness and peace. For example, take craving or greed. This characteristic is associated with a person who has a strong attachment to the self. Certainly one may need a certain amount of money to live. But craving and greed push people to desire to have much more than what they need, and when these cravings are unfulfilled, people suffer.

The larger the self, the stronger the attachment; and the stronger attachment, the more the suffering. How can we liberate ourselves from the yoke of self-attachment? There is only one way. To become awakened. This means to understand the nature of the self and to transcend attachment to the self. That is true freedom and liberation – to be free from bondages of self-view.

4. The Power of Feelings

To be awakened from the illusion of self-attachment, we need to explore the innermost realm of mind. It is the only place where happiness or suffering, enslavement or liberation can be found. The functioning of the mind is complex. According to the Buddhist view, the inner mind can be described through four concepts: *feeling*, *perception*, *volitional formation*, and *consciousness*.

Feeling is the practical life of emotions such as happiness, sadness, hunger, thirst, cold, and hot. *Formation* refers to the active operation of consciousness, such as thoughts, worries, fears, hopes, desires, criticisms, judgments, etc. *Perception* is mental impression, including concepts, words, and images that are expressed silently in the inner mind. *Volitional formation* means intentional actions associated with the life of thinking and the mind-stream of thoughts. Finally, *consciousness*, which is also called the mind is the universal reality; it represents one's ability to know and recognize, and to store memories.

Here, our focus is on feelings. Feelings have an important role in the functioning of the mind. They arise from the interaction of the body and the mind, and it is this interaction that generates direct and specific emotions such as happiness, sadness, resentfulness, or anger. If there is no interaction between the physical body and the mind, there would be no feeling, and the human world would become inert and emotionless, no different from inanimate objects. That is why feeling, even though it may be just a reflection of the interaction of the mind and the body, has a large impact on the development of one's inner mind. Indeed, feeling is said to be the "food" that feeds, stimulates, and nourishes the mind. The mind develops and is shaped by feelings. If we want to be awakened and be in control our mind, we must first be able to control our feelings.

Unlike the intellect, feeling expresses itself directly and honestly. With our intellect, we may be able to hide or disguise our emotions from others. But internally, we cannot ignore our emotions and that we feel a certain way in response to an external

event or development. If we experience a strong emotion, we cannot hide it from showing on the outside – when a strong emotion emerges, it will manifest itself immediately. Strong feelings give rise to the storms in our internal life. They are like a fire from within that burns; over time, they become habits and then lifestyle, enslaving us to our own desires. A drug addict may fully appreciate the dangers of drugs, but when the feeling of craving arises, he cannot control his actions.

On a deeper level, those types of feelings that arise within the mind on a regular basis will gradually become habits – i.e., habits over time will become a lifestyle. In Buddhist terminology, this is the “habitual karma,” meaning karma that is formed as a result of habits. But feelings do not stop at the personal preference level; they extend further and deeper to create strong passions or desires within the self and exert a strong influence over the self.

Buddhist literature provides an example of how strong habitual karma can be and how it can be sensed by others. One day, the Buddha and his assistant, Ananda, while walking toward a village, saw a dove that was being hunted by a falcon. Suddenly the dove swooped down and landed on the ground in the Buddha’s shadow. In the Buddha’s shadow, the dove was calm. When the Buddha and Ananda walked forward, Ananda’s shadow covered the dove. In Ananda’s shadow, the dove sensed fear and quickly flew away. Witnessing this, a disciple asked the Buddha why the dove was calm in the Buddha’s shadow but seemed fearful in Ananda’s shadow. The Buddha explained that the root of anger from the habitual karma was still active in Ananda’s mind, generating a stream of negative energy, and the dove was able to sense this negative energy.

The story above provides an understanding of the nature of habitual karma, a stream of quiet energy in one’s personal lifestyle that is reinforced day after day until it becomes a defining characteristic in each individual personality. People who hold deep hatred or malice from within or those whose tempers are violent and raging will generate a stream of negative energy. When we encounter people permeating a stream of such negative energy, almost immediately we would feel agitated and we become easily provoked. Even their action, voice, or other gestures will create a sense of irritation or

unpleasantness to others around them. Living with individuals who have such negative energy will make us anxious, stressed, and unhappy due to the negative energy that emanates from their bodies, even if they do not directly challenge or attack us. These streams of energy, particularly the negative ones, permeate and affect others. A person whose mind is filled with hatred and revenge will also find that hatred and revenge seem to follow him. Without intentionally provoking others, he often ignites the energy of hatred in others. He brings to the surface the negative emotions in those whose minds bear the same thoughts as he does. This is like putting magnets close to metals, leading them to automatically attract one another. Emotions have the powerful ability to spread to others. This often the cause of “road rage” – the projection of a powerful but negative emotion by an individual to another will cause the receiver of the negative emotion to immediately feel provoked, and things can become volatile and get out of hand very quickly.

For that reason, if we are not able to control our feelings, we will not be able to control our mind nor the desires of the self. As noted earlier, in the Buddhist teachings, feeling is food for the mind. As such, the types of feeling or emotions (positive or negative) that the mind consumes regularly will become its chief source of energy, which in turn is what nurtures one’s life.

5. Inner Peace and Happiness

Each of us lives in our own world of feelings. Our every need originates from our feelings. It is our feelings that first receive the nature of reality before transferring them to the mind. Upon receiving such information, the mind classifies such information in relation to itself – such as “I like this” and “I don’t like that.” In the world of the self, each person constructs a full perspective of life for himself based upon his will, desires, and lifestyle.

While each person may have different preferences, we all share a common goal – peace and happiness. This is the most basic need in human life. If we are not happy, then it does not matter what we have – whether it is love, fame, fortune, power, etc. If not happiness, we will not be able to find any purpose in life. This is the truth as to human life, and this truth is applicable to everyone. Here, we are concerned about true nature of happiness, and are not talking about temporary flashes of happiness that may appear, and disappear just as quickly. Temporary emotions, including pleasures or satisfaction, do not have any significance in the realm of true happiness. In this respect, it is futile to attempt to string together a series of short, temporary moments of pleasure or delight in order to find happiness and meaning in life. Such efforts do not lead to true peace and happiness.

You may ask if pleasure or satisfaction is not happiness, then what is happiness? And more importantly, how do we attain it? To answer these questions, we need to return to the world of feelings. As noted earlier, there are two potential avenues in the search for happiness: external and internal. As we discussed, the external path is to seek pleasure, joy or satisfaction from the outside. For instance, you may try to find delight or pleasure from going out with friends, going to see movies or to parties, attending a music concert, etc. The delights from such external sources come from your interaction between you and other people. As you probably have experienced, these kinds of delights or satisfaction are temporary in nature and will soon fade away. Further, with

respect to such pleasure, you have only partial control. If your counterpart does not provide other half of the interaction, such pleasure or delight would not exist. This approach in the search of happiness separates reality into two components. But it is worth emphasizing that the tendency to divide reality is a key characteristic of the self – the self always distinguish between itself and others (me versus others). This distinction engenders illusion about the perpetual and permanent self. The truth is that any reality that is already divided into several parts, any effort to reunite the parts is merely superficial on the outside. How can an existence become wholeness while its essence is divided?

Any feeling that is derived from the outside cannot satisfy itself; it requires a counterpart. Therefore, the nature of pleasure is that it dependent on others, i.e., the self and the other. But when you are successful in attaining this type of pleasure, you will be drawn into a world of emotional addiction. You and your life will become increasingly restrictive and dependent on others -- without which you will suffer.

But true happiness is not like this. True happiness is, as we have noted, consists of a sense of *inner peace*. That source of peace is subtle and deep. It does not depend upon external objects to exist because its foundation is *the mind as wholeness* without being divided by any dualistic emotions. And it is not governed by anything from the outside. *The path to this happiness is inward. This process begins from the process of purifying the mind.* That is why, when a person has already created for himself the inner peace, he is able to live a happy life regardless of the external circumstances. Gandhi once said: a prison may be a prison for the criminals, but for me, it is royal palace. In making such a statement, Gandhi transcended his external circumstances by attaining inner peace. In short, *when we are able to transcend the world of dualistic emotions and no longer wander and chase after any external object of desires, we will be able to live with inner peace and happiness, even in midst of stormy, violent situations in life.*

As another example, consider romantic love. If romantic love is beautiful, why is sadness (and suffering) often associated with love? Why does such love lead to a sorrowful and often bitter ending? This is because such love is derived from the dualistic

emotions. When you love a person but that person does not share the feeling for you, you are likely to feel a sense of sadness, perhaps even scorn and even suffering. But here, it is important to recognize that the emotion that is labeled love originates from an expectation of something in return. In fact, you may harbor the expectation that if you are with the person that you love, the two of you will share many things together, such as taking long walks on the beach under the moonlight and sharing the deepest inner thoughts, travelling and seeing the world together, etc. In short, you fantasize that by being with this person you will be happy. But this type of love does not come from the heart – instead, it arises from a sense of selfishness as to your own needs and desires. When those needs and desires are not met, this type of selfish love is often transformed into strong negative emotions.

But true love towards another individual does not originate from a personal expectation or desire, such as love of a parent for a child. It arises from the consideration of the needs of other person. Such a love (without an expectation of a return) will not be colored with bitterness or lead to disappointment or suffering.

In the same way, having inner peace is to have a life of happiness that is transcendent beyond the mind of selfishness. It is stable in every single breath, and does not fluctuate because it is not powered by personal thirst or expectation; rather, it is the source of a peaceful, pure, and fresh vitality full of energy, springing from the boundless heart of great compassion. Such a true and pure love is itself always happy and peaceful; it does not need a favorable, reciprocal response from others.

At times in your life, you may have experienced a state of peace and happiness in the moments of tranquility of the inner mind. Although these moments are precious and may come and go very quickly, they bring you the true sense of peace and serenity, full of joyfulness. At times you may have realized that those miraculous senses of happiness are the very original source of vitality that must be latent somewhere in your presence—it cannot be anywhere else. However, it is the mind-stream of worry, hope, fear, comparison, and desires of the self that covers it by producing a field of dark energy and blocking it totally. Therefore, in order to discover this noble source of life again, we need

to strengthen the peace within. Of course, to develop the life of your happiness, you should not create any negative actions through the body, mouth, or mind. The body does no evil, the mouth speaks no evil, and the mind thinks no evil—that is the most practical way of nurturing peace and happiness.

Yes, such is the realm of inner peace. Just a flashing moment of peace and purity, but your mind may expand itself to all sentient beings not because of the expectation arising from your personal hope, but because your heart of wisdom has been awakened in the reality of your mind-stream. In the light of pure wisdom, you will see that your life and that of others are the same in both the desire for happiness and aversion for suffering; such a realization makes it easy for you to sympathize with others as well as share others' sufferings. Once the heart of wisdom blazes your way of mental purification, you will no longer feel lonely or weary of life; rather, it is your great compassion, peace, and deep understanding that will tear the dark screen of the self to pieces, opening a new *dimension of heaven* for the light of the mind to reveal. At that time, you will readily accept life without any obstacle in mind. From the essence of your pure heart, you will love and sympathize more and more. Of course, the more you love, the more you sympathize, and the happier you will be. Such a noble life will not exist if peace and purity are absent from the inner mind.

6. Our True Possession

In the search for meaning in life, people often look to the external world and measure their worth based upon their accomplishments. Because of this as a starting basis, we may believe that whatever we achieve from the external world represent our possessions. But the truth is different. While no one can deny that our possessions include those things that we have acquired or those things that are necessary to living, there is nothing to guarantee that the possessions in our physical world will be long-lasting. More importantly, as to happiness, if we accept happiness as our main goal in life, then our possessions must have the potential to contribute to our happiness. Something that cannot contribute to our happiness does not have value. Material assets are possessions that may be temporary, precarious, and insecure. Today we may have it, and tomorrow we may not. But whatever that exist in our mind can be considered as our own, because nobody can take them away from us.

The mind has an unlimited potential. It is capable of creating love, fame, money, power, happiness, suffering, and so on. The mind defines one's life. External events or things that may happen to us do not have such a role. Even the most important matters in life, such as suffering or happiness, are also governed by the mind. Whenever our mind falls into crisis, our life will be similarly affected. In such conditions, whatever we may have in terms of material possessions would not do much to resolve the issues; only the mind can. This is why we need to take good care of the mind; when the mind is peaceful, our life will also be peaceful, even though the stream of life is impermanent and ever-changing.

The human mind has a large storage unit that is able to accumulate and save all the life-data from childhood until present. The ability of the mind to store information is quite durable. When you recall an event that happened ten years ago, you may still have a feeling that it has just happened recently; sometimes that feeling may even bring you a sense of happiness or sadness or something very emotional as if it is happening here and

now. The mind's memory has a huge impact on your present life; it silently influences your thinking and behaviors in everyday activities. So, when a negative or bad thought arises in your mind, you are the first person who directly receives its negative impact. Here, no other person can become the direct receiver of the thoughts that you bear in your own mind.

As with our physical bodies, the things we eat are converted into energy that, in return, nurtures our physical existence. Of course eating fresh and nutritious food will help to make the body healthy, and consuming unhealthy or harmful things will harm the body and give rise to illnesses. It is the same for the mind. If your mind is filled with thoughts of hatred, envy, revenge, etc., those thoughts will transform into a dark stream of energy that will destroy the wholesome state of the mind. That negative source remains on the surface of the mind and cover the light of the consciousness; at the same time, it quietly destroys the deep root of peace in the mind. In such a situation, you should be mindful of the inner contradiction – your desires to have happiness, but the negative thoughts and emotions that you hold in your mind (hatred and anger) opposes and destroys that happiness. You may know this truth well, but your habit of attachment to such thoughts as hatred, envy, revenge, discrimination, etc., has rooted deeply in your life as well as in your mind. If you find yourself in such a situation, you become both the victim of suffering and the creator of the suffering. In other words, you yourself become the source of your suffering. Assimilating yourself with such a habit of attachment to such selfish concerns as success or failure, gains or losses, you yourself are squeezing out your living energy. In fact, while your adversary may not ever harm you, your thoughts of anger and revenge have already harmed your inner peace. Said differently, it is the negative thought that erodes the foundation of your internal peace gradually, day after day. Even if you may have already defeated your adversary, the remorse that you may have is something you have to carry with you in your life. Regardless of the scale of your success, if you are not able purify your mind, you will not be able to liberate yourself from the pains in your memory, which may be full of anger and bitterness.

Therefore, on the path to happiness, if you want to protect your external possessions, you must also take good care of your internal possessions – i.e., the well-being of your inner life. Once the life of your inner mind is happy and fulfilled, the physical life will become increasingly blissful and successful.

7. The Path to Happy Living

In the pursuit of happiness, each person may take a different path. But to be happy in accordance with its true meaning, there is only one path: *to be in the present moment*. To understand how to live with happiness in the present moment, first you need to have an accurate view of your inner life.

When you look at your current life, you may realize that your life is driven largely by routines and habits, which are formed by three things: (i) memories of past events; (ii) hopes and expectations for the future; and (iii) a constant and aimless thinking. It is this non-stop thinking process that prevents us from living fully in the present moment, even though we may already have everything that we need to be happy. Some may rationalize that thinking about the past may provide valuable lessons or insights, and spending a lot of time thinking about the future will help us to develop a clear plan for the future. This is true -- but only to a limited extent. The problem is that if we always immerse ourselves in the past or future, we lose something very precious -- life in the present. Life does not take place in the past, which has gone, nor in the future, which is yet to come. Life takes place right here and now; it happens in every moment of the present, in every in-breath and every out-breath. The true present is not merely the present of “today”, but it is every moment of the here and the now.

If we look deeply, we will see that our lives are almost always influenced by impressions and memories of the past. The past memory is a strong impulse that quietly affects one's current thinking as well as one's dreams of the future. In fact, the effects of the past are often so strong that they transform one's perspective and actions in the present. For instance, in the past we may have a strong dislike for an individual, and now when we see that person, we continue to have negative feelings for that person, even though that person may have already changed. Any impression from past memories, regardless of good or bad, also has the power to influence your sentiment and emotion.

Depending on the degree, each type of memory will impact your present life in various ways. But usually negative memories will create a sense of fear or anxiety that is contrary to having a peaceful life in the present.

Consider whether your life is being negatively impacted by worries and anxieties based upon past memories and dreams for the future. Clearly, no one is harming or threatening to harm you in this present moment, and you are safe. Yet why is it that you incessantly worry to the point that you may not eat well or sleep well?

Not only is your present life being harmed by dwelling in memories of the past, but your dream of the future is also affected by them. A person's life can be analogized to the structure of a house: the past serves as the house foundation, the present rests on this foundation, and the future is on top of the present. Thus, if your memory of the past is full of painful memories and suffering, then your life in the present will be contaminated by sorrow and sadness, and this present life will in time become part of your past. Therefore, if you do not live in the present moment completely, you will not be able to experience happiness, which exists only in the present.

An example highlighting this point is as follows: there are some people who previously lived a life of poverty and hunger but have managed to escape that life already. Yet when they hold a piece of bread in their hands, the memory of hunger and poverty from the past appears in their mind again. As a result, they have to eat both the bread of the present and are reminded of the taste of poverty from the past. Living in this way with constant flashback to the past does not bring any benefit. In fact it diminishes the potential for happiness in the present.

A large portion of human life is immersed in either memories of the past or dreams of the future—and/or the never ending, aimless thinking. None of these three ways of living will lead to a life of happiness. Most people will say that they have experienced much more sadness and sorrow in life than happiness. It is rare that a person will say otherwise. When you submerge yourself in the memories of the past, you may gain valuable lessons about life and the nature of life's suffering. But if you dwell in the past too much, you will not be able to experience happiness of the present moment.

Likewise, if you live primarily with the dreams of the future, even though that future is close at hand, your life will be based upon illusion and in a dreamlike state. When you are able to live fully in every single moment in the present, your *true life* will begin.

Why is it that only when you live fully in the present can you experience true happiness? This is because happiness does not exist in the past or in the future. Happiness is available only in the present moment. For instance, when you drink milk, you will not know its taste by thinking about the past or the future; only in the present—namely, during the moment when your tongue actually touches the milk—can you truly perceive the true taste of milk. In the same manner, happiness always exists in the present only. Likewise, if you are interacting with the present through the lens of the past or aspirations and hopes for the future, the *present reality* will be distorted based upon your thoughts according to the way in which you thought and the way in which you act. This will cause the present to be divided from a *whole* into little fragments, which destroy all potential happiness in the present. Of course, such a present is no longer the present; rather, it has been transformed into a reality based upon the reflective images from the past or illusions of the future. To have a peaceful life, you must be truly present in the life of the here and now. You should put aside all obsessions and perspectives of the past and the future and pay attention to whatever existence is really happening in the present moment. By living happily with the present and being fully in the present, you will be able to eliminate gradually all the unnecessary sufferings attached to your life, such as hatred, anger, envy, jealousy, going further to directly perceive the happiness that exists in the stream of reality, here and now. When your mind is full of defilements and afflictions, how can you contemplate and perceive the beauty of a flower, an innocent smile, or the delightful taste of a cup of tea?

The miracle of being in the present is that you can transcend above your internal turmoil and begin to receive the source of blissfulness right in the moment at which you truly live in the present, wholeheartedly and completely. This philosophy is not something new, but it has been long part of the practice of meditation, particularly in Buddhism. Here, being in the present means to be in the present, in every single breath or

action with your awareness and mindfulness. For instance, when you wash your hands, you should focus on the feeling of your hands making contact with the water as well as the fragrance of the soap. Try to put all your heart and mind into the washing of your hands; do not allow any thoughts to interfere with your attention to the task of washing your hands. Concentrate all the vitalities of your life on the present hands of reality only; in doing so, not only your hands, but also your mind will be happy. That is the practice of mindfulness in washing hands. Similarly, you should wholeheartedly and completely focus on whatever you are doing, even with respect to simple and ordinary task such as breathing, driving, washing the dishes, cleaning the house, sweeping the kitchen, or emptying the garbage. This is the way of being in the present. Practicing being in the present means you concentrate your wisdom and energy on *only one thing at a time*. Do not split your present so that while you are doing one thing your mind is thinking about something else. Your mind and your body must always unite together in completeness, regardless of time and place. By practicing such a lifestyle, you will not only complete your tasks—simple or complicated, small or large—successfully but also train yourself in developing a strong ability to concentrate. When your mindfulness reaches a certain level of tranquility, it will establish a strong power of concentration, capable of expelling all defilements and obtaining a life of peace and purity. Therefore, the power of being in the present is extremely infinite. The stronger your being is in the present, the more peaceful and the happier your inner mind will be.

The greatest obstacle to happiness is a feeling of anxiousness that originates from a mixture of hope and fear that is the result of your incessant thinking. The fact is that, although you really want to live peaceably and serenely, the mind forces you to think endlessly, one thought after another, without any specific or definitive object. Similar to a bottle floating adrift in the ocean, your inner mind drifts with the wind and waves ceaselessly. Sometimes you want to stop, but there is no resting place. You want to “turn off” the switch to the constant thinking for a few moments but you cannot. Why is that? It is because the illusive images of hope and fear frequently rise and fall in your mind. Finally, without any other means, some may resort to sleeping pills or other drugs in

order to rest in forgetfulness. But this route may turn you into an addict, craving forgetfulness/unconsciousness and attaining such state from sleeping pills. This is a tragedy that you create because you are unable to control your own attachments to regrets of the past and aspirations for the future.

Why are you unable to oppose the stream of endless thinking in your own mind? Why is it that the more you think, the more hope and expectation you have for yourself and the more anxieties and fear that you experience. The self is to blame. The more you are attached to the self, the more worried you feel. Perhaps you truly do want inner peace, but the self or your ego does share that desire. The bigger the self, the more powerful it will respond or thrive in response to challenges as to victory or defeat, success or failure. The self is fearful of being empty or ignored. Consider this: You want people to know you as an important, accomplished person. You want people to recognize who you are by your success and achievements and your status. Such desires are to compensate for the aggressive nature of the self. Such a character of the self simultaneously shows its fear, the weakness that is concealed in the deepest part of the human life. Fear of emptiness, the self, from its essence, gravitates to concepts such as gain, loss, pleasant, unpleasant, praise, blame, fame, and disgrace. For this reason, when you practice being in the present, particularly when you stay firmly in the moment of the here and now, you will begin to make contact with a very deep awakening and you will wake up from an illusion of the self. At that time you will harmonize yourself into a life of reality with a pure and peaceful mind; you will no longer fluctuate due to anxieties or aimless thoughts. Only when you reach the tranquil state of being in the here and now, your true wisdom will appear. Wisdom and insights of awareness are the special light that blazes up from the non-self mind, going beyond all doubts of the self; it is a true light of spirituality that will guide you to the realm of peace and happiness in the present being, here and now.

Once you truly live in the present moment, happiness is available to you and is no longer something high and far for which you have to wait or take pains to attain. Happiness of the here and now is not like that. But with a peaceful and tranquil mind, you will perceive the miracle of happiness regardless of whatever tasks you may be doing,

including simple tasks as washing the dishes, cleaning the house, bathing and doing laundry, walking, listening to music, eating, drinking, and resting, etc. When the mind is pure and peaceful, it will be able to perceive reality deeply. For instance, only in the state of true peace and serenity can you truly see the beauty of a blossoming rose, smell the aromas of a cup of freshly brewed coffee, or the fragrance and taste of a freshly-baked loaf of bread. With a peaceful mind, your senses will become unadulterated and sharpened, and they will be able to recognize the subtle and miraculous reality. Think about how a magnifying glass can burn something just by using the sunlight instead of fire. This is due to ability of the glass magnifier to collect and focus the sunlight. Likewise, when you are able to concentrate all the pure energy of the mind on the present, you will recognize the great miracle of life expressed in the here and now. In fact, those who have obtained certain levels of meditation are able to see the world of reality not only through only its external manifestations, but also its internal, changing nature. When you are able to stay firmly in the present moment, you will have the ability to transcend all doubts and illusions, live peacefully and freely in the world, and deeply penetrate into the stream of reality with the pure and liberated wisdom. Such a life is a true life of happiness, regardless of the time and place or the external circumstances.

8. The Breath: Staying in the Present

As we have discussed, *being in the present* has a special value for peace and happiness of the inner mind. To help us stay in the present, we need to practice meditation. One relatively easy but effective technique is *mindfulness on breathing*. Being mindful to the breath will help us purify, calm, and ultimately control the mind. You may ask how can being mindful of the breath help us to stay in the present. What is the relationship between the breath and the mind? What is the significance of being mindful of the breath to our search for calmness, inner peace and happiness?

At its most basic level, breathing is the expression of human life. If a person continues to breathe, that person is alive. A person's breathing reflects his current physical and mental state. If a person is breathing gently and regularly, he is in a calm and peaceful state. When he is gasping, he lacks energy or he is tired. When a person is breathing erratically, he is likely in a stressful situation. In short, each different mode of breathing corresponds to a different pattern of brain waves. Gentle breathing reflects the mental status of calm and peace, which is illustrated as an *alpha* wave in the brain. Irregularly rapid and interrupted breaths indicate stress, anger, or strong anxiety, which result in *beta* waves. Therefore, the character of the breath as well as its manifestation is closely associated with our lives; in other words, the breath reflects a person's current state. For this reason, we should be concerned as to each breath that we take. Please do not dismiss breathing merely as a biological function. Paying attention to the breath is key to the practice of meditation.

Take good care of the breath is equivalent to taking good care of one's mind – and of one's life. When you establish a tranquil and quiet space, your life will begin to operate consciously through every single breath in and out; you will also begin to be able to hear the voice from the inner mind as well as your true state of existence. To see the

nature of life clearly, you should bring your whole existence to your every single breath, because only here can you realize its true character.

In order to perceive the true nature of reality, you cannot attempt to look at it in a general way or from a broad perspective; instead you have to look directly at its state of momentary/transitory existence through which it displays itself in the field of impermanence. Similarly, by observing the breath with mindfulness and full concentration, you will see that each breath follows a continuous pattern, such as in-out-rest, out-in-rest; in such a way, the life of each breath continues until it finishes a full cycle. Here, due to your strong mindfulness of the process of the breath's cycle, such as in, out, long, and short (the four main expressions of breathing), as well as deeply experiencing the breath's characteristics, such as gentleness or roughness, you may experience that not only does the physical body have the four great elements—namely, earth, water, fire, and wind or air—but each breath itself also has these four basic elements. That is why, when you are able to *perceive* your own breath through its momentary state of existence completely and precisely, your wisdom—or more poetically, your “third eye”—will begin to open to a new dimension of reality that is fresh and miraculous. The life of reality is now, and in your wise eyes, it no longer a rigid and heavy block. On the contrary, it is flexible and as versatile as the breathing in and out. With this special meditation-wisdom of reality, everything that enters the eyes of a Zen Master—a mass of algae in the high part of a waterfall or far away in the ocean, or even a small pebble alongside the driveway—will become miraculous beings that are in the greatest radiant moments of reality. Here, the key for reaching this state of full realization is to maintain *strong mindfulness to every single breath*.

In the pursuit of a life of happiness, the breaths we take are important. As to the biological value of the breath, it is vital nourishment to our lives, which is created by a state of calm and tranquil breathing. Therefore, when you are able to regulate your breaths and make them calm and gentle, you create a special energy of peace and happiness for your own life in both biological and mental fields. In reality, whenever you pay attention to observing your breaths, even for just a few moments, you will be able to

experience a mental state of calmness and concentration. If you are able to staying firmly in mindfulness of breathing, all impulsive movements of fluctuation and disorder in the mind will gradually calm down; thus, instead of being distracted by thoughts, such as worries and anxieties, you will be able to experience reality more deeply and see your own life and the world around you in a sharper focus. In fact, the more your mind is concentrated, the brighter and calmer it will be. In such a practice, your breath becomes a precious and irreplaceable means to guide your mind from the state of turmoil and disorder to return to the state of peace and serenity.

In the practice of meditation, there are advanced practitioners who, while under meditation, can go for an extended period of time without food. They nurture themselves by the “air-nutrition” that comes from their own breaths and through their method of breathing. In some special cases, for instance, when an *Arahat* (a Buddhist saint) enters the concentration of annihilation (*nirodha-samādhi*), he does not need to eat or drink for the entire period of time as his body and mind becomes motionless. When he enters this level of concentration, also known as the ninth concentration, the breath will reach a state of absolute inactiveness, meaning it is not detectable during the meditation time even though there is still heat in the body. When the meditation session ends, the practitioner returns to his normal state and he will eat, drink, and function normally. The fresh air is itself a resource of pure nutrition; therefore, when you harmonize with peaceful breathing and with a pure mind, your life will at once be renewed increasingly and become fresh; following this is the rising of happiness from the inner mind.

The method of applying mindful breathing may sound simple, but its effect is profound. By taking an inhalation with mindfulness, you can bring into your mind (by visualizing) and body a source of pure and fresh air from nature and the universe in order to nurture the present being. Similarly, by taking an exhalation, you may use the power of the mindfulness to release—following the out breath—all defilements, afflictions, and mental pollutants from the mind. If you are able to practice *breathing in and out* in such a manner of mindfulness from five to ten minutes each time, a few times a day, you will see that your life will become more fulfilled and more wholesome – and whatever

difficulties you thought you had no longer seem as urgent and stressful. However, this is just the first step to help you get familiar with your own breath and from which you may go further into the subtle applications of mindfulness. You should keep in mind that making your breath tranquil and peaceful will make your life to be tranquil and peaceful. Thus, try to stay firmly and consciously with your breathing as much as possible, as breathing in mindfulness skillfully will bring us a distinct power that is able to purify all sufferings in the inner mind; at the same time, it will also produce a *super power of concentration* once you are completely in the here and now.

The extraordinary ability of breathing in mindfulness is that it will create for you a special power of *finishing* and *completeness* right at the starting moment. That is to say you can immediately eliminate all sufferings and anguish attached to your mind immediately when you begin to concentrate on your breath. Once you fully focus your mind on only one object, namely the breath, other thoughts cannot arise and interfere with your present mind-stream; therefore, these thoughts (the source of your unhappiness or suffering) will not have a place to take root and grow. In other words, when you no longer pay attention to a thought, you cut off the energy source that fuels that thought, and it will no longer be able to grow in your mind. *The key point to keep in mind is that you may enjoy the effect of this practice not at the end of the journey but immediately as you begin your practice.* Also right in this starting moment, when all the mental distractions no longer arise, the mind-stream will return to its state of one-pointedness; at this time, the light of *true reality* will begin to illuminate in your mind together with the sense of holy blissfulness, which is serene, pure, deep, and subtle. The stronger the mindfulness, the deeper the blissfulness will be. When you are able to fully and happily dwell on each breath in the present moment, you will see that the realm of reality itself is completely perfect in its own essence. It is indeed never powered by any dualistic interferences or discriminations; this *present reality* constantly flows in an ultimately free and pure state of the mind. Thus, it always serves as the original source of happiness that is, by nature, perpetual and limitless.

In addition, once you are able to stay in the present moment, the past cannot invade and cut off your life and the future cannot divide or separate your being as a whole. Neither the past nor the future can create the present; on the contrary, only based on the present can either the past be recalled or the future be dreamed of. That is the rational role of a dualistic mind that is innately complicated and tangled in its processing of distinctions. Meanwhile, the present reality is like a river that is endlessly flowing, naturally and peacefully. Indeed, the river never tries to hold anything that it meets in its current of streaming; all is flowing freely in the ultimately natural movement. Likewise, if you dwell firmly in the present moment, your mind is able to reach its own realm of the infinite, the original fountainhead of happiness, which is beyond the world of birth and death, the ignorant framework of the self.

On the path of practice, you may encounter difficulties or even conflicts in your mind—particularly when you devote all your strength and efforts in order to get in touch with *the realm of true reality*. However, the good news is that all you need for the journey to the present reality is something quite simple. All you need to do is focus on your breathing with mindfulness. In order to practice this method effectively, you should cast aside all concerns and worries that you may have in your life. Thinking about such issues will not contribute anything to your happiness. Rather, you should bring all your vitality to every single breath you take: breathe in, breathe out, and rest as needed. You should consider that this procedure of each single breath—in, out, and rest—is a complete cycle of an actual life. If you are able to live with your breathing in such a devotional manner (i.e., taking each breath in and out with awareness, attention, and alertness), you will fulfill your own life as well as renew the foundation of your inner happiness.

You may ask why we should use the breath as the object of our focus and not another object. The answer is that the breath is neutral and is neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Other objects are not neutral and can be happy and sad—or sometimes both. For this reason, the breath is regarded as a dwelling place for non-impurity. It is pure in its own essence. It is not concealed by all the impure thoughts and is honest and plain.

Most importantly, it may lead you to the state of peacefulness for both the body and the mind whenever you fully harmonize with it expertly and purely. As your breaths are trained and fulfilled, it makes your life peaceful and unrestricted, no matter when or where you are. This is the path of liberation from bondages of mental afflictions in daily life, and development of the mind, making it a vital wisdom of happiness.

If you are new to the practice of meditation, you can practice for short periods from five to ten minutes throughout the day. You should try to be mindful of your breathing as much as possible. There are many opportunities throughout the day for you to be mindful of breathing, such as before eating your meals, while you're waiting at the traffic lights, while you are waiting for your computer to boot up in the morning, while waiting at the elevators, while walking or exercising, while waiting for food or for water to boil, while taking a shower, and while doing the laundry, and before you go to sleep. Instead of allowing your mind to wander from thought to thought with no clear direction, you should make effort to establish a new habit of mindfulness of breathing, dwelling firmly in the present moment. In your daily activities, focus on doing one thing at a time and performing the task well; never do two or more tasks at a time – i.e., don't multi-task.

However, you should be mindful that in the practice of mindfulness of breathing, the breath is not the foundation; rather, it is mindfulness of the breath that serves as the foundation for our practice. Here, mindfulness is the key element that will guide you to the state of a one-pointed mind; meanwhile, the breath is skillfully employed as a tool to train the mind and to cultivate concentration. Therefore, you should visualize that the in-breath and out-breath as like a post, and mindfulness is the rope that ties the mind to the post, preventing it from roaming aimlessly like a wild horse. Once the mind reaches the point of complete stability, it will become a one-pointed mind that has an extraordinary power that is capable of releasing all pain and grief, sorrow and lamentation, as well as giving rise to happiness right here and now.

9. Experiencing Reality

It may be surprising that something as simple as breathing can transcend its biological function and serve as the *spiritual* key to develop and enhance our ability to perceive the true nature of reality. But there is a close connection between the *breath, the truth of reality, and happiness*. Before addressing the characteristics of the breath, we will briefly discuss the relationship between *the truth* and *happiness*.

Truth and happiness always go together. There is no difference between these two concepts in wisdom's light of reality. When a person finds the truth, she or he also finds happiness. That is the consistency in the living reality. Indeed, when a person enters the realm of enlightenment, her or his body and mind are filled with happiness. This is not something unusual. On the path to realizing the truth or the way to enlightenment, two essential characteristics always exist: *wisdom*—realizing the true nature of reality—and *merit*—experiencing happiness. In the light of true knowledge, these two virtuous qualities cannot be separated from one another.

You cannot discover the truth by living in the past or in the future. As always, the only point at which you may realize the truth of reality is the present moment because that is *the truth of living reality*. Thus, only when you are *in the present moment of reality* can you perceive the truth as such. Similarly, on the path to happiness, you may have dreams of happiness, you may recall an actual experience of happiness, but you can really live in happiness and experience happiness only if you are in the present moment.

Reality does not provide you with any promise for the past or the future. Take a look at your own breath. When the breath is taken in or given out, that inhalation or exhalation is gone forever. In fact, when a breath has already been inhaled or exhaled, it cannot be taken back and repeated. Thus, whatever existence dwells on that breath fades with it. You should neither waste your time by trying to find the *life*

in a breath that has gone nor imagine the *life* of a breath that is yet to come. Doing so is just unrealizable and vain. Furthermore, each breath has its own active mode, and no separate breath can share the life of the other breath. That is the truth of reality—it is fleeting and momentary. Therefore, using your breath as *the means to reach the end*, the enlightenment or the truth, is an effective technique that is open to anyone who knows how to breathe properly with mindfulness. This is also the equal way of enlightenment open to everyone, regardless of religion, nation, race, age, or sex. Obviously, you do not need to change your religious faith or belief in order to practice breathing, to live in happiness, or to discover the truth.

However, to transform the breath into an effective tool for cultivating spiritual practice and developing happiness, you should first bring awareness to your breath, the fuller the better. Try to maintain awareness of your breathing and do not let your attention be distracted by any other thoughts or ideas. Pay attention to the entire cycle of breathing in and out. This is called *staying mindful of breathing*; and its effect is to help the mind penetrate more deeply into the stream of reality, from the coarse existence to the subtle one and from the outside to the inside. The nature of each breath certainly has its own dimension, from the rise to the fall, from birth to death, from the coarse outside to the subtle inside, particularly its inner force of causal interactions in responding to the consciousness of the mind. For instance, when you ring a bell, its loud sound is recognized clearly and easily; but when the loud sound becomes quiet, you continue to recognize its subtle sound. Here, the subtle sound is profound and is realized only by your special attention, high tranquility, or concentration of the mind. Now, when the subtle sound of the bell stops completely and is no longer echoing, the auditory impression of the bell's sound will continue to *resound* in your mind. Here, the echo of the sound's impression in your mind is the very force of causal interaction of the volitional action. Of course, every volitional action always leaves an echo behind, after completing its function; this is the force of causal interaction, like the sound's effect from the bell. It will reappear in reality as a sequence of causes and effects, exactly the same as a form of karmic maturation, only

different in its degrees, like strong or weak. In some cases, the bell's sound stopped twenty or thirty years ago, but now you sometimes still hear its *perceptual echoes* whenever you think of it or recall it. Why does a bell's sound from the distant past now still echo? It is because the conceptual consciousness of the bell's sound still exists in one's memory. In the same way, your breath will go through various periods, from coarse to subtle; even when a subtle breath is finished, the consciousness about it still exists, *meaning that the conditions for breathing still exist*. This detail shows us the initiative and power of the conscious mind as well as its direct and overall impact on the operation of human life. In reality, the practitioners of meditation or those who practice mindfulness are able to skillfully employ their minds and breaths in order to enter, exit, or take a rest in the state of deep meditation, *samādhi*.

In summary, in connection with training the mind and breathing, we must remember to maintain awareness throughout various periods in the cycle of breathing in, out, rest; in, out, rest; and so on. Doing so is an effort to keep your awareness on the reality-stream of breathing strongly and vigorously. When we dwell on mindful breathing as such, there is only one object in the mind: your breath. Thus, focusing the mind on breathing is essential to the practice of meditation and concentration. If your mind continues to wander to other objects of thought while you are trying to observe your breathing, you will never obtain any state of one-pointed mind, which is the original foundation giving rise to wisdom of reality. Without the true wisdom of reality, you will never discover the truth or comprehend it fully; thus, whatever you claim to know is just knowledge gained from seeing, listening, and reading, etc.—a large part of which belongs to the collective knowledge (community and society), while only a very small part belongs to your actual experience. You should remember that you can never discover the truth through the eyes of others; the truth can be seen and perceived only through your own eyes since true realization of the truth always comes from the inner experience of each individual. Therefore, experiencing *living reality* through your own breaths is to practice realizing the truth in a very active, realistic, and direct way. It will help you first regain the ability to concentrate and

regain the energy of peace for life; it will continuously help you experience the living reality of your own existence as well as the world surrounding you. That is the way of the inner experience, which will guide you to a state of individual enlightenment. Of course, the stronger your dwelling of mindfulness, the deeper your ability to get in touch with reality will be. Take the example about the life of a breath in its relation to the transformation of the mind-stream. Certainly, nobody will count how many breaths he or she takes a day or how many times he or she changes his or her mind from moment to moment during the day. However, when living in mindfulness and constantly maintaining your awareness on your breathing, you will see that in a cycle of one breath (in, out, and rest), sometimes there are at least three different objects displayed in the mind-stream. In other words, there are at least three different minds that appear in your mental stream in a very short time—as short as one breath. You breathe in with one mind, breathe out with another mind, and yet another mind arises during the time of resting and preparing to take a new breath. That is why, during the practice of breathing, you should pay attention to every display of each breath or three periods of a breath—namely, in, out, and rest, or the beginning, the middle, and the ending of each in-breath or out-breath. The reason for observing these steps of breathing is that, when you are able to grasp your *conscious breaths*, you are able to see the inner manifestation of your mind. If you can see the mind precisely and entirely, you are able to adjust it and take control of it.

Here, the principle for those who practice conscious breathing is that until you can control and calm your breaths, you will not be able to make your life calm, peaceful and happy. Thus, training your breathing will bring to your life practical benefits that you always dream of and wait for, both physically and mentally. However, the ultimate goal of this practice is to eliminate sufferings and afflictions in the inner mind, and to bring a life of happiness in this present moment, in the here and now.

10. Fulfillment of Life

The mind controls and direct one's life. It is an invisible reality through which the visible existence is created, observed and experienced. And there is no visible reality that does not carry within it an invisible reality. Possessions, material wealth, fame, power, suffering, and happiness are creations of the mind. As noted earlier, the mind has an immense capacity to store everything --the positives as well as the negatives. Our mindfulness needs to be strong in order to cultivate the seeds of goodness in the mind or make them express themselves externally through actions or words. For this reason, we need to develop skillful means to penetrate directly into the inner mind to eliminate the mind of the contaminants that are the byproducts of desires, cravings, and ignorance. Being mindful of the breath is the most effective technique to purify the mind.

As discussed earlier, when the breath is pure and calm, the mind will also become pure and calm. When the breath is driven by mindfulness, a special field of energy will be created that drive out feelings loneliness, despair and sufferings. If the breath is nurtured by mindfulness, one's life will be calm and fulfilled even if our life circumstances are difficult and challenging.

Mindful breathing is the true fulfillment of life. On this point, consider what you really have when your breathing is *cooled*. Here being "cooled" in this context does not refer to the cessation of breathing or death; rather, it refers to the *paralysis* of life. That is the state when your body is one place while your mind is in another. This results in your mind being distracted as if it is scattered into small fragments. Such a splintering results in a state of frenzy, anxiety, fear, and turmoil. This mental paralysis is an illness that affects many people, especially in today's modern world with so many things, including technology gadgets that constantly interrupt their attention. Because of this paralysis, many people become focused on illusions of external happiness rather than looking inward and returning to the original source of happiness -- the mind.

In life, each one of us wants to hold something firmly in his/her hands—a successful career, reputation, or something that one creates. But in absolute terms, what we possess exists only in the present moment; what you can hold in your hands is the breath of the present moment. Except for the life of the present moment, it is not possible to firmly hold in your hands anything else. Even if you were to try to cling to or become attached to something, this only causes the inner fire of the desire to burn hotter. No one knows what will happen in the future. Likewise, when your breath literally cools off, there is no choice but to let go. You cannot keep the things that you may be attached to regardless of the intensity of your attachment. When your breath is not warmed by mindfulness, it will cool off. If you continue to let this “cooling off” state spread to all aspects of your life, you will fall into an inner dead-end and lose the ability to generate any positive energy from within the mind. Such is not living life but merely lingering on, day after day. This is why we should return to the present moment and live in the here and now. Being in the present moment, you will directly experience that the more you live in the present, the richer your life will be. Your life will be truly accomplished, fulfilled, and content if you are able to live fully with an existence in the here and now.

When you bring your awareness to your breath, you are—right in these moments—reconnecting to the living reality of the mind-stream. This will make your life meaningful. Whenever you feel fearful, anxious, or worried, you should try to return to your breath, concentrate on the vitality of breath. In particular, you should be mindful on every single breath in and out. You will be immediately warmed by your own mindfulness of the breath. The miracle of the breath will be revealed whenever you bring awareness to it; in other words, your breath will become a true miracle that has a great power to heal all inner pains of life whenever the consciousness comes and stays with it. When the mind and breath embrace each other in mindfulness, they are able to produce a strong current of energy that can heal the injuries in your life. This the art of living that is widely practiced in spiritual training, yoga exercises, martial arts, modern therapy, and medical treatments. Whenever you feel tired, stressed, or fatigued, you can treat these symptoms by just focusing on breathing and following the breaths in and out for five to

ten minutes. Being mindful of the breath for even this short period will give you a sense of inner calmness, peace and certainty.

On a deeper level, conscious breathing not only nurtures your life, but it also provides a pathway to the world of happiness, enlightenment, and realization of the ultimate truth. As we can see in our lives, although theory and practice are separate aspects, they always relate to one another and mutually support each other. Compared to theory, practice is much more difficult. However, in experiencing happiness, you cannot get to the end goal just by learning the theory; only by *truly living* can you obtain happiness and the truth, although theoretical knowledge provides a basis to govern your practice. Enlightenment or happiness arises from each individual experience. How will conscious breaths help you along the way of your individual experience? Let's consider an example of impermanence. With normal understanding, you may believe that everything in our world—both the physical and the mental—is impermanent and is ever changing. The reason you believe in that is because you see impermanence every day in your life. However, this understanding is based on the phenomena that you experienced over time. But it is not an understanding that you gain from direct observation. For instance, although you may have a vague understanding of death from seeing others who have died, the experience of the death of another and that of your own being will be perceived differently. In the spiritual practice, you can use your own conscious breath to see and realize the nature of impermanence directly. Thanks to the power of concentration, you can grasp every detail in the series of conditional links of birth and death, a field of mental energy from which all beings are driven in the cycle of arising, existing, transforming, and destroying. In meditation, you can directly comprehend the truth of impermanence in every single moment of conditions in the stream of reality without relying on theoretical knowledge or knowledge in books. With the light of an ordinary mind, you cannot understand the subtle world of momentary/transitory existence. But in the state of a one-pointed mind, you can recognize all the truth of reality right at the moment when the thought or concept is still in its embryonic form and about

to arise. Yes, this is the marvelous ability that can be attained only with your mindful breathing.

In conclusion, practicing mindful breathing will bring you a wisdom that will liberate you from the world of suffering and allow you to live in happiness and peace in the here and now. You can practice mindfulness of breathing throughout the day and in any situation. The appendix at the end of this book provides guidance as to how you can practice this method. May you make quick progress on your path towards happiness.

11. Applying Mindfulness to Daily Life

Question: *In my daily life, I have to deal with a number of issues and problems, such as my busy schedule. How do I make time to practice meditation? Is meditation and mindfulness difficult for people who are very busy with their lives?*

Answer: To develop the proper perspective and positive attitude for living, you should be mindful of two things. First, while a busy life means that it is productive, meaningful and indeed a fortunate life. You should see it as a blessing. The current economic environment is difficult for many, especially for those who have been unemployed and are looking for work. When you are stressed because of your busy job and project deadlines, you should consider that you are fortunate to be employed and doing productive things.

Second, you need to consider how you can transform those blessings into a life of peace and happiness for yourself. This depends on whether your mind is happy and peaceful. When your mind is peaceful and happy, no matter what you do, you are peaceful and happy. Therefore, maintaining mindfulness in every action and concentrating all the mental vitality on every work of yours in the present are the manners of practicing meditation. To make your work successful, you should focus your mind on one task at a time. Refrain from doing two or more things at the same time. Don't multi-task because your concentration will be segmented and you will be less productive. Instead, try to allocate a block of time for each task, and during this time, focus on the task at hand and do it well. Whatever you do, you should do it with all your devotion wholeheartedly, regardless of what it may be, including cleaning the house, washing the dishes, taking care of children, etc. Try to dwell on the task at hand and focus on doing it completely and wholeheartedly. For instance, the way you clean the floor should be the same way you wash your own face; you wash the dishes as if you are washing the face of your most beloved one with all your love and carefulness. That is

how to practice mindfulness. If you truly stay mindful on every single work or action, you will not only finish that work or action better, but also perceive the real sense of peace and happiness through your own work and action. On the other hand, if you do not pay attention to your work with mindfulness, you will likely do it hastily. You will end up doing one thing while your mind is thinking of something else. Working in such a way will result in distractions, making whatever you do unsuccessful and incomplete. Undoubtedly, this approach to working will make your life more distracted and less successful.

When you practice mindfulness, you become a gentle person. That is the purpose of staying mindful on whatever you do or how you act. That is also the way of applying meditation into practical life. Therefore, anyone can practice mindfulness, and can live in mindfulness in any time and any place. So, the more you are mindful, the better your work and life will be. Living in mindfulness, you can also avoid the dangers, misfortunes, or accidents that may come from your negligence, carelessness, and mindlessness.

Question: *How can I reduce my stress level when I am confronted with a number of difficult problems at the same time?*

Answer: The following story may help you think about a possible resolution for this problem. During the Buddha's time, the Buddha asked Sonadanda about the essential requirements of an individual who attains the status of a Brahmin (i.e., a Hindu monk). Sonadanda answered that a Brahmin must have at least five qualifying characteristics: (a) pure descent going back through seven generations; (b) a repeater of the sacred words, knowing the mystic verses by heart and having mastered the three Vedas; (c) a handsome individual, gifted with great beauty of complexion; (d) a virtuous man, increased in virtue, and gifted with virtue that has grown great; and (e) a learned and wise man, the first among those who hold out the ladle. The Buddha asked Sonadanda to select the most essential characteristic necessary for a Brahmin by gradual elimination of these five standards. After several rounds of elimination, finally

Sonadanda picked up the most vital characteristic of a Brahmin that cannot be eliminated, which is the fourth: he must be virtuous, increased in virtue, and gifted with virtue that has grown great.

Similarly, because of our mental habit of competition, we may unnecessarily exaggerate what is really necessary and essential to life. As in the case of a Brahmin, the most essential and most necessary characteristic he needs to have is that he must be virtuous, increased in virtue, and gifted with virtue that has grown great. Other characteristics are secondary. They are just embellishments, not the fundamental characteristic. In the same way, when you believe that you are encountering many problems or a problem that is too difficult to solve, the best approach in such a situation is to eliminate all the secondary things and identify the most important thing on which you really need to concentrate and find a resolution for it. You need to focus on that most important thing only. You should not be concerned with other additional, non-essential issues that really are pollutants to your life, such as sadness, envy, hatred, gain, or loss, because these attachments will make your life heavier and more worried. However, in order to pick the right choice, you have to stay mindful of the present moment. Another point of time, either the past or the future, cannot help you find the best solution for the here and now.

Another well-known example that is frequently mentioned by the Buddha as recorded in Buddhist literature is the poisonous arrow. When a man is shot by a poisonous arrow, the most urgent thing that needs to be done is to remove the arrow and heal the wound. It is unnecessary and indeed nonsensical for the man to ask questions such as the origin of the arrow, the shooter, the reasons why the unknown person tried to shoot him, or the poison used on the arrow. When you are mindful of the present as well as bring all your life to the present, you will know what is the most essential important action for resolving your own problem quickly and effectively. There are always difficulties in life; thus, you need a clear and peaceful mind and a strong mindfulness in order to identify the important problems and to resolve them.

Question: *If suffering leads to more suffering and I live a life full of sufferings, both mentally and physically, where can I find true happiness?*

Answer: Suffering leads to more suffering. Suffering relies only on other forms of suffering to exist. Suffering cannot attach to the mind of peace and serenity; however, it can attach itself in the non-stop, aimless thinking process that is dominated by worries, fear, hopelessness, etc. When you stay mindful in the present, you will be able to uproot the sufferings that you may experience. Due to mindfulness of the present moment, heaps of suffering will dissipate and making room for the potentialities of the present reality to develop. You cannot find true happiness in any other place than in the present moment. According to the Buddha's the Four Noble Truths, you cannot seek happiness by running away from suffering. You can only eliminate suffering by understanding the true root of suffering. For this reason, the Buddha taught that suffering is the First Noble Truth; when you find the truth of suffering, peace and happiness will arise. Thus, mindfulness of the truth of suffering is not only a resolution leading to mental liberation, but also a skillful means to heal suffering.

Question: *I am too full of pain and hopelessness. I no longer have energy to resist the suffering that is eating away at my life. How can I recover my confidence and regain happiness in the present?*

Answer: The following story from the *Pabbatopama Sutta* (The Simile of the Mountains) provides a useful lesson about the meaning of life. King Pasenadi visited the Buddha after returning from the battlefield. He paid homage to the Buddha and described the challenges of a life a warrior on the battlefield. In response, the Buddha posed a scenario to the king: Suppose that you have been informed that there are four large mountains from the four directions are moving and they are destroying all sentient and non-sentient beings in their paths. And they are converging on your own palace. What should you do in dealing with such a horrible destruction? King Pasenadi responded: "Venerable Sir, in such terrible moments of birth and death, what else could be done but

to maintain my Dharma-conduct, my final effort—that is, keep my three karmas (body, mouth, and mind) pure and uncontaminated.”

The situation of one’s life always changes from moment to moment – but the value and the purpose of your life remains the same; it does disappear simply because you find yourself in a situation of despair. In the situation of both King Pasenadi and us, although old age and death are coming closer to us and threatening our own existences, the belief in goodness fosters our wills; thus the values of life are maintained intact. That is the ultimate purpose and meaning of human life. Similarly, even if you find yourself in a difficult or even in a hopeless situation, but your life continues to exist. Your external circumstances do not define you. They are simply that – external circumstances that will change. Recognizing this truth will help you regain your belief in life. However, your belief will not be advanced if you continue to dwell in unhappy memories of the past or the vague. Your belief and confidence can be improved and cultivated only when you are in the present.

Question: *I cannot live without the sense of self, my individual ego. Everything I do actually arises from the motivation of my self. I always feel offended whenever someone talks or acts harmful to the self of mine. Such hatred lasts very long in my mind. How can I reduce or lessen the sense of self or remove the obsessions of self-love from my life?*

Answer: The exchange between the Buddha and Saccaka recorded in the *Majjhima Nikaya* (MN 35- Cula Saccaka Sutta) will help you understand more deeply about the nature of the self. One day Saccaka and a group of individuals from Licchavis came to debate with the Buddha. The Buddha said that a person is simply a gathering of the five aggregates—namely, form, feeling, perception, volitional formation, and consciousness. From the five aggregates, there is nothing that can be called to be *the self*. Saccaka disagreed with the Buddha’s statement, stating that just as earth is the ground upon which plants and trees can be developed, likewise the self is the foundation on which the five aggregates can be constituted and create such karmas as wholesome or unwholesome. The Buddha asked Saccaka, “Do you want to say that the five aggregates

are your true self?” Saccaka answered, “Yes.” Then he added, “Not only me alone, but everybody here also agrees with me.” The Buddha provides an analogy that helped to awaken Saccaka. The Buddha asked “Does the king wield power over his subjects?” Saccaka answered “Yes, Venerable Sir.” The Buddha then asked, “You say the five aggregates are your true self—what power do you wield over the five aggregates?” Saccaka was unable to answer the Buddha’s question.

When you observe deeply about the characteristics of human life, you will see that man and his environment are constantly changing. The five aggregates (form, feeling, perception, volitional formation, and consciousness) are changing in accordance with their conditions. They can never stand still in one place; thus, they cannot be perpetual and ever-lasting. Indeed, the world of human beings, both physically and mentally, is impermanent and non-self. If you cannot accept this truth, you will be unable to liberate yourself from the attachment to the “I,” “mine,” and “myself.” That is the core of your anxieties, worries, and anguishes that is silently nurtured by the sense of self; this core of self-love always spreads out the tastes of bitterness in the world of your inner mind.

Question: *I can accept that, in absolute terms, the nature of life is non-self; however, I still feel that there are distinctions between the view of non-self and the life of individual happiness.*

Answer: A good life always needs harmony and mutual support between two truths: the conventional truth and the absolute truth (or the means and the end). You should understand that, when talking about the non-self, we are talking about the truth of life; this truth will help us live a more peaceful and happier life. Undoubtedly, if your happiness is built upon the foundation of truth, the life of your happiness can be stable and last long. Likewise, so-called individual happiness is in fact just a skillful reference between two individuals, such as the self and the other. Of course, any discrimination that is based on skillful means will cause no problem to our true lives. Just as in the case of a rose: no matter what name you use, its sweet smell will definitely remain the same. However, if you try to keep an attitude of attachment to a false view, such as considering the means as the end or seeing the conventional as the absolute, you will become wrong

and ignorant. As a person who uses a boat (the means) to go across the river (the end), once you reach the other side of the river, the boat must be left behind. It is foolish to try to carry the boat with you after reaching the other side. Furthermore, happiness is never born alone by itself; it needs to have many conditions come together in order to produce an actual effect. Therefore, whatever existence is constituted by multiple conditions must be non-self by nature; it does not possess any independent entity. The truth is that human life is always created and exists in the flux of multiple conditions and interrelations; thus, happiness itself is also an existence of mutual conditions. It is non-self by nature, whether you want to call it a possession of the self (mine) or the other (yours).

Question: *I think that the self or ego is something very significant to the fame of human life. Therefore, I believe that, if I try to live the best and work effectively in order to build up an individual self for my own person as a special kind of fame of which many people dream, and if I live wholeheartedly with that fame as the favorite thing of my private life, living with such fame must be happier than having nothing to live with?*

Answer: You can choose for yourself a way to live by finding the necessary motivation for each of your efforts. However, if you choose the self as the *center* for all your living efforts, you will, sooner or later, become a selfish person. You should remember that along the path of seeking fame, the self may play an important role; but in the effort to look for a life of true happiness, the self is always a huge obstacle. The truth shows us that, for instance, you cannot have a really sound sleep if you lie in bed while simultaneously embracing the self worriedly in the mind. The more you worry about the self, the more difficult it is for you to sleep soundly. If you want to have a good and sound sleep, you must release all thinking of the self-right at the moment you take off your shoes and begin to lie on your bed. Indeed, in all manners of experiencing happiness, you will not be able to live fully with the happiness in the present while deep in your heart you still embrace the self in your inner mind.

In the philosophy of Mind-only (*Yogacāra*), the nature of the self is described through four types: ignorance about self, belief in self, pride in self, and love of self. Ignorance about self is the false understandings about the nature of the self; thus,

character of the self is named ignorance. Due to false knowledge about the self, human beings consider it an immortal entity. Belief in self is a wrong view about the nature of life both physically and mentally. Pride in self is the superiority complex or self-importance of each individual. Love in self is the attachment to the untrue self, for the self is made up by ignorance; it is artificial and does not actually exist as a perpetual reality. Therefore, if you take the self as your center of life and try to enhance it to be bigger and more powerful, then the characters of the self will gradually become your real person—a person who likes to live in pride, attachment, imagination, and ignorance. This is a really big obstacle for you in your effort to live happily and discover the truths of life. Undoubtedly, so much suffering and pain are involved in pursuing personal fame! In fact, to achieve fame, you have to trade so many things for it! Therefore, in order to live a life of true happiness, you need to overcome all huge obstacles of the self in your inner mind, not anywhere else.

Question: *I have the habit of aimlessly thinking without focusing on any specific subject, but I am not able to stop this process. Instead of thinking aimlessly in this manner, what should I think about in order to overcome all inner sufferings and live in true happiness?*

Answer: To make your mind pure and peaceful as well as to allow your wisdom to develop, you should concentrate your energy on thinking about the core of suffering (the attachment to false self), instead of thinking aimlessly. You should try to realize the truth that the causes of sadness, hatred, envy, gain or loss, like or dislike, etc., all arise from the belief in self. As long as you still believe that there is a permanent entity called “the self,” you will continue to suffer. This belief in the self leads to personal pride stimulating and pushing you into the dispute of gain or loss, although you know that this conflict contributes nothing to your real life of happiness. The effort to attach to the self is like an invisible and horrible tornado that defeats all potentialities of peace and happiness in your inner mind. Until you can release all attachments to the self, you will not be able to enter the state of dwelling in the present moment peacefully and tranquilly. You should try to stay in the present as if you are diving deeply down to the bottom of

the ocean, where there are no whirlpools or strong waves that can stir your profound peace and serenity within your mind. By practicing staying in the present, you will develop your wisdom and happiness. Essentially, you should keep in mind that you will really know the actual tranquility at the bottom of the ocean only until you throw yourself into it.

12. Appendix

Breathing Meditation - *Guidelines for Practice*

I. Preparation for Sitting Meditation

1. **Body:** You may choose one of the sitting postures: *Burmese posture* (cross the legs simply and rest both feet flat on the floor), *full lotus posture* (place the right foot on the left thigh and the left foot on the right thigh, with the soles turned upward), *a half lotus posture* (place one foot on the opposite thigh and the other foot on the floor beneath the opposite thigh), or *chair posture* (sit on a chair with your feet touching the ground.) Your back, neck, and spine must be in a straight line, and this posture must be maintained throughout the meditation. Place the left hand inside the right hand, palms facing upward, thumbs lightly touching, and rest the hands on the lower thighs. You may also rest your hands on your knees. Your sitting posture should be stable, comfortable, calm, and peaceful.
2. **Mind:** Concentrate your attention on the place touched by the breaths at the *nostril opening or the upper lip*. If you feel uneasy or uncomfortable, you can focus your attention on the lower abdomen (near the navel) or just establish mindfulness in front of the face. The mindfulness in meditation must always have three essential characters: awareness, attention, and alertness.
3. **Breaths:** Let the breath in and out be natural. Do not try to make your breathing longer or shorter. Just breathe naturally and lightly. It is important to keep in mind that, during your sitting meditation, your breath is the only meditative subject. Sometimes when your mind is distracted (i.e., thinking of other subjects), you must be aware of the distraction and try to bring your mind back to the meditative subject by observing and paying attention to your breathing in and out, fixing your mindfulness on the *place touched by the breaths*. Visualize that in-breath and out-breath are the post and your mindfulness is the rope that ties the

mind and the meditative subject together, not allowing the mind to be unrestrained in a disordered manner.

II. Three Basic Steps of Practicing Breathing Meditation

1. Step One:

Be aware of each single breath: in, out, long, and short

In this first step, try to observe and be aware of your breaths in a mindful manner. “Breathing (in / out) a long breath, I know I am breathing (in / out) a long breath. Breathing (in / out) a short breath, I know I am breathing (in / out) a short breath.” Here, you should try to be aware of four plain manifestations of the breath: in, out, long, and short. You must recognize any manifestations of *each single breath* clearly in order to keep the mind awake and mindful to further attain pure concentration. When the mind becomes tranquil and the breaths become light and subtle, you can move to the next step.

2. Step Two:

Be aware of the whole body (of in-breath and out-breath)

Try to recognize the entire body of in-breath and out-breath, including the beginning, middle, and end of each single breath. “Breathing (in / out) I am aware of the whole body (of breath).” This is the effort to evidently realize the entire body of each breath. The key point in practicing this step is that you should give your attention to the place touched by the breaths (*the nostril opening or the upper lip*), and be fully aware of the whole body of breath. You should not go in or go out of mindfulness after the beginning, middle, and end of each breath since, in doing so, your mind will be distracted either internally or externally.

3. Step Three:

Calm the whole body (of in-breath and out-breath)

Try to maintain awareness and mindfulness of your breaths in and out constantly, with the determination to calm the breaths, body, and mind. If your breaths are not tranquil, you should silently generate the wish that “May my breaths become tranquil.” After

making such a wish, your breaths will gradually become tranquil, and then your body and mind will be calm as well. At this point, your breaths may at times become very subtle or even difficult to be revealed; at certain times, it may seem not to even exist. This is just the calm feeling of the subtle state of breathing. You should fix your mindfulness on the place touched by the breaths; in this way, you will see that your breaths are clearly noticeable.

III. Important Notes

1. If you cannot focus the mind by observing the in-and-out breaths, you may change to *counting the breaths* as follows: breathe in and breathe out, counting one; breathe in and breathe out, counting two. Keep counting from one to ten and then return to one and count to ten again. By counting breaths in such a way, your mind will gradually become focused. Once you reach the point of preliminary concentration, you may turn to observe the four manifestations of breathing: in, out, long, short, or the entire body of breath.
2. Do not change your mindfulness on breathing to any other subjects such as characters of suffering, impermanence, and non-self. These three characters belong to the subjects of insight meditation in later phases. Here, the aim of mindfulness on breathing is to make the mind tranquil and achieve focus.
3. When moving from step one to step two (or subsequent steps), you should do only one thing: generate the thought that you want to experience the entire body of breath (step two) or the intention that determines to obtain the tranquility of breath, mind, and body (step three). While generating such a thought/intention, you should maintain your awareness of breathing in and out.
4. There are five hindrances that impede the practice of meditation: (1) sensual desire (craving for pleasure to the senses), (2) anger or ill-will (feeling malice directed toward the self and others), (3) sloth-torpor or boredom (drowsiness, mental sluggishness, sleepiness, or lack of concentration), (4) restlessness-anxiety (the inability to calm the mind), and (5) doubt (lack of conviction or trust).

5. Once the mind has become tranquil for a long duration (about an hour or more), a concentration-sign (*nimitta*) of breath such as fragrance, light, or colors will appear in several modes, depending on the individual practitioner. In this case, you should not immediately shift your focus from breath to those signs. Rather, you must maintain mindfulness on the primary subject of meditation: the in-breath and out-breath. If you are able to maintain this kind of calm concentration for a long period (a few hours or more), you may attain access concentration (*upacāra*) whenever the five hindrances (see 4 above) are abandoned. You may further attain absorption concentration (*appanā*), in which the five factors of meditation (*applied thought, sustained thought, rapturous joy, bliss, and one-pointed mind*) become strong and stable.
6. You may apply the technique of breathing meditation to your everyday activities, always and everywhere, such as walking, standing, lying, and sitting. It is important to keep in mind that mindfulness of breathing is the foundation for living happily in the present moment.
7. Once you are well trained in the mindfulness of breathing (*bodily formation*), you should continue to practice the next three spheres of mindfulness (as mentioned in the 16 subjects below).

IV. 16 Subjects of Breathing Meditation

Excerpts from the Pali Canon: Anapanasatisutta, From the Discourse on Mindfulness on In-and-out Breathing:

There is the case of a monk who, having gone to a forest, to the shade of a tree or to an empty building, sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect and keeping mindfulness to the fore. Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.

Mindfulness on body:

1. Breathing (in / out) a long breath, I know I am breathing (in / out) a long breath.
2. Breathing (in / out) a short breath, I know I am breathing (in / out) a short breath.
3. Breathing (in / out) I am aware of my whole body (of breath).

4. Breathing (in / out) I calm my whole body.

Mindfulness on Feeling:

1. Breathing (in / out) I feel joyful.
2. Breathing (in / out) I feel happy.
3. Breathing (in / out) I am aware of my mental formations.
4. Breathing (in / out) I calm my mental formations.

Mindfulness on Mind:

1. Breathing (in / out) I am aware of my mind.
2. Breathing (in / out) I make my mind happy.
3. Breathing (in / out) I concentrate my mind.
4. Breathing (in / out) I liberate my mind.

Mindfulness on Dharma:

1. Breathing (in / out) I observe the impermanent nature of all dharmas (existences).
2. Breathing (in / out) I observe the disappearance of desire.
3. Breathing (in / out) I observe the cessation.
4. Breathing (in / out) I observe letting go.

The Buddha Said:

“I too, bhikkhus, before my enlightenment, while I was still a bodhisatta, not yet fully enlightened, generally dwelt in this dwelling. While I generally dwelt in this dwelling, neither my body nor my eyes became fatigued and my mind, by not clinging, was liberated from the taints.” (Sn, V, 317)

“And, bhikkhus, this concentration through mindfulness of breathing, when developed and practiced much, is both peaceful and sublime, it is an unadulterated blissful abiding, and is banished at one and stills evil unprofitable thoughts as soon as they arise” (S.v, 321; Vin.iii, 70; Visuddhimagga VIII. 145)

“When ordinary people have not lost their jhana, and they aspire to reborn in the Brahmā-world thus, ‘Let us be reborn in the Brahmā-world’, or even though they do not make the actual aspiration, then the development of absorption concentration provides them with the benefits of an improved form of existence. Hence the Blessed One said: “Where do they reappear after developing the first jhana limitely? They reappear in the company of the deities Brahmā’s Retinue’ (Vbh.424), and so on. And even the

development of access concentration ensures an improved form of existence in the happy destinies of sensual sphere.” (Visuddhimagga XI. 123)

“Bhikkhus, when mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it is of great fruit and great benefit. When mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it fulfills the four foundation of mindfulness. When the four foundation of mindfulness is developed and cultivated, they fulfill the seven enlightenment factors. When the seven enlightenment factors are developed and cultivated, they fulfill true knowledge and deliverance.” (Mn. III, 82)

13. Words of Wisdom from the Heart Sutra

While in deep meditation as to the profound wisdom of the Prajñāpāramitā Hrdaya Sūtra, the following thoughts as to the nature of life, happiness, and suffering arose from within the author.

- A life of happiness does not need a “self” to exist.
- The self divides us into various states of status: possession, loss, success, failure, love, hatred, fame, and shame.
- You can live in calmness and accept the ups and downs in life if you let go of the self.
- The self is only an illusion.
- The illusion of the self is the source of anxieties and sufferings in life.
- The more distinctions we have, the more selfish we become and more unhappy we will be.
- Distinctions arising from the self lead to suspicions, judgments, and illusions that endlessly arise from the mind, blocking all sources of light in one’s life.
- If our mind is caught in a constant stream of endless, aimless thoughts and distractions, we are not much different from a person who babbles all day.
- It is unwise to exchange happiness for suffering by embracing concepts that do not truly exist, such as: “I,” “mine,” and “my self”!
- In Buddhism, non-distinction does not mean not knowing the difference between good and bad, but embracing non-distinction serves to challenge to one’s attachment to the self.
- Water and waves differ only in form.
- Distinctions based upon the self lead to stubborn attachments, which harm one’s ability to live peacefully free from delusions.

- By deeply looking at the differences between water and waves, we are able to see the dangers of the dualistic distinctions, such as attachments to concepts of “I,” “mine,” and “my self”.
- Suffering and happiness may seem different from one another. But when we look deeply at their intrinsic nature, both arise from the same source -- the mind.
- Joy arises from the mind, as does sadness. Suffering and happiness are expressions of the mind.
- Your real life does not need a name; nor does your happiness. Be nameless once in order to enjoy your real life.
- The Heart Sutra teaches that “what you are” is but a dream.
- While dreaming, everything seems real. When we wake up, we realize that the experience in the dream was not real. The same can be said of life.
- The more we practice non-attachment, the happier we will become.
- When we let go our attachment to concepts of success, victory, defeat, failure, fame, and power, we become liberated and will be able to experience happiness in the here and the now.
- The happiest moments in life come when the self goes.
- The realization that the “self” does not need to exist for us to be happy is wondrous - just as with a rose, we may call it by any other name, but its sweet fragrance remains the same.
- To become awakened, we do not need to exert any special effort. We simply need to practice looking deeply into what is coming into existence and ending around us constantly - as well as within ourselves (i.e., our breath).
- With passing time, our body may age but our mind does not.
- Enlightenment can be reached only if we are able to live in equanimity and in non-attachment.
- On the path to enlightenment, our minds are awakened; this is like an old man who experiences youthfulness again when he unloads the burden of attachments.
- In the reality of mind-stream, the concept of age has no significance.

- In the world of dreams and illusions, age seems to have meaning only because it is associated with success or failure in life.
- We should not put too much significance into the concept of age because age reflects only the accumulation of happiness and sadness in one's life.
- So as we have youthful spirit or outlook, we will continue to be young living in a beautiful and peaceful world.
- One's ability to *hear* may diminish with age, but one's ability to *listen*—like the original source of mind that transcend notions of birth or death—does not change.
- We enjoy a life of happiness based on the non-self only when we live in that manner.
- When we live in the world of dreams and illusions, we lose our real life.
- We are able to attain true happiness, not in the distant future or at the end of one's life, but now in this moment, in the here and now, in this body and in this world.
- Up until now, what have we been able to hold firmly in our hands in this short and constantly changing life?
- Instead of departing from this world someday with unfulfilled dreams, hopes and ambitions, why not live a life of peace and happiness in the here and now —a happiness without self?
- Like swans gracefully taking flight from a lake, we can live a peaceful life free from all delusions and worldly bondage right in this body and this world.
- We should not wait to achieve all of our ambitions and dreams in this human world and then ascend to heaven because such a journey will never occur.
- To perceive the truth, we must let our eyes return to their original, pure state — meaning our vision will no longer be limited by “what we are”!
- Hope and fear are the two states that always exist in the mind; they exist in every moment, even in our dreams.
- Only the pure eyes are able to observe existence as it truly is.

- In theory, it is not hard to enter a world of happiness; to get there, we do not need to do more – rather we need to let go the heavy baggage of our attachments.
- If one is able to embrace both the good and the bad in life, one becomes a great person.
- When we are able to control ourselves, we are able to control the world around us.
- To a degree, truth and happiness are one and the same; when we discover the truth, we also achieve happiness.
- What will happen if we let go of our distinctions? Will the world be empty and meaningless? Ruined? No. When the layers of distinction are cast aside, we will enter a stream of happiness and our heart of compassion will be awakened.
- Within our traditional framework of thoughts, happiness and truth are seen as different concepts, but from the absolute perspective, they are no different from one another.
- In seeking happiness and truth, being discriminatory leads to confusion and a sense of being lost.
- Overcoming sufferings by “living free” from delusions is a practical way of wisdom, capable of leading to the present happiness, here and now.
- A heart filled with compassion is the source of life.
- Compassion is that which nurtures our spirituality, and serves as a rescue vessel in saving others.
- The heart with compassion and perfect wisdom, the Prajñāpāramitā, are the path of a Buddha or a Bodhisattva.
- With a heart of compassion, we do not feel tired in helping others.
- At times we shed tears in empathy with the sufferings of others such as those the homeless or those who are sick and suffering.
- A heart filled with compassion is wholesome and is like an everlasting bouquet of beautiful flowers.
- Living a life with compassion will lead to a life of happiness.