

The Essential practice

Part II

Dhamma Discourses of

Venerable Webu Sayādaw

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Extinguishing the Fires Within

Sayadaw: There are duties towards the pagoda compound (*cetiyaṅgaṇa*)¹ and the Bodhi tree compound (*bodhiyaṅgaṇa*);² towards one's teachers, parents, wife, and children. If we fulfil these duties, we practise good conduct (*caraṇa*), and this is virtue (*sīla*).

While we are fulfilling our duties, is it not possible to practise mindfulness of breathing too? If we do not fulfil these duties, can we say that our *sīla* is complete? If our *sīla* is not perfect, can we expect to experience the happiness we aspire for? If we are not happy, if we can't get good concentration, and if our mind is not concentrated, we can't attain insight wisdom (*paññā*).

[*Ven. Webu Sayādaw assembled the monks in the ordination hall to recite the 227 monks' rules (the Pātimokkha) and to attend to other matters of the community. At the completion of this meeting, he used to give a discourse to the lay people present.*]

Sayadaw: Today is the Uposatha day.³ At dawn you all got up with the thought, "Today is the Uposatha day," and you undertook to keep the eight precepts. Have you been mindful continuously since then?

Disciple: No, sir, we haven't.

Sayadaw: How much of this time have you spent being aware of in-breath and out-breath?

Disciple: At times we are aware, at times we are not, sir.

Sayadaw: How long did your mind stay with the object and how much time did you lose?

Disciple: (No reply.)

Sayadaw: As you remain silent, I assume that you have been able to keep up your awareness all the time.

Disciple: No, sir, we haven't.

Sayadaw: In that case I have to ask you some more questions. How many times does your mind dissolve in a flash of lightning?

Disciple: Billions and billions of times, sir.

Sayadaw: So it arises and disintegrates billions of times. Every time the mind arises it takes some object, pleasant or unpleasant, liked or disliked. Is there a time when this constant, continuous stream of mental objects is cut or interrupted?

Disciple: No, sir, the mind always takes an object.

Sayadaw: Yes, and these good and bad friends arise in your mind due to the skilful and unskilful deeds or kamma you have done in the past. Now, if a pleasant object, which we call a good friend, enters the stream of consciousness, what happens?

Disciple: Liking or *lobha* arises, sir.

Sayadaw: If liking arises, is this good or bad?

Disciple: It is bad (*akusala*), sir.

¹ *Pagoda*, or *cetiya*: dome-shaped religious monument. It usually contains either relics of a Buddha or a highly respected monk, or a Buddha statue, the holy scriptures or other holy objects. Most pagodas are solid structures and can not be entered. They are symbols of the Buddha.

² *Ficus religiosa*, the tree under which the Buddha attained Awakening.

³ *Uposatha*: There are four Uposatha days a month, using lunar months: full-moon, new-moon, and both half-moon days. On the Uposatha days Buddhists traditionally observe the eight precepts and go to the monasteries for meditation and to listen to religious discourses. In urban Burma, Sundays replace Uposatha days while in rural Burma, the lunar calendar is still in use.

Sayadaw: But if a bad friend, an unpleasant mind-object arises, what happens then?

Disciple: Dislike or *dosa* arises, sir.

Sayadaw: If we allow dislike to arise, are we skilful or unskilful? Is this action *kusala* or *akusala*?

Disciple: It is unskilful, sir.

Sayadaw: So, if we accept the agreeable mind-objects, liking, craving, wanting, and lust arise, and we are creating unskilful acts which lead to the four lower planes of existence. But if unpleasant thoughts or images arise and we take possession of them, then worry, grief, suffering, anger, and aversion arise, and these mental states lead to the lower planes too. Now, when is the time at which no pleasant or unpleasant thought or image or sound or sight or taste or touch arises?

Disciple: There is no such time, sir. The mind always takes an object.

Sayadaw: And all these objects arising in our minds are the results of the deeds we have done in the past, in *saṃsāra*. If an object is pleasant or unpleasant, when it arises what do you normally do?

Disciple: We react unskilfully and create *akusala-kamma* for ourselves, sir.

Sayadaw: If a pleasant object arises in the mind, liking, craving, wanting arise. This craving, this *lobha*, what is it like? Is it not like a fire? *Lobha* is like a fire. What about *dosa*, disliking, aversion, and hatred?

Disciple: *Dosa* is also like a fire, sir.

Sayadaw: So, whatever arises, we have to suffer the burning of fire, don't we?

Disciple: Yes, sir.

Sayadaw: But, of course, if *lobha* and *dosa* have to arise, let them arise. If we are practising the teachings of the Buddha, can they affect us? While we are practising *Ānāpāna* meditation, *lobha* and *dosa* don't get an opportunity to possess our minds.

The teachings of the Buddha resemble the great lake Anottata.⁴ If the fires of *lobha* or *dosa* or any other fires fall into this lake, they are extinguished, and we don't have to suffer their scorching heat any longer. Only if we know each arising of the mind in the billions of times it arises in a split second, can we justly say that we have achieved *adhīpaññā*, real wisdom and insight.

Mind and body arise billions of times in the wink of an eye, and with it your good and bad friends. If you are not watchful, these good and bad deeds of yours will again be accumulated in you billions of times. Now, who is responsible for the pleasant and unpleasant sensations that continuously arise in your body?

Disciple: We ourselves are responsible for them, sir.

Sayadaw: The debts you have accumulated in the incalculably long period of *saṃsāra* are with you. If you don't apply the Buddha's teachings and practise them, you will accumulate the same debts again and again, billions of times in every split second. Are you able to count these debts?

Disciple: No, sir, they are incalculable.

Sayadaw: Therefore, you should apply this practice the Buddha taught. If you don't accept what arises and disintegrates of its own accord, then your accumulated debts will diminish and no new debts will accumulate. If you realise this arising and vanishing for yourselves, then you don't make new debts and you get rid of the old ones. Thus you attain to real wisdom.

⁴ Lake Anottata: a lake in the Himavant (Himalaya) region whose waters always remain cool.

This technique of being aware of in-breath and out-breath can be practised anywhere. You can practise it while you are alone or in company, while you are sitting, walking, standing, or lying down. Wherever you are, you can practise it. Now, do you have to spend money in order to practise Ānāpāna?

Disciple: No, sir.

Sayadaw: Do you have to take time off work to practise?

Disciple: No, sir.

Sayadaw: In that case, what is so difficult about it? Will this practice make you feel tired?

Disciple: No, sir.

Sayadaw: If you make great profits with your business and people ask you, “How much gold, how much silver have you got?”, will you tell them?

Disciple: No, sir.

Sayadaw: And why not?

Disciple: One shouldn’t tell others such things, sir.

Sayadaw: Now, which jewel is more precious, gold and silver, or the Dhamma?

Disciple: The Dhamma is more precious, sir.

Sayadaw: Then don’t talk to others about your achievements. What is the time now?

Disciple: Seven p.m., sir.

Sayadaw: How much time have you got left until sunrise?

Disciple: About ten hours, sir.

Sayadaw: Do you think that you can practise meditation for that long without a break? Work hard to rid yourselves of your debts. The efforts of the past and meritorious deeds performed in the past are giving their good results.

Work Without Wavering!

Sayadaw: You have taken the precepts. Now that you have undertaken the practice of the perfection of morality, fulfil it.

What you realise when you penetrate the Four Noble Truths is called *bodhi*. You are born at a good time and in a good form of existence. Now then, emulate the wise disciples of the Buddha and put forth effort as strong as theirs, so that you may attain the awakening to which you aspired. Those who received the teachings from the Buddha himself worked ceaselessly in all four postures⁵ and thus attained enlightenment.

The human beings, devas, and brahmās who achieved their aspiration [to awakening] on just one occasion cannot be counted in hundreds, thousands, hundred of thousands, or millions. Sometimes in one split second, an incalculably large number of beings achieved their aspirations. From the time the Buddha attained full awakening, beings have been able to attain Nibbāna. But it is not only during the lifetime of the Buddha that beings can attain Nibbāna; Nibbāna can be attained as long as the teachings of the Buddha are available.

The attainment of Nibbāna is not blissful just for a brief moment. It will have lasting effects for the rest of the round of birth and death (*samsāra*). What the Buddha taught is the way out of suffering. You don’t have to know a vast amount. If you practise one technique properly, with strong and steadfast effort, you will come to know for

⁵ The four postures are sitting, standing, lying down, and walking.

yourselves that you are people of great strength. You will not have to ask others about the teachings, and you will not even have to tell others that you are practising.

Once you have established effort, you will not only know what good teachers told you, but you will clearly know for yourselves how the *virīya-iddhipāda* factor⁶ arises in a split second.

You have the good quality of being able to follow the good advice of the Buddha as his disciples did in the past.

When I increase effort, then the *virīya-iddhipāda* factor will increase also. And then what will happen? I will think “With just this much effort, the *virīya-iddhipāda* factor has arisen to this extent. But my energy is not exhausted yet. There is still more. I shall increase my effort further.” And the will to increase effort will arise. At this same instant, effort increases. As effort increases, the *virīya-iddhipāda* factor becomes stronger. When these factors have thus risen to a very high standard, then all your aspirations can be fulfilled.

Do not take rest. Do not take breaks or time off. Work continuously. If you develop continuously, you will become happier and happier. In this way the disciples of the Buddha became very happy, never getting enough of this happiness. Do you understand?

If a king rules over a country, does he say complacently, “This one country is enough for me”?

Disciple: No, sir, he doesn’t remain satisfied.

Sayadaw: And if he rules a whole continent and has become emperor, is he satisfied then?

Disciple: No, sir, he isn’t.

Sayadaw: If he isn’t satisfied, what will he do?

Disciple: He will try to acquire more and more territory, sir.

Sayadaw: When a man is emperor over a continent, he wants the whole world. When he gets the whole world, he wants to become a universal monarch.⁷ Once he is a universal monarch will he say, “This is enough” and be satisfied?

Disciple: No, sir, he will not be satisfied.

Sayadaw: All those who are perfect in their faith and have performed the highest form of generosity and demonstrated the greatest form of respect can’t be satisfied. They will practise meditation and will gradually attain the stages of awakening (*samāpatti*). Once they are able to enter into the states of Nibbāna, only this happiness will count for them.

Nibbāna is the highest and noblest form of happiness there is. It is said that one can never experience enough of the highest and noblest form of happiness. And not only the direct disciples of the Buddha were able to achieve it. If you put forth continuous effort to the same extent that the wise of old did, you too will experience this highest happiness, even now. Then you will know, “I experienced a happiness that doesn’t last only for a moment, or just for a lifetime, but for the remainder of the cycle of birth and death. And why did I attain this happiness? Because I was born into the right form of existence, because I was born at the right time, because I put forth strong effort.”

⁶ *Iddhipāda*: The root or basis of attaining completion or perfection. *Virīya* (effort): “A person with virīya is infused with the thought that the aim can be attained by energy and effort. He is not discouraged even though it is said to him that he must undergo great hardships. He is not discouraged even though he actually has to undergo great hardships. He is not discouraged even though it is said to him that he must put forth effort for many days, months, and years. He is not discouraged even though he actually has to put forth effort for such long periods” (Ledi Sayādaw, *The Manuals of Buddhism*, pp. 190f.).

⁷ A Universal Monarch rules the whole planet righteously. Under the rule of the Universal Monarch there is prosperity and security for human beings.

At any time when human beings, devas, and brahmās accepted and practised the teachings, they were successful. In this context, “At any time” means that whenever one undertakes this practice, one obtains understanding. The time span in which the teachings of the Buddha are available is very important and special: if you want to attain Nibbāna you can do so at any time; it is easy now.

Don’t say, “This isn’t my cup of tea. This isn’t suitable for me. I won’t get anything out of this.” You have noble aspirations and you can fulfil them now. So if you say to yourselves, “I shall take up the practice right now,” don’t you think you can get real understanding? You can get it practising in a group or by yourself. Seek for yourself. Take up one of the techniques the Buddha taught and practise it with one-pointedness and strong effort. Establish awareness of in-breath and out-breath and the spot where the air touches while you are breathing in and out.

When you are thus aware of the spot, can there still be worry, anxiety, and fear? Can there still be greed, aversion, and delusion?⁸ And, when you concentrate your mind in this way, you revere the teachings, don’t you?

Disciple: Yes, sir.

Sayadaw: You will understand that the degree to which you come out of suffering depends on how much effort you put in and on how strongly the *virīya-iddhipāda* factor arises out of this effort.

Disciple: We understand, sir.

Sayadaw: There will be no more room for doubt because you have now practised the technique and experienced it for yourselves, and so you know it. You will think, “Even in such a short time I am able to come out of suffering immediately to such an extent, but my strength is not yet exhausted.” And the will to exert yourself still more arises, and you will become happy with a happiness of which you never tire.

Now, tell me. There is such a thing as a universal monarch in the world, isn’t there?

Disciple: Yes, sir, there is.

Sayadaw: When the time is right for a universal monarch to arise, will no one notice this fact?

Disciple: We don’t know, sir.

Sayadaw: About one hundred years before the universal monarch arises the good news goes around and a commotion takes place. Then all are setting their hopes and yearnings on the universal monarch. They are happy, and when he is born they rejoice.

What are the circumstances necessary for a universal monarch to arise?

Disciple: Only when the “jewel of the wheel”⁹ arrives, sir, can someone become a universal monarch.

Sayadaw: Yes, before the jewel of the wheel arises he is called the embryo universal monarch, but even then his authority, wealth, and power are considerable. Will he say, “Let the jewel of the wheel not arise; what I have got is quite enough for me!”?

Disciple: No, sir, he won’t.

Sayadaw: And why not?

⁸ Greed (*lobha*), aversion (*dosa*), and delusion or illusion (*moha*) are the three root causes of all suffering. *Lobha* includes all degrees of wanting, looking forward to, desiring, lust, etc. *Dosa* includes all degrees of aversion from slight aversion to intense hatred. Fear is also part of *dosa* as it contains aversion against the thing feared. *Moha* means delusion about the nature of physical and mental states. When a person does away with *moha*, he recognizes that all states of body and mind are unsatisfactory, impermanent, and devoid of a self or soul.

⁹ The Jewel of the Wheel arises when the Universal Monarch has fulfilled all the conditions necessary to acquire this status. (See *Dīgha Nikāya*, III 81.)

Disciple: Because he wants to become still greater through the arising of the jewel of the wheel.

Sayadaw: So, when will the jewel of the wheel come?

Disciple: It will come at the right time, sir.

Sayadaw: The jewel of the wheel arises due to the merit the embryo universal monarch has accumulated. But there are still duties for him, and having understood these duties and keeping them in mind, he has to fulfil them. Now say there is an embryo universal monarch. His merit is ripe, but he doesn't fulfil the duties that are the final cause for his becoming a universal monarch. Will the jewel of the wheel arise of its own accord?

Disciple: No, sir, it will not arise by itself, I think. He will have to exercise himself further.

Sayadaw: Now let's say you were the embryo universal monarch waiting for the jewel of the wheel to arise so that you will reign over the whole world. You will still have to practise further. You have to keep *sīla*. But would you say, "Well, I don't need the jewel of the wheel any more. I am quite satisfied with the riches and splendour I have attained"?

Disciple: No, sir.

Sayadaw: You will not give up at this point, because if you become a universal monarch you will be able to reign according to the Dhamma so that the whole world will be happy. Do you think the people of your provinces will say to you, "Oh embryo universal monarch, you have got enough power"?

Disciple: No, sir, certainly not.

Sayadaw: So, what will the people say?

Disciple: "Work hard and fulfil your duties," they will say, sir.

Sayadaw: And why is this?

Disciple: Because they want the jewel of the wheel to arise, sir.

Sayadaw: Yes, you see, because of the power of the wheel of the universal monarch, all will experience many different types of happiness. But when one has become a universal monarch, will this give him results for the rest of the cycle of birth and death? How long can he be universal monarch?

Disciple: Only as long as the jewel of the wheel is there, sir.

Sayadaw: Yes, even a universal monarch can be on his throne at best for one life span, but now the Buddha's teachings are available. If all the good beings who have taken birth in a happy existence take up the practice of the Buddha's teachings, they can attain awakening—as they aspired to in the past. But it is as with the embryo universal monarch: he doesn't become a universal monarch by just enjoying the royal splendour that he has already achieved; he will only become a universal ruler when he has fulfilled the duties and disciplines necessary to obtain the jewel of the wheel.

Now, approximately when do you want to attain Nibbāna?

Disciple: Very soon, sir.

Sayadaw: What does that mean?

Disciple: Now, immediately, sir.

Sayadaw: So, you are going to attain it right now?

Disciple: If it's possible, sir.

Sayadaw: Well, at the time you accept it, you will reach it.

Disciple: One can get it only when the ten perfections (*pāramīs*) are completed, fulfilled, sir.

Sayadaw: You still don't understand. We were talking about the embryo universal monarch just now. He attained that point because of his fulfilling the ten pāramīs. This fulfilment of the pāramīs means that he can become a universal monarch for certain. But when will he become a universal monarch? When he has fulfilled the practices and duties that cause the arising of the jewel of the wheel. So, if he undertakes these, the jewel will arise. Now, don't tell me you want Nibbāna. If you practise now, you will realise it now. Will you take up practising? But then don't get up after some time and run away.

If you want to become sovereign rulers, what do you have to do? You have to master all the arts that are required of an accomplished prince and princess. So what do you think you have to master as sons and daughters of the Buddha?

Disciple: We have to master sīla, samādhi, and paññā, sir.

Sayadaw: What do you have to do to become a king? You have to study and practise the eighteen arts a king has to master. You have to learn about war-elephants, strategy, how to overcome enemies, and so forth. Once you have learned all this, what will you do when you encounter enemies?

Disciple: We'll attack them, sir.

Sayadaw: There are enemies who obstruct our progress towards Nibbāna, and if we want to get there, we have to fight them. Will you fight them after having equipped yourselves with weapons?

Disciple: Yes, sir.

Sayadaw: You will have to sit for a long time. Once the battle starts, you have to fight for real. Once you have deployed your troops in the battlefield, you will have to go ahead. Only if you prevail will you become a king.

Disciple: We shall fight, sir.

Sayadaw: Good, go ahead. Don't get up and run away, even if time seems long. If you fight well, you will become a sovereign king.

During the time of the Buddha, people learned the teachings from the Buddha himself. The Buddha simply taught how to defeat all forms of ignorance. Do you think that all those who listened to his words and then practised accordingly repulsed ignorance? They really refuted all forms of ignorance and therefore they were victorious. They attained supreme happiness. Establish yourselves in effort and all your aspirations will be realised. You are well equipped with weapons for the battle, aren't you?

Disciple: Yes, sir.

Sayadaw: And you will fight, won't you? Your enemies do attack, and they attack often and with full force. Are sloth, torpor, and laziness friends or enemies? What do you do when they come? I think it has been some time since you fought a battle?

Disciple: Quite some time, sir.

Sayadaw: Tell me about the weapons you will have to use, and how you have to fight.

Disciple: We have to fight for one hour every day, sir.

Sayadaw: Only one hour a day?

Disciple: We can't even always manage that much, sir.

Sayadaw: Look here! Is this because the weapons are soft or because the warriors are soft?

Disciple: We are soft, sir.

Sayadaw: Are princes and princesses who want to become rulers soft too?

Disciple: No, sir. They can't be because soft princes are defeated.

Sayadaw: But these princes here, are they people with strength and fortitude or are they soft?

Disciple: We are soft, sir.

Sayadaw: As sons and daughters of the Buddha do you want to become sovereigns of Nibbāna, or do you want to remain princes and princesses?

Disciple: We all want to become rulers, sir.

Sayadaw: The weapon you have is good, so attack! But only if you hold the weapons properly will the enemy fear you. I think you don't hold the weapon properly.

Disciple: We do attack, sir, but our way of attack is weak. Out of compassion give us a powerful weapon, sir.

Sayadaw: I can only give you the weapon. This weapon will not do anything; only if you take this weapon and make use of it can you win. No weapon is weak, and you don't have just one. You have a whole store of weapons. If I were to enumerate them, it would become a long list.

Disciple: Sir, we fail because we have so many weapons.

Sayadaw: No, it's because you don't fight. You have to fight. Do you understand? Don't you want to become sovereign kings? Do you want to stay princes and princesses?

Disciple: We try hard, sir, but we never succeed.

Sayadaw: Yes, yes, but the weapon is all right. You don't succeed because you don't fight. You are talking like most people. You meditate, you put forth effort, but in spite of that you sound as if there was no effort. There is so much energy in you, but you don't use it. You do have energy. If you put all your stock of energy to use, you will assuredly become real sons and daughters of the Buddha, become kings by attaining Nibbāna. Sons and daughters of the Buddha have the ability to accept instructions, make effort, and follow the teachings of the Buddha. All who practise the teachings, be they humans, devas, or brahmās, can fulfil their different aspirations for Nibbāna. Even if you keep up the awareness of in-breath and out-breath throughout only one day, you will understand much. You may say that you have been meditating for so many years, but have you really ever been able to keep your mind focused for a full day?

Disciple: No, sir.

Sayadaw: By one day I mean a day and a night, twenty-four hours. Now, do this: practise the teachings of the Buddha to the full for one day and one night. If you have done this once, you will all be able to appreciate the value of just one single day. Some of you may have been practising for twenty or thirty years and some even longer. But just examine yourselves. Have you really, having established yourselves in complete effort, fulfilled one single day in practice? Have you?

Disciple: No, sir, we haven't.

Sayadaw: And why have you never devoted yourselves fully for one whole day? You do have the energy required, don't you?

Disciple: Yes, sir.

Sayadaw: You don't use the energy you have in the right place. You waste it for no purpose. Are you still going to shows and entertainments?

Disciple: Yes, sir. We watch a *pwe*¹⁰ all night until dawn, without sleeping.

Sayadaw: How many nights in a row do you do this?

¹⁰ *Pwe*, traditional Burmese theatre. It incorporates in a traditional play elements such as drama, clowns, music, dances, etc. It usually lasts all night until sunrise and the people eat and enjoy themselves. It is attended by the whole family, takes place on the village green or, in modern Burma, in town halls. The performing troupes tour Burma in the dry season.

Disciple: About two or three nights, sir.

Sayadaw: How many shows have you seen in all?

Disciple: I can't remember, sir.

Sayadaw: You see; *there* you have plenty of energy. Day and night. There your effort is strong. Now, how many times have you observed the Uposatha precepts?

Disciple: Many times, sir.

Sayadaw: I mean, how many days have you observed the eight Uposatha precepts day and night?

Disciple: We have observed them ever since we were children, sir.

Sayadaw: How many days altogether? A day I call a day and a night, twenty-four hours. Do you get a full day of Uposatha observances, if you look at it like this?

Disciple: No, sir, we don't. We observe them about half a day at a time, sir.

Sayadaw: Have you fulfilled them to the utmost during that half day?

Disciple: We are unable to do that, sir. We started this morning, sir, and shall keep it up until tomorrow.

Sayadaw: You do have the will to work, but you don't usually use it for this noble purpose, but rather to watch *pwes*. If you die while watching a *pwe*, where will you go?

Disciple: To the lower world, sir.

Sayadaw: Do you want that?

Disciple: No, sir.

Sayadaw: Even if you don't want it, it has great power over you, doesn't it? If you were to really observe the Uposatha day, with full effort for the whole day, could you not fulfil your aspirations? If you keep up the practice on an Uposatha day, you will understand, you will come to know something.

The real disciples of the Buddha take *sīla* on Uposatha days, and then they immediately take the object and firmly keep their attention fixed on it. Now if your attention is so firmly fixed on an object, can sloth, torpor, or laziness disturb you?

Disciple: No, sir, they can't.

Sayadaw: If our attention is firmly established on in-breath and out-breath and the point of contact, do we still hear other people's conversation?

Disciple: No, sir.

Sayadaw: What if someone speaks very loudly?

Disciple: It doesn't disturb us, sir.

Sayadaw: There is no greed, aversion, or delusion. If our minds are thus purged of greed, aversion, and delusion, will there still be loneliness, depression, and laziness?

Disciple: No, sir.

Sayadaw: Do we still miss company?

Disciple: No, sir.

Sayadaw: Do we still want to know what others are saying?

Disciple: No, sir.

Sayadaw: If someone comes and invites us out, are we excited?

Disciple: No, sir.

Sayadaw: We shall not jealously guard what we have. Good people are not like that. We share it with those with whom we live. “May they also get what I have got.” Now, what will happen if all of you establish strong effort from sunrise to sunset, without a break. This is a long time-span, from sunrise to sunset. But will you feel it to be long?

Disciple: No, sir.

Sayadaw: You will think, “Today the time went so quickly! We observed Uposatha and the time just flew! And I really don’t know why this day was so short.” And after sunset you will again establish awareness of the object, and then day will break, and you still continue with the awareness of the spot below the nose, above the upper lip until it is light. Without interruption. And you will wonder, “How did this night pass so quickly? Now it is day again!”

This is how they used to practise on Uposatha days. When the direct disciples of the Buddha undertook to practise for a day, they practised for twenty-four hours. And when day came, they were still not satisfied and said, “In the long cycle of birth and death we have been doing all those other things for a long time, but not this.” And they continued their work without wavering. Do you have days like this?

Disciple: Our days contain some interruptions, sir.

Sayadaw: If someone keeps Uposatha, and his mind wanders here and there—just anybody, I don’t mean you—so his mind flits around here and there. But he is at a pagoda or under a holy Bodhi tree, and say he dies at that moment. What will happen to this worshipper?

Disciple: He will go to the lower worlds, sir.

Sayadaw: How many lower planes are there?

Disciple: There are four lower planes, sir.

Sayadaw: What are they?

Disciple: Hell, the animal world, the plane of the hungry ghosts, and the demon world.

Sayadaw: Now, who wants to go to hell or the animal world?

Disciple: I don’t, sir.

Sayadaw: What about the ghost world or the demon world?

Disciple: I don’t want to go there, sir.

Sayadaw: If you take sīla and don’t firmly put your mind to observing the teachings of the Buddha, is that skilful or not?

Disciple: It is unskilful, sir.

Sayadaw: If someone observes the Uposatha days without keeping his mind focused, where will he be reborn when he dies?

Disciple: In the lower planes of existence, sir.

Sayadaw: Are you sure?

Disciple: Yes, sir, I’m sure.

Sayadaw: If I talk about someone who doesn’t keep his mind fixed on the object, I am not talking about you people; I’m talking about that (fictional) worshipper.

Disciple: Sir, out of compassion show us the good road out of the lower worlds.

Sayadaw: Do you remember how you focused your mind as the Buddha taught?

Disciple: Yes, sir, I remember.

Sayadaw: So then, let us keep the mind on the spot. What do you think?

Disciple: Yes, sir.

Sayadaw: But, of course, now you can't do a full day any more. But if you practise until it is light, you will have done half a day. What do you think?

Disciple: We will keep our minds at the spot, sir.

Sayadaw: What other things do you have to do tonight?

Disciple: There is nothing to do at night, sir.

Sayadaw: You have eaten, so you don't have to cook any more, and there is nothing else to do. Very good. Will you stay here now that you have undertaken to keep the Uposatha days? Won't you want to go away?

Disciple: We shall do our best, sir.

Sayadaw: If you say, "We shall do our best," will there be no disturbances coming in? Will no enemy attack? Only if you really mean it are the enemies afraid. If you are firm, they run. You know about Mahā-Kassapa, don't you?

Disciple: Yes, sir, we have heard about him.

Sayadaw: He met the Buddha and then practised what the Buddha taught in order to escape from suffering. There are four bodily postures: sitting, standing, walking, and lying down. Which of these is prone to let in the enemy? Laziness and sloth come in while lying down, and they come to stay, don't they? If we indulge in laziness and sloth, shall we be able to develop in morality, concentration, and wisdom?

Disciple: No, sir, we won't.

Sayadaw: Laziness and torpor are our enemies. Therefore Mahā-Kassapa reacted this posture in which the enemy attacks and adopted the other three postures in which the enemy can't remain for long.

There are thirteen ascetic practices and Mahā-Kassapa practised all thirteen. Only those among the disciples of the Buddha with the strongest determination practised the sitter's practice, that is, did not lie down at all, twenty-four hours a day. If one takes up the sitter's practice and makes the strong determination not to sleep, this sloth and laziness can't overpower him. Though these noble disciples of the Buddha did not lie down or sleep, they lived long and were very healthy.

Do you fight wars?

Disciple: Yes, sir, we do.

Sayadaw: Now, you are going to start your meditation. What preparations do you have to make?

Disciple: We have to spread out our mat.¹¹

Sayadaw: If you spread out your mat before starting your meditation, soon someone will come along. Who do you think that will be? Do you think laziness and sleepiness will come your way?

Disciple: If they come, sir, I shall lie down and sleep.

Sayadaw: What will you say to them?

Disciple: I won't say anything, sir.

Sayadaw: You will say, "Ha, now only you come; I got the mat ready a long time ago." And what are you going to do then? You are going to lie down flat on your back and sleep. If you do this, will you be able to fulfil your aspiration for Nibbāna?

Disciple: No, sir.

¹¹ In rural Burma people sleep on mats on the floor. Spreading a mat means getting ready to lie down.

Sayadaw: If you practise without sleeping, you are establishing full effort and are always keeping your attention firmly fixed on the object, day and night. If you practise in this way, your morality, your concentration and control over the mind, and your insight and wisdom will become stronger and stronger. They will develop from moment to moment.

If you watch a *pwe* all night, you will feel tired in the morning. But if you practise the teachings of the Buddha all night, you will experience happiness and joy without end, and you will not feel sleepy. Do you understand? ... The Buddha taught this; it is not my teaching. If you follow the teaching of the Buddha and don't rest until you understand it completely, you will really know.

If people tell you, "This shade is cool," don't simply believe them, but try it out for yourselves. If you just repeat, "It is cool, it is cool ...," because others say so, you don't really know about its coolness; you merely talk about it. If someone just babbles along, he doesn't show appreciation. But if someone speaks from experience, then won't he be able to speak with deep appreciation and radiant happiness and love?

So pay attention and practise. If you practise, you will reach your goal. Not just hundreds, not thousands, not tens of thousands, not hundreds of thousands; all who follow the teachings will master them.

When you start to meditate you still have to check: Is everything arranged? Is there a place to sleep at night and one to rest during the day? Only when all this is in order, will you meditate. Isn't that so?

If you act in this way, you nourish your enemy, you call him a friend; you love him. Once you recognise your enemy as such, do you still associate with him?

Disciple: No, sir.

Sayadaw: What do you do if he comes?

Disciple: We check him and defend ourselves.

Sayadaw: How do you defend yourselves? Will you attack him? Will you mount a full attack?

Disciple: We shall repulse him, sir.

Sayadaw: How do you repulse him? Softly, so that he doesn't get hurt?

Disciple: We shall ward him off immediately so that he can never come back.

Sayadaw: Yes, carry on. Cut him off and throw him overboard so that he can't ever come back. Well then, what will you do when tiredness and laziness really arise?

Disciple: I shall probably fall asleep, sir.

Sayadaw: What about others in the audience?

Disciple: I don't know, sir.

Sayadaw: Will you recognise the enemy and destroy him?

Disciple: Just so, sir.

Sayadaw: Very good. I shall give you a simile. If a man sleeps a deep sleep and you wake him up, he will awake quickly. If you try to wake up someone who pretends to sleep, you will not be successful. Why is this so?

Disciple: The more one works on him the more he pretends to sleep.

Sayadaw: Yes. Now what about you; are you really fast asleep or do you pretend to sleep?

Disciple: I don't know, sir.

Sayadaw: If you are really asleep, you will simply get up when I wake you up. Will you get up?

Disciple: Yes, sir.

Sayadaw: Yes, and after getting up, you will go back to sleep, I think. But I'm not sure about that. I only think so.

Disciple: I shall work hard as you instruct me, sir.

Sayadaw: Put forth effort and you will become perfect. You have all you need.

All of you have acquired the elements of insight and renunciation. Because of this, you now esteem the teachings of the Buddha; you want to fulfil and practise them. If the accumulation of the perfection of renunciation is small, your ears will be blocked to the teachings of the Buddha. For instance, if somebody tells you to come to this place, you don't want to come because you are bored by this. But now you are attracted by this teaching. All you need now is the same amount of effort that the noble disciples of the Buddha made.

When you begin to practise you may worry, "If I sit just for one or two hours, I am aching and stiff. How can I possibly sit for a whole day and night? I think that's quite impossible." Don't you worry like this?

Disciple: No, sir, I don't.

Sayadaw: Though you may not worry now, it will come up. But don't worry in this way. The Buddha didn't teach suffering. He taught the way leading to happiness. You may not believe this because you think your own thoughts. But you have to work with full effort and without wavering. Now, when you meditate with full effort, the *viriyā-iddhipāda* factor will arise. You will understand this. But when you sit, all of you feel some discomfort, don't you?

Disciple: Yes, sir, we do.

Sayadaw: Even if you are aching and stiff, there is a place where there is no pain. There is sleepiness, and there is also a place where there is no sleepiness. What do you do when you are drowsy?

Disciple: I go to sleep, sir.

Sayadaw: Do you ever get enough sleep?

Disciple: Yes, sir, I do.

Sayadaw: But you sleep every day, and now you want to sleep again? So you haven't actually had enough yet. If you sleep every day, you will never get enough sleep. So when you feel sleepy, make an effort to reach the place where there is no sleepiness, and then you will need no more sleep. Get up and walk up and down. Keep your attention at the spot where the air touches when you breathe in and out. If you keep it fixed on this spot with full effort, at some time you will find the place of no sleep. There is no "I won't find it," there is only a "I haven't got there yet." You will get it.

If you sleep and postpone meditation until you are rested, you will wake up when it is light and there will be no time left to meditate. I am just telling you what the Buddha taught. There is nothing I know. Everything the Buddha taught is true.

All of you have to make a living, work, toil, and shoulder burdens, don't you?

Disciple: Yes, sir.

Sayadaw: So let us be simple. You breathe, don't you?

Disciple: Yes, sir, we do.

Sayadaw: So, simply be aware of the in-breath, the out-breath, and the point below the nose where the air touches. It goes in and out without interruption, doesn't it?

Disciple: Yes, sir, that's right.

Sayadaw: Only when your attention wanders away is the continuity broken. And then, don't allow your attention to follow the breath. Your attention should always remain with this small spot. When you keep your attention there at the spot, your respiration will become soft and subtle. Once it has become subtle, you don't have to make it rough again. The Buddha taught that we have to make the rough and harsh subtle and fine. The Buddha didn't say that we should make the subtle rough. When you feel the spot, touching it with your finger, your attention will not wander to other objects. Can't you fix your attention firmly on the spot with the breathing?

Disciple: I can, sir.

Sayadaw: Will greed, aversion, and delusion still arise when your attention is focused on the spot? When you are well concentrated, even for a short moment, your mind is cleansed of greed, aversion, and delusion for that short moment. Can't you keep your attention fixed on the spot for a longer time-span?

Disciple: Yes, sir, I can.

Sayadaw: So, make a strong effort and keep your attention here. If you keep it there, is there any drowsiness or laziness disturbing you?

Disciple: They don't come up, sir.

Sayadaw: But what will happen if you reduce your effort?

Disciple: Laziness will come in, sir.

Sayadaw: Sloth and laziness will come, and your concentration will become weak. This is because you're at the beginning; later it will improve. And then you should view this laziness as a friend, not as an enemy, and you will get used to it. Though it comes, you will not get lazy any more. When we feel sleepy, we say, "This is good. Now I want to find the place where one doesn't feel sleepy quickly. Then there will be an end to sleeping." Work, fix your attention firmly on the spot as I just instructed you, and when your limbs ache, know: "The only way out of this is to get to a place where there is no pain." Now, if the discomfort becomes very intense, is it too difficult then? It is not difficult. Don't worry about all this. Simply keep your attention on the spot. Put it back on the spot. Don't allow it to go away! If it runs away, you will never get to the place I just told you about.

Though we can't avoid being offered food and having to eat it, don't you think that we can keep our attention at the spot and eat? Do you think you will make comments like, "Too much salt, too little salt," about the food that your wife, daughter, granddaughter brought from home?

Disciple: I wouldn't make that sort of comment, sir.

Sayadaw: So, if they offered you food that was far too salty, would you become angry?

Disciple: No, sir, I wouldn't.

Sayadaw: Do you think you would even notice that the food had too much salt?

Disciple: No, sir.

Sayadaw: Why? Because you are aware of something far better, so you don't notice their food. If you get upset and angry about food, even though you are observing the eight precepts, and you die at that moment of anger, where will you go?

Disciple: To the lower worlds, sir.

Sayadaw: If you work with proper effort, not just superficially, will you even know whether the food tastes good or bad?

Disciple: No, sir.

Sayadaw: Keep your mind steadfastly focused on the spot. Your daily work needn't suffer. It doesn't cost you anything. Others won't know about it. Will you practise the sitter's practice tonight?¹² Keep your attention on the spot and you will find it very easy. If you feel drowsy, or if you are aching, say: "Good, it has come early," and then concentrate still harder on the spot.

If you reach the goal before drowsiness and discomfort come up, so much the better. If these disturbances don't manifest themselves, don't stop working, thinking, "If they don't even come up now, there is no need to work to get to a place where they don't exist." Just keep working.

Will you undertake the sitter's practice? Or will you, when sleepiness and tiredness set in, change to another (of the four) postures and reduce your effort?

Disciple: We won't reduce our effort, sir.

Sayadaw: All of you, or just a few among you?

Disciple: All of us, sir.

Sayadaw: So, if you keep each other company, so much the better. Now, then, undertake to carry out the sitter's practice!

I'll say it in Pali,¹³ you repeat after me:

Seyyam paṭikkhippami, nesajjikaṅgaṃ samādiyāmi.

(I shall abstain from lying down. I undertake the sitter's practice.)

You may think, "It wasn't right that we just gave in to sleepiness in the past." Well, now you have undertaken the sitter's practice, and I think it is for the first time isn't it?

Disciple: Yes, sir, the first time.

Sayadaw: This is the weapon. With this weapon you can fight your battle. With this weapon you will be victorious. If you fight with a pillow as a weapon, you cannot win.

I shall tell you a story you probably already know. At the time of the Buddha, there was a rich lady who owned a big estate. When she became old, she distributed the inheritance among her children. But the children, after receiving the money, didn't care for their mother any more. She was not treated well in the houses of her sons and daughters and she was in distress.

When she was about eighty or ninety years old, the neighbours had her ordained as a nun (*bhikkhunī*), as they couldn't bear to see her poverty and suffering. When the nuns of her nunnery were invited for alms food to a house one day, they all went. Only Soṇā Therī,¹⁴ our old woman, had to stay back because she was too old to go along.

Before they left the nunnery they said to Soṇā Therī, "You are very old, you can't come with us. But fill the water pots for drinking water, and those for washing hands and feet, so that everything is ready when we return, and also prepare some hot water."

But this nun was very old. To carry the water she had to use a small pot, and as she was working away, she got very tired. But she didn't rest. She forced herself to do what she had been ordered to do. Because she overworked herself, she fell down between the

¹² One of thirteen *dhutaṅgas*, practices of great renunciation. The monk observing the sitter's practice never lies down. Disciples of Ven. Webu Sayādaw still keep this practice up. (For a description, see *The Path of Purification*, II, 73–76.)

¹³ The moral precepts when taken by lay disciples from a monk are always recited in Pāli. Ven. Webu Sayādaw treats this taking up of the sitter's practice as a taking up of moral precepts. Taking this vow in Pali gives it weight.

¹⁴ The verses of this Therī are found in Elders' Verses II, 102–106. Her story is given in the commentary on the Therīgāthā (Thī-a, 95f.; The Commentary on the Verses of the Therīs, 126–32). Cf. the story of Bahuputtikā, *Buddhist Legends*, II 160f.

water pots, and couldn't lift herself up. She wasn't pretending; she was exhausted from carrying water.

She had been given the teachings of the Buddha. So she thought, "Well... I can't fill the pots any more. There is more water to be carried and I haven't prepared any hot water yet either. But I can't even get up. I will take up an object of meditation given by the Buddha." And she started meditating as we did. She fixed her attention firmly on the spot. She focused her attention so that it stayed there, whatever happened. That's all! And as she was meditating with strong effort, she did what had to be done and made an end to suffering.

Of course she was full of the bliss of emancipation. When the others came back, they couldn't find her. "Where could this old nun have gone?" they said and looked all over the nunnery. Eventually they found her lying between the water pots, and they all gathered around her and abused her. "Now what about our orders? You didn't fill the pots, and there is no hot water either. You are so lazy that you just lie down and sleep."

But the old nun was absorbed in bliss. The other nuns were worldlings, of course, and they stood there blaming her. "Look how lazy she is. No water pot is full, no hot water. Just lying around!"

You too can talk like that, can't you? Not pleasant talk. But this nun was an Arahāt. She had attained Arahātship along with the super-normal powers. She said: "All that you desire will be done. There will be water in the pots and there will be hot water too." And after saying this, she made a strong determination, and the water pots were filled to the brim and the hot water was boiling over.

This nun was very old, and in exhaustion she fell down and could not get up again. She practised as you are doing now. Do you hear this? How long will it take you to reach the goal, you who are healthy and strong?

Disciple: We shall work hard.

Sayadaw: Will you still say, "Oh, we are old; we can't practise any more"? Soṇā Therī was eighty or ninety years old and she still carried the water as she had been told to do. When she fell down in exhaustion she just meditated. The disciples of Buddha attained the goal because their power of effort was great.

You have the teachings, the technique. All you need now is effort. And why do you need effort? Because during meditation the enemies will come to disturb you.

Keep your attention on this small spot. If your limbs ache, work so that you reach the state where there is no aching. When you are drowsy, work so that you reach the state where there is no drowsiness. Good, good ... establish effort and meditate, work to make an end to all suffering.

A Happiness That Ever Grows

*Sayadaw:*¹⁵ Be perfect in the practice of *sīla*. Only if your practice is perfect will all your aspirations of the present time and of the future be fulfilled without exception. Because this is true, the aspirations of the good people of the past who practised and strove were fulfilled completely. You too have to take up the practice of that *sīla* that brought about their happiness. Work hard and perfect yourselves in it.

Being perfect in *sīla*, keep your mind straight and practise generosity (*dāna*) as it pleases you, giving your possessions yourselves with sincerity to those who are worthy. Approach and give your offerings and your respect to the peerless Buddha and his

¹⁵ This discourse was given by the Webu Sayādaw on his second visit to the IMC in Yangon. He started travelling widely in Myanmar only after his first visit to the IMC in 1953.

teaching, keeping in mind your aspiration for awakening, Nibbāna. This type of aspiration is called right aspiration. What you realise when you penetrate the Four Noble Truths is called *bodhi*.

There are different types of *bodhi*: *sammā-sambodhi* (Buddhahood), *pacceka-bodhi* (Non-teaching Buddhahood), *sāvaka-bodhi* (Arahatship). There are different types of Arahatship: *agga-sāvaka* (chief discipleship), *mahā-sāvaka* (leading discipleship), *pakati-sāvaka* (simple discipleship as an Arahat). You have always to keep in mind your aspirations for Nibbāna, the highest goal.

Aspirations thus taken are well taken. After having perfected yourself according to your aspiration, attain Nibbāna. The noble persons who have attained Nibbāna are innumerable. Why could they bring their various aspirations for *bodhi* to fruition? Because they had been born into the right form of existence at the right time and because they exerted proper effort.

When is the time that these aspirations can be brought to fruition? From the moment the Buddha attained awakening, many human beings, devas, and brahmās came to the Buddha to pay respects and to show their devotion. But no human being, no deva, and no brahmā was satisfied by merely being in the presence of the Buddha and having the opportunity to pay respects. The Buddha observed them through his mind's eye and taught them the truth that he had penetrated through his own super-knowledge, his omniscience. As soon as they received the instructions of the Buddha, they began to practise, to exert themselves with unwavering energy in all the four postures of the body. This effort, which is continuous without break or pause and full of joy, is called good effort. When their effort was perfect and equal to the effort of the wise men of old, they arrived at their goal in due time and all the aspirations of their hearts came to an end. Because they had achieved this state they were exceedingly happy and blissful.

What was the nature of their happiness, their bliss? It was not happiness or bliss that lasted for only a moment or a single lifetime; it was that happiness that is so great it is able to last for the remainder of *saṃsāra*. Even if you are born in the human plane for only one life, you are able to rise above the suffering of the cycle of birth and death.

In this way happiness and bliss come to you. When one has attained this happiness, when one has received the sign of bliss, when one has reached the goal, there is no jealous guarding of a secret. No, you will want all human beings, devas, and brahmās to attain this bliss and happiness. As you know for yourself how to attain this happiness, the actions of body, speech, and mind will always be in harmony with the cause of attaining Nibbāna. You will act with joy as your base.

How could so many human beings, devas, and brahmās attain such high states of bliss? Only because they knew that they were going to bring the aspirations of their heart to fruition.

What are the things that support the Buddha's teachings? They are the donation of shelter, robes, alms food, and medicine for the monks. Having understood this, they practised it. With these four requisites the wise supported the teachings of the Buddha. While they supported the teachings of the Buddha by donating the four requisites, many human beings devas, and brahmās received the instructions of the Buddha. They were endowed with the ability to understand and follow the instructions and they practised with a joyful mind without taking rest as the wise of old. When they thus practised they attained their goal without delay. In just one moment innumerable human beings, devas, and brahmās fulfilled the wish of their heart. The energetic people saw this and supported the teachings of the Buddha and established them in a very short time. But they didn't do only this; this didn't satisfy them yet. In order to strengthen and make firm the teachings they would also meditate. So they were full of good volition, and they were accordingly endowed with unwavering effort and faith. Since the time of the Buddha there have been such noble people who supported and carried out the teachings of

Buddha with supreme effort, and ever since the days of the Buddha human beings, devas, and brahmās have been attaining Nibbāna. The number of those who have reached the goal in just a short moment can't be reckoned, let alone the number of all who have attained Nibbāna.

Now the good time for all the various noble people has come. This is so because the time when a Buddha and his teachings blossom is the good time. The existences of human beings, devas, and all the happy abodes are good. Having been born into one of these, people accepted the teachings as you are doing now. They practised with full effort and arrived at the goal.

After his awakening the Buddha honoured Rājagaha before any other country with his presence. The king of this great city, Bimbisāra, came to the Buddha and because he received the teachings and followed them, he attained the goal. He was full of bliss. He wanted others to attain the same bliss, and understanding the reason, the cause for his happiness, he donated the four requisites. He did this so that his mother, father, grandmother, and grandfather could fulfil their aspirations completely. The Buddha, out of his great compassion, dwelt in the king's delightful garden. Humans, devas, and brahmās came to revere him there and with great compassion he taught them what he had realised himself. In just one short moment innumerable humans, devas, and brahmās achieved their aspirations. And after this it went on and on. The good time for all the people with noble aspirations had come! The time at which there is a Buddha or his teaching is the good time. Human life, life as a deva or a brahmā, is a good life. Good effort is called the effort that is established after one has received the teachings. And what are the Buddha's teachings? Everything in the Tipiṭaka preached and explained by noble disciples out of loving kindness and compassion is the Buddha's teaching. They are very extensive, profound, and difficult to understand. Though they are extensive, profound, and difficult to understand, they really are just one thing: the way of escape from suffering.

They are expounded by the wise in brief and in full as time permits, and everyone has knowledge of them according to his capability. You all have some understanding of the Tipiṭaka in accordance with your capabilities. If you were to talk about what you know it would never end.

But you have to establish strong effort and focus your mind on one object according to the teachings of the Buddha, as I said, and keep out all other objects. When you fix your mind on one object exclusively with strong and stable effort, then you will be established in the teachings. Isn't that so?

U Ba Khin: Yes, sir.

Sayādaw: To establish your attention thus is effort (*virīya*). When you fix your attention on one object and no other object enters your mind and your attention is stable, you reach *virīya-iddhipāda*.¹⁶ Because the teachings are so extensive you may think it tiresome to practise them. That is why I instruct you in this way, that you can reach the goal quickly.

What happens to the causes of suffering—*lobha*, *dosa*, and *moha* (greed, aversion, and delusion)—when you control your mind in this way?

U Ba Khin: They are cut out and become quiet.

¹⁶ *Iddhipāda*: The root or basis of attaining completion or perfection. *Virīya* (effort): "A person with viriya is infused with the thought that the aim can be attained by energy and effort. He is not discouraged even though it is said to him that he must undergo great hardships. He is not discouraged even though he actually has to undergo great hardships. He is not discouraged even though it is said to him that he must put forth effort for many days, months, and years. He is not discouraged even though he actually has to put forth effort for such long periods" (Ledi Sayādaw, *The Manuals of Buddhism*, pp. 190f.).

Sayadaw: People write and preach a lot about greed, aversion, and delusion, don't they? When they debate, they talk only to win the debate, whoever they are talking to. But if they establish awareness of breathing and make their minds stable, they acquire real merit. Why don't we try to do this?

U Ba Khin: Yes, sir.

Sayadaw: Will there be worry, fear, and greed at that time?

U Ba Khin: There won't be.

Sayadaw: No, there won't; there won't be any worry, fear, or greed. If there is worry, fear, or greed, are you happy or unhappy?

U Ba Khin: Unhappy, sir.

Sayadaw: And if there is no worry, fear, or greed?

U Ba Khin: Then one is happy.

Sayadaw: If one establishes effort only for one split second the *virīya-iddhipāda* arises. It excludes worry, fear, and greed, and there is happiness. There are types of happiness which are not related to the happiness achieved through the Buddha's teachings, but people still call them happiness. What sort of happiness am I talking about? I am talking about the happiness of becoming a human being or deva, of becoming a king, a rich man, a universal monarch, a deva king, a Sakka, or a brahmā. Of course their enjoyment is also called happiness ... But let me give an example. If you were asked to bear the golden royal insignia and live in the golden palace of a country that abounded with gold, silver, gems, rice, water, and paddy, that was plentiful in everything, would you accept this offer or not?

U Ba Khin: Of course I would accept.

Sayadaw: Of course you would accept. This country is so rich that there is absolutely nothing missing. So you would live wearing your crown in your golden palace smiling all the time. So I think, smiling like that all the time, you would enjoy yourself; you would be happy, wouldn't you? Would this happiness keep worry, fear, and wanting away?

U Ba Khin: No, it wouldn't.

Sayadaw: Oh, really?

U Ba Khin: It wouldn't, sir.

Sayadaw: I mean at that moment, you see.

U Ba Khin: It wouldn't.

Sayadaw: Why are they all smiling and happy then?

U Ba Khin: Somebody could try to usurp the kingdom. If something happens in his territory he would have duties to fulfil.

Sayadaw: There is nothing like that. This country is so good that there is no danger or worry of that kind. It is a very peaceful country. There is no problem at all; everything is calm and quiet. It is that kind of country. No troubles at all; you just have to live in the golden palace wearing your crown. You simply live there with your ministers, troops, concubines, and wives. You live always with a smile on your face. Will worry, fear, greed, and anxiety be kept at bay in these circumstances? You are always smiling and happy. So, do you think there is any worry?

Disciple: There will be, sir.

Sayadaw: Why?

Disciple: Because there is the fear of death.

Sayadaw: Yes, there will still be the fear of death. But you are smiling still. What is this smiling? What are greed, aversion and delusion?

U Ba Khin: They won't be kept away.

Sayadaw: Even smiles don't keep them away?

U Ba Khin: No, sir.

Sayadaw: What do smiles mean?

U Ba Khin: They indicate that the object of mind is *lobha* (greed).

Sayadaw: Really? Is one happy if there is *lobha*?

U Ba Khin: No, sir.

Sayadaw: Is *lobha* cool and pleasant?

U Ba Khin: No, it isn't.

Sayadaw: Is it *kusala* (skilful) or *akusala* (unskilful)?

U Ba Khin: It is *akusala*.

Sayadaw: Are you happy when you are smiling as we just said?

U Ba Khin: No, sir.

Sayadaw: But you are smiling great smiles, aren't you? But you aren't happy yet. You are king, aren't you? Maybe you aren't happy because you rule only one country? I'll give you another one. So?

U Ba Khin: Even then I won't be any happier.

Sayadaw: Are you going to tell me that you don't want another country?

U Ba Khin: No, sir, I would take it.

Sayadaw: You would take it, but still not be happy. Well, I won't give you just another country; I'll give you the whole continent. Will you tell me that you don't want it?

U Ba Khin: No, sir.

Sayadaw: So, will you be happier then?

U Ba Khin: I won't be happier.

Sayadaw: Really? All right, I won't give you just another continent, but the whole planet and the jewel of the wheel of the universal monarch. Now, there won't be any worry or fear. With the turning of the jewel of the wheel you will become a universal monarch. Will you be happy now?

U Ba Khin: I won't, sir.

Sayadaw: Will you feel calm and cool?

U Ba Khin: I won't.

Sayadaw: Why not, disciple?

U Ba Khin: There is still the burning of greed, aversion and delusion?

Sayadaw: Oh, is it still there?

U Ba Khin: It's still there.

Sayadaw: So you aren't happy yet. Well now, what about Sakka, the brahmās, and the deva kings?

U Ba Khin: The same applies to them too.

Sayadaw: We said they were happy and now you tell me the contrary?

U Ba Khin: The objects of their minds are greed, aversion and delusion?

Sayadaw: Oh really? Let it be. If one lives to a ripe old age always smiling and then dies smilingly, will he find peace in the cycle of births and deaths?

U Ba Khin: He won't find peace.

Sayadaw: Where will this smiling fellow go?

U Ba Khin: When the (good) kamma of this smiling person comes to an end, his fate will turn.

Sayadaw: Yes, and where will this smiling fellow end up?

U Ba Khin: Because of his smiling, the mind will be controlled by greed and he is destined for the lower worlds.

Sayadaw: Oh really ... I thought that being happy was good, disciples. Is it not good? I have to ask you, "Is it good?"

U Ba Khin: (Laughing) No, it isn't.

Sayadaw: Okay, we are not happy yet. But when I asked whether we would be happy later on, you said no. There was no peace, you said.

U Ba Khin: There is no peace.

Sayadaw: So, now there is no peace; what about later? Will it become just a little bit better?

U Ba Khin: It won't improve, sir.

Sayadaw: What will happen, in the lower planes ...

U Ba Khin: We will go to the lower planes.

Sayadaw: Really? So, there is no peace *now*; there won't be any after. Which is worse?

U Ba Khin: It will be worse later.

Sayadaw: Oh ... We all thought we were quite all right, but not so. But now we've got the teachings of the Buddha and we can have as much of it as we want, can't we?

U Ba Khin: We can.

Sayadaw: Endowed with the ability to accept the teachings we can take up one technique with steadfastness. Will the happiness that derives from this practice become less the more we use it, the more we practise?

U Ba Khin: It won't.

Sayadaw: Will it ever be exhausted?

U Ba Khin: It won't.

Sayadaw: Oh, really? My word, this thing is good. Isn't it, my dear disciples? And if we use it all the time, continuously, will it then get used up, will it come to an end?

U Ba Khin: It will neither diminish nor get used up.

Sayadaw: Wait a minute. We shall keep our attention focused while we are sitting like this, but while we are standing, can we still practise this?

U Ba Khin: We can.

Sayadaw: And when we are walking?

U Ba Khin: We can.

Sayadaw: Yes, we have to carry the burden of our body. It is not the same as other worldly possessions. When you work hard to acquire various jewels and gold and are successful, you will store them away in a certain place, I think. But having acquired our body and

mind, the five *khandhas*, is it possible to live with ease, happily and without making great efforts?

U Ba Khin: It isn't possible.

Sayadaw: We have to shoulder our burden. We can't rest for a short moment even, can we? And for whom do we have to shoulder the burden of our bodies without ever taking rest?

U Ba Khin: For ourselves.

Sayadaw: For the five aggregates.

U Ba Khin: For the five aggregates, sir.

Sayadaw: Yes, we have to work, disciples. If I practise this awareness a lot, then I don't want to miss the happiness that derives from it. Isn't it possible to practise this all the time?

U Ba Khin: It is possible, sir.

Sayadaw: This is very good. Will it diminish?

U Ba Khin: No, sir, it won't.

Sayadaw: Is it tiresome to keep up this awareness?

U Ba Khin: It isn't tiresome.

Sayadaw: Will you use up material goods you have saved up?

U Ba Khin: No, sir.

Sayadaw: You won't. What about your work; will it be disturbed?

U Ba Khin: It won't be disturbed.

Sayadaw: Will others know about our practice?

U Ba Khin: They won't notice.

Sayadaw: Oh, the other people won't notice? Yes, disciple, when we have the teachings of the Buddha and practise them continuously, when we are able to focus our mind on the object, we won't get tired, will we?

U Ba Khin: We won't, sir.

Sayadaw: We won't spend anything; our work won't be disrupted, and others won't even notice. You receive the teachings in no time and then you say to yourself, "Now I shall follow these teachings." When you have this volition and put forth effort then the *viriyā-iddhipāda* factor will arise and you will arrive at the goal in no time. If you take up the practice now, will your progress be slow or fast, my disciples?

U Ba Khin: According to circumstances, sir, sometimes it will be slow, sometimes ...

Sayadaw: No! Wait, wait ...

U Ba Khin: Yes, sir.

Sayadaw: Never mind about this. If I focus my attention according to the teachings and keep it with the awareness of respiration, isn't this much possible?

U Ba Khin: It is possible.

Sayadaw: Is this quick or slow?

U Ba Khin: It is quick, sir.

Sayadaw: You see. If you establish effort, the *viriyā-iddhipāda* factor arises. Can you say how quick this is?

U Ba Khin: Yes, sir.

Sayadaw: Have you put your attention there and does it stay?

U Ba Khin: Yes, sir.

Sayadaw: As I decide to put it there, it stays, doesn't it?

U Ba Khin: It does.

Sayadaw: So if it stays, you have reached happiness. Are you able to speak as quickly as this happiness is able to arise?

U Ba Khin: I am not, sir.

Sayadaw: It is easy to achieve happiness if you want it.

U Ba Khin: Yes, sir.

Sayadaw: This is the highest sort of *kusala*. Do you hear? This is the highest, the highest. Only if you have *pāramī* can you be born as a human and receive the Buddha-Dhamma. This type of *kusala* cannot be put in numbers. Do you understand? Then, the six qualities of the Dhamma are there; the qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha. When the Buddha taught this, people understood. Among the six qualities of the Dhamma, *akālika* is one, isn't it? What does *akālika* mean?

U Ba Khin: Immediateness.

Sayadaw: Immediateness means that as soon as you fix your attention the results come. So, if you establish effort with intelligence the results come so quickly that you can't say "there" quicker than they come. Or you can't even think that fast. Is it so? If you establish awareness now, if you keep it here with your effort, happiness arises in the very same moment. This is immediate; who would have to question this any more?

U Ba Khin: Who would have to doubt his own experience?

Sayadaw: Yes, when happiness has arisen there is no looking for it any more. The answer comes by itself, doesn't it? It doesn't take any time. All of you are bright people, and you have understood the teachings of the wise and compassionate Buddha while still young, even before the words of instruction were complete. Though you understood, at times your mind will think as it pleases, but let us practise. What happens in the mind when we plan to practise to acquire *kusala*? "I'll perform *kusala* later on; now I have to do this quickly." Doesn't this happen to you?

U Ba Khin: It does.

Sayadaw: Is it good to think and speak like this?

U Ba Khin: No, sir.

Sayadaw: And then you make efforts and the *virīya-iddhipāda* factor has arisen. What is the right thing to do?

U Ba Khin: The right thing to do is to practise.

Sayadaw: Yes. If you want to become happier and happier, you have to put forth effort as soon as you have received the instructions of the Buddha and have accepted them. Then the *virīya-iddhipāda* factor will arise. When you make use of this factor that arises in a split second, does it get consumed?

U Ba Khin: It doesn't.

Sayadaw: Does it diminish?

U Ba Khin: It doesn't.

Sayadaw: If you decide that the happiness you have is quite sufficient for now and the future and say, "I don't want to progress," can you practise and not progress?

U Ba Khin: One will progress.

Sayadaw: If you practise not just for a short time, but longer, will you achieve only as much as you get out of a short period of practice?

U Ba Khin: One will get more.

Sayadaw: This is good, disciple. This is possible because we are now in an auspicious era, because we are born into the right form of existence, and because you make right efforts. The energetic get the true answer even without asking others. Very good. Do you hear? Isn't this so?

U Ba Khin: It is so.

Sayadaw: So, even if we live with this happiness all the time, it won't diminish; it won't be used up. And what happens if one doesn't want to progress?

U Ba Khin: It isn't possible not to progress, sir.

Sayadaw: Yes. If you aspire to this there must be many different troubles. Is it possible to attain *bodhi* or not?

U Ba Khin: It is possible.

Sayadaw: It is possible now and in the future. So let us say, "I don't want to progress," and then focus our minds. Is this possible?

U Ba Khin: It isn't possible not to progress if we work.

Sayadaw: Do we achieve greater happiness the more we work?

U Ba Khin: We do, sir.

Sayadaw: We can attain *bodhi* and we can also choose the time and the place of birth. We can then choose a good existence as we wish. When you attain the happiness you desire, what else do you need.

U Ba Khin: Nothing else, sir.

Sayadaw: You don't need anything; you just have to choose. Is choosing tiresome?

U Ba Khin: It isn't, sir.

Sayadaw: You can attain it at any time. There are four stages to Nibbāna. Is it possible only for certain types of Ariyas (individuals who have attained one of the four stages)? Do we have to choose the state of Nibbāna?

U Ba Khin: No, sir.

Sayadaw: What about the place?

U Ba Khin: It isn't necessary.

Sayadaw: Yes. All by yourself, without any help?

U Ba Khin: It's possible.

Sayadaw: And in a crowd? If you go outside the pagoda it won't be possible, I think. It is easy, isn't it? The Buddha, the all-compassionate and omniscient, taught many humans, devas, and brahmās the knowledge that he had attained by penetrating the truth himself. These beings, full of confidence after receiving the teachings, were able to fulfil their aspirations.

As you establish awareness you should establish continuous effort. There are many different types of people. Some are good at reciting or reading or preaching or explaining. I have no doubt about you, disciples, with whomever you compete you will win.

U Ba Khin: Yes, sir.

Sayadaw: Yes, though others are victorious in their talk, will they achieve anything if they don't practise?

U Ba Khin: No.

Sayadaw: So, what's the difficulty? Talking is tiresome, isn't it? All we have to do is to make efforts to bring to fruition the aspirations we have made and work as the wise ones of old. Understanding that we have to take up this work our minds will be focused. You are very busy. You may say, "We will practise later when we are free." Does this thought come up still?

U Ba Khin: It does.

Sayadaw: Sometimes the mind is like that. But I think you don't actually say so?

U Ba Khin: We might, sir.

Sayadaw: You even speak your mind?

U Ba Khin: We do.

Sayadaw: Well, if you want to say this, never mind. But for the future can't you burn these impurities out? You have the teachings of the Buddha. When this happens to you, [when you want to procrastinate,] get rid of your doubts. Strive to find the answers without asking others. If you focus right now, won't you get the answers immediately? Isn't this possible?

U Ba Khin: Yes, it is possible, sir.

Sayadaw: It is possible to focus as you sit here.

U Ba Khin: Yes sir, it is.

Sayadaw: Is it also possible to maintain the happiness you achieve in this way when you are standing up?

U Ba Khin: It is, sir.

Sayadaw: Yes. And when you walk?

U Ba Khin: It's possible then, too.

Sayadaw: Yes, see, it is always possible.

U Ba Khin: If a person is able to maintain awareness, it's possible.

Sayadaw: What ability do you need? There is nothing difficult in it. Or is it difficult after all?

U Ba Khin: Once a person has acquired proficiency in this, it isn't difficult anymore.

Sayadaw: He says that it is not possible to simply focus here. Just put your attention here. That's all. Well, isn't that easy?

U Ba Khin: It is easy, sir.

Sayadaw: It is ever so easy ... The Buddha is incomparable. He accumulated virtues without ever resting. He completed his pāramīs on his own, working for the welfare of all, didn't he?

U Ba Khin: Yes, he did.

Sayadaw: And because he could fulfil the pāramīs it is easy for us now, isn't it? It *is* easy. How is it today? You have to raise yourself up happily and complete your work. Then, depending on what your aspirations are, you simply take the bliss you desire. It is very easy. Don't be modest. Don't allow yourselves to think, "This is not possible for me," "This is not suitable for us," "This is not proper for us," "This is not for me." Aim at what you desire. You will get it. Isn't this so?

U Ba Khin: Yes, it is, sir.

Sayadaw: In the days of the Buddha, too, devas, and brahmās came to the Buddha, worshipped him, and after they received his teachings, they achieved everything. They completed all their various aspirations, didn't they?

U Ba Khin: They did.

Sayadaw: Isn't it possible to fulfil your aspiration by establishing unwavering effort while you are a king? Can we count the names of kings who attained complete understanding of the Dhamma?

U Ba Khin: They are without number, sir.

Sayadaw: Many wealthy people made efforts and attained understanding while continuing their work in business, didn't they?

U Ba Khin: They did.

Sayadaw: Isn't this possible?

U Ba Khin: It is, sir.

Sayadaw: Can you count how many wealthy people have done this?

U Ba Khin: No, sir.

Sayadaw: What about the people who were neither kings nor rich people.

U Ba Khin: They are innumerable.

Sayadaw: All those who received the teachings and who followed them assiduously fulfilled their wishes, didn't they?

U Ba Khin: They did.

Sayadaw: Humans and devas alike, all of them, lay disciple! What about today, lay disciple? The period is the same, the occasion is the same, the plane of existence is the same. If we simply establish our effort and accept the teachings, do we still have to choose certain times to practise?

U Ba Khin: There is no need for that.

Sayadaw: Really?

U Ba Khin: That is correct, sir.

Sayadaw: Yes! The time and the form of existence is right. You can achieve your aspirations when you wish, can't you?

U Ba Khin: That is correct sir.

Sayadaw: Yes! Do you understand? Before, they didn't practise because they were busy. How is it with this "I'll practise when I'm free"? Do we still have to set times like this?

U Ba Khin: It is not necessary to set aside certain times.

Sayadaw: What happens if we practise only when we are free? If we stop the practice, then we won't attain what we ought to attain. But now, we do our work and something else as well: we also fulfil our aspirations. We get two things done at the same time, don't we, lay disciples? What is better: to get one thing done or to get two things done at the same time?

U Ba Khin: It is better to get two things done at the same time, sir.

Sayadaw: You see? It's worth keeping yourself busy. But, even though I say it's worth keeping yourself busy, don't start enjoying being busy just for the sake of being busy—if you want to realise the teachings, I mean. Don't just keep running around all the time. If you establish *virīya* at the same time, the *virīya-iddhipāda* factor will arise. Make yourselves firm in this. If you say that you want to do this work but go on distracting yourselves

here and there, your progress will be slow. On the other hand, if you establish this awareness and keep it up, working happily, then you will make progress. What about this work that you can't avoid having to do?

U Ba Khin: We will also make progress with that.

Sayadaw: Yes, lay disciples. Not only do you get results in this noble work, you get much more besides. What I say is what the Buddha taught. I'm not adding anything.

Now, you are all people making great effort, aren't you? I just wanted to warn you. What I just mentioned [about being too busy] can happen at times.

When you have holidays, you decide to come here and meditate for a few days. Then you have to go back to work and don't get time off anymore. You don't come back. Does this happen sometimes?

U Ba Khin: Yes, it does.

Sayadaw: Then you abandon the meditation, I think, don't you? Don't abandon it. Carry on with this awareness and at the same time do your work. Then you get two things in one go. You get two. If you postpone the work until your hours of leisure, you get only one benefit. The aspirations you are fulfilling are not ordinary ones, are they? You can attain to the highest, noblest bliss.

Now, what are these aspirations you are going to fulfil? There are the different forms of *bodhi*. *Bodhi* means the penetrative understanding of the Four Noble Truths. If you establish effort, saying that you want to get it, you can fulfil all your various aspirations for *bodhi* right now. This is not ordinary.

How are you going to fulfil your aspirations? Each type of *bodhi* has to be fulfilled in its own way: *sammā-sambodhi* as *sammā-sambodhi*, *pacceka-bodhi* as *pacceka-bodhi*. We must understand it in this way if we are to understand it correctly. It is like planting a mature seed. When it rains, a plant springs up. Here, the plant is nursed well, when you go back home, it has deep roots and is strong.

Is it possible to describe how good this period, this time, is? It is so easy now, lay disciples! Tell me, is this a period when one is oppressed by worries and has to groan and moan?

U Ba Khin: No, sir.

Sayadaw: Is it a period when we can only stare resignedly?

U Ba Khin: No, sir.

Sayadaw: It is a period when we can be happy and blissful immediately, when we can never get enough of this joy. You get even more than you wanted. You get even more than you aspired to, don't you, disciple?

U Ba Khin: Yes, sir.

Sayadaw: Oh yes! You never get tired, not in the present and not in the remainder of *samsāra*. What are the teachings of the Buddha? There is nothing in the teachings that causes stress and misery, is there? There isn't! It is pure happiness!

There is one thing, however: the mind may get confused with many thoughts, and I don't think that these thoughts are very pertinent. Now, if you determine to establish this practice, then I don't think that thoughts of doubt will remain at the back of your mind. Can you not be successful in this way? The mind will think what it wills. Let it! Follow the teachings. Do you understand? When you arrive at the goal, you will probably find that it isn't what you expected it to be. Doesn't this happen to people?

U Ba Khin: It has happened many times, sir.

Sayadaw: Yes, it happens. Dear lay disciples, I am telling you only a little. Those among you who work hard will think, “This monk is reluctant to tell us everything. He is stingy with giving away his knowledge.” [Everybody laughs.] You will think, “This is much greater than he said.” When you strive for real happiness and in this way arrive at the goal, then you experience something that you cannot describe with all the words there are. Once you’ve decided, “I’ll strive so that I will know for myself,” then don’t procrastinate. Don’t delay. Do you hear? This is so elevated. It is so good, lay disciples. Work hard. Do you understand? You are all people of great effort, aren’t you?

U Ba Khin: Almost all of us, sir.

Sayadaw: Yes. Good, good. Work hard, won’t you? You see, when you yourselves arrive at the goal—and for many of you even before that time—you can give this happiness to others. You will never feel reluctant to give. You will want to give a great deal of it, a great deal.

U Ba Khin: This is true, sir. In the course we are conducting now there are three or four students who, after about three days, cry with great sobs because they regret not having come here earlier.

Sayadaw: Yes, it is like that.

U Ba Khin: They think, “I should have come earlier!”

Sayadaw: Yes, this happens! Work hard in order to attain the highest. This place is very good.

U Ba Khin: It is a place to which you gave your blessings, Venerable Sayādaw!

Sayadaw: This is the beginning. I also started from this place. Do you hear me? May this happiness spread slowly out from this place. Yes, yes, you must work hard, strive diligently. Working means that you must meditate at times, and then, at times, you will want to take rest. Does this also happen here?

U Ba Khin: It doesn’t, sir.

Sayadaw: It doesn’t?

U Ba Khin: If the students start to meditate at 12.30 p.m. they come out of their meditation cells only at 5.00 p.m. At the beginning, they do take breaks, but after two or three days, they don’t come out for breaks anymore.

Sayadaw: Yes, you see! It’s like that! The highest bliss cannot be described in words. But the mind is like a magician. Even though you may be meditating here like this, even though you may be meditating calmly, negative thoughts may arise: “Oh, meditation is so tiring! How can I achieve anything? I can’t.” Isn’t it like that?

U Ba Khin: It is just as you say, sir. They do think that way.

Sayadaw: Yes. Your mind may be cheating you, but after having established right effort, there is no cheating yourself—or is that still possible?

U Ba Khin: No, sir, it isn’t.

Sayadaw: It is only during the period before you really know that you can cheat yourself.

U Ba Khin: Yes, sir.

Sayadaw: Even so, you may be saying to yourself that you meditate too long—so take rest now.

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