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FOREWORD

Is it possible for people today to attain the deep absorption states of jhāna? Can modern meditators directly know and see ultimate realities, and personally realize the liberating fruit of vipassanā? Decades of teaching both monastics and laypeople from all over the world have demonstrated to me that the answer is *yes*.

Effective methods for practicing jhāna and vipassanā have been preserved and mastered by generations of dedicated monastic and lay practitioners, but until recently have been little known in the West. Many years ago my teacher asked me to plant the seeds of this approach in the West. Under my guidance, Shaila Catherine, one of my American lay students, has since 2006 thoroughly practiced the detailed methods of both jhāna and vipassanā. I encouraged her to write a book based on her own experience of this training, and I am very pleased with what she has done.

Wisdom Wide and Deep is a beautifully written handbook that describes an effective approach to the path of jhāna and vipassanā. This book introduces meditation practices adapted from the fifth-century meditation manual *The Visuddhimagga*, supported by the philosophical structures of Abhidhamma analysis, and securely rooted in the Buddha's teachings. This method is distinguished by its emphasis on the initial development of the meditative absorptions called jhāna, and the precise discernment of the ultimate realities of mind and matter. Once the mind is concentrated and psychophysical processes are seen clearly, insight practice becomes efficient, transformative, and exceedingly effective for realizing liberating knowledge. *Wisdom Wide and Deep* skillfully guides

dedicated meditators to experience the stability of deep concentration, to recognize the subtle nature of material and mental processes, and to realize the exquisite peacefulness that arises from genuine insight knowledge.

This is a handbook that respects both the ancient tradition and the needs of contemporary lay practitioners, without compromising either. Shaila Catherine presents the Buddha's teaching by blending scriptural references, personal examples, and timeless stories with detailed meditation instructions. She writes with an authority that comes from genuine meditation experience, and a clarity that is informed by her own personal experiences of this training. The combination of Shaila's pragmatic style and theoretical knowledge produces a striking invitation for the reader to apply these instructions and master the complete practice for awakening.

I highly recommend *Wisdom Wide and Deep* to any serious meditator who wants to practice what the Buddha discovered and taught.

Pa-Auk Sayadaw

PA-AUK SAYADAW is the abbot of Pa Auk Forest Monastery in Burma. He has spent his life promoting the teachings of the Buddha through study, practice, and realization. He teaches worldwide and is the author of *The Workings of Kamma* and *Knowing and Seeing*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A DETAILED AND COMPREHENSIVE BOOK of this nature represents the work of many individuals who have each brought their insightful and caring attention to these pages.

I am deeply grateful to the Buddhist tradition, past and present, and the countless unknown individuals who have preserved, translated, and articulated these teachings and trainings. It is remarkable that I can sit in a suburban town thousands of years and thousands of miles removed from the culture of ancient India where the Buddha lived and taught, and find my life deeply touched by his teachings. The rich legacy left by generations of meditators includes detailed records of the Buddha's ministry, instruction manuals, and commentaries that remain remarkably relevant to contemporary explorations of mind.

The approach presented in *Wisdom Wide and Deep* shares the teachings that I was privileged to receive from Venerable Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw during a 2008 retreat held at the Insight Meditation Society, in the USA. Venerable Pa-Auk Sayadaw carefully guided me through this training. His mastery of these teachings, his patient and flexible teaching style, his extraordinary devotion to meditation, and the wisdom that he earned during more than seventy years of practice combined to create an astonishing presentation of this profound and systematic approach to direct insight. The Sayadaw's assistant, Venerable U Jāgara, brought a practical clarity that helped to make these traditional methods relevant and accessible for Western practitioners. Anonymous practitioners at Pa-Auk Monastery have devoted countless hours to a careful editing of

INTRODUCTION
Approaching Deep Calm and Insight

One who stops trains of thought
As a shower settles a cloud of dust,
With a mind that has quelled thoughts
Attains in this life the state of peace.
—The Itivuttaka[1]

This book, *Wisdom Wide and Deep,* follows my first, *Focused and Fearless: A Meditator's Guide to States of Deep Joy, Calm, and Clarity,* which contains the initial instructions for developing concentration in daily life, overcoming obstacles such as restlessness and distraction, building conditions for tranquility and calmness, and establishing the deep meditative absorptions called *jhāna. Wisdom Wide and Deep* extends the training of concentration and insight by drawing extensively on the wisdom preserved in two traditional sources—*The Visuddhimagga,* a traditional manual for Buddhist practice, and the Abhidhamma, a branch of Buddhist philosophy that emphasizes a systematic and analytical approach to understanding the mind. The structure for these practices and many illustrations are derived directly from the teachings that I received from the meditation master Venerable Pa-Auk Tawya Sayadaw of Burma (Myanmar). *Wisdom Wide and Deep* is not, however, a strict presentation of Venerable Pa-Auk Sayadaw's work. Rather, I have infused each topic with related teachings, personal

examples, and wisdom gleaned from other Buddhist sources that have also supported my path of practice as a Western lay practitioner.

Wisdom Wide and Deep is an extended introduction to an in-depth training that emphasizes the application of concentrated attention to profound and liberating insight. With calm, tranquility, and composure established through a practical experience of jhāna, or deep concentration, meditators are able to halt the seemingly endless battle against hindrances, eliminate distraction, and facilitate a penetrative insight into the subtle nature of matter and mind. It was for this reason the Buddha frequently exhorted his students, "Develop concentration; one who is concentrated understands things as they really are."[2]

The reader will learn how to establish jhāna using a host of objects: breath; body; colors; elements; immaterial perceptions of infinite space, consciousness, nothingness, and the stilling of perception; heartfelt social attitudes of loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity; as well as recollections of the Buddha, impermanence, and death. Each potential meditation subject has unique qualities that foster a deeper penetration of reality. Each concentration subject can usher the mind into sublime states of blissful absorption and then serve as an effective foundation for the clear perception of reality. This well-structured and time-honored curriculum cultivates a refined and focused attention that is capable of examining subtleties of mind and matter. It is a system of training in concentration and insight that will ultimately lead the meditator to a direct realization of the peace of nibbāna.

Some meditators will find jhāna practice easy; they will quickly experience deep levels of absorption and be able to periodically access jhāna during busy lay life. Other meditators may initially find jhāna practice more difficult and will progress slowly, gradually strengthening the spiritual faculties. They may shift back and forth between concentration and mindfulness practices while endeavoring to overcome distraction, self-interest, and hindrances. The majority of meditators have the capacity to succeed at jhāna practice if they dedicate the time and create the conditions for concentration. The Buddha compared the training of the mind to the taming of a wild horse. Some horses learn quickly, others develop slowly; some horses seem to enjoy the training, other horses resist.

Although everyone might hope for pleasant and rapid progress, our rate of development may not conform to our wishes as we each progress with pleasure or pain, quickly or slowly.[3] The continuum of pleasant and painful practice experience is determined by how strongly our nature is disposed to lust, hatred, and delusion. And the sluggish-to-quick continuum is determined by the strength of the five controlling faculties of faith, energy and effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. These will be explained and discussed further in chapter 2. But whether your progress is quick or slow, pleasant or painful, is of little importance—a wise practitioner will strive to develop every aspect of the path, both the factors that come easily and those that require arduous effort. You can know for yourself bliss beyond sensory pleasures, directly experience transformative insight, and learn how to sustain deep joy and clarity within the complex dynamic of daily life.

Although it has been widely assumed that jhāna states are difficult to attain, and that even if they are attained in the protected conditions of retreat, they cannot be maintained in daily lay life, please do not allow these misconceptions to thwart your explorations. Even in the Buddha's time, some people denied the existence of the bliss of jhāna concentration, like a person born blind might deny the existence of color, arguing, "I do not know this. I do not see this. Therefore, it does not exist."[4] Yet the Buddha taught jhāna practice to laypeople as well as to renunciates, enabling even busy merchants and political leaders to periodically abide in the bliss of jhāna.[5] Although it will require effort, attaining and maintaining access to jhāna is a real possibility, even when immersed in a busy lay life.

We do not stop with the development of concentration. We apply this profound stability to the meticulous discernment, analysis, and contemplation of reality as it is actually occurring. You will learn how to sustain an in-depth examination of the nuances of mind and matter to unravel deeply conditioned patterns that perpetuate suffering. Based on the sturdy foundation of deep concentration, a pragmatic application of the Buddhist psychology of Abhidhamma, and a careful analysis of causes and effects, this training will culminate in a direct and unmistakable realization of liberation. It is the aim of this book to present a

practical guide for applying concentration and insight to the fulfillment of the Buddha's path.

Wisdom Wide and Deep is intended as a practice manual; it is not a scholarly or critical exposition. I have largely ignored the philosophical criticisms commonly levied against Abhidhamma scholasticism and the historical controversies that might keep practitioners from a pragmatic application of this course of training. The trainings contained in these pages illuminate the teachings of the Buddha as preserved in the Discourses of the Buddha, along with elaborations and interpretations offered by the tradition of practitioners who followed after the Buddha. The tradition offers us a remarkably effective training in virtue, meditation, and wisdom, and a direct path for realizing the peace of nibbāna.

There are many ways of applying and interpreting the Buddhist path. The approach described in this book is one that I have found to be profoundly effective. With full confidence in the efficacy of this method, I am inspired to present this training in a format accessible to Western lay practitioners. Readers will discover that most chapters include two parallel approaches. First, I have included refined meditation instructions that were derived from the *Visuddhimagga* and the methods taught by Venerable Pa-Auk Sayadaw. Many of these practices will be difficult to understand if you have not practiced in a retreat context with the guidance of a teacher who is trained in these techniques. Second, these rigorous traditional instructions are complemented by a parallel presentation of contemporary reflections that are set off in graphic boxes. These exercises encourage contemplation of the general concepts and support a broad integration of concentration, mindfulness, and insight into daily lay life. Such reflective exercises will be of benefit to all readers with or without access to retreat conditions, teachers, or jhāna attainments.

A strict adherent of the systematic approach may cringe when coming across casual passages that encourage a comparatively superficial contemplation of general concepts; likewise, the casual reader may skip over the technical instructions that seem like boring literature. This work, straddling two worlds, respects both formal and casual modes of exploration. At times you may sense a tension between the general and specific exercises; at times it is a struggle to maintain both balance and depth in

SECTION I

Establishing Concentration through Mindfulness with Breathing

CHAPTER 1

Clearing the Path: Overcoming the Five Hindrances

Whatever states there are that are wholesome, partaking of the wholesome, pertaining to the wholesome, they are all rooted in careful attention, converge upon careful attention, and careful attention is declared to be the chief among them.
—Saṃyutta Nikāya[10]

You are clearing a path for concentration and wisdom. Like a trail that provides a clear path through the wilderness, your mindful training opens a pathway to an inner goal that is unhindered by habitual tendencies and the obstruction of desire. It may feel at times that a powerful effort is needed to meditate, like the force of a bulldozer that clears away rubble after a hurricane. At other moments the endeavor may consist in just a light inclination of intention, that abandons doubt as gently as flicking away recently settled dust with a feather duster. Whether it seems as though the sea has parted effortlessly before you, or that you are doggedly carving out a jungle trail, the moment that craving ceases, an unobstructed path opens up.

→ Meditation Instruction 1.1
Mindfulness with Breathing plus Counting

This is the initial instruction. Begin the development of concentration by using the breath as the meditation object. The breath is a

simple and versatile object with which to learn to establish concentration. You are breathing now. Direct your attention to feel the breath as it enters and exits the nostrils. Focus your attention at the area between the nostrils and upper lip to find the breath. In this meditation you will give your attention exclusively to the knowing of the breath at this location. You do not need to feel the expansion and contraction of the body breathing or observe movement; your object is the breath itself. Every other experience, such as a sound in the room, the hardness of the seat, a memory of the novel read last night, a plan for a conversation you hope to have tomorrow, an emotion of excitement, sadness, frustration, or delight, the scent of flowers wafting in from an open window—all experiences other than the simple knowing of the breath are ignored. Let every experience fall into the background as the breath takes center stage. A traditional analogy suggests that the meditator observes the breath as it enters and exits the nostrils, without concern for any other phenomena, just the way a gatekeeper posted at the city gate observes all that enters and exits through that gate but does not leave his post to follow visitors into the marketplace or to travel out with caravans to the next village.[11] Give your attention exclusively and completely to the steady awareness of the whole breath just at the nostril area.

This can be a very challenging exercise at first. You may find that the mind wanders into thought. If it does, simply redirect your attention back to the breath, again and again. You can add a mental count to each breath to help maintain the focus. Breathe in knowing the inhalation, breathe out knowing the exhalation, and count "one." Breathe in knowing the inhalation, breath out knowing the exhalation, and count "two." Continue to know the in-breath and the out-breath, counting up to eight or ten. Then reverse the count. Breathe in knowing the inhalation, breathe out knowing the exhalation, and add the number. When you return to the count of one, progress forward to the count of eight or ten and then backward to the count of one for several cycles. Then observe the breath without adding any numbers. Use the counting method to help direct your

attention to the breath, and drop the counting when you no longer need it.[12] Practice mindfulness with breathing like this daily for forty minutes, sixty minutes, or longer as desired. This basic practice of focusing on the breath is the first meditation subject that we shall use to establish concentration and explore jhāna. ←

One Primary Obstacle

You don't need to struggle to overcome a multitude of diverse hindrances or employ an arsenal of antidotes to tackle each specific problem. To develop concentration you can address one primary obstacle—unwise attention. As the Buddha said, "Whatever an enemy might do to an enemy or a hater to those he hates, a wrongly directed mind can do even greater harm than that."[13] A deliberate and wise application of attention is the root skill that every meditator cultivates.

One of the first lessons dogs must learn in canine obedience class is to pay attention to their owners. There are many distracting sights and smells, as well as other dogs around, and the urge to go sniffing every provocative scent is powerfully ingrained. This first lesson—to pay attention—is paramount. Just as dogs need to inhibit natural impulses in order to be guided by the commands of their owners, you must gain control over your mind and thereby protect yourself, and others, from the tendencies that dwell within. The Buddha said:

> Controlled while walking,
> Controlled while standing,
> Controlled while sitting,
> Controlled while reclining,
> Controlled in bending and stretching his limbs—
> Above, across and below,
> As far as the world extends.
> A bhikkhu observes how things occur,
> The arising and passing of the aggregates.
> Living thus ardently,
> Of calm and quiet conduct,

The state of jhāna lies beyond the range of hindrances. Therefore, every moment that you spend engaged with the hindrances diverts your attention, postponing unification with your meditation object. You may have planted a garden with tomatoes, daisies, basil, melons, and zucchini; but you may find that among the seedlings you planted, weeds have also sprouted. Although it is important to discern the difference between the weed and the melon and respond appropriately to each, a wise gardener would not spend all his or her time plucking up weeds—energy must also be given to nurturing the plantings. In meditation practice you must abandon the unwholesome states and also give attention to esteemed wholesome states, such as concentration, mindfulness, generosity, patience, and diligence. You learn what to cultivate and what to discard. You learn how to relate wisely to whatever arises in the mind, to consistently and efficiently abandon wrong attention and establish right attention by focusing on the meditation object.

Dangers that Are Just Enough

Just as an oyster transforms the irritating presence of a grain of sand into a pearl, meditators convert irritants into wisdom. If you know you are susceptible to certain hindrances, guard your mind; be heedful. Convert challenges into assets that will deepen your practice.

Soon after arriving at a forest monastery in Thailand, I discovered that several vipers lived in the hollow space below the floor of my *kuti*. Each time I descended the three steps that raised the bamboo hut above the jungle floor I had a flashlight in hand—I was alert to the danger. The Buddha listed several "dangers that are just enough"[16]—not causing panic, disability, or paralysis, but just enough to inspire urgency, mindfulness, and wakefulness. His list included snakes and scorpions; stumbling and falling; digestion, bile, and phlegm; criminal gangs; and vicious beasts such as lions, tigers, and spirits. What are the "dangers that are just enough" in your life? What conditions demand that you pay attention, even when you are tired or busy? Vigilance protects us from external dangers, and it effectively protects us from the internal threat posed by the obstructive forces of craving, doubt, and fear.

Continuity of Awareness

For most lay practitioners, formal meditation averages only an hour or so per day—a tiny fraction of our time. Distraction poses a formidable barrier to concentration. Therefore, to build momentum, we must augment the sitting meditation with careful attention during daily activities. To strengthen the focus on the breath, become sensitive to the breath as you are drinking coffee, bathing, cooking, conversing, slipping on shoes, mowing the lawn, photographing your child, balancing your checkbook, delivering a lecture, or eating breakfast. Notice at any time and during any activity how your mind is disposed, where it wanders, how it apprehends sensory objects; then encourage a composed and calm awareness of the breath as you continue to do your work or engage in the activity. During daily activities, it is not possible to exclusively focus on the breath, yet, whether you are walking, working, talking, or eating, you can use your interest in the breath to encourage a balanced state of calm composure.

The Five Hindrances

The Buddha compared the presence of the five hindrances to trying to view the reflection of a face in a pot of water. A mind obscured by the hindrances does not produce a mirror-like reflection of reality.[17] Each hindrance clouds the mind in a slightly different manner. While extensive examination of hindrances should not be undertaken during jhāna practice, meditators must learn to recognize and abandon these common obstructions to concentration.

The first hindrance, *sensual desire (kāmacchanda),* obscures consciousness, as colored dyes will diminish the clarity of water, presenting

an alluring field of pattern instead of a clear reflection. Desire has the characteristic of projecting onto an object attractiveness that the object itself doesn't intrinsically possess. When you are entranced by beautiful appearances, you see what you want to see, rather than what is actually present. The misperception inherent in craving embellishes objects with the illusion of desirability or hate-ability—the illusion that the object can bring or destroy happiness. But desire and craving never actually result in fulfillment. The sense of satisfaction, of being and having the object of your desires, only lasts until you want something else; it is fragile and destroyed by the next desire that arises.

As you develop concentration and contemplate impermanence, craving will lose its power over you. You won't need to force yourself to let go. Instead, just as children who play with sandcastles will eventually outgrow a fascination with worlds made of sand, we outgrow the compulsive desires that keep us restlessly seeking satisfaction in external perceptions and activities.[18]

Desire arises when there is incorrect attention to pleasant feelings, whether it is a primitive craving for barbecued ribs, a refined attraction for cultural arts, an inclination toward sophisticated intellectual pleasures, or a subtle craving to repeat a perfectly tranquil meditation. Desire removes you from the direct perception of present experience and seduces you into a mental realm of hope and craving.

One *Calvin and Hobbes* comic strip illustrated this nicely: The young boy, Calvin, was looking at the ground and called out: "Look! A Quarter!" He picks up the coin and exclaims "Wow!!! I'm rich beyond my dreams! I can have anything I want! All my prayers have been answered!" In the next frame Calvin stands quietly for a moment. And in the following frame he leaps onto the grass searching: "Maybe there's more."

The lustful mind is blind to the simple presence of things as they are. With the senses continually reaching toward pleasurable encounters, the mind is left unguarded and seduction is a constant threat. To steady the mind, you don't need to change what you see, smell, or feel; you don't need to eliminate pleasant encounters. You need, instead, to control how you relate to sensory experience. The Buddha taught:

A man's sensuality lies in thoughts of passion.
Sensuality does not lie in the world's pretty things;
A man's sensuality lies in thoughts of passion.
While the world's pretty things remain as they are,
The wise remove the desire for them.[19]

Keep your attention focused and be content with the observation of the meditation object. Hold it diligently and stray desires will not have the opportunity to seduce you. Just as when an elephant walks through an Indian market with street-side fruit and vegetable stands, the elephant trainer will have the elephant hold a rod with its trunk to keep it safely occupied, you can curb a mind that tends to wander toward attractions by firmly holding your meditation object. You may still experience sensory pleasures, but you won't get lost in them. As the Buddha describes, "He takes his food experiencing the taste, though not experiencing greed for the taste."[20] With the development of wisdom, you will understand that sensual desire is not pleasure; it is suffering; it is a force that inhibits the deep peace and rest you seek.

The Buddha taught his disciples to divide pleasure into two categories: coarse sensory pleasure, which is to be feared and abandoned, and refined meditative pleasure, which is to be cultivated and welcomed.[21] Just as a connoisseur of fine cuisine will not find pleasure in greasy junk food, the consistent attainment of refined pleasures dissolves the prior fascination with coarser pursuits. The subtle pleasures of deep meditative absorption replace painful preoccupation with temporary sensory pleasures, just as sunlight replaces shadow.[22] This training progressively abandons lesser happiness to attain greater happiness. Through this quest for real peace, the mind eventually releases into a deep and complete awakening.

The second hindrance, *aversion* or *ill will (vyāpāda),* is compared to water that is heated on the fire. It boils up and bubbles over, preventing a clear reflection. Aversion persists when there is incorrect attention to unpleasant feeling. It can take mild forms such as irritation, impatience, and frustration; chronic forms such as pessimism, pity, miserliness, and

Interrupt the Craving

You need not wait until the threshold of jhāna or the direct perception of nibbāna before you abandon cravings. In introductory meditation classes I ask my students to pause every hour during their daily activities—just a brief pause, to interrupt the seduction of familiar activities and bring attention to the body breathing. Periodic pauses of this sort can interrupt the stream of habitual cravings that dominate the busyness of daily life. Pausing provides a moment of quiet ease; an intervention in the obsession with activity, productivity, and identity; an opportunity to make a different choice. When "wanting" arises, we question it: Do I really want this thing? Is this a reliable basis for my happiness? What is the price I pay in money, time, upkeep, relationship conflict, health, self-respect? What is the long-term cost? Do I know that I have the choice to say no? You might discover that you don't even want the things that you crave. If you don't stop to ask yourself a few questions, you might find unused gadgets cluttering your shelves and useless thoughts cluttering your mind. Craving will pick up anything to sustain itself—whatever or whoever passes by.

anxiety; or dramatic forms such as hatred, rage, terror, jealousy, and aggression. Anything can be the trigger for an aversive reaction if there is unwise attention. You might react to theft with rage, to an illness with pity, to traffic with impatience, to a noisy neighbor with hatred, to cold weather with complaints, to a spider with fear. Aversion has the characteristic of projecting onto an object repulsiveness that the object does not inherently contain. Aversion can never end by replacing unpleasant external conditions with comfortable and agreeable conditions, since

energy source that intensifies through jhāna practice. Your physical need for sleep will noticeably diminish.

The fourth hindrance, *restlessness and worry (uddhaccakukkucca),* is compared to water that is shaken by wind—it trembles, eddies, and ripples. This agitated state precludes the possibility of clear seeing. Restless and distracting thoughts are the principal obstructions to concentration; therefore I will address this hindrance at length and include several pragmatic methods to overcome the influence of mental restlessness.

It is not easy to stay focused on the breath. Most meditators sit down, apply their attention to the breath, and the mind immediately deviates. The *Visuddhimagga* aptly describes the untamed restless mind like this: "it runs off the track like a chariot harnessed to a wild ox."[26]

Imagine the horror if thoughts took form, had shape, or occupied space; we would all be squeezed right out of the room! Although invisible and silent, thoughts exert tremendous influence over moods, energy, health, emotions, abilities, relationships, and perceptions. Plans and worries scatter attention like a pile of ashes scatters when a rock is thrown into it. Restlessness dissipates your effort to collect attention; it prevents the cohesion of concentration.

When you are restless you are more vulnerable to whims and may act in ways you later regret, fueling worry and remorse. Even if the content of thought is beautiful, excessive thinking tires the mind and obstructs concentration.[27] As the Buddha remarked, "you are eaten by your thoughts."[28]

The primary method for working with thoughts is to learn to let them go. Clear the mind of compulsive clutter. In fact, much of what you will do when you begin meditation is to abandon thoughts. Sweep away fantasies of future events, ruminations about past activities, and commentary about present happenings. Train your mind to be quiet by not allowing your attention to fuel a constant stream of chatter and interpretation. One of my early meditation teachers compared this basic quieting of the mind to watching a football game on television with the sound muted. You don't need the opinions of the commentator. Let go of your internal commentary and watch life's events unfold with a silent mind.

The networking capacity of the mind is both baffling and awe-inspiring. One contact—a sound, a sight, a touch, a thought—may lead the way through a chain of associations, drawn from the archives of memory. A sight of a fruit bowl might trigger the simple thought, "I wonder what I will have for lunch." It could be followed by a yearning for Thai noodles, thoughts of beaches along the coast of Thailand or the latest advances in diving equipment, memories of the friend who taught your children to swim, the recollection that he died of cancer, anxiety about medical insurance, and financial worries. Any thought can remove you from what could otherwise have been a mindful observation of a peach in a bowl.

Living Mindfully

If the tendency to wander off into thought is a strong pattern, don't wait for your formal daily meditation. Interrupt the habit as you are driving to work, cooking dinner, reaching for the telephone, walking to the toilet, or exercising at the gym. Many times every day, notice what your attention is preoccupied by and repeatedly bring it back to present awareness.

Planning Is a Joke

There is a popular joke: How do you make God laugh? Easy, just tell him your plans! Things never occur as planned, yet the pattern of planning reoccurs. The Buddha said, "What people expect to happen is always different from what actually happens. From this comes great disappointment. This is the way the world works."[29] We can plan almost anything, as grand as our whole lives, as useless as what other people will say about us, as mundane as the shopping list, as subconscious as which foot will reach the stair first, or as exalted as what we will do when we are enlightened.

Planning is a deeply entrenched habit, effective for many professional pursuits, but an enormous obstruction to concentration.

In meditation you must sit with your own mind and notice if there is a tendency to fantasize about the future or dwell in memories of the past. H. W. L. Poonja, one of my teachers, curtly informed disciples who indulged in stories of long past events that they were living in a graveyard, digging up corpses that have been dead for a long time. In meditation you must dispel fascination with the content of your thoughts and stop retreating into a private world of imagination. You wake up to the present moment as it is.

Thoughts may seem elusive because they exist only in your mind. Each meditator must discover how to let go of this habit. I repeatedly remind myself to "make no plans" during meditation. This simple reminder helps cut through the compulsive tendencies of the planning mind. One of my students visualizes holding up a Ping-Pong paddle, imagining thoughts bouncing off with their own momentum, no aversion added. Another student visualizes a soft whisk broom gently sweeping thoughts aside. You may not need to add visualizations to the meditation; it may be enough to diligently return to your meditation object.

Be the Master of Your Mind

If you find that you are often lost, entangled in a quagmire of agitation, plans, and regrets, don't worry. You do not need to remove yourself to Himalayan caves or sequester yourself in a desert retreat. Trekking in a remote corner of the steppes or the wilderness of the Mohave is not the only way to discover spaciousness and quietude, for simply turning the mind away from habitual imaginings clears the space for jhāna to arise. Thoughts such as "what I will do, what I will say, how I will be seen, what did I experience, what will someone think of me" only clutter and weary attention. Through jhāna meditation you develop the ability to abide removed from disruption and entanglement and access an inner dimension that is undistracted, uncluttered, and unperturbed.

The Buddha warned, "Not understanding thoughts, one runs back and forth with wandering mind."[30] Enjoy the opportunity to

quiet your mind in meditation; stop racing between stories of past and future. Be at ease where you are and discover the deep rest of concentration.

What Do You Think?

Take a moment now to sit quietly. Notice if the quality and content of your mind is worthy of respect. Sometimes thoughts run on automatic—out of control—and are scarcely even concerned with topics that you value. Each meditator will discover his or her patterns and tendencies—perhaps self-criticism, blaming, dwelling in past regrets, or anxiety. Identify your vulnerable areas, reflect upon them, and make a firm decision to tackle these obstructions to concentration. On some retreats I create a personal list of the topics I will not permit my mind to think of. If a thought repeats, I add it to my list, effectively excluding the four or five most persistent themes from intruding upon my retreat.

In a conversation recorded between a group of great disciples who discussed their individual approaches to the Dhamma, Venerable Sariputta describes his power over mind thus:

> Here a bhikkhu wields mastery over his mind, he does not let the mind wield mastery over him. In the morning he abides in whatever abiding or attainment he wants to abide in during the morning; at midday he abides in whatever abiding or attainment he wants to at midday; in the evening he abides in whatever abiding or attainment he wants to abide in during the evening. Suppose a king or a king's minister had a

> chest full of variously colored garments. In the morning he could put on whatever pair of garments he wanted to put on in the morning; at midday he could put on whatever pair of garments he wanted to put on at midday; in the evening he could put on whatever pair of garments he wanted to put on in the evening. So too, a bhikkhu wields mastery over his mind, he does not let the mind wield mastery over him. In the morning…at midday…in the evening he abides in whatever abiding or attainment he wants to abide in during the evening.[31]

To develop a mind like Sariputta's you will need the impeccable self-discipline that develops with jhāna practice. The Buddha declared, "[A liberated one] will think whatever thought he wishes to think and he will not think any thought that he does not wish to think."[32] Imagine this potential! Try it. If you don't want to think about something, then don't think about it! Focus your attention on something that you wish to dwell upon, such as your meditation object, or a beautiful quality such as loving-kindness. Resolve to not dwell with unskillful thoughts, and if they arise, interrupt the wandering mind and direct your attention to the object of meditation. Train your mind until it comes under your control and responds to your direction. Become skilled like the great monks and nuns who were described as the "masters of their own minds."[33]

The hindrance of doubt *(vicikicchā),* the final one in this classic list of obstructions to concentration, is likened to water that is stirred up, turbid, muddy, and set in a darkened room. In such a state one cannot see a reflection clearly. Doubt as a hindering force is distinct from intelligent inquiry. This classic hindrance of doubt does not refer to every uncertainty that might arise in life. As a hindrance it specifically refers to doubt in the efficacy of the Buddha's teachings. It may manifest as the view that intentional actions won't lead to results or as disbelief in the Buddha's awakening. It could arise with thoughts such as "enlightenment is not possible for contemporary practitioners" or "jhāna can't be maintained by lay-people."

a slave who is freed from slavery, able to go wherever he liked. And he compared a mind unfettered by doubt to the feeling of a merchant who, fearing for his safety and survival while traveling through a dangerous desert, finally arrives at the edge of a village. These people would surely rejoice.

Until you perceive the disappearance of the hindrances within your own mind, you will suffer as a debtor, sick person, prisoner, slave, and desert traveler. Perceiving the disappearance of those same hindrances, you can celebrate as one released from bonds, dangers, and burdens. "And when he knows that these five hindrances have left him, gladness arises in him, from gladness comes delight, from the delight in his mind his body is tranquilized, with a tranquil body he feels joy, and with joy his mind is concentrated."[37] With the honest recognition that the mind is unhindered, happiness develops, concentration matures, and you gain the prerequisites for entrance into jhāna.

CHAPTER 2

Leading the Way: Enhancing Five Controlling Faculties

So now I will go,
I will go on into the struggle,
This is to my mind delight;
This is where my mind finds bliss.
—SUTTA NIPĀTA[38]

WHILE SIPPING a cup of tea one afternoon, I found an apt quote by Virginia Woolf printed on the tea bag label: "To enjoy freedom, we have to control ourselves." There is an important link between freedom and control. Self-esteem and confidence are necessary to stabilize attention in meditation, and these arise out of self-control. As you stop resisting the fact that some things are pleasurable and other things are painful and cease diverting energy by trying to accumulate pleasant experiences and avoid unpleasant ones, you will discover an untapped potential to make significant change in your life. In other words, when you learn to control your mind, you will discover the freedom to live with ease in the midst of things that are beyond your control. The Buddha taught, "When this concentration is thus developed, thus well-developed by you, then wherever you go, you will go in comfort. Wherever you stand, you will stand in comfort. Wherever you sit, you will sit in comfort. Wherever you lie down, you will lie down in comfort."[39] An effective synthesis of concentration and

mindfulness will enable you to live in comfort throughout life—even as the body ages, the economy fluctuates, and life unfolds.

Five particular faculties lead the mind in the development of concentration, mindfulness, and insight. These five are sometimes called controlling factors, spiritual powers, or spiritual faculties—both beginning and experienced meditators rely on them. They are faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. These factors gauge and control the development of the spiritual life, and when highly refined they are potent attributes providing power for the spiritual path. The Pāli term for a controlling function is *indriya,* which refers to "the act of ruling by rulers." Analogous to the way effective governance protects a society from corruption and internal strife through the rule of law, you exercise control or leadership over your own mind through the cultivation of these five mental factors. These faculties balance attention so that the mind is well directed, orderly, and not overpowered by adventitious defilements; they sustain the power that we need to make progress on the path. If you find it difficult to stabilize the deep concentration of jhāna, you might work more directly to reinforce these five controlling faculties. If your jhāna absorptions weaken and crumble before you intend to emerge, you might examine and fortify these indispensable faculties.

A discussion of each of these five controlling factors follows.

Faith *(saddhā)*

When you open a box of jigsaw puzzle pieces, you trust that everything that is present is necessary, and everything that is necessary is present. You can likewise trust that you possess the basic abilities needed to concentrate the mind. No doubt you will need to bring forth persistent effort and practice diligently. If you live a complex and crowded lay life, some simplification and solitude may be needed. But what is required is already present in this human life. The willingness to place your heart upon your meditation object, and have faith in the unfolding of concentration and insight, launches this journey. Like a spider sailing out on a thin thread, you venture into practice, not demanding a familiar landing

place. Boldly engaging in the practice will develop the path until you realize for yourself the great peace of the liberated mind.

Classical Buddhist teachings describe faith *(saddhā)* as bearing the characteristic of trusting; it gives us the confidence to set forth in our practice. Faith manifests as clarity and resolution. The traditional symbol of faith is a magical gem that when dropped into water has the power to cause all impurities to settle to the bottom, producing pure, clear sparkling water to enjoy. Faith can purify the mind, leaving experience clear and sparkling. Faith settles doubt and agitation, leaving the mind ready to apply effective and cohesive effort. In order to attain jhāna, you will need conviction in the practice, clarity regarding the object, and diligence to continue even when the meditation becomes challenging. Faith is indispensable.

Faith, in a Buddhist context, is not a mystical quality. It is a mental factor that is remarkably practical and functions in relationship to the other four spiritual faculties. Faith does not deify Buddha. Faith in the Buddha, rather, inspires us to make the necessary effort to awaken. There is a deep confidence that since he, a human being, awakened to the peace of nibbāna and taught the way, therefore, we can follow the instructions and realize liberation ourselves. Trust the value of the goal, the efficacy of the methods, and the worthiness of your endeavor. Knowing that generations of Buddhist practitioners have succeeded in this practice, confidently place your heart upon your meditation object.

In meditation you may not perceive instant results, but you might see the fruit of the practice gradually. Some people learn fast, others learn more slowly, but speed of attainment is not an important criterion of success. The Buddha compared the progress of disciples to the rates at which camphor, dry wood, or wet wood burn. Just as these substances will all eventually burn, every meditator will eventually develop concentration. There is no need to compare your progress to that of others—this is not a race for jhāna and there is no definitive timeline for completion. Faith in the practice can keep you diligently plodding along, wearing away hindrances, and burning up the defilements, as you gradually develop mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom.

The type of concentration needed for jhāna can develop quickly for some students; for most, though, it is a slow and gradual process. Likened to the lumberjack whose toil slowly wears an imprint of his hand into the handle of his ax, our efforts will, bit by bit, have an effect. The lumberjack cannot say which day the handle became truly worn to his hand, but there is no doubt that his efforts have made it that way. You may not be able to say in which sitting you overcame the alluring seduction of sloth and torpor, or at which moment you secluded the mind from distracting fantasies, and yet your effort has the effect of wearing away the defilements and hindrances.[40] It is a natural law that actions have effects; even if your development is not as rapid as you would like, progress occurs through meditation.

If your faith is weak and you are faced with pain or difficulties, doubt can arise. You might wonder if you can really do this practice. You might wonder if you will ever attain jhāna. If conviction slackens, you will need to encourage and inspire yourself. Allowing attention to sink into the meditation object requires a yielding, trusting steadiness. If you don't trust the practice or your direction, you will remain preoccupied with superficial speculation—criticizing, comparing, anticipating, conceptualizing, and analyzing the meditation before it has matured. If the cohesive force of conviction weakens, then endeavor to strengthen your faith.

Although faith is indispensable, it is also vulnerable to error. The Buddhist tradition distinguishes between verified faith, which is confirmed through your own experience, and "bright faith," which is merely aroused from an outside source. Bright faith (sometimes called blind faith) has valuable inspirational properties, but it can be feeble and will not sustain us through obstacles. Verified faith, on the other hand, stands the test of investigation and is not diminished by criticisms. This deeper level of conviction is born out of wise consideration. Because conviction has been confirmed through discernment and personal experience, you can trust it, even when life is hard or pain racks the body. Gradually, by experiencing the benefits of concentration and insight first hand, you will gain confidence that you have the capacity to endure pain with equanimity, that you are able to let go of destructive habits, and that

Laziness, hesitancy, and partial commitment divert precious energy. There is so much that you actually can do to bring peace into your life. People often underestimate the amount of energy drained by habits, energy that could otherwise be tapped as a resource and strength. As the Buddha exhorted in his final teaching: "All conditioned things are of a nature to decay. Work out your liberation with diligence."[41] Wise and heartfelt persistence nurtures a balance of effort and ease as you give your whole heart and mind to the practice.

Total Dedication

In what ways do you offer less than 100 percent dedication to awakening?

Learn what drains and diminishes your effort. Notice the effect of daily habits and entertainments on your meditation. Observe the effects that watching TV, engaging in gossip, or surfing the Web might have on your concentration. If you discover that an activity increases distraction or reduces your energy, you can do something different—engage in more supportive pursuits. Confront any obstacles that sap your strength and determination for practice.

Enhancing Effort: A Tiger's Patience, a Spider's Diligence

Tigers are powerful and patient hunters. They are well adapted to pounce on their prey, but only from relatively short distances—they must wait patiently for prey to get close before striking. Naturalists have discovered that tigers succeed in less than one out of every twenty attempts at the hunt; they need forbearance to keep trying without discouragement. You too need patience to keep making the effort, to continue returning to your meditation object, even when it seems redundant and nothing

appears to be happening. There may be periods that are calm to the point of dullness and others that are excruciatingly restless. Meditation will not always be exciting or blissful, but a skillful meditator will apply ardent resolve and open ease, diligently continuing to practice.

In the early 1990s, NASA sent a spider into space in an experiment on the effects of zero gravity on web building.[42] Without her body weight as a guide, the spider wove misshapen webs for the first three days. On the fourth day, she spun a near perfect web. Like web-spinning, jhāna does not need perfect conditions, but it does require diligence. You may not enter jhāna in your first attempt, or your first retreat, but like spiders, you will learn if you just keep trying.

Skillful Effort Is "Just Enough"

Effort is not a static quality. You can't rely upon a single decision to be aware and expect that to bring calm or insight. Skill is needed to adjust the quality and quantity of your effort in each meditation session. Like a well-tuned instrument, your effort should be neither too tight nor too loose.[43]

The ability to adjust the quality and quantity of effort is an important meditation skill. For thousands of years teachers have used daily life examples to describe the intuitive adjustments that we make as our attention meets the meditation object. Balanced effort is compared to the way surgery pupils train to use a scalpel by cutting on a lotus leaf that is floating in a dish of water. An arrogant student may cut it in two or submerge it with overconfident, pushy, and forceful energy. A fearful student is too afraid to touch it and will not make the cut. But a student who applies balanced effort makes a precise and careful scalpel stroke on the leaf.

Similarly, a zealous skipper may decide to hoist his sail in a high wind and so send his ship adrift. A hesitant skipper may decide to lower his sail in a light wind and so will not navigate the waters. But "one who hoists full sails in a light wind, takes in half his sails in a high wind, and so arrives safely at his desired destination"[44] demonstrates the correct application of effort. As the *Visuddhimagga* states:

Adjusting the Quality of Effort

Notice in your meditation how much effort it takes to bring attention to meet the breath. If your energy is low, how does the attention respond? If there is too much effort, how do you recognize that force of striving? Experiment by first reducing the effort, then intensifying the meditation with more vigorous effort. What is the result of each adjustment? When is a strong and powerful energy needed, and when is a light touch more appropriate?

To consume a meal, you must apply the right amount of effort for your fork to pierce a potato. If you exert too much force, the fork will smash through the potato. If there is a deficiency of energy, the potato will not be firmly gripped and could slip off the fork and mess up your clothes. Notice how naturally you adjust the application of strength in daily tasks, and consider what amount of effort is required to settle the mind on the breath.

Just as with these similes, so too…one bhikkhu forces his energy, thinking "I shall soon reach absorption." Then his mind lapses into agitation because of his mind's overexerted energy and he is prevented from reaching absorption. Another who sees the defect in overexertion slacks off his energy, thinking, "What is the absorption to me now?" Then his mind lapses into idleness because of his mind's too lax energy and he too is prevented from reaching absorption. Yet another who frees his mind from the idleness even when it is only slightly idle and from agitation when only slightly agitated…with balanced effort, reaches absorption. One should be like this last named.[45]

Four Applications of Energy/Effort

The Buddha described four kinds of effort, each of which has an important function in practice: (1) the effort to avoid or prevent unwholesome states that have not yet arisen; (2) the effort to abandon unwholesome states if they have arisen; (3) the effort to cultivate wholesome states that have not yet arisen; and (4) the effort to maintain wholesome states that have already arisen.

1. *The effort to avoid or prevent unwholesome states that have not yet arisen.* To prevent relapse, an alcoholic may spend the evening at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting rather than a local bar. To avoid sloth and torpor, a meditator may begin the meditation in an upright posture rather than reclining in bed. Using concentration practice, you prevent the arising of hindrances by occupying your attention with the breath.

   You can also avoid unwholesome states by learning from others' mistakes. The *Visuddhimagga* suggests that when seeing an unprofitable state in someone else, you may strive, thinking, "I shall not behave as he has done in whom this state has now arisen, and this state will not arise in me."[46] Thus you can circumvent many common errors by observing others.

2. *The effort to abandon unwholesome states if they have arisen.* Anytime you notice that aversion, ill will, greed, lust, doubt, restlessness, laziness, or any unwholesome state has arisen, you have a choice—you can entertain that state or abandon it. When you focus your attention in meditation, you have abandoned all other objects to attend to the simple perception of your meditation object. When your attention wanders off the meditation object, you can practice letting go of distraction. In daily activities, notice where your attention dwells and steer it away from patterns that disrupt clarity or happiness.

3. *The effort to cultivate wholesome states that have not yet arisen.* The Buddha encouraged his disciples to examine the mind and cultivate

wholesome states, day and night. This practice develops many wholesome states such as loving-kindness, generosity, compassion, equanimity, wise attention, insight, happiness, tranquility, concentration, and the five factors that are the focus of this chapter—faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom.

Cultivating Wholesome States

Choose a quality that you would like to develop. Decide how you will remind yourself of that quality and what you will do to strengthen it. Create simple daily projects for yourself. For example, if you wish to cultivate good will, you might remind yourself of loving-kindness by taping a note with a phrase such as *May you be happy and well* on the bathroom mirror and resolve to recite the phrase as you comb your hair each day. If you'd like to strengthen concentration, you might decide to forsake television and movies, and reduce newspaper reading, in order to add a little more time for meditation each day. If you want to refine honesty, you might carry a small notebook and write down every exaggeration, white lie, deception, or inaccurate statement to discover how dishonesty creeps into your speech.

Decide what you'd like to improve, and actually do something about it. Apply your effort.

4. *The effort to maintain wholesome states that have already arisen.* Once you have experienced a flicker of calmness, how do you nourish its continuance? When you have done a generous action, do you reflect on it to allow the motivation to mature? After you have cleared your mind of the hindrances, how do you maintain that purity? Once you have experienced jhāna, do you maintain access to deep tranquility

Strong determination is needed to turn away from the sensual sphere and enter jhāna. Without this mental energy, concentration would be impossible. Let nothing deter your resolve. Make your focus unwavering, entertain no sidetracks in your pursuit of liberation.

Mindfulness *(sati)*

Meditation teachers use a variety of terms to describe mindfulness, awareness, attention, and concentration. Some use strongly directive language to describe mindfulness, such as "penetrative attention," "attention that is thrust upon an object," or "awareness that sinks into the object." Other teachers describe mindfulness as a "receptive, relaxed, nonjudgmental observation," and reserve the more forceful language for descriptions of concentration.

Mindfulness is a mental factor that occurs in conjunction with a cluster of associated mental factors. This ensemble of factors creates the state of heightened attention that we generally call "being mindful," in which circumstances, interrelationships, patterns, and objects that are occurring in the mind and body are seen clearly. Whether attention is focused on a fixed object such as the occurrence of the breath, or directed to observe changing sensory phenomena—for example, following the movement of the belly as it rises and falls with each breath, or observing changing emotional responses—mindfulness is the factor that prevents attention from wandering off the chosen object.

Mindfulness does not permit superficiality; it manifests as the direct confrontation with the object of perception. Its function is to prevent confusion and to consistently remember the object of perception, thus enabling attention to sink deeply into a penetrative awareness of the object. You are mindful when you remember to pay attention, and you are unmindful when you are lost in a cloud of associative thinking and forgetfulness. Mindfulness arises in conjunction with all wholesome states; it is not present in unwholesome states such as greed or hatred.

We cannot neatly separate the development of concentration and mindfulness, practicing one on Tuesday and the other on Friday.

Mindfulness is needed for concentration to develop into jhāna, and concentration is needed for mindfulness to sharpen and mature. The development of mindfulness not only precedes jhāna by clearing away hindrances and recollecting the meditation object, but the factor of mindfulness is found in every jhāna state.[50] While absorbed in jhāna, you will not be spaced out in relaxed trancelike states or float off in a cloud of bliss. Quite the contrary, in jhāna mindfulness is pure, continuous, and highly refined.

Mindfulness serves as the guardian of both the mind and the meditation object. The Buddha encouraged meditators to use mindfulness as protection from the dangers of sensual desire, craving, anger, arrogance, and any form of delusion.[51] Guard your mind with mindfulness, and cultivate mindfulness by remembering your meditation object. If you are developing present-moment attention, you can remember to be present with things as they are. If you are struggling to overcome hindrances, you can keep watch for any hint of obstruction. If you are mindful of the breath, you permit nothing to divert your attention. Try to not forget what you are doing. Become sensitive to what you are experiencing. Mindfulness is absolutely essential for the clear observation of things as they are.

Four Foundations of Mindfulness (satipaṭṭhāna)

The Buddha identified four foundations of mindfulness: body, feeling tone, mental states, and objects of mind.

Mindfulness of body includes awareness of posture—whether sitting, standing, reclining, or moving. You can develop mindfulness and clear comprehension not only when you sit still, close your eyes, and focus on a meditation object, but also while engaged in any activity: brushing your teeth, eating, talking, walking, driving, sweeping the floor, dialing the telephone, typing, urinating, folding laundry, solving a puzzle, watching a child play. Maintain a continuity of mindfulness of the body by focusing on the breath in all your activities. The consistent awareness of this basic expression of breath will support the calming and concentrating of attention, and facilitate a rapid development of concentration with the meditation subject of breath.

The second foundation, mindfulness of feeling tone, refers to a bare impression of the pleasantness, unpleasantness, or neutrality of any present experience. This "feeling" is an initial impression, not an elaborate emotional response to that impression of pleasantness, unpleasantness, or neutrality. When you are not mindful of feeling tones, you might grasp what you find pleasant, push away what you experience as unpleasant, or space out for neutral experience. Mindfulness of feeling can free you from the agitation that comes with the push and pull of desire and aversion. An untrained mind reacts for or against the feeling tone, but when mindfulness arises you will remain present and attentive with any feeling without being compelled by attraction, fear, or repulsion. When mindfulness of feeling is developed, your orientation to experience shifts—you will begin to understand feeling as an opportunity to develop a stable equanimous presence, free of the burden of accumulating ever more pleasant sensations and avoiding painful ones.

Mindfulness of mental states, the third foundation, directs attention to the mind as it is colored by emotions such as love, joy, anger, hatred, interest, boredom, tranquility, and fear. Become sensitive and aware of mental phenomena without indulging or wallowing in emotional states. Don't take mental states personally—just notice what is present and what is absent. Any time you notice that your attention is entangled in a story, let go of the thoughts and notice the quality of the mind instead. Sometimes you will find restless agitation and although you try to return to your meditation object, a moment later the attention slides off again. Keep trying. Mindfulness grows with repetitive practice. When mindfulness becomes strong, you will calmly observe the inner workings of the mind. Each jhāna will sport a distinctive degree and quality of happiness, interest, and equanimity. Notice the dominant flavor of each state; remain mindful and understand fully what is occurring.

The fourth foundation is mindfulness of mental objects, which includes an awareness of the functions of mental states. Now you may observe how desire functions as a hindrance, how faith functions as a spiritual ally, how concentration supports insight, and how craving causes suffering. As your application of mindfulness extends beyond the mere ability to return to your meditation object, you may notice

the context, connections, interactions, causal relationships, and functions of mental states. This fourth foundation of mindfulness promotes a dynamic understanding of phenomena, how things arise and interact, and how they support or obstruct the development of the mind.

Clear Comprehension (sampajañña)

The development of right mindfulness is often combined with clear comprehension or full understanding. With mindfulness *(sati)* and clear comprehension/full understanding *(sampajañña)* established, the meditator maintains clarity regarding four aspects of every endeavor: (1) clarity regarding the purpose, (2) clarity regarding the suitability, (3) clarity regarding the proper domain, and (4) clarity regarding the undeluded perception of the activity concerned.[52]

To highlight these four modes of clear comprehension, when you perform an action, first consider if the action is aligned with your aim. Ask yourself: *Is this act likely to support a desirable result?* In the case of meditation, consider if your approach has the possibility to increase concentration and insight, and to reduce suffering. We do not meditate to indulge in bliss or accumulate personal powers; the purpose is to realize liberating insight that will transform a fundamental experience of suffering in life. Clear comprehension of the purpose is the basis for making wise choices.

Second, become aware of the broader context that surrounds an action. Ask yourself: *Is the action appropriate to the current conditions?* In the case of meditation, consider the appropriateness of external conditions such as timing and environment, and internal conditions such as your health and mental state. For example, it might not be appropriate to enter jhāna while the fire alarm is warning of danger, when a child needs food, or in an attempt to deny painful emotions such as grief.

Third, you can consider the domain, range, or extent of your activity. The Pāli term *(gocara)* is the same word used to describe a pasture or field in which a cow might graze. It implies the field that attention dwells within or the range of perceptions that occupy attention. How large a pasture do you give to your attention, and does that range support your aim? For instance, when developing jhāna using the breath

you will intentionally restrict the focus to the breath at the area near the nostrils—whenever the mind wanders off quickly bring the attention back to the breath. Insight practices emphasize the contemplation of changing phenomena—although there are a multitude of objects for vipassanā meditation, we shall focus on a range of formations and contemplate a set of specific characteristics. The scope of your awareness should support your purpose and be appropriate to the conditions that are present.

At one retreat center I volunteered to assist the cooks as part of a team of vegetable choppers; we silently washed, peeled, and chopped piles of vegetables each morning. A new participant at the retreat center joined the team and was given his first task of squeezing six lemons. Dedicated to his mindfulness practice he carefully washed, cut, squeezed, and deseeded the lemons, diligently bringing mindful awareness to each sensation and movement. After twenty minutes he had successfully squeezed only two lemons, after thirty minutes he had only partially completed the third lemon. The cooks looked on aghast and lobbied the managers of the retreat center to reassign him to a different department; the rest of the veggie chopping team put in overtime preparing the mountain of vegetables that were piling up on the counters all around the lemon-squeezing retreatant. Perhaps his concentration and mindfulness were admirable, but clear comprehension of the purpose of the task, the suitability of his pace, and the field of his attention was distorted. Actions must be appropriate to the conditions—sometimes that will require quick movement, and other times you will have the luxury of slowing down.

And fourth, consider if you have an accurate view of your activity. Have you embellished the perception of your meditation subject with fantasy, desire, hope, expectation, or pride? Is the meditation experience a basis for self-grasping, I-formations, or conceit? When your practice finally culminates in insight, you will fully understand phenomena as they are actually occurring; you will experience things free of the delusion that distorts phenomena into objects of attachment. These four aspects of clear comprehension—clarity regarding the purpose, suitability, domain, and undeluded perception—enhance clarity in every

Concentration is called a "profitable unification of mind";[58] it sustains a steadfast attention on the object and adds a powerful force to the observing capacity of mindfulness. Concentration is like the lens that magnifies and focuses sunlight to such a degree that it can ignite fire. The focused and continuous mindfulness of your meditation object will bring strength and intensity to your insight.

Concentration and the Four Jhānas

In the Discourses of the Buddha, the sequence of four material jhānas is frequently described as the defining feature of concentration:

> And what, bhikkhus, is the faculty of concentration? Here, bhikkhus, the noble disciple gains concentration, gains one-pointedness of mind, having made release the object. Secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, he enters and dwells in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by thought and examination, with rapture and happiness born of seclusion. With the subsiding of thought and examination, he enters and dwells in the second jhāna, which has internal confidence and unification of mind, is without thought and examination, and has rapture and happiness born of concentration. With the fading away as well of rapture, he dwells equanimous and, mindful and clearly comprehending, he experiences happiness with the body; he enters and dwells in the third jhāna of which the noble ones declare: "he is equanimous, mindful, one who dwells happily." With the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous passing away of joy and displeasure, he enters and dwells in the fourth jhāna, which is neither painful nor pleasant and includes the purification of mindfulness by equanimity. This is called the faculty of concentration.[59]

In this passage, *right concentration* is defined as the experience of jhāna absorptions. Much of this book is devoted to cultivating these refined states of powerful concentration. But perhaps most importantly,

the training will apply your hard won concentration to elicit a direct and wise encounter with reality.

Wisdom *(paññā)*

Wisdom is the ability to clearly discriminate and discern the essence of things—an ability that develops out of sustained mindfulness and concentration. Wisdom illuminates the object of attention, like a lamp illuminates a cave. It transforms an ignorant or deluded way of relating to experience into a wise, clear, and lucid knowledge of reality. Like a skilled guide who, knowing the way through a dark forest, travels the forest paths without bewilderment and leads the way to emerge safely, wisdom is an indispensable faculty on the path of liberation.

At every level of the training, you will make choices based on whatever degree of wisdom you can muster. The Buddha said that thoughts can be divided into two classes, wholesome thoughts and unwholesome thoughts.[60] Unwholesome thoughts lead to an increase in unprofitable states, exacerbating sensual desire, ill will, or cruelty. Wholesome thoughts promote profitable states such as renunciation, loving-kindness, and compassion. The Buddha said, "Whatever a bhikkhu frequently thinks and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of his mind. If he frequently thinks and ponders upon thoughts of sensual desire, he has abandoned the thought of renunciation to cultivate the thought of sensual desire, and then his mind inclines to thoughts of sensual desire."[61] Consider what your thoughts cultivate, and choose, based on reasoned reflection, whether that thought ought to be entertained or abandoned. When you discover that certain thoughts lead to harm, you may wisely choose to let them go.

The Buddha did not merely instruct his disciples to let go of harmful thoughts, but he also taught that there was value in letting go of all preoccupation with thought, even thoughts of kindness, wisdom, or compassion. He examined wholesome thoughts in his mind and considered:

> This does not lead to my own affliction, or to others' affliction, or to the affliction of both; it aids wisdom, does not

> cause difficulties, and leads to Nibbāna. If I think and ponder upon this thought even for a night, even for a day, even for a night and a day, I see nothing to fear from it. But, with excessive thinking and pondering I might tire my body, and when the body is tired, the mind becomes disturbed, and when the mind is disturbed, it is far from concentration. So I steadied my mind internally, quieted it, brought it to singleness, and concentrated it. Why is that? So that my mind should not be disturbed.[62]

Although there is nothing wrong with wholesome thoughts, the Buddha chose to develop a calm, quiet, and still mind—a mind absorbed in jhāna. You may not be obsessed by lust, hatred, or cruelty; usually we are

Two Kinds of Thought

Observe your thoughts today and categorize them according to the root intention behind each thought. Make two lists—one for the wholesome and one for the unwholesome. If you notice a thought that is fueling anger, recognize the aversive state at the root, and add it to your unwholesome list. If you notice a thought of compassion, recognize the wholesome root of non-cruelty, and add it to your wholesome list. When you notice impatience, see the underlying force of aversion. When you think about dessert, feel the force of greed. When confused, arrogant, or hypocritical thoughts arise, notice the root of delusion. And when thoughts of impermanence, causes and effects, and the value of honesty intrigue you, notice the wholesome root of wisdom from which they spring. Track your thoughts throughout a day.

just preoccupied by innocuous but incessant stories and personal plans about our own lives. But until you discover your capacity to rest the mind, focused, clear and fully aware, jhāna will be impossible.

After you have calmed the distracted mind, attained jhāna, and emerged from the absorption, you will harness the power of the concentrated mind to discern ultimate mental and material phenomena in order to understand the causes of suffering and realize its ending.

A Powerful Mind

The five spiritual faculties discussed in this chapter—faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom—must not only be strongly developed, but also well balanced.[63] Together these five faculties produce a powerful mind. The Buddha said:

> Bhikkhus, so long as noble knowledge [wisdom] has not arisen in the noble disciple, there is as yet no stability of the [other] four faculties, no steadiness of the [other] four faculties. But when noble knowledge [wisdom] has arisen in the noble disciple, then there is stability of the [other] four faculties, then there is steadiness of the [other] four faculties.
>
> It is just as in a house with a peaked roof: so long as the roof peak has not been set in place, there is as yet no stability of the rafters, there is as yet no steadiness of the rafters; but when the roof peak has been set in place, then there is stability of the rafters, then there is steadiness of the rafters... In the case of a noble disciple who possesses wisdom, the faith that follows from it becomes stable; the energy that follows from it becomes stable; the mindfulness that follows from it becomes stable; the concentration that follows from it becomes stable."[64]

When the five faculties are fully developed each factor reinforces and supports each other factor, preparing the mind for success in jhāna and insight practices.

Meditation Instruction 2.3
Observing Long and Short Breaths

After you have observed the breath at the nostrils for some time as introduced in meditation instruction 1.1, you'll notice that some breaths are long and others are short. Observe each in-breath and each out-breath as they naturally occur; notice if each half breath is long or short. In order to determine if it is long or short, you must attend to the beginning and ending of each inhalation and each exhalation. You don't need to mentally recite the words *long* or *short,* nor would you precisely measure each breath. Don't alter the length of the breath. Let the breathing occur naturally and quietly; audible breathing usually indicates excessive control. Observe the breath itself—not the sensation on the skin, not the sound of its passing. Simply register the length to foster a continuity of attention from the beginning to the end of each breath.

If the breath seems to disappear, patiently continue directing your attention toward the spot it last appeared. Resist the temptation to make the breath coarser in order to observe it. Gradually, mindfulness will become refined enough to perceive the subtle breath.

the five controlling faculties of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom as discussed in chapter 2. In particular, balance faith with wisdom, so that neither an excessively critical nor an overly gullible stance overshadows awareness. Also balance concentration with energy so that effort and focus grow stable together like a swift chariot drawn by horses of equal strength and endurance.[68] Strive to bring balance to any area of your life that seems to swing between the extremes of deficiency and excess.

3. *Choose a clear subject for meditation, and know your object well.* Develop clarity regarding both the subject and the object. For example, with the meditation subject of the breath, the object of attention might sometimes be the touch sensation, the nimitta, or the recognition of breath. When working with the meditation subject of loving-kindness, the object might be a dear friend, a squirrel, or all living beings. Fully embrace your meditation subject. If you work with the breath as the subject for meditation and someone were to ask you, "how do you experience the breath?" would you be able to describe the perceptions that you experience as the breath? Would you be able to clearly describe the specific object of attention? Be patient. Remain with your chosen meditation subject without succumbing to the temptation to switch to a new one when you feel bored, tired, or challenged. After concentration is well established, you may go on to incorporate a series of additional practices, but in the initial stages it's necessary to remain clearly attentive to a single, distinct meditation subject, allowing the perception of that object to naturally become more and more subtle.

4. *Dispel sluggishness.* If the mind falls into dullness, actively enliven your attention by arousing three enlightenment factors—investigation, energy, and joy. The tradition offers many suggestions for stimulating these factors.[69] You might exert the mind by studying Dhamma, enhance interest by asking questions, gain inspiration by offering alms or performing acts of generosity, generate joy by reflecting on your virtue, inspire urgency by considering the fearful consequences

of laziness, energize attention by changing postures or sitting in the open air, avoid overeating which might cause sluggishness, and set your resolve upon the development of an alert, energetic, and joyful quality of attention.

5. *Calm the mind when it becomes overenthusiastic.* Occasionally you may need to restrain the surging energies that build with concentration. When rapture is intense, excitement and elation can overpower the mind like the swell of a tidal wave. Excessive delight will hinder progress. Learn to calm and channel the energies of pleasure. Don't let the jubilant energy of jhāna seduce you away from a composed presence. If you feel excessive elation or giddiness growing, feel your feet on the ground, take a few slower and deeper breaths, sense the body, and control your thoughts. Intentionally restrain, compose, and calm yourself. Channel your mental energy to develop tranquility, concentration, and equanimity.[70]

6. *Encourage the mind when progress is painful or slow.* Lift the mind up when it becomes discouraged. You may naturally feel disheartened at times, so it is beneficial to know how to uplift your mind when you feel disappointed or frustrated. What might delight your mind without distracting you from your goal? What would inspire your practice and carry you just a little further along the path of awakening, even when you just don't feel like being aware? What actions or reflections have an encouraging effect for you?

   You might be inspired by reflecting on Buddha's qualities, cultivating loving-kindness, reading passages from the Discourses of the Buddha or recalling quotes from your teachers, reflecting on your goals, sensing the power of previous acts of generosity, or reciting chants. Any of these activities might infuse a discouraged mind with energy.

   Contemplating the Buddha, Dhamma, and Saṅgha can remind us that for thousands of years people have cultivated these practices to free the mind from suffering—you can too! Reflecting on death may stimulate spiritual urgency and dispel procrastination or negligence. Inspire yourself to overcome challenges and strive for your highest

potential.

When you are absorbed in jhāna, pain cannot arise, but before and after absorption, pain may sometimes assail you. Chronic or intense pain is exhausting, but you can learn to encourage the listless mind with purposeful urgency and faith. Become sensitive to early signs that the mind is becoming fatigued, overwhelmed, or withered by pain and respond to these clues by easing up or backing off. Respect your vulnerabilities, and face what is difficult a little at a time. Use walking, standing, or reclining meditation to provide some ease for the body while maintaining the continuity of practice. Awareness of pain can, in its own way, bring profound rewards. Facing the fact of pain conveys us toward an experience of peace and compassion that is deeper than what comfort usually affords; when we hurt, we are rarely complacent.

Especially when in a busy lay life, take a moment before you fall to sleep at night to cheer your mind. Reflect on your day, recalling acts of virtue and good things that occurred. If you can't think of anything good, then consider that at least there won't be any more problems to deal with today; perhaps that thought will cheer the mind before you fall to sleep.

7. *Maintain a continuously balanced awareness.* Apply effort that is neither forced nor lax. Sometimes an intensely vigorous resolve is required. Other times you'll refresh attention joyfully with the buoyant energy of enthusiasm. And there will be other times when you look upon your meditation object quietly with equanimity. Adjusting your energetic connection with the meditation object to bring the attention into skillful balance can be a bit like riding a bicycle—when you are on a bike, you are not fixed in a static central position but are continuously returning to balance as you adjust to the variously changing forces of movement, inertia, and gravity. A meditator who is skillful at maintaining a balanced, even, and equanimous attention on the object is likened to a charioteer whose horses progress evenly together.[71]

Your engagement with the meditation subject will invite a dynamic

process of continuous adjustment. Self-assessment or judging, however, can interrupt the momentum of concentration. Inhibit any tendency to judge how well the meditation is going, or to measure how close you are to absorption. If rapture begins to arise, don't dissipate it by rushing off to tell someone about it. When concentration begins to intensify, relax any excessive excitement that might otherwise interrupt the tranquility of the meditation. Remain alert; when you feel deeply still and calm, restlessness could re-arise and concoct stories starring your radiantly composed self who performs enlightened activities! When these habits and tendencies arise, balance your awareness, or they will pull you back into distraction.

8–9. Avoid distracted friends, and seek the company of focused friends. You don't need to search out a soul mate or expect that your friends and family will follow a meditative path. Social encounters do, however, leave impressions in memory that can ripple through the mind during later meditations. If your associates frequently engage in unethical activities or harmful speech, it may be wise to find new companions. If your friends don't share your interest in concentration, you might seek out a local meditation group to provide supplemental social support for your practice.

10. Reflect on the peace of absorption. Contemplate the peaceful and admirable qualities associated with the attainment of jhānas and liberation, and let the potential of this deep happiness inspire your practice.

11. Incline the mind to develop concentration. A clear resolve sets the direction for your development. Articulate your intention and recollect it. Recall that intention each and every time you sit to meditate.

→ Meditation Instruction 3.1
Observing the Whole Breath

In your daily meditation, focus your attention repeatedly and exclusively on the whole breath. Observe the breath from the very

beginning of the inhalation, through the middle, and to the end of each in-breath and each out-breath. Direct your attention to perceive the breath at the spot between the nostrils and upper lip. As your attention dwells with the breath for some time without distraction, certain experiences associated with concentration may arise. When the breath is uninterruptedly known for a long time, the mind becomes light, buoyant, and bright. Perception of the size and shape of the body may change. Feelings of contentment, rapture, and happiness may flood consciousness. It is not a problem to notice these natural changes as subtle shifts in the background of awareness, but do not give your attention directly to these expressions of concentration. Many pleasant mental factors will develop, but if you follow each one, they will distract you from the simplicity of mindfulness with breathing and will stall the deepening of concentration. Consciousness can receive only one object at a time, so if you are observing changing mental factors instead of the breath, you are not sustaining attention on the chosen meditation object. Remain consistently and exclusively attentive to the breath, undeterred by hindrances, and unswayed by the pleasures associated with concentration. ⇜

of these factors to eclipse his or her focus on the breath. As the factors develop internally, the breath becomes an increasingly refined meditation object. While you continue to embrace the breath as the focal point in the foreground of awareness, trust that these jhāna factors are indeed maturing in the background. It can be helpful to have some understanding of these factors at the onset of deep concentration; you will not, however, explicitly investigate the functioning of each jhāna factor until after you have attained a stable absorption in the first jhāna and then emerged from it. Until then, keep the meditation simple and direct—stay attentive to the bare occurrence of the breath.

Factor 1: Vitakka—Directing the Attention to the Breath

Vitakka—the initial application of attention—describes the mind's capacity to aim, direct, and apply attention to any object that it perceives. This is an essential factor for negotiating the world. Inundated with a daily barrage of sensory stimuli, you naturally direct your attention to certain perceptions while screening out other information that is irrelevant to your aim. Without this ability to direct attention, you might become distraught by the demands of daily encounters.

A resolve to return to the breath any time the focus wanders off and fades will strengthen the directed awareness of the breath. Basic counting exercises introduced in earlier chapters support the repeated directing of attention to the meditation object. The *Visuddhimagga* describes this invigorating initial application of the mind as having the function "to strike at and thresh" its object.[75] Such an energized application of attention connects directly with the meditation object and allows no space for the sort of dull withdrawal that feeds sloth and torpor. Vitakka, in this way, counters the hindrance of sloth and torpor.

Factor 2: Vicāra—Sustaining Attention on the Breath

Vicāra is the sustaining function that accompanies the initial application of the mind. It anchors attention in the present moment. Vicāra is the factor that yokes the mind to the object and escorts consciousness into a penetrating experience of what is perceived. According to the *Visuddhimagga,* "[vicāra] has the characteristic of continued pressure on

(occupation with) the object. Its function is to keep conascent [mental] states [occupied] with that. It manifests as keeping consciousness anchored [on that object]."[76] The thorough and confident knowledge of the object that is supported by the sustained focus of vicāra dispels the hindrance of doubt.

The meditative exercises introduced thus far are formulated to support a continuity of attention through the full length of the whole breath—without drifting away. The "applying" and "sustaining" functions work together to focus attention on the breath. The Buddhist tradition offers several similes to illustrate this teamwork.[77] The initial arousing of the mind toward its object of perception *(vitakka)* is likened to a bird spreading out its wings when about to soar into the air and forcing its wings downward to cause it to lift into the sky. Continuous attention on the object *(vicāra)* is compared to that bird catching the draft by planing its outspread wings against the currents, quietly but firmly maintaining constant pressure against the wind. Just as the bird must both periodically flap its wings and also maintain firm pressure in order to keep hold of the air and soar, likewise, the meditator must refresh interest to maintain a continuous observation of the object. That initial application of the mind is also compared to the movement of a bee diving directly toward a lotus; while the sustaining function is associated with the bee's hovering above the lotus and investigating the flower. Applied attention *(vitakka)* is further described as "gross and inceptive like the striking of a bell"; whereas the more subtle act of anchoring and maintaining pressure on the object *(vicāra)* resembles the resounding of the bell.[78] Whatever the analogy, directing and sustaining attention on the breath comprise two critical functions that are consciously and intentionally cultivated. Engaging these two forces occupies much of the initial effort to establish jhāna.

Factor 3: Pīti—Joyous Interest in the Breath

Pīti is a quality of distinctly joyous and rapturous interest in your meditation object. It can manifest in several forms: (1) as a feeling of shivers or goose bumps on the skin, (2) as a feeling like lightning streaking through the body, (3) as a surging wavelike sensation, (4) as an uplifting,

buoyant experience reminiscent of floating, or (5) as an all-pervading rapture that suffuses consciousness. It is only this fifth degree of pīti, that of pervasive rapture, which is stable enough to support jhāna.[79] The lesser qualities of pīti can flood the entire body and mind with joyous thrills, but these relatively coarse manifestations of rapture are unsuitable for the deeply tranquil states of jhāna. The manifestation of pīti that functions as a jhāna factor and intensifies concentration must arise as a consequence of the exclusive perception of the meditation object. It is a form of nonsensuous delight that arises through the direct knowing of the object of meditation.

Pīti has the characteristic of being pleased with the object of meditation. This intensity of interest in the meditation object serves to overcome the hindrance of aversion. It functions to refresh the body and mind, but it can also intensify to excessive manifestations of elation or excitement. You may be thrilled that something is finally happening, find the energized appearance of rapture pleasant, or consider it quite irritating. Let pīti arise and suffuse the knowing of the breath, but don't allow it to divert your attention from the breath. Observing pīti tends to amplify its more caustic attributes and cause it to manifest as an agitating field of vibration in the body. Whether you like it or hate it, this energized delight must settle in order to perform the function of refreshing consciousness and effectively enabling jhāna. Restrain any direct fascination with pīti itself and do not let it distract you from the continuous observation of the breath. Trust that pīti, along with the other jhāna factors, will all mature in the process; you don't need to fuss over them.

Factor 4: Sukha—Deep Contentment Regarding the Breath as Object

Sukha is a feeling of deep contentment, joy, peace, or ease that occurs as a consequence of the simple observation of the meditation object. It drenches the mind in happiness. Attention to the breath will remain undisturbed and undistracted when the tenor of experience is deep joy. You may feel like you could sit forever and never want to leave this joy-filled state of ease. There will be no wish to hurry toward the next project or experience. The arising of this vast expression of happiness thus

counters the hindrance of restlessness. With the arising of sukha, consciousness will settle even more deeply with the meditation object—the mind is happy to attend to nothing but the breath.

Factor 5: Ekaggatā—One-Pointedness of Attention on the Breath

Ekaggatā is described in the classic commentaries as having the characteristic of leadership. It functions to unite and bind the associated mental factors, much like moisture permits the particles of bath powder to form a soap bar, or rennet enables the particles of milk to form a cheese. This one-pointedness of attention that completely unifies the mind with the meditation object transforms the hindrance of desire. A mind infected by sensual desire moves through life by clinging to serial possessions, opinions, pleasures, relationships, and experiences, as a monkey travels through the forest by grasping one branch after another. When perpetually reaching for the next potential source of gratification, the heart lacks inner peace. As an antidote to the compulsive dissatisfaction of desire, one-pointed attention is unified; it is settled on just what is present, and it needs nothing more. When one-pointed attention blossoms as an intensifying factor, there will be no sense of lack. Consciousness will settle exclusively with the meditation object without wandering and without distraction. Like the steady illumination of a lamp's flame when there is no breeze, a strongly unified focus manifests as a peaceful, nonwavering calm. When you can keep your attention focused this way, the scattering tendencies of habit dissipate and your attention unites with the meditation object.

These five jhāna factors—vitakka, vicāra, pīti, sukha, and ekaggatā—will naturally develop into extraordinarily strong assets through the continuous practice of connecting with and sustaining attention on the breath. You don't need to make a special effort to cultivate each factor individually. Resist the temptation to conjure up happiness, enhance rapture, or rev up these novel thrills. It is not necessary to be specifically aware of the strength of these jhāna factors at this stage of the practice. At this point in your meditation, investigation of the individual factors could disperse the unification of mind that you are carefully nurturing. Be satisfied with a consistent knowing of your meditation object, the

breath, and trust that all five jhāna factors will develop out of the simple effort to attend to that object.

TABLE 4.1
Five Jhāna Factors

What Is a Nimitta?

As you are engaged in the process of directing and sustaining your attention with the breath, at some point a bright light, luminous field, or subtle image associated with the breath might appear. This can be the beginning of a significant transformation in the meditative