Be an Island

The Buddhist Practice
of
Inner Peace

Ayya Khema

author of *Being Nobody, Going Nowhere*

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Foreword by Sandy Boucher

Wisdom Publications • Boston

Wisdom Publications, Inc.
199 Elm Street
Somerville MA 02144 USA
www.wisdompubs.org

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Khema, Ayya.
Be an island : the Buddhist practice of inner peace / by Ayya Khema.
p. cm.
ISBN 0-86171-147-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Spiritual life—Buddhism—Psychological aspects.
2. Peace of mind—Religious aspects—Buddhism. 3. Buddhism—Doctrines.
I. Title.
BQ5612.K44 1999
294.3'444—DC21 98-40893

ISBN 0-86171-147-5
eBook ISBN 978-0-86171-909-9

11 10 09 08 07
8 7 6 5 4

Cover image: *View of the Shimmering Sea from Woods Hole, Massachusetts*, Feodor Zakharov, ca. 1927, Collection of Duke University Museum of Art
Passages from the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* in the preface adapted from *The Last Days of the Buddha* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1988).
Verses from the *Dhammapada* on page 23 translated by Ven. Khantipalo.

Designed by: Jennie Malcolm

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Printed in the United States of America

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Foreword

In the great adventure of Buddhism's coming to the West, one of the most fascinating developments has been its meeting with feminism. The relationship that developed between the two, while sometimes thorny, has enriched both endeavors immeasurably. Sister Ayya Khema, one of the first generation of Western women teachers, contributed powerfully to this conjunction; an American citizen born in northern Europe, she will be remembered most vividly for her championing of the cause of Buddhist nuns.

Ayya Khema was a strong, independent woman who survived early hardship. As a German-Jewish child in the Second World War she knew prejudice, imprisonment, and the death of her father. As a married woman she worked a farm in Australia while raising her children. She then founded a Theravada Buddhist forest monastery there and took the robes, shaving her head and donning the brown cloth of a renunciant. Her new name, Khema, had belonged to a nun alive during the Buddha's lifetime who had been known for her great insight and verbal ability and had been cited by the Buddha as providing a standard for right conduct. Ayya Khema radiated confidence; her being a woman never impeded her study and practice of Dhamma. She penetrated deeply into the practice and communicated the fruits of her insights with great clarity in her public talks and private instruction. That her own Theravada tradition denied her full ordination, that nuns in Southeast Asian countries were neglected and ill-served by their tradition—these injustices turned Ayya Khema into an activist. She did not choose the battle, but, self-respecting as she was, she stood up for her own dignity and that of all women. As a sincere practitioner and a powerful spokesperson, she became one of the Western Buddhist teachers who has truly made a difference in this century.

To be involved in the publishing of this book takes me back to another book preparation twelve years ago on Parappuduwa Nuns Island in Ratgama Lake in Sri Lanka. In the damp, tropical heat, I sat on a verandah surrounded by extravagant jungle vegetation and pored over the proofs of a book of Ayya's Dhamma talks to be published by a group of Sri Lankan donors. That rustling in the underbrush, I knew, signaled the progress of a giant monitor lizard lumbering past; the wild screeches piercing the air came from brilliantly hued birds perched in the low trees.

Ayya Khema, stout in her brown robe, her head shaved clean, leaned over me to confer on some very strange wording that could only have been produced by a typesetter to whom the English language was an exotic challenge. Ayya would frown as she concentrated on the mangled phrase, and then, often, as we sorted it out, our consternation would dissolve into laughter.

My proofreading occupied only a few hours of each day. Up at 4 A.M., we *anagarikas* (eight-precept nuns) donned our white robes, lit our kerosene lanterns, and trudged in thick darkness to the top of the island's solitary hill, to enter the *bhāvanā sala* or meditation hall. At the front of the room we could barely discern the immobile form of Ayya Khema, deep in meditation. Gradually brightness gathered in the room; birds awoke, announcing their presence with cascades of sound; and Ayya became visible, her head raised, face suffused with joy, a lightness like a benediction.

Thus our day began, and progressed through sutta study with Ayya and a single, ceremonially served meal, sometimes brought to us by the villagers on the lake shore, sometimes prepared for us by our Sri Lankan cook. As the sun fell behind the tall trees bordering the lake, we again sat in meditation, and listened to Ayya expound upon an aspect of the Buddha's teachings. Then we ended our day with chanting, Ayya's voice strongly guiding us, first through the unfamiliar Pali syllables, then through the English translations. We chanted, for instance,

Even as a mother protects, with her life,
Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all living beings:
Radiating kindness over the entire world . . .

One of Ayya's great contributions is her founding of Buddhist centers. As one student put it, "You know how when the baby Buddha walked, at each step a lotus sprang up? Well, everywhere Ayya Khema goes, a meditation center springs up." She began in 1978 with the forest monastery Wat Buddha Dhamma in New South Wales, Australia. Then in the eighties in Sri Lanka she formed the International Buddhist Women's Center and founded the nunnery Parappuduwa Nuns Island at the invitation of the Sri Lankan government. She did so in order to provide Western women with a Buddhist monastic experience in a Buddhist country: to offer us silence, safety, concentration, inner spaciousness. With her German students she created Buddha-Haus. And as her death neared, she established Metta Vihara, a monastery to accommodate both men and women, the first Theravada monastery in Germany.

Ayya savored the peace and enclosure of monastic life, yet she was willing, in the middle of our rains retreat, to leave Parappuduwa Nuns Island and fly to the United States to speak on a panel on Women and Buddhism at a prestigious academic Buddhist-Christian convocation. When she returned to the island, at our request she shared the tape of her panel with us. On the tape Ayya spoke briefly and concisely about the situation of women in Buddhist traditions. She told the truth in blunt, no-nonsense terms, and I remember thinking how extremely radical and brave she was in doing so. But it was in the question-and-answer period that she captivated us and provoked a roar of approving laughter. A male questioner wondered, in a tone intended to trivialize and dismiss the whole subject of the panel, why there should be a *separate* panel comprised only of women, to address the issue of women and Buddhism. Why couldn't the topic be incorporated into the other discussions? One panelist began a tempered, careful response, and then Ayya's voice cut in, its tone balanced just on the edge of annoyance. Perhaps the questioner should ask instead, she suggested, why almost every one of the other panels at the conference was composed exclusively of *men* and excluded all concerns specific to women! That would be a more productive inquiry, she concluded. And the subject was closed. One could only imagine the look on the man's face as the room erupted in applause and amusement.

Ayya did not dislike individual men—indeed she had loyal male students—but she hated the hardship visited on women by the male

supremacy endemic to Buddhism. Quick-witted, strongly grounded in what she knew, and unafraid, Ayya Khema could be formidable.

Her forthrightness could cause friction with students and associates. Women who came to the Nuns Island wanting a warm, motherly mentor found instead a strong exponent of the Dhamma, a demanding teacher, and a consistent spiritual companion. Ayya Khema did not hesitate to speak her mind and assumed that we novices could handle what came our way and stay focused on our practice. Some people found Ayya Khema's manner authoritarian and brusque, and at times people's feelings were hurt by her treatment of them. I believe Ayya Khema was not much interested in personality, her own or anyone else's: she focused always on the goals of liberation and equality, and she emphasized the necessity to cleave to practice. Sometimes this prevented her from attending to the complexity of human relationships and opening to others' limitations and perspectives. She was flawed, as we all are; at the same time she lived a life of immense value to others.

ৎ Ayya Khema taught often in the United States, particularly in California, where one of her daughters lived. I first met her at Dhamma Dena, the meditation center in the Mojave Desert headed by Ruth Denison. Years after my stay on the Nuns Island, I sat with Ayya Khema in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and at Green Gulch Farm in California. During this time she was establishing a center in Germany, and she regularly went to Europe to teach. Often she spoke at the conferences and events sponsored by Sakyadhita, the international association of Buddhist women, which she had helped to found.

This human life is short, Ayya reminded us, and the priority is to get on with the practice. She embodied the Theravadan concept that the teachings matter, not the teacher. This insistence upon the message rather than the messenger informs Ayya Khema's many books, which have been published in English and German and translated into numerous other languages. They are all, with the exception of a recently published autobiography, collections of her Dhamma talks. Her genius as a teacher lay in her ability to present the essence of the Buddha's teachings in simple, accessible prose. This she did without notes or sources of any kind, quoting frequently from the suttas, speaking distinctly, in a strong voice, as her large eyes assessed

her audience. She was an impressive, inspiring exponent of the timeless wisdom of the Buddha's teachings. Her printed talks, including the ones in this volume, reflect her conviction and clarity.

In 1988, at the Chinese Hsi Lai Temple near Los Angeles, Ayya Khema received full ordination in the nuns' lineage that extends back to the *therīs,* the enlightened women ordained by the Buddha himself. Ordination within this Chinese lineage in most cases is not accepted by the Southeast Asian Theravada sanghas of monks—Ayya's tradition—but it was the only ordination open to her. One can argue that ordination is an external gesture that is meaningless in terms of actual spiritual attainment, but Ayya Khema understood its importance for the validation of her own and other women's efforts; women so utterly committed to the path of Buddhist renunciation deserved to be recognized by the worldly establishment of their tradition.

Over the years Ayya Khema spoke up for ordination of Theravada nuns on several continents and in countless gatherings great and small. She pointed out that without full ordination the nuns are, particularly in the eyes of Asian communities, spiritual nonentities, not deserving of material support, proper training in Dhamma, nor the respect accorded the monks. As so visible a spokeswoman, Ayya drew much critical fire, yet she never sacrificed her convictions in order to be accepted by the Southeast Asian Buddhist establishment. She will be best remembered for this campaign she waged. Her name and her efforts are known throughout the Buddhist world, wherever there are women in robes. Indeed the changes in attitude and behavior toward nuns that have come about, still partial and gradual in many areas but happening nevertheless, are the result of the activism and strong inspiration of Ayya Khema and a few other valiant and determined female renunciants. Her example and her message have kindled a light in the hearts of countless women who had been inured to second-class status and official neglect, and showed them a way to express their full humanity. Nothing could be more essentially Buddhist than spiritual equality regardless of gender; Ayya Khema knew that in challenging the establishment she expressed the deeper truth of Buddhist teachings.

In the almost fifteen years I knew Ayya Khema my respect for her grew. Her fidelity to her chosen path never faltered, her mistakes were honest ones, her limitations no worse than mine, and her strengths far exceeding any I could imagine possessing. Remembering her now, as I last saw her,

dying of cancer yet fully alive and focused on her task, I realize my respect for her had deepened to love. She was a woman of great heart and vision, and unshakable courage. She was one of Buddha's lions. May her roar echo in these pages and out across the world to generations of followers-of-the-way to come.

Sandy Boucher ॐ November 1998

Preface

Before the Buddha died, 2,500 years ago, he gave a last discourse. This talk is recounted in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta (Great Passing Discourse)* and is preserved in the Pali canon, the sacred books of Buddhism. During his ministry of forty-five years the Buddha had taught all that was necessary to reach the goal of liberation. In this last phase of his life his primary concern was to impress on his disciples the need to put those same teachings into practice.

In the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, when Ānanda, his cousin and faithful attendant, voices his hope that the Buddha will give some last instructions to the community of monks and nuns, the Buddha tells him that he has withheld nothing "with the closed fist of a teacher who keeps some things back." And he emphasizes that his disciples need not depend on him for leadership: "Therefore, Ānanda, be islands unto yourselves, refuges unto yourselves, seeking no external refuge; with the Dhamma as your island, the Dhamma as your refuge."

He then goes on, "Those disciples of mine, Ānanda, who now or after I am gone, abide as an island unto themselves…having the Dhamma as their island and refuge…it is they who will become the highest [enlightened], if they have the desire to learn."

The twenty-four talks in this book are given in the spirit of the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* and are all aimed at our own practice, "having the Dhamma as our island and refuge." While they elaborate and interpret the Buddha's words, they are based on his discourses and his answers to questions.

The first chapter helps us understand what it means to "take refuge" in the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha. The second chapter begins with an expression of homage and trust in the Dhamma and goes on to describe the

inner opening of heart and mind we need to "seek no other refuge." Both chapters appear at the beginning of the book as an offering, which we may use or not, as we see fit. Having finished the book, we may return to them and find them more meaningful.

Perhaps we will find only a few of the other chapters helpful at the present moment. But that too will be a great opening, nonetheless, because the Dhamma will have then become a part of our inner life and can grow and expand until it becomes all of us.

ఌ My thanks go to all the nuns, anagarikas, and the lay men and women who have listened time and again to my expositions of the Buddha's teachings. Without them, these talks would not have happened, and this book would not be possible.

A very special thank-you to my friends whose continued understanding and generosity have supported my work and the publication of this book. Those who typed the manuscript from tapes made during the talks have given freely of their time, energy, and love to the propagation of the Dhamma.

May everyone connected with this joint undertaking reap the excellent karma caused by their gift. May this book contribute to happiness and joy in the hearts of its readers.

Ayya Khema
Buddha-Haus, Germany
December 1995

Opening the Heart and Mind

1

Taking Refuge

A Kind of Love Affair

Taking refuge in the Enlightened One *(Buddha),* the teaching *(Dhamma),* and the community of enlightened disciples *(Sangha)* has a deep significance. A refuge is a shelter, a safe place. There are very few safe places in this world. In fact, to find a totally safe shelter anywhere in worldly life is impossible. Physical shelters burn down, get demolished, disappear. Buddha-Dhamma-Sangha is not a physical shelter but a spiritual one, a haven protected from the storm. On the ocean the storms, winds, and waves make progress difficult. When a ship finally reaches the shelter of a harbor, where the water is calm, it can come to anchor. This is what it means to take refuge in Buddha-Dhamma-Sangha.

We feel that we have finally found the place where we can come to rest: the teaching that promises, without a shadow of a doubt, that there is an end to suffering, to all the ills besetting mankind. The teaching, the Dhamma propounded by the great teacher and perpetuated by his Sangha, shows us the way. "Sangha" here means those who become enlightened through the Buddha's teaching, not necessarily those who wear robes. When we accept that promise by realizing the possibility of an end to suffering and by trusting in the Dhamma's efficacy, taking refuge is very meaningful.

Buddhaṁ saraṇaṁ gacchāmi	To the Buddha I go for refuge.
Dhammaṁ saraṇaṁ gacchāmi	To the Dhamma I go for refuge.
Saṅghaṁ saraṇaṁ gacchāmi	To the Sangha I go for refuge.

It is essential to understand the meaning of the Pali. Otherwise we are

repeating words in a foreign language just like parrots, who don't know what they are saying.

When we feel that taking refuge is a reality for us, our hearts open up in devotion, gratitude, and respect toward Buddha-Dhamma-Sangha. We feel grateful that cessation of suffering is available; we feel devotion to the path, which promises an otherworldly reality; we feel appreciative of those who made propagating the path their life's work.

Taking refuge can become the most important thing in our lives. Everything that we do can be done for Buddha-Dhamma-Sangha. I can carry stones for Buddha-Dhamma-Sangha, and they weigh nothing. But if I carry stones because somebody tells me to carry stones, they're heavy and the work is tiring. It is not difficult at all to perform tasks for the highest ideal that promises another level of being once we have seen that the reality in which humanity lives is unsatisfactory and are willing to let go of it.

Most of us gladly take refuge—with utter devotion, gratitude, and respect—in someone who has reached the most elevated consciousness possible and is able and willing to explain the path in such a way that we can actually follow it.

When we feel gratitude, devotion, and respect, we have love in our hearts. Love and respect go hand in hand with the spiritual path. These two feelings are appropriate and essential for any relationship we may have, but even more so for the spiritual path, which is the closest relationship we can have because it concerns our own being. Heart and mind must both be engaged. The mind understands and the heart loves, and unless that fusion happens, we may limp along on one leg. The integration of intellect and emotion helps us walk ahead steadily.

Unsteadiness in our practice will again and again bring dissatisfaction into our hearts and also skeptical doubt: Am I doing the right thing? What's this all about? Why don't I do what everybody else is doing? Skeptical doubt arises because a lack of emotional connection to our practice leaves us shaky. We need to be solidly grounded and have both heart and mind wholeheartedly involved in all our actions.

In this human world we are beset by troubles, difficulties, and constant fears for ourselves and our loved ones. Finding a refuge, a safe place within all that anxiety, is so rare and valuable that most people cannot fathom its importance.

We call Buddha-Dhamma-Sangha the Three Jewels, or the Triple Gem *(Tiratana),* because they are of the utmost value. The jewels are not the physical bodies of the Buddha and the Sangha but the transcendence that they represent, the *nibbānic* consciousness, overriding all human desires and foibles.

Being able to take refuge is not only rare but denotes excellent karma. But such a wonderful opportunity will bear fruit only if we take refuge with our hearts and not just with our mouths.

All of us have at least once in our lives been in love, and we can remember the feeling, especially if the love was reciprocated. It felt marvelous, didn't it? The same exhilarating emotion can be ours if we love Buddha-Dhamma-Sangha, because we meet all three within our hearts. This can be a perpetual love affair, and whatever we do, we do for the ones we love, which becomes an easy task. Energy becomes natural and doesn't have to be aroused over and over. It arises from certainty and direction, from a heart fully connected to all we do.

The Buddha promised that we can come to the end of every bit of suffering that ever was in our hearts, and that we can reach the end of all anxiety, fear, and worry, the end of even the smallest niggling feeling that something isn't right. When we enter the path leading to the final elimination of all *dukkha* (suffering), we enter a relationship that can purify us totally and that will eventually make us part of the Enlightened Sangha. If taking refuge is understood in this way, we derive great benefit from it.

The same chants that encourage gratitude, devotion, and respect also help us memorize the teaching, leading us thereby to wisdom and insight. Here I give the English translation of the Pali original.

Homage to the Buddha:
Indeed the Blessed One is thus:
The accomplished destroyer of defilements,
A Buddha perfected by himself,
Complete in clear knowledge and compassionate conduct,
Supremely good in presence and in destiny,
Knower of the worlds,
Incomparable master of those to be tamed,
Teacher of devas and humans,

Awakened and awakener,
And the Lord by skillful means apportioning Dhamma.

Homage to the Dhamma:
The Dhamma of the Blessed One is perfectly expounded,
To be seen here and now,
Not a matter of time,
Inviting one to come and see,
Leading inward,
To be known by the wise each individually.

Homage to the Sangha:
The Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples has entered on the good way.
The Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples has entered on
the straight way.
The Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples has entered on the true way.
The Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples has entered on
the proper way.
That is to say:
The four pairs of humans, the eight types of persons,
This Sangha of the Blessed One's disciples is fit for gifts,
Fit for hospitality, fit for offerings, and fit for reverential salutation,
As the incomparable field of merit for the world.

Wisdom has three stages. The first one is knowledge acquired by hearing or reading. We reach the second stage when we make this knowledge our own by taking its guidelines to heart and trying to actualize them through thought, speech, and action. As we do this more and more, our thoughts, words, and deeds are purified, and the third and highest stage of wisdom arises.

We have all seen statues or pictures of the Buddha. Nobody knows what the Buddha really looked like, for in those days there were no cameras, and no drawings of the Buddha were made either. The statues and pictures we see depict each artist's idea of beauty and compassion.

We can make our own Buddha statue in our minds, according to how we visualize perfection and beauty. We can let golden rays emanate from it, make it the most wonderful thing we can possibly imagine, and carry it around in our hearts. This will develop love for ourselves and also help us

to love others, since we see that they might be carrying the same beautiful statue around in their hearts. Even if they speak differently and look different from us, they still carry the same beauty in their hearts.

Unless we practice loving feelings toward everyone we meet, day in, day out, we're missing out on the most joyous part of life. If we can actually open our hearts, there's no difficulty in being happy. Anyone who has a successful love affair has a happy heart.

When we love the Three Jewels it is the kind of love affair that cannot disappoint us. Our lover does not run away or pick someone else. And since we haven't yet discovered the depth and profundity of the loved one, new horizons open up all the time. When we become enlightened, the whole consciousness of our beloved, the Buddha-Dhamma-Sangha, will be available to us, and we cannot possibly be disappointed.

This is a kind of transcendental relationship, not dependent upon a human being who will eventually die and who is imperfect. It is a relationship with perfection itself, which is difficult to find in the human or any other realm. We are extremely privileged to have that opportunity. Yet we must also turn our perception toward our imperfect inner reality and recognize clearly what the Three Jewels mean for us. Then loving devotion will arise and fill us. When we see the greatest beauty and purity, the greatest wisdom, we cannot help but love their expression.

We have a lot to be grateful for, and it is our own good karma that has made it possible to be here at this moment. The Dhamma protects the Dhamma practitioner. We are protected because our reactions are dependable and we have found the pathway to freedom. This is the only safety we can find.

2
The Dhamma of the Blessed One

The Dhamma of the Blessed One is perfectly expounded,
To be seen here and now
Not a matter of time,
Inviting one to come and see,
Leading inward,
To be known by the wise, each individually.

The first line of this chant proclaims real faith in the Dhamma—not a belief in everything without inquiry, but an inner relationship of trust. When we are faithful to someone, we trust that person, we put ourselves in his or her hands, we have a deep connection and an inner opening. When we have faith in the teaching of the Buddha, this is all the more true. Those aspects of the Dhamma that we do not understand we leave in abeyance, but that does not shake our faith and trust.

Dhamma is the truth expounded by the Enlightened One, the law of nature surrounding us and imbedded within us. If we feel that it is "perfectly expounded," then we are very fortunate, for we have found one thing in this universe that is perfect. There is nothing else to be found that is without blemish, nor is there anything that approaches such perfection. If we have that trust, faithfulness, and love for the Dhamma and believe it to be perfectly expounded, then we have found something beyond compare. We are blessed with an inner wealth.

"To be seen here and now" means that understanding the Dhamma is up to each one of us. The Dhamma has been made clear by the Enlightened One, who taught it out of compassion, but we have to see it ourselves with an inner vision.

"Here and now" means never forgetting the Dhamma, but being aware

of it in each moment. This awareness helps us to watch our reactions before they result in unskillful words or actions. When we see the positive within us, we cultivate it; when we see the negative, we substitute the positive. When we believe all our thoughts and claim justification for them, we are not seeing the Dhamma. There are no justifications, only the arising and ceasing of phenomena.

"Not a matter of time" means that we do not depend upon a buddha being alive in order to practice the Dhamma. Some people think there has to be a perfect teacher or perfect meditation. None of that is true. Mental and physical phenomena *(dhammas)* are constantly coming and going, changing without pause. When we hang on to them and consider them ours, we will believe any story our mind tells us, without discrimination. We consist of body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness, which we grip tightly and believe to be "me" and "mine." We need to take a step back and be a neutral observer of the whole process.

"Inviting one to come and see, leading inward": the understanding of the Dhamma leads us into our inner depth. We are not invited to come and see a meditation hall or a Buddha statue, a stupa or a shrine, but to see the dhammas arising within us. The defilements as well as the purifications are to be found inside our own hearts and minds. The arising and ceasing phenomena, which are our teachers, never rest. Dhamma is being taught to us constantly. All our waking moments are Dhamma teachers, if we make them so.

Our minds are very busy, remembering, planning, hoping, or judging. We could make our body equally busy by picking up little stones and throwing them into the water all day long. But we would consider that a foolish expenditure of energy, so we direct the body toward something more useful. We need to do the same with the mind. Instead of thinking about this and that, allowing the defilements to arise, we should direct the mind toward something beneficial, such as investigating our likes and dislikes, our desires and rejections, our ideas and views.

When the mind inquires, it does not get involved in its creations. It cannot do both at the same time. As it becomes more observant, it remains objective for longer periods. That is why the Buddha taught that mindfulness is the sole means of purification. The clear and lucid observation of all arising phenomena eventually shows that there are only mind and body

constantly expanding and contracting, in the same way as the universe does. Unless we become very diligent observers, we will not notice that aspect of mind and body and cannot know the Dhamma "here and now," even though we have been "invited to come and see."

"To be known by the wise, each individually" means that no one can know the Dhamma for another. We can chant, read, discuss, and listen, but unless we watch all that arises, we will not know the Dhamma by ourselves. There is only one place where the Dhamma can be known—within our inner being. It has to be a personal experience. Meditation helps. Unless we inquire into our reactions and know why we want one thing and reject another, we have not seen the Dhamma. This practice will also give us a clear perception of impermanence *(anicca)* because our desires and dislikes are constantly changing. We will see that the mind, which is thinking, and the body, which is breathing, are both unsatisfactory *(dukkha).*

When the mind does not operate with an uplifted, transcendental awareness, it creates suffering *(dukkha).* Only a measureless, illumined mind is free from that. The body produces dukkha in many ways, through its inability to remain steady. Seeing this clearly will give us a strong determination to know Dhamma by ourselves.

Wisdom arises from within and comes from an understood experience. Neither knowledge nor listening can bring it about. Wisdom also means maturity, which has nothing to do with age. Sometimes life experiences may help, but not always. Wisdom is an inner knowing, which creates self-confidence. We need not look for somebody else's confirmation and goodwill; we know for ourselves with certainty.

Treading the Dhamma path is like walking a tightrope. It leads along one straight line, and every time we slip, it hurts. When we first start to walk on the tightrope we are not used to balancing. We sway all over the place, going in many directions, wherever it is most comfortable. We may feel restricted and coerced, not being allowed to live according to our natural instincts. Yet to walk on a tightrope we have to restrict ourselves through mindfulness. These restrictions may at first feel irksome, like fetters or bonds, but later they turn out to be liberating.

To have this perfect jewel of the Dhamma in our hearts, we need to be awake and aware. Then we can prove by our watchfulness that "the

Dhamma of the Blessed One is perfectly expounded." There is no worldly jewel that can match the value of the Dhamma. Each one of us can become the owner of this priceless gem. We are most fortunate to have such an opportunity. When we wake up in the morning, let this be our first thought: What good fortune it is for me to be able to practice the Dhamma.