

Contents

6	In This Very Life	
	Sixth Army: Fear	70
	Seventh Army: Doubt	71
	Eight Army: Conceit and Ingratitude	82
	Ninth Army: Gain, Praise, Honor, Undeserved Fame	86
	Tenth Army: Self-Exaltation and Disparaging Others	91
4	THE SEVEN FACTORS OF ENLIGHTENMENT	97
	Becoming a Noble One	97
	Mindfulness	99
	Investigation	103
	Courageous Effort	110
	Rapture	136
	Tranquility	146
	Concentration	150
	Equanimity	157
	The Factors of Enlightenment Developed: Healing into the Deathless	164
5	THE VIPASSANĀ JHĀNAS	171
	Softening the Rigid Mind	171
	Blowing Out Suffering	176
	Hindrances and Antidotes	187
	Comprehending the Nature of this World	190
	Reaching the Higher Vipassanā Jhānas	198
	On Nibbāna	205
6	CHARIOT TO NIBBĀNA	213
	Appendices	
	Seven Factors of Enlightenment Chart	263
	Hindrances and Antidotes	268
	The Progress of Insight	269
	Numerical Lists	274
	Glossary	280
	Index	293
	Foreword by Joseph Goldstein	7
	Acknowledgments	8
	To the Reader	9
	Technical Note	10
	BASIC MORALITY AND MEDITATION INSTRUCTIONS	11
	A Basic Sense of Humanity	11
	Meditation Instructions	13
	Walking Meditation	16
	The Interview	22
	CUTTING THROUGH TO ULTIMATE REALITY	29
	One: Attention to Impermanence	31
	Two: Care and Respect	32
	Three: Unbroken Continuity	34
	Four: Supportive Conditions	36
	Five: Reapplying Helpful Conditions from the Past	42
	Six: Cultivating the Enlightenment Factors	42
	Seven: Courageous Effort	45
	Eight: Patience and Perseverance	51
	Nine: Unwavering Commitment	56
	THE TEN ARMIES OF MĀRA	63
	First Army: Sense Pleasure	64
	Second Army: Dissatisfaction	64
	Third Army: Hunger and Thirst	66
	Fourth Army: Craving	67
	Fifth Army: Sloth and Torpor	67

Foreword

When Sayadaw U Pandita first came to teach in the United States in 1984, we knew him only by reputation as the successor to Mahāsi Sayadaw of Burma. But in ways that we could not have imagined at the time, his teaching and presence helped to open many new doors of understanding. As a meditation master, he has guided us through the subtleties of practice; as a scholar, he has brought new meaning and life to the timeless words of the Buddha; and as a great spiritual friend, he has inspired us to seek the highest freedom.

Just as the Buddha came from the warrior class of ancient India, so too, is Sayadaw U Pandita a spiritual warrior of our time. His emphasis on heroic effort is joined with a joyous confidence that liberation is possible in this very life. Sayadaw has helped us recognize our own inner capacity to overcome the limitations of the conditioned mind.

This book is a collection of talks from the first three month retreat that Sayadaw taught at the Insight Meditation Society. He describes in detail both the practical journey of awakening and a profound theoretical model of understanding. These discourses reward a thoughtful reading, allowing the familiar aspects of the teachings to mature in our minds, and challenging us with new perspectives on some old and cherished viewpoints.

This book is a treasure house of applied *Dhamma*. May it help to awaken wisdom and compassion in us all.

JOSEPH GOLDSTEIN
Barre, Massachusetts

Acknowledgments

This book came into being through the help of many people.

We want to thank all those who arranged for and supported Sayadaw U Pandita's course at the Insight Meditation Society, Barre, Massachusetts in 1984. Venerable U Aggacitta expertly and lucidly translated Sayadaw U Pandita's discourses. Ron Browning asked that the tapes be transcribed. Evelyn Sweeney patiently transcribed them. U Mya Thaug went over every word of the manuscript, and Eric Kolvig edited one draft of it. We are grateful to Bruce Mitteldorf for his generous contribution toward the printing of this book.

Kate Wheeler steadfastly and very skillfully devoted months to editing the talks – none of this would have been possible without her.

SHARON SALZBERG
Insight Meditation Society
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To the Reader

It is my humble and sincere wish to help you discover for yourself the state of inner peace through the essays in this book, based on the *Dhamma*, or way of truth, taught by the Buddha and also following the tradition of the late Venerable Mahāsi Sayadaw of Rangoon, Burma. I am trying my best, as far as my wisdom can take me, to provide this service to you.

The publication of these essays helps fulfil five beneficial purposes. First, it may give you access to new aspects of the *Dhamma* which you might not have heard before. Second, if you have already heard about these subjects, you may be able to consolidate your knowledge of the *Dhamma*. Third, if you have doubts, these essays may help you to clear them. Fourth, if you have certain pet views and preconceptions which are incorrect, you may be relieved of them by proper and respectful attention to the *Dhamma* of the Buddha.

The last and perhaps the most fulfilling aspect is that you may be able to tally your own experiences with what is written in this book. If your practice is deep, it can be a joyous and rapturous occasion when you realize that your experiences conform to the theory.

If you do not practice meditation, perhaps these essays can inspire you to begin. Then wisdom, the most potent medicine, can bring you relief from the sufferings of your mind.

I offer you my personal best wishes and encouragement. May you reach liberation, the highest goal.

SAYADAW U PANDITA

Technical Note

The Pāli terms in this text are meant to introduce a precision of meaning that is not possible in English. It is hoped that readers will pause and reflect in a way they might not, had the terms simply been translated.

Pāli is used this way in Burma and in most of the communities in countries where Vipassanā meditation is practiced. As Pāli words are incorporated into living languages, they inevitably lose endings or suffer other minor changes. The Pāli in this text will differ slightly from academic usage. This reflects the use in Sayadaw U Pandita's native Burma, and more importantly, the refined application of these terms specifically to meditation practice and understanding. For ease of readability, we have used English forms for pluralization or adjectival case.

The first use of a term in the text is italicized and subsequent uses are generally unemphasized. Definitions will be found in the Glossary, pages 280-292.

1 Basic Morality and Meditation Instructions

We do not practice meditation to gain admiration from anyone. Rather, we practice to contribute to peace in the world. We try to follow the teachings of the Buddha, and take the instructions of trustworthy teachers, in hopes that we too can reach the Buddha's state of purity. Having realized this purity within ourselves, we can inspire others and share this *Dhamma*, this truth.

The Buddha's teachings can be summed up in three parts: *sīla*, morality; *saṃādhi*, concentration; and *paññā*, intuitive wisdom.

Sīla is spoken of first because it is the foundation for the other two. Its importance cannot be overstressed. Without *sīla*, no further practices can be undertaken. For laypeople the basic level of *sīla* consists of five precepts or training rules: refraining from taking life, refraining from taking what is not given, refraining from sexual misconduct, refraining from lying, and refraining from taking intoxicating substances. These observances foster a basic purity that makes it easy to progress along the path of practice.

A BASIC SENSE OF HUMANITY

Sīla is not a set of commandments handed down by the Buddha, and it need not be confined to Buddhist teachings. It actually derives from a basic sense of humanity. For example, suppose we have a spurt of anger and want to harm another being. If we put ourselves in that other being's shoes, and honestly contemplate the action we have been planning, we will quickly answer, "No, I wouldn't

Burmese meditation master Sayadaw U Pandita is the rarest kind of teacher, one who can show us that freedom is as immediate as breathing, as fundamental as a footstep. In this book he describes the path of the Buddha and calls all of us to that heroic journey of liberation.

This is a truly alive transmission of the Buddha's teachings...a direct and explicit guide to the freeing of the mind here and now. The Buddha's teachings can be realized by each one of us, and *In This Very Life* shows us how.

Joseph Goldstein, author of *The Experience of Insight*

In This Very Life is an exquisitely precise and profound analysis of mind states and meditation practice written in remarkably clear, readable style. Roger Walsh, Professor of Psychiatry and Philosophy, University of California

Vital teaching from one of the greatest living meditation masters.

Daniel Goleman, author of *The Meditative Mind*