

Snow in the Summer

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This book is a compilation of extracts from letters written by Sayadaw U Jotika, a Burmese Buddhist monk, to his Western students — ten to fifteen years ago. These letters have been collated under the topics as indicated by the chapter headings below.

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In short, you can open this book and read any page — no need to read it in any particular order.

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Introduction: Sayadaw U Jotika (Autobiographical)

The need to express is very strong. It is very important for our growth. If you don't have any opportunity to express, you lose creative thinking. Well, that's another attachment. I can't force myself to let go of it. Many times I picked up my pen to write, and many times I put it down. Something hard to put into words is in my mind. Please don't think I'm preaching. I'm just expressing my personal point of view (feeling, observation) which seems true to me.

I know that a lot of things I've said can easily be misconstrued. A person can use them against me. I can't really make my points clear in a letter. Even to talk about them would be a very difficult task for me. Anyway I tried to express my views. The things I've said might not agree with the great books. I don't expect you to agree with me. They are not universal truths. Just my opinions as of October 1986. I'm liable to change, as anything else. Excuse me for my mistakes. I'm a man who keeps himself upset all the time, believe it or not. One day I'll be happy. Here is something about me. I was born into a Muslim family on 5 August 1947. I was educated at a Roman Catholic missionary school. I read about most of the things in this universe. I was called a communist when I was young because I did not believe in any organised religion. Do I believe in organised religion now? Well, who knows? I thought of becoming a *bhikkhu* (monk) from the age of nineteen but instead I went to university, and found the education very unsatisfactory. I then educated myself. I found that almost everybody was after position, money, pleasure — very superficial.

So I decided education was not worth the trouble. I couldn't go on living for the rest of my life like that. I left my family although I love my daughters very dearly. I have no place in this competitive society. Being a *bhikkhu* and living in the forest is the best way of life for me; it suits my temperament. Yes, my grandmother was Shan. She lived a long, peaceful life and died when she was about eighty. I was fourteen then. We were very close. I think of her quite often.

I like Shan people, too. They are very mellow. There are a lot of Shan people around Maymyo; some living in Ye Chan Oh Village where we are. There is another village called Yengwe where most of the villagers are Shan, and they speak the Shan language. Some old Shan ladies look like my grandmother — quiet, peaceful, loving, simple, patient, content, unimposing and very friendly. How unlikely to find such people in modern cities. People who are rich are very suspicious; they think people are after their money. You asked me about my relationship with my family. It was never good. The only person I love in my family is my elder sister. She loves me although she could not understand me.

Yes, "I've never felt I belong to that family". I was like a stranger in my family. Maybe some day I'll go and see my sister. My relationship with my par-

ents was a love-hate relationship. (Both of them are dead now.) I was very lonely at home. I know how you feel about your relationship with your family. It's OK. We find love and understanding elsewhere. No matter what you do and no matter what happens I will always be your father, brother, friend, counsellor, etc.

I live on the border of two different cultures — Eastern and Western. Born in Burma (Myanmar) and educated in a Western-style school. Being exposed to all different kinds of religions — Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Islam — and also to materialism through philosophy. I ended up not believing in anything seriously. Western psychology — Freud, Jung, Adler, Rogers, Laing, William James, and many others; Western philosophy — Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, Kant, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Bertrand Russell, Wittgenstein, Bergson, etc. — enough to make a person very confused. I studied electrical engineering; read advanced scientific theories, including black holes. I know how little people are sure of anything. The most important thing to know is your own mind. Yes, I want freedom. And this should be known from the outset. My freedom is not for sale. Living too long in one place makes me feel like I'm in prison. I'm a lion, according to the Burmese tradition. I really feel like roaming in the mountains like a mountain lion. Ah, freedom... I can't tolerate any restriction, bond, or tie. Even attachment that restricts my freedom is not to my liking. People get attached to me and I see that as a danger to my freedom. I love freedom and I can't exchange it for anything. I love freedom of mind too. So I am seeing more and more what imprisons the mind. Although I've read a lot of the Piṭaka [see glossary for definition], when I find something (see something) it's like I'm making a new discovery. To discover for myself those simple truths — what a great joy! Eureka!

I can't stand those people who talk like they know about something just because they've read about it in books. But sometimes I catch myself doing just that, though I'm doing it less and less. Mountain lion I am. Alone, but not lonely anymore. I have learnt to live alone. Sometimes I want to express my deepest understanding, but it's hard to find a person who knows how to listen, understand and appreciate. Mostly I'm the one who listens. People like to talk to me. I think wanting to be independent and free (physically as well as mentally) is my strongest desire. There are different forms and stages of freedom. I must follow my nature, at all costs. I might have to disappoint my friends. So many people expect so much of me. It is very unlikely that I can/will fulfil their expectations of me. I am heading towards my own freedom, not conformity. I've been reading *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* by Carl Jung. I am very interested in some of his ideas. Some of the things he said about himself really expresses me also. So I am going to quote some of the passages to you: "As a child I felt myself to be alone, and I am still, because I know things and must hint at things which others apparently know nothing of, and for the most part do not want to know."

Loneliness does not come from having no-one around oneself, but from being unable to communicate the things that seem important to oneself, or from holding certain views that others find inadmissible. If a man knows more than

other people, he becomes lonely. But loneliness is not necessarily inimical to companionship, for no-one is more sensitive to companionship than the lonely man, and companionship thrives only when each individual remembers his/her individuality and does not identify him/herself with others. I have to obey that 'inner law' which is imposed upon me, leaving me no freedom of choice. Of course I did not always obey it. How can anyone live without inconsistency? ("Talking about rebirth — in my case it must have been primarily a passionate urge toward understanding which brought about my birth, for that is the strongest element in my nature.")

"I have also realised that one must accept the thoughts that go on within oneself of their own accord as part of one's reality. The categories of true and false are, of course, always present but because they are not binding they take second place. The presence of thoughts is more important than our subjective judgment of them. But neither must these judgments be suppressed, for they are also existent thoughts which are part of our wholeness." (So, be mindful of everything.) A person who has not passed through the inferno of their passions has never overcome them. They then dwell in the house next door, and at any moment a flame may dart out and set fire to his own house. Whenever we give up, leave behind, and *forget too much*, there is always the danger that the things we have neglected will return with added force. (Don't sit on top of your passions; be mindful of them. For me, 'passed through' doesn't mean 'acted out', it means being aware of them, experience them mindfully.) "Indeed, our 'cult of progress' is in danger of imposing on us even more childish dreams of the future the harder it presses us to escape from the past. Reforms by advances, that is, by new methods or gadgets, are of course impressive at first, but in the long run they are dubious and in any case dearly paid for. By no means do they increase the contentment or happiness of people on the whole. Instead, they are deceptive sweetenings of existence, like speedier communications, which unpleasantly accelerate the tempo of life and leave us with less time than ever before." (So, live as simply as possible.)

I have done without electricity, and tend the fireplace and stove myself. Evenings, I light the old lamps. There is no running water, and I pump the water from the well. I chop the wood and cook the food. These simple acts make man simple; and how difficult it is to be simple. In Bollingen, silence surrounds me almost audibly, and I live in modest harmony with nature. An indescribable stillness prevailed.

In the Tower at Bollingen it is as if one lived in many centuries simultaneously. The place will outlive me, and in its location and style it points backward to things long ago. There is very little about it to suggest the present. If a man of the sixteenth century were to move into the house, only the kerosene lamp and the matches would be new to him; otherwise, he would know his way about without difficulty. There is nothing to disturb the dead, neither electric light nor telephone. (*Carl Jung*)

There is a lot more left, but I want to stop here. You must be bored to death. I think I am a rebel in some ways. All my life I've been a rebel. My fantasy: living deep in the mountains, away from people and noise with bare necessity; quietly and peacefully. Do I cry? Well, who would believe that an old monk like me still has tears to cry. My nature is like slow burning ember. You don't see the flame but it burns nonetheless. I don't want judgment; I want understanding. I am also not perfect.

I am becoming even more imperfect. So I'm scared of those who are judgmental. I want to be left alone. They say a monk shouldn't be attached to anybody or anything but I can't do that. I'm not just a monk; I'm also a human being. I am not trying to be somebody. I just try my best to understand whatever is happening in my life, in my mind, in my heart. No name and no fame; when I die nothing will remain.

Chapter 1: Mind, Mindfulness and Meditation

Whether meditation, as I understand it, is not creating something (calm, concentration or insight, or what not). Rather it is seeing clearly whatever is happening in the moment in a very simple way. Aiming at, or creating calmness, or insight is trying to start from where we should be. So we always fall back to where we are because we did not start from where we are. Another way of saying it is: Meditation is complete internal communication, or life (problems) understood in depth is meditation.

So there should be no difference between untangling the content of one's 'stuff', working with problems (neurotic, or what not), and meditation. It is all part of the same process.

For me, doing counselling and giving guidance in meditation are not much different. So a person who does not understand people but has a lot of book knowledge is not a meditation teacher (or counsellor) but is a scholar. A person who teaches and guides people according to a formula should not teach!

Most Westerners need a lot of help just untangling the content of their stuff. For this, a worldly teacher can be very helpful... I understood this point a long time ago, and I am getting deeper into this matter. Even when I was in the USA my way of working with people was first to understand their life, their stuff, their problems, and see where they are stuck. Helping them see their problems clearly. The whole point of meditation is just untangling — to untangle internal and external tangles.

So there can be no cut and dried formula for everybody. People are unique. So there should be flexibility. The Buddha himself gave different instructions for different people.

My understanding is that a meditation teacher must be very sensitive. He (or she) must understand himself very deeply. He must be aware of his own tangles; be very creative in dealing with people; understand every person in a deeper way; be gentle and patient in guiding; not be pushing or demanding to make progress which can cause a feeling of inadequacy and unhappiness. He must understand where his student is. You know, we must start from where we are, not from where we should be. So, a teacher must understand where a student is and give him/her guidance so that the student can start from where he/she is.

Meditation, as it's been taught to and practised by many people, has its limits. That's because they don't understand it properly and they are trying to do it as if it is something apart from their life.

Real mindfulness meditation is all-inclusive. No part of our mental and physical life should be left out of our mindfulness. Every aspect of our life should be well understood.

Real practice is natural, moving, living, limitless, should be practised everywhere, every time. A specialised and fragmented approach is unacceptable for me. I am beginning to feel that a specialised, standardised approach is harmful

(I have never been able to force, restrict myself to do that). For me meditation is *not* something special.

Everything seems so trivial to me. Crazy games. Meaningless hurry, hurry. Why so much doing?

The best thing I can do for myself is to be mindful. Look into your mind (life) and see how dependent you are on people and books. See how easily you get bored. Can you live with boredom without doing anything about it, except being mindful of it?

Doing nothing is actually not easy. I believe you know that from your experience. What happens to your mind when you do nothing? Have you carefully observed that? Boredom is unbearable. So we try to find something to do, to run away from boredom. Just try to do nothing for a few days.

Non-doing is not easy. If you try to do non-doing, then you are doing. If you try to accomplish something, you are doing. And your ego is strong. If you don't do anything then you become meaningless and empty.

Non-doing is a state of mind which is free from ego. Doing without reacting; without a person doing it. And most important of all, doing wholesome deed without expecting anything in return.

Understanding comes to those who are not in a hurry to understand. Understanding is like a fruit tree; it takes time to become mature. One cannot force it to bear fruits.

Instead of running away from boredom, if you can work through it you will find a kind of wakefulness, alertness, life, clarity beyond that. Then the mind becomes workable. Mostly we give in and become busy, busy. When we're busy we feel useful, important. When we're doing nothing we feel useless and feel ashamed. Some people take pride in being busy.

There is a kind of dullness in the mind which is always there. We need something exciting, some kind of stimulant, either talking or reading or travelling or... to keep the mind awake. Otherwise it is in a half-wakeful state. If you can train your mind to be awake all the time, without any of those stimulants, you will find a new kind of energy. Only by being constantly mindful can you get there. Whether you are on retreat or not it is important to be mindful all the time. Doing a retreat is useful. But it is very important to keep up your practice so that you can maintain your clarity. Otherwise you go downhill again. It's like swimming upstream: If you don't make a continuous effort you go downstream.

Effort in meditation is like effort in learning to ride a bicycle. In the beginning you put too much effort and you fall off. Later on, by doing it repeatedly, you learn to put just enough effort to keep you on the bicycle so you can put more effort to move forward. You learn by doing it. The most important point, I think, is continuity. If you know what mindfulness means then, be mindful more and more. By being mindful you learn how to be mindful with relaxed effort. If you think you need to put more effort, do it and see how it affects your mind (mindfulness). You will learn how to maintain your mindfulness. You will find that your mind is not at ease when it is not mindful.

I want to be free and peaceful, bodily and mentally. So I'm looking to see what makes a person *not* free and *not* peaceful. The more I can see what's binding me, the better there is the chance of becoming free. The answer is quite simple — attachment and pride. But to see them when they are in action is most important, not just to think about them.

I don't want to be busy. Being busy is a wasteful way of living. When you're busy you get so involved that you cannot see what's going on in your mind. You become unmindful. So I don't want to be a busy teacher. Never. I talk about this again and again.

If you want to get the most out of meditation do it wholeheartedly. Do it as if there is nothing else you want to do in your life. Beware of distractions!

To learn how to swim you have to get into the water. No use sitting on the bank and asking people to teach you how to swim. With minimum instruction you can get into the water and teach yourself how to swim. Choose a suitable object (or two) for yourself, and be mindful of them continuously. Continuity is the most important point. Thinking cannot make the mind happy. Watch your thoughts without wanting to control them. When you see them clearly they will stop. Thinking is such a big burden.

The most important thing is to be aware of your own mind. Also your motives when you do things. Mostly people are not aware of their motives when they speak or do things and, in most cases, when they are aware of their motives they justify them.

Mindfulness practice (meditation) is awareness of everything happening in all six sense bases all the time, from the moment you wake up until the last moment before you fall asleep. Not just when sitting.

Much more important to be mindful of and understand your fantasies, ideas you are attached to, frustrations, loneliness, and any other feelings, weak or strong.

If something works for you (like noting), do it. Do it long and do it well so that you know all about its advantages and disadvantages.

Meditation is the best *kusala* (wholesomeness).

If you are mindful and wise, you never lose.

The ideal is to be mindful always.

I'm happy when I'm alone. Talking is boring. I told you about my feeling of drifting away into the universe. Things (and also people) are losing their influence on me. Hard to talk about this feeling. I feel much lighter in my heart.

Don't take the emotion — commotion seriously. And don't try to justify it either. You are living your own life and you have a right to do whatever you think is right for you at that moment. If you make a mistake, learn from it.

If you make a mistake and you're in trouble, look into it without complaining or blaming (oneself or others) or running away; without justifying yourself or getting upset about it. If you can see this without any resistance you can overcome (grow out of) that very quickly and easily. I am getting better at that, now.

Relationships are so frustrating. I told you many times: I'm becoming alone. So I understand very well what you said: "I retreat within myself". If you watch your mind really closely without wanting to be different, it will resolve your knots, but don't watch your mind only in order to resolve your knots. That will cause a conflict. See *anattā* (no-self) in your mind.

I think one day I'll go away and live alone somewhere. I'm getting tired of religion. I'm just preparing my mind.

I've been meditating more this last month. So nice to be alone. I want to read less and less. Now I want to read my mind more. I don't learn anything in depth from books. Only when I see my life (my mind) clearly can I learn something in depth.

For a human being, understanding human nature in general and understanding his/her mind in particular is the most fruitful thing.

What I'm doing here is so important for me (I mean delving into my mind) that I don't want to interrupt it unless there is a good reason. In fact, I want to go to a much more secluded place, and live alone and meditate all the time, without interruption. Nothing else is worth the trouble. You have read; you have talked; you have discussed; you have thought a lot; and still you are confused. Enough of all those things.

This clarity makes the mind a lot less attached. My mind is now very much detached and clear. I don't want to get distracted. So you are not confused about being confused? Some people don't know they are confused. They are too busy or crazy to think about that. All I can tell you is don't think too much and be mindful. You know thinking too much makes you more confused.

If you can be mindful when you are sick you will learn something very deep and meaningful. You will see how lonely you are and how meaningless everything is. When the worst of the worst happens we will be really alone.

I'm seeing this loneliness more and more. There are very few people who can reach us and understand us. Between each person there is a big chasm of misunderstanding.

Mindfulness is part of our nature. It can be developed naturally with ease.

Can you explain to her how to be aware of her thoughts and feelings? Not control. Just simple, bare awareness of mind. The chattering, the monologue or dialogue going on in the mind. The comments, judgments, etc.

Mindfulness is a way of life (living). Wherever we are and whatever we are doing we should do it mindfully. Thinking is a big hindrance to mindfulness. We should be mindful of that. Actually, it is very important to be aware of thinking. Watch your mind without blaming or judging. See it as a thing in itself; not you, not yours.

In meditation, do whatever comes easily and naturally. The most important point is to be interested and it should be interesting, to be happy doing it. There should be some satisfaction in doing it. Once something becomes boring there is a negative attitude towards it. With that sort of negative attitude it is tiring to go on doing it. You said, "*saddhā* (confidence) = energy". Yes, when you have *saddhā* in your practice you have energy to do it.

So, if you are interested in watching your mind instead of rising and falling, why not? The mind is the most interesting thing in life.

Walk more and be mindful. The more you think of how to improve your situation the more unhappy you become. Always planning for the future — “I will be happy if I live in a good place.” Always: “I will be happy if...”. Never, “I am happy...”. Enough planning, improving.

‘Becoming’ is so predominant in our life. We don’t see that there is no ‘being’. How can there be ‘becoming’ without ‘being’? Just see what is happening at this moment without any motive to improve it.

I understand your struggle and pain. I know you are trying your best to be a good disciple of the Buddha. It is hard. It is not even easy to keep the five precepts. Yes, some people think *sotāpatti maggaphala* (the path and the fruit of streamwinning) is nothing. They don’t understand how extraordinary it is not to have (to be rid of) wrong views; to overcome rites and rituals (superstitions). To come to see clearly that *dhamma* practice is the only way that could lead to liberation, happiness. They don’t know what an extraordinary thing it is not to have any envy (jealousy); to rejoice in other people’s prosperity; to share whatever you have with others; and to have overcome all the doubts about one’s practice (whether it is the right way or not). What a relief it is not to have doubts about the path one is walking on.

I can understand how hard it is to practise *sati*, for someone who is living such a busy life. I am not one hundred per cent mindful either. It would be better if you can cut down on any unnecessary activities. We listen to the dictates of our minds and run around doing things that our minds tell us to do, but if we watch our minds more closely we will see that we don’t have to believe all the things that our minds tell us to believe, and we don’t have to run around like mad doing all the things that the mind tells us to do.

“He who would accomplish anything, must learn to limit himself.” (*Goethe*) We waste so much time in trivial pursuits. The Buddha said: “*appakicco*” (few duties or responsibilities).

If you limit yourself more carefully, you will be able to develop deeper awareness. If you cannot be mindful in your daily life, you cannot develop understanding of life. The understanding of life and the understanding of *Dhamma* go together. First of all, learn to live your daily life meaningfully, sanely.

I’ve found very few people who are deeply interested in *Dhamma* as you are. Most people are not even aware of their states of mind. We all have good (wholesome) states of mind and bad (unwholesome) states of mind. To be aware of both states of mind is the first and most important thing to do. We don’t really have any real control of the mind, and that is why it is *anattā*. See that you are not making these bad (unwholesome) mind states.

To understand the nature of mind, that is, the nature of *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (aversion), *moha* (delusion), *māna* (comparing), *issā* (jealousy), *macchhariya* (stinginess), *kukkucca* (worry), and so on; and also to understand *sati* (mind-

fulness), *samādhi* (concentration), *paññā* (wisdom), *mettā* (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), etc., is more important than to attain some stage of enlightenment or to get rid of any *kilesa* (defilement). Understanding comes first; overcoming happens (follows) naturally, later. So, please, be willing to watch whatever is happening in the moment. See the nature of it first. If you are upset because there is *lobha*, or *dosa*, or... you will not see it clearly because you are agitated, you have *dosa* (aversion). See that too. Only when you are willing to look at your mind without feeling guilty, without wanting to do anything about it, will you be able to see it clearly. Then it will lose its power over you because it is exposed — it is transparent.

Please don't condemn greed, pride, anger, and so on. You can learn quite a lot from them. You cannot grow up unless you know about them very well. Only when you can see them with a clear mind can you learn about their true nature, especially their *anattā*-ness (selflessness).

The first and most important step in meditation is non-identification with mental (*nāma*) and physical (*rūpa*) phenomena. It is not overcoming anything except overcoming identification with the *nāmarūpa* process. Why do people get upset? Because they identify with *nāmarūpa*. So, when there is greed, lust, attachment or frustration, anger or pride, etc., the most important point is to see them as a natural phenomenon without taking them as something personal. Don't try to overcome them. Being upset is another ego trip. Is there a person (*attā*) who is upset? Being upset is just another natural phenomenon. Being upset is ego boosting. If the mind doesn't get upset, if there is non-identification in the watching mind, which means there is equanimity, the mind will be able to watch greed, etc., with interest, calmness and clarity, and see it for what it is — a fleeting, insubstantial, impersonal, natural phenomenon. Identification makes all defilements stronger. Without identification they are not so strong. A *sotāpanna* [see glossary] still has greed, anger, etc., but there is no identification with *nāmarūpa*. Only *anāgāmis* [see glossary] and *arahats* [see glossary] are free from greed and anger. But only an *arahat* is free from *māna*. If you are upset because you enjoy music, you are being too demanding, you are asking (expecting) too much. But if you see the enjoying mind and watch it with equanimity, only then will you see it for what it is. Being upset (which is *dosa*) is a close companion of greed and pride. Because you think: I am a meditator so there shouldn't be greed or pride arising in my mind, you get upset. When there is greed or enjoyment of any kind, say instead: Please stay and let me study you. They are really wonderful. Greed is the greatest magician. Learn (see) the way it conjures up pleasant feelings. The mind gets so tricked by greed that we don't see it as a magician, we see it as me.

The mind is tricky. The mind wants change, something different. It craves for entertainment, stimulation. Boredom is a great problem. That's what most people are doing — running after stimulation in one form or another.

If we don't watch out we can become very self-righteous because we are meditators, or practising Buddhists, or we know *Dhamma*; we know what is good and what is bad..., which is *māna* again.

When there is *māna* in your mind, be willing to see it clearly. Don't try to drive it away. To see it clearly is very important. The rest will take care of itself. Only when one becomes an *arahat* is one totally free of *māna*. Don't practise humility; it will be forced humility. Just be mindful of *māna*. If you see your mind clearly you will become humble naturally. You won't feel like you're practising humility. You become less proud without your consciously doing it.

Without understanding the immediate effect of wholesome and unwholesome states of mind there cannot be real appreciation of *Dhamma*. Outward submission to any form of religious practice will never have a profound and lasting result. To understand the reaction of the mind to every experience through the six sense doors is very important, especially the influence of ideas and the attachment to them.

Have you understood (do you understand) wholesome (*kusala*) and unwholesome (*akusala*) states of mind? I think this is most fundamental in the practice. I don't want to use the words good and bad in connection with *kusala* and *akusala*. I don't mean understanding them by reading about them in a book or by thinking about them. I mean by really seeing them immediately. To see the difference of the qualities of minds when it is wholesome and when it is unwholesome.

Sometimes when I see these very clearly I come to understand that it is not worth having an unwholesome state of mind no matter what the situation (circumstance) is. There must be a proper way (without having an unwholesome state of mind) to confront a trying situation. This is wisdom. To be able to live in any situation without an unwholesome state of mind. To get that wisdom, first we must be clearly mindful of the mind reacting to all situations. To everything we see, we hear, etc.

To see whatever is happening in the mind without wanting it to be different whether it is unwholesome, unpleasant, not beautiful, not desirable, e.g. anger, lust, doubt, conceit, and to see whatever is pleasant happening in the mind without wanting to hold on to it, without trying to make it last longer (calm, tranquillity, rapture, clarity, etc.). This is very important.

The moment the mind wants to be in control of the situation (to oppose, obstruct or hinder what is happening, or to create, to bring into being, or to make it last longer), it loses its balance.

Opposing is aversion. Holding on to is attachment.

But not to oppose doesn't mean to encourage either, and not to hold on to doesn't mean to discourage. Just simply watching is mindfulness. Watching without getting involved.

We are so used to doing something, making something that we don't know how to simply watch. We want to have control over things. We want to get

involved. So we get into trouble. I don't mean to say: Don't get involved, don't control because then you will be trying not to get involved, not to control. Which is again trying to be in control. So, if you are trying to control, simply be aware of that.

Actually, more and more I can see that without mindfulness life would be very superficial. Mindfulness gives depth and meaning to life.

It is something hard to understand. People say they want to be happy. But, then, how come they are not interested in being really mindful? It must be because they think happiness lies somewhere else, like in sense pleasure, such as in getting what you want, in becoming somebody, in being in control of some important position, in some pleasurable feeling.

People (you and I) want excitement, something stimulating (intellectually, for me). Sometimes we want to rest; we get tired of stimulating things. Then we want to practise mindfulness, keep the mind quiet. Sometimes I get really tired, feel burnt out, of reading, talking, thinking, planning. Then my mind turns away from all those things. I can see how meaningless they are, how unnecessary. At that time, it is very easy to be just simply mindful. So I wish I felt burnt out all the time. So, it is OK to feel burnt out. Siddhattha was burnt out when he left home.

So many petty schemings in the world. "Our highest insights must and should sound like follies and sometimes like crimes when they are heard without permission by those who are not predisposed and predestined for them." (*Nietzsche*)

It is very important to keep the body and mind well-tuned, like you tune your car or your radio. Only when in good condition will they be sensitive, able to detect properly the frequencies, the vibrations, and the signals.

So, it is very important to learn how things affect our body and mind. Food, weather, exercise, talking, reading, sensual pleasures: everything affects body and mind. And also meditation. Meditation makes the mind more sensitive.

The mind likes to dwell in the past or in the future: It touches the present only tangentially, doesn't want to stay in the present; always looking for distraction — watching TV, listening to the radio, or a cassette, eating, talking, smoking, reading (yes, I forgot that — reading), and what not. Do we really like mindfulness? Well,... yes... but... Ha, ha. No wonder we are superficial.

We use mindfulness as a painkiller. Only when life becomes too painful do we want to go to a quiet place and meditate. Otherwise we are quite content with distractions.

One cannot be totally free from anger. It will come when there is sufficient cause. All one can do is to see that there is anger. It helps if one can see that people are suffering.

See how much you hurt yourself when you are upset. It's not worth getting upset over anything. Be mindful. See anger only as anger, not 'my anger'.

Don't say you should not be angry. It is very important to be realistic. We have ideals, but we might never attain those ideals. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't have ideals. It means we must be aware of our capacity. So, don't be discouraged because you have ups and downs. Try to be mindful as much as possible. Try your best.

I used to feel bad (ashamed) about having faults (not being perfect). In some cases, it is other people's unrealistic expectations projected onto me; and unknowingly I slip into the role they expect of me. It is impossible; it is even dangerous; it makes me feel inadequate. But now I have learnt to be myself.

Please be mindful even though it is hard sometimes. When you think it is impossible to be mindful, that is the time when it is most important to be mindful.

It is more important to meditate when you are restless. When you think it is impossible for you to meditate because your mind is crazy — that is the most important time for you to meditate.

In the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the Buddha said: “*Vikkhittaṃ vā cittaṃ vikkhittaṃ cittaṃ pajānāti.*” (When the mind is restless, one knows that the mind is restless.) You are not expected to do more than that.

The Buddha did not say you should feel guilty for being greedy or angry. You know what's happening. Don't deceive yourself. That's all you can do. So, be mindful but don't beat yourself up. Acceptance and honesty is the most important thing.

Just knowing the states that the mind is in would be enough. If you try to do anything more than that, you'll end up being even more frustrated. There is no control, and that means *anattā*. *Sarāgaṃ vā cittaṃ sarāgaṃ cittaṃ pajānāti.* (When the mind is lustful, one knows that the mind is lustful.)... *Pajānāti* (to know clearly); that's all, not more than that. To have a calm and peaceful mind all the time is impossible for someone who is in contact with so many people every day.

I know how reading some *dhamma* books and/or listening to some *dhamma* tapes can make one feel guilty. The ideal is too high. We cannot reach it. We don't need to feel guilty about enjoying sense pleasures as long as we don't harm anyone. See what enjoyment of sense pleasure is.

Sukhaṃ vā vedanaṃ vedayamāno sukhaṃ vedanaṃ vedayāmī pajānāti. (While enjoying pleasant sensations one knows that I enjoy pleasant sensations.) Where does guilt come in? Who taught us to feel guilty whenever we enjoy our life? Enough! Even though we know mindfulness is the best thing we can do for ourselves, we get distracted very often. We want to be stimulated.

Watch your mind and see what it is doing. If you understand your mind, most of your problems will disappear because most of the problems are mind-made — they have no reality outside your mind.

The best you can do is to acknowledge, to be aware, to know the state of the mind is in without blaming yourself, or justifying; without wanting it to be different, or running away; without feeling guilty or ashamed.

Look at your mind as *mind*, not as 'my mind'. Whether it is 'good' or 'bad' see that as *anattā*; see that it arises because it has sufficient conditions to arise, not arising on its own. Not a being, not me, not mine. *Kilesas* (defilements) are very interesting.

Expectation is the source of disappointment. In itself, it even makes the mind restless.

Sometimes, I think that having an ideal of calmness, peacefulness and cheerfulness makes a person even more frustrated.

Those who are living a secluded life might be able to be equanimous (but not me). As soon as you have contact with people (people who are inconsiderate, selfish, who take advantage of you), you will find it difficult to have equanimity.

Calmness is necessary to develop deep insight; it is the opposite of agitation. There is nothing wrong with having some calmness, but be careful of attachment to calmness — that attachment is dangerous. Calmness makes the mind clear. It refreshes the mind and helps mindfulness.

Yoniso manasikāra (right attention) is the proximate cause of *kusala* (wholesome states of mind). There can be no *kusala* without *yoniso manasikāra*. *Ayoniso manasikāra* (wrong attention) is the cause of *akusala* (unwholesome states of mind).

We are doing auto-suggestions every day, but most of us don't know that. Some are positive and of course some are negative. Suggestions are very much like attitudes.

The most important thing to know is your own mind.

The only thing you have direct experience of is your mind, which includes, your thoughts, feelings, attitudes, etc. All the rest is inference. Even when you look at your hands and think that you see its shape and colour, it has gone through many stages. How do you see shape and colour? What is shape? And what is colour?

A friend reported to me that when he was meditating and was aware of sound, at first he experienced sound as coming from somewhere at a distance. Later when he became more mindful he experienced sound in the ear, happening in the ear. And then when he became even more mindful he experienced sound happening in the mind. Without mind there can be no sound.

Nothing is a good substitute for mindfulness. You said, "I knew many of my problems would go away if I were to continue this practice." We often say, 'If, if, if...' What is it which keeps us from really doing it? Why if? It seems like we don't want our problems to go away. Or we don't really believe we can make it. So it is better to say if. This keeps us hoping. If we really do it and don't succeed, then we will have no hope anymore. So better not to really plunge into it. Just hoping. If you don't really do it, you can always say 'I can'. This is the way the mind plays tricks. To protect itself from feeling hopeless, it never does anything wholeheartedly.

Why do we try so hard to convince others?

When I came back from America many people asked me whether there were a lot of people in the USA who believed in Buddhism. They were very happy that Westerners are practising the Buddha's teachings. Yet they themselves are not really practising. Why are they happy that Westerners are practising, or becoming Buddhists? Why do you feel happy when others believe in what you believe?

People are very funny.
We don't know anything for sure,
But we know that we suffer.
If we don't get agitated
We'll find an answer.
The pride of having an answer
Has caused my blindness. (*Sayadaw U Jotika*)

Do whatever you want to do. Meditate, take robes, do penance. You know what's best for you. If I may give you any advice though, I would say: Be mindful.

Practise relaxing meditation. It's quite simple. Sit in an easy position or lie down if possible. Go through your whole body starting from your forehead, checking all the tension spots and for dull pain. As you become aware of the unpleasant feelings more and more you will learn to relax the muscles, and the tension or pain will slowly fade away. Go over every part of your body without exception. Even the inside of your body. Do it very slowly and patiently, down to your fingers and toes, front and back. Do it once and over again.

Before I became a monk I had read many books on meditation. So I thought I knew all about it. After being a monk for about a year I thought: Now only do I know what meditation is, and after being a monk for three years I thought: Only now I really *do* know what meditation is. It goes on like that.

When I was young I read many books about explorers and I was very disappointed that there weren't any unexplored places left. Since I found the psychological world I know that this is a wilderness world which has been explored by many. Many return into this world without proper instruments, and get lost. I have the best instrument — mindfulness. Sometimes I am surprised when I find a lot of people who are religious and don't know even the simplest thing about mindfulness. Some people said that it was the first time they'd heard that one can practise mindfulness anywhere, anytime no matter what one is doing. Many people thought that one should practise meditation when sitting only. And that one should not do anything while meditating. They think that is the *only* time to meditate which means they are not willing to watch their mind when they are relating to people.

In their daily life, many people do a lot of sitting practice but they don't see their greed, desire, anger, hatred, pride, envy, jealousy. A lot of meditators do not see the importance of watching with honesty the defilements arising spontaneously in their daily life, in their interactions with people, and when talking to people. I emphasise a lot about being mindful while talking — that's when people are the least mindful. Most meditators have a scheduled time to meditate. They do formal sittings, and they choose some object like breathing, the rising and falling of the abdomen, touching or feelings. They have a choice of their object of meditation (which is OK in the beginning). Choice means exclusion (they exclude some things), meditation should be about inclusion. My understanding is that people should first try to be aware of their defilements.

Bhāsīte sampajānakārī hoti. (A person who is practising mindfulness talks mindfully.) Talking is a big part of our life. It is very beneficial to develop mindfulness while talking. It is not easy but it is also not impossible. Be mindful of what you want to talk about, and, when talking, be mindful of your lips moving, the tone and loudness of your voice, or whatever is related to talking.

The most painful experiences in life arise from relationships. So it is very important to be mindful when we are relating to people. We should be aware of our attitude towards the people we relate to. To watch our attitude toward anything is very important. If we don't have the right attitude we will create a lot of problems. A lot of meditators who do not see their attitudes clearly cause a lot of problems.

I try to be mindful while riding in a car, talking to people, doing things. A good opportunity for one to practice mindfulness is when one is busy. Practising what I teach!

To be mindful is the best thing I can do for myself. If you can practice mindfulness for mindfulness sake you will understand mindfulness better.

People are full of conflicting wishes and desires. Most people don't know what they really want to do. They change their minds back and forth. Inconsistency is the rule. The mind is full of conflicting feelings.

The shadows of the trees are long. The sun is going down. The evening breeze is cool. How quiet and peaceful it is here. It is like a *brahmā* world. Simplicity, contentment, restraint (*saṃvara*), mindfulness, thoughtfulness, endurance, loving-kindness, compassion, and understanding of the mind and body are what makes life here so peaceful. I never feel boredom. I live peacefully and I hope to die peacefully in a forest. I watch my mind. Things come and go. Nothing lasts forever. Even the worst of them doesn't last long. So when they come I know they will be gone in the next instant. I don't have to do anything to make them disappear. I want to see them as if I'm looking through a microscope at something very interesting. But the moment I focus my mind on whatever is arising I see only a glimpse of it. Then it's gone. I want to say: Please stay, let me see you well. After all, we are old acquaintances. But they are afraid of close scrutiny. So mindfulness is my constant companion. I watch mindfulness. I am mindful that I am mindful. Awareness of awareness.

The most important thing is to be mindful. To be so mindful that thinking comes to a stop and you see what life is all about, where the problems come from. Your problems come from your mind. You won't understand what I mean when I say, '*Your problems come from your mind*', but when you reach a point where you understand your mind really deeply then you will know. I live peacefully because I understand my mind deeply. Wisdom can overcome *kamma*.

Another point I noticed a long time ago about mindfulness is that you must do it continually. The same for keeping precepts either as a monk or as a layman. If you say I will keep the precepts and be mindful in retreat but not try your best when out of retreat, then you are not true to the *Dhamma*. (It's like

committing adultery when married to a woman — a funny simile?) The relationship becomes a fake. You can't get real joy. You can't even be really serious. Well, that's the way I see it. One must be always true (faithful, not commit adultery) to what one is doing (precepts, mindfulness). Otherwise you can't respect what you are doing, or respect yourself. And without that respect your action will not be joyful, fulfilling, fruitful.

Mindfulness has no motive or attitude. It only sees things clearly, without judging, without wanting things to be otherwise. Practise mindfulness to see what is. That's all.

We are not aware of a great part of the process which we call our mind, and we've forgotten a large part of our experiences and feelings and decisions in the past (past lives too). Yet those things have much influence on the way we feel and think, and that part which we are not very well aware of, or have forgotten but is still part of our mind, I call the unconscious mind, for want of a better term.

I am becoming more and more aware of the dark side of my mind, and as I become more accepting it becomes more revealing and I become more at ease.

We use words when we communicate, but words are so vague in meaning.

A lot of things have lost their importance for me. I am not concerned about a lot of things anymore. That gives me more freedom to see what's going on in my mind, in my life, and what the mind is really doing. I am deeply interested in meditation.

Much of our suffering is our own creation. The mind is a great magician: It creates suffering and it suffers; it creates pleasure and it enjoys; it is bitten by a snake which is its own creation and suffers the effect of the poison. If only it knew and did not create so much suffering, ninety per cent of the mental pain would not be there any more.

I have come here so that I can have more time to go deeper into my own mind and heart. I want to become more acquainted with myself — to see all the conflicting motives, desires, wishes, ideals, in my mind and heart. I want to be familiar with all the dark nooks and crannies of my mind, and all the creeping and crawling spiders, scorpions and vipers, all the lions and eagles, etc. Not that I want to drive them away. I just want to become a good friend to my mind, a kind and understanding friend. Unless I know them very well, they will not let me sleep peacefully. I want to get a clear idea of how to relate to people.

I don't like people thinking of me being a certain type of person which I really am not. But that is inevitable. Everybody in the world is misunderstood. And I will still be upset if they understand me correctly. As long as I'm clear about my motives, it's OK. Where you live and with whom you associate with is very important. Some places and people put your mind in a bad mood, and to be in a bad mood all the time can really damage your mind. We are very subtly influenced by people around us. I am becoming more detached from people and organisations. People use people for their own self-aggrandisement in the name of helping. "Whoever fights with monsters should see to it that in the process they do not themselves become monsters." (*Nietzsche*)

I have been watching my mind for so many years now. So I am very much aware of my mind. I know how stupid, silly, foolish, mischievous the mind can be, but because I am aware of it, it cannot carry me away.

I have forgotten most of what I've learnt from books. I don't want to remember too many things. But I know a lot about myself, my mind, my mental states, all the bad, silly things about me. I've been taught by people that such things are shameful, that I should feel guilty for having such thoughts. I refused to believe them. I know that all of us have such thoughts but most of us deny that. I'm not going to tell people all about me. I accept (I don't resist) all about me, good and bad. "We cannot change anything unless we accept it." (*Carl Jung*) Understanding and accepting myself gives me peace of mind, ease of mind. I'm OK just the way I am. I will go on seeing my mind without rejecting, judging, resisting, denying. One person I really want to know well is myself.

I prefer my mind empty, clear, and light and not burdened with learning. I have nothing to prove, nothing to defend and nothing to propagate.

I did a lot of foolish things when I was young. (I still do foolish things sometimes.) I can't even talk about them but I don't try to forget them. The memory of the things I did come into my mind; I don't resist them. I don't even feel very upset although I feel the pain.

Everybody makes mistakes. I have learnt a lot about what happens to the mind when a person makes a mistake — how the mind burns with guilt; how the mind wants to forget the past (mistakenly); and especially how it (mistakenly) keeps the person from feeling worthy of the good things in life (such as love, respect, devotion, honour, etc.). I forgive myself. Given the circumstances, how could I have avoided doing those things? But do I need to go on feeling guilty for the rest of my life? No. I've learnt from my mistakes and I'll try my best not to repeat them. What more can I do? Nothing.

Accepting the truth will free the mind.

I'm not all-wise; I'm very foolish sometimes. Mindfulness of my mind is my compass. When I make mistakes, mindfulness of my mind always tells me that I am in trouble.

There can be no real spiritual growth without deeply understanding ourselves just the way we are. Momentary peace and bliss is very encouraging but that alone cannot bring transformation.

Opinions that agree offer security. Yes, I can go on being upset about people for not being open-minded, but I don't want to do that anymore. I cannot change them; I am not responsible for them; I will help them if I can. Most people don't know what is happening in their mind, in their life. They think they know but they don't. Most people are very heavily conditioned. You need tremendous awareness and honesty to overcome that conditioning. You are conditioned and I am conditioned too. Do we know that we are conditioned? Most of our thinking and reactions are conditioned reflexes. So let us work first on ourselves. When we ourselves are free from conditions, then I think we can do something

to help others become deconditioned. As long as we are upset, we will hurt others in the name of helping. Self-deception. Sometimes it can be so complete that you don't even know. Defensiveness makes you blind to your own weaknesses (self-deception). We deceive ourselves to be happy. Sometimes it is painful to see our weak points.

Don't carry all the past memories and all the future cares in your mind. Live each and every moment mindfully. The future will take care of itself.

As we learn we grow out of many of our attachments, desires, dreams, hopes. Disillusionment is painful in the beginning because it is associated with disappointment, but later on it frees the mind. It makes one become more realistic. Life is not a fairytale. There is no 'they lived happily ever after' in real life. To be truthful, we must change. Like a snake which sheds its skin because it has become too tight, we must shed our cherished dreams. Instead of complaining that it has become too tight for us to breathe, we must shed our old skin and grow a new one, allowing us to breathe more easily. But we must remember that when the time comes to shed that again, we should not be reluctant. It is always painful to shed old skin. One becomes very vulnerable and over-sensitive because the new skin is not strong enough yet to stand contact with the environment.

I have become more and more independent psychologically. I don't feel lonely.

"How to be mindful/watchful of the deep down mental states?" You can sense the feeling. Be mindful of the feeling and wait patiently for the thing to surface. Don't use force. Keep your mind soft.

Happiness is having a quiet mind, and being completely mindful, so mindful that there is no thought, no sense of I. This happiness comes when all thoughts of the past or future do not occur — no 'I', no yesterday, no tomorrow, no plan. In that timeless moment there isn't an 'I' experiencing that bliss. There is only the happiness. Real happiness has no reason. When you are really happy (with no sense of I) you cannot say 'I am happy because...' If you try hard to be happy you are sure to fail. Real happiness comes without being invited.

Can you watch your mind so closely that it comes to a point where thinking stops? The mind is peaceful when there is no thought but just awareness of what is. Thinking cannot make the mind peaceful. There are problems which cannot be solved, and the best way to deal with such problems is not to think about them. Thinking round and round just wears you out. Educated people like us think too much. We must admit that. We must discipline ourselves not to indulge in thinking too much.

Reading, talking, and all other distractions make a person forgetful. A person who does too much of (any of) these feels very empty, restless and bored when not doing them, or their mind becomes very dull without those stimulants.

Each thought wears and tears the mind. Thinking is a burden, a torture. You think you can find a way to make yourself happy by thinking about it. How long have you fooled yourself that way? And how long are you going to fool yourself? Enough thinking! Just see what's happening without thinking.

A lot of things have lost their importance for me. That gives me a lot more freedom to see what's going on in my mind, in my life.

A thinking mind cannot see; thinking is blind. A seeing mind does not think; seeing excludes thinking. Really seeing is not the same as noting. The more you think, the more you go round and round. If you see thinking really clearly, it must stop.

I'm not thinking. Thoughts are going on by themselves. It seems like they are self-perpetuating.

Don't think too much and don't do too much. To be able to meditate one should: not be busy; not talk much; not indulge in sleeping; delight in solitude; be aware of all the six sense doors; be moderate in eating.

How's your meditation these days? When you stop thinking, when you even stop noting, when your mind comes to complete silence, being alert and aware, then you see the fleeting nature, the dream-like nature of things.

In the box, there are some old newspapers. I started to read them, and I watched my mind. Distractions! Entertaining. Time-killing. Useless.

People get absorbed in entertainment and information, diverting their mind from the real, important things in life. It is much more rewarding to study your own mind and your own life, but most people are afraid to do that. Instead they want to forget themselves. They are running away from themselves; they don't have enough courage to face themselves. Or they are scared, scared they will go crazy if they think too much about themselves. But I'm not talking about thinking; I'm talking about watching. Yes, if you think too much about yourself, you will go crazy.

People feel empty and useless. To cover that they try to keep themselves busy. People feel important when they're busy.

Who can tell you what to do? Not me. Neither a guru nor a psychiatrist. You have to find out for yourself. I can only tell you: Be mindful and live a simple life, which I think you are doing anyway. We cannot have everything. We have to make a choice and let the rest go.

Less desire, less burden.

I have no doubt that craving, attachment, lust, and greed is the source of *dukkha* (suffering), and the only way to grow out of them is seeing through and through. Suppressing and/or expressing has not much value either. Understanding deeply is what counts.

No amount of explanation can make you understand what greed is unless you see it when it is functioning in your mind. It is like a spy; it has many faces and is deceitful. You've been deceived by greed.

Tanhā (greed), *māna* (pride, conceit, I-ness), *diṭṭhi* (wrong views) are *papañca* (hindrance to spiritual progress, illusion, delay). They are the cause of so much unnecessary activities, the cause of the prolongation of *samsāra* (cycle of birth and death), and the cause of delay for people to practise and become

liberated. *Papañca* expands mental and physical phenomena, keeping people busy and distracted.

Vitakka (initial thought, reflection) is initially putting (applying) the mind on an object, or initially taking an object into the mind, whereas *vicāra* is keeping the mind on the same object in a sustained way. *Vicāra* works together with *vitakka* in the beginning stages of meditation because the mind slips away from the meditation object. It has to be put back again and again and kept there. After some practice the mind does not slip away so easily but it needs effort to keep it on the object. After much practice it stays on the object. Both are mental concomitants (*cetasika*).

I have read Vimala Thakar's article 'Meditation, A Way of Life'. Here are some of the things I really liked in it:

... unless there is an innate passion to find out, to discover for oneself one will not be equipped to live the meditative way. Meditation is a total way of living, not a partial or fragmentary activity... Life is neither occidental or oriental... There is no excitement in a real enquirer, there is a depth of intensity, not the shallowness of enthusiastic excitement... Then that state of observation begins to permeate the waking hours. Whether you cook a meal, go to the office, or while you are talking, the state of observation begins to permeate all activities of the waking hours... When the state of observation is sustained the sensitivity gets heightened, and from morning till night you are much more aware than before... It is no use concentrating your attention upon the activities of the mind, to the exclusion of the rest of your way of living. Meditation is something pertaining to the whole being and the whole life. Either you live in it or you do not live in it. In another words, it is related to everything physical and psychological... Thus, from the small area of mental activity, we have brought meditation to a vast field of consciousness, where it gets related to the way you sit or stand, the way you gesticulate or articulate throughout the day. Whether you want it or not, the inner state of your being gets expressed in your behaviour... This co-relation of meditation to the total way of living is the first requirement on the path of total transformation... Very few of us realise that constant verbalisation is one of the greatest obstacles in the path of meditation... Life is a homogeneous whole and you can never fragment it... To be aware of the lapse or the gap is itself a kind of observation. (*Vimala Thakar*)

A fragmentary or specialised approach to life will not work. One needs an all-round understanding. In the body, every part is related to every other part. So it is in life: Every aspect of your life is related to every other aspect of life. The economic, sexual, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual aspects of your life are all related. You cannot keep them separate. If you try to keep them separate your life will be unfulfilling and unharmonious. There will be conflict, a schism, paralysis.

Have you ever read that the Buddha washed his feet, hands and bowl very carefully? Everything he did was spiritualised. That is true spirituality. It is related to every aspect of your life. So the way you talk, dress, relate to other people, eat, sleep, laugh — everything you do reflects your mind.

What do people mean when they say: “very deep meditation experiences”?

What is a streamwinner? Who can tell whether somebody is a streamwinner or not? Is there any difference between a streamwinner and an ordinary worldling? What is the difference?

Answer yourself. Don't bother to tell me.

How to think profoundly? You need a quiet, mindful mind; a mind which is not tired or agitated but seeing clearly. It is the seeing clearly which is important.

Conflicts we all have, both internal and external. Only clear awareness and wisdom can help. *Nissatta* (being-less), *nijjiva* (soul-less)!

Try to think more positive thoughts. Thinking is very powerful. And have things around you which will make you more cheerful. Read books that make your mind calm, serene and cheerful. Some books are depressing. And don't expect too much either from yourself or others.

After I'd practised mindfulness meditation for two years, I read Mahasi Sayadaw's book on mindfulness practice and found that most of what I'd experienced agreed with what he had said in his book (to my astonishment and delight). Better to practise long enough and then read the book on *nyanzin* (stages/progress of insight), but *nyanzin* is not a feather in one's hat. A *sotāpanna* will not break the five precepts. That's what the Buddha repeatedly said.

Some basic knowledge of what the Buddha taught is necessary. Without having heard about *Dhamma* from some good teacher it is impossible to practise it rightly. How much *pariyatti* (theoretical knowledge of the *Dhamma*) is necessary? That's the question.

Pañcavaggi — the group of five monks heard the *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta* and the *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*, and that was enough for them (to attain enlightenment). *Sīla* (morality) is necessary, without which one cannot be at peace with oneself. *Sīla* supports meditation and meditation supports *sīla*.

You will find all sorts of people in that country. Some are sincere, some understand *Dhamma*, but a lot of them are totally lost and mixed-up. Hindu, Zen, Tibet, Theravada, Western Psychology. Someone said it is *hin-lei-oh* (a type of Burmese curry with many ingredients) in America. All sorts of things mixed up and boiled. No perfection anywhere. If you don't know anything about *Dhamma* you can get even more confused. Go there for a visit and find out. Life is a series of experiments. Nobody can tell you whether you'll be happy there or not but you'll sure find a lot of freedom, freedom to live your life in your own way. As for the way others are living their life, what can one say? It's their life. Everybody is more or less a *bāla* (fool). Your understanding and practice of *Dhamma* is your only protection.

Yes, the more mindful one is the softer one becomes. One becomes more sensitive: more sensitive to pain; more sensitive to unhappiness; more sensitive to nonsense. One can get easily irritated by meaninglessness. You might feel upset because the world is full of people who are not even aware of their unwholesome states of mind. And they even expect you to share their attitude towards life (conduct). You might sometimes feel very unhappy that people not only do not appreciate *Dhamma*, but they even laugh at those who practice it. Sometimes they even intentionally give them trouble. These things happen even among monks. So understand people and forgive them. *Upekkhā* (equanimity) is very peaceful.

Sometimes, some people ask me why they become so easily irritated (upset) in their relationships with people. The answer is that they can't tolerate so much nonsense anymore. They don't want to waste so much time talking and gossiping. Before, they enjoyed talking, gossiping, killing time, talking politics. Now they can only tolerate a small dose of it. When they become mindful of what they are talking about, they feel it tastes bad in their mouth. They feel degraded, upset when the other party doesn't take the hint. They might even become rude. So you must be very mindful of that kind of mind state. Understand people and forgive them.

"The more I meditate and have *sati* (mindfulness) the more I want to run away from this mad, mad world." It would be nice if that were possible. But before you can change try to be tolerant and develop *upekkhā*, or else you will burn yourself out.

"You always try to help us, understand us, have you no need for others to understand you?" Yes, I don't need others to understand me but I would appreciate it if they did. To understand somebody is not so easy. I don't really understand others but I try. It's hard enough to understand oneself. If you don't understand yourself, how can you understand another person? And to understand yourself, you must be very honest with yourself.

It's really difficult to be honest with oneself. We lie to ourselves all the time. I am a hypocrite. It's painful to see that.

Maybe you forgot I am a human being too with my own share of foolishness. I don't think I can become perfect, and I don't want to be perfect. All I hope for is to see what is real in me. Even when I see my faults I don't get excited or upset. I am not in a hurry to remove them. I can't remove them. I can only hope to see them as they really are. And in most cases, even when I see them I distort them. The mind is very good in distorting things. Self-deception. I deceive myself most of the time. I'm learning to see self-deception more and more. I'm not really upset when I see self-deception. If not for mindfulness my life would be a bad joke.

To accept the inevitable is very important for peace of mind.

Real *anicca* (impermanence) is beyond story level. Reading something in a newspaper and understanding *anicca* is being intellectual. When you really see

anicca it is what you are experiencing in the immediate present. There is no thinking. It's hard to write everything in a letter. So much to say, so little space.

After all, what I've said is not really important. No big deal. It could be quite useless. What I've left unsaid, what I couldn't say seems to me more important. This is just beating around the bush.

When my mind is calm, I have nothing in my mind to write.

If you want the truth
I will tell you the truth
Friend, listen:
the God whom I love is inside. (*Kabir*)

People create ideas, and those ideas become prisons, but a man who can see through the walls can go through it.

If you can meditate well it doesn't matter what kind of clothes you wear. Labels don't mean much if you know what they are for. But people get attached to labels, packages. It is up to you to decide how many precepts you want to keep.

Choose a suitable object or two for yourself, and be mindful of them continuously. Continuity is the most important point. Thinking cannot make the mind happy. Watch your thoughts without wanting to control them. When you see them clearly they will stop.

I'm going to meditate more seriously. My mind is too full with too many worldly matters. I've travelled and talked too much. Now I want to be quiet again. Thinking is such a big burden. I am a man in a boat in the open sea: alone, without any radio to contact, but I have my compass (mindfulness).

When your thoughts become radical and you do not want to be misunderstood, you become silent, or you will say things that you are not really interested in saying. You say things that get near to what you want to say but you say it in such a way that people don't understand what you are saying. Sometimes you are happy that they don't understand what you are saying. Why do you want to express your thoughts? That is another attachment. If you let go of that attachment there will be silence and peace.

To be resisting all the time to people and situations, even though it is slight, can cause mental strain, which can cause exhaustion in the long run. Watch your mind and see how much reaction is going on to real and imaginary situations. See the mental strain. It is better to live in a place where you don't have to resist or react all the time. You might have to live alone (if you can stand loneliness).

“The deeper you feel the more silent you must be about your feeling.”

“Whereof one cannot speak thereof one must remain silent.” (*Wittgenstein*)

I would like to be a silent Buddha. Being misunderstood is too frustrating. Most people have not enough courage to see/accept the truth. They want some-

thing that will make them happy. Truth is sometimes frightening. Really. Being disillusioned is scary. There is nothing you can hold on to. Not even *Dhamma*. (What is *Dhamma*, anyway?) There is only to see, to understand. Most people are looking for something they can hold on to — a set of ideals; a goal; a method; a community; a sect; an order; anything they can identify with. Unless you can embrace loneliness you will not understand what friendship really means. For most people friendship is a means to overcome loneliness. Cultivate loneliness. Live alone as much as possible and see if you feel OK about that.

If you can really handle loneliness it will be nice to live in a place like that. If you can get a good friend to share that peaceful place with you it would be better. But I think the price is too much.

I hope you are happier now, doing something you like. Do you practice mindfulness always?

Chapter 2: Solitude

Solitude should be cultivated, bodily solitude as well as mental solitude. Bodily solitude means to be alone. I don't mean to say that we should avoid meeting with people. Rather I mean we should spend time by ourselves. Mental solitude means not thinking about anything but being alert and aware. Some people believe that when we are not thinking about anything, then we must be deeply asleep, or dull and sleepy. People don't understand the importance of solitude. They want to be with somebody who can give them some fun or stimulate them somehow. Craving for stimulation. When there is nothing to stimulate them they become bored. Even when they are alone bodily, they read or watch TV, listen to the radio or cassette, or they think about things they've done or about the things they will do. Being alone, not reading or watching TV, listening to the radio or cassette, and not thinking are things they never thought of as productive.

Wisdom is the fruit of solitude.
Solitude is recharging.

Life flowing out of deep stillness of my heart
Undefinable
Everything else is incidental. (*Sayadaw U Jotika*)

I'm now in M., arriving here a week ago. Nice and quiet. Simple. No big *dāyakas* (supporters) here, just village folks, farmers. A simple place with simple people. Only my mind is complicated. A lot of birds; I like to listen to them. Wind rushing in the trees, calming and soothing. So different from the busy, noisy cities. A totally different world. Big cities and big important people are very disturbing.

It's much easier to meditate here. I have no big ambition. Just living simply and seeing clearly. I cannot change the world; I cannot change anybody, not even myself, but I can watch. If I'm wise I will just watch without getting upset about anybody or anything. Who am I to carry the world on my shoulder?

Sometimes I wish I had a friend with whom I could really talk. A lot of people like to come to me. Wherever I go there are people coming to see me. Maybe they get stimulated, encouraged, and inspired to practice mindfulness, or at least relieved temporarily from the monotony to listen to somebody who is provocative, radical, and challenging. There are a lot of people running around doing things for me, offering this and that but there isn't anybody here with whom I can share what is really meaningful to me. At least I have learnt to keep my thoughts to myself and live peacefully.

Yes, the world is crazy but what can I do about it? Nothing. Why waste time and energy being upset about it.

It is raining slowly. No wind. Makes me feel calm. The trees are much taller than they were last year. In a few more years there will be a good forest here. The Forestry Department gave me about eight acres of land. Cheap, eh? Good spring water and good weather except in the hot season. Good enough food also; mostly vegetarian. I have all the things I need. A lot of solid time.

People don't come to disturb me. Sometimes a few people come to clean the monastery grounds. I have a mosquito-proof room with screen windows, a bed and an easy chair, books, medicines, papers and pens. Ah! What is there for me to be unhappy about?

Drinking a pot of good tea from a beautiful glass. It tastes and smells wonderful. Makes me feel fresh and alert. Celebrating the tea ceremony alone. Rain getting heavier.

As far as I know this is the only place where there is no disruption. Scarcity of food (rice) everywhere, but not here. It is now about 1.15p.m. So quiet. Some crickets and cow bells. The monks are meditating in their *kuṭi*(s) (huts).

I dreamed an unusual dream last month. In my dream I was holding a bunch of papers and tickets in my right hand and was going through the checkpoint in an airport, boarding a jet plane bound for America. Maybe it was because of what happened here which made my unconscious mind want to go away. No place is perfect. This place is good enough. The people here and also the monks are kind to me. I look after the monks when they are sick. They think of me as a doctor. Yet it is so hard to get medicines.

There are three forest monasteries in this forest. My place is the most secluded. No visitors most of the time. A few people come on full moon days to work. Since we don't need much, we have everything we need. I want to read some books, but I can't get any. Maybe I should let go of my craving for intellectual stimulation.

One day is almost the same as another. We walk up and down in the evening. Nothing has changed much in here, as if time has come to a stop or slowed down. The outside world is in a turmoil but here it is quiet; nothing to do, nothing seems important. All, or almost all, the problems seem imaginary. If only we knew how much of our problems are imaginary.

It is as peaceful as ever. Lots of birds here. No conflicts and no problems except the occasional minor ailments. My health is good — nothing to complain about these last four months. I'm learning to take care of myself. I eat a lot of vegetables, less oily food, and very little sugar. Peacefulness helps a lot. This place seems to be the best for me.

Life is very peaceful and quiet here: No fights, because there is no organisation here. I'm also getting less and less attached to many things and many people.

Cloudy today. It drizzled. Quiet. The birds are singing. Dried leaves all around. The trees are holding up their bare arms welcoming rain. Hot and dry. No problems. We drop all our leaves. We'll grow new ones when the first rain falls.

Now it's getting cold. Winter is here. Morning temperature is 58°F. The sky is very clear these days. Only a few puffy clouds way near the horizon. The air is cool and crisp. In the night with the full moon, it's really beautiful and peaceful.

Last night I went for a walk alone. Where are cares and worries? Couldn't find them anywhere. It's only imagination, I think.

It is early in the morning now, 4.45 a.m. All the birds are singing. There are hundreds of them in the monastery, and they seem to be pretty cheerful. Since the weather is quite warm nowadays they like to take baths. So I set out two small terracotta bowls (earthen bowls) of water for the birds to drink and swim. It makes me very happy to watch them bathing. They seem to really enjoy that. I give them rice every day. A lot of them come for the food and water. They don't come and take my food and water for nothing either — they sing for me and teach me not to worry; to take my life one moment at a time; and not to think too much and muddle my mind. To accept life as it is and also to be ready to die at any moment. They say life is hard. (Who said it was easy?) But still you can be cheerful and learn a lot from your life. And if you prefer you can get out of this round of existence. (Is it a merry-go-round?)

I am now sitting on the veranda of my little *kyaung* (hut) here, very quiet. I hear a couple of doves cooing from a distant tree, the wind in the trees. It's about 4 p.m. Rested for a while after a hot bath.

Sometimes I think of finding a cave in the mountains and going to live there alone, but nothing can bring real satisfaction.

I want to live a quiet and peaceful life. I have freed myself of all responsibilities. I want peace, freedom, and deep understanding of life. I don't care for having a following or disciples, recognition or fame.

I want you to understand the way I live my life: Simplicity, quiet, peaceful, with few possessions. I give away most of what I get anyway. So if I don't tell you what I need, it means I don't really need them. To live with few things is much easier for the mind. My friends are Ryokan, Thoreau, Zenon, and my *vinaya* (discipline) teacher.

You (I) should live in a place where you (I) feel totally relaxed, at ease, and psychologically free, free from the expectations of others; a place where you (I) feel really yourself (myself) and don't have to say or act to please anybody.

I have learnt to live alone. Sometimes I want to express my deepest understanding, but it's hard to find a person who knows how to listen and understand and appreciate. Mostly I am the one who listens. People like to talk to me.

Went for a walk in the forest. Very quiet. Met nobody. Only birds singing cheerfully. Human beings are gloomy.

I have to try to isolate myself from the world.

The higher you climb, the less travellers you find. Oh mountaineer, can you endure loneliness?

My life is quite simple and peaceful. We are three monks here in Mahamyaing. All of us are content and very much in touch with our own mind. Knowing what's going on in the mind is the only way to sanity. I read a few hours a day, meditate quite a lot, walk in the evenings, and talk with my friends. It is very quiet here. I hear birds and crickets. People are very nice and friendly.

I'm not always happy though. Sometimes I feel very sad for not being able to help my kids in more ways. But I will not disrobe. I really love being a monk and living in a forest. I think I am by nature a hermit. I love talking with my friends who really have something to say. I also like to spend a lot of time meditating. Without these things life would be a mess.

Very beautiful sunrise this morning. Beams of light coming down through the clouds. What a mystical world I'm living in! There are enough beautiful things right here. Of course it lasts for a while only but that's OK. Do you feel the mystery in your life? Everything around us is a great mystery. I am a great mystery. You are a great mystery. In a way very sacred too.

I'm living with tremendous awe. How wonderful everything is! They say life is terrible. That's true in a way, but how terribly wonderful life is also. Sometimes I feel so alive and so happy that I'm alive. I look forward to living a long and healthy life. Just recently I've learnt how to live anew. My life has just begun. I'm beginning to appreciate myself, my life, you, my daughters and their mother, and my friends here; also the blue sky, the white clouds, the trees, the birds. I'm really in love with life. (It seems like I'm becoming a heretic.) No, I don't hate life. Yes, there is suffering. It's OK. That's the price I pay for life. I'm really grateful to life. I thank life for all the pain and all the joy it has given me, and I know there's more to come. (Do you think I can teach Buddhism?)

The bamboo grove near my cabin has about fifteen new shoots: beautiful, big, fat, lovely shoots. Every day I look at them and feel very happy that they are growing up so well. They are my kin. I just love them.

Sipping a cup of ginseng tea. Tastes great. Just wonderful. The cup is also very beautiful. Greenish brown with grains. I've fallen in love with the Japanese cup too. Have I taken acid? No, no, never seen acid in my life. I'm quite sober. Or, I'm drunk from drinking ginseng.

I've got the book of poems you've sent me: *The Mountain Poems of Stonehouse*. I really love it. You know what sort of poems I like. I love Stonehouse just as I love Ryokan; both of them are right here near me and I read them often. Actually, I live them.

Another cup of ginseng. Wow, how wonderful!

It's sunny. The birds are quite excited; they're calling out to each other. They really enjoy life, not like human beings. Human beings are gloomy, dissatisfied, complaining, dull, and most of them are depressed. I've never seen a depressed bird in my life! I'll learn from the birds, not from depressed and ungrateful human beings.

Just came back from a walk. So nice to feel the warm sunshine and the cool wind. To be with nature in nature. I feel like going jogging. I've been doing

exercises. My muscles are quite strong, radiating energy. I've put on some weight. I must do more exercises to burn off the fat.

A third cup of ginseng. What millionaire can enjoy such pleasure?

I've read your letter more than ten times. I have time to read and think. I want to know what you are trying to say. I will go on doing that. I want to understand my friend very deeply. I will spend all my life trying to understand myself, my friends, my family and my daughters. That's my priority. The rest of the things, I'll do if necessary. I will not consider my life a success if I don't understand myself and those who are dear to me. Now, I don't value just information and knowledge about external things. The inner world is so rich and wonderful. The more I understand and appreciate those who are close to me the more meaningful my life becomes. It took me so long to find out this truth. They say life begins at forty. That's true for me. I'm so young in this sense, very enthusiastic. I'm beginning to see for myself, with my own eyes. I'm beginning to feel in my own way. I appreciate my life, the people who are close to me, the world I live in, and in general how everything is. I appreciate it when people care for me, help me. I appreciate their help, their kindness; I'm grateful to them. I used to take these things for granted.

How can I curse my life? How can I complain that life is meaningless? Life is so wonderful, so full of wonder. When I die I want to die with gratitude in my heart, and not with bitterness.

Thank you for your sharing and caring.

I'm really glad that we can write to each other (thanks to the mail service). This is very precious. There are only a few people who are deeply meaningful in my life. You are one of them. How long have we known each other? Ten years. I feel closer to you. I can tell you all my silly thoughts and feelings and I know you will not judge me. I'm becoming more and more like a human being. I love my children and their mother more than ever. How strange that I don't become more and more indifferent. A good monk should not have attachments. So, I'm not a good monk. That is proven. Well, anyway, I'm a human being. Not a bad one I suppose (I hope). Never mind. I hope you understand this unscrupulous monk.

Very beautiful sunset this evening, with golden colour clouds. Beyond words.

I hear the call of the wild. At last I have to accept the truth that I am a hermit by nature. I know enough about the world; I will leave it alone.

Have you found a place where you'll be happy and content for the rest of your life? I haven't found a place like that yet but I hope to find it some day. I think every place is a temporary place. Better to have a temporary place which is quiet and secluded. Hoping, hoping, hoping.

You said that you liked Chinese paintings. I like Chinese paintings too. So if you have any prints of Chinese paintings, please send me some. I like old (traditional style) Japanese paintings too — big mountains with waterfall and small huts and farms, simple wooden and bamboo huts. Japanese gardens are very simple and peaceful. You can make a small one with a gravel walking path,

some wooden or rock benches, flowering bushes, and of course some bamboo, maple or cherry trees, and you put a small pond or stream somewhere. You need a lot of time to cultivate a garden; so grow something in a pot or in a box, a mini-garden. You can even grow some moss in a box or in a corner of your house.

Just doing office work every day must be tiring. You need to do something creative.

I enjoy looking at the Chinese paintings of hermitages very much. I would like to go deeper into the mountains and live near a simple and quiet village. I might do that some day. This world is becoming more and more crazy. Discontentment and displeasure is burning like a forest fire, spreading far and wide. It's like a contagious disease. Very few people appreciate ancient wisdom, contentment, simplicity. Westernisation is the in thing.

It has been raining since last night. No sun. Cloudy and cold instead. My little charcoal stove is burning slowly. After my meal I drank some tea with sugar. Earplugs in my ears. Have been reading poems from *Cold Mountain*. Here are some of my favourites:

I came once to sit on Cold Mountain
And lingered here for thirty years.

I divined and chose a distant place to dwell
T'ien T'ai: What more is there to say?
Monkeys cry where valley mists are cold
My grass gate blends with the colour of the crags
I pick leaves to thatch a hut among the pines
Scoop out a pond and lead a runnel from the spring
By now I am used to doing without the world
Picking ferns, I pass the years that are left.

Cold cliffs; more beautiful the deeper you enter
Yet no-one travels the road.
White clouds idle about the tall crags;
On the green peak a single monkey wails
What other companions do I need?
I grow old doing as I please.
Those face and form alter with the years
I hold fast to the pearl of the mind.

Wise men, you have cast me aside.
Fools I do the same to you.
I would be neither wise man nor fool;
From now on, let us hear no more from each other.
When night comes I sing to the bright moon;
At dawn, I dance with white clouds.
How could I still my voice and my hands
And sit stiff as a stick with my grey hair rumpled.

I love ancient China. Maybe I was a Chinese in those days. I've been reading *Cold Mountain* poems again. It is my favourite. I am living here doing as I please. I go for alms in the morning; have my meal for the day at 8 a.m.; walk and sit and read, think, meditate. That's what I want to do all my life, whether I live here or in some other place. I see my attachments and I'm learning to let go more and more. Attachments are heavy burdens — I, my, mine. If you have no strong attachments you can live in a quiet place like HantŕShan.

I imagine the scenes when I read poems like these. Sometimes, in my imagination, I take you for long walks in the forest and introduce you to the quietness, the trees, many different kinds of birds such as song birds and wood cocks, and to the deep peacefulness which you can never feel living among people who are always upset about one thing or another — non-verbal relationships with animals and nature.

I think about the Buddha quite a lot. I have a postcard-size picture of the Buddha sitting in deep *samādhī* (concentration). He's sitting under a big, old banyan tree with roots coming down from branches. There are some rabbits near him. And it's close to a big ancient lake with lotuses abloom. On the far side of the bank is a big forest and mountain. The moon, a full moon, is just above the mountain. There are some ripples on the surface of the lake. The surroundings are quiet and peaceful. And there the Buddha, my teacher, is sitting in complete tranquillity. No greed, hatred, pride, envy, jealousy, or delusion — a perfect symbol of peace. His face is radiating, glowing with a soft white light, his whole body all very soft and relaxed, perfectly at ease with no tension anywhere. And I, I'm sitting under another tree not far away (but I'm not in the picture). Peaceful. You can join us if you choose to.

Imagination is very powerful. When you imagine a peaceful situation, your mind becomes peaceful. On the other hand, you can scare yourself to death by imagining terrible situations. Since you have a choice, choose peaceful images, like sitting in meditation near the Buddha in a peaceful setting. Imagine all the details. Imagine that you are deep in the mountains. Cool, quiet. Near the Buddha you feel very calm, tranquil, safe, secure, and free from dirt. Or collect some poems which make your mind calm. Copy them neatly in a small notebook, which you can carry with you.

9.30 p.m. I came back from a short walk just now. The moon is very bright. It was a full moon day yesterday. The moon is perfectly round tonight. Cold and misty also. The rain has stopped. It's beautiful, unearthly.

I came back from a walk just now. The bright moon is just above the trees. It's cool. I live in a twelve by eight foot, one-storey house, alone. There are two other monks living in separate *kuṭīs*, not far away. They are good meditators. There is a small pond near my *kuṭī*. A lot of water insects swim and dive into the pond, and many kinds of plants are growing there. I like to stand near the pond in the evening and watch the insects in the water. I saw two tadpoles yesterday. We have no electricity here. So I am writing this aerogram by candlelight. I like

it. I feel very relaxed here. People are very kind to me. They believe things are better when I'm around.

I got sick for a few days. People brought some food to me. A doctor came. It wasn't serious. People are too concerned for me. I live among a lot of people who love me dearly.

I have all the things I need. I'll tell you when I need anything. I am used to economising everything, even rain water, which is free and abundant, I use it sparingly. It has become a habit with me. I used to live in remote villages where everything, even water, was scarce.

I took a nap. I woke up and went for a walk. It's cloudy, going to rain soon. I hear the thunder. It's been raining for a week; farmers are happy. The birds are happy too; they're singing and calling out to each other. One little bulbul is taking a bath in a water bowl. Life goes on. Because of my opinions about how life should be I get upset quite a lot. So now I decide to do what I can and leave the rest alone. Being unhappy doesn't pay. People have different opinions and they fight. Let them fight. I won't join them. I won't let them disturb my mind.

The weather is very beautiful today. White clouds against a deep blue sky. Occasional showers of rain and rolling thunder in the distance. Very quiet. I have everything I need: books to read; enough to eat; a nice cabin. People leave me alone. I have no reason to be unhappy. Discontentment is a disease. People don't see that they're making themselves unhappy. Greed, pride, envy. A lot of people want to leave Myanmar (Burma). Agitation is everywhere. I'm here like an oasis. Some say they feel happy when they come to the monastery. People are reinforcing each other to be aggressive. They don't see that happiness is not out there. If you carry all your defilements with you, no matter where you go you'll be unhappy; something is always wrong with every situation. People blame each other: 'I'm unhappy. It's somebody's fault.' How strange it is that we don't see our own faults.

A very colourful sunset. All of us watched it from the top of the hill. The colours changed slowly from light yellow to a deep glowing red. Sometimes we forget to see the beauty of nature, we're so occupied with our problems instead. Mostly we live in a world of our own creation, which is full of problems.

It's early in the morning before sunrise. So many birds are singing. Because it is safe in the monastery many birds live here. I get to see them and hear them all the time. I love them more and more. They live a hard life, it seems, but they are so cheerful and independent. Different sizes, shapes, and colours. No matter how long I watch them I never lose interest. Do you remember reading about *Water Oozle* by John Muir? I read John Muir's book again and again. The only book I have by and about him is *The Wilderness World of John Muir*. He was marvelous; he didn't care for luxuries at all, never owned a car. Lived with so much love for nature; he is one of the Americans I love.

Every morning I go for alms down the road. Just about seven houses nearest to the monastery. Mostly I get vegetables, potatoes, beans and rice. I get more

than I can eat. Simple food (no processed food), good for the health. I eat only one meal a day, mostly (except when I'm sick). The weather here is good (not so hot). I have a nice *kyaung* (hut) for my own. I've some books to read; enough robes and blankets to keep me warm; medicines and vitamins to help my body stay healthy. I travel very rarely, maybe once a year. I have some supporters who provide me with the things that I need (and I need very little). So, I don't need to complain about anything at all. In fact, compared to some other monks, I'm rich (not in money though). I don't have any money to my name; I don't need it. I'm glad that I can do away with money. Living without money is much easier for my mind.

I'm rich in time: I've all the time I need to study and meditate. I'm never in a hurry.

I like reading Ryokan. Here is a good one:

It's not that I do not wish
To associate with men,
But living alone I have the better Way.

A lonely four-mat hut
All day no-one in sight.
Alone, sitting beneath the window
Only the continual sound of falling leaves.

When it's evening, please come to my hut
To listen to the insects sing;
I'll also introduce you to the autumn fields. (*Ryokan*)

How simple life could be. Why are people creating such big burdens for themselves?

People are so busy they don't hear the birds singing. They don't know how to appreciate the birds singing.

I love birds, trees, clouds. Walking in the forest is my favourite exercise. I like reading *dhamma* and meditating. But I don't like preaching. So, if I don't teach any *dhamma*, please forgive me.

I know I can live in luxury if I want to but I choose to live a simple life. Maybe I'm a fool (or a *Daigu* — Japanese for Big Fool).

I've no intention to make a big name (or a big noise) for myself. I don't want to become a big teacher. My biggest ambition is to live my life peacefully, quietly, simply, and mostly alone. I don't give any lectures. People can come and talk to me if they want to. Sometimes I tell them to try meditation. But then, they have to go to a meditation centre.

Early in the morning. Lots of birds singing. They seem to be very cheerful, welcoming the sun, beginning a new day with a new (fresh) mind. They don't carry any psychological burden or guilt from yesterday, and they don't worry about the future. How wonderful it is! People are losing intimacy with nature. Instead they watch nature on TV.

I went for a walk in the forest and listened to many kinds of birds singing. I want to live deep in the forest and be a friend of birds and deer and all sorts of animals; and also with trees, streams, clouds, sky, rain, and fog. When I lived in a forest I made friends with some rabbits, squirrels, lizards and a peacock.

I am quite well too. I walk every day. It makes my body healthy and energetic. My mind becomes much more relaxed after walking. I have everything I need. It is peaceful here. No worries, no cares. One day is the same as another. Months go by so fast. Even a year doesn't seem so long. As I become older I hope I become more and more peaceful.

I hear a wood cock crowing. How nice to hear him. A couple of big black forest crows have come. They are not afraid of me. They come quite close to me and look at me directly.

It's been raining for six days now. It's very peaceful. I go out for short walks whenever it stops raining. I would like to go for a long walk in the forest away from people. People are very unpeaceful nowadays. I pick up their minds. I try my best to make them soft, mellow. They're very upset about the situation in Myanmar. It seems like the whole world is burning with greed, anger, envy, jealousy, pride.

A lizard is climbing the tree in front of my *kuṭi* and a dove is cooing behind my *kuṭi*. What more do you want to know about my life?

Early in the morning I go for alms at about 6 a.m. and eat my meal for the day between 7 and 7.30 a.m. Then I walk for a while. After that I sit and watch the birds and trees and meditate. If I have a good book to read I'll read. Sometimes people come, two or three, to talk about many things but always back to the *dhamma*. In the afternoon, a young Shan monk comes for his Pali lesson. In the evening, I usually go for a walk into the forest. It's very peaceful in the forest. My mind gets very calm when I get away from people. Birds and trees are peaceful companions. The next day is much the same.

My only indulgence is reading books.

A cuckoo is cooing. So mellow and sweet. It makes me happy and cheerful. "my life is like an old run-down hermitage. Poor, simple and quiet." (*Ryokan*) I live outside of this busy, noisy, crazy world. Don't become too busy. Cut down all unnecessary activities. Get enough time to rest and relax and meditate.

People should find time to go and stay for a while in the forest. Whenever I go into the forest I feel very relaxed. It is not natural and healthy for people to live in a crowded place. You should live more in touch with nature. At least get out of the city to visit some shrine in the mountains and meditate once in a while.

People are a little crazy living in such congested cities. They don't know what they're doing. Some are born there and used to living there. Some have no choice; they work there, like you, although they don't like living in big cities.

I live in a very different world no matter where I live, because I have a different mind. I don't care for the things that people care for, like money, pleasure, and tradition. I feel more akin to birds and animals and trees and clouds. I

understand people and their suffering. They are going blindly down the wrong path. I have compassion for them. They have no quiet space in their mind, and they don't hear my message. They're full of second-hand opinions. Becoming more and more like robots. How I long to see a human being whole, intelligent, alert, awake, sensitive, not dogmatic, always learning and growing.

I've lived in forests for too long. I don't like to be in dirty, noisy, polluted places, where people are so greedy. It reminds me of a poem I read when I was young: "Goodbye proud world, I'm going back home".

I like to eat a lot of fresh vegetables and beans cooked simply. I noticed a long time ago that if I don't eat vegetables and beans I don't feel well, and if I eat a lot of meat I get sick. Taking some vitamin and mineral supplements helps my digestion. If you don't eat a lot of vegetables you surely have vitamin and mineral deficiency, which results in tiredness, weak digestion, and anaemia. I wish I could get brown rice. All the people here eat white rice only, which is nothing but starch.

I intend to stay here this year. Although it is hot it is very peaceful here. Many people say that they feel very peaceful when they come to the monastery. Let the body be hot as long as the mind is cool.

A magpie robin
sitting on a tree
singing and singing

I look at the sunset.
And I think of you.
Summer evening.

How different our lives are.
And yet there is something
We both have.

How strange that we've met.
And the memories
Will last until we die.

A heart which wants to reach out
And touch another heart.
Why is there so much fear?

A symphony of birds and cicadas.
Is there a music which is any better? (*Sayadaw U Jotika*)

Who can imagine the mental life of this monk?

It's about sunset now and I'm sitting outside near the bamboo grove and writing to you. Lots of mynah birds calling out to each other, talking about the day. Well, they must have a tough day, the weather getting so very warm... Such a beautiful and wonderful world we are living in.

I've been sick for a week with a bad throat infection. The weather is cold. Trees are dropping old leaves. After travelling for five weeks, meeting and talking with people it feels really nice to be alone in a quiet place again. People are very unmindful and unsettling, their uncertainty and lack of information is really tiring.

I've been quite busy last month. Discussions, questions and answers with visitors and monks. People and monks come to ask me questions as if I have all the answers. Well, I told them what I know. I'm glad some people are really interested in living a meaningful life.

One of the reasons why I feel so peaceful here is that there is no board of directors here and no organisation. Do you think people can work in harmony? I don't think so. I haven't seen an organisation (monastic) working in harmony. So my motto is: If you want peace, stay away from organisations.

Because I live a very quiet and peaceful life here, sometimes I don't know what to do with so much time. So I write letters to my friends, read a little and meditate. I don't have anything serious or important to say; so it is not easy to write a letter.

You asked, "Sayadaw, do you think I could really live a peaceful and natural life?" Yes, if you really want to, but the transition period is very important (because it isn't easy). After being so busy we don't know what to do with so much time, and sometimes you might think that you're not doing anything productive. You might think that you're being selfish to live such a peaceful, easy life while the whole world is suffering, because you feel like you're somehow responsible for the world. It's not easy to do nothing, to be still, to be a nobody, and to have no responsibility. Especially for you — you feel guilty if you don't suffer.

It's a green, green world I'm living in.
Whichever way I look it's green
How beautiful the world is.
I'm deeply in love with the world. (*Sayadaw U Jotika*)

What have I done to have such happiness and peace?

Some people think that a monk shouldn't love anything, instead be totally disenchanted with everything. I'm not sorry to say that I'm not disenchanted with everything! I love and appreciate many things in life, and I'm very glad that so many nice things have happened in my life. Of course there were/are some bad things in my life too, but that's OK.

We've finished making the ceiling (of the *kuti*); it looks like the floor, upside down; it's very neat. We made it with good teak wood. It will last for a long time. It makes the room cool and less noisy when it rains. I like it very much. I will leave it as it is; I won't paint it. The grain and the colour of the wood is much more interesting and beautiful than a plain white colour.

I'm becoming more of a *Daigu* everyday, forgetting more and more of what I have learnt from books, and seeing and learning more from life. Life is the best book for me. My heart is becoming more simple and open. I don't preach.

Yes, trees are my friends, companions, teachers. I've lived with them so long. I love them very much.

It is very peaceful here. A lot of rain this year. The little pond near my cabin is full. It is sunny today. Very beautiful. I wish you were here.

The weather is getting cooler. Misty in the evenings and mornings. The moon is bright. A nightjar is making a knocking sound — tok, tok, tok, tok, tok, tok. A dog howls from a distant village. I love nature.

I am sitting in the same old easy chair, outside my cabin near the bamboo grove. It is 2 p.m. now. The weather is getting cooler, north wind blowing. The rain has stopped. The sky is so clear and so, so blue. I hear cowbells; bulbuls are chattering; and the best of all songs, the most pleasant to my ears, guess what, it's the wind blowing through the trees. I live with trees and birds, clouds, sky, sunrises, sunsets, moon, and stars. What a wonderful, beautiful, peaceful world I live in. I live a poem. Everything here is almost the same. U.H.S. comes as usual; he gives us brown rice every day. As if time is an illusion.

I live here quietly and peacefully, but this isn't chance happening — I worked very hard for it. It's about hard work, not just good *kamma*. I chose to live quietly and peacefully. Every day I choose to live quietly and peacefully; it's a constant choice. Needs a real strong determination, a letting go. We can't have our cake and eat it too.

I have found a place. It is very peaceful there. No country, no nation, no government, no religion, no judgment. I go there quite often. Some day I'll go there and stay there for good.

There is a whisper among the bamboo groves
Those who do not depend on words to
understand the meaning will understand the meaning.
Listen!

I went on trip to Saw in the Ch'in Hills. I've been to a very different world, meeting people who live in a very different way, with different values. They have just the bare necessities and yet are very happy people. No psychological problems. The mountains — oh! They are majestic. The mountains have a very deep meaning for me. I will go back to the mountains and live there for a longer period. People living in big, modernised cities are all crazy. That's what John Muir said a hundred years ago, and I agree with him. I have a lot to say about the mountains, but I don't have time now. I will tell you all about my travels in the mountains later.

I love the simple way of life more than before. Do we really need so much?

I have been very busy for many months. I hope to be back soon; only there can I live quietly and peacefully. I don't like being busy all the time.

We take our old habits of mind wherever we go.

Happiness is such a simple thing: you are happy when you are not trying to be happy. True happiness is not made, not put together, not something you can possess. Why am I so happy? See, when you are happy you want to know why you are happy! That's the way the mind is — always wanting to know why.

I don't have any strong desire for anything. My mind is calm. I feel a lot of *mettā* (loving-kindness). I wish you all the good things I have, dear friend.

I don't want to force myself to do anything. I let my nature move easily into whatever is its natural course, and I've found that it's always positive. My way of life really fits my nature.

Chapter 3: Parental Love and Guidance

I came back yesterday from where my daughters are living. Spent sixteen days with them. It was really a great joy for me to see them after so many years. Their love for me is astounding. I am overjoyed about our relationship which is really open. This is real loving-kindness. Something I was secretly hoping for but never thought possible. My relationship with my former father-in-law and my former wife are also very friendly. We talked a lot about life and *Dhamma*, and we also discussed my daughters' education. I told them what real education means to me. I am glad to take part in helping my daughters learn about life.

My elder daughter is very intelligent, sensitive and expressive. The way she looked at me made my heart tremble with *mettā* (loving-kindness). I yearn to hug them. I understand now what it cost me to be a monk. I am crazy, almost, with my love for my daughters. Only mindfulness saved me from making a big fool of myself. I was and I am a good actor.

She cried when she came to see me in the monastery where I stayed for a while in their town. I was choking, crying without tears. I felt like my heart was going to burst open. I didn't know what to say. She cried again at the railway station before I got on the train to leave. I never felt so much and such strong love for anybody before. I will be (I am) in their lives. I need no heart-opener — my daughter has opened it up wide. I wish her to understand about life deeply and live a peaceful life in spite of life's turmoil; go through this messy thing, this meaningless and painful phenomenon called life, safely. I will be at her side whenever she needs me.

My daughter and I talk about a lot of things. We read books together. We can understand each other very well. She wants to get a good education. She wants to learn deep and meaningful things. I am always thinking of how to help her.

As for me the most important event in my life now is being with my kids. I am not a provider but I can be a very good friend.

I'm teaching my daughter many things. She's reading quite a lot. She likes reading, thinking and meditating too. We have become very open. *We are real friends*. I'm her father, teacher, and friend. I love my kids more and more. I want to have a good relationship with my kids and I want to be helpful to them (psychologically). My kids' wellbeing, happiness, and their education are my biggest concern.

My daughter is doing *cittānupassanā* (contemplation of the heart/mind). She is becoming more and more aware of her thoughts and feelings (mental). Her personality is very much like mine, as are her interests. I have no concern for myself; I am only concerned for my daughters. I hope they become more and more aware of their minds. The mind is tricky; it wants change, something different, and boredom is often a great problem. It craves for entertainment and stimulation. That's what most people are doing — running after stimulation in many forms.

I plan to spend a couple of months in Magway. I will help my daughter learn more about the mind and people, relationships, how to talk properly, how to listen and, above all, *Right Attitude*. The quality of education in Myanmar has been very poor, and now it is uncertain. What do kids learn? Irrelevant information; things they will forget very soon, and no teaching on how to improve their character and personality, which is more important than scientific facts.

To be a father and not be a provider. Well, I will make up for that by being a teacher and friend and counsellor. What is most needed? Somebody who understands you deeply and loves you unconditionally. What is the best thing I can give to my daughters? My heart and mind. My daughter said that she felt loved by me; she feels my love. I am happy.

I want to spend as much time as the conditions permit me with my daughters. I don't know when the next chance will come, but I hope, as we grow older, we'll see each other more and more. I want to help them in every way I can.

I am quite healthy and happy. Really enjoying being with my kids. Everybody is so kind to me. I'm a bit surprised. It's the attitude of my mind towards them. I love them and understand them and I appreciate them very much.

My daughters left yesterday evening. There's a vacuum in my heart. Deep emotion. How can I explain it even now? Compared to my love for my daughters I can say I have never loved anybody before. My heart never was so open. One of them has got very thin because she was worrying that I will go far away for too long. How can I go away for too long? I will not do anything that will make her unhappy. She said, "I don't care for anything. I love my father. I want to see you and write to you often. I want you to love me forever. I was very sad for a long time thinking that being a monk you are indifferent to us."

She misses me all the time. So do I. Well, my dear friend, I'm a human being. I will let her decide how long I should stay in the USA. I will never make her unhappy again. I don't care for anything but her happiness. I asked her how long I should stay in the USA if/when I go there. She said, "About a year should be enough." Maybe she'll let me stay a bit longer. I don't want to deceive her. I want to be completely honest with her. At least with one person — with her — I want (I'm willing) to be vulnerable. She's very innocent and vulnerable. How can I be otherwise with her? My heart is filled with my love for my daughters. At the moment, I'm not interested in anything else. I don't want to read. I don't want to talk to anybody. I want to be alone thinking about my daughter. Her love for her father is unbelievable. Such a young little girl. Such intense love.

The best thing is my improved relationship with my daughters. I can talk with my daughter with real openness. She is very open and honest with me too. It's really wonderful. To love and to be loved. She is quite mature in her thinking, emotionally very stable, kind, and realistic. She has my type of mind. We understand each other very well.

I give all my love to my daughters. The only thing I can give so abundantly. I talk with them; listen to them; laugh with them. I'm looking forward to seeing them again.

My daughter and I understand each other's mind (heart) very well; we even seem to have telepathic communication. She just knows how I feel, and I know the same for her. We have intuitive understanding of one another's mind. We will become the most loving and understanding father and daughter. Some day we will live in a quiet and peaceful place together, and I will help her understand her mind very deeply. I am her best friend. I will teach her all I know about everything I have learnt. I want to live a long, long life so that I can be with my daughter for a long time. My love for her is the deepest love I've experienced in my life. It is rooted in deep understanding. There is no doubt or hesitation, no reservation or pretence.

Chapter 4: Life, Living and Death

What is the most important thing to do in this life?

Do not disturb yourself by thinking of the whole of your life. Do not let your thoughts at once embrace all the various troubles which you may expect to befall you; but on every occasion ask yourself ‘What is there in this which is intolerable and past bearing?’ for you will be ashamed to confess. (*Marcus Aurelius*)

Life is full of difficulties. But don’t despise life. Human life is an opportunity to learn and grow. You have lessons to learn and develop your wisdom. If you don’t learn deeply you have to come back again to learn. All the difficulties you are going through are very meaningful if you have the right attitude and proper perspective. You must help others to live a meaningful life and there are others who will help you. We must have some kammic connection. We will help each other. So, please don’t think all these difficulties are meaningless. We cannot go around; we have to go through.

Things will never be perfect in life. Better not to expect perfection. I am not perfect; I will never be, and I don’t expect that.

“That which does not kill me makes me stronger.” (*Nietzsche*) Even with all its pain, disappointment, despair and regret, I still find life interesting and meaningful.

“The times when you are wounded are often times when, out of these wounds, come new thoughts, new possibilities.”

“Joy increases to the extent that the capacity for woe does also.”

It is a considerable boon for a person to realise that he has his negative side like everyone else, that the daemonic works in potentiality for both good and evil, and that he can neither disown it nor live without it. It is similarly beneficial when he also comes to see that much of his achievement is bound up with the very conflicts this daemonic impulse engenders. This is the seat of the experience that life is a mixture of good and evil; that there is no such thing as pure good; and that if the evil weren’t there as a potentiality, the good would not be either. Life consists of achieving good not apart from evil but in spite of it. (*Rollo May*)

Life would be so superficial and boring if there were no hardships.

Suffer, learn, and grow.

I have suffered a lot and I suffer now, but I suffer calmly, with dignity. I take suffering as part of life, a very important part. How can I learn anything if I don’t suffer? But I stay calm when I suffer. Who would believe that I have deep suffering? I don’t think that there should be no suffering; I don’t think that there is something wrong because there is suffering; I don’t think I should try to remove suffering; I do not try to overcome suffering, but I try to make suffering meaningful; I try to understand suffering deeply. No resistance. I am not depressed, agitated. I only hope that I am wise enough to understand suffering and life.

Each time I suffer intensely, I take a step forward towards detachment. It teaches me to let go. *Samudaya* (the second Noble Truth: desire) leads to *dukkha* (suffering). How simple and how true.

We have hard lives. So we learn a lot more than easygoing people. My life is very hard too. Anyway I like it. I have learnt quite a lot: feeling, seeing, and learning very deeply. If you are mindful, suffering makes you see things very deeply. I don't want a carefree life, nor do I want to live superficially, but I do want to know all about life and suffering.

Most people live their life very superficially. They are born into a society and they live the values into which they are born; they are caught up in that society. You have to be very clear about what you want from life in order to create your own value and live it. Even when you create your own value (judgment) you must keep on looking into it and see whether it is realistic, see how it affects your mind. Living your life is an art. There is no formula. You must always be alert and creative. Once you lose creativity you are as good as dead. Creativity in living one's life is so rare. No wonder people behave like robots! No wonder they have no joy.

All of us have ups and downs. It is important to see them objectively.

To take my life one moment at a time. Not to think too much and confuse my mind. To accept life as it is and also to be ready to die at any moment. They say life is hard. It's even hard for those who don't need to work. But still you can be cheerful and learn a lot from your life. And if you prefer you can go out of this round of existence. (Is it a merry-go-round?)

I don't like *dukkha* at all. Do you? Here life is simple, and I want it to be even more simple.

Stay calm; wait; be patient. Do whatever is possible at the moment. Nothing lasts forever. Things will change, possibly for the better if you stay clear and calm, but if you get agitated and run around like crazy you will disturb the situation.

All the things that happened to me in the past brought me here, to this point. Since I'm living a meaningful and peaceful life in the present moment now, I feel OK about the past. I forgive myself and everybody, and I am grateful to all of them for what they have done to me or for me. If they had been good to me I might not have decided to become a monk. Now I understand them much better, I appreciate their good qualities.

We feel hurt as if we are still that little boy or girl. To accept the inevitable is very important for peace of mind. I am very grateful to life; it has taught me so much. I want to live a long life so that I can learn more. There are certain things which we can only learn in old age.

Life is very important. The way we live our life, the way we relate to people is the reflection of our practice of *Dhamma*.

Where you live and with whom you associate is very important. Some people and places put your mind in a bad mood, and to be in a bad mood all the time can really damage your mind. You are very subtly influenced by people around you.

Life isn't so bad. At times it can be really peaceful, blissful, but I don't want another life. I'm trying to understand myself and others and life deeper. To understand is the main thing in my life. I have less craving for things, which makes my mind lighter. However I still have craving for books. No desire to do anything great. Just trying to live my life with the least amount of pain and with the most understanding.

I am doing what I can. Not taking anything too seriously. Everything which arises passes away. Nothing really happens the way I want it. So it is better not to worry too much; not to insist that it should happen the way I want it, especially with people — they have their own mind, their own preferences.

So many things have happened in my lifetime. People have suffered so much because they take things too seriously, not knowing that it is not worth the trouble.

I want you to know that whatever happens is OK with me. I can let go of anything. Death seems closer as I grow older. Many of my friends have died. Two died of liver disease, one of leukemia, another from a heart attack, and one other by accident. My mother died from I don't know what. I will die; I don't know when, where, or how. Everything passes away. It's not worth getting too attached to anything.

I have learnt something from everything that has happened to me in my life. So I am open to any experience now.

Every situation/experience in life, whether it's good or bad, is an opportunity to learn.

To be able to accept uncertainty, and live with it, is a sure sign of maturity. We often want to be sure about the future. Whatever will be, will be. Before we know about life we say "It's no good". Before we've learnt how to live our life we want to know how to overcome it. All head and no heart makes life very dry. I just hope that you know what you want to do with your life. Do something that will help you feel really happy all your life, until you die.

Three treasures I cherish:
The first is fathomless love,
The second is frugality,
The third is reluctance to lead. (*Tao Te Ching*)

Yes, the world is crazy. What can I do about it? Nothing. Why waste time and energy being upset about it?

You know 'funny business' gives you more pain than pleasure. I knew all the while what was going to happen but I had no way to tell you. If you want pleasure you have to accept the pain which comes with it. If you don't want pain then don't go after pleasure. Defilements make life complicated. Without greed, desire, and attachment you can live a simple life like Ryokan. I don't want to tell you to become a monk. I know it's too hard for you, but at least you can be a layman living a simple life. You have conflicting desires. You are like the proverbial donkey between two stacks of hay. First of all understand your mind deeply. How do you want to live your life? What do you want to value most in life?

There is no satisfaction in anything at all, and yet we think, 'I'd be happy if...' Looking for satisfaction is looking for pain. Knowing this deeply we learn to let go. Psychological explanations are all right, (I like reading psychology), but unless it leads to seeing our attachments and company and letting go it doesn't lead to peace. With no peace we are still confused and unhappy. Intellectual understanding is not enough; it explains and explains, and the problems pile up — there's no end to explanations.

Many times you said, "Really, I don't know". I think that's a real feeling. What do we really know? Really, I don't know either. But I go very slowly; I'm not in a hurry; I don't expect too much either from myself or from others. I make mistakes and I learn from my mistakes.

When you don't know what to do, when you are confused, then you really start looking. It is an opportunity for a new beginning. Uncertainty is unpleasant but it makes the mind become alert. What to do? Look deeply into your mind without thinking too much. Keep your heart open to uncertainty. You have 'don't know mind' now. It is part of your growing process; it wakes you up from your slumber.

I hope you are not unhappy about being confused. Life is strange, at least for me.

Life is a series of changes. No finality or certainty. Always experimenting with new ways of living and relating, thinking that there must be a perfect place to live and a perfect partner to live with; fooling ourselves all the time. How scared we would be without such make-believe! But as we grow up and become more and more disillusioned we find out slowly that there is no perfect place in the world, no perfect friend, no perfect teacher, no perfect monk... Nothing in this world is perfect. I'm not perfect and I never will be. They say the Buddha was perfect.

Is there anything you know for sure? How full of assumptions our life is. Full of make-believe. We are standing on assumptions. If we take away all the assumptions, we will have nothing to stand on. Are you really sure what you are living for? Yes? What is that?

Beliefs, assumptions, hopes. Enough!! Without them the mind becomes light. Those are burdens. Without those one can pay more attention to what is.

You know that if you are not living for something meaningful your life is meaningless. What are you living for? Truth, love, political ideal, your country? You see it's hard to answer. No?

If you have an answer, say, truth. Then, does your everyday life show any proof for your answer? My dear friend, we are so lost. We are going nowhere. We are drifting like a boat with no rudder.

It's quite amazing the way people are living their life, without any direction, goal, or meaning in life, without *mettā* (loving-kindness) and understanding for each other. What a great mess life is!

Some people are just drifting, going nowhere. They have no direction, no aim; they are lost. They don't understand life, the meaning of life, and the nature of *saṃsāra* (the cycle of births and deaths).

Some people here have all the opportunities to live the *dhamma*, to practise, but they are wasting their time. You don't know the value of what you have until you lose it.

I'm interested in how you live your daily life, how your days are spent. The way you live should be the source of your inspiration.

I received a letter from U Dh. telling me of his difficulty living in the West as a *bhikkhu* (monk). He found it impossible to meditate. He said that there was too much happening around him. Well, I know that.

Don't be busy. Get a lot of time to relax. About being busy, the Buddha said, "*Appakicco ca sallahukavuttī*" (not busy, living simply) — busyness is the way to craziness.

If you limit yourself carefully you'll be able to develop a deeper understanding of life. Understanding life and understanding *dhamma* go together. First of all learn to live your daily life meaningfully, sanely.

Do what is the most important. There are many useful things one can do, but we must limit ourselves and do what is best.

One of my friends told me: "You are very talented", but I don't want to be a slave to my talents. I limit myself although I can do many things. I've done a lot in my previous lives. In this life however, I'll learn to live meaningfully; I'll learn the meaning of life.

One should understand deeply that one has been almost everything (man, woman, rich, poor, educated, powerful, etc., etc.). Why be the same this life?

We need some sort of ideal in our life, so that we have some direction/purpose, but we shouldn't become crazy about our ideal. The best ideal is to be mindful always. An unrealistic self-image is very dangerous.

First of all understand your mind deeply. How do you want to live your life? What do you value most in life?

"How to make life as simple as possible?" Make your mind as simple as possible, then your life will be simple. It is greed hand-in-hand with ignorance which make life so complicated. Not easy when almost everybody around you is living such a greedy, speedy, and complicated life. One needs great wisdom and a strong mind not to follow them. Before you know it, you are thinking of what to do to prove that you are not a failure. You'll try to do all the things you can to prove that you are a success. It's hard to live your life without thinking of what others think of you.

You don't have to spend your life earning and spending money, and yet that's what most people do.

When you want to buy something, ask yourself: Do I really need it? Don't buy something just because it's useful. There are too many useful things in the world. (Too many useless things too.) Make the best use of what you have. Paper is made from trees. If you love trees don't waste paper.

Time is very precious. We waste so much time reading, talking, going here and there, just to kill time. Boredom/ennui is a big problem. That is why entertainment becomes so important. The mind wants a change. It can't stay with one object.

For many years, I read about philosophy, comparative religion, Buddhism, science, politics, psychology, literature, poetry, trying to find out some sort of guideline to live my life by, something to live for, and trying to find some universal formula to follow. The more I read the more I found that religious or political ideals cause a lot more harm to humanity. Religious wars and political wars prove that. It is really ironic: they talk about making people happy and yet they create misery; they talk about love and yet they can't bear the sight of each other; they talk about solidarity and unity, yet create schism and faction instead.

Now I think for myself. It is my responsibility to find out how I want to live my life, what I want to live for. If I make a mistake I am the one who is responsible; I cannot blame anybody. I cannot be sure about my value judgments, and the choices I make. I have to always be on the alert and see how my thinking affects my life. This is not easy to do. I need to be very mindful, sensitive, and absolutely honest with myself.

Taking complete responsibility about how I live my life is not an easy thing. No wonder most people put that responsibility on religious and/or political leaders! — somebody else to take the responsibility for our happiness or unhappiness.

I am not a follower, because that would mean I am not taking complete responsibility for my life. Neither am I a leader, because that would mean I am taking responsibility for others, which would mean taking away from them responsibility for themselves. I am a friend. I am forever an explorer.

I want to keep my heart open for anybody or anything. I don't know how much I will succeed in doing that. I've been living a very secluded life for about six years now, and now I want to expose myself to more people. I believe I will learn a lot if I learn to live with people. It will be a great challenge for me. "Alienated people don't contribute." That is true.

Can you tell me your first priority in life? I am not trying to be somebody. I just try my best to understand whatever is happening in my life, in my mind, and in my heart.

Most things have lost their importance for me because I don't invest anything in them. Some people might find it hard to understand my change of attitude. I understand them and their problems but I can't take them so seriously. For example, my friend U Dh., wrote about trying to make a *sīmā* (chapter house, boundary) in his monastery. I have totally lost interest in such things. I don't even care what people think of me — just fleeting thoughts in somebody's mind. I don't want to disturb them though.

Do what you can, but remember you will never reach your ideal. You cannot be blamed for not being perfect. As for me, I am less concerned about what people expect of me; I don't care if I don't meet their expectations. Feels like I

am getting clearer about myself. I have my own standard of values, and I don't think anybody should agree with me about it. I cannot share my understanding and insights with other people because most people are tradition-bound.

To be in conflict with people is tiring. To desire for the esteem, appreciation, and regard of people is a prison. I've tried my best to be a nice guy; I've tried to make everybody happy but I found that when I made somebody happy, there was always somebody else who wasn't happy about that! So I failed in making everybody happy. Now I am trying my best to make just one person happy and that's myself; even that's not always possible.

I've tried to improve people around me, tried to find solutions for the problems in the world. I used to carry a big philosophical question in my mind. A few years back a friend convinced me that I was not God. I think he was right. I'm not responsible for the world; I shouldn't carry the world on my shoulder. Since then I dropped it. So now I've no burden to do anything about it. I live each day simply, peacefully with a 'joie de vivre'.

"Thinking about the people in this floating world something must be wrong somewhere" — I think it's in between their ears.

One day is exactly the same for me as any other day. I'm neither happy nor unhappy about the coming new year. So instead of saying 'Happy New Year' to you, I would rather say 'Happy every day', if such a thing could be. It is the same for me with my birthday; I don't know why I should feel happier on my birthday. But I don't mind people saying 'Happy Birthday to you'.

One day is the same as another. Sometimes I lose track of what day, date or month it is. Sometimes I don't look at a calendar for weeks to check. Time goes by unnoticed; days slip away quietly. Very soon this life will be over. But don't worry, you'll have many more lives. So take your time, take it easy. Why be in such a hurry?

This insight gives me tremendous energy (psychological); it makes me alert. I am an explorer travelling into an unknown territory. Being careless is something I cannot afford. I'm always observant, always taking bearings; always careful about every move I make, and always making adjustments.

"I'm aimless. It took me a while to realise I was lonely." Well, I think you are not alone in that. There are billions who are aimless and lonely. Most of them are not aware of it and the rest are denying it or covering it up with something (job, sense pleasures, etc.).

It's hard to accept that I've nobody on whom I can depend, who will understand my loneliness, but a little bird told me, "Such is life, don't carry all the past memories and all the future cares in your mind. Live each and every moment mindfully. The future will take care of itself."

You said, "I'm lost." Where are you going? If you are not going anywhere you cannot be lost. You are where you are. Well, I'm joking. I know how you feel, and I've heard a lot of people say that. Even some people in Burma feel that way. We want our life to be different. But what do we want? Not money, not

fame, not power. Something beyond those. Isn't it better not to want anything at all? But then people will say you've no motivation, you're not contributing anything to your country, or humanity. Society demands that we must want something, do something, or else we are useless lazybones. It's hard to just sit quietly and watch the show; it's hard just to be mindful.

I'm doing a lot of 'doing nothing' here. It's great, and people support me just for that. Thanks to the culture, and thanks to the Buddha, too, who made it possible.

"To dare not to be ahead of others." I like that.

More and more people are looking at me as if I'm a wise monk. Sometimes I feel that as a burden. They won't allow me to be foolish sometimes. It's so nice when nobody is around. I'm not faultless, and I don't aspire to be perfect. It's easier when I allow myself to be foolish. A good reputation is a prison.

Try to understand people more. Only with kindness and understanding can you get close to people. Otherwise they will not share their lives with you. It's dangerous to reveal yourself to somebody who's not kind and who cannot understand you, who will judge you and condemn you instead. If you can get into people's hearts you will see that a lot of people are suffering deep inside but they have learnt to cover that up.

Be kind to people but don't try to please them. Don't be an angel. It is hard enough to be a decent human being. Being *too* good might mean ending up being too bitter.

I always tell people my limit, even when it is something about *Dhamma*. It is quiet and peaceful here because we have a limit. People want to come every day but we say "No! Sorry".

In the end you must decide what you want to do. Nobody can decide for you what you should do. You cannot live my life and I cannot live your life. It's hard to be an adult. We cannot rely on anybody. Self-reliance is the best.

Nobody and no place is perfect. A perfect place, a perfect community, or a perfect teacher are nowhere to be found.

I know many people but I haven't found anybody who is peaceful except Uṭṭi.; he is uneducated but he knows how to live peacefully.

We are not all-wise. So sometimes we make mistakes. I don't think we have to feel guilty for the rest of our lives for the misdeeds we have done in the past.

Forgive yourself. Let yourself be a new person. We confirm ourselves as this or that sort of person. Others who know us also confirm us as such and such a kind of person, but what you are is always changing. You are not the same person as you were ten years ago; you have changed quite a lot; you are always changing. Allow yourself to change, to become a different person.

Life is an experiment, an adventure. It is risky. Take the risk but make sure that your decision comes from a quiet mind.

When I was young I thought life was like a mathematical formula. Now that I am older I see that life is like a poem.

I'm trying my best to make my life tolerable. Sometimes I am in bliss, sometimes desperate.

You won't think I have *dukkha* (suffering). You think my life is unending bliss? It is *dukkha* on top of *dukkha*; a different kind of *dukkha* though, but *dukkha* nonetheless. I endure it; I work on it; I have to pay the price. I suffer but I don't complain. I hope I am worthy of my suffering, suffering observed calmly.

A life which is really fulfilling does not need advertisement. If your life is really fulfilling you don't feel the need to prove that.

You said, "It's so easy to get lost here in the USA, lost in busyness, lost in the unbelievable flood and glut of entertainment and information... lost in various distractions." You're right and I think this is very dangerous. A busy life is a superficial life. If you are too busy you don't even have time to understand your feelings, your mind. My father was a businessman. Very busy. He died a stranger to us, his children. I don't know anything about his mental, emotional, or psychological life. He was a workaholic. As a result I decided not to be busy. Most of the wise men, wise authors, and poets I know were/are not busy. They lived/live a quiet and peaceful life. They don't care for recognition, name, fame, money, luxury, etc. What people mean by success is so superficial.

Of course one has to earn a living, but to spend all your time running around like mad doing a hundred and one things, which are not essential, is crazy. You don't even know about yourself, you don't have time to look deep inside, because you are always looking outside, which you think is more important, or you get into the habit of looking outside. You don't even know the person you say you love so much.

I understand what you said about the feeling of inadequacy among American males. I have noticed this myself when I was in America. This disease (so-called) is quite rare among tribal people in underdeveloped regions in Burma. Yet even Burmese from well-to-do families have this problem too. I think it's because people expect too much from them, and the model of a successful life is too rigid, narrow, materialistic, stereotyped, and dumb. As if there were only one good model for everybody. Live your life in your own way. Whoever really cares about you anyway?

Take it easy. Ultimately nothing matters.

I hope you learn to live peacefully in this imperfect world.

I completed my thirty-ninth year on 5th August. According to the Burmese way of counting I am in my fortieth year. My hair is turning grey, especially on the sides, and I'm also getting thin on the top, a sure sign of old age! Can't escape it. It was so unreal when I was young. Very soon I'll be gone, but I feel OK about that.

What's wrong with death? It is a very important and necessary part of life. It would be terrible not to die. I wonder what will happen to my mind if I live for another forty years? I might be as stupid as I am, or... Yes, I'm getting old too. Lost a lot of my hair. A bald patch and grey hair. Very soon I'll be dead. Now I

have pain in my back on and off, pain in my finger joints. Arthritis? That's part of life. No complaints. I want to really live my life fully in my own way for the rest of my life. After that I don't know.

I'm growing older; there's no doubt about that. What I mean to say is that as I'm old now I can really feel it now through how I live my life; as if I'm blind with an acute sense of touch. I don't just see and hear people; I feel them in my heart. I know how warm or cold they are, soft or hard; I smell them too — I know whether they are clean or not, whether they are pretending or not.

The good part is that the mind is becoming more mature, more detached. I know nothing is worth the *dukkha*. I have a place to live, enough clothes; I get enough food every day. My health is not bad. I have enough and I know that. I've some good friends. I can meditate all day; I'm never busy. So, you envy my way of life? I am doing OK. Getting old though. Becoming less attached to my self-image. Happy to be nobody.

Late at night,
listening to the winter rain,
recalling my youth -
Was it only a dream?
Was I really young once? (*Ryokan*)

Very soon you'll be asking yourself the same question.

Now I'm becoming more expressive of my love. Seems like this old monk's heart is growing bigger in his old age. Cardiomegaly — not the disease! But I cannot love everybody. Those whom I love, I love really well. There are a lot of people I love dearly, and some feel it.

Dying a natural death is OK. The important point is how to live a peaceful and meaningful life. I don't mind dying, but I don't want to suffer. All of us must die one day. It might be now. It is one hundred per cent sure that we will all die. Knowing that, we must really live wisely and not waste our time and energy doing trivial things, thinking and worrying about insignificant things.

Death is not that bad. It is the pain in dying which is actually difficult. Because of attachment we think of death as bad, for we leave everything dear to us when we die. I think we should educate ourselves on how to die with peaceful heart, and on how to leave everything we love. A person who hasn't learnt how to live peacefully hasn't learnt much from life. Living all one's life denying death is a sure sign of the immature mind. Better to accept what cannot be denied.

Yes, I reflect on death quite often. I got close to dying twice. Seeing life from that point of view, it's so clear that we are wasting our time — foolishly chasing after status, possessions, admiration, approval, and there is never enough. I've seen death closely, but how can I tell others what it's like? When you know you're going to lose everything and when you feel that it's OK, I gave up everything. Then I know the most precious thing I have is the deep understanding of

life. Well, some day I'll tell you all about that. I'm quite well. Just growing old and learning from my mistakes. I'm trying my best to live a peaceful life.

Repeatedly I find that attachment leads to suffering. There is no mistake about that. Watch out for attachments. Desires make you believe that you'll be happy when it is fulfilled, but there is no end to fulfilling desires. We think that some day we'll be happy. Some day, some day... and that some day always moves on ahead. You're lucky if you can say 'I'm happy'.

Growing old is not that bad if you have mindfulness and wisdom. Take care of your health. Rest before you are tired. Please take care of your health so that you live a long and healthy life. We will have a lot more to share when we grow old. As we grow older I hope we become more open and friendly. Real sharing and caring. I am very grateful to life. It has taught me so much. I want to live a long life so that I can learn more. There are certain things which we can learn only in old age. I don't feel sorry to hear that another of my friends has checked out (died). It's so natural.

People have so much to do that mostly they forget the dead.

We think we're important. That is a delusion.

We should do what we can without expecting that people will remember what we have done for them.

We want to be important in other people's lives. We want to feel (believe) that we make a big difference in other people's lives.

You try too hard to be kind to people.

You have too much concern about other people's practice. You will not be at peace if you go on doing that.

Live your life peacefully first. Then do whatever you think is appropriate with a peaceful mind.

"Giving others the freedom to be stupid is one of the most important and hardest steps to take in spiritual progress." Yes.

Do whatever you do with care and attention.

Better to do a little and do it well.

Pure motive is rare. (It's almost impossible.)

The more we deny our selfish motives the more harm we will do to ourselves and to others in the name of selfless sacrifice.

To deny darkness is to deny danger.

Acknowledgement illumines.

Denial darkens. (*Unknown*)

We can pretend for a while, but the truth shows through every now and then.

Chapter 5: Learning and Teaching

Craving for a relationship, financial security, someone to look after me, or to be desired by someone make you blind.

It's your reaction that makes you burnt out. Watch and let go. Things got better in my life because I did not react. I've been very patient.

To be too much in a hurry to get results can interfere with the process of progress. Do the right thing and wait patiently. I said I've become very different this year; it's because I think I'm not so serious about results anymore.

Until we can accept that we are alone and until we can stand on our own feet, we cannot have a healthy, meaningful relationship with another. Dependent, exploitative, and manipulative relationships are not meaningful and cannot last long. A good relationship is very rare, even among family members.

We think we know what is good, and because we think we know what is good, we think we are good. Unless we know how bad we are, we cannot be real. Are you mindful always? You are thinking most of the time how bad people are.

I make suffering meaningful.

I am glad that my understanding of life is becoming more realistic.

We are all more or less idealistic.

Can you see your life without any religious point of view?

You are bitter but because you cannot express your bitterness you become depressed.

Almost everyone is struggling in some form or other to build or protect his self esteem, his sense of significance as a person.

Goodness makes demands on us, and the naive belief that people simply love the good is one of our earliest illusions.

Innocence is, in addition, a condition of powerlessness. One of our problems, as we discuss innocence, will be to establish the extent to which this powerlessness is capitalised on by the innocent person. The question is: How far is innocence used as a strategy for living? (*Rollo May*)

I am not innocent: I know I am both good and bad.

I have been talking with too many people for too long. My mind has speeded up — I think fast and talk fast. This speed is very bad; it makes me agitated.

But now I am here, which is quiet and peaceful. I need to get in touch with the stillness in the depth of my heart. To be too concerned about worldly things makes one less concerned about the real meaning of life. What am I living for?

Being alone is necessary for me to get in touch with my innermost being. If we are not in touch with ourselves, how can we be in touch with others? Not being in touch with ourselves is the cause of not being in touch with others, which is why most people are lonely.

It's sunny today. The trees have grown a lot. Very shady here. The bamboo grove has many big, healthy, beautiful shoots; they grow so fast. So much power, they have, the power to grow.

Birds are singing: doves cooing from distant trees; small birds chirping; another bird whistling so sweetly. So cheerful, they are. And the wind in the trees — so soothing to the mind and heart. A beautiful butterfly, flitting about.

Do you like classical music? I listened to a lot of classical music when I was young. I still remember some of it. It might sound strange to you to hear this about classical music: Mozart, Chopin, Strauss, Beethoven, Rachmaninov, etc. Get the best recording. Music is a kind of language: very poetic and profound. If you can get *Nocturne* by Chopin, listen to it: it will tell you all about life.

The Great Way is not difficult
For those who have no preferences
When love and hate are both absent
Everything becomes clear and undisguised. (*Sengstan*)

Thinking creates so many problems.
And yet it is always trying to solve problems.
Imaginary problems and imaginary solutions
Goes on and on.
When you can just be
There are no problems.
When you want 'to become'
Endless problems arise.
Why is it so difficult
To just 'be'?
Why does 'becoming'
seem so important?

Well, because we think
'Becoming' would be better.
We never feel at home
In just 'being'.
So we are forever homeless.
Being homeless, we look for a home.
But we are looking for home in the wrong place.
Home is in 'being';
Not in 'becoming'.
Ups and downs
Round and round
The more unmindful you are the more confused you are.

(*Sayadaw U Jotika*)

I am reading *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* by Jung again. Once you wrote to me about this book. I would like to tell you to read pages 33 — 4 and 44 — 5. I also have a very strong feeling of being two different persons, I have felt it since I was quite young. Although my parents gave birth to my body I am much, much older than my parents. I told T.T. about this because otherwise she won't be able to understand me. At first I couldn't understand why I did certain things. When I became aware of the 'older I' it became clear: the 'older I' knows that life is very short. There are things to be done. To understand deeply is much more satisfying than 'cheap thrills'. To live a meaningful life is most important. I plan to educate my daughters. By that I mean I'll teach them about: Life, Mind, Relationship, Communication, Right Attitude, Meaning, Maturity, Struggle, and above all Mindfulness of one's own mind. T.T. is doing very well in watching her mind. That is why things are getting better in her life. We are very good friends. S.S. is also becoming more and more aware of her emotions and feelings. She is also doing 'body scan'.

"I would like to beg you, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, some day far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answers." (*Rainer Maria Rilke*)

Isn't that passage beautiful? It's so sensitive and so profound.

Right attitude is very important in doing everything. Try to find out what right attitude is.

To do the right thing without too much concern about the result.

I am, hopelessly and forever, a learner. I will never be a teacher, but I'm willing to share my learning which isn't the same thing as teaching.

You said bamboo shoots are not good for one's health. I found out that you are right. So I avoid bamboo shoots. I judge that it is not good for health (at least for me); but I don't criticise bamboo shoots. I don't hate them but I avoid them although I like them. I don't find fault with them. I told my friends that it's hard to digest bamboo shoots, that they are not agreeable to people with poor digestion.

Some religious leaders and teachers, don't have intellectual honesty; they want to convert others to their religion. They teach things they don't themselves practise or believe, and they pretend to have all the answers to all the questions. Without absolute honesty there is no chance to see reality. Dishonesty clouds the mind. I am disenchanted with the shows of gurus, roshis, etc. It has become a profession, another way of a livelihood.

Anybody who is bent on converting somebody will become a menace, a liar. Anybody who wants disciples is an actor, a person in show business. The world is full of gurus who want to make a big show.

Is there a place with no trip? Can you make a place with no trip?

I am also very much frustrated about the teaching technique or approach of most of the gurus/teachers — all head and full of book knowledge. Too eager to convert people!

Dhamma is in living your life, not in books. If you don't understand your life, meaning your experience at this moment, you don't understand *Dhamma*, no matter how much book knowledge you have. Without understanding your life, talking about *Dhamma* is just an intellectual game.

Some people think that if you know all the theories about how things work, you know everything well. How far from the truth.

No theory can explain how nature works. Every theoretical explanation is fragmentary.

Because my understanding of the practice of *Dhamma* is so different from most teachers, it is difficult for me to work with them. I cannot talk to any Sayadaw with real openness. It is hard for me to translate for somebody else for the same reason. I stand alone. The more my practice deepens, the more I see the gap between me and other monks widen. Sometimes I don't feel like talking about practice at all. I might never become a teacher and that's OK with me. I am no saviour but I might be helpful to a couple of my friends.

It's boring to talk to somebody who doesn't think for themselves, who is talking from a book, who has no doubt, who believes in everything in the books. Even talking to... is boring although he is nice and very innocent. I have lost my innocence.

People who read a map have very different ideas of the real landscape. Maps are useful; without them you can get lost, but you have to travel and explore to understand how the place in the map really looks like, and the two look quite different although they are related. There is a big difference between a map and a real landscape: a map is a simplified version of the real landscape.

I think the best way to prepare being a teacher is to deepen your understanding of the *Dhamma*. If you are deeply interested in the *Dhamma* then you have enough impetus to go on finding out, never resting for a while. Never feel satisfied until you get to the hard rock bottom. You know, one of the causes of the decline of the *Sāsana* (the Buddha's dispensation) is inexperienced teachers teaching the *Dhamma*, inexperienced both in learning and practice.

To be too much in a hurry to be a teacher can be a great hindrance in one's practice. If you want to be a teacher you must be creative. Learning the facts and handing them down is not enough. You must understand people, their life, their problems, their capacity, their bent, and then talk to them in a way they can understand and can relate to. Help them understand their problem from a *dhammic* point of view. Guide them slowly so that they can see the true nature

of reality in their own life, in their experience. To be able to do that you must first understand your life and your experiences, your problems, pains, happiness, joy, hope, in fact every aspect of your life. So, first understand yourself. Then help others.

You must also understand that *dhamma* is universal; it never becomes outmoded. It's suitable for all cultures.

I have heard many Western teachers distorting the *Dhamma* to suit their way of life to reach more people. Distorted *Dhamma* is no *Dhamma* at all. They don't have enough courage to live the truth, or they don't understand wholesome and unwholesome consciousness. You can't make an unwholesome consciousness become wholesome, no matter what culture you're born in. So you need a lot of courage to be able to accept the truth, see the truth, practise the truth, and speak the truth. I'd rather teach the truth or not teach at all. No wishy-washy teaching. But first I must see the truth for myself and live it.

Real *anicca* (impermanence) is beyond the mundane level. Reading something in a newspaper and understanding *anicca* is intellectual. When you really see *anicca* it is what you are experiencing in the immediate present. There is no thinking. It's hard to write everything in a letter — so much to say, so little space.

If what I've said is meaningful for you I'll be satisfied. I am not for sale; I don't want to be bought or hired. I don't want to be an employee working for somebody or some organisation. I want to be a freely-functioning person. I don't think this is pride: it's my self-respect.

I remember how some people judged me, or talked about me, for doing counselling in America. I've been counselling since my high school days. I think the more knowledge and wisdom you have the better a counsellor you become. One cannot make a person become a counsellor unless one has a natural tendency for counselling. It's like being an artist. Only if you are deeply interested in people and life and their problems will you become a good counsellor.

What is the difference between a *Dhamma* teacher and a good counsellor? I don't see much difference; both are working with the same human problems. A good *Dhamma* teacher is a good counsellor. I understand that the Buddha was the best counsellor. What do you think, my dear friend?

A fragmentary or specialised approach to life will not work. One needs an all-round understanding. In the body, every part is related to every other part. So it is with life. Every aspect of your life is related to every other aspect of life. The economic, sexual, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual aspects of your life are all related. You cannot keep them separate. If you try to keep them separate your life would be unfulfilling. There will be no harmony but conflict instead — schism. Paralysis.

Don't do anything you don't really love doing. We have wasted a lot of time doing things we don't really love doing. For duty's sake, to please somebody, "*anaday*" (feeling bad, embarrassed, feeling obligated) — enough!

I'm getting old. You are too. No time to waste.

Understanding people's superstitions and stupidity is part of my education, but if I want to keep myself upset by thinking about other people's faults, I'm sure I can do that for the rest of my life. It's quite easy. Do I want to do that? That's the question. An important question for me at the moment. *Dosa* (aversion) is painful.

Let's not waste so much time talking about people's stupidity, and let's be more mindful of our own defilements.

Don't expect to change the world. Blind force (*avijjā paccayā saṅkhārā*) leading to blind action.

We are upset about people being religious (orthodox and close-minded); we are upset about people being too sceptical (which is another form of close-mindedness). They won't even try mindfulness. When will people become just what we want them to be?

Seeing my own limitations, how hard it is for me to see where I am stuck and to become unstuck. "People are stuck", you say. Only when you see clearly where you are stuck is there a chance that you might become unstuck.

People behave like they know what they are doing. Do they really know what they're doing?

Self-deception. Sometimes it can be so complete that you don't even know it. Defensiveness makes you blind to your own weaknesses. We deceive ourselves in order to make ourselves happy. Sometimes it is painful to see our weak points; it takes a lot of courage, honesty and mindfulness.

You know I am deeply interested in therapy because I know how much therapy can help. A good therapist who is also a good practitioner of mindfulness practice can help a lot. He/She can help a person become aware of their 'stuff'.

You know I am deeply interested in people. I've been doing counselling for nearly twenty years. It's my nature, not my profession. I've read a lot about psychological problems in Western countries. I don't mean to say that I can solve all the problems but I can understand them. I have the will to understand. I've worked with many people with different problems and I've helped them to understand themselves.

You have a lot of good qualities; you only have to develop them. If you understand *dhamma* in theory and practice you will be able to help many people as well as make your life more meaningful and productive. Don't you feel like you have something to express but couldn't? As if you have a treasure house but couldn't find the key to it?

When you feel really OK about yourself and the way you're living, only then can you really help others. So, it's very important for you to get deeply in touch with your mind. Only when you see things very clearly in your mind can you find a way to live in harmony with yourself. With inner harmony you can do anything: help others, or just do nothing.

Please don't get into the trip of helping others and bringing the *Dhamma* to the West. First be at peace with yourself. Understand your limitations and de-

filements. After you have learnt to live peacefully and meaningfully, then think of helping others to do likewise.

Worrying too much about others, about helping others, about *dhamma* in the West, about corruption of *dhamma* in the West, can be a way of escaping from one's own meaningless existence.

Anybody who is trying to transplant Buddhism to America hasn't understood it well. One should take the seed and grow it in new soil.

I think the most important thing a person (either oriental or occidental) should do is to be mindful and to be even more mindful. Let mindfulness decide what forms the *Dhamma* should take on in the West.

Dhamma should be learnt in life, not in schools or retreats. Retreats are crash courses.

Is it possible to do nothing and feel happy about it? I'm trying to find out.

Doing nothing is not easy, especially in America where doing is the main thing in life. Without support from those who are near and dear to you it must be hard to live in a peaceful place and just meditate. You need a very strong mind to do that. But if you're sure that's what you want to do forget what others think about it. Just go ahead and do it. The Buddha did that. Tell me if/when you find a peaceful home.

Glad to know that you have time to meditate. In a country like America, where people can do so many things and where there are so many distractions, to meditate is not easy. One gets older doing this and that, finding no real satisfaction in anything.

I'm the only idle man.

I don't want to be busy. Being busy is a wasteful way of living. When you're busy, you get so involved that you cannot see what's going on in your mind. You become unmindful. So I don't want to be a busy teacher. Never. I talk about this again and again because I want you to understand me. I respect your wish. You want me to come to America. But why? To teach? To be busy? To teach what? Things I've read?

The Pali text is such a great bank of treasure, containing so many clear instructions and guidance. Nothing wishy-washy like most fake gurus' talks and books. America — a land of gurus.

If you have to rely on somebody to explain to you the meaning of the text (Pali texts), you will never have real confidence in yourself. No translation is good enough.

You can learn some Pali; it's not hard. In one year you could learn enough Pali to be able to read the suttas by yourself for the rest of your life. Americans are teaching the *Dhamma* in the West but they are not well grounded. No good foundation in learning and practice. Practice alone is not good enough if you are going to be a teacher. And the confidence you get from being able to read the teachings of the Buddha for yourself is unspeakable. Not having to rely on somebody else's translation is a big relief. Anyway, all translations are inadequate.

When you live differently you see things in a different way; when you live in a different culture you learn different things, even your own culture seems different to you. Your eyes become sharper. You see things that you hadn't noticed before. Values change; you become less rigid, more open. A different environment makes you alert. It calls forth different aspects of your nature. You're compelled to use your resources that you don't use in your familiar place, resources that you didn't even know you had. So it's very useful to be in a different country, in a different culture, and living with different people.

Books are my best companions. They enrich my life, giving me a deeper and broader understanding of the world I live in. I think I will read for as long as my eyes can see. Reading, meditating, walking in the forest, talking with some people sometimes, living a simple and quiet life, nothing to worry about: that's the way I will live the rest of my life, no matter where I live.

Yesterday I talked with the primary school children in the evening. Some kids recited poems, some asked me questions. One asked me why I took robes. I answered their questions as best as I could. I told them about my childhood days.

A lot of people came in the evening. Most of them are educated. They have a lot to say and a lot to ask. We talked for two and a half hours. Well now, I can't complain that people are not interested in meditation. We did group counseling. People shared about their lives with the group and I shared with them about my life and my experiences.

A lot of people came to talk with me. It's surprising that most of them are quite young, in their twenties and thirties. We have group discussions every day in the evenings. During the day I give interviews. It is very encouraging that so many people are eager to find out about meditation and Buddhism, to learn. Some of them are good meditators. So I am very busy these days. But I'm happy.

I am willing to meet people and talk with them. I am very glad that I can be (am) a good friend. The time I spend with them is not wasted. It is inconvenient for me to travel but it's worth the trouble. People do so much for me. So I want to give something back in return. All I can give them is *mettā* (loving-kindness), understanding, and some advice. So if they cannot come to me, then I'll go to them.

Many people come to see me; most of them are newcomers. Now I see what they're looking for; they are looking for a good friend and a teacher with whom they can discuss freely in a way they can understand. I hope to fill that gap to a certain extent.

I visit people's homes in the mornings; have my meals in their homes; listen to their *dukkha* (suffering) and give them whatever advice I think is suitable. So much *dukkha* in the world. To accept the inevitable is very important for peace of mind.

If/when I come to your place, it will be just to listen to you and to talk with you and some of your friends. I'm not a teacher; I'm just a friend/brother. I can't make people practice, but if they're practising and they want my advice I'm willing to help.

The role of a teacher is full of *dukkha*. I'm always on the alert to see if I slip into a role. I'm happy enough to be a simple *bhikkhu* (monk) living in a simple forest monastery out of the way.

I have forgotten most of what I have learnt from books. I don't want to remember too many things. I prefer my mind to be empty, clear, and light, and not burdened with learning. I have nothing to prove, nothing to defend, and nothing to propagate.

People are full of conflicting wishes and desires. Most people don't know what they really want to do. They change their minds back and forth. Inconsistency is the rule.

Do you know that you are very sensitive? You know, people who are sensitive suffer more and they also learn more deeply than insensitive people.

You asked, "Do you trust many people?" To trust means to have confidence that people will not do anything harmful to you, that they will not use you. In that sense I can say I have quite a few people whom I trust.

An arahat lives his life without comparing himself with others. Others cannot do that. It would surely be more peaceful if we didn't "compare what is and what is not". But then our way of life would be very different from the way we are living now.

We go on living our life full of resistance: resistance to life and resistance to death; resistance to pain and loss; resistance to love (yes, really). Acceptance is so difficult. Children are not like that though. As we grow up we learn this resistance.

Thinking of you and feeling a bit anxious about how things are going on with your life. Uncertainty is most tiring. I am most concerned about your health. If you are healthy you can do anything no matter how hard. Do a lot of walking — that keeps the blood moving around in your body, not too fast and not too slow. Whenever there is something wrong with my body, either in my lungs or in my stomach, or when I can't sleep well, or when I'm dizzy, I walk at normal speed for a few hours, and it always helps; even when I had an infection of some sort I found that it healed more quickly this way.

U.I. and I walk in the evenings for a couple of hours, as usual. Mostly we talk about the nature of mind. Sometimes we talk about what people value most in their lives, and how that shapes and forms both their thinking and feeling.

There are good and bad things about everything, everybody, and every place. When we see bad things about a place or a person we should not forget the good things. We tend to see one side only. When we're upset we tend to exaggerate the bad things, and when we are pleased we tend to exaggerate the good things.

Adaptability is very important for survival. Rigidity is most dangerous. Compromise in everything except your integrity.

You said, "I've changed so much." Well, the process is just beginning. If you don't hold on to your old self-image the change will go on and on. You will feel like a new person, always changing and growing, and you will feel younger too. The old is always old; the new is always young.

Learning is quite painful, and acknowledging what is true is also painful but only then do we grow up.

You need some distance to see things clearly, to assimilate. When you are too emotionally involved with your experience you cannot understand it.

Understand your limitations. You can only do so much.

I don't want to put myself into a pigeon-hole; it is too limiting. I want freedom from a name, a label. I am what I am. I don't need to be categorised. Do you know the root of the word 'category'? It comes from Latin and Greek. [LL *categoria* Gk *kategoria* accusation. Also; kind of prediction = kategor (os) accuser, affirmer (kategor (ein) (to) accuse, affirm, lit., speak publicly against)].

So, categories (affirming people) are becoming less and less meaningful to me such as Buddhist — that's a category.

I don't like being affirmed, either positively or negatively.

My mind is becoming more and more free of categories, including good and bad, and things like that. I want to see the real nature of phenomena without naming it. I hope nobody misconstrues me. Why is naming so important? In some cases naming is the same as calling a bad name, accusing.

Another thing I want to talk about is regarding expectations. How do we know that what we expect is possible? Why do we need expectations? Why can't we live with what is? Aspirations/expectations make people feel good. When one (aspires) expects something elevated and good, one thinks that one is a good person. Sometimes aspirations and expectations are self-deceptions. They can also cause disappointment.

The Buddha said that when a person becomes an arahat he/she overcomes views and opinions. How full of views and opinions we are. Yet we are not sure of anything; we're just a lot of talk; a lot of words — blah, blah, blah.

Even though I am so loaded with facts and ideas, I still want to know more. My mind is over-crowded, but what is most meaningful, the essence of my learning, cannot be communicated directly and positively by words.

I know the superficiality of the world, and I know I cannot do anything about it. Sometimes I am superficial myself. Without mindfulness how can people be other than superficial.

I am reading the history book you've sent, *Renaissance Europe*. It's important to read history to get the wider and deeper understanding of human beings: how ideas and ideals change; how people create *dukkha*; how attached people are to views and opinions, which always change. Identification with views, religions, and nationality creates so much *dukkha* and conflict. Self-image creates separation and loneliness.

Have you noticed when someone writes something — you know they're writing it from their thinking mind, or from reading about it somewhere else? And when they write it out of their own experience and heart — can you see the difference?

Have you ever really given any thought to where your problems come from? And how the web of ignoring the root of the problems has landed you in this situation now? Any pains, any remorse, any regrets?

How would you feel if someone does something to your children but with plenty of justifications?

Can you feel for others? If someone can't put themselves in the shoes of others and feel how they feel, what will the consequences be?

Have you observed the self-images you could have? Idealised ones, idolised ones, real ones, different ones, which you show to different people. Altogether how many? How can you reconcile them all? How do you put them into one self-image? Or is there such a thing as only one self-image? Then who is this 'big self'? Have you met someone who has the same and constant self-image no matter who they're with and where they are, and in any situation or circumstance?

When people start to label you, do you start to believe the labels and live according to what they say of you? How much of their perception of you is right and how much is wrong, erroneous, or distorted? How much of what you see in others is wrong, erroneous, and distorted too?

Have you noticed that a number of people who hate evil are likely to be very evil themselves? Why? I have seen many who only watch out for the evil in others but not in themselves. Their own evil, they run away from it. Would it be true to say that by denouncing others they feel superior to those they deem evil and thus the feeling of superiority gives them the false sense that they are not evil at all?

A liar can do anything. Do you agree with this statement? How do you feel when a person lies to you? What do you think truth is? When a person transgresses truth, what is he/she losing? What does one get if one lives a life of lies and self-deception? Can a person grow and develop mentally and psychologically if he/she does not live a life of truth? What will one achieve if one remains at an infantile stage — emotionally, psychologically, mentally? Is there any real lasting joy and satisfaction in staying at such a stage?

How are you going to deal with a person with two very distinct and extreme personalities? One persona is kind and caring; the other is cold, callous, manipulative, selfish, inconsiderate, unthinking, unreasonable, uncontrollable, unrestrained, and destructive. Have you met such people before? I have seen a few and I didn't know how to deal with them.

Words are very vague in meaning and communication. Many things can't be communicated using words. In many cases people just use words to impress, but the truth is far from the words themselves.

How to know oneself thoroughly? If one does not know oneself, can one know others and expect others to know us?

Have you pondered and asked yourself why you do certain things, and with what motivation, or do you just do things because there is a string pulling you to do them, without ever considering whether they are wholesome or unwhole-

some, harmful or beneficial? Are you controlled by old habits and itches rather than having control over such habits and familiar ways, which are not beneficial or conducive to happiness.

Is there such a thing as a fixed personality? Thus, is there such a thing as a leopard which can't change its spots, or can you turn a black crow into a white dove? Are human beings so weak that they won't and can't change for the better but have to be slaves to their old habits and ways? If there is no change, there is stagnancy.

What is forgiveness to you? Do you forgive yourself and others?

How much injustice has been done to you? How much injustice have you done to others?

Do you think it's worthwhile to rectify your shortcomings and weaknesses, or would you prefer to stay so attached to your old self-images; that it hurts the ego too much if you change? Can you see the benefit of letting go of self-images and the ego which causes so much unhappiness to oneself and others?

What is loving-kindness? How to transform it into action in our daily lives? At the end of each day is there a reflection of what one has done, both wholesome and unwholesome? Is there a resolve to avoid further unwholesomeness? Or you just don't give a damn and you never think of it in terms of retribution?

If you are uneasy with the shadow side, you avoid it and run away from it. Have you noticed that your shadow never leaves you if there is a light around? It always follows you. How come light itself is not shadow or dark? How far can you run away from your own shadow? Have you ever given a thought to this shadow — something that you don't know but perhaps have a very skimpy, superficial glimpse of but it's too painful and fearful to delve into it? How can you solve problems and mysteries if you refuse to acknowledge what it is? Are you courageous enough to call them by their right names and expose them and then walk away from them?

Always be very alert. If it is something that you refuse to acknowledge and deny, and you stay away from (fear arises first), this is actually the time when you really need to look at them. They are always in the unconscious and can arise at any time. Do you dare to confront them? Have you noticed that in the beginning it can be very difficult to start something, but after a few tries it gets easier and easier. Like mindfulness practice, in the beginning it is difficult because the mind is attached to old and heedless ways — always careless. But if you keep on persisting, you will see that mindfulness comes quite naturally. Practice makes perfect. Don't you think?

How do you see *kamma* working in your life? Does it work like a boomerang?

What is suffering to you? How many people have you subjected to suffering? Do you have any past involvement with harmful substances that have caused immense suffering to others? Will you, for the sake of self-gain, do something that will subject others to much unhappiness and suffering, and do it with ample excuses and justifications? If there is no guilt involved, is there a need to justify?

What is the meaning of life to you? What does life want from you? Why do you think you are here in this existence called life? Do you think it is such a precious opportunity to be born as a human being rather than as an animal or other lower forms of beings?

When you do things, do you do it on impulse or do you make decisions after considering the consequences first? Have you noticed how we are often required to make decisions in life? What are the criteria you have in mind when you make a decision?

Everyone wants kindness, understanding, love, and compassion from others. How much are we willing to give the same to others?

If you had only one month to live, what would you do in that month?

What meaning and significance does death have for you? Can life be meaningful and complete without suffering and death?

How much have you learnt from suffering — your own and from others?

Do you dream nightly? Can you remember them? What sort of things do you usually dream about? Can you see how the conscious mind affects the unconscious mind in dreams?

Chapter 6: Value and Philosophy

“Man everywhere and at all times, whoever he may be, has preferred to act as he chose and not in the least as his reason, advantage dictated.” That’s what Dostoevsky said in his *Notes from Underground*. What do you say?

My friend, Henry David Thoreau, said: “A saner man would have found himself often enough in formal opposition to what are deemed the most sacred laws of society, through obedience to yet more sacred laws, and so have tested his resolution without going out of his way.”

As for me, I’m getting tired of being in conflict. I want to live my life very peacefully. I want to find a way to live, without agreeing with the crazy world and without being in conflict with the world either. Let the world go its own crazy way. I’ll stand aside.

If I take anything for granted I cannot be called an earnest seeker of truth, even though it is something the Buddha himself said. I cannot believe something just out of respect for him (and I have the highest respect for him). I want to know for myself.

Another thing I’ve learnt is to communicate with myself. The only person with whom I can communicate with really, really well is myself. It’s not so easy. Every movement, frustration, feeling, pride, boredom (especially when with people because I don’t feel bored when I’m alone) is completely communicated (available to me). I feel completely revealed to myself. I understand myself deeply now.

I no longer have any strong desire to improve myself anymore, which is something most people cannot understand. Do you understand that? And I have no strong desire (wish) to improve anybody either. Now I enjoy a kind of ease, which I have never enjoyed before.

“All things of value must come from this heart.” Quite true. You know, I used to be an intellectual. I valued knowledge and reasoning too much. I read thousands of books on all subjects. But now I read very little although I still value knowledge and reasoning. I can’t preach anymore because I feel it’s presumptuous. Instead I say and share what I have learnt. My heart is opening more and more.

Ideals are less important to me now. I don’t live a formula. I look deeply into my heart. ‘Shoulds’ and ‘should nots’ are not important anymore. I trust my heart instead (my brain is too rational); I feel more alive when I am aware of my heart.

I don’t want judgment; I want understanding. I am not perfect, in fact I am becoming even more imperfect. So I am scared of those who are judgmental. I want to be left alone.

I’ve done a lot of unwholesome things in my life, but I don’t blame myself or others. It’s impossible not to have done anything unwholesome. I am trying to practise *dhamma* and I’m happy about that.

I like discipline. So when people don't do things right, I have to tell them off. I know I have to behave in a certain way which is pleasing to the people here in Burma, and when I talk I should say things that they can understand. I can be radical within a certain limit only. In some cases although I don't accept their value judgments I shouldn't say anything that will disturb them too much. It is not useful to be in conflict with people. As long as I don't do or say anything with the intention to deceive them, I feel at peace in my heart. What I am trying to say is that I cannot behave or talk the way I really feel inside. This is Burma. For example, people come to see me and treat me in such a way that it makes me upset because they know I used to be a Muslim. Yet it is wonderful for them to see a monk who was a Muslim too. They expect me to believe all the tales that they believe in. What can I do? I smile.

I was called a Communist when I was young because I didn't believe in any organised religion. Do I believe in organised religion now? Well, who knows?

How do you remove religious flavour from the *Dhamma*? I'm trying to do that here.

So I want to get a clear idea about how to relate to people. I don't like people thinking of me as a certain kind of person which I am not, but that's inevitable. Everybody in the world is misunderstood. And I would still be upset if they understood me correctly.

As long as I am clear about my motives, it's OK.

I agree with you about how a stupid person can get a position in an organisation. I have enough of that sort of experience with stupid people. I can understand people better but I don't want to argue with a stupid person, especially with a stupid person who thinks he/she is smarter. I am becoming more detached from people and organisations. I don't think much about helping; people use people for their own self-aggrandisement in the name of helping.

“Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process they do not themselves become monsters.” (*Nietzsche*)

As someone once said: “What? A great man? I always see only the actor of his own ideal.” (*Nietzsche*) So much of what I do is to show the world (people) that I'm not a fool (not a sucker).

I am changing so fast that sometimes it is hard for me to tell what my attitude will be next year. I find my teachers and friends sitting where they were (where they have always been). I can talk with them only about unimportant matters like health, the weather, and the government. For them the whole of truth has been revealed in books; for me everything is questionable. I have found a lot of ideals unrealistic. What am I going to teach?

The change in me is still going on; I don't want to interfere with that. One disillusionment after another. Maybe that's learning — waking up from a beautiful dream into harsh reality.

My values have changed so much that I find it difficult to talk with people. I want to become clearer about my attitude. I mean, I can't play the role of a Sayadaw; the hocus-pocus is driving me to distraction.

Are you afraid of change? I hope not. If you are afraid of change, you can't stay a friend of mine. "One has to change to stay akin to me", as Nietzsche once said.

We want to be something more and different. Why? Is it because what we are is not good enough, or acceptable? Is it because of ego or pride?

One person says, 'I would like to become enlightened!' Another person says, 'I would like to understand what is greed, anger, pride, doubt, etc.' Which is the proper attitude?

Most people don't have any direction in their life, because they look for a direction outside, in the Bible, in the sacred books of the East, in philosophy or in science. Any direction a person gets from an outside source is not a true direction; it is just a whimsical direction, a direction in the dark. But outer sources can give a hint to a person to find inner direction. Without having this inner direction a person is lost. No inspiration from reading a sacred book or following a saint, a guru, or a Sayadaw can give a person a true direction. I have seen this everywhere.

Only a person who is in despair about the meaninglessness, blindness, and lack of direction can have a chance of finding a direction. To be able to despair about the situation one is in, a person needs a lot of intelligence and observation. (The state of mind of Siddhattha before he set out to become the Buddha.)

A lot of people read *dhamma* books, follow great teachers, listen to *dhamma* talks, some can teach *dhamma*, but I see they have no direction. They just repeat stories, always second-hand, never first-hand. Some of them become famous, and they enjoy their fame, becoming very proud of their success. That's their downfall. That shows that they have no direction.

Some people become happier by following a teacher, practising some kind of meditation, but there is no real depth in that. Getting excited about a beautiful idea, a beautiful ideal, doesn't last long. Some people are just looking for a difference, a change. They grab at anything — Tibetan, Zen, Yoga, Southern Buddhism, etc.

"Our highest insights must (and should) sound like follies and sometimes like crimes when they are heard without permission by those who are not predisposed and predestined for them." (*Nietzsche*)

People like to be deceived. It is hard to make them let go of a false idea they are clinging to. They get really upset when you say something that threatens their pet ideas (dreams, fantasies, etc.).

People like to believe in myth, I think. It is almost impossible to make them give up believing in it. They are like children. Without make-believe of one sort or another they feel lost; without it their lives become like a dry bone. So if you want to take myth away from them, you have to give them something else to take its place.

People grow old, but they don't grow up.

"Faith means not wanting to know what is true". (*Nietzsche*)

Intellectual honesty is very rare. When teachers talk they talk as if they know for sure, even though they have no experience about what they are talking about. They never express their doubts. Don't they have any doubts? Is that possible?

I want to live in broad daylight, not in a dream.

When I live by myself, not talking much, I live in a different world. I would call it a spiritual world, but when I talk too much with people, about all sorts of worldly matters, I feel like I've been pulled down into the sensual, material, crazy, superficial world, compelled to listen, respond, and to participate in the conversation.

Somebody (I forgot who it was) once told me that some people wear a lot of jewelry and gold ornaments because they are themselves worthless; they only feel worthy when they have these ornaments on. Some people own colourful stones and glittering metals; some have big numbers in the bank; some are temporarily appointed as ministers and presidents (and look how puffed up these people are). If you don't call that craziness, I don't know what craziness is! Are there any other ways by which people make themselves feel worthy (or show others that they are worthy), like, for example, wearing robes as monks and nuns? I remember A. used to say, "So much pain in the world". I would like to add further: So much nonsense in the world!

No matter how much you try not to get into this nonsense drama, you are compelled to take part in it. Have you been in such a fix? People are saying (monks and lay people): "He was an Arahat and his ashes turned into balls of the size of beads in a rosary", as if that's the criterion to prove that a monk was an Arahat or not. I want to stay out of the whole thing. (The ashes could turn into balls. So what?)

You need a lot of mindfulness not to get 'sucked in' in a conversation. I would like to be more quiet. It would be better for my own peace of mind.

If you can remove nonsense, assumptions, and lies from conversations, you won't have much to talk about. I'm getting very tired of assumptions, too many assumptions make life unreal. Assumed people doing assumed actions in an assumed situation, living an assumed life.

Beware of those who attach great value to being credited with moral tact and subtlety in making moral distinctions. They never forgive us once they have made a mistake in front of us (or worse, against us); inevitably they become our instinctive slanderers and detractors, even if they should remain our friends. (*Nietzsche*)

How true. What psychological insight.

I'm afraid I'm becoming more and more radical; I might have to take the road least trodden, where I might be alone; I might have to let go of a lot of my friends' hands.

I've met a few of my friends (some monks, some lay people), it's hard for me to talk to them because of my unconventionality. I'm trying to understand and

adapt to that. I'll make new friends, and lose a few old ones. People are afraid of radical people, I think, and of change. They find security in old, familiar ideas; new ideas are threatening — people who change their minds are unreliable.

Another quotation from *An End to Innocence*:

To the extent that they deny the existence of evil forces in themselves and others, again and again in his or her own way each unwittingly abets socially or personally destructive transactions with the people around them... For some the pseudo-innocence takes the form of a life-long search for a magic way to make people care about them. If only they could learn to enchant others with their grace and beauty, to please them with their compliance, impress them with their achievements, or manipulate them with their wiles, then they could live happily ever after. (*Sheldon Kopp*)

Some changes regarding value judgments are going on in me, which I want to tell you about. A lot of things that I thought would make my life meaningful, fulfilling, successful, and deeply satisfying, don't seem important anymore, or at least they're not my first priority anymore. One of them is teaching (helping). Doesn't sound good? Ha! Helping or teaching can be (and is) an ego trip. I see a lot of contradictions in the way some people teach and the way they live their lives. Why is there contradiction? This is a big and very interesting question for me.

I have so much time — no need to work for a living; no family to support; not enjoying sensual pleasures, which take so much time; not many people to talk to (I talk about an hour or two a day); practically nothing to worry about and no responsibilities. Since I have so much time, I think a lot about life and its meaning; since I have no other serious matter to think about, it becomes a very serious matter to me. What do I really want? Why?

The things that make me feel desperate are meaningless and childish for some people. Because I have nothing to worry about my livelihood, I think very seriously about things that are beyond most people's concern.

Since I don't believe in any dogmatism, I look for my own answer freely.

My point is, sometimes I am really in despair. Sometimes I feel really burnt out. Then I get down to the basics and simple things, and try to look at life afresh without any preconceived value judgment. In those detached, peaceful, clear moments, nothing seems to be very important. Only a few fundamental truths appear very clearly, such as *anicca* (impermanence), *anattā* (egolessness), craving (desire, attachment, clinging), and suffering (unsatisfactoriness, pain — mental and physical), *lobha* (greed), *dosa* (aversion), and *moha* (delusion). The worst is delusion. Not having the opportunity to observe is too bad — too many distractions in life.

"... how a man must have suffered to be so much in need of playing the clown!" Is this true, my dear friend? You must know. That was what Nietzsche said regarding Shakespeare.

Because my ideas are radical it is not easy for me to talk with most people who are orthodox. Therefore, it is hard for me to teach. If I really speak my mind, I will end up in trouble. It's not easy to be honest. I want to be more honest and open but I don't want to get into trouble. I have to learn to be quiet, or otherwise become a hermit.

In this super busy, supersonic, super distraction, superficial world — is there any hope for the majority of mankind to be sane? I'm not talking about the majority; I'm talking about those few who are above average? Let the average people eat, sleep, listen to rock 'n' roll, and die.

People are becoming like manufactured clothes — stereotyped, cheap, short-lasting style with no personal uniqueness. I like things (clothes) that are specially custom-fitted, with taste and quality (yes, that's very important), and which are long-lasting.

I have read about satellites in a science book: some satellites go around the Earth with increasing radius; they go farther and farther as they go around the Earth, and at a certain point when they cannot go around the earth anymore, they go off, away from the Earth, breaking away from the gravitational force. I feel like that satellite. I feel this very often and very strongly.

Sometimes I don't feel like talking much. People talk mostly to kill time, not because they have anything special to communicate. Then there is the danger of misunderstanding when you try to communicate something that you feel deeply. You are laughed at. Understanding is a very precious and rare phenomenon.

Just as a physician might say that there very likely is not one single living human being who is completely healthy, so anyone who really knows mankind might say that there is not one single living human being who does not despair a little, who does not secretly harbour an unrest, an inner strife, a disharmony, an anxiety about an unknown something or a something he does not even dare to try to know, an anxiety about some possibility in existence or an anxiety about himself, so that, just as the physician speaks of going around with an illness in the body, he walks around with a sickness, carries around a sickness of the spirit that signals its presence at rare intervals in and through an anxiety he cannot explain. (*Kierkegaard*)

The Buddha said: "I can see that some people are healthy in body for one day, two days... one year, two years. But if anybody says that he is healthy in mind even for a short while what can he be except being a fool?"

So, who are you, my dear friend? Are you healthy in mind or are you a fool? (Catch 22). If you say that you are healthy in mind, then you are a fool!

Kierkegaard again: "It is always good to be distinguished by something. I ask nothing better than to be pointed out as the only one in our serious age who is not serious." How do you like that? You want to die while laughing, don't you?

I would like to write you a few quotations from *An End to Innocence*. Here is one of them:

There is another breed of pseudo-innocent whose attention is directed mainly toward the maintaining of a saintly self-image. As a strategy for living, saintliness may have its own implicitly exploitative expectations of how others are to respond to one's purity. Still, the main concern is with continuing reassurance of one's own angelic innocence. I find that such people always turn out to be too good to be true.

I've been thinking about this one for quite a long time. Here's another one: "super good intentions often result in super bad actions." What do you think about that? "Unhappy at the outcome of their folly, some of the neurotic too-good-to-be-true innocents end up seeking psychotherapy." Now, here comes my observation: Mostly, those who cannot help themselves talk a lot about helping others; maybe because they need it. Help people to help themselves, so that they won't need your help anymore.

People don't understand what real spirituality is. They mistake spirituality with faith, blind faith — I am for spiritual freedom.

A person who thinks that helping others (distributing *dhamma*) and serving mankind (or saving mankind) is the most important thing to do with their life doesn't know what is really important and profound. The most important thing an intelligent person can do is to live their life truthfully, earnestly, intensely, and strive for a deeper understanding of their true nature. Helping should be secondary.

One thing is becoming clear to me: Unconsciously I've been looking for a way of life, which is acceptable to any intelligent person and reasonable from every point of view as well as practicable and useful for everybody. I've been too concerned about, or I have too much respect for, other people's way of understanding and thinking. Now I understand that that is not important; I don't have to explain everything I do.

Even before, I used to do what I wanted, but I tried to explain it in a way that looked reasonable to other people. Now I see that my private life is of no concern to others. I live (and will live) my life so that it is satisfying to me, and not according to what other people think I should do.

I don't want to deal with any organisation anymore. Too much talking, petty fights, rivalry and slander; I would like to be beyond all these. I'm sure I'm not an organisation person. I don't want to be one anyway, but I will try my best to help anybody who comes my way.

I have a habit of identifying myself with humanity; everything which is a problem to mankind is my concern. I don't know whether this is good or not, but I have learnt a lot that way. Now, I see what a big burden this is. Why should I try to solve all problems? (Mentally, I have the habit of solving problems.) Who am I to solve all problems? I cannot solve another's problem; I've got enough of my own. Some people think I don't have any problems. Yes, not their kind of problems, but I've got my own kind of problems nonetheless. Desperately I try to find the answers to my kind of questions, questions that most people don't

think about. Answers that satisfy most people are not satisfactory to me. For most people, all the answers to all the questions are in books, but not for me.

A castle built with cardboards, blown away.
Very hard to let go of dreams. (*Sayadaw U Jotika*)

Petty problems keep the mind busy (occupied).

I've got a lot of things that most people want. Every time I tried to get something, I thought it would make my life more meaningful, but when I got what I wanted I found that it was only superficial, just another stepping stone, another thing to let go of. There is a kind of awakening in every letting go, until nothing is left to let go of.

What I've done and what I'm doing seem very important to me, but it doesn't seem to be of any importance to anybody else. After I'm dead, I'll be forgotten. No big deal. The most important thing for me is to live a deeply satisfying and meaningful life, meaningful for me.

Praise and blame are not so important for me, mostly they are biased.

A lot of things are now losing their importance, their hold, their grip, their charm on me, for example, politics, progress in science and technology, and even religion.

It is amazing what people believe in. It seems to me that people cannot live without believing in something. I wonder what it would be like to live my life without any kind of belief or expectation (aspiration). Can you imagine that?

Busy, busy, busy. Unnecessarily. So crazy, so meaningless. Is there intelligent life on Earth? What is intelligence?

What a waste it is not to do what is really meaningful to you and do what people expect you to do. Do you know what is really meaningful and deeply satisfying to you?

To be happy is not enough for me. I want to understand everything deeply, to understand not just by thinking but by living, living the real life and not the ideal.

Although I conform (I have to) bodily, in many ways, with the established tradition, mentally I live a unique life.

This smart commentator in the mind is a nuisance (a thorn in the flesh); it has to put a footnote to every phenomenon. What do you want people to learn? What do you want them to be? How are you going to do that?

But, how are you living your life?

I am reading Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. I'm enjoying reading it which is surprising. I like his style very much. I've got another of his books *Sickness unto Death*, which I have read through quickly. I will read it again. Do you know any good books on existential philosophy? I've never read Jean-Paul Sartre. Enough about books.

I would like to quote a passage from *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*:

Let us then proceed, but let us not try to deceive one another. I, Johannes Chimacus (he used this assumed pen-name when he wrote this book), am a human being, neither more nor less; and I assume that anyone I may have the honour to engage in conversation with, is also a human being. If he presumes to be speculative philosophy in the abstract, pure speculative thought, I must renounce the effort to speak with him; for in that case he instantly vanishes from my sight, and from the feeble sight of every mortal.
(*Kierkegaard*)

Very well expressed! Exactly the way I feel about myself and other people. I am a human being, neither more nor less; not just a monk, and I like to engage in conversation with a human being.

When I talk to somebody who is acting a role (either of a monk or a teacher, or a guru, or any kind of role), I feel very discombobulated. (Ha! Ha! I found a big word in the Synonym Finder [means: thrown into confusion].)

To call yourself something, a monk or a guru or a philosopher, is very limiting, confining, restricting, binding. I want to be able to talk freely; to have to talk a monkish-talk is really dull. (I have the deepest respect for the Buddha, please don't forget that.) So, I'm in a fix, in a predicament. These days, especially in Buddhist culture, to be a monk is to act like a monk. You don't speak your mind. You say what a monk should say, what people expect you to say. You pretend that you understand and believe everything in the sacred books. Even though you don't understand everything, you believe everything anyway. Can I do that? I can't talk to most of the monks because they will say what they should say, not what is really in their minds. (In most cases they have nothing in their minds.) I'm not just saying blah blah blah, my dear friend. This is something I feel very strongly.

The word 'Buddhist' is a newfangled word. In the olden days they used *sammā-dīṭṭhi-vādī* (one having right views). Do Buddhists have right views these days?

"Of all evil I deem you capable: therefore I want the good from you."
(*Nietzsche*)

People want to daydream; they don't want mindfulness, mindfulness of the present, because in the present there is nothing one can daydream about.

To see my mind through and through, and not to deceive myself is now the most important task for me. When I don't believe in something, it is very important for me to see clearly that I don't believe in it instead of trying to believe it.

I wish I had some humour like Mark Twain, or at least like you. A man cannot survive (cannot protect himself from going nuts) without it. I'm too serious about mankind. Can human beings think straight?

I'll tell you a story. Yesterday, a monk came to see me. He's thirty-nine years old. I've known him for a long time. He told me that he aspired to become a Buddha. Not only that but he said he's sure that he's going to become a Buddha. When I didn't take him seriously and said, "Nobody can be sure about that", he got very upset and talked for another two hours trying to make me believe him.

He went around and told everybody he's going to be a Buddha. That sort of megalomaniac is not rare in Burma. Ha! Ha! Better to laugh than to get upset. It's hard for me to float along. I wish I could say, like T.P.S., "Is that right?"

Since a lot of things are losing their importance for me, things that nobody can find out for sure whether they are true or not, I've found that I've less and less things to talk about. The things that I'm experiencing at present become more and more important for me. Without trying to attain anything, I am able to see things very simply and clearly. I feel more strongly now about the things happening to me.

The present phenomenon is the only thing I have, whether I like it or not; so it is more important for me. Without much diversion, I can observe things easily.

"One must shed the bad taste of wanting to agree with many." (*Nietzsche*)

I would like to repeat (that idea), very experimentally, hesitatingly, tentatively. It could be easily misunderstood. Because words could be misconstrued, stretched.

I think a person's (my) most important task is to understand themselves (myself) well; to understand everything happening in life deeply and not just philosophically; to understand my own motive and attitude very clearly when I say something or do something; to understand without distortion how I feel about something I've heard, seen, etc. (the true reaction of my mind); not to be deceived by anybody, or to deceive myself; not to follow anybody; not to have an ideal just because it sounds beautiful, but to find out for myself whether it is natural, possible, and about the consequences; and to know my own capacity when I undertake to do something. When I understand all those things clearly then I can think of helping others. Otherwise I will be deceiving myself and also deceiving others in the name of helping others. Helping others can become self-aggrandisement. I see this self-aggrandisement everywhere. That is why I talk about it again. Excuse me for repeating myself.

"A matter that becomes clear ceases to concern us." Guess who said that? (*Nietzsche*)

I'll tell you a story about a snake. Once upon a time there was a snake. One day a bee came and stung him on his head and would not let go of it. The snake tried to get rid of the bee but couldn't. Then the snake saw a bullock cart coming with a heavy load. So the snake said to the bee, "I'll let you know." He went to the track and laid his head right on the way of the wheel. The wheel rolled and killed the bee. The snake was really successful in punishing the bee. See how smart the snake was? No shortage of smart people like that in the world.

What do you expect of me, my dear friend? To be perfect? Well, I am perfect in only one way — I am a perfect FOOL! Not really stupid but quite a big fool, and I feel quite OK about that. I have enough courage to say "I don't know".

People don't change radically. Transformation is possible only through meditation. Even then, it takes a long time. Deep awareness which sees *anattā* (selflessness) clearly is necessary, and that is hard work. So I don't expect too much.

What you wrote about Bangkok is really shocking. Will Burma (Rangoon) become like that one day? That is the price you pay to become modernised. I would rather live in the mountains, eat simple food, live in a simple hut, breathe pure air, do things at a leisurely pace, not worry about money and status, with no week-days or weekends, and no luxury.

We want so much admiration, recognition, respect and love that we think quite a lot about what to do to get them. That way we don't live for what we value most but for what others value most. It is very important to find out what we value most and live it without being in conflict with others if possible. We create values and live them. So it is very important to find out whether those values are really worth living for.

Some people think it must be like *devaloka* (a heavenly realm) to live in B. where you can enjoy all the sense pleasures and where you can get all the luxuries. How hard it is to understand that sense pleasures and luxuries are empty like dreams.

I want to have a friend who is not rigidly, blindly and indiscriminately following a set of rules or formulas; who is observant; who lives his life intelligently; who learns and grows as the years go by; who is flexible (who understands a situation and acts accordingly); who wants to find out for himself even the most simple truth (taught by the wisest man in history); who won't take anything for granted (but with due respect), but tries instead to find out for himself; a man who is alive and not lukewarm, who is not afraid to stand alone.

What a funny thing fame is — how empty and annoying.

When I hear from some friends what people say about me, I don't know whether to laugh or to get upset. What crazy, funny stories people invent. People are stupid and crazy; there is no doubt about that. They want to be deceived, yet they deceive themselves. I know they are basically really nice, simple folks; they don't want to believe the truth, and they are too ready to believe fantastic stories. Why are people so ready to believe fantastic stories? What do they gain by doing so?

I enjoyed reading *The Illusion of Technique*. The Buddha said, '*Mā naya hetu,*' which means 'Don't believe something (idea) to be true just because it agrees with the system (of philosophy)'. Technique or system is deceiving; techniques and systems are inventions of the human mind. Nature doesn't fit into any system strictly. Even the *Abhidhamma* [see glossary] cannot really explain natural phenomena completely; it is lacking in many ways. I read them, try to understand them, test them and learn something from them, I know you are disappointed with Western philosophy, and I am not satisfied with it either, but I think I can learn something from them. Most of the existential philosophy is very depressing. They tell you how terrible life is but they can't tell you how to live your life peacefully. Most of the philosophers are all head, muddle-headed. All they do is thinking; they aren't even happy, and many of them went crazy. Most people don't think so much, don't read philosophy, and they're happier

than most philosophers. The more I read these philosophies, the more I appreciate the teachings of the Buddha, which are so practical and meaningful.

Mettā (loving-kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic joy) and *upekkhā* (equanimity), *sīla* (morality), *samādhi* (concentration), *sati* (mindfulness) and *paññā* (wisdom) — these things are really meaningful and important in life, and if one develops them, they can really make a difference in one's life.

In many ways and for many people, philosophy and science helps a lot to free the mind from dogmatism. That's the best thing about them but they also create a vacuum in people's mind; people are left empty, disillusioned and lost, but can we really blame philosophy and science for that? Philosophy and science helped me to free my mind from believing in my parents' religion yet that left me in limbo also. Now it is my responsibility to give meaning to my life.

Reading existential philosophy helps me, in some ways, to understand Westerners and their problems, their way of thinking and what is lacking in their thinking, and how they are trying to solve their problems. Can the teaching of the Buddha help them? How? Is the way most Sayadaws teach suitable for Westerners? No? Why not?

Understanding others is important in understanding oneself.

This world is crazy, absolutely senseless, a fake, a show, a conceited show. Fools get caught in its snare. Vain glory. False possessions.

Allusion

I pretend that I came
To improve the world and make people happy.
In fact I feel empty inside.
It's frightening to see how ugly I am.
Got to do something to cover this ugliness.
Empty and meaningless I am.
Looking for something to fill this emptiness
and meaninglessness.
I thought I've got something, at last, to make my
life fulfilled. Something beautiful and meaningful.
Looking closely I found. It too is empty.
I want to teach people. Why?
But I myself am deluded.
To hide my delusion I must teach people, and
pretend that I know.
Talking about love. Big Beautiful Words
Flying high like eagles.
But my heart is filled with anger and frustration.
Pretending to be detached.
And secretly craving to be well-known for
being detached.

Talking about wanting few. And yet enjoying luxuries.
Pleased and proud for being endowed with presents.
Talking about purity and chastity but haven't got
courage to look oneself in the eye.

What hypocrisy.

People said, "You are a beautiful person,
Wise and happy." I wish that were true.

Seeker of truth
Follow no path
All paths lead where
truth is here. (*e. e. cummings*)

"So much of my *Dhamma* connection has fizzled, partly because of my laxness, partly because I've become so disillusioned with the usual forms and institutions." I can understand that very well, my dear friend. My situation is not much different. It is very hard to talk to monks, my former teachers and friends who are monks. I try to understand them and also myself. *Mettā* and *karuṇā* I have for them but no deep mutual understanding. There is a big gap between us, and I have no hope of finding a monk with whom I can share my deepest thoughts and feelings and insights. It seems to me that the more you know, the more lonely you become intellectually.

Well, anyway, I am not so upset about that anymore although I still yearn for an open communication, free from being judged. I am trying to learn to live with that loneliness; I have to. I feel like I am a star, a million light years away from another star! I think everybody is desperately lonely. Some are more sensitive and so they feel it more.

I feel very free in my mind though, with only wholesome and unwholesome thoughts as my guideline. Unwholesome thoughts are painful and are also causes for pain, whereas wholesome thoughts are peaceful.

"... there's no vehicle left." Do we need any vehicle? I think if we practice mindfulness in its completeness (not leaving out any part of our life), it should be enough.

I don't think I could ever become a member of an organisation because I cannot stand being bound by party dogma. I want to live mentally free. I might never accomplish anything significant 'in the eyes of others', but I feel OK about that. Internally, however, I feel a kind of freedom which I did not feel before and which most people don't know of. By this I don't mean any stage of enlightenment in its formal sense.

My dear friend, you can live a peaceful life if you are clear and wise. Why are you so concerned about others? Do you think you are responsible for them?

It is not worth being unhappy about anything. I don't mean I am always happy, but I can see that when there is a big ego identified with something there is also unhappiness.

Your words again: "I guess what I'm saying is that I have yet to resolve, within my own mind, the Big Question of what kind of balanced form the practice of the *Dhamma* can take here in the West, being both true to genuine practice and at the same time meet the strange material needs of this culture." This is a Big Question. Answer this question for yourself first.

I think the first and most important thing a person should clearly see in their practice is to see the truth that unwholesome thoughts make a person unhappy. It's not about trying to overcome them, but just to see them plainly and clearly.

What do people want? They want happiness and they don't want pain. So see what makes you unhappy. People don't see that it's the unwholesome thoughts which make them unhappy; it's hard for most people to accept that. They think that sensual pleasures and all the things they want can make them happy. If you are happy inside you don't need much to be happy.

"Except for the ascetic ideal, man's life has been animalic and meaningless."
(*Nietzsche*)

"The most spiritual men are the strongest ones." (*Nietzsche*)

"Even a single compromise with the tastes of public opinion might lead a thinker eventually to lose his intellectual integrity." (*Nietzsche*)

"Great power reveals itself in great self-mastery." (*Nietzsche*)

For everyone who does not know
How to control his inmost self would fain control
His neighbour's will according to his own conceit.
(*Goethe*)

What is your most beautiful fantasy?

Ah! Beautiful dreams! They made me happy; they nourished me; they were useful when I was young. Now I know they are only dreams. Sometimes I wish I can become dreamy again. Such ignorant bliss! But no that's not possible. I have to climb this mountain, alone, in the bright noon. I long for a companion but, alas, I couldn't get one. I must make my mind and body stronger so that I might be able to climb to the top alone.

I know what loneliness means. I'm preparing myself for that. That is my destiny. Sweet, sweet loneliness.

My dearest friend, get deeply in touch with yourself.

I am less and less inclined to teach, but I'm still interested in talking to intelligent, open-minded people, not to orthodox Buddhists who believe everything in the texts. Worst of all I can't listen to somebody who talks like a preacher, as if he knows everything.

If you write your story then I'll read it. A person who is a battleground of conflicting ideals; a Jewish-American Buddhist; a person who knows too much

and doesn't know what to do with his life; a person who sees the farce (joke) in the world and can't take anything seriously, including himself, which has become a serious problem for him. (This is true for me too, but I am much more aware of my mind.)

Let go! Watch!

“Instead of appreciating your kindness, they think you are cheap, stupid and for use and they start to manipulate. Why?” That's because they have no respect for other people. They have not learnt to have a good relationship with people. Maybe they were never treated with respect. We learn these things from our experience, not from books, maybe they've lived with people, parents, spouse who manipulate each other.

It is very hard to find someone who doesn't manipulate others. We manipulate others because we don't trust or respect them, and we don't trust ourselves either. If we respect and trust each other we won't manipulate each other. Manipulation is a sign of weakness and immaturity.

Life is mystical.

Those who cannot feel it will find no joy or wonder.

Those who try to explain away life are vain.

They will never succeed.

I'd rather be a mystic than a scientist.

Some mystics are also scientists. (*Sayadaw U Jotika*)

Deception (self-deception) never leads to growth or insight. If you want to see the truth you need courage and honesty first.

We are part angel and part demon. If we deny the demon it will haunt us from the dark; let the demon come out into the daylight.

Make-believe, *maya* (illusion), and autosuggestion make life even more empty.

There are all kinds of dependence which in our society — having so many anxious, lonely and empty persons in it — masquerade as love. They vary from different forms of mutual aid or reciprocal satisfaction of desires (which may be quite sound if called by their right names), through the various business forms of personal relationships to clear parasitical masochism. It not infrequently happens that two persons, feeling solitary and empty by themselves, relate to each other in a kind of unspoken bargain to keep each other from suffering loneliness. (*Rollo May*)

“The tragic issue is the issue of seeing the reality and the truth about oneself.”

For those who get distracted easily, it is better to keep their mind busy noting one thing after another; for those who are calm and mindful, they can just watch whatever comes naturally.

“When you are thwarted, it is your own attitude that is out of order.” (*Meister Eckhart*)

If you have nothing to live for it means you value nothing in life, you have no centre. All the ideals you valued were borrowed. In a time like right now, you have no firm ground to stand on.

“... one can never apply some centre from the outside.”

“Difficult as the task is, we must accept ourselves and our society where we are, and find our ethical centre through a deeper understanding of ourselves as well as through a courageous confronting of our historical situation.”

“And the most constructive place to begin learning how to love is to see how we fail to love.” (*Rollo May*)

To forgive is to understand.

To forgive is to be free.

When you cannot forgive somebody you are in bondage.

When you see *anattā* who is there to forgive.

(*Sayadaw U Jotika*)

Here are a few extracts which I find very thought-provoking:

“Now it is a well-known psychological tendency that when we repress one attitude or emotion, we often counterbalance it by acting or assuming an attitude on the surface which is just the opposite. You may, for example, often find yourself acting especially politely toward the person you dislike.”

“Furthermore, if we do not confront our hatred and resentment openly they will tend sooner or later to turn into the one effect which never does anyone any good, namely self pity. Self-pity is the preserved form of hatred and resentment.”

“... no one can arrive at real love or morality or freedom until he has frankly confronted and worked through his resentment.”

“Freedom is not rebellion.”

“Freedom means openness, a readiness to grow; it means being flexible, ready to change for the sake of greater human values.”

“... man always live in a social world, and that world conditions his psychological health.”

“The good society is, thus, the one which give the greatest freedom to its people — freedom defined not negatively and defensively, but positively, as the opportunity to realise ever greater human values.”

“Freedom is man’s capacity to take a hand in his own development. It is our capacity to mould ourselves.”

“... the less self-awareness a person has, the more he is unfree.”

“As the person gains more consciousness of self, his range of choice and his freedom proportionately increase.”

“Freedom is shown in according one’s life with realities.”

“It is doubtful whether anyone really achieves health who does not responsibly choose to be healthy.”

“Thus freedom is not just the matter of saying ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to a specific decision: it is the power to mould and create ourselves.”

“Freedom does not mean trying to live in isolation. It does mean that when one is able to confront his isolation, he is able consciously to choose to act with some responsibility, in the structure of his relations with the world, especially the world of other persons around him.”

“The basic step in achieving inward freedom is ‘choosing one’s self’. This strange sounding phrase of Kierkegaard’s means to affirm one’s responsibility for one’s self and one’s existence... accepting the fact that one must make his basic choices himself.

“The mark of the mature man is that his living is integrated around self-chosen goals: he knows what he wants...”

“... the beliefs and traditions handed down in the society tend to become crystallised into dead forms which suppress individual vitality.

“The real problem, thus, is to distinguish what is healthy in ethics and religion, and yields a security which increases rather than decreases personal worth, responsibility and freedom. The person in our day, therefore, who seeks values around which he can integrate his living, needs to face the fact that there is no easy and simple way out.”

“... more accurately, is it not the conflict between every human being’s need to struggle toward enlarged self awareness, maturity, freedom and responsibility, and his tendency to remain a child and cling to the protection of parents or parental substitute?” (The message is: Grow up!)

“Does a given individual’s religion serve to break his will, keep him at an infantile level of development, and enable him to avoid the anxiety of freedom and personal responsibility? Or does it serve him as a basis of meaning which affirms his dignity and worth, which gives him a basis for courageous acceptance of his limitations and normal anxiety, but which aids him develop his powers, his responsibility and his capacity to love his fellow men?” (*Rollo May*)

“The problem of being prey to someone else’s power is reinforced, of course, by one’s own infantile desire to be taken care of.”

“They have been taught that happiness and success would follow their ‘being good’, the latter generally interpreted as being obedient. But being merely obedient, as we have shown above, undermines the development of an individual’s ethical awareness and inner strength. By being obedient to external requirements over a long period of time, he loses his real powers of ethical, responsible choice. Strange as it sounds, then, the powers of these people to achieve goodness and the joy which goes with it are diminished.”

“... the person who surrenders his ethical autonomy has relinquished to the same degree his power to attain virtue and happiness. No wonder he feels resentful.”

“The neurotic uses of religion have one thing in common: they are devices by which the individual avoids having to face his loneliness and anxiety.”

“... the human being is in the depth of himself basically alone,... there is no recourse from the necessity of making one’s choice ultimately alone.”

“... despair and anxiety can never be worked through until one confronts them in their stark and full reality.”

“Maturity and eventual overcoming of loneliness are possible only as one courageously accepts his aloneness to begin with.”

“What anxiety makes me now wish to run to the wings of an authority, and what problem of my own am I trying to evade?”

“We define religion as the assumption that life has meaning.”

“Religion is whatever the individual takes to be his ultimate concern.”

“... psychologically, religion is to be understood as a way of relating to one’s existence.”

“But we do mean to emphasise that unless the individual himself can affirm the value; unless his own inner motive, his own ethical awareness, are made the starting place, no discussion of values will make much real difference.”

“Love demanded as a payment is not love at all.”

“We receive love not in proportion to our demands or sacrifices or needs, but roughly in proportion to our own capacity to love. And our capacity to love depends, in turn, upon our prior capacity to be persons in our own right.”

“The reason we do not see truth is that we do not have enough courage.”

“When one has been able to say ‘No’ to the need that he be ‘borne up’, when, in other words, he is able not to demand he be taken care of, when he has the courage to stand alone, he can then speak as one with authority.”

“The more a person is able to direct his life consciously, the more he can use time for constructive benefits. To be able to see truth thus goes along with emotional and ethical maturity. When one is able to see truth in this way, he gains confidence in what he says. He has become convinced of his beliefs ‘on his own pulse’ and in his own experience, rather than through abstract principles or through being told.”

“The more a person lacks self awareness, the more he is prey to anxiety and irrational anger and resentment: and while anger generally blocks us from using our more subtle intuitive means of seeing truth, anxiety always blocks us.”

“I have been a learner all my life, but I make truth, which is universal, my own from within, through the exercise of my freedom, and my knowledge of truth is my own relation to truth.”

“To be capable of giving and receiving mature love is as sound a criterion as we have for the fulfilled personality.”

“... the most important thing at the outset is to call our emotions by their right names. And the most constructive place to begin learning how to love is to see how we fail to love.”

“But when ‘love’ is engaged in for the purpose of vanquishing loneliness, it accomplishes its purpose only at the price of increased emptiness for both persons.”

“Love, as we have said, is generally confused with dependence: but in point of fact, you can love only in proportion to your capacity for independence.”

[Most of these quotations have come from *Man's Search for Himself* by Rollo May or *Freedom to Learn* by Carl Rogers]

Chapter 7: Friendship, Relationships and Loving-kindness

What is the key to people's hearts? (Understanding.)

The most valuable thing in life is relationship (friendship).

Life cannot be real if relationships are not real.

Relationship is sacred.

The best thing I can give you is my friendship.

Relationship is the source of the greatest joy and the greatest mental suffering.

The quality of our life depends much on the quality of our relationship with people around us.

It is nice to have good friends. Life would be so flat without *kalyāṇa mittas* (noble/spiritual friends).

How rare it is to have a friend.

Dear friend, I don't have many friends left. So I value whatever friends I still have.

To have a friend is one of the most wonderful experiences in life. To develop a deeper and deeper understanding of oneself and the world is also very wonderful. For me understanding is the most satisfying thing in life.

There is no time and space in our friendship.

I have made many new friends with whom I can relate to; I don't expect anything from them: just open-hearted, free-flowing communication.

Yes, I also have "deeper cravings for some kind of sincere companion".

I want my relationship with you, with him, with my daughters, with my former wife to be a nurturing, nourishing relationship.

Relationships with people are not really reliable in most cases. Most relationships are just games. An honest, open, sincere, genuine, non-manipulative, non-dominating relationship, where there is mutual respect and trust, and which does not have unrealistic expectations — is such a relationship possible?

I want to quote from C. Roger's book *Freedom to Learn*:

Furthermore, I have no desire to instruct my readers, or impress you with my knowledge in this field. I have no desire to tell you what you should think or feel or do.

The only solution I have come up with is that perhaps I can share something of myself, something of my experience in interpersonal relationships, something of what it has been like to be me, in communication with others.

... interpersonal communication is almost never achieved except in part. You probably never feel fully understood by another, and neither do I. Yet, I find it extremely rewarding when I have been able, in a particular instance, truly to communicate myself to another. I find it very precious when, for some moment in time, I have felt really close to, fully in touch with, another person.

I believe I know why it is satisfying to me to hear someone. When I can really hear someone it puts me in touch with him. It enriches my life.

(C. Rogers)

A person needs a good relationship for his/her psychological development. A good relationship is a necessity in a person's life. A person learns and grows in a good relationship. Without a good relationship we are like robots; with a bad relationship we become beasts or worse than beasts. People are becoming more and more inhuman because they don't have good relationships with people.

Relationship is the soil in which we grow psychologically. If the soil is of poor quality we don't grow well or we have stunted growth; if the soil is good we grow well, strong and mature. There can be no real psychological maturity without good relationships. So we need good relationships in which communication is honest, smooth, flowing, and without fear of any kind. Bad relationships are poisonous.

With sincerity, openness, understanding, caring, loving-kindness and patience they will surely work. Most relationships don't work because they don't have free flow of information (openness), genuine caring, real respect for others, and an understanding that we are all human beings (each of us has our own imperfections, limitations). Expecting too much from another person can also be a cause of disappointment which leads to rejection (thinking this is not what I expected, or acceptable).

With openness, vulnerability, honesty, *mettā* (loving-kindness) and understanding it will be a good relationship which will promote spirituality, maturity, etc. Most relationships become routine after a while (lifeless, stagnant).

Without honesty there can be no real communication; without real communication there can be no real relationship; without real relationship there can be no real help (support, teaching, etc.).

You need a good friend (or good friends, which is better, if possible). One should not live in a place where there is no friend. But what is a friend? And you need a place which is suitable to your temperament.

It is easy to have compassion for a suffering being, but it is not easy to live with that person for the rest of your life.

Love is not enough for two people to live together; deep understanding of each other is necessary. Love is not enough in a relationship; deep understanding and appreciation is also necessary. See if you can accept all the bad things about him without wanting to change him and see if you can also respect him as he is now. Dependent relationships don't work well.

Relationships shouldn't be used as a means; it should end in love, understanding, respect and appreciation. Nobody is perfect. Sometimes relationships become entanglement if they are not grounded on right attitude.

Do not use marriage or any relationship as a means to solving a problem. People should relate to each other just because they love, respect and appreciate (admire) each other as the way they are. Otherwise there is no genuine relationship.

It's OK to fall in love but don't be in a hurry to get married. People change once they're in an intimate relationship.

It takes a lifetime to make sure that you really love somebody. The hay stack burns with a big flame and lasts for a short time, but the husk fire burns imperceptibly and lasts for a long, long time.

Marriage is not a bad thing. I've seen many couples living in harmony, supporting each other in *dhamma* practice. It is very rare though.

It is so rare to find somebody who cares for you. Love without hoping for the relationship to last. Look at the glorious sunset while it is there, but you can't hold on to it.

We never have too much *mettā*; usually we have too little. Real *mettā* never makes you unhappy. It is attachments and expectations which make you unhappy. You can't expect *mettā* as a return for your *mettā*; *mettā* can't be traded. If there's an expectation, then that means there's self-interest. If we love somebody because we want to be loved, then we get hurt when we don't get *mettā* in return.

Feelings come and go and desires come and go — let them come and go. Don't take them so seriously. Just watch them. If you don't try to control them and don't wish them to be otherwise you won't get so upset. Our desire to be in control makes us burn out. We don't suffer because we have a heart; we suffer because we have desires and take them so seriously.

I hope you and him can be lifelong *dhamma* friends helping each other on this journey of spiritual growth. Imposing one's ideas and ideals on someone can cause great conflict. Judging and criticising don't help much either; it can cause loneliness. You cannot change him and he cannot change you. Expecting that the other party should change hinders free communication. Better not to have expectations in a relationship.

Sharing and caring is already healing enough. That will lead to his unburdening of all his feelings. People want to unburden their feelings but they're afraid that they'll be looked down upon; that they'll be misunderstood or manipulated; that they'll be talked about and not loved if people know all about them; that they'll be thought of as abnormal, etc. So they carry all that pain, fear, disappointment, and longing all their life, staying lonely the whole time and acting like tough people, but they melt down when they meet another person who will not judge or gossip about them; who will still love them even after they know all about them; and who really cares for them.

Unconditional acceptance is what he needs. Can you give him that sort of acceptance? I will marry you if... I will not marry you if... The ifs are really terrible, terrifying things.

When somebody says, "I love you", we feel very happy, but we don't really believe it. We always have this fear in our minds, "When he/she knows more about me he/she will not love me any more. I have to be prepared for that. I have to be prepared for being rejected." We don't have complete trust; we are

always uncertain. Are we really sure when we say, “I love you”? Very rarely. It seems rare to know somebody who can really understand you. When you have nobody who understands you (or at least tries to understand or empathise with you), you feel very lonely. How many lonely people are there in this world of five billion people? Is there real contact between one person and another? Can we really touch another human being? Will you let another person touch you?

Many people tell me, “You are the only person who understands me.” I am surprised to hear that repeatedly, and the way they say that is really touching. I try. I wish I could understand people deeply; I don’t expect to understand everybody — that would be too much for me. But at least I want to understand my daughters and their mother, and my close friends.

You want someone to love you. Yet when you love someone you don’t feel that you’re worthy of their love. To make you feel worthy of his love you must sacrifice yourself, but that kind of relationship is never secure and satisfying. Security in relationships: it’s possible only for those who are mature and secure in themselves. Those who have feelings of insecurity and unworthiness will never feel secure in any relationship.

People usually don’t love someone who has sacrificed for them; they don’t want to be indebted to anybody. And even more so if you remind them of how much you have sacrificed for them. Strange? Yes, people are strange. If you have helped someone it’s best for you if you then forget about it. If they remember, it’s nice of them, but if you remind them of how much you have done for them, they’ll hate you for it.

“If I sacrifice for him he’ll love me forever.” No! Don’t deceive yourself.

“I love you not for what you’ve done for me, but for who you are.”

“I’ll forgive him and he’ll forgive me, and we’ll love each other.” No! That’s a kind of bargaining.

I don’t want you to live your life always wondering whether or not he is telling you the truth; that will drain all your mental and physical energy. Yes, a liar can do anything. I am not willing to live with a person in whom I do not trust. I can forgive a mistake but I cannot live with an untrustworthy person. Read *Sanity, Madness and Family* by R.D. Laing. You know how you can go crazy having to live with people who won’t tell you the truth.

It’s OK to help a person but to get into a deep relationship with a person who is not truthful is really taxing. You cannot have a fulfilling relationship with a person in whom you do not trust and respect.

People want to be loved, including you and me, but what we do to be loved is different.

To be loved unconditionally, that is what we really want. But can we love ourselves unconditionally?

Do you love yourself? Strange question. We don’t think about it.

It is easier to love than to understand, it is better still if the two go together.

We must learn to love without becoming dependent or possessive. Pure love doesn't cause pain.

Real *mettā* is necessary in relationships; without it relationships don't mean much. With *mettā* comes acceptance, understanding and tolerance. We are not perfect and nobody is perfect. To see our own imperfection and to feel OK about it is very important to our happiness and even to the progress in our practice. If we cannot accept our imperfection how can we accept somebody else's?

People could live in harmony if they were willing to give each other as much freedom as possible, if they were not so manipulative or bossy.

“The power of loving-kindness, even personal *mettā*, *mettā* for a particular person; and how this can have such an impact on someone's spiritual life.” Yes.

Real love and deep understanding is much more satisfying than any sense pleasure or money. Moreover a way of life based on mindfulness and wisdom will surely make this life worth living.

You cannot have *mettā* for somebody with the expectation that they will be kind to you. You want to be happy and peaceful, so extend that attitude towards others. There is no other way. You should wish for others all the good things that you wish for yourself.

We need *mettā* from many people, if possible from all the people around us. These days most people are suffering from *mettā*-deficiency syndrome (MDS). Most people are crazy because they don't have *mettā*, *sīla* (morals), *sati* (mindfulness) and *paññā* (wisdom), they're attracted to luxuries and new toys, so they lose sight of good qualities of their heart — they've sold their souls to the devil, so to speak.

Do you think you can find somebody who can make you happy? Do you think you can find somebody who will love you unconditionally forever?

“That our care for others is our care for ourselves, a deep honouring of the being we all share.” That is true when there is no ego, and when we see that all beings are related.

“You cannot harm another being without harming yourself.” So when you help another you help yourself; our care for others is caring for ourselves also. To see it and feel it we must first lose our sense of ego. Without others I don't exist. Imagine that there was nothing and nobody, what would you be then? So everybody we know somehow affects our lives. Can you imagine what impact you have on me, on my life? You know what impact I have on you, on your mind, on your life? The same is true for me: You also have great impact on my life; you've made my life richer in many ways.

A woman with a mind of her own can love a man with a mind of his own. Two grown-ups, psychologically independent, mature persons respecting each other's individuality and freedom, can have a deep, lasting, meaningful, and nourishing relationship. We can buy a slave but we cannot buy a friendship.

One cannot be realistic when one is overwhelmed with love. Love is irrational. Because we can talk about it, explain it or even have it, we think we know

it. But how mysterious it is. We feel it; we are overwhelmed by it; sometimes we can't believe ourselves. Is it really true that I love somebody so wholeheartedly? Because we are always so reserved and because we don't trust ourselves, we don't trust anybody.

"I love you with all my heart. And I know that you love me. There is no doubt whatsoever. This is tremendous. For me at least, to know that it is possible for me. I have never expected it. How can I expect something which I have never known? So it is more like a surprise. I feel really grateful. But to whom? Well, to life" — sweet-aching longing.

If you have not loved (and if you do not love) somebody with all your heart you are not a fully-fledged human being yet; you're only a *potential* human being.

To be in love is to be in an altered state of mind.

Love is not reasonable; it is beyond reasoning.

You are alive and overflowing with feeling. Such a thing happens once in a lifetime. I'm very glad to hear that your heart is open now. Let it open even though sometimes it may be painful. We're afraid to love, afraid that we'll be rejected; afraid that we won't be taken seriously, or we'll be manipulated; afraid that we'll be vulnerable, and sometimes we don't trust ourselves; we don't believe that we can really love somebody.

Let all your feelings come out. Write down, express your feelings in blank verses.

Don't be in a hurry to get married. Get to know her better. She's a human being; like all of us she has her share of faults. Try to understand the whole person and love her for that, not just parts of her, or your own projection of her.

You said, "She is very honest." That's the most important quality; without it there can be no meaningful relationship.

"But she's so painfully level-headed about things." What do you expect? To be crazy about a guy who is crazily in love with her? Of course she should be more careful. She must have some experience with men who get crazy and then... It's better for her to learn to love you more and more. For a woman the stake is bigger. And love is not enough. You must have read/heard about romantic love. Some of them didn't last long, some had tragic ends.

"It hurts like a raw nerve." Well, well, it hurts and at the same time you don't want the hurt to go away. It's so precious, so special. It's painful and it's pleasant too.

To love somebody with all your heart is to become a real human being. This experience of yours has real impact on the way you look at human beings; it is priceless.

Even love for a woman can be a spiritual experience. There should be spirituality in every aspect of our life. Then only life would be beautiful and meaningful.

You see, nobody can teach you how to open your heart; how to be vulnerable; how to love another human being; how to go beyond all conventions; how to go beyond limits and to find that which is beyond.

What you are going through is somewhat similar to the experience of enlightenment. You are in a totally different world with different values; you have become a different person and you cannot be the same person that you once were — the transformation is irreversible.

“I value heart-to-heart contact with other people.” I know what it feels like to be in contact with people heart-to-heart. Most relationships do not work because there is no bilateral (mutual) caring, sharing, vulnerability, honesty, tenderness, sensitivity, and real and abundant flowing of *mettā* (not desire). There is one more quality which is no less important, i.e., deep understanding of another person as a person (not as a sex object). Sex is also a part of the relationship between a man and a woman; it should not be neglected, but it should be in harmony with the real sharing of pleasure and not just a gratification of one’s animalistic desire.

We talk too much about love. Do we know what we are talking about? You said, “It feels, sometimes, like I no longer know what reality is.” Did you know what reality was about? As long as we think about reality we are separated from it; when we are one with reality we no longer think about it.

If I could give you advice, I would say take your time to understand your own mind very deeply about what it is you really want from this life. One can go on and on doing one thing after another getting in and out of relationships. What do you expect from a relationship? What are you looking for? If you don’t know what you are looking for, you will end up having a lot of things that you don’t want.

I know what you mean when you said “living from the heart”. With most of my relationships with people, I have been very frustrated thinking that something which makes relationships authentic is missing. In quite a few cases, I didn’t have it myself. So things didn’t work well in the long run; something goes wrong. But now I’m much more aware of it. Yet with some people friendship happens so naturally: for example, it’s so easy for me to relate to you.

I hope both of you are really open and honest with each other. There is no such thing as ‘they lived happily ever after’. There will always be some unexpected problems; we only need to learn to solve them intelligently.

It’s necessary to have some problems. After you’ve worked through a difficult time together with sensitivity and patience you become closer, you understand each other better. That understanding of each other makes a relationship more meaningful and long-lasting. Love alone isn’t sufficient. Deep understanding of each other’s feelings, wishes, dreams, fears, hopes, etc., is very important. Our parents love us. How come we can’t relate to them?

You are very fortunate to know what it means to love another human being. I don’t know about the future, but I believe your love for her has already brought much depth and meaning to your life. I think that alone is enough for a lifetime. Most people have lived and died without knowing what it means to love tenderly. They sing songs about that though.

They say the nightingale pierces his bosom with a thorn
When he sings his love song
So do we all
How else should we sing? (*Kahlil Gibran*)

Nice to hear that she and you are intimate now. Get to know the living reality — her mind, her feelings, her difficulties in adapting to you and America and the conflict in her mind if she has any (most people do have conflicts). Do you really know the depth of her being? Do you know how it feels being her? What if she won't marry you?

What makes a relationship really nourishing, satisfying, lasting, alive, and not merely routine?

You wrote, "I wanted her so much... but what do I want?" That question is very important, and nobody can give you the answer to that. You have to look deep inside yourself for the answer.

The union of hearts — deep and intuitive understanding of each other; non-verbal communication; mystical, transcending all reasons; a knowing in the guts that the two are meant to be together on this round of rebirth, loving, caring, and helping each other; knowing that the understanding between the two will grow and grow until the two minds become totally transparent; no fears, no secrets and complete trust; no games or role playing; being vulnerable. Is this possible?

Ask her to tell you all about herself — her childhood, her parents, her brothers and sisters, her hopes, her fears, etc. You said, "So, the nutty intense craving has faded", and also, "Is it because it just faded on its own? Or partly because I have been successful in gradually winning her affection?" Life cannot go on with such great intensity, it would burn you out. Mostly it is (and should be) just simple.

Everything in nature goes in cycles. You can't go on living with that intense feeling all the time; your survival would be in danger, you would not be able to do the usual things you need to do in your life. The intense feeling is too consuming. I am not invalidating or in any way saying that the intense feeling is not important. It gives us some glimpse of what it means to be 'really alive', and it changes our values, our aims. Your second question can also be answered in the affirmative. You've got her affection. So you no longer have to worry about not getting it, which was what made you feel so nutty, but that doesn't mean that your love for her is less than it was before. It means your mind is now more stable. Hot, burning craving (or love) is not good in the long-term. Warm and sometimes even a cool (not cold) kind of *mettā* is much better; it is more reliable and more nourishing. Well, you'll go crazy again when you have your first child. I'll wait for that.

When you have a child let me be his/her friend, companion, playmate. I know how to be a good friend to a child. Let me help him/her learn about nature, life, and about him/herself, please.

Unhealthy relationships should be concluded. If you don't change, you don't live fully. Anything that lives must change of necessity. No change means death. So for a friendship to be a living one, it must always be changing. Most of us don't feel alive because we are afraid of change (going into the unknown). We don't want to take risks.

Before you let go of your attachment to anybody or anything, look at the attachment in the mind. Understanding attachment is very important. Only deep understanding of attachment can free the mind of it. If you force your mind to let go of attachment without really seeing the nature of it, it will come back very soon. Seeing clearly and understanding deeply is the only way to overcome it. Forced detachment is not real detachment.

Most people have grown an invisible, impenetrable shell around themselves to protect them from being hurt, and they're looking for satisfaction in money, status, sense pleasures, drugs, alcohol, and sex mainly because they don't have somebody who loves them and who understands them more deeply. Too scary to be open and vulnerable!

There can be forced (and artificial) love, compassion, contentment, humility, etc. Behind forced love and humility, there could also be (and in most cases there is) hatred, fear and pride. It is more important to see hatred, greed, pride, etc. Seeing through can mean cutting through.

I have similar difficulties in relating to people. I find most people very superficial. Because I'm a monk I can avoid some people whom I cannot tolerate, but we are human beings (social animals); we cannot live alone; we need some human contact; and we're living in a world where most people are very unmindful, selfish, inconsiderate, stupid, proud, jealous, and so on.

So a person who's sensitive and intelligent must of necessity suffer from contact with people. Tolerance and deep understanding of people are very important. At times you have to remind yourself what the Buddha said: "*Puthujjano ummattako*" (mad worldlings)!

You are dealing with people who are crazy. People grow old but they don't necessarily grow up! So you're dealing with overgrown kids. Since you can't run away from people though, try to find a way to relate to people with wisdom and kindness.

When you have nothing in common with another person, you can't share anything with him/her. You feel like a stranger. If you want to have friends see if there is anything you have in common with them. If you're interested in them they will feel close to you.

Learn to listen to people without judging. You don't have to solve their problems. Be open and kind.

To be in conflict with people is tiring. To desire for the respect, appreciation, and regard of people is a prison.

If possible, avoid associating with fools (*bālā*); if not, be careful not to follow their wrong advice, but don't get into conflict with them. We live in a world of

fools. If one associates with fools, sooner or later one will get into trouble. Most people do not take the Buddha who never gave bad advice, seriously.

Yes, *asevanā ca balānaṃ* (not to associate with fools). Identify them and avoid them, but don't make yourself unhappy thinking too much about them. Just like you avoid poisonous snakes, avoid fools. But what makes a person a fool?

If you can find a good friend, live together; if not, live alone. There is no friendship in a fool.

Since I was a boy, I noticed that people are mostly hypocrites. It was/is hard for me to believe in people, but that's the way it is whether I like it or not. Take it or leave it. Once in a while you come across somebody who is not a hypocrite but who is sincere, and because these people are so rare, they are precious.

Most people are after money, fame, position, pleasure, etc., even monks are. Very few people are earnestly looking for (seeking) the truth and peace. Some people use meditation as a substitute for narcotics. Are you upset about that? Then you can be upset for the rest of your life.

I am happy that there are still some people who are honest, sincere, etc. Try to look at the bright side of people. They are not as bad as they could be, they could be worse!

Everybody is bad. After we have accepted that, we can really appreciate it when we see some good in everybody.

It seems to me that you are much older, psychologically, than most people of your age. So you don't fit in your age group. Do you know that highly intelligent people have a hard time doing things that normal people do?

Because your values are so different from the values of most people around you, you are in conflict with them, which is quite natural. Try to understand the nature of the problems first of all. Sometimes, understanding the problem solves half of the problem.

You need somebody you trust to talk about whatever is in your mind, especially the worries and cares. Sometimes I think you would feel lonely in the crowded city. You're living alone away from your family; you must sometimes feel the need to be close to somebody who will not take advantage of you, who understands you and your struggle and pain.

These days it must be hard to trust somebody outside your family. But I think there are good people everywhere in the world. You just have to find them out. Isn't there anybody in your circle who is kind and virtuous?

I understand what you are going through as I had similar experiences. The most difficult part is the decision. The pain heals after a while. I lived with so much fear, pain and guilt for many years, but now those are just memories. Some day I'll tell you my story.

It will take some time for you to recover from whatever damage the relationship has done to your mind. Be more mindful and be more relaxed. Your mind

has reacted for so long in such frustration that it'll need a lot of mindfulness and patience to unlearn the old ways of acting and reacting. No matter how long it takes, be patient and kind to yourself. Change cannot be forced; it should be welcomed. Your personality will change, too.

The worst thing that can happen to a person is losing self-respect.

You said, "What *kamma* to be left alone in this lousy place when all the good monks and people are in Myanmar." Seeing it from another point of view, you could say, "What wonderful *kamma* to have so many good friends and good monks as *kalyāṇamittas* (noble/spiritual friends) in Myanmar." Most people don't have a single friend in the world.

To be loved unconditionally, that is what we really want, but can we love ourselves unconditionally?

To be important in somebody's life. To be able to make a difference. But for me...

A person who does not love herself/himself unconditionally, and who is not independent psychologically, cannot and does not really love anybody. To be able to love we must be free.

Do I really love anybody? In most cases we love because we are so lonely. Hoping that we will overcome loneliness if we really love somebody and if that somebody can really love me. Unless we can accept our loneliness and accept another person's loneliness we cannot really meet each other. Each of us is utterly lonely. Let us accept our loneliness, and not try to cover it or run away from it or try to find a way to overcome it. We will always be lonely. Only for brief moments when we forget ourselves we are temporarily relieved from our loneliness, but it comes back for sure. I am lonely. I am lonelier than ever before. I'm seeing this loneliness more and more. There are very few people who can reach us and understand us. Between each person there is a big chasm of misunderstanding.

I have friends who love me and respect me, but they don't know who I am or understand me as a human being. They cannot know. I am not blaming them for not knowing who I am. They love their projections of who they think I am, which is a false image. But do I know who I am? What I think I am is also a projection of my mind. Better to be mindful from moment to moment without trying to find answers for these questions. Mindfulness is my only refuge.

I know how lonely people are; I know how lonely you are; because I know how lonely I am. I have learnt to live my life quietly, peacefully, and alone, but I appreciate real heart-to-heart contact with somebody.

I suffered a lot and I become a monk.

I suffered more and I become a human being.

How hard it is to have a friend. A friend is one who does not manipulate you; who listens and understands; who has time to listen without interrupting or getting distracted; and who listens with attention and sensitivity. Most people

are distracted, unmindful and unhappy; they are preoccupied with their own problems.

If you are not peaceful, how can you listen?

I know many people very intimately; they've told me things about their lives and their feelings which they've never told anybody else, and in some cases they told me things which they have never before thought consciously. Only when I asked them more questions to clarify some points did they start looking deeply into their minds/hearts and, to their amazement, they started seeing things which they've never seen before. We can hide from ourselves so well. Most people are split; they are not whole. If you are not whole you cannot grow. To be whole you should not deny or reject anything, any thought or feeling or idea, no matter how unacceptable they might be/are.

So from my experiences with people I know that people are lonely, even those who are living with their families, and some with their extended families. Loneliness doesn't just go away by being around somebody; loneliness is when there is no deep understanding and acceptance. Even family members don't understand and accept each other. So much judgment and misunderstanding even among family members.

The source of the problem lies in not knowing or understanding oneself in depth, not accepting oneself. We are always rejecting some aspect of ourselves. Can we love and respect ourselves unconditionally?

So, unless you know yourself deeply (and that is not easy), there is no way to solve this problem. We want relationship mostly because we feel lonely. Relationship as a means to overcoming loneliness doesn't work. Each of us expects that somebody can make us feel not lonely. Relationship as a means to an end always ends in disappointment. Running away from loneliness. That's what most of us do most of the time. We don't have time for other things.

Once you get deeply in touch with yourself your life takes a new turn, and that needs a good friend who is deeply in touch with him/herself; who feels OK about him/herself; who is not afraid to see things as they are; who is used to seeing things which most people pretend are not there. It's like diving deeply in the ocean: you see things which you've never imagined — unlikely shapes and colours, some beautiful and some very ugly.

People looking for rubies don't see diamonds because they (diamonds) have no colour of their own. Even though a diamond is colourless, it sparkles. (Though man-made diamonds have colours.)

It's better to help people the least amount you can because you can do that without too much time and effort, so you don't get tired or burnt out. If/when you can, do a little more sometimes (but not always). If you do the most you can, very soon you will feel that you can't go on doing it anymore; it becomes too much.

You said, "Sayadaw, people are strange. When you are good to them, they take you for granted. You've to be nasty to them." No, you don't have to be nasty

to them. You just need a clear-cut limit to what you can do, and how much you can do. You have to tell them your limit and the way you want to spend your day. If you don't tell them, how can they know? Do you expect them to know your needs without your telling them? They are more concerned about what they want, not what you want. So you have to let them know, you have to demand.

If you don't tell them your limit they will ask you to do more and more, and in the end you feel being exploited and you will react with frustration, which will cause damage to your relationship with those people. I always tell people my limit, even when it's something about *Dhamma*.

So if you go to another place, right from the beginning set a limit, have a strict schedule. Being too good, you end up being too bitter! You end up hating those for whom you've accommodated yourself too much. Everybody, including our family members, expects too much from us, and they take us for granted.

Nobody has any power over you unless you empower them. You allow (empower) people to influence your mind. Now that you are not willing to be influenced by them, they are powerless and have no power over you. As long as you think they are powerful and strong, they have power over you. Don't you see how scared, powerless, and dependent they could be? They will behave like kings and queens if you put them on a throne, but if you put them down on the ground you'll find that they are just like anybody else — powerless, weak, scared, dependent, and lonely.

When we let go of our self-image, when we remove our guard (self-defence), we see who we really are. I am not much different from you.

Real power comes from understanding oneself.

“Real show of power is in restraint.” (*Aristotle*)

A people empower a person to be the president. So the president has power.

Don't let people take advantage of you. When you are taken advantage of, tell yourself that's the price you pay in order to find out whether some person will take advantage of you or not. How else can you be sure about that?

The bamboo waves and bends when strong wind comes. Who's to blame? The wind or the bamboo? I read some good books, write letters to my friends, and try to be mindful. I enjoy being here — quiet and peaceful; beautiful blue skies and white rolling clouds; birds and trees. I am not unhappy but I miss my daughter very much; she has become the focus of my life.

So, you see, there is always one thing or another (somebody). It's hard to live just for oneself. We need something (an ideal) or somebody to live for. Even a hermit has an ideal to live for.

I hope to see you some day, my dear friend. Don't know when that some day will be. You're changing and I'm changing. So let's not get disappointed when we find each other different. I feel OK as long as you are your real self, and you'll find me the same.

One thing I'm sure about: I don't have any power to change anybody; I'm not interested in doing that. I will never be a guru. If I ever become anything, I will become a very simple man, and I hope humble, too.

I value our friendship very much. Something hard for me to let go of at the moment. I will try to keep *mettā* and let go of attachment.

You are my friend. Isn't that enough reason for me to share my deepest feelings with you? Please don't think that you are not worthy of it. I just hope you understand.

I have lived with you long enough, and I think I know something about people from my long experience of relating to them. I think I know you and understand you somewhat. (I can't be totally wrong.) Please understand that there is a friend who trusts you and respects you and understands you. If it is fine with you, I will go on telling you about my deepest feelings.

If I am in any way special, then you must also be special in some ways to be my friend.

There is longing, a yearning in my heart.
I reach for you. I know you are reaching for me.
But I cannot reach you. Something is keeping us apart.
What is that?
I feel like there is a vacuum in my heart.
I am living but I don't really feel alive.
How can I feel alive without that?
How can I reach you without that?
How can you reach me without that?
We are apart? But we don't know.
What's really keeping us apart?

Only lately I found out that I don't have it.
I used to have it.
And I lost it.
I did not know I lost it.
But I know all the time that something is missing.
There is no life in my life.
I feel dead. At all cost.
I must get it back again.
Without it life is not worth living.
How foolish I was to neglect that and
Turn all my body and mind
Toward such superficial things.

Now my heart is crying.
What a lie I've lived.
What a waste it would be to live all my life like this.
How meaningless!
Can I overcome my wrong conditioning?
Have I enough courage to overcome this lie?
Can I live a healthy, meaningful life?
Am I healthy enough to become really healthy again?
To become a really whole and complete human being again?

(Sayadaw U Jotika)

Once I was afraid of losing my friends because of my changing understanding and values. But, slowly, now I am able to accept that. I must be true to myself.

Now it has become a routine. There is no zest anymore.
I remember how it was.
There was uncertainty. There was hope.
There was anxiety that it won't come to me.
There was great sadness. Life was so intense.
Even the intense pain, piercing, crushing pain
in my heart was so, so meaningful.
At least it gave some meaning to my life.
Complete surrender, complete giving away,
complete understanding and complete acceptance.
Longed for the two to merge into one.
Something spontaneous, not planned or calculated.

When I got it I feel like something is missing.
What is it that is missing.
I know. But I cannot define it.
Is it something that we can only dream about?
When it was out of my reach it looked complete.
When it is in my hands, something is missing.
Optical illusion.

Pali Glossary

Abidhamma	The third part of the Buddhist canon/ scriptures [Tripiṭaka] containing a treatise of Buddhist psychology and philosophy
akusala	unwholesome (states of mind)
anāgāmi	a person who has realised the third stage of enlightenment
anattā	selflessness, no-self, egolessness
Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta	The Discourse on the Characteristic of Selflessness
anicca	impermanence
appakicco	having few duties or responsibilities
arahat	person who has realised the final stage of enlightenment
attā	person
avijjā paccayā saṅkhārā	ignorance conditions formations
bāla (bālā)	fool (fools)
balānaṃ	with fools
bhikkhu	monk
brahmā	a deity of the highest heavenly realms
cetasika	mental concomitants
cittaṃ	mind
cittānupassanā	contemplation of the heart/mind
dāyaka	donor, supporter
Dhamma/dhamma	truth, Buddha's teaching, phenomena, nature, morality
devaloka	a heavenly realm
Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta	The Discourse of the Turning of the <i>Dhamma</i> Wheel
diṭṭhi	wrong views
dosa	aversion
dukkha	suffering, oppression
hoti	to be
issā	jealousy, envy
kalyāṇa	charming, good, virtuous
kalyāṇamittā	noble, virtuous friends
kamma	action, deed, work
karuṇā	compassion

kilesa	defilement
kukkucca	worry, remorse
kusala	wholesome (states of mind)
kuṭi	hut
lobha	greed
macchariya	stinginess, avarice
Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta	The Great Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness
māna	conceit, comparing oneself with others, pride
mettā	loving-kindness
moha	delusion
muditā	sympathetic joy
nāma	mental phenomena
nijjiva	lifeless
nissatta	being-less
pajānāti	to know clearly
Pali	Indic language used in canonical books of Buddhists
Pañcavaggi	the group of five ascetics who met the Buddha shortly after he was enlightened
Paññā	wisdom
Papañca	obstacle, hindrance (to spiritual growth), illusion, mental proliferation
pariyatti	theoretical knowledge of <i>Dhamma</i> , scriptures
Piṭaka	referring to the ‘Three Baskets’ of Discourses, Discipline, and Higher Truth
rūpa	physical phenomena
saddhā	faith, confidence
sadosaṃ	with dosa
sallahukavuttī	one leading a simple life
samādhi	concentration
sammā-diṭṭhi-vādī	a person with right view
sampajānakārī	one who is thoughtful
saṃsāra	cycle of births and deaths
samudaya	The Second Noble Truth: desire
saṃvara	restraint
sarāgaṃ	with lust, or passion
sāsana	teaching, doctrine, dispensation
sati	mindfulness
sīla	morality, precepts
sīmā	boundary, chapter house

sotāpanna	a person who has realised the first stage of enlightenment
sotāpatti	first stage of enlightenment
sotāpatti maggaphala	the path and the fruit of streamwinning
[streamwinner	see sotāpanna]
sukhaṃ	happiness
sutta	discourse
taṇhā	greed, craving
upekkhā	equanimity
vedanaṃ	feeling, sensation
vedayamāno	experiencing (a feeling)
vedayāmī'ti	'I feel'
vicāra	sustained thought, investigation
vinaya	monastic rules of conduct and discipline
vitakka	initial thought, reflection
upekkhā	equanimity
yoniso manasikāra	wise consideration, right attention

Burmese words

anaday	feeling bad, embarrassed, feeling obligated
hin-lei-o	Burmese curry (with many ingredients)
kyaung	hut
nyanzin	stages/progress of insight

“To stay cool in hell



Snow in the summer.”

THE END