

## THE THREE REFUGES - THE BUDDHA, DHAMMA, AND SANGHA

### **Refuge in the Buddha**

What is a refuge? A refuge is a place of safety, a secure place where it is peaceful and sane, not crazy, insane and confused. A place where there is understanding, intelligence and harmony, away from the world of confusion and disharmony, craving and greed, hatred and ill-will, ignorance and delusion.

Because people's minds are restless and confused, they are caught by craving, resentment, and delusion. And so they take refuge in the wrong things: they kill and hurt others, they steal and cheat, they compete with others and get angry and upset, they say bad things and spread rumours. People behave very selfishly, only thinking about themselves and what they possess; they only think in terms of 'me' and 'mine'. Their minds are caught in this illusion of self or ego and so they cause problems for themselves and for others. Most people do not understand themselves, understand their own minds and the laws of Nature and are therefore restless and confused, constantly grasping and clinging to worldly things including to ideas, concepts, ideals, views and opinions. They do not know about Dharma, the nature of the world and the way things are.

The more we understand the Dharma through study, reflection and meditation practice [mind training and cultivation], the more we begin to realise the profundity, the depth and vastness of the Buddha's teachings. And it becomes a real joy, very exciting and wonderful, to take the 3 refuges in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, and this inspires the mind. Many traditional buddhists in countries like Thailand, Burma and Sri Lanka constantly repeat or chant the 3 refuges during their ceremonies but it's just habitual repetition of words - it doesn't mean anything after awhile. It's just a habit.

Similarly, the taking of the 5 precepts by the lay devotees has become a habitual part of the ceremony; it becomes empty and meaningless after sometime. So they keep taking the 5 precepts at every ceremony and they keep breaking the precepts. It's nothing special. People do not bother to reflect, to think over, and actually find out, investigate what they mean : what Refuge mean, what Buddha mean, and so on. Just repeating words is not enough: we have to calm the mind first and then reflect, contemplate on what they mean.

The word BUDDHA is a lovely and interesting word. It means 'the One who is awake' or 'the One who knows', the person who is alert and wise, intelligent, clear and peaceful, patient, kind and compassionate. And the first refuge is in the Buddha as the personification, the human symbol and example of wisdom and compassion. What was the Buddha awake to? He was awake, alert and sensitive to the problems, confusion and suffering of the world. He understood the truths of existence and the nature of the human condition.

When we take refuge in the Buddha, it doesn't mean that we take refuge in a person or in a god or some savior; we take refuge in that which is wise and intelligent, sane, kind and compassionate in the world, in the universe, in human nature, in our own minds and hearts. It means that we dedicate ourselves to the noble path, to the way of understanding, peace and wisdom. It means that we want to follow the Buddha's example, the example of Siddhartha Gotama, in seeking the highest truth, enlightenment, so that our minds can be free of worry, fear, anxiety, sorrow, craving, hatred and delusion [mental suffering] and we can become peaceful and joyful human beings.

The Buddha was a healer, a doctor of mental-emotional problems, and in teaching the Dharma he wanted us to understand our own minds and to take responsibility for our own mental health and sanity and not to depend on others. He wanted us to awaken our own Buddha Nature, our own wisdom mind.

Some people worship the Buddha as a god, as a supernatural being, asking for good luck in business and family matters, and then asking for more money and wealth. They pray and wave joss sticks at the Buddha statue. This is called joss stick Buddhism! This is only superstition caused by fear, uncertainty, insecurity and craving/desire. They want the Buddha, as a powerful, outside agent, to help them fulfill their wishes and dreams. This is not the true meaning of taking refuge in the Buddha. Superstitious people also want charms and talismans to protect them from ghosts and spirits, bullets and knives, etc. They often ask monks to give them these things and they are willing to pay a lot for them. This is taking refuge in fear and superstition, and this doesn't help us because fear will come back again and again to trouble us. Dealing with fear takes a lot of awareness and insight.

People in western countries are now more modern and sophisticated, they don't take refuge in magic charms. Christians take refuge in the belief that there is a God and eternal life after death. People take refuge in money, in the bank, in the stock market, in lottery tickets hoping to win a lot of money. People take refuge in material possessions, romantic relationships and sense pleasures, they believe these pleasures will give them true and lasting happiness and security. Some take refuge in their physical beauty, good health and strength. But that is still taking refuge in things which offer no real safety because these things are impermanent, temporary and uncertain. These things and conditions around us and in us can change at any time. We cannot guarantee what will happen in the future.

Life is uncertain, always changing, only death is certain. Our bodies and physical looks have to change. We have to grow old, experience illness, and we all have to die someday. Our health and strength have to change, this is the law of nature. So there is no safety in the material and physical world. Our parents, spouses and children, and friends also have to grow old and die someday.

Taking refuge in the Buddha, in wisdom, in right understanding and view, when we understand the conditions of this world, when we live and act wisely, we can accept these natural changes, the ups and downs of life with peace, humility and equanimity. This is our real place of safety, our real home: a peaceful and wise mind that understands and accepts the changing conditions of existence. This is the Buddha mind.

### **Refuge in the Dhamma**

It is to walk in the footsteps of the Buddha and other wise and noble beings, to follow their example. It is to devote one's life to spiritual growth and understanding, to clearly realise the nature of existence so that we can become like the Buddha - wise, peaceful, patient, kind and compassionate. The Dharma is not separate from daily living, it is not a subject that you read in books about buddhism and philosophy. It has to do with the nature of the world and the human condition and not what our conditioned minds think or believe it to be. Our conditioned minds prevent us from seeing the world as it really is. It is limited and is caught in the illusion of thoughts, ideas and concepts, and images. Hence, our confusion, greed, anxiety, fear, prejudices, anger and so on. It is our conditioned mind that gives us problems.

So taking refuge in the Dharma is to follow the path of self-knowledge, wisdom and freedom. The Buddha did not invent or create the Dharma, some new philosophy about life; he was simply awakened, enlightened to the truths of existence, the laws of Nature and the human condition, which existed before the Buddha and still exist today. So when we are awakened, when we understand the Dharma, we too become Buddhas. We become timeless, unconditioned and free. The practice of Dharma is not dependent on being a monk or nun, it depends in right understanding and view. The Dharma is timeless, eternal Truth or Reality. It is beyond the conditioned mind, beyond the thinking process and the concept of self. It is always here and now like the air and sky.

### **Refuge in the Sangha**

Sangha means a community of monks and nuns, also lay devotees, a spiritual group of friends. People who can encourage and inspire you to lead a noble life towards wisdom and peace. The Buddha encouraged people to have noble friends for guidance, support and inspiration. A teacher should be a noble friend and guide. Following the example of the noble ones, we do good deeds, avoid bad, unwholesome actions, and we purify the mind through training and cultivation. We try our best to observe the precepts.

We take refuge in virtue, in that which is good, decent, kind, generous and compassionate. Patience is a virtue. We don't take refuge in those things in our minds that are mean, nasty, cruel, selfish, jealous, hateful and resentful, and greedy. In our relationships we strive to be kind, patient and understanding so that there is peace and harmony, no division and conflict. If someone gives us problems we don't hold a grudge, we don't get angry and cling to negative emotions. We forgive and forget, we let go of conflicts and bad memories and hurt feelings. If we cling to these things, we only suffer. Our minds will not be peaceful, our hearts will not be open and loving.

We all have good thoughts and feelings, and sometimes bad thoughts and feelings. Conditions in the world are changing and impermanent, good and bad thoughts and feelings come and go, they change. But we take refuge in virtue, in goodness rather than in hatred, resentment and aversion, in bad conditions of

the mind. We take refuge on our wholesome states of mind which are kind, compassionate and loving towards ourselves and others. Actually, when we reflect more, we begin to see that the real enemy, the real problem in life are our own defilements and unwholesome states, our anger and aversion, pride, arrogance, selfishness, and so on.

So refuge in the sangha is a very practical, useful refuge in everyday living. We can have peace, goodwill and harmony with others and with ourselves. We don't blame other people for our problems, for the way we feel. We have to take complete responsibility for our mental-emotional states, for how we live, for our speech and actions. It is easy to blame others, our family and friends, our parents, our politicians, our society, our country, our teachers: "If only they were wise, intelligent, kind and understanding, etc., then I wouldn't be having these problems!"

When we take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha, we realise that to blame others for our problems, for the way we feel, is immature and a complete waste of time. We have to take responsibility for our own life and live it with intelligence and wisdom. Even if we had bad parents or poor parents, it still doesn't matter. There is no one to blame but ourselves, our own ignorance, selfishness, pride, arrogance and conceit. We forgive, we let go of those bad memories. Here and now! We free the mind of defilements, unwholesome thoughts and feelings. This is the path of maturity, truth, and peace, the path of morality, mind training and cultivation, and wisdom.

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The Ancient Way exists in a realm beyond the measurements of time and space. If it is sought with vanity and greed in the heart, it cannot be known or found. If it is sought as a prize, or as a goal of personal achievement, it will not reveal itself. Because it requires nobility of motive, it has been called the Noble Way. This is the way for all mankind, it's not for buddhists alone. The Buddha was not a 'buddhist' [similarly, Jesus Christ was not a christian]. He did not become a Buddha through buddhism. The Dharma [the truths of existence, the laws of Nature] produced a Buddha, the Buddha proclaimed the Dharma. Let Dharma be your refuge. In the last 25 centuries thousands of books have been written which seek to elaborate or simplify the Dharma. Religions have been formed around it and countless practices [rites, rituals, ceremonies, etc.] have been advised in its name, all of which tend to separate the Dharma from life, from everyday existence - all of which glorify and venerate the pathfinder [the Buddha, various mystics, and their followers] - yet which ignore the Timeless Path and the qualities of nobility needed to even commence the pilgrimage. This ignorance [ignore-ance] in which the bewilderment of suffering has its base, has been the reason why the one continuing advise of the Buddha has been continually ignored. What is this advise? - Satipatthana [mindfulness, calm attention]. To be mindful of life. To pay attention, to be alert and awake! To examine sensibly and without preset views and opinions the physical and mental states of phenomena. Each of us must therefore be mindful as we thread the Ancient Way. Each of us must see the path through our own eyes. Each must know the Dharma through one's own experience. Just reading books is not enough; the value of the Dharma isn't to be found in books. Those are just the external appearances of Dharma, just fingers pointing to the moon, they're not the realization of Dharma as a personal experience. **If you realise the Dharma you realise your own mind**, you see the truth there. When the truth becomes apparent it cuts off the stream of delusion. We must be mindful of our methods and conditioned habits of forming opinions and prejudices, of the processes we call "instinctive", of the body and mind, and of actions and thoughts and mental images. With mindfulness, awareness, we must investigate and reflect, disintegrate and reintegrate this mystery we call Life, this ignoramus and illusion we call "I" or "me" or ego. Words alone cannot tell us, philosophical formulae will be meaningless until we experience the wordless truth of seeing things as they are in the flame of attention, in the clarity of perception, free from the conditioning/programming of the mind - labels, judgements, comparisons, criticisms, likes and dislikes, etc.

Through mindfulness, we may strip life of its illusions and complexities, its pretenses and hallucinations, its half-truths, its fears and insecurities, anxieties, tensions and so on. Samadhi is a state of mindfulness, calm attention and joy. A state of repose and restful awareness, of quiet confidence and goodwill, wherein clear one-pointedness of mind may operate undisturbed by physical tensions or emotional worries. Through mindfulness one will observe the interactions of emotions on the body and of physical tensions on the mind and by knowing these things we gain confidence, insight and repose. To see things as they really are, there must be a firm foundation of physical relaxation and emotional repose in daily life as we relate and react to the world so we can see clearly the habitual patterns which exert their powerful forces from the dark depths of the caverns of memory, past experiences and knowledge. The Buddha taught the way of Satipatthana through which the Dharma may be clearly realized. Mindfulness, choiceless, effortless awareness in daily life, leads to insight, self-knowledge and wisdom, freedom, loving kindness and compassion, and harmony.

The root-meaning of Nirvana or Nibbana is "letting go", a state of mind which is free of craving and attachment, grasping and clinging, free from all self-centered activities. It is a state of calm and peace, restful, expansive awareness. Even the desire for Nirvana can cause conflict, suffering and dis-ease. We're always looking outside of ourselves for happiness and security. And out of fear and insecurity we have created God or a Savior, a concept or image in the mind. All things are within ourselves if we only care to look. We are simply fooled, seduced, distracted and mesmerized by the world of appearances which is an illusion because it is constantly changing. Truth is not static, it is dynamic and alive. Nirvana is a state of mind which is simple and clear, free and innocent, compassionate and patient. There is nothing to lose or gain, nothing to become or to get rid of, and nothing to prove. Wisdom is being and accepting who you are and seeing things as they are, seeing what's what without reacting to it. Our minds are conditioned to react, our brains are programmed/educated to label, compare, judge, criticize, condemn, to like or dislike, to want or not to want. So, this is the cause of our conflicts, discontentment, disharmony and dis-ease. The idea of a permanent, unchanging ego-center or self is strengthened by this conditioning and it is this deep-rooted illusion of a permanent and separate ego-entity which is the source and cause of our problems and conflicts, fears and worries, craving, greed and attachments.

- In mindfulness one is not only restful, calm + happy, but alert + awake. Meditation is not an evasion or escape; it is a clear + serene encounter w/ reality.
- The secret of life is revealed when we are living in harmony with the changes + motions of life, when we are not constantly struggling to change what is. Patience + acceptance are the key to peace, compassion, wisdom + freedom.
- Liking + disliking is a dis-ease of the mind. Clinging to personal preferences causes conflict, frustration, suffering.
- Death is the mirror in which the true meaning of life is reflected. Life is short + uncertain, there are no guarantees. What is the most important thing, the real priorities of existence?

## A GUIDE TO WALKING MEDITATION - Thich Nhat Hanh

Walking meditation is meditation while walking. We walk slowly, in a relaxed way, keeping a light smile on our lips. Breathing in, one step, breathing out, the other step - keeping awareness of our breathing and the movement of our feet. When we practice this way, we feel deeply at ease, and our problems and anxieties drop away, and peace and joy fill our hearts. Anyone can do it. It takes only a little time, a little mindfulness, and the wish to be happy and content. And when our minds wander away with thoughts and images, we gently bring back our attention to breathing in, one step, breathing out, other step. In this way we can let go of our mental activity and return to presence. This is an aspect of mind training and cultivation.

The Buddha was asked, "What do you and your disciples practice?" and he replied, "We sit, we walk, we breathe, and we eat." The questioner continued, "But sir, everyone sits, walks, breathes, and eats." The Buddha told him, "When we sit, we know we are sitting. When we walk, we know we are walking. When we breathe, we know we are breathing. And when we eat, we know we are ~~breathing.~~ eating."

Most of the time, we are lost in the past or carried away by the future. When we are mindful, deeply in touch with the present moment, our understanding of what is going on deepens, and we begin to be filled with acceptance, joy, peace, and compassion.

The seed of mindfulness is in each of us, but we usually forget to water it. We think that happiness is only possible in the future - when we get a house, a car, a Ph.D., a spouse. We struggle in our mind and body, and we don't touch the peace and joy that are available right now - the blue sky, the white clouds, the green leaves, the flowers, the smile of our friends. What is most important? Many people have passed exams and bought houses and cars, yet they are still unhappy and discontent. What is most important is to find peace and share it with others. To have peace, we can begin by walking peacefully and mindfully. Everything depends on your steps and breathing.

In Buddhism, there is a word which means wishlessness or aimlessness. The idea is that we do not put anything ahead of ourselves and run after it. When we practice walking meditation, we walk in this spirit. We just enjoy the walking, with no particular aim or destination. Our walking is not a means to an end. We walk just for the sake of walking.

A.J. Muste said, "There is no way to peace, peace *is* the way." Walking in mindfulness brings us peace and joy, and makes our life real. Why rush? Our final destination will only be the graveyard or the cremation fire. Why not walk in the direction of life, enjoying peace in each moment with every step? There is no need to struggle. Enjoy each step. We have already arrived.

If you think that peace and happiness are somewhere else and you run after them, you will never arrive. It is only when you realize that peace and happiness are available here in the present moment that you will be able to relax. In daily life, there is so much to do and so little time. You may feel pressured to run all the time. Just stop! Touch the ground of the present moment deeply, and you will touch real peace and joy.

If you look deeply, you can see all the worries and anxiety people print on the Earth as they walk. Our steps are usually heavy and aggressive, filled with sorrow and fear. We feel restless, confused and insecure, and our steps reveal it. This world has many paths. Some are lined with beautiful trees, some wind around fragrant fields, some are covered with leaves and blossoms.

But if we walk on them with a heavy heart, we will not appreciate them at all. When we were one or two, we begin to take tottering steps. Now, we have to learn to walk again - slowly, with mindfulness and ease. After a few days of practice, you will know how to do it. When I see you walking with deep comfort and peace, I will smile happily.

As you make the effort to let go of your worries and anxieties, please smile. It may be just the beginning of a smile, but keep it there on your lips. It is very much like the Buddha's half-smile. As you learn to walk as the Buddha walked, you can smile as he smiled. Why wait until you are completely transformed, completely awakened? You can start being a part-time Buddha right now!

The half-smile is the fruit of your awareness that you are here, alive, walking and breathing, at ease. At the same time, it nurtures more peace and joy within you. Smiling as you practice walking meditation will keep your steps calm and peaceful, and give you a deep sense of ease. A smile refreshes your being and strengthens your practice. Don't be afraid to smile.

Your smile proves that you are not a colony, that you have sovereignty over yourself, that you are doing your best. The Buddha is sometimes called, "One who has Sovereignty over Himself or Herself." Events carry us away, and we lose ourselves. Walking meditation helps us regain our sovereignty, our liberty and sanity as a human being. We walk with grace and dignity, like an emperor, like a lion. Each step is living with clarity and certainty, without confusion.

When he was challenged by Mara - who personifies delusion - the Buddha touched the Earth with his right hand and said, "With Earth as my witness, I will sit here in meditation until I realize true awakening." When he did that, Mara disappeared. Sometimes we too are visited by Mara - when we feel irritated, angry, greedy, or unhappy. When that happens, please touch the Earth deeply with your feet. Please practice walking meditation. The Earth, our Mother, is filled with deep love for us. When we suffer, she will protect us, nourishing us with her beautiful trees and flowers.

Walking mindfully on the Earth can restore our peace and harmony, and it can restore the Earth's peace and harmony as well. We are children of the Earth. We rely on her for our happiness, and she relies on us also. Whether the Earth is beautiful, fresh, and green, or arid and parched depends on our way of walking. When we practice walking meditation, we massage the Earth with our feet and plant seeds of joy and happiness with each step. Our Mother will heal us, and we will heal her.

The core practice taught by the Buddha was mindfulness, including mindfulness of breathing: "Breathing in, I know I am breathing in. Breathing out, I know I am breathing out." It is like drinking a glass of cool water. As we breathe in, we really feel the air filling our lungs. In sitting meditation and in walking meditation we practice like this, paying close attention to each breath and each step.

If you see something along the way that you want to touch with your mindfulness - the blue sky with white clouds, the hills in the distance, a tree, or a bird - just stop, but while you do, continue breathing mindfully. You can keep the object of your contemplation alive by means of mindful breathing. If you don't breathe consciously, sooner or later your thinking will settle back in, and the bird or the tree will disappear. Your thoughts and images will obscure the clarity of seeing. Always stay with your breathing, then you'll be able to touch the beauty of the environment.

When we practice walking meditation, we arrive in each moment. Our true home is in the present moment. When we enter the present moment deeply, our regrets and sorrows disappear, and we

*discover life with all its wonders + beauty.*

The world is you and you are the world. It is very important to understand this. In our disorder, in our restlessness and confusion, in our desire for security, in our constant pursuit for pleasure and material comfort, we have created a world outside of us as society which is corrupt, immoral, superficial, confused, everlastingly at war because we in ourselves are confused, we are in conflict. You have to begin with yourself, not the alteration of the system, the outer world. It means not looking for a new leader, political or otherwise, a new system or policy, a new belief or philosophy, new gurus, but looking at yourself as you are. Can you observe yourself as you would observe your face in a mirror? Can you observe your reactions, your impulses, your responses because your reactions, impulses and responses are what you are.

You are related to the past - memory, tradition, the church, the mosque, the temple, the priests, monks, or you are related to some future idea or concept. You are related to your wife, to your husband, to your children, neighbours, friends, government, to society, to your environment, to nature, to the clouds and sky, the sun and moon and stars at night. So relationship is the basis of human existence; it is the most important thing in life.

Is the human brain your brain or is it the brain of humanity? This is really a very serious profound question. Is your brain an individual brain or the brain of mankind? When you say it is my brain or it's my consciousness, is it really so? Or is it the consciousness of mankind? Inquire into it. You suffer, you are confused and uncertain, you are anxious and afraid, you worry, you are regretful, you are hurt, you are in agony, pain. That is what you are. You are not separate from your thoughts and emotions, your mental states. You have ideas, opinions, beliefs, fears, knowledge, pride and conceit, character. And this is what you are. And this is exactly what your neighbour is. He or she is also suffering, that person also goes through agony, sorrow, frustration, fear, and so on. So, is your consciousness separate from the rest of mankind? No, of course not. You may think you are an individual because you are male or female, dark or fair, short or tall, attractive or ugly, smart or dull, etc. because peripheral activity makes you think you are an individual, unique and separate. But, deeply, you are the same as everyone else; you are the rest of humanity, of mankind. We all want to be happy, we want to be secure, to be loved and accepted, we all have fear and anxieties and sorrow. We are 'all in the same boat', we are all living creatures on the same planet whirling endlessly around the sun. When you realise this fact, this truth very deeply in your heart, not intellectually or superficially, you will never hurt or kill another because you are hurting or killing yourself. Then out of that understanding comes great compassion and love.

We share, all humanity shares, the sunlight and the rain; that sunlight and rain are not yours or mine. It is the life-giving energy which we all share. And our consciousness in which is included our reactions and actions, our ideas, concepts, patterns and habits, systems of belief, ideologies, fears, anxieties, insecurities, pleasures, faith, the worship of something which we have projected, our sorrows, our griefs, and pain. All this is shared by all human beings. When we suffer we have made it into a personal affair. We shut out all the suffering of mankind like pleasure; we treat pleasure as a private thing - *ours, my pleasure, my enjoyment* - the excitement of it and so on. We forget that man has suffered from time beyond all measure. And that suffering is the ground on which we all stand. It is shared by all humans. We know our own sorrow, but we are not aware of the sadness of others. When our hearts are weary and dull, how can we feel the weariness of another? Sadness is so exclusive, isolating and destructive. How quickly the smile fades! Everything seems to end in sorrow, in depression, the ultimate isolation. To feel and share the suffering [and joy] of mankind is the flowering of compassion and love. With love there is the ending of time and sorrow. When the 'me' is not, then love is. This is virtue and freedom.

We are responsible for everything that is happening in the world as long as the content of our consciousness continues. As long as fear, nationalities, the urge to succeed, craving, greed, hatred, etc. exist we're part of humanity, part of the human movement. This is important to understand. It is so. The self is put together by thought as memory, past experience and knowledge. Thought is not yours or mine. Thinking is not individual thinking. Thinking is shared by all beings. Psychological problems, conflicts and

fears are universal. And when one has really seen the significance of this, then I think we can understand the nature of what it means to die. Man has created these societies on Earth, on the planet, out of our own pettiness, narrowness, out of our ignorance and delusions and limitations, greed, envy, brutality, violence, competition and so on. We are responsible for the mediocrity, stupidity, vulgarity, for all the tribal nonsense and religious sectarianism. Unless each of us changes radically, society will never change.

The desire to be gratified makes us dull and <sup>shallow</sup>stupid, and gratification at all levels is the same. There is no higher and lower gratification. Though we may consciously disguise our gratifications in noble words, the very desire to be gratified makes us dull and insensitive. It is very hard for the shallow mind to see that its activities are vain, useless, petty and self-centered. Is not the shallow mind, however cunning, subtle, learned and intellectually brilliant, always shallow? The shallow mind can never become unfathomable, the immeasurable, it cannot know the beauty and innocence of love. The very becoming through desire and craving is the way of shallowness; becoming is the pursuit of the self-projected. Any movement of the mind at any level is still shallow and superficial. It is the shallow mind that is active, restless and agitated, and this very activity keeps it in that state. It's activity is its own conditioning and conditioning is limited, destructive, isolating and disintegrating, and it breeds misery and conflict. It is the narrow path of the self or ego, the me-center.

An occupied mind is not free, spontaneous and open, and only in spontaneity can there be discovery. An occupied mind is self-enclosing; it is unapproachable, not open and vulnerable. Thought by its very structure is self-isolating, it cannot be made vulnerable and innocent. It cannot be spontaneous and free. Thought is the continuation of the past as memory and that which continues cannot be free. What we think we are. It is the understanding of the process of thought that is important, not what we think about.

Thought/thinking is always fragmentary and isolating, it creates division, conflict, and space between people, between the observer and the observed, between man and his environment. It distorts the clarity of perception and actuality, the 'what is'. It destroys the beauty of innocence and bliss. Thought is limited and what it holds is always partial as memory. It cannot observe the whole, the limited dimension of thought cannot see the whole, and the imprint of benediction is non-verbal and non-communicable through words, through any symbol, idea or concept that the mind creates. Thought is linear and therefore incapable of grasping the multi-dimensional nature of reality, of life on the planet and the immensity and timelessness of the universe and outer-space. Thought will always fail in its attempt to discover, to experience that which is beyond time and space. The brain, the machinery of thought can be quiet; the very activity of the brain can be quiet and still, its machinery can run very slowly. The quietness of the brain, though intensely sensitive, is essential; then only can thought disentangle itself and come to an end. The ending of thought is not mental death, it is clear awareness and attention; only then can there be innocence, freshness, a new quality of being. It is this quality that puts an end to sorrow and despair. All the activities of thought - hopes, desires, images, vanities, worries and fears, regrets, ill-will and resentment, etc. - have to come to an end easily, without effort and choice, in the flame of attention and awareness.

Intelligence is not the mere capacity of design, remembrance and communication; it is more than that. One can be very informed and clever at one level of existence and quite dull and ignorant at other levels. Mere knowledge, however deep and wide, does not necessarily indicate intelligence. Capacity or talent is not intelligence. Intelligence is sensitive awareness of the totality of life; life with its problems, contradictions, ironies, miseries, paradoxes, joys, its illusory nature. To be aware of all of this, without choice and without being caught by any one of its issues and to flow with the whole of life is intelligence.

Everything on Earth, on this beautiful planet, lives, dies, comes into being and withers away. To grasp this whole movement of life requires intelligence - not the intelligence of thought, or books, or knowledge, but the intelligence of love and compassion with its sensitivity. Death isn't some horrific thing, something to be avoided, something to fear, to be postponed, but rather something to be with day in and day out. And out of that comes an extraordinary sense of love, mystery, joy and immensity.