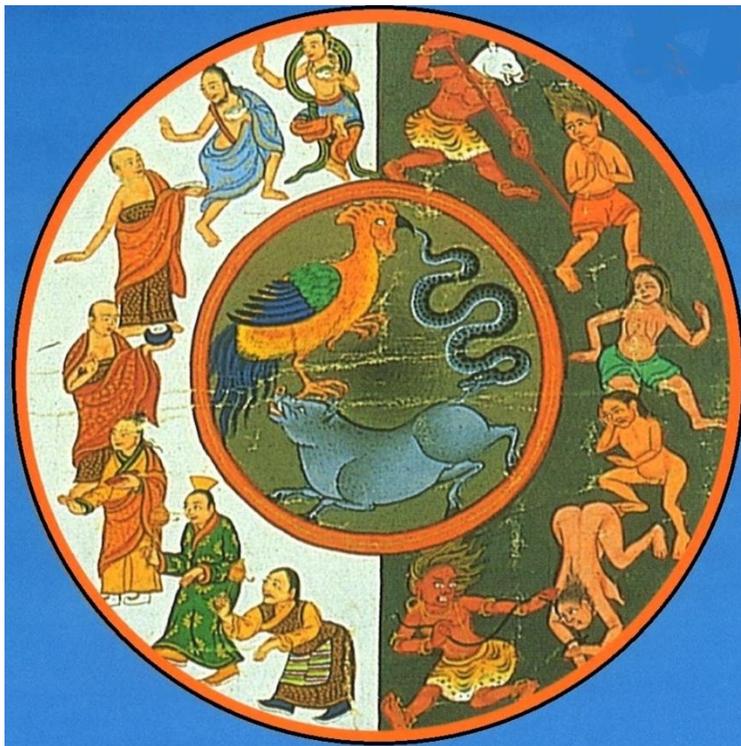


FROM HUNGRY GHOST TO BEING HUMAN: THE JOURNEY OF THE HERO



Taking Sajja Beyond Wat Thamkrabok

*There is life without alcohol and other drugs
- a life free from shame, free from blame and free from guilt –
a life free from craving, free from aversion and free from confusion.*

Everyday Nibbana - every day.

Introduction

The **Realm of the Hungry Ghosts** – *the condition of unsatisfiable craving as experienced by alcoholics and drug addicts* - is not a physical place but a **mind-state**; a state of being in the world.

In fact, all of the ‘Realms of Becoming’ (often depicted as the Buddhist Wheel of Life) including the Heaven and Hell Realms and the **Realm of Being Human** are also mind-states; states of being in the world that we move through from moment to moment, often unconsciously, throughout each and every day.

In Buddhism, all situations are temporary, transient and impermanent; even Heaven and Hell mind-states. Therefore, it is possible through our own conscious thoughts, words and actions to move away from the destructive suffering of addiction and compulsions – *the living hell of the Hungry Ghost* – to live in harmony and balance with the 10,000 sorrows and 10,000 joys of everyday life; embracing the ordinary and the mundane of just being human.

The **Realm of Being Human** is where we cultivate self-discipline, make wise choices and take skilful actions. The **Realm of Being Human** is the world of opportunity, the world of possibilities, and the world of things as they really are.

There are many paths leading away from the **Realm of the Hungry Ghosts** – *the world of addictions and compulsions* – to the **Realm of Being Human** and this little booklet tries to describe just one such path; the path of **Sajja**¹ [pronounced : ‘*Sat-cha*’].

What is Sajja?

Wat Thamkrabok monastery in Thailand has treated more than 110,000 addicts since 1957. The monastery is world-famous for its herbal-medicine induced vomiting treatment, its herbal-pills and herbal-tea, and its herbal steam-baths; all employed in the very real and very rapid detoxification of the physical body. But a ‘clean’ body is just the start of the path of recovery. The core element of the treatment of addictions and compulsions at Thamkrabok is an apparently simple vow or promise that is called ‘**Sajja**’.

But **Sajja** is not just a simple promise to stop taking intoxicating substances; it is much more than this. **Sajja** vows are taken in full acknowledgment of - and in accordance with - the law of Karma (*intentional actions*) and the reality of Karma’s results – “**Actions do not die**”². The **Sajja** vow is a commitment to starting a new life, a life that embraces truth and truthfulness, honesty and abstinence; a commitment to accepting responsibility for all of our thoughts, words and actions.

¹ English spelling ‘*Sajja*’ from the Thai, or ‘*Sacca*’ from the Pali, or ‘*Satya*’ from the Sanskrit).

² Luang Por Charoen Parnchand, late Abbot of Wat Thamkrabok monastery in Thailand

For most addicts, this effectively means changing our view of the world, and changing our view of ourselves in that world.

There is a saying at Thamkrabok that is sometimes printed on tee-shirts:

“Clean body with herbs – clean mind with Sajja”

Journey of the Hero

The treatment at Thamkrabok has been likened to the archetypal 'Journey of the Hero' as described by Joseph Campbell; This 'Journey' has three steps -

1. A Separation from home and family, and all that is familiar.
2. A (sometimes) frightening, difficult, but exhilarating journey, helped along by unexpected hospitality from strangers and help from mystical allies. So you face your vulnerability and break out of many youthful fears and neuroses.
3. Finally, a return home: the traveller apparently the same person, but forever changed.

It does not matter whether you travel half-way around the world to vomit in a gutter in public, or whether you just make a simple resolution in the privacy of your kitchen in England; getting clean - anywhere, anyhow - is your *personal* Journey of the Hero. And remember what one monk at Wat Thamkrabok said :

"Don't forget one thing: the hero is not made in those proud hours after victory but in the long, desperate and hellish hours as he passes through darkness without giving up!"

'Taking Sajja Beyond Thamkrabok' is a work in progress.

This booklet is intended primarily as a hand-out at 'Hungry Ghost' recovery retreats (see www.HungryGhostRetreats.org) and secondly as a Handbook for the Fifth Precept Sangha (see www.5th-precept.org). The latest version can be downloaded from:

[www.5th-precept.org/From-Hungry-Ghost-to-Being-Human-\(Taking-Sajja-Beyond-Thamkrabok\).pdf](http://www.5th-precept.org/From-Hungry-Ghost-to-Being-Human-(Taking-Sajja-Beyond-Thamkrabok).pdf)

The version that you are now reading is dated July 2013 (v20)

Should you have any comments or suggestions, please send them to vince.cullen@tara-detox.org



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A Karmic Compass

The ongoing process of 'World building' and 'Selfing'.



This is the law of Karma.

Beings are owners of their karma,
 heirs of their karma,
 karma is the womb from which they are born.
 Their karma is their friend and refuge.
 Whatever karma they perform,
 bright or dark,
 of that they will be the heirs.

(MN: 135)

Alternatively: ***"Karma means you don't get away with anything!"***

The Buddhist Wheel of Wandering-on (Samsara) and the 12-links of Dependent Arising



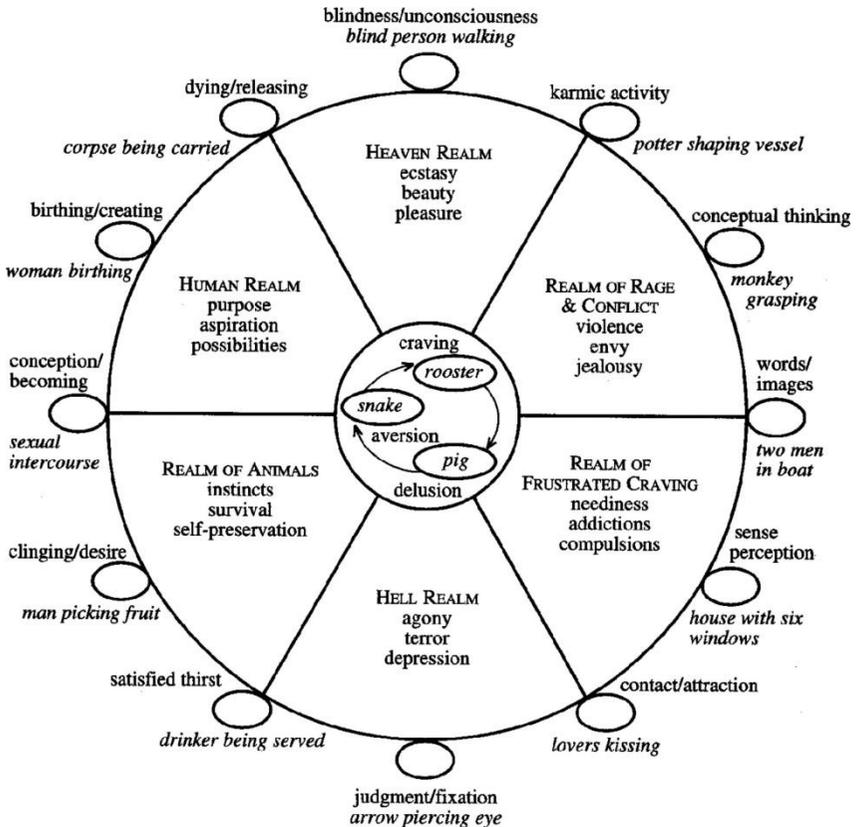
Samsara : suffering in motion - going around in circles- again and again!

Image used with the kind permission of Kulananda, author of 'The Wheel of Life (Buddhist Symbols)'
- Published by Windhorse Publications (2001)

Six Realms of Consciousness & Reality

A map of the mind: the landscape of Addictions & Compulsions

Our mission, should we decide to accept it, is to get from the realm of the **Hungry Ghosts** (Frustrated Craving) to the **Human Realm** without stopping – *for too long at least* – in any of the other Hells! The mission is not easy but also it is not impossible. Freedom from the struggle and stress of addictions and compulsions is possible – here and now.



Some of the obstacles or hindrances that we should be aware of, – and beware of:

- (1) switching our craving to other sense pleasures (*changing addictions*);
- (2) anger, ill-will, hatred for our 'self' & others;
- (3) laziness, boredom, lack of interest & effort;
- (4) restlessness, agitated or stressed mind (*shame, remorse, guilt*);
- (5) fear, paralysing doubt and a lack of trust in ourselves and in the path.

Image used with the kind permission of Ralph Metzner from his article: 'The Buddhist six-world model of consciousness and reality' (Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, 28(2), pp155-166)

A Buddhist Oriented Approach : The Path of Recovery

There are many paths to and of recovery. Some are short term interventions, some are lifetime commitments. Here, is an approach to Buddhist recovery that is based on the following multidimensional practices.

Truth, Truthfulness and Commitment (*Sajja*) : pain is inevitable - suffering is optional. The truth of Karma; and the truth of the way things really are. Our own commitment to seek the freedom that we have set our Heart upon.

Generosity (*Dana*) : the antidote to the selfishness of the ‘addict self’. A generosity of heart and mind expressed in our thoughts, in our words and in our actions. Generosity gives rise to ethical living, to kindness, to the ability to forgive and to fellowship; and it supports our meditation practice.

Ethics (*Sila*) : the aspiration to live fearlessly, harmlessly and skilfully through the Five Precepts using these gifts to prevent relapse and to reduce the harm in our life.

Loving-kindness (*Metta*) : the regular practice of loving-kindness meditation to lift our self-esteem and promote our well-being, and the well-being of all those around us. We can in time expand our practice to include Compassion, Joy-Gladness and Equanimity. “There is no finer mindfulness” – Buddha.

Forgiveness (*Khama*) : the regular practice of forgiveness meditation to skilfully examine and let go of the past; healing our present moment and embracing our future - whatever it may hold. Forgiveness is a gift to ourselves.

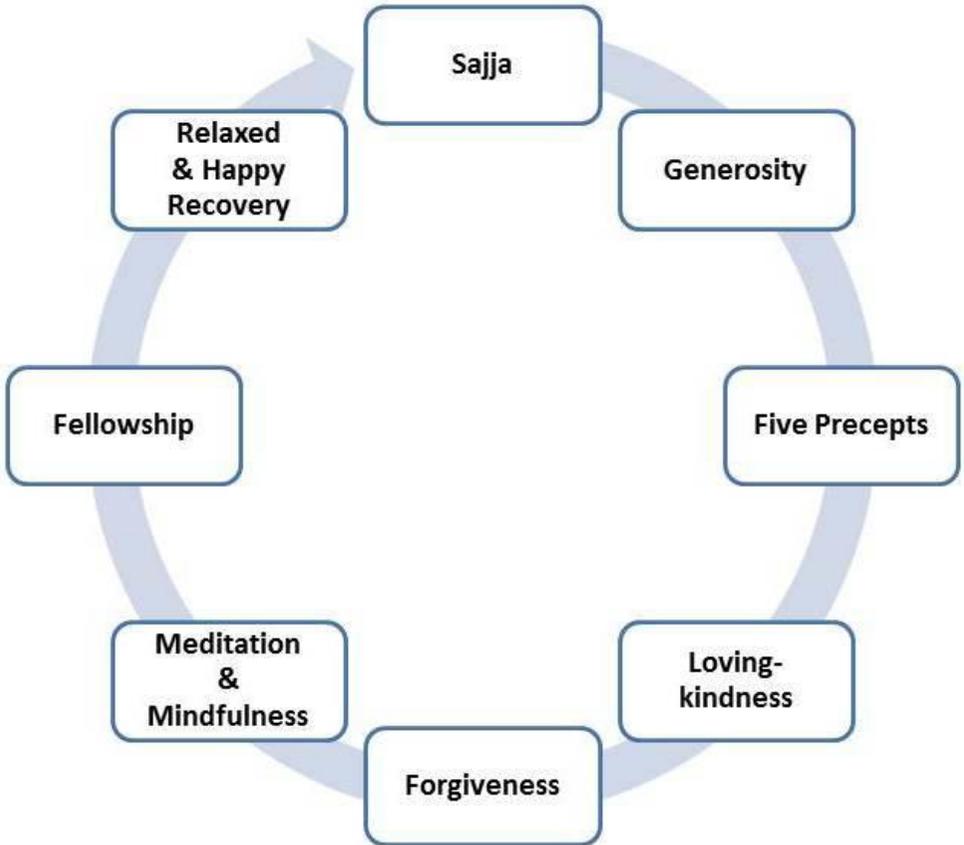
Mindfulness (*Sati*) and Meditation : the practice of meditation of body, feelings and mind; and the cultivation of an ethically focussed mindfulness that supports and protects our recovery.

Admirable Friends & Fellowship (*Kalyāna-mittatā*) : we may join a support group or start our own. “Admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the spiritual life.”

It is important to note that we do not have to be ‘a Buddhist’ to cultivate any of these qualities or to adopt or adapt any of these meditation practices.

You must be kind to be a Buddhist; but you do not have to be a Buddhist to be kind!

The Path of Recovery is...



... a process, a journey, a gradual awaking...

... a joy, a delight, a gift.

Sajja : the Starting Point for Recovery

The gift of Sajja is beyond giving.
 The taste of Sajja is beyond sweetness;
 The joy of Sajja is beyond joy.
 The end of addiction is the end of sorrow.

(354 Dhammapada - alternative version)

From a Buddhist perspective everybody is subject to suffering to a greater or lesser degree, in one way or another. But as addicts our suffering is greatly amplified by our exaggerated craving for pleasure or relief; and our aversion to the pain of withdrawal. It is this craving and aversion together with a confused understanding of reality that leads directly to our own personal unhappiness.

There is a path to freedom from **avoidable** suffering - *including our addictions and compulsions* – that is open to everyone. As the saying goes, pain is inevitable - suffering is optional. We do have a choice – here and now.

Our first and most important step on the path of recovery is **Sajja**. Sajja has three broadly distinct meanings:

Sajja as a statement of Truth

In this sense the word *Sajja* means the truth of the way things really are; including all earthly events such as birth, aging, illness, and death, which are **unavoidable** by all human beings.

Sajja is also, knowledge of the Truth; for example the Buddha taught the Four Ennobling Truths, the second of which can be understood by addicts as *“the source of our suffering is craving”*.

If we can see clearly the truth of Karma, we will see in essence that we are the inheritors of the fruit of all of our actions; bright and dark, skilful and unskilful, wholesome and unwholesome. ***The Law of Karma means we don't get away with anything!***

When we can see - *and accept* - the truth of our addictions and compulsions; this is **wise understanding**.

Sajja as Truthfulness

This is *Sajja* as a virtue; as a positive quality of mind, body and speech. This includes the aspiration for the non-deception of our 'self' and others. In this sense *Sajja* means sincerity and honesty with no intention of concealment; this is a virtue that we should try to cultivate.

2,600-years ago the Buddha provided some simple but effective guidelines to move us away from suffering. These guidelines known as the **Five Precepts** include commitments to honesty, truthfulness and sobriety.

Sajja as a Sacred Vow or Intention

Sajja is the true way of spiritual life:
 To speak truly,
 To act truly,
 To believe truly,
 And to see truly.

(Luang Por Charoen - 2nd Abbot of Thamkrabok Monastery)

This is the meaning of the term 'Sajja' that is most commonly associated with the world famous Thamkrabok Monastery in Thailand; that is Sajja as a commitment, promise or a vow (see page 25). The Thamkrabok Sajja vow may be considered by some to be 'holy' or 'sacred' but maybe it is more logical than spiritual. It is a promise to ourselves - *with the Natural Elements as our witnesses* - not to indulge in our addictive behaviours.

The Abbot at Thamkrabok Monastery will tell addicts that the Herbal Detox is only 5% of the process of ending the suffering of addiction; the other 95% is Sajja.

The Sajja vow is more rational than mystical. But in the sense of the extraordinary, it really does work if you keep it! And that is a blessing, or the natural result of a skilful choice and action (*bright Karma*), as best fits your personal belief system!

It must be said that Thamkrabok Sajja is not simply a promise or a vow to stop taking intoxicating substances; it is much more than this. Sajja is a solid commitment - **a noble intention and resolution** - to change, to starting a new life, to embracing truthfulness and honesty. A new life committed to seeing things as they really are.

Effectively, as addicts we must come to change our view of our 'Self', our view of the 'World', and our view of our 'Self' in that 'World'. This is **wise intention**.

Taking Sajja beyond Thamkrabok

To paraphrase the Buddha's teaching on the Four Ennobling Truths –

There is addiction
 There are causes of addiction
 The suffering of addiction can be ended
 There is a path leading to freedom from the suffering of addiction

If we look truthfully at our own addiction we will see the pain and harm it causes our 'self' and those around us. Seeing the truth of our addiction and the results of our behaviour, we can **resolve** to break those negative habits in skilful ways that move us away from the avoidable suffering that result from cravings and compulsions.

'Sajja' in all its meanings, is a doorway to recovery, it is the starting point of our healing but it can also be the end point of this approach. There are many addicts who have regarded the Thamkrabok *Sajja* vow (see page 25) - *simply to stop using their drug of choice* - as a total recovery plan. While it is true that this approach has worked for some, it is also true that it has not worked or lasted for everyone. Sadly, some people relapse - *and even sadder* - some people die.

Experience shows that the more dimensions of practice that you can include in your life, the more assured you can be of a simple, relaxed and happy recovery.

At this point it is important to emphasize again, that you do not have to be '**a Buddhist**' to cultivate any of these qualities or to adopt or adapt any of these principle or meditation practices.

To further paraphrase the Buddha's teaching on the Four Ennobling Truths –

There is unhappiness
 There are conditions leading to unhappiness
 There is happiness
 There are conditions leading to happiness

The rest of this booklet is intended to support 'taking Sajja beyond Thamkrabok'; to encourage an ethical-mindful path of recovery.

Whoever you are, and wherever you are, may you find the freedom that you have set your Heart upon; may you find ***everyday Nibbana – every day.***

Generosity

The Antidote to Selfishness

The gift of Dhamma conquers all gifts

(354 Dhammapada)

After accepting the truth and reality (**Sajja**) of our addiction, the second part of the Buddhist path of recovery is generosity. Generosity is the antidote to the selfishness of the 'addict self'. Particularly, the generosity of heart and mind expressed in our thoughts, in our words and in our actions.

This is a generosity of open-heartedness as much as open-handedness; but more than just the generosity of material things - money, time etc.

Generosity gives rise to **ethical living**, to **kindness**, to the ability to **forgive** and to **fellowship**; and it supports our **meditation** practice.

To give to ourselves - *and others* - the gift of fearlessness cultivated through the Precepts (Ethics/Sila). To give to ourselves - *and others* - the gifts of **Loving-kindness**, **Compassion**, **Joy** and **Equanimity**; and **Forgiveness**.

This generosity includes a willingness to give to ourselves as much as we give to others. We can give to ourselves whatever it is that is needed – *that is wholesome, skilful and wise* - to heal the heart and mind in recovery.

The first part of the Buddhist path of recovery is generosity.

The **Fourfold Training** taught by the Buddha is *Generosity, Ethics, Mindfulness and Wisdom*; these four functions are the core path to liberation; to freedom from fear, freedom from guilt, freedom from shame and freedom from remorse.

"These are the five rewards of generosity: One is dear and appealing to people at large, one is admired by good people, one's good name is spread about, one does not stray from the rightful duties of the householder, and with the break-up of the body at death, one reappears in a good destination, in the heavenly worlds."

(AN 5.35)

The Five Precepts

Not to harm ourselves or others.

I will train myself to refrain from killing and harming living beings.

This cultivates and promotes compassion.

Not to take what has not been freely given.

I will train myself to refrain from stealing and taking that which is not mine.

This cultivates and promotes generosity and contentment.

Not to cause harm through our sexual behaviour.

I will train myself to refrain from causing harm through sexual misconduct.

This cultivates and promotes restraint, respect, fidelity and harmony in relationships.

Not to speak untruthfully.

I will train myself to refrain from false speech, harmful speech, gossip, and slander.

This cultivates and promotes truthfulness and honesty.

Not to take intoxicants.

I will train myself to refrain from intoxicants such as alcohol or drugs that cause carelessness or loss of awareness.

This cultivates and promotes restraint and renunciation leading to clarity of mind.

Whoever destroys life,
disregards truth,
is sexually irresponsible,
takes what is not rightfully theirs,
and heedlessly indulges in drugs,
destroys the very roots
of their own life.

(246 – 247 Dhammapada)

We can choose to experience freedom from conflict, freedom from fear, freedom from blame, freedom from guilt, freedom from shame, freedom from remorse. Freedom from the struggle and stress of addictions and compulsions.

This tangible liberation can be experienced here and now. Everyday Nibbana, every day!

*The absence of **avoidable** suffering is true happiness -* 

Precepts for Harm Reduction and Relapse Prevention

Living skilfully and wisely through the generosity of the Five Precepts.

The **Five Precepts** are the original Harm Reduction Programme steering us away from avoidable suffering. Training in the **Five Precepts** is a commitment to non-harming of our-selves and others.

The Buddha said that to practice mindfulness without the **Precepts** is like trying to row your boat to the other shore without first untying it from the bank. You might put in a lot of effort but you're not going to get very far!

The **Five Precepts** are essential to any mindfulness-based recovery programme. The Precepts are like a Harm Reduction Programme and when combined with mindfulness they function as Relapse Prevention tools.

The **Five Precepts** are like a Karmic Compass, pointing us in a wise and skilful direction away from harm and avoidable suffering.

By adopting the **Five Precepts** we cultivate self-respect for ourselves, self-trust for our actions; and consequently we move towards freedom from guilt and remorse.

These commitments to cultivate a safe, non-harming and fearless environment come internally from the individual - not from a commandment or rule 'outside'. The **Five Precepts** can be seen as the original 'Relapse Prevention Program' benefiting both the individual and the community.

The **Five Precepts** support *Sajja*, they promote harmonious living; and in any Buddhist tradition they are essential to develop a meditation practice. They are also essential for spiritual maturity. All of these precepts together lead to a peaceful and calm mind.

The precepts are completely intertwined with mindfulness practice in the Buddhist teachings on the path to liberation *or the path to freedom* : The Fourfold Way : Generosity (*Dana*) - Precepts (*Ethics*) – Meditation & Mindfulness – Wisdom & Insight.

This is a progressive path, as generosity upholds ethics leading to a clear conscience that provides an indispensable basis for meditation, and meditation is the ground on which wisdom can develop.

Loving Kindness (*Metta*)

Alt: Unbounded or Boundless Friendliness for our 'Self' and Others.

As addicts we often indulge in self-loathing. We harbour harsh thoughts and feelings about ourselves. Many people experience these feeling to a greater or lesser degree, but with addicts these are greatly intensified. These negative thoughts and emotions can be overwhelming so that - *when combined with our cravings* - we can't and sometimes refuse to see that there is a skilful solution.

This door to relapse can be closed by cultivating **Metta** (*Loving-kindness or Boundless Friendliness*). We can learn not to judge ourselves - to be gentle and kind to ourselves - as we are - here and now.

Loving-kindness is the wish for the welfare and happiness of all beings everywhere – without exception – so that includes ourselves.

Loving-kindness is a boundless friendliness with all things, beings and experiences. Of course, we can't love – or even like - everything, everyone and every experience but we can at least be kind and friendly.

The Heart has around 40,000 (brain-like) neurones. So as one teacher says of Loving-kindness, ***"We should stop feeling with the head and start thinking with the heart."***³

The ancient texts say ***"Whatever one thinks and ponders upon, that will become the inclination of one's mind"***, or as another teacher says ***"What the mind thinks and ponders shapes the mind – the shape of your mind shapes your world."***⁴

Therefore, we practice **Loving-kindness** to deliberately incline the mind to kindness to dispel ill-will, anger and hatred.

When we develop and practice **Loving-kindness** both on and off the cushion, our mind will incline towards **Loving-kindness**; it becomes a natural process. There are some habits that we most definitely want to let go off and there are many new habits that we most definitely want to cultivate so that they become natural to us; they become second nature... or even first nature!

Whether we are addicts or not, we should remember the Buddha's teaching that ***"you can search the whole tenfold Universe but you will still not find a single Being more deserving of your Loving-kindness than the one right here - you."***

Make friends with your 'self'!

³ John Peacock (Pali Scholar and Dhamma Teacher)

⁴ Christina Feldman (Dhamma and Meditation teacher).

Phrases for Loving-kindness

May I be safe [*from all dangers outside and within myself*]
 May I be well [*free from all sickness and disease*]
 May I be at ease [*and in harmony with the world*]
 May I be happy [*free of all mental distress*]

Use the phrases and images that work for you; it's OK to drop the others.

The phrases can be used during normal meditation or during dedicated sitting periods. You can also use the phrases before going to sleep; or even before difficult meetings!

The regular practice of Loving-kindness meditation can lift and heal our 'self' esteem and promote our well-being; and as consequence, the well-being of all those around us.

The Buddha said that Loving-kindness should be practiced in thought, word and deed – in public and in private. Everything we do in recovery should be infused with Loving-kindness. ***“There is no better mindfulness here”.***

Brahma-Viharas (Devine Abodes)

The 'Brahma-Viharas' pre-date Buddhism and as such they have a Universal quality.

Loving-kindness is the first of the four Brahma-Vihara practices intended to develop '*Immeasurable, Boundless Qualities of the Heart*'. The other three Brahma-Viharas are **Compassion, Joy-gladness** and **Equanimity**. Together they are the doorways to *self-love, self-compassion, self-appreciation and self-balance*.

Out of the rich soil of **Loving-kindness**,
 Grows the beautiful bloom of **Compassion**,
 Shaded by the cool tree of **Equanimity**,
 Watered by tears of **Joy-gladness**.

These four '**insight**' meditation practices illuminate and transform many of the obstacles that we may meet on the path of recovery.

These are a gradual training : you only take on that which you can skilfully and wisely deal with. These practices of Loving-kindness, Compassion, Joy-gladness and Equanimity are a prescription for healing the Heart-mind (*Citta*).

The '*Brahma-Viharas*' inform - and transform - our relationship to ourselves and to our present moment experience.

Compassion

"Authentic happiness can only come from the long-term cultivation of wisdom, altruism, and compassion, and from the complete eradication of mental toxins such as hatred, grasping, and ignorance."

(*Matthieu Ricard*)

Phrases for Compassion

May I be free of fear and danger.
 May I be free of sorrow and pain.
 May I find peace and healing.

Joy-Gladness

"So there is a place every day for a little rejoicing, a rejoicing in one's own good fortune and good work. And when we practice this - even in ordinary daily life - it comes so naturally to rejoice in the good fortune and good qualities of others."

(*Bhante Bodhidhamma*)

Phrases for Joy-gladness

May I be joyful.
 May my happiness increase.
 May I not be separated from great happiness.
 May my good fortune and the causes for my joy and happiness increase.

Equanimity

"Even a happy life cannot be without a measure of darkness, and the word happy would lose its meaning if it were not balanced by sadness. It is far better to take things as they come along with patience and equanimity."

(*Carl Jung*)

Phrases for Equanimity

May I know and accept things as they really are.
 May I know and accept that actions have results.
 May I be at peace and balanced.

Forgiveness

Healing the past, healing the Heart & Mind in recovery

"These two are fools. Which two? The one who doesn't see his/her transgression as a transgression, and the one who doesn't rightfully pardon another who has confessed his/her transgression. These two are fools.

"These two are wise. Which two? The one who sees his/her transgression as a transgression, and the one who rightfully pardons another who has confessed his/her transgression. These two are wise."

(AN 2.21)

In our addiction and in our recovery we can be immobilised by our sense of guilt and shame of events that have happened in the past.

We can close this door to relapse through the practice of **Forgiveness** meditation.

It can be very positive and beneficial to practice **Forgiveness** meditation, particularly in the early stages of recovery. We can learn to ask for forgiveness, to forgive ourselves and we can also set the intention to forgive others.

We can bring forward memories about things that have happened in the past in a way that is skilful, without re-traumatising ourselves.

It is important to be aware of the difference between **Guilt** and **Remorse**.⁵

Guilt is 'unskilful' in Buddhist terms, as it has the tendency to solidify into *"I'm a bad person"* and even *"I'll always be a bad person"*.

Remorse, on the other hand, is a skilful expression of personal regret for a thought, word or act which we feel has caused ourselves or someone else suffering and hurt. Remorse views things in terms of cause and effect (*Karma-Vipaka*) :

"When these causes and conditions arise AND when these choices are taken, then these results will follow. There may be suffering for me and others."

⁵ Amma Thanasanti Bhikkhuni - *"Four Foundations of Mindfulness"* (Sunrise Ranch Retreat - April 30th - May 6th 2010),
Awakening Truth - <http://awakeningtruth.org/Sunrise-Ranch-May-2010/>
www.5th-precept.org

We can use this healing practice to examine the ways in which we have harmed ourselves and other people; and how we have been hurt by others, then we can let it all go.

What does the act of Forgiveness mean?

- We have all been harmed or betrayed; just as at other times we have harmed or betrayed ourselves or others. In undertaking this practice, we set forth the intention to **forgive**, to ask for **forgiveness** and to ask-extend **forgiveness** to ourselves.
- **Forgiveness** does not justify or condone harmful actions. While we **forgive**, we may also say *“never again will I allow this to happen!”*
- **Forgiveness** does not mean that we have to seek out and speak to those who have caused us harm.
- Sometimes **forgiveness** does come naturally from this meditation practice but it can have quite the opposite effect; uncovering all of the pain, anger and resentment that we still carry. In this instance we offer Loving-kindness for ourselves.
- **Forgiveness** is an act of the heart. We let go of the burdens of the resentment, ill-will and outrage that we have carried for too long.
- The process of **forgiveness** cannot be faked or rushed. In some situations and circumstances full **forgiveness** may take years. This is OK! But in the end, **forgiveness** will come as a relief; as a release of the heart.
- We enter gently into the practice of **forgiveness**. This is a practice that can be done a hundred times. Gradually, little-by-little, it will liberate us from the past; and open our hearts to the present, letting us move on with our lives.⁶
- Fundamentally, **forgiveness** is for our own sake; a way to no longer carry the pain of the past.

The Generosity of Forgiveness

We should forgive one another and wash away that stain from our hearts. Why? Because otherwise it turns into animosity and enmity. The act of forgiving is called the gift of forgiveness.

(Source: Ajahn Lee Dhammadharo - www.accesstoinight.org/lib/thai/lee/everyone.html)

⁶ Amma Thanasanti Bhikkhuni - "Four Foundations of Mindfulness" (Sunrise Ranch Retreat - April 30th - May 6th 2010), Awakening Truth - <http://awakeningtruth.org/Sunrise-Ranch-May-2010/>
www.5th-precept.org

A Buddhist Wish for Forgiveness

*If I have harmed anyone in any way
either knowingly or unknowingly
through my own confusions
I ask their forgiveness.*

*If anyone has harmed me in any way
either knowingly or unknowingly
through their own confusions
I forgive them.*

*And if there is a situation
I am not yet ready to forgive
I forgive myself for that.*

*For all the ways that I harm myself,
negate, doubt, belittle myself,
judge or be unkind to myself
through my own confusions
I forgive myself.*

"Not by hating hatred ceases
In this world of tooth and claw;
Love alone from hate releases —
This is the Eternal Law."

(5 Dhammapada - translated by Francis Story)

Meditation and Mindful Recovery

Developing mindful awareness through meditation practice.

Quieten your mind.
 Reflect.
 Watch.
 Nothing binds you.
 You are free.

(350 Dhammapada - translated by Thomas Byrom)

The Buddha said that to practice **mindfulness** without the **Precepts** is like trying to row your boat to the other shore without first untying it from the bank. You might put in a lot of effort but you're not going to get very far!

The practice of ethically focussed **mindfulness** puts a space between you and what's going on for you. Meditation on your breath, your body, your thoughts and your feelings can let you see "this is pain", "this is love", "this is fear", "this is joy", "this is craving", mindfulness reveals them all; and all can be met with kindness.

Kevin Griffin (author of 'One Breath at a Time') says that mindfulness is not just concentrating on something. Mindfulness is a focused, non-judgmental awareness on what is happening in the present moment. **Mindfulness** helps us to let go of stress and connect with the beauty and joy of our ordinary daily life.

Mindfulness in recovery has the potential to bring the benefits of:

- Calming - relieves stress of recovery.
- Insight - reveals destructive thought patterns.
- Patience - sitting with urges helps us to let go.

John Kabat-Zinn (founder of MBSR) makes the point of saying that **mindfulness** is not r.e.l.a.x.a.t.i.o.n. spelt differently! His definition can be paraphrased as:

"Mindfulness is paying attention; on purpose; in the present moment; non-judgmentally; as if your life depended upon it."

As addicts in recovery we have to agree with Jon Kabat-Zinn; when it comes to the practice of **mindfulness**, one day our very life might just depend upon it.

"There is now scientific, as well as anecdotal, evidence of the benefits of **mindfulness** and meditation for recovery but knowing this is not enough... *it is the time spent on the cushion that counts*".⁷

⁷ Dr. Kathy Lustyk at Buddhist Recovery Network inaugural conference – Los Angeles – October 11, 2009

Surfing the Urge

Here are a couple of **relapse prevention** tools intended to bring you back to reality – to give you some *breathing space* - in times of great stress or craving.

S.O.B.E.R.

This **'surfing the urge'** technique was developed by the late G.Alan Marlatt⁸.

Surfing the urge is *"How to cope with triggers and high-risk situations, how to manage urges and cravings. It also helps people get a better sense of their own personal journeys and the forks in the road that lead either to recovery or to falling off the wagon."*⁹

- S** – Stop : pause wherever you are.
- O** – Observe : what is happening in your body & mind?
- B** – Breath : bring focus to the breath to help you focus and stay present.
- E** – Expand awareness : to your whole body & surroundings.
- R** – Respond : mindfully vs. automatically.

M.A.R.A.

Even after his awakening, the Buddha was visited many times by Mara, the 'Evil One'. Mara has many faces and many moods, and is more of a nuisance than an all-powerful 'Lord of Death'.¹⁰

Mara is the personification of unskilful emotions, the devil of temptation and compulsions (*Craving*).

Mara is that part of ourselves that distracts us, and blocks our path to freedom from struggle and stress. Mara is that part of us that seeks to sabotage our own recovery.

- M** – Mindful : present-moment-recollection. *Remember to remember!*
- A** – Awareness : what is happening right now in body and mind?
- R** – Responds : as opposed to reacting automatically or habitually
- A** – Appropriately : wisely to whatever situation you find yourself in

"Mara - I see you!!!"

⁸ Founder and director of the Addictive Behaviors Research Center at the University of Washington

⁹ Surfing the Urge (<http://www.inquiringmind.com/Articles/SurfingTheUrge.html>)

¹⁰ With acknowledgement to Stephen Batchelor for his reflections in the book 'Living with the Devil : A Meditation on Good and Evil'

Admirable Friends and Spiritual Fellowship

Don't associate with bad friends.
 Don't associate with the low.
 Associate with admirable friends.
 Associate with the best.

(78 Dhammapada - Thanissaro Bhikkhu)

Joining a 'recovery' group of any type is an act of **generosity** and **compassion** both for your-self and the other members of that group. It doesn't matter whether it's a Buddhist community, a 12-Step Fellowship or SMART group. As long as you can get and give support as appropriate.

If you decide to join (or even start) a Buddhist recovery group then you might also consider an occasional 'retreat' to refresh and energise your recovery and your practice.

Recovery groups are for mutual support, for sustenance, and for community.

In the ancient Buddhist texts, there is a conversation between the Buddha and his cousin and disciple Ānanda in which Ānanda enthusiastically declares,

'This is half of the spiritual life, lord: admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie.'

The Buddha replies:

'Don't say that, Ānanda. Don't say that. Admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the spiritual life.'

If you find a good companion,
 of integrity and wisdom,
 you will overcome all dangers
 in joyous and caring company.

(328 Dhammapada)

Links :	Fifth Precept Group	www.5th-Precept.org/html/sit-and-share.html
	Buddhist Recovery Network	www.BuddhistRecovery.org/meetings.htm
	Hungry Ghost Retreats	www.HungryGhostRetreats.org
	Thamkrabok Monastery	www.Wat-Thamkrabok.org
	New Life Foundation	www.NewLifeThaiFoundation.com

APPENDIX: A Sajja Vow

To undertake a **Sajja Vow**¹¹, recite each line to yourself [or if at Wat Thamkrabok then repeat each line after the Sajja Monk]:

***I ask for forgiveness from others for whatever harmful things I have done:
the mistakes, failures and wrong-doings
that I have intentionally or unintentionally done with body, word and heart.***

***I ask for and extend forgiveness to myself for whatever harmful things I have
done to myself: the mistakes, failures and wrong-doings
that I have intentionally or unintentionally done with body, word and heart.***

***As far as I am able; I forgive others for whatever harmful things they have
done: the mistakes, failures and wrong-doings
committed intentionally or unintentionally with body, word and heart.***

***In this place of mindfulness,
with the natural Elements [and those present] as my witnesses,
I knowingly and openly commit to the following Sajja vow:***

***I will not take alcohol or other drugs that lead to carelessness for
the rest of my life. [for one year] [for one week] [for one day]***

***May the merit and benefits from the fulfilment of this Sajja vow
relieve the suffering of those beings currently experiencing the Hell realms,
and those beings currently experiencing the Heaven realms; may it be shared
around the whole Universe.***

***In the realm of the Human beings; may the merit and benefits be shared with
my family, with my benefactors and with my friends;
and may it relieve the suffering of all the people that I have hurt or harmed.***

May I and all beings - be free from the pain and sorrow of addiction.

May I and all beings - be filled with loving-kindness.

May I and all beings - be safe from inner and outer dangers.

May I and all beings - be well in body and mind.

May I and all beings - be happy and at ease in the world.

- (bow three times) -

[If witnesses are present: Response: -- ***Well said, well said, well said!***]

¹¹ Adapted by Vince Cullen from an original translation by Phra Hans Piyathammo Ulrich Kamperfer.

*All that you are now
is the result of what you were yesterday,
and all that you will be tomorrow
will be the result of all that you are now.*