

Mahasi Sayadaw

Fundamentals of Vipassana Meditation

Translated by MAUNG THA NOE

Edited by Sayadaw U SILANANDA

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Publisher's Note..... | 4 |
| Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw A Biographical Sketch | 5 |
| FUNDAMENTALS OF VIPASSANA MEDITATION | 11 |
| Introductory..... | 14 |
| Calm and Insight | 14 |
| Aggregates | 15 |
| Knowledge and Freedom | 17 |
| The Right Method..... | 20 |
| The Mind..... | 25 |
| What For and What Time?..... | 26 |
| Origination | 28 |
| How Grasping Arises | 30 |
| Meditate Right Now..... | 31 |
| Incessant Work..... | 34 |
| Things Fall Apart | 35 |
| Impermanence..... | 37 |
| Rediscovery..... | 40 |
| Peace at Last | 42 |
| Progress..... | 43 |
| Noble Path..... | 46 |
| Summary | 47 |
| Words of Encouragement | 48 |
| The Dull Young Monk..... | 49 |
| A Disciple of Sāriputta Thera | 50 |
| Uposathā the Goddess..... | 52 |
| Truths | 53 |
| Instructions to Insight Meditation..... | 58 |
| Questions and Answers..... | 66 |
| The Benefits of Walking Meditation | 81 |
| Guidance for Yogis at Interview..... | 88 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| The First Aphorism | 88 |
| Three Aspects of a Physical Object | 89 |
| Three Kinds Of Characteristic | 91 |
| The Second Aphorism..... | 92 |
| The Third & Fourth Aphorism..... | 92 |
| The Fifth Aphorism..... | 93 |
| The Sixth Aphorism..... | 93 |
| The Last Aphorism | 94 |
| Glossary | 95 |
| Sharing Merits..... | 105 |

Publisher's Note

We are very happy to have the book “Fundamentals of Vipassana Meditation completed and published for free distribution in a timely manner as planned. For this reason, we would like to take this opportunity to thank those who help and contribute financially to make it possible.

The book is such titled because its main part is the book “Fundamentals of Vipassana Meditation” by Mahasi Saydaw, translated by Maung Tha Noe, edited by Sayadaw U Silananda and published in 1991 by Dhammachakka Meditation Center whose editor was Sayadaw U Silananda himself. Since it is a precious book whose copy is very hard to find, we thought of republishing it again. Actually, we had published a book in Vietnamese consisting of its translation along with other sources related to Vipassana meditation mentioned below to benefit Vietnamese Buddhists and yogis prior to getting an idea to have this equivalent book published in English for the wider audience.

As mentioned above, the other sources included in this book are as follows:

- “Instructions to Meditation Practice” by Mahasi Saydaw
- “Benefits of Walking Meditation” by Sayadaw U Silananda
- “Guidance for Yogis at Interview” by Sayadaw U Pandita
- “An Interview with Mahasi Saydaw,” by Thamanaykyaw, translated by U Hla Myint.

The late Mahasi Sayadaw, while still living, had devoted his whole life in spreading the teachings of the Buddha, especially the Vipassana Meditation. He had trained thousands of people, including famous meditation teachers such as Sayadaw U Pandita, Sayadaw Janakabhivamsa, Sayadaw Kundala, Shwe Oo Min Sayadaw, Sayadaw U Silananda, Sayadaw Khippa Panno...who have also devoted their entire lives to the Buddha's Sasana.

In publishing this book, our goal is to have a book serve as a manual of Vipassana meditation at our center and as a precious source for Vipassana yogis. We would like to express our appreciation to the Triple Gems, especially the late Mahasi Sayadaw. We dedicate and honor this book to the late Sayadaw U Silananda, who was our Chief Meditation Teacher for almost two decades and passed away in 2005.

Tathagata Meditation Center

Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw A Biographical Sketch

The late Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw was born in the year 1904 at Seikkhun, a large, prosperous and charming village lying about seven miles to the west of the historic Shwebo town in Upper Burma. His parents, peasant proprietors by occupation, were U Kan Taw and Daw Oke. At the age of six, he was sent to receive his early monastic education under U Adicca, presiding monk of Pyinmana Monastery at Seikkhun. Six years later he was initiated into the monastic Order as a novice (samanera) under the same teacher and given the name of Shin Sobhana (which means Auspicious). The name befitted his courageous features and his dignified behavior. He was a bright pupil, making remarkably quick progress in his scriptural studies. When U Adicca left the Order, Shin Sobhana continued his studies under Sayadaw U Parama of Thugyi-kyaung Monastery, Ingyintaw-taik. At the age of nineteen, he had to decide whether to continue in the Order and devote the rest of his life to the service of the Buddha Sasana or to return to lay life. Shin Sobhana knew where his heart lay and unhesitatingly chose the first course. He was ordained as a Bhikkhu on the 26th of November 1923. Sumedha Sayadaw Ashin Nimmala acted as his preceptor. Within four years, Ven. Sobhana passed all three grades of the Pali scriptural examinations conducted by the government.

Ven. Sobhana next went to the city of Mandalay, noted for its pre-eminence in Buddhist learning, to pursue advanced study of the scriptures under Sayadaws well-known for their learning. His stay at Khinmakan-west Monastery for this purpose was, however, cut short after little more than a year when he was called to Moulmein. The head of the Taik-kyaung Monastery in Taungwainggale (who came from the same village as Ven. Sobhana) wanted him to assist with the teaching of his pupils. While teaching at Taungwainggale, Ven. Sobhana went on with his own studies of the scriptures, being especially interested in the Mahasatipatthana Sutta. His deepening interest in the satipatthana method of vipassana meditation took him next to neighboring Thaton, where the well-known Mingun Jetavan Sayadaw was teaching it. Under the Mingun Jetavan Sayadaw's instruction, Ven. Sobhana took up intensive practice of vipassana meditation. Within four months, he had such good results that he could teach it properly to his first three disciples at Seikkhun while he was on a visit there in 1938. After his return from Thaton to Taungwainggale (due to the grave illness and subsequent death of the aged Taik-kyaung Sayadaw) to resume his teaching work and to take charge of the monastery, Ven. Sobhana sat for and passed with distinction the government-held Dhammacariya (Teacher of the Dhamma) examination in June 1941.

On the eve of the Japanese invasion of Burma, Ven. Sobhana had to leave Taungwainggale and return to his native Seikkhun. This was a welcome opportunity for him to devote himself wholeheartedly to his own practice of satipatthana vipassana meditation and to teaching it to a growing number of disciples. The Mahasi Monastery at Seikkhun (whence he became known as Mahasi Sayadaw) fortunately remained free from the horror and disruption of war. During this

period, the Sayadaw's disciples prevailed upon him to write the "Manual of Vipassana Meditation," an authoritative and comprehensive work expounding both the doctrinal and practical aspects of satipatthana meditation.

It was not long before the Mahasi Sayadaw's reputation as a skilled meditation teacher had spread throughout the Shwebo-Sagaing region and came to the attention of a devout and wealthy Buddhist, Sir U Thwin. U Thwin wanted to promote the Buddha Sasana by setting up a meditation centre directed by a teacher of proven virtue and ability. After listening to a discourse on vipassana given by the Sayadaw and observing his serene and noble demeanor, Sir U Thwin had no difficulty in deciding that the Mahasi Sayadaw was the meditation teacher he had been looking for.

On the 13th of November 1947, the Buddhasasana Nuggaha Association was founded at Rangoon, with Sir U Thwin as its first President and with scriptural learning and the practice of the Dhamma as its object. Sir U Thwin donated to the Association a plot of land in Hermitage Road, Rangoon, measuring over five acres, for the erection of the proposed meditation centre. In 1978, the Centre occupied an area of 19.6 acres, on which a vast complex of buildings and other structures had been built. Sir U Thwin told the Association that he had found a reliable meditation teacher and proposed that the then Prime Minister of Burma invite Mahasi Sayadaw to the Centre.

After the Second World War, the Sayadaw alternated his residence between his native Seikkhun and Taungwaingale in Moulmein. Meanwhile, Burma had regained independence on 4th January 1948. In May 1949, during one of his sojourns at Seikkhun, the Sayadaw completed a new nissaya translation of the Mahasatipatthana Sutta. This work excels the average nissaya translation of this Sutta, which is very important for those who wish to practice vipassana meditation but need guidance.

In November of that year, at the personal invitation of the then Prime Minister, U Nu, Mahasi Sayadaw came down from Shwebo and Sagaing to the Sasana Yeiktha (Meditation Centre) at Rangoon, accompanied by two senior Sayadaws. Thus began Mahasi Sayadaw's guardianship of the Sasana Yeiktha at Rangoon. On 4th December 1949, Mahasi Sayadaw personally instructed the very first batch of twenty-five meditators in the practice of vipassana. As the meditators grew in numbers, it became too demanding for the Sayadaw to give the entire initiation talk to all the meditators. From July 1951, the tape-recorded talk was played for each new batch of meditators with a brief introduction by the Sayadaw. Within a few years of the establishment of the Sasana Yeiktha at Rangoon, similar meditation centres were inaugurated in many parts of the country with Mahasi-trained members of the Sangha as meditation teachers. These centers were not confined to Burma alone, but extended to neighboring Theravada countries like Thailand and Sri Lanka. There were also a few centres in Cambodia and India. According to a 1972 census, the total number of meditators trained at all these centres (both in Burma and abroad) had exceeded seven hundred thousand. In recognition of his distinguished scholarship and spiritual

attainments, Mahasi Sayadaw was honored in 1952 by the then Prime Minister of the Union of Burma with the prestigious title of Aggamahapandita (the Exalted Wise One).

Soon after attaining independence, the Government of Burma began plans to hold a Sixth Buddhist Council (Sangayana) in Burma, with four other Theravada Buddhist countries (Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos) participating. For this purpose, the government dispatched a mission to Thailand and Cambodia, composed of Nyaungyan Sayadaw, Mahasi Sayadaw and two laymen. The mission discussed the plan with the Primates of the Buddhist Sangha of those two countries.

At the historic Sixth Buddhist Council, which was inaugurated with every pomp and ceremony on 17th May 1954, Mahasi Sayadaw played an eminent role, undertaking the exacting and onerous tasks of Osana (Final Editor) and Pucchaka (Questioner). A unique feature of this Council was the editing of the commentaries (Atthakatha) and subcommentaries (tikas), as well as the canonical texts. In the editing of this commentarial literature, Mahasi Sayadaw was responsible for making a critical analysis, sound interpretation and skillful reconciliation of several crucial and divergent passages.

A significant result of the Sixth Buddhist Council was the revival of interest in Theravada Buddhism among Mahayana Buddhists. In 1955, while the Council was in progress, twelve Japanese monks and a Japanese laywoman arrived in Burma to study Theravada Buddhism. The monks were initiated into the Theravada Buddhist Sangha as novices while the laywoman was made a Buddhist nun. Then, in July 1957, at the insistence of the Buddhist Association of Moji, the Buddha Sasana Council of Burma sent a Theravada Buddhist mission to Japan. Mahasi Sayadaw was one of the leading representatives of the Burmese Sangha in that mission.

Also in 1957, Mahasi Sayadaw undertook the task of writing an introduction in Pali to the Visuddhimagga Atthakatha, to refute certain misstatements about its famous author, Ven. Buddhaghosa. The Sayadaw completed this difficult task in 1960, his work bearing every mark of distinctive learning and depth of understanding. By then, the Sayadaw had also completed two volumes (out of four) of his Burmese translation of this famous commentary and classic work on Buddhist meditation.

At the request of the Government of Sri Lanka, a special mission headed by Sayadaw U Sujata, an eminent deputy of Mahasi Sayadaw, went there in July 1955 to promote satipatthana meditation. The mission stayed in Sri Lanka for over a year doing admirable work, setting up twelve permanent and seventeen temporary meditation centres. Following the completion of a meditation centre on a site granted by the Sri Lankan government, a larger mission led by Mahasi Sayadaw left Burma for Sri Lanka on 6th January 1959, via India. The mission was in India for about three weeks, during which its members visited several holy places associated with the life and work of Lord Buddha. They also gave religious talks on suitable occasions and had interviews with Prime Minister Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, President of India Dr. Rajendra

Prasad and Vice-president Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. A notable feature of the visit was the warm welcome received from members of the depressed classes, who had embraced Buddhism under the guidance of their late leader Dr. Ambedkar.

The mission flew from Madras to Sri Lanka on 29th January 1959 and arrived at Colombo on the same day. On Sunday, 1st February, at the opening ceremony of the meditation centre named “Bhavana Majjhathana,” Mahasi Sayadaw delivered an address in Pali after Prime Minister Bandaranayake and some others had spoken. The members of the mission next went on an extended tour of the island, visiting several meditation centres where Mahasi Sayadaw gave discourses on vipassana meditation.

They also worshipped at famous sites of Buddhist pilgrimage like Polonnaruwa, Anuradhapura and Kandy. This historic visit of the Burmese mission under the inspiring leadership of Mahasi Sayadaw was symbolic of the ancient and close ties of friendship between these two Theravada Buddhist countries. Its benefit to the Buddhist movement in Sri Lanka was a revival of interest in meditation, which seemed to have declined.

In February 1954, a visitor to the Sasana Yeiktha might have noticed a young Chinese man practicing vipassana meditation. The meditator in question was a Buddhist teacher from Indonesia by the name of Bung An, who had become interested in vipassana meditation. Under the guidance of Mahasi Sayadaw and Sayadaw U Nanuttara, Mr. Bung An made such excellent progress that, in little more than a month, Mahasi Sayadaw gave him a detailed talk on the progress of insight. Later he was ordained a bhikkhu and named Ven. Jinarakkhita, with Mahasi Sayadaw as his preceptor. After he returned as a Buddhist monk to Indonesia, the Buddha Sasana Council received a request to send a Burmese Buddhist monk to promote missionary work in Indonesia. It was decided that Mahasi Sayadaw, as the preceptor and mentor of Ashin Jinarakkhita, should go. With thirteen other Theravada monks, Mahasi Sayadaw undertook such primary missionary activities as consecrating simas (ordination boundaries) ordaining bhikkhus, initiating novices and giving discourses, particularly talks on vipassana meditation.

Considering these fruitful activities in promoting Buddhism in Indonesia and Sri Lanka, we might describe Mahasi Sayadaw’s missions to these countries as “Dhamma-vijaya” (victory of the Dhamma) journeys.

As early as 1952, at the request of the Thai Minister for Sangha Affairs, Mahasi Sayadaw had sent Sayadaws U Asabha and U Indavamsa to Thailand for the promotion of satipatthana vipassana. Thanks to their efforts, Mahasi Sayadaw’s method gained wide acceptance in Thailand. By 1960, many meditation centres had been established and the number of Mahasi meditators exceeded a hundred thousand.

It was characteristic of the Venerable Sayadaw’s disinterested and single-minded devotion to the cause of the Buddha Sasana that, regardless of his advancing age and feeble health, he undertook

three more missions to the West (Britain, Europe and America) and to India and Nepal in the three years (1979, 1980 and 1981) preceding his death.

Abhidhajamaharatthaguru Masoeyein Sayadaw, who presided over the Sanghanayaka Executive Board at the Sixth Buddhist Council, urged Mahasi Sayadaw to teach two commentaries to the Sangha at SasanaYeiktha. Ven. Buddhaghosa's Visuddhimagga Atthakatha and Ven. Dhammapala's Visuddhimagga Mahatika deal primarily with Buddhist meditation theory and practice, though they also offer useful explanations of important doctrinal points, so they are vital for prospective meditation teachers. Mahasi Sayadaw began teaching these two works on 2nd February 1961, for one and a half or two hours daily. Based on the lecture notes taken by his pupils, the Sayadaw started writing a nissaya translation of the Visuddhimagga Mahatika, completing it on 4th February 1966. This nissaya was an exceptional achievement. The section on the different views held by other religions (samayantara) was most exacting since the Sayadaw had to familiarize himself with ancient Hindu philosophy and terminology by studying all available references, including works in Sanskrit and English.

Up until now, Mahasi Sayadaw has to his credit 67 volumes of Burmese Buddhist literature. Space does not permit us to list them all here, but a complete up-to-date list of them is appended to the Sayadaw's latest publication, namely, "A Discourse on Sakkapanha Sutta" (published in October 1978).

At one time, Mahasi Sayadaw was severely criticized in certain quarters for his advocacy of the allegedly unorthodox method of noting the rising and falling of the abdomen in vipassana meditation. It was mistakenly assumed that this method was an innovation of the Sayadaw's, whereas the truth is that it had been approved several years before Mahasi Sayadaw adopted it, by no less an authority than the mula (original) Mingun Jetavan Sayadaw, and that it is in no way contrary to the Buddha's teaching on the subject. The reason for Mahasi Sayadaw's preference for this method is that the average meditator finds it easier to note this manifestation of the element of motion (vayodhatu). It is not, however, imposed on all who come to practice at any of the Mahasi meditation centres. One may, if one likes, practice anapanasati. Mahasi Sayadaw himself refrained from joining issue with his critics on this point, but two learned Sayadaws brought out a book each in defense of the Sayadaw's method, thus enabling those who are interested in the controversy to judge for themselves.

This controversy arose in Sri Lanka where some members of the Sangha, inexperienced and unknowledgeable in practical meditation, publicly assailed Mahasi Sayadaw's method in newspapers and journals. Since this criticism was voiced in the English language with world-wide coverage, silence could no longer be maintained and so Sayadaw U Nanuttara of Kaba-aye (World Peace Pagoda campus) forcefully responded to the criticisms in the pages of the Sri Lankan Buddhist periodical "World Buddhism."

Mahasi Sayadaw's international reputation has attracted numerous visitors and meditators from abroad, some seeking enlightenment for their religious problems and others intent on practicing meditation under the Sayadaw's personal guidance. Among the first meditators from abroad was former British Rear-Admiral E.H. Shattock, who came on leave from Singapore and practiced meditation at the Sasana Yeiktha in 1952. On his return to England, he published a book entitled "An Experiment in Mindfulness," in which he related his experiences in generally appreciative terms. Another foreigner was Mr. Robert Duvo, a French-born American from California. He came and practiced meditation at the Centre first as a lay meditator and later as a bhikkhu. He subsequently published a book in France about his experiences and the satipatthana vipassana method. Particular mention should be made of Anagarika Shri Munindra of Buddha Gaya in India, who became a close disciple of Mahasi Sayadaw, spending several years with the Sayadaw learning the Buddhist scriptures and practicing vipassana. Afterwards he directed an international meditation centre at Buddha Gaya, where many people from the West came to practice meditation. Among these meditators was a young American, Joseph Goldstein, who has written a perceptive book on insight meditation entitled "The Experience of Insight: A Natural Unfolding."

Some of the Sayadaw's works have been published abroad, such as "The Satipatthana Vipassana Meditation" and "Practical Insight Meditation" by the Unity Press, San Francisco, California, USA, and "The Progress of Insight" by the Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka. Selfless and able assistance was rendered by U Pe Thin (now deceased) and Myanaung U Tin in the Sayadaw's dealings with his visitors and meditators from abroad and in the translation into English of some of Sayadaw's discourses on vipassana meditation. Both of them were accomplished meditators.

The Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw is profoundly revered by countless grateful disciples in Burma and abroad. Although it was the earnest wish of his devoted disciples that the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw might live for several more years and continue showering the blessings of the Buddhadhamma on all those in search freedom and deliverance, the inexorable law of impermanence terminated, with tragic suddenness, his selfless and dedicated life on the 14th of August 1982. Like a true son of the Buddha, he lived valiantly, spreading the word of the Master throughout the world and helping tens of thousands onto the Path of Enlightenment and Deliverance.

U Nyi Nyi (Mahasi Disciple and Meditator)

Member of the Executive Committee Yangon, Myanmar Buddhasasana Nuggaha Association,
18th October 1978

FUNDAMENTALS OF VIPASSANA MEDITATION

By Mahasi Sayadaw

Excerpts from Editor's Note

This book was published in Burma by the Budhasāsanānuggaha Organization for free distribution. Since this book deals with the very fundamentals of Vipassana meditation clearly and succinctly, it was chosen for publication by the Dhammachakka Meditation Center.

I took the liberty to edit this book for publication here in the U.S. and in doing so, made a few necessary alterations so as to make it easier for the western readers to understand and also to bring it closer to the original in some places. Many explanations have been added in the Glossary to help the uninitiated reader understand more fully...

May all those connected with this publication attain final deliverance from all suffering.

Sayadaw U Sīlānanda

December 16, 1991

A Word from the Translator

“The Fundamentals of Vipassana Meditation” is a series of lectures delivered by the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw during the New Year Holidays of the Burmese Era 1320 (1959). The lectures first appeared in book form in 1961, and have ever since enjoyed such popularity with the readers that they have run into several editions. This is their first English translation.

As the reader will see in the following pages, the lectures were addressed to lay listeners -- people to whom the subtle points of Vipassana practice were totally new. As such, the Sayadaw took great pains to make his language plain, easy, direct and to the point. He led his listeners, stage by simple stage, from such basic facets as differentiation between calm and insight meditations to such intricate aspects of the Dhamma as reality and concept, process of consciousness and thought-moments, stages of progress in mind development and realization of Nibbāna. The listener -- or the reader in our case -- begins with the very first lesson: what insight is and how it is developed. He is then instructed how to begin his work, how to progress,

how to be on his guard against pitfalls in the course of his training and, most important of all, how to know when he “knows. “ He is thrilled, encouraged, and made to feel as if he were already on the path to bliss.

Buddhism is a practical religion, a creed to live by -- not just another system of metaphysical philosophy as most outsiders are wont to imagine it to be. It examines the ills of this sentient life, discovers their cause, prescribes the removal of the cause, and points the Way to the release from all suffering. Anyone desirous of liberation can walk along the Way. But he must make the effort to step and walk. No one will pick him up and offer him a free ride to Peace Eternal.

You yourselves must make the effort. Buddhas only point the way.

Those who have entered the Path and who meditate will be freed from the fetters of illusion. (Dhammapada, 276.)

What then is the Way to liberation? The Buddha himself tells us in Satipatthana Sutta that there is but One Way -- the Way of establishing mindfulness. It is this establishing of mindfulness that serves as the cornerstone of the whole system of insight meditation expounded and popularized by the Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw for over half a century.

Here one must not forget the fact that preaching Vipassana is quite unlike the preaching of any other aspect of the Buddha’s teaching, say, its moral or metaphysical portions. This most scholars versed in the scriptures can do. But Vipassana is something which only experience can convince. The Buddha himself (or, more correctly, the Bodhisatta) searched for the Way, found it, traversed it himself, and only then did he teach it to beings from his experience.

“Even so have I, monks, seen an ancient way, an ancient road followed by the wholly Awakened Ones of olden times... Along that have I gone, and the matters that I have come to know fully as I was going along it I have told to the monks, nuns, men and women lay followers...” (S.i,105.)

The Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw, on his part, took up the Way pointed out to all of us by the Buddha, realized the Dhamma, and then spoke to his disciples from his experience. They, too, have realized the Dhamma. About this the Sayadaw says in his lectures, “Here in the audience are lots of meditators who have come to this stage of knowledge. I am not speaking from my own experience alone. No, not even from the experience of forty or fifty disciples of mine. There are hundreds of them.”

One attribute of the Buddha’s Dhamma is that “it is a come-and-see thing (ehipassiko).” Millions came and saw it well over 2500 years ago. And today hundreds of thousands have come and seen it, and hundreds of thousands more will follow them, as we can see in the meditation centres the world over. It only remains to the aspirant after liberation to awake and join the multitude in their march. This book sets out the plan of the Way that lies ahead of him. It is, as the noted scholar in

the foreword to the Burmese edition remarks, not the kind of book one reads for reading's sake. It is to be his guide as he ventures from one stage of higher wisdom to another.

In translating this book, I have tried to reproduce in English all that the Sayadaw has to say in his Burmese lectures. But I have not attempted a literal translation. Nor have I turned out an abridged, free version. I have avoided repetitions so characteristic of spoken language, and have left untranslated all the mnemonic verses that accompany the revered Sayadaw's lectures. Excepting these, I have kept the word of the Sayadaw intact, and every effort has been made to retain his simple, straightforward and lucid style.

For translation of the Pali texts quoted by the Sayadaw in his work, I have relied mostly on such noted scholars as Dr. Rhys. Davids, F. L. Woodward, I. B. Homer, Nyanatiloka, Nyanamoli and Pe Maung Tin, with modifications here and there. I must record my indebtedness to them.

Maung Tha Noe Rangoon, 3 March 1981.

Introductory

Today insight meditation needs no special introduction. Everybody is saying that it is good. The contrary was the case twenty years ago. People thought insight meditation was meant for monks and recluses and not for them. When we began preaching insight meditation, we had had a hard time doing so. The situation has changed now. Today people keep asking us to lecture on insight. But when we begin telling them the simple facts of insight meditation, they seem unable to appreciate them. Some even rise and go away. One should not blame them. They have had no grounding in meditation to understand anything.

Some think calm is insight. Some talk of insight meditation as nothing different from calm meditation. The insight meditation as preached by some people, though high-sounding in language, proves just impossible in practice. Their listeners are left in confusion. For the benefit of such people, we will talk about the elements of insight meditation.

Calm and Insight

What do we meditate on? How do we develop insight? This is a very important question.

There are two kinds of meditation: meditating to develop calm and meditating to develop insight. Meditating on the ten kasina devices only gives rise to calm, not insight. Meditating on the ten foul things (a swollen corpse, for example), too, only gives rise to calm, not insight. The ten recollections, like remembering the attributes of the Buddha, the Dhamma and others, too, can develop calm and not insight. Meditating on the thirty-two parts of the body, like hair, nails, teeth, skin, these too are not insight. They help to develop only concentration.

Mindfulness as to respiration is also concentration developing. But one can develop insight from it. Visuddhimagga, however, includes it in the concentration subjects, and so we will call it as such here.

Then there are the four divine states: loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity, and the four formless states leading to formless jhānas. Then, there is the meditation on loathsomeness of food. All these are subjects for concentration-meditation.

When you meditate on the four elements inside your body, it is called the analysis of the four elements. Although this is a concentration meditation, it helps develop insight as well.

All these forty subjects of meditation are subjects for developing concentration. Only respiration and analysis of elements have to do with insight. The others will not give rise to insight. If you want insight, you will have to work further.

To come back to our question, how do we develop insight? The answer is: we develop insight by meditating on the five aggregates of grasping. The mental and material qualities in beings are aggregates of grasping. They may be grasped with delight by craving, in which case it is called “grasping of the sense objects,” or they may be grasped wrongly by wrong views, in which case it is called “grasping through wrong views.” You have to meditate on them and see them as they really are. If you don’t, you will grasp them with craving and wrong views. Once you see them as they are, you no longer grasp them. In this way, you develop insight. We will discuss the five aggregates of grasping in detail.

Aggregates

The five aggregates of grasping are matter or form, feelings, perception, volitional activities and consciousness. What are they? They are the things you experience all the time. You do not have to go anywhere else to find them. They are in you. When you see, they are there in the seeing. When you hear, they are there in the hearing. When you smell, taste, touch or think, they are there in the smelling, tasting, touching or thinking.

When you bend, stretch or move your limbs, the aggregates are there in the bending, stretching or moving. Only you do not know them to be aggregates. It is because you have not meditated on them and so do not know them as they really are. Not knowing them as they are, you grasp them with craving and wrong view.

What happens when you bend? It begins with the intention to bend. Then come the material properties of bending one by one. Now, in the intention to bend, there are the four mental aggregates. The mind that intends to bend is the consciousness. When you think of bending and then bend, you may feel happy, or unhappy, or neither happy nor unhappy, doing so. If you bend with happiness, there is pleasant feeling. If you bend with unhappiness or anger, there is unpleasant feeling. If you bend with neither happiness nor unhappiness, there is neutral feeling. So, when you think of bending, there is the “feeling” aggregate. Then, there is perception, the aggregate that recognizes the bending. Then, there is the mental state that urges you to bend. It seems as though it were saying “Bend! Bend!” It is the aggregate of volitional activities. Thus, in the intention to bend, you have feelings, perception, volitional activities and consciousness--all four mental aggregates. The movement of bending is matter or form. It is the material aggregate. So the intention to bend and the bending together make up the five aggregates.

Thus, in one bending of the arm, there are the five aggregates. You move once and the five aggregates come up. You move again and there are more of the five aggregates. Every move calls up the five aggregates. If you have not meditated on them rightly and have not known them rightly, what happens we need not tell you. You know for yourselves.

Well, you think “I intend to bend” and “I bend”, don’t you? Everybody does. Ask the children, they will give the same answer. Ask adults who can’t read and write, the same answer. Ask someone who can read, the same answer still if he will say what he has in his mind. But, because he is wellread, he may invent answers to suit the scriptures and say “mind and matter.” It is not what he knows for himself, only inventions to suit the scriptures. In his heart of hearts, he is thinking: “It is I who intend to bend. It is I who bend. It is I who intend to move. It is I who move.” He also thinks: “This I have been before, am now, and will be in future. I exist forever.” This thinking is called the notion of permanence. Nobody thinks, “This intention to bend exists only now.” Ordinary people always think, “This mind existed before. The same I that have existed before am now thinking of bending.” They also think, “This thinking I exist now and will go on existing. “

When you bend or move the limbs, you think, “It is the same limbs that have existed that are moving now. It is the same I that have existed that am moving now.” After moving you again think, “These limbs, this I, always exist.” It never occurs to you that they pass away. This, too, is the notion of permanence. It is clinging to what is impermanent as permanent, clinging to what is no personality, no ego, as personality, as ego.

Then, as you have bent or stretched to your desire, you think it is very nice. For example, as you feel stiffness in the arm, you move or rearrange it and the stiffness is gone. You feel comfortable. You think it is very nice. You think it is happiness. Dancers and amateur dancers bend and stretch as they dance and think it is very nice to do so. They delight in it and are pleased with themselves. When you converse among yourselves you often shake your hands and heads and are pleased. You think it is happiness. When something you are doing meets with success, again you think it is good, it is happiness. This is how you delight through craving and cling to things. What is impermanent you take to be permanent and delight in. What is not happiness, not personality, but just aggregates of mind and matter, you take to be happiness, or personality, and delight in. You delight in them and cling to them. You mistake them for self or ego and cling to them, too.

So, when you bend, stretch or move your limbs, the thinking “I will bend” is aggregate of grasping. The bending is the aggregate of grasping. The thinking “I will stretch” is the aggregate of grasping. The stretching is the aggregate of grasping. The thinking “I will move” is the aggregate of grasping. The moving is the aggregate of grasping. When we speak of aggregates of grasping to be meditated on, we mean just these things.

The same thing happens in seeing, hearing, etc. When you see, the seat of seeing, the eye, is manifested. So is the object seen. Both are material things. They cannot cognize. But if one fails to meditate while seeing, one grasps them. One thinks the whole material world with the object seen is permanent, beautiful, good, happy, and self, and grasps it. So the form eye and the form visible object are aggregates of grasping. And when you see, the “seeing” is manifest, too. It is the four mental aggregates. The mere awareness of seeing is the aggregate of consciousness.

Pleasure or displeasure at seeing is the aggregate of feeling. What perceives the object seen is the aggregate of perception. What brings the attention to see is the aggregate of volitional activities. They constitute the four mental aggregates.

If one fails to meditate while seeing, one is inclined to think that seeing “has existed before, and exists now.” Or, as one sees good things, one may think “seeing is good.” So thinking, one goes after good and strange things to enjoy seeing. One goes to watch shows and films at the expense of money, sleep and health because one thinks it is good to do so. If one does not think it is good, one will not go to waste money or impair one’s health. To think that what sees or enjoys is “I” , “I am enjoying”, is to grasp with craving and the wrong view. Because they grasp, the mind and matter that manifest themselves in seeing are said to be aggregates of grasping.

You grasp in the same way in hearing, smelling, tasting, touching or thinking. You grasp all the more to the mind that thinks, imagines and reflects as being the I, the ego. So, the five aggregates of grasping are none other than the mental-material things that manifest themselves at the six doors whenever one sees, hears, feels or perceives. You must try to see these aggregates as they are. To meditate on them and see them as they are--that is insight knowledge.

Knowledge and Freedom

“Insight meditation is meditating on the five aggregates of grasping.” This is in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha. The teachings of the Buddha are called suttas, which means “thread.” When a carpenter is about to plane down or saw off a piece of timber, he draws a straight line using a thread. In the same way, when we want to live the holy life, we use the “thread” or sutta to draw straight lines in our actions. The Buddha has given us lines or instructions on how to train in morality, develop concentration and make become wisdom. You cannot go out of the line and speak or act as you please. Regarding the meditation of the five aggregates, here are a few excerpts from the suttas:

“Material shape, monks, is impermanent. What is impermanent, that is suffering. What is suffering, that is not self. What is not self, that is not mine, that am I not, this is not my self. As it really comes to be, one should discern it thus by right wisdom.” (S.ii,19.)

You must meditate so that you will realize this impermanent, suffering, and not-self material form is really impermanent, dreadfully suffering, and without a self or ego. You should meditate likewise on feelings, perception, volitional activities, and consciousness. What is the use of looking upon these aggregates as impermanent, suffering and not-self? The Buddha tells us:

“So seeing all these things, the instructed disciple of the Ariyans disregards material shape, disregards feeling and so on.” (S.iii,68)

He who realizes the impermanent, suffering, and not-self nature of the five aggregates is wearied of material form as he is of feelings, perception, volitional activities and consciousness.

“By disregarding he is passionless.” That is to say, he reaches the Ariyan Path. “Through passionlessness, he is freed.”

Once he has reached the Ariyan Path of passionlessness, he arrives at the Four Fruitions of freedom from defilements, too.

“In freedom the knowledge comes to be I am freed.”

When you are freed, you know for yourself that you are so. In other words, when you have become an Arahant in whom the defilements are extinguished, you know that defilements are extinguished.

All these excerpts are from *Yad anicca Sutta*, and there are numerous suttas of this kind. The whole *Khandha vagga Samyutta* is a collection of such suttas. Two of these suttas are especially noteworthy: *Sīlavanta Sutta* and *Sutavanta Sutta*. In both suttas, the Venerable Mahā Kotthika puts some questions to the Venerable Sāriputta, who gives very brief but vivid answers. Mahā Kotthika asks:

“What things, friend Sāriputta, should be attended to correctly by a monk of moral habit’?”

Note the attribute “of moral habit” in this question. If you want to practice insight meditation with a view to attaining the Path, Fruition and Nibbāna, the least qualification you need is to be of pure moral habit. If you don’t even have pure moral habit, you can’t hope for the higher conditions of concentration and wisdom. The Venerable Sariputta answers:

“The five aggregates of grasping, friend Kotthika, are the things which should be correctly attended to by a monk of pure moral habit, as being impermanent, suffering, as a disease, as a boil, as a dart, as unwholesome, as illness, as alien, as void of self, as decay.”

What is the good of meditating like that? In answer, the Venerable Sariputta goes on:

“Indeed, friend, there is a possibility that a monk of pure moral habit so correctly attending to these five aggregates of grasping as impermanent and so on may realize the fruits of Stream-winning.”

So, if you want to be a Stream-winner and never to be reborn in the four lower states, you have to meditate on the five aggregates of grasping to realize their impermanence, suffering, and not-self nature.

But that is not all. You can become an Arahant, too. The Venerable Maha Kotthika goes on to ask, “What things, friend Sāriputta, should be attended to correctly by a monk who has become a Stream-winner?”

The Venerable Sāriputta answers that it is the same five aggregates of grasping that should be correctly attended to by a Stream-winner, as impermanent, suffering, and not-self. The result? He moves on to Once-returning. What does a Once-returner meditate on? Again the same five aggregates of grasping. He then becomes a Non-returner. What does a Non-returner meditate on? The five aggregates again. Now he becomes an Arahant. What does an Arahant meditate on? The five aggregates again. From this it is clear that the five aggregates are the things one has to meditate on even when one has become an Arahant.

What good is it to the Arahant by meditating so? Will he become a Silent Buddha? Or a Supreme Buddha? No, neither. He will end his round of rebirths as an Arahant and gain Nibbāna. The Arahant has no defilements left unremoved or uncalmed. All the defilements have been removed and calmed. So, he has nothing to develop in order to remove the defilements left unremoved or to calm those left uncalmed. Neither has he any moral habit, concentration or wisdom yet to perfect. All the moral habits, concentration and wisdom that ought to be perfected have been perfected in him. So he has no need to work for the perfection of what ought to be perfected, nor has he any need to increase those already perfected. The insight practice brings no such benefits to the Arahant.

One of the benefits the Arahant receives by meditating on the aggregates is living with happiness in this world. Notwithstanding his being an Arahant, if he remains without meditation, disquiet and discomfort keep coming up at the six sense-doors, now here, now there. Here, disquiet does not mean mental distress. As the sense objects keep coming up despite himself, he finds no peacefulness of mind. That is all. Not to speak of an Arahant, even our meditators of today who are immersed in the practice feel ill at ease when meeting with the sense objects. As they return home from the meditation centre, they see this thing, hear that thing, get engaged in such and such business talks, and there is no peace at all. So some come back to the centre. To others, however, the disquiet does not last very long. Just four, five or ten days. Very soon the homely spirit gets the better of them, and they are happy with their home life and set to household cares again. The Arahant never returns to such old habits. If he meets with various sense objects without meditation, only disquiet results. Only when he is absorbed in insight meditation does he find peacefulness of mind. Thus meditating on the five aggregates of grasping brings to the Arahant living with happiness in this world.

Again as he lives in earnest meditation, mindfulness and comprehension of the impermanence, suffering and not-self keep rising in him. This is another benefit. The Arahant in whom mindfulness and comprehension keep rising through meditation is said to be called *satata-vihāri* (one who dwells with meditation constantly). Such a one can enjoy the attainment to fruition at any time and for as long as he desires. For these two benefits -- a happy living in this very life and mindfulness and comprehension-- the Arahant lives in meditation.

The above are the answers given by the Venerable Sāriputta in *Sīlavanta Sutta*. The answers are found in *Sutavanta Sutta*, too. The only difference is in the terms *sīlavanta*, “of moral habit” or

“virtuous,” and sutavanta, “instructed” or “well-informed.” All the other words are the same. Based on these two suttas and other suttas on the aggregates, the dictum has been formulated:

“Insight knowledge comes from meditating on the five aggregates of grasping.”

Now to come back to the grasping that rises through the six sense-doors.

When people see, they think of themselves or others as being permanent, as having existed before, as existing now, as going to exist in future, as existing always. They think of them as being happy, good or beautiful. They think of them as being living entities. They think likewise when they hear, smell, taste or touch. This “touch” is widespread all over the body -- wherever there is flesh and blood. And wherever touch arises, there can arise grasping. The bending, stretching or moving of the limbs mentioned earlier are all instances of touch. So are the tense movements of rising and falling in the abdomen. We will come to this in detail later.

When one thinks or imagines, one thinks, “The I that have existed before am now thinking. After thinking, I go on existing,” and thus one thinks of oneself as being permanent, as an ego. One also thinks the thinking or imagining as being enjoyable, as being very nice. One thinks it is happiness. If someone is told that the thinking will disappear, he cannot accept it. He is not pleased. This is because he is clinging to it.

In this way, one clings to whatever comes through the six sense-doors as being permanent, as being happy, as ego, as self. One delights with craving and clings to it. One mistakes with wrong view and clings to it. You have to meditate on these five aggregates that can be clung to or grasped.

The Right Method

When you meditate, you have to meditate with method. Only the right method can bring about insight. If you look upon things as being permanent, how can there be insight? If you look upon them as being good, beautiful, as soul, as ego, how can there be insight?

Mind and matter are impermanent things. These impermanent things you have to meditate on to see them as they really are, as being impermanent. They rise and pass away and keep on oppressing you, so they are dreadful, they are sufferings. You have to meditate to see them as they are, as sufferings. They are processes lacking in a personality, a soul, a self. You have to meditate to see that there is no personality, no soul, no self. You must try to see them as they really are.

So, every time you see, hear, touch or perceive, you must try to see the mental and material processes that rise through the six sense-doors as they really are. This you must note “seeing,

seeing.” In the same way, when you hear, note “hearing.” When you smell, note “smelling.” When you taste, note “tasting.” When you touch, note “touching.” Tiredness, hotness, aches, and such unbearable and unpleasant sensations arise from contact, too. Observe them: “tiredness, hot, pain” and so on. Thoughts, ideas may also turn up. Note them: “thinking, imagining, desire, pleasure, delight,” as they arise. But for the beginner, it is hard to observe all that come up through the six sense-doors. He must begin with just a few.

You meditate like this. When you breath in and out, the way the abdomen moves, rising and falling is especially conspicuous. You begin observing this movement. The movement of rising you observe as “rising.” The movement of falling you observe as “falling.” This observation of rising and falling is void of the lingo of the scriptures. People who are not used to meditational practice speak of it in contempt: “This rising and falling business has nothing to do with the scriptures. It is nothing.” Well, they may think it is nothing because it is not done up in scriptural language.

In essence, however, it is something real. The rising is real, the falling is real, the moving air-element is real. We have used the colloquial words rising and falling for convenience’s sake. In scriptural terminology, the rising-falling is the air-element. If you observe the abdomen attentively as it rises and falls, the distendedness is there, the motion is there, the conveying is there. Here the “distendedness” is the characteristic of the air-element, the motion is its property, and the conveying is its manifestation. To know the air-element as it really is means to know its characteristic, property and manifestation. We meditate to know them. Insight begins with the defining of mind and matter. To achieve this, the meditator begins with the matter. How?

“(The meditator) should...comprehend by way of characteristic, function and so on.”
(Visuddhimagga,ii,227.)

When you begin meditating on matter or mind, you should do so by way of either the characteristic or the property (function). “And so on” refers to the manifestation (mode of appearance). In this connection, the Compendium of Philosophy is quite to the point.

“Purity of view is the comprehending of mind and matter with respect to their characteristic, function (property), mode of appearance (manifestation) and proximate cause.”

The meaning is this: Insight begins with the analytical knowledge of mind and matter. In the seven stages of purity, first you perfect the purity of morals and the purity of mind, and then you begin the purity of views. To achieve the analytical knowledge of mind and matter and the purity of views, you have to meditate on mind and matter and know them by way of their characteristic, property (function), manifestation and proximate cause. Once you know them thus, you gain the analytical knowledge of mind and matter. Once this knowledge matures, you develop the purity of views.

Here, “to know them by way of their characteristic” means to know the intrinsic nature of mind and matter. To know “by way of property” is to know their function. Manifestation is their mode of appearance. It is not yet necessary to know the proximate cause at the initial stage of meditational practice. So we will just go on to explain the characteristic, function and manifestation.

In both the Path of Purity and the Compendium of Philosophy just quoted, it is not indicated that mind and matter should be meditated on by name, by number, as substance of material particles or as incessantly coming up processes. It is only shown that they should be meditated on by way of their characteristic, function and manifestation. One should take careful note of this. If not, one can be led to concepts of names, numbers, particles or processes. The commentaries say that you should meditate on mind and matter by way of their characteristic, function and manifestation; and so, when you meditate on the air-element, you do so by way of its characteristic, function and manifestation. What is the characteristic of the air-element? It is the characteristic of support. This is its intrinsic nature. The air-element is just this. What is the function of the air-element? It is moving. What is its manifestation? It is conveying. Manifestation is what appears to the meditator’s intellect. As one meditates on the air-element, it appears to the meditator’s intellect as something conveying, pushing, and pulling. This is the manifestation of the air-element. As you meditate on the rising and falling of the abdomen, all the distendedness, moving, conveying, become clear to you. These are the characteristic, function and manifestation of the air-element. This air-element is important. In sections on postures and clear comprehension, in the Contemplation of the Body, in Satipatthana-sutta, the commentator has laid emphasis on the air-element. Here is the Buddha’s teaching:

“Gacchanto va ‘Gacchāmi’ ti pajanati.”

(When he walks, he knows “I am walking.”)

The Buddha is instructing us to be mindful of the form walking by noting “walking, walking,” every time we walk. How knowledge is developed from meditating thus is explained by the commentator:

“The thought I am walking arises. This produces air-element. The air-element produces the intimation. The bringing forward of the whole body as the air-element spreads is said to be walking.”

The meaning is this: The meditator who is used to meditating “walking, walking,” every time he walks, realizes like this. First, the idea “I will walk” arises. This intention gives rise to tense movement all over the body which, in turn, causes the material body to move forward move by move. This we say “I walk,” or “he walks.” In reality, there is no I or he that walks. Only the intention to walk and the form walking. This the meditator realizes. Here, in this explanation of the Commentary, the emphasis is on the realization of the moving of the air-element. So, if you

understand the air-element by way of its characteristic, function and manifestation, you can decide for yourself whether your meditation is right or not.

The air-element has the characteristic of support. In a football, it is air that fills and supports so that the ball expands and remains firm. In colloquial speech, we say the ball is full and firm. In philosophical terms, the air-element is in support. When you stretch your arm, you feel some stiffness there. It is the air-element in support. In the same way, when you press an air-pillow or mattress with your body or head, your body or head will not come down but stay high above. It is because the air-element in the pillow or mattress is supporting you. Bricks pile up as the ones below support those above. If the bricks below are not supporting, the ones above will tumble down. In the same way, the human body is full of the air-element which gives support to it so that it can stand stiff and firm. We say “firm” relatively. If there is something firmer, we will call it “lax.” If there is something more lax, it becomes “firm” again.

The function of the air-element is moving. It moves from place to place when it is strong. It is the air-element that makes the body bend, stretch, sit, rise, go or come. Those unpractised in insight meditation often say, “If you note “bending, stretching,” only concepts like arms will appear to you. If you note ‘left, right’, only concepts like legs will appear to you. If you note “rising, falling,” only concepts like the abdomen will appear to you.” This may be true to some of the beginners. But it is not true to think that the concepts will keep coming up. Both concepts and realities appear to the beginner. Some people instruct the beginners to meditate on realities only. This is impossible. To forget concepts is quite impracticable at the beginning. What is practicable is to observe concepts combined with realities. The Buddha himself used the language of concepts and told us to be aware “I am walking,” etc., when we walk, bend or stretch. He did not use the language of realities and tell us to be “aware it is supporting, moving,” etc. Although you meditate using the language of concepts like “walking, bending, stretching,” as your mindfulness and concentration grow stronger, all the concepts disappear and only the realities like support and moving appear to you. When you reach the stage of the knowledge of dissolution, although you meditate “walking, walking,” neither the legs nor the body appear to you. Only the successive movements are there. Although you meditate “bending, bending,” there will not be any arms or legs. Only the movement. Although you meditate “rising, falling,” there will be no image of the abdomen or the body, only the movement out and in. These as well as swaying are functions of the air-element.

What appears to be conveying to the meditator’s mind is the manifestation of the air-element. When you bend or stretch your arm, it appears something is drawing it in or pushing it out. It is plainer when walking. To the meditator whose concentration has grown sharper by noting “walking, right step, left step, lifting, moving forward, putting down,” this moving forward as if being driven by something from behind becomes quite plain. The legs seem to be pushing forward of their own accord. How they move forward without the meditator making any effort is very plain to him. It is so good walking noting like this that some spend a lot of time in it.

So, when you meditate on the air-element, you should know it by way of its characteristic of supporting, its function of moving, and its manifestation of conveying. Only then is your knowledge right and as it should be.

You may ask, “Are we to meditate only after learning the characteristics, functions and manifestations?” No. You need not learn them. If you meditate on the rising mind-and-matter, you know the characteristics, the functions, and the manifestations, as well. There is no other way than knowing by way of characteristics, functions, and manifestations when you meditate on the rising mind-and-matter. When you look up to the sky on a rainy day, you see a flash of lightning. This bright light is the characteristic of the lightning. As lightning flashes, darkness is dispelled. This dispelling of darkness is the function of lightning, its work. You also see what it is like -
- whether it is long, short, a curve, a circle, straight, or vast. You see its characteristic, its function, its manifestation, all at once. Only you may not be able to say the brightness is its characteristic, dispelling of darkness is its function, or its shape or outline is its manifestation. But you see them all the same.

In the same way, when you meditate on the rising mind and matter, you know its characteristic, its function, its manifestation, everything. You need not learn them. Some learned persons think that you have to learn them before you meditate. Not so. What you learn are only name concepts. Not realities. The meditator who is contemplating the rising mind and matter knows them as if he were touching them with his own hand. He need not learn about them. If there is the elephant before your very eyes, you need not look at the picture of an elephant.

The meditator who is meditating on the rising and falling of the abdomen knows the firmness or laxity thereof -- its characteristic.

He knows the moving in or out -- its function. He also knows its bringing in and pushing out -- its manifestation. If he knows these things as they really are, does he need to learn about them? Not if he wants the realization for himself. But if he wants to preach to others, he will need to learn about them.

When you meditate “right step, left step,” you know the tenseness in every step -- its characteristic. You know the moving about -- its function. And you know its conveying -- its manifestation. This is proper knowledge, the right knowledge.

Now, to know for yourselves how one can discern the characteristic and so on by just meditating on what rises, try doing some meditation. You certainly have some hotness, pain, tiredness, or ache, somewhere in your body now. These are unpleasant feelings hard to bear. Concentrate on this unpleasantness with your intellect and note “hot, hot” or “pain, pain.” You will find that you are going through an unpleasant experience and suffering. This is the characteristic of suffering going through an unpleasant experience.

When this unpleasant feeling comes about, you become low-spirited. If the unpleasantness is little, there is a little low-spiritedness. If it is great, then low-spiritedness is great, too. Even those who are of a strong will have their spirits go low if the unpleasant feelings are intense. Once you are very tired, you can't even move. This making the spirit go low is the function of unpleasant feeling. We have said "spirit" -- the mind. When the mind is low, its concomitants get low, too.

The manifestation of unpleasant feeling is physical oppression. It manifests itself as a physical affliction, something unbearable, to the meditator's intellect. As he meditates "hot, hot, pain, pain," it comes up to him as something oppressing in the body, something very hard to bear. It shows up so much that you have to groan.

If you meditate on the unpleasant feeling in your body as it rises, you know the undergoing of undesirable tangible object -- its characteristic, the withering of associated states -- its function, and the physical affliction -- its manifestation. This is the way the meditators gain knowledge.

The Mind

You can meditate on mind, too. Mind cognizes and thinks. So what thinks and imagines is mind. Meditate on this mind as "thinking, imagining, pondering," whenever it arises. You will find that it has the intrinsic nature of going to the object, cognizing the object. This is the characteristic of mind, as it is said, "Mind has the characteristic of cognizing." Every kind of mind cognizes. The consciousness of seeing cognizes the object, as do the consciousness of hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking.

When you work in collective, you have a leader.

Consciousness is the leader that cognizes the object that appears at any sense-door. When the visible object comes up to the eye, consciousness cognizes it first of all. It is then followed by feeling, perception, desire, delight, dislike, admiration and so on. In the same way, when the audible object comes up to the ear, it is consciousness that cognizes it first. It is more obvious when you think or imagine. If an idea comes up while you are meditating "rising, falling," etc., you have to note the idea. If you can note it the moment it appears, it disappears immediately. If you can't, several of its followers like delight, desire, will come in succession. Then the meditator realizes how consciousness is the leader -- its function.

"Mind precedes things," (Dhammapada, 1.)

If you note consciousness whenever it rises, you see very clearly how it is acting as leader, now going to this object, now going to that object.

Again, the following is said in the Commentary: “Consciousness has the manifestation of continuity.” As you meditate “rising, falling,” etc., the mind sometimes wanders away. You note it and it disappears. Then another consciousness comes up. You note it and it disappears. Again, another consciousness appears. Again, you note it and again it disappears. Again, another comes up. You have to note lots of such comings up and goings away of consciousness. The meditator comes to realize: “Consciousness is a succession of events that come up and go away one after another. When one disappears, another appears.” Thus, you realize the continuous manifestation of consciousness. The meditator who realizes this also realizes death and birth. “Death is nothing strange after all. It is just like the passing away of the each moment of consciousness I have been noting. To be born again is like the coming up of the consciousness I am now noting that has risen in continuation of the one preceding it. “

To show that one can understand the characteristic, function and manifestation of things even though one has not learnt about them, we have taken the air-element out of the material properties, and the unpleasant feeling and consciousness out of the mental qualities. You just have to meditate on them as they arise. The same applies to all the other mental and material qualities. If you meditate on them as they arise, you will understand their characteristics, functions and manifestations. The beginner in meditation can meditate on and understand the mental-material aggregates of grasping only by way of these characteristics, functions and manifestations. At the initial stage of the analytical knowledge of mind and matter and the knowledge of discerning conditionality, which are elemental in insight meditation, understanding that much is enough. When you come to real insight knowledges like the knowledge of investigation, you know the nature of impermanence, suffering, and not-self, as well.

What For and What Time?

The question now arises: What do we meditate on the grasping aggregates for? And, with regard to time, at what time do we meditate, when they are gone, or before they come up, or when they arise?

What do we meditate for? Do we meditate on the aggregates of grasping for worldly wealth? For relief from illness? For clairvoyance? For levitation and such supernatural powers? Insight meditation aims at none of these. There have been cases of people who were cured of serious illness as a result of meditational practice. In the days of the Buddha, persons who got perfected through insight meditation had supernatural powers. People today may have such powers if they get perfected. But fulfillment of these powers is not the basic aim of insight meditation.

Shall we meditate on phenomena past and gone? Shall we meditate on phenomena not yet come? Shall we meditate on the present phenomena? Or, shall we meditate on phenomena which are

neither past, future nor present, but which we can imagine as we have read about them in books? The answer to these questions is: we meditate not to grasp and we meditate on what is arising.

Yes, people not practised in meditation grasp at the rising mind and matter every time they see, hear, touch, or become aware of. They grasp at them with craving, being pleased with them. They grasp at them with wrong views, taking them as permanent, happy, the I, or the ego. We meditate in order not to let these graspings arise, to be free from them. This is the basic aim of insight meditation.

And we meditate on what is arising. We do not meditate on things past, future, or indefinite in time. Here we are speaking of practical insight meditation. In inferential meditation, we do meditate on things past, future, and indefinite in time. Let me explain. Insight meditation is of two kinds, practical and inferential. The knowledge you gain by meditating on what actually arises by way of intrinsic characteristics and individual characteristics such as impermanence is practical insight. From this practical knowledge, you infer the impermanence, suffering and not-self of things past and future, things you have not experienced. This is inferential insight.

“The fixing of both (seen and unseen) as alike by following the object...” (Patisambhidamagga.)

The Visuddhimagga explains this statement as follows:

“...by following, going after the object seen, visually determining both (the seen and unseen) as one in intrinsic nature: ‘as this (seen) one, so what goes as complex broke up in the past and will break up in the future also.’ ” (The Path of Purity, p.786)

“The object seen” -- this is practical insight. And “going after the object seen... determining both... in the past... in the future” -- this is inferential insight. But here note: the inferential insight is possible only after the practical. No inference can be made without first knowing the present. The same explanation is given in the Commentary on Kathavatthu:

“Seeing the impermanence of even one contemplated formation, by method one draws the conclusion as regards the others as ‘Impermanent are all formations’ .”

Why don't you meditate on things past or future? Because they will not make you understand the real nature and cleanse you of defilements. You do not remember your past existences. Even in this existence, you do not remember most of your childhood. So, meditating on things past, how can you know things as they really are with their characteristics and functions? Things of the more recent past may be recalled. But, as you recall them, you think, “I saw, I heard, I thought. It was I who saw at that time and it is I who am seeing now.” There is the “I” notion for you. There can even be notions of permanence and happiness. So recalling things past to meditate on does not serve our purpose. You have already grasped them, and this grasping cannot be removed. Although you look on them as just mind and matter with all your learning and thinking, the “I” notion persists, because you have already grasped it. You say “impermanent” on the one hand,

you get the notion “permanent” on the other. You note “suffering,” but the notion “happiness” keeps turning up. You meditate on “not-self” but the self notion remains strong and firm. You argue with yourself. In the end, your meditation has to give way to your preconceived ideas.

The future has not yet come, and you can’t be sure what exactly it will be like when it comes. You may have meditated on them in advance but may fail to do so when they turn up. Then will craving, wrong view, and defilements arise all anew. So, to meditate on the future with the help of learning and thinking is no way to know things as they really are.

Nor is it the way to calm defilements.

Things of indefinite time have never existed, will not exist, and are not existing, in oneself or in others. They are just imagined by learning and thinking. They are high-sounding and look intellectual, but on reflection are found to be just concepts of names, signs and shapes. Suppose someone is meditating, “Matter is impermanent. Matter rises moment to moment and passes away moment to moment.” Ask him: What matter is it? Is it matter of the past or the present or the future? Matter in oneself or in others? If in oneself, is it matter in the head? the body? the limbs? the eye? the ear? You will find that it is none of these but a mere concept, and imagination such as name concept. So we do not meditate on things of indefinite time.

Origination

But the present phenomenon is what comes up at the six doors right now. It has not yet been defiled. It is like an unsoiled piece of cloth or paper. If you are quick enough to meditate on it just as it comes up, it will not be defiled. You fail to note it and it gets defiled. Once defiled, it cannot be undefiled. If you fail to note the mind-and-matter as it rises, grasping intervenes. There is grasping with craving -- grasping of sense-desires. There is grasping with wrong view -- grasping of wrong views, of mere rite and ritual, of a theory of the self. What if grasping takes place?

“Conditioned by grasping is becoming; conditioned by becoming is birth; conditioned by birth, old age, dying and grief, suffering, sorrow, despair, lamentation come into being.

Thus comes to be the origination of This entire mass of ill.” (M.i,333; S.ii,1-2.)

Grasping is no small matter. It is the root-cause of good and bad deeds. One who has grasped works to accomplish what he believes are good things. Everyone of us is doing what he thinks is good. What makes him think it is good? It is grasping. Others may think it is bad, but to the doer it is good. If he thinks it is not good, of course he will not do it. There is a noteworthy passage in King Asoka’s inscriptions: “One thinks well of one’s work. One never thinks evil of one’s work.” A thief steals because it is good to him to steal. A robber robs people because he thinks it

is good to rob. A killer kills because he thinks it is good to kill. Ajatasattu killed his own father, King Bimbisara. He thought it was good. Devadatta conspired against the life of the Buddha. Why, to him it was good. One who takes poison to kill himself does so because he thinks it is good. Moths rush to a flame thinking it is a very nice thing. All living things do what they do because they think it is good to do so. To think it is good is grasping. Once you have really grasped you do things. What is the outcome? Well, it is the good deeds and the bad deeds.

It is a good deed to refrain from causing suffering to others. It is a good deed to render help to others. It is a good deed to give. It is a good deed to pay respect to those to whom respect is due. A good deed can bring about peace, a long life, and good health in this very life. It will bring good results in future lives, too. Such grasping is good, right grasping. Those who thus grasp do good deeds like giving and keeping precepts and cause thereby to bring about good kamma. What is the result then? “Conditioned by becoming is birth.” After death they are born anew. Where are they born? In the Good Bourn, in the worlds of men and gods. As men they are endowed with such good things as a long life, beauty, health, as well as good birth, good following, and wealth. You can call them “happy people.” As gods, too, they will be attended by multitudes of gods and goddesses and be living in magnificent palaces. They have grasped by notions of happiness and, in a worldly sense, they can be said to be happy.

But from the point of view of the Buddha’s teaching, these happy men and gods are not exempt from suffering. “Conditioned by birth are old age and dying.” Although born a happy man, he will have to grow into an old “happy” man. Look at all those “happy” old people in this world. Once over seventy or eighty, not everything is all right with them. Gray hair, broken teeth, poor eye-sight, poor hearing, backs bent double, wrinkles all over, energy all spent up, mere good-for-nothings! With all their wealth and big names, these old men and women, can they be happy? Then there is disease of old age. They cannot sleep well, they cannot eat well, they have difficulty sitting down or getting up. And finally, they must die. Rich man, king, or man of power, dies one day. He has nothing to rely on in them. Friends and relatives there are around him, but just as he is lying there on his death-bed he closes his eyes and dies. Dying he goes away all alone to another existence. He must find it really hard to part with all his wealth. If he is not a man of good deed, he will be worried about his future existence.

The great god, likewise, has to die. Gods, too, are not spared. A week before they die, five signs appear to them. The flowers they wear which never faded now begin to fade. Their dresses which never got worn-out now appear worn-out. Sweat comes out in their armpits, an unusual thing. Their bodies which always looked young now look old. Having never felt bored in their divine lives, they now feel bored. (Itivuttaka, p.247.)

When these five signs appear, they at once realize their imminent death, and are greatly alarmed. In the days of the Buddha, the Sakka (King of the gods) himself had these signs appear to him. Greatly alarmed that he was going to die and lose his glory, he came to the Buddha for help. The Buddha preached the dhamma to him and he became a Stream-winner. The old Sakka died and

was reborn as a new Sakka. It was lucky of him that the Buddha was there to save him. Had it not been for the Buddha, it would have been a disaster to the old great god.

Not only old age and dying, "...grief, suffering, sorrow, despair and lamentation come into being." All these are sufferings. "Thus comes to be the origination of this entire mass of ill." So, the good life resulting from grasping is dreadful suffering after all. Men or gods, all have to suffer.

If the good life resulting from good deeds is suffering, had we better not do them? No. If we do not do good deeds, bad deeds may come up. These can lead us to hell, to the realm of animals, to the realm of ghosts, to the realm of Asuras. The sufferings of these lower planes are far worse. Human and divine life is suffering compared with the happiness of deathless Nibbāna, but compared with the sufferings of the lower states, human or divine life is happiness indeed.

Right grasping gives rise to good deeds. Likewise wrong grasping gives rise to bad deeds. Thinking that it is good to do so, some kill, steal, rob, do wrong to others. As a result, they are reborn in bad bourn -- in hell, in the realm of animals, in the realm of ghosts, in the realm of Asuras. To be reborn in hell is like jumping into a great fire. Even a great god can do nothing against hell fire. In the days of the Kakusandha Buddha, there was a great Mara-god by the name of Dusi. He was contemptuous of the Buddha and the members of the holy Order. One day he caused the death of the chief disciple. As a result of this cruel deed, the great god died immediately and was reborn in Avici hell. Once there, he was at the mercy of the guardians of purgatory. Those people who are bullying others in this world will meet the same fate as that met by the great god Dusi one day. Then, after suffering for a long time in hell, they will be reborn animals and ghosts.

How Grasping Arises

So grasping is dreadful. It is very important, too. We meditate to let this grasping not be, to put an end to it. We meditate not to grasp with craving or wrong view -- not to grasp as permanent or happy, not to grasp as self, ego, the I. Those who fail to meditate grasp whenever they see, hear, feel or perceive. Ask yourselves if you don't grasp. The answer will be too obvious.

Let's begin with seeing. Suppose you see something beautiful. What do you think of it? You are delighted with it, pleased with it, aren't you? You won't say, "I don't want to see, I don't want to look at it." In fact, you are thinking, "What a beautiful thing! How lovely!" Beaming with smiles you are pleased with it. At the same time, you are thinking it is permanent. Whether the object seen is a human being or an inanimate thing, you think it has existed before, exists now, and will go on existing forever. Although it is not your own, you mentally take possession of it and delight in it. If it is a piece of clothing, you mentally put it on and are pleased. If it is a pair of

sandals, you mentally put them on. If it is a human being, you mentally use him or her and are pleased, too.

The same thing happens when you hear, smell, taste or touch. You take pleasure on each occasion. With thoughts, the range of your delights is far wider. You fancy and take delight in things not your own, long for them, and imagine them to be yours. If they are your own things, needless to say, you keep thinking of them and are pleased with them all the time. We meditate to check such taking delights in and graspings.

We grasp with wrong views, too. You grasp with the personality view. When you see, you think what you see is a person, an ego. Your own consciousness of seeing, too, you take as a person, an ego. Without a thorough insight knowledge, we grasp at things the moment we see them. Think of yourselves and you will see for yourselves how you have got such a grasping in you. You think of yourself as well as of others as an ego that has lived the whole life long. In reality, there is no such thing. Nothing lives the whole life long. Only mind and matter rising one after another in continuation. This mind-and-matter you take as person, ego, and grasp. We meditate to not let these graspings with wrong views be.

But we have to meditate on things as they come up. Only then will we be able to prevent the graspings. Graspings come from seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking. They come from six places -- six doors. Can we cling to things we cannot see? No. Can we cling to those we cannot hear? No. The Buddha himself has asked these questions.

“Now what think you, Malunkya’s son? As to those shapes cognizable by eye, which you have not seen, which you have never seen before, which you do not see now, which you have no expectation of seeing in future -- have you any partiality, any passion, any affection for such shapes?”

“Not so, my lord.” (S.iv.72.)

What are those shapes you have not seen before? Towns and villages and countries you have never been to, men and women living there, and other scenes. How can anyone fall in love with men and women he or she hasn’t ever seen? How can you cling to them? So, you do not cling to things you have never seen. No defilements arise in respect of them. You do not need to meditate on them. But things you see are another matter. Defilements can arise -- that is to say, if you fail to meditate to prevent them.

The same is true of things heard, smelled, tasted, touched, and thought.

Meditate Right Now

If you fail to meditate on the rising phenomena and so do not know their real nature of impermanence, suffering and not-self, you may relive them and thus let defilement be. This is a

case of latent defilements. Because they arise from objects, we call them “object-latent.” What do people cling to and why do they cling to? They cling to things or persons they have seen because they have seen. If you fail to meditate on them as they arise, somehow or other grasplings arise. Defilements are latent in whatever we see, hear, taste, etc.

If you meditate, you find that what you see passes away, what you hear passes away. They pass away in no time at all. Once you see them as they really are, there is nothing to love, nothing to hate, nothing to cling to. If there is nothing to cling to, there can be no clinging or grasping.

And you meditate right now. The moment you see, you meditate. You can't put it off. You may buy things on credit, but you cannot meditate on credit. Meditate right now. Only then will the clingings not come up. Scripturally speaking, you meditate as soon as the eye-door thought-process ends and before the subsequent mind-door thought process begins. When you see a visible object, the process takes place like this: First, you see the object that comes up. This is the seeing process. Then you review the object seen. This is the reviewing process. Then you put the forms seen together and see the shape or material. This is the form process. Last of all, you know the concept of name. This is the name process. With objects you have never seen before, and so you do not know the names of, this naming process will not occur. Of the four, when the first or seeing process takes place, you see the present form, the reality, as it rises. When the second or reviewing process takes place, you review the past form, the form seen -- reality again. Both attend on reality -- the object seen. No concept yet. The difference is between the present reality and the past reality. With the third process you come to the concept of shape. With the fourth, you come to the concept of names. The processes that follow are all various concepts. All these are common to people not practiced in insight meditation.

There are 14 thought-moments in the process of seeing. If neither seeing, hearing, nor thinking consciousness arises, life-continuum goes on. It is identical with rebirth consciousness. It is the consciousness that goes on when you are sleeping fast. When a visible object or any such appears, life-continuum is arrested, and seeing consciousness, etc., arises. As soon as life-continuum ceases, a thought-moment arises adverting the consciousness to the object that comes into the avenue of the eye. When this ceases, seeing consciousness arises. When this again ceases, the receiving consciousness arises. Then comes the investigating consciousness. Then, the consciousness that determines whether the object seen is good or not. Then, in accordance with the right or wrong attitude you have with regard to things, moral or immoral apperceptions arise forcefully for seven thought-moments. When these cease, two retentive resultants arise. When these cease, there comes subsidence into life-continuum like falling asleep. From the adverting to retention there are 14 thought-moments. All these manifest as one seeing consciousness. This is how the seeing process takes place. When one is well-practiced in insight meditation, after the arising of life-continuum following the seeing process, insight consciousness that reviews “seeing” takes place. You must try to be able to thus meditate immediately. If you are able to do so, it appears in your intellect as though you were meditating

on things as they are seen, as they just arise. This kind of meditation is termed in the Suttas as “meditation on the present. “

“He discerns things present as they arise here and now.” (M.iii.227)

“Understanding in reviewing the perversion of present states is knowledge in arising and passing away.” (Patisambhidamagga)

These extracts from the Suttas clearly show that we must meditate on present states. If you fail to meditate on the present, apprehending process arises cutting off the flow of life-continuum. This process arises to review what has just been seen. The thought-moments included are: apprehending consciousness 1, apperceptions 7, and registering consciousness 2 -- a total of 10 thought-moments. Every time you think or ponder, these three types of consciousness and ten thought-moments take place. But to the meditator, they will appear as one thought-moment only. This is in conformity with the explanations given in connection with the knowledge of dissolution in Patisambhidamagga and Visuddhimagga. If you can meditate (or note) after the apprehending process, you may not get to concepts but may stay with the reality - the object seen. But this is not very easy for the beginner.

If you fail to meditate even on the apprehending, you get to form process and name process. Then graspings come in. If you meditate after the emergence of graspings, they will not disappear. That is why we instruct you to meditate immediately, before the concepts arise.

The processes for hearing, smelling, tasting, touching are to be understood along similar lines.

With thinking at the mind-door, if you fail to meditate immediately, subsequent processes come up after the thought. So you meditate immediately, so that they may not arise. Sometimes, as you are noting “rising, falling, sitting, touching,” a thought or idea may come up in between. You note it the moment it arises. You note it and it ends right there. Sometimes a wandering of the mind is about to arise. You note it and it quiets down. In the words of some meditators, “it is like a naughty child who behaves himself when shouted at ‘Quiet!’”

So, if you note the moment you see, hear, touch, or perceive, no subsequent consciousness will arise to bring about graspings. “...you will simply have the sight of the thing seen, the sound of the thing heard, the sense of the things sensed, and the idea of the thing cognized.”

As this extract from Malunkyaputta Sutta shows, the mere sight, the mere sound, the mere sense, the mere idea is there. Recall that only the real nature you have understood will appear. No graspings. The meditator who meditates on whatever arises as it arises sees how everything arises and passes away, and it becomes clear to him how everything is impermanent, suffering, and not self. He knows this for himself -- not because a teacher has explained it to him. This only is the real knowledge.

Incessant Work

To arrive at this knowledge needs thorough work. There is no guaranteeing that you will gain such knowledge at one sitting. Perhaps one in a million will. In the days of the Buddha, there were people who attained to the Path and Fruit after listening to a stanza. But you can't expect such things today. It was then the Buddha himself who was teaching. He knew the disposition of his listeners very well. The listeners on their part were people of perfections; i.e., they had accumulated experience in their past lives. But today the preacher is just an ordinary person who preaches what little he has learnt. He does not know the disposition of his listeners. It will be difficult to say that the listeners are men and women of perfections. If they had been, they would have gained deliverance in the days of the Buddha. So we cannot guarantee you will gain special knowledge at one sitting. We can only tell you that you can if you work hard enough.

How long do we have to work? Understanding impermanence, suffering and not-self begins with the investigating knowledge. But it does not come at once. It is preceded by purity of mind, purity of views, and purity of transcending doubts. To speak from the level of the present-day meditators, a specially gifted person can achieve this knowledge in two or three days. Most will take five, six, or seven days. But they must work assiduously. Those who get slack at work may not gain it even after fifteen or twenty days have passed. So I will talk about working in earnest in the beginning.

Insight meditation is incessant work -- meditate whenever you see, hear, smell, taste, touch or think, without missing anything. But to beginners, to note everything is quite impossible. Begin with several. It is easy to observe the moving form in the rising and falling of the abdomen. We have already spoken about it. Note without a let-up "rising, falling, rising, falling." As your mindfulness and concentration grow stronger, add the sitting and the touching and note, "rising, falling, sitting, touching." As you note on, ideas may come up. Note them, too: "thinking, planning, knowing." They are hindrances. Unless you are rid of them, you have not got purity of mind and will not have a clear understanding of mind-matter phenomena. So, don't let them in. Note them and get rid of them.

If unbearable feelings like tiredness, hotness, pain, or itching appear in the body, concentrate on them and note: "tired, tired" or "hot, hot" as they arise. If the desire arises to stretch or bend the limbs, note it too, "desire to bend, desire to stretch." When you bend or stretch, every move should be noted: "bending, bending, stretching, stretching." In the same way, when you rise, note every move. When you walk, note every step. When you sit down, note it. If you lie down, note it, too.

Every bodily movement made, every thought that arises, every feeling that comes up, all must be noted. If there is nothing in particular to note, go on noting "rising, falling, sitting, touching." You must note while eating or having a bath. If there are things you see or hear particularly, note

them, too. Except for the four, five or six hours you sleep, you keep noting things. You must try to be able to note at least one thing in a second.

If you keep on noting thus in earnest, you will, in two or three days, find your mindfulness and concentration quite strong. If not in two or three days, in five or six. Then very rarely do wanton thoughts come up. If they do, you are able to note them the moment they come. And they pass away the moment you notice them. The object noted like the rising and falling and the mind noting it seem to be well timed. You note with ease. These are signs that your mindfulness and concentration have become strong. In other words, you have developed purity of mind.

Things Fall Apart

From now on, every time you note, the object noted and the mind that notes it appear as two separate things. You come to know that the material form like the rising and falling is one thing and the mental state that notes it is another. Ordinarily, the material form and the mind that cognizes it do not seem separate. They seem one and the same thing. Your book knowledge tells you they are separate but your personal feeling has them as one. Shake your index finger. Do you see the mind that intends to shake? Can you distinguish between that mind and the shaking? If you are sincere, the answer will be “No.” But to the meditator whose mindfulness and concentration are well developed, the object of attention and the awareness of it are as separate as the wall and the stone that is thrown to it.

The Buddha used the simile of the gem and the thread (D. i72). Just as when you look at a string of lapis lazuli you know: the gem is threaded on a string; this is the gem, this is the string the gem is threaded on, so does the meditator know: this is the material form, this is the consciousness that is aware of it, which depends on it, and is related to it. The Commentary says that the consciousness here is the insight consciousness, insight knowledge, that observes the material form. The lapis lazuli is the material form and the string is the consciousness that observes. The thread is in the gem as the insight awareness penetrates the material form.

When you note “rising,” the rising is one thing, the awareness is one thing -- only these two exist. When you note “falling,” the falling is one, the awareness is one -- only these two. The knowledge comes clear in you of its own accord. When you lift one foot in walking, one is the lifting, the other is the awareness -- only these two exist. When you push it forward, the pushing and the awareness. When you put it down, the putting down and the awareness. Matter and awareness. These two only. Nothing else.

As your concentration improves further, you understand how the material and mental things you have been noting keep passing away each in its own time. When you note “rising,” the form rising comes up gradually and passes away. When you note “falling,” the form falling comes up

gradually and then passes away. You also find that the rising as well as the awareness passes away, the falling as well as the awareness passes away. With every noting, you find only arising and passing away. When noting “bending,” one bending and the next do not get mixed up. Bending, passing away, bending, passing away -- and thus the intention to bend, the form bending, and the awareness, come and go each in its time and place. And when you note the tiredness, hotness, and pain, these pass away as you are noting them. It becomes clear to you: they appear and then disappear, so they are impermanent.

The meditator understands for himself what the commentaries say, “They are impermanent in the sense of being nothing after becoming.” This knowledge comes to him not from books nor from teachers. He understands by himself. This is real knowledge. To believe what other people say is faith. To remember out of faith is learning. It is not knowledge. You must know from your own experience. This is the important thing. Insight meditation is contemplation in order to know for yourself. You meditate, see for yourself, and know -- this alone is insight.

Regarding contemplation on impermanence the Commentary says:

“... the impermanent should be understood. “ “... impermanence should be understood.”

“... the discernment of the impermanence should be understood.” (Visuddhimagga,i,281.)

This brief statement is followed by the explanation: “Here, ‘the impermanent’ are the five aggregates.” You must know that the five aggregates are impermanent. Although you may not understand it by your own knowledge, you should know this much. Not only that. You should know that they are all suffering, all without a self. If you know this much, you can take up insight meditation. This understanding made by learning is given in Culatanhasankhaya Sutta:

“If, O lord of devas, a monk has heard, ‘All states are not fit for adherence,’ he understands all the truth.” (M.i,318.)

To “understand” means to meditate on mind-and-matter and be aware of it. It is the basic insight knowledge of Analytical Knowledge of Mind and Matter and the Knowledge by Discerning Conditionality. So, if you have learnt that mind and matter are all impermanent, suffering and not-self, you can begin meditating from the analysis of mind and matter. Then you can go on to higher knowledges like the Investigating knowledge.

“Understanding all the states, he comprehends all of them.”

So, the least qualification required of a beginner in insight meditation is that he must have heard or learnt of the impermanent, suffering, and not-self nature of mind and matter. To Buddhists in Burma, this is something they have had since childhood.

We say mind and matter are impermanent because they come to be and then pass away. If a thing never comes to be, we cannot say it is impermanent. What is that thing which never comes to be? It is a concept.

Concepts never come to be, never really exist. Take a personal name. It comes into use from the day a child is named. It appears as though it has come to be. But actually people just say it in calling him. It has never come to be, it never really exists. If you think it exists, find it.

When a child is born, the parents give it a name. Suppose a boy has been named “Master Red.” Before the naming ceremony, the name Master Red is unknown to all. But from the day the boy is named, people begin calling him Master Red. But we can’t say the name has come into being since then. The name Master Red just does not exist. Let’s find it out.

Is the name Master Red in his body? on his head? on his side? or on his face? No, it is not anywhere. People have agreed to call him Master Red and that is all. If he dies, does the name dies with him, too? No. As long as people do not forget it, the name will live on. So it is said, “A name or surname never gets destroyed.” Only when people forget it will the name Master Red disappear. But it is not destroyed. Should someone restored it, it will come up again.

Think of the Bodhisatta’ s names in the Jatakas:

Vessantara, Mahosadha, Mahajanaka, Vidhura, Temiya, Nemi -- these names were known in the times of the stories but were lost for millions of years until the Buddha restored them. Four asankheyyas and a hundred thousand kappas ago (asankheyya is a number with the digit 1 followed by 140 zeros) the name Dipankara the Buddha and the name Sumedha the recluse were well known. They were lost to posterity afterwards. But our Buddha restored them and the names are known to us again. They will be known as long as the Buddha’s teaching lasts. Once Buddhism is gone from earth these names will be forgotten, too. But if a future Buddha were to speak about them again, they would become known again. So, concepts, names, are just conventions. They never exist. They have never been and they will never be. They never arise, so we can’t say they “pass away”. Nor can we say they are impermanent. Every concept is like that -- no existence, no becoming, no passing away, so no impermanence.

Nibbāna, although it is a reality, cannot be said to be impermanent because it never come to be or passes away. It is to be regarded as permanent because it stands as peace for ever.

Impermanence

Realities other than Nibbāna -- mind and matter -- never were in the beginning. They come into being whenever there arise causes. After coming into being, they pass away. So we say these realities of mind and matter are impermanent. Take seeing for example. In the beginning, there

was no seeing. But if the eye is good, the object comes up, there is light, and your attention is drawn to it -- if these four conditions concur -- then there is seeing. Once it has arisen, it passes away. No more of it. So we say seeing is impermanent. It is not very easy for an ordinary person to know that seeing is impermanent. Hearing is easier to understand. There was no hearing in the beginning. But if the ear is good, the sound comes up, there is no barrier, and your attention is drawn to it -- if these four conditions concur -- then there is hearing. It arises and then passes away. No more of it. So we say hearing is impermanent.

Now you hear me talking. You hear one sound after another. Once you have heard them, they are gone. Listen. "Sound, sound, sound." When I say s-, you hear it, then it is no more. When I say -ound, you hear it, then it is gone. That is how they come and pass away. The same is true of other psycho-physical phenomena. They come and go. Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking, bending, stretching, moving -- all come and go away. Because they keep passing away, we say they are impermanent. Of these, the passing away of consciousness is very clear. If your mind wanders when you are noting "rising, falling," you note "wandering." As you note it, the wandering mind is no more. It is gone. It has not existed before. It comes about just then. Then it is gone in no time at all when noted. So we say it is impermanent. The passing away of unpleasant feelings, too, is obvious. As you go on noting "rising, falling," tiredness, hotness, or pain appears some where in the body. If you concentrate on it and note 'tiredness, tiredness', etc., sometimes it disappears completely, and sometimes it disappears at least for the time you are noting. So, it is impermanent. The meditator realizes its impermanent characteristic as he notes its rising and passing away.

This realization of the fleeting nature of things is Contemplation of Impermanence. Mere reflection without personally experiencing it is no true knowledge. Without meditation you will not know what things come up and what things pass away. It is just book learning. It may be a meritorious deed but not real insight knowledge.

Real insight knowledge is what you know for yourself by meditating on things as they come up and pass away. Here in the audience are lots of meditators who have come to this stage of knowledge. I am not speaking from my own experience alone. No, not even from the experience of forty or fifty disciples of mine. There are hundreds of them. Beginners may not have such clear knowledge yet. It is not quite easy. But it is not too difficult to achieve, either. If you work hard enough as we instruct, you can have it. If you don't, you can't. Educational degrees, distinctions, honors are all results of hard work. No pain, no gains. The insight knowledge of the Buddha, too, must be worked for.

As your concentration grows sharper, you will be able to see a great number of thoughts in one single act of bending or stretching of the limbs. You will see large numbers of thoughts coming up one after another as you intend to bend or stretch. The same number when you step. There arises a great number of thoughts in the twinkling of an eye. You have to note all these fleeting thoughts as they arise. If you cannot name them, just note "aware, aware." You will see that

there are four, five or ten thoughts arising in succession every time you note 'aware'. Sometimes when the awareness is so swift, even the word "aware" is no longer necessary. Just following them with your intellect will do.

Now a thought arises, now the mind is aware of it; now another arises, now the observant consciousness is aware of it. It is like the (Burmese) saying: "a morsel of food, a stroke of the stick."

For every thought that arises, there is the observant consciousness to be aware of it. When you are thus aware, these arisings and passings away cannot but be very plain to you. The wandering mind that arises as you are noting the rising and falling of the abdomen is caught by the observing consciousness as an animal that falls direct into the snare or an object that is hit by a well-aimed stone. And once you are aware of it, it is gone. You find it as clearly as if you were holding it in your hand. You find thus whenever consciousness arises.

When tiredness arises, you note "tired," and it is gone. It comes up again, and it is gone again. This kind of passing away will be made all the more clear in higher stages of insight. Tired, noted, gone; tired, noted, gone -- they pass away one by one. There is no connection between one tiredness and the next. The same with pain. Pained, noted, gone; pained, noted, gone -- each pain is gone at each noting. One pain does not mix with the other. Each pain is distinct from the other.

To ordinary people there is no awareness of interruption in tiredness or pain. It seems to tire or pain you continuously for a long time. In fact, there is no tiredness or pain for a long while. One tiredness and the next, one pain and the next, just very short pieces, very separate ones. The meditator sees this as he notes.

When you note "rising," the rising comes up gradually and passes away by degrees. When you note "falling," the falling comes up and passes by degrees. Common people who are ignorant of this fact think of the rising and falling in terms of the absurd abdominal shape. So from their own experience they think meditators, too, will only be seeing the absurd abdominal shape. Some make accusations to this effect. Don't speak by guess, please. Try and see for yourselves, let us warn. If you work hard enough, you will find out.

When you note "bending," you see clearly how it moves and passes, moves and passes, one move after another. You understand now the scriptural statement that realities like mind and matter do not move from place to place. Ordinary people think it is the same hand that moves, that has been before the bending. They think the same hand moves inwards and outwards. To them it is ever-unchanging hand. It is because they have failed to see through the continuity of matter, the way matter rises in succession. It is because they lack in the knowledge to see through. Impermanence is hidden by continuity, it is said. It is hidden because one does not meditate on what arises and passes away. Says Visuddhimagga:

“Because the rise and fall are not attended to, the characteristic of impermanence does not appear, as long as it is hidden by continuity.” (Vis. xxi, Path of Purity, p.781.)

Since the meditator is watching every arising, all things mental and material appear to him as separate, broken pieces -- not as things whole and unbroken. From a distance, ants look like a line, but when you get nearer you see the ants one by one. The meditator sees things in broken pieces, so continuity cannot hide the fact from him. The characteristic of impermanence unfolds itself to him. He is no longer illusioned.

“But when the rise and fall are grasped and continuity is broken, the characteristic of impermanence appears in its true peculiar property.” (Ibid.)

This is how you meditate and gain the knowledge of Contemplation on Impermanence. Mere reflection without meditation will not give rise to this knowledge. Once this knowledge is made become, those on suffering and not-self follow.

“To one, Meghiya, who has perceived impermanence, the perception of not-self is established.” (A. iii, 169.)

How will you take what you very well know to be capable of rising and passing away to be self, ego, a being? People cling to the self because they think they have been the same person the whole life. Once it is clear to you from your own experience that life is but made up of things that rise and pass away incessantly, you will not cling as self.

Some obstinate persons say that this sutta is meant for Meghiya alone. This is something that should not be said. We fear others will come up who will say what the Buddha said was meant for the people of his days, not for us who live today. But the statement is found not in that sutta alone. In Sambodhi Sutta, the Buddha says:

“To one, monks, who has perceived impermanence, the perception of not-self is established.” (A. iii, 165.)

And, if one realizes impermanence, one realizes suffering, too. The meditator who realizes how things are rising and passing away, can see how the two events, rising and passing away, have been oppressing him. The Commentary to Sambodhi Sutta says: “When the characteristic of impermanence is seen, the characteristic of not-self is seen, too, since when one of the three characteristics is seen the other two are seen, too.”

So, it is very important to understand the one characteristic of impermanence.

Rediscovery

In this connection, let me tell you a story from my own experience as a meditation teacher. It is about a meditator from my native village, Seikkhun, in Shwebo district. He was none other than a cousin of mine. He was one of the first three persons from the village to take up insight meditation. The three of them agreed among themselves to meditate for a week first. They worked very hard. They had brought to the hermitage cigars and betel quids to be taken one each day. But, when they returned from the hermitage, they took home all the seven cigars and betel quids untouched.

So hard did they work that, in three days, they attained the knowledge of rising and falling and were overjoyed to experience tranquility and see the brilliance around. “Only at this old age have we discovered the truth,” they spoke with great joy. Because they were the first to take up meditation, I thought of letting them go with their joys and just told them to go on noting. I did not tell them to note the joys. So, although they worked for four more days, they did not get any higher.

After a few day’s rest, they came again for another week of meditation. That cousin of mine then reached the stage of the Knowledge of Dissolution. Although he was noting “rising, falling, sitting,” he did not see the abdominal shape, and his body seemed to have disappeared. So he had to touch it with his hand to see if it was still there, he told me. And, whenever he looked or saw, everything seemed to be dissolving and breaking up. The ground he looked at was dissolving, and so were the trees. It was all against what he had thought things to be. He began to wonder.

He had never thought that such external, season-produced, gross material things like earth, trees, logs, etc., could be incessantly breaking up. He had thought they perished only after a considerable length of time. They lasted for quite a long time, he had thought. Now, as insight knowledge gained momentum with meditation, the rising and passing of phenomena appeared to him of their own accord without his specially meditating on them. They were passing away, breaking up, there before him. It was all the reverse of his former beliefs. Perhaps his new vision was wrong. Perhaps his eyesight was failing.

So he asked me and I explained to him: “The passing away and breaking up you saw in everything were true. As your insight grew sharper and quicker, things appeared as rising and passing away to you without your meditation on them. These are all true.” Later on he again told me about his own findings as he progressed in insight. Today he is no more. He has long been dead.

When insight knowledge has grown really sharp, it will prevail over wrong beliefs and thoughts. You see things in their true light, as impermanent, suffering, not-self. An uncultured mind or reflection without meditation cannot give you real insight into the nature of things. Only insight meditation can do that.

Once you realize impermanence, you see how they oppress you with their rising and passing away, how you can derive no pleasure from them, how they can never be a refuge, how they can perish any moment, so how they are frightening, how they are suffering, etc.

“...ill (suffering) in the sense of fearful.”

You thought, “This body will not perish so soon. It will last for quite a long time.” So you took it for a great refuge. But now, as you meditate, you find only incessant risings and passings away. If no new ones rise up for the mental and material things that have passed away, one dies. And this can happen any moment. To make a self out of these mental and material things that can die any moment and to take a refuge in it is as dreadful a thing as sheltering in an old house which is tumbling down.

And you find that nothing happens as you desire. Things just follow their natural course. You thought you could go if you wished to, sit if you wished to, rise, see, hear, do anything if you wished to. Now as you meditate you find that it is not so. Mind and matter are found to be working in a pair. Only when there is intention to bend is there the form bending. Only when there is intention to stretch is there the form stretching. There is effect only when there is cause. Only when there is something to see do you see. If there is something to see, you can't help seeing it. You hear when there is something to hear. You feel happy only when there is reason to be happy. You worry when there is cause to worry. If there is cause, there is effect. You cannot help it. There is nothing that lives and does what it desires. There is no self, no ego, no I. Only process of arising and passing away.

To understand clearly is the most important thing in insight meditation. Of course, you will come across joys, tranquilities, bright lights in the course of your training. They are not important things. What is important is to understand impermanence, suffering and not-self. These characteristics are made clear to you as you just keep on meditating as explained.

Peace at Last

You make things clear to yourself, not believing what others tell you. If any of you beginners have not had such self-made knowledge yet, know that you have not reached that stage. Work on. If others can, you can. It will not take very long. The knowledge comes to you as you are meditating. Only when you know for sure that all are impermanent, suffering and not-self will you not cling to sense objects as permanent, happy, beautiful, good. Nor will you cling to them as self, soul, the I. All the graspings are done away with. What then? Well, all the defilements are calmed and Ariyan Path and Nibbāna are realized.

“One who has no grasping does not long after things.

One who does not long after things is calmed in himself.” (M.ii,318.)

Whenever you meditate, you have no obsession with the object noted. So no grasping arises. There is no grasping to what you see, hear, smell, eat, touch or are aware of. They appear to rise each in its time and then pass away. They manifest themselves as impermanent. There is nothing to cling to. They oppress us with their rise and fall. They are all sufferings. There is nothing to cling to as happy, good or beautiful. They rise and fall as is their nature, so there is nothing to cling to as self, soul, or I that lives and lasts. All these are made very plain to you. At that the graspings are done away with. Then you realize Nibbāna through Ariyan Path. We will explain this in the light of Dependent Origination and Aggregates.

“The stopping of grasping is from the stopping of craving; the stopping of becoming is from the stopping of grasping; the stopping of birth is from the stopping of becoming; from the stopping of birth, old age and dying, grief, suffering, sorrow, despair, and lamentation are stopped. Thus comes to be the stopping of this entire mass of ill.” (M . i, 337; S. ii, 1- 3.)

One who meditates on the mental and material objects that appear at the six doors and knows their intrinsic nature of impermanence, suffering and not-self does not delight in them. As he does not grasp them, he makes no effort to enjoy them. As he refuses to make an effort, there arises no kamma called “becoming.” As no kamma arises, there is no new birth. When there is no new birth, there is no occasion for old age, dying, grief, etc. This is how one realizes momentary Nibbāna through insight path whenever one meditates. We will explain the realization by Ariyan Path later.

In Silavanta Sutta earlier quoted, the Venerable Sāriputta explained how, if a monk of moral habit meditates on the five aggregates of grasping as impermanent, suffering, and not-self, he can become a Stream-winner; if a Stream-winner meditates, he can become a Once-returned; if a Once-returned, a Never-returned; if a Never-returned, an Arahant. Here, to realize the four Ariyan fruitions of Stream-winning, Once-returning, Never-returning, and Arahantship means to realize Nibbāna through the four Ariyan Paths.

Progress

To get to the Ariyan Path, one starts with insight path. And insight path begins with the Analytical Knowledge of Mind and Matter. Then one arrives at the Knowledge of Discerning Conditionality. Then, working on, one gains the Knowledge of Investigation. Here one comes to enjoy reflecting on things, investigating them, and persons of considerable learning often spend a long time doing so. If you do not want to reflect or investigate, you must keep on meditating. Your awareness now becomes light and swift. You see very clearly how the things noted arise and pass away. You have come to the Knowledge of Rising and Passing Away.

At this stage, noting tends to be easy. Illuminations, joys, tranquilities appear. Going through experiences unthought of before, one is thrilled with joy and happiness. At the initial stage of his work, the meditator has had to take great pains not to let the mind wander this way and that. But it has wandered and, for most of the time, he has not been able to meditate. Nothing has seemed all right. Some have had to fight back very hard indeed. But, with strong faith in one's teachers, good intentions and determination, one has passed all the difficult stages. One has now come to the knowledge of rising and passing away. Everything is fine at this stage. Noting is easy and effortless. It is good to note, and brilliant lights appear. Rapture seizes him and causes a sort of goose-flesh in him. Both body and mind are at ease and he feels very comfortable. The objects to be noted seem to drop on one's mindfulness of their own accord. Mindfulness on its part seems to drop on the object of its own accord. Everything is there already noted. One never fails or forgets to note. On every noting, the awareness is very clear. If you attend to something and reflect on it, it proves to be a plain and simple matter. If you take up impermanence, suffering and not-self, about which you have heard before, they turn out to be plainly discernable things. So you feel like preaching. You think you would make a very good preacher. But if you have had no education, you will make a poor preacher. But you feel like preaching and you can even become quite talkative. This is what is called "the Ideal Nibbāna" the meditators experience. It is not the real Nibbāna of the Ariyans. We may call it "imitation Nibbāna."

"It is the immortality of those who know."

Training in meditation is like climbing a mountain. You begin climbing from the base. Soon you get tired. You ask people who are coming down and they answer you with encouraging words like "It's nearer now." Tired you climb on and very soon come to a resting place in the shade of a tree with a cool breeze blowing in. All your tiredness is gone. The beautiful scenery around fascinates you. You get refreshed for a further climb. The knowledge of the rising and passing away is the resting place for you on your climb to higher insight knowledge.

Those meditators who have not yet reached this stage of knowledge may be losing hope. Days have passed and no taste of insight yet. They often get disheartened. Some leave the meditation centre with thoughts that meditation is nothing after all. They have not discovered the "meditator's Nibbāna." So we instructors have to encourage newcomers to the centre with the hope that they will attain to this knowledge at least. And we ask them to work to attain to it soon. Most succeed as we advise. They don't need further encouragement. They are now full of faith and determination to work on until the ultimate goal.

This "meditator's Nibbāna" is often spoken of as *amānūsī rati* -- non-human delight or superhuman enjoyment (i.e., joy or delight transcending that of ordinary human beings). You derive all kinds of delights from various things -- from education, wealth, family life. The "meditator's Nibbāna" surpasses all these delights. A meditator once told me that he had indulged in all kinds of worldly pleasures. But none could match the pleasure derived from meditation. He just could not express how delightful it was.

But is that all? No, you must work on. You go on with your noting. Then, as you progress, forms and features no longer manifest themselves and you find them always disappearing. Whatever appears disappears the moment you notice it. You note seeing, it disappears swiftly. You note hearing, it disappears. Bending, stretching, again it disappears swiftly. Not only the object that comes up, the awareness of it too disappears with it in a pairwise sequence. This is the Knowledge of Dissolution.

Everytime you note, they dissolve swiftly. Having witnessed it for a long time, you become frightened of them. It is the Knowledge of the Fearful. Then you find fault with these things that keep passing away. It is the Knowledge of Tribulation. Then as you meditate on, you get weary of them. It is the Knowledge of Repulsion.

“So seeing all these things, the instructed disciple of the Ariyans disregards the material shapes, disregards feeling.” (M.i,137; S.iii,68.)

Your material body has been a delightful thing before. Sitting or rising, going or coming, bending or stretching, speaking or working -- everything has seemed very nice. You have thought this material body of yours to be a dependable and delightful thing. Now that you have meditated on it and seen that everything dissolves, you no longer see your body as dependable. It is no longer delightful. It is just a dull, tiresome business.

You have enjoyed both pleasurable feelings of the body and mental pleasure. You have thought, “I am enjoying,” “I feel happy.” Now these feelings are no longer pleasurable. They, too, pass away as you notice them. You become wearied of them.

You have thought well of your perception. But now it, too, passes away as you notice it. You feel disgusted with it as well.

Volitional activities are responsible for all your bodily, mental and vocal behaviors. To think, “I sit, I rise, I go, I act,” is to cling to volitional activities. You have thought well of them, too. Now that you see them passing away, you feel repulsion for them.

You have enjoyed thinking. When newcomers to the meditation center are told that they must not engage in thinking about things, but must keep noting, they are not at all pleased. Now you see how thoughts, ideas, come up and pass away, and you are tired of them too.

The same thing happens to your sense-organs. Whatever come up at the six doors is now a thing to disgust, to be wearied of. Some feel extreme disgust, some a considerable amount.

Then arise desires to be rid of them all. Once you are tired of them, of course you want to get rid of them. “They come and pass incessantly. They are no good. It were well if they all ceased.” This is the Knowledge for Deliverance. Where “they all ceased” is Nibbāna. To desire for deliverance from them is to long for Nibbāna. What must one do if one wants Nibbāna? He works harder and goes on meditating. This is the Knowledge of Re-reflection. Working with

special effort, the characteristics of impermanence, suffering and not-self become all the more clearer to you. Especially clearer is suffering.

After re-reflection you come to the Knowledge of Indifference to Formations. Now the meditator is quite at ease. Without much effort on his part, the notings run smoothly and are very good. He sits down to meditate and makes the initial effort. Then everything runs its course like a clock once wound up goes on ticking of its own accord. For an hour or so, he makes no change in his posture and goes on with his work without interruption.

Before this knowledge there may have been disturbances. Your mind may be directed to a sound heard and thus disturbed. Your thought may wander off and meditation is disturbed. Painful feelings like tiredness, hotness, aches, itches, coughs appear and disturb you. Then you have to start all over again. But now all goes well. There are no more disturbances. Sounds you may hear, but you ignore them and goes on noting. Whatever comes up you note without being disturbed. There are no more wanderings of the mind. Pleasant objects may turn up but no delight or pleasure arises in you. You meet with unpleasant objects. Again you feel no displeasure or fear. Painful feelings like tiredness, hotness or aches rarely appear. If they do, they are not unbearable. Your noting gets the better of them. Itching, pains and coughs disappear once you attain this knowledge. Some even get cured of serious illnesses. Even if the illnesses are not completely cured, you get some relief while noting in earnest. So, for an hour or so, there will be no interruption to your notings. Some can go on meditating for two or three hours without interruption. And yet they feel no weariness in the body. Time passes unheeded. "It's not long yet," you think.

On such a hot summer day as this, it would be very fine to have attained this knowledge. While other people are groaning under the intense heat, the meditator who is working in earnest with this knowledge will not be aware of the heat at all. The whole day seems to have fled in no time. It is a very good insight knowledge indeed, yet there can be dangers like excess of worry, ambition, or attachment. If these cannot be removed, no progress will be made. Once they are removed, the Ariyan Path knowledge is there to realize. How?

Noble Path

Every time you note "rising, falling, sitting, touching, seeing, hearing, bending, stretching" and so on, there is an effort being made. This is the Right Effort of the Noble Eightfold Path. Then there is your mindfulness. It is Right Mindfulness. Then there is concentration which penetrates the object noted as well as remains fixed on it. This is Right Concentration. The three are called Concentration Constituents of the Path. Then there is initial application which, together with concentration, ascends on the object noted. It is the application of the concomitants on the object. Its characteristic is putting the concomitants on to the object

(abhiniropana-lakkhana), according to the Commentary. This is Right Thought. Then there is the realization that the object thus attended is just movement, just noncognizing, just seeing, just cognizing, just rising and disappearing, just impermanent and so on. This is the Right View. Right Thought and Right View together form the Wisdom Constituents of the Path. The three Morality Constituents, Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood, have been perfected before you take up insight meditation -- when you take the precepts. Besides, there can be no wrong speech, wrong action or wrong livelihood in respect of the object noted. So whenever you note, you perfect the Morality Constituents of the Path as well.

Thus, the eight constituents of the Noble Path are there in every act of awareness. They constitute the insight path that comes up once clinging is done away with. You have to prepare this path gradually until you reach the Knowledge of Indifference to Formations. When this knowledge grows mature and strong, you arrive at Ariyan Path in due course. It is like this: When the Knowledge of Indifference to Formations has matured and grown stronger, your notings get sharper and swifter. While thus noting and becoming aware swiftly, all of a sudden, you fall into the peace that is Nibbāna. It is rather strange. You have no prior knowledge that you will reach it, you cannot reflect on it on reaching, either. Only after the reaching can you reflect on it. You reflect because you find unusual things. This is the Knowledge of Reflection. Then you know what has happened. This is how you realize Nibbāna through the Ariyan Path.

So if you want to realize Nibbāna, what is important is to work for freedom from clinging. With ordinary people clingings arise everywhere: in seeing, in hearing, in touching, in being aware. They cling to things as being permanent, as being happy, good, as soul, ego, persons. We must work for a complete freedom from these clingings. To work is to meditate on whatever rises, whatever is seen, heard, touched, thought of. If you keep meditating thus, clingings cease to be, the Ariyan Path arises leading to Nibbāna. This is the process.

Summary

How is insight developed?

Insight is developed by meditating on the five aggregates of grasping. Why and when do we meditate on the aggregates? We meditate on the aggregates whenever they arise in order that we may not cling to them.

If we fail to meditate on mind and matter as they arise, clingings arise. We cling to them as permanent, good, and as ego. If we meditate on mind and matter as they arise, clingings do not arise. It is plainly seen that all are impermanent, suffering, mere processes.

Once clingings cease, the Path arises, leading to Nibbāna. These, then, are the elements of Insight Meditation.

Words of Encouragement

The Young Weaver

Now a few words of encouragement. When the Buddha preached, his listeners meditated as they listened to him and gained enlightenment. The number of people who thus gained enlightenment at the end of each preaching was very great indeed. Sometimes as many as eighty-four thousand beings gained enlightenment at the end of a sermon, according to the Commentary. But reading this, you may want to remark, “It appears quite easy to gain enlightenment. But here we are, working very hard and yet unable to gain anything. Why such a difference?”

Here you must remember that the Commentary is just giving an account of the occasion and, as such, does not go into details as to the qualifications of the listeners. The preacher himself was the Buddha and none other. His listeners were people of perfections. As an example, let us consider a story.

Once the Buddha was teaching at Alavī, the present day Allahabad. His theme was mindfulness of death. He told his listeners to remember, “My life is not lasting. My death is sure to come. My life will end in death. Inevitable is my death. My life is uncertain. Death is certain.” Then he went back to Sāvatti.

Among the listeners at Alavī was a sixteen-year-old girl, a weaver. She developed mindfulness of death since then. Three years later, the Buddha came to Alavī again. As the Buddha sat among his listeners, he saw the girl coming towards him. He asked, “Young lady, where have you come from?” The girl replied, “I don’t know, my lord.” “Where are you going?” he continued. “I don’t know, my lord” was the answer. “Don’t you know?” “I do, my lord.” “Do you know?” “I don’t, my lord.”

The people were full of contempt for the girl. She was showing disrespect to the Buddha, they thought. The Buddha, therefore, asked the girl to explain her answers. Said she: “Sir, you the Buddha will not engage in small talk. So when you asked me where I had come from, I knew at once you were asking something significant. You were asking me what past existence I had come from. This I do not know and I answered so. When you asked me where I was going to, you meant the next existence I am going to. This again I don’t know and so I answered. Then you asked if I don’t know I am to die one day. I know I have to die one day, so I answered I do. You then asked if I know when I will die. This I don’t know and I answered no.” The Buddha said, “Well done” (Sādhu) to her answers.

So, by the third question, it is certain that we will die. It is not certain when we will die. Let us ask ourselves the second question “Where are you going?” It is rather difficult to answer, isn’t it? But there are ways to make the answer not difficult. Think about your bodily, verbal and mental deeds. Which are greater in number, good deeds or bad deeds? If good deeds, you will go to Good Bourn. If bad deeds, you will be bound for the Bad Bourn. So we must make an effort to do good deeds. The best way is to be engaged in insight meditation, so that you will be freed from the lower states forever. You should try to reach at least the stage of Stream-winning. Is this enough? If you can reach that stage, I will be happy. But according to the Buddha, you must work till you attain to the fruition of Arahantship.

Now to go back to the young weaver. She became a Stream-winner at the end of the Buddha’s sermon. Clearly, she gained enlightenment as a result of her having developed mindfulness of death for three years. From this, we can infer that many people had been like her.

While the Buddha was staying at Jeta Grove at Sāvatti, there were dhamma talks every day. There the citizens of Sāvatti came in the evening dressed in clean clothes and brought offerings of flowers and incense to listen to the dhamma. The same thing may have happened while the Buddha was staying at Bamboo Grove, Rājagaha. So, listening to the dhamma, they must have taken up meditation just as they had taken to keeping the precepts. Even today, people listen to a teacher of meditation and began practicing it. It was then the Buddha himself who was preaching. How could they help not practicing it? It was these people who had listened to his previous sermons that listened to a sermon and gained enlightenment.

Then there were monks, nuns, laymen and women disciples, all types of people. These people who had the opportunity to listen to the Buddha must have been men and women of great perfections. And when the Buddha preached, he did so to suit the disposition of the listener. Now this is important.

The Dull Young Monk

Once there was one Younger Panthaka who could not learn (memorize) a stanza of 44 syllables in four months. His brother the Older Panthaka got impatient with him and sent him away. The Buddha took him to himself, gave him a piece of cloth, and instructed him to handle it while repeating, “Removal of impurity, removal of impurity.” The monk did as instructed, realized the nature of mind and matter in him and became an Arahant. It must have taken him two or three hours at most. He gained enlightenment so easily because he was given a subject of meditation that suited his disposition.

A Disciple of Sāriputta Thera

Once a disciple of the Venerable Sāriputta meditated on the foulness of the body in vain for four months. So, the Venerable Sāriputta took him to the Buddha, who brought forth a golden lotus by his supernormal power and gave it to the monk. It turned out that the monk had been a goldsmith for five hundred existences in succession. He liked beautiful things and had no interest in foul things. Now when he saw the golden lotus, he was fascinated and developed jhana while looking at it. When the Buddha made the lotus fade away, he realized the impermanent, suffering and not-self nature of things. The Buddha then taught him a stanza, on hearing which he became an Arahant.

The Elder Channa was not successful in his efforts to attain enlightenment. So he asked the Venerable Ananda for advice. Ananda said to Channa, “You are a person capable of gaining enlightenment.” The elder was filled with joy and delight. He followed Ananda’s advice and soon gained enlightenment.

Some teachers of meditation of today do not know how to teach to suit the disposition of the would-be meditators. They use words not suitable to them. As a result, the prospective meditators go home discouraged. But some do know how to speak. Their disciples who thought of spending only a few days at the meditation centre were heartened enough to stay on till they finished the course satisfactorily. It is very important to teach to suit the disposition of the listener. No wonder thousands of people gained enlightenment at the end of a sermon by the Buddha.

Here among our listeners can be one or two who have attained perfections as those people in the days of the Buddha. Then there will be those who have matured after days and months of training. These few may gain enlightenment while listening to the dhamma now. If you can’t get it now, you will get it very soon as you go on meditating. Those of you who have never meditated before have learnt the right method now, and if you start meditating at some convenient time, you will also gain it. Whether you have gained enlightenment, or just done good deeds, you will all be born in the six deva worlds when you die. There you will meet those Ariyan devas who have been there since the days of the Buddha. You will meet Anāthapindika, Visākhā and others. Then you can ask them about what they have learnt from the Buddha and practiced. It would be a delightful thing discussing the dhamma with good folk in deva worlds.

But if you do not want to be born in the deva world but just want to be born in this world of men, well, you will be born here. Once, that is, about 25 or 30 years ago, a Chinese devotee invited some monks to a feast at his home in Moulmein. After the meal, the presiding monk made a gladdening speech for the occasion. He said how, as a result of his good deed of feeding the monks, the Chinese devotee would be born in the deva worlds, where life is full of delights with magnificent palaces and beautiful gardens. The monk then asked the Chinaman, “Well, devotee,

don't you want to be born in the deva world?" "No," the Chinaman replied, "I don't want to be born in the deva world." Surprised, the monk asked, "Why?" "I don't want to be anywhere else. I just want to be in my own house, in my own place." "Well," said the monk, "then you will be born in your own house, in your own place." The monk was right. His kamma will lead him to where he wants to be.

"The aspiration, monks, of a man of morality is realized because of purity." (A. ill, 71.)

Now you listeners here are of pure morality. At a time when most people in Rangoon are enjoying themselves at this New Year time, you are here to do meritorious deeds, away from the merry-making, some of you donning the yellow robes and training in meditation. Some keep eight precepts and do meditation. So your moral habits are pure. If you want to be born in deva worlds, you will be born there. If you want to be born in this human world, you will.

In this connection there is something that has been a cause of concern to us. Today countries in Europe and America are prospering. We fear those Burmese who do good deeds get inclined towards those countries and will be born there. I think it is the case already. Some ask, "Although Buddhists do good deeds, why isn't a Buddhist country prospering?" They seem to think, "When a Burmese dies, he is born in Burma only." It is not so. A man of merit can be born anywhere. A Burmese, if he so desires, can be born elsewhere.

Those wealthy people in other countries may have been good Buddhists from Burma. There are so many people who do meritorious deeds here. But there are not enough wealthy parents to receive them in their next life here. So they will have to be born elsewhere. If you are born there, and if you are just a worldlying, you will have to take up the religion of your parents there. This is very important.

So, to be steadfast in your religious faith, you must work now. You must try to reach a stage in which your faith in the Buddha, the Teaching and the Order will never waver. Such a stage is that of Stream-winning. Once a Stream-winner, your faith in the Three Gems will never waver in whatever country you may be born.

These days it is not very good to be born in the world of men. Life is short, diseases are plentiful, ideologies are confusing, and dangers abound. So, if you do not want to be born in the world of men, you will be born in the world of devas. Even if you have not gained the Path and Fruit, your good deeds of giving and keeping precepts will take you wherever you want to be. If you have attained the Path and Fruit, all the better.

And the world of devas is not very hard to come by. One Indaka of Rājagaha made a gift of a spoonful of rice (to the Order) and was born in the Tāvātimsa heaven. Our lay devotees in Burma have been making far greater gifts than a spoonful of rice. With regard to precepts, observing them for a while has sent people to deva heavens. Some kept eight precepts for half a day and were born in heavens. Now you have observed eight precepts very well and practiced meditation

very well. If you want, you will easily get to the deva worlds. Why not? Once there, ask the Ariyan devas about the teachings of the Buddha and discuss the dhamma with them. Please do, may I ask you.

Uposathā the Goddess

In the time of the Buddha, there was a girl called Uposathā at Sāketa, which lies in Kosala region in Central India. She lived by the teachings of the Buddha and became a Stream-winner. When she died, she was born in Tāvātimsa heaven. There she lived in a magnificent palace. One day the Venerable Moggallāna met her while on a tour of deva worlds. The monks in those days were perfect in higher knowledge and had acquired supernormal powers. They could travel to deva worlds or look towards them with their deva-sight or listen to them with their deva-hearing. But today, there are no monks known to possess such powers. We cannot go to the deva worlds. Even if we managed somehow to get there, we would not be able to see them. Let alone those devas in the higher planes, we cannot even see devas in this world of men, such as guardians of trees and guardians of treasures.

Well, the Venerable Moggallāna often toured the deva worlds by his supernormal powers. It was his intention to get first-hand reports from the devas interviewed as to how they had got there, what good deeds they had performed to deserve the good life there. Of course, he could learn of their stories without going to them. But he wanted their stories as told by themselves. As the Elder went there, he came near to the palace of the Goddess Uposathā, who saluted him from her palace. Moggallāna asked her, “ Young goddess, your splendour is like the brightness of the planet Venus. What good deeds have you done to deserve this splendour and good life?” The goddess answered:

“I was a woman, by the name of Uposathā, at Sāketa. I listened to the Buddha’s teaching, was full of faith in his teaching, and became a lay disciple who went to the Three Gems for refuge. “

Putting your faith in the Three Gems, the Buddha, the Teachings, and the Order, is “going for refuge.” You do this by repeating the formula: “I go to the Buddha for refuge, I go to the Dhamma for refuge, I go to the Order for refuge. “

The Buddha knows all the dhamma. Having himself realized Nibbāna, the end of all sufferings like old age, disease and death, he taught the Dhamma so that beings may enjoy the bliss of Nibbāna like him. If one follows the teachings of the Buddha, one can avoid the four lower states and be freed from all suffering. Believing this, you go to the Buddha for refuge. When you are ill, you have to put your faith in the physician. You must trust him. “This doctor is an expert. He can cure me of my illness.” In the same way, you put your trust in the Buddha knowing that you will be saved from all suffering by following his teachings. But these days, some do not seem to

know the significance of the formula. They repeat them because their parents or teachers make them repeat. This is not the right thing. You must know the meaning, think of it in your mind, and repeat the formula slowly. If you cannot do it often, try to do it at least once in a while.

When you say, “I go to the Dhamma for refuge,” you are putting your faith in the teachings of the Buddha -- teachings of the Paths, the Fruits and Nibbāna. You are acknowledging your belief that the practice of these teachings will save you from the four lower states and from all suffering of the round of rebirths.

When you say, “I go to the Order for refuge,” you are putting your faith in the Brotherhood of the Holy Ones who, by practicing the dhamma as taught by the Buddha, have attained or are about to attain the Paths and Fruitions. You are acknowledging the belief that reliance on the Order will lend you freedom from the lower states and the round of rebirths.

A man who has gone to the Three Refuges is called in Pāli an upāsaka, and a woman an upāsikā. Being an upāsaka or upāsikā amounts to doing a good deed that will send you to the deva worlds.

“Those who have gone to the Buddha for refuge Will not go to the lower worlds. Leaving human bodies, They will fill deva bodies.” (D.ii,204; S.i,25.)

The goddess Uposathā had done other good deeds, too. She continued, “I was full of morality. I gave alms. I kept the eight precepts.”

Those who do not know Buddhism make fun of keeping the eight precepts and often say, “You fast and get starved. That’s all.” They know nothing about good and bad deeds. They do not know how, by overcoming the desire to eat -- which is greed -- good consciousness is being developed. But they will know how fasting can be good to sick people. They praise it then. They understand current material welfare only. They are totally ignorant of mind and after-life. To observe the eight precepts is to prevent bad things from coming up and develop good things like restraint. “The holy ones, the Arahants, live avoiding forever bad things like killing, stealing, sex, falsehood, strong drinks, eating at improper times. I will follow their example for one day and honor them by so doing.” The Ariyan good folk think like this when they keep the eight precepts. When you feel hungry, you control yourself and try to free yourself of the defilement of hunger. It is a noble act. As noble acts arise in your mind, it gets purified. It is like fasting and cleansing your intestines when you are sick. Since your mind is pure, when you die, a pure continuity of consciousness goes on. This we say “being born a man or a deva”.

Truths

The goddess Uposathā continued, “I come to live in this palace as a result of restraint and generosity.” Here “restraint” is very important. Even in this world, if there is no restraint in your

spending, you will become poor. If there is no restraint in your actions, you will contract diseases or get involved in crimes. As for the next life, restraint is important as it can purify the heart. That generosity can lead one to deva worlds is common knowledge among Buddhists.

She said, “I knew the Noble Truths.” The Noble Truths are truths to be known by, made known to the Noble Ones or the Ariyans. Once you understand these truths by yourself, you become an Ariyan. They are the Truth of Suffering, the Truth of the Cause of Suffering, the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering, and the Truth of the Path Leading to the Cessation of Suffering. This is the most important part.

“To know the Noble Truths” does not mean to learn of them from hearsay. It means realization by yourself. You should understand them well, give up what ought to be given up, realize (the end), and make become (the Path) in yourself. So goes the Commentary.

The five aggregates of grasping we have discussed constitute the truth of suffering. So noting the aggregates and understanding them is understanding the Truth of Suffering. As you note, you see how they arise and pass away, how they constitute suffering. Thus, you understand while meditating. When you reach the Ariyan Path, you see Nibbāna, the end of suffering, and on reflection understand that whatever arises and passes away and has not come to cessation is suffering. Thus, you understand at the Path moment. It is not understanding by way of attention to the object, but rather by way of function.

As you meditate, there can be no craving for the object meditated on. This is understanding by way of giving up. On reflection, no craving will arise on objects you have seen to be impermanent, suffering, and not-self. It has been extinguished. This is how you understand while meditating. When you realize the Ariyan Path and Nibbāna, no craving will ever arise with respect to the Path. With the Path of Stream-winning, any gross craving that can lead one to the lower states is done away with. With Never-returning, all cravings for the sense-pleasure are put away and with Arahantship, all remaining types of craving.

Whenever you note, no defilements, no kamma, so no sufferings will arise in respect of the objects noted. All are extinguished. Such cessation of suffering is experienced with every act of noting. This is how you realize the Truth of Cessation. At the Ariyan Path moment you realize Nibbāna. This is obvious now.

Every time you meditate, Right View regarding the true nature of mind and matter arises. Once there is Right View, its concomitants such as Right Thought arise, too. We have dealt with them above. To make become the eight constituents of the Path is to develop the Path. It is how you understand while meditating. At the Ariyan Path moment, the eight constituents arise and Nibbāna is realized. The one who has arrived at the Path and Fruition can see on reflection how the Ariyan Path has come to be. He sees. This, too, is understanding.

Thus, if you understand how mind and matter are sufferings, if you have given up craving which is the cause of suffering, if you realize the end of suffering, and if you make become the eight constituents of the Path in you, we can say you know the four truths. So, when the goddess Uposathā said she knew the four noble truths, she meant she had seen the insight path and the ariyan path by her own experience. In other words, she was a Stream-winner.

Once you know the four truths, you know the Ariyan dhammas as well. We will give an excerpt from the suttas.

“ ... the well instructed Ariyan disciple, one who sees the Ariyans, who is skilled in the Ariyan dhamma”

If you are not an Ariyan, you will not know by right wisdom what kind of a person an Ariyan is. Those who have never been initiated into the Order will not know from personal experience how a monk behaves and lives. Those who have never taken up meditation will not know how a meditator behaves and lives. Only when you yourself are an Ariyan will you discern who an Ariyan is.

According to the Commentary, the Ariyan dhamma consists of the four establishments of mindfulness, four supreme efforts, four means of accomplishment, five faculties, five powers, seven factors of enlightenment, and eight constituents of the Path -- seven categories in all. If you know anyone of the seven categories, you know the other six. So we have said that if you know the four truths you know the Ariyan dhamma, for the Eightfold Path which is one item of Ariyan dhamma is included in the four truths.

When you try to make become any of the seven categories like the establishment of mindfulness in you, you understand it from your own experience. This is true understanding. Learning from hearsay will not do.

“A monk when he walks is aware ‘I am walking’.” So the meditator who is going to be an Ariyan, when he walks, walks noting either “walking, walking,” or “lifting, moving forward, putting down.” As he so walks, mindfulness arises whenever he notes, as does knowledge that cognizes the object noted. You know how the intention to walk, the material form of walking, and the awareness arise and pass away. The mindfulness and knowledge that arise whenever you note constitute establishing mindfulness by way of contemplation of the body.

“He is aware ‘I am feeling a painful feeling’ when he feels a painful feeling.” The meditator notes “hot, hot” or “pain, pain” whenever there arises hotness or pain. Thus, he is mindful and he knows how feelings arise and then pass away. This is establishing mindfulness by way of contemplation of feelings.

“He is aware of a passionate mind that it is passionate.” Every time such a thought or idea arises, the meditator notes “clinging, delighting.” He is, thus, mindful and knows how they arise and pass away. This is establishing mindfulness by way of contemplation of mind.

“One who has existing in himself a sensual desire is aware ‘There is in me a sensual desire’.” The meditator notes “desire, delight,” and so on, and is mindful and knows how dispositions like sensual desire arise and pass away. This is establishing mindfulness by way of contemplation of dhamma objects (= hindrances and so on).

Those of you who have been training here have been meditating and understanding from self-experience. You get skilled in the Ariyan dhamma, the four establishments of mindfulness. At the same time, you are making the four supreme efforts, too. As you note, you are making an effort to discard evils that have arisen, or to prevent the arising of those evils not yet arisen, or to develop those good deeds of insight and Path that have not yet arisen, or to augment the insight knowledge that has already arisen. The four means of accomplishment are involved, too. When you work, you have to rely on either will, effort, thought or reason. The five faculties of confidence, effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom are there, too. The five powers are the same as the five faculties. The seven factors of enlightenment, too, are there. When you note, you have mindfulness, investigation (of the dhamma), effort, rapture, quietude, concentration and equanimity. That the Eightfold Path is involved too need not be repeated here.

To go back to the story of the goddess Uposathā. She said, “I kept the five recepts. I was a lay woman-disciple of Gotama the Buddha. I often heard of Nandana and wanted to be there. As a result, I came to be born here in Nandana.”

Nandana is the name of a garden in the deva world. In those days, people talked so much of Nandana as they do of America or Europe these days. Uposathā heard people talk about the deva garden and wished to be born there. So was she born. But now she was not happy there. She got dissatisfied with her lot. She told Moggallāna, “I failed to do the Buddha’s word. Having turned my mind to this lowly plane, now I am full of repentance.”

The Buddha taught us life -- whatever form it takes -- is no good. It is mere suffering. He told us to work for the end of suffering. But Uposathā had disregarded the Buddha’s teaching and longed for life in a deva world. Now she realized she had been mistaken.

You may ask, “Well, why not work for the end of suffering in the deva world?” It is not easy to meditate there. The devas are always singing, dancing and making merry. There is not a single quiet spot there as in the world of men. Well, even in this world of men, when you meditators return home, you can’t meditate well, can you? So, work hard now.

The Venerable Moggallāna cheered her up with these words, “Don’t worry, Uposathā. The Fully Enlightened One has declared that you are a Stream-winner with special attainment. You are freed from the Bad Bourn.”

The young goddess is still in Tāvātimsa. She has not been there long in the reckoning of the deva world. A century here equals a day there. From the Buddha's time till now it is 2500 years, which is only 25 days according to the Tāvātimsa calendar. She is not yet a month old. If you attain enlightenment now, in forty, fifty or sixty years you will be born in the deva world, meet this goddess, and discuss the dhamma with her on equal level. If you have not got any stage of enlightenment, do not be discouraged. At least you will be born in the deva world. Then ask the Ariyan devas, listen to their teachings, and pay attention to what they teach. Then you will attain to the Path and Fruition. The corporeality of the devas is very pure. The consciousness that arises depending on this pure matter is keen and swift. So, if you remember what you have meditated on in your human existence, you will understand the arising and passing away of mind and matter and reach the Ariyan Path and Fruition in no time at all.

“The pieces of the dhamma which he has experienced before flow to him in his happiness there. The arising of recollection, monks, is slow. But then quickly does that being reach the attainment of Path, Fruition and Nibbāna.” (A.i,505.)

A Sakyan woman, Gopikā by name, who was a Stream-winner, died and was born a son of Sakka, the King of devas in Tāvātimsa. There he saw three gandhabba gods who had come to dance at his father's palace. On reflection, Gopaka (for it was his name now) saw that the three gods had been monks he had worshipped in his former existence. He told them. Two of the gods remembered the dhamma they had practised, meditated on it, and there and then gained jhana, and became Non-returners, and rose to Brahmāpurohita world.

There are lots of gods and goddesses like Uposathā now living in the world of devas, who have practiced the dhamma in the Buddha's time. There are gods like Gopaka who have been born gods from women. All of them practiced the dhamma just like you. It is very heartening. This is the ancient road. It is the road taken by the Ariyans. You must know that we are following this road. Every time you note you are walking along this road. As a traveller nears his destination with each step, you come closer to Nibbāna with each noting.

If the Path-Fruition were to be reached in ten thousand notings, and if you now have made a thousand notings, then you need nine thousand more notings to reach it. If you have made nine thousand notings already, then you need only a thousand more. If you have 9999 already, then the very next noting could be the Path process. The more you note, the nearer you come to the Path.

May you be able to note the five aggregates of grasping whenever they arise at the six doors.
May you realize their impermanence, suffering and not-self nature.

May you make swift progress in your insight and realize Nibbāna, the end of all suffering!

Instructions to Insight Meditation

Mahasi Sayadaw

(The following is a talk by the Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw Agga Maha Pandita U Sobhana given to his disciples on their induction into Vipassana Meditation at Sasana Yeiktha Meditation Centre, Rangoon, Burma. It was translated from the Burmese by U Nyi Nyi.)

The practice of Vipassana or Insight Meditation is the effort made by the meditator to understand correctly the nature of the psycho-physical phenomena taking place in his own body.

Physical phenomena are the things or objects which one clearly perceives around one. The whole of one's body that one clearly perceives constitutes a group of material qualities (rupa).

Psychical or mental phenomena are acts of consciousness or awareness (nama). These (nama-rupas) are clearly perceived to be happening whenever they are seen, heard, smelt, tasted, touched, or thought of. We must make ourselves aware of them by observing them and noting thus: "Seeing, seeing," "hearing, hearing," "smelling, smelling," "tasting, tasting," "touching, touching," or "thinking, thinking." Every time one sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches, or thinks, one should make a note of the fact. But in the beginning of one's practice, one cannot make a note of every one of these happenings. One should, therefore, begin with noting those happenings which are conspicuous and easily perceivable.

With every act of breathing, the abdomen rises and falls, which movement is always evident. This is the material quality known as vayodhatu (the element of motion). One should begin by noting this movement, which may be done by the mind intently observing the abdomen. You will find the abdomen rising when you breathe in, and falling when you breathe out. The rising should be noted mentally as "rising," and the falling as "falling." If the movement is not evident by just noting it mentally, keep touching the abdomen with the palm of your hand. Do not alter the manner of your breathing. Neither slow it down, nor make it faster. Do not breathe too vigorously, either. You will tire if you change the manner of your breathing. Breathe steadily as usual and note the rising and falling of the abdomen as they occur. Note it mentally, not verbally.

In vipassana meditation, what you name or say doesn't matter. What really matters is to know or perceive. While noting the rising of the abdomen, do so from the beginning to the end of the movement just as if you are seeing it with your eyes. Do the same with the falling movement. Note the rising movement in such a way that your awareness of it is concurrent with the movement itself. The movement and the mental awareness of it should coincide in the same way as a stone thrown hits the target. Similarly with the falling movement.

Your mind may wander elsewhere while you are noting the abdominal movement. This must also be noted by mentally saying "wandering, wandering." When this has been noted once or twice, the mind stops wandering, in which case you go back to noting the rising and falling of the

abdomen. If the mind reaches somewhere, note as “reaching, reaching.” Then go back to the rising and falling of the abdomen. If you imagine meeting somebody, note as “meeting, meeting.” Then back to the rising and falling. If you imagine meeting and talking to somebody, note as “talking, talking.”

In short, whatever thought or reflection occurs should be noted. If you imagine, note as “imagining.” If you think, “thinking.” If you plan, “planning.” If you perceive, “perceiving.” If you reflect, “reflecting.” If you feel happy, “happy.” If you feel bored, “bored.” If you feel glad, “glad.” If you feel disheartened, “disheartened”. Noting all these acts of consciousness is called *cittanupassana*.

Because we fail to note these acts of consciousness, we tend to identify them with a person or individual. We tend to think that it is “I” who is imagining, thinking, planning, knowing (or perceiving). We think that there is a person who from childhood onwards has been living and thinking. Actually, no such person exists. There are instead only these continuing and successive acts of consciousness. That is why we have to note these acts of consciousness and know them for what they are. That is why we have to note each and every act of consciousness as it arises. When so noted, it tends to disappear. We then go back to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen.

When you have sat meditating for long, sensations of stiffness and heat will arise in your body. These are to be noted carefully, too. Similarly with sensations of pain and tiredness. All of these sensations are *dukkhavedana* (feeling of unsatisfactoriness) and noting them is *vedananupassana*. Failure or omission to note these sensations makes you think, “I am stiff, I am feeling hot, I am in pain. I was all right a moment ago. Now I am uneasy with these unpleasant sensations.” The identification of these sensations with the ego is mistaken. There is really no “I” involved, only a succession of one new unpleasant sensation after another.

It is just like a continuous succession of new electrical impulses that light up electric lamps. Every time unpleasant contacts are encountered in the body, unpleasant sensations arise one after another. These sensations should be carefully and intently noted, whether they are sensations of stiffness, of heat or of pain. In the beginning of the yogi’s meditational practice, these sensations may tend to increase and lead to a desire to change his posture. This desire should be noted, after which the yogi should go back to noting the sensations of stiffness, heat, etc.

“Patience leads to *Nibbāna*,” as the saying goes. This saying is most relevant in meditational effort. One must be patient in meditation. If one shifts or changes one’s posture too often because one cannot be patient with the sensation of stiffness or heat that arises, *samadhi* (good concentration) cannot develop. If *samadhi* cannot develop, insight cannot result and there can be no attainment of *magga* (the path that leads to *Nibbāna*), *phala* (the fruit of that path) and *Nibbāna*. That is why patience is needed in meditation. It is patience mostly with unpleasant sensations in the body like stiffness, sensations of heat and pain, and other sensations that are

hard to bear. One should not immediately give up one's meditation on the appearance of such sensations and change one's meditational posture. One should go on patiently, just noting as "stiffness, stiffness" or "hot, hot." Moderate sensations of these kinds will disappear if one goes on noting them patiently. When concentration is good and strong, even intense sensations tend to disappear. One then reverts to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen.

One will of course have to change one's posture if the sensations do not disappear even after one has noted them for a long time and, if on the other hand, they become unbearable. One should then begin noting as "wishing to change, wishing to change." If the arm rises, note as "rising, rising." If it moves, note as "moving, moving." This change should be made gently and noted as "rising, rising," "moving, moving" and "touching, touching." If the body sways, "swaying, swaying." If the foot rises, "rising, rising." If it moves, "moving, moving." If it drops, "dropping, dropping." If there is no change, but only static rest, go back to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen. There must be no intermission in between, only contiguity between a preceding act of noting and a succeeding one, between a preceding samadhi (state of concentration) and a succeeding one, between a preceding act of intelligence and a succeeding one. Only then will there be successive and ascending stages of maturity in the yogi's state of intelligence. Magga-ñāna and Phala-ñāna (knowledge of the path and its fruition) are attained only when there is this kind of gathering momentum. The meditative process is like that of producing fire by energetically and unremittingly rubbing two sticks of wood together so as to attain the necessary intensity of heat (when the flame arises).

In the same way, the noting in vipassana meditation should be continual and unremitting, without any resting interval between acts of noting whatever phenomena may arise. For instance, if a sensation of itchiness intervenes and the yogi desires to scratch because it is hard to bear, both the sensation and the desire to get rid of it should be noted, without immediately getting rid of the sensation by scratching.

If one goes on perseveringly noting thus, the itchiness generally disappears, in which case one reverts to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen. If the itchiness does not in fact disappear, one has of course to eliminate it by scratching. But first, the desire to do so should be noted. All the movements involved in the process of eliminating this sensation should be noted, especially the touching, pulling and pushing, and scratching movements, with an eventual reversion to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen.

Every time you make a change of posture, you begin with noting your intention or desire to make the change, and go on to noting every movement closely, such as rising from the sitting posture, raising the arm, moving and stretching it. You should make the change at the same time as noting the movements involved. As your body sways forward, note it. As you rise, the body becomes light and rises. Concentrating your mind on this, you should gently note as "rising, rising."

The yogi should behave as if he were a weak invalid. People in normal health rise easily and quickly or abruptly. Not so with feeble invalids, who do so slowly and gently. The same is the case with people suffering from “backache” who rise gently lest the back hurt and cause pain.

So also with meditating yogis. They have to make their changes of posture gradually and gently; only then will mindfulness, concentration and insight be good. Begin, therefore, with gentle and gradual movements. When rising, the yogi must do so gently like an invalid, at the same time noting as “rising, rising”. Not only this, though the eye sees, the yogi must act as if he does not see. Similarly when the ear hears. While meditating, the yogi’s concern is only to note. What he sees and hears are not his concern. So, whatever strange or striking things he may see or hear, he must behave as if he does not see or hear them, merely noting carefully.

When making bodily movements, the yogi should do so gradually as if he were a weak invalid, gently moving the arms and legs, bending or stretching them, bending down the head and bringing it up. All these movements should be made gently. When rising from the sitting posture, he should do so gradually, noting as “rising, rising.” When straightening up and standing, note as “standing, standing.” When looking here and there, note as “looking, seeing.” When walking note the steps, whether they are taken with the right or the left foot. You must be aware of all the successive movements involved, from the raising of the foot to the dropping of it. Note each step taken, whether with the right foot or the left foot. This is the manner of noting when one walks fast.

It will be enough if you note thus when walking fast and walking some distance. When walking slowly or doing the *cankama* walk (walking up and down), three movements should be noted in each step: when the foot is raised, when it is pushed forward, and when it is dropped. Begin with noting the raising and dropping movements. One must be properly aware of the raising of the foot. Similarly, when the foot is dropped, one should be properly aware of the “heavy” falling of the foot.

One must walk, noting as “raising, dropping” with each step. This noting will become easier after about two days. Then go on to noting the three movements as described above as “raising, pushing forward, dropping.” In the beginning, it will suffice to note one or two movements only, thus “right step, left step” when walking fast and “raising, dropping” when walking slowly. If when walking thus, you want to sit down, note as “wanting to sit down, wanting to sit down.” When actually sitting down, note concentratedly the “heavy” falling of your body.

When you are seated, note the movements involved in arranging your legs and arms. When there are no such movements, but just a stillness (static rest) of the body, note the rising and falling of the abdomen. While noting thus and if stiffness of your limbs and sensation of heat in any part of your body arise, go on to note them. Then back to “rising, falling.” While noting thus and, if a desire to lie down arises, note it and the movements of your legs and arms as you lie down. The raising of the arm, the moving of it, the resting of the elbow on the floor, the swaying of the

body, the stretching of legs, the listing of the body as one slowly prepares to lie down, all these movements should be noted.

To note as you lie down thus is important. In the course of this movement (that is, lying down), you can gain a distinctive knowledge (that is magga- ñana and phala-ñana, the knowledge of the path and its fruition). When samadhi (concentration) and ñana (insight) are strong, the distinctive knowledge can come at any moment. It can come in a single “bend” of the arm or in a single “stretch” of the arm. Thus it was that the Venerable Ananda became an arahat.

The Ven. Ananda was trying strenuously to attain Arahatsip overnight on the eve of the first Buddhist Council. He was practising the whole night the form of vipassana meditation known as kiyagatasati, noting his steps, right and left, raising, pushing forward and dropping of the feet; noting, happening by happening, the mental desire to walk and the physical movement involved in walking. Although this went on until it was nearly dawn, he had not yet succeeded in attaining Arahatsip. Realizing that he had practiced the walking meditation to excess and that, in order to balance samadhi (concentration) and viriya (effort), he should practise meditation in the lying posture for a while, he entered his chamber. He sat on the couch and then lay himself down. While doing so and noting “lying, lying,” he attained Arahatsip in an instant.

The Ven. Ananda was only a sotapanna (that is, a stream winner or one who has attained the first stage on the path to Nibbāna) before he thus lay himself down. From sotapannahood, he continued to meditate and reached sakadagamihood (that is, the condition of the once-returner or one who has attained the second stage on the path), anagamihood (that is, the state of the non-returner or one who has attained the third stage on the path) and arahatsip (that is, the condition of the noble one who has attained the last stage on the path.) Reaching these three successive stages of the higher path took only a little while. Just think of this example of the Ven. Ananda’s attainment of arahatsip. Such attainment can come at any moment and need not take long.

That is why the yogi should note with diligence all the time. He should not relax in his noting, thinking, “this little lapse should not matter much.” All movements involved in lying down and arranging the arms and legs should be carefully and unremittingly noted. If there is no movement, but only stillness (of the body), go back to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen. Even when it is getting late and time for sleep, the yogi should not go to sleep yet, dropping his noting. A really serious and energetic yogi should practice mindfulness as if he were forgoing his sleep altogether. He should go on meditating until he falls asleep. If the meditation is good and has the upper hand, he will not fall asleep. If, on the other hand, drowsiness has the upper hand, he will fall asleep. When he feels sleepy, he should note as “sleepy, sleepy;” if his eyelids droop, “drooping;” if they become heavy or leaden, “heavy;” if the eyes become smarting, “smarting.” Noting thus, the drowsiness may pass and the eyes become “clear” again.

The yogi should then note as “clear, clear” and go on to note the rising and falling of the abdomen. However, perseveringly the yogi may go on meditating; if real drowsiness intervenes, he does fall asleep. It is not difficult to fall asleep; in fact, it is easy. If you meditate in the lying posture, you gradually become drowsy and eventually fall asleep. That is why the beginner in meditation should not meditate too much in the lying posture. He should meditate much more in the sitting and walking postures of the body. But, as it grows late and becomes time for sleep, he should meditate in the lying position, noting the rising and falling movements of the abdomen. He will then naturally (automatically) fall asleep.

The time he is asleep is the resting time for the yogi. But, for the really serious yogi, he should limit his sleeping time to about four hours. This is the “midnight time” permitted by the Buddha. Four hours’ sleep is quite enough. If the beginner in meditation thinks that four hours’ sleep is not enough for health, he may extend it to five or six hours. Six hours’ sleep is clearly enough for health.

When the yogi awakens, he should at once resume noting. The yogi who is really bent on attaining magga-ñāna and phala-ñāna, should rest from meditational effort only when he is asleep. At other times, in his waking moments, he should be noting continuously and without rest. That is why, as soon as he awakens, he should note the awakening state of his mind as “awakening, awakening.” If he cannot yet make himself aware of this, he should begin noting the rising and falling of the abdomen.

If he intends to get up from bed, he should note as “intending to get up, intending to get up.” He should then go on to note the changing movements he makes as he arranges his arms and legs. When he raises his head and rises, note as “rising, rising.” When he is seated; note as “sitting, sitting.” If he makes any changing movements as he arranges his arms and legs, all of these movements should also be noted. If there are no such changes, but only a sitting quietly, he should revert to noting the rising and falling movements of the abdomen.

One should also note when one washes one’s face and when one takes a bath. As the movements involved in these acts are rather quick, as many of them should be noted as possible. There are then acts of dressing, of tidying up the bed, of opening and closing the door; all these should also be noted as closely as possible.

When the yogi has his meal and looks at the meal-table, he should note as “looking, seeing, looking, seeing.” When he extends his arm towards the food, touches it, collects and arranges it, handles it and brings it to the mouth, bends his head and puts the morsel of food into his mouth, drops his arm and raises his head again, all these movements should be duly noted.

(This way of noting is in accordance with the Burmese way of taking a meal. Those who use fork and spoon or chopsticks should note the movements in an appropriate manner.)

When he chews the food, he should note as “chewing, chewing.” When he comes to know the taste of the food, he should note as “knowing, knowing.” As he relishes the food and swallows it, as the food goes down his throat, he should note all these happenings. This is how the yogi should note as he takes one morsel after another of his food.

As he takes his soup, all the movements involved such as extending of the arm, handling of the spoon and scooping with it and so on, all these should be noted. To note thus at meal-time is rather difficult as there are so many things to observe and note. The beginning yogi is likely to miss several things which he should note, but he should resolve to note all. He cannot of course help it if he overlooks and misses some, but, as his samadhi (concentration) becomes strong, he will be able to note closely all these happenings.

Well, I have mentioned so many things for the yogi to note. But to summarize, there are only a few things to note. When walking fast, note as “right step,” “left step,” and as “raising, dropping” when walking slowly. When sitting quietly, just note the rising and falling of the abdomen. Note the same when you are lying, if there is nothing particular to note. While noting thus and if the mind wanders, note the acts of consciousness that arise. Then back to the rising and falling of the abdomen. Note also the sensations of stiffness, pain and ache, and itchiness as they arise. Then back to the rising and falling of the abdomen. Note also, as they arise, the bending and stretching and moving of the limbs, bending and raising of the head, swaying and straightening of the body. Then back to the rising and falling of the abdomen.

As the yogi goes on noting thus, he will be able to note more and more of these happenings. In the beginning, as his mind wanders here and there, the yogi may miss noting many things. But he should not be disheartened. Every beginner in meditation encounters the same difficulty. But as he becomes more practiced, he becomes aware of every act of mind-wandering until eventually the mind does not wander any more. The mind is then riveted on the object of its attention, the act of mindfulness becoming almost simultaneous with the object of its attention such as the rising and falling of the abdomen. (In other words, the rising of the abdomen becomes concurrent with the act of noting it, and similarly with the falling of the abdomen.)

The physical object of attention and the mental act of noting are occurring as a pair. There is in this occurrence no person or individual involved, only this physical object of attention and the mental act of noting occurring as a pair. The yogi will in time actually and personally experience these occurrences. While noting the rising and falling of the abdomen, he will come to distinguish the rising of the abdomen as physical phenomenon and the mental act of noting of it as psychical phenomenon; similarly with the falling of the abdomen. Thus, the yogi will distinctly come to realize the simultaneous occurrence in pair of these psycho-physical phenomena.

Thus, with every act of noting, the yogi will come to know for himself clearly that there are only this material quality which is the object of awareness or attention and the mental quality that

makes a note of it. This discriminating knowledge is called namarupa-pariccheda-ñāna, the beginning of the vipassana-ñāna. It is important to gain this knowledge correctly. This will be succeeded, as the yogi goes on, by the knowledge that distinguishes between the cause and its effect, which knowledge is called paccayapariggaha-ñāna.

As the yogi goes on noting, he will see for himself that what arises passes away after a short while. Ordinary people assume that both the material and mental phenomena go on lasting throughout life, that is, from youth to adulthood. In fact, that is not so. There is no phenomenon that lasts forever. All phenomena arise and pass away so rapidly that they do not last even for the twinkling of an eye. The yogi will come to know this for himself as he goes on noting. He will then become convinced of the impermanency of all such phenomena. Such conviction is called aniccanupassana-ñāna.

This knowledge will be succeeded by dukkhanupassana-ñāna, which realises that all this impermanency is suffering. The yogi is also likely to encounter all kinds of hardship in his body, which is just an aggregate of sufferings. This is also dukkhanupassana-ñāna. Next, the yogi will become convinced that all these psycho-physical phenomena are occurring of their own accord, following nobody's will and subject to nobody's control. They constitute no individual or ego-entity. This realization is anattanupassana-ñāna.

When, as he goes on meditating, the yogi comes to realize firmly that all these phenomena are anicca, dukkha and anatta, he will attain Nibbāna. All the former Buddhas, Arahats and Aryas realized Nibbāna following this very path. All meditating yogis should recognize that they themselves are now on this sati-patthana path, in fulfilment of their wish for attainment of magga-ñāna (knowledge of the path), phala-ñāna (knowledge of the fruition of the path) and Nibbāna-dhamma, and following the ripening of their parami (perfection of virtue). They should feel glad at this and at the prospect of experiencing the noble kind of samadhi (tranquillity of mind brought about by concentration) and ñāna (supramundane knowledge or wisdom) experienced by the Buddhas, Arahats and Aryas and which they themselves have never experienced before.

It will not be long before they will experience for themselves the magga-ñāna, phala-ñāna and Nibbāna-dhamma experienced by the Buddhas, Arahats and Aryas. As a matter of fact, these may be experienced in the space of a month or of twenty or fifteen days of their meditational practice. Those whose parami is exceptional may experience these dhammas even within seven days. The yogi should, therefore, rest content in the faith that he will attain these dhammas in the time specified above, that he will be freed of sakkaya-ditthi (ego-belief) and vicikiccha (doubt or uncertainty) and saved from the danger of rebirth in the nether worlds. He should go on with his meditational practice in this faith. May you all be able to practice meditation well and quickly attain that Nibbāna which the Buddhas, Arahats and Aryas have experienced!

Sādhu (well done)! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Questions and Answers

The following questions and answers are from the booklet “An Interview with Mahasi Sayadaw,” prepared (in Burmese) by Thamanaykyaw and translated by U Hla Myint.

Q1: Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw, did you have full faith in Satipatthana Vipassana practice when you started it?

“No, frankly I didn’t. I did not initially have full faith in it. So, I don’t blame anybody for not having faith in practice before they start it. It is only because they have little or no experience of it. In 1931, when I was in only eighth Vassa (monastic year in terms of seniority), much to my curiosity and confusion, a meditation master called Mingon Zetawin Sayadawji was teaching: Note going when going; note standing when standing; note sitting when sitting; note lying when lying; note bending when bending; note stretching when stretching; note eating when eating. I got confused by the fact that there was no object to observe in ultimate sense, such as mind and body, and their impermanence, suffering and egolessness. But I gave it some consideration and thought: “How strange the way Sayadawji teaches, I’m sure “he is highly learned, and is teaching from his own experience. It may be too early for me to decide whether it is good or bad before I myself practice it.” Thus, I started to practice with him.

Q2: Venerable Sir, could you explain the meaning of Satipatthana?

Satipatthana means mindfulness or remembering constantly. What one is supposed to remember without fail are all physical, sensational, mental or general phenomena the moment they occur to him or her.

Q3: Venerable Sir, I believe you made very fast progress in your practice arousing one insight knowledge after another. Didn’t you?

No, I didn’t. I could not appreciate the practice three or four weeks after I had started because I did not yet exercise enough effort. Some of the yogis here, however, even though the practice is new to them, manage to develop enough concentration and mindfulness after a week or so, to see impermanence, suffering, and insubstantiality to some extent. For me, I could not make any remarkable progress in the practice even after a month or so, let alone four or five days. I was then still at zero progress in my practice. This is because my faith in the practice was not strong enough, and I did not make enough effort.

At this point, skeptical doubt called Vicikiccha, usually hinders the insight knowledge and Magga-Phala from taking place. So it is very important to do away with such doubt. But, I was wasting my time by mistaking the skeptical doubt for productive analysis.

I thought it was only a conventional or conceptual way of practice and not in the ultimate sense that one observes objects such as going, bending, stretching, etc. The Venerable Sayadawji

taught me in that way as a basic training. Perhaps, later he would teach me how to distinguish between mind and body, etc. Later on, while continuing with this practice I spontaneously realized: “Wow! This is not just a basic training, but noting physical and mental behaviors, like going, bending, stretching, etc., are also intermediate advanced instructions, too. These are all I need to observe. Nothing else.”

Q4: Venerable Sir, what do we have to note when we start our practice? When going, for example, are we supposed to note the mind and body involved?

“Yatha-pakatam Vipassana-bhiniveso” = “Vipassana stays with any obvious object” it is said in the subcommentary on the Visuddhimagga. So, one is instructed to start his or her Vipassana by noting any obvious object; i.e., an object easy to note. You should not start with subtle or difficult objects thinking that you will accomplish the practice sooner rather than later. For example, when a student begins schooling, he should begin with easy lessons. He could not be given difficult ones. In the same way, you should start the practice with the easiest observations. The Buddha teaches the easy way: “when going,” for example, note “going”. That’s it.

Q5: Venerable Sir, is it possible to experience phenomena in an ultimate sense by merely observing “going,” for example, as going in a conceptual way?

There are three kinds of “I”. The first is the “I” mistaken for a person or ego in terms of wrong view (ditthi). The “I” taken as someone important in a sense of pride (māna) is the second one. And the last one is the “I” we use in every day language in a conversational sense. When you note “going” as going, the “I” involved is the third kind, which was used even by the Buddha and Arahats, as it has nothing to do with ditthi and māna. So I instruct yogis to note in every day language every step they take as “going.”

Although conventional language is used, a yogi is bound to experience phenomena in an ultimate sense beyond the concepts when his concentration gets strong enough. When going, for example, at some point, he or she is bound to experience the intention to take a step, the stiffness, tension or motion involved, and their constant changes. He or she will not find solid form or shape, but the phenomena arising and passing away on their own accord. In due course of time, he or she will see not only objects to observe, but also the concurrent noting mind itself arising and passing away immediately. If you don’t believe it, try it. I ensure you that if you follow my instruction, you will, indeed experience it for yourself .

Q6: Venerable Sir, did you initiate the observation of “rising-falling” of the abdomen when breathing?

No, I’m not the one who initiated the observation of “rising-falling.” Actually it was the Buddha who did it, because he taught to observe Vayo-dhatu the air-element included it the five aggregates. The rising and falling is constituted of the air element.

Initially, some people questioned the observation of the rising and falling of the abdomen. However, encouraged by friends, they tried later on, they appreciated it so much that they even criticized the former nitpickers. I'm sure every one who tries it will appreciate it from his or her own experience, just like the taste of sugar which one can appreciate directly from one's own experience.

Q7: Venerable Sir, in Vipassana practice is it necessary to label or name an object such as “rising, falling” etc.?

Names, whether they are in technical terms or in ordinary language, are all conceptual or conventional and not that important. What matters most is to be aware of the phenomena involved in an object like “rising and falling of the abdomen when breathing.” In reality, just being aware of an object without labeling at all, will serve the purpose.

Without labeling, however, it may be difficult to be fully aware of an object precisely and accurately. Also, it will not be easy for the yogi to report his or her experience to the teacher, or for a teacher to give advice to the yogi. That is the reason why the yogi is instructed to label an object when he or she notes it. Even then, it would be difficult to use technical terms for all objects a yogi encounters. That is why I instruct yogis to use ordinary language like “rising, falling” when he or she practices.

Q8: Venerable Sir, do you always encourage us to label an object?

No, not always. There are times you find objects occurring to you so fast that you have no time to label them each. Then you have to keep up with them by being merely aware of them moment to moment, without labeling. It is also possible to be aware of four, five or ten objects spontaneously, although you are able to label only one of them. Don't worry about that. It also serves your purpose. If you try to label all the objects occurring, you are likely to get soon exhausted. The point is to be scrupulously aware of objects; i.e., in terms of their characteristics. In this case, you can also note objects occurring through the six senses moment to moment instead of noting routinely,

Q9: Venerable Sir, is there any disadvantage by not labeling a meditation object, like rising, falling, sitting, standing, doing, lying and so on?

Yes, of course, there are some disadvantages in not labeling a meditation object: inaccurate concurrence of mind and meditative object, superficial awareness, energy reduction, and so on.

Q10: Venerable Sir, if noting “sitting, sitting” when one is sitting serves one's purpose, why is one instructed to note “rising, falling” when one is sitting?

Of course, it serves one's purpose to note “sitting, sitting” when sitting. But if one observes a single kind of object for long, it would become so easy that he may lose balance from little energy and too much concentration. This would result in sloth and torpor and shallow or weak

awareness. That's why one is instructed to observe "rising and falling" as a main object when one is sitting.

Q11: Venerable Sir, how does a yogi keep the balance between concentration and energy by noting "rising and falling?"

Noting "rising and falling" demands neither too much concentration as it is not a monotonous kind of object, nor excessive enthusiasm as it's only two types of object to note. Thus, the balance can be kept between concentration and energy.

Q12: Venerable Sir, what is the purpose for the rotation of one-hour sitting and one-hour walking in practice?

Too much walking tends to arouse more energy but less concentration. So one is scheduled to sit and walk alternately an hour each. Thus, the balance can be kept between concentration and energy.

Q13: Venerable Sir, if one notes "rising and falling," will one be expected to be solely aware of the abdomen itself rising and falling?

Yes, indeed, in the beginning of practice, one is plainly aware of the abdomen itself. There is no problem in that. Enlightenment of magga phala is not expected in the beginning, of course. Even Nama-rupa-pariccheda-ñāna (the first and foremost insight distinguishing between mind and body) cannot be gained. In the beginning of practice, one has to work to keep the hindrances (wandering thoughts) away by noting them closely. Only when the hindrances are kept away for quite a long time (Vikkhambhana) and the mind is free of them, will a yogi start to experience true phenomena involved in the "rising and falling," such as stiffness, tension, vibration and so on, beyond the plain abdomen.

Q14: Venerable Sir, what is a yogi expected to be aware of when standing?

When standing, just note continuously "standing, standing." If it becomes monotonous because it is a single object, then a prominent touching point should be added to it, noting "standing, touching; standing, touching." Or you note "rising and falling" of the abdomen, instead.

Q15: Venerable Sir, is it the temperature element, or unpleasant sensation (dukkha), when a yogi is aware of cold or heat?

When a yogi is simply aware of heat, that is the experience of the temperature element. If he or she finds the heat uneasy or uncomfortable, that's experience of Dukkha. Similarly with cold wind or water, it can be temperature, or unpleasant sensation accordingly.

Q16: Venerable Sir, how does a yogi experience apo-dhātu, the water element?

(Actually, the water element is untouchable, but) a yogi can experience it as “liquidity or wetness” being connected with other elements. So when one feels tears, phlegm, saliva and sweat flowing down, the apo-dhātu, water element can be experienced as “liquidity or wetness” in any part of the body.

Q17: Venerable Sir, what does a yogi need to do to see phenomena clearly?

At night, for example, one cannot see things clearly. But if one uses torchlight, things can be clearly seen in the spot light. In the same way, concentration can be compared to the light, through which one can see phenomena clearly: the manner of rising and falling, and the tension, tightness and movement etc.

Q18: Venerable Sir, why do you instruct yogis to start their practice with noting “rising and falling”?

It will take time to develop concentration if you note an object too varied, or too subtle, while it can be aroused faster if you observe an obvious and limited object. That is why we instruct yogis to start their practice with watching the abdomen characterized by stiffness, pressure, vibration, which are identical with vayo-dhātu, the air-element.

Q19: Venerable Sir, are there only two objects to note, “rising and falling”?

Yes, one is instructed to note initially only two objects, “rising and falling.” He is, however, instructed to note thoughts also if they occur to him, and then to go back to the main object. Similarly with pain. He should go back to the main object when the pain fades away, or after a moderate amount of time even if the pain persists. The same is true with bending or stretching his limbs, or changing his posture. He should note each and every activity or behavior involved in it, and then go back to the main object. If one sees or hears something predominant, one must note it as it is; i.e., “seeing,” “hearing” and so on. After noting them three or four times, one must go back to the main object with full energy.

Q20: Venerable Sir, is it possible to bring about insight knowledge by observing the objects like going or right step, left step, which are known in common sense to every body?

You know the Ana-pana practice, the observation of in-and-out breath. The object, “inhalation and exhalation” seems not to be observed, as it’s known by common sense to everyone. But no one dares to criticize like that. In the same way, it makes no sense if you criticize that mindfulness, concentration and insight knowledge cannot be developed by noting “right, left” which is compared with military training. The military training is taken for the purpose of sport or health, while the noting is used to develop mindfulness, concentration and insight knowledge. If you reject this part of the practice, that will mean you are rejecting the teaching of the Buddha.

Q21: Venerable Sir, what does it mean by the word, “noting”?

The word, “noting” means to pay attention to a meditative object with the purpose to be aware of phenomena that are really happening from moment to moment.

Q22: Venerable Sir, for what purpose do you instruct us to act very slowly?

It is only when you act slowly that your concentration, mindfulness and insight knowledge can keep up with the objects. That’s the reason why you have to start the practice by doing everything slowly and mindfully. Indeed, in the beginning, if you do things fast, your mindfulness or awareness cannot follow.

Q23: Venerable Sir, is there any kind of pain or discomfort which belongs to the practice itself? If so, how do we have to deal with it?

Yes, you may experience several kinds of unpleasant sensations like itchiness, heat, pain, ache, heaviness, stiffness and so on when your concentration gets very strong. They tend to disappear once you stop practice. But, they may reappear if you resume your practice. Then, that is surely not a disease or illness, but just unpleasant sensation which belongs to the practice. Don’t worry. If you keep on noting, eventually it will fade away.

Q24: Venerable Sir, what are we supposed to note when the rising and falling fade away?

When the rising and falling fade away, you are supposed to note: “sitting, touching” or “lying, touching.” You can change touching points. For example, you note “sitting, touching” paying attention to a touch point on the right foot, and then note “sitting, touching” focusing a touching point on the left foot. Thus, you can shift your attention from one touch point to another. Or, you can shift your attention to four, five or six touch points alternately.

Q25: Venerable Sir, which touching point should we note among others?

Any touching point is possible to note. If you note, for instance, a touching on one’s buttock as “touching, touching,” that is correct; note it on one’s knee as “touching, touching,” that is correct; note it on one’s hands as “touching, touching,” that is correct; note it on one’s head as “touching, touching,” that is correct; note in-and-out breath as “touching, touching,” that is correct; note it in one’s intestines or liver as “touching, touching,” that is correct; note it on one’s abdomen as “touching, touching”, that is correct.

Q26: Venerable Sir, should we rather observe stiffness, motion or movement when walking if we are supposed to be aware of the characteristics?

The Buddha said: “Be aware of going, when going”. When we walk, the air-element prevails, which is experienced as pressure, or stiffness in terms of its characteristics, or motion, pushing or movement in terms of its function. The Buddha, however, did not instruct us to note it as “pressure,” “stiffness,” “movement.” “motion” or “pushing.”

The Buddha's actual instruction is: "Be aware of going, when going". That's all. The reason is he wanted to give the easy and understandable way. Noting in conventional language is quite familiar and easy to every body, of course.

Q27: Would it not be harmful to one's health if one practiced too intensively?

It is said in the pali texts: "kaye ca jivite ca anapekkhatam upatthapeti = with no regards to one's life and limbs." This encourages one to practice with heroic effort, even to sacrifice one's life and limbs. Some may think: "how horrible the practice is!" In fact, no one has died from intensive practice, and it is not even harmful to one's health. Actually, there are many testimonies that some people have been cured of chronic diseases by practicing this meditation.

Q28: Venerable Sir, can you mention suitable postures of sitting?

There are three postures of cross-legged sitting: the first is the sitting with both soles facing up like a Buddha statue does; the second is with one's calves kept parallel, or on each other; and the third is the way Myanmar women do with their knees folded underneath, which is called addha-pallanka (half cross-legged sitting). Any one is suitable. For women, they can sit the way they like, unless in public. The point is to be able to sit for a long time, so that concentration will get chance to take place, develop eventually resulting in insight knowledge.

Q29: Venerable Sir, do you advise yogis not to speak at all during practice?

No, I don't. It is not advisable to do so. It would be wise, however, not to speak of anything frivolous or unnecessary. One should only speak of things necessary, beneficial or doctrinal, and in moderation. Thus, both worldly and spiritual progress can be made.

Q30: Is it possible to note an object a moment after it takes place?

No, of course not. Even though you can buy something on credit and pay for it later, no credit is given in the case of Vipassana. So, you must note an object the moment it takes place lest you become attached to it.

Q31: Venerable Sir, what is a yogi expected to be aware of when sitting or lying?

When sitting, just note "sitting, sitting" continuously. If it is boring and monotonous, since it is a single object, then a prominent touching point should be added to it, noting "sitting, touching; sitting, touching." Or you can note "rising and falling" of the abdomen instead, focusing on the sensation of the air-element characterized by stiffness, movement. Similarly with lying down.

Q32: Venerable Sir, what should a yogi do, if or when he or she finds the observation of "rising, falling" too easy or a gap noticeable between them?

A yogi, adding the sitting posture to the "rising, falling," should note three objects: "rising, falling, sitting; rising, falling, sitting." He or she must be aware of "sitting" in the same manner

as “rising, falling.” Even then if a gap is found in between, note four objects by adding a prominent touching point to it: “rising, falling, sitting, touching.” When lying down, note in similarly way: “rising, falling, lying, touching”, or “rising, lying, falling, lying.”

Q33: Venerable Sir, does age make a difference in one’s practice?

Yes, there is some differences between the old and the young. In order to reach to a certain level of insight knowledge, one man, for example, at the age of twenty or thirty, may take about a month, and another in his sixties or seventies has to take two or three months. It is because the young are physically healthier, mentally active, and less worried than the old. Of course, the older they get, the sicklier they become. The old have weaker memory and understanding, and stronger commitments and worries.

As for a monk, it would be great if he would practice soon after his ordination. Because as a newly ordained monk, he is still young and has strong faith in the practice, and his moral conduct is also still flawless. So, in my opinion, however important his study is, a monk should practice soon after his ordination, for three months at least. There were some monks who unfortunately passed away before they could practice. What a pity! ---

Q34: Venerable Sir, does our concentration or awareness make a difference in our experience of pain?

When your concentration and awareness are not yet strong, you will find the pain increasing while noting pain, stiffness or heat. But you should keep on noting it with patience and persistence. They often fade away when concentration and awareness are strong enough. Sometimes, while you are noting it, you may find it disappears on the spot. Such type of pain may no longer come back.

Q35: Venerable Sir, does one’s sex make a difference in making faster progress in practice?

I often find that women work harder along with strong faith in their teacher and his guidance. As a result, they develop concentration sooner rather than later. This in return arouses insight knowledge faster. Thus, I often find women make faster progress in practice than men do. I also found, however, some women who wasted their time with their wandering thoughts, and made no progress. There are several reasons why they make little or no progress in their practice such as laziness, old age, poor health and so on. Of course, there are also men and monks who make fast progress in their practice when following the instructions strictly.

Q36: Venerable Sir, is it true that for learned persons, their knowledge forms an obstacle to the progress in their practice?

No, it’s not suitable to say so. It is impossible that one’s knowledge is an obstacle to the practice. As you may know, a highly learned monk called Potthila became an Arahat sooner rather than

later by practicing under the guidance of a young novice. In view of this, it is clear that one's education or knowledge cannot be an obstruction to the progress in the practice.

As a matter of fact, the real obstacles are pride in one's education or knowledge, little or no faith in the practice, skeptical doubt, failure to follow strictly the guidance of the teacher, lack of heroic effort, and so on. Such are real obstacles to the development of concentration and insight knowledge.

Q37: Venerable Sir, is there any difference between meditators and non-meditators when they face with a painful illness?

Yes, of course. Non-meditator can only remember to take precepts, to listen to the Paritta chanting, to donate robes or food and so on. What a pity, they can only perform charity and morality! As for meditators, they remember to perform high-level practice until they become enlightened by noting closely their discomfort itself moment to moment.

Q38: Venerable Sir, should we insist on practice without spiritual aptitude (pārami) strong enough for Magga, Phala enlightenment?

If you do not practice, your spiritual aptitude (pārami) can, by no means, be formed. In other words, even if your pārami is fully accumulated, you cannot be enlightened without practice. On the other hand, if you practice, your pārami will be formed, which will help you experience Nibbāna sooner. If your pārami is fully developed, you will be enlightened in this very life. Or it will serve, at least, as a seed for enlightenment in the future.

Q39: Venerable Sir, is it realization of im- permanence when we see, for example, a pot break down or of suffering when we have a pain caused by a thorn in our flesh?

Sometimes, you discern impermanence when you find a pot break down, or suffering when you have a pain caused by a thorn in your flesh. That is, actually conventional knowledge of impermanence, which cannot help you to realize egolessness in an ultimate sense.

On the other hand, the real realization of impermanence takes place when you see present phenomena arising and passing away, and that of suffering when you see them tortured by the flux. Only then, can you realize the egolessness in an ultimate sense.

Q40: Venerable Sir, can you describe how we are supposed to realize egolessness in an ultimate sense?

Some believe that realization of egolessness takes place if or when you lose your sense of body shape or form by visualizing physical body as particles. Actually, it is not the realization of egolessness that you merely lose the sense of solidity or form of the body by practicing whatever way. It is because you are clearly experiencing the knowing mind and identifying it with "I" or ego. This is similar to the celestial beings called arupa brahama, who have no

physical body but still mistake their mind for “I” or ego. So the mere loss of sense of solid form cannot mean realization of egolessness.

Only when you observe mind and body the moment they take place and see them arising and passing away on their own accord without subject to anyone’s authority, do you realize the egolessness in an ultimate sense.

Q41: Venerable Sir, is it true that by realizing impermanence, one is supposed to spontaneously appreciate suffering and egolessness?

Yes, indeed. Whatever is impermanent is regarded to be suffering and, at the same time, egoless. Actually, they are in an ultimate sense the five aggregates constituted of mental and physical phenomena although they have different names.

Q42: Venerable Sir, is it not too soon for one to describe his or her progress of Vipassana insights within a month or so?

No, it is not too soon because the Buddha claimed that his method is excellent enough to help one to become anāgami or arahat even within a week. So, if someone states that it is impossible to bring about enlightenment within a month, no matter how intensively a yogi practices, then he is blemishing the Buddha’s teaching and hindering people from practice.

Q43: Venerable Sir, what types of difficulties have you encountered in your teaching of Vipassana?

In 1939, I started teaching this satipatthana vipassana in my native place, Mahasi monastery, Seikkhun village, Shwebo township. At that time, the abbot from the adjacent monastery was not happy with my teaching. But he dared not condemn it openly in my presence because he knew I was highly learned. So he did it in my absence only. There were also some monks and lay people who supported him. However, I never acted in response but kept on teaching as usual. Whatever condemnation they made, nothing could shake or waver me because I was teaching through my own experience. Later, more and more people began to prove my teaching to be true from their own direct experience.

Later, the monk who had condemned my teaching, unfortunately had an affair with a woman and was disrobed within a few years. He passed away four or five years later.

Again, when I started teaching in Yangon, one of the newspapers kept on condemning my teaching for some time. But I never acted in response. And then, a book entitled “The Ladder To Pure Land” apishly criticized my teaching. Moreover, there was a journal that continually expressed articles condemning my teaching. I did nothing, however, to respond to them considering that the dhamma doctrine was the Buddha’s, not mine. So those who appreciated my teaching would come to me. Otherwise, they went to other teachers. Again, I kept on teaching as usual, found no failures but only success in my spiritual career year after year.

I opened this Yangon Meditation Centre with 25 yogis in the year of 1950. Now, in the summer time, there are about one thousand of yogis practicing here in this centre. Even in the winter, when usually fewer yogis practice, there are some two hundred yogis practicing in the centre. Indeed, that indicates no failure but success.

Q44: Venerable Sir, how much time should we spend noting at the dining table?

If or when you have your meal alone and can note precisely and accurately, you may have fifty or sixty moments of noting within a single morsel. Thus, it would take you about an hour or so to finish your meal. But when you are eating in a group, it is impossible for you to note in that manner. You should determine to note as much as possible.

Q45: Venerable Sir, how long is it likely to take a yogi to reach the certain level of insight called Udaya-bhaya-ñāna (the insight into arising and passing away of phenomena)?

Most people, if they work hard, may take a week or so to attain this insight knowledge. However, a few exceptional people, maybe one or two in a hundred, can accomplish it within three or four days. But there are some people who have to take ten or fifteen days to reach this insight because of insufficient effort or weak mental faculty. Also there are some people who cannot reach to even after a month or so because of some deficiency. Anyway, a yogi is normally expected to accomplish this insight within a week or so if he or she works diligently.

Q46: Venerable Sir, is it necessary to accept nothing but practical experience?

It is not practical for you to accept only practical experience. In other words, there is no reason not to believe in nonempirical reality. Although you cannot see something with your naked eyes, it may be seen through a microscope or telescope. Although you have never been to some parts of the world, it is reasonable for you to believe in what is said of it by those who have been there. Of course, we have to accept the discoveries of astronauts although we have never been in outer space.

The law of the Dhamma is very subtle and delicate. The reason one may not experience it is probably because of deficiency in spiritual talent and effort or obstructions like Kamma, Kilesa, Vipaka, Vitikkama and Ariyupavada. Most often, however, insight knowledge is not realized due to a weakness in one's effort and concentration. So, if you don't practice as seriously as others do, you cannot expect to realize something special as the others do.

Q47: Venerable Sir, do some people become enlightened while merely listening to a Dhamma talk?

No, it was not by listening to the talk that some were enlightened. In order to attain magga phala enlightenments, awareness of body, feeling, mind or general phenomena is essential.

Q48: Why could Jhana-achievers not discover mind and body to be impermanent, etc., despite their attainment of Jhana?

Because they do not observe mental and physical phenomena, which really prevail every moment they go, stand, sit, see, hear and so on, they cannot discover mind and body to be impermanent, etc.

Q49: Venerable Sir, is it true that Magga, Phala cannot be realized in this day and age, however hard we work?

Those who have such opinion will fail to practice for sure, let alone the attainment of Magga and Phala. That view is simply an obstruction to the holy path.

Q50: Venerable Sir, is it possible for us to attain Magga, Phala in these days?

Why not? Suppose you have a formula for a drug, then you can make medicine and take it to get cure of your disease. In the same way, the teaching of the Buddha, like a formula, is present and you also have spiritual aptitude, so all you need to do is put it into practice. You will surely attain Magga and Phala. Keep it in your mind. Moreover, no Pali canons say it is impossible to be enlightened nowadays. In fact, they even say that one can become an Arahant with Triple Occult (Te-vijja) in these days. Even the commentary on Vinaya says, to a minimum extent, that one can become Anagami, the third noble one.

The best reference to cite here is: “Ime ca subhadda bhikkhu samma vihareyyum, asunno loko arahantehi assa.” “Oh Subhadda,” said the Buddha, “as long as there are monks who practice properly, this world will never be empty of arahants.” We can find, in these days too, those who practice in a proper way under good guidance. So I am sure, the world is not empty, even now, of noble persons including arahants.

Q51: Venerable Sir, what do we have to do to realize impermanence of mind and body?

If you watch mind and body moment to moment, you are bound to experience true characteristics of phenomena and to see them arise and then vanish immediately.

Q52: Venerable Sir, what is the maximum amount of “Puñña” or merit that can be accumulated by practicing Vipassana meditation?

One moment of noting is available in each second. Thus, 60 moments in a minute, 3600 in an hour and 72,000 a day except for the four hours for sleeping. This is a huge pile of merit!

Q53: Venerable Sir, how long does it take a yogi to accomplish his or her progress of Vipassana insights?

It depends. Only a few people can describe their accomplishment of insight knowledge within a week or so, while most people usually mention their complete set of insight knowledge after one

and a half months, or two. There are, however, some people who have to take three or four months to accomplish it. If, however, one practices seriously as instructed, he or she is likely to describe his or her achievement within a month or so. That's why a yogi is typically encouraged here to practice for at least a month.

Q54: Venerable Sir, can you describe what one's experience of magga-phala enlightenment is like?

One's mental state changes remarkably and abruptly when he or she realizes Magga, Phala enlightenment. He or she may feel as if he or she were newly reborn. His or her faith and confidence distinctly flourish resulting in strong rapture, ecstasy and great happiness. Sometimes, these mental states prevail so much that he or she cannot penetrate into objects like before even though he or she focuses attention on them. Hours or days later, however, such mental states tend to be mild and he or she can do well again in the practice. For some people, they may feel relaxed or apparently unwilling to practice or seemingly satisfied with what they have just achieved probably because they might not intend to achieve higher.

Q55: Venerable Sir, can you describe someone who, you believe, experienced Nibbāna?

Yes, I can. Among those who first practiced under my guidance, my cousin called U Phochon was impressive. When he reached the stage of bhanga-ñāna (the fifth level of Vipassana insight), he started to find trees or people fluxing. He thought something was wrong with his view because he had learned from a teacher that things like a tree, log, post, stone, human body, etc., last for a due period, while physical phenomena caused by one's kamma or mind passed away immediately after they arose. On the contrary, he saw, at that time, things flux.

So he came and asked me what was wrong with his view. I encouraged him saying that nothing was wrong with his view but it was bhanga-ñāna (the fifth level of Vipassana insight), which helped him to see things passing away immediately. After a few days, he clearly described his experience of Nibbāna, the cessation of mind and body.

Q56: Venerable Sir, what are the descriptions of Nibbāna made by those who, you believe, have attained it?

Some descriptions of Nibbāna made by those who, I believed, realized it are as follows:

- I found objects and noting mind to cease abruptly.
- I discovered that objects and noting mind were cut off like a creeper chopped down.
- I saw objects and noting mind fall down immediately like a heavy burden unloaded.
- I perceived objects and noting mind drop down as if I lost my hold on them.
- I felt as if I escaped from objects and noting mind.
- I found out that objects and noting mind ceased abruptly like a candle light blown out.

- I felt as if I got out of the objects and noting mind, like coming into the light out of the darkness.
- I felt that I escaped the objects and noting mind, as if I got into clarity from obscurity.
- I found both objects and noting mind submerged as if they were to sink into the water.
- I discovered that both objects and noting mind stopped suddenly like a sprinter who was pushed back from the front.
- I found both objects and noting mind disappeared suddenly.

Q57: Venerable Sir, by allowing a yogi to listen to the talk on the progress of insights, are you confirming that he or she is a Sotapanna (who has reached the first stage of enlightenment)?

No, not at all. We never make judgments of one's spiritual status. When we are sure, however, that a yogi is good enough at practice, we allow him or her to listen to the talk given by one of our meditation teachers, expounding on how the insight knowledge advances up to the enlightenment of magga and phala. The purpose is to help a yogi to be able to decide his or her spiritual level by checking his or her own experience with the talk given. Moreover, this will offer him or her a chance to enjoy his or her achievement and give encouragement to work harder for further development. It is not for us to decide what level of enlightenment he or she has attained. So, it is simply a misunderstanding that we confirm that a yogi is Sotapanna by allowing him or her to listen to that talk.

Q58: Venerable Sir, it is, some say, unreasonable that a meditation teacher is unable to confirm that so and so yogi among his students becomes Sotāpanna. Is that true?

Yes, it may be unreasonable from their point of view, but it is very appropriate to Sāsana tradition that a meditation teacher is not able to confirm that so and so person among his yogis becomes Sotāpanna. The Buddha is the only one in this position to confirm someone's enlightenment such as sotāpanna, sakadāgāmi, anā-gami or arahat.

Even Venerable Sāriputra never did it that way. So we never do this way, either. This is the appropriate way in the Sāsana tradition.

Q59: Venerable Sir, how many people do you believe to be enlightened under your guidance?

I believe there are thousands of people who have reached, within a week, the insight knowledge distinguishing between mind and body from one's own experience by practicing strictly as instructed and arousing strong concentration. And also, there are thousands of those who experience mind and body interacting and constantly changing; i.e., cause and effect, and impermanence, suffering and egolessness of the phenomena. And also, there are thousands of

people who are believed to accomplish Magga, Phala enlightenment after they have developed mature insight knowledge by observing mind and body moment to moment.

Q60: Venerable Sir, what is a yogi expected to be aware of, when he or she is walking, noting “right foot, left foot,” or “lifting, pushing, and dropping?”

The sensation in the foot or body of a yogi is what he or she is to be aware of. In technical terms, vayo-dhatu, the air-element characterized by stiffness, pressure, motion or vibration; tejo-dhatu, the fire-element characterized by temperature: cold, warm or hot; pathavi-dhatu, the earth-element characterized by hardness, softness or smoothness. But, especially vayo-dhatu is prominent to observe most of the time.

From “An Interview with Mahasi Sayadaw” Prepared by Thamanay Kyaw Sayadaw, November 17, 2001 Translated by Hla Myint Kyaw, January 21, 2002

The Benefits of Walking Meditation

By Sayadaw U Silananda

At our meditation retreats, yogis practice mindfulness in four different postures. They practice mindfulness when walking, when standing, when sitting, and when lying down. They must sustain mindfulness at all times in whatever position they are in. The primary posture for mindfulness meditation is sitting with legs crossed, but, because the human body cannot tolerate this position for many hours without changing, we alternate periods of sitting meditation with periods of walking meditation. Since walking meditation is very important, I would like to discuss its nature, its significance, and the benefits derived from its practice.

The practice of mindfulness meditation can be compared to boiling water. If one wants to boil water, one puts the water in a kettle, puts the kettle on a stove, and then turns the heat on. But if the heat is turned off, even for an instant, the water will not boil, even though the heat is turned on again later. If one continues to turn the heat on and off again, the water will never boil. In the same way, if there are gaps between the moments of mindfulness, one cannot gain momentum, and so one cannot attain concentration. That is why yogis at our retreats are instructed to practice mindfulness all the time that they are awake, from the moment they wake up in the morning until they fall asleep at night. Consequently, walking meditation is integral to the continuous development of mindfulness.

Unfortunately, I have heard people criticize walking meditation, claiming that they cannot derive any benefits or good results from it. But it was the Buddha himself who first taught walking meditation. In the Great Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness, the Buddha taught walking meditation twotimes. In thesection called“Postures,” he said that a monk knows “I am walking when he is walking,” knows “I am standing when he is standing,” knows “I am sitting when he is sitting,” and knows “I am lying down when he is lying down.” In another section called “Clear Comprehension,” the Buddha said, “A monk applies clear comprehension in going forward and in going back.” Clear comprehension means the correct understanding of what one observes. To correctly understand what is observed, a yogi must gain concentration and, in order to gain concentration, he must apply mindfulness.

Therefore, when the Buddha said, “Monks, apply clear comprehension,” we must understand that not only clear comprehension must be applied, but also mindfulness and concentration. Thus, the Buddha was instructing meditators to apply mindfulness, concentration, and clear comprehension while walking, while “going forward and back.” Walking meditation is, thus, an important part of this process.

Although it is not recorded in this sutta that the Buddha gave detailed and specific instructions for walking meditation, we believe that he must have given such instructions at some time. Those instructions must have been learned by the Buddha's disciples and passed on through successive generations. In addition, teachers of ancient times must have formulated instructions based on their own practice. At the present time, we have a very detailed set of instructions on how to practice walking meditation.

Let us now talk specifically about the practice of walking meditation. If you are a complete beginner, the teacher may instruct you to be mindful of only one thing during walking meditation: to be mindful of the act of stepping while you make a note silently in the mind, "stepping, stepping, stepping," or "left, right, left, right." You may walk at a slower speed than normal during this practice.

After a few hours, or after a day or two of meditation, you may be instructed to be mindful of two occurrences: (i) stepping, and (ii) putting down the foot, while making the mental note "stepping, putting down." You will try to be mindful of two stages in the step: 'stepping, putting down; stepping, putting down.' Later, you may be instructed to be mindful of three stages: (i) lifting the foot; (ii) moving or pushing the foot forward; and (iii) putting the foot down. Still later, you would be instructed to be mindful of four stages in each step: (i) lifting the foot; (ii) moving it forward; (iii) putting it down; and (iv) touching or pressing the foot on the ground. You would be instructed to be completely mindful and to make a mental note of these four stages of the foot's movement: "lifting, moving forward, putting down, pressing the ground."

At first yogis may find it difficult to slow down, but as they are instructed to pay close attention to all of the movements involved and as they actually pay closer and closer attention, they will automatically slow down. They do not have to slow down deliberately but, as they pay closer attention, slowing down comes to them automatically. When driving on the freeway, one may be driving at sixty or seventy or even eighty miles per hour. Driving at that speed, one will not be able to read some of the signs on the road. If one wants to read those signs, it is necessary to slow down. Nobody has to say, "Slow down!" but the driver will automatically slow down in order to see the signs. In the same way, if yogis want to pay closer attention to the movements of lifting, moving forward, putting down, and pressing the ground, they will automatically slow down. Only when they slow down can they be truly mindful and fully aware of these movements.

Although yogis pay close attention and slow down, they may not see all of the movements and stages clearly. The stages may not yet be well-defined in the mind, and they may seem to constitute only one continuous movement. As concentration grows stronger, yogis will observe more and more clearly these different stages in one step; the four stages at least will be easier to distinguish. Yogis will know distinctly that the lifting movement is not mixed with the moving forward movement, and they will know that the moving forward movement is not mixed with

either the lifting movement or the putting down movement. They will understand all movements clearly and distinctly. Whatever they are mindful and aware of will be very clear in their minds.

As yogis carry on the practice, they will observe much more. When they lift their foot, they will experience the lightness of the foot. When they push the foot forward, they will notice the movement from one place to another. When they put the foot down, they will feel the heaviness of the foot, because the foot becomes heavier and heavier as it descends. When they put the foot on the ground, they will feel the touch of the heel of the foot on the ground. Therefore, along with observing lifting, moving forward, putting down, and pressing the ground, yogis will also perceive the lightness of the rising foot, the motion of the foot, the heaviness of the descending foot, and then the touching of the foot, which is the hardness or softness of the foot on the ground. When yogis perceive these processes, they are perceiving the four essential elements (dhatu). The four essential elements are: the element of earth, the element of water, the element of fire, and the element of air. By paying close attention to these four stages of walking meditation, the four elements in their true essence are perceived, not merely as concepts, but as actual processes, as ultimate realities.

Let us go into a little more detail about the characteristics of the elements in walking meditation. In the first movement, that is, the lifting of the foot, yogis perceive lightness, and when they perceive lightness, they virtually perceive the fire element. One aspect of the fire element is that of making things lighter and, as things become lighter, they rise. In the perception of the lightness in the upward movement of the foot, yogis perceive the essence of the fire element. But in the lifting of the foot there is also, besides lightness, movement. Movement is one aspect of the air element. But lightness, the fire element, is dominant, so we can say that in the stage of lifting the fire element is primary, and the air element is secondary. These two elements are perceived by yogis when they pay close attention to the lifting of the foot.

The next stage is moving the foot forward. In moving the foot forward, the dominant element is the air element, because motion is one of the primary characteristics of the air element. So, when they pay close attention to the moving forward of the foot in walking meditation, yogis are virtually perceiving the essence of the air element.

The next stage is the movement of putting the foot down. When yogis put their foot down, there is a kind of heaviness in the foot. Heaviness is a characteristic of the water element, as is trickling and oozing. When liquid is heavy, it oozes. So when yogis perceive the heaviness of the foot, they virtually perceive the water element.

In pressing the foot on the ground, yogis will perceive the hardness or softness of the foot on the ground. This pertains to the nature of the earth element. By paying close attention to the pressing of the foot against the ground, yogis virtually perceive the nature of the earth element.

Thus, we see that in just one step, yogis can perceive many processes. They can perceive the four elements and the nature of the four elements. Only those who practice can ever hope to see these things.

As yogis continue to practice walking meditation, they will come to realize that, with every movement, there is also the noting mind, the awareness of the movement. There is the lifting movement and also the mind that is aware of that lifting. In the next moment, there is the moving forward movement and also the mind that is aware of the movement. Moreover, yogis will realize that both the movement and the awareness arise and disappear in that moment. In the next moment, there is the putting down movement and so also the awareness of the movement, and both arise and disappear in that moment of putting the foot down on the ground. The same process occurs with the pressing of the foot: there is the pressing and the awareness of pressing. In this way, yogis understand that, along with the movement of the foot, there are also the moments of awareness. The moments of awareness are called, in Pali, *nama*, mind, and the movement of the foot is called *rupa*, matter. So yogis will perceive mind and matter rising and disappearing at every moment. At one moment, there is the lifting of the foot and the awareness of the lifting and, at the next moment, there is the movement forward and the awareness of that movement, and so on. These can be understood as a pair, mind and matter, which arise and disappear at every moment. Thus, yogis advance to the perception of the pairwise occurrence of mind and matter at every moment of observation; that is, if they pay close attention.

Another thing that yogis will discover is the role of intention in effecting each movement. They will realize that they lift their foot because they want to, move the foot forward because they want to, put it down because they want to, press the foot against the ground because they want to. That is, they realize that an intention precedes every movement. After the intention to lift, lifting occurs. They come to understand the conditionality of all of these occurrences — these movements never occur by themselves, without conditions. These movements are not created by any deity or any authority, and these movements never happen without a cause.

There is a cause or condition for every movement, and that condition is the intention preceding each movement. This is another discovery yogis make when they pay close attention.

When yogis understand the conditionality of all movements, and that these movements are not created by any authority or any god, then they will understand that they are created by intention. They will understand that intention is the condition for the movement to occur. Thus, the relationship of conditioning and conditioned, of cause and effect, is understood. On the basis of this understanding, yogis can remove doubt about *nama* and *rupa* by understanding that *nama* and *rupa* do not arise without conditions. With the clear understanding of the conditionality of things, and with the transcendence of doubt about *nama* and *rupa*, a yogi is said to reach the stage of a “lesser *sotapanna*.”

A sotapanna is a “stream-enterer,” a person who has reached the first stage of enlightenment. A “lesser sotapanna” is not a true stream-enterer but is said to be assured of rebirth in a happy realm of existence, such as in the realms of human beings and devas. That is, a lesser sotapanna cannot be reborn in one of the four woeful states, in one of the hells or animal realms. This state of lesser sotapanna can be reached just by practicing walking meditation, just by paying close attention to the movements involved in a step. This is the great benefit of practicing walking meditation. This stage is not easy to reach, but once yogis reach it, they can be assured that they will be reborn in a happy state, unless, of course, they fall from that stage.

When yogis comprehend mind and matter arising and disappearing at every moment, they will come to comprehend the impermanence of the processes of lifting the foot, and they will also comprehend the impermanence of the awareness of that lifting. The occurrence of disappearing after arising is a mark or characteristic by which we understand that something is impermanent. If we want to determine whether something is impermanent or permanent, we must try to see, through the power of meditation, whether or not that thing is subject to the process of coming into being and then disappearing. If our meditation is powerful enough to enable us to see the arising and disappearing of phenomena, then we can decide that the phenomena observed are impermanent. In this way, yogis observe that there is the lifting movement and awareness of that movement, and then that sequence disappears, giving way to the pushing forward movement and the awareness of pushing forward. These movements simply arise and disappear, arise and disappear, and this process yogis can comprehend by themselves — they do not have to accept this on trust from any external authority, nor do they have to believe in the report of another person.

When yogis comprehend that mind and matter arise and disappear, they understand that mind and matter are impermanent. When they see that they are impermanent, they next understand that they are unsatisfactory because they are always oppressed by constant arising and disappearing. After comprehending impermanence and the unsatisfactory nature of things, they observe that there can be no mastery over these things; that is, yogis realize that there is no self or soul within that can order them to be permanent. Things just arise and disappear according to natural law. By comprehending this, yogis comprehend the third characteristic of conditioned phenomena, the characteristic of anatta, the characteristic that things have no self. One of the meanings of anatta is no mastery — meaning that nothing, no entity, no soul, no power, has mastery over the nature of things. Thus, by this time, yogis have comprehended the three characteristics of all conditioned phenomena: impermanence, suffering, and the non-self nature of things — in Pali, anicca, dukkha, and anatta.

Yogis can comprehend these three characteristics by observing closely the mere lifting of the foot and the awareness of the lifting of the foot. By paying close attention to the movements, they see things arising and disappearing, and, consequently, they see for themselves the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and non-self nature of all conditioned phenomena.

Now let us examine in more detail the movements of walking meditation. Suppose one were to take a moving picture of the lifting of the foot. Suppose further that the lifting of the foot takes one second, and let us say that the camera can take thirty-six frames per second. After taking the picture, if we were to look at the separate frames, we would realize that, within what we thought was one lifting movement, there are actually thirty-six movements. The image in each frame is slightly different from the images in the other frames, though the difference will usually be so slight that we can barely notice it. But what if the camera could take one thousand frames per second? Then there would be one thousand movements in just one lifting movement, although the movements would be almost impossible to differentiate. If the camera could take one million frames per second — which may be impossible now, but someday may happen — then there would be one million movements in what we thought to be only one movement.

Our effort in walking meditation is to see our movements as closely as the camera sees them, frame by frame. We also want to observe the awareness and intention preceding each movement. We can also appreciate the power of the Buddha's wisdom and insight, by which he actually saw all of the movements. When we use the word "see" or "observe" to refer to our own situation, we mean that we see directly and also by inference; we may not be able to see directly all of the millions of movements as did the Buddha.

Before yogis begin practicing walking meditation, they may have thought that a step is just one movement. After meditation on that movement, they observe that there are at least four movements and, if they go deeper, they will understand that even one of these four movements consists of millions of tiny movements. They see *nama* and *rupa*, mind and matter, arising and disappearing, as impermanent. By our ordinary perception, we are not able to see the impermanence of things because impermanence is hidden by the illusion of continuity. We think that we see only one continuous movement but, if we look closely, we will see that the illusion of continuity can be broken. It can be broken by the direct observation of physical phenomena bit by bit, segment by segment, as they originate and disintegrate. The value of meditation lies in our ability to remove the cloak of continuity in order to discover the real nature of impermanence. Yogis can discover the nature of impermanence directly through their own effort.

After realizing that things are composed of segments, that they occur in bits, and after observing these segments one by one, yogis will realize that there is really nothing in this world to be attached to, nothing to crave for. If we see that something which we once thought beautiful has holes, that it is decaying and disintegrating, we will lose interest in it. For example, we may see a beautiful painting on a canvas. We think of the paint and canvas conceptually as a whole, solid thing. But if we were to put the painting under a powerful microscope, we would see that the picture is not solid — it has many holes and spaces. After seeing the picture as composed largely of spaces, we would lose interest in it and we would cease being attached to it. Modern physicists know this idea well. They have observed, with powerful instruments, that matter is just a vibration of particles and energy constantly changing — there is nothing substantial to it at

all. By the realization of this endless impermanence, yogis understand that there is really nothing to crave for, nothing to hold on to in the entire world of phenomena.

Now we can understand the reasons for practicing meditation. We practice meditation because we want to remove attachment and craving for objects. It is by comprehending the three characteristics of existence — impermanence, suffering, and the non-self nature of things — that we remove craving. We want to remove craving because we do not want to suffer. As long as there is craving and attachment, there will always be suffering. If we do not want to suffer, we must remove craving and attachment. We must comprehend that all things are just mind and matter arising and disappearing, that things are insubstantial. Once we realize this, we will be able to remove attachment to things. As long as we do not realize this, however much we read books or attend talks or talk about removing attachment, we will not be able to get rid of attachment. It is necessary to have the direct experience that all conditioned things are marked by the three characteristics.

Hence, we must pay close attention when we are walking, just as we do when we are sitting or lying down. I am not trying to say that walking meditation alone can give us ultimate realization and the ability to remove attachment entirely, but it is, nevertheless, as valid a practice as sitting meditation or any other kind of vipassana (insight) meditation. Walking meditation is conducive to spiritual development. It is as powerful as mindfulness of breathing or mindfulness of the rising and falling of the abdomen. It is an efficient tool to help us remove mental defilements. Walking meditation can help us gain insight into the nature of things, and we should practice it as diligently as we practice sitting meditation or any other kind of meditation. By the practice of vipassana meditation in all postures, including the walking posture, may you and all yogis be able to attain total purification in this very life!

Guidance for Yogis at Interview

Venerable Sayadawgyi U Panditabhivamsa

Despite instructions given on how to meditate, there are yogis (meditators or retreatants) who are unable to practice properly and to report back on their experiences at interview with the teacher. Some can practice well but cannot describe properly how they have meditated and what they have experienced. This talk is intended to help such yogis report back properly on how they have meditated, on what they have observed and experienced in the course of their meditative practice or exercise.

As to the mode of meditation, the late venerable

Mahasi Sayadaw's recorded introduction talk (for new yogis) gives the essential instructions, beginning with noticing or observing the primary object of attention in the mindfulness meditation (Satipatthana), namely, the rising and falling of the abdomen.

In terms of scriptural explanation, we are made up of psycho-physical phenomena, which are arising and passing away all the time. A yogi is expected to experience them at the six sense-doors through the mindfulness. When a sight is seen, for instance, the eye and the sight are physical phenomena, while the resultant consciousness of seeing is a mental phenomenon. Similarly, with the experiencing with sound, smell, taste, touch and mental objects, and several movements of the body such as folding and stretching of the arms, turning or leaning (inclining) of the body and the taking of steps in walking, Mahasi Sayadaw has instructed that all kinds of happenings should be closely noticed the moment they become obvious to us, with no exception of even trifling incidents.

Although Mahasi Sayadaw's instructions are given in very clear and simple language, yogis encounter some difficulties when they come to follow them in actual practice. To help yogis to overcome such difficulties, meditation teachers of this Centre explain and demonstrate to beginners how to notice or observe the primary objects of attention; i.e., rising falling of the abdomen, and secondary objects of attention like thoughts or reflections, feelings or sensation, and external stimuli like sights and sound or other acts of behavior the moment they take place. Yet, some beginners find it difficult to put them into practice properly and to report their experiences clearly to the teachers. To obviate such difficulties, the meditation teachers have devised maxims or aphorisms that are easy to remember and helpful to the better understanding. They are as follows:

The First Aphorism

“Say how you observe the primary object And what sensation you experience of it.”

The primary object of attention, to which the mind should be tethered as it were, is the rising and falling of the abdomen as the yogi breathes during sitting practice. In the absence of any other noticeable object of attention, the yogi should keep on watching or observing it. The mind should also revert to it when a secondary object of attention has been noticed and fallen away.

The yogi is expected to report whether he is able to observe the movement of the rising abdomen from the beginning to the end. As he inhales, the abdomen begins to rise somewhat rapidly and goes on rising as he continues to inhale. When the yogi ceases to inhale, the rising movement comes to an end.

When observing the rising movement of the abdomen, the entire movement should be experienced and known. The scripture texts say: “sabba-kāya patisamvedii” ---- that means all the physical phenomena involved in the entire process of the rising abdomen should be noticed as continuously as possible (i.e., without a break).

The observing or noticing mind should be focused on the physical process of the rising abdomen through all the successive stages from the beginning to the end. The beginner would not, of course, be able to notice all the stages of the movement but he should strive to be able to do so. He is urged to strive, thus, to ensure serious and sufficient concentration of the mind on the object.

The yogi should be able to report if he is able to notice the object with enough concentrative attention, if there is enough concurrence between the object and the noticing mind, if he is able to notice the movement (of the abdomen) through its successive phases. If he is able to notice the object properly, then what does he “see,” that is, what does he experience? Not that he should concern himself with other (irrelevant) objects of attention, but that he should be able to report (accurately) on the object he observes and what (exactly) he experiences of the rising movement.

There are two factors involved in this kind of meditative practice. The first is the object of attention. The second is the awareness of it. Only on the basis of these two factors, will the yogi be able to say what he has “seen” or experienced.

Here, with regard to the primary object, the yogi is expected to report clearly if his awareness is concurrent or consistent with the meditative object (the rising abdomen) along with its progressive movement. If so, what does he “see” (become aware of)? Is it the abdomen itself, the manner or mode of its arising, or the tension and the movement involved in the rising of the abdomen.

Three Aspects of a Physical Object

When a yogi observes a physical object like the rising abdomen, he is likely to see or experience one of three aspects of it. They are classified into:

1. Form or shape of the meditative object (santhāna)

2. Manner or mode of it (ākāra)
3. Essential characteristic or quality of it (sabhāva)

When a yogi observes the rising abdomen, its form or shape may become obvious to him. Or he may see its manner or mode, in which the abdomen rises up from the state of being flat to gradual inflation until it stops to deflate. He is likely to see these two aspects before he “sees” the physical characteristic or quality of the object.

Actually, “seeing” the form and manner is not vipassanic insight. The yogi must “see” the physical characteristics or qualities of the object beyond the form and manner of it, namely, tension and motion or movement manifested during the rising of the abdomen. If the yogi observes intently, he will “see” these physical characteristics or qualities. He is expected to relate it at interview. Of course, he must say so as he actually sees it, not as he thinks he sees it thus. The report must be based on his actual own experience.

The yogi is similarly expected to observe, “see” the abdomen falling progressively, and report his experience.

So also when he is doing the walking (cankama) meditation. As he lifts his foot, is he able to observe concurrently the lifting movement progressively from the beginning to the end of it? If he is so able, what does he “see?” Does he “see” the foot or the manner or mode of its lifting, or does he feel the foot becoming light and rising upward, or the foot becoming tense and being pushed?

He is expected to report on any of these three aspects from his own experience. When he thrusts his foot forward (in the course of his step-taking), is his mind observing or noticing concurrently with the thrusting movement of the foot? Here also, what does he “see?” Does he “see” the foot or the manner or mode of its thrusting, or some physical characteristics or qualities of it, like the foot being pushed from behind and pulled from before?

Similarly, when he drops the foot, is he able to observe or notice the dropping movement progressively from the beginning to the end until it touches the floor or the ground? If he is, what does he come to know? Does he know the foot, or the manner of its dropping, or some physical characteristics or qualities of it like the foot becoming light and soft?

Similarly, he should observe or notice other meditative objects such as folding and stretching of the limbs, turning or inclining (leaning) of the body, assuming the sitting posture or the standing posture. With regard to these phenomena also, is the yogi able to observe or notice the phenomena concurrently with its appearance from the beginning to the end of its manifestation? It is important for the yogi to confine his reporting to the three aspects of the meditative object, as mentioned above, and not to wander off into reporting on stray and random occurrences.

Three Kinds Of Characteristic

It is good for a yogi to understand what is meant by the following three kinds of characteristic of psychophysical phenomena:

1. sabhāva lakkhana (Individual Characteristic)
2. sankhata lakkhana (Conditional Characteristic)
3. sāmāñña lakkhana (Common Characteristic)

1. Sabhāva Lakkhana

Sabhāva Lakkhana means the individual characteristic of mental or physical phenomena. Regarding physical phenomena of 28 kinds, hardness or softness, for instance, belongs to only the earth element (pathavī dhātu) and not to any other elements. Heat or cold is the particular characteristic of the fire element (tejo dhātu). Cohesion and fluidity is that of water element (Apo dhātu) and the tension, pressure or motion is that of wind element (vayo dhātu), and so on.

Regarding mental phenomena, the particular characteristic of mind is to be conscious of sense-objects. Out of the 52 mental components, the characteristic of Phassa (contact) is to bring the mind into contact with sense-objects, Vedana (feeling) is to feel the sense-objects, and so on.

2. Sankhata Lakkhana

Each and every individual characteristic of all psycho-physical phenomena has three phases, arising, lasting and disappearing, which are respectively termed in Pali uppāda, thiti and bhanga. Uppāda means arising of a phenomenon. Thiti is a duration or continuance or proceeding towards dissolution. Bhanga is breaking up or dissolution. These three phases are called Sankhata lakkhana (conditional characteristics).

3. Sāmāñña Lakkhana

The third characteristic of all psycho-physical phenomena is called sāmāñña lakkhana (common characteristic) such as the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and impersonality. In Pali, these three characteristics are termed annica lakkhana (characteristic of impermanence), dukkha lakkhana (characteristic of ill, suffering or unsatisfactoriness) and anatta lakkhana (characteristic of egolessness or impersonality). These characteristics are common to all physical and mental phenomena that are conditioned. They are, therefore, designated as sāmāñña lakkhana (common characteristics).

Of these three characteristics, our meditative practice is directed towards realization of the common characteristic of the phenomena. How do we make our meditative effort to realize the characteristic of the phenomena? We should observe or notice them the moment they arise. Only then, will we realize their characteristics, but not otherwise.

As the yogi inhales, the abdomen rises. Before inhalation, there was no rising of the abdomen. The yogi's mind should go on observing the rising movement of the abdomen from its beginning to its end. Only then would the yogi be able to "see" the real nature of this movement. What is its real nature (characteristic or quality)? With the in-breath, the wind goes in. And what is wind? It is the wind element with the characteristic of tension, pressure or motion. It is this real nature of the wind element that the yogi comes to "see." He will "see" it only when he observes it the moment it rises and continues until it passes away. Otherwise, he won't even see its form or shape or mode or manner, not to speak of its true characteristic; far less he will "see" it. Continuing to pay concentrated and concurrent attention to the meditative object, that is, the rising and falling of his abdomen, he will progressively strengthen his concentrative power.

As his concentration strengthens, he will no longer "see" the form or shape of his abdomen, or the mode or manner of its rising or falling. His insight will go beyond them by seeing the individual characteristics, such as tension, pressure and movement involved in the movement of the abdomen.

As he breathes out, he will feel the tension subsiding and the falling movement of the abdomen coming to an end as he comes to the end of his exhalation. He also has similar experiences with the movements involved in walking meditation including the lifting of the foot, pushing it forward, dropping and placing it on the floor or the ground.

The meditation teacher will not tell the yogi what he is going to "see" but will instruct him how to observe or notice. It is the same as in the doing of arithmetical sum. The teacher will not give the answer but will teach the working out of the sum.

The same instructions apply in the case of different kinds of bodily movement, sensations and thoughts. All these should be noticed the moment they arise in order to ensure that their true nature may be "seen." We have dealt with the first aphorism. True characteristics of phenomena will be revealed only when they are observed the moment they arise. The last two characteristics will manifest themselves as a matter of course, once the first one has been grasped by concentrated and concurrent awareness of the meditative object.

The Second Aphorism

The second aphorism says, "Only when the individual characteristics of phenomena are "seen," will the conditional characteristics of phenomena become manifest," meaning the phenomena will be seen in three sequences, arising, lasting and passing away.

The Third & Fourth Aphorism

So, the third aphorism is: "only when sankhata (conditional characteristic) becomes apparent,

will *sāmañña* (common characteristic) be ‘seen’. “ This will be followed by the fourth aphorism which says “when *sāmañña* (common characteristic) is “seen,” *vipassana-ñāna* (insight knowledge) emerged.”

After its emergence, *vipassana* insight will gradually mature and ripen and form the preliminary path knowledge called *pubbabhāga-agganana* which, in turn, will be succeeded by the noble, full-fledged path knowledge (*ariyamagganana*), which will enable the yogi to realize *Nibbāna* with the cessation of the psycho-physical phenomena, which represent suffering.

It should be repeated that, in reporting, the yogi should relate what he has actually “seen,” not what he thinks he has “seen.” Only what he has “seen” is his own insight, not what he thinks he has, which at best is borrowed (second-hand) knowledge. This is not in conformity with the real nature or character of the phenomenon which he has observed or noticed.

The Fifth Aphorism

The next aphorism is: “All thoughts observed and known should be related.”

While the yogi is sitting in meditation, observing or noticing the primary object of attention, namely, the rising and falling movement of the abdomen, various thoughts may occur to him -- this being in the very nature of mind which is not subject to control. The mind has a tendency to wander, leaving the primary object and go on to all kinds of ideas, some wholesome, others not. What should the yogi do then, just notice whatever comes into the mind? Are you able to do so or not? You should be. If you do, does the thinking go on, or is it arrested, or does it vanish all together? Or does your attention revert to the regular (primary) object of attention? You are expected to report all that takes place in these respects.

For the novice in meditation, feelings or sensations do not arise yet while he is focusing his attention on the primary object. But thoughts are likely to occur. Even then, the novice is not able to notice all thoughts that arise. In order to minimize such (stray) thoughts, the beginning yogi should focus his attention as closely as possible on the primary object.

The Sixth Aphorism

However, when the novice has sat in meditation for 5, 10, or 15 minutes, certain unpleasant sensations in the body are apt to arise with corresponding effects on the mind. When feelings or sensations arise, they should be noticed. When reporting, it is better to describe them in plain everyday language as “itching,” “aching,” “numbing” or “tingling” and so on, rather than in scriptural language as just “*vedanā*” (feeling). These feelings, which arise spontaneously, should be noticed in the same manner as above, whether they are intensifying, weakening, stabilizing or disappearing.

So the aphorism is: “All feelings (sensations) should be observed, known and related at interviews.”

The Last Aphorism

Next, what other phenomena are there to be noticed and known? They are sights seen, sounds heard, odors smelled, food tasted; and then mental objects such as liking, transgressing, sloth and torpor, distractedness, anxiety, doubt, remembrance, clear comprehension, attention, satisfaction, delight, tranquility, serenity or calm, ease of meditation and so on.

The Buddha has collectively termed them as dhammarammana (mind-object). Suppose a liking arises and is noticed, then what happens? Liking is followed by craving. The yogi is expected to report this. Take another example. The yogi is experiencing sloth and torpor and feebleness of mind. When he notices these states of mind, distractedness arises. What happens when these are observed or noticed in turn? Whenever these mind-objects arise, they should be observed.

In summary, the following are the four objects of attention in satipatthana vipassana bhavana (insight meditation through mindfulness):

- 1) Acts of bodily behavior;
- 2) Feelings or sensations;
- 3) Acts of consciousness; and
- 4) Mind-objects.

Three events occur in such meditation in successive order:

- a) Arising of the phenomenon
- b) Observing or noticing of the phenomenon that arises
- c) What the yogi comes to know and “see.”

The last aphorism requires all that happens thus to be understood. For every meditative object (belonging to the four categories listed above), it is important to understand the three successive events mentioned above. The yogi’s main concerns are the events (b) and (c) above, i.e., to observe or notice the phenomenon that occurs to him and to report it. The aphorism for this is:

“What arises, what is observed and what comes to be known and “seen,” should be understood completely and related at interview.”

Glossary

Action = kammanta

Right action = sammā-kammanta, it consists of refraining from killing, stealing and sexual misconduct.

Wrong action = micchā-kammanta, it consists of killing, stealing and sexual misconduct.

Activities, volitional = sankhāras. This word is also translated as mental formations. They consist of volition or will and other mental concomitants (cetasikas).

Adverting = āvajjana. In a thought process, it is the moment when mind, or rather, consciousness turns towards the object presented through one of the sense-doors, viz., eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, or when consciousness becomes conscious of the object.

Aggregate = khandha. Khandhas are so called because they have the division into past, present, future, internal, external, etc. Perception, for example, though only one is called khandha or aggregate because there can be past perception, present perception, and so on.

- of grasping or of clinging = upādānakkhandha, aggregates that are objects of grasping or clinging (upādānas).

Air-element, see element.

Analysis = vavatthāna. Discerning things well defined, seeing which is which. See next.

- of four elements = catudhātu-vavatthāna. Seeing the four elements clearly and well defined, seeing 'This is earth-element', 'This is water-element' and so on. See element also.

Analytical knowledge of mind and matter = nāmarūpa-paricchedañāna. An insight knowledge which sees mind and matter clearly and well defined as, for example, "This is mind," "This is matter."

Apperception= javana. The meaning of this Pāli word is "running, or force, or speed." In Abhidhamma, it is the name given to certain types of consciousness which experience the object forcefully or thoroughly. It is also translated as "impulsion."

Attainment= samāpatti. This means entering into and remaining in a certain state of higher consciousness. There are three kinds of samapatti:

1. Jhāna-samāpatti, entering into and remaining in the state of jhāna.
2. Phala-samāpatti, entering into and remaining in the state of Fruition consciousness.

3. Nirodha-samāpatti, entering into and remaining in the state of cessation of mental activities.

Awareness = viññāna. Pure awareness of the object is the characteristic of consciousness (citta or viññāna).

Becoming = bhava. It is also translated as existence.

Birth = jāti. Arising of mind and/or matter; so, it does not necessarily mean to be born as a child only.

Body = kāya.

Contemplation of the body = kāyānupassanā. See contemplation.

Bourn = gati. Existence or realms beings “go to.”

Bad bourn = duggati, realms of woe, such as hell and animal kingdom.

Good bourn = sugati, realms of happiness, such as human and deva worlds.

Brahma = higher celestial beings.

Calm = samatha, also translated as “tranquility.” Samatha is synonymous with samadhi (concentration).

Characteristic = lakkhana. A sign or a mark by which a certain thing is identified.

Clear comprehension = sampajañña.

Compassion = karunā.

Compendium of Philosophy = name of the English translation of an ancient Abhidhamma treatise called “Abhidhammatthasangaha.” It itself is often referred to as Compendium of Philosophy in the present book.

Concentration = samādhi. Samādhi is defined as that mental state (cetasika) which places consciousness and its concomitants undistracted and unscattered on a single object. Samadhi is one of the five mental faculties functioning during meditation.

Concept = Paññatti. Paññatti is explained as having no individual essence, so it is a non-reality .

Concomitants of mind = cetasikas. Cetasikas are those mental states or mental factors which arise and perish together with consciousness (citta).

Condition = paccaya.

Confidence, faith = saddhā. See also faculty.

Consciousness = viññāna or citta, which is defined as the pure awareness of the object.
Consciousness (citta) and concomitants of mind (cetasikas) constitute what we call mind.

Constituent (of Path)= (magg-)anga. There are eight of them, and they are as a group what is popularly known as the Noble Eightfold Path.

Contemplation = anupassanā.

- of body = kāyānupassanā.
- of feelings = vedanānupassanā.
- of mind = cittānupassanā.
- of dhamma objects = dhammānupassanā.

continuity = santati.

craving = tanhā.

Death, dying = marana. Disappearing of mind and matter.

Deed = kamma. See kamma. Bad deed = akusala kamma. Good deed = kusala kamma.

Defilements = kilesas. Mental impurities such as attachment, ill will and delusion.

Dependent Origination = Paticca-samuppāda. The teaching (or law) of conditionality. This word is also translated as Conditioned Genesis.

Desire (will) = chanda. Chanda is mere will to do. It can be associated with kusala or akusala.

Determining consciousness = votthabbana citta. It is the type of consciousness which determines whether the object presented to the mind and investigated by the previous moment of investigation is desirable or undesirable.

Devas = celestial beings. It can mean both lower celestial beings and higher celestial beings called “brahmas.”

Deva-sight = dibba-cakkhu. It is one of the supernormal knowledges; by it, one can see things very minute, subtle, far away, hidden and so on. The ability to see beings dying from one existence and being reborn in another is a variety of this knowledge.

Deva-hearing or deva-ear = dibba-sota. One of the supernormal knowledges by which one can hear sounds very minute, subtle, hidden, far away, and so on.

Deva-world = devaloka. The realm of celestial beings.

Divine states = brahma-vihāras, way of living of brahmas. They are lovingkindness (metta), compassion (karunā), sympathetic joy (muditā) and equanimity (upekkhā).

Door (sense-door) = dvara. There are six sense-doors according to Buddhism: viz., eye-door, ear-, nose-, tongue-, body-and mind-door. These are the doors through which objects come into contact with mind.

Effort = vāyāma. See also faculty. Right effort = sammā-vāyāma.

Ego (self) = atta.

Element = dhātu. Mental as well as physical properties are called “dhatus.” There are four great elements of matter, viz.:

1. Earth-element = pathavī-dhātu, solidity of things.
2. Water-element = āpo-dhātu, fluidity or cohesiveness.
3. Fire-element = tejo-dhātu, heat or cold, temperature.
4. Air-element = vāyo-dhātu, distendedness.

Equanimity = upekkhā. Upekkhā also means indifference or neutral feeling.

Establishment of mindfulness = satipatthāna. It is also translated as “foundations of mindfulness.”

Factors of Enlightenment = sambojjhanga or bojjhanga. There are seven of them, viz.:

1. Mindfulness = sati.
2. Investigation of dhammas = dhamma-vicaya. It is in reality understanding or wisdom.
3. Effort = viriya.
4. Joy or rapture = piti.
5. Tranquility = passaddhi.
6. Concentration = samadhi.

7. Equanimity = upekkha.

Faculty = indriya. There are 22 of them taught in Ahhidhamma. The five mental faculties important in the practice of meditation are confidence, effort, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom.

Faith (confidence) = saddhā.

Feeling = vedanā. Form (matter) = rūpa.

Formless = arūpa. The word means “non-matter” which, according to Buddhism, comprises consciousness (citta), mental factors (cetasikas), and Nibbāna. In most cases, however, it means consciousness and mental factors only. Arūpa is synonymous with “nāma.”

Foul thing = asubha, such as a bloated corpse.

Fruit(ion) = phala. It is the resultant of magga or Path consciousness and, at the time of enlightenment, it immediately follows the Path consciousness and arises for two or three times. In phala-samāpatti, it arises countless times.

Function, property as = kicca. Action done by things of reality. The function of air-element, for instance, is moving.

Going for Refuge= sarana-gamana, taking someone or something as a refuge, as a guide. Only those who take refuge in the Triple Gem are called upāsakas or upāsikas, followers of the Buddha or Buddhists.

Grasping = upādāna. It is the name of attachment and wrong view.

Happiness = sukha.

Happy living in this very life = ditthadhamma-sukhavihāra.

Higher knowledge (superknowledge) = abhiñña. Hindrances = nīvarana. There are five of them,

viz.:

1. Sense-desire = kāmacchanda.
2. Ill will = byāpāda.
3. Sloth and torpor = thina-middha.

4. Restlessness and remorse = uddhacca-kukkucca.

5. Doubt = vicikicchā.

In Abhidhamma, ignorance (delusion) also is described as hindrance.

Impermanence = anicca.

Inferential insight = anumāna-vipassanā.

Initial application = vitakka.

Insight = vipassana. The real meaning of the word “vipassana” is “seeing in various ways.” i.e., seeing mental and physical phenomena as impermanent, suffering (or unsatisfactory), and not-self (or insubstantial).

Intimation = viññatti. There are two kinds of intimation, viz.:

1. Bodily intimation = kaya-viññatti. gestures. etc.
2. Verbal intimation = vaci-viññatti, mode of speech.

Investigating consciousness = santīrana citta. It is the type of consciousness which investigates the object presented to mind and accepted by the previous moment, whether it is desirable or undesirable.

Investigating knowledge = sammasana-ñāna, one of the stages of vipassana knowledge.

Investigation of dhammas = dhamma-vicaya.

See Factors of Enlightenment.

Kamma = volition. Technically, kamma is volition, a mental factor. Since it is always with this volition that beings do good or bad deeds, deeds themselves are often referred to as kamma.

Knowledge = ñāna.

-analytical of mind and matter = nāmarūpa-pariccheda-ñāna.

-of desire for deliverance = muñcitukamyatā-ñāna.

-of (by) discerning conditionality = paccaya-pariggaha-ñāna.

-of dissolution = bhanga-ñāna.

-of indifference to formations = sankhārupekkhā-ñāna.

-of investigation = sammasana-ñāna.

-of re-reflection (re-observation) = patisankhā-ñāna.

-of repulsion (disgust) = nibbidā-ñāna.

-of rise and fall (rising and passing away) = udayabbaya-ñāna.

-of the fearful = bhaya-ñāna.

-of tribulation = ādīnava-ñāna.

Law = dhamma.

Life-continuum = bhavanga. It is the inactive moments of consciousness.

Livelihood = ājīva.

Right livelihood = sammā-ājīva.

Wrong livelihood = micchā-ājīva.

Lovingkindness = mettā.

Lower states = apāya, literally, states of woe or suffering.

Manifestation (mode of appearance) = paccupatthāna.

Matter (material, physical, form) = rūpa.

Means of accomplishment = iddhipāda.

Meditator = yogi.

Member of enlightenment = bodhipakkhiya- dhamma.

Mental quality (mind, psychological) = nāma.

Mind = mana, citta or nāma. "Mind" is often used to mean citta and cetasikas together.

Mind and matter = nama-rūpa.

Mindfulness = sati.

-of death = maranassati.

Mode of appearance = see manifestation.

Moral habit = sīla.

Nāma = literally that which inclines towards the object or that which makes others incline towards it. It consists of consciousness (citta), mental factors (cetasikas), and Nibbāna. But, in most cases, nama is used to mean citta and cetasikas only as, for example, in the word “nāma-rūpa.”

Neutral feeling = adukkha-m-asukhā vedana.

Never-returner (non-returner) = anāgāmī.

Noble one = ariya.

Noble Eightfold Path = Ariyo Atthangiko Maggo.

Non-returner = anāgāmī. Notion = saññā.

Notion of permanence = nicca-saññā.

Notion of loathsomeness of food = ahare patikUla-saññā. Developing the notion that food is loathsome by reflecting in various ways, so that one does not get attached to food.

Not-self = anatta.

Object = ārammana.

Object-latent = ārammanānusaya. Old age = jarā.

Once-returner = sakadāgāmī.

Order (of noble monks) = samgha. Origin (origination, cause) = samudaya.

Path = magga. The name given to the group of eight factors of Path, such as Right View, etc. Consciousness which they accompany is called Path Consciousness.

Path of Purity (Purification) = Visuddhimagga. Perception = saññā.

Permanence (-ent) = nicca.

Pleasant (pleasurable, happy) = sukha. Power = bala.

Practical (personal) insight = paccakkha-vipassanā.

Process (thought-process) = vīthi.

Property = rasa. It has two varieties, viz., as function and as achievement.

Proximate cause (immediate occasion) = padatthāna.

Purity = visuddhi.

Quietude (tranquility) = passaddhi, one of the factors of enlightenment.

Rapture = piti. "Piti" is translated differently by different authors, as joy, happiness, rapture, zest, and pleasurable interest.

Reality = paramattha.

Reason = vīmamsā.

Rebirth = patisandhi. It is also translated as relinking.

-consciousness = patisandhi-citta.

Receiving(recipient)consciousness=sampaticchana citta. It is the type of consciousness which receives the object presented to the mind.

Recollection = anussati. Refuge = sarana.

Retentive (registering) consciousness = tadārammana citta. This consciousness always arises twice or not at all. It follows the moments of apperception (javana). Round of rebirths = samsāra. Self (ego) = atta.

Sense-objects = kāma.

Silent Buddha= Pacceka Buddha. 'Pacceka' literally means separate. They are not Supreme Buddhas, nor are they ordinary arahants. They are lower than the Supreme Buddhas, but higher than the arahants. They appear in the world when there are no Supreme Buddhas or no teachings of Supreme Buddhas are available.

Specification (analysis) = vavatthāna. Speech = vācā.

Right speech = sammā-vācā. wrong speech = micchā-vācā. Stream-winner = sotāpanna. Stream-winning = sotāpatti.

Subject of meditation = kammattāna. It also means the practice of meditation.

Subsequent (thought-) process = anuvattaka vīthi.

Suffering (ill, misery, pain) = dukkha. Supreme Buddha = Sammāsambuddha. Supreme effort = sammappadhāna.

Sympathy (sympathetic joy) = muditā. Theory of the self = attavāda.

Thought = citta, sankappa.

Right thought = sammā-sankappa. wrong thought = micchā-sankappa. Thought moment = cittakkhana.

Three Gems = Tiratana. Tranquility = passaddhi.

Transcending doubts = kankhāvitarana.

Unpleasant = dukkha.

Unwholesome = akusala. 'Akusala' is also translated as immoral, unprofitable and unskillful.

View (wrong view) = ditthi.

Volitional activities = sankhāras.

Wholesome = kusala. It is also translated as moral, profitable and skillful. Will (desire) = chanda.

Wisdom = paññā.

Wrong = micchā.

Yogi = meditator.

Sharing Merits

May all beings share this merit Which we have thus acquired

For the acquisition of all kinds of happiness

May beings inhabiting space and earth, Devas and nāgas of mighty power Share this merit of ours

May they long protect the teachings!