

The Tree of Wisdom

The River of No Return

The practice and development on insight meditation

Sujiva

THE TREE OF WISDOM

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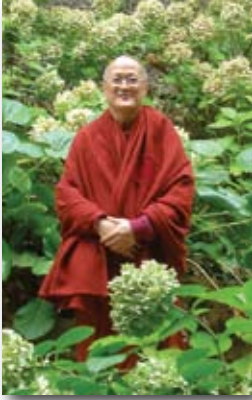
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VENERABLE SUJIVA

Venerable Sujiva is a well-known Buddhist Theravadin monk who has devoted his early years to the teaching of *vipassana* meditation in Malaysia. He is also well-respected by his students for his compassion, skilful guidance and deep understanding of the Buddha's teaching. The Venerable has conducted countless *vipassana* retreats at the Santisukharama hermitage in Kota Tinggi, Johor, Malaysia since 1982.

Another milestone in the development of his teaching of *vipassana* meditation occurred in 1996 when he began conducting retreats abroad, particularly in Australia. Since then he has held numerous retreats in Hong Kong, New Zealand, Republic of Czech, Republic of Slovakia, Sweden, Italy and the United States. He has also conducted meditation workshops and discussions during a brief stay in Switzerland in 1999. An *Abhidhamma* course was also held that year in the United States and Hong Kong.

His sharp discerning skills at times seemingly unconventional from the mainstream techniques, makes him a contemporary meditation master much sought after.

The Venerable donned the robes shortly after graduating from the University of Malaya with an honour degree in Agricultural Science in 1975. During his monastic training, he practiced under several distinguished meditation masters, notably Ovadacariya Sayadaw U Pandita of Burma.

He has authored a number of books on *Vipassana* Meditation and Buddhist poetry.

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PREFACE 1



As with the earlier book – “The Essentials of Insight Meditation”, this book too is a compilation of notes taken from my personal practice and talks given at various retreats. At best, it is a personal research into a profound subject and so is not to be taken as a scholastic work or to be a reference for spiritual realisations. Other than those from textual sources, some of which have been indicated, one will also find ideas that are my own postulations and conclusions. So, the reader will have to be wary and exercise his own discretions and judgements. However, I also do not believe that the practice which I describe here have strayed too far off from the Burmese system of insight meditation that I had been trained in.

Meditation as I see it, is a practice that evolves with the situations it finds itself in – **like a growing tree or a flowing river**, with many unexpected twists and turns. And it has, since the last book which was published and translated into several languages. It has been 10 years hence that I was separated from the conservative and classical oriental form and exposed to the open, pluralistic occidental ideas, the language and presentation of the universal truths have taken a different form. Besides, by now, I have encountered and discovered many new ways of looking at and many new methods of dealing with the situations.

My main aim here, besides putting on record my own failing memory of the many gems I have encountered while practicing the Dhamma, is also to offer useful tips and methods to my friends, the number which

has grown considerably, especially in Europe, as well as others who are sincerely interested in insight meditation. I hope that they may benefit from the tips and methods and progress to live with less suffering and more peace.

The book is divided into three parts:

1. The classical presentation by way of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness
2. A functional presentation as to why we do what we do
3. Miscellaneous helpful topics

To add interest, I have included photographs which were taken before and while the book was being written. These are images that passed through my mind that may have influenced to some degree the final outcome.

Finally, I must acknowledge all those who have helped to make this book possible. Ms Leong Poh Chwee for helping to type out the book and its various drafts. Datuk Dr Victor Wee and Lee Lee Kim for editorial input, Tan Siang Chye for the art work, Steve Christopher for the helping to type the first draft, Aaron Lee for typesetting and the various generous donors, the many yogis who had served as guinea pigs to my new techniques, and also others who had helped in other ways.

Sujiva

Pian Dei Ciliegi

Italy

2009

PREFACE 2



Regarding the title of the book:

The Tree of Wisdom

The River of No Return

- The practice and development of insight meditation

The Tree of Wisdom

We planted many trees at the hermitage in Kota Tinggi, Malaysia. I counted over 200 species. They are now the pride of the place, not to mention giving the wonderful and refreshing ambience to those in search of spiritual peace. When I told this to my Swiss friend Beat, a botanist, he nearly dropped off from his chair. That is because there are only over 30 species in the whole of Switzerland. Now I am actively promoting the planting of trees in Europe. This time it is with the conifers in mind. However, the interest does not seem to be just based on environmentalism alone or for that matter, aesthetics. As a cleric once wrote, “The man who plants trees goes to heaven.” He repopulated large parts of Switzerland with larches. There is obviously also something spiritual about it. I think it has something to do with symbolism and recognition of Nature.

I was asked once, which flower I liked best. I answered, “The lotus, and the one with the purest white.” As far as temperate ones are concerned, I chose the Columbine (*Aquilegia sp*) at that time because of its three dimensional structure not common among flowers. I had yet to find one of spiritual significance.

As for a tree, the Maha Bodhi. What else? Its botanical name is *Ficus religiosa*, a member of the group of stranggling fig trees that are not uncommon in the tropics. But the Bodhi tree is not just any one of those from the species because if it is at all to be considered a member of the spiritual family, it must come from the original one which the Buddha sat under on that full moon night of Wesak and attained Full Enlightenment. And this was the tree that the Buddha himself chose to represent Himself. There are some well known Bodhi trees at present. One is found at the actual site of Enlightenment, although it was brought back and replanted, after the original one died. Another is at Sarawasti, the Ananda Bodhi planted at the Jeta grove, as well as the one in Sri Lanka brought over by Mahinda and Sanghamitta to Sri Lanka. There are many such trees planted in the Buddhist World. For us, beholding the tree inspires great faith. Meditating under it nurtures deep tranquility.

And what of the trees in temperate climate? Maybe it is the yew, some of which are very old and gnarled, giving one a sense of awe to the extent of beholding something ghastly. In Italy, it would have to be the olive, the branch of which is now accepted as the symbol of peace, although I think it was Picasso that first made it so.

In a book on trees by Mike Buffin, he writes:

“Trees are one of the oldest living forms of plant life. They also live longer than any other organism on the planet. In California, USA, there are bristlecone pines that are known to be over 4,500 years old and in UK there are yew trees of similar age.”

Trees are a good symbol of Life. They grow and they also give life. They provide food, shelter, medicine, building materials, and countless other things. Just think of the bamboo and the coconut tree! But here we speak of trees as a spiritual symbol. So there is the tree of craving with its powerful tentacles reaching to the ends of the Earth. Fortunately, there is also the Tree of Wisdom, which is the Bodhi Tree. The Tree of Wisdom grows and feeds on fertile soil of good kamma. It establishes deep roots of virtue. It has strong trunk of concentration from which spreads out the far and extensive branches of wisdom. Finally, when fully matured, it bears the Fruits of Liberation. This is that one tree that one must cultivate – The Inner Bodhi Tree!

The River of No Return

Among the world's longest rivers, the Nile came up first followed by the Amazon. No, I have not been there or seen them with my own eyes, but I did sail along the third longest, i.e. the Yangtze of China. But what comes to mind is the sixth longest which is the Yellow River in China. The reason for this is because of a verse well known among the Chinese:-

Unless you see the Yellow River, your heart will not die.

Unless you see the coffin, tears may not fall.

The Yellow River is difficult to control. Through the centuries it flooded the surrounding plains, causing the inhabitants much suffering. It is also called the River of Sorrow.

But when you think of the Buddha, the mind traces back to the Ganges in India, which ranks 39th in terms of length. But length is not all that matters when you practice, or perhaps not even time. The Ganges has, however, been a backdrop of countless of human dramas through its long history, and India being the land of Sannyasees, comes up with much spirituality. Many of the sermons given by the Buddha occurred along the Ganges, which was often mentioned in the discourses. One such example is the name of the Ganga, which is repeated after every chapter in the Mahavagga of the Samyutta Nikaya concerning a group of the 37 Factors of Enlightenment, such as the Eightfold Path, Seven Factors of Enlightenment, Four Foundations of Mindfulness, etc.

To quote Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation of it:

“The river Ganges slants, slopes and inclines towards the east, so too a bhikkhu who develops and cultivates the Noble Eightfold Path slants, slopes and inclines towards Nibbana. Here, ...develops right view... concentration which is based on seclusion, dispassion and cessation and maturing in release...”

You might perhaps also be familiar with the term, the River of Life. There is also the River of Craving. They flow side by side or rather within each other. And so one singer sang –

*Time and the river, flowing side by side,
There will be no other, till time and the river runs dry.*

But here, we are talking of the River of the Dhamma. The Practice of Dhamma has made much progress and there will be no turning back. It is also the very same River of Life, but is now given the right direction and a way that can only bring peace and freedom. In this practice, all of one's mental powers are built up to be in line with and then released into the inner most Truth. Conflict with Truth creates suffering, while harmony brings happiness. Hence, I think it appropriate to give it the name - The River of No Return. Thus, in Insight Meditation, at first you learn to swim and then later you flow along the river to the Sea of Nibbana. This is that one river that you must jump into!

And so when I thought that these are perfect symbols – The River and The Tree, I simply had to use them as the title of this book. Would it not be inspiring to think of the original scene where the Bodhisatta came to the Maha Bodhi growing by the River Neranjara at Bodhagaya, walked round it, then sat facing east, with the determination that he would not move from that seat even if his flesh, bones and blood dried up, until he attained full enlightenment?

PART I

GROUND ZERO



OBSCURE ORIGINS

Just exactly when and how did I begin to practice meditation? Frankly, I do not know. The past is far too blurred for me to be precise. Maybe it was those Lobsang Rampa books that stimulated my interest enough for me to try out something like meditation. This later led me to search for a meditation master which brought encounters and experiences I would rather forget but cannot. Finally, I ran into a Chinese monk whom I later discovered was a genuine Chan Master. Through him I can safely say I had some genuine spiritual (*Vipassana*) experiences, although there was the need for clearer understanding on how I got there if the practice was to be stable and progressive. Fortunately, I then proceeded to discover the Theravadin *Vipassana* approach - the Burmese *Satipatthana* method as taught by Mahasi Sayadaw. This provided a more rational structure I was used to, having undergone British education that emphasizes on reason and rationality. From then on, the path was clear.

As I am not writing an autobiography, it is not necessary to go into the details of how I took up meditation. I only want to show that for many like me, the initial phase was a rumble and stumble. Maybe there was a little more of choice than chance but just a little more. A more meaningful question is, “WHY did I take up the practice?”

The question takes a step back from the actual issue of meditation. It concerns the grounds of faith, which has been compared to the seed of spiritual life. This question will also lead to the consideration of past lives

which can be used to explain why things happen as they do. But to avoid unnecessary arguments and skepticism, I will just limit the discussion to the present existence which, by itself, often lacks clarity.

In the recollection of my earliest childhood, I cannot think of anything spiritual or remarkable associated with meditation. Even from what my mother told me, it sounded very ordinary. For example, she had a craving for pineapples when she was expecting me, and pineapples, I assure you, are not my favourite fruit. Another thing that she said was that I often slept halfway when breast fed. Sorry, no lotuses blossoming under my feet, no stars overhead that lead a magi. If there was anything spiritual, it was put into me by my dear mother in accordance with Chinese moral standards and customs.

Why I took to Buddhism was purely because I was born into a Buddhist family. Therefore, I thought that I might as well know what Buddhism was all about. From the little I could get hold of, it sounded good. Therefore, I can “conclude” that I belong more to the category of people who use reasoning as a vehicle for the awakening of faith in Buddhism, which is more often the case of people in non-Buddhist countries for the Buddhist faith. In Buddhist countries, it can be quite the reverse.

Here is where it begins (I suppose) - reason/understanding and faith. The former can also be called Right View; the second is one's inborn inclination to goodness and purity. These two work as forerunners of that long process of search and cultivation. They are also called spiritual faculties, which have to be balanced for them to function effectively. Too much faith leads to gullibility; excessive reasoning to skepticism. Some common sense (which I call mindfulness and clear comprehension) help to keep the faculties in balance. But the beginner is usually not clear how to do this even when told, so maybe it is best to be practical, to work on the practices that nurture these two mental qualities - wisdom and faith, hand in hand.

WHAT IS INSIGHT MEDITATION?

There are two words here - insight and meditation. First, let us consider “meditation”. The Pali word for it is “*bhavana*”, which literally means “cultivation” with reference to the mind. Generally, the word “meditation” refers to contemplative practices, once linked closely to religion and spirituality, but now it includes many self-improvement techniques.

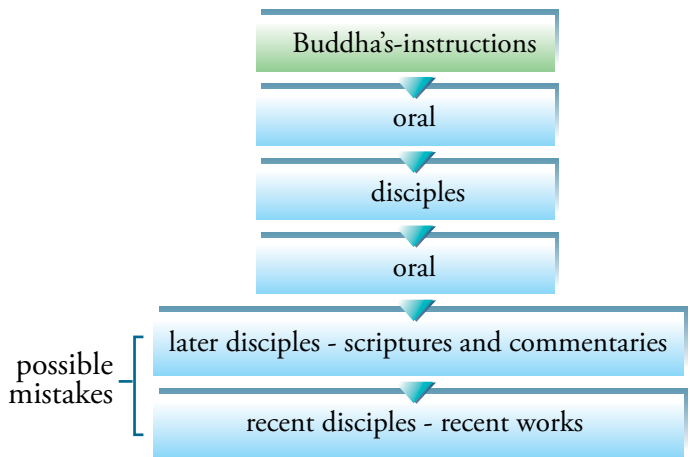
In Buddhism, especially in the Theravadin School, “insight” refers to direct experiential knowledge of reality. Insight is differentiated from knowledge that involves thinking and conceptualization. The emphasis is on insight because it is through this means that the Truth can be realized. It is the realization that radically removes defilements and puts an end to suffering, or expressed positively it brings eternal peace.

Hence, the practice of Insight Meditation is a practice that traced back to what was taught by Siddhartha Gotama, and passed down through the centuries by his disciples. It is a mental process where mindfulness is cultivated, concentrated and sharpened into penetrative, purifying insight. Often, tranquility meditation is also used to support this practice. Tranquility meditations, which use concepts as their objects of concentration form a stable, pure base for insight to work from. The objects for Insight meditation, on the other hand, are mind/body processes which can be observed directly, and experienced as a flow of nature, embodied with the three universal characteristics, i.e., impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self.

Centuries after the *Parinibbana* (passing away) of the Buddha, his disciples spread far and wide. Different views and interpretations emerged, giving rise to different schools and multiplicity of methods. Even within one school, the methods, approaches and attitudes vary with individual teachers. But truth is always the same no matter the time, place or person, and this serves as the criteria of which methods and approaches are based.

One way of finding out what was the method taught by the Buddha is to try to trace back to his original instructions. Theoretically, this would lead us to the earliest recorded scriptures that began as an oral transmission. Commentaries and sub-commentaries were written later to expand on the early teachings and stem down deviations and misinterpretations.

A diagram to represent this will be:



The later disciples broke up into schools. Generally, there is the conservative Theravadin School that preserved the earlier form and the progressive Mahayanists which include *Vajrayana* and are more flexible in their approach. Therefore, there is one conservative school which preserves orthodoxy, whilst the other later schools are expansive but may deviate from the original forms.

The methods of practice also reflect this development. The *Theravadin* School remains loyal to original instructions, down to the word, and so may be limiting. The Mahayana School gives more room for more creativity and expansion, but if not careful, one can end up deviating from the truth.

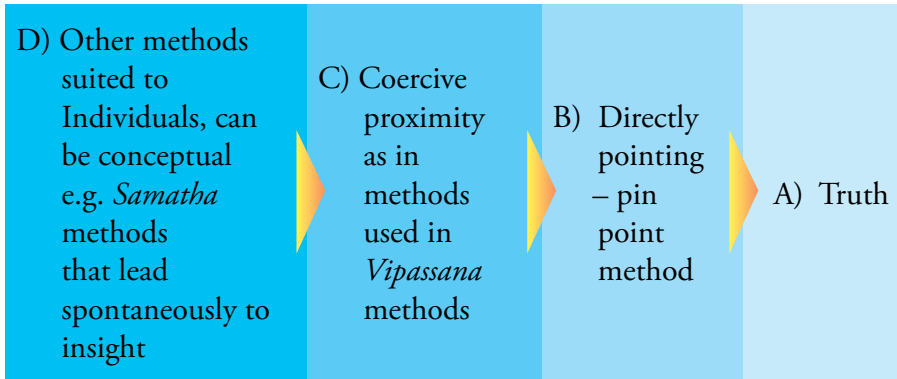
This book reflects the first form but with less emphasis on the word-for-word instructions. The emphasis is more on the essence and principles of original teachings, while giving more room for creativity and expansion.

Another way as viewed by the practitioner is one that is based on Truth or Reality. The key, however, will depend on how well one knows Reality. If one does, then it is clear which methods enable one to reach it and which methods do not. It is as if you are in Rome, and you know which roads will bring you there if you come from elsewhere.



Fig. 1. Methods leading to Nibbana

One can assume that the further we work away from a truth, the less relevant are the methods. In the diagram below, B methods are closest to the truth because they are spoken from the direct experience of A, the truth, and they point directly to it. C methods are most relevant to those who have no direct experience from A and so, one has to work towards eliminating what is not connected with the truth. D are methods which are usually considered to lie outside the practices that can or may lead to A. But some of the D methods enable individuals of certain temperaments to slip into C. Samatha methods can fall under this category because some (the meditation objects, e.g. Death) deal with impermanence, etc which are central to *vipassana* practice.



In this book, all B, C and D are included. B is referred to as the pin-point method. C falls neatly into *Vipassana* methods. In D are the *Samatha* methods that support the direct *Vipassana* methods and therefore, can be turned into C or B methods. How this happens can be explained.

There is also a third phase of the instructions. There are more advanced methods meant for one who has come to true realization. These instructions would not make sense if one has not reached that level and may seem contradictory. The methods work from the center to transform all the way to the conventional world. I would call it the YYG Transformation Method.

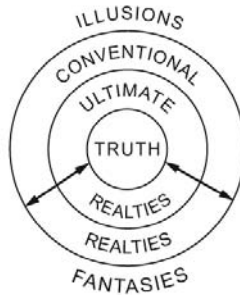


Fig. 2. Experience of the truth and methods leading to the Truth should be reflected in the different levels of realities



**Teacher of Nations,
Naarden, Nederlands 2008**

I was surprised to find such a huge statue of Kommensky here in Naarden, Netherlands right in front of a church. He was a Czech and was recognised as 'the Teacher of Nations', a sort of a Confucius of Europe. Below appropriately is a scientist and teacher that came to the retreat and he holds experiments in mental effects of meditation. I take meditation as a research that can bring the greatest benefits to oneself and others.

BASIC REQUIREMENTS

What are the basic requirements of a person intending to take up meditation? We have mentioned two of the requirements, that are: (1) faith (initial goodness), and (2) right view (understanding).

The rest are (3) morality; (4) right method, which can come about only by meeting the right person(s) who will be your first instructor, and (5) time and place which have to be sought.

1. FAITH

Some people prefer the word “confidence” instead of “faith”, which they say gives a better idea of what is required. Others support that argument by saying that there are two types of faith; ordinary faith and the faith that which comes with meditation. From meditation experience arises faith. While this is true, beginners do not have this type of faith yet and so would have to take one step back. There will have to be reasoning for faith to arise. If we were to take yet another step back, one would say that from previous (wholesome) conditioning arises faith. (There are those who act out of factors other than reasoning, which may be from emotions or habits ingrained when young.) From the metaphysical aspect, I would describe faith (*Saddha*) in Buddhism as the inclination of the mind to what is pure and good. This reminds me of a question that was once posed to me. “What is spirituality?” I answered that it is that practice that brings one to Reality, which purifies the mind. As such, it has been compared to the jewel that when placed into water, purifies it. Similarly, the mind is purified by faith. The Buddha himself said, “The door to the Deathless is open to those who have faith.” Elsewhere, he also may be quoted as saying faith is the key to all treasures. In this way, faith can be seen in all its aspects. Preferably, of course, faith should be accompanied by wisdom; otherwise, it may be dangerous. As stated in the *Kalama Sutta*, we should not merely believe based on hearsay. Faith

with wisdom/understanding is recommended, not just for meditation but in all aspects of one's life.

More than once I have been told by people that they do not have enough faith to practice. This has been said in reference to faith in the Triple Gem which constitutes the Article of "Buddhist" faith.

The Buddha

The Enlightened One, historically Siddhartha Gotama, who attained full enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree.



Holiest of Shrines, Bodhgaya, India 1998

Bodhgaya, where the Buddha was Enlightened is undoubtedly the holiest of Buddhist shrines. Even after all the centuries, the joy of freedom still emanates from the place. Now that it is also in the Buddhist hands, pilgrims flood in every year. If you have not been here, its about time. This picture was taken inside the shrine where an image with the likeness of the Buddha sits on the spot he sat.

The Dhamma

His teaching, with special reference to the Noble Eightfold Path, i.e., practice.

The Sangha

His disciples, more specifically, the enlightened ones.

For those who were not brought up in a Buddhist background, the lack of faith is understandable. However, when we look deeper into the meaning behind the Triple Gem, we can find this faith in everyone. The Buddha himself says, “He who sees the *Dhamma* sees me; and the *Sangha* is such also because of the *Dhamma*.” Faith hinges onto the universal *dhamma* which everyone can initially understand and accept to some extent. A more crucial issue is how this faith is tied onto the trust in one’s own abilities. As the saying goes - “If you think you cannot, you would not; if you think you can, you will.” Within humans there is a vast potential. It is only the extent to which we develop it. So, I am not wrong to say that everyone can meditate to some extent, and if you are not badly retarded or insane, you can go a long way.

Yet another question posed in my teachings in Europe is: “Can a Christian gain (Buddhist) insight or not?” “Truth,” I answered, “is universal, and not the domain of any one religion. It is possible for a Christian to get insight as stated in Buddhist teaching as long as he maintains an open mind and the willingness to learn. Seeing the universal truths may, in fact, make him a better Christian.”

Three Types of Faith

When I first went West, I noticed a lack of Buddhist symbolism outside the Buddhist centers. Even then, some simply refused to have any, saying “I do not need that!” and sometimes even implying decadence. They say we do not need images, we need confidence. It prompted me to think about the issue and come up with the understanding of faith at three levels.

1. Faith of Popular Buddhism

This category of faith occurs among the people of Buddhist countries. You may say it is simple and you may call it superficial. You may even say that it is tainted by external and questionable factors. In places where intellectualism and literacy are not easily found, this purely devotional form is expected to be common place. But I do not think one should underestimate it. As someone said that at least they got started, whereas people here who often hesitate too much and do not even get started. Someone also once said, "Faith works in mysterious ways." I disagree. It seems mysterious only when you do not understand it, but it does work in ways not comprehensible to one who relies on logic based on science and thinking. The mind is profound and requires deep concentration and discernment to understand its workings, and faith is one quality that can reach the depths.

First, this seemingly superficial faith clears one's mind and brings one to the door of knowledge. If it is fueled by wise guidance, it will flower in time. If one has the potential that was carried forward from past lives, insight may arise spontaneously in a short while. One may think that where I came from, in Asia, one is automatically inclined to these icons. Not so. Many Chinese from where I come from are basically materialists with a little background knowledge of Chinese ethics. But we make use of what we can get hold of and proceed along. True, there are pitfalls, such as superstitions, but such faults are always there. One only needs to exercise some careful discrimination. Please do not underestimate this type of faith. It is a starting point for many who have now become more advanced Buddhists. The ritualistic practices and icons stir up much faith, joy and energy that are needed for the path.

2. Intellectual Faith

For thinking and literate people, this would be the faith of their choice. However, it is not easy to arise. For a start, one begins by raising questions over things that are new, and if one is unable to resolve them then skeptical doubts arise. As such, access to good literature and teachers is needed. In cases where meditative states are involved, a practitioner is required. Although this form of faith is slow to begin, however, when started, it will be more stable and preferable, especially when balanced with the support from more experienced guides.

3. Faith in the Beyond

After much practice and experience, faith grows. When meditation progresses, deeper faith as to what the mind can do and the beneficial results that can ripen throws one into the momentum of mental growth beyond that of one's rational mind. This is when one's faith goes beyond the preconceived and expected. The mind is no longer held back by the fear of the unknown or doubt of one's capabilities. This type of faith is sorely needed to transcend mundane limitations.

How to Arouse Faith

There are, I suppose, different ways of arousing faith. But going back to basics, I would like to think of it as arising from contact. From contact arises feelings. The law of conditioning states: Feelings, in turn, give rise to craving when ignorance holds sway, but if there is understanding, then faith arises. It is from contact that the mental processes and action (*Kamma*) follow. What they are to be depends on the object and other conditioning factors such as habit, will power, views, etc.

Objects can be powerful conditioning factors. Hence, religious objects such as images, icons, symbols as well as monks are often found in religious centers. These objects play a role in the early part of one's

growth, especially children. There are also practices of devotion which intellectuals may scorn, the emotionally inclined overindulge and the illiterate turn into superstition.

But these are not what they are meant to be. When properly utilized they are powerful means to cultivate faith. More contact and emphasis on these articles of faith develop the feelings and thought processes associated with joy that are of great help in times of difficulty. It also forges the concentration power to grow manifold. Feelings and emotions are often, if not always more powerful than rational thinking. In Buddhist countries where the faith has reached the masses, time has allowed these to develop in many forms. They certainly add more color and interest to life's meaning.

Last but not least, we must not forget the intellectual aspects which begin with listening to talks and discussions on the *Dhamma*. Again, contact with the right persons is foremost. Failing in that, books will come in handy. Still, in this modern age of information technology, we cannot help but be careful. As a final word, it should be mentioned that as one treads into deeper waters, much of what has to be known is being transmitted through the oral tradition. I wondered why, but history has some answers. The Buddha's teachings were only committed to the written form centuries later. Simply, the monks do not carry shelves of books around. The ancient tradition of knowledge transmission was oral. From observances of the present age, I can see why. People who practice do not find much time. When they teach they are too busy. So, very often many masters had been left out as unknown because there were no written records of them.

2. RIGHT VIEW

This can be a sensitive issue because it impinges onto the beliefs and opinions of others. Views can be ingrained into a person so as to protect him from factors that try to shift him away from reason and all things that are good. As they say, the demon is very devious and cunning. When one is just of a little lesser caliber, his faith falls. Although we can agree that views protects (hopefully, what is good, not evil), it can also create limitations, as in the case of extreme sectarianism.

Right View here refers to right understanding which can come about only when it is in consonance with reality. Therefore, it has to be wholesome, pure (*kusala*). Such a mind is open, alert. Whatever ideas, reasoning, philosophies and emotions that follow, they will have to pass through the door of mindfulness. Hence, when one is introduced to a practice or an idea in a book, while it is right to be careful, one needs to remain open. As in one *sutta*, the Buddha states.....“It is not that....”

In Buddhism as in other institutions, one is first taught the basic doctrines, tenets, etc. However, one is also not to merely accept it on the basis of blind faith. One has to question in what should be doubted. In this case, doubt is not an unwholesome skepticism, but a genuine search for answers. The Teacher himself says, “You should test my teaching like you test silver with fire.”

There will be things that one cannot yet resolve, and so the pragmatic approach is used. One has to set priorities.

First, consider the Four Unthinkables:

- (1) Beginning and end of the world
- (2) Field of Buddhas
- (3) Field of absorptions and miracles
- (4) Field of Kamma

It is not that we cannot think about them, it is just that we have to recognize our limitations. We can understand them when our minds are sufficiently developed. Meanwhile, we can accept them as a presumption to work on. If anything contradicts with the reality of things, then we cast them aside. Thus, we see here that Right View is Right Understanding of reality. It also can occur with different levels.

Buddhism explains Right View in many forms. To simplify matters we consider two main types:

- (1) *Right View of Kamma, and*
- (2) *Right View of Four Noble Truths*

(1) Right View of Kamma

Kamma is the moral law of cause and effect. Good begets good and evil begets evil. This view establishes the reality behind morality, immorality and their consequences. This form of conditioning comes with the nature of the mind as it creates the cycles of life. Anger, for example, is a harmful, violent force that will give harmful, violent results. Compassion is a healing force that alleviates suffering. These are not difficult to comprehend except when *Kamma* spans several lifetimes. Even then, one can see this when one watches the mind closely.

This understanding tells us to maintain mindfulness. The mind is always creating *Kammic* conditionings. Even with drops of water is a pot filled. All our actions accumulate forces deep in our minds like seeds waiting to sprout. So, you can understand why an immoral person will find it difficult to concentrate. His conscience will give him hell. On the other hand, one who has led a moral, clean and compassionate life will be backed by pure forces. He will not find it difficult for peace to settle in. One's mind had been bent on peace anyway. The establishment of a strong moral base is, therefore, necessary to go far in meditation. Like

building a skyscraper, we have to make the foundations solid. To travel fast, the vehicle has to be equipped with strong horsepower.

Examples of immoral actions are - killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and intoxication in alcohols. These actions are done with immoral mental states. Examples of actions done in moral mental states are generous acts, discipline, mental cultivation.

The *dhamma* also tells us that not everything that occurs is because of *kamma*. There are other laws in Nature. Some of these are:

- | | | |
|------|----------------------|-----------------------------|
| i. | <i>Bija niyama</i> | laws of seeds (organic) |
| ii. | <i>Utu niyama</i> | laws of seasons (inorganic) |
| iii. | <i>Citta niyama</i> | laws of the mind |
| iv. | <i>Dhamma niyama</i> | laws of phenomena |
| v. | <i>Kamma niyama</i> | laws of kamma |

But *kammic* conditioning is most important if you are bent on the spiritual path that leads out of suffering. When *kamma* is backing you, you have the most powerful force on your side.

(2) Right View of Four Noble Truths.

The Four Noble Truths - suffering, cause of suffering, cessation, and way to the cessation of suffering - is a map of one's spiritual direction based on reality. Suffering and cessation of suffering is the beginning and end of one's path. The cause, craving together with its accompanying defilements, keeps one in suffering. The path leads to the other shore. If you see that the way of release is the understanding of what is suffering and what is not, then it is clear how purification occurs. The key is the realization of Truth. When there is no longer conflict with Truth, then there is no suffering - there is only peace.

The question is how. The answer is insight/wisdom developed through deep, concentrated, mindful experience of things as they really are. The vision obtained from this Insight practice is called Right View of Insight. Different depths of this experience correspond to various levels of knowledge and purification. “The Way” has been expounded to great length in the *Tipitaka* by the Buddha. In brief, it is the Noble Eightfold Path - i.e., Right View, Right Mindfulness, etc. A further summary is morality (right speech, action and livelihood), concentration (right effort, mindfulness concentration), and wisdom (right view, thought) - where one factor reinforces another.

Aim/Objective

Closely connected with right view is having the correct aim of one’s practice. People come to learn meditation for many reasons. The most common is to overcome their stress and suffering. The other side of this is to find more calmness and happiness. Although these two reasons are not exactly the same, they do share similar grounds, because to remove suffering also means acquiring happiness. Mindfulness meditation definitely serves this purpose, and many of its techniques have now been incorporated into disciplines and practices connected with healing and stress relief.

There are those that come into Buddhism and would like to know what it is all about. This is especially when they have heard so much about meditation and would like to give it a try. Then there are cases where they approach Buddhism from a more religious perspective with a spiritual flavor. The aim is then raised to a higher level, such as the deep absorptions and realizations not spoken of in the materialistic world.

The aims of meditation can be categorized in two groups:

- (1) To serve mundane purposes – This would be easier to achieve and serve as a short term and more immediate goal.
- (2) To reach higher spiritual goals – This would take much longer time although it is indeed possible. In this case, even going halfway is already a wonderful experience.

Having too much ambition often ends up with much frustration. So, it is good to be realistic. But it should not prevent you from going far. As Confucius said, “The journey begins with one step.” Therefore, while having a long-term goal, one first proceeds on the immediate, short-term objectives.

And what is the ultimate goal? Nibbana, of course! But what is it? In common language, it is the end of all sufferings (forever) and it is also the achievement of perfect peace (forever).

Once, I asked my teacher what is the best attitude of a yogi. He answered: purification of the mind. His answer strikes a right note. To say that one strives for happiness may often lead to craving for some blissful state, and Nibanna is not a state to be craved for - it is a state that comes with total detachment. So for the masses, it is better to say that the aim of meditation is to purify one’s mind. Total purification comes with total detachment which, in turn, leads to the realization of Nibbana, the ultimate peace.

3. MORALITY/VIRTUE

Morality can be looked in terms of discipline. Discipline keeps us in line with what is considered to be proper, respectable behavior. Generally, it involves shunning vices, such as alcohol, thefts, murder, etc. It is not difficult to understand why a society shuns these harmful actions. Often, laws have to be enforced to keep a place safe.

In Buddhism, morality is based on the states of the mind. It can be defined as the restraint from evil/unwholesome states. Morality acts like a shrinking from or turning away from harmful mind states and its supportive conditions. It is like a protector, and so the two main factors responsible for morality in society are called “Guardians of the World”. They are conscience (*hiri*) and prudence (*ottapa*). They are often translated as moral shame and moral fear.

There are other mental states that bring about morality. They are:

- *Patience*
- *Compassion*
- *Mindfulness*
- *Wisdom*

The Buddhist community undertakes to observe these basic rules or restraint as an initial and basic training. It serves to clear gross defilement, which when present, hinders development of the finer work of concentration and insight. The number of these rules varies with commitment. Monastics observe several hundred rules, depending on the Buddhist tradition. Laity, generally, observes the basic Five Precepts (abstinence from taking life, stealing, etc.) and on holy days and retreats, the precepts are extended to eight. The observance of additional rules serves to remove finer defilements. With more mindfulness of one’s action and speech, the mind is developed.

The restraint that finally encompasses everything would be restraining of the six senses from the three evil roots when being impinged by sense objects. When seeing, one is mindful. So too is one mindful at the ear, nose, tongue, body and mind door when they come into contact with sense objects. Only when one is mindful and restrained at the six senses is restraint complete. Unless this is done, there will be moments when the defilements still arise even though rules or precepts are kept unbroken. Other than these, there are other forms of morality worth mentioning.

Firstly, there is the morality of right action and right speech. This is mentioned because discipline does not only occur in the negative sense of “do not”, but also the positive sense of “do”. This form of morality covers areas of behavior or actions and speech that ought to be done, such as performing one’s responsibilities mindfully, which includes following meditation retreat schedules.

Then, there is morality of right livelihood which involves restraint from wrong livelihood such as trading in poisons, weapons and flesh. It, therefore, includes avoiding actions that may cause harm to others and the environment. Stated positively, it encourages one to undertake a livelihood that chiefly involves wholesome acts for oneself and others.

Last but not least, there is a restraint of proper use. It involves reflection of the proper use of requisites. This is done by monastics before and after the use of robes, food, shelter and medicine. One is reminded of its purpose and so prevents indulgence. These rules or precepts for laity are often administered by monastics in a ceremonial manner or in a simple request followed by the taking of the Three Refuges and the Five Precepts. When this is not possible or convenient, it can be done by oneself in front of a shrine.

4. TEACHER/GUIDE

Nowadays, many people pick up meditation from books. But even then, someone has to write the instructions in books. So, you may not have met your first meditation teacher in person. There was a case of disciples who took refuge in the Buddha, but could not recognize him when they met him in person.

There are many types of teachers in terms of what they teach, their methods and what they are. Often we blame them for teaching us wrong things but we should also take part of the blame. The mishap would not have happened if we are clear as to what we are looking for. It is only logical to check the doctor's credentials before taking his medicine. The Teachings tell us of many types of teachers (*acariya*). Some of these are:

- (1) Preceptor teacher - one who administers your precepts. He also takes the place of spiritual guardian.
- (2) *Dhamma* teacher - one who imparts knowledge to you, which can be worldly or spiritual.
- (3) Meditation teacher - one who guides you in meditation.

On the spiritual side, all three may be found in one. On the other hand, one may have more than one of each type.

With respect to attitudes and methods, some are authoritarians and there are those who act like comrades. The former tends to be hard and strict, the other soft and flexible. Different people may find one teacher more suitable than the other, yet we can certainly learn from both. We also can learn from everybody and everything. Yes, the teacher is one matter but more important, I think, is the commitment in our search and remaining sincere and open. What I feel is that a person is a teacher not because

he teaches, but rather the acceptance of him as a teacher by his students. One is not really a teacher if no one listens to him. Otherwise he is like a preacher I once saw who spoke to an empty hall.

What happens when precepts are broken? You can take them again. Precepts are rules to live by not laws that send you to prison if you are caught breaking them. As for the latter, *Kamma* will take care of your misdeed, not because you broke a precept, but because of the unwholesome mind states that accompany the action. It should not become a matter of remorse which comes with states of aversion and self-hatred. Rather it is taken as a recollection to renew one's effort in restraint. Practices of confession are done in monasteries in a formal way, although it is encouraged among the laity.

In Buddhist lands, it is known that an offense done out of anger to spiritually advanced people can create a kammic condition that will bar one from spiritual realization. It can, however, be overcome if one asks for pardon, directly from the person or if that is not possible, then through a representative. A similar condition can be created by weighty *kammas*. May we be reminded that many little kammas, when accumulated, can become pretty heavy!

There is one thing for sure - we all still have something to learn. Our defilements and failings speak loudly about it, and we may even consider them as teachers. One can even regard mosquitoes as teachers. Yet another claimed that Death is the best teacher. One can also consider mindfulness that shows you "what is what" as a foremost teacher. It all depends on our state of mind. I also read a book, "The Universe speaks to you."

Having another person to tell us something that is useful and helpful is certainly good. This is not always appreciated, but as the *dhamma* says, "...Easy to see are others faults; difficult to see is one's own....."

At times, there is a clear hierarchy between teachers and students; at times it is less obvious. Still, teachers can be friends and friends, teachers. As to whom they are, it is wise to exercise discretion.

What are some characteristics to look for? Here are some suggestions which also help one to discern whom to trust. This usually takes time as deeper characteristics, whether bad or good, often lie hidden, In the case of bad, it makes it more dangerous. In the case of good, it is subtle and not easily understood.



Burmese teacher, Rangoon, Burma 1979

This is a picture of my first Burmese meditation teacher, Sayadaw U Javana in Mahasi Centre in Rangoon. I actually dreamt of him while awaiting for the visa approval in Thailand, and was surprised when I met him in person. Although half a cripple from a stroke, one can see how alert his mind was and how he turns his students around and about. I remember his concise but profound instructions to this very day. Every word is loaded with meaning.

1. Morality

Morality is the most apparent window to a person's character. Giving some leeway to our own wrong judgments, when we notice that the slack in morality gets too obvious then you know it is time for you to leave your "teacher". Vices reflect gross defilements, which will quickly disqualify one from being a god-like guru, if you happened to be looking for one.

2. Concentration

This is an extension of the first factor. It reflects the strength of a pure mind and the peacefulness which comes with it. If the concentration is intense and aggressive rather than gentle and peaceful, do take care. Even if it is well meaning, you may still suffer from it. So be mentally prepared for more severe methods.

3. Wisdom

It can be just knowledge in the form of textual information. It can be knowledge from the experience of practice in daily life. It can also be knowledge from experience in meditation practice. You may not find all the wisdom in one person, but if you can, then you are truly fortunate. This factor usually remains hidden, so what is relevant is look out for the purity of mind that comes with it. This also means that the deep meditation experience of reality should be the key criteria. Unfortunately, this is not easy to discern especially if the teacher is overly tacit on such matters. His skills will remain hidden, probably with good reason. So, listen attentively and read between the lines.

4. Communication skills

These skills include language, cultural understanding, diplomacy, and probably many other skills, such as the use of computers! Although they are not the criteria for assessing an individual's spiritual attainments, still

they are important skills in teaching and imparting wisdom. These skills come about only after some years of teaching. It may, therefore, be easier if one learns the teacher's language and culture. In the same way, one can use the ancient Indian languages, such as Pali and Sanskrit, in which the earliest forms of scriptures are recorded.

5. Compassion

The very reason for teaching is compassion. Having seen suffering, how can one not feel compassion? Having seen spiritual happiness, one will naturally want to share it with others. Spiritual development comes together with many other virtues centered on experiential insight into reality. However, the degree will vary with individuals depending on temperament. For example, a person who has a strong tendency to solitude will naturally avoid people. Others who excel in the practice on the impurities of the body may turn many away. It does not mean they have no compassion. It may be that there has not been an opportunity for this quality to flower. As a saying goes, "It is not that I love Man less, rather it is that I love Nature more." It is only natural to be more drawn to that warm and caring feeling. But we also need to know when is the time for us to be serious, and there are things to learn from serious people.

6. Method

This is the most important factor for beginners. Even for veterans, there is room for improvement. How do you know if the method is right? Even if it is so, others may have better alternatives. It depends on the skill of the Teacher and one's temperament as to which method works best. As the presence of a teacher may not be easily available, one may have to settle for what one can get.

Often I have been asked by a meditator if he has been meditating correctly. I would ask in return, “Are you mindful?” If the reply is uncertain, then one must make sure. The mindfulness ensures that the mind is in a wholesome state. After that I will proceed to check on the other factors. The Teachings do give us guidelines on the right Dhamma which should lead to detachment from sensual cravings, ill will and delusion. It should lead to seclusion, concentration, wisdom and liberation.

Another thing to bear in mind is that the method must be as clear as possible from the start. For example, one must be extremely attentive to the instructions. If one is unsure, one must ask. A period of practice and feedback is necessary before one understands enough basics to start the process of cultivation. So, the beginner progresses by having understood the basic exercises and the immediate outcome and how to deal with them rather than aiming for blissful states.

7. *Affinity*

Our past conditionings which span lifetimes make us what we are. This explains why we cannot say we get along well with everyone. In cases where we do get along well, good kammic connection is formed. Affinity may also be because of similarities in preferences, culture, etc. But when affinities hit the right note, you get along with your teacher, which allows for a healthy and easier transmission.

There are other reasons for an affinity or lack of affinity with someone such as a teacher. It may be that his attitudes, methods and approach do not agree with you. It may even be his face, color or sex; some of these are actually not his choosing. It can also be the result of past kammic associations. Whatever it is, do try to check out the reasons, because we may end up missing something important. If the relationship really does not work, it is better to avoid unnecessary messy situations and negative *Kamma*. If it works, then a beautiful friendship will blossom.

5. PLACE AND TIME

The training of meditation requires one to be mindful and pure everywhere and always. There will be moments and places where meditation becomes more difficult. Life is not always peaceful but it is for us to make it so. For beginners who are still in need of strengthening, it is best to take note of the more conducive times and places to nurture their seeds.

1. Place

“Here are the forest, root of trees and empty places, meditate...” so the Buddha advised his monks. The earlier monks were wanderers and often very austere in their practices. Nowadays, many would resort to more comfortable surroundings, which is understandable. There are certain conditions to look out for as suitable places for meditation:

- (a) Retreat centers and hermitages
- (b) Temples and shrines
- (c) Parks and gardens
- (d) Any quiet, cozy place
- (e) In one's own lounge or room specially set up for meditation



This is photograph of the Mahabodhi Tree at the holiest spot in Bodhi, India. Under the shelter of this tree, seated on grass seat, having a proper meal, these were sufficient external conditions for the Buddha's enlightenment.

Mahabodhi, India 1996

i. Safety

The foremost condition is safety. Fearing for one's life is very unsettling especially for the neophyte. However, some practitioners actually seek out such places to keep away from people. Dangers come, for example, from diseases. This is not to be trifled with. When the body is weakened, the mind of the beginner is often greatly affected. Prevention is better than cure. Then, there is danger** from wild beasts, including those poisonous vermin. Monks often practice loving kindness to them - an offer of peace. Finally, there is danger from malevolent spirits. For this, there are protective recitations.

If it seems insurmountable, the best way is to go elsewhere where dangers are less. But dangers lurk everywhere - including from "pink panthers" and so, monks are often on the move.

ii. Quiet and Solitude

Noise can be very disturbing, especially when it comes from machines, cars trucks and screaming children. People are distracting too, especially the talkative ones. Hence, the need to observe silence. Sound, however, can be used as an object of contemplation, and one should learn to do so. However, too much of noise can certainly reduce one's concentration levels considerably. Sometimes, there may not be much noise, but too many activities around, which render the surroundings as not an ideal place for practice.

iii. Convenience

The place for practice should be convenient to access. Too much hustle and bustle can be tiring and one would need extra time to recuperate. It should also be close to where food and other necessities can be obtained.

** *In this category, one can also include other health hazards such as pollution and other environmental dangers such as the possibilities of floods.*

In some places, monks have to walk several miles to collect daily meals. While this could serve as good exercise, it takes away time for deeper practice.

iv. Work

There need to be a balance between practice and work responsibilities. When at home, there are so many responsibilities to shoulder. When you look at the floor, you like to sweep it. When you see the lawn overgrown, you have to cut it. When you are hungry, you have to eat, etc. It is best if all these can be put aside. It is not just the time spent; it is also the mental preoccupation that goes on, long before and after the activity.

v. Presence of Suitable Persons

The presence of suitable persons is important for good practice. While unruly people distract, suitable individuals, such as diligent practitioners, support one's practice. The presence of a guide, suitable discourses and discussions also help greatly. The guide, which can easily be the most important factor, can show by example and render help in times of need. One good tip saves many years of search.

2. *Time*

Time passes, time flies. Make full use of time while you may. We should try to be mindful all the time. As for the times most conducive for serious practice, it is up to us to make as much of it as possible, such as planning in advance for longer retreats.

For daily meditation practice, it is best to do it in the morning after a good rest for the body and mind. The evenings before sleeping time can also be good, after having fulfilled the daily responsibilities. But one may be tired after work. So have a catnap to solve that, and undertake casual

activities to cool down the mental activities. What is important is the regularity of the practice to keep up the continuity and the application in daily activities since that covers most of the waking hours.

Five Factors of Striving (Padhaniyanga)

These Five Factors of Striving is a way of looking at the requirements of a meditator (one who strives for freedom). The source is textual. It gives you an even wider view of conditions that are required of a meditator.

1. *Faith*
2. *Health and well being*
3. *Honest and sincere*
4. *Energetic in giving up evil, to hold onto good*
5. *Insight into the way of arising and dissolution of things.*

1. Faith

We have dealt with this topic earlier. Without this factor, one would not have started to meditate. And if we have started but faith is weak, we will not go far. Faith is like the spark or fire that drives us on. It establishes itself fully only when there is realization of the truth.

2. Health and Well Being

The text describes it as having a good digestion, which is neither too hot nor cold. Maybe it suggests that nutrition and energy balance are important factors in health. In any case, health is a very important factor. It is the reason why one is advised to start young. Besides having more time (maybe), the body is still strong to take on a lot of beatings by the world around. It is true that only when one's training is well established that we can say "mind over matter." For most, when the body fails, the mind follows quickly behind. So, it is very important to take care of one's health.

3. Honest and Sincere

Meditation, especially insight meditation, is about knowing truth and “being real”. If one cannot be honest and sincere to others, how can one be thus to oneself? It is also true vice versa.

For a start, honesty involves the morality that influences the world around us, which is the fourth precept of not telling lies. Then, this follows on how sincere we are with our practice. During retreats, interviews are conducted to help practitioners. Some even tell lies! It only shows all those tricks the mind comes up with to avoid an ugly truth. One needs to see the dangers to be able to remove them. In most cases, unless you are honest with the teacher, he cannot help you.

4. Energetic

Meditation involves a great amount of effort, supreme effort in fact. To begin the practice, one has to lift oneself up from an old rut often hemmed in by old habits of restlessness and defilements. Once started, there seems to be an endless journey ahead bedeviled by obstacles and hindrances. Even nearing the end, many fall short of patience in waiting. Fortunately, one may say that there is unlimited energy in the mind - we need only to harness it.

5. Insight into the Way

To gain insight, one must first need some common sense to start with. We need to make correct decisions. When one gets deeper insight, one can see it in one’s ability to see through facades and zero into the essentials followed by penetration into their natures. In insight practice, that penetrative awareness brings one to see the impermanent nature in the mind and material process that is first experienced as a flow and then in a moment- to-moment arising and passing away of these phenomenal

realities. The fourth insight knowledge of arising and dissolution is taken as an indication that one possesses the potential for final realization.

Mindfulness



"I keep close watch on this heart of mine, I keep my eyes wide open all the time."

This line from a Johnny Cash song is a suitable caption for the owl standing at the gate of the meditation hermitage in Kota Tinggi, Malaysia that emphasizes mindfulness.

Owl at the gate, Kota Tinggi, Malaysia 2006

After years of practice and teaching, I find that mindfulness stands right at the scene. Mindfulness takes the lead and it needs to be around in every function and after some practice, it seems to be everywhere. The texts are not scanty in comments, for example:

"...A noble disciple who has mindfulness as his gatekeeper will reject what is unsalutary and cultivate what is salutary. He will reject what is blameworthy and cultivate what is blameless, and he will preserve his purity. What monks, is the monk's domain, his very own paternal home. It is the four foundations of mindfulness."

(Anguttara VII)

*"At the five sense doors spread the net of mindfulness, so fine and subtle
In it defilements will be caught and killed by insight clear."*

(Anuruddha Thera)

*"The friend has passed away; the Master too, has gone.
There is no friendship now that equals unto this:
The mindfulness directed body wards."*

(Ananda-Thera Gatha)

*"And how, Ananda, does a monk be unto himself as an island, as refuge,
without any other refuge? How is the Teaching his island, refuge and
nothing else?"*

*Herein a monk dwells practicing mindfulness of body, mind, mind
objects, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, having overcome
covetousness and grief concerning the world."*

(Mahaparinibbana Sutta)

When one discovers the nature of mindfulness (at least in some aspects), then I think that is when the practice really begins. One then makes the effort to keep arousing it until it is continuous. Three mental states play in the process of arising, and it is interesting if one cares to look into it. These three states are:

1. *Perception (sanna)*
2. *Attention (manasikara)*
3. *Volition (cetana)*

When one has a correct perception of what mindfulness is, then with volition one shifts, by means of attention, the mental states and its object so that what results is a mindful state. One can compare volition as the driver, attention to the steering wheel, and perception as one who knows where one is.

You will see that a correct perception is important for a beginner. It is like telling someone who has not heard of what gold is to look for gold. You have to give him the right perception of mindfulness.

We can now begin to talk of what mindfulness is. As best as I can remember, I did not try to find out clearly what this important mind state is. I probably did not differentiate it very much from concentration. It was probably through the constant bombardment of the word that made me a little more aware of this state. With my search into relevant literature, I picked up more of it. All in all, I cannot think of a single condition that really gave me the right idea of what mindfulness is. It seems more like it reveals itself by intuition after much practice. It is like a young baby, after learning how to walk and balance, which becomes quite natural as he gets older, and then wonders, “How did I manage to learn to balance myself?”

One interesting thing is my search for the meaning of mindfulness from the literature. Fortunately for me, I came upon a teacher in meditation

who was also a master in Buddhist metaphysics (*abhidhamma*). He opened a new inner world of metaphysics to me. I gobbled up as much I could and as a result I became more aware of the types of mental states as I never did before.

When it came to the mental factor of mindfulness, it defines it as “to remember.” It did not seem to hit a right cord, so I ignored it. “Memory” and “remembering” seemed to me to be the workings of perceptions (*sanna*) linking to the past. It then continued to explain mindfulness with regards to its characteristic of “non-floating away” (*apilapana*). It also provides an example of plugging into something unlike those that float about. Again, that did not ring a bell in me. This definition sounded more like what they call concentration, or one pointed fixation (*ekaggata*).

Next comes its function of unforgetfulness (*asammosa*) or “non-omission”. Like the first, I thought it sounded like “memory”, but I had to admit there is something about forgetfulness linked with negligence. The opposite of it does mean some mindfulness.

As for its manifestation, it is given as meeting face-to-face or confronting with the object. It left me blurred and confused, wondering what this has to do with mindfulness. So, as I always do, blame it on my ignorance and conveniently put it aside hoping to return later to it when wiser.

The last one, which is the proximate cause of firm perception and application of mindfulness to body, etc., is obvious, and so I was happy to have scored one in four. So it seems I had harped very much on to the word “mindfulness” from the beginning, which fortunately is not far from the truth. There are other words, like “heedfulness” used as a translation of another Pali word (*appamada*) which did make sense, and so I picked it up. I supposed as I read on, certain words like “thoroughness” also came in to help, so I got along.

It was only after sometime that I came across some better redefinition of the translations that I encountered at the beginning. They were from my Burmese teacher and certainly made more sense since they came in a book which described it as non-superficiality. I suppose translations of texts by a practitioner make a world of difference from one who is a mere scholar. And so, I wondered if I would have understood them if I were to read them this way when I started. I probably would but may not be able to fathom the meaning as much as now, because of lack of experience.

By then I had already made some new discoveries. Once when I read through the texts of the numerical sayings (*Anguttara Nikaya*) I noticed that the good states of mind described could easily come under three categories - clarity, peacefulness, and softness. And since mindfulness is present in all wholesome consciousness, the knowing and awareness which come with them could safely fall into what we consider a mindful state. This became extremely helpful in teaching meditation. I noticed that many yogis who did intensive retreats had ended up with tensions, which could be attributed to pushing too hard and ending up with emphasis on concentration without enough consideration, hence, loss of mindfulness. So, I stepped up the emphasis on mindfulness over concentration.

I would then explain these three characteristics at every retreat, telling meditators to be certain they had any or all of these good mental states.

1. Clarity

Clear awareness is the definition I often give to mindfulness (*sati*). Clarity, as compared to dispelling its opposite states; dullness, delusion, confusion, when they vanish like dispersing clouds (as when one overcomes sleepiness), shines out far like the sun. Hence, it is close to the brightness of the mind which is expansive. To bring one to understand better through experience, I make use of imagery. Yogis are told to visualize or just think of bright light or clear crystal. Watch then how the state of a

clear mind is. It becomes obvious. With clarity, all objects also become clear. Like a well- cleaned lens, what is focused on becomes vivid. Purity is the all important quality that comes with clear awareness, and it is of paramount importance for those developing concentration and mental power.

2. Peacefulness

A pure mind is peaceful while agitation is the base for greater suffering. Mindfulness must come with peacefulness. The opposite is chaos. So too, states like aversion and excitement are just chaos. If one can visualize a peaceful lake which is then expanded to a sea, one can experience a peaceful and blissful mind. It is close to and arouses concentration quickly, brings about balance, and prolongs stillness and tranquility. Knowing thus, one will be motivated, and just being mindful is worthwhile. This is one state that one must have so the seed, before right concentration and tranquility, can grow. This tranquility itself develops sensitivity by bounds. It is like the still waters where the tiniest leaves will generate ripples.

3. Softness/Gentleness/Flexibility

This third factor is a mind that is as soft as cotton wool, as fluid as water, and as gentle as healing balm. These correspond to several beautiful mental factors as described in the Buddhist metaphysics. With presence and awareness, mind knows objects clearly even though they may be subtle, illusive, or harsh and difficult to bear. The opposite state is hardness, rigidity and stubbornness as in one with hatred or prejudice, aggressiveness and harshness where there is strong desires and anger. Try imagining falling snow, sparkling mist or white cotton and you will know what I mean.

Although it is technically not right to rank these mental states because they all arise together in the mindful state in some form, yet we may still place them in order of importance. First in importance is purity, i.e. clarity. Next, is peacefulness as the base to deeper concentration, and with it then comes softness and flexibility to determine finer development which, in turn, contributes to greater clarity and purity.



Fig 3

Satipatthana Mindfulness

When I continued practice, I could not help noticing the link among the three aspects of wholesome mindfulness and what my teacher refers to as *Satipatthana* mindfulness. In his discourse, he described it in three ways:

1. Plunging into the object and not floating away

This is also the definition given by the commentaries on this state. By this, I take it to mean a developed form of mindfulness that is concentrated onto the object. When one is totally involved in observation, one develops concentration hand-in-hand and so plunges into the object. This brings the mindfulness to a deeper state and therefore, deeper experiences are possible. Later, I found out that a better word for it is the state of non-superficiality and thoroughness.

2. *Being quick, precise and exact in capturing the object*

The *vipassana* object is a fleeting moment. If you do not catch it when it is there and then, it is gone. It can also change into other forms, so one has to be open, exact and precise at that moment to register its nature. He described it like a predator quickly springing and clutching its prey. It is like shooting at a moving object. This quality again can come with the manifestation of confronting its object.

3. *All suffusing.*

My teacher compared this nature to water that suffuses into a fabric. It reveals all the aspects of the object and so is able to give it a good overall view. This is true when one more often does not see the forest for the trees. In getting too caught up with the little things, one forgets the essential. But often before that, one needs to fit all the pieces into the puzzle. I would describe this mindfulness like a light (not literally), more like a laser beam that flows along with the river of mental and material processes (i.e. life), lighting up everything about it. Only that it does so moment-to-moment and takes time to develop. When it becomes stronger, it penetrates deeper.

Although I cannot really say that they are similar, it also helps to link them:

- (1) Softness + flexibility with quickness + precision (as both are involved in capturing a quick, subtle object)
- (2) Peace + stability with plunging into the object (as both can bring about deeper concentration and involvement)
- (3) Clarity with all suffusing mindfulness (as both can bring out overall clarity of the object)

So, it is actually this satipatthana mindfulness which is observant, concentrated and sharpened to become insight. It is a particular specialized form of mindfulness that is not normally encountered in the world. The reason is that it has to be cultivated, so unlike the weak and distracted mind. It is a spiritual rather than a worldly state, which is associated with the defilements of greed, anger, and delusion. Also, it is because this form of non-thinking, non-conceptual mindfulness takes as the object of ultimate realities that the world at large takes for granted and overlook. It takes many hours of moment-to-moment practice like many drops of water to form a momentum and flow of such mindfulness in the river of life.

As rivers flow to the sea, mindfulness and insight into the three universal characteristics as well as the mind and material processes lead to the unconditioned. That is when the nature of mindfulness and insight become supramundane, a state described in the texts as the path consciousness or the Noble Eightfold Way. How is this like? I would like to think of it as a clarity in that Supramundane state, peacefulness in that supramundane state, subtlety of that supramundane state, just as the contemplation of peace (i.e. *nibbana*) begins. It is peaceful, subtle, and the tranquilization of all formations.... *Nibbana*. The characteristic of *Nibbana* has been described as peace (of the end of formations), the unconditioned, a truth that is ever present. I also would say it is a nature, a phenomenon which is so subtle that it is overshadowed by the gross conditioned states that we are used to. I think that if we have really sharp, clear awareness, mindfulness that is just present, precisely in the here and now, it can cut through everything and arrive at the Supramundane. That is clear because truth is only in the here and now. Usually, that sharpness, precision and strength have to be cultivated for many years to cut through the whole veil of ignorance completely. Nevertheless, if we can keep this in mind, we have the right bearing and aim, and draw a bee-line from A to B.

And so, I usually start by introducing this mindfulness even from the start, hoping that at least someone can pick it up. That is, he or she has to be just clearly present. Do not hold on to “what” and “who” is present. Just let presence be. By just that, all other states fall into place. Mindfulness is experienced in its three pure forms - clear, peaceful, soft. The mindfulness is not superficial but looks deeply into present states, does not omit anything or slip away. It is mindfulness that confronts reality, i.e., all that the metaphysical definitions I gave and encountered. When powerful, it is also none other than *Satipatthana* mindfulness itself.

So, I have come around in one big circle of the definitions I first encountered. It took me many years of practice to discover the true meaning of what the commentaries spoke about, which might seem so simple and probably obvious to them, but not so in my case or for many beginners.

Along the way, besides this main thread, many other side threads and forms of mindfulness have and still continue to unravel. Some of these we will look into later in the book.

The Process of Mindfulness

Mindfulness has first to be aroused. In the beginning, it is often more of an energetic attention with, hopefully, some mindfulness. When one is more aware of what mindfulness is, its flow and duration would be enhanced. After that, one can try to ensure that it is *Vipassana* mindfulness - the clear awareness free from concepts (such as oneself - the person, time and space) that just follows and observes the object of contemplation, which are mental or material qualities and are just processes. This clear awareness, in short, just knows these processes as they really are.

The pathway of mindfulness runs as the mind does through the six sense doors. Depending on the objects one uses, it will run more frequently in those directions. In deeper practice, however, when concentration deepens, it will dwell more at the mind door. The process or pathway by which mindfulness develops can be simplified as:

Mindfulness aroused - mindfully follow the object/process - mindfully observe the nature of the object/process

What objects are used in the meditation and how the practice proceeds as one progresses, depends on who teaches what, i.e. the lineage and tradition as well as individual methods.

Here will be given an approach based on the *Satipatthana Sutta* (the Discourse on Foundation of Mindfulness). Even this varies with practitioners. It will be based on my training given by the Burmese under the Mahasi system, which has evolved with my practice and teaching encounters in the West. So, it is not what is exactly taught if you are at some Mahasi centers but it will not be too far off. But let me assure you that this method is not a deviation from Buddha's teachings.

Concentration and Mindfulness

Often meditators when told to be mindful end up trying to concentrate at the expense of mindfulness. That may be because mindfulness is not commonly emphasized, or that they do not really see much difference, especially when concentration and mindfulness arise together at the moment of thought.

First, you have to learn about mindfulness which becomes clearer when you become more adept at knowing when you are not mindful. That is, you see the difference and so also the effects. Next, the difference between concentration and mindfulness comes into consideration. Concentration

is the fixation or unification of the mind and its object. When coupled with mindfulness, it is right concentration. Otherwise, this can be considered as wrong concentration, which is harmful. That is why the emphasis on the purity of mindfulness cannot be underestimated.

Mindfulness, we have described, is looking at the object with proper/wise attention and with the pure, wholesome qualities described earlier. In meditation, one is being very observant as to the nature of the object. When this is so, some concentration is present. Therefore, the emphasis is on mindfulness rather than concentration to ensure that one progresses in the way of insight.

PART II

THE SATIPATTHANA VIPASSANA METHOD



SATIPATTHANA SUTTA

The *Satipatthana Sutta*, the Discourse on Foundations of Mindfulness, is a discourse on meditation by the Buddha. It is placed as the tenth discourse in the Middle Length Sayings (*Majjhima Nikaya*) as recorded in the Pali canon of the Theravadins. This *sutta* begins by saying, “This is the sole way to the purification of beings, the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for destroying of pain and grief, for reaching the right path, for the realization of *Nibbana*, namely the four foundations of mindfulness”. So it is understandable that with its emphasis on mindfulness that the discourse and its commentaries have been used as a basic reference text by meditators. The four foundations - body, feelings, mind and *Dhammas*/phenomena - are actually objects used to build up those foundations. In the *Sutta*, lists of objects can be found. At the end of each “chapter”, one is led to insight contemplation as it says, “He lives contemplating origination of things in the body, or he lives contemplating dissolution of things in the body, or he lives contemplating origination and dissolution of things of the body.” The same is said for feelings, mind and mental objects. As the *Sutta* will be put in the appendix, just the list will be given here.



What's Einstein doing here? He returned in the Wax museum in Amsterdam. What do you think would happen if he had taken up Insight Meditation? A genius has great intellectual or wisdom faculty. He may even make it to Arahatship. But it does not need a genius to make good progress in meditation. The commentary to the Satipatthana sutta confirms this by saying that it is meant also for people of average abilities. Diligence and faith are just as important, and especially so in the beginning.

Genius, Amsterdam, Netherlands 2007

1. KAYANUPASSANA SATIPATTHANA

Body-contemplation as foundations of mindfulness

1. Breath
2. Postures (standing, sitting, walking, lying down)
3. Clear comprehension
4. Parts of body (impurities)
5. Four elements (earth, water, fire, wind)
- 6-14. Cemetery contemplations (9 stages of decay of corpses)

(Note: It is clear that some of these are initially objects of pure tranquility exercises).

2. VEDANANUPASSANA SATIPATTHANA

Feeling contemplation as foundation of mindfulness

1. Pleasurable feeling
2. Painful feeling
3. Neither pleasurable nor painful feeling,
i.e. indifferent feeling.
- 4-6. As in 1-3 in being worldly
- 7-9. As in 1-3 in being spiritual

3. CITTANUPASSANA SATIPATTHANA

Consciousness contemplation as foundation of mindfulness

1. Consciousness with lust
2. Consciousness freed from lust
3. Consciousness with anger
4. Consciousness freed from anger
5. Consciousness with delusion
6. Consciousness freed from delusion
7. Consciousness that is shrunken
8. Consciousness that is distracted
9. Consciousness that has grown great/exalted
10. Consciousness that has not grown great/exalted
11. Consciousness with some states superior
12. Consciousness without states superior
13. Consciousness that is tranquil
14. Consciousness that is not tranquil
15. Consciousness which is freed
16. Consciousness which is not freed

4. DHAMMANUPASSANA SATIPATTHANA

Contemplation of Phenomena as foundation of mindfulness

1. Five Hindrances
2. Five Aggregates of Clinging
3. Six Internal and External Sense Bases
4. Seven Factors of Enlightenment
5. Four Noble Truths

As in the body contemplations, the other three also ends up with the contemplation into their transitoriness and being independent, clinging to nothing in the world. Finally, the discourse ends up by assuring practitioners of the fruit of the highest knowledge, and if not, the state of non-return within the period of seven days to seven years.

Chapter 1



MINDFULNESS OF BODY – ESTABLISHING STABILITY

THE BURMESE SATIPATTHANA METHOD

As a large part of the practice described in this book still follows the procedure of the Burmese *Satipatthana* Method as taught by the most Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw of Burma, it is only fair that I put a word about it.

Vipassana meditation, by itself, refers to any meditation practice that gives rise to insight into the true nature of things. I do believe that this occurs in meditation systems outside the Mahasi tradition, outside the Theravadin tradition or the Buddhist traditions. There are too many traditions and I will not attempt to analyze and judge them, as it is not within the scope of this book.

It is obvious to those who have encountered the *Satipatthana* method that it belongs to the pure insight vehicle which does not rely on tranquility concentration as a base for the development of insight. The continuous mindfulness developed in intensive retreats readily produces enough concentration and results in as clarity and purity for insight to arise. This method was introduced and popularized by Mahasi Sayadaw, who practiced under the Venerable U Narada (Jetavana or Mingun Sayadaw). To date, there are certain peculiarities that make this method stand out from the other *Vipassana* approaches:

1. It makes use of body contemplation to a large extent in its practice, although the other foundations are also used.

2. The main object used is the “rising – falling” of the abdomen.
3. Mindful notings of each process contemplated is performed and then increased until the point when objects arise and cease too quickly to be noted.
4. Walking meditation is alternated with sitting meditation, usually for an hour at a time.
5. Intensive retreats are encouraged and the day starts before sunrise, (at the time I was there, it was 3:00 am., although many centers start later), and ends at 11:00 P.M. (or earlier in other centers.) During the period of retreat, there is regular feedback on the practice, daily or a few times a week.

This method is to a great extent the most popular in Burma and has spread to other Theravadin countries after the Sixth Council in the 1950s. Now it has gone world wide to the western nations as well.

After many years of practice, I found it to be a well considered method in many aspects, especially for the beginner in insight practice. It establishes a strong base in mindfulness, which by itself, can lead to higher realizations. At the same time, it also provides, if one is observant, avenues of more specialized practice like mind contemplation and tranquility (*samatha*) development. Without a strong base in the grosser body-objects, the expansion to other areas of development may be difficult.

PRELIMINARY INSTRUCTIONS

These are preliminary instructions given to yogis who had come for an intensive retreat. They are formal meditation exercises which one practices after putting aside all of one’s worldly activities. The general practice in daily life will be dealt with in a separate chapter.

These exercises are given to a beginner, since the veteran meditator should already be aware of them. They are meant to arouse mindfulness and to be made continuous. When mindfulness is continuous, the rest will fall into place, maybe with the help of a few extra instructions.

First, the spiritual aim is stressed followed with a clear description of the nature of mindfulness. The next step will be the objects and how to be mindful of them.

I usually give a graduated, guided meditation in the morning sittings for the first few days to help the beginner establish mindfulness onto his body-object and then led into concentration. The meditation is divided into three parts:

1. Sitting meditation
2. Walking meditation
3. Daily activities

Having seated comfortably in a proper meditation session and noting all the movements and sensations involved, the yogi is given the following typical guided meditation:

1. SITTING MEDITATION

*Note: a - given at the start
ab - added later*

- a Take a few deep breaths and relax as you breathe out.
 Imagine clear, peaceful light descending from above.

- (a1) { It floods through the body from head to feet.
As it keeps flooding in, it becomes brighter and brighter.
As it keeps flooding in, it spreads outwards wider and wider.
- ab { It dispels darkness, dullness and sleepiness.
It brings in peacefulness, tranquility and clear awareness, and perceptions become sharp and clear.
It creates a clear inner space of clarity and brightness.
Identify the bright mind and notice how it expands as the light is expanded
- a Start relaxing the crown of the head, the forehead, eyebrows, eyes, the nose, face, mouth and jaws.
- ab { Let the relaxation and peacefulness sink deep into the head - the brain, the skull, the sinuses, the teeth, gums, tongue and down to the throat.
- a Relax the back of the head, ears, down to the neck.
Relax the shoulders, down the arms to the fingers.
- ab Let the relaxation and peacefulness sink into the skin, muscles, bones, nerves and blood.
- a Relax the chest and abdomen.
- ab Let the relaxation and peacefulness sink into the lungs, heart intestines and other organs.
- a Relax the shoulder blades, back, down the spine, waist and buttocks.
- ab Let the relaxation and peacefulness sink into the back muscles, spine and kidneys.

- a Relax the buttocks and legs down to the feet and toes.
- ab Let the relaxation and peacefulness sink into the muscles, bones, nerves and veins.

a {

At the base, try to mindfully pick up and feel the sensations.
Tingling feelings at the fingertips, spreading to the palms, warmth.
Tensions, pressures at the legs.
Warmth and pressure at the buttocks.
Merge the three parts into one large area of observation.
Notice how sensations merge, pulsate, turn into vibrations, currents.
As your awareness is immersed into the mass of sensations and vibrations, try to be as clearly aware how they come and go.
Slowly bring your awareness up the arms and body.
Notice the sensations and vibrations as you go along.
Once up to the top of the head, relax downwards again.
This time notice the peaceful awareness that descends along is clearer.
Notice the sensations and vibrations in the particular area that you are passing through are clearer.

Relax the head.....neck
Shoulders.....fingers
Chest.....abdomen
Back.....buttocks
Legs.....toes

At the chest, let the peacefulness sink deep into the heart.
At the base again, pick up and feel the sensations as clearly as you can.
Bring your awareness up and down the body as before, several times until you feel the body as just a mass of sensations, vibrations, and energies.

- ab {
- Place the one-pointed clear awareness in the center of the whole mass of changing sensations and notice how they change, shift, arise and pass away.
 - When noticing sensations in the body, note, “Sitting...”.
 - When sensations are at the points of contact e.g., at base, note “touching, touching.”
 - Notice how the awareness changes with the changing sensations. It merges with them, e.g., vibrations and pass away as they cease... note “knowing.....knowing”.
- a {
- Place your primary object, the breath/rising and falling (sensation) of the abdomen in the center of the mass of changing sensations.
 - See it as a wave in a whole sea of sensations.
 - Follow this wave, noting mindfully, “rising, falling”/ “in” - ”out” breath
 - From beginning to end.
 - See this wave as a stream/process of sensations/vibrations.
 - Sounds that enter into the field are noticed as energy, vibrations that arise and pass away, noting mindfully, “hearing....hearing”.
 - Bodily feelings that enter into the field are noticed as energy, vibrations that arise and pass away,- noting mindfully, “feeling...feeling.”
 - Thoughts that enter into the field are noticed as energy, vibrations that arise and pass away,- noting mindfully, ”thinking.....thinking.”
 - Mind states like sloth and torpor are seen also as mental energy, vibrations which are heavy and slow. Try to keep the mind clear and alert, noting mindfully, ”sleepy.... sleepy”.

- a {
 - When painful sensations arise, if they are slight, ignore them.
 - When they are strong, note them mindfully as “pain... pain”.
 - When they pass away, return to the primary object.
 - If the primary object is not present or very unclear, return to body sensations
 - When painful sensations are strong and persistent, they are taken as the main, primary object.
 - Notice the different types of painful sensations, their variations, and how they change, e.g., throbbing, pulsating, pulling and letting go.
 - If they pass away, return to the 1st primary object.
 - If you cannot bear it any longer, mindfully shift the legs or posture to release the pain and return to the primary object.

- (a.2) {
 - ab {
 - Certain images may be helpful to establish mindfulness in the body and perceive sharply the sensations.
 - At the heart area, imagine/visualize a clear, transparent, cool pool of water.
 - Allow it to expand into an expansive, wide, peaceful lake.
 - Allow it to expand into a wide, limitless, peaceful sea.

 - ab {
 - Identify the feelings and emotions that come with the image.
 - Notice how the heart opens as the water body is extended.

 - ab {
 - As one relaxes and moves the peaceful awareness downwards, notice the sensations and vibrations, follow and descend down.
 - They are like falling snowflakes,
 - Like mist with fine particles of moisture.

- ab { As the bright mind shines on, they are bright and sparkling.
As they fall onto the expanded water body at the heart/ chest region, they merge with the changing feelings and emotions.
- ab { At the base, notice how the sensations shift, change and vibrate as a mass of energy on a plate.
Notice how the sensations arise as the awareness moves upwards.
These are like smoke rising.
These give a vitalizing, energizing, massage to the body and mind.
- a { When the hour is up, mindfully notice the intention to get up, noting “intention....intention”.
If the bell is rung, note mindfully, “hearing....hearing”.
Get up mindfully, noting all the movements of body, feet, hands, etc.

* sections (a.1) and (a.2) are not usually done.



Italian stone cottages in the villages often have dark interiors. This one was taken in Ottiglio in one of our smaller retreats. Here we have a serious yogi sitting in imitation in of the Buddha image.

In imitation of the Buddha, Ottiglio, Italy 2007

2. WALKING MEDITATION

Walking meditation usually precedes sitting meditation, and alternated with it. There are different ways of doing it and it serves many purposes.

1. Brisk Walking

This form of walking is faster than the normal pace. Sometimes it can be quite fast, almost a run. One is generally aware of the movements at the feet, at the same time noting “walking....walking”. Usually, the distance is fair and so the movements may create some noise. So, it is best to avoid places where people are more concentrated, e.g., sitting halls. It serves as an exercise after the sitting sessions when the body has stiffened. It also serves to shake the mind off heavy torpor and persistent thoughts. Usually it takes only about 10 minutes before slowing down to the moderate pace. Sometimes it may take half an hour or more.

Even this type has two types - the more energetic form which wakes one up, and the relaxed type which is done more leisurely to tune down.

2. Moderate Pace Walking

When one is ready for walking meditation proper, then one proceeds with a moderate pace. Its speed is a little slower than one’s normal speed. Here, there is a slowing down, first with the body movements and then the slowing of the mind. This helps to calm it down and bring about more mindful observation.

Standing Meditation

One first starts with the standing posture.

The feet together, spine and head straight.

Eyes downcast but not looking (focused) at anything.

Looking ahead may distract and so to be avoided where possible.

Hands are held at the back or front to hold on to composure.

Relax from head to feet as described in sitting meditation.

Rest the mind at the soles of the feet, pick and feel the sensations.

Sweep the awareness up and down the body, picking and feeling the body sensations.

One may mindfully note mentally, “standing,.....standing”.

When one does this, one performs the same process as in sitting meditation. Any thinking, sounds, etc., are mindfully noted when they arise. Make sure that one is mindful and not distracted. One eventually ends up with observing the body as a mass of sensations, vibrations, arising and passing away.

The Cankamana

The Cankamana is the cloistered walk for the place devoted to walking meditation. Sometimes they are covered/sheltered:

There are recommendations:

It should not be too long	}	These may cause restlessness, tension and negligence.
It should not be too short		
It should not be too narrow		
It should not be too wide		

It should not have things in the way, i.e., should be a straight line, as the concentration will not be interrupted.

It should not be covered with grass where beings may dwell underneath and these creatures may be harmful.

It should not be made of material too coarse that it hurts the feet.

Normally, a walking distance around 20 - 30 feet is good, but it depends also on one's temperament. Some reduce it to six steps. Width can be 1 1/2 - 2 feet. To determine the walk is straight, one may use a mat, if not, it can be marked by stones or sticks. This will help one to be more definite. It is also best be leveled. The material recommended is fine sand, but a mat of woven grass, etc., will also be good. The textures help to promote mindfulness.

Walking meditation

Moderate pace walking is done with one or two phases.

It begins after standing with the intention to walk. When one notices the intention, one mindfully notes "intending....intending". The mindfulness is then directed to the lower part of the calves downwards. When still standing, with the pressure of the whole body on the soles, the sensations there will be more obvious and, therefore, noticed. As one walks, other parts may be obvious and noticed.

One then raises one's right foot and places it gently in a small step with soles placed level in front. This ensures that the hind foot does not rise before the front foot is down. While doing this, one mentally notes with mindfulness, "right step..." When the right foot is down, immediately the left hind foot rises for the next step and noted mindfully, "left step."

One's eyes are left downcast and unfocused, but see enough to walk straight.

Hands are held in front or back as in standing. Sometimes to relax, they may be at the sides or folded in front.

The procedure is as mentioned before:

Mindful ► **follow** ► **observe.**

The “follow” can progress to “follow closely”. In the process, as in sitting, the mind will be distracted to thinking or fall into dullness. As soon as one notices this, (one makes it a point to) quickly and mindfully note “thinking” or “dull” or “seeing” and then bring it back to the feet. If necessary, one stops walking to note persistently when the thoughts are too strong. Otherwise, revert to brisk walking. Slowly, the mind will be able to follow each step one after another mindfully and calmness will set in. When one reaches the end of the walk, and one intends to stop, mindfully note the “intention to stop.” Similarly, mindfully note the intention to turn, as well as the act of turning and stopping. One can then do the standing meditation and then proceed in the reverse direction.

At first, one is unable to observe many sensations, may be just contact with pressure, hard and soft. When concentration improves, one slows down further and one’s observation can become more clear and sharp.

One may then take a step further by breaking each step into two phases: noting mindfully, “lifting.....” when the foot is lifted off the ground, and “stepping” when one starts lowering the foot until it touches the ground. At each phase, one should notice the different sensations. In the lifting, it will probably be light with tension; in the lowering, heavy but relaxed.

3. Slow Walking

As one becomes more concentrated, walking slows down. It may also be true vice versa, but not necessarily so. One can slow down the walking deliberately to slow down the mind and help it to concentrate, if it is ready. Slowing down too slow quickly may create tension instead. So, a more gradual procedure will work better.



He still came to the retreat even though he had met with a little accident that caused a fracture in his foot. And so his walking meditation has to be a little different from the usual. The natural processes that underlie it however, remains the same. Such determination is noteworthy.

Crippled Walking, Connemara, Ireland 2007

Slow walking can also be done with one- or two-phase walking, but not necessarily so. But when it comes with the three phases per step walking, the processes are:

“Lifting” - when the foot is lifted off the ground

“Pushing” - when the foot is pushed forward

“Stepping” - when the foot is lowered onto the ground

There are some points to bear in mind when doing slow walking.

Relaxation

When one slows down, there is a tendency to tense up. When tension becomes strong, then it is difficult to calm down and pick up the subtle sensations. So, when one realizes that one is tense, then it is time to put the foot down, be mindful of the standing posture and start the relaxation exercise.

Balance

When walking slowly, which one is not used to, one may start to wobble. Some exaggerate each phase – help to make it easier to follow mentally.

But if one is not ready or careful, it also becomes wobbly, and on top of that, it raises tension and fatigue. So it is advisable to take small steps which are low and parallel to the ground. Unbalanced, wobbly steps are definitely not conducive to concentration.

Clear perception of each phase

Each phase of a step bears its own set of sensations. For example, the lifting movements bears the tension involved with lifting ; pushing is even lighter, soft and runs along like the wind blowing, stepping is relaxing and associated with a heaviness. When the foot reaches the ground, a whole new set of sensations run through the soles. A point here is not to expect what sensations will arise. Rather, one picks up whatever that arises. One does not choose what one picks up but only directs the mindfulness to the phases of the steps, i.e., the walking process.

When one is able to do this, then the phases can normally be broken down further into 4 - 6 segments. This helps to increase the ability to be mindful of the walking as a process of changing sensations or elements.

** (Please see the diagram for the different phases in walking meditation.)*

When concentration picks up and is continuous, the mind is no longer distracted or thinking but sinks into a peaceful state that flows with the witnessing of the objects, i.e., the sensations as they flow and change from moment-to-moment. Again, here one reaches the state as in sitting meditation. One can then start (if one has not) to drop off concepts - of person, form, space and time. An elaboration of this will be given in the chapter on concepts and realities.

After this, there is a further phase where one just focuses on the consciousness. It is going into contemplation of consciousness (cittanupassana) and deeper absorption levels are just on the edge that one may slip into.

Walking meditation is a very important part of the practice and should not be neglected. It serves many purposes, as follows:

1. Exercise and relaxation as explained in “Brisk Walking.”
2. Initial build-up of mindfulness and concentration, preparing one to get into concentration deeper and quicker in the sitting meditation. It also gets rid of gross hindrances and defilements.
3. It helps to balance the faculties. When one is sleepy, walking faster and attentively stirs up energy. When one is tense, relaxed walking lowers energy and stress.
4. It maintains continuity of mindfulness throughout the day.
5. It develops the perception of the elements and sensations more easily since they are grosser than when sitting. A clear perception of these sensations is important in insight meditation, for they are the base from which the perception of the three universal characteristics is built up.
6. It is a typical condition and process in which the moment-to-moment momentary concentration of insight meditation is built up that one gets acquainted with.
7. It helps to integrate the practice of mindfulness and insight into all activities including those in daily life.

In the Mahasi system, yogis generally follow the the practice of one hour walking alternated by one hour sitting. This makes a healthy balance of postures as well as the mental faculties of energy and concentration. This balance is suitable for insight meditation, which usually requires a higher level of energy as compared with pure tranquility meditation. In the latter practice, the meditator is usually encouraged to sit long to develop deeper and longer concentration.

4. *The Leisure Walk*

This is sometimes not considered as walking meditation. It is more of a relaxation. But knowing when and how to relax is also an important part of the practice. In this busy modern world, goal-oriented people often come to intensive retreats with this pushy tendency that is brought into their meditation practice. When stress and tension become threatening, the leisure walk comes to the rescue. If you are such a person, it is good to go to where there are plenty of nature walks to help you let air out of the bag.

In such leisurely walks, the more relaxed attitude would mean the creeping in of thoughts and emotions as well as the wandering of eyes to the surroundings. One has to keep it within safe bounds by maintaining some mindfulness so that the mind does not get totally lost in fantasies, illusions and delusions. Mindfulness used is also of the open, general type.

3. OTHER DAILY ACTIVITIES

Besides walking and sitting meditation, one maintains mindfulness of all the other activities. In an intensive retreat, this will fill in the gaps outside sitting and walking. One is taught to be mindful the moment one wakes up. When one hears the gong or alarm, one mindful takes note: “hearing.” When intending to get up, “intending”, and so on with “getting up”, “standing”, “walking”, “opening the door”, “brushing teeth”, “urinating”, “defecating”, “bathing”, etc. Also, of particular importance are the activities during meals which includes the mindful noting of “seeing the food”, “picking up (the fork/spoon)”, “stretching”, “bringing”, “opening (mouth)”, “closing mouth”, “chewing”, “taste”, “swallowing”, “drinking”, etc.

This would help the practice to:

- (1) *Slow down one's activities.* It allows more time for the nascent mindfulness to catch up and observe. If one returns to one's normal pace, very often one will forget to be mindful and do things out of habit.
- (2) *Mindful labeling or noting each activity.* This encourages doing one thing at a time, which in turn helps one to slow down and concentrate. The mindful noting helps to bring the mind to the object (activity) and also reminds one to be mindful. This is particularly helpful for the beginner who very easily reverts to the habit of thinking. In the case of daily activities where many actions are involved, it is very easy to get lost. Where many actions have to be performed quickly, then a more general noting is used instead, e.g., “walking” instead of “lifting”, “pushing”, etc.

There will also be a danger that after sometime, the notings will become mechanical, and there will actually be no mindfulness accompanying it. In this case, different labels can be used to give it a fresh kick. Usually, notings are gradually increased to increase the sharpness, quickness, and precision of the mindfulness. It will also become cumbersome when one's practice has developed to be sensitive enough to pick up many, many objects arising and passing away. Then it is only wise to drop the noting with labels and names, which are just (helpful) concepts. One can then directly observe the nature of the objects and process much more closely and instantly.

- (3) *Taking special note of the intentions* prior to the actions, especially the main ones, like those involved with the major change of postures, or those that lead to a whole set of new activities, like “intending to bath”, “intending to eat”, etc. Like walking, noting of intentions is not just to maintain continuity to the whole practice but it also can arouse insight and is a training in clear comprehension, a topic which will be dealt with later.

Priority of Objects

When the meditator begins his practice, he will be given his meditation object, *Kammatthana*, in Pali, which literally means the “place of work/action”. It is also the “soil” from which the mental states of concentration and insight are cultivated. This is usually the main object that is worked with, which we call the “primary object”. In the process, one meets with other objects which intrude or we have to resort to and handle for the time being. These are secondary objects.

Very often I am asked by people who are in a dilemma as what to watch. Usually, the primary object has vanished or been overshadowed, and at times more than one object competes in dominance.

The object we choose to watch will be dictated by clear reason. In our case, we will refer to insight meditation as we practice here.

1. Firstly, the primary object should be the one which is easiest to develop mindfulness and concentration. For this, in my case, I was given the “rising-falling” of the abdomen. It was selected from the grosser bodily objects and has till now remained so as the primary object of insight meditation as practiced by the Mahasi tradition. Tradition does dictate what the primary object is, and often the “in-out” breath is also given elsewhere. One may stick to this, following and observing it mindfully according to instructions given to develop mindfulness, concentration, and eventually, insight.

While trying to accomplish this, other objects would come in. These secondary objects can be pain, thinking and restlessness, sloth and torpor, hearing of sound, and other bodily sensations. When these are slight, they can be ignored. The exception will be the occurrences of the hindrances for the beginner as “restless thinking” and “dull, sleepy, sloth and torpor”. These have to be promptly attended to. If one can nip it at the bud, then we will not have to suffer their heavy

onslaught, waste precious time and start again from ground zero. These two hindrances have the priority of immediate importance, for with them around there is either no mindfulness or very soon to be no mindfulness.

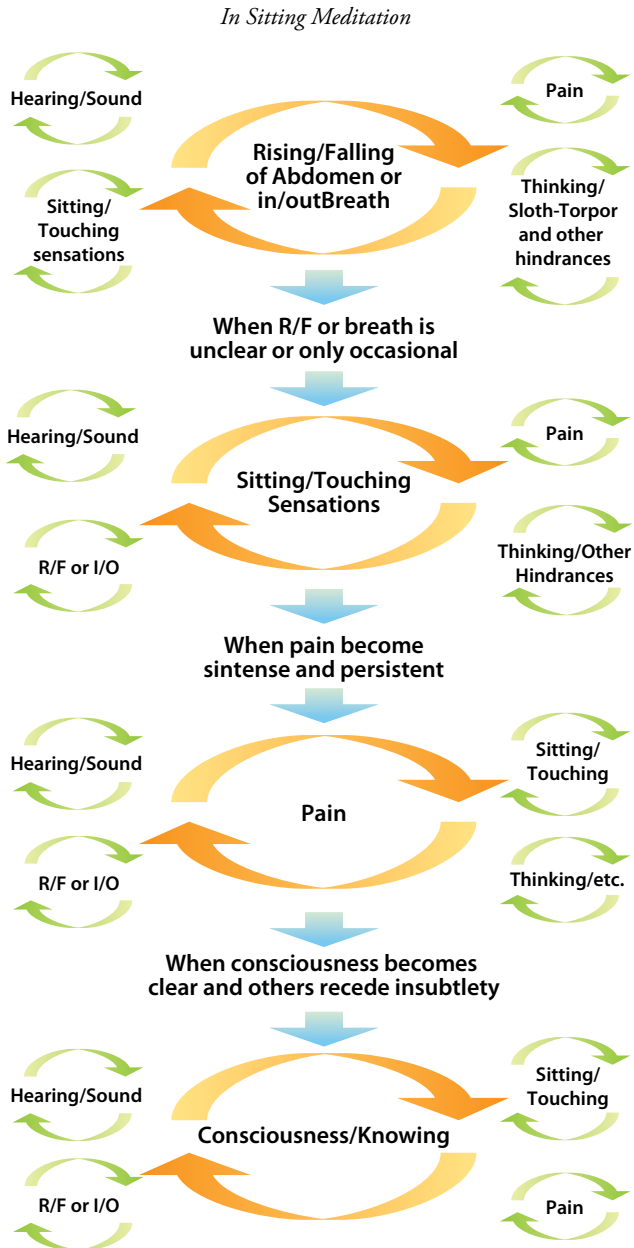
2. The next in priority will be dominance. Dominance is in the sense that it stands out and overshadows the primary object - which sooner or later will be obliterated. Sometimes we can still hold onto the primary object which has become subtler and fine. Then by all means do so. When we really cannot do so, then the next dominant object is one that comes into view. This is often painful sensations. Otherwise we fall back onto bodily sensations. Sound/hearing may also dominate when it is loud, and the eye object/seeing when we are walking.
3. In the case where two objects compete for dominance, the other factors have to be considered. There is also the possibility of watching both at the same time. In this case, the “view” or “screen” would be more open. An example of this is watching pain on two extreme points of one leg or body. Concentrating on one, the other will become more dominant. So, one ends up running from one to the other. This can be unsettling and so expanding one’s vision to both will stabilize the mindfulness.
4. The internal object is preferred when compared to the external object. This is because the internal object tends to composure while the external object tends to distraction. For example, if one has to choose between body sensations and sounds (which are not too loud), then the former is preferred.
5. When one’s mindfulness is established, then one chooses the objects which manifest clearly, the three universal characteristics of impermanence, suffering and non-self. This is the case of *vipassana* because these three universal characteristics are the true *vipassana*

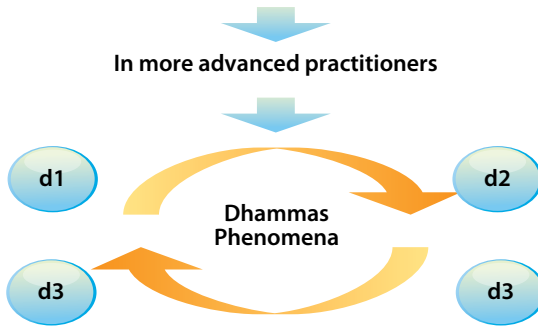
objects. Often, this direction will, in fact, be directed to by the teacher from the beginning and so concentration may not develop quickly. But given patience it eventually will. So, it may be preferable to watch pain which displays “change”, etc., than staying on with an object, like a calm state of mind where change is not obvious.

For some people, the primary object given at the beginning will be held on for most of the time to produce the desired results. There will be those who will have to switch to other objects for a longer period of time. It may be that the primary object quickly becomes unclear and one is unable to stay with it. Or, it may be another more dominant object quickly taking over. Whatever the reason, the secondary object that takes over will become the primary object. This may, again, be shifted to another when conditions change. So, over a period of time, one may have more than one primary object.

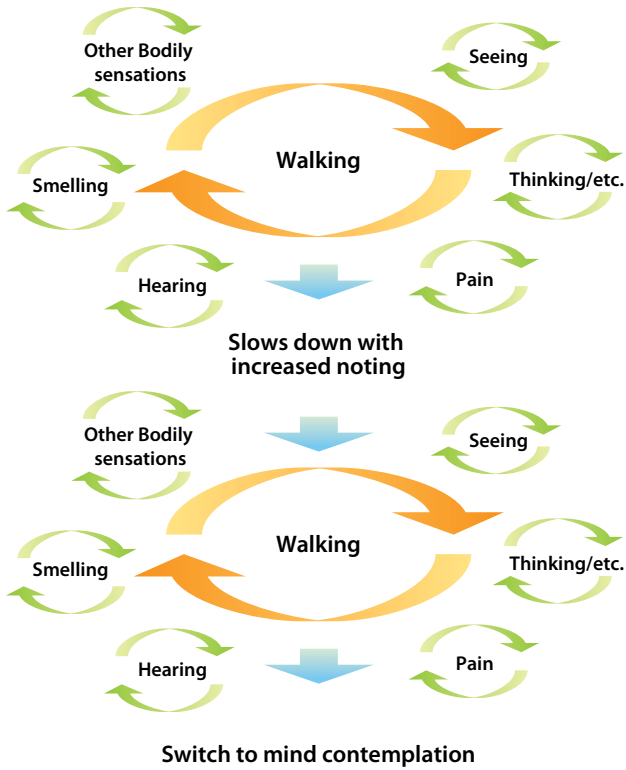
This does not matter. What is important is that the flow of mindfulness becomes continuous. Once the continuity is established, another matter such as concentration falls into place. Of course, concentration would increase quicker if one can stick onto one primary object for a longer period of time.

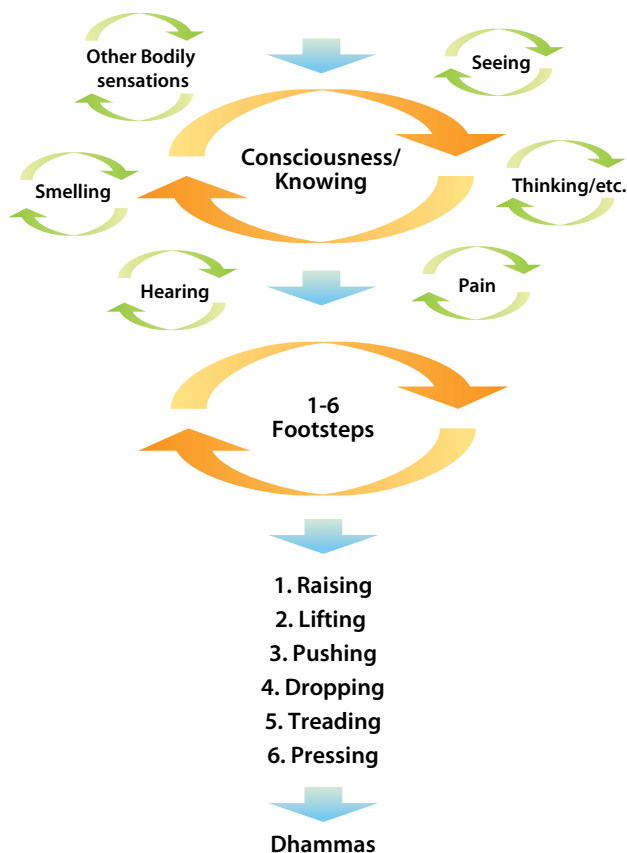
Fig. 4 Flow Chart On Priority of Objects





In Walking Meditation





A Note on Progressive Practice

Given that one has understood what one is required to do in the basic instructions and one proceeds to the practice, then one is bound to find that it is not as easy as it sounds.

Firstly, one will find oneself battling just to be mindful. The all-too-familiar hindrances meditators face in the initial struggle for basic concentration will first have to be cleared. These are usually none other than the defilements, negative emotions, etc., and will have to be substituted and replaced by mindfulness, which will take over as a basic

habit. When concentration is reached and hindrances put aside, then the objects become clear and the mindfulness is sharpened to penetrate into them to experience their true nature. The deepening insight purifies the mind progressively until realization is reached. All these processes will be dealt with in the subsequent chapters.

Climb Every Mountain

Body Foundation of Mindfulness (*Kayanupassana Satipatthana*)

The first foundation of mindfulness makes use of the body and its activities to cultivate mindfulness, not just any mindfulness but the special mindfulness that is concentrated and sharpened to penetrate reality and bring about realization. It is reasonable that many make use of it as the first base because it is gross (as compared to mind) and easier to follow. It is also not as stressful as painful feelings. However, it is sometimes regarded as boring for those who prefer more mentally stimulating challenges. Even if that is true, they still need to develop a strong base for grounding.

Nowadays, one can find many types of body-works and therapies, such as exercises. Done with mindfulness, they can fall into the field of mindfulness-work. But for them to be considered meditation, the practices require more discipline and concentration because meditation concerns mental control. As for mindfulness-work in body contemplation, it would require work much deeper than that to bring about liberating insight.

Two Bodies, Two Realities

The one that the ordinary man calls the body, we call it the conventional body. The physical man, together with his form, organs, and his limbs, constitute the outer reality which can be contrasted to an inner reality called ultimate realities. They comprise material qualities perceived by awareness that does not conceptualize. We call this the material body.

In the chapter on body contemplation, you will find that one begins with the first and arrives at the second later. However, the first part is also important. It develops the right attitude towards the body, which is also a factor contributing to morality. That is, one regards the body not for the indulgence of sensual pleasures, but for the development of true happiness. To this end, there are the meditations of bodily impure parts and cemetery (i.e., on corpses) contemplations to overcome lustful desires. The body gives a solid base for mindfulness and the grounding for concentration.

Then there are those that bring one more directly to the cultivation of insight, for example, postures, clear comprehension elements. Breath meditation by itself can be both for the cultivation of insight and traditionally tranquility. Most would follow the instructions given in the discourse on breath (meditation), which is first done as a pure tranquility exercise, although in the *Satipatthana Sutta*, it is more directly performed as an insight practice.

Body Sensations

Nowadays, many (if not most) yogis make use of either the breath or the rising/falling (of abdomen) as their primary object. In insight practice, they are essentially body sensations, which when observed with insight meditation mindfulness, will enable one to discern the three universal characteristics.

Once someone asked me, “Teacher A tells me to watch breathing in/out. Teacher B tells me to watch rising/falling of abdomen. Why is it YOU tell me to watch body sensations?” I answered him by saying, “Whatever you watch, the breath or the rising/falling, you will finally end up with watching bodily sensations, which are essentially the material elements. So, why not start with it directly?” He agreed. Actually, there is more to it. It happens that he had been trying both for many years but failed to

get any appreciable concentration. You may put him among one of the obsessive thinkers, although I have met with worse.

This is what I have noticed when teaching these “thinking” people. They can also be very goal oriented. So firstly, if you tell them to watch either rising/falling or breath, they push themselves overboard trying to follow an elusive thing and tense up. The result is often frustration and they may drop out. Secondly, they cannot hold on to those objects because they are not used to “being in the body”. They are more “in their brains”. When you cannot sense much of the gross body, how well can you keep to that little point at your nostrils? So, meanwhile I will leave these two primary objects aside to deal with something more basic.

A good preliminary will nurture the ability to pick up bodily sensations. That is why I start in the preliminary meditation with relaxing and sensing. When one is adept, then following any bodily object will not be a problem.

Four Postures

1. Sitting Posture

The sweeping of clear awareness through the body from head to toe during sitting can be regarded as mindfulness of the sitting posture. This can be done with any bodily posture, but for a start for the four main ones - sitting, standing, walking, and lying down – will suffice. There are many ways of going about this. Here are some.

The simplest way is just to sweep the awareness through the sitting posture. One may mindfully note “sitting”, which is directed towards the forces within that maintain the upright sitting posture. There are many such forces, often tensions, connected with the musculo-skeletal structure. The most obvious will be tensions at the back, especially

around the lumbar area. From here, one may trace the other forces at other places, like shoulders, hips and legs. That noting is alternated with “touching”, which is directed to the sensations at the surface of the body. Since the surface area is fairly wide, the most obvious will be the base - legs, buttocks - because of the weight of the body on it. On scrutiny, many sensations can be picked up and one will find that the same are spread all over the other parts of the body.

Often people start by noting “sitting”, “touching”, and the points may be increased to more and more touch points. There is a tradition that does more than 40 touch points.

There are also ways of playing into this - one may note “sitting”, touch point one, sitting, touch point two, or sitting, point one, two, three, and so onn; sitting, point one, two, three and so on. There can be endless combinations of them. If one is able to do that, the momentum picks up, leaving no space for distractions to creep in and so concentration can be considerable.

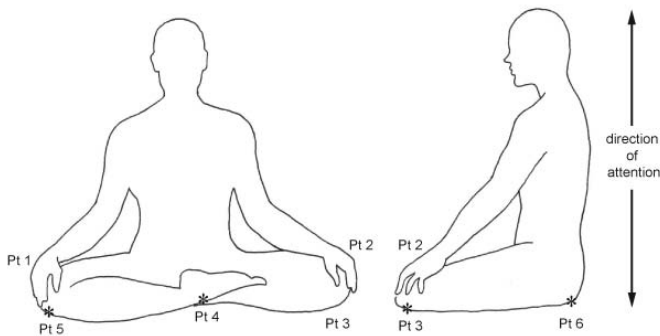


Fig. 3. Fields of experience in sitting meditation

However, one must bear in mind that it is not just keeping the mind concentrated but one has to really be able to be mindful and observe the nature of bodily sensations, and pick them up with clear perception of the qualities of the material elements.

Therefore, the approach suggested in this book is sweeping down and up the body with clear mindfulness. Every time the awareness reaches the base (legs, buttocks, palms), sensations are picked up and observed. This improves one's sensitivity of sensations in the other parts of the body when one sweeps upwards or away from it.

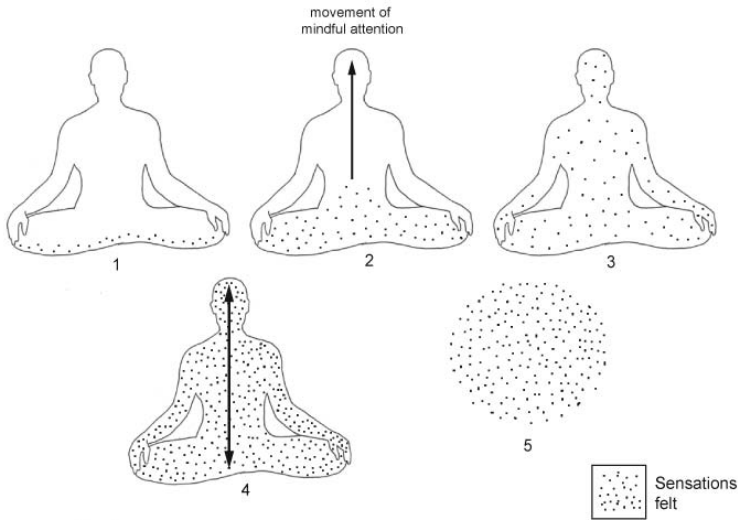


Fig. 4.

After sometime, the sensations are plenty and the body loses its strict outlines/form. It is perceived only as a mass of changing sensations, in currents, waves that are like fluxes of energies. Some points may stand out and one can dwell longer in that. Here, there are some differences in watching with another meditation tradition (Goenka), which sweeps through the body slowly in parts, stopping at times, but is not encouraged. Here, one is encouraged to stay longer at a part which is clear so that concentration can pick up faster.

Perception of Sensations/Material Elements

There needs to be some clarification of the word, “sensation”. By sensation, I mean any of the sense objects as perceived directly by any of the six sense doors. Sensations can also mean bodily feelings and feelings strictly come under mental phenomena. Both definitions are sometimes interchangeable and so may cause some confusion. In this chapter, I refer to the first definition and if the latter is meant, it will be indicated.

In the strict (Buddhist) metaphysical sense, the four primary material qualities/elements are earth, water, fire and wind. The body door (sense) picks up three of these. The water element, however, occurs only at the mind door/sense, although is associated with the other three. In practice, this differentiation is not so obvious except that the water element, being more subtle, is sensed later. One is to be reminded that there are subtler forms of earth, wind and fire as well. The descriptions of these elements are as follows:

- a. Earth element : The material quality of extension
 - Characteristic : hardness
 - Function : acting as foundation (for other material qualities)
 - Manifestation : receiving
 - Proximate cause : other three great essentials

When one experiences hardness, softness, roughness and smoothness, one is experiencing this quality.

- b. Water element : The fluid element
 - Characteristic : trickling, oozing
 - Function : intensify coexisting material states
 - Manifestation : holding together, cohesion in matter
 - Proximate cause : Other three great essentials

When one experiences stickiness, materially flowing, dispersing, spreading or holding together like a lump, then one is experiencing this quality.

c. Fire Element : The heat element

Characteristic : heat, cold
Function : to mature/ripen other materials
Manifestation : continuous supply of softness
Proximate cause : Other three great essentials.

When one experiences hot, cold, one is experiencing this quality.

d. Wind Element : The kinetic element

Characteristic : distension
Function : to cause motion in the materialities
Manifestation : conveyance to other places
Proximate cause : other three great essentials.

When one experiences movements, vibrations, tension, slackness, then one is experiencing this quality.

The definitions given are guidelines as to where to direct the mindfulness. For example, when one directs one's mindfulness to a touch point at the ankles, one may experience hardness, that is clearly the earth element. After sometime, heat may build up, then the fire element. There are various manifestations to the mind's eye. The fire element, for example, has been described as:

1. Warming heat
2. Aging/maturing heat
3. Burning heat
4. Digestive heat

The air element is described as:

1. Upgoing (movements), like vomiting
2. Down going, e.g., defecation
3. Wind in belly outside bowels
4. Wind in bowels
5. Wind that runs through all limbs
6. Breath (in/out)

Besides these, when one experiences the element directly, it appears in different forms, depending on the conditions present at that moment.

Once one has overcome the initial distractions and is able to focus on the sensations directly, then what is important is to develop the ability to get a clear, sharp experience of them.

Initially (as in some traditions) go through exhaustively in learning (conceptually) the nature of these material qualities and then watch how these occur as experienced in the body. One is taught to hold firmly to these characteristics. Even then, one must eventually let go and notice how it changes with the conditions.

Therefore, what is very important is that the clarity of awareness is always being stepped up. The clearer the mind, the clearer is the object. Secondly, one needs to clearly register what one has experienced, often encouraged by clear descriptions after sitting (and not during). Thirdly, the exploratory aspect of mindfulness has to be cultivated. This is necessary to give a wider and deeper picture of what is happening.

So, the naming and identification can help at the beginning, but eventually the direct, non-conceptual, exploratory mindfulness must come in. The sooner, the better.

The Mind Door

An important note at this point is the emphasis of the perception at the mind-door. In Buddhist understanding, the mind processes work through the six sense doors.

1. Eye
2. Ear
3. Nose
4. Tongue
5. Body
6. Mind

The first five are called externally sensitive qualities that receive the five external sense objects:

1. Colors
2. Sounds
3. Odours
4. Tastes
5. Tangibles

The sixth is the mind sense which opens into a deep, wide field of mind objects that encompasses everything. All deep concentration and insights arise at this door, although it can be linked initially to the external bases. Knowing this, we can be sure we know the direction of development.

What often happens is people associate their minds with their brains and so their mind stays in the head. This retards progress because it limits the workings of meditation on the gross physical body and so they find it difficult to be totally immersed at the mind door. I would often tell them to forget their heads. “Now you are all headless yogis.” After that, the awareness naturally falls to the chest and later can be moved to any

part of the body. The more direct engagements with the objects bring out their characteristics clearly. When one associates the mind in the head, one observes the objects as if watching with the eyes. This can cause complications when one tries very hard to concentrate and observe because tensions accumulate in the head, especially between the eyes. It also undermines deeper concentration that occurs only at the mind door.

So, the second point to note is not to “see” but to “feel” the object. It is not visual although one may have a tendency in that direction. This point helps one greatly in non-conceptual perception that is free from shapes and forms.



2. Walking Meditation

The same principle applies to the walking meditation. The initial part is getting the mindfulness to follow continuously the walking process. Once this is maintained, then one goes into the observation of what it is that makes up this process. Again, one arrives at the sensations/material qualities directly experienced at the feet through the mind door.

The perception of these qualities is, at first, general when walking at the quicker pace. However, to really notice the sensations at the feet, one has to slow down, feel and sense them as if the mind is at the feet or the feet with the mind (at the chest level). Usually, the step is broken into phases and as more phases are observed, the slower one would walk. It enables one to feel and observe closely what is picked up. Here is another point to note - that we direct the mindfulness at the feet without the expectation of what we will sense/feel. It is like looking out at the window of the moving train. That part is concentration. The emphasis is on mindfulness, i.e. to know clearly what is outside the window. For example, in stepping on the ground, one is not to have an expectation of what one feels. Whatever arises at that moment, one picks it up, feels it, observes it and then one knows, “Oh, it is hard”, or “Oh, it is soft.” Also, notice that is “earth element” and depending on conditions (like how quickly or slowly we put the foot down), it can be experienced as hard or soft.

One will also notice that each phase of a step has its own peculiar set of sensations. In the commentary to the *Satipatthana Sutta*, it mentions the predominant material quality. The upward movement manifests the lightness of fire and wind elements, the downward movement manifest the heaviness of water and earth elements. Actually, each phase itself is made up of many processes.

When one walks very slowly and mindfully, following and observing the sensations, the conceptual form of the feet would slowly be left out and there will just be a flow of material qualities as a process.

Lastly, these sensations at a certain level of concentration and mindfulness would seem to repeat themselves but when concentration deepens, one enters into a different “world” and the sensations will appear subtle like many small particles arising and passing away. The nature and how concentration occurs in walking meditation will be dealt with in a separate chapter.

3. Standing Posture

The standing posture occurs between the sitting and walking postures. Usually this is not done as often and as long as the two other postures. The same procedure applies to standing meditation. One sweeps the awareness up and down, feeling the sensations in the body and noting “standing”, “touching”, “standing”

The feet are slightly apart to give some stability. Sometimes a thin, soft layer is put under the feet to ease the weight of the body should one decides to stand longer. A noticeable effect is swaying of the body which one notes as “swaying.” One may also stand near a wall or support to give more confidence.

A useful function of standing is to arouse more energy. It is done when sleepiness becomes overwhelming and instead of walking or sitting, one can use the standing posture. One may also insert rising/falling between the notings of standing and touching.

4. Lying Meditation

This “luxurious” or “forbidden” posture is normally not used unless unavoidable because one tends to fall asleep. However, during the times when you lie down to sleep or just before getting up, you too have to be mindful. It can also be useful when one is sick or when the mental energy and tension are excessive. The factor concerned here is energy. In lying down, no physical exertion is involved and this, in turn, influences the mental energy. So one has to be very alert, otherwise torpor would set in. There are different postures. The preferred is lying on one’s right side. The reason given is that the pressure is not exerted on the heart. It is called the lion’s posture. One may also use the other side or flat on one’s back (dead man’s posture). As in the previous postures, one sweeps the body, sensing, observing the body sensation – “lying down”, “touching”... One may also use the breath or rising/falling of the abdomen between these notings.

If one wishes to sleep, then one should watch these sensations in a more relaxed and superficial manner, otherwise, one would be unable to sleep.

Balance of Postures

We are told that illness can arise due to the imbalance of postures. When one posture is held for too long, extra stress is put onto the body system. That is one reason why we need to change postures regularly. The exception is when one has attained a deeper level of concentration which enables one to stay unharmed for hours or even days. Generally, one has to maintain the balance between walking, standing, and sitting. Lying down is usually the restful pose. If one’s concentration is not yet up to par, one should remember that sitting long is not necessarily beneficial. The change of posture also helps to balance the faculties of concentration and energy.

Breath

Breath is a common object today for meditators. The Theravada tradition bases it on the *Anapanasati Sutta* and its commentaries. It is also found in the *Satipatthana Sutta* but in less detail because its emphasis is on insight which contemplates on arising and dissolution of the breath formations.

The first tetrad of instructions is:

1. Breathing in a long breath he knows “I breathe in a long breath”
Breathing out a long breath he knows “I breathe out a long breath”
2. Breathing in a short breath he knows “I breathe in a short breath”
Breathing out a short breath he knows “I breathe out a short breath”
3. Making clear the entire in-breath body, I shall breathe in.
Making clear the entire out-breath body, I shall breathe out.
4. Calming the gross in breath, I shall breathe in.
Calming the gross out breath, I shall breathe out.

At the start, one may try to hold the mindfulness on the breath by counting 1-5 or 1-10 with each in- or out-breath focused at the area where the breath touches the area around the nostrils. This is actually a concentration exercise, but in the beginning there is really no harm. If one embarks onto pure tranquility (*samatha*) meditation, then one has to stick with it until it becomes subtle and its sign (a mental image) arises. From there one can develop the concentration to absorption.

Otherwise, the insight practitioner drops the concepts such as counting and “long” or “short” breath when the hindrances are overcome at access concentration and to follow and observe the sensations at the nostrils area. Even following of the breath can be done in different ways. Some people follow it from the nose to the lower lungs and back. Some feel the sensation between the eyes. Some even lead it to the heart area, which I found very effective, because it brings it right to the mind door.

Traditionally, it is recommended that one watches the breath at the nose tip just like one sawing a piece of wood concentrates at the point of contact. This approach is extremely effective for concentration. Yet another says he feels the best is not to associate the movement of the breath with any part of the body. This approach, I feel, is more relaxing and less stressful while leaving aside the physical form of the body.

The small/fine point concentrated on obviously places emphasis on concentration and when this can be done, tranquility sets in quickly. The breath becomes more and more subtle and if one's mindfulness is not sharp enough, one's thread of mindfulness would break and one would have to repeat the process.

When practicing insight development, one has to make sure of one's direction. It is very easy to relax and fall into more tranquility or even sleep. Extra alertness must be summoned so that the subtle object is not lost and also to observe the material elements that arise and pass away with each breath. As the object and point can be very fine, it may be helpful to extend the range of sensations from those where the breath touches the nose tip/nostrils to the areas around it. The broader area provides more sensations to watch and so remain continuously on the insight path.

In *Samatha* meditation, one changes into insight cultivation at access, or after one or more absorptions. One directs one's mindfulness to the mental and material qualities that arise and pass away. The qualities may be connected with the breath but not necessarily so.

It is obvious that when concepts are dropped, so are the conceptualization of form and parts of the body. But because the mind is habitually acquainted with the breath, it tends to stay fixed with the elements there, although this may not necessarily be the case. One can easily switch to observe the elements and the universal characteristics connected with any body part or process.

Rising/Falling of the Abdomen

The rising and falling of the abdomen in *Vipassana* practice is popularized by the Mahasi tradition. As I had heard from my teacher, Mahasi was not the first to use this technique. He took it from another person (layman) and found it beneficial to his students. Since then, this practice had spread among his disciples throughout the globe.

There was, however, also considerable criticism from Burma and Sri Lanka, which called it “belly meditation”, and argued that Buddha had used recollection of breath at the nose tip. The answer is obvious for practitioners who are not so caught up with words. The Buddha did teach other objects of meditation besides mindfulness of the breath with concentration at nose tip, as is shown in the *Satipatthana Sutta*. In watching of the rising/falling of the abdomen, the object is:

1. Tangible object (*phottabbarammana*) which occurs at the body base (kaya pasada)
2. It is the tangible element (*photthabba dhatu*) of 18 elements
3. It is the wind element (*vayo dhatu*) of the four elements
4. It is the wind element in belly outside bowels

When one is able to see through concepts of shape and form, it is a wonder why this had become an issue. When watching the abdomen rise and fall, one (should) eventually (perhaps with some direction) be focused mindfully on the process that occurs with the quality of motion, tension, etc., in dominance.

The rising/falling usually refers to the process of sensations that occurs at the belly when one breathes. Preferably, it is the area (not necessarily a spot) above the navel, closer to the diaphragm region. This is where the tissues are softer and flexible and so movements can be more easily discerned. Further down, the abdomen tends to be more taut and so the

movements are somewhat restricted. For ladies, however, who may tend to use more chest breathing, the upper area close to the chest may be more obvious to watch.

Usually when one breaths in, the belly moves outwards, but not necessarily so. It can be the reverse. It may also be that there are no movements even though there is breathing, especially when the breath is fine and shallow. One can then watch, if it is suitable, the sensations that still occur at the belly. If it is not possible, then one should revert to the “sitting/touching” object or the other bodily sensations. So rising/falling is not breathing, although it is connected with it.

While watching, it is again emphasized that one “feels” rather that “sees” (which creates a visual image). The awareness just “sits” on the object at the belly. It first follows the object and, when more adept, it just sits on it like a surfer or sail along like a boat.

At the beginning, one mindfully notes and notices the rising-outward movement as “rising”. When falling, the inward movement as “falling”. One follows closely with mindfulness as clearly as possible and notices what is present.

When one is still new to the object, then one may seem to think of it as a line that moves or one may still bear the shape of a balloon. This automatic conceptualization is unavoidable. But when the sensations on the qualities of matter are clear, the concepts are phased off. One is encouraged to observe the nature of the rising/falling in detail. Firstly, the nature of each rise and fall (like long, short; fast, slow; tense, relaxed) and with improvement, the variations within each rise and fall. To encourage the perception of flow/change, one may note each rise and fall several times, like “rising, rising,.....” “falling, falling....”. It also helps to keep the mind to the present occurrence.

Open and Narrow Awareness

The *vipassana* object is a process, or shall I say processes? When concentration on the process is not dictated by one dominant element (e.g., wind element) one tends to have a wider view.

For example, while watching rising/falling, one tends to pick up

1. Extraneous objects that intrude, e.g., sounds, thoughts
2. Objects other than one intended (movement) such as at the belly itself, as heat which may arise or, for that matter, sounds.
3. Objects from other body parts which are dominant, e.g., pain

Although the objects are from different sources, the mind's eye, when it is not so absorbed, may tend to see them together in a big flow, with the central primary object.

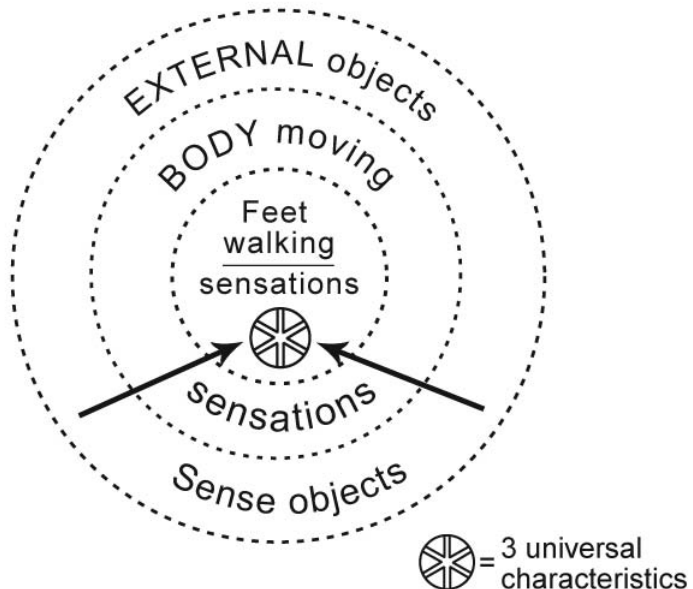


Fig.5

One should not push away or deny the existence of objects which have in fact come into the field of one's mindfulness. To deny them would mean not seeing things as they really occur. So they have to be noticed and reported as such. But when concentration increases, one becomes more absorbed into the process with the dominance of one element/quality. With the field narrowed, the concentration intensifies. Again, one must make sure the mindfulness is still open to penetrate into the three universal characteristics, truth.

Open awareness can be said to be of several types:

1. Completely Open Awareness

This is when one is completely open to anything that arises at the six sense doors. It is most flexible but can also be most distracting. No matter, we still have to work in this area with the frequency ranging from sometimes to very often.

- a. With wide view - this is like being aware of everything at the same time.
- b. With deeper concentration of one object at that time. It is like bumping into one object and then into the next. It is still open to any object that arises at the six sense doors.

2. Open Awareness Centered on the Consciousness (mind):

The difference between this and the former is that in this case the object comes to the mind, while in the latter, the mind goes to the object. The concentration in this case, would be more stable, and its contemplation is mainly on consciousness (mind). The other merges into contemplation of phenomena (*dhamma*).

3. Collected Open Awareness

This is narrowed down to the body or part of the body, and so not as open. Still, there are many objects to deal with. The advantage here is that the concentration picks up faster and yet keeps a fairly wide range of sensations, more than enough to ensure that one is practicing insight on change, etc, and not pure tranquility. It is also very stable.

4. Openness in Narrowed Awareness

Narrow awareness would mean that the mindfulness is narrowed down to a single process with a single specific characteristic/quality or point, e.g., on just one movement or the point at the nose tip. Concentration, as expected, would rise quickly but there must still be that “openness” to the penetration of things as they really are. It is like looking into a microscope and nothing else, but one has to keep on increasing magnification. One would see the object with more changes.

Openness in Walking Meditation

The open awareness is more obvious in walking meditation. With the eyes open and moving, one is bound to encounter more external objects than sitting stationary with closed eyes. All types of open awareness described (1-4) can occur, but in (3), it is at the primary object, that is the feet. (4) becomes less common unless one walks very slow. When the momentary concentration deepens, it tends to take the form of 1(b), moving on to (2) and (3). When one considers the importance of insight development, then it should not be underestimated. Concentration can reach access when hindrances are put away and open awareness allows more free development of insights over a larger field.

Breath Meditation vs. Rising/Falling

With improved communication, the world is getting smaller. We meet with an overload of information and choices. Meditation is no different. Unfortunately, information is not the same as wisdom. Much of the deeper experiences are still in the oral tradition, and these matters are not easily communicated.

As a result, people meet with many meditation techniques and so can be at a loss as to which one to be committed to. Narrowing down to the Buddhist meditation tradition and further narrowing down to the Theravadin insight practice, the two most common objects used are breath meditation, which focuses on in/out breath, and the rising/falling of abdomen. Even this has caused conflicts, personally and among groups. I will not go into detailed arguments but just state what is noticeable and obvious from my observations.

Breath-in/out

1. area small
2. object range less
3. soft, calming
4. quickly becomes subtle
therefore, may become less
obvious

Abdomen-rising/falling

1. area larger
2. object range more
3. grosser, can be painful
4. grosser object reveals
change better

Putting aside individual mental dispositions, it is obvious that breath meditation brings up concentration faster, while the rising/falling will be more suitable for insight development. This is not something difficult to see if you practice. Besides this, traditionally, most breath meditation traditions nowadays guide one to tranquility absorptions before embarking onto insight development, which may be based on the breath itself or other objects. The rising/falling tradition is usually a pure insight vehicle, which is more direct if you lack time (who does not?) But it does not mean one does not take up tranquility practices (which are helpful and useful) later.

What about doing both? Do not be fickle, but it is possible. One needs clear comprehension to avoid conflicts. Some who try both do meet with this dilemma. If one feels really divided, then the advice is to abandon both and fall back to watching the “sitting/touching” object. One can still keep the breath-in/out for concentration purposes.

Clear Comprehension

In the chapter of clear comprehension, we can see how mindfulness is being applied to all of one’s activities throughout the day.

1. Going forward and back
2. Looking straight ahead and away.
3. Wearing robes or clothes
4. Eating, drinking, chewing, savoring
5. Urinating and defecating
6. Walking, standing, sitting and falling asleep (lying down)
7. Waking, speaking and keeping silent.

The process of how mindfulness is aroused, followed and observed is the same, but it is noteworthy of mention the meaning of clear comprehension (*sampajanna*) which is a significant factor in the practice.

Clear comprehension means knowing clearly, precisely, entirely (in all its aspects) in a balanced manner.

The definition given is similar to what has been explained in the text at the beginning about mindfulness. However, one who is studying its further elaboration can see the wide range of its function in the practice. The range covers from the initial purifying and clarifying aspects of mindfulness to regulating and integrating holistically the practice in life, to the deeper realizations, i.e., wisdom. Therefore, the Four Fold clear comprehensions are:

1. Clear comprehension of purpose/benefit (i.e., the motive, intention, volition and nature of mental impulses)
2. Clear comprehension of suitability (i.e., how the surrounding conditions and situations are suited to one's purpose.
3. Clear comprehension of (meditator's) domain/field (i.e., areas in life and how it is covered by practice)
4. Clear comprehension of non-delusion, that is, as insight (i.e., realization of the nature of deeper practice and reality)

The first two are realized through the watching of “intentions”. Before every action, there has to be an intention (consciously or unconsciously). If one is able to be mindful of it, then its purpose and suitability can be comprehended.

Take for example, in walking meditation the eyes are downcast to avoid unnecessary eye contact. Then, there is someone or something walking in front of you. You look ahead, in front. An impulse made you look ahead. Why? There is an intention or impulse to do so. In this case, there is no special purpose - it is a natural response but still it is a response. And if you are mindful enough, you can catch the “impulse” or “intention” to look ahead.

But when you are doing walking meditation, you are mindful that it is generally not suitable to be looking ahead because it can distract you. Then, another “intention” arises for you to want to talk to the person. When you are able to catch it at the moment it occurs, then the purpose of the intention can also be known - why? If you are just bored, then its purpose is not right. If the other person is doing walking meditation, then it is not suitable. So you see, when you catch the “intention” or “impulse”, you can gain clear comprehension of purpose and suitability. Try seeing what happens to the other cases.

When one has applied this form of clear comprehension which comes with mindfulness and concentration, then the skill or faculty of correct judgement with regards to practice is built up and strengthened. There are, however, some things to note. They are:

1. Ability to catch purpose as intentions and impulses which can be very quick, deep and subtle, and can reach to the deeper levels of the mind, such as hidden motives, moods, schemes, and other deeper causes not normally manifest to the conscious mind.
2. The aspect of suitability depends also on the extent of one's exposure to information and life as a whole. They form the basic information and data which the mind draws upon and refers to. Often it includes customs and cultures that are quite alien. But, if suitability is just on the practice alone, then mental conditions surrounding the situation have much to say.
3. These two pertain to what one may call intuition, i.e., a sense of knowing things deeper and farther than the conscious mind.
4. How quickly and efficiently this clear comprehension works depend on one's practice. When one is more adept, it works like an efficient, automatic, built in computer that quickly tells one what is bad to do, not to do, and why.

This is how clear comprehension functions to maintain the practice in our life, which by right should be a meditation, that is, when meditation is by then equated with life.

But it is clear that at the onset one can do so and have mindfulness only when situations are not too hostile. Even in a retreat where conditions are meant to be more conducive, it is not always the most congenial. But with practice and experience, one is able to extend the practice to a wider domain. From sitting and walking meditation to daily activities, one can still maintain fairly good mindfulness and clear comprehension. Still, there will be moments and areas that are less suitable. These are areas where the moral base itself is intruded, such as where people are involved with killing, harming, stealing, cheating, sexual vices, abuse, intoxications and so on. If one's integrity is threatened, it is best to avoid it.

Technically, it is said that the domain of clear comprehension is none other than the four foundations of mindfulness. It would also not be wrong to say that its final objects are those of realities - the mind-body processes and truths that underlie all things. When one is able to keep in touch with these realities and maintain mindfulness and clear comprehension, then one is in one's domain. Outside is a danger zone.

When mindfulness and clear comprehension have deepened, then they penetrate beyond the superficial realities and concepts and one is able to experience deeply the inner natures. This is none other than reality itself, as expressed by impermanence, suffering, non-self, and that is when it becomes the clear comprehension of non- delusion/insight. It becomes clear when this is explained by seeing or understanding that all phenomena are non-self.



On a walk along the outskirts of Amsterdam, this little dog popped out its little head from a small hole in the fence and started barking. It's a shame that he could not do more than that. Still he has a good look on the other side of the fence. So many are blind to reality. An insight meditation retreat even if it be for just a week can help you take a peek at what the world really looks like. Then you will want to get out.

A Head Out, Amsterdam, Netherlands 2005

Chapter 2



VEDANANUPASSANA SATIPATTHANA

Mindful Contemplation on Feelings - Crossing The Ocean

While contemplation on body is like walking on the ground, at first solid and then becoming fizzy, meditation on feelings is like getting your feet wet and very soon you will have to swim.

As mental and bodily phenomena have become clear, it is only natural that feelings will stand out. Contact, which has been identified as the proximate cause, supplies the very reason. And of all feelings, painful feelings are grossest. Little wonder that beginners have to face the painful feelings (or challenge if you are more of the positive type), often sooner rather than later. But it is not all so bad with feelings, for there is also the pleasant as well as the neither pleasant nor painful sides.

What is feeling?

Feeling has been defined as that natural phenomenon which savors its object, like the king savoring his food. I have another definition which may be more comprehensible to some people. Imagine that you throw a stone into the water. That stone represents the object/stimulus and the water, the mind. On impact, it immediately causes ripples. That impact is contact and the ripples, feelings.

There are three feelings: (1) painful (2) pleasant and (3) neither painful nor pleasant. Painful and pleasant can again be divided into bodily and mental feelings. For the body, it is called bodily happiness and bodily pain. Mentally, there is mental pain (sometimes called displeasure),

mental happiness/pleasure, and neither painful nor pleasurable which are also called indifferent or neutral feelings. Hence, there are five feelings in this classification. Please take note that there is no bodily neutral feeling. The reason given is the immediate impact. Another interesting note is that the *Satipatthana Sutta* mentioned carnal (or worldly) and spiritual feelings. This has relevance to the object concerned, which could be worldly or spiritual.

Sensations

Another point of interest is the word “sensations” which can easily fall under bodily feelings. It can also mean object of the senses. As such, all six objects of sense can be called sensations, but they often refer to bodily objects which may be the material elements. Please exercise some discretion where the word is used.

Bodily Painful Feelings

The beginner’s introduction to insight meditation can be painful brought about by the initial physical pain related to posture or illness. Whichever the case, the choice of a suitable posture can make the first lessons easier.

The traditional Lotus posture (a) is usually considered the best because it keeps the spine erect, which helps the attention to become alert. But for beginners, the pain at the knees and ankle kills unless they have legs that are boneless and jointless.

The half lotus (b) or Burmese posture (c) are often a more common choice. The common folded form (d) is another possibility, but stress eventually builds up at the ankles. Side postures are more often used as a change in posture or by ladies in sarongs. Whatever, keep the spine fairly erect or with a natural bend without creating too much strain. A balanced posture helps one to maintain an even attention. Hands can be

folded at the lap or placed on the knees. Some teachers place emphasis on finger “*mudras*”, which I do not think it is of great importance. Some people recommend that the tongue should lightly touch the upper palate in the mouth. It seems that it maintains the circulation of energy. I never do that and it does not matter to me. However, it may be of significance to others.

It is relevant to keep the body firm yet relaxed and comfortable and the mind alert. Sitting on chairs is not conducive for alertness, but I think it is alright if one finds that sitting on the floor is too painful, although care ought to be taken not to lean on something since one tends to slacken in alertness. Cushions do help and have become important meditation accessories but avoid those that are too soft. You will sink into unknown states - probably sleep, and wake up with backaches.

Personally, I think a thin, firm cushion for the base would be sufficient to be complemented with some towels to lift the buttocks up to help straighten the spine.

But no matter what cushions one uses, sooner or later, pain will become strong. When pain is minor, one is first encouraged to build up mindfulness and concentration on the easier primary object of meditation. Only when it is strong enough to take the mind away, then it is dealt with. At first, pain does not stay long and so is treated as a secondary object. One returns to the primary object when pain passes off or it can be ignored. But when pain is dominant and persists, it is made the primary object.

How does one watch pain? I think the most important factor is motivation. I agree that we are here not to practice self mortification, but nothing is gained without some sacrifices. What we can get from good meditation far supersedes these little pains we meet with. But if one does not see that, one's discouragement is understandable. Another advice is to treat this as a training lesson, in patience, and, O yes, we all need more

patience. It will also help to tell oneself that one does not have to go through this if one does not want to. Finally, knowing how to deal with pain is what it is all about. I have always wondered how some people can take so much pain and after all these years, there is certainly much more to learn from painful sensations, and whatever learned will certainly be useful to help life become happier.

The first thing again is to exercise mindfulness. A common mistake made is to concentrate on the pain. The result is that it becomes magnified and so clutches onto you like a dog which had sunk its teeth into the flesh and refuses to let go. If we remember that our main aim is to develop mindfulness then this approach may not suit the purpose.

When it comes to dealing with pain, exercising mindfulness means being at peace with it. And that means to be relaxed and take it on as if you are taking on a difficult task, or even better, like taking on the care of a sick child. Here, I think we have come to the main point in the meditation on feelings....the attitude of acceptance.

We always think of pain as being connected with terrible things, such as suffering, death, etc. It need not be so. If we can be mindful, the situation can reverse and, pain can become a blessing in disguise. It may also change into something better.

So when it comes, do not panic. Take a deep breath if you have to; peacefully accept it, like absorbing water with a piece of cotton wool (maybe a BIG piece). When you can remain totally at peace and accepting, to the point of falling asleep if you so wish, then I think you have made the first step. It is unusual to fall asleep with pain around (although some do, when it is not intense), and so it keeps one awake and because it is strong and tends to stick, concentration, i.e., one pointedness, naturally follows. Isn't it ironical that even for those who try to build up concentration, the objects tend to slip away, while in this case pain tails us

when we get trailed off, and wakes us up when we fall asleep. And pain is one object that is unique in producing *Vipassana* (insight) concentration because the three characteristics are very apparent. So, with mindfulness pain becomes a blessing. It can be compared to a strict teacher or a frank friend who gives it to you straight. If one can stay cool and listen, then there are lessons to be learned. There are of course, physical and mental limits, and so these we must heed.



Hang On, Prague, Czech 2004

I do hope we do not end up in this position, although for others it has happened and even reached further down there. For the meantime, just hang on until help comes. Another symbol for patience which is not common and has to be cultivated.

What are the limits? Mentally, it is when we cannot hold our mindfulness anymore. When there is a 50-50 chance, then it is still a training session. When it falls to a near zero level, then let us leave it to come back later. Physically, it is trickier. But if you listen to the signs, it will tell, such as uncontrollable shaking, shivering or outpouring of cold sweat. I do not

think it is wise to stretch oneself too far, for some physical damage may result. Health is still an important issue. But if death is at hand anyway... it is not a matter of choice. Again, here we stress on mindfulness as in insight meditation. Pain should be taken as a mere phenomenon, so when being mindful of pain, it should be regarded as “not me”, “not mine”, “not myself”. This expression actually refers to a level of insight which comes with meditative experience, although quite initial, but this is not so to beginners. An intellectual understanding or reminder of this fact can, however, be helpful. At least a sense of detachment ought to be present to maintain a distance from the painful phenomenon.

This means that pain can be watched (i) directly, like holding the bull by its horns; or (ii) at a distance, like shooting at something from afar. The initial choice is preferred because it brings the mindfulness close to it, if not into it, so as to get the best view. If it is too stressful, then the second approach is adopted. It also works but the perception is weaker, or it might eventually come close anyway.

So the first step is to mindfully zero in on the most painful spot, like the firm hand gripping the viper by the neck. You look into its eyes and say, “There, I have got you; you are not going to bite me, are you?” The ability to hold on with mindfulness generates concentration of that mindfulness as well as the next step, which is to mindfully observe and study it. So looking into the eyes of the viper, you say, “Now, I will look deep into you and know all your secrets.”

And so you watch the types of pain in terms of how it moves and changes, like the way you watch the colors of its skin and how it whirls and wriggles.

Types of pain? Hot pain, cold pain (associated with fire element); stretching, twisting, pulling, (associated with wind element); hard, squeezing, pounding (associate with earth element); numbness, sourish, ticklish and many, many more.

When one is able to do that, then one can trace its routes. At first, they are stationary at one spot, then it throbs and sends out connections. It tends to run, spread, and finally cease. Here, there are many ways of looking at a situation. One is that many pains of equal intensity are spread over different parts of the body. When concentration is focused into one, it fades and another comes into view. When you look into this, it fades and the first returns. So you end up very busy, running about and ending up tired. A way to deal with this is to widen one's field of awareness to cover both, or all, which is like watching the sitting posture as a whole. Usually these strong pains do not vanish so easily. They grow, become more intense before fading away. Very often it becomes increasingly difficult to tolerate. So there is an alternative of holding onto another object yet still watching it on one side. It is like seeking the support of a friendly ally. If the pain becomes worse, one may try to ignore it. Just bear in mind the building up of mindfulness above all else. If mindfulness builds up (and in this case with determination), one may pull through.

After being able to be mindful and discern the different types of pain, the next step is to be able to see it as a process. That is, to be able to follow and observe its changes. This is when it becomes more tolerable and interesting. When it just grows in intensity, then there comes a time when tolerance wears out. If it comes and goes, then life goes on! In the *Girimananda Sutta*, the Buddha advised Girimananda on the 10 perceptions to be developed and he would be healed of his illness. The first is the perception of impermanence, and to develop that, one watches changes in pain. If that perception is strong and sharp, then one sees clearly into the cessation of pain, or even the illness.

However, we are all reminded that the chief reason we watch pain is not to get rid of pain, but to look into its true nature. Feelings, of which pain is a part, will always be around when there is consciousness, unless one reaches the goal of utter cessation of *Nibbana*, which is sometimes called cessation of feelings and perception. Bearing this advice in mind helps us

to maintain mindfulness and right attitude. That is because latent with pain is aversion (hatred root), which pops up all too easily though we may not realize it when present in subtler degree. Therefore, if one finds out that one indeed has aversion, then one should deal with that with mindfulness and acceptance.

Right Attitude

Right Attitude to pain plays a large part in dealing with it. Here are some to take note.

1. Warrior Attitude

“I have no fear of it, for I am a warrior.”

The warrior image is an ancient one. In Buddhist texts it appears frequently. It is a symbol of courage and determination to overcome all odds, and variation of this is the hero. My teacher often tells his students to make “heroic effort.” Sometimes to chide my students, I ask them, “Are you a man or a mouse?” Bearing the warrior attitude is certain to summon much energy. If one has great confidence and knows of the unlimited energy present in the mind, it takes one beyond one’s limits.

But one has to take care in this case. Firstly, arrogance. For example, I have seen more than one macho being turned into mice. Conceit itself is a big obstacle. To be realistic and yet open to challenges would be more like the approach needed. We are here to cast away conceit, not to add on more. Secondly, aggressiveness may be present, and this contradicts the soft, accepting part of mindfulness that is critical in this situation. You do not fight with pain, you work with it with understanding.

2. The Doctor/Nurse Attitude

“What is wrong? Let us see if we can make life better.”

Personally, I prefer this gentler approach. Softness and gentleness, unfortunately, is often misunderstood as a weakness. With purity and mindfulness, they are in fact strong and can be more powerful than hatred. You can be surprised how much softer the whole world will become when this attitude is adopted, e.g., overcoming anger with love.

Pain has been compared to a barb. It comes with the body, and so the body has been compared to a wound. With this attitude, one’s mindfulness becomes like a soft healing force - like cotton wool or cooling balm that works into the wound and removes the barb. At the same time, one observes the universal characteristics to bring about insight that leads to greater healing.

Once, a lady who recently had an operation and was in pain regardless of whatever posture she took. After learning this method, she told me she used “a lot of cotton wool.” It works. This attitude is complementary to the development of compassion, when one sees suffering in oneself, then too in others.

3. The Scientist Attitude

“This is very interesting.”

I remember the occasion when a doctor said this concerning a patient whose disease he could not diagnose. I could not help smiling with the thought that would he say the same if he himself was the patient. Being depressed does not help, being interested does. The interest helps one to investigate deeper into the problem, and curiosity is an important precursor of insight.

A good question to start with is, “What is this?” This will encourage one to be aware of what is happening rather than running away. Then one may add, “What is next?” to encourage one to continue observing. And when one asks, “What is this REALLY?” one looks deeper. Another good suggestion is to ask, “If it is not pain, what then is it?” It will give one a different outlook beyond the fact that these are just strong sensations.

Will there be more “tricks” to deal with pain? I am sure there are and one has to be creative. Whatever they may be, one very important factor is strong right concentration - the strength that holds the mindfulness intact. It is sort of an unshakeable force that if one looks at pain, one remains unaffected. If one chooses to turn away, one can also do so. Strong detachment from the body and senses makes it all possible.

Such is the case when dealing with extremely severe pain, as in deadly diseases, serious accidents, or even at moments when death is near. That is when you need to summon up all your good *kamma* and training. A little late is too late, so it is advisable not to procrastinate in one’s training and practice.

In the *Vipassana* method, one looks into the pain and its connected conditions, seeing into its impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and non-self. The penetration into truth is healing. It would, therefore, be the first choice since we will all die one day anyway, sooner or later. But for beginners, it is better to build up right concentration (with the perception of the three universal characteristics) on an easier object before coming straight on to it. Then, with the perceptions sharply developed, when one looks at the pain and illness with sufficiently strong detachment, they should vanish - if not altogether, then at least for sometime. Long sittings of several hours (six or more) are recommended. The best are those with deep insights. It has been shown from the texts that the Buddha and his noble disciples heal themselves by the power of the factors of enlightenment which are present in insight practice. They enter into the supramundane attainments and emerged healed. Otherwise, the

shift to a *samatha* object will give one the rest and strength after much battering. The joy of right concentration itself is healing. If death does come anyway, right concentration contributes to one's quality of life and is sure to contribute to a better one to come. Of particular relevance are appropriate visualizations (e.g., pure light), compassion (to oneself), equanimity and acceptance, and contemplation on 32 parts of the body.

Yet the most effective means I have discovered is total acceptance or surrender. Here, it is important to differentiate it from the state of despair and hopelessness. It is the acceptance and surrender to reality, and so requires strong yet soft mindfulness. The mind, thus, becomes like the empty space into which all objects enter and vanish. Usually a difficult struggle between this acceptance of faith and understanding, on one hand and self preservation, on the other, occurs before the self surrender sets in, and when it does, the pains, no matter how strong, can amazingly vanish.

Bodily “Happy” Feelings

Bodily “happy” feelings are nice feelings connected with the body base. Body comfort may be the more appropriate word. It is evident when bodily pain vanishes suddenly, what replaces it may be really nice.

In insight practice, this may not be very apparent since it is overshadowed by pain. But they do occur such as during a change in posture, in the resting posture or on entering a more soothing environment. This, too, has to be mindfully noted, “Bodily happy feeling....,” to ensure a continuity of mindfulness just in case the latent potential of attachment arises, and if it does, one would have to deal with it.. When this is done, then comfortable bodily feelings will safely condition pleasant mental feelings, which are, in turn, conducive to concentration.

Mentally Painful/Displeasurable Feelings

Purely mental feelings are those that arise at the mind door. But what of those that arise at the eye, ear, nose, and tongue bases? Here is an interesting note. Those feelings that arise as a result of their objects touching the bases are associated with indifferent feelings, unlike the more direct impact of the body object with body base. Being indifferent, they are more subtle and so not usually contemplated on by beginners.

All feelings are mental anyway, but these have to do with the external senses. Even many mind door experiences have to do with the senses.

What concerns us now are the emotions. These are like waves of the great ocean. When storm breaks, these waves can break down one's sanity. Yes, we know that matters of the heart are very powerful and that mental pain far exceeds physical pain.

Mental painful feelings arise with the root of anger/aversion. When one is unable to accept the situation, one becomes troubled and agitated. The waves are violent and harmful when they strike an obstacle that does not only stand in the way but also hits back, like two cars from opposite sides running into collision and doubling the force .

The proximate cause as we are told is the repulsive object. Ironically, pain is one such object that when a person gets angry, he or she is like being pierced by two arrows. Generally objects that are too harsh, strong and destructive have this nature.

In the case of mental feelings, trouble has reached "one's own house." Steps must be taken quickly before it causes complete chaos and breakdown. Here, one works as one does with difficult situations, but knowing how to do this at the mental level makes much difference. It has been called "emotional intelligence."

On one hand, because of the root of aversion, feelings are generally gross, and so easily detectable. But there are subtler and hidden forms such as when one refuses to acknowledge it or when it is overshadowed by other desires. When one is not completely at ease, there is already the possibility of displeasure. So mindfulness must be aroused and one should mindfully note, “Displeasure.....”

When aversion or its other forms, such as fear, remorse, worry, hatred or jealousy arise, they would have to be dealt with accordingly. More on this will be given in the chapter on consciousness.

At this juncture, one must “hold one’s heart firm.” Be like a rock or an island. One will then feel the thrashing from the waves of displeasure receding. When one holds onto mindfulness long enough, its strength grows and displeasure passes away. If not, one may need to resort to *samatha* methods, such as loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, or equanimity to weaken the displeasure or put it away.

Observe closely how the heart cries and sobs, scolds or becomes depressed. One should try not to be affected by it. It is more like seeing a disabled aged whom one is willing to help. Finally, one will be able to see these displeasurable feelings arise and pass away, as is the characteristic of all conditioned things.

Mentally Pleasurable Feeling

Mentally pleasurable feeling can be tricky to handle. They come in wholesome and unwholesome forms. The unwholesome forms come with craving, which include craving for worldly as well as spiritual objects. The wholesome or pure forms may or may not be associated with meditation. When pleasurable feelings arise, one can very easily get attached to them, which is corrupting. However, when we can be mindful in the face of pleasurable feelings, concentration builds up quickly and one rises up into

the clouds. With mindfulness, concentration should become subtler and more peaceful, but if energy is intense it can become stronger. When this happens, one needs to calm it down so as not to be thrown off balance.

So when pleasurable feelings arise, make sure you are really mindful. Note, “pleasurable feelings...” Usually, pleasure causes one to relax and mindfulness to slip away. The attachments that have arisen can become stronger or even obsessive. So one has to maintain the mindfulness that is alert, energetic and free flowing, not stiff and heavy. A lesser evil is to fall asleep.

Special care is needed when it involves meditation where concentration is stronger. Maintaining a strong sense of detachment is important. Where there is conceit and hallucinations with regards to spiritual attainments, it can lead to deep psychological problems. So time and again, the need for detachment is emphasized, and with good reason! When attachments and craving becomes obvious, then these mental states are dealt with accordingly with mindfulness, noting “craving.....” very closely until it passes away. Safety comes first, but it should also not create any fear of pleasurable feelings.

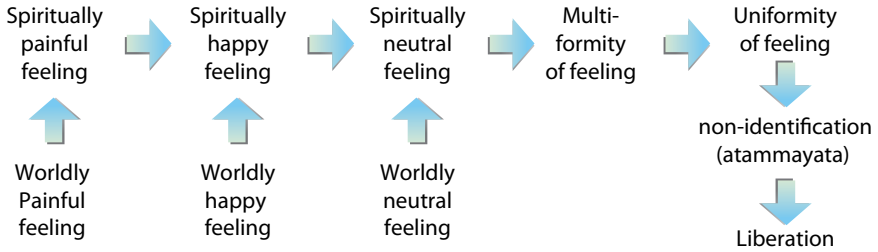
When one is able to maintain mindfulness on pleasurable feelings, then one’s meditation is smooth sailing and a treat. Keep following its flow - like soft gentle waves that rise and fall, sometimes full of bubbles of joy. This joy (*pīti* in Pali) also occurs in different forms, from light tingling zaps, uplifting impulses to overwhelming waves and pervasive sensations. Again, it is important to remain mindfully detached, carefully observing its changes. The pleasurable feeling eventually settles down to more subtle and peaceful levels. Finally, it becomes a neutral feeling.

Neutral/Indifferent Feeling

The name given in the texts can be translated into neither pleasurable nor displeasurable feeling. This implies that it is subtle and difficult to detect. Often it is overshadowed by other grosser mental states or their objects. When one's ability to perceive feelings develops very clearly, their nature will be certain.

These indifferent feelings can also be wholesome or unwholesome. When feelings are unwholesome, they can be rooted in delusion or craving. Delusion types are dull and heavy, or scattered and weak, while those rooted in craving are obsessive like strong compulsions. Defilements identified with joyful or painful feelings often overlook this fact. Thinking that there is nothing harmful, one becomes negligent. It should also be noted that the absence of strong emotions does not indicate purity.

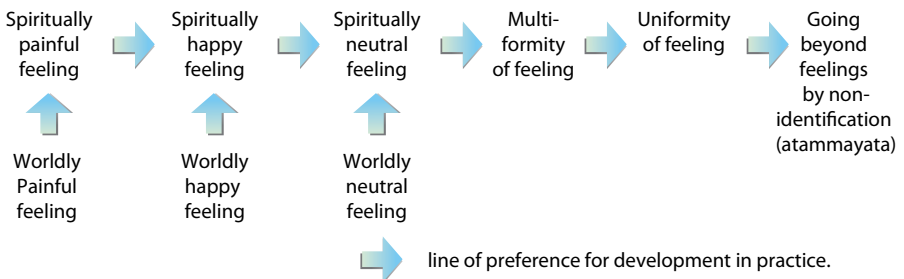
When the mind is pure, it can also be accompanied with neutral feelings. But in this case, it is light and soft, and so may be even subtler. But with mindfulness that is developed and sharpened, this feeling can also be observed. It occurs when pleasurable feelings have become subtle and turned into neutral feelings. To be able to see into the impermanence, moment- to-moment change of this feeling is important and amounts to insight. This is when feelings are observed in their true form. Neutral feeling becomes more like a subtle sensation, and if magnified by concentration and sharp mindfulness, a strong sensation passes like electric currents. At that time you may also say it is closer in its nature to "suffering", hence, one may call it suffering of formations. Such perception is usually developed after the observation of change and other universal characteristics of the grosser feelings.



Feeling, as we understand from the teachings, is very much part and parcel of the mind stream. In Buddhist metaphysics, it is a mental state that is present as long as the mind is there. It is absent only in unusual cases, e.g., attainment of cessation (*Nirodha Samāpatti*), and *Nibbana*.

This position makes it special. For one thing, feelings will be there and it is undeniably powerful. Ignore it at your peril. Deny it and you will soon suffer more. Like an ever flowing stream, it cannot be stopped by an ordinary man. The rational way to face it is to control its flow and make the best use of it. Try to be like the stoic eagle of the rock and you may end up as a stone-faced, cold-hearted demon. Therefore, proper understanding into the nature of feeling is necessary before mastery is possible. We may be able to arouse a suitable feeling or to transform it into another one if we so wish. We will have at our disposal all the powers in this great ocean of feelings and emotions. Then, there will be only or mainly joyful and peaceful feelings.

One final addition to this chapter will be the *Salayatana Vibhanga Sutta*, which gives us a hierarchy of feelings which can be represented below:



It is easy to understand why painful feelings are the less preferred of the set. They are gross and can be accompanied by aversion root. But the choice of spiritually indifferent feelings over happy feelings is worth thinking over.

Usually joyful feeling is appreciated more than neutral feeling because of their ability to lift one above sorrows. But in the case of pure states, especially with regards to meditation, neutral feelings can be superior. For example, the higher levels of concentrated absorptions have neutral feelings; so too are the case of the higher insight knowledges starting from knowledge of dissolution. Such feelings imply balance and stability that accompany pure awareness. It will allow greater growth in right concentration and penetration. A further refinement that deepens the state further is the progression from multifarious objects to uniform objects.

Still, in the end, the highest stage is to see into the utter cessation of feelings for feelings are conditioned and impermanent and a base for suffering. Insight brings us to the nature of their cessation described as “peaceful bliss.” Bliss? It is certainly not a type of feeling but a kind of silence from it all.... an everlasting one.

Chapter 3



CITTANUPASSANA SATIPATTHANA Contemplations of Consciousness as Foundation of Mindfulness

Citta

The definition given to “*citta*”, usually translated as consciousness, is that phenomenon/state which thinks of the object. Another definition puts it as “receiving the object”, and yet another as “knowing” the object. If I am to give my own, I would call it the “knowing mind” at an instant. But this is just the tip of an iceberg. When asked who you are, you may point to your nose or face. But what is more important is the “heart”. In the same way, trying to define “*citta*” with a sentence is insufficient. But I would still use the word “consciousness” but it is used more as a technical term rather than what is meant in the English dictionary. So, as in all realities, one’s understanding of it is very much a matter of experience.

When dealing with consciousness, we encompass a wide range of phenomena or forces. They all have that similar quality of knowing the object. And yet that knowing takes various forms, experiences and objects. The whole thing would seem to be like the workings of a monster computer or a monster amoeba/octopus.

There is an interesting verse from the *Dhammapada* that goes like this:

*Wandering far, wandering alone bodiless lying in a cave;
those who subdue it are freed from the bonds of Mara.*

(Dhammapada. 37).

The verse does give us a picture of the mind. It is explained that “alone” refers to the fact that no two thought moments occur at the same time. The consciousness itself is not yours or mine. It is just consciousness. It is not 1 or 2. It is just it at that instant. Over periods of time it seems to be here, there, and everywhere...distance is a concept. It is with the object and it is just there. It is also not a solid substance with color or shape which are attributes of materiality. At a restful or passive phase, it is described by commentaries and disciples to reside at the “cave” of the heart base. It is home base, one may say. Yet, it is this consciousness that creates the universe we find, and will find ourselves in a magical situation which can also turn into a nightmare. Is it a white or a black wizard? It could be both, hence, the verses,

*“The mind is hard to check, swift, flits wherever it listeth:
To control it is good. A controlled mind is conducive to happiness.”*



Low caste, high mind, Nepal 1994

A woman of lower caste came as a cleaner in the place where we meditated in Trisuli in Nepal. The photo was taken as she saluted just before I left the place. Her humility and respectful-ness is reflected in the serenity of her expression. All this goes to show a higher consciousness.

Consciousness and Mental States (*Citta and Cetasika*)

Having dealt with consciousness, what then is mental state? The texts define it as “that phenomenon that arises with, ceases with, having the same object and base as the consciousness.” It emphasizes the “associated” relationship. A teacher gave the simile of the water and state of water. If water is consciousness, then the restless or calm state is the mental state of restlessness or tranquility. The consciousness and mental state co-exist inseparably in one moment, but looking at them over a period, there are distinct differences.

Usually the mental state of perception (*sanna*) is more apparent and consciousness is at the background. It is for this reason that it is easier to see changes in the mental state than the consciousness. One usually approaches to see changes in the consciousness by way of the mental states. This is provided that one does not cling on to the consciousness as unchanging self which unfortunately is often the case, even with “religious” and “philosophical” people. This view prevents one from going beyond the mundane and conditioned.

As another example to clarify the difference between the two phenomena is when one meditates, one notes mindfully on this and that. That mindfulness moves towards the objects, observes and makes perception clear and sharp. This is the mental state of mindfulness. At some point, when concentration has picked up sufficiently, one feels a complete shift to another level of knowing that is very pure and clear of sleepiness, restlessness, etc. It is as if one [i.e., the mind] is completely different. That “knowing” mind is the consciousness.

Hence, I conclude that watching the consciousness is watching (what we usually call) the mind. However, at this moment, we do not try to differentiate consciousness and mental states. We just observe what is there. But for the sake of discussion and knowledge, we need to be clear on

this point. We must make sure that our mindfulness does not just remain watching the mental states. We must be watching the consciousness as well, to see into its transiency, incompleteness and non-self, so that it may reach beyond the conditioned states.

Firstly, it would be very helpful to have some basic knowledge of how the mind works if we are to deal with it. As a beginner, it is not possible to know in detail but we will still need to start somewhere.

As a simple explanation, consciousness can be observed to run through six pathways beginning at the six sense avenues. These six doors are:

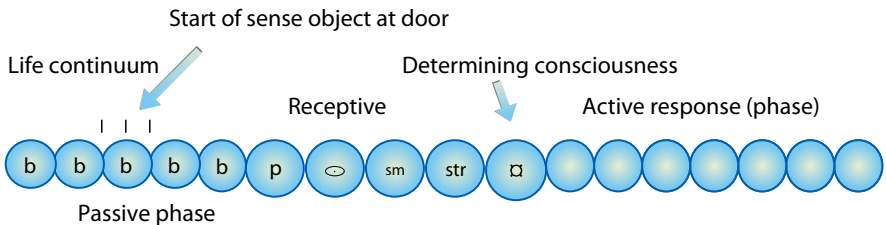
Door	Object	Consciousness
Eye door	eye object (colors)	seeing consciousness followed by accompanying thought processes.
Ear door	ear object (sounds)	hearing consciousness followed by accompanying thought processes.
Nose door	nose object (odors)	smelling consciousness followed by accompanying thought processes.
Tongue door	tongue object (tastes)	tasting consciousness followed by accompanying thought processes.
Body door	body object (tangibles)	touching consciousness followed by accompanying thought processes.
Mind door	mind object	mind-sense knowing consciousness followed by accompanying thought processes.

When the stimulus (object) impinges at the five sense doors, the life continuum is interrupted and the five sense consciousness pick up the stimulus. It is followed by response to the stimulus, which is an active phase in the process. The same occurs at the mind door without passing through the five senses. It is at this mind door that the sense impression grows from mole hills into mountains, moisture droplets into seas.

What is the life continuum (*Bhavanga*)? There is one way to explain it although the best way is to experience and observe it.

The mind, as we know it, is ever trying to do something. Running - now here, now there, hatching plans, carrying out schemes. It is what you may call an active state. In certain instances, like in the type of deep sleep where there are no dreams, it withdraws into a basic passive state. Yet within it are found the potentials that are carried over from the distant past lives. It is also from this that the mind objects arise; including objects we never dreamed existed. It is also this life continuum which occurs to maintain the mind as a process from the beginning of one's life until interrupted by death, and gives rise to the thought processes. Therefore, it is also that which gives us a sense of an individual's existence. And so, the life continuum is different with different persons and beings.

It is not easy to know this consciousness because it is soft and subtle. When it arises, thought processes also stop. But for people dwelling often in meditative states it eventually becomes apparent how from this luminous, clear consciousness arise countless images and thought processes that go on trying to create worlds. It would be good if one is able to really get to know this consciousness. This is the life continuum, the basic consciousness of an individual which flows (or rather changes moment-to- moment) when there are no thought processes, hence, it is called process freed.



Active Consciousness (*Kamma Citta*)

After the receptive phase of the thought process, which is passive, the active phase begins, with the shift of the mind's attention (labeled as the determining consciousness), a point that turns it into an active response. This can be positive/wholesome response that comes with pure states, or it can be negative/unwholesome response, which comes with impure states. By their nature of being actively involved with and responding to the object, these can be noticed easier, first as mental state and later as the consciousness as well. This is the phase that Buddhists call *Kamma*. It is these which the *Satipatthana* chapter on contemplation of consciousness begins with.

Unwholesome Consciousness

How can one define a state as unwholesome or wholesome without dogmatic beliefs? Truth or nature is self-evident for those with little dust in their eyes. Our truth of wholesomeness and unwholesomeness is based on the universal truths which can be perceived with a clear, unbiased and non-conceptualizing mind, i.e., mindfulness.

Unwholesome states arise rooted in the three evil roots - attachment, aversion and delusion. Attachment is a blind clinging to transient things. Try catching the wind. Aversion is non-acceptance in nature. Agitated, it can become violent and harmful. Delusion is darkness which is blind to deep reality. The blind shall come to harm sooner or later. The Nature of these states can be observed, and so too the associated consciousness. Thus, in the *sutta*:

1. When there is *consciousness with lust* he knows, when there is consciousness without lust he knows;
2. When there is *consciousness with anger* he knows, when there is consciousness without anger he knows;
3. When there is *consciousness with delusion* he knows, when there is consciousness without delusion he knows.

The case with anger (*Dosa*) or aversion is grossest and so it is not difficult to take notice of its unwholesomeness. The expression of “blowing up one’s top”, as in a volcano, speaks for itself. A *sutta* described it as “boiling water”, or in another “burning”. It is certainly the mind that is disturbed. It shakes, trembles, tries to escape and finally withers away or blows up. It can occur in various forms - such as shivering in fear, acid with jealousy, worn down by sadness, and so on. When one is familiar with observing anger, one sees also the supportive conditions which help one to resolve the issue as well as to be more prepared for it the next time around. The anger will also be noticed even in its earlier stages and can be nipped off at the bud. Finally, one goes to its very roots.

The commentaries often mention a repulsive object as its near cause, such as someone or something that has harmed, is harming or will harm a person or his loved one. It could also be helping an enemy. However, if you look into the roots, it goes into the mind and its related roots - attachment and delusion, the roots of conditioned existence.

Do not just watch anger as a mental state; look upon it as consciousness. In watching anger as a consciousness, we are able to get hold of the main culprits all in one, because consciousness is connected to them all. Cast the net of mindfulness over consciousness!

In watching, one has to observe the mentally displeasurable feelings as mentioned earlier. The first point to remember is not to think since it will be like adding fuel to the fire. All that rationality becomes subservient to the demon. Hence, it is better to do what one can to keep it calm. If one is able to hold on to mindfulness long enough, anger will subside. If one is unable to face it directly, then choose another object like the body movements or the breath. If that fails, then use other tranquility methods such as loving kindness

on a lovable person, or companion, if that is suitable. Reflect on *kamma* for acceptance of the unavoidable circumstances. Anger is also impermanent. It will eventually pass but it may take a long time and the damage caused can be considerable.

So, it is best if one can notice anger with mindfulness at the start. Watch the conditions that cause its arising. Watch how it ceases when its conditions cease. One will see that the consciousness arising with anger comes before its cessation. When it ceases, then it is replaced by a completely different and pure consciousness. It feels like the fire has gone out and now there is only coolness. The distinct change in consciousness, not just the mental state, is noticed. This is consciousness without anger. The experience of the nature of cessation deepens with growing insight. Watching thus, one also sees into its non-self nature, which further helps to uproot attachment. Seeing into its three characteristics removes delusion. Then, you have made the best use of anger as an object of mental purification. It is like using dung as manure to grow the tree that bears the fruit of freedom.

When one looks into the nature of craving consciousness, it becomes tricky. Unlike anger, it can be pleasant. One would want more of it and so craving develops into attachment, and attachment into clinging. It can grow stealthily unnoticed and then at a great speed, faster than the creeper called “a mile a minute”. It then extends everywhere. Then, a little late is too late as suffocation begins and heavy debts would have to be paid soon or one day, with eventual separation, death, or woe.

So, one cannot be more careful about this. Be on the look out in case craving creeps in. Even if it does, make sure it does not get too far. Wake up before indulgence sets in, saying, “Aha!” here it is again. It is like catching a child with his hand in the cookie jar. But

one need not have a punishing attitude, which often comes with aversion. Firmness with a touch of compassion works better, on everyone, including oneself. The quality to accompany this instance is detachment. When the need arises, one can be strong, firm and determined like a rock unshaken by the wind. At less serious situations, one may even find the situation rather amusing.

This craving has been described as stickiness - the glue that sticks to everything. To try to detach afterwards, one peels away part of the skin. It has also been described as “burning”, just as in burning passion. When you hear the scream within, “I WANT, I WANT...”, then it is calling for urgent attention. Conceit is another form of craving. It is like an overblown balloon, so fully stuffed with air that it can explode any minute.

Many teachers warned about joy, a factor which by itself is not craving, but often comes with it. It helps to blind one to the faults and dangers of craving, like the lovely smile of the hunter when he sees his preys come to view.

When you see the consciousness that comes with craving, you see it doing its act. The mind burns and desperately seeks to satiate its desires. When it thinks it has got what it is looking for, it seems satisfied for that moment but soon after it looks for more. Craving is never satisfied. It will cease only when conditions for its presence are not there, or it may change its form and objects to add spice, the variety of life.

If one is mindful, one replaces that craving consciousness. Detachment further helps to unplug that craving consciousness. Seeing the peacefulness of a pure state adds impetus to wholesome development.

As in the mindfulness of angry consciousness, one sees craving consciousness mindfully. See how it arises with the conditions, and ceases when those conditions cease. Again, knowing the conditions, we will know better how to deal with it.

The near cause of craving is given as the attractive (or shall we call it “intoxicating”) object, usually something colorful, shining, or even refined and artistic. Anything (with the exception of path-fruit and *Nibbana*) can be its object, but some are more likely than others. Looking into its mental conditions, we meet with its roots, particularly delusion and its accompanying restlessness, lack of moral fear and shame. Even the root of anger contributes greatly as a cause when in the absence of mindfulness. We want very badly to get out of a situation. Of course joy, sweet joy, is partly responsible.

When mindfulness is strong enough to overcome craving decisively for at least a longer spell, the distinct shift of consciousness becomes apparent. If it is the discovery of what one has lost through obsessive gambling, it can be replaced by something worse - the aversion and remorse that eats up all one’s joy in life. Better there is mindfulness. It is as if one has discovered the trick of a swindler or tempter who tries to lure one with a bait. Then, one takes a deep breath of relief like a rabbit running free from the cage.

So, if a person is bound by the consciousness with craving whether they come with heavy iron locks or golden chains, he shall not go far along the path of freedom. And the consciousness without craving is one with detachment freedom, like a bird which is free to fly above the world.

It is not easy to see consciousness as impermanent, but defilements being grosser could be perceived to some extent by a beginner. As perception of impermanence grows, so too the insights into the other two universal characteristics, i.e. suffering/incompleteness and non-self.

Delusion is most difficult of the three roots to observe. It is a black figure and shadow that moves between and behind the other mental states. It is present when there is craving and anger; otherwise they would not arise in the first place. It also occurs by itself. Its more apparent forms are usually accompanied by the other two roots, but it will be obvious when it plays the main role. One who is completely hallucinated or insane is such a case. To a lesser degree, one who is dull or spaced out, is with a mind that is clogged up in darkness.

Did you notice how thoughts often arise without you knowing how it started? The blank areas are often occupied by delusion. So it is a case when you just do not know. How can we get around it? This is the important point in mindfulness on consciousness, i.e., **the need to maintain continuous mindfulness**, which is built up from the initial wise attention to be mindful, starting from body objects to feelings and finally to consciousness. So, even when delusion blacks out conscious awareness for an instant, mindfulness quickly returns and looks back, - “Hey, what is this blank state for?”, then finding a dull consciousness without purpose with a meaningless object hanging around its neck. These roam around all the thought processes like weed seeds scattered on neglected wasteland. No wonder they say that “idleness is a devil’s workshop.”

Take care to spot them and you will find yourself sweeping and cleaning skeletons from cupboards. There is where your shadows hide and yet, that “darkness within darkness are the doorways of knowledge.” (Daote Ching).

No, these consciousnesses are not static or dead. They can move and grow, so beware of them. Once, I saw meaningless things stick out from my mind - tooth brushes and slippers. My teacher tells me that I was looking at the mad mind, which contained a jumble of rubbish. But, being mindful, these delusion consciousness

immediately dissolve. If they are thick, they move slowly away. It is certainly a process of awakening. Delusion consciousness change and are impermanent. They certainly are suffering, like those lunatics. They are non-self - who me? No, not me. Not you. Just delusion.

So, on awakening from that dark world of a dreamy, shadowy life - the mind becomes resplendent like the summer sun. That consciousness freed from delusion can be felt distinctly from that which has passed. Wholesomeness and purity are better!

But delusional consciousness stays hidden for awhile before negligence lets it come again. Therefore, we need to keep training until it is totally uprooted in the final stages of insight.

4. The *constricted consciousness* refers to the consciousness which is lethargic, a case that occurs frequently to new yogis in the first days of a retreat. As this consciousness and restlessness will be dealt with more thoroughly in the chapter of five hindrances, they will be touched upon here in brief. Like delusion, this consciousness is hazy. It tends to slow down and shut down all avenues and return to the most passive state - sleep. If you ask yourself, are you really in need of it, often you are not. It is more of being bored and lazy. In this state, there is dullness and a wish to close down. Hence, it constricts and shrinks away from affairs that need exertion. The ability to be mindful with clear perception of the nature of this consciousness is an important step in overcoming it. Try to clearly describe what this consciousness is like and you will be amazed at the ability of mindfulness. That consciousness is like a fog, one would say; another would say it is like a blanket. Once when clarity is strong, the fog clears away.

5. The *distracted consciousness* is the restless consciousness, another typical case that occurs frequently in new yogis. But this type has more energy and so we have reason to be more careful on how to handle it. It is like the uncontrolled wild horse that cannot keep still. It needs to run - it needs to DO SOMETHING! Seated and unmoving help to control it to some degree, but it is physical and the consciousness can find escape through the mind door.

As they say, you can lock him up, but his mind can still run. One may try to control it through indoctrination and brainwashing but practicing mindfulness is a better option. It does not punish or enforce. It trains for the welfare of oneself and others. Being mindful is substitution for the restless state. Every time we become mindful, we put a little calmness in it. As wholesome and unwholesome consciousness cannot co-exist, one will have to go. In other words, the heart cannot be restless and calm at the same time.

So while being mindful, the restlessness passes away. A restless consciousness is sometimes perceived as a noisy mind - very much busy talking and discussing ideas that cannot yet be settled. When it stops, there is great silence within. Or, it can seem to be a mind that is very tense and under high pressure. When there is release, the mind is very relaxed and peaceful.

But before the ebbing of distracted consciousness happens decisively, thoughts arise and pass away. The idea is not to try too hard to force it away. It is better to be mindful and let it pass. Restlessness is often tied up with excessive and uncontrolled energy.

As in other types of consciousness, we can also contemplate on these two types of consciousness, that they are impermanent, suffering and non-self. They can also be objects that give rise to insight.

Wholesome Consciousness (*Kusala Cittani*)

These are consciousness that respond in a wholesome way to objects that they take. Being wholesome (*kusala*), they are also in the active phase. When not in an active phase, they are called beautiful (*sobhana*) consciousness.

These consciousness have their roots in non-attachment (i.e. detachment), non-aversion (i.e. acceptance), and non-delusion (understanding). Together with these consciousness are other beautiful mental factors such as lightness, softness, malleability, etc. The beautiful and wholesome state of the consciousness is obvious when the defilements are put away and the pure consciousness stands out like a most beautiful pure lotus flower. There are many types of these consciousness and so we will give more emphasis for those in the practice. But for now, let us continue with the list given in the *Satipatthana Sutta*.

The first ones in this section have been dealt with as:

6. *Consciousness freed from lust,*
7. *Consciousness freed from aversion, and*
8. *Consciousness freed from delusion,*

which are observed when lust, aversion and delusion cease and when mindfulness replaces them. But it should not stop there. Continuous practice develops into right concentration and makes the pure mind even stronger and clearer. Hence, the *sutta* describes “concentrated” consciousness and unconcentrated consciousness.

9. *Unconcentrated consciousness* are those that are unfocused or scattered, and

10. *Concentrated consciousness* are those at access or absorption level.

Then, there is

11. *Unexpanded consciousness* - which refers to those consciousness not at absorption levels, and
12. *Expanded consciousness* - which refers to those at absorption levels.

Before one's concentration becomes deep, restless thoughts accompanied by defilements still creep in, even though pure states may be present to some degree. When access concentration is reached, one notices a shift of consciousness to another level. It is definitely more peaceful and stronger. It is as if one can sit for a long time without being disturbed. The mind is controllable and obedient. This concentrated consciousness is definitely different from the unconcentrated consciousness, but even when access concentration is reached it is not static. Consciousness is ever flowing, arising and passing away moment-to-moment. With increased clarity, observation and scrutiny becomes efficient, something which is important to insight development.

At deeper levels, absorptions take place and they take a completely different form. Totally removed from the sensual realm, one may be unable to describe it on one's first experience. But the process of unification before that will be clear. It is very easy to be attached to these types of consciousness. Following that, conceit and even wrong view may arise if one grasps onto the idea that one has become enlightened to the Supramundane when one has not. Then, one's practice begins to stagnate and backslide. So, it is important to be mindful of these types of consciousness, which are fine and subtle. To be able to see the three characteristics in them takes even more training

But when one practices mindfulness with regards to these characteristics, then familiarity will help one get easier access to these levels and make full use of them. Only with sharp concentration and mindfulness with regards to the three universal characteristics, can one rise beyond them.

13. *Freed consciousness*
14. *Not freed consciousness*

Freed consciousness means consciousness freed from defilements either temporarily or over an extended period of time. It could be by the momentary *Vipassana* concentration or extended concentration of tranquility meditation. Here, the emphasis is freedom from defilements. If one understands the happiness involved, this state is worth striving for. It is not because of joy that it is happy, but because of its purity.

But what about freedom from defilements at the Supramundane level? I suppose those states are not accessible to beginners, but they can be included in case of *ariyas* (Nobles Ones) who have experienced them.

Mind vs. Mind

We have discussed how mindfulness is brought to watch the different types of consciousness as mentioned in the *Satipatthana Sutta*, and these are active consciousness. I must also stress again that the key factor of this contemplation is for one to have gained some degree of continuous mindfulness.

In the beginning, consciousness is not used as a primary object but one makes use of some other easier objects instead. But with progress, one's field is extended to more subtle areas that cover the contemplation of

consciousness. When it is clear enough, then one may use it as the primary object of meditation.

This involves skills that have to be acquired, and so while there may be some delay in practicing these skills, it is an investment worth taking up. The consciousness remains the key figure of mental development. The whole focus of the Buddha's training is based on it. Once in direct control of the mind, one can command it to do what one wishes. The trained mind has sometimes been compared to a well-trained horse or elephant. This is also useful and convenient because the mind is the center of all creations of our world. As the first verse of the *Dhammapada* states: "Mind is the forerunner of all states. Mind is chief; mind-made are they...."

There is an interesting question here. How can the mind watch the mind? Does it mean then that there are two minds? One person jokingly put it - that is because we are split. The dilemma approaches the very question on conditionality. Theoretically, we say the mind at one instant cannot make itself an object, so what is watched is the immediate past. But all this is still a conceptual discussion. The real answer is to observe and allow what is really there to be. If one can do this, then one penetrates into the conditioned nature of consciousness.

How does one take the consciousness as the primary object? I would advise one to learn to take the mindful consciousness as the primary object.

1. So just be present. Do not try to look for anything, and the mindfulness that comes with presence will reflect on itself like a mirror facing another mirror. Mirrors within mirrors that mirror the mirror of the mind. That is, when mindfulness is present, one will know that the consciousness is mindful. Just hold it there, centered and stable, as best as one can. If a momentum of mindfulness has

been set up, then it is easier. Otherwise, constant effort must be put in before one can center and stabilize it, which amounts to concentration. While one is doing this, one will notice that it does not stay still.

Again, as in the *Dhammapada*

“The flickering, fickle mind, difficult to guard, difficult to control; the wise person straightens it as a fletcher straightens an arrow.”

(Dhammapada 33)

2. The point of the work is to keep bringing the mind back to the present.

What happens is that the mind will run to the six sense objects. When there is a sound, like someone coughing, it runs to it, and if one is mindful, the mind notices the hearing process. When there is an itch, it runs to the bodily feeling at the body, and one notices the bodily feeling. When it becomes intensely hot, one notices the fire element and touching process. Then a thought arises, and it runs to that thought. At first one notices this object, and how mindfulness runs to the object and another, and how one skillfully brings it back, centered. It is like taking a dog for a walk. It runs after a car or rabbit, then returns. Often you have to follow it and bring it back.

3. If mindfulness is sharp, then one notices that at each door the process and consciousness are different from the change of objects. This consciousness becomes the primary object even with a change of its object. Then, it is like taking the dog for a walk. It runs after a rabbit, a car, but sometimes you have to chase it back. When the dog is well trained, however, it returns to the master.

4. When this happens, pay special attention to the consciousness. You will notice that if your mindfulness is sharp, its nature changes with the nature of the object. The ability to perceive this change is the ability to perceive impermanence in consciousness. Such clear perception is an important factor to the progress of insight. At this juncture, one also finds in this practice that one is centered on the consciousness and at the same time aware of the six sense processes. As instructed by the Buddha, “In the seeing there is only the seen. In the hearing there is only the heard. In the knowing there is only the known....”

In the beginning, mindfulness just halts the processes of response that are unwholesome, a process called restraint of the senses. When this has been done, the mindfulness of insight practice looks into these processes as they really are, i.e. according to the three universal characteristics.

5. With practice, one’s mindfulness and concentration become more centered with the consciousness and they occur at the mind door. That pure, mindful consciousness will be observed in its various fluctuating forms. You will notice first the mental factors that change. Sometimes light, sometimes heavy, bright dark, soft hard, relaxed tense, etc., then the consciousness also changes with the mental factors. Objects then seem to come to the consciousness rather than consciousness running to them. Such consciousness is like a flickering flame. The objects are like the insects that fly around it. Come a little closer andzzzzit! It is gone.
6. Continued practice leads to seeing the moment-to-moment change of the consciousness in various ways.

Because of the subtlety of the consciousness, it is difficult to detect change. So the character of the consciousness must first be clearly perceived. Any changes first detected will be connected with the changes of:

- (1) the associated mental state, and
- (2) the associated object.

The first is like watching the waves to detect the water flow. The second is like watching the reflections to do the same. When one is able to do this and consciousness is made the object, then the mindfulness pins onto the flow of the consciousness. The result is like a boat holding its course on the center of the river, while the rest of the connected conditions pass by at the sides.

7. In the process, the other two characteristics

- (1) unsatisfactoriness/incompleteness, and
- (2) non-self, also becomes clear, as these three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and non-self are connected.

In the case of unsatisfactoriness, the consciousness with all its instability, oppressiveness and the hidden horrors it is capable of, manifests.

In the case of non-self, the mind acts as if it has a mind of its own. Most obvious at the start is that it would not listen to what you want and would later move on by its own laws.

8. Further refinement is connected with the sharpening of awareness to a fine line, then a fine point of perception. The consciousness can also be refined and developed by cultivating certain qualities as one practises. These qualities would be cultivated as one's *vipassana* develops, but if one knows of their importance, then they can be

specifically attended to. As mindfulness and investigation form the core of the *vipassana* mechanism, what I have in mind are energy, joy, quietude, ease, concentration and equanimity. Also to be mentioned here is detachment to all things in the world. It will finally be the point of insight practice – “to let go” and “to let be”, or in the traditional words, “Seeing things as they really are.” It is just this, but it will not be much if one has not developed the deep concentration and revealing insight awareness that is free from all concepts.

It has to be stressed that consciousness is non-self. Many have fallen into this wrong view. Such a case is not new, as can be seen in the *sutta* describing “*Sati*”, the fisherman’s son. He was admonished by the Buddha when he thought that the consciousness was permanent, self, etc. It becomes clearer when *Nibbana* is described too as non-self. One is always trying to seek an identity with the everlasting self, a manifestation of craving to become/exist. Unable to see subtle changes, it quickly grabs onto a consciousness that is pure, bright, and seemingly void. Following that, one begins to write out volumes of theory to support this perception of self. Yogis must be wary of this!

9. When one is skillful in watching consciousness, then one can do so in whatever posture one is in and in whatever object one is attending to. Consciousness, after all, is present when there is an object. Then it is only the question as to when it is suitable to observe just the consciousness in a concentrated and deepening manner.

Factors Contributing to the Continuity of Mindfulness

As a recapitulation, it would be appropriate here to briefly go through the factors of continuity.

1. Continuous balanced effort.

Having a good grasp of the basic instructions, it is a matter of effort - balanced effort – that is not too intense or slack, like a long distance runner that economizes on his usage of energy to last until the end of the race. Effort is like the petrol...no effort, no go. Continuous effort means continual movement towards the goal.

2. Avoiding and overcoming hindrances and obstacles.

This is done first at a behavioral level such as avoiding the pitfalls of excessive:

- (1) Sensual indulgence
- (2) Sleep
- (3) Food
- (4) Intimacy
- (5) Talk
- (6) Company
- (7) Worldly activities, and
- (8) Diffuseness.

It also includes the observance and restraint in moral precepts and discipline. These generate sound and functional mindfulness.

Then, there is the mindful noticing and contemplation on defilements or hindrances as they arise in the mind in practice.

Lastly, the careful noting and mindfulness of pleasant states that rise with progress come under the mindfulness of Imperfections of Insight (*Vipassana upakkilesa*). One is advised to guard against attachment to these factors.

3. Mindfulness and clear comprehension of intentions

This serves to ensure continuity between one action and the next, as well as to develop a faculty that effectively manages one's practice.

4. Skill in contemplation on the various objects.

One needs to acquire skills to deal mindfully with the various objects of the body, feeling, consciousness, etc. Unless this is done, one's mindfulness will slip off at a more difficult point. Skill is also needed to penetrate into each of these objects.

5. Balancing of the faculties

Especially between the faculties of concentration and energy, and also between confidence and understanding, which enables a balanced and smooth flow of the practice.

6. Concentration

Having concentration is like having a battery charged. With that, the clarity and mindfulness can go on quite effortlessly for sometime before defilements return. The stronger the concentration, the better it is to resist more difficult situations.

7. Insight/Understanding

Meditation should not be blind. We must know what we are doing and why. The more understanding we have, the more we proceed with sure steps, though this is not always possible. The lack of experience often comes with pitfalls, but with help at hand it saves the day. We learn from our mistakes, but better if it is from others.

There is nothing like learning from our own mindfulness. Every time we get concentration or insight, we can look back and see why and how it is so.

In the case when insight arises, it becomes a deeper settling in of experience into reality, which can in turn enrich every aspect of the previous experiences. But this has often to be done consciously to extend its sphere of influences, especially into daily life.

Chapter 4



DHAMMANUPASSANA SATIPATTHANA Mindfulness of Phenomena as Foundation of Mindfulness

There are many meanings that can be used for the word “*dhamma*”. Some of these are truth, righteousness, teachings, and phenomena. “*Dhamma*” in mindful contemplation is usually translated as “mental objects”. Mental objects, like objects of the mind door, include everything. The point made here is that mental objects occur at the mind-door, but this does not seem very specific for the purpose. So I prefer another definition used in an article in Thai which I read. In that article, the author uses “phenomena” as the meaning of mental object.

“*Dhamma*” in this sense means a state or a “thing” that bears its own specific characteristics. It has also been emphasized in its general quality as not sentient or not soul, but empty. Hence, I think the key to this section on contemplations is the comprehension of non-self. To be able to see the world at the level of ultimate realities (*paramattha dhamma*), is an experience free from concepts. This also amounts to the first insight knowledge in the set of 16 insight knowledges.

One may also say that at this point we have come to look at the common ground from which all practices of insight can be based. All things of the world have the ultimate realities as their basis; otherwise, there would not be existence. While mindful contemplation of consciousness is central (it is also a *dhamma*) and strategic, here it becomes expansive and all inclusive. It is like you can make the whole universe as your *Vipassana* object. All these ultimate realities/phenomena are related to one another in different ways of conditioning. Hence, some co-exist, while others cannot. They also function as supportive, obstructive, or neither roles. Hence, we can

classify them into groups for the purposes of our intentions, e.g., for understanding of the practice.

When the Buddha preached, He did so in different ways using these groupings. All are meant as starting points that lead into the practice. Each has its special aspect suitable to situations and individuals. In the *Satipatthana Sutta*, it is described in five groupings, although we need not be limited by them, as other groupings can be found elsewhere in the texts.

The five groupings are:

1. Hindrances (*Nivarana*)
2. Aggregates (*Khandha*)
3. Bases (*Ayatana*)
4. Factors of Enlightenment (*Sambojjhanga*)
5. Truths (*Sacca*)

1. HINDRANCES (*NIVARANA*)

Hindrances are unwholesome states that are seen in the mechanism of hindering or obstructing progress to right concentration. They are like barriers that keep you imprisoned at the lower levels of being. These five hindrances can be seen in all their power when you try to meditate, especially at the start when mindfulness is still at a nascent stage.

And unless one has reached the highest, i.e. *Arahatship*, these hindrances will still be around and so it is only wise to learn how to deal with them, both in a retreat and in daily life. The usual way people deal with them is by using the tranquility method. In *vipassana*, we use mindfulness and clear comprehension. In the longer run, the later approach is definitely more effective since it goes right down to the origins. So rather than quickly pushing them aside, be patient to look carefully and closely at them and see how they work.

These five hindrances are:

- (1) Sensual Cravings/Desires (*Kamacchanda*)
- (2) Ill-Will (*Vyapada*)
- (3) Sloth and Torpor (*Thina Middha*)
- (4) Restlessness and Worry/Remorse (*Uddhacca Kukkucca*)
- (5) Skeptical Doubt (*Vicikiccha*)

(1) Sensual Cravings (*Kamacchanda*)

Sensual craving is craving and attachment to sense pleasures and sense objects. It is a formidable force that keeps things entrenched in the sensual realms, which includes states of unfortunate rebirth. It frequently arises with many of yogis.

This mental state should be mindfully observed when it arises so that its nature and accompanying conditions are also clearly known. Because of its magnetic and hypnotic effect, people get obsessed with it, chiefly because they think it is happiness in some form. Again, joy is often also responsible. Advice is usually given to the yogi to watch the mental state rather than the object. Detachment is the key in watching craving. Keep alert and keep the distance. Its impermanence and dissolution will follow. One must be determined to keep detached and not to enjoy it with excuses. Keeping a safe distance from its tricks and allies, one will be able to observe it as a wretched thirst, hunger and wanting. It pauses for a while when one thinks one has got what is really wished for. But there is never enough in the case of craving. It always wants more, and for what one has gotten, one soon gets bored with it.



Devil at your service, Italy 2007

This statue I found in a museum in Italy is a little amusing and scary. The museum houses a large collection of trophies, horns of deers, stags and so on. So this horny story with its demon is appropriately placed here. Beware, you hunters. Beware everyone, of craving. It often has a very beautiful face and smile. The real problem, however, is in one's own mind

There is the saying, “Hatred is never overcome by hatred; only by love is hatred overcome. This is the Eternal Law.” The same may be said of craving. Craving is not overcome by craving, only by detachment/contentment is craving overcome. Only when one finally sees that craving is replaced by the pure, detached mind does one see something better to strive for.

Sensual cravings are easier to overcome in a retreat where one, together with good company, observes more moral precepts and practices meditation. Outside a retreat and even sometimes within a retreat, it can be overwhelming. So, some tranquility methods are useful for weakening sensual craving before mindfulness is used to work into it. These tranquility methods are, for example, meditation on corpses, impurities of the body to overcome body lust, loathsomeness of food for gluttony, etc. Still, the best is to look into the roots of sensual cravings which are tied up with the very ignorance of the nature of existence.

(2) Ill-Will (*Vyapada*)

Ill-will, or aversion, comes as an inability to accept a situation or the object. As a result, there is no peace. In its place comes irritation and agitation, which may develop into more destructive forms like hatred, jealousy, fears, etc. It can be ranked as the most apparent destructive force where kammic consequences are heaviest.

Ill-will comes with displeasurable mental feelings and so can be easily detected and seen as suffering. But to be able to pick it out in its beginning stages, one needs to see it in its more subtle forms and be quickly aware of the conditions that can spark it.

When it has arisen, one quickly makes the mental note, “Anger, anger...”, “Aversion, aversion.....”, “Fear, fear...”, etc. Notice how it is burning, churning and gripping ferociously. Sometimes it turns out angry words at others, sometimes it leads one to blame oneself. It works towards an explosion. Remaining calm inside is crucial. If it does not pass away, then at least it buys time particularly when one is determined enough to keep that mindfulness in place and control it.

On being mindful of ill-will/aversion, one adopts the mindfulness that is as soft, gentle, and tranquil as one can produce, for these are qualities that are opposite of it. As in painful feelings, acceptance is crucial. Denial and dislike for it adds fuel to the fire. See it as a crying child that needs attention and love. Appease it with thoughts of love if it becomes uncontrollable. Often with people of strong anger, temperaments or mental traumas, a serious period of meditation on loving kindness or compassion is necessary before any insight practice.

Usually, when concentration and mindfulness increase, ill-will quickly vanishes. The three universal characteristics can be perceived at that moment. For some, it can become persistent. Persistent mindfulness

will make the three universal characteristics clear and insights can arise with it as an object. As in craving, illwill traces its arising with the other two roots - craving and delusion, especially craving - the active instigator of how things should be.

(3) Sloth and Torpor (Thina Middha)

Sloth and torpor refer to the unwieldiness of consciousness and mental states. It is the laziness, lethargy and torpidity that draw one to shut up all activities and finally return to sleep.

These states are very common in beginners. If they had just been very busy, sloth and torpor is extreme. The mind just turns blank. It can be also because of physical fatigue. If one has had enough, sloth and torpor is the chief factor. Boredom is also another form of it. By itself it seems harmless, but boredom cannot be underestimated. It is a weakening force that lets in all the rest of the defilements.

Heaviness of the mind is an indicator. The mind is stiff and movement difficult. Weakness is a closer description. Generally, it is dark and foggy, like being suffocated. One needs to work out the opposite - energy - that is clear, pure and light, swiftly flowing...not stagnating.

The first instruction is to mindfully note “sleepy...lazy...heavy...” Here, mindfulness is emphasized, not just lip service. Often people just say it mentally; it will not work. Once there is some mindfulness, add the energy. This can be done by noting repeatedly and quickly. Please do not force - forcing is aggressive and is often accompanied by dislike; dislike for this foggy, heavy state. Repeated noting generates energy. Note, “Sleepy...sleepy...” quickly but not to the extent that one cannot follow.

In the process, one may still drop off. Do not be disappointed. Take it as a rest and start again. If your head touches the ground, get up and walk.

One may have to nod several times before one wakes up. Take it as a discovery. The riddle being, “What is this state that pulls the carpet under my feet and makes me nod?” You will see this foggy cloud approaching. You will detect a dark hand covering your face. You will feel a heavy load on your head. Aha! That is it! You have noticed its characteristics. Brighten up like the sun. Take a few deep breaths to expand the lungs and mind. Keep watching closely for that slothful mind and it will pop off to let the sun shine in. Then, notice the difference, you cannot sleep now even if you wanted to.

Often there is a tug of war before it disappears altogether. If so, other methods to step up the energy can be used. One way is to increase the touch points to be noted in the body, and to note them systematically - e.g., clockwise and counterclockwise. If T= touch point, and S=sitting posture, then

T1, T2, T3, T4 --or-- T4, T3, T2, T1, etc. or
ST1, ST2, ST3 --or-- ST1, T2, T3, or ST3, T2, T1, etc.

Another way is quickly sweeping the body with mindfulness noticing the sensations as clearly as one can. One may need to do this up to half an hour before one can see results.

Alternative tranquility methods can also be used. One effective means is the perception of light. Light brightens and expands and so is its effect on one who perceives/visualizes it. This may not be useful for those with little visualization capabilities. Even then, it helps if one stays in a bright room with open spaces. Recitations also work in the sense of arousing the flow of positive mental energy, which in devotional chants are further charged with faith and joy. Yet another way is to contemplate on the eight bases of sensory urgency - (i) birth, (ii) old age, (iii) sickness, (iv) death, (v) suffering of woeful states, (vi) suffering of past, (vii) suffering of future, (viii) suffering of present, such as suffering of earning a livelihood

If these efforts fail, it has been suggested to rub one's arms, pull one's ears, or even sit until pain comes. Otherwise, walking seems to be a better choice of action. In a worst case scenario, go take a cat nap.

Still, all these other methods are to arouse energy and mindfulness. The main work here is: (i) to be able to summon through one's will power the ability to arouse the energy, and (ii) to be able to observe mindfully this state of sloth and torpor, how it arises with conditions and ceases with conditions and, thus, clearly perceives the three universal characteristics that come with insight.

(4) Restlessness & Worry/Remorse (*Uddhacca Kukkucca*)

The common ground between these two is the mental flurry and distractedness involved. It is like being unable to sit still. Restlessness is a more basic negative state. It is that lack of inner peace, and so provides a ground for other unwholesome states to arise. To be able to catch it early is to nip it off at the beginning of all these negative arisings. The difficult part is that it comes with delusion which conceals it as if there is just nothing, just blankness. If you scrutinize it closely, you will see it working up nonsense. Worry (*kukkucca*) is defined as that agitated state that arises because of things done and undone. Some prefer to use the word remorse. Maybe anxiety could also fit. Generally, restlessness is the base of distraction; worry amplifies it.

In the beginning, it is not so necessary to discriminate between the two. The beginner just notices the barrage of thoughts that take him away from his meditation object. One is taught to mindfully note "thinking" as soon as one realizes it. Again, noting mindfully versus just naming mechanically are two different things. When mindfulness is present, it replaces the restless state as well as notices its dissolution. Lip service, again, will not work. Thinking quickly returns.

The point is to note the nature of the restlessness. The object, its proximate cause, should not take main importance unless it is an issue so great that must be resolved. Restlessness can be observed as something very unstable, like a rough sea with its waves lashing out mercilessly. Another described it as a hive of bees. When restlessness went away, one is left with deep silence.

Sleepiness usually subsides after a couple of days, but restlessness is more persistent. Because of the potency of its energy that is able to drive one to hysteria, one has to be careful in handling it. The train of thoughts must be interrupted, and especially so in a retreat where mental powers can become very strong.

Failure to stop it may be because of the lack of mindfulness or the inability to hold onto the object. If one has mindfully noted the thinking and restless mind, then be certain of what is happening to one's field of objects. It may be that the primary object is too weak or unclear. Or it may be some secondary objects are much stronger, e.g., pain. Therefore, the right choice of object is critical. Sometimes none seem clear and so choiceless awareness may be the preferred way.

One point to bear in mind is that strong restlessness is usually accompanied by one of the roots, which can be quite specific. In such a case, the ability to zero down on the mental state, e.g., craving for cigarettes, will make the mindfulness more effective in dealing with that mental state.

Once, a psychotherapist asked me this question. He said that in his discipline, he was taught to psychoanalyze the thoughts to resolve them. In *Vipassana*, one just watches the thoughts as they arise and pass away. Which approach should he adopt? I answered that since he was here on a *Vipassana* retreat, the course was follow the *Vipassana* way.

This brings up a relevant matter on the objective of one's practice. *Vipassana* solves problems at its roots, i.e., at the existential levels. Psychotherapy resolves it at a more conventional level. The latter may have quicker and more satisfactory results for a person's immediate problems. This is because time and skill are needed for *Vipassana* to reach to insight levels to resolve issues. But it definitely reaches farther.

When methods we try fail, what to do? I would advise then to ask oneself, "Why?" Inquiry generates understanding. It makes one consider and reflect when one would mechanically repeat mistakes otherwise. It is thinking, but we still have to resort to sometimes. This, again, comes under the area of clear comprehension. By doing that you may be surprised at the answers you get. It could hit the nail on the head.

(5) Skeptical Doubts (*Vicikiccha*)

Skeptical doubts and healthy doubts are two different states. The first is confused while the second is at least not yet. Healthy doubt is a sign of an inquiring mind, a precursor of understanding. As the Zen saying goes - small doubt brings small enlightenment, great doubt brings great realization. In the *Kalama Sutta*, the Buddha praised the Kalamas for doubting what should be doubted. The questioning drives one to search for answers. "Search and ye shall find." But when one fails to get answers, one may become disappointed. And in case of existential matters which goes beyond one's limited thinking capabilities, which are mundane and conceptual, one may end up confused and in disbelief.

The Buddha has listed four unthinkableables:-

- (i) Ultimate beginning of the world,
- (ii) Range of absorptions and supernormal powers,
- (iii) Range of an Omniscient Buddha, and
- (iv) Intricate workings of *Kamma*

It is not that one cannot know anything about these. It is just that one needs to develop the mind enough, because more thinking does not reach thus far. Thinking will instead lead to frustration.

The deeper scope, field and experiences of meditation can also be considered in the same way. For example, what is *Nibbana* as an experience? In the texts, there are plenty of words to describe it. But will you understand?

The answer is faith or confidence, not blind faith, but faith based on something reasonable and essential at the beginning. You never know until you have tried carefully and mindfully, after taking matters into consideration. Surely you can trust mindfulness that reveals truths, although it may be difficult to swallow at first. Surely you can trust the power of the mind although you need mindfulness for it to be beneficial and useful. Surely you could trust the kindness of some people. With faith arises hope, and with hope a better life.

At the first level, skeptical doubt comes with thinking, so mindfully note “thinking...thinking...” If it is identified as skeptical doubt, note it mindfully as such. It is like a string of thoughts that go round and round and gets entangled. Unable to dislodge the knot, frustration and disbelief results. If one can look upon it as confusion based on one’s limitations and does not serve any purpose, then one can let go. Trust the loose ends to find their way, knowing that one will continue one’s spiritual search.

Another way is to seek at least some rational or theoretical base to satisfy that intellectual curiosity or to provide rational meaning to what one is doing. Having a trusted and experienced friend or guide to counsel could be better because much experiential knowledge is still in the oral tradition.

The three evil roots, the five hindrances and the host of groups (e.g., fetters, floods, etc.) are made up of the negative, unwholesome states.

They can be regarded as the “dark forces”, the basic causes of suffering. They do cause havoc and terror if uncontrolled, and there is every reason to be wary of them, for when interpreted in Kammic terms their effects may span lifetimes and worlds. There may arise fear and hatred when one thinks of them as enemies.

There can be another way of looking at them; that is they are sicknesses and weaknesses that need to be remedied. Or that they are wild potential to be tamed and harnessed. In this way, any self-hatred present will not be deepened and a more compassionate approach can be pursued.

One has also to bear in mind that they are totally eradicated in the *Arahat* - one perfected in Wisdom. Sure, it may be some time before that happens: One needs to be patient. Think of it as keeping the house clean. That is life if you are to be happy. It is better to live with the devil you know than one that you do not. It is an ever learning process. It brings even more happiness.

Finally, even the contemplation of these forces brings insight. They, too, are subjected by the three universal characteristics.

In the *suttas*, one can find some interesting similes for each of the hindrances as well as the opposite force that counters it. A study of these is helpful to the practice.

	Water simile	Person simile	Opposing Jhanic factor	Vipassana mindfulness
1. Sensual Craving (<i>Kamacchanda</i>)	Dyed water	One in debt unable to pay much to enjoy transient pleasure	One-pointedness, detachment from senses	Non-distraction, Tranquility, detachment

2.	Ill Will (<i>Vyapada</i>)	Boiling water	One who is sick, with pain of body which prevents any pleasure	Joy <i>vipassana</i> factor to acceptance	
3.	Sloth and Torpor (<i>Thina Middha</i>)	Slimy water	One in prison – cannot know what good is happening outside	Initial application (arouses energy)	Clarity
4.	Restlessness & Worry (<i>Uddhacca Kukkucca</i>)	Disturbed water	One on errands and is too busy to do anything important for oneself	Happiness, peaceful (subtle and restful)	Peacefulness
5.	Skeptical Doubts (<i>Vicikiccha</i>)	Stagnant water	One lost in desert and cannot find way out of distress	Sustained application (promotes continued investigation)	Investigative quality

2. AGGREGATES (*KHANDHA*)

The five Aggregates - “*Khandha*” in Pali language - have also been translated as “groups”. That is because when seen superficially they appear as one compact mass. However, on close observation, one realises that they are, in fact, made up of many things. One should also not stop just there. On further observation they can be seen as conditioned qualities that arise and pass away like flows and energy fluxes. This is a key factor that masks the Truth because the latent clinging to self preservation hangs on to them as an unchanging mass, and so continues the cycle of life after life. Thus, the teachings help break up the false notion of an everlasting entity.



*Two Friends, Berne,
Switzerland 2007*

Every individual is an evolving set of conditions, like the river that takes many winding turns. We meet and part as we journey along in Samsara. If we get attached, parting is painful. If we develop hatred, worse things can happen. What matters finally is what we have done together, i.e. kammic actions. Here by chance I photographed 2 friends taking a walk, leaving a trail of the path behind, heading towards the mountains. Can Man walk together in peace to that great liberation? They have to.

These compactness spoken of are:

- (1) Continuity - which can be broken by seeing discontinuity as in impermanence.
- (2) Mass - which can be broken by seeing into the different characteristics or qualities of phenomena clearly.
- (3) Function - which can be broken by seeing clearly that the functions such as seeing, hearing, etc. are indeed made by different phenomena and processes.
- (4) Object - which can be broken by seeing how consciousness and mental states take objects one at each moment and that they arise and pass away instantly.

These five aggregates are:

- (1) Aggregate of Materiality
- (2) Aggregate of Feelings
- (3) Aggregate of Perception
- (4) Aggregate of Mental Formations
- (5) Aggregate of Consciousness

In the *Anatta Lakkhana Sutta*, the Buddha preached to the five ascetics the non-self characteristic of the five aggregates of clinging and they all attained the highest realisation. It shows the importance of this teaching of non-self, a key to wisdom which is often misunderstood or even feared. The clinging to existence is very strong, and it will grasp onto anything to give life some sense and meaning. Unfortunately, if it arises from delusion, it merely creates more suffering.

The sutta also gives the relationship of five Aggregates with the Three Universal Characteristics and the three characteristics within themselves. That which is impermanent is suffering and that which is suffering is non-self. The realisation of this must be intuitive and usually comes about through direct perception of nature as taught in the techniques of insight meditation. It is obvious that the initial perceptions of change and oppression in phenomena would first impress the mind of the meditator.

However, if one is to look deep into these characteristics, the main characteristic is the characteristic of non-self which means Nature as it is. This perception of non-self has been recognised as the first insight knowledge and climaxes in the realisation of the same in the supramundane level. The result is freedom that comes about as a result of dispassion from these phenomena.

Thus, in the Mulapariyaya *Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikaya*) describes a clinging to the self:

1. As the aggregate itself
2. As in the aggregate
3. As apart from the aggregate
4. As the aggregate which is mine

Hence, one may also see it as:

1. The material body seems solid, hence, I exist because I am the body and it is solid.
2. Feelings make me feel happy and sad, therefore, I exist.
3. I exist because I remember and recognise, and these are perceptions.
4. I think, therefore, I exist. These are mental formations.
5. I know, see, hear, smell, taste and touch, therefore, I exist. These are consciousness.

(1) Aggregate of Matter (*Rupakhandha*)

Rupa here means materiality. It is not exactly physical matter defined in science. In a general sense, it does mean the physical world. In the personal sense, it means the body. In a metaphysical sense, it means phenomena that is impermanent, conditioned but does not know or take an object. When we consider *rupa* as an aggregate, it includes its various qualities. In the *Anattalakkhana Sutta*, it quotes: Matter of the past/present/future, internally/externally, gross/subtle, inferior/superior, near/far. In the metaphysical sense, it covers the 28 material qualities as given in the Abhidhamma.

It is not difficult to see why attachment and identification occur with these material qualities. Its grossness gives a sense of reality and stability, as they say, seeing is believing. Hence, we are given our birth certificates

as to when we are born and who our parents are. Later we are given identity cards with picture of our faces and finger prints on it. After that it extends to other material things, such as houses, cars, clothes, etc which we can claim as ours by more certificates. It soon includes other bodies which we claim as our friends, husbands, wives, children, etc. All these identifications with ourselves and each other reinforce our belief and attachments and become institutionalised. To abandon it you will have to go against the rest of the world, but the main key is attachment to oneself!

The mindfulness contemplation of the body, which deals with the detachment from this material form, has been explained in an earlier chapter. One particular thing not mentioned there is the meditation on repulsiveness of the body, which includes meditation on impurities of the body and of corpses in the cemetery. These are particularly suitable for lustful temperaments. Once strong concentrated detachment has been developed, it not only removes the hindrance of sensual desires but also helps in overcoming some identifications with the self, a necessary step prior to the development of insight knowledges.

Another form is the contemplation (or called the definition) of the four elements.

In this case, it also brings one's observation closer to noticing the characteristics of the elements and, hence, ease the way to seeing the three universal characteristics.

As for the other topics, breath meditation has a strong calming effect for the restless, while with the meditation on the clear comprehensions makes insight possible in all of one's activities.

When the body is perceived as just material qualities arising and passing away, one can thus gain insight into the three universal characteristics of Nature.

Thus, the contemplation of the elements break the illusion of solidity.

The contemplation of repulsive breaks the illusion of beauty.

The contemplation of various parts of the body breaks the illusion of a single mass.

The contemplation of impermanence, suffering and nonself breaks the identification process and helps to realise the reality behind all phenomena.

(2) Aggregate of Feelings (*Vedanakkhandha*)

“*Vedana*”, translated as “feeling” is defined as the mental state that savors the object. It is also that phenomena that makes it pleasant, painful or indifferent. It can be bodily/mental. In the *Satipatthana Sutta*, it is further classified into spiritual or worldly. As an aggregate, it is also made known as such in the same way as matter, i.e. of the past/present/future, internally/externally, gross/subtle, inferior/superior, near/far...and all these are rightly regarded with understanding as not me, not mine, not myself.

Attachment clings naturally, habitually and then tenaciously to pleasurable feelings. With identification as self, it becomes even more tenacious. The excitement and joy that come with it contribute to the clinging. It is also a way to forget and drown any suffering that may be present.

As for painful feelings, one has aversion for it instead. But this is also fueled by identification with feelings. Thus people say, “I am sad, I am in pain”. Isn't it amazing how the mind can be masochistic? It is certainly not funny! Perhaps one thinks that it is better to be in pain than not to exist. Certainly it is clinging to feeling in one way or another and it does not have to be reasonable to one. Often it is just a habitual tendency.

Indifferent or neutral feeling is less obvious and often not noticed. So they say of someone, “He does not have any feelings”. But certainly clinging and identification can still be present. Hence, people say that they are bored or they feel stoned.

There is actually a vicious cycle present. We try to get pleasure but pain keeps catching up with us. When there is pleasure, one gets caught up in craving. When there is pain, aversion arises. Even with neutral feeling, we are not free. There can be delusion or craving. These are the latent tendencies that are found with each type of feeling. It will be good to be wary of them and to be in the right state, i.e. detached, accepting and sharply aware. Pleasure is the bait, pain the punishment and delusion conceals.

The process of dealing with feelings has been given in the previous chapter on contemplation on feelings. The meditation first involves mindfulness into feelings as feelings, not “My feelings”, not “I am feeling”. But this clear perception of non-self may come only later when perception is sharp. When one perceives sharply how different the feelings become with association of different mental states and objects as the nature of conditioning, impermanence, and non self becomes clearer. This contemplation usually proceeds from pain to pleasure and finally to indifferent feelings. When impermanence and non-self become clear, the moment-to-moment change then gives rise to the understanding of what is called “suffering of formations”. This is crucial in the development of detachment from all conditioned phenomena and formations, the force that leads one to be free and go beyond feelings. It is, however, an interesting note that equanimous feeling is seen as superior and a stepping stone to higher insights because of its stability and evenness.

The *Salayatana Vibhanaga Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikaya* gives a good description in this direction of the heirachy of feelings when seen with a spiritual eye. There are painful worldly feelings which can be transformed

into painful spiritual feelings. There are pleasurable worldly feelings which can be transformed into pleasurable spiritual feelings. There are neutral worldly feelings which can be transformed into neutral spiritual feelings. Even with spiritual feelings, pleasurable is preferred to painful and neutral to pleasurable. For neutral spiritual feelings, one advances from multiformity to uniformity and finally to non-identification (*atammayata*).

As a summary, it can be said that the contemplation of the six senses is actually mindfulness directed at the six thought processes and conditions involved. One begins by attending to the six sense doors and as a result follows the thought processes involved. One sees into the conditions that give rise to the processes as well as what happens during the processes. One sees how the mind reacts to stimuli as well as progresses deeper into the mind door as one deepens in the practice of mindfulness and concentration. All these factors are seen according to the three universal characteristics and thus, bringing about the path leading to the cessation of the cycle.

Looking back at *Dhammanupassana Satipatthana* as a whole, it can be seen as a comprehensive and extensive system of practice ingeniously devised. First, one deals with the lower states, the hindrances in depth followed by looking into the bundles of aggregates that people tend to identify with. This brings one into the *vipassana* practice where the characteristics of non-self and natural occurrence of realities are brought to clarity. Then when attending to the six sense bases, one is made to follow the consciousness and its processes through all its changing conditions. Then as insight progresses, the enlightenment factors become apparent and even made into objects that are eventually transcended into the states that are beyond the world. Finally, the Four Noble Truths sum up the practice as a whole. In all its components and sections, one is eventually led to the three universal characteristics which, when observed, develops detachment that leads one out of *Samsara*.

(3) Aggregate of Perception

I had difficulty grasping what perception meant until I went into the study of Buddhist metaphysics. Perception (*sanna*) itself is a mental state which knows the object by its marks and signs. It has also been described as the knowing of a child, a most simple form of cognition. The Thai translation of this is “memory”, which gives us the idea of making impressions. When an object strikes the mind, it makes an impression onto it. It differs from consciousness in that it is a mental state (*cetasika*). Past perceptions make up memories, future perceptions are projections, and present perception acts by taking note of the basic characteristics of the object just like a secretary jotting down notes dictated by her boss.

We cling to memories and we use it to identify ourselves, even though we eventually forget things along the way. Our birth, for example, being crucial to our identification is not remembered. How much of our early childhood can we recall? Then, there are those who suffer from Alzheimer’s disease. So, it is a case of, “I remember, so I exist”. We identify ourselves with this stream of mind and matter and we perceive it as an individual and then cling on to it. It is interesting how perception makes things seem so real. It is like saying, “Perceiving is believing.”

Perception is very similar to consciousness. In a way, at one moment of time, one could not separate them. They are associated (*sampayutta*) states. Generally, when people say “I know what it is”, they mean perception. That is because the consciousness, which is finer and more inclusive, remains at the background and is seldom understood. What is obvious is the more active expression or manifestation, and that is perception. Only with more practice on observing mental states do we get a clearer picture of consciousness.

Perhaps it will be clearer when we say that perception is noticing the natures of the object. When yogis are told to note their objects, it means to take notice mindfully of what is happening. If it becomes mechanical

and mindfulness lapses, then only perception remains. If left to go on without mindfulness, it may proliferate into wrong thoughts and perverted views.

How does one practice insight meditation with regards to perception? It would mean mindfully noticing the noting which may be with or without mindfulness. It would also take into account how perception develops and plays its part in guiding the mind onto the path of freedom.

When Perception is noticed clearly with regards to the three universal characteristics, one experiences and understands that noting and noticing as non-self, an impersonal, natural process that arises and ceases moment-to-moment. When this is clear, the impermanence and cessation of consciousness also becomes clear. That is when that perception that makes them seem so real is also no longer dependable and so too with the whole world that one perceives. It then hits home the illusion of life. It can cause dismay and dilemma for many, but for the seeker, it should spur him deeper in his search.

The teachings tell us of different types of perceptions. They tell us that we can use it as a tool for our freedom. We also learn that insight is actually sharp, clear and direct perception of reality. Sharp perception cuts through as a razor blade into soft flesh! Instructions to note bring us to the object. What does one notice when one does that? It also arouses concentration and, thus, mental and magnification power. What is important is observation power. Notings are then increased and quickened with development and so the perceptions with regards to them become more efficient and sharpened. The process will develop to the point that the penetrative observation becomes automatic and fast that the mechanical effort and mental noting became a hindrance instead of a help and so is dropped. Only when the force slows down that the mindfulness needs to be recharged.

In its final phases, perception goes beyond the normal worldly sense of the mundane. That occurs when one realizes the three characteristics and the detached mind would not allow a pegging down onto any conditioned sign or mark. These are nothing to be held on to and not worth holding onto. The detached mind frees all the mundane perceptions. It becomes complete in openness – like an open palm. The mind, totally involved in this, is in the “signless zone”. It is like the mind without an object*. But then the consciousness is defined as that which knows the object. Perhaps we should not call it the mind.

*(hence, sometimes is called undirected)

(4) Aggregate of Mental Formations

The aggregate of mental formations (*sankhara khandha*) needs some explanation. There are many definitions for the word “*Sankhara*” depending where it is being used. The two notable ones are as in:

1. *Sankhara khandha* – mental formations
2. *Sabbe sankhara* - all formations.

They both have the meaning of being compounded or conditioned, made up or formed. It means that these things are made up, conditioned or formed by many factors. The difference is the first one comprises of just mental factors, while the other also includes material qualities. For our purpose here, we will just concentrate on the first definition.

An easy example of formations is when we imagine and fantasize. Our minds create worlds within ourselves, often false and quite impossible. Man shall dream dreams but dreams can become real when we work hard enough for it. But when we talk of mental formations, we talk of only the mental states that make up the set of mental phenomena. The mind takes many forms, just as the sea has many moods. How the consciousness

behaves depends on how the different mental states combine and work with each other at that moment. But the main factor involved is what is called “*cetana*” usually translated as volition. I would rather call it the formative aspect of the mind, in the sense that the consciousness can take forms we never consciously dream of. But the active aspect of it will be the volition or will. But it can also be passive, in the sense that it can create forms out of factors outside our conscious control.

Such formations can be clung on to as Self, just as a philosopher once said, “I think, therefore, I exist.” Does that mean that he does not exist the moment he stops thinking? Mental formations include other mental states. For example, they identify themselves with craving (I want it very badly) or anger (I am really angry) or even cleverness (I am very wise). There are plenty of traps here, all in the same form as described - that this is me, mine, my Self.

Generally, when people say they are watching the mind, I think that they are watching the mental states (*cetasika*) rather than the consciousness (*citta*). That is because the all-inclusive consciousness is at the background and overlooked, just like the saying that one does not see the forest for the trees. So, when one is looking more specifically at a mental state, such as the hindrances, then one is actually in the contemplation of mental formations. We would, therefore, come into a very interesting and extensive direct study of the mental states by observation. Specially select a mental state and observe it and one can write a book about it. Take a look at the Buddhist metaphysics that gives a list of 52 mental factors, two of them, feeling and perception, have been dealt with in the previous two aggregates and so remains.

Say, when the beginner is told to mindfully take notice of “thinking”, he will discover the mental formations of thinking, a process made up of processes. On looking deeper, the thinking formations reveal more mental formations in it, such as the workings of greed, anger, delusion

or even wholesome states like generosity, patience and so on. As said in the chapter on hindrances, when looked into through the mind's eye, the formation the mind takes is perceived clearly. How these states and formations change are also taken notice of clearly - I think this clarity is an important factor of getting clear perception of consciousness and the three characteristics associated with it.

As mentioned before, the chief mental factor involved here is "*cetana*", volition, or the creative forming aspect of the mind. This has also been identified as the chief mental factor involved in kammic conditioning. This has great implications in life and so too with practice. The mind is always creating things and as the saying goes, "We are the result of what we thought." But what we want to achieve may not be what we end up with. There are many conditions involved and so the moral (wholesome or unwholesome) mental factors must also be considered. Therefore, if there is no mindfulness, the mind becomes "the devil's workshop."

These kammic laws, in a very simplified explanation is, "good begets good and evil begets evil". Good, in the Buddhist tradition is preferably called wholesome mental states and evil, preferably called unwholesome mental states. The wholesome mental states can be further classified as those leading on in the cycle and those leading out of the cycle. It is the latter case that is emphasized in *vipassana* practice. The cycle here means the cycle of conditioning, of birth and death, of *Samsara*. The *vipassana* practice is meant to break this cycle to reach to the state of the unconditioned. It is like switching off the main switch in the devil's workshop. But our minds have been undergoing so much conditioning that the habit is really hard to die. So, many steps have to be done before that and many lesser switches to be turned off.

The preliminary stages before true *vipassana* practice involves the setting up of the basic right concentration. The volition has first to be ensured that it is mindful, then only with the development of concentration, it becomes

right concentration. It anchors on knowing what right concentration is and it is something to be learned by experience. Here, I am emphasizing on the precision of the volition, having as clear an understanding of what one wants to create and eventually also how to go about it. It would, of course, be facilitated by a skillful guide.

The true *vipassana* comes after many basic *vipassana* exercises have been done well and so one is able to perceive and realize the three Universal Characteristics of Existence. These characteristics show conditionality and thus, also the emptiness and ungraspable nature of the formations. Every formation that one experiences vanishes the moment they appear. The clearer the formations, the clearer will be the dissolution. It happens not because one wants it to, but because it is a natural truth inherent in them. Trying to grasp onto them creates frustration and the need to maintain them. Eventually, the mind will realize that it is better to let go and let things be as they REALLY are.

Would this not lead to chaos, as control freaks would tend to say? It will be so for one untrained and subjected to atrocious habits. And so, the initial strengthening of the wholesome, right concentration is necessary. It is again that movement from the evil to good and finally beyond good and evil. That is when one neither wants to create/be nor destroy. There should not be any effort to be or not to be. One must not have any idea that the goal called *Nibbana* exists or not exist. There should not be the striving for it but just a natural working towards the unconditioned. So, every time we see formations mindfully, we see creation on the conditioned, seeing them dissolve, one sees its unsatisfactoriness and insubstantiality. This develops detachment from formations and the volition that creates them. Then, only the conditioning process limits. Thus, detachment is like the switch to free volition of all switches - the doing to not to do. Truth is sufficient, what other need is there?

(5) Consciousness Aggregate

This is obviously the most subtle of the five aggregates, and thus, also the most difficult to perceive as an aggregate. As mentioned in the chapter on mindfulness of consciousness, it is usually in the background of knowing.

Consciousness is described in Buddhist metaphysics as the phenomenon which knows and classified into 89 types according to different characteristics, functions and so on. There are active and passive types. They can be moral, immoral as well as unmoral. They arise from different roots as well as those which are rootless. Such study helps to develop the perception that consciousness is indeed varied and, thus, also impermanent, suffering and non-self.

Being subtle, it is difficult to perceive its change and so it is natural to presume it as an unchanging entity. From there, the false notion is extended to the mental states that coexist with it and then also to the other aggregates and their objects. Finally, philosophies are created and thought out to support and confirm it. Thus, when Bhikkhu Sati (as narrated in the *Mahatanhasankhaya Sutta, Majjhima Nikaya 38*), held on to the wrong view of an everlasting consciousness, the Buddha admonished him saying, "...have I not stated that consciousness to be dependently arisen, since without a condition there is no origination of consciousness?" And thus, the Buddha continued to describe the dependent origination of how eye-consciousness arises dependent on the eye door and eye object, and so too with the other senses.

Even then, it is interesting to note that even good meditators fall for it. For example, there are those who come across subtle states of consciousness. One such thing is the state of deep sleep. For the ordinary man, it is a blank period. For meditators, they begin to feel it increasingly as a peaceful state. Like someone once asked me, "There is this state which is so peaceful, it

is like sleeping.” I answered that it must have been the deep sleep state. Then, there are those who have attained absorptions or jhanas. They may describe it as falling into a void or indescribable peace, unification and non-dualistic experience. The *Brahmajala Sutta* recognises this trap and describes it as a wrong view to take these absorptions as *Nibbana*. The same can happen also with *vipassana* practitioners who experience types of “cessations” which actually fall short of the supramundane but think that they have realised the ultimate.

Therefore, it is important that one is able to perceive impermanence, etc., in these subtle and fine types of consciousness as one progresses. Here, it would be appropriate to mention two schools of thought.

One says *Nibbana* is something, while the other says it is not. It is like saying that the Buddha exists after Death, while the other says he does not. These are extreme views. One tends to eternalism while the other to nihilism. In a conventional sense, we say it does. Otherwise, why do we strive? It has been categorised as an ultimate reality (*Paramattha Dhamma*). But when one thinks of “IS”, one relates only to conditioned existence. As for the supramundane, it means “beyond the world” and thus, is also beyond all thinking. As such, I think the negative seems to be safer for the beginner but one must not cling to the “nothing concept”. I also find “freedom” more directional as an instruction. One has to keep the mind really open to receive that highest state. The clinging to the mundane consciousness as self, etc., can be considered to be the last, if not, one of the last barriers to be overcome before any true realisation.

How one goes about observing the consciousness aggregate has been dealt with at length in the chapter of contemplation of the mindfulness of consciousness.

Verse on Simile of the Froth:

Like a lump of foam is this body

Like bubbles are feelings

Like a mirage - perceptions

Like (pithless) plantain - mental formations

Like a ghost- consciousness

The Buddha gave this verse to monks at the banks of the Ganges. He pointed to a lump of foam and compared it to the body. He then continued to give similes to the other aggregates.

For meditators these similes are very true. When observing them at the level of ultimate realities, that is how they appear. When watching the physical sensations, the material phenomena can be perceived as qualities that arise and pass away as a group. They are like little bubbles which stick and change together. On further observation, they can appear as fine particles like little atoms that pulsate and move about.

Feelings also flow, especially those from the heart. At first they seem like water, then also as bubbles. When angry, feelings are like hot boiling water, with lots of bubbles. When pleasurable, they are like bubbles from a cold fizzy drink. As mental phenomena, these would appear to change faster. Later, they seem to gather speed and may seem like electric currents.

Perception draw lines and dots on the landscape of experience. It also paints colours. When they are noticed to arise and pass away moment-to-moment, these pictures of experience drawn by perception vanish like a mirage when you approach it.

As for the simile of the plantain trunk, it needs a little explanation. The plantain trunk is actually not a trunk. Botanically, they are suckers which give rise to shoots that grow above the ground. Peeling off the layers,

one eventually ends with nothing. There is no pith. Similarly, one may think that within one's mental states and thought forms there may be an everlasting entity. On closer observation, one finds conditions within conditions. Finally, they all dissolve and cease.

Consciousness is like a ghost. It seems it is around all the time, but when looking for it, it seems to vanish. What one seems to catch are the mental states which act like its cover or mask. They arise and cease together but one sees the mental state. For those who have become familiar with it, directly watching as it arises and ceases makes a difference. What seems self is seen as a ghost, a shadow of truth rather than truth itself. You stop trying to hold on to the ghost. You let the ghost be what it is, a ghost, which is ultimately empty. It cannot harm you.

3. SIX SENSE BASES (AYATANA)

The contemplation by way of the six sense bases is another way of breaking up the false view of an everlasting personality.

There are six internal sense bases:-

- (1) Eye base which is the material quality of visible sensitivity
- (2) Ear base which is the material quality of sound sensitivity
- (3) Nose base which is the material quality of odorous sensitivity
- (4) Tongue base which is the material quality of taste sensitivity
- (5) Body base which is the material quality of touch sensitivity
- (6) Mind base which is the consciousness that knows mind objects

There are six external sense bases:-

- (1) Form base which are colours and light
- (2) Sound base which are sounds
- (3) Odorous base which are odours
- (4) Sapid base which are tastes
- (5) Tangible base which are the touch objects of earth, fire and wind elements
- (6) Mind objects.

When one analyses one's experience, they come under these six categories. When we are not careful and take them as one compact unit, they seem to give an idea that this is what the person is but upon close observation, these six categories are found to be conditioned phenomena. They depend on each other to exist and are sustained moment-to-moment. When the false view of the person has arisen, it gives rise to further clinging to each of these as oneself, or belonging to oneself. It then extends to others.



**Illusionary people,
Berne, Switzerland
2006**

People that we see are just eye objects....material qualities. If you are not careful you may mistake some of the paintings on the wall as real. It is the mind that makes the difference, to see real and unreal as true to its nature or otherwise.

For example, people can attach to themselves as how they look, they attach to their sense of vision, what they see and how they see things. The same goes for the sound, their voices, their hearing; they identify with the smelling, smells; they do so to tastes, touch and mind. Notice that it is the mind that finally makes up all these attachments and wrong views.

The *Satipatthana Sutta* describes the contemplation as the understanding of the eye, the form (eye object), the fetter that arises dependent on both, how it comes to be the arising of the unarisen fetter, how it comes to be the abandonment of the arisen fetter and how it comes to be the future non-arising of the abandoned fetter. The same is repeated for the remaining five internal and external sense bases. Finally, there is the summary and repetition of the verse on the contemplation of mind objects internally, externally, both internally and externally, its arising factors, its dissolution, both its arising and dissolution.

The understanding spoken of is obviously for a start the understanding of the eye, etc., as a natural phenomena which is not a being, not a soul, empty (*nisatto, nijivo, sunno*). From there, as bases, they give rise to other conditionings, particularly the thought processes. These thought processes comprise the part which receives and knows its object followed by another part which responds to it. When unmindful, it gives rise to many other unwholesome processes in the round in the creation of suffering. It is true in the reverse case of wholesome response which brings happiness. In *vipassana*, it is further developed to go beyond this round of conditioned existence.

The *Culamalunkyaputta Sutta* has verses that illustrate this process:

*Having seen form, mindfulness is forgotten
When attending to lovely signs
He experiences the impassioned mind
Clinging stays in him*

*Arising from form, manifold feelings increase
With covetousness and annoyance
The mind is burdened, accumulating suffering
Is far from Nibbana*

(The same is repeated for the other five sense bases)

*He who is not attached to form
When having seen form mindfully
Experiences the dispassionate mind
In him no clinging stays
And just as he sees form (mindfully)
So too, he practises (mindfulness) on feelings
Exhausting, not accumulating
He strives mindfully doing away with suffering
Is near to Nibbana*

(Again, the same is repeated for the other five sense bases.)

When unskillful, one is said to be far from *Nibbana*. When skillful, one is said to be near to *Nibbana*. Skillful or not depends on our mindfulness which makes it wholesome and brings wholesome results. But when mindfulness is that of the *vipassana* type, it gives rise to clear comprehension and insight.

The eye, eye object are after all realities. They can be observed and experienced to arise and pass away, according to the three universal characteristics. But it is not so easy. Habits die hard. In a split of a second, the thought process creates concepts. Latent tendencies are also strong, and they arise becoming fetters to the Path. One must be determined to keep the mindfulness to the “present occurrence”. Thus, one holds back the formation of concepts and traces back to experience the object as it is.

At this point, it is interesting to note that the eye thought process creates concepts of shape first from the colors picked up, then to three dimensional forms. These further conglomerate to other forms and ideas. Knowing thus and keeping the mind from perceiving shapes, helps to stop the conceptualization and keeps it to the ultimate realities. As for the hearing, the words formed from sounds further gives rise to ideas. It is concepts that arise from perception of smell, taste and touch before naming concepts arise. As for mind, it is obvious to catch it in the process of conceptualising, making up, and creating. Therefore, there is the advice, “when there is seeing, let there be just the seen. When there is hearing, let there be just the heard. When there is knowing, let there be just the known.” Thus, meditators when seeing, just note “seeing”. It keeps one mindful; it keeps one from further conceptualizing; it keeps one to the present reality.

The Sutta speaks of Ten Fetters (*samyojana*):

- (1) Wrong views
- (2) Attachment to wrong practices
- (3) Skeptical doubts
- (4) Sensual cravings
- (5) Ill-will
- (6) Craving for form sphere existence
- (7) Craving for formless sphere existence
- (8) Conceit
- (9) Restlessness
- (10) Delusion

Fetters 1-3 are eradicated by the Stream Winner. The Once Returner further reduces Fetters 4 and 5. It is only at the stage of Non-Returner that they are eradicated. The higher Fetters 6-10, are eradicated only in the *Arahatta*. The eradication here is radical. Therefore, there is no more arising of these fetters in the future. The reason? It must be that

supramundane knowledge that comes with the Noble Path Consciousness. The teaching of the fetters give us an idea of the stepwise purification in the practice.

With wrong views present, any truth is masked. Wrong practices further entrench one into wrong views. Skeptical doubts prevent any healthy enquiry. They must be put aside before any insight can arise. So we see the importance of association with the wise. It is also true that they can be eradicated radically in the Stream Winner because he has seen the Four Noble Truths by insight; Otherwise, it can still come back when one is unmindful. Then, what follows will be thorough doing away with sensual cravings and ill-will. To be successful, the factor of strong right concentration is critical. Finally, it is only in the wisdom of the *Arahatta* that can eradicate the rest, which will go off only when the root of roots – delusion, is totally eradicated.

As a summary, it can be said that the contemplation of the six sense bases is actually mindfulness directed at the six thought processes and the conditions involved. One sees into the conditions that give rise to the processes as well as what happens during the processes. All these factors are seen according to the three universal characteristics and thus, bring about the path leading to the cessation of the cycle.

4. SEVEN FACTORS OF ENLIGHTENMENT (*SAMBOJJHANGA*)

In the *Satipatthana Sutta* the Buddha instructs: “When the enlightenment factor of mindfulness is present, he knows it is present. When the enlightenment factor of mindfulness is absent, he knows. He knows how the unarisen mindfulness enlightenment factor comes to be, he knows how the unarisen mindfules factor of enlightenment comes to complete development.” The same is said with regards to the other six enlightenment factors.

There are Seven Enlightenment Factors:

- (1) Mindfulness
- (2) Investigation of States
- (3) Energy
- (4) Joy
- (5) Tranquility
- (6) Concentration
- (7) Equanimity

(1) Mindfulness Enlightenment Factor

What does one mean by enlightenment factor? It is easy to just think of it as a factor that leads to enlightenment. The definition is based on “enlightenment” which is an experiential insight and yet for most it is dealt with in a theoretical manner. So, it struck me when my teacher said that the mindfulness enlightenment factor becomes clear at the insight knowledge of arising and dissolution. I, hence forth, considered the mindfulness enlightenment factor as clear awareness with a life of its own, ever looking into the *vipassana* object as it is. This definition bases the enlightenment factor and its object on to the truth of non-self. The rest of the characteristics (unsatisfactoriness, impermanence), enlightenment factors and development, follows.

Here, mindfulness is studied as we practice. The beginner has first to familiarise himself with what is mindfulness, i.e. before it can be considered as an enlightenment factor. We try to arouse it and see if it works. Then, we see it develops. There are different forms of it. With proper guidance, some insight arises and makes clear what it is as an enlightenment factor. Hence, the mindfulness here is seen to arise and cease moment-to-moment together with its objects. This perception of reality is increased with development. Mindfulness as it develops with levels of insight are also observed. They cannot be clung on to. Mindfulness has

to be allowed to unfold. It breaks barriers limited by narrow mindedness. It opens up a world within. It sees oneness in all things. It goes beyond the world. The culmination is Realisation of the highest degree and comes with the complete abandonment of all defilements.

The *Satipatthana* commentary is usually quoted as factors of its arising.

- i. The practice of mindfulness and clear comprehension as described in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.
- ii. Association with the mindful
- iii. Dissociation from the unmindful
- iv. Inclination to the development of the mindfulness enlightenment factor

Personally, I think the most important factor is knowing what this mindfulness enlightenment factor is like. Then, comes the factors of commitment, faith, energy and patience which is keeping the engine going. We become a factory producing it.

(2) Investigation of States Enlightenment Factor

In texts, we are told that this is the Wisdom Faculty itself. Personally, I would call it the “inquiring mind”. The inquiring is not in the sense of thinking although there is bound to be some of it at the beginning. Rather, it is that sharp mindfulness that keeps delving its observation deeper and deeper into the object. It is like a microscope that keeps increasing its magnification, bringing to light its deepest nature.

It can be said that, on one hand, it is exploratory and, on the other, it is exposing. Being clear and unprejudiced, it is very revealing. Fear, such as that of the unknown, is often paralysing. Inquisitiveness and curiosity tend to encourage it.

At first, one has to be encouraged to observe, and not just concentrate or follow the object. Then, one has to develop this investigative factor more with keener perceptions. One is often asked during interviews to describe one's experience with ever more detail and precision. The teacher would then point out places and times when this factor is lacking or how it can be improved.

Again, let me quote the commentarial list of conditions for its arising.

- i. Asking questions (on relevant matters)
- ii. Cleanliness of the body
- iii. Balanced controlling faculties
- iv. Avoiding the foolish
- v. Associating with the wise
- vi. Reflection on the profound truths
- vii. Total commitment, inclination to its development

I do agree that the inquiring mind is of foremost importance in this matter. As was said, those who search shall find. It also depends on how one searches and what one is searching for. That is where the correct associations and the method come in. Even these have to be done with discrimination. After the initial phases, it will then depend on how well one understands the Factors of Enlightenment, the tool and spearhead that pierce through the clouds of delusion. Keep sharpening the mindfulness and keep on looking into the Nature of these mind and material processes.

(3) Energy Enlightenment Factor

The first two factors are the main tools in the process of realisation. It is like a sharp axe used to break through the thick wall of darkness. What it needs is a pair of strong arms. Get the idea? **HARD WORK!**

Energy is needed in all forms of work. Here, we are speaking more of the mental aspect although the physical cannot be ignored. The matter at hand is understanding reality and this is described as the Four Supreme Efforts of the Noble Eightfold Path. To repeat:

- i. To abandon unwholesome states arisen
- ii. To avoid unwholesome states unarisen
- iii. To arouse wholesome states unarisen
- iv. To maintain wholesome states arisen

The chief factor here is the third effort, for if it is present, the rest will also be present. Again, the wholesome state is the process of insight development led by the first two enlightenment factors. The energy will then be that which arouses these factors and develops them to the highest degree. It will also be one with them and hence, an enlightenment factor.

The commentarial list of conditions for arising again is worth looking into.

- i. Reflection on states of misery
- ii. Reflection on benefits of energy
- iii. Remembering the Noble Ones
- iv. Appreciation of support
- v. Inheritor of a Noble Heritage
- vi. Remembering the greatness of the Buddha
- vii. Remembering the greatness of the Lineage
- viii. Remembering our Comrades' greatness
- ix. Avoid the lazy
- x. Associate with the diligent
- xi. Inclining the mind to the development of the enlightenment factor of energy

Much can be said of it as the Controlling Faculty of Energy. From the above list, one can summarise that energy can be aroused from inspiration (which comes under the faith faculty) or the sense of urgency (which comes from moral concerns and it, in turn, comes from understanding of circumstances). This is critical for the beginner who may not have much faith. With patience and practice, some results may help one to continue. Having good teachers and friends at hand is helpful, and if not some good books. There has to be persistence and perseverance. Once the machinery gets going, it also has a life of its own. It may seem effortless, but what it means is non-conscious effort. Then, one has to be careful to maintain its balance with the concentration faculty. This also involves refinement. It is an amazing fact that mental energy is limitless. When properly aroused and balanced, it can take one far to the beyond.

(4) Joy Enlightenment Factor

Joy may not be so common for meditators embarking on the pure insight vehicle. With the development of concentration, it eventually takes off. It occurs more plentiful in those who have taken the tranquility vehicle and on emergence from absorptions it is often taken of as an object. This is provided it is observed in the manner that produces insight, that is with sharp perception into the three universal characteristics.

Teachers will always forewarn practitioners of the dangers of attachment to joy. It is understandable for latent in pleasurable objects is the latency of sensual attachment. Even if one does not feel it, without strong detached mindfulness, it can creep in. Then, it spells downfall. Although the advice is well founded, it should also be balanced by the encouragement to develop it as an enlightenment factor.

Joy is necessary for the process of realisation. Life is beset with tragedies. Practice too faces obstacles. The fountain of joy helps lift up the spirit when it is low and spurs extra energy to overcome barriers. This is especially so

when one begins to see more clearly the characteristic of suffering. That is when we need inspiration most. Knowing how to arouse joy makes the difference. With joy, concentration deepens. So, if it does not make practice rapturous, at least it becomes tolerable.

Commentary speaks of the ways of arousing joy.

- i. Recollection of the Buddha
- ii. Recollection of the Teachings
- iii. Recollection of the Order
- iv. Recollection of Virtues
- v. Recollection of Generosity
- vi. Recollection of Deities
- vii. Recollection of Peace
- viii. Recollection of Discourses
- ix. Avoiding coarse people (without faith)
- x. Associating with refined people (with faith)
- xi. Inclining the mind to the development of joy enlightenment factor

One ought to have a whole collection of tricks up one's sleeve to arouse joy when needed. Pictures, spiritual icons, close comrades, one's favourite verses, beautiful walks, tapes, talks and whatever you can think of. My last resort is a collection of suttas, and that usually works.

Joy is usually spoken of in five types.

- i. Minor rapture (*khuddaka piti*)
- ii. Momentary rapture (*khanika piti*)
- iii. Wavelike, overwhelming joy (*ubbega piti*)
- iv. Floating, light, uplifting joy (*okkantika piti*)
- v. All pervasive rapture which fills up every cell in the body (*pharana piti*)

When concentration picks up, initial difficulties fall away and joy surges up. To ensure that the mind is on track, care is taken to be mindful of joy so that attachment does not arise. But this does not mean trying to get rid of it. If one is mindful, it may pass away or remain in a more subtle form. If it remains dominant, one can take it as an object of *vipassana*, to develop insight. It can be observed and experienced as it changes moment-to-moment, as non-self as well as bearing the characteristic of imperfection. Thus, joy becomes an enlightenment factor as well as an object for the development of insight. What eventually happens is that it becomes so subtle to become equanimity. Still the process of enlightenment continues. There are stories of monks who strive and finally attained realization based on joy.



Sweetest Nun, Angkor, Kampuchea 2006

This is the picture of the sweetest nun I have met. Even though Kampuchea had just emerged after many years of civil war and genocide, one can see the resilience of the people determined to be happy and this is clearly reflected in the nun who I consider from her actions and expression as intensely joyful. I also noticed that people ferry nuns to the Angkor to set up small shrines and collect donation. Who could refuse her smiles and her loving kindness?

(5) Tranquility/Quietude Enlightenment Factor

I would like to call this factor the cool, tranquil and soft factor. It is like concentration in the sense that it is the opposite of agitation. But, the ease also carries with it all the wholesome factors such as softness, lightness, workability, malleability, sincerity, openness of mind and mental states. Thus, it makes the mind very capable and adaptable to situations and objects. These are also necessary for one to be able to accept reality.

It is interesting to consider the factors mentioned in the commentary that arouses this factor.

- i. Proper food
- ii. Good climate
- iii. Comfortable posture
- iv. Balanced effort
- v. Avoid rough people
- vi. Associate with refined people
- vii. Inclining the mind to the development of tranquility enlightenment factor.

These factors strongly suggest external conditions. One can also look at the internal conditions. These are wholesome mental factors.

- i. Quietude of mind and mental states (*passaddhi*) - ensures smooth working, tranquility and balance necessary for concentration and insight.
- ii. Lightness of mind and mental states (*lahuta*) - overcomes heaviness, lethargy and promotes agility in the practice.
- iii. Softness of mind and mental states (*muduta*) - overcomes hardness and rigidity which comes with aggressiveness, anger and stubbornness.

- iv. Workableness of mind and mental states (*kammannata*) - flexibility to adapt to the changes and unpredictability of situations and in the meditation object.
- v. Straight forwardness of mind and mental states (*ujjukata*) - sincerity and openness to receive teachings and accept reality.
- vi. Efficiency of mind and mental states (*pagunnata*) - being strong and healthy state of mind that is resistant to defilements and strengthens faculties.

Being mindful of these also means being mindful of subtle mental states and its changes, which are peculiar to the contemplation of phenomena. These are also finally observed to bear the three universal characteristics of existence and, therefore, leading to the final insight.

(6) Concentration Enlightenment Factor

It is clear that concentration is a necessary factor for enlightenment. Later chapters dealing with concentration will clarify what it is and matters concerned with it. For the present, let us consider a distracted mind that is unable to focus on to any subject for long. It is obvious that the mind is unable to see things properly. It is like muddy water or a shaky camera unable to focus, much less take a clear photo. Such a mind is also weak and unable to surmount any arduous task. Concentration makes the mind strong enough to resist negative tendencies, strengthen positive qualities, magnify the object and bring it to close focus.

But what is to be emphasized here is that as an enlightenment factor, it must be *vipassana* concentration. The object is an ultimate reality, a process that arises and ceases moment-to-moment. The characteristics of non-self and unsatisfactoriness should also be obvious in the object as well as the concentration itself. Otherwise, it would not be possible to go beyond the mundane.

Mindfulness of this factor means as in the other factors, the knowing of its true nature, how it arises and how it can be brought to completion. It is the factor that keeps the practice on the path.

Although repetitive, it is good to bring up the factors for its arising as given in the commentary.

- i. Cleanliness
- ii. Balanced mental faculties
- iii. Clear mental image
- iv. Inciting the lethargic mind on occasion
- v. Calming down the over-energetic mind on occasion
- vi. Gladdening the discouraged mind on occasion
- vii. Regarding with equanimity when it should be regarded as such
- viii. Avoiding distracted people
- ix. Associating with those with concentration
- x. Reflection of peace
- xi. Inclining the mind to the concentration enlightenment factor.

In the beginning, we need to know how to arouse and develop it. A skillful balance as described in the conditions above brings about strong and stable concentration. Then, we look deeply into Reality. This includes the concentration and thus, the mind itself and is especially relevant with regards to the deeper concentration and absorptions that will eventually arise. To be able to see into its three universal characteristics is necessary to prevent subtle attachments and go beyond all mundane forms of consciousness.

(7) Equanimity Enlightenment Factor

The opposite of equanimity is an unstable and moody temperament. One moment, one is in the clouds, another moment, one is in hell. Equanimity, the balance in mental state, overcomes all these by promoting stability,

smoothness, peace and harmony. It reflects acceptance and understanding. Thus, any concentration developed will be able to last long and become very deep. When it is *vipassana* concentration, deep insights arise.

The factors given for its arising are:—

- i. Developing balance with respect to living beings
- ii. Developing balance with respect to inanimate things
- iii. Avoiding unbalanced people
- iv. Associating with balanced people
- v. Inclining the mind to the equanimity enlightenment factor

The balance of mind towards living beings can be developed by contemplation of *Kamma* and its consequences. The balance of mind towards other matters can be done through contemplation of the eight vicissitudes of life, also called the Eight Worldly Conditions of gain, loss, etc. But these still belong to tranquility meditation and so have limitations.

The equanimity that comes with insight practice can be truly called an enlightenment factor. This equanimity firstly arises with the stabilised mindfulness, then the stable insight concentration and finally from the insight into the true nature of all phenomena. Thus, one becomes detached from all worldly conditions and remains unaffected. It is also worthy to note that teachers warn meditators not to attach to this subtle, peaceful state. Thus, as in all conditioned phenomena, one has also to be aware of the three universal characteristics inherent in it as one develops it.

5. Four Noble Truths (*Sacca*)

The instruction in the *Satipatthana Sutta* with regards to this topic is simple as quoted:-

Here a monk knows as it really is:-

“This is Suffering; This is the Origin of Suffering; This is the Cessation of Suffering; This is the Way to the Cessation of Suffering.”

The key to understanding is to know things as they really are. Therefore, one goes back to that clear awareness which is non-conceptual, sharp and penetrative and brings about insight.

The Four Noble Truths hits the point on the Nature of Spiritual Life. It nails down the existential problem of suffering. Lasting peace is what is lacking. Seeking for it unskillfully ends up with craving and more suffering.

Hence, “suffering” is always quoted as the five aggregates of clinging. In *vipassana* practice, we understand it as the incessant arising and passing away of the aggregates. This incessant arising and passing away is also called “suffering of formations” which we should develop dispassion from. Thus, this is what is to be learnt, as quoted from the first discourse. Watching mindfully, we learn that this suffering is present in all conditioned phenomena and it is towards these that dispassion is developed

As for the origin of suffering, it is quoted as craving - sensual craving, craving for existence and craving for non existence. In a broader scope, it includes all defilements. As for the very root, the stain of stains is delusion, and insight is that which overcomes it.

Thus, we begin by watching these defilements arise and pass away as hindrances that are manifested through body and speech and later also, in the mind. Then, we look into the conditions which cause their arising and we find latent tendencies. They, however, can be totally abandoned by the realisation of the supramundane noble path .

As for the Cessation of Suffering, there is a definition of cessation of craving which is also a definition of *Nibbana*. In the text, *Path of Purification*, it also defines cessation of being void of all destinies. That is, cessation of the cycle. This cessation can be clearly seen when impermanence is clearly perceived. When unsatisfactoriness is seen, there is letting go and cessation also results. When its real nature is seen as in non-self, it reveals its true nature in cessation. This is what is to be realised. There is no substitute for direct experience!

As for the path leading to the cessation, the Noble Eightfold Path is quoted again.

The Eightfold Path factors are:

1. Right View – the insight that comes with seeing things as they are
2. Right Thought – the directing of insight into the real nature to be focussed on
3. Right Speech – restraint from wrong speech through mindfulness in insight practice
4. Right Action – restraint on wrong bodily conduct through mindfulness in insight practice
5. Right Livelihood – restraint from wrong speech and bodily actions involved with one's livelihood through mindfulness in insight practice.
6. Right Effort – the four supreme efforts as mentioned before, that is exertion in insight practice
7. Right Mindfulness – Mindfulness of the Four Foundations, which in short is mindfulness in insight practice

8. Right Concentration – the one-pointed nature of mindfulness that focuses on to real nature which is the *vipassana* object that brings about insight through the *vipassana* practice.

The first two factors comes as Wisdom, the next three as Virtue and the last three as Concentration. Therefore, the three trainings - Virtue, Concentration and Wisdom. One leads to the next as the path that lead one onwards towards the destination.

As one can see, the Eightfold Path factors can be found in the practice of insight meditation itself. Only when the supramundane is reached can it be considered as the Noble Path. But by examining these factors in our practice, we can check on our practice as to the mental states to arouse or abandon. We can work step-by-step towards the spiritual goal.



Narrow Neck,
Tasmania, Australia
2004

One can talk of bridges and narrow necks but few can beat this one in terms of beauty. The Narrow Neck joins Cape Bruny to mainland Tasmania. But there are more fascinating ones, such as I was told, of the golden and silver bridges that span between lives. We have all gone crossed them umpteen times but how many can remember? What is more important is the one that brings one across Samsara.

Thus, to summarise the teaching and practice with regards to the Four Noble Truths,

*Suffering is to be learnt
Origin of suffering is to be abandoned
Cessation of suffering is to be realised
The way to the cessation of truth is to be developed.*

Finally, on examining the Four Noble Truths, the most important is the Path. For if this is to be developed, the functions connected to the rest will also be fulfilled.

“Dispersion is the Path; Liberation is the Fruit.” This quote from the “*Path of Discrimination*” happens to be one of my favorites. It summarises the nature of the path. For Buddhists, Dispersion has a special meaning. It is Dispersion that includes the Path as well as all Supramundane States including the Unconditioned State of Nibbana.

Looking back at Dhammanupassana Satipatthana as a whole, it can be seen as a comprehensive and extensive system and practice ingeniously devised. First one deals with the lower states, the hindrances in depth followed by looking into the bundles of aggregates that people tend to identify with. This brings one into the *vipassana* practice where the characteristic of non-self and natural occurrence of realities is brought to clarity. Then when attending to the 6 sense bases, one is made to follow the consciousness and its processes through all its changing conditions. Then as insight progresses, the enlightenment factors become apparent and even these are made into objects and eventually transcended into the states that are beyond the world. Finally the 4 noble truths sum up the practice as a whole. In all its components and sections, one is eventually lead to the 3 universal characteristics which when observed develops detachment that leads out of Samsara

Afterword

There are by now quite a few books published in English on the practice of the 4 foundations of mindfulness. Besides the ones by the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw. I had also in the earlier days, came across a work by the Venerable Soma Thera called “The Way of Mindfulness”, It gave a good translation of the *Satipatthana Sutta* and its commentary, and on top of that added many interesting comments. One interesting note is how each of the foundations was suited to different temperaments.. Then I was introduced to another good compilation of the subject and its commentary called “*The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*” by Nyanaponika Thera. Besides his own comments, he also made available translations of commentaries found in other suttas otherwise not found elsewhere in English. Finally there is the “Four Foundations of Mindfulness” by Sayadaw U Silananda on the Sutta explained in more direct and simple language. This I still use as a reference when I give talks on the Sutta.

After reading many of these good works, I find that there is still nothing like the discoveries one makes when one really goes into the practice.. It is like getting aboard a huge ship that takes one across the sea of *Samsara*, and while on board, discovers its many rooms and works.

It is also understood that each of these foundations is capable of leading one to the goal; they are all interconnected and support each other. And unless one progresses so rapidly, one usually has to practice all 4 although one may be more adept in one.

At this point, I will recapitulate certain interesting and relevant aspect of each.

The body foundation of mindfulness is important as an initial base for grounding of mindfulness and concentration. In the simile of the journey, it is like traveling along an earthen path. The key to this seems to be

sensitivity to bodily sensations. This in turn leads to the establishment of the other foundations. It has a unique property of developing detachment to the body, often a stumbling block to progress in this sensual world.

The feeling foundation of mindfulness would naturally come next since its proximate cause is contact. In the simile of the journey it is like sailing on the river, feelings being a watery element. Here one arrives at an important point about the basic motivation and search for the meaning of existence which is connected with true happiness. The key factor here I see to be acceptance especially of pain and after that detachment to even the finest joys before reaching for the supramundane.

As feelings are connected to mental states one finally arrives to the consciousness, often called the King and Lord. At this point one arrives at what I consider as a strategic position in the practice. This is because consciousness is present in all of one's experiences. If one is able to get this foundation established, then one has reached a point where one can proceed in any direction as long as one uses consciousness as one's reference point. But consciousness can be very elusive and slippery because of the latent defilements. And so the key factor is being able to maintain continuity of mindfulness. In the simile of the journey, it is like a bird taking off into the air.

But consciousness is also dependent and conditioned, connected with the formations and the universe. Together, they work as forces that keep the world turning. The chapters of the *Dhamma* foundation of mindfulness e.g. Hindrances, Aggregates etc, illustrate how these forces can be grouped according to its natures and how each group can be made use of to develop insight and liberation in a particular way with particular effects in different situations.

As to *Dhamma* foundation of mindfulness, I came to understand this better only later. Those books often do not seem to point out clearly its

position and relation to the other foundations. Later I realized that this foundation is the ultimate one since it refers to reality and truth and so covers *vipassana* in all forms and levels, The key to this foundation I take it to be the basic insight into non-self in all phenomena.

In the simile of the journey, this is like the ants that in the burrow and create a labyrinth of tunnels leading into the heart of the world.

In short, I find the practice of *Satipatthana* a very thorough, exhaustive and expansive. It has been very well thought up, devised and encrypted in the *Sutta* by the Buddha, his disciples and the Venerable Elders for future generations.

PART III

FUNCTIONAL VIPASSANA



Gring Grong

*A*n incident occurred on a day during my winter retreat in Schangnau in a small village in the Emmental, Switzerland. It is not a “big” incident, but a thought in a form of a useful question came to my mind and gave me a clear direction in the practice. After sitting in meditation, experiencing things I had often undergone, there suddenly arose a question in the mind, “What is happening? What is all these ‘gring grong’?” By ‘gring grong’ I refer to the rumble and tumble of the consciousness and objects that pass through during a period of concentration. This had been going on for many years. I was sure then of the process of insight meditation, which eventually leads to the goal. I have ceased to question as to what each one really is. So, often it seemed to be a meaningless process that rumbled by. But the question not only reconfirmed that what I was doing was right, it also led to a more open and flexible way of practice and teaching.

It was first followed by a question often asked by my students, “Is what I am doing correct? If so, why?” So I checked on the presence of mindfulness and absence of defilements. When this was in order, I questioned the concentration, which I found was clearly in access concentration. But as to insight, there was clearly nothing conceptual about it. My mind did not try to interpret what it was and so there was no rational understanding about it, although I had to trust that it was alright based on past experiences. I suppose I could easily fit some of these “gring-grong” into some of the insight knowledges, especially

those where the characteristics of “non-self” are strong, sharp and clear, but I had ceased to be concerned about which experience level corresponded to which insight knowledge, for I knew that purification was more important, so I left out further judgements.

The incident, however, made me wonder as to how much of the basic techniques which I had started with are still being used. For example, the noting and naming of the actions and objects that arose. I had actually stopped doing that for a long time, although I repeated the need to do it to newcomers in the preliminary instructions. Rather, I emphasized the need for a deeper feeling, experiencing and observing of the objects/processes, which might as well be done from an early stage.

Secondly, it also prompted me to observe the various ways of development, the concentration of these “gring grong”, mind and body processes as manifestations of the three universal characteristics. Surprisingly, it could arise with many objects, such as sound, pain, body sensations, besides the rising and falling of the abdomen. The observations showed me that the concentrated *vipassana* process can be brought to be in many ways and objects besides the one that I was originally trained in. It had opened many “doors of the *dhamma*” for entering into the path. Coming to the West where openness is often more appreciated than a more rigid, conservative approach to a particular tradition, this allowed me to adopt a liberal stance towards the meditators who had been exposed to different traditions and thus, lead them to the “one way” to liberation. It also had, in turn, the effect of removing more original concepts of practice that may have become barriers to a wider and deeper practice.

So, it had become clear why the method of sweeping mindfulness through the body had been effective when introducing the practice to my first Swiss students. Later, it had the effect of giving more emphasis on the contemplation of consciousness. Then, came one day when I returned to Malaysia and introduced some of the new approaches and the watching

of the “gring-grong”, someone asked, “Which foundation of mindfulness does this practice of the “gring-grong” method come under?” At first, I was surprised at how easily people categorize things to fit into their concepts and make judgements. Not that it is not useful but in this case, I realized I was also making some breakthroughs in the ways the method is traditionally taught.

As an answer, I replied, “All the four foundations of mindfulness.” To explain further, I said, “When you watch these “gring-grong”, you are actually watching body sensations - such as vibrations which come under “body contemplation.” Then, there are feelings such as itches and aches which are objects of “feeling contemplations.” Although these comprise the majority of the “gring-grong”, on further practice, the consciousness as in consciousness contemplation soon sets in as the main foundation. From then on it was clear that the “gring-grong” is consciousness in its rapid change. The whole thing sometimes prompted me to call it “washing machine meditation”, for what one has put into a washing machine with all its spins and turns, comes out sparkling clean. Contemplation can be better accomplished with clearer perception.

Now when I think, it would be simpler to group them all into *Dhammanupassana* or mind-object contemplation. But that would need more explanation on what that is! Yet another outcome of this “gring-grong” discovery is the idea of functional *vipassana*. That is, the answer to the question why? Is there any use of these “spasms” (as one student described)? The answer gave obvious reasons and the reasons solve dilemmas. This aspect will appear in the next chapter.

Functional Vipassana

This section on functional *vipassana* deals with the practice in terms of understanding why we do what we do. Something for the “why-people”, i.e., people who want to know why are they doing what they do. Knowing

the reasons gives us motivation to continue, whether on an intensive retreat or in daily life. It also helps to have a better grasp of techniques and also the control of the mind.

Secondly, it also helps to counter the craving for progress. It so happened that quite a number of meditators judge their practice and progress based on what is described as the 16 insight knowledges; which they try to identify through the description of experiences from books. By seeing into the purpose behind the practice, one avoids wrong interpretations and puts oneself back into right perspective.

In this respect, I have classified what we do into few simple yet profound purposes. Each of them brings benefits ranging from those in daily life to the loftiest spiritual levels. When one is able to see the purpose behind what one is doing, then it is worth doing well and doing all the time. When we forget, we go off the line.

The main functions are:

1. Clearing
2. Strengthening
3. Sharpening
4. Directing
5. Liberating

Chapter 1



1. CLEARING

This process starts from the very beginning of the practice. That is to say clearing the mind of the defilements, which are the real causes of suffering. In practice, it includes clearing the many conditions that bring about the arising of defilements. In meditation, we can refer to them as the Five Hindrances. The Ten Obstacles (*palibodha*), however, refer to certain conditions that do not favor meditation. These may not be defilements. On a broader scale, they include anything that is not conducive to the development of a pure state of mind. Here, the context will be confined to the first definition.

The unwholesome states arise from three unwholesome roots, namely, attachment/craving, anger/aversion and delusion. It is clear that when these roots are present, they form a cloud concealing reality. Delusion is the main culprit, craving its active counterpart, and aversion, a terrible development. The wholesome state of mind, when present, is clearly obvious when the Hindrances have been overcome. It is especially obvious when that dark, heavy cloud of sloth and torpor vanishes. Restlessness makes a racket. When gone, it gives way to deep silence. Freedom from sensual desire and aversion is like putting out the flames, and having resolved skeptical doubts, one feels as if one is freed from the perplexity of mental knots. That clear mind is bright, open and free, happy and peaceful. This wholesome state produced by mindfulness is the ground for all forms of happiness.



**Alcatraz, San Francisco,
USA 2006**

Alcatraz is infamous as a prison. If you end up there, woe betide for many years. May be its also kammic retribution. On the other hand, many secluded monasteries are also like that. But instead of grief and regret, there is instead, tranquility. It is all in the consciousness. Sloth and torpor has been compared to a prison which prevents us from seeing what's happening in the world.

Take the classical example of a field of crops. It needs clearing and ploughing before the crop can be planted and grow productively. The mind too works the same way. How fertile the soil is also makes the difference, but this potential varies with each individual.

Since we have covered the ground of the Five Hindrances under contemplation of phenomena (*Dhammanupassana*), we will not repeat it here.

What is to be stressed is that these defilements operate on three levels:-

- (1) gross - when manifested in body and speech, such as when transgressing the precepts of killing, stealing, etc.;
- (2) when occurring only at the mental level which can be very subtle; and
- (3) when they are at the latent level.

Morality/virtue can clear the gross level of defilements but cannot cover subtler mental obsessions. Concentration inhibits them, but only insight can radically remove those latent tendencies. Why? That is because insight practice goes to the very root of existence. This is where the clearing is most difficult. Even the strongest concentration cannot reach it. One has to be very attentive and sharp when noticing and observing deeply into the conditions that make up and bring about the clinging to the mind/body processes. Only when realizing these illusions, can there be the real “letting go”.

The clearing process operates in all three levels. If one sees it in depth, then one realizes the importance of just keeping mindful, even for a moment. It is especially relevant when you have in mind the final goal of utter purification. Then, all the energy moves to that direction. Time is another matter, but for now the purpose matters and it yields immediate results of peace. However, clearing does not just mean the mind settling down into peaceful states. It also mean clearing at deeper level, such as those of the latent defilements, and this can be done only with insight.

2. STRENGTHENING

Another way to look at the practice is as a strengthening process. It is easy to understand that a sick body is not only incapable of doing anything substantial, but also a bag of agony. The same can be said of the mind except that its capabilities of benefit and harm are much greater.

When we speak of strength, again I must remind that it is not “power”. Rather, it is in a sense of health and well-being. Greed and anger are powerful, but they are a weakness in the true moral perspective. Hence, strength as such is wholesome, and this is especially so with reference to realization as factors of enlightenment.

The Five Strengths (*Bala*) are:

- (1) Faith/Confidence
- (2) Energy
- (3) Mindfulness
- (4) Concentration
- (5) Wisdom

In a way, it is related to cleansing because it is the strength of these states that is able to clear the defilements and hence, all sufferings. But when speaking of strength, it gives more positive to the picture. Just as physical health gives physical happiness, mental strength gives mental happiness. Strength, therefore, can be regarded as strong conditioning factors. We need these to go through life unscathed. We need this to reach beyond the mundane. With dangers lurking at every corner, we need these strengths all the time.

In the *Manual of Buddhism* by Ledi Sayadaw, he points out the difference between ordinary strength (e.g. faith - *Pakati Saddha*) and meditative strength (*Bhavana Saddha*). Because of its development and cultivation, the latter is obviously more powerful. It is able to overcome more suffering and gives better happiness. Still, we must not disregard the ordinary forms, for they are the seeds. But when we are aware of meditative practices, we should not procrastinate.

(1) Faith

Faith moves mountains, so it is said. But when regarding the powers of the mind, faith can do more. It is out of faith we perform many wholesome acts. Meditation churns out strengths unknown to one, including faith - a faith that is steeped in confidence will take us farther and farther until it becomes unshakeable beyond all skeptical doubts.

(2) Energy

Physical energy has obvious limitations. Mental energy is inexhaustible if one knows how to harness it. Craving for existence has kept beings running from one life to another since time immemorial. With insight, it shall make an end to the cycle. Such effort is also called the Four Supreme Efforts, that is, it is said to burn up the defilements. Everyone who meditates knows how much energy it takes. It also comes from within. It directly overcomes laziness.

(3) Mindfulness

Mindfulness looks carefully and thoroughly into its object. As such it serves many purposes such as building up the strength of the pure mind. It also gives an even and complete picture of what is going on, which is a precursor to insight. With this developed, the defilements stand no chance of taking over, or even escape.

(4) Concentration

With concentration, all the mental forces are concentrated. So, it may also be considered as the strength of strengths. The mind that becomes powerful is capable of performing feats beyond the ordinary. With wholesome, pure thoughts that are concentrated, one is also lifted far beyond the lower sense desires to absorptions. Together with clarity, mindfulness is, thus, able to work on more subtle levels to bring about deeper insight. It directly overcomes restlessness and agitation.

(5) Insight/Wisdom

While displays of the strength of concentration can be dramatic, wisdom has the relieving ability since it is through understanding that problems are resolved and skills are acquired. It is associated with sharpness that

sees through illusions. Worldly wisdom sees through worldly issues; spiritual wisdom sees through everything. Therefore, it is this wisdom that transcends the defilements, concepts, and all sufferings that we strive to develop through meditation.

Chapter 2



STRENGTHENING CONCENTRATION

Because strength is closely related to concentration, it is appropriate to deal with this topic at this point. The Pali word used is *Samadhi*, usually translated as concentration. Although the rendering is correct, I prefer “tranquility” as a better alternative, since it suggests a pure, wholesome aspect rather than a mere functional idea. I remember having read a Thai book which renders the meaning of *samadhi* in its three important aspects or levels, which is important to practitioners and, therefore, worth mentioning.

1. It is *samadhi*, because it is tranquil from the hindrances and defilements which are agitation and causes of further agitation.
2. It is *samadhi*, because it is one pointed so that it does not suffer distraction which is weakening and disturbing.
3. It is *samadhi*, because it is fine and subtle after having abandoned grosser states of mind.

The first definition is most important because it stresses purity so that we avoid wrong concentration. Wrong concentration, which is without mindfulness, enhances negative states, which turns from greed to obsession, aversion to fury, and ignorance to hallucinations.

Right concentration must come with mindfulness and, thus, the mind moves up the ladder in tranquility. When this condition is assured, then for practical purposes the second definition comes into play. How well we are able to hold the mind to a point or a process is also how well and quick this strength of tranquility and concentration come about.

The third factor is made more relevant when that one-pointedness has been achieved. When one has developed, for example, the first absorption of abandoning grosser mental factors, one moves to further absorptions. After the form absorptions, the resorting to finer mind objects in formless meditation takes one further in concentration and subtlety.

These definitions provide us more understanding of *samadhi* than just concentration. The moral aspects and mental states, other than one-pointedness, need to be considered.

Reasons Why People Practice Concentration

Many if not most, people associate meditation with concentration. It is not surprising because most meditations do emphasize it, although there are other things, depending on the type of meditation.

1. When asked what they want, the obvious reason is to overcome stress. In modern life, especially in the busy cities, high stress levels are common. People resort to many things for relief, and meditation is one. One often imagine a meditator seated cross-legged, eyes closed, settled into a peaceful bliss freed from all anxieties. This is true when it is right concentration (of pure mental states). It is also true that before one arrives at that state, one has to undergo much training. The reason is obvious. Stress (i.e., mental), is comprised of unwholesome mental states.
2. The other side of the coin is mental strength and happiness. When one practices meditation correctly, true peace of mind and happiness follows the strengthening of pure states. With the increase in such concentration, then happiness in life is also greater. Again, it varies with the qualities of mental states concerned - as loving kindness brings joy in relationships, faith brings joy in spiritual devotion.

3. As an extension of the above beyond ordinary levels, one acquires supernormal skills or abilities. Some people work very hard to acquire these. While such skills give extra advantages, it can also be a source of attachment to higher ideals. But when handled well, they can give much room for service and extension to compassionate acts.
4. A further result of concentration will be happy rebirth in higher realms. Right concentration gives the Kammic Force its extra weight to push through all other Kammic forces to ripen. Its extra strength and purity brings one to higher places. The absorptions, for example, give rebirth in the Brahma Worlds.
5. As a base for insight - for Buddhists, the emphasis is insight, the tool for total liberation from suffering, the means by which everlasting peace is reached. One cannot do that if the mind is burning with hatred and greed, muddled up and confused with delusion. One cannot if one's mind is weak. Concentration is needed to clear all these weeds so that the tree of Wisdom can grow, and it often does so slowly. Concentration needs to be maintained to finally give the fruit of Liberation.

Types and Levels of Concentration

The idea one has of something (e.g. concentration) based on explanation or description can be quite different from what it is as an experience. Therefore, any intellectual or theoretical references are best made only after one has gone through them as experiences. For a beginner who needs some structure to start with, then it must then come from a reliable source. Often it also requires an explanation so that his mind can comprehend enough to avoid pitfalls, go astray, and work towards one's goal. Therefore, when speaking of concentration types and levels, one must bear in mind that they cover a wide range of experiences and

objects. The variables include objects of concentration, mind states and variations of experiences. These vary farther when each individual attempts to describe them. Thus, it is not possible to give a full picture in words. So, only certain highlights and generalities which are helpful to the meditator are given here.

Right and Wrong Concentration

This has been brought up earlier, but needs some more elaboration. One is wholesome and pure; the other is unwholesome and defiled. For one with mindfulness, this is clear. For one obsessed with trying to concentrate, wrong concentration can develop unnoticed. One may then end up developing strong craving, anger or delusion that can leave one mentally unbalanced. It is for this reason that mindfulness should be stressed before concentration. That is why forewarning against craving for joy and results have often been given. It serves well to check on one's mindfulness and absence of defilements when concentration deepens, before strange new experiences arise. When mindfulness is strong and automatic, there is no reason to fear the unknown.

Levels of Concentration

By level, one usually means how fixed the mind is to its object. Hence, there are two variables here.

1. In terms of its power of fixation. The stronger it is, the more unlikely it is overthrown by other objects.
2. In terms of its duration. While the former is strength of fixation, this is in terms of quantity. Usually the longer one is able to stay with an object, the deeper will be the fixation. This is not always the case, for there are other factors involved, such as individual potential and supportive conditions.

Often in the process of trying to keep the mind on the object, disregarding all others, one forgets about the mental state. The more important factor is the type of mind state that gets concentrated. The object, although important, is just the supportive means. Safety before speed! But once one is sure, then concentration as fixation to the object can go on full steam.

Levels of concentration as fixation onto the object can correspond to the traditional classification of:

1. Preliminary concentration (*Parikamma Samadhi*)

This initial level is associated with the preliminary object (*parikamma*). In pure tranquility meditations, the actual physical object serves to bring about concentration when one looks at it. After that, it develops as the “grasped object” (*uggaha nimitta*) when one is able to reproduce it in the mind with eyes closed.

In *Vipassana*, it can also be associated with the initial objects the beginner starts with, which can be associated with concepts.

There can be a phase of development here. As long as the hindrances are not well inhibited, there will be an uneasy struggle. Here, it can be compared as a struggle to climb uphill. Sometimes better, at other times one becomes easily distracted.

2. Access Concentration (*Upacara Samadhi*)

Access means close to absorption. Some may even take it to a particular consciousness (*citta*) that arises in the absorption thought process. This goes too far, as many tranquility meditations can be developed to attain access levels. A more practical definition would be the point where the hindrances are satisfactorily inhibited. It can be clearly experienced as a

change in level of consciousness. Until this happens, the discursiveness and thoughts will enter oneself unnoticed. After this point all hindrances stay clear. The dark clouds of sloth and torpor are away and the clarity is refreshing. No thoughts of anger or craving, no nonsensical and meaningless jumble. It is balanced and easily directed. Often it goes on by itself as tame and obedient as a well trained horse.

At some point here, the mirror image (*patibhaga nimitta*) arises - which is perfect, clear, shining and transparent, and which extends into absorption.

Even within this access concentration level, there also exist a range of concentration and the nature of the object as it develops. All becomes still at absorption.

In *Vipassana*, the same can be noticed as concentration levels deepen. However, its objects are “realities”, or mind-body processes which will be dealt with later. In this case, the mind which flows closely with the change of objects then becomes one with the flow.

3. Fixed Concentration (*Appana Samadhi*)

Fixed concentration refers to absorption (*jhana/appana samadhi*) in Pali. But one should be careful here. The Pali word “*jhanas*” has a wider meaning. It can mean just strong concentrated meditative mental states.

When one enters fixed concentration, the mind undergoes a specific form of mental process, entering into a fixed impulsion (*appana javana*) which leaves behind any conscious subject-object experiences. This fixation can be clearly experienced as a merging of the mind with its object. When complete, one falls into or lifts up to another level, which with absence of subject--object considerations, seems like unconsciousness. Some would

disagree, but I think this accord well with *Abhidhamma* explanations. Only on emerging and reviewing what has passed, can it be possible to know that one had indeed been keenly mindful and concentrated on the object at that period.

There are different levels of this. Its level deepens with successive abandoning of grosser absorption factors (*jhananga*). With the different objects that can be used, they occur as different experiences with different effects.

Traditionally, there are four form absorptions:

1. First form absorption - Initial application, sustained applications, joy, happiness and one-pointedness
2. Second form absorption - Joy, happiness, and one-pointedness
3. Third form absorption - Happiness, and one-pointedness
4. Fourth form absorption - Equanimity and one-pointedness

In the *Abhidhamma* classifications there are five, where the first is broken up into two - one with both initial and sustained application, the other with only sustained application. After the fourth (or fifth), one can proceed to the formless absorptions which differ in its objects which get subtler as one advances.

1. Infinite space (as object)
2. Infinite consciousness (consciousness of former absorption as object)
3. No-thingness concept as object
4. Neither perception nor non-perception (consciousness of former absorption as object)

4. Momentary Concentration (*Khanika Samadhi*)

Often this is concentration that is mentioned when concentration is encountered in *Vipassana*. It is what I would call a specific quality for concentration that is highlighted and brought up but not at level of fixation. Then, it is further added that it is equivalent to access concentration and has also the power to overcome the hindrances to serve as a base for insight to develop. What this concentration emphasizes is the impermanent nature of the *Vipassana* object, and thus, the concentrated mind is also seen to behave likewise - arising and passing away, moment-to-moment. Only with this type of observation can knowledge of the Three Universal Characteristics come to be realized. It has also to be noted that *Vipassana* concentration levels are not limited to just this. In terms of texts and experiences, it is possible to occur like the different absorption levels encountered in pure tranquility meditations.



By the Ganges, India 1996

On that morning while on a boat on the Ganges, I saw a monk all covered from the head with robes sat by its bank. From the posture, I could feel strong mindfulness and concentration emanating. To my surprise I discovered he was not an Indian when he uncovered his head just as I caught him with my camera. He gently waved back, and that gentle kindness I saw in him I still kept until now.

Factors That Bring About Concentration

Have you wondered why some people can go easily into concentration while others cannot? If you belong to the second group, then it is worth giving it more thought. It is not that I belong neatly into the second group, but I was not too far from them. I also have to look a little deeper into the factors that bring up concentration.

1. Inborn Kammic Factors

Let us face it, not everyone is a prodigy, and be it a Beethoven, Einstein, or a Buddha. The last is most rare! The same goes for ability to reach deep absorptions in a short time with ease. There will be a range, and even if you are above average, it still may not be easy. Such special inborn tendencies do occur, but it is something we cannot choose, and so we accept what we are bestowed with and work from there.

2. External Factors

These external factors also have to be considered. They include the Seven Suitabilities:

- (1) Dwelling - safe, quiet, clean and convenient
- (2) Food - healthy
- (3) Weather - mild
- (4) Posture - balanced
- (5) Talk - profitable
- (6) Resort - refers to where monks seek alms/others as right livelihood
- (7) Person - inspiring, supportive

These may be summarized into two groups - physical environment and human environment, and although the former is critical for a beginner, the second remain most important.

The next few factors, such as morality, faith and right view, have been discussed in the initial chapters, and so it will only be redundant to repeat here. However, the next set is what I had once set down to investigate and then came out with. They are simple conditions and remain as the main consideration in settling into concentration.

(1) Physical relaxation

Physical discomfort agitates the mind. The reverse, comfort, gives mental happiness and peace, if mindful. Tension builds up when we become stressed in daily living. They accumulate physically and mentally. Relaxation releases physical stress which in turn triggers mental letting go. This relaxation is at first voluntary, and as it goes deeper, it reaches parts of the body normally beyond our conscious control. At some point, accumulated harmful energies are released, which are often accompanied by their mental conditioning. The result is relief and peace.

I remember a case of a lady who had difficulties in her meditation because of physical tensions which made her cough. All she could do, she says, is to relax. In that process she was actually meditating. For every time any tension arises, she notices it mindfully, relaxes, and see it pass away. As relaxation went deeper, she became calmer, and noticed the mental causes behind the tensions. It became obvious that when the major conflict arose in her mind and the tension that arose immediately with it caused strong coughing.

(2) Detachment

I often tell people that going into concentration is like sleeping, except that one keeps awareness of one object and lets go of the rest. In sleeping, one lets go of everything and returns into a state of passivity, the life continuum (or deep sleep). Even that is difficult for some. One reason is that thinking has become so habitual that it has turned obsessive. It is like a radio that cannot be turned off. Again, I tell them that they have been thinking so much for so long, so it is about to stop for a while. And they reply it is not that they do not want to, but just cannot help it.

Habits die hard and so it will take time to slow it down. The key factor is to “let go”, i.e., be detached from it as soon as one has noticed it, and it will proceed on according to the law of impermanence and cessation.

That obsessiveness is tied with craving for things, and there is plenty of it. Then, there is the craving to get rid of things which arouses aversion. Letting go includes letting go of this as well. Ironically, this craving includes trying to get meditation results. If that is so, just say “Let go. All I want is just to have some peace of mind.” Lowering one’s goal to the barest minimum keeps one contented.

When one reaches this point of a very basic peace, this itself is concentration, which is although not very deep but will develop given time. Absorptions, we are told after all, are states that are strongly detached from the five senses.

(3) Patiently Building Up a Continuous Flow of Mindfulness

Concentration has been explained as fixation to the object. How that comes about is through what will be explained later - as the Five Factors of Concentration. These are developed as a flow. When continuous, it builds up its strength and drives out all the unwholesome states. This

flow is more obvious in *Vipassana*, where the objects are the flow of mind and mental processes. To repeat, in *Vipassana*, one does not hold onto the object. Rather, one flows along with it, and finally becomes one with it. Emphasis for the beginner is then, mindfulness first before concentration. When mindfulness is continuous, concentration will fall naturally into place. If, however, one wants to accelerate this concentration, then one can try to keep as much as possible, the primary object, single process or at least fewer processes.

(4) Establishing Mindfulness Into Its Object.

Once the flow is strong enough, and one can keep it in one direction, then all the force is concentrated. It is like hitting the nail on the head so hard that it sinks in deep into the wall. Although one-pointedness is the tip of the nail, one still needs the force behind it to sink in. At first it goes to other objects, and especially so with open awareness. Narrowing it down builds concentration rapidly.

(5) Let Go And Fly

Real depth comes when the mind can by itself keep the line and one can sit back to let it happen automatically. That is when one feels one's whole consciousness lifts up or sinks down into a different, much more peaceful or blissful level. At this point, some may experience fear and retreat, while others get excited and fall out. This is when the maintenance of equanimity is necessary. One will then sleep or slip into it easily, but total letting go and letting be are necessary.



When I saw this I remembered something which I wrote about long ago – the joy of letting go. It is still relevant and even more so after more years of practice. Detachment and giving up of attachments is often feared and yet when you do it, it can be quite blissful.

Joy of Letting Go, Connemara, Ireland 2007

The Five Factors of Concentration (*Jhananga*)

These five factors are often mentioned with regards to absorptions in tranquility meditations, but they are also applicable to concentration in general.

1. Initial Application (*Vitakka*)

The first part of concentration involves the “bringing” or “lifting” of the mind (with mindfulness) to the object, which may be the rising/falling of the abdomen or in/out of the breath. Mindfulness must be present, and in *Vipassana* practice, that mindfulness is unique to *Vipassana* meditation.

After that, it is “initial application” that ferries it in that same direction to the *Vipassana* object, initially the unique qualities of the “ultimate realities”, later the Three Universal Characteristics. Everyone succeeds; it is like hitting the target. In the beginning, there will be misses, and so the mind may seem distracted. That “right aim” is the precision of mindfulness developed after much patience, endurance and practice.

2. Sustained Application (*Vicara*)

Once one has been brought to the object, the next step is to sustain it there. It is like following the object - the closer the better. It also suggests the continuous flow of mindfulness with its direction maintained. In *Vipassana*, this becomes tricky because the objects change and so one has to be very flexible and adaptable. The rising/falling of the abdomen can, for example, change quickly from fast to slow, smooth to rough, etc. It may also suddenly stop and one has to hop onto another object, like “touching”.

3. Joy (*Piti*)

With joy comes ease, which in turn gives rise to bliss. When the flow of mindfulness is smooth and continuous, it gathers momentum and makes waves, which is joy. I see joy as a harmonious mental state born of wholesome movements of the mind. When joy arises, everything becomes nice and happy, and so one finds special interest and satisfaction in the practice. There are various levels and forms of joy. Traditionally, five types are usually mentioned.

- i. Minor joy - minor thrills
- ii. Momentary joy - one that comes in sudden flashes.
- iii. Uplifting joy - one that is light and uplifting.
- iv. Shaking, wavelike joy - one that sweeps and overwhelms
- v. Pervasive joy - one that pervades every cell in the body

Whatever the form, yogis find it good, and so attachment often arises. Teachers understandably issue warnings. But some go to the extent of denying it, trying to get rid of it or even fearing it. This should not be the case. Instead, one needs to make use of it for deepening of concentration and as a factor of enlightenment. The idea is to refine it so that mindfulness and concentration becomes subtler and deeper.

4. Happiness (*Sukha*)

The happiness meant here is the pleasurable mental feeling that comes with deep peace. Unlike the former, which tends to be bubbly, this factor is more of a sweetness that seeps into the heart. When there is this happiness, peace and tranquility becomes established, and so restlessness and worry is kept at bay.

5. One Pointedness (*Ekaggata*)

Finally, the mind becomes so still that it “freezes” and “fixes” itself to the object. In the case of absorptions, the unification is complete and one loses the sense of a subject-object relationship. It is like sticking to, merging of the mind with the object, and the mind is transformed into an altered state. This stabilizes the concentration and its effect becomes far reaching even after emergence.

It is possible at this point to bring out one more mental state - equanimity - mentioned with respect to the absorptions. It definitely is important and is mentioned as a factor in the highest absorption, although present in the others. In the *suttas*, this is somehow not mentioned but considered in *Abhidhamma* as a factor of concentration.

Equanimity is a balanced state of mental factors. Its equilibrium itself is wholesome and harmonious. Its steadiness gives strength and concentration which is lasting. Just try to keep mental balance and you

will find concentration building up.

As an extension to this, I will add a verse that I composed:

*Physical comfort is the nest from where concentration is born.
With joy it deepens and grows rapidly.
Balance gives it strength and durability.
Impermanence, the door where it can set the mind free.*

A point to take note is physical comfort and sensual indulgences are different things. For bodily comfort, health is important, not pleasure, which may in fact be responsible for future discomfort and ill-health. Physical strength is needed for striving.

In the second line, joy mentioned has often been underestimated. If joy arises with mindfulness, and one allows it to flow and be one with the object, excluding all else without fear or expectations, concentration will quickly deepen beyond one's expectations.

On the third point, balance, if focussed, gives great strength and durability - only that it may tend to maintain at a certain depth for an extended period of time. So, allow it to deepen after some stability has been established and then strengthen it again by balance until both works simultaneously and automatically.

In the last line, I have stressed that concentration needs to be transformed into insight to reach beyond the worldly perceptions and levels to be free. This understandably proceeds through the Three Universal Characteristics.



The Eleven Conditions That Lead to Concentration

This set can be found in the commentary to the *Satipatthana Sutta* and is worthy of consideration.

1. Purity of Physical Basis

How we behave reflects on our mental state. Thus, cleanliness and orderliness reflects mental discipline and purity, factors related to right concentration. Connected, is simplicity which puts away the unnecessary and frivolous, and just narrows down to that one purpose, one function and one result. If you are one who tends to be in a mess and mess up things, try putting things into order and live by cleanliness and you will see the difference. Mindfulness becomes a constant companion. Ease and clarity follows closely behind and finally more peace!

2. Imparting Evenness to the Spiritual Faculties

The spiritual faculties are faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom. These are controlling faculties in that they exercise control in the mind that works towards the goal of peace. Mindfulness is the key factor and when evenness is imparted, development becomes smooth

and stable. This is because excessive energy gives rise to restlessness and excessive concentration gives way to sloth or lethargy. In a balanced state, the mind remains calmly focused, and at the same time is able to investigate with energy into the nature of the object/process.

3. Skill In Taking Up the Sign In Meditation

Every object has its own peculiarities. Just as in life, every person has his own temperament and every environment has its seasons. These are all objects. Knowing how to deal with them requires some skill. It involves getting to know them better, learning to live with or in them happily. The same applies to the meditation object. To be able to handle it requires some skill. One learns of its special characteristics and behavior. One learns of how it changes with conditions. In the process, we also learn of how the mind behaves and changes along with it.

In *Vipassana* meditation there are many objects. The breath can be subtle and elusive, the rising and falling of the abdomen can be erratic, painful feeling, exhausting, pleasurable feelings, seductive, consciousness, quick and deceptive. Unless we can handle them with skill we may not stay with them longer so that concentration and insight may arise. Much of this has been dealt with in earlier chapters.

4. Inciting the mind when it is lax

5. Restraining the mind when it is restless

6. Gladdening the mind when there is dissatisfaction

7. Regarding the mind without interference (i.e. equanimous) when it is functioning properly in the practice.

These four points involve mind control. We can compare the mind to a horse. When it is lazy, we need to incite it to move, i.e., arouse energy. When it is restless, we need to calm it down or hold it back, i.e., arouse concentration. When it is down, we need to perk it up, i.e., arouse joy.

When it moves on according to our wishes, we sit back and let it carry us to our destination, i.e., let equanimity have its way. The need for energy and restraint occurs unavoidably, and is involved with the balancing of the spiritual faculties. Restraining is particularly relevant to goal-oriented societies, and inciting when people take the practice for granted. In *Vipassana* meditation, gladdening is of importance because one tends to meet many objects that manifest into suffering. Eventually, equanimity develops, and when development progresses well, one tries not to give unnecessary interference to the process.

8. Disassociating From the Restless People

9. Associating With the Calm People

If we want to have concentration, then it is best if we can avoid restless people who cannot sit still and must talk. If we are not careful, we too will end up with frivolous talk. Who we associate with influences our minds. In this respect then, one would choose to associate with those who have concentration. I remember a case where many yogis went into a center where they practice tranquility meditation. Their minds often went into a peaceful and still state. The problem then is that the mind does not want to budge and look, or observe deeper into the process which is a key factor in insight practice. Such matters are especially important for beginners who depend a lot on group support.

10. Reflection on the Benefits of Absorptions and Emancipations

The benefits of absorptions and emancipations are many, ranging from the happiness in daily life to the more ecstatic states. When one is aware of the benefits, one would naturally make more effort in that direction. In *Vipassana* meditation, how concentration contributes and affects it is taken into consideration. Think of how much longer one can stay on in meditation. How much easier one can observe the finer and subtler objects - and thus, the effects and results would be great, and even more dramatic.

11. Inclination Towards the Development of Concentration

This inclination is first developed when one begins to be aware of its necessity and benefits in the practice and in life. When practice grows, one becomes more aware of the deeper and more sublime levels. As one goes further, one's faith, energy, and purpose becomes strong and automatic. The will power and determination become a great force that propels one towards the deepest levels of concentration.

Absorptions and Skills of Concentration

When one practices long enough, concentration will eventually develop for most cases. It continues to develop until it reaches absorption. This allows greater flowering of insight. The development of concentration occurs in many aspects. Each of these has its unique effects and experiences. If any aspects do not develop well, it is up to us to address it so that we can reap its benefits. One thing, however, is sure - as long as concentration holds out, and the process of insight development is going on, then it is a matter of time when progress becomes obvious and things continue to happen.

What are absorptions? Usually we trace back the word to the Pali word "*Jhana*", which means deep concentration. Giving it levels, as in first *Jhana*, second *Jhana*, etc., refers to specific types of consciousness of fixed concentration when the mind has made complete unification with the object. These absorptions make the pure mind very strong so that no defilements can intrude. There are pure tranquility forms and insight forms. Pure tranquility absorption fixes to their respective conceptual objects, such as visualized circles, body parts, etc. When highly developed, on emergence, one can develop specialized psychic skills, such as clairvoyance, telepathy, recollection of past lives, levitation, etc. These are still considered worldly according to Buddhist teachings, and so one is advised that it is best to use this concentration as a base for development of insight. That is, one switches one's concentration to objects of insight development.

There is another approach where insight is developed without prior development of pure concentration techniques. When one is keenly involved in being mindful of the mind-body processes, concentration is simultaneously developed. The concentration developed is usually termed momentary concentration, and its power is equivalent to access level of the purely tranquility forms. Insight practitioners, however, go further to say that deeper absorption occurs, which gives rise to disagreements at the scriptural and commentarial levels, mainly as scholastic points of view.

Personally, having tried both forms, I agree that they do occur, especially at the experiential level. With *Vipassana* concentration, the mindfulness does seem to be absorbed into the *Vipassana* object in the same way that the *Samatha* concentration absorbs into its object. For the duration of absorption, subject-object differentiation is not there. On emergence, one realizes the absorbed state of mind, its object as well as the process before and after emergence, clearly.

For example, one may be closely watching the rise and fall processes of the abdomen. One notices one's mind goes close to it and finally merges into that flow. After that, an unconscious period occurs which one realizes only on emergence and are able to review how one entered into absorption. In the absorption, the mind is unified to the object and the whole experience is like a soft cloud of pure bright awareness floating and flowing in space. Such experiences do not occur that frequently, but it does, and on close "reviewing", one knows that it occurs with depth and subtlety like the different levels of tranquility (*samatha*) absorptions. A clear difference is the Three Characteristics are dramatically clear in *Vipassana* absorptions. Its profundity is startling, and inspires one to carry on deepening one's insight above all else.

Skills of Concentration (*Samadhi*) and Attainment (*Samapatti*)

These ten skills have been mentioned in the *Anguttara Nikaya*, and so it is fitting that the meditator looks into it and tries to acquire it.

1. Adverting (*Avajjana*)

Adverting is also directing, and in this case I take it to mean the skill to bring the mind to the desired object and enter into concentration (*samadhi*) or attainment (*samapatti*), which is usually taken as a fixed level (*appana*).

The part would, therefore, cover how skillful one is able to bring the mind from the distracted state to the point where one finally enters into fixed absorptions. It involves in what we spoke of before in the conditions for bringing about concentration, especially with regards to the Five Jhanic Factors.

2. Steadfastness (*Thiti*)

This is the ability to sustain the concentration, or in the case of absorption, the ability to remain long in it. In this respect, one needs to have made ample preparation so that there is no anxiety, and the mind settles confidently to take on the extended period. It also needs practice of sitting longer and longer; and in fixed absorption, the ability to exercise effectively the resolution for the absorption to last. Then, there are qualities and virtues that are helpful - such as patience and contentment. This skill, when fully developed, we are told, can remain steadfast for as long as seven days.

3. Emergence (*Vutthana*)

Usually the difficulty is in the ability to enter and stay long in concentration. One usually comes out naturally when the “battery” is depleted. But for those who have ample “fire”, the skill of emergence is helpful. One would then be able to determine exactly when one wishes to emerge or to the conditions present which one would like to emerge. To get that precision usually requires practice of making precise resolutions. What would happen if one overshoots one’s target? It can range from something minor to something more serious.

4. Fitting (*Kallita*)

In this case, I take it to mean having the suitable quality of concentration at different times and situations. For example, knowing when it is best to have tranquility concentration, and when insight concentration is best. When is it to have deeper or lighter concentration, and when is it fitting to a more open or narrower form, etc.?

5. Object (*Arammana*)

To be able to have concentration, if not all then most of the time, then one needs to be skillful enough to go into concentration with the different types of tranquility meditation objects and insight meditation objects. Venerable Sariputta gives the ease of shift of the different levels of absorptions and the various objects the simile of changing whatever attire that one wishes.

6. Range (*Gocara*)

This refers to the skill of going into the whole range of concentration, from first form concentration to the fourth form concentration, and then beyond into the formless realm concentration. In practice this involves

forward progression (absorptions 1-5), backward progression (absorptions 5-1), skipping of absorptions (e.g., 1, 3, 5, 3, 1, 2, 4, etc.,) and weaving absorptions (e.g. 1, 2, 3, 2, 3, 4.....). All these, when executed quickly and precisely allows one to go into any absorptions one wishes very quickly.

7. Resolve (*Abhinhara*)

I take it that it means to be skillful in exercising resolutions effectively. It is like the switches are in full order and just by pressing one, results in yield instantaneously. At the beginning it will take sometime for these resolves to sink in. With practice the time taken would be less.

8. Respectfulness or Seriousness (*Sakkacca*)

The skill in giving respectful attention, hence, is importance to the concentration. This naturally gives it the priority in all situations, and upgrades it.

9. Perseverance (*Satacakkari*)

This is the skill of keeping the concentration at all odds. Energy and determination is involved and for it to be effective, the exercise of clear comprehension and discretion is important. It is the factor that brings us to the portal of liberation.

10. Profit and Benefit (*Sappaya*)

This is the skill in application to bring up its benefits. Different types of concentration bring their own set of benefits, while some are common to all, e.g., stress removal, others such as psychic powers may be more difficult. Of the latter, liberation from *samsara* is noted as the greatest of all miracles.

Chapter 3



BALANCING OF THE CONTROLLING FACULTIES

When one learns to ride a bicycle, one requires control to balance it. When one walks on a tight rope, it is more than riding a bicycle. It requires experience and skill developed through much training. You may say that much of these controls are mental. To be able to keep this delicate balance of forces and conditions makes it possible for one to go far in achievements.

In meditation, we speak of a balance that occurs with the spiritual faculties which enable one to tread along the way to freedom. Since the process has much to do with strengthening and concentrating the mind, it is only appropriate to elaborate on the subject at this point. It is a skill which plays a great role in maintaining the continuity of practice once the basics are understood.

The Five Controlling Faculties

The five controlling faculties are:

1. Faculty of Faith/Confidence - The faith and confidence in the practice and teaching of the enlightened ones, which spurs one's effort.
2. Faculty of Energy - Energy as in the Four Supreme Efforts, the effort made in the *Vipassana* practice.
3. Faculty of Mindfulness - Mindfulness in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. The mindfulness that develops into insight.

4. Faculty of Concentration - Right concentration, access or fixed, the concentrated awareness into reality.
5. Faculty of Wisdom - Right vision, wisdom that comes with direct experience of reality.

They are called controlling faculties because they exert control over their respective territories. To be able to keep control also means keeping order and harmony as opposed to chaos and conflict, as in the case of unwholesome states. Here they occur also as enlightenment factors, and so they control like one would over a vehicle (the mind) so that it moves towards the goal of liberation.

A question often asked at this point is, “Does this not contradict with the Buddhist concept of non-self, i.e., no controller?” The answer to this is no. Control here means harmony and order. No personal controller does not mean no control at all, which would be disastrous!

The Direct Relationship

This is the usual explanation given for us to have an idea of how they operate. At first, one has some degree of faith that meditation would benefit us. With this, one makes effort, (i.e., energy). If the guidance is genuine, then mindfulness should arise. Further practice and guidance leads to concentration. When it is the concentration of *Vipassana* mindfulness, then insight arises. This in turn arouses more faith, and so it goes through cycle after cycle until one reaches the final realization and liberation.

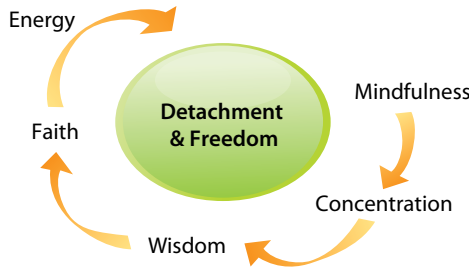


Fig. 14

In this relationship, faith is the base and is the most critical factor for without which the fuel (energy) will not function to keep the vehicle going. Mindfulness is the key and main control to see that all goes well and in the right way. Concentration is power and the indication of development, while insight/wisdom is the peak or flower of the practice that leads to detachment and freedom.

The Co-Dependent Relationship

In this next explanation, it takes into account that the factors can exist at the same time. It is just a matter of which is playing the dominant role.

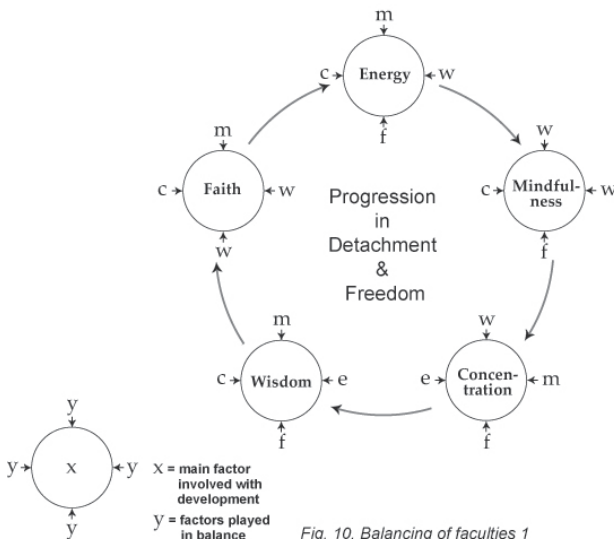


Fig. 10. Balancing of faculties 1

1. At the initial stage where faith plays a most critical factor, wisdom is needed to balance and guide it; without it blind faith can fall into gullibility. But at this stage, wisdom is of the intellectual and conceptual type. The insight that arises through meditation has not yet been developed.
2. When the practice has begun, then the energy faculty comes into the main picture. The effort has to be right effort with the right aim, that is the effort to be mindful. How much effort made is important. There is such a thing as “optimal effort”. Effort which is lesser or over this optimal point is less efficient. This is the point where mindfulness is best although it may not be much. Trying harder creates tension, relaxing too much causes one to backslide. This point is in the mind of the individual and it is up to one to find out. Through trial and error, one gets the feel of the balance. This is when the meditation machine is working fine - listen to the purr of the engine.
3. The practice begins to pick up when mindfulness finds its place as the chief. As it has the overall view of what is happening, it is in the best position to make the best and correct decision. This stage is when the practice has built up its foundation and gets its direction. The balancing function of mindfulness is then maintaining balance between:
 - (a) Energy and concentration faculties, and
 - (b) Faith and wisdom faculties.

At the start there is too little concentration to be of significance, and so it is a matter of balancing between faith and intellectual wisdom as well as the application of optimal effort. When concentration picks up, then its critical balance with the energy comes into play.

4. With continuous mindfulness, concentration naturally follows. As the momentum of its flow gathers strength, defilements are pushed aside. If this goes on, deeper concentration occurs, with the sinking into objects that stay (e.g., primary object) or are suitable. When this happens, it also means that the faculty of energy has grown. So like a powerful bull or car, one has to have better and more precise control, or else accidents may occur. It also means factors that accompany concentration such as joy, would arise. With excessive concentration, mindfulness may fall away, giving in to attachment and wrong concentration as a diversion. It may slip into tranquil states which, although are peaceful, stagnates and does not lead to insight. As a lesser evil, it falls into sloth and slumber. The emphasis on mindfulness again keeps one on the track, carefully avoiding attachment to joyful and peaceful states, keeping the energy going and faculties balanced.
5. When insight arises after sustained correct practice, then the direction is clear. All the other faculties keep behind and beside to support this development. It will also be clear insight, a state of mind that comes about from concentrated and sharpened mindfulness directed at “things as they really are.”

There is never enough of wisdom unless one has reached full enlightenment. So, how can you speak of the balance between wisdom and faith? It is the balancing of the faculties at the point where faith tends to be blind and gullible, and when wisdom is still limited, e.g., to conceptual knowledge or inability to fathom deeper areas.

From this point, one has to bear in mind that wisdom or insight is not the end itself, it is just a means to the end. Insight functions in the unraveling of the chains that bind, setting the heart free. Insight sees the suffering and shows us the way of detachment.

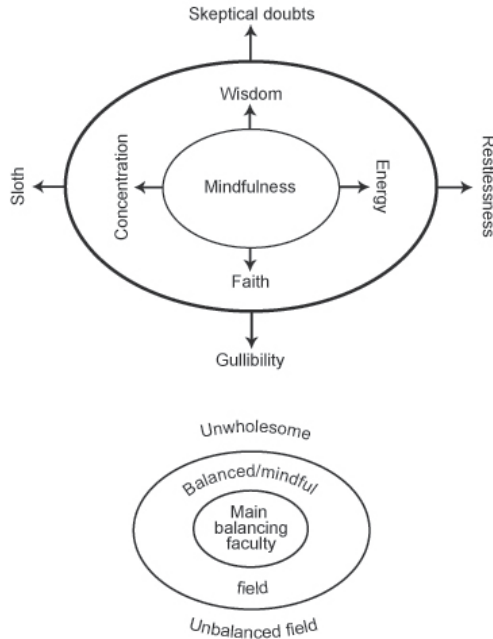


Fig. 11. Balancing of the faculties 2

Balancing the Faith and Wisdom Faculties

In the beginning, it is assumed that the beginner has not much wisdom derived from meditative insight, and it is for this that he embarks into the practice. For this to happen, one must first have faith and confidence. We have discussed where this comes from at the very beginning of the book. It may be inborn, ingrained culturally, or preferably, born of understanding that is intellectual and conceptual, i.e., through reading, reasoning, and good advice. But this has limits. Meditation experiences can help one go beyond these limits. So one must have enough faith to try meditation and to keep it for sometime until results come in. This may take some time, and so encouragement and inspiration are needed to keep a yogi going, for when faith drops and skeptical doubt creeps in, the practice could come to a halt.

On the other side of the coin, too much faith without checking can turn up as gullible faith, which is dangerous. It may end up as a blind belief. So it is better to have a good guide at hand. Otherwise, it is good to be a little skeptical. That skepticism is actually a discriminative wisdom that makes one careful, and one cannot be too careful.

As one progresses in the practice, faith also develops though not to the extent of overcoming all skeptical doubts. There still exist large areas of experiences that will be strange for one who has not traversed through them. Again, it is best to have a guide around otherwise, doubts again can arise. The other possibility is to go back to one's faith in mindfulness and one's ability, or at least to hold out until proper counsel can be sought. Here, we can see why faith is such a critical factor for the beginner, or even a not-so-beginner. Experience needs time to develop.

As far as insight is concerned, there can never be too much of it. There is always a lack of it. What can be harmful is mistaking mere experience as real experiential wisdom, mistaking reflective, thinking wisdom for pure meditative, experiential insight.

Insight is not just an experience. It is a deep experience of reality that transforms and purifies the mind. Insight is not thinking. It is direct experience with clarity and concentration where the yogi is able to accept, be one, and be in harmony with reality.

To be able to go through all these subtleties and pitfalls throughout the mental development does require the exercise of wisdom faculty at all its levels - intellectual, intuitive and experiential.

Balancing the Energy and Concentration Faculties

To understand the process, one has first to know that these faculties occur together in the same consciousness, and that consciousness is a state that is moving and developing towards realization and liberation. With the

mindfulness faculty as the main player in this process, the energy faculty is the active aspect and concentration is the still aspect of it. When we look to see what is happening to these faculties, we will be looking at the mind/consciousness and will realize what faculties are excessive or lacking. For example, if we see the mind active and highly charged, there may be too much energy. If we see the mind very quiet and not knowing much, concentration may be on the excessive side.

As a general yardstick, we must first decide on how well mindfulness is functioning. When it is balanced, we say that mindfulness is working at its optimal efficiency. It can follow and sink into the object however it may be, and is also able to take notice and observe clearly what is happening moment-to-moment. Otherwise, two things can happen. First, it is too active and cannot settle down. If left to go on, it will most probably end up with restlessness. Secondly, it is peaceful and quiet, but nothing much happens. When left to itself it may fall into dullness, lethargy and finally, sleep.

In the first case, energy is excessive over concentration. In the second case, concentration is that excessive over energy. This, however, is spoken in terms of relative proportion. Excessive does not mean much, it just means proportionally. The other point is that excessive energy also means lacking in concentration and excessive concentration, means lacking in energy. Do they really mean the same thing?

Again, if it is just the proportion that is meant, then it can be so. So, it is better to regard it as:

- A. Excessive energy means a need to increase the concentration for balance.
Excessive concentration means a need to increase the energy for balance.
E>C concentration up = balance
C>E energy up = balance

There is also the other alternative of decreasing the excessive faculty instead:

- B. $E > C$ energy down = balance
- $C > E$ concentration down = balance

The two alternatives do not produce the same results. In case A, the power of the faculties increases. In case B, they decrease. Ideally, the first is preferred, so that progress is faster. But it is not always safe. When the mental powers are strong, a little imbalance may leave the yogi in a bad state for some time. That is, making the wrong judgement and taking the wrong action may leave one even more hysterical. So, if one is not experienced enough and prefers the safe way, one can decrease the faculties instead, and this often means “turning off the switch.”

The following diagram gives one an idea of the balancing process:

Chart for Balancing of Faculties of Energy and Concentration

E+ or C-	E < C	E = C	E > C	C+ or E-
	Not well balanced	<u>Balanced</u> Realization & Liberation	Not well balanced	
Level 3				
	Enters frequently into absorptions often with <i>samatha</i> objects	Concentration deep, mindfulness sharp & precise, Insights arise; strong feeling of non-self	Alert and mind highly charged, often not needing any sleep	

Level 2				
	Mind very peaceful, sinks into object & stays long but cannot notice any phenomena or changes	Meditation progressing satisfactorily. Mindfulness & concentration picks up. Can follow and observe objects fairly well with little or no thinking.	Mind very alert & clear. Needs little sleep, not tired but difficult to sink & stay long with objects. Mind often very bright & expanded.	
Level 1				
	Feeling peaceful, calm and relaxed, but easily falls off to sleep or blankness	Mindfulness still at early stage of development. Can note and follow objects.	Feeling alertness clear & well being but mind easily distracted to external things & thoughts.	
Level 0				
	Unwholesome - sloth, lethargy, sleepy Wrong concentration	No mindfulness	Unwholesome - Restless, distracted, much thinking Unwholesome - Hysterical - Manic	

Ways of Balancing Energy and Concentration Faculties

When energy is lacking or concentration excessive, energy should be aroused or concentration lowered.

When energy is excessive or concentration lacking, energy should be lowered or concentration aroused.

Lowering energy is relaxing

Arousing concentration is maintaining stillness

Lowering concentration is letting the mind be more free

Arousing energy is increase of mental activity

A. Employing the Correct Consciousness

To simplify, two types of consciousness are described here.

1. *The Cobra consciousness* - to raise energy and counter sloth. Here the consciousness is raised to a very alert stance, just like the cobra that raises its head ready to strike. The consciousness is alert to pick up clearly whatever objects arise. When it loses strength, it is like the cobra's head begins to droop, so raise it up straight again.
2. *The Sleeping Buddha consciousness* - to lower energy, develop stillness to counter restlessness. Here, the consciousness is very relaxed, blissfully at peace, only that it does not drop off to sleep. There is a kind of "could not care less" attitude, being happy and blissful no matter what is happening.

B. Employing the Type of Mindfulness

Knowing that we need mindfulness is not enough. We can be more specific. We use energetic mindfulness when energy is needed, and a peaceful, relaxed mindfulness will be more suited to the concentration faculty.

Often, energy can also be understood as two types--physical and mental. Oddly enough, one can be confused between one and the other. That is because they are connected.

One way is to lie flat on one's back to get complete relaxation. If one manages not to drop off to sleep, then one notices that to stay awake, the mind has to be maintained in all its clarity and alertness. This is the mental energy faculty. So mindfulness thus applied would be light, quick, yet easy flowing. Imagine a fizzy drink popping its cap out. Imagine the race horse trotting gleefully.

To counter excessive energy and encourage concentration, the mindfulness aroused should be relaxed, quiet and tranquil. It is as if one is letting go, except it is not to sleep, but rather to an easy, restful awareness, like sitting back on an easy chair and watching the world go by with no time constraints or deadlines to meet. At this point, one should not be afraid of dropping off to sleep. If you do, you have overdone it. But it is better than being hysterical. Be off to a fresh start. The mistake is holding on and not letting go.

C. The System of Mindful Attention Employed

1. Directed mindfulness for energy

Directed mindfulness means directing the mindfulness to the object, such as to the breath, to the touch points, etc. For the directing to be more precise, labels such as “rising, falling”, “in, out”, “touching....”, or in walking, “lifting, stepping,” When one directs or notes, energy is needed. When there is more noting, more energy. Therefore, to arouse energy, do more noting and more actively. The speed of noting can also be increased, but not to the extent of becoming tense and losing mindfulness.

2. Choiceless Awareness for Lower Energy

By choiceless awareness, it is meant not choosing any object for observation. Whatever the mindfulness settles on or picks up, one looks into its nature. In this method there is no probing or searching for or chasing after objects. It is like the spider waiting for the insect to fall into its web. It is like a mirror that reflects whatever that falls into it.

3. Still Awareness for Increase of Concentration

An extension of the former is that there is an intention to keep the mind as still as an unflickering candle flame, or as calm as a lake without waves, and let it be aware of not objects that fall into it, but just itself, which is actually mindfulness of consciousness.

Usually, the directed awareness is employed first, as it encourages a rapid build up of mindfulness through the energy faculty. Later, the choiceless awareness allows a more stabilizing effect, and finally the still awareness leads deeper into concentration.

Sometimes choiceless awareness is used from the beginning, but it has the disadvantage of a slower buildup of concentration and distractions may run on for sometime. This, however, is unavoidable in daily activities where the mind runs to the six sense doors quickly. One advantage here is that the three characteristics may be more apparent, while those in directed awareness can get caught up with just concentration and become too rigid to be able to observe clearly the three characteristics. An alternative is using pure tranquility methods first, and when switching to insight practice, one turns to choiceless awareness.

Therefore, usually it is best to employ choiceless awareness only after when one's mindfulness is fairly continuous. And when concentration finally picks up, still awareness is then held on to encourage even deeper concentration.

4. Choosing the Suitable Postures and Their Lengths of Time.

There are four main postures, and they affect the balance by the associated physical effort and objects. Usually, physical effort and mental energy are interdependent, hence:

Standing--	++E	Tends towards energy build up, and so a relaxed, tranquil mindfulness is needed for balance
Walking--	++E	
Sitting--	+E	Has a greater tendency towards concentration and so, alertness and energy is needed for balance.
Lying down--	0E	

Although I have heard of a teacher saying standing requires the most energy, which I also think is true, walking is more dynamic, and so may also arouse a freer flow of energy. Hence, I have put them at par.

The usual procedure used is an equal amount of sitting and walking. For example, one hour of sitting is alternated by one hour walking. Standing is used sparingly between walking, although sometimes substituted for walking in an attempt to arouse energy and rid the mind of sloth, especially at night. Lying down, on the other hand, is not encouraged because it easily gives way to sleep, unless one is sick or one's energy is reaching "hysterical" levels.

From what I have experimented the proportion of walking and sitting can be quite significant effect on balance. For example, one and a quarter hour walking to one hour sitting can give a balanced mind. On the other hand, those who are too tense may use half an hour walking with one hour sitting. With longer sittings, longer walking is also encouraged. Personally, I prefer walking longer than an hour, like one and a half hours of walking to two hours sitting. It really depends on the situation of the individual and their rhythms. It is important to know the best combination for one's rhythm, especially for longer individual retreats.

5. Choosing Objects to Balance Faculties

Each object has its peculiar characteristics. It also influences the arising of one faculty more than the other because of its nature. Hence, if an object tends to bring up energy, then we have to be careful not to put in too much exertion; rather, we try to observe it in a relaxed manner.



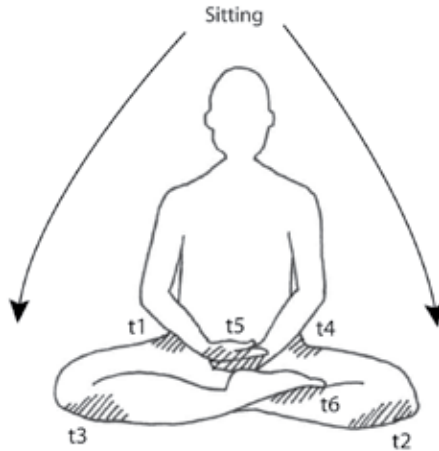
**Little Boat
People, Tonle Sap,
Kampuchea 2006**

This is another picture of the ingenuity, resourcefulness of the Kampuchean people. With these little tubs, these little boys convert it to a boat. See how skilfully they balance themselves and manouvre the little tubs. It just needs practice and we really do not need so much to stay alive.

(a) “Sitting”, “Touching”, (+E)

This set of objects usually brings up energy. To encourage more energy, more touch points are used. This is because directed mindfulness has to be employed to bring the mind to the objects. Therefore, when the objects are clear, it is best to let the mindfulness dwell deeper and longer into each.

Diagrammatically, it can be shown:



(b) “In Breath, Out Breath” (+C)

This set of objects brings up concentration. Its nature is soft and subtle, and is observed at a smaller area or point at the nostrils. All these encourage concentration. It is also the reason why it is traditionally used as a tranquility practice first. To get into insight practice, more energetic mindfulness is required and often the area observed is expanded.

(c) “Rising/Falling (of abdomen)” (+C)

The “rising, falling” movements of the abdomen is used by the Mahasi (Burmese) Satipatthana method as its primary object. Generally, it is also conducive to concentration faculty, but not as much as the in-out breathe as an object. It has a wider berth in the sense that the area involved is wider and so the changes in characteristics and elements are more apparent. This serves as a very suitable *Vipassana* object, and the balance with the energy faculty better.

(d) Painful Feelings (++E)

Painful feelings clearly require a lot of energy to face them. Hence, when pain is present, it is best to be aware of any build up of tension. Long periods of watching pain can finally take up much physical energy as well as leaving one quite exhausted. Try to be very relaxed when watching pain. One is so relaxed that, if desired, one can sleep.

(e) Pleasurable Feelings (+C)

As happiness is regarded as the proximate cause of concentration, pleasurable feeling can naturally be regarded as an object conducive to concentration. Hence, energy is to be aroused to create balance to prevent falling into sleep or even attachment. Once balanced, concentration deepens with mindfulness to give insight.

(f) Neutral Feelings (+C)

Neutral feelings are subtle, but if one can perceive it mindfully, they tend to be stable and peaceful. Also, because of that, mindfulness may peter out if energy is not enough and so the mind slips into sleep or dullness.

(g) Hearing/Sound (-E-C)

Hearing of sound is usually not used as a primary object because it is extraneous (not conducive to collectedness) and leads to scatteredness. It can, however, help to maintain alertness of the present moment when all other objects are unclear. Hence, it often comes in when employing choiceless awareness. It has the quality of lowering the faculties (energy and concentration) while maintaining some mindfulness.

(h) Seeing Light (+E)

Like hearing of sound, seeing is also abandoned when concentration sinks deep. However, its bright and expanding nature helps to dispel sloth and arouse energy.

When sitting, one may see “light” with closed eyes. These come under mental objects and may be used in tranquility meditation to increase concentration, since it leads deeper into the mind door with the exclusion of other objects. In *Vipassana*, they are taken note of and then let go to for them pass away with all other objects.

(i) Walking

As mentioned, this posture is dynamic and so tends to increase energy. Even so, there can be various forms of it. Faster walking generally encourages more flow. More notings also encourage more energy. More relaxation and less noting encourages less energy, but with the soft, tranquil attitude, concentration picks up. Another factor that can be mentioned here is the surface of the walk. Softness is for concentration and sharp, rougher surfaces are for Energy. One may proceed to consider the effect of the surrounding environment on the faculties!

(j) The Joy Factor

When nothing seems to work, joy can come to the rescue. There is magic in it. Darkness turns into light and the burden falls from your shoulders. No wonder joy is given the position of the concentration factor, and then elevated as a factor of enlightenment. In *Vipassana*, it is like a refreshing drink in that long trudge to Nibbana. So, it is not always that seductive foe that tempts you to the devil’s realm. Just look for that mindfulness that shines like a star on her head and you will know it is an angel.

For our purpose here, we look at it from two sides.

- (i) An inspirational form that arouses energy and it often comes with faith and devotion. It is uplifting and vitalizing.
- (ii) The pacifying form that casts a spell chasing away all the chaos, noise and heat from the restless heart.

These two can be chosen to balance the faculties. The former arouses energy with recollections of the Three Jewels. The latter is associated with other peaceful practices, like loving kindness or peace.

The Influence of the Temperament

An important consideration in the balancing of faculties is one's temperament. It is like knowing your horse and its moods. Each of us has our peculiar temperaments, moods and responses.

In a goal-oriented society filled with expectations, people tend to be pushy. Driven by habit, as well as by forces that craving or its pure counterpart, faith can stir up energy beyond imagination. If you know you are one such person, it is only wise to keep a check on excessive energy, since it can make you end up ready to explode. Besides, carry that bag full of tricks and keys to play down the energy:

A pin to pop the bubble
A spanner to loosen the bolt
A teddy bear to distract attention
A sip of honey to forget the aim...just for a while, so that the heart is balanced again.

Then there are people who tend to be laid back, those sleepy heads and daydreamers, or those concentration freaks who would lock themselves in *samadhi* if left in an auto mode. It is the energy faculty that must be tended to, like the furnace that constantly needs to be fed with wood blocks to keep the steam going.

Balancing is a Dynamic Process

Meditation is a dynamic process. Balancing, therefore, also has to keep pace with the development. As one practices continuously, the faculties become stronger, but often not in a balanced manner. Often, one is too pushy, but in an intensive retreat, energy increases anyway. So one has always to relax so as not to go overboard. The more energy, the more tranquility has to settle in as a balance. Normally, mindfulness will do the job, but it can be shifted off the center by other causes. For example, when concentration sets in, one becomes enamored by it and shifts over in excess. The more peaceful and tranquil it becomes, the more alert we have to be without upsetting the subtlety. It is like cycling uphill; the steeper it is the more effort is needed without losing balance. The faster it goes downhill, the more steady you have to hold the bicycle. Just remember that the point of balance is the point of optimal insight mindfulness, with an allowance for it to develop deeper, subtler and clearer.

Sitibhava Sutta

This short discourse from the *Anguttara Nikaya* summarizes mind control in meditation. *Sitibhava* means becoming “cool” a term used to mean the ultimate goal, Nibbana--cooled from defilements.

It states six things which can/cannot realize the cool.

1. One checks/does not check the mind when ought to, i.e., from unwholesome states

2. One exerts/does not exert the mind when ought to, i.e., to the path
3. One gladdens/does not gladden the mind when ought to, i.e. when one is down.
4. One gives no heed/gives heed to the mind when ought not to/ought to, i.e., when mind is equanimous.
5. One is bent on fine, lofty/low things, i.e., fine states: concentrated states; low states: sensual states.
6. One finds delight in Nibbana/bundle (of aggregates)

The two directions, i.e., wise/unwise attention are clearly marked out. The first four involves mind control and balance. Concentration is meant to develop as implied by fine (*panita*) states in (5). The last (6), is clearly the way of insight.

Chapter 4



SHARPENING OF FACULTIES

A repetitive simile found in the suttas is the simile of the ear of the wheat (barley?), which says that when well directed it can pierce the flesh and draw out blood. The ear of wheat is something fine and can even be said to be fragile. But it is sharp and when well directed can pierce big things. Such is the sharpening of the mind.

In another simile, Ananda saw youths shoot arrows with amazing precision and he reported this matter to the Buddha. The Buddha later said that the mind can be even more precise.

A sharp mind is very useful in life. It distinguishes one from the dullard. One who is sharp can discriminate differences found in fine things. It is when one is negligent that they pass off unnoticed - those dangers as well as those opportunities. The ability to separate the essential from the non-essential is of relevance to true happiness. That is what makes mindfulness turn into insight wisdom, the razor sharp blade that cuts through illusion and bonds to bring about liberation.

The process of sharpening again can be seen in three parts:

1. Opening and reception
2. Clear and sharp perception and recognition
3. Transcending and going beyond.

OPENING AND RECEPTION

Opening

A closed mind is one that holds fast to views and cannot grow. Real understanding leads to development, not stagnation. As the Buddha said in the —*Udumbarika - Sihanada Sutta*:

*“There are unwholesome things that have not been abandoned....
It is for the abandonment of these things that I teach the
Dhamma. If you practice accordingly, these things will be
abandoned and things that make for purification will develop
and grow, and you will attain to and dwell in this very life,
by your own insight and realization in the fullness of perfect
wisdom”*

Opening is, on one hand, the openness to receive. In this sense, it is also faith. Faith inclines to what is pure, real and good. One must have faith that meditation is beneficial before one is prepared to practice what is not easy. After much experimentation, faith grows. One has to be open to receive what is real, which at first can be ugly, but acceptance will lead one to better experience. As said in an earlier chapter, please open your heart and mind so that you may receive the truths. What one needs is clear mindfulness to go with faith so that it will not be blind faith. You will also need to be careful but as they say, “no venture, no gain....” A ship may be safe in a harbour, but that is not what the ship was meant for. Accordingly, man is meant for higher things.

On the other hand, opening also means searching. “What is it that smothers the world?”, asked Ajita of the Buddha, who answered, “Craving and negligence.” Truths are often hidden by matters of the world. Some come to it easily, while others only after hard search, so one has to be careful not to be misled by appearances. One has also to be thorough

in one's observation. This often means searching. In meditation, this process is seen clearly when one tries to sense, feel and experience ever more clearly the nature of objects. It is also the reason why the teacher keeps on insisting that you report more findings in your observations - more and finer.

Imagine one is blind and walking; one is forced to be sensitive. I have also noticed that some blind people describe the great variety of sensations at their feet when they walk.

All these refer to the initial process of reception. Like collecting data, it should be mindfully accurate. Only when mindfully received can we look closer and deeper to allow the growth of insight.

In this sense, there is also sensitivity but this is to be taken in the positive sense (with mindfulness) and not the negative sense (e.g. easily hurt). In this sense, the mind is like a very sensitive photographic plate that is capable of picking up objects even in the darkest night. This training of sensitivity may take time. For example, many people cannot feel sensations in many parts of the body, including the abdominal or nose area. But with training, one can do so and sensations can be felt like falling rain. Similarly, for people who are used to wearing socks and shoes, sensations at their feet are benumbed unless they take them off. In this sense, one is like an explorer, and in our case to explore the greater unknown within. Curiosity will be a key attribute, and the one attribute very valuable to seekers of the Truth.



I was surprised how clearly the reflections stood out even in the photograph. A good camera does wonders. Except for those little indications, one may even wonder which way is the top side. The mind is also like the camera. Sharp perceptions give sharp images. Sharp images can give rise to Insight.

Reflections, St Louis, USA 2006

Clear Perception and Recognition

To be able to see something and to see it clearly are two different things. Even in full light, if I do not wear spectacles I will not recognize someone some distance away. That is because I am short-sighted. But I am also nearsighted. Hopefully, it is only an eye defect, not that of the mind. It is like using binoculars or a telescope... it needs focusing. The sharp outlines define clearly the perception of the object according to its mark and signs.

For that to be the case, clarity of the mind is the first condition. Notice how clear and even luminous what we see when we get up from good concentration. How clear the mind can be cannot be measured by physical means. It can be clearer than the clearest crystal, which becomes invisible! So it is important to know what clarity of mindfulness means, a topic we have dealt with in an earlier chapter.

Keep encouraging this quality to develop. There are, however, certain practices that help to develop it, such as the perception of light and the

kasinas - visualized circles. Then there are the meditation of impurities that develop the perception of foulness, an aspect of suffering, the contemplation of four elements which heighten the perception of material qualities. Although these are methods of tranquility meditation, they can definitely help to sharpen the perception in insight meditation.

The sharp defining of the qualities can also be encouraged by good reading. Theory can help practice. From information, it develops experience. Then one knows what to look for, like having a map in hand. The *Abhidhamma*, for example, describes the different mental factors and material qualities according to their characteristics, functions, manifestations, and proximate causes. Knowing these, one naturally becomes more aware of them.

During interviews with the teacher, one is also asked to give clear, precise reporting. One, therefore, makes effort to take clear notice of the nature of the objects and how they arise and pass away. In this way, the perception with regards to them develops as we try to look deeper into them. At this point, I must say that some thinking may creep in, and so one has to be careful not to build up a stumbling block against direct experience. As such, all these are experiences noted down in a notebook only after coming out and not during meditation. It also helps to link the experiential mind with the rational mind to form a supportive system in the practice.

Transcending and Going Beyond

This third aspect is the cutting edge of sharp perception. This means that it does not stay limited to what it has perceived. There is always something more and subtler. It is like the first quality of openness, except it is more like going deeper into what one has perceived and as a result, one goes beyond.

For example, when one has discovered that pain is actually made up of many strong sensations, one goes into one of them to find even more, and so the former perception is abandoned. This perception is thus, consequential, developmental and penetrative. Keep looking deeper into what one has perceived, knowing that its picture is far from complete. Keep going finer and subtler. Do not be afraid to abandon old truths.

These three are actually part of the process of the sharpening of mindfulness. It is like climbing a ladder. First, one reaches out for a rung, grabs hold of it. Then when one has reached out for another rung, one lets go of the lower one. That is how it is - searching, finding, abandoning.

DIRECTING

A sharp mind is like a sharp arrow. Concentration is like the strength to shoot it far. But to get to the bull's eye, it needs precise directing; otherwise, it will land onto something else - maybe the bull's tail! When well directed to the *Vipassana* object, it naturally becomes insight. Why so? Because insight is the sharp, clear experience of reality, two factors are involved - as in all conditioned existence - the mind and its object. Reality here can be defined at several levels:

1. Conventional Reality - The world with its concepts
2. Ultimate Realities - The world of mind and material qualities experienced according to their specific characteristics.
3. Three Universal Characteristics
4. Unconditioned Reality - *Nibbana*

Depending on the depth of one's mindfulness, successive levels are penetrated, but the direction represented by the progression of levels has to be clear.

Concepts

Concepts make up much of our conventional reality. They seem so real because we can keep coming back to them, at least for a while. Yet with time and looking deeper, it is superficial.

What are concepts? They are objects that are conceived out by the mind. There are many of these. The most obvious are those fantasies, imaginations which often end up with strange conclusions and philosophies. These we know are made up like castles in the air. They are unreal, yet for those who are deeply involved will swear by it. Is there really a Father Christmas? Many kids think so.

Another set of concepts come with the streams of thoughts. We do not actively, consciously conceive them, and so we cannot call them imaginations. It is done by the mind itself, depending on conditions internally and externally. However, with a little more investigation, we can know them as such. With meditation experience, it becomes clear. Since there are many, we will concern ourselves with the main ones.

Sound Concepts

Sound concepts are those that are made up of sounds. When we hear a word, for example, “selfish” - it comes in two main parts - sel + fish. “Sel” comes first followed by “fish”. They do not come both at once, even “sel” is made of sounds - “s-e-l” and “fish” as “f-i-s-h”. They can be further broken down until we get sounds which are vibrations at the moment. That is when we arrive at the ultimate reality of sound which can occur only at the “present moment”. And yet, the word “selfish” seems so real when the sounds come together. That is because of the conceptualization processes involved. We can understand this by the explanation given in *Abhidhamma* (Buddhist metaphysics).

1. First there is the thought process that receives the sounds of a syllable at the ear door.
2. Secondly, it is transferred to the mind door process
3. 1 & 2 processes are repeated with various sounds and collect them in a cumulative process in the mind, like an idea of an arrangement.
4. After that, the word concept is formed.
5. Ideas associated with the word concepts further arise.

Melodies and music also fall under this category. However, when we read books, it is not based on sound unless we read it aloud. It is more visual. Verbal noting of meditation objects would clearly be sound concepts, but this is usually done silently with words in mind. So it is mental but still corresponds to a word conceptualization at phase 3.

Concepts of Space

Concepts of space depend on concepts of dimensions - length, breadth, height, form. In mathematics, we learn that a line is made up of points. That is how it is. But what is a point? In terms of the physical world, it is matter/materiality (*rupa*). When we think of it in a linear manner over a period of time, it becomes a length. When we think of it in relation to different physical objects, it goes into two other dimensions. It becomes clear when we ask, “How long is long?” For convenience, people base it on a stick somewhere in England. That is because they thought of it first. Then, what is left or right, east or west? They base it on a spot in England. Then English have many firsts. The Chinese too.....

With dimensions and space, there arise shapes, forms, so they must also be concepts. Again, we can understand this by the example of the television screen. From science, we know that the pictures are

made up of light particles shooting out at an incredible speed. Since we are not fast enough to follow it to the moment, we see pictures. It is like taking a photo of a car at slow shutter speed at night. It appears as a line of light. Aren't these all thinking? True, but it can be experienced when the mindfulness is just present, free from concepts.

As a matter of interest, there are other space concepts.

1. Space as defined by free movement - when movement is experienced we get a sense of space. This is experienced through the body and the change of visual objects. In the former, people who have centered their awareness in their minds feel they are walking on the same spot. The movements are just objects experienced as sensations arising and passing away. In the latter, it is like one sitting in a stationary train but upon seeing a moving one may think that it is his train that is moving. It is an idea made up from changing eye-sense objects.
2. Space as defined as a visualized concept - This comes with those involved with concentration techniques. They try to visualize expanding light and get a feel of space in their minds. There are limited and unlimited space concepts.
3. Space as defined as delimiting matter - This is explained in Buddhist metaphysics as a derived matter, a result of the difference of material characteristics and so they cannot co-exist. In this case, it falls under modes of ultimate realities but when we think about it, it is still a concept.

Concepts of Time

There are various time concepts and they depend on experience.

1. Chronological - This is based on the turning of planets which are also finally concepts. So there is day and night which depends on the position of the sun and from Greenwich measured the various hours which again is complicated by daylight savings time, mountain time, etc., changes owing to political reasons, which are finally determined by the hands of clocks and now digits on computers.
2. Biological - This measurement is based on the body, such as old age, youth, birth, death, maturity and even menstrual cycles.... and of course, hunger and toilet.
3. Functional - This is defined according to functions we do, such as eating, working, resting and recreation, not to mention spiritual activities. As far as insight meditation, it is timeless.
4. Processes - When it has passed away, we call it the past. When it is still happening, we say present. If unarisen, we say future. But what is a process? It still remains an idea if we do not really look into it. And so, even thinking of past, present, future and processes is still conceptual.

Person Concept

This concept plays an important role in the existence of an individual, and so too in insight meditation. Clinging to this concept ends with wrong views. Seeing into it frees one from wrong views and sets one to right view, the view of wisdom.

Many times I have asked people, who is this "I"? Some traditions even make this question as a key in their spiritual practice. We do forget "ourselves" sometimes, but it is not always good. We forget "ourselves" in sleep, but that is quite harmless. Forgetting ourselves means putting aside the "person" concept. What is also important

is the state of mind. But the person concept does give an extra force to that state of mind present. It also acts as a central factor that integrates our actions. We do act in terms of who we think we are. This idea of the person is latent in beings. It develops and changes as one grows up.

Yet we think we have always been what we are. Looking deeply, what do we find? The meditator in insight meditation, even as a beginner can tell you -- thinking, sleepiness, physical sensations such as pain and with time also more pleasant things. When all thinking and conceptualization ceases, and mindfulness becomes sharp and strong, all these are clearly seen as just phenomena or processes. The person is no longer in question because he is not there. He arises again with thoughts, ideas, i.e., conceptualization. When we read about this and agree with its reasoning, we have an intellectual understanding for a start. But intellectual logic is tricky. On inquiring further but unable to get answers, skeptical doubts arise. The reason for this is the truth of non-self is to be understood through direct experience. Such an empirical experience expels doubts. It is wisdom that leads to deeper wisdom. A more thorough dealing on this topic will follow later.

Nimitta Concepts

“*Nimitta*” literally means sign. In meditation, we often take it to mean visualized objects. When we close our eyes and see sceneries, people or geometric shapes, these mental objects are called *Nimittas*. Some arise through our conscious wish, others seem to arise on its own accord, while we can see others develop while concentrating on certain objects.

In visualizing “*kasina*” objects, the *Nimitta* of the *kasina* (a circle of color, element, etc.), arises through much effort and later when it becomes habitual, it appears effortlessly. The same occurs with

visualized images of Buddhas, Bodhisatvas, devas, etc. The trouble comes when we take them as real.

Such *nimittas* can also develop from *Vipassana* practice. When watching sensations at nose tip, it is common to end up with a *nimitta* encountered in tranquility meditation on breath rather than the three universal characteristics. Even while watching the rising and falling of the abdomen, one may perceive it as first like flowing water, then becoming a visual image of a river. For others, it takes forms of a pendulum, or even kneading dough.

Knowing thus the difference, one directs one's mind away from concepts and inclines it towards the ultimate realities.

Ultimate Realities (*Paramattha Dhamma*)

Perhaps the translation of this word is not the most accurate, but since it has been accepted in most literature on Buddhist metaphysics, I will still make use of it. I would prefer to translate it as phenomena with the ultimate meanings. This is because, all these phenomena, with the exception of *Nibbana*, is conditioned and impermanent, and so cannot be really called ultimately real. They are actually phenomena experienced as qualities or characteristics when we are mindful, clearly aware and having put away all conceptualizations.

Buddhist metaphysics classify them under four subheadings:

1. Consciousness (*citta*) 89 types
2. Mental factors (*cetasika*) 52 types
3. Matter (*rupa*) 28 types
4. The Unconditioned (*Nibbana*), one and only

As a more detailed explanation of this would only lead to a voluminous book, it would suffice to mention these as extracted from the work of *Vipassana-dipani*,² by Venerable Ledi Sayadaw.

The 28 Material Phenomena (Rupasangaha)

Of the two kinds of ultimate phenomena, material and mental, the former is of 28 kinds:

- (I) The four great essential elements, viz:
 - 1. Element of solidity.
 - 2. Element of cohesion, or the holding, the fluid.
 - 3. Element of kinetic energy.
 - 4. Element of motion.

- (II) The six bases, viz:
 - 5. Eye basis
 - 6. Ear basis
 - 7. Nose basis
 - 8. Tongue basis
 - 9. Body basis
 - 10. Heart basis

- (III) The two sexes, viz:
 - 11. Male sex
 - 12. Female sex

- (IV) One species of material quality of life, viz:
 - 13. Vital force

- (V) One species of material quality of nutrition, viz:
 - 14. Edible food

(VI) The four sense fields, viz:

15. Visible form
16. Sound
17. Odour
18. Savour

These 18 species are called *Jatarupani* or genetic material qualities, as they possess the power of production.

(VII) One species of material quality of limitation, viz:

19. Element of space

(VIII) The two communications, viz:

20. Intimation through the body
21. Intimation through speech

(IX) The three plasticities, viz:

22. Lightness
23. Pliancy
24. Adaptability

(X) The four salient features, viz:

25. Integration
26. Continuance
27. Decay
28. Impermanence or death.

These last ten species are called *Ajatarupani* or non-genetic material qualities, as they do not possess the power of production.

The 54 Kinds Of Mental Phenomena

Citta: mind or consciousness;

Cetasika: 52 mental properties or concomitants, and

Nibbana: Getting out of the circle of existences;

(*Nibbana* is here reckoned as a mental phenomenon, not from the subjective, but from the objective point of view.) *Citta* means the faculty of investigating an object (*arammana*) or the faculty of taking possession of an object, or the faculty of knowing an object, or the faculty of being conscious of an object.

Cetasikas are characters of consciousness, or mental properties born of mind, or concomitants of mind.

Nibbana means freedom from every kind of infelicity.

Consciousness is divided into six classes:

- Consciousness of sight
- Consciousness of sound
- Consciousness of smell
- Consciousness of taste
- Consciousness of touch
- Consciousness of mind.

The Consciousness arising at the eye-basis is called the consciousness of sight, and has the function of seeing.

The Consciousness arising at the ear-basis is called the consciousness of sound, and has the function of hearing.

The Consciousness arising at the nose-basis is called the consciousness of smell, and has the function of smelling.

The Consciousness arising at the tongue-basis is called the consciousness of taste, and has the function of tasting.

The Consciousness arising at the body-basis is called the consciousness of touch, and has the function of touching.

The Consciousness arising at the heart-basis is called consciousness of mind. In the *Arupa-loka*, however, mind-consciousness arises without any basis. The mind-consciousness is again subdivided into four kinds.

- a) *Kama*-consciousness
- b) *Rupa*-consciousness
- c) *Arupa*-consciousness
- d) *Lokuttara*-consciousness

a) Of these, *Kama*-consciousness is that which lies within the jurisdiction of desire prevailing in *Kama-loka* (*Kama-tanha*) and is fourfold, thus: Moral (*kusala*), Immoral (*akusala*), Resultant (*vipaka*), and Ineffective (*kriya*).

b) *Rupa*-consciousness is the *jhanic* or ecstatic mind which has become free from *Kama*-desire but still remains within the jurisdiction of the desire prevailing in *Rupa loka* (*Rupa-tanha*) and it is threefold, thus:

Moral,
Resultant,
Ineffective.

c) *Arupa* consciousness is also the *jhanic* or ecstatic mind, which has become free from *Rupa*-desire, but still remains within the jurisdiction of the desire prevailing in the *Arupa-loka* (*Arupa-tanha*), and it also is threefold, thus:

Moral,
Resultant,
Ineffective.

- d) *Lokuttara*, or transcendental consciousness, is the noble mind (*Ariya-citta*) which has become free from the threefold desire, and has transcended the three planes, *Kama*, *Rupa* and *Arupa*. It is of two kinds, thus: Noble consciousness in the Path, and Noble consciousness in the fruition.

Fifty-Two Kinds Of Cetasika Mental properties

- a) The Seven Common Properties (*Sabba cittaka*), so called on account of being common to all classes of consciousness, viz:

Phassa (contact)
Vedana (feeling)
Sañña (perception)
Cetana (volition)
Ekaggata (concentration of mind)
Jivita (psychic life)
Manasikara (attention)

- b) The six Particulars (*pakinnaka*) so called because they invariably enter into composition with consciousness, viz:

Vitakka (initial application)
Vicara (sustained application)
Viriya (effort)
Piti (pleasurable interest)
Chanda (desire-to-do)
Adhimokkha (deciding)

The above 13 kinds (a) and (b) are called Mixtures (*vimissaka*), or better, as rendered by Shwe Zan Aung “Un-morals”, as they are common to both moral and immoral consciousness in composition.

c) The 14 Immoral’s (*papa-jati*), viz:

Lobha (greed)
Dosa (hate)
Moha (dullness)
Ditthi (error)
Mana (conceit)
Issa (envy)
Macchhariya (selfishness)
Kukkucca (worry)
Ahirika (shamelessness)
Anottappa (recklessness)
Uddhacca (distraction)
Thina (sloth)
Middha (torpor)
Vicikiccha (perplexity)

d) The 25 Morals (*kalayana-jatika*), viz:

Alobha (disinterestedness)
Adosa (amity)
Amoha (reason)
Saddha (faith)
Sati (mindfulness)
Hiri (modesty)
Ottappa (discretion)
Tatramajjhata (balance of mind)
Kayapassaddhi (composure of mental properties)

Cittapassadhi (composure of mind)
Kayalahuta (buoyancy of mental properties)
Cittalahuta (buoyancy of mind)
Kayamuduta (pliancy of mental properties)
Citta muduta (pliancy of mind)
Kayakammannata (adaptability of mental properties)
Cittakammannata (adaptability of mind)
Kayapagunnata (proficiency of mental properties)
Cittapagunnata (proficiency of mind)
Kayujukata (rectitude of mental properties)
Cittujukata (rectitude of mind)
Sammavaca (right speech)
Sammakammanta (right action)
Sammaajiva (right livelihood)
 (The immediately preceding three are called the Three Abstinences)
Karuna (pity)
Mudita (appreciation)

Let us see some examples.

1. In walking meditation

Firstly, one may use labels “right”, “left”, to direct the mindfulness to the footsteps. When these labels are used more often, it brings one closer to the walking process. Later, one progresses to increase in each step from 1 to 6 phases... “rising”, “lifting”, “pushing”, “treading”, “stepping” and “pressing”. Even within one phase, it can be repeated several times. But labels are concepts. What is important is to be able to feel the sensations. One should be encouraged to develop this ability to feel and experience them ever more clearly. When the sensations are obvious and so at a suitable time, the labeling can be dropped. Later even the concepts associated with the form of the foot and even the phases can be dropped.

One is then left with just the process of the sensations. Likewise, when one's insight contemplation improves, concepts of person, space and time are also dropped and if one has not done so naturally, one can try to do it consciously.

- (1) Person, i.e., there is not person walking.
- (2) Space, everything is just a process of the mindfulness and its object.
- (3) Time, there is just this nature, occurrence.

2. In sitting meditation

Similarly, one may use notings and labels but they should be dropped when the sensations are obvious. Even when we observe the rising/falling of the abdomen, or in-out of breath, we may have the idea of the physical form, i.e., stomach, nose. These concepts ought to be dropped with progress in practice. Even long/short, fast/slow are concepts based on time and space that should be dropped. Then, there is just left the moment-to-moment arising and passing away of the sensations. If the person concept is held onto, then it should also be dropped.

The dropping of concepts can come naturally with some, while for others, they need to consciously do so. Some may even need to be persuaded and convinced before doing so. This dropping of concepts is a necessary step, or else the ultimate realities will not manifest clearly to give rise to the three universal characteristics which with clear perception gives rise to wisdom. The direction will then be targeted onto the three universal characteristics and then to what they essentially mean in the deeper sense - things as they really are, the bull's eye.

This leads us to the next topic of wisdom, or insight, the acquiring which comes with sharp, well directed mindfulness that fulfills the following functions of purification, transformation, and release.

Nine Ways of Sharpening the Faculties

This set of conditions appears in the *Path of Purification* and is often cited and talked about. And so it is appropriate to put it down here as a reminder of the process of sharpening.

Looking at the context, it actually means conditions that work together in the process of sharpening of the faculties. The items should be taken as a whole. If taken singly, it may not justify it as a factor of sharpening.

1. He sees only the destruction of arisen formations

The statement points out at the direction of his mindfulness. It has to first come from theory and learning supported by faith; otherwise, he would not pursue his course of practice. It is like having trust in a clearly marked map. This points to the sharpening of the perception of impermanence. “Formations” itself indicates non-self or nature. What are these? One has to be fully committed and involved in the process of meditation in that direction to realize by direct experience.

2. He makes sure he is working carefully

Carefully here is another way to qualify mindfulness. Careful not to leave every stone unturned, careful not to allow any infiltration of unwholesome states, careful to ensure every noting is done with high quality awareness. It is not difficult to tell that a sloppy yogi will not go far. It is easy to tell that one with impeccable mindfulness will develop wisdom.

3. He makes sure of working perseveringly

Sharpening the faculties is like sharpening a knife. It takes time and effort. Any relenting can be seen as backsliding. Time is running out, continuity leaves no room for negligence. In many cases, many do not

make the mark because of the lack of time. For those who have the time, their continuity is pathetic, and so the mind becomes blunt and rusty too soon.

4. He makes sure of working suitably

Suitability refers again to the seven suitabilities, i.e., abode, resort, speech, person, food, climate and posture.

Knowing what is really suitable requires skill, although much of it is common sense. Much of it depends on temperament. It is also said that for one with intelligence, nothing is unsuitable. As often said, “There are no distractions in insight meditation.” That is because everything comes into the field of mindfulness. Still, there are things more conducive than others, so if we know and can, then we can make the choice and action.

5. By apprehending the sign of concentration

Concentration is a necessary factor for insight to arise. Longer duration allows more time; deeper concentration opens up subtler levels for inspection. How well one is able to recall these skills depends on how one is able to develop it. Some of these can be communicated through teachers, but still, to a large extent it depends on oneself. The “sign” usually means the object of concentration which develops and is stabilized. In *Vipassana* meditation, it is the three universal characteristics which one will have to negotiate it through the ultimate realities. Therefore, *vipassana* concentration is unique in the sense of being more and more concentrated in an awareness that is “open” as to allow a clearer perception of reality.

6. By balancing the enlightenment factors

Firstly, the factors have to be developed. When they are clearly developed, like at the stage of the fourth insight knowledge, then the balancing is important to stabilize the mindfulness and lead to a specific direction.

7. Establishes disregard of the body and life

It does not mean we should not try to keep ourselves alive. If we have to take risks, or even at the risk of death, then we must be willing to do so if we are to go far. Too often people chicken out because of minor difficulties. If we contemplate more on suffering, impermanence, death, *kamma, samsara*, then we will be able to see the reason behind this.

8. He overcomes pain by renunciation

Pain is something unavoidable. It is a part of life, and so also meditation. The chapter of mindfulness on feelings is clear about this. It needs effort, great effort. It needs concentration, and so on. It needs detachment which is renunciation.

9. By not stopping half-way

Half-way here means anywhere before the final goal of freedom, as in an *arahatta* - the unshakeable deliverance of the mind.

Chapter 5



WISDOM/UNDERSTANDING

There are many words in Pali that cover this territory. *Panna* translated as wisdom or understanding is common, usually mentioned as the third aspect of the Noble Eightfold Path (*sila*-virtue, *samadhi*-concentration, *panna*-wisdom). There are others, such as *bodhi*-enlightenment, *nana*-insight, *vijja*-knowledge, and so forth. One can say that it is the key factor of practice, without which there will not be any buddhas, much less any enlightened disciples. The simile of light has been given to it, for it reveals while its opposite, delusion conceals. These are mental states and so too are its results - our suffering and happiness, thus the Four Noble Truths.

The path of purification (*visuddhi magga*) gives a good comparison of three mental states to illustrate the nature of understanding.

1. Perception (*Sanna*) - which knows an object by its marks or signs. It is a very basic form of knowing, like the knowing of a small child when looking at a coin sees it as round, flat, shiny...
2. Consciousness (*Vinnana*) - which knows an object in a general manner, something more than perception, like a villager who knows what a coin is and how to use it.
3. Understanding (*Panna*) - which knows the nature of an object thoroughly and in depth. The example given is that of a money changer, who on looking at it can tell its real value, where minted, etc.

The point indicated here is that understanding is not just knowing, but a knowing that is deep and thorough, of subtle and difficult things, so it is something not commonly found. For example, even a child can build sand castles on a beach so does not need wisdom. But to build a 100-storey skyscraper, one would need understanding.

This brings us to the different types of wisdom. A large part of the world's knowledge is worldly knowledge, from building skyscrapers to heart transplants. Many of these are helpful to the world but others can be terribly harmful, such a weaponry. They are worldly because they concern worldly matters. Spiritual knowledge is not concerned with the world. Rather in the case of Buddhism, the concern is leading out of the world to the unconditioned *Nibbana*. *Nibbana* is lasting peace while the world has sufferings and fleeting pleasures. One thing that stands out in spiritual knowledge is that it definitely purifies the mind of greed, hatred, delusion, and is capable of doing so radically. Worldly wisdom, on the other hand, often does not, and even if some knowledges do, they cannot reach to similar depth.

Spiritual knowledge again is often analyzed into three types:

1. Knowledge from Listening

In the early days, books were far and few. Much was transmitted orally. Even today, much wisdom is not written. The early Buddhist teachings were originally memorized for some hundreds of years before committed to script. But books themselves are not knowledge if not read and understood. Similarly, listening itself does not mean wisdom. One must listen carefully, not simply believing everything said. Wrong information is not wisdom. Wisdom is clear understanding.

2. Wisdom from Thinking

From experience and correct information, one can draw out further knowledge of thinking and experimentation. Again, these have to be conducted with mindfulness to be precise and correct. Like a scientist that comes out with knowledge only after collecting much data, sieving them out and putting them to trials. The practitioner too is told by the Buddha to test His teachings as one would test silver by fire.

3. Wisdom from Meditation

Through meditation, one reaches levels not fathomed by the normal mind. Increased concentration and mindfulness make it possible to see many of the subtle processes in Nature. It also makes possible the many skills of a finely crafted mind.



Hui Neng, Kwangjou, China 1995

Zen practitioners know him very well. The 6th Chan patriarch from China whose lineage derives from Bodhidharma of India is well recognised. Coming as a woodcutter from the south, he was considered by the North as a barbarian. And yet he stood out spiritually as a giant. The morale of the story is, 'Never judge a book by its cover'.

So with tranquility meditations, skills and understanding unique to them can be cultivated - such as the psychic miracles of telepathy, levitation, etc., while insight meditation can lead to the realization of the unconditioned.

In this set, insight wisdom is stressed, because only this can be considered truly spiritual, purifying and its effect eternal. And what is this? Again, the answer is knowing things as they really are; the true nature of ultimate realities, the three universal characteristics of existence.

Three Universal Characteristics of Existence

Try to run away but you cannot escape from yourself. Another way to put it is that you cannot run away from reality. Close your eyes, deny, deny and deny, they are there wherever, whenever, whoever... That is why it is called reality, and reality is universal. But it is not to be blamed, and it is impersonal. With mindful acceptance, it can only be for the better. Unwholesome response, such as with aversion, leads to further downfall. That is how the magic of *Vipassana* meditation works. From cases of healing of disease to final emancipation, it is all in the here and now. That is where reality stands and it always does.

The three universal characteristics are what I consider to be a description of reality given by the Buddha so that the seeker can comprehend and work towards its realization. They are signs that point to the direction of his destiny. Like the finger pointing to the moon, it is something to be made use of and not to be attached to.



There is the example of the Zen finger pointing to the moon. Look at the moon, not the finger. In this case the finger was pointing to Bern. It has the same indication, but pointing to the way rather than to the goal. When standing on higher ground, one can see better what is around. This is what the 3 characteristics is about. It gives us the direction to look towards.

Pointing to his world, Berne, Switzerland 2006

The three universal characteristics are usually given in their three aspects for clearer understanding:

- 1a. *Anicca*: impermanence – reality to be realized, moment-to-moment change/process
- 1b. *Anicca lakkhana*: sign of impermanence-existing only for a moment, where its arising is also its dissolution.
- 1c. *Aniccanupassana*: contemplation of impermanence.

- 2a. *Dukkha*: suffering – reality to be realized – oppression which is momentariness.
- 2b. *Dukkhalakkhana*: sign of suffering—oppressiveness, unsatisfactoriness, imperfection.
- 2c. *Dukkhanupassana*: contemplation of suffering.

- 3a. *Anatta*: non-self: reality to be realized – true nature of conditioned existence – momentariness.
- 3b. *Anattalakkhana*: sign of non-self: absence of controller, soul.
- 3c. *Anattanupassana*: contemplation of non-self.

From commentarial definitions, it is clear that impermanence, suffering and non-self mean the same thing – reality. But to really experience them, one has to work on their signs first. This work is done with *vipassana* or *satipatthana* mindfulness, which is the mentioned contemplations. It starts when one begins to direct the mindfulness onto the change (which at first is still a conventional and conceptual change). One then works towards the ultimate realities which will manifest their deeper universal truths.

Of these three, which one should come first? As all three are aspects of the same reality, it would depend on the nature of the mental tendencies of the individual. But that is looking at the conceptual aspect of the three signs. In a sense of ultimate realities, it ought to be *Anatta*: non-self. If

you look into the progress of insight, the very first insight knowledge points to this. In principle, this is the ground from which all insights grow.

Anatta (Non-Self)

The teaching of *Anatta* (non-self) is an important and unique part of the Buddha's teachings. It is also often misunderstood. So it is necessary to say more than a few words.

So how is this ego seen in the eyes of a Buddhist? If one looks into Buddhist metaphysics, the "I" is just a concept and in case of humans, a person concept. It is a necessary concept to live in society, giving it a reference point with the world around. We need it to communicate and relate. The trouble comes when it is not used wisely. Without mindfulness, one clings to it, and quite tenaciously too. One is then totally covered up by greed, delusion, and soon, hatred.

Often, I do ask people, "Who are you?" They become dumbfounded, and any answer they give can fall into any of the Five Aggregates – this body is me, mine, and myself. Often the materiality gross and apparent qualities seem to give it some form of lasting reality to cling on to. This feeling is me (I am happy), is mine (my feelings), is myself (my "heart" is my soul). It is like saying I feel, therefore, I exist.

Perceptions - I remember, therefore, I exist.

Formations - I think, therefore, I exist.

Consciousness - I know, therefore, I exist.

The meditator who observes mind and material processes as they arise and pass away clearly sees that such identifications are incorrect, and can be harmful. Harmful because when things pass away or do not go the

way one desires, then there can be only grief and frustration, such as, “Why must it be this way?” With a strong clinging to a strong ego, it can spell disaster, not only to himself but also to others.

Once, I mentioned that a society that I was in is egotistic and egocentric, and they were certainly unhappy about what I said. These two words which indicated a strong ego obviously carried a negative meaning. Such a one is overly conceited. But looking at the psychological sense it need not be so. It just means the “ego” which acts as an integrative function and gives meaning to things, is strong. It can be healthy when it becomes the focal point of good qualities, but terrible if it is unhealthy and becomes a focal point of negative qualities. Without it, everything will tend to split. Thus, there has to be a movement from bad ego to healthy ego and to the understanding of no ego.

Another point to bring up here is that absence of an ego and understanding of no ego are different. When we are asleep, there is no ego play there, but there is also no insight into non-self. Some may even resort to getting drunk to forget their woes, and it is worse than sleeping. Again, what is important is not so much of the ego concept, but more of the mental states present.

As I see it, there can be two types of definitions for the word Anatta.

1. Negative Definition - Non-Self.

The meaning here anchors on the meaning of “self”. Hence, non-self means no absolute controller, no everlasting soul no matter how great or small.

This definition is often fearful to many, for it seems to totally negate the existence of the person. So, I counter this by saying that it is meant to

say that you are not what you think you are, but something more, which will be realized after you have given up the clinging to the concept of the self.

This definition has the function of removing any clinging to all wrong views of personality, a necessary step before getting a correct vision of reality and existence. It is interesting to note that these false views can be extremely varied as explained as the 62 wrong views in the discourse (*Brahmajala Sutta*).



There is a famous story of the 'White Lady', a ghost that haunts this beautiful castle in Cesky Krumlov. See how they capitalise on her, making fun of a woeful creature. That faceless picture does seem right when one thinks of 'non-self' and non identification. If you put your face into that empty space, you become that woeful White Lady.

*Faceless Ghost, Cesky Krumlov, Czech
2007*

2. Positive Definition

There is, however, a positive definition to non-self (*anatta*) which is often translated as such because of the negative prefix “a”. If one gives up the clinging to the idea of a self, then what is there? Reality will therefore manifest naturally if one is mindful. And depending on how clear and sharp it is, the experience will be experienced differently. In the initial stages, it will be perceived as merely specific characteristics or qualities that are mental or material that make up the processes. As one’s insight perception deepens, the three universal characteristics will be perceived. If insight is mature, then there is just the unconditioned. In these states, the question of the existence of “self” does not exist because there is no thinking. There is just the mind and the object. Hence, the positive meaning of non-self is just “things as they really are”, or reality freed from concepts.

When one gets to this with clarity, insight can be said to have arisen. With a positive experience of Anatta, one steps into the door of insight development, into the world of phenomena free from concepts, a path that leads to the beyond. All successive insights are built upon this. Therefore, it has to be clear with regards to mental and material phenomena, and it can be observed and experienced in all of one’s waking hours. Those who have gone through this can tell you the relief they get when that “little screaming mouse” of ego is kept quiet and put into its proper place.

They can also tell you that life is more peaceful because all emotions and defilements have become much lighter. But more important is that the way ahead and the meaning of life is clearer. This itself is a source of great purpose and happiness.

How this non-self aspect comes about is through the practice of *Vipassana* as described. To summarize, one may say:

- (1) There is continuous strong mindfulness that is clear of concepts.
- (2) There is sharp, vivid perception of the characteristics of mental and material phenomena, which bear a state of natural occurrence.
- (3) There is clear perception of conditioning. That is, how these phenomena and qualities are related and dependent on each other for their existence.
- (4) The intentions prior to each action is clear, and so one abandons any clinging to a self connected to it, as well as the conditioning between intention and action.
- (5) There is clear perception of changes in mind and matter and one lets go of attachments.
- (6) There is clear perception of suffering in mind and matter and one lets go of attachments.

With the development of understanding of *anatta*, there is also a shift in how and why we do things. The central role played by the ego in our lives will be replaced by right view/understanding. Hence, the actions will be more and more influenced by wisdom that is in harmony with reality. More happiness is the result.

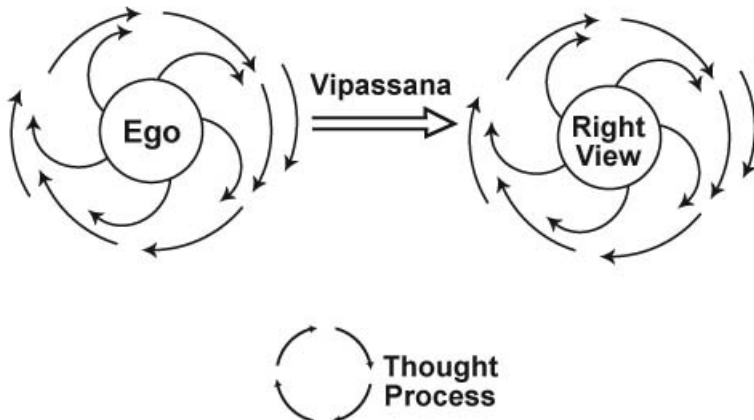


Fig. 12. Replacement of egocentrism by dhammacentrism

This experience of *Anatta* may actually be frightening at the beginning. If one has no supportive mental or theoretical structure, one may actually think one is going crazy and stop practice altogether. Even people who have a good theoretical and intellectual base have been shaken. And so, guidance is necessary. For example, there was a *Dhamma* speaker who meditated and experienced this truth clearly. When he went home and saw his wife, he wondered who she really was. He went to work and wondered why he worked. His whole life was in question and was not ready to take it all, so he got frightened and stopped for sometime. But once this realization is understood when guided over a period of time, its benefits and meaning to the person will be obvious.

When one continues to reinforce the process of transformation by being mindful of the concept of “I” every time it arises, one then either makes proper use of it or puts it aside with the return of realities as the center of one’s actions.

At this point, it will also be interesting to note that there is a close connection between wrong view (*miccha ditthi*), which is eradicated by the stream winner, and the “I am” conceit eradicated only at the final stage of the *arahatta*. While the former is the strong clinging to a wrong opinion regarding the nature of existence (i.e., phenomena), self and happiness of samsara, rather than the opposite, the latter is a sense of self importance or egocentrism. Isn’t it basically the same thing? I think it is, but defilements work at various levels and the grossest are eradicated first. Hence, the “I am” conceit can be very subtle and deeply embedded even in the more spiritual people.

The other point to note is the statement “all *Dhammas* are non-self”. It is a statement which includes *Nibbana*, the unconditioned, which supports the idea that even the highest truth and state is not an individual or person in the real sense. This gives no room for doubt of the existence of a smaller or greater self. So, while the discourse of non-self characteristic

spells out a contemplation to rid this clinging to the Five Aggregates, the discourse on the root of all things makes sure that this has to be done completely with regards to the “I am” conceit until the final liberation.

THE PROGRESS OF INSIGHT AND THE THREE UNIVERSAL CHARACTERISTICS

Knowledge of Discrimination into Mind and Matter (*Namarupapariccheda Nana*)

The progress of insight is often spoken of with regards to the 16 insight knowledges. It begins with the insight knowledge of discrimination into mind and matter.

The explanation is that one clearly experiences the mind that observes it as one thing, and the object or material quality (like the breath or rising / falling of abdomen) as another, although that arise and pass away together in pairs. That is to say, the observer and the observed come together. This is, in a very simple form, a description of the conditional relationship of the mind and object as a very basic principle in existence. What must be added is that at that moment, there is clear experience of “non-self”, that there are just those qualities that are natural occurrences. The question of a person, individual, or self does not at all come into the picture. That is because there are no concepts; there is just the pure experience of nature. Only on emergence after this experience that reflections on it can occur. This links it to the rational mind, and it spreads its effect to daily life activities. It also means one can, with familiarity and skill, bring up the same insight experience to any object and time if one so wishes. The peace and purification can then be extensive.

The experience can, therefore, be quite varied, the stronger the better, to reach the more subtle mental phenomena as well as flexible to extend to all aspects of one's life. This initial insight forms the base for all other

insights and so should be stable. It opens its doors to the higher insights and so should be wide.

Unfortunately, with wrong reflections, the reverse harmful effect can occur. How can this be if insight comes from a pure mind? It can be reasoned that this initial insight may not be strong, and defilements lay waiting once one emerges from concentration. Secondly, it falls into an area outside of concepts, and so for one without theoretical structure or support, the rational mind cannot link to it. Without help, one may think one is going crazy and finally closes the door to insights against one's own good. So, some theoretical structure is also important and best with the first hand experience from a guide.

Knowledge of Conditionality (*Paccayapariggaha Nana*)

As a follow up to this, the purely mindful and experiential process develops to cover more ground, i.e., to more phenomena, to see that all these mind and material qualities are interconnected. Their relationships are varied and a wide field of knowledges are connected with the causes and effects, the conditioning and the conditioned. In extreme cases, it traces back into the numerous past lives, although it is not necessary to go to that extent to proceed to further knowledges. This experience can be said to be an extension of deepening of insight into “non-self”. Its interdependency for existence is clearly conditioned existence, that each one of these is not a discrete and lasting experience. This knowledge removes doubts because one begins to comprehend at the level of pure experience what the normal conceptual and rational reasoning do not fathom. All conditionings that are experienced with insight are the real inner reasons as to why this and not that, and all “these and those” are found in the natural flow of phenomena, reality.

Knowledge of Comprehension (of the Three Universal Characteristics) (*Sammasana Nana*)

What follows with the development is that the flow of the mind and material phenomena becomes apparent - the “river of life” that is found in all of us. Finally, all merge into this process which flows from the future to the present and into the past. What we experience are all subjected to the Law of Change.

Interestingly enough, although the characteristics of impermanence are what in principle plays an apparent part, the two, non-self and suffering, are not less striking. After all, the three are manifestations of the same reality.

At this level, everything must flow; that is nature. As a result, it goes against many tendencies found in the rational mind as well as latent defilements. The revelation of an impermanent, fickle and thus, extremely insecure reality underlying all our conventional reality can be difficult to accept, if not intellectually then definitely emotionally. Sometimes, it arouses unexpected emotional shocks; at times it reveals deep pain. At other times, hidden shadows of personalities make us think we are mad. Generally, a whole rumble and tumble of formations arise flowing through a deeper breaking up of perception and conceptualizations. They flow slowly at first, being caught up now and again when latent defilements of clinging, aversion and delusion arise, when mindfulness and concentration are not strong enough to keep them under control. Many teachers say that this is a difficult stage and with it also lurks danger. Psychological break down and arising of latent madness can occur if one is not careful.

With determined effort and continuous mindfulness, right concentration should prevail, giving rise to ease, what could have been another problem. What is mentioned are the 10 imperfections (*upakkilesa*) of insight, arises at the mature stage of this insight level and extends to the immature stage

of the next. Again, if one is not careful, one can develop attachments to the pleasant and otherwise beautiful states, and falls into greater complications.

In brief, the 10 imperfections of insight are:

1. Effulgence (*obhasa*)/illumination

A bright mind creates brightness. That bright mind is a product of clarity, which in turn creates or looks for bright objects, such as light. They range from spotlights to extreme cases where a whole monastery may be illuminated. One is also able to see in the dark, auras around people and other hidden objects.

2. Knowledge (*nana*)

Knowledge is knowledge that arises through insight practice. But this knowledge which can be insight itself or a reflection on it, is still incomplete and imperfect. It can still pose as an object to attachment.

3. Rapture (*piti*)

It refers to rapture/joy that arises due to insight. There are five kinds often described.

- a. Minor - lesser forms like thrills
- b. Momentary - as in flashes
- c. Showering - as in waves
- d. Uplifting - as in light and flying feelings
- e. Pervading - as in suffusing into every cell in the body

4. Tranquility/quietude (*passaddhi*)

This is ease, comfort of body and mind, making one cool and peaceful. Included with this are the other wholesome mental factors, like lightness, softness, and malleability. One experiences the mind like a peaceful lake, soft cotton wool, etc.

5. Bliss/Happiness (*sukha*)

This happiness or bliss is the mental state of feeling that is very pleasurable and sweet, which comes with insight.

6. Resolution (*adhimokkha*)

This is faith that arises with the arising of insight. Based on insight, confidence becomes deep and committed. Unfortunately, at this stage, it is still shakable, i.e., when the level drops and hindrances arise, skeptical doubts can return. It is often, for example, people who want to renounce the world or perform great acts of merit, but change their minds later.

7. Exertion (*paggaha*)

Exertion is balanced effort, energy in the practice associated with insight. With it one does not become tired, but is able to go on deep into the night, day after day.

8. Establishment (*upatthana*)

This is mindfulness that is well established with insight. As such, it is strong and convincing. One is able to observe things clearly and deeply as they arise at the six sense doors.

9. Equanimity (*upekkha*)

It is the very balanced and equanimous state of mind that comes with insight in the practice. The mind becomes very stable, smooth and flexible, hence, very efficient in adverting to objects as they arise.

10. Attachment (*nikanti*)

Often this is translated as complacency when one has grown fond, satisfied or even proud of one's achievements, no matter how slight. At this stage, there is even more reason to be guarded.

Knowledge of Arising and Dissolution (*Udayabbaya Nana*)

With the maturation of the perception of impermanence, the rapidity of the process is experienced. All phenomena are noticed to arise and pass away, i.e., flow quicker and quicker as mindfulness and concentration progresses. Finally, everything vanishes at its moment of arising. That slowly, flowing stream advances to gather speed of a quickly flowing river to rushing torrents, waterfall and finally to rapidly sprays of droplets that burst into fireworks. This knowledge is considered a landmark in the practice when with its maturity all concepts are left out. One realizes that from these atom-like particles, which are just that moment of a process that all else is formed. Often, there is much joy accompanying it, but with maturity of the knowledge one lets go more of this River of Life.

Knowledge of Dissolution (*Bhanga Nana*)

With development, the perception of impermanence climaxes into the perception of dissolution. The process in its deeper sense is cessation. That is what everything finally ends up with. As a teacher mentioned of the three marks of conditioning, (*sankhata lakkhana*) - origination, decay, dissolution, the last is the closest expression of reality. Often one

looks and sees clearly that one is looking at nothing. Even the observer is nothing; that is the essence of the process, which is cessation. And yet, this cessation, teachers warn, is cessation that is part of the process of becoming, a cessation that arises again (*upada nirodha*). One should strive on to realize the cessation without arising (*anupada nirodha*).

It is clear that these “*upakkilesa*” (except for the last) are good states that come about because of improved mindfulness and concentration. The last – (*nikanti*) complacency, is regarded as a true defilement, because it is a type of clinging that stagnates and prevents one from going further.

What is frightening is that it does not stop there. It develops into what is called proliferation of:

1. Craving
2. Conceit
3. Wrong View

In the extreme case, one can become very unbalanced. Craving then develops into obsession, conceit into megalomania, and wrong view into spiritual madness. For example, he develops a certain level of knowledge about his practice and he craves for more. This is craving. He then becomes proud of it. This is conceit. When he believes that he has reached the experience of the unconditioned when he has not is wrong view.

An interesting note must be mentioned, which is given by a teacher in a manual of insight practice regarding these five initial knowledges. He draws out salient marks of the process in them.

1. In the first insight, the middle (decay) aspect is clear.
2. In the second insight, the beginning and middle aspect is clear.
3. In the third insight, the beginning, middle and end aspect is clear.
4. In the fourth insight, the beginning and end aspect is clear.
5. In the fifth insight, the end, dissolution aspect is clear.

In the first, the non-self aspect with its specific characteristics is clear, but its beginning and ending is not. These are like flashes that arise too quickly to catch the precise moment, so too its dissolution. The second is like an overlapping flow of experiences. The third is like a flow with distinct waves and ripples. The fourth is a rapid flow breaking into splashes and drops. The fifth is a flow that rushes into the void. All these marks a cycle of mindful experience where a climax of perception of impermanence is reached. In the (*visuddhimagga*) path of purification, an interesting classification of the penetration process is given.

First and second insights are called full understanding of the known – penetration of the specific characteristics.

Third and fourth insights are called full understanding as investigation – penetration of the general characteristics.

From the fifth insight onward is full understanding as abandoning – where the seven contemplations of -

- (i) Impermanence abandons perception of permanence.
- (ii) Suffering abandons perception of pleasure
- (iii) Non-self abandons perception of self
- (iv) Dispassion abandons perception of delight
- (v) Dispassion abandons perception of greed
- (vi) Cessation abandons perception of originating
- (vii) Relinquishment abandons perception of grasping

Suffering (Dukkha)

“Suffering”, the translation of the word “*dukkha*”, is often insufficient. This is a fault that can be ascribed to the English vocabulary, which lacks words for such contemplative matters. If you include “things that are a basis of suffering” then it can cover more ground than the word “*dukkha*” is meant to indicate. Still, more needs to be explained.

The characteristic of suffering is usually explained as oppressiveness. It will be clearer when the explanation is further elaborated in the three types of suffering.

1. *Dukkha dukkha* - literally, painful suffering. It means apparent suffering of both body and mind. Bodily pains are in physical pains and discomfort, like a toothache, while mental pain are as in sorrow and grief. Go to the hospital and you will see how it affects people. Sit a little longer than usual and it will also happen to you.
2. *Viparinama dukkha* - usually translated as suffering of alteration or change. It is used to indicate the deeper nature of pleasurable feelings. That it is essentially the same thing as painful feelings. It only depends on what those feelings are associated with. When pleasure fades, pain often takes over its place.
3. *Sankhara dukkha* - suffering of formations. This is the suffering which is the incessant, moment-to-moment change of the mind and material processes. In this sense, it covers truly the meaning of “dukkha”. When one experiences moment-to-moment change, it can be described as “suffering” or “painful”, like sharp sensations that flash like fire in your heart, like needles that scratch across the skin.

The first two types of suffering are frequently met in the first two insights and the third slowly begins to appear in the third insight. It is clear only after the fourth insight, which sees into the moment-to-moment change. When one is able to perceive suffering, oppressiveness as that, then the subsequent insights (5-8) follow up.

Knowledge of terror (of formations)
(Bhaya Nana)

Where one perceives the moment-to-moment change of formations as terrifying, just as when one sees a building collapse, one sees the terror of it, one also sees the collapse of the phenomena as terrifying. This does not mean there is fear in one at that moment; rather one sees into the conditions that can cause fear to arise.

Knowledge of danger/faults (of formations)
(Adinava Nana)

Where one perceives flux of formations as full of faults and danger, just as one who sees a body about to break up and die, one sees the phenomena that crumbles and breaks up is ungraspable, undependable and insecure.

Knowledge of disenchantment (of formations)
(Nibbida Nana)

Where one perceives the moment-to-moment change of formations as disenchanting or disgusting, sometimes the description as “boring” is used and is said to occur in this stage. But being “bored” is too weak a term. It is more like seeing a body that is diseased and eaten by crawly worms – that is how momentary change is often perceived. Sometimes it is like snakes. When change is more violent, it becomes like rapidly flowing sewage or faeces. But the word “disgust” implies aversion, and it may very well arise if mindfulness is not steadfast enough. Strong disenchantment will do as a more appropriate word.

Knowledge of desire for deliverance (from formations)
(Muncitukamyata Nana)

This is where the suffering of formations reaches a peak and a strong

desire arises to be freed from these. If one's mindfulness is not steadfast, one may instead make a cowardly exit from the practice. Otherwise, it is a detachment itself. At this stage, teachers tell of yogis having extreme pain, itches, and mental suffering, wanting to run away but no where to turn to, but finally to the meditation itself.



The temple in Houston had shipped in many sculptures of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Arahatas in wooden crates for their new building and left it at the open grounds. It is amusing to see this one trying to get out.

Get me out of here! Houston, USA 2006

These four knowledges are called *Dukkha nanas*, or knowledges of suffering. Teachers also say that intrinsically, they are the same, differing only in degree as well as aspects of perception. The important point is that it produces detachment, dispassion from formations that arise and dissolve moment-to-moment. That is essentially what *samsara*, the cycle of existence is, and seeing it as suffering produces that liberating force. Without developing this to its completeness, the state of the unconditioned cannot be realized, for any little clinging to fine and pleasant formations is enough to prevent the escape.

Another important point to note is that these knowledges are closely involved with the purging of certain defilements, such as those associated with the root of aversion, like fear. Notice how closely aversion can resemble detachment. Both see fault in the object. The first is agitated, the second is peacefully determined. That is the sort of transformation that takes place. Hopelessness and terror is changed into direction and resolve, which moves us into the next insight of reflection. One must, therefore, be determined, full of faith and hope in the practice, and guard against any aversion that may arise.

It can be said that suffering of formations, when they arise and experienced by the meditator, is not easy to handle. Like bitter medicine, it is not easy to swallow. Sometimes (like in people with much anger or unwholesome kammic luggage), it can last long and be difficult to pass through. Usually, they need good guides to inspire and who have proven skillful techniques. Here are some suggestions.

1. Develop sharper perception of impermanence and non-self in both material and mental phenomena and their processes

Perception of the unique characteristics of phenomena must be developed, otherwise this level would not have arisen. But the perception can certainly be made sharper, particularly regarding the three characteristics, such as impermanence and non-self, and especially mental phenomena. As this

is subtler and clinging is deeply entrenched, this perception does not arise so easily and with a high degree of sharpness. But the “suffering” here is largely mental, and so the perception of non-self regarding it is crucial, otherwise it would be there will be difficult to see through and pass it. Where there is still some subtle clinging lingering behind, it will not pass off. Clear perception of non-self into feelings, thoughts, mental states and consciousness is needed to clearly see the arising and dissolution of these phenomena.

2. Connected with clear perception is the development of certain imagery

Though somewhat conceptual in nature, certain imagery does aid in the perception of its breaking up. For example, the formations may seem to be slow moving like sludge, hard and heavy, weighing down like a ton, then burning like a large piece of charcoal. If you assume the mindfulness as a razor sharp knife slicing through it, it breaks apart. Some saw it like a frog-like substance, and so “stomped” on it. Amazing enough, this substance splattered into bits. Then someone else commented that one should have more compassionate ideas for animals! Of course! Yet another saw the whole process as stinking bubbling filth, and so he happily used mindfulness as a shovel to make them flow faster. It did!

3. The Joy Factor

The “sufferings” experienced are very real. They are all deep inside, and follow you wherever you are. They are stifling and heavy, they are chaotic and meaningless. Why must there be suffering? Even when the “me” is not there, suffering can still go on! It takes away much energy and it tends to waste away those who have weakened. How long can you bear these meaningless spasms? This is where the joy factor gives you an upper hand. We must have many such tricks and inspirations up our sleeve. In retreats, the teachers’ inspiring and informative talks give the yogi an extra boost of energy to turn the table around.

“Model yogis” who work like bulls through night and day provide additional encouragement. If you are in a place where the faithful are plentiful, it also helps. Recollections that bring about joy also lighten the burden of striving. Energy is the key factor. No petrol, no go. Recollection of the basis for the sense of urgency is also important. (i.e., at birth, old age, sickness, death suffering of past, present, future and of having to keep up one’s living). One has to be creative in this field. Sometimes, I take walks in the forest since nature is healing and supportive. Sometimes, I look into the open sky which opens the mind. Once, my teacher commented that he appreciates a small razor and I can recollect on that. Being at ease and peaceful, one can practise with joy and humour helps. Rigidity, on the other hand, can be stifling and cause unnecessary tensions.

4. Other Tranquility Meditations

Pure tranquility meditations can also come to the aid. Although the objects are different, it can be done in such a way as to complement insight practice. Of particular relevance are those that suit the temperament of the individual and those that are inspirational and joyful can be used here at the stages. The recollections of the Triple Gem are especially inspiring while the sublime abiding such as loving kindness can be joyful. In addition, I also recommend the meditation on peace, which is very pacifying to turbulent formations. More will be dealt with in a later chapter.

5. Use of Aspirations as a method of redirecting

Aspirations are resolutions made for the arising of certain states of mind. It is like giving a command to a computer to produce results. We can use this to arouse levels we have passed through, for example, the knowledge of arising and passing away, or knowledge of dissolution. At these levels, the perception of impermanence is strong. It can then be superimposed onto the formations observed. This makes the work easier and progress faster.

6. Transformation into corresponding positive states

When one gets stuck at the levels concerning the suffering of formations, often latent tendencies of aversion arise where mindfulness is weak. A technique to quickly transform it into the wholesome state of detachment is the shift to wise attention. This has often to be done so that the mind would not turn increasingly negative.

Knowledge of Contemplation/Reflection (*Patisankha Nana*)

The explanation of this knowledge is one which contemplates again on the three characteristics of formations. So, it is like the third insight knowledge with the difference being very much more matured stage of the faculties. There it is described that an extra surge of energy lifts one up from those rather stressful experiences of the previous levels. Extra faith and energy characterizes this stage and one feels that the mind is now moving deeper into the meditation. The universal characteristics and formations experienced are even clearer. If they are strong enough, one feels very detached from formations, like a bird soaring over trees and valleys, and finally like a plane going higher and higher. That is when this insight knowledge advances to the next knowledge, and so it is considered a precursor or immature stage of that. If the faculties are not strong enough, then it falls back to the lowest stages, back to the boiling pot to make sure that one learns the lesson more thoroughly. I also take the cue that this knowledge indicates cycles of maturity of the lower levels. These cycles do go round until the faculties are strong enough to lift one above the formations. To help, one has to let go more of the formations which include ideas about and clinging to the insights that one has gone through or will go through!

Knowledge of Equanimity of Formations **(*Sankharupekkha nana*)**

The *Visuddhi Magga* states that deliverance begins with the desire for it (#9), then the means (#10), and equanimous looking at the end (#11). It is actually a matured level of insight contemplation after one has gone through the thorough contemplation on the three characteristics of formations and their voidness, and so, because of deep concentration, mindfulness and insight have become very detached, equanimous and sharp. There is no longer terror and delight in formations. There is only indifference and neutrality. The energy has become very automatic and balanced. Sittings usually become effortless, and tend to last very long. Equanimity and detachment are established. The mind keeps on plunging into subtler and subtler states discerning formations in various ways. Concentration also becomes deeper and deeper and tends toward uniformity, rather than multiformity. This is a landmark of the practice. From here on, one approaches the gateways of liberation when the faculties are mature.

The three gateways of liberation are:

1. Signless Gateway (*Animitta Vimokkha*)

It is said that one with strong faith tends to use this gateway. The perception is highly developed onto the sign of impermanence of formations. It frees one from signs, marks of the formations, and leads one to the signless, unconditioned *Nibbana*. It can also be that this stage is beyond description, for it is through signs and comparison that we make the description. Therefore, all limitations are abandoned and the mind is freed from conditioning.

2. Desireless Gateway (*Appanibhita Vimokkha*)

It is said that one with strong concentration tendencies approaches this gateway. Their perception of suffering/pain in formations is highly developed. Hence, there is letting go of everything conditioned to lead one to the desireless, (or another translation as undirected), unconditioned, *Nibbana*. Hence, it also has the nature of no more grasping, running away from pain; there is only peaceful happiness.

3. Voidness Gateway (*Sunnata Vimokkha*)

It is said that one with strong wisdom tendencies approaches this gateway. Their perception of non-self in formations is highly developed. Hence, there is just letting things be. All illusions vanish, only the ultimate is there as it has always - the timeless, most natural unconditioned *Nibbana*. In a way, it is also like a great emptiness that is empty of all formations, yet is complete by itself.



*Flying over the Sea, N Island, NZ
2004*

The bird here is a gannet, flying from a colony off the coast of New Zealand. The sea is large, wide and powerful. It signifies travel and often Samsara. The bird is the uplifted consciousness. An example given is a bird feeding on a boat, when it sees land, it will fly off and not return – a bird of no return. This bird glides over observing one of the waves. Is that process “the rising/ falling of abdomen” or “in/out breath”? The morale is that the vipassana object is just a means to an end. What is important is that the bird flies to safety. And that is that dispassion from conditioned things that drives one towards the unconditioned.

One is said to approach the gateways when the knowledge of equanimity reaching the culmination. But then, I think that the knowledge as to which gateway arises is only apparent after the reviewing consciousness from which the rational judgements that relate to it arises some time after. Hence, they come to be called “signless *Nibbana*”, “desireless”, “void” through the influence of the gateway, perfections (*parami*) and the process that judges the experiences and its objects. This is the name with the next few knowledges until the Path and Fruition knowledges. Following that, there is conformity knowledge leading to emergence of the path and fruition knowledges.

This is illustrated in the thought process of the realization as explained in Abhidhamma.

X	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	X
b	bc	ba	M	Pr	Up	An	Go	Mg	Phl	Phl	b

sankhara as object *Nibbana* as object
(1 of 3 characteristics being clear)

1. *Bhavanga calana* - vibrating bhavanga
2. *Bhavangupaccheda* - arresting bhavangas
3. *Manodvaravajjana* - mind/door averting
4. *Parikamma* - preliminary
5. *Upacara* - access
6. *Anuloma* - conformity
7. *Gotrabhu* - change of lineage
8. *Magga* - path
9. *Phala* - fruition
10. *Phala* - fruition

4-6 is conformity knowledge (no. 12)

7 is change of lineage knowledge (no. 13)

8 is path knowledge (no. 14)

9-10 is fruition knowledge (no. 15)

Conformity Knowledge (*Anuloma Nana*)

The conformity knowledge (#12), has been said to be the last conscious moment when one of the universal characteristics of formations is taken before taking up the supramundane objects. It is called conformity because it conforms to the preceding knowledges, and so is in essence the most matured form of it, and can be so strong that it can lead to the emergence of the supramundane path and the object. It can also be taken as the final link to the supramundane from the side of the mundane. Since it occurs in only one thought moment, it is too brief and subtle to be noticed with precision. But for those who have passed into the supramundane know for certain that it exists. It is an in between state of such subtlety that can be perceived only by a perception of extreme sharpness - like a pin point that ends in the void.

An interesting note is the function of the final dispelling-the-mark-of-formations attributed to this knowledge. The levels with the unconditioned object do not, since it occurs only when there are no more clouds. And so, the finest part of understanding of the insight path up to the point of dealing with formations is enshrined here.

Hence, it is from here that I have evolved a method called the pin-point technique, which is a further development when the unconditioned characteristics are also taken into the picture, and synonymous with the meditation on peace.

13. Knowledge of Change of lineage (*Gotrabhu nana*)

14. Path Knowledge (*Magga nana*)

15. Fruition Knowledge (*Phala nana*)

These three knowledges come with the emergence of the path. They come together in four thought moments and so occur in a short spell like a flash of lightning. They share the same object, i.e., the unconditioned element - *Nibbana*.

The change of lineage it seems is like the linkage on the “other side”. In the texts, it is considered as turning towards the “path” consciousness. When it occurs, the path occurs too, all as a natural part of the process. But a similar instance occurs in the case of going into other fixed concentrations such as the absorptions. So it is like turning into, switching into a different level in the field of experience and existence.

The “path” and “fruition” consciousness are supramundane consciousness, in that they take only the supramundane object, *Nibbana*, and nothing else. The “path” consciousness is the Noble Eightfold Path on the supramundane, and so the purest level. Its function is to radically purify the mind from defilements. Depending on which path a person is on, different levels are eradicated. In the first path, skeptical doubts, wrong views and attachment to wrong practices are eradicated. In the final, all are eradicated.

When they fall under “signless concentration”, it is indescribable. When it is desireless, all is let go of. When it is void, it seems like there is nothing and yet it is all there is.

In the falling into “non-occurrence”, “cessation”, “ultimate peace”, “non-birth”, “deathless”, there is a clear cutting off from the formations and processes. This involves also a clear cutting off the subject-object type of knowing, since it is fixed concentration. So for a short spell of these three knowledges, one is as if unconsciousness, or as some describe, experiences a blackout or a gap. These make some think that when blackouts occur, it means the path has emerged. Such thoughts are too presumptive. There are many reasons and states that come with blackouts.

Some of the reasons are for the false cessations.

1. Sleep, Sloth/Torpor

One can go into a “blackout” because one falls asleep. The sleeping consciousness or life continuum (*bhavanga*) can occur when one is tired, drowsy or even if one is clear and peaceful. Usually, one is unaware how and when it exactly happens. Only on coming out one knows. If it is because of sloth and torpor, one’s mind is usually heavy and unclear. Sometimes it is also clear and one knows how and when it happens, and so in such cases it occurs only for short moments. It is also quite peaceful! But definitely there is no great insight involved. Those who are used to watching how these sleeping consciousness occur will be familiar when the “sleeping mind” drops in.

2. Joy and Tranquility (*piti passadhi*)

Joy, or zest and tranquility/quietude are nice states. They are pleasant and soft. It is easy to let go into it and forget everything else. So one either forgets oneself for a while, which is like forgetting everything, or drop off into the deep sleep. Again, there is no great insight involved.

3. Happiness (*sukha*)

This occurs like the former, but in this case, the happiness is a bliss that comes with deep concentration and peace.

If one has not experienced these levels before, then one is likely to think that this is real cessation. It is like falling into a deep cessation that is peaceful. Again, ask the question, so what? For one used to deeper concentration, they are common place, and so easily taken notice of mindfully and let pass.

4. Concentrations and Absorptions

When deeper concentrations and subtler objects first occur, it is usually experienced like moments of unconsciousness. That is because it is new and occurs only in short moments. It is especially so in pure tranquility meditations when mindfulness is not very keen. With time, however, it will be obvious. But meanwhile, one knows something “special” or “uncommon” has occurred. It is also something very easy to fall for with attachments! It is alright to take it as an encouragement, and to be certain what it is, one should look deeper with greater clarity and without attachments.

5. Equanimity (Upekkha)

When mindfulness and concentration is strong and stable, equanimity can arise with strength. It can last and one becomes very detached, so detached that it obliterates everything except itself, which is just a very subtle, deep indifference. In experience it is like a very peaceful blackout. This form occurs frequently in the knowledge of the equanimity of formations and may also occur with accompanying deep insights into formations, but it is still short of the supramundane.

6. Knowledges connected with cessations that arise again (*uppada nirodha*)

Experiences in insight meditation will include experiences connected with impermanence, and hence change of formations. Such passing away, change, and dissolutions culminate in cessations, which are often experienced as “blackouts” or “moments of unconscious”. This is especially so when it is the dissolution of the consciousness. They can be connected with insight, but not necessarily with the supramundane. An overestimation is unfortunate, for it will definitely complicate any progress.

The true cessation is that which comes with the emergence of the path. Its confirmation comes with the next insight knowledge.

Reviewing Knowledge (*Paccavekkhana Nana*)

This knowledge comes with a thought process that follows immediately after the emergence of the path. An interesting point here is that they take as their objects, path, fruition, defilements abandoned and remaining, and *Nibbana*. This is to say that what had happened just before, during and after the path-fruition realizations thought process, is clearly imprinted to the conscious mind on emergence from that “special blackout”. This also means that one can consciously experience *Nibbana*, the unconditioned element. How then can it be possible that doubt can arise? Just like someone said, “If a lightning strikes your head, how can you not know?” It is possible that one can be mistaken because one can encounter many strange and wonderful experiences, but for one who has really experienced the unconditioned, it is impossible for skeptical doubts to arise.

Once one is certain (of course one must), then one proceeds with making resolutions to repeat or experience again the fruition of the path with the resolution:

“May I experience again the highest dhamma,” or “May I experience again the fruition of the path.”

Notice that in this first resolution that “the highest *dhamma*” that is referred to is obviously the supramundane (*lokuttara*) *dhamma*, but it does not specify which of the nine (four paths, four fruitions and *Nibbana*). It, therefore, leaves it open to progress, further understanding and investigation.

With the second resolution (to experience the highest *dhamma* again), notice it does not specify which of the four paths. But from the reviewing knowledge one should be able to tell at least one is on the first path, later second, or the third or fourth. Time will tell!

The resolution when executed properly will certainly repeat the experience of the fruition. Some people may have some difficulty in mastery, but in an intensive retreat, one should be able to repeat the experience to some extent. Total failure gives the teacher reason to think that it was a false cessation, and further instructions may be held back. The attainment of fruition can then be lengthened from a few seconds to minutes, to hours, and may be also for days. He does this by resolving during the sitting meditation when the level of concentration and practice is high. “May I experience the fruition for a period of 5 minutes,10 minutes, 1 hour, 3 hours, etc...” It would certainly need greater concentration, determination and preparation if it is to last for the maximum stretch of a week. However, most teachers do not think it necessary to go to that extent. On the other hand, the repetition of the fruition is a very helpful stepping stone to the progress into the next path. Thirdly, it is also a moment when the yogi can, for a period, take a break to savor the results of his striving. He is one as my teacher described, “One who lives in the happiness of the present state.”

The fruition in analysis is a supramundane resultant (*lokuttara vipaka*) and is as such a replay. Every successive path has their fruition. Obviously, there is a difference between them, at least when seen on this side of the fence. We can say it is “clearer” than the last. How clear can a “blackout” be? Well, that is where experience comes in. It is in the “reviewing”.

At this point is an interesting note. *Nibbana*, being the unconditioned truth cannot by itself be analyzed. Analysis just means conditioning. What we can do is based on the impressions left by it on the “reviewing knowledges”. You cannot know truth directly; you know it from the foot prints it left behind. That is because “knowing” is also a form of conditioning. The Abhidhamma itself tackles the situation by putting in the path and fruition as the supramundane consciousness which is known only by the reviewing knowledge, only after it has “happened”.

So, you can see how the “reviewing knowledges” play an important role in consecutive practice. One has to make use of resolutions skillfully, and one has to be careful not to take the reflection of the moon as the moon itself.

Personally, I think the *magga* and *phala* are intrinsically the same thing, but the means and causes by which they arise are different. In the *magga*, it is an active (*kamma*) consciousness, and so the volitional force is stronger. It comes about through the conscious active momentum from the impulsion in the conformity stages where it radically eliminates defilements and increasingly in later paths. The *phala* repetition comes from an aspiration for a replay, and the replay, like a reprint, cannot cause a sharper “reviewing” than the first “print”. But after subsequent paths, the resultant *phala* can give a reviewing as clear, if not clearer than the first *magga*. The other interesting note is that the further impact of the *phala* can be extended by an extension of duration in that attainment. It then would also add more light on the effects of *phala* and the reviewing process.

For what it is, the fruition itself has other beneficial effects other than those mentioned. Firstly, it is healing and curative. It has been used since the times of the Buddha to heal oneself. But it has to be strong and lasting enough, and depending on the seriousness of the illness. Definitely it can do something. For the Buddha whose basis of accomplishments (*iddhipada*) is fully developed, it can extend his life to the maximum period.

Secondly, it is purifying and peaceful, and so helps the lower stages of noble ones further purify their minds and make a peaceful life even more peaceful.

Thirdly, being on the peak of the scale of insight knowledges, it can be used as base to gain a clearer overview of the insight development. That is, after emerging from fruition, one makes the resolutions to review each of the stages of insight knowledge.

Hence, one may make the resolution: “May the knowledge of discrimination of mind and matter arise”, and then one proceeds to the practice as before, and notice what happens. The knowledge as an experience then will occur. One may do it several times, and the more one does, the clearer and matured it becomes. When satisfied, one can proceed to make the resolution to study the next insight knowledge. This can go on until one has completed the whole set with satisfaction. This also allows one to study the insight knowledges on a wider spectrum, its characteristics, functions, manifestations, near causes and its effects on the practice and life as a whole. It also helps in the maturation of insight to attain the next path.

Usually, yogis are told to make the resolution for the fourth insight knowledge:

“May the knowledge of arising and dissolution arise”, once the resolutions made for the fruition attainment is satisfactory. This is a way whereby one is set off onto the higher paths. Naturally, the insights that follow will be of a similar pattern, but would have to be more matured. How this fourth insight appears will be characteristic of one having passed through the first path, and is used by teachers as one of the signs that indicate it. This fourth knowledge would become extremely clear, clearer than ever experienced before by the yogi. However, it certainly is not the confirmation.

One can also go on to say that the successive knowledges have also to be more matured. As such, each may have to be held back from progressing to the next level to give it more time to be more matured before being allowed to advance. It also means that at the “equanimity of formations” insight knowledge, one holds back by not allowing it to go into the “fruition knowledges” that one has experienced before, no matter how good it can be. Hence, at the very start of the new path, one is also asked to make the resolution: “May I put aside old *dhammas* and experience new *dhammas*.” The new *dhammas* indicate the new/next path consciousness.

There is certainly more to be done by one aspiring for the new path, but this will be in a later chapter.

At this point, it will be of interest to note the points given to say whether a yogi has indeed passed through the first path. Some of these are given in a *vipasanna* book written by a Burmese teacher:-

1. One has clearly passed through insight knowledges 1-11.
2. The conformity knowledge leading to emergence is clear.
3. The moment of cutting off occurrence to non-occurrence and its emergence is clear.
4. The reviewing knowledge about the nature of the unconditioned is clear.
5. The emergence of an extremely clear and matured fourth insight knowledge following the path and fruition.
6. The appearance of the extremely pure consciousness following the emergence from the supramundane consciousness.
7. One is able to repeatedly attain the fruition by the power of one's resolution and stay longer in it.
8. When one discards the Old *Dhammas* one has already achieved, one experiences extraordinary new *Dhammas* (Insights).

Sharpening, Directing of Mindfulness and the Development of Insight

As one may realize, one cannot speak fully about the sharpening and directing of mindfulness without an idea of the development of insight knowledges. Therefore, I have mixed them up. For some clearer treatment, it is only logical to look into some salient points of these insights and the position they are in the scale of 16 levels.

1. It is unarguable that the knowledge of discrimination between mind and matter comes first since it is the door to all knowledges. The initial perception of nature as it is (*anatta*) free from concepts is just

like before diving into the water, one must first touch the surface. How can it be otherwise?

2. Next, seeing the interconnectedness naturally follows. This is covered by the second insight knowledge.
3. Then the flow of these phenomena until the point that they clearly arise and pass away, as mere processes. This is reached by the third and fourth insight knowledges.
4. The deepening and clarification of the flow as penetrative experience of the three universal characteristics. This is reached by third through fifth insight knowledges.
5. The perception of unsatisfactoriness, suffering is the process which produces detachment and dispassion from formations. This is reached by the knowledges of suffering.
6. Strong build up of momentum of this dispassion uplifts one above the formations. This is reached in 7 through 11 insight levels.
7. Maturity of insight and dispassion where one cuts off formations to the level of supramundane. This is covered by the 12 through 15 insights.
8. Reviewing of the entire process. This is reviewing knowledge.

If the teacher is aware of the development, then he can help the yogi to sharpen and direct his mind in the way of development.

e.g., First, to see things free from concepts

Next, to see the interconnectedness, conditionings of the phenomena

Then, to the three universal characteristics, and so on.

The most crucial point will be at “equanimity of formations”, leading to “conformity” knowledges. But before we go into that, there is also a point to look into the development which is mentioned as the Five Perceptions in the *Anguttara Nikaya*.

The Five Perceptions:

1. Perception of impermanence
2. Perception of suffering in impermanence
3. Perception of non-self in suffering
4. Perception of abandonment
5. Perception of dispassion

It is clear from the points made here that the three universal characteristics are interdependent and part and parcel of each other, like three sides of a triangle. It can also be seen that the development of perception of one leads to another - clearer perception of impermanence leads to clearer perception of suffering (in impermanence), which leads to clearer perception of non-self in suffering. This in turn gives clearer perception of abandonment, leading to clearer perception of dispassion, which is often synonymous with the supramundane states and *Nibbana*.

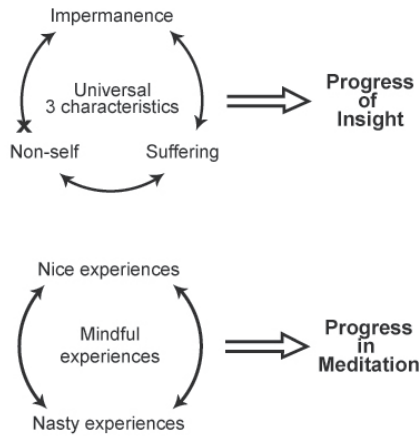


Fig. 13

Cycles within Cycles

For people who practice, the cyclic nature occurs here as everywhere. There will be good times and bad times. But as the Old Master advises, “When you are traveling on a journey, you will meet with scenic landscapes at times and just monotonous ones at other times. Still you go on! With the right method and energy, what else can happen but eventual progress?”

External conditions cannot be conducive forever. Internal conditions likewise fluctuate with the strength of faith and will. Many conditions and factors play their parts. But most important is that we have enough faith to persevere. “Patience leads to *Nibbana*”, again is another of the Old Master’s quotes. All these contribute to the cycles.

One will also notice that there will be occasions when one of the universal characteristics is more striking than the other two. These can be seen as described in the insight knowledges. For example, insights 1, 2; non-self. Insight 3; all three characteristics. Insight 4,5; impermanence. Insight

6 through 9; suffering. Insight 10; all three characteristics. Insight 11; non-self. Insight 12; one of the three characteristics. Insight 13 through 16; non-self. So, you can say that there is a cycle that runs through these three characteristics.

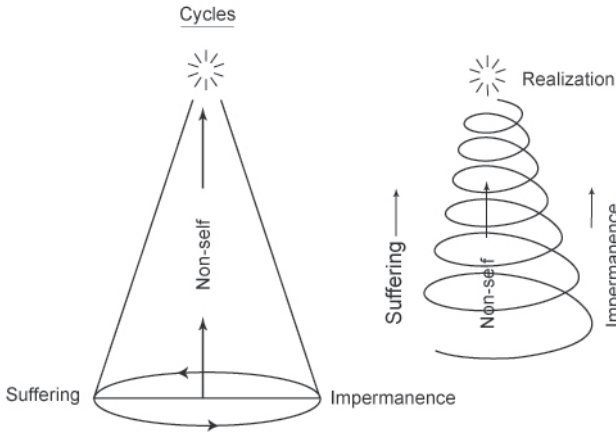


Fig. 14

This can be described by another way as a cycle between pleasant and nasty experiences. The latter would come with the suffering aspect. Again, what is important is that one makes sure that the practice of mindfulness goes on. Then, rather than running around in circles, it becomes a circling whirlwind that rises up and destroys the defilements, such as clinging. When one recognizes this cyclic nature in one's practice, then one will not be disappointed or elated. One would be determined to carry on with balanced effort.

As mentioned many times before, the three universal characteristics point to and mean one thing, namely, things as they are. Just as one commentator defines impermanence (i.e., not the characteristic/sign) as the incessant, moment-to-moment arising and dissolution of mind and

matter. He defines suffering and non-self with the same definition. This has a definite implication and instruction in the practice. It is actually an instruction to direct it to the “signless.”

Take for instance, when we direct our mindfulness to the signs of impermanence, we look into the change, flow, and fleeting nature of the mental and material phenomena. Their specific characteristics, such as hardness (as in Earth element), or pain (as in feelings), become a stepping stone. It is like looking at first to the water to watch its flow. When well directed, we flow and change with the process. The specific characteristics are no longer obvious, but the moment-to-moment change which is the beginning and end of things (i.e., fourth insight knowledge) is only what is apparent. What then is the object? We could say, the characteristics of impermanence, where the object disappears the moment it arises. As perception so further sharpened, there is only dissolution (fifth insight knowledge), which amounts to seeing “nothing”. But teachers would say that it is not real cessation. It is just that the cessation sign/aspect of conditioning (*sankhata lakkhana*) is clear. It is still part of the cycle of conditioning. It is just so subtle that it makes you think there is nothing. And so, the further sharpening and directing must go on. Even the signs are not the real objects. They are like the first objects with concepts sticking on them like the specific characteristics without the attached concepts sticking on, they are stepping stones, objects as conveniences that lead to the signless object none other than *Nibbana*, which is free from signs. To get to that point is to get that “signless concentration”.

In the case of the characteristics of suffering, when one is directed to perceive its oppressiveness, unsatisfactoriness or incompleteness, the natural response is to be detached and to let go. It brings us to something deeper, subtler or more real, which we go on to perceive its oppressiveness; it is an illusion, so let us go further. So it seems, again we do not hold onto the object whether the “suffering” comes with the specific characteristic or general characteristic/sign. The idea is to let go and be desireless and hence, approach the “desireless concentration”. Another definition given

to it is undirected. That implies a state that does not go after things. It is more than contented to just be.

Where non-self characteristic is concerned, we direct it to what is naturally that phenomenon that bears its own characteristic, to what it really is. First, knowing it as such being freed from concepts, then naturally into its specific and general characteristics. It is like using a microscope and increasing its magnification. As the magnification increases, the previous object is no longer a true picture, the new one is real. Again, objects are transcended. They are all just conveniences - to the void concentration. How does voidness come in? It can be explained in this way. When there are conditioning signs, there is always room for comparison, and this is limiting - just as a line is limited by the two end points that define it. The more complicated the objects, the more points that limit them. As for *Nibbana*, it is incomparable and not limited or circumscribed. Even when we think of a point, we think of the areas not covered by it. So, if we arrive at just that one thing which is only what is there, all limitation signs vanish. It is like one point which is not there in the first place. But one point is closer to no point than many points, and so is a convenience to arrive at what there is. And what is that one point? Just knowing things as they really are. Just knowing that one *dhamma* - which bears its own characteristic.

Hence, when all else disappears, it is like going into an unlimited space of emptiness, void. Yet it is not void, it is truth, unconditioned, timeless reality that has always been and always will be. Definitely it is not me or you! Not self!

So this is what that real directing of insight practice is. However, it is not easily understood by the beginner. The clarity and precision of this point develops as one's practices. All other practices involving clearing, strengthening and sharpening, although important and necessary, are just preparatory practices to arrive at this point. This true directing of the sharpened mindfulness is true *Vipassana*.

The Pin Point Method

The Coercive method vs. Directed method

The difference is this: One says what it is not, the other says what it is.

The Coercive method works on the basis of eliminating what one does not want. As a result, one moves closer to the objective. It is like the sheep dog guiding the sheep into the paddock with a small gate. It runs around preventing them from straying away. The result is they are guided through the gate.

This method occurs with most of the Theravadin Satipatthana practices I have come across. By noticing what is impermanent, the object passes away. By noticing what is suffering, one lets go. By noticing what is non-self, one lets go of clinging to self. The result is one keeps on recognizing conditioned formations as suffering and keeps letting go. The result is a movement towards the unconditioned.

You may say it is not direct, but it is safest. The craving mind is too ready to grasp anything of lesser value. Besides, one does not know yet what is the beyond. As they say, “We do not know who is enlightened, but we can tell who is not.” Or we may add, “When a person is enlightened, he will know, but there are those that think they are but they are not.”

The direct pin-point approach refers to the technique of pointing to the objective. It is like shooting an arrow to the bull’s eye. It is going straight to the point. Some Zen approaches are like that. We can also find many such instances in Theravadin sources.

How do we direct it at some point we do not know? The answer is we direct to points we can conceive. It is a direction. Truth is not a point. It is beyond points. But we can have one as close as we can and work from

there. We must, therefore, remember that the point is just a means to an end, and we have to stay open. It is like going to the door but not stay at it. One has to go through it.

Take the example of the *Bhaddekaratta Gatha*. The first two lines say,

*“Do not trace back the past, or wonder about the future.
The past is gone, the future yet to be reached.”*

The lines come under the coercive method. It functions in clearing and putting away.

The fourth line says,

*“But let him see the present Nature/Truth that can
be pierced by insight, invincibly, unshakably.”*

These lines are the direct-pin point approach. It brings one to watch with penetrative mindfulness the present reality - here and now.

Elsewhere in the *Sutta Nipata, Parayana Vagga*, the Buddha tells Udaya,

*“The removal of both the intense desire for sensuous thing and
the grief, the rejection of laziness and the resistance to worry.”*
(This part is the coercive instruction)

*“The purity of perfect, balanced mindfulness, built on a basis of
seeing the way things are. This is liberation knowledge, and this
is the destruction of ignorance.”*
(This part is the direct pin point approach.)

Negative and Positive Definitions

There are two types of definitions, positive and negative. Positive means what is and negative, what it is not. They correspond with the two ways with regards to the meaning. In a way, it also reflects on a basic question of existence - it is or is not.

So does truth exist or not? Of course it exists! But before we settle further into that question, we see that many definitions in the Theravadin teachings are given in the negative way. It may be because it is a translation which follows the negative prefix system, like:

alobha = *a* + *lobha*

i.e. non-attachment = not (-tive) + attachment

adosa = *a* + *dosa*

i.e. non-hatred = not(-tive) + hatred.

asankhata = *a* + *sankhata*

unconditioned = not(-tive) + conditioned.

But “*alobha*” (non-attachment) does not just mean absence of attachment. It refers to the mental quality that is opposite of attachment, i.e., detachment, contentment and letting go. Similarly, it is better to translate non-hatred as acceptance or amity, depending on the situation. The case here is to say that there are two sides of the coin. Even when given a word with a negative definition, one can still get a positive definition from it.

However, in the case of the unconditioned it gets difficult because it is something that most people have not experienced. To jump into a conclusion how it is like as an experience, one would most probably make a mistake. So it is safe to think what it is not. But we should not stop at that. We have to move towards what it is, that is, direct our mindfulness

and attention to get even closer to it.

In the direct pin-point method, one gets the direction given in the conceptualized meaning of the truth as endorsed by the word first and then directs the mindfulness to experience it.

For example, there is the recollection of peace (*upasamanussati*). It has been described in the *Mahamalunkya Sutta* how the monk meditates..... it is certainly a case of the directed method.

Hence, to repeat, one can try to grasp a conceptual idea of reality, of *Nibbana*, the unconditioned, and direct the pure insight of mindfulness to it, and then let it develop in that direction. If one has already had that experience, one would have grasped the impression set in by the “reviewing knowledge” on emergence from the supramundane states. These are signs left behind by the ultimate. Recognizing and following them bring one ever more closer and familiar with it. With frequent emergence and reviewing, many of these can be found.

Here is a list of some of them:

- a. Impermanence
 - cessation (with arising)
 - cessation (without arising)
 - incomparable
- b. Non-self
 - present moment
 - present nature
 - just presence
 - everlasting presence
 - pure existence
 - just this
 - unconditioned

- c. Suffering
 - detachment
 - completely letting go
 - peace
 - freedom
 - peace from conditioning/freedom
 - ultimate peace/freedom

You will notice that I have initiated this with the concepts connected with the three universal characteristics, and these have reality as backing. They can develop further with subtler concepts leading to the goal with also realities backing it up. It finally ends up like a line becoming shorter until it becomes a point, the point becoming subtler until it reaches beyond itself. Its multiformity to uniformity and from uniformity to the beyond.

What is this point? It is a natural phenomenon, reality or truth, which has its own characteristic. Depending on the sharpness of the insight mindfulness, it will be experienced differently. With open, perfect, balanced mindfulness, the unconditioned takes over. That is purely *vipassana* and its object. We should not even differentiate that! The idea is to lead the mind further and closer to the goal. Once this process has been built up, it goes by itself to the target. One then has to leave all concepts, no matter how subtle and fine. The ultimate, unconditioned cannot be defined precisely; it can only be! Even this is saying too much!

It would not be wrong to say that the pin-point method, to work best, must have at least been fairly established in the workings of the classical coercive approach. Firstly, one does not just fall for any nice experience as the goal. One lets everything go of whatever one meets with. Everything comes under intense scrutiny.

Secondly, the driving force away from formations and towards the unconditioned is very strong. What one needs is someone to point with precision the direction, or to remove that obstacle one overlooked. One can also say that at the doorstep to liberation, many run to and fro, missing the pointless point, gateless gate. At this juncture, this method is most useful. For beginners, I would advise first a thorough drilling of the traditional time tested system of satipatthana mindfulness practice.

Perception (*sanna*), Attention (*manasikara*), and Volition (*cetana*)

Perhaps this should have also brought up in the earlier section of the book. The understanding involves also the very basics of the practice. Here it reaches an acme. These three, when taken together, involve mental experience, mental direction and mental control, in that order.

Perception is like the sensor and receptor. Attention is like the rudder or pivot; volition is like the driver or controller. Meditation is when all these three are taken all at once. However, people usually take them one at a time. For example, in beginning, one wills (volition) mindfulness to arise, then attends (attention) to the object (breath), and then perceives what and how it is. At later stages, volition and attention is set into an “automode” and what we get are the experiences brought in by perception.

It is important that the volition sets up the proper and precise attention. With lack of understanding, one falls short. Hence, we say the volitions are that which lead one out of the cycles, conditioning (*vutthagami kusala*). Perception gives the impression left from experience. From that the rational mind that returns later can reflect, judge and conclude wisely if needed to, to establish the practice further. But at the critical stage, attention is the one that determines.

What is interesting here is the factor of attention (*manasikara*). It is the mental factor that directs the consciousness to the object. There is, however, more to this. It also brings out other mental states that are connected with the object. If you think of the ball in the game of roulette, it spins and settles onto a slot with a number. That slot can be considered as the object. The ball is the consciousness. At the stationary state, the states or mental factors involved are pivoted onto the slot i.e. the object. Attention will then be the pivot, the central point which when rotated, determines the other conditions.

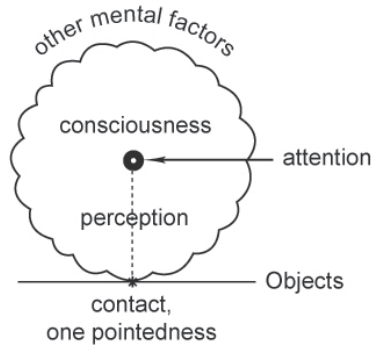


Fig. 15

Hence, the *Sabbasava Sutta*, a discourse by the Buddha recorded in the middle length collection of the Pali canon, describes proper/wise-attention or improper/unwise-attention in two aspects.

1. With respect to whether wholesome or unwholesome states arise when attending to an object. That is, the criteria is object based.
2. With respect to arising of doubts, wrong views, or right views and realization. That is, it is mental-result based.

Knowing thus the pin-point method identifies and connects with this pivotal position of attention and volitionally sets it into motion to produce the genuine experience of the ultimate.

Again, taking that the basics have been accomplished (i.e., mindfulness is strong, continuous and sharp, the insight practice, machinery set forth, etc.), one just directs the mind to know things as they are. It is as one would follow the Master's advice to Mettagu:

*“In every direction there are things you know and recognize,
above, below, around and within.
Leave them: do not look to them for rest or relief.
Do not let consciousness dwell on the products of existence,
on things that come and go.” (coercive)*

Or to Jatukanni

*“Lose greed for pleasure.
See how letting go of the world is peacefulness.
There is nothing that you need hold onto or push away.
Dry up the remains of your past, have nothing for your future.
If you do not cling to the present, then you go from place to place in
peace.”*
(directed – to peace)

Or to Udaya:

*“The removal of both intense desire for sensuous things and grief, the
rejection of laziness and the resistance to worry (coercive)
The purity of a perfect, balanced mindfulness, built on a basis of seeing
the way things are! This is liberation, knowledge and the denunciation
of ignorance”*
(directed)

That perfect, balanced mindfulness is perfect because it perceives sharply and precisely without concepts, things as they really are. It is balanced because it is so strong and stable. It is just this!

Whenever I discover something new in the course of meditation, I am amazed how foolish I am to overlook them and as a result I miss many points and make many errors. They are presumptions we have and even though we do not think about it and its presence in the mind is enough to thwart some important realization. They often concern the basics of ideas and existence that we have taken for granted, and I think these are often the mainstay for latent defilements to flower.

One such matter is the relationship of the mind and its object, a basic conditioning that occurs in our existence. A question often pops up, asking is the mind and object different? Can the mind take the mind as an object? These seemingly entertaining metaphysical questions are actually inquiring into the nature of existence. On one occasion I realized the mind that we can know is only known as an object. What of the mind then? In metaphysics, the answer is that it is not possible to know the consciousness that is presently knowing its object. When and why, the answer given to me is that it cannot perform both the function of knowing the object and the object. I suppose I could continue to ask why, and the answer will be what my teacher used to reply, “Go on practicing/watching and it will be clear to you.” The point I make here is that it cannot be taken for granted. It is because of taking these basic elements for granted that we do not really look deep into them, and this keeps the Cycle of Samsara turning. And not looking deeper also amounts to negligence and allowing delusion to work its evils. To go beyond the mind we need to break this barrier!

Another such matter concerns the question of existence and non-existence. I had read many times about this mentioned in scriptures, but had taken it for granted. For example, the Buddha says that to say that the *Tathagata* (Buddha) exist after death is one extreme view. And to say he does not is the other extreme view. For many a time, I considered it a matter for *arahats* for near-*arahats* to understand. But actually, it is important to have a right view on the state that is close to realization.

To cling on to wrong ideas of eternalism or nihilism can close the door leading to realization shut. “Eel wriggling”, a term for a philosophical avoiding of the issue is also not the answer. These basic concepts based on ignorance run deep in the deluded mind patterns. One has to break through it (by having an open mind on this matter), and see into it as it is (by having that perfect signless, mindful concentration).

To illustrate this point: One stuck on eternalist ideas will always look for an object with its signs. By doing so, he cannot be freed from conditioned formations. Someone once said, “I cannot understand how the limited, conditioned consciousness experiences something unconditioned.” It goes beyond itself. Thus, such limitation he made for himself disallows it!

In the other case, the nihilistic idea will render cessation as an idea that denies all realities. As someone once said after a talk on *Nibbana*, “This is dangerous teaching. If cessation is good, I might as well jump into the river and drown myself.” The idea she had grasped onto was a wrong one, a conceptual cessation. To know that reality called “cessation”, one has to experience it. Again, the negative definition is taken without the positive one. In extreme cases, one may become suicidal!

So for that pinpoint to be increasingly precise, one has to keep a look out to eliminate these very subtle assumptions and outlooks that is a barrier and conceals the nature of reality. It is so easy to say I do not have any concepts. I just know things as they are. I can also say as a reply to that, many a times I thought I was not thinking, but later I discovered that I was!

One more thing needs to be mentioned on the pin point method. Because of that one pointed directing, the once distant objective is now brought close. The energy aroused can be tremendous. If not careful, one

can become impatient and obsession sets in. That is why the extremely equanimous and detached attitude is needed. When it gives in to some anxiety and craving, it is best to switch back to the classical coercive approach.

Chapter 6

**NIBBANA**

Even the beginner ought to have an understanding of what *Nibbana* is. It constitutes Right View. To be specific, Right View of Truths. It is a view from which all our thoughts and thus activities of life, when based upon it, will be also right. For meditators, that view will be clearer as they progressed and they will not swerve away from it.

For the beginner, we are, however, speaking of right “idea”, a concept about it, like a mark on the map. This is what this chapter is about. If one cannot yet know exactly what it is, at least one knows clearly what it is not. It will become clearer as one’s meditation progresses, when the many other points leading to it have been experienced and defined.

But *Nibbana* is experienced only by those who have practiced far enough to have developed such insight. It is a truth, a reality that concepts do not reach. It cannot be seen, heard, smelt, tasted or touched by any of the five sense doors. It can only be known by a very concentrated and sharp mind that is well directed.

Firstly, one ought to know that the Buddha himself did define and talk about it. It appears frequently in his discourses. For example, “*Nibbana* is the highest bliss.” Some people even believe that there should not be anything said about it! How strange not to tell others what the goal means! The late Mahasi Sayadaw had a book, *The Nature of Nibbana*, published. What I hope to do here is to give a clear idea to beginners or those more than beginners, to help them in their practice.

It must be said that *Nibbana* is an ultimate truth. That is, it is not just an abstract idea. It is a phenomenon, nature that can be directly experienced, here and now. In other words, it is not a concept. It is more real than you and me (which are personal concepts). More real than form, space and time, more real than philosophies. When one has not experienced it does not mean it does not exist.

Secondly, it is an unconditioned reality. That is to say, it does not need anything else for it to exist. It also means that it does not have a past, future or present. It is timeless. The closest we can say is “present”. But the present moment too is a concept. That is why it has often been called “deathless” or “unborn”. Things conditioned arise and pass away. Such conditioned natures are not of *Nibbana*, because its nature is unconditioned.

Here again is where definitions often fall short in giving more precise ideas. “Deathless” and “unborn” are negative definitions. It just means absence of death and birth, born of the process of becoming. It does not tell you the opposite, positive quality it is supposed to convey. The understandable reason is not to give a wrong idea. It will serve best for the time being to remove wrong ideas.

Hence, the texts do say, for example, *Nibbana* comes from *Ni + vanna*, i.e., absence of craving. Thus also,

Samsara is *sankhara* (formations),

Nibbana is cessation

Samsara is relinking

Nibbana is non-relinking

Samsara is accumulation

Nibbana is non-accumulating

Samsara is conditioned

Nibbana is unconditioned

Samsara is arising
Nibbana is non-arising
Samsara is occurrence
Nibbana is non-occurrence

Another way we can justify the negative definition is that one really does not know what it is unless one has experienced it. On the other hand, if the very opposite qualities of *Samsara* are pointed out, we get a better idea. We get also the direction to proceed. Hence, we recognize the nature of craving and move away from it. So too, we can move away from formations, relinking, accumulation and conditioning. What is best to do is recognizing clearly that mindfulness, when it has become insight, will also be liberating.

However, when speaking of *Nibbana* as an ultimate reality (*paramattha dhamma*), it has been given the characteristic of peace. When I first came across this, I was pleasantly surprised. It is something very positive compared to other definitions. It also explains clearly that it is a peace because the incessant arising and passing away of mind and material formations have ceased. Like a restless sea, all waves cease. Like a loud din in a factory, all becomes silent.

This is further emphasized when it is spoken of as happiness of peace (*santisukha*) as compared to happiness of feelings (*vedayita sukha*). A question that can arise will be, “How can it be happiness when there are no feelings?” Feelings can be pleasurable, painful or indifferent. While happiness is certainly not pain and it is usually identified with pleasurable feelings, we can also accept as happiness, indifferent feelings as a peaceful kind (i.e., wholesome). Yet it is still feelings. One way to understand this is the insight that “pleasure is pain”, as described in the *Satipatthana* commentary on feelings. In this sense, feeling is a kind of sensation, which on looking closely, is quite close to pain. So when it ceases, there is an obvious relief. Like a burden uplifted, like a thorn removed. Yet it all sounds like a negative definition. It ought not to if you take it as “peace”.

Happiness here is broadened to cover areas outside feelings, which mean beyond the mind, as an ordinary man understands it. Whatever, it is certainly encouraging. It is not just nothing, which, by the way, is a “nothingness” concept.

This brings us to the three types of *Nibbana* mentioned earlier, when referring to the three types of liberation:

1. Signless *Nibbana* (*Animitta*) - An experience, existence of non-presence of marks, signs, for descriptions or comparisons: experiences impermanence clearly and is done by one dominant in faith.
2. Non-Grasping *Nibbana* (*Appanahita*) - An experience, existence of letting go, non doing, not creating: experiences suffering clearly, and is done by one dominant in concentration.
3. Voidness *Nibbana* (*Sunnata*) - An experience, existence that is void, void of self, perfect emptiness: experiences non-self clearly and is done by one dominant in wisdom.

The “doors” are impermanence, suffering and non-self: the three Universal Truths, first at the conditioned, *samsaric* level. A deep insight into these reveals that they are the doors and so, they can be called the signless door, the desireless door or the empty door. They give you the idea that the door is an empty space, which one is barred by one’s own limitations and corruptions. Hence, the Buddha’s quote: “Opened are the doors of the Deathless for those who have faith.”

Yet another thing we can draw from this is that the universal characteristic that is clearest prior to entry into the supramundane affects the perceptions of the reviewing that occurs after that. And since which characteristic comes clearest is dependent on the faculty and temperament of the individual, different individuals will have a somewhat different reviewed experience.

So we can ask, “What then is common to them?” And I would draw the conclusion that although descriptions would vary somewhat, the unconditioned peace freed from suffering is what I would look for. By unconditioned (*asankhata*), I mean no beginning, middle, ending as a negative definition, and as a positive definition, just “that” presence, which when devoid of all descriptions, is a perfectly peaceful void. This too, I must add, is already a concept emerging from the reviewing process.

Once when I was studying Buddhist metaphysics (*abhidhamma*), my teacher told me to pay special attention and so I did. He was explaining the thought processes involving the supramundane, *Nibbanic* object. What struck me was when the process has run through, the supramundane object enters into the life continuum mind stream. From this, I concluded that it is already inside you, and once inside, you cannot lose it. How that is so, and what more it can do is what I will find out later.

First, there is the point to make as to *Nibbana* as an object and *Nibbana* as a truth/reality/phenomenon. Again, the same teacher made an amusing statement in this area. He advised us, “If someone asks you whether *Nibbana* is mind or matter, you answer “mind”. If they ask you again, “Really?”, you answer, “No.”

I also remember once in Tasmania, that after coming out of my meditation, I realized that all that we know is known as just “objects”, including the mind as we know it.

Objects can be described as a type of conditioning, a relationship. The existence of the consciousness is dependent on it. It is like the walking stick without which the old man would fall. It is like the hook on the wall, without which the coat will drop. And this object can be anything, as I am told, and which also appears in the commentary (*atthasalini*), except the mind (at that instant) that knows it. When asked why, the best answer I got so far was from one of the most notable monks in Thailand, who says the mind at that moment cannot perform two roles

- the object and the knowing. I gather that the conditioning factor and the conditioned cannot be the same; otherwise, conditioning itself is meaningless.

The *Nibbana* that is the phenomena, reality, and that which is known is an object. It can be known by the supramundane consciousness (path or fruition consciousness) as well as the sense-sphere consciousness associated with wisdom. This means that when we speak of it as a phenomenon, we still speak of it as an object directly or indirectly. Without the consciousness can we speak of anything? No! Can we experience anything?

Nibbana, as we learn in *Abhidhamma*, strictly speaking, is not mind. It does not know an object. It differs from matter in that it is not impermanent or suffering. It shares the third characteristic - non-self, with all phenomena. Hence:

All formations are impermanent
All formations are suffering
All *Dhammas* (phenomena) are non-self.

And then, I came across people saying that the freed mind is *Nibbana*. This is clearly not the *Theravadin* position. In the *Mahatanhasankhaya Sutta*, the Buddha clearly admonishes Bhikkhu Sati about his wrong views concerning the permanence of the consciousness. This idea is certainly not new. Many other sects of later traditions also agree with the permanence of a pure, freed consciousness. With due respect to their experiences, I still fall into the category of those who believe that *Nibbana* is not the consciousness. It is the cessation of consciousness and the other four aggregates.

Then, one may argue about the “supramundane path and fruition” consciousness. They too are impermanent. That is why one cannot stay in the attainment of fruition forever. Then, one may ask regarding the functional consciousness of an *arabat*. They too are impermanent. That

is why the *arahat* finally passes into *parinibbana* (final decease of *arahat*). So, there is the twofold *Nibbana* that has been expounded:

1. *Nibbana* with aggregates remaining
2. *Nibbana* without aggregates remaining.

It is clear in the second case, the aggregates of the *arahat*, who when without anymore craving for existence, will cease and never to arise, giving no further birth again. But what of the first? This type of *Nibbana* is also said to include the *Nibbana* concerning the other three sanctified individuals with some defilements not removed, and so includes their paths and fruitions. In this latter case, it would have to occur as an object. Another possibility is the state of cessation that occurs with the *arahat* or *anagami* possessing the eight attainments that can reach to the attainment of cessation (*Nirodha samapatti*), where the mind ceases without trace.

Could there be anything more than that? If there is, it will be known by people who have crossed to the other shore. Those are matters of the beyond.

What is important for most people therefore, is the path leading to the fourth Noble Truth - the Path. As for the third Noble Truth, Cessation, the Buddha describes it as cessation of craving without remainder (of craving). By including the qualification of “without remainder”, it means the state of the *arahatta*. It aims only for the highest. What of the lesser levels? Here, Mahasi Sayadaw of Burma refers to them as “inferior cessations”. Then can one say the Noble Truth of Cessation is different from *Nibbana*? I would like to think that at some point words fail, concepts complicate. So to emphasize this point again, the practice to purify the mind is what is most important to put an end to all suffering. *Nibbana* and consciousness are words based on experience, and so what they are understood as will change as, experience deepens. Eventually, if one goes far enough, one will experience the Supramundane.

Chapter 7



PURIFICATION AND TRANSFORMATION

There are two classical works on meditation, which have been handed down, called *The Path of Freedom (Vimutti Magga)*, and *The Path of Purification (Visuddhi Magga)*. Today in the West, they may have preference for the first title. As for the second, “Purification”, many seem to think it as puritanical. The dislike may be more cultural than anything else. Personally, I do not mind. It may perhaps be more acceptable if one thinks purification in the sense of removal of harmful elements. In this sense, it is more like healing.

The teachings of the Buddha is a pragmatic one. Suffering, like illness, arises from causes. When these are eradicated (i.e., purified), then suffering is eradicated and in its place there is happiness - the finest form being described as peace.

Purification, we are told, occurs with the three levels of practice.

1. Morality/virtue removes the defilements that occur at the level of speech, bodily actions, as well as those connected mind states, sometimes termed transgressive, outbursting or obsessive defilements.
2. Concentration removes the defilements that occur on the mental level.
3. Insight removes the defilements that occur at the latent levels.

You will notice that only through insight that the defilements are eradicated altogether. How? If you understand the nature of insight,

then you will also know its cutting, purifying function. Such insight that totally purifies is obviously that which comes with insight meditation.

Latencies? What are these? Or rather, how do they lie latent? The mind is not solid. So, it is not hidden like the seeds buried underneath the earth. They are latent in the conditioned nature of things.

We are told of two types of latencies:

1. Latency in the Object

As has been mentioned, contact gives rise to feelings. Feelings give rise to other mental states, such as unwholesome ones. The attractive object conditions the arising of pleasant feelings, which in turn brings up craving. Similarly, the repulsive object brings up aversion, and the neutral object, delusion. We connect and relate to different objects in different ways. Two people may meet the same person but different mental states will arise. When they separate, such mental states return to latent states. So we can say that they lie as a latent condition in the object.

It is not difficult to understand how these latencies can be removed. Every time we are mindful when the object appears in our minds, it changes the habit or tendency. It is like an unseen momentum or force that is reduced every time it appears, and we pluck it out. In psychology, it is called desensitization. In ordinary language, we say we work with it. But in meditation, deeper levels of concentration and mindfulness bring into view the more subtle objects and their underlying latencies, see into its impermanence and let go.

2. Latency in the Stream

The stream of life continuum consciousness flows from the beginning of one's life, changing moment-to-moment until its end. It is replaced immediately at death by another and so on. If delusion and the craving

for existence are still present, not uprooted, it goes on. This leads many to think that the consciousness is permanent. Or it may be something in it that is.

Where then is anger when you are not angry? Where then is craving when you are asleep? In a *sutta*, the Buddha takes the example of a baby. He says that one sees it as without defilements, and yet it is latent in the baby. Given conducive conditions, it arises. He attributes it to the habitual tendencies built up. It is a force, a momentum, when built up can arise when conditions are right. Just as volatile fuels will burst into flames at the right temperature, but the fuel cannot be called fire.

They are, one may say, in the nature of the mind, like our characteristics are in the DNA, except we are speaking purely of the mental levels. Its continuity is linked with the conditions that are responsible for the formations flowing in a process. It is a process, which we build up time concepts, the cycle of birth and death.

To break through this is to break through the cycle, as well as concepts of words and ideas about impermanence, suffering, and non-self. Seeing through these natures, delusion is abandoned, and with it the defilements that flow latent with the stream.

TRANSFORMATION

Transformation indicates change from one form to another, as more defilements are removed. It allows the growth of wholesome beautiful states of mind. Just as when weeds are removed, the crops get more nutrients and grow stronger. It is interesting to note that in the physical world, they are all reducible to material elements. As for the mind, they are reducible to the basic elements of conditioning.

The major transformations occur when the supramundane levels are reached. That is when the mind has reached the unconditioned, which affects a transformation based on its unchanging nature.

Insights must be practiced to produce the purifying and transforming function. To do this, one has to bring the deepest levels of experience and knowledge right to one's daily life. Failing in this is like living in the two worlds of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. In psychology, the word is "split".

PURIFICATIONS

The description of the 16 insight knowledges is often judged based on description of experiences. That is because it is experiential knowledge and not thinking. But experiences by themselves are not necessarily insights. And so mental states, faculties and their development must be first considered, like the depth of concentration, the sharpness of mindfulness, the intuitive understanding, the purifying results. All these and more have to be considered. We cannot make a judgement of one's stage based on a description of an experience. Many experiences, which are not insight, can seem like those that are, and these include people going "high" on drugs! Besides, experiences overlap in insight knowledges, for example, strong equanimity may occur in levels lower than stage 11 (equanimity of formations). In another example, seeing bright lights do occur in the third insight knowledge, but can also occur plentiful in tranquility visualizations, or even in one's hallucinations!

This brings us to the point that insight is a means to an end - it purifies the mind of defilements that are the real causes of suffering. Little wonder, therefore, that the 16 insight knowledges themselves come under gradations of purifications. This is their important function and it should be noted as the important criteria for progress.

There are seven purifications and they are correlated with the 16 insight knowledges.

Seven Purifications

1. Purity of morals - when restraint is fulfilled
2. Purity of mind - access and fixed (absorption) concentration
3. Purity of view - first insight knowledge
4. Purity of doubts - second insight knowledge
5. Purity of what is/is not path - third and immature fourth insight knowledge
6. Purity of knowledge/vision of the way - fourth (mature) through to the 12th insight knowledge
7. Purity of knowledge and vision - four supramundane paths - 14th insight knowledge

Note that the 13th insight falls between the sixth and seventh purification, and the 15th and 16th are not mentioned, but can be included in the seventh.

Purification: what does this mean? It means to cleanse one of the causes of suffering. Once the Buddha said, “Dust is not dirt....greed, anger and delusion is dirt.” After a little thought, it is obvious that dust is merely an element. The root cause of sufferings is mental, and they cause sufferings life after life. If our *kammic* forces are good enough, even diseases do not come near. If our meditation is good, many diseases can be healed. Purification can be seen as a healing and transformation process, from suffering to peace, from pain to comfort, from chaos to order, from turmoil to harmony, from darkness to light.

Having heard of the insight knowledges, one tends to judge and jump into conclusions which one falls into. It is not easy, and mistakes are more possible than accuracy. Besides, one can become conceited. A better way is to find out how much defilement is put away, and how purified one's mind is.

Purity of Morals

The text speaks of this in four aspects:

1. Virtue regarding restraint according to the *patimokkha*.

The *patimokkha* are rules for Buddhist monks. For the layman, there are his lay precepts - 5, 8 or more. Purity involves the observation of these rules without breaking or tarnishing them. If so, one has to undergo confession or even purification in procedures as well as reinstatements.

2. Virtue regarding sense faculties

Sense faculties are the six senses; eyes, ears.....mind. If unmindful, they respond negatively with defilements to the sense stimuli. One has always to be on guard.



*Henk's finger, Den Hague,
Netherlands 2007*

This story about a Dutch boy who saved his village from flooding by plugging his finger in the dyke is well known all over the world. But it seems it was invented by someone in America, probably a migrant. The Thai meditation teacher in Netherlands, Mettavihari used to give this as an example of mindfulness guarding the sense doors.

3. Virtue consisting of purity of livelihood

For a monk, there are strict rules to insure his life is kept by proper means. He should not earn his livelihood by means such as business ventures. For laymen, any harmful occupations, such as dealing with weapons, poison, killing, etc., which involves unwholesome action come under wrong livelihood.

4. Virtue connected with the use of requisites

Monks usually wisely reflect on the wise before and after the use of their requisites - robes, alms food, dwelling, and medicine. It helps to overcome any attachments that may arise. This is usually not done by the laity, although they can do so with benefits.

Of the four, a manual of meditation singles out the second, the restraint of senses as the indicator of purity of morals. The other three are also aspects whereby virtue can be practised but do not totally exclude the arising of defilements. When the six senses are well guarded then the mind is also kept pure.

With purity of virtue, one's life is blessed, one's life is blameless, in harmony, and in order with the world around him. He is in a position to build up a great kingdom of peace within him. His way to that great peace is open.

Purity of Mind

Some degree of tranquility and concentration is necessary before insight can arise. The mind has to be clear and calm, like clear, calm water, before we can see what is underneath. The texts define it as access or absorption concentration. It means that the hindrances, defilements, are kept away. That is one, if not its most important function. Such a mind is powerful enough to execute tasks that lie ahead. One is able to remain happy and

peaceful in otherwise stressful situations. In fact, that happiness born of detachment is more blissful, satisfying and beneficial than the sensual pleasures.

Access concentration is near absorption. Absorption, or fixed concentration, is full unification, merging of the mind into its object. The fixation enables the mind to keep its purity over an extended period of time. Pure insight meditation usually referred to as momentary concentration, falls under access level. To reach these levels, some undertake purely concentration meditations first and then switches to insight cultivation. It is also possible to begin with pure insight meditation. With the continuity of mindfulness, one is able to reach access concentration.

Purity of View

All wrong views are said to stem from the wrong view (clinging to an opinion that is contrary to Reality) of self (*sakkaya ditthi*) that there is an everlasting core, which is the person. The presence of this wrong view fortifies all negative tendencies, which also stem from delusion and craving. The purification of views removes all these. It is like removing one's tinted glasses to look at the world again with new light. It is strange but true, that for some there is no wrong view, but they also have "no view". So do they need to purify it? They still have to, for there still exists the possibility and it is said to be as a latent tendency.

The purification of view occurs at the first insight knowledge, when one is able to discern clearly the nature of mind and matter. This is to say that one is able to see into the reality behind all the concepts of person, time and space. There are just these natural qualities and characteristics. The concepts of person, time and space are built up from them. They are like shadows, like forms and shapes when clouds congregate. Seeing through all these, defilements become weaker, the wholesome qualities increases. Without that thorn of ever having to assert to assure and protect the illusion of a self, one is much happier and at peace. From here, one's way into insight practice begins.

Purity of Overcoming Doubts

This purification is said to occur with the second insight knowledge of conditioning. As a continuation of the preceding knowledge, one is able to see the interconnectedness of the ultimate realities. Their conditional relationship as to the causes and effects are the very things to explain why and what happen in the world, as to what is past, present and future. There can be no paradox here, as there are no concepts.

Seeing into this, the mind overcomes doubts as to where the answer lies with regards to the true nature of the world. In place of doubts, faith becomes stronger. One is also able to trace the inner causes and results to make better decisions. One ceases to blame oneself or others for any errors. One does not concern oneself with matters of praise and blame. What matters now is just the practice of the Noble Path.

Purity of What is/is not Path

At the stage of comprehension and immature fourth knowledge, there is a build up of concentration. This gives rise to many beautiful experiences. There is a natural tendency to have attachment for these. So here is a phase where the finer defilements (*upakkilesa*) have their opportunity to cast their fine nets. With the presence of concentration, it can be quite vicious when it takes completely over. Recognizing these, one purifies one's mind of these finer, subtler defilements that accompany blissful meditative states. Only when these are overcome can the mind develop further insights.

Purity of Knowledge and Vision of the Way

This purification occurs as one passes through the nine insight knowledges, from the fourth to the twelfth. As one's perception and insight into the three universal characteristics deepen, the mind becomes more purified.

Problem arises because of the ignorance of the true nature of existence as indicated by the three universal characteristics. All latent defilements also spring from this. So, it is purification as one moves farther along the way of insight that is beyond all concepts.

Purity of Knowledge and Vision

The purification at the supramundane paths is a landmark in this function. Here is where radical destruction occurs. Certain defilements then no longer arise at the mind stream. More are uprooted with successive paths until they are completely overcome. It has to do with the supramundane nature of the object on the consciousness. With the arising of light, the spell of eternal darkness is broken. With this connection, there is but one way to go, and there is no turning back. The prize is a freedom and peace that is beyond all conditioning. It is always there!

THE SIMPLE MAN'S CRITERIA OF INSIGHT PROGRESS

By “simple”, I do not mean foolish or dull. I certainly do not include the “complicated”. In the latter case, one creates more problems than need be, suffering when it should be purification instead. These are people who crave impatiently for results. After making some progress they get terribly attached to them. But often, it cannot be helped. It comes with innate tendencies; the materialistic culture nurtures it. One even goes to the extent of projecting his progress. “There are 16 insight knowledges. If I get two in one retreat, then I will make it in eight retreats...” After sometime he decides that if he progresses in 1/2 an insight he should be glad. Even this is asking too much!

I remember how I could clearly and neatly place my experiences when I first came across the teachings on the insight knowledges. After some time, I noticed I could not do that with most that I came across. Fortunately, I was quite simple then. I just carried on at times by faith,

at other times I noticed an increase in my understanding of the three universal characteristics. But after teaching for some years, I met many “complicated” people; therefore I decided to draw out another set of criteria for progress.

It is only natural to expect progress. Faith and hope come hand-in-hand. How much is too much? How little is too little? A healthy set of criteria can solve the issue!

1. Methodology

I was amazed one day when a young man started complaining of no progress after just one sitting. Surely one has to be more than a little patient to get results.

If one is a beginner, then one must first get the basics right. While giving initial instructions, the teacher may miss out a couple of points. The listener also leaves out or misinterprets another couple of points of what have been said. By the time he practices more points are left out, instead he supplements with his own, perhaps from somewhere else. So it takes some time just to get across the basic techniques and ideas.

I often tell beginner not to expect any blissful concentrated states of mind, much less startling enlightenments. Instead, they will most likely encounter bouts of sleepiness, followed by a heavy traffic of restless thoughts and then by pain. Actually, that is a discovery by itself - as to how much need one has for meditation. However, if one begins to learn something of one's mind states and how to handle them better, it is real progress.

For example, the first thing is whether one is mindful or not. Just knowing this, is a test of the technique. It will make a great difference in one's life. Then, there is the difference between concentration and

mindfulness. This determines the fork on the path, whether you walk the way of insight or pure tranquility. By then you would have some level of concentration. The point of getting the technique right involves familiarity and accuracy in recognizing the mental states. If you want gold, you have to look for its ore first then you can proceed to extract it from the dirt and then purify it further. So get the basics right and this also means knowing why. Unfortunately, not all teachers are willing to explain. Some will say that you must put the instructions into practice first before you ask, and that may mean some time; hopefully your faith and patience do not wear out before that.

Still, you cannot expect the teacher to tell you everything. There are time constraints and individual limitations. So we try several teachers. We can learn from many things, including mosquitoes and flies (who are great teachers for patience)...and I must also mention Death! So to a great extent, we rely on ourselves. In this respect, common sense plays an important role. If you can get hold of some good literature on the subject it will be a great help.

Personally, one of the main factors helping me in my practice is asking the reason why I do such things, why do I come across such experiences, what are these experiences? The inquiring mind is a precursor of wisdom. From there, I have discovered countless techniques to deal with various situations. Therefore, when one has an increasing bag full of genuine methods, then one can be said to be progressing.

2. Increase of Pure States of Mind/Decrease of Unwholesome States

When the basic exercises are done quite well, one would expect an increase of mindfulness. Then one knows this quality of mind, which will slowly grow to be one's best guide and teacher. In the Venerable Ananda's own words:

*“The friend has gone, the master too,
There is no friend like this
Mindfulness with regards to the body.”*

People usually judge their progress based on how good a concentration they have. Beginners must beware of that without mindfulness, one may actually be developing wrong concentration which will be worse than before they started, especially so with the pure insight vehicle, where objects keep changing. What is stressed is the continuity of mindfulness, which serves the function of purification while maintaining a constant watch on changing phenomena. This stance is important for a certain development of the path of insight, because it is so easy to fall into the blissful states of pure tranquil concentrations when change is not obvious and sharp when attending to a sole object. So I always advise beginner not to pay much attention to concentration, but to mindfulness. Objects come and go, mindfulness must continue to flow. Being able to do this, the mindfulness makes the mind obedient, flexible, and then strong. Then the deeper levels of concentration can sink in, and when it does it will be deep and it will bring forth insight. This also means that the purity of mind and the decrease of unwholesome states will be obvious not only in one's retreat but also in daily life.

3. Better Understanding of One's Practice

By better understanding, I mean one begins to get some initial insights, that is, what non-self is about, what the three characteristics is about, clear at least to be freed from doubts and wrong views. One need not be able to pin point with accuracy, which level it falls under. One need not be able to analyze them into subtle metaphysical categories. One need not be able to recollect past lives! Knowing thus little-by-little, these initial knowledges add up. It is based on these that the higher one's develop. The wider one's base of basic experience, which are the building blocks for the pyramid, the higher one can construct the structure.

4. New Experiences

Having new experience does not necessarily indicate progress. Depending on what the experience is, it may be something worse. That is why I have put it after the first three items. Once you have some understanding whether an experience is good or not, then new experiences reveal. Then you know that even if you are not reaching a higher peak, then at least you are adding to the mass.

Every new experience indicates a new connection or avenue of development. These new avenues suggest new techniques. For example, while doing some tranquility exercises, I noticed how it easily switches to insight practice. And every type of tranquility objects contribute to certain aspects of insight practice, for instance, light visualizations brighten the mind and so too clarify insight objects. Loving kindness flow calms and directs an easier flow when feelings are used as objects.

Therefore, I must say that it is important to understand one's experiences. More so if they are strong and strange. Many teachers will advise one not to think about it. Thinking brings out concepts and restlessness. In the case of restlessness it is true. But it is also true that one needs to know what is going on, especially when a good guide is absent. One ought to know when to and when not to think! So when you have concluded that it is a result of deeper levels of concentration and insight, then you have reason to rejoice, but not to become complacent.

5. Transformation of Character

One of the first things to notice of one who has taken up meditation seriously is that his character changes for the better. Many have abandoned their vices if not completely, then at least to a satisfactory level. The most obvious mental state to be reduced will be anger. Things like attachments are more sticky. The more stubborn one's will take time to loosen their grip. Much has to do with how much one applies the practice into daily life.

As an example, one man gave up 10 years of smoking after a ten day retreat. When asked why he did not before, he answered that no one told him to. In another case, a man remembered his wedding anniversary after many years, during his first time in meditation.

Mindfulness is a close relative of wise attention, and therefore it plays a key role in the arising of all wholesome states - in other words, all good things in life. For one who is always mindful, virtues develop and vices are abandoned. It may take time, and it eventually will.

Yet another misunderstanding is that people think that people who practice insight meditation turn cold and robotic. It is true that newcomers to a retreat find themselves among zombie-like creatures. That is because they are here to be seriously meditating, not socializing.

The practice brings out all good states. The insight derived is insight into suffering. Having seen suffering in oneself, one naturally sees it in others. Compassion follows. Having found happiness with practice, one naturally wishes it for others. That is loving kindness. It is also true that there will be temperaments that tend to be aloof and austere, but it does not mean that they are unkind and cold. Given the opportunity, the qualities of loving kindness and compassion will show.

6. Increase of developed states – concentration and insight

Eventually, it will be clear that we will find that the states of concentration and insight have indeed arisen and developed to some extent. At the beginning we had ideas of how they are and how they should be. Often these are not completely wrong but it can also not be very correct. After all, these are states to be experienced, and until one has reached those levels and have become familiar with them, one may need guidance. Generally progress is when one's mind is stronger and purer, sharper and have deeper understanding of the three universal characteristics.

7. Happiness, Peace and Freedom

Last but not least, there will be an increase of happiness, peace and freedom. More than once I have been asked how come I seem so happy. They think that I should be grave and serious. The misconception probably arose from their reading about Buddhism and suffering. Although there is a quote from the Buddha that goes, “I teach one thing; suffering and the way to end suffering...”, it does not negate happiness. To remove suffering also means to gain happiness. Much of what may be called happiness (such as sensual pleasures) may be harmful and dangerous, and so it is only right to develop those that are harmless and beneficial. As such, it may be better to call it peace, as opposed to excitement. As one practices, the wholesome, pure states of mind abound. With concentration they become deep, blissful and lasting. With insight they become liberating.

Once, someone asked me what is liberation? As he is a beginner, I answered using the classical way - that it is a freedom from defilements and suffering. There is, however, another definition. It is a peace without any deep-seated tendencies of defilements, a peace that is unconditioned, most subtle, something to be experienced. As the Teacher Himself said, “The one taste of Freedom.”



When I visited the planetarium in Hamburg, the place was full of ladybirds. I tried to take a picture of it flying from my hands and succeeded. Despite its size freedom is still freedom.

Lady bird freedom, Hamburg, Germany 2007

As a final word on this, I would quote a verse from the Buddha himself, uttered shortly after his enlightenment:

*“Happy is detachment for one who is content;
For one who has learnt the Dhamma and sees,
Happy is non-affliction in the world,
Restraint towards living creatures;
Happy is passionlessness in the world
Having overcome sensual desires;
But the abolishing of the “I Am” conceit
That is truly supreme bliss.”*

Mucalinda Gatha

FOUR KINDS OF PROGRESS

Taking other factors to be constant, and narrowing it down to the individual, these four kinds of progress clearly show the main factors involved.

The four kinds of progress are:

1. Easy and swift - best
2. Easy and slow - needs time
3. Painful and swift - needs patience
4. Painful and slow - slow and steady wins the race; needs much patience.

We would all choose the first if we could. Unfortunately, many will still end up as the last. What are the reasons that determine the nature of our progress? On examining the matter, one can conclude that it is made up of two variables:

- a. Easy/painful
- b. Slow/swift

In the first case, the defilements and unwholesome qualities contribute to it. In the second case the spiritual faculties. When one has more craving, anger and delusion, one misses more of one's pleasure, detests and gets angry at the slightest faults, and lastly makes terrible errors. It would be good if we are sincere and determined to change no matter how painful it may be.

The spiritual faculties are a different matter. Having less defilement does not necessarily mean the opposite. For instance, by not eating poison does not mean you are having good nutrition. For some, they have developed these qualities of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom in past lives. On encountering meditation, these qualities spring up like healthy buddings after a spring shower. But definitely we must practice hard to get more.

PART IV



AUXILIARY MATTERS

Chapter 1

HELPFUL TRANQUILITY EXERCISES FOR INSIGHT DEVELOPMENT

Tranquility and Insight Meditation

The Cultivation of the Mind, or simply called meditation can be broadly classified into two types:

A. Tranquility meditation (*Samatha Bhavana*)

This practice is chiefly a concentration exercise where the mind is made to focus onto objects. When done properly, depending on the type of object, different levels of absorptions are reached, and from that different results such as psychic potentialities can be manifest.

B. Insight Meditation (*Vipassana Bhavana*)

This practice stresses on insight development, into seeing into the nature of reality that is present in all our experiences. It brings into focus and comprehension that all these mind-body processes end up as the three universal characteristics – transiency, unsatisfactoriness and non-self. The result of the insight is peace that comes from detachment to conditioned things, that is, the path, fruition and Nibbana.

It is clear that Insight meditation is THE MEDITATION. But tradition

also tells us of the wealth and benefits that come from tranquility meditations, which are helpful and supportive of the insight practice besides bringing much happiness into our daily lives. Although it can be said that these are not absolutely necessary for realization but we can certainly do with whatever help we can get. For some, they may actually be a necessary factor to overcome the hindrances and obstacles before any work on insight can be done.

So although these two types of practice are quite different, they can be used to serve the same end. As such, there are four approaches that one may take with regards to these two types of meditation when taking on the path of liberation.

- (1) The practice of the pure insight vehicle,
- (2) The practice of tranquility followed by insight,
- (3) The practice of insight followed by tranquility, and
- (4) The practice of insight and tranquility hand in hand.

Here is a point to note. One should not confuse tranquility/concentration as a mental state with that of tranquility meditation. Tranquility meditation consists of sets of mental exercises and processes states, while the former refers to a certain mind state, one-pointedness that would also occur in insight practice. Similarly, the wisdom faculty is present in both types but it is developed into a specific form in the case of tranquility meditation, while in insight meditation it can bring about liberation from samsara.

Which of the four approaches one takes depend on many factors. One's ability and potential is one factor. Then there is the critical factor of access to a skilful teacher and method. Then the time available also remains a critical factor for the laity who is laden with worldly responsibilities. What is important is that one needs to practice, practice and practice!! And the part of insight should not be delayed!!

The practice of tranquility meditations covers very wide terrain. Its

territory reaches beyond Buddhist boundaries. These methods have been practised before the Buddha arose in this world. The Bodhisatta's teachers were adepts in it. However, in the Buddhist context, they were brought to serve as a base for the development of insight, and this gives it a profound connection and value. It is very interesting, as will be explained later, how it would eventually become a process which gives rise to insight.

The Classical Theravadin meditation manual, "The Path of Purification" by Buddhaghosa enlists 40 meditation objects. It may be implied that from there can arise many variations of the practice. As this book is meant chiefly for the practice of insight, I will not deal with all the topics. Only selected ones that I have found to be extremely helpful to insight practice and have been used in retreats, especially as preliminary exercises, will be included.

1. The Kasina Objects

The Kasina Objects are circles used for concentration. All except the Wind Kasina are visualizations. They lead to deep absorptions and from there one can progress to the formless absorptions. There are 10 of them:

- | | |
|------------|------------|
| (1) White | (6) Earth |
| (2) Blue | (7) Water |
| (3) Yellow | (8) Fire |
| (4) Red | (9) Wind |
| (5) Light | (10) Space |

The first five are colour Kasinas, while the next five are Elements. The circular shape is suitable for concentration, and to start with should be of suitable diameter, i.e. not too small or too large. As to the choice of which colour or element, it will have to depend on the temperament of the yogi concerned. These kinds of objects are very precise and exacting. It requires much mindfulness and mind control. As such it is not meant for beginners or those with tendencies for hallucinations. Nevertheless

they are capable of bringing about deep absorptions and can be used for calming down. In any case, if one decides to do this method, it will be worthy of note that it is not a matter to be rushed. Craving for results is a thing to be wary of. What is given here is a simple exercise to calm down one's mind. It also has a unique property of making the mind, and thus its objects extremely clear. That is something especially useful in the development of insight.

First select a suitable object to be used as a preliminary object. As to the colour of the kasinas, choose a deep shade in the form of a circle or globe. The surface is best smooth and colour of a deep shade. It is to be placed in front of one at a comfortable distance and in a comfortable position. It is best not to stare at it directly but rather look at it nonchalantly, gently without any stress. The aim to be remembered is to calm one's mind down. Slowly thoughts will be brushed aside and the object will sink into the mind, so much so that on closing one's eyes, it appears as an image. This is called the "grasped object". Usually this does not happen easily with everyone. For many, it is enough to know that one has that object for tranquility as a thought in the mind. It is just as if one closes one's eyes and think dreamily of the full moon. Slowly all else vanishes and only the mind and the moon is left. It is important when trying to concentrate and visualise, one should not to be tense or too eager for results. If one is not careful, it may lead to obsessiveness, wrong concentration and hysteria.

As for the Earth Kasina, smooth round stones or crystal quartz can be used. For Water Kasina, bowls of water, fountains, streams. For Fire element, fire places. For Wind, leaves blown by the wind suggests the element.

Only when the grasped object (a reproduced, copy, mental image in the mind) is clear and lasts longer that it is slowly developed with deepening refinement, either through conscious will or subconscious will, into the

luminous and transparent mirror image. The object itself is after all a reflection of the mind and mental states that conceive it. Before this stage happens, the image will have imperfections. For example, it could appear as an oval rather than a perfect circle. Its surface may have blotches and wrinkles. All these will have to be removed before the perfect mirror image (*patibhaga*) arises. From there, given time and maturity, one is able to reach absorptions. The process can be slow or quick. But as was said before, tranquility and mind control are the important consideration.

Snow Meditation

During my time in Europe I spent winters in the snow. I noticed how calming snow was and later I found out why. I discovered that snow is made up of my two favorite Kasina objects - White light and Water. Since then I have always switched to it as my meditation object whenever there is snowfall. I would then take a stroll across the snow and watch the flakes fall. It had a very pleasant, calming and purifying effect. It never fails to save the day when things did not go too well. By the time I returned to the meditation seat and closed my eyes, concentration on the snow object came as easily as the object. Even on the first experience, many snow and ice objects appeared, often unseen by me before but later to discover that they really exist. Snow flakes are seen as if by a microscope in many glittering variations. They all lead to deeper and deeper concentration.

Snow meditation and its objects are not too far away from insight practice. When seeing them fall, it is eye consciousness and eye object. When it is in the mind, it is the mind consciousness and the mind object. But snow flakes come in bits and pieces one after another. They are like light particles. As a mental objects, it is not difficult to see them as consciousness flickering and passing away. It is interesting how the various Kasina meditation and its objects can be switched to Insight Practice.



*Beautiful Snow, Bindt,
Slovakia 2005*

Milan, my attendant in a small retreat held in the deep snows of central Slovakia that winter is now happily a monk. This is one happy result one can see in this life. But that snowy retreat is something special, because the snowfall was heavy. When asked, the owners of the house said that Russia's snowfall is something like this, only a little more. Everything was white there – the sky, the houses, the trees, the streets, the people and meditation.

White is the colour of light. White is the colour of snow. White is the colour of purity. White can bring me peace.

Truth underlies all things. There is always the consciousness to make things its object. The switching from Samatha to Vipassana meditation is itself a skill to be learned. It involves two types of attention and two types of objects. In *Samatha* meditation, it is fixed, while in *Vipassana* meditation, it is open and free. These are two processes developed from the basic exercises, so it may take sometime before the form of conditioning takes off to give its true form. So it is not surprising for the *Samatha* yogi to keep falling back to his usual type of concentration and the *Vipassana* yogi to do the same. One has usually to develop one technique sufficiently to act as a base for the development of the other. After that, the skill in switching has to be developed. That is when one has to be determined to develop the new type of concentration to the extent that it can arise as easily as the first type. After that it is a matter of exercise of the will.

In the case where the Kasina meditation is to be switched to Vipassana practice, one can:

- (1) be that the flow of consciousness during the practice to be used as the object
- (2) be the factors of concentration that are taken as the object, and
- (3) be the object itself, e.g. eye object

2. The Divine Abodes (*Brahmavihara*)

There are many reasons why the mind cannot settle down and become tranquil. The most unsettling factor is the root of aversion which can take different forms such as anger, fear, anxiety, remorse, worry, impatience and so on, all characterised by a displeasurable mental feeling. It stems from an inability to accept the situation or reality as it is and with it comes extreme restlessness. When it concerns relationships with other beings, then it becomes anger, jealousy, and even cruelty. The immediate opposite and antidote to them will be loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity.

- (1) Loving-kindness (*Metta*) meditation.

When I first started to teach vipassana meditation in the West, I was told that I can only do so after teaching loving kindness meditation. After some years, I still did not swallow it all, just a part of it. Still I try to include it as part of the retreat.

This is because there are many other blessings besides getting rid of anger and giving joy, although it can be said that these two are especially important factor for concentration. Below are the usually mentioned 11 blessings of loving kindness and are recollected when one has decided to take up the practice. By merely recollected them one will be able to arouse loving kindness or at least be much encouraged to do so. They are:

- i. One sleeps happily
- ii. One wakes up happily
- iii. One dreams no bad dreams
- iv. One is loved by humans
- v. One is loved by non humans
- vi. Deities protect him
- vii. Fire, poison and weapons do not harm him
- viii. Has good complexion
- ix. Mind concentrates easily
- x. One dies with an unconfused mind
- xi. If one fares no further (i.e. reach Arahantship), one gains rebirth in the Brahma worlds.



Gooseair, Ost See, Germany 2007

Gooseair happens to be the email address I use. There's a long story as to how it came about but I will not spill it out here. Since then I have also used the symbol of migrating geese in my website. The idea behind this is that since I left the responsibilities of a large centre, I decided it best not to get caught in another one. The floating centre where I use any facilities available would be best. It could then benefit more people around the world without worries about the economics of the place or entanglement in politics. So far, it has worked pretty well and a universal fellowship of flying geese is building up. These geese you see in the picture were flying over the coast of northern Germany next to the Danish border, where my friends Hans and Nicole of Hamburg took me to a really wonderful outing and walk.

Following that, one is advised to give loving kindness first to oneself. This is because only when one is established in happiness can one effectively wish that for another. This may present a difficulty for some people. I have narrowed down the difficulty to three main reasons. Firstly one feels that it is a selfish act. And so some decide to give it to others first and later return to oneself. It is a wrong understanding that it is selfish. Here we mean spiritual happiness, which has to come with unselfishness. Secondly, one may have the feeling that one is never good enough and does not deserve it. It has something to do with highly competitive societies where parents or teacher tells one that one is not good enough in order to make one work harder. In reality, one always deserves to be happy, and especially so with spiritual happiness. It is a right of all beings. Thirdly, a cultural and religious factor is involved. Some are told that they are born with an original sin and so contributes to low self esteem. There is also something like this in Buddhism, because we are taught that we are born with defilements. But we are also told that Man is born from wholesome Kamma and has great spiritual potential. In the human world, they can even aspire to become Buddhas.

As for this first part of giving loving kindness to oneself, I do it through relaxation and suffusing mindfulness to oneself. As one makes the aspiration of wishing well, one directs the power of mindfulness into the process.

Traditionally, the four aspirations used are:

- i. May I be safe, free from danger (*Avero homi*). Here one keeps in mind the purity of mindfulness, and that it protects one from the real causes of suffering, the defilements. One also knows that it brings about wholesome kamma and it protects one from all dangers, as seen in the blessings of loving kindness.

- ii. May I be at peace free from mental suffering (*Abyapajjho homi*). Here one can highlight in one's mind the peaceful quality of mindfulness and encourage it to grow, dispelling all mental sufferings.
- iii. May I be healthy free from physical suffering (*Anigho homi*). Here one brings to focus the relationship between the mental and physical energies. With mindfulness, one wills the creation of good and healing vitality to the body or the part intended.
- iv. May I take care of myself and live happily (*Sukhi attanam pariharami*). In this final aspiration, one can encourage and lengthen an ever deepening wish for profound peace so that it may arise if not all times, then most of the time in our lives.

In the next step, one directs the loving kindness to a single chosen individual. The person chosen is a lovable person with many virtuous and loving qualities. He is usually a benefactor or very good friend. In Asia, they are usually our parents or teachers. In the west, it can still be so but often it is a sincere, helpful friend. One is advised against another who is too intimate (as craving lurks behind), one indifferent (apathy), or one repulsive. Definitely not the hostile!

When one has chosen the individual, recollect his –

- i.. good qualities
- ii. how he has helped one and
- iii. good times spent together.

These reflections are controlled to the extent of arousing the loving kindness . When it has arisen, one then makes it into a continuous and automatic flow with the use of the same four aspirations directed to the other person.

- i. May he/she be safe free from danger
- ii. May he/she be peaceful free from mental suffering
- iii. May he/she be healthy free from physical suffering
- iv. May he/she take care of himself/herself and live happily

The important points here are that:

- i. There is the mental state of loving kindness. If it is absent, one is advised to start again.
- ii. Loving kindness is made to flow continuously, uninterrupted.
- iii. The person used as an object is kept in mind. Sometimes one visualises the person. This is alright as long as one has no problems with visualising things or else, an extra stress is added. It is sufficient for a start to know then one is having the person in mind.

At the start, there may not be much mindfulness, loving kindness and concentration, and so the hindrances (*Nivarana*) run wild. With persistence in the right method and will, wholesome states increase and these hindrances will be abandoned. Meanwhile, they will have to be handled accordingly. How this is done with mindfulness has been explained in the chapter on the hindrances. In short, it is noting them mindfully as soon as possible. The process replaces it with a wholesome state. In loving kindness meditation, one replaces it with loving kindness. If it is a case with much distraction and agitation, slow repetition and recitation with soft peaceful loving kindness will calm it down. If sluggish, bring it to a quicker repetition of the wishes together with more emotional content. If neither works, always switch back to giving loving kindness to oneself. Mindfulness will bring it back to balance and clarity.

When one keeps using the aspirations, one must remember that its purpose is to arouse a continuous flow of loving kindness. Care should be taken that it does not become mechanical. Where a single aspiration

works better, it can be used more often. Where it is ineffective it can be left out. When the flow becomes continuous with ease, joy naturally arises. It then deepens quickly and will have to be refined if excessive. Sometimes, there seems to be just the flow, while the person used as the object is absent. Then it had to be brought back again. If this goes on, ease and joy will follow. The joy can become overwhelming and so one will need to guard against attachment. With mindful refinement, the mind will become very peaceful and subtle and the object clear and bright. With further progress, the object develops and becomes luminous and transparent. When concentration further deepens, it can go into absorption (*jhana*). With further training, one can develop onwards to the higher absorptions. But this lies beyond the scope of this book and so when at least access level has been reached, one can proceed to give loving kindness to other individuals. That is, the intimate person, the neutral person, the repulsive person and lastly the hostile person. When this has been done successfully, they will become lovable persons.

One can then carry on further to give loving kindness as:

- i. Unspecified pervasion to:
 - a. all beings
 - b. all living things
 - c. all creatures
 - d. all individuals
 - e. persons

- ii specified pervasion to:
 - a. all female kind
 - b. all male kind
 - c. all spiritually realised
 - d. all ordinary folks
 - e. all deities
 - f. all humans
 - g. all unfortunate ones

Finally one can combine the above 12 groups with the 10 directions. That is, all beings in the:

- a. east
- b. west
- c. north
- d. south
- e. south-east
- g. north-west
- h. south-west
- i. north-east
- j. below
- k. above

May they be safe, at peace, healthy and live happily.

In the switch back to insight meditation, one can do so by

- i. Returning to giving loving kindness to oneself by suffusing mindfulness with regards to the body. This is followed by watching the bodily sensations or any of the other vipassana objects one is accustomed to, such as the breath or rising/falling of abdomen. Care must be taken that the type of awareness present looks into the three universal characteristics.
- ii. continuing the practice of loving kindness but at the same time be aware of the flow of loving kindness with all its conditions and factors changing with it. In this case, there are two processes involved. One the loving kindness process and the other the process that watches its flow.

(2) Compassion (*Karuna*)

The meditation of compassion is done in the same way as Loving kindness meditation. The difference lies in being more focussed on the suffering of a sentient being and the wish for it to be free from that suffering. This may be more effective and natural for those with less emotional inclination to be “lovey-dovey”. It has also been recommended for those with cruel tendencies. In this case the choice of the being would not be one who is intimate, indifferent, repulsive or hostile, but be one whom you know is undergoing much physical and mental pain. The idea to develop a good sense of empathy without being affected by it, otherwise grief instead may arise.



Sheep Rescue, Banks Peninsula, NZ 2001

While taking a walk in the Bank's peninsula, we came across a sheep fallen into a small hole with its four legs in the air. How on earth did it end up like that? It was obviously badly hurt and so Jan decided to rescue him, which means pulling him out of that awful position and then giving him a drink. But it was too late. When he returned the next day, it had died. Still, I think, that compassion matters to the sheep.

After infusing mindfulness into oneself, one can bring to mind this suffering being, and when compassion aises, make it continue to flow on by the four aspirations:

- i. May he/she be free from physical sufferings.
- ii. May he/she be free from mental sufferings.
- iii. May he/she be free from samsaric sufferings
- iv. May he/she be free from all sufferings.

The rest can be done as has been described in the part on Loving kindness.

Forgiveness Meditation

This form of meditation is another form of compassion meditation. In this case, it can be very effective for overcoming inner grudges, which no matter how justified it may seem, is nevertheless the root of aversion and should not be kept in the heart and is best discarded.

It can be done first by giving forgiveness to oneself and then to the other party. First, think of an event in the recent past that you have said or done that resulted in a problem. Bring to mind as mindfully as you can, the incident, matter and people involved. Focus on the sufferings involved in yourself and then in others. When you have done so and recognised your fault (if it is) , then quietly tell yourself: “ I am still human and imperfect and I accept it. It is useless and harmful to bear such self-hatred and so I will forgive myself and try not to do it again in the future. I also recognise the good qualities in myself and will develop them to the welfare of myself and others.”

When doing this, you will feel the relief coming from self forgiveness and this will encourage the process. You can then proceed to forgive the other parties concerned but in this case you can only wish that they change for better in the future. After this, you can proceed to an event further away. This process can go on until all the inner grudges are done away with.

(3) Sympathetic joy (*Mudita*)

Sympatheic joy is a state of mind which rejoices at the happiness of another. It comes as appreciation, gratitude and sympathy. It is also the most rapturous of the four divine abodes. I have noticed that some of these people are so light as if they are floating as they walk! A very uplifting force. A recommendation against jealousy.

In this case, one brings to mind the blessings of one who is intimate. When sympathetic joy arises, then it is made to continue and concentrated using the four aspirations:

- i. May he/she continue to receive whatever material blessings he/she has got.
- ii. May he/she continue to receive whatever human blessings he/she has got.
- iii. May he/she continue to receive whatever spiritual blessings he/she has got.
- iv. May he/she continue to receive all the blessings he/she has got.

The rest is similar to the part described for Loving kindness.

For a person who does not think well of himself and is often engaged in self castigation, he can also practise this as a self appreciation. In this case, he can use the four aspirations as mentioned but think of them as being applied to himself.

(4) Equanimity (*Upekkha*)

Equanimity is certainly the most profound of the four divine abodes. Its tranquility is founded on the maturity of wisdom. Its stability gives much solace and it allows much space for spiritual development.

The Pali work “*upekkha*” has many definitions but in the case of a divine abode, it refers to a state of mind that is balanced with regards to the condition of beings. To achieve this, Buddhists reflect on Kamma. It concerns also the eight worldly conditions (gain/loss, praise/blame, fame/infame, happiness/pain) and with these, the existential nature of life. Thus from there one can plumb into the depths of reality. When that occurs, the state is a state of peaceful acceptance.

For this purpose, I have used the five subjects for frequent recollection mentioned in the texts. It can be done first for oneself and then also for others.

Method

- i. Sit, relax and infuse mindfulness as before
- ii. Recollect the five items as followed
 - (a) *I am subjected to aging and I have not overcome it. I will accept it and be at peace.*

With old age comes:

- (i) Graying and dropping of hair. When my hair turns gray and white and drop off till I be bald, I will accept it and be at peace with it.
- (ii) Yellowing, decay and falling away of teeth. When my teeth turns yellow, decays and I become toothless, I will accept it and be at peace with it.
- (iii) Drying, wrinkling of skin. When my skin wrinkles, dries and sags, I will accept it and be at peace with it.

- (iv) Failing of faculties. When my faculties fail, i.e. eyes turning blind, ears turning deaf, losing sense of smell and taste, body becoming weak, until I may become cripple, bed ridden. Even the mind faculty will fail. Memory fails and even other mental abilities. I may even end up like a vegetable. So while I can I will practise and be mindful to the best of my ability, accept it and be at peace with it.
- (b) *I am subjected to illness and I have not overcome it. When I become ill, I will accept it and be at peace with it.*

There are many types of illnesses.

There are diseases of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, head, outer ear, mouth, teeth. Cough, asthma, colds, burns, fever. Stomach diseases, vertigo, diarrhoea/dysentery, body aches, cholera, leprosy. Boils, eczema, consumption, epilepsy, cutaneous eruptions, itches, yaws, pustules, scabies. Coughing out blood, Diabetes, skin rashes, blisters. Diseases due to bile, due to phlegm, due to wind, due to the combination of the above three, Diseases caused by weather change, caused by irregular activities, due to mind, due to Karma. Cold heat, hunger thirst, urination, defaecation.*

**(from a translation from the Girimananda sutta)*

When I am afflicted by any of these, I will be mindful of these, accept it and be at peace with it.

- (c) *I am subjected to Death and I have not overcome Death. When Death comes, I will accept it and be at peace with it.*

Death can come to anyone and everyone, at any time, any place. When Death comes, I will have to leave behind everything and everyone. I will accept it and be at peace with it.

- (d) *Whatever is near and dear to me will change and leave me. When this happens, I will accept it and be at peace with it.*

All my material possessions, be they cars, houses, money, jewellery, land will change and leave me. Whatever lovely relationships I have, be they parents, husband, wife, children, will change, grow old, sick, leave me and die. When they do, I will accept it mindfully as it is the Nature and be at peace with it.

- (e) *Kamma is my true property, true inheritance, true birth, true relative, true refuge. Whatever wholesome or unwholesome deed I have done, I will reap the results. And I will accept this and be at peace with it.*

In this last part, better understanding of the nature of Kamma will render the contemplation more effective. In short, one understands that Kamma is a creative force in our minds. When it is wholesome or unwholesome, it renders happy or unhappy results.

These five contemplations can be repeated with reference to another person, preferable someone notable whom one knows fairly well with regards to his life, yet not intimate or repulsive. When there is the state of equanimity, one can continue to repeat with the words that he has kamma as his true property, etc....until access concentration is reached. The difference in this equanimity meditation is that it enables one to enter into the fourth (in the four fold classification) absorption only. If one wants to do this, one will have to attain the lower levels of absorption, i.e. first to third absorption through the other three Divine abodes. After that one can do the same to the other individuals, specified and unspecified pervasion. Finally, one does it in the 10 directions.

This type of meditation develops a mind that is able to accept with peace anything and any object that comes along. Having done so, one can then look into them to develop deeper understanding. The mind also becomes very subtle as it is a void that is able to swallow everything and let it pass away.

So when we return to *Vipassana* meditation we will be able to meet with many difficult objects with acceptance thereby paving the way for easier progress.

3. Recollection of the Triple Gem

These three recollections on the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha are based on faith. They are used to a great extent in Buddhist countries so much so that entire sects have been formed together with their devotional practices. However, we shall only concern ourselves with the concentration practice that is helpful to the development of insight.

(1) Recollection of the Buddha (*Buddhanussati*)

This practice involves recollecting the virtues of the Buddha in a serial order. When one does this mindfully, the hindrances are overcome and access concentration is reached. Confidence or faith is the key mental state involved. It is this state that maintains its purity and when coupled with concentration, becomes powerful.

The usual list of virtues recollected in the Theravadin tradition is as follows:

For this reason, the Buddha is:

- i. The Exalted One (*Bhagava*)
- ii. The Worthy One (*Araham*) – One who has eradicated all mental defilements
- iii. The Supremely Enlightened One (*Sammasambuddho*)
- iv. Endowed with knowledge and conduct (*Vijjacarana sampanno*)
- v. The Well-gone (*Sugato*)
- vi. The Knower of Worlds (*Lokavidu*) – Knower of the three worlds – Sensual, Form and Formless
- vii. The Incomparable Charioteer of Men to be Tamed (*Anuttaro Purisadhamma Sarathi*)
- viii. Teacher of Gods and Men (*Sattha devamanussanam*)
- ix. The Enlightened One (*Buddho*)

This recollection is done firstly through mindful recitations followed by mindful mental recollections in a series. One also needs to be mindful of the meaning of the virtues recited and not repeat them like a parrot. It is done at a speed which is not too fast or slow but one that is conducive to tranquility. It will sooner or later settle into an automatic flow of peaceful to rapturous concentration. Sometimes it may settle into one of the virtues and deepen. There is a delicate balance of the energy and concentration faculties, followed by a refinement. The process is described in the chapter dealing with the factors of concentration but in this case, joy is usually plentiful and may have to be restrained.

There are many variations of how these virtues can be recollected. It can be forward in the list given and then backward. One can then juggle them around and this deepens up the interest. More virtues can be added such as the 10 powers as well as instances as mentioned the the Stanzas of Victory (*Jayamangala Gatha*).

One can also use helpful devices such as Buddha images, pictures, symbols, rosaries, and taped recordings.

The practice brings many benefits besides establishing one onto a base where insight practice can proceed with greater ease. One significant advantage is the overcoming of fear. Joy that comes with confidence certainly helps one when the spirits are low, especially in moments of pain or little progress. A good dose of it will help one pick up again.

One thing about this recollection is that the procedure is quite straight forward and so is often employed at the initial phase of the practice with simple people as well as children. After that one can embark onto more difficult levels. It also contributes to the emotional and devotional aspect of the practice, sometimes lacking in those who are coldly entrenched in excessive intellectualism and inhuman stoicism.

As to the switching to insight practice, it is done so after access concentration has been reached. One can adopt one or both ways.

- i. One switches to a common vipassana object such as the elements connected with the body e.g. breath, rising/falling of abdomen.
- ii One watches the flow of the consciousness involved with the flow of the concentration. Joy can also used as an object when it has become overflowing.

(2) Recollection of the Dhamma (*Dhammanussati*)

In the Recollection of the Dhamma (Teachings), traditionally the six virtues that are recited are used for meditation. As in the Recollection of the Buddha, they are recollected mindfully one after another in a serial order at a suitable pace. One begins with verbal recitation and then followed by mental recollection. When this is done, it will flow automatically, and likewise the hindrances will be overcome and access concentration reached. Using this as a base, one can proceed to insight practice with greater ease.

The virtues of the Dhamma if recollected with understanding and connected with Truth will give its profundity and bring the mind directly into insight practice and experience. And so, a deeper understanding with regards to the Dhamma is important, and the beginner may require some initial theoretical understanding. This meditation is very close to insight practice.

The six virtues of the Dhamma are:

- i. Well preached is the Teachings of the Blessed One (*Svakkhata Bhagavata Dhammo*). The teachings of the Buddha is direct and clear. One such teaching is found in the *Bhaddekaratta Gatha*:

*Do not trace back the past or wonder about the future ;
 Whatever past is gone and the future unreached;
 And the Present Reality, one sees at it is;
 Unshakeably, invincibly, as can be penetrated by practice;
 Even today effort must be made, who knows Death comes tomorrow;
 There is no compromise with the army of Death;
 Thus is diligent living, Striving relentlessly by day and night;
 Such is the Lover of Solitude, the Sage has called.*

- ii. Self evident (*Sanditthiko*). There is this Truth and Reality before me. What is this? Be mindful of this present phenomenon
- iii. Timeless (*Akaliko*). Truth is eternal. It is always Here and Now. This is the Timeless Truth. Be mindful of the ever present here and now.
- iv. (Inviting One to) Come and See (*Ehipassiko*). It is beneficial to experience and accept the present reality and truth. So look carefully, properly and mindfully into it.
- v. Leading onwards/ applicable (*Opanayiko*). Practice makes perfect. With continuous practice, mindfulness and insight will grow. Keep on looking deeper and clearer into this reality.

- vi. To be experienced by the wise each for himself (*Paccatam vetitabbo vinnuhi*). Watch this present reality and phenomenon with sharp, precise mindfulness and insight .

As it can be seen from above, the recollection of these virtues lead one directly to Reality and thus to insight practice. It serves to remind one of the profundity and keeps one from wandering to matters of lesser importance. The contemplation also arouses much joy and faith. This recollection when done properly should automatically and naturally lead one into insight practice. Otherwise, it can be done as in recollection of the virtues of the Buddha, to switch to a *vipassana* object such as one connected with the body, joy or to the consciousness of concentration which flows on as a process.

(3) Recollection of the Community (*Sanghanussati*)

Sangha means community or order. As can be seen in the recollection, the virtues are ascribed to the four noble persons and eight individuals. Basically it is just four because the “path individual” lasts only for a thought moment. These are people who have experienced the supramundane state at least once and are definitely assured of the peace of *Nibbana*. They, therefore, provide the link to the unconditioned peace and reality for humanity. Such individuals are endowed with much virtue, concentration and insight and so can lead others along the path of liberation with confidence. They serve as inspiration as well as a valuable source of experiential wisdom. They also would have much loving kindness and compassion and so is an incomparable field of merits in this world.

It is also true that one will not be able to know who these individuals are as they do not reveal themselves. So the presence of such individuals are taken out of faith. It is therefore best if one practices until oneself becomes one such individual. Meanwhile, virtuous, practising people who serve as excellent examples and inspiration can be used as objects.



*Cave of Ancients, Bihar, India
1996*

This is the Satapanni Cave, the one used by the Arhats after the Buddha's parinibbana to hold the first council. An earthquake has sealed its entry but when I was there I could very well imagine all those great elders congregating out of compassion to preserve the priceless treasure of the Teaching for posterity. I wonder also how many people appreciate it.

The virtues of the Sangha traditionally recollected are:

- i. The Blessed One's disciples have entered onto the good way (the way of purity, the way of the dhamma and vinaya)
- ii. The Blessed One's disciples have entered onto the straight way (the direct way, the middle way, way unbending to defilements)
- iii. The Blessed One's disciples have entered onto the true way (the way with the aim of Truth, *Nibbana*)
- iv. The Blessed One's disciples have entered onto the proper way (the way worthy of veneration)
- v. That is, the four pairs of persons, eight individuals, who are
- vi. worthy of gifts
- vii. worthy of hospitality
- viii. worthy of offerings
- ix. worthy of salutations
- x. An incomparable field of merits in this world.

As in the previous two recollections, it begins with verbal recitations followed by mental ones. When the consciousness with faith and respect flows continuously, access concentration is reached and one can then proceed to insight practice as described before.

4. **Recollection of Peace** (*Upasamanussati*)

I first encountered this meditation in a little booklet in my earlier years. It suggested that one just repeat the word “peace” as an exercise and that is enough to bring one peace. Although I agreed with it, I thought it rather simplistic and so did not pursue the matter. How often important advices are taken superficially.

Many years have passed and now with more experience I realise that this meditation is most profound and very direct. As a result, I have also developed a practical system for it and was delightfully surprised one day to discover it mentioned in the Mahamalunkya Sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya. How often wonderful techniques mentioned in the scriptures are by passed and left unused!

In the “Path of Purification” it is referred to as the recollection of peace. “Peace” referred to here is *Nibbana* (the unconditioned element). And so in this meditation, the qualities or virtues of *Nibbana* are recollected systematically until access concentration is reached. Since the experience of *Nibbana* falls only in the domain of the realised, the meditation reaches perfection only in these nobles ones. However, it does not mean that the unrealised individual cannot do it. If he has the right idea and understanding, and despite being conceptual, if done, it is possible for him to attain access concentration with many benefits.



This peace monument was built by the Japanese for the fallen soldiers during World War II in this area, Sarawak, then British, now part of Malaysia. The whole inscription is "Peace is Best". The Chinese character above it means stupa, in this case means monument. The other two chinese characters not shown means peace. I particularly like this because there is a quote from the Buddha that says "Peace is the highest happiness". In this sense, Peace here is referred to Nibbana.

*Peace Monument, Sarawak, Malaysia
early 1990's*

The scheme for this meditation which I have worked out for the benefit of yogis has been put under different headings which also correspond with certain levels of practice. From this one can see how close this tranquility exercise is to insight development and at some point, they cannot be differentiated.

The six headings are:

- (1) Pure Insight meditation
- (2) Preliminary Peace meditation
- (3) Recollective Peace meditation
- (4) Insight practice guided by Peace recollection
- (5) Supramundane Peace recollection
- (6) Meditation for the extension of Peace into the mundane.

1-4 can be practised by anyone

5-6 can be practised only by those who have had experience with the unconditioned element.

(1) Pure Insight Meditation

Insight Meditation can be considered as essentially peace meditation since its goal, *Nibbana*, has Peace as its characteristic. Here it is peace from all things that arise and pass away, the ultimate peace, the real peace. Although the recollection of its virtues as advised in the *Path of Purification* is conceptual, it nevertheless is able to bring up right understanding with right concentration as to what real peace is. However, the real peace has to come about with actual experience and this is possible only when we undertake insight practice. This occurs when one sees that the momentary arising and dissolution of phenomena is suffering and its cessation is peace, and that this peace comes about with the detachment and dispassion from conditioned phenomena. It also goes to confirm that this peace can be realised only when attending to real ultimate realities as objects. Insight meditation performs all the functions of clearing, strengthening, sharpening and directing of the mindfulness so that insight can arise. Without sufficient power developed from insight practice, it is not possible for the mind to rise above the forces and conditions that keep one to the cycle of conditioned existence. Ultimately, it is this insight into things as they really are that brings about realisation of the real peace.

(2) Preliminary Peace Meditation

Before one can grow in peace, one must first put in the seed. This seed is a humble beginning, a peaceful state of mind in the most ordinary sense, something mentioned as the result of blamelessness. Often we try to concentrate while the mind is still restless, hoping that it will calm down and then finding it difficult to do so. It is better to make sure that there is some peace at the very start.

For this preliminary peace meditation, one has first to rid one of the hindrances. They are recognised and dealt with appropriately in the chapter on hindrances. After effectively overcoming hindrances, one can call up some peace of mind. For a start it can be one related to external factors.

One asks, “What is peace, where can I find peace?”

The answer may be in the silence. Then one can rest one’s mind on silence and let peace gather strength. One can then do the same, i.e. let the mind rest in the peaceful environment e.g. a forest, a shrine, a wide expanse of open sea or view of hill and mountains. The peace likewise gathers more strength. One can also do it with the moon on the lake or someone spiritual or a religious icon one can think of.

One can then proceed inwards and see how a comfortable body or posture can bring forth peace and then let the mind rest on them. It will encourage further relaxation of the body to give more peace.

Next one can proceed to mental states. One of them is the mental state of letting go or detachment. Another is clarity. With peace being strengthened, these qualities will also grow because they are part and parcel of those states. Then one can proceed to seeing that subtle joy that is present and then to calmness, tranquility and stillness. At this point, we are approaching the essential point of concentration. When one has reached to this level, it can be said that an appreciable concentration has been reached, enough to switch to insight exercises.

(3) Recollective Peace Meditation

This part has been described in the “*Path of Purification*” under the heading of Recollection of Peace. In the text it mentions the recollection as –

Dhammas (states), whether form or formless, Dispassion (viraga) is best, i.e. It is

- i. Disillusionment of vanity
- ii. Elimination of thirst
- iii. Abolition of reliance (sense desires)
- iv. Termination of the round (rebirth)
- v. Destruction of craving
- vi. Fading away of passions
- vii. Cessation
- viii. *Nibbana*

It also gives another list for recollection –

- i. Unformed
- ii. Truth
- iii. Other shore
- iv. Hard to see
- v. Undecaying
- vi. Lasting
- vii. Undiversified
- viii. Deathless
- ix. Auspicious
- x. Safe
- xi. Marvellous
- xii. Intact
- xiii. Unafflicted
- xiv. Purity
- xv. Shelter

In the last part, it mentions that the profound nature of these qualities recollected brings the mind to access concentration. And that this recollection brings benefits such as bliss in sleep and in an awakened state. Respect from the fellowship and if one penetrates no further, is bound for a happy destiny.

To this I will add that it is extremely helpful in directing the mind to the ultimate and unconditioned goal of spiritual life. I have also discovered as a very effective way to calm down destructive and chaotic mental formations which may arise in the course of one's meditation. At least it will bring it to a more manageable and tolerable level.

My own list of virtues contemplated, however, is drawn from the *Girimananda Sutta* which is also as I found later in the *Mahamalunkya Sutta*.

It goes as stated below –

Pali

- i. *Etam santam* it is peaceful
- ii. *Etam panitam* it is sublime/fine
Yadidam that is,
- iii. *Sabbasankhara samatho* stilling of all formations
- iv. *Sabbupadhi patinissago* tranquilisation of all substrate (of existence)
- v. *Tanhakkhayo* destruction of craving
- vi. *Virago* dispassion
- vii. *Nirodho* cessation
- viii. *Nibbanam Nibbana* / truth, unconditioned reality

Having done the preliminaries of starting from relaxation and establishing basic mindfulness and calmness, one goes on to recollect these virtues sequentially one after another. It starts with an idea and then produces states or brings one to reality states meant by the idea. The purpose is not just to reach a level of concentration but also to give a direction for the mindfulness to develop. These peaceful states when continually developed with the right idea moves the consciousness towards the supramundane path and fruition.

A further elaboration of the virtues is given below, as well as phrases used in the guided meditation on peace which I often do.

i. It is peaceful

What is peace? The preliminary peace contemplation gives us an initial idea. If one has met with the Teachings, it will be more profound, precise and more effective. By now one would have arrived at some initial peace. With constant prompting and repetition of the word and idea, the mind will go into more and more peaceful states. It is like encouraging and letting the consciousness settle and sink into ever deeper levels of tranquility and stillness.

In guided practice, I would say, “Let your mind be calmer and calmer, sink and settle into more and more peaceful states like into deepening levels of water”.

ii. It is subtle/fine

Subtlety and fineness are opposite of gross states. Gross are the defilements and unwholesome states. Subtler and finer are wholesome and pure states of mind. Sense sphere consciousness are gross, form and formless states are finer. One can go on from grosser to finer levels in the various insight knowledges in the ascending scale.

In guided practice, I would say, “Let your mind be subtler and finer. Lighter and quieter. Become smaller and smaller like a fine snow flake becoming smaller and smaller in an ever expanding voidness.”

iii. The stilling of formations

Formations are building blocks of existence, like “lego” or jigsaw puzzles.

These are qualities that come about through conditions and they influence each other. Perception is what that makes us see things as they seem to be, while volition makes them up like a cook making cookies. The mind is like a factory churning out limitless articles, many of them useless, others worse than useless. They all flow with time like a river. Sometimes it is sludge and rubbish, other times sparkling clean. It depends on conditions. In *Vipassana*, one eventually realises that all these are a lot of noise. They are like clouds and dust. They can also be very troublesome and dangerous. Sometimes it is great but eventually we make mistakes and end up in hot soup. As long as the music goes on, there will be no silence, no real peace. The stilling of formations is to stop all these noise. Stop creating and making up stories. Build no more houses. It is like turning off the switches that run the factory of samsara. It is stopping all work and reaching to a state of perfect rest, eternal rest.

Thus in guided practice, I would say –“ May the mind cease to produce conditioned formations. May it not see as real refuge and rest in these conditioned states.”

iv. The tranquilisation of accumulations, all substrates of existence

“*Upadhi*” are underlying factors that create conditioned existence. They are like seeds, latent tendencies that act as fuel in the consciousness to link one life to another. Given opportunity, they sprout into forests of desires. Although we cannot see them at first but we know they are there. With just this knowledge, one can make a resolution to clear them. As one’s mindfulness and insight deepens, they become clearer and more are uprooted.

Thus, we can wish, “May the mind be rid of underlying tendencies of defilements that act as substrate of existence which give continuity to samsara. May the mind builds up the forces that clear these up. May the mind be empty of these, and be empty.”

v. Destruction of Craving

Craving or thirst is often spoken as being threefold: for sensuality, existence and non existence. It all boils down to the craving for existence. The other two are different forms of it. It stems from the ignorance of reality and so one goes on making up things. It involves existential suffering. Vipassana makes us realise this and that it only causes more suffering. Vipassana makes us realise that the truth that can be found in us and nature is self sufficient. We do not need anything more than just letting things be as they really are. To reach to this state, we usually has to undergo insight practice to see all phenomena as impermanent, unsatisfactory and nonself. This recognition makes us let go, and see clearly the underlying forces of craving. Thus we let go of these one by one at which lie at the deeper layers of the mind. *Nibbana* is called the cessation of craving!

Thus, one makes a wish deep within one's heart, "May I renounce all cravings - sensual, for form and formless, for existence and non-existence."

vi. Dispassion

The Pali word "*Viraga*" is sometimes translated as fading away, but I prefer the old translation, dispassion. One, however, has to note that in the Buddhist sense it is not just detachment and disenchantment. It stretches over to the beyond which includes *Nibbana*, the supramundane paths and fruitions and its associated mental factors. In other words, it includes the state when detachment has gone to the point where everything has been detached, where there is strong non-attachment. It would, of course, have to begin with detachment or dispassion to gross things like the manifested defilements and material things. Then one goes into subtle mental ideas and calm states. Finally, it is dispassion to total non- attachment that reaches beyond conditioning.

Thus, one makes the wish in the practice, “May my heart be let go, be dispassionate, be detached, be unattached to all things, to oneself and the world. May there be complete self surrender.”

vii. Cessation (Nirodha)

All conditioned phenomena are subjected to the Law of Impermanence. And why? For vipassana practitioners it is clear that it is the reflection of a deeper truth within. Cessation can be observed first with change and then with the moment to moment arising and dissolution of the five aggregates—matter, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness. As one gets closer to this flow, it moves faster and the nature of dissolution becomes clear in the fifth insight. That true cessation (without arising) occurs only with the supramundane. That is the ultimate cessation. The observation of this makes us let go. The appreciation of this comes with this recollection and aids in the process.

Thus, as we recollect of cessation, “Matter ceases, feelings cease, perceptions cease, mental formations cease, consciousness cease. Let go, let all cease according to Nature. Let Mind and Material processes that give rise to individuality cease.”

viii. Nibbana

The definition given to *Nibbana* is freedom from craving. The texts are not silent on this as some would think. It gives many descriptions of it. For the scheme here, I have chosen one, and that is Truth, Truth which is the present reality. It is the unchanging state, deathless state that is present here and now for those who are mindful and intuitive enough to know.

As in the *Bhaddekaratta Gatha*:

*Do not trace back the past nor wonder about the future
The past is gone, the future is unreached
But see clearly (with insight) the present state
As it really is
Penetratively, invincibly, unshakeably.....*

*“It is being mindful of things as they really are
It is just being clearly present
It is just being open and letting things be
And let Truth manifest.”*

(4) Insight meditation guided by Peace recollection.

As to this part, it is like the coupling (*yugandha*) form where both tranquility and insight are done hand in hand. If this is not possible, then the texts themselves would not mention the coupling form. The Mind can be very quick, efficient and precise when trained to be so. It can switch objects quickly from one to another. The objects themselves are not so separate. Concepts and ideas arise from the consciousness and mental states that make them up. Looking at the mirror of mindfulness, these reflections merge and transform into realities.

It is advisable that this form of practice is best done by one who has reached the matured fourth insight knowledge of arising and dissolution. That is, the momentum and flow of insight meditative formations and forces are clear and powerful. It is a driving force that pushes one into the unknown. For one who is learned and well guided, the direction is clear, but it is not always the case with everyone. There are many distracting and deceiving objects. The defilements are very cunning and sneaky. A little unwholesome thought can complicate the process at a critical moment.

- i. The recollective practice which can be done at the start or in between when things get rough not only calm things down but also give a clearer view and direction. It can be done for some minutes, say 15 to get one back to stability.
- ii. The recollective process can be done as above but using just one of the eight virtues which one finds most effective until concentration, balance and direction is reached and then switch back to vipassana.
- iii. The recollection can also be done while watching the vipassana objects, or what I call “gring-grong rolling along” as do waves and currents of a river. One can actually see the development of insight clearly together with the transformation in its objects when it is held on long enough. Once the channeling is efficient, the currents become powerful. Then the recollective process stops and only the penetrative process is left. It is possible that the insight development can go on all the way to the Supramundane and even to the 16th reviewing knowledge which looks back on the process and its object. This is being made used of in the next step.

(5) Supramundane Peace Recollection

Hopefully at some point, insight matures and there is realisation. On emergence one knows what has happened. This sentence itself is a paradox. The unconditioned is timeless and cannot be in the past. Another paradox is that it is like saying one knows the unknowable. To know itself means that the consciousness has an object which implies conditioning. But *Nibbana* is the unconditioned. So, I have to admit I am talking a little short of nonsense. At best I say it as an ordinary person (definitely not a scholar) would say in his most naive expressions. In *Abhidhamma* (Buddhist metaphysical) language, the realization process called the path and fruition thought process occurs while running through with the unconditioned element, *Nibbana*, as its object. Following this is a

reviewing process which constitute the 16th insight called the reviewing knowledge which runs through with the supramundane objects – *Nibbana*, path and fruition consciousness as its objects. One knows this is the sense sphere wholesome consciousness associated with wisdom. In other words, one KNOWS .

Strangely enough, at that moment of realization or its replay in the fruition attainment through resolution to get it again, it is fixed (*appana*) concentration where there is no subject-object differentiation (and knowing as we usually mean) at those moments. What one knows is at the retrospection that follows up at later periods, and these are more like impressions left behind with some thoughts or even concepts built over it. At that precise moment when it occurs, one does not know.

The important point is, firstly the connection has been made and the object and impression will remain in the mind stream. It also means that some defilements starting with wrong views, and skeptical doubts, have been radically removed. The next point is that faith or confidence has been established and have become unshakeable. Having made the connection, the experience or happening can be replayed. In other words the supramundane object can be recalled. This is interesting because it can also be an object of meditation. All that follows is likely guided by resolutions that are made prior to its entry. Usually, the yogi would make resolutions to go into this replay or fruition attainment again and for longer periods and then proceed to renounce it to gain the higher paths. He then makes a resolution such as, “May I experience the highest Dhamma clearer than before.” The procedure is repeated after one has reached a higher path. I have, however, noticed that making the resolution to review the supramundane with greater clarity brings up better results and understanding of the practice that is to be done after the First Stream Entrant path. The Nature of the Supramundane, when clearly imprinted onto the consciousness up to the very ordinary and mundane levels, plays a big part in the process of purification, sublimation and transformation.

So when one keeps on making the resolution repetitively to get a

- i. Clearer picture of what has happened during cessation and entry into the supramundane levels. On emergence, one picks up ever more clearer impressions of it. One also keeps making resolutions
- ii. More diverse impressions of it.

These are all recollected as virtues and qualities of the unconditional peace by direct means. They can come under any of the eight recollected virtues of *Nibbana* and more. The impressions and concepts built up are also later made into doorways into the beyond. But one has always to bear in mind that these are just impressions and footprints left behind. Beyond the door, it is undescrivable and at that very moment unknowable (in the normal sense of the word). The door is like a hole where the bird flies free. The closest word I use for it is freedom.

Finally, since everything is Dhamma, phenomena or natural truth which has connection with reality (although some more than others), there can be just as many portals to liberation. One practices vipassana and peace in the most ordinary or even the most unlikely situations. This is extension of peace to the mundane world which comes under the next part of the peace meditation.

(6) Meditation for the Extension of Peace into the Mundane

i. Seeing the Dhamma, Truth in everything

For one who has experienced directly the supramundane, there cannot be any doubt what reality is about. All else fade into secondary importance. And yet this clarity can still be muffled at times and will take time to grow. But there can be no turning back like the great river that is destined to run to the sea. You cannot deny forever that stark reality before your very eyes, under your very nose. Effort can be made to

hasten it. Frequent reminders too keep one on the go. One has to keep on looking into the reality in things. The beginner directs it to the three universal characteristics. The experienced direct it to the Dhamma, the Truth, which is so obvious and yet others are blind to it. It depends on the attention (*manasikara*) to direct it to the right pin point. With the right wise attention, the object, consciousness and mental factors come together as ultimate dispassion. Its right there in front of you, at the back of you, all round you, inside and outside - the unspeakable truth. It may seem contradictory at first. How can the other reality coexist with this reality? The mind can only take one as the object at a time. This is all thinking and concepts no matter how well founded. Reality is reality, and repeated seeing of it with clarity is beyond question. Truth reigns supreme. On safe grounds for argument's sake, we may say we try our best to see as closely and as precisely as we can to that ultimate reality, which with skill can turn out to be the unconditioned element. Repeated practice in this would keep one to the centre of the path no matter where one is, even in the toilet!

ii. Breaking the Barriers

To be able to recognise and acknowledge this is not easy. It means one has to break the subtlest barriers of nature and perceptions in our minds. It is like seeing through the delimitations of existence and non-existence. It amounts to making the invisible visible and vice versa. In practice one has to first practice discrimination to the subtlest levels. Then one has to see into their synthesis, which is the relationship or conditional relationship between these phenomena. At first it is analytical thinking, then followed by experience. They all finally fall neatly into the Nature as expressed in the three Universal Characteristics – Impermanence, Unsatisfactoriness and Non-Self. It is that flow of mind, body processes that underlies all experiences. But there is still the differentiation of greater and lesser suffering. Greater and lesser happiness. When Cessation comes, all ceases and thus also all barriers imposed by conditioned things.

Coming out of that Ultimate state, one is then able to see both aspects of everything and also what is beyond both of them. This is because the Phenomena and their relationships become clearer than ever. This is also the connection between them. Their separateness is not as wide as it is thought. Seeing into this repeatedly and clearly helps us to break the barriers. Such recognition helps to facilitate the transformation process.

For example, the consciousness and mental states will be more like being the same and different things at the same time. This also happens with mind and material processes, so too with external and internal objects. The three Universal characteristics will also be recognised as one. Finally the defilements will be transformed into beautiful mental states!! Then it is clear how vipassana purification at the root of existence can occur in daily life. One will also seem to be in Samsara and at the same time in *Nibbana*. These seem contradictory because it does not make sense to the logical mind. Do we not seem to see and hear at the same time? Does it mean *Nibbana* with aggregates remaining (*Saupadisesa Nibbana*) manifested in daily life? Food for thought? No, experience has no substitute. But breaking of these barriers does wonders. There is much freedom without having to sacrifice harmony and order as kept by moral principals. Truth is on the side of order and harmony, love and peace in the Universe. This is also the point when love and compassion flower. Such a mind directed to anyone merely brings out the best spirituality in them. I have found out that it is the point which mindful-insight practice directed externally to beings is loving kindness.

iii. Disappear between Worlds

Where is Peace? The question is asked at the beginning of the preliminary peace practice. The ordinary man would say that he will find it in a quiet place, probably at a holy spot. The more practical will say that it is a state of mind. Develop tranquility through meditation.

The Dhamma speaks of three types of seclusions (*viveka*) –

- a. Seclusion of body
- b. Seclusion of mind
- c. Seclusion from all substrate of existence

The first two seclusions are clear to people. The last refers to this Peace we are dealing with. The Peace from conditioned existence. The Peace completely beyond the reaches of the defilements. Usually it is accessible only to those who have developed sufficient concentration because it is said that it occurs only in fixed, absorption concentration levels. With skill, I think it can also be done while engaging in daily activities. It again depends on the skillfulness of the wise attention to pin point the boundary and slip between worlds. One just pin points the portal, recognise it as a hole of unknown possibilities and slip the completely open vipassana clarity into it. It is like setting the mind free, the bird disappears into the void.

I remember what my Abhidhamma teacher once jokingly commented. If someone asks you, “Is *Nibbana* Mind or Matter?” You may answer it as “Mind.” If he again asks, “Really?” You then answer “No.”

In the present case, if someone would ask me then, “Do you say then that *Nibbana* is the free mind?” I would counter question by asking, “What mind?”

This brings us back again to my favourite quote:

Dispassion is the Path, Liberation is the Fruit.

5. Meditation on Death (*Marananussati*)

A veteran yogi who was struck by a terminal illness once said that Death is the best teacher he ever had. That is something to bear in mind. Many of us do need something strong to wake us up and hopefully it is not too late. Then we will ask ourselves if there is anything worthy that we have done or should do in life. We will look into the essentials and not quarrel over nitty-gritty things of lesser importance. It is about doing what one thinks is most worthy and doing it to our utmost. When Death comes at the doorstep, two things come into the foreground – compassion and wisdom. Meditation is one of the important ways how these things can be achieved. Although it is not always pleasant and easy, but then there are things which are less pleasant, more difficult to accomplish and quite useless.

The traditional manual on meditation, the *Path of Purification*, uses a set of contemplation to be done systematically which would eventually lead to excess concentration. I have come up from this a simpler approach to serve as a means to arouse a sense of urgency as well as to develop an initial concentration that can act as a base for insight practice.

As to the object, one is advised not to think of a beloved (as sorrow may arise) or an enemy (as evil gladness may arise) or the neutral person (as apathy may arise). Instead think of a person whom one knows well when alive, together with his joys and sorrows. Then it makes you think, “He was so alive, and now what has happened to him? Where is he now and what has he done in life?” What comes out glaring will be that Death has done its thing. Keeping that person in mind, one reflects, “Death has come (for him), his life faculty has been cut off.” It would be better if one has seen the corpse or else his gravestone can also be used. Notice the solemnity and silence. With mindfulness and acceptance, any emotions and fear will turn into peacefulness.

Each of these eight contemplations has its own significance and can be repeated. Death has many lessons to teach. In brief, they are:

- (1) *Death as a murderer.* Here in this sense, one contemplates that Death is always around as if waiting for an opportunity to take away one's life. Keeping the person in mind as described above, one repeats, "Death will come, the life faculty will be cut off". Then refer it back to oneself: "Death will come to me, my life faculty will be cut off." This contemplation gives one an awareness of Death being ever present.
- (2) *Death as a ruin of success.* Think again of the person one has used as an object. Think of what he has accumulated in life. His possessions, his position, his livelihood, his parents, his wife, kids and lovers. And all that knowledge he has gained. What has happened to these when he died. He could not take them away with him. Only his Kammic deeds followed. Then keep him in mind with the thought, "Death has come, his life faculty has been cut off." Again, refer it to oneself and with the thought, "Death will come, life faculty will be cut off." This contemplation helps in the detachment to all worldly gains.
- (3) *Death as something that happens to everyone.* As one thinks again of one's object, think also how all other beings like him have died, will die and are dying. From the great man to the humble pauper. From the young to the elderly. From Brahmas, devas to petas and animals, all humans likewise die. This contemplation helps to detach one from pride, selfishness and youth. Again refer it to oneself. "Just so as all beings have died, are dying and will die, I too have died, am dying and will die."
- (4) *The Body as fragile, having to share it with others.* This contemplation thinks of the body as the home of many beings – such as worms, insects, etc. As such it can break down soon and Death will come. If

one knows the dangers to the person when alive, it would be suitable to bring it out. Again, refer back to oneself. It helps to be detached to the body as me, mine and myself.

- (5) *Death as connected with the frailty of life.* One thinks of the various causes of Death. Due to lack of oxygen one dies. One may die of starvation, thirst. One may die of illness. One can die of accident on the road. One can be poisoned or murdered. One can die of old age, slip at a ladder, choked at the throat. One can also die because of the imbalance of elements in the body. There are countless possibilities. Think then of the person how he has died. Then refer again to oneself.
- (6) *Death as signless.* This recollects the fact that one does not really know when Death comes (time), where it will meet us (place) and how. But certain it will come and we should be ready. This gives us a sense of urgency to quickly do what we can while we still have the energy. Think of Death that it can come any at any place and time unannounced.
- (7) *Contemplate Death with regards to the limitedness of lifespan.* Here one thinks how long can a person live. Seldom people live beyond hundred. Many nowadays do not go beyond 70. This person has died at the age of How long can I live? I am at now at the age of ... Life is uncertain, Death is certain.
- (8) *Contemplation of Death in the shortness of the moment.* Here one sees Death in the moment itself. Death bears its mark in the dissolution sub-moment in all impermanent processes of Nature. To look and watch out for it means to look into the Nature of Impermanence itself. Here is given the link to *Vipassana* meditation. It would, I assume that by the time one gets to this, one would have arrived at least into access level of concentration where the hindrances have been suppressed.

After some analysis, I have considered it possible to group some of these together to simplify things as a preliminary contemplation before vipassana practice.

1. Death as a murderer
- 2/3. Comparison with those died as to their possessions etc
- 4/5 Frailty of life can include the section on sharing of the body with others.
- 6/7 Signlessness of Death and limitedness of lifespan
8. Momentary Death as Impermanence in mind and body processes.

Death indeed is a manifestation of an inner Reality, the Truth of Impermanence. It is inherent in the flow of Nature. All conditioned phenomena are subjected to origination, decay and dissolution. Death of a lifetime is the dissolution of a set of phenomena based on a Kammic resultant which we call the life continuum consciousness. Essentially, it is the dissolution phase of all phenomena. We have been taught to be mindful to the very last breath. To be able to do that, means that we have to be prepared and that means lots of practice. In *Vipassana* practice we do this repeatedly. Seeing into change, the arising and passing away of phenomena is part and parcel of it. Clearly, the penetrative insight into it leads us to realise that which is beyond birth and death.

Finally, it would be complete only with the provision of some of the verses which can be used when building up concentration of Death awareness, i.e. when focussing on the object, the person who has died.

Adhuvam jivitam
Dhuvam maranam

Life is unsure
Death is sure

Avassam maya maritabbam
Maranapariyosanam me jivitam

Death is inevitable for me
My life ends in Death

<i>Jivitam me aniyatam</i>	Life is uncertain
<i>Maranam me niyatam</i>	Death is certain
<i>Aciram vatayam kayo</i>	Before long, this body
<i>Pathavim adhisessati</i>	Will lie on the Earth
<i>Chuddo apetavinnano</i>	Empty, devoid of consciousness
<i>Nirattham va kalingaram</i>	Like a useless charred log
<i>Sabbe satta maranti ca</i>	All beings die
<i>Marimsu ca</i>	have died
<i>Marissare</i>	will die
<i>Tathevaham marissami</i>	I indeed, as such will die
<i>Natthi me ettha samsayo</i>	For me there is no doubt

6. Meditation of Body parts (*Kotthasa*)

In this practice, one recollects body parts in a sequence starting “upwards from the toes and downwards from the hair on the crown, encased by the skin, are many impurities”, thus the discourse explains. This meditation comes under the development of the perception of loathesomeness to the body, a quality of detachment to overcome bodily lust while concentration is being built. It is, therefore, suitable for those with lustful temperaments. It is also known from practice that such strongly concentrated and pure mind directed at these body parts can also bring about health and healing to those parts. One advantage is that the method is something direct and simple, at least at the beginning. One brings to mind with recitation one item followed by another. There are 32 items and they are grouped together into six groups. One begins with the first group, i.e. group A. Even with this it yields great results and the stories handed down in the texts tell us that monks have reached realisation even during the recitation phase.



Not far from Prague is a UNESCO heritage place called Kutna Hora. One interesting place there is the Bone Chapel where the whole chapel within from chandeliers to chalices are all made from human bones. Rather than eerie, it gives out a liberating atmosphere as if of freedom.

Bone Chapel, Kutna Hora, Czech 2007

The groups are:

- A. (1) head hair (2) body hair (3) nails (4) teeth (5) skin
- B. (6) flesh (7) sinews (8) bones (9) bone marrow (10) kidney
- C. (11) heart (12) liver (13) diaphragm/pleura (14) spleen (15) lungs
- D. (16) bowels (17) entrails (18) chyme/gorge (19) faeces (20) brain
- E. (21) bile (22) phlegm (23) pus (24) blood (25) sweat (26) fat
- F. (27) tears (28) grease/lymph (29) spittle (30) snot (31) synovial fluid (32) urine

There are six fold skill in the learning process.

- (1) Verbal recitation
- (2) Mental recitation
- (3) Colour
- (4) Shape
- (5) Direction (found in upper or lower part of body)
- (6) Location (position with respect to other parts)
- (7) Delimitation (boundaries of a particular part)

Then there are 10 fold skill of paying attention.

- (1) following in serial order
- (2) done not too quickly
- (3) done not too slowly
- (4) warding off distraction, sticking to the object
- (5) surmounting the concept and establishing on just the repulsiveness
- (6) successive leaving out of unclear parts
- (7) bringing about absorption
- (8-10) giving attention from time to time in balancing the faculties and the enlightenment factors. This last part is clearly insight practice.

Take for example the first group A . One does the forward recitation: head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin. And a traditional text mentions that it is done for 5 days. This is followed by the reverse: skin, teeth, nails, body hair, head hair for another 5 days.

Finally, one proceeds in both ways from head hair to skin and back from skin to head hair. This takes another 5 days. After that one proceeds with group B: forwards 5 days, backwards 5 days, both ways 5 days. Next, groups A and B are combined to give a combination for forwards, backwards and both ways each 5 days. This procedure is repeated with the new group C and its combination with A and B after that. When the whole works is done, it takes a total of 5 ½ months.

Usually one is also expected to bring to mind in a visual form, that part of the body recited. One may not have seen some parts and so do get hold of an anatomy book which have nice pictures. But let us come back to the first group of 5. They are obviously the external, and visible parts. Following the recitations, with faculties balanced, concentration will develop. Those unclear parts can be left out and one may just end up with one.

An interesting part of this practice is that the object can develop three ways:

1. As colour which can be dealt with as colour visualisation of a kasina.
2. As a perception of loathsomeness, and
3. As a definition of elements.

If one wishes to develop detachment to the body but that form of perception does not arise, then one is advised to arouse it in five ways. These five ways (with examples using the head hairs) are:

- (1) colour, e.g. imagine black hair on porridge
- (2) shape, e.g. imagine hair like greasy black threads
- (3) odor, e.g. imagine smell of sweaty, unwashed hair
- (4) habitat, i.e. the tissues of fat and grease and blood from which it arises
- (5) location, e.g. hair is like a mop on top of head

When concentration is developed, it can reach the first absorption when done with perception of the repulsive, the fourth absorption when done as a colour kasina, and access concentration when done as a definition of elements. It is obvious that the definition of elements would be closest and easiest when shifting to insight practice. But one can still shift to insight practice from any of the other types of tranquility objects.

Definition and Analysis of Elements

In the *Satipatthana Sutta* we can find the method described under the chapter of Analysis of Elements.

...he reviews the body however placed as consisting of elements.

...In this body is the Earth element, the Water element, the Fire element, the Wind element. Just as a skilled butcher or his apprentice had killed a cow, and seated at cross road with it, cut to pieces. So too ...he reviews in this body...

Firstly, the contemplation runs through the characteristics or qualities of the four elements.

- (1) Earth element – as harsh, hard, rigidity
- (2) Water element - as watery, fluid
- (3) Fire element – as fiery, warmth, digestive, burning, maturing
- (4) Wind element – as air, airy, movement

With proper consideration as well as observation, one is to get a clear understanding as to what it means. The clear definition also serves to sharpen the perception which will be helpful when it is time to switch to insight practice.

Thus one goes through the first 20 parts and consider them with regards to the Earth element. These parts are the very same ones given in the recollection on parts of the body, i.e. groups A-D. With each part thus directed to and considered, one reflects, e.g. with regards to the hardness of the head hair, that it is;

1. without consciousness
2. unmoral
3. void
- 398 4. not a living being.

This process obviously will develop or fortify the perception of non-self.

Then the same is done for the 12 parts which are liquid and consider them with regards to the Water element e.g. bile and it is without consciousness, unmoral, void and not a living being.

Next one considers the Fire element in the same way. The types of Fire element given are:

- (1) Fire that warms
- (2) Fire that ages
- (3) Fire that burns up
- (4) Fire that digests

After that one considers the Wind element with regards to the six types of wind:

- (1) Up going winds
- (2) Down going winds
- (3) Winds in belly
- (4) Wind in bowels
- (5) Winds that runs through the limbs
- (6) In and out breath

When one considers methodically in this way, access concentration can be reached. With the abandonment of hindrances, one can switch with ease to vipassana practice. Looking at the nature of the practice, it should easily switch to vipassana. However, for some, the reflecting and thinking involved may become a hindrance. There are also subtle concepts involved and so the moment to moment change, i.e. the three universal characteristics, must come into view.

Chapter 2



MEDITATION AND PROBLEMS

It is a fact of Truth that there will always be problems in life. Meditation too has its share. But there is also a way to solve problems in which they can be considered as “suffering” in the doctrinal sense and it tries to solve it.

In trying to meditate, we come across problems. Firstly, there is the question, “How do we do this?”, and as we go on, we meet with obstacles and hindrances. And so we ask, “now what?”. There are problems with learning to meditate and there are problems which arise because of it. There are also problems which have nothing to do with it directly but are nevertheless connected with it in some way, just as life is connected to everything that we do. So I find it a little difficult to give an accurate title to this chapter, with the last segment focused on problems. Perhaps the title could be better phrased as “Problems of Meditators”, but it does not matter very much. So it is not a major problem because you will soon know what it is all about. You will actually be more interested to solve your problem than a suitable title for the chapter. However, you may still be disappointed to find that I do not deal with all of the problems, or at least not in great details, especially with the problem that you have in mind. In many cases, it will be more of a reminder of what has been discussed in the previous chapters. Finally, it is you yourself that is the key to the solutions. In the Dharma, it is all non-self and so is ignorance, craving and anger, the three evil roots. We can resolve them with understanding, contentment/detachment and love/acceptance.

Once, a psychotherapist asked me about the two approaches to a problem. He said that when a problem arose in his mind, his training taught him

to solve it analytically at a psychological level. In *Vipassana*, however, he was told not to think about it but just watch as it arises and passes away. Which then is the way he should choose? Promptly I told him to take the second way. That is because he is in a *Vipassana* retreat. It may not be the very best answer for this individual if his psychological problems are indeed heavy, but it does have its bearing. In *Vipassana* meditation, problems are dealt with at an existential level. It goes to the very roots of existence from which all problems spring. When the problems are so heavy that it is not possible even to bring up sufficient mindfulness to give one some relief and stability, then it is better to find someone to talk to, like a good friend or psychotherapist. Fortunately, from the yogis I have met, there are not many who need that so very often.

Problems overlap and it is not easy to classify them neatly under discrete headings. So I have categorized them in a simple way for simple reading, simple understanding and simple writing, making a complicated case simple, the first step to solving a problem.

1. Problems of Beginners

Beginners are people who come to learn about meditation. Their problems generally come under three types: (a) strong defilements, (b) weak spiritual faculties, and (c) lack of supportive factors.

(1) Strong defilements

It is not correct to say that all beginners have strong defilements but it is safe to assume that all of them to have their hands full when they come face to face with defilements when they try to meditate. This initial “clearing” process is necessary and inevitable but can be quite difficult. This had been dealt with in the previous chapters of the “Five Hindrances” and the “clearing” process of functional *vipassana*. For example, addictions would come under Sensual Cravings, traumas would come under Aversion,

highly judgemental and critical attitude would come under Skeptical Doubts. Procrastination would come under Sloth and Torpor, but more often than not, it would come under Restlessness and Remorse.

These can, to a great extent, be overcome when mindfulness has been made continuous and powerful. Sometimes one may need some extra help from a suitable tranquility meditation exercise, such as loving kindness meditation, for example, in individuals with angry temperaments. If it still does not work, it may be that you have not got the right instructions from the start!

(2) Weak spiritual faculties

It is also not fair to conclude that all beginners have weak wholesome mental faculties because many should have developed them in previous trainings or existences before they came this way. But if it is their first encounter with *vipassana* meditation, then it may be the first time in this life that they will have to develop it in the way of the spiritual faculties that lead one along the Noble Eightfold Way to Nibbana. The solution would then be the right method and techniques done in a structured and systematic manner under suitable conditions that the mind can follow and accept. The next key will be the persistent arousing of this *vipassana* mindfulness until it becomes automatic and continuous. Then with a little bit of skill and guidance, all things should fall into place.

(3) Suitable and supportive conditions

Again, the seven suitable conditions have been mentioned in an earlier chapter. The seven are:

- i. Dwelling
- ii. Weather
- iii. Food
- iv. Resort

- v. Talk
- vi. Posture
- vii. Person

One will have to seek, if not create, suitable if not the best condition for meditation. As for internal conditions, then it is none other than the Five Spiritual Faculties of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom. Generally, I would think that the main key factors would be:

- i. Good friend or teacher
- ii. Righteous will-power, and
- iii. Conducive environment.

2. Problems of Non-Beginners

This group comprises yogis who have at least grasped the basic meaning and techniques of *vipassana* meditation. They should have acquired the basic momentary concentration, basic insight into non-self and, therefore, some appreciable degree of confidence and given time, the practice should progress further. But how much further? Can they all realise the supramundane? Definitely not all of them because there are still many more levels to go through and many more obstacles to overcome. But one does not stop practice just because one may not realise the supramundane. We practice to overcome suffering and gain more happiness. In a journey, we have to climb mountains and ford rivers. One can consider them obstacles or consider them as part of the path. A positive attitude makes a difference. It just goes to show that there is more to learn. Of course, we still keep that lofty goal in mind. That is the guiding star.

(1) Problems of balancing the faculties

It is difficult to shoot right at the target if you do not have a stable stance. In the same way, it is difficult to develop insight when the mindfulness and concentration are not stable. When the mind is too highly charged with

energy, it tends to be restless. When it is too still, it inclines to lethargy. The right balance between the energy and concentration faculties ensures that the mindfulness is functioning properly. Like a well balanced car, it progresses with stability along the highway. When the mind becomes more powerful and the defilements creep in, it becomes more dangerous. This part has been dealt under the chapter on the balancing of the faculties (Part III, Chapter 3). Balance is really something of an experience like balancing a pot on one's head. After sometime, one will know how to balance one's mind but it may take sometime. There are many factors involved, and it is easy to overlook some of them.

(2) Problem of Proliferation

Cravings and being proud of and clinging to wrong views about pleasant and refined states that arose out of the practice are called proliferations (*papanca*). When right concentration develops, the wholesome mental states that arise give rise to beautiful and refined experiences. There may even arise supernormal powers and miraculous events. As a result, strong attachments, pride and wrong views may set in. Then it begins as a real problem connected with meditation. One is then in a kind of trance or madness and may need something strong to shake one out of it. It can then be quite an embarrassment or in the long run, end up with some real psychological woes. This again has been dealt with under the section on "Imperfections of Insight" (Part III, Chapter 4b)

(3) Existential Problems

This is the root problem, the problem of all problems. It is something behind all activities. Questions like "Why are we here? Do I have to go through all these?" are existential in nature. That is because we identify situations and things with ourselves. But the conditioned world is imperfect, incomplete and false. The root of roots is delusion. When we see deeply into these conditionings, we come face to face with it as

something that has gone quite wrong. Then there manifests confused and painful mental formations that are chaotic. It can be like finding out that one's own mind is crazy, or that the whole world is a meaningless dream.



*Roots, Angkor, Kampuchea
2006*

Angkor is well known for the tenacious roots of trees growing over the ruins of an ancient kingdom. Many remarked it as amazingly beautiful. To me it tells of negligence. When unattended to, the defilements of greed, ill will and delusion grow strong and destroy the very foundations of spirituality. However, there is something nice to reflect about the picture. That Nature is resilient although it takes time. Man seems to be getting more and more destructive and wreck up the planet that gave him life.

Without guidance, one can end up quite depressed. One then feels caught between the devil and the deep blue sea. This is when faith and inspirations are needed to come to give one a lift. There is nothing like getting experienced guidance to deal with this situation. A greater part has to do with methods of handling “sufferings due to formations” (*sankhara dukkha*), which was dealt with under a previous chapter (Part II, Chapter 4).

(4) Problems of Unwise Attention

Attention determines the object that is to come into view as well as the accompanying mental states. Wise or proper attention indicates the presence of mindfulness and other wholesome mental states. With continued practice, right concentration can be attained. But right concentration can be just tranquility without insight, so the right attention that we are concerned with here has come with insight into the Three Universal Characteristics. Even when one begins to see these, one can start building concepts about them. *Nimittas* or visualized mental forms can be developed quite automatically. Usually at some point one holds on to an object and stagnates. One has to keep maintaining that sharp, clear, open awareness of things as they really are until the deepest insights develop. One of the good ways described as wise attention I think, is called in Pali “*atammayata*” translated as non-identification. It is an attention that does not identify an object as this or that or even as an object.

(5) Conflicts with the Conventional World

With practice we begin to know more and more about that inner reality of ultimate qualities (*paramattha dhamma*) that underlie all conventional realities. We also know that we have to increasingly reach for the other shore. This would be ideal in a retreat environment but in the conventional world it can be a challenge. If things do not work out as we hope for, then stress results. So we cannot ask too much. We have to be patient. We make the best of the situation. To some extent, this will also be dealt on the chapter of mindfulness in daily life. However, some of the conflicts are given as follows.

i. Problems of being a no body

Trying to understand non-self is itself not easy. This is due to the habitual tendency of identifying ourselves with everything around us. When we have had at least some basic experiential understanding, we find that we

are going against the habits and thoughts of the world at large. They may think for instance, “He thinks he does not exist, so he must be crazy!” Here one has to understand that others may not understand and one has to be careful in sharing one’s experiences to others. It is no fun when others think you are crazy. If you think they are right, then the problem may actually start. Then when one gets that strange feeling that the “I” is absent, the world around one seems to crumble and fall apart. As to such problems, a sound structure and theory is needed. It gives us a place to work from and the rational mind to accept and draw its lines. The process of transformation is gradual. It involves a gradual replacement of the Self view with the Self-less reality view. It is a skill of switch and play between the two realities (ultimate and conventional) which occurs with oneself and others.

ii. Problems of adjustment

This is also like the former set except it covers a wider field of activities. When one has returned from a retreat, one finds that the world is not the same as before. If the retreat has been a long one, that old world may no longer be there. One’s values and attitudes may have changed. Others too, towards one. Due to concentration, they can become magnified. One can also be extremely sensitive. It will take sometime to adjust back to the old situation and definitely changes will have to be made with habits and friends.

iii. Problems of continuity

It is natural to try to maintain what one has gained in retreats but the conventional world is not so conducive for states of deeper concentration. So one will have to make choices, priorities and sacrifices. One will firstly have to accept the situation and not to expect too much. A little is better than nothing. Secondly, the emphasis on mindfulness rather than concentration. The mindfulness for insight can still be sharpened to be able to develop some more insight. Next, the practice has to be taken in a

different form. Theoretical structure and ingenuity plays important keys to proper organization and planning of one's practice. It is a matter then as to how much time one can get to practise more intensively – a spiritual luxury. Yes, time is a very important factor. Without time to spare and always having to rush, mindfulness flies out of the window. Time can be made and saved. The question is also how much of worldly gains do we want and how much of spiritual blessings. Finally there is nothing like some tips from the more experienced practitioners.

(6) The Great Mistake

This is a case of over estimation, which is not an uncommon mistake. We read about many things in books and we try to identify them in our meditative experiences. There is hope and more hope, and there is overestimation, and sometimes also underestimation. The reason is that experiencing is one thing, and concepts about them another. It would depend greatly on finding someone who can really coordinate and confirm matters. Who is this person?

It is no big deal to make wrong judgements with many things, but to think one has realized Nibbana, the unconditioned Truth, is something else. It would then fall under Wrong Views when the clinging to it is strong (which it eventually and often does). Then it is unfortunate because it prevents any true realisations. Such a person can also be described as one who plays God, and so is a kind of madness. So if the thought arises that, "This is *Nibbana*", put on the red alert. Mindfully note, "thinking, thinking". Someone asked, "How do we know if we are enlightened?" The answer will be, "Definitely one will know, but there will be those who think so but are mistaken."

True realization wipes out all skeptical doubts. As long as a little bit of skeptical doubts is present, it can not be it. More important, therefore, is that one keeps on practising. The teacher does not give such confirmations; his duty is to keep the yogi practising. The Realisation is a matter for

the yogi and the yogi alone. What is also certain is that after realisation, certain mental defilements no longer arise. They are cut off at the root. And why? This I ask of people who think they have realised. Sometimes they start to sweat profusely after that. However, there are definitely certain conditions that have to be satisfied first before it can be considered a possibility.

3. Some Problems that Occur to Both Beginners and Non-Beginners

1. Stone in the head and other psychosomatic problems

“The stone in the head” is a condition where the pressure and tension in the head increases, especially around and between the eyebrows and around the nose. At first glance, it will seem to fall under a case of being too pushy, that is, exertion has been made excessively without mindfulness. Stress is, thus, built up until a stone seem to have formed in the head. It may be because many people associate stress with the head. Steps must then be taken to relax, and relax completely until the faculties are balanced. After some observations into such cases, it is obvious that there are several causes for it. If one can narrow down to the important cause or causes, then much of the battle is won. It then requires time to offset the condition. I have also noticed that in many such cases, the eyes have their part in it. When people are very “eye centered” in their experiences, they continue to use their eye muscles even though they are supposed to “feel” it when watching other bodily sensations. It is like one who has been concentrating on the TV or the computer screen for hours without a break. Mindfulness can be made to grow without forcing and tension, and it ought to be thus. So the advice will be to develop mindfulness without the onset of any stress being built up, especially around the head and eyes.

Another physical problem that we do get to see now and then is the occurrence of constipation. Someone said that it has something to do

with holding onto something in the past and not letting go. It is amazing how this problem vanishes the moment they leave the meditation retreat. A good way to find out will be to ask oneself the question, “What am I not willing to let go of?”

There was an obvious case of a persistent cough that keeps booming in the midst of a meditation hall. On watching the process, it is obviously triggered by an inner conflict. A choice has to be made. In another case, intense itching and rashes arose. In this case, it was a conflict of religious values. And when I asked the person to switch to loving kindness meditation, it miraculously vanished. We could go on, but it is clear that the body and mind are closely related. I remember coming across the book by Louise Hayes on *Heal Thyself* and it is wonderful how she has come up with a list of the relationship of physical problems and their mental causes.

2. Problems with Attitude

When I think of “wrong attitude”, I think of narrow mindedness and loose mindedness. The former is restrictive. The problem occurs with blind ultra conservatives as well as sectarians. “All else is wrong, and only mine is right,” is a typical attitude they may bear. Although this attitude is not strictly connected with meditation, but it does occur in the meditation circles. People often glorify and worship their teachers which may not be bad. But when conceit and ignorance are present, one’s outlook becomes inflexible and limits the expansion of one’s knowledge. The other type is “loose minded” who tries to accommodate everything and everybody. While he may be a popular all rounder, he may end up blind to the conflicting realities, and so end up confused without clear directions.

Then there is the perfectionist. Someone said that these are the ones that suffer most. But I wonder if they are also the one who will achieve the highest. Even if they do, the pragmatist will fare with less suffering. Better progress depends on other factors such as the Wisdom faculty present

in each individual. Personally, I think perfectionists have a tendency to be unrealistic, because the second universal characteristic, “*Dukkha*”, can also mean imperfect or incomplete. If one seeks perfection in the imperfection, then one will be in trouble. *Vipassana* is the way to be free from imperfections. Nibbana then is Perfect? If so, unless one experiences it, one will not know for sure. So in the meantime, it is better to be pragmatic.

Then again, there is the case of those who are apathetic. This may not occur at the head start. It may occur when one begins to see suffering more than one can accept or bear. One then turns pessimistic or apathetic. The arousing of the faith and joy factor should set things right.

It is not easy to solve these problems because they are often inherent in the individual’s character and habits that have developed and become part and parcel of his or her mental processes. One has to make a conscious, determined and persistent effort to improve.

3. Of Kamma and Demons

This part edges into the unknown. Kamma and questions on the world are classifiable under the “unthinkables”. That is, it goes into areas not understood directly with the conscious levels of thinking. Kamma is one, demons are another, which do get tied up or blamed for one’s failure to meditate and make progress. But if it is of any consolation, we know that they are definitely tied up with the inner ultimate realities and processes. Usually, we would look into other possible causes before we end up with these two possibilities.

Kamma has been defined as active volition that creates. There are wholesome kamma and there are unwholesome kamma and they bear their results accordingly. Meditation is concentrated wholesome kamma and when it is *vipassana*, it is that which frees the mind from negativities and sufferings through clarity and understanding. From clarity, there is

understanding and from understanding, there is detachment which in turn brings peace. But what interests us here is that certain kamma and its results that get into the practice may be helpful or problematic. Sores appear on the body, atrocious tendencies may surface. When its causes link up with the genes, then we can usually say that *Kamma* is definitely involved in a big way. When we have narrowed down to the kammic causes of problems, then we can perhaps also find the other kammic solution to it. Some of these are:

- i. Asking for pardon for wrong deed done.
- ii. Determination and resolution to improve in the positive direction
- iii. Transference of merits
- iv. Undertaking major meritorious undertakings
- v. Development of strong concentration.

Demons and devas are beings normally not visible to the naked eye. Buddhists acknowledge their existence and many discourses by the Buddha have been given to them or because of them. As practitioners, we know that they are as real as we are real. If we go beyond that, then there are just the ultimate realities. But many people see things that are actually hallucinations and so where do we draw the line? In most cases they can be ignored, but if they come as demonic possessions then it becomes serious. Usually we are taught to regard these as mental objects, not dwell on them and let them pass away as in all natural phenomena. If they persist and their belief is so strong, then one may resort to Shamans of which I am not in the position to comment. My belief is that the Truths in the underlying ultimate realities, if realized, should be able to go beyond all these that cause problems. Generally, we recommend recitations and in most such cases it works. There is for example the *Atanatiya* protection that wards off evil spirits.

Chapter 3



PRACTICE OF MINDFULNES IN DAILY LIFE

*N*ot many people have the good fortune of an extended period of intensive meditative practice. Most will have to return to their dependants and earn their livelihood after a couple of weeks. This does not mean that they forgo their practice. Rather, they will have to practise under less conducive conditions. It is then expected that the state of mind will undergo some backsliding but one will realise that one is actually stronger and happier than before the retreat. But in the mean time, adjustments have to be made. As mentioned before, one must not have high expectations. One has to be patient. But with some planning and organization, more time and conducive conditions can be made up. To think of daily practice as accumulating the “perfections” and supportive kamma is a good attitude.

1. Establishing conditions conducive for practice in daily life
 - a. Finding the suitable environment. The usual suggestions are quietude, safety, convenience, space, and sympathetic people. Such conditions are also conditions for a hermitage and have been dealt with in the earlier chapter.
 - b. Proper and right livelihood. Right livelihood means a livelihood that does not transgress moral principles such as killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, harmful speech and addictive habits. Since one spends much time in earning ones livelihood, the accumulation of unwholesome kamma from wrong livelihood can be considerable. The reverse is true for right livelihood. An extra advantage to look for in a job would be the time available to go for retreats.

- c. Relationships. There are some relationships we can choose and there are those that cannot. Associating with the wise, dissociating with the fools, honouring the honourable, each of this is the highest blessing. So says the discourse on blessings. We do have a choice to a great extent, and so we try to make the wise choices of who we associate with. Who? Those with faith, those who are energetic in wholesome deeds and striving. The ever mindful, the tranquil and the Wise. If we cannot find such people, then at least they are sympathetic. If not, at least they do not obstruct or give problems to our practice. As for those we have to live with, we can try to influence them in a positive way. In the worst scenario, be indifferent and equanimous until one can find a way out.
- d. Engage in activities that are helpful to the practice. This includes reading to provide good conceptual structure and theory, meritorious activities such as welfare works motivated by compassion, exercises that take care of the health of the body, and caring for the environment, e.g. planting trees, reading up the texts to gain better understanding of structure of practice.

2. Establishing mindfulness in daily life

I think the most important factor is “not to rush”. When we rush, we lose mindfulness and the rest follows.

Question: How is the practice of mindfulness different from a retreat? It is obvious that we have to do many things other than just practising the formal exercises as in a retreat. A large part of the mindfulness practice would be done under more worldly situations and objects. Therefore, we have to do many things at the same time – think, decide, act and get involved with many complicated actions and situations. But the underlying truths remain the same – that they are mind and material processes arising and passing away. If we can be mindful of them, then mental cultivation goes on.

To note some differences:

In retreat, objects are more of ultimate realities, movements slowed down, often doing a thing at a time, thinking and speaking only when necessary. In conventional life, objects are more often concepts, movements have often to be faster, doing several things at once, and much thinking and speaking are often necessary.

Thus, mindfulness used will be more of the general type, which gives a bird eye view of the situation, as well as access it and how to act. The key to it is clear comprehension described earlier. When something important arises, then other things are put aside and one concentrates onto the issue concerned. This is like reading and painting, or listening to someone's problem. One has then to remember to be relaxed and tranquil to ensure optimal mindfulness, otherwise stress may build up instead. When it is time to act, then the clear comprehension of purpose and suitability comes into play. If possible, we also include clear comprehension of resort and non delusion. For e.g. when speaking, take mindful note of the speaking. Make sure it comes with good and suitable intentions. Then speak slowly, endowed with the qualities of good speech (true, gentle, kind, useful and healing). Communication plays a big part in society and our relationships. Whenever possible, one can grab the opportunity to go into a slightly deeper level of concentration and insight development. Such snatched moments may be seconds or minutes but should not be underestimated.

So, one tries to maintain continuous mindfulness throughout the day from the moment one wakes up, brushing teeth, attending to toilet matters, breakfast and so on until one goes to work. At work, one tries to be mindful of all that goes on in the office until one returns home. At home one rests, takes dinner, attends to family matters, meditates and finally falls asleep.

Many situations are like this and as they say, life is one thing after another. There will always be problems and it all ends only in Nibbana. So meanwhile, we try to make ends meet and we do it as happily as we can. If we can remember that the spiritual task is the most essential matter, then all else fade into the background. For this, contemplation of Death is a good reminder. One needs to use one's ingenuity and common sense, which we call clear comprehension, to deal with the situations. We also need breaks to increase the efficiency of practice.

In daily life, mindfulness is not always of the vipassana form. Often we also employ practices like loving kindness and the other divine abidings. At other times we practice perfections of patience, truthfulness and discipline. All these add up to the final result which is held together by the spiritual aspiration to reach the unconditional peace.

When one has an hour or more, one can then engage in the formal exercises as are done in retreats. If so, it would be better if the time for each day is the same. Usually it is better in the morning after a good physical and mental rest. One or more type of guardian meditations (recollection of the Buddha, Loving kindness, Body impurities, Death contemplation) if done regularly will help quickly calm down one's mind. Then one can proceed to practice to develop insight.

Is it possible to develop insight in daily life? I think it is, because the underlying inner realities are the same. Momentary concentration can operate in the levels of conventional reality. It just need a little to bring one over the edge and this comes with familiarity, habit and some skillful directing of the sharpened, mature mindfulness to the three universal characteristics.

- (i) *Impermanence*. It is found in the change or flow of the objects at the six sense doors. It is seeing of the River of Life flowing through one.

- (ii) *Suffering*. It is seen in the unsatisfactoriness of all worldly conditions—gain/loss, praise/blame, fame/infame, happiness/ suffering. Where there is unsatisfactoriness, it is seen in the instability and thus undependability of these conditions and they lead back to the processes underlying them, like turbulent waves of formations and objects. Peace is best!
- (iii) *Non-self*. It is seen in the world as a kind of illusion. What we know is superficial. There is always a deeper aspect of things. We ourselves are just a conceptual creation of the mind. When we see and piece out these building blocks or formations, we get again the stream of inner processes which we have to penetrate. Reality of conditioned existence is unsubstantial. It is like seeing oneself like a puppet on stage, the theatre of life.

It is true that deeper concentration levels give rise to deeper insights but one has also to bear in mind that it is the maturity and sharpness of the mindfulness that counts. How then can we account for the possibility of dry visioned Arahants? Besides, it is also an illusion that deeper concentration cannot arise in daily life. It does, although slowly.



Under severe windy conditions on the Hartz mts. of Tasmania, this tree which must be very old has to lie low. The wonder of it is that it survives and to an old age. Sometimes when we have to practice under unfavourable conditions, we also have to lie low and be very patient.

Prostrate Tree, Tasmania, Australia 2004

PART V



SPREADING THE LIGHT

Light has often been used as a simile for wisdom because wisdom reveals what has been concealed by delusion. So it can also be considered the way of wisdom. But wisdom and compassion which seem quite different, in the end are actually related. For example, one can conclude that a wise man will be also a compassionate man, and a compassionate man will likewise have some wisdom. These two universal forces are wholesome and are connected.

1. Loving-Kindness/Compassion and Vipassana

A poignant question was asked to me after which it sets off trains of thoughts. ‘If everything is non-self, would it not make loving-kindness superficial?’ It can also be put another way. ‘Does *vipassana* practice make a person robotic?’

The two qualities - insight and compassion, are closely linked to man’s search for that peace which is freedom from suffering. So any confusion would just be misunderstanding of the lines between insight and compassion/loving-kindness meditations. But let us first look at the first question which deals at a more intellectual dimension. In my reply, I said that the question is more intellectual than realistic. The worlds of conventional and ultimate realities are inextricably linked. In fact, the first arises from the latter. For if there is no mind to conceptualize, where then are the concepts? One cannot deal with the skin without considering the flesh and it is also true vice versa. That is to say, when there is harmony and peace within, it will also influence it to be likewise

without. And if the outside is chaos, it can also create disaster within. As the practice of the *Dhamma* deals with the overcoming of suffering firstly with the individual, so to do that satisfactorily, if not completely, one will have to go to the internal, existential roots. When one has done sufficiently to have peace in oneself, then one can be effective to do so with others.

Loving-kindness and compassion on the other hand begins at the conventional level to bring out happiness to beings and from there one follows up into more profound levels. It is often said that one practises tranquility first and using it as a base one goes to develop insight. However, the reverse is also valid and one can also do both together. Loving-kindness, therefore, can be a base for the development of insight as well as the factor that extends itself and insight to the external world. After practice and observation of the process, I noticed that *vipassana* can be an extension of loving-kindness and vice versa. It is more easily understood how *vipassana* is loving-kindness to oneself. When one is practising insight, one is doing what is best for oneself. Spiritual happiness, after all, is true happiness. With oneself happy, one is able to give love effectively to others.

As for the reverse case, where loving-kindness can be an extension for insight. Firstly, minds do influence other minds. We also know how one or more individuals with good practice can influence others in the group be it for better or worse. The closer one is to them the greater will be the influence. This works not just on external levels like setting good or bad examples, but also at the mental levels. When we look at another person with mindfulness, clarity and peace, it not only brings up the good effects to that person but also good qualities. It is like people will be good to you if you are to them. It will, likewise, bring out those qualities in them. So, it also goes to say that if one does so with insight, influences will also be in that direction. In other words, with compassion and loving-kindness, insight can spread much easily to others.

A combination of both *vipassana* and loving-kindness meditation will definitely enrich and support each other. In the same way, this happens also between individuals.

2. Teaching *Vipassana* Meditation

Sometimes I wonder which is more difficult, to teach meditation or to meditate. One can also ponder as to the benefits of each. The two are certainly linked. One cannot really teach *vipassana* meditation if one does not know how to do it oneself. On the other hand, everyone who knows something can do so at their level. As for insight meditation, one must have at least reached the initial levels of insight; otherwise, one can at best introduce the basic exercises and instructions based on theoretical understanding. But I also wonder what misunderstandings will also be transmitted. I am certainly not discouraging the spread. I only emphasize the need to be careful from the start.

Firstly, one needs to know the basic texts and doctrines. The structure supports the practice. Over centuries, teachers who tried to lead their students onwards devised skillful means. Many have been lost but some survived; those that do evolve into lineages and traditions. What are transmitted are the techniques and sometimes also the reasons why they tell you to do what. But it must be remembered that the source has to be insight itself. Without that being strong, the techniques cannot be effective. These techniques can be broad or narrow based, broad in the sense that they cover more ground and people as to their effectiveness, and narrow in the sense of covering less ground. Being specifically suited to an individual is another matter. All these depend on how widespread and deep is one's insight. What is relevant is that the technique does arouse insight in another.

How does one do that? It is something that does something to the mind of the other person. It should be that the understanding of this process makes the guidance effective. This understanding would involve:-

- a. Understanding of one's own mind and how insight arises from the practice.
- b. Understanding of the other person's mind and how insight can arise from the practice.
- c. Understanding of the various methods of how insight can be aroused.

As to the first, it is obvious one should not practise blindly. Knowledge of the theoretical base helps but many of the required knowledge occurs only in the practice and hopefully the teachers will point out the why and how. After that, much is left to one's common sense. As to the second, much depends on the first. Although the mind follows certain laws, it varies greatly with individuals. It is a big mistake to think that fools and great men think alike. And although all great men agree with important issues, the chances that fools disagree are greater. Each person's mind is like a computer programme and so if you want to meddle in another's computer, do find out some useful passwords. Good communications make worlds of difference in relationships and teaching involves healthy relationships. Without this one may as well just read books.

Communication can work through:-

- i. The body.

I was once in a meditation centre where people began to walk around with their hands folded at the back. That was how it was taught about walking meditation and the teacher there walked around like that. When he is absent, his assistant did everything the same way as he does, although having much less experience. But body communication does to some degree tell others of the mental state. It is possible that some Zen traditions base their practice on this.

ii. Verbal communication

When it comes to verbal communication, we approach closer to expressing what's in our minds. Finer issues with regards to mental states can be described. Proficiency of language is important to understand what the teacher says and often it is just possible by suggestion and idioms. Being conceptual, so it still lacks much in terms of directness.

iii. Mental communication.

Of the three, mental communication is most direct and so if it is possible it will be best. Telepathy should be the answer, but there are not many such masters around. On a lesser degree, one need not have those great telepathic powers. One just needs to be a little sensitive to another's feelings. From there, one can proceed to mental states and finally ideas. In this line of communication, there are accesses and blocks. Sincerity and loving-kindness are important heart openers. Conceit excludes, anger banishes. A certain degree of closeness (not necessarily intimacy) would also have to be developed.

As to the various techniques possible, one must have surveyed the range available in the various traditions. It would take some time to have tried them all to see the faults and advantages of each technique. Usually one would need to go deep into one first and when one has reached to a high level or found it unsuitable, then one can proceed to look into others. In the former case, it's like having reached the peak and so can look down to find out which way is best for which individual.

iv. The Meditation Guide

Once I told someone that I do not think that I am a meditation teacher. She immediately reacted by saying, "O yes you are! You teach so you are a teacher." She has a point there. It is a functional definition. What I mean

is that teaching is not the most important part of my life. It is something that I cannot avoid in my position. I would rather say I share what I know with people who are interested. Besides I also think that one is a teacher because people consider him as one. If no one listens then it is an illusion. I also think that it is better to consider oneself as a friend first.

There are many types of teachers. The GURU type occurs in many traditions. He is taken to be a GOD or Buddha or something of that category. I suppose some will need this type of teacher and will get much goodness from it, but I am too skeptical. Fortunately, in the tradition I am in, the teacher is more like a counselor and good friend than a master or boss.

Then there are those who are strict and those that are soft. Although many would need the first type but may also break before any good happens. Given a choice many would prefer the second and he is often loved. But then, he may not be able to control those exceedingly wild horses. What I think is, it is the wisdom and compassion which is relevant. Because with that, one will know how and when to be hard or soft.

Finally, I would like to say that being a teacher or student is a matter of the situation. The roles often change as conditions change. There are things each of us knows better or less. Using discretion, the student often is the one to gain. The teacher's role also is a learning process. He also learns from his students. As they say, it is better to learn from others' mistakes than your own. It can also be seen as a research not only on oneself but also on others. When there is progress, there is sympathetic joy, when there is suffering, there is compassion. Finally, one makes many friends, and loving-kindness grows.



*Friends, Schilthorn, Switzerland
2007*

This picture was taken in Schilthorn with a very good friend of mine on a visit. We had been friends now for nearly 20 years and many waters have passed under our bridges. Although we began and met in Malaysia, he spends much of his time now in China and I in Europe. Still, meditation plays the most important part of our lives and the bond of friendship is still as strong if not stronger. The backdrop is the reflection are the three well known peaks of the Bernese Oberland – Eiger, Monch and Jungfrau, first introduced to me by my Swiss friends and only recently began to deeply appreciate it. Next year I will visit him in China and hope to take many more good pictures.

Spreading the light

This last bit is what I have finally to say for this last chapter. *Vipassana* meditation links us to the great peaceful beyond and from extend outwards to others. In the latter part of the process, compassion and loving-kindness plays its part. Everyone can do their bit no matter how small. It is true that not everyone is perfect. Defilements still run rife in religious circles. But it is better than stark delusion. Here, not everyone is blind.

The existence and success of the spread depends on those who practise. Often people start too early to teach while others wait until their realizations deepen. Although the latter is better, but still he can do something before that.

Secondly, the spread needs much loving-kindness and compassion. It is not easy to handle one's own mind, how much more difficult it will be to manage other's. Other than patience, one has also to be open to other's point of view. Sectarianism is common in religious circles and it is not uncommon to think one's tradition is the best. Even if it is the best around where one lives, with discretion, one can still learn from others.

A combination of loving-kindness and insight meditation is wonderful in spreading the light of happiness and peace to the world. Both are universal qualities and can be tailored to suit whatever culture and language. This also occurs at the mental level, where these two qualities work to promote the growth of happiness and peace to oneself and others.

I have often meditated with friends and there is distinctly good mental support and influence. It first promotes their practice and then it falls back to oneself. Often the sense of separateness of individuals is absent. Given this fact, it is amazing how the practising and teaching of these two meditations in combination opens the way to progress in oneself and others in the two worlds (of conventional and ultimate truths).

Consider this happening -

When one has realized the unconditioned reality which is most peaceful and stable within "oneself", and one can directly access to it and link it to one's consciousness. With the help of the immeasurable states such as loving-kindness and compassion which helps to link up beings in the benevolent way, it could in turn link it with consciousness of other beings around. How effective this is would certainly depend on one's concentration and insight and the other party's receptivity. Then that one person (who knows does not think of oneself as a person, knows of just what there is) would be a centre of light (of wisdom), loving-kindness and peace that radiates out the best thing there is in this world.

I also remember reading from a Daoist text that says that the brightest light cannot be seen. This is the light that is meant here. It manifests in this world as formations of wisdom.

This is the gift of practising both insight and loving-kindness meditations.



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