

# Practical Vipassana Exercises

Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw



E-mail: [bdea@buddhanet.net](mailto:bdea@buddhanet.net)  
Web site: [www.buddhanet.net](http://www.buddhanet.net)

Buddha Dharma Education Association Inc.

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# Part I • Basic Practice

## Preparatory Stage

If you sincerely desire to develop contemplation and attain insight in this your present life, you must give up worldly thoughts and actions during the training. This course of action is for the purification of conduct, the essential preliminary step towards the proper development of contemplation. You must also observe the rules of discipline prescribed for laymen, (or for monks as the case may be) for they are important in gaining insight. For lay people, these rules comprise the eight precepts which Buddhist devotees observe on Sabbath days (uposatha) and during periods of meditation.<sup>1</sup> An additional rule is not to speak with contempt, in jest, or with malice to or about any of the noble ones who have attained states of sanctity.<sup>2</sup> If you have done so, then personally apologize to him or her or

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<sup>1</sup> **The eight Uposatha precepts are:** abstention from 1) killing, 2) stealing, 3) all sexual intercourse, 4) lying, 5) intoxicants, 6) taking food after noon, 7) dance, song, music, shows (attendance and performance), the use of perfumes, ornaments, etc., and 8) using luxurious beds.

<sup>2</sup> There are four noble individuals (ariya-puggala). They are those who have obtained a state of sanctity:

- a. The stream-winner (sotāpanna) is one who has become free from the first three of the ten fetters which bind him to the sensuous sphere, namely, personality belief, sceptical doubt, and attachment to mere rules and rituals.
- b. The once-returner (sakadāgāmi) has weakened the fourth and fifth of the ten fetters, sensuous craving and ill-will.
- c. The non-returner (anāgāmi) becomes fully free from the above-mentioned five lower fetters and is no longer reborn in the sensuous sphere before reaching nibbāna.
- d. Through the path of holiness one further becomes free of the last five fetters: craving for fine material existence (in celestial worlds), craving for immaterial (purely mental) existence, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance.

make an apology through your meditation instructor. If in the past you have spoken contemptuously to a noble one who is at present unavailable or deceased, confess this offence to your meditation instructor or introspectively to yourself.

The old masters of Buddhist tradition suggest that you entrust yourself to the Enlightened One, the Buddha, during the training period, for you may be alarmed if it happens that your own state of mind produces unwholesome or frightening visions during contemplation. Also place yourself under the guidance of your meditation instructor, for then, he can talk to you frankly about your work in contemplation and give you the guidance he thinks necessary. These are the advantages of placing trust in the Enlightened One, the Buddha, and practising under the guidance of your instructor. The aim of this practice and its greatest benefit is release from greed, hatred and delusion, which are the roots of all evil and suffering. This intensive course in insight training can lead you to such release. So work ardently with this end in view so that your training will be successfully completed. This kind of training in contemplation, based on the foundations of mindfulness (satipaṭṭhāna), had been taken by successive Buddhas and noble ones who attained release. You are to be congratulated on having the opportunity to take the same kind of training they had undergone.

It is also important for you to begin your training with a brief contemplation on the 'four protections' which the Enlightened One, the Buddha, offers you for reflection. It is helpful for your psychological welfare at this stage to

reflect on them. The subjects of the four protective reflections are the Buddha himself, loving-kindness, the loathsome aspects of the body, and death. First, devote yourself to the Buddha by sincerely appreciating his nine chief qualities in this way:

Truly, the Buddha is holy, fully enlightened, perfect in knowledge and conduct, a welfarer, world-knower, the incomparable leader of men to be tamed, teacher of gods and mankind, the awakened one and the exalted one.

Secondly, reflect upon all sentient beings as the receivers of your loving-kindness and identify yourself with all sentient beings without distinction, thus:-

May I be free from enmity, disease and grief. As I am, so also may my parents, preceptors, teachers, intimate and indifferent and inimical beings be free from enmity, disease and grief. May they be released from suffering.

Thirdly, reflect upon the repulsive nature of the body to assist you in diminishing the unwholesome attachment that so many people have for the body. Dwell on some of its impurities, such as stomach, intestines, phlegm, pus, blood.<sup>3</sup> Ponder on these impurities so that the absurd fondness for the body may be eliminated.

The fourth protection for your psychological benefit is to reflect on the phenomenon of ever-approaching death. Buddhist teachings stress that life is uncertain,

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<sup>3</sup> The thirty-two parts of the body as used in body contemplation are: head-hair, body-hair, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, kidney, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, stomach, excrement, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, lymph, tears, serum, saliva, nasal mucus, synovial fluid, urine and brain.

but death is certain; life is precarious but death is sure. Life has death as its goal. There is birth, disease, suffering, old age, and eventually, death. These are all aspects of the process of existence.

To begin training, take the sitting posture with the legs crossed. You might feel more comfortable if the legs are not inter-locked but evenly placed on the ground, without pressing one against the other. If you find that sitting on the floor interferes with contemplation, then obtain a more comfortable way of sitting. Now proceed with each exercise in contemplation as described.

## **Basic Exercise I**

Try to keep your mind (but not your eyes) on the abdomen. You will thereby come to know the movements of rising and falling of it. If these movements are not clear to you in the beginning, then place both hands on the abdomen to feel these rising and falling movements. After a short time the upward movement of exhalation will become clear. Then make a mental note of *rising* for the upward movement, *falling* for the downward movement. Your mental note of each movement must be made while it occurs. From this exercise you learn the actual manner of the upward and downward movements of the abdomen. You are not concerned with the form of the abdomen. What you actually perceive is the bodily sensation of pressure caused by the heaving movement of the abdomen. So do not dwell on the form of the abdomen but proceed with the exercise. For the beginner it is a very effective method of developing the faculties of attention,

concentration of mind and insight in contemplation. As practice progresses, the manner of the movements will be clearer. The ability to know each successive occurrence of the mental and physical processes at each of the six sense organs is acquired only when insight contemplation is fully developed. Since you are only a beginner whose attentiveness and power of concentration are still weak, you may find it difficult to keep the mind on each successive rising movement and falling movement as it occurs. In view of this difficulty, you may be inclined to think, “I just don’t know how to keep my mind on each of these movement.’ Then simply remember that this is a learning process. The rising and falling movements of the abdomen are always present and therefore there is no need to look for them. Actually it is easy for a beginner to keep his or her mind on these two simple movements. Continue with this exercise in full awareness of the abdomen’s rising and falling movements. Never verbally repeat the words, rising, falling, and do not think of rising and falling as words. Be aware only of the actual process of the rising and falling movements of the abdomen. Avoid deep or rapid breathing for the purpose of making the abdominal movements more distinct, because this procedure causes fatigue that interferes with the practice. Just be totally aware of the movements of rising and falling as they occur in the course of normal breathing.

## **Basic Exercise II**

While occupied with the exercise of observing each of the abdominal movements, other mental activities may

occur between the noting of each rising and falling. Thoughts or other mental functions, such as intentions, ideas, imaginings, are likely to occur between each mental note of rising and falling. They cannot be disregarded. A mental note must be made of each as it occurs.

If you imagine something, you must know that you have done so and make a mental note, *imagining*. If you simply think of something, mentally note, *thinking*. If you reflect, *reflecting*. If you intend to do something, *intending*. When the mind wanders from the object of meditation which is the rising and falling of the abdomen, mentally note, *wandering*. Should you imagine you are going to a certain place, note *going*. When you arrive, *arriving*. When, in your thoughts, you meet a person, note *meeting*. Should you speak to him or her, *speaking*. If you imaginarily argue with that person, note *arguing*. If you envision or imagine a light or colour, be sure to note *seeing*. A mental vision must be noted on each occurrence of its appearance until it passes away. After its disappearance continue with Basic Exercise 1, by being fully aware of each movement of the rising and falling abdomen. Proceed carefully, without slackening. If you intend to swallow saliva while thus engaged, make a mental note *intending*. While in the act of swallowing, *swallowing*. If you spit, *spitting*. Then return to the exercise of noting rising and falling.

Suppose you intend to bend the neck, note *intending*. In the act of bending, *bending*. When you intend to straighten the neck, *intending*. In the act of straightening the neck, *straightening*. The neck movements of bending



and straightening must be done slowly. After mentally making a note of each of these actions, proceed in full awareness with noticing the movements of the rising and falling abdomen.

### **Basic Exercise III**

Since you must continue contemplating for a long time while in one position, that of sitting or lying down<sup>4</sup>, you are likely to experience an intense feeling of fatigue, stiffness in the body or in the arms and legs. Should this happen, simply keep the knowing mind on that part of the body where such feelings occur and carry on the contemplation, noting tired or stiff. Do this naturally; that is, neither too fast nor too slow. These feelings gradually become fainter and finally cease altogether. Should one of these feelings become more intense until the bodily fatigue or stiffness of joints is unbearable, then change your position. However, do not forget to make a mental note of *intending*, before you proceed to change your position. Each movement must be contemplated in its respective order and in detail.

If you intend to lift the hand or leg, make a mental note *intending*. In the act of lifting the hand or leg, *lifting*. Stretching either the hand or the leg, *stretching*. When you bend it, *bending*. When putting it down, *putting*. Should either the hand or leg touch, *touching*. Perform all of these actions in a slow and deliberate manner. As soon as you are settled in the new position, continue

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<sup>4</sup> It is not advised that the meditator should use the lying posture except when it is time to sleep.

with the contemplation in another position keeping to the procedure outlined in this paragraph.

Should an itching sensation be felt in any part of the body, keep the mind on that part and make a mental note, *itching*. Do this in a regulated manner, neither too fast nor too slow. When the itching sensation disappears in the course of full awareness, continue with the exercise of noticing the rising and falling of the abdomen. Should the itching continue and become too strong and you intend to rub the itchy part, be sure to make a mental note, *intending*. Slowly lift the hand, simultaneously noting the actions of *lifting*; and *touching*, when the hand touches the part that itches. Rub slowly in complete awareness of *rubbing*. When the itching sensation has disappeared and you intend to discontinue rubbing be mindful by making the usual mental note of *intending*. Slowly withdraw the hand, concurrently making a mental note of the action, *withdrawing*. When the hand rests in its usual place touching the leg, *touching*. Then again devote your time to observing the abdominal movements.

If there is pain or discomfort, keep the knowing mind on that part of the body where the sensation arises. Make a mental note of the specific sensation as it occurs, such as *painful, aching, pressing, piercing, tired, giddy*. It must be stressed that the mental note must not be forced nor delayed but made in a calm and natural manner. The pain may eventually cease or increase. Do not be alarmed if it increases. Firmly continue the contemplation. If you do so, you will find that the pain will almost always cease. But if, after a time, the pain has

increased and becomes unbearable, you must ignore the pain and continue with the contemplation of rising and falling.

As you progress in mindfulness you may experience sensations of intense pain: stifling or choking sensations, such as pain from the slash of a knife, the thrust of a sharp-pointed instrument, unpleasant sensations of being pricked by sharp needles, or of small insects crawling over the body. You might experience sensations of itching, biting, intense cold. As soon as you discontinue the contemplation you may also feel that these painful sensations cease. When you resume contemplation you will have them again as soon as you gain in mindfulness. These painful sensations are not to be considered as something wrong. They are not manifestations of disease but are common factors always present in the body and are usually obscured when the mind is normally occupied with more conspicuous objects. When the mental faculties become keener you are more aware of these sensations. With the continued development of contemplation the time will come when you can overcome them and they will cease altogether. If you continue contemplation, firm in purpose, you will not come to any harm. Should you lose courage, become irresolute in contemplation and discontinue for some time, you may encounter these unpleasant sensations again and again as your contemplation proceeds. If you continue with determination you will most likely overcome these painful sensations and may never again experience them in the course of contemplation.

Should you intend to sway the body, then knowingly note *intending*. While in the act of swaying, *swaying*. When contemplating you may occasionally discover the body swaying back and forth. Do not be alarmed; neither be pleased nor wish to continue to sway. The swaying will cease if you keep the knowing mind on the action of swaying and continue to note *swaying* until the action ceases. If swaying increases in spite of your making a mental note of it, then lean against a wall or post or lie down for a while. Thereafter proceed with contemplation. Follow the same procedure if you find yourself shaking or trembling. When contemplation is developed you may sometimes feel a thrill or chill pass through the back or the entire body. This is a symptom of the feeling of intense interest, enthusiasm or rapture. It occurs naturally in the course of good contemplation. When your mind is fixed in contemplation you may be startled at the slightest sound. This takes place because you feel the effect of sensory impression more intensely while in a state of concentration.

If you are thirsty while contemplating, notice the feeling, *thirsty*. When you intend to stand, *intending*. Keep the mind intently on the act of standing up, and mentally note *standing*. When you look forward after standing up straight, note *looking, seeing*. Should you intend to walk forward, *intending*. When you begin to step forward, mentally note each step as *walking, walking, or left, right*. It is important for you to be aware of every moment in each step from the beginning to the end when you walk. Adhere to the same procedure when strolling or when taking walking exercise. Try to make a mental note of each step in two sections as follows:

*lifting, putting, lifting, putting.* When you have obtained sufficient practice in this manner of walking, then try to make a mental note of each step in three sections; *lifting, pushing, putting*; or *up, forward, down*.

When you look at the tap or water-pot on arriving at the place where you are to take a drink, be sure to make a mental note, *looking, seeing*.

When you stop walking, *stopping*.

When you stretch out the hand, *stretching*.

When you touch the cup, *touching*.

When you take the cup, *taking*.

When dipping the cup into the water, *dipping*.

When bringing the cup to the lips, *bringing*.

When the cup touches the lips, *touching*.

When you swallow, *swallowing*.

When returning the cup, *returning*.

When withdrawing the hand, *withdrawing*.

When you bring down the hand, *bringing*.

When the hand touches the side of the body, *touching*.

If you intend to turn round, *intending*.

When you turn round, *turning*.

When you walk forward, *walking*.

On arriving at the place where you intend to stop,  
*intending*.

When you stop, *stopping*.

If you remain standing for some time continue the contemplation of rising and falling. But if you intend to sit down, note *intending*. When you go to sit down, *walking*. On arriving at the place where you will sit,

*arriving*. When you turn to sit, *turning*. While in the act of sitting down, *sitting*. Sit down slowly, and keep the mind on the downward movement of the body. You must notice every movement in bringing the hands and legs into position. Then resume the practice of contemplating the abdominal movements.

Should you intend to lie down, note *intending*. Then proceed with the contemplation of every movement in the course of lying down: *lifting, stretching, putting, touching, lying*. Then take as the object of contemplation every movement in bringing the hands, legs and body into position. Perform these actions slowly. Thereafter, continue with noting rising and falling. Should pain, fatigue, itching, or any other sensation be felt, be sure to notice each of these sensations. Notice all feelings, thoughts, ideas, considerations, reflections; all movements of hands, legs, arms and body. If there is nothing in particular to note, put the mind on the rising and falling of the abdomen. When sleepy, make a mental note, *sleepy*. After you have gained sufficient concentration in contemplating you will be able to overcome drowsiness and you will feel refreshed as a result. Take up again the usual contemplation of the basic object. If you are unable to overcome the drowsy feeling, you must continue contemplating drowsiness until you fall asleep.

The state of sleep is the continuity of sub-consciousness. It is similar to the first state of rebirth consciousness and the last state of consciousness at the moment of death. This state of consciousness is feeble and therefore, unable to be aware of an object. When you

awake, the continuity of sub-consciousness occurs regularly between moments of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching, and thinking. Because these occurrences are of brief duration they are not usually clear and therefore not noticeable. Continuity of sub-consciousness remains during sleep — a fact which becomes obvious when you wake up; for it is in the state of wakefulness that thoughts and sense objects become distinct.

Contemplation should start at the moment you wake up. Since you are a beginner, it may not be possible yet for you to start contemplating at the very first moment of wakefulness. But you should start with it when you remember that you are to contemplate. For example, if on awakening you reflect on something, you should become aware of the fact and begin your contemplation by a mental note, *reflecting*. Then proceed with the contemplation of rising and falling. When getting up from the bed, mindfulness should be directed to every detail of the body's activity. Each movement of the hands, legs and rump must be performed in complete awareness. Are you thinking of the time of day when awakening? If so, note *thinking*. Do you intend to get out of bed? If so, note *intending*. If you prepare to move the body into position for rising, note *preparing*. As you slowly rise, *rising*. Should you remain sitting for any length of time, revert to contemplating the abdominal movements.

Perform the acts of washing the face or taking a bath in due order and in complete awareness of every detailed movement; for instance, *looking, seeing, stretching,*

*holding, touching, feeling cold, rubbing.* In the acts of dressing, making the bed, opening and closing doors and windows, handling objects, be occupied with every detail of these actions in sequence.

You must attend to the contemplation of every detail in the action of eating;

When you look at the food, *looking, seeing.*

When you arrange the food, *arranging.*

When you bring the food to the mouth, *bringing.*

When you bend the neck forwards, *bending.*

When the food touches the mouth, *touching.*

When placing the food in the mouth, *placing.*

When the mouth closes, *closing.*

When withdrawing the hand, *withdrawing.*

Should the hand touch the plate, *touching.*

When straightening the neck, *straightening.*

When in the act of chewing, *chewing.*

When you are aware of the taste, *knowing.*

When swallowing the food, *swallowing.*

While swallowing the food, should the food be felt touching the sides of the gullet, *touching.*

Perform contemplation in this manner each time you take a morsel of food until you finish your meal. In the beginning of the practice there will be many omissions. Never mind. Do not waver in your effort. You will make fewer omissions if you persist in your practice. When you reach an advanced stage of the practice you will also be able to notice more details than those mentioned here.



## **Advancement in Contemplation**

After having practised for a day and a night you may find your contemplation considerably improved. You may be able to prolong the basic exercise of noticing the abdominal movements. At this time you will notice that there is generally a break between the movements of rising and falling. If you are in the sitting posture, fill in this gap with a mental note of the fact of sitting in this way: *rising, falling, sitting*. When you make a mental note of sitting, keep your mind on the erect position of the upper body. When you are lying down you should proceed with full awareness as follows: *rising, falling, lying*. If you find this easy, continue with noticing these three sections. Should you notice that a pause occurs at the end of the rising as well as at the end of the falling movement, then continue in this manner: *rising, sitting, falling, sitting*. Or when lying down: *rising, lying, falling, lying*. Suppose you no longer find it easy to make a mental note of three or four objects in the above manner. Then revert to the initial procedure of noting only the two sections; rising and falling.

While engaged in the regular practise of contemplating bodily movements you need not be concerned with objects of seeing and hearing. As long as you are able to keep your mind on the abdominal movements of rising and falling it is assumed that the purpose of noticing the acts and objects of seeing is also served. However, you may intentionally look at an object; two or three times, note as *seeing*. Then return to the awareness of the abdominal movements. Suppose some person comes into your view. Make a mental note of *seeing*, two or

three times and then resume attention to the rising and falling movements of the abdomen. Did you happen to hear the sound of a voice? Did you listen to it? If so make a mental note of *hearing, listening* and revert to rising and falling. But suppose you heard loud noises, such as the barking of dogs, loud talking or shouting. If so, immediately make a mental note two or three times, *hearing*, then return to your basic exercise. If you fail to note and dismiss such distinctive sounds as they occur, you may inadvertently fall into reflections about them instead of proceeding with intense attention to rising and falling, which may then become less distinct and clear. It is by such weakened attention that mind-defiling passions breed and multiply. If such reflections do occur, make a mental note *reflecting*, two or three times, then again take up the contemplation of rising and falling. Should you forget to make a mental note of body, leg or arm movements, then mentally note *forgetting*, and resume your usual contemplation on abdominal movements. You may feel at times that breathing is slow or that the rising and falling movements are not clearly perceived. When this happens, and you are in the sitting position, simply move the attention to *sitting, touching*; or if you are lying down, to *lying, touching*. While contemplating touching, your mind should not be kept on the same part of the body but on different parts successively. There are several places of touch and at least six or seven should be contemplated.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Some of these points where the body sensation may be observed are: where thigh and knee touch, or where the hands are placed together, or finger to finger, thumb to thumb, closing of the eyelids, the tongue inside the mouth, the lips touching when the mouth is closed.

## Basic Exercise IV

Up to this point you have devoted quite some time to the training course. You might begin to feel lazy after deciding that you have made inadequate progress. By no means give up. Simply note the fact, *lazy*. Before you gain sufficient strength in attention, concentration and insight, you may doubt the correctness or usefulness of this method of training. In such a circumstance turn to contemplation of the thought, *doubtful*. Do you anticipate or wish for good results? If so, make such thoughts the subject of your contemplation; *anticipating*, or *wishing*. Are you attempting to recall the manner in which the training was conducted up to this point? Yes? Then take up contemplation on *recollecting*. Are there occasions when you examine the object of contemplation in order to determine whether it is mind or matter? If so, then be aware of *examining*. Do you regret that there is no improvement in your contemplation? If so, attend to the feeling of regret. Conversely, are you happy that your contemplation is improving? If you are, then contemplate the feeling of being happy. This is the way in which you make a mental note of every item of mental behaviour as it occurs, and if there are no intervening thoughts or perceptions to note, you should revert to the contemplation of rising and falling. During a strict course of meditation, the time of practice is from the first moment you wake up until the last moment before you fall asleep. To reiterate, you must be constantly occupied either with the basic exercise or with mindful attention throughout the day and during those night hours when you are not asleep.

There must be no relaxation. Upon reaching a certain stage of progress with contemplation you will not feel sleepy in spite of these prolonged hours of practise. On the contrary, you will be able to continue the contemplation day and night.

## Summary

It has been emphasized during this brief outline of the training that you must contemplate on each mental occurrence, good or bad; on each bodily movement large or small; on every sensation (bodily or mental feeling) pleasant or unpleasant; and so on. If, during the course of training, occasions arise when there is nothing special to contemplate upon, be fully occupied with attention to the rising and falling of the abdomen. When you have to attend to any kind of activity that necessitates walking, then, in complete awareness, each step should be briefly noted as *walking, walking* or *left, right*. But when you are taking a walking exercise, contemplate on each step in three sections; *up, forward, down*. The student who thus dedicates himself or herself to the training day and night, will be able in not too long a time, to develop concentration to the initial stage of the fourth degree of insight (knowledge of arising and passing away)<sup>6</sup> and onward to higher stages of insight meditation (*vipassanā bhāvanā*).

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<sup>6</sup> Taruna-udayabbaya-tāṇa - On the degrees of insight knowledge see the Progress of Insight by the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw (Published by The Forest Hermitage, Kandy, Sri Lanka).

## Part II • Progressive Practice

When as mentioned above, by dint of diligent practice, mindfulness and concentration have improved, the meditator will notice the pairwise occurrence of an object and the knowing of it, such as the rising and awareness of it, the falling and awareness of it, sitting and awareness of it, bending and awareness of it, stretching and awareness of it, lifting and awareness of it, putting down and awareness of it. Through concentration attention (mindfulness) he knows how to distinguish each bodily and mental process: “The rising movement is one process; the knowing of it is another”. He realises that each act of knowing has the nature of ‘going towards an object.’ Such a realisation refers to the characteristic function of the mind as inclining towards an object, or cognising an object. One should know that the more clearly a material object is noticed, the clearer becomes the mental process of knowing it. This fact is stated thus in the Visuddhimagga:

“For in proportion as materiality becomes quite definite, disentangled and quite clear to him, so the immaterial states that have that materiality as their object become plain of themselves too”. (*The Path of Purification*, translated by Bhikkhu Ñānamoli).

When the meditator comes to know the difference between a bodily process and a mental process, should he be a simple man, he would reflect from direct experience thus: “There is the rising and the knowing it; the falling and knowing it, and so on and so forth. There is nothing else besides them. The words ‘man’ or

‘woman’ refer to the same process; there is no ‘person’ or ‘soul’.” Should he be a well-informed man, he would reflect from direct knowledge of the difference between a material process as object and a mental process of knowing it, thus: “It is true that there are only body and mind. Besides them there none such entities as man or woman. While contemplating one notices a material process as object and a mental process of knowing it; and it is to that pair alone that the terms of conventional usage ‘being’, ‘person’ or ‘soul’, ‘man’ or ‘woman’ refer. But apart from that dual process there is no separate person or being, I or another, man or woman”. When such reflections occur, the meditator must note “reflecting, reflecting” and go on observing the rising of the abdomen, and its falling.<sup>7</sup>

With further progress in meditation, to the conscious state of an intention is evident before a bodily movement occurs. To the meditator first notices that intention. Though also at to the start of his practice, he does notice “intending, intending” (for instance, to bend an arm), yet he cannot notice that state of consciousness distinctly. Now, at this more advanced stage, he clearly notices to the consciousness consisting of to the intention to bend. So he notices first to the conscious state of an intention to make a bodily movement; then he notices to the particular bodily movement. At to the beginning, because of omission to notice an intention, he thinks that bodily movement is quicker than to the mind knowing it. Now, at this advanced stage, mind appears to

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<sup>7</sup> The preceding section describes the ‘analytical knowledge of body and mind’ (nāmarūpa-pariccheda-ṭāṇa), belong to the ‘Purification of View’.

be to the forerunner. To the meditator readily notices the intention of bending, stretching, sitting, standing, going, and so on. He also clearly notices to the actual bending, stretching, etc. So he realises to the fact that mind knowing a bodily process is quicker than to the material process. He experiences directly that a bodily process takes place after a preceding intention. Again he knows from direct experience that to the intensity of heat or cold increases while he is noticing “hot, hot” or “cold, cold.” In contemplating regular and spontaneous bodily movements such as to the rising and falling of to the abdomen, he notices one after another continuously. He also notices to the arising in him of mental images such as to the Buddha, an arahat, as well as any kind of sensation that arises in his body (such as itch, ache, heat), with attention directed on to the particular spot where to the sensation occurs. One sensation has hardly disappeared, then another arises, and he notices them all accordingly. While noticing every object as it arises he is aware that a mental process of knowing depends on an object. Sometimes, to the rising and falling of to the abdomen is so faint that he finds nothing to notice. Then, it occurs to him that there can be no knowing without an object. When no noticing of to the rising and falling is possible one should be aware of sitting and touching or lying and touching. Touching is to be noticed alternatively. For example, after noticing “sitting”, notice to the touch sensation at to the right foot (caused by its contact with to the ground or seat). Then, after noticing “sitting”, notice to the touch sensation at to the left foot. In to the same manner, notice to the touch sensation at several places. Again, in noticing

seeing, hearing, to the meditator comes to know clearly that seeing arises from to the contact of eye and visual object and hearing arises from to the contact of ear and sound.

Further he reflects: “Material processes of bending, stretching and so on, follow mental processes of intending to bend, stretch and so forth. He goes on to reflect: “One’s body becomes hot or cold because of to the element of heat or cold; to the body exists on food and nourishment; consciousness arises because there are objects to notice: seeing arises through visual objects; hearing through sounds, and also because there are to the sense organs, eye, ear etc., as conditioning factors. Intention and noticing result from previous experiences; feelings (sensations) of all kinds are to the consequences of previous kamma in to the sense that material processes and mental processes take place ever since birth because of previous kamma. There is nobody to create this body and mind, and all that happens has causal factors”. Such reflections come to the meditator while he is noticing any object as it arises. He does not stop doing so to take time to reflect. While noticing objects as they arise these reflections are so quick that they appear to be automatic. To the meditator, then, must note: “Reflecting, reflecting, recognising, recognising”, and continue noticing objects as usual. After having reflected that material processes and mental processes being noticed are conditioned by to the previous processes of to the same nature, to the meditator reflects further that body and mind in to the former existences were conditioned by to the preceding causes, that in to the following existences body and mind



will result from to the same causes, and apart from this dual process there is no separate ‘being’ or ‘person’, only causes and effects taking place. Such reflections must also be noticed and then contemplation should go on as usual.<sup>8</sup> Such reflections will be many in to the case of persons with a strong intellectual bent and less in to the case of those with no such bent. Be that as it may, energetic noticing must be made of all these reflections. Noticing them will result in their reduction to a minimum, allowing insight to progress unimpeded by an excess of such reflections. It should be taken for granted that a minimum of reflections will suffice here.

When concentration is practised in an intensive manner, to the meditator may experience almost unbearable sensations, such as itching, aches, heat, dullness and stiffness. If mindful noticing is stopped, such sensations will disappear. When noticing is resumed, they will reappear. Such sensations arise in consequence of to the body’s natural sensitivity and are not to the symptoms of a disease. If they are noticed with energetic concentration they fade away gradually.

Again, to the meditator sometimes sees images of all kinds as if seeing them with his own eyes; for example, to the Buddha comes into to the scene in glorious radiance; a procession of monks in to the sky; pagodas (dagobas) and images of to the Buddha; meeting with beloved ones; trees or woods, hills or mountains, gardens, buildings; finding oneself face to face with bloated dead bodies or skeletons; swelling of one’s body, covered with

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<sup>8</sup> The preceding section refers to ‘knowledge by discerning conditionality’ (paccaya-pariggaha-ṭāṇa), belonging to to the ‘Purification by Overcoming Doubt’.

blood, falling into pieces and reduced to a mere skeleton, seeing in one's body to the entrails and vital organs and even germs; seeing to the denizens of to the hells and heavens. These are nothing but creatures of one's imagination sharpened by intense concentration. They are similar to what one comes across in dreams. They are not to be welcomed and enjoyed, nor need one be afraid of them. These objects seen in to the course of contemplation are not real; they are mere images or imaginations, whereas to the mind that sees those objects is a reality. But purely mental processes, unconnected with fivefold sense impressions, cannot easily be noticed with sufficient clarity and detail. Hence principal attention should be given to sense objects which can be noticed easily, and to those mental processes which arise in connection with sense perceptions. So whatever object appears, to the meditator should notice it, saying mentally, "seeing, seeing" until it disappears. It will either move away, fade away or break asunder. At to the outset, this will take several noticings, say about five to ten. But when insight develops, to the object will disappear after a couple of noticings. However, if to the meditator wishes to enjoy to the sight, or to look closely into to the matter, or gets scared of it, then it is likely to linger on. If to the object be induced deliberately, then through delight it will last a long time. So care must be taken not to think of or incline towards extraneous matters while one's concentration is good. If such thoughts come in, they must be instantly noticed and dispelled. In to the case of some persons they experience no extraordinary objects or feelings and, while contemplating as usual, become

lazy. They must notice this laziness thus: “lazy, lazy”, until they overcome it. At this stage, whether or not to the meditators come across extraordinary objects or feelings they know clearly to the initial, to the intermediate and to the final phases of every noticing. At to the beginning of to the practice, while noticing one object, they had to switch onto a different object that arose, but they did not notice clearly to the disappearance of to the previous object. Now, only after cognising to the disappearance of an object, they notice to the new object that arises. Thus they have a clear knowledge of to the initial, to the intermediate and to the final phases of to the object noticed.

At this stage when to the meditator becomes more practised he perceives in every act of noticing that an object appears suddenly and disappears instantly. His perception is so clear that he reflects thus: “All comes to an end; all disappears. Nothing is impermanent; it is truly impermanent”. His reflection is quite in line with what is stated in to the Commentary to to the Pali Text: “All is impermanent, in to the sense of destruction, non-existence after having been”. He reflects further, “It is through ignorance that we enjoy life. But in truth, there is nothing to enjoy. There is a continuous arising and disappearing by which we are harassed ever and anon. This is dreadful indeed. At any moment we may die and everything is sure to come to an end. This universal impermanence is truly frightful and terrible”. His reflection agrees with to the commentarial statement: “What is impermanent is painful, painful in to the sense of terror; painful because of oppression by rise and fall”. Again, experiencing severe pains he reflects thus: “All is

pain, all is bad”. This reflection agrees with what to the Commentary states: “He looks on pain as a barb; as a boil; as a dart”. He further reflects: “This is a mass of suffering, suffering that is unavoidable. Arising and disappearing, it is worthless. One cannot stop its process. It is beyond one’s power. It takes its natural course”. This reflection is quite in agreement with to the Commentary: “What is painful is not self, not self in to the sense of having no core, because there is no exercising of power over it”. To the meditator must notice all these reflections and go on contemplating as usual.

Having thus seen to the three characteristics by direct experience, to the meditator, by inference from to the direct experience of to the objects noticed, comprehends all to the objects not yet noticed as being impermanent, subject to suffering, and without a self.

In respect of objects not personally experienced, he concludes: “They too are constituted in to the same way: impermanent, painful and without a self”. This is an inference from his present direct experience. Such a comprehension is not clear enough in to the case of one with less intellectual capacity or limited knowledge who pays no attention to a reflection but simply goes on noticing objects. But such a comprehension occurs often to one who yields to reflection, which, in some cases, may occur at every act of noticing. Such excessive reflecting, however, is an impediment to to the progress of insight. Even if no such reflections occur at this stage, comprehension will nevertheless become increasingly clear at to the higher stages. Hence, no attention should be given to reflections. While giving more attention to to

the bare noticing of objects, to the meditator must, however, also notice these reflections if they occur, but he should not dwell on them.<sup>9</sup>

After comprehending to the three characteristics, to the meditator no longer reflects but goes on with noticing those bodily and mental objects which present themselves continuously. Then at to the moment when to the five mental faculties, namely, faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and knowledge, are properly balanced, to the mental process of noticing accelerates as if it becomes uplifted, and to the bodily and mental processes to be noticed also arise much quicker. In a moment of in-breathing to the rising of to the abdomen presents itself in quick succession, and to the falling also becomes correspondingly quicker. Quick succession is also evident in to the process of bending and stretching. Slight movements are felt spreading all over to the body. In several cases, prickly sensations and itching appear in quick succession momentarily. By and large, these are feelings hard to bear. To the meditator cannot possibly keep pace with to the quick succession of varied experiences if he attempts to notice them by name. Noticing has here to be done in a general manner, but with mindfulness. At this stage one need not try to notice details of to the objects arising in quick succession, but one should notice them generally. If one wishes to name them, a collective designation will be sufficient. If one attempts to follow them in a detailed manner, one will get tired soon. To the important thing is

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<sup>9</sup> The preceding paragraphs refer to to the ‘knowledge of comprehension’ samasana-ṭāṇa.

to notice clearly and to comprehend what arises. At this stage, the usual contemplation focused on a few selected objects should be set aside and mindful noticing should attend to every object that arises at to the six sense doors. Only when one is not keen on this sort of noticing, then one should revert to to the usual contemplation.

# Practical Vipassanā Meditation Exercises

*The following is a talk by the Ven. Mahāsī Sayādaw (Aggamahāpaṇḍita) given to meditators on their induction at Mahāsī Meditation Centre, Rangoon, Burma. It was translated from the Burmese by U Nyi Nyi, and edited in 1997 by Bhikkhu Pesala.*

The practice of Vipassanā or Insight Meditation is the effort to understand correctly the nature of the mental and physical phenomena within one's own body. Physical phenomena are the things or objects that one clearly perceives around and within one. The whole of one's body constitutes a group of material qualities (rūpa). Mental phenomena are acts of consciousness or awareness (nāma). These are clearly perceived whenever things are seen, heard, smelt, tasted, touched, or thought of. We must make ourselves aware of these mental phenomena by observing them and noting thus: 'Seeing, seeing', 'hearing, hearing', 'smelling, smelling', 'tasting, tasting', 'touching, touching', or 'thinking, thinking'.

Every time one sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches, or thinks, one should make a note of the fact. However, in the beginning of one's practice, one cannot make a note all of these events. One should, therefore, begin with noting those events which are conspicuous and easily perceivable.

With every act of breathing, the abdomen rises and falls — this movement is always evident. This is the material quality known as the element of motion (vāyodhātu).

One should begin by noting this movement, which may be done by mentally observing the abdomen. You will find the abdomen rising when you breathe in, and falling when you breathe out. The rising should be noted mentally as ‘rising’, and the falling as ‘falling’. If the movement is not evident by just noting it mentally, keep touching the abdomen with the palm of your hand. Do not alter the manner of your breathing. Neither slow it down, nor make it faster. Do not breathe too vigorously, either. You will tire if you change the manner of your breathing. Breathe steadily as usual and note the rising and falling of the abdomen as they occur. Note it mentally, not verbally.

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

Your mind may wander elsewhere while you are noting the abdominal movement. This must also be noted by mentally saying, ‘wandering, wandering’. When this has been noted once or twice, the mind stops wandering, in which case you return to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen. If the mind reaches somewhere, note as ‘reaching, reaching’. Then return to the rising and falling of the abdomen. If you imagine meeting somebody, note



as ‘meeting, meeting’. Then return to the rising and falling. If you imagine meeting and talking to somebody, note as ‘talking, talking’.

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

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

When you have sat meditating for a long time, sensations of stiffness and heat will arise in your body. These are to be noted carefully too. Similarly with sensations of pain and fatigue. All of these sensations are dukkhavedanā (feeling of unsatisfactoriness) and noting them is vedanānupassanā. Failure or omission to note these sensations makes you think, “I am stiff, I am feeling hot, I am in pain. I was alright a moment ago. Now I am uneasy with these unpleasant sensations.” The

identification of these sensations with the ego is mistaken. There is really no 'I' involved, only a succession of one new unpleasant sensation after another.

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

There is a saying, "Patience leads to Nibbāna." This saying is particularly relevant in meditation practice. One must be patient to meditate. If one shifts or changes one's posture too often because one cannot bear the sensation of stiffness or heat that arises, good concentration (samādhi) cannot develop. If concentration cannot develop, insight cannot result and there can be no attainment of the path (magga), the fruit of that path (phala) or nibbāna. That is why patience is needed in meditation. It is mostly patience with unpleasant sensations in the body like stiffness, heat, pain and other unpleasant sensations. On the appearance of such sensations one should not immediately change one's posture. One should continue patiently, just noting as 'stiff, stiff' or 'hot, hot'. Moderate unpleasant sensations will disappear if one

notes them patiently. When concentration is strong, even intense sensations tend to disappear. One then reverts to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen.

One will, of course, have to change one's posture if the sensations do not disappear even after noting them for a long time, or if they become unbearable. One should then begin by noting 'wanting to change, wanting to change'. If one raises the arm, note as 'raising, raising'. If one moves, note as 'moving, moving'. This change should be made gently and noted as 'raising, raising', 'moving, moving' and 'touching, touching'.

If the body sways, note 'swaying, swaying'. If you raise the foot, note 'raising, raising'. If you move it, note 'moving, moving'. If you drop it, note 'dropping, dropping'. When there is no more movement, return to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen. There must be no gaps, but continuity between a preceding act of noting and a succeeding one, between a preceding state of concentration and a succeeding one, between a preceding act of intelligence and a succeeding one. Only then will there be successive and ascending stages of maturity in the meditator's understanding. Knowledge of the path and its fruition are attained only when there is this kind of accumulated momentum. The meditative process is like that of producing fire by energetically and unremittingly rubbing two sticks of wood together to generate enough heat to make fire.

In the same way, the noting in vipassanā meditation should be continuous and unremitting, without any interval between acts of noting, whatever phenomena may arise. For instance, if a sensation of itchiness

intervenes and the meditator desires to scratch because it is hard to bear, both the sensation and the desire to get rid of it should be noted, without immediately getting rid of the sensation by scratching.

If one perseveres, the itchiness will generally disappear, in which case one reverts to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen. If the itchiness does not disappear, one may eliminate it by scratching, but first the desire to do so should be noted. All the movements involved in the process of eliminating the itch should be noted, especially the touching, pulling and pushing, and scratching movements, eventually returning to the rising and falling of the abdomen.

Whenever you change your posture, begin by noting your intention or desire to change, and note every movement closely, such as rising from the sitting posture, raising the arm, moving and stretching it. You should note the movements at the same time as making them. As your body sways forward, note it. As you rise, the body becomes light and rises. Focus your mind on this, you should gently note as 'rising, rising'.

A meditator should behave like a weak invalid. People in normal health rise easily and quickly, or abruptly. Not so with feeble invalids, who do so slowly and gently. The same is the case with people suffering from backache who rise gently lest the back hurts and causes pain. So also with meditators. They should make changes of posture gradually and gently; only then will mindfulness, concentration and insight be clear. Begin, therefore, with gentle and gradual movements. When rising, the meditator must do so gently like an invalid, at the same

time noting as 'rising, rising'. Not only this: though the eye sees, the meditator must act as if blind. Similarly when the ear hears. While meditating, the meditator's concern is only to note. What one sees and hears are not one's concern. So whatever strange or striking things one may see or hear, one must behave as if one does not see or hear them, merely noting carefully.

When making bodily movements, the meditator should do so slowly, gently moving the arms and legs, bending or stretching them, lowering the head and raising it up. When rising from the sitting posture, one should do so gradually, noting as 'rising, rising'. When straightening up and standing, note as 'standing, standing'. When looking here and there, note as 'looking, seeing'. When walking, note the steps, whether they are taken with the right or the left foot. You must be aware of all the successive movements involved, from the raising of the foot to the dropping of it. Note each step taken, whether with the right foot or the left foot. This is the manner of noting when one walks fast.

It will be enough if you note thus when walking fast and walking some distance. When walking slowly or pacing up and down, three stages should be noted for each step: when the foot is raised, when it is pushed forward, and when it is dropped. Begin with noting the raising and dropping movements. One must be fully aware of the raising of the foot. Similarly, when the foot is dropped, one should be fully aware of the 'heavy' falling of the foot.

One must walk noting as 'raising, dropping' with each step. This noting will become easier after about two days.

Then go on to noting the three movements as described above, as ‘raising, pushing forward, dropping’. In the beginning, it will suffice to note one or two movements only, thus ‘right step, left step’ when walking fast and ‘raising, dropping’ when walking slowly. If when walking thus, you want to sit down, note as ‘wanting to sit down, wanting to sit down’. When actually sitting down, note attentively the ‘heavy’ falling of your body.

When you are seated, note the movements involved in arranging your legs and arms. When there are no such movements of the body, note the rising and falling of the abdomen. If, while noting thus, stiffness or sensation of heat arise in any part of your body, note them. Then return to ‘rising, falling’. If a desire to lie down arises, note it and the movements of your legs and arms as you lie down. The raising of the arm, the moving of it, the resting of the elbow on the floor, the swaying of the body, the stretching of the legs, the listing of the body as one slowly prepares to lie down — all these movements should be noted.

To note thus as you lie down is important. In the course of this movement (that is, lying down), you can gain distinctive knowledge (i.e. knowledge of the path and its fruition). When concentration and insight are strong, distinctive knowledge can come at any moment. It can arise in a single ‘bend’ of the arm or in a single ‘stretch’ of the arm. That was how Venerable Ānanda became an arahant.

Venerable Ānanda was trying strenuously to attain Arahantship overnight on the eve of the First Buddhist Council. He was practising the whole night the form of

vipassanā meditation known as kāyagatāsati, noting his steps, right and left, raising, pushing forward and dropping of the feet; noting, event by event, the mental desire to walk and the physical movements involved in walking. Although this went on until it was nearly dawn, he had not yet attained Arahantship. Realising that he had practised walking meditation to excess and that, in order to balance concentration and effort, he should practise meditation in the lying posture for a while, he entered his room. He sat on the bed and then lay down. While doing so and noting, ‘lying, lying’, he attained Arahantship in an instant.

Venerable Ānanda was only a stream-winner (sotāpanna) before he lay down. From the stage of a stream-winner he reached the stages of a once-returner (sakadāgāmi) a non-returner (anāgāmi) and an arahant (the final stage of the path). Reaching these three successive stages of the higher path took only a moment. Remember this example of Venerable Ānanda’s attainment of Arahantship. Such attainment can come at any moment and need not take long.

That is why meditators should always note diligently. One should not relax one’s effort, thinking, “this little lapse should not matter much.” All movements involved in lying down and arranging the arms and legs should be carefully and unremittingly noted. If there is no movement, return to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen. Even when it is getting late and time for sleep, the meditator should not stop the noting. A really serious and energetic meditator should practise mindfulness as if forgoing sleep altogether. One should go on meditating

until one falls asleep. If mindfulness has the upper hand, one will not fall asleep. If, however, drowsiness is stronger, one will fall asleep. When one feels sleepy, one should note as 'sleepy, sleepy', if one's eyelids droop, as 'drooping'; if they become heavy or leaden, as 'heavy'; if the eyes smart, as 'smarting'. Noting thus, the drowsiness may pass and the eyes may become clear again. One should then note as 'clear, clear' and continue noting the rising and falling of the abdomen. However determined one may be, if real drowsiness intervenes, one does fall asleep. It is not difficult to fall asleep; in fact, it is easy. If you meditate in the lying posture, you soon become drowsy and easily fall asleep. That is why beginners should not meditate too much in the lying posture; they should meditate much more in the sitting and walking postures. However, as it grows late and becomes time for sleep, one should meditate in the lying position, noting the rising and falling movements of the abdomen. One will then naturally fall asleep.

The time one is asleep is the resting time for the meditator, but the really serious meditator should limit sleep to about four hours. This is the 'midnight time' permitted by the Buddha. Four hours sleep is quite enough. If the beginner thinks that four hours sleep is not enough for health, one may extend it to five or six hours. Six hours sleep is clearly enough.

When one wakes up, one should immediately resume noting. The meditator who is really intent on attaining the path and its fruition should rest from meditation only when asleep. At other times, in all waking moments, one



should be noting continually and without let up. That is why, as soon as one awakens, one should note the awakening state of mind as ‘awakening, awakening’. If one cannot yet be aware of this, one should begin with noting the rising and falling of the abdomen.

If one intends to get up from the bed, one should note as ‘intending to get up, intending to get up’. One should then note the movements one makes as one moves one’s arms and legs. When one raises one’s head and rises, one notes as ‘rising, rising’. When one is seated, one notes as ‘sitting, sitting’. If one makes any movements as one arranges one’s arms and legs, all of these movements should also be noted. If there are no such changes, one should revert to noting the rising and falling movements of the abdomen.

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

When one has one’s meal and looks at the table, one should note as ‘looking, seeing, looking, seeing’. When one extends one’s hand towards the food, touches it, collects it and arranges it, handles it and brings it to the mouth, bends one head and puts the morsel into one’s mouth, drops one’s arm and raises one’s head again, all these movements should be duly noted. (This way of noting is in accordance with the Burmese way of taking a meal. Those who use fork and spoon or chopsticks should note the movements in an appropriate manner.)

When one chews the food, one should note as ‘chewing, chewing’. When one comes to know the taste of the food, one should note as ‘knowing, knowing’. As one relishes the food and swallows it, as the food goes down one’s throat, one should note all these events. This is how the meditator should note when taking each morsel of food. As one takes soup, all the movements involved such as extending the arm, handling the spoon, scooping with it and so on, should all be noted. To note thus at meal-times is rather difficult as there are so many things to observe and note. The beginner is likely to miss several things that should be noted, but one should resolve to note them all. One cannot, of course, help overlooking some, but as one’s concentration deepens, one will be able to note all of these events precisely.

I have mentioned so many things for the meditator to note, but in brief, there are only a few things to remember. When walking fast, note as ‘right step’, ‘left step’, and as ‘raising, dropping’ when walking slowly. When sitting quietly, just note the rising and falling of the abdomen. Note the same when you are lying down, if there is nothing particular to note. While noting thus and if the mind wanders, note the acts of consciousness that arise. Then return to the rising and falling of the abdomen. Note also the sensations of stiffness, pain, aching and itchiness as they arise. Then return to the rising and falling of the abdomen. Note also, as they arise, the bending, stretching and moving of the limbs, the bending and raising of the head, the swaying and straightening of the body. Then return to the rising and falling of the abdomen.

As one goes on noting thus, one will be able to note more and more of these events. In the beginning, as the mind wanders here and there, one may miss many things, but one should not be disheartened. Every beginner encounters the same difficulty, but as one becomes more skilled, one becomes aware of every act of mind-wandering until, eventually, the mind does not wander any more. The mind is then rivetted onto the object of its attention, the act of mindfulness becoming almost simultaneous with the object of its attention. In other words, the rising of the abdomen becomes concurrent with the act of noting it, and similarly with the falling of the abdomen.

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

With every act of noting, the meditator will come to know clearly that there are only this material quality which is the object of awareness or attention and the mental quality that makes a note of it. This discriminating knowledge is called analytical knowledge

of mind and matter (nāmarūpa-pariccheda-ṭāṇa), which is the beginning of insight knowledge (vipassanā-ṭāṇa). It is important to gain this knowledge correctly. This will be succeeded, as the meditator continues, by knowledge by discerning conditionality (paccaya-pariggaha-ṭāṇa).

As one goes on noting, one will see for oneself that what arises passes away after a short while. Ordinary people assume that both the material and mental phenomena persist throughout life, that is, from youth to adulthood. In fact, that is not so. There is no phenomenon that lasts for ever. All phenomena arise and pass away so rapidly that they do not last even for the twinkling of an eye. One will come to know this personally as one goes on noting. One will then become convinced of the impermanency of all such phenomena. Such conviction is called aniccānupassanā-ṭāṇa.

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

When, as one continues meditating, one comes to realise firmly that all these phenomena are anicca, dukkha and anatta, one will attain nibbāna. All the former Buddhas, Arahants and Ariyas realised nibbāna

by following this very path. All meditating meditators should recognize that they themselves are now on this satipaṭṭhāna path, in fulfilment of their wish for attainment of knowledge of the path, its fruition and nibbāna, following the ripening of their perfections (pāramī). They should feel glad at the prospect of experiencing the noble kind of tranquillity brought about by concentration and the supramundane knowledge or wisdom experienced by the Buddhas, Arahants and Ariyas, which they themselves have never experienced before. It will not be very long before they experience this knowledge for themselves. In fact, it may be within a month or twenty days of meditation practice. Those whose perfections are exceptional may have these experiences within seven days.

One should therefore be content in the faith that one will attain these insights in the time specified above, and that one will be freed of personality-belief and doubt, and thus saved from the danger of rebirth in the lower worlds. One should continue one's meditation practice optimistically with this faith.

May you all be able to practise meditation well and quickly attain that nibbāna which the Buddhas, Arahants and Ariyas have experienced!

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Well done! Well done! Well done!

# The Venerable Mahāsī Sayādaw

## A Biographical Sketch

The Venerable Mahāsī Sayādaw was born in the year 1904 at Seikkhun, a large, prosperous and charming village lying about seven miles to the west of the historic Shwebo town in Upper Burma. His parents, peasant proprietors by occupation, were U Kan Taw and Daw Oke. At the age of six he was sent to receive his early monastic education under U Ādicca, presiding monk of Pyinmana Monastery at Seikkhun. Six years later, he was initiated into the monastic Order as a novice (sāmaṇera) under the same teacher and given the name of Shin Sobhana (which means Auspicious).

The name befitted his courageous features and his dignified behaviour. He was a bright pupil, making remarkably quick progress in his scriptural studies. When U Ādicca left the Order, Shin Sobhana continued his studies under Sayādaw U Parama of Thugyi-kyaung Monastery, Ingyintaw-taik. At the age of nineteen he had to decide whether to continue in the Order and devote the rest of his life to the service of the Buddha Sāsana or



to return to lay life. Shin Sobhana knew where his heart lay and unhesitatingly chose the first course. He was ordained as a bhikkhu on the 26th of November 1923, Sumedhā Sayādaw Ashin Nimmala acting as his preceptor. Within four years Ven. Sobhana passed all three grades of the Pāli scriptural examinations conducted by the Government.

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

Dhammācariya (Teacher of the Dhamma) examination in June 1941.

On the eve of the Japanese invasion of Burma, Ven. Sobhana had to leave Taungwaingale and return to his native Seikkhun. This was a welcome opportunity for him to devote himself wholeheartedly to his own practice of satipaṭṭhāna vipassanā meditation and to teaching it to a growing number of disciples. The Mahāsī Monastery at Seikkhun (whence he became known as Mahāsī Sayādaw) fortunately remained free from the horror and disruption of war. During this period the Sayādaw's disciples prevailed upon him to write the 'Manual of Vipassanā Meditation', an authoritative and comprehensive work expounding both the doctrinal and practical aspects of satipaṭṭhāna meditation.

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

On the 13th of November 1947, the Buddhasāsana Nuggaha Association was founded at Rangoon with Sir U Thwin as its first President, and with scriptural learning and the practice of the Dhamma as its object. Sir U Thwin donated to the Association a plot of land in



Hermitage Road, Rangoon, measuring over five acres, for the erection of the proposed meditation centre. In 1978, the Centre occupied an area of 19.6 acres, on which a vast complex of buildings and other structures had been built. Sir U Thwin told the Association that he had found a reliable meditation teacher and proposed that the then Prime Minister of Burma invite Mahāsī Sayādaw to the Centre.

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

In November of that year, on the personal invitation of the then Prime Minister, U Nu, Mahāsī Sayādaw came down from Shwebo and Sagaing to the Sāsana Yeikthā (Meditation Centre) at Rangoon, accompanied by two senior Sayādaws. Thus began Mahāsī Sayādaw's guardianship of the Sāsana Yeikthā at Rangoon. On 4th December 1949 Mahāsī Sayādaw personally instructed the very first batch of twenty-five meditators in the practice of vipassanā. As the meditators grew in numbers, it became too demanding for the Sayādaw to give the entire initiation talk to all the meditators. From July 1951 the tape-recorded talk was played for each new batch of meditators with a brief introduction by the

Sayādaw. Within a few years of the establishment of the Sāsana Yeikthā at Rangoon, similar meditation centres were inaugurated in many parts of the country with Mahāsī-trained members of the Saṃgha as meditation teachers. These centres were not confined to Burma alone, but extended to neighbouring Theravāda countries like Thailand and Sri Lanka. There were also a few centres in Cambodia and India. According to a 1972 census, the total number of meditators trained at all these centres (both in Burma and abroad) had exceeded seven hundred thousand. In recognition of his distinguished scholarship and spiritual attainments, Mahāsī Sayādaw was honoured in 1952 by the then President (‘Prime Minister’) of the Union of Burma with the prestigious title of ‘Aggamahāpaṇḍita’ (the Exalted Wise One).

Soon after attaining Independence, the Government of Burma began plans to hold a Sixth Buddhist Council (Saṃgāyanā) in Burma, with four other Theravāda Buddhist countries (Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos) participating. For this purpose the Government dispatched a mission to Thailand and Cambodia, composed of Nyaungyan Sayādaw, Mahāsī Sayādaw and two laymen. The mission discussed the plan with the Primate of the Buddhist Saṃgha of those two countries.

At the historic Sixth Buddhist Council, which was inaugurated with every pomp and ceremony on 17th May 1954, Mahāsī Sayādaw played an eminent role, undertaking the exacting and onerous tasks of Osāna (Final Editor) and Pucchaka (Questioner). A unique feature of this Council was the editing of the

commentaries (Aṭṭhakathā) and sub-commentaries (ṭīkā), as well as the canonical texts. In the editing of this commentarial literature, Mahāsī Sayādaw was responsible for making a critical analysis, sound interpretation and skilful reconciliation of several crucial and divergent passages.

A significant result of the Sixth Buddhist Council was the revival of interest in Theravāda Buddhism among Mahāyāna Buddhists. In 1955, while the Council was in progress, twelve Japanese monks and a Japanese laywoman arrived in Burma to study Theravāda Buddhism. The monks were initiated into the Theravāda Buddhist Saṃgha as novices while the laywoman was made a Buddhist nun. Then, in July 1957, at the instance of the Buddhist Association of Moji, the Buddha Sāsana Council of Burma sent a Theravāda Buddhist mission to Japan. Mahāsī Sayādaw was one of the leading representatives of the Burmese Saṃgha in that mission.

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

At the request of the Government of Sri Lanka, a special mission headed by Sayādaw U Sujāta, an eminent deputy of Mahāsī Sayādaw, went there in July 1955 to

promote satipaṭṭhāna meditation. The mission stayed in Sri Lanka for over a year doing admirable work, setting up twelve permanent and seventeen temporary meditation centres. Following the completion of a meditation centre on a site granted by the Sri Lankan Government, a larger mission led by Mahāsī Sayādaw left Burma for Sri Lanka on 6th January 1959, via India. The mission was in India for about three weeks, during which its members visited several holy places associated with the life and work of Lord Buddha. They also gave religious talks on suitable occasions and had interviews with Prime Minister Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, President of India Dr. Rajendra Prasad and vice-president Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. A notable feature of the visit was the warm welcome received from members of the depressed classes, who had embraced Buddhism under the guidance of their late leader Dr. Ambedkar.

The mission flew from Madras to Sri Lanka on 29th January 1959 and arrived at Colombo on the same day. On Sunday 1st February, at the opening ceremony of the meditation centre named 'Bhāvanā Majjhaṭṭhāna', Mahāsī Sayādaw delivered an address in Pāli after Prime Minister Bandaranāyake and some others had spoken. The members of the mission next went on an extended tour of the island, visiting several meditation centres where Mahāsī Sayādaw gave discourses on vipassanā meditation. They also worshipped at famous sites of Buddhist pilgrimage like Polonnāruwa, Anurādhapura and Kandy. This historic visit of the Burmese mission under the inspiring leadership of Mahāsī Sayādaw was symbolic of the ancient and close ties of friendship between these two Theravāda Buddhist countries. Its

benefit to the Buddhist movement in Sri Lanka was a revival of interest in meditation, which seemed to have declined.

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

Considering these fruitful activities in promoting Buddhism in Indonesia and Sri Lanka, we might describe Mahāsī Sayādaw's missions to these countries as 'Dhamma-vijaya' (victory of the Dhamma) journeys.

As early as 1952, at the request of the Thai Minister for Saṃgha Affairs, Mahāsī Sayādaw had sent Sayādaws U Āsabha and U Indavaṃsa to Thailand for the promotion

of satipaṭṭhāna vipassanā. Thanks to their efforts, Mahāsī Sayādaw's method gained wide acceptance in Thailand. By 1960, many meditation centres had been established and the number of Mahāsī meditators exceeded a hundred thousand.

It was characteristic of the Venerable Sayādaw's disinterested and single-minded devotion to the cause of the Buddha Sāsana that, regardless of his advancing age and feeble health, he undertook three more missions to the West (Britain, Europe and America) and to India and Nepal in the three years (1979, 1980 and 1981) preceding his death.

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

available references, including works in Sanskrit and English.

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

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

This controversy arose in Sri Lanka where some members of the Saṃgha, inexperienced and

unknowledgeable in practical meditation, publicly assailed Mahāsī Sayādaw's method in newspapers and journals. Since this criticism was voiced in the English language with world-wide coverage, silence could no longer be maintained and so Sayādaw U Ñānuttara of Kabā-aye (World Peace Pagoda campus) forcefully responded to the criticisms in the pages of the Sri Lankan Buddhist periodical 'World Buddhism'.

Mahāsī Sayādaw's international reputation has attracted numerous visitors and meditators from abroad, some seeking enlightenment for their religious problems and others intent on practising meditation under the Sayādaw's personal guidance. Among the first meditators from abroad was former British Rear-Admiral E.H. Shattock who came on leave from Singapore and practised meditation at the Sāsana Yeikthā in 1952. On his return to England he published a book entitled 'An Experiment in Mindfulness' in which he related his experiences in generally appreciative terms. Another foreigner was Mr. Robert Duvo, a French-born American from California. He came and practised meditation at the Centre first as a lay meditator and later as a bhikkhu. He subsequently published a book in France about his experiences and the satipaṭṭhāna vipassanā method. Particular mention should be made of Anagārika Shri Munindra of Buddha Gayā in India, who became a close disciple of Mahāsī Sayādaw, spending several years with the Sayādaw learning the Buddhist scriptures and practising vipassanā. Afterwards he directed an international meditation centre at Buddha Gayā where many people from the West came to practise meditation. Among these meditators was a young American, Joseph



Goldstein, who has written a perceptive book on insight meditation titled 'The Experience of Insight: A Natural Unfolding'.

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

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

U Nyi Nyi (Mahāsī Disciple and Meditator) Member of  
the Executive Committee Buddhasāsana Nuggaha  
Association Yangon, Myanmar. 18th October 1978

## **APPENDIX**

Below is a concise excerpted translation from the Pāli of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta accompanied by a commentary from the author, Mahāsī Sayādaw. This is offered as an expanded aid in this meditation technique, a reference to the source from which all Satipaṭṭhāna meditation arose, the words of the Buddha.

### **Techniques of Meditation**

The Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta states:

“And moreover, monks, a monk, when he is walking, is aware of it thus: ‘I walk’; or when he is standing, or sitting, or lying down, he is aware thereof.”

“And moreover, monks, a monk, when he departs, or returns, when he looks at or looks away from, when he bends or stretches (his limbs), when he puts on the lower robe, the upper robe, or takes the bowl, when he is eating, drinking, chewing, savouring, or when he is obeying the calls of nature - he is aware of what he is doing. In going, standing, sitting, sleeping, watching, talking, or keeping silence, he knows what he is doing.”

“And moreover, monks, a monk reflects upon this very body, however it be placed or disposed, with respect to the four elements.”

“Herein, monks, when affected by a feeling of pleasure, a monk is aware of it as ‘I feel a pleasurable feeling’. Likewise, he is aware when affected by a painful feeling.”

“Herein, monks, if a monk has a lustful thought, he is aware that it is so, or if the thought is free from lust, is

aware that it is so. Herein, monks, when a monk is aware of sensual desire he reflects ‘I have sensual desire’.”

In accordance with these teachings of the Buddha, it has been stated in colloquial language thus: “rising” while the abdomen is rising; “falling” while the abdomen is falling; “bending” while the limbs are bending; “stretching” while the limbs are stretching; “wandering” while the mind is wandering; “thinking”, “reflecting”, or “knowing” while one is so engaged; “feeling stiff, hot,” or “in pain” while one feels so; “walking, standing, sitting,” or “lying” while one is so doing. Here it should be noted that walking and so on are stated in common words instead of “being aware of the inner wind element manifesting itself in the movement of the limbs,” as is stated in the Pāli texts.

## **Rising and Falling Movement of the Abdomen**

It is quite in agreement with the Buddha’s teachings to contemplate on the rising and falling movements of the abdomen. Such rising and falling is a physical process (rūpa) caused by the pressure of the wind element. The wind element is included in the material group of the five aggregates (khandhā); in the tactile object of the twelve sense bases (āyatana); in the body impression of the eighteen elements (dhātu); in the wind element of the four material elements (mahābhūta); in the truth of suffering of the four noble truths (sacca). The material aggregate, a tactile object, a body impression and the truth of suffering are certainly objects for insight contemplation. Surely they are not otherwise.

The rising and falling movement of the abdomen is therefore a proper object for contemplation, and while so contemplating, being aware that it is but a movement of the wind element, subject to the laws of impermanence, suffering and unsubstantiality, is quite in agreement with the Buddha's discourses on khandhas, āyatanas, dhātus and saccas. While the abdomen is rising and falling, the pressure and movement experienced thereby is a manifestation of the wind element which is tactile, and perceiving that rightly as such is quite in accordance with what the Buddha taught as briefly shown below.

“Apply your mind thoroughly, monks, to body and regard it in its true nature as impermanent.”

“Monks, when a monk sees the body which is impermanent, as impermanent, this view of his is right view.”

“Herein, monks, a monk reflects: ‘Such is material form, such is its genesis, such its passing away’.”

“Apply your minds thoroughly, monks, to the tactile objects and regard their true nature as impermanent.”

“Monks, when a monk sees tactile objects which are impermanent, this view of his is right view. However, by fully knowing and comprehending, by detaching himself from and abandoning the tactile objects, one is capable of extinguishing ill.”

“In him who knows and sees tactile objects as impermanent, ignorance vanishes and knowledge arises.”

“Herein, monks, a monk is aware of the organ of touch and tangibles.”

“Whatever is an internal element of motion, and whatever is an external element of motion, just these are the element of motion. By means of perfect intuitive wisdom it should be seen of this as it really is, thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self’.

Thus it will be seen that the contemplation of the rising and the falling movement of the abdomen is in accord with the above discourses and also with the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta (Dhātumanasikārapabba — section on attention to the elements), Again, the wind element that causes the movement and pressure of the abdomen, comprised in the corporeality group, is the truth of suffering.

# **Mahāsī Sāsana Yeiktha Meditation Centre, Yangon, Myanmar**

## **Information for Foreign Meditators**

### **Mailing Address:**

Buddha Sāsana Nuggaha Organisation  
No 16, Sāsana Either Road  
Yangon, (Rangoon) 11201 Myanmar  
(Burma)

**Telephone:** (+95) 01 541971, 552501

**Fax:** 289960, 289961

**President:** U Hla Kyaing

**The Meditation Centre:** This meditation centre was opened in 1950, with the Most Venerable Mahāsī Sayādaw as its Principle Preceptor. The most Venerable Mahāsī Sayādaw started the teaching of the Mahāsī method of insight in 1947 and taught for 33 years until his death in August, 1982. The centre has prospered with up to 500 meditators (yogis) practicing intensive meditation daily at the centre. It is located on approximately twenty acres of quiet pleasant garden land in Hermitage. There are over one hundred buildings on the ground for housing the meditation teachers and

meditators both monks, nuns and laity, men as well as women and providing complete retreat facilities.

**Location:** The centre is only about 20 minutes by taxi from Yangon's Mingaladon Airport, or about 20 minutes by taxi from the Tourist Centre in downtown Yangon. It is shown on tourist guide maps and there is a prominent sign board at the junction of Kaba-Aye Pagoda Road with Sāsana Yeiktha Road.

**Accommodation:** Boarding and lodging are free to foreign meditators for the period of their practice at the centre. Accommodation for Bhikkhus (monks), Thilashins (nuns) and women meditators is separate and assigned on arrival. All rooms have bedding and mosquito nets. Wherever possible single rooms are provided for foreigners, but they may have sometimes to share. You should provide your own toiletries, towels, vitamins and medicines, and cushions if you need them.

**Medical Care:** There is a dispensary at the Centre for treatment of minor ailments open every Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 4 to 6pm. Cases needing special attention will be treated at the State Hospital. Meditators preferring treatment at a private clinic will themselves have to bear the necessary expenses.

**Programme of Meditation:** There is no periodically scheduled or weekend Courses, but the Centre is open throughout the year to receive those who are prepared to undertake full-time Satipattana Vipassanā meditation for six to twelve weeks.

All lay Yogis (meditators) are expected to observe the Eight Precepts throughout the length of their stay, and

these will be explained by the Meditation Teacher at the time of induction. The observance of these moral Precepts conduces to the development of Vipassanā insight knowledge. At the time of their induction, a tape-recorded talk on Satipattana Vipassanā Meditation, its purpose, method of practice and benefits derived therefrom is played for the new meditator.

**The Daily Programme of Meditation Practice:** The day starts at 3 am and continues until 11pm with breaks for meals, bath, etc. Almost the entire day is spent in silent individual meditative practice alternating with group sittings in a meditation hall.

Individual interviews with the meditation teacher are scheduled at regular intervals to enable the meditators to report their meditational experiences and to receive necessary guidance by their teacher for further progress. In addition, Dhamma talks will be given from time to time to the practising meditators by the senior meditation Teachers.

In this way each meditator will receive personal attention and guidance throughout the entire course of meditation and will have the opportunity of gaining personal knowledge and experience of Satipattana Vipassanā Meditation through all stages of progressive vipassanā insight.

**N.B.** All instruction and discourses for foreign meditators will be through the medium of English which the prospective meditator should have at least at working knowledge.