

# MINDFULNESS MEDITATION MADE EASY



*By Venerable Dr Khammai Dhammasami*

# Mindfulness Meditation Made Easy

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# CHAPTER ONE

## *INTRODUCTION TO VIPASSANA MEDITATION*

### **THE AIM OF MEDITATION**

WHAT WE ARE going to start now is a few days of meditation retreat. We are making a special effort to get together and help each other with meditation practice. This evening is an introduction. I would like to talk to you about why we need to meditate, what is concentration and how to begin to practise it.

To keep yourselves physically healthy, you go to a gym for an exercise, which is to make yourselves stable and physically strong. In the same way, to have a stable and strong mind we do meditation, which is mental exercise. Many people associate meditation with superstitious or extraordinary ideas. However, generally meditation in Buddhism is mental training.

It may help us to understand meditation better by thinking of mind **metaphorically** as a scene from nature. **Before we do that**, please bear in mind that the mind cannot

be compared with anything we can see with our eyes. The mind is so quick, wonderful, complicated, and mysterious.

## **MIND IS LIKE WATER IN A LAKE**

Nevertheless, for the sake of our own understanding, we can liken mind to a lake filled with lotus flowers and aquatic creatures. If you have a large lake filled with unpolluted water, you will have a green environment, on which people around it can depend. The mind is something like the pure water and the lake is like our physical body. Imagine what would happen if there was a leakage of water. The lake would eventually go dry. The aquatic creatures and the lotus flowers would die. The green environment would no longer exist. People would no longer be able to depend on it. **Here**, note the word *leakage*. It suggests that the water is **draining away** without your knowledge. You are not aware of it **or** the need to block the leak.

Just like that, during the day, without any intention to think, thoughts just come into our minds and waste away our mental energy. We get exhausted after 20 or 30 minutes of being immersed in wandering thoughts. So what do you do? You push them away and sigh, which is a sign of being exhausted. Sometimes you cannot even sleep because mental

energy is leaking away. Frustration at work is a leak. Agitation at work is a leak. Mental energy is being wasted. You are not aware of it because it is just a leak.

## **WORRY IS A LEAKAGE**

If worry or fear is present in a person, then that worry is like a leak draining all his energy. That person will become exhausted. That will also affect his physical health. It is important to block this leakage of mental power just as it is crucial to protect the aquatic creatures and the lotus flowers in order to keep the environment clean and enjoyable.

**Suppose**, at work you meet someone behaving very arrogantly. He may be a colleague or a client. Let us suppose that you become very agitated. Agitation takes away mental energy. The day you feel agitation, you will feel more tired than on other days. This is not necessarily due to the workload, but because of agitation you experience at work. The next day when you go to work, you may become agitated again. Suppose, this happens daily. One week later you come home and **may** feel disturbed very easily. Then you could start blaming others, sometimes your family, perhaps for a minor problem. You start quarrelling; you start losing the ability to appreciate what your family is doing for you. So now, the

aquatic creatures inside the lake begin to suffer. The lotus flowers are the members of your family. They cannot be happy around an agitated man. If someone is agitated in this room, not yet depressed but simply agitated, then people cannot smile at all. The leakage of mental energy has that kind of effect on society, starting from your own family and friends.

That is why it is important to know how our mind works, why we feel agitated, why we feel frustrated, why we feel unhappy, and, of course, **also** why we feel happy. So to know this we meditate. When we discover our own agitation, frustration, disappointment, resistance, resentment, we should try to accept it, see it more closely. **This will then surely lead us to understand it.**

## **ACCEPTING THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH**

There are four noble truths; suffering (*dukkha sacca*), the cause of suffering (*samudaya sacca*), the end of suffering (*nirodha sacca*) and the path leading to the end of suffering (*magga sacca*). The first one, the noble truth of suffering means suffering exists in reality. Worry is suffering. Agitation, aversion, frustration and disappointment are suffering. We do not normally accept these as suffering. Instead, we try to justify our own emotional reactions such as agitation. We try

to blame others for our agitation instead of trying to understand and accept it. Suffering is an inseparable element of life.

Therefore, when we meditate we are going to see these things. We are going to accept suffering and try to understand it. Vipassana meditation is about trying to understand the First Noble Truth, **a universal experience**. It is not for the Buddha; it is not for me but for the one who meditates. We cannot share **our meditation achievement**; but **the lack of it is rather obvious: the states of our mind** in relation to our environment will be reflected, or indeed determined by whether or not we meditate. This is why it is important to meditate.

## **MEDITATION OR BHAVANA**

Let me now say something about meditation. The English word *meditation* does not contain any special Buddhist ideas. Some people think that meditation is to sit quietly, closing your eyes, thinking only of what is good in your life, ignoring all that is bad, cultivating an optimistic view. Some people think meditation is extra work, has little to do with the majority of people in daily life, and is only for monks, nuns and old people who have retired and have time for it. Sadly,

even for many born Buddhists, meditation is seen only as a practice for those who wish to achieve nibbana here and now, maybe as a shortcut. If you are not concerned about nibbana or becoming an arahant, in their opinion, you do not need meditation. In some religions, meditation means reflection on something in the past, what you have done, both good and bad.

In our case, to understand meditation, we have to go back to the original word in Pali, which is *bhavana*, which means to develop mental ability. We believe that as human beings, we have the ability to make our minds stable and concentrated, and make full use of it to understand, to think and to create something wonderful. Nevertheless, this ability within us is only a seed. We have to nurture it to enable it to grow. Although we have the ability to be mindful, to be concentrated and to understand, like seed, which remains a seed and will not become a plant until you grow and nurture **it, the mind** remains undeveloped without **proper** mental exercise. The technique to do this is called *meditation*. When we meditate, we explore and we try to discover how the mind works. The technique was discovered and taught by the Buddha but *we have to see* it for ourselves. We need a technique to develop our minds, our mental energy, like the way we develop our muscles in our body.



## **MEDITATION OBJECT**

We are going to practise *vipassana bhavana* or mindfulness meditation. From now on, I shall describe the technique. The object of meditation is very important. In 1995 when I went to Taunggyi, in Shan State, the Union of Burma, I met one of my devotees who had been meditating for quite some time. He did not understand the concept of the meditation object. He expected me to tell him the best meditation object. I told him that the object that arises at the present moment is a good meditation object. Anger is a meditation object if you are aware of it. Jealousy is a meditation object. Stress is a meditation object. Breathing is a meditation object. And the Buddha is a meditation object. I did not have the impression that he made anything of my answer.

I was, theoretically, in broad terms, saying the whole world is a meditation object. When you go to work as a doctor, all that you see and experience, your patients, your colleagues, your work, everything is a meditation object.

## **THE SIX SENSORY WORLDS**

How do we perceive objects? We perceive them through our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. From the

meditation point of view there are six worlds; the seeing world, the hearing world, the smelling world, the tasting world, the touching world and the thinking world. The first five are physical and the last is mental. Everything that you perceive through these six senses is a meditation object. Whatever comes into your mind is a meditation object; whatever you see is a meditation object. You are now sitting and your body is touching the floor. That touch is a meditation object. You are hearing my voice, which is another meditation object. There is nothing that cannot become a meditation object. We experience the world in only these six ways.

## **CONCENTRATION**

What are we going to focus on? We have only one mind but we have to cope with six objects. Now you see me. This is a visual object. You hear my voice — an aural object. You are also thinking about what I am saying — this is a mental object. Your body is touching the floor, which is again another object — altogether four objects. Now which one are you going to focus on? This is where the technique comes in.

Imagine the mind is a watchman and he has to look after an object, say a house, which has six doors — the eye door, the ear door, the nose door, the tongue door, the body door

and the mind door. You are alone inside and do not feel secure. Someone may come in through the front door; another may come in through the back door. They are there and you have to catch them. The way to do it is to close the other five doors and watch the remaining one and catch the person(s) coming through that door. This is what we call concentrating. You focus on one point. The ability to do that keeping your mind on one door and not the rest is called concentration. This word is sometimes explained as one-pointedness, in its most developed state. You keep your mind on one point.

You want to go to the supermarket, you want to go to the library, you want to visit your friend, you also want to watch a video at home — four things. Which one are you going to do? Unless you have a strong mind, you will not be able to enjoy anything. Your mind will go to supermarket while talking to a friend. You fully enjoy none of the two. When you have a strong mind and decide "*I'm going to watch a video,*" then you will be able to sit and watch it. At the time, you are watching the video, your mind does not go to the supermarket, nor does it wander either to your friend or to the library. This is concentration.

## **PRIMARY AND SECONDARY OBJECTS**

Among these objects, we are going to select one as a *Primary Object* or an *Initial Object* and we are going to stick to that. As they come, we will watch the other objects as well. We will notice them, but they are *Secondary Objects*. If you have done meditation before and you have been given a certain meditation object as a primary object, you can keep to that. Otherwise, we are going to choose breathing in and out as initial object. As you breathe in you will say mentally "*breathing in*" and as you breathe out say "*breathing out*"; *breathing in, breathing out, breathing in, breathing out*. This is your primary object. However, this primary object is not the only meditation object. You do not shut yourself off from other objects altogether. It is not possible to do that. As they come in, whatever the object, you are going to note them, meaning to register them in your mind.

## **INSTRUCTIONS ON SITTING POSTURE**

Now I will begin giving instructions. Please sit comfortably. First, I will say something about posture. When you sit, do not cross your legs unless you are used to doing that before and have indeed found you have no problems with that. It is better to keep your legs apart but touching each other. If you keep them crossed, they can produce heat and pain, and later unnecessary stress and distraction. If you keep them apart, you may move them unconsciously as the pressure of the time builds up. You are not supposed to move immediately or frequently, although you can do so at some point. This is to develop patience and determination. Keep your spine upright and look straight ahead of you.

Regarding your hands, do not keep the back of one hand in the palm of the other as this can produce heat and cause distraction. Keep your fingers together; you can keep them crossed or just place one on top of the other. If you keep your body straight, that will maintain your posture. If you feel your body slumping forward, try to straighten it, but do it slowly and mindfully.

Now you are going to keep your eyes closed, not tightly but merely closed. If you close your eyes tightly, it will make your mind wander. You just close them lightly.

## **BREATHING**

Focus your mind on your nostrils. Start breathing in and out normally. As you breathe in, say in your mind "*breathing in*". This means you are naming the object. As you breathe out say in your mind "*breathing out*" — *breathing in, breathing out, breathing in, breathing out*. During the course of breathing in and out, if your mind goes somewhere, say it goes to the hospital and you see the hospital, now you release your mind from the breathing and take note of the hospital. When you see the hospital in your mind, you should willingly note "*seeing, seeing, seeing*" three or four times and after that come back to breathing. Start *breathing in, breathing out* again. If you hear somebody talking to you in your mind, you should keenly note "*hearing, hearing, and hearing*" three times or four times and then come back to your primary object, which is breathing in and out. If you hear the ticking of the clock, you focus on that direction and wholeheartedly note *hearing, hearing, hearing* three or four times and come back to the breathing. If you hear that again you can go back again and note *hearing, hearing, and hearing*.

## **PAIN**

When you feel pain in some part of your body, say in your knee, you switch all your mental energy to your knee. Register in your mind as "*pain, pain, pain*" for three or four times. Leave it there and come back to breathing. The pain may decrease or increase. If the pain increases you go back there again and attentively note *pain, pain, pain* three or four times. Leave it there and come back to breathing.

If the pain keeps *increasing* you go back again, stay with the pain, and note it with some intensity for a longer time. If the pain makes you impatient, register "*impatience, impatience, impatience*" or "*agitation, agitation, agitation*", and come back to breathing.

If you feel cold, you note "*cold, cold, cold*". If you feel numbness, do not change your posture immediately. Try to stay with numbness as long as possible and note "*numbness, numbness, numbness*", then, leave it there and come back to breathing. If it becomes stronger, go back there and note "*numbness, numbness, numbness*" once again. If you are thinking of what you have done today or what you are going to do tomorrow, simply note "*thinking, thinking, and thinking*" and then release it and return to breathing.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *THE PRACTICE OF METTA MEDITATION*

#### **SUPPORTIVE MEDITATION**

There are four kinds of meditation we need to practise in order to support Vipassana meditation. They are metta meditation, meditation on the qualities of the Buddha, meditation on the impersonality of the body and meditation on death. These four, if practised earnestly and correctly, help in the development of Vipassana practice. Vice versa, Vipassana meditation assists us achieve deep understanding of these four meditation practices. They are mutually approving and supportive, and that is why these four are known as *Supportive Meditation*.

They are largely reflective types of meditation rather than trying to watch sensation and thoughts momentarily as in Vipassana. They help the mind to focus. Once fully developed, they also tend to influence the way we think. Three of them — *Metta*, meditation on the impersonality of body and meditation on death — help us directly to acquire the *right thought* factor of the Noble Eightfold Path because their nature is that of goodwill, non-violence and detachment.



## METTA MEDITATION

Before practising *metta*, I would like to discuss what *metta* is. Practising *metta* (loving-kindness) meditation is not something new to the Burmese, the Thai and the Sri Lankan Buddhists. Actually in many places, by *meditation* people would immediately understand it as *metta* meditation.

*Metta* meditation comes in a set, comprising four component: *metta*, *karuna* (compassion), *mudita* (sympathetic joy) and *upekkha* (balanced mind). In Burmese and Thai, *upekkha* means being indifferent to someone or something. This is often mistakenly taken to mean the *upekkha* which is a part of *Metta*. In reality, *Upekkha* that is a part of *Metta* is not an attitude of ignoring and being indifferent towards something but rather a balanced mind that is not swayed nor affected either by the suffering object of *karuna* or the pleasant object of *mudita*. It always retains the spirit of *metta*, which is the very foundation of its existence. When we say *metta*, the remaining three are also included. However, in practice, all the four cannot be done at the same time. We have to begin with *metta*. Whether or not we progress to the other three elements depends on how we are progressing with *metta* practice. We could not start off with *karuna* and *mudita* or *upekkha* because each of the last three is a specialized advancement of *metta*. *Metta* is an inclusive primary practice that develops itself into the qualities of heart such as *karuna*, and is essential to furthering these qualities.

## **WHAT IS METTA**

The desire to see peace and success in your life is *metta*. The desire to be free from harm is *metta*. This good intention is to be developed and extended to members of your family and friends. As it progresses, you have to *gradually* extend it to all in the world including your enemy. The desire to see them doing well and happy in their life is the spirit of *metta*

You want to see yourself progress socially, economically and spiritually. This is *metta*. When we wish ourselves good health and prosperity, we are purely developing the awareness of goodwill to ourselves — promoting love for ourselves and avoiding danger, harm and enmity.

## **DO NOT START FROM THE WHOLE WORLD**

*Metta* is a goodwill through which you wish to see welfare and well-being of yourself. In this world, all living creatures love themselves and should have an awareness of this feeling. They should then extend this feeling to those nearby such as parents, family members, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters and teachers. This is the way to start spreading or expanding *metta*. There are some, who start by saying, "*may all creatures in the east be well and happy*". Some practise *metta* with only the whole world as their meditation object, overlooking the people nearest and dearest to themselves. Without being able to develop *metta* fully for themselves and their friends, how can one expect to stretch out *metta* to the whole world? It is not logical. That could become a futile effort and sometimes almost a prayer intended for mere public display.

## UNIVERSAL DIMENSION OF METTA

As *metta* is universal by nature, as said earlier, we have to have a *wholesome feeling* not only for ourselves but also for other people as well. Otherwise, *metta* can lose its true nature and be overcome by its invisible attacker: attachment and selfishness. That is not *metta* any more.

*Metta* by its true character gravitates toward a gradual diminishing of the border between you and your family, friends and strangers, and between yourself and the enemy. Prejudice, favour and fear are the manifestations of the opponents of *metta*; they create a mental boundary between those you *like* and those you *do not* like. *Metta* works to diminish and eliminate such bias and discrimination. *Metta* gives a universal dimension to the way we think and act. With *metta*, come virtues such as friendliness and honesty. One who has sufficiently developed *metta* is exceptionally thoughtful, caring and gentle. He is patient and willing to listen to someone else's point of view.<sup>1</sup> *Metta* seeks to transform the inner character of a person while offering peace and a confident outlook on life.

There are people, who do not have the feeling of goodwill even for themselves. They do not strive to improve themselves; they may even harm themselves or place themselves in danger. Therefore, those people who seek to improve their life righteously and avoid harming themselves

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<sup>1</sup> Suvaco is the quality mentioned in the Metta-sutta.

are at least practising the awareness of *metta* for themselves. They need only proper guidance to extend it to others.

## **INVISIBLE AND VISIBLE ENEMIES OF METTA**

Metta practice can easily be derailed especially in the absence of mindfulness. The goodwill nature of *metta* could change into that of attachment and lust, both of which have magnetic potential. They are an *invisible hindrance* to *metta*. It is extremely difficult to combat them.

Ill-will and anger are the opposite of goodwill and loving-kindness. They have destructive forces within and without. They are the well-known and visible enemies of *metta*. All the hindrances to *metta*, both visible and invisible, are direct emotional responses from within, which require awareness and concentration to detect and put under control.

Actually, *metta* meditation cannot proceed in the absence of mindfulness. The Buddha has made it clear that one must establish mindfulness to sustain *metta*. We have to have a sustained awareness (*sati*), indeed, all the seven factors of enlightenment (*bojjhanga*) to develop *metta*.

The Buddha has also advised anyone to help his relative or friend, if really concerned for them, to practise mindfulness meditation (*Satipatthana*). *Metta* and mindfulness practices are often taught together.

## **NOT JUST RECITATION OF WORDS**

*Metta* meditation is not merely recitation of the *Metta-sutta*, the discourse on loving-kindness. It is about bringing and developing an awareness of the fact that we love ourselves; we do not wish any harm to befall ourselves. Moreover, it is about extending such good thoughts to others. It is also about evolving qualities of heart we mentioned earlier. To do that, right effort must be in place. Nevertheless, without mindfulness, we may not know where and when to make an effort. It is down to mindfulness again.

*Metta* meditation is not just chanting a formula either. There are many formulas translated directly from the Pali texts or based on one like "*may I be happy*", which is a well known formula.<sup>2</sup> It is not enough just to memorize the formula or stanza and recite it like a mantra. It does not work that way. It requires mindfulness and reflection on the issues such as happiness and suffering, and the person who is the meditation object.

## **IMMEDIATE RESULT OF METTA**

Developing *metta* is, in fact, instrumental in overcoming frustration within oneself. This gradual reduction of frustration is the first benefit that one reaps from *metta* meditation.

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<sup>2</sup> For the monastic community a formula in Pali like "*Aham avero homi, avyapajjo homi, anigho homi, sukhi attanam pariharami*" etc is most used. One has to know the meaning and use reflective energy while chanting it.

As one becomes cheerful and hopeful, he is well liked and loved by many. Aversion, irritation, agitation and anger will be greatly reduced as the practice goes forward. An arrogant attitude that tends to belittle others will also vanish. In the absence of metta's aura, contempt and an "*I don't care*" type of attitude can sour all the good will. Our daily life is often disturbing, disappointing and complicated. If your *metta* practice is sufficiently advanced, you will seek a contented, simple and unconfused life.

We need to be introspective to find out whether or not we have any of these qualities within us. To be able to do this, we need to practise Vipassana meditation. If through this meditation practice, we discover that we lack a certain quality, we should then apply right effort. We should reflect on the individual words of the Metta-sutta, the Discourse on Loving-kindness, and assess ourselves on whether we possess those qualities. This is another way of practising *metta*.

## **KARUNA AND MUDITA**

We have to start embracing compassion (*karuna*) and joy (*mudita*) right from the beginning. In metta meditation practice, there should be a meditation object. The first object is none other than yourself. The second object is people who are close to you.

No matter who is chosen to be an object of *metta* meditation, all the objects can be mainly put into two categories: one that is suffering and the other that is happy or successful. For example, my mother is chosen as the object of my *metta*. If she is suffering from a headache, I wish for her to be free from suffering, which is a headache. To have this

goodwill requires *metta* (loving-kindness) as its foundation. As I appreciate her suffering, compassion is born. This is because she is a suffering object.

When she is happy, I wish her happiness sustained with *metta*. As I treasure her happiness, joy comes into existence. The same object, my mother, is giving rise to both *compassion* and *joy*. This is due to the fact that I set out with *metta* practice having a dimension that is wide enough to embrace and give rise to both compassion and joy. The issue of the headache is relevant to develop attentiveness. It is an issue, which is in my mind at the present.

When she is anxious, I would say "*may you be free from anxiety and may you be happy.*" My good wish for her to be free from anxiety is a *compassionate* feeling, which originates from *metta* while the latter, a wish for her happiness, is necessarily a *joyous* one, also firmly established on *metta*. *Metta* sets out, therefore, to develop *karuna* and *mudita*.

In *metta* meditation, both feelings of being compassionate and joyous come into play. When we look at the famine in Sudan and see the people and children starving from hunger, we are observing a suffering object. You immediately develop *karuna* if *metta* is already inherent in you. A person practising *metta* meditation on a suffering object develops compassion. In another words, *metta* is transformed into compassion. When you hear that a certain group of people is being oppressed, you develop compassion if *metta* has already been developed. Of course, without mindfulness, this *metta* could lead to anger over the

oppressor, and you may react accordingly. Here you can see the importance of mindfulness that will help calm the anger.

When we hear of someone's success in the recent GCSE examinations, we feel happy. In this instance, the feeling developed is *mudita*, a joyous feeling. You are happy to see someone doing well. In this world, it is usually quite easy to feel compassionate because suffering objects are by nature very moving. It is very powerful. Just observe how the whole country felt when the news of Princess Diana's tragic death was announced in August 1997. Many, including those who never loved her, broke down in tears.

When she was alive, not all of those people were happy with her; some used to criticise her or even find fault with her, or magnify her mistakes. Some even made a fortune out of her weakness. There was not much *mudita* at that time. What I mean to say is that it is more difficult to rejoice in somebody else's achievement.

## **HARD TO FEEL JOYOUS FOR OTHERS**

Communism developed as a response to the oppression of the working class. From the Buddhist philosophical viewpoint, this oppression and poverty led to feelings of *karuna*, which in turn led to the formation of a system to dispel that oppression and exploitation. Communism was clearly built on compassion. However, the people who followed Communism did not feel happy when they saw rich people. They, especially the Communist leaders, had no joyous feeling. If they had feelings of *mudita*, they might not have nationalised or confiscated businesses that had been justly



acquired, thus might have prevented the present economic and political collapse in Eastern Europe. Those leaders might even have survived until now.

Therefore, when developing *metta*, we should assess ourselves to see whether it contains the necessary fundamentals that also give rise to both *compassion* and *joy*.

### **THE ROLE OF SATI**

The role of mindfulness in *metta* practice has already been discussed earlier. Nevertheless, I should mention it again here. You are moved when you see a suffering object. You are happy to see someone doing well. You become joyous because of *mudita*. Emotionally, these two, compassion (*karuna*) and joy (*mudita*) are opposite. Consequently, when we encounter both emotions at different times, we can be put off balance emotionally. We may become more disposed towards *karuna* and become very sad. Alternatively, we may become inclined towards *mudita* and be pushed towards greed (*lobha*) or pride (*mana*). You really need something to balance these two diametrically opposite emotions, and it is *Sati* (mindfulness), which brings in some balance. This is why we need to practise *metta* along with Vipassana meditation.

Having reached this stage, mindfulness helps develop concentration (*samadhi*). Such a development is vital because without the presence of strong concentration, the mind can be off balance. In plain language, *upekkha*, the last component of *metta*, cannot be cultivated unless concentration is developed. However, concentration alone, without *metta*, *karuna* and *mudita*, there does not bring about *upekkha*. In the

Abhidhamma teaching as well as in the jhana factors, a very advanced concentration is associated with *upekkha* and is called one-pointedness or *ekaggata* in Pali. One-pointedness, an aspect of concentration, helps the mind to balance itself.

When mindfulness is present, our mind is kept in balance. When we meet a person who is suffering, we can help him without being overwhelmed by sorrow. We are able to keep ourselves under control. When we meet a happy person also, we can feel happy as well without becoming greedy or craving. People often feel jealous in such circumstances. If we can feel suffering without anger and the joy without jealousy, then this is what is known as *upekkha*, equanimity. It is quite different from the Burmese and Thai word *upekkha*, which means *to ignore*. An ignoring attitude cannot become an offshoot of caring *metta*. The Pali *upekkha* is, as discussed earlier, related to *samadhi* (concentration) and is developed with it. A person lacking in *samadhi* but who claims to be practising *upekkha* is probably just trying to ignore things.

Why do we need this balance? In brief, it is because of the opposition to one another of the two emotions: *karuna* and *mudita*. In the learning stage, mindfulness balances *karuna* and *mudita*, and thereby helps develop *upekkha*, while in the reflective stage, the awareness of cause and effect contributes to *upekkha* practice.

Let me explain this a bit further. The learning stage is about developing and then using mindfulness/*sati* to grow *upekkha*. It has to be said that the first thing we have to do to balance between two opposing emotions (i.e. *karuna* and *mudita*) is to use mindfulness/*sati* to create and maintain a

balance. By becoming aware of the enemies of both *karuna* and *mudita* through "bare attention" and dealing with them non-judgmentally, some kind of stability is created. In a more developed stage, which I call here reflective stage, mindfulness will have already built up some form of understanding. The most relevant understanding here is that of *dukkha* and its causes; this may also be called wisdom. But here I present it as awareness of cause and effect. In simple words, one is emotionally stable at the learning stage by relying on the sustained presence of awareness, whereas in the reflective stage, one becomes emotionally secure because of the understanding of life as a whole in the context of cause and effect. It is a case of awareness is being strengthened by understanding. Because of the two inseparable qualities (non-judgemental awareness and wisdom) that an enlightened being like an arahant can feel the pain and joy of others appropriately while at the same time being fully conscious of suffering and the causes of suffering. Usually, when non-enlightened people feel *mudita*, they do not necessarily think of *dukkha*, unlike the Buddha. So, the reflective stage is certainly a more advanced progress. I have now briefly explained what *metta*, *karuna*, *mudita* and *uppekha* are.

## **SPECIFIED AND UNSPECIFIED OBJECTS**

When choosing an object for *metta* meditation, there are two types of object: a specified one and an unspecified. A specified object could be a chosen person, whom one specifies by name or appearance. Try to visualise the person in mind when directing *metta* to that person and wishing him good health and happiness.

Without particularising any person, if we just say "*may all beings in the east or in the whole world be well and happy,*" then this is an unspecified *metta* object. This way of propagating *metta* to an unspecified object is only possible and effective if done by a person who has already developed and attained a very powerful degree of *metta* with a specified object. Otherwise, it will be ineffective.

**INSTRUCTIONS ON METTA MEDITATION**  
**(BASIC TECHNIQUE)**  
**IDENTIFYING NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE CONDITIONS**

I want you to think of two negative conditions that you do not wish to have and two positive conditions or things that you wish to have. In other words, think of desirable and undesirable things in your life. We will start our practice based on these settings. To give you an example, I have a gastric ulcer, which wakes me up in the middle of the night because of the pain. I suffer from lack of sleep. Sometimes when I go for lunch invitation, the food offered is very spicy; I end up eating just rice and yoghurt. I have encountered these difficulties. So, I have become mindful of these difficulties and with a feeling of *metta* for myself, my first wish is that *I may get rid of the gastric ulcer*. Secondly, my wish is to be free from bad company, to be far away from them and not to have to meet them. I will simply meditate "*may I be free from bad company.*" These are the two most obvious wishes for me as far as negative situations are concerned.

The two positives are to be able to meditate and study success fully. These are my two most important things, even

burning issues, for me at the present. I will incorporate them into *metta* practice.

## **STEP ONE**

I first choose myself as the meditation object. I say to myself in my mind "*May I be free from gastric ulcers. May I be free from bad company. May I be able to meditate more and successfully, and may I be advancing as I wish with my research study.*" This is repeated two to five times.

## **STEP TWO**

Next I direct my mind to another person, for example, to my mother, visualising her and wishing thus; "*May she be free from gastric ulcers. May she be free from bad company. May she be able to meditate successfully. May she be advancing in her dhamma study.*"

Actually, it should be a relevant issue for her. I may say, *may she be well and happy, may she be free from anxiety and worry.* Good health and happiness are something positive I want her to enjoy. Anxiety and worry are things undesirable I do not want her to have them. We need to choose two negative and two positive issues, and cultivate *metta* first for ourselves and then for a specific person.

By this practice, we develop *sati* (mindfulness) of our feelings of well being, our desire to be free from harm and suffering, and this then leads to the development of *metta* for ourselves. From then on, we can extend the same *metta*, first

to our parents if they are still alive, second to our existing families and then close friends. We direct our *metta* to them individually, one by one.

### **STEP THREE**

We next have to choose a neutral person. He or she may be someone from work or someone you come across in society. This person has to be known to you but one towards whom you have not formed any like or dislike. He or she is entirely neutral. We then direct our *metta* to that person in the same way as we did before.

### **THESE PEOPLE ARE NOT YET MEDITATION OBJECTS**

We should forget the people we have been in conflict with or had arguments with for the time being. Only when we have made some progress in our *metta* meditation, should we include them. Some say that they have just gritted their teeth and cultivated *metta* to people they have had a fight with. I cannot imagine what type of *metta* is being directed to them. This is just not possible. The border between your acquaintances and the neutral person has to be eliminated first, before you can effectively cultivate *metta* towards your enemy. We do not start with the opposite sex either as this can arouse lust. Nor do we begin with those who have died, for this can stir up sorrow.

## CHAPTER THREE

### *HOW TO DEAL WITH PAIN*

IN SITTING MEDITATION, after a while, pain and tingling sensations usually appear. These sensations include itching, feeling stuffy, tension and feelings of lightness or heaviness in some parts of the body. All these sensations are considered as meditation objects (*vedana*). The Burmese and Thai word *Vedana* is derived from the Pali word *Vedana*, which means all the different types of sensations, both good and bad, as well as neutral one. However, the Burmese word *wedana* and the Thai word *wethana* does not apply to all kinds of sensation. Instead, it means only the bad feelings or pain, tingling and numbness. Sometimes it also means mental anguish. So, it is important we understand the original definition of *vedana* as in the sutta. Today, we shall discuss how we should deal with them.

### **VEDANA**

Pain is a kind of *vedana*, feeling or sensation. However, there are different types of feeling; pleasant, unpleasant and neutral. Pain means unpleasant feeling. Feeling, *vedana*, exists as a part of a process in the non-stop function of psychophysical phenomena. It can arise from contact through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind provided that there is a corresponding sense object present. In plain terms, you feel in six ways, through seeing, hearing, smelling,

tasting, touching and thinking. *Vedana*, whether pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, is an experience that makes you aware of something. Psychologically speaking, it is a part of a cognitive process. It is more than a mere sensory state.

We do not start meditating on pleasant or neutral feeling, as in most cases they are not as clear as pain. We do not begin with a lesser known object. Compared with pain, a pleasant feeling is less known and a neutral one is the least perceived by a beginner. That is why we talk about the pain that we confront in almost every meditation session. The way to deal with tension, numbness and other unpleasant feelings, even neutral sensations will be covered under this topic.

Pain has a very important message to tell us when it arises. If we received and realized the intended message for what it is, we can become wise. Otherwise, we tend to become impatient and try to reject it outright. We do not have sufficient courage to observe it, and even less to investigate its nature.

## **PERSONALIZING PAIN**

Whether physical or mental, pain always has a cause. Everything which happens is part of a process. When we sit, pain may develop in the legs, back, shoulders and neck. When it develops, we normally identify the pain with ourselves. Out of habit, we start thinking or rather judging ourselves: we say "*I am in pain*" rather than "*there is pain*". Because we have been conditioned to react in this way, we consider this view perfectly normal and justifiable. The first description "*I am in pain*" is subjective and is an outcome of a defiled and distorted



view. The second expression "*there is pain*" reflects more objectivity. It is much more accurate to say that "*there is pain*". There is no self, with which to identify the pain. In the expressions such as "*I am in pain, my ear is painful, my shoulder is aching*" we are already personalising the pain.

Last November, there was a conference on "*How to Deal with Pain*" held at the North London Hospice. I was invited to present a short paper. In this, I stated that pain increases when we identify the pain with ourselves. People there could not understand this view. Someone said that pain was a personal experience. "*When I feel pain*", they said "*you do not feel it. It is personal.*" From an experiential point of view, it is personal. I have a gastric problem and I feel pain. You do not. It is personal to me in that sense.

However, pain is common to all beings. It is hardly proper to personalise it. In the same way, human rights belong to all and we cannot identify them as belonging to one particular person or group. Looking at life as a whole, is there any self to be identified with? Identity is something created in the mind through perception. It is the way we perceive ourselves and things around us. Such perception itself changes and is, therefore, contradictory to the notion of a *permanent* self. The *non-self* tendency has to be explored and realised to detach ourselves from the pain.

## **THE FIVE AGGREGATES**

The Buddha analysed life into two phenomena, physical and mental. Just these two; the physical state which has no ability to feel or experience, and the mental state which does.

When you analyse yourself from top to toe, these are the only two states that exist. This may be further subdivided into the five aggregates with mental phenomena split into four namely feeling, perception, consciousness and other mental associates (about fifty of them). The person identified conventionally as Dr. Leo Kyaw Thinn still has the same five attributes as the person known as Venerable Khammai Dhammasami. This similarity will become clearer when we discuss the meditation technique on the impersonality of the body tomorrow.

What this means is that a feeling arises from causes and when the causes disappear the feeling vanishes. Pain arises because we sit for a long time, or stand for a long time, or because the circulation is impaired. There is a cause or rather causes. The existence of physical and mental phenomena leads to the existence of pain. It comes as a package. That is why we say *khandha*, which means an aggregate indicating things work in a group. From this package, you may wish to leave out the pain; you may want to pick and choose, wishing to have only pleasant feelings. **This is against.**

There are different types of pain caused by various reasons such as excessive work, mental pressure, injury and even kamma. The Buddha said in the Udana Pali that going through pain mindfully with the help of insight meditation burns away some bad kamma.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF SELF AND EGO**

We create "*Self*" out of these five aggregates. We create illusion out of reality. A feeling is just a feeling, it is not "*I*" nor is it *mine*, just like Venerable Dhammasami is only a name,

which has been given by convention. When I was a young boy, I was known as Sai Kham Mai. Now that name has disappeared. If I am given a new name, then my present name Venerable Dhammasami will disappear. If these exist in reality why should they disappear? As this identification of Venerable Dhammasami develops, so does the development of the ego — I, me and my. We create "*self*", an identity out of the five aggregates. What exists is the five aggregates and what does not exist is "*I*". This "*I*" is just a name given by convention to the five aggregates.

Unfortunately, we have been conditioned by these conventions. That is why whenever a pain arises, instead of just accepting the feeling as pain, we identify it with ourselves. This is how the pain multiplies out of ego. When we feel an itch on our face, our spontaneous response is irritation. This irritation makes you restless

If we train our minds using Vipassana meditation, we can learn to observe the itch as just a feeling of itchiness, not personalising it "*I am itching or I am feeling itchy.*" Once we become trained in this way, the itch becomes tolerable; the pain also becomes tolerable. When we have been practising meditation for some time, the pain may spontaneously diminish. Or if it persists, and we accept it as it is, rather than personalise it, the pain does not get worse — it remains as it is. We do not multiply the pain.

## **PROLONGING PAIN**

In Pali, making a thing increase is called *papanca*, which literally means prolonging suffering. When you see these five realities of aggregates or phenomena, as "*self*" (*ditthi* — wrong

view), you become attached to it (*tanha* — attachment). This wrong attitude and attachment are the factors that prolong *suffering*, which is in this case *pain*.

In modern psychology, the term "*narcissism*" would be equivalent to the Buddhist term of *papanca* (*prapanca* in Sanskrit), prolonging factors namely attachment (*tanha*), pride (*mana*) and wrong attitude (*ditthi*). They are the focus of the Second Sermon of the Buddha. In the presence of these three prolonging factors, instead of seeing these five aggregates objectively as they are without creating the "*self*", the five aggregates come to be seen as an identity. A *wrong perception* is developed. This is a wrong approach towards a problem such as dealing with pain in life.

Take the hair on your head; when it is on your head you love it, you take care of it. As soon as it is cut and falls on the floor, you do not identify it as your hair anymore. You do not care now what happens to it. Within seconds your perception changes. Hair is an object. The nature of the hair has not changed. What has changed is your perception of what you have described as your hair. So wrong perception is one of the factors that enlarge the pain we experience.

In the Buddha and the arahants, the pain they experience is regarded as merely an object, looked at objectively. Therefore, although there is physical pain, there is no mental pain attached to it. Mental pain is something we create after physical pain has arisen. No wonder the pain is so great. On top of the physical pain, we add mental pain, we double or triple the pain. When we accidentally trip and hurt our feet, we say "*Oh, my poor foot hurts.*" Instead of paying

attention to the pain, we pay attention to the foot. Consequently, the pain increases immediately. You get a bonus, just like buying one and getting one free, sometimes even more.

That is why it is very important to have the right attitude. When meditating, we should just acknowledge pain as pain. Just say "*pain, pain, and pain*" — not "*I am in pain*". To use "*I am in pain*" is to satisfy our falsely created identity. Pain is being dealt with in the wrong way.

Attachment to the false identity of "*self*" is *tanha*. It also expands and increases the pain. As soon as we identify ourselves as "*I*", we develop pride (*mana*). You are proud of the identity that you have falsely created. You are really hurt by whatever has been said of you. You think it hurts your pride, a pride born out of wrong perception. You fail to see any objectivity in what is said of you. *Tanha* and *mana* damage the reasoning power as well. They help prolong every kind of suffering.

When we meditate, we try to see an object as an object. Of course, this will not happen straightaway as we do meditation. We will still see it as we have been conditioned to. However, we try to see things as they are. We see sorrow as sorrow, repulsion as repulsion, irritation as irritation, an itch as an itch, hair as hair. Just as, the hair on your head is perceived differently from when it is cut and has fallen on the ground or thrown into the dust-bin, this perception is subjective and manipulative, and not objective. We make an effort to get rid of such perceptions that fool us all the time.

To get rid of it we have to first see the false perception as it is. To see things as they are is the ultimate aim of meditation.

## **RIGHT ATTITUDE TOWARDS PAIN**

Pain is common to everybody. It does not recognise colour, nationality, gender, social status or academic status. It spares no one. Pain exists in reality. It does not change its nature of being impermanent. It is suffering. That is what the Buddha said. That is the truth of suffering. Pain is part of life. With the help of Vipassana meditation, what we have to do is *not* to run away from pain but to face it; not to ignore it but to register and accept it.

Life is never far away from pain. We start life with pain. As soon as we are released from our mother's womb, we cry because the hands of the nurse are painful to the touch of a new born baby. The nurse tries his or her best to be as gentle as possible but that is never enough for a child who is encountering the outside world for the first time. Nevertheless, the mother is happy listening to the cries for the first time. There is not much anyone can do except to let the child adjust himself or herself to the situation. He or she has to grow old physically to live with it. As he or she grows older a few hours later, he or she becomes harmonious with pain and does not cry for the same reason any more. We have to grow older now in wisdom to face a greater pain, even a mental one.

We have to find a way to be in harmony with some kind of pain, a way to accept it and learn from it. This does not mean that we have to live with every kind of pain. It is perfectly all right to use painkiller to suppress unusual pain.

Nevertheless, the kind of pain that is very much a feature of daily life has to be tolerated, watched and learnt from.

A moment with pain can make you one of the wisest persons on earth if there is sufficient patience and mindfulness to learn directly from it. Whether you meditate or not, if you sit for more than one hour, you will experience some form of pain. Our body is capable of producing pain, and, potentially, it can remain that way all the time. It is so important *not* to regard pain as a distraction but as meditation object. Vipassana meditation is an all-inclusive technique that leaves nothing, including pain, out as its object.

### **DEVELOPING PATIENCE THROUGH PAIN**

Dealing with pain will help develop patience, another vital quality of mind. Within a set duration of meditation, make up your mind to face and learn from pain. Do not try to change your posture frequently as it would remove an excellent opportunity of learning something from pain. The greatest Pali commentator Venerable Buddhaghosa in his famous work called *Visuddhimagga, the Path of Purification*, said that pain is covered up by a change of postures. Be determined to learn all of the reactions to the pain, such as repulsion, impatience, frustration, anger, restlessness, disappointment and confusion. Only by dealing with impatience and understanding of it can we develop patience. Patience and impatience are the two mental states that exclude each other. Mindfulness of impatience leads to knowledge of impatience. With this knowledge we can uproot it. Impatience is not something you can throw into the dust

bin when you do not like it. It has to be recognised and understood before it can be effectively removed.

Intense pain at one of the process stages indicates that contemplation is making remarkable progress. Sharp pain as if piercing parts of the body with a knife could be experienced. As one stops contemplating, such sensations may disappear, and reappear as one resumes. At this time it is especially advisable to practice under close guidance of a teacher so that each development is discussed and clearly understood. Such sensations are normally present in the body but are obscured when contemplation is not highly developed to observe it. Never be discouraged in the face of such unpleasant feelings. Just proceed with courage and determination until you overcome them.

Once these gross reactions are overcome with continued development of mindfulness, lesser known sensations such as a delightful sensation (*piti*), a gratifying feeling (*sukha*) and a neutral feeling (*upekkha*) will come. They are experienced only at the point when the mind is largely free from sensory contact (*samisa*). Some would say at this stage that they have overcome pain (*vedana*). Gross pain may not be present but some kind of sensation is always there. One looks dignified because pain is no longer agonizing. One can now sit for a very long time without experiencing pain. Such pleasant feelings, too, must be kept under the close watch of mindfulness in order to understand their true nature.



## YET TO UNDERSTAND IT

All sensations, pleasant, unpleasant and neutral have to be treated equally without any judgement. Being non-judgmental is one of the fundamentals of Vipassana meditation. Understandably, we would like to experience a pleasant sensation or at least a neutral one, not an unpleasant one. This habitual expectation blocks the mind from watching and investigating unpleasant sensations like pain and tension. This is how the mind is conditioned to be judgmental and rigid, not free and flexible.

We have not understood the sensations until we treat all of them in the same way and regard all of them through our instinctively just as another object. The understanding of sensation has to come from *directly knowing* the way in which it arises. If we do not, we have not grasped the true nature of sensation, we are not able to sustain the delightful feeling. We also have been unable to prevent the unpleasant feeling from occurring again. This is, simply, because we have not mastered sensation. For that, there is a need to register sensation through bare attention, just as scientists collect data to understand a substance, without any pre-conclusion whatsoever as to the outcome.

We may know from scriptures that sensations are impermanent. However, we must not go into dealing with pain arising at the present moment by influencing our mind in this way. We must not pre-empt the outcome before we see it. Any pre-conceived notion, even if it is true, can prevent one from seeing the whole picture; it does not help the mind to become flexible.

## **PAIN IN THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH**

*"Bhikkhus, the truth of suffering, in this case pain, has to be fully recognised, accepted and comprehended. Such teachings are unheard of before. By seeing, recognizing, fully accepting and comprehending it, eyes arose, insight arose, wisdom arose, knowledge arose and the light arose."* This is an utterance by the Buddha in the First Sermon.

He fully accepted pain as it is and became sure that it is an ultimate truth with no creator behind it. It works the way it does, and without any one enforcing it upon us. It is the *anatta* teaching. One cannot command pain not to be pain. Pain is pain, and nothing else. The nature of pain is torturous, agonizing and uncomfortable. It is suffering. The Buddha saw it as it was. He no longer reacted to it when facing it.

Our experience of life, in this case *pain*, is taught in Buddhism as the first noble truth. We cannot escape from this truth. It is impossible to walk away from it. The way to get away from it is to be mindful of it, recognise it and comprehend it. Once we understand it and can accept it, the pain seems to become less. We are able to cope better with it. At this stage, the pain has become one of many favourable meditation objects. Strong pain will sustain bare attention, yet it becomes no longer unbearable. The Buddhist way of dealing with pain is not to run away from it but to face it. Of course, physically, if you are in pain, the Buddha was not against taking a painkiller as has been said earlier. What the Buddha was trying to do is to help you prevent the creation of more pain out of the pain that you already experience.

## DEALING WITH PAIN DURING MEDITATION

Now let us discuss how to deal with pain that arises while meditating.

In dealing with pain, there have to be primarily, at least *two meditation objects*. If you have only one (perhaps pain), the pain can easily overpower your mind, and as a result, you may become an agitated person, a frustrated person etc. In order to watch pain with a stable mind, you need two objects. Breathing in and out has been chosen as your *primary object*. When pain arises, (also in the case of numbness, or itchiness, or tension), you should observe that pain, about three or four times and then leave it there. Go back preferably to the primary object, *breathing in and out*.

The pain may get less during this period or it may increase. If it increases, you go back to the pain and observe it again — *pain, pain, pain* — three or four times, leave it there and come back to the breathing again. To be able to watch the pain objectively like this, like watching a film, is fantastic. How nice! I do not need to tell you how great or how happy you should feel when you are not in pain. But just imagine how great it is to be able to stand the pain, work through it, maintain your stability, calm, peace and reason, at the time the pain arises. How great it would be to just watch the pain in that way!

If the pain continues to increase, you have to go there for the third time, and this time you stay longer with the pain.

Do not come back immediately; stay with the pain and watch the pain, focusing your attention on the particular spot where the pain is. Then the pain may decrease or increase, as you are not in control of it. If it decreases, just come back to your primary object. In case it increases, stay with it, observe it with some effort. You may change your posture to relieve yourself from the pain, when it has become unbearable. Make sure that you move only when it is unbearable, and not out of rejection of the pain.

If we can command the pain to stop or increase, then the doctrine of *anatta* (non-self) must be wrong. In the second sermon, the Buddha said, "*You cannot change the nature of pain. You cannot change the nature of happiness or unhappiness.*" These are natural and they only operate according to their own nature, and not according to someone's wishes. This is called *anatta*. So, try to work on the pain and look at the pain. The nature of the pain is just like the nature of any other object. When we look into the pain, it gives us insight and understanding. Regard pain as a meditation object. Be determined to watch and investigate it.

## **DISCUSSION SESSION**

Q: At what stage do you start acting if the pain becomes unbearable during meditation?

A: If after the third cycle of observing the pain and returning to breathing, the pain increases and becomes unbearable, then you may change your posture. But before you do so you have to note your intention to change by observing; *intention, intention, intention* and then change your posture slowly observing the changes at every stage; *moving,*

*moving, moving, lifting, lifting, lifting, placing, placing, placing, touching, touching, touching*, etc. If there is a feeling of relief, please note that as well. Then slowly, return to your breathing. Outside meditation, you can observe pain by giving it awareness once without personalising it or identifying the pain with yourself. Then you can try any necessary measure to relieve the pain.

Q: Can two thoughts exist at one time?

A: When your concentration (*samadhi*) is still weak, you may feel as though two or more thoughts or feelings exist at once. But, that is not true.

Q: Is this because if our concentration (*samadhi*) is strong, our mind will be totally engrossed on one object only?

A: In meditation, there are three stages — a learning, a controlling and a liberating stage. First, we have to learn what it is like to go through pain and learn how to accept it. You learn how to be receptive rather than rejecting. Then, when you become receptive to the pain, you can start to control it. Now, what you have just said is about controlling. You switch your mind on to something else.

When the abbot of the Dhammayatana Monastery from Taunggyi, Shan State, the Union of Burma required a hernia operation, he refused to have anaesthesia. The surgeons did not dare operate on him without anaesthesia. They asked the Director General of Health Department in Rangoon what to do. He knew the abbot. He told the surgeons that if the patient signed a statement refusing anaesthesia, they should go ahead with the operation. It is on record in Sao Sam Toon Hospital, Taunggyi, Shan State that the Dhammaratana abbot

underwent the operation without an anaesthetic. It is possible to control the pain with another object. Some people control it with music. In Vipassana, it is preferred that pain is looked at, even if the mind is to be engrossed in it as only one meditation object. To use concentration power and to avert your mind from pain would bring you a lot of relief but that does not bring an understanding of pain. Vipassana meditation makes use of pain as an instrument to achieve liberation from suffering.

Remember from the time we are born to the time we die, pain is going to be there. The question is "*when will it appear*" and "*whether we will be able to control it*". Pain is part and parcel of our life.

Some meditators have a wrong perception. They try to meditate on the pain in order to do away with it. The assumption that meditation will necessarily get rid of pain is quite wrong. The aim or intention of meditation is not to get rid of pain. The pain is the Dhamma. It is inviting you to come and see it for yourself what it is like. Come and see (*ehi-passiko*) is the nature of the Dhamma.

Q: Should we seek the truth of suffering, *dukkha sacca* while meditating?

A: What we are trying to do is to understand this truth. There is no need to seek it. All the meditation objects belong to the truth of suffering. What is needed here to see it. It is already there. As I have explained before, in terms of practice, mindfulness (*sati*) and clear comprehension (*sampajanna*) are the aims. Being mindful of pain leads to its comprehension. More than that, to be aware of its causes leads to cessation of pain. So, you start understanding more about the pain. You

will understand it as *dukkha sacca*, the truth of suffering. What we are doing is watching the pain and accepting it without any judgement or speculation. We register, watch, observe and later investigate it. We do not philosophise as to what the pain is but rather directly experience it to bring about direct knowing of pain.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *INSTRUCTION ON WALKING MEDITATION*

VIPASSANA MEDITATION PRACTICE can be accomplished adopting various postures, standing, sitting, walking, eating, lying, etc. It can be practiced at anytime. The most common postures are sitting and walking. People usually start with sitting and alternate it with walking.

Unlike sitting, in walking meditation you keep your eyes open. This is closer to how we would be doing in our working life. If you master walking meditation, you will find it easier to apply it to your working day and thereby improve general awareness in daily life.

Similar to choosing breathing in and out as our primary object, the primary object in walking is the movement of our feet, lifting and placing. Contemplating lifting as we lift our foot off the ground and placing as we place it on the ground. However, we must not look at our feet. We look straight ahead and downward at an angle of 40 degrees or three meters. This is to help us avoid the obligation of making any eye contact with other people. If we look straight down we may become dizzy and be unable to develop concentration (*samadhi*). If we look too far ahead, we will not be able to develop contemplation, as there will be many distractions.

The hands may be clasped together either in front or at the back, or folded in front of the chest. They must not swing by the sides.



You then walk slowly, much slower than usual speed, noting *lifting, placing, lifting, placing*, until you reach the end. Now stop, noting *stopping, stopping*. Turn back, observing *turning, turning, turning*. Stand for a while to make a mental note of *standing, standing, standing*. Then start walking again noting, *lifting* and *placing*. At the beginning, the distance must not be less than ten paces or more than thirty. It is preferred that one chooses to make between 20-30 paces if possible. If it is too short, your mind will tend to wander and you may feel frustrated. If it is too long, you will have difficulty developing concentration.

After walking like this back and forth, for about five or six rounds, you add another primary object — *lifting, forward, placing*, while walking. Then as you are about to turn, you note the intention to turn; *intention, intention, intention*. Turning and standing should be observed as described earlier. However, this time before you lift your feet, please note intention to do so saying in mind; *intention, intention, intention* — and then proceed with *lifting, forward* and *placing*. In other words, at this stage, in addition to "*lifting, forward and placing*", you have to add "*intention to turn and intention to lift your feet*". The intention to turn and the intention to lift your feet are mental objects, "*lifting, forward and placing*" are physical objects.

If during your walking you hear a sound that has become so overwhelming, you stop and note; *hearing, hearing, hearing* three or four times. Likewise, if a numbness or pain develops and become very dominant, stop walking for a while and note it three or four times. If a thought enters your mind and becomes so prominent, stop your steps for short while

and note; *thinking, thinking, thinking* and then continue the walking. The speed at which you walk is decided by you to suit your own need. You will discover your own pacing just as you make an effort to discover your correct posture in sitting. Ways to observe sensations and thoughts are almost the same as in sitting meditation. However, one does not contemplate seeing what is on the path. Instead, keep bare attention on the movements of the feet as the primary object. Some find walking meditation easier. People should be encouraged to do it more as it is the first step towards achieving general mindfulness in daily life. Walking meditation helps to balance many things, including blood circulation and the attentiveness of the mind.

As concentration improves, there comes a time when one should begin to increase observing the moving of the feet in more details. Nevertheless, to avoid pressure of having to cope with too much detail before one is ready for it; one should only increase in observing movements in detail with the approval of the teacher. The teacher would advise when one should indeed direct the mind from merely focusing on the walking to focusing on things of a more investigative nature.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *MEDITATION ON THE BUDDHA*

#### **REFLECTION ON THE QUALITIES OF THE BUDDHA**

MEDITATION ON THE Buddha or reflective meditation on the qualities of the Buddha is another supportive meditation. We have already talked about metta meditation. As this is a short retreat, I can only introduce you to the meditation techniques and ask you to meditate for a short period. This type of reflective meditation is called in Pali: *Buddha-nussati*, which is recollecting the qualities of the Buddha.

#### **BUDDHA-NUSSATI**

*Anussati* is a combined word; *anu* — "again or repeatedly" and *sati* "mindfulness"; we try to be mindful again or to reflect. We often see quite a few people using their rosaries and reciting *araham* over and over again when they are meditating on the qualities of the Buddha, without even having time to contemplate. You have no time to reflect if you just keep repeating *araham*, *araham* very quickly. What has happened is that the *araham* has become a mantra, which it should not be. *Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa* is not a mantra. It is something for us to reflect on and be inspired by. The Buddha is a very important person. Here, we know only too well that the dhamma, which

he has taught, has never been personalised. However, His personality is very important, because it proves that the highest achievement is within human reach. He was born a human being. He suffered as we suffer. If he did not eat, he felt hungry. If he walked too long, he felt tired. However, since he worked hard he became enlightened on his own and has become the symbol of human purification, human effort and human wisdom — the highest achievement in the universe. We are going to focus on that.

*Buddha-nussati* is, as described earlier, a reflective meditation. We are supposed to reflect and not chant. When we chant *Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa*, it is to remind ourselves. When we chant as a group, this is just to make the group uniform. When we chant it is too fast, it does not allow us time to reflect. What you have to do is to spend time to study what *arahato* is and what *samma sambuddho* is, and to make an effort to reflect on it. This is what is meant by reflection meditation, *anussati*.

It is necessary for everyone to study about the Buddha through books, discussion or listening to dhamma talks. One can then start reflecting. The two books about the nine qualities I would recommend in English are *The Buddha, My Refuge* by Ajahn Khantipalo and *The Nine Qualities of the Buddha* by Venerable B. Ananda Maitreya. Reading them will make your meditation easier. Read and choose the quality(ies), which you are going to contemplate. Reflect on that regularly. You will understand each quality better if you put it in the context of the daily life of an ordinary human beings, to which the Buddha once belonged before he developed these qualities.

In Burma, some people just count the rosary and even become superstitious about this exercise. Among the Theravadins, Burmese use more rosary than any other Buddhists. They will use the rosary on their birthdays or just specific days like, for example Sundays, with a specific number of counting, and for the rest of the week will get up to whatever misdeeds they choose. They certainly give that impression. What people tend to do in Burma, or any other Buddhist country for that matter, nowadays, is to use chanting mainly as mantras.

In the Shan State, the Union of Burma where I come from, some Tai-yai people even tattoo themselves with the words *Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa*. It is not meant for tattoo but for reflection. I cannot help comparing such thing with a forced tattooing of the old soldiers from the General Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese Nationalist Army. The soldiers were abandoned by their general who was defeated by Mao Zedong and fled to Taiwan in 1949. They were later inducted into the People's Liberation Army and were sent to the Korean war. As they were captured, the Nationalists infiltrated the camps and persuaded them not to go back to China when the war ended. When they refused, they were reportedly tattooed by force proclaiming "*Destroy the communist bandits*". The doctrine of anti-communism was not something they seemed to have understood but the proclamation of the anti-communism was tattooed. That served no purpose.

You should instead recite the stanza slowly and reflect on it. That is the correct way of practice.

What we normally understand as the qualities of the Buddha are described in the following stanza in many discourses of early Buddhism: *Itipi so bhagava araham, samma-sambuddho, vijja-carana sampano, sugato, lokavidu, anuttaro purisa dhamma sarathi, sattha deva-manussanam, buddho, bhagava*. There are altogether nine important qualities of the Buddha. In Pali, the nine are (1) *araham*, (2) *samma-sambuddho*, (3) *vijjacarana-sampanno*, (4) *sugato*, (5) *lokavidu*, (6) *anuttaro-purisa-dhammasarathi*, (7) *sattha-deva-manussanam*, (8) *buddho* and (9) *bhagava*. In some places, it is said that the qualities of the Buddha are infinite and that one can go on and on endlessly reflecting the qualities. However, all those infinite qualities are included in these nine. As the practice goes on and you become more aware of your emotional shortcomings day by day because you see those qualities in the Buddha and not in yourself; but surprisingly this awareness of your own shortcoming does not depress you; instead it will increase in you the faith in the Buddha. You can now become increasingly more flexible with the definitions of each quality of the Buddha because you can relate to the presence of those qualities in the Buddha through their absence in yourself. In other words, the definitions of each quality become your own, coming from your own heart, and no longer the ones you have learnt from a book or a talk. Once you start to realise their true meaning in your own context, they become more lively and meaningful. Let us now discuss in brief the nine qualities in the Pali stanza.

i. **ARAHAM**

*Araham* (also arahant) has several meanings. First, it means that the Buddha had eradicated all the defilements. Defilement in plain language means bad thoughts, bad reactions like anger, anxiety, hatred, frustration, stress,

depression, ignorance, jealousy, gossip, attachment, dogmatism and so on; the Buddha had got rid of all these. No defilement means no frustration, anxiety and depression, and any other unwholesome thoughts.

Here is how you can relate your daily life experiences to the qualities of the Buddha. When you discover attachment in yourself, you reflect, "*Oh, I have attachment but the Buddha had no attachment.*" When you are disappointed, reflect on the fact that the Buddha had no disappointment. A day hardly goes by without us experiencing stress and frustration in day to day life. At work, you often feel agitated. Do not try to justify your agitation. Instead, recall that the Buddha never felt agitated even in the most difficult circumstances. There were times when the Buddha can not even convince his pupils. The monks sometime ignore him. There were occasions where listeners just walk out unconvinced of what was being said by the Lord Buddha, see for instance, the first sutta in the Majjhima-nikaya. Look at also, for example, the case of Upaka and Radha. It is a great relief and support for us to remember that the Buddha also had to face such situations but was not hindered by these obstacles in his mission to help people to get out of suffering. The Buddha was never emotionally disappointed nor frustrated. This is the way to reflect on the qualities of the Buddha. The Buddha inspires us with his qualities. Because he had got rid of all defilement, he is *araham*.

The second meaning of *Araham* is one who has no secrets; and the Buddha had no secrets; he had nothing to hide. He was totally open to everybody. There is a story of four men who were sitting together and talking. After a while,

one got up and left. As soon as that happened, the remaining three started gossiping about him, how useless he sometime was. They were talking behind his back because they wanted to hide what they were saying from him. Not long after that, another one got up and left. The remaining two started talking about him saying he was stupid. Then when the time came for the remaining two to part, they suddenly realised that they had been gossiping about the other two friends who had left earlier. So they pointed at each other and simultaneously said, "*When I leave don't gossip about me!*"

We all have many secrets, but the Buddha, because of the purity in his life, had none. He was morally pure — pure in his deeds, pure in his verbal actions and pure in his thoughts. Even towards those who plotted against him like Devadatta, he did not desire for revenge. If a person has any desire for revenge against another person, and is being asked whether he forgives the other person who hurts him, and he answers "Yes", just to appear magnanimous, then he is just hiding his emotions. He is not true to himself. When we come across people or situations like this, we should reflect on the Buddha's quality of being an arahant, a person who has surpassed the need for secrecy. A totally open society: that is what the Buddha wanted to see. Not just democratic, but also being totally open and transparent. An arahant does not mind surrendering his privacy to the community. This will help the members of the community to be open and become close to each other. However, in our case you can see that we are very resistant to doing so.

While repeating the word *araham*, you go on reflecting at the same time comparing the quality the Buddha has and you



do not have. You may or may not use the rosary. The rosary is only an instrument to help you concentrate. There is no superstition attached to it. We see some people choosing wood according to an astrologer's calculation. To make a rosary with that calculation, they feel, will help produce a miracle. They have really missed the point of reflecting on the qualities of the Buddha.

ii. **SAMMA-SAMBUDDHO**

This means to discover and understand fully, the Four Noble Truths, without any aid from a teacher. The Four Noble Truths that we have read about, heard about, thought about — we still have difficulty in understanding them fully. What is *dukkha*? What is *samma sati*? What is *samma samadhi*? What is *samma ajiva*? People still ask about these things and we are still struggling to explain them. I am still not completely clear either. When I think about the teachers who have taught me these things time and again, and despite of this, I am still not sure about some of them, I am in awe of the intelligence and wisdom of the Buddha. I reflect on how the Buddha discovered all of these by himself, alone and without the help of any teacher. He was truly an Enlightened One. He realised the Four Noble Truths through direct experience. He is the best example of any self-enlightened and self-transformed person.

iii. **VIJJA -CARANA-SAMPANO**

*Vijja-carana-sampano* is knowledge and conduct, or theory and practice; the Buddha is endowed with both. He says as he acts and he does what he says. In this world, there are times when kings and leaders announce or say certain things in public and before long disclaim them or fail to keep

their words and break promises. When you see things like this, you realise how great is the quality of *Vijja-carana-sampano* the Buddha possesses, and how valuable are all his qualities. Some people know the theory but do not practise it. They are like people who just study a map without venturing on the journey. Some people go on journeys all the time without reading the map, so they get lost. As for the Buddha, he knows the map, knows the route and has made the journey. He was wholly trustworthy. This is why the Buddha invited people to study critically what he said, and not to believe it blindly. That is why Buddhism makes it not a case of believing but, indeed, of seeing for oneself.

#### iv. **SUGATO**

*Sugato* is a great speaker, who is adept in the art of choosing the right words, saying them at the right time, and in such a way as will benefit the listener. The Buddha was a master of that. We sometimes say things with good intention but because of the wrong choice of words, our intention may be misunderstood. Sometimes people say nice things like, "Very good, excellent, wonderful", but their sincerity is in doubt. Whenever we see the word and act not matching one another, we can reflect on the *Sugato* quality of the Buddha at home, at work or wherever we are.

Another meaning of *Sugato* is that the Buddha walks the best path to reach his goal — the path leading to freedom from suffering (*dukkha*). When he meditates and a pain arises, he observes the pain without increasing *dukkha*, whereas the majority of people personalise pain or suffering and misperceive it through attachment and pride (*mana*). The

Buddha avoided this path of misconstruing things and followed the right path. He had chosen to deal with things in the right way that freed him from suffering. Most of the time, we choose to walk just the opposite path that adds more to our suffering. The Buddha, being a *Sugata*, walked the path of freedom and freed himself from mental suffering.

v. **LOKAVIDU**

*Lokavidu* is the person who knows about the world. What do we mean by *loka*? As I have explained in my previous talks there are six worlds; the seeing world, the hearing world, the smelling world, the tasting world, the touching world and the thinking world. There are no other worlds than these six. The Buddha understands how they arise and cease. He knows how clashes and harmony happen in these worlds. He knows why people can be trapped in them or be free from them. That is why he is called *Lokavidu*. You are in harmony with the world only when you know about it and you can then live accordingly accepting it as it is. An unenlightened being always fights with the world, unable to accept it for what it is.

vi. **ANUTTARO PURISA DHAMMA-SARATHI**

*Anuttaro purisa dhamma-sarathi* means that the Buddha is the best teacher who can bring the wayward back into the fold. The Buddha can make people understand with either just one sentence or a whole series of talks, like the time he gave his first sermon to the five ascetics, which took five whole days. We should reflect on this quality of the Buddha whenever we experience problems in teaching or explaining things to children. How capable the Buddha is in these things!

There are plenty of examples to illustrate this quality. There was a man who belonged to a very low class and worked as a road-sweeper. The Buddha on one of his alms rounds came across him and was able to explain to him the Four Noble Truths. The Buddha was also able to explain these four Noble Truths to Venerable Sariputta, a brilliant, intellectual monk, who was the son of a rich Brahmin, well educated and previously from a different religion. Apart from the Buddha he became the most respected one for his wisdom during the Buddha's time. The Buddha also understood how to counsel Prince Nanda, his half brother. On the day of his marriage, Prince Nanda was taken to the monastery where he started to pine for his newly wed bride. The Buddha showed him heavenly girls. Nanda then came to desire these much prettier maidens so he started meditating seriously believing this would help him win the hand of one of these girls. Meditation eventually led him to discover the Dhamma, which made him lose his desire for such things.

Another example was a man by the name of Vangisa who was the cleverest in his class and would compete with others whenever he had the chance to see who was cleverer. He had not once come across a person who could beat him. One day, he met one of the Buddha's disciples and started talking to him. He then asked a question to which the monk answered, *"If you wish to know the answer, you have to become a monk."* Therefore, he decided to become a monk with the intention of leaving monkhood once he learned the answer, and not because he wished to achieve Nibbana. In the end, because of the way the Buddha taught him the Dhamma,

he reached the state of an arahant and never returned to a lay life.

The Buddha brought to his senses even Angulimala, the vicious serial murderer who was about to kill his own mother who would have been his one thousandth victim. These cases showed how effectively the Buddha could teach the Dhamma to people of different make-ups and intellectual status, and how incomparable were his skills as a teacher.

Once when the Buddha was on his alms round, he came across five hundred workers queuing for rice which their rich landlord was distributing as it was harvest time. The Buddha joined the queue. It came eventually to his turn. The landlord recognised Buddha Gotama who was not one of his workers. He told the Buddha off, *"Why don't you work like the rest and earn your food? Why do you beg for your food? You have healthy limbs."* The Buddha was not angered by this, but replied that he also worked. The landlord retorted and said that he had never seen Him work. Nevertheless, he knew that monks never lied and so asked the Buddha for an explanation. The Buddha replied, *"Yes, I also do cultivation work. Saddha or confidence is my seed, my practice is the rain, my wisdom is the hoe, thus I work."* The Buddha explained the Noble Eight Fold Path to the landlord in the terms he understood so well that he immediately gave away his land and property, and entered the monkhood, eventually attaining arahantship. In this way, the Buddha was able to teach the Dhamma with clarity in all sorts of circumstances. That is why he has the quality of *Anuttaro purisa dhamma-sarathi* — the matchless teacher in training people's minds.

vii. **SATTA DEVA-MANUSSANAM**

*Satta deva-manussanam* — the teacher and leader of devas and men. Let alone knowing more than the Buddha or even knowing as much as the Buddha did, we struggle to understand even a tiny bit of what he has said in his sermons and this is in spite of having many learned monks teaching us. When we were young, we studied hard because we wanted to pass our exams, not because we wanted to reach nibbana. We did not understand things well. It was like children being taught through rote learning "*okasa, okasa, okasa*". We just learnt them by heart and recited them. We are not as clever as the Buddha was. Hence, because of his infinite and unsurpassed wisdom, he was the *Satta deva manussanam*. There were many who became the Buddha's followers. Even after he passed away, there are many like us who regard the Buddha as their teacher and leader. We do so voluntarily, not because of we or our forefathers have been conquered or forced to follow him. He did not ask to be our teacher. It is of our own choosing and of our own free will that we become his followers

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viii. **BUDDHO**

*Buddho* is the person who knows the Four Noble Truths. This is similar to *Samma sambuddho*, which emphasises the fact that the Buddha discovered the Four Noble Truths by himself. *Buddho* just emphasises the fact that he knows it well. He was the Awakened One, who had awakened from ignorance and delusion.

ix. **BHAGAVA**

*Bhagava* is the person endowed with special powers. The merits the Buddha had accumulated are much more than others and this is also why he was called *Bhagava*. The merits are acts of sharing, ethical morality, patience, renunciation, wisdom, diligence, truthfulness, determination, loving-kindness and equanimity. He perfected these to the most difficult and advanced level. He shared not only material things in his past lives but also his limbs and life.

The commentaries may explain *Bhagava* in a more superstitious way. The term, *Bhagavaha* has many meanings.

**TECHNIQUE OF MEDITATION ON THE QUALITIES OF  
THE BUDDHA (BUDDHA-NUSSATI)**

Now we shall meditate on the qualities of the Buddha. As we all know, *Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa* means *I pay my homage to the Buddha who has the two qualities of arahato and samma-sambuddho*.

Arahato is the same as *Araham*. It is important to observe our defilement or (negative feelings or thoughts) and to accept that we still have them. When we feel disturbed, we reflect on how the Buddha was free from mental distress and all defilement. Because we are not arahant we may suffer from stress and depression, unlike the Buddha. As we reflect the qualities of *Araham* and *Samma-sambuddho*, we try to visualise the Buddha on these qualities. Whether we are monks or lay people, we still feel worried when we have to leave our homes even for a few days, the Buddha gave up

everything and left his family, wealth and kingdom. He became free from all attachment. This is how we meditate on his quality of *Arahato*. Sometimes we have second thoughts when throwing away our old clothes. In some monasteries, we find all kinds of old stuffs in places like kitchens, none of which is of any use. It is ideal to sit and reflect on the quality of *Arahato* in such a place. Just think of how the Buddha was devoid of *lobha* (greed) and craving. We should try to expand our understanding of how the Buddha was free from all defilement and reflect on the quality of *Arahato*.

People get angry. Countries wage war and threaten against each other. The Buddha was free from such anger. Sometimes when we are criticised, we get upset. There was once a beautiful, young lady, whose parents wanted the Buddha for her husband. The Buddha refused, saying that he had renounced the world and had no desire for anything. He went on to describe her body as full of disgusting matter, so the young lady felt very insulted and became very angry. Later she married a king and became a queen. Bearing a grudge against the Buddha, she organised a mob and one morning, as the Buddha and Ananda were walking into the city on their alms round, the mob started to shout at them, *"You are liars. You are not truly saints. You are not really enlightened."* Venerable Ananda felt very upset. He was reacting to the taunts of the mob. He said, *"Lord, let us go away to another place."* *"Why Ananda?"* Ananda was asked. *"These people are insulting us, Sir,"* he reasoned it to the Buddha. The Buddha replied, *"What will you do if the people in that place started behaving like this, Ananda?"* *"We'll move to another place, Sir,"* said Venerable Ananda. *"What if the same thing happens over there, Ananda?"* *"We'll move again, Sir."* Venerable Ananda wanted to keep moving because he was repelled by



the criticism. However, the Buddha was very calm and did not react to the criticism.

When someone says something, which upsets you, just remind yourself, *"Oh, I'm just an ordinary man. That is why I get upset. But the Buddha is an arahant — an extraordinary man."* The Buddha also told Venerable Ananda, *"Ananda, we cannot run away from criticism. People's criticism cannot last longer than seven days. Likewise their praise also doesn't last more than seven days."* The Buddha was viewing the situation in perspective, not allowing one incident to hijack everything. That was because he had eradicated all elements of anger from his mind. Indeed, he has uprooted from his mind all the negative emotions.

Besides, when we come across any good quality in ourselves, we should also remind ourselves that compared to the Buddha's good qualities, ours are nothing. We should take inspiration from the Buddha's qualities and reflect on them.

*Samma Sambuddho.* This is the ability of the Buddha to discover on his own the Four Noble Truths. Not only does he understand them, but he understands them perfectly and fully.

The question has been asked whether the Buddha as the Ascetic Gotama had come to understand the Truth of Suffering even before gaining enlightenment. As Prince Sidhartha, he saw a sick man just once and he realised immediately that sickness was a prevailing element of suffering. He saw a dead man and immediately accepted the presence of suffering in life and was constantly aware of death. As for us, in spite of having attended so many funerals,

we tend to forget these things after a few days. Maybe, it is only emotionally moving for us while we are attending the funeral. As soon as we are back home, we forget it. The very first time Prince Siddhattha saw the sick man, he accepted suffering. However, he did not *yet* accept it as the ultimate truth at that stage. In other words, he had not realised the whole four truths together and in their entirety.

In some religions, suffering is regarded as the wish and deed of God. This implies that this suffering is not the ultimate truth. These sufferings and impermanence are seen as just a delusion (*maya*) according to Hinduism, as they believe that there is a permanent and unchangeable object underlining them. That is why the type of suffering and impermanence they believe in is not considered as the ultimate. According to Buddhism, suffering is an ultimate truth. As we all know, there are four ultimate truths. When the Ascetic Gotama became Buddha; he became completely sure of them. There is nothing behind this suffering. Suffering is not a delusion. It is an ultimate reality. If you study Buddhism, you will come to realise how we are faced with these four truths in everyday life. We see *suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering* and *the path, which leads to the cessation of suffering*. This was what the Buddha discovered without anyone's help and why the Buddha was called *Samma sambuddha* (The Fully-Self Enlightened).

## CHAPTER SIX

### *BARE ATTENTION*

#### **SATI-PATTHANA SUTTA AS A FOUNDATION AND CHIEF FACTOR**

TODAY I SHALL discuss "*bare attention*" in Vipassana meditation, what we mean by it and how to apply it in mindfulness meditation. The main discourse for Vipassana meditation is considered to be the discourse on the foundation of mindfulness — Satipatthana. The Pali words *Sati* means mindfulness. *Patthana* means the foundation that must be acquired first. It also means a leading or chief factor that has to guide, guard and sustain the mind in developing other required factors such as concentration and direct knowledge. *Patthana* can also mean placing, here placing of mindfulness rightly on an object leading to the rise of wisdom. Mindfulness is fundamental throughout the practice, from start to finish. We try to establish mindfulness. First, we have to discover that we are not mindful. Our mind goes here, there and everywhere. The mind sometimes is thinking when we are not supposed to be thinking or when we do not really intend to. By recognizing the fact that mindfulness is not yet present, we can make a good start in our effort to gain it.

*Sati* means mindfulness, to be mindful of or to be consciously aware of an object, whatever that may be. We divide objects into primary and secondary objects for technical

reasons. Mindfulness means constant awareness of an object, without any break. It is being aware of one object after another arising here and now. There is no break or gap in between, for example, breathing, the ticking of the clock, the sounds coming from outside, the road, being contemplative of sensation and so on. Any object can be a meditation object and to be aware of it continuously is called mindfulness practice. This is the main task in the initial stage of Vipassana meditation practice. It is about being conscious of something at the present moment, being conscious of the world we live in. It is about merely *registering* an object perceived directly through any of the six doors of our senses.

## **EXPERIENCE AND JUDGEMENT**

We do not live in the same world all the time. For example, someone is thinking about his work. Then his world at that time is his thoughts about his job. At that moment, he is not living in any other world, but in the world of thinking. He is conscious of his job, and if he were to meditate at that time his job is the object of his meditative mind. So there are only two things out there — the meditative mind and the meditative object.

As we have discussed before, there are six worlds and we do not live in the same world all of the time. Prof. Oliver Goldsmith of Einstein Medical School, New York tells of a man who was operated on for his blindness. The patient had been blind since the age of five. He was forty-five when he was operated on. He had lived as a blind man for forty years. He could not remember seeing anything during the first five years of his life because he was too young. He had lived for forty

years through listening, touching, smelling, tasting and thinking. He studied, graduated and had a job. He even got married. His wife insisted that he had the operation. The doctors also persuaded him to have the operation because they wanted to try out their newly found technology. So both eyes were operated on and fortunately he regained his sight. On the first day that they removed the bandage, the surgeon stood in front of him without saying anything. He could see the surgeon but he could not make anything out of what he was seeing. Only when the surgeon stated to talk did he recognize him and say, *"Oh, it is you!"* This is because he had not lived in the seeing world for the last forty years. He was instead living in the hearing world. So, he could not make anything out of what his newly repaired eyes could see.

We make many things out of what we see and hear. We create happiness as well as unhappiness. We create joy; we create agitation, through what we see, what we hear, what we taste, what we smell, what we feel and what we think. We need to be fully conscious of this. In the case of this man for the last forty years, consciousness never operated between his eyes and a visual object. However, between the two physical objects — the sounds and the ears, consciousness had been operating. So as soon as he heard the voice of the surgeon he was able to make something out of it, identifying someone he knew. When he was having physiotherapy, he was made to walk and open doors without touching or feeling. When he started walking, even for just one or two steps, he would jump, he could not judge distance through his use of sight.

This is how our mind operates when the meditation object and the meditative mind come together. The mind that

operates at this time is called consciousness. The mind and consciousness are the same. The mind that is called consciousness is something that operates between two objects. The ear is a physical object and the sound is another physical object. When they come together, then the mind functions and becomes consciousness. You become conscious of the sound. That is the height of the cognitive process. In the same way, you become conscious of visual objects. You become aware or conscious of touching, tasting, seeing, etc. This is how things operate. What we should do is to just pay bare attention to it without judging. Everything in the world is a meditation object.

When we see things we make something out of it; and what follows from there is our judgement. As we have discussed how we judge the hair. The hair on our head, we love it, it is pleasant. That is because we interpret it as "*mine*" — this is *my* hair. We wash it every day. Once it is cut and separated from our head, we do not bother with it or care for it any more. Our attitude has changed. There is no more attachment to that hair. Should your hair fall into a plate of food that you are about to eat, your attitude towards the food will change. This is what is meant by judgement. If your hair happens to be in my plate, if my hair happens to be in your plate, it is even worse. Even if you know I wash my hair every day and I know you wash your hair every day. Yet, still we cannot bear it. As we form an opinion and make a judgement, we unconsciously decide not to experience things fully.

Another thing that we often judge is the food we eat. When the food is in the pot or on the table, it looks very nice. Even before we eat, we may say it looks delicious. Then you

put the food in your mouth and chew it. After the space of one or two seconds, you will not want to see it anymore, although that is exactly what you are about to swallow. Just try taking it out and looking at it, how will you feel? Your attitude has now changed. This is what we call judging. All our reactions are judgements. "*Oh, It's disgusting*" we might say or rather judge. Some may even vomit. When this happens and the food we have eaten comes out, we rush to wash it away. We do not want to see it any more. Nevertheless, this is what we have inside our body. Therefore, this is an example of how we keep changing our attitudes. This is our reaction. We keep reacting to the object — to what we see, to what we taste, to what we smell. The same thing is true with sound. When we are expecting someone and when we hear the sound of a car engine, we feel happy. But when you are reading or when you want silence and you can hear the sound of a car, you may feel disturbed. Therefore, you make different judgements of the same sound. When we practise bare attention, we say to ourselves "*hearing, hearing, and hearing.*" We do not even say listening. We just say hearing. We say tasting — not good taste or bad taste. There is no value judgement attached to it. Just bare attention.

## **NON-JUDGMENTAL NATURE OF VIPASSANA**

In Vipassana meditation, the Buddha even goes so far as to say, wandering mind and concentrated mind are equally valuable as meditative objects. To quote the Pali passage from the Satipatthana Sutta: "*Samkhittam va cittam samkhittam cittanti pajanati, vikkhittam va cittam vikkhittam cittanti pajanati*" which means a *shrunken mind and wavering mind are to be treated in the same manner by being aware of it and*

*then comprehending its true nature.* When a mind is shrunken into an object, it is totally immersed into it; this is a concentrated mind. A wandering mind never stays in one place; it travels all over the places. The Buddha said that if you are aware of these two — a concentrated and a wandering mind — if you are mindful of both, just pay bare attention to it and do not judge. Do not say the wandering mind is bad or the concentrated mind is good. Make no value judgement.

We know we are usually judgmental because of the unsettled minds. We often hear people saying that meditation makes mind still and calm. This implies to us that the wandering mind is the very obstacle to meditation. This is where Vipassana really differs from *Samatha* in handling "*restless mind*."

To have a concentrated mind is very important for all meditation purposes. But even though concentration is very important, you still have to treat the concentrated mind just like the wandering mind because both are *objects*. The presence and absence of them are object of contemplation. You have to treat each object objectively, unlike the way we treat our hair and our food, which is quite prejudiced and subjective, not objective.

To see things as they are is the ultimate aim of Vipassana meditation. When being prejudiced and subjective, we cannot see things as they actually are. The whole objective of Buddhism is to see *dukkha* as *dukkha*, and not to react to it. In Vipassana meditation, when observing pain, it is a practice to see pain as pain, no longer reacting to it creating agitation, impatience, frustration or disappointment. So long as we are



reacting and continuously justifying our reactions, we do not yet see things as they really are yet.

Another Pali passage from the same Sutta worthy of quoting is "*Sadosam va cittam sadosam cittanti pajanati. Niddosam va cittam niddosam cittanti pajanati,*" meaning *an angry mind and a not angry-mind, maybe a compassionate or a loving one, these two are the same.* Ethically speaking, an angry mind and a compassionate mind cannot be the same. The angry mind is bad because it can create tension. It is bad for your health. It creates many problems. As far as the ethical aspect is concerned, we can even have different views as to whether anger is good or bad. Some say that anger makes people take you seriously and therefore is justifiable. It is very subjective and open to personal judgement. This is when you approach the issue through ethics (*sila*). But, the Buddha said that when you approach these two psychologically, you have to rise above the ethical aspect of it.

It may be said here, by saying what we have just said, that we do not underestimate the role of ethical morality in *bhavana* but rather emphasize the two different approaches at different levels. Both are indeed part of the training in the Noble Eightfold Path.

## **DO NOT SUPPRESS IT**

Remember that in Vipassana meditation there are three stages — learning, controlling and liberating stages. You need to learn about the angry mind before you can control anger. At the second stage, you are able to control the angry mind and, at the third stage, you will be able to liberate your mind from

anger. Liberation comes from *direct knowing*, and *direct awareness (sati)* leads to direct knowledge (*sampajana*).

In the first stage of Vipassana meditation, we are developing bare attention. We are talking about this today. What you need to do is just to observe — to observe that this is an angry mind or a mind lacking in anger. A murderous thought and a loving thought are equally important as meditation objects. When a murderous thought arises, you note "*this is murderous thought, murderous thought, murderous thought*", and just be fully conscious of its presence; to be mindfully experiencing it and knowing what a murderous thought is like. Because without understanding it, we are not going to be able to get rid of this angry mind, we will not be able to control it. If we are anxious to control it, we force ourselves — "*Don't get angry*". We are just suppressing it, instead of accepting and trying to see it. If you say, "*Do not get angry*", it means you are suppressing it. If you are suppressing something, you will not be able to see it. But, it does not mean that it has gone away. It is there. It may pop up without your knowledge. This is what happens all the time.

We normally learn about what is good and what is bad. Later we begin imposing a golden rule on ourselves "*Anger is not good, I must not be angry.*" Nevertheless, anger is still practically there. So, it does not work that way. Therefore, what we should do is to try to accept it and see it as an angry mind with no whatsoever value judgement attached to it. Normally we would intellectually analyze it: a loving mind is wholesome and an angry one unwholesome consciousness. Nevertheless, Vipassana meditation is something that will lead you to transcend both wholesome and unwholesome. Without

unwholesome, you will not have wholesome. One does not exist without the other as they belong to dualistic states diametrically opposed to each other. They both belong to the *kammic* (*karmic*) process. Nibbana is realized once the *kammic* process ceases to operate.

In the case of the Buddha and the arahants, there is no more wholesome or unwholesome *kamma* (*karma*). In Buddhist philosophy, the end of *kamma* and the end of *dukkha* (suffering) are the same. It is nibbana. When we say the end of *kamma*, we do not mean just the end of unwholesome *kamma* but also that of wholesome *kamma*. What has led us to be born as human beings is wholesome *kamma*. It is leading us to suffer in a human world. When we look at things as wholesome or unwholesome, this is at a mundane level, with two standpoints. The middle path which we also call the Noble Eight-Fold Path of which Vipassana meditation is a very important aspect, is something that transcends both. Normally when we do good things in a mundane sense, we try to get rid of as much of the unwholesome and accumulate as much as the wholesome. But, the aim of Vipassana meditation is to get rid of both. That is why value judgement is not attached even to wholesome *kamma*.

## **JUST KNOWING IT**

The Buddha gave instruction that when the mind is concentrated, know it as a concentrated mind; when it is not, then know it as an un-concentrated mind. Normally, when our mind is not concentrated and it goes here and there, we tend to get disappointed and upset. People mumble, "*Oh, I'm not doing well in this session; my mind keeps wandering; I have a*

*lot of disturbances and distractions.*" These are habitual reactions; we are conditioned to react in this way. Both wholesome and unwholesome minds are conditioned. Vipassana Meditation is a way out of *conditioning (sankhara)* as well as *being conditioned (sankhata)*. We are, of course, still in the process of conditioning and being conditioned, and not yet out of it. But the unconditioned state is where "*Bare Attention*" will lead us to. First develop Bare Attention and be open to any conditions. Merely knowing them, and not forming any opinion of or adding value judgement to them is a way to the *unconditioned state (asankhata)* here and now

## **NO PRE-CONCEIVED NOTION**

Let us go back to another aspect of bare attention. Bare attention is not to have any preconceived notions. To give an example, you want to get rid of itchiness on your face (while meditating) and you note *itchiness, itchiness, and itchiness*. Your mind is being conditioned by the desire to get rid of the itch. Before it acts, the mind is already attached to judgement. If the itchiness does not go away, you are going to react to it. Even if it goes away, you will still react to it by saying, "*Oh, good. I've done it.*" If it does not, you feel disappointed — "*Oh, it's getting worse; the numbness in my leg is getting worse; the pain in my back is getting worse.*" This is because of the notion that this is *my back*, this is *my leg*, etc. This notion overrides or overshadows the pain or numbness. So instead of seeing the pain as it is, or the numbness as it is, we see the pain and numbness overshadowed by the preconceived notion that this is *my back* or *my leg*. That preconceived notion prolongs the pain and numbness.

Sometimes, people are encouraged to contemplate pain, saying that the pain will vanish after some continued observations. This leads to a belief that in order to get rid of pain, one has to contemplate; contemplation of pain will bring the end of pain. This is a preconceived notion of what could come about from contemplation effort. In fact, the pain may vanish or increase. Vipassana teaches only what to do if it vanishes or if it increases. We cannot command pain to disappear or increase. It is *anatta*. If the preconceived notion is there, the mind is blocked, and not open. As it is not open, it will reject any outcome not in line with one's expectation. One is not prepared to face alternative situation. Flexibility comes only with an open and receptive minds.

### **NOT TO GET RID OF IT BUT RATHER TO COPE WITH IT BETTER**

The aim of Vipassana is not to get rid of pain, as pain is as a part of life. There is no world where there is no pain. Vipassana meditation is rather a method of how to cope with it when it arises: to make use of pain as a meditation object in order to gain *insight* that brings the end of suffering. It is true that at some stage, pain is greatly relieved and one does not feel it as one used to, one can also sit for many hours at this point and facial looks become bright, dignified, calm and serene.

In the *Satipatthana Sutta*, the discourse on mindfulness, there are two very important words in Pali; *sato* and *sampajano*. The first one is bare attention; that is to pay bare attention to an object by merely knowing its existence. This bare attention progresses and matures as you are collecting

data, you are registering the bare facts. You are going to see the characteristics of the object. Before that, you are not going to condition your mind and say "*The pain is impermanent*", or "*It will go away*". You must not judge or condition your mind with anything, not even with impermanence, although the law of impermanence is real and true. Nevertheless, since you are going to make use of this law only in theory in order to get rid of the pain, not because you see the impermanent nature of the pain. Also not necessarily because you see the impermanence happening here and now, but because you have read it in a book or heard of it in a dhamma talk. Moreover, you are expecting to strengthen your ability to tolerate the pain with the consolation and knowledge that the pain is impermanent and will not last forever, expecting it to go at any moment. Therefore, impermanence in theory is not a real impermanence.

## **BARE ATTENTION LEADS TO MINDFULNESS AND CLEAR KNOWLEDGE**

When we observe an object continuously, we get a clear comprehension of these objects, about pain, sounds, breathing and so on. Clear comprehension is the realization of the six worlds. What we are trying to do first in Vipassana meditation is to establish this bare attention. We usually keep reacting all the time. However, during the course of the practice, we become aware of the lack of bare attention, and that strengthens our resolve and willingness to establish bare attention.

This bare attention will then be used for two purposes. One is for reflection. You are going to contemplate and reflect

all the objects. To reflect, first you have to establish bare attention or constant awareness. Before that is achieved, reflection can lead to speculation. To quote in Pali from the Discourse, "*Sati paccu-patthita hoti yavadeva nyanamatthaya patisatimatthaya*" meaning "*in order to reflect, we have to establish mindfulness and in order to understand things clearly as they are we have to establish mindfulness, which is bare attention.*" Before we can reflect effectively (*patisati-matthaya*), we have to establish mindfulness by paying bare attention to all that arises here and now. The second purpose of bare attention is to comprehend things as they are (*nyana matthaya*). Seeing anger just as anger not mine or me, pain just as pain not mine or me is to see things as they are. As we relate to the present moments more and more, we are now starting to progressively see things as they are and then live our life fully at the present moment. With that, the wisdom needed to live a peaceful life gradually arises.

That is why once you are in a position to control your mind, you will be able to use your mind to reflect on the object. Now, when you are trying to establish mindfulness, even if an insignificant reflection comes into your mind, you merely note "*reflection, reflection, reflection*" and try to go on with the task of establishing mindfulness. Do not actually do reflection too early and do so only with a proper consultation with the teacher.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *MEDITATION ON THE IMPERSONALITY OF THE BODY EXPLANATION AND INSTRUCTION*

#### **FIRST STEP IS TO STUDY**

THIS EVENING WE are going to discuss the impersonality of the body, which is about the reflection on the different parts of our own body. Afterwards, we will meditate on that. In the olden days, the analysis was done in this way. The body was divided into 32 parts. We shall divide these into six groups according to the tradition. They are,

- (a) head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, skin;
- (b) flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, kidneys;
- (c) heart, liver, intestines, spleen, lungs;
- (d) bowels, stomach, undigested food, faeces (faeces, faeces) brain;
- (e) bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fats<sup>3</sup>
- (f) tears, lymph, saliva, nasal mucus, oil of the joints (synovial fluid)<sup>4</sup>, urine.

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<sup>3</sup> Microscopically fat may be found in all parts of the body under the skin. But in places like the palm, bridge of nose and ear lobes, it is not grossly present. But one may concentrate on fat situated in the abdominal area, arms and legs.

<sup>4</sup> Synovial fluid is the fluid between the bone joints. There are four types of bone joint in the body: The hinge type which is in the knees and elbows, the ball and socket type found in shoulders, the flat type found in the



There are other ways of grouping these, which, I think, work equally well for our purpose. It is important to know these parts of the body by name so that one can meditate on them through mental recitation without the assistance of reading or listening. Not only that, one should also know their colour, shape, location and their relation to other parts of body in terms of both similarity and dissimilarity. One should even know the actual odor of each part. It involves some degree of basic anatomical study to meditate on different parts of body effectively. We can understand the remark of the great commentators of Pali texts that states that to learn about these 32 parts of body in the way we have discussed would take weeks or even months. It is very much an analytical procedure in its own way.

To make this type of meditation a principal practice, one has to meditate on one group at least for fifteen days dividing it into three steps each lasting for five days. First, one should begin according to the order given above, and reverse it after five days, which makes the second step. During the last five days, one would meditate forward and backward.

## **PURPOSE OF THIS MEDITATION**

The purpose of this type of meditation is to bring to our awareness the wrong perception we have of our body. We perceive the whole body to be one *entity*. We do not usually

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skull and the spinal cord type. Synovial fluid found in the knee joints is like a lubricator for ease of movement.

think of it as different parts. Therefore, we see it as a *whole* rather than as *parts*. When we see it as an entity, we come to differentiate each body as a specific person, for example, Dr. Loe Kyaw Thinn, Dr. Maung Maung Lat, Dr. Sein Shwe and so on. We do not see it in terms of having things in common. We see each being as a *separate* entity. Because of this perception, we become proud of our own perceived entity. The *deceitfully perceived entity* is an object for *clinging*. Wrong perception of the body is a source of attachment. The ultimate aim of this type of meditation is to develop detachment through seeing and being mindful of the repulsive nature of the body. It is another meditation method of reflective nature. This technique may be used to serve the different purpose of *samatha* or *vipassana* meditation. However, we are discussing it here in the context of *vipassana*, mindfulness meditation.

As this type of meditation gains momentum, we will start seeing some small but important effects. One's fear and dread in secluded places will weaken and one will be able to tolerate different climates and enjoy different foods and places. The ultimate aim, however, is to understand the true nature of the body. As this practice brings deep insight into the nature of the body, detachment from the body will follow. Our aim is not to repress the feeling of bodily attraction by directly producing a repelling emotion but see the body as it is and consequently gain direct knowledge from the exercise. Detachment and insight into the true nature of body happen together. Direct knowing of the nature of the body gives rise to freedom from false notions of it.

## **TECHNIQUES OF MEDITATION ON THE IMPERSONALITY OF THE BODY**

As discussed earlier, there is a lengthy procedure especially to practise this type of meditation. It takes about six months to complete the preliminary stage. During these months one comes to discover those parts which are clear in one's mind and those which are not clear. One then comes to the second stage only when one has gradually eliminated from the list all of the objects that are not perceived clearly in the mind. Certain parts may be clear to some meditators but not others. So, this is where people become different and individual. The process of eliminating goes on until the clearest object is found; afterwards one begins focusing on that alone object, until one can effectively control one's mind to apply it to a chosen object without any difficulty. From here, if one pursues it earnestly so as to acquire a well-developed understanding, one comes to a point where one has to choose either *samatha* or vipassana to progress further.

The 32 parts of body are placed in six groups according to their approximate nature. Some belong to the outer part and are dried; some are situated in the abdominal region; and some are of a fluidic nature. Yet, others are more of the characteristic of the earth element, which is hardness. They have been classified in this way for a purpose. The traditional practice starts from the first group and then expands to include all eventually.

There have also been many modifications to this method over the centuries especially where the practice has been unbroken. Venerable Taung Pulu Sayadaw, one of the most

famous meditation masters that Burma has produced this century, had some wonderful methods of meditation on different parts of body. He was a close friend of the Most Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw. I used to try one of such modified methods that is said to have an effect on gastric problems. I chose to try this as I have a gastric ulcer and my stomach produces more gas. I found that it could control gas within a few minutes, bringing calm and contemplation. This method is a technique, which differs from what we have discussed. It still includes, of course, five parts, small and lower intestine, undigested food, faeces and brain. One of my devotees, Emma, also reminded me of this technique, which she had read from a monthly Buddhist magazine, which described how an American Buddhist monk was cured of his gastric problem after practising this particular technique of meditation given by the Most Venerable Taung Pulu Sayadaw. This is a good example of how the Buddha's teachings are flexible and suit people of various needs.

## **INSTRUCTIONS FOR A SHORT RETREAT**

This evening, since we are only in a relatively short retreat we are going to reflect on the different parts randomly. This will give you an idea of this kind of meditation, and may even help you to discover which part could be the clearest for you. I have found this technique most useful for those who have not learnt about all the 32 parts in details as required in the Pali commentary.

We shall focus first on bones, beginning with the skull. Do not include the hair, skin, blood, and muscles yet. Just leave them for a while. Just try to see the skull without the

eyes, muscles, nerves and skin. Then come down to your shoulder, and then the arms. Try to see only the bones without the muscles, flesh, sinews, blood or even the nails. You then go right down to your toes. You form your body only in bones. There are small bones in your legs and feet. Try to see them. Sweep down slowly. Then come back to the skull again. Try to see the body in the skull and bones only.

Now after that, try to see the joints in various regions of your body, like in your neck, shoulder, elbow, wrist, etc. Try to see each joint. Go down to your toes contemplating joints in your hips, knees and ankles. You will see how vulnerable the body is when you see the joints. Now you have covered two parts already, the bones and the joints.

Next, you are going to put all the muscles on, from the top downwards, slowly through the body, the thighs, and the legs, to form a person. Put on the nerves, the sinews and the vessels in this way, also the blood. Look again at the upper part, the brain and the skin. Then you look at the hair on your head. Try not to see it as a whole, but as single strands of hair. Get to its roots if you can. Then the hair of the body. Then go to each nail. When you reflect on the nails, try to see them separately from the bones and the skin. Note each nail, all twenty of them, on both hands and feet.

The next stage is to go to the parts inside. First your teeth. Try to see each individual tooth, inside and outside. If possible, get down to the roots. Try to go around each tooth. See them as something that is not fixed to the jaw but individually and separately. The idea is to see the different

parts which fit together to make a person. Inside the mouth, you also have the saliva or sputum to observe.

Then go further down inside into the internal organs. You have the heart, the lungs, and the liver (I think being doctors, you have an advantage here). I do not know whether or not you will get frightened. This is a kind of mental operation. You use your mind to go through different parts of your body. You see the stomach, intestines, new food, the waste and all. Try to see them individually. As you see them, you name them repeatedly.

Choose at least ten different parts. The scriptures say that you should choose at least five. Nevertheless, here, I think it is nice to choose about ten and make a list. You go down this list and then up it again. You repeat this list a number of times. If you choose the internal organs, you can choose the heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, stomach and intestines. If you choose the bones, it is important to also include joints. If you choose the blood vessels, it has to be also with blood and muscles. If you choose hair, it is helpful to bring in the teeth and nails. There are many things from which to choose. You can even choose tears.

### **NOT ON DISSIMILARITY BUT SIMILARITY**

When you see these individual parts, you will come to see that the body known as Venerable Dr. Dhammasami is composed of all of these parts, and are the same as Dr. Leo Kyaw Thinn, Dr. Maung Maung Lat, Zaw Zaw, etc. They are all the same. Therefore, what we now see is different parts of the body. What we do not see is Venerable Dhammasami. Are the

nails Venerable Dhammasami? Or is it the bones, or the joints? It is only when you take them as a whole that you can name it as Venerable Dhammasami. Therefore, you get a deep insight into the impersonality of the body. Usually, we tend to personalise; we have been conditioned to perceive things in that way. We have been made to see that we are different from others.

Once, I saw a cartoon in a magazine, of two girls watching a movie in the cinema. They hated the actor. When the actor appeared, one of them said, "*Oh, no. I hate this man. Let's go.*" The other said, "*No, no. Do not go, he's going to die in the next scene.*" You see, they had been made to see the actor as different from themselves. Because of *differentiating perception* they wished him to die. This attitude is common to all of us.

When we were young and we fell on the ground, we would cry and blame the ground. I am not sure whether I did or did not! But I saw such action later when I visited a home, a child fell down and cried, not because he was badly hurt, but because he got so frustrated with the ground and thought the ground had hit him. He perceived that the ground had nothing in common with him, not part of his being, and was to blame. Then his mother could not console him; she hit the ground telling the child "*I've hit the ground.*" Only then did the child stop crying. The idea of revenge had made him see the ground *differently*, not part of his own self. In such a way, we have been led to emphasise the dissimilarities rather than similarities.

## DOWN TO FOUR ELEMENTS

The other day, Dr. S. Shwe was asking me about the four elements (*maha-bhuta*). The four elements are earth, water, fire and wind. Solid or rigid element is called the earth element (*pathavi-dhatu*). The bone is hard. This is the earth or hard element. Look, I am moving my hand now. The ability to move or stretch is the wind element (*vayo*). This includes walking as well. It is an element that makes mobility possible. We do not see anything in common between the earth and us. Although the earth has all these four elements, significantly prominent among them is the earth element, which is hard in nature. In the sea, the water element (*apo*) is prominent, but the other elements are still there. We have all of this element of cohesion that binds different parts of our body together. After sitting and meditating, we become hungry and it burns inside. That is the heat element (*tejo*) that is present. The body is made up of these four elements. You feel the hard element when you sit on the floor. It is hard because the earth element is so prominent. When you go out, you feel cold because of the weather. We do not usually consider that these four elements are with us. Although we see, non-sentient materials of being worth little, we do not, however, usually see our body, which also consists of the same four elements in the same way. We always see it as being worth more. Even between sentient beings, we say that my four elements are more beautiful than yours!

So we are now going to reflect on the different parts of our body for twenty minutes and follow it with vipassana meditation for fifteen minutes. Or if you prefer, you can do



vipassana meditation first and then do the reflection on the different parts of the body for twenty minutes afterwards.

While contemplating of these many parts of the body, if any sensation or thought arises so prominently, you may observe it as a secondary object and return to the part where you stopped. Should you feel repulsion, fear or disgust, bring in mindfulness to pay bare attention to the feelings before continuing with contemplation on the body again. *Vipassana* and this meditation technique are supportive to each other.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *INTENSIVE MINDFULNESS PRACTICE*

WE DISCUSSED BARE ATTENTION the other day. Today we shall be discussing the same thing from a different point of view, which is *mindfulness*. Mindfulness is something people find it difficult to understand. Mindfulness is a very important factor that needs to be acquired and developed in meditation. It forms not only the basis but also acts as a chief factor along the way in developing other factors such as concentration, effort and wisdom.

#### **WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?**

Mindfulness means different things at different stages. *Constant awareness* is mindfulness. This is a good description. However, if we do not know what kind of awareness, of what and how, then there is still a lot to experience in order to understand it. We need more explanation, as we have not understood things. Mindfulness will be realised through practice.

Mindfulness actually means paying bare attention to an object without any preconceived notion, prejudices or valued judgment. It also means being aware of the existence of something in the here and now; and at a later stage, mindfulness is a mental state of flexible and investigative nature.

Being receptive, being flexible, not reacting but acting, being heedful, being in harmony with oneself, being actively watchful, direct experience of the present object and being at the present moment are some popular descriptions of the functions of mindfulness.

## **MINDFULNESS AS AN EXPLORATION**

Mindfulness is a kind of exploration. You will not explore if you know something very well. When you climb the highest mountain, you will expect to discover something you have not seen. You are *not certain* of what you will find. You expect something uncertain and unfamiliar. You are prepared to face and learn from it. This is exploration.

You do not expect to see all that is calm and peaceful, settled and easy to cope with. That is not exploration. You want to see what you have not seen and what only a few people can see. That is why you venture off to places like the North Pole or South Pole. And you do see something exciting. When you explore something what you have to do is to observe. You observe what you see, what you hear. *Observation* is the first step in mindfulness practice.

Before you learned how to swim well, you would have learnt theoretically how to swim and would have tried a bit; you tried to reach the other side without an instructor \_ for twenty minutes, thirty minutes or forty minutes. This involves some sort of exploration. Life is the very universe you could explore and become a wiser person. When you close your eyes and try to do intensive mindfulness practice, you set out to explore. Remember at the time you begin, that mindfulness

has not been fully established. As a result, observation may not go as far as you expect. Do not be disappointed. Simply put in some effort and try it again.

## **TWO KINDS OF MINDFULNESS**

When we do mindfulness meditation, there are two kinds of mindfulness, *intensive* and *general mindfulness*. Today, we are doing intensive mindfulness. Tomorrow, I will be talking about general mindfulness.

## **MINDFULNESS AS LEARNING TO BE WITH THE UNEXPECTED**

Mindfulness is also about learning to *face the unexpected*. As human beings, we possess a valuable quality, the mental capacity to think, to learn, to cope with things. But often we are taken by surprise by something we have experienced repeatedly before. Anxiety, agitation, worry, anger etc. are not unknown to us. But we are still taken aback each time they come. I remember the time when I was already a lecturer at the Sasana Mandaing Pali University, Pegu (Hamsavati). I got the news from Laikha, my hometown in the Shan State that a few days previously my father had passed away. It happened just as I was about to administer the eight precepts to my devotee, Madam Daw Yee, who supported my education and ordination in Moulmein, Mon State. I was sitting on a chair and the lady devotee and her children were sitting in front of me reciting *okasa, okasa, and okasa* in Burmese. My friend turned up immediately with a message he received from a telephone call from the University the previous night. My father had died a few days earlier and

now my mother and relatives were waiting for me to attend my father's funeral. My mind just went blank. I was shocked to receive the news. I knew that things are impermanent; life is impermanent but I did not expect that it would be my father's life. I did not expect that it would come that time. I was taken by surprise.

When I reflected upon impermanence, unconsciously I am sure I would have spared my father. So when my father died I could not take it. I did not go ahead with administering the precepts. I could not talk anymore. It was grief that became overwhelming. Grief was not something new to me. I had experienced it before and cannot even remember how many times I had gone through it. But I did not expect such grief would be connected to my father's death. I was in terrible shock. I could not even wait to take the regular ferry to catch up the train in Mottama (Martaban). I hired a boat. But from Moulmein to my hometown Laikha in central Shan State, it took five days. The transport was so inadequate. I just managed to miss the funeral by a few hours. I was experiencing grief for the whole week because I did not expect it to come; it came unexpected. I was not prepared to face the ever-present impermanence law.

This mindfulness practice is not only about expecting miserable facts of life such as death, but it is about preparation to face the unexpected in day to day life as well. When we do not expect things, it is very difficult to accept them. We are not receptive to it at all. Instead, we keep resisting. Say, we expect everything to be according to our own culture when we go to another country. As we discover different behaviour and a different way of life, we get shocked.

Sometime we even think they are impolite. We become judgmental, thinking that our culture is superior. This is because we are not receptive to their culture. You are not prepared for difference. You never expect things to be otherwise from what you have known. So when you discover things like that you feel upset because you cannot accept it as it is.

When we are mindful, not only can we observe what we are seeing, but at the same time we are also prepared to accept what we have not seen before.

The pain comes, we observe that. That looks alright at the moment. But something we do not expect follows the pain. That is the reactions to it. We keep reacting to the presence of pain because we never dealt with it mindfully before. Like anxiety, agitation, irritation, frustration are there in every body's life, it is a fact common to everybody. But we just cannot accept it as it is. And we keep reacting endlessly. We become impatient and finally just give up meditating.

With mindfulness, we learn about pain through intensive training like this. As pain comes we just pay bare attention to it and note *pain, pain, pain*. We register the bare fact without adding any value. Now if any reaction to that comes; maybe frustration or impatient simply pay bare attention to it as well, observe it. We are exploring and observing. Pain has presented itself for observation.

We may not succeed overnight; we cannot force ourselves *not* to react. In that circumstance, we are simply observing the reaction. Disappointment is one reaction,

getting upset is another reaction, getting discouraged or disheartened is another reaction. Therefore, what we are trying to do is to observe these things. When we observe, we come to see both, the expected and the unexpected. We mainly have to learn how to live with the unexpected one.

We have had twenty and thirty minute sessions of meditation for two days and we tried a forty-minute session today. I said in the morning that we were going to have a forty-minute session which is to prepare you mentally for that. You will remember that most of you reported that you felt the time was a bit short and you could have gone on longer. This is because you were mentally prepared for forty minutes. We know that if we fly to Bangkok from London, we have to sit for more than ten hours and yet because we are mentally prepared, we do not complain about it. It is easier to accept when you are mentally prepared. You are more receptive to what is to come.

This afternoon, you expected to sit for forty minutes but did not expect to sit for over an hour. As we sat more than one hour, you all reported of being restless and impatient for the alarm to ring. You were not prepared for that. Had I asked you if you were going to sit for more than one hour, all of you would have said no. This is something I know you will resist. If we simply look into our minds, we experience resistance many a time during the day for one or another reason. We could experience resentment and rejection having to sit more than we could. We have to observe resentment or restlessness as well. Your purpose is to act as an observer and an explorer, to collect facts and data for registering. Now you have registered agitation, irritation, frustration, impatience, you have got all

the data. They will reveal their nature to you at one point. They come unexpected at work, at home or while driving. This mindfulness practice is a kind of learning how to live with the unexpected. If the unexpected produces pressure, then mindfulness is the way to deal with pressure.

## **MINDFULNESS AS ACCEPTANCE OF FACTS OF LIFE**

You observe as a traveller who explores the world. You see a lot, mostly different from what you have seen before. Many people, mostly British, tell me that it was nice to have been in India, in Brazil; although they didn't have running water everywhere, no flushing toilet, no hot water on demand, it was still nice. If things were the same, they would not have spent their money to go there and experience it. Therefore, when they come back they appreciate more the things they have got here in England. Contentment is born in their heart. They have an ability to enjoy the same thing even more. A man from the BBC world service, who is a very experienced journalist, agreed to go to Brazil with an explorer to raise some funds. Later when he returned, he reported the hard time he had had, trying to escape from wild animals, insects, etc. Worse than that, he said, was not having a toilet. When he agreed to go there, he did so because he thought there would be flushing toilets. He was prepared to face those wild animals in the Amazon. However, because he was not prepared for a situation without flushing toilets and running water, it was quite a struggle for him. This is the typical way an ordinary man deals with daily life.

We do not get everything we expect in life. We may get something we do not expect and we learn to deal with this



through meditation as well. Vipassana meditation experience is not something different from real life. It very much reflects the reality of life.

## **DO NOT REJECT IT**

The Buddha said that his way of solving problem is opposite to what the world thinks is the way to solve problem. His way of thinking is against the mainstream. If the people said that you have to run away from a problem, the Buddha would say, *"You have to face it and accept it."* *"We can't be bothered with suffering; forget about it,"* people would say. The Buddha would, however, say, *"No, you have to be mindful of it. You have to see it. You have to understand it. You cannot run away from it."* It is a totally different way of thinking altogether. However, such acceptance is only possible through constant awareness or strong mindfulness. Otherwise, every time we see it we will keep rejecting it because we are not used to accepting it.

## **MINDFULNESS AS LETTING GO**

Sometimes people say, *"Just let it go."* However, it is not that easy to let things go. You want to let things go, and you try to forget things, but it just does not go away. When my father died, if possible, I wanted to forget everything and tried to behave as if my father was still alive. However, things did not happen that way. Sorrow and grief kept coming. I tried to let them go but it was not possible until I experienced them mindfully.

You cannot arrange the world in such a way that you will never feel disturbed and upset. You cannot put only nice people and all wonderful things around you. Life does not start in such abstract form. Nor does the world exist in an ideal way either. The world exists the way it is, not the way we imagine it to be. We just have to take it as it is and let go of it.

Pain is there even when we do not pay attention to it. When we ignore it, we think it will go. We think this is the way to let go. This is a very normal and logical way of thinking habituated in people whose mind is not trained in mindfulness practice. Therefore, you try to forget your toothache by listening to music or trying to engage in any other activity. This will not work. But the Buddha said that the actual way of letting things go is to face it, to be mindful of it, to be aware of its existence. You confront the fact that you have a toothache. Before you accept it, you will not even think of seeing a dentist. When mindfulness is not strong, you cannot let go of pain. You are just confused about what to do with it. So the pain now creates irritation, impatience, frustration and so on, it is an endless frustration because you cannot let things go.

As the mind becomes contemplative, it gets strong. What happens is that when we observe the pain, there is no more frustration and sometimes even joyous feelings appear. This means you are now letting it go. You are freeing yourself from it. You feel no longer attached to the pain or the part of body where you feel pain. Maybe you are observing the pain objectively as a surgeon rather than as a patient or a relative of the patient. If you do not look at it objectively, you will not be able to help the patient. You will be overwhelmed and overtaken by the suffering the patient is experiencing. So to

let things go is something that is possible only through mindfulness. Letting go brings freedom and objectivity.

## **MINDFULNESS AS PROTECTION**

Mindfulness is also like a *protection*. An example here is the cat. I think his name is Coco. When it came in the first day, you felt disturbed. You were not protected from disturbances coming from Coco. However, as you learned how to observe the cat's coming, the noises and its touch, you learn how to live with it. It does not bother you anymore. When it comes you just observe the sound and its touch \_ you are now in harmony with the cat Coco. You are now protected from being disturbed. You free yourself from his disturbances, not necessarily by running away from it nor getting rid of him but by accepting his presence and trying to live in harmony with him.

It can be quite miserable to have to wait for a coach for two hours. Sometimes flights are delayed for one day. You feel agitated and miserable. But when you are mindful of the fact that it is late and you accept it, you will not be feeling as much agitated. You may be quite happy doing something else and making best use of the time made available to you unexpectedly. Therefore, this is a protection. You are protected by mindfulness. You are safe only when you are mindful. You are safe from agitation and misery. Otherwise you will be reacting and those reactions are dangerous. They harm you physically and mentally. They exhaust you. The Buddha said never try to justify your being upset for whatever reason. Being upset is bad. Anger for whatever reason is bad. If someone criticizes you, you are already suffering from the

criticism. When you are angry, on top of that suffering you create yet another one. An angry man is not happy. When faced with criticism, if you can remain calm, peaceful and stable, how great that would be. That is possible only when mindfulness is present. There will be no end to our complaints if we are to make a fuss every time we see our weak points or someone else's. The world is established in imperfection. No one is perfect. We have just to live, as it were, with this imperfect world

Imperfection is not a reason for being annoyed or upset. It is something we can learn to accept through mindfulness. We can be compassionate to the other party. We can help whenever it is possible. So we do not try to justify our anger, jealousy, envy, gossip or annoyance. They are what we should learn through mindfulness. It can save us from having to complain all the time.

Britain is a prosperous nation. People are quite well off, but they never stop complaining. The same is true in Japan. People even commit suicide out of frustration. Do you think someone who is complaining is happy? Something is burning inside like a fire. Anger is like a fire. Resentment is like a fire. We should be mindful of the dangers of anger, jealousy, hatred, getting upset, frustration, irritation, agitation and we must not seek to justify them.

## **AMATA NIBBANA: MINDFULNESS AND THE IMMORTAL**

To go a bit deeper in practice and understanding, mindfulness produces immortality (*amata nibbana*). With

sustained mindfulness alone, can such immortality be experienced here and now. Immortality we are talking about here is not about permanent life after death. This is quite difficult to understand.

So, I shall explain the immortality through the experience of mindfulness. When mindfulness gets stronger, we come to see more in this physical movement. You lift your feet, but behind that, there is the intention to do so, the intention comes before the movement. There is an intention to speak, then you speak. The intention is there behind everything. Since one cannot perceive intention consciously before any physical or verbal action, one would like to think that one just acts without any intention. This is because one's mind is not contemplative enough to see intention behind it. Intention is the least known meditation object whereas any product of it such as the feet lifting is the best known one. Intention is a mental phenomenon just as other mental reactions like agitation, unhappiness, happiness, joy and getting upset.

Yesterday the physical movements that we reflected on as we meditated on the different parts of the body are physical phenomena. And we come to see later that what really exists is something that we can call physical phenomena and something that can feel like mental phenomena. These two things are real. They exist in reality. What is not there is what we normally create "*self identity*," called "*atta*" or "*atman*".

In other words, the five aggregates are real. They are there in existence. In Pali, they are called *sakkaya* = *something that exists in reality: nama* and *rupa*, physical and

mental phenomena or mind and matter whatever you may call it. What does not exist in reality is self-identity. However, it does exist in notion or perception, a perception that is born out of physical and mental phenomena that are real. Perception is something we create in our mind, not necessarily an actual phenomenon. Depending on something that exists in reality, we create something unreal. So, wrong perception or belief in the existence of something that does not exist is called *sakkaya ditthi*. *Ditthi* means a wrong perception. Literary speaking, *sakkaya* is not wrong but *ditthi* is.

When you practice mindfulness that is getting stronger and stronger passing through the *learning stage* and the *controlling stage*, reaching the *liberating stage*, you come to see what really exists and what does not. In a Buddhist philosophical sense, mortality or death means the death of that kind of entity, the entity that we wrongly perceive to exist. The arising and falling, the coming and going of the physical and mental phenomena are not something new to us. Scientifically, every twenty-four hours, about a hundred billion cells are replaced, the old by the new ones. Therefore, death occurs every moment. It is not something new and unknown to human beings. Cells are being replaced all the time. Change or impermanence of physical phenomenon is not something we call death or mortality.

Earlier when you were meditating for more than one hour, you got frustrated. You had to meditate more than one hour because unlike in other sessions I did not set the timer, and just let the session take its own course; I am sure many of you might have been expecting the alarm to go off. But that frustrated mind is no more now. As you are listening to my

talk, there is now an attentive mind, paying attention to the Dhamma talk. The frustrated mind has gone and it has been replaced by the attentive mind. At the end of the one-hour session, your frustrated mind was immediately replaced by a relieved mind as soon as I said we would stop here. Therefore, the mind keeps changing as well. A new mind keeps coming and is being born every second. It has been proved scientifically.

It does not mean that we are not afraid of the change or the going, the passing away of this physical and mental phenomenon, which exists in reality. We are. As a result, there is fear of death, but the death of what? Actually, the deeply rooted fear is that of death of the false identity that we have created in our mind. This is what we call *the mortality of the false self-identity*. With this identity in existence, you feel hurt, you feel fearful and attached. Once you let it go you are now free from anger, fear and attachment.

In the last stage of mindfulness when you have accepted that only these two things, mind and matter, are real, there is no more falsely perceived *self*, then there is nothing to die. The cessation of these physical and mental phenomena is taking place here and now; since the time we were in the womb. Unless they keep changing, we would not be growing or getting old. So when we say *nibbana* is immortal, it means mindfulness is never broken and we are constantly aware what is there in reality. The Buddha from the age of thirty-five to the age of eighty was constantly aware of what truly exists. No false identity was created in his mind any more. Consequently, there was nothing to die, hence immortality.

## **THE CONDITIONING (sankhara) AND THE CONDITIONED (sankhata)**

Let us talk a bit about the conditioning and the conditioned, which we talked about in the morning.

What do we mean by *conditioning* and *conditioned*? Life is a process. It is not a single entity existing throughout for forty, fifty, seventy or eighty years. It is a dynamic process with change taking place momentarily. Just take one process from your meditation experience as an example. The pain is there. The pain arises basically because we have these physical and mental phenomena, of which we are composed. If you are composed in this way, with mind and matter, how can you run away from pain? The pain is there all the time. The question is whether you perceive it or not. When the pain arises, you normally start reacting to it. You become agitated. But you are not mindful of agitation. The agitation is there. As the pain becomes unbearable, frustration is born. First, there is impatience and then frustration. Pain, agitation, impatience, frustration and now maybe also disappointment; look at them as a part of a process, that are related to one another as cause and effect. Now you have things operating in a series. The pain has produced the agitation. Therefore, the pain is *conditioning* the agitation. Agitation has been *conditioned* by the pain. The pain is the immediate cause for the agitation and the agitation is the immediate effect of the pain. The conditioning is the cause and the conditioned is the result. The cause that is conditioning is called in Pali *sankhara*. Grammatically, it is a subjective case. The conditioned has been created. It is the objective case. In Pali it is called *sankhata*.



When mindfulness is progressing satisfactorily, the pain no longer gives rise to agitation. The pain stops being a conditioning factor and consequently the result is not born. Momentary rebirth ceases at least temporarily.

## **MINDFULNESS AND SAMSARA, THE CIRCLE OF CAUSE AND EFFECT**

Pain experienced in meditation itself is a good illustration of how *samsara* the circle of suffering begins and operates. Pain, impatience, frustration and agitation come in a series that makes a cycle, with the immediate predecessor factor serving as a direct cause. Something that was earlier the conditioned becomes the cause or the conditioning. Agitation is born out of frustration, and agitation is the effect, the conditioned. This is how change is taking place here and now, from effect to cause. You become a father from first being a son. It goes on and on. If you have only one, or even two factors, you do not call it a *cycle*. Something that has been produced continues to produce. That is an endless process of cause and effect. What we call *samsara* means this very cycle of cause and effect.

We have discussed that when the mind lacks constant awareness, any pain can create agitation and frustration. Contrarily, if sufficient mindfulness is present, the pain will stop producing agitation and frustration. Accordingly, there is no such thing as the *conditioned thing* simply the pain is not producing anything. Since it is not producing anything, you cannot say any more that the pain is the *cause*. The process of cause and effect is broken in this way. Other consequences

like impatience, frustration, agitation, stress, depression, low-esteem and other negative emotions will also stop from *becoming*. The process stops by itself, as there is no cause to bring it into existence. If they are not conditioned to become, they will definitely cease to be there to condition others at the same time.

This process is weakened, broken and ultimately cut off by constant awareness, constant mindfulness. That is why mindfulness practice is called one that is geared towards *asankhata* - the unconditioned. The mind still works, it does even a more wonderful job. But it is not conditioned any more. There is no disturbance to it. It can now function more effectively without being motivated by any prejudices or emotions. It is a *lotus mind*, similar to the existence of a lotus flower: while retaining its root in the muddy water, it nevertheless, has risen up above the mud and water.

This life, composed of a unit called psychophysical phenomenon has been conditioned by the past *kamma*. It is the conditioned. However, if it does not produce another effect, in other words, if this so-called the conditioned does not become the conditioning, then the process of going round the cycle is stopped. This can be achieved in this life. *Amata nibbana* can be realised only at the present moment in this way.

## CHAPTER NINE

### *MEDITATION ON DEATH (MARANASSATI) EXPLANATION AND INSTRUCTION*

THIS EVENING WE are going to reflect on death. It is another type of reflective meditation practised with mindfulness meditation. This is the last of the four supportive meditation we shall introduce in this retreat.

#### **ILL-OMENED?**

Death is a subject, which many people prefer not to talk about, especially in other cultures and religions. Many regard discussion about death as ill-omened, unpleasant and luckless. Death as the darkest side of life is considered an inappropriate subject for conversation. People tend to cover their awareness of the reality of death with enormous abstract imaginings and theories. They actually try to suppress that reality in their conscious mind. The mind is thus deceived by intellect. Deception gradually becomes perception. This perception of death, however, seems to have achieved general acceptance.

The Buddha's way of thinking is different and in this case even against the mainstream. He said, "*death is another object for meditation.*" We should recognize, accept and try to understand it. The Buddha taught his disciples that *in order to uproot mental defilement and thereby achieve peace, one should stay vigilant and develop a sharp mindfulness of*

*death*'.<sup>5</sup> Can we run away from death? Certainly not. It is an inevitable process we all have to go through.

People do not like to talk about it because they fear death. This is true of anybody. Some people also think that talking about death may bring ill fate and could destine them for ruin. The Buddha, however, said that the fear of death arises when there is no insight into it. If you do not talk about it, you will not understand it. That is why this meditation on death is meaningful and worthwhile, however fearful it may sound. This Buddhist approach of acceptance is well sympathised, indeed accepted in modern psychotherapy.

## **FEAR OF DEATH**

Imagine this room with no light and in silent darkness. If you come across a wire in the dark, you may think that it is a snake, and you will be very frightened; that is because you cannot see what it is really there. If you come across a cat, you may think that it is a ghost, as you cannot see what is exactly there. You just speculate on the sound of the cat's movements and create fear within yourself. Not seeing things as they are makes you scared. It is oppressive to be in the dark because darkness prevents us from seeing many things. Fear, however, is automatically expelled when the light comes. What we need is light that helps us to see a wire as a wire, and to make sure that it is not a snake. This is also true even when it comes to matters like death; what we have to do is to understand it, to know what it is like and what fear of death is like. Understanding is likened to light.

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<sup>5</sup> *Pathama Maranassati-sutta, the Anguttara-nikaya.*

Many religions, throughout the ages, have tried to solve the mystery of death and of the fear that is necessarily linked to it. They come up with various philosophies as to what death is in order to dispel fear of death in the minds of people. There is always, consciously or unconsciously a threat of death. No matter how you ignore it, this is a fact of life. The Buddha said that we have to have courage to analyze it and reflect upon it. That courage comes through mindfulness. Many religions try to come up with what they think are solutions to solve this psychological problem facing people who live in fear of death.

In pre-Buddhist times in India, people said that when someone died it was just like someone changing clothes, as they did every day. In the same way, the permanent soul was said to keep changing its body, from one to another. They believed in rebirth. Because the idea of rebirth existed even before the Buddha's time. This is emphasized in the early scriptures like the Upanishads. They said that when someone dies and the soul goes to another body, the cycle of birth (*samsara*) goes on. So again, the idea of *samsara* was already there. They said the liberation or *moksha* comes about when that individual soul (each and everybody is considered to have an individual soul) is reunited with the universal soul, which is called *atman*, the everlasting soul. When these two souls merge together there is no longer an individual soul or a universal soul. There is only one. According to the Upanishads, when you see two, you are under an illusion. This is a part of their effort to dispel the fear of death. You have nothing to fear because you are one step closer to becoming reunited with the universal soul which is everlasting. People are afraid of impermanence, of cessation, of disappearance, of going

away. Therefore, they try to come up with an idea of something that is everlasting. Although people are taught to hold on to these ideas based on a belief in something everlasting, still fear does not go away.

In all the Abrahamic religions, like in Judaism, Islam and Christianity, there is one rebirth after death, which is supposed to be after the Day of Judgement \_ where one will be reunited with God, the Creator who will welcome the dead into an immortal state. I see this again as an attempt to dispel fear of death. Fear is real. Fear in you, fear in me, fear in everyone in the street regarding death, is very real. All these philosophies are formulated with one aim: to lessen the fear of the experience of death. At times, all the theories may give people a sense of security in life, but unfortunately they could do very little to help one in the face of actual death. I think the actual problem is not death itself but fear of death. What we are going to do today is discuss the fear of death rather than death itself. Imagine, if we have to live under the shadow of the fear of death throughout our life, how can we enjoy life? Can there be real peace of mind? Before death actually comes, one is already defeated by the fear of it.

Fear of death is a fear of future that results in our not being able to live fully at the present moment. We fear and are worried that we are going to lose what we have, unable to accept that things are impermanent. It hurts and discourages one to think that we have to leave all hard-earned wealth and reputation, and go. The future always seems something uncertain for human beings. Indeed, uncertainty is the whole mark of life after death. Buddhism says that without fully accepting the uncertainties associated with death, life never

feels secure. Life is, of course, naturally insecure. However, it is possible to feel secure amid the insecure provided we develop our mind, dealing with the fear of death here and now when we still have a lot of time to live.

## **THE BUDDHIST APPROACH TO DEATH**

As well as various techniques of meditation including vipassana, there are teachings in Buddhism that help to lessen fear of death such as *kamma* and rebirth. Here, however, we are approaching the problem of fear of death from Vipassana meditation point of view. In the Vipassana meditation, one of the principles is to start looking at things from the best known point and to progress to the less known. What is best known here is *fear*. It exists in you, in me, in every one of us. Therefore, we have to start tackling this fear. We do not start from the *unknown*, which is life after death and all the mystery connected to it. If it is unknown, how can we start with it? What I am trying to say is that despite all these theological concepts, including those in Buddhism \_ the idea of heaven, the idea of Brahma loka, the idea of being born as a human being, which presuppose that there will be at least, in theory life after death \_ enormous fear still surrounds death. So, instead of contemplating the less known such as rebirth, we will start from the best known, that is fear of death. When we understand or comprehend what it is fear, we will not then be fearful of death anymore; as long as we live, we will live happily. That is why we reflect on death.

Another cause of fear is *pride* in day to day life. We are so proud of who we are, of what we have, of what we have achieved as a person or family, that we start behaving as

though we are *not* going to die, that we will have to do whatever necessary to protect what we have achieved. On the other hand, knowing that we have to leave any achievement and go at death looks simply so horrifying. Pride is one of the many aspects of attachments and of not-letting go.

Due to pride, you can also expect tension and conflict even between brothers and sisters and between families. We follow our egoistic tendency by often saying; "*I want to do this and no way will I compromise with that.*" Our pride! Very often we argue over non-essential things in daily life. We do not want to listen to someone's needs and concerns, because we think if we do so, that may be considered as weakness and hurt our pride. That always creates problems psychologically and then socially. Sometimes it is not about right and wrong that we keep arguing with each other, but rather about resistance from within, where we usually claim "*this is my idea, this is my culture.*" So when you are too proud of your culture, you can never enjoy other cultures. That is *pride*. Young people here in this retreat like Tom, Zaw Zaw and Saw Mala, you have the opportunity to enjoy both cultures \_ maybe even more than two. The best thing is to look at things from the Buddhist perspective that nothing is perfect; so no one culture, either Asian or Western, is perfect. Neither is superior to the other. Both have advantages and disadvantages. When we look at life in this way, we gain more than we lose. Otherwise, if we are too proud of Asian culture we will not be able to get anything from Western culture and vice versa. You stand to lose out much that way. This kind of pride is what we are going to tackle through reflection on death.



Lack of the right attitude is another ground where fear of death is bred. In reality, death is very much a part of life; death has to be viewed in the context of life, and life in the context of death. Everything has context and we need to contextualize our outlook. For example, we go to funerals, we see the dead. If we do not view them in the context of life, we do not get the full picture. Looking at life alone can make us forgetful and arrogant, behaving as if we are never going to die.<sup>6</sup> Focussing on death alone can bring us disappointment, negative fear and pessimism. Life and death are the two sides of the same coin.

It is so much relieving to know that death is common to all \_ no matter whether you are a billionaire or a pauper, a ruler or a ruled, a doctor or a patient, a man or a woman, a grown up or a baby. Terrifying and painful experience of death is not unique to anyone nor is it escapable.

Contemplation of death is something that can make one a wise person and enables one to view life seriously. When Sidhartha Gotama was a prince, his father arranged everything so that he would not see old people, sick people and dead bodies. This was because his father, having consulted with his astrologers was told that his son, the prince, would one day leave home for a homeless life; and the king did not want his son to leave home but wanted him to succeed him when he died. So till the age of twenty-nine, he had never seen any of those things. But just to have seen a dead body, an old man and a sick man once, only once, was enough for him to be convinced that this was a real problem

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<sup>6</sup> *The Thana-sutta, the Anguttara-nikaya.*

facing him as well as the rest of the world, including those nearest and dearest to him: his family. That was something that made him determined to go through all the extraordinary experiences, renouncing the princely life, following the well-known religious teachings available in India at that time and undergoing the hard life of an ascetic.

Realizing that death arises at all times while we are still alive in the conventional sense is also very helpful to defeat fear of death. The old cells in the blood die and are being replaced continuously by new ones. It is said that the cells that die and are reborn momentarily are to be in their billions. The mind replaces itself in the same way but in a much quicker speed. This is the law of impermanence, something the Buddha takes it an ultimate truth. Brain cells that do not replace give a clearer explanation of impermanent nature because they only deteriorate without being replaced by new ones. Death in this sense is happening here and now. It is important to see and accept it scientifically.

During the time of the Buddha, Kisa Gotami, a young mother, suddenly lost her only child. She could not and did not accept that her toddler son was now dead. She refused to be convinced by the appeal of common sense reality. She went on looking for a cure to bring him back to life. It was only too understandable that she as a mother would react in the way she did. The child meant everything to her.

The same happened to Patacara, a young lady who lost her two sons, husband and parents within a matter of days so mercilessly and unbelievably. It was too much for her to take.

She had a complete breakdown. She could not accept that such thing had happened to her.

From meditation point of view, the suffering for these two young mothers increased because they did not accept what had really happened but kept rejecting it. The grief was being multiplied anytime they refused to accept it in their mind.

Both had the good fortune of meeting the Buddha in person who could convince them to accept what had happened to them and show them to see the way things are. As we all know from these famous real stories from the Buddhist scriptures, the Buddha very skilfully asked Kisa Gotami to bring mustard seeds to make medicine she was looking for to bring her son back to life. The Buddha said that the seeds must be from a family which has never experienced death. She went out straightaway in search for the seeds only to find that there was no such family that had never experienced death. Kisa Gotami came back to her senses, buried her dead child and returned to the Buddha for the path to the deathless. Both, Kisa Gotami and Patacara accepted what had happened to them and became noble disciples of the Buddha not long after that. Patacara became the one who excelled most among the female disciples in the disciplines of the monastic community (*Vinaya*).

Vipassana meditation is to help us see and accept things as they are and thereby not to create more suffering out of suffering. This is what mindfulness practice is all about. With the presence of sufficient mindfulness, Patacara was able to see the ever-changing world as it was when contemplating on

the river flowing where she was to wash her feet. She was now in harmony with the impermanent world, never expecting it to be otherwise than it was. The desire of *wanting* the world and her life to be in a certain way and *not wanting* them to be in a certain way ceased within her. She had by then stopped resisting the change that was the world. Peace within was achieved in her heart, there and then, while the world went on the way it did. The two young ladies were no longer touched by the world. They did not live beyond the world but certainly above it all just like a lotus flower above water.

## **REFLECTION ON THE REALITY OF DEATH**

Reflection on death helps lessen fear of death and bring peace of mind ultimately. Mindfulness of death, if developed, can help us realize the immortal state (nibbana) here and now. There are many causes of death such as various kinds of diseases and accidents:<sup>7</sup> a man for some reason could just take away the life of another man; an animal can harm you and become a cause of death. While sleeping, eating or working and while being in the sea or land or on air, death can happen at any time. It is not predictable nor is it certain.<sup>8</sup>

The Buddha Gotama recounted to his disciples how Araka, one of the previous Buddhas taught his disciples on how to reflect on death. The Araka Buddha summarized that human Life is short, fleeting, fragile, full of unfulfilled desires and anxiety.

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<sup>7</sup> *The Dutiya Maranassati-sutta, the Anguttara-nikaya.*

<sup>8</sup> *The Salla-sutta, the Sutta-nipata.*

The Araka Buddha, who became enlightened when people had a relatively longer life span than our times, gave many analogies to life. "Life is likened to dewdrop on the tip of a blade of grass that disappears soon after the sun rises. Life is also like dust that is washed away mercilessly by heavy rain. A line drawn with a stick on the surface of water lasts but briefly, even so life is ephemeral. A stream having flowed a great distance in tranquillity, may reach a precipice only to fall down very quickly without a pause. Human life is as little and swift as the stream that falls from the mountain. A strong man, having collected sputum from the floor of his mouth spits it out fleetly and naturally. Life is like a drop of sputum that is done away with by the man. A piece of meat is burnt away very quickly indeed once it is put into a saucepan that has been heated all day. Life is similar to that piece of meat. It lasts but not for long. Once an animal has been selected to be slaughtered, each step it makes helps its advance towards the slaughterhouse; similarly, life moves forward only to death. Once born, none escapes death.<sup>9</sup> One should also reflect that one cannot escape from death and that none in the world does."

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<sup>9</sup> *The Araka Sutta, the Anguttara-nikaya.*

## **INSTRUCTIONS ON THE MEDITATION ON DEATH**

Now we are going to reflect upon the reality of life, especially death. From now on, I will start giving instructions on how to meditate on death. There will be four stages.

### **STAGE ONE**

The first is to remind ourselves about the reality that death is very much a part of our life. The kings and queens, the prime ministers, the presidents, actors, and actresses, the rich and the poor \_ can you imagine that any of them would escape from the process of death? If there is no way to get out of it, why fear? Sometimes when I go to a funeral, I imagine myself to be in the coffin. For many, this would seem something terrible and even stupid. I find it terrible too. However, this is the way I have been taught and I have found that fear of death has actually lessened by doing so. You can also see what is going on in the hearts of the relatives left behind. Now, just reflect whether anyone you have come across \_ the ruler, the ruled, the beautiful, the ugly, men and women, the educated, the uneducated, the academic, the non-academic, the old and the young \_ can get away from this. Death is inevitable for everyone, both the sick and the healthy. Death can happen at any time. There is no guarantee or appointment. Death has no calendar. Because there is no guarantee, we need a lot of insurance. We rush to take insurance and we are often asked, "*Are you insured?*" People would say, "*I'm fully insured. I have got two or even three insurance policies.*" We may feel we need to have even more because the more we think of about the vulnerability of life the

more we can see that life has no insurance. You feel relieved to have some insurance policies. Say, I have life insurance. That would not be for me. If I die what will happen to that insurance from the Nationwide? It will be for those who are living.

In the first stage, it is essential to recognize that death is very much part of life and that it can happen any time, any day and there is no appointment. A mother cannot save her son or the son his mother.

A few weeks ago, I went to a funeral of a prominent doctor who suddenly fell ill and passed away within a week. The wife, also a doctor, three daughters and one son were crying. However, he was lying dead and breathless. He could not appreciate their worry or tears. He could not treasure them anymore. This is the nature of death. He was very affluent but he had to leave everything and go. In such a way, death is suffering. The Buddha said in the first sermon "*death is a painful experience*" \_ "*maranam pi dukkham*". It is painful to a Buddhist as well as a non-Buddhist, to a doctor and a patient, to a monk and a lay person, to an old person as well as an infant. The ruler fears it as much as a homeless person does. It is a universal experience.

We live in fear of death only when we live in the future. When observing present pain, we do not observe the one that has not arisen, in other words, the pain in the future. Nor do we focus on the pain that is gone. We focus on the present one. If you want to learn how to live in the present, we have to focus on the present object. Train your mind with the object arising at the present. Fear of death exists at the present. We

are going to observe that. The first thing, as I have just explained, is to reflect that death is very much a part of our life and nobody can escape from that. It can happen anywhere, anytime, to any body and in any form. Vipassana meditation trains one to live at the present moment and is, therefore, the path to the deathless here and now.

## **STAGE TWO**

At the second stage, you are going to apply that reflection to specific people. When we do meditation on loving-kindness, we start with ourselves. But now we are not going to start with ourselves. If we do that, we may become more frightened. Death is a frightening phenomenon.

At this stage, we are going to apply reflection on death to a neutral person. Recollect people who are neutral to you, the people towards whom you have not formed like or dislike, say, people in the street or in the station. Look at the crowd and look for someone who is not going to die, someone who can escape from this process. Is there any such?

I think all of you know Sir James Goldsmith, the billionaire, from the Conservative Party in Britain. He could write a draft worth millions or even a billion. When he died only his wife was with him and only a few people attended his funeral. His eldest daughter who was in Mexico was not even informed. She did not know. From that point onward, Sir James Goldsmith's signature was worth nothing. The bank would no longer accept his signature. The billions that he accumulated are nothing to him now. This is the reality of life. How fearful life is and how painful death is. For the neutral



person you can also imagine someone like that. You can imagine a crowd as well as an individual.

At any stage of this type of meditation, should you feel sad or frightened, please bring in mindfulness as practised in the Vipassana meditation. When we become frightened, what we do in Vipassana meditation is to look into our minds and note *frightening, frightening, and frightening*. When we become upset, we note upset; we feel fear we recognize *fear, fear, and fear*. Fear is a meditation object. Fright is a meditation object. It can bring an immediate psychological relief.

### **STAGE THREE**

At the third stage, you are going to focus on someone near and dear to you who has passed away. In my case, it can be my father, my great aunt, my eldest brother and my niece. If you know someone only in death but not in life, you may not choose him or her because it may not help you to see death in the right context. All my grandparents died before I was born. As I have never seen or even heard of how they lived their life, I cannot meditate on them. You are going to choose someone whom you have seen both in life and in death. As we discussed earlier, death has to be reflected in the context of life. You focus by recollecting a few points on how they lived their lives and how they died. Their bodies lie lifeless and breathless. So, the third reflection is on the people who are close to you but have passed away.

## STAGE FOUR

The fourth stage may be a bit hard for you. It could be the hardest. It is to apply the reality to yourself. You are not going to include someone you love or someone you do not like. If you include someone you love, you will be very upset. If it is someone you do not like, you will be very happy \_ the kind of happiness that can be full of revenge and ill will. You may be able to include them at a later stage but not now. In the fourth stage, you reflect on yourself, on how you lead your life and one-day you will go lying breathless, lying in a coffin.

I should make one thing special here by offering myself to be included in your meditation object. You are also going to reflect and apply that reality to me, the person giving you the meditation instructions. It is important to do that. I have seen in many countries. People become so attached to their teacher that they become blind and they do not look for other teachers any more. If people go to Burma, say, to the Mogok Vipassana Meditation Centre, some of them learn automatically how to criticize the others such as the Sunlun, Mahasi, etc. This happens in many other centres. To me, the Venerable Sunlun Sayadaw is a remarkable teacher. The Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw is distinguished. The Venerable Mogok Sayadaw is great. Sayagyi U Ba Khin is excellent. The Venerable Ledi Sayadaw and Anagam Saya Thet Gyi are also extraordinary. The Venerable Mingun Cetawun Sayadaw and Ka-thit-wai Sayadaw are marvellous. The Venerable Ajahn Mun and Ajahn Chah are excellent. All of them are great. They are great people. But we should not misuse their greatness to create blind faith by impairing our investigative sense and by starting to criticize others, which these great teachers themselves did

not do. Attachment or even devotion to a teacher can make you blind.

I have been talking to you like this and we have been together for a few days. One day I will go. I will have to. That is the reality of life. So you focus and apply the reality of death to yourself and then me, the person giving you the instructions.

I will repeat the instructions again. The *first* is to reflect that death is a part of life. There is no escape from it and no one escapes from it. There is no appointment. It can happen at any time. Like a clay pot that can be broken at any time, we are vulnerable at any moment. We are like a fruit, which can fall to the ground at any time. The sun that has risen has only one way to go \_ to go down in the west. In the same way, life leads to nothing but death. That is the reality. The *second* instruction is to apply this to a neutral person(s) \_ a crowd or an individual, who is neutral to you, someone you neither like nor dislike. Try to meditate on both their life and their death. *Thirdly*, you will reflect upon the life and death of those who have been close to you but have now departed. *Fourthly* and lastly, you will be reflecting upon yourself and on me.

### **PALI CANONICAL TEXTS** (excerpt)

There are discourses from the Pali Canonical texts dealing on the subject of reflection on death. The following is a translation of one of them. I have done a new translation here, using many available translations in English, Thai and Burmese. For the Thai, I use Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya

edition; for the Burmese, the Chatthasangayana and Sitagu edition. For the English translation, I refer to (1) *The Rhinoceros Horn and Other Early Buddhist Poems* translated by Professor K. R. Norman, Mss. I.B. Horner, both of Cambridge University, and Ven. Professor Walpola Rahula, published by the Pali Text Society, Oxford: 1996. (2) *The Suttanipata* translated by Ven. Professor H. Saddhatissa, and published by Curzon, London: 1994. (Reprint) and (3) *The Salla Sutta: The Arrow* by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Access to Insight: 2009. <http://www.accesstoinsight.org>

### ***The Salla Sutta***

1. The life of mortals in this world is without sign even for the imminent death and uncertain. It is difficult, brief and tied up with misery.
2. There is no way by which those who are born will not die. From old age, or some other cause, there is death. Because this is the nature with living beings.
3. For ripe fruits just as there is constantly danger of falling, so for mortals, once born, there is constant fear of death.
4. As a potter's clay vessels end up broken, so too the life of beings ends up with death.
5. Young & old, stupid & wise, all come under the sway of death; all have death as their end.

6. When overcome by death, going to the other world, the father cannot save his son, nor relatives a relative.
7. Look! Even while relatives are looking on, wailing heavily, people are led away one by one like a cow to the slaughter.
8. In this way is the world afflicted with aging & death, and so the wise do not grieve, knowing the world as it is.
9. One knows not his path, coming or going; seeing neither end, one grieves in vain.
10. By grieving, one gains nothing; confused, harming himself, if a wise man grieves, he hurts himself, too.
11. Not by weeping & grief, does one attain peace of mind. Pain arises all the more. His body is harmed.
12. He grows thin and pale, harming himself by himself. In that way, he cannot bring the dead back to life. Grief is therefore pointless.
13. Not abandoning grief, a person goes all the more to pain. Bewailing the dead, one falls under the influence of grief.
14. Look at others going on their way, people going in accordance with their karmic actions. When coming under the sway of death, living beings simply tremble here.
15. However people may imagine it, life always turns out other than that. Such is the difference. See the way of the world.

16. Even if a person lives a century — or more — he is eventually parted from his community of relatives; he leaves his life behind in this world.

17. So, having heard the arahant, having dispelled lamentation, seeing that someone has died, one should reflect, "he is no longer alive with me."

18. Just as one would put out a burning shelter with water, so does the wise one —discerning, skilful, & wise — blow away any grief arisen, as the wind a bit of cotton fluff.

19. Seeking his own happiness, one should pull out one's own dart (barb/arrow) of grief, longing, & sorrow.

20. With dart pulled out, no clinging, one attains peace of mind; having arisen above and being free from all grief, he has extinguished defilements.

## CHAPTER TEN

### *MINDFULNESS IN DAILY LIFE*

#### **BHAVANA**

WE HAVE COME to the last day of our six-day retreat. We have been practising *mindfulness meditation*. Some prefer to call this mindfulness meditation *Insight Meditation*, which is the translation of the Pali word *Vipassana*. It is important to understand another Pali word *bhavana* in order to understand mindfulness meditation. *Bhavana* means developing mental ability.

Any method that develops our mental ability enhancing our ability to cope with life, to enjoy life, to be peaceful, happy and calm, is called *bhavana*. There are many types of meditation. Some people meditate using various techniques that mainly emphasize acquiring concentration, which practically means not allowing your mind to wander but to focus on one chosen object; maybe a mantra, breathing, a candle, a kind of reflection, chanting, gardening or even golfing. People would use anything that makes the mind concentrated. Since they develop the mind in a certain way, they may be called *bhavana*.

## MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

In mindfulness meditation, the emphasis is somewhat different. It is *not* about acquiring concentration only for the sake of it. Concentration is *not* everything that is required. There are many other factors that have to be developed together. It is vital that the uniqueness of mindfulness be seen in the context of the Noble Eightfold Path. The Noble Eightfold Path is a composition of the eight factors: right understanding, right attitude, right effort, right concentration, right mindfulness, right action, right speech and right livelihood. This Path is known as the *Middle Path* that transcends two extremes. The two extremes can be found in whatever unenlightened being does. They are diametrically opposed to each other such as like and dislike, have and have-not, eternalism and nihilism, self-indulgence and self-torture, indeterminism and pre-determinism. Only by seeing the two extremes and abandoning them, can the *Middle Path* be discovered. Mindfulness meditation is indeed a practice that is directly aimed at developing the first five factors to form the Path. Here, each individual has to form the Path for himself or herself.

The word used by the Buddha is not merely "*mindfulness*" but "*Right Mindfulness*". Mindfulness is right only when it is developed with the other seven factors. Mindfulness becomes a part of the Path at the point it has helped develop the other seven factors. **Here**, there are two kinds of mindfulness, intensive and general. The first one is developed in intensive meditation while the latter is in normal working life. Today we are going to discuss how to develop the general mindfulness in daily life.



## RIGHT ATTITUDE

I have often emphasized in this course of meditation retreat that suffering is very much a part of our life and it is very important to have the right attitude towards it. Let us take pain as an example. It is important to be aware of the fact that pain is common to all living beings. Pain that is being experienced may increase or decrease. This is suggested as *anatta*, the doctrine of non-self. Do not expect it to work one-way, that is to decrease. Keep the mind open to both possibilities. Be flexible with and be prepared for either of the outcomes. This is the right attitude, which is relevant to the reality of life. Otherwise, we are not prepared for the worst in good times and forget to hope for the best in bad times. The nature of non-self (*anatta*) is the ultimate reality. This means we are not in ultimate control of pain. Things are the way they are, and are not always the way we imagine them to be. For this reason, generally the way things work for us is very unsatisfactory.

To be unsatisfied and frustrated with things around us is called *dukkha*. There are three aspects of ultimate reality; impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and non-self or no-creator (*anatta*). Our attitudes to life have to be based on life itself, and not on an abstract imagination of life. These three aspects make up the very characteristics of our daily world. Anything that we see when we go shopping or when we are at home including all the objects we experience during meditation has but these three characteristics. They encompass the nature of the whole universe. They are ultimate.

## REALISTIC VIEW

When observing the pain, if we expect it to respond in a certain way, say, to go away, then our mind is not open to the other half of reality. Consequently as the pain increases, we start reacting with impatience or frustration. This is because we are not in touch with the whole of reality. Wrong attitude can make us suffer more. So to have the right attitude is very important. This kind of right attitude is what we call *sammaditthi* (right understanding) — right understanding of life in the context of change, unsatisfactoriness and non-self. This basic right understanding is very important in order to develop a realistic view of life. Otherwise, you can develop a pessimistic or optimistic view, and not a realistic one.

As a doctor, you can see that if you have a pessimistic view, you are not going to try your best to save a life. If you are too optimistic, then you are not going to be seriously taking any measures you should be taking. If someone suffers from a certain disease, to know that that person is suffering from that disease, to know it correctly, this is the realistic view. Realistic view is safer than either the pessimistic or the optimistic views. The Buddha was a realist. He had a realistic view. He was neither optimist nor pessimist.

Intensive mindfulness is what we have been doing for the last five days, with 20, 30, 40 minutes and one-hour sessions. You were determined to practise and develop mindfulness intensively. You pay attention to even a slight sound and a mild pain intensively. You try to develop unbroken mindful-ness continuously. This is intensive

mindfulness. We have retreats of ten days, one week, one month or a few months. Those are all intensive retreats.

Intensive mindfulness is mainly for training. As a soldier under training you learn how to put instruction into practice, use weapons and respond to the situation. You study how to do certain things intensively. However, some of those methods you learn may not be directly useful in battle, but they provide a basic knowledge and a good foundation based on which you act in battle. For someone who has never had any training in a camp, it would be very difficult to respond correctly in the frontline. Therefore, for us, the purpose of intensive training such as this is to learn the techniques under the close supervision of a teacher.

In intensive mindfulness practice, when you walk, you try to be aware of each movement, first the physical movement and later on the intention and sensations. This is the way the mind functions. What we do is try to be aware of the functions of the mind. We have concerned ourselves with establishing mindfulness (*sati*) rather than concentration (*samadhi*) because as far as I understand it, in Vipassana meditation, *sati* is the basic and chief factor. Only with the help of mindfulness will we be able to see what we do not have and what we have. Say when our posture slumps forward, we detect it because of awareness. Otherwise, our posture would be slumped the whole day. We would not be aware of it. We also discovered that we react to things in a certain way. When pain comes, we feel agitated and frustrated. We learn about these reactions. We also learn that we do not react sometimes. We learn about something, which is there, and which is not there. We will be able to apply our

efforts only when we discover both the presence and absence of something. Mindfulness needs to be understood in the context of right effort — applying it when necessary.

However, intensive mindfulness is not practicable all the time in working life. When you drive a car, you cannot be intensively noting all of your movements or thoughts. Just as the purpose of putting a soldier in the training is not to confine him to the camp but to equip him with the practical knowledge to face real battles.

## **GENERAL MINDFULNESS**

Let us talk about general mindfulness, also known as daily awareness. General mindfulness is what you practise in daily life — at work, at home, when you drive, when you play golf, or when you go shopping. This is the ultimate aim of establishing intensive mindfulness. In the case of successful meditator such as an arahant, mindfulness is ever present in daily activities. For them, they do not need to sit to develop mindfulness intensively, although sometimes they do that to increase a certain ability such as concentration or a certain calmness and peace. Now people ask me, *"How can you do this? If you have to note lifting, forward, placing, how will you cross the road? If you note seeing, seeing, how will you drive? If you note hearing, hearing, how can you speak to someone?"* This is a practical question. To answer this question, it is necessary to know about general mindfulness. Indeed, unless and until we know this, our life is not going to really benefit from mindfulness practice.

## JUST ONE AWARENESS

Just have one awareness when you cross the road. Develop the awareness that you are crossing the road. When you are walking, you will not be noting *lifting, forward and placing* in the middle of the road. Before you go into the kitchen, you bring one awareness to your mind "*going to the kitchen.*" You do not need to do the naming exercise. However, try to produce direct awareness of what you are doing without saying anything mentally. We do naming in intensive practice only. Naming will come to an end at a certain level even in intensive practice. It is just like using a raft to cross a river. Once you are on the other side, you do not need the raft or boat anymore. Naming is just a raft. The technique is just a raft used to cross to the other side.

When you are going to work, bring about one awareness in the mind "*going to work.*" When you are going to drive "*going to drive.*" In case you have to drive continuously for a few hours, often bring in an awareness that you are behind the wheel. You come to a traffic jam, there should be one awareness "*traffic jam.*" Make yourself aware of it as soon as possible. If you do not have that awareness, you may forget that you are sharing the road with other people. If you want to go quickly, you may want other vehicles out of your way so unreasonably that you create agitation in yourself. So when you are behind the wheel — have just one awareness — you are behind the wheel. You go to the supermarket and have picked up many things. In front of you is a long queue. Retain one awareness "*a long queue.*" This will sustain your ability to be patient. Otherwise, you will be standing in the queue feeling miserable. We spend many years of our lives in

anxiety, worry, frustration and fear. How nice it would be if we could reduce these negative emotions that take away our ability to enjoy life. We will then have more good times.

You go to work as a doctor and see so many patients in the surgery/ clinic/ hospital. You allow yourself to make a conscious awareness by observing "*many patients.*" Otherwise, you will come under pressure unconsciously. This will cause you work-stress. If you have to finish your work by lunchtime but more patients keep coming, the pressure will keep building up.

Suppose, you have forty-five minutes to finish your meal and clear the kitchen. Please pay one awareness to the period time, which is likely to create pressure. Pay one attention to what you have to do such as warming up food in the microwave, taking the correct plates out, and to cleaning them up after eating. This will give you awareness of the overall situation in the kitchen and dining room. Such awareness gives you some realistic undertaking for the 45 minutes. It prevents you from being too ambitious and helps you relieve some pressure of time. It helps you to plan and execute your daily routine.

Otherwise, time can create a lot of pressure so that you would not enjoy the meal. You would not finish washing or cleaning. Do not forget your primary object when under pressure. This suggests that you should be aware of taking some regular breaths while work pressure is mounting. The *primary object* (e.g. breathing) always helps you not to be overwhelmed by *secondary objects* such as stress and agitation and helps you to maintain your calm and peace at

work. Just be aware of the *time* and the *situation* in which you are.

For example, you go into your office. Someone comes to work with a disturbed mind maybe having had some problems at home. You are not sure what he has been through for the last few hours. What you should do is to be aware of the fact that you are in the office with others, and you are not at home where things are at your disposal. It is a different environment. This prepares you to face something uncertain. You would not take things for granted as you do at home. If you see someone speaking very impolitely or in a stressful manner, you have to observe him as "*being stressful.*"

## **INTROVERTED AND EXTROVERTED MINDFULNESS**

Here meditation can be split into two, introspective (*ajjhatta*) and extroverted (*bahiddha*) mindfulness. In introspective mindfulness, you note your own movements, emotions and feelings. It is an inner-directed attentiveness. However, in extroverted mindfulness, you note objects outside you. If you are aware that your office colleague is depressed, you are not going to take offence at what he says or how he behaves. Otherwise, you are in a vulnerable situation, taking everything on a personal level.

We discussed yesterday that mindfulness serves as a protection. If mindful, you will be protected from the bad consequences of having problems, arguments and being upset. If you have to work with someone who has a short temper in the office, then you should go to the office with one awareness that you are with that kind of person at work.

Then you are in a better position to cope with things. Otherwise, you can get upset easily and react endlessly towards what he does and says. This is extroverted mindfulness in daily life.

## **LIVE IN THE PRESENT**

When the weather is cold, if we are aware that it is winter, we can enjoy it rather than complain about it. During winter, it is supposed to be cold. It is natural. Instead of complaining about the cold, we should learn how to live with it and enjoy it. There is no point in complaining about the cold during winter in England. We cannot change it. This is the way it is. During summer, of course, it is warm. But, in summer people say, *"It's too hot!!, It's terrible!"* They are unable to accept things as they are, there is no end to their complaining and frustration. We tell ourselves to live in the present, but when summer comes, we long for winter. In the winter, we look forward to having summer. It is always unsatisfactory.

We can never be satisfied with what we have and with the situation we are in. Life could always be miserable because of the lack of right attitude and awareness. Whenever we think of the past, it always sounds better than what we have now. Our golden past exists only in memory. This is because we forget many situations surrounding the reality of the past. We keep remembering only what we want. It is not that the past is more pleasant than the present in general. Actually in Buddhism, the past and future exist only in perception — not in reality. The future never comes and the past exists only in memory. It is only a concept. It is just like morning and evening that are concepts and exist in relation to the



movement of the earth. Concepts are developed based on the existence of other things. There is a concept of space in this room. But this concept exists only when depending on the existence of walls from different directions. Space does not exist alone. But the walls do and are not a concept. Time does not exist alone. Past, present, future, morning, evening and so on are relative reality. There is a concept of morning or evening because there is the movement of the earth, something real to depend on and develop a concept. Nevertheless, awareness of time is very important. To be aware of the place you are in, the environment and the people around you, the pressure and the time are all important. Without abandoning the use of conventional reality such as concept and words, we have to try to realise the objective nature, the ultimate reality.

So just have one awareness before you do something. This means you will not take things for granted anymore and you will not follow your habitual way of doing things. You insert one awareness at a time. This is for people practising general awareness in daily life. If things are difficult, then be aware that you are going through a tough time. Do not forget to hope for the best while facing the worst. Only then will you be in a better position to cope with things.

General mindfulness is assisted and sustained by regular practice of intensive mindfulness. Therefore, it is important to adopt a regular intensive meditation practice as a way of life.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### *WHY MEDITATION RETREAT*

A closing talk on the final day of the six-day intensive meditation retreat.

#### **FORMAT**

This six-day retreat is a short one but it has some unique qualities of its own. The timetable has been arranged in close consultation with devotee Dr. Leo K. Thinn, in whose residence we have been holding this retreat, to fit within the six days you are on holiday. The set-up of the retreat is based around my experiences in London. It is not meant to be over-ambitious, but relies on gradual but regular practice. The emphasis is on being a regular meditator. The aim is to reduce anxiety at work and in daily life.

The sitting session on the first day was only twenty minutes. Since then, you have gradually progressed to thirty and then forty-five minutes without feeling too much pressure from the duration of the session. In the majority of meditation centres, alternate sessions of sitting and walking meditation of one hour at a stretch is standard practice. Some even have two and three hours as a standard session. Here, however, we have started with thirty minutes of sitting meditation alternating with thirty minutes of walking meditation. I have purposely made this retreat quite different from the other

retreats in which I have taken part. One significant difference in this retreat is the interviews held with the meditators. These individual interviews have taken place four times a day because one of the main aims of taking part in a retreat is to learn the techniques of meditation.

Completing a ten-day retreat once in your life is hardly sufficient. A ten-day or one-month retreat will not produce a miracle. Applying the techniques that you have learnt during the ten-day or one-month retreat to your daily activities is what is important.

## **MEDITATION RETREATS IN BURMA**

In Burma, Thailand Sri Lanka, it was only after the World War II and in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that the ten-day retreats gained popularity. Before that, few retreats like these were organized. It was through the encouragement and managerial abilities of learned and lay people, for example, in Burma like Mr. Than Daing from the Mogok Meditation Centre and Sir U Thwin from Mahasi Meditation Centre, that these ten-day retreats came within the reach of many people. Similarly, successful business people from middle class background in Thailand and Sri Lanka brought their business management skills to help the top meditation teachers organize retreats for lay people. When they started, they were not very widespread. However, now, even young children will attend short retreats during their school holidays. They have become rooted in modern Buddhist culture just like temporary ordination of boys and girls in the summer.

There are over ten major techniques of vipassana meditation currently in practice in Burma. And there are a few in Thailand as well. So, you should consider ourselves lucky to have been born in Burma, Thailand and Sri Lanka because of the commonly availability of meditation teachers and centres. However, it is up to individual whether he or she travels *from the light into the dark*. Since we are born lucky, we have to live lucky, enjoying all the benefits of the Dhamma.

## **FLEXIBILITY**

Given the number of proven Vipassana meditation techniques, to get yourself affiliated to only a particular technique and to shut yourself off from the rest, is really a shame. All those techniques are excellent. They have been proven and accepted by many generations. If they were not valid, they would not have survived this long. In my opinion, we should select and adopt what is good from those techniques, and use them to our benefit, in a flexible way. It is not helpful to become attached to one particular technique and start degrading the others. It is actually harmful to look down on other techniques. If one becomes dogmatic, one begins to cause damage to all of the techniques including the one to which you are affiliated.

Flexibility is one of the main principles in the set-up of this retreat. I did not seek to impose a single technique on anyone. Even the technique in breathing can vary and it is so in Mahasi, Mogok, Sun Lun and Ajahn Chah tradition. The type of meditation, which I would like to but has not been possible to be included in this six-day retreat, is the meditation on the four elements also known as the *Ka-thit-wai* technique. To be

able to practise this technique you would need in addition to time to acquire some basic knowledge of the four elements first.

## **THEORETICAL & PRACTICAL UNDERSTANDING**

Theoretical and practical understanding needs to be in balance as well. I have given priority to this in the set-up of the retreat. In some retreats, the individual may only have the opportunity to discuss with the instructor just once or maybe three times in a whole week or ten days. There may be some doubts requiring some discussion. Many discourses are record of the discussions, which took place between the Buddha and the meditators. Some meditators do not progress because they lack this opportunity for discussion although they may have many opportunities to listen to Dhamma talks. Listening to the Dhamma talk and experiencing what is said in the session are very important. The late Mogok Sayadaw, Venerable Aggamahapandita Vimala, explained the Paticca-samuppada, *the Law of Dependence Origination* every single day in his meditation retreats. This is because he wanted people to gain the basic right views and attitudes

The four times a day interviews are based on that experience as well as my understanding of the importance of the two blessings (*Mangala-sutta*) in search of the true Dhamma — listening and discussing (*Kalena-dhamma-savanam* & *kalena-dhamma-sakaccha*). You have been blessed with these two crucial factors during this retreat.

## **MINDFULNESS EMPHASISED**

I have given first priority to *sati* (mindfulness) and secondary status to *samadhi* (concentration). Mindfulness and not concentration is emphasized in vipassana meditation. Concentration is to be acquired with unbroken and advanced mindfulness. I mentioned this in my letter to Dr. Leo K. Thinn. If we wish to practise vipassana Meditation, we have to base it on the Satipatthana-sutta, the *Discourse on the Foundation of Mindfulness*. Of the many Discourses, this one is a most complete. In the Satipatthana-sutta, priority is given to *sati*, awareness because it forms the basis as well as the principle of the practice. You will know whether effort and concentration are in balance through awareness. Whether or not confidence and understanding are in balance, you will find out through awareness. That is why you require *sati*, mindfulness all the time. There is never a surplus of mindfulness.

In *Satipatthana Vipassana meditation*, *sati* is the foundation. Although using the term the *Satipatthana*, people often emphasize more on the development of *samadhi* rather than *sati*. In fact, this perhaps should be called of *Samadhipatthana* rather than *Satipatthana*! We may not even realise what is happening because of the lack of adequate mindfulness. In order to realise the correct path we require *sati*.

The Buddha as the Ascetic Gotama studied under Alara Kalama and Udaka Ramaputta, two teachers who had developed the Sankhyayoga philosophy. The Ascetic Gotama, before becoming enlightened acquired *Arupa-jhana*, the third stage, with one teacher and the fourth stage with the other.

These were the stages he reached through development of *samadhi*. These stages are very high attainments in themselves, no doubt. That was why Alara Kalama and Udaka Ramaputta, together with their followers, were quite satisfied with their attainment, which provided them with peace, tranquillity and bliss. However, the Ascetic Gotama realised that, although he had attained a high level in his meditation this was not the answer to the problem he had determined to solve. Having made this judgement, he left these two teachers and tried a different technique. He tried self mortification which was and is still practised by Jainas in India. He had a great deal of *samadhi* and meditated with a minimal intake of food, and later without eating at all. That also did not help him reach the goal of cessation of *dukkha* (suffering). Eventually he discarded this practice as well.

The unique character of Buddhist meditation, which is different from meditation practised by other religions, is that *sati* (mindfulness) is given priority over everything else. The reasons for this are not only academic but also logical. That is why my intention was to emphasize *sati* throughout this retreat and not use a meditation practice, which directly develops *samadhi*. I know that at times it can be very difficult to sit and meditate without building up *samadhi* first. Nevertheless, as we realise the difficulties and our reactions to these, this leads us to understand that these reactions are conditioned and exist when being conditioned, and that it is possible to stop the conditioning process.

Within these few days, I have also explained and instructed you on the other types of meditation such as metta meditation, Buddha-nussati meditation, meditation on

impersonality of the body and meditation on death. However, this is not all. It is merely the beginning. I have taught all these methods so that you will be able to continue with the meditation practice, in your own time. Although you will not be able to see me every now and then, you can still contact me by telephone if there is anything you wish to ask or discuss.

## **MEDITATION IN DAILY LIFE**

The last aim of this short retreat was to introduce meditation into your daily life. You can meditate while leading a normal lay person's life. Some people like to meditate when in the meditation Centre or a temple, but as soon as they return home, they stop everything. This cannot be right. The temple should be regarded as the place where you study the Dhamma and your home the place where you practise it. What usually happens is just the opposite. People practise the Dhamma in the temples where they stay for only a short period. They should practise the Dhamma at home, with their family, relatives and friends and in the work place, applying the principles that have been taught.

Another thing, which I would like to remind you about is the Noble Eightfold Path (*atthangika-magga*). The Pali word *magga* means path or a way, which is the pathway of life. A businessman, a professional or a skilled worker who walks along this pathway will become successful and prosperous. The word *magga* is usually translated as the Buddhist way of life and is composed of eight parts. The human body is composed of various parts such as the heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, skull, arms, legs, etc. and just one part does not make a human. Only when all these parts combine, does it



form a human being. Likewise, just one component of the eight factors does not form the Path. Both mindfulness and concentration are part of this path. Only when all eight components are present does it construct the path, and become the true path (*magga-sacca*).

This *magga-sacca*, "the truth of the path" may be simply divided for practical purpose into *dana* (sharing), *sila* (ethical morality) and *bhavana* (meditation). Usually people practise *dana* and *sila* but leave out the *bhavana*. They tend to choose what they want to do, sometimes saying, "Oh, the time is not yet right for me to do *bhavana*." What happens then is that because they pick and choose, this practice no longer becomes the right path (*magga*) and no longer meets the criteria of the Four Noble Truths. Unless you are on the Noble Path (*ariya magga*), you are not practising Buddhism. You may be giving *dana* but this cannot be regarded as "*Buddhist Dana*." Although you may be donating something to a monk, it may not be deemed to be in accordance with the Eightfold Path. That is why it is very important for you to know and understand the Eightfold Path. So please read books on the Noble Eightfold Path and listen to sermons on that. Put into practice what you learn from the books and sermons, such as right understanding, right attitude, right effort and right mindfulness.