

The Burmese Master, Mahasi Sayadaw, is said to have been one of the most influential vipassana meditation teachers, of the twentieth century, so we have, accordingly, included some of his writings which will help to enhance our basic understanding of how the arousal of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness is the way to attainment of enlightenment.

**Satipatthana Vipassana**  
**Insight through Mindfulness**

by

**The Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw**

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## **Translator's Introduction**

On the personal request of the Honorable U Nu, Prime Minister, and Thado Thiri Thudhamma Sir U Thwin, President of the Buddha Sasananuggaha Association, the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw, Bhadanta Sobhana Mahathera, came down from Shwebo to Rangoon on 10th November 1949. The Meditation Centre at the Thathana Yeiktha, Hermitage Road, Rangoon, was formally opened on 4th December 1949, when the Mahasi Sayadaw began to give to fifteen devotees a methodical training in the right system of Satipatthana Vipassana.

From the first day of the opening of the Centre a discourse on the exposition of Satipatthana Vipassana, its purpose, the method of practice, the benefits derived therefrom, etc., has been given daily to each batch of devotees arriving at the Centre almost every day to undertake the intensive course of training.

The discourse lasts usually for one hour and thirty minutes, and the task of talking almost daily in this manner inevitably caused a strain. Fortunately, the

Buddha Sasananuggaha Association came forward to relieve the situation with an offer of the donation of a tape-recorder, and the discourse given on 27th July 1951 to a group of fifteen devotees undertaking the training was taped. Thereafter this taped discourse has been in constant daily use preceded by a few preliminary remarks spoken by the Mahasi Sayadaw.

Then, owing to the great demand of many branch meditation centers of the Mahasi Satipatthana Vipassana, as well as of the public, this discourse was published in book form in 1954. The book has now run into its sixth edition. As there is also a keen interest and eager demand among many devotees of other nationalities who are unacquainted with Burmese, the discourse is now translated into English.

U Pe Thin (translator)  
Mahasi Yogi  
December, 1957

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# **Satipatthana Vipassana**

**Mahasi Sayadaw**

*Namo Buddhassa*

*Honor to the Fully Enlightened One*

On coming across the Teaching of the Buddha, it is most important for everyone to cultivate the virtues of moral conduct (*sila*), concentration (*samadhi*), and wisdom (*pañña*). One should undoubtedly possess these three virtues.

For laypeople the minimal measure of moral conduct is the observance of the Five Precepts. For bhikkhus it is the observance of the Patimokkha, the code of monastic discipline. Anyone who is well-disciplined in moral conduct will be reborn in a happy realm of existence as a human being or a *deva* (god).

However, this ordinary form of mundane morality (*lokiya-sila*) will not be a safeguard against relapse into the lower states of miserable

existence, such as hell, the animal realm, or the realm of petas (ghosts).

It is therefore desirable to cultivate the higher form of supramundane morality (*lokuttara-sila*). When one has fully acquired the virtue of this morality, one will be secure from relapse into the lower states and will always lead a happy life by being reborn as a human being or a deva. Everyone should therefore make it his duty to work for supramundane morality.

There is every hope of success for anyone who strives sincerely and in real earnestness. It would indeed be a pity if anyone were to fail to take advantage of this fine opportunity of being endowed with higher qualities, for such a person will undoubtedly be a victim sooner or later of his own bad karma, which will pull him down to the lower states of miserable existence in hell, the animal realm, or the sphere of petas, where the span of life lasts for many hundreds, thousands or millions of years. It is therefore emphasized here that coming across the

Teaching of the Buddha is the unique opportunity to work for path morality (*magga-sila*) and fruition morality (*phala-sila*).

It is not, however, advisable to work for moral conduct alone. It is also necessary to practice *samadhi* or concentration. Samadhi is the fixed or tranquil state of mind. The ordinary or undisciplined mind is in the habit of wandering to other places.

It cannot be kept under control, but follows any idea, thought or imagination, etc.

In order to prevent this wandering, the mind should be made to attend repeatedly to a selected object of concentration. On gaining practice, the mind gradually abandons its distractions and remains fixed on the object to which it is directed. This is samadhi.

There are two kinds of concentration: mundane concentration (*lokiya-samadhi*) and supramundane concentration (*lokuttara-samadhi*).

Of these two, the former consists in the mundane absorptions, such as the four *rupa-jhanas* -- the absorptions pertaining to the world of form -- and the four *arupa-jhanas* -- the absorptions pertaining to the formless world. These can be attained by the practice of tranquillity meditation (*samatha-bhavana*) with such methods as mindfulness of breathing, loving-kindness (*metta*), kasina meditation, etc. By virtue of these attainments one will be reborn in the plane of the brahmas. The lifespan of a brahma is very long and lasts for one world cycle, two, four, or eight world cycles, up to a limit of 84,000 world cycles, as the case may be. But at the end of his lifespan, a brahma will die and be reborn as a human being or a deva.

If one leads a virtuous life all the time, one may lead a happy life in a higher existence, but as one is not free from the defilements of attachment, aversion and delusion, one may commit demeritorious deeds on many occasions.

One will then be a victim of his bad karma and be reborn in hell or in other lower states of miserable existence.

Thus mundane concentration also is not a definite security. It is desirable to work for supramundane concentration, the concentration of the path (*magga*) and the fruit (*phala*). To acquire this concentration it is essential to cultivate wisdom (*pañña*).

There are two forms of wisdom: mundane and supramundane. Nowadays, knowledge of literature, art, science, or other worldly affairs is usually regarded as a kind of wisdom, but this form of wisdom has nothing to do with any kind of mental development (*bhavana*).

Nor can it be regarded as of real merit, because many weapons of destruction are invented through these kinds of knowledge, which are always under the influence of attachment, aversion, and other evil motives.

The real spirit of mundane wisdom, on the other hand, has only merits and no demerits of any kind. True mundane wisdom includes the knowledge used in welfare and relief work, which causes no harm; learning to acquire the knowledge of the true meaning or sense of the scriptures; and the three classes of knowledge of development for insight (*vipassana-bhavana*), such as knowledge born of learning (*sutamaya-pañña*), knowledge born of reflection (*cintamaya-pañña*), and wisdom born of meditative development (*bhavanamaya-pañña*).

The virtue of possessing mundane wisdom will lead to a happy life in higher states of existence, but it still cannot prevent the risk of being reborn in hell or in other states of miserable existence. Only the development of supramundane wisdom (*lokuttara-pañña*) can decidedly remove this risk.

Supramundane wisdom is the wisdom of the path and fruit. To develop this wisdom it is necessary to carry on the practice of insight

meditation (*vipassana-bhavana*) out of the three disciplines of morality, concentration, and wisdom. When the virtue of wisdom is duly developed, the necessary qualities of morality and concentration will also be acquired.

## **The Development of Wisdom**

The method of developing this wisdom is to observe materiality (*rupa*) and mentality (*nama*) -- the two sole elements existing in a living being -- with a view to knowing them in their true nature.

At present, experiments in the analytical observation of materiality are usually carried out in laboratories with the aid of various kinds of instruments, yet these methods cannot deal with the mind.

The method of the Buddha does not require any kind of instruments or outside aid. It can successfully deal with both materiality and

mentality. It makes use of one's own mind for analytical purposes by fixing bare attention on the activities of materiality and mentality as they occur within oneself.

By continually repeating this form of exercise, the necessary concentration can be gained, and when concentration is keen enough, the ceaseless course of arising and passing away of materiality and mentality will be vividly perceptible.

The living being consists solely of the two distinct groups of materiality and mentality. The solid substance of body as it is now found belongs to the group of materiality. According to the usual enumeration of material phenomena, there are altogether twenty-eight kinds in this group, but in short it may be noted that body is a mass of materiality.

For example, it is the same as a doll made of clay or wheat, which is nothing but a collection of particles of clay or flour. Materiality changes

its form (*ruppati*) under physical conditions of heat, cold, etc., and because of this changeableness under contrary physical conditions, it is called *rupa* in Pali. It does not possess any faculty of knowing an object.

In the Abhidhamma, the elements of mentality and materiality are classified as "states with object" (*sarammana-dhamma*) and "states without object" (*anarammana-dhamma*), respectively. The element of mentality has an object, holds an object, knows an object, while that of materiality does not have an object, does not hold an object, and does not know an object.

It will thus be seen that the Abhidhamma has directly stated that materiality has no faculty of knowing an object. A yogi also perceives in like manner that "materiality has no faculty of knowing."

Logs and pillars, bricks and stones and lumps of earth are a mass of materiality. They do not possess any faculty of knowing. It is the same

with the materiality which makes up a living body -- it has no faculty of knowing. The materiality in a dead body is the same as that of a living body -- it does not possess any faculty of knowing. People, however, have a common idea that the materiality of a living body possesses the faculty of knowing an object and that it loses this faculty only at death. This is not really so. In actual fact, materiality does not possess the faculty of knowing an object in either a dead or a living body.

What is it then that knows objects now? It is mentality, which comes into being depending on materiality. It is called *nama* in Pali because it inclines (*namati*) towards an object. Mentality is also spoken of as thought or consciousness. Mentality arises depending on materiality: depending on the eye, eye-consciousness (seeing) arises; depending on the ear, ear-consciousness (hearing) arises; depending on the nose, nose-consciousness (smelling) arises; depending on the tongue, tongue-consciousness

(tasting) arises; depending on the body, body-consciousness (sense of touch) arises. There are many kinds of sense of touch, either good or bad.

While touch has a wide field of action in running throughout the whole length of the body, inside and outside, the sense of seeing, hearing, smelling and tasting come into being in their own particular spheres -- the eye, ear, nose and tongue -- each of which occupies a very small and limited area of the body.

These senses of touch, sight, etc., are nothing but the elements of mind.

There also comes into being mind-consciousness -- thoughts, ideas, imaginings, etc. -- depending on the mind-base. All of these are elements of mind. Mind knows an object, while materiality does not know an object.

## *Seeing*

People generally believe that in the case of seeing, it is the eye which actually sees. They think that seeing and the eye are one and the same thing. They also think: "Seeing is I," "I see things," "The eye, seeing, and I are one and the same person."

In reality this is not so. The eye is one thing and seeing is another, and there is no separate entity such as "I" or "ego." There is only the reality of seeing coming into being depending on the eye.

To give an example, it is like the case of a person who sits in a house. The house and the person are two separate things: the house is not the person, nor is the person the house. Similarly, it is so at the time of seeing. The eye and seeing are two separate things: the eye is not seeing, nor is seeing the eye.

To give another example, it is just like the case of a person in a room who sees many things when he opens the window and looks through it.

If it is asked, "Who is it that sees? Is it the window or the person that actually sees?" the answer is, "The window does not possess the ability to see; it is only the person who sees."

If it is again asked, "Will the person be able to see things on the outside without the window?" the answer will be, "It is not possible to see things through the wall without the window. One can only see through the window."

Similarly, in the case of seeing, there are two separate realities of the eye and seeing. The eye is not seeing, nor is seeing the eye, yet there cannot be an act of seeing without the eye. In reality, seeing comes into being depending on the eye.

It is now evident that in the body there are only two distinct elements of materiality (eye) and mentality (seeing) at every moment of seeing.

In addition, there is also a third element of materiality -- the visual object. At times the visual object is noticeable in the body and at

times it is noticeable outside the body. With the addition of the visual object there will then be three elements, two of which (the eye and the visual object) are materiality and the third of which (seeing) is mentality.

The eye and the visual object, being materiality, do not possess the ability to know an object, while seeing, being mentality, can know the visual object and what it looks like. Now it is clear that there exist only the two separate elements of materiality and mentality at the moment of seeing, and the arising of this pair of separate elements is known as seeing.

People who are without the training in and knowledge of insight meditation hold the view that seeing belongs to or is "self," "ego," "living entity," or "person." They believe that "seeing is I," or "I am seeing," or "I am knowing."

This kind of view or belief is called *sakkaya-ditthi* in Pali. *Sakkaya* means the group of materiality (*rupa*) and mentality (*nama*) as they

exist distinctively. *Ditthi* means a wrong view or belief. The compound word *sakkaya-ditthi* means a wrong view or belief in self with regard to *nama* and *rupa*, which exist in reality.

For greater clarity, we will explain further the manner of holding the wrong view or belief. At the moment of seeing, the things which actually exist are the eye, the visual object (both materiality), and seeing (mentality). *Nama* and *rupa* are reality, yet people hold the view that this group of elements is self, or ego, or a living entity. They consider that "seeing is I," or "that which is seen is I," or "I see my own body." Thus this mistaken view is taking the simple act of seeing to be self, which is *sakkaya-ditthi*, the wrong view of self.

As long as one is not free from the wrong view of self, one cannot expect to escape from the risk of falling into the miserable realms of the hells, the animals or the petas. Though one may be leading a happy life in the human or deva world by virtue of one's merits, yet one is liable

to fall back into the miserable states of existence at any time, when one's demerits operate.

For this reason, the Buddha pointed out that it is essential to work for the total removal of the wrong view of self:

"Let a monk go forth mindfully to abandon view of self"

*(sakkaya-ditthippahañaya sato bhikkhu paribbaje).*

To explain: though it is the wish of everyone to avoid old age, disease and death, no one can prevent their inevitable arrival. After death, rebirth follows.

Rebirth in any state of existence does not depend on one's own wish. It is not possible to avoid rebirth in the hell realm, the animal realm or the realm of the petas by merely wishing for an escape.

Rebirth takes place in any state of existence as the consequence of one's own deeds: there is no choice at all. For these reasons, the round of birth and death, *samsara*, is very dreadful.

Every effort should therefore be made to acquaint oneself with the miserable conditions of *samsara*, and then to work for an escape from *samsara*, for the attainment of Nibbana.

If an escape from *samsara* as a whole is not possible for the present, an attempt should be made for an escape at least from the round of rebirth in the hell realms, the animal realm and the *peta* realm.

In this case it is necessary to work for the total removal within oneself of *sakkaya-ditthi*, which is the root cause of rebirth in the miserable states of existence. *Sakkaya-ditthi* can only be destroyed completely by the noble path and fruit: the three supramundane virtues of morality, concentration and wisdom.

It is therefore imperative to work for the development of these virtues. How should one do the work? By means of noting or observing one must go out from the jurisdiction of defilements (*kilesa*). One should practice by constantly noting or observing every act of seeing, hearing, etc., which are the constituent physical and mental processes, till one is freed from *sakkaya-ditthi*, the wrong view of self.

For these reasons advice is always given here to take-up the practice of vipassana meditation. Now yogis have come here for the purpose of practicing vipassana meditation who may be able to complete the course of training and attain the noble path in no long time.

The view of self will then be totally removed and security will be finally gained against the danger of rebirth in the realms of the hells, animals and petas.

In this respect, the exercise is simply to note or observe the existing elements in every act of

seeing. It should be noted as "seeing, seeing" on every occasion of seeing. By the terms "note" or "observe" or "contemplate" is meant the act of keeping the mind fixedly on the object with a view to knowing it clearly.

When this is done, and the act of seeing is noted as "seeing, seeing," at times the visual object is noticed, at times consciousness of seeing is noticed, at times the eye-base, the place from which one sees, is noticed.

It will serve the purpose if one can notice distinctly any one of the three. If not, based on this act of seeing there will arise *sakkaya-ditthi*, which will view it in the form of a person or as belonging to a person, and as being permanent, pleasurable, and self.

This will arouse the defilements of craving and attachment, which will in turn prompt deeds, and the deeds will bring forth rebirth in a new existence. Thus the process of dependent origination operates and the vicious circle of

samsara revolves incessantly. In order to prevent the revolving of samsara from this source of seeing, it is necessary to note "seeing, seeing" on every occasion of seeing.

### *Hearing, Etc.*

Similarly, in the case of hearing, there are only two distinct elements, materiality and mentality. The sense of hearing arises depending on the ear. While the ear and sound are two elements of materiality, the sense of hearing is the element of mentality. In order to know clearly any one of these two kinds of materiality and mentality, every occasion of hearing should be noted as "hearing, hearing." So also, "smelling, smelling" should be noted on every occasion of smelling, and "tasting, tasting" on every occasion of tasting.

The sensation of touch in the body should be noted in the very same way. There is a kind of material element known as bodily sensitivity

throughout the body, which receives every impression of touch. Every kind of touch, either agreeable or disagreeable, usually comes in contact with bodily sensitivity, and from this there arises body-consciousness, which feels or knows the touch on each occasion.

It will now be seen that at every moment of touching there are two elements of materiality -- the bodily sensitivity and the tangible object -- and one element of mentality -- knowing of touch.

In order to know these things distinctly at every moment of touching, the practice of noting as "touching, touching" has to be carried out. This merely refers to the common form of sensation of touch.

There are special forms which accompany painful or disagreeable sensations, such as feeling stiffness or tiredness in the body or limbs, feeling hot, pain, numb, aches, etc.

Because feeling (*vedana*) predominates in these cases, it should be noted as "feeling hot," "feeling tired," "feeling painful," etc., as the case may be.

It may also be mentioned that there occur many sensations of touch in the hands, the legs, and so on, on each occasion of bending, stretching, or moving. Because of mentality wanting to move, stretch or bend, the material activities of moving, stretching or bending, etc., occur in series.

(It may not be possible to notice these incidents at the outset. They can only be noticed after some time, on gaining experience by practice. It is mentioned here for the sake of general information.)

All activities in movements and in changing, etc., are done by mentality. When mentality wills to bend, there arises a series of inward movements of hand or the leg. When mentality wills to stretch or move, there arises a series of

outward movements or movements to and fro. They fall away soon after they occur and at the very point of occurrence, as one will notice later.

In every case of bending, stretching, or other activities, there arises first a series of intentions, moments of mentality, inducing or causing in the hands and legs a series of material activities, such as stiffening, bending, stretching, or moving to and fro.

These activities come up against other material elements, the bodily sensitivity, and on every occasion of contact between material activities and sensitive qualities, there arises body-consciousness, which feels or knows the sensation of touch.

It is therefore clear that material activities are predominating factors in these cases. It is necessary to notice the predominating factors. If not, there will surely arise the wrong view which regards these activities as the doings of

an "I" -- "I am bending," "I am stretching," "my hands," or "my legs." This practice of noting as "bending," "stretching," "moving," is carried out for the purpose of removing such wrong views.

## *Mind*

Depending on the mind-base, there arises a series of mental activities, such as thinking, imagining, etc., or generally speaking, a series of mental activities arises depending on the body.

In reality, each case is a composition of mentality and materiality, mind-base being materiality, and thinking, imagining, and so forth being mentality. In order to be able to notice materiality and mentality clearly, "thinking," "imagining," and so forth should be noted in each case.

After having carried out the practice in the manner indicated above for some time, there

may be an improvement in concentration. One will notice that the mind no longer wanders about but remains fixed on the object to which it is directed. At the same time, the power of noticing has considerably developed. On every occasion of noting, one notices only two processes of materiality and mentality: a dual set of object (materiality) and mental state (mentality), which makes note of the object, arising together.

Again, on proceeding further with the practice of contemplation, after some time one notices that nothing remains permanent, but that everything is in a state of flux.

New things arise each time.

Each of them is noted as it arises. Whatever arises then passes away immediately and immediately another arises, which is again noted and which then passes away.

Thus the process of arising and passing away goes on, which clearly shows that nothing is

permanent. One therefore realizes that "things are not permanent" because one sees that they arise and pass away immediately. This is insight into impermanence (*aniccanupassana-ñāna*).

Then one also realizes that "arising and passing are not desirable." This provides insight into suffering (*dukkhanupassana-ñāna*).

Besides, one also usually experiences many painful sensations in the body, such as tiredness, heat, aching, and at the time of noting these sensations, one generally feels that this body is a collection of sufferings. This is also insight into suffering.

*Then at every time of noting it is found that elements of materiality and mentality occur according to their respective nature and conditioning, and not according to one's wishes.*

One therefore realizes that "they are elements; they are not governable; they are not a person or living entity." This is insight into non-self (*anattanupassana-ñāna*).

On having fully acquired these insights into impermanence, suffering, and non-self, the maturity of knowledge of the path (*magga-ñāna*) and knowledge of fruition (*phala-ñāna*) takes place and realization of Nibbana is won. By winning the realization of Nibbana in the first stage, one is freed from the round of rebirth in the realms of miserable existence. Everyone should therefore endeavor to reach the first stage, the path and fruit of stream-entry, as a minimum measure of protection against an unfortunate rebirth.

## **The Beginner's Exercise**

It has already been explained that the actual method of practice in vipassana meditation is to note, or to observe, or to contemplate, the successive occurrences of seeing, hearing, and so on, at the six sense doors.

However, it will not be possible for a beginner to follow these on all successive incidents as

they occur because his mindfulness (*sati*), concentration (*samadhi*), and knowledge (*ñāna*) are still very weak.

The moments of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking occur very swiftly. It seems that seeing occurs at the same time as hearing, that hearing occurs at the same time as seeing, that seeing and hearing occur simultaneously, that seeing, hearing, thinking and imagining always occur simultaneously. Because they occur so swiftly, it is not possible to distinguish which occurs first and which second.

In reality, seeing does not occur at the same time as hearing, nor does hearing occur at the same time as seeing. Such incidents can occur only one at a time. A yogi who has just begun the practice and who has not sufficiently developed his mindfulness, concentration and knowledge will not, however, be in a position to observe all these moments singly as they occur in serial order. A beginner need not, therefore,

follow up on many things. He needs to begin with only a few things.

Seeing or hearing occurs only when due attention is given to their objects. If one does not pay heed to any sight or sound, one may pass the time without any moments of seeing or hearing taking place. Smelling rarely occurs. The experience of tasting can only occur while one is eating. In the case of seeing, hearing, smelling and tasting, the yogi can note them when they occur.

Body impressions, however, are ever present. They usually exist distinctly all the time. During the time that one is sitting, the body impression of stiffness or the sensation of hardness in this position is distinctly felt. Attention should therefore be fixed on the sitting posture and a note made as "sitting, sitting, sitting."

## *Sitting*

Sitting is an erect posture of the body consisting of a series of physical activities, induced by consciousness consisting of a series of mental activities. It is just like the case of an inflated rubber ball which maintains its round shape through the resistance of the air inside it. The posture of sitting is similar in that the body is kept in an erect posture through the continuous process of physical activities.

A good deal of energy is required to pull up and keep in an erect position such a heavy load as this body. People generally assume that the body is lifted and kept in an upright position by means of sinews. This assumption is correct in a sense because sinews, blood, flesh and bones are nothing but materiality. The element of stiffening which keeps the body in an erect posture belongs to the group of materiality and arises in the sinews, flesh, blood, etc., throughout the body, like the air in a rubber ball.

The element of stiffening is the air element, known as *vayo-dhatu*. The body is kept in an erect position by the air element in the form of stiffening, which is continually coming into existence. At the time of sleepiness or drowsiness, one may drop flat because the supply of new materials in the form of stiffening is cut off. The state of mind in heavy drowsiness or sleep is called *bhavanga*, the "life-continuum" or passive subconscious flow.

During the course of *bhavanga*, mental activities are absent, and for this reason, the body lies flat during sleep or heavy drowsiness.

During waking hours, strong and alert mental activities are continually arising, and because of these the air element arises serially in the form of stiffening. In order to know these facts, it is essential to note the bodily posture attentively as "sitting, sitting, sitting." This does not necessarily mean that the body impression of stiffening should particularly be searched for and noted. Attention need only be fixed on the

whole form of the sitting posture, that is, the lower portion of the body in a bent circular form and the upper portion held erect.

It may be found that the exercise of observing the mere sitting posture is too easy and does not require much effort. In these circumstances, energy (*viriya*) is less and concentration (*samadhi*) is in excess. One will generally feel lazy and will not want to carry on the noting as "sitting, sitting, sitting" repeatedly for a considerable length of time. Laziness generally occurs when there is an excess of concentration and not enough energy. It is nothing but a state of sloth and torpor (*thina-middha*).

More energy should be developed, and for this purpose, the number of objects for noting should be increased. After noting as "sitting," the attention should be directed to a spot in the body where the sense of touch is felt and a note made as "touching."

Any spot in the leg or hand or hip where a sense of touch is distinctly felt will serve the purpose. For example, after noting the sitting posture of the body as "sitting," the spot where the sense of touch is felt should be noted as "touching." The noting should thus be repeated using these two objects of *the sitting posture* and *the place of touching* alternately, as "sitting, touching, sitting, touching, sitting, touching."

The terms "noting," "observing" and "contemplating" are used here to indicate the fixing of attention on an object. The exercise is simply to note or observe or contemplate as "sitting, touching." Those who already have experience in the practice of meditation may find this exercise easy to begin with, but those without any previous experience may at first find it rather difficult.

## *Rising-Falling*

A simpler and easier form of the exercise for a beginner is this: With every breath there occurs in the abdomen a rising-falling movement. A beginner should start with the exercise of noting this movement. This rising-falling movement is easy to observe because it is coarse and therefore more suitable for the beginner. As in schools where simple lessons are easy to learn, so also is the practice of vipassana meditation. A beginner will find it easier to develop concentration and knowledge with a simple and easy exercise.

Again, the purport of vipassana meditation is to begin the exercise by contemplating prominent factors in the body. Of the two factors of mentality and materiality, the former is subtle and less prominent, while the latter is coarse and more prominent. At the outset, therefore, the usual procedure for an insight meditator is to begin the exercise by contemplating the material elements.

With regard to materiality, it may be mentioned here that derived materiality (*upada-rupa*) is subtle and less prominent, while the four primary physical elements (*maha-bhuta-rupa*) -- earth, water, fire and air -- are coarse and more prominent. The latter should therefore have priority in the order of objects for contemplation. In the case of rising-falling, the outstanding factor is the air element, or *vayo-dhatu*. The process of stiffening and the movements of the abdomen noticed during the contemplation are nothing but the functions of the air element. Thus it will be seen that the air element is perceptible at the beginning.

According to the instructions of the Satipatthana Sutta, one should be mindful of the activities of walking while walking, of those of standing, sitting and lying down while standing, sitting and lying down, respectively.

One should also be mindful of other bodily activities as each of them occurs. In this connection, it is stated in the commentaries that

one should be mindful primarily of the air element, in preference to the other three elements. As a matter of fact, all four primary elements are dominant in every action of the body, and it is essential to perceive any one of them. At the time of sitting, either of the two movements of rising and falling occurs conspicuously with every breath, and a beginning should be made by noting these movements.

Some fundamental features in the system of vipassana meditation have been explained for general information. The general outline of basic exercises will now be dealt with.

### *Outline of Basic Exercises*

When contemplating rising and falling, the disciple should keep his mind on the abdomen. He will then come to know the upward movement or expansion of the abdomen on breathing in, and the downward movement or

contraction on breathing out. A mental note should be made as "rising" for the upward movement and "falling" for the downward movement. If these movements are not clearly noticed by simply fixing the mind on them, one or both hands should be placed on the abdomen.

The disciple should not try to change the manner of his natural breathing. He should neither attempt slow breathing by the retention of his breath, nor quick breathing or deep breathing. If he does change the natural flow of his breathing, he will soon tire himself. He must therefore keep to the natural rate of his breathing and proceed with the contemplation of rising and falling.

On the occurrence of the upward movement of the abdomen, the mental note of "rising" should be made, and on the downward movement of the abdomen, the mental note of "falling" should be made. The mental notation of these terms should not be vocalized. In vipassana

meditation, it is more important to know the object than to know it by a term or name.

It is therefore necessary for the disciple to make every effort to be mindful of the movement of rising from its beginning to its end and that of falling from its beginning to its end, as if these movements are actually seen with the eyes. As soon as rising occurs, there should be the knowing mind close to the movement, as in the case of a stone hitting a wall. The movement of rising as it occurs and the mind knowing it must come together on every occasion. Similarly, the movement of falling as it occurs and the mind knowing it must come together on every occasion.

When there is no other conspicuous object, the disciple should carry on the exercise of noting these two movements as "rising, falling, rising, falling, rising, falling."

While thus being occupied with this exercise, there may be occasions when the mind wanders

about. When concentration is weak, it is very difficult to control the mind. Though it is directed to the movements of rising and falling, the mind will not stay with them but will wander to other places.

This wandering mind should not be let alone. It should be noted as "wandering, wandering, wandering" as soon as it is noticed that it is wandering. On noting once or twice the mind usually stops wandering, then the exercise of noting "rising, falling" should be continued. When it is again found that the mind has reached a place, it should be noted as "reaching, reaching, reaching." Then the exercise of noting "rising, falling" should be reverted to as soon as these movements are clear.

On meeting with a person in the imagination, it should be noted as "meeting, meeting," after which the usual exercise should be reverted to. Sometimes the fact that it is mere imagination is discovered when one speaks with that imaginary person, and it should then be noted as

"speaking, speaking." The real purport is to note every mental activity as it occurs. For instance, it should be noted as "thinking" at the moment of thinking, and as "reflecting," "planning," "knowing," "attending," "rejoicing," "feeling lazy," "feeling happy," "disgusted," etc., as the case may be, on the occurrence of each activity. The contemplation of mental activities and noticing them is called *cittanupassana*, contemplation of mind.

Because people have no practical knowledge in vipassana meditation, they are generally not in a position to know the real state of the mind. This naturally leads them to the wrong view of holding mind to be "person," "self," "living entity." They usually believe that "imagination is I," "I am thinking," "I am planning," "I am knowing," and so forth.

They hold that there exists a living entity or self which grows up from childhood to adulthood. In reality, such a living entity does not exist, but there does exist a continuous process of

elements of mind which occur singly, one at a time, in succession. The practice of contemplation is therefore being carried out with the aim of discovering the true nature of this mind-body complex.

As regards the mind and the manner of its arising, the Buddha stated in the Dhammapada (v.37):

*Durangamam ekacaram  
asariram guhasayam  
ye cittam saññamessanti  
mokkhanti marabandhana.*

Faring far, wandering alone,  
Formless and lying in a cave.  
Those who do restrain the mind  
Are sure released from Mara's bonds.

*Faring far.* Mind usually wanders far and wide. While the yogi is trying to carry on with the practice of contemplation in his meditation room, he often finds that his mind has wandered

to many far-off places, towns, etc. He also finds that his mind can wander to any of the far-off places which he has previously known at the very moment of thinking or imagining. This fact is discovered with the help of contemplation.

*Alone.* Mind occurs singly, moment to moment in succession. Those who do not perceive the reality of this believe that one mind exists in the course of life or existence. They do not know that new minds are always arising at every moment. They think that the seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking of the past and of the present belong to one and the same mind, and that three or four acts of seeing, hearing, touching, knowing usually occur simultaneously.

These are wrong views. In reality, single moments of mind arise and pass away continuously, one after another. This can be perceived on gaining considerable practice. The cases of imagination and planning are clearly

perceptible. Imagination passes away as soon as it is noted as "imagining, imagining," and planning also passes away as soon as it is noted as "planning, planning."

These instances of arising, noting and passing away appear like a string of beads. The preceding mind is not the following mind. Each is separate. These characteristics of reality are personally perceptible, and for this purpose one must proceed with the practice of contemplation.

*Formless.* Mind has no substance, no form. It is not easy to distinguish as is the case with materiality. In the case of materiality, the body, head, hands and legs are very prominent and are easily noticed.

If it is asked what matter is, matter can be handled and shown. Mind, however, is not easy to describe because it has no substance or form. For this reason, it is not possible to carry out analytical laboratory experiments on the mind.

One can, however, fully understand the mind if it is explained as *that which knows an object*. To understand the mind, it is necessary to contemplate the mind at every moment of its occurrence. When contemplation is fairly advanced, the mind's approach to its object is clearly comprehended. It appears as if each moment of mind is making a direct leap towards its object. In order to know the true nature of the mind, contemplation is thus prescribed.

*Lying in a cave.* Because the mind comes into being depending on the mind-base and the other sense doors situated in the body, it is said that it rests in a cave.

*Those who do restrain the mind are sure released from Mara's bonds.* It is said that the mind should be contemplated at each moment of its occurrence. The mind can thus be controlled by means of contemplation. On his successful controlling of the mind, the yogi will win freedom from the bondage of Mara, the King of Death. It will now be seen that it is important to

note the mind at every moment of its occurrence. As soon as it is noted, the mind passes away. For instance, by noting once or twice as "intending, intending," it is found that intention passes away at once. Then the usual exercise of noting as "rising, falling, rising, falling" should be reverted to.

While one is proceeding with the usual exercise, one may feel that one wants to swallow saliva. It should be noted as "wanting," and on gathering saliva as "gathering," and on swallowing as "swallowing," in the serial order of occurrence.

The reason for contemplation in this case is because there may be a persisting personal view as "wanting to swallow is I," "swallowing is also I." In reality, "wanting to swallow" is mentality and not "I," and "swallowing" is materiality and not "I." There exist only mentality and materiality at that moment.

By means of contemplating in this manner, one will understand clearly the process of reality.

So too, in the case of spitting, it should be noted as "wanting" when one wants to spit, as "bending" on bending the neck (which should be done slowly), as "looking, seeing" on looking and as "spitting" on spitting. Afterwards, the usual exercise of noting "rising, falling" should be continued.

Because of sitting for a long time, there will arise in the body unpleasant feeling of being stiff, being hot and so forth. These sensations should be noted as they occur. The mind should be fixed on that spot and a note made as "stiff, stiff" on feeling stiff, as "hot, hot" on feeling hot, as "painful, painful" on feeling painful, as "prickly, prickly" on feeling prickly sensations, and as "tired, tired" on feeling tired. These unpleasant feelings are *dukkha-vedana* and the contemplation of these feeling is *vedananupassana*, contemplation of feeling.

Owing to the absence of knowledge in respect of these feelings, there persists the wrong view of holding them as one's own personality or self,

that is to say, "I am feeling stiff," "I am feeling painful," "I was feeling well formerly but I now feel uncomfortable," in the manner of a single self.

In reality, unpleasant feelings arise owing to disagreeable impressions in the body. Like the light of an electric bulb which can continue to burn on a continuous supply of energy, so it is in the case of feelings, which arise anew on every occasion of coming in contact with disagreeable impressions.

It is essential to understand these feelings clearly. At the beginning of noting as "stiff, stiff," "hot, hot," "painful, painful," one may feel that such disagreeable feelings grow stronger, and then one will notice that a mind wanting to change the posture arises. This mind should be noted as "wanting, wanting." Then a return should be made to the feeling and it should be noted as "stiff, stiff" or "hot, hot," and so forth. If one proceeds in this manner of

contemplation with great patience, unpleasant feelings will pass away.

There is a saying that patience leads to Nibbana. Evidently this saying is more applicable in the case of contemplation than in any other. Plenty of patience is needed in contemplation. If a yogi cannot bear unpleasant feelings with patience, but frequently changes his posture during contemplation, he cannot expect to gain concentration. Without concentration there is no chance of acquiring insight knowledge (*vipassana-ñāna*) and without insight knowledge the attainment of the path, fruition and Nibbana cannot be won.

Patience is of great importance in contemplation. Patience is needed mostly to bear unpleasant bodily feelings. There is hardly any case of outside disturbances where it is necessary to exercise patience. This means the observance of *khantisamvara*, restraint by patience. The posture should not be immediately changed when unpleasant sensations arise, but

contemplation should be continued by noting them as "stiff, stiff," "hot, hot," and so on. Such painful sensations are normal and will pass away. In the case of strong concentration, it will be found that great pains will pass away when they are noted with patience. On the fading away of suffering or pain, the usual exercise of noting "rising, falling" should be continued.

On the other hand, it may be found that pains or unpleasant feelings do not immediately pass away even when one notes them with great patience. In such a case, one has no alternative but to change posture. One must, of course, submit to superior forces. When concentration is not strong enough, strong pains will not pass away quickly. In these circumstances there will often arise a mind wanting to change posture, and this mind should be noted as "wanting, wanting." After this, one should note "lifting, lifting" on moving it forward.

These bodily actions should be carried out slowly, and these slow movements should be

followed up and noted as "lifting, lifting," "moving, moving," "touching, touching," in the successive order of the process. Again, on moving one should note "moving, moving," and on putting down, note "putting, putting." If, when this process of changing posture has been completed, there is nothing more to be noted, the usual exercise of noting "rising, falling" should be continued.

There should be no stop or break in between. The preceding act of noting and the one which follows should be contiguous. Similarly, the preceding concentration and the one which follows should be contiguous, and the preceding act of knowing and the one which follows should be contiguous. In this way, the gradual development by stages of mindfulness, concentration and knowledge takes place, and depending on their full development, the final stage of path-knowledge is attained.

In the practice of vipassana meditation, it is important to follow the example of a person

who tries to make fire. To make a fire in the days before matches, a person had to constantly rub two sticks together without the slightest break in motion. As the sticks became hotter and hotter, more effort was needed, and the rubbing had to be carried out incessantly. Only when the fire had been produced was the person at liberty to take a rest.

Similarly, a yogi should work hard so that there is no break between the preceding noting and the one which follows, and the preceding concentration and the one which follows. He should revert to his usual exercise of noting "rising, falling" after he has noted painful sensations.

While being thus occupied with his usual exercise, he may again feel itching sensations somewhere in the body. He should then fix his mind on the spot and make a note as "itching, itching." Itching is an unpleasant sensation. As soon as it is felt, there arises a mind which wants to rub or scratch. This mind should be

noted as "wanting, wanting," after which no rubbing or scratching must be done as yet, but a return should be made to the itching and a note made as "itching, itching." While one is occupied with contemplation in this manner, itching in most cases passes away and the usual exercise of noting "rising, falling" should then be reverted to.

If, on the other hand, it is found that itching does not pass away, but that it is necessary to rub or scratch, the contemplation of the successive stages should be carried out by noting the mind as "wanting, wanting." It should then be continued by noting "raising, raising" on raising the hand, "touching, touching" when the hand touches the spot, "rubbing, rubbing" or "scratching, scratching" when the hand rubs or scratches, "withdrawing, withdrawing" on withdrawing the hand, "touching, touching" when the hand touches the body, and then the usual contemplation of "rising, falling" should be continued. In every case of changing

postures, contemplation of the successive stages should be carried out similarly and carefully.

While thus carefully proceeding with the contemplation, one may find that painful feelings or unpleasant sensations arise in the body of their own accord. Ordinarily, people change their posture as soon as they feel even the slightest unpleasant sensation of tiredness or heat without taking heed of these incidents. The change of posture is carried out quite heedlessly just while the seed of pain is beginning to grow. Thus painful feelings fail to take place in a distinctive manner. For this reason it is said that, as a rule, the postures hide painful feelings from view.

People generally think that they are feeling well for days and nights on end. They think that painful feelings occur only at the time of an attack of a dangerous disease.

Reality is just the opposite of what people think. Let anyone try to see how long he can keep

himself in a sitting posture without moving or changing it. One will find it uncomfortable after a short while, say five or ten minutes, and then one will begin to find it unbearable after fifteen or twenty minutes.

One will then be compelled to move or change one's posture by either raising or lowering the head, moving the hands or legs, or by swaying the body either forward or backward. Many movements usually take place during a short time, and the number would be very large if they were to be counted for the length of just one day. However, no one appears to be aware of this fact because no one takes any heed.

Such is the order in every case, while in the case of a yogi who is always mindful of his actions and who is proceeding with contemplation, body impressions in their own respective nature are therefore distinctly noticed. They cannot help but reveal themselves fully in their own nature because he is watching until they come to full view.

Though a painful sensation arises, he keeps on noting it. He does not ordinarily attempt to change his posture or move. Then on the arising of mind wanting to change, he at once makes a note of it as "wanting, wanting," and afterwards he returns again to the painful sensation and continues his noting of it.

He changes his posture or moves only when he finds the painful feeling unbearable. In this case he also begins by noting the wanting mind and proceeds with noting carefully each stage in the process of moving.

This is why the postures can no longer hide painful sensations. Often a yogi finds painful sensations creeping from here and there or he may feel hot sensations, aching sensations, itching, or the whole body as a mass of painful sensations. That is how painful sensations are found to be predominant because the postures cannot cover them.

If he intends to change his posture from sitting to standing, he should first make a note of the intending mind as "intending, intending," and proceed with the arranging of the hands and legs in the successive stages by noting as "raising," "moving," "stretching," "touching," "pressing," and so forth.

When the body sways forward, it should be noted as "swaying, swaying."

While in the course of standing up, there occurs in the body a feeling of lightness as well as the act of rising. Attention should be fixed on these factors and a note made as "rising, rising." The act of rising should be carried out slowly.

During the course of practice it is most appropriate if a yogi acts feebly and slowly in all activities just like a weak, sick person. Perhaps the case of a person suffering from lumbago would be a more fitting example here. The patient must always be cautious and move slowly just to avoid pains.

In the same manner a yogi should always try to keep to slow movements in all actions.

Slow motion is necessary to enable mindfulness, concentration and knowledge to catch up.

One has lived all the time in a careless manner and one just begins seriously to train oneself in keeping the mind within the body.

It is only the beginning, and one's mindfulness, concentration and knowledge have not yet been properly geared up while the physical and mental processes are moving at top speed. It is thus imperative to bring the top-level speed of these processes to the lowest gear so as to make it possible for mindfulness and knowledge to keep pace with them. It is therefore desirable that slow motion exercises be carried out at all times.

Further, it is advisable for a yogi to behave like a blind person throughout the course of training. A person without any restraint will not look dignified because he usually looks at things and

persons wantonly. He also cannot obtain a steady and calm state of mind.

The blind person, on the other hand, behaves in a composed manner by sitting sedately with downcast eyes. He never turns in any direction to look at things or persons because he is blind and cannot see them. Even if a person comes near him and speaks to him, he never turns around and looks at that person. This composed manner is worthy of imitation.

A yogi should act in the same manner while carrying out the practice of contemplation. He should not look anywhere. His mind should be solely intent on the object of contemplation. While in the sitting posture he must be intently noting "rising, falling."

Even if strange things occur nearby, he should not look at them. He must simply make a note as "seeing, seeing" and then continue with the usual exercise of noting "rising, falling." A yogi should have a high regard for this exercise and

carry it out with due respect, so much so as to be mistaken for a blind person.

In this respect certain girl-yogis were found to be in perfect form. They carefully carried out the exercise with all due respect in accordance with the instructions. Their manner was very composed and they were always intent on their objects of contemplation. They never looked round. When they walked, they were always intent on the steps. Their steps were light, smooth and slow. Every yogi should follow their example.

It is necessary for a yogi to behave like a deaf person also. Ordinarily, as soon as a person hears a sound, he turns around and looks in the direction from which the sound came, or he turns towards the person who spoke to him and makes a reply. He does not behave in a sedate manner. A deaf person, on the other hand, behaves in a composed manner. He does not take heed of any sound or talk because he never hears them. Similarly, a yogi should conduct

himself in like manner without taking heed of any unimportant talk, nor should he deliberately listen to any talk or speech.

If he happens to hear any sound or speech, he should at once make a note as "hearing, hearing," and then return to the usual practice of noting "rising, falling." He should proceed with his contemplation intently, so much so as to be mistaken for a deaf person.

It should be remembered that the *only* concern of a yogi is the carrying out intently of contemplation. Other things seen or heard are not his concern. Even though they may appear to be strange or interesting, he should not take heed of them. When he sees any sights, he must ignore them as if he does not see. So too, he must ignore voices or sounds as if he does not hear. In the case of bodily actions, he must act slowly and feebly as if he were sick and very weak.

## **Other Exercises**

### **Walking**

It is therefore to be emphasized that the act of pulling up the body to the standing posture should be carried out slowly. On coming to an erect position, a note should be made as "standing, standing." If one happens to look around, a note should be made as "looking, seeing," and on walking each step should be noted as "right step, left step" or "walking, walking." At each step, attention should be fixed on the sole of the foot as it moves from the point of lifting the leg to the point of placing it down.

While walking in quick steps or taking a long walk, a note on one section of each step as "right step, left step" or "walking, walking" will do. In the case of walking slowly, each step may be divided into three sections -- lifting, moving forward and placing down. In the beginning of the exercise, a note should be made of the two

parts of each step: as "lifting" by fixing the attention on the upward movement of the foot from the beginning to the end, and as "placing" by fixing on the downward movement from the beginning to the end. Thus the exercise which starts with the first step by noting as "lifting, placing" now ends.

Normally, when the foot is put down and is being noted as "placing," the other leg begins lifting to begin the next step. This should not be allowed to happen. The next step should begin only after the first step has been completed, such as "lifting, placing" for the first step and "lifting, placing" for the second step.

After two or three days this exercise will be easy, and then the yogi should carry out the exercise of noting each step in three sections as "lifting, moving, placing."

For the present a yogi should start the exercise by noting as "right step, left step," or "walking,

walking" while walking quickly, and by noting as "lifting, placing" while walking slowly.

## **Sitting**

While one is walking, one may feel the desire to sit down. One should then make a note as "wanting." If one then happens to look up, note it as "looking, seeing, looking, seeing"; on going to the seat as "lifting, placing"; on stopping as "stopping, stopping"; on turning as "turning, turning."

When one feels a desire to sit, note it as "wanting, wanting." In the act of sitting there occur in the body heaviness and also a downward pull. Attention should be fixed on these factors and a note made as "sitting, sitting, sitting."

After having sat down, there will be movements of bringing the hands and legs into position. They should be noted as "moving," "bending,"

"stretching," and so forth. If there is nothing to do and if one is sitting quietly, one should then revert to the usual exercise of noting as "rising, falling."

## **Lying Down**

If in the course of contemplation one feels painful or tired or hot, one should make a note of these and then revert to the usual exercise of noting "rising, falling." If one feels sleepy, one should make a note of it as "sleepy, sleepy" and proceed with the noting of all acts in preparation to lie down: note the bringing into position of the hands and legs as "raising," "pressing," "moving," "supporting"; when the body sways as "swaying, swaying"; when the legs stretch as "stretching, stretching"; and when the body drops and lies flat as "lying, lying, lying."

These trifling acts in lying down are also important and they should not be neglected. There is every possibility of attaining

enlightenment during this short time. On the full development of concentration and knowledge, enlightenment is attainable during the present moment of bending or stretching. In this way the Venerable Ananda attained Arahantship at the very moment of lying down.

About the beginning of the fourth month after the Buddha's complete passing away, arrangements were made to hold the first council of bhikkhus to collectively classify, examine, confirm and recite all the teachings of the Buddha. At that time five hundred bhikkhus were chosen for this work. Of these bhikkhus, four hundred and ninety-nine were Arahants, while the Venerable Ananda was a *sotapanna*, a stream-enterer.

In order to attend the council as an Arahant on the same level with the others, he made his utmost effort to carry on with his meditation on the day prior to the opening of the council. That was on the fourth of the waning moon of the month of Savana (August).

He proceeded with mindfulness of the body and continued his walking meditation throughout the night. It might have been in the same manner as noting "right step, left step" or "walking, walking." He was thus occupied with intense contemplation of the processes of mentality and materiality in each step until dawn of the following day, but he still had not yet attained to Arahatsip.

Then the Venerable Ananda thought: "I have done my utmost. Lord Buddha has said: 'Ananda, you possess full perfections (*paramis*). Do proceed with the practice of meditation. You will surely attain Arahatsip one day.' I have tried my best, so much so that I can be counted as one of those who have done their best in meditation. What maybe the reason for my failure?"

Then he remembered: "Ah! I have been overzealous in keeping solely to the practice of walking throughout the night. There is an excess of energy and not enough concentration, which

indeed is responsible for this state of restlessness. It is now necessary to stop walking practice so as to bring energy in balance with concentration and to proceed with the contemplation in a lying position."

The Venerable Ananda then entered his room, sat down on his bed, and began to lie down. It is said that he attained Arahathship at the very moment of lying down, or rather at the moment of contemplating as "lying, lying."

This manner of attaining Arahathship has been recorded as a strange event in the Commentaries, because it is outside the four regular postures of standing, sitting, lying and walking. At the moment of his enlightenment, the Venerable Ananda could not be regarded as strictly in a standing posture because his feet were off the floor, nor could he be regarded as sitting because his body was already at an angle, being quite close to the pillow, nor could he be regarded as lying down since his head had not

yet touched the pillow and his body was not yet flat.

The Venerable Ananda was a stream-enterer and he thus had to develop the three other higher stages -- the path and fruit of once-returning, the path and fruit of nonreturning, and the path and fruit of Arahatsip in his final attainment. This took only a moment. Extreme care is therefore needed to carry on the practice of contemplation without relaxation or omission.

In the act of lying down, contemplation should therefore be carried out with due care. When a yogi feels sleepy and wants to lie down, a note should be made as "sleepy, sleepy," "wanting, wanting"; on raising the hand as "raising, raising"; on stretching as "stretching, stretching"; on touching as "touching, touching"; on pressing as "pressing, pressing"; after swaying the body and dropping it down as "lying, lying."

The act of lying down itself should be carried out very slowly. On touching the pillow it should be noted as "touching, touching." There are many places of touch all over the body but each spot need be noted only one at a time.

In the lying posture there are also many movements of the body in bringing one's arms and legs into position. These actions should be noted carefully as "raising," "stretching," "bending," "moving," and so forth. On turning the body a note should be made as "turning, turning," and when there is nothing in particular to be noted, the yogi should proceed with the usual practice of noting "rising, falling."

While one is lying on one's back or side, there is usually nothing in particular to be noted and the usual exercise of "rising, falling" should be carried out.

There may be many times when the mind wanders while one is in the lying posture. This wandering mind should be noted as "going,

going" when it goes out, as "arriving, arriving" when it reaches a place, as "planning," "reflecting," and so forth for each state in the same manner as in the contemplation while in the sitting posture. Mental states pass away on being noted once or twice. The usual exercise of noting "rising, falling" should be continued. There may also be instances of swallowing or spitting saliva, painful sensations, hot sensations, itching sensations, etc., or of bodily actions in changing positions or in moving the limbs. They should be contemplated as each occurs. (When sufficient strength in concentration is gained, it will be possible to carry on with the contemplation of each act of opening and closing the eyelids and blinking.) Afterwards, one should then return to the usual exercise when there is nothing else to be noted.

## *Sleep*

Though it is late at night and time for sleep, it is not advisable to give up the contemplation and go to sleep. Anyone who has a keen interest in contemplation must be prepared to face the risk of spending many nights without sleep.

The scriptures are emphatic on the necessity of developing the qualities of **four-factored energy** (*caturanga-viriya*) in the practice of meditation:

"In the hard struggle, one may be reduced to a mere skeleton of skin, bones and sinews when one's flesh and blood wither and dry up, but one should not give up one's efforts so long as one has not attained whatever is attainable by manly perseverance, energy and endeavor."

These instructions should be followed with a strong determination. It may be possible to keep awake if there is strong enough concentration to beat off sleep, but one will fall asleep if sleep gets the upper hand.

When one feels sleepy, one should make a note of it as "sleepy, sleepy"; when the eyelids are heavy as "heavy, heavy"; when the eyes are felt to be dazzled as "dazzled, dazzled." After contemplating in the manner indicated, one may be able to shake off sleepiness and feel fresh again.

This feeling should be noted as "feeling fresh, feeling fresh," after which the usual exercise of noting "rising, falling" should be continued. However, in spite of this determination, one may feel unable to keep awake if one is very sleepy. In a lying posture, it is easier to fall asleep. A beginner should therefore try to keep mostly to the postures of sitting and walking.

When the night is advanced, however, a yogi may be compelled to lie down and proceed with the contemplation of rising and falling. In this position he may perhaps fall asleep.

While one is asleep, it is not possible to carry on with the work of contemplation. It is an interval

for a yogi to relax. An hour's sleep will give him an hour's relaxation, and if he continues to sleep for two, three or four hours, he will be relaxed for that much longer, but it is not advisable for a yogi to sleep for more than four hours, which is ample enough for a normal sleep.

### *Waking*

A yogi should begin his contemplation from the moment of awakening. To be fully occupied with intense contemplation throughout his waking hours is the routine of a yogi who works hard with true aspiration for the attainment of the path and fruit.

If it is not possible to catch the moment of awakening, he should begin with the usual exercise of noting "rising, falling." If he first becomes aware of the fact of reflecting, he should begin his contemplation by noting "reflecting, reflecting" and then revert to the usual exercise of noting "rising, falling." If he

first becomes aware of hearing a voice or some other sound, he should begin by noting "hearing, hearing" and then revert to the usual exercise.

On awakening there may be bodily movement in turning to this side or that, moving the hands or legs and so forth. These actions should be contemplated in successive order.

If he first becomes aware of the mental states leading to the various actions of body, he should begin his contemplation by noting the mind. If he first becomes aware of painful sensations, he should begin with the noting of these painful sensations and then proceed with the noting of bodily actions. If he remains quiet without moving, the usual exercise of noting "rising, falling" should be continued. If he intends to get up, he should note this as "intending, intending" and then proceed with the noting of all actions in serial order in bringing the hands and legs into position.

One should note "raising, raising" on raising the body, "sitting, sitting" when the body is erect and in a sitting posture, and one should also note any other actions of bringing the legs and hands into position. If there is then nothing in particular to be noted, the usual exercise of noting "rising, falling" should be reverted to.

Thus far we have mentioned things relating to the objects of contemplation in connection with the four postures and changing from one posture to another. This is merely a description of the general outline of major objects of contemplation to be carried out in the course of practice. Yet in the beginning of the practice, it is difficult to follow-up on all of them in the course of contemplation. Many things will be omitted, but on gaining sufficient strength in concentration, it is easy to follow up in the course of contemplation not only those objects already enumerated, but may many more. With the gradual development of mindfulness and concentration, the pace of knowledge quickens,

and thus many more objects can be perceived. It is necessary to work up to this high level.

## **Washing and Eating**

Contemplation should be carried out in washing the face in the morning or when taking a bath. As it is necessary to act quickly in such instances due to the nature of the action itself, contemplation should be carried out as far as these circumstances will allow. On stretching the hand to catch hold of the dipper, it should be noted as "stretching, stretching"; on catching hold of the dipper as "holding, holding"; on immersing the dipper as "dipping, dipping"; on bringing the dipper towards the body as "bringing, bringing"; on pouring the water over the body or on the face as "pouring, pouring"; on feeling cold as "cold, cold"; on rubbing as "rubbing, rubbing," and so forth.

There are also many different bodily actions in changing or arranging one's clothing, in

arranging the bed or bed-sheets, in opening the door, and so on. These actions should be contemplated in detail serially as much as possible.

At the time of taking a meal, contemplation should begin from the moment of looking at the table and noted as "looking, seeing, looking, seeing"; when stretching the hand to the plate as "stretching, stretching"; when the hand touches the food as "touching, hot, hot"; when gathering the food as "gathering, gathering"; when catching hold of the food as "catching, catching"; after lifting when the hand is being brought up as "bringing, bringing"; when the neck is being bent down as "bending, bending"; when the food is being placed in the mouth as "placing, placing"; when withdrawing the hand as "withdrawing, withdrawing"; when the hand touches the plate as "touching, touching"; when the neck is being straightened as "straightening, straightening"; when chewing the food as "chewing, chewing"; while tasting the food as

"tasting, tasting," when one likes the taste as "liking, liking"; when one finds it pleasant as "pleasant, pleasant"; when swallowing as "swallowing, swallowing."

This is an illustration of the routine of contemplation on partaking of each morsel of food till the meal is finished. In this case too it is difficult to follow up on all actions at the beginning of the practice. There will be many omissions. Yogis should not hesitate, however, but must try to follow up as much as they can. With the gradual advancement of the practice, it will be easier to note many more objects than are mentioned here.

The instructions for the practical exercise of contemplation are now almost complete. As they have been explained in detail and at some length, it will not be easy to remember all of them. For the sake of easy remembrance, a short summary of the important and essential points will be given.

## **Summary of Essential Points**

In walking, a yogi should contemplate the movements of each step. While one is walking briskly, each step should be noted as "right step, left step" respectively. The mind should be fixed intently on the sole of the foot in the movements of each step. While one is in the course of walking slowly, each step should be noted in two parts as "lifting, placing."

While one is in a sitting posture, the usual exercise of contemplation should be carried out by noting the movements of the abdomen as "rising, falling, rising, falling." The same manner of contemplation by noting the movements as "rising, falling, rising, falling" should be carried out while one is also in the lying posture.

If it is found that the mind wanders during the course of noting "rising, falling," it should not be allowed to continue to wander but should be

noted immediately. On imagining, it should be noted as "imagining, imagining"; on thinking as "thinking, thinking"; on the mind going out as "going, going"; on the mind arriving at a place as "arriving, arriving," and so forth at every occurrence, and then the usual exercise of noting "rising, falling" should be continued.

When there occur feelings of tiredness in the hands, legs or other limbs, or hot, prickly, aching or itching sensations, they should be immediately followed up and noted as "tired," "hot," "prickly," "aching," "itching," and so on as the case may be. A return should then be made to the usual exercise of noting "rising, falling."

When there are acts of bending or stretching the hands or legs, or moving the neck or limbs or swaying the body to and fro, they should be followed up and noted in serial order as they occur. The usual exercise of noting as "rising, falling" should then be reverted to.

This is only a summary. Any other objects to be contemplated in the course of training will be mentioned by the meditation teachers when giving instructions during the daily interview with the disciples.

If one proceeds with the practice in the manner indicated, the number of objects will gradually increase in the course of time.

At first there will be many omissions because the mind is used to wandering without any restraint whatsoever.

However, a yogi should not lose heart on this account. This difficulty is usually encountered in the beginning of practice. After some time, the mind can no longer play truant because it is always found out every time it wanders. It therefore remains fixed on the object to which it is directed.

As rising occurs, the mind makes a note of it, and, thus, the object and the mind coincide. As

falling occurs, the mind makes a note of it, and, thus, the object and the mind coincide.

There is always a pair, the object and the mind which knows the object, at each time of noting. These two elements of the material object and the knowing mind always arise in pairs, and apart from these two there does not exist any other thing in the form of a person or self. This reality will be personally realized in due course.

The fact that materiality and mentality are two distinct, separate things will be clearly perceived during the time of noting "rising, falling."

The two elements of materiality and mentality are linked up in pairs and their arising coincides, that is, the process of materiality in rising arises with the process of mentality which knows it.

The process of materiality in falling falls away together with the process of mentality which knows it.

It is the same for lifting, moving and placing: these are processes of materiality arising and falling away together with the processes of mentality which know them. This knowledge in respect of matter and mind rising separately is known as *nama-rupa-pariccheda-ñāna*, the discriminating knowledge of mentality-materiality. It is the preliminary stage in the whole course of insight knowledge. It is important to have this preliminary stage developed in a proper manner.

On continuing the practice of contemplation for some time, there will be considerable progress in mindfulness and concentration. At this high level it will be perceptible that on every occasion of noting, each process arises and passes away at that very moment.

But, on the other hand, uninstructed people generally consider that the body and mind remain in a permanent state throughout life, that the same body of childhood has grown up into adulthood, that the same young mind has grown

up into maturity, and that both body and mind are one and the same person.

In reality, this is not so. Nothing is permanent.

Everything comes into existence for a moment and then passes away. Nothing can remain even for the blink of an eye. Changes are taking place very swiftly and they will be perceived in due course.

While carrying on the contemplation by noting "rising, falling" and so forth, one will perceive that these processes arise and pass away one after another in quick succession. On perceiving that everything passes away at the very point of noting, a yogi knows that nothing is permanent. This knowledge regarding the impermanent nature of things is *aniccanupassana-ñāna*, the contemplative knowledge of impermanence.

A yogi then knows that this ever-changing state of things is distressing and is not to be desired. This is *dukkhanupassana-ñāna*, the contemplative knowledge of suffering. On

suffering many painful feelings, this body and mind complex is regarded as a mere heap of suffering. This is also contemplative knowledge of suffering.

It is then perceived that the elements of materiality and mentality never follow one's wish, but arise according to their own nature and conditioning. While being engaged in the act of noting these processes, a yogi understands that these processes are not controllable and that they are neither a person nor a living entity nor self. This is *anattanupassana-ñāna*, the contemplative knowledge of non-self.

When a yogi has fully developed the knowledge of impermanence, suffering and non-self, he will realize Nibbana. From time immemorial, Buddhas, Arahats and Ariyas (noble ones) have realized Nibbana by this method of vipassana. It is the highway leading to Nibbana. Vipassana consists of the four *satipatthana*, applications of mindfulness, and it is *satipatthana* which is really the highway to Nibbana.

Yogis who take up this course of training should bear in mind that they are on the highway which has been taken by Buddhas, Arahats and Ariyas.

This opportunity is afforded them apparently because of their *parami*, that is, their previous endeavors in seeking and wishing for it, and also because of their present mature conditions.

They should rejoice at heart for having this opportunity.

They should also feel assured that by walking on this highway without wavering they will gain personal experience of highly developed concentration and wisdom, as has already been known by Buddhas, Arahats and Ariyas.

They will develop such a pure state of concentration as has never been known before in the course of their lives and thus enjoy many innocent pleasures as a result of advanced concentration.

Impermanence, suffering and non-self will be realized through direct personal experience, and with the full development of these knowledges, Nibbana will be realized. It will not take long to achieve the objective, possibly one month, or twenty days, or fifteen days, or, on rare occasions, even in seven days for those select few with extraordinary *parami*.

Yogis should therefore proceed with the practice of contemplation in great earnestness and with full confidence, trusting that it will surely lead to the development of the noble path and fruit and to the realization of Nibbana.

They will then be free from the wrong view of self and from spiritual doubt, and they will no longer be subject to the round of rebirth in the miserable realms of the hells, the animal world, and the sphere of petas.

May yogis meet with every success in their noble endeavor.

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## **About the Author**

The Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw, U Sobhana Mahathera, was one of the most eminent meditation masters of modern times and a leader in the contemporary resurgence of Vipassana meditation. Born near Shwebo town in Burma in 1904, he was ordained a novice monk at the age of twelve and received full ordination as a bhikkhu at the age of twenty. He quickly distinguished himself as a scholar of the Buddhist scriptures and by his fifth year after full ordination was himself teaching the scriptures at a monastery in Moulmein.

In the eighth year after ordination he left Moulmein seeking a clear and effective method in the practice of meditation. At Thaton he met the well-known meditation instructor, the Venerable U Narada, also known as the Mingun Jetawun Sayadaw. He then placed himself under the guidance of the Sayadaw and underwent intensive training in Vipassana meditation.

In 1941 he returned to his native village and introduced the systematic practice of Vipassana meditation to the area. Many people, monks as well as laymen, took up the practice and greatly benefited by his careful instructions.

In 1949 the then Prime Minister of Burma, U Nu, and Sir U Thwin, executive members of the Buddha Sasananuggaha Association, invited Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw to come to Rangoon to give training in meditation practice. He acceded to their request and took up residence at the Thathana Yeiktha Meditation Centre, where he continued to conduct intensive courses in Vipassana meditation until his death in 1982.

Under his guidance thousands of people have been trained at his Centre and many more have benefited from his clear-cut approach to meditation practice through his writings and the teachings of his disciples. More than a hundred branch centers of the Thathana Yeiktha Centre have been established in Burma and his method

has spread widely to other countries, East and West.

Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw also holds Burma's highest scholastic honor, the title of Agga Mahapandita, awarded to him in 1952. During the Sixth Buddhist Council, held in Rangoon from 1954 to 1956, he performed the duties of Questioner (*pucchaka*), a role performed at the First Buddhist Council by the Venerable Mahakassapa. Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw was also a member of the executive committee that was responsible, as the final authority, for the codification of all the texts edited at the Council.

Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw is the author of numerous works on both meditation and the Buddhist scriptures in his native Burmese. His discourses on Buddhist suttas have been translated into English and are published by the Buddha Sasananuggaha Association (16 Hermitage Road, Kokine, Rangoon, Burma.)

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**[Thus ends this text]**

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The following book, also by Mahasi Sayadaw, will help broaden the scope of our understanding of the process and detailed practice of mindfulness concentration based on the principles outlined in the Satipatthana Sutta:

**The Progress of Insight**

# **A Modern Treatise on Buddhist Satipatthana Meditation**

by

**The Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw**

Translated from the Pali with Notes by

**Nyanaponika Thera**

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## **Translator's Foreword by Venerable Nyanaponika**

To present to the reading public a treatise on Buddhist meditation needs no word of apology today. In wide circles of the West, Buddhist meditation is no longer regarded as a matter of purely academic or exotic interest. Under the stress and complexity of modern life the need for mental and spiritual regeneration is now widely felt, and, in the field of the mind's methodical development the value of Buddhist meditation has been recognized and tested by many.

It is, in particular, the Buddha's Way of Mindfulness (*satipatthana*) that has been found invaluable because it is adaptable to, and beneficial in, widely different conditions of life.

The present treatise is based on this method of cultivating mindfulness and awareness, which ultimately aims at the mind's final liberation from greed, hatred, and delusion.

The author of this treatise, the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw (U Sobhana Mahathera), is a Buddhist monk of contemporary Burma and an eminent meditation master. A brief sketch of his life is included in this volume.

The path of meditation described in these pages was, and still is, taught by him in his meditation center called Thathana Yeiktha, in Rangoon, and is also set forth in his lectures and books in the Burmese language.

The framework of the treatise is provided by the classical "seven stages of purification" (*satta-visuddhi*), like in Acariya Buddhaghosa's famous *Visuddhimagga*.

On gradually reaching these stages, various phases of insight knowledge (*ñāna*) are

developed, leading on to the stages of ultimate liberation.

The approach followed is that of "bare insight" (*sukkha-vipassana*) where, by direct observation, one's own bodily and mental processes are seen with increasing clarity as being impermanent, liable to suffering, and without a self or soul.

The meditational practice begins with a few selected subjects of body-contemplation, which are retained up to the very end of the road.

With the gradually increasing strength of mindfulness and concentration the range widens and the vision deepens until the insight knowledges unfold themselves in due order, as a natural outcome of the practice.

This approach to the ultimate goal of Buddhist meditation is called *bare insight* because insight into the three characteristics of existence is made use of exclusively here, dispensing with

the prior development of full concentrative absorption (*jhana*).

Nevertheless, and it hardly needs mention, here as well a high degree of mental concentration is required for perseverance in the practice, for attaining to insight knowledge, and for reaping its fruits.

As stated in the treatise itself (p.5), it is not the author's purpose to give a detailed introduction to the practice for the use of beginners.

The foremost concern in this work is with a stage where, after diligent preliminary practice, the insight knowledges have begun to emerge, leading up to the highest crest of spiritual achievement, arahantship.

Of the basic exercises, the treatise gives only a brief indication, at the beginning of Chapter I. Detailed instruction about these may be gathered by the student from the author's *Practical Insight Meditation* or the translator's book *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*. Also

knowledge of the Buddha's original "Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness" (Satipatthana Sutta) will be indispensable.

This treatise was first written in the Burmese language and later, in 1950, a Pali version of it was composed by the author. As the treatise deals chiefly with the advanced stages of the practice, it was originally not intended for publication.

Handwritten or typed copies of the Burmese or Pali version were given only to those who, with some measure of success, had concluded a strict course of practice at the meditation center.

For the use of meditators from foreign countries, only a few cyclostyled sheets in English, briefly describing the phases of insight knowledge, were issued instead of the treatise itself.

This was done to enable the meditator to identify his personal experience with one or other of the stages described, so that he might direct his further progress accordingly, without

being diverted or misled by any secondary phenomena that may have appeared during his practice.

In 1954 the Venerable Author agreed to a printed edition of the Pali version in Burmese script, and after this first publication he also permitted, at the translator's request, the issue of an English version.

He had the great kindness to go carefully through the draft translation and the Notes, with the linguistic help of an experienced Burmese lay meditator, U Pe Thin, who for many years had ably served as an interpreter for meditators from foreign countries. The translator's gratitude is due to both his Venerable Meditation Master, the author, and to U Pe Thin.

Nyanaponika Thera

Forest Hermitage

Kandy, Ceylon,

On the Full-moon Day of June (Poson) 1965.

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## Introduction

*Homage to the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the Fully Enlightened One*

Homage to Him, the Great Omniscient Sage,  
Who spread the net of rays of His Good Law!  
These rays of His Good Law -- His very  
message true -- Long may they shed their  
radiance o'er the world!

This treatise explains the progress of insight,[[1](#)] together with the corresponding stages of purification.[[2](#)] It has been written in brief for the benefit of meditators who have obtained distinctive results in their practice, so that they may more easily understand their experience.

It is meant for those who, in their practice of insight, have taken up as their main subject either the tactile bodily process of motion,[[3](#)] evident in the rising and falling movement of the abdomen,[[4](#)] or the tactile bodily process based on three of the primary elements of

matter[5] evident in the sensation of touch (bodily impact).

It is meant for those who, by attending to these exercises, have gained progressive insight as well into the whole body-and-mind process arising at the six sense doors,[6] and have finally come to see the Dhamma, to attain to the Dhamma, to understand the Dhamma, to penetrate the Dhamma, who have passed beyond doubt, freed themselves from uncertainty, obtained assurance, and achieved independence of others in the Master's dispensation.[7]

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## **I. Purification of Conduct**

Purification of conduct means here, in the case of male and female devotees (*upasakas* and *upasikas*), the acceptance of the precepts, and the proper guarding and protecting of their observance -- whether it be the Five Precepts,

the Eight Uposatha Precepts, or the Ten Precepts.[8]

In the case of bhikkhus, purification of conduct is the well-kept purity of the fourfold conduct incumbent upon monks, beginning with restraint according to the disciplinary rules of bhikkhus, called the Patimokkha. Of that fourfold conduct, the restraint according to the Patimokkha rules is of first importance, because only when that restraint is pure will one be able to accomplish the development of meditation.[9]

## **The Method of Insight in Brief**

There are two kinds of meditation development, tranquility (*samatha*) and insight (*vipassana*). A person who, of these two, has first developed tranquility, and after having established himself in either access concentration or full concentration,[10] subsequently contemplates the five groups of grasping,[11] is called a

*samatha-yanika*, "one who has tranquility as his vehicle."

As to his method of attaining insight, the *Papañcasudani*, commenting on the Dhammadaya Sutta of the Majjhima Nikaya, says:

"Herein, a certain person first produces access concentration or full concentration; this is tranquility. He then applies insight to that concentration and to the mental states associated with it, seeing them as impermanent, etc.; this is insight."

In the *Visuddhimagga*, too, it is said: "He whose vehicle is tranquility should first emerge from any fine-material or immaterial jhana, except the base consisting of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, and he should then discern, according to characteristic, function, etc., the jhana factors consisting of applied thought, etc., and the mental states associated with them" (*Path of Purification*, XVIII,3).

He, however, who has neither produced access concentration nor full concentration, but from the very start applies insight to the five groups of grasping, is called *suddha-vipassana-yanika*,[\[12\]](#) "one who has pure insight as his vehicle."

As to his method of attaining insight it is said in the same Commentary to the Dhammadayada Sutta:

"There is another person, who even without having produced the aforesaid tranquility, applies insight to the five groups of grasping, seeing them as impermanent, etc." In the *Visuddhimagga*, too, it is said thus: "One who has pure insight as his vehicle contemplates the four elements."

In the *Susima-paribbajaka Sutta* of the *Nidanavagga Samyutta*, too, it is said by the Buddha: "First arises the knowledge comprehending the actual happening of things

(*dhammatthiti-ñāna*) and afterwards arises the knowledge realizing Nibbana (*nibbane ñāna*)."

When purification of conduct has been established, the meditator who has chosen pure insight as his vehicle should endeavor to contemplate the *body-and-mind* (*nama-rupa*). In doing so, he should contemplate, according to their characteristics,[\[13\]](#) the five groups of grasping, that is, the bodily and mental processes that become evident to him in his own life-continuity (at his own six sense doors).[\[14\]](#)

Insight must, in fact, be developed by noticing,[\[15\]](#) according to their specific and general characteristics,[\[16\]](#) the bodily and mental processes that become evident at the six sense doors.

At the beginning, however, it is difficult to follow and to notice clearly all bodily and mental processes that incessantly appear at the six sense doors.

Therefore the meditator who is a beginner should first notice the perfectly distinct process of touch, perceived through the door of bodily sensitivity; because the *Visuddhimagga* says that in insight meditation one should take up what is distinct.

When sitting, there occurs the bodily process of touch by way of the sitting posture and through touch sensitivity in the body. These processes of tactile sensitivity should be noticed as "Sitting \_ touching \_," and so forth, in due succession. Further, at the seated meditator's abdomen, the tactile process of bodily motion (that is, the wind, or vibratory, element) which has breathing as its condition, is perceptible continuously as the rise (expansion) and fall (contraction) of the abdomen.

That too should be noticed as "rising, falling," and so forth.

While the meditator is thus engaged in noticing the element of motion which impinges

continuously on the door of bodily sensitivity in the abdomen, it becomes evident to him in its aspects of stiffening, of vibrating, and of pushing and pulling. Here, the aspect of stiffening shows the motion element's *characteristic nature* of supporting; the aspect of vibrating shows its *essential function* of movement; and the aspect of pushing and pulling shows its *manifestation* of impelling.[17]

Hence the meditator, noticing the tactile bodily process of rise and fall of the abdomen, accomplishes the observation of the *bodily process (rupa)*, by getting to know the characteristic nature, etc., of the element of motion.

Later when he has accomplished the observation of mind (*nama*) and the observation of both *body and mind (nama-rupa)*, he will also come to know the *general* characteristics of the processes concerned -- their impermanence,

liability to suffering, and their being void of a self.

But while he is engaged in just noticing the rising and falling of the abdomen and other tactile processes, there will appear thoughts of desire, etc., feelings of pleasure, etc., or acts such as adjusting various parts of the body.

At that time, these activities (of mind and body) must be noticed, too. After noticing them, he should turn again to the continuous noticing of the tactile process of the rising and falling of the abdomen, which is the basic object of mindfulness in this practice.

This is a brief sketch of the methodical practice of insight. It is not the place here to treat it in detail, because this is a brief essay on the progress of insight through the stages of purification; it is not a treatise explaining in detail the methodical practice of insight.

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## **II. The Purification of Mind**

During the early part of the methodical practice, as long as the meditator's mind is not yet fully-purified, wandering thoughts arisen by his thinking of objects of sense desire, etc., will also appear intermittently between thoughts of noticing (of the objects of meditation).

Sometimes the beginning meditator will perceive occurrence (of these interruptions) and sometimes he will not. But even if he perceives them, it will be only after a short time has elapsed after their appearance.

For then the momentary concentration of his mind is still very tender and weak. So these wandering thoughts continue to hinder his mind while it is occupied in developing the practice of noticing. Hence, these wandering thoughts are called "hindering thoughts."

When, however, the momentary concentration of his mind has become strong, the thought process of noticing becomes well-concentrated.

Hence, when attending to the objects to be noticed -- the abdominal movement, sitting, touching, bending, stretching, seeing, hearing, etc. -- his noticing thoughts now appear as if falling upon these objects, as if striking at them, as if confronting them again and again.

Then, as a rule, his mind will no longer go elsewhere. Only occasionally, and in a slight degree, will this happen, and even in those cases he will be able to notice any such stray thought at its very arising, as expressed in common speech; or, to be exact, he will notice the stray thought immediately after its actual arising.

Then that stray thought will subside as soon as it is noticed and will not arise again. Immediately afterwards he will also be able to resume continuous noticing of any object as it becomes evident to him. That is why his mind at that time is called "unhindered."

While the meditator is thus practicing the exercise of noticing with unhindered mind, the

noticing mind will close-in upon and fix-on whatever object is being noticed, and the act of noticing will proceed without break.

At that time there arises in him in uninterrupted succession "the concentration of mind lasting for a moment," directed to each object noticed. This is called *purification of mind*.[\[18\]](#)

Though that concentration has only momentary duration, its power of resistance to being overwhelmed by opposition corresponds to that of access concentration.

In the Commentary to the *Visuddhimagga*, in the explanation of the chapter relating to mindfulness of breathing, it is said thus:

‘Momentary unification of mind’ means the concentration of mind lasting only for a moment. For that (type of concentration), too, when it occurs uninterruptedly with its respective object in a single mode and is not overcome by opposition, fixes the mind immovably, as if in absorption.”

"It occurs uninterruptedly with its respective object" refers to the uninterrupted continuity of the thoughts engaged in noticing; after noticing one object, one attends, in the same manner, to another that follows immediately;[\[19\]](#) again, having noticed that object, one turns to the next one, and so on.

"In a single mode" means: though the objects to be noticed, as they present themselves, are numerous and varied, yet the force of concentration of the mind uninterruptedly engaged in noticing remains virtually on the same level.

For what is meant here is: just as the first object was noticed with a certain degree of concentration, so the second, third, and other subsequent objects are noticed in each case with the same degree of concentration.

"Is not overcome by opposition": this means that the momentary concentration in its

uninterrupted flow is not overwhelmed by the mental hindrances.[[20](#)]

"As if in absorption": this means that the strength of the momentary concentration is similar to that of concentration which has reached full mental absorption. However, such similarity of momentary concentration with fully absorbed concentration will become evident (only) when the methodical practice of insight reaches its culmination.[[21](#)]

But is it not said in the Commentaries that the term "purification of mind" applies only to access concentration and fully absorbed concentration? That is true; but one has to take this statement in the sense that momentary concentration is included in access concentration.

For in the Commentary to the Satipatthana Sutta it is said:

"The remaining twelve exercises are subjects of meditation leading only to Access Concentration."[\[22\]](#)

Now, in the case of the subjects dealt with in the sections of the Satipatthana Sutta on postures, clear comprehension and elements, the concentration of one who devotes himself to these exercises will be definitely only momentary concentration.

But as the latter is able to suppress the hindrances just as access concentration does,[\[23\]](#) and since it is in the neighbourhood of the noble path attainment concentration,[\[24\]](#) therefore that same momentary concentration is spoken of by the name of "access" (or "neighbourhood") and also the meditation subjects that produce that momentary concentration are called "meditation subjects leading to access concentration."

Hence it should be understood that momentary concentration, having the capacity to suppress

the hindrances, has also the right to the name "access" and "purification of mind." Otherwise purification of mind could not come about in one who has made bare insight his vehicle by employing only insight, without having produced either access concentration or fully absorbed concentration.

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### **III. Purification of View**

#### **1. Analytical Knowledge of Body and Mind**

Endowed with purification of mind and continuing the practice of noticing, the meditator now comes to know body-and-mind analytically as follows: "The rising (upward movement) of the abdomen is one process; the falling (downward movement) is another; sitting is another; touching is another," etc.

In this way he comes to know how to distinguish each bodily process that he notices. Further he realizes:

"The knowing of the rising movement is one process; the knowing of the falling movement is another."

In that way he comes to know each mental act of noticing. Further he realizes:

"The rising movement is one process; the knowing of it is another. The falling movement is one process; the knowing of it is another," and so on.

In that way he comes to know how to distinguish each bodily and mental process. All that knowledge comes from simply noticing, not from reasoning; that is to say, it is knowledge by-direct-experience arrived at by the mere act of noticing, and not through knowledge derived from ratiocination.

Thus, when seeing a visual object with the eye, the meditator knows how to distinguish each single factor involved:

"The eye is one; the visual object is another; seeing is another, and knowing it is another."

The same manner applies in the case of the other sense functions.

For at the time, in each act of noticing, the meditator comes to know analytically the mental processes of noticing, and those of thinking and reflecting, knowing them for himself through direct knowledge by his experience thus:

"They have the nature of going towards an object, inclining towards an object, cognizing an object."

On the other hand, he knows analytically the material processes going on in the whole body -- which are here described as "the rising and falling movements of the abdomen," "sitting," etc., knowing them thus:

"These have *not* the nature of going or inclining towards an object, or of cognizing an object."

Such knowing is called "knowing matter (or the body) by its manifestation of non-determining."

For it is said in the *Mula-Tika*, the "Principal Sub-commentary" to the *Abhidhamma Vibhanga*:

"In other words, 'non-determining' (as in the passage quoted) should be understood as having no faculty of cognizing an object."

Such knowledge as this, which analyzes in each act of noticing both the bodily process noticed and the mental process engaged in noticing, according to their true essential nature, is called "analytical knowledge of body and mind."

When that knowledge has come to maturity, the meditator understands thus:

"At the moment of breathing in, there is just the rising movement of the abdomen and the knowing of the movement, but there is no self

besides; at the moment of breathing out, there is just the falling movement of the abdomen and the knowing of the movement, but there is no self besides."

Understanding it thus in these and other instances, he knows and sees for himself by noticing thus:

"There is here only that pair: a material process as object, and a mental process of knowing it; and it is to that pair alone that the terms of conventional usage 'being,' 'person' or 'soul,' 'I' or 'another,' 'man' or 'woman' refer. But apart from that dual process there is no separate person or being, I or another, man or woman."

This is called *purification of view*.

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## **IV. Purification by Overcoming Doubt**

### **2. Knowledge by Discerning Conditionality**

When purification of view has come to maturity, the conditions necessary for the bodily and mental processes observed will also become evident.

Firstly, the consciousness that is the condition of the (respective) bodily process will be evident. How? For instance, when bending the arms or legs, the consciousness intending to bend these limbs is evident. So the meditator first notices that consciousness, and next he notices the act of bending, and so on. Then he understands by direct experience:

"When there is consciousness intending to bend a limb, the bodily process of bending arises; when there is consciousness intending to stretch a limb, the bodily process of stretching arises."

And in the same way he understands other instances too by direct experience.

Again, he also understands by direct experience the condition for the mental process, in the following manner:

"In the case of consciousness desirous of running-off the track, there arises first a corresponding consciousness giving initial attention (to the distracting object).

If that consciousness is not noticed (with mindfulness), then there arises a consciousness that runs off the track.

But if the consciousness of initial attention to the distracting object is noticed and known, no stray thought will arise.

It is similar in the case of other (types of consciousness, for instance when taking delight or being angry, greedy, etc.).

When both the sense door of the eye and a visual object are present, there arises visual consciousness; otherwise visual consciousness will not arise; and so it is in the case of the other sense doors. If there is a noticeable or recognizable object, then there arises consciousness engaged in noticing or thinking or reasoning or understanding, as the case may

be; otherwise no such consciousness arises. Similarly he understands what occurs in every other instance (of mind-door cognition).

At that time, the meditator will generally experience many different painful feelings arising in his body.

Now, while one of these feelings is being noticed (but without concern), another feeling will arise elsewhere; and while that is being noticed, again another will appear elsewhere.

Thus the meditator follows each feeling as it arises and notices it. But though he is engaged in noticing these feelings as they arise, he will only perceive their initial phase of "arising" and not their final phase of "dissolution."

Also many mental images of various shapes will then appear. The shape of a dagoba, a monk, a man, a house, a tree, a park, a heavenly mansion, a cloud, and many other such images will appear.

Here, too, while the meditator is still engaged in noticing one of these mental images, another will show itself; while still noticing that, yet another will appear.

Following thus the mental images as they arise, he goes on noticing them. But though he is engaged in noticing them, he will perceive only their initial phase, not the final phase.

He now understands: "Consciousness arises in accordance with each object that becomes evident. If there is an object, there arises consciousness; if there is no object, no consciousness arises."

Between sequences of noticing he also, by considering inferentially, comes to know thus: "It is due to the presence of such causes and conditions as ignorance, craving, kamma, etc., that body-and-mind continue."

Such discernment through direct experience and through inference as described, when noticing

body-and-mind with their conditions, is called "knowledge of discerning conditionality."

When that knowledge has come to maturity, the meditator perceives only body-and-mind processes occurring in strict accordance with their particular and appropriate conditions and he comes to the conclusion:

"Here is only a conditioning body-and-mind process and a conditioned body-and-mind process.

Apart from these, there is no person who performs the bending of the limbs, etc., or who experiences feelings of pain, etc."

This is called *purification (of insight) by overcoming doubt*.

### **3. Knowledge of Comprehension**

When this "purification (of insight) by overcoming doubt" has reached maturity, the

meditator will discern distinctly the initial, middle, and final phases of any object noticed by him.

Then, in the case of various objects noticed, he will discern distinctly that only after each earlier process has ceased, does there arise a subsequent process.

For instance, only when the rising movement of the abdomen has come to an end, does there arise the falling movement; only when that has ended, is there again a rising movement.

So also in the case of walking: only when the lifting of the foot has come to an end, does there arise the carrying forward of the foot; only when that has been completed, does there follow the placing of the foot on the ground.

In the case of painful feelings, only after each single feeling occurring at its particular place has ceased, will another new feeling arise at another place. On noticing the respective painful feeling repeatedly, twice, thrice or more, the

meditator will see that it gradually grows less, and at last ceases entirely.

In the case of the variously shaped images that enter the mind's field, it is only after each single image noticed has vanished, that another new object will come into the mind's focus.

On noticing them attentively twice, thrice or more, he will see well that these mental objects which are being noticed move from one place to another, or they become gradually smaller and less distinct, until at last they disappear entirely.

The meditator, however, does not perceive anything that is permanent and lasting, or free from destruction and disappearance.

Seeing how each object, even while being noticed, comes to destruction and disappearance, the meditator comprehends it as *impermanent* in the sense of undergoing destruction. He further comprehends it as *suffering* (painful) in the sense of breaking up after each arising.

Having seen how various painful feelings arise in continuous succession -- how if one painful feeling ceases, another arises, and how when that has ceased, again another arises -- having seen that, he comprehends the respective objects as just a conglomeration of suffering.

Further, he comprehends the object as consisting of mere *impersonal* phenomena without a master, in the sense of not arising of (or by) themselves, but arising subject to conditions and then breaking up.

This comprehension of an object noticed, as being impermanent, painful, and without a self (impersonal), through knowing its nature of impermanency, etc., by means of simply noticing, without reflecting and reasoning, is called "knowledge by comprehension through direct experience."

Having thus seen the three characteristics once or several times by direct experience, the meditator, by inference from the direct

experience of those objects noticed, comprehends all bodily and mental processes of the past, present, and future, and the whole world, by coming to the conclusion:

"They, too, are in the same way impermanent, painful, and without a self." This is called "knowledge of comprehension by inference."

Alluding to this very knowledge, it is said in the *Patisambhidamagga*:

"Whatever there is of materiality, past, present or future, internal or external, coarse or fine, inferior or superior, far or near, all materiality he defines as impermanent. That is one kind of comprehension," and so on.

Also in the Commentary to the *Kathavatthu* it is said:

"Even if the impermanence of only a single formation (conditioned phenomenon) is known, there may be consideration of the rest by

induction thus: 'All formations are impermanent.'

The words "All formations are impermanent" refer to an understanding by induction, and not to an understanding by perceiving a (co-present) object at the same moment. (This passage is the authority for the usage of the term "inductive insight.")

Also in the Commentary to the Majjhima Nikaya[[25](#)] it is said: "Because in the case of the realm of neither-perception-nor-non-perception, the insight into the sequence of mental factors belongs to the Buddhas alone and not to the disciples, he (the Buddha) said thus thereby indicating the insight by groups." (This passage is the authority for the usage of the term "comprehension by groups.")[[26](#)]

#### **4. Knowledge of Arising and Passing Away: The Ten Corruptions of Insight[[27](#)]**

When the meditator, in the exercise of noticing, is able to keep exclusively to the present body-and-mind process, without looking back to past processes or ahead to future ones, then, as a result of insight, (the mental vision of) a *brilliant light* will appear to him.

To one it will appear like the light of a lamp, to others like a flash of lightning, or like the radiance of the moon or the sun, and so on. With one it may last for just one moment, with others it may last longer.

There will also arise in him strong *mindfulness* pertaining to insight. As a result, all the successive arisings of bodily and mental processes will present themselves to the consciousness engaged in noticing, as if coming to it of themselves; and mindfulness too seems as if alighting on the processes of itself. Therefore the meditator then believes: "There is no body-and-mind process in which mindfulness fails to engage."

His *knowledge* consisting in insight, here called "noticing," will be likewise keen, strong, and lucid.

Consequently, he will discern clearly and in separate forms all the bodily and mental processes noticed, as if cutting to pieces a bamboo sprout with a well-sharpened knife. Therefore the meditator then believes:

"There is no body-and-mind process that cannot be noticed."

When examining the characteristics of impermanence, etc., or other aspects of reality, he understands everything quite clearly and at once, and he believes it to be the knowledge derived from direct experience.

Further, strong *faith* pertaining to insight arises in him. Under its influence, the meditator's mind, when engaged in noticing or thinking, is serene and without any disturbance.

And when he is engaged in recollecting the virtues of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha, his mind quite easily gives itself over to them. There arise in him the wish to proclaim the Buddha's Teaching, joyous confidence in the virtues of those engaged in meditation, the desire to advise dear friends and relatives to practice meditation, grateful remembrance of the help received from his meditation master, his spiritual mentor, etc. These and many other similar mental processes will occur.

There arises also *rapture* in its five grades, beginning with minor rapture.[\[28\]](#)

When purification of mind is gained, that rapture begins to appear by causing "goose-flesh," tremor in the limbs, etc.; and now it produces a sublime feeling of happiness and exhilaration, filling the whole body with an exceedingly sweet and subtle thrill. Under its influence, he feels as if the whole body had risen-up and remained in the air without touching the ground, or as if it were seated on

an air cushion, or as if it were floating up and down.

There arises *tranquility* of mind with the characteristic of quietening the disturbances of consciousness and its mental concomitants; and along with it appear mental agility, etc.[[29](#)]

When walking, standing, sitting, or reclining there is, under the influence of these mental qualities, no disturbance of consciousness and of its mental concomitants, nor heaviness, rigidity, unwieldiness, sickness, or crookedness.[[30](#)]

Rather, his consciousness and its mental concomitants are tranquil through having reached the supreme relief in non-action.[[31](#)]

They are agile in always functioning swiftly; they are pliant in being able to attend to any object desired; they are wieldy, in being able to attend to an object for any length of time desired; they are quite lucid through their proficiency, that is, through the ease with which

insight penetrates the object; they are also straight through being directed, inclined, and turned only towards wholesome activities.

There also arises a very sublime feeling of *happiness* suffusing all his body. Under its influence he becomes exceedingly joyous and he believes:

"Now I am happy all the time," or "Now, indeed, I have found happiness never felt before," and he wants to tell others of his extraordinary experience. With reference to that rapture and happiness, which are aided by the factors of tranquility, etc., it was said:

Superhuman is the bliss of a monk  
Who, with mind at peace,  
Having entered a secluded place,  
Wins insight into Dhamma.  
When he fully comprehends  
The five groups' rise and fall,

He wins to rapture and to joy --  
The Deathless this, for those who understand.

*Dhammapada* vv. 373-374

There arises in him *energy* that is neither too lax nor too tense but is vigorous and acts evenly.

For, formerly, his energy was sometimes lax, and so he was overpowered by sloth and torpor; hence he could not notice keenly and continuously the objects as they became evident, and his understanding, too, was not clear.

And at other times his energy was too tense, and so he was overpowered by agitation, with the same result of being unable to notice keenly, etc. But now his energy is neither too lax nor too tense, but is vigorous and acts evenly; and so, overcoming these shortcomings of sloth, torpor, and agitation, he is able to notice the

objects present keenly and continuously, and his understanding is quite clear, too.

There also arises in him strong *equanimity* associated with insight, which is neutral towards all formations.

Under its influence he regards with neutrality even his examination of the nature of these formations with respect to their being impermanent, etc.; and he is able to notice keenly and continuously the bodily and mental processes arising at the time.

Then his activity of noticing is carried on without effort, and proceeds, as it were, of itself. Also in adverting to the objects, there arises in him strong equanimity, by virtue of which his mind enters, as it were, quickly into the objects of advertence.[\[32\]](#)

There arises further a subtle *attachment* of a calm nature that enjoys the insight graced with the "brilliant light" and the other qualities here described. The meditator, however, is not able

to discern it as a corruption but believes it to be just the very bliss of meditation. So meditators speak in praise of it thus: "Only now do I find full delight in meditation!"

Having felt such rapture and happiness accompanied by the "brilliant light" and enjoying the very act of perfect noticing, which is ably functioning with ease and rapidity, the meditator now believes:

"Surely I must have attained to the supramundane path and fruition![\[33\]](#) Now I have finished the task of meditation."

This is mistaking what is not the path for the path, and it is a corruption of insight which usually takes place in the manner just described.

But even if the meditator does not take the "brilliant light" and the other corruptions as an indication of the path and fruition, still he feels delight in them.

This is likewise a corruption of insight.

Therefore, the knowledge consisting in noticing, even if quick in its functioning, is called "the early stage of (or 'weak') knowledge of arising and passing away," if it is beset and corrupted by those corruptions.

For the same reason the meditator is at that time not in a position to discern quite distinctly the arising and passing away of bodily and mental processes.

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## **V. Purification by Knowledge and Vision Of What is Path and Not-path**

While engaged in noticing, the meditator either by himself or through instructions from someone else, comes to this decision:

"The brilliant light, and the other things experienced by me, are not the path. Delight in them is merely a corruption of insight.

The practice of continuously noticing the object as it becomes evident -- that alone is the way of insight.

I must go on with just the work of noticing." This decision is called purification by knowledge and vision of what is path and not-path.

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## **VI. Purification by Knowledge and Vision of the Course of Practice**

After noticing these manifestations of brilliant light and the others, or after leaving them unheeded, he goes on continuously as before with the act of noticing the bodily and mental processes as they become evident at the six sense doors.

While thus engaged in noticing, he gets over the corruptions relating to brilliant light, rapture, tranquility, happiness, attachment, etc., and his knowledge remains concerned exclusively with

the arising and passing away of the processes noticed. For then, at each act of noticing, he sees:

"The noticed object, having arisen, disappears instantly." It also becomes clear to him that each object disappears just where it arises; it does not move on to another place.

In that way he understands by direct experience how bodily and mental processes arise and break-up from moment to moment.

It is such knowledge and understanding resulting from the continuous noticing of bodily and mental processes as they arise and dissolve, moment after moment, and the discernment, in separate sections, of the arising and passing away of each of them, while being free from the corruptions, that is called "final knowledge of contemplation of arising and passing away."

This is the beginning of "purification by knowledge and vision of the course of practice,"

which starts from this insight and extends to adaptation knowledge (No.13).

## **5. Knowledge of Dissolution**

Noticing the bodily and mental processes as they arise, he sees them part by part, link by link, piece by piece, and fraction by fraction:

"Just now it arises, just now it dissolves." When that knowledge of arising and passing away becomes mature, keen and strong, it will arise easily and proceed uninterruptedly as if borne onward of itself; also the bodily and mental processes will be easily discernible.

When keen knowledge thus carries on and formations are easily discernible, then neither the arising of each bodily and mental process, nor its middle phase called "presence," nor the continuity of bodily and mental processes called "occurrence as unbroken flux" is apparent to him; nor are the shape of the hand, the foot, the

face, the body, and so on, apparent to him. But what is apparent to him is only the *ceasing* of bodily and mental processes, called "vanishing," or "passing away," or "dissolution."

For instance, while noticing the rising movement of the abdomen, neither its initial nor middle phase is apparent, but only the ceasing or vanishing, which is called the final phase, is apparent; and so it is also with the falling movement of the abdomen. Again, in the case of bending an arm or leg, while noticing the act of bending, neither the initial nor the middle phase of bending is apparent, nor is the form of the limb apparent, but only the final phase of ceasing and vanishing is apparent. It is similar in the other cases of stretching a limb, and so on.

For at that time each object that is being noticed seems to him to be entirely absent or to have become non-existent.

Consequently, at this stage of knowledge, it seems to him as if he were engaged in noticing something which has already become absent or non-existent by having vanished; and the consciousness engaged in noticing appears to have lost contact with the object that is being noticed. It is for that reason that a meditator may here think:

"I have lost the insight"; but he should not think so.

For, formerly, his consciousness normally took delight in conceptual objects of shapes, etc.;[\[34\]](#) and even up to the knowledge of arising and passing away, the idea of formations with their specific features[\[35\]](#) was always apparent to him.

Hence his mind took delight in a plainly distinguishable object consisting of formations, with its particular structure[\[36\]](#) and its particular feature-idea.

But now that his knowledge has developed in the way described, no such idea of the formations' features or structure appears to him, still less any other, cruder concept. At such a stage, the *arising* of formations, that is, the first phase of the process, is not apparent (as it is in the case of knowledge of arising and passing away), but there is apparent only the dissolution, that is, the final phase, having the nature of vanishing.

Therefore the meditator's mind does not take delight in it at first, but he may be sure that soon, after becoming familiar (with that stage of the practice), his mind will delight in the cessation (of the phenomena) too, which is called their dissolution. With this assurance he should again turn to the practice of continuous noticing.

When thus engaged, he perceives that in each act of noticing there are always present two factors, an objective factor and a subjective one -- the object noticed and the mental state of

knowing it -- which dissolve and vanish by pairs, one pair after the other.

For in each single instance of a rising movement of the abdomen, there are, in fact, numerous physical processes constituting the rising movement, which are seen to dissolve serially.

It is like seeing the continuous successive vanishing of a summer mirage moment by moment; or it is like the quick and continuous bursting of bubbles produced in a heavy shower by thick rain drops falling on a water surface; or it is like the quick, successive extinction of oil-lamps or candles, blown out by the wind, as these lights are being offered at a shrine by devotees.

Similar to that appears the dissolving and vanishing, moment by moment, of the bodily processes noticed. And the dissolution of consciousness noticing those bodily processes is apparent to him along with the dissolution of the bodily processes. Also, while he is noticing

other bodily and mental processes, their dissolution will also be apparent to him in the same manner.

Consequently, the knowledge will come to him that whatever part of the whole body is noticed, that object ceases first, and after it the consciousness engaged in noticing that object follows in its wake. From that the meditator will understand very clearly in the case of each successive pair the dissolution of any object whatsoever and the dissolution of the consciousness noticing that very object.

(It should be borne in mind that this refers only to understanding arrived at through direct experience by one engaged in noticing only; it is not an opinion derived from mere reasoning.)

It is the perfectly clear understanding of the dissolution of the two things, pair by pair -- that is, (1) of the visual or other object appearing at any of the six sense doors, and (2) of the

consciousness noticing that very object -- that is called "knowledge of dissolution."

## **6. Awareness of Fearfulness**

When that knowledge of dissolution is mature, there will gradually arise, just by seeing the dissolution of all object-and-subject-formations, an awareness of fearfulness[[37](#)] and other (higher) knowledges, together with their respective aspects of fear, and so on.[[38](#)]

Having seen how the dissolution of two things -- that is, any object noticed and the insight-thought engaged in noticing it -- takes place moment by moment, the meditator also understands by inference that in the past, too, every conditioned thing (formation) has broken-up in the same way, that just so it will break up also in the future, and that at the present it breaks up, too.

And just at the time of noticing any formations that are evident, these formations will appear to him in their aspect of fearfulness. Therefore, during the very act of noticing, the meditator will also come to understand: "These formations are indeed fearful."

Such understanding of their fearfulness is called "knowledge of the awareness of fearfulness"; it has also the name "knowledge of fear." At that time, his mind itself is gripped by fear and seems helpless.

## **7. Knowledge of Misery**

When he has realized the fearfulness (of the formations) through the knowledge of fear, and keeps on noticing continuously, then the "knowledge of misery" will arise in him before long.

When it has arisen, all formations everywhere -- whether among the objects noticed, or among

the states of consciousness engaged in noticing, or in any kind of life or existence that is brought to mind -- will appear insipid, without a vitalizing factor,[\[39\]](#) and unsatisfying.

So he sees, at that time, only suffering, only unsatisfactoriness, only misery. Therefore this state is called "knowledge of misery."

## **8. Knowledge of Disgust**

Seeing thus the misery in conditioned things (formations), his mind finds no delight in those miserable things but is entirely disgusted with them.

At times, his mind becomes, as it were, discontented and listless. Even so he does not give up the practice of insight, but spends his time continuously engaging in it.

He therefore should know that this state of mind is not dissatisfaction with meditation, but is precisely the "knowledge of disgust" that has

the aspect of being disgusted with the formations.

Even if he directs his thought to the happiest sort of life and existence or to the most pleasant and desirable objects, his mind will not take delight in them, will find no satisfaction in them.

On the contrary, his mind will incline and lean and tend only towards Nibbana. Therefore the following thought will arise in him between moments of noticing: "The ceasing of all formations that are dissolving from moment to moment -- that alone is happiness."

## **9. Knowledge of Desire for Deliverance**

When through this knowledge (now acquired) he feels disgust with regard to every formation noticed, there will arise in him a desire to forsake these formations or to become delivered from them.

The knowledge relating to that desire is called "knowledge of desire for deliverance."

At that time, usually various painful feelings arise in his body, and also an unwillingness to remain long in one particular bodily posture.

Even if these states do not arise, the comfortless nature of the formations will become more evident than ever. And due to that, between moments of noticing, he feels a longing thus: "Oh, may I soon get free from that! Oh, may I reach the state where these formations cease! Oh, may I be able to give up these formations completely!"

At this juncture, his consciousness engaged in noticing seems to shrink from the object noticed at each moment of noticing, and wishes to escape from it.

## **10. Knowledge of Re-observation**

Being thus desirous of escaping from the formations, the meditator makes stronger effort and continues the practice of noticing these very formations with the single purpose of forsaking them and escaping from them.

For that reason, the knowledge arising at that time is called "knowledge of re-observation." The term "re-observation" has the same meaning as "re-noticing" or "re-contemplation." Then the nature (or characteristics) of the formations -- their being impermanent, suffering, and without a self -- will be clearly evident to him; and among these three, the aspect of suffering will be particularly distinct.

At this stage, too, there will usually arise in his body various kinds of pains which are severe, sharp, and of growing intensity. Hence his whole bodily and mental system will seem to him like an unbearable mass of sickness or a conglomeration of suffering.

And a state of restlessness will usually manifest itself, making him incapable of keeping to one particular posture for any length of time. For then he will not be able to hold any one position long, but will soon want to change it. This state, however, simply manifests the unbearable nature of the formations.

Though he wants to change his bodily posture, still he should not give in easily to that wish, but should endeavor to remain motionless for a longer period in the same posture and continue to carry on the practice of noticing. By doing so, he will be able to overcome his restlessness.

Now his insight knowledge is quite strong and lucid, and by virtue of it even his painful feelings will at once cease as soon as they are firmly noticed.

Even if a painful feeling does not cease completely, he will perceive that it is dissolving, part by part, from moment to moment.

That is to say, the ceasing and vanishing, and disappearing of each single moment of feeling will become apparent, separately, in each corresponding act of noticing.

In other words, now it will not be as it was at the time of the knowledge of comprehension, when the constant flow or continuity of feelings of the same kind was apparent as a single unit.

But if, without abandoning the practice, that feeling of pain is firmly and continuously noticed, it will entirely cease before long.

When it ceases in that way, it does so for good and will not arise again. Though, in that way, the insight knowledge may have become strong and perfectly lucid, still he is not satisfied with that much.

He will even think: "My insight knowledge is not clear." He should, however, dismiss such thoughts by applying the act of noticing to them, and he should go on with his task of

continuously noticing the bodily and mental formations as they occur.

If he perseveres thus, his noticing will become more and more-clear as the time passes in minutes, hours, and days.

Then he will overcome the painful feelings and the restlessness in being unable to remain long in one particular posture, and also the idea that his insight knowledge is not yet clear enough.

His noticing will then function rapidly, and at every moment of noticing he will understand quite clearly any of the three characteristics of impermanence, etc.

This understanding of any of the three characteristics of impermanence, etc., through the act of noticing which functions with promptness in quick succession, is called "strong knowledge of re-observation."

## **11. Knowledge of Equanimity about Formations**

When this knowledge of re-observation is mature, there will arise knowledge perceiving evident bodily and mental processes in continuous succession quite naturally, as if borne onward of itself. This is called "knowledge of equanimity about formations."

Now, in the act of noticing, effort is no longer required to keep formations before the mind or to understand them. After the completion of each single act of noticing, the object to be noticed will then appear of itself, and insight knowledge, too, will of itself notice and understand it.

It is as if no further effort need be made by the meditator. Formerly, owing to seeing the dissolution of formations, there arose, in successive order, the aspect of fearfulness, the perception of misery, the aspect of disgust, the

desire for deliverance, and dissatisfaction with the knowledge so far acquired.

But now these mental states no longer arise even though, in the present state too, the breaking-up of formations which are dissolving more rapidly is closely perceived.

Even if a painful feeling arises in the body, no mental disturbance (grief) arises, and there is no lack of fortitude in bearing it.

Generally, however, at this stage, pains will be entirely absent, that is, they do not arise at all. Even if the meditator thinks about something fearful or sad, no mental disturbance will arise, be it in the form of fear or of sorrow.

This, firstly, is "the abandoning of fear" at the stage of "equanimity about formations."

At the earlier stage, on attaining knowledge of arising and passing away, great joy had arisen on account of the clarity of insight. But now this kind of joy does not arise, even though there is

present the exceedingly peaceful and sublime clarity of mind belonging to "equanimity about formations."

Though he actually sees desirable objects conducive to joy, or though he thinks about various enjoyable things, no strong feeling of joy will arise.

This is "the abandoning of delight" at the stage of "equanimity about formations."

He cherishes no desire nor hate with regard to any object, desirable or undesirable, that comes into the range of his sense doors, but taking them as just the same in his act of noticing, he understands them (that is to say, it is a pure act of understanding). This is "equable vision" at the stage of "equanimity about formations."

Of these three qualities just mentioned, it is said in the *Path of Purification*:

"Having discarded fear and delight, he is impartial and neutral towards all formations" (*Visuddhimagga*, xxi,62).

If he resumes the practice of noticing with the thought:

"Now I will do it vigorously again!" then, before long, the noticing will function efficiently as if borne onward of itself.

From now onwards there is no need for the meditator to make further (deliberate) effort. Though he does not make a (deliberate) effort, his noticing will proceed in a continuous and steady flow for a long time; it will go on even for two or three hours without interruption. This is "the state of long-lasting (practice)" of equanimity about formations.

Referring to this it is said in the *Patisambhidamagga*:

'The wisdom lasting long' is the knowledge present in the mental states of equanimity about

formations." The Great Commentary to the *Path of Purification* explains as follows: "This is said with reference to knowledge functioning in a continuous flow."

Now when noticing functions spontaneously as if borne onward of itself, the mind, even if sent out towards a variety of objects, generally refuses to go.

And even if it does go, it will not stay long but will soon return to the usual object to be noticed, and will resume continuous noticing. In this connection it was said:

"He shrinks, recoils, and retreats; he does not go forth to it."

## **12. Insight Leading to Emergence**

So, through knowledge of equanimity about formations, which is endowed with many virtues, blessings, and powers, he notices the formations as they occur. When this knowledge

is mature, having become keen, strong, and lucid, on reaching its culmination point, it will understand any of the formations as being impermanent or painful or without self, just by seeing their dissolution.

Now that act of noticing any one characteristic out of the three, which is still more lucid in its perfect understanding, manifests itself two or three times or more in rapid succession. This is called "insight leading to emergence."[\[40\]](#)

Thereupon, immediately after the last consciousness in the series of acts of noticing belonging to this insight leading to emergence, the meditator's consciousness leaps forth into Nibbana, which is the cessation of all formations, taking it as its object. Then there appears to him the stilling (subsidence) of all formations called cessation.

This mode of realization of Nibbana has been mentioned in many discourses of the Master, for example:

"The vision of truth arose: whatsoever has the nature of arising is bound to cease."

Herein the words "bound to cease" indicate the aspect of realizing the stilling and ceasing of all formations which have the nature of arising.

Also in the *Questions of King Milinda* it is said:

"His consciousness, while carrying on the practice of bringing to mind (i.e., noticing), passes beyond the continuous occurrence of phenomena and alights upon non-occurrence. One who, having practiced in the correct manner, has alighted upon non-occurrence, O king, is said to have realized Nibbana."

The meaning is this: the meditator who wishes to realize Nibbana should repeatedly bring to mind, through the practice of noticing, every bodily and mental process that appears at any of the six sense doors.

When he brings them to mind thus, his consciousness engaged in noticing -- here called

"bringing to mind" -- will, until adaptation knowledge is reached, fall at every moment upon the (conditioned) bodily and mental formations called, here, "continuous occurrence," because they go on occurring over and over again in an unbroken flow, like a river's current.

But in the last phase, instead of falling upon that continuous occurrence, consciousness passes beyond it and alights upon "non-occurrence," which is the very opposite of the bodily and mental formations called, here, "occurrence."

In other words, it arrives at non-occurrence, that is to say, it reaches, as if it "alights upon," cessation, which is the stilling of the formations (or conditioned phenomena).

When the meditator, having already before practiced correctly and without deviation by way of the knowledge of arising and passing away and the other knowledges (or by way of the purification of conduct, of mind, of view,

etc.), has in this manner arrived at non-occurrence (by the consciousness alighting upon it), he is said to have "realized Nibbana." He is called one who has made Nibbana a direct experience and has actually seen it.

### **13. Knowledge of Adaptation**

Here the knowledge by way of noticing that occurs last in the series constituting insight leading to emergence, is called "knowledge of adaptation."[\[41\]](#)

This is the end of the *purification by knowledge and vision of the course of practice.*

### **14. Maturity Knowledge**

Immediately afterwards, a type of knowledge manifests itself that, as it were, falls for the first time into Nibbana, which is void of formations

(conditioned phenomena) since it is the cessation of them. This knowledge is called "maturity knowledge."[\[42\]](#)

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## **VII. Purification by Knowledge and Vision**

### **15. Path Knowledge**

It is followed immediately by knowledge that abides in that same Nibbana, which is void of formations since it is the cessation of them. This is called "path knowledge."[\[43\]](#) It is also called "purification by knowledge and vision."

### **16. Fruition Knowledge**

That again is immediately followed by knowledge that belongs to the final stage and continues in the course of its predecessor. It abides in that same Nibbana, which is void of

formations since it is the cessation of them. This is called "fruition knowledge."

## **17. Knowledge of Reviewing**

The duration of that threefold knowledge of maturity, path, and fruition is, however, not long. It is very short, and lasts for just an instant, like the duration of a single thought of noticing.

Subsequently there arises "knowledge of reviewing." Through that knowledge of reviewing the meditator discerns that the insight leading to emergence came along with the very rapid function of noticing, and that immediately after the last phase of noticing, the path consciousness entered into the cessation (of formations). This is "knowledge reviewing the path."

He also discerns that the consciousness abided in that same state of cessation during the

intervening period between the path and reviewing. This is "knowledge reviewing fruition."

He further discerns that the object just experienced is void of all formations. This is "knowledge reviewing Nibbana."

In this connection it is said in the *Path of Purification*: "

'By that path, indeed, I have come'; thus he reviews the path. 'That blessing was obtained'; thus he reviews the fruition. 'That state has been penetrated as an object by me';[\[44\]](#) thus he reviews the Deathless, Nibbana" (*Visuddhimagga*, xxii, 20).

Some meditators, but not all, have "reviewing of defilements."[\[45\]](#)

After having reviewed in this way, the meditator still continues the practice of noticing bodily and mental processes as they become evident.

But while he is thus engaged in noticing, the bodily and mental processes appear to him quite coarse, not subtle as before at the time of the knowledge of equanimity about formations.

Why is this so? This is so because the knowledge present now has the nature of the knowledge of arising and passing away.

For when the noble disciples (namely, stream-winners, etc.) resume the practice of insight (by noticing), the knowledge of arising and passing away usually arises at the beginning. This is the usual course of order in this respect.

However, when some meditators emerge from the attainment of path and fruition, great faith, happiness, rapture, and tranquility, produced by virtue of the attainment, arise flooding the whole body.

Owing to that, they are unable to carry out the practice of noticing anything apparent at that time. Even if they make double effort and attempt to proceed with the practice of insight,

they fail to discern the phenomena clearly and separately, at the moment of their occurrence.

They continue to experience only rapture, tranquility, and happiness, which occur with great force. This state of mind, which is extraordinarily serene through the strong faith prevailing, lasts for one hour, two hours, or more, without break.

Because of this, meditators feel as if they were in some such place as a wide open space suffused with radiance and most delightful. The rapture and happiness, of a serene character, that then arise are praised by meditators thus: "Surely, I have never before felt and experienced such happiness!"

After two or three hours have passed, that faith, happiness, rapture, and tranquility will fade. The meditators can once again proceed with noticing the bodily and mental processes as they occur, distinguishing them separately, and they will be able to discern them clearly. But at that time,

too, first the knowledge of arising and passing away will appear.

## **18. Attainment of Fruition**

While he is thus engaged in noticing, his insight knowledge will gradually grow, and soon will again reach the stage of equanimity about formations. If his power of concentration is still short of perfection, only the equanimity about formations will go on repeating itself.

But if his concentration has reached perfection, then, in the case of one who does the insight practice of noticing with a view of attaining only to the first path and fruition, the fruition consciousness of the first path alone reaches cessation of formations by way of the *attainment of fruition*.[\[46\]](#) This occurs in precisely the same way as the path and fruition consciousness that occurred earlier in the consciousness-sequence belonging to the initial attainment of the first path. The only difference

here is the capacity of the fruition attainment to last long.

One should also set one's mind resolutely upon the further tasks: to be able to repeat the achievement of fruition attainment, to achieve it rapidly, and, at the time of achievement, to abide in it a long time, say for six, ten, fifteen or thirty minutes, or for an hour or more.

In one who applies himself to achieving the attainment of fruition, knowledge of arising and passing away will arise at the beginning. Advancing from there in the due sequence, soon the knowledge of equanimity about formations is reached.

But when skill in the practice has been acquired, the knowledge of equanimity about formations will arise quickly even after four or five acts of noticing. If the power of concentration has reached perfection, the fruition consciousness will repeatedly become absorbed in cessation by way of fruition attainment.

The mind can thus reach absorption even while one is walking up and down, or while taking a meal, and the fruition attainment can remain for any length of time resolved upon.

During the fruition attainment, the mind will abide only in the cessation of formations and will not be aware of anything else.

## **19. The Higher Paths and Fruitions**

When the meditator has thus become skilled in achieving the fruition attainment, he should resolutely set his mind upon the task of attaining to the higher paths and fruitions. What should now be done by one who has set himself that task?

Just as before, he should carry out the practice of noticing (anything occurring) at the six sense doors.

Hence, the meditator should notice any bodily and mental process that becomes evident to him at the six sense doors.

While he is thus engaged, he will see, at the stage of knowledge of arising and passing away, that the first objects consisting of formations appear to him rather coarse, and that his mind is not well concentrated.

The development of insight belonging to the higher paths is, in fact, not as easy as that of insight belonging to the fruition attainment already achieved by the meditator.

It is in fact somewhat difficult, due to the fact that insight has to be developed anew. It is, however, not so very difficult as it was at the first time when beginning the practice. In a single day, or even in a single hour, he can gain the knowledge of equanimity about formations.

This statement is made here, basing it on the experience usually gained by persons of the present day who had to be given guidance from

the start and who did not possess particularly strong intelligence. Here it is applied, by inference, to similar types of persons in general.

But although equanimity about formations has been attained, if the spiritual faculties[[47](#)] have not yet reached full maturity, it just goes on repeating itself. Though he who has won (one of the lower) fruitions may be able to enter into it several times within one hour, yet if his spiritual faculties are immature, he cannot attain the next higher path within as much as one day, two, three, or more days.

He abides merely in equanimity about formations. If, however, he then directs his mind to reach the fruition already attained, he will reach it perhaps in two or three minutes.

When, however, the spiritual faculties are mature, one who carries out the practice of insight for attaining to a higher path will find that immediately after equanimity about formations has reached its culmination, the

higher path and fruition arise in the same way as before (i.e., as at the time of the first path and fruition), that is to say, it is preceded by the stages of adaptation and maturity. After the fruition, the stages of reviewing, etc., that follow are also the same as before.

Anything else concerning the method of practice for insight and the progress of knowledge right up to arahantship can be understood in precisely the same way as described. Hence there is no need to elaborate it any further.

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## **Conclusion**

Now, the present treatise on the "Progress of Insight through the Stages of Purification" has been written in a concise form, so that meditators can easily comprehend it. Hence complete details have not been given here. And since it was written with a view to making it easily intelligible, in many passages of this treatise relevant canonical references have not

been quoted, and there are repetitions and other faults of literary composition. But these shortcomings of presentation and the incompleteness of canonical references may here be overlooked by the reader.

Only the meaning and purpose should be heeded well by the wise. It is to this that I would invite the reader's attention.

Though in the beginning it was mentioned that this treatise has been written for those who have already obtained distinctive results in their practice, others may perhaps read it with advantage, too.

Now these are my concluding good wishes for the latter type of readers: Just as a very delicious, appetizing, tasty and nutritious meal can be appreciated fully only by one who has himself eaten it, and not without partaking of it, in the same way, the whole series of knowledges described here can be understood fully only by one who has himself seen it by

direct experience, and not otherwise. So may all good people reach the stage of indubitable understanding of this whole series of knowledges! May they also strive to attain it!

This treatise on the purities and insights,  
For meditators who have seen things clear,  
Although their store of learning may be small --  
The Elder, Mahasi by name, in insight's method  
skillful,  
Has written it in Burmese tongue and into Pali  
rendered it.

The Treatise on the Purities and Insights  
composed on 22.5.1950  
is here concluded.

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## Notes

1. Here, and in the title of this treatise, the Pali term *ñāna* has been rendered by "insight," as at

the outset the word "knowledge," the normal rendering of *ñāna*, might not be taken by the reader with the full weight and significance which it will receive in the context of the present treatise. In all the following occurrences, however, this Pali term has been translated by "knowledge," while the word "insight" has been reserved for the Pali term *vipassana*. When referring to the several types and stages of knowledge, the plural "knowledges" has been used, in conformity with the Pali *ñānani*. [[Go back](#)]

2. In the canonical Buddhist scriptures, the seven stages of purification (*visuddhi*) are mentioned in the Discourse on the Stage Coaches (Majjhima Nikaya No. 24). They are also the framework of the Venerable Buddhaghosa's *Path of Purification* (*Visuddhimagga*), where they are explained in full. (Translation by Ñānamoli Thera, publ. by BPS.) [[Go back](#)]

3. "Motion" (*vayo*, lit. wind, air) refers to the last of the four material elements (*dhatu*), or primary qualities of matter. The other three are: earth (solidity, hardness), water (adhesion), and fire (caloricity). These four elements, in varying proportional strength, are present in all forms of matter. The so-called "inner wind element" which applies in this context is active in the body as motion, vibration, and pressure manifesting itself in the passage of air through the body (e.g., in breathing), in the movement and pressure of limbs and organs, and so on. It becomes perceptible as a tactile process, or object of touch (*photthabbarammana*), through the pressure caused by it. [[Go back](#)]

4. The attention directed to the movement of the abdomen was introduced into the methodical practice of insight-meditation by the author of this treatise, the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw, and forms here the basic object of meditative practice. For details see *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* by Nyanaponika Thera (London:

Rider & Co., 1962; BPS, 1992), pp. 94f., 106. If preferred, the breath itself may instead be taken as the basic object of meditative attention, according to the traditional method of "mindfulness of breathing" (*anapanasati*); see *Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, pp.108ff. *Mindfulness of Breathing* by Ñānamoli Thera (BPS, 1982). [[Go back](#)]

**5.** According to the Buddhist Abhidhamma teachings, only the three elements of earth, fire, and wind constitute the tactile substance in matter. The element of water is not held to be an object of touch even in cases where it predominates, as in liquids. What is tactile in any given liquid is the contribution of the other three elements to its composite nature. [[Go back](#)]

**6.** "Door" is a figurative expression for the sense organs (which, including the mind, are six-fold), because they provide, as it were, the access to the world of objects. [[Go back](#)]

**7.** The preceding sequence of terms is frequently used in the Discourses (Suttas) of the Buddha to refer to those individuals who have attained to the first supramundane stage on the road to arahantship, i.e., stream-entry (*sotapatti*), or the following ones. See Note 33. The term *Dhamma* refers here to Nibbana. [[Go back](#)]

**8. I.** The Five Precepts binding on all Buddhist laymen, are: abstention from (1) killing, (2) stealing, (3) unlawful sexual intercourse, (4) lying, (5) intoxicants.

**II.** The Eight Uposatha Precepts are: abstention from (1) killing, (2) stealing, (3) all sexual intercourse, (4) lying, (5) intoxicants, (6) partaking of solid food and certain liquids after noon, (7) abstention from (a) dance, song, music, shows (attendance and performance), (b) from perfumes, ornaments, etc., (8) luxurious beds. This set of eight precepts is observed by devout Buddhist lay followers on full-moon days and on other occasions.

III. The Ten Precepts: (1)-(6) = II, 1-6; (7) = II, 7 (a); (8) = II, 7 (b); (9) = II, 8; (10) abstention from acceptance of gold and silver, money, etc. [[Go back](#)]

**9.** The other three items of the monk's fourfold pure conduct are control of the senses, purity of livelihood, and pure conduct concerning the monk's requisites. [[Go back](#)]

**10.** Access (or "neighbourhood") concentration (*upacara-samadhi*) is that degree of mental concentration that approaches, but not yet attains, the full concentration (*appana-samadhi*) of the first absorption (*jhana*). It still belongs to the sensuous plane (*kamavacara*) of consciousness, while the jhanas belong to the fine-material plane (*rupavacara*). [[Go back](#)]

**11.** *Pañcupadanakkhandha*. These five groups, which are the objects of grasping, are: (1) corporeality, (2) feeling, (3) perception, (4) mental formations, (5) consciousness. [[Go back](#)]

**12.** Also called *sukkhavipassana-yanika*. [[Go back](#)]

**13.** Literally: "according to their true nature and function." [[Go back](#)]

**14.** This method of meditation aims at "knowledge by direct experience" (*paccakkha-ñāna*), resulting from mindfulness directed towards one's own bodily and mental processes. It is for that reason that here express mention is made of "one's own life continuity." Having gathered the decisive direct experience from the contemplation of his own body and mind, the meditator will later extend the contemplation to the life-processes of others, by way of inference (*anumana*). See, in the Satipatthana Sutta, the recurrent passage: "contemplating the body, etc., externally." [[Go back](#)]

**15.** "Noticing" (*sallakkhana*) is a key term in this treatise. The corresponding verb in the Pali language is *sallakkheti* (*sam* + *lakh*), which can be translated adequately as well as literally by

"to mark clearly." Though the use of "to mark" in the sense of "to observe" or "to notice" is quite legitimate in English, it is somewhat unusual and unwieldy in its derivations. Hence the rendering by "noticing" was chosen. "Noticing" is identical with "bare attention," the term used in the translator's book *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*. [[Go back](#)]

**16.** The Sub-commentary to the Brahmajala Sutta explains as follows: "Things in their true nature (*paramatthadhamma*) have two characteristics or marks: specific characteristics and general characteristics. The understanding of the specific characteristics is knowledge by experience (*paccakkha-ñāna*), while the understanding of the general characteristics is knowledge by inference (*anumana-ñāna*)." The specific characteristic, for instance, of the element of motion (*vayo-dhatu*) is its nature of supporting, its function of moving; its general characteristics are impermanence, etc. [[Go back](#)]

**17.** The three terms printed in italics are standard categories of definition used in the Pali Commentaries and the *Visuddhimagga*. In the case of mental phenomena, a fourth category, "proximate condition" (*padatthana*) is added. The definition of the element of motion (or of wind) occurs, for instance, in the *Visuddhimagga* (XI, 93) and is shown in this treatise to be a fact of direct experience. [[Go back](#)]

**18.** "Purification of mind" refers to mental concentration of either of two degrees of intensity: full concentration or access concentration (see Note 10). In both types of concentration, the mind is temporarily purified from the five mental hindrances (see Note 20), which defile the mind and obstruct concentration. [[Go back](#)]

**19.** The "other" objects may also belong to the same series of events, for instance, the recurrent rise and fall of the abdomen. [[Go back](#)]

**20.** The five mental hindrances (*nivarana*) which obstruct concentration, are: (1) sense-desire, (2) ill-will, (3) sloth and torpor, (4) agitation and remorse, (5) skeptical doubt. For details, see *The Five Mental Hindrances and their Conquest*, by Nyanaponika Thera (BPS Wheel No. 26). [[Go back](#)]

**21.** Insight reaches its culmination on attaining to the perfection of the "purification by knowledge and vision of the course of practice." See Note 41 and the *Visuddhimagga*, XXI,1. [[Go back](#)]

**22.** This passage is translated in *The Way of Mindfulness* by Soma Thera (3rd ed., BPS, 1967), p. 104, where, for our term "access concentration," the rendering "partial absorption" is used. [[Go back](#)]

**23.** When occurring during the practice of tranquility meditation. [[Go back](#)]

**24.** This is the fully absorbed concentration (*jhana*) achieved at the attainment of the noble paths and fruitions. [[Go back](#)]

**25.** In the Commentary to the Majjhima Nikaya No.111, the Anupada Sutta. [[Go back](#)]

**26.** The *Visuddhimagga* says that both terms, "knowledge by inductive insight" and "comprehension by groups," are names for the same type of insight. According to the *Paramattha-manjusa*, its Commentary, the former term was used in Ceylon, the latter in India. [[Go back](#)]

**27.** The ten corruptions of insight (*vipassanupakkilesa*) are first mentioned in the *Patisambhidamagga* (PTS, Vol. II, pp.100f.) and are explained in the *Visuddhimagga* (XX, 105ff.). The names and the sequence of the terms as given in this treatise differ slightly from those found in the above two sources. [[Go back](#)]

**28.** The five grades of rapture (*piti*), dealt with in the *Visuddhimagga* (IV,94) are: (1) minor, (2) momentarily recurring, (3) flooding, (4) elevating, (5) suffusing. [[Go back](#)]

**29.** This passage refers to the six pairs of qualitative factors of mental activity, which, according to the *Abhidhamma*, are present in all moral consciousness though in different degrees of development. The first pair is tranquility (a) of consciousness, and (b) of its concomitant mental factors. The other pairs are agility, pliancy, wieldiness, proficiency, and uprightness, all of which have the same twofold division as stated before. These six pairs represent the formal, or structural, side of moral consciousness. For details see *Abhidhamma Studies*, by Nyanaponika Thera (2nd ed. BPS, 1985), pp.81f. [[Go back](#)]

**30.** These six obstructions of mind are countered by the six pairs of mental factors mentioned in Note 29 and in the following sentence of the text. [[Go back](#)]

**31.** *Non-action*, non-activity or non-busyness, refers to the receptive, but keenly watchful, attitude of noticing (or bare attention). [[Go back](#)]

**32.** *Advertence* is the first stage of the perceptual process, as analyzed in the Abhidhamma. It is the first "turning-towards" the object of perception; in other words, initial attention. [[Go back](#)]

**33.** The supramundane paths and fruitions are: stream-entry, once-returning, nonreturning, and arahantship. By attaining to the first path and fruition, that of stream-entry, final deliverance is assured at the latest after seven more rebirths. [[Go back](#)]

**34.** "Conceptual objects of shapes" (*santhana-paññatti*). The other two types of concepts intended here are: the concepts of individual identity derived from the *continuity* of serial phenomena (*santati-paññatti*), and collective

concepts derived from the *agglomeration* of phenomena (*samuha-paññatti*). [[Go back](#)]

**35.** "The idea of formations with their specific features": this phrase elaborates the meaning applicable here of the Pali term *nimitta*, which literally means "mark," "sign," "feature," i.e., the idea or image conceived of an object perceived. [[Go back](#)]

**36.** "With its particular structure" (*sa-viggaha*): the distinctive (*vi*) graspable (*gaha*) form of an object. [[Go back](#)]

**37.** *Bhay'upatthana*. The word *bhaya* has the subjective aspect of fear and the objective aspect of fearfulness, danger. Both are included in the significance of the term in this context. [[Go back](#)]

**38.** This refers to the knowledges described in the following (Nos. 7-11). [[Go back](#)]

**39.** *Niroja*. Lit. "without nutritive essence." [[Go back](#)]

**40.** According to the *Visuddhimagga*, the "insight leading to emergence" is the culmination of insight, and is identical with the following three knowledges: equanimity about formations, desire for deliverance, and knowledge of re-observation. It is called "leading to emergence" because it emerges from the contemplation of formations (conditioned phenomena) to the supramundane path that has Nibbana as its object. [[Go back](#)]

**41.** The *Visuddhimagga* says (XXI,130): "The knowledge of adaptation derives its name from the fact that it adapts itself to the earlier and the later states of mind. It adapts itself to the preceding eight insight knowledges with their individual functions, and to the thirty-seven states partaking of enlightenment that follow." [[Go back](#)]

**42.** *Gotrabhu-ñāna* (maturity knowledge) is, literally, the "knowledge of one who has become one of the lineage (*gotra*)." By attaining to that knowledge, one has left behind the

designation and stage of an unliberated-worldling and is entering the lineage and rank of the noble ones, i.e., the stream-enterer, etc. Insight has now come to full maturity, maturing into the knowledge of the supramundane paths and fruitions. Maturity knowledge occurs only as a single moment of consciousness; it does not recur, since it is immediately followed by the path consciousness of stream-entry or once-returning, etc. [[Go back](#)]

**43.** "Path knowledge" is the knowledge connected with the four supramundane paths of stream-entry, etc. Here, in this passage, only the path of stream-entry is meant. Path knowledge, like maturity knowledge, lasts only for one moment of consciousness, being followed by the fruition knowledge resulting from it, which may repeat itself many times and may also be deliberately entered into by way of the "attainment of fruition" (see No. 17). [[Go back](#)]

**44.** That means that Nibbana has now become an object of direct experience, and is no longer a

mental construct of conceptual thinking. [[Go back](#)]

**45.** The knowledge of reviewing defilements still remaining, does not obtain at the stage of arahantship where all defilements have been eliminated. It may occur, but not necessarily so, at the lower three stages of stream-entry, etc. [[Go back](#)]

**46.** See Note 43. [[Go back](#)]

**47.** The five spiritual faculties (*indriya*) are: faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. For details see *The Way of Wisdom* by Edward Conze (BPS Wheel No.65/66). [[Go back](#)]

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## **The Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw**

Mahasi Sayadaw, the Venerable U Sobhana Mahathera, was the son of U Kan Htaw and Daw Shwe Ok of Seikkhun village, which is about seven miles to the west of Shwebo Town,

a one-time capital of the founder of the last Burmese dynasty. He was born on the third waning of the month of second Waso in the year 1266 of the Burmese Era (29 July 1904). At the age of six, he began his studies at a monastic school in the same village, and at the age of twelve he was ordained a samanera (novice). On reaching the age of twenty, he was ordained a bhikkhu on the fifth waning of the month of Tazaungmon in the year 1285 of the Burmese Era (23 November 1923). He then passed the Government Pali examinations in all the three classes of Pathamange, Pathamalat and Pathamagyi in the following three successive years.

In the fourth year after his bhikkhu ordination, he proceeded to Mandalay -- a former capital of Burma -- where he continued his further studies in the Khinmagan Kyaung Taik under various monks of high scholastic fame. In the fifth year he went to Moulmein where he took up the work of teaching the Buddhist scriptures at a

monastery known as Taung Waing Galay Taik Kyaung.

In the eighth year after his ordination, he and another monk left Moulmein equipped with the bare necessities of a bhikkhu (i.e., almsbowl, a set of three robes, etc.) and went in search of a clear and effective method in the practice of meditation. At Thaton he met the well-known meditation instructor, the Venerable U Narada, who is also known as "Mingun Jetawun Sayadaw the First." He then placed himself under the guidance of the Sayadaw and at once proceeded with an intensive course of meditation.

After this practical course of meditation he returned to Moulmein and continued with his original work of teaching Buddhist scriptures. He sat for the Pali Lecturership Examination held by the Government of Burma in June 1941 and succeeded in passing completely at the first attempt. He was awarded the title of Sasanadhaja Siri Pavara Dhammacariya.

In the year 1303 of the Burmese Era (1941) and in the eighteenth year of his bhikkhu ordination he returned to his native village (Seikkhun) and resided at a monastery known as "Maha-Si Kyaung" because a drum (Burmese: *si*) of unusually big (*maha*) size is housed there. He then introduced the systematic practical course of Satipatthana meditation. Many people, bhikkhus as well as laymen, gathered round him and took up the strict practical course, and were greatly benefited by his careful instructions. They were happy because they began to understand the salient features of Satipatthana and had also learned the proper method of continuing the practice by themselves.

In the year 1311 B.E. (1949) the then Prime Minister of Burma, U Nu, and Sir U Thwin, executive members of the Buddha Sasananuggha Association, requested the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw to come to Rangoon and give training in meditative practice. In his twenty-sixth year of bhikkhu ordination, he

therefore went to Rangoon and resided at the Thathana Yeiktha, the headquarters of the Association, where since then intensive training courses have been held up to the present day.

Over 15,000 persons have since been trained in that center alone and altogether over 200,000 persons have been trained throughout Burma, where there are more than 100 branches for the training in the same method. This method has also spread widely in Thailand and in Sri Lanka.

Mahasi Sayadaw was awarded the title of Agga-Maha-Pandita in the year 1952.

He carried out the duties of the Questioner (*pucchaka*) at the Sixth Buddhist Council (Chattha Sangayana) held at Rangoon for two years, culminating in the year 2500 of the Buddhist Era (1956). To appreciate fully the importance of this role it may be mentioned that the Venerable Maha-Kassapa, as Questioner, put questions at the First Council held three months after the passing away of the Buddha.

Then the Venerable Upali and the Venerable Ananda answered the questions. At the Sixth Council, it was Tipitakadhara Dhammabhandagarika Ashin Vicittasarabhivamsa who answered the questions put by the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw. The Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw was also a member of the committee that was responsible, as the final authority, for the codification of all the texts passed at the Sixth Council.

He has written several books on meditation and the following notable works may be mentioned.

(1) *Guide to the Practice of Vipassana Meditation* (in Burmese) -- 2 volumes.

(2) Burmese translation of the Mahasatipatthana Sutta, with notes.

(3) *Visuddhiñāna-katha* (in Burmese and Pali).

(4) Burmese translation of the *Visuddhimagga*, with notes.

(5) Burmese translation of the *Visuddhimagga Maha-Tika*, with notes -- 4 volumes.

(6) *Paticca-Samuppada* (Dependent Origination) -- 2 volumes.

A large number of his discourses, based on the Pali Suttas, have been translated into English and published by the Buddha Sasananuggha Association (16 Hermitage Road, Kokkine, Rangoon, Myanmar (Burma)).

Mahasi Sayadaw passed away on 14 August 1982 following a brief illness.

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Those who have benefited through the guidelines of the progress of insight as outlined in the above texts by Mahasi Sayadaw should also be [or become] familiar with The Four Foundations of Mindfulness as outlined and explained in the Maha Satipatthana Sutta articles which the reader may locate on this same webpage.