

U Hla Myint

**GREAT  
OBSERVING  
POWER**

(Satipaṭṭhāna)

## **Great Observing Power**

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**2013**

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**In remembrance of the late  
Sayadaw U Sīlānanda**

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## **Publisher's Notes**

The book "Great Observing Power" is an elaboration of the Buddha's *Maha-Satipatthana Sutta* (often known as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness Discourse). This discourse contains the Buddha's complete teachings about mindfulness meditation. It is an important discourse for those who practice Vipassana meditation, since it includes all practical instructions. To help meditation practitioners deepen their meditation experience, U Hla Myint took time to thoroughly explain the discourse, so that they can clearly comprehend it. Serious yogis will surely gain lots of benefits once they apply what they learn from this book to their practice.

We are very happy to publish the book and introduce it to all of those who are interested in the Dhamma, especially the mindfulness meditation practice.

With metta,  
Tathāgata Meditation Center

## Preface

The Great Discourse on Development of Mindfulness (*Maha-satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*) is one of the most unique discourses of the Buddha, because it teaches us in a unique way how to develop vipassana insights progressively until we become fully enlightened or awakened out of illusion.

The late Venerable Sayadaw U Sīlānanda, a highly respected Pāḷi scholar and a meditation master of worldwide repute, taught this discourse to the founding members of Tathāgata Meditation Center (TMC) and many other devotees in the U.S. and abroad. On this very discourse, he also wrote a book titled "Four Foundations of Mindfulness," which is highly cherished by TMC's devotees as the priceless heritage left by their beloved teacher. When Sayadaw passed away, however, the TMC devotees lost the access to the copy right of this book. To substitute for it, therefore, they asked me to write a similar book with the like purpose to help people better understand this Great Discourse. I feel greatly honored by this assignment, indeed. This is how this book, "Great Observing Power," comes into your hand. So, this book is totally dedicated to our beloved master, the Late Venerable Sayadaw U Sīlānanda, who always wanted all of us to be well-informed of Dhamma so that we can practice meditation successfully.

We, all in nature, love freedom and happiness although we may not really know what exactly they are. In search of happiness, therefore, we try to satisfy our senses at any cost. Unfortunately, the happiness available from sensual satisfaction is exactly like the pleasure from scratching an itch. The more we scratch the itch, the more insatiable it becomes. So, real pleasure only lies in the complete eradication of the itch, but not in the constant scratching of it. In the same way, it would be counterproductive to satisfy our senses in search of freedom and happiness, because the sensual desire, being insatiable, just oppresses and enslaves us instead of bringing us freedom and happiness. Without eradicating the insatiable desire, there is no way for us to attain ultimate freedom and happiness. That is why the Buddha said in his first sermon, thus: "The complete eradication of that very insatiable desire is the complete cessation of suffering." To eradicate the insatiable desire, we need to eliminate the illusory sense of "I" or "mine," because the insatiable desire is rooted in such an illusion.

Millions of our ancestors from the past can no longer be found anywhere on earth. It is even hard to say whether they had ever existed on this planet. We have to face the same destiny when we die, indeed. This planet would become empty of beings within just one hundred years if no more babies were newly born. Hypothetically, this very planet itself will one day completely disappear in a way. Compared to the lifespan of the planet, we humans are like seasonal bugs that live for a few hours. So, it is obviously under illusion that we feel like someone unique and

timeless and foolishly enjoy sensual pleasure and self-image. To eradicate such an illusion, we need to see what we really are by watching ourselves constantly. This means we have to develop mindfulness by constantly observing the psycho-physical phenomena that are divided into four meditative objects in this discourse: body, feeling, mind and Dhamma. Indeed, such mindfulness is Great Observing Power, which will bring us timeless freedom and happiness along with progressive insights and enlightenments.

The Late Venerable Sayadaw U Silānanda strongly wished that we would become well-informed of Dhamma and practice meditation successfully. So, he took great trouble day and night to teach us Dhamma, especially how to develop mindfulness, the Great Observing Power. In loving memory of such a great teacher, the TMC's members publish this book, a humble attempt to meet his sublime wish to some extent.

In conclusion, if you find this book contributes to your better understanding of the Great Discourse, as expected by TMC's members, I will feel greatly honored by that.

With much metta,  
U Hla Myint

## **Acknowledgement**

If I were not fortunate enough to have practiced with great meditation masters, the Late Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw, and his direct descendant, Sayadaw U Panditabhivamsa, it would not be possible for me to write a book on such a profound topic as the Great Observing Power, even though I have 22-years' experience of monastic life and three degrees in Pāli text. And also, I owe a lot to modern Pāli scholars, like Bhikkhu Bodhi and Bhikkhu Analayo, whose books greatly contribute to my understanding of this topic from the modern perspective.

Moreover, my special thanks go to all the TMC members, especially to Mr. Luyen Pham for his wisdom, patience and precious time devoted to the final editing of this book, and Mr. Son Tu for providing me with his priceless feedbacks. Last, but not least, I must express my gratitude to Mr. Kenneth Morris and Ms. Barbara Genus for their kindness, wisdom and precious time devoted to the initial editing of this book.

With much metta and gratitude,  
U Hla Myint

**Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato  
Sammāsambuddhassa**





# TRANSLATION OF THE SATIPAṬṬHĀNA SUTTA



## Introduction

*Thus have I heard: On one occasion, the Blessed One was living in the Kuru country at a town of the Kurus named Kammāsadhamma. There he addressed the monks thus: "Monks." "Venerable sir," they replied. The Blessed One said this.*

## Direct Path

*"This is the only path, monks, for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of dukkha and discontent, for the acquisition of the Noble Path (ñāya), and for the realization of Nibbāna; namely, the four satipaṭṭhānas.*

## Definition

*"What are the four?"*

*"Here, monks, a monk abides contemplating the body in the body, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in the world.*

*He abides contemplating feelings in the feelings, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in the world.*

*He abides contemplating the mind in the mind, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in the world.*

*He abides contemplating dhammas in dhammas, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in the world."*

## **BREATHING**

*"And how, monks, does he abide contemplating the body in the body? Here, gone to the forest, or to the root of a tree, or to an empty hut, he sits down folding his legs crosswise, setting his body erect, and directing the mindfulness towards (the meditative object).*

*Only mindful he breathes in; only mindful he breathes out. Breathing in long, he knows "I breathe in long;" breathing out long, he knows "I breathe out long." Breathing in short, he knows "I breathe in short;" breathing out short, he knows "I breathe out short." He trains thus: "I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body (of breath);" he trains thus: "I shall*

*breathe out experiencing the whole body (of breath)."* He trains thus: "I shall breathe in calming the bodily formation;" he trains thus: "I shall breathe out calming the bodily formation."

*"Just as a skilled turner or his apprentice, when making a long turn, knows "I make a long turn;" or, when making a short turn, knows "I make a short turn;" so too, breathing in long, he knows "I breathe in long;" breathing out long, he knows "I breathe out long." Breathing in short, he knows "I breathe in short;" breathing out short, he knows "I breathe out short." He trains thus: "I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body;" he trains thus: "I shall breathe out experiencing the whole body." He trains thus: "I shall breathe in calming the bodily formation;" he trains thus: "I shall breathe out calming the bodily formation."*

## **Culmination**

*"In this way, he abides contemplating the body in the body internally; or, he abides contemplating the body externally; or, he abides contemplating the body both internally and externally. He abides contemplating the nature of arising in the body; or, he abides contemplating the nature of the passing away in the body; or, he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in the body. Mindfulness that "there is a body" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness. And, he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how he abides contemplating the body in the body."*

## **POSTURES**

*"Again, monks, when walking, he knows "I am walking;" when standing, he knows "I am standing;" when sitting, he knows "I am sitting;" when lying down, he knows "I am lying down;" or, he knows accordingly however his body is "disposed."*

### **Culmination**

*"In this way, he abides contemplating the body in the body internally; or, he abides contemplating the body externally; or, he abides contemplating the body both internally and externally. He abides contemplating the nature of arising in the body; or, he abides contemplating the nature of the passing away in the body; or, he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in the body. Mindfulness that "there is a body" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness. And, he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how he abides contemplating the body in the body."*

## **ACTIVITIES**

*"Again, monks, when going forward and returning, he acts clearly knowing; when looking ahead and looking away, he acts clearly knowing; when flexing and extending his limbs, he acts clearly knowing; when wearing his robes and carrying his outer robe and bowl, he acts clearly knowing; when eating,*

*drinking, consuming food, and tasting, he acts clearly knowing; when defecating and urinating, he acts clearly knowing; when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and keeping silent, he acts clearly knowing."*

## **Culmination**

*"In this way, he abides contemplating the body in the body internally; or, he abides contemplating the body externally; or, he abides contemplating the body both internally and externally. He abides contemplating the nature of arising in the body; or, he abides contemplating the nature of the passing away in the body; or, he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in the body. Mindfulness that "there is a body" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness. And, he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how he abides contemplating the body in the body."*

## **ANATOMICAL PARTS**

*"Again, monks, a monk contemplates this very body up from the soles of the feet and down from the top of the hair, enclosed by skin, to be full of many kinds of impurity thus: In this body, there are head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, bowels, mesentery, contents of the stomach, feces, (brain), bile, phlegm,*

*pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil of the joints, and urine."*

*"Just as though there were a bag with an opening at both ends full of many sorts of grains, such as hill rice, red rice, beans, peas, millet, and white rice, and a man with good eyes were to open it and review it thus: "This is hill rice, this is red rice, these are beans, these are peas, this is millet, this is white rice;" so too, he contemplates this very body up from the soles of the feet and down from the top of the hair, enclosed by skin, to be full of many kinds of impurity thus: "In this body there are head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, bowels, mesentery, contents of the stomach, feces, (brain), bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil of the joints, and urine."*

## **Culmination**

*"In this way, he abides contemplating the body in the body internally; or, he abides contemplating the body externally; or, he abides contemplating the body both internally and externally. He abides contemplating the nature of arising in the body; or, he abides contemplating the nature of the passing away in the body; or, he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in the body. Mindfulness that "there is a body" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness. And, he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how he abides contemplating the body in the body."*

## **ELEMENTS**

*"Again, monks, a monk contemplates this very body, however it is placed, however disposed, in terms of elements thus: In this body there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element."*

*"Just as though a skilled butcher or his apprentice had killed a cow and was seated at a crossroads with it cut up into pieces; so too he contemplates this very body, however it is placed, however disposed, in terms of elements thus: "In this body, there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element."*

### **Culmination**

*"In this way, he abides contemplating the body in the body internally; or, he abides contemplating the body externally; or, he abides contemplating the body both internally and externally. He abides contemplating the nature of arising in the body; or, he abides contemplating the nature of the passing away in the body; or, he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in the body. Mindfulness that "there is a body" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness. And, he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how he abides contemplating the body in the body."*

## **CORPSE IN DECAY**

1. *"Again, monks, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a burial ground—one, two or three days dead, bloated, livid, and oozing matter.*
2. *Again, monks, as though he were to see a corpse being devoured by crows, hawks, vultures, herons, dogs, leopards, tigers, jackals, or various kinds of worms.*
3. *Again, monks, as though he were to see a skeleton with flesh and blood, held together with sinews.*
4. *Again, monks, as though he were to see a skeleton fleshless and smeared with blood, held together with sinews.*
5. *Again, monks, as though he were to see a skeleton without flesh and blood, held together with sinews.*
6. *Again, monks, as though he were to see bones disconnected and scattered in all directions, here hand bones, there foot bones, ankle bones, shin bones, thigh bones, pelvis, rib, spinal bones, collar bones, neck, jaw, teeth or skull.*
7. *Again, monks, as though he were to see bones bleached white, the color of shells.*
8. *Again, monks, as though he were to see bones heaped up, more than a year old.*
9. *Again, monks, as though he were to see bones rotten and crumbling to dust*

*He compares this very body with it thus: "This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate."*



## **Culmination**

*"In this way, he abides contemplating the body in the body internally; or, he abides contemplating the body externally; or, he abides contemplating the body both internally and externally. He abides contemplating the nature of arising in the body; or, he abides contemplating the nature of the passing away in the body; or, he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in the body. Mindfulness that "there is a body" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness. And, he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how he abides contemplating the body in the body."*

## **FEELING**

*"And how, monks, does he abide contemplating feelings in the feelings?"*

- *"Here, when feeling a pleasant feeling, he knows "I feel a pleasant feeling."*
- *When feeling an unpleasant feeling, he knows "I feel an unpleasant feeling."*
- *When feeling a neutral feeling, he knows "I feel a neutral feeling."*
- *When feeling a sensual pleasant feeling, he knows "I feel a sensual pleasant feeling."*
- *When feeling a non-sensual pleasant feeling, he knows "I feel a non-sensual pleasant feeling."*
- *When feeling a sensual unpleasant feeling, he knows "I feel a sensual unpleasant feeling."*

- *When feeling a non-sensual unpleasant feeling, he knows "I feel a non-sensual unpleasant feeling."*
- *When feeling a sensual neutral feeling, he knows "I feel a sensual neutral feeling."*
- *When feeling a non-sensual neutral feeling, he knows "I feel a non-sensual neutral feeling."*

## **Culmination**

*"In this way, he abides contemplating the feelings in the feelings internally, or he abides contemplating feelings externally, or he abides contemplating the feelings both internally and externally. He abides contemplating the nature of arising in the feelings, or he abides contemplating the nature of the passing away in the feelings, or he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in the feelings. Mindfulness that "there is feeling" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how he abides contemplating the feelings in the feelings."*

## **MIND**

*"And how, monks, does he abide contemplating the mind in the mind?"*

- *"Here, he knows a desire-associated mind to be "desire-associated," and a desire-disassociated mind to be "desire-disassociated."*
- *He knows an aversion-associated mind to be "aversion-associated," and an aversion-*

*disassociated mind to be "aversion-disassociated."*

- *He knows a delusion-associated mind to be "delusion-associated," and a delusion-disassociated mind to be "delusion-disassociated."*
- *He knows a contracted mind to be "contracted," and a distracted mind to be "distracted."*
- *He knows an advanced mind to be "advanced," and a basic mind to be "basic."*
- *He knows a surpassable mind to be "surpassable," and an unsurpassable mind to be "unsurpassable."*
- *He knows a concentrated mind to be "concentrated," and an unconcentrated mind to be "unconcentrated."*
- *He knows a liberated mind to be "liberated," and an unliberated mind to be "unliberated."*

## **Culmination**

*"In this way, he abides contemplating the mind in the mind internally, or he abides contemplating the mind externally, or he abides contemplating the mind both internally and externally. He abides contemplating the nature of arising in the mind, or he abides contemplating the nature of the passing away in the mind, or he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in the mind. Mindfulness that "there is a mind" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness. And he abides independent,*

*not clinging to anything in the world. That is how he abides contemplating the mind in the mind."*

## **FIVE HINDRANCES**

*"And how, monks, does he abide contemplating dhammas in dhammas?"*

*"Here he abides contemplating dhammas in dhammas in terms of the five hindrances. And how does he abide contemplating dhammas in dhammas in terms of the five hindrances?"*

- *"If sensual desire is present in him, he knows 'there is sensual desire in me;' if sensual desire is not present in him, he knows 'there is no sensual desire in me;' and he knows how unarisen sensual desire can arise, how arisen sensual desire can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed sensual desire can be prevented."*
- *"If aversion is present in him, he knows 'there is aversion in me;' if aversion is not present in him, he knows 'there is no aversion in me;' and he knows how unarisen aversion can arise, how arisen aversion can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed aversion can be prevented."*
- *"If sloth-and-torpor is present in him, he knows 'there is sloth-and-torpor in me;' if sloth-and-torpor is not present in him, he knows 'there is no sloth-and-torpor in me;' and he knows how unarisen sloth-and-torpor can*

*arise, how arisen sloth-and-torpor can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed sloth-and-torpor can be prevented."*

- *"If restlessness-and-worry is present in him, he knows 'there is restlessness-and-worry in me;'* if restlessness-and-worry is not present in him, he knows "there is no restlessness-and-worry in me;" and he knows how unarisen restlessness-and-worry can arise, how arisen restlessness-and-worry can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed restlessness-and-worry can be prevented."
- *"If doubt is present in him, he knows 'there is doubt in me;'* if doubt is not present in him, he knows 'there is no doubt in me;' and he knows how unarisen doubt can arise, how arisen doubt can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed doubt can be prevented."

## **Culmination**

*"In this way, he abides contemplating dhammas in dhammas internally, or he abides contemplating dhammas externally, or he abides contemplating dhammas both internally and externally. He abides contemplating the arising nature in dhammas, or he abides contemplating the disappearing nature in dhammas, or he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and disappearing nature in dhammas. Mindfulness that 'there are dhammas' is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world.*

*That is how he abides contemplating dhammas in dhammas in terms of the five hindrances."*

## **FIVE AGGREGATES**

*"Again, monks, he abides contemplating dhammas in dhammas in terms of five aggregates of clinging. And how does he abide contemplating dhammas in dhammas in terms of the five aggregates of clinging?"*

- *"Here, he knows, such is material form, such its arising, such its passing away;*
- *Such is feeling, such its arising, such its passing away;*
- *Such is cognition, such its arising, such its passing away;*
- *Such are volitions, such their arising, such their passing away;*
- *Such is consciousness, such its arising, such its passing away."*

## **Culmination**

*"In this way, he abides contemplating dhammas in dhammas internally, or he abides contemplating dhammas externally, or he abides contemplating dhammas both internally and externally. He abides contemplating the arising nature in dhammas, or he abides contemplating the disappearing nature in dhammas, or he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and disappearing nature in dhammas. Mindfulness that 'there are dhammas' is established in*

*him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world.*

*That is how he abides contemplating dhammas in dhammas in terms of the five aggregates of clinging."*

## **SIX SENSE-SOURCES**

*"Again, monks, he abides contemplating dhammas in dhammas in terms of the six internal and external sense-sources. And how does he abide contemplating dhammas in dhammas in terms of the six internal and external sense-sources?"*

- *"Here, he knows the eye, he knows forms, and he knows the fetter that arises depending on both; and he also knows how an unarisen fetter can arise, how an arisen fetter can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed fetter can be prevented."*
- *"Here, he knows the ear, he knows sounds, and he knows the fetter that arises depending on both; and he also knows how an unarisen fetter can arise, how an arisen fetter can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed fetter can be prevented."*
- *"Here, he knows the nose, he knows odor, and he knows the fetter that arises depending on both; and he also knows how an unarisen fetter can arise, how an arisen fetter can be*

- removed, and how a future arising of the removed fetter can be prevented."*
- *"Here, he knows the tongue, he knows flavors, and he knows the fetter that arises depending on both; and he also knows how an unarisen fetter can arise, how an arisen fetter can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed fetter can be prevented."*
  - *"Here, he knows the body, he knows tangibles, and he knows the fetter that arises depending on both; and he also knows how an unarisen fetter can arise, how an arisen fetter can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed fetter can be prevented."*
  - *"Here, he knows the mind; he knows mind-objects, and he knows the fetter that arises depending on both, and he also knows how an unarisen fetter can arise, how an arisen fetter can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed fetter can be prevented."*

## **Culmination**

*"In this way, he abides contemplating dhammas in dhammas internally, or he abides contemplating dhammas externally, or he abides contemplating dhammas both internally and externally. He abides contemplating the arising nature in dhammas, or he abides contemplating the disappearing nature in dhammas, or he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and disappearing nature in dhammas. Mindfulness that 'there are dhammas' is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and*



*continuous mindfulness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world.*

*That is how he abides contemplating dhammas in dhammas in terms of the six internal and external sense-sources."*

## **SEVEN ENLIGHTENMENT FACTORS**

*"Again, monks, he abides contemplating dhammas in dhammas in terms of the seven enlightenment factors. And how does he abide contemplating dhammas in dhammas in terms of the seven awakening factors?"*

- *"Here, if the enlightenment-factor of mindfulness is present in him, he knows 'there is the enlightenment-factor of mindfulness in me;' if the enlightenment-factor of mindfulness is not present in him, he knows 'there is no enlightenment-factor of mindfulness in me;' he knows how the unarisen enlightenment-factor of mindfulness can arise, and how the arisen enlightenment-factor of mindfulness can be perfected by development."*
- *"Here, if the enlightenment-factor of investigation of dhammas is present in him, he knows 'there is the enlightenment-factor of investigation of dhammas in me;' if the enlightenment-factor of investigation of dhammas is not present in him, he knows 'there is no enlightenment-factor of investigation of dhammas in me;' he knows how the unarisen enlightenment-factor of investigation of dhammas can arise, and how the arisen*

*enlightenment-factor of investigation of dhammas can be perfected by development."*

- *"Here, if the enlightenment-factor of energy is present in him, he knows 'there is the enlightenment-factor of energy in me;' if the enlightenment-factor of energy is not present in him, he knows 'there is no enlightenment-factor of energy in me;' he knows how the unarisen enlightenment-factor of energy can arise, and how the arisen enlightenment-factor of energy can be perfected by development."*
- *"Here, if the enlightenment-factor of rapture is present in him, he knows 'there is the enlightenment-factor of rapture in me;' if the enlightenment-factor of rapture is not present in him, he knows 'there is no enlightenment-factor of rapture in me;' he knows how the unarisen enlightenment-factor of rapture can arise, and how the arisen enlightenment-factor of rapture can be perfected by development."*
- *"Here, if the enlightenment-factor of tranquility is present in him, he knows 'there is the enlightenment-factor of tranquility in me;' if the enlightenment-factor of tranquility is not present in him, he knows 'there is no enlightenment-factor of tranquility in me;' he knows how the unarisen enlightenment-factor of tranquility can arise, and how the arisen enlightenment-factor of tranquility can be perfected by development."*
- *"Here, if the enlightenment-factor of concentration is present in him, he knows 'there is the enlightenment-factor of concentration in me;' if the enlightenment-factor of concentration is not*

*present in him, he knows 'there is no enlightenment-factor of concentration in me;' he knows how the unarisen enlightenment-factor of concentration can arise, and how the arisen enlightenment-factor of concentration can be perfected by development."*

- *"Here, if the enlightenment-factor of equanimity is present in him, he knows 'there is the enlightenment-factor of equanimity in me;' if the enlightenment-factor of equanimity is not present in him, he knows 'there is no enlightenment-factor of equanimity in me;' he knows how the unarisen enlightenment-factor of equanimity can arise, and how the arisen enlightenment-factor of equanimity can be perfected by development."*

## **Culmination**

*"In this way, he abides contemplating dhammas in dhammas internally, or he abides contemplating dhammas externally, or he abides contemplating dhammas both internally and externally. He abides contemplating the arising nature in dhammas, or he abides contemplating the disappearing nature in dhammas, or he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and disappearing nature in dhammas. Mindfulness that "there are dhammas" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world.*

*That is how he abides contemplating dhammas in dhammas in terms of the seven enlightenment factors."*

## THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

*"Again, monks, he abides contemplating dhammas in dhammas in terms of the Four Noble Truths. And how does he abide contemplating dhammas in dhammas in terms of the four noble truths?"*

*"Here, he knows as it really is, 'this is suffering;' he knows as it really is, 'this is the arising of suffering;' he knows as it really is, 'this is the cessation of suffering;' he knows as it really is, 'this is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.'*

### The Noble Truth of Suffering

*And, what, monks, is the Noble Truth of Suffering? Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, death is suffering; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and excessive despair are suffering; association with the disliked is suffering; separation from the liked is suffering; not to get what one wishes is also suffering. In brief, the five aggregates of clinging are suffering.*

- **Birth:** *What, now, is birth? The births of beings belonging to whatever group of beings, their being born, their origination, their conception, their springing into existence, the manifestation of the aggregates, the acquisition of the sense-sources. This, monks, is called birth.*
- **Aging:** *And what, monks, is aging? The aging of beings belonging to whatever group of*

*beings, their old age and decrepitude, breaking of teeth, grayness of hair, wrinkling of skin, the failing of their vital force, the wearing out of their sense faculties. This, monks, is called aging.*

- **Death:** *And what, monks, is death? Departing and vanishing of beings from whatever group of beings, their destruction, disappearance, dying, the completion of their life period, dissolution of the aggregates, the discarding of the body, the destruction of the controlling faculties of our vital principle. This, monks, is called death.*
- **Sorrow:** *And what, monks, is sorrow? The sorrow of one afflicted by this or that loss, touched by this or that painful thing, the sorrowing, the sorrowful state of mind, the inner sorrow, the inner deep sorrow. This, monks, is called sorrow.*
- **Lamentation:** *And what, monks, is lamentation? The wailing of one afflicted by this or that loss, touched by this or that painful thing, lament, wailing and lamenting, the state of wailing and lamentation. This, monks, is called lamentation.*
- **Pain:** *And what, monks, is pain? Bodily pain, bodily unpleasantness, painful and unpleasant feeling produced by bodily contact. This, monks, is called pain.*

- **Grief:** *And what, monks, is grief? Mental pain and mental unpleasantness, the painful and unpleasant feeling produced by mental contact. This, monks, is called grief.*
- **Excessive Distress:** *And what, monks, is excessive distress? The distress of one afflicted by this or that loss, touched by this or that painful thing, excessive pain and the state of excessive distress, monks, is called excessive distress.*
- **Association with the Hated:** *And what, monks, is suffering which is association with the hated? Whatever undesirable, disagreeable, unpleasant objects that are visible, audible, odorous, flavorful, and tangible; or whoever those wishers of loss, wisher of harm, wishers of discomfort and wishers of non-release from bonds are, it is that being together with them, coming together with them, fraternizing with them, and being mixed with them. This, monks, is called suffering, which is association with the hated.*
- **Separation from the Loved:** *And what, monks, is suffering which is separation from the loved? Whatever desirable, agreeable, pleasant objects that are visible, audible, odorous, flavorful, and tangible; or whoever those wishers of welfare, wishers of benefit, wishers of comfort and wishers of release from bonds are—mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters,*

*friends, colleagues, relatives, or blood relations, it is not being together with them, not coming together with them, not fraternizing with them, and not being mixed with them. This, monks, is called suffering which is separation from the loved.*

- **Not to Get What One Wishes:** *And what, monks, is "not to get what one wishes is also suffering?"*
  - a. *In being subject to birth, such a wish arises, "Oh, that we were not subject to birth! Oh, that no birth would come to us!" But this indeed cannot be attained by mere wishing. This is "not to get what one wishes is also suffering."*
  - b. *In being subject to aging, such a wish arises, "Oh, that we were not subject to aging! Oh, that no aging would come to us!" But this, indeed, cannot be attained by mere wishing. This is "not to get what one wishes is also suffering."*
  - c. *In being subject to sickness, such a wish arises, "Oh, that we were not subject to sickness! Oh, that no sickness would come to us!" But this indeed cannot be attained by mere wishing. This is "not to get what one wishes is also suffering."*
  - d. *In being subject to death, such a wish arises, "Oh, that we were not subject to death! Oh, that no death would come to us!" But this indeed cannot be attained*

*by mere wishing. This is "not to get what one wishes is also suffering."*

- e. *In being subject to sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and excessive distress, such a wish arises, "Oh, that we were not subject to sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and excessive distress! Oh, that no sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and excessive distress would come to us!" But this indeed cannot be attained by mere wishing. This is "not to get what one wishes is also suffering."*

- **Five Aggregates of Clinging:** *And what, monks, is "in brief, the five aggregates of clinging are suffering?" They are aggregate of clinging of material form, aggregate of clinging of feeling, aggregates of clinging of perception, aggregates of clinging of mental formation, aggregates of clinging of consciousness. This, monks, is called "in brief, the five aggregates of clinging are suffering."*

*This, monks, is called the Noble Truth of Suffering.*

## **The Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering**

*And what, monks, is the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering? It is that craving which gives rise to further rebirth and, associated with pleasure and lust, finds ever fresh delight, now here, now there — to wit, the sensual craving, the craving for existence, and the craving for non-existence.*



*Where, monks, does this craving, when arising, arise, and, when settling, settle? Whatever in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing, therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*

### **Craving for Six Senses:**

- 1. What in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing? Eye in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
- 2. Ear in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
- 3. Nose in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
- 4. Tongue in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
- 5. Body in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
- 6. Mind in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*

### **Craving for Six Sense-Objects**

- 1. Visible forms in the world are delightful things, pleasurable things; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*

2. *Sounds in the world are delightful things, pleasurable things; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
3. *Smells in the world are delightful things, pleasurable things; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
4. *Tastes in the world are delightful things, pleasurable things; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
5. *Tangible objects in the world are delightful things, pleasurable things; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
6. *Dhammas in the world are delightful things, pleasurable things; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*

### **Craving for Six Sense-consciousness**

1. *Eye-consciousness in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
2. *Ear-consciousness in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
3. *Nose-consciousness in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
4. *Tongue-consciousness in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
5. *Body-consciousness in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*

6. *Mind-consciousness in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*

### **Craving for Six Sense-contacts**

1. *Eye-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
2. *Ear-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
3. *Nose-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
4. *Tongue-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
5. *Body-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
6. *Mind-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*

### **Craving for Six Feelings**

1. *The feeling born of eye-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
2. *The feeling born of ear-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein*

- this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
3. *The feeling born of nose-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
  4. *The feeling born of tongue-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
  5. *The feeling born of body-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
  6. *The feeling born of mind-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*

### **Craving for Six Sense-Perceptions**

1. *The perception of visible forms in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
2. *The perception of sounds in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
3. *The perception of smells in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*

4. *The perception of tastes in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
5. *The perception of tangible objects in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
6. *The perception of Dhammas in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*

### **Craving for Six Volitions**

1. *The volition regarding visible forms in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
2. *The volition regarding sounds in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
3. *The volition regarding smells in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
4. *The volition regarding tastes in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
5. *The volition regarding tangible objects in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing;*

*therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*

6. *The volition regarding Dhammas in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*

## **Craving for Six Objects**

1. *The craving for visible forms in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
2. *The craving for sounds in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
3. *The craving for smells in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
4. *The craving for tastes in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
5. *The craving for tangible objects in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
6. *The craving for Dhammas in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*

## **Craving for Six Thoughts**

- 1. The thought of visible forms in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
- 2. The thought of sounds in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
- 3. The thought of smells in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
- 4. The thought of tastes in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
- 5. The thought of tangible objects in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
- 6. The thought of Dhammas in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*

## **Craving for Six Ponderings**

- 1. The pondering on visible forms in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
- 2. The pondering on sounds in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein*

- this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
3. *The pondering on smells in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
  4. *The pondering on tastes in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
  5. *The pondering on tangible objects in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*
  6. *The pondering on Dhammas in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when arising, arises and, when settling, settles.*

*This, monks, is the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering.*

## **The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering**

*And what, monks, is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering? It is the total extinction by removing of, forsaking of, discarding of, freedom from, and non-attachment to that same craving.*

*And where, monks, is this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned, and when does this craving, when ceasing, cease? Whatever in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing, therein this*



*craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when ceasing, ceases.*

## **Abandoning Six Senses**

*What in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing?*

- 1. Eye in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
- 2. Ear in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
- 3. Nose in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
- 4. Tongue in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
- 5. Body in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
- 6. Mind in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*

## **Abandoning Six Sense-Objects**

- 1. Visible forms in the world are delightful things, pleasurable things; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
- 2. Sounds in the world are delightful things, pleasurable things; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
- 3. Smells in the world are delightful things, pleasurable things; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
- 4. Tastes in the world are delightful things, pleasurable things; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
- 5. Tangible objects in the world are delightful things, pleasurable things; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
- 6. Dhamma in the world are delightful things, pleasurable things; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*

## **Abandoning Six Sense-consciousness**

- 1. Eye-consciousness in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*

2. *Ear-consciousness in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
3. *Nose-consciousness in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
4. *Tongue-consciousness in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
5. *Body-consciousness in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
6. *Mind-consciousness in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*

### **Abandoning Six Sense-contacts**

1. *Eye-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
2. *Ear-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
3. *Nose-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when*

- being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
4. *Tongue-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
  5. *Body-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
  6. *Mind-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*

### **Abandoning Six Feelings**

1. *The feeling born of eye-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
2. *The feeling born of ear-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
3. *The feeling born of nose-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
4. *The feeling born of tongue-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*

5. *The feeling born of body-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
6. *The feeling born of mind-contact in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving, when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*

### **Abandoning Six Sense-perceptions**

1. *The perception of visible forms in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
2. *The perception of sounds in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
3. *The perception of smells in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
4. *The perception of tastes in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
5. *The perception of touch in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
6. *The perception of dhammas in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein*

*this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*

### **Abandoning Six Volitions**

- 1. The volition concerning visible forms in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
- 2. The volition concerning sounds in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
- 3. The volition concerning smells in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
- 4. The volition concerning tastes in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
- 5. The volition concerning touch in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
- 6. The volition concerning dhammas in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*

### **Abandoning Cravings for Six Objects**

- 1. The craving for visible forms in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein*

- this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
2. *The craving for sounds in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
  3. *The craving for smells in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
  4. *The craving for tastes in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
  5. *The craving for touch in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
  6. *The craving for dhammas in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*

### **Abandoning Six Thoughts**

1. *The thought of visible forms in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
2. *The thought of sounds in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*

3. *The thought of smells in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
4. *The thought of tastes in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
5. *The thought of touching in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
6. *The thought of dhammas in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*

### **Abandoning Six Ponderings**

1. *The discursive thought of visible forms in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
2. *The discursive thought of sounds in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
3. *The discursive thought of smells in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
4. *The discursive thought of tastes in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein*



*this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*

5. *The discursive thought of touching in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*
6. *The discursive thought of dhammas in the world is a delightful thing, a pleasurable thing; therein this craving when being abandoned, is abandoned and, when being ceased, ceases.*

*This, monks, is the Noble Truth of Cessation of Suffering.*

## **The Noble Truth of the Path Leading to Cessation of Suffering**

*And what, monks, is the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering? It is simply the Noble Eightfold Path; namely, Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.*

1. **Right View:** *And what, monks, is Right View? Understanding of suffering, understanding of the cause of suffering, understanding of cessation of suffering, understanding the Path leading to the cessation of suffering. This, monks, is called Right View.*
2. **Right Thought:** *And what, monks, is Right Thought? Thought of renunciation, thought of*

*non-hatred, thought of non-cruelty. This is, monks, called Right Thought.*

3. **Right Speech:** *And what, monks, is Right Speech? Abstaining from false speech, abstaining from slanderous speech, abstaining from harsh speech, abstaining from frivolous speech. This is, monks, called Right Speech.*
4. **Right Action:** *And what, monks, is Right Action? Abstaining from killing, abstaining from stealing, abstaining from sexual misconduct. This is, monks, called Right Action.*
5. **Right Livelihood:** *And what, monks, is Right Livelihood? Here, monks, a noble disciple having abandoned wrong livelihood, makes a living by means of Right Livelihood. This is, monks, called Right Livelihood.*
6. **Right Effort:** *And what, monks, is Right Effort? Here, monks, a monk engenders wishes, makes effort, arouses energy, exerts the mind, and strives for the non-arising of evil, unwholesome states that have not arisen; engenders wishes, makes effort, arouses energy, exerts the mind, and strives for the abandoning of evil, unwholesome states that have arisen; engenders wishes, makes effort, arouses energy, exerts the mind, and strives for the arising of wholesome states that have not arisen; engenders wishes, makes effort, arouses energy, exerts the mind, and strives for the stabilizing, for the collation, for the*

*increase, for the maturity, for the development, for the perfection through cultivation of wholesome states that have arisen. This is, monks, is called Right Effort.*

7. **Right Mindfulness:** *And what, monks, is Right Mindfulness? Here, monks, in regard to the body a monk abides contemplating the body, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world. In regard to feelings, he abides contemplating feelings, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world. In regard to the mind, he abides contemplating the mind, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world. In regard to dhammas, he abides contemplating dhammas, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in regard to the world. This, monks, is called Right Mindfulness.*

8. **Right Concentration:** *And what, monks, is Right Concentration?*

**First Jhāna:** *Here, monks, a monk, quite secluded from sense pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, attains and dwells in the first jhāna accompanied by initial application, accompanied by sustained application, with rapture and happiness born of seclusion;*

**Second Jhāna:** *Subsiding initial application and sustained application, he attains and dwells in the second Jhāna with inner tranquility and oneness of mind, with no initial application and sustained application, born of concentration, and with rapture and happiness;*

**Third Jhāna:** *With the overcoming of rapture as well as initial application and sustained application, he dwells in equanimity, is mindful and clearly comprehending, experiences happiness with his body and mind. He attains and dwells in the third jhāna, on account of which noble ones announce, "With equanimity and mindfulness, he dwells in happiness."*

**Fourth Jhāna:** *With the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the disappearance of previous joy and grief, he attains and dwells in the fourth jhāna, which has neither pain nor pleasure and has purity of mindfulness caused by equanimity. This, monks, is called Right Concentration.*

This, monks, is the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering.

### **Culmination**

*"In this way, he abides contemplating dhammas in dhammas internally, or he abides contemplating dhammas externally, or he abides contemplating dhammas both internally and externally. He abides contemplating the arising nature in dhammas, or he*

*abides contemplating the disappearing nature in dhammas, or he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and disappearing nature in dhammas. Mindfulness that "there are dhammas" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world.*

*That is how he abides contemplating dhammas in dhammas in terms of the Four Noble Truths."*

## **ASSURANCE OF ATTAINMENT**

*"Monks, if anyone should develop these four satipaṭṭhānas in such a way for seven years, then one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now, or, if there is a trace of clinging left, non-returning.*

*Let alone seven years, monks, if anyone should develop these four satipaṭṭhānas in such a way for six years, five years ... four years ... three years ...two years ...one year, then one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now, or, if there is a trace of clinging left, non-returning.*

*Let alone one year, monks, if anyone should develop these four satipaṭṭhānas in such a way for seven months... six months ... five months ... four months ... three months ... two months ... one month*

*... half a month, then one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now, or, if there is a trace of clinging left, non-returning.*

*Let alone half a month, monks, if anyone should develop these four satipaṭṭhānas in such a way for seven days, then one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now, or, if there is a trace of clinging left, non-returning. So, it was with reference to this that it was said:*

*"Monks, this is the only way for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of suffering and discontent, for acquiring the true method, for the realization of nibbāna, namely, the four satipaṭṭhāna."*

*This the Blessed One said. Glad in their hearts, the monks welcomed the words of the Blessed One.*

*Namo tassa bhgavato arahato sammā-sambuddhassa*

## THE DISCOURSE ON SATIPAṬṬHĀNA



### Introduction

*Thus have I heard...*

*On one occasion, the Blessed One was living in the Kuru country at a town of the Kurus named Kammāsadhamma. The Blessed One addressed the monks thus: "Monks," and the monks replied, "Venerable Sir." And the Blessed One spoke as follows:*

*"Monks, this is the only path for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of mental and physical distress, for the acquisition of the Noble Path (ñāya), for the realization of Nibbāna, namely the four satipaṭṭhānas."*

*Here, monks...*

*A monk dwells (spends his time) contemplating the body in the body, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in the world.*

*He dwells (spends his time) contemplating feelings in the feelings, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in the world.*

*He dwells (spends his time) contemplating the mind in the mind, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in the world.*

*He dwells (spends his time) contemplating dhammas in dhammas, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in the world.*

## **Definition of *Satipatthana***

The term *satipaṭṭhāna* is a compound of *sati* and *paṭṭhāna* (or *upaṭṭhāna* with "u" omitted by vowel elision). The word *sati* comes from the root *sara* that literally means to remember or to recollect. In some cases, therefore, *sati* denotes the memory. Strictly speaking, *sati* is not really memory but it does activate memory. In the context of mindfulness practice, it has nothing to do with past memory; it is not to remember anything in the past but to remember everything in the present; that is, to be



mindful of present psycho-physical phenomena that represent or constitute what we really are. In this sense, *sati* is generally translated as “mindfulness.”

The latter word *paṭṭhāna* (or *upaṭṭhāna*) is composed of *pa* (or *upa*) and *ṭhāna*. The commentary defines the prefix *pa* (or *upa*) in three ways: jumping into (*okkanditvā*), rushing toward (*pakkhanditvā*) and spreading all over (*pattharivā*), which respectively mean “ardently,” “urgently,” and “comprehensively.” And *ṭhāna* is defined as “to establish.” So, *satipaṭṭhāna* literally means “the mindfulness established (by noting present phenomena) ardently, urgently and comprehensively.” Something present is something real. So, to see something real, we have to see it while it is still present. A present phenomenon always lasts only a split second, like a lightning strike. Only when we note it ardently, urgently and comprehensively can we discern it as it really is. Undeniably, we are changing at every moment from all aspects, physical, mental, and emotional. To be aware of such fleeting present phenomena comprehensively, therefore, we must note them ardently and urgently, as if we were to jump into or rush towards them. This is the correct way to establish mindfulness. In other words, it is the great observing power.

### **“Thus have I heard’**

The Buddha expounded the establishment of mindfulness as defined above in the discourse known as *Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, which is recorded in the Pāli text called *Dīgha-nikāya* (the collection of long

discourses)<sup>1</sup>. This discourse (sutta) like any other discourses is started with the sentence “*Thus have I heard,*” by Venerable Ānanda, when he reported it to the First Buddhist Council that was held about three months after the Buddha’s demise in Rājagaha city, known today as Rajagir in India. So, referring to this sentence, modern Pāli scholars verify the authenticity of discourses recorded during that council. Therefore, the texts without this sentence, like Paṭisambhidāmagga, Moliṇḍa-pañhā, Abhidhamma, etc., are considered later additions to the Pāli text. Here, “later additions” mean the Buddha’s teachings that were collected and compiled later, especially in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Buddhist Councils. It does not mean they are not authentic, though.

## **Authenticity of a Discourse**

Venerable Ānanda was Buddha’s first cousin and served as a permanent attendant to the Buddha for twenty-five years, until the Buddha’s demise. So, most of the discourses were given in his presence. The discourses delivered in his absence were also repeated to him according to the request he had made when he accepted the assignment as an attendant to the Buddha. So, he was the one who learned all the discourses by heart and reported them to the First Buddhist Council. In this council, the Buddha’s teachings were collected and carefully scrutinized. Only when a discourse satisfied the

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<sup>1</sup> The same discourse recurs in *Majjhima-nikāya*. Moreover, the topic of mindfulness or *satipaṭṭhāna* is expounded in many shorter discourses in *Samyutta-nikāya* and *Anguttara-nikāya*.

assembly that it was the authentic teaching of the Buddha was it admitted to the collection and recited in unison. This is how a discourse was accepted as the authentic word of the Buddha unanimously by the council.

### **Where, When and To Whom**

In each and every discourse, along with its occasion, Venerable Ānanda also stated location and audience in general. So, in the beginning of this discourse he stated thus:

*"On one occasion, the Blessed One was living in the Kuru country at a town of the Kurus named Kammāsadhamma. The Blessed One addressed the monks thus: Monks, and the monks replied, Venerable Sir. And the Blessed One spoke as follows:"*

According to the Indian archeology department, the Kuru country was believed to have been situated just a few kilometers from New Delhi, the capital city of modern India. There is a rock with Emperor Asoka's inscription signifying this historical site. The commentary described this town as a prosperous place where well-informed peoples had lived. This was the reason why the Buddha expounded this discourse there.

Regarding the audience, there are four kinds of audience: monks, nuns, male and female devotees. The Buddha addressed bhikkhu (monks) among

others because monks were leading audience, and moreover the word "bhikkhu" actually refers to anybody who is fearful of saṃsāra (the continuous process of birth and death) and puts effort in the practice for liberation.

## **Mindfulness and Its Purposes or Benefits**

As mentioned before, mindfulness (*sati*) here means to be aware of current psycho-physical phenomena that represent what we really are. In this discourse, the phenomena to observe are classified into four kinds: body (physical actions), feelings, minds and Dhammas (general objects like seeing, hearing, etc.). In daily life, while we are doing something, we normally think of something else. So, we are not really mindful of our actions. We may be angry or lustful, but we are not fully aware that we are so. When angry, for example, our mind is fully focused on someone we are angry with, but not on the anger itself. When lustful, our attention is fully drawn to someone we lust for, but not the lust itself. The mindfulness arises only when we become really aware of such current psycho-physical phenomena that represent what we really are.

In the very beginning of the discourse, the Buddha mentioned the purposes or benefits of established mindfulness as follows:

*"Monks, this is the only path for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance*

*of mental and physical distress, for the acquisition of the Noble Path (ñāya), for the realization of Nibbāna, namely the four satipaṭṭhānas."*

### **"This is the only Path"**

The Pāli word *ekāyana* is composed of two words *eka* (one) and *āyana* (way or path). Here, "one" (*eka*) can mean "only one or only." According to the commentary, therefore, *ekāyana* is often translated as "only way." Regarding this translation, Sayadaw U Paṇḍita once recounted an incident that a female yogi got out of his audience when she heard him saying "the only way," because, she said, it made no sense to say so, as there must be several other ways.

According Pāli grammar, "one" (*eka*) has many meanings, such as, the first digital number (*sankhyā*), no two or unparalleled (*atulya*), alone or oneself (*asahāya*), unmixed or direct (*amissana*), number one, the best or superior (*setṭha*), only one or only (*anañña*), absolute or unique (*sacca*), certain (*mukhyā*), complete (*kevala*), and so on.

The commentary defines the word *ekāyana* according to five meanings of *eka* (one) among others as follows:

- This (great observing power) is the *direct* path, as it has no junction.
- This is the way one must walk *alone* or *oneself*. No one can do this on our behalf.

- This is the way of the *Superior* One, the Buddha who discovered it.
- This is the *certain* way, as it certainly leads to the goal, nibbāna.
- This is the *only* way, as there is no other way that can promise the destination.

### **1. "For the purification of beings"**

Basically, we walk on this Path for five purposes. The first purpose is "the purification of beings." This means to purify ourselves of mental defilements. We were not born sinners, but we are defiled and contaminated with unwholesome mental states such as greed, selfishness, anger, hatred, pride, conceit, ill will, jealousy, and so on. Because of greed and selfishness, we may even kill our own brothers, sisters, or spouses. During the Buddha's time, Prince Ajāta-sattu assassinated his father, King Bimbisāra of Māgadha kingdom, to enjoy his kingship earlier. The Buddha's relatives, people of Warrior cast, discriminated against Prince Viṭṭhapa who, in revenge, killed thousands of them when he became the king. This is an example of pride, prejudice and hatred. Human history is always full of bloody wars and painful events because of these mental defilements.

Because of greed and selfishness, we abuse the natural resources causing horrible pollution, deforestation, global warming, etc., on top of causing a shortage of resources. Now our planet is becoming more difficult for us to live in. For example, the air in many places has become polluted and harmful to

people. Even in the mighty ocean, there is growing shortage of marine life. Thus, the mental impurities such as greed, selfishness, etc., cause damage to ourselves and our planet. Obviously, we need to be purified of these mental impurities.

### **Three Ways of Purifying**

We can purify ourselves of such horrible mental impurities in three ways: by means of mindfulness, by means of vipassana insights or high-level concentration (*jhāna*), and by means of magga-enlightenment. For example, if we feel jealous of someone's achievement, then the three ways of purification are as follows:

- Momentary purification: If we are really mindful of jealousy by noting it as "jealous, jealous," it normally stops right away, or comes under control. If mindfulness is not strong enough, it may come back again and again. But we can overcome it in the end if we can note it again and again. That is why this is called a moment-to-moment purification (*khaṇika-pahāna*).
- Prolonged purification: We can prevent it from arising for longer periods like months or years through the mature insights (*vipassanā*) or high-level concentration (*jhāna*). This is called a prolonged purification (*vikkhambhaṇa-pahāna*).
- Permanent purification: We can get rid of it once and for all only when we attain the magga enlightenment through the stages of

Vipassanā insights developed by establishing mindfulness. This is a complete purification (*samuccheda-pahāna*).

Thus, we can purify ourselves of mental defilements for a moment by means of mindfulness, for longer periods by means of higher vipassana insights or jhāna and, once and for all, by means of *magga-phala* awakening. Actually, it is mindfulness that culminates into higher vipassana insights and magga-phala enlightenments. Therefore, by establishing mindfulness, we become gradually purified of mental defilements, indeed.

## ***2. "For the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation"***

The second purpose is to overcome sorrow and lamentation or worry and anxiety. Nowadays, growing population, job competition and decreasing natural resources have made our lives more and more stressful. Job loss and busy livelihood can cause stress and depression. Although science and technology are now extremely advanced, we cannot be said that we are happier than our forefathers. In fact, many people even commit suicide. A Japanese friend of mine once said the suicide rate in Japan was getting higher every year.

We can apply mindfulness in the most effective way to overcome these problems. If we cannot sleep because of worry, for example, we should be mindful of this very worry by noting it as "worry, worry, worry..." If the mindfulness is not strong enough, the worry may get the upper hand, but we should not



give up easily, but keep on noting “worry, worry, worry.” At the very least, we should make sure we are aware of our worrying. Remember that being worried and being aware of worry are totally different. We have to make sure we are really aware of worry instead of just being worried. This simple method can help keep the worry under control. It definitely helps to gradually calm down our mind. In the end, we will fall asleep soundly. Of course, there are many other methods to overcome worry and anxiety, but the mindfulness is really unique and effective. If you suffer from worry and sleepless nights (I hope you don’t), please try to apply mindfulness instead of tranquilizers or sleeping pills, or doing something foolish like drinking. We can prevent worry and anxiety for longer periods with higher vipassana insights or samatha meditations, and can eradicate them once and for all at the third stage of magga-enlightenment (*anāgāmi-magga*).

### ***3. "For the disappearance of physical and mental distress"***

The third purpose is to put an end to mental and physical distress. Our bodies are subject to pain and to all kinds of diseases. Pain is unavoidable in life. From time to time, we may have illness or disease that causes us severe pain or discomfort. We may see patients in a hospital or old people in a nursing home complaining bitterly about their severe pain. Actually, even in our daily life we have to change our physical posture every now and then to overcome pain that otherwise will arise.

Mindfulness helps put an end to mental and physical pain. According to scientific research, all kinds of diseases are closely related to the mind. So, it is reasonable to assume that peaceful wholesome minds will surely result in the orderly body-functions and healthy chemical changes that can help reduce or heal many diseases and pains. There are cases in which some types of chronic pains or diseases were fully healed by mindfulness.

One of my best friends recounted his experience to me. Once, he got a big cut on his foot while hiking in the forest and had to get it stitched without using any anesthetic. He said that mindfulness helped him endure such severe pain in an amazing way. He noted it as "pain, pain, pain" with precise awareness. Thanks to his good training in mindfulness practice, he found pain as pain separate from himself, and experienced it as if it belonged to nobody in particular. Then, the pain no longer bothered him.

As mentioned before, all sorts of suffering and distress are closely related to the mind or, strictly speaking, to the illusory sense of "I" and "mine" (*sakkāya-ditthi*) and its subsequent attachment. So, Buddha and fully enlightened persons, although liable to physical illness and diseases, are never agitated by any kind of mental and physical distress.

- The Buddha was always calm and tranquil, not because his life was always easy.
- He was never worried about anybody, not because he lacked compassion.

- He was never mad about anything or anybody, not because he was always revered.
- He was never affected by any distress, not because he was a celestial being.
- But it is because he had totally eradicated all attachments.

The Buddha compared life (mind and body) to a mirage that deer mistake for water and pursue with distress. We suffer distress because of our illusion about life and our attachment to it. So, when we discern mind and body as they really are without illusionarily identifying them as "I" or "mine", we will no longer be affected by mental and physical distress. Once mindfulness becomes steadily established, we develop vipassana insights step by step from low to high. And when vipassana insights are mature, we attain the magga enlightenment. At that time, all forms of distress can be put to an end once and for all.

### **Nakula-pitā**

Once, the Buddha instructed Nakula-pitā, one of his most dedicated disciples, who was seriously ill, as follows:

*"Nakula, suppose someone gets a thorn in his flesh and tried to take it out with another thorn<sup>2</sup>. Unfortunately, the second thorn breaks and remains in the flesh. Thus, he suffered the*

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<sup>2</sup> *In old days, most people walked around with bare feet and often got thorns into their flesh. Having no needle to take them out, they used the second thorn, which, in some cases, broke in the flesh, indeed.*

*double pain. In the same way, physical pain is the first thorn, and worry about it is the second. That is why, when you have a physical illness, be mindful so that you will not suffer the double pain."*

Following this advice, Nakula-pitā tried to be mindful of his pain and fully recovered sooner than expected.

In brief, by being mindful of the ever-changing psycho-physical phenomena that represent what we really are, the ego-illusion and craving can be reduced partially or completely. Then, we will no longer be affected by mental and physical distress as before. Through the magga-phala enlightenment, we become liberated from the entire cycle of suffering. This is how mindfulness helps us put an end to all physical and mental pain once and for all.

#### ***4. "For the acquiring of ñāya"***

The Pāḷi word "*ñāya*" literally means a method or way, which is described by the commentary as magga enlightenment in this satipaṭṭhāna context. Magga enlightenment is actually just the culmination of the mindfulness and progressive vipassanā insights. This fact will become obvious in the later sections on this discourse.

#### ***5. "For the realization of nibbāna"***

The Pāḷi word "*nibbāna*" is literally defined in two ways: to be freed from attachment and to be tranquil

or content. The two meanings are interrelated because less attachment always means more tranquility or more contentment. Where there is no attachment, there is calmness or absolute peacefulness. However, there is much more for us to understand about the meaning of nibbāna. It is explained in detail in the last section of this discourse. Indeed, “nibbāna” is our spiritual destination to which the mindfulness practice can directly lead.

## **Brief Statement of Mindfulness Meditation**

In order to establish such powerful mindfulness, the Buddha introduced us to the contemplation of the four kinds of meditative objects as follows:

*Here, monks,*

- *A monk dwells (spends his time) contemplating the body in the body, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in the world.*
- *He dwells (spends his time) contemplating feelings in the feelings, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in the world.*
- *He dwells (spends his time) contemplating the mind in the mind, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in the world.*
- *He dwells (spends his time) contemplating dhammas in dhammas, diligent, clearly knowing, and mindful, free from desires and discontent in the world.*

## Four Kinds of Contemplation

In the above passage, "the body" is repeated in the phrase "*contemplating the body in the body.*" The first part of the phrase "contemplating the body" refers to awareness of the body (physical phenomena that constitute the body), while the second "in the body" refers to the focus point. This means *to be aware of the body by focusing on the body.* A yogi once said that she saw physical phenomena changing every moment while watching the fleeing cloud in the sky. Some other yogis may report that they see the flux of phenomena in the external objects like trees. Here, the Buddha vividly instructed us "*to contemplate the body in the body,*" but not in the sky or the trees. According to the commentary, this phrase puts the emphasis on discerning the body distinctively without confusing it with other phenomena like feelings and thoughts and, more importantly, without identifying as "I" or someone else, male or female, lovable or despicable, and so on. To support this point, the commentary quoted old sages saying thus:

"You don't see what you really see.  
You see what you don't really see."

For example, when we see an object, what we should really see is its color ("what you really see"). Instead, we see its concepts, such as male or female, beautiful or ugly, and so on ("see what you don't really see"). In other words, we just perceive the object instead of the reality as it is (color). Therefore,

we see what we don't really see. So, the Buddha instructed us "*to contemplate the body in the body*" or take the object as it really is without identifying it as "I" or someone else, male or female, beautiful or ugly, and so on.

Regarding feelings, when we have pain, for instance, we are most likely to focus on the painful body part rather than the pain itself. When happy, we may focus on objects that make us happy instead of the happiness itself. That is why the Buddha instructed us "*to contemplate feelings in the feelings,*" but not in the body parts or the objects that make us happy. This also implies that we should not identify the feeling as "I" or "mine."

The same is true with the minds. When we are thinking, we should focus on the minds or thoughts, but not the objects we are thinking of. More importantly, we should not identify them as "I" or "mine." In this sense, the Buddha instructed us "*to contemplate the mind in the mind.*"

In regard to the phrase "*contemplating the dhammas in the dhammas,*" the dhamma objects cover varieties of phenomena and, therefore, will be described in the last section on this discourse.

## **Four Important Factors**

In the passage mentioned earlier, the Buddha clearly stated four qualities that are required to establish mindfulness on the four objects, namely:

- Diligent (*ātāpī*)
- Clearly knowing (*sampajāno*)
- Mindful (*satimā*)
- Free from desire and discontent in the world (*vineyya loke abhijjhā-domanassamī*)

In the context of the vipassana meditation, mindfulness is all about being aware of *present* psycho-physical phenomena that represent or constitute what we really are. Something present is something real. Present phenomena only last a split second. In order to be aware of them, therefore, we must be diligent or we must make an ardent effort to see them clearly.

Our minds and bodies are changing every moment. When we were born, we were very small and weighed just a few pounds. Even though we may live to be over one hundred, our bodies age not year by year or month by month, but moment by moment. So, at every moment our bodies consist of newly arising phenomena. Only when we are diligent in developing mindfulness, can we discern such an ever-changing body clearly and be free from desire and discontent. To illustrate this point, let me recount one of my past experiences. Once, as a teenager, I was on a bus in Yangon, the old capital city of Burma. The bus was so crowded that I found it hard to breathe. Then, someone behind me pressed quite hard. I felt very upset and discontent. But when I looked back over my shoulder and found it was someone young and pretty, my discontent turned immediately into pleasure and desire.



When we touch someone as in this case, if we are really mindful of the body at that moment, we will become aware of warmth of skin contact (fire element), or softness or hardness of muscle contact (earth element), or solid formation of limb contact (water element), or pressure or motion (air element). Only with an ardent effort (*atāpi*), can we become clearly aware (*sampajāno*) and mindful (*satimā*) of such physical phenomena beyond the illusory sense of male or female, pretty or ugly. Only then, can we free ourselves from desire and discontent regarding the body<sup>3</sup> (*vineyya loke abhijjhā-domanassamī*).

In the same way, we should make an ardent effort (*ātāpi*) to see feelings, mind, and dhammas while they presently arise in us, so that we can see them as they really are without identifying them as "I" or someone else, male or female, lovable or despicable. This is how to know them clearly (*sampajāno*), how to be mindful of them precisely (*satimā*), and how to remove desire and discontent regarding them (*vineyya loke abhijjhā-domanassamī*).

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<sup>3</sup> *The Pali word "loke" is normally translated as "in the world." Here, however, it is translated as "regarding the body," because the commentary explains that "the world" is nothing other than mental and physical phenomena. In the context of the mindfulness of body, "the world" just refers to the body (physical phenomena). Moreover, according to the Pāli grammar, the word "loke" has the suffix "e" called ādhāra that can show time (kāladhāra), location (desādhāra) and domain or topic (visayādhāra). So, "loke" should be translated as "in the body," to mean location, or "regarding the body," to mean the domain (i.e., topic or context).*

# CONTEMPLATION OF THE BODY IN THE BODY

## MINDFULNESS OF BREATHING

*And how, monks, does a monk dwell (spend his time) contemplating the body in the body? Here now, monks, a monk having gone to the forest, to the root of a tree, or to an empty hut (or secluded place), sits down folding his legs crosswise, setting his upper body erect, and directing the mindfulness toward (the meditative object).*

*Only mindful he breathes in; only mindful he breathes out. Breathing in long, he knows, "I breathe in long." Breathing out long, he knows, "I breathe out long." Breathing in short, he knows, "I breathe in short." Breathing out short, he knows, "I breathe out short." "Experiencing the whole breath, I shall breathe in," thus he makes effort. "Experiencing the whole breath, I shall breathe out," thus he makes effort. "Calming the kaya-sankhara, I shall breathe in," thus he makes effort. "Calming the kaya-sankhara, I shall breathe out," thus he makes effort.*

## **The Buddha's Experiment in the Meditation on Breathing**

In order to establish the mindfulness of the body, the Buddha first expounded the contemplation on the

breath. Before we go straight to the exposition of the practice itself, it is good for us to learn the historical background of this meditation.

The meditation on the breath (*ānāpāna*) is probably the most well-known among the Buddhist meditations, because Buddha himself practiced it until he attained the high-level concentration (*jhāna*) under the Bodhi tree, Bodhi Gaya, India on the full moon day of May over 25 centuries ago. The highly-developed concentration (*jhāna*) brought the Buddha supernatural powers that enabled him to see his and others' past lives, and to realize the laws of kamma that determines the quality of one's life. And then, he applied this powerful level of concentration to his mind and body and saw the psycho-physical phenomena arising and passing away at every moment. Thus, he developed Vipassanā insights step by step until he became fully enlightened on that very spot.

However, before that, the Buddha spent six years practicing the meditation on breathing without success. There were two reasons why he failed: wrong method and extreme effort. He meditated on breathing by holding it as long as possible or without letting it out. This practice was, therefore, called "*appanaka-paṭṭipadā*." Most likely, he followed this method because people in those days believed that breath was a vital part of life. The longer it was held, the more powerful it would become.

The second reason for his failure was that he put excessive effort in the practice. He devoted all his

time and energy to this practice, caring about nothing else, even his food. There were times when he had no food or drink except only a handful of fruit or bean soup. Therefore, he became so weak that he sometimes fell unconscious. He once suffered constipation so severely that he forced himself to move his bowels and fell unconscious. Thus, he often came close to death during his six-year experiment on the breath meditation.

He was not an ordinary person who would easily give up due to hardship and failure. After six years, however, he gave up this practice because he realized that this self-denial practice had done more harm than good instead of serving his purpose for purification and liberation. So, he started living a moderate ascetic life-style that became known as the "Middle Way," avoiding the two extreme points: self-indulgence and self-denial. He did not go back to his luxurious life of the royalty, nor did he put the effort into self-denial practice. He resumed going for alms food to the nearby village, called Senā, and ate enough food to regain enough energy for further practice.

Two weeks later, he was offered very nutritious milk porridge by a lady called Sujātā from a nearby village that was just across the Neranjarā River from Bodhi Tree. That very evening, he crossed the river toward the Bodhi tree under which he practiced meditation on the in-and-out breath without holding it any more. Having learned a lot from his previous mistakes, he managed to fully concentrate on the breath and attained the highest level of concentration

called *jhāna* (meditative absorption)<sup>4</sup> in the first watch of the night. He could see his past lives. During the second watch of the night, through such a powerful concentration, he first saw the cycle of death and rebirth or the law of kamma. During the last watch of the night, he turned his focus toward his mind and body and saw them arising and passing away moment by moment. Thus, he first developed samatha-based psychic powers and then vipassanā insights step by step until he became fully enlightened on that very spot.

Most likely, this is the reason why the meditation on the breath (*ānāpāna*) is so well-known among Buddhists. Fortunately, we do not need to experience what the Buddha had to go through to find the correct method. His teachings come from his own experience as how to practice this meditation successfully.

## **Preparations for Mindfulness of Breathing**

When the Buddha taught us how to develop mindfulness of breathing, he first mentioned preparations for this efficient practice thus:

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<sup>4</sup> *Actually, on one occasion during his early youth, Buddha happened to focus on his breath and developed strong concentration until he reached the first stage of meditative absorption (jhāna). That ability, related to his practice undertaken in the previous lives, presumably lost due to his indulgence in sensual pleasures during his adolescence and later in life as a young man. Therefore, he had to develop it anew. One's vivid memory of one's past life experiences rarely goes beyond one's adolescence.*

*"And how, monks, does a monk dwell (spend his time) contemplating the body in the body? Here now, monks, a monk having gone to the forest, to the root of a tree, or to an empty hut (or secluded place), sits down folding his legs crosswise, setting his upper body erect, and directing the mindfulness toward (the meditative object)."*

The above passage mentions the preparation procedure in three stages:

- Go to the forest, the root of a tree or an empty hut
- Sit with legs crossed and upper part of body kept straight
- Direct the mindfulness toward (the meditative object)

### **Go to the Forest, the Root of a Tree or an Empty Hut**

First of all, the Buddha mentioned suitable places for us to practice thus: *"Having gone to the forest, to the root of a tree, or to an empty hut<sup>5</sup> (secluded place)."* To make a faster progress in the practice requires a quiet and secluded place like a forest, root of a tree, or an empty hut and so on<sup>6</sup>. Seclusion is very important, especially for beginners whose minds

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<sup>5</sup> "Empty hut" is a literal translation of "suññā-gāra," which is generally translated as "secluded place."

<sup>6</sup> There are some other secluded places mentioned in the other suttas, such as a hill cleft, a mountain cave, a charnel ground, a jungle thicket, open space, and so on.

are easily agitated or affected by distractions, like noises and people around. This reminds me of an incident.

One day, an attractive and well-dressed woman came to the Panditarama meditation center and requested Venerable Sayadaw U Paṇḍitābhivamsa to send a meditation master to teach at her hotel, one of the few five-star hotels in Yangon, Burma. She said she was the manager of the hotel and wanted Vipassana meditation accessible to her customers, since it was something unique to Burma. Sayadaw rejected her request right away. As a translator sitting nearby, I humbly requested him to reconsider his decision, because I thought, to make the teachings available in such a prestigious hotel would really be something special. But he firmly said: "A luxury hotel was a place suitable to enjoy sensual pleasure but not to practice meditation."

Of course, meditation practice is unsuitable not only in a luxury hotel like this but also in any other environment where there are people and noises around, like our home where there are our beloved family members around, and in our offices where there are people and noises surrounding us. As an example of suitable places, the Buddha mentioned a forest, a tree and an empty hut. Nowadays, it would be very hard for us to practice under the tree or in the forest, especially in western countries. Fortunately, however, there are many meditation centers that provide us secluded environments for practice. They are, of course, the best substitutes for forests and trees. In our houses, an empty room

during the quiet hours is an exact substitute for an empty hut, of course. If we have good training in the practice, however, we can develop mindfulness, even while we are standing in a queue, or in a waiting room crowded with peoples, for instance. In bed, it can be very blissful to develop the mindfulness of breath, as it makes our minds calm, and may lead to a sound sleep in the end, even if no better benefits are attained.

### **Sit Folding the Legs Crosswise and Setting the Upper Part of Body Straight**

Regarding the bodily posture suitable for practice, the Buddha recommended sitting with legs crossed. This sitting style requires no facility like a chair, and is possible to do anywhere and anytime. More importantly, this style is the best for longer sitting. Unfortunately, however, westerners find it hard to sit this way, as they only sit in chairs throughout their life. Even then, they eventually find this style comfortable and suitable to develop concentration and mindfulness. However, we can successfully practice this breath meditation while we are standing or reclining, too. Even though this sitting style is recommended for longer sitting, it does not necessarily mean we are not allowed to sit on a chair or in any other sitting style. So, nothing is wrong with any style of physical posture, as long as we can really develop concentration and mindfulness. In addition, we are recommended to keep the upper part of the body straight, as this assists us to keep our minds strong. Sitting and letting our backs bend often means a lack of energy or an absence of courage.



This description of the appropriate posture for meditation occurs not only in relation to the mindfulness of breathing, but also in the context of several other meditation practices. This fact clearly indicates that this formal sitting style is very conducive to the cultivation of the concentration, although this does not mean that meditation should be confined to the sitting posture only.

### **Directing the Mindfulness toward (the Meditative Object)**

Last, but not least, is the phrase "*directing the mindfulness towards the meditative object.*" In this particular case, the meditative object is the breath. We have to direct our attention to the breath that can be felt in our nostrils or upper lips. Thus, this phrase indicates the importance of the right place to focus our mind on and right time to note the object. So, like a gate-keeper, our mind must stay at the gate of the nostril or upper lip right under our noses (right place), and note the in-breath while we are breathing in, or the out-breath while we are breathing out (right time). In other words, the mindful noting must be concurrent with the actual object, in-breath or out-breath. So, the normal procedure of the practice will be as follows:

#### **Normal Procedure**

1. Sit with legs crossed.
2. Keep the upper part of the body straight but not too rigid.

3. Put one hand face up on the lap and rest the other on top of it. Actually, any sitting style would be allowable, if it can well support for long sittings without moving frequently.
4. Close the eyes. Although this instruction is not mentioned in the texts, closing our eyes prevents our attention from diverting to visible objects. However, we may keep them open if we find it more convenient.
5. Breathe in and out naturally, neither too softly nor too vigorously.
6. Focus the mind on the nostrils or the upper lips where the breath can be felt.
7. We are highly recommended to mentally label as "in" and "out," accordingly. Labeling is greatly helpful to develop concentration and precise awareness in the same way as we recite the phone number so as to dial it correctly. But when or if we find it is no longer helpful, our teacher may suggest we drop it. What matters most is, of course, to be able to concentrate and correctly see the object.

With an ardent effort, we have to focus our minds on the nostrils or the upper lips where the breath is felt. Our attention should not leave this focus point. At the moment the mind is fully focused on the object, there arises concentration which is naturally accompanied by tranquility and rapture. The longer the mind is focused on the object, the stronger the concentration becomes. With the stronger concentration, we can see clearly psycho-physical phenomena changing every moment in our body and minds.

## Four Steps

Now, the Buddha described four steps of mindfulness of breathing as follows:

1. *Only mindful he (a monk) breathes in; only mindful he breathes out.*
2. *Breathing in long, he knows "I breathe in long." Breathing out long, he knows "I breathe out long." Breathing in short, he knows "I breathe in short." Breathing out short, he knows "I breathe out short."*
3. *"Experiencing the whole breath, I shall breathe in," thus he makes efforts. "Experiencing the whole breath, I shall breathe out," thus he makes effort.*
4. *"Calming the kaya-sankhara, I shall breathe in," thus he makes efforts. "Calming the kaya-sankhara, I shall breathe out," thus he makes effort.*

**First Step: "Only mindful he breathes in; only mindful he breathes out"**

The Buddha explained how to develop the mindfulness of breath in four steps. As a first step, the Buddha said: *"Only mindful he breathes in; only mindful he breathes out."* Most of the time, we do not breathe consciously, let alone mindfully. So, doctors often advise us to breathe deeper and more consciously so that our blood and brains can get more oxygen and for our minds to feel refreshed.

Breathing consciously is different from breathing mindfully, of course. Just by breathing consciously,

we cannot develop concentration or mindfulness, let alone wisdom, because our minds are aimlessly going everywhere. In order to develop mindfulness and concentration, therefore, we have to aim or focus our minds on the nostrils or upper lips where the breath can be felt. We should not let our minds go in or out beyond this focus point. It is because if the object is not stable, the mind cannot be stable either. So, first focus on the nostrils or upper lips, and then breathe in and out consciously. Then, we will become mindful of the breath clearly. The more breaths we can be mindful of, the stronger the concentration will become. With the stronger concentration, our minds become calmer and more stable and lead to deeper understanding of whatever we experience. This is why the Buddha said: *"He directs his mindfulness to the meditative object. Only mindful he breathes in; only mindful he breathes out."*

The most challenging part of the practice is wandering minds. Our monkey minds are naturally jumping around, agitated, rebellious and naughty. However, we should not be disappointed, since that is the way of an untrained mind. To develop concentration, all we have to do is to pull our attention back to the object as often as our mind wanders away and to do it as soon as we become aware of it. This makes it possible to help us become focused on a single object for longer periods. This is how concentration develops. So, to deal with a wandering mind, all we have to do is to draw our attention back to the object (the breath) as soon as

possible, and as often as the mind wanders away. Remember that development of concentration is all about learning to train a wandering mind.

Although we try our best to prevent the mind from wandering away from the meditative object, we may still find it hard to continuously stay focused on the object. If so, we are then advised to count the breaths. We should not count less than five breaths nor go beyond ten without any break in the series. By stopping short of five breaths, the mind does not have enough room for concentration to develop. By counting beyond ten, the mind takes the number rather than the breath for its object. So, we should mentally count "one," when both in-breath and out-breath are completed. In this way, we should count up to five, and resume from "one" again. In using this method, it is most important to make a firm resolution to fully focus on the object without any moments of wandering mind for the entire set of counting. We may stop counting when we find our attention can stay focused on the object without it.

If we are to develop vipassana insights, however, we just need to be mindful of whatever arising each present moment. So, when a wandering mind is present, we must be aware of it as it really is. When it disappears, we have to return to the breath. Vipassana is to be aware of minds and bodies as they really are without analyzing, reasoning or judging. If

we see our minds wandering, that is a good start. Vipassana insight develops along with seeing mind and body as they really are, that is, in terms of their characteristics, conditionality and impermanent nature. In the case of vipassana, therefore, we just note presently arising phenomena in a choiceless manner, such as wandering mind, hearing sounds, getting angry, or whatever else is present. And, if there is nothing more predominant than the breath, we need to remain focused on the breath. However, the longer we can focus on a primary object like breath, the stronger the concentration will become leading to a deeper understanding of our mind and body. That is why it is strongly recommended for us to focus on the primary object as long as possible without paying attention to any other objects when we practice either samatha or vipassana.

**Second Step: "*Breathing in long, he knows  
"I breathe in long"..."*"**

At the second step, our concentration is strong enough to be spontaneously aware of the length of the breath, whether long or short. We should not consciously control the length of the breath, though. We are advised to breathe naturally without changing the pattern of the breath at all. If we interfere by adjusting the breath to see its length, then there is neither concentration nor mindfulness.

Our breath pattern is mostly influenced by our mental states or emotions like anger, fear, lust,

excitement, happiness, and so on. Depending on such mental states, the breath pattern is changing every moment. We may happen to breathe long at one moment, and short at the next. But without mindfulness, we will not notice it. Only with the development of mindfulness and concentration can we perceive the natural length of the breath.

To illustrate this point, the Buddha gave us the simile below:

*"Just as a skilled turner or his apprentice, when making a long turn, knows "I make a long turn," or when making a short turn knows "I make a short turn;" so too, breathing in long, he knows "I breathe in long;" breathing out long, he knows "I breathe out long." Breathing in short, he knows "I breathe in short;" breathing out short, he knows "I breathe out short."*

This simile explains how one comes to be aware of the length of the breath, long or short. So, it vividly illustrates this second step in particular, although it appears at the end of the fourth step. Moreover, this simile of a long or short turn helps us identify the breath pattern in our mind's eyes, which often facilitates the contemplation of the breath. Otherwise, the breath is often too vague to contemplate on.

### **Third Step: *"Experiencing the whole breath I shall breathe in"***

Here, the Pāli word for "the whole breath" is *sabba-kāya*, which literally means "entire body." But

“body” here does not mean the anatomical body, but the breath body. The Pāḷi word kāya can mean anatomical body as well as a group or a compound like deva-kāya (group of deva) or nāma-kāya (mental compound). It is similar to when we talk about a body of members. Here, in this context, sabba-kāya (the entire body) means the entire breath, but not the entire anatomical body.

In the third step, our mindfulness of the breath and concentration are believed to relatively improve, but we can find short and subtle forms of wandering thoughts still interfering with the practice even within a single breath. So, we may be mindful of one part of a breath but miss other parts of it. One time we may catch the beginning part, but miss the middle or ending part, and other times we miss the beginning part, but can catch the middle and ending parts. This means that our concentration and mindfulness are still not strong enough to follow the breath all the way from the beginning to the end. So, we need to make further efforts to be mindful of the whole body of the breath. Therefore, the Buddha said thus:

*"Experiencing the whole breath, I shall breathe in," thus he makes efforts.  
"Experiencing the whole breath, I shall breathe out," thus he makes effort.*

In the above passage, we may notice the future tense, thus: *"I shall breathe in."* It clearly indicates that, from here on, we have to make an effort to be aware of the entire breath, by following it all the way from the beginning to the end.



In order to be mindful of the whole body of the breath, it is very helpful to label or note every single breath as "in, in, in, in..." and "out, out, out, out..." as long as it lasts. However, just labeling without mindfulness certainly serves no purpose. So, we should make sure we focus on the nostrils and are mindful of the breath all the way from the beginning to the end. Unless the concentration is strong enough, however, we may only be able to make such continuous labeling for a few moments of breath before our mind wanders away. In this case, we may then resume counting the breaths until our concentration gets strong enough again. In due course of time, we will be able to become mindful of one whole breath after another continuously for a longer time without using counting.

#### **Fourth Step: "*Calming the kaya-sankhara I shall breathe in*"**

The Pali word "*kāya-saṅkharā*" is grammatically defined as "body-generated." Questions to pose here are: Which body does it refer to in this context, anatomical body or breath body? And what exactly does that body generate?

This compound word is interpreted mainly in two different ways. In the first way, the commentator takes "body" as anatomical body, and interprets this phrase as "the breath generated by the anatomical body." The Venerable Sayadaw U Sīlānanda, therefore, explains thus: "*Kaya-sankhara* here means the breath that is conditioned by the body (*kaya*)."

And he drew the conclusion: "What is meant here by the term is just the breath. Here it should be taken as the gross breath because it has to be calmed down." So, he translates this passage as follows:

*"Calming the gross in-breath, I shall breathe in," thus he makes efforts.*

*"Calming the gross out-breath, I shall breathe out," thus he makes efforts.*

In the second way, "body" is taken as "breath" to be consistent with the third step, and the phrase "body-generated" is interpreted as "functions generated by the breath." So, some of the modern scholars, like Nyana-punnika, etc., translate this passage as follows:

*"Calming the bodily functions I shall breathe in," thus he makes efforts.*

*"Calming the bodily functions I shall breathe out," thus he makes efforts.*

This translation can find support in Visuddhi-magga and Paṭisambhidā-magga, which indicate that the fourth step of mindfulness of breathing refers to *maintenance of a calm and stable bodily posture in the sense of calming any inclination to move.*

Let me elaborate a little bit more about it. The gross form of the breath naturally makes the body move slightly up and down and sway slightly side by side. With stronger concentration and calmer mental states at the fourth step, we can even calm these

subtle bodily functions, not to mention restless bodily postures. Thus the second interpretation can also be supported from a practical point of view. At this step, we are believed to have developed steadfast concentration that naturally calms not only our minds but our breaths and breath-generated bodily functions, too. Given all the facts mentioned above, it is reasonable to conclude that the meditation on breath can progressively calm our breathings and breath-related functions to an absolute minimum. So, two interpretations overlap in essence or work together to bring us the comprehensive understanding of the phrase “calming the kaya-sankhara.”

### **Classic Classification of Four Steps**

Visuddhi-magga and Paṭisambhidā-magga have made a different classification of the four steps. They classified the contemplation of long and short breaths, respectively, as the first and second steps in the procedure of the practice.

From a grammatical point of view, however, the Pāḷi passage “dīghaṃ vā... rassaṃ vā...,” (long or...short or...) involves two vā (“or”) which refer to two alternatives (vikappana)<sup>7</sup>. This obviously means that we should be aware of the breath in length short or long as they occur. It does not imply that the practice advances from awareness of long breaths to the awareness of short breaths. Moreover, from the practical point of view, the length and pattern of the

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<sup>7</sup> Three or more “vā” in Pāḷi means three or more alternatives.

breaths are closely related to different emotions and mental states. Depending on the various emotions, our breaths may vary in length and pattern, like short and fast, or long and gross, or long and subtle, or short and subtle and so on. So, awareness of short breaths does not necessarily mean an advanced step; i.e., the second step. Actually, the experience of subtler and finer breaths is explicitly concerned with the fourth step, but not with the second step.

In view of these facts, it is reasonable to conclude that according to the original Pāḷi passage, the Buddha instructed us to be aware of breath in length, long or short as they occur. He did not mean the breaths change from the longer form (the first step) to shorter form (the second step) in a progressive manner.

### **Leading to Vipassana Insights**

So, strong concentration and a tranquil state of mind at the fourth step are undoubtedly supportive of knowledge and insight. That is why the Buddha said thus: "Being well-concentrated, one can see things as they really are." As mentioned before, the Buddha himself developed this mindfulness of breath under the Bodhi Tree until he attained the highest level of concentration that led to his attainment of psychic powers. When he redirected such a powerful concentration to his own mind and body, he was able to discern mental and physical phenomena changing every moment in him. Thus, he developed vipassana insights step by step until he became fully enlightened on that very spot. This implies that the

mindfulness of breath is not only for the development of high-level concentration or meditative absorption (jhāna), but also for the cultivation of progressive vipassana insights (vipassana) until magga-phala enlightenment.

## **Culmination of Mindfulness Practice**

The Buddha concluded “the meditation on breathing” with its culmination. According to the statement, this meditation is believed to lead to the progressive vipassana insight step by step until magga-phala enlightenment:

- 1. In this way, he dwells (or spends his time) contemplating the body in the body internally; he dwells contemplating the body externally; or he dwells contemplating the body both internally and externally.*
- 2. He dwells contemplating the arising nature of the body, or he dwells contemplating the disappearing nature of the body, or he dwells contemplating both the arising and disappearing nature of the body.*
- 3. Mindfulness that “there is a body” is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and steadfast mindfulness.*
- 4. And he dwells independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how he dwells contemplating the body in the body.*

Actually, each and every meditation exercise mentioned in this discourse is concluded with the

similar statement. This obviously means they all lead to the *magga-phala* enlightenment.

During the Buddha's time, there were many different religious sects and denominations. Their followers practiced many different exercises with different purposes. For example, there were ascetics who lived a naked life and practiced exercises like sitting among the fire spots in the hot summer or submerged in the icy cold water in the winter. Their purpose was to torture the body so that it could no longer arouse mental impurities, or to pay off their unwholesome kammic debt. There were people who prayed to several kinds of gods and sacrificed animals or even fellow human beings. Their purposes for these rituals were to be protected and blessed by the gods and goddesses or to let their individual souls (*jīva-atta*) join with the Great Universal Soul (*parama-atta*) or to be reborn in heaven. Some of these exercises can still be seen even in modern India today.

### **Four Stages of Culmination**

Unlike such vain practices of unconvincing purposes, the Buddha explicitly assures us that the practice of mindfulness leads to the four stages of culmination as follows:

1. Discerning the body (physical phenomena) internally, externally or both
2. Seeing the arising and disappearing nature of the body

3. Establishing the mindfulness for bare knowledge and steadfast mindfulness
4. Dwelling independent, not clinging to anything in the world

**The First Stage: *"Contemplating the body internally; externally; both internally and externally"***

In harmony with the commentary, the phrase "*contemplating the body internally*" means to be mindful of our own body, while "*contemplating the body externally*" refers to someone else's. Actually, it is impossible to be mindful directly of someone else's body. But we can discern it by inference based on the awareness of our own. According to some Pāḷi discourses (Di-3, 103/ A-1, 171), we can develop awareness of someone's feeling and mental states by carefully observing their outer manifestations like facial expression, physical gesture and tone of voice. Such awareness is often just a matter of common sense. In the context of mindfulness practice, awareness of another's body goes much deeper than such common sense, because it is totally based on the empirical experience of our own body (breath).

In this regard, Venerable Mahāsi Sayadaw described two kinds of vipassana insights based on Pāḷi texts and commentaries: empirical insight (*paccakkha-vipassanā*) and inferential insight (*anumāna-vipassanā*). To experience the taste of the ocean water, for example, we just need to drink a glass of it. It is unnecessary or impossible to drink the whole ocean, indeed. In the same way, being aware

of our own phenomena we can understand those of others in the world, because we are all constituted of the same kinds of phenomena. So, awareness of our own phenomena is empirical insight and that of others' is inferential. The two insights lead to the complete understanding of everything in the world, whether internal or external. So, in the Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta, the Buddha said thus:

*"So, monks, you should discern that all the bodies (physical phenomena) are neither me nor mine whether they are internal or external, gross or subtle, superior or inferior, far or near, present, past or future."*

Moreover, the phrase "*contemplating the body both internally and externally*" is explained in Abhidhamma in a very convincing way. According to it, this phrase refers to the moment when we become aware of the body as it is without discriminating between our own and another's. In other words, the moment we experience phenomena as they really are, we will become independent of whether they occur in ourselves or in others. Such awareness will leave no room for illusory sense of "I" and its subsequent attachment. To see the body without discrimination between our own and others, therefore, means to be aware of the body both internally and externally at the same time. Thus, contemplating the body internally, externally or both, we develop two kinds of insights, empirical and inferential, which together culminate in the complete discernment of the body. This is the first stage of culmination.



**The Second Stage: *"Contemplating the arising nature, the disappearing nature, and both the arising and disappearing nature of the body"***

Here, the Pāḷi words *samudaya* and *vaya* are defined respectively as arising and disappearing, and *dhamma* as nature. So, the phrases *samudaya-dhamma* and *vaya-dhamma* are translated as the arising nature and the disappearing nature. In the commentary, however, the two are defined respectively as conditions for arising and conditions for disappearing. In this sense, the commentary describes the conditions for the breath that include physical body, the nasal aperture and the mind. Their presence and coordination are conditions for the arising of breaths, while their absence are conditions for the disappearing of breaths. In harmony with this commentarial explanation, therefore, Sayadaw U Sīlānanda translated this passage thus:

*"He dwells contemplating the origination factors of the breath body, or he dwells contemplating the dissolution factors of the breath body..."*

In the context of mindfulness practice, however, we are not encouraged to analyze or contemplate deliberately such conditions as physical body, nasal aperture, etc. That is why Mahāsi Sayadaw said that the phrase "the origination (dissolution) factors of the breath body" just means the appearance and

disappearance of the body (physical phenomena that are related to the breaths). When we become clearly aware of breaths, we will discern physical phenomena related to the breaths and their conditionality, appearance and disappearance without deliberate analysis of the conditions for breaths, like nasal aperture, etc.

As mentioned before, if we observe the lightning while it is present in the sky, then we can discern what the lightning really is; we can see it arising and passing away, too. In the same way, if we can be aware of in-breath while we are breathing in, and out-breath while breathing out, we will become aware of the air element in terms of pressure or motion, or cool touch concurrently with in-breaths and warm touch with out-breaths. Cool and warm are temperatures (fire element) in different degree. Thus, when we discern such present phenomena as pressure, motion, warmth, coolness, etc., we will see their conditionality and changes; we will see them arising and disappearing every moment. This is the second stage in which the mindfulness of the body (breath) culminates.

In this case, the scope of mindfulness seems to be limited to such a small amount of phenomena as air element and fire element related to the breaths. Like a glass of ocean water, however, it can surely help us realize the whole mighty ocean of all mental and physical phenomena, internal or external, present,

past or future, gross or subtle, superior or inferior, near or far.

**The Third Stage: *"Mindfulness that "there is a body" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and steadfast mindfulness."***

The mindfulness of body is to see the body as body without identifying as "I" or "mine." Such discernment of body means bare knowledge or the insight into the body (physical phenomena). So, we should not expect the mindfulness of the body to bring about something magic, like psychic power or heavenly rebirth, although it is supportive of such things.

The discourse Brahmajāla Sutta in the Dīghanikāya mentions the cases in which meditation practice culminated in supernatural power leading to wrong views. In the earlier days of the universe, there were high-level jhāna-achievers who, exercising the psychic power, saw their own previous lives and others'. Subsequently, they happened to develop the wrong view that there were souls that live forever and transmigrate from old bodies to new ones. They also saw a certain celestial being with mighty power (known as mahā-brahmā) who had lived earlier than anybody else in the universe. Then, they identified him as the creator. In these cases, the accomplishment of meditation ended with wrong views. Such are not the purpose of the mindfulness.

The Buddha vividly described the bare knowledge and steadfast mindfulness as the culmination of mindfulness. So, we establish the mindfulness to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness, but not for psychic power, heaven rebirth, eternal life or something romantic. However, the concentration we develop through the mindfulness naturally brings us tranquility and contentment in a unique way. At the certain stage of vipassana insight, we may experience something exciting like illumination, calmness, contentment. Anyway, what important is to discern mental and physical phenomena without identifying them as "I" or "mine." Such discernment means bare knowledge<sup>8</sup> that must be progressively developed all the way from the very beginning of the practice until the attainment of full enlightenment.

Yet, many of us often complain that we find nothing special in the awareness of such phenomena as hardness, warmth, etc. Actually, the discernment of such phenomena is really important, since it signifies the insight into mind and body, which forms the necessary foundation for all the higher stages of vipassana insights and magga-phala enlightenments. So, such bare knowledge along with steadfast mindfulness is the third stage in which the

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<sup>8</sup> Here, the phrase "for bare knowledge and steadfast mindfulness" is also interpreted as "for further knowledge and mindfulness." Some scholars take this phrase to imply that it is just bare mindfulness, which, therefore, needs to be supported by jhānic concentration for the attainment of magga-phala enlightenment and nibbāna.

contemplation of the body will culminate in. That is why the Buddha said thus: "Mindfulness that 'there is a body' is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and steadfast mindfulness."

**The Fourth Stage: *"Independent, not clinging to anything in the world"***

The last stage for mindfulness to culminate in is "to dwell independent, not clinging to anything in the world." Independence is a bliss. Dependency is a disaster. Drug dependency, for example, is just a painful tragedy. If we are attached to the drug, we are enslaved by that and no longer independent. It is also kind of dependency if we are attached to people or things. We are attached to the people like spouses, girlfriends, boyfriends, children, brothers, sisters, so on, and to the things like houses, cars, laptops, iPhones, and so on. If we are attached to something or someone like that, we cannot be happy without them; we cannot live freely and independently. Actually, we were born alone and empty-handed; we used to be happy without people and things that we now think we cannot live without. So, if we feel happy only when we have certain people or certain things, this means we are fooled and enslaved by attachment. So, we are no longer independent.

So, it is nobody but our attachment that fools and enslaves us. The increasing degree of independence is directly related to the decreasing degree of attachment. Unless we can reduce the attachment, we cannot live independently. Indeed, independence is a bliss. A friend of mine was once put in jail for two

years because he got involved in gambling. In the jail of Burma, he said, he felt like in the hell. When he was released from the jail, he recounted, he was so happy and so excited that he ran about two to three miles nonstop yelling and shouting delightfully. What a blissful it is to be independent! So, here the Buddha instructed us thus:

*"Dwell independent not clinging to anything in the world."*

By focusing on a meditative object like breath, we develop concentration that prevents our minds from thinking of something unwholesome, from regretting the past, and from worrying about the future. This is how the concentration helps us to be independent and enjoy freedom from attachment. Calmness and tranquility are natural outcomes of the concentration which is, therefore, called samatha. However, the prime importance is to discern psycho-physical phenomena related to the breaths (or the whole body) without identifying them as "I" or "mine" so that we can develop vipassana insights step by step until we can eradicate attachment once and for all. Indeed, we can then dwell independent without clinging to anything or anybody in the world.

## **Additional Information**

Like a math teacher, the Buddha gives us just the formula but not the answer when he teaches us how to develop concentration and insight. Of course, for the correct answer, all we need to do it is to properly follow the correct formula. However, it would be

encouraging for us to learn the answer from theoretical aspect before we can do from practical aspect. Here, therefore, I would like to explain from the theoretical aspect how the mindfulness of breathing culminates in the meditative absorption (*jhāna*) and how in progressive insight and enlightenment based on commentaries and Abhidhamma.

The mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpāna*) can be practiced either to develop high-level concentration, such as meditative absorption (*jhāna*), or to develop progressive vipassana insights up to the enlightenment. The Buddha practiced the meditation on breathing until the attainment of *jhāna* and its resultant psychic powers. Given this fact we are sure that the Buddha practiced this meditation as samatha. Directing his powerful *jhānic* concentration to his mind and body, however, the Buddha discerned psycho-physical phenomena arising and passing away and developed vipassana insights step by step until he became fully enlightened along with the attainment of omniscience wisdom (*sabbaññuta-ñāna*).

## **Samatha**

The Pāli word "samatha" literally means tranquility that comes along with the development of concentration, because restless and unstable minds calm down by the concentration. The moment the mind is fully focused on a meditative object like the breaths, there arises concentration that is always accompanied by tranquility and calmness. So, to

develop such powerful concentration, we have to make an effort to focus our minds on a meditative object as long as possible, thus reducing wandering thoughts to an absolute minimum.

If our minds wanders away, we have to pull them back to the meditative object (breath in this case) as immediately as possible, or as often as it wanders away. With stronger determination and greater effort, both frequency and length of such wandering minds (known as mental hindrances, *nīvaraṇa*) gradually reduce. Then, the breaths will become obvious enough for us to focus on. We can then discern them in length whether long or short. And then, with stronger concentration we will be able to focus on each breath all the way from the beginning to the end. And finally, we will find the breath become very subtle; however, we are supposed to persist in focusing on it.

### **Three Forms of a Meditative Object (*Nimitta*):**

In due course of time, we will find the breath suddenly change from the very subtle form to somewhat like a three-dimensional image. This image will become so vivid that it will be just like seeing it with our naked eyes<sup>9</sup>. Thus, we can experience the breath in three progressive forms:

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<sup>9</sup> Pāḷi References: Abhidhamm'attha-sangaha 152:

*Cakkhunā passantasseva mano-dvārassa āpātham'āgataṃ, tadā tamevārammaṇaṃ uggaha-nimittaṃ nāma.*



1. The workable form of the object (parikamma-nimitta): It is the breath that becomes obvious enough to work on for the development of concentration.
2. The visualized form of the object (uggaha-nimitta): It is the breath that becomes so vivid as if it were seen through our naked eyes.
3. The identical form of the object (patibhāga-nimitta)<sup>10</sup>: It is the breath that is transformed from its subtle form to a three-dimensional image. In most cases, it is felt as if it were a light ray going in and out of the nostril.

According to scripture, at this stage, we are likely to have different kinds of signs and visions: something like stars, a cluster of gems twinkling, a piece of cotton, a puff of smoke, or a long and bright thread going in and out of our nostrils, and so on. However, there are neither a definite number nor definite kinds of visions for a person to see. If we ask ten people, we may get ten different visions. Because we have different inclinations, dispositions, perceptions, we may experience different forms of visions.

**The First Jhāna:** One thing we can definitely say is that such a unique form of the object is so powerful that our attentions are fully focused and sustained there for a long time. Thus, there arises strong

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<sup>10</sup> *Yadā tappatibhāgaṃ vatthu-dhamma-vimuccitaṃ paññatti-saṅkhātāṃ bhāvanāmayam-ārammaṇaṃ citte sannisinnam samappitam hoti. Tadā tam patibhāga-nimittam samuppannanti pavuccati.* (153).

concentration. The nature of this level of concentration is accompanied by rapture (*pīti*) and happiness (*sukha*). This stage is regarded as the first stage of absorption (*jhāna*), which consists of five leading mental factors: initial attention (*vitakka*), sustained attention (*vicāra*), rapture (*pīti*), happiness (*sukha*) and concentration (*ekaggatā*). Mental hindrances and tranquility (*pīti-sukha*) are diametrically opposed in nature like light and dark. For example, when we are angry, our mind cannot be calm and peaceful. In the same way, when we feel jealous or sexually active, tranquility cannot be there. Conversely, when there are no such mental hindrances, there naturally arise happiness and tranquility. The strong concentration can calm mental hindrances and bring about tranquility at the same time.

**The Second Jhāna:** At the second stage, concentration is so strong that the mind is spontaneously focused on the object without making much effort to pay attention to the object. Therefore, without initial attention (*vitakka*) and sustained attention (*vicāra*), the mind is concentrated on the object and followed by rapture (*pīti*) and happiness (*sukha*). Thus, the second stage of absorption or the second *jhāna* only consists of three mental factors: rapture, happiness, and concentration.

**The Third Jhāna:** At the third stage of *jhāna*, concentration is even stronger than in the previous two stages. We do not even need to pay attention to the meditative object, since the mind is spontaneously focused on the object. At this stage,

the mind becomes more tranquil and less elated. So, this state only involves subtle happiness without rapture. Thus, the third stage of *jhāna* consists of only two factors: a subtle form of happiness and a stronger form of concentration.

**The Fourth Jhāna:** At the fourth and highest stage of *jhāna*, the concentration is so mature that it no longer needs to be supported by the initial and sustained attentions, and is no longer accompanied by rapture and happiness. At this stage, the mind is fully concentrated and totally tranquil. So, this stage involves only two leading factors: the deepest tranquility (*upekkhā*) and strongest concentration (*ekaggatā*). The mind is so pure that with further training it can culminate in intuitive and psychic powers. Naturally, the mind becomes powerful when it is concentrated.

## Vipassana

Samatha and vipassana are different mainly in terms of their objects and culminations. Samatha is to focus on a single conceptual object and it culminates in high-level concentration (*jhāna*) and supernatural powers (*iddhi*). Vipassanā is to observe one's own mind and body, and culminates in progressive insights (*vipassana-ñāṇa*) and stages of enlightenment (*magga-phala*).

If we observe the breath to develop vipassana insights, we have to focus on real physical phenomena involved in the breath, such as air pressure, temperature..., not just the conceptual form

of in-breath and out-breath, as in the case of samatha. In the context of vipassana, we should be mindful of present psycho-physical phenomena, which always last just for a moment in nature. Therefore, we will discern different phenomena at every moment, even during a single breath. For instance, we will become aware of motion or pressure of air at one moment, and warm or cool touch of the breaths at the next. We are just to be aware of them as they really are without analyzing, reasoning or judging. So, we should not make a choice or select what to observe and what to discern. Vipassana is often described as a choiceless awareness.

### **Why Abdomen in Place of Breath**

Mindfulness of breathing is categorized as samatha by two authorities, Paṭisambhidā-magga and Visuddhi-magga (volume-1, 232), as follows:

“The three sections relating to the four bodily postures, the four kinds of clear comprehension of the body, the mindfulness of four physical elements are said to fall under the category of vipassana (insight meditation practice). Whereas the two sections dealing with mindfulness of the in-and-out breaths, recollection of loathsomeness of the physical body are said to fall under the category of samatha (tranquility meditation).”

A samatha meditator is required to focus on a single object at a stretch ignoring anything else, whereas a vipassana meditator needs to be aware of

whatever different phenomena that are obvious in the present whether physical, sensational, mental, or dhamma. This is why the Venerable Mahāsi Sayadaw, one of the most highly-respected meditation masters of the twentieth century, was very hesitant to instruct vipassana meditators to focus only on the breaths for a long period, since it is described as a samatha practice. Instead, he instructed us to observe whatever is obvious in the present moment. However, we are most likely to become restless when we try to observe different phenomena that are occurring in a random manner at every moment unless we have developed strong enough concentration. This is why Mahasi Sayadaw highly recommended that we focus on a primary object like the abdominal movement during sitting and steps during walking. By focusing on such a stable object, our minds can become stable enough to observe any other arising objects that are more obvious than the primary object. He himself successfully practiced vipassana in this way under the guidance of the Most Venerable Minguon Sayadaw.

### **Whether in Harmony with Pāḷi Canon**

For the observation of the abdominal movement, Mahāsi Sayādaw claimed support from many Pāḷi discourses that instruct us to see the psycho-physical phenomena arising and passing away in us. This *Sati-paṭṭhāna Sutta* itself explicitly mentions mindfulness of the air element in the section of contemplation on four primary elements. "Rising and falling of the abdomen is the daily language we use," he said, "but it clearly represents the air element." Furthermore, in the next section, the Buddha concludes mindfulness

of postures with the passage thus: "He (a monk) knows accordingly however his body is disposed." This passage obviously indicates that we should be mindful of any physical manners or movements (including abdominal movement) in addition to the four postures.

Actually, Mahāsi Sayadaw agrees that a vipassana meditator can observe either the breaths or abdominal movements, since they are equally helpful to discern physical phenomena, such as the air element that is characterized by pressure, tension, motion, etc., and the fire element in terms of heat, warmth, cold, and the earth element signified by hardness, softness, and so on. The golden rule is a vipassana meditator must observe whatever phenomenon is present and predominant, but not to stick to a single object (breath or abdomen) all the time as in the case of samatha practice. We are advised to keep on observing our breaths or abdominal movements, if no other object is more prominent than they are. Mahasi Sayadaw compared the breath or abdominal movement to the center point of a spider web where the spider stays at all times unless any insect comes into the web.

### **Why a Home Object Is Needed**

Here, I would like to make further clarification of why we need a home object to focus on. When we develop vipassana insight, the most preferable objects to observe are our own (*atta*) and present (*paccakkha*) phenomena. We have to observe our own psycho-physical phenomena while they are

present in us. If phenomena belong to others, we cannot directly experience them. We cannot feel someone else's hunger or itchiness, for instance. And a vipassana object must be something in the present. An event in the past no longer exists and events in the future do not arrive yet, so it is not possible to directly experience them. Whereas, something arising in the present moment is something real, and something we can directly experience. So, if we can observe something while it is still in the present, we will be able to discern mental and physical phenomena without identifying with them as "I" or "mine."

According to the Pāli texts, there is no phenomenon that recurs; everything newly arises since nothing is stored anywhere. When certain conditions are met, certain kinds of phenomena newly arise, like the fire that newly arises when a match is struck. Therefore, nothing can be said to be old, because all phenomena newly arise and pass away so quickly that they have no time to get old. So, it is said thus:

*"Unarisen phenomena arise. Arisen ones disappear.  
All the conditioned phenomena are brand-new,  
Like the sound (that newly come out) from a harp."*

However, we find people or things do become old as time goes by. Of course, we look older over time, because the newly arising physical phenomena naturally become poorer and poorer in quantity and

quality. So, if we are really mindful, we can discern different phenomena arising and passing away in us at every moment. We are advised to observe them in a choiceless manner.

Practically, however, it would not be easy to observe and discern such ever-changing phenomena without highly-developed concentration, viz., neighborhood or jhānic concentration. So, Mahāsi Sayadaw advised us to observe the abdominal movement as a primary object because, according to the commentary, the physical object is more prominent and easier to observe for a human meditator; whereas mental objects are more prominent for a celestial being. By focusing on such a home object, we can more easily become aware of newly-arising phenomena, mental or physical, and simultaneously establish moment-by-moment concentration (*khaṇika-samādhi*). According to Pāli scriptures, this concentration can serve as a substitute for neighborhood or jhānic concentration. This is the reason why Mahasi Sayadaw instructed us to focus first on physical phenomena as primary objects rather than mental phenomena. By focusing on the physical objects (rising/falling of the abdomen or the in-and-out breath at the nostrils), we can then become more easily aware of our mental states or thoughts.

In conclusion, if we practice mindfulness of breathing with the purpose to develop progressive vipassana insight, we have to first focus our minds on the in-and-out breath or rising-and-falling of the abdomen with each breath, as long as no other object



is more prominent. More importantly, our emphasis should be on presently arising real physical phenomena that are involved with breath like pressure, motion, warmth, coolness and so on. Of course, we have to observe other phenomena, like unpleasant sensations, wandering thoughts, emotions, and so on, if they become more prominent than the breath, or if they interfere with staying focused on our breathing. Thus, we will be able to observe and discern mental and physical phenomena as they really are, developing progressive vipassana insight until the magga-phala enlightenment.

## **MINDFULNESS OF POSTURES**

The second subsection on the Contemplation of the Body is the mindfulness of bodily postures. Here, the Buddha said thus:

*"Again, monks, when walking, he knows 'I am walking;' when standing, he knows 'I am standing;' when sitting, he knows 'I am sitting;' when lying down, he knows 'I am lying down;' or 'however his body is disposed, he knows it accordingly.' "*

According to this passage, mindfulness must be applied to all four bodily postures: going, standing, sitting and lying down. In this passage, the last sentence *"however his body is disposed, he knows it accordingly"* is open to different interpretations. The commentator interprets this sentence as knowing the four postures accordingly. The sub-commentary

describes it as putting emphasis on the body as a whole. And Mahāsi Sayadaw interpreted this sentence to include all the small deportments and movements of the body like stretching or bending the limbs, opening or closing the eyes, rising or falling of the abdomen, and so on. The original Pāḷi sentence includes the conjunction "vā panā" meaning "moreover." So, this sentence should be translated thus: "*Moreover, however his body is disposed, he knows it accordingly.*" Then, this sentence vividly supports Mahāsi Sayadaw's explanation from the grammatical point of view.

### **Sounds Foolish?**

According to the above-mentioned passage, the Buddha obviously instructed us to be aware of going when we are going. It might sound foolish at first, because we believe we are always aware of this. The commentary, therefore, poses a question about it before it explains why:

Question: Even for animals like dogs and foxes, when they are going, they are aware that they are going. Why does the Buddha instruct us to be aware that we are going when we are going?

Answer: Actually, while going, we are always thinking of something else. So, we cannot say we are fully aware that we are going. Even if we are aware, we are still under the illusion that it is I who is going. We think we have been the same person, going on our own accord from the day we were born until now.

So, to overcome such illusion and to develop insights, we are instructed to be aware that we are going when we are going.

## **Ignorance**

Only with a stable and focused mind, can we be aware that we are going when we are going. If we are worried, anxious or agitated, then we will not even be aware we are going. About 20 years ago, my teacher, Venerable U Paṇḍita, assigned me to teach meditation to the drug-addicts at a rehabilitation center in Burma. The center was a part of the psychiatric hospital where many mental patients were treated. So, I often saw some patients doing something foolish like playing out a one-man show or digging in the ground for no reason. Apparently, they did not know they were doing something foolish, as their minds were not stable enough to be aware of their actions.

However, even with the stable minds, we are often lost in aimless thoughts without being present with our own mind and body. While we are sitting here, for example, we may think of an event that happened twenty years ago; or we may think of a holiday to come; or we may think of a retirement plan, etc. Usually, we are not fully aware that we are sitting here. So, it is very meaningful that the Buddha instructed us to be aware that we are going when going, and so on.

### **Story from Reader's Digest**

To illustrate this point, I would like to tell you a humorous story from the Reader's Digest magazine:

Once, an old man with an injury on his head came into a clinic. "What is wrong with your head?" the doctor asked. "It was about 25 years ago," replied the patient. "No," the doctor said, "I'm asking about the injury on your head." The patient said, "Oh yes, I'm explaining about that very injury." The doctor said, "Ok, go ahead then."

He continued thus: "Twenty-five years ago, I worked for a farmer whose daughter was very pretty. One evening, she visited me and kindly asked, "Are you bored with our farm?" I replied, "No, I'm not. I'm happy here." Then, she continued, "Are you not lonely?" "No, I'm ok; I'm not lonely." Then she asked me again, "Are you sure you are not lonely?" "Oh yes, sure." I replied and after a while, she left.

At this point, the doctor impatiently interfered, "Sir, I'm asking what happened to your head." The man said "Let me finish my story. This morning I was on the roof of my house fixing a leak. I happened to think of that event, and realized what she had meant that evening, and how stupid I had been then. Thereupon, I fell down from the roof and got this injury on my head."

This story illustrates that there are times when we do not even know whether we are going, sitting or doing something, because our minds are so overwhelmed by mental hindrances, such as lust-related thoughts, aversion-related thoughts, aimless

thoughts, worry-related thought, and so on. So, if we are not really aware that we are going, standing, sitting, or lying down when we are doing so, we are ignorant.

## **Illusion**

Even when we are aware that we are going, etc., our common awareness is under the illusory sense of permanence, pleasure and person. As mentioned before, when we were born, we weighed just a few pounds, and now we might weigh over a hundred pounds. Such a dramatic change takes place not immediately nor suddenly, not year by year, not month by month, but actually moment by moment. So, we are changing at every moment. If we think we have been the same person going, sitting, etc. from the day we were born until now, that would be just an illusion. Such an ego-illusion is deep-seated in our hearts.

We also think it is on our own accord (a free choice) that we are going (sitting, and so on). Suppose, for example, we go to the kitchen to have a coke because we are thirsty. In this case, thirsty feeling takes place because of physical need, but not because we want to be thirsty. This thirsty feeling makes us think of a coke. Therefore, the thought of a coke gives rise to the intention to go to the kitchen. This very intention generates the physical process of going. So, it is simply illusion if we think we are going to the kitchen simply on our own accord. Even if we believe that we have chosen to go and are generally

aware that we are going, the entire event is still mired in illusion.

## Insight

That is why the Buddha instructs us to be aware that we are going when going, and so on. By being present with our own mind and body in this way, we will eventually become more aware of our own mind and body in terms of their characteristics (*nāma-rūpa-pariccheda-ñāṇa*), conditionality (*paccaya-pariggaha-ñāṇa*), and fleeting nature (*samasana-ñāṇa*). Thus, we develop the necessary insights step by step until magga-phala enlightenments.

Regarding the conditionality, the commentary explains the three conditions for going or walking (or any other bodily movement): the mind that desires to go (or sit, lie, etc.), the air element that is caused by the mind, and the movement of the different parts of the body caused by the movement of the air element. Here, to illustrate these three conditions the commentary gives us an analogy in a poetic form, which is translated by Sayadaw U Silananda as follows:

“Just as a ship goes on by winds impelled,  
Just as a shaft goes by the bowstring’s force  
So goes this body in its forward course,  
Fully driven by the vibrant thrust of air.  
As to the puppet’s back the threads are tied,  
So, to the body-doll the mind is joined  
And pulled by that the body moves, stands,  
sits,

Where is the living being that can stand, or  
walk,  
By force of its own inner strength,  
Without conditions that give it support?"

## **How to Practice**

According to the mindfulness practice of the four postures, we have to make effort to become fully aware that we are going (standing, etc.) when we are going (standing, etc.). To develop precise awareness, Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw advised us to label our going as "(I'm) going, going, (standing, standing, etc.)." Such labeling without a focus point, however, may be too general to develop the necessary precise awareness and concentration. So, he recommended—based on his own experience and profound knowledge of Pāḷi text—a home object to focus on, such as the abdomen during sitting, the moving feet during walking, and the bodily movements during daily chores. So, we can note in general like, "going, going..." or we focus on our moving feet and note them accordingly "left, right; left, right..." or "lifting, moving, dropping." During sitting, we can note in general as "sitting, sitting, sitting..." in harmony with the original passage; or we may focus on the abdomen in particular and observe its rising and falling as mentioned before. In the same way, we should note standing as "standing, standing, standing..." When lying down in bed, we can focus on the abdomen noting "rising, falling", or on the lying bodily posture as a whole and note it as "lying, lying, lying..."

Obviously, this passage suggests us to develop mindfulness in whatever bodily posture or situation we are in. Most of us, however, put too much emphasis on the sitting meditation. Some meditators even think the longer they sit, the wiser they can become. Actually, wisdom comes from constant mindfulness in all postures, not just from sitting on the floor. So, in the meditation centers under the guidance of the Venerable Mahāsi Sayadaw, the meditators are required to sit and walk alternately and are also encouraged to be mindful of all other activities they do on any other occasions such as those during bath time, meal time... To illustrate the importance of continuous mindfulness, the Venerable Mahāsi Sayadaw gave us the analogy of producing fire in the old days. Having no matches or a lighter, people in the old days had to rub two pieces of woods constantly without a break until a fire was produced.

He also encouraged us to be mindful in whatever bodily posture we are in, because we can become enlightened at any time in any posture when our mindfulness and concentration become mature enough. In this regard, he gave us the example of Venerable Ānanda, the Buddha's personal attendant. Venerable Ānanda, only a stream-winner at that time, was trying strenuously to attain arahantship on the eve of the First Buddhist Council, because participants in the council were expected to be fully enlightened ones (*arahant*). Throughout the night, he developed the awareness of body (*kayagatasati*) by walking back and forth. Although this went on until it was nearly dawn, he had not yet succeeded in attaining arahantship. Then, Ānanda realized that he had practiced too ardently, or he had put



too much imbalanced effort in the practice. So, he decided to practice in a more relaxed manner for a while. He relaxed his mind, entered his chamber, sat on the couch, and began to mindfully lay himself down. In this instant, he attained arahantship. From this example we can learn two important facts: first, we can be enlightened not only during sitting meditation, but also in any posture; second, we need to relax our minds and bodies if we happen to put too much wrong effort in the practice and become overly stressed.

## **Culmination**

Similar to other subsections in this discourse, the Buddha concludes this subsection, Mindfulness of Bodily Postures, with its culmination as follows:

- *In this way, in regard to the body he dwells (spends his time) contemplating the body internally, or he dwells (spends his time) contemplating the body externally, or he dwells (spends his time) contemplating the body both internally and externally.*
- *He dwells (spends his time) contemplating the nature of arising in the body, or he dwells (spends his time) contemplating the nature of the passing away in the body, or he dwells (spends his time) contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in the body.*
- *Mindfulness that "there is a body" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness.*

- *And he dwells independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how, in regard to the body, he abides contemplating the body.*

These passages have been explained in detail in the previous section. Here is a brief explanation made. If we are really mindful in all postures, we will come to see our body as just a body without identifying it as "me" or "mine," and we will come to distinguish the body from the mind. And later, we will come to see the mind as a driving force behind most of our physical activities, and vice versa. For example, low temperature (physical phenomenon) may give rise to the thought of sitting by the fireplace, or the desire for a cup of hot coffee. Subsequently, there will arise the physical process of moving closer to the fireplace, or the physical process of making coffee. This is how we come to see the conditionality and interactions of mind and body. After that, we will come to see different phenomena at every moment realizing impermanence (*anicca*). Seeing this fleeting nature of mind and body, we will realize that nothing is reliable or satisfactory (*dukkha*); everything arises and disappears in harmony with conditions (*anatta*), but not with our wish or from a god's command. This is how we come to develop the empirical insights into our own minds and body (*paccakkha-vipassanā*).

Based on such empirical insight, we will also realize inferentially (*anumāna-vipassanā*) phenomena from other people, without limit to time and location, that all phenomena are impermanent, suffering, and egoless, whether they are present, past or future,

internal or external, gross or delicate, inferior or superior, far or near. This is how we can live independently, not clinging to anything in the world.

## **MINDFULNESS WITH CLEAR COMPREHENSION**

The third subsection on the *Mindfulness of Body* is the mindfulness of activities with clear comprehension. Here, the Buddha said thus:

*"Again, monks, when going forward and returning, he (a monk) acts clearly knowing; when looking ahead and looking away, he acts clearly knowing; when flexing and extending his limbs, he acts clearly knowing; when wearing his robes and carrying his outer robe and bowl, he acts clearly knowing; when eating, drinking, consuming food, and tasting, he acts clearly knowing; when defecating and urinating, he acts clearly knowing; when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and keeping silent, he acts clearly knowing."*

According to this passage, the Buddha instructed us to be mindful of all our activities with clear comprehension at anytime and anywhere even in the bathroom, as explicitly mentioned in the passage. So, when going forward or returning, we should do so mindfully by noting it as "going, going..." or "returning, returning..." In order to make faster progress in the development of concentration and

mindfulness, Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw highly recommended us to focus on the moving foot, noting it as "right step, left step" accordingly, or noting each step in two segments as "lifting, dropping," or in three segments as "lifting, pushing forward, and dropping." The same is true with the remaining activities. When looking ahead or away, we should note it as "looking ahead," or "looking away;" when flexing or extending our limbs, we should note it as "flexing" or "extending," and so on.

Here, the phrase "clearly knowing" obviously differentiates the mindfulness of bodily activities from the mindfulness of four postures. Some scholars take this phrase to mean that the mindfulness with clear comprehension includes a restrained and dignified behavior that helps protect one's mind away from mental distractions. Unless we restrain our senses, our minds will be distracted by objects all the time. If we are mindful of our activities, we spontaneously restrain our senses; then we become aware clearly of the body and develop the progressive vipassanā insight leading to magga-phala enlightenment.

### **Definition of "Clearly Knowing"**

On top of restrained and dignified behavior, the phrase "clearly (*sam*) knowing (*pajāna*)" has a deeper connotation. Here, according to the commentaries, Venerable Sayadaw U Silānanda defined the adverb "clearly (*sam*)" in three ways: correctly, comprehensively, and evenly. Our activities, like going forward or returning, etc., represent our mental and physical phenomena and their interactions. In other

words, our activities are just visible manifestations of our minds and bodies, their conditionality and interactions. In order to discern this fact, we have to do all the activities *clearly knowing*, that is, knowing our bodies “correctly,” “comprehensively,” and “evenly.”

## **Knowing the Body Correctly**

Here, “knowing the body correctly” means seeing the body as it really is without identifying it as “I” or “mine,” or as someone lovable or despicable. Although we are instructed to observe our activities like going forward, returning, etc., what we are to discern is not the activities, but the psycho-physical phenomena that involve in the activities. Even during a single step, if we are really mindful, we may experience different phenomena at every moment beyond conceptual forms or manners. We may become aware of lightness or heaviness at one moment and pressure, vibration or warmth at the next. Then we come to discern physical elements as they really are without identifying them as “I” or “mine.” The solid form of the body is actually an illusion, since there is nothing solid in the ultimate sense. From the Abhidhamma point of view, the body is not something solid or lasting as we normally think. It is actually just the manifestation of constantly changing elements. According to the Abhidhamma commentary,<sup>11</sup> a physical particle is of four kinds in its smallest size as follows:

1. Tājjarī is the size of the dust that falls on things like a table or chair.

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<sup>11</sup> Sammoha-vinodanī -328

2. Ratha-renu is the size of the dust that arises up in the air when a vehicle passes by.
3. Anu is the size that can only be seen through the sunrays.
4. Paramānu is the size that cannot even be seen by one's naked eyes.

Even the smallest particle like "paramānu" can be divided repeatedly until there is nothing solid, but just formless elements. This is why, when we are really mindful of our bodies, we will come to be aware only of physical elements, such as hardness or softness (earth), warmth or cold (fire), pressure or tension (wind), and so on, instead of solid forms or instead of "I" or "mine." Thus, we will realize from our own experience the impermanent and impersonal nature of the body instead of seeing the body as someone solid and timeless. This is what is meant by the phrase "knowing the body correctly."

### **Knowing the Body Comprehensively**

"Knowing the body comprehensively" means discerning the body from all aspects. For example, if we look at an apple, for example, we can see or experience its color; when we touch it, we can have the experience of hardness, smoothness or toughness (the earth element), coolness or warmth (the fire element), or tension and pressure (air element). If we eat it, we can experience its taste, smell, and nutritional value. In the ultimate sense, therefore, the apple is nowhere to be found. What we call "an apple" is just a concept (*paññatti*) created by the manifestation of physical phenomena involved. The

characteristics of elements, such as hardness, coolness, pressure, color, smell, taste, and nutrition, on the other hand, are what really exist, what we can directly experience, what we are to discern. That is why vipassanā practice is accurately defined as "seeing things as they really are" (*bhūtaṃ bhūtaṃ passati*), and the vipassanā object is described as "what one can directly experience" (*atta-paccakkha*).

In this regard, we need to understand three kinds of knowledge: Intellectual (*suta-maya*), empirical (*paccakkha*), and inferential (*anumāna*).

1. For example, suppose, we have learned that a lightning bolt of 30 million volts has enough power to light up the entire New York City; lightning strikes the US 40 million times each year. Learning the facts of lightning in this way is not experiencing the real lightning, but only intellectual knowledge.
2. Seeing the lightning at the moment it strikes in the sky is a direct experience of real lightning and is based on empirical knowledge.
3. After having seen real lightning, we can understand how lightning, as we experienced it, can appear anywhere and anytime. Such a realization is considered inferential knowledge.

We need to understand our bodies through these three kinds of knowledge and, more importantly, through the last two kinds. If we watch our bodily actions like going, standing, or rising and falling of the abdomen in the present moment, we will discern real physical phenomena involved and their

impermanence. When we observe the rising of the abdomen, for example, we will come to discern physical phenomena like hardness, warmth, pressure or vibration and their arising and fading away. Such discernment is empirical insight. Based on the empirical insight, we can inferentially realize something similar is occurring in all bodies without limit to person, time, and space. Thus, the comprehensive understanding of the body is formed by the two kinds of insight: empirical insight (*paccakkha-vipassanā*) and inferential insight (*anumāna-vipassanā*). This is what is meant by the phrase "knowing the body comprehensively."

### **Knowing the body evenly**

To know the body evenly means to discern physical phenomena with well-balanced mental faculties. There are five mental faculties: faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and knowledge. Among these five factors, there can never be too much mindfulness, since our minds are always agitated with mental distractions. So with mindfulness, "the more the better." As for the remaining four faculties, a balance is needed between faith and knowledge, and between effort and concentration. Regarding knowledge, the vipassanā knowledge (*bhāvanāmayā ñāṇā*) can also never be excessive. However, intellectual knowledge (*sutamaya ñāṇā*) and reasoning power (*cintāmayā ñāṇā*) can become extreme. So, intellectual knowledge should be balanced with factual faith. In the same way, effort and concentration must also be balanced especially during intensive retreats because, if either one is



excessive, we cannot make progress in the practice. Only with well-balanced mental faculties can we develop steadfast mindfulness. This is what is meant by the phrase “knowing the body evenly.”

### **Too Much Faith**

Strong faith in the practice is a very important factor to make faster progress in the practice. But we need to be careful not to fall victim to blind faith (*mudha-ppasanna*). There were many incidents in history in which some religious leaders and hypocrites took advantage of ingenuous people. In one incidence in the US, people in a cult drank poison to commit suicide. They were convinced that it was the way for them to meet God. We should be careful not to fall prey to such blind faith. Even when we practice with the correct method, too much faith is still not good. One of my best friends, a monk named U Khemācāra, was a very dedicated practitioner. His faith in the practice was so strong that he believed his practice would lead him to enlightenment within a three-month rains retreat if he put a great effort in it. Unfortunately, he did not succeed. I still believe his excessive faith should have been more balanced with wisdom. Another form of excessive faith is likely to happen at a certain stage of vipassanā practice when we mistakenly take some of our unusual experiences for spiritual attainment. Sometimes, we hear of someone who (doubtfully) claims to be a stream-winner or even an arahant. These are some examples of excessive faith.

Therefore, we need to balance excessive faith and devotion with knowledge or reasoning power

(*paṭisāṅkhāna-bala*). In this regard, we need to make sure we learn dhamma properly by practicing or receiving advice from skilled teachers or reading good books or seeking an advice from fellow meditators with dhamma experience. Basically, we need to understand that vipassanā practice is all about continuous mindfulness.

### **Too Much Reasoning**

Reasoning power called *paṭisāṅkhāna-bala* is encouraged by the Buddha to the extent to which it helps us to engage in right actions, right speech, and right livelihood. In order to see physical phenomena while they are presently arising, we have to make a great effort; so during meditation practice, we have no time to spending on reasoning, analyzing or judging. Moreover, analyzing, reasoning or judging in an unskillful way only leads to skeptical doubt and confusion. For example, suppose, we may try to find reasons to analyze whether mind is a separate phenomenon or just one of the highly sophisticated brain functions; whether this current life is the only life or there are lives before or after the current one. Such unskillful reasoning often results in doubt and confusion, but confers no benefits. Another form of unskillful reasoning is very common to those who have read a lot of dhamma books written by different teachers with different backgrounds, or to those who have practiced different methods of meditation under the guidance of different meditation masters. They always love to analyze or judge one method in comparison with another instead of putting a necessary effort into this practice. Commonly, their

faith in the practice becomes weak and they rarely make progress in meditation. Obviously, too much reasoning does more harm than good in one's practice. So, the Buddha once said: "Even I cannot help someone with a wavering mind."

Therefore, it is important to keep our reasoning power in balance with factual faith resulting from the practice. Faith is necessary to succeed in accomplishing anything. We put effort into something only when we have faith in its benefits, but not otherwise. So, we need to keep our reasoning power balanced with rightful faith in the practice.

### **Too Much Effort**

Effort is one of the four factors<sup>12</sup> required to accomplish whatever we wish. However, if we put too much effort in the practice, or if we are over-enthusiastic to make progress in the practice, we will become restless, nervous, or anxious, thus weakening our mindfulness and concentration. Excessive effort does more harm than good especially to people of a weak mind. People with mental problems know their minds are unstable and often expect meditation will help. Unfortunately, however, they are likely to put in too much effort in the practice unnecessarily. Thus, their mental problems may get aggravated.

At some point, they become excessively restless and undisciplined. Furthermore, some meditators think longer

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<sup>12</sup> *There are four factors required for accomplishment (iddhi-pāda): ambition, will, effort, and knowledge.*

sitting means better progress in the practice. So, they take a lot of pain to sit for three to four hours, but without much mindfulness. Such courageous effort is not as beneficial as they expect. Other meditators may put too much effort in moving slowly, which is useless without the continuity of mindfulness. In brief, there is no magic in sleepless nights, long sittings or moving slowly. The magic is in the continuity of mindfulness. So, the right effort to make is to be mindful continuously anytime and anywhere even in the restroom, as mentioned in this section.

Yet again, there are some meditators who put too much effort in trying to penetrate into the nature of the objects so that they can see mind and body clearly in terms of characteristics and conditionality, impermanence, and so on. Such effort often makes our practice more stressful and less rewarding leaving a lot expectations unfulfilled. We need to remember the original Pāḷi passage in which the Buddha instructed us to be aware that we are going when going, and so on, in a very simple and practical way. With the continuous mindfulness of our activities like going forward, returning, etc., however, a time will come when we will see clearly the psycho-physical phenomena involved in our activities and their conditionality, interaction and impermanence, etc. So, make just enough effort to be mindful continuously of our activities, and let insight come by itself in due course of time.

These excessive efforts need to be balanced with relaxed receptiveness without being overly concerned with results. To relax our mind and body, Venerable

Mahāsi Sayadaw sometimes recommended that a yogi who has become excessively stressed takes a short break from the practice by listening to dhamma talks or reading dhamma books or taking a nap. It is also good to remember the example of Venerable Ānanda who became fully enlightened only when he relaxed his mind and body on his bed after having practiced without resting for the whole night. On the other hand, to boost up energy when it is weak, see the "Contemplation of Awakening Factors" in the fourth sub-section of the Contemplation of Dhamma.

### **Too Much Concentration**

Too much concentration does not necessarily mean it is a very strong concentration. Mostly, it refers to concentration with weak effort. This problem is likely to happen to the meditators who have made progress to some extent in the practice. Right faith and great effort naturally lead us to a smooth practice with less pain and less wandering mind. At that point, we are able to concentrate on the object without making much effort. Thus, the concentration has become relatively stronger while the effort is weaker. As a result, our mind and body becomes very relaxed leading to falling asleep during the sitting hour. Some practitioners even fall asleep for two to three hours straight in a sitting position without moving. If they are left alone, they may even keep on sitting for hours without eating. So, they should be made to get up and go for food and to the bathroom. In other cases, the meditators become extremely concentrated on the meditative object and experience a state of oblivion, somewhat like the unconscious state. That is

often mistaken for meditative absorption (*samāpatti*) or even for the experience of nibbāna (*phala*). The meditators with too much concentration like this are normally advised to spend more hours in walking meditation than sitting. Thus, they can boost up their energy balanced with concentration.

So, with the proper balance between faith and knowledge and between effort and concentration, we can discern physical phenomena clearly without identifying them as "I" or "mine." This is how we know the body evenly; i.e., in a well-balanced manner.

## **Four Clear Comprehensions**

As mentioned above, the phrase "clearly knowing" is defined as "knowing the body correctly, comprehensively, and evenly." On top of that, the commentaries elaborated on this phrase in terms of four kinds of "Clear Comprehension" (*sampajañña*) or the four things to be clearly known when we do our activities. They are benefit, suitability, domain, and non-delusion. So, whatever activity we do, we should do knowing clearly whether it is beneficial and purposeful, whether it is suitable, whether it is in our domain, and whether it is devoid of delusion.

### **Whether Beneficial**

The clear comprehension of benefit is a mental quality we should develop. Life constitutes series of decisions and choices. For example, once we wake up from sleep, for instance, we need to make a decision whether to get up right away, or to spend a few more

minutes lying in bed. So, it is very important to be able to make the right choice and right decision so that we can do something beneficial. Our time here on earth is very limited. We should do something only if it is beneficial. Although it is beneficial, we should also weigh the benefits against the possible drawbacks. Even if the benefits outweigh the drawbacks, we may still need to inquire if there is something else even more beneficial to do. Our decisions and actions must always be the most beneficial possible.

When we have spare time, for example, what are we going to do? Shall we watch TV, read a book, or go fishing? If our choice is to watch TV, then we should select a beneficial program rather than just entertainment. We should also try to find out whether there is any other program that is more beneficial. Sometimes, reading or meditation may be the better choice. Fishing is always a wrong action, of course. Furthermore, it is also advisable to find a way to benefit from any activity or situation we are involved in. Suppose, for instance, we are in a waiting room and have nothing special to do. What benefits can we take out of this situation? Reading may be the only benefit we can take out of this situation. Or we may find it more beneficial to use the time to develop *mettā* or mindfulness than to read something not worthwhile. Make sure our choice is the most beneficial one possible. How we spend our time is how we live our lives. We should try and make what we do as beneficial as possible. This is the clear comprehension of benefit (*sāthaka-sampajañña*), an amazing mental quality we should develop.

## Whether Suitable

Even if beneficial and purposeful, some activities may not be suitable to the situation. We should do things in harmony with time, place and person (*kāla, desa, puggla*). As the saying goes, "When in Rome, do as Romans do." Noble Silence is beneficial, but it is not suitable when it is time to speak. The Buddha once criticized his monks for not talking to each other during the rain retreat in the forest. A talk on mindfulness practice is beneficial but not suitable at a wedding ceremony or to someone of a different religious denomination. One of my teachers always talked about being mindful of the rising and falling of the abdomen on any occasion, whether it was a funeral, birthday or a wedding. Furthermore, strict discipline is beneficial, but not suitable, if it does more harm than good. Even in the vinaya rules, there were a lot of amendments made to ease the strictness according to time, place and person. For instance, meditation practice is beneficial, but not suitable when it is time for sleeping or time for our family and friends. The Buddha once criticized an Arahāt for practicing in a secluded place when he was supposed to attend to a sangha meeting. So, in conclusion, we need to be mindful of our activities in such a way that they are not only beneficial but also suitable to time, location and the people concerned. That is clear comprehension of suitability (*sappāya-sampajañña*).

## Whether in Our Domain

We need to know clearly what our domain or territory is. In a jātaka tale, an eagle snapped up a



small chick that was walking alone in open space. Obviously, the open space is not a right domain or territory for a chick. The mother quail (bird) seeing this, stood on a big dirt hill and challenged the eagle to a fight. The arrogant and angry eagle dived at full speed towards the mother quail. When the eagle almost reached her, the mother quail jumped down from the soil lump letting the eagle crash into the hill and die. The lesson is even a small weak quail can successfully fight against the mighty eagle by standing within her domain. So, it is very important for us to be in our domain so that we are safe from all sorts of dangers and disasters.

What is our domain? In many discourses, the Buddha instructed us to be in our own domain or territory referring to mindfulness that can protect us from the danger of mental defilements (*satārakkhena sampannāgato*). Unless we are mindful, we are exposed to a variety of dangers generated by mental defilements. For example, if we are greedy, we are likely to commit stealing or cheating; if we are lustful, we may commit rape or adultery; if we are angry, we may get involved in quarrelling, shouting, hitting and sometimes even in murder; if we are jealous of someone's success, we may make an attempt to jeopardize his or her success; if we are conceited, we may insult someone out of pride or prejudice, and so on. Only at the moment we are mindful, are we saved from such dangers. So, mindfulness is described by the Buddha as protection or safe territory for us. If we are not arahants, even when we try and note mindfully, defilements can still arise. But, as long as we continue making the effort to note, we will be in

our domain and will be protected by mindfulness. So, whatever activity we do, we should do within our domain or to do with mindfulness. That is clear comprehension of domain (*visaya-sampajañña*).

### **Whether Devoid of Delusion**

Delusion means not seeing the truth. Here in this context of *satipaṭṭhāna*, the truth refers to mental and physical phenomena, because they are something real. Actually, they just newly arise when conditions are met and pass away immediately. However, the ceaseless and massive process of newly-arising phenomena (*santati-ghana*) gives us the illusory sense of something or someone unique or timeless. This is delusion. We can overcome such delusion when we discern mental and physical phenomena without identifying them as "I" or "mine." For this purpose, we have to be mindful of our activities, such as going forward, returning, and so on, which are just manifestations of mental and physical phenomena and their conditionality and interaction. By being continuously mindful of our activities in this way, we will be able to see mental and physical phenomena clearly beyond illusory sense of permanence, pleasure and person. Through the mindfulness of our activities, therefore, we can spontaneously develop the clear comprehension of non-delusion (*asammoha-sampajañña*).

In brief, this section instructs us to be mindful of our activities with clear comprehension in four aspects, namely, benefit, suitability, domain (mindfulness) and non-delusion. So, being mindful of our activities with four kinds of clear comprehensions,

is the same in essence as seeing our bodies correctly, comprehensively and evenly. To put it in a nutshell, we can accomplish the mindfulness practice by being mindful of our activities with four kinds of clear comprehension or by seeing our bodies correctly, comprehensively and evenly. In the original Pāḷi passage, the list of bodily activities to be done with mindfulness and clear comprehensions includes:

1. Going forward and returning
2. Looking ahead and looking away
3. Flexing and extending one's limbs
4. Wearing one's robes and carrying one's outer robe and bowl
5. Eating, drinking, consuming food, and tasting
6. Urinating and defecating
7. Walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and keeping silent

In the above list, the number four, "wearing one's robes and carrying one's outer robe and bowl" is concerned with monks and nuns only. As for lay people, however, this phrase means similar activities such as wearing lay clothes and using or taking bowls, cups, plates, and so on. In view of the instruction to be mindful of even urinating and defecating among others, it is very obvious that there is no single activity for us to do without mindfulness and four kinds of clear comprehension.

### **Culmination**

The Buddha concludes this subsection, "Mindfulness of Activities with Clear Comprehension" with its culmination thus:

- *In this way, in regard to the body he abides contemplating the body internally, or he abides contemplating the body externally, or he abides contemplating the body both internally and externally.*
- *He abides contemplating the nature of arising in the body, or he abides contemplating the nature of the passing away in the body, or he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in the body.*
- *Mindfulness that "there is a body" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness.*
- *And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how in regard to the body he abides contemplating the body.*

Each and every sub-section of this discourse is concluded with this passage, which shows the culmination of the practice in four stages. Since it is explained in the previous sections, here is only a brief summary. At the first stage, we will discern the body internally (this means discerning our own body), or and externally (anyone else's body), or both internally and externally (this means seeing the body as body without discrimination between ours and others'). At the second stage, we will see different physical phenomena arising and passing away at every moment along with our bodily activities. At the third stage, mindfulness will be established seeing "there is a body" leading to the bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness. At the fourth stage, we can

dwell independent not clinging to anything in the world.

## CONTEMPLATION OF ANATOMICAL PARTS

As the fourth subsection of mindfulness of the body, the Buddha expounded the contemplation on thirty-two anatomical parts thus:

*"Again, monks, a monk contemplates this very body up from the soles of the feet and down from the top of the hair, enclosed by skin, as full of many kinds of impurity thus: In this body there are head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, bowels, mesentery, contents of the stomach, feces, (brain)<sup>13</sup>, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil of the joints, and urine."*

### Thirty-two Anatomical Parts

In the above passage, there are the thirty-two anatomical parts for us to meditate on. It is not necessary to find the clinical accuracy of the body parts or to bother about whether some of them are really constituent parts of the body, such as contents of the stomach, feces and urine. They are mentioned here just to help us discern the repulsiveness of the

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<sup>13</sup> *Brain is mentioned as one of the anatomical parts to observe in Paṭisambhidā-magga but not in this discourse, probably because it is counted as the bone-marrow.*

body. Anatomical parts are, of course, many more in number, but these thirty-two parts suffice for the spiritual development of samatha or vipassanā.

According to this meditation, we have to divide the body into thirty-two anatomical parts in our mind's eye and contemplate on their repulsiveness. This enables us to realize what the body really is and what we really are. We know this body is not a single solid piece, but we feel as if it were so. We know we are not immortal, but we really feel as if we were so. It is really hard to consider ourselves as someone with disgusting anatomical parts, as mentioned in this section. For sure, in our self-image, we believe we are someone unique and unchanging. As a result, our bodies are most precious to us. So, we do not really want to find any fault with our bodies, which represent who we think we are. This was the reason why Queen Khemā of Rājagaha Kingdom did not meet the Buddha for years, even though King Bimbisāra was a very dedicated disciple.

### **Queen Khemā**

During the Buddha's time, the area known today as Bodh Gaya used to belong to Magadha Kingdom. Its capital city was Rājagaha (nowadays known as Rājagir) just a two-hour drive from Bodh Gaya. King Bimbisāra of this kingdom was well known as "seniyo," for he had powerful army, while his chief queen Khemā was famous for her unique beauty.

The king, having attained the first stage of enlightenment, was very dedicated to the Buddha. He

was the one who had Veļuvana (Bamboo Grove) monastery built for the Buddha. But his queen never visited the Buddha for two reasons. First, she was so beautiful and cherished so much by the king that she was too arrogant to care about the Buddha. Second, she did not want to listen to the dhamma talks given by the Buddha whom she thought emphasized the negative aspects of the body.

As a dedicated disciple of the Buddha, the king wanted his queen to visit the Buddha but was not willing to force her. So, he contrived a tactful plan. He had a beautiful song composed by a skilled musician in praise of the Veļuvana monastery and got singers to sing it within ear-shot of the Queen. Below is one of the four stanzas of the song:

*Whoever gets no chance to see the Veļuvana monastery, the Bamboo grove residence of the Buddha, he or she is considered to be so unfortunate like someone who loses the chance to see Nandavana Park in the celestial realm.*

When the queen heard the song, although she had been to Veļuvana (Bamboo Grove) on a pleasure visit with the King, her interest in Veļuvana was aroused afresh. Having obtained the King's permission, therefore, one day in the morning she went at a time when she presumed the Buddha was away on alms round. When she arrived there, she first looked around at Veļuvana which was, as mentioned in the song, full of flowering and fruit trees, where honey bees busied themselves collecting

honey, and where the birds sang and peacocks preened their feathers in the quiet park.

Afterward, she entered the Buddha's residence hoping that he would be away somewhere on an alms round. Much to her surprise, however, she found the Buddha sitting in his seat and being fanned by a young girl whose beauty surpassed even hers. Such a remarkable beauty above all else fascinated her so much that she just gazed at the girl with great astonishment. Actually, the girl was not someone real but just a creation made by the Buddha through his supernormal powers. While gazing at the girl, the beauty of the girl diminished perceptibly. After a while, she even turned old and decrepit with wrinkled skin, gray hair, decayed teeth, black spots all over her skin, protruding joints, and a twisted body. Thus, within a few moments, the young girl turned into an old woman who, trembling and breathing hard, and struggling for her life, finally gasped and collapsed. She had died and her body decayed rapidly leaving only a skeleton behind.

This vivid sight enlightened the queen thus:

"All worldly pursuits unavoidably end in sorrow: acquisitions end in dispersion; buildings in destruction; meetings in separation; youth in old age; births in death."

At this point, the Buddha gave her a brief talk thus:

- Khemā, look at the body that is afflicted with pain, impure putrid, discharging impurities



upwards and downwards, which a fool takes so much delight in.

- Khemā, just as the body of this girl by my side breaks up, so too will yours. Just as this girl's body looked attractive for a while before death, so too does yours. Therefore, give up attachment to the body both internal and external.
- Develop the mind by practicing meditation so that you will see the loathsomeness of the body. Contemplate on the thirty-two anatomical parts; be detached from them.

Then, the Queen Khemā was awakened with the attainment of the first stage of enlightenment when the Buddha continued with a further discourse called Mahā-nidāna Sutta. Later, she was ordained as a nun and continued meditation until she became fully enlightened.

### **Be Open-minded**

Like Queen Khemā, most of us do not even want to hear about the negative aspects of our bodies, which represent what we really are. The instruction to see disgusting aspects of the body may be considered by some as a pessimistic view. Actually, seeing things as they really are is always beneficial. Seeing an enemy as the enemy, for example, is not pessimistic. On the other hand, viewing an enemy as a friend is not optimistic.

We think our body is not something attractive and pleasurable. Actually, it is repulsive and disgusting.

So, it is insightful to see the body in terms of its anatomical parts. Otherwise, it always appears as if it were someone attractive, unique and timeless, which does not represent who we really are. From such an illusion, our ego grows bigger along with love and hate, worry and anxiety. We love someone who is helpful or lovable to us while we hate someone who is harmful or despicable to us. So, our love and hate is always ego-oriented. We are worried and anxious about someone we love. We will do anything good or bad for his or her wellbeing. So, the illusion of a self is underlying our worries, misdeeds and misfortunes. In order to reduce this illusory sense of ego to an absolute minimum, we need to become aware of what our bodies really are by seeing them in terms of separate anatomical parts. First of all, we need to be open-minded enough to accept the true fact that our bodies are constituted of disgusting anatomical parts.

### **How to Practice**

To practice this meditation, the first thing we have to do is to learn the thirty-two anatomical parts properly until we have at least a general idea of their color, shape, size, and location. Most of them, however, are very familiar to us, such as hair, nails, teeth, skin, and so on. But a few of them may not be well known enough, like diaphragm, spleen, and mesentery. Nowadays, it would not be that difficult to learn all these parts, because we can easily find their pictures from books, the internet or somewhere else. We can print out the list of these anatomical parts and recite them mentally but not verbally when we practice this particular meditation. However, we will

get nowhere just by reciting the list of parts. It is important to contemplate each and every part concurrently with the recitation. The recitation helps us to direct our attention to the right place or right object.

### **From a Correct Aspect**

It is also very important to see these anatomical parts from the correct aspect. Medical doctors see real anatomical parts in their operation theater or during an autopsy. However, they may not develop any insight into the nature of the body, simply because they see them only from the medical aspect, but not from dhamma aspect. Naturally, we can find different facts or values of something if we see it from different angles even though it is the same thing. So, it is important to look at the thirty-two anatomical parts from the correct angle; therefore, we can develop the necessary spiritual insights. Unlike the medical doctors, we need to see each of the thirty-two anatomical parts from two aspects: repulsiveness and non-self.

We may contemplate their repulsiveness by reciting them all at a stretch, thus:

“In this body, there are only anatomical parts that are all foul and filthy such as head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, bowels, mesentery, contents of the stomach, feces, brain, bile,

phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil of the joints and urine.”

Or, we may contemplate their repulsiveness and non-self by reciting them one by one, thus:

Head-hairs are foul and filthy, and not me and mine.

Body-hairs are foul and filthy, and not me and mine.

Nails are foul and filthy, and not me and mine.

Teeth are foul and filthy, and not me and mine.

Skin is foul and filthy, and not me and mine, and so on.

### **From the aspect of repulsiveness**

Once we clearly discern the true nature of each and every body part from correct angle, it will become evident that there is nothing inherently beautiful or lovable in any particular aspect of the body, such as, for example, eyes, hair, and lips. In the Therī-gāthā (473), a nun vividly illustrates this insight by pointing out that, if one were to turn the body inside out, even one’s mother would be disgusted and unable to bear the smell of it. During the Buddha’s time, this meditation was accidentally responsible for a painful tragedy in Mahā-vana (Great Forest) in Vesālī County. Practicing this meditation for a long time and seeing one body as very disgusting, many of the monks felt so embarrassed with their

bodies that they committed suicide<sup>14</sup>. Therefore, it's very important to see the anatomical parts from the correct angle. And equally important is to balance the sense of repulsiveness with the sense of non-self, so that we can cool down sensual desire without stimulating aversion.

### **From the aspect of non-soul**

So, it is vital to see the thirty-two anatomical parts from the aspect of non-soul. This body is somewhat like a snowman. Children make a human figure out of snow. And then, they make themselves believe it to be a person. Our bodies are not much different from the snowman, as they are nothing but physical phenomena, which we identify as "I" or "mine." When we can divide the body into thirty-two separate anatomical parts in our mind's eye, we will see the body to be empty of "I." Hair alone includes thousands of separate threads. Which hair in particular can be identified as me or mine? Nails are of twenty separate pieces. Which nail exactly should be considered me or mine? Teeth are of thirty-two separate pieces. Which tooth particularly should be taken as me or mine? Bones are of more than three hundred separate pieces. Which bone should be regarded as me or mine? Strictly speaking, even a tiny little piece of skin or flesh is constituted of millions of separate cells and billions of separate molecules. Seeing the body from this aspect, we will find the body empty of "I;" we will realize that the body is not a single solid piece, but an assembly of

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<sup>14</sup> Vi-1, 87; Sam-3, 278

parts or a physical compound. Thus, we reduce the illusory sense of "I" or "mine."

Here, the Buddha illustrates this point with simile thus:

*"Just as though there were a bag with an opening at both ends full of many sorts of grains, such as hill rice, red rice, beans, peas, millet, and white rice, and a man with good eyes were to open it and review it thus: This is hill rice, this is red rice, these are beans, these are peas, this is millet, this is white rice; so too he reviews this same body up from the soles of the feet and down from the top of the hair, enclosed by skin, as full of many kinds of impurity thus: In this body, there are head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, bowels, mesentery, contents of the stomach, feces, (brain), bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil of the joints, and urine."*

As mentioned in the above passage, when we see the body as an assembly of separate anatomical parts or as a physical compound, we will see the body to be empty of "I." Then, we can experience the blissful moments of freedom from worry and anxiety that is inherent in the illusion of the body as "our self." With stronger concentration, we can even see the physical phenomena that constitute the anatomical parts beyond their conceptual forms. Thus, we can develop

vipassanā insights step by step until we become fully enlightened.

### **Either Samatha or Vipassana**

The commentaries, however, put this meditation under the category of samatha (the development of concentration and tranquility). And Abhidhamma explicitly categorizes this meditation as samatha that can culminate in the attainment of the first jhāna (but not higher jhānas). The Visuddhi-magga says that this meditation—known as body-based mindfulness (*kāya-gatā-sati*)—was taught as samatha in this discourse because it describes how to contemplate the body parts in terms of repulsiveness. This meditation, however, was taught as vipassana in other discourses<sup>15</sup> in which the Buddha described how to contemplate the body parts in terms of physical elements instead of repulsiveness.

However, at the end of this section, the Buddha explicitly declared that this meditation culminates in seeing the body internally, or externally, or internally and externally; and in seeing the nature of arising and passing away; and in not clinging to anything in the world. Given the culmination of this meditation, it is reasonable to conclude that this contemplation of thirty-two anatomical parts is expounded in this discourse to develop vipassana insights and enlightenment. So, we can draw the conclusion that

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<sup>15</sup> *It refers to the discourses that include Mahā-hatthi-padopama Sutta, Mahā-rāhulovāda Sutta and Dhātu-vibhāṅga Sutta (Upari-paṇṇāsa)*

we can practice this meditation either to develop jhānic concentration or vipassana insights.

For the development of vipassana insights, however, the commentaries encourage us to develop jhānic concentration first. And then, with the help of powerful jhānic concentration, we may redirect our mindfulness to the present mental phenomena involved in the jhāna itself. Seeing jhānic mental states arising and passing away, we can develop vipassana insights step by step until enlightenment. Alternatively, without developing such jhānic concentration, we can also observe the anatomical parts in terms of physical elements as mentioned in the next section, so that we can see physical phenomena arising and passing away, thus developing vipassana insights step by step until magga-phala enlightenment. So, this meditation can be practiced either for the development of jhānic concentration or for the attainment of vipassana insights and magga-phala enlightenment.

## **Culmination**

Like any other sub-section regarding mindfulness of the body in this discourse, this contemplation of the thirty-two anatomical parts is also concluded with its culmination as follows:

- *In this way, in regard to the body he abides contemplating the body internally, or he abides contemplating the body externally, or he abides contemplating the body both internally and externally.*



- *He abides contemplating the nature of arising in the body, or he abides contemplating the nature of the passing away in the body, or he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in the body.*
- *Mindfulness that "there is a body" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness.*
- *And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how in regard to the body he abides contemplating the body.*

The detailed explanation of the above passages should be understood as in the previous sub-section of Mindfulness of the body. Here is a summary: Seeing our own bodies in terms of its thirty-two anatomical parts, we can view anyone else's body in the same manner. This is how we can realize all bodies internally or externally or both internally-and-externally. We can also see arising and passing away of physical phenomena that constitute the anatomical parts, or mental phenomena that constitute the jhāna developed by observing the anatomical parts. When we see real phenomena, mental or physical, there will be no room for illusory sense of "I", and "I"-related attachment. This is how we become independent not clinging to anything in the world.

## **Additional Information**

### **Skill in Learning the Thirty-two Parts**

To practice this meditation, it is necessary to learn thirty-two anatomical parts properly. Otherwise, it is

almost impossible to practice this meditation especially for people of the old days when there were no papers or pins to write down the list of these body parts, let alone getting pictures and photos from the books or the internet. So, the commentary really emphasizes the need of proper learning these anatomical parts in terms of color, shape, direction, location and delimitation of each body part. The Visuddhi-magga commentary describes each and every one of the thirty-two parts in detail. It is also said that, even if we were highly learned and well-versed in the entire teaching of the Buddha, we would still need to learn these body parts properly if we want to practice this meditation effectively. First, we must recite the names of these thirty-two parts. The procedure of recitation as mentioned in Visuddhi-magga takes 330 days, almost a year!

First, the thirty-two anatomical parts are divided into six groups as follows:

1. Head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin
2. Flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys
3. Heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs
4. Bowels, mesentery, contents of the stomach, feces, brain
5. Bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat
6. Tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil of the joints, urine

And then we have to recite these six groups systematically. To recite the first group, we have to take fifteen days: five days each in forward order, in backward order, and both in forward-and-backward

order. So, it will take us fifteen days to complete the recitation of the first group. As for the recitation of five remaining groups, we have to take thirty days: fifteen days to recite them in the same way as the first group, and another fifteen days to recite them together with the previous groups in the same manner. Thus, we have to take 165 days altogether, nearly half a year to complete the oral recitation alone.

After the oral recitation, there comes the mental recitation to carry out in the same manner. So, it will also take another 165 days. So, to complete the recitation alone, we have to take 330 days. This is how to master the skill in recitation.

After having completed the oral and the mental recitations, we are required to learn each and every body part in terms of color, shape, direction, location and delimitation, which are described in details in the commentary. But nowadays, we are fortunate that we can get the list of the thirty-two anatomical parts, their pictures and photos from books, the internet or somewhere else. So we can learn these parts in detail without too much difficulty.

### **Tenfold Skill in Procedure**

In addition, to carry out the effective procedure of the practice until the attainment of jhāna, the commentary advises us to develop skills in:

1. Reciting the body parts in the prescribed order without skipping

2. Observing the body parts by reciting them not too quickly
3. Observing the body parts by reciting them not too slowly
4. Warding off mental distractions (by resisting the temptations of external objects)
5. Contemplating them beyond their conceptual forms (by contemplating their repulsiveness in color, shape, odor, original source, and location)
6. Leaving out unclear parts one by one until there remains only the clearest one
7. Taking the clearest body part as an object of Jhāna practice
8. Developing concentration
9. Exerting effort
10. Arousing equanimity

Out of the tenfold skills, the first five are quite clear and do not need clarification. Among the last five, the sixth and seventh skills indicate how to develop this meditation until the attainment of jhāna. To meet these two skills, we have to observe the body parts concurrently with recitation. A time will come when we will find some of them become clearer than the others. Then we have to eliminate the unclear parts one by one until only the clearest one remains. Lastly, we have to then focus on this clearest one all the way to the attainment of jhāna.

### **The Last Three Skills**

In order to meet the last three skills (i.e., developing concentration, effort and equanimity) in a

well-balanced manner, the commentary encourages us to learn some discourses. One of them is the discourse known as "Sifting out Gold" (Paṃsudhovaka)<sup>16</sup>, in which the Buddha applied the simile of sifting out gold when he depicts the step-by-step purification of mind along with the development of concentration and equanimity. Below is the brief translation of the first part of the discourse:

*"O monks, suppose, one sifts out the gold repeatedly: first from coarse debris like gross stones and broken pieces of earthen ware; and then from subtle debris like small stones and rough sand; and then from even more subtle debris like fine sand and black dirt. Thus, one sifts out the gold from debris. Yet again, the gold smith continues to refine the gold with the fire repeatedly until it is pure and shining enough to make ornaments like a ring, earring, bracelet or necklace.*

*In the same way, monks, one purifies oneself: first from gross debris, viz., bodily misconduct, verbal misconducts and mental misconduct; and then, from subtle debris, viz., lust-related thought, hate-related thought and hostility-related thought; and then from even subtler debris, viz., thought of one's relatives, thought of one's home and thought of one's self-image.*

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<sup>16</sup> It can be found in *Anguttara-nikāya Volume-1*, 256. Another two discourses recommended by the commentary include one in the *Anguttara-nikāya Volume-3*, page 435, and another in *Saṃyutta-nikāya-5*, page 113.

*Then, there remain only dhamma-related thoughts. Such is concentration, but it is still not cool enough, not sublime enough, not arising from calming the defilements, and not reaching one-pointedness. There still remains a struggle with mental disturbances.*

*O monks, there will come a time when the mind becomes well concentrated and stilled with one-pointedness (ekodibhāvādhigato). With such concentration, the mind no longer struggles (na sasamkhāra-niggayha-vārita-gato). It is cool (santo) and sublime (pañīto), which comes from calming the defilements (paṭipassaddhi-laddo). If one is inspired, any kind of supernatural knowledge would be accessible to him at anytime once certain conditions are met."*

### **Culminate in Jhāna**

In harmony with the procedure mentioned above, we should go to a suitable place and contemplate the thirty-two anatomical parts over and over again concurrently with the recitation until there remains only one body part which is the most clear to us. By focusing on that single body part, we have to develop concentration until we reach the first jhāna.

### **Culminate in Vipassana Insight**

After having attained jhānic concentration, if we want to develop vipassana insight, we can redirect

our mindfulness to the jhānic mental states. With the help of powerful concentration, we can see mental phenomena arising and passing away moment by moment. Thus, we can develop vipassana insights step by step until we reach magga-phala enlightenment. Alternatively, without developing jhānic concentration, we can also contemplate body parts in terms of physical elements so that we see the physical phenomena arising and passing away moment by moment, and develop vipassana insights step by step until the attainment of magga-phala enlightenment.

## **CONTEMPLATION OF FOUR ELEMENTS**

In this fifth subsection of mindfulness of the body, the Buddha expounded the contemplation on four fundamental elements thus:

*"Again, monks, a monk contemplates this very body, however it is placed, however disposed, in terms of elements thus: 'In this body, there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element.' "*

### **Definition of Four Elements**

This subsection on the mindfulness of the body deals with contemplation of four kinds of fundamental elements, which constitute our bodies and, in a broader sense, the entire world we live in. In other words, our body and the outer world are composed of the same kinds of phenomena. Therefore, in many

discourses, each and every individual is described as "the world" (*loka*), which literally means "the process of arising and passing away." So, we may reasonably say that the entire world can be found in this body. However varied the materials on earth are or however sophisticated the bio-mechanism of the body is, the content of the world and our body is reducible to four fundamental elements: earth, water, fire and air. Actually, not only the body as a whole but each and every little piece of the body constitutes these four elements. Even a tiny little thing like a hair consists of these four elements as well as big trees or rocky mountains.

First of all, we need to learn what the four elements really are, because they are not exactly what we think they are. They are not something visible. For instance, we cannot actually see fire in any part of our bodies, but only experience it as heat. According to the commentary and Abhidhamma, therefore, the late Venerable Sayadaw U Sīlānanda explained the four elements from three aspects: individual characteristics (*lakkhana*), functions (*rasa*) and manifestations (*paccupaṭṭhāna*).

## **Earth Element**

The earth under our feet is not exactly the earth element in the ultimate sense. Although, that is not totally wrong. When we see the earth under our feet, however, what we really see is the color, but not the earth. When we smell it, the smell we get is just smell, but not the earth, either. Moreover, the earth is not something solid as we may think, as it can be



divided repeatedly until there remain nothing solid, but just certain kinds of electromagnetic elements. We cannot move through the earth as we do with air or water because the way we experience the earth element is only through our senses. Strictly speaking, the earth element is not really the earth under our feet, but it is just energy or a material element that manifests itself as solid or hard. This element exists in everything found in the world and in sentient beings, as well as in plants and inanimate objects. In brief, if something feels solid, hard or soft, then that something constitutes of a higher proportion of the earth element.

So, the earth element is the physical energy that is one of the main constituents of our bodies. It can be experienced as hardness or softness. In other words, the characteristic of the earth element is hardness or softness (*lakḥaṇā*). It can also be experienced as a somewhat solid base in terms of its function (*rasa*), or as something that holds or bears the body in terms of its manifestation (*paccupaṭṭhāna*). Therefore, we are able to realize what the earth element really is only when we are aware of it in terms of its characteristic, function or manifestation.

## **Water Element**

We normally think of the water element as water in a storage tank or in the ocean. However, when we see water, what we are really seeing is the color, but not the water element. When we drink it, we can experience its smell and taste, which are not the

water element, either. Abhidhamma says, the water element is untouchable, and can only be experienced in terms of three other elements that involved with it. When we touch water in the ocean, for example, we may experience coldness or warmth that represents the fire element, not the water element. We may experience ocean waves pushing and pulling in a very powerful way. This is just the air pressure involved in the water but not the water element, either. We may touch water and feel its physical aspects, but this is just the earth element involved in the water, not the water element.

The water element, therefore, is not what we think of it, but a particular kind of physical energy that is one of the main constituents of our bodies. It can be experienced as fluidity or trickling in terms of its characteristic (*lakḥaṇā*); or as expansion or enlargement in terms of its function (*rasa*); or as adhesiveness or cohesiveness in terms of its manifestation (*paccupaṭṭhāna*). There is cohesion of elements in everything, in stone, in wood or in bricks, and so on. This cohesion, which holds things together, is the manifestation of the water element. When we add water to the flour, for instance, we get dough. It is the water element that holds the flour particles together. This is how the water element manifests itself to us when we contemplate the body. We cannot always see the water element in a liquid form. Everything solid like a bone or tooth always means there is a water element that holds its material particles together to create a solid form.

## Fire Element

Normally, when we think of fire, we think of its flame form. Actually, the fire element, in terms of temperature, exists in everything on earth, in our bodies, in a tree, in the rocky mountain even in the ocean and in ice. According to Abhidhamma, this universe was born of fire. If not for the sun, which is an extremely massive fire ball, we and our planet would not even have come into existence in this universe. So, no wonder under certain temperatures various kinds of insects, plants, flowers and fruits are born and develop. Scientific studies show that temperature is one of the main factors that determine the gender of some living things. Given these facts, it may be reasonable to assume that the fire element itself is essential to the births, growth and development of everything on earth. Depending on how low or how high its temperature is, the fire element can be experienced as hot, warm, cool, or cold in our bodies or in everything else. The fire element is not something we can see. The flame we see is just the color of fire, but not the fire element itself. The fire element exists not only in the flame but also in the ice, too.

So, the fire element is a certain kind of physical energy that is one of the main constituents of our bodies and can be experienced as hotness, warmth, coolness or coldness in terms of its characteristic (*lakkhanā*); or as maturing or aging of the body in terms of its function (*rasā*); or as softening the body in terms of its manifestation (*paccupaṭṭhāna*). We find that, at some point, a dead body becomes stiff and

rigid. It is no longer soft because it is now devoid of enough of the fire element. So, one way we may experience the results of the fire element in our bodies is by the manifestation of its softness.

## **Air Element**

The air element does not necessarily refer to the wind blowing around us. Obviously, we cannot see the air element. Air that is felt to be cold or hot is not the air element but just the temperature (fire element) bound up with the air. No doubt the air element is not something solid, but it exists in everything on earth, in sentient beings or inanimate things, in a giant rocky mountain or in a tiny hair. It is the air pressure that operates our digestive system, blood circulation and any other physical movements. So, the air element is very predominant in the body parts that are moving, because it is but air pressure that generates these movements. In the Pāli texts, one's physical strength (*kaya-bala*) is due to the air element (*vāyo-dhātu*) instead of nutritional substances.

So, the air element is a certain kind of physical energy or material element that is one of the main constituents of our bodies and can be experienced as pressure, tension or tightness in terms of its characteristic (*vitthambhana-lakkhaṇā*); or as motion or vibration in terms of its function (*samudīraṇa-rasa*); or as pushing forward or pulling back in terms of its manifestation (*abhinihāra-paccupaṭṭhāna*).

In conclusion, everything on earth is mainly constituted by these four elements: earth, water, fire

and air. A question in this regard is: Why then are living beings (and things on earth) different in size, color, life span and so on if they are all composed of these four elements? The answer is that this is due to the different proportions and different formations of the elements that are determined by four conditions: kamma, mind, weather and nutriment. For instance, cats in the U.S. are much bigger and furrer than those in Burma due to environment, nutrition, etc. In any case, the most important fact the Buddha would like to teach us is that our bodies are nothing other than these four fundamental elements. There is nothing to take as me or mine, or something lovable or despicable.

### **To Discern Four Elements, Observe Bodily Activities**

The four fundamental elements manifest themselves along with our bodily postures and activities. So, we can discern them by observing our bodily activities and movements in harmony with mindfulness of the four postures and that of other activities with clear comprehension.

The different elements predominate in different bodily positions or movements. For example, our body temperature, which represents the fire element, is changing every moment along with our bodily movements. The body temperature, for instance, reaches its peak during running fast and drops to its lowest during sound sleep. Changes in body temperature can also be detected from different parts of the body or even in the same limb. As for the air element, it is the air pressure that helps our heart pump up the blood into the brain and throughout the

body for our entire life. The same is true for our digestive system, which is run by air pressure. In a similar way, it is believed that air pressure generates all our bodily activities. Basically, the air and fire elements play a key role when we are physically active, whereas earth and water elements when less active. Thus, the physical elements are changing at every moment according to our actions.

Therefore, when we reach for something, a higher proportion of fire and air elements manifest themselves with that action. When we are sitting or reclining, the earth and water elements are more predominant in our body. So, if we contemplate on our body while sitting or reclining, we can experience the dominance of these two elements in terms of hardness or heaviness. If we contemplate the body while standing up, we can experience the dominance of fire and air elements in terms of warmth, air pressure or motion. When walking, if we contemplate the foot being lifted, we can experience the dominance of two elements, fire and air, in terms of lightness, warmth or motion. When the foot is dropped down, the earth and water elements can be experienced in terms of heaviness or hardness. In brief, the fire and air elements play a major role in bodily postures and in any physical movements or activities, like the movement of lips and tongue, movement of eyes blinking, or movement of the abdomen, and so on.

So, by observing bodily activities and movements, we are able to discern various physical elements. Such discernment directly leads to penetrative insight into what the body really is (*rūpa-pariccheda-ñāṇa*). This insight also forms the foundation for all the

higher vipassana insights and enlightenments. In other words, all the higher vipassana insights lie in the awareness of the elements. Unfortunately, many of us underestimate or even mistake such awareness for something trivial. Sometimes, we also complain about not being able to see impermanence, suffering and soullessness. Actually, to see different elements changing at different moments means to see their impermanence. And again, seeing impermanence means also seeing suffering and soullessness. So, awareness of the elements is very important for developing the entire course of progressive vipassana insight.

### **Simile**

By seeing the four elements in this way, we can realize that our bodies are nothing but just a combination of elements or chemical compounds. This realization helps us to reduce the illusory sense of person to an absolute minimum. This point was illustrated by the Buddha with the simile as follows:

*"Just as though a skilled butcher or his apprentice had killed a cow and was sitting at a crossroads with it cut up into pieces; so too he contemplates this very body, however it is placed, however disposed, in terms of elements thus: "In this very body, there are the earth element, the water element, the fire element, and the air element."*

As mentioned in the above passage, this contemplation of four elements is depicted with a

butcher who slaughtered and cut up a cow to sell. According to the commentaries, the butcher simile indicates a change of cognition (*saññā*). It is because after the slaughter, the butcher thinks no longer in terms of "a cow," but only in terms of "meat." A similar shift of cognition takes place when a meditator mentally divides the body into four elements; the body is no longer experienced as "I" or "mine," but simply as a combination of the elements.

In this way, a healthy degree of detachment develops counteracting the illusory sense of "I" and our attachment to material pleasure. With sustained contemplation, we may come to realize that this apparently solid and compact material body is entirely devoid of essence. There are only elements that are characterized by simply different degrees of hardness or softness, of wetness or dryness, of hotness or coldness, and of pressure or motion. Contemplation of the four elements, thus, has the potential to lead to a penetrative realization of the insubstantial and selfless nature of the body.

### **Special Benefits**

Here, the Visuddhi-magga mentions the special benefits we can gain from the contemplation of the four elements in a passage as follows:

"Having devoted oneself to the contemplation of the four elements, one can penetrate into emptiness of ego and eliminates the perception of person. Since he has abolished the perception of a living being, he is no longer scared by wild beasts, spirits, ogres, etc. Thus,



he conquers fear and dread; he conquers delight and aversion (boredom); he is neither exhilarated nor depressed by agreeable or disagreeable things; with great understanding, he either ends his round in saṁsāra, or he is bound for a happy destiny."

## **Culmination**

- 1. In this way, in regard to the body he dwells (or spends his time) contemplating the body internally, or he dwells contemplating the body externally, or he dwells contemplating the body both internally and externally.*
- 2. He dwells contemplating the nature of arising in the body, or he dwells contemplating the nature of disappearing in the body, or he dwells contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in the body.*
- 3. Mindfulness that "there is a body" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and steadfast mindfulness.*
- 4. And he dwells independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how in regard to the body he dwells contemplating the body.*

As discussed earlier, by contemplating the four fundamental elements that are newly arising at every moment in our bodies, we will come to realize that there are only these elements in our body, nothing else, nothing to call "me" or "mine." This realization helps us to realize the similarity of other bodies by inference. Through such a realization, we find only these elements without discrimination between our

own or another's. This is how we realize the body internally, externally or both internally and externally.

As mentioned repeatedly before, elements always arise anew and pass away immediately at every moment. If we can contemplate the elements while they are still present, without making much effort, we will see them passing away. Seeing this fleeting nature of the elements is what is meant by the phrase "contemplating the nature of arising, etc."

Then, mindfulness of our body is developed to gain bare insight into the nature of the body. At this point, mindfulness of the body is also well established. For someone who sees the body as body without identifying it as "I" or "mine," there will be no room left for attachment to anything in the world. This is what is meant by the last two passages.

In view of these passages, it is very reasonable to conclude that this contemplation of the four elements is to practice with the purpose of the attainment of vipassana insights and magga-phala enlightenments.

## **Additional Information**

### **To Discern Four Elements, Observe Forty-two Parts**

In some other discourses<sup>17</sup> in the Pali text, the contemplation of the four elements is expounded in

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<sup>17</sup> *Mahā-hatthi-padopama Sutta, Rāhulovada Sutta (Majjhima-panṇāsa Pāḷi, 83); Dhātu-vibhanga Sutta (Upari-panṇāsa Pāḷi,*

terms of the forty-two body parts by adding four kinds of fire elements and six kinds of air element to thirty-two anatomical parts. According to those discourses, the commentaries explain how to contemplate the four elements in terms of forty-two parts. Although every anatomical part is constituted of four elements, certain kinds of elements are extremely predominant in certain body parts. Among the thirty-two anatomical parts, therefore, earth element is very prominent in the first twenty and water element in the last twelve. Regarding two other elements, four kinds of fire elements and six kinds of air elements are also described in these discourses.

According to the discourses, we should contemplate the four elements by observing the forty-two body parts. So, the four elements in our bodies should be understood as follows:

### **Earth Element**

The earth element is predominant in the first twenty anatomical parts: head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, bowels, mesentery, contents of the stomach, feces, and brain. When we observe these twenty parts, we should contemplate the earth element that is mainly predominant in these body parts.

In the previous section, we are instructed to observe these body parts contemplating their repulsiveness thus:

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*281), and Dhātu-vibhaṅga Pāḷi (Abhidhamma Vibhaṅga Pāḷi, 284)*

“Head hairs are foul and filthy, they are not me and mine,” and so on. In this section, the emphasis is put on the awareness of elements. So we have to observe these twenty body parts by contemplating the earth element thus: “In the head hairs, there is a predominance of the earth element, which is not me or mine,” and so on. Both methods of contemplation (of elements and of repulsiveness) have an equal potential for the realization of the true nature of the body, thus reducing the sense of ego and attachment.

### **Water Element**

The water element is mainly predominant in the last twelve anatomical parts: bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil of the joints, and urine. In the previous section, we are instructed to contemplate these body parts in terms of their repulsiveness thus: “Bile is foul and filthy, and not me or mine,” and so on. In this section we are to contemplate them in terms of the water element thus: “In the bile, the water element that is predominant is not me or mine,” and so on. Both methods help reduce the illusory sense of me or mine, indeed.

### **Fire Element**

Fire Element is mainly predominant in the four kinds of heat in the body:

- Body heat (santappana)
- Aging heat (jīraṇa)
- Fever heat (ḍāha)

- Digestive heat (pācaka)

Among them, the first three kinds refer to the different degree of body temperature, and the last one deals with our digestive system. So, the body temperature itself is known as aging heat, because it helps physical phenomena in our bodies grow, mature and age like the external temperature that makes fruits grow bigger and ripe. We can experience one of the four kinds of heat if we focus on our bodies, especially the body temperature which can be experienced at any time. We should note them accordingly thus: "In the body heat, the fire element is predominant which is not me or mine," and so on. The best way, as instructed by Mahāsi Sayadaw, is to note them as "hot, hot," or "warm, warm" in daily language as they are experienced.

## **Air Element**

Air Element is mainly predominant in the six kinds of air in the body:

- Up-going air (*uddhañ-gama*) that deals with burping, hiccups, vomiting, and so on
- Down-going air (*adho-gama*) that helps with urinating, defecating, releasing gas, etc.
- Belly air (*kucchi-ssaya*) that plays a very important role in functions of internal organs
- Bowel air (*koṭṭhā-saya*) that helps with functions of bowel and intestines
- Limb air (*añgamañga-nusāñi*) that runs through all the limbs generating the bodily movements
- Breath air (*assāsa-passāsa*)

When these air elements become obvious, we should contemplate on them in terms of the air elements without identifying them as me or mine. For instance, when burping we should contemplate it thus: "In burping, the air element is predominant which is not me or mine," and so on.

## **Breath Air**

Regarding the breath, we may contemplate thus: "In the inhaling, the air element is predominant which is not me or mine," and "In the exhaling, the air element is predominant which is not me and mine," so on. In this method of contemplation, the focus point is not limited to the nostril as in the case of meditation on breath (*ānāpāna*). So, we may focus on the nostril or on the abdomen, or follow the breath all the way from the nostril to the abdomen back and forth.

Of prime importance is to be aware of the real air element. The best way is, as instructed by Mahāsi Sayadaw, just focus on the breath or abdominal movement, and note them accordingly by using the daily language "in-breath, out-breath," or "rising, falling," instead of by the technical term "air element." What important is to be fully aware of the air element in terms of its characteristic. The breaths and abdominal movements are life-long continuous biorhythms driven by air, and can be observed any time. The other kinds of air are available only at the moment they occur. By focusing on ever-obvious objects like breath or abdominal movement, we can

easily develop mindfulness of the air element, concentration and vipassana insights especially if we have strong faith and confidence in the practice. Naturally, where there is faith there can be efforts leading to success.

## **Why Expounded in Two Ways**

The commentaries say that the contemplation of the four elements was expounded in brief in this Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, but in more details in other discourses such as Mahā-hatthi-padopama Sutta, Mahārāhulovāda Sutta, etc., in which the four elements are explained in terms of forty-two body parts. Regarding the question why the same kind of contemplation was expounded in two ways, the commentary says that the brief one was intended for the fast-learners and the detailed one for slow-learners. However, the Buddha taught the contemplation of four elements in terms of forty-two parts to Venerable Rāhula, his only son, who can by no means be regarded as a slow-learner. So, the most sensible reason may lie in the fact that a different way of teaching is suitable to the different audience with different spiritual aptitudes. It is very inspiring to learn the original discourse given by the Buddha to Venerable Rāhula, which is known as "Mahā Rhulovāda Sutta" recorded in the Majjhima-panṇāsa Pāli, Page 84.

## **Mahā Rāhulovāda Sutta**

One day, the Buddha was accompanied by Venerable Rāhula for alms round into Sāvatti City.

On the way to the city, the Buddha looked back at Venerable Rāhula and said thus: "Rāhula, you should see any physical body through wisdom that they are neither me nor mine whether they are present, past or future, internal or external, gross or subtle, superior or inferior, far or near." Then, Venerable Rāhula asked if this topic was concerned only with the physical body (physical aggregate). Then the Buddha continued with the other four mental aggregates in the same way. This episode of father and son walking and talking on the way to Sāvatti can be found to be full of life. On that very day, in the evening, the Buddha again taught Venerable Rāhula regarding the four elements as follows:

### **Earth Element**

*What is the earth element, Rāhula? The earth element may be internal; may be external. What is the internal earth element, Rāhulā? Whatever there is internally in oneself that is hard, harsh and subject to clinging, that is to say, head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, bowels, mesentery, contents of the stomach, feces and brain, or whatever else there is internally in oneself that is hard, harsh, and subject to clinging—that, Rāhulā, is called the internal earth element.*

*Whether internal or external, earth element is just earth element. That should be seen through wisdom thus: "It is not me; it is not*



*mine." Having thus seen, you will be disenchanted with the earth element; your mind will no longer be attached to the earth element.*

## **Water Element**

*And what is the water element, Rāhula? The water element may be internal; may be external. What is the internal water element, Rāhulā? Whatever there is internally in oneself that is water, watery, subject to clinging, that is to say, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil of the joints, and urine or whatever else there is internally in oneself that is water, watery and subject to clinging—that, Rāhula, is called the internal water element.*

*Whether internal or external, water element is just water element. That should be seen through wisdom thus: "It is not me; it is not mine." Having thus seen, you will be disenchanted with the water element; your mind will no longer be attached to water element.*

## **Fire Element**

*And what is the fire element, Rāhula? The fire element may be internal; may be external. What is the internal fire element, Rāhula? Whatever there is internally in oneself that is fire, fiery, subject to clinging, that is to say, that whereby one is warmed, ages, and burns*

*up, and whereby what is eaten, drunk, chewed and tasted gets completely digested, or whatever else there is internally in oneself that is fire, fiery and subject to clinging—that, Rāhula, is called the internal fire element.*

*Whether internal or external, fire element is just fire element. That should be seen through wisdom thus: "It is not me; it is not mine." Having thus seen, you will be disenchanted with the fire element; your mind will no longer be attached to the fire element.*

### **Air Element**

*And what is the air element, Rāhula? The air element may be internal; may be external. What is the internal air element, Rāhula? Whatever there is internally in oneself that is air, airy, subject to clinging, that is to say, up-going air, down-going air, air in the belly, air in the bowels, air that courses through all the limbs, in-breath and out-breath, or whatever else there is internally in oneself that is air and airy, and subject to clinging—that, Rāhula, is called the internal air element.*

*Whether internal or external, air element is just air element. That should be seen through wisdom thus: "It is not me; it is not mine." Having thus seen, you will be disenchanted with the air element; your mind will no longer be attached to the air element.*

## **To Counteract Resentment**

In the second part of this Mahā-rāhulovāda Sutta, the Buddha taught Venerable Rāhula the contemplation of the four elements from an additional perspective by applying this contemplation for the inspiration to develop the mental qualities of loving kindness and compassion. From this perspective, the Buddha instructed Venerable Rāhula to develop a wholesome mental attitude by taking examples of the earth, water, fire and air, which are free from resentment, even when various types of refuse are thrown into them. Keeping the mind free from resentment in this way, one will be able to react with loving kindness and compassion even in adverse circumstances.

## **CONTEMPLATION OF DECAYING CORPSE**

As the sixth subsection of mindfulness of the body, the Buddha expounded the contemplation of a decaying corpse thus:

### **CORPSE IN DECAY**

- 1. "Again, monks, as though he were to see a corpse thrown aside in a burial ground—one, two or three days dead, bloated, livid, and oozing matter.*
- 2. Again, monks, as though he were to see a corpse being devoured by crows, hawks, vultures, herons, dogs, leopards, tigers, jackals, or various kinds of worms.*

3. *Again, monks, as though he were to see a skeleton with flesh and blood, held together with sinews.*
4. *Again, monks, as though he were to see a skeleton fleshless and smeared with blood, held together with sinews.*
5. *Again, monks, as though he were to see a skeleton without flesh and blood, held together with sinews.*
6. *Again, monks, as though he were to see bones disconnected and scattered in all directions, here hand bones, there foot bones, ankle bones, shin bones, thigh bones, pelvis, rib, spinal bones, collar bones, neck, jaw, teeth or skull.*
7. *Again, monks, as though he were to see bones bleached white, the color of shells.*
8. *Again, monks, as though he were to see bones heaped up, more than a year old.*
9. *Again, monks, as though he were to see bones rotten and crumbling to dust*

*He compares this very body with it thus: This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate."*

## **Nine Stages of a Decaying Corpse**

In ancient India, corpses were apparently left out in the open space in burial grounds. Even today we can see a lot of corpses lying on the bare ground waiting to be cremated along the bank of the Ganges, or in the mortuaries everywhere in India. So, it was not very unusual in ancient India that the corpses could be seen

in the open space in burial grounds decaying and being devoured by wild animals like crows, vultures, dogs, and so on. The above passage from this discourse vividly depicts the decomposition of a dead body in nine stages as follows:

1. one, two or three days dead, bloated, livid, and oozing matter
2. being devoured by crows, hawks, vultures, herons, dogs, leopards, tigers, jackals, or various kinds of worms
3. a skeleton with flesh and blood, held together with sinews
4. a skeleton fleshless and smeared with blood, held together with sinews
5. a skeleton without flesh and blood held together with sinews
6. bones disconnected and scattered in all directions, here hand bones, there foot bones, ankle bones, shin bones, thigh bones, pelvis, rib, spinal bones, collarbones, neck, jaw, teeth or skull
7. bones bleached white, the color of shells
8. bones heaped up, more than a year old
9. bones rotten and crumbling to dust

Totally different from ancient Indian burial grounds, the cemeteries in the U.S. are so beautiful. One of my Burmese friends once said, when he came back from the U.S., that the roads in the U.S. were so smooth and clean that you feel like you could sleep on them. Cemeteries, like Rose Hill in Los Angeles, California, he said, were so beautiful, with huge roses and vast green lawns that you would like to die there

right away. About thirty years later, I found out he was right. The burial grounds or cemeteries in the U.S. are so beautiful and peaceful that I often feel like spending some time reading or relaxing there. So, the beautiful burial grounds in the US only hide the reality. They are by no means good places for us to be able to see the true nature of our bodies. Even when we do look at a dead body, we cannot see its true nature, because it is made to look peaceful and beautiful, more like a sleeping body than a dead one.

### **Substitutes for a Decaying Body**

This exercise was to be undertaken in a burial ground according to Visuddhi-magga and some discourses such as the thera-gāthā. However, the subordinate clause in the above passage, "*as though he were to see a corpse, (seyyathāpi passeyya sarīraṃ)*" clearly indicates the fact that this meditation does not necessarily demand a sight of an actual corpse. The Pāḷi conjunction "*seyyathāpi*" (as if; as though) always indicates something imaginary or comparable, but never refers to something real. In many Vinaya cases, the conjunction *seyyathāpi* (as if) is often used. For example, monks were blamed for their misbehavior with the clause, "as if monks were lay pleasure-seekers" (*seyyathāpi gihī kāma-bhigino*). By this clause, monks are criticized in comparison with lay pleasure-seekers, but not described as real lay people at all. In the same way, the subordinate clause "*as though he were to see a corpse,*" just refers to seeing our bodies in comparison with a corpse, but not necessarily to seeing a real corpse.

So, in modern days, when we cannot find a decaying corpse to observe in a burial ground, the pictures or photos of a decaying corpse can be good substitutes, because they can bring us the same images as a real one can. This point can also be supported from the Abhidhamma perspective because what we really see is color, whether we look at a real dead body or its pictures or photos. We can also find this point acceptable from a practical point of view if we try to look at the photos of a decaying corpse. The prime importance is to get a correct and clear vision of a decaying corpse. So, it is a reasonable conclusion that we can use pictures or photos as good substitutes for the image of a real corpse. In other words, either the image of a real corpse or the substitute of a photo can meet the purpose of counteracting the sensual desire and illusory sense of "I."

Another substitute for a decaying corpse according to Venerable Ledi Sayadaw<sup>18</sup> is a dead animal. In the villages of Burma, it is not unusual to see a dead dog thrown into the bushes nearby; in India, I even saw a dead cow decaying on the busy roadside, since there are so many cows roaming freely. Vultures and crows can also be seen devouring dead bodies. So, dead animals are easily available for this kind of meditation in countries like Burma and India. By contemplating

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<sup>18</sup> *Venerable Ledi Sayadaw is a highly-learned Pāli scholar of worldwide repute in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was highly respected for his intensive practice in the forest and in the cemeteries. He wrote many books in Burmese and in Pāli, as well. Among his works, the Pāli grammar titled Nirutti-dīpanī and Abhidhamma titled Abhidhammattha-vibhāvinī written in Pāli became valuable additions to the classic Pāli literature.*

our bodies in comparison to these dead animals, we can develop a sense of repulsiveness and can meet the main purpose of counteracting sensual desire and attachment to our body.

*"This body too is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate,"*

According to this passage, the real exercise is to apply the image of a decaying corpse to our own living bodies (or others) by reflecting that our body will also undergo the same destiny as this decaying body. In the Thera-gāthā (267- 70), there was also a monk who became an arahant by applying this image of repulsiveness of the body when he saw a beautiful girl singing and dancing.

### **Side Effects**

In another case reported by thera-gāthā, two monks each contemplated a female corpse, but one was able to gain insight, and the other was not, because the sight of the female body aroused sensual desire in him. A recently dead body of the opposite sex can cause lust unless we pay proper attention to it. The same cases can be found in Vinaya stories, and even in some modern-day mortuaries. This danger is also reflected in the commentaries, which caution against the use of a corpse belonging to the opposite sex. Even though contemplation of a corpse of the opposite sex might not be advisable to a novice meditator, nevertheless, if carried out successfully, we can expect such contemplation to constitute a particularly powerful antidote to sensuality, as in the



case of the monk, mentioned above, who became an arahant by applying this meditation to a beautiful girl singing and dancing.

A very common side effect of the image of a decaying corpse is that we might evoke extreme disgust and aversion towards the corpse, instead of developing the insight into true nature of the body. Sometimes, we may also have nightmares of seeing a decaying corpse, especially if we practice this contemplation during night time. So, it might be advisable to practice this meditation in the morning rather than in the evening. As in the case of the contemplation of thirty-two anatomical parts, it is very important to balance the sense of repulsiveness with the sense of emptiness of self.

### **Precautions against Possible Harms**

If we are to contemplate the nine stages of decay in an actual corpse in a burial ground as in the old days, we need to undertake this exercise properly, because watching a decaying corpse in a burial ground can naturally be very emotional. We may have optical illusions like seeing the corpse rising up from the ground, shouting painfully, putting its arms around our waists, or something like that. Mahāsi Sayadaw once recounted an experience of his practice in the cemetery. One night, when he was practicing meditation (vipassana meditation) in a burial ground<sup>19</sup>, he saw a tiny little

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<sup>19</sup> *Most of the burial grounds in Burma are places that are very deserted and secluded and, therefore, good for meditation practice. Human bones can also be seen scattered everywhere there, as dead bodies are traditionally buried.*

object, somewhat like a white butterfly that came out of the ground near his sitting place. Much to his surprise, that object suddenly loomed, flew into the space and disappeared. Ledi Sayadaw and many other experienced monks also recounted their experiences of mysterious things like ghosts in the burial grounds especially during the night time. So, the contemplation of a decaying corpse in a burial ground is really emotional and has the potential to create optical illusions or other mysterious events. Another possible problem is to encounter thieves, robbers, wild beasts, etc., that may take refuge in burial grounds, since it is a deserted place. Therefore, we need to learn how to undertake this exercise properly so that we will not get in trouble in the face of such complicating impediments.

### **Preparations and Procedure**

Below are the preparations and procedure of the practice described by the Visuddhi-magga:

When we have learned the correct method, and are going to practice in a burial ground, we are advised to inform someone (like our meditation teacher or a fellow meditator) that we will be practicing at so and so a place during such and such a time in case we get in trouble and need their help. For example, we may encounter thieves and robbers in the cemetery. They may do harm to us or we may get accused of theft or robbery by the property-owners or security guards.

When we go there, we must go with mindfulness and restraint so that we are well protected from the desire and discontent due to the objects we may encounter on the way to the deserted burial ground.

Also, we should remember the direction and orientation to and from the burial ground and make a note of obvious objects like a rock, anthill, trees, or bushes along the path and around the corpse, as well in order for us not to become confused if we have a frightening hallucination.

We are advised to approach a bloated corpse from upwind lest its awful smell may interfere with our concentration. And we should not sit or stand too close to the corpse, nor too far from it because, if we are too close, we may feel frightened by the sight of it and, if we sit too far away, we cannot see the corpse clearly. Also, we should not sit right in front of its feet or head in case we will not see the foulness clearly. After standing or sitting near the bloated corpse, we should look at the corpse and try to comprehend its foulness by reciting "bloated, bloated, bloated..."

### **To Observe in Six Ways**

The repulsiveness of the corpse should be observed in six ways:

1. In color: First, we should contemplate the foulness of the bloated corpse in color. We can find some part of the body to be black and other parts to be white, blue or yellow.
2. In age: We should roughly recognize the age of the person to whom the bloated corpse belongs; for instance, it may belong to somebody of early age, middle age or old age.

3. In shape: We should identify what the shape of its head, neck, hands, chest, hips, thighs, calf, feet, and the entire body shape, as well.
4. In orientation: Here, orientation means the direction. We should view the bloated corpse by recognizing which direction its upper and lower parts are oriented.
5. In position: We should view the corpse by recognizing the positions of its parts: How its head, hands, feet, legs, etc., are positioned or disposed.
6. In delimitation: We should also examine the delimitation of the bloated corpse. We can find it to be delimited below by the soles of its feet and above by the tips of its hair and all around by the skin. The entire body is delimited by the constitution of the thirty-two anatomical parts.

### **To Observe in Five Additional Ways**

If we cannot make satisfactory progress in the practice in this way, the foulness of the corpse should be contemplated in five additional ways:

1. By joints: We should contemplate the repulsiveness of the bloated corpse by examining its fourteen major joints: three joints each in two arms and two legs, and one joint each in the head and waist.
2. By openings: Openings mean the hollows between the arms and the sides, between the legs, the hollow of the stomach, the hollow of ears, eyes and mouth.

3. By concavities: We should define the corpse by "concavities," such as the eye sockets, the inside of the mouth, or the base of the neck.
4. By convexities: "Convexity" means any raised part of the corpse, such as the knee or the chest or the forehead.
5. By everything around: We also have to examine the entire body of the corpse and everything around it.

### **Three Forms of the Meditative Object**

As mentioned above, we have to observe the bloated corpse in several ways so that the vision of the corpse becomes clear enough to contemplate and to develop the insight into the true nature of the body. This clear vision is called the "workable form" of the meditative object (*parikamma-nimitta*). We should first look at the corpse with our eyes opened reciting mentally: "Bloated and repulsive; bloated and repulsive ..." for thousands of times, and then try to visualize the corpse reciting the same for another thousand times with the eyes closed. This vision later will become clearer and clearer until we can see this bloated corpse with the eyes closed. This is called the memorized (or visualized) form of the meditative object (*uggaha-nimitta*). Then, we can continue this exercise at home or somewhere else by focusing on this visualized form of the corpse, which normally manifests itself as a fearful corpse. In due course of time, the corpse will appear like a very fat person with a full stomach lying down on the ground. This vision is called the identical form of the object (*patibhāga-nimitta*), because it is still identical to its

original form of the corpse, although it is no longer the same as the original.

This identical form of the object is so vivid and so powerful that it draws and sustains our full attention leading to the first stage of high-level concentration (*jhāna*) which is naturally accompanied by rapture and happiness. So, the first stage of *jhāna* is composed of five factors: the initial attention (*vitakka*), sustained attention (*vicāra*), rapture (*pīti*), happiness (*sukha*) and one-pointedness of mind or concentration (*ekaggatā*). Thus, this meditation—if practiced as *samatha*—can culminate only in gaining the first *jhāna* because the concentration in this particular exercise cannot be developed without initial attention and sustained attention.

If we want to develop *vipassana* insights, we are advised to be mindful of the *jhāna* itself (the *jhānic* mental state). So, the *jhāna* and the mindfulness of that very *jhāna* have to be developed in rotation in order to bring about the *vipassana* insights step by step until we become fully enlightened. These are the preparations and procedure of the contemplation of a decaying corpse mentioned in the *Visuddhi-magga* commentary.

## **Culmination**

In this discourse, however, the achievement of *jhāna* may not be the main purpose of this meditation, since it is apparently aimed at the attainment of insight into the true nature of the body rather than *jhāna*. The vision of a decaying corpse

definitely helps us realize the true nature of the body counteracting the illusory sense of self and its resultant attachment. This realization itself (without the attainment of jhāna) is believed to contribute to the development of vipassana insights until magga-phala enlightenment. This point can claim support in the following passages that conclude each of the contemplations of the nine stages indicating the culmination of this practice:

- *In this way, in regard to the body he abides contemplating the body internally, or he abides contemplating the body externally, or he abides contemplating the body both internally and externally.*
- *He abides contemplating the nature of arising in the body, or he abides contemplating the nature of the passing away in the body, or he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in the body.*
- *Mindfulness that "there is a body" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness.*
- *And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how in regard to the body he abides contemplating the body.*

According to the above passages, by contemplating the nine stages of a decaying corpse, we will empirically see the true nature of our own bodies without identifying them with "I." Based on this empirical insight, we will inferentially see the bodies of others without discriminating between our own and theirs. This is what is meant by the passage

*"contemplating the body internally, externally and both internally and externally."*

By contemplating the decaying corpse, we can for sure reduce the illusory sense of "I" and attachment. Thus, our minds become purified of mental defilements to the extent to which we can see physical phenomena arising and passing away in the body. This is how we *"contemplate the nature of arising, the nature of passing away, and the nature of both arising and passing away."*

Although we think we are independent, we are always enslaved by something or someone we are attached to. As long as we have attachment, therefore, we cannot live independently. Seeing the body as it really is or seeing the physical phenomena arising and passing away in it, we no longer identify the body as "I," and the attachment to the body is thus reduced to an absolute minimum. This is how to *"abide independent not clinging to anything in the world."*

According to these passages, therefore, this contemplation of the nine stages of a decaying corpse in this discourse is aimed at the attainment of vipassana insights and magga-phala enlightenments rather than the attainment of jhāna.

## **Additional Information**

### **An Alternative Practice: Contemplation of bones**

Among the nine stages of a decaying corpse, the last seven (from the third to ninth) deal with the



skeleton and bones. So, a meditation known as contemplation of bones (*aṭṭhika kammaṭṭhāna*) is a good alternative to this practice. According to this meditation, we are to contemplate a skeleton or separate bones by reciting mentally as "bones, bones, bones..." or as "skeleton, skeleton, skeleton..." The mental recitation like this is very helpful to direct our attention to the object. It can be used, if needed, or skipped if not necessary. The main importance is to apply the vision of bones or the skeleton to our own body or that of anyone else so we can overcome illusory sense of "I." This meditation is very simple and very beneficial, too. We can find a skeleton or separate bones without too much difficulty. Or, we can also use a photo or picture of the skeleton instead. Moreover, we can also feel our bones by massaging our bodily parts accordingly. For example, we can feel our skull by massaging our head thoroughly.

Although we are intellectually aware that our bodies are comprised of more than three hundred separate bones, we always feel as if we were someone made of a single solid body. Such an illusion can be overcome by this contemplation of bones or skeleton (*aṭṭhiaka-kammaṭṭhāna*). When we can see separate bones that make up our body, we will not find any individual bone or even the whole skeleton that can be identified as "I." Then, the attachment to the body will naturally be reduced to the absolute minimum.

There is a story of a monk named Elder Mahā Tissa who practiced this bone meditation intensively.

One day, when he was on his way to a village to take his alms round, he met a young woman who had quarreled with her husband and was on her way back to her parents' house. When she saw the monk, she smiled at him showing off her beautiful teeth. Seeing her teeth, however, the monk developed the discernment of bones that enabled him to realize the true nature of the body until he attained full enlightenment right at that moment. After a while, her husband, going to look for her, met the monk and asked whether he had seen a woman pass by. The monk replied, "I did not see any man or woman. I just saw a skeleton going down this road." In view of this story, this bone meditation can help us to realize the true nature of the body leading to enlightenment.

### **The Second Alternative: Recollection of Death**

The contemplation of nine stages of a decaying corpse is practiced for two purposes: to develop the insight into the repulsive nature of the body and to realize the fact that death is the inescapable destiny of all living beings. So, to develop the insight into our inescapable destiny, death, another alternative to the cemetery meditation is the recollection of our death (maraṇa-ssati). We are frightened by death just because we identify the body as "I." So, the recollection of death serves as a useful preparation for the time when we actually have to face our death. Thus, this practice helps reduce our ego and attachment and brings us the essential courage to peacefully face our inescapable destiny, death.

Most of us do not even want to hear about death, but death is our inescapable destiny. This is why the Buddha said: "Nobody can escape from death even if we may hide ourselves in the sky, in the ocean, or in a cave on a mountain cliff <sup>20</sup>." However, it is really mysterious that we always feel we will live forever, even when we see someone die right under our noses. Sometimes, we may even feel like saying: "Others may die, I will not." This is the way we feel against our intellectual knowledge and reasoning power.

With such mysterious illusion, we are just like a drug-addict who never hesitates to do anything he can to get the drug he needs. There are cases in which a drug-addict commits murder in order to meet his need of drugs. A drug-addict never finds anything more important in the world other than taking his drug. No matter how highly educated we may be, if we were addicted to a drug, that is the way we would behave. We must be happy that we are not addicted to drugs. Unfortunately, however, we are deeply addicted to our ego, and deeply attached to our body. We feel as if we were someone special, unique and eternal. With such ego-addiction we never find anyone more important than ourselves. Such ego-centricity is the bases for conflicts and fighting causing everyone to suffer. This ego-centric emphasis has made a human bloody history. However, we can recover from this terrible ego-addiction by meditating on the recollection of our death.

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<sup>20</sup> *na antalikkhe, na samudda-majjhe, na pabbatānaṃ vivaraṃ pavissa* (Dhamma-pada)

The Visuddhimagga mentions several different ways to recollect death. One of them is to recollect death from the perspective of five unknown factors: at what age we are going to die, of what disease, at what date and time, at which place, and what sort of life we will have after death.

1. Age (jīvitam): We do not know at what age we are going to die. There are people who die in their mother's womb, some die just a few days or weeks after birth. Some of our friends have died before us. Some of our classmates died when they were teenagers. Even in primary school, some of our friends died. We really do not know at what age we are going to die.
2. Disease (byādhi): We do not know what disease we will die from. Nowadays, there are an increasing number of new and deadly diseases, such as several kinds of cancer, AIDS, etc. Moreover, many people die because of accidents or disasters like floods, fires, storms and earthquakes. We do not know what kind of disease or disaster we will die from.
3. Time (kālo): We do not know when we are going to die. We cannot know the day or date, morning or evening when we will die. In the world, every minute and every second people are dying. We cannot know when it is our turn to die.
4. Place (deha-nikkhepanam): We do not know which place or which part of the world we are going to die in. Many people die somewhere they may have never imagined. We cannot be

sure we will die in our homeland or in a foreign country. Actually, the Buddha once said: "There is no place in the world where our bodies have not been buried before." We do not know where we will die or where our funeral will be.

5. Life after Death (gati): We cannot predict the life we will have after death. There are lives before and after this life. Just think about where we had been before we were born, and where we will be after death. Using common sense, we can reasonably assume that if we have present lives, we must also have had past lives and will continue to have future lives. There are also many documented examples of people who can accurately recall their past lives. So, it is certain we will have lives after death, but we do not know what kind of life we are going to have after death.

Although these five factors are unknown to us, we can be sure we are going to die one day no matter how educated and wealthy we may be. Nobody can escape from death. In the past, millions of our grandfathers, great-grandfathers and great-great-grandfathers passed away leaving everything and everybody else behind. In the present, mortuaries or funeral homes everywhere in the world are always busy. All the people in the world today will surely die within one hundred years. If no more people were born, this planet would be empty of human beings within just one hundred years.

However, we mysteriously feel like someone immortal. In this sense, we are just like seasonal bugs or insects that appear only in season and live for only a few hours or a few days. Apparently, they think highly of themselves; their ego is obviously as big as ours. So, they fight one another over the food, mates or territory. They enjoy their time with their girlfriends or boyfriends. And they make love; they lay eggs within a few days of their lifespan. From all aspects, we human beings are not much different from these kinds of bugs or insects. Compared to the lifespan of the universe ours is as short as that of the seasonal bugs. Undeniably, we are getting closer and closer to death every moment. We totally ignore that, while thinking highly of ourselves, and looking down on others. Thus, we become greedy, selfish, hostile, jealous, and conceited. We also fight over commercial opportunities, territory, natural resources, and so on, creating endless wars throughout human history. As a result of a big ego, several kinds of prejudice and discrimination still prevail among our so-called civilized society.

To reduce such a horrible ego and attachments, we need to recollect our inescapable destiny, death. The Buddha said that we cannot make an appointment with death nor can we bribe death either. Without warning or notice, therefore, we can die at anytime and anywhere. So, the Buddha instructed us to contemplate the uncertainty of life by considering the fact that even the next mouthful to be eaten and the next breath to be inhaled are not guaranteed to take place.

## **How to practice**

So, the recollection of death is normally practiced by chanting the formula below:

“I don’t know how I will die:  
at which age, at which place,  
on which date, from which disease.  
Nor the life I will have after my death.

Death is certain  
Life is uncertain;  
I can die anytime, anywhere.”

## **Benefits**

The regular recollection of death helps us to realize the fact that death is the inescapable destiny of all living beings. It can also help change our mental attitude towards death and the illusion of permanence. It, therefore, makes us a better and wiser person when we realize that we only live on earth just for a short time like a seasonal bug. With this full realization of death, we will no longer be so greedy, selfish, conceited or ignorant. Thus, the recollection of death can help us to become a better and wiser person. So, this meditation is a good alternative to the contemplation of the nine stages of a decaying corpse.

## **Conclusion**

Now, we come to the end of the Contemplation of the Body. There are six subsections of mindfulness of

the body: Mindfulness of breathing, mindfulness of bodily postures, mindfulness of activities with clear comprehension, contemplation of thirty-two anatomical parts, contemplation of four fundamental elements, and nine cemetery contemplations.



## CONTEMPLATION OF FEELINGS

As the second contemplation, the Buddha expounded the contemplation of feelings thus:

*"And how, monks, does he abide contemplating feelings in the feelings?"*

*"Here, when feeling a pleasant feeling, he knows 'I feel a pleasant feeling.' When feeling an unpleasant feeling, he knows 'I feel an unpleasant feeling.' When feeling a neutral feeling, he knows 'I feel a neutral feeling.' When feeling a sensual pleasant feeling, he knows 'I feel a sensual pleasant feeling.' When feeling a non-sensual pleasant feeling, he knows 'I feel a non-sensual pleasant feeling.' When feeling a sensual unpleasant feeling, he knows 'I feel a sensual unpleasant feeling.' When feeling a non-sensual unpleasant feeling, he knows 'I feel a non-sensual unpleasant feeling.' When feeling a sensual neutral feeling, he knows 'I feel a sensual neutral feeling.' When feeling a non-sensual neutral feeling, he knows 'I feel a non-sensual neutral feeling.' "*

### FEELING

The Pāḷi term for "feeling" is *vedanā*, whose root *vida* means to experience and to know. In the *Abhidhamma*, feeling is classified into five kinds: comfort (*sukha*), discomfort (*dukkha*), happiness (*somanassa*), unhappiness (*domanassa*), and neutral

(*upekkhā*). Among these five, the first two are related to the body, the second two to the mind, and the last one to both. Here, "bodily sensation" means body-related sensation, which is a feeling but not a physical phenomenon. Dry skin on one's back, for instance, is felt as itchy and unpleasant. In this case, "dry skin" is body; "itchy" is physical feeling; "unpleasant" is mental feeling. The physical feeling arises anywhere in the body and the mental one arises in the mind.

We make an all-out effort and spend as much money as we can in order to gain comfort and happiness and avoid discomfort and unhappiness. Thus, we react to feelings by various means that are either skillful or unskillful depending on our mindset (*manasi-kāra*). Feeling is like a T-junction of wholesome and unwholesome paths, since it decisively influences and determines our subsequent thoughts and actions. So, it is very important to react to feelings in a skillful way. The wisest reaction to the feeling is, of course, to be mindful of it. The mindfulness of it will lead to wholesome thoughts, wholesome actions and wholesome rebirths. It will also counteract illusion and attachment and lead to magga-phala enlightenment. According to Dependent Origination, therefore, feeling is described as the only link by which we can modify or stop the cycle of rebirths. So, the role feelings play in our lives is so important that it is ranked as a separate aggregate and a separate object to be mindful of, even though, according to Abhidhamma, it is just a single mental factor among the fifty-two mental states.

## **Definition and Classifications of Feeling**

Feeling varies in our experience depending on our physical needs and mental reactions to those needs. For example, according to physical need, warm temperature and heavy clothing are felt as pleasant during the cold season, unpleasant during the hot season, and neutral during the cool season. Any of our bodily postures feels pleasant in the beginning and unpleasant after some time, and neutral in between. Moreover, according to our mental reactions we can find something to be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. A weight resting on our bodies is naturally felt as unpleasant, but would be pleasant if it is by someone we care for. Even an emperor with absolute power, it is said, would be happy to be kicked by someone if it is his own baby son lying on his lap. Thus, according to our physical needs and mental reactions, the feeling, although it is a single mental factor, varies in experience into three kinds: pleasant, unpleasant and neutral.

### **Nine Kinds of Feeling**

However, in this discourse, we can find feeling to be of nine kinds because, as mentioned in the Pāḷi passage below, it includes six additional (and more exacting) kinds by modifying the first three basic feelings with two adjectives "sensual" and "nunsensual". The Buddha instructed us to be mindful of them as follows:

1. *"Here, when feeling a (generally) pleasant feeling, he knows "I feel a (generally) pleasant feeling."*
2. *"When feeling a (generally) unpleasant feeling, he knows "I feel a (generally) unpleasant feeling."*
3. *"When feeling a (generally) neutral feeling, he knows "I feel a (generally) neutral feeling."*
4. *"When feeling a sensual pleasant feeling, he knows "I feel a sensual pleasant feeling."*
5. *"When feeling a non-sensual pleasant feeling, he knows "I feel a non-sensual pleasant feeling."*
6. *"When feeling a sensual unpleasant feeling, he knows "I feel a sensual unpleasant feeling."*
7. *"When feeling a non-sensual unpleasant feeling, he knows "I feel a non-sensual unpleasant feeling."*
8. *"When feeling a sensual neutral feeling, he knows "I feel a sensual neutral feeling."*
9. *"When feeling a non-sensual neutral feeling, he knows "I feel a non-sensual neutral feeling."*

## **A Translation Note**

The words "sensual" and "non-sensual" are translations of the Pāḷi terms, *āmisā* and *nir-āmisā*. The word "āmisā" (*ā + masa*) is literally defined as things that are constantly touched by craving. So, "āmisā" means things that we crave for. In some discourses like *Dhamma-dāyāda Sutta*, therefore, it refers to four requisites (i.e., robe, food, shelter and medicine for monks and nuns) and, in this

satipaṭṭhāna Sutta and many other discourses, it indicates to five sense-objects (*pañca-kāmaguṇa āmisa*): sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. There are a countless number of things we crave for but, in an ultimate sense, they can be reduced into the five sense-objects. When the sense-objects satisfy our senses, there arises pleasant feeling (happiness), or otherwise unpleasant feeling (unhappiness). This is why the word “āmisa” is translated here as “sensual” instead of normal translation “worldly,” because the Pāḷi word for “worldly” is *lokiya*, but not *āmisa*. Its opposite *nir-āmisa* is translated as “non-sensual,” instead of “unworldly.”

## **Sensual Pleasant Feeling**

So, “sensual pleasant feeling” means the feeling we experience when we enjoy sensual pleasure. For example, at a party, by seeing beautiful couples, hearing the sweet music, breathing in fragrant perfume, sipping a drink and putting our arms around the waist of someone we love, we are satisfying our five senses and, as a result, have pleasant and happy feelings. These kinds of pleasant and happy feelings apparently take place when our senses are satisfied by sense-objects. In the Pāḷi texts<sup>21</sup>, this sensual pleasant feeling is divided into six kinds, in correspondence with the six sense-objects which includes dhamma-objects.

Furthermore, according to the Abhidhamma this sensual pleasant feeling is always rooted in two kinds

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<sup>21</sup> *Sakka-pañha Sutta (Dī-2, 222) and Saḷāyatana-vibhaṅga Sutta (Ma-3, 260)*

of mental states: illusion (*moha*) and attachment (*lobha*). To illustrate this point, there is a monastic story about a woman with a big scar on her face. She was purposely appointed as a monastic steward (*kappiya*) so that the monks would not get attached to her. After a few months, however, one monk found himself feeling pleasant to see her; she was no longer ugly to him. So, he said to his devotees thus: "Listen, you'd better let the woman go back home, as I can no longer see the scar on her face." This story indicates that the sensual pleasant feeling is related to the illusion and attachment.

We will not find anything pleasant or unpleasant if we see it as it really is. Beauty is literally skin deep. If we penetrate into the reality to see what is really there, then we will not find anyone at the party to be beautiful or ugly. And, music is just sound. If we pay attention to the music in each present moment, we will only hear it as sound, without melody or rhythm. We will then no longer find it to be pleasing or unpleasing. In the same way, if we are mindful of the smell, we will become aware of smell as smell without the illusory sense of pleasure. Similarly, if we sip a drink mindfully, we will only experience its taste, but will not find it to be pleasing or unpleasing. If we pay attention to what we really experience when we put our arms around the waist of someone we love, all we can really experience is just his or her body temperature. Nothing in that can be found to be pleasant. However, because of illusion and attachment, these sense-objects are felt to be pleasant. In Sakka-pañha Sutta, this kind of sensual pleasant feeling (*āmisā-sukhā*) is described as a

feeling not worth experiencing (*asevitabba*), because we are just fooled by illusion and attachment. If we note it as "pleasant, pleasant...", we can discern its true nature and will see it for what it really is. This type of discernment means insight that leads to enlightenment.

Before we go to the second kind of happiness called "Non-sensual Pleasant Feeling," I would like to explain some more about the sensual happiness, because it is something we are desperately pursuing. We are willing to go through a lot of trouble and difficulty to obtain luxurious things that, we believe, will make us happy, even more so in our attempts to find a compatible relationship with the opposite sex.

On a wild mountainous region located between India and Burma, there lives an ethnic minority called Naga. The Naga people live almost naked. They possess next to nothing. In the winter, they sleep around a fire in a big hole dug deep in the ground. In the summer, they swim in the lake nearby. They do not even know what soap or shampoo is. Their area is so remote that many of them never see a bike, let alone a motor vehicle. One of the Buddhist missionary monks brought twenty-five Naga boys to the Buddhist institute where I studied for nine years. They all ordained as novice monks and studied Burmese along with some basic Buddhist teachings. Two or three years later when they were able to communicate with us in Burmese, we became friends. Soon afterwards, however, they planned to go back

home. I wondered and asked why they wanted to go back home to such a remote place. They said they were even happier in their home where they were able to run around freely hunting in the forest and fishing in the lake. In other words, they are attached to their native place and lifestyle. "Maggots living in feces are happy in feces" as a Burmese saying goes. If we were maggots, we would be happy living in feces, too. It is not luxurious materials, but illusion and attachment that make us think we are happy. So, sensual happiness is just illusory happiness and not genuine happiness.

### **Non-sensual Pleasant Feelings**

"Non-sensual Pleasant Feelings" refers to certain kinds of happiness that are neither related to five sense-objects nor rooted in illusion and attachment. According to the Abhidhamma, this non-sensual pleasant feeling can be classified into four kinds<sup>22</sup> in terms of the progressive refinement of happiness as follows:

1. The first kind of non-sensual pleasant feeling (happiness) is related to loving kindness and compassion. We can find ourselves to be

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<sup>22</sup> *Abhidhamma describe four kinds of pleasant feelings: lobhamūla somanassa which refers to sensual happiness; kāmāvacara kusala somanassa, which refers to the happiness related to the wholesome deeds, such as an act of generosity, moral conduct and meditation; mahaggata-somanassa which is concerned with five stages of high-level concentration called jhāna; and lokuttara somanassa that refers to the happiness arising from complete eradication of defilements.*



happy when we do something with loving kindness and compassion, such as the act of generosity, act of moral conduct, volunteer works, learning or teaching dhamma and so on. When we give someone something he needs, or when we help someone get out of trouble and we find they become happy, then we also become happy. However, this does not mean our happiness is dependent on another, rather, it is the loving kindness and compassion in itself that bring us happiness. This kind of happiness is rooted in three wholesome roots: unselfishness (*alobha*), loving kindness or compassion (*adosa*) and understanding (*amoha*). It takes place when we do any good deed with loving kindness and compassion.

2. The second kind of non-sensual pleasant feeling (happiness) is finer than the first one. It is related to mental purification through concentration and mindfulness. We cannot be happy if our minds are defiled and agitated by mental defilements. By practicing samatha, such as metta meditation and recollection of death, etc., we can purify our minds of mental defilements to some extent, such as lust, greed, selfishness, anger, hatred, jealousy, conceit, and so on. With vipassana (i.e., moment to moment mindfulness), our minds are purified from the defilements. If we are angry, for instance, we note it as "angry, angry." Then, the anger may disappear if concentration and mindfulness are strong.

Even if it persists for a few days or weeks, we should not give up easily but keep on noting it as frequently as it recurs. We will overcome it in the end. For sure, the purer the mind, the happier we will become.

3. The third kind of non-sensual pleasant feeling (happiness) is even finer than the second one. It comes along with jhānic concentration or higher level of vipassana insights, because both reduce the mental defilements to the minimum next to the magga-phala enlightenment. So, in Saḷāyatana-vibhaṅga Sutta, it is said, the non-sensual pleasant feeling takes place when we see six sense-objects<sup>23</sup> (and their corresponding mental and physical phenomena) arising and passing away. This kind of pleasant feeling is leading to the magga-phala enlightenment and, therefore, described in Sakka-pañha Sutta as the feeling worth experiencing (sevitabba). Thus, with the least amount of mental defilements, we can experience our happiest

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<sup>23</sup> *There are six kinds of sense-objects (ārammaṇa): sights, sounds, smells, taste, touch and mind-objects. Corresponding to these sense-objects, there are six kinds of consciousness: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness and mind-consciousness. Based on these factors, there arise our mental reactions good or bad according to our mindset. With a wrong mindset, there come such unwholesome mental states as lust, greed, hate, jealousy. With a right mindset, there come wholesome mental states such as selflessness, loving kindness, compassion, understanding, mindfulness, and so on.*

moments when we experience this finest form of happiness.

4. The fourth kind of non-sensual pleasant feeling is the absolute happiness which we can experience when we can eradicate illusion, attachment and their concomitant mental defilements through magga-phala enlightenment. Enlightenment is actually the culmination of fully developed mindfulness, but not itself a meditative object to observe. This absolute kind of happiness continuously prevails in the heart of a fully-enlightened person as a result of the absolute eradication of mental defilements.

These four stages of pleasant feeling constitute the progressive refinement of happiness and are literally called "non-sensual pleasant feeling." The best way to react to these kinds of feelings is, of course, to note them as "happy, happy, happy..." so that we can become aware of their true nature and develop progressive vipassana insight without getting attached to them.

### **Sensual Unpleasant Feelings**

In the physical world, it is really ironical that discomfort and unhappiness are the prices we have to pay for the comfort and happiness. In other words, the more comfort and happiness we want, the more discomfort and unhappiness we have to accept. Moe Goke Sayadaw once said, ordinary people take double

dukkha: natural dukkha to live their lives, and additional dukkha to enjoy sensual pleasure. In a jātaka story, an old man married a pretty girl as young as his grand-daughter. Initially, of course, he was very happy to have such a young and pretty girl. He was happy to see her, to hear her, to kiss her. But he had to work very hard like a slave in order to fulfill her constant needs. In the end, she had an affair with a young man of her age and left the old man with a broken heart that led him to a woeful death and rebirth. In the same way, at first we are happy when we can own a luxury car or house, but we have to work hard to pay it off. By the time we have paid off the mortgage on our house, we might be old enough to need a nursing home. Therefore, there is a price to pay for sensual pleasure; namely, we cannot avoid encountering sensual unpleasant feeling (*āmisadukkha*).

Moreover, according to Saḷāyatana-vibhaṅga Sutta, this sensual unpleasant feeling is said to arise when we cannot get sense-objects we want (material things like a car, house, iPod, etc., or a loving relationship), or when we lose those sense-objects we once had. For instance, when we see other people riding in a luxury car, we may feel unhappy that we do not possess one, or we may feel unhappy to have lost a car we once owned. When we see a happy couple we may feel unhappy not to have such a wonderful partner ourselves or that we have lost the partner we used to have. This kind of unhappiness is literally called "sensual unpleasant feeling," which is often evil-oriented and, therefore, described as the feeling not worth experiencing (*asevitabba*).

However, if we can note it as “unpleasant, unpleasant...,” this unpleasant feeling will become good-oriented and be regarded as feelings worth experiencing (*sevitabba*).

## **Non-sensual Unpleasant Feelings**

“Non-sensual unpleasant feeling” is the unhappiness that arises while we are performing wholesome deeds. When we undertake an act of generosity or moral conduct, for example, we often have to sacrifice our comfort or pleasure to some extent; we may also have to encounter something or someone unpleasant. For example, when we avoid unwholesome deeds, we may lose a well paying job or we may not be able to make as much money as dishonest others do. When we do wholesome dhamma work, we may feel unhappy with many things that are not done properly, or with people who are not considerate. When we take an intensive retreat, we temporarily renounce sensual pleasure and all the usual comforts we had. We may even have poor food and poor accommodations during the retreat. We may have to share a room with someone who is not very considerate. Thus, we will feel unhappy and frustrated. This is how we can experience non-sensual unpleasant feelings even while doing wholesome deeds.

Literally, this non-sensual unpleasant feeling is said to take place when we cannot make progress in

the meditation practice. For various reasons, we may not be able to make decent progress in the practice during the retreat. Then, we are likely to feel unhappy and frustrated. So, owing to such dissatisfaction with our spiritual imperfection, we experience this non-sensual kind of unpleasant feeling. In the commentary (Dī, Ṭha-319), this point is illustrated with the story below:

### **The Story of Mahāsīva**

Venerable Mahā-sīva was a senior monk, highly learned and highly respected. There were thousands of monks who studied the Buddha's teachings with him and practiced meditation until they became fully enlightened. But he still remained an ordinary person without any spiritual achievement. One day, one of his arahant students came over and upset him by reminding him that he was still an ordinary monk without any spiritual attainment. So, he left for the forest to practice, without informing anybody, because he thought he would only need two or three days at most to accomplish the magga-phala enlightenment. However, he spent twenty-nine rain retreats (*vassa*) practicing in the forest without any achievement. So, he wept regretfully at the end of every rains retreat. Once again, he spent his thirtieth rains retreat practicing without success. As he had done in previous times, he could not help weeping for his failure to achieve enlightenment. However, this time, he heard someone weeping, too. So, he asked who was weeping and for what reason. Then, he heard a deity reply that she was weeping with the

purpose to accomplish spiritual attainment. He then realized that the deity was making fun of him over his failure in practice. Having learned a lot from his previous mistakes, he now was able to practice successfully until he became fully-enlightened.

Here, his frustration and unhappiness about his failure in the practice had nothing to do with sensual pleasure but, in this case, even led to his spiritual attainment. Such unhappiness is literally known as "non-sensual unpleasant feeling" (*nirāmisa-dukkha*) and described as an unhappiness worth experiencing (*sevittabba*).

## **Sensual Neutral Feeling**

"Sensual neutral feeling" is the feeling that takes place when we are neither apparently comfortable and happy nor uncomfortable and unhappy. This state of feeling is called "neutral." This neutral feeling is quite vague and can only be noticed in comparison with the other two kinds, as it is something in between. This neutral feeling seems to be peaceful, but we are rarely satisfied with such a vague feeling and, therefore, we try to seek for more obvious and nicer feelings by all means available. This is why the commentaries said: "Experiencing pain one longs for pleasure; experiencing pleasure one longs for even more; neutral feeling is the same as pleasure, as it is calm." Sensual desire is always insatiable. With the sensual neutral feeling, therefore, we yearn for something more pleasant. So, the *Cuḷa-vedalla Sutta* (M-1, 303) points out that these three kinds of sensual feeling mainly activate the underlying

tendencies of mental defilements (*anusaya-kilesa*). Therefore, according to Dependent Origination, the sensual neutral feeling, like the other two kinds, is described as the source of attachment that leads to stronger attachment and good or bad actions that, in turn, generate the rounds of rebirth or the cycle of suffering. So, this sensual neutral feeling is attachment-related and evil-oriented and, therefore, called the feeling not worth experiencing (*asevitabba*). However, if we can note it as "sensual neutral, sensual neutral, sensual neutral ...," this feeling will become good-oriented and regarded as the feeling worth experiencing (*sevitabba*).

So, it is very important to react to feelings in a skillful way, whether they are pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, so that we can develop wholesome thoughts, wholesome actions and wholesome rebirths. The wisest reaction to a feeling is to be mindful of it by applying the techniques taught in vipassana meditation. Thus, we can prevent mental defilements from arising and at the same time can develop vipassana insight step by step until we become fully enlightened.

### **Non-sensual Neutral Feeling**

"Non-sensual neutral feeling," like non-sensual pleasant feeling, can take place when we do wholesome deeds, such as an act of generosity, moral conduct, meditation, and so on. Regarding vipassana meditation, therefore, the Buddha said in Saḷāyatana-vibhaṅga Sutta that the wholesome pleasant or



neutral feeling arises to those who see sense-objects arising and disappearing through the six sense-doors.

Vipassana meditation is quite simple; it is just to see our own mind and body as they really are. Complicating this is our monkey mind that is always naughty, rebellious and restless. Only with strong faith and heroic effort can we focus our mind on the meditative object in order to develop mindfulness and concentration. Only with continuous mindfulness and strong concentration can we discern mental and physical phenomena without identifying them as "I" or "mine." Only then can we see different phenomena arising and passing away moment by moment. Even during a single step, for instance, we can experience lightness and vibration at one moment when the foot is lifted, and motion or coolness at the next when the foot is moved forward. With vipassana practice, we can see that we sometimes feel happy and other times indifferent or neutral. At the mature stage of vipassana insight, our mental state is very calm and tranquil and we do not react to sense-objects with desire or discontent or with happiness or unhappiness, no matter how pleasant or unpleasant the sense-objects may be. In such a tranquil mental state, there prevails this non-sensual neutral feeling<sup>24</sup>, which is described in Sakka-pañha Sutta as the feeling worth experiencing (*sevitabba*) because it can

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<sup>24</sup> *This mental state literally refers to the balanced state of mind between pleasant and unpleasant conditions (sarikhārupekkhā-ñāṇa). In this mental state, therefore, the non-sensual neutral feeling prevails. So, the commentary on Sakka-pañha Sutta (323) said that this vipassana-generated tranquil state of mind implies the non-sensual neutral feeling (tatra-majjhatt-upekkhā).*

lead straight to the magga-phala enlightenment at any time when mental faculties are well-balanced.

### **During the Actual Practice**

Thus, feelings are classified into nine kinds in this discourse. During actual practice, however, we are highly recommended to use simple daily language, like happy, unhappy, pleasant, unpleasant, comfortable, and uncomfortable and so on, which directly activates our awareness. As for neutral feeling, we rarely observe it, because it is not clear enough, and we always have something more obvious to observe. During sitting meditation, different kinds of physical discomfort become very obvious, especially for a novice meditator. We may feel pain on our knee at one moment, and the itchiness on the back, numbness in the legs, or heat on the hip at the next. We are encouraged to note them accordingly with patience and persistence, like "pain, pain," "itchy, itchy," "numb, numb," "hot, hot" and so on, until they disappear. Or, if we can focus on the primary object ignoring the unpleasant sensation, we are advised to keep on noting the primary object.

Different kinds of mental feelings can also be experienced at different moments. Seeing different people, hearing different sounds, smelling different odors, there arise many different kinds of mental feelings even within a few minutes. At one moment, we may feel happy and in the next moment unhappy, frustrated or neutral. During a meditation retreat, sometimes we are happy when the practice goes well with continuous mindfulness. It should then be noted

as "happy, happy..." Sometimes, we are unhappy when we cannot note continuously, or when we are disturbed by a roommate or fellow meditator. The best reaction to such unpleasant feelings is, of course, to note them as "unpleasant, unpleasant..." These kinds of happy and unhappy feelings can be regarded as "non-sensual" and worth experiencing because they are mainly related to dhamma practice; they are the initial steps or stepping stones to spiritual achievement.

## **So Simple**

When we feel a pleasant feeling, the Buddha instructed us to know that we feel a pleasant feeling, and so on, as mentioned in the beginning of this section. This instruction is so simple that it may even sound foolish. In this regard, the commentary raises a question before an explanation is made: "Even babies know they feel pleasant when they are suckling milk. Why are we instructed to know we feel pleasant when we feel pleasant, and so on?"

Actually, to feel pleasant and to be aware of it are totally different. Although we know happiness and unhappiness or comfort and discomfort like a baby does, what we really know is "I," but not the true nature of the feeling. We always think that I was in comfort a moment ago, but I am now in pain. The way we think is always related to "I," but not to the true nature of the feeling. That is why we are instructed to be aware of the feeling whether pleasant or unpleasant, comfortable or uncomfortable so that we can see feeling as feeling

without identifying it as "I." In the Anatta-lakkhaṇa Sutta, therefore, the Buddha said as follows:

*"Monks, feeling is not yours. If it were yours, it would not have to stay unpleasant, but would be governable: "May my feeling be this way, but not that way.""*

## **The Correct Attitude to Unpleasant Feelings**

During sitting meditation, unpleasant sensations are the most common problem next to the wandering thoughts. So, we may have a wrong attitude towards them. We mistakenly consider these unpleasant feelings obstacles to the practice and often complain about them. Worse, is to get frustrated and try to get rid of them instead of making the attempt to just be mindful of them. Actually, we try not to get rid of or wish them go away, but just to be aware of their true nature and instability. Therefore, it is very important to have the correct attitude towards unpleasant feelings by understanding that unpleasant feelings are not obstacles to the practice, but only something to be aware of or to be understood during practice.

Different kinds of sensations take place in our bodies at different moments. They are also changing in degree and pattern at every moment. They can be increasing, decreasing, shifting somewhere else, fading away, manifesting again, and so on. For example, walking may feel pleasant initially, but unpleasant after some time. Then, when we change posture from walking to sitting, we feel pleasant again. But after a while, the sitting starts to feel unpleasant; so reclining may be the most relaxing and

pleasant choice of posture. But, if we lie down on a bed for too long, there arise unpleasant sensations, even in the back discomfort. Similarly, bending our limbs may feel pleasant at first, but unpleasant a moment later. Then, when we stretch them again, we feel relief. But, continually stretching can once again become unpleasant. Similarly, a warm temperature feels pleasant when the weather is cold, but unpleasant when the weather is hot. Therefore, all we have to do is to note all of these changing sensations as they really are. We note them to be aware of their true nature and instability, not to feel ease or remove their discomfort.

### **More Mindful, More Painful**

Another problem is, when we note unpleasant sensations, we often find them become even worse. Actually, it is not that the pain becomes really worse, but just that it becomes more obvious. So, if we divert our attention to something more fascinating (say, to our girlfriends or boyfriends as one of my Antioch University students once revealed), we can ease or release the pain for a moment. Mr. Jivaka, the Buddha's physician, once did a successful operation on a patient by having a pretty woman sit in front of the patient during the operation. Understanding this tricky nature of the mind, we should not be overly concerned about the unpleasant sensations that become seemingly worse when noted.

### **No Pain, No Gain**

Normally, we are advised to keep on noting the unpleasant sensations with patience and persistence

until they fade away or become mild enough for us to go back to the home, or primary, object. However, if they become unbearable, we can move our bodies. However, we should do so slowly and mindfully (i.e., noting all mental and physical movements involved in the changing process) starting with the intention to change. Only then, can we sustain concentration and mindfulness. After changing posture, the discomfort will leave and we feel pleasant sensations. Do not forget to note the new sensation as it is. However, if we change posture often, it will be difficult to develop concentration. So, we are strongly recommended to note the unpleasant sensations with patience and persistence as long as possible. We should remember the saying, "No pain, no gain," which may be particularly relevant to meditation practice.

Here, by the saying "No pain, no gain," we do not mean to let our bodies get injured. As mentioned earlier, we are allowed to change our posture if the pain is unbearable. In due course of time, however, when we see pain as just pain without identifying the pain as "I" or "mine," we may even feel like we are observing it from a distance or that it is someone else's pain. At that point, the pain will no longer bother us and we will be able to sit for two or three hours at a stretch without any problem. Ironically, however, with fewer pains the mind can become too relaxed and our mind easily wanders. This wandering mind is a real hindrance to the practice and we may even miss the previous unpleasant sensations

## Pleasant and Neutral Feelings

There are moments when we feel comfortable and happy in our daily life. During the course of meditation, however, we may experience a unique form of delight and comfort, especially at the fourth stage of progressive vipassana insight. Because it is so pleasurable, there is a tendency to not continue to note it. So, we need to be careful to maintain awareness and note it as "pleasant, pleasant, pleasant..." We might experience only neutral sensations (*upekkhā*) when our concentration is strong enough but it is not as obvious as the other two. This explains why Mahāsi Sayādaw instructed us to observe pleasant and unpleasant feelings rather than neutral ones because, the Pāḷi text says, vipassanā is being absorbed in what is obvious (*yathā-pākaṭaṃ vipassanā-bhiniveso*). Actually, we may spontaneously develop the awareness of neutral sensations while we are being aware of the other two kinds.

## Culmination

Like the previous sections, this contemplation of feelings is also concluded by the Buddha with its culmination as follows:

- *"In this way, in regards to feelings he abides contemplating feelings internally, or he abides contemplating feelings externally, or he abides contemplating feelings both internally and externally.*

- *He abides contemplating the nature of arising in feelings, or he abides contemplating the nature of the passing away in feelings, or he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in feelings.*
- *Mindfulness that "there is feeling" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness.*
- *And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how in regards to feelings he abides contemplating feelings."*

The contemplation of feelings, like the previous contemplations, is culminated in seeing the arising and passing away of feelings in ourselves (empirically) and in others (inferentially).

This contemplation can directly lead to establishment of mindfulness, vipassana insights and *magga-phala* enlightenment, the liberation from the cycle of suffering. Below is the story from the commentary that illustrates this point.

### **Story from the Dhammapada**

Once, some 60 monks were doing an intensive retreat in a deep forest. One night, a tiger took one of them away while he was practicing. The other monks tried their best to save him. However, the tiger took him onto a mountain cliff where nobody could follow. All they could do was to remind him to practice mindfulness thus: "Sir, it is time for you to take refuge in the Dhamma. Please develop the mindfulness of sensation." As severe as it was, he



managed to observe the pain by noting it over and over again, "pain, pain, pain..." Then, he saw pain as pain, just an impersonal sensation. At that point, pain no longer bothered him, and the awareness of sensation was thus developed. In this way, he successfully developed vipassanā insights step by step until he became fully enlightened just a few moments ahead of his death.

# CONTEMPLATION OF THE MIND

*"And how, monks, does he in regards to the mind abide contemplating the mind?"*

*"Here... He knows a desire-associated mind to be 'desire-associated,' and a desire-disassociated mind to be 'desire-disassociated.' He knows an aversion-associated mind to be 'aversion-associated,' and an aversion-disassociated mind to be 'aversion-disassociated.' He knows a delusion-associated mind to be 'delusion-associated,' and a delusion-disassociated mind to be 'delusion-disassociated.' He knows a contracted mind to be 'contracted,' and a distracted mind to be 'distracted.' He knows an advanced mind to be 'advanced,' and a basic mind to be 'basic.' He knows a surpassable mind to be 'surpassable,' and an unsurpassable mind to be 'unsurpassable.' He knows a concentrated mind to be 'concentrated,' and an unconcentrated mind to be 'unconcentrated.' He knows a liberated mind to be 'liberated,' and an unliberated mind to be 'unliberated.' "*

## MIND

The Pāli word "citta" technically refers to consciousness that is, according to Abhidhamma, a certain kind of cognitive phenomenon. It is devoid of its own color or identity, if it were not associated with its corresponding mental factors (*cetasika*). So, it is impossible to be aware of such colorless

consciousness in particular, since it alone has no recognizable identity. In the context of satipaṭṭhāna, therefore, citta vividly refers to "mind" which is colorful, in that it contains all sorts of mental factors, wholesome or unwholesome, superior or inferior; but in this context, it does not refer to the colorless consciousness.

Our bodies, themselves, think nothing, feel nothing, do nothing. When we die, our bodies are not concerned, even when they are cremated. It is the mind that experiences and interprets the outer world with the help of the senses; it is the mind that serves as a driving force behind all of the actions we do. So, it is no wonder that we identify the mind as "I." In actual fact, there are only processes of thoughts, but no thinker<sup>25</sup> entity behind them. Thoughts continuously arise, one after another, like a continuous succession of electrical impulses that light up a lamp. So, it is simply an illusion if we think it is the same mind that has been thinking from the day we were born until now. It is from this illusion there arises mental and physical distress. In order to

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<sup>25</sup> **No Thinker:** *The question here is: If there is no thinker behind our thoughts, how can we control our thoughts and cultivate mindfulness? The answer is: The thought processes are very dense, and the preceding ones pass their information to the succeeding ones. Thus, the succeeding ones become well-informed enough to find and fix their errors by themselves like a computer program that can find and fix its errors by itself. The textual explanation is: We have an inborn mind (a sort of sub-consciousness) associated with wisdom (ti-hetuka-bhavaṇiṅga), which we can develop by feeding information to it (paripāka-indriya) and by keeping it away from mental defilements (kilesa-dūrībhāva).*

overcome such illusion and illusion-generated mental defilements, it is very important to be aware of the true nature of the mind. For this purpose, the Buddha instructed us to contemplate the mind as mentioned above.

## **The Classification of Mind**

In Abhidhamma, the colorless consciousness, only a single kind of mental phenomenon, is divided into eighty-nine kinds from many aspects, such as its associated mental factors (*cetasika*), sense-doors (*dvāra*), sense-objects (*ārammaṇa*), realm (*bhūmi*), and so on. In this discourse, however, the Buddha classified the mind into sixteen kinds (or eight couples) from ethical aspects as follows:

1. A desire-associated mind and desire-disassociated mind
2. An aversion-associated mind and an aversion-disassociated mind
3. A delusion-associated mind and a delusion-disassociated mind
4. A contracted mind and a distracted mind
5. An advanced mind and a basic mind
6. A surpassable mind and an unsurpassable mind
7. A concentrated mind and an unconcentrated mind
8. A liberated mind and an unliberated mind

### **1. Desire-associated Mind**

The Pāḷi word “*sa-rāga*” literally means “rāga-associated.” The word “rāga” is normally translated as

“lust” and that generally refers to romantic feelings. In the context of satipaṭṭhāna, however, the term “rāga” refers to lobha, which includes not only lust but also many other mental states, such as greed, selfishness, desire, attachment, craving, clinging, wanting, passion, family love, romantic love, and so on.

To cover all the range of its meanings, the word “*rāga*” is translated here as “desire,” which can indicate rāga in different degrees and different forms according to different kinds of desirable objects, such as:

- The desire (*rāga*) for material things, like: money, cars, houses, iPhones, iPods, jewelry, flowers, food, clothing, medicine, and so on.
- The desire (*rāga*) for living things, like: girlfriends and boyfriends, husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, friends and colleagues, students and teachers, employers and employees, and so on.
- The desire (*rāga*) for something conceptual like: beauty, popularity, reputation, respect, self-image, high social status, high living standard, and so on.
- The desire (*rāga*) for pleasant feelings like: comfort, happiness, sensual pleasure, sexual pleasure, and so on.

### **Classification of “Desire-associated Mind”**

This desire-associated mind arises on such occasions as when we think about having a desirable object (like a car or a partner); when we actually get

it; when we enjoy it; or when we become attached to it. In the Abhidhamma and commentary on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, this desire-associated mind is technically divided into eight kinds by modifying it with three pairs of phrases: "with or without illusion," "with happy or neutral feeling," and "prompted or unprompted."

For example, when thinking about buying a car or having a partner, sometimes we feel pleasant and other times indifferent or neutral. Such mental states sometimes take place by themselves without being prompted, but other times they are prompted by thinking about the advantages of having a car or a partner. Moreover, this mental state is mostly associated with illusory sense of "I." As for the first two stages of enlightenment, it does not have this illusory sense of "I," because it has been uprooted. However, even without having this illusion of "I" they can still be attached to things and people. So, even when we can eradicate the illusory sense of "I," desire or attachment will still persist. It is desire that creates what we are now. We cannot uproot it until we are fully enlightened. The best way to react to such a desire-associated mind is, of course, to note it, as "desire-associated mind, desire-associated mind..." or just "desire, desire..."

## **2. Desire-dissociated Mind**

"Desire-dissociated mind" refers to selfless nature of the mind<sup>26</sup>. Generally, we human beings are

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<sup>26</sup> According to the commentary on Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, this desire-dissociated mind includes the arahant's thoughts (mahā-

regarded as selfish in nature. Our activities are motivated by self-interest. For our survival, we are often selfish and aggressive. And with our over-concern about survival, we often over-react to conflict by fighting a war. However, there are thousands of non-profit organizations and humanity foundations (like Noble Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, etc.,) that signify the selfless nature of the human mind. We make donations to charities, foundations and non-profit organizations with unselfish mental states. Actually, there can be thousands of people who will even sacrifice their life and limbs if they feel their sacrifice would bring worthwhile benefits to humanity. Our would-be Buddha gave up the great opportunity for his full liberation under the guidance of Dipaṅkara Buddha and, instead, took great pains going through the cycles of life and death (*samsāra*) for eons fulfilling his pāramī so that he could help beings to become liberated.

There is a story that indicates this kind of selfless mind. Once upon a time, a king in the guise of an ordinary man went alone around his kingdom to observe what his kingdom was really like. On his tour, he learned a lot about his country and his people. Of all the things he had learned, it was what an old man said that made the biggest impression on the king.. Seeing an old man in a village planting a young mango tree, the king approached and asked how old he was. The old man said he was over eighty. Then

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*kriyā*) and *jhānic minds* (*rūpāvacara* and *arūpāvacara*), which are not mentioned here simply because they have nothing to do with us.

the king said in a disapproving manner: "You think you can live long enough to eat the fruits of that plant." The old man thus replied, "I know I will not live long enough to enjoy the fruits of this tree. But I will be happy if someone enjoys its fruits whoever it may be." The king was very impressed by his answer, because it shed light on the selfless nature of the human mind.

In our day-to-day life, while we are working hard to earn our living, we sometimes think about saving money to give to our parents or to contribute to a charity, etc. Although these thoughts may appear to be trivial, they signify the selfless nature of mind. At such moments, there arises the selfless mental state that is literally called "desire-dissociated mind." This is classified into eight kinds (in Abhidhamma and the commentary on Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta) by modifying it with three pairs of the phrases: "with pleasant or neutral feeling," "with or without understanding," and "prompted or unprompted." This mental state is wholesome, but it may be counterproductive if it makes our ego bigger. So, the best way to react to it is, of course, to note it as "desire-dissociated mind, desire-dissociated mind..." or "selfless, selfless..."

### **3 – 4. Associated or Dissociated with Aversion**

The Pāli word for "aversion-associated" is *sadosam*. In this phrase, the word *dosa* is normally translated as "anger." Actually, *dosa* literally means "destructive (phenomenon)," including several kinds of mental states such as dislike, disgust, hostility, resentment, hatred, aversion (in an active sense), and



fear, worry, anxiety, disappointment, frustration, depression, and so on (in a passive sense). To cover the entire range of its meanings, the word *dosa* here is translated as "aversion." The mind that is associated with this aversion takes place when we are angry or unhappy with someone or something or when we are worried or anxious about someone or something. It always comes along with the unhappy feeling (*domanassa*) and offensive attitude (*paṭigha*).

The Abhidhamma divides it into two kinds by modifying it with "unprompted" and "prompted," because it sometimes takes place by itself without being prompted, but other times it is prompted by thinking about negative aspects of someone or something.

Diametrically opposite of the aversion are loving kindness and compassion. The mind that is accompanied by these mental factors is literally called "aversion-dissociated mind." So, this aversion-dissociated mind takes place when we act, speak or think of something with loving kindness, compassion and understanding. In any case, the most effective way to deal with aversion is, of course, to note it as "aversion, aversion, aversion..." whereas if we feel compassionate, note it as "compassionate, compassionate, compassionate..."

## **5 – 6: Associated or Disassociated with Delusion**

The Pāli word for "delusion-associated" is *samoha*. Here, *moha* literally means "cloudy (mind)" referring to ignorance and illusion or not knowing

(*appaṭipatti avijjā*) and knowing falsely (*michā-paṭipatti avijjā*). For example, it is ignorance if we do not know what the body is, while it is illusion if we mistake the body for "I" or "mine." Such mental states are sometimes associated with skeptical doubt or confusion (*vicikicchā*) and other times with wandering minds (*uddacca*). Most of the time, we have a wandering mind thinking aimlessly. The train of thought always keeps on going without any fixed destination. Moreover, this delusion-associated mind underlies all sorts of unwholesome activities, speech and thoughts. So, this delusion-associated mind arises on such occasions as when we think it is I who is doing, speaking or thinking; when we feel as if we were someone unique and ageless; when we find another person lovable or despicable; when we have wandering thoughts; or when we get confused between right and wrong. Then, we should note it as "delusion-associated mind, delusion-associated mind..." in the technical terms, or "illusion, illusion...", "wandering, wandering..." or "confusion, confusion..." accordingly in daily language.

The delusion-dissociated mind, like the desire-dissociated mind, takes place when we act, speak or think with unselfishness, loving kindness, compassion, and understanding. Then, we should note them accordingly, either in technical terms or in daily language.

## **7 – 8. Contracted or Distracted**

"Contracted mind" refers to the laziness which is literally known as sloth-and-torpor (*thina-middha*).

Sometimes, we are inactive and unwilling to put effort in something wholesome like meditation practice. We often give lame excuses for our failure to do good and beneficial things. For instance, we may make excuses that we cannot practice meditation, as we are too busy, or too weak, or the weather is too cold or too hot, and so on. With such laziness or unwillingness, the mind is said to be contracted because at this moment we do not act, speak or think of anything clearly and distinctly. Laziness often leads to sleepiness or drowsiness. Lazy means certain kind of mental states, but it is sometimes related to our physical conditions.

In this regard, it is the drowsiness that Venerable Moggalāna experienced during his intensive retreat was documented in the Pāḷi text. At that time, the Buddha gave him simple advice<sup>27</sup>:

1. To not contemplate on the meditative object that made him drowsy, or to change a meditative object
2. If still sleepy, to ponder the dhamma as he had studied
3. If still sleepy, to chant dhamma as he had learned by heart
4. If still sleepy, to pull his ear-lobes and massage his limbs
5. If still sleepy, to wash his eyes and look up at the sky and stars

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<sup>27</sup> *Pacalāyamāna Sutta, Sattaka, Ariḡuttara-nikāya, Page 461*

6. If still sleepy, to develop a sense of light (*āloka-saññā*)<sup>28</sup>
7. If still sleepy, to contemplate on back-and-forth walk (i.e., to do walking meditation)
8. Even then, if still sleepy, to go to bed

If we feel lazy or sleepy for any reason, the first thing we should do, according to this discourse, is to note it as “lazy, lazy, lazy...” or “sleepy, sleepy, sleepy...” We may overcome it easily. If not, we may get up and walk or wash our faces as advised by the Buddha. Then we may overcome it. The last resort is to go to bed, of course, unless any other method works.

The opposite of the contracted mind is “distracted mind,” which refers to wandering thoughts that take place when our minds are restless and agitated with mental distractions related to the varieties of sense-objects. So, “distracted mind” should be understood in the same way as wandering thoughts that are

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<sup>28</sup> *The commentary (saṃyutta-tthakathā-3, 291) explains how to develop the sense of light thus: One, sitting in the open space, develops a sense of light by opening and closing the eyes alternately until one can feel luminous, as if one’s eyes were opened while they are actually closed. The sense of light is regarded to be well developed if one can feel luminous, as if it were day time during the night. Mahasi Sayadaw explained it in a different way that, at the certain stage of progressive vipassana insight (the 4<sup>th</sup> stage), a yogi tends to feel luminous, as if it were broad daylight shining with the sun, the moon or stars. In order to reach such a luminous stage of vipassana insight, Mahasi Sayadaw advised us to put an effort in discerning psycho-physical phenomena clearly.*

explained under the category of “delusion-associated mind.”

## **9 – 10. Advanced or Basic**

Here, two Pāḷi words *mahaggata* and *a-mahaggata* literally mean “Great” and “Non-great.” In harmony with the context, however, they are translated here in common language as “advanced” and “basic.” In *Abhidhamma*, the progressive stages of mind are stated from the very basic to higher basic and advanced levels, which are respectively described as unwholesome minds (*akusala*), worldly wholesome minds (*kāmāvacara*), and jhānic mind (*mahaggata*) and supra-mundane mind (*lokuttara*). In the case of mindfulness practice, supra-mundane minds are not taken as a meditative object. So, among the three remaining kinds of minds, the jhānic mind is regarded as the advanced and the other two as the basic.

- a. “Basic Mind” (unwholesome): Most species of animals only know basic things like eating, sleeping and sex. So, they have only a basic level of mind that is associated with lust, hate, pride, ego, jealousy, and so on. Under the law of the jungle, the stronger and bigger ones eat smaller and weaker ones. They rarely have loving kindness or compassion towards one another. Even among human beings, some of us only have this basic mind. They go hunting or fishing just for fun without sympathy for the poor animals. Being greedy and selfish, they will do anything for their own self interest without sympathy or kindness towards others. Their minds are very basic. So, the moment we

have these basic mental states as lust, hate, jealousy, ego, ignorance, etc., our mind is called "Basic Mind" (*a-mahaggata*). If we find ourselves having such a basic mind, we should note it in daily language, as "lust, lust, lust..." or "hate, hate, hate..." accordingly.

- b. "Higher Basic Mind" (wholesome): Kindness, compassion and understanding are basic wholesome mental states that can arise in all living beings in general. However, they are different in degree from one individual to another, indeed. Such wholesome mental states will arise more frequently and in a greater degree in the people of high-level aptitude (*pāramī*) than in rudimentary humans and animals. It is through such wholesome mental states that we human beings perform acts of generosity, acts of moral conduct, acts of compassion, and acts of loving kindness, like establishing the non-profit organizations and humanity foundations to help others. The mind associated with such wholesome mental states is much superior to the unwholesome basic mind, but it is still called "basic mind" (*a-mahaggata*), because it basically belongs to all kinds of living beings, human, animal or celestial. If we find such wholesome basic minds arise in us, we should note them accordingly as "kindness, kindness..." or "compassion, compassion..."
- c. "The Advanced Mind" refers to the mind that is highly refined with jhānic concentration. We can

develop the jhānic concentration by focusing our mind on one of the forty kinds of meditative objects mentioned in Abhidhamma. Most of the time, the mind is restless and jumping around, thinking of sense-objects in a random manner and agitated with negative emotions. Such a restless mind is powerless. When we can train it by concentrating it on a meditative object for longer periods, it becomes less agitated, and more stable and more tranquil. If we can develop it into the high-level concentration (jhāna), it will become extremely stable and powerful like a miracle. Such is what is called “advanced mind” (*mahaggata*). Only when we reach such jhānic concentration, can we get a chance to be mindful of the “advanced mind.” For the time being, therefore, we have nothing to do with this advanced kind of mind, of course.

### **11 – 12. Surpassable or Unsurpassable**

“Surpassable Mind” and “Unsurpassable Mind” are the same as “Basic Mind” and “Advanced Mind”, respectively. The Buddha often expressed the same things with different terms in harmony with different audiences and their spiritual background. Jhānic minds are the most superior among the mundane kinds of minds. In this sense, they are called “Unsurpassable”, whereas the remaining two kinds are “Surpassable”.

### **13 – 14. Concentrated or Unconcentrated**

Here, “Concentrated Mind” refers to the mind that is associated with jhāna or its neighborhood

concentration. So, it is the same in essence as the Advanced Mind, although the neighborhood concentration technically belongs to the wholesome Basic Mind. And "Unconcentrated Mind" is similar to the Basic Minds. Unwholesome Basic Minds are agitated with mental defilements. Wholesome Basic Minds are associated with loving kindness, compassion and understanding, but not with powerful jhānic concentration. Therefore, both Basic Minds are called "Unconcentrated".

## **15 – 16. Liberated or Unliberated**

"Liberated Mind" here refers to the mind that gets liberated from the bondage of mental defilements with the help of mindfulness or jhānic concentration. When we observe our minds and bodies in the present, we will discern the mental and physical phenomena as they really are. Then, we will not find anything desirable or undesirable. At this moment, our minds are liberated from the bondage of mental defilements. This is temporary liberation called *tadaṅga-vimutti*. When we can develop jhānic concentration through the samatha practice, we can keep our minds away from mental defilements for a longer period. This is what we call "durable liberation" (*vikkhambhana-vimutti*). When we are fully enlightened, we can attain complete liberation (*samuccheda-vimutti*). In the context of mindfulness meditation, however, we take only the first two kinds of liberation: temporary liberation and durable liberation. So, when we are angry, for instance, we note it as "anger, anger..." Then the anger disappears. At that moment, the mind is liberated from the bondage of



anger. Such is "liberated mind." We should note it as "liberated, liberated..."

"Unliberated Mind" is the mind that is associated with unwholesome mental states, such as lust, greed, hatred, jealousy, and pride, etc. Being neither in custody nor in prison, we think we are free. However, we are compared to a cow that is tied with a rope to a post and cannot go further than the length of the rope. A cow is normally tied with a single rope, but we are fettered by ten kinds of rope that are described as fetters (*saṃyojana*) in Pāḷi texts. Among them, illusion and attachment (*avijjā* and *taṇhā*) can be said to be most fundamental. We always feel as if we were unique and ageless, even if we were to see someone die in our lap. In a mysterious manner, ego-illusion is deep-seated in our hearts. Being bound by that illusion, we cannot think of anything beyond our ego and our own interests. We desperately react to any situation if we think our ego is hurt. Thus, our minds are bound by this illusion.

Moreover, based on this illusion, we become attached to people like family members and friends and to the material things like home, car, popularity, social status, and so on. There were cases in which youngsters committed suicide because they lost their girlfriend or boyfriend. There were billionaires who committed suicide when they lost part of their wealth. This response is apparently due to their attachment to wealth or their social status. These cases indicate how firmly our minds are fettered by this illusion and attachment. Such minds are called "unliberated minds."

So, when we find the mind associated with mental defilements, such as greed, lust, hatred, jealousy, and so on, we should note it as “unliberated mind, unliberated mind...” if we experience it in that way. Or, we can also note it in daily language, as “lust, lust...”, or “greed, greed...” accordingly. When we note them with full awareness, we find they disappear right away. At that very moment there arises mindfulness or vipassana insight, which is called “liberated minds.” We should note this accordingly, of course.

### **During the Actual Practice**

The classification of minds broadens our knowledge and contributes to the deeper understanding of the mind. However, when we develop the awareness of mind, it is not necessary to use technical terms, such as desire-associated mind, aversion-associated mind, and so on. The prime importance is to be aware of the true nature of our current mind no matter what terms (in Pāli or English, daily language or technical terms) we use to make note of it. So, Mahāsi Sayādaw instructed us that when we have a lustful mind, we should note it mentally thus: “lustful, lustful, lustful...” In the same way, when we are angry, we should note it as “angry, angry, angry...” When we feel jealous, note it as “jealous, jealous, jealous...” In addition, there are many other mental states, and we should note them accordingly in common language terms, thus: “thinking, thinking, thinking,” “wandering, wandering, wandering,” “daydreaming, daydreaming, daydreaming,” “imagining, imagining, imagining,”

"planning, planning, planning," "judging, judging, judging," "analyzing, analyzing, analyzing," "reasoning, reasoning, reasoning," and so on. Normally, such thoughts disappear right away if they are noted carefully. Then, we should go back right away to the home object, like the rising and falling of the abdomen.

### **Are we thinking on our own accord?**

We believe that we are free to think of whatever we want, we think on our own accord, and we do it knowingly or purposely. So, it may sound silly when we are instructed to be aware that we are thinking when we are thinking. Actually, thoughts are occurring to us without our knowledge. We do not want negative thoughts to arise, but they do against our will. We want positive thoughts to arise, but they may not do so. We cannot predetermine our thoughts or select a certain kind of thought to arise in us. Actually, our thoughts are conditioned by several factors, such as sense-objects that impinge on our sense-organs, our attitude toward the objects, our mood and mentality, and so on. For example, upon seeing someone, we may respond with an angry mind if we think he or she is despicable, or a lustful mind if we think he or she is attractive. Moreover, hormonal changes may give rise to certain kinds of thought. Physical needs like hunger may make us think of delicious food. The external phenomena, like weather, places, etc. are likely to arouse certain kinds of mental states. For instance, full moon days may be the reason for some of our emotional thoughts; a certain degree of temperature may result in certain kinds of mental states.

Therefore, it is simply an illusion if we think our thoughts are based entirely on free will.

So, even though we try our best to stay focused on the meditative object, we will find it very difficult to stop thinking. Moreover, we know what we are thinking about (object), but rarely are aware of the thinking mind itself (subject) unless mindfulness is applied. When we think of someone attractive, for instance, all we know at that moment is that attractive person, but we are not aware of the lustful mind itself. When we are angry with someone despicable, all we know at that moment is the despicable person, but we are not aware of the angry mind itself. Therefore, generally, we are not really aware of our mind. In other words, we do not think knowingly. This point can be illustrated by the story below.

### **A Story from the Dhammapada**

A teenage novice was waiting upon a senior monk at the lunch table. He was fanning the monk with a palm leaf fan. Meanwhile, he was thinking about disrobing to marry the girl he had met before. He thought about earning his living by breeding sheep. After a year or so, he imagined, he would make enough money to marry his girlfriend. Then, one day he would take his wife and child in a bullock cart to the monastery to see the monk. It was just within these few minutes that he imagined he got a baby son! On the way, he would say to his wife that he would carry the baby, but his wife would tell him to drive the cart and not to bother about the baby. He would insist and grab the baby from her. Between them the baby would drop on the road, and the

wheel would pass over the baby. He would then get so furious that he would hit his wife with the goading-stick. Thereupon, he happened to hit the head of the senior monk with the palm leaf fan.

This story indicates that our minds think without our awareness. Like this novice, we rarely know what kind of thought arising in us, lustful, hateful or deluded. The mind is naturally powerful but, with the hindrances, it becomes cloudy and powerless. Because of this, it does us more harm than good. Mindfulness helps us master the mind. If well-trained, the mind works like a miracle for all purposes. That is why the Buddha said thus:

*"Good it is to tame the mind, which is hard to control, flighty, alighting where it wishes. The disciplined mind brings happiness."*

## **Insight**

So, we should try our best to be aware of our minds so that we can master them, and they can bring us happiness like a miracle. More importantly, we can realize their true nature developing the vipassana insights step by step until we become fully enlightened. Before the practice is mature, however, thoughts will continue to interfere with our practice over and over again. By noting them carefully as often as they occur and as immediately as they arise and, as much as possible, we will become aware of their particular characteristics, conditionality and moment-to-moment changes. In this way, we can reduce their frequency to an absolute minimum and,

at the same time, develop vipassanā insights until we are fully enlightened. Thus, fully developing awareness of mind culminates in magga-phala enlightenment. This point is clearly illustrated in the following passages:

## **Culmination**

- *"In this way, in regard to the mind, he abides contemplating the mind internally, or he abides contemplating the mind externally, or he abides contemplating the mind both internally and externally.*
- *He abides contemplating the nature of arising in the mind, or he abides contemplating the nature of the passing away in the mind, or he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in the mind.*
- *Mindfulness that "there is a mind" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness.*
- *And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. That is how, in regard to the mind, he abides contemplating the mind."*

The contemplation of the mind, like the previous contemplations, is culminated in seeing the arising and passing away of the mind in ourselves (empirically) and in others (inferentially). This contemplation can lead directly to establishment of mindfulness, vipassana insights and *magga-phala* enlightenment, that is, the liberation from the cycle of suffering. Below is the story from the Dhammapada commentary that illustrates this point.

## **Another Story from the Dhammapada**

One day, a monk was very agitated by the monastic rules and regulations that were too tough and too much for him to follow. So, he decided to leave the monastery. On his way home, however, he ran into the Buddha who was walking to and fro at the monastery gate. "Where are you going?" asked the Buddha. "I am going home to return to lay life," he replied. "Why?" asked the Buddha. "Because, sir," he said, "there are so many monastic rules and regulations. It is really depressing for me to observe them." Then, the Buddha asked, "Is this the only reason why you want to disrobe?" He said, "Yes sir." Then the Buddha asked, "If there is only one precept for you to observe, will you remain as a monk?" He said, "Yes sir, I will." Then, the Buddha said, "Alright, only one precept for you to observe is to watch your mind." By being aware of his minds, the monk eventually became fully enlightened. This story indicates that the awareness of mind alone can help us to become fully enlightened.

## **Additional Information**

### **Present Thought to Observe**

It is impossible to note a thought while it is still present. While we are thinking, we cannot notice the thought. When we finally notice it, it will have disappeared. Actually, thinking mind and observing mind cannot take place at the same time because at

each moment, only one mind<sup>29</sup> arises. So, it is no wonder we cannot notice the thoughts while they are still present. But, the most recent thoughts are considered the present thoughts. With stronger determination and greater effort, however, we can notice them almost immediately. It is very important to note them before we return to noting the home objects so that we can develop mindfulness of thoughts. Before our concentration and mindfulness are strong enough, they occur over and over again. This is their nature. We should not be disappointed, but just note them as often as they occur.

### **Home Object and Slow-motion**

The Late Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw—the meditation master of world-wide repute, highly respected for his intensive practice and profound knowledge of Pāḷi texts—instructed us to select physical phenomena as home objects to focus on so that we can develop the degree of concentration (*khaṇḍika-samādhi*) required for awareness and insights. There are so many kinds of mental and physical phenomena occurring to us at every moment, that if we try to note them all in a random manner without strong concentration, we will end up being restless or agitated without developing any vipassana insight. So, it makes a lot of sense to focus on a home object. Moreover, the selection of physical phenomena like rising and falling of the abdomen as

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<sup>29</sup> By "one mind," I mean one moment of consciousness (*citta*) along with its concomitant mental factors (*cetasika*).



the main home-object conforms to Mahāvagga Commentary (314) that says thus:

“The Buddha put emphasis on the mindfulness of body (*rūpa-kammaṭṭhāna*) for human beings, because human bodies are coarse and tangible, and more obvious than non-physical objects. As for celestial beings, he recommended the mindfulness of non-physical objects including sensations and thoughts (*a-rūpa-kammaṭṭhāna*) as their bodies are too subtle and too delicate (to observe).”

So, it makes a lot of sense that Mahāsi Sayādaw instructed us to select physical phenomena as home objects, like abdominal movements during our sitting and feet during our walking. Mindfulness of the body especially facilitates mindfulness of thoughts. If we never develop mindfulness of the body, it will definitely be more difficult to become mindful of our thoughts. On the other hand, if we have developed mindfulness of the body quite well, we will find it more easy to be mindful of our thoughts. In fact, we become spontaneously aware of our thoughts while we are developing awareness of the body.

In addition, when we develop mindfulness of the body, the Visuddhimagga commentary recommends that we slow down our motions so that our mindfulness can catch up with our bodily actions. Of course, just doing extreme physical slow-motion in and of itself is not correct practice. Rather, moving slowly enough to note our movements helps develop penetrating mindfulness.

# CONTEMPLATION OF DHAMMA

## What *Dhamma* Means

The Pāli word *dhamma* is very difficult to translate since it can assume a variety of meanings according to the context in which it occurs. Its meanings can be wholesomeness, merit, truth, nature, justice, law and order, psycho-physical phenomena, mental factors (*cetasika*), nibbāna, and so on. Below are just a few examples:

- “All the Dhamma are non-self” (*Sabbe dhammā anattā*): Here, *dhamma* refers to all kinds of phenomena that include minds, bodies, concepts and nibbāna.
- “Dhamma protects the dhamma-practitioner” (*Dhammo have rakkhati dhamma-cāriṇ*): Here, *dhamma* means three trainings: morality, concentration and wisdom.
- “Dhamma leads to a blissful realm” (*Dhammo pāpeti sugatim*): Here, *dhamma* means wholesome deeds.
- “King Brahma-datta ruled the country with Dhamma” (*Brahma-datto dhammena samena rajjam kāresi*): Here, *dhamma* means justice or law and order.
- “Dhammas are led by the mind” (*Mano-pubbaṅgamā dhammā*): Here, *dhamma* means mental constituents (*cetasika*), which are always led by the mind.

- “There are Dhammas that arise from cause” (*Ye dhammā hetuppabbhavā*): Here, *dhamma* only indicates conditioned phenomena (minds and bodies).
- “Dhamma-objects” (*Dhammārammaṇa*): Here, *dhamma* refers to certain kinds of phenomena that can be perceived only through the mind, but not through the five senses. They include physical sensitivities (eye-sensitivity, etc.), delicate physical phenomena, consciousness, mental constituents, nibbāna, and all imaginary or conceptual things.
- “Dhamma-sources” (*Dhammāyatana*): Here “dhamma” refers to delicate kinds of physical phenomena, mental constituents and nibbāna.

## **Dhamma to Contemplate**

Regarding the *dhamma* to contemplate in the context of mindfulness practice, the commentary<sup>30</sup> explains thus:

“The Buddha described only physical phenomena through the contemplation of the body and only mental phenomena through the contemplation of feelings and that of the mind. Now, through this contemplation of dhamma, the Buddha described both physical and mental phenomena collectively. In other words, the first three sections deal respectively with three aggregates, body, feeling and consciousness,

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<sup>30</sup> *Satipatthana Sutta commentary and Visuddhimagga commentary*

while the fourth is concerned with all the five aggregates collectively.”

According to this commentary explanation, *dhamma* to contemplate apparently refers to the five aggregates<sup>31</sup> (or mind and body, or physical and mental phenomena). Yet again, the mental phenomena to contemplate do not include supra-mundane minds (magga-phala enlightenments) because they are what vipassana meditation culminates in, and not objects of vipassana. Furthermore, we are instructed to observe the psycho-physical phenomena that are present in our mind and body, because something present is something real, and something arising in our own mind and body is something we can directly experience through our senses. Based on the empirical knowledge of our own and present phenomena, however, we can also inferentially realize another mental and physical phenomena, whether past or future, internal or external, coarse or delicate, inferior or superior, far or near. Strictly speaking, therefore, the *dhamma* to contemplate, in the context of mindfulness practice, refers to psycho-physical phenomena that are presently arising in our mind and body.

## **Five Sections of Dhamma**

In this discourse, the *Dhamma* to contemplate is expounded in five sections thus:

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<sup>31</sup> *Five Aggregates includes body, feelings, perception, mental formation, and consciousness. Among them, the first one is physical phenomena, and the remaining four are mental ones. So, the five aggregate means the same as "mind and body" or "mental and physical phenomena."*

1. Five Hindrances (*nīvarana-pabba*)
2. Five Aggregates (*khandha-pabba*)
3. Twelve Sense-sources (*āyatana-pabba*)
4. Seven Awakening Factors (*bojjhaṅga-pabba*)
5. Four-fold Noble Truths (*sacca-pabba*)

*Dhamma* is normally translated as objects of the mind or mental objects. In view of the five aggregates and twelve sense-sources that are described here as the dhamma to contemplate, *dhamma* apparently refers not only to the objects of the mind (the 6<sup>th</sup> sense) but also to the objects of the remaining five senses, such as sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. This is why the original Pāḷi term *dhamma* would be the best to use, instead of its English translations.

Moreover, the arrangement of five sections implies the sequential progression towards realization. By being mindful of mental hindrances, we can gain the sufficient degree of mental stability for two further contemplations: five aggregates and twelve sense-sources. The former leads us to a realization of the subjective personality, while the latter enables us to realize the relationship between the subjective personality and the outer world. These two kinds of realization, in turn, form an essential basis for developing the awakening factors and full understanding of the Four Noble Truths, the final exercise among the contemplations of dhammas and the successful culmination of *satipaṭṭhāna* practice.

## THE CONTEMPLATION OF FIVE HINDRANCES

Among the five sections of the contemplation of dhamma, the first one is the contemplation of five hindrances, which is expounded by the Buddha thus:

*"And how, monks, does he in regard to dhammas abide contemplating dhammas?"*

*Here he abides contemplating dhammas in dhammas in terms of the five hindrances. And, how does he abide contemplating dhammas in dhammas in terms of the five hindrances?*

*"If sensual desire is present in him, he knows 'there is sensual desire in me;' if sensual desire is not present in him, he knows 'there is no sensual desire in me;'"and he knows how un-arisen sensual desire can arise, how arisen sensual desire can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed sensual desire can be prevented."*

**Note:** the same is true with the remaining four hindrances: aversion, sloth-and-torpor, restlessness-and-remorse, and skeptical doubt.

### Five Hindrances

As mentioned in the above passage, there are five mental hindrances (*nīvaraṇā*), which are so called because they hinder progress in the practice (and also

in secular life). During a meditation retreat, we can discover how terribly our practice is interfered by:

1. Sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*) that arises when we think about having something desirable, or about having a good time with someone we love, and so on.
2. Aversion (*byāpāda*) that takes place when we feel upset or angry with someone like our roommates or a yogi sitting next to us, or noises, heat, pain, poor food, poor accommodation, and so on.
3. Sloth-and-torpor (*thina-middha*) that come into existence when we are unwilling to put the correct effort in our practice, or we tire of noting continuously.
4. Restlessness-and-remorse (*uddhacca-kukucca*) that come up when we are worried, anxious or remorseful about past mistakes or our failure to take wholesome action; or when there is little or no progress in our practice.
5. Skeptical doubt (*vicikicchā*) that appears when we get confused between right and wrong, or wholesome and unwholesome, or when we lose faith and confidence in the practice, in our teachers, or in our ability.

Such mental states often interfere with our practice. Only when we have strong faith and have great effort, can we be mindful of them as immediately as possible. Otherwise, they may last from a few minutes to half an hour or even longer. When this happens, there will be no way for us to make any progress in our practice. So, learning how

to withstand their impact with awareness is an important skill for our successful progress on the path.

The contemplation of the five mental hindrances is encompassed by the contemplation of the mind, the third contemplation. Sensual desire is the same in essence as the desire-associated mind. Regarding the remaining hindrances, there is no difference in essence between aversion and aversion-associated mind; between sloth-and-torpor and the contracted mind; between restlessness-and-remorse and the distracted mind; and between skeptical doubt and the delusion-associated mind. The Buddha expounded the same thing from different perspectives to accord with the spiritual aptitude of the audience (*puggala-ajjhāsaya*) and to broaden his teaching style (*desanā-vilāsa*).

## **Middle Path**

In this particular contemplation of *dhamma*, the Buddha put great emphasis on the comprehensive understanding of the hindrances. So, he instructed us to be aware of the hindrances from five aspects: their presence, their absence, the reason for their presence, the reason for their absence, and the prevention. In order to understand a hindrance from the five aspects, all we have to do is to recognize (or to note) it when it is present. This technique of simple recognition constitutes a powerful way in which the obstacles to meditation are made to turn into objects of meditation. So, we are instructed to be mindful of a hindrance when it is present in us, but neither to suppress it, give vent to it or indulge



in it. Between suppression and indulgence, the bare awareness (bare recognition) of a hindrance forms a middle path. With an awareness of the presence of a hindrance, it can often be prevented from continuing to arise or simply spontaneously disappear. So, this task of mindful recognition is the central theme in the contemplation of the hindrances.

## **SENSUAL DESIRE**

The first hindrance is sensual desire, which is described as unwholesome for two reasons: First, it always comes along with selfishness and illusion, and often leads to misdeeds (*sāvajja*); second, it is the source of mental and physical distress (*dukkha-vipāka*). Moreover, it is called a hindrance, because it interferes with the wholesome practices. To withstand the unhealthy impacts of sensual desire and to develop vipassana insights, the Buddha instructed us to be aware of sensual desire in a very comprehensive way thus:

*"If sensual desire is present in him, he knows 'there is sensual desire in me;' if sensual desire is not present in him, he knows 'there is no sensual desire in me;' and he knows how un-arisen sensual desire can arise, how arisen sensual desire can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed sensual desire can be prevented."*

The above passage instructs us to be aware of sensual desires from five aspects:

1. Presence of the sensual desire
2. Absence of the sensual desire
3. How (why) the un-arisen sensual desire arises
4. How the arisen sensual desire is removed
5. How a future arising of the removed desire can be prevented

## 1. Presence of the Sensual Desire

The Pāli term *kāma-cchanda* literally means “*kāma*-desire.” Here, *kāma* means something a living being desires. Mahāsi Sayadaw said, a cake, for example, can be called *kāma*, because it is desired not only by human but also animals like a dog, a cat, a mouse, a fly, an ant, and so on. In this sense, there are millions of *kāma*, because we have a desire for millions of things. In the ultimate sense, however, there are only five *kāmas* for which we have a desire. They are desirable sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. The desire for them is called sensual desire, which comes to be present in us on such occasions as:

- When seeing something desirable, we want to have it, fancy we are getting it, and then are attached to it when we actually get it. Or, when we see someone attractive, we are aroused by romantic feelings, and become so attached to him or her that we think of him or her repeatedly afterward.
- When hearing a pleasant sound, we enjoy it, get attached to it, and then believe the sound is expressing our feelings. Or, when we hear

someone of the opposite sex talking or singing, we enjoy it, and later think repeatedly of it.

- When smelling the fragrance of flowers or the lingering perfume from someone who passes by, we enjoy it, get attached to it, then later think of it repeatedly.
- When eating food, we enjoy it, are attached to it, we repeatedly think of it or of peoples and places related to it like a cook, an attractive server, fancy restaurants, and so on.
- When experiencing the soft touch of an object or a romantic touch with someone, we enjoy it, get attached to it, and then think of it quite often.

Just as the correct diagnosis is necessary for successful treatment, to be aware of sensual desire is also the first thing we have to do for the successful prevention or removal of the desire. Actually, the awareness of sensual desire serves not only as correct diagnosis but also as correct remedy for the infection of sensual desire. That is why the Buddha instructed us thus: "If the sensual desire is present in one, one should be aware 'there is sensual desire in me.' " This means we should make mindful recognition of it as "desire, desire, desire..."

## **2. Absence of the Sensual Desire**

The second aspect which we need to be aware of regarding this sensual desire is its absence. When this sensual desire is not present in us, we need to be aware that sensual desire is not present in us. Here "not present" is defined by the commentary in two

ways: Not arising (*a-samudācāra*) and being removed (*pahīna*). Sometimes sensual desire may not arise in us even though we encounter desirable objects because we apply the skillful attitude (*yoniso manasikāra*) or mindfulness (*sati*) to the objects in a timely manner. Other times, however, the desire does arise but is removed by noting it as “desire, desire, desire...” Then there is the absence of sensual desire which should be recognized with awareness. Just as a patient needs to be aware of whether the symptoms of the disease increase, decrease or disappear so that he can gain better understanding of the treatment, similarly, we need to be aware not only of the presence but also of the absence of sensual desire so that we can be aware of how the sensual desire is prevented, reduced or removed. So, it is important to recognize this absence of this sensual desire when it is removed through awareness.

### **3. How the Un-arisen Sensual Desire Arises**

The third aspect which we need to be aware of regarding sensual desire is “how the un-arisen sensual desire arises.” Here, “the un-arisen desire” means new desire (i.e., the desire provoked by new or different sense-objects). As a matter of fact, no phenomena are stored anywhere, but all mental and physical phenomena newly arise when conditions are met like a sound that newly arises from a musical instrument being played. When a new product is introduced into the market, for example, there can arise the desire for that product. Such is called “un-arisen or new sensual desire.” This kind of desire

arises in us every time we want something different or better or someone more attractive. The main condition for this kind of desire to arise is *a-yoniso manasi-kāra*, which is translated into several ways, such as “unwise mindset,” or “unwholesome attitude,” or “unskillful way of thinking,” or “taking things irrationally,” and so on. It is literally defined as the illusory sense of permanence, pleasure, person and attractiveness.

In the Pāli text, there is a simile that indicates the link between the desire and such illusion. If babies were to die every time a woman gave birth to them, she would definitely become fed up with having any more babies. In the same way, if we really discern that everything is impermanent, that everybody will die one day, we will not have desire for anything or anybody. So, to have a desire for something means to have the illusory sense of permanence, etc. This illusion is called *a-yoniso manasi-kāra* (irrational mindset, unskillful way of thinking). This illusion always underlies any kind of desire. So, when we have the sensual desire for new or different objects, we should be aware that un-arisen sensual desire has arisen in us. We will also spontaneously realize the unskillful attitude or illusion as the condition for such desire to arise. Therefore, the Buddha said:

“O monks, it is the frequent application of an unwise attitude to a desirable object, which forms the condition for un-arisen sensual desire to arise, for arisen sensual desire to increase.”

The Buddha thus instructed us to be aware of how the un-arisen sensual desire arises.

#### **4. How the Arisen Sensual Desire Can Be Removed**

The fourth aspect which we need to be aware of regarding sensual desire is "how the arisen sensual desire can be removed." Here, "the arisen sensual desire" means the desire for the same sense-objects as the ones we had before. For instance, the desire to eat the same food we ate last time is regarded as "the arisen sensual desire." It is a skillful attitude that helps us remove such desire. As mentioned above, to apply a skillful attitude to a desirable object literally means to see the object to be impermanent, unsatisfactory, and empty of ego and devoid of attractiveness. There will be no room for the sensual desire to take place if we see the true facts that all worldly pursuits have a sorrowful end such as acquisitions end in dispersion, constructions in destruction, meetings in separation, youth in old age, births in death. In addition, the commentary made a further explanation that, if we see the repulsive nature of the body through the contemplation of thirty-two anatomical parts, there will be no room for sensual desire. For example, suppose we may find someone's hair style attractive. If that very hair were to be cut or changed, we might then find it to be repulsive. We may find someone's young body to be well-shaped and beautiful but when they become old and deformed, we might find that person's body now to be completely repellent. That is why the Buddha said thus:

*"O monks, it is frequent contemplation of the repulsive nature of body which forms the condition for un-arisen desire not to arise and for the arisen desire to be removed."*

Here, the commentary describes some more exercises for the arisen sensual desire to be removed such as sense-restraint (*indriya-samvara*), moderation in food intake (*bhojane mattaññutā*), having a good friend, and suitable conversation. Among them, the sense-restraint means not to give vent to the sensual desire by indulging in sensual pleasure. Moderation in food means avoiding eating too much or too rich food that can give rise to sensual desire. For this purpose, while eating we are advised not to eat the last four or five mouthful of food but to drink water to fill up our stomach instead. Good friends and suitable conversation are also very important conditions for the arisen sensual desire to be removed, because we are normally influenced by our close friends and their ideas, advises and behaviors. Of course, the most effective and simplest way is to be mindful of the desire by noting it, as "desire, desire, desire..." Such mindfulness is a very powerful tool for the arisen sensual desire to be removed. With stronger and more mature mindfulness, we can keep the desire away for longer periods. We are, therefore, instructed to be aware of how the arisen sensual desire is removed.

## **5. How a Future Arising of the Removed Desire Can Be Prevented**

The fifth aspect which we need to be aware of regarding sensual desire is "how a future arising of the

removed sensual desire can be prevented.” As mentioned above, the sensual desire can be removed in several ways by applying a skillful attitude to the desirable objects, by contemplating on the repulsive nature of the body, by cultivating sense-restraint, by exercising moderation in food, and so on. In the case of vipassana, Mahasī Sayādaw said, the skillful attitude means the mindfulness of sensual desire itself. However, sensual desire removed by the above-mentioned ways can still recur at any time when the right conditions are met unless we are fully enlightened. This point is illustrated by the following Jātaka story.

In a deep forest on the Himalaya mountain range, there lived a hermit with the attainment of jhānic power. As the best friend of the king, he flew to the royal palace from time to time by exercising his psychic power. One day, the hermit mistakenly got into the chamber of the queen when the king was away. Seeing the hermit coming into her chamber, the queen got up suddenly out of her bed and, as a consequence, her silk outfit fell off her delicate and beautiful body. Fascinated by the beautiful body of the queen and unable to help romantic feelings from arising, the poor hermit lost his jhānic concentration and psychic powers and could not fly back to the Himalayas.

This story points out the fact that, unless we reach the third stage enlightenment, the removed sensual desire can recur any time. That is why the Buddha instructed us to be aware of how a future arising of the removed desire can be prevented. This means we should try our best to develop mindfulness until we become fully enlightened.



## **AVERSION**

The second hindrance is aversion. In order to overcome aversion and gain a breakthrough on the Noble Path, the Buddha instructed us to be mindful of aversion in a very comprehensive way thus:

*"If aversion is present in him, he knows 'there is aversion in me;' if aversion is not present in him, he knows 'there is no aversion in me;' and he knows how un-arisen aversion can arise, how arisen aversion can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed aversion can be prevented."*

The above passage instructs us to be aware of the aversion from five aspects:

1. Presence of the aversion
2. Absence of the aversion
3. How (why) the un-arisen aversion arises
4. How the arisen aversion is removed
5. How a future arising of the removed aversion can be prevented

### **1. Presence of the Aversion**

Aversion is the second hindrance to our spiritual development (and to secular life, as well). It arises in us when we react to undesirable objects without mindfulness. Here, the Pāḷi term for "aversion" is *byāpāda* that indicates such negative emotions as anger, hatred, ill-will, dislike, displeasure, frustration, dissatisfaction, and so on. This kind of aversion arises in us when we react to undesirable sense-objects. For

example, when we see something or someone we do not like; when we hear noises or unpleasant sounds, when we are told something unpleasant; when we get a sweaty odor from someone who passes by; when we eat a food we do not like; when we feel uncomfortable; when we are bitten by insects and so on. Thus, aversion arises in us quite frequently; however, we are rarely aware of it because our attention is fully focused on the undesirable object but not on the aversion itself. So, we are unprotected from the possible misfortune that the aversion is likely to bring us.

A few years ago, in Tokyo, Japan, some Burmese workers lived together in a narrow apartment. One evening, one of them was drunk and made a lot of noise shouting and yelling while another was praying in the shrine room. The praying man became very annoyed by the noise and repeatedly requested the drunkard not to shout. Of course, his request was ignored. Then, the praying man got so mad that he came out of the shrine room and took a knife from the kitchen and stabbed the drunkard in the chest killing him immediately.

The lesson we can learn from this event is that a fatal problem like this can arise at any time from a small thing like a noise unless we can apply mindfulness to the situation before it is too late. If either the praying man or the drunkard had applied the mindfulness to this situation, this fatal problem would not have happened. So, the magic needed to prevent such a horrible misfortune is mindfulness, which is very simple but very powerful and applicable

to any situation. Just make sure we turn our attention to the aversion (subject) instead of someone whom we are averse to (object). The exercise is quite simple, just to make mindful recognition of the aversion as "aversion, aversion, aversion..." That is why we are instructed that, if aversion is present in us, we should be aware that there is aversion in us.

## **2. Absence of the Aversion**

The second aspect which we need to become aware of regarding aversion is its absence. Sometimes the aversion may not arise in us, because we do not encounter something or someone undesirable or when we are engaged in wholesome deeds. Other times, however, the aversion does arise but is removed by applying a skillful attitude to the undesirable objects (*yoniso manasi-kāra*) or by being mindful of aversion (*sati*) in a timely manner. In this regard, I would like to recount one of my experiences. One afternoon I was on the bus and someone like a homeless person came and sat next to me. He was smelly and looked very tired and leaned against me. At first, I was very upset, but later I felt pity for him thinking that he must not have a decent place to sleep. My aversion and unhappiness then disappeared and I felt comfortable with him right away thanks to applying this skillful attitude to the uncomfortable situation.

The best and simplest way to withstand the impact of aversion is to make a note of it as "aversion, aversion, aversion ...". Normally, aversion disappears right away if it is not very strong. But it

may take some time to disappear if it is quite strong. If we continue to note it relentlessly, we will overcome it sooner than expected. When aversion is not present in us, we should make a note of it as "aversion is absent, absent, absent..." The awareness of its disappearance forms a very convenient basis for a comprehensive understanding of how it occurs and how it is removed.

### **3. How (why) the Un-arisen Aversion Arises**

"How (or why) the unarisen aversion arises" is the third aspect which we need to become aware of regarding aversion. "The un-arisen aversion" means the aversion to undesirable objects that are new or different from the objects we have encountered previously. In daily life, we often feel adverse to one thing or another because we react without mindfulness to different kinds of sense-objects that newly impinge on our senses. For example, when we see someone behave in an arrogant manner, we might feel averse to him. At that moment, our minds are focused on the person who is arrogant, but not our aversion to that person. So, we are not really aware that we feel aversion nor are we aware of how or why aversion arises.

In the Mahasi Meditation Center in Burma, a female yogi once made a complaint to the nun in charge of the meditation hall about the children making noise near the hall where she was sitting. But later it turned out that it was her grandchildren waiting to see her who were making noise. Then, she made a kind and wise remark: "Oh, that is the way all

the kids on earth are." Apparently, it was not the noise but her unwise attitude towards the noise that made her angry. An unwise attitude is literally defined as the illusory sense of "I." So, it is our ego that always plays tricks on us. If we are aware of aversion in the present moment by noting it as "aversion, aversion, aversion..." then we can become aware of its origin, i.e., the unwise attitude. That is why the Buddha said thus:

*"O monks, it is frequent application of an unwise attitude to an undesirable object, which forms the condition for un-arisen aversion to arise, for arisen aversion to increase."*

#### **4. How the Arisen Aversion Is Removed**

"How the arisen aversion is removed" is the fourth aspect which we need to become aware of regarding aversion. "The arisen aversion" means the aversion to the undesirable objects that we once encountered. This definition can be depicted by the story of Māgaṇḍī. Brahmin Māgaṇḍī was a Vedic scholar. One day, he saw the Buddha's footprints and got an impression that the Buddha was someone special on earth. So, he proposed to the Buddha to marry his pretty daughter, Māgaṇḍī. At that time, the Buddha purposely told him that he would not even want to touch her body, since it was filled with repulsiveness. She was then so humiliated that a strong aversion arose in her. Later, she became one of the three chief queens of King Utena. One day, the Buddha was on his missionary tour to her kingdom. When she heard this news, her aversion against the Buddha

immediately reoccurred. So, she got people to drive the Buddha and his monks out of the kingdom by using harsh words and by throwing stones at them. She also tricked the king so that he misunderstood Sāmāvātī (her rival queen), who was very devoted to the Buddha. Finally, the king found out the truth and had her punished by setting her on fire. She suffered such a tragedy, because she could not prevent the same kind of aversion from arising that had arisen in her as a young girl.

In order to withstand the terrible impact of the arisen aversion, the Buddha recommended first applying the skillful attitude of loving kindness (*yoniso manasi-kāra*) thus: *"O monks, it is the frequent application of a metta-related attitude, the liberation of the mind, which forms the condition for un-arisen aversion not to arise, and for arisen aversion to be removed."*

In addition, the commentary suggested other exercises to remove the arisen aversion, namely considering the law of kamma, applying reasoning power (*paññā*), associating with good friends and having wholesome conversations. The most powerful way to remove the arisen aversion is, of course, to be aware of it by noting it as "aversion, aversion, aversion..." Through the awareness of aversion, we can also become aware of how it is prevented or removed. In this sense, the Buddha instructed us to be aware of how the arisen aversion is removed.

## 5. How a Future Arising of the Removed Aversion Can Be Prevented

"How a future arising of the removed desire can be prevented" is the fifth aspect which we need to become aware of regarding aversion. As mentioned above, aversion can be removed in several ways: By applying a skillful attitude to undesirable objects, by developing loving kindness, considering the law of kamma, applying reasoning power, associating with good friends and having wholesome discussions. Aversion removed by these methods, however, can recur any time when the right conditions are met, unless we attain the third stage of enlightenment of *anāgāmi-magga*. So, by these instructions, we should now be aware of how a future arising of the removed aversion can be prevented, the Buddha means we should try our best to develop mindfulness until we reach the third stage of enlightenment.

### SLOTH-AND-TORPOR

The third hindrance is sloth-and-torpor, which mainly refers to laziness. As the King of Devas once said to his son, Susīma, "there is neither success nor happiness on earth for the one who is lazy." Obviously, laziness is a big hindrance to the spiritual (as well as secular) success. To withstand its impact and to gain a breakthrough on the Noble Path, the Buddha instructed us to be mindful of it in a very comprehensive way as follows:

*"If sloth-and-torpor is present in him, he knows 'there is sloth-and-torpor in me;' if*

*sloth-and-torpor is not present in him, he knows 'there is no sloth-and-torpor in me;' and he knows how un-arisen sloth-and-torpor can arise, how arisen sloth-and-torpor can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed sloth-and-torpor can be prevented."*

According to the above passage, we are to be aware of the sloth-and-torpor from five aspects:

1. Presence of the sloth-and-torpor
2. Absence of the sloth-and-torpor
3. How (why) the un-arisen sloth-and-torpor arises
4. How the arisen sloth-and-torpor is removed
5. How a future arising of the removed sloth-and-torpor can be prevented

### **What "Sloth-and-torpor" Means**

The third hindrance is "sloth-and-torpor" (*thina-middha*). It actually consists of two separate phenomena that are subsumed under the third hindrance, since they are obviously the same in effect and character. They are defined by the commentaries and Abhidhamma as the lethargy of consciousness and that of mental factors, respectively. In daily language, they just refer to being lazy or unwilling to do something wholesome. In some cases, like Venerable Moggalāna's, however, it may be simply concerned with the physical lethargy. As mentioned before, Venerable Moggalāna, the second chief disciple of the Buddha, was drowsy and nodding during his attempt to gain a breakthrough in the highest level of enlightenment. Apparently, his



drowsiness should be regarded as physical lethargy but not as laziness, because he was then putting great effort in his practice. According to medical science, we generally need to sleep seven to eight hours a day for our body and brain to be healthy. As a matter of fact, sleepiness is not necessarily the same as laziness. As an actual hindrance to practice, it is the latter, but not the former.

If we are lazy, we will not succeed in any endeavor. Even worse is that we are open to several kinds of misfortunes that can be brought about by mental defilements. So, we need to make an attempt to put our minds and bodies under the protection of constant mindfulness. In other words, we should not be lazy. To some, this attempt at making effort may feel oppressive. A meditation teacher once tried to persuade a woman to practice meditation. Her reply was: "I would not mind running around a football field two or three times, but doing meditation feels like killing me. I prefer to live a life on earth in a relaxing manner." Unfortunately, restraint here is misinterpreted as oppression, while unruliness is regarded as freedom. Actually, there are really not many things we need to do in order to reach our spiritual goal of *magga-phala* enlightenment. All we have to do is just be mindful of our mind and body in a receptive, non stressful manner. Mindfulness means neither oppression nor suppression of our emotions. Constant mindfulness means constant protection and comprehensive understanding of ourselves (mind and body). Unwilling to put the right effort in such a wholesome practice means being "lazy," or having "sloth-and-torpor."

## **How It Arises**

In the discourses, the Buddha described what sloth-and-torpor is, how the un-arisen sloth-and-torpor arises and how the arisen sloth-and-torpor is removed, as follows:

*"Monks, it is the frequent application of an unskillful attitude to boredom, bodily lethargy, chaotic posture, food-related drowsiness, and mental sloth, which forms the condition for un-arisen sloth-and-torpor to arise and for the arisen sloth-and-torpor to increase."*

Boredom at a secluded place like a meditation center is described as a form of sloth-and-torpor. Entertaining such an unhealthy mental state means it is the unskillful attitude that serves as the condition for the un-arisen sloth-and-torpor to arise and for the arisen sloth-and-torpor to increase. Similarly, bodily lethargy, chaotic posture, food-related drowsiness are forms of sloth-and-torpor. Entertaining such unhealthy states provides the unskillful attitude that forms the condition for the un-arisen sloth-and-torpor to arise and for the arisen sloth-and-torpor to increase.

## **How It Is Removed**

Regarding how to remove the arisen sloth-and-torpor and how a future arising of the removed sloth-and-torpor can be prevented, the Buddha said thus:

*"Monks, it is the frequent application of a skillful attitude to initial effort, sustained effort,*

*and culminating effort which forms the condition for the un-arisen sloth-and-torpor not to arise and for the arisen sloth-and-torpor to be removed."*

Here there are three kinds of effort described by the Buddha: initial effort, sustained effort, and culminating effort. In any field, secular or spiritual, there are not many people who can make effort all the way from the beginning until reaching the goal. For instance, we have hundreds of classmates who have gone from elementary school to college. But, in retrospect, we can find only a few who were able to make the efforts necessary to achieve the goal of graduation; there were many who failed. So, three stages of effort are required to reach the goal. Valuing and entertaining such continuous effort are honored as having the skillful attitude that forms conditions for the un-arisen sloth-and-torpor not to arise and for the arisen sloth-and-torpor to be removed.

For example, in the spiritual field, during a one-month retreat, we may make effort in the first two or three weeks, but we may not be able to sustain our effort until the end of the retreat. Similarly, during a one-hour sitting meditation, we may make a great effort in the first twenty or forty minutes and waste the rest of the time thinking aimlessly or feeling frustrated about unpleasant sensations, and so on. Even during a single rising or falling of the abdomen, we may not be able to follow it all the way from the beginning to the end. One moment we may make effort to be mindful of it, and the next moment we may just relax too much. Thus, laziness

often arises in us even during a single rising or falling. In this sense, we can be compared to the story of the race between a rabbit and a turtle. At the beginning of the race, the rabbit is much faster and was further ahead of his opponent, a slow moving turtle. Since he was so far ahead, he decided to take a rest, delaying his reaching the goal. Meanwhile, the turtle moving with a continuous and sustained effort passed by the rabbit and reached the goal first. So, unwilling to make such a sustained effort or eager to relax before we reach the goal is considered laziness. Three stages of effort must be put into our practice. In other words, effort must be sustained until we gain a breakthrough on the Noble Path. In this regard, we should remember that the great effort is necessary for continuous mindfulness rather than by just sleepless nights, long sittings, slow motion or even by the discernment of mental and physical phenomena. Just being mindful continuously is like walking without stopping towards our final destination. In this way, we will reach the goal in the end.

## **Continuous Mindfulness**

“Continuous mindfulness” does not really mean to be mindful every second. That is not possible. There arises only one mind moment at a time, not two or more at the same time. One moment, for example, we may see someone and the seeing consciousness arises in us and, if we are really energetic, we may become mindful of the seeing in the next moment. Strictly speaking, we are not able to see the entire body of someone with just a glance. We have to see it bit by bit and piece by piece until mentally all the pieces come together and we realize we are seeing someone or we can recognize or

identify whom we are seeing. So, at the point when we become aware that we are seeing someone, hundreds of mental processes have already passed. In the same way, when walking, there are many mental processes required for the foot to lift. While the mental processes are generating the action of lifting, mindfulness cannot arise, since only one mind arises at a time. If mindfulness is really continuous, the action of lifting would not take place. So, it is by no means possible to be mindful every second, although we are hypothetically encouraged to be so. Unbreakable mindfulness is one of the qualities unique to the Buddha (*āveṇika-guṇa*). Given these facts, we should draw the reasonable conclusion that continuous mindfulness means the mindfulness that comes every few seconds during an intensive retreat or every few minutes in daily life.

By a skillful attitude to the three stages of effort, that is, by valuing and cultivating sustained effort in establishing continuous mindfulness, the arisen sloth-and-torpor is removed and a future arising of the removed sloth-and-torpor can also be prevented. Moreover, the commentary mentions some other exercises that can help us overcome sloth-and-torpor: to moderate in food intake, to change one's posture mindfully, to have a vision of the light, to practice in the open space, to have a good friend and to have a wholesome conversation. Nevertheless, it needs to be kept in mind, in the context of mindfulness practice, that the emphasis is not put on actively opposing a hindrance, but on clearly recognizing a hindrance, concurrently with conditions related to its presence or absence.

## RESTLESSNESS-AND-REMORSE

"Restlessness-and-remorse" consists of two separate mental factors, but they are subsumed under the fourth hindrance apparently because of their similarity in effect and character<sup>32</sup>. A calm and stable mind is necessary for success in life, spiritual or secular. If our minds are restless and unstable, or anxious and sorrowful or remorseful, we are more likely to make a wrong decision and fatal mistakes. With a restless mind, it is very difficult for us to succeed in life, spiritual or secular. To withstand such negative impact of this hindrance and to gain a breakthrough on the Noble Path, it is a prime importance to be aware comprehensively of this kind of hindrance. That is why the Buddha instructed us thus:

*"If restlessness-and-remorse is present in him, he knows 'there is restlessness-and-remorse in me;' if restlessness-and-remorse is not present in him, he knows 'there is no restlessness-and-remorse in me;' and he knows how un-arisen restlessness-and-remorse can arise, how arisen restlessness-and-remorse can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed restlessness-and-remorse can be prevented."*

According to the above passage, there are five aspects which we need to be aware of regarding restlessness-and-remorse:

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<sup>32</sup> *The commentary says that this fivefold presentation of hindrances corresponds with five jhānic factors. Actually, these five hindrances serve as obstacles not only to five jhānic factors but to seven awakening factors and any other wholesomeness also.*

1. Presence of the restlessness-and-remorse
2. Absence of the restlessness-and-remorse
3. How (why) the un-arisen restlessness-and-remorse arises
4. How the arisen restlessness-and-remorse is removed
5. How a future arising of the removed restlessness-and-remorse can be prevented

## **Restlessness**

The Pāḷi word for “restlessness” is *uddhacca*, which is described as a scattered mind and illustrated with analogy of ash flying wildly in the sky when a stone is thrown into the pile of ash. So, “restlessness” mainly refers to wandering minds or aimless thoughts. In this regard, Mahāsi Sayādaw once gave an account of a business woman. She took a retreat at the Mahāsi Center in Burma but went back home without making any progress in the practice. She said she could not concentrate at all on the meditative object because she was constantly thinking about trading cooking oil from Upper Burma to Lower Burma.

Because different objects impinge on our senses at random in every moment, there are different kinds of thoughts also taking place at random. When I saw, for instance, a wood-pecker pecking on a tree, it evoked the past memory of my days in elementary school learning about this kind of bird as a reading exercise. Having never seen a woodpecker before, I looked at its picture in the textbook and imagined what it would look like. I asked my older sisters and

father where the bird could be found. They had no idea, at all. All these details came back to my mind that, in turn, led me to the thought of one classmate whom I was in love with. This girl's eye was pierced with a stick by another classmate. With only one eye left, she was so embarrassed that she never came back to the school. Subsequently, I thought about where she would be now; how she would look at this time; how I could see her again. Thus, a sight of a woodpecker brought me back to my home town five decades ago. Such a wandering mind or aimless thoughts are called *uddhacca* which is normally translated as "restlessness." They come randomly, sometimes with delight and happiness, but most often with sorrow, regret and remorse.

Categorized under "restlessness" are such mental states as wandering mind, agitated mind, anxious mind, nervous mind, excited mind, emotional mind and so on. Unless we receive good training in mindfulness meditation, this kind of wandering mind may keep on going from a few minutes to an hour or more. What a waste of time! With a wandering mind, we cannot expect to make any progress in our practice. We need to be aware of it from five aspects: its appearance and disappearance, how it takes place, how it is removed, and how to prevent the removed hindrance from coming back.

## **Remorse**

"Remorse" here refers to a guilty conscience that is mainly related to mistakes we made or opportunities that we missed. So, the commentaries



define it as regret about evil deeds one has committed and good deeds one has failed to do.

To illustrate this point, there is a story in Dhammapada. It was about Temba-dāṭhika<sup>33</sup> who served as an executioner for years in the Māgadha Kingdom during the Buddha's time. When he became old, he retired as he was no longer strong enough to behead criminals in one strike as he used to do. On the first day of his retirement, he prepared a very special lunch for himself. When he was just ready to enjoy his special lunch, he saw Venerable Sāriputta standing for alms food at the gate. Impressed by the remarkable demeanor of Venerable Sāriputta, he offered the Venerable One his special food. After lunch, Venerable Sāriputta gave him a dhamma talk in appreciation of his generosity but he could not pay attention to that because he felt remorse about beheading so many people. Knowing that, Venerable Sāriputta decided to use a ploy on him (*vañjessāmi naṃ*) by asking him a very tactful question: "Was it by the king's order or on your own accord that you beheaded criminals?" This question made Temba-dathika feel like it was the king and not himself who was really guilty for killing. The Venerable One then continued his talk without waiting for the answer. Thus, Temba-dāṭhika was able to calm down and paid proper attention to the dhamma talk until he reached a certain level of spiritual knowledge called *anuloma-*

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<sup>33</sup> He was called Tamba-dāṭhika because he had brown beard.

*ñāṇa*<sup>34</sup>. Soon after the venerable One left, Temba-dathika was gored to death by a cow, but was reborn in a blissful realm called Tusitā.

Of course, we should learn lessons from our mistakes. However, it is disastrous to entertain remorse because what is done cannot be undone. The chance we missed can never be regained; therefore, we must move forward from where we are. Remorse just brings us misfortune and a woeful rebirth. If Tamba-dāṭhika had not overcome his remorse, he would definitely have been reborn in a woeful state let alone the attainment of certain spiritual status. So, remorse is a real hindrance to our spiritual progress. We need to be aware of it from five aspects: appearance, disappearance, how it takes place, how it is removed, how to prevent the removed hindrance from coming back.

## **How It Arises and How It Is Removed**

Regarding the appearance and increase of the restlessness-and-remorse, the Buddha said as follows:

*"O monks, it is a frequent application of unskillful attitudes to one's restlessness and remorse of mind, which forms the condition for the un-arisen restlessness-and-remorse to arise, and for the arisen restlessness-and-remorse to increase."*

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<sup>34</sup> Here, "*anuloma-ñāna*" is mentioned in terms of certain level of deeper understanding of the dhamma, but not the *anuloma-ñāna* that precedes the *magga* enlightenment.

Here, "unskillful attitude to the restlessness and remorse" means to entertain the unhealthy mental state, restlessness-and-remorse, instead of being aware of it from the five aspects. So, to overcome this hindrance the Buddha said thus:

*"O monks, it is the frequent application of a skillful attitude to the tranquil mind that forms the condition for the un-arisen restlessness-and-remorse not to arise, and for the arisen restlessness-and-remorse to be removed."*

Here, "a skillful attitude towards the tranquil mind" means the appreciation of a tranquil mind that is developed through strong concentration or through mindfulness of restlessness-and-remorse. In addition, the commentary mentions six kinds of exercises that can help us to overcome restlessness-and-remorse, especially to get rid of remorse concerning a monastic offence: by an accumulation of dhamma knowledge, dhamma discussions, a thorough study of monastic codes, association with knowledgeable seniors, association with good friends and having a suitable conversation.

In the case of mindfulness practice, however, we are not to actively oppose a hindrance, but to recognize it clearly together with conditions related to its presence or absence. That is why, Mahasi Sayadaw said, "the application of a skillful attitude to the tranquil mind" means to be mindful of restlessness-and-remorse because the mind naturally becomes tranquil every moment a hindrance is

removed through mindfulness. Moreover, if we can be mindful of a hindrance while it is present in us, we can spontaneously become aware of it from five aspects: its appearance, disappearance, how it takes place, how it is removed, how the removed hindrance is prevented from coming back. So, when the restlessness-and-remorse is present in us, all we should do is to note it with full awareness as "restless, restless, restless..." or "remorse, remorse, remorse..." in technical terms, or just "wandering, wandering, wandering...", "thinking, thinking, thinking..." in every day language.

## **DOUBT**

The Pāḷi word for "doubt" is *vicikicchā*, which consists of two words *vici* (analyzing) and *kicchā* (to dither or waver). If we analyze something beyond our knowledge, we are most likely to dither or waver. For example, if we were to try and analyze the Theory of Relativity, we would only become confused, unless we had a sufficient knowledge of physics. As a hindrance to spiritual progress, however, "doubt" does not refer to such secular confusion but to the confusion between right and wrong, and between absolute truth and conventional truth. Suppose, for instance, we find selfish and aggressive people become more successful than those who are goodhearted. Then, we may analyze the reason and end up getting confused between wholesome and unwholesome; getting skeptical about the law of kamma and rebirth which cannot be explained in scientific terms.

Regarding the absolute truth, even though we know we are going to die one day, we always feel as

if we were someone unique and ageless. Therefore, when we are taught there is no "I" but only mental and physical phenomena changing every moment, we get confused between what we believe and what we are taught. Subsequently, we may also feel skeptical about the Buddha's teaching, meditation practice and its benefit, the meditation teacher and his method, our capability and potentiality, and so on. Such skepticism or confusion are called "*vicikicchā*" which is normally translated as doubt.

When we get confused and indecisive, we get stuck and cannot move forward. As a consequence, we may not be able to act in time to prevent our coming to harm. In this sense, we are compared in the commentary with someone who gets captured and killed by the enemy, because he or she stops at a crossroad not knowing which way to turn. This is why the Buddha once said: "I cannot help anyone if he or she is really skeptical about dhamma." In order to withstand such a negative impact of doubt and to gain a breakthrough in the Noble Path, it is of prime importance to be aware comprehensively of this kind of hindrance. That is why the Buddha instructed us thus:

*"If doubt is present in him, he knows 'there is doubt in me;' if doubt is not present in him, he knows 'there is no doubt in me;' and he knows how un-arisen doubt can arise, how arisen doubt can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed doubt can be prevented."*

According to the above passage, there are five aspects in which we need to be aware of the doubt or confusion:

1. Presence of doubt
2. Absence of doubt
3. How (why) the un-arisen doubt arises
4. How the arisen doubt is removed
5. How a future arising of the doubt can be prevented

## **How It Arises and How It Is Removed**

Regarding the appearance and increase of the doubt, the Buddha said as follows:

*"O monks, it is a frequent application of an unskillful attitude to dubious facts (vicikicchā-ṭhāniya), which forms the condition for the un-arisen doubt to arise and for the arisen doubt to increase."*

Here, "unskillful attitude to the dubious facts" means misjudging or misinterpreting the facts. It also refers to mistaking the doubt for reasoning power and entertaining it instead of being aware of it from the five aspects.

So, to overcome this hindrance the Buddha gave us the following advice:

*"O monks, it is a frequent application of a skillful attitude to (distinction between facts) moral and immoral, wholesome and unwholesome, worthy to practice and unworthy to practice, inferior and superior, black and white which forms the condition for the un-arisen doubt not to arise, and for the arisen doubt to get removed."*

In addition to “a skillful attitude to the distinction between facts” as mentioned above, the commentary mentions six kinds of exercises that can help us overcome the doubt: to accumulate dhamma knowledge, to have dhamma discussions, to study monastic codes thoroughly, to train in having correct conclusion, to associate with good friends, and to have a suitable conversation.

However, as mentioned before, in the case of mindfulness practice, we are not to actively oppose the doubt but to recognize it clearly together with conditions related to its presence or absence. That is why Mahasi Sayadaw said, “the application of a skillful attitude to the distinction between the facts” means to be mindful of the doubt when we feel skeptical about dhamma. Mindfulness and concentration will help us to distinguish between right and wrong, moral and immoral. Moreover, if we can be mindful of doubt while it is present in us, we can spontaneously become aware of it from the five aspects: its appearance, disappearance, how it takes place, how it is removed, how the removed doubt is prevented from coming back. So, when the doubt is present in us, all we should do is to note it with full awareness as “doubt, doubt, doubt...” or “confusion, confusion, confusion...” accordingly.

## **Two Sets of Similes**

There are two sets of similes in the discourses that illustrate the characteristics and effects of hindrances. The first set is concerned with the presence of each

hindrance, and the second set with their absence. According to the first set of similes, the effect of each hindrance is illustrated by the unclear image of one's face reflected on the surface of the water in a bowl. Sensual desire is compared to water mixed with dye; aversion to water heated to a boil; sloth-and-torpor to water covered with algae; restlessness-and-remorse to water stirred by wind; and doubt to water dark and muddy.

The absence of the hindrances is illustrated by the second set of similes. According to this set, the absence of sensual desire is likened to being relieved from debt; the absence of aversion to recovering from a physical illness; the absence of sloth-and-torpor to being released from prison; the absence of restlessness-and-remorse to being liberated from slavery; and the absence of doubt to crossing a dangerous desert safely. This second set also depicts by inference the sensual desire as being heavily in debt; aversion as having illness; sloth-and-torpor as being imprisoned; restlessness-and-remorse as being enslaved; and doubt as missing one's way in the middle of a dangerous desert.

## **Culmination**

The contemplation of hindrances, like the previous contemplations, is culminated in seeing the arising and passing away of the hindrances in ourselves (empirically) and in others (inferentially). This contemplation can directly lead to establishment of mindfulness, vipassana insights, and *magga-phala* enlightenment, the liberation from the cycle of suffering. So, the Buddha said as follows:



- *"In this way, in regards to dhammas, he abides contemplating dhammas internally, or he abides contemplating dhammas externally, or he abides contemplating dhammas both internally and externally.*
- *He abides contemplating the nature of arising in dhammas, or he abides contemplating the nature of the passing away in dhammas, or he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in dhammas.*
- *Mindfulness that "there are dhammas" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness.*
- *And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world.*
- *That is how in regards to dhammas, he abides contemplating dhammas in terms of the five hindrances."*

## **CONTEMPLATION OF FIVE AGGREGATES OF CLINGING**

*"Again, monks, he abides contemplating dhammas in dhammas in terms of the five aggregates of clinging. And, how does he abide contemplating the dhammas in dhammas in terms of the five aggregates of clinging?"*

*Here, he knows,*

- *"Such is material form, such its arising, such its passing away;*
- *Such is feeling, such its arising, such its passing away;*

- *Such is cognition, such its arising, such its passing away;*
- *Such are volitions, such their arising, such their passing away;*
- *Such is consciousness, such its arising, such its passing away."*

## **The Five Aggregates of Clinging**

The contemplation of five aggregates is the second subsection on the contemplation of dhamma. In many discourses, the Buddha described a living being in terms of five aggregates: body, feeling, recognition, volition and consciousness. Nowadays, in the world there are more than six billion people, but no one is the same as anyone else from the perspective of: color, race, height, weight, education, social status, personality, mentality, potentiality, etc. No matter how different each person is in these conceptual terms, in the ultimate sense, we are all composed only of these five aggregates. In other words, there are only five aggregates, but neither an "I" nor an "other." So, the Buddha instructed us to be aware of the five aggregates as mentioned in the above passage.

The Buddha expounded mind and body in terms of five aggregates by classifying the mind into four categories: feeling, perception, volition and consciousness. We inherently cling to them in terms of illusion and attachment and, therefore, they are distinctively called "aggregates of clinging" (*upādāna-kkhandhā*). This excludes nibbāna and the *magga-phala* enlightenment, which we cannot experience

through our normal senses. Moreover, "aggregate" here does not mean the group of many phenomena, but each and every single phenomenon, physical or mental, is called an "aggregate" to include it in all forms such as present, past and future, one's own and others', gross and subtle, inferior and superior, near and far. So, the "five aggregates of clinging" is what we really are. We may think we are someone smart, good-looking, and educated. But, that is only "who we think we are." As a matter of fact, "what we really are" is just the five aggregates of clinging, nothing else. In order to understand ourselves, we need to understand these aggregates.

1. **Material Form:** The Pāli word for "material form" is *rūpa*, which is literally defined as something tangible and affected (*ruppati*) by external conditions, such as cold and heat, hunger and thirst, mosquitoes and so on. Although tangible, the body is not something solid and ageless. As mentioned often before, it can be sub-divided repeatedly until there is nothing solid, but there remains only physical elements such as four fundamental elements, five senses plus five sense-objects and so on. The body is a tangible base for the senses through which we experience the world. Therefore, we identify the body as "I," and become attached to it. We even enjoy our own image reflected on a mirror, in photos or on paper, not to mention our actual bodies. How deluded we can be! By following the instructions given in the contemplation of body in the previous sections, we can discern the

real physical phenomena (*rūpa*). Thus, we will come to know "*such is material form.*" Subsequently, we will also become aware of their arising and passing away, thus, reducing the illusory sense of "I" to an absolute minimum. This is how we come to know "*such is its arising and such is its passing away.*"

2. **Feelings:** The standard presentation in the discourses relates feeling to the sense organs, such as the feeling generated by eye-contact (*cakkhu-samphassajā vedanā*), the feeling generated by ear-contact (*sota-samphassajā vedanā*), and so on. When, for instance, we see someone and feel happy, we think it is I who is happy; it is I who feels pleasant or unpleasant. This is the illusion that provokes and reinforces the attachment to oneself and someone else. Thus, feelings are the main source of the illusory sense of "I" and attachment. No wonder we are always ready to spend our time, energy and money to experience happy and pleasant feelings, and to avoid unhappy and unpleasant feelings. Actually, feeling is just feeling; it takes place when certain conditions are met; it represents nobody in particular. So, we should try our best to be aware of the true characteristic of the feeling with the help of our mindfulness. How to develop the awareness of feeling should be understood as mentioned in the second section, the contemplation of feeling (*vedanānupassanā*). The brief explanation is: When we feel happy or unhappy, pleasant,

unpleasant, or neutral, we should be aware of them while they are present. Then, we will become aware of them in terms of their characteristics and conditionality. This is how we “*know such is feeling.*” If we see them appearing, then we will spontaneously see them disappearing. This is how we “*know such is its arising and such is its passing away.*”

3. **Cognitions:** The Pāḷi term for cognition is *saññā* which literally means to know (an object) well. According to the commentary and Abhidhamma, “knowing well” here means cognizing and recognizing an object from distinctive aspects, such as its color, shape, form, dimension, and so on. By *saññā*, therefore, we are likely to mistake one object for another if it changes in color, shape, etc. So, *saññā* is different from wisdom or realization (*paññā*). For example, two domestic roosters do not fight if they have been raised together. So, people dye the face of one rooster and let the other fight with it. Thus, knowing something by *saññā* is not always right, because it is just cognizing or recognizing something from conceptual aspects but not from absolute aspects. In brief, it is *saññā* that cognizes or recognizes who a person is or what an object is. But we think it is “I” who cognizes or recognizes someone or something. Thus, *saññā* is the source of the illusory sense of “I” and attachment. So, we are instructed by the Buddha to be aware of *saññā* as soon as it comes to be present, so

that we can realize its characteristic and conditionality, how it appears and how it disappears. Thus, we "*know such is cognition,*" and "*such is its arising, such is its passing away.*"

4. **Volitions:** The fourth aggregate is composed of volitions. The Pāḷi word for "volition" is "*sarikhāra,*" which literally means acting or activating, referring to the intention (*cetanā*) that precedes all of our activities. In ancient India, the soul is described as the one who acts, who feels, who owns, who exists forever and who lives on its own accord. The Buddha denied the existence of such a magic soul, and instead described how there is no soul, but only volition or intention that precede one's actions according to the law of cause and effect. In harmony with Abhidhamma, this aggregate is comprised of fifty mental factors (*cetasika*), such as greed, anger, hatred, jealousy, conceit, etc., on the unwholesome side, and unselfishness, generosity, loving kindness, compassion, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom, etc., on the wholesome side. So, it is greed or selfishness that underlies unwholesome acts like stealing, cheating, sexual misconduct; it is anger or hatred that generates actions like killing, hurting, insulting, using harsh words, and so on; it is conceit that causes actions like discrimination, arrogance or insulting behaviors, and so on. On the other hand, it is unselfishness and compassion that stimulate the act of generosity, morality and so

on; it is mindfulness, concentration and understanding that lead to one's valuable actions like the practice of meditation. In this sense, *sarikhāra* refers to fifty mental states that represent our actions, good or bad.

So, there is nothing but these mental states that perform actions, good or bad. If we think it is I who is acting, that is simply an illusion causing us to become attached to these mental states and their objects. Here, the Buddha instructed us to be aware of them when they come to be present. If we can be aware of them while they are still present, we will see them in terms of their characteristics, conditionality, how they appear and how they disappear. Thus, we "*know such is volition; such is its arising and such is its passing away.*"

5. **Consciousness:** The fifth aggregate is composed of eighty-nine kinds of consciousness. In the context of mindfulness meditation, however, we take only eighty-one mundane kinds of consciousness, but not supra-mundane kinds<sup>35</sup>. The Pāḷi term for "consciousness" is *viññāṇa* which literally means "knowing (an object) remarkably"<sup>36</sup> referring to being

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<sup>35</sup> According to *Abhidhamma*, there are eighty-nine kinds of consciousness. Among them, four *magga*'s and four *phala*'s are supra-mundane, and the remaining eighty-one are mundane.

<sup>36</sup> **Three Kinds of "Knowing":** So, there are three mental factors that are similar in terms of knowing: *saññā*, *viññāṇa* and *paññā*. To know by *saññā* is to cognize or to recognize an object from its noticeable aspects. This knowing is very superficial and is prone to

conscious of the outer world (or sense-objects). So, they are classified into six kinds corresponding to the six senses: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, and mind-consciousness. Here, "mind-consciousness" refers to all kinds of consciousness, except for the first five. It is *viññāṇa* that is conscious of visible objects, sounds, smell, and so on, but, again, there is no "I" involved. So, according to the Buddha's teaching, seeing is eye-consciousness, but there is nobody who sees. The same is true with hearing, etc. If we think it is "I" who see, hear, and so on. That is simply an illusion, which causes or reinforces the attachment to consciousness and its corresponding sense-objects.

Regarding how to develop an awareness of the aggregate of consciousness, we should refer to the third section of this discourse, the contemplation of mind, where the Buddha described sixteen kinds of consciousness, such as

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*false impression. To know by viññāṇa is to experience the sense-object. To know by paññā is to know an object comprehensively. The distinction between them is depicted with analogy by the Abhidhamma and the commentary on Mahā-vedalla Sutta Mūlapaṇṇāsa. When a baby sees a gold coin, he just knows it as something bright but not what it really is; a villager just knows what it is, but not what quality it is and what value it is; a gold smith knows comprehensively what it is, what quality it is and what value it is. These three similes are respectively compared to saññā, viññāṇa, and paññā.*



desire-associated mind, aversion-associated mind, and so on. So, we should be aware of them by noting them accordingly, "desire-associated mind, desire-associated mind..." or "desire, desire..." and so on. If we can be aware of them while they are still present, we will see them in terms of their characteristics, conditionality, how they appear and how they disappear. Thus, we "*know such is consciousness,*" and "*such is its arising, such is its passing away.*"

The Buddha described the insubstantial nature of the five aggregates with a set of similes when he was with his monks on the banks of the Ganges River near Ayujjhā village, Bārāṇasī City. Pointing to the bubbles on the surface of the river, the Buddha said to the monks, "Look at those pieces of bubble on the surface of the river. They are fragile and insubstantial. So are the five aggregates, i.e., body, feelings, perception, mental formation and consciousness." Then, the Buddha made an analogy with each aggregate:

Body (is) effervescent-like;  
Feelings bubble-like;  
Perception mirage-like;  
Mental formations banana-stem-like;  
Consciousness illusion-like. (Saṃyutta-2, 116)

Describing the insubstantiality of the five aggregates, the Buddha highlighted the fact that we are nothing but five aggregates that are conditioned and fragile like a bubble, etc. Indeed, it does not mean that we cannot do anything to improve our quality of life and

only act like a robot responding to the requirements of physical body or brain. During the Buddha's time, there were two well-known materialists, Ajita-kesa-kambala and Pakudha Kaccāyana (Di-1, 56). According to the former, there is no such thing as good and evil deeds, since a human being is just a combination of the four elements, nothing else. According to the latter, human beings are made of nothing other than seven immutable elements and, therefore, even cutting off someone's head with a sword should not be considered killing but should be reckoned only as putting the blade between these seven elements. From their perspective, human effort appears to be useless and ethical responsibility also seems to be senseless. Of course, our minds are influenced by the body and brain in several ways. But, if the brain has plasticity and can recoil in response to our thoughts and activities, it is reasonable to assume that we can do something to improve our quality of life, and that we are responsible for our actions and thoughts. Moreover, if rebirth and the memory of one's past life are acceptable concepts, then our mind can be considered something beyond the physical brain. So, the Buddha accepted neither materialism nor a permanent and inherently independent soul, but he affirmed kammic consequences and ethical responsibility, although we are nothing but just five aggregates.

As mentioned in the third section on "the contemplation of mind," by cultivating wholesome mindsets or by developing concentration and vipassana insights, we can promote our mental states from unwholesome to wholesome, from unhappy to happy. Thus, we can improve the quality of life. But, ultimately, life ends in death, no matter how wealthy

and educated we may be. So, we take an endless journey from womb to tomb and from tomb to womb. Such an endless cycle of births and deaths is nothing but distress (*dukkha*), even though we can do wholesome things to improve the quality of life to some extent. That is why the Buddha instructed us to develop mindfulness, so that we can discern the five aggregates and become disenchanted with them until we are liberated from the endless cycle of births and deaths.

## **Culmination**

The contemplation of five aggregates of clinging, like the previous contemplations, is culminated in seeing the arising and passing away of the mental and physical phenomena in us (empirically) and in others (inferentially). This contemplation can directly lead to establishment of mindfulness, vipassana insights and *magga-phala* enlightenment, the liberation from the cycle of suffering. So, the Buddha said as follows:

- *"In this way, in regards to dhammas, he abides contemplating dhammas internally, or he abides contemplating dhammas externally, or he abides contemplating dhammas both internally and externally.*
- *He abides contemplating the nature of arising in dhammas, or he abides contemplating the nature of the passing away in dhammas, or he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in dhammas.*

- *Mindfulness that 'there are dhammas' is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness.*
- *And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world.*
- *That is how in regards to dhammas he abides contemplating dhammas in terms of the five aggregates of clinging."*

## **CONTEMPLATION OF SIX SENSE-SOURCES<sup>37</sup>**

*"Again, monks, he abides contemplating dhammas in dhammas in terms of the six internal and external sense-sources. And how does he abide contemplating dhammas in dhammas in terms of the six internal and external sense-sources?"*

- *"Here, he knows the eye, he knows forms, and he knows the fetter that arises dependent on both; and he also knows how an un-arisen fetter can arise, how an arisen fetter can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed fetter can be prevented."*

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<sup>37</sup> *The Pāli term āyatana is normally translated as "sense-base" or "sense-sphere." However, both translations confuse āyatana with two other Abhidhamma terms, vatthu and bhūmi, which are respectively translated as "base" and "sphere." According to Pāli dictionaries, the word āyatana has a variety of meanings including a base, a sphere, a cause, a source, a shrine room, a temple, and so on. Among them, the most preferable in this context is "origin" or "source" according to its root (ā + yata + na).*

- *"Here, he knows the ear, he knows sounds, and he knows the fetter that arises dependent on both; and he also knows how an un-arisen fetter can arise, how an arisen fetter can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed fetter can be prevented."*
- *"Here, he knows the nose, he knows odor, and he knows the fetter that arises dependent on both; and he also knows how an un-arisen fetter can arise, how an arisen fetter can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed fetter can be prevented."*
- *"Here, he knows the tongue, he knows flavors, and he knows the fetter that arises dependent on both; and he also knows how an un-arisen fetter can arise, how an arisen fetter can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed fetter can be prevented."*
- *"Here, he knows the body, he knows tangibles, and he knows the fetter that arises dependent on both; and he also knows how an un-arisen fetter can arise, how an arisen fetter can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed fetter can be prevented."*
- *"Here, he knows the mind, he knows mind-objects, and he knows the fetter that arises dependent on both; and he also knows how an un-arisen fetter can arise, how an arisen fetter can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed fetter can be prevented."*

In the previous section, we are described in terms of the five aggregates. In this section, we are described in terms of the relationship between our

senses and the sense-objects. Compared to the life-span of the universe, we are exactly like short-lived seasonal bugs. Experiencing the world through our senses continuously, however, we feel as if we were someone ageless and immortal. This is simply an illusion under which we find ourselves living out our short lives. Also, this is how we become attached to what we think we are and what satisfies our senses. In this way, illusion leads to attachment and both together prolong the endless journey of womb-to-tomb and tomb-to-womb. Thus, we are kept in bondage via the painful round of births and deaths (*samsāra*). If we realize the truth about our senses and objects as they really are, we will no longer be affected by any object, lovable or despicable; we will no longer continue to react to the outer world by means of desire and discontent. In other words, we are liberated from this painful bondage. So, it is very important to be aware of senses and their corresponding objects in terms of their true nature. For this purpose, the Buddha gave us the instructions as mentioned in the above passage.

### **Six Internal and Six External Sense-sources**

According to the passage, the six senses and six sense-objects are respectively known as "Six Internal Sense-sources (*ajjhattikāyatana*)" and "Six External Sense-sources (*bahirāyatana*)."  
Our senses and their corresponding sense-objects go in pairs as follows:

1. Eye and visible forms
2. Ear and sounds
3. Nose and odors

4. Tongue and flavors
5. Body and tangibles
6. Mind and mind-objects

These six pairs are called sense-sources, because the consciousness or our experience of the objects arises out of them. In the wake of such sensual experience, there arise mental defilements which keep us in the bondage of *samsāra* and are called "fetters" (*samyojana*). Here, "eye" means eye-sensitivity but not a tangible eyeball. In our eyes, there are certain kinds of sensitive physical phenomena that receive a visible object and are called "eye-sensitivity" in a technical term or "eye" in daily language. Similarly, "ear" means ear-sensitivity, but not a tangible ear. In our ears (eardrums), there are certain kinds of sensitive physical phenomena that receive a sound and are called ear-sensitivity or "ear." The same is true with the remaining internal sense-sources, such as nose, tongue and body. As for the external sense-sources, there are six sense-objects: visible form, sound, smell, taste, touch<sup>38</sup> and dhamma (objects of mind).

In this regard, there are many Pāḷi discourses that describe how six kinds of consciousness (*viññāṇa*) arise. They arise out of the meeting between six internal senses and six external sense-sources thus:

*"Depending on eye (internal source) and sights (external source) , there arises eye-consciousness (consciousness),"* and so on.

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<sup>38</sup> *Through a touch, we can experience three kinds of phenomena: hardness or softness (earth element), warmth or cold (fire element) and tension, tightness or pressure (wind element). So, "touch" refers to these three elements collectively.*

Regarding the last set, the Buddha said thus:

*"Depending on the mind (internal source) and dhammas (external source), there arises mind-consciousness (consciousness)."*

Given these discourses, it is very obvious that the internal sense-sources are sense-doors (*dvāra*) and external sense-sources are sense-objects (*ārammaṇa*). Regarding the last pair, therefore, "mind" should be taken as "mind-door" and "dhamma" as dhamma-object in the same way as the first five pairs. Therefore, the mind-source (*manāyatana*) and "mind-door" (*mano-dvāra*) are the same, both referring to sub-consciousness (literally known as life-continuum, *bhavaṅga*), on which dhamma-objects (*dhammāyatana*) impinge. And, dhamma-object can be any kind of phenomena that can be taken by mind only, but not by the first five senses: all the physical phenomena except the first five objects, all kinds of mind and mental factors, all kinds of conceptual objects and nibbāna. Thus, eighteen elements (six sets) are made by six sense-doors, six sense-objects and six consciousnesses as follows:

**Door**

**Object**  
**Consciousness**<sup>39</sup>

Eyes

forms  
eye-consciousness

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<sup>39</sup> *The first six are known by three names each: source (āyatana), element (dhātu), door (dvāra); the second six by three names each: source, element, object; the last six just by one name, element (and also manāyatana in accordance with Abhidhamma).*



|         |                                 |
|---------|---------------------------------|
| Ears    | sounds<br>ear-consciousness     |
| Noses   | smell<br>nose-consciousness     |
| Tongues | flavors<br>tongue-consciousness |
| Bodies  | tangibles<br>body-consciousness |
| Minds   | Dhammas<br>mind-consciousness   |

### **To Be Aware; Not to React**

The Buddha vividly instructs us to be aware of senses, sense-objects and their subsequent fetters. If we are aware of seeing when we see, for instance, we will come to be aware of eye or visible objects or their subsequent fetters. However, to prevent the fetters from arising, we are not instructed to shut our eyes or to cut off the beautiful roses in front of our houses. At the same time, we are not encouraged to give vent to desire or discontent, either. In a jātaka tale, a deva accused a monk of stealing just because he as a monk enjoyed the fragrant smell of water lilies. However, shutting our noses or cutting the fragrant lilies off is considered an extreme and is rejected by the Buddha. In one vinaya case, a monk even cut his male organ to oppress his sexual desire. Then, the Buddha complained thus: "Oh monks, while one thing (fetter) should be cut, the stupid man cut the other." In the Indriya-bhāvanā Sutta, the Buddha said to a Brahmin that, if simply avoiding seeing and hearing were in itself conducive to realization, then

blind and deaf people would be accomplished practitioners.

So, we are vividly instructed to follow the middle path. That is to be aware of senses, sense-objects and their subsequent mental defilements (fetters) without indulging in, cutting off or closing any of our senses or sense-objects.

## Ten Kinds of Fetters

Except for the time we fall asleep, we are experiencing one object after another continuously. It is impossible to only see, hear, smell, taste and touch what is wished for, let alone to have thoughts only when and how we would like to have them. Without mindfulness, we are totally ignorant of our senses, objects and their impacts. As a result, we often react to them by unskillful means rather than skillful ones. So, when we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, or think of an object, unless we are mindful, we are most likely to be:

1. Lustful if the object is someone attractive (*kāmarāga*)
2. Averse if the object is someone loathsome or displeasing to us (*paṭigha*)
3. Conceited if the object is someone to compare with us (*māna*)
4. Deluded if the object is to be identified as "I" or someone lovable or loathsome (*diṭṭhi*)
5. Skeptic if the object is to confuse us regarding whether it is wholesome or unwholesome, right or wrong, worthwhile or worthless (*vicikicchā*)

6. Concerned with rites and rituals if the object is related to them, like praying to a God, and so on. In ancient India, there are many kinds of rights and rituals, such as bathing in the Ganges river to wash one's offenses away, sacrificing animals to God to be blessed and protected, torturing one's own body or behaving like a dog or a cow to pay off one's kammic debts, and so on (*sīlabbata-parāmāsa*)
7. Attached to eternal existence if the object is something or someone we would like to possess not only in the present life but also in the lives to come (*bhava-rāga*)
8. Jealous if the object is someone who is more successful, popular or prosperous than we are (*issā*)
9. Unhappy if the object is someone who is as successful, popular or prosperous as we are (*macchariya*)
10. Ignorant if the object is unknown to us in an ultimate sense (*appatipatti avijjā*) or known in an illusory sense (*micchā-patipatti avijjā*)

Thus, we react to the sense-objects by means of ten kinds of unwholesome mental states that are called "fetters," because they bind or tie us to the cycle of birth and death. Motivated by them, we may commit theft, murder or rape and so on leading to woeful rebirths. Thus, like walking in the dark or getting no light shed on the facts, we take a wrong and dangerous path and cannot find our way out from the painful rounds of birth and death. This current life is not the only existence. If there is a present life, there must be past and future lives, also.

There is an essential relationship between today and tomorrow, this month and next month, this year and next year, this life and next life. As long as we cannot cut these fetters of ten kinds of unwholesome mental states, we have no means to find the way out of this painful and endless journey of birth and death (*sarṁsāra*).

### **Fettered by Attachment**

During the Buddha's time, a monk received a brand-new robe of good quality. Unfortunately, he passed away that very evening. When the monks were about to share his belongings among their fellow monks in accordance with monastic rules, Buddha asked them to postpone it for another week, because he heard by his divine ear a louse on that very robe crying for help thus: "Please help me! Help me! The greedy monks are trying to steal my robe."

Obviously, the monk was reborn as a louse just because of his attachment to the robe. After a week, when the louse died, the monks were allowed to share the robes. This story shows the extent that we can be fettered by the attachments.

About fifty-seven years ago, a devotee had a beautiful monastery built for a monk on Zagaing Hill, Upper Burma. When construction was almost completed, the monk passed away. So, the second senior monk took over that newly built monastery.

Every night for a few months afterward, monks in the monastery heard someone doing construction work even though nobody was really there. Apparently, the late abbot was reborn as a ghost in that very building as a result of his attachment to it. Sometimes, we can hear of similar events in the U.S. or Europe. These two stories indicate how we can be fettered or bound to saṃsāra by attachment to objects.

### **Fettered by Aversion and Jealousy**

To illustrate how we can be fettered by the aversion and jealousy, there is a Dhamma-pada story. Once, there lived a married woman who was barren. She was afraid that unless her husband and parent-in-law would get a baby who could inherit their name and wealth, she would be mistreated by them. So, she herself arranged for her husband to marry another woman. But, as soon as she knew the second wife was pregnant, she gave the second wife food mixed with drugs causing her to have miscarriage. On her third pregnancy, the second wife kept it to herself without informing the barren wife. But when the latter came to know about it, she again caused an abortion. Eventually, the second wife died in childbirth. Before her death, the poor woman was filled with hatred and vowed vengeance on the barren wife and her future offspring. Thus, the hatred started.

Among their following existences, the two were reborn as hen and a cat; a doe and a leopardess; and finally as the daughter of a nobleman in Sāvatti and an ogress. One day, the ogress (Kāḷa-yakkhinī) was in hot pursuit of the noble man's daughter and her baby. Then, the lady fled to the Buddha and placed her son at his feet for protection. Fortunately, their long and painful journey of revenge was finally settled under the compassionate and wise teaching of the Buddha. This story highlights how the aversion and jealousy can bind us to the sorrowful round of rebirths.

### **How to Practice**

Because we are caught in this painful circle of births and death, we are still liable to make terrible mistakes for which we will have to pay a painful price now or in the future. In order to be liberated from this bondage, we have to break the fetters of mental defilements that arise whenever we react to sense-objects in an unskillful manner. As mentioned before, we are not instructed to walk away from the sense-objects or to violently cut them off, but to be mindful of them when we encounter them.

In this section, therefore, the Buddha instructed us as follows:

*Here, he knows the eye, he knows forms, and he knows the fetter that arises dependent on both; and he also knows how an un-arisen*

*fetter can arise, how an arisen fetter can be removed, and how a future arising of the removed fetter can be prevented."*

According to this passage, there are six factors for us to know when we react to a sense-object:

1. Sense-organ
2. Sense-object
3. Fetters
4. How the un-arisen fetters can arise
5. How the arisen fetters can be removed
6. How a future arising of the removed fetter can be prevented

If we note seeing as "seeing, seeing..." for instance, we can become aware of either seeing consciousness or the visible object or our eyes (or eyesight). Then, we can spontaneously become aware of the fetters if they arise. If we are aware of the fetters while they are still present, we can spontaneously see them arising and passing away, how they arise and how they disappear, and how they get removed and how they are prevented from arising again in the future. The same is true with the remaining senses. So, if we note seeing as "seeing, seeing..." and hearing as "hearing, hearing..." and so on, then we will become aware of six factors, such as sense-organs, sense-objects, fetters, and so on, as the saying goes, "one stone hit two (six in this context) birds."

## Culmination

Like the previous contemplations, the contemplation of six internal and six external sense-sources is culminated in seeing the arising and passing away of the mental and physical phenomena in us (empirically) and in others (inferentially). This contemplation can directly lead to establishment of mindfulness and vipassana insights up to *maggaphala* enlightenment, the liberation from the cycle of suffering. So, the Buddha said as follows:

- *In this way, in regards to dhammas he abides contemplating dhammas internally, or he abides contemplating dhammas externally, or he abides contemplating dhammas both internally and externally.*
- *He abides contemplating the nature of arising in dhammas, or he abides contemplating the nature of the passing away in dhammas, or he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in dhammas.*
- *Mindfulness that "there are dhammas" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness.*
- *And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world.*
- *That is how, in regard to dhammas, he abides contemplating dhammas in terms of the six internal and external sense-sources.*



## The Additional Information

### The Story of Bāhiya

Regarding the awareness of senses, the Bāhiya Sutta is very remarkable. It is very brief but so profound that it is a kind of brain-storming topic for the Buddhist scholars today. Before the sermon itself is mentioned, I would like to recount the story of Bāhiya, who became fully enlightened by this sermon.

Bāhiya was a sailor. One day, his ship was destroyed while out on the ocean. Fortunately, he managed to hold onto a plank and swim to the port known as Suppāraka<sup>40</sup>. However, he came to the shore without any clothes on and, being naked, he had to hide among the bushes. Later, he was able to weave leaves and sticks around his waist in order to cover up the lower part of his body. Hence, he was later known as Bāhiya Dārucīriya. His strange appearance made him look somewhat like a self-denial practitioner, which was impressive to the people of those days. So, the people who saw him thought that he was someone holy, pure and so innocent that he was comfortable to be seen half naked. Thus, this false impression of his appearance brought him great fame and gains. Later, he deluded himself by thinking he really was someone holy. Fortunately, a deva, who was a friend of his in the previous life, came down and said: "You are neither a holy person nor are you on a Holy Path. In Sāvatti

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<sup>40</sup> *The historians today believe the Suppāraka port to have been somewhere around Bombay (Mumbai).*

city, there lives a real holy person known as the Buddha. Go and see him there right away.” Then, Bāhiya rushed all the way to Sāvatti about one thousand kilometers away from Suppāraka Port.

When he arrived at the monastery, Buddha had gone for alms in the city. Then, Bāhiya rushed out again into the city and met the Buddha on his alms round. On the roadside in the city, he humbly requested Buddha to give him a brief talk on how to be liberated. “Bāhiya, it is not the right time,” said the Buddha purposely rejecting his request. This is because the Buddha knew that Bāhiya was so excited to meet the Buddha and so enthusiastic to listen to the talk that he would not be able to pay proper attention if the talk was given at that time.

Although his request was rejected three times, he still insisted: “Sir, I humbly request you once again to give me a brief talk right now because nobody can guarantee that you or I will be alive tomorrow.” In the meantime, he felt less excited and calmed down enough to pay proper attention to a talk. Only then, did the Buddha give a brief sermon as follows.  
(*Udāna Pāli-85*)

*Tasmātiha te, Bāhiya, evaṃ sikkhitabbarū.  
ditṭhe ditṭha-mattarū bhavaissati; sute suta-  
mattarū bhavissati; mute muta-mattarū  
bhavissati; viññāte viññāta-mattarū bhavissati.*

This Pāli passage can be translated in three ways<sup>41</sup> as follows:

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<sup>41</sup> According to Pāli grammar, these sentences as mentioned above can be translated in several ways because:

"So, Bāhiya, you should practice this way:

- On seeing (*diṭṭhe*), it would be (*bhavissati*) just seeing (*diṭṭha-mattarṃ*).
- Whatever is seen (*diṭṭhe*), it would be (*bhavissati*) for that seeing moment (*diṭṭha-mattarṃ*).
- Whatever is seen (*diṭṭhe*), let it be (*bhavissati*) just as it is or let it go (*diṭṭha-mattarṃ*)."

**Note:** The same is true with the remaining senses: hearing, experiencing (of smell, taste and touch) and perceiving.

### Translation-1

"*On seeing, there would be just seeing.*" This means that, when seeing occurs, there is just seeing but no one sees. Seeing is just a seeing consciousness which newly arises when certain

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- ***Diṭṭhe*** is a verb participle, and its suffix "e" is equivalent to "on/when." So, it can be translated as "on seeing" in an active sense, or "on being seen" or "whatever is seen" in a passive sense. The same is true with *sute*, *mute*, and *viññāte*.
  - ***Diṭṭha-mattarṃ*** is a compound noun. Its second part "*mattarṃ*" means "moment" and its suffix "ṃ" is equivalent to "for." So, *diṭṭha-mattarṃ* means "for the moment of seeing." And "*mattarṃ*" also means "just" or "just as;" so, it can be translated "just seeing" or "just as it is." The same is true with *suta-mattarṃ*, *muta-mattarṃ*, and *viññāta-mattarṃ*.
  - ***Bhavissati*** is the verb that can be translated as "there would be," "that would be" or "let it be'."

conditions are met. In other words, when a visible object impinges on our eyes and our attention is drawn to that very object, seeing consciousness occurs. When these conditions are met, nobody can stop seeing from arising. Without these conditions, nobody can create the seeing. So, seeing is a conditioned impersonal phenomenon that involves nobody. If we think that it is "I" who is seeing or seeing is in our control, that is simply an illusion. If we note seeing the moment we see, we will find seeing simply as seeing without identifying it as me or mine. Then, there arise vipassanā insights for that moment.

The same is true with the remaining senses: hearing, experiencing (of smell, taste, and touch) and perceiving. For example, hearing is hearing, which involves nobody. It newly arises when conditions are met.

## **Translation-2**

*"Whatever is seen, that would be for that seeing moment."* This means whatever object we see, that would last only for that very moment of seeing. In reality, we cannot see anything or anybody more than once as both who sees and what is seen are changing every moment as the saying goes, "One cannot step twice into the same river." All of our psycho-physical phenomena are changing at every moment. So, we can be regarded as a different person at every moment. However, all of us and everything else on earth seem to be permanent because of the density and speed of this process (*santati-ghana*). This process of psycho-physical phenomena is like the

continuous succession of new electrical impulses that light up a lamp. So, it is simply illusion if we think we see someone or something more than once. It is an insight into ultimate reality if we realize that everything we see can last only for that moment of seeing.

The same is true with whatever is heard, experienced, and perceived. So, we cannot hear (experience, perceive) the same thing twice.

### **Translation-3**

*"Whatever is seen, let it be just as it is."* This means what we really see is just colors or visible phenomena. Whether male or female, beautiful or ugly, lovable or loathsome is simply an illusion. When we are aware of what we really see, there will be no room for such illusions. The same is true with the remaining senses.

The phrase "Let it be as it is" can also be interpreted as "Let it go; don't be attached to whatever is seen"<sup>42</sup>. The same is true with "whatever is heard, experienced and perceived."

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<sup>42</sup> **Misinterpretation:** "Let go" used to be misinterpreted: "Just let go; don't practice strenuously." According to Pāḷi texts, we can let go of everything temporarily at the 11<sup>th</sup> stage of insight, and completely at the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> stages of enlightenment. In order to reach these stages, we have to make a strenuous attempt to develop Vipassana insights step by step, of course.

## Conclusion

Then, the Buddha concluded this brief talk thus:

*"When you practice this way, Bāhiya, you will no longer be with them. When you are no longer with them, you will no longer be there. Then, Bāhiya, you will no longer be over here, no longer over there, no longer in between. That's the end of suffering."*

If we are mindful of our senses, sense-objects and their corresponding sense-consciousness, we will realize from our own experience that there are only the mental and physical phenomena arising and passing away. With such realization, we will no longer identify senses and objects with "I" or "mine" in terms of illusion and attachment. Then, we will be no longer over here in terms of attachment to senses; no longer over there in terms of attachment to objects; no longer in between in terms of attachment to the corresponding sense-consciousness.

According to this brief talk, Bāhiya realized the truth and became fully enlightened on that very spot. Therefore, he was honored by the Buddha as the foremost among the monks with fastest spiritual attainments. He was an exceptional person whose *pāramīs*<sup>43</sup> were mature enough to be enlightened in such an exceptional way.

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<sup>43</sup> *Pāramī* literally means deeds of noble people, referring to ten kinds of noble deeds, such as deeds of generosity, morality,

## How to Develop Awareness of Dhamma

In brief, to develop the awareness of dhamma, we need to be aware of the phenomena that we experience through our senses. While sitting, if we imagine seeing something or someone, note it as "seeing, seeing." If you hear a noise, note it as "hearing, hearing." When the noise disappears, we should go back to the home objects. If the noise lasts long, we should note it for a few times, and ignore it, and try to continue focusing on the home objects (such as the rising and falling of the abdomen). Similarly, we do the same with smell and taste during meal-time. Regarding touching, when rising and falling are not obvious enough to be aware of, we are usually instructed to observe touching, especially between the buttock and the floor or between the two hands. That is how to develop the awareness of dhamma.

## CONTEMPLATION ON SEVEN AWAKENING FACTORS

*"Again monks, he abides contemplating the dhammas in dhammas, in terms of the seven awakening factors. And, how does he abide contemplating the dhammas in dhammas in terms of the seven awakening factors?"*

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*spiritual development (meditation), and so on. But, pāramī often refers to one's spiritual talent or aptitude developed by doing such noble deeds throughout one's cycle of rebirths.*

*"Here, if the awakening factor of mindfulness is present in him, he knows 'there is the awakening factor of mindfulness in me;' if the awakening factor of mindfulness is not present in him, he knows 'there is no awakening factor of mindfulness in me;' he knows how the un-arisen awakening factor of mindfulness can arise and how the arisen awakening factor of mindfulness can be perfected by development."*

**Note:** The same is true with the remaining factors, namely, investigation of dhamma (*dhamma-vicaya*), effort (*vīriya*), gratification (*pīti*), tranquility (*passaddhi*), concentration (*samādhi*), equanimity (*upekkhā*).

## **Awakening out of *Kilesa* Sleep**

The Pāli term "*sambojjhāriga*" means enlightenment factors or awakening factors that refers to the seven mental qualities that enlighten or awaken us from the *kilesa* sleep.

When we fall asleep, for example, we do not really know what is happening to us or to our surroundings; therefore, we are open to all kind of dangers and disasters like enemies, wild animals, floods, fires, earthquakes, and so on. For many reasons, we are exactly like someone who is asleep, since we do not know what is happening to us. We do not know we are changing physically, mentally and emotionally at every moment. In other words, everything is changing in us



without our knowledge or consent to that. Thus, we are open to all sorts of mental defilements (*kilesa*) and their resultant misfortunes. In this sense, we are exactly like someone who falls asleep and is open to all sorts of dangers and disasters. Out of compassion, therefore, the Buddha taught us how to wake up from this *kilesa* sleep by developing the seven awakening factors as mentioned above.

Below are the Seven Awakening Factors:

1. Mindfulness that refers to being mindful of mental and physical phenomena by practicing the exercises described in this discourse.
2. Investigation of dhamma, which means discerning our mind and body as they really are.
3. Energy which refers to being inspired, enthusiastic and energetic when we discern mind and body without identifying them as "I" or "mine."
4. Gratification which means being gratified with such dhamma experience.
5. Tranquility which naturally follows gratification.
6. Concentration in the wake of gratification and tranquility.
7. Equanimity which refers to the stable mind unaffected by any kind of sense-objects, pleasant or unpleasant.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *In many discourses, the Buddha described this kind of tranquility thus: "Seeing an object with the eyes, one is neither happy nor unhappy, but just tranquil, mindful, and clearly comprehending," and so on.*

When we begin our meditation, to focus on a meditative object is not an easy job, because our "monkey minds" are rebellious and constantly jumping around. Unpleasant sensations are another problem that makes the practice so difficult. A life of solitude can be depressing because, in order to stay in a secluded place, we need to leave our loved ones behind. Moreover, at the meditation center, we may have to face various inconveniences. So, strong faith and courageous effort are essential qualities for having a successful mediation retreat. Even with these qualities, however, our practice may still feel miserable before we develop the awakening factors.

### **The Awakening Factor of Mindfulness**

Affected by different sense-objects at every moment, we have different emotions and feelings along with different facial expressions and different physical gestures at every moment. We are not aware of them unless we are mindful. We do not know what is truly happening to our minds and bodies and how fast mental and physical phenomena are changing in us. We feel as if we are someone special and ageless. How deep this illusion is! To overcome this illusion, the Buddha instructed us to be mindful of the mental and physical changes by observing our bodily actions, feelings, thoughts, etc., as mentioned in the previous sections. The mere presence of mindfulness can counter illusion and illusion-based mental defilements (*kilesa*). In other words, mindfulness

helps awaken us from the sleep of illusion and therefore, is called an "awakening factor."

The key to developing the awakening factors is to be mindful at all times and on all occasions, even in the restroom as the Buddha instructed in the previous section. Only with such continuous mindfulness and strong concentration can we discern mental and physical phenomena beyond the conceptual forms and without identifying them as "I" or "mine." With this discernment, we can realize what our mind and body really are (i.e., their characteristics, *sabhāva*), how they arise (i.e., their conditionality, *saikhata*), and how they disappear (i.e., their impermanence, *sāmañña*). At this moment of realization, we are considered to be awakened from the illusion and illusion-based mental defilements. The next moment, however, we may fall asleep again in terms of illusion when we think that it is "I" who is seeing something or someone beautiful or ugly. Then, we are exposed again to the enemies, namely, the mental defilements, such as greed, lust, attachment, anger, hatred, and so on. Thus, at the early stages of developing mindfulness, we can only become awakened momentarily. But, at the mature stages, with more continuous mindfulness, we can be awakened for a longer period. Eventually, we will become fully awakened from all illusions once we are fully enlightened.

The Buddha instructed us to know the awakening factor of mindfulness from four aspects thus:

1. *If the awakening factor of mindfulness is present in him, he knows "there is the awakening factor of mindfulness in me."*
2. *If the awakening factor of mindfulness is not present in him, he knows "there is no awakening factor of mindfulness in me."*
3. *He knows how the un-arisen awakening factor of mindfulness can arise.*
4. *He knows how the arisen awakening factor of mindfulness can be perfected by development.*

With continuous mindfulness and strong concentration, not only the meditative objects (mind and body) but also the mindfulness of them can become known to us successively. This is what we call "dual insight" (*paṭi-vipassana*)<sup>45</sup>; it is like the first thought moment that is known by the second. This is how we know mindfulness to be present in us. Sometimes, we note the meditative objects but cannot penetrate deeply into the phenomena, since our mindfulness is superficial and our concentration is not yet strong enough. Then, we can come to know that mindfulness is not present in us. Based on these experiences, we are able to realize how mindfulness can arise and be perfected.

## **Investigation of Dhamma**

"Dhamma" here refers to the mental and physical phenomena, while "Investigation" means to see them

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<sup>45</sup> *This dual insight is more obvious at the fifth stage of progressive vipassana insight (bhaya-ñāṇa), in which we can see the phenomena (objects to be noted) and the mindfulness of them disappear in pair according to Paṭisambhidā-magga.*

as they really are. So, "Investigation of Dhamma" does not mean to analyze the dhamma (mind and body) using our rational thought process. If we observe the four meditative objects, such as the body (like the rising falling of the abdomen), feelings (like pleasure and pain), the mind (like thoughts), or dhamma (like seeing, hearing, etc.), we will discern mental and physical phenomena beyond the conceptual form or shape. For example, when we walk mindfully focusing on the feet, we can discern—beyond the conceptual form of the feet—the physical phenomena, such as lightness or heaviness, pressure or vibration, warmth or cold, and so on. Regarding mental phenomena, say, we have pain in our shoulders, if we are mindful of the pain, we will see the pain (with *sati*) distinctively and separately from the shoulder or the body. In other words, once we can observe pain without identifying it as my pain, the pain will no longer bother us. To discern mental and physical phenomena in this way means to investigate the Dhamma (*dhamma-vicaya*). So, "Investigation of Dhamma" or the discernment of mental and physical phenomena is just the natural outcome of developing mindfulness, the first awakening factor.

## **The Other Awakening Factors**

With a clear discernment of mind and body, we will naturally become enthusiastic, energetic (*vīriya*), gratified with our dhamma experience (*pīti*), calm and tranquil (*passaddhi*), mentally stable, concentrated (*samādhi*), and unmoved (*upekkhā*) by pleasant or unpleasant sense-objects. Thus, the Seven

Awakening Factors successively arise starting from mindfulness. In other words, they form a conditionally related sequence, with mindfulness as the initial cause and foundation. This confirms that the development of these awakening factors is a natural outcome of mindfulness. This causal sequence is often described elsewhere in the discourses and proceeds from gratification to tranquility, happiness, concentration, and culminates with the arising of wisdom and realization.

## **To Know the Awakening Factors**

To know the awakening factors does not mean to observe them deliberately<sup>46</sup> but to understand them through our own experience as facets of the progressive vipassana insight; or, in other words, to see them arising during the actual practice. We will become spontaneously aware of these facets when they become prominent during certain stages of vipassana insight. According to the commentarial definition of *sambodhi*<sup>47</sup>, these seven factors arise in a meditator starting from the fourth stage of vipassana

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<sup>46</sup> *The awakening factors can be developed by a broad range of meditation exercises including, for example, contemplation of a decaying corpse, development of loving kindness, mindfulness of breathing, or contemplation of the three characteristics. This indicates that to contemplate the awakening factors does not mean to observe them deliberately but to see them arising while practicing meditation.*

<sup>47</sup> *Starting from the insight into arising and passing away (of mental and physical phenomena), a meditator develops the awakening factors and can be called sambodhi. (Udayavayañānuppattito paṭṭhāya sambodhi-paṭipadāyaṃ ṭhito nāma hoti.) (from sub-commentary on Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta).*

insight. According to the Progressive Vipassana Insight, however, "mindfulness" can become obvious starting from the first stage (i.e., the insight into mind and body (*nāma-rūpa-pariccheda ñāṇa*)); "investigation of dhamma" becomes vivid starting from the third stage (i.e., the insight into three common characteristics<sup>48</sup> (*samasana ñāṇa*)); "energy" and "gratification" are the most obvious among others at the fourth stage (i.e., the insight into arising and passing away (*udayabbaya ñāṇa*)); and the last three factors, tranquility, concentration and equanimity, are most prominent at the eleventh stage, the insight that is unmoved by sense-objects, pleasant or unpleasant (*sarikhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*). During these stages, we will become aware of the corresponding awakening factors without deliberately trying to observe them.

Indeed, these seven awakening factors are perfected and become known to us through the reflection of enlightenment (*paccavekkhanā ñāṇa*) when we reach one of the four stages of *magga-phala* enlightenment.

In this sense, the Buddha instructed us that, if an awakening factor is present in us, we should know that there is an awakening factor in us; if an awakening factor is not present in us, we should know that there is no awakening factor in us. We should know how the un-arisen awakening factors

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<sup>48</sup> "Three common characteristics" refers to impermanent, insubstantial and impersonal natures of mind and body. These three characteristics begin to be known to us at the second stage of vipassana insight when we see mental and physical phenomena changing process by process (but not yet moment by moment).

can arise and how the arisen awakening factor can be perfected by development.

## **Supportive Conditions**

The commentary on the Sati-paṭṭhāna Sutta describes the supportive conditions for developing the awakening factors.

**Mindfulness** (*sati*): There are four supportive conditions for developing mindfulness:

1. Performing physical activities mindfully according to the third subsection on the contemplation of the body
2. Avoiding unmindful people
3. Associating with mindful people
4. Devoting our time and energy to developing mindfulness

**Investigation of Dhamma** (*dhamma-vicaya*): Below are seven supportive conditions for developing "Investigation of Dhamma" or seeing mind and body as they really are:

1. Theoretical inquiry: We should learn about Buddhist doctrines, such as five aggregates, twelve sense-sources, four fundamental elements, etc.
2. Personal hygiene: We should bathe regularly, cut our nails when necessary, wash our clothes, and clean our rooms. Such cleanliness is conducive to the wise investigation of dhamma.



3. Balancing the five mental faculties: faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration and knowledge. Among them, mindfulness is the awakening factor whose development is beneficial at all times and on all occasions. This means that there can never be an excessive amount of mindfulness. Whereas, a balance is needed between faith and knowledge and between effort and concentration (as mentioned in the third subsection on the contemplation of the body). Such balance of these mental faculties directly contributes to the wise investigation of dhamma.
4. Avoiding unwise people: We should avoid people who are ill informed about the Buddha's teachings (such as the five aggregates, twelve sense-sources, etc.).
5. Associating with wise people: We should associate with people who are well-informed of the Buddha's teachings and can help us develop the awakening factors.
6. Reflecting on the deeper aspects of the Dhamma: We should profoundly reflect on the teachings of the Buddha, such as the five aggregates, Four Noble Truths, Dependent Origination, etc.
7. Devoting our time and energy to developing the Investigation of Dhamma

**Energy (*vīriya*):** Below are eleven supportive conditions for developing energy and being inspired, enthusiastic and energetic:

1. Reflecting on how miserable the rebirths in woeful realms are: Unless we attain the first

stage of enlightenment, we are liable to be reborn in woeful states. Reflecting on this dreadful fact, we should boost up our effort in our practice.

2. Reflecting on the benefits of effort: Without courageous effort, we cannot accomplish anything; great effort always brings us great accomplishments. Reflecting this point, we should boost up our energy.
3. Reflecting on the path to be practiced: Only heroic and energetic people can walk on the Noble Path following the footsteps of such noble persons as the arahants and the Buddha. Reflecting on this fact, we should boost up our effort in our practice.
4. Honoring the alms one has received: This is primarily concerned with monks and nuns who rely on the generous supports of lay people. It also applies to meditators on retreat who are taken care of by volunteers. We should reflect thus: "People take good care of my needs; I should honor their kind support by putting great effort into my practice."
5. Reflecting on the inspiring qualities of the heritage: Here, "heritage" refers to the Dhamma heritage passed down from the Buddha. Meditators should reflect thus, "Great, indeed, is the dhamma heritage left by the Buddha. If I am lazy, I do not deserve it."
6. Reflecting on the inspiring qualities of one's teacher, the Buddha: This means recalling the great events in the life of the Buddha and admonishing ourselves thus, "It does not

benefit me to be lazy after learning from such a great teacher.”

7. Reflecting on the inspiring qualities of one’s status as a follower of the Buddha: We should reflect thus: “I am a spiritual child of the Buddha. I must be energetic.”
8. Reflecting on the inspiring qualities of fellow meditators: We should admonish ourselves thus: “Sāriputta, Moggalāna and many other great disciples of the Buddha were fully enlightened having put heroic effort into the practice. Am I following their way?”
9. Avoiding lazy people: If we associate with lazy people, we are most likely to become lazy, too. So, we should avoid associating with them so that we can become energetic.
10. Associating with energetic people: We can boost up our energy by emulating energetic fellow meditators.
11. Devoting our time and energy to developing energy.

**Gratification** (*pīti*): The Pāḷi term for “gratification” is *pīti*, which is normally translated as rapture, joy, happiness, or delight. In the context of the Seven Awakening Factors, however, it refers to being gratified with one’s remarkable experiences especially at the fourth stage of the progressive vipassana insight. The exercises mentioned below are supportive conditions for developing “gratification”:

1. Recollecting the Buddha’s qualities
2. Recollecting the Dhamma’s qualities
3. Recollecting the Sangha’s qualities

4. Recollecting one's virtue (*sīla*), such as five or eight precepts
5. Recollecting one's acts of generosity
6. Recollecting heavenly beings (*devas*) and their good deeds that lead them to such a blissful life
7. Recollecting the peacefulness of nibbāna (or cessation of mental defilements)
8. Avoiding rough people who do not care about the Dhamma.
9. Associating with gentle and Dhamma-devoted people
10. Reflecting on inspiring discourses
11. Devoting our time and energy to developing gratification

**Tranquility** (*passaddhi*): Below are seven supportive conditions for developing tranquility:

1. Good food: This means suitable food, which is neither very poor nor very lavish, but good enough to satisfy and nourish us.
2. Agreeable weather.
3. Comfortable posture.
4. Balanced behavior: We should behave in a balanced and tranquil manner by reflecting on the law of kamma and avoiding the two extremes: belief in no cause and belief in a wrong cause such as creator.
5. Avoiding restless people: There are some people who harass others. Associating with such people, we are likely to behave the way they do. So, we should avoid such restless people to keep ourselves tranquil.

6. Associating with calm people.
7. Devoting our time and energy to developing tranquility.

**Concentration (*Samadhi*):** Below are eleven supportive conditions for developing concentration:

1. Personal hygiene.
2. Balancing the five mental faculties.
3. Skill in observing the *samatha* objects to develop concentration: When the mind is restless with lustful feeling, for example, the skill in contemplating thirty-two anatomical parts of the body will help; when agitated with aversion, the skill in developing metta will work, and so on.
4. Exhilarating or inspiring the mind at the right time: When the mind is bored or inactive, we should inspire it by developing the three awakening factors, namely, investigation of dhamma, effort and gratification.
5. Calming the mind at the right time: When the mind is overactive or full of expectations, we should calm it down by developing the last three awakening factors, namely, tranquility, concentration and equanimity.
6. Gladdening the mind at the right time: When the mind is disheartened, we should gladden it by arousing a sense of urgency through the recollection of eight objects: birth, old age, sickness, death and several kinds of distress in woeful realms, distress in past lives, distress in future lives, and struggle for survival in all forms of life.

7. Relaxing the mind at the right time: When the mind is well-balanced, that is, neither inactive nor overactive nor disheartened, we should sustain such balanced mental states in a relaxing manner.
8. Avoiding distracted people.
9. Associating with attentive people.
10. Reflecting on the attainment of absorption.
11. Devoting our time and energy to developing concentration.

**Equanimity** (*upekkhā*): Below are five supportive conditions for developing equanimity:

1. Not being overly concerned about other people: By reflecting on the law of kamma and emptiness of self, we should remain equanimous without being overly concerned about other people.
2. Not being overly concerned about material things: By recollecting the ownerless and impermanent nature of material things, we should keep equanimity without being overly concerned about material things.
3. Avoiding individuals who are overly concerned about people and things.
4. Associating with individuals whose minds are stable without being overly concerned about people and material things.
5. Devoting our time and energy to developing equanimity.

## **Culmination (Accomplishment of the Goal)**

Like the previous contemplations, the contemplation of the Seven Awakening Factors is culminated in seeing them empirically arise and pass away in us and inferentially in others. This contemplation helps establish mindfulness and vipassana-insight step by step until the cessation of clinging, that is the first liberation from the cycle of suffering. So, the Buddha said as follows:

- *In this way, in regards to the dhammas, he abides contemplating dhammas internally, or he abides contemplating dhammas externally, or he abides contemplating dhammas both internally and externally.*
- *He abides contemplating the nature of arising in dhammas, or he abides contemplating the nature of the passing away in dhammas, or he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in dhammas.*
- *Mindfulness that "there are dhammas" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness.*
- *And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world.*
- *That is how, in regards to dhammas, he abides contemplating dhammas in terms of the Seven Awakening Factors.*

## THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The Pāli word for "truth" is *sacca*. In the Pāli text, there are several kinds of "sacca" (truth), such as *ditṭhi-sacca* (a doctrine that is taken as truth), *vacī-sacca* (truthful oath or truthful proclamation), *sammuti-sacca* (the relative truth that is concerned with concepts such as male or female, sister or girlfriend, paper or a dollar bill, beautiful or ugly, long or short, and so on), and *paramattha-sacca* (the ultimate truth which refers to mental and physical phenomena that are actually present), and *ariya-sacca* (Noble Truth). According to the ultimate truth, there is a clear distinction between merit and demerit, pleasure and pain, right and wrong. As for enlightened people or Noble People (*ariya's*), however, all mental and physical phenomena, whether wholesome or unwholesome, right or wrong, pleasant or unpleasant, are seen as *dukkha*<sup>49</sup> (true suffering), attachment to them as the cause of *dukkha*, cessation of attachment as the cessation of *dukkha*, and the eight-fold noble path as the path to the cessation.<sup>50</sup> That is why these four facts are called "Noble Truths" (*ariya-sacca*), meaning the truth realized by noble people or by the Noble One (the Buddha), or the truths that make us noble.

There were questions unanswered by the Buddha, because the answers would be beyond the boundary of

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<sup>49</sup> *The magga-phala mental states are not considered dukkha, because they are not related to attachment, the cause of dukkha.*

<sup>50</sup> *"The Discourse on Four Noble Truth" by Mahasi Sayadaw.*



human knowledge. They were mostly related to the origin of the world, the doctrine of non-self against the law of kamma and rebirths, and so on. On many occasions, the Buddha replied to such questions thus: "I only teach what is beneficial to all living beings, that is, the Four Noble Truths: dukkha, the cause of dukkha, the cessation of dukkha, and the path leading to such cessation." So, the "Four Noble Truths" is the core essence of all the Buddha's teachings. In other words, the sole purpose of the Buddha's teachings is to help us realize the Four Noble Truths.

In this discourse, the Buddha instructed us to realize the Four Noble Truths thus:

*"Here, he knows as it really is, 'this is dukkha;' he knows as it really is, 'this is the cause of dukkha;' he knows as it really is, 'this is the cessation of dukkha;' he knows as it really is, 'this is the path leading to the cessation of dukkha.'"*

According to the above passage, to know the Four Noble Truths means

1. To discern dukkha (suffering), which refers to mental and physical phenomena.
2. To eradicate the cause of dukkha (i.e., the attachment to sensual pleasure and existence).
3. To experience nibbāna, which indicates the cessation of attachment and attachment-generated dukkha.

4. To walk on the Eightfold Noble Path that leads to the cessation of dukkha, which refers to magga-phala enlightenment that can be attained by practicing as instructed in this discourse

## THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH:     **Dukkha**

The first Noble Truth is *dukkha*. We have no direct English counterpart for the Pāli term *dukkhā*<sup>51</sup>, as it means different things in different cases. According to the context where it is used, it can refer to pains, hardships, inconveniences, unhappiness, suffering, distress or unsatisfactoriness, and so on. “Distress” may be the best term for dukkha among others, since it can refer to both mental and physical pain. From Abhidhamma point of view, the mental and physical phenomena are classified into three kinds of *dukkha*:

- a. *dukkha-dukkha* (distress of distress) which refers to unpleasant sensations, because it is really hard to bear.
- b. *viparināma-dukkha* (distress of flux) which indicates the pleasant sensation whose disappearance is always painful.
- c. *saṅkhāra-dukkha* (distress of conditionality) which refers to all conditioned phenomena (mind and body) exclusive of the two kinds of sensations mentioned above. They are called

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<sup>51</sup> The word “*dukkha*” is defined by Pāli grammars in several ways: *du + khāda* (badly experienced); *du + khamu* (hard + to bear); *du + khanu* (badly undermining); *dvi + khanu* (dual undermining, i.e., mental and physical distress).

dukkha because they—being conditioned—are subject to the painful cycle of arising and passing away.

In this discourse, The Buddha described the “Noble Truth of Dukkha” thus:

*"And, what, monks, is the Noble Truth of Suffering? Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and excessive despair are suffering; association with the hated is suffering; separation from the loved is suffering; not to get what one wishes, that also is suffering. In brief, the five aggregates of clinging are suffering."*

According to the above passage, “dukkha” includes birth, old age, sickness, death, etc., in common language. In an ultimate sense, however, the Buddha summarized all kinds of dukkha in a few words, thus: *"In brief, dukkha is the five aggregates of clinging."* In the case of the Noble Truth, “dukkha” is just the five aggregates (mental and physical phenomena) which we identify as “I” or mine (*ditthi*)<sup>52</sup>, and get attached to (*taṇhā*). In this regard, I would like to recount my experience of a remarkable moment.

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<sup>52</sup> *The continuous process of arising and passing away of mental and physical phenomena is the torturous cycle that is generated by the illusory sense of "I" and attachment to "I." Therefore, our mind and body are called "upādāna-khandha," which means the aggregates that we get attached to by identifying them as "I."*

At a Pāḷi institute<sup>53</sup> where I spent nine years studying and teaching Pāḷi texts, we traditionally drew buckets of water from wells, filled large containers and took showers together in the open. Kusala, one of my students, often helped me take water from the well, and we shared one of these containers when we bathed. So, I often saw him washing his face and body gently and caringly. Like everybody else in the world, he wanted to look good and attractive; he was young, just nineteen or so. He worked very hard studying Pāḷi texts but often looked depressed about the slow progress in his study. Later, however, I found him very happy when he got a generous supporter who would sponsor his education for the years to come. Indeed, he worked really hard to earn a high-school degree in Pāḷi texts.

One afternoon, I was one of a few monks who had to cremate his body since he died of pneumonia the night before. In the cemetery, we burned firewood in the open space, put his body on the fire, and pierced it with pointed bamboo sticks so that it would burn properly and quickly. Within a few minutes, I saw his skin falling off his face, showing the skull; his intestines and bowels coming out of his stomach, along with a lot of fluid; his flesh falling off his shoulders and chest displaying the cage of ribs; his limbs got burnt,

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<sup>53</sup> *It is known as Mahā-gandayone, one of the most prestigious Pāḷi institutes in Burma, just eight miles south of Mandalay, the second biggest city of Burma. Nowadays, there are about two thousand monks studying there.*

exposing the white bones. It was really scary to see the aggressive fire roaring and burning his body desperately like a ghost, devouring its food greedily. It was scarier, of course, to look at a human body breaking up rapidly and devastatingly on the fire. About three or four hours later, I found only ash, no more Kusala on earth, one of my best friends. I felt then something very strange beyond what words could express. Seeing the ash left by Kusala, I was lost in the thought of whether Kusala was someone who had really existed on earth or was an illusion. "If he is someone real," I asked myself, "then where is he now?" "How about his happiness and sadness, failure and accomplishment. Do they mean anything on earth?"

According to the teachings of the Buddha, we are just manifestations of mental and physical phenomena (five aggregates) which are conditioned and ever-changing. Their arising and passing away are a mere torturous cycle, dukkha. This fact is illustrated in Vajirā Sutta, Saṃyutta:

### **The Story of Sister Vajirā**

On one occasion, at Sāvatti, Sister Vajirā, having had her lunch, went into the depths of some Dark Woods (*Andha-vana*) and seated herself at the foot of a certain tree for her noonday rest. Then, Māra<sup>54</sup>,

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<sup>54</sup> *Māra literally means "a killer," which often refers to mental defilements and also to a certain celestial being in a figurative sense.*

intending to interfere with her practice, came up to her and addressed her thus:

“By whom was this ‘being’ created? Where is this being? Who makes him? When does a being arise? Where does the being cease and pass away?”

Then, Sister Vajirā, knowing who Māra was and for what purpose he came, replied thus:

Here, Māra, what you take in as “a being” is just your illusion.

This is a mere bundle of conditioned phenomena. No “being” can be discerned to be here.

For just as, when the parts are rightly assembled, the notion of “chariot” arises.

So, too, it is convenient in our usage to say: “A being” when the aggregates are there.

It is simply *dukkha* that arises; *dukkha* that does persist; and *dukkha* that wanes away.

Nothing beside *dukkha* comes to arise. Nothing else but *dukkha* does cease.<sup>55</sup>

According to this discourse, we are nobody but five aggregates that are described as *dukkha*. So, if we want to see *dukkha*, we can just look into the mirror! If we want to touch the *dukkha*, we can just touch any part of our body!

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<sup>55</sup> *Samyutta-1, 136*

## **Dukkha Discovered by a Monkey**

There is a Burmese tale in which a curious monkey wanted to know what dukkha really meant. The reason was that it often heard the hermit who lived nearby using this word on many occasions. One day, he asked the hermit what dukkha meant. The hermit said he would explain it to him the next day. So, the monkey came over to the hermitage the next morning. The hermit gave him a heavy bag to take away saying that there was dukkha in the bag, which should be untied only in the open space where there were no trees around. So, stressfully, the monkey carried the bag on his back to an open space where he untied the bag. A big and hostile dog came out of the bag and tried to bite the monkey. So, he had to run fast and far and found a tree to climb up for a narrow escape. Much to his relief in the tree, he looked down at the life-threatening dog underneath and drew conclusion thus: "Dukkha means something scary with a big mouth, chilling teeth and a dangling tongue."

Actually, dukha does not have to be something scary with a big mouth and a dangling tongue as the monkey concluded. As a matter of fact, dukkha is really the one we love most on earth because it refers to mental and physical phenomena that represent what we really are. Therefore, if we want to see

dukkha, we just look into a mirror! If we want to touch dukkha, just touch any part of our body!

## **To See Dukkha**

So, to see dukkha means to see mental and physical phenomena arising and passing away in us. Our bodies and minds are changing at every moment. Due to the density and speed of their continuous process, however, they seem solid and non-changing. We cannot completely see our entire body changing at every moment, even though it actually is. But, we can see changing phenomena newly arising at every moment, if we mindfully observe our mental and bodily actions as mentioned in this discourse. If we are really mindful of our bodies, we can discern various physical elements (such as heat, cold, hardness, etc.) arising and passing away at every moment. We can discern heat one moment, hardness, pressure or vibration at the next. We can also discern different sensations (pleasant or unpleasant) and different thoughts (moral or immoral) arising and passing away at every moment. We may feel an itch on our back at one moment and a pain on our shoulder at the next; depressed at one moment and inspired at the next; happy at one moment and unhappy at the next; lustful at one moment and adverse at the next, and so on. To discern such phenomena means to discern dukkha. This is how we realize (*priññā*) the Noble Truth of Suffering.



## THE SECOND NOBLE TRUTH:

### The Cause of Suffering

The second Noble Truth, the cause of dukkha, is *taṇhā*, which literally means thirst. Thirst can be quenched only for some time, but never once and for all. Equally unquenchable are thirst or craving for sensual pleasure (*kāma taṇhā*) and thirst for existence (*bhava & vibhava taṇhā*).

The Buddha described this Second Noble Truth, thus:

*"And what, monks, is the Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering? It is the craving which gives rise to further rebirth and, bound up with pleasure and lust, finds ever fresh delight, now here, now there—to wit, the craving for sensual pleasure, the craving for existence, and the craving for non-existence."*

### Three Kinds of Thirst

According to the above passage, there are three kinds of thirst (*taṇhā*): the thirst for sensual pleasure, the thirst for existence, and the thirst for non-existence. Here, the thirst for sensual pleasure means the craving for delight in sense-objects such as sight, sound, etc., (*Kāma-taṇhā*); the thirst for existence is the craving for the continuous existence of "I" (*bhava taṇhā*); and thirst for non-existence is craving for the existence of "I," but only in the present life (*vibhava taṇhā*).

## Thirst for Sensual Pleasure

We quench sensual desire by enjoying sensual objects especially related to the opposite sex. However, our thirst for desirable objects<sup>56</sup> can never be quenched once and for all. We always desire to have more, better or newer pleasurable objects. For example, suppose, the desire for a car of the latest model becomes satisfied when we actually have it. After some time, however, we may crave for another car better or newer. Or, we may desire something else like a house with a beautiful garden, and so on. When we get a house in the east coast, for instance, we may want to get a house in the west coast or in Hawaii. Similarly, even after we get the partner we love, later on, we still may want someone else. So, it is no wonder, that throughout history, there were emperors with absolute authority who had hundreds of partners and thousands of concubines. Therefore, sensual desire is compared to an itch. In the old days, there were many lepers (*kuṭṭha*) who suffered from physical deformity and itchy skin. They found pleasure in rubbing the itch on their skin. However, the more they rubbed, the more they itched; the more they itched, the more they rubbed. Thus, there is only the painful cycle of unsatisfactoriness. It is also likened to drinking salty water. The more we drink, the thirstier we become. So, the thirst for

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<sup>56</sup> *In this discourse, the Buddha described the thirst for sixty desirable objects: six senses, six sense-objects, six sense-consciousness, six sense-contact, six feelings, six perceptions, six volitions, six cravings, six thoughts, and six discursive thoughts. Please refer to the translation of the discourse.*

sensual pleasure (*kāma taṇhā*) is unquenchable, miserable, and leads only to dukkha.

### **Thirst for Continuous Existence**

This second kind of thirst is related to the belief in eternal life or ceaseless existence of "I." No one on earth wants to die. This simply means we are attached to life; we thirst for the ceaseless existence of "I."

Even though different in size, color, shape, lifespan, mentality..., all living beings value and try to find some enjoyment in their lives. Some of them are so tiny and so small that we cannot even see them through our naked eyes. They also value their lives in the same way as we do. Some of them look very scary and disgusting, like lice, leeches, maggots, worms, caterpillars and larvae. Even though they look so repulsive, they also value living and want to find some pleasure in their lives. Obviously, all living beings are afraid to die. This means we all are attached to our lives; we all would like to enjoy a blissful life in an ageless manner. Even if we were born as maggots, we would find pleasure in our existence, no matter how repulsive we may seem to human beings. In fact, the maggots would not feel envious of the luxurious human life-style. How disgusting their life might seem to us, their life is priceless to them. Everyone is attached to their life. Even if someone were to commit suicide, he or she would still have a strong expectation for something better. Thus, the attachment to the ceaseless

existence of "I" is also a kind of thirst, unquenchable and miserable, and leading to dukkha.

### **Thirst for the Current Existence**

There are many people in the world who do not accept that we have lives before and after this present life. Mahāsi Sayadaw said,<sup>57</sup> materialists of modern days are the kind of people who believe in only in their current existence. What Mahāsi Sayadaw meant is that they just want to freely enjoy sensual pleasures without bothering about the ethical commitment necessary for a happy rebirth after death. If there is life after death, the actions we do in this life will have a great impact on our lives after we die. Because we are responsible for our actions, we cannot be free to do whatever we want; or, we cannot enjoy sensual pleasure as far as we wish without consequences. So, people who do not accept there is life after death are also those who want to enjoy sensual pleasure freely and do not want to take responsibility for their ethical behavior. They wish to live a life without ethical restrictions. On the other hand, those who believe in life after death are more likely to do good deeds and avoid bad deeds so that their lives after death will be pleasurable. Therefore, not only is the belief in no life after death wrong, but also it endangers all of humanity. Because of their beliefs, people are attached to the existence of "I." This is a kind of thirst, unquenchable and miserable, and leading to dukkha.

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<sup>57</sup> *"The Discourse on Four Noble Truth" (2010) by Mahasi Sayadaw*

These three kinds of thirst (attachment or craving) are considered to be the cause of suffering for two reasons:

## **The First Reason**

Due to insatiable desire, we are rarely satisfied with what we have. Such unsatisfactoriness in itself is *dukkha*. All forms of desire are based on illusion or delusion. We always mistake mental and physical phenomena, whether beautiful or ugly, for an "I." As a result, we get attached to things and people. And we go through all sorts of painful difficulties, just to meet all the needs of "I" (or someone we love). In this sense, we are exactly like a deer that mistakes a mirage for water and pursues it foolishly, only to end up miserable. Indeed, it is necessary to have some degree of difficulties and pain in order for us to survive. *Dukkha* means the difficulties and pain we experience based on our attachment to things or people. As mentioned before, a woman cried sorrowfully for a man killed in a train crash, but broke out in laughter when she found out it was not her husband. This event indicates that her sorrow and laughter were based on whether the dead person was someone she was attached to or not. So, even real pain (*dukkha-dukkha*) won't be experienced as *dukkha* or as something unsatisfactory if we can see it as it is without identifying it as "I" or mine. Therefore, an arahant, having eradicated attachment, suffers no *dukkha* even though his or her physical body is subject to pain. It is attachment or craving that turns the nature of phenomena into the actual

suffering and is, therefore, called the cause of suffering according to this second noble truth.

## **The Second Reason**

The attachment is the main factor that generates the painful cycle of birth and death. As mentioned repeatedly, nobody on earth really wants to die, because everybody is attached to life. Such attachment is the mighty power that generates the painful cycle of births and deaths. For this reason too, attachment is described as the cause of suffering.

To illustrate this fact, here is a story from the Dhammapada. Once upon a time, there lived a man who loved his wife very much. Unfortunately, his wife had a love affair with his younger brother who ended up killing him. When the husband died, due to the force of his attachment to his wife, he was reborn as her pet dog. As a dog, he was still so attached to her that he followed her everywhere, even into the restroom and the bedroom. Eventually, she became so annoyed that she had the dog killed. However, because he was still so attached to her, he was once again reborn in her household, this time as a calf. Again, he was killed in the end for the same reason. Next, he was reborn as a snake in the same place. As a snake, he was able to slip into her bedroom through the ceiling and saw her making love with a man. He became so upset that he fell down onto her bed, and once again was killed. Finally, he was reborn as her son. This time, however, remembering all the times he had been killed by this woman, he did not allow her to touch him even though she was his own

mother. Whenever she tried to touch him, he cried in panic and had to be taken care of by his grandmother.

When he came of age, he revealed his past lives to his grandmother. He and his grandmother became so disenchanted with the cycle of existence that they ordained and practiced meditation until they were fully liberated.

There are two mighty powers that create one's rebirth: *taṇhā* (attachment to one's life) and *kamma* (volitional deeds one has done). In this story, the man was deeply attached to his wife because she satisfied his senses. That very attachment was the energy that created his rebirths as her pet dog, calf, snake and finally her son. So, attachment is the mighty power that creates life after life. Whether future life is woeful or blissful depends on whether one has done good or bad deeds during his or her present life. So, attachment is the mighty power that generates the painful cycle of birth and death. For this reason, attachment is considered to be the cause of suffering.

### **Truths Available to Us**

Two kinds of truths always represent what we really are: *dukkha* (mental and physical phenomena) and the cause of *dukkha* (attachment to them). As mentioned above, *dukkha* is nothing but the mental and physical phenomena that constitute what we really are. Identifying the mental and physical phenomena with "I" or with someone else, we get

attached to people and things. As ordinary people, therefore, we embody the first two Noble Truths: the truth of suffering and the truth of the cause of suffering. With mindfulness developed as explained in this discourse, we will be able to discern our mind and body as they really are. With this kind of discernment, we can then realize the truth of dukkha and, at the same time, overcome attachment as the saying "kill two birds with one stone" goes. Cessation of attachment means cessation of dukkha in harmony with the third Noble Truth.

Thus, an understanding of dukkha and its cause (attachment) leads to the third and the fourth noble truths, freedom from dukkha and the practical path leading to that freedom. So, although the Buddha put great emphasis on dukkha, he described great advantages for our lives from the aspect of the last two Noble Truths.

## **THE THIRD NOBLE TRUTH:**

### **The Cessation of Suffering**

The Cessation of Dukkha refers to "nibbāna," which is composed of two words *ni* (no) and *bāna* (bondage). So, nibbāna literally means "no bondage" or "liberation" (*vimutti*). Here, "bondage" means attachment. When we are attached to something or someone, we are bound or tied to that thing or person. Just as a cow cannot leave the post to which it is tied, we cannot leave something or someone we love once we become attached to, either. In this sense, the attachment is called bondage. So, "no bondage" means no attachment or the cessation of



attachment<sup>58</sup>. This is the literal meaning of nibbāna. That is why, in this discourse, the Buddha described nibbāna (the cessation of suffering) thus:

*"And what, monks, is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (nibbāna)? It is the complete cessation of attachment, giving it up, eradication of it, freedom from it, or detachment."*

Here, there is a question to pose: If the cessation of attachment is the cessation of suffering, then why did the Buddha, for example, suffer backaches after having fully eradicated attachment? The answer is: Although he had backaches, he was not affected or agitated by them at all. Of course, his physical body was subject to pain, because it was the legacy of attachments from his previous lives. This is called the *nibbāna* with remainder of mind and body (*sa-upādisesa nibbāna*).

There are some more common questions regarding *nibbāna*: What exactly is nibbāna? Where is it? How does one reach it? To these questions, the following story may give an answer.

### **The Story of Rohitassa**

Once upon a time, a hermit tried to reach the end of infinite universes exercising his supernatural

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<sup>58</sup> *Concerning the attachment to be put an end to, the Buddha described it to sixty kinds of desirable objects as mentioned in the Second Noble Truth.*

power. He could fly across one universe as fast as an arrow passes through the shadow of a palm tree. He traveled at such supernormal speed for his entire life passing through one universe after another; however, he never reached the end of the universes. The number of universes is uncountable, indeed! After his demise, he was reborn as a powerful deva called Rohitassa. One day, he visited the Buddha and asked a question as follows: "Where is the end of the world and how can one get there?" The Buddha gave him an answer in a very enlightening way:

*"I say, Deva, in this very fathom-long body that is cognitive and conscious, there is the world, the origin of the world, and the end of the world." (Anguttara-1, 356)*

According to the above statement, each and every individual is considered a world because a living being and the world are constituted of the same kinds of phenomena, which are changing and disintegrating at every moment. Therefore, the entire world as well as each and every individual is called "*loka*." *Loka*, which is normally translated as "world," literally means the process of arising and passing away. So, each and every one of us is regarded as the world. This individual world comes into existence due to attachment. With the cessation of attachment, therefore, we can be considered to having reached the end of the world. In this sense, the Buddha said that, in this very fathom-long body, there is the world, the origin of the world, and the end of the world. As a matter of fact, nibbāna is beyond time

and space and cannot be described where it is and what it is in worldly terms and concepts.

## **Description of Nibbāna**

In the first discourse of the Dīgha-nikāya, however, the Buddha described nibbāna as follows:

*Nibbāna, which is known (by the wisdom of the Noble Path), cannot be seen (by naked eyes); it has no limits (of arising and dissolution whatsoever); it is luminous in all aspects. Here, no water element, no earth element, no fire element, and air element to gain a foothold. Here, no length, no shortness, no smallness, no greatness, no beauty, no mind, no matter, no ugliness gain a foothold. Here, mind and matter disappear once and for all. Along with the cessation of consciousness, all this (mind and matter) ceases.*

In view of the word "luminous" in the statement above, some people misinterpreted nibbāna as an extraordinary kind of light and, in this regard, the Venerable Mahāsi Sayadaw explained as follows:

Material things can be polluted by dirt; mental phenomena can be polluted by mental defilements, such as greed, hatred, and so on. Even wholesome mental states can be polluted when they are preceded or succeeded by greed, hatred, and so on. Nibbāna, however, has nothing to do with such pollutions; so, it is exceptionally pure. In this sense, nibbāna is described as "luminous." But it should not be interpreted as an extraordinary kind of light. As

a matter of fact, light is a certain kind of material phenomenon; however, according to the Buddha's teachings, nibbāna has nothing to do with any form of mind or matter.

## **Unconditioned and Ageless**

Nibbāna is also defined as "unconditioned" (*a-saikhata*) and, therefore, as "ageless" and "deathless" (*a-mata*). Below is a story from Mahāvagga that illustrates this point.

According to ancient Indian astrology, October (at the end of the rainy season in India) is a remarkable month, because we can see a completely cloudless sky with fullest number of stars in the year. On the full moon day of that very month, the most famous carnival called nakkhatta-sabhā is held in which thousands of people participate or watch the dancing and singing. On one such moonlit evening, among the thousands of people in attendance, there were two young men, Upatissa and Kolita. They were very close friends and sons of two Brahmin millionaires. While observing the thousands of people celebrating, they pondered thus, "Here, we are enjoying this beautiful evening without concern about the unavoidable destiny of our death. Everyone here is living now but will die one day. If no more people were born, the world would be empty of living beings just within one hundred years." In light of the unsatisfactory nature of life, they reflected thus, "Just as there is dark, there is light in nature; so also, if there is death, there must be non-death (*a-mata*)."

Thousands of people were enjoying the beautiful evening. No one except these two young men was concerned about this unavoidable destiny for all living beings. Even if we see someone die right before our eyes, we may not be concerned about our own unavoidable destiny. Instead, we most likely think "you may well die, but I never will." Of course, these two were not ordinary men. Later, they renounced their worldly life in search of deathlessness. To make a long story short, by practicing under the guidance of the Buddha, they found what they sought, non-death (*a-mata*), and became the two chief disciples of the Buddha known as Sāriputta and Moggalāna. Thus, in this story and many other discourses, nibbāna is defined as "non-death" (*a-mata*).

Mind and body are conditioned (*sarikhata*) and, therefore, subject to destruction (*mata*). Diametrically opposite is nibbāna, which is neither mind nor body and, therefore, unconditioned (*a-sarikhata*), deathless (*a-mata*) and traceless (*a-nimitta*). Whatever is conditioned is always subject to destruction. For instance, for a tree to grow, there are a lot of conditions like a suitable amount of water, sun, fertile soil, and so on. It dies due to deficiency or excess of these conditions. Like a tree, the arising of our mind and body processes are inherently conditioned by ego-illusion (*sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) and attachment, and they are subsequently fueled by our genes, weather, food, lifestyle, mentality and so on. Determined by these conditions, we were born, get old, get sick, die and then are reborn. Thus, we are miserably going from womb to tomb and from tomb to womb. Upon getting enlightened, such a painful process ceases along with

the cessation of attachment. Such cessation is nibbāna, which is neither mind nor body and, therefore, unconditioned (*a-sarikhata*), ageless, deathless (*a-mata*) and traceless (*a-nimitta*).

Many of us expect nibbāna to be somewhat like a heavenly state, full of pleasure and happiness, and completely free from displeasure and unhappiness. Actually, happiness and unhappiness are just our conceptual interpretations of feelings based on our mental and physical reactions to the outer world. We cannot define nibbāna in terms of feelings, because it has nothing to do with any kind of mental phenomena. Nor can we explain where it is and what it is in molecular terms, because it is beyond time and space. Once, Venerable Sāriputta was asked: "If there is no feeling in nibbāna, how can it be described to be pleasant?" The Venerable answered: "Simply blissful is the absence of both pain and pleasure. Their absence itself means the peacefulness of nibbāna." An itch, for example, is painful while rubbing it is pleasurable. But, really blissful is to have neither itch nor rub and neither pain nor pleasure. In the same way, sensual desire is like an itch; happiness that arises from satisfying the desire is like a pleasure of rubbing an itch. So, it is simply blissful to have neither. This is why Venerable Sāriputta said that the absence of both pleasure and pain signifies the bliss of nibbāna.

Indeed, nibbāna can by no means be described in worldly terms, because it does not belong to this world. We belong to this world, and we look at things from a worldly point of view. It is very difficult for us

to understand what nibbāna really is, because it is totally different from what we know or have experienced. This point is illustrated by the Late Venerable Sayadaw U Silānanda with a story of a tortoise and fish.

One day a tortoise left the water, walked on land, and then went back into the sea. It told a fish that he had walked on land. Then, the fish asked: "How did you find swimming around on land?" The tortoise said: "No, I did not swim; I walked on land." The fish wondered if there was such a thing as land to walk on, because it had no idea of what the land really was. It thought land was also another liquid form in which it could swim.

So, worldly terms are most likely to give us wrong impression of nibbāna. We may misinterpret it as eternal death and be frightened by the loss of "I." Of course, it is not annihilation of any individual. Nor is it a unique kind of heavenly rebirth in a heavenly realm of eternal bliss as suggested by some religious denominations. As a matter of fact, nibbāna is an unconditioned phenomenon (*asaṅkhata*). It is just reverse side of conditioned psycho-physical phenomena.

## **THE FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH:**

### **Noble Path to the Cessation of Suffering**

The fourth Noble Truth is the Path to the Cessation of Suffering. The Pāli term for "path" is "*maggā*" which literally means path or road that leads to somewhere. In this discourse, this term refers to

the Eightfold Noble Path (*magga*), which directly leads to nibbāna, the complete cessation of suffering. The Buddha described the Noble Path thus:

*"And what, monks, is the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Cessation of Suffering? It is simply the Noble Eightfold Path, namely, Right View, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, Right Concentration."*

According to the above passage, the Noble Path is composed of eight factors:

1. Right View (*sammā-diṭṭhi*)
2. Right Thought (*sammā-saṅkappa*)
3. Right Speech (*sammā-vācā*)
4. Right Action (*sammā-kammanta*)
5. Right Livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*)
6. Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*)
7. Right Mindfulness (*sammā-sati*)
8. Right Concentration (*sammā-samādhi*)

These eight factors are classified into three categories called the Three Trainings (*sikkhā*): The first two are wisdom training, the middle three morality training, and the last three concentration training.

### **Three Stages of the Path**

In order to accomplish the three trainings, there are three stages of the Path we have to walk on successively: the Prerequisite Path (*mūla-magga*), the Preliminary Path (*pubba-bhāga magga*), and the Noble Path (*ariya magga*).



## 1. The Pre-requisite Path (*Mūla Magga*):

“Prerequisite Path” is led by “right view,” which refers to understanding kamma as our own possession. When we were born into this world, we brought nothing with us except kamma. One day, we will leave this world empty-handed incapable of taking anything with us except our kamma. So, what we really possess is kamma, nothing else. Understanding this fact is what we call “right view” in the context of the Pre-requisite Path. Guided by this right view (*sammā-diṭṭhi*), our way of thinking becomes rational and skillful (*sammā-saṅkappa*). These two factors, right view and right thought, thus forms “wisdom training” at this stage. Subsequently, our moral training can be fulfilled by observing four kinds of moral speech (*sammā-vācā*), three kinds of skillful actions (*sammā-kammanta*)<sup>59</sup> and skillful livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*). The understanding of kamma also leads us to concentration training (i.e., samatha practices). Samatha practice consists of three Path factors: right effort (*sammā-vāyāma*), right

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<sup>59</sup> *Three Right Thoughts (sammā-saṅkappa) include thoughts of renunciation, thoughts of loving-kindness, and thoughts of compassion by avoiding three unwholesome thoughts: thoughts of sensual pleasure, thoughts of killing, and thoughts of hurting. Four Right Speeches (sammā-vācā) means avoiding unwholesome speech: telling a lie, slandering, harsh speech, and frivolous speech. Three Right Actions (sammā-kammanta) refers to refraining from three wrong actions: killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. Right livelihood means earning one's livelihood without getting involved in the three wrong actions and four wrong speeches.*

mindfulness (*sammā-sati*) and right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*). Samantha practices help purify our mind from mental defilements (*kilesa*). Loving kindness meditation, for example, helps quiet such kilesas as anger, hatred, ill-will, jealousy, conceit and so on; the contemplation on 32 anatomical parts or recollection of one's death helps minimize our ego, intolerance, and selfishness; the meditation on the in-and-out breath protects our mind from negative emotions like worry, anxiety, depression, wandering thoughts, and so on. Hence, concentration is honored as mental purification, which forms a strong foundation for higher spiritual development.

Thus, with understanding of kamma as our own property, we do wholesome deeds that form eight factors of the Prerequisite Path (*mūla-magga*).

## **2. Stages of the Preliminary Path Culminating in the Noble Path**

"Preliminary Path" refers to the development of progressive vipassana insight by discerning mental and physical phenomena that are changing every moment. It is an illusion to see someone or something to be solid and lasting, beautiful or ugly, whereas it is vipassana insight to see the flux of mind and body beyond such illusion.

In order to discern mind and body, we should be mindful of four kinds of objects (according to this discourse): body, feelings, minds and dhamma. In the beginning of the practice, we cannot see real phenomena, their conditionality or changes beyond

concepts such as "I" or "mine." The illusory sense of "I" or "mine" always prevails in our heart. We still think it is "I" who is sitting, walking, happy, unhappy, thinking, planning, seeing, hearing, and so on. When concentration and mindfulness are strong enough, however, we will be able to discern physical and mental elements beyond such concepts and without identifying them as "I" or "mine."

### **Discernment of Mind and Body**

1. When we note physical objects like breath, abdominal movement or bodily actions, we mainly experience four kinds of physical elements: the earth element, in terms of hardness or softness; the water element, in terms of heaviness and lightness; the fire element, in terms of cold, warmth, or heat; the air element, in terms of tightness, tension, vibration, and pressure.
2. When we note sensations or feelings such as pleasure or pain, happiness or sadness, we can see them as separate from the body and without identifying them as "I" or "mine." Normally, we think "it is I" who is in pain or unhappy. Under the light of strong mindfulness and concentration, we can see pain as pain or unhappiness as unhappiness without identifying it as "I" and "mine."
3. When we note thoughts, such as lust-related thoughts, anger-related thoughts, worry-related thoughts, wandering thoughts and so on, we can see different thoughts arising along with different sense-objects. We can also see

mental phenomena as separate from the body and without identifying them as “I” or “mine.”

4. When we note dhamma-objects such as seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching, we can discern real phenomena—senses, sense-objects, their corresponding sense-consciousness or subsequent thought processes—without identifying them with “I” or “mine.”

Thus, we will discern mind and body if we are able to see phenomena while they are still present. For instance, the Venerable Mahāsi Sayadaw said, if we want to really see lightning, we have to see it the moment it strikes, neither before nor after. To catch such moments, we must be alert and mentally active. In the same way, to see mental and physical phenomena while they are still present, we must be very alert and mentally active. Once we see the present phenomena, we can discern what they really are and how they arise and disappear. Such discernment forms a strong foundation for the entire structure of progressive vipassana insights. In other words, discernment of mind and body leads us all the way from the basic level of vipassana insight up to magga-phala enlightenment. Unfortunately, many of us take these discernments for granted and think they are unimportant, as we often complain that we are experiencing nothing special. So, remember that we are building the strong foundation necessary for the whole structure of spiritual accomplishment by being able to discern phenomena as mentioned above.

## **Five or Eight Factors of the Preliminary Path**

Each and every stage of vipassana insight consists of five Working Path-factors (*kāraṅga maggaṅga*). Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration are involved in the attempts we make to become aware of presently arising phenomena. "Right Thought" here refers to the attention we direct towards the meditative objects. "Right View" arises in terms of understanding mind and body as they really are. These five factors are called the Working Path-factors (*kāraṅga-maggaṅga*), because they are working together to develop vipassana insights until they culminate in maturity of the Eight-fold Noble Path. However, we are considered to be developing all the eight Path Factors every time we see mind and body as they really are. This is because the three moral factors (right speech, right action and right livelihood) are usually fulfilled either before or during meditation practice.

### **3. The Noble Path (Ariya Magga)**

Thus, progressive vipassana insight advances gradually until it culminates in magga-enlightenment which is composed of eight factors called the Eightfold Noble Path. Here, Mahāsi Sayadaw compared the Preliminary Path (vipassana insights) and Noble Path (magga-enlightenment) to jumping over a canal and landing on the other bank. There are four tasks that are accomplished at the moment of enlightenment: First, seeing mind and body being constantly tormented by impermanence (*dukkha*); second, eradicating attachment to them, which is

responsible for the cycle of rebirth (the cause of dukkha); third, experiencing their cessation, nibbāna (the cessation of dukkha); and lastly, accomplishing eight factors of the Noble Path, which reach their full maturity at this moment (the Path leading to the cessation of dukkha).

## **Accomplishment of the Goal**

Among the Four Noble Truths, before enlightenment, we only experience the first two, namely, dukkha (mental and physical phenomena) and the cause of dukkha (attachment). It is only when we attain the magga-phala enlightenment that we can experience the last two Noble Truths: the accomplishment of the Eightfold Noble Path and the realization of Nibbāna. However, as mentioned repeatedly, if we can note objects while they are present, we will be able to discern mental and physical phenomena without identifying them as "I" or "mine." Such discernment means realizing dukkha (the first truth), undermining attachment (the second truth), leading to the experience of nibbāna (the third truth), and walking on the Noble path (the fourth truth).

*"Oh monks, just as the River Ganges flows towards, inclines towards, tends towards the east, so too, one who cultivates and develops the Noble Eightfold Path flows towards, inclines towards and tends towards nibbāna."  
(Samyutta 5, 38)*

By practicing as instructed in this discourse, we will empirically see the first two Noble Truths arise

and pass away within us, and we will inferentially see these in other beings. Through this practice, mindfulness is established and vipassana-insights are developed step by step until the cessation of clinging; that is, magga-phala enlightenment and the realization of nibbāna. So, the Buddha said as follows:

### **Culmination**

1. *"In this way, in regards to dhammas he abides contemplating dhammas internally, or he abides contemplating dhammas externally, or he abides contemplating dhammas both internally and externally.*
2. *He abides contemplating the nature of arising (while observing) dhammas, or he abides contemplating the nature of the passing away in dhammas, or he abides contemplating the nature of both arising and passing away in dhammas.*
3. *Mindfulness that "there are dhammas" is established in him to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and continuous mindfulness.*
4. *And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world.*
5. *That is how, in regards to dhammas, he abides contemplating dhammas in terms of the Four Noble Truths."*

### **ASSURANCE OF ATTAINMENT**

Having studied the great discourse on the establishment of mindfulness or great observing power (Mahā-satipaṭṭhāna Sutta), we now come to

the Assurance of Attainment which was given by the Buddha himself. Before we study this assurance, let us review what we have learned from this sutta so far.

## **Twenty-one Ways**

In this sutta, the Buddha taught us how to establish mindfulness in twenty-one different ways:

- The Contemplation of the Body in fourteen ways: mindfulness of breathing, bodily postures, clear comprehension of activities, contemplation on the thirty-two anatomical parts of body, on the material elements, and the nine cemetery contemplations.
- The Contemplation of Feelings
- The Contemplation of the Mind.
- The Contemplation of the Dhamma in five ways: Mindfulness of the five hindrances, the five aggregates of clinging, the six internal and external sense-sources, the seven awakening factors, and the Four Noble Truths.

After describing all these twenty-one ways of meditation on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Buddha gave this assurance,

*"Monks, if anyone should develop these four satipaṭṭhānas in such a way for seven years, then one of two fruits can be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now or, if there is a trace of clinging left, non-returning.*



*Let alone seven years, monks, if anyone should develop these four satipaṭṭhānas in such a way for six years, five years ... four years ... three years ... two years ... one year, then one of two fruits can be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now or, if there is a trace of clinging left, non-returning.*

*Let alone one year, monks, if anyone should develop these four satipaṭṭhānas in such a way for seven months... six months ... five months ... four months ... three months ... two months ... one month ... half a month, then one of two fruits can be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now or, if there is a trace of clinging left, non-returning.*

*Let alone half a month, monks, if anyone should develop these four satipaṭṭhānas in such a way for seven days, then one of two fruits can be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now or, if there is a trace of clinging left, non-returning. So, with reference to this, it was said:*

*"Monks, this is the only sure path for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the disappearance of dukkha and discontent, for acquiring the true method, for the realization of nibbāna, namely, the four satipaṭṭhāna."*

*This the Blessed One said. Glad in their hearts, the monks welcomed the words of the Blessed One.*

In the conclusion of the great discourse, the Buddha compellingly assured us that we can accomplish the highest or the second highest stage of enlightenment if we practice satipaṭṭhāna meditation for seven years at most or seven days at least depending on how mature our spiritual potentials are. In his assurance, the Buddha used the number "seven" a lot. He counted down from "seven years" to "one year", and then "seven months" instead of "eleven months" according to mathematical order and ended his statement with "seven days." In ancient India, "seven" was a popular number for several reasons, so this statement was not intended to set an exact time frame for spiritual accomplishment within seven years, seven months or seven days. For example, Venerable Mahāsīva, a highly-learned senior monk, took three decades while Bāhiya Dārucīriya took just a few minutes to accomplish the spiritual breakthrough to the realization of nibbāna.

As a matter of fact, this assurance clearly indicates the variation in time for spiritual accomplishment of individuals with different spiritual backgrounds. So, this statement vividly implies that we can become awakened at any moment, if the mindfulness is well established (*supaṭṭhita-sati*) and with the help of well-balanced mental faculties<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> *A balance is required between faith and knowledge and between effort and concentration. Regarding too much faith, a*

According to the discourses, we cannot say exactly how long we need to practice in order to accomplish mindfulness or to eradicate our mental defilements. In this regard, the Buddha gave us a simile. A carpenter, the Buddha once said, cannot measure how much his ax handle has worn out when observing it on a daily basis, but will realize this over time, due to his finger marks which impress on the handle after repeated use. So too will a meditator, after repeated practice, realize that the defilements are growing weaker and are gradually being eradicated. This simile indicates a gradual progress towards realization, although it cannot be measured in a precise time frame. Obviously, the finger marks on the handle arise gradually; they do not suddenly emerge. In the same way, Bāhiya's spiritual aptitude (*pāramī*), when he met the Buddha, had gradually

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*good example is Venerable Vakkali, who became fully awakened only when he balanced excessive adoration of the Buddha with the cultivation of wisdom. For excessive effort, Venerable Ananda is a good example. He became fully enlightened once he relaxed his excessive energy. Another example is Venerable Soṇa, who became an arahant by reducing his excessive effort according to the guidance given by the Buddha with the simile of the harp whose strings, if too loose, will not produce a nice sound, whereas they will break, if too tight. Regarding the excessive application of one's knowledge, a good example is Venerable Mahāsiva who, highly learned and over-confident, had to take three decades to accomplish his practice. Another well-known example is Venerable Sāriputta, who applied too much knowledge to his practice and experiences and, therefore, attained the arahantship a week later than his best friend, Venerable Moggalāna.*

developed and matured enough for a sudden breakthrough to the realization of nibbāna.

Actually, even gradual progress towards realization has many ups and downs along the way until enlightenment like a bird that always flies up and down as it steadily moves toward its goal. Mahāsi Sayadaw explained this point in comparison with the speedometer that always goes up and down according to the acceleration of the car. One day, we may reach the higher stages of vipassana insight when our practice accelerates due to continuous mindfulness, strong concentration and having well-balanced mental faculties. The next day, however, an imbalance of mental faculties during our practice may return us to the basic stages of practice. Even during the same day, our practice may progress in the morning, but regress in the evening. So, the fluctuation of progression and regression is a normal process which yogis experience in their meditation practice. Despite these fluctuations, this process gradually builds up momentum and, due to an ever-increasing potential, may culminate in the sudden realization of nibbāna. This means we can become awakened at any moment. So, remember that each and every single moment of mindfulness is a step closer to the goal.

With much metta,  
U Hla Myint

## Sharing Merits

May all beings share this merit  
Which we have thus acquired  
For the acquisition of all kinds of happiness

May beings inhabiting space and earth,  
*Devas* and *nāgas* of mighty power  
Share this merit of ours  
May they long protect the teachings!

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