

# A Vipassana Retreat

with Venerable Pannyavaro



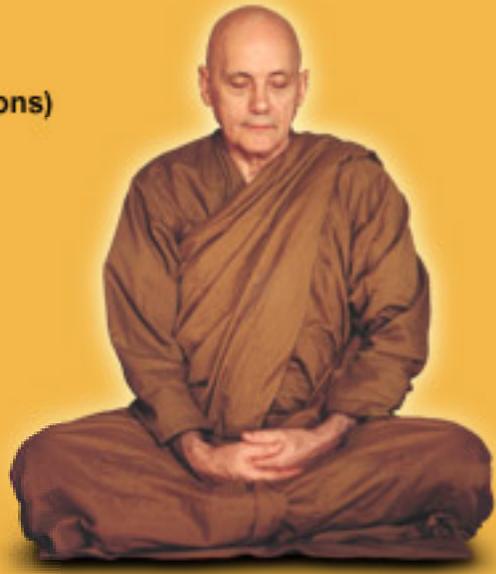
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Buddha Dharma Education Association Inc.

# A Vipassana Retreat

TALKS FROM A 10 DAY RETREAT WITH VEN. PANNYAVARO

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## **About the Vipassana Retreat**

Vipassana meditation requires long-term commitment. While it can be done casually in an everyday life situation, realistically for the practise to deepen it has to be done intensively. The practice is developmental, so to realise its ultimate benefit it needs to be sustained with appropriate intensity under supportive conditions.

Therefore, vipassana retreat centres specialising the needs of vipassana practitioners have evolved to cater for these needs, usually to the exclusion of any religious or study activities.

The intensive vipassana retreat is a recent trend in Buddhism originating in Burma after the Second World War when the Burmese Prime Minister U Nu, a keen meditator, invited the late Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw to teach in a meditation centre he set up in Rangoon, the Mahasi Sasana Yeiktha. This was the beginning of the modern revival of vipassana meditation which originated in Burma and soon spread to other Theravada Buddhist countries in Asia and retreat centres in the West.

A worldwide meditation culture has now evolved which caters for lay meditators who are not necessarily Buddhists, often with lay teachers, supported by senior monastic teachers in the lineage. This style of practice, while demanding, has proved to be popular as vipassana techniques can be systematically taught and there is a pool of knowledge and experience with a variety of trained teachers.

The retreats can run for two, four, nine, sixteen or thirty days. They are conducted in silence, which includes no talking, no communication through body language, no listening to music, no reading or no writing except for brief notes recording the meditation experience. However, there are opportunities to discuss the practice with the teacher through individual consultations or group discussion.

A typical retreat day begins at 5 am and ends at 10 pm, with a rest period in the middle of the day. The whole day is spent practising sitting and walking meditation, cultivating continuous attention to the changing nature of the moment-to-moment experience. The retreat teacher gives evening talks to inspire and explain the practice as well as conducting interviews.

A meditation retreat is a serious undertaking, which requires effort and self-discipline. A retreat is not a chance to escape the pressures of daily life, nor a time out in which to do your own thing. Rather it is an opportunity to cultivate the Buddha's way of liberation through the practice of ethics, meditation, and understanding. Walking this path, we can learn to abandon actions of body, speech and mind that bring suffering to ourselves and those around us, and cultivate actions that bring happiness and harmony to ourselves and those around us.

- **Go to [The Three Areas of Practice](#) (Basic Instructions)**

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### **A Vipassana Retreat**

#### **THREE AREAS OF PRACTICE: SITTING, WALKING & DAILY ACTIVITIES**

1. Sitting - the primary focus is on the rise and fall movement of the abdomen, switching to secondary objects, such as pain, sensations, thinking, etc. as they arise.
2. Walking - the component parts of the steps in walking are noted and known in fine detail.
3. Daily Activities - detailed awareness of all body movements and actions with the support of mental noting or labeling throughout the day's activities.

Linking these three areas of practice together will create an unbroken 'thread of awareness' that will give momentum to the practice.

#### **Technique of Mental Noting**

A useful device to support meditative attention is naming or labeling the various objects during the investigation of your own body and mind. Used judiciously, it is a useful tool for focusing and sustaining the attention. The noting is done by repeatedly making a mental note of whatever arises in your body and mind experience. For example, 'hearing', 'hearing', 'thinking', 'thinking', 'touching', 'touching', etc. This is a powerful aid to help establish attentiveness, especially at the beginning of the practice, when it is vital to systematically note or label as much as possible to establish the attention. Otherwise, you are likely to get lost in unnoticed wanderings with long periods of inattention.

Only when you have succeeded in sustaining the attention can the mental noting be dropped. If the noting has become mechanical or is so clumsy that it is interfering with the subtle attention then one needs to do it more lightly. In noting, ninety percent or more of the effort should go into being with the experience of the object, the rest in the labeling.

Having acquired the ability to monitor your experience with just bare attention, you will need to return to the mental noting only when the attention weakens, is lost or needs to be re-established. The mental noting can be combined with the practice of orientating to your sense impressions by the naming of the physical and mental objects as they arise at the six sense doors. Be careful not to analyse what is being observed, just register or note it without reaction.

#### **Instruction for Sitting Meditation**

The first step is to find a balanced sitting posture. You should be relaxed, yet your spine should be straight - you may have noticed how a 5-year-old sits up in a balanced way without effort. Allow your head to balance freely on the spine, checking that it is not pulled back or

fixed. Allow your chin to drop so that your eyes and ears are at about the same level.

If sitting on the floor, use cushion(s) so that your knees are below your hips and in contact with the floor (otherwise your spine will collapse) or else use a chair with a firm base (not a sofa). Slumping only increases the pressure on the legs and discomfort in the back. Try radiating loving-kindness above and below and in all directions around you to check that you are not holding or contracting in the front or the back, etc. Check that your breathing is free and easy - any restriction indicates a fixed posture. Turn your awareness to the parts of your body which contact the cushion, ground or chair, softening onto the supporting surfaces.

It is useful to spend five minutes scanning the body in this way. Note that there is no such thing as 'perfect posture' and postural aches will come and go as a natural part of the unfolding practice. If pain becomes overwhelming or is due to injury, mindfully adjust the posture after noting the various sensations. However, as concentration develops, sensations of hotness, stiffness and itchiness will arise as part of the contemplation of feeling and sensation, and it is important to note them mindfully without fidgeting.

It is important to attend to your posture with wisdom, not insensitive willpower. Posture will improve with time, but you need to work with the body, not use force against it. If you have a lot of pain during a period of sitting, change posture, sit on a small stool or chair, or stand up for a while.

### **Checking your posture**

- Are the hips leaning back? This will cause a slump.
- The small of the back should retain its natural, unforced curve so that the abdomen is forward and 'open'.
- Imagine that someone is gently pushing between the shoulder blades, but keep the muscles relaxed.
- Note and gently release any tension in the neck/shoulder region.

Once you have settled into a comfortable, upright, balanced position you can begin meditating.

On the basis of working from the gross to the subtle, i.e. from the body to the mind, feel the touch sensations of hardness or softness from the body's contact with the ground or chair (earth element). This will help to anchor the attention to the body, especially when assisted by the mental label of 'touching', 'touching'. Then tune into the natural rising and falling movement of the lower abdomen, making a mental note or label of 'rising', 'rising' concurrent with the upward movement and 'falling', 'falling' with the downward movement.

Make sure when noting the rise and fall movement of the abdomen that you are connecting with the airflow and are not merely knowing the conceptual form and shape of the abdomen. You are always looking for the specific characteristics - the subtlest phenomena, the fine nuances of the movement.

It is important to be alert to the specific characteristics of the various elements under observation, e.g., the series of sensations from the movement of the abdomen (wind element) or the specific characteristics found in pain such as heat, throbbing, etc. (fire element). The

traditional sitting posture gives the right environmental conditions and allows you to focus intensely and apprehend, at a microscopic level, the body's elements and the subtle mind events.

## **The Transition in the Change Over**

At the end of each sitting session make a gentle transition. That is do not abruptly drop the meditation, but carefully follow through to being aware of unfolding the limbs, noting the release of the pressure in the posture, the movements in standing up and stretching, thereby carrying the practice into the next activity. Take extra care in the traveling between the sitting posture and the formal walking meditation. Try to do it without a break - as it is the continuity of the practice that will deepen it.

## **Technique in Walking Meditation**

While meditation is usually associated with the sitting posture, vipassana meditation exercises can be practised while walking. The walking exercise is essentially about the awareness of movement as you note the component parts of the steps. Alternating walking meditation with sitting meditation helps to keep the meditation practice in balance.

Walking meditation is also a skillful way to energise the practice if the calming effect of sitting is making you dull or you are becoming over concentrated. Actually, it can be the preferred mode as it is meditation in action.

You will need to find a level surface from five to ten metres long on which you can walk back and forth. Your arms should hang naturally with your hands lightly clasped in front. Gaze at a point about two metres in front of you on the ground to avoid visual distractions. Establish your attentiveness by first noting the standing posture and the touch sensation of the feet at the start of the walking track. Then as you walk keep the attention on the sole of the foot, not on the leg or any other part of the body.

For the first five to ten minutes or so, you can start with noting each step as 'left', 'right'; then you can move to noting three parts of each step: 'lifting', 'pushing', 'dropping'. Mentally note or label each step part by part, building up so that you are noting all six component parts: 'raising', 'lifting', 'pushing', 'dropping', 'touching' and 'pressing' - concurrent with the actual experience of the movements.

While walking and noting the parts of the steps you will probably find the mind still thinking. Not to worry, keep focussed on the noting of the steps, so long as the thoughts remain just 'background thoughts'. However, if you find you have been walking 'lost in thought' you must stop and vigorously note the thinking as 'thinking', 'thinking', 'thinking'. Then reestablish your attention on the movement and carry on. Be careful that the mental noting does not become so mechanical that you lose the experience of the movement.

Try to do a minimum walking period of half an hour and build it up to a full hour. Strategically it is better to do a walking period before a sitting session as it brings balance into the practice. If you can alternate the walking and sitting sessions without any major breaks you will develop a continuity of awareness that naturally carries through into the awareness of daily activities.

## **Full Awareness of Daily Activities**

For awareness to deepen, continuity, which gives momentum to the practice, must be maintained for at least a few hours in the day. Continuity arises through careful and precise attention to movements, actions, feelings and mind-states, whatever is prominent, for as long as possible during the routine of the day.

Nothing can be dismissed as unimportant when noting daily activities: domestic chores, eating, cleaning your teeth. Repeatedly note any and every movement and activity in order to establish the habit so that it becomes second nature to note them in your daily routine. Of course, this is not easy to establish and so requires patience and perseverance - especially in being kind to yourself when you feel frustrated by constant forgetfulness!

If you are having difficulty, set yourself up to do a daily mindfulness exercise using a 'trigger' as a reminder. For instance, you could use contact with water as a trigger to remind you to be present with whatever you are doing while you are doing it, for instance washing your hands, doing the dishes, hosing the garden, washing the dog, etc. If you succeed only once in paying full attention it might be the start of establishing the habit of being mindful.

It can be helpful to reinforce your efforts in being attentive in daily life by reviewing or taking stock of your daily mindfulness - but without evaluating or making judgments about the practice - and recording your practice in a meditation diary.

## **The Four Postures**

Another practice that can be included in the awareness of daily activities is the noting of the four postures: sitting, standing, walking and lying down. It is a simple thing to do and it can be used as a 'thread of awareness' practice throughout the day. That is, you continually note or monitor the four postures at all times. You would start from the moment of awakening in bed in the lying down posture and note or be aware of all the touch contacts of the body on the bed; then as you rise note the sitting posture - as 'sitting', and then having got out of bed, you are standing - note 'standing', 'standing', and as you move, note 'walking', 'walking'.

You can monitor the four main postures throughout the day in this way until the end of the day when you lay down the body to take rest for the night. You can find more detail in the posture movements as you make a transition from one posture to another, as this will maintain the continuity of the attention, which in vipassana practice is the key to its success.

- **Go to [Day 1: Orientation to the Practice](#)**

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### **A Vipassana Retreat**

DAY 1: ORIENTATION TO THE PRACTICE

#### **Adjusting to the Intensive Retreat Situation**

Whether this is a first time experience of intensive meditation or you're a meditator who has some experienced in this style of practice, every meditator here will need to make some adjustment to the intensive retreat situation. Ongoing instruction on the basics of the practice of will be given, supplemented by personal guidance and further instruction in the interviews during the retreat. For the practice to develop, it is important that the teacher and the students work together in tandem. As a technician of vipassana meditation with some travel experience my role here is to instruct and guide you. Even when you go along with a guide and still have to do you own work, which in this case is quite demanding; because it requires honesty, attentiveness, patience and above all persistence. First let us look how one practices in an intensive retreat situation, and the way to adjust to a retreat environment before we go into the instructional side of things.

#### **A Practical Self-regulatory Approach**

This is not a group practice, there are no formal groups sittings. The walking and sitting meditation sessions are done individual at your own pace. The approach is self-regulatory practice. Therefore you need to learn how to manage yourself in the practice so that you can make your own adjustments as you go along with the help of the teacher. To 'self-manage' the practice requires that you have a thorough understand of what you are doing - the techniques and strategies - and as the teacher I am here to help you do that.

#### **Putting Aside Unfinished Business**

At the beginning of the retreat there can be a lot of busyness of an ongoing nature in the mind that is brought into the retreat. Perhaps there is some 'unfinished business' you have not dealt with, especially if it is of an emotional nature such as a problem in a relationship. So at the start of a retreat it is useful to make a determination (adithani) to put aside as much as possible all outside business for the duration of the retreat as this will help you to settle.

#### **Be Gently with Yourself**

Be gently with yourself as you are probably carrying a sleep-debt, are tired or perhaps stressed. Most people will experience some sleepiness and restlessness in a retreat - at least initially. If you allow for that without reacting to it you will very soon find yourself settling down into the routine of the retreat. For most people, it takes at least a few days to settle and for the mind to become reasonably quiet. So allow for this settling in period as you recuperate and let the mind wind down. Then you will be able to give your full attention to what is happening in

the mind and body; and as the practice matures then one can know the naturally silent mind.

## **Changing the Focus**

In everyday life we are naturally preoccupied with the content of our minds - our story. And for the most part we are externally focused on sensory objects. What needs to happen is a change in one's focus from the sensory world with its external focus to an inner exploration of our own mind-body phenomena. In the intensive retreat situation as the mind settles down we switch to investigating the natural processes of the mind and body from a state of receptivity. Although the switch of focus will naturally happen in the course of the retreat, it is useful to intentionally change the focus of our attention from the external to the internal by inhibiting the wanderings at the sense doors - the seeing, hearing, etc. In this way the attention is refocused to introspect one's own mind and body phenomena.

## **Getting Around in the Retreat Environment**

Use the whole of the retreat environment as your practice area. Do not confine the practice to the formal practice in the meditation hall only. It is all about staying watchful and attentive as much as possible in the total retreat environment: in the bathroom, dining-room, and sleeping place as you travel from place to place. Start by being purposely deliberate in your movements and actions as you move around the retreat as this will help you to slow down - to settle.

## **Maintaining the Intensity**

It is essential to maintain the intensity of the practice without straining. Steady and sustained application is needed in all areas of practice: sitting, walking, and detailed awareness of all activities throughout the day.

Effort and energy go together. Nobody can be 100% at all times. One has to go with one's natural rhythms - one's energy cycles. A balanced effort is required that has to be as continuous as possible as it will produce the momentum that eventually deepens the practice.

Notice how you are relating to your experience without evaluating or judging it. Have no expectations. Skillful attitude is one of acceptance of whatever conditions and mind-states arise. Monitor your mind-states, emotions and feelings without reacting to them, as this acceptance and non-reactive awareness will develop the maturity factor of equanimity.

The Pali Buddhist term for this practice is *Vipassana Bhavana* which translates as the development of insight. Keep in mind then that this practice is developmental - allowing it to evolve and grow. And 'practice' is repeated performance or the repetition of an action to develop the skill. The skill that is being developed here is that of ongoing attentiveness which is the key to the development of insight.

## **How to Act during an Intensive Retreat**

### **Act like a sick person**

During practice, a meditator needs to act feeble and slowly in all activities just like a weak, sick person, as if he was suffering from back pain. A person with a chronic back problem must

always be cautious and move slowly just to avoid pain. In the same way, a meditator should try to keep to slow movements in all actions. While it is not a slow motion exercise, per se, slowing down in intensive meditation is necessary to establish moment-to-moment awareness. If you are still operating in top gear, bring the mind to bottom gear and be patient with the change of speed until you are able to slow down and function in bottom gear at all times.

### **Act like a blind person**

It is advisable for a meditator to behave as a blind person during a course of training. A person without restraint will be constantly scanning around to look at things that randomly take his attention. So it is not possible to obtain a steady and calm state of mind. On the other hand, a blind person behaves in a composed manner, sitting quietly with downcast eyes. He never turns in any direction to look at things because, of course, he is blind and cannot see them. This composed manner of a blind person is worth imitating. A meditator should not go sightseeing but stay focused on the meditation object without exception, but if a sight happens to take his attention he must note immediately, as "seeing", 'seeing".

### **Act like a deaf person**

It is necessary for a meditator to also act like a deaf person. Ordinarily, as soon as a person hears a sound, he turns around and looks in the direction from which the sound came, or he turns towards the person who spoke to him and makes a reply. A deaf person on the other hand, behaves in a composed manner. He does not respond to any sound or conversation because he never hears them. In the same way, a meditator should not respond to any sound or any unimportant talk, nor should he deliberately listen to any talk. If he happens to hear any sound or speech, he should immediately note "hearing", hearing". He should be so intent on the practice that he could be mistaken for a deaf person.

- **Go to [Day 2: Path Map with Clear Directions](#)**

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### **A Vipassana Retreat**

#### **DAY 2: A PATH MAP WITH CLEAR DIRECTIONS**

What do we base the practice of vipassana meditation on, and what is the purpose of it - the outcome? The practice is based on a path map with clear directions, which the Buddha gave in a teaching called the Satipatthana Sutta\* or the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

This text - the main points will be explained here - maps out the process of transformation of the meditator's consciousness as practice develops, and outlines the stages of progress from the beginning of the path to its ultimate destination - transformation of consciousness, and thus liberation.

The Buddha very clearly stated the aims and outcome of this practice allowing for no doubt or misinterpretation. In the preamble to the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Buddha said:

"Bhikkhus, (monks or practitioners) this is the one and the only way for the purification of mind, for overcoming sorrow and lamentation, for the cessation of physical and mental pain, for attainment of the Noble Paths and for the realisation of Nibbana".

Within this path map there are various routes one can take, but essentially the destination of this map is the path of liberation, whichever route you happen to take. The choice of the route, and the subjects given, are to be found in the four divisions and twenty-one subjects in the text.

To give an outline of the text: the four divisions for the establishment of mindfulness are: contemplation of the body (kayanupassana); contemplation of feelings (vedananupassana); contemplation of consciousness (cittanupassana) and contemplation of dhammas or mental objects (dhammanupassana).

The subjects within the four divisions are:

#### 1. Contemplation of the Body

- Mindfulness of Breathing
- The Four Postures of the Body
- Clear Comprehension of Activities
- Repulsiveness of the 32 Parts of the Body
- The Four Material Elements
- Nine Cemetery Contemplations

#### 2. Contemplation of Feelings

#### 3. Contemplation of Consciousness

#### 4. Contemplation of Dhammas (5 subjects)

Contemplation of Dhammas is classified into five sections, namely (i) Five Hindrances\* (ii) The Five Aggregates\* (iii) Six Internal and Six External Sense Bases\* (iv) The Seven Factors of Enlightenment\* (v) Four Noble Truths\*.

\* 5 Hindrances: sensuality, all forms of ill-will; mental inertia; remorse, restlessness and worry; skeptical doubt.

\* 5 Aggregates of Grasping: body; feelings; perception; mental formations; consciousness.

\* 7 Factors of Enlightenment are: mindfulness; investigation of the dharma (phenomena); effort; rapture; tranquility; concentration; equanimity.

\* Six Internal and Six External Sense Bases.

\* Four Noble Truths: The fact of suffering, cause of suffering, ending of suffering, way to the ending of suffering.

#### **Access to Insight**

This approach or the access to insight follows the lineage of the late Mahasi Sayadaw of Burma. It is that of 'bare insight' where, by direct observation, one's own bodily and mental processes are seen with increasing clarity as the 'Three Marks of Existence': impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-me, not-myself.

The 'bare insight' meditator begins by watching the air element (vayo-dhatu) in the abdomen in sitting, and movement in the walking. This is from the Four Material Elements meditation, focusing primarily on the wind or air element, combined with Clear Comprehension of Activities. The other main sections: Feelings; Consciousness and Mental Objects are worked with as well, but as secondary objects until they predominate.

#### **Two Types of Meditation**

For clarity one needs to know that there are two types of meditation: Serenity meditation (samatha), which is based on concentration on a single object to achieve one-pointedness; and Insight meditation (vipassana), which is an experiential investigation of your own mind/body processes. These two types of meditation can be combined or vipassana as 'Bare Insight' can be done by itself.

#### **Three Types of Concentration**

As it is necessary for the meditator to understand the types of meditation and their outcomes it is also useful to understand the three types of concentration in meditation, they are: one-pointedness (appana), access (upacara) and momentary concentration (khanika).

Momentary concentration (khanika samadhi). The pure vipassana meditator uses momentary concentration, which comes about through the noting of vipassana objects, i.e., noting the various mental and physical phenomena that occur in the mind and body, as they occur. It is called khanika (momentary) because it occurs only at the moment of noting and, in the case of vipassana, not on a fixed object as in Samatha-jhana meditation but on changing objects or phenomena that occur in the mind and body.

Access or Threshold Concentration (upacara samadhi). In pure vipassana, access or threshold concentration arises with fluency in the practice, but it is not specifically induced in any way. Access and momentary concentration are more than sufficient for vipassana practice as most of the subjects in the Satipatthana Sutta lead only to access or momentary concentration. Generally it can be said that a person reaches upacara samadhi when the five hindrances are inhibited.

It was necessary to briefly explain the concentration required in this practice because of the confusion and controversy regarding the type of concentration in vipassana meditation - whether it is better to do Jhana first or whether *khanika samadhi* is strong enough to do the job. So let me assure you that *khanika samadhi* is more than enough for this practice as is verified by the thousands if not hundreds of thousands of meditators who have attained by going down this path.

We are following the path of the dry or bare vipassana practitioner without any Jhanas, whose knowledge is not from learning, from reading or listening to talks, but from intuition. Freed by wisdom alone, by experientially knowing the characteristics of the mind and body and insighting into their Impermanence, Unsatisfactoriness and Insubstantiality.

Of the twenty-one sections for contemplation in the Satipatthana Sutta, in only two sections is it possible to attain Jhana - anapanasati and contemplation of the repulsiveness of the body (asubha). With the other sections one can develop upacara samadhi (threshold) and khanika (momentary) concentration.

The conditions that exist in the modern world are not conducive to developing the Jhanas. With the pressures and stressful pace of life most people can find little time for meditation; the same can be said for the ordained Sangha as well, as they too can be caught up in administrative work and study.

### **Ways to Work with Mental Impurities**

It is helpful to make a model of the mind to explain the three practices that go with them as a way to work with the impurities of the mind. The three levels of the mind are: dormant/hidden, manifest and expressed. The dormant or hidden level is where the impurities of the mind are, as it were, stored; the manifest level is when this material rises to the surface or to the conscious level of mind in thought; and the expressed mode is when this material is expressed in words or actions.

An analogy to explain how this works is that of a sleeping snake, which represents the dormant negative material, such as anger in the mind. When the snake is disturbed it becomes active and trashes about like angry thoughts in the mind; then the snake strikes as when one expresses the anger in words or actions.

Thus restraint (sila) is applied to inhibit the expression of the anger, as there is always some consequence from the expression of negative energy. But of course the anger is still active in the manifest level of mind; here we use a pacifying concentration-based meditation such as loving-kindness to still the mind. But this negative material still remains dormant in the mind

until vipassana meditation roots out the hidden mental impurities.

## **The Process of Purifying the Mind**

As well as leading to the Insight Knowledges and ultimately Path and Fruition Attainment (magga-phala) through experientially knowing the Three Universal Characteristics of Existence, Vipassana Bhavana or the development of insight is the process where the purification of the mind itself takes place.

The 5,8,10 precepts or the 227 rules of the monk are imposed to restrain the mind. But precepts and rules do not purify the mind if they are ritualised; being conceptual they are not experientially transforming in themselves.

Concentration (samadhi) of itself merely suppresses the mental impurities temporarily as it works only on the manifest level of the mind. It does not clean the mind. Vipassana meditation is the only way, the Buddha said, to purify the mind.

## **Psychotherapy before Meditation?**

In the Western meditation culture, there is a debate on whether one needs to do psychotherapy before meditation. This is because many meditators seem to be experiencing a lot of mental problems and difficulties as they meditate. Actually, from a Buddhist perspective it is the *kilesas*, or impurities in the mind of greed, hatred and delusion that meditators are experiencing which are not to be confused with clinical conditions such as psychosis, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorders and such.

It is an essential part of vipassana practice that one goes through the natural purification process that the Buddha referred to in the Satipatthana Sutta. One has to allow a ventilation of the deep mental content as one meditates, so that the dormant impurities of anger, lust, and delusion, etc are released - that is cleansed.

The attitude of the meditator or the way he or she relates to the meditation experience is one of the most critical factors in the practice. As it is vital that one allows any negative material to surface and not react or play back into it. In this way, a non-reactive awareness develops that allow for a natural purging and cleansing of the mind.

Referring back to the text we have been following, the Satipatthana Sutta, the Buddha gave us a specific time frame for attainment in this practice - 7 years to 7 days. For a beginner, a 10-day retreat is not enough time to complete the practice, but by working sincerely during this retreat you can establish the basis for an ongoing practice which potentially can lead to the ultimate liberation - Nibbana.

## **Recommended source material:**

\* The Satipatthana Sutta can be found in Venerable Nyanaponika's first-rate book on vipassana meditation: "The Heart of Buddhist Meditation", or the sutta is very clearly explained in Sayadaw U Silananda's "The Four Foundations of Mindfulness".

- **Go to [Day 3: Investigating the Body Phenomena](#)**

# INSIGHT MEDITATION ONLINE

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### A Vipassana Retreat

#### DAY 3: INVESTIGATING THE BODY PHENOMENA

To be free of illusion we need to penetrate the reality of the body-mind phenomena. Yet unknowingly we identify with the body's form and shape. That is, we have an image in our mind's eye of the shape and appearance of the body. The Buddha lists the body as the first of the five aggregates we grasp at, that is, identify with as 'me, myself'. The question is can we have a direct experience of the body's phenomena without identifying with it? It is not so easy to be free of this identification, as can be seen in the 'lost limb syndrome' where a person who loses a limb, will act, at least initially, as if the lost limb is still there.

How to then access the reality of the body and not automatically identify with it? One way is to investigate the body phenomena at its elemental level, that is, through The Four Essential Elements: earth, air, fire and water, or the experience of hardness, softness, movement and vibration, temperature, and the fluidity of the body. Such an introspection of the body will expose just the elements in the body and thus the meditator momentarily loses the sense of the body's boundaries, thereby weakening at least the gross identification with the body.

In contemplating the body, the primary object in this meditation is the tactile bodily process of motion, evident in the rising and falling movement of the abdomen, at the centre of the body. The 'inner wind element' is active in the body as motion, vibration and pressure manifesting itself in the passage of air through the body (e.g. in breathing), in the movement of limbs and organs, and so on. It becomes perceptible as a tactile process, as an object of touch, through the *pressure* caused by it. We are looking for particular or specific characteristics in the movement of the abdomen, which will reveal the Three Universal Characteristics of change, unsatisfactoriness and insubstantiality.

Insight meditators who focus on the body as their primary meditation object should have the same body consciousness as an athlete in training preparing his or her body for their sport. Ideally, the meditator's body is open and relaxed so that he or she can tune into the internal and external movements from a state of receptivity.

If on the other hand, the meditator's body is tight and tense, the practice becomes a struggle and one is out of tune with the present moment. So at the beginning of a sitting session, check to see if the body is relaxed and if at any time during the session you notice that the body has tensed, do a body scan and soften into any tension or contraction. If the body is contracted so must be the mind. Be open and allowing, as the practice is about receptivity, just tuning in to what is.

Do not interfere. Do not force or manipulate the movement of the abdomen in any way, just sense into the natural movement. Beginners often assume that they must stay focused on the

abdomen movement all the time and measure their success on whether they do it or not. When actually, within say an hour sitting session, the abdomen movement might only be discernible for short periods of time; other objects such as body sensations, mind states and thinking become predominant and so are noted as secondary objects.

While we initially are focused on the body, there are actually two things going on that we need to be aware of: the object and the 'knowing of it' or the 'consciousness of', for example, body sensations and the awareness which knows it.

This practice of 'pairing' needs to be established from the very beginning of the practice, in this way the meditator will come to appreciate that what is observing the phenomena is just the 'knowing' or the mind knowing the mind and 'not me or myself'.

For the clarity that leads to insight, we need to be able to differentiate between mind and body. Normally, the mind and body tends to merge or we act as if the body leads. Yet the Buddha tells us in the first verse of the Dhammapada that: "Mind precedes all knowables, mind's their chief, mind-made are they". Seeing the distinction between mind and body will create space, which will free us from the identification with the phenomena, allowing one to witness as an impartial observer without attachment.

In walking meditation, which is a technique of investigating movement in the process of walking, the meditator slows down and pays close attention in order to see all of the movements and stages clearly. Then what had appeared to be just one continuous movement is seen to be clearly defined stages. He or she will know that the lifting movement is not mixed with the moving forward movement, and the moving forward movement is not mixed with either the lifting or the putting down movement.

As the practice develops, the meditators will observe much more. When lifting the foot they will observe lightness of the foot. When their foot is raised, it will become lighter and lighter. When they push the foot forward, they will notice the movement from one place to another. When they put the foot down, they will feel the heaviness of the foot, because the foot becomes heavier and heavier as it descends. When they put their foot on the ground they will feel the touch of the foot on the ground and the hardness or softness of the foot or the ground.

When these processes are perceived, meditators are knowing the qualities of the essential elements, i.e. heaviness, lightness, heat, etc. By paying close attention to the stages of walking meditation, the four elements in their true essence are perceived, not merely as concepts, but as actual processes, as ultimate realities.

As the meditator continues to practise walking meditation, he or she will come to realise that, with every movement, there is also the noting mind, the awareness of the mind. There is the lifting movement and also the mind that is aware of the lifting. In the next movement there is the moving forward movement and also the mind that is aware of the movement. In addition, the meditator will realise that both the movement and the awareness arise and disappear in that moment. So the meditator will perceive mind and matter, arising and disappearing at every moment. At one moment there is the lifting of the foot and the awareness of the lifting, at the next moment there is the movement forward and the awareness of the movement, and so on. These can be understood as a pair, mind and matter, which arise and disappear at

every moment.

Another process that meditators will discover is that they lift the foot because they want to, move the foot forward because they want to, put it down and press the ground because they want to. That is, they realise that an intention precedes every movement. After the intention lifting occurs. They come to understand the conditionality of all these occurrences - these movements never occur by themselves, without conditions. There is a cause or condition for every movement and that the condition, in this case, is the intention preceding every movement.

When meditators comprehend mind and matter arising and disappearing at every moment, then they will understand the impermanence of the process of lifting the foot, and they will see the impermanence of the awareness of the lifting. The occurrence of disappearing after arising is a mark or characteristic by which we understand that something is impermanent. The next understand unsatisfactoriness, is seen because constant arising and disappearing of phenomena is experienced as oppressive.

After comprehending impermanence and the unsatisfactory nature of things, the meditator observes that there is no control over these things, that is, things are arising and disappearing according to natural laws. Thus, the meditator by this time has understood the three characteristics of all conditioned phenomena: change, unsatisfactoriness and insubstantiality.

The benefit of practising vipassana meditation is that it will free us from attachment and the desire for objects. It is by experientially knowing the three characteristics that desire or hankering in the mind is removed. We need to remove desire because we do not want to suffer. As long as there is desire and attachment, there will always be suffering. We come to realise that all things are just mind and matter, arising and disappearing, that things are insubstantial. Once this is deeply realised, attachment for things will end and we are free.

- **Go to [Day 4: Full Attention to Daily Activities](#)**

# ***INSIGHT MEDITATION ONLINE***

## ***INSIGHT MEDITATION ONLINE***

### **A Vipassana Retreat**

#### **DAY 4: FULL ATTENTION TO DAILY ACTIVITIES**

We rarely give full attention to what we do. At best it is just partial attention. The consequence of this is 'faulty intelligence' - not seeing reality. If you don't have the right intelligence you'll misread the experience, live in delusion and suffer. The writer, Iris Murdoch wrote: "We live in a fantasy world, a world of illusion. The great task in life is to find reality".

For the most part we live a shallow superficial culture that lacks depth. Everything is geared to allow us to give only partial attention towards what is in front of us. The dominant software company, Microsoft has coined a phrase for the way we take in the world around us: continuous partial attention. Their products are all geared to be usable under such circumstances. Three or more task windows are open on my computer screen at any time. So I skip from one to the other - just skimming and scanning, which is unfortunately symptomatic of the shallow life the majority of us lead.

The task in this retreat is to turn this around and train oneself to be fully attentive, which will create 'presence of mind' with clear comprehension, to uncover reality and in good time bring healing and a transformation of consciousness.

To do this we need to acquire the capacity for a sustained and deep attentiveness of all our movements and activities down to the minutest detail throughout the day. This dynamic practice of close attentiveness with full understanding of one's movements is the key to deepening vipassana practice, as it intensifies the awareness and exposes the reality of one's own physical and mental phenomena.

We cannot pretend that it is easy, as having continuous, close attentiveness goes somewhat against the grain - it is not natural to us. Therefore, we have to make constant effort to train ourselves to do this practice until it is so well established that it has become, as it were, our second nature.

It is very revealing to read the instructions the Buddha himself gave in the Contemplation of the Body in the subsection on Full Attention with Clear Comprehension (sati-sampajanna) in the Satipatthana Sutta or the Four Foundations of Mindfulness:

"And again, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu, while going forward or while going back he does so with clear comprehension; while looking straight ahead or while looking elsewhere he does so with clear comprehension; while bending or stretching his limbs he does so with clear comprehension; while carrying the alms bowl and while wearing the robes he does so with clear comprehension; while eating, drinking, chewing, and savouring he does so with clear

comprehension; while urinating or defecating he does so with clear comprehension; while walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking, speaking or when remaining silent, he does so with clear comprehension or full attentiveness".

You can see here that the Buddha is emphasising the continuity of awareness of daily activities with clear comprehension of all body movements in great detail - including what you do in the bathroom, nothing is too trivial that it is left out.

This is the most important set of instructions and perhaps the most demanding to follow in the practice of vipassana meditation. Yet meditators often find resistance in the mind to being purposefully attentive.

From the Buddha's time down to the present there have been teachers who have suggested practices and strategies that support the attentiveness practice. One of most prominent of these was the late Mahasi Sayadaw of Burma with a mental naming or noting technique:

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

When one wakes up, one should immediately resume noting. The meditator who is really intent on attaining the path and its fruition should rest from meditation only when asleep. At other times, in all waking moments, one should be noting continually and without let up. That is why, as soon as one awakens, one should note the awakening state of mind as 'awakening, awakening'. If one cannot yet be aware of this, one should begin with noting the rising and falling of the abdomen.

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

It is important to not give the mind any chance to slip into its old habits. We are very much creatures of habit operating on "autopilot" a lot of the time, making unconscious movements and actions. Hurrying is an indicator that you have slipped into automatic pilot. So turn off the autopilot and use the manual control, by consciously and deliberately noting all your actions throughout the day. Effort has to be made in this practice, but the effort you make is to be in the moment, being intimate with and fully attentive to whatever you are doing.

The beginner is advised to start by keeping a thread of awareness on one particular action

throughout the day, for example, naming the walking movement as 'walking', 'walking' without a break. Whenever the mind wanders from the noting of the walking to a secondary object such as thinking, seeing, hearing - then note the object that has taken your attention, before going back to the noting of walking. Then combine the noting of the walking with the noting of sitting, standing, and lying down, being especially attentive to the transition between each posture.

Close and sustained attention is the key to the practice. Maintaining close attentiveness for say 75% of daily activities for at least two to three hours in the day will carry over and increase the fluency of the practice in the formal sitting and walking meditation.

For meditators whose practice of full attentiveness has matured, they would be able to note or know nearly all their movements and actions - whatever is predominant in their experience - including the specific characteristics of the movements, for most if not all the day.

This practice then is not superficial, casual observation, as you must deeply penetrate the object under observation - 'presence' is combined with clear comprehension. That is, one must see the specific characteristics of the phenomena, the subtle and fine nuances of the movement, without identifying with the limb.

Then you will discover that what appears to be continuous movement is actually a series of discontinuous movements. Such an insight exposes the illusion of continuity. While this practice is not a slow motion exercise per se, it cannot be emphasized enough that the mindfulness meditator must slow down all bodily movements as much as possible in order to be there for the subtleties of the movements.

Take at least one activity during the day, such as eating and taking your time, try to do it 100%, finding the minutest detail. When you are eating all the senses are activated: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. Try and label all the physical movements and note the chewing, tasting, swallowing and savouring as well. This detailed noting is dynamic and increases the momentary concentration, thereby counterbalancing the static concentration in the formal sitting meditation.

A benefit that is not so much appreciated from this attentiveness training is that, with presence of mind, the mind is wholesome. Therefore you will feel good as you are freed from anxiety and worry and experience the blessing of being in the now.

The result of the practice of full attention of one's activities is that it creates the momentum that deepens the practice, where one sees that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent, unsatisfactory and not-me, not-myself, that is, the direct experience of the Three Universal Characteristics of existence.

By having established and habituated the practice of full attention in the supportive conditions of a retreat environment, it will give you the potential to integrate the attentiveness practices into everyday life. The benefits will be felt in all of your relationships and activities and can be the basis for an ongoing practice of mindfulness in daily life.

• **Go to [Day 5: Paying Attention to Feelings](#)**



# ***INSIGHT MEDITATION ONLINE***

## ***INSIGHT MEDITATION ONLINE***

### **A Vipassana Retreat**

#### **DAY 5: PAYING ATTENTION TO FEELINGS**

It is difficult to make much progress in vipassana meditation until you can come to terms with feelings and emotions, as the practice itself, at least in the early stages, will often bring up intense and persistent feelings and emotions. In the practice, positive or negative emotional states are acknowledged by noting without reaction as much as possible. Then it can be taken a step further by picking up the underlying feeling tone that is associated with an emotion, allowing for the feeling itself to be investigated.

While the term 'feelings' refers to physical sensations it also includes mental feelings as well. I would stress the importance of the practice of attentiveness to mental feelings because, by differentiating feelings from emotions you can defuse the emotional charge once you have developed the ability to catch the underlying feeling tone.

So let us take a closer look at feelings and how to work with them. In the English language we use the term 'feelings' interchangeably with 'emotions'. For example, when we say, "I'm feeling delighted" we are referring to the emotion of happiness. But in this context the term 'feeling' is used in the technical sense of a quality of pleasant, unpleasant or neither pleasant nor unpleasant, that is neutral feeling.

To make a statement of the obvious as sometimes the obvious can be overlooked: We are beings on the sensory plane. We live in the world of the senses - seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. It is through our senses that we experience the world, and it is through the sense impressions that we experience feelings.

Feelings are the source of our liking and disliking. If we are not aware of the underlying feelings we tend to automatically react to sense objects with liking or disliking - which is what is conditioning us. We 'pull in' what we like and 'push away' what we don't like. So mostly it is just liking, disliking - 'pushing and pulling'.

Whether people are aware of it or not, feelings are all pervasive in human life. Peoples' lives are mostly spent in unceasing effort to increase pleasant feelings and avoid unpleasant feelings. More pleasant feelings are sought as they bring emotional satisfaction called happiness.

So you can appreciate the Buddha's terse saying on feelings: "All things converge on feelings".

Yet feeling by itself, in its primary state, is quite neutral when it just registers the impact of an

object as pleasant, unpleasant or indifferent. Only when emotional add-ons are admitted, such as when one's personal story is involved, will there arise aversion, hatred, anxiety and fear.

Feeling and emotions need not be mixed as they are separable, in fact many of the weaker impressions we experience during the day stop at the mere registering of very faint and brief feelings. This shows that stopping at the primary feeling is possible, and that it can be done with the help of awareness and self-restraint, even in cases when the stimulus to convert feeling into emotion is strong.

For the vipassana meditator it is essential to work with feelings, especially one's mental feelings. By monitoring feelings one can maintain one's equilibrium in the practice, allowing the enlightenment factor of equanimity to mature.

Working with feelings as a practice starts with establishing awareness on minor feelings. Then it is a practice of monitoring what feelings are present, even when they are faint and brief, throughout the day. There are occasions, when the mind is calm and alert and one is not totally preoccupied, to notice feelings clearly at their primary stage.

If, however, you are unable at first to clearly differentiate feelings, it is a useful strategy to ask yourself a checking question: 'What feeling is present?' In this way, you can highlight the predominant feeling and be able to focus on it rather than being confused by the jumble of fleeting feelings.

It is of particular importance to dissociate the feelings from the thought of 'I' or 'mine'. There should be no ego-reference, as for instance: "I feel", nor should there be any thought of being the owner of the feeling: "I have pleasant feelings" or "I have pain". Awareness of feeling without the ego-reference allows the meditator to keep the attention focused on the feeling alone.

In working with feelings there should first be an awareness of the feelings when they arise, clearly distinguishing them as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. While there are degrees of intensity of feelings, with attentiveness there are no such things as mixed feelings.

Attention should be maintained throughout the short duration of the specific feeling down to its ending. If the vanishing point of feeling is repeatedly seen with increasing clarity it will become much easier to catch and finally to stop thoughts and emotions which normally follow so regularly and are habitually linked. Pleasant feeling is habitually linked with enjoyment, unpleasant feelings with aversion, neutral or indifferent feeling with ignorance and confusion.

When 'bare' attention, that is, registering the feeling without reaction in a state of receptivity, is directed to the rising and vanishing of feelings, the polluting add-ons are held at bay and inhibited from further elaboration. So gradually the gross feelings weaken and fall away - you lose interest - thus dispassion arises, which is a natural, effortless 'letting go'.

A trap to watch out for is not acknowledging pleasant feelings, especially pleasant feelings and sensations that arise from the fluency of the practice. There is usually no problem in noticing unpleasant feelings, but we should be wary and note pleasant feelings when they

arise as we are predisposed to get attached to them and lose equanimity.

Like all mindfulness exercises, it is essential that the practice of awareness of feelings should be applied in everyday life, especially whenever feelings are prone to turn into unwholesome emotions. So by practising awareness of feelings the benefits will be immediately apparent in our relations and dealings with people and in our own clarity and peace of mind.

In the teaching of the Five Aggregates of Grasping, the Buddha likened feelings to bubbles. If feelings can be seen in their bubble-like, blown-up and bursting nature their linkage to grasping and attachment will be weakened until the chain is finally broken. Through this practice, attachment, which is a kind of stuckness to feelings, will be skillfully eliminated.

This does not mean that this practice will make you detached or emotionally withdraw. On the contrary, mind and heart will become more open and free from the fever of clinging. Out of this seeing, an inner space will be provided for the growth of the finer emotions: loving-kindness, compassion, patience and forbearance.

Through your own experience as a vipassana meditator, it can be confirmed that the ever-revolving round of the wheel of life that we tread can be stopped at the point of feeling, and that there is no inherent necessity that feeling is automatically followed by attachment. This is done by the practice of being mindful at one of the six sense doors and intercepting the bare feeling between the linkage of sense impression and grasping.

- **Go to [Day 6: How to Handle Thinking and Pain](#)**

# ***INSIGHT MEDITATION ONLINE***

## ***INSIGHT MEDITATION ONLINE***

### **A Vipassana Retreat**

#### **DAY 6: HOW TO HANDLE THINKING AND PAIN**

At the beginning of the practice at least, most meditators are much troubled by their thoughts as well as painful body sensations, mostly from not being accustomed to the crossed legged sitting posture.

With thinking, meditators assume that somehow they must get rid of the thoughts or block them out to be successful in meditation. This might be the case in concentration-based meditation where the concentration will eventually suppress the thinking process to produce a state of calm. But in vipassana meditation, however, we do not want to suppress the thinking merely to get some relief from the turbulence in the mind. Rather we seek to insight into the nature of the mind and to the thinking processes itself.

Thinking by its nature cannot be of the present moment; thinking is either of the past or a projection into the future. Thinking creates ideas, plans, conceptions, or opinion produced by mental activity. It is symbolic, not an ultimate reality. It doesn't lead to the primary experience, that is, direct knowing.

The strategy in working with thinking in vipassana meditation is to first allow it to be, not getting into struggle with it - regarding it as just another object to be noted. In time, one becomes a witness to the thinking process without getting too involved in the content. It is like standing on the pavement watching the traffic going by until eventually the mind is quiet or until at least it quietens. It is the naturally quiet mind or the silent mind which is open to the direct experience of the phenomena under observation.

To have the truly 'stilled mind' is not so easy, for again and again the meditator finds himself or herself 'lost in thought' - only catching the thinking retrospectively. Patience and perseverance is called for in this situation. Be assured that the trains of thoughts will at least slow down sufficiently so that you will start to notice gaps - or pauses in the discursive thoughts. The circuit is broken and the mind quietens.

So by being aware - even just occasionally - of the gaps in the thinking there is an opening to be able - as it were - to catch the next thought as it is forming, that is the beginning of the thought. This can act as a circuit breaker. At this level the mind has quietened sufficiently to be just knowing, that is, the mind knowing the mind.

In the short term, there is another way to work with thinking using 'skillful means', that is using the mental noting of 'thinking', 'thinking', to cut the incessant thinking. But it has to be done vigorously otherwise one can find one has drifted off thinking about the nature of thought. The mental noting of thinking can be a powerful tool to inhibit the thinking but has to be used judiciously.

## **Pain and Suffering**

There is a saying: "Pain is inevitable, suffering is optional".

Usually meditators want the pain they experience in the practice to go away. The underlying assumption is that by bearing the pain it will go away and then they will feel good, and without the pain they will have good experiences as a reward for their effort. When actually, in vipassana meditation we are trying to understand the nature of pain, that is to investigate the so-called pain - not to get rid of it. The vipassana meditator is very fortunate to have pain, at least posture pain, as it is an excellent teacher - with the added bonus that there will be no sleepiness in meditation.

Pain is the body's signal that something is wrong. The pain is telling you that you must attend to it. The painful sensations we work with in meditation are mostly those from the sitting posture, as the reason for the pain is that a person is not used to sitting crossed legged for long periods at a stretch. The rule of thumb when working with pain is to first check whether it is a medical problem or not. Take note as to whether the pain that one was experiencing during the sitting goes away more or less immediately after the session. If that is the case, then one can be assured that it is only posture pain and no damage is being done.

When you experience pain in sitting meditation it is actually an opportunity to work with it. Regard it as your best friend, as you can learn much from it, so you do not want to drive it away. Invite it in and get to know it. It is not a matter of just bearing the pain. The practice is to investigate it - to penetrate it deeply. If you can successfully work with physical pain, then you will more likely be able to work with mental pain.

Understandably meditators tend to avoid pain. For example, every time they get to the threshold of pain they pull away, this then becomes the 'pain barrier', a block in the practice. They hope that they can build up a tolerance of pain without having to work with it. But unfortunately disinclination to work with pain becomes a major obstacle to the meditator's progress.

### **How to Work with Pain**

To work with painful sensations, first find the centre of the pain, thereby localising it, for example, the knee area. Initially, there might be muscular reaction to the pain, like when one has a dip in icy cold water, there is an initial shock, but once one is in the water usually one can bear it and stay with the cold sensations. Then relax and soften into the painful sensations, looking for particular characteristics in the pain - heat, tension, stabbing, throbbing, etc.

When there is no resistance to the pain, the particular characteristics will manifest. Then when the particular characteristics are aligned with the 'knowing of' the pain (consciousness of) this will reveal the general or universal characteristics of change, unsatisfactoriness and insubstantiality.

Besides posture pain, there can be all sorts of mysterious aches and pains in this type of

meditation - so-called 'vipassana pain', that is various painful sensations in the body, often so intense that you suppose there must be some medical condition causing them. But not to worry - it is all workable. They have a saying in the Burmese tradition: "Pain is the doorway to Nibbana". The teachers are very pleased when you report interesting pain in interview, as they know that you can make good progress in the meditation if you are prepared to work with and can sort out the pain from the suffering.

It is the resistance to the pain that is causing the suffering. The mind is striking at the so-called pain, complaining about the pain, wanting it to go away or trying to dissociate from the pain. But once you are able to work with pain you will be able to differentiate the pain from the suffering.

### **The Three Kinds of Suffering**

Not appreciating the basic premise of the Buddha Dharma - the 1st Noble Truth, that is the fact of suffering (dukkha sacca) is the root of the problem, vipassana meditators need to be able to understand and handle suffering. There are three kinds of suffering: ordinary suffering (dukkha-dukkha) everyday ups and down, psychological, emotional and relationship problems. We all experience this ordinary suffering nearly every-day to some degree. If you are skillful it need not be a problem as you can work with this kind of suffering.

Then there is the suffering of change (viparinama dukkha) also known as the 'suffering of happiness'. Whether it is a change in circumstances or just a mind-state, nothing can remain the same for very long, everything, absolutely everything is subject to change. But if one is not so attached to things or relationships, then again this type of suffering caused by change is manageable.

The third kind of suffering is not so apparent - it is conditioned or existential suffering (sankhara dukkha). Ordinary people are not even aware of it. It is the deep suffering stemming from the mental constructions (sankharas). It is experienced in the 'insight knowledges' in vipassana meditation when the intelligence and wisdom is so highly developed that one sees that all mental and physical phenomena are unstable, unsatisfactory and are just an impersonal process - not me, not myself. The maturity of this insight brings about a deep transformation of consciousness that finally frees us from all suffering.

### **Mental Pain and Suffering**

The purpose of Buddhist meditation, vipassana or otherwise, is not just for curing physical diseases. If physical healing happens to happen then it is considered a byproduct of the practice, nothing more. A whole range of stress related physical illnesses, such as stomach ulcers, angina, migraine, etc., could be alleviated by meditation practice. But meditation is not about miraculous cure - that is more of the nature of faith healing.

Healing and transformation is the outcome of the practice. All forms of suffering or mental pain, such as anguish, remorse, grief, etc., can be cured in vipassana meditation, through the purification of the mind. That is the real miracle. Whether medical science can ultimately cure all physical disease is problematical as it is the nature of the body to eventually break down. All phenomena have three phases: birth, life and death. Therefore, pain is inherent in nature. While we may or may not be able to cure physical disease, vipassana meditation is tailored to

cure mental suffering.

Nobody wants to suffer and the underlying message of the Buddha Dharma is that suffering is unnecessary. We do not need to suffer. There is the fact of suffering, the cause of suffering, the ending of suffering and the way leading out of suffering. If we are suffering it is because of ignorance. What we usually experience is unnecessary suffering. But we do not need to suffer mentally at all, as the compassionate Buddha has shown us the way to be free of suffering through the practice of vipassana meditation. It is the intelligence that insights into the true nature of our mind and body phenomena that will finally free us from mental suffering.

- **Go to [Day 7: At the Sense-doors](#)**

# ***INSIGHT MEDITATION ONLINE***

## ***INSIGHT MEDITATION ONLINE***

### **A Vipassana Retreat**

#### **DAY 7: AT THE SENSE DOORS**

We label the practice we are doing vipassana meditation, but actually what we are doing in the practice is watching phenomena as it is happening at the sense-doors, that's all. The teaching of orientating to the six sense-doors is to be found in the Contemplation of Mind Objects (Dhammanupassana) in the text we are following - the Satipatthana Sutta.

After each section in the Satipatthana Sutta, you will find this passage: "In this way he abides contemplating the body as a body (or feelings, etc.) internally, externally, and both internally and externally". What does this mean? It means that the focus of one's attention changes from the subjective (internally) to the objective (externally) and by "both" is meant seeing the relationship - their interdependence.

The focus of the practice so far has been mainly introspective, now the watchfulness or attentiveness can be expanded to include the external as well, that is the attention can be switched from the subjective to the objective.

The six sense-doors are the eye, ear, nose, tongue, touch and mind, and these are the bases for the reception of the various sorts of information which each can gather in the presence of the correct conditions.

The six sense-doors are depicted in the Tibetan tradition by a house with six windows and a door. The senses are the 'portals' whereby we gain our impression of the world. Each of the senses is the manifestation of our desire to experience things in a particular way.

This information falls under six headings corresponding to the six bases: sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles and thoughts. Beyond these six bases of sense and their corresponding six objective bases, we know nothing. All our experience is limited by the senses and their objects with the mind counted as the sixth. The five outer senses collect data only in the present but mind, the sixth, where this information is collected and processed, adds memories from the past and hopes and fears for the future, as well as thoughts of various kinds relating to the present.

#### **Orientation to a Sense-door**

To make an orientation to a sense-door, you start by literally coming to your senses: seeing, hearing, tasting, touching and smelling. These are the five sense-doors or sense bases; the 'sixth sense' is 'consciousness of', which is the mind-base with its eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, etc.

You also need to be aware of the senses internally as well as externally; that is, the organs and their sense objects: nose/smell, tongue/taste, body/tactile objects, ear/sound, mind/mind-objects or consciousness.

Attentiveness or 'presence of mind' at one of the sense-doors during a sense impression is the way to practice. For example, most people are predominantly visual so being attentive at the eye-door allows you to notice the effects of the contact between the eye and the visible objects and how you are relating to them.

The process is this: there is the eye (the internal base), and a visible object (the external base). With contact or a sense impression, first consciousness arises followed by feeling. The moment of consciousness ordinarily is too rapid to catch while the feeling tone can be more easily known and apprehended.

This orientation to a sense-door allows awareness of what is happening during a sense impression and with it the ability to monitor the associated feelings and consciousness that arise. When this feeling tone is apprehended the link to liking/disliking is broken, therefore one is free at that moment from conditioned suffering.

This strategy of attentiveness at a sense-door ties in with the practical implementation of the teaching of Dependent Arising (patticasamuppada). In fact these two teachings combined will lead to the purification of mind and the realization of Nibbana.

The Law of Dependent Arising is a deep subject; it is the very essence of the Buddha's teachings. In the words of the Buddha: "He who sees Dependent Arising sees the Dharma; he who sees the Dharma sees Dependent Arising."

There was an exchange between the Buddha and his personal attendant, Ananda, when Ananda casually remarked that he thought it was an easy thing to understand. The Buddha responded by saying, "Not so Ananda, don't ever say such a thing. It is because people do not understand origination (Dependent Arising), that they are not able to penetrate it, that their minds are befuddled. Just as a ball of twine becomes all tangled up and knotted, just so are beings ensnared and unable to free themselves from the wheel of existence, the conditions of suffering and states of hell and ruin."

How to untangle the tangle? This is a quote from the Visuddhi-magga or The Path of Purification. The untangling can be done by "insighting" into Dependent Arising through the practice of attentiveness at a sense-door. What we are experiencing now is from a series of events that arose because of previous conditions and is linked as a causal chain of effects, that is, cyclic existence or Samsara.

It is useful for the meditator to be familiar with the twelve links in the cycle of Dependent Arising and also Transcendental Dependent Arising\*, that is, the principle of conditionality, which lies at the heart of the Buddha's doctrine:

The first application (Mundane) is the usual one, setting forth the causal sequence responsible for the origination of samsaric suffering. Apart from a slight change it is identical to the twelve-factored formulation recurring throughout the Pali Canon. The change - the

substitution of "suffering" for "aging-and-death" as the last link of the series - becomes the lead for the second application and a more positive version of Dependent Arising.

The series of conditions presented in the Upanisa Sutta can be mapped out in the abstract as follows:

Mundane Order	Transcendental Order
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ignorance (avijja)</li> <li>• Kamma formations(sankhara)</li> <li>• Consciousness (viññana)</li> <li>• Mentality-materiality (nama-rupa)</li> <li>• Sixfold sense-base (salayatana)</li> <li>• Contact (phassa)</li> <li>• Feeling (vedana)</li> <li>• Craving (tanha)</li> <li>• Clinging (upadana)</li> <li>• Existence (bhava)</li> <li>• Birth (jati)</li> <li>• Suffering (dukkha)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Faith (saddha)</li> <li>• Joy (pamojja)</li> <li>• Rapture (piti)</li> <li>• Tranquillity (passaddhi)</li> <li>• Happiness (sukha)</li> <li>• Concentration (samadhi)</li> <li>• Knowledge and vision of things as they are (yathabhutañānadassana)</li> <li>• Disenchantment (nibbida)</li> <li>• Dispassion (viraga)</li> <li>• Emancipation (vimutti)</li> <li>• Knowledge of destruction of the cankers (asavakkhaye ñana)</li> </ul>

As the vipassana meditator experiences the series of causal events, they can be intercepted at the linkage of the sense impression and the feeling. The ability to do this gives you the potential of being free of the conditioned cycle of suffering that most people are unknowingly trapped in.

### Try an Exercise in Orientating to a Sense-door

Check! Where is your attention at this present moment? What sense impression is predominant now? Is it the eye-door attracted by some visual object, the ear-door taken by sounds or the touch sensations of the body's contact on the cushion or chair you're sitting on? This moment is the time to establish the habit of being consciously present at a sense-door and notice what is happening during a sense impression.

So stop for a few minutes, choose a sense-door (most people are predominantly visual, although others can be more auditory inclined) and be attentive to what is happening there: what feeling is present, what is the quality of that feeling, is it pleasant, unpleasant or neutral; and particularly notice the changes. It is important to make a habit of asking yourself checking questions during your daily routine: what sense door am I at, what is happening there and what are the associated feelings that arise?

### The Story of Bahiya

Here is the enlightenment story of Bahiya, the wooden robed one, who was able to practise in this way. Bahiya was originally a merchant, who when travelling at sea with all his

merchandise was shipwrecked and was cast ashore naked. He found bark to cover himself, and finding an old bowl, he went searching for alms- food. The local people were impressed by his seeming austerities and his reputation grew as an ascetic. He was tested when people offered him fine robes, but knowing that they would loose faith in him if he accepted, he refused, keeping up the deception.

Bahiya was installed in a temple and worshiped as an Arahant (an Enlightened One), so that in time he came to believe that he was actually an enlightened being. He lived impeccably and gained good concentration powers. Sitting in meditation one day, it is said that a deva was able to persuade Bahiya that he wasn't really enlightened at all, that he should go and see the Buddha, an Arahant who could help him.

Bahiya made a long journey to where the Buddha was at Savatti and reached the monastery just as the Buddha was about to go on the daily alms-round. Bahiya had to request the Buddha to teach him the Dharma three times, before the Buddha would teach at such an inopportune time.

The Buddha then gave these brief instructions:

Bahiya, you should train yourself in this way:

"With the seen, there will be just the seen; with the heard, there will be just the heard; with the sensed (touched, tasted, smelt) there will be just the sensed; with the cognised, there will be just the cognised.

When for you, Bahiya, there is merely the seen, heard, sensed and cognised, then you will not be therein. Then you, Bahiya, will be neither here nor there nor within both - this is itself the end of suffering."

Through this brief instruction, Bahiya was immediately enlightened - through non-clinging - thus becoming an Arahant.

Not long after the Buddha had departed, a cow fatally gored Bahiya. When the Buddha returned from his alms-round he found Bahiya dead and arranged for his cremation and a stupa to be built for him. When asked what the destiny of Bahiya was the Buddha said that because he had grasped the meditation subject in the teacher's presence, and practised as instructed according to the Dharma, Bahiya had attained Parinibbana - final Enlightenment.

Nothing more needs to be added. How much more instruction do you need? After practising in this retreat for eight days, and being given detailed instruction and personal guidance, perhaps all you need to do now is pay full attention to the Buddha's succinct instructions to Bahiya once more:

Bahiya, you should train yourself in this way:

"With the seen, there will be just the seen; with the heard, there will be just the heard; with the sensed (touched, tasted, smelt) there will be just the sensed; with the cognised, there will be just the cognised."

\* See Transcendental Dependent Arising - An Exposition of the Upanisa Sutta, translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi.

- **Go to [Day 8: Developing Loving-kindness](#)**

# ***INSIGHT MEDITATION ONLINE***

## ***INSIGHT MEDITATION ONLINE***

### **A Vipassana Retreat**

#### **DAY 8: DEVELOPING LOVING-KINDNESS**

Once the meditator is well established in the basics of vipassana practice, loving-kindness meditation can be brought in to support the more demanding vipassana practice. While it is switching meditation modes to a concentration-based practice, its benefit is in that it uplifts and sweetens the mind and helps to overcome difficulties in the practice, especially in working with negative emotions.

It can be developed either to give the benefit of just clearing the way for the awareness practice or it can be further developed in a more systematic way to achieve the level of meditative absorption or one-pointedness.

Having developed the mind of loving-kindness, the meditator then switches back to vipassana mode. This is done by investigating the qualities of the mind state that has been induced in loving-kindness, thereby changing to the vipassana mode of watching the mind state.

Loving-kindness, as a meditation practice, specifically retrains the mind to overcome all forms of negativity. It brings about positive attitudinal changes by systematically developing the quality of 'loving-acceptance'. It is the qualities of acceptance and receptivity that create the spaciousness and clarity of mind that allows for deepening attentiveness.

When loving-kindness meditation is developed systematically to the level of meditative absorption or one-pointedness, the five absorption factors of concentration are developed. The first two are causal factors - applied thought and sustained thought, followed by three effects - rapture, ease-of-mind and one-pointedness or unification of mind.

The advantage of having gained the five absorption factors is that they counteract the five mental hindrances or obstacles for the meditator. Applied thought, by arousing energy and effort, overcomes the hindrance of sloth and torpor; sustained thought, by steadying the mind, overcomes skeptical doubt, which has the characteristic of wavering; rapture, with its uplifting effervescence, prevails over feelings of ill-will; ease-of-mind, by relieving accumulated stress, counteracts restlessness or agitation of mind; while one-pointedness holds the mind's wanderings in the sense-fields to inhibit sensuality.

Because of its auto-suggestive nature the positive mindset of loving-kindness combined with deep concentration will imprint the new positive conditioning to override old negative patterns. For example, the overly critical mind, which finds fault with anything and everything, is reprogrammed to be more accepting and allowing. So on the psychological level the therapeutic benefits for the individual are enormous as old negative habits are broken and are replaced with new positive ways of thinking.

The structure of the practice is fairly simple. The meditator must start with generating loving-feelings and acceptance of him or herself. Then one induces positive emotional feelings of loving-kindness towards four types of people, after which one, directionally pervades the loving-feeling to all points of the compass. The final stage is non-specific pervasion, which more or less arises spontaneously as the concentration intensifies and there is little or no self-referencing.

As it is a concentration-based meditation you must not allow the mind to wander - when it does gently bring it back. The time you need to spend doing this practice would depend on the time it takes to arouse the loving feeling. But at least a half-hour session would be needed for the practice to develop sufficiently.

The practice must always start with developing loving acceptance of oneself. However, if resistance is experienced then it indicates feelings of unworthiness are present. Don't worry as this indicates there is work to be done. Essentially you are working with a quality of mind, and as the practice is auto-suggestive, any quality of mind, positive or negative can be changed. In good time and with persistent practice, feelings of self-doubt and negativity can be overcome. Then you can move on to develop loving-kindness to others.

Four types of people are chosen to develop loving-kindness towards:

1. A respected, beloved person - such as a teacher or mentor.
2. A dearly beloved - that is, a close family member or dear friend.
3. A neutral person - somebody you know but have no special feeling towards.
4. A hostile person - a person you are currently having difficulty with.

Starting with yourself, then moving systematically from person to person in the above order the objective is to break down the barriers between the four types of people and yourself. In this way, it can be said to break down the divisions within one's own mind, the source of much of the conflict we experience in our relationships.

The key to the practice is being able to go beyond the barriers we create in the mind, for the Buddha describes the loving person as having 'a mind with the barriers broken down'. When a person has seen and seen through the conceptually created barriers of race, class, and 'mine' and 'not mine' they are able to love others unconditionally.

A truly beneficial effect of practising systematic loving-kindness meditation is that one is transforming particular love one naturally has for one's close family members and dear friends - which is actually an attached love - to a general, universal love that embraces everybody without exception.

Just a word of caution, if you practice loving-kindness intensively it is best to choose a member of the same sex or if you have a sexual bias to your own sex then a person of the opposite sex. This avoids the risk of arousing the near enemy of loving-kindness - lust. Try different people to practise on as some people do not easily fit into the above categories, but do keep to the prescribed order.

Three ways to arouse feelings of loving-kindness:

Visualisation - create a vivid positive mental picture of yourself or the four people you have chosen, in order to promote a sense of well-being and joyousness.

Reflection - think about the positive qualities of the person and the acts of kindness they have

done to you or make an affirmation, a positive statement about yourself, in your own words. The exception to using the 'reflection device' is when working with the 'difficult person' because the thinking might trigger the painful relationship and aggravate things. So just a visualization of the difficult person, reinforced by the auditory repetition is sufficient. Auditory - This is the simplest but probably the most effective way. Repeat an internalised phrase such as 'loving-kindness', 'loving-kindness'.

The visualizations, reflections and the repetition of loving-kindness are devices to help you arouse positive emotional feelings of love. Use all of them or one that works the best for you. When the positive feeling arises switch from the devices to the feeling, as it is the feeling that is the primary focus. Keep the mind fixed on the feeling, if it strays bring it back to the device or if the feeling weakens or is lost then return to the device, for example, use the visualization to bring back or strengthen the feeling.

The next stage is Directional Pervasion, where you systematically project the aroused feeling of loving-kindness to all points of the compass: north, south, east and west, up and down, and all around. Bringing to mind Dharma friends and communities in the cities, towns and countries around the world can enhance the directional pervasion.

The last stage, Non-specific Pervasion, tends to spontaneously happen as the practice matures. It is not discriminating. It has no specific object and involves just naturally radiating feelings of universal love. When it arises the practice has come to maturity in that it has changed preferential love, which is an attached love, to an all-embracing, unconditional love!

When the mind has been uplifted and is sweet with feelings of loving-kindness, you will find that the drier vipassana practice is very much easier - the meditator is in a heightened state of receptivity and able to tune in more sensitively to what is happening in the present moment.

- **Go to [Day 9: Difficulties Facing Meditators](#)**

## **A Vipassana Retreat**

### **DAY 9: DIFFICULTIES FACING MEDITATORS & THEIR SOLUTIONS**

In a way it is fortunate that there is no such thing as a perfect meditator, as all the problems and difficulties we encounter in meditation practice become 'grist for the mill' - that is, they are 'workable'. As in life, what we see as difficulties in meditation can be the cause of growth in the Dharma.

This is especially true of vipassana meditation where a lot of difficulties can be encountered. It is not until the maturity factor of equanimity develops that there will no more difficulties in the practice. That is why it is critical for the meditator to be monitoring feelings and emotions in his or her practice, as it is the ability to accept whatever feelings and emotions arise without reaction that helps the practice to stabilise.

There are common difficulties facing all meditators. These hindrances or obstacles have been well signposted. They are called the *Nirvaranas* in Pali, which translates as the Five Hindrances:

1. Sensuality: yearning after sense objects or preoccupation in the sensory world.
2. All forms of Ill-will: from resentment to outright hostility.
3. Mental Inertia: sloth and torpor, laziness or lack of mental and physical energy.
4. Remorse/Restlessness and Worry: agitation in the mind, tracing back to the past.
5. Skeptical Doubt: persistent uncertainty either about one's own ability, the teacher or the technique.

Having mentioned the negatives then we should look at possible solutions. An antidote for sensuality is the reflection on the repulsiveness of the 32 parts of the body (asubha) strong but it works; for all forms of ill-will, loving-kindness meditation will change the quality of mind from negative to positive; arousing one's energy and effort can help overcome mental inertia; with restlessness and worry, calming and stabilising the mind with a concentration meditation is helpful; skeptical doubt is more difficult to overcome unless one can develop sufficient confidence to overcome the wavering in the mind - reflections on the qualities of the Buddha (Buddhanusatti) can inspire and arouse the necessary confidence. Concentration meditation can be relied on to give relief from the five hindrances by suppressing them. It is only by vipassana meditation that the mind can be cleared of the hindrances. Yet as threshold concentration (upacara samadhi) arises in vipassana it too will temporarily inhibit the hindrances.

### **Handling Difficulties in the Practice:-**

**Mind Wanderings:** preoccupied with the content of the mind; being lost in thought or

obsessive trains of thoughts require skillful handling. It is not the object of the practice to repress the thinking. Rather one has to allow that over the period of a retreat the mind will naturally settle. There are two ways to work with the thinking: mentally noting vigorously the thinking as 'thinking', 'thinking' to cut it; or when possible, allow the train of thoughts to run and find the gaps or pauses between thoughts, and if one is sharp enough, then try to catch the beginning of the next thought that is about to form. In this way at least the circuitous thinking is broken and the mind tends to quieten.

**Sleepiness:** this is a common problem when people come to meditation retreats. Usually, it is just exhaustion for a lot of people. We are so over extended - stretched and stressed - that people are simply exhausted. We do not give ourselves enough rest. We are trying to function on less sleep so we end up with a 'sleep debt' at the cost of our well-being. A meditation retreat gives us time out to recuperate and recharge ourselves. It used to take just a few days into a retreat for people to recover now it can take weeks, which indicates that the pace of life is accelerating rapidly. It is possible that by focusing on the sleepy state as you mentally note it, the sleepiness will disperse.

**Inability or Disinclination to Handle Pain:** posture pain is being referred to here, not a pre-existing medical condition. Pain is inevitable in meditation as in life - only suffering is optional. The meditator should not try to make it go away, but regard it as a friend for then its true nature will be seen. You work with posture pain by softening into the pain sensations by relaxing into any muscular contractions. Then find the centre of the so-called pain by noticing specific characteristics in it, such as tension, heat, throbbing, stabbing, etc. When the mind is quiet and there is just the knowing of the pain, i.e. the 'consciousness of', then the pain will change. It will probably come back but you get some insight into its nature on the way.

**Fears and Feelings of Anxiety:** unpleasant feelings of apprehension or distress caused by the anticipation of imagined danger. It is the feeling of looking forward in dread to something that one supposes is going to happen that brings up the fear. The antidote for fear is to stay in the present. There is also 'fear of the unknown'. As a result some people stop meditating altogether. Deep within our minds lie unwholesome tendencies: the dark side, the shadow. Powerful material can surface during vipassana meditation. Most can handle this OK without breaking down. Only people deeply troubled with a neurosis or with a clinical condition such as psychosis, should not do intensive vipassana meditation without guidance.

**Wrong Attitude:** ambition to achieve results in wanting immediate effects, which is a gaining attitude. Right attitude is an open acceptance of things as they are - without expectation. The power we need in meditation is described by the Buddha in the Dhammapada: "Patience and forbearance is the power of those who meditate".

**Handling the Meditation Object Wrongly:** unusual experiences can arise in meditation: visions, images, voices, and lights. If you cling to them whether they are blissful or fearful you will become attached to the phenomena. It is critical that you remain neutral towards them by labeling them as 'seeing', 'seeing', 'hearing', 'hearing', etc. Never give any unusual experience, positive or negative, any significance. Report them to a qualified teacher or mentor who can assist you to handle them.

**The 'Sinking Mind':** that is dropping into the mental continuum (*bhavanga*) or the stream of

consciousness. This can happen during any meditation practice, but this can become a chronic problem that affects long-term meditators who practise without a clear object or focus and tend to lose contact or awareness of their body. A way to avoid this is never sit in meditation without a well-defined meditation object and keep some reference to the body, such as the sitting touch sensations.

Understanding these problems will help you manage your practice and give you the ability to make the appropriate adjustments, based on knowledge of methods and techniques. The path of meditation is a path of practice. Practice is repeated performance or methodical exercises to develop skills, which include the ability to self-manage your meditation practice.

## **Keeping the Balance**

Generally, a lot of the difficulties encountered in practice can be addressed by balancing the three meditation skills in the Eight-fold practice Path - effort, mindfulness and concentration.

### **4 Ways of Relating to the Meditation Experience to Maintain the Balance:**

**Witnessing your experience:** an attitude of neutrality, which is restricted to the bare registering of physical and mental events without posturing or positioning oneself - 'just witnessing'.

**Non-clinging:** rather than seeking gratification of wishes, impulses, desires, there has to be at least some degree of non-clinging, that is giving up, to create the space to see - 'letting go'.

**Removal of the Censor:** an attitude of acceptance of all thoughts, emotions, feelings and sensations into awareness without discrimination or selection - 'uncensored'.

**Cultivating Receptivity:** vipassana meditation is tuning in and being sensitive to and intimate with what is observed from a place of spaciousness - 'receptivity'.

An image often used to describe the practice of awareness is that of walking a tightrope. In order to do so, you must necessarily pay attention to the balance. In meditation practice, this applies to how you are relating to your experience. Reaching out to grasp the object (attaching) or pushing it away (rejecting) are both reactions that are unbalancing. Keeping your balance is developing a mind that does not cling or reject, like or dislike and is without attachment or condemnation. Equipoise and equanimity in the face of life's inevitable stress and conflict is to practise the Buddha's Middle Way.

Developing the ability to adjust and manage your effort in practice is essential. A certain effort is involved in developing 'moment-to-moment awareness', but it is not the effort to attain anything in the future. The effort is to stay in the present, just paying attention with equanimity to what is happening in the moment.

The Buddha gave an example of just how attentive we should be. He told of a person who was ordered to walk through a crowd with a jug of oil, full to the brim, balanced on his head. Behind him walked a soldier with a sword. If a single drop were spilt the soldier would cut off his head! That is the quality of attention needed. So you can be sure that the person with the

jug walked very attentively.

Yet, it has to be a relaxed awareness. If there is too much force or strain the least jostling will cause the oil to spill. The person with the jug has to be loose and rhythmic, flowing with the changing scene, yet staying attentive in each moment. This is the kind of care we should take in practicing awareness, being relaxed yet alert. In this way, the training helps to maintain your balance and the ability to live in harmony with others.

When all is said and done, the best way to work with difficulties in meditation is to seek a kalyana-mitta. This is not a guru who claims to do the work for you, but a meditation friend or teacher who has had some travel experience and can guide and advise you on the practice path.

There was an exchange between the Buddha and his attendant, Ananda, where Ananda said that he had heard all the teachings and therefore he could practise by himself. The Buddha responded to the effect that without a guide, a kalyana-mitta, the Dharma could not be realised. In the final analysis, it is not a matter of this or that technique, but the need for a guide with travel experience - a mentor in the Dharma.

- **Go to [Day 10: Continuing the Practice at Home](#)**

# ***INSIGHT MEDITATION ONLINE***

## ***INSIGHT MEDITATION ONLINE***

### **A Vipassana Retreat**

#### **DAY 10: CONTINUING THE PRACTICE AT HOME**

The time and effort and the skills that you have learnt in this retreat will not be lost if you continue to practise regularly at home. Of course, the meditation cannot be done as intensively and you will have to do it discreetly, allowing for the situation you are in. The real challenge after a retreat is integrating the attentiveness practices established at the retreat into your daily routine.

It has to be acknowledged that incorporating meditation into a busy life is not easy. Therefore, you need to set yourself up to do it, good intention is not enough, it has to be purposely set up and there has to be commitment. You will have to consider your priorities: what will benefit you more, hours sitting in front of the TV screen or time spent meditating?

The regular daily home sit, morning or evening, is the anchor for the practice, even if it is only mental hygiene that allows a discharge of the day's busyness. It is really a 'must do' as it will bring peace of mind and harmonise family and work relationships.

Most people will continue on with the sitting meditation after the retreat at home. A daily sit of an hour a day will just keep the practice going, a block of two hours a day will maintain the practice to where you got to in the retreat. Three hours or more a day at home will allow the practice to develop, which might seem a lot when you have many other commitments, but if you examine your priorities you may be surprised by what is possible.

When meditating at home it is a good strategy to combine loving-kindness meditation with an awareness exercise, as these practices compliment each other and will keep the mind wholesome, uplifted and alert. It is important to maintain the daily meditation sit at home as a way of sustaining and stabilising your practice. It has to become habituated though, otherwise if it is done only occasionally or only when you feel like it then you are likely to find some excuse to put it off for another day until it is forgotten. A recent study has shown that for any activity to be habituated you must persist with it for at least six months before it becomes part of your routine - by then the practice has become ingrained.

With a busy life it is easy to convince yourself that you really haven't the time anymore to maintain the regular sitting, or when you are feeling tired you will want to drop it. Naturally, when you get stressed or overtired there is resistance to facing the stress by meditating, but usually it is only the initial resistance you have to face before you go through it.

What people are inclined to overlook when practising at home is the walking meditation. As most working people are stretched and stressed it can be difficult to immediately get down to

a static sitting practice. Whereas a walking meditation session of a half hour or so before a sitting session will help a busy mind to settle.

The daily activities awareness exercises you were doing in the retreat can still be done when moving around your living place as it is probably a situation that can be controlled to some extent. Nothing need be dismissed as unimportant: domestic chores, eating, cleaning your teeth, whatever. Any and every movement and activity is repeatedly noted in order to establish the habit so that it becomes second nature to note during the daily routine. Of course, this is not easy to establish and so requires patience, perseverance and a sense of humor, especially when you feel frustrated by constant forgetfulness.

Try setting yourself up to do a daily awareness exercise using 'triggers' as reminders. Such a trigger can be every time there is contact with water to remind you to be present with whatever you are doing while you are doing it. There are many situations when you come into contact with water, such as washing your hands, doing the dishes, hosing the garden, washing the dog, etc. If you can occasionally pay full attention to some activity at home it can be the start of establishing the habit of having presence of mind wherever you are.

A particular advantage of vipassana meditation when applied to daily life is that it does not require any special place, equipment or posture. In fact it is done discreetly without anybody ever needing to know that you are practising it, as you appear to be doing nothing out of the ordinary. All that is different from your normal behaviour, but is not apparent to others, is that you have more 'presence of mind' in whatever you are doing.

When we are out and about in life we can apply ourselves to what can be called 'situational mindfulness', which is another way of saying use the circumstances and situations you happen to find yourself in as the practice environment, whether this is the home, the workplace or any public place. It is somewhat analogous to the sport of orienteering, where the objective is to navigate one's way through some terrain. With 'situational mindfulness' the objective is to navigate your way through the business of the day with presence-of-mind.

In the relentless busyness of most people's lives, there is a need for the practitioner to have a reference point to anchor his or her attention to. This acts as an aid to help maintain presence-of-mind. Such a reference point can be a touch point on the body, such as the sitting touch point, but it has to be habituated so you do not have to think about doing it. It has to become ingrained by practice, that is, repeated performance or repetition until it becomes as it were one's second nature.

We lose a lot of energy and create unnecessary stress through the random wanderings of the mind, especially when we are not completely focused on the job in hand. So checking the wandering mind has to be targetted, as it is leaking energy. Intellectual work is more efficient and with less stress when we are properly focused. Daydreaming needs to be checked by noting the wandering mind as 'thinking', 'thinking'. If you are persistent, a lot of mind wanderings will be inhibited and there will be more peace and clarity. The way to relate to all superfluous thinking is as a witness watching the passing traffic of the mind without being involved in it, until eventually you lose interest in it and the mind becomes naturally still when not engaged in any particular task.

You could also be monitoring your mind states throughout the day. Just naming them as they arise: happy, sad, elated, depressed, whatever. We are simply noticing, not doing anything to change them. When the mind states are not noticed we tend either to indulge in them, if they are pleasant, or resist them when they are unpleasant. By noticing mind states as they change we go with the flow, not getting stuck, just being with the natural changes and rhythms of the day's activities.

If you can sustain your presence-of-mind for two or three hours in the daily routine the mindfulness will noticeably improve. If you are so inclined, you can check the mindfulness ever hour on the hour as there is often much forgetting, times when the mindfulness is lost.

A useful way to manage the awareness practice is to review the day's mindfulness work at the end of the day or by keeping a meditation diary. In this way, the patterns of your practice will become apparent allowing you to make adjustments.

Avoid making negative judgments or evaluating your practice, as the reviewing will probably expose weaknesses. Reviewing can also be helpful as it can suggest new strategies to improve the practice. So reviewing the day's practice is a very worthwhile thing to do, as you need to be constantly reinforcing the habit of awareness in daily life.

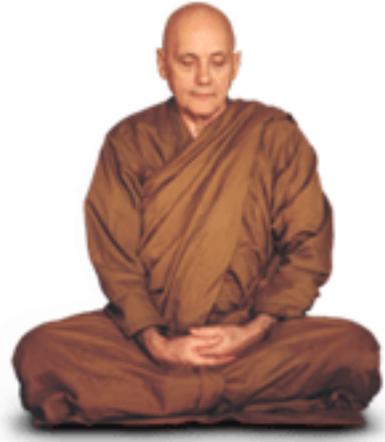
**Go to:** [about the Teacher](#)

# ***INSIGHT MEDITATION ONLINE***

## ***INSIGHT MEDITATION ONLINE***

### **About the teacher**

Venerable Pannyavaro is an Australian Buddhist monk who has devoted his life to the meditational aspects of the Buddha's teachings. During his meditation training he practised under several meditation masters in Sri Lanka and Burma including Venerable Sayadaw U Janaka of Chanmyay Meditation Centre, Rangoon, who is the foremost disciple of the renowned Burmese meditation master, the late Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw.



Pannyavaro was involved in the beginnings of a number of the very early Buddhist communities in Australia. He later received full ordination at Wat Borvornivet in Bangkok under Venerable Phra Nyanasamvarva, the Sangha Raja of Thailand.

For the past thirty years, he has from time to time studied and practised meditation in most of the major Theravada Buddhist countries, including long periods of intensive practise of *Satipatthana-Vipassana* meditation at the Mahasi Sayadaw centres in Burma.

As a Western meditation teacher, Ven. Pannyavaro naturally empathises with the concerns and needs of meditators in their own culture. His long training and life experience combine to bring a practical in-depth approach to the teaching of insight (vipassana) meditation in contemporary life.

Pannyavaro is presently the resident teacher with the Buddha Dharma Education Association at its Centre at Surry Hills in Sydney and gives retreats from time to time in Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and other Asian countries, but more regularly at the Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre, Medlow Bath, NSW Australia.

If you would like to develop your meditation practise further with this teacher, please feel free to contact Buddha Dharma Education Association at the contact information below.

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