

Different Aspects of Mindfulness

**A Collection of Discourses
on**

Mindfulness Meditation



Venerable Dhammasami M.A., M.Phil.

A Gift of Dhamma

Donated by Maung Kyi Shane

Different Aspects of Mindfulness

**A Collection of Talks
on Mindfulness Meditation**

Venerable Dhammasami

Preface

- 1. Meditation Object**
- 2. Just Bare Attention**
- 3. The Aim and Technique of Vipassana Meditation**
- 4. Training the Mind Through Mindfulness**
- 5. Not Only Breathing**
- 6. No Courage to see Thing as they Are**
- 7. Developing Patience**
- 8. Direct Experience**
- 9. How to apply Basic Right Effort**
- 10. Seeing Something Strange**
- 11. MINDFULNESS – A Way out of Depression**
- 12. Do not Give it up**
- 13. Coping with Failure**
- 14. Skillful Focus**
- 15. Mindfulness of Ordinary Thing**
- 16. Let it Go**
- 17. A Fixed Mind**
- 18. Satipatthana – Mindfulness Meditation**
- 19. Contemplation of the Dhamma Dhamma -nupassana**

Preface

About the Discourses

A meditation session held every Tuesday at the Sri Saddhatissa International Buddhist Centre, Northwest London, England. Since July 1996, Venerable Galayaye Piyadassi, the head of the Centre has entrusted me with the responsibility of conducting the session. This book is a collection of some of the Dhamma talks I have given to the meditators coming to the Tuesday sessions for the first three years. There are, in fact, not many as Vipassana meditation requires repetition of instruction and content.

I do not usually have a record of my talks and the interviews on Vipassana meditation experience. I do, however keep notes on most of them in my meditation diary. These talks are essentially an edited version of those notes.

Although most of these talks were originally intended for the Tuesday meditation sessions, I have, however, tried my best to make them relevant to the readers of this book. Nevertheless, it must be said that without personal experience in the mindfulness meditation practice, Vipassana Bhavana, it may be difficult to grasp what is contained in these talks. They are aimed at dealing with the practical aspects of mindfulness as taught in the Vipassana meditation and therefore, necessarily, demand a basic practice to appreciate their purpose.

The meditation session at the Centre lasts for about 90 minutes. The majority of the talks are short as they are meant to be preparative before the sitting starts. They are not the actual meditation instruction but practical Dhamma talks aimed at developing the right understanding and the right attitude of the Noble Eightfold Path. More of the practice, in fact, has been taught during the report sessions than in these introductory talks.

Mindfulness Meditation

My own training is essentially monastic in both academic disciplines and meditation. The formats I became familiar with in those trainings are hardly relevant to people with a working life in London. People cannot shut themselves away from all distraction, commitment and family life. They may have a holiday of perhaps four weeks in a year. However, very few would decide to use their holidays for intensive meditation. If the intensive meditation format were the only way open to them, there would be very few people practicing meditation. Moreover, it is extremely hard for people coming from cultures other than Buddhist to decide to go into intensive practice immediately. There needs to be an elementary stage such as this where one learns the essential basic teachings of Buddhism through meditation sessions of this kind. These talks have been primarily intended for people with a working life. Despite a modest start, many people in our meditation sessions have become regular

meditators on a daily basis although just a tiny portion of them have ever joined a retreat.

One does not necessarily start meditation in a retreat; nor does one need to wait until retirement to start the practice. One is more active physically and mentally during one's working life. This provides a good condition for a successful meditation. Besides, as frustration, agitation and anxiety are faced on daily basis we can make good use of them by tackling them through *non-judgmental awareness* before they become so strong that they change our personality

Attachment — A Cause Underlying All Problems

It is hard to see through *reasoning* that our daily experiences such as frustration, agitation, irritation and anger have indeed attachment as their original cause. We discuss this aspect of the mind a great deal in question and answer sessions. Pain, noise and a wandering mind are the common objects people very often feel frustrated with. There is nothing in them that one wants to cling to. It is in this sense that *attachment* is rarely seen as having any role in sustaining frustration.

If, however, one observes carefully through constant awareness, one will come to see that one has a preconceived notion of what meditation is, for example, an idea that focusing on breathing alone is the right way to meditate. In other words, one is attached to breathing or the like primary object and cannot accept pain, noise or the wandering mind. One feels frustrated and disappointed in seeing one self unable to concentrate on breathing. Frustration and disappointment in this case are necessarily linked to the already existing attachment to an object or idea. As one's mind is attached and already occupied with something (in this case a meditation object), one is not ready to live with any object that may arise at each present moment.

Rejection becomes therefore a manifestation of the attachment. Through rejection, one can easily become agitated, impolite towards colleagues at work, and family at home. One's reasoning ability in ordinary life is tempered in this way. Reason has sharp limits in both philosophy and ordinary life.

David Hume, one of the world's foremost moral philosophers who lived in 18th century AD, made a breaking point in moral philosophy when he declared that there was a link between human *passions*, which he often called *sentiments*, and behaviors. Many philosophers before him like Plato (5th - 4th BC), the Stoics, St. Augustine (4th - 5th AD), Spinoza and others disapproved of behavior driven by passions (*of like and dislike*) and viewed passions as irrational and sometimes overpowering influences in need of the disciplined control of reason.

Spinoza went as far as saying that reason alone can free human beings from passions. Hume, by contrast thought that passions need not be censurable. They are vital and worthy dimensions of human nature. He said that we should accept our

nature rather than fight (reject) it. Reason cannot liberate us from the passions. Instead, reasons can only be the faithful servant of the passions.

For Hume, it is very important to experience directly the '*phenomena*' - that is the appearances and events. He was closer to Isaac Newton (1642 -1727 AD), the scientist who was his senior contemporary when he mainly used *experience and observation* to formulate the principles and laws of psychology

Vipassana, Mindfulness Meditation, is a mental discipline that has non-judgmental awareness, also called *bare attention*. It is the major instrument used to *observe* the experiences, thoughts and emotions one has. No denial but acceptance is the principle. Awareness and acceptance of the phenomena will lead to a discovery of their true nature and *comprehensive understanding*, which alone can control and liberate the mind from the circle of frustration and disappointment. It is a testable scientific law. We start not from the unknown but from that which is obvious to us such as breathing, sound and pain categorizing them into primary and secondary objects.

According to the Buddha, like and dislike are judgment of the mind. They are expressed in many ways like greed, craving, lust, obsession, pride, dishonesty, dogmatism, jealousy, irritation, anxiety, fear, worry, restlessness, which are *all fetters (samyojana)* limiting and tying people to *the circle of suffering (samsara)*. Attachment is the titanic cause behind any problem human society may come across. It underlines anything unwholesome and has different forms of manifestation.

The mindfulness meditation practice at the Centre, therefore, has been mainly focusing on relieving stress for people with working life. Awareness rather than concentration is the main theme. In addition, right attitude and understanding are among the most emphasized topics. It is the humble aim of our regular meditation session to help people see and accept things such as frustration, irritation and anger that are truly there in their life. So, the atmosphere is understandably not a monastic one but of a working life.

We talk about real life during interview sessions. In addition, many people with personal problems at work or in the family have come to see me privately. They have given me a chance to understand life in a giant city like London. Many of these talks given in the later periods reflect the problems faced in their day to day life.

Awakening to their Working Life

The topics in this small book reflect our efforts in trying to realize the various aspects of an awakened mind using daily life as a practical basis for exploration. They start from reflection on meditation practice such as how to focus the mind on objects. They then progress to dealing with depression and letting go of the conditions associated with that. The aim is to awaken the mind through mindfulness of their daily experiences. The students are not asked to suppress their thoughts and

emotions. They are instead encouraged to face, acknowledge and accept them. I try my best to help them understand their own reactions. It is to help them start from where they are and go forward as far as their ability enables them.

This is a path to *'being awakened'* to reality as it happens, however uncomfortable it may be.

Meditation Techniques

As our Centre is not affiliated to any particular meditation tradition there is more opportunity of exploring a flexible mind than if we followed a certain tradition like **Mahasi, Mogok, U Ba Khin or Pa-Auk** and so on. We do, however, stress that learning a certain meditation technique properly is important. Equally important, too, is to have the right attitude towards a particular meditation technique. A meditation tradition is not something to be identified with but to be made use of to achieve *a life of constant mindfulness and awakening*. We appreciate all the techniques of Vipassana meditation. We try to benefit from all their proven teachings.

I myself have trained under different meditation and Dhamma teachers in Burma. When in Burma I was often puzzled as to why many people could not appreciate meditation methods other than the one they were presently following. When a tradition becomes a source of identity, there can be grasping rather than releasing and freeing from bondage. It is like a passenger who becomes attached and refuses to leave the ship. The purpose of the ferry is not being served in this way

Each tradition that teaches mindfulness (*Vipassana*) meditation adopts a physical object as starting point. They are, for instance, breathing, rising and falling of abdominal movement or the four elements. An object however is just an instrument, *not* meditation in itself. Strictly speaking, breathing, rising and falling of the abdominal movements and the four elements are not in themselves Vipassana (insight meditation) but objects. Vipassana is the way one views such an object. Therefore, there is no point arguing about an object one focuses on or clinging to it as the only correct one. For an untrained mind, such an object is where an *identity* is created. Through that created identity one comes to cling, defend, be offended and reject the others. A dogmatic tendency (*silabbata-paramasa*) is the result.

This is why it is so crucial to the practice that we have the *right attitude* towards our own practice and the technique we follow. Flexibility comes, according to my experience, by being exposed to many different teachers. I came to appreciate Mahasi Sayadaw's teachings under which I had my initial training more after I had practiced under the late Sayadaw U Dhammathara of the Mogok meditation tradition. As I get to know more of other meditation traditions in the Theravada school itself, I come to see that there is no contradiction among them although they teach differently.

Across Cultures

There are people from across many cultures and faiths attending meditation sessions at our Centre. The majority of them profess no Buddhist faith. As we emphasize awareness and direct experience, not a belief, the teachings are not confined to any particular culture or religion. Buddhists by virtue of being born Buddhist do not necessarily benefit from the sessions more than non-Buddhists. A believer gets no automatic advantage over a non-believer. Individuality is what makes people different in mindfulness meditation, not their backgrounds.

People with Hindu Yoga experience, Tibetan visualization meditation, different methods of Samatha and Vipassana meditation, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Sai devotees and atheists - all have a place in our meditation session. Cultural and outward appearances may be different between the East and the West, nevertheless, the way the human mind functions is basically the same. And in principle, we have common experiences, sensations, emotions, fear, worry, and anxiety that transcend creed and gender, color and nationality. *Constant mindfulness* is what we need since mindfulness itself means knowing and understanding such common experiences, accepting and being flexible with them, being at peace and not clinging to them.

Being Flexible

Attachment to something, material or ideological, makes one confined and dependent — not flexible and free. Flexibility in both theory and practice is what we have tried to make a principle feature of our meditation session. *Flexibility (mudubhute)* in its highest point is synonymous with a state of mind untouched by all defilement (*vigatupakkilese*). A flexible mind is a pure mind and a pure mind is practically a detached mind, which is often compared to a lotus. This very detached mind is the one which is ready for and *capable of (kammaniye)* realization of things as they really are. Mindfulness is the foundation of all (*satipatthana*). Moreover, mindfulness helps one advance along the way. It makes the practice steady and effective in every step. It is extremely necessary at the learning stage as well as in realization. It can be described as the foundation and standard of all.

Acknowledgment

I should say a few words of thanks to those without whom this small booklet would never have been in your hands. Mr. Karl Goonesene, the former editor of the *Budumaga*, the quarterly newsletter of the Centre and his wife Mrs. Rene Goonesene, the Librarian, Buddhist Society, London should unfailingly receive my special thanks for going through these talks patiently time and again and for making most valuable suggestions. Barbara Jones of Kingsbury High School, Northwest London has always been helpful with all my work. She took care of me when I was very ill with gastric ulcers. She has made various invaluable suggestions to the preface. I thank her for all her kindness.

Amanda Lwin, one of the brightest students I have ever had, produced the illustration with some assistance of her father. She asked me what kind of idea I had for the design. It was a question I found most difficult to answer as I am not gifted in that field. She drew the illustration while waiting for her GCSE examination results. I admire her talents and wish to record here my heartfelt-thanks for her.

Venerable N. Sumana, the layout designer of our newsletter has my genuine thanks for doing an excellent job in helping me with some computer work.

Dr. Tin Tin Lwin, a Mahasi yogi since her university days — is very keen to have these talks published and has given me every encouragement. I am most grateful to her for all the efforts she put into this book.

Dr. Maung Maung Lwin & Dr. Yi Yi Myaing, son - Zaw Maung Lwin and daughter - Amanda Lwin; Dr. Aung Kye Myint & Dr. Htay Htay Yi, son - Michael Myint; Dr. (Mrs) Chandra Silva and family; U Tin U & Dr. (Mrs) Khin Kyi Nyunt; Dr. Peter Khin Tun & Win Win Mar, sons - Michael and William; Drs. Yin, Dr. Aye Naing and family; Mr. & Mrs. Goonesene and my friend over twenty years Venerable Nandamedha and David & Yu Yu Wei are the other sponsors to the cost of this book. Drs. Lwin, Drs. Myint and Dr. P Khin Tun, Drs. Yin and Dr. Aye Naing and family came to know me through the need of a Buddhist education for their children. They have been very supportive towards my activities in propagation of the Dhamma.

Dr. Chandra Silva started Vipassana meditation practice with me in December 1997. She was very keen to learn Vipassana properly that she came a long way from South London to our Centre every week ignoring the torture of English winter. She has been to many retreats since then. I am very glad that she has found a real refuge in the Dhamma.

As always, may I record here how grateful I feel all along towards Mary Ng CL, Visco Enterprises, Singapore for all her encouragement and help in communication, Sunanda HE Lim for the excellent cover design and layout; and Layla Peterstone, Cambridge, England for proof-reading.

The publisher, Inward Path, also has my blessing and heart-felt thanks for their care and professional expertise, which they have put into this work.

May all beings overcome suffering through mindfulness meditation practice! May all beings be well and happy!

Venerable Dhammasami

London, England

May 2000

1. MEDITATION OBJECTS

Initial (Primary) and Secondary

Initial Meditation Object: For a beginner the first stage in Vipassana meditation practice can be called a learning stage. In this stage, it is important to have a chosen object to initially focus on. This object should be known as the initial meditation object. This initial object should be a physical one, because it arises and passes slowly and is easy to catch up with while mindfulness is still immature and needs to be established.

Some call this initial object the *primary object*. In that case, *primary* here does not mean being more important than other objects but being an initial meditation object, which we can start with and later come back to it from time to time. This initial object could be breathing-in and out or the rise and fall of the abdomen or even something else which is physical. In our sessions, mostly it is breathing or abdominal movements that we use as the initial object.

Secondary Meditation Object: *Secondary meditation object(s)* means any object you perceive through the six senses during meditation excluding, of course, the primary one. For example, pain is a secondary object in this stage. Sounds, visual objects and thoughts are also secondary objects.

This division of objects into initial and secondary objects is mainly to be observed in sitting and walking meditation.

The *initial object* is useful in directly developing concentration and indirectly assisting you in building up mindfulness. On the other hand, the secondary objects are mainly to train you in awareness, while it also helps to concentrate on any object. You start with the initial object. In the course of time, if you hear a sound, notice it as *hearing, hearing, hearing* for three or four times and come back to the initial object. If the sound persists, go to it again to observe it for three or four times more. Then come back to the initial object. Do not yet try to stay with the sound until it becomes the most obvious and strongest object.

An object has to become a most obvious and strong one in order to sustain your attention. Otherwise, you do not usually stay with a secondary object for a long time because it cannot develop your mindfulness. A weak and unclear meditation can make the mind wander. In Vipassana meditation, we should not be confined to *only one object, initial or secondary*. All that we see, hear, smell, taste, touch or think are meditation objects.

There can be other initial meditation objects as well. For example, the 32 different parts of body, the four elements and even pain at some stage can be taken as the

initial object. However the aim is all the same. And no difference in status is made between a primary or secondary object. However, the choice of giving bare attention to one is made on the spur of the moment — that is when an object, primary or secondary, becomes the most obvious among the many objects you perceive at that moment. You may have difficulty for quite a while in deciding which the most obvious and strongest object is. This difficulty has to be encountered and overcome.

There will be a point where one no longer needs to regard any object either as initial or secondary. The teacher will make it known to the meditator when the time has come

2. JUST BARE ATTENTION

WHEN OBSERVING an object, initial or secondary, just pay bare attention to it. One should not think about the object nor should one add any value judgment to it. Merely observe it and come back to the initial object.

There will be a time when one can reflect on an object but this has to be done only with instruction from a meditation teacher.

Not even an ethical value judgment should be made at this stage. For instance, an angry mind is a meditation object. We do not even say, during Vipassana practice, that anger is bad. We simply observe it in order to know what anger is. When you know what anger is, then you are on the way to know why there is anger. Do not blame yourself for getting angry or being frustrated. Just observe it. Do not also suppress anger but try to accept it mindfully, looking into your mind. Justifying your anger or suppressing it is the two extremes of dealing with anger. We have to choose the middle way of dealing with it, which means, here, paying bare attention to it without defending why we are angry or ignoring it through repression.

We know that anger is bad and that compassionate thought is good. However, compassionate thought is treated in the way we treat anger. We just note it as a meditation object. We add no value to it. We merely try to be with it at the time it arises. This is how to establish mindfulness by paying bare attention to an object.

What we are trying to do in Vipassana meditation is not to pass an opinion about what anger or compassionate thought is, but rather to see what they really are. It is to see, not to judge.

Vipassana meditation goes beyond philosophizing about what is moral and immoral. Vipassana means to see things clearly as they are. Here it means to see the true nature of anger and its cause. This could only be done if you are aware of anger arising and existing in your mind.

In order not to be overwhelmed by anger when it arises, it is important to observe it in relation to the initial object; this means to notice anger for three or four times and return to the initial object. To dwell on anger as a meditation object immediately for a long time does not help you to see and know it. Constant mindfulness needs to be established first. Without it, you could be dragged on by anger and at last be overpowered by it. The same is true in observing any secondary object

3. THE AIM AND TECHNIQUE OF VIPASSANA MEDITATION

"WHAT IS the aim of Vipassana meditation" many people ask," and when we will achieve that aim?" The aim of Vipassana meditation, in brief, is to be happy — to be happy continuously. We are not really happy when we feel anxious, irritated, angry, frustrated and disappointed. We are not happy when we feel jealous nor are we happy when we feel envious.

There is no happiness when there is fear. Nor will there be happiness when the mind is wandering. There is no peace when the mind is being dominated by restlessness and agitation.

The causes of all the unhappiness, according to the Buddha, are attachment, anger (hatred) and delusion. All problems of the mind stem from these three roots. So long as they are there, the mind reacts to the internal and external world in ways that bring unhappiness to one's life. They tend to control the mind and its functions. From the psychological point of view, the aim of Vipassana is to eradicate these three unwholesome factors, attachment, anger and delusion from our mind.

Philosophically, the objective of Vipassana meditation is to see things as they truly are. When we do not see things as they are, we have to make judgment as to what some thing is like. Judgment is by nature a result of not seeing objects directly. When we see water there is no need for a judgment that it must be water. It requires only a statement at most. If our mind is consciously or unconsciously clouded with unwholesome factors, our view is bound to be gloomy. It is to have the right view of life that we practice Vipassana meditation.

Observing breathing or abdominal movements is just the first step to build up mindfulness and concentration. It is not everything about Vipassana meditation. It is only the first step. There is a lot more to it. We have to go ahead from the re.

As the practice progresses, we will understand more how our mind works. Only with that kind of understanding can we control and later make full use of our mind to experience lasting peace. That will be the time when we are away from the three unwholesome factors of the mind. It is this freedom for the mind that we are seeking through Vipassana meditation. By being a bit more observant of the mind, you will notice clearly that the mind tends to create frustration and unhappiness as opposed to our natural desire, which is to acquire satisfaction and happiness. You have to stop the mind doing that by learning to understand, and make use of it to create happiness.

To the last part of the question, "when can this aim be achieved", I have to say I do not know for sure. However, let me make it clear that it is possible here and now

Nevertheless, it depends on the individual especially his ability to secure a good foundation, the amount of effort he makes, his teacher and the environment. It is up to the individual, some make quick progress and some do not. We come to see how *individual* we are as we practice because in meditation two people can never be alike. People are never more individual than in Vipassana meditation practice.

4. TRAINING THE MIND THROUGH MINDFULNESS

VIPASSANA MEDITATION is a mental training. The mind is the most precious asset we possess as human beings. We can think and reflect with the mind, which is not the case at all for animals. Animals cannot reflect and understand as we do. They cannot reason as to right and wrong. They have little choice in their life. A tiger has to hunt and kill for survival. A cat may have to kill a mouse just to fill his stomach. Their minds cannot be developed in reflection and understanding. The human mind is, however, capable of doing many things. It can trigger one to kill or not to kill, to love or to hate and to make peace or war. We can control our emotions or be carried away by them. A huge range of choice is open to us and we have freedom to choose as we deem it right.

Mind cannot be definitely defined unless defilement has been removed. It is ever complex and so changeable.

The mind loses its power when being attacked with negative elements such as anger, aversion, envy agitation, frustration, disappointment, depression, wrong attitude, fear, worry and anxiety. One of these paves way for the other to come and weaken the mind. They are the enemies of the mind. So long as the mind remains bombarded day by day by these enemies, it will underachieve. The mind has to be freed from such disturbing defilement to enable it to realize its great potential.

We may liken various kinds of defilement to obstacles that hinder the growth of a rose. By removing all the defilement that attack, weaken, destroy and change the nature of the mind, and thereby the personality of an individual, we are helping the mind to grow strong, work efficiently and achieve all its potential. We do not grow the rose but remove the obstacles to enable it to grow by itself.

Vipassana meditation is mental training on the Middle Path, which removes all obstacles to the healthy and active mind so that it can accomplish its highest potential.

Mind leads the world, the Buddha said. I take this to mean that we can *lead* our own life in its true sense as we all possess a *mind*. However, while being carried away by anger, disappointment and anxiety, how can we say we are *leading* our life? Actually, we are *being led* by those destructive elements. The physical and mental consequences of these harmful forces dominating our mind are obvious. A trained mind is the source of happiness and the untrained one of misery.

We want to be happy and joyful every day. Yet, without mastering our mind, this potential of life is hard to achieve. Vipassana meditation is designed to remove all the destructive forces (*kilesa*) from our mind once and for all and to help us to become self-sufficient and self-supporting. However, there is no miracle in

Vipassana practice. Sometimes the road is hard and slow, sometimes quick and smooth. Everything depends on the individual.

Mindfulness is the basic as well as the leading factor. We have to acquire it through patience and determination. It is so essential, that one cannot start Vipassana meditation without mindfulness. Once it is acquired, mindfulness may be used for useful reflection and understanding. With mindfulness, we train our mind to *open* to the present moments, to the *conditions* arising here and now. Inhalation and exhalation are taking place here and now. Thoughts and sensations we are conscious of belong to the present. Breathing arrests the mind so fond of something else, and helps it settle on the present moment. This is a mental training through Vipassana meditation.

5. NOT ONLY BREATHING

THERE ARE many meditation objects: to start with such as breathing, abdominal movements, the four elements, visualizing colors or the Buddha. These objects are physical and are mostly given as a starting point to a beginner. One learns how to develop concentration using one of these objects. It depends on the teacher which objects one is given. Breathing is perhaps the most common one. One develops concentration gradually if one continues to focus on, for example, breathing.

Consequently one develops an idea that meditation means focusing on breathing. This is not necessarily wrong, but our human tendency is such that one may come to associate meditation *only* with concentrating on breathing in and out. One does not consider anything, other than breathing in and out, a meditation object. Unknowingly one starts feeling uncomfortable with other objects like sensation especially pain and numbness. Equally uncomfortable for such a meditator are mental objects such as thoughts, emotions and a wandering mind. He does not think he is meditating any longer if he finds his mind on any object other than breathing. The desire to get rid of pain, numbness, emotions and thoughts can get stronger. This repulsive desire becomes a hindrance in learning how to accept things as they really are. Instead of accepting, one is rejecting. In this case, the mind is blocked by the *idea* that meditation means focusing on breathing. It is an opinion born out of genuine efforts to acquire concentration. Such an opinion is a very subtle attachment we can experience. Mind that is cloudy with a factor such as attachment is not flexible any more. It rejects. It creates a judgment of like and dislike and is caught up in them. This may hinder the effort to build up mindfulness and concentration itself.

Some people can focus on breathing for a very long time but find it difficult to deal with their emotions outside intensive meditation practice. They can be easily dragged on by their emotions. This is due to the inflexible factors of the practice. They emphasize concentration more than mindfulness. Meditation can become only a feel-good factor for such people. It is no longer a mental training that helps one face daily life with an energetic outlook. Concentration developed by focusing on breathing makes one calm at times but rigid at the other. The mindfulness factor needs to be developed in such a situation by observing more than one object. Pay more attention to any sensation or mental object that arises at the present moment. Regard them as a good a meditation object as breathing. Do not see them as distractions but as useful objects that one can meditate on.

It is not only breathing which is a good meditation object. And it is not only abdominal movements, four elements, colors or the picture of the Buddha that one can meditate on. Any thought, emotion or sound that we perceive through one of the six senses is a meditation object, too. If there is a problem with observing objects other than breathing, before we start meditating, we should remind ourselves that

breathing is not the only meditation object, and meditation is more than focusing on breathing. It is about developing mindfulness and trying to look at our daily life in the way we have never bothered to before. That is to look at our daily activities as they are with an attitude to accept rather than to reject. It is about seeing them as they happen rather than wanting them to be in the way we imagine.

Breathing is not everything about meditation. Meditation has as its objective to observe and penetrate into the real nature of our daily life. Mindfulness meditation does not aim to separate you from your daily routine but to increase the ability to enjoy them as they are. Do not define meditation as an exercise that needs to focus on breathing alone.

6. NO COURAGE TO SEE THINGS AS THEY ARE

TO SEE things as they truly are is the very accomplished task of wisdom. Once we see things as they are, we will have accepted the world as it is, and not create any more suffering. We shall no longer wish the world to be other than it is. We shall no longer create conflict.

However, to see things as they actually are in practice is something of an uphill task.

In meditation, we discover that we are *not* ready to accept something as it truly is even if it presents itself to us. For instance, when discovering the mind wandering we can not accept it. Instead of contemplating and accepting it, we become impatient and disappointed. Unconsciously and at times consciously we deny it. We are not only *reacting* to the wandering mind but also *rejecting* it at the same time. This is the case when observing tension and numbness, to give you a couple of examples.

When tension presents itself to our senses, what we normally do is shake our shoulders to get rid of it. This happens because we do not have courage to objectively look at it. We are trying to run away from it. Without accepting it, we can not learn anything from it.

We can stand tension physically but it is very hard to do so mentally. You can sit and talk to your friend without much difficulty for one hour but to meditate for one hour is hard for many. Because in meditation, you experience tension in the mind whereas you pay no attention to it at all while talking to your friend. You are just experiencing it physically not in the mind. As you open your eyes, tension seems to disappear immediately because you no longer experience it with your mind. Tension, in reality, is not taken away by just opening your eyes. Physically you continue to experience it.

Mindfulness is to build up *courage* to accept things such as tension in our body they are a part of our life and there is no way we can get rid of them altogether. Life has to be lived in reality, not in abstract thinking. We have to adjust ourselves to the reality of the world in order to enjoy life.

Pain, tension, disappointment etc. are the realities of the world. We have to adjust ourselves to their existence. However, this can happen only when *wisdom* is present. This wisdom is acquired from directly experiencing these realities.

A new born baby finds it too hard to accept the harsh touch of a nurse's hands. The baby has been literally snapped out of the secure environment of the mother's womb and is exposed suddenly to the unfamiliar, the perils of new world. The wind outside his mother's womb is so cruel for the very tender skin of the baby. The wash and the towel do not seem very kind. It is too much for the baby to bear. He cries

immediately and continuously. However, there is *not* much that the nurse can do to help relieve the baby from those pains caused by her hands, seemingly gentle, yet unbearably rough for the baby. The mother cannot ease those pains either. The baby has to adjust himself to the hard reality of life outside his mother's womb. He matures as he accepts reality. He stops crying perhaps in less than an hour. We have to adjust to the reality of life by accepting it and maturing ourselves by directly experiencing it. We have to open, not close ourselves to it.

In daily life, stress and frustration at work are real. To see things turning out in a way other than the way we expect, unfulfilled desire and disappointment are the realities we face day in and day out. They are there as a part of life. They demand *acknowledgment* and *comprehension* through mindfulness. As we accept them by paying bare attention, they cease to progress to create more suffering in our mind. This is the way to create peace.

There are many *different degrees* of seeing something as it really is. At one stage, an awareness of its existence means seeing it as it is. Yet in another, noting the moment it vanishes becomes wisdom. Still further, seeing the arising of the object (such as wandering mind, frustration and disappointment) is considered wisdom. Mindfulness is stronger at this point. At a more advanced level, wisdom requires seeing the thing as a part of a process, in other words, seeing its immediate cause. This leads to the detached mind. As the mind becomes detached from an object, it greatly reduces *reacting*, which is effectively the creation of suffering.

At work, we know that for one reason or another some people are easily agitated. That is a reality at that time. Nevertheless, we just cannot accept it. Consequently, we become agitated. We know by experience that some one is arrogant, which is a reality. Nevertheless, we cannot take him as he is. We want him to behave the way we want. Thus we create suffering for ourselves. We have not the courage to accept him as he is. In brief, we fail to take the real world as it is. Instead, we keep living in a delusive world of our own making. Mindfulness of things as they are will give rise to this badly needed courage.

7. DEVELOPING PATIENCE

WE ARE aware of how we can be impatient when being agitated or distracted continuously. Even the sound coming from a cat's movements can disturb us enormously and make us very distracted. With continued distraction, we may become impatient and think of getting rid of the cat. Impatience has developed. In such circumstances, we should merely observe impatience and not try to get rid of the cat. We should try to see how it is changing us and making us a different person.

It is neither the cat who is making noises nor you who are getting agitated that is to be blamed. Both cat and agitation are just meditation objects. Go through the agitated moments mindfully experiencing them. You will find that agitation leaves no lasting impact on your mind and at the end of the day, you are as happy as ever, not being over shadowed or overcome by this agitation.

At the beginning, it is also crucial to view impatience in the right context. Impatience is not something to be regarded as something to reject. It is just another meditation object. Do not blame yourself for being impatient. Do not justify your being impatient either. Try to accept it and go through it mindfully. Patience is a very important quality of mind. Without it, we stand to lose a lot in life. The way to develop patience is to observe *impatience* itself when it arises. Again, notice it in relation to the initial object so that impatience will not carry you away.

Having patience means not to get agitated or frustrated easily. Of course, you still do what you should do in normal life. Nevertheless, you are able to keep yourself calm in the face of unsatisfying circumstances. Patience does not mean you do nothing, being inactive and staying idle. The Buddha took whatever measure necessary to teach the monks without being agitated. Not all the monks were wonderful even during the time of the Buddha. Sometimes He had to ask them to leave the monastery for being so naughty.

When pain arises, you notice that. You do not change your posture immediately but try your best to observe it as long as possible. This is patience. When the pain increases and becomes unbearable, you can change your posture slowly and mindfully. You are still a patient person. You do not torture yourself by carrying out what is beyond your limit.

When you have patience, you have more courage to face things in life. Patience is not a negative factor as some would like to think. It is a very positive quality. Patience is developed along with determination when you make an effort to observe pain. Patience and determination are virtues to be cultivated, not gifts. Together they help you to be active and at the same time stable. Patience alone without determination can be dull and inactive. Determination divorced of patience brings anxiety and pressure.

The opposite of patience is irritation, agitation, aversion, impatience, disappointment, frustration, anger and hatred. The more we confront and deal with these opposite natures in the meditative way the more we develop patience.

Patience is helpful to mindfulness. It is an ability to sustain us in times of difficulty. It is a sign of stability, and being harmonious with oneself, the lack of which could only mean that one is unsteady and restless.

8. DIRECT EXPERIENCE

LEARNING ABOUT life through Vipassana meditation is not like book learning or learning something from the media. Through newspapers and electronic media, we are fed with how to describe and judge an event. We get and develop a lot of ideas and opinions from these sources. Different people may go on developing different ideas and opinions on the same event. Sometime it is hard to say which the truth is. Ideas and opinions are always value added. They are based on how a person judges what he or she perceives. It is not surprising that people have varied ideas and opinions. Sometime this results in causing barriers and divisions in society. The Buddha was well aware of this fact of life. He discussed them as *Puthujjana* in Pali, which means *people of different opinions*. As long as we are not enlightened, we will go on forming an opinion and consequently will remain different.

It is recorded in the *Bahuvedaniya Sutta*, the Discourse on Various Feelings in the Majjhima Nikaya, the Middle Length Saying that during the Buddha's time, a man by the name of Pancakanga and a monk called Udayi were arguing one day on different types of feelings. The former said there are two kinds of feeling, pleasant and unpleasant. He repeatedly refused to accept the Venerable Udayi's teaching that there are three including a neutral one. Pancakanga stated that the neutral type of feeling could be included with the pleasant one. Udayi, however, declined to accept this. They were overheard by Venerable Ananda, the secretary of the Buddha who reported the matter to Him (the Buddha).

The Buddha pronounced to both that different people describe feelings in different ways, and that both of them were correct. The feelings could be in either two or three categories, depending on *the method of description (Pariyayato)*. When based on description and opinion, there is more likelihood that we come to different conclusions.

The famous story of six blind men conveys a similar message, as their opinions are based on their touching different parts of an elephant. This should convince us that before we see an object together with its *causes* arising and vanishing, we will not see the true nature of the world. Nevertheless, seeing something as a part of a process, not totally a separate identity, can give a more complete picture.

Learning in the Vipassana meditation is not based on description, idea, opinion or judgment. It is based on direct experience, which in many cases goes beyond the exact description of words. At times, we cannot name the emotional experience we have, and we find ourselves confused as to what to call it. This is a common experience for those who use naming technique in mindfulness meditation.

By paying bare attention to pain or tension, we experience it directly without any interpretation of the sort of pain or tension it is. It is hard to bear, prompting

reactions such as impatience and frustration. Nevertheless we come to know directly that pain is like this and tension has this nature. We do not need to impose any idea on our mind that pain and tension are suffering but should keep the mind open to see their nature revealed directly to our senses. Try to see any object *objectively* as it arises. The objects, a meditation technical term for the world, will reveal their true nature as and when your mind is capable of seeing it. To be able to see the true nature of the world, we need to build up a strong and continuous presence of mindfulness. Mindfulness enables you to experience things directly and produces insight into them.

9. HOW TO APPLY BASIC RIGHT EFFORT

RIGHT EFFORT is one of the fundamental components of a developed mind. Instead of "effort," the Buddha constantly used the words "right effort." The prefixed word "right" indicates that there is some sort of wrong effort, which is pressuring and futile.

Some people may associate the idea of making an effort with duration such as having a longer sitting meditation session. It is not entirely incorrect although we have to say that a long duration alone does not make the right effort. In the process of mental training, it is preferred to have the ability to sit longer.

The right effort is part and parcels of the **Noble Eightfold Path**, the only way the Buddha found to be leading to true and lasting happiness. This brings home that without discovering the middle way, we are not exerting right effort in our practice. It is then possible only with the help of *bare* attention, one of the many aspects of mindfulness where right effort can be found and put into use. An effort without mindfulness, indeed, can lead us to one or the other extreme. We may work too hard at times and give it up altogether at others.

At the beginning people are usually very enthusiastic about doing meditation. That is before they even see the whole picture of meditation practice. The kind of effort they make is connected to a *belief* that meditation can produce some miracle for them rather than right effort linked to *confidence* in meditation. Here the right *understanding* of the Noble Eightfold Path comes in as another important factor, without which there cannot be the right effort.

If we cannot *accept* that a wandering mind is just another meditation object, we may then be tempted to react and become disappointed. Enthusiasm can fade away easily. Some cannot accept pain as a meditation object. Instead, they want to get rid of pain. Therefore, being unable to accept something really destroys determination and can kill all our effort.

Courage to accept things as they are is one of the fundamentals of right effort. Actually, the Pali word "viriyā" means both effort and a courageous act. Any failure or mistake does not easily discourage one once the right effort is established. The right effort is similar to a constant determination that is accompanied with some degree of right attitude.

Being punctual and regular in the practice is another way of cultivating the right effort. Life is always busy if we choose it to be in that way. We come up with many excuses not to meditate regularly. To sit and meditate for ten minutes everyday seems as hard as earning a million dollars. Some postpone starting meditation till late in their life. Lack of the right attitude means one is not capable of making use of

the golden opportunity to learn meditation, train one's own mind and achieve peace here and now.

A good ten minutes sitting session everyday is extremely helpful to developing the right effort. We should not think that it is too little and makes no impact. The mind can perceive a lot in ten minutes, certainly much more than the eyes or the ears can do. One may go on increasing the duration gradually and surely. Once the duration is increased, one has to be very careful not to reduce it easily without consulting the teacher as that can damage one's self-confidence and attitude. It is such a sensitive matter to deal with that one should only increase the time with the approval of one's teacher.

Technically, the right effort means to make an effort to remove our weak points and develop more good points. There are two kinds of weak points, ones that we already have, and others that we do not have. The weak points we have are removed through mindfulness. An effort has to be made when a weak point is discovered by the mindfulness. The weak points that we do not see in ourselves but are aware of in some one else have to be watched and reflected upon to ensure that they are recognized if we too harbor them.

Take, gossiping. We gossip about some one. Then through mindfulness, if we come to realize it as weak point, we should simply observe the desire to gossip and stop it. This is a weak point that we can see in ourselves. We should not blame ourselves nor indulge in it. They are the two extremes. Use bare attention to remove the weak point.

Nevertheless, if we see some one gossiping but do not get involved ourselves, we should just observe it as gossiping *or the desire to gossip* as appropriate. Do not blame that person nor should we join him or her.

It is the same procedure regarding good points. But we have to make an effort to develop the good point we see within us and try to acquire the one we see in others but not in ourselves.

All the unwholesome thoughts, speeches and acts are weak points and the opposites are good ones. In Pali, they are called unwholesome *akusala (asava)* and wholesome *kusala* respectively. With skilful reflection the unwholesomeness will decrease and the wholesomeness increase. We have to start with mindfulness.

At the beginning there could be a bit of pressure. However, once the other factors such as bare attention, right attitude, right understanding and skilful reflection are developed, very little pressure is felt. There will be a constant willingness to continue with the practice even in difficult circumstances. The effort then has become effortless effort. This is exactly what is meant by "right effort".

10. SEEING SOMETHING STRANGE

IN NOVEMBER 1997, a lady doctor from East London came to our Centre for a special meditation session with her daughter. She is a general medical practitioner. She said she often saw a terrible picture like a coffin while meditating at home. That created a lot of fear in her mind. The experience looks more horrifying from her cultural background as people do not discuss death in Western culture. People in the Western world are very open compared to people from other parts of the world but they cannot bring themselves to be open about death as their minds are prejudiced with fear.

Another gentleman with about 20 years of Yoga practice frequently reported in the Wednesday meditation session at our Centre that he saw a blue color and asked what that might mean. Recently, someone asked me what could be meant by her dream. She dreamt of her father who passed away ten years ago. That happened just before her brother wrote to her of the arrangement the family in Thailand had made to have an ancestral worship ceremony. She was surprised because she had not thought of her father for quite some time.

We see objects in two ways, through our eyes and in our minds. Both are real. We see a lot of things. Some things make a lasting impact on our minds and some do not. Usually, we *interpret* what we see. The lady doctor interpreted the coffin to be inauspicious, and that she was unlucky to see it again and again. As she interpreted, fear began to arise. The real problem is not about the coffin she saw in her mind but the interpretation of what is being perceived through her mind. This is not reflection but speculation and interpretation. One starts forming an opinion on what one sees. In many of such instances, it is probable when one goes on to create an illusion through interpretation just to feel better. This is where the problem lies.

We as human beings with conscious minds interpret ourselves all the time. We do so in terms of "*what I am*" and "*what I am not*", and "*what I want to be*" and "*what I don't want to be*". The coffin, the blue picture or the dream were being interpreted in the same way — "*what it is*" and "*what it is not*", perhaps in line with what they wanted it to be. As the interpretation becomes dominant, we lose the ability to appreciate the real object being perceived through senses, eyes or mind. The mind is being colored and blocked with opinions and interpretations.

By observing the bare object, being aware of only seeing, and not interpreting or judging it, we open ourselves to what really exists there. What is best known here is what is being perceived through our eyes or mind. We have to start with this bare perception. It would be a fruitless effort to try to start with what is not known, which is here the reason *why* one sees. We want to know "*why*" before we know "*what*." Mindfulness is to start knowing directly "*what*" — the object presented to the senses really is here and now. The present moment is best known, compared

with the future or the past. The mind that is engaged in the less known or least known object tends to create fear and anxiety. It is a strange object because it is beyond what a person is capable of perceiving through the senses.

Buddhism accepts the existence of knowledge obtained through inference. However, this inferred or abstract or indirect knowledge can only be safely acquired when it is derived from experiential knowledge that is based on observation.

The object of mindfulness is always one that arises in the present, not that has not yet arisen or has already gone. The unknown objects such as soul, God and Atman are not an appropriate subject of contemplation. There is no reason to believe that we can begin successfully with something entirely unknown to us.

11. MINDFULNESS

A Way Out of Depression

What is Depression?

DEPRESSION IS an illness that is becoming more prevalent with the pressure of life building up in our modern society. It is one of the most upsetting experiences a person can go through and is often much harder to endure than physical illness. Usually, depression is the result of some emotional experiences that go unchecked. If they were to be examined and recognized early, they would not lead to depression. Depression often helps to bring out more anxiety, resentment, frustration and agitation, which could result in a personality change. There could be a lack of interest in life and a feeling of worthlessness. Blaming others and creating illusions to make oneself feel better, adopting a "why me" attitude, irritability, being over-anxious and worried about the future, being over suspicious, feeling guilty about the past, fear of rejection and lack of confidence, difficulty in seeing another's viewpoint, inability to make decisions, easily losing concentration, losing a sense of priority and proportion, being easily confused, forgetful and panic are some of the psychological manifestations of depression.

Headaches, chronic neck, shoulder and back pain, migraine, sexual difficulty, rapid heart beat, breathlessness, picking at food, loss of appetite, being unable to sit still or talking constantly are some of the physical appearances of the depression. Medical experts say that it is difficult to differentiate between stress and depression, because in both of these conditions the emotion plays a big part.

People become stressed when they cannot cope with increasing demands of work or, for example, when frustrated or when there is too much pressure in life. Unbalanced postures of the day also could put strains on the body and create stress. Stress is related to a growing number of problems — high blood pressure, stomach ulcers, migraines, eczema, asthma and mental disorders.

Physiologically Interconnected

Stress is a part of life. We have to learn to accept and live with it, else it will become a destructive force. Stress is caused by internal and external factors, which evoke a response. This is known as stress response. The internal and external factors causing stress are called the stressors. Mind and body are closely related and affect each other in stress responses. Buddhist scripture is full of such reminders that the states of mind and body condition each other in both good and bad ways. The portion of physical body affected by the mental state is called *cittaja-rupa* or *citta-samutthana-rupa*. The Patthana, the last text of the Theravada Abhidhamma

scriptures shows many of such close relationships. When someone is faced with anger, anxiety, worry, fear, disappointment and so on, the muscles of his body become very tense and require more blood. The hearts and lungs start to work overtime to supply more blood to the muscles for action. The heart rate, breathing rate and blood pressure all go up. Hyperventilation and over-breathing may occur to supply more oxygen.

The blood is diverted from abdominal viscera and skin to action-stations of muscles, heart and lungs. The skin, consequently begins to pale. The internal secretions which are to enable good digestion are immediately withdrawn as they are required elsewhere. So, the mouth, throat, the stomach and intestines dry up.

Accumulated

Whenever there is a stress there is stress reaction in terms of anxiety, worry fear, agitation and so on. At such time the body accumulates stress chemicals, tension and strain. With accumulated stress chemicals, tension and strain, the recovery from stress takes longer than it should. Dislike attracts dislike. Anxiety brings anxiety. Worry conditions worry. It is easier for a new stress to come up but more difficult to go away. This is how the circle of suffering goes on here and now. Psychological stress reactions begin to accumulate as well. In the long term, such accumulated stress reactions are called *latent defilement (anusaya)* in Buddhist psychological analysis.

It all starts from lack of awareness, non-acceptance of the stress reactions. A mature stress that lasts longer leaving its effect even after the causes of stress disappeared is known as depression. The recovery is not instant any longer, as the mind and body are stretched to their limit. Mindfulness helps us detect stress reactions immediately and provide an outlet through non-judgmental awareness and acknowledgment.

Wild Animals

An example is given to help understand repeated stress reactions. Imagine yourself in an open field where a wild animal suddenly appears and you have to escape. You will run quicker than you thought you could. This is a stress response. Say you have escaped. Before you recover, another wild animal appears in front of you that you have to make another escape from. You will still flee as quickly as before but this time the recovery will take longer. If you have to flee in this way continuously three or four times, your getting back to normal is expected to be longer.

Anxiety, worry fear and so on are like a wild animal that appears almost from nowhere.

The practice of mindfulness meditation is to help you see if such wild animals are there in our mind. The practice could not only help someone in stress reactions or even depression with regard to his medication needs, but also could bring insight

into stress reactions and depression itself. From the point of view of the meditation experience, depression is the result of being unable to accept and see things as they are.

Breathing Exercise

One should start with a short breathing exercise, perhaps about ten minutes. Use the technique of breathing deeply and slowly. One can also count the breaths while inhaling and exhaling slowly and deeply. This exercise can increase the supply of oxygen needed for the liver. Do not start with a long session, as it could then produce pressure in itself.

Breathing is a very important factor for us to get right if we expect ourselves to deal well with the daily pressure of living. Normal breathing could keep us fresh and remove stress. It also builds up energy which we can draw and make use of it at work.

A baby's breathing is very interesting. The baby breathes with chest and navel movements in rhythmical rise and fall, whereas an adult breathes upward starting from the navel. The baby's way of breathing supplies sufficient oxygen to the tissues. As breathing becomes abnormal, the oxygen supplied is reduced. This creates some problems for energy flow.

General Mindfulness

General mindfulness of the situation helps one put it into proper perspective. Be mindful that you are in a depressed state either hormonal or exogenous. When one is hungry or does not have enough sleep, one could be easily irritated due to hormonal and biological changes within the body. One could feel very low by just suffering from a headache. It is always helpful to have a general awareness of such situations.

Recognizing Emotions

As you go on contemplating breathing, fears, worries and other negative thoughts, they may come to dominate your mind. As you become aware of them, name them individually as fear or worry as appropriate three or four times, and leave it there. Accept any emotional reactions including feeling helpless and worthless. Return to breathing again. This is the first step of giving recognition to factors of depression.

People often dismiss these factors of depression by advising sufferers to forget about them. This will only lead to ignorance of depression and consequently worsen the situation. We have to change the attitude of ignoring depression. We must learn to recognize any emotion that arises. Do not dwell on it by going on thinking and speculating about it, but pay necessary attention as we said earlier, and keep

returning to the breathing, which is the primary object. The emotions can be easily controlled once they are recognized (*sati*) and understood (*sampajanna*).

Gradual Practice

Practice this simple method of Vipassana twice a day or at least once daily. While under depression, try to reduce your work load substantially. After about a week, make an effort to increase the length of the session to about 15 minutes. It is important not to overdo it, and to increase the duration of the session when the right time has come for you to do so. This should be done in consultation with a meditation instructor. Actually talking to the meditation teacher itself could bring a great relief.

Diet and Exercise

A balanced and moderate diet is highly recommended by the Buddha and Venerable Sariputta, His chief disciple. With a balanced food, a good diet and regular physical exercise, Vipassana meditation could help one out of depression, be it endogenous — that is a result of hormonal and biological changes within the body or exogenous — that is influenced mainly by outside factors. Breathing meditation not only helps develop mindfulness but, it is said, also improves liver functions and blood filtering. Fresh air and a simple and quiet place are conducive to the practice of meditation.

The Right Attitude

One's right attitude towards depression is very crucial when taking the first step. Regard depression as the meditation object. Do not be so judgmental about it. Do not think of it too much. It is already there. Observe it as it comes up at the present moment. Stop complaining and start recognizing it as a reality. If we identify depression at its early stage, we stand a better chance of coming out of it. At the outset of the practice, it may seem more disturbing as one becomes aware of stress responses. However, from meditation and also Buddhist psychological analysis, this is a healthy practice because one does not store stress reactions but let them go. One should not imagine a problem-free life, having a problem is the very real sign of being alive. The Buddha said that understanding problems means understanding life itself. New stress responses may keep appearing as there are causes for them to do so, but this will give one a chance to deal with them there and then. Suppressing them through some sort of distraction requires more strength and energy. And it is not a healthy exercise

12. DO NOT GIVE IT UP

MANY PEOPLE start meditating with some sort of expectation, which is perfectly normal. Some even read the instruction in books and try it on their own. There is enthusiasm to begin with.

As one sits down closing one's eyes and trying to focus on one point such as breathing, one comes to see that it is really hard to keep focusing like that for even five minutes. One starts experiencing a bit of disappointment. Meditation does not seem as fantastic as one used to think. Many actually stop learning meditation at this stage. Determination and patience are tested even at the first kick-off.

Meditation, especially Vipassana meditation, is as difficult to grasp as the nature of one's own mind. Vipassana meditation is, indeed, concerned with learning and controlling the functions of the mind with a view to increasing its efficiency. We all presume that we know ourselves very well, and that includes our mind. In practice, the function of the mind is very complex. In the middle of enjoying ourselves, we can suddenly feel disappointed. What seemed so wonderful in life can quickly become a depressing experience. We know that our mind is the most crucial factor in all this. But we hardly know how it works and how we can make it work better.

To imagine intellectually what the mind is like is similar to looking for an answer to how the world began. We end up with a comfortable answer to satisfy ourselves because we feel rather uncomfortable not knowing. The world was created! We could settle with such a theory which then can invite equally reasonable objections. One cannot be really satisfied unless one forces oneself to believe it, because it is based on presumption.

Vipassana meditation is not based on presumption. The field of study of Vipassana meditation is the function of the present mind, which exist in the very here and now. One comes to see what one did not expect to see such as a wandering mind, crazy thoughts, impatience and frustration lingering on in the mind. It is not that encouraging carrying on with meditation with such things in mind! One has a good excuse to give it up.

Do not give it up even though you cannot keep focusing on the primary object such as breathing or abdominal moments for a very long time. Breathing exercise is not all about meditation. Vipassana meditation is much more than that. It is about learning how we can be happy and how we can be disappointed. Only once we have learnt that will we be able to sustain happiness and prevent another disappointment. When you become disappointed because you cannot focus on your breathing, you should simply observe and recognize that disappointment. Disappointment could be for any reason; it could be because the bus is late or because you do not enjoy your daily meal. What matters here is disappointment itself. Take it as a meditation

object rather than blaming yourself. Do not give it up. Instead, accept it and move forward. Start focusing on breathing again. It does not matter even if you can only stay with one or two breathes. There is no failure. Knowing that disappointment is present is in itself progress. That knowing has to be grasped as the first step and continue to build upon, no matter what the object of knowing is. It can be breathing or your wandering mind, pain or disappointment. The objects are not important here. Only knowing is important. That knowing is called mindfulness. With mindfulness, you will become more determined and more patient.

13. COPING WITH FAILURE

IN MEDITATION, there are people who think of themselves as failures. Not being able to make one's mind concentrated is enough to make one feel a sense of failure, particularly when they hear other people talking that once they enter into meditation, the mind just becomes calm and concentrated, never straying away from breathing. Some set a target for themselves but the mind keeps wandering and at times they get more frustrated, it appears to them that realizing the desired result may not be achieved. Bringing the mind back to the primary object does not seem to help either. The mind never seems settled.

There are many reasons for one feeling a sense of failure. May be the expectation is too high and one is not aware of one's own expectation or one has not learnt how to deal with *expectation* itself. By and large, people come to be disappointed in meditation when they are *unable* to keep the mind focused on one point, especially breathing or abdominal movements. There are those also who feel defeated in their efforts because sounds and various thoughts disturb them. The experience seems to be driving them to the limit of their ability. The problem is one of being unable to accept the *inability*.

This is largely due to the judgmental mind. The principle of a non-judgmental approach to Vipassana is not being heeded. A judgmental mind *conditions* many things — wanting to be something and not wanting to be something. There is a strong desire "*to be*." Vipassana essentially aims at *seeing* such desire. However, it could be very despairing to *see* some of our own real experiences in Vipassana meditation. We are not yet ready to *see* things such as disappointment and the prospect of unfulfilled expectation. While hoping for the best, we are not at all prepared for the worst.

Taking the wandering mind just as another meditation object to observe and contemplate, we could have avoided being disappointed. By observing the judgmental mind, there could be an escape from being trapped in confusion. The mind keeps wanting to be something else (a concentrated mind) all the time, unable to open to the conditions at that present moment, which is *wandering*. There is also an element of "want" manifested in wanting *not* to be something, like having a *wandering mind*. The judgmental mind itself is trapped in two extremes, *wanting to get rid of something* and *wanting to be something else*. Just watching and observing these extremes can help one out of being judgmental. Watching and not reacting, are other aspects of mindfulness working the Middle Way which abandons the two opposite extreme approaches.

There is no failure in meditation. Any effort is rewarding in one way or another. We come to learn a lot about how the mind functions, not least the danger of leaving it untrained. It is helpful to remind ourselves that not all failures are necessarily an

indication of weakness. The ascetic Gautama, before his enlightenment, went through some kinds of failure, if we may say so. He did not obtain the solution he was seeking from the two best-known meditation masters, Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta. Having decided to leave a princely life, he found himself not nearer the set goal. A few years, not just a few meditation sessions, of harsh practices that followed did not bring him any reward either. Six years is a long time for someone who is searching extensively and making an earnest effort like ascetic Gautama. He could have called off all his efforts if not for his strong resolve and patience. He made progress through learning from his own failures. His efforts bore fruits in the end, and we benefit them now. Therefore, determination and patience are important friends in coping with failure.

Meditatively, we should endeavor to cope with failure in two ways. First by cultivating the right attitude towards failure or rather, a perceived sense of failure as discussed earlier. Secondly, we should be mindful of the sense of failure itself and the responses to it such as disappointment, frustration and impatience.

Awareness in these cases will prove that developing concentration alone is not sufficient. There are also other very indispensable qualities like *determination (aditthana)*, and *patience (khanti)* to develop in meditation. Mindfulness helps one to achieve them.

14. SKILFUL FOCUS

THE WORLD is full of things that can irritate us and make our whole life miserable. You can think of what you did not have in your childhood and go on blaming your parents. We all want to have the best in our life but that is exactly what does not happen. Although born royal, Princes William and Harry can still create miseries in their mind by blaming their parents for not sticking together as a happy family, something which many who are not royal enjoy

There is no end to experiencing misery if we keep focusing on what we do not have. No one has everything in this world. We all have to go without having one thing or the other. Satisfaction does not come by having everything but by being able to enjoy what you have and the ability to share with others.

Often you feel disappointed for having thoughts and emotions. What you want is a concentrated mind, not a wandering one. Before seeing how they arise and cease, it is difficult to accept either without being judgmental. It is almost inevitable that you may even feel discouraged for the mind wanders off quite often.

The desire to keep the mind on one object is barely noticed. Without being aware of it, you are under pressure to concentrate and that makes you unable to achieve the very thing you are striving for. Before mindfulness is mature, meditation seems a disaster never giving the slightest hint of calm and peace you heard of before starting.

Some lose self-confidence and come to think of them selves as being unable to make any progress in meditation. They want to give it up. This is because they think of the moments they cannot focus on their breathing rather than the ones they can.

The moment you can focus on breathing may be very short but it is something you have done and after every session, you should focus your mind on those moments, not on wandering mind. Rejoice in the moments your mind is concentrated, maybe just one minute out of thirty. Why should you focus on the 29 minutes and feel miserable? Life already has too much of a misery

There are mistakes we have made in our life starting with doing a lesson badly in school, in the relationship with our parents and friends, not doing something that should have been done today, or in making a big decision that could change our life. If we dwell on those mistakes, there is no way we can have confidence in ourselves and be happy.

There are many good things that as a person we have done. We only need mindfulness to discover them and rejoice in them. It is extremely important that we focus on the good things we have done and go on building upon them. This is not to

say that we have to ignore all the bad things or mistakes we have done. We, of course, have to learn lessons from them. However, it would be a very unskillful way of living a life to dwell on such things.

Had Angulimala dwelled on his past he would have missed all the opportunity to transform himself and become one of the arahants. Had the Lord Buddha Himself focused only on His failure with His six years ascetic practice, He would have never become a Buddha. He learnt a mistake from it, abandoned it and started focusing on a new path, which we now know as the middle path.

Do not be discouraged. Focus on the moments you have mindfulness rather than when you do not have it. Continue to build on what you have. Do not dwell on your wandering mind or any emotional reaction to it. Let it cease. That is the way it will be if you do not cling to it.

Skilful reflection is the starting point and the foundation of all goodness in this world. It is an ability of the mind. All the worry, anxiety, irritation, sleeplessness, loss of appetite, fear, anger, hatred and attachment begin to get weakened with skilful reflection. Loving-kindness, compassion, appreciation and peace start to arise at this same point — skilful thought.

Without this, we cannot even appreciate what our parents have done for us. There always seems to be one or other reason to complain about life. We never appear to have what we want. This is because we keep focus on what we do not have and are lacking. We start looking for educational qualifications, a job, money, a house, family life and fame and so on. One can be satisfied with what one has achieved while continuing to work. Or one can ignore what has achieved while working. In both cases, one is still working. However, one way is conducive to happiness and the other stress. This is due to difference in focus point.

In the Shan Buddhist culture, people often make a vow after donating something to the Buddha or pagoda or the Sangha. It has become like a prayer through which one asks something from God in other religions.

Many Shans would pray for the intelligence of Venerable Sariputta, the brightest among the immediate disciples of the Buddha, the miracle power of Venerable Maha Moggallana, the luck of Venerable Sivali, the handsome appearance of Venerable Kaccayana, the excellent health of Venerable Bakula and a beautiful voice as sweet as the sound of piano. They want everything and all in one. You can just see their devotion and admiration of those Arahants (Saints). There is an undeniable unskillful focus that keeps driving them to do what is nevertheless a good thing: sharing and refraining from harming others. Nevertheless, because of unskillful thoughts they are being driven by that desire rather than being guided by understanding in doing what they do.

There is no way that a person will have all those qualities. It is not just possible. Are you going to judge if yours is a worthy life by having or not having all those things? What a wrong focus! You may rejoice in the Venerable Sariputta's intelligence but should not feel low and depressed for not having it. Peace does not necessarily depend on having all the best things in this world but on skilful reflection, which is made possible through awareness.

15. MINDFULNESS OF ORDINARY THINGS

IN VIPASSANA (mindfulness) meditation, the object of meditation is something that exists in reality by itself, not the one we create in our mind. It has to be real. Breathing in and out is a real object that is there whether we are aware of it or not. Pain, numbness and itchiness are not new to us either. Nor are the emotions and thoughts particular to meditation practice. They are our ordinary experiences in daily life. And they are real, not artificial.

Look at walking meditation. Lifting, forward, placing, stopping, standing and turning are perfectly known to any one of us, meditator or non-meditator, Buddhist or non-Buddhist.

Clearly, the purpose of this meditation practice is not to seek out something extraordinary and have all the excitement to yourself. Rather to look at our daily routine in a different way through mindfulness without being judgmental. It is about observing the same thing but with different attitude and from a different angle. Through mindfulness, we try to experience things as they happen and as they truly are without any preconditioned mind.

We experience pain all the time, while watching television, entertaining guests, working and even while sleeping. What we usually do is to change our posture in order to get rid of pain. We know how to do it even in sleep. This is the way we deal with pain physically.

However in meditation we have a look at the same pain in different way, through mindfulness, which means dealing with physical pain *mentally*. This is totally a different way of dealing with pain. Actually, not only the pain but also all the reactions to the pain are observed with constant awareness.

Sound, thoughts and a wandering mind are all the experiences we do not need an explanation to understand. They are so ordinary an object for anyone. It is the aim of Vipassana meditation to focus on those very ordinary things we experience on a daily basis because without doing so people spend a large part of their life looking for excitement, as they cannot enjoy these ordinary things. They always imagine either the past or the future to be more exciting rather the present moment! They cannot see the usefulness of the present moment any more.

How much can we afford everyday to have an excitement one after another? All the excitement loses its exciting magic after we go through it a few times. No single song can create an exciting beat all time. We have to have a new song one after another to keep ourselves excited.

If you apply this to your family life, what a disaster it could spell if you have to keep looking for excitement all the time. How long can the physical attraction and exclusive loving and caring words and thoughts you have for each other last? If they do not give you any excitement any more, are you going to change your partner every now and then just to satisfy your thirst for excitement? Or are you going to resort to drink and drugs to make you feel ecstatic? They all can but offer you fleeting excitement and bring loads of unhappiness, misery, quarrels, and harm to health and destruction to your life.

It is, indeed, really great if you can still enjoy being with one another when things become ordinary. Not excitement but ordinariness is a challenge to human mind. It is difficult to grasp and to penetrate. There are enormous beauties in such ordinary activity we repeat everyday of our life. Take for example, walking, eating, washing, speaking, and sleeping and so on. If we discover their beauties and enjoy them, we will then start living every moment of our life, no more feeling bored.

There is no pressure in enjoying the beauties of ordinariness. You only need constant awareness, which is twofold; first the kind of awareness we try to develop through intensive practice of meditation and general awareness that we should have in our daily life. Walking simply gives you a lot of joy. Going to work, driving back home, meeting the same people in your life, doing the same job, eating almost the same things, taking your children to school, earning and spending — they do not make you bored any more. You just enjoy every moment of doing your routine. This is the secret of happiness.

This is what is called simplicity, which is the core message of the Buddha for a happy life. Contentment, detachment or living at the present moment! Call it what you want. It is the ability to see the usefulness of very ordinary things and discover the beauties of them. Simplicity is not only a way of life achieved with the help of Vipassana meditation practice but is one of the fundamentals of Metta, loving-kindness, as well. Mindfulness practice has its ultimate aim at this kind of life here and now. Once the beauties of ordinariness are discovered, happiness is no longer conditioned nor does it depend on excitement and acquiring something new. It is an ability of a well trained and powerful mind that enables you to enjoy your life without any pressure of ignorant desire. It is a wisdom-guided life.

16. Let it Go

PEOPLE WOULD normally say that to "let go" means not to think about something, be it a disturbing thought or regrettable past. A young man actually put a question to me on this practice of "letting go". He could not understand why on earth we have to note when a thought arises, if we want to let it go. "Through observation by way of noticing it, you merely cling to it, not let it go", he said "to let go means to ignore it and forget about it". He was a beginner genuinely trying to understand mindfulness.

You cannot let a thing go unless you go through it mind fully by way of paying bare attention to it when it arises. Otherwise, it may stay in your mind most probably unconsciously at times and surface to trouble you at other times because you have not fully dealt with it. However, you think it is gone because you do not see it is there.

You can find people being haunted by their past memories. Ajahn Sumedho said in his Dhamma talk "*Refuge — Safety amidst the unsafe*" that he came across a monk when he was practicing meditation in Thailand. That monk was a soldier in the Laotian Royal Army and has killed a lot of people, in the light of his duty. Now, when meditating, the horrors of those killed came back to haunt him disturbing him continuously so that he wished Ajahn Sumedho was with him all the time. He dare not face them in a meditative way. It was too much for him and he left meditation practice soon after.

Had he decided to face this experience meditatively he might have thrown it out of his mind. We know that during the time of the Buddha, a man called Angulimala killed hundreds of people. Nevertheless, he faced his memories meditatively and came to terms with them. Actually, he uprooted the unpleasant and unwholesome thoughts together with their causes. This is the way to let go.

Regret is another meditation object. However, it is a very strong and troubling emotion. It creates a huge burden on the mind. It is like experiencing nothing but hell here and now. However, one can actually burn away the result of unwholesome action (*akusala kamma vipaka*) by facing, accepting and experiencing it in such a contemplative way. Contemplate such thought on the spot. Do not fear it. By contemplating it, you are not clinging to it but rather you are letting it go!

Any kind of thought, even clinging thought is to be dealt with in this way. We do not let it go by ignoring it or by trying not to think about it but only by contemplating and watching it momentarily. This practice of "letting go" is a practice to train our mind to live in the here and now. It hardly involves any intellectual exercise certainly, no thinking process is involved. Investigation, done at a stage when mindfulness is mature, is not part of thinking as we understand it in ordinary sense.

This practice of "letting go" in meditation can be understood and done only with the help of constant mindfulness.

17. A FIXED MIND

BEFORE MINDFULNESS is sufficiently established and investigative nature becomes a dominant feature of the mind, our mind tends to work rigidly. That often becomes a source of conflict in our mind. The mind does nothing but creates conflicts with what is being perceived through eyes or ears.

I remember someone came and shouted at our Vihara. It was a woman who became insane after her mother died. As she studied a bit of Buddhism and knew something about it, she was accusing somebody of being a hypocrite, not following the true path discovered by the Buddha. We were in the mid of our meditation session that Sunday afternoon.

Many people in the session just got very annoyed and upset by what they heard, not necessarily because of the content (as they reported to me later!) but because they thought that she was making their meditative life difficult. Some paid attention to the content and went on thinking about what was being said. That was no longer bare attention, the mind had become judgmental adding all the values they had.

For instance, shouting at somebody is not good — this is a value that one usually forms. It is indeed a good value ethically and a valid one. Nevertheless, this good value must not create misery in our minds.

According to the Buddha, what is good has two characteristics: causing no harm to any one and making us happy. If a certain value brings no harm from or to others, yet if it still creates unhappiness in our mind we have to train our mind further in order to enjoy the benefit of this value. It is in this sense that we have to look at or rather examine this value from non-value-added aspect. It can only be done through mindfulness practice.

In Buddhist terms, the above value is about Five Precepts that cover the course of action and words but not the mind. Meditation is to learn and then control the mind. The domain is the mind, which is a driving force behind all our physical and verbal action. Observing the precepts is not enough. We have to meditate, develop mindfulness in order to get the full benefit of the precepts.

Even with such a good value, one should not form a perception. Just knowing and being aware of pains caused by such an action (shouting) is enough to deter one from shouting. A perception is not necessary. Once a perception of it is formed, the mind becomes fixed and will act from that fix view rather than an open and liberal one. When our view is fixed, the world we live in gets narrow because our mind makes it narrow. We have more limits to what we think is good and to what we can enjoy. It is a source of unhappiness.

The following are some of the elements that make the mind rigid:

- i. Attachment
- ii. Clinging
- iii. Anger
- iv. Agitation
- v. Irritation
- vi. Hatred
- vii. Fear
- viii. Jealousy
- ix. Suspicion
- x. Pride
- xi. Identity
- xii. Ego

They may not operate obviously on the surface but as an unconscious force lying deep at the bottom of our mind influencing all the way a conscious mind works and reacts.

By paying bare attention to a fixed mind and its conditions, observing them initially as secondary object before mindfulness is strong enough to penetrate, one can weaken the force of a fixed mind and its causes. Do not resent having a fixed mind and consequent reactions that keep creating a conflict with what you see or hear. Do not allow yourself to be immersed in them either. Just pay bare attention. Observe them initially three or four times and move back to primary object.

A fixed mind is also about creating an identity of some thing or about something. You imagine (create) an identity of a meditation session as a peaceful and quiet environment. However, when you do not get that, then there is a clash between the created or perceived meditation session and the real one. An identity makes the mind fixed, not flexible. An unenlightened mind tends to create an identity out of what you see or hear.

If you form an identity of someone as a good person and he turns out not to live up to your expectation, you are disappointed. This is because of the formed identity has made your mind rigid, not being able to accept him as he is at the moment. We are not talking about helping or not helping him, not even expecting or not expecting him to come up to a certain standard. We are only talking about how to keep our mind calm in the face of such a situation.

An identity always brings about clinging to that identity. With clinging, we tend to live in the past, not in the present. Observe any manifestations of a fixed mind. Let it go. Do not be judgmental. Pay only bare attention to it before you can reflect on it.

18. SATIPATTHANA *Mindfulness Meditation*

THE NAME Satipatthana is directly taken from a discourse known in the Pali Canonical scriptures as the Satipatthana Sutta, the Discourse on the Foundation of Mindfulness. Sati means mindfulness, bare attention, contemplation or awareness. Patthana means foundation or leading factor. In this discourse, the Buddha gives details of Vipassana practice. It is a very long discourse so it is included in the Collection of Long Discourses (Digha Nikaya).^{*} It is difficult to understand when going through it for the first time. The words and phrases are rather simple but the philosophy and psychology behind the instruction are so deep that it requires a long intense practice to understand them.

(* Also in the Majjhima Nikaya, The Middle Length Sayings.)

For ordinary lay folk, it may be explained as follows: The core of the Satipatthana practice is to *establish mindfulness* in order to make use of it as a *foundation* at the beginning and also as a *guiding factor* along the way. Mindfulness is not only a foundation but also a factor that must lead all the way before the seven factors of enlightenment become established and balanced. The seven factors are mindfulness, concentration, investigative nature, calm, effort, balance of mind and rapture. They form different aspects of an enlightened mind. They are to be acquired by first establishing mindfulness. This is very important. This is the main difference between Samatha and Vipassana, the two meditation techniques in Buddhism.

However, even in many traditions where the Satipatthana is the main practice, *people often go off the track by giving priority to concentration, and not mindfulness*. As a result, it becomes *Samadhipatthana*, and not Satipatthana. People often ask each other in the retreat if one's mind is concentrated. Very rarely do they ask if one is mindful of what is going on in the mind including *wandering*. Samadhi, concentration is the main factor in Samatha technique. You do achieve calm and peace of mind once concentration is sustained.

Sometimes, after beginning meditation, a person may expect the mind to calm down and focus on the chosen object, for instance, breathing. When this does not happen, he starts speculating on what might be going wrong with his practice. He may start losing confidence. This is because the practice is centered on developing concentration (*samadhi*), not mindfulness (*sati*). This is what is *not* Satipatthana.

In developing mindfulness, what one has to do in this particular instance is to observe the mind that is not calming down. In other words, one should make an effort to notice the wandering mind and should not cling to the breathing object if it is not the most obvious one at that particular moment. Personal reactions to wandering minds such as disappointment, impatience and frustration should also be

eagerly and keenly observed. Observing these objects as they arise is Satipatthana practice. It centers on *being aware* of what is here and now presenting itself to our senses.

All the meditation objects that one comes across in this world are categorized by the Buddha into four, namely physical objects (*kaya*), sensations (*vedana*), Mind (*citta*) and Dhamma.

The first two are clear but it takes a while to grasp the last two. Observing the mind is called the *Mindfulness of the Minds (citta-nupassana)*. The last category is somewhat difficult to define especially without long and sufficient practice. The Dhamma includes both physical and mental, that is to say the word Dhamma covers all the objects we have defined in the first three categories. One good example of it is the five aggregates. The body, the first category of meditation object (*kaya*) is the first aggregate and is considered to be the Dhamma. The sensations (*vedana*) which are the second category meditation object are known as the Dhamma. The mind, the third category is again taken as the Dhamma. We shall have more opportunity to talk about it in detail, another time.

For today, just remember that we can put meditation objects into three categories, physical objects (*kaya*), sensations (*vedana*) and mental meditation object (*citta*). Breathing or abdominal movement is a meditation object, which is physical. Numbness, tension and pain are sensations we experience most in sitting session. Wandering mind or any reaction (here to pain) such as impatience, restlessness and frustration are mental. As you keep noting any object that arises, you are practicing Satipatthana meditation, which is better known as Vipassana.

The purpose of dividing the objects into three categories today is to show you that the objects have different natures. It is not necessary to analyze the type of contemplation. Be it physical, sensation or mental. Just observe the most obvious object arising in the here and now.

19. CONTEMPLATION OF THE DHAMMA

(*Dhamma-nupassana*)

THERE ARE four categories of contemplation, namely the contemplation of (any part or movement of) the physical body (*kaya-nupassana*), the contemplation of the sensations (*vedana-nupassana*), the contemplation of the different minds** (*citta-nupassana*) and the contemplation of the Dhamma.

(** The different mind means the mind that becomes different due to different factors associated with it. For example when agitation is dominant, the mind becomes an agitated mind, but changes to a *lustful* mind when lust exists in it. One looks at the mind as an agitated mind, a lustful mind, a wandering mind or a concentrated mind and so on.)

The last category is somewhat difficult to define especially without long and sufficient practice. The word "Dhamma" is sometimes translated as "mental objects." This is neither accurate nor concise, because the objects of meditation mentioned as the Dhamma belong to both the mental as well as the material group.*** The Dhamma includes both physical and mental — that is to say that the word Dhamma covers all the objects that we have defined in the first three categories. One good example of it is the five aggregates. The body is the first aggregate and is considered to be the Dhamma as well as the first category of meditation object (*kaya*). The sensations (*vedana*) which are the second category meditation object are known as the Dhamma. The mind (*citta*), the third category is again taken as the Dhamma.

(*** 'THE FOUR FOUNDATIONS OF MINDFULNESS' by Venerable U Silananda, *Wisdom Publication*, Boston, USA, London, England and Chatswood, Australia, 1990)

There are, of course, subtle differences in observing a sensation as the sensational object (*vedana-nupassana*) and as the Dhamma (*dhamma-nupassana*). In the former, one focuses on the experience of sensation as pain (*dukkha*), pleasant (*sukha*) or neutral (*adukkha-masukha*). In the latter, one actually forgoes that perceptive nature of sensation and focuses on any sensation just as sensation (*vedana*). More than that, in observing sensation as the contemplation of the Dhamma, one contemplates also the arising and the vanishing of the sensation itself.

It may be explained in plain terms that when mindfulness of sensation, say pain, becomes mature, one would stop reacting to it. At the same time, one will see the arising and the vanishing moment. It is because one sees sensation as merely an object and deals with it objectively. At this stage, due to developed concentration and sustained awareness, one is able to focus on the *nature* of the object. Only when there is no or less reaction to an object, can the mind begin its task of being aware of the nature of the object. This is mindfulness of the Dhamma (*dhamma-nupassana*).

If you look at sensation as pain, tension and numbness, not just as sensation, you are contemplating the sensation object (*vedana-nupassana*). It is quite technical. However, for some one who has been practicing constantly and intensively for a certain length of period of time, it is natural that one comes to be able to contemplate in this way. Before sufficient mindfulness and concentration are developed and one tries to reflect on the nature of an object, one may just end up theorizing or speculating, not seeing and realizing it.

According to the definition of the first three categories of meditation objects, a meditation practitioner sees an object in somewhat conventional terms but he or she may forsake those conventional daily outlooks and embrace an object in a more natural and objective sense when practicing the contemplation of the Dhamma.

Instead of seeing sensation as pain, a pleasant feeling or a neutral one, he or she may actually see sensation in the context of how it arises and ceases; it may be from the contact between eyes and visual objects or ears and sounds etc. The way we see the world starts changing and we see more of the nature of the way the objects operate.

When you feel agitated and observe it as agitated mind, you are doing the contemplation of the mind (*citta-nupassana*). You mainly observe the mind as opposed to its nature or function. When mindfulness is developed to a certain degree, you will see agitation as one thing and the mind as the other. As you choose to watch agitation, how it arises and vanishes and how it creates tension, unhappiness and suffering, you are contemplating the Dhamma (*dhamma nupassana*). You come to see agitation as a hindrance towards achieving happiness. You come to see through directly experiencing agitation that it is suffering. You no longer wish to justify yourself having it. You do not think that anger makes you a stronger man any more.

You may see it more or less as a process in the contemplation of the Dhamma. At times, you are aware of the causes, the existence and the absence of an object. This indicates a developed mindfulness being present.

In hearing a sound, if you note it as hearing, that is the Contemplation of Body (*kaya-nupassana*). As you hear a sound, if you are able to perceive not only the sound but also the ears and the reaction to the sound or the absence of it separately, you are then focusing on the Dhamma (*dhamma-nupassana*). *Dhamma-nupassana* reveals more of the process nature of the phenomena.

To my understanding, the last category, the Contemplation of the Dhamma (*dhamma-nupassana*) can be practiced when we become more familiar with the first three meditation objects (*kaya, vedana, citta*) and have established some degree of constant mindfulness. It is a different way of seeing the same meditation objects already encountered under the first three categories — this time with their natures such as being a hindrance, suffering, the cause of suffering, disturbing or calming and even the link between events. The faculties are more mature at this stage.

Reference - Triple gem (Nibbana.com)

The End