



The Path to Enlightenment II

Venerable Luangpor Pramote Pamojjo

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From My Mind

Lots of my Buddhist practitioner friends like to come to have dhamma discussions with me. One of the questions asked almost on a daily basis is on how I practice dhamma, to which I have to explain the same topic day-in and day-out. To relieve myself from such task I have decided to write this book “The Path to Enlightenment II”, so that friends who want to know how I practice dhamma can read and understand better.

The book was originally completed on July 30, 2002. As time passes, I deem it necessary to improve on the writing, making it more comprehensible, for the benefit of the general dhamma practitioners.

Phra Pramote Pamojjo

July 30, 2006

ESSENCE

1. What is the goal of Buddhism? – Freedom from suffering.

2. What is suffering (dukkha)? – (1) physical and mental discomfort, (2) transience of all conditioned reality, (3) unsatisfactoriness caused by desire and clinging to the idea of self, and (4) aggregates of clinging/birth/body and mind, all which are themselves the cause of suffering, regardless of whether the mind has craving or not.

3. What is the cause of suffering? – Suffering is caused by (1) non-fulfillment of wishes, (2) craving, and (3) ignorance of the Noble Truths.

4. The path to freedom from suffering – The only path to freedom from suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path, or morality, concentration and wisdom. In brief it is mindfulness practice, or constant observation of one's body and mind, until the mind gets insight into the truth that this body and mind are the root of all suffering. Only then will the mind eradicate craving, clinging (intense craving), the mental process of becoming (mental formation), rebirth (acquisition of sense-organs), and become liberated.

5. What is mindfulness practice? – It is to be aware [Clause 6] of the natural condition [Clause 7] that arises at the present moment [Clause 8] as it really is [Clause 9].

6. How to be mindful? – One must constantly be aware of physical and mental phenomena, or body and mind, until the reality of such conditions become clear and imprinted in the memory. With practice mindfulness will automatically arise when these conditions occur. Hindrances to right mindfulness practice are the two extremities, one is to lose oneself to sensual pleasures through the six sense-doors, the other is to control and suppress one's emotions and actions.

7. What is "the natural condition"? – physical and mental phenomena that make up the body and mind, this mass of suffering, and not something from a dream or imagination.

8. What does "arising at the present moment" mean? – It means the condition that is the object of consciousness right at this instant. A practitioner must not cling on to something that has already happened, and must not worry about something that has not yet occurred.

9. What is meant by "as it really is"? – It means knowing the true nature of the condition (or the Three Characteristics of Existence), without influencing it with craving and wrong view.

10. What is the benefit of mindfulness? – (1) happiness and peace, with the knowing, awoken and blissful mind, (2) shame of wrongdoing and fear of its consequences, (3) purity of one's moral discipline, (4) firmness of mind, right concentration, (5) right view and right

understanding of self, others and reality, (6) lessen all clinging, (7) freedom from suffering, and (8) attainment of insight on how to be free from suffering.

CLARIFICATION



1

The Goal
of Buddhism

1. The Goal of Buddhism

1.1 The ultimate goal in Buddhism is to answer the question “**How to be completely free from suffering?**”

1.2 **People often overlook this quest for freedom from suffering, and instead try to pursue happiness.** This is because they do not realize the truth that this body and mind are really the root cause of all suffering, and that there is no everlasting happiness. The more one tries to find happiness or stay away from suffering, the more one’s mind is burdened and the greater the suffering. No matter how much happiness one achieves, it will never ever be enough or long lasting, like a goal that can never be reached. Happiness lures the mind to constantly struggle to find everlasting happiness.

1.3 As a matter of fact, happiness that we look for is only an illusion that cannot be attained. We often think if we could only get a certain thing, if we could only possess it, or if we could only avoid it, we would be happy. We ignorantly hold the belief that knowledge, wealth, family, relatives, friends, reputation, power, joy, health and so on bring about happiness. **We painstakingly strive for happiness without knowing what it really is.**

1.4 Buddhism does not tell us to search for happiness as it is just an illusion. Instead it teaches us to understand suffering, which is the reality of life. Its direct aim is

to answer questions about suffering directly – what its cause is and how to be free from it. **Only by thoroughly understanding suffering will we be rewarded with eternal bliss right before our very eyes.**

1.5 Some people may take the view that Buddhism is too pessimistic because it has an attitude that there is only suffering in life. This issue will not be addressed here because if explained now, it will become a topic for philosophical debate. Simply read this book to the end and learn about suffering according to the guidelines carefully laid out by the Buddha, and the truth will be revealed without any further query.



2

What is
Suffering?

2. What is Suffering?

2.1 Buddhism views suffering in depth and in many more aspects than we normally perceive.

2.1.1 **Suffering as painful feeling (dukkha-vedanā)**: This is general suffering that we all know, namely, bodily pain and mental suffering. Those who have never practiced mindfulness may feel that this kind of suffering seldom appears, but those that have done it can see that in fact pain arises constantly. For example, when mindful of the body, we will find that pain is just like a wild beast that is always chasing and trying to hurt us. It makes us change bodily postures, eat, drink, excrete, wipe and wash, scratch, inhale, exhale and so on such that we are never still. Eventually we fall sick, and finally become too frail to escape, and suffering will consume us until the last breath.

Whenever a painful feeling is relieved, we feel better, but not long after suffering will catch up with us once again.

If we are aware of consciousness, we will realize that our mind is almost always stressed. When the intensity is low, we feel happy, but when the level of stress is increased, we feel unhappy.

2.1.2 **Suffering as unsatisfactoriness (dukkha-lakkhaṇa):** This kind of suffering is not suffering in the normal sense. It refers to a general characteristic of all conditioned reality (namely body, mind, and mental formations (saṅkhāra) – unsatisfactory by virtue of impermanence. Thus, by this definition, even happiness is unsatisfactory because it does not last. This inherent nature of suffering will be more obvious once we start mindfulness practice. For now just knowing its characteristics is sufficient.

2.1.3 **Suffering as craving:** This kind of suffering occurs to human beings and animals almost all the time, but is realized by few. Practitioners may be able to perceive this kind of suffering to some extent, particularly those who contemplate on mentality. They will perceive that **craving (samudaya) is the cause of suffering.** If craving or clinging (upadānā or intensified craving) arises, suffering (i.e. frustration and distress) will also arise. If the mind is free from craving or clinging, it will not suffer, and will automatically become eminent, aware, awake, cheerful and peaceful. Practitioners who have gained insight at this level will have full concentration. The mind will automatically be awake and firm. This is insight at the level of the Non-returners (Anāgāmi). Some who have developed insight to this stage may be so content and do not want to progress further

because the firm and eminent mind is already such a safe haven, with overwhelming happiness.

2.1.4 Suffering as the Noble Truth (Dukkha-sacca, or the aggregates as suffering): This kind of suffering is the most profound. Only those who comprehend it thoroughly (those enlightened) can be free from the cycle of rebirths. This is because comprehension of painful feeling is common to all, whereas unsatisfactoriness is what normal insight practitioners (puthujjana) are already aware of. Comprehension of suffering from craving is not yet the ultimate insight because the mind still believes that some states of consciousness are pleasant and others are unpleasant. At best, they can attain only insight of the Non-returners (Anāgāmī) because they know that if craving and clinging arise, suffering will arise. Thus, they are so content with the stableness of mind and ignore external objects, which are the cause of craving. They cannot let go, and cling to the mindful, awaken and cheerful mind itself.

Only after having perfected insight development will the mind really be able to clearly comprehend the noble truth of suffering, that **the aggregates, physical and mental phenomena, or body and mind themselves are suffering, with or without craving and clinging. Nothing but suffering arises, and nothing but suffering falls away.** It is not that this body and mind are sometimes happy

and sometimes aren't. The truth is they are all suffering, differing in only the intensity. When ultimate wisdom is gained and the mind realizes that all aggregates are suffering, it will see the Noble Truths with utmost clarity. It will comprehend that **craving causes suffering, and ignorance of suffering conditions craving. Thus arises an endless cycle of rebirths. Only with full realization of the truth of suffering will the mind let go. Craving, which is the cause of suffering, will automatically disappear and suffering will end (nirodha or nibbāna) right before one's very eyes. At that very moment the cycle of rebirth will be broken for good.**

Whoever can see the truth that the aggregates or physical and mental phenomena are the root of suffering (gaining knowledge (vijjā) and ridding ignorance (avijjā)) will be completely liberated from clinging to the aggregates or physical and mental phenomena. The condition of suffering is still present, but no sufferer is found. Thus, craving (taṇhā-upadānā) to make “our body and mind” happy and free from suffering will automatically disappear. This struggle or mental formation process (saṅkhāra/bhava/kammabhava) to seek happiness and escape suffering will come to an end. The mind will let go of physical and mental phenomena (jāti), and there will no longer be a self. Nibbāna, or the extinction of suffering, will

appear as the mind is free from all defilements and aggregates.

Development of mindfulness (satipaṭṭhāna) is the only path leading to the realization of the Noble Truths. Once realized the mind will have less craving and clinging, and finally it will completely free itself from suffering, which is the body and mind.

2.2 The suffering which the Buddha teaches us to be free from, through practice, are the aggregates. Once the mind rids itself of ignorance (avijjā) to the truth of suffering, as it realizes that physical and mental phenomena are impermanent, unsatisfactory or not-self, it will immediately give suffering (the aggregates, physical and mental phenomena, body and mind) back to nature, never ever to want anything back again. Bodily pain is inevitable, and must be tended to accordingly. Though when the body suffers, the mind no longer does. And in the final moment, when all aggregates die no new ones are formed, everlasting freedom from suffering be attained.



3

What is the Cause
of Suffering?

3. What is the Cause of Suffering?

3.1 Generally, people and other animals know that **non-fulfillment of wishes causes suffering**. For example, when we age but desire to remain young, suffering arises. When we hope to be healthy but become ill, suffering arises. When we want to become immortal but are confronted with death, suffering arises. When we want something but cannot get it, suffering arises. On the contrary, when we get what we desire, happiness arises.

3.2 Practitioners will come to comprehend more, that **craving causes suffering**. Craving makes the mind strive hard, day and night, so that “we” become happy and free from suffering. Without craving the mind will not struggle. It will be content and tranquil.

3.3 Those who have realized the Noble Truths will see with clarity that **the aggregates themselves are the cause of suffering**, with or without craving. Ignorance to the truth (avijjā) that the aggregates constitute a mass of suffering makes us believe that this body and mind are sometimes miserable and sometimes happy. Thus arises craving (samudaya), a desire to make this body and mind permanently happy and free from suffering. Then arises mental striving, which causes anxiety in the mind almost all the time. Even when dying and the body is about to be destroyed, because of ignorance the mind will trigger the formation of

new aggregates, carrying suffering on to the next rebirth. Thus, **ignorance of the Noble Truths, of physical and mental phenomena, is indeed the root of all suffering.** This is because it triggers grasping of physical and mental objects, struggling to eliminate suffering and finding happiness. New aggregates will form, with no ending to this cycle, causing a never-ending loop of suffering.



4

The Path to
End Suffering

4. The Path to End Suffering

4.1 Now that we know what causes suffering, it is not hard to understand how to end it, which is to simply eradicate ignorance of the noble truths, particularly the truth of suffering, of not knowing that physical and mental phenomena, that the body and mind are not the self. Ignorance triggers craving, driving us to search for happiness and stay away from physical and mental suffering. True understanding of physical and mental phenomena is very important, as is demonstrated by the Buddha's saying: **"Realizing the truth, the mind is revulsed. Revulsed, the mind is dispassionate. Through dispassion, the mind is fully liberated. With liberation, there is the knowledge, 'Fully liberated.' Rebirth has ceased. Fulfilled is the holy life (the study and practice of Dhamma)."**

4.2 The most direct method for the mind to really understand a condition is to **practice mindfulness, which is to be aware of the natural phenomenon at the present moment as it really is.** (In this context, mindfulness means right mindfulness (sammāsati), which always arises with right concentration (sammāsamādhi) and right view (sammāditṭhi) or wisdom (paññā). However, these terms will not be further elaborated at this stage so that interested beginners of Buddhism will not be overwhelmed.) This is probably the most straightforward mode of practice. It is like when we want to really know someone, we have to take time to study him, and do it

without bias. Only then will we be able to know him as he really is. The Buddha affirmed that development of mindfulness of physical and mental phenomena, of body and mind is the only path to purification because it can eradicate craving and wrong view as well as bias (pleasure and displeasure) in the world. The “world” here simply refers to physical and mental phenomena, or body and mind.

4.3 Some of us may wonder whether mindfulness of physical and mental phenomena can end suffering because it is different from what is normally taught, that the path to the extinction of suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path, in short to study and develop morality, concentration, and wisdom. What they have heard is also correct, but we should be able to evaluate by ourselves which practice is conducive to enlightenment and which is not.

4.4 In fact doing all meritorious acts are good. The Buddha himself perfected all kinds of meritorious acts in his past lives before he attained Enlightenment. (They are called the ten perfections; stages of spiritual perfection achieved by a Bodhisatta on His path to Buddhahood.) Once born as Prince Vessantara, he perfected giving by sacrificing his royal elephant, his children, and finally his virtuous wife. In one life he perfected morality unto his death. In another life he developed concentration until he attained the five special powers, which made him be reborn into a Brahma world. (These special powers are clairvoyance,

clairaudience, ability to know the thoughts of others, recollection of past lifetimes, and the knowledge that does away with mental effluents.) In one life, born as a scholar named Mahosotha, he developed perfection of wisdom. So why did he not gain enlightenment in one of those lives, and instead attained the Supreme Perfect Enlightenment (anuttara sammā-sambodhi) in his last life through mindfulness of mind-objects (dhammānupassanā), with reference to the Four Noble Truths (Ariya Sacca Pabba)? If he had not gone through the stages of spiritual perfection, he would not have been able to attain Enlightenment. However, even with all the ten perfections, if He had not develop mindfulness he would not have attained Enlightenment either. The ten perfections laid the foundation from which the Buddha would later find the path to Enlightenment. For example, by giving away his son, daughter and wife for the supreme knowledge in his former life as Prince Vessantara, in his last life he was able to sacrifice his beloved wife Princess Bimba (Yasodhara) and son Prince Rahula in pursuit of enlightenment.

4.5 Doing good deeds such as giving alms, observing precepts, doing meditation, and certain levels of wisdom development do not contribute to the understanding of reality, although they bring happiness because the mind becomes wholesome as the result. In many cases, even at the moment of doing a good deed, the mind may become unwholesome. Some examples are:

4.5.1 **Charity (dāna):** Without mindfulness and wisdom, giving may result in more defilements. It may be done with the wrong view of self, that ‘I’ give alms. When reborn in the next life, ‘I’ will enjoy the fruition of this giving. ‘I’ will attain enlightenment because of this giving. Or it may be done with greed, that ‘I’ wish for lots of good things in return for this giving.

4.5.2 **Observing the precepts (sīla):** Without mindfulness and wisdom, it is easy to cling to mere rules and rituals (sīlabbata-parāmāsa). For example, one may misunderstand that strict observance of the precepts will lessen defilement. But in actuality it is possible that the more one observes the precepts, the more defilements one will accumulate. For example, conceit may arise, that “I am better than others, and others are worse than me because I observe the precepts and they do not.”

4.5.3 **Concentration practice (Samādhi):** Without mindfulness and wisdom, the more one meditates, the more likely one will be so absorbed in peace or tranquility, forgetting mindfulness altogether. And if influenced by delusion (moha) and lust (rāga) one may develop wrong view (micchā-diṭṭhi). For example, when doing concentration meditation, one may be so enchanted and forgets to be mindful, leading to fantastical imaginations of nibbana as a place, a

city, or a crystal ball. Some may think they have gained certain wisdom and become obsessed with their finding. Others may feel that the mind can be controlled, thus confirming the existence of self.

4.5.4 Insight Development (paññā): Not having wisdom and right view, practitioners may make many mistakes. For example, without knowing the difference between concentration meditation and insight development, it is easy to ignorantly do concentration meditation and believing that it is insight development. In particular one may think he/she is contemplating on the three characteristics of existence in objects such as animals, humans, self, others, or things, when in fact he/she is only thinking about the concept and not seeing the reality, resulting in a peaceful mind from this concentration exercise. Sometimes instead of tranquility, confusion in dhamma may arise. For many, the more they reflect on the three characteristics of existence, the more they think they understand and the more conceited they become. **In actuality the three characteristics of existence cannot be perceived by thinking, but must be realized through penetration into the true nature of physical and mental phenomena with mindfulness and right concentration. Only through insight development will one be able to comprehend this.** Some practitioners try to develop insight by focusing on nothingness

(mahā suññatā) instead of physical and mental phenomena. They do not understand that for insight development, the objects of consciousness must be physical and mental phenomena, not emptiness. They have wrong view and think that contemplating on emptiness is the shortcut to dhamma practice.

4.6 Wholesome deeds that contribute to enlightenment must at the same time support right mindfulness, or done with right perception. Examples are provided below.

4.6.1 **Charity (dāna):** Mindfulness and wisdom should accompany the mind before, during, and after giving. If giving is done with faith and wisdom, not causing harm or distress to self or others, then it is appropriate. If happiness and joy arises, be mindful of such feelings. This is the way giving can aid in developing mindfulness. On the contrary, if giving is done with greed and delusion, then it is not conducive to mindfulness development.

4.6.2 **Morality (sīla) development:** Without mindfulness it is difficult to perfect good moral conduct. But with mindfulness of mind, purity of conduct consisting in the restraint of the senses (indriyasamvara-sīla) will automatically arise. When anger arises and the mind is aware, anger cannot influence the mind. Thus, the first

precept is perfected because one will not hurt or kill others. Likewise, when greed arises and the mind is aware, one will automatically refrain from breaking the second and the third precepts.

4.6.3 Concentration (Samādhi) development: In Buddhism right concentration (Sammāsamādhi) or stableness of mind is an element of the Noble Eightfold Path, and thus it must be accompanied by other elements such as mindfulness and wisdom. Concentration without mindfulness and wisdom may bring happiness and other special powers, but it is not useful for mindfulness development because the mind is not constantly aware of body and mind, whereby morality and wisdom cannot be perfected.

4.6.4 Insight (paññā) development: A more detailed explanation on right insight development will be presented later in the section on mindfulness practice. The first step in wisdom development is to study the scriptures (Pariyatti Dhamma). All Buddhists should at least read the scriptures to know the fundamental principles of Buddhism. Otherwise they may be worshipping other doctrines or religions, thinking that they are being good Buddhists.

4.7 Development of morality, concentration and wisdom may seem like a lot to be achieved, but through development of just right mindfulness, we

will automatically develop morality, concentration and wisdom. For example, in the Book of Commentaries (Dhammapada-Atthakatha), there was a story of a monk who went to see the Buddha and requested to be disrobed because he was unable to observe so many precepts. The Buddha told the monk to try and do just mindfulness practice instead of observing all the precepts. The monk did so and was able to purify and perfect his morality and eventually attained enlightenment. If we are constantly aware of the present condition as it really is, then automatically at that moment there is right concentration. The mind will be stable, aware of the present moment without influencing it. What will follow is insight into the nature of physical and mental phenomena, namely the three characteristics of existence, and the Four Noble Truths. Such wisdom arises from mindfulness development with right concentration. Therefore, we can say that the path to end suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path, in brief the threefold training consisting of morality, concentration and wisdom, or in short mindfulness practice. Mindfulness practice is essentially the development of the threefold training and the noble eightfold path.



5

What is
Mindfulness
Practice?

5. What is Mindfulness Practice?

5.1 As aforesaid, the root of suffering in Buddhism is ignorance of the truth, namely, physical and mental phenomena/aggregates/body and mind. Ignorance causes craving (*taṇhā*), clinging (*upadānā*) and mental striving (*bhava*) to make this body and mind permanent, happy and under control. Such striving further adds to mental suffering. If the mind is able to see the truth of physical and mental phenomena/aggregates/body and mind, that they are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self, the mind will then let go of clinging to body and mind. Craving, clinging and mental striving will cease automatically. The mind will be liberated, detaching itself from the aggregates, from suffering, and gain true peace or *Nibbāna*. Therefore, to uproot suffering one must have **wisdom** to eliminate its cause, which is ignorance of the truth of physical and mental phenomena/aggregates/body and mind.

5.2 How to gain wisdom? We are accustomed to conventional learning methods which are (1) apprenticeship, by accepting knowledge or experience of others through reading and listening, and (2) producing theories based on analysis on such topics. Both methods are applicable to most fields of study. But to really understand Buddhism, one needs a third method of learning, namely (3) constant observation of physical and mental phenomena as they truly are. Listening to others' experience gives us memories, while thinking

gives us ideas. Both **memories** and **ideas** may not be the **truth**. We start from studying the doctrines and teachings of the Buddha by reading and listening, then contemplate and reflect on them so that we will have correct guidelines in observing physical and mental phenomena.

5.3 To gain knowledge by reading, listening and thinking is very common to us all and need no further explanation. Let's discuss the third method, constant observation of physical and mental phenomena, or mindfulness development, by **being mindful** (Clause 6) **of the natural phenomena** (Clause 7) **which is arising at the present moment** (Clause 8) **as it really is** (Clause 9).



6

How to Be
Mindful?

6. How to Be Mindful?

6.1 We are all capable of knowing **the object of consciousness** which is appearing at any present moment (see Clause 8 for further details). For example, we can be conscious of ourselves standing, walking, sitting or reclining. We know when we are happy, sad, indifferent, or when we are in love, greedy, angry, deluded, suspicious, distracted, depressed, lazy, faithful, energetic or calm. But we fail to be mindful of the present for two reasons, (1) we are too absorbed in our thoughts or in the object of consciousness, and therefore forget to be aware of our own body and mind; and (2) **we are not mindful correctly**. Instead of perceiving **absolute reality of the object** (see Clause 7), we see only its concept (conventional reality) based on our own thoughts and imagination. For example, we may think “we” are standing, walking, sitting or reclining, when in reality it is this mass called body that is standing, walking, sitting or reclining. We may think “we” are greedy, angry or deluded, when in reality it is mental phenomena that are greedy, angry or deluded. This is because we do not experience the absolute reality of the object or physical and mental phenomena, but are accustomed to thinking that this body and mind is the self, which is conventional truth or thinking with wrong view.

Often times, practitioners overlook the fact that **mindfulness development is simply an exercise**

in which a natural and ordinary mind is used in perceiving absolute reality in the present moment. We mistakenly think that it requires a state of mind that is extraordinary. Instead of utilizing a natural mind to perceive an object, we try to develop an extraordinary state of “awareness”. And the chosen objects of consciousness used are often incorrect.

This clause will describe the condition of the mind that is ideal for insight development. It must have right awareness, right concentration and wisdom. Some practitioners refer to this as the “**knowing mind**”.

6.2 To identify right awareness state, or to have the correct **knowing**, is very difficult. If we start by explaining from our own understanding we will immediately go off track. But if we begin by giving examples of incorrect state of awareness (which result from craving or wrong view), it may be easier to understand the right state of awareness. They are as follow:

6.2.1 **To know is not to be mindless (absent minded/forgetting the self).**

6.2.1.1 To know is the opposite of mindless, which means absentminded, forgetting the self, or daydreaming. It is the state of unknowingly letting the mind indulge in sensual pleasures through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body, or thoughts and

imaginations. For example, when the eyes see an object, the mind recognizes that it is a figure of a beautiful woman or a handsome man, it will unconsciously take pleasure and focuses on to him/her. Or when sitting alone, we may become lost in thoughts. Sometimes we may remember what we were thinking about, other times we may not.

6.2.1.2 This mindlessness is a state where we forget our own body, as if it is not here. And we forget our own mind, unaware of our own feelings, whether it is happy or sad. We can say that when we are **mindless, we cannot be aware of our body, feelings, mind and mind-object.**

6.2.1.3 When we are mindless and then realise, at that moment mindlessness will disappear, and awareness will arise immediately in its place. Therefore simply realizing that we were mindless is right knowing.

6.2.2 To know is not to think.

6.2.2.1 To know is not the same as to think. When we think we know what we are thinking, but we forget to be aware of ourselves, like mindlessness. **To know is to observe phenomena as they really are, whereas thinking is to project what they**

should be. (However at school or work when it's necessary to think, do so accordingly.)

6.2.2.2 Many practitioners do not understand mindfulness development. They believe that to think carefully of the body and mind as impure, impermanent, suffering, and not self, or as physical and mental phenomena is mindfulness development, when in fact it is to be aware of the present condition as it really is, not projecting thoughts on them. Our thoughts are often **biased** or based on **wrong view**. For example, we may think that our body is temporary, but our mind is eternal. Or that after death the mind will leave this body and be reborn into a new one. Alternatively, we may think that we exist only in this life, and will be gone forever after death.

Thinking is not insight meditation. This phrase was confirmed by Luang Pu Thate Desaransi, one of the senior disciples of Luang Pu Mun Bhuridatta, who said that “**examining the body as loathsome can overcome hindrances, and is concentration practice. Contemplation of death and contemplation of the body as aggregates are also concentration practice and can help correct some issues of the mind. But only by being aware of one’s own mind will a practitioner be able to get the essence of dhamma practice**”. Similarly, Luang Por Puth

Thaniyo often emphasized that **“concentration meditation begins when there is no more intention; insight meditation begins when there is no more thinking”**. Luang Pu Dun also taught that **“no matter how hard one thinks he will not know, only when the thinking stops will wisdom arise.”** His teaching corresponds to the doctrine in the Scriptures which states that **“the primary stage of insight is free from thoughts.”**

6.2.2.3 Whenever we think and then recollect that we have been thinking, at that moment the thinking will stop, and awareness will arise in its place. Therefore, simply realizing that we were thinking is right awareness.

6.2.3 To know is not to prepare for practice.

6.2.3.1 To know does not need any preparation. But most practitioners, when they want to practice, they prepare to be aware because they misinterpret the meaning of “to practice” as “to do”. When in fact, to practice is doing nothing more than being directly and naturally aware of physical and mental phenomena as they appear at the present moment. Just like when looking at a picture in front of us, we just open our eyes and look at it. When bitten by a mosquito and it itches, just know it. Natural state of awareness

exists within all of us. But because we do not understand the principle of mindfulness development, we set our mind for practice like a 100-metre runner getting ready, tensing up our body and mind at the starting line instead of being aware of the present object comfortably and naturally.

6.2.3.2 With the desire to practice dhamma, we often force the mind into doing things. For example, we may consciously scan the mind to find an object to contemplate on. Or we may focus intensely at the mind, waiting for something to arise. Such are serious mistakes because the practice is done with craving (wanting to practice) and wrong view (that practicing dhamma is doing it this way or that way so that “I” can realize the truth).

6.2.3.3 With the intention to practice dhamma, some practitioners who like to use the body as an object of contemplation usually begin the practice by interfering with natural actions of the body. For example, when contemplating on the breath, we may try to control the breathing cycle. When contemplating on the body movements, we may try to fix the rhythm of the hand, foot and abdomen movements. These practices are not wrong if the goal is tranquility development, or if we want to have a solid understanding

in concentration meditation before doing insight meditation. However, if we are doing concentration meditation and thinking that we are developing mindfulness, not realizing that craving and wrong view have predominated the mind in the process, then this is a serious mistake.

6.2.3.4 In fact, to develop genuine awareness, we need not do any preparation at all, mentally or physically. For example, when the eyes see an object, just be aware, in this case of color. If after seeing the mind is pleased or displeased, be aware of the feeling. Or if mindful of the body, what posture we are in at the present, be aware of it. When standing, be aware of the body mass which is upright. When the body feels tired and we want to change the posture, be aware of the mind's desire to do it. Then we may change the posture as necessary, or we might want to observe bodily pain first. When sitting leisurely and a thought arises, be aware that the mind is thinking. While thinking, wholesome or unwholesome thoughts may arise, be aware as well.

6.2.3.5 For those of us who cannot be aware of the condition at the present moment in a natural way, do not be discouraged. At first we may prepare for practice. For example, if the mind is so distracted we may start

by doing concentration meditation. Just be careful not to be too enchanted, distracted or tense. Simply relax and be aware of an object of consciousness. This can be anything, even words being recited. Once the mind is calm and comfortable, we can then be aware of changes in our mental states. We may alternatively begin to observe movements of the abdomen, do walking meditation, or move the hand rhythmically. To conclude, we may start with concentration meditation, then develop into genuine mindfulness development.

6.2.3.6 Anytime we have the desire to practice and then realize, at that moment the desire will immediately be replaced by the state of awareness. Therefore, simply realizing that we want to practice and right awareness will arise automatically.

6.2.4 To know is not to make a mental note.

6.2.4.1 To know is not to make a mental note, or try to imagine objects as physical or mental phenomena. Rather it is to pay attention (*manasikāra*) to a present object in a direct and natural way. Many practitioners think that to be aware is to make a mental note because they often hear about awareness of physical or mental phenomena, or of an object of consciousness at present. So, they assume

that to be aware one has to do something, like making a mental note or reflecting on an object, and at the same time labeling each out loud. Some examples are “lifting”, “stepping”, “angry”, “sound”, etc. But this is not awareness. (However many beginners find it is helpful to recite their actions or feelings out loud, even though they should be careful not to get stuck at this preparatory stage of reciting because it is not insight development.) Some practitioners like to analyze the dhamma after detecting an object. Again this is not awareness. For example, when the eyes see an object, a practitioner may reflect that “this object seen through the eyes consists of colors. It is not an animal, a person, or a self.” Or he may reflect that “color is a physical phenomenon, awareness is a mental phenomenon.” **The exercise is done with an intention to make a mental note and occurs after the moment of awareness. Thus, the awareness is not a genuine one.**

6.2.4.2 As a matter of fact, the word “awareness” or “mindfulness” in the Tipitaka means **recollection**. The Abhidhamma further explains that **mindfulness has the characteristic that is the opposite of delusion**, and that its proximate cause is **an accurate perception of a condition**. In recent years practitioners often interpret the

word “mindfulness” as “making mental note” even though to make a mental note is not to recollect, but deliberately doing something beyond recollecting, influenced by greed and volition, and associated with wrong view that to make a mental note is insight development. In fact it is a kind of thinking, which definitely is not insight development. So to make a mental note is not mindfulness development, nor is it a proximate cause of mindfulness. In fact to recollect frequently is what makes the mind remember physical and mental phenomena accurately, and is the proximate cause of mindfulness.

6.2.4.3 Whenever we try to make a mental note, and realize it, at that very moment the intention to make a mental note will instantly stop, and replaced by genuine awareness. Thus by simply be aware that we are making a mental note, and right mindfulness will arise automatically.

6.2.5 To know is not to focus attentively.

6.2.5.1 To be aware is not to focus attentively, but many practitioners like to do so. Even those who do not like concentration exercises and want to do only insight development tend to focus attentively without realizing it. Actually, focusing attentively happens

when one intentionally sets one's mind for practice, starting from thinking of the procedure, composing the body, then focusing attentively at an object of consciousness, resulting in forgetting to be aware of the self. Some practitioners may even become temporarily numb or unresponsive due to over-focusing. Others may intentionally focus on physical phenomena, ignoring mental phenomena. They will see all things appear and disappear, showing the three characteristics of existence, except for mental objects which remain constant. Thus they wrongly conclude that all are subject to the three characteristics of existence except for the mind that is unchanged. Other practitioners may focus attentively at nothingness, which is a mental object, and became so absorbed in it that they are unable to progress any further. Some like to focus on the defilements that arise, and when these defilements disappear (as their causes have disappeared) they will wrongly conclude that "they can get rid of defilements every time they arise." Some people, once they are aware of objects, will unknowingly keep focusing intently and more deeply inwards. This is also focusing attentively, with the object being a fabrication of the mind.

By continuing to focus at an object not too forcefully, the mind will calm down. The result is concentration meditation, though this may not be the right concentration meditation for insight development.

6.2.5.2 To know what focusing attentively is, is not difficult at all. Raise a thumb and stare at it until the mind is firmly fixed to the thumb. Not long after that, we will feel that our only perception is the thumb. This is because the mind intensely focuses all its attention on only one object with desire. At that moment, we see only the thumb, with no awareness of the rest of the body, sensation, feeling of joy or misery, or whether the mind is wholesome or unwholesome. We don't even realize that the mind is firmly fixed to the thumb. In short we only see the thumb, but not the body, feeling, mind or mind-object. We should memorize this intense focusing of the thumb, so that when we are aware of physical or mental phenomena, we will not focus attentively on them the same way we do the thumb. Otherwise we will ignorantly practice concentration meditation and think that we are doing insight meditation, which is awareness of physical and mental phenomena.

6.2.5.3 Whenever we focus attentively and realize, the focusing will stop, and the state

of awareness will arise. Therefore, simply realizing that we were focusing attentively is right awareness. But for those who are accustomed to doing concentration meditation, even though the intense focusing is realized it may not disappear. To put an end to this one might need to further be aware of the desire to end this intense focusing. If this still does not work, one may need to temporarily stop the practice altogether. Once the mind resumes its normal function, say it starts to think, the intense focusing will cease automatically. Then by recollecting on the distracted mind and right awareness will arise.

Even though the author prefers normal insight meditation method, by being aware of physical and mental phenomena as they truly are, the trick on how to come out of intense focusing has to be mentioned. This is because so many practitioners are addicted to over-focusing and cannot free themselves from it. Some can get stuck in this state for 10 years or more. The tactic is to divert the mind from whatever it has been stuck on. Just by diversion and the mind will be able to free itself from over-focusing.

6.2.6 To know is not to induce awareness.

6.2.6.1 To know is not to induce awareness. Inducing is another action that a lot of practitioners do. It is trying to make awareness happen when one thinks of practicing dhamma. It is similar to focusing attentively, the only difference is that **focusing attentively concentrates on only one object of consciousness in order to see it clearly, whereas inducing is not focusing at any particular object but turning attention inward towards tranquility, forgetting the self in the process.** Thus, the practice is done with craving, and the mind either takes pleasure in tranquility, or becomes drowsy and stolid. The practitioner may mistakenly think that such state is good practice. On days that the mind becomes drowsy he is satisfied, and on days that the mind does not he is disappointed. Some people listen to recorded dhamma talks while meditating to help induce awareness, when in fact it helps in speeding the mind to reach an optimal state of drowsiness in a very short period of time.

6.2.6.2 Whenever we induce the mind towards tranquility and then realize, at that very moment the state of inducement will instantly stop, and replaced by genuine awareness. Thus, simply by realizing that the mind was induced is right awareness.

6.2.7 To be aware is not to intentionally know.

6.2.7.1 To be aware is not to intentionally know certain objects. Therefore, if a practitioner asks about awareness, what to be aware of, whether it is the whole body, from the tip of the hair to below the feet, these questions mean that he still does not understand the true meaning of awareness. Genuine awareness arises without the intention to choose one object of consciousness over the other. Where there is intention, there is desire and wrong view.

6.2.7.2 To be aware is a state in which the mind is awoken from the world of imagination and dreams. Most people are awake only physically, but are still mentally asleep, like daydreaming. Genuine awareness is when the mind is awoken from the dream, alert and ready to perceive all objects of consciousness that impinge upon the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. It allows natural reactions to those objects to occur. Moreover, it recognizes and understands those reactions clearly. This awareness arises without any intention. **When an object appears at a sense-door, be aware of it at that present moment without being distracted. This is genuine awareness. It is not intending to be aware of the whole body, because this again is intentionally trying to know the whole body.**

6.2.7.3 Whenever intention arises and is realized, at that moment the intention will disappear, immediately replaced by the state of awareness. Therefore, simply realizing the intention is right awareness.

6.3 In summary, **whenever we try to be aware, or to search for the correct method for awareness, or to try to continuously maintain the awareness (see Clause 6.6), at that moment the practice is incorrect.** Any attempt to do more than just plainly aware, and done with craving and wrong view, will completely block our natural ability to be aware of an object. **Therefore, do not try to be aware correctly. At the moment we are wrong and realize it, at that moment right awareness will have arisen automatically.** Nevertheless so many practitioners, even after having heard the correct method for insight meditation, refuse to practice and turn to giving alms and making merits, excusing that they need to accumulate more merits, or that they need to improve and balance the five controlling faculties first. **What they do not realize is once they develop awareness correctly, all the sense faculties will automatically be strengthened and balanced.**

6.4 Correct knowing or awareness can arise easily with the support of right mindfulness (*sati*) and right concentration (*sammāsamādhi*), as follows:

6.4.1 If the mind can accurately memorize different kinds of natural phenomena, like

love, greed, anger, abstraction, delight, or happiness, when they appear awareness will arise automatically. This is because the mind is familiar with and has experienced these phenomena before. But for unfamiliar conditions the mind will take time to study them, until when it can memorize them accurately mindfulness will arise when they appear.

6.4.2 If the mind has right concentration, correct awareness can arise more easily. The mind with right concentration is stable and undistracted by objects that appear at the six sense-doors (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind). It is calm and content, i.e. not taking delight or dislike in the object. It is light and soothing, but not airy like a floating balloon. It is gentle, pliant, and not stagnant. It is agile and receptive. It is not repressed or high like a drug addict. The mind is true to its function, aware of an object without interfering, like an unbiased judge who does not take sides of either the plaintiff or the defendant.

It is not difficult for the mind to have right concentration if we understand that the mind in its natural state, not dominated by external forces, is a **moral mind with innate right concentration**. However if it does not yet have right concentration the mind can be conditioned. First, the practitioner needs to perfect his moral conducts by observing the five or

eight precepts. Then, he should **perfect his inner morality through concentration meditation, by being aware of a single object continuously. The object can be anything that does not arouse defilements.** Examples are concentration of the breath, concentration of the steps in walking meditation, concentration of hand movements, concentration of abdomen movements, and concentration by reciting a certain word. Make mental note on an object comfortably, without stress or too much effort. From here the mind can develop in one of two ways:

6.4.2.1 If the mind is deluded or influenced by craving, it will be weak and remain in a restful state. The mind may be stuck in a dreamy state, or start to fantasize. This is wrong concentration practice.

6.4.2.2 When observing an object of consciousness, the practitioner should constantly be aware. The mind may wander off to think about something else, be aware. It may be over focusing on an object, be aware. It may become impassive, be aware. The mind of a normal person is always lost in objects of consciousness but goes undetected. So we should begin by focusing on just one object and be aware when the mind slips away from it. **Soon the mind will be proficient at this, and whenever it wanders off it will be aware ,**

resulting in a stable and natural mind. Then when an object of consciousness arises the mind will just be aware of it, without influencing or being influenced by it.

We can say that mental noting (with craving and wrong view) is the tool for concentration meditation, whereas “awareness” is the tool for insight meditation.

6.5 If we are to clarify the state of awareness, we can say that it is the development of the noble eightfold path (*ariya atthangika magga*).

6.5.1 The mind that is aware is stable, independent, and not influenced by feelings of like or dislike. It has right concentration (*sammāsamādhi*).

6.5.2 The mind that is aware is agile and readily receptive. When an object of consciousness impinges on a sense-door (*dvāra*), **right mindfulness** (*sammā sati*) of the present reality will arise naturally.

6.5.3 The stable mind with right concentration is a mind that is aware. And this is the state with right view (*sammāditṭhi*) and clear comprehension (*sampajañña* of type “*asammohasampajañña*”). But if the mind is unstable, it will be deluded, dominated by the object, and become unaware. And when unaware, it will not be able to see reality with

clarity, or the arising and falling away of physical and mental phenomena, or the Noble Truths (ariya-sacca). Thus, it can be said that right concentration (sammāsamādhi) is a proximate cause of wisdom (paññā).

6.5.4 The mind with right awareness (sati), concentration (samadhi) and wisdom (paññā) will have **right thought (sammā sankappa)**, resulting in perfection of **right speech (sammā vācā)**, **right action (sammā kammanta)** and **right livelihood (sammā ājīva)**.

6.5.5 By constantly being aware, sense faculties will be protected. Unwholesome deeds will not be able to influence them, and wholesome deeds will arise more easily and more often. This is **right effort (sammā vāyāma)**.

6.6 Awareness is the tool in the Noble Path development. **Its main task is to make the mind aware of objects of consciousness as frequently as possible.** However, this does not mean that we can make awareness happen for long periods of time, like minutes, hours or days. This is because awareness itself is a mental factor (cetasika-dhamma) that arises and falls away moment by moment together with the mind (citta). We cannot control and make an impermanent thing last. All we can do is try to make it arise more frequently. The proximate cause for this is the ability of the mind to recognize a variety of

natural conditions precisely and as they truly are. (To recognize natural conditions here means to really know their characteristics and not just know their textbook definitions.) So when a natural condition appears, the mind will be able to recognize it quickly. And when awareness arises with high frequency, the chance for the mind to become unwholesome will decrease, until finally it will be rid off for good.

6.7 To train the mind to recognize and accurately remember lots of natural phenomena, we have to begin by looking at objects close to the body and mind. This is a good basis and is taught by most meditation centers now. Examples are concentrating on the breath or movements of the abdomen in breathing meditation, on rhythms in walking or hand movement meditations, on the four posture movements of the body, on reciting “Buddho”, on feelings, and on the mind. The point to consider is the quality of the exercises, because different levels of awareness produce different outcomes. Many practitioners often focus on an object of meditation and tend to end up doing concentration meditation without realizing it. Examples of various levels of awareness and their outcomes are:

6.7.1 **Awareness of the breath:** If during contemplation of breathing we become enchanted and mindless, the exercise is useless. If we focus attentively until the mind is firmly fixed on the breath, then it is concentration meditation. If we are aware of the body breathing, with the mind as

an observer, then it is insight development on the foundation of the body. If during the breathing exercise we are aware of the mind that is distracted from or fixed to the breath, aware of feelings of happiness, unhappiness or indifference, aware of the wholesome or unwholesome states, then we are doing insight development on the foundation of mental states.

6.7.2 Awareness of the abdominal movements:

If during contemplation of the rising and falling of the abdomen we become enchanted and mindless, the exercise is useless. If we focus intently at the abdomen until the mind is firmly fixed, it is concentration meditation. If we are aware of the abdominal movement, with the mind as an observer, then it is insight development on the foundation of the body. If during contemplation of the rising and falling of the abdomen we are aware of the mind that is distracted from or fixed to the breath, aware of feelings of happiness, unhappiness or indifference, aware of the wholesome or unwholesome states, then we are doing insight development on the foundation of mental states.

6.7.3 Awareness when doing walking

meditation: If in walking meditation we become enchanted and mindless, the exercise is useless. If we focus intently at the feet or body, it is concentration meditation. If we are aware of the body walking, with the mind as an observer,

then it is insight development on the foundation of the body. If during the walking meditation we are aware of the mind that is distracted from or fixed to the walking, aware of feelings of happiness, unhappiness or indifference, aware of the wholesome or unwholesome states, then we are doing insight development on the foundation of mental states.

6.7.4 Awareness when doing rhythmic hand movement meditation: If in doing rhythmic hand movement meditation we become enchanted and mindless, the exercise is useless. If we focus intently at the hand, it is concentration meditation. If we are aware of the hand movements, with the mind as an observer, then it is insight development on the foundation of the body. If during the rhythmic hand movement meditation we are aware of the mind that is distracted from or fixed to the hand movements, aware of feelings of happiness, unhappiness or indifference, aware of the wholesome or unwholesome states, then we are doing insight development on the foundation of mental states.

6.7.5 Awareness when reciting “Buddho”: If when reciting “Buddho” we become enchanted and mindless, the exercise is useless. If we focus intently at the word, it is concentration meditation. If while reciting we are aware of the body standing, walking, sitting, reclining, with the

mind as an observer, then it is insight development on the foundation of the body. If when reciting we are aware of the mind that is distracted from or fixed to the recital, aware of feelings of happiness, unhappiness or indifference, aware of the wholesome or unwholesome states, then we are doing insight development on the foundation of mental states.

Similar outcomes can be deduced when we do awareness practice using other objects of consciousness not mentioned above.

6.8 Clause 6.2 talked about various incorrect states of awareness. Here **factors for right awareness** will be elaborated upon, which will help confirm the correct state of awareness. These factors are:

6.8.1 The knowing mind is wholesome consciousness associated with wisdom (mahakusala-citta ñāṇasampayuttam), and arises automatically without external inducement (asankhārikam). Therefore:

6.8.1.1 At any moment that the mind is unwholesome (akusala), it is not the knowing mind.

6.8.1.2 At any moment the mind wants to do something more than cognize, like trying to stop suffering and unwholesomeness, or trying

to maintain happiness and wholesomeness, it is not the knowing mind.

6.8.1.3 At any moment the mind wants awareness to arise, it is not the knowing mind. This is because **the more we crave to have the knowing mind, the lesser the chance to have it. The more we search, the further away we are from the goal.**

6.8.2 **The knowing mind is merely attentive (manasikāra).** Manasikāra means attentiveness or mental advertence. The mind with manasikāra is not distracted to thinking, preparing for practice, making a mental note, gazing, etc. (see Clause 6.2). It is the state of awareness that is weightless, so thin, and silent. It is unintentional and uninfluenced by any craving or wrong view.

6.8.3 The knowing mind must be accompanied by beautiful common mental factors (sobhana-sādhāraṇa cetasika), meaning it must arise with wholesome consciousness. The identifiers are:

6.8.3.1 **Non-attachment (alobha):** The mind at that moment must be devoid of attachment, craving, greed, of the desire to search for the truth. Whenever we want to practice, do it with intent, or take pleasure in the wholesome state, at that moment there is attachment. And that moment is not the right kind of knowing.

6.8.3.2 **Non-hatred (adosa):** The mind at that moment must be devoid of aversion. Whenever we have dislike towards suffering or unwholesome state, such as restlessness of the mind, and attempt to get rid of it, at that moment it has aversion. And that is not the knowing mind.

6.8.3.3 **Equanimity/mental balance (tatramajjhataṭṭā):** This is the mind that is neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and is not biased towards or against an object. Whenever the mind becomes satisfied or dissatisfied, or is swayed by these feelings, at that moment it does not have equanimity. And that is not the knowing mind.

6.8.3.4 **Tranquility (passaddhi):** When the mind is aware of an object, it is tranquil and unaffected. Even once the object such as feeling falls away, the mind is not distracted and remains calm. However, if after the awareness the mind is affected, at that moment it does not have tranquility. And that is not the knowing mind.

6.8.3.5 **Weightlessness (lahutā):** The knowing mind is weightless. It never bears weight when it is aware of an object. If during a practice session the mind is heavy or bears weight, even a for a little bit (including

reverse weight, which means an unnaturally light feeling), it means the mind is no longer aware. And that is not the knowing mind.

6.8.3.6 **Pliancy (mudutā):** The knowing mind is pliant, gentle, not rigid and not stiff. If after practice, the mind is rigid and stiff, it means the mind is no longer aware. And that is not the knowing mind.

6.8.3.7 **Readiness (Kammaññatā):** The knowing mind is always ready for insight development. It is not predominated by hindrances. (However, if a hindrance arises, the knowing mind will be aware of it and realize it as the Truth of Suffering (ariya-sacca). When hindrance arises and the mind is aware of it, but is not dominated by it, then it is right knowing. In any event, if the mind is dominated by a hindrance, that is not the knowing mind.

6.8.3.8 **Proficiency (pāguññatā):** The knowing mind is agile, swift and proficient. If the mind is inert, drowsy or lazy, then it means the mind is no longer aware. And that is not the knowing mind.

6.8.3.9 **Rectitude (ujjukatā):** The knowing mind is aware of an object with rectitude, it does just that and nothing more. However if

the mind reacts to the object of consciousness with bias and defilement, then it is no longer just aware. And that is not the knowing mind.

6.8.4 The knowing mind is the mind with clear comprehension (sampajañña), insight (paññā), the faculty of wisdom (paññaindriya) and non-delusion (amoha). It can develop insight with clear comprehension on what to do (mindfulness development), why (to understand the natural phenomena as it really is) and how (to be aware of the object of consciousness at the present moment as it really is). It will be aware and uninfluenced by delusion. The mind must also have the knowledge and understand the characteristics of each object in its ultimate form, that it is impermanent, subject to suffering and not self. If the mind just observes the phenomena without the wisdom to comprehend their characteristics, then it is not the right knowing for true insight development.



7

What is Natural
Phenomena
(Sabhavadham)?

7. What is Natural Phenomena (Sabhavadham)?

7.1 To develop mindfulness is to understand suffering, or physical and mental phenomena, so that wrong view that they constitute or belong to the self will be eradicated. Only then will the mind let go of clinging to these physical and mental phenomena for good. Therefore to develop mindfulness correctly, we must be attentively aware of the reality of physical and mental phenomena, and not try to fabricate Nibbāna or objects from our own imagination. Even thinking of physical and mental phenomena, that they are subject to the three characteristics of existence, is still dealing with conceptual reality and is neither awareness of the natural conditions nor the realization of their characteristics.

7.2 It is the physical and mental phenomena, this body and mind, that are the natural phenomena that mindfulness must recollect; and wisdom must realize their characteristics. Besides mindfulness and wisdom, the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind, are the key tools used in the understanding of physical and mental phenomena. **Physical phenomena can be realized through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body; whereas mental phenomena can be realized through the mind.**

7.3 Physical phenomena can be realized through all the sense-doors (dvāra), as follows:

7.3.1 Physical phenomena realized through the eyes are countless, like several hundred thousands, or even millions. Examples are woman, man, child, elderly, tiger, monkey, bird, sea, river, mountain, tree, flower, gemstone, etc. Countless as they are, what the eyes actually see are colors. The mind then perceives the colors, through recognition and interpretation, to be a woman, man, or gemstone. So colors are actually the only physical phenomena realized through the eye sense.

7.3.2 Physical phenomena realized through the ears are sounds. Physical phenomena realized through the nose are odors. Physical phenomena realized through the tongue are tastes. Physical phenomena realized through the body are subdivided into three categories: coolness and heat (or fire element, tejo dhātu); softness and hardness (or earth element, paṭhavī dhātu); and rigidity and motion (or wind element, vāyo-dhātu).

7.3.3 Physical phenomena realized through the mind door are greater in number than through the eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body combined. They consist of the five sensitive corporeality/physical sense-organs (pasāda-rūpa), which respond to sense-stimuli through the eyes, ear, nose, tongue and body; and the sixteen subtle physical phenomena (sukhuma-rupa) such as nutriment (āhāra), the masculine/feminine materiality

(bhāva-rūpa), bodily movement and speech for communication.

7.4 Besides the 21 physical phenomena explained above in Clause 7.3.3, there are many more objects that can be realized through the mind door, namely: (1) 52 mental factors (cetasika) such as, pleasure (sukha), suffering (dukkha), equanimity (upekkhā), perception (saññā), greed (lobha), hatred (dosa), delusion (moha), delight (pīti), faith (saddhā), effort (virīya), wisdom (paññā); (2) mind (citta) or natural states of consciousness, which is classified into 89 or 121 states; (3) Nibbāna; and (4) thoughts and dreams (paññatti dhamma), which do not exist in reality (for reference, see Abhidhammattha-vibhavini). Thus, the mind door is the sense-organ (āyatana) that perceives the most extensive and diverse objects of consciousness.

7.5 To put in simple terms, **in mindfulness development, the object of awareness has to be absolute reality (paramattha ārammana), and not our own thoughts and imagination (paññati dhamma).** For example, when we get close to a bonfire, the heat sensed by the body is an ultimate reality (paramattha ārammana); whereas the word “hot” we describe it is conceptual reality (samutti paññati). A practitioner’s duty is to be mindful of the heat that is felt by the body. He does not have to analyze further, that fire is hot like the fire of defilement or fire in hell, etc. Furthermore, he should know from which sense-doors (dvāra) objects arise from. For example, awareness of the four bodily

postures, i.e. standing, walking, sitting and reclining, arise from the mind door, and not the eye door or the body door.

7.6 If the practitioner can perceive physical and mental phenomena, i.e. ultimate reality, he can uproot the wrong view of self, person, being, us or them. This is because ultimate objects in insight development are either physical or mental phenomena, and void of self, person, being, us or them. The idea of self, person, being, us or them derive from thinking of conventional reality which in fact all fall under one of the two categories, physical or mental phenomena.

7.7 Some points to note on objects of consciousness when practicing dhamma:

7.7.1 The mind perceives both ultimate reality and conceptual reality, and cannot choose one over the other as desired. Therefore, any moment the mind perceives ultimate reality, be aware of it. Any moment it perceives conceptual reality, also be aware of it. Even the worthy ones (arahant) perceive both realities, and not just ultimate reality.

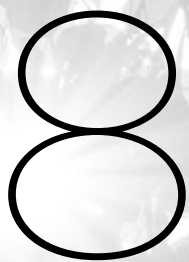
7.7.2 For insight development, the practitioner may either start with mindfulness of physical or mental phenomena. The method may be any of the four foundations of mindfulness, and there is no need to use all four methods. If we do all four we will end up with an ineffective practice, with

the mind distracted and unfocused. The Buddha teaches us to be mindful of “body within body (kāya in kāya), feelings within feelings (vedanā in vedanā), mind within mind (citta in citta) and mental state within mental state (dhamma in dhamma)”. This means we can perceive certain physical and mental phenomena, certain feelings, certain moral and immoral consciousness, and certain mental states, so that eventually we can understand all physical and mental phenomena. This is studying physical and mental phenomena (dhammavicaya) by random sampling, which is an advanced learning process.

An example is if we realize that physical phenomena such as standing, walking, sitting or reclining is not a self, then we can conclude that all physical phenomena are not self. And if we realize that an abstracted mind and a mindful mind are both impermanent and not self, then, we will see that all states of consciousness are impermanent and not self.

7.7.3 Even though in the beginning a practitioner may have to willfully be aware of a certain object of consciousness (vihāra-dhamma), when mindfulness is developed and awareness becomes automatic, he will not be able to choose one object of consciousness over others. Whichever sense-door an object of consciousness arises, the mind will naturally be aware of it, no matter whether the

object is sight, sound, odor, taste, body, feelings, consciousness or mental states. Furthermore, the practitioner will realize the truth that he cannot force the mind to be aware of only a certain object because the mind itself is also non-self and cannot be controlled as desired.



8

What is meant by
“Arising at the Present
Moment”?

8. What is meant by “Arising at the Present Moment”?

8.1 To be aware of natural phenomena, an important principle to follow is that the physical and mental phenomena must arise at the present moment, and not the past or the future. The Buddha’s teachings always emphasize on the present, as described in the Bhaddekaratta Sutta (Ti-pitaka 14/527, translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu):

*You shouldn't chase after the past
or place expectations on the future.
What is past is left behind.
The future is as yet unreached.
Whatever quality is present you clearly
see right there, right there.
Not taken in, unshaken, that's how you
develop the heart.
Ardently doing what should be done
today,
for — who knows? — tomorrow death.
There is no bargaining with Mortality &
his mighty horde.
Whoever lives thus ardently, relentlessly
both day & night,
has truly had an auspicious day: so says
the Peaceful Sage.*

8.2 Physical and mental phenomena arising at the present moment are explained below:

8.2.1 To be aware of physical phenomena at the present moment means to perceive whatever is arising at that very instant, like knowing the body is in standing posture, or a certain object is in motion.

8.2.2 Awareness of mental phenomena has to occur right after it has just arisen, or the moment following the present moment (*santati-paccuppanna*). By nature the mind can be aware of only one object at a time. At the moment the mind is aware of an object of consciousness, it cannot perceive itself. An example is when a practitioner is mindful of the body in sitting posture, he is distracted and starts to think of something. He is no longer aware of the physical phenomena. His mind is rooted in delusion (*moha-mūlacitta*). Five minutes later he realizes that the mind was thinking of something, delusion then vanishes, and awareness arises in its place. Or he may have been feeling angry towards a friend for the past five minutes, and then aware of the anger. This is acceptable. But if he does not realize the anger until the following day, and then regrets it, then his is not acceptable as the present moment because the mind is thinking of the past and not the present. He may realize the following day that he was angry and wants to apologize, and is

worried about what his friend will say. This is also thinking of the past, worrying about the future, and not staying in the present.

8.3 The mind is able to be aware of only one object at a time. So the duty of the practitioner is to be aware of any physical phenomena that arises at present, and be aware of any mental phenomena that has just occurred. Do not try to dwell on a past object for fear of not perceiving the three characteristics of existence (tilakkhana). For example, when the eyes see colors, just perceive the colors as they truly are, as they are the visual object at present moment (rūpārammaṇa). Then, perception (saññā) translates it to be the sight of the beloved. The mind is pleased and passion (rāga) arises. Passion becomes the present mental object (dhammārammaṇa). The duty of the practitioner is to be aware of it arising, and not try to rationalize that the sight of his beloved as undesirable in order to rid of his pleasure. The sight of his beloved has become the past, replaced by passion at the present, showing the arising and passing away of objects of consciousness.

8.4 When saying about awareness of the object at present, some may misunderstand and conclude that Buddhists do not make any future plans. This is a misconception. Buddhists, like everybody else, do have worldly obligations to fulfill, and we do make plans. Even the Buddha Himself carefully planned out his daily chores every morning. He examined to whom he would give a sermon each day, on what

topic and for what outcome. The Buddha was a great planner because He (1) chose a target group; (2) planned the procedures; (3) prepared the lessons to convey to His audience; and (4) took into consideration the benefits that His audience would gain. A practitioner should know when is an appropriate time to practice dhamma. When he has to make a plan, he makes a plan. When he has to study, he studies. When he has to work, he works. When it is an appropriate time to do mindfulness practice, he would do so. When he needs to concentrate at work, he concentrates. When he has to think analytically, he thinks analytically. He should not do only mindfulness practice, but should also take a break and do concentration meditation or analytical thinking.

8.5 Another remark on mindfulness practice is that the term “present” does not mean today, this hour, this minute, or even this second. It means awareness of physical phenomena that is appearing right in front of us at this consciousness-moment, or recollection of mental phenomena that has just disappeared an instant moment before. Awareness arises within the shortest time that nothing can be done more than just “being aware.”



9

What is meant by
"As it Really is"?

9. What is meant by "As it Really is"?

9.1 Clause 6 of this book aims to explain the nature of right mindfulness. Clause 7 describes the natural phenomena that are objects of consciousness. Clause 8 points out that awareness must be of the object that is arising at the present moment. Once proficient at being aware at the present moment, this clause will put a stress on what is meant by "as it really is". It means that the awareness has to be **what is actually appearing (1) without influencing the object** [Clauses 9.2 and 9.3], **(2) without any fabrication** [Clause 9.4], and **(3) with clear comprehension of the characteristics of the physical and mental phenomena in accordance with the Buddha's Teachings** [Clause 9.5].

9.2 **Influencing an object of consciousness:** Many practitioners tend to influence physical and mental phenomena so they are altered from their normal state. The two types are: (1) attempting to prolong the awareness; and (2) splitting or adding steps in the awareness to objects of consciousness.

9.2.1 Many practitioners like to prolong moments of consciousness. For example, they try to move slowly in hopes that the mind will be aware of the motion. In reality though, no matter how slow the motion is, defilements will not slow down with it. Some may take five minutes to walk

one step. Although by focusing intently on the motion they can clearly detect every movement of the body, what they do not realize is at that very moment their minds are predominated by greed, the desire to practice dhamma. They do not even realize that during that five-minute period the mind has slipped from awareness to thinking so many times. Even by firmly fixing on objects such as the hand, foot or abdomen, this is all concentration practice (*ārammaṇupanijjhāna*), not insight practice as intended.

9.2.2 Some practitioners try to split or add steps in the awareness to objects of consciousness. For example, when they practice contemplation of breathing, they will be mindful of a touch of the breath on the philtrum or the tip of the nose. Then, they will follow the breath flowing through the body to the abdomen and other parts of the body along the air route. Some may do walking meditation and split the step into several stages. All these exercises are good for binding the mind to an object, as a concentration practice to keep the mind calm and focused. As the result these practitioners will often experience joy (*pīti*) or mental images (*nimitta*), but may mistakenly think that they have gained wisdom, or *ñāṇa* because they believe that they are doing insight development.

9.3 Influencing the object of consciousness: The goal of insight development is to gain wisdom by understanding the truth of physical and mental phenomena. But many practitioners deviate from the goal. They want to do insight development to achieve happiness, tranquility and virtue, but not to gain wisdom. Therefore, when they are mindful of a natural condition, they often try to influence or fabricate it with the goal of achieving happiness, calmness or virtue. Some examples of this are:

9.3.1 When perceiving any unwholesome state (akusala dhamma), these practitioners will try to rid it. For example, when the mind is restless, they will recite “Buddho” or make a mental note, “restlessness”. When the mind has sensual desire, they will try to contemplate on decaying corpse (asubha). When the mind has anger (dosa), they will try to extend loving-kindness (mettā). When the mind has suffering, they will try to relieve it in a variety of ways. All these actions are caused by:

9.3.1.1 Wrong view (micchadiṭṭhi), because they have heard that all unwholesomeness should be rid of. When unwholesomeness arises they try to extinguish it. These practitioners do not realize that **insight development (vipassanā) is far more advanced than doing good and avoiding evil**. It is the state of purification in which the mind is

aware of both wholesome and unwholesome objects with neutrality, and not liking one but disliking the other. Some may misinterpret the Teachings of the Buddha. For example, they may read in Nīvarana Pubba under dhammanupassana-satipaṭṭhāna in Mahasatipaṭṭhāna Sutta, and mistakenly think that the Buddha teaches us to be aware of hindrances and then extinguish them (nīvaraṇa), and that mindfulness development has to include both awareness and abandonment of natural conditions because awareness alone is not enough.

9.3.1.2 Ignorance, of the Truth of Suffering (dukkhasacca). The task is to be aware of suffering, but instead they try to do away with it when it arises. The mind becomes biased, liking happiness and hating suffering.

9.3.1.3 Misconception, of the principle of insight development, which is to be mindful of a natural condition as it really is until one realizes that there is no animal, self, us or them, and nothing is under anyone's control. Only after realizing the truth will the mind let go and be free from suffering.

9.3.1.4 Familiarity, with concentration practice, that dhamma practice is simply meditation for tranquility. Concentration

meditation results in pleasure which is more refined than sensual pleasure (kāmasukha). Some may find inner calmness, while others may develop certain knowledge and perceptual power and take pride in their special abilities. These people are looked up to by fellow practitioners, and so when an object that interrupts tranquility arises, they will try to do away with it.

9.3.2 When a moral state (kusala dhamma) arises, these practitioners will try to maintain or improve on it. They hope that continuous moral development will lead to enlightenment one day in the future because the mind of the holy ones (arahant) are “forever perfect”. However this is a very wrong attitude because **both the mind (citta) and moral mental factors (kusala cetasika) are conditioned (saṅkhāra) and thus are impermanent and not-self.** It is insight into this truth that makes the mind let go of clinging to itself. Liberation of the mind is through detachment. It is not through making the impermanent mind permanent, making the suffering mind happy, or making the mind that is not-self a self.

9.4 Fabricating the mind: To be aware of physical and mental phenomena the way they truly are, we must neither fabricate the object of consciousness, nor the mind itself when being mindful. But almost

100% of the practitioners start their practices by fabricating the mind to an extraordinary state. Then, they deliberately try to be mindful of physical and mental phenomena. Some even ignore physical and mental phenomena totally. Following are examples of fabrications of the mind:

9.4.1 **Repressing the mind to stillness.** When thinking of practice, almost 100% of dhamma practitioners begin by trying to repress the mind, forcing it to become calm and collected. When in fact the true goal in doing insight meditation is to understand the true nature of the body and mind. How can the truth be revealed if the mind deviates from its natural state. **A repressed mind may see other objects of consciousness reveal the Three Characteristics of Existence (tilakkhana), but it will see itself as calm, intransient and not subject to the Three Characteristics of Existence.** As such, wrong view that the mind is self cannot be eliminated. The delusion of self (sakkāyaditthi) is not realized, and the Fruition of Stream Entry (sotāpattiphala) cannot be attained.

9.4.2 **Clearing the mind:** Some practitioners have heard their teachers say “at the end of the path, the mind is clear from defilements and aggregates.. Thus, they aim to clear the mind directly by **holding the mind still and making up emptiness** to imitate the end goal of meditation. What they don’t take into

consideration is that the Buddha teaches us to begin practice by being aware of physical and mental phenomena, of body and mind. When the mind comprehends the truth and let go of clinging to physical and mental phenomena, it will clear itself from defilements and aggregates. Intentionally clearing the mind will at most be contemplation of infinite space (*ākāsānancāyatana*) or contemplation of nothingness (*ākhiñcaññāyatana*), which are concentration practices (*samatha*). **The mind can become bright, clear and unwaivering for a long time such that they mistakenly think they have attained the stage of holiness (*arahant*), when in fact the mind is ignorantly fabricating an empty realm of existence (*bhava*) and remains stuck there.**

In fact, “the mind will be clear from defilements” once it gains insight into physical and mental phenomena, and ends clinging towards them. As a result defilements and craving will no longer arise. Thus the mind can be aware of sight, sound, odor, taste, bodily contact (*phoṭṭhabba*) and other objects of consciousness. It need not clear itself from all other objects of consciousness to focus on emptiness. “The mind clear from aggregates” does not mean it cannot be aware of the aggregates. But by being aware of the aggregates, it will eventually see the truth that aggregates themselves do not constitute a person or a self.

9.4.3 **Abandoning the mind:** Some practitioners try to abandon the mind through various means. Examples are:

Focusing intently at physical phenomena: Some practitioners focus intently at body movements and do not pay attention to the mind. Instead of just observing physical and mental phenomena separately, that “the body is moving, the mind is perceiving”, the practitioner may focus intently on the body and forget to be aware of mental formations in the mind. Such an act is object-scrutinizing (*ārammaṇupanijjhāna*), which is a form of concentration meditation. Object-scrutinizing will finally lead to the 4th absorption (*catutthajhāna*). By being inattentive to the mind, the mind will be further absorbed to the level of cessation of perception (*asañña-satta bhūmi*). It will be abandoned at that very moment, leaving behind a stiff body in the state of a so-called ‘unconscious brahma’. After these practitioners return to the worldly state, they will perceive the world void of self. When aware of an object, the mind will remain inactive and not processing any thoughts or perception. Some will mistakenly think they have attained the stage of holiness (*arahant*) because there is no defilement. However, this is not *Nibbāna* because **the void of self is fabricated by the mind**. Defilements are temporarily repressed because, through object-scrutinizing the mind fixedly focuses at the object. This is

misunderstood as the fulfillment of the holy task because the mind no longer needs to make mental note of objects. In this case, the physical and mental phenomena are further separated into two parts. Internally the mind is lured into the void and unconsciousness. Externally it is stuck to physical objects. Once the power from the meditation recedes, defilements will return, many times stronger than that of ordinary people.

Another way to abandon the mind is to increase tension to an extreme level that the mind escapes out to an empty fabricated state, with no regard to awareness at all. There are several ways to increase stress in the mind. (a) Contemplate continuously and intensely, such that the mind becomes stressed. (b) Practice continuously without any break, e.g. do sitting or walking meditations all the time, day and night, for several days at a time. With too much stress, some practitioners may suffer mental abnormalities or fall sick. Others may retreat to external void in order to **escape from suffering of the mind**. As the result, these practitioners may misunderstand that they have attained liberation because the mind is happy and at bliss there. They view the external world as void of self, but they cannot see their own mind. They feel hollow inside, but are unable to be aware of their own mind. **The mind is deluded, at bliss, but remains aware of only the outside world.** Some practitioners who follow this kind

of practice often fabricate loving-kindness (metta) and abide in that state.

9.4.4 Wanting to increase efficiency of awareness: Some practitioners think that attentive awareness alone cannot lead to enlightenment, and try to increase the efficiency of the awareness by various methods. Some examples are:

9.4.4.1 Aiding the awareness by analyzing on the phenomena being perceived. For example, once aware of hatred (dosa), the practitioner will try to rationalize that hatred is bad, that it is harmful, and that it will cause suffering, etc.

9.4.4.2 Forcing focus at the phenomena with the intention to see more clearly, or to force it to pass away. In some cases the practitioner may focus so intently and deeply that, though thinking it is awareness, he may not be aware of the present state of the mind that is forcing the focus. It is like a person who leans out to look at something floating in the river, falls right in but does not realize that he has fallen into the river.

9.4.4.3 Attempting to increase certain virtue because at present there may be an imbalance of different types of virtues. They are charity (dāna), morality (sīla), moral shame

(hiri), moral dread of the outcome of an evil (ottappa), truthfulness (sacca), self-control (dama), patience (khanti), sacrifice (cāga), renunciation (nekkhamma), faith (saddhā), mindfulness (sati), endeavor (viriya), joy (pīti), tranquility (passaddhi), concentration (samādhi), equanimity (upekkhā), wisdom (paññā), etc. The practitioner may feel the need to develop certain virtues first so the accumulation will help to balance other qualities which will aid with mindfulness development. **In actuality though, with right view, mindfulness development will automatically lead to accumulation of all ten virtues.** If we aim to develop virtuous qualities (paramī) but neglect to practice mindfulness, it is the same as a traveler who has prepared a lot of food supply for a long journey, but never steps out of his house. No matter how many years have passed, the traveler will never reach his destination.

9.5 Mindfulness of physical and mental phenomena must be in accord with the Teachings of the Buddha. Awareness of reality must correspond to the Buddha's Teachings, not what one thinks or believes to be right, and not what a meditation master says is right if it is contrary to the Buddha's Teachings.

9.5.1 The object of consciousness. The physical and mental objects in mindfulness development

must be the same as those taught by the Buddha. To be mindful is to recollect, and not to make mental note. Insight knowledge (vipassanā ñāṇa) is genuine understanding of the mind, and not strange bodily reactions after a meditation session. Suffering is an unsatisfactory feeling, and not a red spherical ball that appears in meditation practice.

9.5.2 The knowledge gained. With correct mindfulness practice, momentary concentration (khaṇikasamādhi) will arise, making the mind aware, awake and joyful. Physical and mental objects will reveal the three characteristics of existence for the mind to study. Physical objects will reveal their state of suffering and their natural elements, whereas mental objects will reveal their impermanence and non-self. In particular unwholesome mental objects will disappear immediately when awareness arises.

9.6 The reason why we should be aware of phenomena as they truly are, and not try to influence or manipulate them, is because ignorance of this truth causes craving, the root of all suffering (see Clauses 3 and 4). Once ignorance is eradicated, craving and suffering can never arise again.

9.7 Interfering with awareness of natural phenomena will only lead to more misunderstanding. For example, when a defilement like restlessness arises

and a practitioner tries to get rid of it by repeating the word “restlessness”, “restlessness”, restlessness will eventually fall away because the action of reciting blocks the flow of thinking, which causes restlessness. The practitioner will then have wrong view that defilements can be controlled (by a self), that the mind can be controlled (by a self). The more practice, the more skillful one is in fixedly focusing or reciting to overcome defilement. Delusion will accumulate and make conceit (māna) and ego (attā) stronger, not realizing that any dhamma arising from a cause falls away when the cause disappears. The practitioner may believe that dhamma can be controlled because he is so proficient at doing insight meditation.

9.8 Generally for a normal person the mind is unwholesome almost all the time, while wholesomeness seldom arises. An example is when we sit and daydream aimlessly for hours at a time (overpowered by delusion), and then suddenly recollect that we were daydreaming. While deluded, the mind is unwholesome. Once aware, delusion automatically disappears, and the mind instantly becomes wholesome. (Once mindfulness arises, unwholesomeness will automatically disappear. Therefore there is no need to “make” it go away. But what will eventually decrease is the latent disposition (anusaya) or defilement that lurks deep within the mind. For this reason, **our only task is to be aware, not try and make it disappear, because at the moment of correct mindfulness there is no defilement to be rid of.** Even when suffering

arises, there is no need to try and make it disappear because it is there because of a cause. And once the cause ends, suffering will also end. Our only task is to be aware of suffering.) The weak point of many practitioners is that they do not understand the main principle of mindfulness practice. In turn the mind can easily turn unwholesome in a blink of an eye, like when awareness arises, unwholesome thinking may follow. They may regret that they were deluded for a long time, and think of what to do next to improve their practice. Or they may worry of the future, of how to avoid delusion. In actuality, any attempt to do something other than being naturally aware of an object, moment by moment, is wrong.

9.9 Correct awareness in its purest state is called “impassive awareness”, where the mind is aware of the object of consciousness which is appearing as it really is, without interfering in the process at all, like (1) not reminiscing on the object of consciousness, that “it is a physical or mental phenomenon, this is its definition, this is how it works, this is its process, this is its proximate cause, that it is not stable, is suffering, non-self, not wholesome, and that this is impassive awareness; and (2) not having even the slight intention to be aware of the mind.

9.10 The will, volition, or greedy intention (*lobha cetana*) to know objects of consciousness, which includes all objects and the mind, is what feeds or fosters all mental actions (and subsequently influences

physical actions). And we call this “dhamma practice” or “meditation practice”.

What lies behind the intention is craving, wanting to make “our body and mind” happy and forever free from suffering.

What lies behind craving is ignorance, particularly (1) **ignorance of the truth of suffering**, i.e. ignorance of the truth that “these physical and mental phenomena are impermanent, suffering and not-self, but belong to the world”. And this ignorance in turn makes us want “our body and mind” to be happy and free from suffering forever; and (2) **ignorance of the cause of suffering**, i.e. ignorance of the truth that by running away from suffering and trying to find happiness and seeking sensual pleasures, controlling the body and mind, or avoiding contact with objects of consciousness, all these will result in becoming (bhava), birth (jāti) and suffering (dukkha). (Most practitioners feel bound to the mind, and want to “set it free”. They try and search for the way, not realizing that this pursuit of dhamma is either meritorious formation (puññābhisankhāra) or self-mortification (attakilamathānuyoga), which are rooted in ignorance (avijjā), same as demeritorious formation (apuññābhisankhāra) or constant attachment to sensual pleasures (kāmasukh’alikhānuyoga).

All these fabrications overshadow the pure dhamma that is void of self (Nibbāna). They obstruct the vision of truth (ñānadassana), making the practitioner unable

to realize Nibbāna, the perfect immortality that is present right in front of us.

9.11 This “impassive perception” arises because of wisdom, which has many levels: (1) the mind is able to be aware of the two extremities, and not be misguided by defilement into searching for external objects, and fixedly focusing inwards, trying to control one’s own body and mind; (2) The mind is able to detect pleasure and displeasure when impacted by an object through one of the six sense-doors, and most importantly, (3) the mind is able to see the reality of all objects of consciousness, that they are transient, e.g. happiness or displeasure, good or evil. The mind consequently ceases liking one object and hating another, becomes neutral to all objects, and reaches the stage of impassive awareness. **Whatever appears, the mind is impassive because it is wise, (sañkhārupekkhānāna). It knows that all conditioned states are transient.**

9.12 Once there is awareness of absolute reality without intention, and awareness of the mind without intention, then the awareness is genuine. Eventually wisdom will ripen and the truth of suffering, or the true knowledge about the aggregates, will be realized. In this first stage of attainment, the mind will see that **“the aggregates are not self, and there is no self in the aggregates or in anything else.”** This is the first stage of wisdom, the stage of a Stream-enterer (sotāpanna).

With continued development in mindfulness of physical and mental phenomena, the practitioner will see that **“when craving for sight, sound, odor, taste, contact or even from just imagining about them, the mind will suffer. When there is no craving the mind will find inner peace.”** Those who gain this intermediate insight will be content with tranquility of the mind. They view that the mind devoid of defilement and craving is a safe haven free from suffering which is the ocean of rebirths (saṃ sāravatta). The mind will cease to take pleasure in sensual objects. It will have perfect concentration, stable and eminent automatically without any effort. This stage of wisdom is that of a Non-returner (anāgāmi).

With keener insight through steady mindfulness development, and superior controlling faculties (indriya), “insight into suffering” will instantly reach perfection. It will become clear that **“the mind itself is part of nature, which is also subject to the three characteristics of existence. Thus it cannot be taken as refuge.”** Those with strong faith will realize the impermanence of the mind. Those good in concentration meditation will realize suffering of the mind. And those with developed wisdom will realize the non-self nature of the mind. **Suddenly, the mind will surrender itself to nature because it has attained purity of insight that the mind itself is suffering. It is not something miraculous as previously believed and dearly protected.**

It is this clear understanding into the truth of suffering that automatically eradicates craving, which is its cause (samudaya); and within a split-second a state that is purely tranquil, free of defilement and aggregates, void of self and all conditioned states, will arise in its entirety right before us. This is the eradication of suffering, nirodha or Nibbāna.

Do note that a pure mind and Nibbāna are two different things. A pure mind is the knowing mind that is non-self, formless, dimensionless and boundless, but is still in the group of dhamma that arises and falls away. In contrast Nibbāna is pure, non-self, formless, dimensionless and boundless, is an object of consciousness, but does not belong to anyone and does not arise or fall away.

9.13 The “impassive perception”, derived from true knowledge of physical and mental phenomena which makes the mind become equanimous, will influence the mind to free itself from all phenomena and finally attain Nibbāna, the end of suffering. This is explained clearly in the Teaching of the Buddha to Bahiya:

*Bahiya, you should learn to understand
as such.*

*Bahiya, whenever you see is just see, hear
is just hear,
perceive is just perceive, or realize is just
realize,*

*at such moment, the so-called 'you' will
no longer exist.*

*Whenever there is no 'you', at such
moment,*

*'you' will neither exist in this realm,
next realm, nor between those realms.*

That is the end of suffering."

(Bahiya Sutta/Tipitaka 25/49)



10

What is the Benefit of
Mindfulness?

10. What is the Benefit of Mindfulness?

10.1 When we hear about “being mindful of the natural condition at the present moment as it actually is”, many practitioners may doubt if such simple dhamma practice is useful when even more difficult exercises cannot make us attain enlightenment. **The truth is, mindfulness of physical and mental phenomena, or satipaṭṭhāna is the most miraculous thing, so much so that the Buddha Himself did confirm that it is the only path to purification, and with speedy outcome. Enlightenment can be attained from as short as 7 days, 7 months, and or 7 years.**

10.2 We do not need to imagine what the benefits of mindfulness will be, as the Buddha has already explained them, as quoted below.

*Bhikkhus,
when (1) sati sampajañña is present,
endowed with the cause for sati
sampajañña,
(2) the cause for hiri ottappa gets
completed.
When hiri ottappa is present,
endowed with the cause for hiri ottappa,
(3) indriya saṁvara gets completed.
When the indriya saṁvara is present,
endowed with the indriya saṁvara,*

(4) **sīla** gets completed.

When *sīla* is present,
endowed with the cause for *sīla*,

(5) **sammā samādhi** gets completed.

When *sammā samādhi* is present,
endowed with the cause for *sammā samādhi*,

(6) **yathābhūṭayañāṇanadassana** gets completed.

When *yathābhūṭayañāṇanadassana* is present,

endowed with the cause for
yathābhūṭayañāṇanadassana,

(7) **nibbidā virāga** gets completed.

When *nibbidā virāga* is present,
endowed with the cause for *nibbidā virāga*,

(8) **vimuttayanadassana** gets completed.

(Sati Sutra/Tipitaka 23/187)

10.3 Based on the above saying of the Buddha, it is obvious that all the supreme virtues can be perfected only through mindfulness and clear comprehension (sati and sampajañña).

10.3.1 Moral shame and moral dread of unwholesome outcome (Hiri-ottappa): With mindfulness and clear comprehension, the mind will be aware of all defilements (kilesa) that arise, and of harm they will bring. Defilements will cause wrong bodily actions, wrong speech, wrong mentality, in short they will bring suffering. Thus moral shame and moral dread of evil outcome will arise, eliminating any chance to commit a serious immoral act. Hiri and ottappa are what make a human become a divine being (deva-dhamma).

10.3.2 Sense-restraint (Indriyasaṃvara): When not restrained, once the eyes see, ears hear, nose smells, tongue tastes, body senses, and mind feels, unwholesome actions or thoughts may result. But for those who are mindful and have clear comprehension, with moral shame and moral dread, sense-restraint will arise automatically. To be aware of objects of consciousness when they arise at the sense organs is the most direct way to do insight meditation (vipassanā-kammaṭṭhanā).

10.3.3 Morality, or the normal state of mind (Sila): With mindfulness (sati) and clear comprehension (sampajañña), once objects of consciousness

impinge upon the six sense-doors, the mind will neither be dominated by unwholesomeness, nor affected by resultant feelings that arise. This state of normalcy (*sīla*) is characterized by its pure state, with the mind awake, joyful, and automatically focused. Those who had experienced this state before will know well the joy of living in the present. Moreover, this normalcy will result in happiness, bring wealth, and may even lead to Nibbāna. This is because the more normal the mind is, the less the mental formation. And if all mental formations stop, the mind will enter the state of Nibbāna, eternal bliss beyond all formations.

10.3.4 Right concentration (*Sammāsamādhi*, or stability of mind, as mentioned in Clause 6.4 of this book): By nature, the mind with morality (*citta* with *sīla*) is the mind with right concentration, and vice versa the mind with right concentration is the mind with morality. Morality and right concentration (*sīla* and *sammāsamādhi*) are two disciplinary tools that complement each other. It is like washing the right hand with the left, and washing the left hand with the right. With lots of practice in right concentration, some practitioners may gain tranquility at the level of absorption (*jhāna*), which will bring happiness in the present life and make them be reborn in the fine-material world or immaterial world (*brahmaloka*) if *nibbāna* has not already been attained.

10.3.5 The true understanding of physical and mental phenomena according to reality (Yathābhūtañāṇa, anadassana, bhūta here means physical and mental phenomena or the five aggregates): To see the truth is a part insight development, of which the proximate cause is right concentration. When the mind is stable, neutral and aware of a physical or mental object, it will perceive the object as it truly is, and not as it wants it to be (with craving) or thinks it should be (with wrong view).

10.3.6 Dispassion and disenchantment (Nibbidāvirāga): When the mind sees physical and mental phenomena as they truly are, Nibbidā will arise. This is a state of dispassion and disenchantment with all phenomena because it has realized their insubstantiality and meaninglessness. Dispassion is not worldly boredom, which is being bored of suffering, but fond of happiness. It views suffering and happiness, good and evil, rough and refined, objects internal and external, as equally insubstantial.

With dispassion, the mind will no longer want to escape suffering or seek pleasure. Upon continued mindfulness development, the mind will become truly neutral to physical and mental phenomena, and realize the truth that (1) there are no animal, person, self, I or them, but only physical and mental phenomena; (2) physical and mental phenomena

are subject to the three characteristics of existence (tilakkhana), they are impermanent, suffering, non self, and cannot be controlled; (3) each physical or mental phenomenon arises when there is a cause, changes when the cause changes, and falls away when the cause is gone; (4) clinging to physical and mental phenomena causes suffering; and (5) when wisdom is fully developed, it will conclude that physical and mental phenomena are the root cause of suffering. This is the ultimate knowledge of suffering, which leads to clear comprehension of the Noble Truths (ariya sacca) that “the origin of suffering (samudaya) causes suffering (dukkha), and that ignorance of suffering (dukkha) causes the origin of suffering (samudaya)”. Suffering and its origin are interdependent, arising and falling away one after the other continuously with no end. However, **“with clear comprehension of suffering, its origin is eradicated, and with total extinction of the origin of suffering nirodha or Nibbāna is realized. This is the Noble Path.”** This is the end of Suffering. Nibbāna is non-craving, or **virāga dhamma**.

In summary, once the mind becomes indifferent towards all conditioned states and realizes the Noble Truths, it will make an immediate leap towards liberation. This is an unintended act on the practitioner’s part -- once he lets go of the five aggregates he will instantaneously attain nirodha,

Nibbāna, visaṅkhāra or virāga, which is the ultimate goal of dhamma practice in Buddhism.

10.3.7 Perfection of knowledge about the state of liberation from suffering and defilement (Vimuttayanadassana): When the mind becomes unattached to physical and mental phenomena, and realizes Nibbāna, the practitioner will gain understanding of the enlightenment process, and of the state of Nibbāna as well. He will realize that Nibbāna is void of defilements and aggregates. But this is not void in the sense of annihilationism (ucchedadiṭṭhi). At the same time it is not a kind of bhava (existence state) that is eternally permanent being formed up by the mind (sassatadiṭṭhi). Nibbāna is a natural phenomenon that is so complete and perfect all the time. It is tranquil, peaceful, pure, unconditioned and free from all disturbances.

The practitioner who has experienced Nibbāna after having gone through the four stages of enlightenment will be completely liberated from suffering. This is because the **mind is free from defilements (āsava), like a chick which had to break the eggshell and come out, there is no way it will ever go back into the eggshell again.** The mind has earned freedom and eternal bliss because craving no longer has control over it. It has been relieved of all desires and grievances. There is contentment in every bodily posture, day or night, asleep or

awake. Those who had experienced Nibbāna at the moment of enlightenment may be able to recall the experience again in their lifetime by two methods: (1) by not paying attention (*manasikāra*) to all conditioned states (*saṅkhāra*), after which the mind will experience Nibbāna; or (2) by reflecting on Nibbāna directly. These two practices are the fruit of Nibbāna in the present life, which can only be attained by doing mindfulness development.

10.4 In conclusion, the more frequently mindfulness arises the better. Besides developing mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) of physical and mental phenomena, there is no other a path leading to the Noble Truth. Any teaching that aims at conditioning (wholesome) reality to correct conditioned (unwholesome) reality is a teaching that takes a long time to accomplish (but in the beginning this method may be necessary to some). Any teaching that focuses on developing mindfulness of conditioned states (both wholesome and unwholesome) until the mind is liberated from conditioning (both wholesome and unwholesome) is the teaching that leads to the shortest path (*magga*) to the extinction of suffering (*nirodha/Nibbāna*).

The Forest Tradition venerable monks who are the author's meditation masters (e.g. Luang Pu Dun Atulo, Luang Pu Thate Desaransi, Luang Por Budh Thaniyo, Luang Pu Suwat Suvaco) stressed again and again that the author has to develop mindfulness. Some quoted the core of the teaching of Luang Pu Mun Bhuridatta

Mahathera that “**too much concentration (tranquility) meditation makes the path too lengthy, too much thinking makes the mind scattered. The key point is to develop mindfulness in daily life.**

When doing walking meditation, one must walk and be mindful. When doing sitting meditation, one must sit and be mindful. Whatever one does, one must do it and be mindful because whenever mindful, there is perseverance, whenever mindless, there is no perseverance.” The author has always followed the teachings of these meditation masters, and use them as guidelines when doing practice.

(July 30, 2006)

NOTE

Cycle of rebirth (vatta)

“From samudaya arises dukkha.

From ignorance of dukkha arises samudaya.”

Absence of the cycle of rebirth (vivatta)

“With keen insight into dukkha, abandoned is samudaya.

With the extinction of samudaya, attained is Nibbāna.”



VENERABLE LUANGPOR PRAMOTE PAMOJJO

Venerable “Luang Por” Pramote is a Buddhist monk residing in Suan Santidham Temple (The Garden of the Peaceful Dhamma), Sriracha, Chonburi, Thailand. He teaches the dhamma to avid practitioners looking to truly understand the middle way and to progress in their practice. Bangkok residents set out on an hour and a half drive in the darkness of the early morning to arrive before sunrise. They line up outside the temple to get good seats to listen to his teachings, express their concerns regarding their own practice and receive individual advice – a custom that has been coined “submitting their homework” for the headmaster to fine-tune or modify.

He travels tirelessly around Thailand and abroad teaching and helping to wake up the minds of people as he goes, in what is quickly becoming one of the biggest Buddhist enlightenment movements in recent times.

Luang Por became a monk in 2001 after being a keen meditator since he was seven years old. He has had many teachers along the way, but considers himself primarily a disciple of Luang Pu Dune, from North Eastern Thailand’s forest monk lineage of Luang Pu Mun Bhūridatto.

The only path to freedom from suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path, or morality, concentration and wisdom.

In brief it is mindfulness practice, or constant observation of one's body and mind, until the mind gets insight into the truth that this body and mind are the root of all suffering. Only then will the mind eradicate craving, clinging (intense craving), the mental process of becoming (mental formation), rebirth (acquisition of sense-organs), and become liberated.

The Path to Enlightenment II

Venerable Luangpor Pramote Pamojjo