

Satipatthana Vipassana (1954, excerpts): The Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw's Approach to Mindfulness and Insight Meditation

Namo Buddhassa . . . Honor to the Fully Enlightened One

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

The terms "noting," "observing" and "contemplating" are used here to indicate the fixing of attention on an object. . . . According to the instructions of the Satipatthana Sutta, one should be mindful of the activities of walking while walking, of those of standing, sitting and lying down while standing, sitting and lying down, respectively. One should also be mindful of other bodily activities as each of them occurs. . . .

When contemplating rising and falling [of the breath], the disciple should keep his mind on the abdomen. He will then come to know the upward movement or expansion of the abdomen on breathing in, and the downward movement or contraction on breathing out. A mental note should be made as "rising" for the upward movement and "falling" for the downward movement. If these movements are not clearly noticed by simply fixing the mind on them, one or both hands should be placed on the abdomen.

When there is no other conspicuous object, the disciple should carry on the exercise of noting these two movements as "rising, falling, rising, falling, rising, falling." While thus being occupied with this exercise, there may be occasions when the mind wanders about. When concentration is weak, it is very difficult to control the mind. Though it is directed to the movements of rising and falling, the mind will not stay with them but will wander to other places. This wandering mind should not be let alone. It should be noted as "wandering, wandering, wandering" as soon as it is noticed that it is wandering. On noting once or twice the mind usually stops wandering, then the exercise of noting "rising, falling" should be continued. When it is again found that the mind has reached a place, it should be noted as "reaching, reaching, reaching." Then the exercise of noting "rising, falling" should be reverted to as soon as these movements are clear.

On meeting with a person in the imagination, it should be noted as "meeting, meeting," after which the usual exercise should be reverted to. Sometimes the fact that it is mere imagination is discovered when one speaks with that imaginary person, and it should then be noted as "speaking, speaking." The real purport is to note every mental activity as it occurs. For instance, it should be noted as "thinking" at the moment of thinking, and as "reflecting," "planning," "knowing," "attending," rejoicing," "feeling lazy," "feeling happy," "disgusted," etc., as the case may be, on the occurrence of each activity. The contemplation of mental activities and noticing them is called *cittanupassana*, contemplation of mind. . . .

Bodily actions should be carried out slowly, and these slow movements should be followed up and noted as "lifting, lifting," "moving, moving," "touching, touching," in the successive order of the process. Again, on moving one should note, "moving, moving," and on putting down, note "putting, putting." If, when this process of changing posture has been completed, there is nothing more to be noted, the usual exercise of noting

"rising, falling" should be continued.

There should be no stop or break in between. The preceding act of noting and the one which follows should be contiguous. Similarly, the preceding concentration and the one which follows should be contiguous, and the preceding act of knowing and the one which follows should be contiguous. In this way, the gradual development by stages of mindfulness, concentration and knowledge takes place . . .

If he intends to change his posture from sitting to standing, he should first make a note of the intending mind as "intending, intending," and proceed with the arranging of the hands and legs in the successive stages by noting as "raising," "moving," "stretching," "touching," "pressing," and so forth. When the body sways forward, it should be noted as "swaying, swaying." While in the course of standing up, there occurs in the body a feeling of lightness as well as the act of rising. Attention should be fixed on these factors and a note made as "rising, rising." The act of rising should be carried out slowly. . . .

On coming to an erect position, a note should be made as "standing, standing." If one happens to look around, a note should be made as "looking, seeing," and on walking each step should be noted as "right step, left step" or "walking, walking." At each step, attention should be fixed on the sole of the foot as it moves from the point of lifting the leg to the point of placing it down.

While walking in quick steps or taking a long walk, a note on one section of each step as "right step, left step" or "walking, walking" will do. In the case of walking slowly, each step may be divided into three sections — lifting, moving forward and placing down. In the beginning of the exercise, a note should be made of the two parts of each step: as "lifting" by fixing the attention on the upward movement of the foot from the beginning to the end, and as "placing" by fixing on the downward movement from the beginning to the end.

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

Yogis who take up this course of training should bear in mind that they are on the highway which has been taken by Buddhas, Arahats and Ariyas. . . . Impermanence, suffering and non-self will be realized through direct personal experience, and with the full development of these knowledges, Nibbana will be realized. . . . May yogis meet with every success in their noble endeavor.

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