

# Dhamma Bell

Issue 4 ❧ Winter 2008



Newsletter



## **Dhamma Bell Newsletter**

*Dhamma Bell Newsletter* shares news twice a year of Tathāgata Meditation Center (Như Lai Thiên Viện), which was formed in 1987 as the Vipassanā Meditation Group under the spiritual guidance of the late Sayādawgyi U Silānanda. In 1991, the group founded a meditation center and named it Tathāgata Meditation Center. All are welcome to come to Tathāgata Meditation Center (TMC) and practice Satipaṭṭhāna Vipassanā meditation.



# Editor's Note **The Dhamma & Our Daily Life**

**A**S SAYĀDAWGYI U SILĀNANDA ALWAYS REMINDED YOGIS AT THE END OF HIS RETREATS, we should not leave our mindfulness at the gate when we leave the Tathāgata Meditation Center, but must take it with us into our daily life.

When we are at a retreat, we are free of worry: we are provided with the necessities—food and a place to sleep. The only thing that we have to be concerned about is being mindful. Having everything provided for us allows us to fully focus on the practice of Satipaṭṭhāna Vipassanā—the Four Foundations of Mindfulness—and thus to see the three characteristics of everything that has a beginning and an end: impermanence, suffering, and no core or no substance.

However, as soon as we leave TMC, we enter a physical and mental testing ground, with traffic, cell phones, other people, and all of our daily obligations. All of these test our ability to apply what we have learned during our retreat. In addition to this, we need to make a transition from intensive mindfulness practice to maintaining a more general awareness in order to live skillfully and happily in our daily life.

Being mindful means having an open mind. Mindfulness is an open, spacious road. As soon as we leave TMC behind and enter the street that is our daily life, we experience pressure and tension. At first, having just come from a retreat and its intensive mindfulness practice, we may feel “It’s OK,” but as pressure and tension build, we start to feel uncomfortable, and we start to look for an excuse to avoid the cause of the pressure and tension, but we

can’t avoid it. When we experience this pressure and tension again and again, we get impatient, then perhaps resentful, frustrated, agitated.

Once we become aware—mindful—of, for example, agitation, we know that we are departing from the open, spacious road and are getting sidetracked. If we aren’t mindful, our vision becomes narrow and our mind becomes narrow. The only thing that we focus on is this agitation, resentment, frustration, which leads to unskillful words or deeds.

Just at the point of the arising of tension or pressure, of agitation, resentment, frustration, etc., we need to pay attention, be mindful, be aware, observe our state of mind and body. One way to get back to this open, spacious, clear road and open, spacious, clear mind is to remember what we experienced and what we came to know at the intensive retreat: nothing lasts; everyone is doing their best; things come and go, including the air we are breathing. In our daily life, when our mind is unbalanced—by tension, impatience, resentment, agitation—applying this knowledge can help bring the mind back into balance.

During a mindfulness retreat, we pay attention to the breath or the rising and the falling of the abdomen. Every time our mind goes out or becomes sidetracked, we bring it back to the breath or to the rising and the falling of the abdomen. By remembering to keep bringing our mind back again and again, our mind will stay with the breath. We are able to keep the mind still. By keeping a still and balanced mind, we can stay on the open

road without trouble. In other words, we will not act or react with unskillful words or deeds.

In our daily life, when our mind becomes unbalanced we need to be aware that the mind is unbalanced and we need to accept the fact that we are experiencing tension, pressure, agitation, resentment, frustration—acknowledge and accept the state of mind, the condition of mind. Once we have acknowledged and accepted it, we can gently pull the mind back to the breath. In this way, we keep bringing ourselves back to the open, spacious road of a balanced mind. When we do this, we will come to feel that our mind has become light, bright, and clear again. In contrast, the narrow road is dark, heavy, confused, and constricting. When we feel tight, closed-in, constricted, we know that our mind is closing. We need to bring the mind back to the open, spacious, clear road.

When we are on this open, spacious, clear road, we are back in touch with our precious life. Being alive, breathing, is precious. Just through awareness of breathing, we come to see the nature of air: it comes and goes; it moves; it can be cool and it can be warm. We come to see the function of air: our life support. We come to see the impermanent nature of the air element, and we come to see that we cannot control this air element. We can see this impermanence and lack of control only while we have this precious life, only when we are mindful of the breath. We need to take this mindfulness with us from TMC, where we were safe and protected, to the busy and challenging street that is our daily life. ☺☺

## 2009 Schedule of Events

### Special Retreat Schedule (Tentative)

**February 20–March 1:** Ten-day retreat with Venerable Khippa Panno

**May 16–June 28:** Forty-four-day retreat with Sayādawgyi U Pandita

**August 29–September 12:** Fifteen-day retreat with Beelin Sayādaw (U Paññadīpa)

**November 7–29:** Twenty-three-day retreat with a meditation teacher from Panditarama

### Youth Class Schedule (9:00 A.M. – 12:30 P.M.)

**January 11, February 15, March 8, April 5, May 3, July 5, September 13, October 4, November 1**

### Young Adult & Children’s Retreat Schedule (Tentative)

**August 7–11** Young Adult retreat  
**August 12–16** Children’s retreat

### Beautification Days

**February 15, May 3, November 1**

### Weekend Retreat Schedule

**January 3–4, January 17–18**

**February 7–8**

**March 14–15, March 28–29**

**April 11–12, April 25–26**

**May 9–10**

**July 11–12, July 25–26**

**August 22–23**

**September 26–27**

**October 10–11, October 24–25**

### Events

**February 1** Lunar New Year

**May 10** Buddha Day

**July 12** Vassa

**August 23** Appreciation Day

**October 11** Kathina

# Stepping into *by Sayādawgyi U Silānanda* Sātipaṭṭhana Vipassanā

(from a Dhamma talk given on November 1995, during a 9-day retreat at Tathāgata Meditation Center (Nhu Lai Thiên Viên) by the late Sayādawgyi U Silānanda, adapted for Dhamma Bell).  
Transcribed and edited by Theikdi and Maureen O' Brien

**W**HEN YOGIS REPORT THEIR EXPERIENCE IN INTERVIEWS, THEY OFTEN ASK WHETHER THEY ARE PRACTICING CORRECTLY. And I have often had to assure them that so long as they are mindful of the object at the present moment, they are doing the right thing. Some people have doubts about whether they are practicing correctly, probably because they do not know the basics of Vipassanā meditation, so it is important that yogis who practice Vipassanā meditation should know the basics of Vipassanā.

Before we go into the basics of Vipassanā, first, we should understand what Vipassanā is. Vipassanā is translated as “insight meditation,” meaning “the meditation which leads to insight into the true nature of things.” I think that is a good translation, but it does not tell us the literal meaning of the word. The literal meaning of the word Vipassanā is “seeing in various ways.” Actually, the word Vipassanā is made up of two components: Vi and Passanā. Vi is a prefix which here means “in various ways, and Passanā means “seeing.” So Vipassanā means “seeing in various ways.” And “seeing” here means not seeing with the physical eyes, but seeing with the mental eye, so “seeing” really means knowing or understanding.

So Vipassanā means “seeing or knowing or understanding in various ways,” and “in various ways” means knowing mental and physical phenomena as impermanent, as suffering, and as non-soul. And the nature of impermanence, suffering, and non-soul are called “the three char-

acteristics of conditioned phenomena.” All conditioned phenomena have these three characteristics in common, so we can call them the common characteristics or general characteristics of all conditioned phenomena. When you practice Vipassanā meditation, you must see these three characteristics. And only when you see these three characteristics can you say that you are practicing Vipassanā meditation. However, before you see these three characteristics, you can be called a practitioner of Vipassanā because you are going towards that goal, or you are in the neighborhood of seeing these three characteristics. To sum up, Vipassanā is seeing the three characteristics or three marks of all conditioned phenomena.

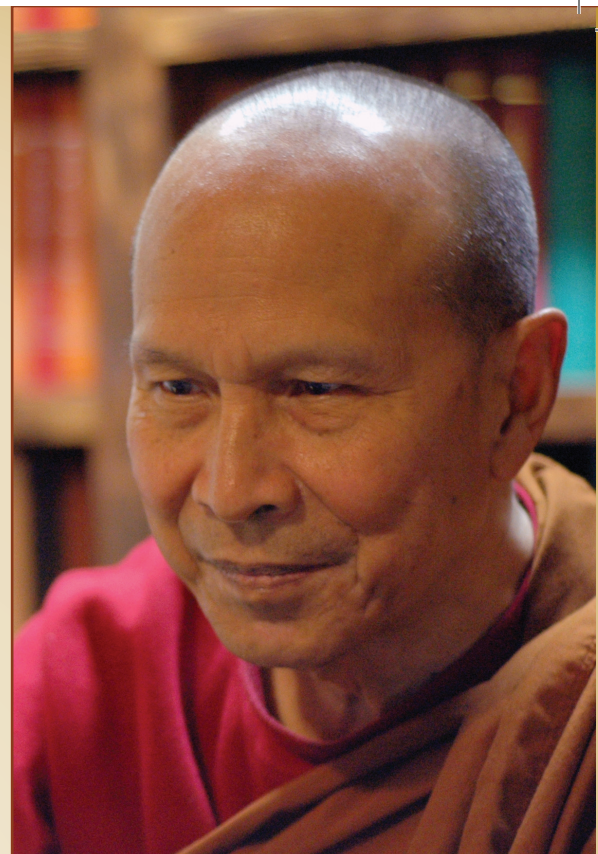
What must we do when we practice Vipassanā? Since Vipassanā means to see—to see the three characteristics, or to see the true nature of things—we must look, we must observe. Without looking, without observing, we will not see these three characteristics. Vipassanā teachers use different expressions when teaching Vipassanā meditation. Some use “observe,” some use “be mindful” or “make mental notes” or “watch” or “be aware of.” All of these mean the same thing—that is, to be fully aware of, to be thoroughly aware of the object. Mindfulness is defined in the Commentaries as something that is “non-wobbling.” This means something that does not float on the surface. What this means is that if it is mindfulness, it must not be superficial. It must be a deep awareness, a thorough awareness of the object. So when we practice Vipassanā meditation, we have to be thoroughly mindful of the object, and we pay close attention so that we are fully aware of the object.

What do we do when we practice Vipassanā meditation? We just watch, or we observe, or we make mental notes, or we try to be mindful of or be aware of the object. Vipassanā meditation is mindfulness meditation: when you practice Vipassanā, you practice mindfulness.

## Projects at TMC

The following projects have been completed since the last issue of *Dhamma Bell*:

- Construction of a new men’s restroom and showers
- Planting of magnolia and redwood trees
- Remodeling the front gate



There is another word that you should understand, and that is Satipaṭṭhana. Sometimes we use Vipassanā and Satipaṭṭhana interchangeably. When you practice Vipassanā, you are practicing Satipaṭṭhana, or the Foundations of Mindfulness, but the practice of Foundations of Mindfulness is wider in scope than Vipassanā. Sometimes you may be practicing Foundations of Mindfulness, but you may not be practicing Vipassanā. But whenever you practice Vipassanā, you are practicing the Foundations of Mindfulness. So whether you practice Foundations of Mindfulness or whether you practice Vipassanā, what you practice is mindfulness: trying to be mindful, mindful of the object.

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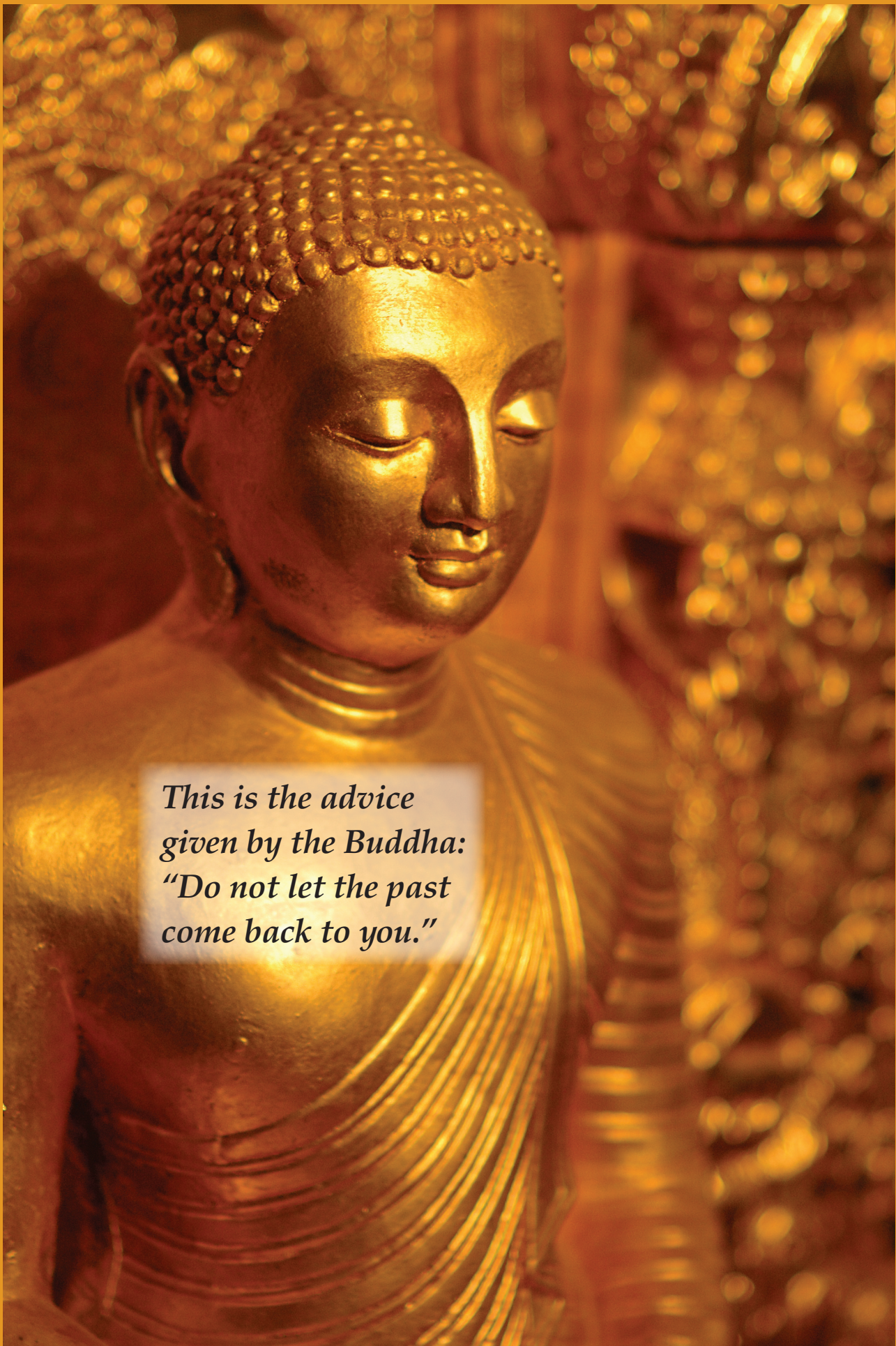


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*If you would like additional copies or if you would like an issue sent to someone else as a gift, please let the Tathāgata Meditation Center know. If you would like to help support the ongoing work of the Tathāgata Meditation Center, please feel free to offer dana. May sati be your friend.*





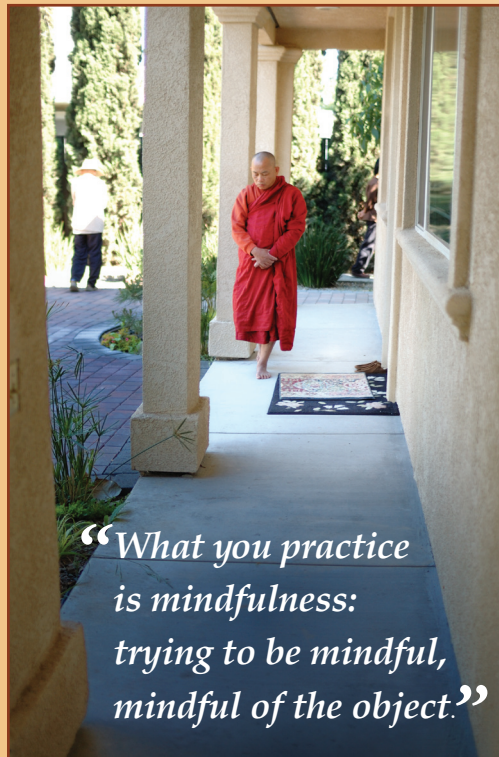
*This is the advice  
given by the Buddha:  
"Do not let the past  
come back to you."*



When we practice Vipassanā, we observe. What must we observe? In other words, what must we be mindful of? There are two answers to this question. One answer, according to the language used in the books, is that we must observe the Five Aggregates of Clinging. I hope that many of you are familiar with these words, “Five Aggregates of Clinging.” In the teachings of the Buddha, beings are analyzed into aggregates, and there are beings that have five aggregates and there are beings that have four aggregates, and so on. These are, actually, the components of a being. For human beings, there are five such components: matter, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. All of these five aggregates can be objects of clinging. “Clinging” here means attachment and wrong view. We can cling to these five aggregates with attachment or with wrong view. That means either that we see something and we like it and we are attached to it or that we take it to be permanent or to be enduring. So everything in the world is the object of clinging: the object of attachment or the object of wrong view.

There are some things belonging to the five aggregates that cannot be the object of Vipassanā meditation, but they are very few. The five aggregates that belong to the mundane world are all called Aggregates of Clinging. In everyday usage, “The Five Aggregates of Clinging” means everything we experience, everything that is presented to us through the six sense doors. Eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind are called senses in the teaching of the Buddha, and objects are presented to us through these six sense doors. For example, visible objects: when the visible object comes into the avenue of the eyes, there is seeing, so we say that the visible object is presented to us through the door of the eyes. So whatever we see, hear, and so on—whatever we experience—can be the object of attachment or the object of wrong view. We may take them to be desirable, and we may want them, we may cling to them with attachment; or we may take them to be permanent and so on, and so we may cling to them with wrong view. So whatever can be the object of attachment and wrong view is what we must observe when we practice Vipassanā meditation. In practice, that means everything: everything that we see, hear, and so on, are the objects to be observed when we practice Vipassanā meditation. So to the question “What must we observe?” we can just say we must observe everything.

The next question is “Why must we observe these objects, the Aggregates of Clinging?” or “For what purpose are we to observe these objects?” We must observe these objects so that we do not cling to them or because we want to avoid clinging to these objects. If do not observe them, if we do not watch them, if we are not mindful of them, then we tend to cling to them. We tend to cling to them with attachment or we tend to cling to them with wrong view. When there is clinging, there follow actions, and when there is action, there is reaction. For example, we want to be reborn in a world of deities. We have attachment to that world of deities. Then in order to



*“What you practice is mindfulness: trying to be mindful, mindful of the object.”*

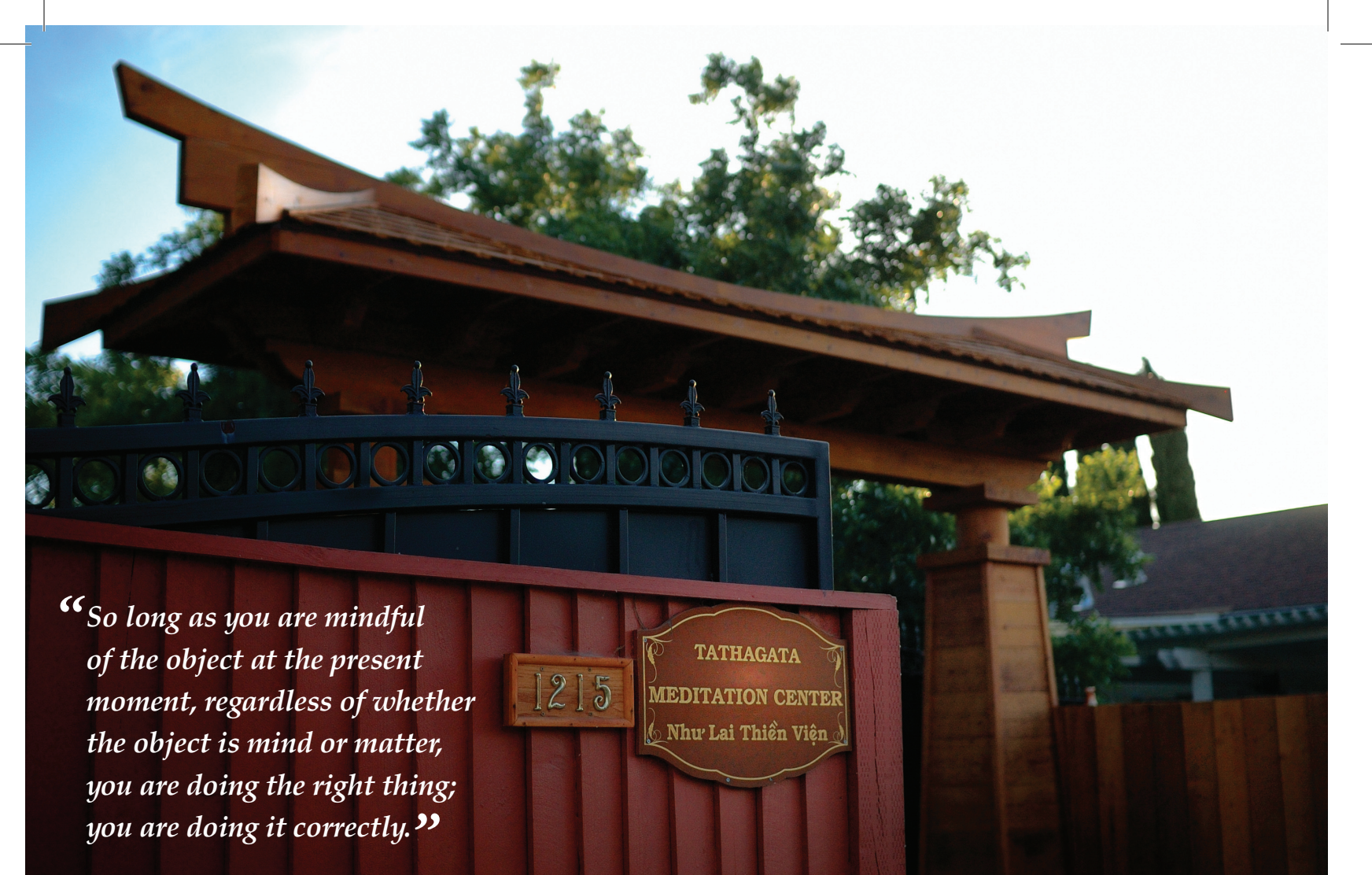
reach that world, we will do something here. Sometimes we will do the right thing and sometimes we will do wrong things. Whether we do the right thing or the wrong thing, when we do something, we acquire what is called *Kamma*, that is, “action.” When there is *Kamma*, good or bad, there is bound to be the result of this *Kamma*—again, a good or bad result. Whether the results are good or bad, they are, in the ultimate analysis, nothing but suffering. When there is clinging, there is action, and when there is action, there is reaction in the form of suffering. So clinging prolongs suffering; clinging produces suffering. If we want to get rid of suffering, then we cannot afford to have clinging. In order not to have clinging, we have to observe the objects. So the purpose of watching or the purpose of

mindfulness is to avoid clinging to the objects. If we do not watch them, if we do not apply mindfulness to the objects we encounter or experience, we will always react to them with clinging. Again, in order to avoid clinging to the objects, we have to be watchful or we have to observe them. When we observe them, we will come to see their true nature, and when we see their true nature, there will be no chance for clinging to arise. So watching or being mindful of the object at the present moment is necessary in order to avoid clinging to that object.

When must we observe the objects? Are we to observe the objects when they are gone or when they are about to come? Observing the objects is necessary in order to see their true nature so that we can avoid clinging, and in order to see their true nature, we need to observe them when they are present. We cannot examine a thing that is not present with us. We cannot examine something that we saw yesterday. We may recall it to our minds, but not see it as clearly as when it is in front of us. So in order to see the true nature of the object, we must observe it, we must watch it, when it is present. When it is gone, we cannot see its true nature. When it has not yet come, we cannot see, we cannot understand its true nature. So in Vipassanā meditation, the present object, the object at the present moment, is the most important.

What will happen if we do not observe the object at the present moment? I think you all know the answer. There will be clinging. Again, when there is clinging, there will be action, and when there is action, there will be reaction. Let’s say we see an object. If we do not observe it, if we are not mindful of it, we tend to have attachment to that object. And once we have attachment to that object, that attachment will live with that object even when that object is past and we recall it to our mind because it is as if we have embedded attachment in that object. For example, say you see a beautiful thing. You like it and so you have attachment for that thing. The next time you remember that thing, you remember it with that attachment embedded in it, or you remember it along with that attachment. That is, you have, as it were, invested attachment to that object. And that is called “the latency of defilement” in the object. There are two kinds of defilements: those that are latent in the object and those that are latent in our continuity of consciousness—in our mind. Actually, there is nothing latent in





*“So long as you are mindful of the object at the present moment, regardless of whether the object is mind or matter, you are doing the right thing; you are doing it correctly.”*

the objects because the objects are just the objects and there is no attachment whatever in an object. But when we are attached to it, we have put this attachment into this object, and so when we recall it to our mind later, it comes to us along with that attachment. So we practice Vipassanā in order to avoid or to get rid of that latency in objects. If we do not observe, then we will always embed attachment or wrong view into the object, and whenever we remember those objects, they will come back to us with these clings embedded.

What will happen if we observe objects while they are present? We will not cling to them. Clinging will not arise because when we are careful and are watching the object, there will be no chance for clinging to come in. When you are noting “seeing, seeing” or “hearing, hearing” or just “in and out,” “in and out,” or “rising, falling,” “rising, falling,” and you pay really close attention, there will be no chance for attachment or wrong view to arise. So at every moment of mindfulness, you are doing away with or you are avoiding clinging. When there is no clinging, there is no action dependent on that clinging.

When there is no action, there will be no reaction, or there will be no result in the future. And that will lead to the end of suffering.

So if we observe when the object is present, we will not embed attachment or wrong view in that object, and when we recall it later to our minds, it will come without that attachment and without wrong view. There will be no latency of mental defilement in that object. In other words, whenever we recall that object to our mind, we will not get attachment or wrong view regarding that object.

Now how must we observe? We must observe the objects so that we are thoroughly aware or thoroughly mindful of them. Our aim is to avoid clinging regarding the object, so we must make careful observation of each and every object that becomes evident or that becomes prominent at the present moment. So the object which is prominent at the present moment is the most important for those who practice Vipassana meditation, and they cannot afford not to be mindful, not to be aware of that object.

“Do not let the past come back to you, do not long for the future. What is past is already abandoned, and what is future has not yet reached us. But a wise person who observes things that are present at every moment of their presence should develop Vipassanā, which cannot be dragged away by attachment and wrong view, which cannot be destroyed by attachment and wrong view.” This is the advice given by the Buddha: “Do not let the past come back to you.” That means do not think of the past and do not long for the future. What is past is already gone and what is future has not yet come. So a person who is wise observes things that are present at the moment.

Another thing when you observe the objects is to pay bare attention. That means just attention, just mindfulness, and not other subjective additions. When we see an object, sometimes—or most of the time—we do not stop at just seeing. After seeing an object we make judgments: “It is beautiful;” “it is ugly”—or something like that—or “it is pleasurable;” “it is not pleasurable,” and so on. When we make judgments, mental defilements follow them. When we judge



an object as beautiful, then we like it, and if we judge it as ugly, aversion follows this judgment. But here we want to see the true nature of the objects, and we don't want to cling to them, so in order to see their true nature, we have to clear away the other things that we might have put on them. If they are hidden under these additions, we will not see the true nature of the things we observe, so it is important that when we pay attention to the objects, when we are mindful of the objects, we are just to be mindful—a simple mindfulness. For example, speculation or evaluation of the objects is not to be done because these lead to mental defilements.

In short, how must we observe? We must observe the objects while they are present and we must observe so that we do not add any judgments or anything on to these objects and we do not take anything, any reality, from those objects. If we can follow this advice, we will be doing the right thing.

So long as you are mindful of the object at the present moment, regardless of whether the object is mind or matter, you are doing the right thing; you are doing it correctly. Sometimes you may see visions or you may have strong sensations and other phenomena. But whatever the object is, if you are just aware of that object at that moment, you are doing the right thing. If you give up mindfulness—for example, because you are afraid—that will be the wrong thing to do. So during the practice of meditation, please bear in mind that what is important is mindfulness, and so you can say, "So long as I am mindful of the object at

the present moment—whether the main object or the secondary objects—I am doing the right thing."

These are the basics of Vipassanā meditation. We have to observe the objects so as to see their true nature. "True nature" means that they are impermanent, they are suffering, and they are non-soul. Only when we see these three characteristics will we be able to get rid of or avoid clinging—by attachment or by wrong view—regarding the objects. When there is no clinging, there will be no suffering produced by clinging. And so when we practice Vipassanā meditation, we observe the object at the present moment, and we pay just bare attention to the object, without any subjective additions of our own. If you bear this in mind, I think your practice will be just fine.

The Buddha gave this advice to an ascetic who came to him while he was going on his alms round and asked that the Buddha teach him: "Let there be just seeing with regard to what is seen. Let there be just hearing with regard to what is heard. Let there be just sensing—as smell, taste or touch—with regard to what is sensed. Let there be just thinking with regard to what is thought."

This means that when you see something, you stop at seeing and do not go over into liking it or disliking it. So with everything we experience—whether it is sight or sound or smell or taste or touch or thought—we should stop at seeing, hearing, and so on. This is easier said than done. It is very difficult to stop at just seeing when we see something

because we are trained to make judgments, and before we know what we have done, we have already made a judgment. You hear a sound, and then instantly you know that it is the sound of a car or the sound of an airplane, and so on. The Buddha's advice to stop at just seeing with regard to what is seen, and so on, means that you stop there and do not add your subjective additions on to these objects, such as "This is beautiful." "This is ugly." "This is desirable" or "This is undesirable." If we can do this, we will be able to avoid clinging to these objects altogether. Without clinging, there will be no actions and reactions, and so that is the end of—or that leads to the end of—suffering. ☺☺☺



TMC volunteers planting >

# Vegetarian Phở

## Ingredients (for 8 bowls of Phở)

- Noodles:** 2 bags of pho noodles (fresh or dried)
- Toppings:** 1 small bowl of sliced mushrooms (shitake and/or white button mushrooms)
- 1 small bowl of sliced fried tofu
- 1 small bowl of sliced vegetarian chicken-flavored ham
- Broth:** chopped cabbage, sliced carrots, sliced daikon, sliced celery, baby corn
- 2 onions, 4 cloves, 2 stems of ginger
- salt
- mushroom powder
- Condiments:** minced green onion, cilantro, fresh chili, lemon or lime, basil, bean sprouts



## Preparation

- Broth:**
  1. Cook all vegetables for one hour in 10 bowls of water, at medium heat.
  2. Roast onions and ginger until brown, and add 4 cloves. (For convenience, you can buy a "phở spice bag" at any Vietnamese store.)
  3. Remove all of the solids from the broth, season with salt and mushroom powder, and keep the broth at a boil.
- Noodles:**
  1. Dip fresh noodles (or soak dried noodles) in plenty of boiling water for one minute.
  2. Remove noodles from water and put into bowls.
- Toppings:** Stir-fry sliced fried vegetarian ham and tofu with sliced soft mushrooms (with onion, salt, and mushroom powder).
- Serving:** Right before serving, put toppings over warm noodles. Then pour boiling broth over them. Sprinkle with black pepper, sliced onion, minced green onion, cilantro, and fresh chili. (optional: hoisin sauce, basil leaves, bean sprouts, lemon or lime)







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**Inside:**

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## Dhamma Thoughts for Yogis

**T**HERE IS NO AMOUNT OF MONEY OR GOLD THAT CAN REPAY PARENTS FOR ALL THAT THEY HAVE GIVEN THEIR CHILDREN. Even if children could make their parents universal monarchs, this would not be enough to repay the debt that they owe their parents. The following story is an illustration of how *atijāta* sons (those wiser than their parents) were able to repay the enormous debt that they owed their father:

During the time of the Buddha, in the city of Sāvattthi, there was a young man named Goghātakaputta (meaning “cow butcher’s son”), who went to Takka-sila to study to become a goldsmith. One day, his master, wanting to test how much he had learned, said, “I have to go on a business trip. Here are some ornaments for you to work on while I am gone.” When he returned, he asked the young man to show him what he had done. After seeing his work, his master said, “Now you have completed your apprenticeship. Also, you have demonstrated that you are skilled as a goldsmith, intelligent, and well-behaved. I will give you my daughter’s hand in marriage.” The young man became a great success as a goldsmith, prospering not only in business but also in his family life. However, he did not practice *dāna* (generosity), *sīla* (morality), or *bhāvanā* (mental development).

Goghātakaputta had two sons who established themselves as goldsmiths in Sāvattthi. Unlike their father, they took refuge in the Triple Gem and supported the *Saṅgha*. When their father grew old and ill, they invited him to live with them so that they could take care of him. One day, they invited the Buddha and the *Saṅgha* for a food offering. After the food offering, they made this request of the Blessed One: “Today our food *dāna* is not for our merit but on behalf of our father. Therefore, we request that today’s Dhamma talk be directed toward him.” Accordingly, the Blessed One delivered this Dhamma talk:

“Goghātakaputta, now you resemble a withered leaf. You are approaching death, yet you have made no provision for this journey by doing wholesome deeds.

Thus, I urge you to make yourself your own island. Practice virtuous actions and practice mental development. Gaining wisdom and eradicating mental defilements, you shall reach the celestial abode.”

At the end of the Dhamma talk, their father attained the first stage of enlightenment, becoming a *Sotāpanna*.

The next day, the two sons invited the Buddha and the *Saṅgha* for another food offering. As on the previous day, they requested that

the Blessed One’s Dhamma talk be directed toward their father. Once again, the Blessed One complied with their request:

“Goghātakaputta, now your time is finished. You are approaching death, and there is no resting place for you on this journey. Yet you have made no provision for your journey.”

At the end of this second Dhamma talk, their father attained the third stage of enlightenment, becoming an *Anāgāmi*.

When parents, as a result of their children’s encouragement, have developed their generosity, purified their morality, and gained understanding and wisdom—especially *Vipassanā* wisdom—and have reached the *Ariya* Path, their children have repaid them for all that they have done for them. When their parents become old, children take care of them as a way of repaying them on the mundane level. When as a result of their children’s encouragement, parents gain *Vipassana* wisdom and reach the *Ariya* Path, their children have repaid them on the supra-mundane level, just as Goghātakaputta’s sons repaid their father. ❧❧

*(A brief excerpt—translated and adapted for Dhamma Bell—from a series of Dhamma talks given at TMC by Beilin Sayādaw (U Paññādīpa), called “How to Achieve the Arahant Path and Knowledge”; this series of talks was later compiled in a book called Five Ways to Cultivate a Mature and Stable Mind.)*