

By Venerable Dr Khammai Dhammasami

Difference Aspect of Mindfulness



Publish on 23 May 2009

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Preface

About the Talks

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

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

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

The meditation session at the Centre lasts for about 90 minutes. The majority of the talks are short as they are meant to be preparative before the sitting starts. They are not the actual meditation instruction but practical Dhamma talks aimed at developing the right understanding and

the right attitude of the Noble Eightfold Path. More of the practice, in fact, has been taught during the report sessions than in these introductory talks.

Mindfulness Meditation

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

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

Attachment — A Cause Underlying All Problems

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

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

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

David Hume, one of the worlds foremost moral philosophers who lived in 18th century AD, made a breaking point in moral philosophy when he declared that there was a link between human passions, which he often called sentiments, and behaviours. Many philosophers before him like

Plato (5th - 4th BC), the Stoics, St. Augustine (4th - 5th AD), Spinoza and others disapproved of behaviour driven by passions (of like and dislike) and viewed passions as irrational and sometimes overpowering influences in need of the disciplined control of reason.

Spinoza went as far as saying that reason alone can free human beings from passions. Hume, by contrast thought that passions need not be censurable. They are vital and worthy dimensions of human nature. He said that we should accept our nature rather than fight (reject) it. Reason cannot liberate us from the passions. Instead, reasons can only be the faithful servant of the passions.

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

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

According to the Buddha, like and dislike are judgement of the mind. They are expressed in many ways like greed, craving, lust, obsession, pride, dishonesty, dogmatism, jealousy, irritation, anxiety, fear, worry, restlessness,

which are all fetters (samyojana) limiting and tying people to the circle of suffering (samsara). Attachment is the titanic cause behind any problem human society may come across. It underlines anything unwholesome and has different forms of manifestation.

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

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

Awakening to their Working Life

The topics in this small book reflect our efforts in trying to realise the various aspects of an awakened mind using daily life as a practical basis for exploration. They start from reflection on meditation practice such as how to focus the mind on objects. They then progress to dealing with depression and letting go of the conditions associated with that. The aim is to awaken the mind through mindfulness of their daily experiences. The students are not asked to suppress their thoughts and emotions. They are instead encouraged to face, acknowledge and accept them. I try my best to help them understand their own reactions. It is to help them start from where they are and go forward as far as their ability enables them.

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

Meditation Techniques

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

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

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

created. Through that created identity one comes to cling, defend, be offended and reject the others. A dogmatic tendency (silabbata paramasa) is the result.

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

Across Cultures

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

People with Hindu Yoga experience, Tibetan visualisation meditation, different methods of Samatha and Vipassana meditation, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Sai devotees and atheists - all have a place in our meditation session. Cultural and outward appearances may be different between the East and the West, nevertheless, the way the human mind functions is basically the same. And in principle, we have common experiences, sensations, emotions, fear, worry, and anxiety that transcend creed and

gender, colour and nationality. Constant mindfulness is what we need since mindfulness itself means knowing and understanding such common experiences, accepting and being flexible with them, being at peace and not clinging to them.

Being Flexible

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

Acknowledgment

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

gastric ulcers. She has made various invaluable suggestions to the preface. I thank her for all her kindness.

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

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

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

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

Dr. Chandra Silva started Vipassana meditation practice with me in December 1997. She was very keen to learn Vipassana properly that she came a long way from South London to our Centre every week ignoring

the torture of English winter. She has been to many retreats since then. I am very glad that she has found a real refuge in the Dhamma.

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

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

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

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Article published on 23 May, 2009

Chapter 1 - Meditation Objects

Initial (primary) And Secondary

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

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

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

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

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

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

secondary. All that we see, hear, smell, taste, touch or think are meditation objects.

There can be other initial meditation objects as well. For example, the 32 different parts of body, the four elements and even pain at some stage can be taken as the initial object. However the aim is all the same. And no difference in status is made between a primary or secondary object. However, the choice of giving bare attention to one is made on the spur of the moment — that is when an object, primary or secondary, becomes the most obvious among the many objects you perceive at that moment. You may have difficulty for quite a while in deciding which is the most obvious and strongest object. This difficulty has to be encountered and overcome.

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

Chapter 2 - Just Bare Attention

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 3 - The Aim And Technique Of Vipassana Meditation

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

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

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

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

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

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

To the last part of the question, "when can this aim be achieved", I have to say I do not know for sure. However, let me make it clear that it is possible here and now Nevertheless, it depends on the individual especially his ability to secure a good foundation, the amount of effort he makes, his teacher and the environment. It is up to the individual, some make quick progress and some do not. We come to see how individual we are as we practise because in meditation two people can never be alike. People are never more individual than in Vipassana meditation practice.

Chapter 4 - Training The Mind Through Mindfulness

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

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

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

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

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

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

We want to be happy and joyful every day. Yet, without mastering our mind, this potential of life is hard to achieve. Vipassana meditation is designed to remove all the destructive forces (kilesa) from our mind once and for all and to help us to become self sufficient and self supporting. However, there is no miracle in Vipassana practice. Sometimes the road is hard and slow, sometimes quick and smooth. Everything depends on the individual.

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

Chapter 5 - Not Only Breathing

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

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

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

It is not only breathing which is a good meditation object. And it is not only abdominal movements, four elements, colours or the picture of the Buddha that one can meditate on. Any thought, emotion or sound that we perceive through one of the six senses is a meditation object, too. If there is a problem with observing objects other than breathing, before we start meditating, we should remind ourselves that breathing is not the only meditation object, and meditation is more than focussing on breathing. It is about developing mindfulness and trying to look at our daily life in the way we have never bothered to before. That is to look at our daily activities as they are with an attitude to accept rather than to reject. It is about seeing them as they happen rather than wanting them to be in the way we imagine.

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

Chapter 6 - No Courage To See Things As They Are

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

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

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

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

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

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

A new born baby finds it too hard to accept the harsh touch of a nurse's hands. The baby has been literally snapped out of the secure environment of the mother's womb and is exposed suddenly to the unfamiliar, the perils

of new world. The wind outside his mothers womb is so cruel for the very tender skin of the baby. The wash and the towel do not seem very kind. It is too much for the baby to bear. He cries immediately and continuously. However, there is not much that the nurse can do to help relieve the baby from those pains caused by her hands, seemingly gentle, yet unbearably rough for the baby. The mother cannot ease those pains either. The baby has to adjust himself to the hard reality of life outside his mothers womb. He matures as he accepts reality. He stops crying perhaps in less than an hour. We have to adjust to the reality of life by accepting it and maturing ourselves by directly experiencing it. We have to open, not close ourselves to it.

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

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

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

Chapter 7 - Developing Patience

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

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

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

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

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

When you have patience, you have more courage to face things in life. Patience is not a negative factor as some would like to think. It is a very positive quality. Patience is developed along with determination when you make an effort to observe pain. Patience and determination are virtues to

be cultivated, not gifts. Together they help you to be active and at the same time stable. Patience alone without determination can be dull and inactive. Determination divorced of patience brings anxiety and pressure.

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

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

Chapter 8 - Direct Experience

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

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

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

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

Learning in the Vipassana meditation is not based on description, idea, opinion or judgement. It is based on direct experience, which in many cases goes beyond the exact description of words. At times, we cannot name the emotional experience we have, and we find ourselves confused

as to what to call it. This is a common experience for those who use naming technique in mindfulness meditation.

By paying bare attention to pain or tension, we experience it directly without any interpretation of the sort of pain or tension it is. It is hard to bear, prompting reactions such as impatience and frustration. Nevertheless we come to know directly that pain is like this and tension has this nature. We do not need to impose any idea on our mind that pain and tension are suffering but should keep the mind open to see their nature revealed directly to our senses. Try to see any object objectively as it arises. The objects, a meditation technical term for the world, will reveal their true nature as and when your mind is capable of seeing it. To be able to see the true nature of the world, we need to build up a strong and continuous presence of mindfulness. Mindfulness enables you to experience things directly and produces insight into them.

Chapter 9 - How To Apply Basic Right Effort

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

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

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

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

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

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

Being punctual and regular in the practice is another way of cultivating the right effort. Life is always busy if we choose it to be in that way. We

come up with many excuses not to meditate regularly. To sit and meditate for ten minutes everyday seems as hard as earning a million dollars. Some postpone starting meditation till late in their life. Lack of the right attitude means one is not capable of making use of the golden opportunity to learn meditation, train ones own mind and achieve peace here and now.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 10 - Seeing Something Strange!

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

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

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

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

By observing the bare object, being aware of only seeing, and not interpreting or judging it, we open ourselves to what really exists there.

What is best known here is what is being perceived through our eyes or mind. We have to start with this bare perception. It would be a fruitless effort to try to start with what is not known, which is here the reason why one sees. We want to know "why" before we know "what." Mindfulness is to start knowing directly "what" — the object presented to the senses really is here and now. The present moment is best known, compared with the future or the past. The mind that is engaged in the less known or least known object tends to create fear and anxiety. It is a strange object because it is beyond what a person is capable of perceiving through the senses.

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

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

Chapter 11 - Mindfulness

A Way Out Of Depression

What is Depression?

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

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

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

Physiologically Interconnected

Stress is a part of life. We have to learn to accept and live with it, else it will become a destructive force. Stress is caused by internal and external factors, which evoke a response. This is known as stress response. The internal and external factors causing stress are called the stressors. Mind and body are closely related and affect each other in stress responses.

Buddhist scripture is full of such reminders that the states of mind and body condition each other in both good and bad ways. The portion of physical body affected by the mental state is called citta rupa or citta samutthana rupa. The Patthana, the last text of the Theravada Abhidhamma scriptures shows many of such close relationships. When someone is faced with anger, anxiety, worry, fear, disappointment and so on, the muscles of his body become very tense and require more blood. The hearts and lungs start to work overtime to supply more blood to the muscles for action. The heart rate, breathing rate and blood pressure all go up. Hyperventilation and over breathing may occur to supply more oxygen.

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

Accumulated

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

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

Wild Animals

An example is given to help understand repeated stress reactions. Imagine yourself in an open field where a wild animal suddenly appears and you have to escape. You will run quicker than you thought you could. This is a stress response. Say you have escaped. Before you recover, another wild animal appears in front of you that you have to make another escape from. You will still flee as quickly as before but this time the

recovery will take longer. If you have to flee in this way continuously three or four times, your getting back to normal is expected to be longer.

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

The practice of mindfulness meditation is to help you see if such wild animals are there in our mind. The practice could not only help someone in stress reactions or even depression with regard to his medication needs, but also could bring insight into stress reactions and depression itself. From the point of view of the meditation experience, depression is the result of being unable to accept and see things as they are.

Breathing Exercise

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

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

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

General Mindfulness

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

Recognising Emotions

As you go on contemplating breathing, fears, worries and other negative thoughts, they may come to dominate your mind. As you become aware of them, name them individually as fear or worry as appropriate three or four times, and leave it there. Accept any emotional reactions including

feeling helpless and worthless. Return to breathing again. This is the first step of giving recognition to factors of depression.

People often dismiss these factors of depression by advising sufferers to forget about them. This will only lead to ignorance of depression and consequently worsen the situation. We have to change the attitude of ignoring depression. We must learn to recognise any emotion that arises. Do not dwell on it by going on thinking and speculating about it, but pay necessary attention as we said earlier, and keep returning to the breathing, which is the primary object. The emotions can be easily controlled once they are recognised (sati) and understood (sampajanna).

Gradual Practice

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

Diet and Exercise

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

The Right Attitude

One's right attitude towards depression is very crucial when taking the first step. Regard depression as the meditation object. Do not be so judgmental about it. Do not think of it too much. It is already there. Observe it as it comes up at the present moment. Stop complaining and start recognising it as a reality. If we identify depression at its early stage, we stand a better chance of coming out of it. At the outset of the practice, it may seem more disturbing as one becomes aware of stress responses. However, from meditation and also Buddhist psychological analysis, this is a healthy practice because one does not store stress reactions but let them go. One should not imagine a problem free life,

having a problem is the very real sign of being alive. The Buddha said that understanding problems means understanding life itself. New stress responses may keep appearing as there are causes for them to do so, but this will give one a chance to deal with them there and then. Suppressing them through some sort of distraction requires more strength and energy. And it is not a healthy exercise.

Chapter 12 - Do Not Give It Up

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

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

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

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

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

Do not give it up even though you cannot keep focusing on the primary object such as breathing or abdominal moments for a very long time. Breathing exercise is not all about meditation. Vipassana meditation is much more than that. It is about learning how we can be happy and how we can be disappointed. Only once we have learnt that will we be able to sustain happiness and prevent another disappointment. When you become disappointed because you cannot focus on your breathing, you

should simply observe and recognise that disappointment. Disappointment could be for any reason; it could be because the bus is late or because you do not enjoy your daily meal. What matters here is disappointment itself. Take it as a meditation object rather than blaming yourself. Do not give it up. Instead, accept it and move forward. Start focusing on breathing again. It does not matter even if you can only stay with one or two breathes. There is no failure. Knowing that disappointment is present is in itself progress. That knowing has to be grasped as the first step and continue to build upon, no matter what the object of knowing is. It can be breathing or your wandering mind, pain or disappointment. The objects are not important here. Only knowing is important. That knowing is called mindfulness. With mindfulness, you will become more determined and more patient.