

A Meditator's Guide

By

Luang Por Pramote Pamojjo (2009)



Translated by

Jess Peter Koffman (2009-2010)

Edited by Phra Korakot Kittisobhano

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Getting Started

It is a wonderful thing to have an interest in meditation. However, before we get started with the practice there are four things we need to be clear about:

- 1) What are we going to practice?
- 2) What can we expect to achieve from this practice?
- 3) How do we engage in this practice?
- 4) When we practice, are we actually doing what we intended?

Regarding the fourth point, we want to do what we set out to do, and shouldn't slip into practicing something other than what we intended without immediately knowing that we have done so. Being mindful of these four points is essential as they provide the foundation that directs our practice and keeps it from slipping off track. They are a basic type of wisdom, which in the Pali language is called *sampajañña*. In English we can call it clear comprehension.

Whenever we observe objects of meditation, there must always be two assistants present. The first assistant is called *sati*, the mindfulness which recognizes the object that is being observed or has arisen in any given moment. The second is *sampajañña*, the clear comprehension that keeps our practice in check. Together, *sati* (mindfulness) and *sampajañña* (clear comprehension) make up the overall awareness that is essential for all meditators. Without these two assistants, without knowing what objects arise and without being clear on what we are doing, it is easy to lose our way and falter in our practice.



Samatha and Vipassana Meditation

There are two main types of meditation found in Buddhism: Samatha and Vipassana. In coming to the practice of Samatha or Vipassana, we need to have the mental clarity to know which one we have selected and for what purpose. The purpose of Samatha is to bring a mind that is not peaceful to a state of peace, to bring a mind that is not happy to a state of happiness, and to bring an unwholesome mind to a state of virtue. In Vipassana, we do not practice to change anything in this way, but to gain a proper understanding of the way things are (*sammā-dhitti*). We practice so we can see the true nature of body and mind.

The body and mind were seen by the Buddha as five distinct groups or aggregates called the five *khandhas*. Each of which has the inherent characteristic that is called non-substantiality and unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*). We must come to know the truth of this in our experience. So our job is to become aware of the

body and mind regularly with an inner watchfulness. This is the practice of Vipassana. When we practice in this way with frequency, wisdom arises – we come to know the true nature of the body and mind. This kind of wisdom is called right understanding (*sammā-dhitti*). We come to know that the body and mind are impermanent, suffering and are not our self, not us. When we have enough wisdom to see the truth of this clearly, authentically, consciousness can then let go of any attachment to the body and mind, and automatically comes to know nirvana (*nibbāna*), the end of suffering.

If we practice watching the body and mind a great deal, one day we will truly see that the body and mind are just aggregates, elements of nature, fractions of the earth. They are not us, nor do they belong to us. When we see the truth that there is nothing we can constitute as being ourselves, we will reach the first

stage of enlightenment called stream-entry (sotāpanna). If we continue watching the body and mind carefully to the point of letting go of all attachment to them, then we become an arahant -- one who has completely ended suffering. An arahant is not someone who is able to make the mind something permanently good, or create permanent happiness or permanent peace. He or she is one who no longer takes interest in such things. Peace, happiness and the like are worldly endeavors. An arahant knows the futility in trying to pursue satisfaction through worldly measures. He or she knows the true nature of body and mind and is beyond any attachment to them. We need to practice Vipassana to learn the truth about the body and mind that we consider our own. True liberation, the end of suffering, is not in trying to make the mind permanently happy or peaceful, but in seeing the nature of the body and mind as impermanent, suffering and not us – and then letting go.



The Three Areas of Training

In watching and learning the body and mind directly, the Buddha taught that there are three areas of training (ti-sikkhā): morality, mentality, and wisdom. Problems will arise if we don't train in all three of these areas.

1. Moral Training

Many Buddhists believe that morality consists merely of taking a vow in front of a monk to follow a list of moral precepts. It is certainly not that superficial. For meditators, it is not only about the lists of Buddhist precepts (five for daily life, eight for nuns and 227 for monks). There is an entire other kind of morality we need to understand, called *indriya-samvara-sila*. *Sila* means morality. *Indriya-samvara* means to guard oneself at the level of the senses. When our eyes see things and forms, our job is to be aware of any liking or disliking as soon as it arises. When we are aware

in such a way, the mental defilements (such as greed and anger) cannot affect us. Then morality will occur in the mind automatically. Can we see how important it is to be mindful of what arises within our mind? It is necessary beyond the scope of meditation, and promotes moral behavior as well. Such awareness is something we need with us everywhere we go and at all times. It upholds the virtuous mind needed for moral behavior, for keeping the mind attentive and free from wandering, and for attaining wisdom. So when our eyes see a lovely lady, and wanting and liking subsequently arise, have the mindfulness to see that desire has arisen. The mind will then not be at desire's mercy, and action in accordance with the desire will not follow. Resultantly, we will not break moral precepts, such as pursuing a woman who is spoken for, or deceiving her in some way.

Perhaps we are walking and see a man's mobile phone fall out of his pocket unknowingly. As it turns out, it is not just any phone but the exact model that we were looking to buy! Greed and wanting arise, but mindfulness sees this. It knows right away that greed has affected the mind, and thus the greed will immediately drop off and be unable to manipulate us. As a result, we will not steal, even if we have no chance of getting caught.

If someone scolds us and we get angry, mindfulness sees the anger arise. Thus, the anger cannot affect us – we will not shout back, become violent or harm anyone in any way. The mind will be impartial. We

will be moral automatically because of the mindfulness that immediately sees whatever arises in the mind.

The Buddha taught, "...When your eyes see forms in the world, liking and disliking appear in the mind. Have the mindfulness to know when they do. If you don't see the liking or disliking immediately, the mind will be burdened and influenced by greed, aversion and ignorance." The mind will stray from its normal state of purity and become immoral. A mind without morality is actually an abnormal mind. It has the mental defilements (greed, aversion, etc.) influencing it.

All meditators need to practice this method of morality. If our ears hear we are being praised, we become buoyant and inflated like a balloon. We must be watchful and know this as it happens so that we do not gloat and lose our way.

Usually when we are on our own, we are in thinking mode: analyzing, replaying, projecting, curious about this, concerned about that. Some thoughts are about good things, some about bad things. Some thoughts create virtue in the mind, others vice. Have the mindfulness to see whatever appears in the mind as it arises. It then cannot override the mind's normal and natural state. This is when we can truly say that our mind is moral.

2. Mental Training

The lesson in mental training is about the loneliest and unluckiest lesson there is since so few people are interested in learning it. Nevertheless, it is of such importance that the wisdom which sees the true nature of things cannot arise without it.

There is one type of meditator that does not take interest in learning proper mental training. He or she will just sit and meditate, thinking that meditating for hours on end and losing oneself in the object of meditation is proper mental training. This is not so. There is another type of meditator that believes that it is enough to just practice labeling mental and physical phenomena and the mind will become concentrated by itself. Once, again, proper mental training is not as easy as just sitting and meditating!

Mental training is about learning our own mental states – which state of mind is a virtuous one, which is not, which state of mind is suitable for Samatha meditation, which for Vipassana, and which state of mind is unfit for any practice at all. We need to know clearly the characteristics of each mental state. This way, we can see which is the most appropriate practice at any given time.

We must understand that there are two ways of learning. The first is the intellectual way, from teachers and textbooks. Those that learn the details of meditation in a scholarly setting will often find themselves studying the Abhidhamma. In this ancient Buddhist

scripture, 72 conditioned phenomena (dhammas) are detailed, of which mind is just one. The mind, however, is the only one that can be separated into 89 or 121 different states. Though the Abhidhamma is interesting, nobody actually experiences all these states. Learning in this way can be tedious and complicated.

The other way to learn is much simpler. This is learning the truth as it happens in our own experience. But at first, we need to understand some principles, such as which mental states are virtuous and which are not. For such things, it helps to have a meditation teacher to point us in the right direction. Otherwise, we can fall into situations like creating unwholesome states of mind within ourselves that we think are virtuous ones. This is surprisingly a very common occurrence among meditators. We also need to understand which mental states are suitable for Samatha and which for Vipassana. If we don't, we will likely bring a mind of low quality into our Vipassana practice and thus render it ineffectual.

A vast number of meditators don't truly know what Samatha and Vipassana are. They intend to do Vipassana but actually unknowingly practice Samatha. This is extremely common in all meditation halls. It is important to clearly understand the fundamental principles of each practice, and then all meditation centers will be of good use. One center's practice isn't any better than any other; however, if watching the body and mind is not taught, there is no Vipassana and no way to gain insight into our true nature. When

we know the principles behind the practice, meditation is not so hard. If we don't know the principles, if we don't know about watching our body and mind, the practice will be very difficult indeed, like fishing for a needle in a haystack.

Let's have a look at what types of mental states are virtuous and which are not. Virtuous ones do not have desire, aversion or ignorance controlling them. So if in any moment the mind is wanting, is in a state of anger or stress, is lost in thought or in sense perception (looking, hearing, etc.) then it is surely not a virtuous one in the Buddhist sense. This is an easy way to measure the quality of the mind in any given moment. With that said, sometimes we can't tell if the mind has desire, aversion or ignorance because they are there in such a subtle form. In such cases, there are other ways to know.

A truly virtuous mind is a light one (*lahutā*). The arising of a weighty mind is a sure sign that we are faltering in our practice, that unscrupulousness or unwholesomeness has come in to replace virtue. Some people's minds become so heavy in their practice it is as if they are carrying a mountain on their shoulders. A virtuous mind is also gentle and pliant (*mudutā*). Any rigidity or dullness is not virtuous. Some people have their minds held rigid all day long. A virtuous mind must be agile and nimble (*pāguññatā*). Be cautious and cognizant of such things.

We may notice that if we are too deliberate when we set our minds to practice, there will arise heaviness,

tightness, dullness or inattentiveness. Why is that? It is because greed has entered. Wanting to practice is a form of greed. When we want to meditate we bring the wanting into our practice and it will affect our mind. Normally when the desire arises to meditate, we meditate. As such, our actions are resulting from a state of mind that is defiled with desire, a non-virtuous state. Heaviness, rigidity, inattentiveness and dullness will thus appear. There will be no chance for a truly impartial mindfulness of inner phenomena to occur. Genuine mindfulness cannot occur at that moment because the area has already become a defiled one. Mindfulness can certainly never arise in conjunction with a defilement. We can only have one or the other. Therefore, if we are meditating and the mind is rigid or dull, know that this mental state has arisen out of greed. Also when the rigidity and dullness arise, aversion will follow because we want these states to go away. We don't like them and feel confined and edgy. We want to be pleased, happy and comfortable. Once again, mental defilements prevail. So we must come to learn the qualities of virtuous and non-virtuous mental states within ourselves.

Speaking bluntly, almost all meditators are practicing without virtue, in so far as they are wanting to be virtuous. What they are creating is rigidity, dullness, heaviness, discomfort. Greed comes in. Aversion comes in. But what is constantly arising is ignorance, and it goes unseen. The true nature of the mental state goes unnoticed for such meditators as the ignorance is blinding them from it. When we practice by firmly

holding our attention somewhere or intensely noting phenomena, the mind often ends up in a daze or just still and lifeless.

Sometimes, however, the mind does become gentle and bright, though what often happens next is that the mind becomes attached to the happiness or peace that arises. We lose our footing; we lose our way. This is a common type of meditator, who firmly holds his or her attention somewhere or intensely notes phenomena as mentioned above and finds that the mind gets very calm and light. The mind is happy and shining bright. This type of meditator must carefully notice that the mind is stiller than it should be, more still than normal. The truth is that the most suitable mind for practicing Vipassana is a mind in its natural, normal state. A regular human mind is just right. Humans already are higher minded beings that are ready to uncover the true nature of things (Dhamma). Nevertheless, a number of meditators when deciding to practice forcibly hold their attention or mentally note phenomena until the normal human mind is lost and replaced by a subtle mind like that of a godly deity (brahma): serene, calm and happy. Such a mind gets lost in these states and floats away in them. Here there is still desire looming but the meditator does not see it.

So these are some common mistakes of meditators. One group practices and a non-virtuous mind arises: stressed, rigid, heavy and tight. Another group practices and enjoys the beautiful sensations and mind states that come along with the practice, and gets absorbed

in them. This group is actually virtuous, but only in the worldly sense. This group is actually creating an obstacle to the path of enlightenment in a very subtle way. We must be very careful. Some people in this group practice so much meditation that their minds become too subtle and serene, much more than is naturally so. They are immersed in such sublime states for days and days. Desire and ignorance have come in but they go unseen. In other cases, ignorance and aversion may be arising right from the start. This is especially true for beginners who practice by the method of mentally noting mental phenomena. By mentally labeling again and again, forcibly focusing attention each time, ignorance and aversion come in. We have to keep learning until we truly know the characteristics of the mind, and then we can practice properly without making these mistakes. Thus our mind will be an impartial one that can truly see and know mental phenomena clearly. This is quality mind, one of virtue and wisdom. Such a mind arises on its own without any effort (in the Abhidhamma this mind is called Mahākusolajit-ñanasampayuta-Asankhārika). In this type of mind, the virtuousness has momentum and fortitude. It is the most suitable mind for practicing Vipassana. There are many more details about this; and we must have patience and gradually understand them.

3. Training in Wisdom

Now we come to the lesson on the arising of insight wisdom which sees the true nature of the body

(rūpa) and mind (nāma). But first we must see the mistakes that meditators make which create obstacles to path of insight. We must not falter to either of the two extremes that block our progress in Vipassana and in the arising of wisdom. The first extreme is controlling our mind to the point of suspending it, making it frozen stiff or overly fine and subtle. The other extreme is letting the mind get lost, mindlessly following our ignorant and indulgent thoughts. These are the two directions we can falter – total control, or mindlessly following the lure of the defilements. Buddhism teaches the middle way. It is important to remember that everything starts in the mind, and then action follows. So whether we tortuously keep our bodies under control, or have them mindlessly go unchecked and do whatever they please, the physical world is not where the root of the mistakes in our practice lies. We must try to open our minds to what is being said here and practice it. Then we will see for ourselves whether or not suffering subsides in our lives.

If we want to know the Buddha's middle way in our experience then we should gradually keep learning until genuine mindfulness arises, the automatic and impartial awareness of mental and physical phenomena as they arise in our experience. Genuine mindfulness (sammā-sati) will occur as a result of clearly recognizing mental states as they arise, not from holding concentration in one spot, or mental noting, or forcing it into being. The Abhidhamma teaches that the proximate cause that enables genuine mindfulness to arise is the recognizing of mental and physical phenomena. When we first

practice using the four foundations of mindfulness (satipaṭṭhāna) that were taught by the Buddha (namely, the body, feelings, mind and Dhamma), we do so to achieve this mindfulness. We practice watching the body until we can see the truth of physicality (rūpa). We practice watching feelings until we truly see the reality of feelings (vedanā). We practice watching the mind until we come to know the truth of the mind (citta). Genuine mindfulness arises on its own when we see the reality of these things.

Usually I teach my students to watch the mind. This is because most of those who come to see me are city people with busy minds. They are thinkers. Their jobs involve thinking all day. Watching the mind is the practice most suitable for such people. Those who are greedy, who want the comforts in life and enjoy fashion and beauty should practice by watching the body.

Take a look at the decision to go to practice at a meditation center. We don't think about what type of personality we have. We want to go, so we do. We don't notice our mental states. Our friends decide to go, so we go too. We unwittingly believe that if a meditation center becomes popular, it must be a good one. The truth is it may or may not be. Furthermore, the master may be first-class, but if the practice doesn't suit our aptitudes and we merely follow the technique as directed, we won't accomplish much. So before we practice we need to observe ourselves and determine where our abilities lie. If we are the kind that is happy with worldly pleasures, beautiful things, comfortable

surroundings, and like being left alone in peace and quiet, we may best suited to watch the body. This is because when we watch the body, we will easily come to know that it is not happy, comfortable or beautiful. Those who think too much, who are caught up in their heads, should watch the mind.

We should discern which of these two main personality types matches us best: sensual or analytical; that is, do our passions lie primarily with worldly pleasures or intellectual ones? Let the choice here act as a guideline for what our objects of meditation should be when we begin our practice. If we are primarily sense driven, we should watch the body, and if we are analytical we should watch the mind. The other two areas to watch (according to the teachings of the Buddha on the four foundations of mindfulness, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*) are feelings (*vedanā-nupassanā*) and the true nature of phenomena (*dhammā-nupassanā*). We should not watch those two areas until our minds are a little more advanced, a little more ripe for wisdom. Watch the mind and the body first as they are fundamental. It is important to note, however, that watching body is most appropriate for those that are skilled in the absorption concentration levels (*jhāna*). Unskilled minds that concentrate hard will completely lose themselves in the body. For example, if we watch the abdomen rising and falling, the mind will be motionless and completely latched to the abdomen, thus rendered ineffective. In walking meditation, the mind will be latched to the feet lifting and moving. In watching the breath, the mind will stick to the breath so completely that we

lose ourselves in it.

It is difficult to watch the body correctly if the mind is not firmly rooted in awareness, that is, if our mind tends to slip down into the object of observation. If we can reach the peace and higher concentration of the second jhāna, something arises that masters in the forest monk tradition call “the knower” or “the watcher”. This watcher is the awakening of right concentration, an unshakable awareness that clearly sees that the body, the feelings, the good and bad thoughts, and the mind that watches are all distinct and separate entities. The body moves; the mind is the watcher. The body sits, and the mind is the watcher. This point is clearly presented in the Abhidhamma when it shows the distinction between the knower and the known.

This means that when we watch the body, we should not get immersed in it. The mind should be independent and watch from a distance as if we are watching someone else. We see this body stand, walk, sit and lay down. The mind is the watcher. When we practice in this way, we will see directly that the body is not us. There will be no need to think about it; the body will be clearly and directly seen as not us or ours. The body stands, walks, sits and lies down and the mind is the watcher. This is how to watch the body. One day the truth will show itself that the body is just flesh and bones, water, heat and movement. The body is under constant oppression by unsatisfactoriness (dukkha), always in some form of discomfort. Then the mind orders the body to move or act to try to relieve

the discomfort. When we practice correctly we will see the true characteristics of the body for ourselves.

Watching the mind is easier than watching the body. When we watch the mind we will see that there are two things that arise in each moment: a mental phenomenon and consciousness. This is because one's consciousness does not arise unless there is an object of consciousness – they appear in unison. We cannot watch the mind without mental phenomena (cetasika) because the mind has no body or form of its own. So first we should watch each mental phenomenon, whether it is classified as a feeling or sensations (vedanā), memory (saññā), or active thinking or mental formations (sankhāra). All such phenomena arise and fall in conjunction with consciousness. For example, at times we have a virtuous mind and at times we do not. Our impression is that the mind that belongs to us is now virtuous, or it is greedy, averted or lost in thought or sense perceptions. This is how we perceive it at first. But when the mind that is ripe with wisdom arises, it will see clearly that consciousness is one thing and greed is another. Consciousness is one thing and disliking is another. Consciousness is one thing and thought is another. They will show themselves as separate and distinct processes. Later we will be able to directly watch their true nature (dhammā-nupassanā). But first, keep watching and knowing the phenomena that arise in the mind.

If we have already been practicing a certain meditation technique which involves watching the body and/

or the mind, I recommend we stay with it. There is no need to stop or change what we do. I do not teach a specific technique – do whatever style you do best and learn the principles I am teaching. When we understand the principles correctly, we should integrate them into our present practice. If the fundamental principles behind our practice are lacking or misconstrued, then it doesn't matter how gracefully we walk or how still we sit; we will not be practicing Vipassana and what we do will not lead to insight wisdom. Those in marching bands have beautiful posture and perform gracefully, but we certainly don't see much enlightenment going on there! Our posture and technique is not the least bit relevant. We can just keep practicing whatever style we have learned in the past, though we must bring a correct understanding into it.

If we have practiced watching the in-breath and out-breath, and we are comfortable with it, then we should keep at it. If we feel agitated, we may then want to pick another place in the body as a home base for our attention. Wherever in the body we may choose as our home base or primary object of attention, the mind will fall into one of the following four categories:

- 1) In the first type, we may be watching the breath, the abdomen rising and falling, or even an intentional body movement such as raising and lowering the arm. What happens is we get caught up in something and forget ourselves. Whether it is in dreamy states or peaceful sensations, we lose our awareness

and mindlessly stray from our intended task. Almost all meditators who enjoy watching their breath get totally lost in it this way. This state is unproductive.

- 2) The second type occurs when the mind moves its way down into breath or other meditation object. Let us pay attention to our breath now. We will start to notice that the mind moves down into it. The mind that moves into the breath is not one of right concentration, not rooted in awareness. The mind has sunk down. It is the same for those who watch the abdomen rise and fall or focus on other bodily movements: the mind sinks down into the area of attention. Watching the body standing, walking, sitting, and laying down can equally result in the mind firmly holding its focus. In this case, the mind sinks down and fixates on the whole body. This is not a hard thing to do. It is quite easy to fix our attention on the breath, the abdomen, or on the whole body. Many people practice by firmly fixing their attention somewhere. This is not the way of authentic awareness, not the watcher we spoke of. Many people firmly fix their attention on their mind, focusing as hard as they can until the mind is still. This is equivalent to Samatha practice, and the effects of Samatha will result such as tingly sensations, swaying, feeling light, or like our body is extremely large or floating away. Some people mistak-

only think when they get such sensations that they are entering the path of insight (ñāna). But these are merely bodily sensations. The path of insight is about wisdom, seeing the true nature of things. So why is it that we intend to practice Vipassana and yet we get sensations associated with Samatha? This is because we are fixing our attention somewhere, latching onto the abdomen or the breathing perhaps. If we keep at it, we are sure to feel lightness, floating sensations, swaying and so on. There is nothing surprising about this, as focusing attention in one area is the practice of Samatha. It's not a bad thing to do this, but it is not Vipassana. If ever our mind is so distracted and exhausted that it doesn't have the energy to do Vipassana, then we can practice Samatha. If we are skilled at watching the breath or the abdomen rise and fall, then we can gently bring attention there and feel calm and happy.

An important piece of knowledge is that concentration will not arise by forcing it to. Concentration is not the cause of happiness. Happiness is the cause of concentration. Try to remember this. Actually as concentration gets more profound and subtle, happiness drops off and there is but equanimity (upekkhā). So we don't practice concentration so that happiness will arise; happiness is the one that brings about concentration. When arriving at the nature of things (dhamma), often

the cause-effect relationship between things will reveal that our previous notions were inversions of the truth. In this case of happiness and concentration, we can see that those who enjoy playing cards can often do so happily until dawn. The body and the mind are totally concentrated on the game. Those who like watching sporting events can get intensely focused on them and stay up far past their usual sleeping hour. They can do this because they are happy. The happiness brings them the concentration, and they stay focused on the game. This is how we should choose what to watch when we practice meditation: choose whichever primary object makes us happy. Whether our choice is the breath, the abdomen, or any other phenomenon, it will quickly make us calm. Our mind will keep to the practice and will come to a rest.

So far we have covered the first two types of minds that occur when practicing meditation, namely, getting totally lost, or losing oneself in Samatha by fixing our attention on the arms, the feet, the abdomen, on the whole body or the mind. What seem like many different meditation techniques from many different centers are really just the same thing: latching our attention on to something. Most meditators oscillate between the first two types without ever being truly aware as in the third type.

- 3) The third type occurs when we watch the body as in Vipassana meditation. We can choose any observable phenomenon of the body, such as the breath, the rising and falling of the

abdomen, or intentional body movements. In the case of the abdomen, we can see that there is rising and falling occurring there, and the mind merely watches this. The mind must be the watcher, an independent phenomenon from the object. The mind does not sink down to the abdomen but is rooted in awareness, and simply sees that the body has this rising and falling motion at the abdomen. Or the mind sees the body is breathing in. It sees the body breathing out. The mind watches the body stand, walk, sit and lay down. It watches the hands and arms moving and stretching and so on. It sees the body doing what it does. The mind is just the watcher. The body moves and the mind watches. The body ceases to be ours. This body moves, but it is not us moving. The hand reaches but not our hand. It won't even feel like it is a hand. It is just a physical form moving. When we see it in this way, there will be a lightness to all that we do. But when we see it as our hand moving, the mind carries more weight. Whenever the hand moves and the mind just knows it, there is tremendous relief. True mindfulness arises. The mind awakens and sees that the physical form that is moving is not us.

- 4) The fourth mental state occurs when we have been practicing the watching of an object of meditation such as in-breath and out-breath, and we are able to notice the occurrence of

mental phenomena. Perhaps the mind goes off in thought, or the mind latches itself on the breath or the abdomen. Here are a few more examples: We watch the breath and a feeling of joy or rapture arises (*pīti*) in the mind and we immediately know that joy has arisen. We watch the breath and happiness arises; the mind knows that happiness has arisen. We watch the breath and feel anxious; the mind knows the anxiousness. Or we watch the abdomen and feel frustrated; the mind knows frustration has arisen. Whatever mental state arises, mindfulness is there to recognize it. As we practice this more and more, we will see how what arises in the mind is always changing. We will eventually come to recognize a great number of mental phenomena. We will know what getting lost in thought is like, what fixing the mind on a spot is like, what a virtuous or non-virtuous mind is like, what greed, aversion and ignorance are like. When we recognize them well, mindfulness will arise on its own in our daily life.

So we can see that mindfulness can be practiced throughout the day. Those who are skilled at watching the mind can do this quite easily. It is a little harder for those who prefer to watch the body, as the body tends to take up all of our attention when we do. As an example of watching our mind in daily life, we may see our friend coming towards us. When

she does, gladness arises. Mindfulness knows this right away, even if we weren't intending to practice. Wisdom sees the gladness and it falls away. Phenomena just arise and pass away. We start talking with our friend and we start enjoying ourselves. The fun feeling arises, mindfulness knows it and then the fun feeling passes. Then our friend says something that bothers us. A little anger arises, it is known immediately and then falls away. If we can watch the arising and falling away of mental phenomena repetitively in this way, then we are able to develop our mindfulness daily life.

The first mental state is the state that most people are in all the time, lost all day and all night. There are six ways to be lost: in seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, bodily sensations, and in thinking. There is one more way to be lost, actually, and that is the second mental state: lost in meditating, that is, lost in fixation on an object or in mental noting. We can enter this second mental state anywhere, but it is quite common among temple goers. They go on a short retreat and get very good at losing themselves in the breath or the abdomen. The third or fourth mental state can be done without having to go on a meditation retreat. In the third, whatever the body is doing – standing, walking, sitting, lying – the mind keeps watching it repeatedly. The mind sees that the body that is engaged in these activities is not us. Such a mind is light and gentle, pliant and agile, adaptable and proficient.



The Principles of Vipassana Practice

Please try to follow what I say. We should read and listen to my talks repetitively and our understanding will deepen. We will slowly absorb more and more each time. Don't just listen once now and come back a few years later and say it is all the same. We need to listen or read often so we will not forget. Please do keep at it. I won't force anyone to come. I don't charge for my lectures, and I give out my books and CDs for free. All I'm doing is asking us to come and listen, asking us for some determination and perseverance.

Now, the last few moments I have not been teaching about the true nature of things (Dhamma). Can we notice that our minds have a lot more movement? Our minds are much more active now. This is how we watch. Just know this is happening. It's easy. There isn't much to it. Most people have the perception that practicing the Dhamma means we must do difficult things, things greater or on a higher level than

is normal or natural. If we endeavor to do things higher than normal, then we won't see the Dhamma. The Dhamma is completely normal, natural. We are not trying to become superman here. We are not even learning so that we can feel happy, or be intelligent, knowledgeable or worldly. We are learning so that we can see the truth. That is all.

It is not necessary to know all the Buddhist scriptures. No one does. We are not the Buddha. We just need to know what happens in our experience. Practicing the Dhamma is similar to climbing a mountain. Before we climb, we want to see what path others have successfully taken, and follow it. If we do, one day we will arrive at the goal. We will also believe that we chose the right way to get there. But standing on the mountain top, we then can see there are many pathways to arrive at the same peak. We could have taken other ways, practiced at other centers, we just needed to know the principles of the practice that I am explaining and thus get the fundamentals right. We need to know the four different categories I explained. The mind at each moment can be depicted as in one of the four, and only the third and the fourth are conducive to wisdom.

Watching the rising and falling of the abdomen and wandering off in thought or enjoyment is a futile practice, and is our first category. Watching by holding our attention at the abdomen is Samatha, our second category. Watching the abdomen as merely the body moving, with the mind as the independent

observer, is Vipassana practice by watching the body (kāyānupassanā). We will see that the body is not us. This is our third category. Watching the abdomen and seeing the mind – happy one moment, suffering the next, good one moment, bad the next – with the abdomen acting as the basis from which we watch the mind, is Vipassana practice by watching the mind (cittānupassanā). This is our fourth category.

The same fundamentals are true for watching the breath. Watching the breath and losing our awareness will have no benefit. Watching the breath with a high degree of focus is Samatha. Watching the breath and seeing the body moving with the mind as the watcher is Vipassana by way of the body. We will see that this body, now sitting here and breathing, is not us. Watching the breath and noticing mental states is Vipassana by way of the mind.

For those who practice a style such as Venerable Master Tian's, where we sit and move the arms, the fundamentals are the same. Moving the arms with the mind wandering here and there is useless. The second way is moving the arms and keeping focus on them. Staying focused intently with each movement in this way is Samatha. The third way is to know the body is moving with the mind as the watcher. The fourth way is moving the arms as a basis for watching mental movement and mental states. The fourth way is how the practice was intended and originally taught, knowing the body is moving and knowing the mind is moving. Unfortunately most people don't follow

the teachings and get stuck in the second state, and many more in the first, stuck in thinking about each movement. “What step is next? Oh yes, this step. Ok great. What’s next?” This is nothing but thinking. Even if we mentally note, “Thinking, thinking, thinking,” we are still thinking!

Keep watching the different mental and physical phenomena. It doesn't matter which technique we choose. We all have our own ways; there is no need to copy others. Just remember well the three areas of training that I discussed. Learn by observing the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. Whatever comes into contact with them, be aware as soon as it arises. Watch how the sensations are always changing. Observe the mind. Know what states are virtuous, non-virtuous. Most of us here are listening and feeling light. Not in the “floating away” sense, but just gentle. Become aware of it now. Some of us are stuck intently focusing, fixing our attention. It will feel dull, sort of dry and emotionless if we are holding our concentration in this way.

(Venerable Pramote then takes the opportunity to assist an audience member) In your case, you are stuck in the practice of intense focus. You make yourself peaceful until you are in a kind of daze. This is not right. You need to be in a state of knowing, attentive, awake, self-aware, yet calm and relaxed. If you practice and you feel irritable or uncomfortable, the mind is not virtuous. In fact, these are defining characteristics of a non-virtuous mind. A mind that feels heavy is

surely non-virtuous. A mind that is light or happy, however, may or may not be virtuous. Thus we must be careful not to be mistaken. Light or happy don't necessarily mean virtuous. Some people have light and calm minds all day and all night but are just lost, without awareness.

Please keep at it. What I said doesn't mean that the practice you are doing has been useless. But you need to keep working on it. Listen to me a little more and you will be able to practice Vipassana properly. Most of us are stuck in Samatha. We get attached to the sensations that occur as a result of our one-pointed concentration on an object, and think that we have reached a level of Vipassana insight. Another name for Vipassana insight is wisdom. Wisdom has nothing to do with physical sensations; it is about seeing the truth. This misunderstanding may be a result of some meditation masters of previous generations that would play little tricks to give encouragement and say that their students are reaching levels of insight even though they weren't. They were happy that at least the students made progress in Samatha and they hoped that the students would then keep practicing. And one day, by the grace of their merit, they may break free of Samatha and enter the path of Vipassana. So everyone please keep learning, keep practicing. Whatever technique we have chosen is fine; they can all be done correctly or incorrectly just the same.

I have practiced with many well-known masters of the forest monk tradition: Luang Pu Dune Atulo,

Luang Pu Thate, Luang Ta Maha Bua, Luang Por Phut, Phra Ajarn Boonchan, and Luang Pu Suwat to name a few. These teachers are very strict about right mindfulness (*sammā-sati*) practice. However, many newer disciples in Luang Pu Mun Bhūridatto's lineage are stuck in *Samatha* practice. And not just that lineage either. The lineage which watches the rising and falling of the abdomen is also stuck in *Samatha*, stuck in holding their attention there. This is because many believe that mental noting is equivalent to genuine mindfulness. They are mistaken about this. Genuine mindfulness is about precise recognition, not fixing the mind somewhere and labeling it with a word. When we note in such a way, we are investing greed in our intent. Greed is continuously entering into our practice unnoticed. In the Commentaries (*Atthāgathā*) to the Theravada Buddhist Scriptures (*Tipitaka*) it is mentioned that mindfulness by noting mental and physical phenomena carries suffering with it. Desire is hovering in the background, which is the cause of suffering (*samudaya*). So if we want to practice, and then start noting, suffering arises immediately. The defilement of wanting to practice is the force behind the noting, causing further karma, further suffering. With that said, some who like to note are quite skilled and can do it happily. They start off with the defilements, producing further karma, but eventually settle in to a nice practice.

It is possible that non-virtue can cause virtue to arise. It is also possible that virtue causes non-virtue. For example, we see our child running out into the

middle of the street or playing in the rain and we have compassion for our child. We don't want to see our child get struck by a car or catch a cold. So we call our child into the house. But when our child refuses to come in, we start to get angry. What we say or do may hurt the child more than a cold would. In this case, we can see a virtuous mind soon produced an unscrupulous one. Once there was a well-known monk who had so much loving-kindness. Unfortunately, his love was so vast that it exceeded his mindfulness. This caused desire and attachment to enter at times when he wasn't sufficiently aware. If we have loving-kindness, losing our footing just a little bit can cause desire. If we have compassion, and our mindfulness is not strong enough, it may result in anger. So we must truly be careful.

Non-virtue can create virtue and virtue can create non-virtue. It goes both ways, as in the following example. We can be in the non-virtuous state well known as the wandering mind. But after an hour or so, we remember our mindfulness and recognize that the mind has been wandering. Now the mind has become virtuous, at least for this moment of mindfulness. We may then get upset with our mind for wandering away for so long: "I can't believe that happened again!" Now we are lost in non-virtue again, this time in regret and over-thinking. Another common situation is when we are concerned about the future and the mind wanders away into different scenarios. Such a non-virtuous mind becomes virtuous the moment that mindfulness realizes this is going on. But then we think, "How can

I prevent all this wandering?” And we then proceed to feverishly mentally note the thinking. This is most certainly greed, and not virtue.

Please listen to this carefully: We are not practicing so that the mind will not wander. We are practicing to know ourselves, to be aware of ourselves. We need to see the wandering mind, to know what it is like, to see it is not permanent, and see that the aware mind that was lost is not permanent either. We are not even practicing so that we can be aware of ourselves all the time. We are not practicing to be or get anything at all!

The truth is that most people in this world walk around with their minds wandering all the time. There is no awareness of it for their entire lives. Even in their next life, they are completely caught up in thought. And they never wake up and notice it. How could they notice? Their minds are too busy wandering all the time! Let's look at an example. Suppose each person in this room, including myself, was a bad person. Then no one here would be bad. Can we see why? Everyone would be equal. We would all be good the same amount. Now if one member of the audience became a good person, then I would be a pretty bad monk! We would be able to see contrasts. In general, the minds of people are completely lost in sense perception and thought all of the time. They have no idea that this is the case, but all the while they all are suffering from it. It is consistent across the entire globe: there is no mindfulness at all from birth until death. There are only a few handfuls of

people that are awake. Nearly everyone is completely lost, but does not know that this is so.

Therefore, we must listen to the Dhamma regularly and then one day our mind will awaken. All it takes is to be truly aware for but an instant, and we will know that for our whole lives prior to that point we had been lost, totally absorbed in content. We will know what being lost is. It is like our above example, if one person suddenly becomes good in a room of bad people, he will clearly see that everyone else is bad, and that he had been bad up until then. As we continue to learn the Dhamma, and see what being lost is, we will also see that we cannot prohibit the mind from getting lost. We will be aware one moment, and lost the next. If we keep watching this, the wisdom will arise that we cannot prevent our mind from getting lost, and we cannot force our mind to become aware. If we try to force mindfulness, for example by feverish mental noting, we will get even more lost. Mindfulness, however, will occur more often as it is able to recognize different phenomena. For example, when it knows what it is like to be lost in thought, it will have a cause for arising. Mindfulness will arise out of natural causation, not because we are forcing it to. And it will also pass quickly. A virtuous mind is not a permanent thing. We will clearly see that we cannot prevent being lost in thought. We can't chase it away, and we can't command mindfulness to come in. We also can't make it stay. Being lost or aware, greedy or not greedy, angry or not angry – they are all equivalent phenomena. A truly mindful mind does

not value one over another. They teach us that they are impermanent, imperfect (unsatisfactory) and that they are not us (The Three Characteristics; *anicca, dukkha, anattā*). This is the wisdom that will arise in our mind. And we will come to know the true nature of things, that a mind that is virtuous and a mind that is not are just passing phenomena. We will know that we cannot control it. In the end, we will see that all things that arise, also pass away. There is nothing in this world that persists. There is nothing that we can force to happen. If there is a cause for something, it will arise. When there is no cause for it to be there, it will pass away. There is no self to be found. The mind that has reached this point will be completely concentrated (*appanā-samādhi*).

When the mind is completely concentrated, it will see phenomena quickly arising and falling away. Then there will be just a few “mental” moments where the mind releases itself from suffering. For some who are very developed, there will just be two mental moments, that the *Abhidhamma* calls the moment of access and the moment of conformity to the Truth (*saccānulomika-ñāṇa*). At this point the mind is closely following the Noble Truth of unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*). The mind sees that each phenomenon that arises is *dukkha*. However, it doesn't have any aversion towards the unsatisfactory nature. Instead, it has patience (*khanti*) and is completely impartial (*upekkhā*; equanimity). It accepts the truth that *dukkha* arises and passes, arises and passes. Other than *dukkha* nothing else arises at all. It accepts the truth so fully that it stops it's

struggle to avoid or chase away dukkha. After that, the mind lets go of its attachment to the aggregates of dukkha; which is to say, it lets go of its attachment to the body and mind. It flows back into the stream of pure consciousness on the Noble Path to freedom, and the defilements that previously covered pure consciousness are then lifted away by the Noble Path. This is why in the Buddhist scriptures (Tipitaka) it says that the mind is released from what was tainting it (āsava) because it no longer clings. It is all perfectly laid out in the Tipitaka. It is surprising how its words of truth managed to be preserved for so long.

It is the defilements that cover up the mind. When the mind completely sees the true nature of things; that is, sees that aggregates which make up body and mind (khandhas) are nothing but suffering, the mind will release its attachment to them and be free of defilements. It is like a fully developed chick that breaks its way through the egg shell into the vastness of the world.

When the mind is let go of, it releases from the world and the idea of self so completely, so fully, that it never attaches again. We can picture a clown that sells helium balloons, holding a huge cluster of them together by just the string ends in his fist. All he has to do is open his hand, and all the balloons are released in a wink.

Humans and other beings don't realize that the body and mind are suffering. We place a false sense of importance on them, and cling to the idea that they are us, that they are our possessions and not the world's,

that they are good things, wonderful things to bring us happiness. Can everyone see? If we don't know the truth of suffering, the truth of body and mind, then we always want to be happy. Such desire keeps us struggling – struggling in our pursuit of happiness for our body and our mind, struggling to keep our body and our mind out of pain. We are always doing this. Nevertheless, the more we struggle to bring happiness and push away suffering, the more we suffer. This is much easier to see when pain arises. When we have pain, our desire for it to vanish is so strong that our minds are often in a greater state of suffering than the body is. Furthermore, this suffering is above and beyond the normal suffering, which are inherent characteristics of the body and mind already! Here we can see that when suffering arises, not knowing the truth of suffering causes desire to arise. And when desire arises, it causes suffering. Thus we have the wheel of samsara, the cycle of birth and death of worldly phenomena. We can see it all in just this process. Ignorance as to the truth of suffering causes the birth of desire, which in turn causes the birth of suffering.

The truth of suffering that the Buddha taught just means this body and this mind are not us. They are just suffering. They are just aggregates (khandhas) that belong to the earth. The mind is just an element. Consciousness is an element. There is no us. We need genuine mindfulness to see this, right concentration and the wisdom to penetrate into the depths of truth. This truth cannot be arrived at through thinking. Thinking cannot release attachment; it cannot let go. Our job

as meditators is to stay determined in observing the body and mind. When we train in this way, we will soon see that when wanting arises, when attachment arises, the mind suffers. When there is no wanting, no attachment, the mind does not suffer. It is important to mention, however, that this is not quite yet the stage of penetrating insight into the true nature of things. Here we are seeing two types of body and two types of mind, namely, mind that suffers and mind that doesn't and body that suffers and body that doesn't. This is not what the Buddha taught. The Buddha taught that the body and mind are suffering (*dukkha*), not that they are sometimes suffering and sometimes happy. So in the early stages, we still don't see the truth fully, we are just seeing a part of the chain of causality (*paṭicca-samuppāda*; dependent origination). But if we watch the body and mind, come to know the body and mind profoundly, we will know that they are suffering itself. They are not us. When we see the truth in this way, the stage will be reached where we return the body and mind to the world, give them back to their rightful owner, relinquishing all attachment to them. Desire then becomes a thing of the past, as there is no longer anyone's mind to preserve or maintain. So when we know the truth of suffering clearly, its cause (desire) will be automatically abandoned.

I used to be curious about the order of the Four Noble Truths as the Buddha taught them, namely, suffering, its cause, the end of suffering and the Noble Path to the end of suffering. I wondered why the cause of suffering wasn't the first one. I concluded that He

must have ordered them this way because suffering was the fundamental problem. This conclusion, however, was purely a result of analytical thinking. The truth is, the Buddha ordered them in this way because this is the way of the practice. First we must see suffering clearly and directly. We cannot just rush into knowing the cause, the end, or jump on the Noble Path. It is all about the practice. The Buddha didn't teach these things so we can memorize them and play with the concepts; He taught them so we can rightly practice. He knew we must see suffering first. We must watch the body and mind and see suffering for ourselves.

If we are watching incorrectly, we will be lost in one of two ways. We will be lost in thought, or lost in focusing, fixing, forcing our attention somewhere. If we watch correctly, we are practicing what is called the middle way. We watch the natural workings of the body and mind. We see the body and mind as they are. The Three Characteristics, the truth of impermanence, suffering and non-self, will then reveal themselves for us to see. If the truth is not revealed, then we are doing something wrong.

If we make our mind still, the mind will seem to be a permanent fixture. In doing so, we will not have the right understanding. We will not see the true nature of the mind. Everything else will exhibit the Three Characteristics, but the mind won't. To practice the middle way rightly is to know what is wrong. Practice by knowing physical and mental phenomena, practice by watching different states: this is going off into

thought, this is forcing attention, this is greed, this is anger, this is mindlessness, and so on. Keep practicing in this way and genuine mindfulness will arise on its own, and the middle way will too. We can't force the middle way to arise. We can't determine ourselves where the middle is!

Many people try to find where the middle is. Some try to find it in the middle of the chest or the middle of the forehead, or just above the navel. I am not sure what they are trying to find. The middle way cannot be found in the body. The middle way arises in the place where there is genuine mindfulness. And the mind will have mindfulness when it recognizes physical and mental phenomena. There is no thinking here. We have to feel it. Vipassana is not about thinking. Those who practice mental noting, be very careful. If anger or another non-virtuous state arises, know it. The knowing is virtuous. To then proceed and mentally note, "anger, anger.." is thinking, which is non-virtuous once again. We must keep watch. Watch the body. Watch the mind. There is movement of the body, and the mind watches. There is movement in the mind, and the mind watches.



Conversations with Luang Por Pramote

After Venerable (Luang Por) Pramote's talks, he has a question and answer period for meditators. Below are two conversations, each between a lay-student (LS) and Luang Por Pramote (LP).

LS: When I'm looking out at the world, I see the view much more than I'm seeing my mind. The knowing is just for a moment, and then I'm looking out again. Sometimes I am aware that looking is happening for longer. But I'm not sure if I am doing it right.

LP: The way you are watching your mind is not quite the real thing. It is almost there, but you are watching too purposefully.

LS: Sometimes I look out, and I am not aware that I'm looking out. But I can feel that I am seeing.

LP: *When you know that you are looking, it is not a natural knowing. It is still a little overdone, which makes it dull.*

LS: *Sometimes I want to come back to watching the mind.*

LP: *Don't do that. If you want to, just know there is wanting. Once there is wanting, see the wanting. That is watching the mind!*

LS: *I have trouble seeing the wanting clearly. I know I'm wanting, but I can't quite sense anything.*

LP: *Just that is enough. Know there is wanting, and then when it is gone know it is gone. It doesn't have to go further than that.*

LS: The mental objects are often weak. I can barely see the wanting at all.

LP: That doesn't matter. Just see what you can. It doesn't matter which of the four foundations of mindfulness (body, feelings, mind, Dhamma) we watch.

LS: Sometimes when I come back to watch my mind, the wanting is already gone.

LP: If you come back to watch your mind intentionally, you should know that you are bringing it back. Here, greed has arisen; a defilement has arisen.

LS: When I intentionally come back to watching the mind, I know there is wanting to do it, but then the original mental phenomenon that I came back for becomes so weak that there is nothing left to watch.

LP: It is so weak because it is something of the past. That phenomenon has fallen away already.

LS: But the wanting seems to stay because it went unnoticed from the start.

LP: So how do you know then that you are wanting to watch the mind? That is the knowing we need. We don't need to watch wanting in any detail. We just need to know there is wanting. A few days ago a child was listening to

me talking about seeing the defilements and asked, "When we see them, what do they look like? Do they have big scary eyes?" I answered that we don't see their body or shape; we just know when they have arisen. She replied, "Ooh, then I see them just fine."

LS: When I listen to you talk, I am still watching my mind too purposefully, right?

LP: Yes, a little overdone, a little more than natural. Can you see? Your mind is rendered a bit dull.

LS: If this is so, what should I do about it?

LP: There is nothing to do. Merely know it, just the way it is. And don't hate it either. If you hate it, know you are hating it. If you want to fix it, know you are wanting to fix it. Just follow each phenomenon with knowing, as much as you can notice. In Vipassana, we can only know as much as we are able to. There isn't a standard by which we need to follow regarding how many phenomena we need to know. "Shoulds" are just our own expectations. Just know what you can of whatever occurs naturally.

LS: I can't seem to separate from my body or mind.

LP: Because you still want a separation. I keep

saying that we cannot make anything happen. Just know. Just know that you want the mind to separate. That is all you need to do. Separation will occur or not according to its own causes. What is the cause of this attachment? You are forcing the practice too much, as I have said, and it is making the mind dull.

LS: When I am looking out at things, does that mean I don't have an inner awareness? Does that mean I am "sending my mind out"?

LP: No. In your case, you don't totally let your mind go out. You are scared to let it out, so you pull it back a bit.

LS: Well, if I let it out it will stay out a long time; it will get lost in thought.

LP: Let the mind get lost. Then when it is lost, just know it.

LS: But it gets lost for so long.

LP: See? It is too long, right? It should be shorter, shouldn't it? There is the word "should" again. Too much, too little, too long, too short – they all come from our expectations. What can you do so that you are lost for shorter periods of time? If your mind recognizes mental states with precision, it will get lost for shorter periods and mindfulness will come in more often.

Everyone please consider what I say now as homework: Whatever method of meditation we presently practice, please continue it. Do it diligently. The only methods I don't recommend are those where we are watching something outside ourselves, like looking at a candle flame. These styles are not relevant to watching our body and mind. It is too difficult to come back inside and see the body and mind in these methods. If our practice is relevant to the body and mind, then please continue it. I recommend at night, we do our evening ritual of prayers or chanting and then do some sitting and walking meditation. We should do whatever method of meditation we are accustomed to, but do it to know the body and mental states. If our method is watching the abdomen rise and fall, likely we watch it as intently as we can in the hopes that we will benefit one day. Now we will make a little adjustment. Now as we watch our abdomen, if the mind goes off to think, then know it. If the mind is forcing attention somewhere, then know it. If the mind is happy, suffering, virtuous, non-virtuous, then know it. Keep watching and knowing the different physical and mental phenomena that arise. If we keep up watching and knowing phenomena every day, the mind will better remember them. This will enable

the mind to recognize different phenomena more easily when they reoccur. Mindfulness of phenomena will then arise by itself. This is why we need to practice regularly.

LS: *If I intentionally come back to watch the mind, then I am forcing it to, aren't I?*

LP: *That practice isn't quite right.*

LS: *But isn't that how I can watch and know mental states?*

LP: *That isn't knowing. That is focusing on the states. Watching the mind is about knowing what has arisen. This means that a phenomenon occurs, and then we know that it has. We get lost in thought, and then we know it. Anger arises, and then we know there is anger. Don't pull the mind back and set it to look. Just know after each mental phenomenon has arisen. Don't intentionally focus your mind in advance.*

LS: *So then how do we make the mind know often?*

LP: *It will know often if we keep noticing mental states as much as possible. We just live our normal lives. The eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind will make contact with the world all the time. We can talk to our friends and do whatever else we do. Just know the mental*

states as they change. Eventually, the mind will well remember a great number of states.

LS: When we are watching, aren't we intending to?

LP: No, that is not true. Allow the feeling or mental state to arise first, and then know it. In this way, at first we will only know the really obvious ones, for example anger. Then later, we will know states a little more subtle, like being annoyed, and eventually, we will be able to notice even the slightest irritation. We don't force ourselves to see subtle phenomena arise; the way is to know simply and enjoyably.

This is what we all should do. Practice our normal meditation method, but when the mind gets lost in thought, know it. When it is focusing, know it. When it is happy, sad, angry, greedy or lost, just know each state has arisen. Train in this way every day. Make time to do this. There need not be the slightest idea about when our practice will improve or when genuine mindfulness will arise. When we have had plenty of practice, our mind will remember many states and thus recognize them at once when they appear. Mindfulness will then arise on its own in our daily life. In this room here there are many of my students who have mindfulness arise on its own. And when it does, we will come to see the body is

not us. It is just a form with movement. We will also see the mind is impermanent, ever changing and cannot be controlled. This is how we will see it.

*At this point, we will have learned what is necessary. And when we keep feeding the truth to our mind each day, watching the body and mind each day, one day true wisdom will blossom. It will be crystal clear that the body and mind are not us. We see more and more clearly as we sever the wrong view that the body and mind are us. (There are 10 'fetters' that are severed, called *saṃyojana*.) We will then back away and never have the feeling that the body and mind are us again. There is nothing to hold on to, nothing to maintain.*

*Keep practicing until one day we will relinquish our attachment to the body. The mind will be completely and constantly awake without any effort. This is the Buddhist stage of sainthood known as the *Anāgāmi*. As we practice further, consciousness, the 'knowing' element, will show its characteristics of impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*) and non-self (*anattā*). And the mind will let go; as it will no longer be anyone's possession, it will return itself to the world. And then it is final. There is nothing left to do. We don't*

even need to call one who has undergone this process “enlightened” or an “arabant” – there remains nothing substantial to give a label or denote.

(Venerable Pramote then turns his attention to Moomai, a lady in the audience)

LP: *Moomai, how are you doing?*

Now, who turned to look at Moomai without remembering to be aware of themselves? Be brave enough to admit it! (Venerable Pramote acknowledges two people at the front) The two of you here are knowing correctly. You understand, right? All that is required for my approval of your practice is to know the states that arise. See the mind get lost at the eyes, the ears, in the thoughts, and so on. Just that is enough. Just that is enough for genuine mindfulness to arise.

Let’s not let our practice slip. Even the world champion boxer doesn’t stop training. No matter how much strength we’ve lost in our left hook, we should never stop training. If we like to use a mantra like “Buddho, Buddho...”, then use it. If we are accustomed to watching the breath, then keep going. If we have trained in watching the abdomen rise and fall, then keep at it. Just know as different mental states arise. Some days we

are tired and lethargic. Some days we fall into Samatha. Some days we separate out of the mental states and are able to see them clearly. This is how the practice goes. If we practice in this way mindfulness will arise in our daily life.

(Another lay-student now addresses Venerable Pramote)

LS: Intellectually, I know so much about the truth. However, when it comes to my practice, I'm afraid I'm just totally lost in desire. I don't have mindfulness. I am not aware. I keep thinking about what you teach and what you say, but I can't seem to do it right.

LP: Just knowing that at the time it arises is enough. Mindfulness is not us or under our control. If it doesn't arise, then it doesn't arise. We don't practice so that we can be aware twenty-four hours per day. We want to be aware so that we can know truly that non-virtuous mental states are impermanent and that virtuous ones are impermanent too. This is what we are learning. We are not learning to have mindfulness every moment of our lives, knowing in every moment. Perhaps you can see that if we were never aware of the body walking, then we would never know that we were primarily lost in thought while walking. But if we can be aware of the body

walking, then as soon as we are we will see, “ a moment ago I was lost in thought, and now I am not. Oh, I got lost again, and now I am knowing again.” Both being lost and aware of body and mind are impermanent mental states; they come and go. We cannot control them. Eventually, the mind will drop both of them. It will not drop the state of being lost and keep the state of mindfulness. Both of them will be let go of. I believe this is the place of your confusion. Sometimes the defilements such as desire are in control. This is normal. It is good that you can see this.

LS: Well, I don't think it is normal in my case. I mean, I do see small desires come and go, but when it is desire to develop in my practice, it sends me on a tangent. I keep feeling that it is correct to have such desires.

LP: It is easy for good people to stop doing bad deeds, but difficult to stop good ones. Can you see that when we love goodness it is hard to let it go? The Buddha said that it is hard for good people to do bad deeds, but easy for them to do good ones. And it is difficult for bad people to do good, but easy for them to do bad. So in your case, you are a good person, so it is easy to stop doing bad. As soon as you see any badness arise in your mind, it drops

away quickly. See it, and it goes. Regarding goodness, it is a different story. You are a good person, so it is hard for you to let go of goodness. No need to be surprised by this.

LS: I always want my thoughts to be good ones. So I have this unpleasant wanting in the mind without being aware of it.

LP: The truth is that once wanting has arisen, it is not a good thing.

LS: I am not aware of the desire when it arises. I just think I'm doing something good.

LP: This is a mental state that you didn't know previously. But now you know it. Do you see that? Now it cannot fool you. Now something else will instead. Whatever we can know when it arises in awareness cannot fool us into becoming it or clinging to it. Whatever we don't know has arisen will fool us again. But remember that we are not practicing to achieve or receive anything. We just practice to see the truth that all mental and physical phenomena are impermanent, suffering, and are not us. And when we see this, we return it all to the world. Upon completely letting go, no feeling of responsibility will remain, even the one to be and do good.

There was a doctor once that told me he went

to pay his respects to a meditation master. When he did, he told the master that he has mindfulness all of the time; all day long he is able to watch his body and mind without fail. The master then looked at the doctor, smiled and said just two words: child's play. The doctor said he was very confused, and so he asked the master if he was not in a state of mindfulness. The master said that he was not. The doctor then asked what the master's internal dwelling place is. The master then said he will refrain from answering that question.

From this story, we can see that mindfulness of the body and mind, right concentration, wisdom and such things are the boat on which we sail to nibbāna. We are not practicing so that we can keep this boat. Gradually watching and knowing the body and mind more and more is the right thing to do, and will bring benefit.

LS: Another thing I would like to say is that I think this is great. When a thought arises and mindfulness knows it quickly, the mind won't start wandering off. Sometimes when I'm not aware enough and the mind already gets into the story, I become aware a few moments later and know that I was thinking. I just want to say that I think this is a good thing.

LP: Good. We don't practice so that we can stop

thinking. We practice so that so we can know when thought does appear. In this way, we will not start thinking aimlessly and unwholesomely. If we have some task to perform that requires thinking, we can think. But if there is no reason to think, we don't have to mindlessly fall into non-virtuous thoughts. When we are mindful, we will see that we cannot prevent the mind from thinking, and we cannot control the fact that everything arises and then falls away. All mental states are the same in this regard.

I believe that is enough for today.

About LP Pramote

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

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

About the Translator

After a shortened career as an actuarial mathematician, Jess Peter Koffman became interested in meditation in 2000 on a journey through Thailand, and has never looked back. Since then, he has completed a multitude of Buddhist meditation retreats, and has compiled, edited and translated spiritual books including *The Top Secret* by Som Sujira and *The Handbook for Mankind* by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu. He holds an M.A. in Buddhist Studies and is a special lecturer in Applied Dhamma at Mahachula University in Bangkok, where he was awarded Best Thesis of 2009. He primarily works as a Reiki Master Teacher/Healer and meditation instructor in Thailand and Canada, and he continues to practice meditation under the guidance of Luang Por Pramote. For more about Jess and his work, please visit www.healinglife.org.

