Panditarama Lumbini International Vipassana Meditation Center

Meditation Instructions

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Contents

Practical Basic Vipassanā Exercises by Mahāsi Sayādaw **1**
Preface . . . 1
Discourse on the Method of Practising Contemplation . . . 2
The Preparatory Stage . . . 2
Basic Lessons in Contemplation . . . 4
Lesson I . . . 4
Lesson II . . . 5
Lesson III . . . 6
Advancement in Contemplation . . . 12
Lesson IV . . . 14
Summary of Lessons . . . 15

Additional Instructions by Sayādaw U Vivekānanda **17**
Preface . . . 17
Sitting Meditation . . . 17
Walking Meditation . . . 21
General Activities & Mindfulness . . . 24
Interviews . . . 25
Difficulties . . . 26
Recommendations for Balanced Practice . . . 28

Practical Basic Vipassanā Exercises by Mahāsi Sayādaw

Preface

"Guide to the practical course of Vipassanā Meditation in two volumes" is a treatise written by Mahāsi Sayādaw (Aggamahāpaṇḍita Bhadanta Sobhana, Mahā Thera). The first volume contains a full informative exposition of the fundamental principles of the systematic method of carrying out practical Vipassanā Meditation in accordance with the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta and its traditional expositions. The second volume discourses wholly on the subject of the practical side of Vipassanā Meditation. It explains in detail the exercises to be carried out in the course of training, how personal experiences are gained and how Vipassanā knowledge is gradually developed. It also gives a full description of the various classes of Vipassanā knowledge by comparing the usual experiences gained during the actual practice. In this respect many well established authorities are quoted.

This is the translation of the first fourteen pages of Vol. II, which contain only the summary discourse on the lessons of the practical basic exercises. This was done for the sake of devotees of other nationalities who have come from time to time to the Mahāsi Satipaṭṭhāna Vipassanā Meditation Centre at Thāthana Yeikthā, Rangoon, for the purpose of carrying out the intensive course of training in Meditation.

This is merely a brief outline of practical lessons and it is intended primarily for the information of a beginner who is then given personal guidance throughout the course until he satisfactorily completes the training by gaining sufficient experience and knowledge in the practical meditation.

U Pe Thin,
Mahāsi Yogi

Discourse on the Method of Practising Contemplation

The exercise to be undertaken for the purpose of developing contemplation and the varied degrees of Insight (Vipassanā Ñāṇa) will be described according to the actual exercises to be carried out and experiences gained thereafter. For the sake of those who possess little or no learning, simple language will be used.

The Preparatory Stage

Anyone who sincerely desires to develop contemplation and attain Insight (Vipassanā Ñāṇa) in the present life should, in the first place, give up worldly thoughts and actions for the time being during the training. He should at the same time strictly observe the rules of discipline (Sīla) prescribed for observance by the lay-disciples and monks respectively. This course of action in the purification of character is essential as a preliminary step towards the proper development of contemplation and plays an important part in gaining Insight (Vipassanā Ñāṇa). The disciple should therefore have full confidence that his action in keeping himself pure of conduct will surely lead him to his main object. If ever the disciple should happen to look upon any Noble One (Ariya) with contempt or speak in jest or malice, he should personally or through his Meditation Instructor (Kammaṭṭhāna Ācariya) tender his unqualified apology. In Commentaries it is emphasized that a disciple should entrust himself to the Buddha during the period of training. The advantage in this action is that he would not feel

alarmed or frightened if he saw any unwholesome or frightening visions during contemplation. Further, it is emphasized that a disciple should place himself directly in charge of his Meditation Instructor (Kammaṭṭhāna Ācariya). The advantage in this action is that his instructor can talk to him frankly as regards his work in contemplation and give him any guidance necessary. The disciple should therefore entrust himself to the Buddha and place himself directly in charge of his Instructor. Though he may not formally place himself in charge of his Instructor, it will be well if the disciple tries his best to follow the instructions given for his guidance. Nibbāna (Deliverance) is wholesome and good. Magga (the Way to Nibbāna) is also wholesome and good. This intensive course of training in Contemplation will surely lead the disciple to Magga Ñāṇa and Nibbāna. The disciple should therefore incline his mind towards that end, ardently believing that his training will be successfully completed.

The same kind of intensive course of training in Contemplation has invariably been taken by successive Buddhas and Ariyas who have attained Nibbāna. It is therefore a matter of congratulation for the disciple to have this opportunity of treading the same path and carrying out the same training. With these encouraging thoughts the disciple should begin his training by first devoting himself to the Buddha, keenly appreciating the nine chief characteristic qualities of the Buddha thus: "Truly, the Buddha is holy, is fully enlightened, perfect in knowledge and conduct, a well-farer, world-knower, charioteer unsurpassed in taming all men, teacher of devas and mankind, awakened and exalted one." The disciple should then give out his Mettā (all-embracing kindness) to all living beings throughout the Universe. If possible he should reflect upon the repulsive nature of the body and the condition of ever-approaching death.

To begin the exercises of the training it would be best to take up the sitting posture with crossed legs. The disciple might feel more comfortable in sitting for a long time if he kept the legs apart, without pressing each other. Those who are not used to sitting on the floor, who would find that it hinders them in concentration, may sit in their usual way. The disciple should then proceed with each exercise in contemplation as described below:

Basic Lessons in Contemplation

Lesson I

The disciple should try to keep his mind on his abdomen. He will then come to know the movement of "rising" and "falling" of his abdomen. If these movements are not clear at the beginning, one or both hands should be placed on the abdomen. After a time the upward movement due to in-breathing and downward movement due to out-breathing will become clear. Then a mental note, such as "rising" for the upward movement and "falling" for the downward movement should be made as each movement occurs. Every effort should be made to know clearly each movement as it occurs. It may perhaps be thought that this kind of exercise will simply lead to knowing the form of the abdomen and not the manner of actual moving upward. One should not dwell on such thoughts but proceed with the exercise. For a beginner it is the only easy method of developing the faculties of Sati (attentiveness), Samādhi (fixedness of Mind) and Ñāṇa (insight) in contemplation. As he gains practice, the manner of movement without the form will be clear. The ability of knowing each successive occurrence of Nāma-Rūpa (mental and physical processes) at each of the six sense-organs can be acquired only when the Contemplation (vipassanā) is fully developed. However, for a beginner whose Sati (attentiveness) and Samādhi (fixedness of mind) are still weak, it is difficult to keep his mind on each occurrence as it takes place successively. He may be at a loss to know how to keep his mind on each. Or he may be losing time in trying to search for his mental objects. The movements of "rising" and "falling" are always present and there is practically no need to look for them. It is very easy for a beginner to keep his mind on these movements. For this reason this first lesson is prescribed as a basic exercise in the course of this training. Further exercises to be taken up by the disciple as he progresses in the practice will be described later on. The disciple should keep on with this exercise of knowing the movements of the abdomen as "rising" and "falling." It may be mentioned that it is necessary to make a mental note of each movement as "rising" and "falling" so as to keep time

with each movement. The disciple should on no account repeat by mouth. The disciple should avoid breathing deeply or quickly with a view to making the movements more clear. If he tries the method of breathing deeply and quickly the disciple will soon feel tired and will not be in a position to proceed with his exercise. It must therefore be emphasized that the disciple should proceed with his exercise of knowing the movements of his abdomen as they occur in the course of normal and natural breathing.

Lesson II

While being occupied with his exercise of knowing each movement of "rising" and "falling" other moments of mental activities, such as thoughts, intentions, ideas, imaginings etc., may also occur between each noting of rising and falling. These mental activities should not be disregarded but must be followed up as soon as each occurs. A mental note of each by whichever term it is known should be made as it occurs.

Illustration

If you imagine, make a mental note such as "imagining." If you are thinking of something, make a mental note such as "thinking." If you reflect — "reflecting"; intend — "intending"; understand — "understanding" and so on. If you find your mind wanders from the object of meditation — "wandering." If in your imagination you go to a place — "going", reach the place — "reaching"; meet a person — "meeting"; speak to him — "speaking"; argue with him — "arguing." If you have a vision of image, light, colour etc. — "seeing." Such mental vision should be noted repeatedly until it passes away. After their disappearance you proceed with the first lesson of knowing the "rising" and "falling" regularly and without relaxation. While being occupied with this exercise if you intend to swallow saliva make a mental note — "intending", "intending"; while in the act of swallowing — "swallowing", "swallowing"; again if you intend to spit — "intending", "intending"; while in the act of spitting — "spitting", "spitting". Then go

back to your original exercise of knowing "rising" and "falling." If you intend to bend your neck — "intending", "intending"; while in the act of bending — "bending", "bending." Again, if you intend to straighten your neck — "intending", "intending"; while in the act of straightening — "straightening", "straightening." The actions of bending and straightening the neck should be carried out very slowly. After these actions you should proceed with the exercise of knowing "rising" and "falling".

Lesson III

As the disciple has to carry on with his contemplation in one definite posture (either sitting or lying down) for a long time he may have an intense feeling of tiredness or stiffness in his body or limbs. In such case, he should keep his mind on the place where such feeling occurs and carry on with his contemplation, such as "tired", "tired" or "stiff", "stiff" in a regulated manner — neither slowly nor quickly. Generally such feeling will become feeble gradually and cease altogether. On the other hand such feeling may grow stronger and stronger until it becomes unbearable. In such cases, if he intends to change his position, he should first make a mental note, such as "intending", "intending" and then proceed with his movements in changing his position, each detail of which should be contemplated in the respective order of movements.

Illustration

If you intend to lift the hand or leg, "intending", "intending"; while in the act of lifting, "lifting", "lifting"; while in the act of stretching, "stretching", "stretching"; while in the act of bending, "bending", "bending"; while in the act of putting down, "putting", "putting"; as it touches, "touching", "touching." The above actions must be carried out slowly. As soon as the disciple is settled in a new position, he should proceed with his usual contemplation of "rising" and "falling." If again in his new position he feels hot in any part of his body and intends to change his position the disciple should carry on with his contemplation in the same manner as mentioned above.

If the disciple feels any itching sensation in any part of his body, he should keep his mind on the spot, making a mental note such as "itching", "itching"; in a regulated manner — neither slowly nor quickly. If the itching sensation disappears in the course of thus making mental note, the disciple should then proceed with the usual exercise of knowing the "rising" and "falling". If, however, the disciple feels that the itching becomes unbearable and he intends to rub the spot, he should first make a mental note of his intention such as "intending", "intending"; then he should lift his hand slowly making a mental note such as "lifting", "lifting"; when his hand touches the spot he should make a mental note such as "touching", "touching"; then he should rub slowly at the same time making a mental note such as "rubbing", "rubbing"; on the ceasing of the itching sensation if he intends to stop rubbing he should make a mental note such as "intending", "intending"; then he should draw back his hand slowly at the same time making a mental note such as "withdrawing", "withdrawing"; when his hand rests at its usual place touching the limb, he should make a mental note such as "touching", "touching." Then the disciple will proceed with his original exercise of knowing "rising" and "falling".

If the disciple feels any other kinds of painful sensation, he should keep his mind on the spot where such sensation occurs, making a mental note such as "painful", "painful"; "suffering", "suffering"; "aching", "aching"; "pressing", "pressing"; "tired", "tired"; "giddy", "giddy" and so on. The mental note must be made in a regulated manner — neither slowly nor quickly. The disciple may feel that the painful sensation ceases after a while. Or on the other hand he may feel that the pain is increasing. If he feels that the pain is increasing he should not be alarmed at this but must proceed with his contemplation resolutely. If the disciple carries on in this manner the pain usually ceases. If, however, the disciple after some time finds that the pain increases and becomes almost unbearable, he must ignore the pain and proceed with the contemplation of "rising" and "falling".

In some cases, the disciple may feel unbearable sensations of pain as soon as he gains certain progress in his Samādhi (attentiveness). At times he may feel a choking or stifling sensation, or he may feel the painful sensation of being poked by a knife or sharp-pointed stick, or

he may feel a burning sensation of being pricked by sharp needles, or he may feel an unpleasant sensation as if small insects were crawling all over the body. At times he may also feel strongly the sensations of itching, biting, intense cold etc. As soon as the disciple stops his contemplation he may feel that these painful sensations cease; and again on his proceeding with his contemplation he may feel them as soon as he gains his Sati (attentiveness). As a matter of fact these painful sensations are neither serious nor are they any form of disease. They are common factors and are always present in the body. As in the normal condition the mind is always occupied with more conspicuous objects, these trifling factors become obscure. With the development of contemplation, the mental faculty becomes keener and the disciple is therefore in a position to know these sensations until he has overcome them and until they cease. By resolutely proceeding with the contemplation, the disciple will not come to any harm. If the disciple feels timid and wavers in the contemplation by stopping, he may encounter them again and again as soon as his contemplation is developed. If, however, he proceeds resolutely with his contemplation he will overcome these painful conditions. He then may not again come across this kind of painful state in the course of his contemplation.

If the disciple intends to sway his body, he should make a mental note, such as "intending", "intending"; and while in the act of swaying — "swaying", "swaying." In some cases it may so happen that the disciple while being occupied with his usual contemplation, finds his body swaying to and fro. He should not be alarmed or worried about this. At the same time he should not be pleased with it and wish for it. On the other hand, he must bear in mind that swaying will automatically cease if he keeps his mind firmly on this "swaying". He should thus make a mental note, such as, "swaying", "swaying"; in a regulated manner — neither slowly nor quickly till swaying ceases. If he finds that swaying becomes intense in spite of his making a mental note, he should lean against the wall or post, or lie down on his bed and then proceed with his contemplation. The disciple should act in the same manner if he finds himself shaking or trembling. At times when his contemplation is developed he may feel a thrill off and on. Or he may feel a chill passing through the back or through the whole

body. This is nothing but Pīti (feeling of intense interest or rapture) which naturally occurs in the course of contemplation when it is good. While his mind is fixed in contemplation the disciple may be startled at the slightest sound. This so happens because the disciple can feel more strongly the effect of Phassa (sensorial "impression") while in a state of good concentration. The disciple should make a mental note of his intention first when he is going to change the position of his body or limbs and then proceed with every action of the movement, which should be carried out slowly.

While, in the course of his contemplation, he feels thirsty, he should make a mental note of this feeling, such as "thirsty", "thirsty"; if he then intends to stand up — "intending", "intending"; then he should make a mental note of each action of movement in preparing himself for standing up; he should keep his mind intently on the act of standing up and make a mental note such as "standing" — "standing"; when he looks forward as soon as he has stood up straight, he will make a mental note such as "looking", "seeing" — "looking", "seeing"; when he intends to go forward, "intending", "intending"; when he begins to step forward he should make a mental note of each step, such as "walking", "walking" or "left", "right." While walking it is important to know completely every movement in each step, from the beginning to the end. The same procedure should be adopted when he is taking a stroll or walking exercise to and fro. The disciple should try and make a mental note of each step in two sections, such as, "lifting", "putting", "lifting", "putting"; on getting sufficient practice in this manner, he should then try and make a mental note of each step in three sections, such as, "lifting", "pushing", "putting" or "up", "forward", "down".

When he looks at the water-pot (or tap) as soon as he reaches the place, he should make a mental note, such as, "looking", "seeing"; when he stops — "stopping", "stopping"; when he stretches his hand — "stretching", "stretching"; when the hand touches the cup — "touching", "touching"; when the hand catches hold of the cup — "catching", "catching"; when the hand dips the cup in the water — "dipping", "dipping"; when the hand brings the cup to the mouth — "bringing", "bringing"; when the cup touches the lips — "touching", "touching"; when he feels cold at the touch — "cold", "cold"; when he swallows —

"swallowing", "swallowing"; when he returns the cup — "returning", "returning"; when he withdraws his hand — "withdrawing", "withdrawing"; when he puts down his hand — "putting", "putting"; when the hand touches the side of the body — "touching", "touching"; when he intends to turn back — "intending", "intending"; when he turns round — "turning", "turning"; when he marches forward — "walking", "walking"; on reaching his place when he intends to stop, "intending", "intending"; when he stops — "stopping", "stopping"; if he keeps on standing for some time, he should proceed with the usual contemplation of "rising" and "falling". If he intends to sit down — "intending", "intending"; when he goes to the place for sitting down — "walking", "walking"; when he reaches the place — "reaching", "reaching"; when he turns to sit — "turning", "turning"; when he intends to sit down — "intending", "intending"; when he is in the act of sitting — "sitting", "sitting"; he should sit down slowly and also keep his mind on the downward motion. Mental note should also be made of every action of his movements in bringing his legs and hands into position. He should then proceed with his usual contemplation of "rising" and "falling".

When he intends to lie down — "intending", "intending"; he should then proceed with the contemplation on every action of movement in the course of lying down, such as, "lifting", "lifting"; "stretching", "stretching"; "leaning", "leaning"; and so on. When he lies down — "lying", "lying"; when his body touches the pillow — "touching", "touching." Again he should proceed with the contemplation of every action of movement in bringing his hands, legs and body into position. These actions should be carried out slowly. Then he should proceed with the usual contemplation of the "rising" and "falling." If he feels any pain or feels hot or feels tired or feels itching or feels any other sensation he should make a mental note of such feelings. Contemplation of various actions in swallowing and spitting, of feelings of pain and any other sensations, of various occurrences of thoughts, ideas, considerations, reflections etc. and of various actions of movement of hands, legs and body etc. should be carried out as is usually done in the sitting posture. If there is nothing particular of note, the disciple should carry on with the usual contemplation of "rising" and "falling."

If he then feels sleepy he should make a mental note, such as, "sleepy", "sleepy"; if he feels drowsy — "drowsy", "drowsy." After the disciple has gained sufficient concentration in contemplation he may find that the sleepy or drowsy feeling passes away soon after and he will feel fresh again. He will then proceed with the usual contemplation of "rising" and "falling". Though he may not be able to overcome the feeling of "drowsiness" he should not stop but carry on with his contemplation until he falls asleep.

Sleep is nothing but a state of Bhavaṅga-santāna (continuity of sub-consciousness). It is similar to the first state of rebirth consciousness and the last state of consciousness at the moment of death. This state of consciousness is feeble and is not in a position to know any object. During waking life this state of Bhavaṅga regularly occurs between moments of seeing, hearing, thinking etc. But as the occurrence of this state of Bhavaṅga does not naturally last long it is not generally clear and noticeable. This state of Bhavaṅga continues for a long time during sleep and it therefore becomes obvious. During sleep no contemplation is feasible.

On awakening, the disciple should start with the contemplation of the first moment of awakening, such as "awakening", "awakening". For a beginner it may not be possible to start from the first moment of awakening. He should, however, start from the moment he remembers. For instance, if he becomes aware of the fact that he is reflecting, he should at once start his contemplation from this point, such as "reflecting", "reflecting." He should afterwards proceed with his usual contemplation of "rising" and "falling." Every detailed action of the movements in turning, bending, stretching etc. his body, hands and legs should be contemplated. If he thinks of the time, he should make a mental note, such as, "thinking", "thinking"; if he intends to get up — "intending", "intending"; if he prepares to gather up his body into position for getting up — "preparing", "preparing"; as he raises up his body slowly — "getting up", "getting up"; when he comes to the sitting position — "sitting", "sitting"; if he remains in the sitting position long, he should proceed with the usual contemplation of "rising" and "falling".

While the disciple is in the act of washing his face or taking his bath, he should carry out these acts with due contemplation of every detail in its order, such as "looking", "seeing", "stretching", "holding", "dipping", "carrying", "pouring", "feeling cold", "rubbing" and so on. While in the act of adjusting his dress, or arranging his bed, or opening or closing the door, or handling or taking up anything he should be occupied with the contemplation of every detail of his actions in their respective order. He should similarly be occupied with the contemplation of every detail of his actions when he is partaking of his food, such as, when he looks at the food — "looking", "seeing"; when he arranges the food with his hand — "arranging", "arranging"; when he brings the food to the mouth — "bringing", "bringing"; when he bends his neck forward — "bending", "bending"; when the food touches the lips — "touching", "touching"; when he places the food in the mouth — "placing", "placing"; when he shuts the mouth — "shutting", "shutting"; when he withdraws his hand — "withdrawing", "withdrawing"; when his hand touches the plate — "touching", "touching"; when he straightens his neck — "straightening", "straightening"; when he chews — "chewing", "chewing"; when he knows the taste — "knowing", "knowing"; when he swallows the food — "swallowing", "swallowing"; when the food goes down the throat touching the sides — "touching", "touching." Thus he should carry on his contemplation every time he partakes of a morsel of food until he finishes his meal. In the beginning of the practice there will be many omissions. However, the disciple should not waver in his endeavour but persist in this practice. As he gains practice he will find that he can carry on with fewer omissions. With more advanced practice he will be able to know more details than those mentioned above.

Advancement in Contemplation

After having practised for a day and a night the disciple may find that his contemplation has advanced considerably and thus he can carry on with his usual contemplation of "rising" and "falling" easily. He will at the same time find that a break generally occurs between the

movements of "rising" and "moving." If he is in the sitting posture, he should fill in the break by making a mental note on the act of sitting as well, such as "rising", "falling", "sitting" — "rising", "falling", "sitting." While making such a note as "sitting", he should keep his mind on the erect position of his body. If he is in the lying posture he should proceed thus — "rising", "falling", "lying", "rising", "falling", "lying." If he still finds it easy to proceed with making a note of three sections and if he finds that a break generally occurs at the end of "rising" as well as at the end of "falling", he should proceed with making a note, such as, "rising", "sitting" (or "lying"), "falling", "sitting" (or "lying"). As soon as he does not find it easy to carry on with this manner of making a note on three or four sections, he should revert to the usual manner of noting two sections, such as "rising" and "falling".

While the disciple is engaged in the ordinary mode of contemplating any movements of his body he need not concern himself with any object of seeing or hearing. So long as he is able to keep his mind on the movements of "rising" and "falling", it may be assumed that the purpose of keeping the mind on the mere point of seeing and hearing is also served. If, however, he happens to look intentionally at an object he should at once make a mental note, such as "seeing", "seeing", two or three times, and then proceed with his usual contemplation of "rising" and "falling." If any person (either male or female) happens to come in sight, he should make a mental note, such as, "seeing", "seeing", two or three times, and then proceed with his usual contemplation of "rising" and "falling." If he happens to listen to any voice, he should make a mental note, such as, "listening", "hearing" — "listening", "hearing", and then proceed with his usual contemplation of "rising" and "falling." If he happens to hear loud sounds, such as barking of dogs, speaking, songs, etc., he should at once make a mental note, such as, "hearing", "hearing", two or three times, and then proceed with his usual contemplation of "rising" and "falling." If he fails to contemplate on sights and voices of such distinctive nature as they occur, he may begin to dwell on reflections about those objects, instead of proceeding with his intense contemplation of "rising" and "falling", which may become less distinct and clear. In this way Kilesas (mind-defiling passions) are bred and propagated. If such reflections

occur, he should make a mental note, such as, "reflecting", "reflecting", two or three times and then proceed with his usual contemplation of "rising" and "falling." On moving his body or any of his limbs, if he forgets or omits to make a mental note of these actions, he should simply make a mental note, such as, "forgetting", "forgetting", and then proceed with his usual contemplation. Sometimes he may feel that his breathing becomes slow and the movements of "rising" and "falling" are feeble and not clear. In this case he should proceed with the contemplation of either "sitting", "touching" if he is in sitting posture; or "lying", "touching", if in lying posture. While contemplating "touching" his mind should not be kept on the same spot but on different spots successively. There must be at least six or seven different places.

Lesson IV

After having spent some time in the course of this training, the disciple may feel lazy in his work when he considers that there is no good progress in his training. He should then contemplate, such as, "lazy", "lazy." Before he can gain sufficient strength in Sati (attentiveness), Samādhi (fixedness of mind) and Ñāṇa (insight), the disciple may feel doubtful about the correctness and usefulness of the method of the training itself. In such cases he should proceed with the contemplation, such as, "doubtful", "doubtful". At times he may expect and wish for a good result. In such case, he should proceed with the contemplation, such as "expecting", or "wishing". At times he might try to remember or think of the way or manner of his having carried out his training. In such cases, he should proceed with the contemplation of "remembering" or "thinking." At times he may be trying to examine whether the object of contemplation is Rūpa (matter) or Nāma (mind). In such cases, he should proceed with the contemplation, such as, "examining", "examining." At times he will feel sorry because he does not find any improvement in his contemplation. In such cases, he should proceed with the contemplation, such as, "sorry", "sorry." At times he may feel happy when he thinks that his contemplation is improving. In such cases, he should proceed with his contemplation, such

as, "happy", "happy." In this manner he should make a mental note of every moment of mental behaviour as it occurs, and then proceed with his contemplation of "rising" and "falling." The period of contemplation is from the time of waking until the disciple falls asleep. Thus the disciple should be occupied incessantly with his contemplation throughout the day and night. There should be no relaxation whatever. On reaching a certain stage of developed contemplation, the disciple will not feel sleepy at all and will be able to carry on with his contemplation day and night.

Summary of Lessons

Whether good or bad, the disciple should contemplate on each mental occurrence. Whether small or big, the disciple should contemplate on each movement of his body and limbs. Whether pleasant or unpleasant, the disciple should contemplate on every sensation of his bodily feelings. Whether good or bad, the disciple should contemplate on every mental object or impression. If there is no special thing, the disciple should be fully occupied with the contemplation of "rising" and "falling." If he has to go on any business the disciple should contemplate on each step as "walking", "walking" or "left", "right"; while taking an exercise in walking, the disciple should contemplate on each step by three sections, such as, "up", "forward", "down". The disciple, who is thus occupied fully with his contemplation throughout the day and night will be able to develop his concentration in order to gain the desirable stage of Udayabbaya Ñāṇa (initial stage of the fourth degree of Insight) in no long time, and other higher stages of Vipassanā-Ñāṇa up to the Final Achievement.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Additional Instructions by Sayādaw U Vivekānanda

Preface

The following are additional instructions on the sitting meditation, on formal walking meditation, general activities, interview, initial difficulties and recommendations for balanced practice. These additional instructions emphasize certain points that have already been mentioned by the late Ven. Mahāsi Sayādaw of Myanmar in his basic meditation instructions.

Sitting Meditation

- **Posture**. A meditator should choose a sitting posture that one can maintain comfortably for a long period of time. If one cannot sit in a full lotus posture, then one could try to sit in what is known as half lotus posture; if this proves to be difficult, then one could try to sit in what is called the Burmese posture, namely placing one foot in front of the other without the legs interlocking. Should you find it difficult to sit like this, then you might consider sitting on a bench or sitting on a chair without leaning against the backrest. Keep your sitting posture as correct as possible, ideally ninety degrees to the ground.

- **Hands**. When sitting place your hands either on the knees or between the knees or place your hands on the lap; any posture of the hands is fine.

- **Breathing**. The breathing as recommended by the late Ven. Mahāsi Sayādaw should be natural breathing. Just let the breathing happen by itself. On occasion it will be faster; then just mindfully observe it, know its nature. When on occasion breathing slows down, it becomes more refined; then accept it as such, observe it and know its nature.

- **Primary and Other Predominant Objects**. The primary object of the meditation practice during the sitting meditation is the observation of ***the rising and falling of the movements of the abdomen***. As soon as the "rising" occurs, label (note) it and then try to observe with mindfulness from start until finish and also try to know its nature. The same instruction applies to the falling movement of the abdomen. So at its very beginning you briefly label (note) it as "falling" and you try to know its nature in terms of the most predominant sensations such as tension, pressure, hardness, softness, smoothness, roughness or the type of the movement. Regarding the observation of the "rising" and "falling" as well as other predominant objects as we will see later on, there are three things to state, namely: ***the occurrence of the object***, the ***noting*** or ***labeling***, plus the ***mindful observation of the object*** and ***knowing its nature***. In terms of the occurrence of the object, there is not much that you have to do, this will happen by itself. The noting or labeling does require some effort on your part: you note the object with the (soft) mental labeling, you observe it from start to finish and then the last aspect is to know the nature of the object. The general maxim for the observation of predominant objects is as follows, namely ***always label, observe and try to know the nature of the most predominant object occurring in the body or in the mind starting with an observation of the rising and falling of the abdomen***. An additional instruction here is for a meditator to always or at most times observe one object at

one time and not trying to attain to observe two or three objects simultaneously. While a meditator is observing the rising and falling movement of the abdomen or some other predominant object it may happen that the mind wanders off, it is thinking about something that has not happened yet, that might happen in the future or it might be remembering and living in the past. In this case, take the planning or the imagination as an object, note it accordingly, observe mindfully by knowing its nature, and then return to the observation of the "rising" and "falling". Likewise, when remembering is predominant, take this as an object, label it accordingly as "remembering, remembering" and then observe it and know its nature; once the memories or the remembering have disappeared then return to the observation of the rising and falling. In this case focus your attention on this predominant pain, label it accordingly, and then try to observe it as best as you can without reacting to it and try to know its nature. When it comes to the observation of pains and aches and other predominant bodily sensations, there are four basic categories that you could pay attention to, namely:

1. what kind of pain is arising,
2. how is the pain behaving in terms of its intensity,
3. what is the pain doing in terms of its location,
4. how is the pain behaving in terms of its duration.

To elaborate on this, if a pain arises, try to observe this pain carefully and try to find out what kind of pain this is — there's a great variety of pains around, it could be a ***stabbing*** pain, or a ***drilling*** pain, or a ***tearing*** pain, or a ***hard*** pain, or a ***cutting*** pain, or a ***burning*** pain and so on and so forth. Next observe this pain carefully and try to find out whether the intensity of that pain is ***decreasing*** or ***increasing***. On observing a pain, you might find that it arises in one spot and then it moves around, it spreads out over a large area — in this case pay attention to this — or it could happen that the pain arises, you observe it for a while and it disappears in the same spot.

When it comes to the duration of the pain or ache or some other predominant object, the object might be long lasting, it might last for several minutes if not more, or it could last just a few seconds or just a few moments, whatever it is, be aware of it. Once pain has disappeared or is no longer predominant, return to the observation of the "rising" and "falling". Now while you are observing a pain, try to do so with as much patience and acceptance as possible. Try not to move your posture right away. Change your posture only if a pain becomes excruciating. If you have to change your sitting posture, try to do so slowly and mindfully of your movements.

- **Other Necessary Factors**. Vital for success in *Vipassanā Bhāvanā* (Insight Meditation) is the continuity of one's mindfulness or present awareness. Continuity of mindfulness means that one is trying to maintain mindfulness moment after moment, so that one moment of mindfulness is connected to the next moment of mindfulness.

  Other factors that contribute to successful Vipassanā meditation are:

  1. **aiming**, in the Pali scriptural language known as "*vitakka*". By aiming is meant that you focus your attention onto the center of the object and you try not to overshoot the object or to miss the object in any way.
  2. **rubbing** the object, in the Pali scriptural language known as "*vicāra*". By rubbing is meant that the observing and knowing mind is in close contact with the object and literally rubbing against the object or anchoring the mind to the object.
  3. **effort**, known as "*viriya*". Now just the presence of aiming and rubbing alone will not be enough, you will also need effort. It is the mental factor of effort that will propel the observing and knowing mind towards the object.

Only then in the presence of these three factors, namely aiming, rubbing, and effort can mindfulness arise and can one then properly observe an object and know its nature.

Walking Meditation

As for instructions on formal walking meditation, first of all we can say that walking meditation is as important as the sitting meditation. One can deepen one's wisdom both in the sitting meditation as well as in the walking meditation. As a result of this, beginning meditators are encouraged to spend an equal amount of time in walking meditation and sitting meditation. Now in the Mahāsi tradition of Vipassanā meditation, meditators are requested to alternate the sitting and walking meditation. That is to do one hour of sitting meditation and one hour of walking meditation. Or as a beginning meditator, one might not be able to sit for the full hour. One may do a bit less than this, like 45 minutes and one would accordingly walk for 45 minutes and then again sit for 45 minutes and then again walk for 45 minutes. The Ven. Mahāsi Sayādaw of Myanmar (Burma) gives instructions on three forms of walking meditation:

- The first one is to be mindful when the left leg moves and to label this as "***left step***" or "***left***" and after the left foot has been placed entirely, the right leg moves and one labels again as "***right step***" or "***right***". This form of walking meditation could be done slightly faster even though it is still slower than ordinary walking.

- The second form of walking meditation consists in dividing one step into two parts, namely, lifting of the foot and then the lowering including the placing of the foot. When the lifting takes place, one labels (notes) this as "***lifting***", and then one tries to observe the entire process in terms of sensations, in terms of movements, etc. from its very beginning to its end. When the lowering takes place, one briefly notes "***lowering or placing***" and then again one observes the entire process from start

to finish and one tries to know the nature of the different sensations such as heaviness, lightness, tension, pressure or the movements involved in the process of placing the foot on the ground. This second form of walking meditation will be done already slower than the first one.

- The third form of walking meditation is to divide our step into three parts: so we have the lifting process, then, moving the foot forward, and the lowering process including the placing of foot on the ground. The first and the last parts, namely the "***lifting***" and the "***placing***" are as already described, new is only the forward movement of the foot. This we note at the very beginning briefly as "***forward movement***" or "***moving***" and then we try to observe with mindfulness this forward movement as best as we can from its very start through the middle until its ending. This third form of walking meditation is done even slower than the other two forms.

To briefly demonstrate walking meditation:

- try to keep your body as upright as possible
- place your hands either behind the back or in front of the body
- focus your eyes on a spot maybe 3 to 4 meters in front of you
- try to restrain your senses and try not to look around unnecessarily; if you have to look around, then do so mindfully, noting the intention to look around and mindfully observe the objects of your walking meditation
- in order to develop your concentration, choose a path that is something between 5 to 7 meters long, and make sure no other meditators are walking near you.

As for the first form of walking meditation, as the left leg moves, we note this as "***left step***" and we try to observe mindfully the most predominant sensations in the leg, wherever the most predominant sensation occurs in the leg, so this could be in the foot, this could also

be in the knee or it could be in the thigh or wherever else. Now as the right leg moves we note this as "***right step***" and again we try to observe mindfully the most predominant sensations occurring in the right leg. So "***left step***", "***right step***", "***left step***", "***right step***". When you come to the end of the path and you're standing, take the standing body posture as an object and note this as "***standing***", observe it as best as you can and try to know the nature of your standing posture. Now when turning and the intention to turn is predominant, take this as an object, and note it accordingly as "***intending to turn***". Then carry out the turning process, note this as "***turning, turning***" and again "***turning, turning***". When you're standing again, take this as an object, note as "***standing, standing***". Observe this carefully with mindfulness and try to know the most predominant sensations occurring in the foot or in the leg or other parts of the body.

For the second form of walking meditation, note the lifting process as the foot moves up and then mindfully observe the different sensations that are involved in lifting the foot such as release of pressure, stretching of the muscles, and some tension, hardness, stiffness, heat, cold, etc. Also pay close attention to the predominant sensations as the foot is moving upward. When you are just about to lower the foot, take the intention itself as an object, and note accordingly, as "***intention***", "***lowering***" and then carefully observe the entire lowering process from start to finish. This will include the placing of the foot on the ground or on the floor when the foot touches the surface. Try to know the most predominant sensations such as sensations of "***roughness***", "***smoothness***", "***hardness***", "***softness***", of heat, of cold, and of pressure — the pressure might even be increasing. As the other foot comes up, note this as "***lifting***", observe it with mindfulness, and know its nature. When you're placing the foot, note this as "***placing***", observe it from the start to finish and try to know the nature of the object. As you come to the end of the path and you're standing, then take the standing itself as an object, note accordingly, knowing that you are standing, and its sensations. When you are turning, be aware of the intention to turn if it is predominant, if it is not predominant there is no need to note this, and then just be aware of the actual physical action of turning. After turning, again be aware of your standing

body posture, note it as "***standing, standing***". With regard to the second and third forms of walking meditation, make sure that you don't take long steps because if you were to do so, then it may easily happen that while you're placing one foot on the ground, the other foot would already lift off the ground and with this the knowing mind no longer knows which object to observe.

For the third type of walking meditation, please do it as slowly as you can. You divide your step into three parts: "***lifting***", "***moving***", and "***lowering***" including the placing of your foot on the ground. So to demonstrate this: "***lifting***" — and while you are lifting, try to know all predominant sensations that are occurring, then at the beginning of the forward movement, we note this as "***moving***" and then we observe the different sensations occurring such as a certain swaying of the foot, such as maybe loosing one's balance, and there might also be some heaviness in the foot or lightness or sometimes meditators say there is no particular sensation at all. Also when you observe the forward movement, mindful of the movement whether there is one continuous movement or not. It may happen that on occasion the forward movement is somewhat hindered. In this case be aware of it and note accordingly. Now when lowering, placing the foot on the ground, note this as "***lowering***". To demonstrate, say: "***lifting, moving, lowering (placing)***", and again, "***lifting, moving, placing.***"

There is a lot of work in walking meditation: the slower you walk, the more progress you will make in the unfolding of wisdom. Slowing down one's walking meditation will help improve a meditator's mindfulness to clearly see all mental and physical phenomena.

General Activities & Mindfulness

Mindfulness should be present and should be applied during the waking hours, that is, from the time you wake up until the time you fall asleep. Mindfulness during general activities includes being mindful of simple activities such as opening and closing of one's eyes, taking off one's shoes, putting one's shoes back on, etc. Included in mindfulness of general activities is the process of taking food, drinking water,

or juice in the evening. Mindfulness should also be applied during very everyday activities such as using the bathroom, brushing one's teeth, taking a shower, doing the laundry, and the like. Just like in formal walking meditation, restraint of the senses as well as slowing down one's activities is of utmost importance. So when you do something, try to do so without unnecessarily looking around, knowing that this would otherwise hinder your development of concentration. All general activities you are trying to perform must be done as slowly as possible, really paying close attention to every little detail.

Interviews

- The interview process starts already with your sitting or walking meditation. After a good sitting meditation or a walking session, feel free to write down your experiences. This is recommended for all those who do not have a perfect memory.

- When coming for an interview, make sure that you're ready for it, that you are already present, and that you are waiting, so to speak, in line in order to save some time. Otherwise if the teacher has to go and search for one, some precious time gets wasted.

- When entering the interview area, try to be as mindful as possible! The way a meditator comes to the interview already reflects to some extent where a meditator's practice is at, whether the meditator is practicing in a devoted way or not.

- Regarding forms of respect during a formal retreat, it is recommended that a meditator bows down three times at the beginning of the interview and at the end of the interview.

- While you give your report, try to be brief and to the point and try to adhere to the standards applied to in modern science, such as perseverance, accuracy and precision.

- When giving your report, mention the occurrence of the object, whether you labeled the object or not and how, and then what you've come to know about the nature of the object.
- Of course time is limited during interviews; therefore report only those parts of your best sitting and your best walking meditations within the last twenty-four-hour period. Should you not quite know what your best sitting and your best walking meditations were, then choose that sitting or that walking session that best reflects your meditation practice.
- When giving your report try to do so by using simple language and not using any Pali technical terms. Try not to report from imagination but rather simply state what actually occurred.
- Another point to pay attention to is not to evaluate your own practice; this is the duty or the task of the meditation teacher.
- When you give your report, it might happen that you get a bit nervous; there is no need for this, simply consider the teacher as your friend who is there to help you with your meditation practice.

Usually the fact that you have to give a report during an interview has a galvanizing effect on your meditation practice and on top of this you will gain the benefit of receiving some valuable advice.

Difficulties

During the beginning of the retreat, meditators are likely to face the following difficulties: sloth & torpor, wandering mind, pains & aches, difficultyto follow the schedule and a certain discouragement.

- When it comes to sloth and torpor, one needs to work with this or needs to be mindful of it, one needs to boost one's effort and again and again try to overcome it. Sooner or later it will subside.

- In the case of wandering mind, meditators again with much patience should be mindful of the wandering mind as quickly as possible, and then note it, observe it with mindfulness to know its nature. If the wandering mind disappears by itself, then go back to the observation of primary object, namely the "***rising***" and the "***falling***" of the abdomen. If not, observe the wandering mind, label it as "***wandering mind***", "***wandering mind***". When doing so do not go into the contents of wandering mind or your thoughts. After a few labelings or notings just let go of it, and then go back to the observation of "***rising and falling of the abdomen***". Important is not to get attached to, nor to identify with the contents of these thoughts. Wandering mind is just another mental phenomenon, one out of so many mental phenomena.

- In the course of the meditation practice, meditators are bound to come across all sorts of physical discomfort and these need to be observed with patience, acceptance, determination and detachment. Pain is not necessarily something to despair over but rather it could be seen as a way of strengthening one's concentration while working and observing it.

- Beginning meditators may have a hard time to follow the schedule, to sit for the full hour and to do the walking session for the full hour. Keep in mind that in the course of the meditation practice, a certain gradual development will take place and even if you cannot sit for the full hour at the beginning of the retreat, know that your body will adjust gradually until it becomes possible. Even though you may not be able to do the full hour of a walking session at the beginning, gradually however, you will develop the strength and the ability to do so.

- In the presence of sloth and torpor, wandering mind, pains & aches and finding it difficult to follow the schedule, naturally a certain discouragement might arise. In this case, just take the discouragement itself as an object of observation, mindfully

note it or label it, observe it in a detached manner. Sooner or later, this mental phenomenon like all others will disappear.

Recommendations for Balanced Practice

- Some retreatants do not drink enough liquids and get dehydrated; ensure that your daily intake of liquid is at least 2 liters a day during the cold season and 3 to 4 liters during the hot season.
- Some retreatants eat very little or even are fasting! Intensive Vipassanā meditation requires that a retreatant eats a moderate amount of food to provide the body with nutrition and strength.
- Some retreatants allow themselves to be constipated for three or more days; deal with constipation soon by taking natural laxatives or by doing exercises that induce a bowel movement.
- In the course of an intensive meditation retreat, the need for night sleep will fluctuate, sometimes lessening, sometimes increasing; it is not recommended to deliberately deprive oneself of sleep or to practice willfully through the whole night.
- Some retreatants push through excruciating levels of pain! Should a pain become excruciating, feel free to change the sitting posture slowly and mindfully.
- Some retreatants strongly assume that thoughts should not arise during Vipassanā meditation. This is a wrong assumption. Instead, thoughts should be included as objects of observation.
- To some new retreatants, it may seem very difficult to sit for the full hour. Sit according to your ability! Over time, the body will loosen up and this will permit you to extend the length of a sitting to one hour.
- Some retreatants unnecessarily put excessive pressure on themselves by entertaining high expectations in terms of attaining

the Dhamma or by competing with fellow meditators. This is counterproductive. Instead take an expectation or a thought of competition as an object of observation, label it, observe it and know its nature!

- Some retreatants try to exercise complete control over unwanted states of mind, which of course is not realistic. Try to observe those states of mind with an allowing or accepting attitude of mind.

- Some retreatants push the mind beyond its limits into states of extreme fear, worry, guilt, self-judgment and the like. Keep your practice balanced! Should you be experiencing extreme levels of fear, depression, anxiety, elation or hyperactivity, inform the teacher without delay!

- In general, try to observe objects with a calm, detached, relaxed yet alert attitude of mind.

In the course of Vipassanā meditation, many different experiences may take place. Each person will experience meditation in a slightly different way. It is important not to develop any expectations as to the way the practice should unfold based on previous theoretical knowledge, others' experience or one's own former practice. The whole range of human experiences can come up during one's meditation and any object, no matter what it is, is a great field for observation and provides an opportunity to learn and gain wisdom. Have confidence in the teacher and yourself!

At times the practice gets difficult but with a balanced mind and with the help and guidance of the teacher you can find the correct way to keep practicing. We are here to support you in any and every way and any time you need help, especially when facing difficulties. Do not hesitate to ask for help or advice if you feel you are incapable of dealing with whatever is arising in your practice. Be patient and try not to judge yourself, others or the method. Do your best and practice wholeheartedly with balanced effort and let the practice unfold naturally. Be honest, sincere, accurate and frank in your reports to

the teacher. Do not conceal anything or try to please your teacher, just report whatever you experience, whether clear or unclear.

Be honest and humble in your behavior. Keep the precepts and rules of the center; they are there for your benefit and development in your meditation practice. If practiced correctly, this meditation method of Mahāsi Sayādaw can give great benefits. Use the opportunity you have with care and respect to gain true inner freedom, through the gradual development of purity of mind. With this, one learns to be at ease in all areas of life.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!