

# Vipassanā

Meditation Guidelines



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## Meditation Guidelines

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Bhikkhu Pesala

Association for Insight Meditation

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## Preface

This collection of ‘sayings’ by Sayādaw U Janaka is from his teachings given during the 1983 retreat he led at the Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Centre in Penang. They were originally compiled by Venerable Sujīva, partly from evening Dhamma talks, but mainly from the daily interviews with the meditators at the retreat.

As the context of these ‘sayings’ was mostly the interview situation between teacher and individual student, it would therefore be most useful to read them as if they were personal instruction and advice from the meditation master.

The original (1983) booklet was revised by Venerable Paññāvaro for the benefit of meditators who took part in Sayādaw U Janaka’s 1989 *Vipassanā* meditation retreats in Australia.

It was revised by Bhikkhu Pesala in 1996 and again in 2015.

# The Practice

Vipassanā or insight meditation is, above all, an experiential practice, based on the systematic and balanced development of a precise and focused awareness. By observing one's moment-to-moment mind/body processes, from a place of investigative attention, insight arises into the true nature of life and experiences.

Through the wisdom acquired by using insight meditation one is able to live more freely and relate to the world around with less clinging, fear and confusion. Thus one's life becomes increasingly directed by consideration, compassion and clarity.

## 1. Mental Noting

- ◊ This is a technique of repeatedly 'naming' or 'labelling' with the purpose of directing the attention to mind/body phenomena in order to understand their true nature correctly.
- ◊ The guiding principle in *Vipassanā* practice is to observe whatever arises at the moment of its occurrence — by noting the present, one lives in the present.
- ◊ Note attentively and precisely. Superficial noting may make the mind more distracted. When the concentration is weak, the tendency to skip over things can be checked by using the device of 'labelling'. The actual saying of the words that constitute the 'label' is not really necessary, but it is helpful in the beginning. Do persist with the labelling until the noting becomes fluent and drop it only if it becomes too cumbersome, then it has outlived its usefulness.
- The meditator will get an appreciation of the purpose of *Vipassanā* meditation by bringing an investigative quality to the 'noting practice'. This exploration can lead to the discovery of the true nature of the body/mind process.

## 2. Sitting Meditation

- ☞ To prepare for sitting meditation, let the body and the mind relax as much as possible. Maintain the body in a well-balanced posture. Do not change the posture abruptly or unmindfully during the sitting, if you are about to move, note the intention to move before actually moving.
- ☞ To give balance to the practice, every sitting should be preceded by an hour of walking meditation.
- ☞ In the changeover from walking to sitting practice, or vice versa, be careful to keep your mindfulness and concentration continuous.
- ☞ The starting point in the sitting practice is to establish the attention on the sensations of the abdomen caused by the rise and fall movement. This is done by synchronising the mental noting or labelling of the movement when repeating 'rising, rising', 'falling, falling' with the actual experience of those sensations.
- ☞ As the movement of the abdomen becomes steady and clear, increase the number of notings. If the movements are complicated, note them in a general way.
- ☞ If there is a gap between the rising and falling movement of the abdomen, insert the noting of 'sitting' and/or 'touching' (noting 'sitting' is awareness of the characteristic of support of the wind element).
- ☞ Do not disturb the natural breathing by taking sharp or deep breaths. This will make you tired. Breathing should be normal.
- ☞ When secondary objects predominate, such as sounds, thoughts, sensations, etc., note 'hearing, hearing', 'thinking, thinking', 'feeling, feeling' and so on. At first, it is not easy to note such a variety of objects, but with increased mindfulness one is able to do so. So, when secondary objects have passed, then one goes back to noting the primary object, i.e. the rising and falling movements of the abdomen.
- ☞ Although one is taught to begin with watching the rising and falling movement of the abdomen, one must not get attached to it. For it is not the only object, but one of the many varieties of objects in Vipassanā meditation.

- ☞ Mindfulness of the movement of the abdomen leads to the direct experience of the wind element. That is, to its specific characteristics of motion, vibration and support. It is then that one can rightly know the real nature of the wind element. Thereby destroying the false view of self.

### **3. Walking Meditation**

- ☞ Take the walking meditation seriously. By merely doing the walking meditation alone, it is possible to attain complete awareness (*Arahantship*).
- ☞ Begin this practice by bringing your attention to the foot. Then note the step part by part as you follow the movement with sharp attention. Mentally noting 'right, left' as you do the steps while walking.
- ☞ Keep the eyes half-closed and fixed on the ground 4 to 5 feet ahead of you. Avoid looking at the foot during the walking, or you will become distracted by it.
- ☞ Do not let the head bend too low, because this will very quickly create strain and tension in your posture.
- ☞ The objects to be noted are increased gradually. That is, the number of parts of the steps observed are gradually increased. At the beginning of a walking meditation period note one part only for about 10 minutes: 'left, right' and so on. Then note your walking in three parts: 'lifting, pushing, dropping' etc. Finally, increase the noting to 'intending, lifting, pushing, dropping, touching, pressing'.
- ☞ Please consider this. The mind is sure to wander off quite a few times during a walking period of one hour. So do not look around here and there during walking meditation. You have had, and you will have many more years to look around. If you do it during the retreat, you can forget about having concentration. The wandering eye is a difficult problem for the meditator. So take note very mindfully of the desire to look around.
- ☞ For the practice to be effective, at least six hours of walking and six hours of sitting meditation each day is recommended.

## 4. Mindfulness of Daily Activities

- ◊ Awareness of daily activities is the very life of a meditator. Once one fails to observe an activity, one loses one's life, as it were. That is, one ceases to be a meditator, being devoid of mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom.
- ◊ The faculty of mindfulness becomes powerful by constant and uninterrupted awareness of every activity throughout the day's practice.
- ◊ Constant mindfulness gives rise to deep concentration, and it is only through deep concentration that one can realise the intrinsic nature of mental and physical phenomena. This then leads one to the cessation of suffering.
- ◊ Failing to note daily activities creates wide gaps of unmindfulness. Continuity of noting is needed to carry the awareness forward from one moment to the next. With this kind of practice there are many new things to discover every day.
- ◊ During a retreat, all you need to do is to be mindful. There is no need to hurry. The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw compared a *Vipassanā* meditator to a weak invalid, who by necessity moves about very slowly.
- ◊ Doing things *very* slowly helps to make the mind concentrated. If you want the meditation to develop, you must get accustomed to slowing down.
- ◊ When a fan is turning fast, you cannot see it as it really is, but when it is turning slowly then you can see. Therefore you need to slow down significantly to clearly see the mental and physical processes as they really are.
- ◊ When you are surrounded by people who are doing things in a hurry, be oblivious of your surroundings. Instead, note your own mental and physical activities energetically.
- ◊ Talking is a great danger to the progress of insight. A 'five minute' talk can wreck a meditator's concentration for the whole day.



## 5. Pain and Patience

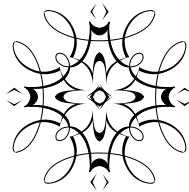
- ☞ Pain is the friend of the meditator. Do not evade it. It can lead you to *nibbāna*.
- ☞ Pain does not have to inform you of its coming. It may not disappear, but if it does, you may cry over it, for your friend has gone away.
- ☞ Pain is observed not to make it go away, but to realise its true nature.
- ☞ Pain is the key to the door of *nibbāna*.
- ☞ When concentration is good, pain is not a problem. It is a natural process. If you observe it attentively, the mind will be absorbed in it, and discover its true nature.
- ☞ When pain comes, note it directly. Ignore it only if it becomes overpoweringly persistent. It can be overcome by deep concentration brought about by continuous mindfulness.
- ☞ If intense pain arises during walking meditation, stop occasionally and take note of it.
- ☞ Be patient with anything and everything that stimulates your mind.
- ☞ Patience leads to *nibbāna* — impatience leads to hell.

## 6. Noting Mental States

- ☞ When noting mental or emotional states, do it quickly, energetically and precisely so that the noting mind is continuous and powerful. Then thinking stops by itself.
- ☞ Unless you can note the wandering thoughts, you are already defeated when attempting to concentrate the mind. If your mind is inclined to wander, it indicates that you are not really noting thoughts energetically enough. The acquired ability to do this is indispensable.
- ☞ If you are aware of the content of thoughts, they will tend to go on. If you are aware of the thought itself, then thinking will cease.
- ☞ Do not be attached to thinking and theory. Meditation is beyond time and space. So do not be caught up with thinking and theory.

Insight will arise with deep concentration, but logical and philosophical thinking comes with shallow concentration.

- ∞ Drowsiness can be overcome by putting in more effort. Labelling activities vigorously is helpful. Note sleepiness energetically — if you accept laziness, you will go on half asleep.
- ∞ Actually, the energy to note is always there. The trouble is that you are reluctant to do it. The mental attitude is very important. So, do not be pessimistic. If you are optimistic, you offer yourself an opportunity. Then there is satisfaction in every situation and there will be less distraction.
- ∞ A human being has a great variety of abilities and the strength to do many things. If you want to develop this meditation to its ultimate goal of complete awareness you will need to put a determined effort into the practice. If you put in this all-out effort you will achieve the final liberation from habitual clinging, fear and confusion.



# Appendix

## The Eight Precepts

- ⇒ Moral integrity serves as the basis for the development of concentration, which is essential for the cultivation of *vipassanā* meditation.
- ⇒ During retreats, all participants are expected to observe the following training rules:
  1. I undertake to abstain from harming or killing living beings.
  2. I undertake to abstain from taking what is not given.
  3. I undertake to abstain from erotic behaviour.
  4. I undertake to abstain from false speech.
  5. I undertake to abstain from intoxicating drink and drugs.
  6. I undertake to abstain from eating after midday.
  7. I undertake to abstain from entertainments, beautification and adornments.
  8. I undertake to abstain from using luxurious beds and seats.

## Guidance for Interviews

- ⇒ All meditators report daily to the meditation teacher. They report on what they have noted and experienced during that day's practice. The teacher will suggest any corrections, give further instructions and try to inspire the meditator onto further progress.
- ⇒ During interviews try to describe:

What was noticed of the rising and falling movement  
feelings/sensations  
imagination/ideas  
mindfulness of daily activities
- ⇒ Describe each of these in detail. Try to be concise and to the point.
- ⇒ During the interview do not pause to wait for remarks from the teacher. Only after you have reported all your experiences will any remarks be made.

- ⇒ Please listen carefully to all the instructions from the teacher and follow them diligently. If there is any doubt, please ask the teacher.
- ⇒ When asked a question, answer it directly. Please do not speak about something else.
- ⇒ Report all experiences even if they seem unimportant to you.
- ⇒ Many meditators find that making short written notes immediately after each meditation is helpful, but one should not make it a point to attempt to remember while meditating. This will disturb concentration.

