

# Mindfulness with Clear Comprehension

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## *Introduction*

Clear comprehension is the subject of one short section in the Great Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness, the only discourse in which a full description of satipaṭṭhāna meditation is found. In this discourse the Buddha sets forth four foundations of mindfulness- contemplation on the body, on feelings, on consciousness, and on dhamma objects.

The first foundation, contemplation on the body, is divided into fourteen sections, beginning with mindfulness of breathing. This is followed by mindfulness of postures of the body. The third section describes mindfulness with clear comprehension. Though short, it is one of the important texts for those who practise vipassanā meditation:

*“And again, monks, a monk in going forward and going back applies clear comprehension; in looking straight ahead and elsewhere, he applies clear comprehension; in bending and stretching his limbs, he applies clear comprehension; in wearing the three robes and in carrying the alms bowl, he applies clear comprehension; in eating, drinking, chewing and savoring, he applies clear comprehension. In obeying the calls of nature, he applies clear comprehension; in walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking, speaking, and in keeping silent, he applies clear comprehension...”*

Another passage describes the monk as practising meditation “ardent, clearly comprehending, and mindful”. In practice, however, mindfulness comes first, before clear comprehension. The Pāli words *sati*, meaning mindfulness, and *samjañña*, clear comprehension, are often used joined together. But we should understand that between mindfulness and clear comprehension there must be concentration, for without it there can be no clear comprehension. Mindfulness leads to concentration, and concentration leads to clear comprehension. So in practice the sequence is mindfulness, concentration and clear comprehension.

Just what is this clear comprehension that the meditating monk should apply to all his activities? It is, in brief, seeing the true nature of things, seeing all of their aspects clearly, completely, and objectively, without emotional reaction. For further understanding we must turn to the meaning of *samjañña*, as explained in the commentaries.

According to the commentaries, *samjañña*, or clear comprehension, means understanding that is correct, thorough and even. ‘Correct’ here means precise. When you examine something or try to define something, you focus on that object only. Not confusing it with other objects, you see it clearly. This is what is meant by precise, correct seeing or understanding, one aspect of clear comprehension. For understanding to be precise, it also must be thorough, must see the object in its entirety and all its aspects. Therefore, thorough understanding is another characteristic of clear comprehension. The third aspect is called ‘even’ understanding, not allowing attachment or ill will to arise with regard to an object. If we do not apply mindfulness when we see an object, either greed (*lobha*) and attachment will arise, or ill will (*dosa*) and anger. Not allowing them to arise in response to an object is even understanding, viewing it evenly. When we have clear comprehension of an object, we see it precisely, in all its aspects, and without greed or anger. This is clear comprehension, seeing the

true nature of things.

Though in the Discourse the section on clear comprehension occupies perhaps a third of one page, the Commentary on it gives about twenty pages of detailed explanation. It states that there are four kinds of clear comprehension to be applied to an action before it is undertaken. One kind is clear comprehension of purpose; the second is clear comprehension of suitability; the third is clear comprehension of resort, and the fourth is clear comprehension of non-delusion. Before we can apply them to our actions, we must first understand them.

## *Clear Comprehension of Purpose*

The first one is clear comprehension of purpose. When we want to do something, it should not be done abruptly or hastily, just by the force of desire or will, We first must find out if the action is purposeful. But that is not enough, for an evil act can be purposeful. So we also must find out if the action is beneficial. If it is not beneficial, if it is not purposeful, it is of no use and should not be done. Only when its purpose is determined to be beneficial should we take up that action. This is called clear comprehension of purpose, which means comprehension of benefit.

The purpose or benefit, must be understood as being within the framework of Dhamma and ultimately of a spiritual nature. Although clear comprehension is explained with reference to the monk engaged in satipaṭṭhāna meditation, it is not limited to monastic practice. Lay people too, should apply it to their activities, with the awareness that the purpose is spiritual growth in accordance with the Dhamma.

There are many beneficial actions that can be undertaken for spiritual growth. Visiting a shrine, paying homage to a bodhi tree, visiting the order of monks or the Elders, going to a place where the dead are cast, or wherever a corpse or skeleton can be observed, all can be of benefit.

For example, you can go to a shrine to pay homage. While there, you may experience joy from worshipping the statue of the Buddha, or from contemplation on his virtues. You then can practise vipassanā meditation on that joy, seeing it to be impermanent, suffering and no-soul. In this way, through meditation on that joy, it is even possible to attain Arahantship. So visiting a relic shrine or pagoda is a beneficial action.

Visiting a bodhi tree is also beneficial. Bodhi trees are treated more or less like pagodas in Buddhist countries, and are objects of veneration. We revere them as we revere the Buddha, because the Bodhi Tree sheltered him during the time of his Enlightenment. Going to a bodhi tree and thinking of the Buddha gaining Enlightenment under such a tree can give rise to joy. Contemplating on that joy and practising vipassanā on it, we can gain enlightenment.

Visiting a community of monks is a beneficial action. In the presence of the Saṅgha, the order of monks, we feel devotion or joy. That joy can become the object of vipassanā meditation. It is also good to visit the Elders, who can counsel and give us instruction. By following their instruction, we can develop spiritual growth and get attainment. So going to visit monks and Elders is of benefit.

Going to a place where the dead are cast and observing a corpse can also be beneficial. By developing the sense of loathsomeness of the body, we can attain jhānas. And practising vipassanā on the jhāna attained, we can get enlightenment. But it is very difficult to see corpses nowadays, for they are quickly removed from public view. During the time of the Buddha many dead bodies were simply left on the charnel ground, where they could be seen in various stages of decay. Observing them enables people to see and to contemplate on the repulsive nature of the body. Though less satisfactory, we can study these stages in photographs to be found in certain medical and criminology books. Relating them to our own bodies, we can use them for contemplation.

There is a story about the benefit that was gained from going to a place where the dead are discarded. A young monk once went with a novice to get some wood for tooth sticks, The novice, who went in front, left the

road and came upon such a place in the woods. There he saw a corpse. Though only ten to fifteen years old, he made the corpse the object of meditation on repulsiveness of the body. After reaching the first jhāna, he practised vipassanā on it and gained the first, second and third stages of enlightenment. Just as he was striving to reach the fourth and final stage, the monk, not seeing him, called out, “Come!”

Hearing him, the novice, who was conscientious, said to himself, “Ever since my first day as a novice, I have never made it necessary for a monk to call me twice. Now he is calling me, so I must go. I will practise to get Arahantship tomorrow or another day.”

Dutifully returning to the monk, the novice said, “Bhante, first go this way, and stand facing east at the place where I stood for awhile.” He wanted the monk to see the corpse too. Following the instructions of the novice, the monk went to the same place and saw the corpse. He, too, practised meditation on it, and gained the three stages of enlightenment. And so, it is said, the same corpse became profitable for two people.

We are presented daily with many opportunities to engage in beneficial activities. After considering and finding an act to be beneficial, should we then do it? Not yet. We have to go to the next clear comprehension, which is the clear comprehension of suitability.

## *Clear Comprehension of Suitability*

Even though an act is beneficial and purposeful, it may not be suitable. If it is not suitable to do it at, the particular occasion, time or place, then it should not be done. So, after understanding that a certain act is beneficial, we must determine whether or not it is suitable to do it.

The Commentary says that visiting a shrine could be purposeful, but there are times when it would not be suitable. A big offering might be taking place, with many people from miles around gathered there, some decked out in fine clothes and cosmetics. If a meditative monk should go there, he might see some attractive object or attractive person, and even lose his monkhood. At the very least, he could lose his concentration altogether at the sight of so many people and so many attractive objects. Or he might see some ugly object and experience anger or ill will in his mind. Such a time is not a suitable time for him to go to the shrine.

The same is true for visiting a bodhi tree. If there are many merrymakers and many attractive or ugly objects, greed or ill will could arise in the mind of a meditating monk. It might even cause the loss of his monkhood, his physical life, or his holy life. Such a time is not a good time, is not a suitable time, for him to visit a bodhi tree.

Again, the same holds true for visiting the Saṅgha, Elders and teachers. A community of monks may be approached by many people from surrounding villages and towns. Whenever there are many people, many distractions will arise. Some teachers are very famous, very popular, and have a lot of followers. Many people go to listen to them and put questions to them. When a teacher or Elder is in such a crowd, it is not a suitable time for the meditating monk to visit them.

What about going to a place where a corpse can be viewed, where there are no crowds or merrymakers? Looking at a corpse in order to practise meditation is beneficial, but it is unsuitable and should not be done if the corpse is of the opposite sex. A male corpse is not suitable for a female, and a female corpse is not suitable for a male. So whether the object itself is suitable must also be taken into account. Only when it is suitable are we to contemplate on it, and only a corpse of one's own sex is suitable.

In this way, we must apply the two clear comprehensions of purpose and suitability. In whatever we want to do, whether meditation or the activities of daily life, they can be used profitably. For example, in setting up a business, you first have to determine whether it will really be beneficial for you. Then you must find out a suitable place to start the business, when to start it, with whom to start it, and a host of other suitabilities. But thought given to these two clear comprehensions will lead to success and prosperity.

The first two clear comprehensions can be applied to both worldly affairs and meditation. In the Commentary, however, the explanation is with reference to meditating monks, so the examples given pertain only to meditative life. But these clear comprehensions should not be seen as meditation. They are only the basis for meditation.

## *Clear Comprehension of Resort*

The third one is called clear comprehension of resort. It is difficult to understand, if we rely only on the English translation of the commentarial text. Sometimes translations can be so confusing that it is very hard to guess at the meaning. We should always sympathize with those who translate, because they face a dilemma. If they try to be literal, their translation often is difficult to comprehend. And if, for the sake of understanding, they become free in their translation, they are accused of being unfaithful to the original. There is always this dilemma. In this explanation of the third clear comprehension, I think the translator wanted to be literal.

*“Further the going on the alms round of that one who has comprehended purpose and suitability after leaving and taking up just that resort- after taking up among the thirty-eight subjects of meditation- called the subject of meditation after his own heart, is clear comprehension of resort.”*

In the Commentary the text is more concise than its English translation, but is just as cryptic. It is, simply, “Taking the *gocara* when he goes to the *gocara* is the *gocara saṃpajañña*.” The key to deciphering this passage is the Pāli word *gocara*. Before we can use this key, we must look at its various meanings.

The word ‘*gocara*’ originally meant a place where cattle roam, their pasture. Later on it came to mean any resort or domain. Thus the place where a monk goes for alms - his roaming place, a village- is called his *gocara*. And the subject of a monk’s constant contemplation- his mental domain, meditation- is also called a *gocara*. So *gocara* can mean a monk’s meditation, as well as a village where he goes for alms. We also have the phrase ‘*gocara saṃpajañña*’, meaning clear comprehension of resort, or domain. Now the sentence is clear. “Taking the *gocara* when he goes to the *gocara* is the *gocara*,” means “Taking meditation with him when he goes to the village (for alms) is clear comprehension of resort.”

This does not mean, however, that clear comprehension of resort is only a monk meditating when he goes to the village for alms. Subsequent statements make clear that it means the practice of meditation itself. The Commentary says repeatedly, “Not forsaking the meditation is clear comprehension of domain.” It does not matter where the monk practises. Whether he is going to the village or sitting in a monastery, if he is practising meditation, he is applying clear comprehension of resort.

Why, then, does the Commentary explain this by way of a monk going to the village and taking meditation with him? In a village there are many distractions that can make it very difficult for a monk on alms round to maintain unbroken meditation. In order to emphasize that the meditation must not be forsaken under any circumstances, the point is made in terms of monks going to the village with it and coming back with it. From this we can infer that the clear comprehension of resort is simply the practice of meditation.

Many illustrations are given to explain this third comprehension. The Commentary describes four kinds of monks. One monk takes meditation with him when he goes to the village, but does not bring it back when he returns to the monastery. Another monk is unable to take meditation with him when he goes to the village, but brings it with him when he comes back. A third monk, a monk who does not meditate, neither takes meditation to the village nor brings it back. Then there is a fourth monk, who takes meditation to the village and also brings it back to the monastery.

### ***Monk with meditation to the village but not to the monastery***

The first one is the monk who takes meditation with him when he goes to the village for alms, but is unable to bring it back. It is explained in the Commentary that he is a meditating monk. During the day he practises walking and sitting meditation, trying to get rid of the mental hindrances. By night also, during the first watch, he practises sitting and walking meditation. He sleeps in the middle watch of the night. During the third watch he gets up and again practises meditation by walking and sitting.

Early in the morning it is time for his monastic duties. He may sweep the terrace of the shrine and bodhi tree, or offer water to the bodhi tree. He may set up water for the other monks to use for drinking, washing the feet, and so on. Monks also have duties to do for their teachers. So he may go to his teachers, offer water for washing their faces, and do whatever else needs to be done. After doing all these things, he may go back to his dwelling place and practise meditation for two or three sittings.

When it is time for alms, he takes his robes and bowl, and, with meditation foremost in mind, he first goes to the shrine. If his usual meditation is the Recollection of the Buddha, he will enter the shrine with that meditation until he reaches the Buddha or stupa. If it is a small shrine, he should circle it three times and pay homage to it in eight places. If it is a large shrine, he circles it three times and pays homage in four places. Then he resumes his regular meditation and goes out for alms.

If his usual meditation is not Recollection of the Buddha, but some other subject, he should leave it at the shrine entrance, enter the grounds, and pay homage with thoughts of the Buddha's virtues. On leaving the shrine, he should pick up his regular meditation subject at the gate. Keeping it foremost in mind, he goes to the village for alms.

When he reaches the village, people will approach him and invite him to their house. They may take his bowl. While he is waiting for the rice to be prepared, other people may come and ask him to give a talk. According to the books, he should give a Dhamma talk, even though he is a meditating monk. He must do it because Dhamma talks always concern meditation. And even if he is not asked, he must give a Dhamma talk, to gladden people and help them. When the food is ready it will be offered to him, and he will eat it with meditation foremost in mind. Until the end of the meal he is with meditation.

After eating and cleaning the bowl, he departs for the monastery. Just outside the village he may meet some other novices and monks. Now comes the trouble. When they meet him they ask, "Reverend sir, who are those people to you? Are they relatives on the maternal side? Are they relatives on the paternal side?" He then asks what they have seen that made them inquire. They reply, "They show so much respect and affection for you that we thought they must be your relatives."

The monk says, "That which even friends find hard to do, these people do for us. Our very robes and bowls are due to them. Owing to the support of these people, we know no fear on occasions for fear, and no lack of food on occasion of famine. There are no people so helpful to us as these folk."

Thus speaking well of the villagers, he continues on his way. However, he has broken his meditation by talking with the young monks and novices, so he cannot return with it to the monastery. This is the kind of monk who carries meditation to the village, but cannot carry meditation from the village back to the monastery. He practises clear comprehension of resort only on the way to the village, but not on the way back.

### ***Monk without meditation to the village but with meditation to the monastery***

The second kind of monk is one who seems to have very good digestion. In the morning he is so hungry that he is perspiring, perhaps even trembling. So he cannot practise meditation. According to the books, his “*kamma-produced calorificity becomes very strong and lays hold of the derived assimilated material of the body, owing to the absence of undigested food in the stomach.*” This is another direct translation that requires explanation.

We Buddhists believe that in the stomach there is a kind of heat born of past kamma. If you had good kamma in the past, you have good digestion. If you have bad digestion, you probably did not do enough good kamma in the past. This fire, as we call it, is produced by kamma, and is the heat that digests the food we eat. The “*kamma-produced calorificity (kamma-produced heat) becomes very strong, and lays hold of the derived assimilated material of the body.*” This means that it lays hold of the inner lining of the stomach. In modern terms, the process refers to the digestive juices. When there is no food in the stomach, they digest the stomach lining. This causes much pain in the stomach, and perspiration all over the body.

The very hungry monk, therefore, cannot practise meditation. So he does his duties quickly, goes to the shrine quickly, and rushes to the village for alms food. In the village he may get some rice gruel, and he may take it to the sitting hall, where monks usually eat. “*After taking two or three mouthfuls, the kamma-produced calorificity material of the body (the inner lining) of the stomach lays hold of the property of the food taken in.*” When there are two or three mouthfuls of gruel in the stomach, the digestive juices begin to attack the gruel instead of his stomach lining. “*So the monk is assuaged of the distress of the caloric process, like a man bathed with one hundred pots of cool water.*” He feels comfortable now, because there is food in the stomach for the digestive juices to act upon.

The monk takes the, first two or three mouthfuls without meditating. But after these few mouthfuls his hunger is assuaged. Therefore he can take the rest of the rice gruel with meditation. So he practises meditation as soon as he gets comfortable. Then he washes his bowl, sits somewhere and meditates.

When it is again time to go for alms, he does not return to the place where he got the rice gruel. He goes somewhere else and receives food, which he takes to a place where monks usually eat food in the village. There he eats the food with sustained meditation, with full awareness. And he even may attain Arahantship while eating. The commentaries say that, after drinking gruel and exerting themselves in the development of insight, countless bhikkhus like this one have reached the state of Arahantship during the Buddha’s dispensation. It is even claimed that in the various villages of Sri Lanka alone, there is not a single sitting hall where a monk having sat and drunk gruel has not attained Arahantship.

This monk is one who does not carry meditation when he goes to the village, but when he comes back he is able to carry it with him. He might attain Arahantship in the village, but if not, he still will come back to the monastery with his meditation, with the clear comprehension of resort.

### ***Monk without meditation to the village nor to the monastery***

The third monk is described as a loose-liver (i.e., a monk who lives in heedlessness), who lives in negligence, who lives in carelessness and indolence. That means a monk who has thrown away the yoke, broken all the observances. That means not doing any duties.

When such a monk enters the village for alms he shows no indication of knowing there is such a thing as a subject of meditation. And, indeed, he does not even know there is such a thing as meditation. After walking about, eating his meal in unsuitable company, and socializing with people in an unfitting manner, he comes out of the village an empty fellow.

This third monk is a person who neither leaves nor returns with any thought of meditation. Because he does not practise meditation at the monastery, he does not carry it to the village. He does not carry meditation to the monastery either, as he has no clear comprehension of resort. He is known as one who lives in negligence, who has thrown away the duty of right exertion, and so is irresponsible.

We have now been presented with three of the four kinds of monks. The first monk carries meditation to the village, but does not bring it back to the monastery. The second monk does not carry meditation to the village, but returns with it to the monastery. The third one neither carries meditation to the village nor does he carry it back to the monastery.

### ***Monk with meditation to the village and with meditation to the monastery***

The fourth and last monk carries meditation to the village, and also carries meditation back to the monastery. This monk is the best of the four. His clear comprehension of resort is complete and intact. The practice of taking meditation to the village and bringing it back to the monastery is called an observance. It is something like a dhutaṅga, one of the ascetic practices that some monks voluntarily vow to follow. This last monk should be understood as practising a similar kind of vow and observance.

The monk who is developing clear comprehension must keep his meditation unbroken throughout all activities during the waking hours. This is not easy to do, especially on alms round, when he is away from the tranquility of the monastery. For an unmindful meditator there are many distractions and pitfalls along the way and in the villages and towns. To counter these difficulties, monks may undertake a voluntary vow to follow an observance that would reinforce their intention and vigilance during alms rounds.

This observance is known as the practice of carrying meditation to the village and carrying it back to the monastery, or as carrying forth and back the subject of meditation. The Commentary has described four kinds of monks: one is able to meditate only while going, the second can meditate only on the way back, and the third does not meditate at all. Only the fourth kind fulfills the observance and reaches the goal. We shall look at some of these steadfast monks, as well as the supporting observances and methods they adopted to accomplish their purpose.

Although the commitment to undertake an observance may be made individually, it can also be made collectively, by mutual agreement of monks living together in a group. An account of such a group agreement is given in the Commentary, which offers a wealth of detail about this aspect of early monastic life.

“Men of good family, desirous of self-improvement, having become homeless ones in the dispensation of the Buddha, when living in a group,... wake an agreement of observance with these words: ‘Friends, you renounced the world not because you are troubled by creditors, not because of fear of punishment from the government or the king, not because of difficulties of subsistence, but because you are desirous of liberation in this life. Therefore, restrain the defilement that arises in going just in the going. Restrain the defilement that arises in standing just in the process of standing. Restrain the defilement that arises in sitting just in the posture

of sitting. Restrain the defilement that arises in lying down just in the process of lying down.”

The agreement here is to restrain or get rid of any mental defilement in the same bodily posture in which it has arisen. The defilement is not allowed to linger on and continue into the next posture. In effect, this means working on restraint of defilements as soon as they arise.

After these monks make an agreement to follow such an observance while carrying meditation to the village and back, they go to a village for alms. As is customary when there are many monks in one monastery, they go out for alms in a line.

If a defilement arises in the mind of a monk in the course of going, he must restrain or suppress it while he is going, while walking. If he fails to do so, if he cannot get rid of the defilement while walking, what must he do? He stops. And when he stops, the monk behind him also stops. When the monk behind him stops, the monk with the defilement admonishes himself, thinking, “This monk behind you knows that an unclean thought has arisen in you. Unbecoming is that to you.” Having reproved himself, he applies himself more ardently to meditation, and with development of penetrative insight he may then and there reach enlightenment.

“If he is not able to do that, if he is not able to get rid of defilement while stopping, then he sits down. Then the monk who comes after him also sits down. Then he admonishes himself, ‘Now the monk after you knows that an unclean thought has arisen in you. It is not befitting to you.’ So he practises meditation, and he may gain enlightenment then and there. Then if he is not able to do that, if he is not able to gain enlightenment, he may stop the thoughts of defilement, and go on to the village with meditation uppermost in his mind.”

When a monk cannot eliminate an arisen defilement while walking, he stops and tries to practise meditation in the standing posture. Awareness that another knows of his lapse, and is delayed by it, may lend urgency to his exertions. He may even reach enlightenment while standing. But if the defilement persists, then he sits down and tries to meditate. If he does not gain enlightenment while sitting, he may stop thinking about the defilement. Keeping meditation in mind, he is free to go to the village for alms.

“Those monks do not raise the foot with the mind bereft of the subject of meditation.” These monks do not take steps without mindfulness. If they ever make a step without mindfulness, they go back and do it over again mindfully. In this way they practise mindfulness. Not a step is taken without it. That is the way to keep mindfulness with us always. One should not wake even a single step without it. This is the practice of the monks who carry meditation to the village and back to the monastery.

There are various means that have been used by monks to safeguard their meditation, their clear comprehension of domain, while following the observance of carrying it forth and back. The Commentary gives four accounts of monks who used different approaches to successfully fulfill this observance and reach the goal.

#### *Elder Mahāphussa*

The first account is of the Elder Mahāphussa. It is said that he spent nineteen years practising with mindful steps the observance of taking meditation to the village and bringing it back. Farmers, field workers and others saw him turning back to make a step again, and then turning back and making the step again. They said, “This Elder goes having halted again and again. Why does he do so? Has he gotten confused about the way, or has he forgotten something?”

But the monk paid no attention to their talk. He just did his duty as a recluse, and kept on practising meditation. For nineteen years he practised, mindful of his steps, and in the twentieth year he gained enlightenment and became an Arahant. On the day of his attainment, a deity who lived at the end of his walking path appeared before him. The deity stood there with radiance streaming from his fingers, in honor of the Elder who had become an Arahant. The four regents of the earth, Brahmāsahañpati, and Sakka, king of the gods, all came to honor him.

Another monk, a forest dweller called Mahātissa, happened to notice the great light. Meeting Mahāphussa the next day, he asked, “Last night there was a radiance about your Reverence. What was that?” Not wanting to reveal his attainment, the Elder Mahāphussa said, “Radiance can be that of light, or that of gem, or of other things.” So he really didn’t say anything. But on being repeatedly pressed with the words, “You are concealing something,” he could not deny it. Saying “yes” he then informed Mahātissa of his attainment. This Elder is one who, by just doing what he was supposed to do, with great perseverance and patience, became an Arahant worthy of honor from the gods.

### *Elder Mahānāga*

The second story is about the Elder Mahānāga, who lived in the Black Creeper Pavilion. When fulfilling the observance of carrying forth and carrying back the subject of meditation, he resolved to use only two postures, standing and walking, for seven years. This meant that he would not sit or lie down for seven years. He made the resolution with the thought of honoring the Bodhisatta’s six-year great struggle practising meditation and austerities in the forest, before becoming the Buddha. Maybe he wanted to outdo the Bodhisatta by making the resolve for seven years, not six.

After completing the rigorous years of this discipline, the Elder Mahānāga practised the observance of carrying forth and back the subject of meditation for another sixteen years. The Commentary says, “He also raises his foot only with his mind yoked to the subject of meditation. If he raises his foot with his mind not thus yoked, he turns back again.” He, too, followed the practice of turning back and making the step again whenever he took a step without mindfulness.

In this way he would go to the village, but he did not enter it immediately. “After standing at such distance from the village as would raise in the mind of one looking from the village the doubt, ‘Is it indeed a cow or a recluse?’ and robing himself, he fills his mouth with a draught of water from the water-carrier hung over his shoulder and hanging under the armpit, having washed his bowl with water from the same source.”

When the Elder Mahānāga went to the village for alms, he stopped at a distance before entering. It was far enough away so that the villagers could not decide whether it was a cow or a monk standing there. Monks use brown-colored robes, so maybe they could be taken for cows. Standing there, he robed himself in preparation for entering the village. When monks are at their monastery, the proper attire includes baring one shoulder. But when they go out of the monastery and enter a village or town, they must cover both shoulders. Then they make a roll of the robe and place it over the left shoulder. This is how the Elder robed himself.

He then washed his bowl with water from the water-container slung over his shoulder. Before a monk enters a village, he must wash his bowl. That keeps it wet, so the food won’t stick to it. After washing it, the Elder took a sip of water from the container, and held it in his mouth.

“For what reason does he fill his mouth so? He does it thinking, ‘Let there be no distraction of the mind, even by uttering the words, “May you live long,” to people who come to worship or give me alms.” It is the custom that whenever lay people pay respects or offer alms to a monk, he must say such things as “May you be well, may you be happy, *sukhi hotu,*” or “May you live long.” The Elder Mahānāga didn’t want to say even that, because it would be a distraction from his meditation. In order not to say anything at all, he would hold water in his mouth.

In Pāli the verb for paying respects is *abhivādeti*, which literally means ‘to cause someone to say something’. When lay people pay respects, they cause monks to say something. So *abhivādeti* has come to mean paying respects.

But there are other occasions when a monk must answer if asked a question. During the days of the Buddha there were no calendars. People often asked monks about the date. Months are divided into the bright half and the dark half, with fifteen days in each half. So monks would say it is the fifth day of the bright half or the fifth day of the dark half, and so on. Sometimes people would ask, “How many monks are at your monastery?”

Monks are expected to give answers. They must know what day of the month it is, and how many monks are living at their monastery. They must also know much more than this, for people ask questions about the Dhamma and other matters.

When a monk is asked such questions, he must answer, even if he is a meditating monk. Otherwise, he will keep silence. So only when asked a question would the Elder Mahānāga swallow the water and give an answer. Then he would take another sip, in order to avoid heedless talk. If no questions were asked, on leaving he would spit out the water at the village gate and go on his way. By this avoidance of unnecessary talk, he helped to maintain clear comprehension of domain, his meditation. He attained Arahantship at the end of the twenty-third year of practice.

### *Fifty monks at Kalamba Landing Place*

A third account in the Commentary tells of fifty monks who spent the rainy season retreat, the *vassa*, at the monastery of Kalamba Landing Place. Monks keep three rainy season months as an observance. During these three months they are not to travel. They are not to go outside of their monasteries overnight. But there is an exception. If there is an invitation, they can be away for up to seven days, meaning six nights or six mornings.

On the full moon day of July, the beginning day of the rainy season retreat observance, the fifty monks made an agreement of observance: “Without obtaining sainthood, we shall not converse with one another.” This does not mean that they did not say anything at all. It is forbidden for monks to take a vow of total silence, which the Buddha called the vow of dumb people. Not being dumb people, monks should not act like dumb people. But they do not talk unless it is necessary. The monks here agreed that they would not converse with one another until attaining Arahant ship.

Like the Elder Mahānāga, these monks would enter the village for alms after filling their mouths with water. Keeping it in their mouths, they went for alms. If asked questions, they would spit it out, answer, and then fill their mouths again. And on leaving the village they would empty their’ mouths at the gate. People

would look at the spots of water there, and find out how many monks had come to the village that day.

“Then these people thought, ‘What indeed is the reason that these monks neither talk with us nor with each other? If they do not speak with each other, surely they are persons who have had a dispute amongst themselves.’ The lay people then said, ‘Conie, we must make them forgive one another.’ So they went to the monastery in a group. But there they saw no two monks in the same place.

“There was a wise man in that group. He said, ‘Good people, a place occupied by quarrelsome people is not like this. The bodhi shrine and the relic shrine are well swept. They are clean and neat, and the brooms are well arranged. Water for drinking and water for washing are well set. Everything is in neat order. So this is not a place where people have quarreled amongst themselves.’”

Realizing at last that the monks must be observing some kind of vow, the people returned to the village. And the monks of that monastery continued their observance until the end of the rainy season retreat, in October, when the *pavāraṇa* ceremony is held. At this ceremony, monks invite each other to point out whatever wrongs they might have done during the three months. But these monks were able to perform what is called a pure *pavāraṇa* ceremony. This means that they were performing it as pure persons, as Arahants. For they all had become Arahants during the rainy season retreat.

#### *Monks practiced like Elder Mahānāga and those observed their rainy season*

The last account is of some monks who practiced like the Elder Mahānāga and the monks who observed the rainy season. “Those monks raised their foot only with their minds yoked to the thought of meditation. Having reached the neighborhood of the village, they filled their mouths with a draught of water and looked at the streets. They entered the street where there were no quarrelsome drunkards, gainsters or such folk, or where there were no restive elephants, horses or the like.”

When a monk enters a village, he must be careful. He must know that the road where he is going for alms is safe. If he sees animals or people that could be dangerous or troublesome, he must avoid that road and take another for alms round. “Thus wandering for alms, he does not go speedily, like one in a great hurry, because there is no ascetic practice in begging food speedily.” A monk must look dignified. He must not go fast. He must not run when he is on alms round.

The word begging is used to describe monks going for alms. It may give the wrong impression to those who do not understand the practice of monks. The word *bhikkhu*, meaning monk, comes from *bhikkha*, to beg. It is true that a *bhikkhu* is a person who begs, but his begging is not like that of beggars. Monks do not ask for anything. They do not say, “Please give me this,” or “Please give me that,” or “Please give me food.” Their begging is called Ariyan begging, noble begging. That means they do not say anything, but just stand silently in front of a house. Occupants who know the custom may come out and offer them food or other alms.

When a monk is going on alms round like this, he does not go too quickly. Standing at the door of a house, he waits a little while, to see if the people inside are willing to give him food. If they show any sign of unwillingness to give him anything, he may pass on to the next house, and may receive alms there. After receiving food, he may take it to the village sitting-hall, where monks often eat. Or he could eat outside of the village, or even back at the monastery.

Monks are instructed to eat food with reflection. One such reflection is, “I take food not for sport, not for intoxication, not for adornment of the body, not for filling out some parts of the body, but for just enough to practise what the Buddha taught.” Monks must make this reflection whenever they eat. Therefore, talking while eating is discouraged.

### *Contemplation on the loathsomeness of food*

They also can practise a kind of meditation called contemplation on the loathsomeness of food. This includes contemplation on unpleasant or repulsive aspects associated with food. When a monk practises this kind of meditation, he may think of the trouble of having to go to the village for alms. Nobody wants to go out in the early morning. Even a monk might want to enjoy sleeping. But he has to go out because he wants food. That is one unpleasant aspect connected with his food.

Having to go through the village from one house to another is also unpleasant. Sometimes people may give him food, but sometimes people drive him away with words of abuse. Whatever treatment he receives must be borne with equanimity. And after he does receive food, he has to put it in the mouth. Then, after entering the mouth and being chewed, the food mixes with saliva and becomes loathsome, disgusting. There are many other aspects of loathsomeness of food. A monk may choose any of them for practising this kind of meditation when he eats.

“He seats himself in a place pleasant and good, attends to the thought of meditation with the setting up of loathsomeness in food, and reflects by way of the similes of axle greasing, applying ointment to ulcers, and feeding upon the flesh of one’s own child.”

These three similes may seem unusual. How can eating food be compared to axle greasing? Wherever bullock carts are used, grease is put on the axle, so that the cart will roll smoothly and not make noise. Food is eaten so that the machine of the body will work well. In this respect, it is like greasing the axle.

Another reason for eating food is implied in the second simile, applying ointments to ulcers. If there is an ulcer or open sore on the body, suitable healing ointments must be applied. This body is full of ulcers and sores in various stages. Food can be medicinal, can heal and repair internal troubles. In this way, eating food is like applying ointments to ulcers.

The third simile, eating the flesh of one’s own child, develops the perception that food is loathsome. When you imagine, while eating, that you are chewing your own son’s flesh, there can be no pleasure or enjoyment, for desire and greed do not arise. There is only the necessity to eat to stay alive. In one of the suttas, the Buddha has given the following story, which is based on this simile.

A man and woman lost their way while crossing a desert with their child. Having no food or water, they sat down and discussed what to do. Though they dearly loved their son, they agreed to kill him and eat his flesh. They reasoned, “If we get out of this wilderness alive, we can get another child. Let us kill this one, instead of all three of us perishing in the desert.” So they killed him. (The Commentary says that they did not kill him. The father sent the child to the mother, and the mother sent him to the father. The child went back and forth until he collapsed and died.) The parents then made provisions of his flesh. And in order to get out of the wilderness alive, they ate the flesh of their own child.

The parents acted with clear comprehension of purpose, not out of desire to eat his flesh. It was their only means of remaining alive to find the way out of the wilderness, *samsara*. For the same reason, a monk is instructed to eat food as though he were eating the flesh of his own son. He is to eat for the sole purpose of keeping his body alive to practise what the Buddha taught, not for any other reason.

### *Eating Meditation*

We now return to the monk who is sitting “in a place pleasant and good”, eating his alms food, and reflecting on one of these similes. For monks, eating is itself a kind of meditation. They are exhorted not to let attachment or anger arise with regard to food. What you eat is not so important as how you eat it. Whether it is meat, fish or vegetables, the important thing is not to let attachment or anger arise concerning it.

“Having eaten, he washes. Then he rests for awhile the body which is tired from the business of eating.” Apart from the short time that he takes rest to get rid of tiredness from eating, he practises meditation throughout his waking hours. He practises meditation before eating and after eating. During the first watch of the night and the last watch of the night, he practises meditation. He sleeps only during the middle watch of the night, from ten o’clock to two o’clock in the morning. The rest of the time he is practising.

Of the four kinds of monks, this monk is one who carries forth and carries back the subject of meditation. When a person undertakes to practise this observance, he always takes meditation to the village and carries it with him on the way back from the village. He may avoid speaking, by filling his mouth with water, or by any other means of keeping his meditation uninterrupted.

“It is said that the person who fulfills the observance of carrying forth and carrying back the subject of meditation reaches Arahantship even in the period of youth.” This means at an early age, the first stage of his life. The life of a man is supposed to be one hundred years. The lifespan is divided into three. So the first stage of life means before the age of thirty three.

Such early attainment, however, depends on certain prerequisites. “That is, if he is possessed of the sufficing condition, is he is possessed of *pāramis*, if he is possessed of experience in the past. If he fails to reach Arahantship in the early stage, then he reaches it in the middle stage. If he fails in the middle stage, then he reaches it at the time of death. If he fails at the time of death, then he will reach it after becoming a deva. If he fails as a deva, then, at a time when no Buddha has appeared on earth, he is born as a man and realizes the truth, and becomes a Pacceka Buddha.” A Pacceka Buddha is a kind of Buddha called a silent Buddha, or semi-Buddha. His attainment lies between the Arahants and the Buddha. He has found enlightenment on his own, but cannot teach others.

“Or if he fails to become a Pacceka Buddha, then he becomes a person who intuits quickly, like the Elder Bāhiya Dārucīriya; or a greatly wise one, like the Elder Sāriputta; or one of great psychic power, like the Elder Moggallāna the Great; or an exponent of ascetic practice, like the Elder Kassapa the Great; or one endowed with clairvoyant power, like the Elder Anuruddha; or an expert on discipline, like the Elder Upāli; or an expounder of the Dhamma, like Puññamantāniputta; or a forest dweller, like the Elder Revata; or one of great learning, like the Elder Ananda; or one desirous of training, like the Elder Rāhula, the Buddha’s son.” So, if failing to reach one kind of sainthood, he will reach another kind.

This is not too encouraging. If the Commentary had stopped after the first sentence, it would have been

very encouraging- you would reach Arahantship in the first stage of life. But then it says that if you fail to do so, you will reach it in the middle stage. If you fail then, you will reach it at the time of death. And if you don't get enlightenment at the time of death, then maybe it will happen in the next life.

The kind of monk "who carries forth and carries back the subject of meditation reaches the crest of clear comprehension of resort." The Commentary describes this third comprehension as "taking the resort to the resort and back to the resort." But, properly understood, clear comprehension of resort means the practice of meditation. Without it, there can be no fourth clear comprehension.

## *Clear Comprehension of Non-Delusion*

Non-confusion in going forward, and so forth, is the clear comprehension of non-delusion. This means understanding the reality in going forward and going back, and so on. Clear comprehension of non-delusion is the knowledge or understanding of reality. It only comes as a result of the third clear comprehension, for without meditation there can be no wisdom. Clear comprehension of non-delusion is the wisdom gained through the practice of meditation. It means, simply, understanding correctly the things you are doing at the present moment.

In the Buddha's dispensation, a monk who understands this does not confuse himself. He is not "like a blinded worldling who, while going forward and back, becomes muddle-headed." Many people who don't practise meditation think in terms of a soul entity, or in terms of 'I'. They have the notion or belief of a soul that is going forward, or that there is a soul that makes us go. Or it is 'I' who is going, or an 'I' that makes the going. These people are called blinded worldlings because they have no eye of wisdom.

"Unlike these, this monk, without confusing himself, when there is the arising in one of the thought, 'I am going forward,' just with that thought appears the process of oscillation originating from mind, which brings to birth bodily expression or intimation. Thus, by way of diffusion of the process of oscillation due to mental activity, this skeleton called 'the body' goes forward." The monk understands in this way.

I don't know if you understand it. Without an explanation it is difficult. Before we make a step, there is the intention to make a step. That intention arises with its concomitants, consciousness and other mental factors. This desire or intention, along with the other mental concomitants, causes certain material properties to arise in the foot. These material properties are the wind element.

There are four elements which are the basis of all physical things. They are: earth element, water element, wind or air element, and fire element. When there is the desire or mind to make a step, this mind causes the wind element to arise. Just as there are millions and millions of thought moments in one second, the material properties caused by that mind are also millions and millions. Millions of material properties, especially the wind element property, arise in the foot, making a kind of movement there. That kind of movement is the many postures of the wind element. The wind element creates what is called movement. With that movement there is stepping, there is going forward.

### *Going forward and going back*

"A person who pays attention to the movements of the foot while he is meditating will come to see this when his meditation becomes mature." It will not be seen the first moment one practices walking meditation. But by paying close attention to the walking, one first will notice the lifting, moving and downward movements. Then one will notice that every voluntary movement is preceded by desire to do it, desire to move, desire to put the foot down. That desire causes some material properties to arise. What we call "lifting" is just the material properties in the foot. We label it "movement"; we label it "lifting". This will be seen when one's meditation on walking becomes developed. "The diffusion of the process of oscillation due to mental activity" refers to the arising of wind element's material properties as the result of the mind's intention to go. When the meditator knows in this way, he is said to have clear comprehension of going forward and going back.

“In raising the foot., two elements, earth element and water element, are weak. The other two elements, fire element and wind element, are powerful.” When you raise the foot, it becomes light. Lightness is the characteristic of the fire and wind elements. When you put the foot down, the earth and water elements are stronger and the other two elements are weak. The meditator, when he raises his foot or puts it down, knows which elements are strong and which are weak.

The Commentary describes a step as broken up into six segments: raising the foot; moving it forward; shifting away, perhaps swaying to one side or the other a little; dropping the foot down; placing the foot on the ground, and, finally, pressing the foot on the ground. It is not so easy to see all six of these parts in the beginning. So initially we place attention on only the three broader stages- lifting, moving, and putting the foot down.

In each of these movements some of the elements are stronger and some are weaker. When you move the foot forward, for example, when you move the foot forward, for example, there is the action, the movement, which is said to be light. When it is light, the earth and water elements are weaker, and the fire and wind elements are stronger. A meditator sees or understands this when his clear comprehension of resort, the practice of meditation, becomes mature.

He also sees that the mind and matter present when raising the foot do not carry over into the next stage, in which the foot is moved forward. And the mind and matter that are present in moving the foot forward do not last into the shifting away of the foot. At every stage, these phenomena arise and disappear together.

After coming into existence in several sections, links and parts, mind and matter break quickly and disappear in the same places in which they have arisen. Neither mind nor matter moves to another place. Because there is the continuity of arising and disappearing, arising and disappearing, we may think that they move from one place to another. But actually they arise in one place and disappear at that same place.

In the Commentary it is said, “They arise and disappear section by section, link by link, part by part.” Then a simile is given. “They break quickly in those places, crackling like sesame seeds thrown into a heated pan.” You can almost hear the crackling sound of mind and matter arising and disappearing when you come to really see the arising and dissolution of mental and physical phenomena.

In the ultimate sense, what takes place in all of our postures is the going, the standing, the sitting, or the lying down of the elements. What is it that we call going? It is just the moving of elements, the earth, water, fire and wind elements. One can see this clearly in the mind when the clear comprehension of resort has developed.

The meditator then understands that there is no one who goes, no ego entity that goes or makes him go. He knows the answer to the question, “Who is the one who goes forward? Whose going forward is there?” No one. For he has seen that there is only mind and matter, only the elements arising and disappearing. He knows clearly; and without confusion that there is no person, no one, who goes forward or back. When this is fully understood as an experienced reality, he has attained the last clear comprehension, the clear comprehension of non-delusion.

The Commentary explains that the clear comprehension of non-delusion is non-confusion in going forward and going back. Non-confusion here means seeing the reality in going forward and going back, seeing it deeply and clearly. This understanding arises by itself when clear comprehension of resort, the practice of

meditation, has matured. When this happens, the underlying realities of all activities, of life itself, are made clear.

People who are not initiated in the teachings of the Buddha, especially those who hold on to the notion of self or soul, think that when somebody goes, a soul goes. Or it is a soul or a self that makes that person go. Sometimes they think “I” go; there is an “I” who does the going, or who makes “myself” go. Their understanding is always rooted in this delusion, the delusion of soul, self or “I”.

But those who practise satipaṭṭhāna vipassanā meditation, following the instructions of the Buddha, know differently when they go forward or when they go back. These yogis know that when there is the mind or desire to walk, this mind produces what is called the air element. Air element means minute material particles of air. This air element, in turn, produces movement. Bodily movements, especially the voluntary movements, are always preceded by the intention or desire to move. That intention or desire, along with consciousness, produces the air element, and the air element produces movement.

This is understood by one who has been practising vipassanā meditation and, through the practice of mindfulness in going forward and going back, has fully developed the clear comprehension of resort. He sees that in going forward and going back, there is just the intention to walk and what is called “walking”. There are only these two things. Beyond these two things there is nothing we can call a self, a soul, an ‘I’, a person, or an individual.

This is correct understanding, in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha, and we can get it only through the practice of vipassanā. We may read books, we may listen to talks, and we may understand a little. But that understanding is not the real understanding. Real understanding is experiential, not intellectual, and we must experience it ourselves. Through vipassanā we must see and know for ourselves that in going forward and back there are only two things- the intention or desire to walk and the walking itself.

The Commentary further explains that in making one step there are six stages. A yogi who has reached clear comprehension of non-delusion sees and understands these six stages in terms of the four elements, or four essentials. They are the earth element, water element, air element, and fire element. Earth element does not necessarily mean the earth, but the quality inherent in earth, i.e., hardness or softness. Water element does not mean water, but something inherent in water, i.e., fluidity or cohesiveness. The element of air does not mean necessarily air itself, but the quality inherent in air- expansion or support. The quality of fire element is heat, not necessarily fire itself. These are called the four great elements.

A yogi sees and understands these four elements while he walks or makes a step. The six stages of a step, as mentioned in the Commentary, are: lifting the foot up; moving it forward; shifting away, meaning swaying slightly to one side or the other; dropping the foot down; placing it on the ground, and, lastly pressing the foot against the ground. Observing these six stages, the yogi clearly sees the four great elements.

The earth and water elements are said to be heavy elements, while the air and fire elements are regarded as light elements. Heaviness is indicative of the water element. When something is fluid, the heaviness in it makes it fall. Earth element is also heavy. It manifests as receiving, and is a receptacle or base. Air or wind has the characteristic of expansion, so moving is the outcome of wind element. Fire element makes things soft. When something is on fire it becomes softer and softer as it melts or turns to ash. That constant softening means lightness.

When you are aware of lightness, you are aware of the fire element. When you are aware of heaviness, you are aware of the water element. When you are aware of movement, you are aware of the air or wind element. When you are aware of your foot pressing firmly on the ground, you are aware of the earth element. In the six stages of one step you can see these four great elements.

This only happens with the practice of meditation, and only when clear comprehension of resort has matured.

A yogi also sees that the mind and matter which arise at the stage of raising the foot do not extend to the next stage. They disappear in the same stage in which they have arisen. At the next stage a new set of mind and matter arises. That too appears and disappears at that particular stage, and does not reach into the next stage. Furthermore, mind and matter arise and disappear link by link, bit by bit, at particular moments within a particular stage, and do not survive into the succeeding stages.

There is mind preceding each movement. In the Commentary only this mind is mentioned. But there is also a mind that arises together with the movement and is aware of the movement. This is the mind that is noting the lifting, moving, putting down, and so forth. These mind moments arise together with the material property and cease with it. Then another set of mind arises and ceases. The process goes on like the flow of the river. One state of consciousness follows another state of consciousness. They follow one another immediately, without any intervening gap. This arising and disappearing of mental and physical phenomena goes on and on and on, until one becomes an Arahant and reaches the final passing away.

“Going forward and going back” does not refer only to walking. It can be applied also to standing, sitting, and lying down. When you are standing, if you lean forward, that is going forward; if you bend backward, that is going back. If you are sitting and you bend forward, that could be taken as going forward; if you bend backward, that is going back. The Commentary does not offer any clues about going forward and going back while lying down, but just says that it is the same. Maybe when you are lying on your back and then turn to one side, it could be called going forward. And when you turn on your back again, that could be going back. Whatever it is, we can say that going forward and going back refer to other postures besides walking.

The four kinds of clear comprehension should be applied to all of our actions. The first one, clear comprehension of purpose, determines whether or not it is purposeful to do a particular act. If it is purposeful, then it must be decided whether it is suitable to do it. After knowing it to be suitable, we practise meditation on it, which is the application of clear comprehension of resort. When clear comprehension of resort matures, correct understanding of the action itself dawns on us. That understanding is called the clear comprehension of non-delusion. According to the teachings, only then does a person see clearly and correctly. But as long as he thinks that actions are done by a person, a soul, or an individual, he is deluded. These four clear comprehensions must be applied to every action mentioned in this section of the Commentary.

Their application to the first set of actions, going forward and going back, has already been described.

### *Looking straight ahead and looking sideways*

The next set concerns looking straight ahead and looking sideways. Looking sideways is explained as looking in small directions to either side, which is necessary for safety and balance in the normal course of walking. Although there are other kinds of looking- looking up, looking down, or looking back- they are not

mentioned in the Commentary. That is because it is neither proper nor profitable for a meditator to be looking all around and getting distracted. However, if he does happen to look up, down or back, he does not stop meditating because of the lapse. He still must practise mindfulness. He must practise meditation when he looks up or down or back. So even though they are not mentioned, all lookings and seeings are to be included in this set of actions.

What is the clear comprehension of purpose here? Before looking at something, a monk or yogi must find out whether it is beneficial to see or look at it. The Venerable Nanda is cited as a model for those who apply clear comprehension of purpose in seeing. The text asks the question regarding purpose: “Should looking straight on in the eastern direction become a thing that must be done by Venerable Ananda? He looks on in the eastern direction, having reflected with all his mind, thus: ‘May no covetous, grief-producing, mean, unskillful mental phenomena flow upon me or overcome me while I am looking in the eastern direction.’”

Looking toward the western, northern and southern directions, he would make the same resolution. Before looking in any direction, he would reflect in this way: “May no akusala overcome me when I am looking in this direction.” To apply clear comprehension of purpose, we too should reflect in this way: “Is it beneficial to see it or not? May no akusala overpower me if I look in this direction.”

An action may be purposeful and beneficial, but not necessarily suitable. For clear comprehension of suitability in seeing, we may turn to the examples given for the first group of actions, going forward and going back. Even such beneficial acts as seeing a shrine, a relic, a bodhi tree, the Saṅgha, or an Elder might not, in some instances, pass the test of suitability. Seeing or looking at a shrine is a beneficial thing for a monk or yogi to do. But if a noisy crowd is celebrating a festival there, it may not be suitable to see the shrine at that time. Suitability should be considered with reference to circumstances, time, and place of the proposed action, in addition to the beneficial purpose.

What is clear comprehension of resort here? It means, simply, sustained meditation. Clear comprehension of resort is not forsaking meditation, not losing mindfulness. Applying mindfulness to seeing straight ahead or sideways is called clear comprehension of resort in seeing.

When you are practising vipassanā meditation, everything becomes the object. When you look or see, you are to be mindful of looking or seeing. A practitioner of vipassanā just sees or looks with the usual mindfulness meditation. You may also apply your knowledge of aggregates, elements, and bases to seeing. That will come later on.

A practitioner of samatha, on the other hand, must focus complete and undivided concentration on a single object as his meditation subject. If you were practising kasiṇa meditation, with your eyes and attention fixed on a colored disk, and you want to look at something else, what should you do? You should look at it with your original meditation foremost in mind, like a mother cow that eats food and at the same time looks at her calf. Having looked in this way, you go back to your meditation with full concentration. So the meditator may look, but not lose sight of his meditation. A samatha practitioner must keep to his original meditation, and not give it up while looking at something else. But a practitioner of vipassanā must see everything that arises in his mind as it arises. There is no going back to anything, for he is watching a dynamic flow. That is his meditation. That is clear comprehension of resort.

What is clear comprehension of non-delusion? It is the insight that there is no entity of any kind that sees

or causes to see. It is knowing that when there is intention to look or see, this consciousness produces the air element. With the air element, or particles of air element, there arises what is called bodily expression or bodily intimation. And that means movement.

To follow the commentarial explanation of seeing, with the diffusion of *vāyo dhātu*, the air element, the lower eyelid drops down and the upper eyelid goes up. When this happens, there is seeing, you see something. At the moment of seeing, there arises seeing consciousness. There is no self or soul that sees or makes one see. It is not 'I' that sees; it is not 'I' who makes seeing. There is just seeing consciousness arising as a result of the eyelids opening up because of the diffusion of air element caused by mind, caused by the intention to see. Stated another way, when you want to see, there is the intention to see, and that causes the air element. That air element causes movement in the eyelids, which causes them to open. Seeing is just that. There is no person or Atman involved.

We have used the term 'seeing consciousness' in order to explain the process more clearly. However, the Pāli word is not 'seeing consciousness'. It is 'eye consciousness'. When eye consciousness arises, it functions as seeing. That is what we call seeing. When you pay attention to what you are seeing, you will notice that the eyelids move because of the wind or air element, and because there is eye consciousness, which performs the function of seeing. When we understand seeing in this way, we are said to have clear comprehension of non-delusion with regard to seeing.

The Commentary next explains the first of three ways to understand the clear comprehension of non-delusion. This may not be so easy for you to grasp, because a knowledge of Abhidhamma is needed to understand it. But, as these ways are given in the Commentary, I will explain them and try my best to make things clear to you. We have been discussing clear comprehension of non-delusion with regard to seeing. It is now time to ask what seeing is, in the light of Abhidhamma.

### *Seeing in the light of Abhidhamma*

When examining phenomena according to Abhidhamma, we are looking at the process and functions of consciousness. When we see something, there is what is called the seeing thought process. We see an object with one or more thought processes. A single thought process consists of seventeen moments of consciousness, though sometimes there may be fewer.

Before we see something, the mind is at rest. It is not seeing the object. It is in a subconscious state called *bhavaṅga*, the life continuum, which goes on and on, from life to life. This passive mind is subject to disturbance whenever a sense object impinges on one of the senses. Its brief arousal sets in motion a thought process.

When a visible object strikes the eye, at the same time it also strikes the *bhavaṅga*, which then vibrates. After two moments of vibrating, the *bhavaṅga* falls, and in its place active mind arises. This first active consciousness is called adverting, turning to the object presented. It initiates a series of active thought moments. After adverting, there is seeing consciousness- seeing the object, coming into contact with it. After seeing the object, there is a receiving or accepting consciousness. Receiving consciousness is followed by investigation as to whether it is a good or a bad object. After investigating, there is determining, deciding that the object is good, or deciding that it is bad.

At this point, the object is not yet fully experienced. But after determining, there are seven thought moments during which full experience of the object takes place. In Pāli these seven moments are called *javana*, meaning swift. They are followed by two registering thought moments, which review the entire thought process. Beginning with the bhavaṅga, there are altogether seventeen moments of consciousness in one thought process, all rising and falling in sequence with extreme rapidity.

This thought process is called the five-sense-door thought process, because it arises through the five sense doors- eyes, ears, nose, tongue and body. We have described it in terms of seeing, because seeing is the focus of our concern. At this point, it might be useful to review the seventeen units of consciousness that arise. They are: bhavaṅga and its two vibrations, adverting, seeing, receiving, investigating, determining, seven moments of javana, and two registering moments.

We shall now turn to the javana's. When we see a person or an object, there may be a feeling of attachment or aversion, even anger. This might be assumed to occur during the javana moments, when the object is being fully experienced. However, the Commentary explains that at the first moment of javana there is no attachment, aversion or delusion. At that moment the seeing is only seeing, without any color or taint. The same is true of the remaining six moments, for all of the javanas are identical in kind, varying only in intensity. Attachment or anger toward the object does not happen during these seven moments.

That is because in the five-sense-door thought process the javanas are very, very weak. Although they all are of the same kind, and can be kusala or akusala, they are too weak to manifest as attachment or aversion. So they really don't amount to much in this procedure.

When, then, do attachment, aversion and delusion arise? The five-sense-door thought process is followed by another process, called the mind-door thought process. There are three distinct mind-door processes that can follow. Only in the mind-door thought processes do the javanas become strong or powerful. It is during these moments that attachment or aversion to things arise.

As the Commentary explains, in the five-sense-door thought process there is no attachment, aversion or delusion during the moments of javana. Attachment or aversion toward the object arises only later, in the mind-door processes. Understanding this is called understanding by accurate knowledge of the root. "Root" here means the five-sense-door thought process. Understanding according to accurate knowledge of the root is one way of understanding the clear comprehension of non-delusion.

Another way of understanding is with reference to the visible object. When it impinges on the eye, the bhavaṅga vibrates and is followed by the sequence of adverting, seeing, receiving, and so forth. Each type of consciousness performs its own function and then disappears. The eight moments of consciousness preceding the javanas are either functional or resultant; they cannot produce kamma. The visible object is like the house of these moments.

The javana's arise like guests in this house. Unlike the previous moments, they have kusala and akusala roots, and can produce kamma. So in this thought process they are like guests in the house of the other types. As guests, they cannot do anything with strength. When a guest comes to a house to ask for something and is met with silence, he is restricted, He cannot say anything or order anybody to give him anything. The position of the javana's is like that. As the prior types of consciousness have no aversion or attachment toward the object, so also at the moment of javana in the five-sense-door process there is no active anger, attachment,

or ignorance. Understanding this way is called understanding by the causal state.

The next understanding is by way of a temporary state. The thought moments, together with their concomitants in the five-sense-door thought process, arise and disappear, arise and disappear. They do not intrude on each other, and they have a very short duration. When they have disappeared, the javana's arise.

When somebody enters a house in which people have just died, it is impossible as well as inappropriate for him to delight in song and dance. For he too is going to die at that very moment. The same is true of the javana's when they arise in the five-sense-door thought processes. Just as the preceding thought moments have come and gone, come and gone, so too will the javana's pass away on arising. They have no power to become attachment or anger at that moment, because their duration is so brief. Though a knowledge of Abhidhamma is needed, clear comprehension of non-delusion can be understood in this way.

The Commentary gives four more ways to understand clear comprehension of non-delusion. They are by way of aggregates, bases, elements and causal conditions.

#### *Clear Comprehension of Non-Delusion – by way of Aggregates*

By way of aggregates, what is seeing? What is there when we see something? There must be the eye and something to be seen. Both the eye and the visible object are aggregates of matter. There are five aggregates—aggregates of matter, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness. In the act of seeing, the eye and the visible object are aggregates of matter. Seeing is the aggregate of consciousness. The feeling concomitant of the seeing consciousness is the feeling aggregate. The perception concomitant of that seeing consciousness is the perception aggregate. Other mental factors that are concomitants of seeing consciousness are aggregates of mental formations. When these five aggregates come together, there is looking straight ahead and looking sideways.

Who is it that sees? Who is it that looks this way or that way? Just these five aggregates. By way of five aggregates we can understand that seeing is just the working of phenomena. There is no person, no Atman, no soul entity or whatever involved in it. In order to see this, you must understand the five aggregates. You must recognize each aggregate and know its function.

#### *Clear Comprehension of Non-Delusion – by way of Bases*

Seeing can also be understood according to the twelve bases. The eye is eye base. The visible object is form base. Seeing is mind base. The concomitants of mind are Dhamma base. When these four bases come together, there is looking straight ahead and looking sideways. So how can there be any agent, any 'I', any Atman or whatever?

#### *Clear Comprehension of Non-Delusion – by way of Elements*

We may also understand seeing by way of elements. There are eighteen elements. The eye is eye element. The visible object is form element. Seeing is eye-consciousness element. The concomitants such as feeling and other mental factors are Dhamma element. When these four elements come together, there is looking straight ahead and looking sideways. So there can be no Atman or 'I' in the act of seeing.

### *Clear Comprehension of Non-Delusion – by way of Causal Relations*

In clear comprehension of non-delusion according to causal relations, the eye serves as a support condition. The visible object serves as object condition. The consciousness preceding the seeing consciousness serves as proximity condition, meaning that there is no gap between that consciousness and the seeing consciousness. The light serves as decisive support condition. Feeling and other mental factors serve as concomitant condition to the seeing consciousness. So seeing consciousness is supported by many conditions. When these conditions come together, there is looking straight ahead and looking sideways. There can be no Atman, no self, no ego, no 'I' that sees. There are just these conditions coming together, and when that happens there is what we call seeing.

Understanding in this way, with reference to aggregates, bases, elements and causal conditions, is called clear comprehension of non-delusion in looking straight ahead and looking sideways. Yogis who do not have a knowledge of Abhidhamma may not see looking straight ahead and looking sideways in this way. If you do not, please don't think that you are doing something wrong. Though you may not see in this way, you can be aware of the seeing and the object that is being seen. You can be aware of the consciousness preceding the seeing. You can be aware of some of the other moments. Except for someone like the Buddha, it is very difficult to see all of them, for mind comes and goes very quickly. It is said that in the snap of the fingers, in the twinkling of an eye, or in the flash of lightning, there can be millions and millions of thought moments.

You may have guessed that some kind of thinking is involved in these various approaches to clear comprehension of non-delusion. When giving meditation instructions, we tell you not to think of anything, but to watch and be mindful. In the beginning it is good not to think of anything. Just be mindful of the things presented to you, because you cannot afford to have distractions at that time. But when you have progressed to this stage, you can do a little thinking.

Actually, the vipassanā knowledge called comprehension knowledge means thinking. First you see directly the impermanence of things. Then, from the impermanence of present things, you infer the impermanence of past and future things. This indirect or inferential vipassanā is just thinking, but it is not thinking devoid of any direct understanding. First there is direct understanding; then, based on that, you think of something. So although there is inferential thinking, it is based on experience, the experience of direct understanding. There is no harm in doing a little thinking when you have reached this stage.

As the Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness makes clear, mindfulness with clear comprehension applies even to the bending and stretching of limbs. Before bending and stretching the limbs, one first should find out whether it is purposeful to do so. Only when it is purposeful is one to bend or stretch.

### *Clear Comprehension – Stretching & Bending*

When a meditator sits with arms or legs bent or stretched out for a long time, he experiences pain, maybe at every moment. If the pain is more than he can manage, he does not get concentration. His meditation may fall away entirely, and he will get no results from the practice.

But a person who bends or stretches his limbs at the right time does not experience pain. When there is no pain and he is comfortable, he gets concentration of mind. His meditation develops, and he gets results from the practice. This is the comprehension of purpose in bending and stretching.

When is the right time to bend or stretch? When practising meditation you need a little comfort. There is no need to suffer pain without reason. So If you have sat for a long time and feel real pain, and that pain is an obstacle to meditation, then you may change your posture in order to ease the pain so meditation can continue. We should practise the middle way here, by not stretching or bending as soon as an unpleasant feeling arises, but only when pain becomes unbearable and is an obstruction to meditation. Then we may bend and stretch the arms and legs.

The next step is clear comprehension of suitability in bending and stretching. Although bending and stretching may be purposeful and beneficial, if one does it at the wrong moment, at the wrong time, there can be undesirable consequences. The Commentary describes several disastrous incidents.

Once, on the terrace of a great relic shrine, some young monks were reciting the Dhamma teachings. Sitting in back of them were some young nuns listening to the recitation. One of the young monks: accidentally touched a nun while he was stretching his arm towards the back. Because of this unmindful action, coming into bodily contact with a female, he became a layman. For by getting involved, they had to disrobe and leave the Order. Disrobing, for a monk, is very serious, as serious as a danger to his life would be.

Another monk, in stretching his leg, extended it into a fire, where his foot was burned to the bone. This monk seems to have been very careless. It must have been a very great fire to have burned his foot to the bone, but he was not conscious or aware of the flames.

Yet another monk stretched his leg onto an anthill, where he was bitten on the foot by a poisonous snake. As the snake was poisonous, the monk must have died. Another monk was less unfortunate. He stretched out his hand until it rested on the pole of a tent made of ropes. A ribbon snake on the pole bit his hand. As that snake is not so poisonous, the monk may have suffered some pain, but he probably did not die.

When stretching or bending limbs we must be mindful, so that we do not suffer pain or loss of life because of careless action. Clear comprehension of suitability is knowing whether it is suitable to bend or stretch at a particular time or particular place.

Clear comprehension of resort means the practice of meditation. In this context applying mindfulness whenever one bends or stretches is clear comprehension of resort. It is illustrated by the story of a senior monk.

A great Elder once bent his arm quickly while seated in his day quarters talking to his resident pupils. Then he brought his arm back to its original position and again bent it, but slowly this time. Curious, the pupils asked, “Reverend Sir, after bending the arm quickly, after having placed it in the position it was first in, why did you bend it slowly? Why did you take the arm back to the place and bend it again?”

The Elder replied, “Friends, ever since I began to practise mindfulness meditation, I have never bent my arm without mindfulness. While I was talking with you, I forgot about mindfulness. Just then I bent without mindfulness. That is why I took my arm to the place and bent it again.” And the pupils said, “Good Reverend Sir, a monk should be like this.”

In practising meditation one should not forget to be mindful of any bending or stretching of the arms or legs. This is the clear comprehension of resort in bending and stretching. It just means applying mindfulness to the bending or stretching of any limb.

Then there is clear comprehension of non-delusion. The meditator sees that bending is only the diffusion of the process of oscillation. By the diffusion of air element born of mental activity, there is bending and stretching. It is like the moving of legs and hands of a marionette when the strings are pulled. He sees clearly, without confusion, that in this act of bending or stretching there are only the intention to bend or stretch and the bending and stretching itself, and nothing else (that is, only the intention and the action.) There is no soul, no permanent entity, no 'I', no person, no individual that bends or stretches." Seeing this way is called clear comprehension of non-delusion in bending and stretching.

In bending and stretching we must understand the four kinds of clear comprehension- clear comprehension of purpose, clear comprehension of suitability, clear comprehension of resort, and clear comprehension of non-delusion. In order to attain the state of clear comprehension of non-delusion, we must practise meditation. We must apply mindfulness whenever we bend or stretch. When mindfulness meditation is practised until clear comprehension of resort matures, clear comprehension of non-delusion arises by itself.

In the beginning only the bending and stretching will be seen. At first we may not even see the intention preceding it. But later on the intention will become clear. With further practice we will become aware of the awareness of the bending and stretching. After seeing these three things clearly, without mixing one with the other, we will come to see that in the act of bending there is only the intention, the bending itself, and the awareness of the bending. Apart from these three things there is no 'I', no soul, or whatever. When we see in this way we will have perfected clear comprehension of non-delusion in bending or stretching. But until reaching this stage, we must make effort in clear comprehension of resort, which opens the door to non-delusion.

The next application of clear comprehension concerns wearing the robes and use of the alms bowl. As this discourse was given to monks, the Buddha talked about clear comprehension of these two important aspects of monastic daily life. But his teachings on these matters can be adapted and applied to lay life, and are just as valid for lay people as for monks.

In wearing the robes and handling the bowl a monk must apply clear comprehension. Here the purpose of picking up the bowl after putting on robes is to go out for alms. So getting food is the purpose.

#### *Clear Comprehension – Wearing Robes*

Whenever a monk puts on his robes, he is expected to make this reflection: "I wear robes, I use robes, for keeping out cold, for keeping out heat, for keeping out bites of insects, and just to cover myself up, and not for any other purpose." If he does not remember to make the reflection every time he picks up the robe, he must make it at least once each day, to remind himself of the purpose in wearing robes. Monks wear robes not to beautify themselves, not to take pride in their robes, but just to ward off cold, heat and insect bites, and to cover themselves.

Suitability of the robe itself should also be considered. "To one who is naturally warm-bodied, fine clothing is suitable; to one who is sensitive to heat, thin clothing is suitable. Also, to one who is weak, a thin robe is suitable."

In the olden days robes were made of thick cloth. When that thick cloth was made into a double-layered robe, it became very heavy. If a monk wearing it was caught in the rain, it could become so heavy that he would

have to find a pole and carry it on his shoulders. Such robes are not like those of today, which are fine and thin. Nowadays there is a choice of thick or thin robes, but in the early days a monk had to accept what was given. A thick or heavy robe is unsuitable for one who is weak. If one is sensitive to cold, however, a thick or double-layered robe is suitable.

An old worn-out robe is unsuitable because it is a hindrance. You have to patch it up. You have to sew it or darn it. This means having to take time away from the practice of meditation. So an old worn-out robe, with loose stitches and holes here and there, is not suitable for anybody.

Also troublesome are robes of silk, fine hemp, and similar materials that can arouse greed in thieves. A silk robe is expensive, and if thieves see it they may want to steal it. So silk and other costly robes are not suitable for one who is living alone, especially one who is living alone in the forest. Such robes invite loss of clothing and loss of life, for a monk could even be killed by thieves wanting to take his robe. Though expensive robes are unsuitable for one who lives alone in the forest, they may be all right for one living in a monastery with many other monks.

Definitely not suitable is a robe acquired by unsuitable means, by wrong means of livelihood. Monks must be very careful to keep their livelihood pure. They are not to ask anything of lay people, unless invited to do so. Nor are they to tell fortunes or give medicine to lay people, because it could mean that a monk might want something in return. That is like doing something for payment. Even if a monk were to tell a fortune and be offered a robe by the grateful recipient, it would not be suitable for him to accept it. Such things are considered wrong means of livelihood for monks. If a robe is obtained by one of these wrong ways, it is not suitable.

A robe that decreases the good and increases the bad in the monk who wears it is also unsuitable. For example, when a monk puts on an expensive robe, he may have attachment to it, which means that it increases his *akusala*. That robe would not be suitable for him. In this way, there are robes that are suitable and not suitable.

What is clear comprehension of resort? It is the non-forsaking of meditation. Here it means being mindful when making use of robes or picking up bowls and other items of use. When this practice of meditation matures, it is automatically followed by the next stage, which is clear comprehension of non-delusion, insight.

There is nothing called a soul that robes itself. It is only through the process of oscillation born of mental activity that the act of robing takes place. When we put on robes there is movement in our bodies. This movement is caused by the air element, which in turn was caused by the desire to wear the robe. There is only the desire or intention to wear it, and the wearing of the robe itself. So there is no soul or whatever inside.

The robe has no power to think. Neither does the body have that power. Neither the robe nor the body has cognizing power. The robe is not aware that it is draping the body. And the body itself is not aware that it is being draped by the robe. The body doesn't know that the robe is around it, and the robe doesn't know that it is around the body. The truth is that mere elements clothe a heap of elements.

The robe is made up of four elements, and the body is made up of more than four elements. Mere elements clothe a heap of elements in the same way that a piece of cloth covers a doll. The doll doesn't know the cloth, and the cloth doesn't know that it is on the doll. So where is there room for elation on getting a fine

robe, or for depression on getting one that is not fine? Whether we get a good robe or not a good robe, we are not to get elated or depressed. Whether it is a good robe or not a good robe, it is just a bundle of material elements.

The Commentary illustrates this with another example. Some people honor an anthill where a cobra lives, a tree shrine, and so forth, with garlands, perfumes and incense. Other people abuse or damage these objects of reverence. Anthills and tree shrines are neither elated by good treatment nor depressed by the bad. In the same way, there should be no elation on receiving a good robe, and no depression on getting an inferior one.

Clear comprehension of non-delusion should be understood to precede this kind of reflective thought. So thinking in this way is called clear comprehension of non-delusion. Whenever you put on or take off clothes, you should understand that the body doesn't know about the clothes, and the clothes don't know about the body. They are just elements- elements put on top of a heap of elements. There is no soul or any other such entity involved in this act of putting on clothes or putting on robes.

### *Clear Comprehension – Handling Alms Bowl*

A monk's bowl is also an object for clear comprehension. When a monk has a bowl he has food to eat, so it is a precious property. In using the bowl, clear comprehension of purpose should be understood in terms of the benefit obtainable through the action of one who takes the bowl and, walking unhurriedly, thinks, "Going out to beg with this, I shall get alms." Picking up the bowl has the purpose of getting alms food. When a monk goes for alms he should not walk quickly. He goes in a dignified manner, holding this purpose in mind.

Bowls, like robes, must be chosen for suitability. For a thin or a weak person a heavy bowl is not suitable. And a bowl that is tied with thread and stopped in four or five places is not suitable for anybody. Bowls are made of clay or iron, and with use, cracks appear. But the monk must not throw it away as soon as a crack appears. He must mend it with thread. If the crack deepens, he must make another stop, another binding. He must make bindings or stops until there are five. When there are five stops on the bowl, he can look for a new one. Otherwise he must keep that bowl and use it.

But if a bowl has many stops, many mendings, it is difficult to clean. One that has stops in four or five places and is hard to wash is not suitable for a monk who is practising meditation, because he must spend a long time washing it to get it clean. A bowl that is hard to wash well is not really suitable for any monk.

Monks have to be very clean in this respect. Not a particle of food should remain in the bowl. In the morning when a monk picks up the bowl and goes on alms round, if the food he receives mixes with a particle of food left from the previous day, he incurs an offense. So a monk must clean his bowl well. A bowl that is difficult to clean, difficult to wash, is not a suitable bowl.

Also unsuitable is a bowl that shines too brightly. Like robes of silk and fine hemp, it is capable of inciting greed in others. When a very well-made bowl is also well-polished, it shines like a gem and is expensive. By arousing greed in thieves, that bowl might be stolen and the monk might be harmed. Such a bowl, which is desirable to others, is not suitable. A bowl acquired through wrong means of livelihood definitely is not suitable. Neither is the bowl by which akusala increases, nor that by which kusala decreases. Other kinds of bowls are suitable. This is clear comprehension of suitability in taking the bowl.

Practice of meditation when taking the bowl is clear comprehension of resort. Here also, when practice has matured, the insight arises that there is nothing that is taking the bowl. Only by the diffusion of air element is there the taking of the bowl. The bowl cannot think; the hands cannot think. The bowl does not recognize that it is taken by the hands. The hands do not recognize that they are taking the bowl. There are just elements taking hold of a heap of elements.

In picking up a bowl there is the intention to pick it up, and there is the picking up. There are only these two things. Apart from these two things there is nothing we can call a soul, a self, a person, an 'I', or whatever. The hand doesn't know it has picked up the bowl, and the bowl doesn't know it has been picked up by the hand. There are just elements picking up a heap of elements. Reflecting this way is clear comprehension of non-delusion.

To illustrate how monks are not to be elated or depressed when getting a good or a bad bowl, the Commentary gives an instructive analogy. In a refuge for the helpless, there are some unfortunate persons with hands and feet cut off, the open wounds oozing with blood and pus, and filled with maggots. Seeing these miserable sufferers, some kindly people give them bandages and containers of medicine. Some of the afflicted may get thick bandages and shapeless containers. Others may get thin bandages and shapely containers. But none of the sufferers will feel elated or depressed about the kind of bandages and containers they receive. They are not interested in containers. Their interest is in getting medication and something to cover their wounds.

Getting a bowl is only for the purpose of getting food. Wearing robes is only for the purpose of keeping out cold, heat, and so on. There is no other purpose. Understanding this, a monk is said to have reached the clear comprehension of non-delusion with regard to wearing robes and taking bowls. But the monk who regards the robe as bandages, the bowl as a medicine container, and alms food as medicine in the bowl, is one who has reached the highest clear comprehension of non-delusion.

A meditator should practise mindfulness whenever he wears clothes or takes them off, and whenever he picks up plates, bowls, or other utensils. In this way he will gain clear comprehension of what is reality in wearing robes and taking up bowls.

### *Clear Comprehension while eating*

The next section in the Commentary is on eating, drinking, chewing and savoring. In the Pāli texts the general word for eating also has a specialized use as the verb for consuming soft food, such as rice or milk curd. Drinking is just imbibing fluids. Chewing is used for hard foods, like apples or parched grain, that require biting and being broken up by the teeth. Savoring, like tasting, mainly involves the tongue, and is also translated as licking. Here this word is used for eating honey, molasses, and other foods eaten by licking. Eating, drinking, chewing or biting, and savoring or licking are the four actions involved in eating.

What is the purpose in eating? It is not for merrymaking, not for intoxication, not for beautifying the appearance, not for building up the physique. Eating is just for the sake of keeping alive and well in order to practise the teachings of the Buddha. This is the purpose in eating. It is not for pleasure, not to become strong or beautiful in order to show off.

Suitability of food is next to be considered. Food is not suitable if it causes discomfort to the one who eats it. Food that makes you comfortable is suitable for you. It may be of any taste or any quality. It may be fine,

bitter, sweet, or anything else. But if it causes discomfort, it is unsuitable for you.

Some foods definitely are not suitable. Food that is acquired by wrong means of livelihood is one category. There are many tricks that a monk knows to get something from you. If a monk uses some of these tricks and gets something to eat, that food is considered to be gained through wrong means of livelihood. Sometimes a monk may not ask you for food directly, but instead may hint at something so you feel obliged to give to him. If you want to know these tricks, read the Visuddhi Magga. Food obtained by wrong means of livelihood is not suitable.

Food by which kusala decreases and akusala increases is unsuitable. Some food may increase one's akusala. Other food may decrease one's kusala. Such foods are not suitable. Food that does not cause the decrease of kusala or the increase of akusala is suitable. This is clear comprehension of suitability.

Clear comprehension of resort arises from the application of mindfulness while eating. When we give instructions for eating meditation, we go into great detail. You may think there are too many, or that they may be the invention of modern teachers. But that is not true.

The Commentary says, "Within there is no eater called a self. As stated already, by the diffusion of the process of oscillation born of mental activity only, there is the receiving of food in the bowl. By the same diffusion of the process of oscillation born of mental activity, there is the descent of the hand into the bowl. And there is making of the food into suitable lumps."

In the east we eat with our hands. When we eat we lower the hand into the bowl, pick up some rice and make it into a ball. This is how the food is made into suitable lumps. "The raising of lumps from the bowl and the opening of the mouth take place because of the diffusion of the air element. No one opens the jaws with a key. No one opens the jaws with a contrivance. Just by the diffusion of the air element born of mental activity this action takes place, the putting of the lump into the mouth.

"Then there is the pestle action of the upper row of teeth grinding, and the mortar work of the lower row of teeth, and the tongue's activity comparable to that of the hand collecting together the material that is being crushed. Thus that food is mixed together with the thin saliva at the end of the tongue. And it mixes with the thick saliva at the root of the tongue.

"That food in the mortar of the lower teeth, turned by the tongue, moistened by the saliva, and ground by the pestle of the upper teeth, is not put into the stomach by anyone with a ladle or a spoon. Just by the process of oscillation it goes in. There is no one within who, having made a straw mat, is bearing each lump that goes in.

"Each lump stands there by way of the process of oscillation. There is no one who, having put up an oven and having lit a fire, is cooking each lump standing there. By only the process of the fire element the lump matures. There is no one who expels each lump with a stick or pole. Just the process of oscillation expels the digested food."

The Commentary explains in great detail. That is why, when we give instructions, we too give in great detail- picking up food, taking food to the mouth, putting food into the mouth, chewing, swallowing. All these activities should be done in full awareness, with mindfulness. By applying intense mindfulness to the activities of eating, you will come to see that there is the intention preceding each action, and there is the action itself.

There is no one, no self, no 'I' or whatever, that performs all these activities. There are only elements doing these activities with the help of air element, earth element, water element, and fire element.

According to the Commentary, it is the air element that does the taking onward, the moving away from side to side. The earth element does the bearing up, turning around, pulverizing, and removal of liquidity. Water element moistens and preserves wetness. Fire element ripens or "cooks", to digest the food that goes in. There is another element, space. Space is the avenue for the entering of the food. Without it, the food cannot enter. And there is mind element, a consciousness of an appropriate kind.

Here the Commentary is explaining by means of six elements. You are familiar with four of them. The other two are: space, *ākāsa*, and consciousness, *viññāṇa*. What we call a person, a man, or a woman, is a bundle of these six elements- earth, water, fire, air, space, and consciousness. When we reach the clear comprehension of non-delusion, we reflect in this way, which involves a kind of thinking rooted in understanding.

### *Reflection on the Loathsomeness of Food*

The Commentary also says that clear comprehension of non-delusion should be further understood through reflection on the loathsomeness of food. The detailed exposition on the loathsomeness of food is given in chapter eleven of the Visuddhi Magga.

A monk should reflect on the loathsomeness of food in ten ways. The first unpleasantness is the daily need, rain or shine, to go to the village for his food. Another is having to seek food from house to house like a beggar, and to endure the rebuffs. The process of eating is itself repulsive, with the hand squeezing foods into lumps to be mashed by teeth and tongue and mixed with saliva. And then, after being swallowed, the food mixes with bile and other internal secretions.

Once this loathsome mess enters its receptacle, the stomach, it has reached a place that has never been washed, not even once, during the whole of your life. If you are a hundred years old, then that place has remained unwashed for a hundred years. Another reflection is by way of the undigested food in the stomach, where, covered with froth and bubbles of fermentation, it becomes increasingly repulsive and filthy looking. And when it is digested, it becomes excrement and urine.

The next reflection is on the consequences of eating. When the food is well digested, it produces head hair, body hair, nails, teeth, and so on, which are filthy and require continual cleaning. When it is not well digested, it causes a variety of diseases and bodily disorders. Another reflection is on the elimination of food through the body's openings, by way of excretions. It is said in the books that food enters by only one door, and goes out through nine doors. One may reflect on the ways that food pollutes the body, forming sweat, ear wax, nasal mucus, and so forth; even when you pick up food to eat it, the hand gets smeared. We have to wash again and again to keep clean. And the outcome of food is a great pollution. The Visuddhi Magga offers some verses on the subject of outflow, the oozing out:

*The food and drink so greatly prized-  
The crisp to chew, the soft to suck-  
Go in all by a single door,  
But by nine doors come oozing out.*

*The food and drink so greatly prized-  
The crisp to chew, the soft to suck-  
Men like to eat in company,  
But to excrete in secrecy.*

*The food and drink so greatly prized-  
The crisp to chew, the soft to suck-  
These a man eats with high delight,  
And then excretes with dumb disgust.*

*The food and drink so greatly prized-  
The crisp to chew, the soft to suck-  
A single night will be enough  
To bring them to putridity.*

This is how monks are taught to reflect on the loathsomeness of food.

Contemplation on the loathsomeness of food is not vipassanā meditation. It is one of the forty samatha meditation subjects, and contemplating on these ten reflections is a samatha method of contemplation. However, reflecting that there are only elements- no soul or other entity involved- is vipassanā contemplation.

When we eat, drink, chew or bite, and savor or lick, we should apply clear comprehension, which means the application of mindfulness. When this application of mindfulness becomes mature, we will come to know the true nature of eating, the reality in eating. There is no one eating, but only the elements doing the act of eating. This is vipassanā.

According to Mahasi Sayadaw, the loathsomeness' of food can be seen even without the ten reflections. If, while eating, you really concentrate on noting, such as, "Bringing, bringing; putting, putting; chewing, chewing," you will come to see the unpleasantness of food. You will come to feel loathsomeness for food. This feeling of loathsomeness of food is not like the feeling of nausea or throwing up. That kind of feeling is not kusala. But when with wisdom, with understanding, a person sees the unpleasantness and loathsomeness of food, this understanding is kusala. This kind of loathsomeness can appear to vipassanā yogis when they pay close attention to the act of eating, by making notes of each moment.

There are some people who have said, after one day of eating with meditation, that they don't want to eat at all. There is so much suffering involved in eating that they lose all desire to eat. They have seen the loathsomeness in food that way. So even though you don't practise the ten reflections, if you pay attention to eating and see with understanding the unpleasantness of food, you will have attained clear comprehension of non-delusion.

Contemplation of the body, the first of the four foundations of mindfulness, contains six sections, the third of which is on clear comprehension. In this section there are only two more segments regarding bodily actions as objects of mindfulness. "In obeying the calls of nature, the monk applies clear comprehension; in walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking, speaking, and in keeping silent, [he] applies clear comprehension.

## *Clear Comprehension in Obeying the Calls of Nature*

Vipassanā deals with fact, whether that fact be considered lofty or lowly. In the practice of mindfulness no activity can be ignored simply because it is seen as unfit to be mentioned in a group or to an audience. The Buddha did not use the words “obeying the calls of nature.” He did not use euphemisms. He just said “in defecating and urinating, he applies clear comprehension.” So these activities, too, must be understood in the light of clear comprehension of purpose, suitability, resort, and non-delusion.

Concerning the clear comprehension of purpose, the Commentary says, “When the time is come, when the time is proper, if one does not do these actions, then one’s body perspires, one’s eyes reel, one’s mind is not collected, and illness in the form of sharp pain, fistula, and so forth, arise for one. But for one who does these actions at the proper time, none of these discomforts, disadvantages, troubles and illness arise.” This is clear comprehension of purpose.

Suitability must also be clearly comprehended. “By doing these actions in an improper place, one commits disciplinary offenses. One goes on getting a bad name and one endangers one’s life.” There are rules for monks and nuns about relieving themselves in an improper place. They are to use only a toilet, outhouse or latrine. If they attend to their needs under a tree or anywhere other than the designated place in the monastery compound, they commit an offense of minor wrongdoing. Because an offense would be incurred, it is not suitable for a monk or nun to do these activities in improper places. It would result in getting a bad name, and even possible loss of life.

In eastern countries there is a belief that guardian deities inhabit trees and certain places. If anybody, lay or monastic, should relieve himself under these trees, the deities would be offended or angry. They might create trouble or even kill the offenders. Human beings might also become disgusted and give them trouble or even kill them. So life can be endangered when these activities are done in an improper place. We should understand where it is suitable and where it is not suitable to do them. This is the clear comprehension of suitability.

Clear comprehension of resort means just practising mindfulness when you are using the toilet. Vipassanā meditation does not stop at the door of the toilet. You must take vipassanā into the toilet and practise there too. For if mindfulness is not practised at the time of urinating and defecating, the notion of ‘I’ or the notion of a soul has an opportunity to arise. Therefore it is necessary to maintain concentration at this time. Applying mindfulness when doing these activities is the clear comprehension of resort.

When this has matured, clear comprehension of non-delusion will arise. “Within there is no doer of these activities. Only by diffusion of the air element born of mental activity do these activities occur. Just as in a mature boil, by the bursting of the boil, pus and blood come out without any wishing to come out.” Nobody wishes or wills that they come out. They just come out. “Just as from an over-filled water pot, water comes out without any desire for coming out, so too, feces and urine accumulated in the abdomen and bladder are pressed out by the force of oscillation [air element].

“Suddenly this coming out thus is neither that monk’s nor another’s. It is just bodily excretion, whether from a water vessel or a calabash. A person throws out the old water. The water thrown out is neither his nor another’s. It simply forms a part of a process of cleansing.” Understanding in this way is the clear comprehension of non-delusion.

When the clear comprehension of resort in regard to these activities has matured, a yogi sees there is no doer. There is only the process of air element causing matter to be expelled from the body. When certain actions are done, and these things are eliminated from the body, they belong to nobody. They are just bodily excretions.

This understanding comes through applying mindfulness to these activities, and ends in the clear comprehension of non-delusion. So clear comprehension of resort should be applied to any activity, however “low” it is supposed to be. Vipassanā practitioners must, at all costs, avoid getting the notion of a soul or an ‘I’. This is the clear comprehension of “obeying the calls of nature.”

### *Clear Comprehension in Bodily Activities according to the Abhidhamma*

The last instruction is “he applies clear comprehension in walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking, speaking, and in keeping silent.” This is explained in two commentaries in two different ways. It appears in Abhidhamma and also in the Suttas, especially the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. Although the Abhidhamma Commentary explains it one way and the Sutta Commentary another, they do not necessarily conflict with each other.

This is how the Abhidhamma Commentary explains walking, standing, sitting, and falling asleep or sleeping. “A monk walks up and down on a path chosen by him, on an ambulatory. When he stands, he understands or contemplates in this way: ‘The mind and body which arise at the one end of the ambulatory do not exist at the other end of the ambulatory.’” That is, those at either end of the ambulatory vanish before reaching the other end. They just arise and disappear at the beginning of the ambulatory. Mind and matter that arise in the middle do not reach either to one end or to the other end of the ambulatory. They also arise and disappear at that point.

“Also, mind and matter which arise while standing do not exist into the posture of sitting. Mind and matter which arise while sitting do not exist into the posture of lying down.

“Contemplating like this, the meditator lets his mind fall into bhavaṅga, or life continuum.” That means, contemplating like this, he lets sleep come to him. I always urge you not to go to sleep, but let sleep come to you. Don’t give up mindfulness and go to sleep. Let sleep come to you while you are mindful of something. Here, the meditator is mindful of mind and matter, *nāma* and *rūpa*, arising and disappearing. In this way he lets his mind fall into bhavaṅga.

“When the meditator wakes up he picks up his meditation again.” One should try to be mindful of the first moment of waking. As soon as you wake up, try to be mindful of that moment as “waking, waking,” or something similar. In the beginning of practice it is very difficult to catch this first moment. But as practice and concentration become stronger, you will be able to catch it. If you are successful, then your day’s meditation begins with that moment. If you cannot catch it, but become aware after some activities, the day’s practice of meditation begins from the moment you remember to be mindful.

In walking, standing, sitting, lying down, and right up to sleeping, you have to apply mindfulness. Here the Pāli word *sutte*, sleeping, is followed by *jāgarite*, waking. As these words appear in sequence, *sutte* means really going to sleep, not just lying down. However, it is impossible to practise meditation when you are asleep. You can practise only before going to sleep and after waking up, so this is what is meant by the practice of

meditation “during sleep.”

The Commentary goes on to say that one should keep his mindfulness or meditation very clear. “A monk should walk up and down, stand, sit, and finally lie down, and practise meditation on that posture as much as he can. Then he should contemplate: ‘This body is not cognizing. The bed is not cognizing.’” The body doesn’t know that it is lying on the bed. And the bed doesn’t know that the body is lying on it. “The uncognizing body is lying on the uncognizing bed.” Contemplating this way, the meditator should let his mind sink into bhavaṅga, and on waking he picks up his meditation again. Though called the application of clear comprehension while asleep or falling asleep, this also means application of clear comprehension when immediately waking up. Therefore one should go to sleep with mindfulness, and try to be mindful of the first waking moment to pick up meditation.

With reference to waking, “Non-occurrence of consciousness which causes action is called sleeping. Occurrence of consciousness which causes action is called waking.” Action here means seeing, hearing, doing things, and so on. A monk, a bhikkhu, who contemplates in this way, who understands in this way, is called one who is applying clear comprehension to waking.

“When there is the non-occurrence of mind causing actions, there is no waking. When such a mind causing actions occurs, this is waking. In this way he contemplates. When he contemplates like this, he is said to be applying clear comprehension of waking.”

According to the Commentary, there is another way he applies clear comprehension of waking. He divides a day into six parts- three in the daytime and three in the night. He practises for five parts and sleeps only for one part. Thus he keeps himself awake almost all the time, sleeping only four hours out of the twenty-four. This also is called clear comprehension in waking.

Speaking is the next activity mentioned. The sound that arises after no sound is known as a dependent material. Material properties are divided into two, broad categories. The four elements, which we have often discussed, are called primary material. Others, such as sight, sound and smell are called dependent materials. The voice, as sound, is a dependent material.

What is speaking? “When there is no arising of the dependent material which is sound, there is no speaking. When there is that dependent material arising, there is speaking. Understanding like this or contemplating like this, a monk is said to be applying clear comprehension to speaking.” In speaking, we must understand that when there is no vocal sound, there is no speaking. When there is voice, there is speaking.

When a monk talks, he must be mindful of that talking. He must not talk about unprofitable things. He must talk only about things that are conducive to fewness of wants, and that are in keeping with the Dhamma. When he speaks in this way, he is said to be applying clear comprehension when speaking.

Then there is keeping silent. When there is the occurrence of voice, there is no being silent. When there is not the occurrence of the dependent material property which is voice, then there is silence. Understanding like this or contemplating like this, a bhikkhu is said to be applying clear comprehension when being silent.

“Or taking any one of the meditation subject, and sitting and meditating or entering into second jhāna, he is said to be applying clear comprehension of being silent.” On emerging from the first jhāna, the meditator

sheds ‘applied thought’ and ‘sustained thought’, *vitakka* and *vicāra*. Taken together, they are called *vācisaṅkhāra*, which means ‘producer of speech’. With his mind freed of mental chatter, discursive thinking, a meditator in second jhāna will never speak. He is said to be in noble silence. Strictly speaking, noble silence means entering into second jhāna. But the commentaries say that just practising one’s regular meditation is also noble silence.

The Buddha once said to the assembly of monks, “Monks, when you are assembled, you can do any one of two things- a talk on the Dhamma or noble silence.” If you have to talk, talk on Dhamma. If you cannot speak on Dhamma, be silent. Keeping silent by entering into second jhāna is also called clear comprehension of being silent. This is the explanation given in the Abhidhamma Commentary.

#### *Clear Comprehension in Bodily Activities according to the Sutta*

The Sutta Commentary approaches clear comprehension of bodily activities in a different way. It begins with quoting Tipiṭaka Mahāseewa Thera, a well-known Elder of the time. He seems to have been well acquainted with the entire Tipiṭaka, which is why he was called Tipiṭaka Thera.

He said, “A person, after walking or going back and forth for a long time, later on stands and contemplates in this way: ‘Mind and matter that arise at the moment of going up and down cease at that moment. They do not exist into later activities.’ This is called clear comprehension in going.” Here the contemplation is that the mind and matter arising while one is walking up and down vanish at that moment, and not at any other moment.

Then, a person may be reciting, answering a question, or just reflecting on his meditation. In this way he may have stood for a long time, so he sits down. After sitting down he contemplates, “Mind and matter that arise at the moment of standing vanish then and there.” This is clear comprehension in standing.

Then there is clear comprehension in sitting. A person may be sitting for a long time, reciting, giving a talk, or some such thing. After getting up he contemplates; in this way, “Mind and matter that arise at the time of sitting vanish then and there.” This is the clear comprehension of sitting.

Then a monk lying down may be reciting, reflecting on meditation, or practising meditation, and he goes to sleep. After some time he gets up and then contemplates, “Mind and matter that arise at the time of sleeping vanish then and there.” This is called clear comprehension in waking. But there is really clear comprehension of two things---sleeping and waking. While lying down he recited something or practised meditation, and then went to sleep. Then he got up and recalled in this way, “Mind and matter that arose during the time of sleeping vanished then and there.” So this is the application of clear comprehension regarding sleeping and waking.

Then there is clear comprehension when talking. “This voice depends on the lips, on teeth, on the tongue, on the palate, and also depends on the mind. Depending on these the voice or sound arises, When he contemplates like this when speaking, he is said to be applying clear comprehension while speaking.”

He may be reciting for a long time, or giving Dhamma talk, or teaching meditation, or answering questions. Later on he becomes silent. Then he contemplates like this: “Mind and matter which arose at the time of speaking vanish then and there. They do not continue into being silent.” This is the application of clear comprehension in speaking.

Then there is the clear comprehension in keeping silent. A person being silent, contemplating on the Dhamma or practising meditation, later on contemplates like this: “Mind and matter’ which arose during the time of being silent vanish then and there.” Speaking means the arising of that dependent matter, and silence means the non-arising of that dependent matter. The mind and matter which arose at the time of being silent just vanish then and there. they do not exist into the other moments. This is what was taught by the Elder Mahāseewa.

This explanation contains no mention of the clear comprehension of purpose, clear comprehension of suitability and clear comprehension of resort. Only the clear comprehension of non-delusion is taught here.

The Commentary says that by clear comprehension we must also understand mindfulness, because the two go together. Without mindfulness there can be no clear comprehension. But although clear comprehension is always accompanied by mindfulness, there can be mindfulness without clear comprehension. We should be aware that they are linked by concentration, without which clear comprehension cannot arise. Mindfulness develops concentration, and concentration develops clear comprehension, which is knowledge or wisdom.

At the beginning of practice there may not be clear comprehension. Initially the yogi must make effort just to be mindful of the object. He may not see it clearly at first. It can take time to see that there are only mind and matter going on at the moment, with no ‘I’ or any other entity as agent. But with the development of mindfulness he will come to see that only two things are going on at a given moment, and there is no individual, no person, no doer.

If you are familiar with the Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, you will have noticed that walking and other bodily activities are mentioned more than once. The second section, on postures of the body, mentions walking or going, standing, sitting, and lying down. The third section, on clear comprehension, first refers to going forward and back. Later on it lists walking, standing, sitting and lying down. The third section, on clear comprehension, first refers to going forward and going back. Later on it notes walking, standing, sitting and sleeping.

Our practice is according to these two sections, on mindfulness with clear comprehension and on postures of the body. As the Commentary explains, the activities mentioned can be divided into three categories- those of long duration, middle duration, and short duration. Whatever the duration, we must be mindful of all of them. We practise mindfulness in order to come to see clearly that there are only two things going on at a time, and that over and above them there is no soul, no person, no individual, no ‘I’.

The Discourse continues: *“Thus he dwells contemplating the body in the body internally, or he dwells contemplating the body in the body externally, or he dwells contemplating the body in the body both internally and externally.”*

*“He dwells contemplating the origination factors in the body, or he dwells contemplating the dissolution factors in the body, or he dwells contemplating both origination and dissolution factors in the body.”*

*“Or his mindfulness is established as ‘there is this body only.’ And that mindfulness, is established to the extent necessary to further knowledge and mindfulness. Independent he dwells, clinging to nothing in the world.”*

How does one contemplate the body in the body internally, externally, and both internally and externally? When you are mindful of the activities going on in your own body, you are practising body contemplation internally. After seeing the activities in yourself clearly, understanding that they are only elements and there is no person or other entity, you may turn attention to the activities of others. You may then infer that just as your own activities are only pure phenomena rolling on and on without a doer, so may be those of others. In this way, sometimes you may infer the activities of others from those of yourself. This is practising body contemplation on the body externally.

At times you may practise it both internally and externally, by alternating the awareness of your own activities, with the inference of another person's activities. Going back and forth in this way, you are said to be practising both internally and externally.

Practising thus, the meditator reaches the stage of clear comprehension of non-delusion. Then "he dwells contemplating the origination factors in the body, or he dwells contemplating the dissolution factors in the body, or he dwells contemplating both the origination and dissolution factors in the body." This means that while you are being mindful of the activities you may also see the causes of these activities, the causes of the different postures of the body. And you see that because there is the mind there is the action.

If you have knowledge of other Dhamma teachings, that knowledge, too, can be applied here. Because there is ignorance, *avijjā*, there is this body. Because there is craving, there is this body. Because there is kamma, there is this body. Because there is food that we eat, this body exists. In this way you may practise meditation on the causes of arising of the body. When there are no such causes, there is no body. You also may contemplate the vanishing of the body through the vanishing of the causes. At times you may be aware of the causes of both arising and dissolution.

According to Mahāsi Sayadaw, it is sufficient just to see the arising, the disappearing, or the arising and disappearing of the body. For this is what is meant by contemplating the origination, the dissolution, or the origination and dissolution of the body. In practice this direct approach is more appropriate. To see the causes while you are concentrating on the activities of the body is more difficult than to see just their arising and vanishing.

When mindfulness is fully applied to the activities, you cannot fail to see them arise and disappear. Seeing the arising is the same as contemplating the origination in the body. Seeing the disappearing is the same as contemplating the dissolution. And seeing both arising and disappearing is the same as contemplating both the origination and dissolution.

This approach of direct observation of the rise and fall of phenomena shows that this practice is vipassanā, not samatha. Only in vipassanā do you see the arising and disappearing of things. Samatha meditation does not encourage seeing arising and vanishing. It encourages the notion of permanency.

The Discourse continues: "Or his mindfulness is established as 'there is the body only.' And that mindfulness is established to the extent necessary to further knowledge and mindfulness." When the meditator sees in this way, and sees nothing over and above this body, then the understanding comes to him that there is the body only. There is no person. There is no man. There is no woman. There is no 'I'. There is no soul or any other such entity. This understanding, accompanied by mindfulness, strengthens the succeeding moments of mindfulness and understanding.

When he understands this way, he does not cling to anything. He is not dependent on anything by way of grasping, attachment, or wrong view. Independent he dwells, clinging to nothing in the world. “Thus...a bhikkhu dwells contemplating the body in the body.”

When a person practises mindfulness meditation on activities of the body or on objects, first he will see them clearly. Then he will see them arising and disappearing. When he sees the arising and disappearing of these activities and objects, he sees their impermanence. Seeing this, there is no room for him to be attached to them or to take them as permanent. The practice of mindfulness leads to not grasping or clinging to anything in the world.

We practise vipassanā meditation in order not to cling to the objects presented to us through the six sense doors. For when there is clinging, there is action dependent on the clinging. Whether the action is in the form of wholesome kamma or unwholesome kamma, it will surely result in the form of rebirth. And with rebirth there is the inevitability of old age, disease and death. Thus, when there is clinging, the cycle of suffering goes on and on.

In order to avoid clinging to things, we try to apply mindfulness. With mindfulness and, later, with clear comprehension of things, we will be able to let go of things, to free ourselves from clinging to things and grasping at them. The knowledge and capacity to achieve this freedom grows as we meditate.

For this reason we must understand correctly the passages in the Discourse on the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. In the beginning of the Sutta it is said that “a bhikkhu dwells contemplating the body in the body, the feeling in the feelings... the consciousness in the consciousness... the Dhamma in the dhammas, ardent, clearly comprehending and mindful, removing covetousness and grief in the world.”

This passage is often translated as “having removed [or “having overcome”] covetousness and grief. . .“ But it is not “having removed”. One who has removed covetousness and grief does not have to practise meditation at all, because he already has achieved his purpose. The Pāli construction here, called the absolute, can denote action taking place either simultaneously (“removing”) with the action of the main verb (“he dwells”), or prior to it (“having removed”). But, as has been pointed out, “having removed” would be a contradiction in the context of the above passage. The appropriate translation is, “he dwells...removing covetousness and grief in the world.” That means simultaneous removal.

When being mindful of the breath or any other object, we are removing or avoiding attachment (covetousness) and ill will (grief) with regard to that object. This removal of covetousness and grief arises simultaneously with the practice of meditation, if our mindfulness is good. Sometimes we lose mindfulness, and then may have thoughts of attachment or anger. But if mindfulness is really strong, these mental defilements will not arise.

While practising mindfulness meditation we are in one sense removing these mental defilements. But we have not removed them altogether or permanently. Only during the time we are applying mindfulness have we removed them. But when mindfulness is lost they may return to the mind. So here ‘removing’ does not mean getting rid of them absolutely or altogether. It is only a temporary removal.

This is the teaching on clear comprehension, *sampajañña*. Clear comprehension is to be applied to all activities from the moment you wake up in the morning until you go to sleep at night. It is not to be excluded

when you are taking showers, not when you are using the toilet, not when you are eating, not when you are walking. Whatever activity you do must be done with full awareness. You have to apply mindfulness to all of your actions, so that the reality in them may be seen. When you see the reality in them you are said to have reached the stage of clear comprehension of non-delusion in these activities. This clear comprehension of non-delusion will lead you step by step until you reach the stage of enlightenment.

**Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!**