

Practical Viapssana Practice

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The Basic Practice

Preparatory Stage

If you sincerely desire to develop contemplation and attain insight in this your present life, you must give up worldly thoughts and actions during the training. This course of action is for the purification of conduct, the essential preliminary step towards the proper development of contemplation. You must also observe the rules of discipline prescribed for laymen, (or for monks as the case may be) for they are important in gaining insight. For lay people, these rules comprise the Eight Precepts which Buddhist devotees observe on the Observance Days (*uposatha*) and during periods of meditation. An additional rule is not to speak with contempt, in jest, or with malice to or about any of the noble ones who have attained states of sanctity. If you have done so, then personally apologize to him or her or make an apology through your meditation instructor. If in the past you have spoken contemptuously to a noble one who is at present unavailable or deceased, confess this offense to your meditation instructor or introspectively to yourself.

The old masters of Buddhist tradition suggest that you entrust yourself to the Enlightened One, the Buddha, during the training period, for you may be alarmed if it happens that your own state of mind produces unwholesome or frightening visions during contemplation. Also place yourself under the guidance of your meditation instructor, for then, he can talk to you frankly about your work in contemplation and give you the guidance he thinks necessary. These are the advantages of placing trust in the Enlightened One, the Buddha, and practising under the guidance of your instructor. The aim of this practice and its greatest benefit is release from greed, hatred and delusion, which are the roots of all evil and suffering. This intensive course in insight training can lead you to such release. So work ardently with this end in view so that your training will be successfully completed. This kind of training in contemplation, based on the foundations of mindfulness (*satipattana*), had been taken by successive Buddhas and noble ones who attained release. You are to be congratulated on having the opportunity to take the same kind of training they had undergone.

It is also important for you to begin your training with a brief contemplation on the "Four Protections" which the Enlightened One, the Buddha, offers you for reflection. It is helpful for your psychological welfare at this stage to reflect on them. The subjects of the four protective reflections are the Buddha himself, loving-kindness, the loathsome aspects of the body, and death.

First, devote yourself to the Buddha by sincerely appreciating his nine chief qualities in this way:

Truly, the Buddha is holy, fully enlightened, perfect in knowledge and conduct, a welfarer, world-knower, the incomparable leader of men to be tamed, teacher of gods and mankind, the awakened one and the exalted one.

Secondly, reflect upon all sentient beings as the receivers of your loving-kindness and identify yourself with all sentient beings without distinction, thus:

May I be free from enmity, disease and grief. As I am, so also may my parents, preceptors, teachers, intimate and indifferent and inimical beings be free from enmity, disease and grief. May they be released from suffering.

Thirdly, reflect upon the repulsive nature of the body to assist you in diminishing the unwholesome attachment that so many people have for the body. Dwell on some of its impurities, such as stomach, intestines, phlegm,

pus, blood. Ponder on these impurities so that the absurd fondness for the body may be eliminated.

The fourth protection for your psychological benefit is to reflect on the phenomenon of ever-approaching death. Buddhist teachings stress that life is uncertain, but death is certain; life is precarious but death is sure. Life has death as its goal. There is birth, disease, suffering, old age, and eventually, death. These are all aspects of the process of existence.

To begin training, take the sitting posture with the legs crossed. You might feel more comfortable if the legs are not interlocked but evenly placed on the ground, without pressing one against the other. If you find that sitting on the floor interferes with contemplation, then obtain a more comfortable way of sitting. Now proceed with each exercise in contemplation as described.

Basic Exercise I

Try to keep your mind (but not your eyes) on the abdomen. You will thereby come to know the movements of rising and falling of it. If these movements are not clear to you in the beginning, then place both hands on the abdomen to feel these rising and falling movements. After a short time the upward movement of exhalation will become clear. Then make a mental note of **rising** for the upward movement, **falling** for the downward movement. Your mental note of each movement must be made while it occurs. From this exercise you learn the actual manner of the upward and downward movements of the abdomen. You are not concerned with the form of the abdomen. What you actually perceive is the bodily sensation of pressure caused by the heaving movement of the abdomen. So do not dwell on the form of the abdomen but proceed with the exercise. For the beginner it is a very effective method of developing the faculties of attention, concentration of mind and insight in contemplation. As practice progresses, the manner of the movements will be clearer. The ability to know each successive occurrence of the mental and physical processes at each of the six sense organs is acquired only when insight contemplation is fully developed. Since you are only a beginner whose attentiveness and power of concentration are still weak, you may find it difficult to keep the mind on each successive rising movement and falling movement as it occurs. In view of this difficulty, you may be inclined to think, "I just don't know how to keep my mind on each of these movement." Then simply remember that this is a learning process. The rising and falling movements of the abdomen are always present and therefore there is no need to look for them. Actually it is easy for a beginner to keep his or her mind on these two simple movements. Continue with this exercise in full awareness of the abdomen's rising and falling movements. Never verbally repeat the words, rising, falling, and do not think of rising and falling as words. Be aware only of the actual process of the rising and falling movements of the abdomen. Avoid deep or rapid breathing for the purpose of making the abdominal movements more distinct, because this procedure causes fatigue that interferes with the practice. Just be totally aware of the movements of rising and falling as they occur in the course of normal breathing.

Basic Exercise II

While occupied with the exercise of observing each of the abdominal movements, other mental activities may occur between the noting of each rising and falling. Thoughts or other mental functions, such as intentions, ideas, imaginings, are likely to occur between each mental note of rising and falling. They cannot be disregarded. A mental note must be made of each as it occurs.

If you imagine something, you must know that you have done so and make a mental note, **imagining**. If you simply think of something, mentally note, **thinking**. If you reflect, **reflecting**. If you intend to do something, **intending**. When the mind wanders from the object of meditation which is the rising and falling of the abdomen, mentally note, **wandering**. Should you imagine you are going to a certain place, note **going**. When you arrive, **arriving**. When, in your thoughts, you meet a person, note **meeting**. Should you speak to him or her, **speaking**. If you imaginarily argue with that person, note **arguing**. If you envision or imagine a light or colour, be sure to note **seeing**. A mental vision must be noted on each occurrence of its appearance until it passes away. After its disappearance continue with Basic Exercise I, by being fully aware of each movement of the rising and falling

abdomen. Proceed carefully, without slackening. If you intend to swallow saliva while thus engaged, make a mental note **intending**. While in the act of swallowing, **swallowing**. If you spit, **spitting**. Then return to the exercise of noting rising and falling.

Suppose you intend to bend the neck, note **intending**. In the act of bending, **bending**. When you intend to straighten the neck, **intending**. In the act of straightening the neck, **straightening**. The neck movements of bending and straightening must be done slowly. After mentally making a note of each of these actions, proceed in full awareness with noticing the movements of the rising and falling abdomen.

Basic Exercise III

Since you must continue contemplating for a long time while in one position, that of sitting or lying down, you are likely to experience an intense feeling of fatigue, stiffness in the body or in the arms and legs. Should this happen, simply keep the knowing mind on that part of the body where such feelings occur and carry on the contemplation, noting tired or stiff. Do this naturally; that is, neither too fast nor too slow. These feelings gradually become fainter and finally cease altogether. Should one of these feelings become more intense until the bodily fatigue or stiffness of joints is unbearable, then change your position. However, do not forget to make a mental note of **intending**, before you proceed to change your position. Each movement must be contemplated in its respective order and in detail.

If you intend to lift the hand or leg, make a mental note **intending**. In the act of lifting the hand or leg, **lifting**. Stretching either the hand or the leg, **stretching**. When you bend it, **bending**. When putting it down, **putting**. Should either the hand or leg touch, **touching**. Perform all of these actions in a slow and deliberate manner. As soon as you are settled in the new position, continue with the contemplation in another position keeping to the procedure outlined in this paragraph.

Should an itching sensation be felt in any part of the body, keep the mind on that part and make a mental note, **itching**. Do this in a regulated manner, neither too fast nor too slow. When the itching sensation disappears in the course of full awareness, continue with the exercise of noticing the rising and falling of the abdomen. Should the itching continue and become too strong and you intend to rub the itchy part, be sure to make a mental note, **intending**. Slowly lift the hand, simultaneously noting the actions of **lifting**; and **touching**, when the hand touches the part that itches. Rub slowly in complete awareness of **rubbing**. When the itching sensation has disappeared and you intend to discontinue rubbing be mindful by making the usual mental note of **intending**. Slowly withdraw the hand, concurrently making a mental note of the action, **withdrawing**. When the hand rests in its usual place touching the leg, **touching**. Then again devote your time to observing the abdominal movements.

If there is pain or discomfort, keep the knowing mind on that part of the body where the sensation arises. Make a mental note of the specific sensation as it occurs, such as **painful, aching, pressing, piercing, tired, giddy**. It must be stressed that the mental note must not be forced nor delayed but made in a calm and natural manner. The pain may eventually cease or increase. Do not be alarmed if it increases. Firmly continue the contemplation. If you do so, you will find that the pain will almost always cease. But if, after a time, the pain has increased and becomes unbearable, you must ignore the pain and continue with the contemplation of rising and falling.

As you progress in mindfulness you may experience sensations of intense pain: stifling or choking sensations, such as pain from the slash of a knife, the thrust of a sharp-pointed instrument, unpleasant sensations of being pricked by sharp needles, or of small insects crawling over the body. You might experience sensations of itching, biting, intense cold. As soon as you discontinue the contemplation you may also feel that these painful sensations cease. When you resume contemplation you will have them again as soon as you gain in mindfulness. These painful sensations are not to be considered as something wrong. They are not manifestations of disease but are common factors always present in the body and are usually obscured when the mind is normally occupied with more conspicuous objects. When the mental faculties become keener you

are more aware of these sensations. With the continued development of contemplation the time will come when you can overcome them and they will cease altogether. If you continue contemplation, firm in purpose, you will not come to any harm. Should you lose courage, become irresolute in contemplation and discontinue for some time, you may encounter these unpleasant sensations again and again as your contemplation proceeds. If you continue with determination you will most likely overcome these painful sensations and may never again experience them in the course of contemplation.

Should you intend to sway the body, then knowingly note **intending**. While in the act of swaying, **swaying**. When contemplating you may occasionally discover the body swaying back and forth. Do not be alarmed; neither be pleased nor wish to continue to sway. The swaying will cease if you keep the knowing mind on the action of swaying and continue to note **swaying** until the action ceases. If swaying increases in spite of your making a mental note of it, then lean against a wall or post or lie down for a while. Thereafter proceed with contemplation. Follow the same procedure if you find yourself shaking or trembling. When contemplation is developed you may sometimes feel a thrill or chill pass through the back or the entire body. This is a symptom of the feeling of intense interest, enthusiasm or rapture. It occurs naturally in the course of good contemplation. When your mind is fixed in contemplation you may be startled at the slightest sound. This takes place because you feel the effect of sensory impression more intensely while in a state of concentration.

If you are thirsty while contemplating, notice the feeling, **thirsty**. When you intend to stand, **intending**. Keep the mind intently on the act of standing up, and mentally note **standing**. When you look forward after standing up straight, note **looking, seeing**. Should you intend to walk forward, **intending**. When you begin to step forward, mentally note each step as **walking, walking**, or **left, right**. It is important for you to be aware of every moment in each step from the beginning to the end when you walk. Adhere to the same procedure when strolling or when taking walking exercise. Try to make a mental note of each step in two sections as follows: **lifting, putting, lifting, putting**. When you have obtained sufficient practice in this manner of walking, then try to make a mental note of each step in three sections; **lifting, pushing, putting**; or **up, forward, down**.

When you look at the tap or water-pot on arriving at the place where you are to take a drink, be sure to make a mental note, **looking, seeing**.

When you stop walking, **stopping**.
When you stretch out the hand, **stretching**.
When you touch the cup, **touching**.
When you take the cup, **taking**.
When dipping the cup into the water, **dipping**.
When bringing the cup to the lips, **bringing**.
When the cup touches the lips, **touching**.
When you swallow, **swallowing**.
When returning the cup, **returning**.
When withdrawing the hand, **withdrawing**.
When you bring down the hand, **bringing**.
When the hand touches the side of the body, **touching**.
If you intend to turn round, **intending**.
When you turn round, **turning**.
When you walk forward, **walking**.
On arriving at the place where you intend to stop, **intending**.
When you stop, **stopping**.

If you remain standing for some time continue the contemplation of rising and falling. But if you intend to sit down, note **intending**. When you go to sit down, **walking**. On arriving at the place where you will sit, **arriving**. When you turn to sit, **turning**. While in the act of sitting down, **sitting**. Sit down slowly, and keep the mind on the downward movement of the body. You must notice every movement in bringing the hands and legs into position. Then resume the practice of contemplating the abdominal movements.

Should you intend to lie down, note **intending**. Then proceed with the contemplation of every movement in the course of lying down: **lifting, stretching, putting, touching, lying**. Then take as the object of contemplation every movement in bringing the hands, legs and body into position. Perform these actions slowly. Thereafter, continue with noting rising and falling. Should pain, fatigue, itching, or any other sensation be felt, be sure to notice each of these sensations. Notice all feelings, thoughts, ideas, considerations, reflections; all movements of hands, legs, arms and body. If there is nothing in particular to note, put the mind on the rising and falling of the abdomen. When sleepy, make a mental note, **sleepy**. After you have gained sufficient concentration in contemplating you will be able to overcome drowsiness and you will feel refreshed as a result. Take up again the usual contemplation of the basic object. If you are unable to overcome the drowsy feeling, you must continue contemplating drowsiness until you fall asleep.

The state of sleep is the continuity of sub-consciousness. It is similar to the first state of rebirth consciousness and the last state of consciousness at the moment of death. This state of consciousness is feeble and therefore, unable to be aware of an object. When you awake, the continuity of sub-consciousness occurs regularly between moments of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching, and thinking. Because these occurrences are of brief duration they are not usually clear and therefore not noticeable. Continuity of sub-consciousness remains during sleep - a fact which becomes obvious when you wake up; for it is in the state of wakefulness that thoughts and sense objects become distinct.

Contemplation should start at the moment you wake up. Since you are a beginner, it may not be possible yet for you to start contemplating at the very first moment of wakefulness. But you should start with it when you remember that you are to contemplate. For example, if on awakening you reflect on something, you should become aware of the fact and begin your contemplation by a mental note, **reflecting**. Then proceed with the contemplation of rising and falling. When getting up from the bed, mindfulness should be directed to every detail of the body's activity. Each movement of the hands, legs and rump must be performed in complete awareness. Are you thinking of the time of day when awakening? If so, note **thinking**. Do you intend to get out of bed? If so, note **intending**. If you prepare to move the body into position for rising, note **preparing**. As you slowly rise, **rising**. Should you remain sitting for any length of time, revert to contemplating the abdominal movements.

Perform the acts of washing the face or taking a bath in due order and in complete awareness of every detailed movement; for instance, **looking, seeing, stretching, holding, touching, feeling cold, rubbing**. In the acts of dressing, making the bed, opening and closing doors and windows, handling objects, be occupied with every detail of these actions in sequence.

You must attend to the contemplation of every detail in the action of eating;

When you look at the food, **looking, seeing**.

When you arrange the food, **arranging**.

When you bring the food to the mouth, **bringing**.

When you bend the neck forwards, **bending**.

When the food touches the mouth, **touching**.

When placing the food in the mouth, **placing**.

When the mouth closes, **closing**.

When withdrawing the hand, **withdrawing**.

Should the hand touch the plate, **touching**.

When straightening the neck, **straightening**.

When in the act of chewing, **chewing**.

When you are aware of the taste, **knowing**.

When swallowing the food, **swallowing**.

While swallowing the food, should the food be felt touching the sides of the gullet, **touching**.

Perform contemplation in this manner each time you take a morsel of food until you finish your meal. In the beginning of the practice there will be many omissions. Never mind. Do not waver in your effort. You will make fewer omissions if you persist in your practice. When you reach an advanced stage of the practice you will also

to be able to notice more details than those mentioned here.

Advancement in Contemplation

After having practiced for a day and a night you may find your contemplation considerably improved. You may be able to prolong the basic exercise of noticing the abdominal movements. At this time you will notice that there is generally a break between the movements of rising and falling. If you are in the sitting posture, fill in this gap with a mental note of the fact of sitting in this way: **rising, falling, sitting**. When you make a mental note of sitting, keep your mind on the erect position of the upper body. When you are lying down you should proceed with full awareness as follows: **rising, falling, lying**. If you find this easy, continue with noticing these three sections. Should you notice that a pause occurs at the end of the rising as well as at the end of the falling movement, then continue in this manner: **rising, sitting, falling, sitting**. Or when lying down: **rising, lying, falling, lying**. Suppose you no longer find it easy to make a mental note of three or four objects in the above manner. Then revert to the initial procedure of noting only the two sections; rising and falling.

While engaged in the regular practise of contemplating bodily movements you need not be concerned with objects of seeing and hearing. As long as you are able to keep your mind on the abdominal movements of rising and falling it is assumed that the purpose of noticing the acts and objects of seeing is also served. However, you may intentionally look at an object; two or three times, note as **seeing**. Then return to the awareness of the abdominal movements. Suppose some person comes into your view. Make a mental note of **seeing**, two or three times and then resume attention to the rising and falling movements of the abdomen. Did you happen to hear the sound of a voice? Did you listen to it? If so make a mental note of **hearing, listening** and revert to rising and falling. But suppose you heard loud noises, such as the barking of dogs, loud talking or shouting. If so, immediately make a mental note two or three times, **hearing**, then return to your basic exercise. If you fail to note and dismiss such distinctive sounds as they occur, you may inadvertently fall into reflections about them instead of proceeding with intense attention to rising and falling, which may then become less distinct and clear. It is by such weakened attention that mind-defiling passions breed and multiply. If such reflections do occur, make a mental note **reflecting**, two or three times, then again take up the contemplation of rising and falling. Should you forget to make a mental note of body, leg or arm movements, then mentally note **forgetting**, and resume your usual contemplation on abdominal movements. You may feel at times that breathing is slow or that the rising and falling movements are not clearly perceived. When this happens, and you are in the sitting position, simply move the attention to **sitting, touching**; or if you are lying down, to **lying, touching**. While contemplating touching, your mind should not be kept on the same part of the body but on different parts successively. There are several places of touch and at least six or seven should be contemplated.

Basic Exercise IV

Up to this point you have devoted quite some time to the training course. You might begin to feel lazy after deciding that you have made inadequate progress. By no means give up. Simply note the fact, **lazy**. Before you gain sufficient strength in attention, concentration and insight, you may doubt the correctness or usefulness of this method of training. In such a circumstance turn to contemplation of the thought, **doubtful**. Do you anticipate or wish for good results? If so, make such thoughts the subject of your contemplation; **anticipating, or wishing**. Are you attempting to recall the manner in which the training was conducted up to this point? Yes? Then take up contemplation on **recollecting**. Are there occasions when you examine the object of contemplation in order to determine whether it is mind or matter? If so, then be aware of **examining**. Do you regret that there is no improvement in your contemplation? If so, attend to the feeling of regret. Conversely, are you happy that your contemplation is improving? If you are, then contemplate the feeling of being happy. This is the way in which you make a mental note of every item of mental behaviour as it occurs, and if there are no intervening thoughts or perceptions to note, you should revert to the contemplation of rising and falling. During a strict course of meditation, the time of practice is from the first moment you wake up until the last moment before you fall asleep. To reiterate, you must be constantly occupied either with the basic exercise or with mindful attention throughout

the day and during those night hours when you are not asleep. There must be no relaxation. Upon reaching a certain stage of progress with contemplation you will not feel sleepy in spite of these prolonged hours of practise. On the contrary, you will be able to continue the contemplation day and night.

Summary

It has been emphasized during this brief outline of the training that you must contemplate on each mental occurrence, good or bad; on each bodily movement large or small; on every sensation (bodily or mental feeling) pleasant or unpleasant; and so on. If, during the course of training, occasions arise when there is nothing special to contemplate upon, be fully occupied with attention to the rising and falling of the abdomen. When you have to attend to any kind of activity that necessitates walking, then, in complete awareness, each step should be briefly noted as **walking, walking** or **left, right**. But when you are taking a walking exercise, contemplate on each step in three sections; **up, forward, down**. The student who thus dedicates himself or herself to the training day and night, will be able in not too long a time, to develop concentration to the initial stage of the fourth degree of insight (knowledge of arising and passing away) and onward to higher stages of insight meditation (*vipassana bhavana*).