

A Discourse on the Mālukyaputta Sutta

by
The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw
of
Burma



Translated by
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Editor's Foreword

A number of lectures by the late Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw have been translated into English for the benefit of a wider audience. This book was reprinted in Malaysia, but this new edition has been completely revised for distribution in the UK.

The Venerable Sayādaw's discourses were addressed to meditators practising intensively at Mahāsi Sāsana Yeikthā, in Rangoon. They therefore contain many Pāli words which, though familiar to those who have heard regular discourses, may not be so familiar to others. I have prepared this edition of the Mālukyaputta Sutta bearing in mind that it will be read by many who may be unfamiliar with Pāli terms. However, because parts of this discourse deal with the extremely subtle thought process (*citta vīthi*), some Pāli technical terms used to explain the higher Buddhist philosophy (*Abhidhamma*) have been retained. The Pāli stanzas have also been retained for the enjoyment of those who do know some Pāli.

Because this Mālukyaputta Sutta deals with the extremely rapid mental events occurring when seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking, it is possible that non-meditators may not understand it. The best solution for those inexperienced in meditation would be to take up the practice of systematically noting all mental events at the six sense doors. If they practise meditation seriously for several days without a break, they will soon experience at least the momentary bliss of *tadaṅga nibbāna*, as mentioned by the Venerable Sayādaw in this most excellent discourse. If they are very diligent, they might attain some insight knowledge, which would significantly improve the quality of their life, and ensure happiness in the future.

This edition has been edited again, and reformatted for A5 paper size and with a larger font. Some more footnotes and numerous hyperlinks were added for the convenience of looking up cross-references if reading it in a PDF viewer. Links will open in your default Internet browser.

To print out a hard copy, use the booklet printing option in your PDF viewer.

Bhikkhu Pesala
August 2013

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A Discourse on the Mālukyaputta Sutta

Introduction

The Mālukyaputta Sutta gives us the fundamental knowledge about the principles of insight meditation (*vipassanā*). It is found in the Saṃyuttanikāya of the Sutta Piṭaka, and the twenty verses it contains can also be found in the Vīsatīnipāta of the Theragāthā. It was given by the Buddha to Bhikkhu Mālukyaputta, at his request. He was the son of a female devotee by the name of Mālukyā, or Mālunkyā according to the Sri Lankan edition of the texts. His request to the Buddha was as follows:

*“Sādhu me bhante bhagavā saṅkhittena dhammaṃ desetu, yamaṃ
bhagavato dhammaṃ sutvā eko vūpakatṭho appamatto ātāpī pahitatto
vihareyyan”ti.*

“Venerable sir, it would be good if you would teach me the Dhamma in brief. Having heard the essence of Dhamma, I will practise it in solitude, abiding vigilant, strenuous, and with single purpose.”

In effect, Mālukyaputta was asking the Buddha to prescribe a subject of meditation, which he wanted to practise in the right way at a quiet place. Solitude is essential for meditation, as it is an aid to concentration, which may be disturbed if one lives with others. However, if one cannot get it, one should mind one’s own business while others mind theirs. In such circumstances one should not speak, nor even look at others to see what they are doing, focusing one’s mind fully on the Dhamma.

Vigilant

The word ‘*appamatto*’ in the text means ‘vigilant.’ This is also vital. In this meditation centre, the meditators are usually vigilant, never forgetting that they are striving for the realisation of the Dhamma. When they see an object, they note it with vigilance. When they hear, smell, taste, touch, or think, they are mindful of hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, or thinking. The slightest action or movement does not go unnoticed or unobserved. They keep their minds alert, never allowing heedlessness to get the better of them.

Strenuous

The text also uses the word *‘ātāpī’* the root of which means to heat up. When one is enthusiastic, *ātāpī* may be said to be at work. Heat causes the evaporation of moisture. Enthusiasm causes the evaporation of all mental defilements (*kilesā*), as flies do not hover around a piece of red-hot iron. When enthusiasm is weak, defilements gain entry into the heart via the six sense-doors and torment ordinary people who fail to note the arising and passing away of all conditioned things. Defilements find no foothold in the mind of a vigilant meditator. In the texts, a defiled mind is compared to a wet, sappy stick. When meditation is practised with the utmost zeal and enthusiasm, defilements evaporate from one’s mind, leaving it absolutely dry and pure.

Four Right Exertions

There are four kinds of right exertion (*sammappadhāna*):

1. Exertion to prevent the arising of unarisen unwholesome states. This preventative action is comparable to a health education campaign, which helps to ward off contagious diseases. As you are sure to encounter evil in your daily life, you must be wary of it, and take care to avoid contamination.
2. Second is the exertion to remove the unwholesome states that have arisen, and prevent them from recurring. We must strive to give up the inclination towards unwholesome things that we are predisposed to, otherwise they will overpower us eventually. Seeing, hearing, *etc.*, stimulate the latent predispositions, which are the root causes of defilements. Such latent tendencies, which are stimulated by sense-objects, are called *‘ārammaṇanusaya kilesā.’* When the meditator gains the path, all latent tendencies cease completely.
3. Third is the exertion to cultivate wholesome actions that have not yet arisen. Wholesome kamma should be acquired through the practice of charity, morality, and mental culture. I urge you especially to practise insight meditation if you have not done so yet. If you are doing it now to attain insight, continue until the path is attained.
4. Lastly is the exertion to develop arisen wholesome actions until the path is gained. A meditator normally acquires all four of these right exertions in the course of practice.

With Single Purpose

‘Pahitatto’ is usually rendered as ‘with a mind dispatched to nibbāna.’ Taking it literally, some postulate that there is no need to practise meditation

once one has dispatched the mind towards nibbāna. This is contrary to the teaching in the texts. What the word means is that one should exert in the practice regardless of life and limb, fixing one's mind firmly on attaining the path, its fruition, and nibbāna. This agrees with the commentary on the *Sīlakkhandha Sutta*, which deals with the subject of mental culture.

The Buddha's Admonition

The Buddha replied to Mālukiya-putta as follows:

“Then what shall I say to other bhikkhus when you are making such a request? You are old, having reached the latter part of your life. Even so you ask for just the gist of the Dhamma from me.”

These words of the Buddha can be taken as both reproach and approval. The old monk had not striven for the Dhamma while young. Only when he already had one foot in the grave did he speak of abiding in the Dhamma. Taken in that light, Buddha's admonition might be a reproach. However, Mālukiya-putta was determined to live the life of a recluse in spite of his advanced years. What would young bhikkhus say to this? They should certainly want to emulate him. In this context it may be interpreted that the Buddha was full of praise for him. If youngsters see old people striving hard for the realisation of the Dhamma, they should try to follow suit.

Since Mālukiya-putta repeated his request, the Blessed One taught him the fundamentals of insight meditation by posing a series of questions to reveal the method of insight.

Sights Not Seen Before

“What do you think, Mālukiya-putta? There are certain visible objects that you have never seen before, do not see now, nor hope to see in the future. Could such objects arouse desire, lust, or affection in you?”

The visible objects or form (*rūpa*) that one can see with one's eyes are a reality, but there may be other unreal objects that appear in one's imagination or dreams. These are called conceptual images. The text refers to objects in the distant past, which means objects from the past existence that are remembered in the present. In the Buddha's time there was a woman by the name of Patipūjaka who could recall her past existence in which her husband

was a *deva* called Mālābāri. She kept remembering him in her present existence. It was with reference to individuals like her that the remote past is mentioned in the text.

It is understandable that one can develop attachment to things dreamt of or imagined, but no attachment could arise in relation to objects that one cannot even imagine. No man could fall in love with a woman he has never met or imagined meeting, and no woman could love a man she has never seen or imagined, either.

Mālukiya-putta replied, “No desire, lust, or affection could arise in me for things that I have never seen before, do not see now, nor hope to see in the future.”

The Story of Anitthigandha Kumāra

The Dhammapada Commentary relates the story of Anitthigandha Kumāra in whom love developed for the kind of feminine beauty that he had imagined. This illustrates that if one can visualize an image in one’s dreams or thoughts, then desire, lust, and affection can develop. The story is as follows:

Anitthigandha Kumāra was born in Sāvatti. He was a Brahmā in his previous existence. While in the Brahmā plane he was naturally free from the shackles of sensual desire and lust. When reborn as a human being, he had no interest in the opposite sex. When he came of age his parents urged him to marry, but he refused. As his parents were insistent he devised a plan by which he hoped to evade marriage. He enlisted the services of sculptors to make a gold image of a beautiful girl, and told his parents that he would marry anyone who looked like this gold image. The parents, being wealthy and capable, hired the services of brahmins to search the land for a bride whose beauty equalled that of the image that their son had conceptualised in the gold image.

When the brahmins reached Sāgala in the Madda kingdom they heard talk of a beautiful sixteen year old girl who was kept secluded in a seven-storeyed tower. Having traced her, they persuaded her parents to allow them to assess her beauty. When she was brought to meet them they found that she was even more beautiful than the statue.

They then negotiated with the parents for the girl to be given in marriage to Anitthigandha Kumāra. Gaining their consent, they informed the parents of the bridegroom. On hearing that the bride was even more beautiful than the figurine he had had sculpted, the bridegroom was anxious to have her

brought as soon as possible. This is an instance of attachment that can arise purely out of one's imagination.

Sāgala and Sāvatti are more than five hundred miles apart, and in those days transportation was primitive. Perhaps she was brought in a horse-drawn carriage. She became utterly exhausted during the journey, fell ill, and died.

When Anitthagandha Kumāra heard this news, he became gravely distressed for having missed the chance even to catch a glimpse of her. He could not eat or sleep. Knowing about this, the Buddha took pity on him, and so came to his house for alms. The parents respectfully offered alms to the Buddha and brought their son to meet him. Then the Buddha preached the following verse:

*“Kāmato jāyatī soko, kāmato jāyatī bhayaṃ;
Kāmato vippamuttassa, natthi soko kuto bhayaṃ.”*

“From lust springs grief, from lust springs fear;
One free from lust, has no grief, whence fear?” (Dhp v 215)

Having heard this verse the young man attained stream-winning. Previously he had been disinterested in women, and thought he had set his parents an impossible task. When the impossible came true with the discovery of a maiden more beautiful than his wildest dreams, attachment arose to torment his innocent mind.

Mālukyaputta's Answer

Mālukyaputta replied to the effect that no desire, lust, or affection could arise for sense-objects that one had never experienced, or even imagine. The meditators in this centre understand this, but others who have no experience in meditation may be puzzled. In 1951 I preached the Mālukyaputta Sutta in Thaddhamma Thitagu Yeikthā in Bassein, when the Thaddhamma Thitagu Sayādaw's sister was among the audience. She confessed that she became confused when I mentioned the visible object that one had never seen or imagined. She wondered what sort of form that might be. She was intelligent, but her mind was unreceptive before she had practised insight meditation. After she had, she became convinced of the truth of the Dhamma. She was so pleased with the discourse that she disseminated the knowledge she gained from what had been preached, to other devotees.

Every thoughtful person can accept that unseen objects cannot incite lust. Is it possible to conceive affection for an individual you have never met

before? Not only affection, but hatred also cannot arise. Neither can delusion, nor wrong view. I have composed the following aphorism to aid your memory:

1. Where visible objects remain unseen, defilements cease automatically.
2. Where visible objects are seen, defilements lie in wait.
3. Note with mindfulness whatever is seen, and dispel defilements that lurk in the mind.
4. The question posed by the Buddha for Mālukyaputta forms the exercise for insight meditation.

It should now be clear that objects that one has never encountered cannot arouse the defilements of desire, lust, or affection. From this we can infer that defilements arise (only) from objects seen or known. The Buddha intended to draw Mālukyaputta's attention to this fact by putting the question in that way, but he also wanted him to realise that defilements continue to arise whenever a sense-object is recalled. Having seen someone smiling or scowling, you may remember it. Every time that you do, the smiling or scowling face reappears. Each time your mind reacts to the mental impression that it creates. Similarly, when you recall things you have seen that incite lust, you become lustful. Anger and delusion are aroused in the same way. If you fail to note at each moment of seeing you tend to be unmindful of the impermanence and insubstantiality of conditioned things, then defilements invade your heart and remain. If you note every moment of seeing diligently, you will realise that it arises just to disappear. When its true nature of impermanence is known, it can no longer torment you.

So whenever you look at anything, note what you see, mindful of its impermanence, giving no chance for defilements to develop. Defilements do not reside in you, but lie in wait for a chance to possess your mind. If you are mindful when noting the phenomenon of seeing, you will realise its transience, and it will subside. Your mind will then remain unperturbed, as if you had not perceived the object. This understanding will help you to practise insight meditation. That is why I say that the Buddha's question reveals the exercise for insight meditation. Later you will hear more about the Buddha's questions regarding sounds and the ear. Meanwhile I will give a brief account of the insight meditation exercises as instructed by the Buddha.

“Etha ca te Mālukyaputta diṭṭha suta muta viññātesu dhammesu diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattaṃ bhavissati, sute sutamattaṃ bhavissati, mute mutamattaṃ bhavissati, viññāte viññātamattaṃ bhavissati.”

“Mālukyaputta! As phenomena are seen, heard, thought of, or known, just let them be as they are seen, heard, thought of, or known at that moment. When you see, you just see it; when you hear, you just hear it; when you think, you just think it; and when you know, you just know it.”

Here it shows that defilements are denied any opportunity to arise when sense-objects cannot gain entry beyond the six sense-doors. The question then arises as to how to exert in repelling defilements when sense-objects do appear at the six sense-doors. Therefore the Buddha lays down the gist of the task of insight meditation in relation to the four modes of seeing, hearing, thinking, and knowing. Here we should note that the senses of smell, taste, and touch are included in the category of thought (*muta*) for the sake of brevity. Meditation on the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self centres on these four modes of seeing, hearing, thinking, and knowing. These senses and sense-objects are not “I”, “Mine”, or “My self.” The objects just appear for a moment at the sense-doors and the meditator just sees or hears them for that moment, and nothing more. This is the essence of the insight meditation method.

The Stream of Eye-consciousness

Seeing means contact between the visible object and the eye-base, which causes eye-consciousness (*cakkhuvīññāṇa*). This is usually rendered in plain Burmese as ‘*myin-thi*’ — seeing-knowing, suggesting perception by the eye. Let me begin by explaining the sequence of a thought-process that operates when a visible object presents itself to the eye-base through the eye-door. Several thought moments occur in sequence during each thought-process. First, when the eye-base receives the image of the visible object, life-continuum consciousness (*bhavaṅga*) wakes up and initiates the process of seeing in three thought-moments. This excites eye-door-adverting consciousness (*cakkhudvārāvajjana*), which turns towards the visible object. The image that falls on the eye-base is cognised by eye-consciousness (*cakkhuvīññāṇa*), which at first remains unperturbed by defilements. It is followed immediately by receiving consciousness (*sampañcchana*), which receives or accepts the image. After that investigation (*santīraṇa*) takes over and investigates the object, so that determining (*voṭṭhapana*) can decide who is who, and what is what. Until now, latent defilement, which has been lying in wait for the opportunity to rear its head, has been unable to operate, but as soon as determining consciousness has decided that the object is agreeable or

disagreeable, liking or disliking develop when the process of impulsion (*javana*) is brought into play. Impulsion normally runs its full course of seven thought-moments. At this stage action can be adjudged as moral or immoral, and defilements of greed, anger, or delusion now shows their true colours. Finally the two thought moments of registering (*tadārammaṇa*) occur. This is a description of the thought-process of the mind on seeing an object. It is called 'vīthi', the path or course that consciousness takes in establishing itself.

The Stream of Ear-consciousness

The stream of consciousness that flows when hearing, tasting, smelling, touching, or thinking is the same as that already explained regarding eye-consciousness, but I shall repeat the whole process to reiterate.

Bhavaṅga is a state of mind that works during sound sleep. (The closest English equivalent is life continuum, for it is an essential condition for continued existence). It does not turn itself towards sense-objects contacted in the present existence, but only towards a sense-object to which one was attached at the moment of death in the preceding existence. It is adjacent to relinking consciousness (*paṭisandhi citta*) of the present existence, which is the first moment of consciousness to arise at conception. It is assumed to be arising continuously, but, being passive, it subsides whenever thought moments of other varieties of consciousness emerge. For instance, when a sense-object enters the stream of consciousness through one of the six sense-doors, *bhavaṅga* is arrested to make room for sense-door consciousness (*dvārāvajjana*), which at once takes up the function of reflecting on the nature of the impression made by the sense-object that enters the sense-door. The eye-consciousness, or ear-consciousness, etc., occurs to be followed by receiving (*sampañicchana*) and investigating (*santīraṇa*). The result of this investigation is determining (*voṭṭhapana*), which decides who is who, or what is what. After this, impulsion (*javana*) vibrates for seven moments in an effort to deliver, as it were, the report of the decision to registering consciousness (*tadārammaṇa*), which vibrates for two thought moments (when the thought process runs its full cycle). This subsides into *bhavaṅga*, which is compared to falling asleep.

When determining decides that an object is worthy of affection and love, immoral actions like lust and greed are aroused as desire for the object. This is the working of unwholesome impulses. However, this is not always the case. Sometimes the object may be judged repugnant, but the subject may be inclined to do wholesome deeds to avoid the consequences of unpleasurable experiences. At other times a beautiful object may be viewed with

compassion and benevolence when moral thoughts are brought into play. In such cases the impulsions are moral. It may be noted that there are fourteen thought moments from adverting to registering. If the sense-object makes a weak impression, the process of impulsion may end after only five or six moments, though it normally runs for seven.

When seeing occurs, just see it: don't do anything more. As the text says, "On seeing, let seeing be." The working of the thought process on hearing or tasting is the same as that of seeing. So when hearing occurs, just hear it. On hearing, let hearing be: do nothing more. This accords with the text: "*Sute sutamattam bhavissati.*" You will hear more about this later, but now I will deal with the abstract knowledge to be gained from noting visible objects.

Seeing Abstract Reality

When the thought moments of eye-consciousness, eye-door adverting, receiving, investigating, determining, impulsion, and registering have all played their part in the process of seeing, the abstract reality of the form and shape of the sense-object (or sense impression) become manifest. Until now the subject who sees has not paid attention to concepts like masculinity or femininity. At this point, unwholesome impulsion may perhaps occur, but as it is weak it is unable to produce a strong reaction, so any result of unwholesome impulsion will not be too bad. Therefore, at this initial stage when the reaction has not yet gathered momentum, you can note the object just as you see it. Next you will experience the abstract reality of both the subject that sees as well as the object that is seen. The subject is, of course, mind (*nāma*) and the object is matter (*rūpa*). So you have now come face to face with *nāmarūpa* as ultimate realities (*paramattha*). Still, you have not considered whether the object you are looking at is a man or a woman, which means you have not yet gained conceptual knowledge of the object seen. So at this stage, although you see something, you can leave it as it is, as you have not started thinking. This agrees with the statement, "When you see, just see it."

From Eye-door to Mind-door

It is no easy matter to stop short at just seeing. A beginner will not be able to catch the thought moments that make up the process of seeing. Being unable to stay with the phenomenon instantaneously as it arises, he or she has to consider the object appearing in the mind's eye as if really wanting to know it. Whatever passes through the mind-door usually needs to be identified, but the beginner finds it difficult to adjust eye-consciousness to

the object seen in his efforts to identify it, so has to rely on mind-consciousness to do some thinking regarding the visible object. The thought process relating to mind-consciousness is as follows.

First mind-door adverting arises, prompting seven thought moments of impulsion that report the findings to two moments of registering. Thus there are ten thought moments in this part of the process. However, if the sense-object creates only a weak impression, impulsion vibrates for less than seven moments, and mind consciousness may be cut off after only five or six impulsions. When eye-consciousness has done its job, mind-consciousness takes over, but it is still unable to distinguish the visible object as male or female. At this stage knowledge is still at the stage of ultimate realities (*paramattha*), as with the preceding eye-consciousness.

However, note one difference here: whereas eye-consciousness cognises the visible object of the present moment, mind-consciousness cognises it as it recedes into the past. Mind-consciousness has to recall the past image as previously seen by eye-consciousness. Even so, the image is still an ultimate reality. It is, therefore, extremely difficult for the beginner to note the visible object as it passes to the first thought process of mind consciousness.

The Birth of Conceptual Knowledge

Failure to note the object with mindfulness as it enters the mind door at the first moment of mind-consciousness, prompts the arising of the second thought process. At this stage conceptual knowledge (*paññatti*) regarding the shape or form of the visible object begins to emerge, and it becomes firmly established at the third thought process. The subject is now able to distinguish the visible object as male or female. This clear cognition relates to both form and name, so concepts of name and form are conceived. This concept comes naturally in rapid succession during the second and third thought processes, but it is a concept gained through ignorance (*avijjā*), which conceals the true nature of the object. The commentaries say that ignorance has the tendency to hide. The basic exercise in mindfulness exhorts a meditator to observe and note every time he or she comes face to face with the realities, before ignorance creates the concept. At first, however, the meditator will find it difficult to apprehend the reality because mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom are not yet strong enough. When these qualities become firmly established, the meditator will be able to realise the true nature of things even at the lapse of the first thought process of eye-consciousness. When the meditator has attained knowledge of dissolution (*bhanga-nāṇa*) and knowledge of equanimity

with regard to formations (*saikhārupekkhā-nāṇa*), he or she will find that it is not imperative for the stream of mind-consciousness to flow up to impulsion, and that after two or three moments of determining, he or she can realise insight relating to the sixfold equanimity towards all the senses of seeing, hearing, etc. This has been explained in the commentary on the Mūla Paṇṇāsa; for more details please refer to my discourse on insight practice.

Poṭṭhila Thera

At the time of the Buddha there was an elder named Poṭṭhila who was learned in the Tipiṭaka, but he neglected the practice of meditation. The Buddha chided him as Tuccha Poṭṭhila — vain and useless Poṭṭhila. Realising his shortcomings in the field of meditation, the elder visited a monastery where thirty Arahants lived in a forest and requested them to prescribe a meditation exercise for him. The senior Arahant knew about his pride of learning and refused to advise him, directing him to approach another monk. The other monks all did the same, until at last only a seven-year old novice, who was also an Arahant, remained. The novice said that he was inexperienced, but Poṭṭhila insisted so the novice gave him this instruction:

“Venerable sir. There are six openings in a mound, which an iguana makes his home. If you want to catch the iguana, close up the five exits from the mound, and wait for it to come out from the last exit. There are six doors through which sense-objects can enter. If you close five of them, and keep watch at the mind-door, your task will be accomplished.

What the young Arahant advised was for Poṭṭhila not to allow impulsion to hang on to any of the five sense-doors, but to shut them all, and note only the mind-door so that impulsion could lead him on to insight. This gave the learned monk a clue to the method of insight practice. When one sees, one must stop at the thought moment of determining and note all phenomena with mindfulness. It is the same as saying, “When you see, you just see it.” Having practised meditation as suggested, Poṭṭhila attained Arahantship.

Seize the Right Moment

You must seize the first critical moment when sense-door consciousness first arises. If you fail to do so, you will be deluded by conceptual knowledge. If you fail to note seeing as it happens, you are dwelling in the conceptual realm. For ease of understanding, let me summarize the four stages of the process that I have explained.

1. First, adverting reflects as the object enters the mind door.

2. That moment of reflection constitutes the first thought process, which tries to gain cognition through consciousness.
3. Then concept is formed in the next thought process.
4. Finally the nature of the object is known by its name or concept.

Mind and matter in the ultimate sense can be known through meditation on the nature of phenomena as soon as they arise. If one knows instantly what is actually happening one gains insight into the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self. The following four points should also be noted.

1. Seize the first moment in the act of seeing.
2. Arrest the flow of consciousness at the first thought process (to conform to the exhortation: “*ditthe ditthamattaṃ bhavissati.*”)
3. Differentiate mind and matter, noting that they are distinct phenomena.
4. Recognise the three characteristics.

As the development of insight gathers momentum, mind will be distinguished from matter, and dissolution will become clearly manifest. As knowledge of dissolution (*bhaṅga-nāṇa*) gets sharper, the mind is able to appreciate that both the object seen and the seeing pass away at a tremendous pace. A meditator who contemplates dissolution may feel that mind-consciousness is fluttering as it dissolves into nothingness. The impression is so hazy that he or she might think that something is wrong with his or her eyesight. Having gained experience of dissolution, the meditator will benefit from direct knowledge of impermanence. This will lead to the revelation that what is not permanent is unsatisfactory and insubstantial, as one has virtually no control over mind and matter. They just occur, which is their intrinsic nature.

If we are mindful of the phenomena of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, according to the Buddha’s instructions, we may realise that they just occur, and that nothing can be done about it. The meditator need not go beyond seeing or hearing to examine what the object is, whether it is male or female, for example. The mind does not dwell on concepts, but stays with the ultimate realities (*paramattha*).

Answering a Critic

Among those who are not experienced in meditation are some who doubt the suitability of noting phenomena. Some of them even suggest that the method of contemplation is wrong. While I was at Chauk, a man approached me with the criticism that eye-consciousness fails to recognise the genesis

(*upāda*) and dissolution (*bhaṅga*) on the arising and passing away of mind and matter. It can recognise only the visible object that enters the eye-door, it cannot appreciate how the object is behaving. His criticism was along the following lines, "As eye-consciousness fails to see the visible object actually occurring, how can observation and noting it contribute to the knowledge of the genesis and dissolution of matter?"

According to the Commentaries and the Abhidhamma, matter (*rūpa*) comes into existence four or five thought moments before eye-consciousness and dissolves twelve, or at least nine or ten thought moments after its subsidence. It is, therefore, correct to say that eye-consciousness fails to notice the genesis and dissolution of the visible object at the moment of seeing. However, mindfulness has the ability to recall the genesis and dissolution of the actual phenomena perceived by eye-consciousness. According to the teaching in the Suttas, if the phenomenon is known by virtue of mindfulness, the genesis and dissolution of the sense-object can be cognised by eye-consciousness too.

The Jhāna Sutta in the Aṅguttaranikāya mentions that when a meditator arises from jhāna, he is able to recall the jhānic consciousness, its concomitants, and the mental aggregate, which he meditated upon during jhāna. He is clearly aware of them as if observing them with eye-consciousness. However, the genesis and dissolution of matter could not be perceived distinctly during jhāna because he did not pay attention to it then. However, when jhānic consciousness, its concomitants, and the mental aggregate have been clearly understood, the nature of the matter that arises because of jhāna can be understood by inference.

So on the authority of that discourse, it may be shown that when one is noting the phenomenon of seeing, one is aware of the genesis and dissolution of the matter that forms the visible object, and that depends on eye-consciousness. When a meditator contemplates matter, he sees its arising and disappearance just like lightning. So it has been said:

"Mental formations renew their appearance, and just as they are renewed they perish, just as a flash of lightning appears and disappears instantly."

Consider a lightning flash. Who can honestly say that he can see its genesis and dissolution? Although one can see the entire phenomenon, one can see neither its beginning nor its end, but one does see it happen. To a meditator who possesses knowledge of dissolution and knowledge of equanimity with regard

to formations, it is clear that the visible object makes its appearance, only to vanish at the next instant, just as lightning arises and disappears. This is even more evident in the case of sounds or tactile sensations. When one realises the three characteristics by direct knowledge of the arising and passing away of mind and matter, one may be sure that one has acquired insight knowledge.

Furthermore, if one continues to meditate in the way instructed, knowledge of disgust (*nibbidā-nāṇa*) will develop. When one thus gets disenchanted with the aggregates, craving will be expelled, and with the absence of craving, the Noble Path can be attained, when one will become a Stream-winner.

Matter that is cognised by eye-consciousness arises simultaneously with passive subconsciousness (*atīta bhavaṅga*) inherited from the past. It dissolves simultaneously with the second thought-moment of registering during the formation of the thought process. However, it is not possible to be directly aware of genesis and dissolution. They can only be understood through applied knowledge (*sutamayapaññā*). Learning things at second-hand, however, may not contribute to the awakening of insight and the consequent realisation of knowledge of disgust (*nibbidā-nāṇa*). No one can say precisely how matter arises, whether it is with the first, second, or third moment of subconsciousness, or when exactly it dissolves, whether with the second moment of registering or the seventh moment of impulsion. If insight knowledge were to require such precision regarding these thought processes, an ordinary meditator could not attain it. What the Abhidhamma Commentaries aim at is for the meditator to gain knowledge through applied methods when necessary. Such details do not matter in the practice of insight meditation. It is enough for the meditator to note the phenomenon as it arises in the same way that one notes the phenomenon of lightning. This agrees with the instruction: "Note that you go, when you go."

Meditating on Hearing, etc.

Mālukyaputta undertook to apply mindfulness to the activities of the six senses. If one is constantly mindful, one will just hear what appears at the ear-door, and no more. As I am delivering this discourse, you are hearing each syllable that I am uttering. If you concentrate on each syllable that I pronounce, you will certainly miss the import and meaning of what I am trying to convey to you. If you stop short at cognition of the sounds that I make, you will not be able to note them in the conceptual way, which means you will not form any concept regarding what you hear. Likewise, when you smell an odour, you just know the odour. Consciousness will not flow any further than that. When you feel tactile sensations

and stop short at that, you will just know that you have touched something or that something has touched you, and you will not go beyond that.

With the range of mental objects too, you will just stop short at the point where mind-consciousness arises without formulating concepts. Then defilements will not be able to arise. I will say more about that later.

Let me remind you of the passage cited earlier regarding seeing, hearing, etc. "When you see, you just see it; when you hear, you just hear it; when you think, you just think it; and when you know, you just know it." This is the practice of insight meditation in a nutshell. It means that when consciousness of sense-objects arises, you should note the arising so that the mind just stops there. You will not be able to do this unless you note the phenomenon with mindfulness. Even when you are trying to note in this way, your mind may deviate from its main objective to investigate the nature of the object, especially when you are just beginning meditation.

Some assert that by merely investigating the three characteristics one can remain just with consciousness as it arises. Some go so far as to say that the mind should be just kept as it is, then it will automatically stop at cognition of things seen or heard. This amounts to saying that the mind should be left unrestrained without keeping guard over it. This means that mindfulness will be discarded. Let me ask such dissenters, "How will you react to harsh words that grind your ears, or to trash that inflames you, or to physical and mental pain that undermine your equanimity?" Without noting the psyche with mindfulness, how can anyone keep it as it is? Let these people judge for themselves the true worth of their own assertions.

When a meditator contemplates constantly on the phenomena of seeing, hearing, *etc.*, he or she will realise the knowledge of dissolution, which will reveal the moment when dissolution occurs. If the meditator abides in that moment, insight knowledge will be strengthened and its benefits will follow.

The Benefits of Insight Knowledge

"Mālukyaputta" If, when you see, you just see it; when you hear, you just hear it; when you think, you just think it; when you know, you just know it, then you will realise that the sense-objects you perceive have nothing to do with you."

This means that in no way can you get involved with the sense-objects that you perceive. You are completely free from the lust, anger, and delusion that those sense-objects usually arouse. When you fail to stop short at seeing,

hearing, *etc.*, your mind will cling to those passions, and whenever you recall those sense-objects they will again arouse lust, anger, and delusion.

Those who fail to note seeing, hearing, *etc.*, get emotionally involved with the sights, sounds, *etc.*, with which they come into contact. Those who have developed insight knowledge of dissolution through the practice of meditation realise the constant dissolution of both the sense-objects and the mind that knows them, and they are able to grasp the significance of the three characteristics. Since sense-objects fail to generate defilements in the meditator, there is no reason for the meditator to recall them, and so defilements are discarded. The inclination to defilements caused by sense-objects is called *ārammaṇānusaya*.

The Commentaries urge meditators to give unwholesome impulses a wide berth. In fact, abandoning such impulses come naturally to the diligent meditator, who requires no special effort to shun evil. When insight knowledge becomes keen, impulses fail to arise because the stream of consciousness stops at determining. So the flow of consciousness subsides at determining, before impulse begins to operate.

The Buddha continued: “Mālukyaputta! When you have nothing to do with the sense-objects that you perceive, you will get no foothold on them.”

Inclination to Nibbāna

The Commentaries on the *Udāna Kathā* elaborate on the word ‘foothold.’ When a meditator lets go of craving and egoistic views, releasing himself from the ideas of “I”, “Mine”, or “My self,” he cannot get stuck in sense-objects. As the Buddha said, “Mālukyaputta” When you lose your foothold on the objects of sense, you will neither be here in this world, nor there in the other world, and not being anywhere in either world means the end of suffering.”

When the ego has no foothold, mind and matter ceases to exist in all possible worlds, and this cessation means the end of suffering. This becomes apparent when the meditator’s mind gets inclined towards nibbāna through the realisation of the Noble Path. When an Arahant attains *parinibbāna* no vestige of mind or matter remains. As soon as death consciousness occurs at the time of *parinibbāna*, the Arahant achieves the extinction of suffering without remainder (*anupadisesa nibbāna*). Regarding this the Commentaries say that when a meditator loses his foothold on matter, he is neither here in the six organs of sense, nor there in the six sense-doors, nor anywhere in the six types of consciousness.

This agrees with the actual experience of the meditator who has gained knowledge of dissolution and knowledge of equanimity with regard to

formations. No defilements can arise on realising the true nature of impermanent phenomena. Such a meditator takes a totally impersonal and objective view of the sights and sounds that he or she sees or hears. After that stage the attainment of adaptation knowledge (*anuloma-ñāṇa*) will prepare the meditator for the Noble Path, when he or she enters the stream of consciousness (*gotrabhū*) that raises him or her to the supramundane stage, overcoming the lineage of the sensual sphere. On the abandonment of the sensual sphere, the meditator realises nibbāna.

This is what the Milinda Pañha says:

“Tassa taṃ cittaṃ aparāparaṃ manasikaroto pavattaṃ samatikamitvā appavattaṃ okkamati, appavattamanuppatto mahārāja sammāpaṭipanno nibbānaṃ sacchikaroti’ti vuccati.”

“One who practises correctly, having paid attention repeatedly to that consciousness, transcends continual occurrence and reaches non-occurrence [of mind and matter]. O King! One who has attained non-occurrence with correct practice is said to realise nibbāna.”

A Summary of the Mālukyaputta Sutta

The following is a summary of what the Buddha taught to Mālukyaputta regarding meditation.

1. When you note with mindfulness what you see, hear, think, or know, remain conscious of just seeing, hearing, thinking, or knowing, and nothing more.
2. If you just see, hear, think, or know what you are seeing, hearing, thinking, or knowing, you will not get emotionally involved in those phenomena.
3. Since you have nothing whatever to do with them, you will find no foothold on the sense-objects that you perceive.
4. As you have no foothold on them, you are neither here nor there, nor anywhere, and because you exist nowhere it means that you have realised nibbāna where all suffering ceases.

When Mālukyaputta had had the benefit of the Buddha’s advice, he expressed his satisfaction in twenty-four stanzas. Saying, “Well said, Mālukyaputta!” the Buddha elaborated on them himself, one by one. I will now explain them all, one by one.

Failure to Meditate on Form While Seeing

“Rūpaṃ disvā sati mutṭhā, piyaṃ nimittaṃ manasi karoto. Sārattacitto vedeti, tañca ajjhosa titṭhati.”

“Having seen a form one loses mindfulness. Getting involved in the attraction of it, one feels the onset of desire that tries to imbibe it.”

It is only human to get attracted to beautiful sense-objects. You look at something because it gives you pleasure. At that moment you forget to practise the Dhamma. Even a meditator may be moved by pleasant visible objects, and attention may be diverted from his or her noble aim. Those unaccustomed to meditation practice, may easily give themselves away to alluring visible objects. As soon as the concept of beauty overpowers them, they will forget about the Dhamma. Form, therefore, makes one forgetful or unmindful.

A pleasing smile makes an impression on the heart of one who sees it, and it is always a pleasure to recall it. One remembers it for days, months, or years. The mind is then taking in the form as if trying to ingest or imbibe it.

Here, I am speaking about the reaction to forms in general terms. Of course, there are occasions when one feels repugnant towards the object one sees. At other times, one may be indifferent. Whatever the case may be, the crux of the matter is that form generates various kinds of feelings such as pain, pleasure, greed, or anger, which give rise to kamma and its results as the round of suffering. Suffering as the result of forms is shown by the next stanza:

“Tassa vaddhanti vedanā, anekā rūpasambhavā; Abhijjhā ca vihesā ca, cittamassūpahaññati. Evamācinato dukkhaṃ, āra nibbāna, vuccati.”

“A multitude of passions such as covetousness and rage, springing from form, torments one who takes a firm hold of it, with the result that his mind becomes burdened with vexation. Therefore, nibbāna remains remote from one who would rather carry the burden of suffering than practise meditation.”

All forms gives rise to feelings or passions. When an agreeable object is presented to anyone, he or she delights in it, which is pleasant feeling. When a repugnant object is presented, he or she feels miserable, which is unpleasant feeling. Such feelings are the cause of vexation, which torment him or her. If one sees a beautiful object, desire to possess it arises. One will get annoyed if one thinks that someone is thwarting one’s wishes to acquire it. Such mental dispositions are the product of greed and anger. They worry the unmindful

person, who is forever busily engaged in malevolent activities against those who obstruct the fulfilment of his or her desires. Spurred on by greed and anger, he becomes exhausted in his or her efforts to counter the opposition of rivals and adversaries, whether real or imaginary.

Most people live without mindfulness throughout their lives. It will be difficult for them to change and become mindful. One who cannot accept mindfulness accepts defilements, which bring about the cycle of suffering. In that case nibbāna remains far away.

Failure to meditate will deprive one of the knowledge of the three characteristics, inviting defilements to increase the miseries of life, just like adding fuel to a fire.

Below I summarise these points relating to form:

1. Form engenders tender passions that send mindfulness to oblivion.
2. The impassioned mind imbibes form.
3. Form gives rise to feelings of pain and pleasure.
4. Conditioned by greed, anger arises causing anxiety and worry.
5. Whoever accepts conditions that create suffering, will always have suffering as a companion.
6. The round of suffering keeps nibbāna remote.

Meditating on Form Brings Nibbāna Near

The foregoing stanzas paint the dark side of the picture, but I shall also give the bright side of it.

*“Na so rajjati rūpesu, rūpaṃ disvā patissato;
Virattacitto vedeti, tañca nājjhossa tiṭṭhati.”*

“Passion remains undeveloped in him who recollects with mindfulness the form that he has seen. Thus freed from lust, he refuses to imbibe it.”

This stanza reveals the essence of insight meditation. It enjoins the meditator to note with mindfulness the object seen, and meditate on it. From this it is clear that insight meditation means noting the object one has actually seen, not an object one has not seen. It can be accomplished only through practical wisdom, and not through knowledge acquired from hearing what others say.

The Commentaries on the Theragāthā say that a meditator must try to note the eye-object perceived as it presents itself to eye-consciousness through the eye-door, being mindful of the four aspects of clear comprehension:

knowing what is beneficial, what is proper, what is the objective, and with unconfused mindfulness.

Earlier I told you about the thought process relating to eye-consciousness. What I am talking about now is the same thing. If you fail to note the process of seeing just as it occurs, try to catch the first thought moment of mind-consciousness. One who can seize that moment and notice the absolute reality of form, may notice the dissolution of both the sense-object and the eye-consciousness at the moment of seeing. When one concentrates on the act of seeing without thinking over what one has seen, visual perception will last only for an instant. This agrees with the saying, *“Ditthe ditthamattaṃ bhavissati.”* In that case, defilements will have no chance to assert themselves. In the absence of defilements, lust and craving subside.

Desire stimulates feelings and passions, which beget craving (*taṇhā*), by means of which one imbibes form. A non-meditator, although fully aware of seeing the object, fails to note it with mindfulness, and so permits craving to arise. However, a meditator does not conceptualise about what is seen, so there is no chance for desire or craving to arise, for the meditator is always mindful of dissolution. In this case, delusion is eliminated and wisdom arises. In the absence of defilements such as craving, kamma and its results as new becoming cannot arise, so the meditator will be liberated from suffering. This is emphasized in the next stanza:

*“Yathāssa passato rūpaṃ, sevato cāpi vedanaṃ;
Khīyati nopacīyati, evaṃ so caratī sato. Evaṃ apacinato dukkhaṃ,
santike nibbāna vuccati.”*

“Looking at a visible object, a meditator just sees it and just feels that he sees it, without conceptualising it. With this, suffering ceases. One who practises in this way is said to be near to nibbāna.”

As the meditator is not imbibing or conceptualising forms, which he or she notes with mindfulness, he or she is not inviting defilements, which bring about kamma and its results.

The Commentaries on the Theragāthā emphasise that “seeing the form” means seeing it with the strength of conviction that what one sees is impermanent. Eye-consciousness brings about sensations of seeing, which mind-consciousness takes to heart. The mind collects them and stores them up in the same way that a greedy person amasses wealth. The result is the upsurge of covetousness, one of the defilements on which kamma and its results depends. A meditator refuses to accept eye-consciousness and its consequences in this

way. In other words a meditator abstains from imbibing defilements that lead to the round of suffering. Each time one meditates on the phenomenon of seeing, insight knowledge is developed. Each time insight knowledge is developed, defilements are discarded. So one is said to be enjoying *tadaṅga nibbāna* — momentary bliss obtained at the moment that defilements are discarded.

A meditator who is dwelling with the realities (*paramattha*), will gradually realise the insight knowledges stage by stage. He or she will proceed from analytical knowledge of mind and matter (*nāmarūpa-pariccheda-ñāṇa*) to knowledge of change of lineage (*gotrabhū-ñāṇa*) through adaptation knowledge (*anuloma-ñāṇa*). According to the sayings in the Paṭṭhāna, this will ultimately lead one to the Path and its Fruition. It should be noted that adaptation knowledge is the highest of the ten stages of insight knowledge. Aspirants to nibbāna must, therefore, engage themselves in insight meditation.

The following is a summary of the points discussed so far:

1. On noting forms with mindfulness, lust is eliminated.
2. In the absence of lust or desire, the mind refuses to imbibe forms.
3. Note as soon as you see, and be conscious just of seeing.
4. If one meditates in that way, the round of suffering will cease.
5. This is the way for meditators to practise.
6. On the cessation of suffering, nibbāna will come into view.

Sounds Not Heard Before

Now I will deal with the second question posed by the Buddha for Mālukiyaṭṭa to answer.

“What do you think, Mālukiyaṭṭa? There are certain sounds that you have never heard before, do not hear now, and do not hope to hear in the future. Could such objects arouse desire, lust, or affection in you?”

Mālukiyaṭṭa replied that no desire, lust, or affection could possible arise from sounds or voices that one had never heard before, did nor hear now, nor imagined. This answer is right. On hearing a pleasant voice and cognising the individual making it, the hearer develops affection or attachment for the owner of the voice. As attachment is developed, defilements are brought into play and the consequences of suffering follow. If one meditates on hearing, defilements will be kept away. Remember what I said previously regarding the phenomenon of seeing.

Concept and Reality

What has been discussed earlier about the thought process relating to eye-consciousness applies with due alteration of details to ear-consciousness, so I give only the gist of the process relating to ear-consciousness.

When a sound enters the ear-door we say that a sound is heard. This is the first thought process relating to ear-consciousness. Then mind-consciousness investigates the nature of the sound heard. This is the first thought process relating to mind-consciousness. In the second thought process of mind-consciousness the name suggested by sound is cognised. In the next thought process, the name given to the sound is apprehended.

As an object makes a sound, the ear just hears it. If you note this with mindfulness, without going beyond the hearing, you call a halt to the process of hearing. The stream of consciousness stops flowing there and then. However, if you are unmindful, mental formations and activities will be brought into play. You may remember the sound that you hear and think over it. That means that the stream of mind-consciousness has taken over. Even then, the process of mind-consciousness is only aware of the sound, and concept has not yet been formed. If you can note this with mindfulness, apperception ends here, stopping at the stage of the abstract idea of the sound. If you fail to interrupt further mental activities, the next process of mind-consciousness will interpret the concept of the individual making the sound, and the next process will distinguish the sex of the individual. This will be followed by the development of affinity or repulsion. This is how the thought process stirs up defilements. So it is imperative to meditate on hearing just as you hear. I have summarised these statements as follows:

1. If you fail to note the phenomenon with mindfulness, you end up with conceptual knowledge.
2. To obtain knowledge of the ultimate realities, the following should be borne in mind.
3. Note with mindfulness the instant that you hear. (Note as soon as the process of ear-consciousness occurs or, failing that, note as soon as the process of mind-consciousness occurs).
4. Interrupt the flow of the process of thought at hearing. (If you can do this, the second process of mind-consciousness cannot arise). This is in accordance with the saying, "*Sute sutamattam bhavissati.*"
5. Then you can distinguish mind from matter. (What you hear is matter at work. When you are noting, mind is at work. Mind and matter are

thus distinguished. Both the hearing and the noting appear only to disappear at the next instant.)

6. Finally, you will recognise the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self.

Failure to Meditate on Sound While Hearing

*“Saddaṃ sutvā sati muṭṭhā,
piyaṃ nimittaṃ manasi karoto;
Sārattacitto vedeti, taṅca ajjhossa tiṭṭhati.”*

“Having heard a sound, one loses mindfulness. Getting involved in the attraction of it, one feels the onset of desire that tries to imbibe it.”

When a sound presents itself at the ear-door, the hearer tries to appreciate it, generally expecting it to be sweet and agreeable, which tends to induce unwholesome thoughts, speech, and actions. While paying attention to the sound, one loses mindfulness, and desire arises if it is a pleasant sound. The hearer takes in what is heard as if ingesting or imbibing it. Whenever the hearer recalls it, desire arises and torments him or her repeatedly. The story of Prince Nanda illustrates this point.

The Story of Nanda

Prince Siddhattha and Prince Nanda were half-brothers; the former’s mother was Mahā Māyā, and the latter’s was Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī. Their mothers were sisters, both married to King Suddhodana. When Mahā Māyā died seven days after the birth of Siddhattha, Mahā Pajāpati Gotamī left her own son in the care of royal wet-nurses, and brought up Siddhattha, breast-feeding him herself.

Prince Siddhattha became the Buddha, and came to Rājagaha to spend the first Rains Retreat there. Three days after his arrival, King Suddhodana arranged a pre-nuptial feast for his second son, Prince Nanda, betrothed to Princess Janapada Kalyāṇī. As the Buddha was invited, he came to the palace where the meal was offered to him. When he was about to return to the monastery, he told Prince Nanda to take his (the Buddha’s) bowl, and follow him. In awe of his elder brother, Nanda did as he was told, expecting the Buddha to take his bowl and discharge him sooner or later. As he was about to leave the palace, Princess Janapada Kalyāṇī called out, “My Lord, come back soon!”

Once at the monastery, the Buddha asked his younger brother if he would become a monk. The prince had no mind to put on the robe, but being overwhelmed with awe he said, “yes.” So he was ordained, but he was not happy at all. One day he complained, “I am unhappy in this noble practice. I cannot stay any longer. I will revert to lay life.”

The Buddha knew of Nanda’s discontent, so asked him why he was unhappy. Nanda told him that Janapada Kalyāṇī’s words were ringing in his ears.

The Buddha took his younger brother by the hand and led him to a desolate place, recently burnt by a forest fire, and showed him a maimed old hag of a monkey sitting by a smouldering log. From there he took him to Tāvatiṃsā, and introduced the love-lorn prince to a bevy of five hundred deities. The Buddha asked Nanda who was more beautiful, Janapada or any one of the deities. Nanda replied, “Venerable sir, compared to these deities, Janapada is like that old monkey I saw previously.”

“Nanda,” said the Buddha, “remain as a bhikkhu. I promise you that you will win one of the beauties you can see now.” When they came back from Tāvatiṃsa, Nanda became diligent in the practice, hoping that one day he would get one of the deities.

Word went around the monastery that Nanda was practising the Dhamma with an eye to getting a beautiful deity for a wife. He was teased by his fellow monks as being like a daily wage-earner, or even a bonded slave, who worked for material benefits. He was mortified by these remarks. Secluding himself, he practised meditation with the utmost effort and determination until all his defilements had dried up. Finally, he won the Path and its Fruition, becoming an Arahant.

The lesson to be learned from this story is that if one is unable to note with mindfulness the sound that one hears, one tends to recall it again and again. Then it gets stuck in the mind. The mind imbibes all the feelings conjured up by craving.

“Tassa vaḍḍhanti vedanā, anekā saddasambhavā; Abhijjhā ca vihesā ca, cittamassūpahaññati. Evamācinato dukkhaṃ, ārā nibbāna, vuccati.”

“A multitude of passions such as covetousness and rage, springing from sound, torments one who takes a firm hold of it, with the result that his mind becomes burdened with vexation. Therefore, nibbāna remains remote from one who would rather carry the burden of suffering than practise meditation.”

This needs no further elucidation as enough has been said about the attitude of mind on seeing, which may be substituted by hearing in the present context.

Meditating on Sound Brings Nibbāna Near

*“Nā so rajjati saddesu, saddaṃ sutvā patissato;
Virattacitto vedeti, taṅca nājjhossa tiṭṭhati.”*

“Passion remains undeveloped in him who recollects with mindfulness the sound that he has heard. Thus freed from lust, he refuses to imbibe it.”

*“Yathāssa suṇato saddaṃ, sevato cāpi vedanaṃ;
Khīyati nopacīyati, evaṃ so caratī sato.”*

“Listening to an audible object, a meditator just hears it and just feels that he hears it, without conceptualising it. With this, suffering ceases. One who practises in this way is said to be near to nibbāna.”

These stanzas need no elucidation. What has been said about seeing applies with due alteration of details to hearing, and this also applies to the summaries given in the form of aphorisms.

Odours Not Smelled Before

The Buddha posed this third question for Mālukyaputta:

“What do you think, Mālukyaputta? There are certain odours that you have never smelled before, do not smell now, and do not hope to smell in the future. Could such odours arouse desire, lust, or affection in you?”

Mālukyaputta replied that it was impossible for desire, lust, or affection to arise regarding odours that one had never smelled, did not smell now, and did not hope to smell in the future.

As desire cannot develop from an unknown quantity, it is not necessary for a meditator to reflect on it, but those who fail to note odours and nose-consciousness will remain remote from nibbāna.

Failure to Meditate on Odour While Smelling

The Buddha, satisfied with Mālukyaputta’s answer, said, “Well said,” and uttered the four stanzas in the same manner as before.

*“Gandhaṃ ghatvā sati muṭṭhā,
piyaṃ nimittaṃ manasi karoto.
Sārattacitto vedeti, tañca ajjhossa tiṭṭhati.”*

“Having smelled an odour, one loses mindfulness. Getting involved in the attraction of it, one feels the onset of desire that tries to imbibe it.”

Meditators rarely enjoy fragrant odours. Mostly they have to endure disagreeable odours. So it is not unusual for them to long for fragrance. This is attachment, which makes one unmindful of the Dhamma.

*“Tassa vadḍhanti vedanā, anekā gandhasambhavā; Abhijjhā ca vihesā
ca, cittamassūpahaññati. Evamācinato dukkhaṃ, ārā nibbāna vuccati.”*

“A multitude of passions such as covetousness and rage, springing from odours, torments one who takes a firm hold of it, with the result that his mind becomes burdened with vexation. Therefore, nibbāna remains remote from one who would rather carry the burden of suffering than practise meditation.”

Here, as before, the emphasis is on the fact that failure to meditate keeps nibbāna remote.

Meditating on Odour Brings Nibbāna Near

*“Na so rajjati gandhesu, gandhaṃ ghatvā patissato; Virattacitto vedeti,
tañca nājjhossa tiṭṭhati.”*

“Passion remains undeveloped in him who recollects with mindfulness the odour that he has smelled. Thus freed from lust, he refuses to imbibe it.”

*“Yathāssa ghāyato gandhaṃ, sevato cāpi vedanaṃ; Khīyati nopacīyati,
evaṃ so caratī sato. Evaṃ apacinato dukkhaṃ, santike nibbāna vuccati.”*

“Smelling an odour, a meditator just smells it and just feels that he smells it, without conceptualising it. With this, suffering ceases. One who practises in this way is said to be near to nibbāna.”

To dispel suffering, note with mindfulness every time an odour presents itself to your mind. Now I will go on to the sense of taste. It will show you how to practise *vipassanā*.

Flavours Not Tasted Before

The Buddha posed the next question for Mālūkyaputta.

“What do you think, Mālūkyaputta? There are certain flavours that you have never tasted before, do not taste now, and do not hope to taste in the future. Could such flavours arouse desire, lust, or affection in you?”

Let me refer in passing to the human weakness for the pleasures of taste. Those who have never tasted fruits and cakes from other countries have no desire to for them, since they have never enjoyed them, but people who have tasted them, develop a craving for them. In the scriptures there are instances of people losing their lives to satisfy their palates. Defilements can be dispelled if one meditates on tasting, noting the instant when taste occurs.

Failure to Meditate on Flavour While Tasting

*“Rasaṃ bhovā sati muṭṭhā,
piyaṃ nimittaṃ manasi karoto.
Sārattacitto vedeti, tañca ajjhossa tiṭṭhati.”*

“Having tasted a flavour, one loses mindfulness. Getting involved in the attraction of it, one feels the onset of desire that tries to imbibe it.”

Few people ever meditate on eating and taste. Ordinary lay people are quite unaware of this meditation practice. Even learned persons do not pay heed to it, assuming that as one gets the flavour of food as it is taken, there is no need to note it with mindfulness. This amounts to irreverence to the teachings of insight meditation. Others go so far as to say that meditating on taste is a sheer waste of time. Eating, they say, should be done quickly so that more time can be devoted to meditation.

The majority of meditators are guilty of unmindfulness in eating. Once they fail to note the flavour as they take food, they lose mindfulness and become attached to it. That means they cherish the desire, and enjoy the pleasure of eating.

All food and comestibles are prepared to be delicious. When lay people offer food to the monks, they take special care to make the food appealing to the palate. This shows how much importance people give to flavour. I remember an observation made by a Sayādaw in Moulmein. He once taught one of his

devotees that it was usual for monks to partake of food with mindfulness that disregards the flavour, as if what is delicious was repugnant. This drew a protest from the devotee who said, “Venerable sir! It is most improper that you should view the delicious dishes that I have prepared for you enjoyment as repugnant.” It was quite logical for him to say so, because food for the monks is usually prepared by donors so that the recipients could eat them with relish. Here, the preparation of delicious food is the responsibility of the donor, but monks should contemplate all food as repugnant so that defilements cannot overwhelm them.

The monastic training requires that monks eat, reflecting wisely. Unlike lay people, monks should take food, not for enjoyment, nor for indulgence, nor for physical development, nor for fattening, but just to maintain the body, for supporting the holy life, to quench the pains of hunger and thirst, so that they can effectively pursue the practice of meditation. If one can practise meditation on the repulsiveness of food (*āhāre paṭikkūlasaññā*), it is all the more commendable. Regarding this please see the Visuddhimagga [Vism. 341]. However, for our purposes it will be best to follow the method of Satipaṭṭhāna.

“Tassa vaḍḍhanti vedanā, anekā rasasambhavā; Abhijjhā ca vihesā ca, cittamassūpahaññati. Evamācinato dukkhaṃ, ārā nibbāna vuccati.”

“A multitude of passions such as covetousness and rage, springing from flavours, torments one who takes a firm hold of it, with the result that his mind becomes burdened with vexation. Therefore, nibbāna remains remote from one who would rather carry the burden of suffering than practise meditation.”

No elaboration is needed beyond the fact that odour is here to be substituted by flavour.

There are three basic necessities of life — food, clothing, and shelter. The world is teeming with millions of hungry people. The search for food is a great burden to them. People go all out to get it. In the struggle for a living, some grab what they want by all means, whether fair or foul, and anger is aroused when they encounter competition or opposition from rivals for the same food. The result is trouble for everyone. All these troubles stem from the development of desire and attachment due to failing to meditate; in this case on taste. When one is overpowered by defilements, one becomes tormented by kamma and its results, which brings about the round of suffering.

Most people do not care to meditate when eating. It is habitual for them to be unmindful when eating, and this habit becomes hardened. In that case they are accumulating suffering, which burns like fire for many lives to come.

Meditating on Flavour Brings Nibbāna Near

*“Na so rajjati rasesu, rasaṃ bhotvā patissato;
Virattacitto vedeti, tañca nājjhossa tiṭṭhati.”*

“Passion remains undeveloped in him who recollects with mindfulness the flavour that he has tasted. Thus freed from lust, he refuses to imbibe it.”

This is a clear instruction to the meditator to apply the principle of insight meditation to the phenomenon of tongue-consciousness, as soon as the food is tasted. It does not say that the flavour one has never experienced should be noted with mindfulness. I will give you an example to show how to meditate on it.

When a monk sits before a table and sees the food, he notes the phenomenon of seeing. As he raises his hand to pick up the food, he notes the raising of the hand. As he takes a morsel of food in his hand, he notes that he is taking it. As he brings it towards his mouth, he notes that he is bringing it. As it touches his mouth, he notes the touching. As he opens his mouth, puts the food in, closes his mouth, brings his hand down, touches the plate with his hand, and meanwhile chews the food, he notes each of these actions. As his hands move and he chews the food, he is conscious of the element of motion operating. If his hand touches hot food, he is aware of the element of heat. When he tastes sweet or sour on the tongue, he notes the flavour. As he is thus noting all the phenomena connecting with eating or tasting, he dispels desire for food, and eventually all lust for it. When his concentration gets stronger, he knows the flavour only as flavour and nothing more. It does not occur to him that a particular dish of chicken curry is delicious. It means that he has abandoned the pleasurable object of taste, and thus he eradicates defilements.

The experience of meditators at Mahāsi Yeikthā bears this out. When a meditator eats, he becomes conscious of the fragrant smell and sweet taste that the food generates. However, as soon as he comes to know the phenomena of smell, taste, and the nose and tongue-consciousness, and the mind that notes this, they dissolve away. Under these circumstances, lust has no chance to assert itself, for the meditator cognises flavour just as flavour and nothing more. Some meditators say as they were noting the phenomenon of tasting, they failed to recognise what kind of food they had been given. This is quite possible. For, in the absence of desire and attachment, no pleasure

can be derived from the food taken. Where there is no attachment, one does not take a firm hold of feeling, as if one is going to devour it.

*“Yathāssa sāyarato rasaṃ, sevato cāpi vedanaṃ;
Khīyati nopacīyati, evaṃ so caratī sato. Evaṃ apacinato dukkhaṃ,
santike nibbāna vuccati.”*

“Tasting a flavour, a meditator just tastes it and just feels that he tastes it, without conceptualising it. With this, suffering ceases. One who practises in this way is said to be near to nibbāna.”

A meditator eats and tastes the food just like anyone else, but does not indulge in the flavour, so does not commit wholesome or unwholesome deeds in relation to the flavour. It means that tasting cannot lead to kamma formations and their results. Without them no new becoming can arise, and there will be an end to the round of suffering.

The doctrine of dependent origination says, “*Vedanā paccayā taṇhā* — feeling begets craving.” However, as no craving arises when the feeling has subsided, clinging does not result, and defilements, kamma and its results become inoperative. Since the causes of suffering are eliminated, a meditator who is steadfast in the practice of insight meditation, attains momentary bliss (*tadaṅga nibbāna*), when peace is established for the duration of the elimination of defilements. This can eventually lead to the fulfilment of the Noble Path and its Fruition.

Realisation of the Dhamma

Many examples are cited in the Commentaries regarding the attainment of nibbāna as one meditates on eating. In Sri Lanka in former times, there were rest houses where monks on their daily rounds for alms could stop to eat. It was usual for them to have their early morning gruel there, and then set out for alms, returning to the same place for their full meal. Most of them practised insight meditation while eating and became Arahants. In those days this was the rule rather than the exception.

In the Commentary on the Puggalapaññatti, it says:

“Making strenuous efforts in insight meditation with implicit faith in it, an individual can realise the knowledge of the Path and its Fruition while walking, standing, sitting, lying down, taking light food or heavy meals. No instances exist where one fails to attain wisdom when one practices like this.”

So I urge you to note in detail the entire process of eating while you eat. If you are having your meals alone, this can be done quite easily. For each mouthful that you take, there may be about sixty things worth noting, and if you note them continuously, it may take you about an hour to finish your meal. If you have to eat with others, this may not be possible, but I urge you to try.

Touches Not Touched Before

The fifth question put to Mālukeyaputta is as follows:

“What do you think, Mālukeyaputta? There are certain tangible objects that you have never touched before, that you are not touching now, and do not hope to touch in the future. Could such objects arouse desire, lust, or affection in you?”

Mālukeyaputta replied in the negative, which is right. Here again it may be stressed that no defilements can arise for sense-objects with which one is unfamiliar. Indigenous peoples develop no desire for foreign fashions, which they have never even seen before. The same analogy applies to friendship — one never makes friends with people whom one has never met or seen before.

For most of us, seeing or hearing is intermittent. We are not seeing or hearing things all the time. Since we are not always eating, tasting is even less frequent. Tactile sensations, however, occur all the time. They are far more pervasive than other sensations. They may be felt even when one is sitting or standing still, or eating and drinking. So we are involved with sensations of touch day in and day out. Meditators usually have to meditate more on objects of touch than on any other objects.

The text says, “*Gacchanto vā gacchāmi’ti pajānāti* — know that you are going, when you go.” When you note the walking, lifting the foot, pushing it forward, and putting it down, you are conscious of the entire movement connected with the process of walking. This means that knowledge of walking arises. So you should let that knowledge remain as it is according to the instruction, “*Mute mutamattaṃ bhavissati* — when you know, just know it.” Do not go further than that. This meditation technique is mostly on the activities of the element of motion, though at times the element of heat, or the element of hardness may also be prominent. Mostly though, one must concentrate on the element of motion.

The text goes on to say, “*Ṭhito vā ṭhitomhī’ti pajānāti; nisinno vā nisinnomhī’ti pajānāti* — know that you are standing when you stand, know that you are

sitting when you sit. Here too, you are instructed to note the nature of the element of motion. If you are not satisfied with this method, note the activity of the element of motion by watching the rise and fall of the abdomen as you are standing, sitting, or lying down.

Why Mindfulness of Respiration is Not Taught

Mindfulness of respiration (*ānāpānassati*) is included in the ten recollections. It is concentration on breathing in and breathing out. Breathing is an act of the element of motion. It may be asked, therefore, "Why not take up the exercise of breathing in and out?" In my opinion, I agree that *ānāpāna* could lead to the establishment of insight knowledge, but it should be noted that the Visuddhimagga puts it in the category of *samatha*, as opposed to *vipassanā* meditation objects. It enumerates the fourteen body contemplations as follows:

"Herein, the three, that is to say, the sections on the four postures, on the four kinds of full awareness, and on attention directed to the elements as they are stated [at M.iii.89] deal with insight. ... So there are only two, that is the sections on breathing and on directing attention to repulsiveness that, as stated there, deal with concentration." (Vism. 240)

Thus it is clearly stated that mindfulness of breathing belongs to the development of concentration. Therefore, if we advocated mindfulness of breathing we would be open to the criticism that we were teaching *samatha* and not *vipassanā*. Then we would be unable to make a rebuttal of this charge without contradicting this teaching in the Visuddhimagga. However, we allow those who like to practise mindfulness of the respiration to have their wish. We impose no restriction upon them.

The *Patisambhidāmagga* and the Visuddhimagga are explicit on the point that, when doing breathing exercises, one must concentrate on the tip of the nose without letting the mind follow the course of the breath in and out. The purpose is to enable the meditator to develop neighbourhood concentration (*upacāra samādhi*) and access concentration (*appanā samādhi*) to enter *jhāna*.

In the practice of insight, there is no restriction that directs the meditator to note only one phenomenon continuously. If we instruct the meditators to note all the phenomena of touch that occur in various parts of the body while breathing in and out, we will again be open to the criticism that we are contradicting the two authorities just cited. That is

why we do not encourage meditators to practise mindfulness of respiration for insight meditation.

Meditation on Abdominal Movements

It has been asked whether meditation on the rising and falling of the abdomen really conforms to the Pāli texts. This question may be answered on the authority of the Saḷāyatana Vagga of the Saṃyuttanikāya where it is stated that failure to note the arising and passing away of mind and matter occurring at the six sense-doors results in the upsurge of defilements, while meditating on them brings nibbāna closer through the realisation of the Path and Fruition with the suppression of defilements. The Mālukyaputta Sutta is also very clear on this point. I shall give reasons in support of our method conforming to the scriptures.

When Satipaṭṭhāna teaching prescribes observing the four elements, it is advocating the observance of the apparent phenomena created by the four primary elements. Abdominal movements indicate the working of the element of motion, which is one of the four elements to be observed by the method of attention to the elements (*dhātumanasikāra*). I prefer ordinary language to Pāli technical terms, so instead of asking meditators to contemplate *vāyo dhātu*, I ask them to observe the rising and falling of the abdomen. Employing everyday language agrees with the Buddha's preference for simple speech when he gave the advice, "*Gacchāmi vā gacchāmi'ti pajānāti.*" As the meditator's concentration develops with continued practice of insight meditation, he or she will come to realise the nature of the element of motion in the movements of the abdomen.

On the authority of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, and others in the Saṃyuttanikāya, we take it that a meditator should concentrate not only on the four postures usually mentioned in the scriptures, but also on other postures or actions that can be met with in the normal course of events.

If a meditator does not feel satisfied with noting the rising and falling of the abdomen, he or she can try meditating on sitting while sitting, on standing while standing, or on lying down while lying down. However, we do not urge meditators to practise mindfulness of respiration as we maintain that it contradicts statements in the Visuddhimagga and Commentaries on the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, which speak of insight meditation after the attainment to jhāna through noting breathing in and breathing out, but we do not deter anyone from practising mindfulness of respiration. Now I will revert to my original theme.

Failure to Meditate on Contact While Touching

*“Phassaṃ phussa sati muṭṭhā,
piyaṃ nimittaṃ manasi karoto.
Sārattacitto vedeti, tañca ajjhossa tiṭṭhati.”*

“Having felt a touch, one loses mindfulness. Getting involved in the attraction of it, one feels the onset of desire that tries to imbibe it.”

Tactile sensations arise everywhere in the body. When a living body touches an inanimate object, sensations arise. When the limbs touch one another, the same happens. These are external sensations. There are also internal sensations, which often pass unnoticed. For instance, we are usually unaware of the fact that blood comes into contact with muscular tissues embedded in the body. Those unaccustomed to mindfulness cannot take full note of the external sensations, let alone the internal ones. So when you practise meditation casually, you are liable to be forgetful of the Dhamma, and will be aware of beauty when you see it. It is natural to hanker after pleasurable sense-objects; and when they are found you forget to note the arising and passing away of the aggregates. At times you may feel repugnant to disagreeable sights that you see or disturbing sounds that you hear. This also makes you forgetful of the Dhamma.

The five constituents of pleasure invite the defilements for unmindful persons. Their way of life is geared to the enjoyment of pleasure. When they sleep on soft beds, they feel comfortable. The latest fashions give them luxurious feelings of touch. Even when doing their daily exercise routine for health they are doing so delighting in the thought that it will contribute to sensual enjoyment and beauty. All these delights and pleasures are the product of their surroundings, which worship the five constituents of the senses. They generate defilements. Nibbāna remains remote from those with a liking for defilements. Hence the following stanza:

*“Tassa vadḍhanti vedanā, anekā phassasambhavā; Abhijjhā ca vihesā
ca, cittmassūpahaññati. Evamācinato dukkhaṃ, ārā nibbāna vuccati.”*

“A multitude of passions such as covetousness and rage, springing from contact, torments one who takes a firm hold of it, with the result that his mind becomes burdened with vexation. Therefore, nibbāna remains remote from one who would rather carry the burden of suffering than practise meditation.”

All that has been said about seeing, hearing, *etc.*, applies to touching. What should be emphasised is that by bowing to the wishes of the defilements one accumulates a mass of suffering, which keeps one remote from nibbāna.

Meditating on Contact Brings Nibbāna Near

*“Na so rajjati phassesu, phassaṃ phussa patissato;
Virattacitto vedeti, tañca nājjhossa tiṭṭhati.”*

“Passion remains undeveloped in him who recollects with mindfulness the contact that he has felt. Thus freed from lust, he refuses to imbibe it.”

While meditating on standing, you may feel tired or stiff, painful or itchy. When these unpleasant sensations appear you must concentrate on the source of discomfort and note the nature of the tiredness, pain, etc. As you are contemplating on feelings, this is *vedanānupassanā*. When you note heat, you are contemplating the element of heat (*tejo*), and when you touch a hard or rough surface you are noting the earth element (*pathavī*). At times you may feel that the element of motion merges with the element of heat. You should note this also. You should note every physical action: bending or stretching your arms or legs, tilting your head backwards or forwards, opening or shutting your eyes, or blinking. As you dress, wash, or take a shower, there may be many kinds of movements. Even when you urinate or evacuate your bowels, you must not forget to note the manifestation of the element of motion. With practice, you may be able to note even speaking when you speak.

Our injunction to note the rising and falling of the abdomen is helpful for beginners in meditation. If one likes one may take up noting the respiration, but in our experience those who began by noting the respiration ended up with contemplating the abdominal movements, and realised the Dhamma. We instruct meditators who have developed their concentration to extend the practice to noting everything occurring at the six sense-doors. When lust is abandoned through this practice of mindfulness, you will have no desire to grasp at tactile sensation, or to indulge in it.

*“Yathāssa phusato phassaṃ, sevato cāpi vedanaṃ;
Khīyati nopacīyati, evaṃ so caratī sato.”*

“On touching a contact, a meditator just touches it and just feels that he touches it, without conceptualising it. With this, suffering ceases. One who practises in this way is said to be near to nibbāna.”

What has been discussed before regarding the other senses applies in this case too.

Negation of the Correct Method

Among us there are some dissidents who neither practise the Dhamma nor accommodate others practising it. They reject the methods relating to meditation, saying that everybody is aware of their physical behaviour, so it is unnecessary to note with mindfulness.

The purpose of meditation is to prevent defilements from arising, from the moment that consciousness occurs relating to sense-objects that contact the sense-bases. Meditation on things that have never been seen or heard before is excluded. Dissidents, in their attempts to criticise our method of teaching, maintain that noting the rising and falling of the abdomen is superfluous. This contradicts what is prescribed in the Mālukyaputta Sutta and the Mahā Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. Everybody is aware that he breathes. It would be preposterous to suggest that he should be made unaware of his own breathing.

Those who propose that one should not meditate on the physical body or parts of it such as head, limbs, or the abdomen, are directly opposed to the Buddha's teaching. Perhaps this is because they have never experienced insight knowledge. When you see and note matter within your own body, it fits perfectly with the instruction, "*Rūpaṃ disvā patissato* — note form when you see it." In the same way you must meditate on contact in accordance with the instruction, "*Phassaṃ phussa patissato* — note contact when you touch." There is nothing in the Pāḷi Canon and its Commentaries to suggest that anyone is to be deterred from noting his physical behaviour. All sense-bases, sense-objects, and sense-consciousness originate in the body, and if we are to be prevented from noting them, it will go against the teaching. Those who advocate such ideas are preaching heresy (*adhamma*).

Below I summarise the method of insight meditation in brief:

"Note every time mind and matter arise. This will lead you to gain knowledge of their causes and effects. Finally you will realise the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and insubstantiality. Whoever practises in this manner can realise nibbāna."

Now I will give you the task laid down by the Buddha regarding meditation on mind objects that give rise to mind-consciousness.

Ideas Not Thought of Before

“What do you think, Mālukiya-putta? There are certain mind objects that you have never thought of before, which you do not think of now, and do not hope to think of in the future. Could such object arouse desire, lust, or affection in you?”

As before Mālukiya-putta answered this question in the negative, and the Buddha instructed him how to practise insight meditation. For a summary of what the Buddha taught him, please refer to [page 7](#).

Failure to Meditate on Mind Objects While Knowing

*“Dhammaṃ nītvā sati muṭṭhā,
piyaṃ nimittaṃ manasi karoto.
Sārattacitto vedeti, tañca ajjhossa tiṭṭhati.”*

“Having thought of a mind object, one loses mindfulness. Getting involved in the attraction of it, one feels the onset of desire that tries to imbibe it.”

Here, the term ‘*dhamma*’ — mind object, is not used in the abstract sense. It relates to the six bases of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. It creates the idea of male or female. It embraces the material qualities of life and nutrition. It includes all concepts of humanity or divinity, and all animals such as cattle, etc. It includes all inanimate object such as pots and pans, and buildings like houses. All sense-objects, whether real or imaginary, are *dhammas*. When ordinary individuals see things that exist in nature, they recognise them by concepts as trees, forests, and mountains. Those who are accomplished in knowledge by comprehension (*sammasana-nāṇa*) and knowledge of arising and passing away (*udayabbaya-nāṇa*) often see visions of deities, Arahants, and Buddhas, and other objects that are real flesh and blood. However they are seen, whether by the eye or the mind’s eye, the subject develops attachment or aversion to them in accordance with his or her feeling about them. Once these feelings arise, he or she becomes forgetful of the Dhamma, ingesting or imbibing what he or she thinks about. Then defilements arise. This is explained in the following stanza.

*“Tassa vaḍḍhanti vedanā, anekā dhammasambhavā;
Abhijjhā ca vihesā ca, cittamassūpahaññati.
Evamācīnato dukkhaṃ, ārā nibbāna vuccati.”*

“A multitude of passions such as covetousness and rage, springing from ideas, torments one who takes a firm hold of it, with the result that his mind becomes burdened with vexation. Therefore, nibbāna remains remote from one who would rather carry the burden of suffering than practise meditation.”

Meditating on Mind Objects Brings Nibbāna Near

The preceding stanzas show the darker side of life for the meditator. There is a brighter side, though, which is given in the following stanza.

*“Na so rajjati dhammesu, dhammaṃ ñatvā patissato;
Virattacitto vedeti, tañca nājjhossa tiṭṭhati.”*

“Passion remains undeveloped in him who recollects with mindfulness the idea he has known. Thus freed from lust, he refuses to imbibe it.”

Here, ideas or *dhammas* — mental objects are not ultimate realities, but concepts (*paññatti*). However, mind-consciousness itself is an ultimate reality. It comprises thoughts and ideas created by the mind object. It appears, and disappears the next instant, so is impermanent. When a meditator visualises an object and notes it with mindfulness, it disappears as soon as it is noted. What actually happens is the disappearance of mind-consciousness that constitutes mind (*nāma*). As the observer is intent upon the object, he or she loses sight of the *citta* or *nāma* created by it. As he or she notes it like this, no attachment arises. In other words, mindfulness dispels lust or passion. In such circumstances consciousness just occurs, it does not go beyond that. This is in accordance with the instruction, “*Viññataṃ viññānamatta bhavissati* — when you know, just know it.” If one fails to meditate on the mind object, feeling tends to incite defilements.

*“Yathāssa vijānato dhammaṃ, sevato cāpi vedanaṃ;
Khīyati nopacīyati, evaṃ so caratī sato.
Evaṃ apacinato dukkhaṃ, santike nibbāna vuccati.”*

“On thinking of a mind object, a meditator just knows it and just feels that he knows it, without conceptualising it. With this, suffering ceases. One who practises in this way is said to be near to nibbāna.”

Any idea must be noted as soon as it is formed so that the inclination to defilements has no opportunity to arise. When the defilements cease, kamma

and results also cease, and that momentary cessation rewards the meditator with momentary bliss (*tadaṅga nibbāna*).

It should be noted that nibbāna is within easy reach of everyone who practises insight meditation. Conversely, it remains remote from non-meditators.

Teaching Given to Bāhiya Dārucīriya

Having uttered the twenty-four stanzas, the Buddha concluded by saying, “Mālukyaputta! I have given you a succinct account of the method [of noting sense-objects], you must try to understand the deeper meaning.”

Rejoicing in what the Buddha had taught, Mālukyaputta expressed his satisfaction, paid homage to the Blessed One and departed. Then he retired to a place of solitude, applied himself to meditation with mindfulness, abiding vigilant, strenuous, and with single purpose. Before long he enjoyed the fruits of the holy life, gained insight, and became an Arahant.

Once, when the Buddha was in Sāvatti for his daily alms round, he was approached by a recluse by the name of Bāhiya Dārucīriya who insisted on being given some brief instruction on the spot. The Buddha advised him to note seeing just as he saw, hearing just as he heard, knowing just as he knew, and thinking just as he thought in relation to the sense-objects he encountered. These are the Buddha’s words:

*“Ditthe ditthamattaṃ bhavissati; sute sutamattaṃ bhavissati;
mute mutamattaṃ bhavissati; viññate viññāṇamattaṃ bhavissati.”*

In this Mālukyaputta Sutta the instructions are identical. So this method of *vipassanā* is to note with mindfulness every time the phenomena of sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, and thought occur. Though the instruction is very brief, it is very far-reaching. For nearly forty years since 1938, I have been preaching this Mālukyaputta Sutta regularly for the enlightenment of thousands of devotees regarding the subjects of the Noble Path and its Fruition, and regarding the knowledge of re-observation (*paṭisaṅkhā-nāṇa*). I believe that many of them by now have come to realise the knowledge that can lead them to the Path and its Fruition.

I will conclude with a prayer, sharing the merits we have performed in relation to charity, morality, and mental development to our parents, relatives, and well-wishers present here, to all humanity, to all *devas* and all sentient beings in the whole universe. May they rejoice in these wholesome actions, and gain happiness in both body and mind!

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

