

# Buddhist Meditation and its Forty Subjects

by

The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw

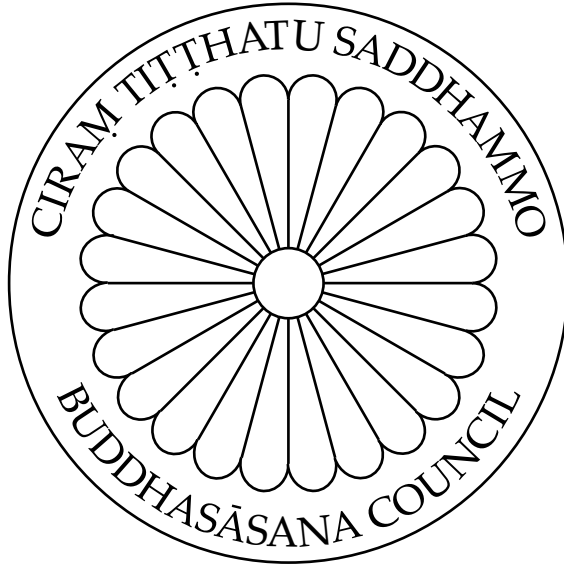


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Edited by

Bhikkhu Pesala

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## **Editor's Foreword**

I have put the Pāli terms in parenthesis to make this book easier to read for those unfamiliar with Buddhist terminology. Technical terms are often difficult to translate satisfactorily, so it is best to retain the Pāli.

Hyperlinks have been added for the stages of insight to the Sayādaw's book, "The Progress of Insight," published by the Buddhist Publication Society.

For a more detailed treatment, readers should refer to Chapter III of the Path of Purification, on Taking a Meditation Subject, in the section on the enumeration of the meditation subjects on page 104.

Bhikkhu Pesala  
September 2021

## **Translator's Preface**

Throughout the whole world there is now a widespread interest and keen enthusiasm in the practice of Buddhist Meditation, but the proper knowledge of its practice in accordance with the actual teaching of the Buddha is still lacking. The majority of the general intelligent public has only a vague idea of the real purpose of undertaking the practice of meditation, the correct method of practice, the benefits derived therefrom and other essential features.

For the sake of clear understanding and appreciation, and at the earnest request of the Union Buddha Sāsana Council, the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw, Bhaddanta Sobhana Aggamahāpaṇḍita, has been kind enough to write a short treatise 'Buddhist Meditation and its Forty Subjects' giving concise information of the fundamentals.

It is translated into English as desired by the Mahāsi Sayādaw.

U Pe Thin (Translator), Mahāsi Yogi  
December 1957

# The Purpose of Meditation

*Honour to the Exalted One, Arahant, Buddha Supreme.*

What is the purpose of the practice of meditation?

The practice of meditation is carried out for the purpose of realising nibbāna and thereby escaping from the ills of life: old age, ill-health, death, and so forth.

All living beings long to live harmlessly, peacefully, happily and prosperously without suffering old-age, ill-health, death and other ills of life; yet they always find these hopes to be vain. For in every life there is still to be found old age, ill-health, sorrow and lamentation due to many dangers and evils, physical sufferings and mental grief. Then after suffering dire pangs and agonies there follows death. Yet there is no end in death. Again there is birth because of attachment to becoming. In this new life too they are the victims of old age and the other ills. In this manner they go round the rebirth-cycle from life to life, suffering all kinds of vicissitudes and without any stop.

On searching for the root cause of this state of affairs it becomes evident that 'Because there is birth there follows the chain of old age, ill-health, death and the other ills of life.' So it is essential to prevent birth if the ills of life in old age *etc.*, are to be avoided.

Rebirth can only take place because of the attachment inherent in the present life. The new birth is nothing but the arising of a new consciousness which is the result of grasping a sense object in the dying moment of the previous life. Where there is no attachment there can be no new birth; so every endeavour must be made to free oneself from attachment if no new birth is desired.

This attachment to life can persist for two reasons, firstly because of not perceiving the ills of mind and body, and secondly by not realising that nibbāna is far superior. For example, it is like the case of a person living in a barren and desolate country which abounds with many dangers. He naturally thinks highly of his country and as a great attachment towards it since he has no real knowledge of the defects of his country and of the better condition of another place. If he comes to know the full facts, his country will no longer attract him and he will readily move to the new country. Similarly, it is essential to try to perceive the ill condition of the mind and body which constitutes this life and to personally realise the superiority of nibbāna with a view to removing totally the attachment to life. These knowledges can be acquired through the proper practice of meditation. Hence, everyone who is desirous of escaping from the ills of old age, death *etc.*, and of personally realising nibbāna should carry out the practice of meditation.

## Two Types of Meditation

There are two types of meditation:-

1. Tranquillity Meditation (*Samatha-kammaṭṭhāna*), and
2. Insight Meditation (*Vipassanā-kammaṭṭhāna*).

1. The practice of tranquillity meditation will develop the eight mundane attainments (*lokiya-samāpatti*) consisting of the four fine-material absorptions (*rūpa-jhāna*) and the four immaterial absorptions (*arūpa-jhāna*). Repeated exercise of these *jhānic* states will bring forth the following:-

a) Psychic Powers (*iddhividha-abhiññā*)— The power to become many from being one, and from being many to become one again. The power to pass through walls and mountains, just as if through the air. The power to walk on water without sinking, as if on the earth. The power to dive into the earth and rise up again, just as if in the water. The power to float cross-legged through the air, like a bird. The power to touch the sun and moon with the hand.

b) The Divine Ear (*dibbasota-abhiññā*)— The ability to hear sounds both heavenly and human, far and near.

c) Mind-reading (*cetopariya-abhiññā*)— The ability to know the thoughts of others.

d) Recollection of previous lives (*pubbenivāsa-abhiññā*)— The ability to recollect the incidents of one's past existences.

e) The Divine Eye (*dibbacakkhu-abhiññā*)— The ability to see all material forms and colours, whether far off or near, whether great or small.

Yet the possession of these attributes will not bring freedom from the ills of life:- old age, death, *etc.* On death with the *jhānic* states remaining fully intact, a person may be born in the Brahma realm where the life-span lasts for one world-cycle or two, four, eight *etc.*, as the case may be. At the end of his life-span he will die and be reborn either in the celestial or human world, where he, just as others, suffers the ills of life of old age, death, *etc.* Often, owing to unfavourable circumstances, he may be reborn in one of the four lower worlds and live in utmost suffering and misery. It is therefore evident that the practice of tranquillity meditation alone will not be a guarantee of absolute freedom from the ills of life.

2. Through the practice of insight meditation one is able to realise nibbāna and thereby win absolute freedom from the ills of life.

Insight meditation is subdivided into (a) One who takes up the basic exercise of tranquillity to realise nibbāna (*samatha-yānika*), and (b) One who directly carries out the direct practice of insight without the basic exercise of tranquillity to realise nibbāna (*suddha-vipassanā-yānika*).



# A Brief Description of Tranquillity Meditation

There are forty subjects of meditation,<sup>1</sup> any one of which may be taken up as a basic exercise of tranquillity for carrying out the practice of insight.

They are:–

1. Ten contemplation devices (*kasiṇa*),
2. Ten impurities (*asubha*),
3. Ten reflections (*anussati*),
4. Four divine abidings (*brahmavihāra*),
5. Four immaterial absorptions (*arūpa-jhāna*),
6. One reflection on the loathsomeness of food (*āhāre-paṭikūlasaññā*),
7. One analysis of the four elements (*catudhātuvaṅṅatthānaṃ*).

## The Ten Devices

1. The earth device (*pathavi kasiṇa*),
2. The water device (*āpo kasiṇa*),
3. The fire device (*tejo kasiṇa*),
4. The air device (*vāyo kasiṇa*),
5. The dark-blue device (*nīla kasiṇa*),
6. The yellow device (*pīta kasiṇa*),
7. The blood-red device (*lohita kasiṇa*),
8. The white device (*odāta kasiṇa*),
9. The light device (*āloka kasiṇa*), and
10. The bounded space device (*paricchinnākāsa kasiṇa*).

## The Ten Impurities

1. A bloated corpse (*uddhumātakaṃ*),
2. A black and blue discoloured corpse (*vinīlakaṃ*),
3. A festering corpse (*vipubbakaṃ*),
4. A corpse cut in the middle (*vicchiddakaṃ*),
5. A gnawed corpse (*vikkhāyitakaṃ*),
6. A scattered corpse (*vikkhittakaṃ*),
7. A hacked and scattered corpse (*hatavikkhittakaṃ*),
8. A bleeding corpse (*lohitakaṃ*),
9. A worm-infested corpse (*puḷuvakaṃ*), and
10. A skeleton (*aṭṭhikaṃ*).

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<sup>1</sup> Vism.110., Path of Purification p.104 ff.

## The Ten Reflections

1. Reflection on the attributes of the Buddha (*Buddhānussati*),
2. Reflection on the attributes of the Dhamma (*Dhammānussati*),
3. Reflection on the attributes of the Saṅgha (*Saṅghānussati*),
4. Reflection on one's own virtue (*silānussati*),
5. Reflection on one's own liberality (*cāgānussati*),
6. Reflection on one's own possession of the attributes of confidence (*saddhā*), virtue (*sīla*), learning (*suta*), liberality (*cāga*), and wisdom (*paññā*), which lead to rebirth as celestial beings, (*devatānussati*),
7. Reflection on nibbāna (*upasamānussati*),
8. Contemplation of the inevitability of death (*maraṇānussati*),
9. Contemplation on the thirty-two parts of the body, such as: head-hair, body-hair, nails, teeth, skin, etc., (*kāyaḡatāsati*), and
10. Contemplation of in-breathing and out-breathing (*ānāpānassati*).

## The Four Divine Abidings

1. Loving-kindness (*mettā*),
2. Compassion (*karuṇā*),
3. Altruistic joy in the attainments of others (*muditā*),
4. Perfect equanimity (*upekkhā*).

"... one resides with a mind full of loving-kindness pervading first one direction, then the second, then the third, then the fourth; just so above, below and all around; and everywhere identifying himself with all, he pervades the whole world with a mind full of loving-kindness, with a mind wide, developed, unbounded, free from hate and ill-will ... with a mind full of compassion .. of altruistic joy ... and of equanimity..." (M.i.438, Jīvaka Sutta).

## The Four Immaterial Absorptions

1. Contemplation of the realm of the infinity of space (*ākāśānañcāyatana*),
2. Contemplation of the realm of the infinity of consciousness (*viññāṇaṇcāyatana*),
3. Contemplation of the realm of nothingness (*ākāñcaññāyatana*), and
4. Contemplation of the realm of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*).

## The Earth Device

A person who, of the forty subjects of meditation, chooses the earth device (*pathavī-kasiṇa*) as the subject of contemplation, should look at a spot of earth

on the ground or at a round earth-device and contemplate, saying mentally 'pathavi, pathavi, pathavi' or 'earth, earth, earth.' After repeated contemplation for some time the vivid image of the earth-device will appear in the mind as if it were seen by the eye. This appearance of a mental image is called the acquired image (*uggaha-nimitta*). As soon as this image becomes fixed and steady in the mind one can go to any place and take up a posture of either sitting, walking, standing or lying down. One should then continue to contemplate on the 'uggaha-nimitta' by saying mentally, 'pathavi, pathavi' or 'earth, earth.' During the time of this contemplation it may happen that the mind does not remain fixed on its object, but often wanders to other objects:-

1. The mind often thinks of desirable objects. This is the hindrance of sensual desire (*kāmacchanda-nīvaraṇa*).

2. The mind often dwells on thoughts of despair and anger. This is the hindrance of ill-will (*vyāpāda-nīvaraṇa*).

3. There is slackness in contemplation and the mind is often dull and unclear. This is the hindrance of sloth and torpor (*thinamiddha-nīvaraṇa*).

4. The mind is often unsteady and restless, or the mind is often worried on recollecting past misdeeds in speech and body. This is the hindrance of restlessness and worry (*uddhacca-kukkucca-nīvaraṇa*).

5. The mind often dwells on thoughts about whether the contemplation which is being undertaken is the right method, whether it can bring beneficial results, or whether there is any hope of achieving any good results. This is the hindrance of sceptical doubt (*vicikicchā-nīvaraṇa*).

These five hindrances should be cut off as soon as they occur and the mind should be brought back at once to the acquired image, which should be contemplated again as 'earth, earth.' If one loses the acquired image, one should go back to where the original earth-device was kept and contemplate again 'earth, earth,' looking at the device until the acquired image is regained. Then one should return and proceed with the contemplation in any posture of sitting, standing, lying down, or walking.

When thus repeatedly contemplating the acquired image for a long time, the image assumes a very brilliant and crystalline appearance unlike the original. This is called the counterpart image (*paṭibhāga-nimitta*). All that time the mind is free from the hindrances. It stays as directed on the counterpart image. This state of mind is called 'neighbourhood concentration' (*upacāra-samādhi*). Now, by continually fixing the mind with this neighbourhood concentration on the counterpart image the mind reaches a state as if it sinks into the object and remains fixed in it. This state of

fixedness and steadiness of mind is called 'attainment concentration' (*appanā-samādhi*). There are four stages of attainment concentration: a) the first *jhāna*, b) the second *jhāna*, c) the third *jhāna*, and d) the fourth *jhāna*.

a) In the first *jhāna* five distinct constituents are present:—

1. Initial application (*vitakka*),
2. Sustained application (*vicāra*),
3. Rapture (*pīti*),
4. Bliss (*sukha*), and
5. One-pointedness (*ekaggatā*).

b) One who has already attained the first *jhāna*, seeing unsatisfactoriness in the first two constituents of initial and sustained application, proceeds with the contemplation to overcome them and succeeds in attaining the second *jhāna* where the three distinct constituents of rapture, bliss, and one-pointedness are present.

c) Again, seeing unsatisfactoriness in rapture, one proceeds with the contemplation to overcome it and succeeds in attaining the third *jhāna* where the two distinct constituents of bliss and one-pointedness are present.

d) Further, seeing unsatisfactoriness in bliss, one proceeds with the contemplation to overcome it and succeeds in attaining the fourth *jhāna* where the two distinct constituents of equanimity and one-pointedness are present.

This is the brief description of the contemplation of the earth device and the development of the four *jhānas*. The same applies to the remaining devices.

## The Ten Impurities

In the case of a person who, of the forty subjects of meditation, chooses the impurities as the subject of contemplation, one should look at a bloated corpse, or a discoloured corpse, *etc.*, and contemplate by saying mentally 'bloated corpse, bloated corpse,' 'discoloured corpse, discoloured corpse,' *etc.* One should then carry out the contemplation in the same manner as in the case of the earth device. The only difference is that the contemplation of these impurities will lead only the first *jhāna*.

The contemplation of the thirty-two parts of the body (*kāyagatāsati*) will also lead to the first *jhāna*. The eight reflections (*anussati*) consisting of the subjects of Recollection of the Attributes of the Buddha to Contemplation of the inevitability of death, reflection on the loathsomeness of food, and analysis of the four elements will lead to neighbourhood-concentration.

## The Four Divine Abidings

The three Divine Abidings of loving-kindness, compassion, and altruistic joy will lead to the stages of three lower *jhānas*, while those who have, through the contemplation of any of these three, already attained the stage of third *jhāna*, will also attain the fourth *jhāna* by carrying out the contemplation of the fourth Divine Abiding of Equanimity.

Those who have, through the contemplation of the ten devices, attained the stage of four material absorptions (*rūpa-jhāna*), will attain the respective stages of four immaterial absorptions (*arūpa-jhāna*) by carrying out in serial order the contemplation of the four immaterial subjects.

## Contemplation of In-breathing and Out-breathing

One who chooses contemplation of in-breathing and out-breathing (*ānāpānassati*) as the subject of contemplation should retire to a quiet place and seat himself cross-legged (or in any convenient posture that enables him to sit for a long time), with body erect, and then keep his mind fixed on the aperture of the nose. He will then come to know distinctly the feeling of touch at the tip of the nose or at the edge of the upper lip, which is caused by the constant flow of breathing in and out. This flow should be watched at the point of touch and contemplated by saying mentally, 'coming, going,' 'coming, going,' on every act of in-breathing and out-breathing respectively. The mind should not go along with the flow either on its inward or outward journey, but it should remain focused on the point of touch.

During this contemplation there will be many hindrances with which the mind wanders. These hindrances should not be followed any longer, but attention should be brought back to the point of touch and contemplation carried on as 'coming, going,' 'coming, going.'

By this means of continually watching the point of touch and carrying on the contemplation:-

1. The long in-breathing and out-breathing are clearly noticed when they are long.
2. The short in-breathing and out-breathing are clearly noticed when they are short.
3. Each course of soft in-breathing and out-breathing with its beginning, middle, and end is clearly noticed from its touching the tip of the nose to where it leaves the nose, and
4. The gradual change from the strong to the gentle form of in-breathing and out-breathing is clearly noticed.

As the in-breathing and out-breathing becomes more and more gentle it appears that it has vanished altogether. In such cases, time is generally wasted by trying to look for the objects of in-breathing and out-breathing, by trying to investigate the cause of vanishing, and finally by remaining idle without carrying on the contemplation. There is, however, no need to waste time: if the mind is fixed attentively either on the tip of the nose or the upper lip, the gentle flow of in and out-breathing will reappear and will be distinctly perceptible.

By thus proceeding with the continued contemplation of in and out-breathing it will be visualised in some peculiar forms or shapes. The following are those mentioned in the Visuddhimagga:—

“To some the in-breathing and out-breathing appears like a star or a cluster of gems or a cluster of pearls, to others with a rough touch like that of a cotton stalk or a peg made of heartwood, to others like a long braided string or a wreath of flowers or a puff of smoke, to others like a stretched-out cobweb or a film of cloud or a lotus flower or a chariot wheel or the moon’s disk or the sun’s disk...”It is said that the variety in the forms or objects is due to the differences in perception (*saññā*) of the individuals. This peculiar form of objects is the counterpart image. The concentration which is then developed with the counterpart image is called neighbourhood concentration. On continuing the contemplation with the aid of neighbourhood concentration then the stage of attainment concentration (*appanā-samādhi*) of the four *rūpa-jhānas* is developed.

This is the brief description of the preliminary practice of tranquillity by a ‘*samatha-yānika*’ who chooses tranquillity meditation as the basis for realising nibbāna.

Those who desire to practise *Vipassanā* should, in the first place, be equipped with a knowledge, either in brief or in detail, of the facts that living beings consist of two constituents of materiality (*rūpa*) and mentality (*nāma*), that the body and mind are formed due to cause and effect and that, as they are in a constant state of flux, they are impermanent (*anicca*), unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), and devoid of self (*atta*).

A person with the proper knowledge mentioned above should, in the first place, induce the *jhāna* which he has already attained and then contemplate on it. He should then proceed by contemplating continuously the sensations such as seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching,

thinking, etc., as they occur clearly at any of the six sense-doors. If he feels exhausted by having to carry on continually the contemplation of these varied objects (*pakiñṇaka-saṅkhārā*), he should again induce the *jhāna* by making strong determination that the *jhāna* may remain for 15 or 30 minutes. When the *jhāna* passes away he should then immediately contemplate on that *jhāna* and afterwards proceed by contemplating continuously the sensations as they occur at any of the six sense-doors. This alternate procedure of inducing *jhāna* and then proceeding with the contemplation of sensations at the six sense-doors should be carried out repeatedly. When the *Vipassanā-samādhi* is sufficiently strong he will be able to carry on the contemplation continuously day and night without feeling any strain.

At this stage it is distinctly perceived as a matter of course at every moment of contemplation that the body and mind are two separate things which are joined together. It is also perceived that the object and the mind which directly knows the object rise and pass away at the very moment of the contemplation. It is therefore understood that “they are clearly proved to be impermanent.” that “they are ill without any pleasant qualities or reliability,” and that “they are merely a process of arising and passing away of phenomena that do not consist of enduring entity or soul (*atta*).”

With the full development of the factual knowledge of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, the insight of the path and its fruition arises and he or she realises nibbāna.

This is the description in brief of the practice by way of ‘*samatha-yānika*’ for the purpose of realising nibbāna.

## A Brief Description of Insight Meditation

With the proper knowledge mentioned above one who desires to practise ‘*Vipassanā*’ should retire to a quiet place and seat himself cross-legged or in any convenient manner that enables him to sit for a long time, with body erect, and then contemplate by fixing his attention on the physical and mental phenomena which are known as the aggregates of attachment (*upādānak-khandhā*), and which are distinctly arising in his body. These phenomena should be continuously contemplated on every occasion of their arising.

The aggregates of attachment are those which are distinctly perceived at every moment of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking of ideas.

At the moment of seeing, both the visual object and the eye, where seeing takes place are perceived. These two things are of the material group. They

are neither pleasant nor a person. Yet those who do not contemplate the very moment of their occurrence do not understand that they pass away immediately and are not permanent; that they are originating and passing away relentlessly and are therefore unsatisfactory; that they are neither a self nor a person, but are not-self in that they are subject to cause and effect in arising and passing away. Because the material group forms the objects of wrong view and attachment they are called the material aggregate of attachment (*rūpupādānakkhandha*).

Eye-consciousness (*cakkhu-viññāṇa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*) of visual object, and exertion to see visual objects or mental activities (*saṅkhārā*) are also distinctly perceived at the moment of seeing. They are merely of the mental group. They are neither pleasant, nor self, nor a person. Yet those who do not notice each and every arising of these phenomena, do not understand that they are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. They therefore consider these mental elements to be pleasant and are attached to them. They egotistically consider, "I am seeing," "I am feeling," "I am perceiving," "I am looking intently," and they are attached to them. These are the very reasons why those mental groups are respectively called '*viññāṇupādānakkhandha*,' '*vedanupādānakkhandha*,' '*saññupādānakkhandha*' and '*saṅkhārupādānakkhandha*.' This is how the five aggregates of attachment (*upādānakkhandhā*) are distinctly perceived at the very moment of seeing the visual object through the eye.

Similarly, the five aggregates are perceived distinctly at the very moment of hearing the sound through the ear, smelling the odour through the nose, knowing the taste through the tongue, feeling of the tactile sensations through the body and knowing the mental objects through the mind-base. However, in the case of mental objects, there may be both material and mental elements.

Though the material and mental phenomena are arising distinctly at each of the moments of seeing, hearing *etc.*, in their respective spheres, it is not possible for a beginner to contemplate them in the serial order of their arising from the very start of the practice of insight meditation. The practice is started with the contemplation of the most outstanding objects present in the body. It is just as in schools, where simple lessons are generally taught at the beginning of one's studies.

Of the two phenomena of mind and matter, the material phenomena, being more outstanding, should be chosen as the primary object of contemplation for insight meditation. Again, of the various classes of material phenomena, the bodily contact (*bhūtarūpa*) — which is more



outstanding than the objects of sense-doors (*upādārūpa*) of seeing, hearing, smelling, and tasting — should be taken up as the primary objects of contemplation at the beginning of the practice.

Therefore, to notice the particular outstanding bodily-contact, attention should be fixed on the sitting posture of the body and the continuous contemplation carried out by making a mental note as 'sitting, sitting.' While thus engaged in contemplation the distinct feeling of bodily contact on the buttocks or legs or any part of the body will be noticed. This particular feeling of bodily contact should be taken up as an additional object jointly with 'sitting' and continually contemplated as 'touching, sitting.' If this manner of contemplation is, however, found to be difficult to begin with, then the attention should be fixed at the contact of the in and out-breathing and contemplation carried out there as 'touching, touching.' If it is still found to be difficult to carry out this contemplation of 'touching' then the attention should be fixed on the bodily motion of the abdomen caused by rising (expanding) and falling (contracting) due to the flow of in and out-breathing.

This is an illustration to show the manner of contemplation. Firstly, attention should be fixed on the abdomen. Then it will be felt that the abdomen is expanding and contracting — there are always bodily movements present in the abdomen. If, at the beginning of the practice, the movement of rising and falling is not clear by the mere act of fixing the attention on the abdomen, one or both hands should be placed on the abdomen. Suspension of breath, and quick or deep breathing should not be done. The natural course of normal breathing should be maintained. As the abdomen is felt rising it should be contemplated by saying mentally 'rising.'

Attention should be fixed on the gradual rising step by step of the abdomen from start to finish. As the abdomen is felt falling, it should be contemplated as 'falling.' Attention should be fixed on the gradual falling step by step of the abdomen from start to finish.

**For particular attention** it may be mentioned here that the words 'rising' and 'falling' should not be repeated by mouth, but they should be repeated mentally. In fact, words are not of real importance. To know the actual movements of the abdomen and the bodily motion present therein is of real importance. However, if the contemplation is carried on by the simple act of mental observation without the act of repeating the words mentally, the contemplation will be casual and ineffective and with many drawbacks such as that the attention fails to reach closely enough to the object to which it is directed, that the objects are not clearly distinguished and perceived

separately and that the necessary energy deteriorates. Hence it is directed that contemplation should be carried out by repeating mentally the necessary words on the respective objects.

While being occupied with the contemplation as 'rising, falling' there may be many occasions when the mind is found wandering to other objects. These wandering mental states should be contemplated as they arise.

**For Illustration:** If it is found that the mind wanders to objects other than those to which it is directed, it should be contemplated as 'wandering,' if the mind intends to do something it should be contemplated as 'intending,' if it is reflecting it should be contemplated as 'reflecting.' In the case of wanting something it should be contemplated as 'wanting;' in the case of being pleased or angry or disappointed, it should be contemplated as 'pleased,' 'angry,' or 'disappointed,' respectively, and in the case of feeling lazy or happy it should be contemplated as 'lazy' or 'happy' as the case may be. The contemplation should be carried out repeatedly until these wavering mental states cease. Then the contemplation should revert to the rising and falling of the abdomen and carried on continually.

If any disagreeable sensations such as being tired in limbs or feeling hot or feeling painful *etc.*, arise in the body, attention should be fixed on the spot of the sensation and contemplation carried on as 'tired, tired,' 'hot, hot,' or 'painful, painful,' as the case may be. On the ceasing of the disagreeable sensations the contemplation of 'rising, falling' should be reverted to.

However, when the painful sensations are so acute that they are unbearable, then the posture of the body and the position of hands and legs have to be changed to ease the situation. In this case of changing, also, attention should be fixed on the outstanding major movements of the body and limbs and contemplation carried on as 'bending,' 'stretching,' 'swaying,' 'moving,' 'raising,' 'putting down' *etc.*, in the successive order of the changing process. When the change is completed then the contemplation of 'rising, falling' should be reverted to.

At times when anything is being looked at it should be contemplated as 'looking, seeing.' If anything is seen without being looked at, it should be contemplated as 'seeing, seeing.' When one happens to be listening to something it should be contemplated as 'listening, hearing.' If anything is heard without being listened to, it should be contemplated as 'hearing, hearing.' If a reflecting thought follows then it should be contemplated as 'reflecting, reflecting.' Then the contemplation of the original objects should be reverted to.

In the case of changing from the sitting posture to that of standing and changing to the lying posture, contemplation should be carried out by

fixing the attention on every outstanding major movement of the body and limbs in the successive order of the changing process.

In the case of walking, contemplation should be carried out by fixing the attention on the moving of each step from the moment of lifting the foot up to the moment of putting it down and by making a mental note as 'walking, walking' or 'moving forward, moving forward' or 'lifting, moving forward, putting down.'

**In summary** it may be mentioned that the contemplation should be carried out on all actions of body and limbs such as bending, stretching, raising, moving *etc.*, to perceive them in their true form as they occur. The contemplation should be carried out on all physical sensations and mental feelings to know their true nature as they arise. The contemplation should be carried out on all thoughts, ideas, reflections, *etc.*, to know their true nature as they arise. If there are no outstanding objects of specific nature to be contemplated while remaining quietly in the sitting or lying posture, contemplation should be carried out by always fixing the attention on any of the bodily contacts. Instructions are, therefore, given here to use the rising and falling movements of the abdomen — which are easy to explain and easy to contemplate — as the primary and main objects of contemplation.

However, there are two other cases of contemplation already mentioned above, namely (i) the contemplation of sitting and touching, and (ii) the contemplation of the touch of in and out-breathing, either of which may be chosen, if so desired, as the primary and main objects in the contemplation.

On achieving the high state of contemplation where it is possible to contemplate on any objects as they arise, there is no need at all to go back to the primary and main objects. Contemplation should be carried out on every moment of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, knowing the bodily contacts, thinking, ideas *etc.*, in the order of their arising.

The disciple who has developed, by this means of continuous contemplation, strong enough concentration and insight will personally perceive a rising and passing away of the mind many times in a second. However, a disciple who has just begun the practice will not be able to perceive such a quick succession. It is just like the case of a person, who at the beginning of study, cannot read as fast and well as one who has already advanced in studies. Nevertheless, a disciple should endeavour to perceive the rising and passing away of the mental states not less than once in every second in the beginning of the practice.

This is the basic summary of the practice of insight meditation.

## The Direct Practice of Insight

In spite of his endeavour to carry on the contemplation as mentioned above, the disciple will either fail or forget to observe many of the bodily actions and mental activities at the beginning of the practice. As pointed out in the section on tranquillity meditation there will be many hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*), which cause the mind to wander to other objects. In the case of tranquillity meditation there is no particular need to contemplate the wandering mental states, but they should be cut off and the original object contemplated continuously, while in the case of insight meditation the contemplation should be carried out on these wandering mental states also. After contemplating like this, the contemplation should revert to the original objects of 'rising, falling.' This is one of the points on which the procedure for tranquillity meditation differs from that for insight meditation as far as dispelling the hindrances is concerned.

In the case of tranquillity meditation one has to contemplate continuously on the original object to make one's mind fixed on that object only. It is not necessary to observe any other mental or physical phenomena. So it is not necessary to contemplate on such hindrances as wandering mental states, which arise occasionally. It is only necessary to dispel them as they arise.

In insight meditation, however, all physical and mental phenomena that occur at the six sense-doors have to be observed. So if and when such hindrances as the mind contemplating something other than the original object of contemplation or the mind entertaining greed, covetousness, *etc.*, they also have to be contemplated. If they are not contemplated, the wrong view and attachment that they are permanent, pleasant, and self will arise. Merely disregarding them is not enough as in the case of tranquillity. The aim of insight will be accomplished only if one contemplates them to know their real nature and characteristics and to be detached from them.

When the wandering mental state is contemplated repeatedly in this manner for a long time there will hardly be any wandering. As soon as it wanders to other objects the mental state is immediately noticed and contemplated, and then it ceases to wander any longer. In some cases it will be found that contemplation is being carried on without interruption because the mental state is recognised as soon as it begins to arise.

At this level of contemplation it is found that the mind that is contemplating, and its object always come together closely and fixedly. This fixedness of the mind on its object is momentary concentration of insight (*vipassanā-khaṇika-samādhi*).

The mind is now free from sensual lust and other hindrances and is therefore on the same level as neighbourhood-concentration mentioned in the section on tranquillity. As the mind is no longer mixed up with any hindrances that cause the mind to wander, but is purely composed of contemplation, it is called purity of mind (*citta visuddhi*).

## The Development of Insight Knowledge

Then the physical phenomena such as rising, falling, bending, stretching *etc.*, which are being contemplated, are perceived at every moment of contemplation in separate forms without being mixed up with the mind contemplating them or with other material phenomena. The mental phenomena, such as contemplating, thinking, seeing, hearing *etc.*, are also perceived at every moment of contemplating in separate states without being mixed up with either material phenomena or other mental phenomena. At every moment of breathing, the body and the mind that knows the body are perceived distinctly and separately as two. The distinguishing knowledge of physical and mental phenomena as two separate processes is **analytical knowledge of body and mind** (*nāma-rūpa-pariccheda-ñāṇa*).

On having developed this insight for a good number of times in the course of continuous contemplation, there arises a clear understanding that there are only mind and corporeality. The body has no faculty of knowing rising, falling, bending, moving, *etc.*, whereas the mind has the faculty of contemplating, thinking, seeing, hearing, *etc.* Apart from these two factors there is no self. This understanding is called **purity of view** (*ditṭhi visuddhi*).

On proceeding further with the contemplation it is perceived that the material and mental phenomena are arising in the body as effects of their respective causes.

**For illustration:** The disciple perceives the fact that because of the mind intending to bend or stretch or move or change the posture, there arise the actions of bending, stretching, moving or changing; because of the fluctuation in temperature, there are always changes in the physical condition either by being cold or hot; and because of the partaking of food there always arises new physical energy. Again, he or she perceives the fact that, because there are present eye and visual object, ear and sound, *etc.*, there arise seeing, hearing, *etc.*, and because of attention being directed, the mind reaches its object. Again, he perceives the fact that, because of the presence of ignorance or delusion, which views life as beautiful and happy, and of craving, all kinds of deeds are thought of

and done, and because of the attachment to those deeds that have been done, there arise, in successive series, new moments of consciousness. Again, he or she perceives that death is nothing but the passing away of the last in the successive series of this kind of consciousness, and birth is the arising of a new consciousness in the successive series of this kind, dependent on a new corporeal formation. This distinguishing knowledge of the dependent origination of cause and effect is **knowledge by discerning conditionality** (*paccaya-pariggaha-ñāṇa*).

On understanding the fact of dependent origination he or she will come to the conclusion that “life in the past was a formation of materiality and mentality, which were dependent on their respective causes and that there will be a similar process of life in the future.” This purity of view is called **purity by overcoming doubt** (*kaṅkhāvitaraṇa visuddhi*).

Before developing the right knowledge of the fact that “life consists of body and mind dependent on their respective causes.” there were many sceptical doubts whether there was ‘I’ in the past, whether ‘I’ come into existence only in the present or whether ‘I’ will continue to exist in the future by holding the view that the formation of body and mind are atta or self. Now these sceptical doubts cannot arise as they have been overcome.

On proceeding further with the contemplation it is perceived that the physical and mental phenomena are arising and passing away at every moment of contemplation. This is **knowledge by comprehension of impermanence** (*anicca-sammasana-ñāṇa*).

On perceiving the fact that the physical and mental phenomena are constantly arising and passing away — that they are constantly afflicted by arising and passing away — they are considered to be neither pleasant nor reliable, but terrible ills. This is knowledge by comprehension of unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha-sammasana-ñāṇa*).

On perceiving the fact that the physical and mental phenomena do not, as a rule, follow the dictates of one’s will but are arising and passing away in accordance with their own nature and relative conditioning, it is realised that they are not atta or self. This is knowledge by comprehension of non-self (*anatta-sammasana-ñāṇa*).

After having reflected on these facts as long as he wishes, the disciple proceeds with the contemplation without any further reflection. He then perceives clearly the beginning of every object of his contemplation. He also perceives clearly the coming to an end of each object of his contemplation as if it were cut off clearly.

## The Corruptions of Insight

At this juncture there generally arise many strange experiences, such as:-

1. Mental visions of brilliant lights,
2. Rapturous feelings,
3. Calm feelings,
4. Devotional feelings towards the Buddha, Dhamma and Saṅgha,
5. Great energy in carrying out the contemplation,
6. Happiness,
7. The quick and clear perceiving of objects,
8. The capability in carrying out mindfulness without missing any object,
9. Automatic contemplation without particular effort,
10. Feeling of subtle pleasure in the contemplation.

The disciple therefore, is so elated that he or she cannot keep silent, but generally speaks about his or her experiences. He or she often considers that he or she has already attained enlightenment. This is the initial stage of **knowledge of arising and passing away** (*udayabbaya-ñāṇa*). However, it is a wrong path.

Then the disciple decides that the experiences of seeing mental visions and other feelings are not the actual attainment of enlightenment, and that the correct method of contemplation to attain enlightenment is only constant observation of whatever arises. He or she comes to this decision in accordance with what he or she has learnt from the text or in accordance with the instructions of his or her teachers.

This decision is **purity by knowledge and vision of what is path and not-path** (*maggāmagga-ñāṇa-dassana visuddhi*).

Having come to this decision and proceeding further with the contemplation, those experiences of seeing mental visions and other feelings gradually decrease and the perceiving of the objects becomes clearer. The arising and passing away of material phenomena at each movement in the course of a single bending or stretching of the arm of the leg or in the course of a single step, fragment by fragment, without reaching from one stage of the movement to another stage thereof, will then be clearly perceived. This is final or mature knowledge of arising and passing away. It is flawless as it is free from the corruptions of insight (*upakkilesa*).

When this knowledge has gained enough strength, the perceiving of the objects is found to be faster. The ending or vanishing of the objects is more clearly perceived than their beginning or arising. The objects of contemplation appear to be vanishing. Forms and shapes of hand, leg, head, body *etc.*, are no longer perceived. On vanishing of body and mind is

perceived at every moment of contemplation. Even the contemplating mind is perceived to be vanishing along with the object of its contemplation at every moment. This knowledge of the process of vanishing, in pairs, of the mind and its object is **knowledge of dissolution** (*bhaṅga-ñāṇa*).

On perceiving the process ever vanishing in pairs of mind and its object there arises the knowledge realising the dreadful nature of things. This is **awareness of fearfulness** (*bhaya-ñāṇa*).

Then there arises the knowledge realising the faults and defects of material and mental phenomena. This is **knowledge of misery** (*ādinava-ñāṇa*).

Then there arises the knowledge realising the unattractive and boring nature of things. This is **knowledge of disgust** (*nibbidā-ñāṇa*).

When it is realised that it would be well only if there were no physical and mental phenomena which are constantly coming into being and passing away in this manner, there arises the knowledge looking for an escape from suffering on account of these phenomena. This is **knowledge of desire for deliverance** (*muñcitu-kamyatā-ñāṇa*).

On further contemplation with special anxiety for an escape there arises a clear perception of the characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self with special emphasis on that of unsatisfactoriness. This is **knowledge of re-observation** (*paṭisaṅkhā-ñāṇa*).

When this knowledge of re-observation is mature, contemplation proceeds automatically without special effort for perception and knowledge. It proceeds contemplating on objects with equanimity — just to take notice of them without digressing into the pleasantness or unpleasantness. This contemplation is so peaceful and effortless and it proceeds knowing its objects so automatically that it may extend over one hour, two hours or three hours; and even though it may last so long, there will not be tiredness or exhaustion. This perception which arises for a long time realising the real nature of the objects of contemplation automatically and without going into the pleasantness and unpleasantness thereof is **knowledge of equanimity about formations** (*saṅkhārupekkhā-ñāṇa*).

Out of this contemplation that proceeds automatically and by its own momentum realising its objects, there arises knowledge that is specially quick and active. This knowledge that rises straightaway towards a noble path, which is also known as emergence (*vuṭṭhāna*), is **insight leading to emergence** (*vuṭṭhāna-gāminī-vipassanā-ñāṇa*).

That special knowledge arises realising that physical and mental phenomena that appear at the six sense-doors at that very moment are impermanent,



suffering, and not-self. The last of such knowledges is **knowledge of adaptation** (*anuloma-ñāṇa*), which consists of three impulse moments (*javana*) called preparation (*parikamma*), approach (*upacāra*), and adaptation (*anuloma*). This is the insight knowledge that fits in both with the preceding eight insight knowledges and the subsequent path knowledge (*magga-ñāṇa*).

Insights from the mature stage of arising and passing away to the knowledge of adaptation are collectively known as **purity by knowledge and vision of the course of practice** (*paṭipadā-ñāṇa-dassana-visuddhi*).

After the knowledge of adaptation, maturity knowledge (*gotrabhu-ñāṇa*) arises, which has nibbāna as its object where the ills and miseries connected with the physical and mental phenomena cease entirely. This is knowledge which cuts the lineage of worldlings (*puthujjana*) and enters the lineage of the noble ones (*ariya*).

Then the **path knowledge** of Stream-winning (*Sotāpatti magga*) and the **fruition knowledge** (*phala ñāṇa*) arise, which realise nibbāna. The path knowledge is called **purity by knowledge and vision** (*ñāṇa-dassana-visuddhi*).

Path and fruition knowledge do not last even for a second. Then there arises reflection of the particular experiences of the path, its fruition, and nibbāna. This is **knowledge of reviewing** (*paccavekkhana-ñāṇa*).

One who has acquired this knowledge of reviewing according to this procedure, is a Stream-winner (*Sotāpanna*).

The Stream-winner is free from the following three fetters (*saṃyojana*):-

1. The wrong view that the aggregates of physical and mental phenomena are an ego or a self, *i.e.* personality-belief (*sakkāya-ditṭhi*).
2. Any sceptical doubt (*vicikicchā*) about the Buddha, Dhamma, Saṅgha, or the discipline.
3. Belief that methods other than that of cultivating the qualities of the Eightfold Noble Path and developing insight into the Four Noble Truths will bring eternal peace, *i.e.* belief in rites and rituals (*śilabbataparāmāsa*).

Furthermore, the observation of the five precepts remains pure and absolute as a matter of course. For these reasons a Stream-winner is secure from being reborn in the unhappy existences of the four lower worlds, and will lead a happy life in the human and celestial realms for seven existences at the most, and during this period will attain Arahantship and *parinibbāna*.

When a Stream-winner carries out the practice of insight to gain the attainment of fruition (*phala-samāpatti*), he or she will reach that state and remain in it for the duration of five or ten minutes, or half an hour, or an

hour. When well-trained in the practice of gaining fruition, he or she will reach it quickly and remain in it for a whole day, a whole night or longer.

If he or she contemplates the aggregates of attachment in the same way as already mentioned to realise the higher paths and fruitions, insight knowledge will develop from the stage of arising and passing away in the same serial order as before and on full maturity he or she will realise nibbāna with the path and fruition of Once-returning (*Sakadāgāmi magga phala*), and will become a Once-returner (*Sakadāgāmi*). He or she is then free from coarse sensual craving (*kāma-rāga*) and ill-will (*paṭigha*). He or she will lead a happy life in the world of human and celestial beings for two existences at the most and will attain Arahantship and nibbāna during this period.

When a Once-returner carries out the practice of insight to gain the attainment of fruition he or she will reach that state. When he or she carries out the practice to realise the higher paths and fruitions, insight knowledge will develop in the same serial order as before and on full maturity he or she will realise nibbāna with the path and fruition of Non-returning (*Anāgāmi magga phala*) and become a Non-returner (*Anāgāmi*). He or she is then totally free from two more fetters: sensual craving and ill-will. He or she will not be reborn in the sensual world, but only in the fine material (*rūpa-loka*) or immaterial realms (*arūpa-loka*) where he or she will become an Arahant and realise *parinibbāna*.

When a Non-returner carries out the practice of insight to gain the attainment of fruition he or she will reach that state. When he or she carries out the practice for the higher paths and fruitions, insight knowledge will develop in the same serial order and on full maturity he or she will realise nibbāna with the path of Arahantship and its fruition (*Arahatta magga phala*) and become an Arahant.

An Arahant is free from the remaining five fetters:-

1. Craving for fine-material existence (*rūpa-rāga*),
2. Craving for immaterial existence (*arūpa-rāga*),
3. Conceit (*māna*),
4. Restlessness (*uddhacca*), and
5. Ignorance or delusion (*avijjā*) together with all defilements (*kilesa*).

At the end of the span of the present life he will attain nibbāna. As there is no more rebirth for him after the *parinibbāna* he is absolutely free from suffering the woes of old age, ill-health, death, etc.

It is with a view to this freedom that the question in the beginning of this article: "What is the purpose of carrying out the practice of meditation?" has been given the following answer:-

“The practice of meditation is carried out for the purpose of realising nibbāna and thereby escaping from the ills of life in the form of old age, ill-health, death, and so forth.”

Therefore all those who earnestly wish to realise nibbāna and thereby gain absolute freedom should carry out the practice of meditation according to the instructions given here.

May all be able to practice meditation and attain nibbāna.

