



PANDITARAMA
Saraniya Dhamma Meditation
Centre (Manchester)

Satipatthana Vipassana



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Satipaṭṭhāna Vipassanā Meditation

This meditation practice was developed by the Most Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw of Burma.

What are vipassanā meditation and its aim?

Samatha and vipassanā meditation

There are many types of meditation techniques according to the objects used to develop concentration. But, basically, they can be grouped into two categories, namely tranquillity meditation, samatha bhāvanā and insight meditation, vipassanā bhāvanā.

Briefly, in tranquillity meditation, samatha, we take one and a single object, and we focus our attention on it. This object can be the qualities of the Buddha, the thoughts of loving-kindness, the notion of death, the loathsomeness of the body, the breath, the earth element, etc... The Buddha has taught 40 kinds of samatha object. So, we contemplate one of these objects again and again; we develop attention, sati, build up concentration, samādhi. And then we can experience calmness, joy and rapture; we can enjoy very deep peace and bliss. And that's it. The aim of tranquillity meditation is only to gain tranquillity, thus its name 'tranquillity' meditation, samatha.

In insight meditation, vipassanā, attention, sati, concentration, samādhi, zest, pīti, tranquillity, passadhi, are as well developed. However, that is not all. What is interesting with vipassanā is that we can realise knowledge or wisdom, paññā. We can gain understanding. Understanding what? Not concept, not external phenomena, but understanding ourselves. And what are we composed of? Of matter and mind. So we practice in order to comprehend our body and mind, that is to say to discover and know the true nature of our body and mind. Vipassanā meditation is thus a practice for self-research. Vipassanā meditation is the endeavour to know the true nature of the physical and mental phenomena that compose us. What are we made up of? We are made up of only mind and matter. So we need to strive to know these mind and matter as they really are. This is the very art of vipassanā meditation or insight meditation. And so how to proceed to understand this body and mind? Simply by looking attentively at them, observing them, giving them full attention in the present moment.

Vipassanā, understanding the true nature of mind and body

Let us take the example of a lake. If the surface of the lake is agitated by violent winds, or is covered by a layer of seaweeds, could we perceive clearly what is in the water? Certainly not. But, if the surface of the pond becomes calm and is clear from any algae, then, when we look in the water, we may distinguish what is in the lake: how many fishes, what kind of fishes, the colour of the coral, whether it is deep or not. So we gain knowledge about the nature of the pond.

Likewise, when our body and mind calm down, and we observe them, we can see clearly their nature. With the magnifying glass of concentration, samādhi, we observe this body and

mind, and we can understand them as they really are. Their true nature is revealed. Thus, with the power of concentration, samādhi, knowledge or wisdom, paññā, unfolds. We can realise insight in what we are. Thus, the name insight meditation. Insight in what? In the true nature of our body and mind, of all the physical and mental processes which compose us.

“True nature” means the nature of impermanence, the nature of insatisfactoriness, and the nature of insubstantiality (or the absence of an unchanging self or soul). It is important to see these three characteristics of phenomena so that you can have a correct view of things, so that you may have less attachment to mind and body. Then gradually, you will be able to weaken the hold of mental defilements that prevent enlightenment.

Can we cultivate insight?

When mindfulness is continuous, concentration, samādhi builds up. When samādhi becomes mature, wisdom or insight knowledge, paññā develops. Indeed, insight knowledge, paññā cannot be cultivated directly. It is simply the fruit resulting from mature concentration, samādhi. When concentration is strong and deep enough, wisdom arises by itself.

Sitting meditation

The posture

→ *cross-legged posture*

Regarding the sitting posture, there are several ways of sitting. You can choose the one that fits you best. What matters is that you can sit quite comfortably and for a long time without moving. If you can, the full lotus is a good posture. There is as well the half-lotus with one foot placed on the thigh of the opposite leg. You can also sit cross-legged, with the legs folded and placed flat on the cushion one in front of the other; so they are not interlocked, pressing against each other. This is the Burmese style. It is quite comfortable and enables you to sit a long time. For yogis who have health problems or elderly ones, sitting on a bench in a kneeling position or on a chair is also ok. In that case, it is better not to lean against the backrest. Then, you will remain more alert. Otherwise, you may easily fall asleep.

→ *Straight back*

Close your eyes and keep your back straight. If you let your back bending forward for a while, the spine will be compressed. Painful sensations may appear very soon. And you won't be able to sit for a long time. So, be careful to maintain your back straight all along the sitting. However, check that there is no tension in your back or shoulders. Keep the posture not too loose, not too tight.

→ *Hands*

As for the hands, you can have them resting on your lap, the right palm on the left one. Some yogis prefer to leave them apart, one on each thigh.

The primary or home object

Where? The abdomen

So we explained that the objects to be observed are all the physical and mental phenomena that compose us. However, in the beginning, if we were asked to contemplate them, we

would not know what to start with. Between physical and mental processes, the physical ones are gross; the mental ones are much more subtle, therefore, more difficult to see. That's why, it is good to start by observing physical phenomena, matter. There are four great elements in the body: the earth element, *phatavī dhātu*, the water element, *āpo dhātu*, the temperature element, *tejo dhātu* and the wind element *vāyo dhātu*. And we observe these four elements as a basis for contemplating the body. Among those four elements, the wind element *vāyo dhātu* is very obvious and easy to observe. That's why, we will take here the wind element as our main object. Then the wind element is present in many places of the body: there is air in the intestines, the in-and-out breath, the wind in the limbs... In some meditation methods, we take the in-and-out breath at the nostrils as object of observation. Here, as the Most Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw instructed, we observe the breath in the abdomen area. Indeed, in the belly, the air element is very much obvious. And many different sensations, which are the nature of the air element, can be experienced in that area.

How?

So, just breath naturally. Do not control the breath in any way. Do not slow it down or speed it up intentionally, or make it stronger. Simply allow it to come and go naturally. Then, simply put your attention on the abdomen while breathing in and out. And be aware of the various sensations and movements, which may occur in the abdomen during the in-breath and the out-breath. When breathing in, the air comes in, and the abdomen rises or inflates; when breathing out, the air goes out, and the abdomen falls or deflates. Try to observe the rising and falling movement of the abdomen from the very beginning through the middle to the end.

In the beginning, (and when concentration is still weak), while watching the rise and fall of the abdomen, you can say silently and gently in your mind, 'rising, rising', and 'falling, falling' to accompany the observation. Actually, the words used are not important. You may label 'rising' and 'falling' while watching an in-and-out movement. It doesn't matter. What is essential is the awareness, the contemplation in itself, not the labelling or naming. But at some stages of the practise, it is a useful tool. It helps to direct the mind towards the object, to focus on the object attentively and precisely. When your mindfulness becomes sharp and powerful, you will be able to note without labelling.

While noting rising and falling, you may be aware of the shape of the abdomen rising and falling, moving up and down, or in and out. This kind of awareness or knowing is quite valuable. Sometimes, we don't even know whether it is the rising or the falling, which is occurring.

Then, there are also a variety of sensations, which you may experience along with the in-breath and out-breath: stiffness, tension, hardness, softness, relaxation, pushing, pulling movement, vibration....

If the movements of the abdomen are not so clear, you can place the palm of your hand on the belly.

The rising and falling, the movements and sensations in the abdomen are called the primary object or home object. Here, to be aware, to note, observe, to contemplate, to be present mean the same thing: namely applying the attention on the object of observation or putting the observing mind on it.

Why observing the movements of the abdomen?

Why does the rising occur? The rising is caused by the air inhaled. Actually, the most important point that I would like you to know is that we observe the four great elements as a basis for contemplating the body: the earth element, *phatavī dhātu*, the fire element, *tejo dhātu*, the air element, *vāyo dhātu* and the water element *āpo dhātu*. And among these four great elements, which one do we want to know when observing the rising of the abdomen? The air element, *vāyo dhātu*. Indeed, the air element, *vāyo dhātu* causes the rising to occur. So we observe the rising and falling of the abdomen to know the true nature of the air element, *vāyo dhātu*. Indeed, how to see the true nature of the air element? This is rather difficult. That's why to do so, we need to rely on an object, which is easy to see, i.e. the rise and fall of the abdomen. This is the wind element. For example, if we want to know whether the wind is blowing or not, what do we look at? We can look at the leaves on the tree and check whether they are moving or not. From that we can find out whether the wind is blowing or not and whether it is strong or weak. So, we take the four great elements as a basis to observe the physical phenomena that compose us. And we use the movements of the abdomen as a medium to know the true nature of the air element, *vāyo dhātu*. Indeed, the rising is produced by the pushing of the air inhaled. And when our concentration and wisdom, *samādhi* and *paññā* are still weak, we cannot perceive and know directly the true nature of the air element yet. Therefore, we need to take the abdomen as a base to observe it. So when noting 'rising' and 'falling', we may be only aware of a rising and falling movement. There is awareness, knowing. Then, our awareness can become wider; and while noting 'rising', we may experience stiffness, tension, tightness, pushing movement... It doesn't matter if it is not our experience in the beginning. Then, later on, when our concentration deepens, we will be aware of these sensations of tightness, stiffness, tension and pushing. These sensations are the very nature of the air element, *vāyo dhātu*.

The rising and falling of the abdomen, and other objects like heat, cold... are physical phenomena, matter. Thus, the observation of these objects is called contemplation of the body, *kāyanupassanā vipassanā*.

Secondary objects

wandering mind and emotions: citta

As you try to focus the mind on the movements of the abdomen, you will find that it is very difficult to do, even for a short time. Quickly, the mind may wander. It may go to the past (memories) or to the future (planning). There are various types of wandering, like reflection, imagination, fantasies, analysis and so on. When this happens, kindly shift your attention to the wandering mind. And take it as your new object of observation. You may label it as 'wandering', 'thinking', 'imagining' or 'planning' according to the nature of the wandering.

No need to label in details like 'thinking of work' or 'remembering my friends'. It is not necessary to name the content of the thinking. Just be aware of the mental process of thinking. Many yogis may get lost in the content of the thoughts. Fascinating ideas or terrible memories may come up in the mind. Yet they are just mental phenomena arising and passing away like a soap bubble. It just forms and pops very soon. So, please, observe the thinking mind carefully. Let go of it. Do not get attached to it.

The same goes with emotions or mental states. If you think and like the thoughts, you may

note 'liking'. If after thinking, you feel angry or disappointed, observe the emotion as 'angry' or 'disappointed'. There can be a great variety of emotions - joy, sadness, impatience, worry, sleepiness, remorse and so on - just take it as new object of observation. And simply label and observe it as 'joyful', 'sad', 'impatient', 'worried', 'sleepy', 'remorseful' and so on. The thoughts or mental states may be nice and pleasant, interesting. Or they may be unpleasant and painful. It doesn't matter. Just note them, be aware of them as they are. Observe and label the wandering or emotion until it disappears. Then go back to the primary object, the movements of the abdomen.

Whether the mind wanders or not is not so important. Let it wander. What is essential is whether you are aware of the wandering mind or not. The observation, the awareness is what matters. But actually it is not an easy task. That is because you are dealing with the mind; and the mind is very unruly and difficult to control. Only after one week or ten days of practice, will you be able to develop a certain control over the mind. Sometimes, yogis get completely carried away by their thoughts, flowing with them.

The observation of wandering mind and emotions is called contemplation of mind, *cittānupassanā vipassanā*.

Sensation: vedanā

After sitting for a while, unpleasant sensations may arise in the body: pins and needles, numbness and various kinds of pains and aches.

Regarding pleasant sensations, it is quite rare to experience them in the beginning of the practice.

There are neutral sensations as well, i.e. sensations which are neither painful nor agreeable. But they are hardly noticeable in the beginning of the practice.

The sensations that you are more likely to experience are unpleasant ones. When they arise, you may want to shift your posture. However, please try to be patient. Do not move straight away. Otherwise, the momentum of concentration will be broken. Just let go off the rising and falling. And turn you attention to the pain. Take it as your new object of observation. Label and note it as 'pain', 'pain'. Focus your mind on it and observe it energetically as long as you can.

Mental attitude is very important. We don't contemplate pain so that it can go away. That would be to push it away (anger) and to want pleasant sensations instead (greed). And don't we practice to remove anger and greed? So, we try to be aware of it, so to understand the very nature of pain. Pain might disappear or not. It doesn't matter. Try to note it to know more about pain. There are 4 things that you can be aware of:

The quality or nature of the pain – see clearly what kind of pain is arising. For example, is it a burning, stabbing, piercing, stinging, tearing, stretching, pulsating (throbbing), compressing, or hard pain?

Its intensity – does the pain increase, decrease or remain the same?

Its location – does the pain move from one spot to another, spread, stay at the same location or vanish?

Its duration – does the pain last only for a short moment or for the entire sitting; does it come and go very quickly (blink on and off).

If there are 2 or 3 painful spots at the same time, observe the one, which is the most painful. Anyway, the noting may fall naturally on it.

As you observe pain with much patience, you may overcome it without moving. However, if it becomes so intense that you cannot bear in anymore, you can of course change the posture. If so, before moving, please, start by observing the intention to shift as ‘wanting to shift’; then while you slowly and gently move your limbs into the new posture, focus your mind on these movements. For example, if you stretch the arms or the legs, ‘stretching’, if you straighten your back, ‘straightening’, if you raise your head, ‘raising’ and so on. When you have finished changing your posture, then go back to the unpleasant sensation or the primary object.

The observation of unpleasant, pleasant and neutral sensations is called contemplation of sensations, *vedanānupassanā vipassanā*.

Seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, knowing: dhamma

While noting the rising and falling of the abdomen, other kinds of secondary objects may arise.

Visions may arise in your mind. All kinds of visual impressions of colours, forms... Then, simply observe them and label them as ‘seeing’. And be fully aware of the seeing process. Be careful not to get carried away with these visions. They can become absorbing.

You may hear some loud sound as well. Then, shift your attention to it. Note it and label it as ‘hearing’. You don’t need to note it as ‘hearing the engine of a car’ or ‘hearing birds singing’. The aim is not to reflect on the source of the sound. “Is it the sound of a car or a motorcycle?” Here again, the content of the hearing doesn’t matter. Simply observe the very process of hearing; for example, be aware of the volume of the sound, of some physical sensations in the ear or any mental reactions. Is the sound arising, passing away? If the sound is pleasant, liking may arise in the mind. If it is unpleasant, disliking may appear. So please, try to be aware of these mental states. However, it is not appropriate to spend too much time on external objects like sounds. Indeed, this leads to distraction. It is better to concentrate on internal objects. Then, if it is a background sound, which occurs repeatedly (like the tick-tock of a clock), kindly ignore it and focus on the primary object.

The same method of observation applies for all other senses like smelling, tasting and touching, knowing.

The observation of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and knowing is called contemplation of Dhamma or mental objects, *Dhammānupassanā vipassanā*.

To sum up,

- Observe the object, which is the most predominant arising in the present moment, either in the body or the mind.
- If there is no secondary object, simply stay with the home or primary object, i.e. the rise and fall of the abdomen.
- If any secondary object arises, shift your attention to it. And when it disappears, go back

to the primary object.

→ Whatever the nature of the object, just contemplate it as it is. Don't expect only agreeable experiences. This is greed. Don't fear, reject disagreeable ones. This is aversion.

Walking meditation

The Most Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw has advised the yogis to also do formal walking meditation so that the continuity of mindfulness can be maintained. It helps to balance concentration, samādhi and energy, vīriya in the practice as well. When we practiced sitting meditation for an hour we do usually one hour of walking meditation. Should we not be able to sit for one hour then we will also shorten the walking meditation.

Where?

Choose a walking path of about a dozen steps where you can walk back and forth. Kindly do not walk in a circular manner.

The posture

Keep an upright posture, with the hands joined either in front of the body or behind. You don't need to close your eyes. Just keep them downcast on the floor at about 2 or 3 meters (or about 6 feet) ahead. It is not necessary to look at your feet. Be careful not to bend your head too much. Otherwise, you will soon feel tension in your neck and shoulders; you may also get a headache or feel dizzy.

How? 3 types of walking meditation

When you do one hour walking meditation, you can divide this walking session into three periods of twenty minutes each.

→ *one step-walking meditation*

In the first twenty minutes, you can walk relatively fast, however slower than ordinary walking. As you make a left step, direct your attention on the left leg and label it as 'left'. As you make a right step, shift your attention to the right leg, and label it as 'right'. In this way, note 'left, right', 'left, right' while being aware of the predominant sensations in the leg. Labelling or naming is not so important. What matters is to develop a sharp awareness of the movement of the leg.

Now, let say this is the end of the path. Do not turn immediately. When you come to the end of the path, you are standing; then please note and label as 'standing', 'standing'. Take a short while to be aware of the standing posture. You may be aware of predominant sensations in the feet, the legs, the upper part of the body... And then when you are just about to turn, there is at times, an intention to turn. When you know that this intention is predominant then note it as 'intention to turn'; then slowly turn and observe the process of turning as 'turning', 'turning'. You may be aware of the movements of the foot, the leg; you may feel the rotation of the waist, the shoulders and so on. And then once back in the standing posture, observe again the standing posture and label it as 'standing', 'standing' for a few seconds or more before starting to walk.

→ *two-steps-walking*

During the second twenty minutes, walk a little slower. And divide one step into two parts namely, 'the lifting process' and 'the lowering process'. So, while the foot is lifting, label as

‘lifting’ and observe that movement from the beginning through the middle to the end of the lifting process. Then when the foot is dropping, label as ‘dropping’ (‘placing’ or ‘lowering’) and observe carefully the sensations involved in that movement, from the beginning through the middle to the end of the dropping process.

You don’t need to pay attention to the foot, which remains static, still on the ground. Just observe the foot, which is moving.

Please do not take a too long step. If you do so, and carry on walking, then one foot will come up while the other foot is still on the ground. So you will have two objects at the same time; and the mind doesn’t know where to go. So rather than taking long steps, it is much better to take short steps; place one foot on the ground and only after that, start lifting the other foot.

There is no need to lift the foot very high, but just enough that you can then place it again.

→*three steps-walking*

During the third twenty minutes period, you may slow down as much as possible. And divide one step into three parts namely, ‘the lifting process’, ‘moving forward process’ and ‘the lowering process’. The slower you walk, the faster you will progress. However, let the slowing down be natural. Do not force yourself to slow down too much either. Indeed, in the beginning, concentration, samādhi may be not strong enough; and the effort made to slow down may be in excess. So you won’t be able to focus precisely on the movements of the foot.

When lifting the foot, label as ‘lifting’ and focus your mind on that movement. The entire attention goes towards the most predominant sensation; try to know it. You may be aware of lightness, heaviness, pulling movement...Then the foot starts to move forward. So label as ‘moving’ or ‘pushing’; and try to know, be aware of the most predominant sensation in the foot. It could be anything: lightness, heaviness, some tension there or stiffness or trembling movement, swaying movement and so on. Then the foot is lowering. Label as ‘lowering’ (‘placing’ or ‘dropping’). And carefully observe the sensations that occurred during the process. Do pay particular attention to the very moment when the heel touches the floor. What kind of sensation is there? Is there hardness or softness? Is there roughness or smoothness? Is there pressure increasing or decreasing? Is there heat or cold or warmth? There is a great variety of possible sensations. Then, as one is placing the foot, more and more on to the ground other sensations like pressure or relaxation in the foot may occur. All these sensations have to be known according to the reality. ‘Lifting’, ‘moving’, and ‘lowering’.

Please keep in mind that these three forms of walking meditation are relevant for the first few days of the retreat. Gradually as you will slow down more and more, you can let go off the first type of walking meditation; then you can do only the second and third one. And later on, some prefer to do only the third type of walking meditation. At times, when feeling sleepy, with low energy, you may prefer to walk fast and energetically.

When you do the walking meditation please do take your time. There is no dead line to be met. All you need to do is just mindfully walk back and forth.

2 conditions for good concentration in walking

There are 2 conditions for good concentration to develop in walking meditation: restraint of the eyes and focus on the movement of the foot.

Restraint of the eyes

While walking, be mindful to keep your eyes well guarded and restrained. It means, don't look around, so that you can maintain your concentration. If you look here and there, the mind tends to go with the eyes. And your concentration will be disrupted. So, when you have the desire to look around, observe attentively this desire and note as 'wanting to look', until it has disappeared. Please be careful not to look around so that you can maintain both your concentration and insight during walking meditation. It may be a little bit difficult and awkward during the first few days of the retreat – indeed we are so used to looking around- later on once you find the benefits of restraining the eyes, you will naturally want to control them.

Focus on the movement of the foot

Do not to observe the foot itself, but try to pay attention to the very movements of the foot.

So, if you can keep your eyes well guarded and focus you mind on the movements of the foot, your walking meditation will be good; and concentration, samādhi will develop.

Meditation in general activities

What is mindfulness of general activities?

Mindfulness of general activities means observing all activities that are not included in sitting meditation and formal walking meditation.

So a process like waking up and getting out of bed is general activity. Then try to know the most predominant object that arises when waking up. Is it a thought? Or is it a sound? Or is it a particular sensation that you experience in the body. Whatever the object, label it, observe it carefully and know its nature. After that you want to open your eyes, note 2 or 3 times as 'wanting' or 'wishing'. And then while opening the eyes, observe the process of opening as 'opening'. Then, when sitting up in the bed, standing up, be aware of the movements of your body. And so on.

In the bathroom, when washing the face, taking a shower, washing your clothes...be also mindful of all these activities involved. Getting dressed, taking off your clothes, opening and closing the door, taking a meal, drinking a beverage, observe the movements involved in these actions as well. For example, at meal time, when seeing the dishes, you can note 'seeing'; then arises the intention to take food, note 'wanting'; and when stretching your arm to take the fork, note 'stretching'; while holding the fork 'holding', while taking the food, 'taking', when opening your mouth 'opening', when putting the food into your mouth, 'putting', while chewing, note 'chewing'; you may be aware of different tastes and textures, note 'knowing'; liking or disliking may arise towards the food you're eating, note 'liking' or 'disliking'. Then, you swallow the food, note 'swallowing'. In this manner, try to be mindful of all the movements, sensations and mental states involved in eating.

When you move from one place to another, be mindful of the movements of your feet. Just note 'left, right'; the one-step walking meditation is enough as for general activities.

So, from the moment you wake up until the moment you fall asleep at night, try to be mindful of all your activities. Try to live with mindfulness all along the day. General activities are as important as the sitting meditation and the walking meditation. You should not look down on the daily activities, thinking "they are not important, so no need to be mindful". You need to remain mindful, even while going to the toilet. It is the continuity of mindfulness throughout the day that makes the progress. In the beginning, it may be quite

difficult to be that much mindful. However, just remain determined to be aware of as many activities as possible. Try your very best. And as your concentration, samādhi, builds up, you will be able to note more and more activities.

2 factors for good mindfulness in daily activities

With regard to mindfulness of general activities, there are 2 factors that help to develop good mindfulness, namely: slowing down your activities as much as possible and restraining your senses.

Slowing down

Usually, we do things in rush and quick manner. Thus, we miss out so many things. So, when you sit down, do it very slowly, being aware of the whole movement of sitting. The same goes while standing up. When taking a bath, dressing etc, try to slow down your actions and observe the movements involved. Slow down all your activities as much as possible. This is very helpful to see minute details in the body and mind. Let us take an example. Imagine a fan, which is turning very quickly. Could you see easily how many blades there are? Certainly not. However, if the fan is moving very slowly, you will be able to distinguish the number of blades. So, when you slow down things, a whole microcosm of new experiences can emerge. And you will be able to observe things that you are not usually aware of. Seeing them develops wisdom. Indeed, all mental and physical processes are always changing – appearing and disappearing, arising and passing away. You need to realize this as the true nature of mental and physical phenomena. Therefore, it is importing to slow down all actions as much as possible.

Restraint of the senses

Just like we need to practice the restraint of the senses during the walking meditation, so too have we to practice it during the general activities. So please try to restrain your eyes, ears, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind as much as possible. Indeed, looking around or following external sound distracts the mind. A distracted mind is not a concentrated mind. And when the mind is not concentrated, it is very difficult for wisdom to arise.

So basically, mindfulness of general activities means that you carry out every single general activity with utmost mindfulness from moment to moment to moment. You observe every activity carefully; and you try to know the nature of the most predominant object involved.

The 3 aspects of meditation practice

“Arising of the object, observation of it and knowing or understanding of it”

In meditation, there are 3 aspects: the first one is the **occurrence or arising** of the object; the second is the **observation** (and labelling) and the third aspect is **knowing** the nature of the object.

The arising of the object: what object arises? (For example, rising of the abdomen occurred.)

The observation and labelling of the object: how did you note the object? (For example, I noted ‘rising, rising’; the noting was very sharp; as soon as the rising appeared, I could note it; or it takes some time for the mind to go to the rising...)

Knowing the nature of the object: what do you come to experience, know, feel, be aware of? In the case of the rising of the abdomen, it means be aware of the different sensations

that occur during that very rising (For example, I experience upward movement, stretching, pressure, tension, stiffness, vibration or hardness...). In knowing the true nature of the object, you don't have to look for something special. Simply be aware of the various sensations, as they do exist.

So meditation is only about arising of the object, observation of it and knowing or understanding of it. And among these 3 aspects of the practice, the 3rd one is the most important one. Indeed, if a pupil attends school the whole day, and doesn't know what he has come to learn, there is no much benefit. Mere watching is not enough. There should be comprehension or knowing of what is going on. For example, you turn your attention towards something and look at it; you see it; so, what do you come to see? 'This is a man or a woman. His or her face is like this, his or her body is like that and so on...' 'What do you come to see, to experience?', this is the wisdom part. So rising occurs. You observe it. Then, what do you come to experience, to know? While noting rising, you may experience the abdomen moving up and so be only aware of its shape. Or, you may feel/know tightness, stiffness, tension or pushing movement. So, it is not enough to look at the object casually, in an unmindful, automatic way. You need to look at the object with full commitment, with all your heart. You direct your attention there, so that you can penetrate into the true nature of the object. This experience or knowing of the object is wisdom.

The interview

Report in 3 phases: what occurred, how you noted, what happened to it

Again, the 3 aspects of contemplating mind and matter are:

The **arising** of the object (When the object arises, the mind must be turned towards the object.)

The **naming and observation** of it

The **knowing** of what is there (its characteristics ...)

Interviews are very important for the practice. They enable the meditation teacher to assess your practice and give you appropriate guidance.

Try to communicate the essence of your practice in about 10 minutes.

There is a formal structure for interview. Please kindly report your experience in 3 phases, namely the arising of the object, the labelling and observation, and finally the most important point, the knowing or understanding of the object.

The arising of the object – you identify what occurred;

The labelling and observation – you report what you did, how you noted it (what name or note it was given);

The knowing – you describe what you saw, felt or experienced, what details were noticed; that is, what happened when you noted it;

Then you can continue explaining:

What happened to the object; how the object changed as it was observed;

What you did next.

Let us take an analogy to clarify this point. Imagine that I'm sitting in front of you. I

suddenly raise my hand into the air. I open it so that you can see that I'm holding an apple. You direct your mind towards this apple; you recognize it and (because this is an analogy) you say the word 'apple' to yourself. Now you go on to discern that the apple is red, round and shiny. At last, I slowly close my hand so that the apple disappears. How would you report your experience of the apple, if it were your primary object of meditation?

You would say "*The apple appeared. I noted it as 'apple'. And I noticed that it was red, round and shiny. Then the apple slowly disappeared.*"

First, there was the moment when the apple appeared; and you became able to perceive it. Second, you directed your attention to the apple and recognize what it was (and you made the effort to label it verbally in your mind). Third, you continued attending to the apple; and you could see its qualities, and how it disappeared from your awareness.

This 3-step process is the same one you should follow in vipassanā meditation. And the way of reporting is a guide for how awareness works in vipassanā. That's why, reporting is very helpful for yogis: it asks them to focus on their experiences as clearly as possible.

Start your report by explaining your experience in the sitting meditation, then the walking meditation and finally the general activities meditation.

The primary object

Please always begin every report with a clear and full description of the primary object, the rising and falling of the abdomen. Sayadaw can learn a great deal about your practice from your description of the rising and falling.

For example, a yogi may say:

"Rising occurred";

"I noted it 'rising'";

"and I experienced stretching, pressure, and tightness; towards the end of the rising, the tension increased".

"Falling occurred";

"I noted it as 'falling'";

"and I experienced movement, relaxation and decreasing tension."

Secondary objects of awareness

After describing the primary object, continue with the secondary objects. Please describe them in the same manner than the primary object: mention which object occurred; then describe how you noted it, and relate your experiences until the object disappears or your attention moves elsewhere. Secondary objects may be:

Bodily sensations – pain, itch, and so on...

For example,

"Pain occurred"

"I noted, 'pain'"

"I experienced stabbing pain"

"then the stabbing pain changed into a hard pain"

"and I noted as 'hard'"

#3. *"I experienced a slow pulsating hardness"*

#4. *"As I observed it, it grew stronger for a while and at one point, it decreased"*

#5. “and I went back to note the rise and fall”

Thoughts – planning, remembering, imagining, reflecting...

For example, you may report: “*the mind wandered off the rising and falling; It got lost in thinking. It took me a while to notice it; then I noted ‘thinking’. The thinking quickly stopped. And I returned to the rising and falling.*”

Mental states/Emotions – anger, pride, happiness, fear, confidence, boredom, discouragement and so on...

For example, you may report: “*there was sadness, and I noted as ‘sadness’. Sadness grew stronger, and then gave way to anger. I forgot to note ‘anger’, and the anger grew stronger. I became aware of tightness in the chest and noted ‘tightness’. The tight area seemed to move around slowly. As I continued to note ‘tightness’, the sensation grew weaker. I was again aware of anger and I noted as ‘anger’. I became furious and I noted as ‘furious’. Suddenly, I became aware of a memory of a conversation, and I noted ‘remembering’. As I continue noting ‘remembering’, the memory slowly faded away. Then a strong mental image arose; I noted as ‘seeing’, and the image quickly disappeared. Slowly as I continue to note it, the anger grew weaker; and I returned to the rise and fall*”.

Walking meditation

For example, you may report: “*I noted ‘lifting’ and I experienced...; I noted ‘moving’ and I experienced...; I noted ‘dropping’ and I experienced....*”

General guidelines for reporting

→ Relax and don’t get nervous about the interview. You don’t have to feel like a patient who is going to see the dentist in a few minutes, all shaking and trembling. You can see your meditation teacher as a friend, who is there to help you in your practice. He is not there to judge you. His aim is to give you valuable advice so that you can progress smoothly and swiftly, and become peaceful and happy.

→ What to report: it is not necessary to describe all your experiences in detail. You need to sum up what you have experienced during the sitting, walking and daily activities meditation sessions. If sittings are similar, you may combine the significant features together in a general report. As a rule, describe what you have seen the most clearly. You may also choose the best sitting or the one that reflects the best your practice. And/or you may relate the difficulties that you have met.

→ Kindly use an easy, simple and clear language to explain your experience. Short and simple is the best, in particular if you have to work with a translator. Using long rambling, poetic or metaphoric language can lead to misunderstanding.

Use plain day-to-day words rather than pali terms (*like anicca... I’ve seen dukkha...anatta is so clear to me...*)

→ **Please try to be clear, precise and short to the point. Consider that you are reporting on your research into yourself, which vipassanā actually is. So try to apply the standards used in the scientific world: brevity, accuracy and precision.**

Try to describe what is happening, not why you think it is happening, or whether you think it is a good sign or bad. Your own interpretations, judgements, analyses and thoughts about what is happening are not useful to Sayadaw. So refrain from evaluation your own practice. This is the job of the teacher.

→ Do not report from imagination. Honesty and sincerity are essential in the practice and the interview.

→ No need to worry about your report when practising. Try not to let having to report lead you into too much thinking or worry. Simply practice wholeheartedly. And then try to share your experience with Sayadaw. You may write down your experiences. And if you cannot remember all that happened during your sitting, it doesn't matter. What is really important is that you have been mindful, not that you can relate your experience.

→ The 3-step reporting form is very helpful for Sayadaw to assess properly your practice. Whatever you experience in the practice can be included in your report, whether there are blissful, peaceful states or painful, difficult emotions or sensations. What happens is less important than how you relate to it; and how clearly you observe what happens. And sayadaw will always want to know "how did you note it? What did you experience or come to know?".

→ Most yogis expect some kind of response from the teacher after they have reported. At times, if you are on the right track, Sayadaw will not need to say much. The instructions that he will give in return may consist of just a few words. Sometimes, if he feels that he had enough information about your practice, he may interrupt you and give necessary instruction. Don't feel offended at such times.

→ Trust the teacher. To learn a new subject, we have to go beyond the current limits of our understanding. It takes a trusting relationship with a skilled meditation teacher to be able to transcend our ignorance.

So may you be able practice wholeheartedly to be mindful of whatever object arises at the 6 sense doors (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking). May you be able to report as suggested below. Then Sayadaw will be able to help you develop vipassanā insight.

APHORISMS

Guidelines for practising satipaṭṭhāna vipassanā meditation

Sitting cross-legged, back straight, on the abdomen the mind.

Breath in and out naturally, when rising and falling, focus and stick your mind.

The mind pure, free from misdeed - this is genuine wholesomeness.

Stiffness, tension, movement - with discernment know.

All kinds of thinking, how they appear - note them all.

Unpleasant, pleasant, neutral, all sensations - do not forget to note.

Seeing, hearing, touching, knowing - do not forget to note.

Guidelines for interview

Arising, noting, experiencing– how to report

Rising occurring,

Noting,

Experiencing and knowing – may you be able to explain.

Falling occurring,

Noting,

Experiencing and knowing – may you be able to explain.

Thinking arising,

Noting,

Experiencing and knowing – may you be able to explain.

Sensation arising,

Noting,

Experiencing and knowing – may you be able to explain.

Mental objects arising,

Noting,

Experiencing and knowing – may you be able to explain.

Arising,

Noting,

Experiencing/knowing – 3 important phases.

These 3 aspects, clearly – may you be sure to explain.

Not discursive, the essence, only the special – may you be able to explain.

Brief and clear, no extra, only the essential – may you be able to explain.

(8/9. Short to the point, no extra, only the essential – may you be able to explain)

When reporting, sparing it – may you use the time.

How to report in a nutshell

At the moment the object arises,

With full energy focus your mind,

Whether you can follow and stick to the object or not - please explain.

Close, firm and accurate,

Whether your noting is or not – please explain.

What you can note,

All that you know,

Accurately – please explain.

What you cannot note,

All that happens,

How you observe and know – please explain.

Vipassanā and the present moment

Vipassanā meditation is an awareness meditation. It teaches you to be with the present moment... to live in the present moment. It teaches you to be aware of everything that comes to you and is happening to you. Only the present moment is important. And everything that comes to you at the present moment through the 6 sense doors – eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind- is to be noted, to be watched, to be observed as the object of awareness.

Indeed, the object has to be observed, at its very moment of occurrence. For example, you cannot be aware of the rising of the abdomen before it appears. It is not there yet. And you cannot observe it after. It is too late. It has disappeared. It is not there anymore. The only moment when you can catch the object is at its time of occurring - in the very present moment. So vipassanā is a meditation of the present, not a meditation of the past or the future.

The beauty of vipassanā meditation lies in the fact that all things are the object for this meditation. The rise and fall of the abdomen is only the primary or home object. If you have no other object to note, keep with the breath in the abdomen area. And if there are other objects, keep noting them too. Whether you are keeping your mind on the rising and falling or on other objects, if you are aware of them, your meditation is good.

When you practise vipassanā, you have to be patient and persevere. And do not get discouraged if you cannot get concentration at the beginning. Everybody has that experience. Leave all expectations behind when you are meditating. Just be in the present moment.

(from Chanmyay Sayadaw – Vipassanā meditation course)

[The Six Elements Explained](#)

In accordance with the Buddha's philosophy this so-called person is composed of six elements: the four material elements and the one mental element. Of the four physical, material elements the first one is the element of hardness and softness. We call it pathavi-dhatu. The second is the element of fluidity and coalition. We call it apo-dhatu in Pali. The third is the element of heat and cold, temperature. We call it tejo-dhatu. The fourth is the element of motion, movement, vibration, expansion and contraction. This is called vayo-dhatu in Pali.

These four primary material elements constitute the so-called bodily process. When you feel your body then you may have a sensation of hardness or softness. That is pathavi-dhatu. You may feel heat or cold. That's tejo-dhatu. You feel the nature of fluidity or coalition. That's apo-dhatu. You may feel motion, movement, vibration, supporting. This is vayo-dhatu, one element.

These four primary elements together with the other minor elements are composed as a material unit called the indestructible unit - Kalapa. These eight elements cannot be divided, cannot be destroyed even with the atomic bomb. You can divide the atom into say nucleus and proton and neutron and so on. But the tiniest detail of the atom consists of these four primary elements. So you can't divide it. You can't destroy it so it is called the unit of indestructibility - Avinibhoga-rupa in Pali. So when the innumerable number of these material units are composed then they become a body: a finger, a nail, a hair, and so on. Then the sixth one is the mental element. That is, mind, consciousness, mental processes, emotional processes. All these are called vinyana-dhatu, the mental element or mind element.

Normally we are not able to penetrate into these elements and realise them in their true nature. That's why we take these compounded elements for a personal being, an I or a you, because we can't divide. Our intellectual knowledge is not enough to penetrate into these elements, and realise them in their true nature. So we think this is a body, this is a mind, this a man, this is a woman, this is a leg, this is a nose, this a hair. If we have penetrating insight knowledge through our vipassana meditation, insight meditation, then we can penetrate into these primary elements and know them and their nature and also their appearance and disappearance, and the nature of transitoriness of these elements.

So here when you practise walking meditation you feel that you are walking on a boat which is floating on the waves of the sea, or as though you were walking on the air, or as though you are walking on a heap of cotton. You are realising the specific nature or specific characteristic of the wind element vayo-dhatu. Vayo-dhatu, the wind element has movement, motion, supporting, vibrating as its specific characteristics, or individual characteristics.

Normally we do not realise it. But when we watch the movement of the foot while we are walking very closely, attentively and precisely, then our concentration becomes deeper and deeper. Then, because of deep concentration the insight knowledge or experiential knowing becomes penetrating and sharp. So that penetrating insight realises the process of movement and its specific characteristics of movement, motion, vibrating and supporting. So we feel we are walking on the air, or we are standing on the boat, or on the waves of the sea. Because the waves of the sea are always moving.

Then, gradually our concentration becomes deeper. You will feel the specific characteristics of the wind element in that way. At that time you very often feel you are not yourself. Here 'you are not yourself' means you are not mad. You are not aware of your body. You are not aware of yourself. What you are here realising is just movement. A great deal of movement which is going on of its own accord. So in this way you have destroyed the idea of a personal being, a self or a soul by means of the walking meditation.

But here you should be careful not to expect any unusual experiences when you are walking. When you expect anything, the expectation disturbs your concentration. Then the concentration becomes weak. Then you can't experience anything new. So you mustn't expect anything. But what I have explained to you is that your noting of the movement of the foot has such and such a benefit you can experience.

So what you should do is just be mindful of what is happening to your body and mind, that's all. Except for mindfulness you mustn't do anything else. You mustn't expect anything, you mustn't be curious or inquisitive about anything. But what you should do is be mindful of what's happening. If you have expectation, that expectation must be aware of expecting. If you have curiosity, curiosity must be aware of curiosity, and so on until it has disappeared. You mustn't allow them to disturb your concentration and mindfulness. So what you should do is just be mindful while you are walking, while you are sitting, while you are lined up, while you are eating, while you are dressing, while you are showering, whatever you are doing. What you should do is just be mindful of it as it is, that's all.

(...)

I should continue to explain to you the specific characteristics of the other physical, material elements. This body, or physical process, is composed mainly of four material elements as you know. What are the four material elements which constitute the so-called body? Pathavi-dhatu, apo-dhatu, tejo-dhatu, vayo-dhatu.

Here pathavi means earth; dhatu means the element. Pathavi-datu means the earth element. Apo means water; dhatu means the element. Apo-datu, water element. Tejo means the fire; dhatu means the element. Tejo-dhatu means the fire element. Vayo is wind or air; dhatu is element. Vayo-dhatu, wind element or air element.

These are the four primary material elements which constitute the so-called body of a man or a woman. There are twenty-four other minor material elements, twenty-eight all together. The primary material elements are four, then the secondary elements are twenty-four. But the twenty-four secondary elements arise dependent on the four primary material elements, so the secondary elements are not so much important as the primary ones. That's why we have to watch the four primary elements.

Here when we say pathavi-dhatu, earth element, actually it is not earth because we have not the proper term for this nature, physical characteristic. We have to name it as pathavi-dhatu or earth element. Hardness and softness are the specific characteristics of the earth element. This hardness and softness is called pathavi-dhatu or earth element.

Did you observe it while you were meditating? It may be difficult for a meditator who sits on the cushion to find this element. It's better for you to sit on the floor without a cushion, then you'll find this element very distinctly. When you sit even on the cushion and your legs touch the floor, there you find hardness. When you sit on the cushion you find softness. When you feel soft or hard on any part of the body you must be aware of it, you must watch it: hard, hard, soft, soft. Why should you watch it? To close the door. If you do not observe soft, soft, soft, soft, soft, then you feel it pleasant. That pleasant feeling gives rise to attachment, desire for your cushion. Because you do not observe soft, soft, soft you are enjoying softness of the cushion and a pleasant feeling as well. That pleasant feeling causes attachment and desire to arise. So wherever you go you have to take this cushion to sit on. Please be careful whenever you observe your physical processes. Any of these specific characteristics of these primary four elements are distinct, so you should observe them. You can analyse or investigate them. Here analyse means not theoretically analysing, but when you know the softness or hardness through your experience by means of mindfulness of it. Then you don't take that softness as pleasant or unpleasant; you don't identify the feeling of softness with yourself.

The feeling of softness and the pleasant sensation is away from you. The feeling, the sensation of softness and pleasantness is here. Then you note it: pleasant, pleasant, soft, soft, soft. This pleasantness and the feeling of softness is not a person, not a being, not I, not you. You know that through your experience. Because you observe it you are mindful of it, you are aware of it. When you don't feel this pleasant or unpleasant sensation of soft as a person a being, an I or a you, then there won't arise any attachment or anger or aversion depending on that softness. Then you shut up your bodily sense doors and mental defilement cannot come to your mind through these doors. That's why the Buddha said, 'When you feel soft or hard you must be aware of it.' That is the specific characteristic of the hard element.

The water element actually is not water. Its characteristics are fluidity and coalition. Fluidity and coalition are the specific characteristics of the water element and your body. Did you find fluidity and coalition in your mind when you were meditating? Yes, you experience them when you sit and note arising, falling, sitting, touching, arising, falling, sitting, touching. Sometimes you have a tearing, and also sometimes you have a sweating. These are the specific characteristics of the water element. Sometimes you feel some fluidity on your face or on your back. Then you have to note fluidity, fluidity and so on. Then when you open your eye and see, there's nothing because the fluidity is internal not external. Your internal bodily process, material process, had fluidity as its characteristic.

Then tejo-dhatu. We call it the fire element. Except that's actually not fire. It's temperature. Tejo-dhatu has as its characteristics heat and cold. Heat and cold are the specific characteristics of tejo-dhatu the Fire element or temperature element. Then do you experience that tejo-dhatu when you sit for meditation? A lot! Sometimes you feel as if you are sitting on the fire. Sometimes you are sitting on a block of ice. Cold and hot. Then you have to watch it, cold, cold, hot, hot. If you do not observe it then you'll identify that feeling of cold with yourself: 'Oh I am cold, I am cold. I need some sweater or some blanket to cover on me,' because you identify the cold with yourself.

Actually cold is not yourself. Theoretically you know cold is not a person, not a being, not a man or not a woman, but you perceive it to be a person because, 'I cold.' I am the man who feels cold. I am the woman who feels hot. Then cold and hot are identified with yourself and your person. Why? Because you do not close your door. Then what should you do? You

should close your door, and note cold, cold, hot, hot, hot.

When your mindfulness becomes powerful and concentration deeper then you realise cold separate from your body or away from your body. The feeling of cold or hot is there. You are here, you are realising and noting it. Sometimes when concentration becomes deeper then there's no you or no person who notes the cold. But there's the mind that notes it. Then you come to realise the dual process of mentality and physicality and sensation too. At that moment your bodily form has disappeared from your mind. You are not aware of it; you are not conscious of it. Then you feel there's no person, no being, no I or no you, no self. What is really existing is a dual process of feeling of cold and the mind that notes it, that's all. Then there won't arise any mental defilement because these mental defilements arise dependent on the idea or the concept of a person, a being, an I or a you, a self. If you have destroyed that idea of a personal being then there won't arise any mental defilements because it has no seeds to grow out of it. Then here you have closed your doors.

After that there's the fourth one, vayo-dhatu, the Wind element or air element. It's also not actually wind or air. The wind element has movement as its specific characteristic: movement, motion, vibrating, supporting. Did you experience these specific characteristics when you sat in meditation? Rising falling, yes. Rising and falling, then sitting down and rising from the seat, you have the wind element. When you rise from the seat you have to rise gradually. Then that movement is the wind or air element. Both. So when you note rising, rising, rising, rising, or getting up, getting up, getting up, then what you should realise is the process of the rising movement from this your seat until you stand still.

There you realise the specific characteristic of the wind element, a series of many movements arising and passing away. The same way when you sit down, you have to be aware of sitting, sitting, sitting, sitting, sitting, sitting, sitting. Here what you are aware of is this sitting movement, all the movements which are involved in the act of sitting. Then you know the wind or air element. Then when your concentration is good enough and you come to realise when you sit down you don't find any man or human being or any body. What you find is a series of many movements going on.

You don't identify those movements with yourself. In other words you don't regard them as a person, a being, an I or a you. What is it? That's a natural process of physical phenomena. When you know that there won't arise any concept of a being a person an I or a you depending on that movement. You close your door. There won't arise any mental defilement, desire or attachment, anger or aversion. Then you live happy.