

**AWARENESS  
ALONE  
IS  
NOT  
ENOUGH**

Questions & Answers with  
Ashin Tejaniya

**NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO**

**ARAHATO**

**SAMMA SAMBUDDHASSA**

Homage to Him, the Blessed One,  
the Worthy One,  
the Perfectly Self-Enlightened One

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My special gratitude goes to my teacher, the late Venerable Shwe Oo Min Sayadaw Bhaddanta Kosalla Mahā Thera, who taught me Dhamma and the right attitude for my spiritual development and meditation practice.

I want to express my appreciation to all yogis. Their questions and difficulties have once again inspired many of the explanations and answers given in this book. I really hope that this second book too will help yogis to better understand mindfulness meditation and to deepen their practice.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to the completion of this book.

Ashin Tejaniya

## WE PRACTISE BECAUSE WE WANT TO UNDERSTAND

Most people don't seem to really appreciate the value of the work of awareness. They tend to think that the importance of meditation is in the things that they observe. But the objects do not really matter. People also spend a lot of time thinking about the results. They want to experience peaceful states; they want to 'bliss out'. Then they get attached to these states and to the objects they focus on.

The real value of meditation is not in getting such results, however enjoyable they may be. The real value of meditation is the actual process of being aware and understanding what is happening. The process is important, not the result!

Instead of complaining about what is or is not happening, you should appreciate that you are aware - regardless of what you are aware of - and learn from it.

Awareness alone is not enough! Having a desire to really understand what is going on is much more important than just trying to be aware. We practise mindfulness meditation because we want to understand.



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## DEAR READER,

This book is a sequel to *DON'T LOOK DOWN ON THE DEFILEMENTS, THEY WILL LAUGH AT YOU*.

Why a sequel? Is there really a need for yet another book on meditation? Ashin Tejaniya's first book certainly covers the basics of his approach to meditation. We were, however, under some pressure to publish it and this left us with a feeling that we could have done a better and more comprehensive job. Not only were there areas we had not covered, but Ashin Tejaniya also keeps coming up with new ways of explaining and looking at things. It was also pointed out to us by several fellow yogis that while Ashin Tejaniya's teaching was accurately expressed, the book did not represent his style. So the idea was born to produce a sequel in a question & answer format since this is the way Ashin Tejaniya teaches.

We have used material from recorded Dhamma discussions plus from our personal notes and conversations. All material has been edited, some of it extensively, in order to improve comprehension and flow. Ashin Tejaniya read through the final draft and made further adjustments.

Again, you will not get a comprehensive and complete explanation of what meditation is all about, but rather a collection of practical hints, ideas, and useful advice. There

will also be a number of repetitions since the same theme comes up in different contexts and is looked at from different angles. If you are not familiar with a Pāli term used in the discussions, please look it up in the glossary at the very end of the book.

Just like the first book, this too has been produced for yogis practising at Shwe Oo Min Meditation Centre. It is meant as a source of information and inspiration but it most certainly cannot replace the personal guidance of the teacher. We would therefore like to add a word of warning to all yogis: A lot of the advice you find in this book is perhaps not at all useful to you. Please only apply what immediately speaks to you and what you can easily put into practice.

We have tried to translate and express the teachings of Ashin Tejaniya as accurately as possible. If we made any mistakes, please point them out to us.

Moushumi Ghosh (MaThet)	Interpreter
Walter Köchli	Compiler and Editor





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# QUESTIONS ABOUT PRACTICE

Whenever possible, the following Dhamma discussions have been loosely grouped into sections according to topic.

## DEVELOPING AN INTEREST IN DHAMMA

**Yogi:** How can we turn our minds towards Dhamma? How can we develop more confidence in Dhamma?

**SUT:** When you are new to the practice you will not have much confidence in the Dhamma because there are still a lot of defilements in the mind. In order to make your confidence in the Dhamma grow, you have to clearly understand the benefits of what you are doing. You have to see how Dhamma benefits you in your life. Understanding this is wisdom, and this wisdom will then increase your faith, your confidence.

Can you see the difference between being aware and not being aware?

**Yogi:** When I am aware I know what is happening, I know what to do.

**SUT:** How much do you know about your awareness? What benefits do you get from being aware? You need to discover this for yourself. You need to continuously learn from your experience. If you cultivate this kind of ongoing interest in your practice you will understand more and more.

Awareness alone is not enough! You also need to know the quality of that awareness and you need to see whether or not there is wisdom. Once you have seen the difference in mental quality between not being aware and being fully aware with wisdom, you will never stop practising.

Your interest will grow, you will practise more, you will understand more and therefore you will practise even more — it's a cycle that feeds itself. But this process will take time; it will take time for your awareness to become stronger and for your understanding level to grow.

**Yogi:** Sometimes I lose interest because I cannot see any progress.

**SUT:** That's because you are not learning. You are not really interested in what you are doing. You expect results. You need to learn from what you are doing, not just sit there and expect results. You need to be aware of and learn from what is happening right now, you need to look at the process of meditation itself.

Never get discouraged when you lose awareness. Every time you recognize that you have lost awareness you should be happy. Because the fact that you have recognized that you lost awareness means that you are now aware. Just keep looking at this process of losing and regaining awareness and learn from it. What happens when you lose it, what happens when you regain it? Why do you lose it, how do you regain it? Take an interest in whatever happens, whether good or bad. Every experience is Dhamma, is just the way it is. Good and

bad is your personal judgement. If you have the right view, you will accept anything that happens just as it is.

## **INFORMATION — INTELLIGENCE — WISDOM**

**Yogi:** You always stress the importance of having the right information in order to practise correctly. Can you explain how this process of gathering and applying information works?

**SUT:** I recently heard about a very interesting model that is used in information technology. You start off with collecting data, the accumulated data becomes information, information develops into knowledge, and using all this knowledge in skilful ways is wisdom.

This is exactly what we do in meditation. When we pay attention to our experiences, we collect data. Once we have a lot of data, we call it information. In this way, a yogi keeps feeding several information streams: data about the body feeds the information stream about the physical processes, data about the mind processes will accumulate as information on feelings, emotions, etc. Putting all this information together enables the mind to understand how physical and mental processes interact, and this is knowledge.

Awareness works at the data level; awareness is just gathering data. Our innate wisdom, our intelligence, collects and channels the data into streams of information, and by comparing these streams of information it creates knowledge. Wisdom then uses this knowledge about the interaction of



physical and mental processes in skilful ways in order to positively influence events. To the extent that wisdom understands causes and effects, it knows how to work on the causes and conditions.

**Yogi:** Where does the information you give us fit in?

**SUT:** I have gone through this process of data — information — knowledge — wisdom. I try to pass on my knowledge and wisdom on how to practise. I teach you how to collect the data into streams of information, how to work with these streams of information so that they become knowledge, and how to apply this knowledge so that you gain more wisdom. You have to do all the work yourself; I can just advise you on how to do it. Once you have seen the benefits of working in this way and have become skilful at maintaining all these processes, you will keep expanding them and keep growing in wisdom. When you keep practising in this way, awareness and wisdom will eventually always be present and then insights can arise.

Insights will arise under very ordinary circumstances. The object of your observation can be a very simple and straightforward one, but the insight can be very deep, a world apart from the simplicity of the experience. The object can be something you come across every day, but the insight will be mind-blowing. For example, while smelling the soap when taking a shower you suddenly and very deeply understand that there is just this smelling and knowing, that there is nobody doing it, that these processes just happen by themselves.

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**Yogi:** I am trying to be aware of whatever happens. You told us that we need to be aware intelligently. Can you say more about this?

**SUT:** As long as your mind remains equanimous, all you need to do is be open and receptive. Whenever something comes up, you need to reflect on it wisely. As a vipassanā practitioner you first accept whatever is happening. You acknowledge that you are worried, that you are sick, etc. But then you need to ask yourself: "What am I going to do about it?" You need to bring in wisdom. The defilements cannot have their way if you give wisdom priority. You have to use wise thinking to decide how to handle things; you cannot just try to be aware. That's not good enough. The defilements are very dominant in the mind, they are very experienced, they are very skilful, and they will always get their way if we are not aware that they are present. If you don't fully recognize them and bring in wisdom, they will take over your mind.

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**Yogi:** You said that some form of wisdom is always present in moments when there is no greed, aversion, or delusion. How can I become aware of this wisdom?

**SUT:** First you need to ask yourself: "Am I really aware of my present experience?" Then: "How do I think about this experience, what are my views connected to it?" If you can recognize right views, that's wisdom at work. But you might

see wrong views a moment later and it is important that you keep an eye on them. Your experience is constantly changing, right and wrong views keep coming and going and so you need to keep investigating your experience moment to moment.

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**Yogi:** I have been thinking about the difference between what we call right attitude versus Right Effort as described in the Noble Eightfold Path. It seems to me that they are contradicting each other. Right attitude seems all about non-involvement, about accepting and just letting be. Right Effort on the other hand seems all about getting involved; trying to get rid of defilements or preventing them from arising, as well as cultivating good mind states.

**SUT:** What is going to prevent the defilements from arising and what is going to remove the defilements that have already arisen? Which quality of mind is going to do that? Awareness cannot do it, only wisdom can do it. So when the Buddha talks about this, he really wants people to develop the wisdom which will do that work. Because we don't understand what the Buddha meant, we think that we personally have to try to prevent or remove the defilements.

We can use effort to practise or we can use wisdom. The Satipatthāna Sutta tells us to use wisdom to practise. If you want to use effort you still have to watch the mind — because the defilements arise in the mind — and you also have to watch the mind continuously. How else could you prevent the kilesas from entering? Are you able to be right

there every time a mind arises? If you can do that, be right there, every moment, with awareness, always ready, you can prevent the defilements from coming in. You have to fill every moment with awareness and that is a lot of effort. You have to be a very dedicated practitioner and do a lot of work. Do you think you can do that much work?

Another way to do it is to cultivate wholesome qualities of mind. If we always cultivate wholesome qualities, the unwholesome qualities will automatically be replaced. That is why the Buddha told us not to do anything bad and to do things that are good. You can use your mind full-time to do everything right: Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Thought. If the mind is full of this all the time, bad states of mind cannot enter. We need to keep watching the mind all the time. We have to keep a tag on the mind, always be aware of what is going on and keep working on it. It is a full-time job. As long as you are busy doing good things, you have no time to do anything bad.

If you want to practise with effort, think all the good things you can, say all the good things you can, and do all the good things you can. That's for people who are effort oriented. For them this is very effective because they like to be working. People who are awareness oriented, people who are very alert, sharp, very aware, should spend more time practising awareness. Those who are wisdom oriented can make more use of the ideas of Right View and Right Thought. People who have very good concentration can begin by doing samatha and then switch to vipassanā. Faith oriented people can start by contemplating the qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. The Buddha taught so many kinds

of practices because there are so many different kinds of personalities. But no matter which of these practices you do, you cannot do any of them without knowing the mind.

**Yogi:** So wisdom comes from understanding, when I look at the aversion...

**SUT:** Wisdom starts with information. Right information is part of our wisdom. Then we use our intelligence, our logic, our reasoning to figure out how to use the information we have. All this is wisdom at work. When we try to find out how we do things right, how we do things wrong, when we learn our lessons and how to practise, all that is also wisdom at work. Knowing how to do something is wisdom. All the people in the Buddha's time who got immediately enlightened after listening to a teaching from the Buddha were wisdom oriented people. The rest of the listeners had to continue practising.

Wisdom is the fastest way. No matter what practice you start with, you will end up doing vipassanā. As long as the defilements are very strong, never try to see or understand — that's mission impossible. We can only remain aware of whatever is going on and collect little bits of wisdom. As long as the defilements are very strong in the mind, we cannot develop very deep wisdom. But if we keep collecting these little bits, wisdom will grow. When there is more and more wisdom, the defilements will decrease.

A yogi once asked me whether it was possible to suddenly enter Nibbāna by accident. That's impossible. There is no reason why you should just stumble into Nibbāna. You have to pay the price. Only when the conditions are fulfilled, the

effect will come about. Be patient and work steadily. Don't think about it, don't hope for it, and just keep practising. You will know when you are very far away, and you will also know when you are getting nearer.

## **ONLY WISDOM UNDERSTANDS**

**Yogi:** We were talking about conflicts between the habitual unconscious mind, pushing you to do something in one way, and the meditating mind which is trying to learn new habits, trying the techniques of vipassanā. Are there any other ways, any other tools besides concentration, to work with such conflicts so that they don't prevent progress?

**SUT:** There are two ways to change a habit. One is using samādhi and the other is using paññā. The problem with using samādhi is that this only helps you to temporarily subdue the conflicts. If you are very skilled at samādhi, you might be able to do this successfully over a long period of time. But this approach does not at all deal with the underlying reasons for that conflict. Therefore the conflict will come up again with full strength as soon as you stop practising samādhi. Only when we try to look at the situation in a discerning way, when we are learning to understand the underlying causes and conditions, can we develop the wisdom necessary to free the mind from a particular conflict. Samādhi tries to keep something at bay, wisdom understands.

**Yogi:** If I experience any kind of pain, no matter whether physical or emotional, there is always an instant response. It happens so fast and automatically, my emotional reaction is so strong and immediate that it is too late to bring in any vipassanā reflections. It seems to me that doing samādhi is a skilful way of dealing with such situations, of temporarily calming oneself.

**SUT:** Vipassanā is not just a process of sitting and watching. In such a situation you need to remind yourself of the right view towards what's happening. You need to acknowledge that it is happening and accept it — as it is. Then you examine what is happening and try to learn from it, try to understand the nature of this kind of mind, try to understand how it works. But this takes time; it will take many such observations for true understanding to arise. Once you have really understood a problem or a conflict situation, the mind will be free from this suffering. Only then will it no longer react when confronted with a similar situation. Acquiring this kind of wisdom is of course not easy. Practising in this way can be quite difficult, particularly at the beginning. We need a lot of patience and perseverance.

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**Yogi:** I had an interesting experience yesterday and I wonder whether you would call it an insight. I suddenly became aware that I was holding the view that my retreat here had been a complete failure, that I had not made any progress. It really hit me very deeply that this was such a wrong view and it felt

very painful realizing that I had been carrying this wrong view. But after that, for the next several hours, I was much more open and sensitive. I could feel the wind on my skin and I was moving quite slowly — ordinarily I walk around very quickly. When I met people I could feel very subtle reactions towards them, and I could see things in my mind that I would not ordinarily see. There was so much more clarity than I usually experience. Still, I am not sure whether this was an insight or not.

**SUT:** Yes it was. Whenever there is an insight, it gives a lot of strength to the mind; it enhances all the good qualities of the mind. It's amazing how quickly and strongly the mind pattern can change, isn't it? Only true understanding can have such a tremendous effect on the mind. When something is realized in such a clear way, it is an insight. One might be uncertain whether an experience was the result of an insight — as in your case — but there will be no doubt at all about the truth of what you have realized, right?

**Yogi:** Yes, that's right.

**SUT:** This was just a small insight. Imagine what effect a vipassanā insight, an insight into the true nature of things would have!



## **DIRECTING THE MIND**

**Yogi:** Why is it that when I intentionally get myself ready to accept something that's happening (e.g. a mosquito biting me), the mind can tolerate it easily and does not react, but when I am not prepared (and a mosquito bites me) I get angry quickly?

**SUT:** The mind needs to be directed. We also need to have a direction in which we want to lead our lives. We set directions for the mind all the time. Once you have set a direction for the mind, then all the succeeding minds will follow that lead. The mind is a natural process. If you leave the mind undirected there will be chaos.

**Yogi:** Can you give me an example?

**SUT:** OK. If there is anger and you decide to investigate this emotion you are setting the mind in the right direction. If, however, you decide to try to get rid of this anger, you are directing the mind wrongly.

## **CONSISTENT PRACTICE DEEPENS UNDERSTANDING**

**Yogi:** I often feel a resistance to investigate. I am very busy with trying to observe, with being aware of my experiences, and I seem to be afraid of missing something if I investigate.

There is this feeling that I don't have the time to do it. Maybe there is some greed involved.

**SUT:** Just do what is important and let go of everything that is not important. You only want to be open and receptive when there is equanimity. But when you are experiencing strong emotions, put your energies into dealing with them; that's the important issue at hand — forget whatever else is happening. If you ignore an emotion and try to keep track of everything else that is going on instead, it will remain at the back of your mind. But as soon as there is an opportunity, the emotion will come up again and give you a lot of trouble. The function of awareness is to recognize everything that is happening in the mind. Wisdom decides which issues need to be dealt with.

**Yogi:** I guess I just don't have enough wisdom yet.

**SUT:** You need to give yourself time. Go slowly, feel your way through the things that are happening, try to understand and gather as much information as you can. Whenever you feel that there is an issue that needs to be looked into, investigate it. What is going on in the mind will seem rather chaotic at first. You need to look at the same issues repeatedly and from different angles. As your awareness becomes more continuous, your mind will become calmer and you will begin to understand which issues are important and which are not.

**Yogi:** Does that mean that if I just keep at it, if I just keep reminding myself to be aware, no matter what, that the mind will eventually calm down and begin to understand?

**SUT:** Yes, your level of understanding depends on the level of practice, on how consistently you practise. In the beginning we need a lot of awareness in order to build a foundation. We don't really have any understandings of our own and therefore we need to rely on information to help us in our practice. After some time we will start having little understandings, little insights.

As long as we keep practising we will be able to maintain this level of understanding. If we don't practise wholeheartedly, however, if we only practise intermittently, the level of understanding won't grow and we won't get any more skilful. In case we stop practising altogether, delusion will start growing again. If we neglect our practice for a long time, delusion will start clouding over again all the things we once understood.

But if we practise diligently and continually, we will keep having these small understandings and insights over and over again. If we refresh and maintain them over a long period of time, they will become so persistent that they will work together with awareness. Once wisdom starts working together with awareness, they will move on to a bigger level of understanding. We will have bigger insights.

These bigger understandings have a life of their own, they have more power. They are not so dependent anymore on awareness. Once we have had such insights, they will always

be available; wisdom will always be there. At this stage, awareness will step back, so to speak, will play an inferior role. It will always be present because wisdom cannot exist without awareness, but at this level of understanding, wisdom begins to have a life of its own. Awareness will keep feeding wisdom and our understandings will grow in strength. At this stage, the mind always knows what to do, and it can happen that the practice becomes so easy that it will keep going even if we are not making any effort to practise.

**Yogi:** I can see that this is possible if one lives in a spiritual community. Personally, and I am sure that this is true for most other people, I find it very difficult to keep up continuity in modern society.

**SUT:** Yesterday a yogi talked about this too. He told me that he finds it easy to remain aware of everything he is doing and to maintain a calm and balanced mind but that when he is with other people he finds it very difficult to be aware. I pointed out to him that the difference in the two scenarios is that in the first case the attention is directed 'inwards' and in the second it is directed 'outwards'. If you focus all attention 'inwards' you cannot interact with the 'outside', if you put it all 'outside' you cannot know yourself. You need to learn to do both, and this takes practice.

**Yogi:** I understand what you say but the world 'out there' is so different from a retreat situation and I always very quickly get pulled into things.

**SUT:** Why do you allow yourself to get pulled in? Nobody is really pulling us in; this mind wants to get sucked in. Who is more important, you or other people?

**Yogi:** Well, I am.

**SUT:** You pay attention to the 'outside' because you think that it is important for you. If the quality of your mind was really important to you, you would always pay attention to it and take care of it. You would always check the state of your mind, in every situation. What is more important, talking to someone or your mind state?

**Yogi:** My mind comes first.

**SUT:** Yes, you have to take care of your mind first, and then you can relate to others.

**Yogi:** Putting this into practice will certainly be a challenge. It will be very interesting to see what comes up.

## **JOY IN THE PRACTICE**

**Yogi:** I have a question about the place of joy in the practice. I am asking this because I got this idea that if you like something it is kind of bad. For example the other morning I saw the sunrise and I could notice this joy coming up. It felt very natural. Is it bad to enjoy something like that?

**SUT:** Let it happen naturally. In vipassanā we don't tell you that you cannot feel things. Just notice that this is happening. Whenever you recognize that something is happening, it means that your mind has taken in some information. When you are aware continuously and observe similar events again and again, you will become aware of the effects of having certain states of mind. You see it as natural phenomena happening in the present moment.

I am neither telling you to go out and enjoy yourself nor to not enjoy yourself. If enjoyment naturally arises in the present moment, know that it is happening. But don't get carried away, don't get involved, and also don't suppress it. Recognize it is happening and be with it. Feeding your enjoyment, trying to get more and more is one extreme, suppressing it is the other extreme. The Buddha told us to take the middle way. Recognize the enjoyment with the right attitude. A feeling is just a feeling, enjoyment is just enjoyment.

## **NO INTEREST IN THE PRACTICE**

**Yogi:** You encourage us to ask questions in order to enliven the practice, to stir up interest. It does not seem to work for me; the mind does not seem to be interested. What can I do?

**SUT:** Ask the mind why it is not interested! [Laughter] When you ask questions you need to ask the sort of questions you are really interested in. Only when you really want to know, will the mind become interested. If you just throw in a

question because you have been told to, out of a sense of duty, it is not going to work.

**Yogi:** OK, I will try to find out what the mind is really interested in. Would you advise me to ask many different questions or just one question at a time?

**SUT:** Usually it is best to just ask one question at a time. At the beginning of your practice it will be necessary to think up questions to ask yourself. As your practice develops, awareness becomes more continuous and wisdom starts to work. The mind will develop a sense of curiosity, a natural tendency to investigate. Curiosity is an expression of wisdom. Questions will now come naturally to the mind and give it a sense of direction in which it will continue to observe. Once you find that the mind asks questions naturally, there is no more need to intentionally think them up. Just use the questions that arise naturally.

**Yogi:** Does this mean you only encourage thinking about the practice but you do not encourage general conceptual thinking during practice?

**SUT:** Sometimes you have to think through something in order to figure out what you need to do. Thinking is an essential activity of the mind. We just need to be careful not to get involved, not to get carried away by the thinking or planning mind.

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**Yogi:** For me it is very easy to find the motivation to practise when I am suffering. But when there is no obvious suffering I find it very difficult to sustain interest in the practice. I don't have a strong sense of curiosity.

**SUT:** When I began to practise in earnest it was because I was suffering. I wanted to know why the mind was suffering. By the time I had overcome that particular problem, the mind had realized that there was now less suffering because of all the understanding and wisdom that had been gained. The mind had become interested in the process of learning and wanted to know more and more.

**Yogi:** What do we do though if the mind has neither had this kind of understanding nor developed a genuine interest in the practice?

**SUT:** Then we just need to keep plodding on until we really understand what we are doing. It is absolutely vital that we recognize the value of awareness itself. We need to value the actual work of being aware. We need to understand that this activity brings the results. The moment we become aware, we replace not knowing with knowing. Only when we know, can we understand and develop an interest in what is happening. Understanding what is happening will bring peace to the mind. Once you understand the preciousness of this process, you will feel joy and you will always be interested in looking deeper and deeper.



## CULTIVATING RIGHT EFFORT

**Yogi:** I know that by diligent right practice the idea of self will go away and be replaced by Right View. But the actual practice itself feels like working hard at a task. I am trying to accomplish something and therefore there is a grasping associated with the self. Could you comment on this?

**SUT:** It is very important to have the right information before we start practising. Don't identify with the effort, but instead recognize that what is doing the work is effort plus whatever other qualities that are involved. These qualities are at work, not 'I'.

Right effort is only possible if the mind has the right information, if it really understands what right effort is. We are working towards a goal, but getting to the goal will happen sometime in the future. Right now we need to know how to work. We need to know what right effort is and what right practice is.

A mind which is striving towards a goal, which is focused on achieving a certain result, is motivated by greed. Wisdom knows the cause-effect relationships and it will therefore concentrate on fulfilling the causes and conditions.

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**Yogi:** Walking meditation is very straightforward; I am usually bright and alert all the time. But sitting meditation is very different. I normally begin sitting meditation with a sense

of clarity but then it regularly changes into a dull sort of mind state. What am I doing wrong?

**SUT:** When alertness fades, it indicates that there is lack of right effort. You need to pay more attention to the observing mind. Watch the quality of the mind that is working to be aware, and notice when it changes.

Try to notice the difference in energy needed to remain aware in different postures. When you are walking, the mind is fairly busy and aware of many different objects. When you sit, the mind has much less to do and therefore you need to learn to 'tune' the mind to remain bright and alert in this position.

**Yogi:** I try to apply energy to stay alert when I sit, but I think what happens is that I am trying too hard or in the wrong way because I always tire myself out. Then I get this feeling that it is all a waste of time.

**SUT:** You need to apply wisdom to keep the mind alert and interested. Trying to get the mind more interested in what is happening is 'wisdom effort'. The kind of strenuous effort you have been using is more physical and therefore you inevitably become tired. If a sense of curiosity does not come naturally, you can ask yourself questions. Asking questions helps the mind to remain interested and therefore alert.

## PRACTISING LIKE A SICK PERSON

**Yogi:** I have been sick and therefore have been feeling very tired and heavy. But actually this has been a good time for practice because there has been less trying, I cannot try, I can just observe.

**SUT:** That's good. That's exactly the mind state you are advised to have when you are told to practise like a sick person! It does not mean to move around slowly. The mind of a really sick person does not want to do anything but just passively observes and accepts the situation.

## MAKING A DECISION

**Yogi:** How can I become more decisive in my thoughts and actions? How can I learn to make decisions more quickly?

**SUT:** Do you need to make decisions quickly or correctly? Is it more important to be fast or right? If there are no defilements in your mind and if you have awareness and understanding, there is no need to think. The mind knows what to do because you are ready, because the understanding is already there. But if there is any like or dislike, if there is any kind of agitation in your mind, you cannot make the right choice. Whenever you need to make a decision but find your mind is agitated, wait until your mind has calmed down and only then decide.

Make it a habit to watch out for any emotional disturbances. When you can keep your mind clear of them, when there is no eagerness to get things done, wisdom can come in and make the decision. Of course you also need to have all the necessary information to decide. Never decide because you like or dislike something. Always take your time to make a decision, check your attitude, clear your mind.

## **SITTING**

**Yogi:** When the mind feels balanced, especially in the afternoons, should I continue sitting or should I get up after one hour?

**SUT:** You can sit longer if you want to. But I do not encourage people to sit for long periods of time; don't sit for more than an hour and a half. People who like calmness are fond of sitting longer, those who like awareness prefer activity. I encourage people to be active because it forces the mind to be 'on its toes' so to speak and to really work at being mindful in the present moment. Unfortunately, we don't have yogi jobs here as you have in the West.

## **WALKING**

**Yogi:** What would you recommend for walking meditation, keep the eyes downcast all the time or look around?

**SUT:** Don't intentionally do either. Just be natural and be aware of what the mind knows. If you are looking around, you are aware that you are looking around, if you are looking down, you are aware of that. Just be aware of what is actually going on.

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**Yogi:** Could you give me some advice on how to do walking meditation and how to investigate while walking?

**SUT:** First recognize that there is walking. Then you can ask yourself a question. For example: How are the mind and the body interacting? What state of mind are you walking in? Why are you walking? Who is walking? By introducing such questions you can slowly step up the investigation.

## **LYING DOWN**

**Yogi:** How will lying down meditation help me become aware of tension?

**SUT:** When we lie down, the mind takes it as a signal to relax. It does not use any energy to support the body. In sitting we support the body a little bit and if we do not recognize how much energy is necessary, the mind naturally puts in the amount of energy that it is used to putting in. Lying down is a very good way to explore this. When you then compare, you will see how much energy is being used to keep up sitting and other postures.

When you do lying down meditation, notice the energy which is used, so that you have a reference point. This way you can see how much energy you use in other postures, and whether you use too much and therefore get tense. But if we are really interested in being aware of our mind, the way we feel when the mind is in a particular state etc., and if we are actually able to tune into our mind all the time, then every posture should be a posture for investigation.

**Yogi:** And every posture should be relaxed?

**SUT:** Yes. If you can be both relaxed and alert in the lying down meditation, you can bring this state of mind into every posture, into every movement. If you fall asleep, you know that you still need to do some tuning.

## **NOTHING TO DO**

**Yogi:** Sometimes my mind feels very quiet and I get the sense that there is nothing to do.

**SUT:** When the mind becomes quieter, there is a lot of work left to do. You have to start investigating at that time. When the mind becomes quiet it does not mean that there is nothing to do — the mind has just become ready! When you do not bring in questions to help the mind look more critically at what is happening, it will feel **that** there is nothing to do.

For example you could ask yourself whether you can clearly see the difference between the nature of the mind

and the body, between physical and mental processes. That will keep the mind busy.

## TENSE OR RELAXED

**Yogi:** I have been noticing less tension. But I still have some struggle because once I am relaxed I often start feeling lazy, and when that happens I start feeling guilty and the mind becomes busy and of course tense again. I know the mind works best when it is relaxed and I am trying to find the right balance.

**SUT:** The balance you have to find is the balance between 'relaxation' and 'interest'. Interest is using wisdom; there is a wisdom quality to interest. People usually try to find a balance between effort and relaxation by using more or less effort. But if there is interest, effort is already present. When the mind is interested in knowing something, there is already effort. But be patient with yourself; to have zero tension is not easy.

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**Yogi:** What exactly does it mean to be relaxed? I know how it feels to be relaxed physically, but what does it mean to be relaxed mentally?

**SUT:** Feeling relaxed is really about being free of expectation and anxiety. You can only be totally relaxed when the mind is

free of lobha and dosa; wanting to be relaxed or trying to become relaxed will only make you even tenser.

## **FEELING RESTLESS**

**Yogi:** I have been feeling a bit restless recently. I only have ten more days to go before I leave and the mind seems to be very eager for progress.

**SUT:** It is important that you are aware of the restlessness and that you know why you are restless. If thoughts come up because of restlessness, never believe those thoughts. If you believe those thoughts, it will just get worse. Whenever you feel discomfort about something, the mind is actually telling you that it wants to feel good. A yogi who really understands the practice is fine with uncomfortable or difficult experiences and sees them as a challenge, as a learning opportunity. If there is no understanding, there will immediately be resistance to the unpleasant experience. We need to learn to accept things as they are, and that also means accepting difficult situations as they are.

## **FEELING STUCK**

**Yogi:** Sometimes I feel really stuck in meditation and don't know what to do. Then the mind looks for the attitude but sometimes it cannot even see the attitude. Other times the



attitude is clear, for example there is aversion, and then the mind tries to see what is behind that attitude.

**SUT:** Just recognize as much as you can. Don't look for or search for what you cannot see, and also don't try to guess what it might be!

**Yogi:** But is there something behind that attitude?

**SUT:** Don't even think about it! If you think, it is gone because your mind already forms an idea of what it might be or how it might be. Also don't think in terms of behind or in front of! If the mind has the ability to see, it will see more, if it doesn't, it won't.

**Yogi:** I am still struggling with basics like the attitude, wondering what the right attitude is, how to become really aware and so on. There is no formula for it and I find this quite exhausting. You encourage us to recall good experiences, and the mind then tries to do this and to recall how the state of awareness was at that time and how the mind got to that state of awareness. I cannot do this; the mind just gets more confused when it tries to do all this.

**SUT:** Don't do this kind of investigation now! You just said that you are still struggling with the basics and that you find this exhausting. At this stage you should not do any investigation because it just makes things very complicated in the mind. You need to wait until the mind becomes stable.

Just practise in a simple way now, just observe what is happening.

Group interviews can be confusing in a way because yogis pick up a lot of information which is not really suitable for them. What is suitable for one yogi might not at all be suitable for another yogi. If some information you hear is helpful, you can of course use it, but don't try to follow advice given to someone else if you do not find it helpful for yourself.

**Yogi:** OK, so I need to wait until the mind is stable.

**SUT:** Yes, investigation can only come when the mind is stable, then it can come quite naturally. But many people actually feel lost when the mind quiets down and becomes stable, they don't know what to do with the quietness. That's when I need to encourage yogis to investigate.

**Yogi:** Ah, I see. I don't have that problem ... 😊

**SUT:** It is good to acquire a lot of knowledge. But the personal needs of yogis are very different, so you must choose carefully what you apply in your own practice.

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**SUT:** When you seem to be stuck with a negative attitude towards meditation, you have to recall how meditation has been helpful in the past, what difference meditation has made to your life. Think of the benefits you got, of the things you have understood through meditation. Think about how it feels

when you are not being mindful and how different that is to being mindful. Reflecting like this will help you to reorient your mind.

Something else you could try: When you experience good mind states, actively remember them. Remind yourself that you are experiencing a good mind state, that good mind states are possible, that this is how a good mind state feels. In this way you reinforce the understanding of the good states you experience. If you know why it is good or how it feels good, try to articulate that to yourself. This will help your mind to remember it next time you are feeling low. It will more easily remember positive experiences.

**Yogi:** Yes, I can understand this well. But sometimes the resistance is so strong and the attitude towards meditation so negative, that all I can do is just sort of automatically walk up and down. Then, very slowly, some mindfulness develops, and with the development of mindfulness, there is some joy, and the attitude towards meditation becomes positive again.

**SUT:** The problem many yogis have is that they are so used to making things happen. In daily life they are used to setting themselves goals, to applying a lot of effort, and to achieving what they want. Then they do the same thing in meditation. They want to be good, very good, the best. When they are not as good as they want to be, they quickly become disappointed. That's why they lose faith and why they lose interest in the practice.

Not thinking about meditation anymore, not even trying to meditate anymore but just walking up and down can therefore be the best thing to do for a while. As soon as you really don't try to do anything anymore, when you don't expect anything anymore, but just let things be, awareness comes back. Why? Because it has always been there!

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**Yogi:** I feel I am not making any progress. I tend to get bored very easily. How can we avoid boredom? How can we avoid becoming stagnant in our practice?

**SUT:** You cannot and you should not try to avoid getting bored, and you cannot and should not try to avoid becoming stagnant in your practice. As long as you are not skilful, these things will happen. This is normal. You cannot help getting bored and becoming stagnant. If you become bored or if your practice becomes stagnant, be aware that this is happening and try to be aware of the factors leading to these states. You must remember that the practice of vipassanā is not trying to do anything or make anything happen. Just recognize what is happening, that's all, very simple!

## NOT ENOUGH ENERGY — FEELING SLEEPY OR TIRED

**Yogi:** Last week I noticed that I have more mental and physical energy in the mornings. In the afternoons they both wane. I am never quite sure why this happens. Is this just mental or is it because we eat in the mornings but have no food in the afternoons, so the body energy goes down and therefore the mind energy goes down too?

**SUT:** This happens to yogis when they practise all day. They are fresh in the morning, they have plenty of energy but then they tend to use it all up. You need to keep checking how much energy you use! Are you getting tense from the way you use your energies? Are you using too much energy? Are you practising over-enthusiastically? If you really keep an eye on this and only use the energy you need, you can keep going until nine or ten at night.

You also need to remind yourself that you do not need much energy to focus on objects or experiences. Do you need to listen in order to hear? Do you need to look in order to see? Do you need to focus in order to be aware?

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**Yogi:** I have been having problems with sleepiness during sitting meditation. It happens to me regularly, particularly at the beginning of a retreat.

**SUT:** When you begin your sitting do you notice any dullness or any other precursors to sleepiness?

**Yogi:** Sometimes.

**SUT:** Rather than just observing what is happening, try using some questions to feed the interest in your mind. Ask yourself: "Is the mind aware? What is it aware of? What is it doing?" Often, this will keep the mind alert and active. It also sounds like you have developed a habit of sleepiness at the beginning of retreats; you have sort of accepted that this happens. Asking questions will wake the mind up a little. If you have the right attitude and practise consistently you will find that — over time — the energy of your mind will start increasing; you will become more awake, alert, and aware.

**Yogi:** What should I do if that does not work? Sometimes I find myself just struggling to sit through the hour and getting frustrated for falling asleep again and again.

**SUT:** It should not be a struggle. If you find that nothing works, that you cannot observe and explore the state of sleepiness at all, if you are just struggling to stay awake, it is better to get up and do something else — do some walking meditation.

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**Yogi:** I have been experiencing a lot of sleepiness on this retreat. When I do not feel sleepy I feel agitated and then there is this running commentary on my experiences. About a week ago, I realized that my sīla-base is not as stable as it has been in the past. This year I have done a number of things I wish I had not done. I also noticed that my mind is judging other people's behaviour a lot, and I think it is doing this in order to assure myself that I am not such a bad person after all. This seems a kind of trick of the mind to make me feel less guilty about the unwholesome things I have done. My question is: What can I do to re-establish a sound base of sīla? I feel I cannot practise in the way I did in the past unless I become a more virtuous person.

**SUT:** You cannot change the past. Don't think about the past!

**Yogi:** OK, so I need to go forward. How should I do this?

**SUT:** If you have samādhi in this very moment, your sīla is pure. Why do you think about the past sīla? You made mistakes, OK, but can you go back?

**Yogi:** No.

**SUT:** So leave it behind.

**Yogi:** Is it a defilement to keep holding on to this?

**SUT:** Yes, you are attached to the wrong you have done. What was the reason that you were not able to keep pure sīla? Was it lobha; greed or desire?

**Yogi:** Yes.

**SUT:** Is that greed 'you'?

**Yogi:** No.

**SUT:** So you understand that because there was too much greed, there was a lack of sīla. The sīla that was not pure was not your sīla. And right now, with the development of samādhi, sīla is pure again.

**Yogi:** This is something I have difficulties accepting since I grew up in a Christian society.

**SUT:** The sīla was not pure before, but it is pure now. Just bring awareness into the moment and make your sīla pure now.

You also mentioned that sleepiness was a problem. Because you were thinking of sleepiness as a problem, your mind was wondering why you were feeling this way. It therefore started thinking about the past and got you into all this trouble. You came to the conclusion that breaking sīla caused the sleepiness. This is wrong view, a false conclusion. You need to see the cause of sleepiness in the present moment, not think of a story that could be behind it.



You want to know what has happened in the mind that is making it sleepy now. The more skilful you are at observing the activities of the mind, the easier it will be for you to see why your state of mind is changing.

My understanding of sleepiness is very straightforward. I believe that the reason the mind becomes sleepy is because there is no interest. Maybe the awareness is still working, maybe there is still samādhi, but when the wisdom faculty is not working, when the mind is not interested, it becomes sleepy. If the mind is truly interested in the processes which are going on, if it wants to understand the objects, the feelings, the emotional reactions and how they all interact, it will never feel sleepy.

What often happens to people who practise a lot is that samādhi grows but wisdom does not keep up. We need to investigate; we need to use our wisdom. Once we have some samādhi, once we have a measure of calmness and balance of mind, we should ask ourselves questions. Am I clearly aware of what is going on in the mind? What does the mind know about the object and the mind?

**Yogi:** That would mean making the mind the object of our awareness.

**SUT:** Yes. You not only want to be aware that the mind is quiet but also of the mind which is aware of that quietness. Don't stay with the object or the experience but go to the mind that is aware of the object or the experience. If we stay with this awareness and continue to recognize its

presence, it will grow stronger. But if we forget to do this and look at the samādhi instead, the awareness will gradually weaken and we will not be aware of it.

What do you do when you experience calmness?

**Yogi:** Usually I just relax back into it. The other day though I turned my awareness to what was happening in the mind. The question arose whether there were any defilements present. I could not see any, but immediately the thought came up that I probably cannot see the more subtle defilements. Then I thought of a close relative who I have been having many difficulties with and immediately I could see very strong defilements.

**SUT:** Did you feel sleepy at that time?

**Yogi:** No.

**SUT:** Only when the mind is not working does it go to sleep! Whenever the mind is quiet and calm, it is ready to investigate. But you don't necessarily have to use conceptual thinking. You can just investigate how the mind is working. Do you know the awareness? Is it still present? Is awareness static or is it new in every moment? There is no need to find the answers! Just introduce the questions, give the mind something to work with, encourage it to take an interest in what is happening.

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**Yogi:** I have been practising the way you told me but I find I am getting tired very easily. I cannot see anything wrong with the way I practise. Watching the activities of the mind seems to make me tired.

**SUT:** Does the mind accept everything it notices?

**Yogi:** No, it has many reactions to what is going on.

**SUT:** That's what makes you tired. If you find yourself reacting to your experiences very strongly, it is better to do some samatha practice. For example, when you experience aversion, recognize it and then change to a neutral object like the breath or some physical sensation. Watch this for a while to calm the mind, then look at the aversion again for a while — just keep going back and forth. Many yogis find it too difficult to watch the mind continuously. As long as we don't have real wisdom, as long as we depend on bringing in wisdom intellectually, we will have to use a samatha practice to calm the mind.

## **DEPRESSION**

**Yogi:** Could you say something about depression. How should we deal with such a difficult mind state?

**SUT:** You need to investigate depression as a mental activity. You need to understand what triggers off a depression and observe the effects it has.

There are two ways to deal with depression. To begin with you might have to practise samatha meditation in order to develop samādhi. As samādhi increases, depression will decrease. But even though the depression might totally lift for a while, it will always arise anew when the samādhi is gone and you are again confronted with the causes for depression. You can only overcome depression through understanding. The more effective way to deal with this mental activity is therefore to observe it in order to understand its causes and conditions. Only once these are really understood, will the mind be free of depression.

For most people suffering from depression, it will probably be best to use a combination of both these methods. First they need to do a samatha practice in order to gain a measure of samādhi. With this relatively stable mind they can then practise vipassanā, i.e. they can observe and investigate the depression. When the emotions and feelings become too strong to look at, i.e. when the mind becomes agitated, they should again do a samatha practice till the mind is calm enough to do more observing and investigating. They might have to go back and forth like this quite often until the mind is strong enough to just be with the depression. It is very important not to expect quick results; understanding depression usually only comes after a very long time of regular practice of accepting, observing, and investigating.

People who are already experienced in meditation before they suffer from depression will of course find understanding this whole process and putting it into practice much easier. Those who are on medication should continue taking them regularly. Only when the mind really has some firm

understanding, they might consider reducing their medication very gradually — after consulting their physician of course. Medication is often necessary to stabilize the mind and a sudden and substantial reduction could have very negative consequences.

## **SLEEP**

**Yogi:** I have been unable to go to the Dhamma Hall in the morning because I usually fall asleep very late.

**SUT:** Why can't you fall asleep? What does your mind do?

**Yogi:** Well, at first it tries to meditate but then it starts wandering off.

**SUT:** That's why you are tired in the morning. Letting your mind wander aimlessly for a long time makes the mind tired because that is a very poor quality mind. The quality of mind that you have when you fall asleep will be the quality of mind that you wake up with. If you fall asleep in this wandering, hazy state, you will wake up in a similar state. The defilements make the mind tired. That's why we should not let the mind be idle. That's why I am telling you to practise continuously all day. We need to maintain the quality of our minds. You are working the whole day continuously trying to build up the quality of this mind and then at night, within a few hours, you throw it all out of the window. So don't let your mind wander freely.

**Yogi:** I find it very difficult to really watch or control the mind when I am in bed, ready to sleep.

**SUT:** The reason your mind wanders off is because it does not have an objective at that time. You have no aim, you do not tell the mind what to do. You need to aim at remaining aware until you fall asleep. Try it and see how it makes you feel in the morning.

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**Yogi:** I have had three nights now of hardly any sleep. The first night I realized that I did not want to be here. I really wanted to leave. Last night was interesting. I went in and out of sleep; I maybe had three hours of sleep only. But it wasn't bad. I'm really tired but at the same time I have really high energy — and things are strange.

**SUT:** That sounds fine. Just keep doing this — maybe for another week. Take it easy, see how it goes. Your reactions are getting less and therefore your samādhi is growing. When samādhi becomes really good, it will be easy to sleep. Just don't ever think of wanting to go to sleep. When there are no more reactions in the mind, you will naturally fall asleep.

**Yogi:** When I first mentioned my problem, you said that we don't need to sleep. Can one really go without sleep in daily life?

**SUT:** Yes, I have tried it myself. There are people in Myanmar who practise going without sleep. Not lying down is one of the ascetic practices for monks. Not being able to sleep is not a problem, only the defilements give us problems. My teacher used to say that night time is the time of virtuous yogis. There are monks in Myanmar who teach all day and meditate all night.

## **DREAMS**

**Yogi:** I have a lot of painful, difficult dreams, especially in intensive practice. I have dreams about pain, dying, loss, doing harm, suffering, etc.

**SUT:** These kinds of dreams all have dosa character. You can investigate your dreams; dreams are very real. During the whole day you consciously control your mind and therefore the kilesas have little chance to manifest. In your dreams you cannot control anything and the kilesas will find ways to express themselves.

**Yogi:** Is there anything that can be done while the dreams are happening?

**SUT:** Have you ever woken up in the middle of a dream?

**Yogi:** Oh, that happens to me all the time!

**SUT:** And do you see the dosa at that time?

**Yogi:** Yes, I see the dosa in the dream and I can feel the residue.

**SUT:** Do you continue to observe that residue?

**Yogi:** Yes I do. Sometimes there can be insights after dreams, other times I just continue to feel disturbed.

**SUT:** Whenever you feel disturbed, remember the right attitude to observe this feeling. Whose dosa is it? If you identify with it, you will experience it as difficult.

**Yogi:** Is there any way to get into dreams directly?

**SUT:** Yes, if there is momentum. Dosa does its own work and awareness too does its own work. When awareness is continuous during your waking hours, when recognizing everything that happens becomes a habit of the mind, if you can be aware of every thought that comes into your mind, you will automatically be aware of your dreams too. This is the only way to get into your dreams. It is not something you can do, momentum does it.

**Yogi:** OK, I'll keep working on it.

**SUT:** Let your mind think whatever it wants to think. As long as you are conscious of whatever thoughts come up, you are



doing fine. In order to be able to do this though, you need to be really interested in seeing and understanding whatever is happening in the mind. You need to be very awake and alert.

## **AWARE OF AWARENESS**

**SUT:** Are you aware of your awareness? Do you always recognize that awareness is present?

**Yogi:** Yes, but I have to make a conscious effort to check that it is there.

**SUT:** Good, first check whether the awareness is stable, whether you are always aware and present. Once you feel that you are aware and present, try to recognize that awareness. Then try to see whether you recognize the attitudes that are present in that awareness.

**Yogi:** OK. Now I feel like the awareness is looking through a microscope.

**SUT:** How much does your awareness actually know? Does it only know your body sensations, or does the awareness also notice your thoughts and your feelings?

**Yogi:** If it is good, the awareness is sort of panoramic.

**SUT:** When you are aware of body sensations, thoughts, feelings, and other activities of the mind, can you also see

how they are interrelated, how they influence each other? When the mind is thinking something, how does that affect your feelings and your body sensations? When you have certain body sensations, how does that change or influence the feelings and the thoughts?

When you ask yourself any of these questions, your mind is introducing wisdom into the situation. You don't need to find answers; simply asking such questions awakens the wisdom. You are introducing new software so to speak. Have you noticed the difference in quality of your mind when you are aware and when you are not aware?

**Yogi:** Yes.

**SUT:** It is very important that you recognize these things for yourself. Noticing these differences for yourself helps you to recognize and appreciate the value of awareness. When you can appreciate the value of awareness, you will also slowly start appreciating the value of understanding, of wisdom. You need to see clearly what difference the quality of awareness makes in your life, and you also need to be able to appreciate the benefits you get from wisdom. Once you understand all this, you will practise wholeheartedly.

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**Yogi:** It seems to me that when I am observing awareness, clarity of mind is the result. Then that becomes the object. I think that is why I was having trouble distinguishing between the observing and the clarity of mind.

**SUT:** Yes, the clarity of mind and the practising itself are different things.

**Yogi:** I noticed two different experiences of observing. One where the observing feels like there is a distance between the observing and the object, the other one feels like there is no separation, there is simply observation of what there is.

**SUT:** These are just two perspectives of the same experience. In the first one you notice the fundamentally different natures of the object and the observing. Because they function in different ways you notice their difference. In the second perspective you see that in fact these different functions are happening together. The second perspective is more natural. With the first one, i.e. when we see a separation, there is a degree of conceptualisation of our experience.

**Yogi:** Yes, that makes sense. I noticed that the second one is happening when the mind is quiet and balanced.

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**Yogi:** What's the best thing to do when the mind becomes really quiet?

**SUT:** Don't try to look into the quietness but stay with the mind that is aware.

**Yogi:** The mind tends to get attached to and somehow entangled with the quietness.

**SUT:** When that happens you are not meditating anymore. You are enjoying a mind state. Your attention needs to be on the awareness and not on the object. You need to check whether there is still awareness of what's happening and — equally important — whether there is right view.

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**Yogi:** Who or what is aware of all my experiences; the seeing, hearing, etc.? I have a sense of something that is receiving all this, of something that is aware of what is happening. Is that true?

**SUT:** Isn't it? Who do you think it is? You know that there is awareness and that this is aware of what is happening, don't you?

**Yogi:** I don't know. When I am seeing or feeling things I feel a sense of awareness of self. It is just part of my experience, moment to moment.

**SUT:** OK, that's fine.

**Yogi:** So, is there somewhere to look? Is there a place of awareness?

**SUT:** It is already seen; you don't need to do anything deliberately. If you try to do something deliberately, this quality will disappear. Awareness is one of many qualities or functions of the mind. Just keep observing mental activities, and your understanding of all these processes will grow.

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**Yogi:** I occasionally experience a state of clear, pure awareness. When that happens, other objects are a little more in the background. The observing mind too is a little in the background. The observing mind is a bit confused whether to pay attention to this clarity, to just rest in it or to pay attention to objects.

**SUT:** The most important thing to do is to keep recognizing the observing mind and to understand that everything else is there with it — whether in the background or not.

**Yogi:** It seems that there is nothing happening except pure experience.

**SUT:** That's it, just know that. Who is it happening to? What is pure experience?

**Yogi:** Experiencing body sensations primarily and then thoughts come in...

**SUT:** You can continue recognizing that these things are happening and that all of them are being known by the mind. Are they constant or are they in flux?

**Yogi:** They are continuously there and they are constantly changing.

**SUT:** OK, can you see which part of your experience is physical and which part is mental?

**Yogi:** It seems that it is all physical and the mental is just that clarity.

**SUT:** And the observing?!

**Yogi:** Well, yes, but it is more of a knowing. What I call the observing mind is the 'little guy' in there that's judging, looking and making decisions and then this other greater clarity is just the seeing of all that.

**SUT:** Ah, I see. What you call the observing mind, I call mental activities, and what you call clarity, I call the observing mind!

**Yogi:** OK, the observing mind is doing nothing but observing then?

**SUT:** Yes, that's right. Is there wisdom in the observing mind?

**Yogi:** Hopefully!

**SUT:** Actually, the fact that it can observe with such clarity means that there is some wisdom operating, but we fail to recognize this.

**Yogi:** I guess my concern here is that if I rest in that clarity of observing that I am not doing anything.

**SUT:** There is a well-known saying in Burma: 'Meditation is meditating but you are not meditating.' When we begin to practise we think 'I am practising' but later we realize that it is just the mind that is practising. This is a natural progression in the development of awareness. For example, in the beginning of our practice we will just notice that there are thoughts. After some time, we will begin to understand that this is the mind. Realizing this means we are at a different level of understanding; wisdom has started realizing that a thought is just a mind.

Once this level of understanding has become established, the mind will always understand that 'this is just the mind' and the next level of understanding can arise. This will be the realization that 'minds are just arising', 'minds are just happening'. There will be the understanding of 'arising' or 'becoming' (jāti).

When you see the nature of 'becoming' you will start realizing that everything is always new. Every moment is new; there is nothing that's old. Everything you perceive right now, you perceive for the first time. At this level of understanding, many things in life will cease to be a problem. Wisdom will see that there are just these minds coming and going. There

will be no more identification and interference; the 'I' will no longer participate.

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**Yogi:** What should I focus my mind on when there are very few thoughts, when the mind is very spacious and still?

**SUT:** Become aware of the awareness. You don't have to focus on anything. What you need to do is to recognize that you are still aware; to recognize that awareness is still present and to keep recognizing that. Acknowledge to yourself again and again that awareness is present. Also watch out for the defilements that occur in the observing mind. The defilements which arise in the observing mind affect you more significantly than the ones you see passing through your mind as your experience. The latter do not matter so much, but it is very important to watch out for the ones that infiltrate the observing mind.

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**Yogi:** I find it difficult to maintain awareness during certain activities, particularly during mealtimes.

**SUT:** If you know that you have a weakness in a certain area, during a particular activity, always take your time. Remind yourself not to hurry, and prepare yourself. Determine your priorities. Remind yourself that you want to maintain



mindfulness, that you want to be fully aware of this experience. Tell yourself that you are not eating but practising. By making these autosuggestions you are telling the mind to move into a particular direction. This is right thinking.

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**Yogi:** I sometimes feel that there is nothing going on in the mind, I am just sitting there and the mind seems to be blank or empty.

**SUT:** This feeling of emptiness can come up when there are very subtle objects only. But if you are awake and alert, i.e. not sleepy, you can still be aware of the sense of awareness at such times. You know that awareness is working, and the awareness will be very clear. Just stay with that.

If you find it difficult to recognize awareness at work, you need more practice. Ask yourself often: "What is the mind aware of now?" In this way you will gradually learn to see the mind more clearly and to know what awareness feels like. At first you need to practise with very obvious mind activities such as the mind being aware of thinking, of hearing, or of directing attention to a particular object. Also remind yourself to be as continuously aware as you can; continuity of mindfulness too will help you to clearly recognize awareness. It will help you to see the mind. Eventually you will realize that awareness is happening naturally all the time.

**Yogi:** How can we keep up the continuity of awareness in daily life?

**SUT:** You need to have some wisdom, some understanding that the practice is beneficial. It is not enough to hear it from other people. A real desire to practise will only arise after you have recognized yourself what difference the practice of awareness makes to your life. You need to really understand how beneficial the practice of awareness is for you. Such an understanding will motivate you much more than any outside encouragement or support.

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**Yogi:** I find it easy to be aware of the body. When I do some physical work, all I need to do is focus on body sensations and stay with them. I find it much more difficult to observe the mind when I do mental work. What is the best way to do that? What exactly do I focus on?

**SUT:** Knowing the body is different from knowing the mind. You need to focus a little to be aware of the body, but this is not necessary to be aware of the mind. Awareness is a mental activity, it is already there, and you don't need to do anything. Trying to focus on awareness is counter-productive. Knowing the mind simply requires a lot of practice. You need to become skilful at observing the mind in order to know that the mind is doing mental work like thinking, planning, or writing. Until

you have enough practice in observing the mind, you will lose mindfulness quite often whenever you do this kind of work.

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**Yogi:** I have a question about awareness in social situations. If I am in a harmonious social environment, interacting positively with people, there seems to be a natural flow, a sense of ease and enjoyment. If I bring mindfulness into such a situation, it seems to interrupt this natural flow and the joy and ease seem to fade away. What is your take on this?

**SUT:** This is a misunderstanding of the practice. The fact that you know that you are interacting with others, that the situation is harmonious, that there is ease and enjoyment, shows that you are aware of what is going on. If you then decide to observe this, you are doing too much. You are putting in unnecessary effort to be mindful and that feels unnatural. Just let your awareness flow naturally with what is happening.

**Yogi:** But I often do not feel that I am being aware!

**SUT:** There is probably a lack of skill in watching with a natural kind of awareness. If we are used to applying a very conscious kind of awareness, if this is the only kind of awareness we know, we will bring this in when trying to observe social situations. What we need to do is to learn to practise a more natural awareness when we do formal practice and to avoid the kind of very purposeful, very intense awareness. If we

can get in touch with this natural flow of awareness, when we just work with the awareness that is, we can bring this understanding into social situations and be mindful in an easy and natural way.

When we practise with a super-conscious kind of mindfulness, when we always tell ourselves that now we are going to be mindful, we will distort the picture and our experience will be kind of stultified. We need to learn to remain in an open and relaxed state of just noticing what is going on; we need to intentionally practise in a simple way. We need to keep doing this until it becomes natural, both when we are on our own and when we are with other people. For most yogis this is not easy and will take a lot of patience and perseverance.

**Yogi:** When I am on my own, I feel that there is a very easy and relaxed kind of awareness. But when I am in a social situation, being mindful becomes kind of artificial.

**SUT:** You need to remind yourself to be aware in that easy and relaxed kind of way when you are with people. You also need to be aware of where your attention is. When you are on your own, your attention will tend to be all 'in here'. When you are with others, it will most likely be all 'out there'. Why does it all go 'out there'? It is because you are more interested in what is going on 'out there', because you are not really interested in what is going on 'in here'. When the attention is all 'outside', thoughts and emotions will come unnoticed and things will build up.

**Yogi:** Right! This is where the conflict arises for me. I try to maintain the internal awareness but when the awareness wants to go out, it affects that awareness.

**SUT:** OK, the outside is important but so are you! Why not be aware of both, why not go for 50/50?

**Yogi:** Sounds good, sounds like a deal!

**SUT:** There are of course variations; in some circumstances it might be 60/40, etc. You need to experiment, learn in different situations and also remember to apply whatever you have learned on retreat.

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**Yogi:** I find it easy to be aware of whatever arises at the sense doors. But I find it confusing when I try to be aware of awareness itself. I am not sure where to put my awareness.

**SUT:** The mind cannot be found anywhere; trying to find it is a futile exercise. It would be a bit like trying to find your glasses when you are actually wearing them. The mind is not something that you can take hold of and look at. You can recognize the mind because it is doing its work. Awareness is already present; because of this you are aware of things. You are getting confused because you are looking for something other than what is there, because you think there must be 'something' else.

Put your hands together like this. Can you feel the sensations?

**Yogi:** Yes.

**SUT:** Do you recognize that you know the sensations?

**Yogi:** Yes.

**SUT:** That's awareness of awareness. Don't try hard to look for awareness; relax and see that it is already there. We find being aware of the mind difficult only because we lack practice. Experienced yogis find that being aware of the mind is just as straightforward as being aware of the body.

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**Yogi:** You say that vipassanā is effortless because there is no choice to be made. But it seems to me that there is always choice in practice; how long to stay with an object, which of the many objects that arise to pay attention to and so on.

**SUT:** Becoming aware is a gradual process. In the beginning the mind needs to learn to recognize that there is consciousness. In the beginning you should allow the mind to recognize whatever it is noticing. Once awareness is established, the mind will naturally be aware of many things. At this stage a choice can be made. You can ask yourself: "What is more important to pay attention to now?" You will,

however, need to check the mind that is observing. Wisdom has to make the choice, not 'you'. You have to check to see whether there is any greed, expectation, aversion or rejection. You might also have to remind yourself that the object is not important, that you need to look at the mind.

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**Yogi:** I am used to focusing on one object. Now you are telling me not to do that. How can I be aware of many objects at the same time?

**SUT:** You need to recognize that you are aware. Don't observe the objects; just keep checking whether awareness is present. As your awareness becomes stronger, it will automatically be able to see more objects. It is like a good satellite dish; the better the dish and the receiver, the more channels you can receive.

Yogis often start off by concentrating on one object, and when they start becoming aware of many things they think that the mind is being distracted. This is a problem for samatha meditation, but for vipassanā meditation it means that the mind has become more receptive, that there is more awareness.

In our practice of awareness we begin by paying attention to an object, so there is knowing of the object. The next step is becoming aware that we know this object. Then we will also learn to become aware of the attitude behind the awareness. With practice you will be able to see all of this at the same time.

**Yogi:** That might be relatively easy if I just observe hearing or sensations, but what do I do when I am confronted by strong feelings of worry, anxiety, or fear? How do I observe them?

**SUT:** Observe how such emotions make you feel. Do they make you feel hot, tense, tight, etc? Also pay attention to the thoughts that you are having and how the thoughts and the way you feel affect each other. Don't get lost in the story or get carried away by how you are feeling. Look at how the mind is working. You will learn how thoughts influence your feelings and how feelings influence your thoughts. You will recognize certain harmful patterns, and this will enable the mind to let go. You will for example stop indulging in certain ways of thinking when you realize that this just makes the mind feel miserable.

You need of course a relatively cool mind to be able to watch and learn. It is also very important to know why you are watching. If you are watching because you are really interested in understanding what is going on, wisdom can arise. But if you are just looking at what is happening with the hope that this will make the unpleasant emotion go away, it will not work.

**Yogi:** How will I know when wisdom arises?

**SUT:** You will see that very clearly. You will have an experience of 'ah, now I understand'. This is real understanding, not just intellectual understanding. You won't have to ask anyone, you will know.

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**Yogi:** Is kamma being created when we are working with awareness, when we are aware of awareness?

**SUT:** You could say so, good kamma.

**Yogi:** Good kamma means good rebirth or the end of rebirth!?

**SUT:** Good rebirth, good character, good mind. This awareness is just kamma, it is an action. Only if the action results in wisdom, in the kind of wisdom that leads to the end of rebirth, then that kamma is going to give good results in that way. Rebirth cannot be ended by kamma; rebirth is ended by paññā, by wisdom.

## **EFFORTLESS AWARENESS**

**Yogi:** Yesterday I felt very surprised when I recognized a strengthening of awareness. I could actually see that awareness was getting stronger, and this felt like a miracle. What came with it was a feeling of confidence which felt new. It seemed like this process of awareness leading to more awareness was just a process which was happening and had nothing to do with me. It seems to me that I don't have to be striving for anything because the process is taking care of itself.

**SUT:** We call this state effortless. Effortless in the sense that you are not putting in any personal effort, the process itself is putting in the effort, nature is doing the job.

**Yogi:** Sometimes it seems that way and other times it doesn't at all; it's back and forth, back and forth.

**SUT:** If you think of the times when you were striving and the times when you experienced this non-striving, didn't the non-striving come at a time when you did not expect it at all and when you were not striving?

**Yogi:** Yes!

**SUT:** That's why it felt so amazing, because you were not expecting it. But the moment we are working towards it, when we are expecting it, it does not come! We always need to remember the difference between personal exertion and Dhamma taking over. As long as we are striving, as long as we are trying, we believe that 'we' are the ones that produce the input that creates the result. But when Dhamma takes over, there is no trying to get anywhere, there is just a doing of what is necessary.

If you are personally very involved in trying to do the practice, you cannot see what is going on naturally. Only when you step back are you able to see that the process of awareness is actually happening naturally. That's why I sometimes ask yogis: "Have you noticed that you can hear even though you are not listening, that seeing is happening even though you are not trying to look at anything, and that even though you are not paying attention, your mind already knows things?"

I would like yogis to get to the point where they realize that without focusing or paying attention, the nature of knowing is happening. I would like yogis, especially people who have been practising for years, to just recognize that this is going on. They are too busy thinking they are practising. But after many years of meditating their practice must have gained momentum and they need to step back in order to see that this happening. They need to switch from doing to recognizing.

Of course it is not possible to just switch, to immediately change the paradigm. But it is good to have this information because this will enable you to sometimes switch into this new mode. This way you will slowly understand what is actually happening and this will enable you to let go of the old paradigm. Only when we don't do anything, can we see the non-doing, the non-self. That's why momentum is so important, when things continue under their own steam and you can really see that you are not involved. But there is no need to try to understand this! If you just practise continuously, the understanding will come. Once you gain some understanding that this process is just happening, the mind will start seeing things more and more from this perspective.

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**Yogi:** I am still struggling with letting go of old habits. I have been taught to be the doer, to really focus, to do mindfulness. I am finding it difficult to let go and open up.

**SUT:** Don't worry about it, many people go through the same process. Usually we start off by trying to observe. Then, after we have been given — and have understood — the right information, we just wait and watch. Lastly, when mindfulness has gained momentum, 'we' don't need to do anything anymore. The mind knows what to do. At this stage there is no more personal effort. You could call it effortless awareness.

When you get 'there', be careful not to get attached to this state. It is possible to have moments, hours, days, or even weeks of 'effortless' mindfulness and then lose it again. Most people will take years of practice until it becomes really natural.

**Yogi:** Would you say that just waiting and watching is the same as what you call 'not going to the object but letting the object come to you'?

**SUT:** Yes, but even the use of the word 'come' is not quite correct since in fact the objects are already there; object and mind happen together.

## **DHAMMA AT WORK**

**Yogi:** Can you explain the difference between what is usually called personal effort and what you call 'Dhamma doing its job'?

**SUT:** I'll give you a simple example: Let's assume you are doing mindfulness of breathing and the mind's attention strays

elsewhere. Will you bring awareness to the breath or will you just let it go with the flow? Bringing it to the breath is personal effort, letting it go with the flow is Dhamma at work.

**Yogi:** That's seems the opposite of what we usually hear.

**SUT:** To keep bringing one's attention to the breath can be useful for beginners and when the mind needs calming down. But I encourage all yogis to remain aware of whatever happens, of whatever the mind naturally takes an interest in.

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**Yogi:** You talked about natural awareness and letting Dhamma do its job. I find it difficult to just let the mind choose its object. Could you explain this whole process of opening up, of allowing oneself to become more and more receptive to what's happening and to understand why it's happening?

**SUT:** The mind naturally takes objects and that's Dhamma at work. Interfering with this process and deliberately focusing the mind here and there is personal effort. If you find it difficult to let the mind take whatever object it chooses, if this is confusing, you can bring it to a main object. But don't get attached to this object; use it as a safe place to go to but also allow the mind to go elsewhere. Allow the mind to know several objects.

It is OK to start with one object to establish awareness and concentration, but then we should allow the mind to relax

and open up. Yogis often feel uncomfortable when they notice that the mind is aware of several objects, and they then try to force it to be aware of their main object only. You need to remind yourself that it is natural for a mind that is stable and has some continuity of awareness to become aware of several objects. It means that awareness is getting stronger. I call this sharp awareness.

When you allow yourself to know many objects, you are moving towards vipassanā. When you keep bringing your attention to a main object, you are doing more of a samatha kind of practice. If you want your awareness and wisdom to grow, you need to allow the mind to know more things.

There is a natural progression in the growth of awareness. You might start off with just one object, say the breath. After a while you will become aware of several objects in the body. Then you will notice how you are feeling — while being aware of all these objects in the body. Later on you will become able not only to be aware of objects and feelings but also of the mind that is aware plus of the attitude that is behind this awareness. Once you are able to see this whole picture, you will begin to understand how all these objects affect each other. This is understanding, this is wisdom.

But you have to be patient; this process takes time to unfold. First you need to practise awareness in order to gather a lot of data. The mind will then put this data together into different streams of information, and eventually this process will bring about knowledge. It is therefore essential that you allow the mind to expand, to become aware of more and more objects. If it stays on one object only, it cannot gather much data and awareness and wisdom cannot grow.

## BEING AWARE WHILE READING

**Yogi:** I have more time to read these days and I wonder what the best way is to remain aware while reading.

**SUT:** Who is reading? What is reading?

**Yogi:** The mind is reading.

**SUT:** Can you know that mind? The mind is reading, the mind understands, using its intelligence.

**Yogi:** Is it necessary to make an effort to do that?

**SUT:** Not deliberately during reading; you need to make an effort to recognize the mind at work whenever you practise. When we practise for a long period of time, when watching the mind has become a habit, it will be easy to see that we use the mind in all our activities, whether mental or physical.

**Yogi:** Sometimes I get lost in what I am reading.

**SUT:** Yes, that can happen. If you are very interested in what you are reading you tend to get carried away, the mind gets sucked in.

**Yogi:** So I need to make an effort not to get lost.

**SUT:** You just need to notice whenever you get lost. You can find out what the difference is between getting completely

absorbed in what you reading, and remaining relaxed and aware while reading. It feels different.

## **WRONG ATTITUDE — RIGHT ATTITUDE**

**Yogi:** Today I found myself getting really frustrated, feeling that I don't understand, that I don't know what to do, and that I don't know how I am supposed to meditate.

**SUT:** In such situations don't try to meditate but check to see what attitude you are meditating with. You need to recognize that you are trying to meditate with a wrong attitude. You are frustrated because you have a wrong attitude.

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**Yogi:** I often find it very difficult to name my attitude or my emotions. I can feel whether they are positive or negative though. Is it sufficient to be aware of that?

**SUT:** Yes, it is. It is not so important whether you can name your attitude or not. Most yogis are so focused on the object that they are not at all aware of the mind. By repeatedly checking your attitude, you build up a habit which will allow you to be aware of the state of mind you are practising with. When you get used to observing the mind, you will be able to see the whole picture: the attitudes, the objects, the emotions and feelings as well as any changes taking place.



**Yogi:** I think I don't really understand what attitude means. Do you mean mood or whether or not I have aversion in my mind?

**SUT:** You can call it mood or attitude. It is the negative or positive commentary in your mind that judges or evaluates whatever you are relating to. Say, you see some food on the table and your automatic reaction is 'ooohhh'. What is the attitude behind this reaction? It's obvious, isn't it? In such moments you actually express your attitude. Our attitudes will always express themselves in some way.

**Yogi:** OK, so thoughts are different from attitudes?

**SUT:** Yes, but they can betray your attitude; they can be an expression of your attitude. In the same way, images, feelings, choices, decisions and some physical and verbal expressions can also indicate your attitude.

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**Yogi:** Usually I find it quite straightforward to see my negative attitudes, to relax and let them go. But sometimes my mind feels very confused and I don't know what to do.

**SUT:** Just watch the confusion. Whenever my mind is confused, I stop doing things, keep to myself and wait for the mind to calm down. There cannot be any wisdom as long as you are confused. If you try to think of solutions when in

a confused state of mind, you will only get confused answers. Don't try to do anything, don't even try to meditate.

The same principles apply when you are in a negative mood. Don't do anything. Anything you do, say, or think will be negative in some way. Just watch the bad mood until it subsides. If you have the right attitude, this will be easy. Once the mind has calmed down, you are in a position to make a wise decision.

So just watch that confusion. Don't try to push it away or ignore it but make it a habit to watch it in an uninvolved way. Whenever I am confused about something, I stop thinking about it. The reason why there is confusion is because there is no clarity, no wisdom about the topic. Trying to think in such a state will create more confusion. Looking at the sensations and feelings that are present will help the mind to calm down. When the mind has become calmer, it can investigate the situation.

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**Yogi:** There are times when the mind feels very blurred, so blurred that I cannot concentrate on anything. No matter what I try to do, I cannot focus on anything.

**SUT:** Don't try to do anything about it — and certainly never try to focus! Check how the mind feels about being blurred. It is very likely that when things are not going the way we think they should, the mind thinks that we should do something about it, that we should improve things. If such a wrong attitude is present, it becomes more difficult to work

with the present situation. If you do not see the wrong attitude, it will keep motivating your actions or reactions.

If you find yourself in a difficult situation like this, instead of trying to do something about it, stop for a while and think. Look at the situation, reflect on what might be the appropriate thing to do, and then take another look at what is happening. Carefully thinking about your plan of action is much more important than doing something about the situation.

**Yogi:** But when the mind is so blurred it is difficult to think even...

**SUT:** Just accept it as it is! This is really essential. If you cannot accept the situation, the difficulty, you cannot look at it. Just accept that feeling blurred is one of the qualities of the mind, a way that the mind happens to be functioning right now.

**Yogi:** But when the mind is blurred it is in such a foggy state...

**SUT:** Your attitude towards this state of mind is really fundamental. If you feel negative about it, you cannot do anything about it and you cannot learn anything from it. Tell yourself that feeling blurred is a state of mind. Then tell yourself that you want to understand what this state of mind is like and how it works. This way the blurriness becomes your object. Observe what happens to it. Does it become more blurred or less blurred? Now you know what to do — try it out next time the mind becomes blurred.

You see once again how important information is. Recently I told my Burmese yogis: Whenever you are experiencing an emotion, ask yourself the question: "Am I going to *feel* the emotion or *be aware* of the emotion?" In other words: "Are you going to watch it as an uninvolved observer or are you going to participate in the emotion?" It has made a big difference to a lot of the yogis. Just thinking of that question, just asking the question has made a big difference to how their mind reacted. You need to have the right information in order to think in the right way and in order to have the right attitude.

## EXPECTATIONS AND PATIENCE

**Yogi:** Why is it that whenever we have expectations, the situation becomes negative? How does this process work?

**SUT:** Expectations are expressions of lobha. Expectations are present because of delusion, moha, because we don't know things as they really are. If we really accepted things as they are we would not have expectations. But when we don't understand, we tend to have expectations. The stronger the expectation, the stronger the aversion when the expectation is not met.

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**Yogi:** How can a yogi develop more patience?

**SUT:** Watch the dosa. Dosa is the problem. My teacher always said to me that all the problems in the world originate from the trio of lobha, dosa, and moha. Keep an eye on them. Watching the bad qualities is more important because if you can keep them at bay, the good qualities will automatically come in. That's why I chose 'Don't Look Down on the Defilements' as the title of my first book.

I did a lot of retreats trying to develop good qualities. But I didn't really change; I didn't become a better person. That's because I neglected to look at the bad qualities. The quality of my mind only started to improve when I began watching the bad qualities. Watching them really consistently and continuously enabled me to understand their nature.

**Yogi:** Would it be correct to say that impatience and expectations are the two main defilements to watch out for in our practice?

**SUT:** Yes, you should patiently watch the impatience. I myself became more patient because I watched impatience every time it arose.

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**Yogi:** Sometimes I have the impression that the investigation is going more towards a manipulation of the experience, that it is changing the experience in some way because there is an

intention and this intention is based on some kind of expectation or wanting.

**SUT:** If there is a sense of wanting some result in your investigation other than wanting to understand, i.e. wanting a particular result to happen, the mind is manipulating the situation. Whenever you get this impression, you need to check your attitude to see whether the mind is actually trying to do this. Investigation just wants to know in an open way, wants to know what exactly is going on. It does not want to manipulate things.

**Yogi:** I don't usually experience wanting any results. It is more that I am aware that there are so many aspects of my experience which I could bring my awareness to. That's why I am wondering why I am choosing a particular one, why there is a preference for it, and whether there is some kind of wanting behind that choice.

**SUT:** You can investigate in that way too. Ask yourself why you have chosen a particular aspect. But sometimes it is not your choice; the mind has automatically chosen. When you do any investigation, you must always remember that the mind is doing its own work. If you identify with this process, it becomes very complicated. But if you just recognize that the mind is doing these things, that the mind is making certain choices, it is easy to observe and investigate how the mind works.

Whenever you investigate it is very important that you watch out for expectations. It can happen that you heard or read something which seems very similar to what you are experiencing in meditation and — without being aware of it — you might interpret or manipulate your experience in the light of that information.

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**Yogi:** I very easily get bored watching the mind, particularly during sitting meditation.

**SUT:** Why do you get bored?

**Yogi:** I guess because I expect something to happen.

**SUT:** Yes, when we want something to happen quickly, the mind cannot wait and gets bored.

**Yogi:** So what should I do? Stop meditating?

**SUT:** You need to practise patience. Notice every time the mind is eager for results and remind yourself of the right attitude. Only when the mind is simple, can wisdom develop. A complicated mind, a mind which thinks, expects, and plans, blocks off wisdom. The mind must be simple in order to be in the present and in order to see things just as they are. When awareness is really in the here and now, the mind never gets bored.

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**Yogi:** I used to have a lot of expectations in my practice and I often got attached to results. But now I try not to ask anything of my practice. I attempt to do the practice just for its own sake. Is it OK to really ask nothing of the practice?

**SUT:** Yes, that's fine. When the conditions or causes are fulfilled, the effects or results will naturally follow. Waiting for the effects to happen is greed. Wisdom understands that just working on the conditions will bring about the results and therefore it does not worry about them.

The mind is, however, likely to play tricks on you. You might feel that there are no expectations but then, suddenly, they somehow sneak back in again. So don't pay too much attention to the experiences you have during meditation but make an effort to keep watching the mind. If your attention is more on the mind, you will more easily notice whenever any form of greed sneaks in.

## **PRAYING AND MEDITATION**

**Yogi:** How important are prayers — in comparison to meditation?

**SUT:** How many times can you pray in one day?

**Yogi:** I pray every time after meditation. Should I pray when I meditate or is it better to pray at different times?



**SUT:** Meditation is about being aware with the right understanding. You can be aware of the fact that praying is happening. So praying and meditation can happen at the same time.

Taking the advice of the Buddha is the same as praying or paying respect to him. The Buddha's main advice to his followers was to be aware all the time, as much as possible. The Buddha very often reminded people not to be forgetful — 'appamādena sampādetha' in Pāli. Therefore, every time we remember this advice and practise awareness, we are paying respect to him. A prayer does not need to be expressed in words; it can be a mental attitude. Consequently, if we are aware all day long, we are paying respect to the Buddha all day long too.

The word Buddha means 'one who knows', and knowing is the quality of wisdom. Whenever we cultivate wisdom we are therefore inviting his presence. It is almost like being with him at these times.

## HEAVEN AND HELL

**Yogi:** I find the concepts of hell realms, heavenly realms, and rebirth very difficult to accept. Other teachings of Buddhism are very straightforward because I can put them into practice and experience them directly. Do you have any suggestions on how to look at these concepts?

**SUT:** You don't have to believe in other realms or in rebirth. Just keep on practising. Once there is greater wisdom, the mind will start understanding these things in the right way.

You could see other realms as different qualities of mind. When you feel miserable, the mind is in hell, and when you are in jhāna, you are in a heavenly realm. Life is a reflection of the quality of the mind. If you really understand the mind, you understand the world. You don't need to believe something you cannot intellectually understand. Just keep investigating. Just keep learning from your personal experience.

## **ATTACHED TO MINDFULNESS**

**Yogi:** Is it OK to be attached to mindfulness?

**SUT:** NO, it isn't! There is no need to be attached to mindfulness, mindfulness develops because of momentum. What is there to get attached to? Any attachment should be avoided. It is of course possible to become attached to anything, but no attachment is good.

## **WANTING TO BE BETTER**

**Yogi:** I often observe myself wanting other people to do poorly so that I will look best.

**SUT:** Yes, that's good, you know your mind! It is in the nature of the mind to always want to be better than others, to want

to see others as inferior. Only when this is recognized do we get the opportunity to change.

**Yogi:** How can I work skilfully with such observations?

**SUT:** Look at how it feels when the mind has a thought like that. You will see that it is not very pleasant. If you recognize this feeling every time there are such thoughts, the mind will become so familiar with the unpleasantness of them, that it will no longer want to be that way. The mind will not only realize that such thoughts are unpleasant but also that it is unnecessary to have them and that they are unwholesome. Once the mind really understands all this, it will easily let go.

## **ATTACHMENT TO 'I'**

**Yogi:** I have accomplished and suffered a lot in my life. Now I really appreciate the practice but I am definitely still very attached to 'me', to the 'I' who is doing all this. I find the idea of having to let go of 'I' or 'me' very frightening.

**SUT:** You don't have to believe in anything and you don't have to let go. You just need to practise. Nobody here really believes that there is no 'I'.

**Yogi:** It feels like I would fall into some kind of void somewhere.

**SUT:** This is only because you don't understand. Just trying to let go would be a meaningless exercise. Don't worry about it; as long as you find joy and interest in the practice, you are doing fine. All you need to do is to take in the information you are given and explore. There is no need to try to believe in the existence or non-existence of anything.

## **GREED AND WISDOM**

**Yogi:** Is it possible to like something without having greed?

**SUT:** Let me put it this way: Wisdom also desires things. But wisdom has a different motivation; it understands the true benefit of something and therefore it moves towards that. It is very different from greed or lust.

**Yogi:** I was thinking of intrinsically liking something, like walking in the woods and listening to a woodpecker's sound.

**SUT:** That's greed! I will give you another example. Some people, after hearing about Nibbāna, will try to practise very hard because they want to get it. That too is greed; they have no idea what Nibbāna is really about. This is the same as striving to earn a lot of money, thinking that once you get it you will be able to fulfil all your wishes.

When wisdom wants something there is no agitation, there is no urge to get there immediately. It understands the proximate causes to attain the goal and will steadily work

to fulfil them. Wisdom always sees both sides, the good and the bad; it sees things from different perspectives. If wisdom sees black it also understands that it is not white. If it sees dukkha, it understands that the opposite must be possible, and that is what the mind subsequently strives towards.

When wisdom is present there will never be frustration, disappointment, or depression because the goal has not yet been reached. Since there is a real understanding, it knows that just by keeping on the path it will eventually get there. Greed, on the other hand, will always be disappointed as long as it has not reached its goal.

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**Yogi:** While I am doing sitting meditation I am aware of different objects. There is often desire in connection to one of the objects. How can I drop such defilements in order to be really meditating?

**SUT:** Don't try to drop that desire! Recognize that there is desire, that's enough. You just want to recognize what's happening, you don't want to get involved.

When you experience a desire and become aware of it, does it stay the same or does it become stronger?

**Yogi:** If it is strong to begin with, it gets stronger. I am often lost in it.

**SUT:** If desire arises because of a particular object, you should stop observing that object. It is not a Dhamma object; it is an object of desire. The object you need to watch in such a situation is desire itself. Watch the feeling that comes with the desire.

How should you watch desire? From what point of view?

**Yogi:** I guess I should try not to identify with it.

**SUT:** Yes. Remind yourself that desire is just a natural phenomenon. It is not *your* greed. This will create a little distance to it and allow you to observe it more objectively. Also try to watch the intensity of the desire — does it increase or decrease? If you can observe this, you could ask yourself why it decreases or increases.

## **WISDOM NEITHER LIKES NOR DISLIKES**

**Yogi:** I am finding the heat unbearable these days.

**SUT:** So what do you do? Complain or meditate?

**Yogi:** It is too hot to meditate.

**SUT:** Whenever your mind complains, it is prime meditation time! When your mind is agitated, you need to look at your attitude and you need to examine your thinking. What is heat? It's a natural phenomenon. That's Right View. If you allow

your mind to judge the heat as bad, it will always complain. It is therefore very important that you adjust your attitude first, that you change the way you look at the situation before you do anything about adjusting the environment.

After you have accepted the situation with right view, i.e. after you have reminded yourself that heat is just a natural phenomenon, you need to examine your mind. How does aversion feel? How intense is your dislike? If you watch the aversion with the right attitude, the right view, and the right thought, your feelings will calm down.

**Yogi:** So I should not try to focus on anything?

**SUT:** No, just be aware of the unpleasant feeling. Don't judge what is happening, accept the situation.

**Yogi:** But if the heat gets too intense it might become dangerous to my health!

**SUT:** If your health is really threatened, you must of course do something to cool down. But make sure that this does not become an automatic reaction. Always try to accept the situation and look at your aversion before you do that.

The natural tendency of the mind is to indulge in what it likes and to avoid what it dislikes. Wisdom follows the middle way, wisdom neither likes nor dislikes. It just accepts the situation as it is and only does something about it if and when it is really necessary. If you want the mind to be peaceful, you need to cultivate more and more wisdom.

## WATCHING MENTAL PROCESSES

**Yogi:** I am trying to understand what the mind is. Occasionally there seems to be a palpable, an almost physical feel to it but often it seems so elusive. Can you say something about the mind?

**SUT:** When we start watching the mind, it seems elusive because we are not used to observing it. But once we have some practice in watching the mind, it becomes more and more apparent. It feels more and more palpable — in a way just as if you were observing body sensations.

It is really important to recognize what is going on in the mind. Sometimes it is calm and happy, other times it is agitated and unhappy. By becoming clearly aware of these states and observing them we will — over time — learn why they arise. We see how our thoughts and ideas affect our emotions. We can see that our behaviour and our thinking are governed by ideas and values we blindly accepted, usually when we were young, and we also realize how much we are attached to them. Becoming aware of these ideas and values gives us a chance to bring in some wisdom which will allow us to re-evaluate them, to become less attached to them and, if necessary, to replace them with more useful ideas and values.

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**Yogi:** When the mind is in a positive state I intentionally ask myself questions like: "What is the cause of this state?" or: "What is the effect of this state?" Is it necessary to do this or not? I find it takes quite some effort to do it and it brings up agitation and restlessness.

**SUT:** Don't ask questions if that makes you feel agitated. Just trying to understand intellectually is not real! That's why continuity of awareness is so important. If you recognize all the minds that are happening and what the mind is doing and feeling, causes and effects will become obvious.

As long as you are interested in the process of watching, the mind will automatically investigate the relationship between cause and effect. If you are watching continuously, you will be aware of the state of mind before the good state comes into existence, and also observe how it fades away again. Watching this whole process, the mind will recognize the causes and effects.

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**Yogi:** What is the best way to watch the activities of the mind?

**SUT:** Don't focus on any objects! Only if you don't focus can you notice the mind. When you wear glasses but are not looking at anything, you will easily notice that the glasses are there. However, when you are looking at something, you will not notice the glasses. The nature of the mind is similar; it either focuses

'outwards' or — when it is not focusing — it very naturally retreats 'inwards'. Only if you don't focus outwards can the mind be aware of itself.

## **SEEING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MIND AND OBJECT**

**Yogi:** My awareness is good, I can see the various activities of the mind quite continuously throughout the day, but I am not clear whether I am aware of observing these things or whether I am just observing them. Let me give you an example: I was doing walking meditation and some confusion arose. When I became aware of observing confusion, the mind became very clear. It was very clear that there was the awareness of the observing.

**SUT:** That's because the qualities of a confused mind and an observing mind are very different.

**Yogi:** Yes, exactly! That's why it is so clear. But when the mind is calm and peaceful it is less clear that I am observing it.

**SUT:** But what is happening and the watching are very different, right?

**Yogi:** Yes, when there is a state of confusion or agitation they are very different.

**SUT:** So when you are trying to observe a clear and peaceful state of mind, is there a desire to want to see this state more clearly?

**Yogi:** Yes.

**SUT:** Don't try to see it more clearly!

**Yogi:** Ok, that's helpful.

**SUT:** If you can see the difference between the observing and the observed clearly in one state of mind, you will gradually become able to see it in any other states too. Clearly understanding the difference between the observing and the observed, between the mind and the object, is a kind of insight. You can ask yourself: "Which is the object, which is the mind?" But then you need to let the mind do its own work. Don't expect answers! If there are expectations or any other kind of lobha, the mind gets confused.

**Yogi:** Yes, there are expectations!

**SUT:** For many yogis, not recognizing that some form of expectation has crept into the observing is their main problem. So always check the attitude before you do something. Don't expect results! When the mind has no desire at all, everything is very clear. You don't have to look very hard. Once the mind is moving in a wholesome direction, it will keep going and things will unfold naturally.

**Yogi:** Yes, I have been trying too hard.

**SUT:** Your effort always has to be balanced. You have to practise correctly, in a balanced way, continuously, and wisely.

## **OBSERVING FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS**

**Yogi:** How can I distinguish between my own feelings and emotions and those which I experience because of the influence of other people?

**SUT:** If you watch your mind all the time it will be obvious. When you are aware of your thoughts and feelings as you interact with others, you will see how they are feeding each other.

**Yogi:** So I will be able to see which feelings are influenced by others?

**SUT:** Yes, you will see how their thoughts and feelings affect your thoughts and feelings and vice-versa. You will see how your feelings are influenced by what they say and the way they say it. It is important to always be aware of your reaction to whatever you experience.

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**Yogi:** I continued observing the feeling of frustration I told you about during our last meeting. It kind of stayed in the background but it was always there. Then, this morning, I suddenly realized that I had become frustrated because I had been very lonely. Once I could see that, the frustration was gone.

**SUT:** When we keep an eye on feelings, they cannot grow, they cannot become more intense. When you observe a feeling, you will also find out where it came from, where it began. Because you had not been aware of the loneliness, it grew into something else, into frustration, but then the constant observation of the feeling of frustration led you back to it, i.e. it made you see where it all began.

**Yogi:** I had always believed that emotions change very quickly and that emotions do not stay in the body. But my experience was different, I could definitely feel it in the body and it was not changing quickly at all.

**SUT:** Seeing the nature of mind, i.e. seeing the constant and quick changes, can only happen when the mind is very clear, calm, and strong. The mind is neither in the body nor out of the body but the mind is always connected to the body. It is always interacting with the body. We therefore experience that certain emotions affect certain parts of our body. We might perceive emotions as lingering in the body but in fact there is just this interaction going on.

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**Yogi:** I was wondering about bringing things into sitting meditation. I might have feelings, moods, and so on when I am walking but my mind is not really settled enough to investigate them. But when I sit in meditation I can encourage these to arise and then investigate them and use that as a way of trying to understand them. This way I am bringing something in rather than seeing what arises. I am not dealing with it in an intellectual way but in an investigative way.

**SUT:** Yes, you can do that, when the mind is ready you can do that. When the mind is quite stable, when the awareness is good and you have enough samādhi, you can recall such emotions in order to investigate them.

One yogi experienced very strong hatred every time he remembered a particularly difficult encounter he had had with someone. I told him to watch his feelings every time this memory came up spontaneously, and I advised him to switch to a neutral object whenever he felt that the feelings were becoming too strong and to only watch them again after his mind had become more stable. I also suggested to him that whenever his mind felt really firm, stable and calm, to bring up the memory in order to see what he could learn from it. He did all this over a long period of time and little by little he began to understand things and then, at some point, he no longer experienced any anger when the memory of that event or the image of that person came up. He was able to forgive him because he had really understood the situation.

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**Yogi:** I am not clear about vedanā. Is it enough to just know that there are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feelings?

**SUT:** Vedanā is an activity of the mind. There is a difference between this activity of feeling and our perception of it as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Vedanā means feeling or 'sensing' something, feeling into something, while pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral is our interpretation of feeling.

**Yogi:** So do we need to be mindful of this feeling process or the qualities of pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral?

**SUT:** We need to know both, and it is important to understand that they represent different functions of the mind, the aggregates of feeling and perception. The function of perception (saññā) is to interpret feeling (vedanā) as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. The function of vedanā is just to feel.

**Yogi:** That means we need to be mindful of the activity of vedanā as separate and distinct from the pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral?

**SUT:** Yes, that's right. You can also make further distinctions between feelings. When the mind interprets a particular sensation as a bodily pleasant feeling (sukha) it will usually immediately give rise to a pleasant mental feeling, called somanassa. When the body sensations are interpreted as unpleasant (dukkha), it will usually give rise to an unpleasant

mental feeling, called *domanassa*. The reaction to neutral feelings in the body (*adukkha-m-asukhā*) will be equanimity.

**Yogi:** Do *vedanā* and *saññā* always work together?

**SUT:** Yes, *vedanā* touches everything, together with consciousness and other mental factors. You experience the world *through* this activity of *vedanā*.

**Yogi:** Is it difficult to become aware of *vedanā*? Is it very subtle?

**SUT:** Yes, it is quite subtle. Neutral feelings are already quite subtle in comparison to pleasant or unpleasant ones. The process of *vedanā* is even more subtle than that. It is not easy to become aware of it. Becoming aware of the mind at work takes a lot of practice; it is not an ordinary knowing, it is a very subtle understanding process.

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**Yogi:** When doing lying down meditation I had this sense of knowing a feeling as unpleasant but not feeling it as unpleasant. Later a different type of feeling arose and the mind knew 'happiness'. This time the feeling was known as pleasant but it was not felt as pleasant.

**SUT:** You were aware of the feelings but the mind that was aware of the feelings had no *lobha* or *dosa* towards what was



being felt. So there was no reaction of unpleasantness or pleasantness (domanassa or somanassa). The mind had just registered the experience as unpleasant or pleasant. It did not react to, i.e. it did not participate in that feeling.

**Yogi:** Yes, that was my experience.

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**Yogi:** You mentioned that feelings need not be categorized as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Sometimes I find it helps me to recognize them. When I recognize that something is very pleasant, it helps me to see how I am becoming attached to it and how I suffer when it is not there anymore. Could you comment on this?

**SUT:** We cannot avoid experiencing pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feelings. They just happen naturally. I advise yogis not to pay much attention to the pleasantness or the unpleasantness because by doing so we actually perpetuate that particular pleasant or unpleasant feeling.

I would like yogis to pay more attention to the process of feeling rather than to its pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral quality. Being aware of feeling is more subtle than being aware of its quality; it means being more aware of it as a mental activity.

**Yogi:** Sometimes pleasant feelings are unpleasant and sometimes unpleasant feelings are pleasant.

**SUT:** Yes, whether or not something is experienced as pleasant or unpleasant depends on whether the mind is holding greed or aversion. When the mind is full of greed, it usually finds things pleasant but when the mind has aversion, it tends to find things unpleasant. When we feel cold, we will find heat pleasant but when we then get hot, we'll find heat unpleasant.

The actual mental activity is feeling and I would like yogis to learn to recognize this reality. We need to learn to see that the mind feels, that the mind is doing this work of feeling.

## **SEEING AND HEARING — LOOKING AND LISTENING**

**Yogi:** The other day you were talking about the importance of seeing and hearing versus sight and sound. I still don't understand. Can you explain this to me?

**SUT:** Don't pay attention to a particular sound. Just be aware that you are hearing. Hearing means that you know that the mind knows the sound, that you are aware of the sound and the knowing mind. If you are aware of hearing you can be aware of many different sounds. If you focus on one particular sound you will get caught up in concepts, i.e. thinking about what causes the sound, the direction it comes from, etc. and you cannot be aware of the mind. So don't pay attention to the objects of hearing but to the process of hearing. The same goes for seeing.

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**Yogi:** If I am listening to someone and I feel like I am paying attention to what they are saying, responding to them as best as I can, do I also need to be aware of the fact that listening is happening, or that conversation is happening, or that I am sitting in a room, or that I hear sounds, etc.? When I tried to do that I felt that I was all over the place, that I was fragmented.

**SUT:** When you are not very experienced, you tend to go to the objects. When you do that, when you try to be aware of as much as you can, it will feel like you are all over the place.

Start by paying attention to your feeling. It is really important to know how you are feeling while you are listening or talking. Are you reacting in any way? Simply be present with that, just stay with whatever you are feeling. You will notice that whenever you get the feeling of being stable and collected, the mind will start to expand and you will become able to notice other experiences without even trying. It is almost like the objects come to you when the mind is in a calm and receptive state. Yogis who understand how their minds work can just be in this receptive state of awareness and be content with whatever the mind knows.

**Yogi:** So, is it wrong practice to be listening and then to remember to be aware of the fact that you are listening?

**SUT:** I would not call it wrong practice; I just think that it might be difficult at first, when you are not yet skilful at being aware when interacting with others.

When you are listening, what is listening, how are you listening?

**Yogi:** I am using my ears and I am also using my mind.

**SUT:** That's the key; it is the mind which listens. We just need to notice what the mind is doing.

Is hearing the same as listening?

**Yogi:** Hearing is passive and listening is active.

**SUT:** Yes, even when you are not trying to listen, you can still hear. Even if you aren't trying to look, you will still see.

So when you aren't trying to pay attention to your experience, can the mind still be conscious of it?

**Yogi:** Hm, my initial answer is: it depends ...

**SUT:** OK, say you were listening to something, and usually you pay attention to your breath but now the mind has slipped away and feels something on one of your hands. What would you be paying attention to?

**Yogi:** I think to my hand.

**SUT:** Yes. There is no need to bring the mind to any place. The mind is doing its own work; you just need to recognize what the mind is doing. If you want to understand 'nature', you just have to let things happen naturally. Bringing our

awareness 'back' to something is making a personal effort. For a beginner this might be necessary, but after some time you don't need to do this anymore.

Instead of listening to a sound, we should be aware that hearing is happening. In the hearing there is a knowing of the sound — that's what is called hearing. So everything is there. I am speaking now and you are listening to me. Are you hearing sound which is coming from me or are you hearing sound which is already your experience, which is already with you and not 'out there'? So by just staying with yourself you can know everything.

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**Yogi:** I am a little confused about being aware of seeing. I was just looking out of the window and I could see that the mind is putting labels on things, that it is using concepts all the time. This is happening naturally. With all this going on automatically, how can I see things as they are? How can I be aware of seeing itself?

**SUT:** There is no need to get rid of what the mind naturally does. The mind is reality and you can recognize that it is doing its work. Perception (saññā) is one of the functions of the mind and you cannot stop that from happening. It is enough to recognize that perception is a function of the mind and to remind yourself not to identify with the process.

When we look at our five physical sense doors, it will be very obvious that touching, smelling, and tasting occur in the

body. Why is it that we perceive seeing and hearing as happening 'out there'? Actually, seeing and hearing happens right here too. But we believe in the concepts that the mind is using; we believe perception which perceives a distance.

So how can we recognize the reality of seeing in seeing? When you pay attention to what you are seeing, you just see concepts such as shape, colour, distance, size, etc. But reality is said to have no colour, no size, and no form! How can we become aware of this reality?

The key is in recognizing the knowing mind. Can we recognize that we know? Does knowing have colour, size, or form? We need to recognize this mind. What does it know? It knows its object. The object is reality, the reality behind concepts.

Without understanding we cannot know reality, however hard we try. Awareness sees the concepts and understanding knows the reality.

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**Yogi:** I find it much more difficult to be aware of seeing and hearing than to be aware of body sensations. Why is that?

**SUT:** Everyone has this problem. Smell, taste, and touch are perceived as happening inside the body but sight and sound are perceived as happening outside. This is because we believe in the concepts of 'out there', 'direction', etc. In fact what we hear and see is also happening inside; in a sense there is no outside world. Everything we experience happens in the

mind. The world is a creation of the mind. So there is no need to look outside; everything is happening right here in our own minds.

## THOUGHTS

**Yogi:** I have become aware that there are many thoughts in my mind.

**SUT:** Do you only know the thoughts? Or do you understand that this is just the mind? Or do you understand the nature of arising?

**Yogi:** I am not sure.

**SUT:** Most people only know that there are thoughts but they don't understand that it is just the mind at work. Some people understand that it is just the mind but they don't understand the nature of arising. This reflects their different levels of understanding.

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**Yogi:** Sometimes there is nothing in the mind. I'm just aware of my posture.

**SUT:** There is always some mind activity going on. Whenever you check the mind, check how you feel. Are you relaxed or not, are you tense or not? Also see if there are any thoughts.

**Yogi:** I tend to get carried away with thoughts.

**SUT:** That's OK, we can get lost in thoughts sometimes. When you check your mind and notice that thoughts are present, don't dwell on them. Just recognize that there is thinking!

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**Yogi:** I find myself regularly getting lost in thinking. There is some resistance to being aware. The mind finds it pleasurable to get lost in thinking. This keeps happening even though I know that when I let the mind run freely, at the end of it, there is a lot of tension from doing that.

**SUT:** The mind works from habit patterns. You understand a little bit that this habit causes tension but wisdom is weak and the habit pattern is strong. Therefore it is really important for you to see what is motivating your thinking. You need to really watch out and notice the mind wanting to think, wanting to be lost in thought. Pay attention to the intensity of this desire; notice whether it fades or increases. You will find that when it fades, the thoughts don't come, and when it grows, the thoughts start coming in. At the same time don't forget to keep asking yourself whether there is awareness, whether awareness is at work. But don't *try* to be aware. You just need to be the supervisor; you just need to keep checking whether awareness is doing its job.

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**Yogi:** I find it challenging to stay with my thoughts. I might get a glimmer of my thoughts but it is very difficult for me to remain rooted. I easily slip into my story.

**SUT:** Two factors contribute to that: One is that awareness is not strong enough; the other factor is the lack of skill or practice. Most people have very little practice in recognizing thoughts, i.e. in acknowledging that a thought is happening and in remaining aware of the thought. What most people are used to is focusing on thoughts in order to make them disappear.

I advise beginners to simply recognize a thought, to just acknowledge it and then bring their attention to whatever object they had been observing before. Doing this grounds them again. Watching the thought continuously would just suck them into the story. You can train yourself by doing this over and over again; recognize that a thought is happening and bring your attention to whatever else you had been observing. This builds up awareness. But once you get involved in the story in some way, you will get lost.

Once you have some practice in recognizing thoughts in this way, you can ask yourself the question: Do I see that this is a thought or do I recognize that this is the mind?

The contents of what you are thinking might be about the past or the future but the mind arises in the present moment only. We often use the expression 'wandering mind' which seems to suggest that the mind has wandered away, has moved somewhere. The truth is, however, that the mind does not go anywhere; the mind is only happening here and now. All it does is arise and pass away. A thought about

someone far away or about an event in the past or the future is simply a thought that has arisen here and now. Awareness alone can only recognize that a thought is happening. But when there is a realization of the nature of thoughts, when there is some understanding, wisdom can see that this is only the mind.

You can look at thoughts from many different perspectives. You may realize that this thought is just the mind, that it is a defilement, that it is important or unimportant, or that it is wholesome or unwholesome.

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**Yogi:** Every time I become aware of thinking, the thinking immediately stops. But when I go out for a walk and become aware of looking, the looking does not stop. Can I learn to be aware of thinking without making the thoughts disappear?

**SUT:** For experienced yogis, the observing is naturally very strong and the desire to think is not very strong, particularly in a retreat environment. For beginners it would be different; their desire to think is much stronger, the thinking does not stop and they keep losing themselves in thoughts.

Instead of focusing on the thoughts, you need to learn to recognize that the mind is thinking. Once this has become a habit, the awareness becomes stronger, more continuous, and you will be able to watch the thinking process and investigate it.

**Yogi:** Can you suggest anything which would help me catch the thought from the beginning?

**SUT:** No. Don't worry about that. Just watch thinking whenever you become aware of it. As you watch your thoughts, some understanding can arise. You might for example realize that a thought is completely useless. Such an understanding will make the thought disappear. This is wisdom at work; this is not 'you' doing something to the thought.

**Yogi:** Sometimes I catch myself having thoughts about what a good person I am, somehow there is a need to comfort myself.

**SUT:** That's natural; we always try to make ourselves feel better, in all sorts of ways. Remember that a thought is just an object which can help us to develop awareness, effort, and concentration. If you don't see it as an object, you will get carried away by the train of thoughts, you will lose yourself in the story.

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**Yogi:** I used to find it very difficult to remain aware of thinking. I very quickly got involved and then so strongly identified with the story line that mindfulness completely disappeared. This still happens at times, but now I can more often remain aware of thinking. It feels like there is a distance between the observing and the thinking.

**SUT:** Why are you now able to observe thinking?

**Yogi:** I guess it is because of effort and practice.

**SUT:** Yes, that's important too, but what actually enables you to observe is understanding. You changed your thinking and your attitude. Now some wisdom is working alongside awareness.

**Yogi:** Yes, I can see that. I am not taking the thoughts so seriously anymore and I often see how they begin.

**SUT:** That's really important. When you can see how thoughts begin, when you start understanding that they arise because of certain conditions, you will also realize that this is just the mind at work. Once you clearly comprehend what is actually happening, you will always be able to keep that distance between the observing and the thinking.

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**Yogi:** You said that if we don't focus too much on thoughts, they will not immediately disappear and that we then can be aware of both the thoughts and the awareness. Does this also apply to unskilful thoughts?

**SUT:** Yes. If we can maintain this open and balanced state of awareness when there is recognition of the unskilful thoughts, and we don't get lost in them, then we are able to observe and learn something about the unskilful thoughts. In other

words, this way of recognizing and observing will allow wisdom to arise.

How are you able to tell if a thought is unskilful?

**Yogi:** I get very tense.

**SUT:** When the mind actually understands that, when the mind clearly sees that a thought is unskilful, it will just let go.

**Yogi:** That does sometimes happen; I recognize a thought as unskilful and it just goes. But I thought that was happening because my focus was too strong.

**SUT:** No, when you understand an unskilful thought, it disappears because of wisdom. When a thought disappears because you are focusing too much, there will be no understanding; it will just stop and you will not see why. When wisdom understands something it will somehow tell you. There might be a thought flashing up saying: "This is stupid." You will clearly know that something has been understood.

**Yogi:** OK, but why is it that the same unskilful thought can come up repeatedly? It can happen that a thought pops up and disappears again immediately because it was recognized as unskilful but a while later it comes up again.

**SUT:** It depends on the defilement. Some of them are very old and strong habits and therefore they will keep coming up

again and again. But every time the mind clearly recognizes it as a defilement, it loses some strength. You will need a lot of patience and perseverance to overcome deeply ingrained unskilful habits.

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**Yogi:** I have heard from another teacher that the more simple a person is, i.e. the less thinking he does, the faster he progresses. You said that if a person is intelligent and uses a lot of reasoning he will progress quickly!?

**SUT:** Have you thought about what kind of thinking this yogi who is simple is not doing? It will be thinking which is not helpful, not beneficial, and not useful. He does not do any thinking with defilements; it is that kind of simplicity. What kind of thinking does the yogi apply who uses a lot of reasoning? Wise thinking. So neither statement is wrong, you just need to know how to interpret them.

People do not think about the quality of the thinking, they just hear 'no thinking'. If you do not think at all, what can you do? You cannot even cook! People who do not know anything at all, do not think at all either. When I was young I read this comment by a writer on a Burmese saying which goes like this: 'A wise man has few words, those who are of few words are wise.' The writer dryly commented: 'But those who do not know anything at all do not say anything either.'

The Buddha encouraged people to think, speak, and do what is good and right. One of the metaphors used for sati is

a security guard. A security guard will allow those to enter who are supposed to be in the building but not allow those people in who have no right to be there. Sati is not a door lock. If you lock the door, neither the bad nor the good people can enter.

## USING PHRASES

**Yogi:** I have been using phrases such as 'anger is just angering', 'doubt is just doubting', or 'fear is just fearing'. This immediately creates some space and gives me peace of mind. Is this all I need to do?

**SUT:** No. Using such phrases will only alleviate the gross levels of such emotions; you should also look at the more subtle levels. Using these phrases is just borrowed wisdom; we don't really understand their meaning and therefore there can just be a partial reduction of the emotional intensity.

Right view or right thought alleviates some of the suffering caused by the defilements. They are expressions of wisdom and will always bring some relief. Let's assume there are five levels of intensity of emotions. Right thought — when it works — will bring us down to level three only. Level two usually does not bother us much anymore; we can easily cope with that. But the emotion is not gone and you need to investigate further.

Only once the mind really understands that thoughts are just thoughts, feelings are just feelings, etc. will such emotions immediately drop to zero.

**Yogi:** How do we get the real wisdom?

**SUT:** You have to do a lot of observing and investigating over a long period of time. You have to keep investigating until the mind has gathered sufficient information to see the whole picture, until it really understands.

## **LABELLING**

**Yogi:** I have been trying to watch the mind, but labelling automatically comes in because I used labelling for over two months before coming here.

**SUT:** But the mind is labelling!

**Yogi:** Yes, but I keep using words in my mind like 'thinking'.....

**SUT:** How does it feel when you see such labels come up in the mind?

**Yogi:** It's a little bit distracting. I try to push the labelling aside...

**SUT:** NO, NO, don't try to push it aside!! Just recognize that the mind is labelling. You cannot stop a habit abruptly. If you try to stop it forcefully, there will be a conflict.

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**Yogi:** What's the difference between labelling and just observing or noticing? In either case you recognize what is happening. What's wrong with using words?

**SUT:** Labelling gives the mind a lot of work to do and therefore it has less time to investigate. Phenomena are happening at an incredibly fast rate, and labelling them will therefore also be late, i.e. you are naming the experience long after it happened.

**Yogi:** So just feel the emotion as opposed to labelling it?

**SUT:** Yes, by being aware of what is going on continuously. When we observe something, the mind naturally comments on what is going on. There is nothing wrong with that. Mechanically labelling 'fear, fear, fear' is very different. That is not only tiring and but it also prevents you from seeing the details of your experience. It is unnecessary. But you cannot stop the natural comments the mind makes when it recognizes something.

Mechanical labelling weakens both awareness and understanding of the mental processes. We don't really need labelling to explain anything to ourselves; we only need labels to explain things to other people. When we use labelling, the mind will get involved with all the meanings and associations connected to that label. By using labelling we also target a particular aspect of our experience and therefore cannot see the whole picture.

## **SORT OUT YOUR ANGER FIRST**

**Yogi:** Some questions have been on my mind about people who are expressing wrong views about the practice. I was talking with a friend and became quite angry when I listened to his wrong views and his justifications of them. I knew that because I was angry and because I wanted to change his mind I had wrong views myself. I don't know how to manage such a situation. I am convinced that his views are wrong and I know that I cannot change them, but I would also like to be able to speak to him wisely about it.

**SUT:** It is not so important to correct his wrong views. Sort out your anger first! When you have no more anger, you can try to figure out how to help other people. How can we help other people with our defilements? Instead of helping them we might actually cause some harm.

## **DAILY LIFE**

**Yogi:** Can you give us some advice on how to practise outside the retreat centre?

**SUT:** How do you want to live in the world 'out there'? If you really want to continue the practice, the mind will find a way. Only if there is a measure of true understanding of the value of the practice will the mind be prepared to make a consistent effort in daily life. No matter how many techniques you know, unless the mind has a true desire to practise in the world,

you will not be able to apply any of them 'out there'. A mind that has understood the benefits of the practice, will find time and skilful ways to apply what has been learned on retreat.

People who are really interested in the quality of their minds will watch that quality all the time. They will learn how to always keep that quality in the best possible state. If you can clearly see the vast difference between the quality of the mind when it is aware and the quality when it is not aware, you will automatically want to be aware more and more often. This is exactly why I often ask yogis whether they are aware of the quality of their mind, whether they can clearly see the difference between a mind that is aware and one that is not aware.

**Yogi:** Thank you, I believe this is very good advice. It is just so different from anything I have ever heard before. It will take some time to digest.

**SUT:** I really want to encourage people to think for themselves. You have all been practising for some time, you have the basic tools. You need to understand the benefits of the practice so that the motivation to practise really comes from within. If your heart is not in it, you will never give your best; you will never fully develop your inner potential.

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**Yogi:** In my job I have to use a lot of effort in order to keep many details in mind and to get the tasks at hand finished in

time. I usually experience a lot of tension and at the end of the day I am always very tired.

**SUT:** Do you understand why you get tense when you work?

**Yogi:** I guess it is because I am using a lot of effort.

**SUT:** Why are you using such a lot of effort? You need to find out why you are using so much energy to do your work.

**Yogi:** How do I find that out?

**SUT:** Check the thoughts that your mind is harbouring. Look at the thoughts you have when you do your work, look at the views and ideas you are holding, and also notice the feelings you have when these thoughts come up.

You already understand that the effort is causing tension. You also need to recognize that it is because there is too much effort that there is tension. You are using more effort than you need.

**Yogi:** I have deadlines; I need to have things done by a certain time. I always feel that I need to get on with it. Then I always feel very tired and tense.

**SUT:** You just explained why you are getting tense. The main reason why you are putting in so much energy is because you have anxiety.

**Yogi:** That's true.

**SUT:** Now you need to understand why you are anxious. Are you not skilful in what you are doing?

**Yogi:** Well, I guess I am. I always get things done.

**SUT:** So whenever you get these feelings of anxiety, just recognize them. Ask yourself whether it is really necessary to feel anxiety. Is it necessary to have anxiety to finish a job?

**Yogi:** No, it isn't.

**SUT:** You need to acknowledge anxiety every time it comes up. Watching these feelings will help you understand something and this will allow your mind to let go. Remember that the purpose of vipassanā meditation is not to relieve you from what is happening but to help you understand what is happening.

When trying to deal with an emotion you can ask yourself four questions. First question: "When I am having this emotion, does it make my body and mind feel good or bad?" Does it feel pleasant or unpleasant? If you recognize the emotion every time it arises, and also recognize whether it feels pleasant or unpleasant in body and mind, the mind will start wondering whether it is worth having this emotion. Eventually your mind will realize that it does not have to live with this emotion. Once you know that something does not feel good, are you just going to keep indulging in it?

**Yogi:** I don't think so.

**SUT:** OK, the second question: "What is the emotion about, what is it directed towards?" The third question: "Why am I having this emotion?" The fourth question: "Is having this emotion necessary or unnecessary?"

These questions support the practice because they create interest and encourage us to use our intelligence. The moment we get a real answer, when the mind really sees something, it lets go. In your case, that would mean letting go of the anxiety you suffer.

If you watch and recognize the emotions of anxiety every time they come up, they will decrease. But as long as you haven't really understood them, they will keep coming up again and again. You will have to watch them persistently and patiently until the mind really understands and can let go.

There are other questions you can ask yourself: "Who is angry?" "What is anger?" All these questions make the mind interested, awake, and alert. Your meditation becomes more interesting. Once you have the right understanding of how to practise vipassanā, you will never feel bored. You will always be trying to find out why things are happening. But don't ask too many questions, don't drive yourself crazy! Usually, one question at a time is enough. The purpose of asking questions is to keep you really interested in what is happening.

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**Yogi:** I am having a hard time to keep up the practice. I am in the middle of packing and moving and so I often forget.

**SUT:** One of the main reasons why we forget, why we are not able to practise in daily life, is not what we are doing but the way we go about it. It is because we are eager to get things done, because we are in a hurry to finish the task at hand. In daily life we really need to watch our minds, we really need to keep checking what kind of mind state we are working with.

How can we learn to maintain awareness and samādhi (stability of mind) in daily life?

**Yogi:** I hope to be able to find a job which does not put me under so much pressure. But I believe the main thing is to continue practising as much as I can.

**SUT:** Yes, when there is a lot of pressure, a lot of stress, practising becomes difficult. Try to learn from the difficulties at your workplace. What makes the mind agitated? Why do you lose mindfulness? Why does the mind become eager? Is it necessary to hurry? Investigating in this way will help you deal more skilfully with difficult situations and will prevent unwholesome mind states from taking over.

**Yogi:** OK, but how do I keep up mindfulness in a job that demands me to do things very quickly, where I need to be fast and efficient because I have a deadline?

**SUT:** Just do as much as you can. Take and appreciate any opportunity to practise. While you are working, try to be aware of how you feel, of what kind of mind states you experience. But don't try to focus, do it loosely, lightly. If you make too much of an effort to practise, you won't be able to do your job properly. If you focus too much on the job, you won't be able to be mindful. You need to find the right balance.

**Yogi:** OK, I'll try. Do you have any specific advice on how to practise while talking? Most office jobs involve a lot of talking on the phone and we also constantly need to communicate with our fellow workers.

**SUT:** That requires a lot of practice. Every time you talk to someone on the phone or when someone approaches you, try to remember to check how you are feeling. What do you think and feel about that person? Throughout the day, whether at work or not, make it a habit to always check what kind of emotional reaction you have every time you interact with another person. How do you feel when the phone rings? Is the mind eager to pick it up quickly? You need to notice these things.

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**Yogi:** In my work I often have to deal with very demanding and sometimes very angry and aggressive customers. I would appreciate any advice on how to deal with such situations.



**SUT:** Every time you are confronted with an angry or demanding customer, check to see how your mind feels. Their greed and aversion is their problem, you need to see whether there is greed and aversion in your mind.

**Yogi:** The problem is that coming face to face with someone who has such strong mind states tends to automatically trigger the same mind states in me. The same goes when I meet great teachers; their calmness of mind immediately affects my mind.

**SUT:** There is of course this mind-object relationship; i.e. when the object is positive the mind tends to react in a positive way and when it is negative it tends to react in a negative way. It takes practice in observing the mind to understand these processes. Through understanding, the mind gains a measure of stability and will no longer be so strongly affected by either negative or positive objects or experiences. As understanding matures, the mind becomes less and less reactive. It also realizes that every time it blindly reacts, it is not free. For these reasons, the mind will become more and more interested in what is going on 'inside' and will put in more effort to investigate.

Every time liking or disliking arises, the mind will not only be aware of it but it will also ask itself why liking or disliking arises. It will then realize that the object is not inherently positive or negative but that it is our judgement, our opinion that makes it so. Whenever the mind decides that a certain object, experience or person is not good, it reacts

in a negative way, whenever it decides it is good, it reacts in a positive way. Once you can see these judgements you need to further investigate: Is this evaluation based on wisdom or on delusion? If it is delusion, the mind will react with greed or aversion, if it is wisdom, the mind will just see it as it is and there will be no reaction, no liking or disliking.

When through observing our anger we truly understand the suffering that it always causes us, it will become easy to feel compassion whenever we are confronted with an angry person. We know how they feel, we can easily empathize with them, and therefore we will not become angry anymore.

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**Yogi:** I experience a lot of anxiety around food and eating. I am trying to avoid eating certain things as well as to be aware as much as I can, but I find this very difficult because I quickly get tired of being mindful.

**SUT:** You are getting tired because the motivation to be aware is anxiety and not wisdom. The mind remembers that in the past it suffered a lot because you were eating the wrong things and it does not want to suffer again. It is trying very hard to avoid making the same mistake and is therefore putting in too much effort.

Notice your state of mind when you suffer because you have eaten something that does not agree with you and also when you are trying to avoid suffering. How bad is the suffering after eating unsuitable food? What state of mind

are you observing with? You need to bring awareness and wisdom into these situations.

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**Yogi:** I am talking about daily life. When there is aversion, when there are uncomfortable feelings, or when the mind is agitated, my reaction based on my training is to calm the mind and the body. You are saying don't do that. You are telling us to turn awareness to the nature of the experience of aversion and agitation. Is that correct?

**SUT:** The paying attention comes later. First you need to see whether you can accept that this anger or this identification with anger or aversion is not 'you'. What views are you holding in regard to the experience? This right thought needs to come in first.

**Yogi:** So this whole idea of wholesome and unwholesome that I have heard a lot about includes practice. It is a little counter-productive to what you are saying because wholesome or unwholesome does not matter in what you are saying.

**SUT:** I am not saying that it does not matter. The practice is to understand what a wholesome mind is and what an unwholesome mind is, to really know for yourself. Whose mind is the wholesome mind? Whose mind is the unwholesome mind? Is it your mind? Having the right thought about an experience is a wholesome mind, having the wrong thought about an experience is an unwholesome mind. You are going to look at

this because you really want to know for yourself, because you want to understand nature as it is.

The purpose of calming the mind and the body is to enable you to observe. Applying the right thought, reminding yourself that 'this is not me, this is the nature of this emotion' calms the mind and the body too. You need a calm mind to observe. If you find that using this kind of right thinking does not work, that it does not help the mind to calm down, then use the method you already know. But afterwards don't forget to use the calm mind to observe.

Why does a wholesome mind arise? Why does an unwholesome mind arise? What is this wholesome or unwholesome mind? Why does a wholesome mind increase, why does an unwholesome mind grow? Why does a wholesome mind decrease or fade away, why does an unwholesome mind fade away? This is your field of research.

## THE HIDDEN KILESAS

**Yogi:** Sometimes I have to work with kilesas that are very deep and it really takes a lot of work to approach them with the right attitude. It seems that I have to learn it all over again.

**SUT:** Yes, that is what you have to do. If your understanding was complete, you would not find this a problem anymore, but obviously there is still a lot to learn.

**Yogi:** When your practice develops and wisdom grows, is it natural that the hidden kilesas surface?

**SUT:** Yes, you could say that what was unconscious becomes conscious.

**Yogi:** So when I become mindful of such kilesas, how do I investigate them?

**SUT:** It is good to start from the understanding that the mind is just the mind. Ask yourself: "What is this defilement?"

**Yogi:** It is often not so easy to see that the mind is just the mind!

**SUT:** That's because your understanding is not complete. You need to remind yourself throughout the day that every mental activity is just the mind at work. Then, whenever a defilement comes, this understanding will also be there. When there is the understanding that the mind is just the mind, there is no identification.

How do you recognize defilements?

**Yogi:** There is tension, there is a feeling, and there are some thoughts.

**SUT:** Again you can apply the same understanding. A feeling is just a feeling and a thought is just a thought. That is why in dhammānupassanā the hindrances just become objects; you

see the hindrances as natural phenomena, you realize there is no 'me', no person involved.

**Yogi:** So they are no longer hindrances when they are seen in that way?

**SUT:** Yes, that's right, but only when that understanding is present.

**Yogi:** So if one is experiencing a kilesa as 'mine', what is the suggestion? Should we reflect on the fact that it is the mind, or bring our attention to the identification?

**SUT:** Remind yourself that a feeling is just a feeling, that a thought is just a thought, that the mind is just the mind. Also recognize that there is identification but don't try to do anything about it, simply recognize that it is happening.

Although the real understanding that this is just the mind, just a feeling, just a thought is not there at the moment, you want to bring in that understanding intellectually. You want the mind to tune into that mode. Think it through so you know why the mind accepts this intellectually, and then the mind will try to be aware of things in that way.

**Yogi:** OK, kind of shift the observation, the quality of the observation.

**SUT:** That's right. What you are always trying to adjust is the quality of observation. Whatever you are able to feel,

whatever you already have, whether it is intellectual understanding or knowledge from your own experience, when you are able to feed that into the observing mind it will help you to see things more clearly.

This is why I always emphasize the importance of right information. You not only need to know whether you have the right information but also whether the mind is actually making use of the right information. Even if the mind does not actually understand or see things in that way, using the intellectual understanding decreases the moha that is usually present. If you don't even bring in the intellectual understanding then there is just moha. There might be awareness but the awareness has no power. By bringing in wisdom, you give the mind a sense of direction. Once you have given the mind a sense of direction through this kind of input, the mind continues to apply this during meditation and at some point an understanding will arise.

**Yogi:** So we always need to observe the quality of the observation and also the relationship to the kilesas.

**SUT:** Yes, but that is happening together; once you know the quality of your observation, the understanding of the relationship of the observation to the object is already there.

**Yogi:** One of the difficulties for me has always been around energy in the body, in terms of it not being in balance, i.e. there is a lot of fluctuation in the energy. This seems to have quite an effect on the mind.

**SUT:** OK, let's think of this as energy-sensations. If the mind has a lot of kilesas and it is feeling these sensations, what will it feel about them? If, on another occasion, the mind has a lot of wisdom, how will it then feel about these sensations?

**Yogi:** It will feel them very differently.

**SUT:** So the sensations could be the same in each case but what the mind is holding at that time will influence the subsequent chain of mental reactions. If there is strong lobha in the mind, the sensations will be experienced as desirable, if there is dosa, the mind will experience them as repulsive.

**Yogi:** Yes, that's me.

**SUT:** When lobha and dosa decrease, understanding can increase. Yogis often forget the lobha and dosa that is present in their mind and is colouring everything. They keep trying to see things without realizing that everything is coloured by lobha or dosa.

## **SUBTLE DEFILEMENTS**

**Yogi:** Is it always unwholesome to do things which you like?

**SUT:** There are many different levels of unwholesomeness. In the beginning we need to look at the gross manifestations, we need to discriminate between what is wrong and what is



right. But if you then take a closer look and trace an unwholesome impulse back to where it started, you will see that it comes from one of the subtle unwholesome habits that you have developed. With practice you will more and more easily see subtle manifestations of unwholesomeness and you will understand that all those little ones are problems too. They will eventually grow into big problems.

Once understanding becomes deeper, you will know that even the slightest unwholesome thought is dangerous. When your mind becomes very equanimous and you start seeing things just as they are, you will notice that even the tiniest defilement is a problem. But if you start enjoying this peaceful and clear state of mind, your ability to see things as they are will fade away and there will be no more new understandings. As your wisdom grows, you will more and more realize that even the most harmless looking desire is unwholesome and that it prevents you from seeing the truth.

**Yogi:** OK, what about eating something I like? I like chocolate, and there is nothing bad about that!

**SUT:** It's not about eating or not eating certain kinds of food. It's about watching your mind. You can learn to eat without greed. You can change your attitude so that you no longer eat something because you like it but because it is food. Eat something because it is appropriate or because it is healthy and not because greed is pushing you. You need to be aware of your liking and disliking, and your decision what to eat or what not to eat should never be based on that.

Ask yourself why you like certain kinds of food or not and find out the practical reasons why you should eat them or not. Find out what kinds of food are best or most suitable for you. Under some circumstances you might also decide to eat something which you don't really like and which you know is not particularly healthy because you know that eating it will make your host happy. Always make sure it is neither liking nor disliking but practical considerations which make you choose. Check your attitude before you choose! Don't let the defilements make the choice, always choose with wisdom!

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**Yogi:** You advise us to accept things as they are so that we can see things as they are. Can you tell us more about how to actually do this?

**SUT:** We need to look at our experience in a really simple and honest way. In the watching there should be no ideas at all about how things should be seen or experienced. We need to pay close attention to the way we observe the object. Even the most subtle kind of expectation or anxiety will distort the picture.

## **DEFILEMENTS ARE BURNING**

**Yogi:** Lately I have been able to observe conceit more closely. Every time I am aware of its presence, I experience a strong feeling of disgust and also the thought 'this is a waste of

time and energy' crosses my mind. As a result, the conceit disappears but then it comes up again at the next opportunity. Could you say something about this process?

**SUT:** The mind can only completely drop a defilement when wisdom has fully understood it. If you have to deal with the same defilement again and again, there is not enough wisdom and you need to keep learning from the situations in which it manifests.

**Yogi:** What does it mean to fully understand?

**SUT:** You cannot stop a defilement. But you can change your point of view, your relationship to the defilement. Once you have done this, the defilement no longer has the power to overwhelm you — but it will continue to come up. So all we can do is work with the defilements and learn from them. Full understanding and therefore complete eradication is only possible when we get enlightened.

**Yogi:** There is a defilement that comes up again and again in connection with a particular memory and I keep getting lost in it. Every time I become aware of this process, I can see the suffering in it but I cannot see why the memory keeps arising.

**SUT:** What is it that keeps arising?

**Yogi:** A memory.

**SUT:** Do you have the right view in regard to this memory?

**Yogi:** Well, sometimes I just get lost in the story, and sometimes I can see that it is just a memory.

**SUT:** You need to keep practising the right view and clearly see any wrong views. Your object of awareness must be the mind, not the story. You need to cultivate a keen interest in the state of your mind.

**Yogi:** I have the impression that the defilements burn more now than they did many years ago. Why is that?

**SUT:** Because now you are looking at the defilements directly and accept them as they are. In the past you repressed them with your samatha practice. When you have strong samādhi it is easier to bear things. But only when the mind understands just how much the kilesas burn will there be a real desire to get rid of them.

**Yogi:** Yes, I feel that is happening.

**SUT:** We need to see kilesas as they are. How much suffering do they bring? How much do they torture and oppress us?

**Yogi:** It seems that the suffering increases.

**SUT:** Good, that means you won't get attached and therefore learn more quickly.

## UNDERSTANDING IMPERMANENCE

**Yogi:** How can I learn to see impermanence?

**SUT:** You don't have to watch out for impermanence. When wisdom grows, wisdom will understand that things have this nature. Your responsibility is to remain aware, to be as continuously aware as you can. When the awareness becomes more continuous and stronger, wisdom will begin to understand the nature of things. Don't try to understand those things; just try to be aware with the right attitude.

**Yogi:** So I just wait until wisdom comes in?

**SUT:** Yes, your responsibility is to make the mind stronger. It is just like with seeing. If your eyes are not good, you may try as hard as you can to see better but it is all a waste of energy. Only if you put on your glasses, will you see clearly. Whatever can be seen is already there. But you have to wear wisdom glasses, not colourful glasses. If you wear red glasses, you will see everything red; if you wear blue ones, everything will be blue. That's why the watching mind, the meditating mind, must be of the right nature. Only if it is without any greed or hatred can it see things as they are. If you want to see impermanence you are wearing red glasses. Because there is wanting, you cannot see things as they are; you cannot see and understand impermanence.

## EFFORTLESS AWARENESS AND IMPERMANENCE

**Yogi:** You are saying that we can be aware of many objects without making an effort. I don't understand how this works.

**SUT:** As your awareness becomes more and more continuous, you will notice that there are as many minds as there are objects. After some time you will realize that this is just nature at work, that it has got nothing to do with 'you', that there are just mental and physical processes. As long as we do not understand that mind and object are just natural phenomena, we will believe that there is an 'I' who is observing.

Can you see something because you look at it, or can you look at something because you see? If you can only see because you are looking at something, greed is at work and there is wrong view.

What actually happens is that because seeing is happening naturally, you have the ability to look. This understanding is wisdom. A totally blind person cannot see and therefore will not even try to look. As long as we think that we can see things because 'we' are paying attention, our motivation is greed, and we do not understand this process.

The same principle applies when we look at signs of impermanence, things arising and passing away. Will something disappear because you are looking at it?

**Yogi:** No.

**SUT:** If something disappeared because you were looking at it, it could not be a real manifestation of impermanence. It would also make you proud and happy: 'I saw impermanence, I made something disappear.' Reality is very different. Nature is impermanent; impermanence is part of the fabric of all phenomena. Only a mind that has been developed sufficiently will be able to really understand that all things are impermanent. Once you really understand impermanence, you will also understand dukkha and anattā.

I often hear yogis talk about seeing arising and passing away when they are on retreat. When they get back home, however, there is no more arising or passing away. At home things are suddenly very permanent again. A true understanding of impermanence is very different. It is a very deep knowing that everything ends.

Does impermanence only manifest when the leaf is falling off the tree, or is the leaf already impermanent when it is still part of the tree?

## **DEVELOPING RIGHT VIEW**

**Yogi:** I can see my wrong views more and more often but I still need to keep making an effort to bring in right views. Why do right views not come spontaneously?

**SUT:** There are different levels of right view. In the beginning, when we don't really understand right view, it is borrowed wisdom. This means that we need to apply the

appropriate information intellectually to help us in a particular situation. After doing this repeatedly over a long period time the mind will remember the right view more and more easily and eventually it will understand the truth of it. Once the mind really understands the truth of that right view, it becomes your own wisdom. Then you won't have to try to recall the right view anymore, the mind will automatically see the situation with the right view.

## **DELUSION IS LACK OF WISDOM**

**Yogi:** In a sense I know that delusion, moha, is there all the time, it seems to pervade everything. On the other hand, I cannot help wondering how a deluded mind can recognize delusion.

**SUT:** Only when an insight arises can delusion be understood, because insight is the opposite of delusion. Wisdom understands the natural characteristics of the object. Delusion covers up these natural characteristics of the object, but it does not cover up the object. Perception recognizes the object, delusion distorts perception.

**Yogi:** Maybe this is the sense of delusion I have, this veil between me and reality, so to speak.

**SUT:** Yes, that's why you say it pervades everything. In moments of insights, this veil suddenly drops — for a very



short time. Therefore, unless we strive to have as much understanding as we can, delusion will cover things up all the time.

**Yogi:** Could you give a definition of delusion?

**SUT:** Delusion isn't complete ignorance. Delusion is not knowing the truth of what is. It is the lack of wisdom.

**Yogi:** Why is delusion so strong, why is there so little wisdom?

**SUT:** Because delusion wants to remain deluded and because we have been 'practising' delusion for eons.

## **EXPERIENCING METTA AND KARUNA**

**Yogi:** Sometimes people ask me whether I miss my family. I don't miss them but I don't know why. We have a normal family life; there are no serious problems or conflicts. So my question is: Does this practice over time eliminate the craving for affection, the missing of one's family, and all other affectionate emotions?

**SUT:** Yes, that's possible, not because of practising this, but because there is some understanding. When the defilements decrease you can still love people, your parents, your family, your friends, in fact you know how to love them better. There is no more attachment, and therefore feelings like mettā and

karunā naturally grow. In other words, the defilements decrease and these wholesome minds grow.

**Yogi:** It feels to me that before it was conditional love but now it's unconditional love.

**SUT:** Yes, that's right. Whenever you experience unconditional love you only give and you don't expect anything in return.

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**Yogi:** Some Buddhist traditions emphasize the importance of understanding the relationship between awareness and compassion. Could you say something about the relationship between awareness and mettā or karunā when we are resting in awareness?

**SUT:** When there is no dosa, it becomes possible to practise mettā. This is a natural development; all Brahma-vihāras can be practised when there is no dosa. When there is no dosa, when both awareness and wisdom are present, the object of our attention will trigger off one of the Brahma-vihāras. It will be mettā in the case of someone who is our 'equal', i.e. someone who is in a similar situation to us; karunā in the case of someone who is suffering more than us; muditā for someone who is more successful than us; and upekkhā if we are faced with a situation we cannot do anything about.

It is really important to understand that to the extent that there are defilements in the observing mind our

reactions to events and people will be unskilful. Wisdom can only arise to the degree that the observing mind is free of defilements and this will enable us to relate skilfully to others. This is why I am more interested in wisdom than in practising the Brahma-vihāras. I used to do a lot of mettā practice but no matter how much I practised, I still had dosa, I was still an angry person and anger could get out of control.

I have had some deep understandings while observing dosa which now enable me to deal with it skilfully. I still get angry but wisdom always prevents dosa from growing out of proportion.

## **DOUBT OR NO DOUBT**

**Yogi:** How can we differentiate between doubt as a hindrance and skilful doubt, doubt which helps us clarify things?

**SUT:** If the doubt is unskilful, it causes more confusion and agitation; it makes you feel less and less comfortable. A skilful doubt will make the mind curious; it will put it into an investigative mood. Personally, I would not call that doubt anymore; it is more like a sense of adventure: I don't know or I am not certain and therefore I want to find out.

## SAMATHA OR VIPASSANA

**Yogi:** Part of me is still holding on to the idea that I should be practising for strong concentration. There has been a sense of conflict about that because of everything I have heard about how the mind needs to be calm and concentrated in order to have any insight. That has been making me doubt the way that the practice goes here, so I have this unresolved feeling about it.

**SUT:** To achieve the kind of high concentration necessary for samatha meditation you have to focus on one object only. Vipassanā samādhi does not depend on an object for its stability. Vipassanā samādhi comes from right view, right attitude, and right thinking which, together with continuity of awareness, give the mind stability. This kind of samādhi is called sammā-samādhi.

**Yogi:** Why did the Buddha instruct his bhikkhu disciples to go to the forest and practise jhāna?

**SUT:** He did not say this to everybody. He would encourage those who had been practising samatha for years or lifetimes — and therefore had built up a personality inclined towards samatha — to continue and go deeper. Those disciples who were strong in wisdom, in awareness, in effort, or in faith were given practices suited to their inclinations.

When your mind is very agitated, you can of course practise samatha until it has calmed down again. Especially

beginners will have to resort to this occasionally. It is simply a skilful means to help us on our path. If you are skilful you can use any means which helps you move towards the ultimate goal of understanding the nature of things.

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**Yogi:** I heard you talk about vipassanā samādhi but I still don't understand. What exactly is vipassanā samādhi and how can we develop it?

**SUT:** Samatha samādhi is gained by focusing on one object again and again. This builds up a kind of concentration which feels strong and a bit heavy, a bit rigid. In order to develop vipassanā samādhi, you need to have wisdom. This can be right information and/or what you have understood through your own reflection and experience. Because of this wisdom, the mind neither wants nor pushes away anything. Because of this wisdom, the mind feels stable; there is no reaction in the mind. This is vipassanā samādhi and it is only from this kind of samādhi that insight can arise.

It is absolutely essential that we meditate with the right information (sutamayā paññā) working at the back of our minds and that we apply our own intelligence (cintāmayā paññā). We need to apply these two kinds of wisdom in order to get insight (bhāvanāmayā paññā), the third kind of wisdom. If the first two kinds of wisdom are not well developed, the third will not arise.

If we focus too hard on one object, the mind cannot think much anymore and the faculty of awareness is weak. What happens is that the mind does not think of unwholesome things, but neither can it think of anything wholesome and therefore wisdom also becomes weak. For that reason, whenever we are applying a samatha kind of samādhi, insight cannot arise. If we really want to develop insight, we need to practise vipassanā samādhi.

In order to develop vipassanā samādhi, we need to have the right attitude and continuity of awareness. Without right attitude we cannot have samādhi and the mind always feels some agitation. Having a wrong attitude means that there is some liking or disliking in the mind, and that destabilizes the mind. Samādhi means having a stable mind. Right effort does not mean putting in energy, but practising with patience and perseverance.

Vipassanā is a practice you need to keep doing for the rest of your life. You cannot stop and rest. If, however, you use a lot of energy, you will not be able to keep practising all the time. You need to keep in mind that this is a long-term practice which needs to be done steadily. Just do as much as you can, but do it steadily.

If we use too much effort we cannot sustain this kind of practice, and though we go on retreat again and again for many years we may not gain any insight at all. When we do any kind of work over a long period of time we will learn many things about that field of work, but when we engage in that same kind of work only occasionally for short periods of time we will never gain a high level of proficiency.

Vipassanā is a learning process. In order to truly understand something we have to investigate that subject over a long period of time. If we look at something for a short time only, deep understanding cannot arise; our understanding will remain superficial. Since we need to do this practice long term, we have to learn to do it consistently. Right effort means perseverance. We understand that this practice is important and so we keep doing it persistently. Right effort is called 'right' because there is a lot of wisdom present.

## THE MIND THAT KNOWS

**Yogi:** When we are not aware, the mind still knows. Can you say something about the mind that knows — even though we are not aware?

**SUT:** That's a natural process, that's what the mind does. In English this mind is often called the unconscious but in terms of practice it is just a process that we either can or cannot be aware of. The process is happening all the time; we are either conscious of it or not.

**Yogi:** But it is probably still bigger than our consciousness.

**SUT:** Yes, it is a stronger mind.

**Yogi:** Is that always the case? Is what we call the unconscious mind always stronger or bigger than our conscious mind?

**SUT:** It is stronger in the sense that it is a natural, automatic, and free-flowing process. Let's take the example of pain. The mind experiences resistance, a reluctance to be with the pain. In meditation we will make a conscious effort to be with the unpleasant feeling, whereas the unconscious mind does not want to do that. If the unconscious mind is very strong, it will get into a big conflict with the conscious mind. Yogis will start moving in funny ways on the cushion; they will start swaying or their legs will start shaking, etc. This happens because the unconscious mind has taken over and moves the body to alleviate the pain. The yogis will only be aware of the conscious mind which is trying to sit still and bear the pain. They are often not aware that they move, or they say that the movement just happens by itself. They don't understand how their mind is working.

**Yogi:** Will the unconscious mind create a memory when the conscious mind is not aware, and can you later bring into consciousness what you were not aware of?

**SUT:** Yes, that is possible. Experienced yogis have reported that they have suddenly become able to remember many past incidents of their lives, some of which happened when they were toddlers. They say that these memories had not been accessible to them before.

**Yogi:** I have had memories coming up from childhood myself. They were unpleasant memories and so they came with very painful feelings. But I am not certain whether these memories are accurate. I am asking myself whether these things really



happened to me or whether I made them up. I don't trust myself in this. Part of me is wondering whether I need to know, part of me really wants to know. Could you say something about this?

**SUT:** It is not so important whether the content of your memory — the story-line — was real or not. You meditate in order to understand the way the mind works. We can never be sure about the stories but we can always see and understand the principles of how the mind works.

Some people experience a lot of distress when they have old memories come up during meditation. When we are young we are full of delusions, we attach very strongly to our negative experiences and so when such memories come up they have a very strong and painful impact on us. As we progress in our practice, many suppressed memories will surface and we have to learn to let them come up and deal with them.

Unless we 'clear things up', unless we really look at all the regrets and whatever other unpleasant stuff that the mind presents us with from our past, it will be very difficult to make any further progress. We need to learn our lessons. There is no shortcut. If we don't learn our lessons when they present themselves, they will come up again and again until we give them our attention and learn from them. We have to earn our understandings; insights don't happen by accident.

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**Yogi:** You have been talking about the awareness as the working mind and viññāna as the knowing mind. You have talked quite a lot about the working mind. Could you talk a little about the function of the knowing mind?

**SUT:** Viññāna or consciousness is the mind that arises together with the object. As far as practice is concerned, you can only be aware of it, you cannot use it because it happens automatically with every contact. We can be aware of what is happening because the working mind — which I usually call the observing mind — is present. But you also need to remember that the other aggregates (khandas) are working alongside consciousness; they always work together simultaneously.

**Yogi:** Is it sometimes helpful to tune into the viññāna? If so, would you call this mindfulness of the viññāna?

**SUT:** Yes, you can take it as an object and explore it. It is necessary that we explore the functions of all the aggregates. How does consciousness work? How does feeling work? How does perception work? How do mental formations work?

Consciousness is rather stupid; all it does is be conscious. The same goes for feeling; it just feels. Perception just recognizes things or events. Why can you remember and recognize someone even if you only saw him once before?

**Yogi:** Because perception automatically did its job.

**SUT:** Exactly! It does this whether you are aware of it or not.

**Yogi:** It seems to be much more difficult to remember names.

**SUT:** Yes, perception has its own peculiar character. Sometimes it remembers many details, other times very few. Things it is not interested in, it will not remember very well at all.

## **WITH OPEN EYES**

**Yogi:** You advised me to meditate with open eyes. I find this very difficult and tiring because I am constantly distracted by things, particularly by people moving.

**SUT:** When you meditate with your eyes open, don't look at things, and just recognize that there is seeing going on. Don't look at anything!

Our minds are used to focusing. We are very skilful at it because we do it all the time. The problem is that we don't recognize that we are focusing. We are trying to meditate but we don't really understand what meditation is.

Instead of trying to understand how the mind is working, how the mind is paying attention, we go out to those things. We look at the objects and think this is meditation. Since the mind is expert at taking concepts as objects, it focuses on them and we forget what we are supposed to take as

meditation objects. So don't look at anything. Be aware of seeing and be aware of your awareness.

## **WHEN THINGS ARE GOING WELL**

**Yogi:** Early this morning I had a great lying down meditation and so I did another lying down meditation before lunch because I thought the mind was in a good way and this was a good thing to do. But five minutes into my lying down meditation I realized that I was just trying to repeat what happened earlier on in the morning. I realized that I was not really open to the new experience because I was trying to repeat.

**SUT:** That's good; this is something you need to know! You need to recognize your wrong attitude, this is also an understanding, this is also wisdom! It is just as important as knowing your right attitude.

**Yogi:** Oh that's great, I can't lose.

**SUT:** Make it a habit to reflect on your state of mind not only when things aren't going well but also whenever they are going well! Ask yourself questions like: "What is happening?" "How is the mind working?" "What attitude is present?" "Why are things going so well right now?" You need to recognize the factors that are contributing to the positive state.

When you do this kind of checking while things are going well, you are adding another kind of wisdom. If you don't do this, the mind takes the good states for granted. It thinks that this is just a natural flow, that this is just the way it is. When it takes it for granted, it indulges in it, it sort of very secretly starts enjoying it, and then it will try to recreate the same experience. So don't forget to reflect on the reasons why things are going well!

## DEVELOPING INTUITION

**Yogi:** Is intuition important in this practice?

**SUT:** Yes it is. It is necessary. Intuition is natural intelligence; it is using your innate intelligence. Where do you think that intuition comes from?

**Yogi:** I think that intuition is the natural mind, the mind that is not created by 'me'.

**SUT:** Actually, there are many experiences and incidents in our lives which feed into our intuition. People whose mindfulness is very continuous have very strong intuition.

**Yogi:** But intuition can be wrong. Why is that?

**SUT:** Intuition depends on wisdom and information, on the understanding of causes and effects. Only when we

understand all the causes that lead to a particular effect can our intuition be 100%.

## **NIBBANA IS HARD WORK**

**Yogi:** What is Nibbāna? How does it arise?

**SUT:** The Buddha said that a mind without greed, aversion, or delusion is Nibbāna. In other words, a mind without defilements can see Nibbāna. A mind without greed, aversion, or delusion is a mind full of wisdom and such a mind can understand Nibbāna.

**Yogi:** Does that mean that we can experience moments of Nibbāna when the defilements are temporarily gone?

**SUT:** Yes, that's possible. It is called momentary freedom. The more wisdom we have, the more often we can experience such moments of freedom and the faster our wisdom grows. A mind which gets strengthened in this way will have a lot of wisdom, but yogis often find it very difficult to express this in words.

When we have vipassanā insights, insights into ultimate reality, we do not understand Nibbāna. Do you know why?

**Yogi:** No idea.

**SUT:** Because all objects of vipassanā insights are mental and physical processes (nāma-rūpa) and these are conditioned phenomena. As these vipassanā insights become stronger, they will eventually reach a stage called magga-ñāna. Only a mind which possesses this level of wisdom will be able to understand Nibbāna.

**Yogi:** So you see it as a very gradual gaining of wisdom, it is not just a sudden awakening?

**SUT:** Yes. Experiencing Nibbāna is not an accident, you don't fall into it. As with everything else, only when all the conditions are fulfilled, the effect will follow. This is the doctrine of anattā.

**Yogi:** How about people who practised a lot in previous lifetimes? Might they not be able to remember this and suddenly become enlightened?

**SUT:** Which previous life? Yesterday? Yesterday is a previous life, tomorrow is the next life! Conceptually speaking there is a next life but in terms of ultimate reality there is just the next mind. Every mind is one life. A mind full of awareness, concentration, and wisdom, moment to moment, is fulfilling the pāramīs.

We won't get Nibbāna for free; we will have to work for it. So never be content with what you have understood. The moment we feel satisfied with ourselves, we lessen our efforts.

## LETTING THINGS UNFOLD NATURALLY

**Yogi:** When I woke up this morning I still felt really tired. I asked myself whether I should stay in bed or get up and practise. I could hear others move and get ready to go to the Dhamma hall and I therefore started feeling that I should join them. I could not make up my mind and began to feel restless. This happens to me quite often and it also brings up doubt about my ability to practise. Could you give me any advice on how to deal with such situations?

**SUT:** Don't worry about what other people do or what they might think about you. Just look at your own situation very carefully. Do you need more sleep? Are you really tired? Would it be better to get up to practise or perhaps just sit up in bed? If you cannot make up your mind, just accept that. Simply stay in this 'space'; recognize and accept what is happening. It is OK to feel indecisive, confused, or restless. Look at this mind state and try to learn from it. Whenever it happens, this is your practice.

**Yogi:** But don't I need to make a decision at some stage?

**SUT:** Thinking that you need to make a decision will only make things worse. If you can just stay with such a mind state and keep observing it, the mind will eventually settle down and make its own decision. Never try to force an issue. Just acknowledge, accept, and keep observing until things unfold naturally.



**Yogi:** OK, but what about doubt?

**SUT:** Doubt arises when there is dissatisfaction with the way things are and also when there is a conflict in the mind about what should or should not be done. The best thing you can do is, again, just acknowledge and watch it. Wait patiently, don't get involved but just keep recognizing continuously what is happening. Continuity of awareness brings stability of mind and understanding of what is happening. This will enable the mind to 'automatically' come up with the right decision or solution.

**Yogi:** Hm, sounds like a great deal of hard work to be done. I think I will need a lot of practice to be able to really let this process unfold.

**SUT:** Yes, you have to be patient. Don't force yourself. All you need to do is to keep practising. Of course you need to be really interested, to be really curious to find out for yourself.

## **THE BENEFITS OF THE PRACTICE**

**Yogi:** What are the benefits of this practice?

**SUT:** In a nutshell: You will experience and be able to understand things you have neither experienced nor understood before.

## REAL HAPPINESS

**SUT:** Do you practise meditation because you want to be happy or because you want to understand?

**Yogi:** That's a very good question — but I don't know.

**SUT:** As long as our goal is happiness there is bound to be some desire to be happy. If there is happiness there is also unhappiness; you cannot have the one without the other.

Only when there is true understanding, will there be real happiness. Not the kind of happiness people want to indulge in, but a happiness that arises because you are at peace with things as they are.

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# QUESTIONS ON TERMINOLOGY

## SADDHA

**Yogi:** Very little is said about faith (saddhā) in the blue book (*DON'T LOOK DOWN ON THE DEFILEMENTS, THEY WILL LAUGH AT YOU*). Could you please say something about the meaning and importance of faith?

**SUT:** Saddhā is faith, confidence, or trust. When we practise meditation, all the spiritual faculties, including faith, should increase. There should be an increase in faith in ourselves, in our ability to do the practice, and in our understanding of the practice. Only if we have trust and confidence in something, can we actually apply ourselves to it. We must recognize the faith we have — however little or much. It is what keeps us on the path.

Those who know how to think correctly, whose wisdom is strong, have strong saddhā. But if there is no wisdom to temper faith, faith can become blind. In order to know whether our saddhā is growing we can examine ourselves. Do we really know and understand the benefits we are getting from the practice? How much faith do we have now and how much faith did we have before we started practising? It is important that we recognize our own saddhā.

Most people have heard about the balancing of the five spiritual faculties and most people spend a lot of time trying to balance viriya and samādhi. Very few people know about or

do any balancing of faith and wisdom. Those who are very intellectual and think too much have very little faith. They do too much questioning. But if someone has a lot of faith and does not do any questioning, wisdom becomes weak.

Traditionally, faith is interpreted as confidence or faith in the Triple Gem. But how can someone who has just started practising have faith in the Triple Gem? The confidence, trust, or faith yogis need is faith and understanding in what they are doing. Those who think correctly and who consequently do the right things find that, as a result, their interest and confidence grow automatically.

**Yogi:** If wisdom and faith are out of balance, if there is too much questioning and too little faith, is that likely to lead to doubt?

**SUT:** Yes! Definitely! The five spiritual faculties work together. If anyone of them becomes too strong, if it does too much of the work, it sort of blots out the other four. The others cannot be effective anymore; they can no longer do their work properly. If somebody has too much samādhi, paññā is not strong and cannot grow, viriya cannot be strong because of the heavy concentration, and sati is not sharp. But if those three are not working well, then saddhā will suffer; you will start losing confidence in the practice.

If the wisdom faculty is too strong, if there is too much intellect, too much questioning, too much thinking, then there is no samādhi, the mind has no stability. This again leads to the deterioration of the remaining faculties and faith of

course suffers again. The five spiritual faculties need to be balanced in order to work effectively.

**Yogi:** It seems like you are using the word intellect to refer to wisdom and that does not seem like wisdom to me.

**SUT:** We have talked about the three kinds of wisdom before: sutamayā paññā, cintāmayā paññā, and bhāvanāmayā paññā. I have just been talking about the paññās we can apply, the first two. If you have bhāvanāmayā paññā everything is in balance. You cannot have too much bhāvanāmayā paññā. You cannot 'input' or create bhāvanāmayā paññā; you can only 'tweak' the faculties. The output depends on our input.

**Yogi:** OK, I got it; the more bhāvanāmayā paññā, the more faith, but the more faith, not the more bhāvanāmayā paññā.

## KAYANUPASSANA

**Yogi:** The contemplation of bodily parts (kāyagatāsati) and the contemplation of a corpse in decay (sīvathikā) are well-known kāyānupassanā exercises. Why do you not teach them?

**SUT:** My teacher taught me a lot about the nature of meditation; he did not teach me these exercises. When you learn about the nature of things (dhammānupassanā), kāyānupassanā is already included. If you do cittānupassanā and dhammānupassanā, kāyānupassanā and vedanānupassanā are already done. My teacher no longer began with samatha

before going to vipassanā, he went straight for vipassanā. Kāyānupassanā is the samatha section of the Satipatthāna Sutta; you only pay attention to concepts.

**Yogi:** In my experience, the contemplation of bodily parts has been helpful. It gives me useful information to keep at the back of my mind which comes in handy whenever there is lust in the mind. I have stopped doing the exercise now, but I found it very important for my own practice at some stage.

**SUT:** Sure, it can be helpful and is probably necessary sometimes — that's why the Buddha taught it.

If we really try to understand the mind, and if there is constant and continuous contemplation of the mind, then, slowly, over time, all of these different aspects of the practice become part of our own experience and understanding. We should not forget that ultimately — whatever we may start practising with — our task is to learn how to deal with the defilements.

## **SATI AND MICCHA DITTHI**

**Yogi:** I heard you mention mindfulness (sati) in connection with wrong view (micchā ditthi) to a yogi. How do these two come together?

**SUT:** The Noble Eightfold Path mentions all these 'Rights', Right View, Right Thought, etc., and so by inference there is a 'wrong'. For Right Awareness (sammā-sati) there needs to

be Right View and Right Understanding. Without them it cannot be sammā-sati. If you are just watching something, looking at it, you cannot say that it is sammā-sati. Only when sati has the quality of appamāda, of non-negligence, of not forgetting the right object, or in other words only when sati has some wisdom can it be sammā-sati.

If you tell people who are completely unfamiliar with meditation to watch themselves, how do you think they will go about it? What kind of perspective will they meditate from? MY body, MY mind! That is wrong view, not sammā-sati. This is why it is so essential for people to have the right information before they start their meditation practice. So when I give instructions, I try to point out that what we are observing are just natural phenomena, nature at work. I ask yogis to reflect on questions like: Are you the only person who experiences all these different sensations and mind states? Yogis need to understand for themselves that these are all universal, that they are all part of nature, that they do not belong to any individual.

## **SAMADHI**

**Yogi:** I come from a tradition that places great importance on samādhi, on getting into the jhānas. Could you please explain your understanding of samādhi?

**SUT:** I am interested in the kind of samādhi which develops because of wisdom. When there is wisdom, when the mind understands things, there is stability of mind and we have



what is called sammā-samādhi. Right samādhi brings clarity of awareness and insight. Many yogis think they only have samādhi when they experience a feeling of being in a kind of trance. This kind of samādhi has been built with some tension in the mind. In such a state they cannot learn anything and clarity of awareness cannot improve. The state of mind which we call samādhi is very relaxed, cool, and calm. It is receptive and sensitive to whatever happens and can therefore know a lot more.

Many yogis have wrong ideas about how to build samādhi. They focus; they put in a lot of effort. What develops might be quietness, but it's heavy; there is no lightness to it. In vipassanā-practice all we need is enough stability of mind to remain aware from moment to moment. We need just the stability of mind to know what is happening, that's all. We don't need jhānic samādhi; you cannot use absorption concentration for vipassanā. Yogis who develop jhāna before they practise vipassanā need to get out of jhāna first.

Jhāna temporarily controls the defilements; there are no gross defilements in a jhānic state. Jhāna suppresses the five hindrances. But jhāna only suppresses kāma-cchanda, sensual desire. It does not suppress other kinds of lobha. Bhava-tanhā, the desire to become, is very much present in every jhānic state.

Samādhi is only complete when it has all three ingredients: sammā-sati, sammā-vāyāma, and sammā-samādhi. When there is continuous awareness with the right attitude and the right ideas, samādhi develops naturally.

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**Yogi:** When I first came here I found all the talking and socializing very difficult to accept. I did not believe that you could have any kind of samādhi with that kind of behaviour. It took me quite a while to accept that talking meditation was a valid and important practice. After I had overcome my resistance and started doing it myself, I discovered that there not only was samādhi but that it also felt much more pliable — less brittle. Why is that? What's happening?

**SUT:** The samādhi you get from being quiet is a bit tight — or brittle as you put it. It very much relies on one condition and that's why you can easily lose it when the silence is interrupted. It feels strong but it is actually very fragile.

When you practise to be mindful under more trying circumstances, when you keep practising while talking and socializing, it will be more difficult to develop samādhi. You will only be able to develop this with an open mind and with the right attitude. However, since you need to be more skilful in developing samādhi under these circumstances, it will last longer. This samādhi is also more flexible because it does not depend on fixed conditions. Every time you lose mindfulness, you will calmly reconnect with your practice.

It is impossible to always have mindfulness and samādhi when you practise in daily life; it will be there for a period of time, then you lose yourself in activities, and later you become aware again. As long as you have the right attitude and keep noticing every time you 'get lost', you are doing fine. If, however, you have the fixed idea in your mind that you can only develop mindfulness and samādhi under special

circumstances, you become inflexible and are somehow stuck in your practice.

## **DHAMMA-VICAYA, BOJJHANGA, AND SAMPAJANNA**

**Yogi:** You don't mention the term investigation of phenomena (dhamma-vicaya) in the blue book. However, you seem to give an interpretation of it in the chapter BE AWARE INTELLIGENTLY. Is this correct?

**SUT:** Yes, that's correct.

**Yogi:** Could you say more about the meaning and importance of dhamma-vicaya?

**SUT:** Vipassanā meditation is a work of intelligence. That's why dhamma-vicaya is very important. The goal of vipassanā is wisdom. If you want to gain wisdom, you have to start with wisdom; you have to invest wisdom to gain more wisdom. That's why I often ask yogis this question: "We are all puthujjanas (mad worldlings) and the definition of puthujjana is 'one who is full of defilements' — so how can you follow my instructions to meditate without the defilements?"

Since we are full of defilements we are unable to meditate without them, so where do we start? A puthujjana has to start meditating with information on amoha, on wisdom. Although all puthujjanas are full of defilements, they have some wisdom too. Buddhism distinguishes between three kinds

of wisdom: sutamayā paññā, cintāmayā paññā, and bhāvanā-mayā paññā. The first is information, general knowledge, the second is using your own intelligence, rational mind, logic and reasoning, and the third is insight. Dhamma-vicaya falls under cintāmayā paññā.

Where does the ability to use dhamma-vicaya come from? From information, we must have a lot of right information. Once we have this kind of basic or general knowledge, we know how to think. I myself had a very good teacher who gave me a lot of information and advice which I could apply in my meditation practice. I am very grateful to the kind of 'space' my teacher gave me to learn for myself. Whenever I discovered something new in my meditation and then went to tell Sayadawgyi all about it, he would often just ask me: "Why?" I usually did not know the answer and he would never give it to me immediately. Since I desperately wanted to know, I would invest all my energies into trying to find the answer. For this kind of investigation it is not sufficient to just be aware. I really had to use my brain. This is intelligent investigation, dhamma-vicaya. I wanted to know and for me this was always a very constructive challenge — more like a game — and so I tried all sorts of ways to find answers. I usually found an answer but not always the right one. When my teacher saw that I could not get it, he would explain things to me.

Three of the bojjhargas, of the seven factors of enlightenment, are causes and four are effects. The causes are: sati, dhamma-vicaya, and viriya. You can 'input' these factors, you can actively do these. The effects are: pīti,

passaddhi, samādhi, and upekkhā. We cannot create them, we cannot make them happen. When talking about the three kinds of wisdom, I said that dhamma-vicaya falls under cintā-mayā paññā. The upekkhā of the seven bojjhanga comes under bhāvanāmayā paññā; this is equanimity that arises because of true understanding.

Intelligence or wisdom is essential for vipassanā. Dhamma-vicaya is a kind of wisdom and is therefore very important. For those who are intelligent and know how to think for themselves, vipassanā works. It is easy for them to understand; bhāvanāmayā paññā comes very easily to those who have strong innate wisdom, strong cintāmayā paññā. For those whose cintāmayā paññā, their ability to reason, to see logic and so on is weak, it takes a long time. Those who are weak in cintāmayā paññā need to rely a lot on sutamayā paññā. They need to gather a lot of information and they need to listen to advice from others. They need others to tell them what to do since they are unable to figure out answers for themselves.

According to the scriptures, there are seven conditions for dhamma-vicaya to arise:

1. Repeatedly asking Dhamma questions, talking about topics related to Dhamma nature, investigating them, thinking about them.
2. Cleaning our possessions, both external and internal. This brings clarity of mind. Clarity of mind is a condition for wisdom to arise. (Cleaning outside means cleaning our bodies and our environment — to whatever extent that is possible — but what is more important is cleaning the inside which means cleaning the mind of defilements.)

3. Learning to balance the five spiritual faculties. (There is a lot of work that needs to be done here. You need to become able to recognize these faculties, and you need to find out what is too much and what is too little so that you can balance them well.)
4. Avoiding the company of people who do not have wisdom.
5. Associating with people who have wisdom.
6. Contemplating deep wisdom, contemplating or reflecting on deeper things.
7. Having the desire to grow in wisdom.

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**Yogi:** What is the difference between dhamma-vicaya and clear knowledge (sati-sampajañña)? Could you please elaborate on the four sati-sampajaññas?

**SUT:** Both are wisdoms. In the Satipatthāna Sutta it is mentioned that there must be sati plus sampajañña, clear comprehension, that they must both be present. All four sampajaññas are concerned with wisdom. Very simply put, the first one is about understanding suitability (sātthaka-sampajañña) and the second is about understanding beneficiality (sappāya-sampajañña). These two come under sutamayā paññā and cintāmayā paññā. They are concerned with our actual practice. But when the practice gains momentum and understanding is increasing, we experience the third kind of sampajañña, gocara-sampajañña, which is understanding that there are just mental and physical

processes, that there is nobody there. The last one is asammoḥa-sampajañña, which means understanding anicca, dukkha, and anattā. The last two come under bhāvanāmayā pañña. The first two, understanding what is suitable and what is beneficial, are the causes and the last two are the results, the insights that arise.

The first sampajañña, sātthaka-sampajañña, is concerned with suitability. What would be the most suitable thing to do right now? The second is concerned with beneficiality. What would be most beneficial to apply right now? What is likely to work best? All this is dhamma-vicaya. You see the mind at work in the present moment and you see the whole picture; the field of awareness, how the mind is putting in energy, how it relates to the objects etc. Then the mind asks itself: "What shall I do right now?" Just staring at things quietly is not enough. This is why I have begun to question the term 'bare attention'. What do we mean by that?

The first two sampajaññas are really common sense wisdom. It is wisdom that is at work when you are meditating, it is wisdom that tells you how to do something. Is this a suitable way to do something? Is it beneficial if it is done this way? It is, for example, understanding how using more energy affects your meditation. In daily life too, this common sense wisdom is at work, helping you to make a wise decision on whatever activity you intend to do, to see clearly whether it is suitable and beneficial or not.

**Yogi:** I am still not clear about the difference between sati-sampajañña and dhamma-vicaya.

**SUT:** They overlap, but only the first two sampajaññas are dhamma-vicaya. This is how I understand it.

There is something I want to add to my explanation of gocara-sampajañña. Putting it another way one could say that gocara-sampajañña comes into play when the mind pays more and more attention to the Dhamma nature of things rather than to concepts. This happens when there is momentum in the practice. It becomes almost natural to the mind to look at the reality of the situation rather than the concepts. The Dhamma nature has become the grazing field (literal translation of gocara) of wisdom. If this kind of awareness can be kept up over a long period of time, the nature of dukkha, anicca, and anattā will no longer be misunderstood.

Instead of truly understanding dukkha, anicca, and anattā people spend too much time contemplating it, thinking about it in their practice without having any real, experiential, intuitive understanding. This is why I don't even like using those terms when I talk about Dhamma. I prefer it when people talk about their actual experience, about what they have been watching or experiencing, rather than telling me that they saw anicca or anattā — which does not make any sense.

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**SUT:** It is not enough to just be calm, and make an effort to remain aware, you should check whether all the five spiritual faculties (indriyas) are present. You can ask yourself the questions: "Do I have confidence in what I am doing? Do I



really know what I am doing?" With experience you will be able to always see whether the five indriyas are at work or not, and whether they are balanced or not.

**Yogi:** How about the seven factors of enlightenment, the bojjhngas, do we also need to check them?

**SUT:** Yes. The seven bojjhngas are divided into cause and effect. You only need to check the causes: sati (awareness), viriya (effort), and dhamma-vicaya or paññā. You have to pay special attention to effort; that is the difficult one among these three. There is no problem with awareness and wisdom, they are always wholesome (i.e. there are no defilements), but effort is very problematic. Effort that comes with a defilement is wrong effort. Most yogis make an effort with some kind of desire, so they use effort together with a defilement. There are two kinds of desire: lobha which is unwholesome desire, and chanda which is wholesome desire. You need to be very clear whether you are making an effort with lobha or chanda.

When you make an effort with lobha, you will become tense and you will suffer. When you are successful, you will feel very happy, when not, you will become upset, maybe even depressed. But if you make an effort with chanda (which is wise desire, desire for spiritual growth) you will not suffer and the mind will become powerful. When you succeed, you will not feel elated and when you don't succeed, you will not feel upset. This is the result of right effort. With right effort, you never give up but you try again and again. So it is

very important to keep checking your mind to see whether you have the right motivation.

Asking and exploring questions is conducive to dhamma-vicaya. According to the commentaries to the Satipatthāna Sutta there are four questions to each of the bojjangas that a yogi should look into. For example: a yogi must know when sati-sambojjhanga is present, when it is not present, why it is present and, lastly, why it is developing. Each of these questions reflects a different level of understanding; it is not so difficult to recognize whether or not something is present, but the last two questions could yield a large variety of possible answers. Any understanding on these levels can be difficult. Asking yourself such questions, trying to figure things out for yourself and discussing them with others, will all help wisdom to grow. This kind of exploration is considered as one of the causes for dhamma-vicaya.

## **OBSERVING AND OVERCOMING KILESAS**

**Yogi:** Can there be kilesas plus wisdom of knowing that kilesas are present *and* relaxation in the midst of that knowing?

**SUT:** Yes, it is possible; when the defilements are clearly known as objects, when there is this clear understanding. That's why I keep telling yogis to be more concerned with how they are watching. If they are watching in the right way, if there is no defilement in the watching, they can watch defilements in an unbiased way. Many yogis have reported this ability, of being in this space where the watching is

different, separate from the defilements and they can also clearly express the feeling that there is no defilement in the watching.

**Yogi:** So the feeling is one of ease and freedom even though there are defilements?

**SUT:** Yes, they can see clearly that those defilements have nothing to do with 'me'. An understanding of anattā is present.

**Yogi:** Does the defilement that is being watched in this way continue to be a defilement?

**SUT:** There are two different perspectives of wisdom that might be working. There can be the wisdom which frees the watching mind from identifying with the defilement, so that there can be freedom in the watching. But the defilement does not go away by just looking at it. Only if the understanding is about the defilement itself, if you fully understand that defilement, will it go away.

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**Yogi:** Can you say something about the three levels of kilesa?

**SUT:** When you are not aware of any defilements in the mind, when they only exist as potentials, they are called latent (anusaya). At this level, the kilesas are hidden and it is impossible to become aware of them. We can only observe

defilements when they arise in the mind — that's the second level — and when they express themselves in words or deeds — that's the third level. In Pāli the kilesas of the second level are called pariyutthāna, the ones of the third vītikkama.

**Yogi:** So the kilesas of the first level are invisible, they are just waiting to get you?

**SUT:** Yes, they just exist as potentials and they will only arise when there are the conditions necessary for them to arise. As soon as they arise they are called pariyutthāna. Only insights on the level of enlightenment can eradicate the kilesas on the anusaya level.

## **METTA BHAVANA**

**Yogi:** You do not seem to encourage the practice of mettā bhavana. Do you consider it unsuitable for practitioners of insight meditation?

**SUT:** It is not that I think it is unsuitable. It can be useful sometimes. My teacher told me to do mettā bhāvanā at some stage in my practice. It really depends on the person. There are many beginning exercises for meditation. The Buddha taught some people mettā bhāvanā as a meditation to start with, but he also taught other beginners satipatthāna.

When you practise satipatthāna, you practise with the idea of not trying to create anything. You don't try to create

your experience, you take your experience as it is and try to learn something from it. But then what does mettā bhāvanā do? It tries to create a feeling of mettā. You might be angry with someone but you are trying to feel mettā towards this person.

For some people, to practise mettā bhāvanā when they are angry can create an internal conflict. For them it does not work. What is real is the anger, and trying to intellectually suppress it won't help. I tried to send mettā to people I was angry with. But now my wisdom just cannot accept it. My wisdom tells me: "Be real! Watch the anger! Understand the anger!" It feels like the mind is trying to lie to itself. I have done quite a lot of mettā bhāvanā in the past, even practised all night long and got into absorption, into really blissed-out states for a whole day, but it did not make me a less angry person. The moment I stopped practising I was full of anger again.

After I had been practising satipatthāna at home for many years, continuously watching all mental activities, I started having periods during which there was really no more dosa in the mind. Then it was easy to send mettā to anyone — no problem. My teacher would sit until his mind was really peaceful and only then send mettā. Because then it was real mettā. Only if you have money in your pocket, can you give some away...

When there is no dosa in the mind and you come across an equal person, it will feel mettā. When it is faced with someone who is in difficulties, it will feel karunā, when meeting someone who is doing well, it will feel muditā, and when

confronted with a situation in which nothing can be done, it will feel upekkhā. But when there is only a little bit of dosa, none of this is possible. When the mind is clear and when there is no dosa, other contemplations become easy too. If you see a picture of the Buddha, you will start having feelings of reverence towards the Buddha because your mind is in a good state. You are naturally and spontaneously doing Buddhānussati.

There are three ways of seeing the Buddha: 1. with our eyes; 2. by imagining him in our minds (i.e. by visualization); and 3. by understanding the Buddha with our wisdom. That's why the Buddha said: "Those who see the Dhamma see me." Many people who lived with the Buddha didn't really see him. He even had to send a disciple away who did not practise but just wanted to look at him.

The mettā I would like you to have is real mettā, not the kind you try to create for yourself or towards someone else. If there is no dosa, then mettā, muditā, karunā, and upekkhā all become possible, and you can radiate as much mettā as you like. Mettā grows out of adosa and it is therefore more important to acknowledge, observe, and understand dosa than to practise mettā. I emphasize this point of first dealing with the dosa because it is real.

**Yogi:** I sometimes work with mettā when I am suffering; I realize that I do not feel any mettā for another person and therefore I cultivate mettā for myself so that the mind can become more wholesome.

**SUT:** Yes, that's the right way to do it. You should start with yourself because only when you are happy yourself can you

send mettā to other people. I always tell yogis who want to practise mettā to be aware of themselves while they are doing it. When you are observing yourself while sending mettā, you are doing satipatthāna. Watch your mind at work sending mettā; check whether you really feel mettā. Then you will also notice if you are angry and that it is really difficult to send any mettā when you are angry.

**Yogi:** If right attitude is present, is true mettā then automatically possible?

**SUT:** Yes it is, whenever there is wisdom — right attitude is wisdom. That is why I always emphasize the importance of wisdom; if wisdom is present, then everything else becomes possible. I am trying to go to the most important thing first; I am not going to start from the bottom. In the progression sīla — samādhi — paññā, sīla is basic, samādhi is higher, and paññā is highest. Try just maintaining your sīla and not have any samādhi — you cannot maintain your sīla. But when you have samādhi, sīla is easy to maintain, and when you have wisdom, both samādhi and sīla will automatically be present.

There are two kinds of sīla. At first we try to practise; we restrain ourselves from doing unwholesome deeds. The second kind of sīla arises because the mind understands something, and this means that there is no restraint necessary because there is no more or little desire. Both lobha and dosa have been weakened, and it is called sīla of the cetasikas, 'mental-contents' sīla. When true wisdom arises, i.e. when someone experiences enlightenment, sīla becomes immediately pure and the Noble Eightfold Path is understood.

During the Buddha's time quite a few people had a very well developed wisdom faculty. Because their wisdom was so strong, it often only took a few words from the Buddha for them to get enlightened.

I am stressing the importance of wisdom more and more in my teaching. I myself have tried all kinds of methods. I tried hard to maintain my sīla and to develop samādhi but it did not really change me. Only when my mind began to understand things, when wisdom grew, I became a better person. Of course this growth in wisdom helped me to maintain better and better sīla. One of the practices I did as a layman was keeping eight precepts, not the ones you keep here on retreat, but the usual five precepts plus an extension of the speech precepts, i.e. I tried not only not to lie, but also undertook to abstain from harsh speech, from slander or backbiting, and from idle talk. I soon found out that I needed a lot of mindfulness, a lot of self-awareness to keep all these speech precepts and that is when my practice really started zooming. The starting point here again was wisdom. There was the wisdom, the understanding that this way of practising would be helpful. When there is wisdom, everything will turn out right. I really want everyone to grow their wisdom, precisely because I know what a big difference it makes.

I don't really want to talk about mettā, but if you know how to look, you can see mettā. Without real patience, which is akin to mettā, it would not be possible for me to devote all this time to teaching. But I cannot give mettā to every individual, it's more universal, I feel for you, all of you.



## PARAMI

**Yogi:** There are four pāramīs which I don't quite understand: adhitthāna (resolve), nekkhamma (renunciation), sīla (morality), and sacca (truthfulness). Could you please tell me how you understand these?

**SUT:** Adhitthāna is a process of strengthening resolve of the mind. It is usually applied in order to reinforce or strengthen some quality that is already present. This can be done by doing something repeatedly and also by pushing the borders of the mind a little bit at a time in order to strengthen the mind. I have done a lot of adhitthāna. In my experience, making strong resolves never really works except when the motivation is wisdom. If you just bash about with resolve it is never very steady, but if you have been practising steadily, wisdom can take all the strength from that practice and use it effectively. When wisdom is there, resolve is present too.

**Yogi:** So the strengthening of the mind happens by challenging it?

**SUT:** No, challenging means wanting to go beyond your limits. The strengthening happens by reinforcing what is already there.

**Yogi:** How do I reinforce what is already there?

**SUT:** You have to become clear about what you are capable of, and then do that again and again. I'll give you a very basic example: If you want to become able to practise all night, you don't go and try to do it straightaway. You start by resolving the first night to stay up as long as you can and then the following nights you try to repeat that, i.e. you stay up until the same time again. If you can keep this up for two weeks or so, then you can try pushing the mind to practise one more hour. Then you wait and see whether you can keep that up for a week or two before you again try to push further.

**Yogi:** Thank you, that's clear. I think you once said that renunciation was about non-greed, is that right?

**SUT:** Yes, learning to watch *all* the defilements every time they come up is renunciation — you are making an effort not to indulge in them.

Your third question was about *sīla*. *Sīla* is about restraint and responsibility; the more wisdom there is, the more complete *sīla* becomes.

**Yogi:** Yes, I understand that. But I am still not clear about the meaning of *sīla*, does morality mean keeping the eight precepts?

**SUT:** No, it is understanding what should be done and what should not be done. It is both doing what you should do and not doing what you should not do.

**Yogi:** OK, my last question is about sacca, truthfulness.

**SUT:** Sacca basically means truth but it has different meanings. In this context it is about speech, it means not breaking a promise, i.e. once you have promised to give or do something you do not break that promise. But I do not know that much about the technical meanings of sacca. In Burma we have a colloquial way of using sacca. People strongly believe in the power of truth, even when used in a negative way. For example, someone has lied and then uses this as a truth by saying: "It is true that I just lied to my mother, may the power of this truth help my aunty to recover from her illness." Apparently this really works, but it has less power than when used with a positive truth.

## **SELF NATURE**

**Yogi:** A teacher from the Chinese Chan Tradition talks about relaxing into nature, into one's true nature. What is your understanding of seeing self nature, of seeing into self nature?

**SUT:** The way I understand it is that we have made something that actually is nature into a self. If we understand that we are making nature into a self, that we are creating a concept, then what you said would make sense and also that if we understand nature, we understand 'ourselves'. That's how one could express it in words. Sometimes I ask a yogi: "Who are you?" "What are you?"

I don't see a self, the word self is just a designation that people use. But you cannot communicate without using it. The Buddha said that there is no attā, but he also said "Rely on yourself". When we are talking about relying on ourselves, we mean relying on the good qualities like awareness, concentration, wisdom, etc.

**Yogi:** My sense is that the expression 'self nature' is pointing to relaxing into the Unconditioned and having that attitude in practice.

**SUT:** But if it is Unconditioned you do not need to relax! If it is the Unconditioned the mind is already free, there is no need to relax anymore. Only as long as there is an 'I' to relax, is there still a need to relax.

## **ANATTA**

**Yogi:** You often encourage yogis to remind themselves that what they are experiencing is just 'nature'. Why do you want us to look at our experiences in terms of 'these are all just natural phenomena' rather than in terms of 'non-self'?

**SUT:** The term non-self or anattā is usually misunderstood. People tend to think of it in terms of an absence of self and this 'non-self' becomes a concept. In reality there simply is no self and there has never been one! It is therefore better to think of experiences in terms of 'these are just natural

phenomena'. These phenomena arise because of causes and conditions. Looking at things in this light is right view, and by observing how certain causes and conditions lead to a particular result, we can understand that there are just these causes and conditions, that there is no 'I' involved. Understanding conditionality is understanding anattā.

## DUKKHA

**Yogi:** You were talking about dukkha the other day, saying that it is everything which is difficult to get rid of. Do you mean getting rid of once and for all or just temporarily?

**SUT:** Whatever is difficult to get rid of is dukkha — whether just temporarily or once and for all.

Which is harder to get rid of, dosa or lobha?

**Yogi:** I'd say they are neck to neck.

**SUT:** Lobha is more difficult, more subtle — and moha is hardest. The point I was making the other day was that we should better not use the word suffering when we talk about dukkha. Most yogis don't understand the truth of dukkha but they understand suffering. Usually the only kind of suffering they understand is 'feeling' suffering (dukkha-vedanā) and this interpretation of suffering will lead to aversion. Understanding dukkha is very different.

Many yogis have been told that because things are impermanent they are suffering. They also know that arising

and passing away is a sign of impermanence. Because they are eager for progress, they also tend to try to see arising and passing away. When they do this, they will of course remember all the information they were given, and they will interpret whatever they see coming and going as suffering. Because they see this as a sign of progress, their minds will then start to lean towards suffering and they become fearful. Fear is passive dosa. Sometimes yogis become so frightened that they break down and cry.

The meaning of the word dukkha is much wider and deeper than just the experience of physical or mental suffering. Any kind of suffering, from the most obvious manifestations of pain or grief to the most subtle notions of discontent, uncertainty, unsatisfactoriness, unreliability, unpredictability, ambiguity, insecurity etc. all just refer to the grossest level of dukkha. According to Buddhist tradition, this level is called dukkha-dukkha. The pain of birth, getting sick, ageing and death as well as any emotional sorrow like anger, fear, despair, disappointment, anxiety, getting separated from loved ones, having to be with unpleasant people, not getting what we want or getting what we don't want — all this is traditionally listed under the first level of dukkha.

The next level is called viparināma-dukkha. This is more subtle, more difficult to see. Any kind of sensual pleasure or mental rapture, in fact any kind of happiness whatsoever — however subtle and long-lasting — will sooner or later end. Doing something over and over again or trying to achieve something also belongs to this category of dukkha. You might

be experiencing a lot of samādhi, piti, and passaddhi every time you meditate but this too won't last. Experiencing such states is also dukkha. Most people find it very difficult to understand that all happiness is dukkha.

The third and last level of dukkha is called sankhāra-dukkha, also referred to as existential dukkha. Nāma-rūpa is dukkha; the sheer fact that we exist is dukkha.

It is really important to understand the difference between experiencing dukkha and understanding it. Physical or mental suffering - however gross or subtle - automatically comes with some form of aversion; dukkha vedanā or domanassa always arise together with dosa. All such experiences will lead to unwholesome states of mind and therefore to more suffering.

Understanding dukkha does not mean mental suffering. Understanding dukkha is very different; it is a wholesome quality of mind, a liberating and life transforming experience. Every little understanding of dukkha enables the mind to let go and therefore to experience more freedom. Understanding dukkha will lead to more wholesome states of mind; it will make the mind stronger.

In order to be able to understand dukkha we not only need to have this right information but we also need right thinking. The Buddha said that the one thing that keeps us trapped in this endless cycle of existence is not seeing and not understanding dukkha. If we don't understand dukkha, we will keep hoping for better times and we will keep getting disappointed. Most people waste a lot of time trying to fight dukkha, trying to manipulate their world. This resistance to dukkha is not only exhausting but it also creates even more

dukkha. Right thinking is accepting and acknowledging dukkha. Seeing and accepting dukkha means seeing and accepting how things are, and such a state of mind will free up a lot of energy which we can use to practise.

When we become more and more skilled at recognizing dukkha we will also more often see whenever we 'create' new dukkha. My teacher used to say that only when we understand the dukkha in becoming (jāti-dukkha), will the mind really strive towards Nibbāna. Everything that comes into existence is dukkha — and its passing away is dukkha too. It is because we don't understand jāti-dukkha that we want to get something or to get rid of something. A mind that understands dukkha will neither want happiness nor will it resist anything it is experiencing; it will be completely at peace with whatever is happening.

All beings experience dukkha but only those who recognize dukkha can work towards freeing themselves from it. Clearly recognizing and accepting dukkha will lead to inner freedom. The Buddha said that those who see dukkha also see the end of dukkha. Only if dukkha is really understood, will striving for Nibbāna be seen as the only worthwhile thing to do.

## **INSIGHT OR WISDOM?**

**Yogi:** You rarely use the word insight. You always talk about wisdom. So I am not sure whether you are using a different model than the one I am used to or whether you just use different terminology. I have been taught that when you apply



mindfulness it creates samādhi, that samādhi then leads to insight, which leads to wisdom. Do you agree with this model or do you have a different understanding?

**SUT:** I use the same model. What we watch are mental and physical processes. Over time, with practice, our understanding of these processes changes. Whether we call it understanding, insight, or wisdom does not really matter; these are just different words pointing to the same thing.

There is a growth in the level of understanding. For example, awareness can see that something is a thought. When the level of awareness grows, wisdom understands that 'this is the mind'. When the understanding that 'this is just the mind' is firmly established, wisdom will start to see that 'this is just happening'.

It is important to remember that any kind of insight or understanding can only arise when there is no moha, lobha, and dosa in the observing mind.

# FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The following points are a mixture of short reflections, ideas, and suggestions from Ashin Tejaniya. Since they are taken out of context, they might not always be very meaningful to yogis who are not very familiar with his teachings or to those who are relatively new to meditation and to Dhamma study.

We therefore suggest that you take inspiration from the ones that immediately make sense to you and that you skip the ones that do not speak to you. Mulling over points you cannot connect with is likely to confuse or frustrate you.

1. If there is even a little expectation, the mind gets confused. Watch your attitude, don't expect results!
2. When you use wisdom, effort is already present.
3. Being mindful is being aware of what is right here already.
4. When the mind is idle, it will think.
5. Whenever you are upset, look within. There is nothing and nobody out there you can blame for your state of mind.
6. Having assumptions is delusion at work.
7. It is important to learn to see clearly the difference between the object and the mind. Which is the object? Which is the mind?
8. Whenever people get depressed it is a sure sign that they wanted something and that they did not get it.

9. Thoughts can lie to you but your feelings (*vedanā*) cannot — feelings are real.
10. Wanting to talk and not wanting to talk are the same problem.
11. Whether or not you want to do something is not important. Just ask yourself whether you *need* to do it.
12. Don't pay attention to the sound, just recognize you are hearing. Hearing includes knowing the sound. The same goes for seeing, etc.
13. The small defilements will grow. Ultimately we need to become able to see even the tiniest manifestations of greed and hatred.
14. Why are you doing this? Because you want it? Because you need to do it? Because it is the appropriate thing to do under the present circumstances?
15. When there is no greed or aversion in the mind, you are able to make the right decisions.
16. Just ask the question, don't look for the answer. The answer will come as soon as the mind has gathered enough data.
17. Don't tell yourself to be patient, watch the impatiencel!
18. Wisdom can control the mind; you cannot control the mind!
19. Don't try to maintain equanimity, only try to keep awareness.

20. If you have problems in your family you have to solve them at home. You cannot solve them at the meditation centre.
21. Appreciate the knowledge and understanding you have. Do as much as you can and be content with whatever result you get.
22. What are you going to pay attention to? Seeing? Hearing? Smelling? Touching? Tasting? Thinking? Or are you going to get involved in looking, listening, smelling, touching, or tasting? Will you get lost in thought? Don't get carried away by old habits; retrain the mind!
23. As long as you have a wrong attitude, the mind cannot be strong. When the mind is strong, it can see whatever it is able to. This is Dhamma at work; there is no personal involvement at all. Never try hard to see anything. Eagerness to see is greed.
24. Never try to locate the mind, place is a concept. You recognize the mind by the fact that it is doing work.
25. What we call the planning mind is just thinking. You may be planning something but you are not doing anything because the intention is not strong enough. Real intention is not thinking. It is just impulses, just energy of the mind.
26. Knowing why the mind is doing something is wisdom.
27. Sometimes a thought is so subtle that you cannot know whether it is driven by a defilement, but you can feel it.

28. A true understanding of dukkha is free of suffering, it will free the mind.
29. At the beginning of your practice, thinking will stop as soon as you become aware of it; you cannot be aware and think. Only when mindfulness is strong can you observe thinking.
30. When you really understand the principle of something, you will never forget it.
31. We must realize just how harmful the defilements are. It takes a long time until the mind gets really weary of the defilements; just knowing intellectually that lobha, dosa, and moha are not good is not enough. Most people actually want to live with greed, anger, and delusion. We all must go through many difficult periods of constantly looking at the defilements, there is no shortcut. Only when the mind becomes really fed up with the defilements will it be able to free itself.
32. Don't hurry, just keep learning.
33. Why are the defilements stronger at home? Because it is MY home, MY wife, MY car, etc.
34. If you are really continually aware, thoughts of fear will not arise. If a sound is just a sound, etc., imagination will not go wild. Whatever you think you see and whatever you think you hear are just concepts.
35. Applied awareness cannot be used in daily life, only natural awareness, awareness that does its own work.

Then wisdom will see kusala and akusala, and will drop akusala for kusala. The longer you practise the more you will understand this process.

36. Inside and outside are concepts.
37. Always examine the mind, why is it doing this, how does it feel?
38. Why is the mind getting agitated? What did you do before this happened? Remember!!
39. When you are agitated you really need to practise.
40. The mind does not calm down because of an object but because of interest, right attitude, and continuity of mindfulness.
41. If you do not practise talking meditation in the meditation centre you won't be able to do it outside.
42. If you think you have something very important to think about, stop and ask yourself if it is really important. Why are you so eager to think about it?
43. In a work situation, the momentum of stress can be slowed down or even stopped if you practise mindfulness of breathing for a minute or so every hour — or whenever you have time.
44. When people start practising meditation, they will have no — or not enough — faith to keep them going and therefore they need a lot of motivation. Faith needs time to develop.

45. What you think of as sukha is dukkha.
46. Is it important for the attachment to go or to understand why the attachment is there? Wanting to get rid of anything is dosa!
47. Mindfulness and wisdom will automatically eradicate the defilements; we can only create the right conditions. We need to recognize and accept the defilements.
48. Feeling confident that you have understood a kilesa is moha at work!
49. We need to learn our lessons over and over again until we really understand.
50. What you know is never enough! Wisdom understands what is happening and what needs to be done. Wisdom keeps growing in many ways.
51. The more you resist what is happening and the more you want to change it, the worse it feels.
52. Think about how to be mindful, don't think about the experience.
53. Even if you are afraid, just go for it!
54. When you are depressed everything is a problem.
55. We have to take action. If we do not do anything, the thoughts will keep doing their stuff. The defilements are very strong, they can run very fast and so wisdom needs to be fast to catch up.

56. If we want to have real understanding we must practice in real situations.
57. Investigating is using wisdom energy.
58. Wisdom never believes. Wisdom always investigates.
59. We use thinking, but the quality we try to harness is wisdom. It is not the thought itself that is the point; it is what lies behind the thought, the meaning, the right ideas, the understanding.
60. Understanding how to do something is wisdom.
61. We need to use concepts to talk about wisdom and reality. Concepts and reality co-exist.
62. People who are attached to samādhi need to be encouraged to investigate.
63. People who are naturally curious and intelligent will automatically look closer or deeper into whatever they are aware of.
64. Wisdom never takes it easy; wisdom understands that it can always go further.
65. If you think you can take it easy, you will suffer.
66. Those who are wise work harder.
67. Wanting a peaceful life is laziness.
68. Be careful when you make a resolution! People often make resolutions without even considering what they are actually capable of.



69. We cannot stop the defilements; we have to learn to work with them. People who play games understand this very well. You have to solve problems or overcome difficulties before you can proceed to a higher level.
70. We cannot get rid of a defilement by using a defilement. Every time we deal with a defilement, we need to be aware — without any interference. We first need to recognize, observe, and understand what is going on. Whenever we label something as bad we bring in aversion. Keep checking your attitude!
71. The sense of 'I' arises continuously, but to the mind it is just like any other object. You can learn to be aware of its presence or absence.
72. Whenever you let the mind run idle, the kilesas will strike.
73. There are always at least two main causes which affect your present experience: The momentum of your good and bad habits and what you are doing right now.
74. Every time you understand something, you will experience a sense of freedom.
75. People don't want to live with things as they are; they always want to live with things as they want them to be.
76. If you don't even have common sense, how can you hope to get vipassanā insights?
77. This is the nature of Dhamma: if you get it, you don't feel happy; if you don't get it, you don't feel unhappy.

Many yogis become very happy when they have a certain experience and very upset if they don't. This is not practising Dhamma. Practising Dhamma is not having an experience, practising Dhamma is understanding.

78. There are three kinds of seeing: i) seeing something with your eyes, ii) seeing something with your mind, iii) seeing through something — that's insight.
79. The real objective is to understand things. Happiness will then follow naturally.
80. In vipassanā we want to know what is happening, why it is happening, and what we should do about it.
81. The moment you want to be happy or peaceful, you have a problem. Wanting is a problem. It is essential to practise with the right information, the right thinking, and the right attitude.
82. Every time you are in a hurry or eager to do or know something, the mind will start to concentrate, to focus, and to want results.
83. Real understanding can only happen in the moment.
84. Sīla is doing what you should do and not doing what you should not do.
85. Vedanā is a verb.
86. It is wrong to expect others to respect us.
87. Directing the mind towards the right object is sammā-sankappa.

88. You cannot *pretend* to know Dhamma; the level of your understanding will always show in your words and actions.
89. When there is no paññā, there is moha.
90. When you understand paññā better, you understand moha better.
91. Saññā and paññā work simultaneously.
92. Sati sees what is going on, paññā knows what to do.
93. The whole world is unfair. People do bad things because they don't know better, because of moha.
94. Wanting others to be like you is a stupid expectation.
95. The process of understanding is often very painful.
96. Trying to keep your attention on the object is wrong effort.
97. Whatever you perceive are just objects. All objects are natural phenomena. Let things happen.
98. Every time you judge something as good or bad, moha has got a hold on you.
99. No matter how many unskilful deeds you have done, wisdom can liberate you in this life.
100. Have you ever had a peaceful moment with absolutely no expectation, no worry, and no anxiety?
101. When the mind feels joy in understanding, it will be motivated to look deeper.

102. Investigation is observing what is happening in order to understand the whole picture.
103. Meditation is cultivating wholesome states of mind.
104. Having natural awareness is like driving a car; you know what to do, how to do it, and what to pay attention to.
105. What is happening right now?
106. Why do we like things? Because we don't see them as they really are.
107. Reality has no direction, reality does not go anywhere.
108. Things don't happen because you want them to happen but because conditions are right.

# GLOSSARY OF PĀLI TERMS

During Dhamma discussions both the teacher and the interpreter frequently use key Pāli terms. They are usually left untranslated because translations can only approximately describe their meanings and can sometimes even be misleading. Below you will only find some of the main terms plus the words used in this book. The explanations given should be sufficient for our purposes but they are not comprehensive. For more complete definitions please consult Buddhist dictionaries and textbooks. Also try to get a 'feel' for Pāli terms when you hear them; try to understand them in context.

abhidhamma	Buddhist canonical description of the processes and characteristics of the mind
adhitthāna	determination, resolution
adosa	hatelessness
adukkha-m-asukhā	feeling (vedanā) which is neither pleasant nor unpleasant
akusala (also see kusala)	kammically unwholesome, unskillful, unprofitable
anattā (also see attā)	a) not-self, non-ego, impersonality, there is no abiding substance (or an ego, a self, or a soul), there is no self-existing entity b) nothing can arise on its own or from a single cause, and nothing can exist or move on its own

	c) one of the three universal characteristics of existence (see dukkha and anicca), understanding anattā is a liberating insight (paññā)
anicca	a) impermanence, all conditioned phenomena are impermanent, everything that comes into existence changes and passes away b) one of the three universal characteristics of existence (see dukkha and anattā), understanding anicca is a liberating insight (paññā)
anusaya	potential or latent defilements
appamāda	non-laxity, diligence, presence of self-awareness, (literally: non-forgetfulness)
asammoha-sampajañña	clear knowledge of non-delusion; understanding anicca, dukkha, and anattā
attā	self, ego, personality
avijjā	synonym for moha
bhāvanā	mental development, meditation
bhāvanāmayā paññā	wisdom or knowledge acquired through direct experience, through mental development
bhava-tanhā	craving for existence
bhikkhu	fully ordained monk, member of the Sangha
bojjhanga	the seven factors of enlightenment, also referred to as sambojjhanga

Brahma-vihāra	the four divine abodes or boundless states: loving-kindness (mettā), compassion (karunā), sympathetic joy (muditā), and equanimity (upekkhā)
Buddhānussati	recollection of the Buddha's qualities
cetasika	mental factor (This refers to the 52 mental factors listed in the abhidhamma. Some are kammically neutral, some kammically wholesome, and some kammically unwholesome.)
chanda	wholesome intention, aspiration, zeal
cintāmayā paññā	wisdom or knowledge acquired by thinking and reasoning, by intellectual analysis
citta	mind
cittānupassanā	contemplation of the mind
dāna	giving, offering, generosity
dhamma	a) 'natural law', 'nature' b) object, thing, phenomena c) Buddhist doctrine
dhammānupassanā	contemplation of dhamma
dhamma-vicaya	investigation of phenomena, investigation of dhamma
ditthi	view, belief, speculative opinion micchā ditthi (wrong view) / sammā ditthi (right view)
domanassa	any kind of unpleasant mental feeling, mentally painful feeling

dosa	hatred, anger, any kind of aversion or disliking (including sadness, fear, resistance, etc.)
dukkha	a) unsatisfactoriness, pain, suffering b) the suffering in change c) the unsatisfactory nature of all existence, of all conditioned phenomena d) one of the three universal characteristics of existence (see anicca and anattā), understanding dukkha is a liberating insight (paññā)
dukkha-dukkha	unsatisfactoriness, pain, suffering
gocara-sampajañña	clear knowledge or understanding that there are just mental and physical processes
indriya	the 5 spiritual faculties: saddhā, viriya, sati, samādhi, and paññā
jhāna	meditative absorption
kāma-cchanda	sensual desire
kamma	volitional action (of body, speech, and mind)
karunā	compassion
kāyagatāsati	contemplation of the 32 parts of the body
kāyānupassanā	contemplation of the body
khandha	5 aggregates or categories: rūpa, vedanā, saññā, sankhāra, viññāna
kilesa	defilements, unwholesome qualities of the mind, any manifestation of greed, anger, and delusion (see lobha, dosa, and moha)



kusala (also see akusala)	kammically wholesome, skilful, profitable
lobha	greed, any kind of craving or liking (synonym for tanhā)
magga-ñāna	path knowledge (leading to Enlightenment)
magga-phala	literally 'path and fruit'; synonym for Enlightenment
mettā	loving-kindness, selfless love, unconditional love
mettā bhāvanā	cultivation of loving kindness
micchā ditthi	wrong view
moha	delusion, ignorance, not understanding, not seeing reality (synonym for avijjā)
muditā	altruistic or sympathetic joy
nāma	mental processes, mind (collective term for vedanā, saññā, sankhāra, and viññāna)
nāma-rūpa	mental and physical processes
ñāna	synonym for paññā
nekkhamma	renunciation, 'freedom from defilements'
Pāli	name of the language in which the Buddhist scriptures (Pāli Canon) were first recorded
paññā	wisdom, understanding, knowledge, insight (synonym for ñāna)
paññatti	relative (conceptual) reality, concepts

paramattha	ultimate reality
pāramī	perfections, potential 'talents': perfection in giving, morality, renunciation, wisdom, energy, patience, truthfulness, resolution, loving-kindness, and equanimity
pariyutthāna	used to describe kilesas which arise in the mind
passaddhi	tranquillity
paticca-samuppāda	dependent origination, conditioned co-production, conditionality
pīti	joyful interest, enthusiasm, rapture
puthujjana	literally 'one of the man folk', a worldling, someone who has not yet experienced enlightenment
rūpa	physical processes, corporeality
sacca	truth (many meanings)
saddhā	faith, confidence, trust
samādhi	calmness, stillness or stability of mind
samatha	tranquillity meditation, concentration meditation
sammā-samādhi	Right Samādhi
sammā-sankappa	Right Thought
sammā-sati	Right Awareness
sammā-vāyāma	Right Effort
sankhāra	mental formations

sankhāra-dukkha	the unsatisfactory nature of all existence, of all conditioned phenomena
saññā	recognition, memory, perception
sappāya-sampajañña	clear knowledge of suitability
sati	mindfulness, awareness
Satipatthāna Sutta	the four foundations of mindfulness, see kāyānupassanā, vedanānupassanā, cittānupassanā, and dhammānupassanā
sati-sambojjhanga	the enlightenment factor of mindfulness
sati-sampajañña	mindfulness and clarity of consciousness
sāttaka-sampajañña	clear knowledge of whether a mental, verbal, or physical action is beneficial or not
sīla	morality, ethical conduct, virtue
sīvathikā	cemetery contemplations, contemplations of a corpse
somanassa	any kind of pleasant mental feeling, mentally pleasurable feeling
sukha	happiness
sutamayā paññā	wisdom or knowledge acquired through reading or hearing
sutta	discourse of the Buddha
tanhā	synonym for lobha

upekkhā	a) neutral feelings and sensations (vedanā) b) equanimity, a wholesome mental state (sankhāra, cetasika)
vedanā	pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feelings or sensations
vedanānupassanā	contemplation of feeling
vinaya	rules of conduct and discipline for monks (bhikkhus)
viññāna	consciousness, cognition, the knowing mind
viparināma-dukkha	the suffering in change
vipassanā	insight, insight meditation
virīya	energy, 'wisdom' energy, (('remindfulness'))
vītikāma	used to describe kilesas which are expressed verbally or physically
yoniso manasikāra	a) right attitude, right frame of mind, right attention b) wise consideration