

# Invitation to Insight Meditation

By Visuddhacara



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**Buddha Dharma Education Association Inc.**

# *Invitation to Insight Meditation*

## Visuddhacara

“Monks, those for whom you have compassion, those who may deem you worth listening to, your friends and colleagues, your relatives—they ought to be encouraged, introduced to and established in the four Foundations of Mindfulness.”

“E’en in constraints of life the teaching can be found  
That to *Nibbana* leads, the end of ill:  
It’s found by those who win to mindfulness:  
Their hearts attain to perfect concentration.”

“Mindfulness, I declare, O monks, is helpful everywhere.”

### *The Buddha*

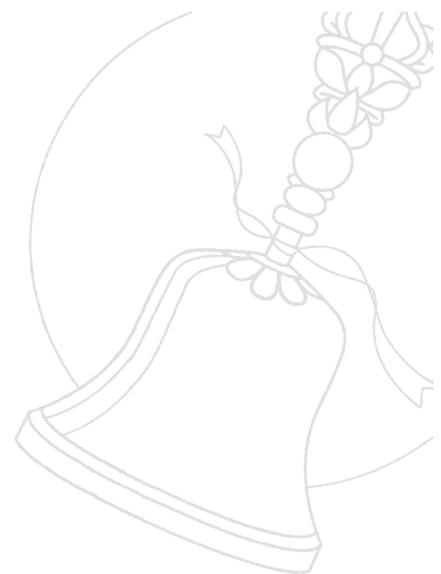
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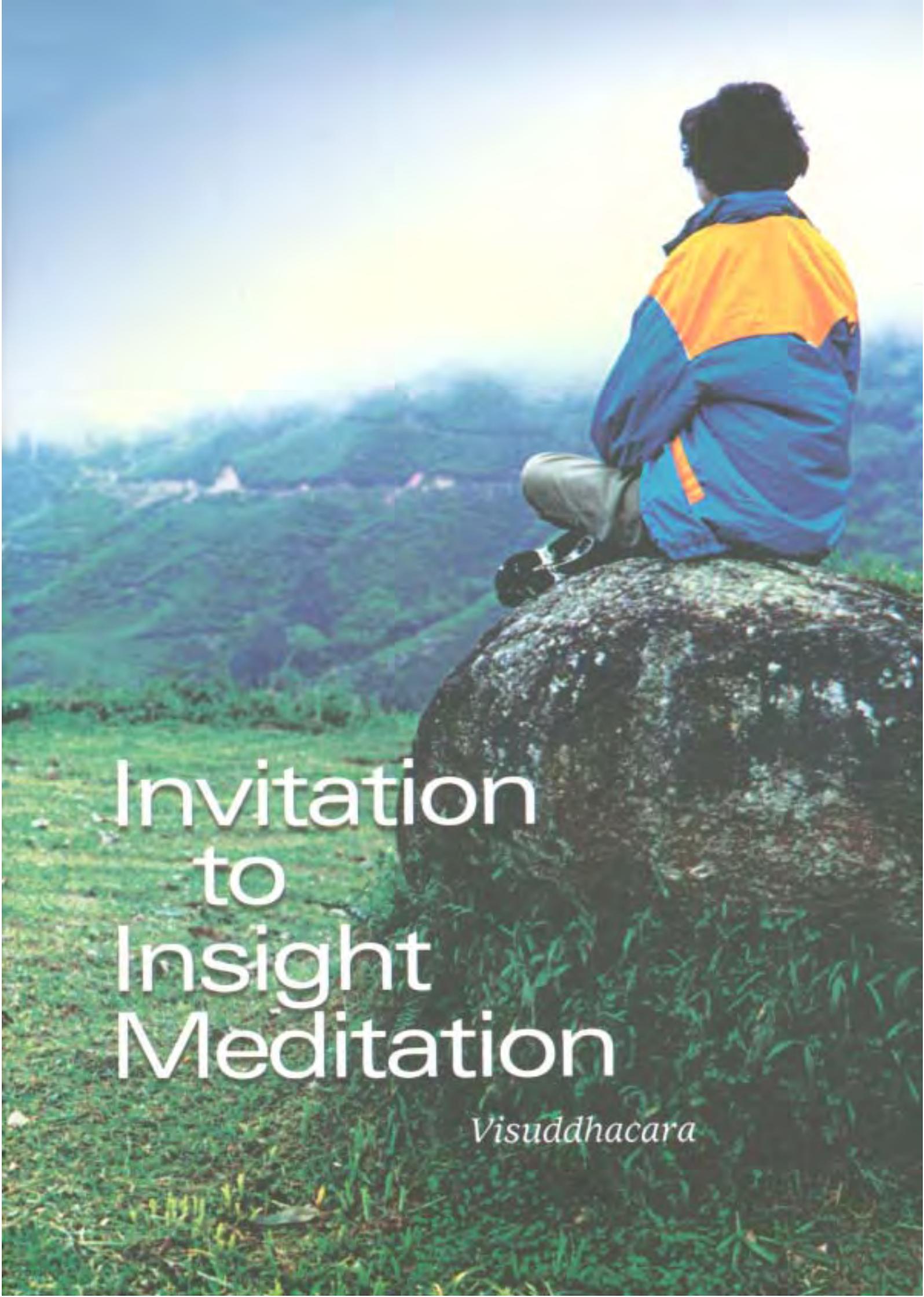
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A person with dark hair, wearing a blue and orange jacket and light-colored pants, is sitting cross-legged on a large, dark, mossy rock. They are looking out over a vast, misty valley with rolling green hills and a small village in the distance. The sky is bright and hazy. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

# Invitation to Insight Meditation

*Visuddhacara*

# Preface

**T**HIS BOOK CONTAINS TWO SECTIONS: 1. *Invitation to Vipassana* and 2. *Basic Instructions*. In the first part, I have endeavoured to explain:

- a) the basic principles underlying the Vipassana practice, how it is essentially the observation of physical and mental processes that occur in the body and mind,
- b) how this observation leads to the understanding of the truths of impermanence, suffering and not-self as taught by the Buddha,
- c) how the application of mindfulness is required for this observation,
- d) how the Wisdom of impermanence, etc. is important, making us wiser, stronger, etc.—i.e. the benefits we can get from this understanding, how it helps us in our daily life, and shape our whole outlook and attitude towards life, and
- e) various other aspects of the benefits of mindfulness and *living in the present*, such as the curtailment of worries and anxieties, improvement in health, concentration and memory.

It is hoped that the essay, though short, is sufficient to give readers enough understanding and appreciation of the practice to take it up. As for those already practising, it might serve as an encouragement to persevere and continue with more zest and enthusiasm.

For those wanting to begin practice, the next question is how to start? What are the basic instructions? Thus, I have provided in the second part, simple basic instructions which are enough to

start off a beginner after which for continued guidance, a teacher or an experienced meditator should be consulted for advice.

My reason for writing is simple: having practised Vipassana, first as a layman and later as a monk, and appreciating its manifold benefits and the meaning and stability it can give to our lives, it is only natural that one would like to share what little one understands and encourage others in the practice. If others, spurred by this encouragement, do take up the practice, my little effort in contributing this article, would be more than amply rewarded.

Before concluding, I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to my *upajjhaya* and teacher, the Venerable Sayadaw U Pandita, and other senior meditation teachers who have taught me Vipassana. Many *sadhus* are also due to all those who have donated towards the printing costs.

May all beings share in the merits of this *Dhamma-dana*, realize all their wholesome desires and attain *Nibbana*, the supreme happiness.

*Visuddhacara,*  
Nov 1991

*Visuddhacara* has been practising insight meditation since 1982. He was a journalist and later a monk for some years and is presently teaching meditation and Buddhism as a lay person. He is the author of several books, including:

*Curbing Anger Spreading Loot; Loving And Dying;*  
*Hello With Love And Other Meditations;*  
*And Metta: The Practice Of Loving-kindness for a Happier Life.*

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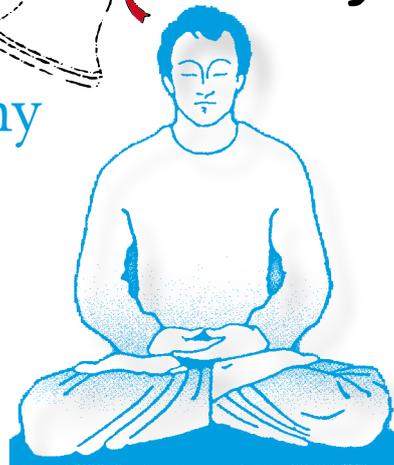
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# Invitation to Insight Meditation

**V***ipassana is a system of meditation* taught by the Buddha to liberate the mind from unwholesome states and overcome suffering. *Vipassana* is a Pali word that means *wisdom* or *Insight*. So *Vipassana* meditation is Insight or Wisdom meditation. When we do *Vipassana* we will come to attain a balance of mind that will enable us to face the ups and downs of life. This is very important as most of our sufferings come from our inability to control the mind. We suffer from anxiety, fear, worries, depression, envy, jealousy, excitement, anger, hatred, delusion, pride and a host of unwholesome states of mind. We want to live calmly and peacefully, yet we are unable to do so. We are overwhelmed by our moods that can go from one extreme to another, from, so to speak, the deepest hell to the highest heaven.

With regular practice of *Vipassana* we can gradually gain mastery over our mind. This comes about through the gradual understanding of the nature of existence, the nature of our body and mind. With this understanding comes wisdom which liberates us from all suffering. To understand the nature of this liberation, we need to consider the character of an *arahant*—a Buddhist saint, one who has accomplished the goal in meditation. During the Buddha's time, many monks attained arahatship after learning *Vipassana* from the Buddha. Many lay-persons attained lower stages of sainthood (i.e. the *sotapanna*, *sakadagami* and *anagami* stages) which also brought them much mental relief, happiness and mastery over the mind.

The *arahants* who have understood fully the nature of existence are always calm and peaceful. They can never be shaken by any adversity or change in their circumstances. They always respond to all situations with calmness, equanimity and wisdom.

Thus they are fully liberated from all mental suffering. They never worry. They are never anxious or restless. They are always calm and serene. This is what we all would like to be—calm and steady all the time—unshakable like a rock. Even when they undergo physical suffering, such as illness, the arahants never suffer mentally. Their mind is not depressed or dejected as a result of the physical pain. They remain calm and equanimous, able to bear the pain with fortitude and courage. They can contemplate on the impermanent nature of the pain, how it is constantly arising and passing away. Finally, even physical suffering comes to an end for the arahants; for when arahants die, they undergo no new rebirth. If there is no birth, there is no decay and death together with the accompanying suffering one faces while living. So if there is no birth there is no suffering. *Arahants* go to *Nibbana*, a state of cessation of mind and matter, which means the cessation of suffering. To put it positively, *Nibbana* is the supreme happiness or peace.

By doing *Vipassana* we are walking along the path of the *arahants*. We may not become *arahants* overnight but we are heading in that direction, the right direction. Our mind will become more and more calm and peaceful as we progress along the way. We begin to enjoy the fruits of our practice—mental joy, calm, bliss, equanimity, wisdom, etc. We will be better poised to face the vicissitudes of life, such as the eight worldly conditions of loss and gain or success and failure, happiness and unhappiness, praise and blame, fame and disrepute. We will be able to stay in the middle—cool and collected—amid the changing fortunes of life.

This is what we want, a steady peaceful mind, but most of us don't know how to go about it. The Buddha has discovered the way more than 2,500 years ago. He wants to share it with all of us. He wants to show all who would care to listen the way to purify the mind and reach the end of suffering. Those who practised during the Buddha's time attained mastery over their mind. They were

liberated from both mental and physical suffering. Those who continued to practise even after the Buddha's time also attained liberation. The *Vipassana* method has been handed down from generation to generation through monks and lay teachers. Today we still have the method. It would be a pity and a great loss if we do not avail ourselves of the opportunity to practise. The Buddha, in fact, wants us to inherit the true essence of his teaching, not just the superficial aspects. He has always stressed that his teaching is aimed primarily at putting an end to all suffering. He was concerned about the human condition and he wants to show us the way to control our mind and eradicate suffering. If we do not take up the golden opportunity, we will have missed something truly priceless in our lives. We will have missed the essence of the Buddha's teaching.

The teaching of *Vipassana* is a scientific one in that one need not subscribe to any dogma or faith. One only has to practise and observe the results for oneself. Only when we undergo positive changes in our mental states will we come to appreciate the value of the practice. Only when we see how our mind becomes more trained and controlled, how we can be more steady, calm and peaceful, only then will we come to acknowledge the Buddha as a great teacher. In the Pali text, the Buddha is acknowledged as the *Incomparable teacher of gods and men*. But we do not ask people to believe in Buddha by mere faith. We ask them to practise and experience the results for themselves, and then believe. Such kind of faith is not based on mere belief but on experience and verification through practice. The Buddha himself invites us with the words "*Ehi passiko.*" It means "come and see." "You need not have to believe what I tell you, but only come and practise and find out for yourself. Then you can accept or reject." In this article, we extend an invitation to all and sundry to come and practise and see for themselves.

## What is Vipassana

*Vipassana* is essentially the observation of what goes on in our mind and body. This will lead to the understanding of the impermanent, unsatisfactory and insubstantial nature of all phenomena. (More of this will be explained later.) *Vipassana* involves the application of mindfulness (*sati*) to observe mental and bodily processes. For example, we observe sensations such as hardness, softness, tension, stiffness, relaxation, cold and heat in our body. The Buddha explained these phenomena as the primary qualities of matter (*rupa*). Matter is said to be made up of four primary elements which are given the names of earth (*pathavi*), water (*apo*), fire (*tejo*), and air (*vayo*). They are not literally earth, water, fire and air but these terms are used to express certain qualities. For example, hardness and softness are characteristics of the earth element, cohesion and fluidity the characteristics of the water element, heat and cold the characteristics of the fire element and tension, motion and support the characteristics of the air element. These elements are said to be the ultimate realities (*paramattha*) of what constitutes the body or matter.

As we observe these various physical phenomena such as hardness and softness, cold and heat, we will eventually see how they arise and pass away from moment to moment, how they do not remain the same but are constantly undergoing arising, decay and dissolution.

Initially it will be difficult to pay close attention, but with persistent practice and developed mindfulness, one will see vividly the constant arising and passing away of phenomena. This observation may extend to all phenomena that arise at the six sense-doors, i.e. at the moment of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking. One can experience in a unique way how phenomena arise and pass away in series. For example, seeing is not just one seeing but a series of seeing, i.e. a series of seeing

consciousness arising and passing away. Similarly with hearing and the rest. So too in walking and stretching, one may observe a series of movements, not just one movement but a series of uncountable movements arising and passing away at a very fast speed.

As with physical phenomena, so too with mental activities. In fact, mind is arising and passing away faster than matter. We observe that it is not one mind that thinks but a series of minds arising and passing away. All these must be experienced to be understood. Conceptual or intellectual understanding alone is not enough. Only experiential understanding will leave us with no doubt whatsoever on the impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and insubstantiality (*anatta*) of existence.

Seeing how mental and physical phenomena are constantly in a state of flux, arising and passing away, we can see that there is no such thing as security in the world. We can't hold on to anything. Things arise and pass away according to conditions. They are not lasting. They are impermanent. Whatever arises must pass away. Seeing this truth occurring vividly in our own mind and body complex will bring about a change for the better in our outlook on life. We will begin to cultivate a realistic, wise and detached attitude towards life. We will continue to do our work as usual, responsibly and well. We will cherish our loved ones, take good care of them. We will relate with kindness and compassion towards all beings. But no more will we be attached to conditions or expect them to remain always to our liking. Understanding impermanence, we can accept it when a loved one passes away. We can accept when good conditions pass away and bad ones arise. We understand that this is the nature of existence and we have now become matured enough to take it calmly without anger, bitterness, without tears, depression or sorrow. There will only be the wisdom that "What has the nature of arising must as a consequence pass away. How can it be otherwise? To wish for it to be

otherwise would be only to court sorrow and suffering.” In this way, the meditator comes to maturity in wisdom. He lives in the world but is above it. He transcends the dualities of good and bad, like and dislike, sorrow and happiness. He stays calm and equanimous like an unshakable rock.

Having understood impermanence, he appreciates the Truth of Suffering or unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*). We can understand suffering when we see the obvious occurrences of suffering, such as pain and sickness, killings and deaths in the world. But the meditator sees more than this obvious suffering. He sees the suffering inherent in change (*viparinama dukkha*), for the states of pleasure or happiness are also impermanent. When they pass away, pain or suffering may take their place. Thus, when he experiences pleasure and happiness, the meditator is not attached to them. He understands their impermanent nature. Consequently, when the happiness passes away, the meditator is not grieved. He does not sigh, weep, lament, or become depressed like another person might, for he has understood well the suffering that is inherent in change.

Furthermore, the meditator understands the suffering inherent in formations (*sankhara*). Having observed the continuous arising and passing away of phenomena, he sees them as something oppressive and frightful, not to be clung to. He does not expect lasting happiness from them. Instead, he is determined to attain the state of *Nibbana* where the constant flux of phenomena is stilled and true peace is reached. Thus he perseveres in his practice and is patient with the burden of the *khandha* (the aggregates of mind and matter) which he has to bear in the meanwhile. Body and mind are considered as *sankhara* or conditioned formations. We have to take care of the body daily, feed, clothe and clean it, urinate and defecate, take medicine when necessary, etc. Then we have to go about earning a living in order to obtain the necessary income to enable us to fulfill our responsibilities and live a comfortable life.

The mind too has to be taken care of, for it often gets sick by becoming depressed, worried, angry, etc. The meditator understands the suffering inherent in formations, in having this mind and body. He bears it with courage and fortitude. He goes about discharging his responsibilities cheerfully, accepting the reality of life. But there is this difference. He now has a goal, a sense of direction. He is working towards the elimination of all suffering. He continues his practice of meditation and dedicates all his deeds towards the attainment of the highest wisdom. He is charitable. He helps others, feeling compassion for all those who are suffering. He observes morality such as non-killing, non-stealing, nonsexual misconduct, non-lying, non-taking of intoxicants and drugs, and thus displays sensitivity and consideration for his fellow beings.

Understanding *anicca* (impermanence) also leads to the understanding of *anatta* (insubstantiality or not-self). The meditator becomes more and more selfless. How? Having seen impermanence, he understands that ultimately there is no “I”, no ego or a permanent entity. Everything is always in a state of flux. There is only a continuous process of mind and matter arising and passing away according to conditions. Thus, he sees through the illusion of selfhood. The so-called “I” is just made up of these processes, and it is actually just a bundle of suffering. By wrongly identifying these processes as an ego, an “I” or self, he suffers more. His pride increases, and whenever something goes amiss he thinks it is “I” who is suffering. But the meditator comprehends that it is just a process that goes on according to conditions. He does not cling to it as “It is I, myself,” etc. He observes suffering as merely suffering and the so-called suffering as a process of continuous arising and passing away of mind and matter. Apart from this process, there is no person. Not clinging tenaciously to the “I”, he consequently suffers less. The arahant who has totally penetrated the shell of ignorance, has no experience of mental suffering whatsoever. He

sees this mind and body complex as just phenomena existing due to conditions. Seen in this light, one can perhaps understand better the enigmatic Pali verse:

*Dukkha eva hi, na koci dukkhito  
karako na, kiriya va v jati  
atthi nibbutim, na nibbuto puma  
maggam atthi. gamako na vijjati.*

Mere suffering exists, no sufferer is found.  
The deed is but no doer of the deed is there.  
*Nibbana* is, but not the man that enters it.  
The path is, but no traveller on it is seen.

Furthermore, *anatta* is also understood as there being no ultimate controller. One cannot say of this body, “Let it be this way,” or “Let it be that way.” For example, when the conditions arise, the body will fall sick. We cannot will it otherwise. We have to try instead to create the necessary conditions (eg. by taking medicine) to change the situation. Eventually too, we will grow old and die. There is no one who can prevent it, not even a reputedly almighty God. All beings are subject to decay and death. The meditator understands that he cannot control this process of arising and passing away as long as the conditions for its existence exist. He appreciates the truth of *anatta*. But if he perseveres in his practice, he will reach a state of *Nibbana* where the process of arising and passing away stops, and mind and matter cease. He experiences a deep, unique peace. He must experience this peace for himself to appreciate and understand what the Buddha meant about *Nibbana*. The proof of the pudding is, as they say, in the eating of it. The meditator who experiences *Nibbana* has no doubts about what the Buddha taught. He has become a true convert, a *sotapanna*, that is a first-stage saint. As he carries on with his practice, he will attain the second, third, and

the fourth-cum-final stage of sainthood, i.e. arahatship. In the first stage, his wisdom is still considered somewhat weak when compared to that of arahatship. He has reduced greed and hatred considerably but has yet to totally cut them off. But as he progresses, he will gain better and better control over his mind until he reaches arahatship when he will attain absolute control.

The mind becomes totally pure, not having even a speck of greed, hatred or delusion. Consequently, he will be totally calm and peaceful. It is said that the *sotapanna* will attain arahatship in at most seven more lives. As for the arahant, he has finished the job; he will never return to *samsara*, the cycle of birth and death. On dying, he undergoes no rebirth. He attains final *Nibbana*, the cessation of all suffering.

## **Sati's Efficacy**

We have said that *Vipassana* is essentially the application of mindfulness to observe the mental and physical processes going on in our body and mind. We have seen how this leads to the understanding of the characteristics of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta*, and how the perception of these characteristics enables one to live with calmness and wisdom. Now we shall look further into the working of mindfulness—how it brings about invaluable benefits.

Being mindful just means being aware of our physical and mental activities. So we can be mindful all the time, anytime. For example, we can be mindful when we walk, knowing that we are walking, noting “left step, right step,” or “stepping, stepping,” or we can disband with the labelling and just know that we are walking. The same principle applies in all manner of activities we may be in, such as sitting, getting up, lying down, stretching a hand, lifting a telephone, closing a door, answering the calls of nature, brushing teeth, sweeping the floor... the list is endless—you can note and be aware of everything you are doing. Now, what is the

benefit of doing this? What purpose does it serve? Why should we be mindful of every little thing we do?

The answer is this. Our mind is normally fragmented. It is in the habit of wandering and thinking about things of no account, worrying about this or that, being anxious, fearful etc We often go about our daily activities pre-occupied with our thoughts. Thus, we don't live in the present, in the moment. We can't do what we are doing now well if our mind is not paying full attention but wandering here and there. Habits are hard to change and all our lives we have been conditioned in living with a wandering mind that flits here and there every now and then. Thus when we first begin to discover and apply mindfulness, we see how difficult it is to exercise such a simple thing as mindfulness. We can't stay aware and pay full attention to whatever we are doing. Time and again we have to bring the mind back to the present. But do not despair. This itself is a sign of progress. Once we are aware of how often our mind wanders, we are actually being more mindful of the state of events. Previously we didn't even know when our mind wandered. We just allowed it to go where it liked but now we are checking that unhealthy trend, that "runaway mind syndrome." It is apt here to quote a verse from the *Dhammapada*.

*"Formerly this mind wandered about as it liked, where it liked, as it pleased. Today with wisdom I will control it as a mahout controls an elephant in rut."*

Now as we are able to stay in the present, and be more aware of whatever we are doing, we shall begin to experience a special kind of peace and quietness of mind. It has to be experienced to be fully appreciated. As our mind wanders less, we become calm, peaceful and relaxed. We worry less. We live lightly, passing each day peacefully. Furthermore, our mental concentration improves. We can stay for long periods attentive and absorbed in whatever we have to do. Consequently we will do our work well, efficiently.

We will find it less of a chore or a drag to go about our daily tasks. It will be a duty which we will discharge calmly and well.

Being mindful also improves our memory. When we recollect we find that we can easily remember the day's events. For example, if we want to recollect where we have put a certain thing, we can with a little effort remember where we have put it—we can recollect how we had mindfully placed it in a certain place. So there is no problem in finding it.

We are mindful not only of our physical activities but also our mental states. We know when happiness or unhappiness arises in us. We know when anger, depression, fear, anxiety, worry, sorrow, despair, etc. are arising. As such we are not carried away by such states. When we are excited or happy, we wouldn't get too elated because we understand that everything is temporary, impermanent. When we are sad too, we can check the sadness and will not allow depression, etc. to set in for too long. If we are not mindful, if we do not acknowledge and observe these mental states, then we will just be carried along with them. We will get more and more miserable and have more unwholesome states of mind. But when we are able to note it, we cut off the strength of its momentum. As we note more and more, its strength is further reduced. Besides, noting gives us time to pause to institute positive states of mind to counter the negative trend. We can reflect wisely on the *Dhamma*, summon courage, fortitude, patience, strength, wisdom and an army of positive qualities that can help us overcome the unwholesome states. We can, for example, easily check anger through mindfulness. Usually when we get angry, we just get carried away by the emotion. We just lose our temper and blow up. We snap or yell at people. In extreme cases we will strike at a person, kick at something, or slam a door. But if we have developed the habit of mindfulness, we can spot the anger the moment it arises, at the early stage. Then as we catch and note this anger, that

emotion will lose its strength and subside. Furthermore, we have time to pause and consider how anger is unwholesome and bad for our mind. We can reflect in various ways to cool down ourselves. In this way, mindfulness helps us to check emotions such as anger.

In short, mindfulness enables us to respond with wisdom in any situation. We have time to pause and respond wisely. Normally, when we encounter a pleasant object, we respond with craving, and when we encounter an unpleasant object, we respond with aversion. Mindfulness will enable us to respond calmly with equanimity. Not being carried away by either extreme, we will stay in the middle, cool and steady. This is a very refreshing benefit which we have to experience for ourselves to truly appreciate it.

Western psychiatrists and psychologists have, for some time already, come to appreciate the efficacy of mindfulness. Some have even taken up the practice of *Vipassana* and use the technique to help heal their patients. No suppression of emotions is involved in *Vipassana*. One watches what arises. One acknowledges it. One watches as it passes away. One becomes, in a sense, like a detached observer. One does not identify what one experiences with an “I” or “self” or “ego” but just as a mere process that arises and passes away according to conditions. In that way, we live more lightly, easily.

Western doctors have, in fact, found that the state of mind has a bearing on the physical health of a person. Diseases are sometimes caused by unhappy states of mind. Prolonged depression, anxiety, fear, unhappiness, etc. can lead to chemical imbalances and other disorders which can even cause diseases such as cancer and heart ailments. Unwholesome mental states may also lower resistance against infection and thus one becomes more susceptible to diseases. Other studies showed that anger or agitation causes the production of the chemical, epinefrin, which increases blood pressure, heartbeat and oxygen consumption. Fear and anxiety cause

the secretion of far more than the normal amount of acid which attacks the intestinal membranes resulting in ulcers. Prolonged states of nervous tension are known to impair the autonomic nervous system in such a way that it affects the digestive function and elimination of waste products. This results in constipation and self-poisoning.

On the other hand, it is found that peaceful states of mind are conducive to physical health. Because of diseases having a relation to the mind, doctors have encouraged patients to take up meditation which can have a healthy effect on both body and mind. According to the scriptures, when there is *samadhi* (concentration), we experience mental rapture (*piti*) and bliss (*sukha*). This brings about the production of healthy cells or matter in the body (*cittajarupa* = matter born of mind). As such, meditators have been known to be cured of various diseases, even chronic ones, when they reached an advance level of practice. Such cases, including those of tumours which might be malignant, have been documented in a book called *Dhamma Therapy* written by Mahasi Sayadaw and translated from the Burmese by Bhikkhu Aggacitta.

Thus, in addition to mental well-being, meditation is conducive to physical health. This should be a further incentive to take up meditation practice in today's stressful world and fast life-style. The various other benefits of mindfulness described earlier are also worthy of consideration. Ultimately, the gaining of wisdom will bring the greatest satisfaction and happiness. Those who have practised will be able to verify the efficacy of mindfulness for themselves. They can vouch for it. For those who have not practised, we hope this little treatise will arouse their interest and spur them into giving it a try. We are confident that if they should take it up, they will not regret doing so.

May all beings be happy. May they find the path that can lead them to both physical and mental well-being.

# Basic Instructions Overview

**T**here are various methods of *Vipassana* meditation but they are all based on the same principles of observing mental and physical processes that occur in the mind and body, and at the six-sense doors, i.e. seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking. In Myanmar, for example, there are various popular methods taught by renowned teachers such as Mahasi Sayadaw, Mogok Sayadaw, Sunlun Sayadaw, U Ba Khin and others. (These teachers had passed away but their disciples are continuing teaching their methods which have become widely practised.) The methods may differ in the initial primary objects that the meditator starts off with but they are all based on the Satipatthana Sutta (Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness) taught by the Buddha. Here we will be giving in brief the method taught by Mahasi Sayadaw. The Mahasi Meditation Centre in Yangon is more than 20 acres in area. There are normally several hundred yogis including monks and lay-persons meditating at the Centre daily. In peak seasons, such as the New Year holidays, there are a few thousand yogis. In addition, there are about 300 Mahasi branches in various towns and villages throughout Myanmar.

The instructions we will give here are brief and basic but it is enough for one to try some practice at home. For further instructions and advice, however, one should approach a teacher or an experienced meditator. As quite a number of people has been practising the Mahasi method, one may be able to contact experienced meditators in various towns in Malaysia. It is best, of course, to be close to a teacher but unfortunately there are not many teachers of *Vipassana* meditation in Malaysia, so beginners could consult with the experienced meditators when they are unable to approach a teacher.

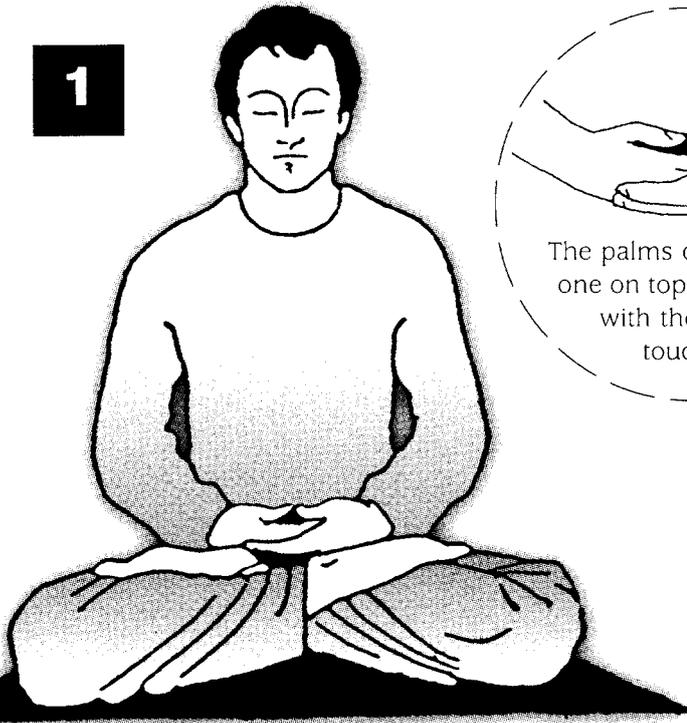
Attending a Retreat is the best way of getting acquainted with the method. In Retreat Centres, practice is intensive and one will be sure to get a good grounding in the practice and understanding of mindfulness. There are now three main Retreat Centres teaching the Mahasi method in Malaysia—the Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Centre in Penang, Santisukharama Meditation Hermitage in Kota Tinggi, Johor, and the Lunas Meditation Hermitage in Lunas, Kedah. In addition, some Buddhist Societies in various towns are also teaching *Vipassana* in their premises. Beginners should make an effort to attend a retreat, spending from say ten days to several weeks or even months in intensive practice. After a retreat, they will find practice at home much easier, having had a good grasp of the method and the way to maintain mindfulness.

## **Basic Instructions**

Sit in a cross-legged position. You could sit with one leg on top of another as in the half-lotus or quarter-lotus position or with both legs placed on the ground. (See diagram on pages 22.) Sometimes placing both legs on the ground is recommended as one may be able to sit more comfortably in this position, there being no pressure of one leg pressed against another. Sitting full-lotus is most difficult as pain normally sets in very quickly. Few yogis can sit full-lotus for long. Those who are unable to sit cross-legged may sit on a stool or chair with their hands placed on the lower thighs. Sitting on a chair is however, unless unavoidable, normally not recommended.

Keep the back straight but not too stiff nor too loose. It should be erect and comfortable. The hands can be placed in front, say, with the right palm on the left palm and with the thumbs touching. Note the right palm on the left palm and with the thumbs touching. (See diagram.) Now close your eyes and you are ready to begin.

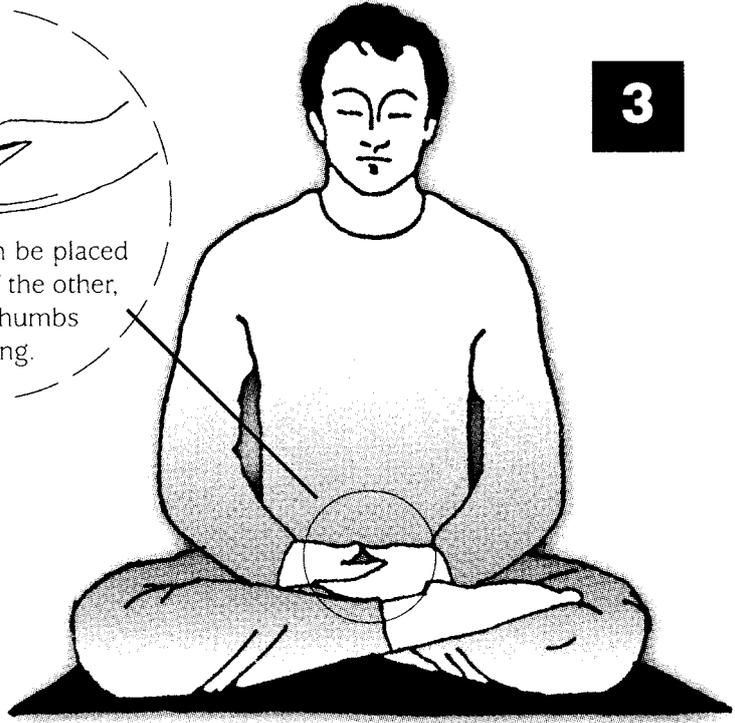
1



**full lotus**

Both feet are placed right up onto the thighs.

3



**quarter lotus**

The foot is not placed right up to the thigh but on the calf, i.e. the lower part of the leg. (The other foot is tucked under.)



The palms can be placed one on top of the other, with the thumbs touching.

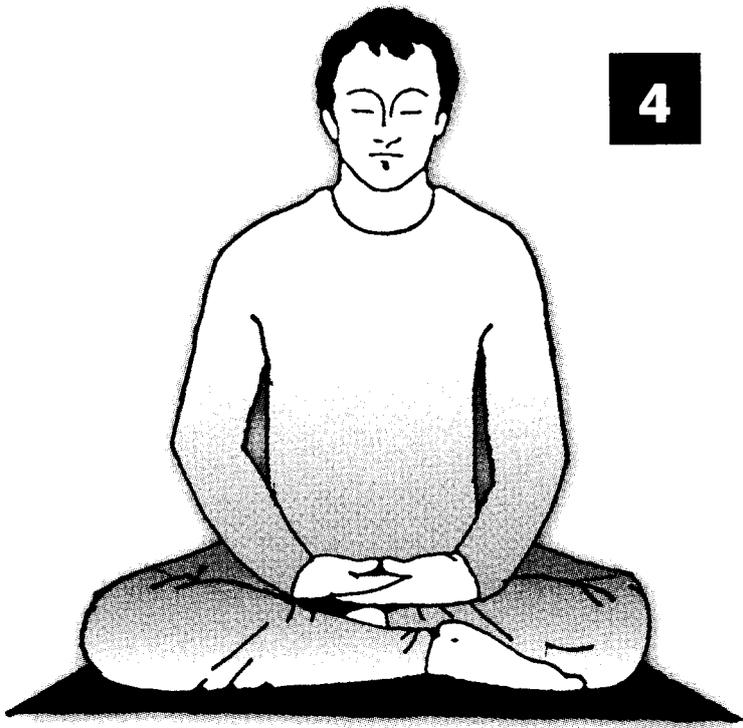
2



**half lotus**

One foot is placed on the thigh

4



Both legs are placed evenly on the ground, one in front of the other.

As you breathe in, you will notice that your abdomen expands and as you breathe out, the abdomen contracts. Note these two movements i.e. the rising and falling of the abdomen. Breathe normally. There is no need to force the breath. As you breathe in, note the rising movement of the abdomen; as you breathe out, note the falling movement of your abdomen. Follow the rising movement as closely as you can from beginning to end. Similarly, follow the falling movement as closely as you can from beginning to end. Make a mental note saying (not verbally but mentally) “rising” as the rising occurs and “falling” as the falling occurs. The labelling is to help you direct your mind to the object. The important thing, however, is to be able to note and follow the movement closely with the mind. The noting or mental awareness of the rising must be concurrent with the rising as it occurs. And so too with the falling. Rising and falling may not always be the same. It may be long, short, fast, slow, distinct, unclear, gross, subtle, tensed, loose, continuous, discontinuous, etc. All these are to be observed and noted as they occur. With practice of seeing things as they are, one will eventually perceive the arising and passing away of phenomena, their impermanence (*anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and insubstantiality (*anatta*).

In the rising and falling movements, the characteristics of the air element (*vayo dhatu*)—motion, tension, tightness, relaxation, etc.—are predominant. So, when one observes the movements, one is actually observing characteristics of the air element, which is as instructed under the section of *Attention on the elements (dhatu manasikara)* in the *Satipatthana Sutta* (Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness). We are mentioning this here for the sake of relating the practice to the theory. But during the practice, the meditator should not be thinking or analysing. For example, he should not be thinking or analysing that “Ah! this motion is the wind element, that hardness is the earth element,” etc. He should just

observe and be aware of whatever sensations as they occur without thinking or analysing.

As the yogi is noting the rising and falling of the abdomen, his mind may wander, especially in the case of beginners. Whenever his mind wanders he should note “wandering, wandering,” “thinking, thinking,” etc. If he was worrying, he can note “worrying, worrying”; planning something “planning, planning”; imagining “imagining, imagining”; reflecting on the past, “reflecting, reflecting” and so on. After noting the thinking, etc. he should not continue thinking. He should let it go and go back to noting his primary object, i.e. the rising and falling of the abdomen.

If a sound distracts his attention, he should note “hearing, hearing”, after which he should not pay further attention to the sound but go back to noting the rising and falling. If an itch arises on his face or any part of his body, he should note “itchy, itchy.” He should try to observe the sensations closely, how they change, become more intense, subside, etc. If he is unable to bear the itch and wants to scratch, he should note the *intention to scratch*. Then he should not as yet scratch. He should wait a while and note a little longer, for the desire to scratch may pass away. Then, when he feels strongly like scratching again, he may do so this time. But he should do so very slowly, observing all the movements involved in scratching, i.e. the lifting of the hand to the itchy area, the touching, scratching, the sensation of relief, the withdrawing of the hand and putting it back to its original position.

As with itch, so too with pain. When pain develops he should note “pain, pain.” He should observe the pain closely, seeing what kind of pain it is. Is it a pricking pain, a cutting pain, a pulling pain, a twisting pain, etc? Does it remain the same or change? Does it move around or stay in a spot, etc? In this way, he can note the pain in its various forms and modes. He is to note the pain calmly, detachedly, without mental resistance. He should not wish for the

pain to go away or to stay. If he should desire the pain to go away, then he should note that desire. He should have the attitude of just wanting to note and know the pain as it is. Whether it goes away or not should not be his primary concern. If he can note in this way he will have less problem putting up with pain. Pain is also a meditation object in *Vipassana* and can be a good one because it can keep us wide awake. By noting pain, which is *Vedanānupassana* (contemplation on feelings), one can reach the state of *Nibbana* too. If the pain subsides, the yogi should revert to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen. If the pain becomes unbearable and he wants to, say, shift his leg or straighten his body, then just as in the case of noting itch, he should not shift immediately. He should note the desire to shift, then continue to note the pain for a little longer. After that, if he still must shift he should do so very slowly, observing all the movements involved in shifting.

Restlessness, boredom, drowsiness, aversion, anger, craving and various mental states are liable to arise during the sitting. These mental states too are to be noted and attention then reverted to the rising and falling of the abdomen. Should one see any lights, visions, images, etc. during meditation, such lights and images are also to be noted as “seeing, seeing.” One should not pay long attention to these lights and images. After noting them, one should not pay them further attention but should revert to noting the rising and falling.

A beginner should make persistent effort to note the rising and falling of the abdomen. If despite persistent effort he cannot observe them, then he may note *sitting and touching*. But first it must be emphasized that he should try hard to get the rising and falling movements. This is because the rising and falling are good objects and thousands of yogis have benefited from noting them. So he should put in effort even for days and weeks to note clearly the rising and falling movements of the abdomen. If despite his

efforts the movements are indiscernible, then he may note *sitting and touching*. When one notes “sitting”, one should be aware of the upright posture. Just know one is sitting and upright. Note the upright posture as “sitting” and then note the touching sensation at the right buttock, i.e. the touching sensation between the buttock and the ground. Then note “sitting” followed by “touching”, this time at the left buttock. Then note “sitting” followed by “touching”, this time at the hands, i.e. the touching sensation at where the two hands are placed together. In this way, one is noting touching at three points, each time alternated with sitting. To repeat, first one note sitting, then touching at the right buttock; then again sitting and touching at the left buttock; then again sitting and touching at the hands. The notings of each sitting and touching can be done briefly at a systematic pace and eventually the touch points will become clearer and clearer and the mind concentrated. If while noting sitting and touching, the rising and falling become clear, one may revert to noting rising and falling.

## **Walking**

Walking meditation comes under the *iriyapatha* (postures) section of the Satipatthana Sutta where the Buddha instructed that the monk when going should know that he is going (*Gacchanto va gacchamiti pajanati*). Practising any of the 21 sections of the Satipatthana Sutta can lead to the attainment of wisdom culminating in arahatship. Walking also helps to arouse the effort faculty so that when one sits one can be mindful and alert. Long sittings without walking may lead to excess concentration (*samadhi*) that is not balanced with effort or energy (*viriya*). When concentration is in excess and effort deficient, sluggishness and drowsiness will creep in. Thus, in an intensive retreat, yogis are instructed to balance walking with sitting by walking one hour and sitting one hour. In this way, there could be about seven walkings

and eight sittings totalling 15 hours in a day of practice. At other times, such as when eating, bathing, etc. yogis should also be mindful of all their daily activities.

There are three ways of doing the walking meditation:

1. brisk walking,
2. two parts of a step and
3. three parts of a step.

1. *Brisk walking:* The yogi walks up and down at a normal or brisk pace. He notes just the stepping, i.e. as he walks he notes “right step, left step” accordingly as he steps down his foot. When he reaches the end of his walk and turns around, he notes “turning, turning” and then “right step, left step” again as he walks up and down.
2. *Noting two parts of a step:* In noting two parts of a step, he slows down and notes the lifting and lowering down of the foot. As he lifts he mentally labels the movement as “lifting.” He follows this movement closely from beginning to end—from the moment he raises his heel till the lifting of the toes off the ground. Then as he lowers his foot he mentally labels the movement as “lowering” and follows the movement closely from beginning to end. As his foot touches the ground, he should be aware and note the touching sensation, such as hardness and softness, cold and warmth, etc. Only when one foot is completely down on the floor should he lift the other foot. When he reaches the end of the walk and stops, he should note “stopping, stopping” when he stops. When he turns he should turn slowly and note “turning, turning”. After turning he should note his standing upright posture as “standing, standing” before resuming his walk.

3. *Noting three parts of a step:* Here he notes lifting, pushing and lowering. He notes “lifting” as he lifts his foot, “pushing” as he is pushing his foot forward and “lowering” as he lowers down his foot. Again he should follow all the movements closely from beginning to end. He should be aware of all the sensations he may discern in the movements, such as lightness, heaviness, etc. As his foot touches the ground, he should be aware of the touching sensation. When he reaches the end of the walk and stops, he should note “stopping, stopping” etc. as in the noting of two parts of a step described above.

The above instructions on sitting and walking are good enough for a start for one whether practising at home or at a retreat. But as one practises, one will eventually encounter various experiences and uncertainties on how to proceed with practice. One then needs to consult a teacher or an experienced yogi. So a yogi should seek advice accordingly as he practises.

May yogis strive diligently, attain all the insight knowledges and realize *Nibbana*, the cessation of suffering. §

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## c o n n e c t e d n e s s

At **Auspicious**Affinity, we celebrate the joy of a precious connection with the Buddha’s teaching (*dharma*).

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