



# 100

## Questions and Answers

Venerable Uda Eriyagama Dhammajiva Maha Thero  
Nissaranavanaya - Mitirigala

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## Questions and Answers

### Translator's Foreword

This book contains one hundred questions and answers compiled from several discussion sessions held at meditation retreats conducted by Venerable Uda Eriyagama Dhammajiva Maha Thero, the Chief Meditation Master and Abbot of Nissarana Vanaya, Mitirigala. The questions posed by retreatants and the answers given by Venerable Dhammajiva in Sinhala, have been simultaneously transcribed and translated into English. The question and answer sessions were selected from many retreats that were held in Sri Lanka at Nissarana Vanaya as well as at overseas retreat centres from 2011 onwards. The questions are a mix, combining those that would suit beginners in the practice as well as those that would benefit experienced practitioners.

Venerable Dhammajiva has been conducting meditation retreats in Sinhala and English for about nine years. Over the years there has been a steady increase in students and practitioners following his teachings in Sri Lanka as well as overseas. Today his reputation as an inspiring and charismatic meditation master is well established. In Sri Lanka Venerable Dhammajiva stands out as a meditation teacher whose teachings are systematic and well-prepared, and are based on *suttas* as documented in the *tipitaka*. His teaching programs are organized and structured, and the teaching schedule throughout the entire calendar year is published in advance on the Nissarana Vanya website ([www.nissarana.lk](http://www.nissarana.lk)).

At the Retreat Centre in Nissarana Vanaya the difficulty to obtain a placement at retreats bears testimony to the popularity enjoyed by this teacher.

Whilst this book would ideally suit a regular practitioner who uses the Master's instructions for guidance and to navigate one's self through the delicate steps in a meditative journey, it would also come in handy for a beginner. A reader who is familiar with Venerable Dhammajiva's teachings will feel at home with the deep but typically lucid answers given to the questions posed by the meditators.

It is indeed rare to have the merit to listen to deep teachings of the Buddha communicated to us with precision and clarity. It is as though a period of 2600 years had not passed since this precious doctrine was expounded in a land far away from home, and as if a special 'missionary' was sent to convey these teachings in its pristine glory. The richness of discourse and the ability to capture the attention of majority of retreatants irrespective of their age or duration of their practice, are what make Venerable Dhammajiva's teachings unique. Frequent participants at meditation retreats will vouch for the humor, clever wit and captivating anecdotes which are often accompanied by bursts of song and verse; as typical features of a retreat conducted by this meditation master. The closing sessions of most retreats are emotional, where dedications are recited and in the case of some, tears flow freely.

### Acknowledgements

The Dhamma discussions that were used to compile this publication were accessed on [www.damsara.org](http://www.damsara.org) - an immensely valuable internet archive prepared and managed by Aruna Manatunge. The Translator/Transcriber of this publication is indebted to two of her fellow practitioners (who wished to remain anonymous) for meticulous editing of the script, so as to avoid duplication and repetition of questions covering similar themes.

The idea for this publication originated from the sponsor – Vishwaparami Foundation. We are grateful to Vishwaparami for being a generous partner in Dhamma Dana in more than one way for the past many years. The aesthetically pleasing cover of the book was designed by our fellow yogi Chandana Bandara.

*Notes:*

*Questions considered to be more suited for beginners in meditation are indicated as 'B'.*

*This book will be presented to Venerable Dhammajiva at the 100<sup>th</sup> Meditation Retreat conducted by him on the 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2015, at Nissarana Vanaya, Mitirigala.*

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## Questions and Answers

### *Question 1*

**When analyzing the *Mahānidāna sutta* you explained that disease and death (*jarā and maraṇa*) stem from birth (*jāti*), and that although we consider these as separate events, they are not so. I believe we see this as a duality due to our own ignorance (*avijjā*), and hence our continued journey in *samsāra*.**

Conventionally we welcome birth with joy but we consider old age, disease and death as sorrowful events. We fail to realize that all these events (i.e. birth, old age, disease and death) are different facets of the same event and that they are all responsible for sorrow - *dukkha*. While *jāti* is the arising of the event, *jarā*, *vyādhī* are seen at the peak and finally the event ceases with *marāṇa* or death. The Buddha describes these as formations or *sankhāra* belonging to the same event and that it is our individual preferences and prejudices that make us accept/reject the different phases of this same predictable cycle. If we understand this clearly, then we will not greet birth with joy and reject old age, disease and death with sadness. And if we are practicing the path to liberation and *nibbāna* (i.e. *nibbāna gāmaṇi patipadā*) we will do so to eliminate birth as well, not only to eliminate old age, disease and death.

*Dukkha* arises simultaneously with birth and this undergoes significant transformation almost instantly (*viparināma dukkha*). We don't understand this because our inherent greed - *tanhā* for the event conceals this reality. In actuality we have *tanhā* for *dukkha*. But we don't see this because *avijjā* prevents us from seeing this.

After joyfully welcoming birth we then have to deal with the consequences of the event (i.e. old age, disease and death), thus yielding more and more dissatisfaction – *dukkha dukkha*. The Buddha advised us to trace the beginning of every event and then we will see the origin and cause of the dissatisfaction. Craving/greed or *tanhā* is the cause of *dukkha*, but we don't see this because we don't apply radical reflection or *yoniso manasikāra*. If we manage to see the causative factor of *dukkha* we will then see the *viparināma dukkha* or the transformation that the event undergoes.

The Buddha advised us to see the arising, the summit/middle and the cessation as three facets of the same event, and we are advised to see these with a balanced mind. Then we will not be joyful at the occurrence of birth and weep with sorrow, when we meet disease, old age and death. Instead we will note all three facets with a balanced mind and such a balanced mind will pave the way for development of equanimity or *upekkha*. With extreme maturity of faith in the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, the mental factor *adhimokkha* (resolve/determination) blooms and paves the way for *Sammāditthi* (Right View) and *yoniso manasikāra* (radical/wise reflection) to develop. Simultaneously Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood take shape in the yogi and he will begin to see things as they really are – *yathābutha ñānadassana*.

The Four Noble Truths will then be understood.

## Question 2 (B)

**Can we realize *nibbāna* by the insights we get through meditation only?**

**Is it essential to listen to *suttas* to realize this goal?**

Meditation is not simply a practice of sitting cross-legged with eyes closed in a quiet environment. In reality, the term meditation

encompasses a very much broader spectrum. *Samatha* meditation can be represented by the sitting practice alone. However the Buddha taught *vipassanā* meditation as one where the yogi is engaged in 'meditation' during the entire day, in all postures and during every activity. In the latter case, where the yogi conducts his entire day in mindfulness meditative practice realization of *nibbāna* is possible.

The Buddha taught that *suttamaya ñāna* (theoretical knowledge), *cintāmayā ñāna* (deductive or inferential knowledge) and *bhāvanāmayā ñāna* (meditative knowledge) are all essential for the realization of *nibbāna*. *Suttamaya ñāna* is equally important for the development of ones' internal *sāsaṇa* as well as the external *sāsaṇa*, since the yogi will be directly coming into contact with the Buddha's teachings. Therefore I recommend that reading *suttas* and listening to teachers discussing *suttas* will be useful to augment the development of one's meditation practice. In addition to the Theravada *suttas* I also recommend that you read some of the Mahayana *suttas* as well, because they deal with general conduct in keeping with societal norms as well as newer scientific discoveries that describe what the Buddha taught two and a half centuries ago. The significant omission in the Mahayana texts is the message the Buddha gave, that realizing *nibbāna* in this life itself is a possibility.

## Question 3 (B)

**I regularly sit for meditation and develop *samādhi* very easily. In fact I can remain in meditation for about an hour during each sitting. However I am not very sure if I have fallen asleep during this spell of *samādhi*.**

The definition of *samādhi* (one pointedness) needs to be considered carefully. First, when we think we are in *samādhi* are we sure that

we haven't fallen asleep? I mention this because it is a common mistake faced by all meditators at the start of their practice. At the beginning all meditators try to note the in/out-breath with difficulty. During this process everyone has to wage a battle with the hindrances (*nīvarana dhamma*) and to identify the breath as distinct from the hindrances. It is after a lot of regular and consistent practice and with great difficulty that they overcome hindrances at least momentarily and the yogi is able to bring his attention to the breath and 'capture' the in/out-breath with success. At the beginning the breath is coarse but with time if the yogi is able to keep the breath in focus, he will find the breath becoming indistinct and subtle. The yogi will also notice that the mind which notes the coarse in/out-breath is a 'coarse' mind, and that gradually the mind becomes refined and then it is a refined mind that is able to note the subtle and almost indiscernible breath.

The yogi is then able to stay with the breath longer than before. He can also note the finer characteristics of the breath. In addition there will be sounds, pains and thoughts that will disturb the yogi, but yet he would be able to give priority to the breath and to keep it in focus for a longer period despite these disturbances. Such a yogi would be gradually mastering the technique of using a sharpened *sati* (mindfulness) to keep noting the breath whilst being in the midst of sounds, thoughts and pains. This technique is very much alive and sharply differs from the *samatha* technique where the yogi will only keep his/her attention on the breath. Even though the pains can become unbearable or the sounds and thoughts are quite disturbing, yet the yogi can transcend these and still be able to note the in/out-breath.

At a particular stage all these disturbances become secondary and the breath becomes the most prominent point of focus. Such a yogi is able to reach *samādhi* successfully. Sometimes this happens as soon as he sits for meditation. With a strong and uninterrupted *sati*, such a yogi will be able to note the in/out-breath whilst in the midst

of sounds, thoughts and pains, and know each time the mind flits to each one of these disturbances. He/she will also note the transformation of the in/out-breath (from coarse to subtle) as well as the transformation of his mind (from coarse to refined). The sign (*nimitta*) and characteristics (*akāra*) of the object (i.e. breath) diminishes gradually. Mindfulness until then had used these signs and characteristics of the breath to recognize it. Therefore when the breath becomes indistinct the mind of an unprepared yogi becomes confused and doubtful. Such a yogi may feel uncomfortable or stop the meditation or he may even fall asleep!

However, if the yogi is forewarned and goes into meditation fully prepared, he will skillfully use mindfulness (*sati*) to identify the transition from where the breath is coarse to when it becomes subtle. In fact *sati* functions like a bridge, taking the yogi from *ānāpānasati* with a *nimitta* to *ānāpānasati* with *animitta* (breath meditation with the signs of the breath to one without). Thereby we discover that *sati* is the most powerful mental factor that can guide us when the object of meditation seems to 'leave'. The *sati* that remains with the meditator when the breath is refined and indiscernible is a far more powerful *sati* than one which is present when the breath is coarse. Meditation where *sati* remains unshaken when the breath 'disappears' is strong and mature, and such a yogi is skilled. A lot of understanding and preparation is needed by the yogi to reach this stage. In fact the only meditation object that loses its prominence and coarseness with progress of the practice, is the breath.

The yogi needs to be fully prepared to face this transition. Don't start doubting, getting confused or feel bored and give up meditation when this happens. Our defilements (*kilesa*) will dictate otherwise and will 'encourage' us to leave the practice. But don't become a victim to those suggestions that will enter the mind. Go fully prepared and then you will be gently taken on the road which will lead to *nirāmisa* (spirituality) and eventually to

*nibbāna*. This juncture is critical in one's practice and therefore we should go fully prepared to meet this situation.

I advise yogis at the beginning of each retreat, if they find that the mind settles and breath becomes indistinct no sooner the sitting session begins, not to proactively seek out the breath and examine its beginning, middle and end. If the breath had already become refined at the start itself, and if *samādhi* sets in effortlessly let it be so, and simply continue maintaining the *sati* on the sitting posture – 'here now I am'. Keep bringing the mind back to 'here now I am' each time the mind drifts. Then the yogi will not fall asleep and be able to maintain *sati* independent of a sign or *nimitta*. This is a good stage of the practice. The yogi would be leaving the known to enter the unknown, an indescribable state which is not familiar and therefore we get uneasy and frightened. But this is indeed the road to *nibbāna* where *tanha*, *māna*, *ditthi* (greed, conceit and self-view) cannot exist. Our 'me/mine/self'-ness gets a beating. The journey is from : *nimitta* to *animitta*, from the object to no object, from matter to no matter. In an average sitting meditation session the yogi will move to and from each of these scenarios, and the key is to keep on meditating while this happening. Neurones and circuits in the brain which so far had not been activated will be energized and opened up each time we experience these changes. A radical minded yogi will face this valuable stage with courage and determination.

Whilst a *samatha* practitioner will stop at the initial stage where the hindrances are suppressed, *vipassanā* meditation allows the yogi the freedom to adjust and improvise as and when these new experiences are faced. When the breath becomes indiscernible it's an indication that *kāyānupassanā* has been transcended and it is then that we are in a position to experience the *nāma dhamma* (mentality) – *vedanā* (feelings), *sañña* (perceptions), *sankhāra* (volitional formations) and *viññāna* (consciousness). It is only after *kāyānupassanā* has been experienced and transcended that the

doors open for *vedanānupassanā* (contemplation of feelings), *cittānupassanā* (contemplation of the mind) and *dhammānupassanā* (contemplation of phenomena). Until the latter three are embarked upon we still have the mind set of 'animal-world' and the materialistic mind state. It is only with the exposition of *nāma dhamma* that higher and profound mental states (which is possible only for a human mind) can be contemplated on. Indeed this is the beginning of *vipassanā*. This would mean that we have transcended coarse materiality and reached a point where matter is not felt, and what remains is energy. We then have the ability see how energy and matter are interchangeable, and how energy can transform into a sound, smell, taste, and how these in turn can be reduced to energy again. This changing transition will happen over and over again.

This phenomenon described by the Buddha is now being demonstrated by quantum physicists. In the depths of the ocean various currents of energy circulate. Some of these currents can become waves and thereby they become subject to specific gravity. As long as the energy currents remain as pure energy they will not be subject to specific gravity. When this transition occurs large waves, rogue waves, tsunamis and water-related catastrophes are the result. Physicists discovered this only quite recently. The Buddha said, what we can 'see' and discern is purely the tip of the ice berg. The deep recesses of the mind cannot be seen and understood unless with a highly trained meditative mind.

## Question 4

***Animitta and ānantharika samādhi, anidassana viññāna : are these similar states?***

This is the state of mind when *ānāpāsati* appears diminished, yet *sati* remains undisturbed. This shows that the mind does not always need a *nimitta* or sign to keep the mind one-pointed. The



*nicca saññā* (perception of permanence) makes us feel that we always need an object or a sign to keep the mind focused. But in fact that is not so. The yogi will learn for the first time that *sati* can be maintained with no coarse object or sign when this happens. Such a *samādhi* is referred to as *animitta samādhi* and the *viññāna* is referred to as *anidassana viññāna*. The *viññāna* remains, but with no coarse object and with nothing evident, with no manifestation of *nāma/rūpa*, and hence the term *anidassana viññāna*.

The Buddha said that even *anusaya dhamma* (*anusaya kilesa* = dormant defilements) are adequate to perpetuate *viññāna*. Like a fire that rises to the sky even after the wood that started the fire was all burnt out, i.e. *viññāna* can remain after the fuel is no more – at least for a while. This is entirely a highly spiritual field and an important juncture in one's meditative journey.

*Ānāpāna samādhi* is also referred to as *kanikha samādhi*, or momentary concentration or uninterrupted concentration. This state of *samādhi* goes in tandem with moment-to-moment awareness (uninterrupted *awareness* or *kshnamāthra sati*) and both together (*kanikha samādhi* and *kshnamāthra sati*) are very powerful and essential tools in *vipassanā practice*.

## Question 5

**During sitting meditation my *sati* is very strong. At the beginning I used to note elemental manifestations very well and practiced *dhāthu manasikāra*. Initially these manifestations were frequent and prominent (eg, intense salivation inside the mouth, very strong air drafts between teeth and the jaw) and were also distressing at times. Now I feel these same manifestations in a more refined manner. I wonder if this change (from prominent and coarse, to refined and subtle) is a natural phenomenon as the meditation proceeds?**

The Buddha taught that these experiences as well as all others are subject to change. In fact, *viparināma* (transformation) of every situation or experience is the most obvious manifestation of impermanency - *anicca*. The reason why we get disturbed is because we are so used to wanting situations to remain unchanged, and we keep viewing the world through this lens of *nicca* – permanency. For instance the air element (*vāyo dātu*) has opposing characteristics, i.e. the ability to constrict and *thāe* ability to cause movement. Similarly in the case of the water element (*āpo dātu*) it can manifest as fluidity and dribbling as well as demonstrate cohesive properties. These elements alternatively demonstrate these different properties and are very diverse in their manifestations.

Whether it is the breath or elemental manifestations, initially these are coarse and eventually they become refined. That is natural, because as we proceed in meditation taming of the object of meditation occurs. And this applies to the breath or elemental manifestations, or to any other object. But this natural transformation of the object (from coarse to refined to even more refined) will occur only if mindfulness and contemplation on the object remain stable for a long period. If for some reason the meditation gets interrupted due to some problem or mental discomfiture, then the yogi will once again experience coarseness in the object and will have to practice for a while to reach the refined stages.

An experienced yogi will understand this formula and will endeavor to continue the practice without getting disheartened, even during a problem. Doubting can be harmful and the Buddha advised that we understand this *viparināma* and that we keep faith (*saddhā*) at the forefront, so that we will not allow doubt to hamper the progress in meditation.



## Question 6

**Please explain when in *sati*, how we will come to realize non-self (*anattā*)?**

In fact when we are in *sati* we are in the present moment. This means that we will not catch any form of end or infinity. A straight line will lead to infinity. But a curved/crooked line will not. *Sati* is a straight line which will always eventually lead to *anattā*. It will not take a curvaceous or tangential direction. But we must be very clear that we know we are in *sati* and that we are in the present moment. When that happens, every thought-moment (*cittakkhana*) that we are in the present will be devoid of time and space, and will not reflect the concepts of me/mine/myself. But the problem is that even if we have one thought-moment where we are fully in the present, if we are unmindful in the thought-moments that are preceding and following that, then the mindful thought-moment will lose its power. If we are to reap full benefit then we must aim for a stream of continued mindfulness where every consecutive thought-moment is in *sati*. Such an uninterrupted stream of mindful thought-moments will be devoid of time and space, and will yield a lot of power and will be stress free. Such a mindful stream of *sati* will always end in realization of *anattā*. That is inevitable.

Those who are firmly entrenched in the *nicca saññā* (the perception of permanency) and those who have a deep attachment to one's self and have pampered their body with luxury, will not be able to tolerate the notion of non-self and therefore will feel uncomfortable in such a stream of *sati*. In fact they may even fear that situation.

## Question 7 (B)

**During meditation whenever the mind shifts from the object of meditation, is it because those thought-moments have been**

**over-powered by defilements (*kilesas*)?**

In my view, if the yogi feels remorse that the mind has shifted from the object of meditation then it is a *kilesa*. If on the other hand the yogi knows when the mind strays and accepts the situation with no remorse, then there is no *kilesa*. Our mind's attitude to any situation is what will determine if it is *kusal* or *akusal* (skillful or unskillful). The Buddha recommends that we keep a balanced mind in every situation, whether we can maintain *sati* during meditation or not. In life too we need to strive towards maintaining a balanced mind during every situation, good and bad.

We need to regard *sati* as just a tool we are using to remove another tool. *Sati* tool will change, and that's a fact. *Sati* will also give us *dukkha* because it will change. If we can watch how *sati* changes and still remain equanimous with no remorse then we don't generate *kilesa*.

Venerable Sāriputta's teaching is that when a yogi has developed *sati* to such a degree that even when *sati* leaves, he knows it and feels no remorse, then he has reached a stage of *sati balaya* – i.e. *sati* has become powerful. A person with *sati balaya* will not easily get provoked. He/she will not react when situations arise but will realize that these occur due to the doctrine of cause and effect.

## Question 8

**It is known that during *samatha samādhi* (*samādhi* obtained through *jhānic* absorptions) the *sankhāra* generated are *āneñjhābhi sankhāra*. In the case of *vipassanā* practice is it correct that *sankhāra* aren't generated?**

When in *jhānic* absorption it is known that meritorious (*puññābhi*) or de-meritorious (*apuññābhi*) *sankhāra* are not generated. *Āneñjhābhi sankhāra* (imperturbable formations, not yielding any

merit or de-merit) are the type of *sankhāra* that occur when in *jhāna*. However, after emerging from *jhāna* there is the possibility of having a great liking for that preceding state, thus creating *sankhāra*. Please refer the Culavedalla Sutta for more details on this explanation.

During *ānāpānasati* meditation when the breath gets refined we refer to that state as *passambhayam kāysankhāra* (calming the bodily formations). The Commentaries mention that before this state of *passambhayam kāysankhāra* occurs *citta sankhāra* (mental formations - *vitakkha vicāra*) have to calm down. In fact this state of calming of *vitakkha vicāra* has been compared to the second *jhana*, in the case of *samatha* practice. However this doesn't apply in the case of a *vipassanā* practitioner.

In the *Ānāpānasati* sutta, no mention of a pre-requisite such as *jhāna* is mentioned. In this *sutta* it is mentioned that, after *vacī sankhāra* (word formations) has ceased and after the bodily formations – in/out breathing (*kāya sankhāra*) have calmed down, the meditator enters a deeper stage of the practice where he faces *citta sankhāra* or *mano sankhāra* i.e. *vedanā* and *saññā* (feelings and perceptions). These are mind-made formations that may seem far from reality. The meditator faces various types of bizarre *vedanā* and *saññā* that may be quite disturbing. If a meditator is able to watch these arise and cease without creating any volition, *cetanā* - *sankhāra*, it is indeed admirable. However, although the meditator may not intentionally create any formations there will be deep down in the mind, un-intentional (*asanskhārikha*) bodily and speech formations that keep occurring. These will occur without any intention or volition on the part of the meditator and they occur due to the operation of the underlying/dormant tendencies and hidden defilements in the mind (*anusaya, āsava kilesa*).

The meditator can have serious doubt when faced with such *vedanā* and *saññā* and he may think he has lost *samādhi* and *sati*. The un-intentional formations the meditator may create when faced with

such a situation are called - *asanskhārikha kāya viññatthi*, *asanskhārikha vacī viññatthi* and *asanskhārikha mano viññatthi* (un-intentional formations related to body, speech and mind, respectively).

When these occur we are advised to disclaim these as 'not mine, not me, not myself' - then we can consider these un-intentional formations as empty, not worthy and non-substantial. Just keep watching these like a blind, deaf, incapacitated person with no-reactivity and a balanced mind. Do not try to analyze and assess these. This is like a catharsis and we must allow these *sankhāra* to leave us, like the pus leaving a ripened wound. This is common to every meditator, and a mature yogi will learn this very gradually. A mature yogi will also know that certain underlying deceptive, crafty and cunning *kilesa* are operating during this process. These will either make the yogi claim these formations as mine/me or they may even tempt the yogi to ignore or reject the un-intentional formations, and may not have the courage to face them. Only with a lot of experience the yogi will learn how to watch and deal with these without any *cetanā* and without creating any new *sankhāra*. This needs maturity, *saddhā* as well as wisdom - *paññā*.

During an average day if we recount how many thoughts cross or mind with or without any intention, we will realize that more than 90% of thoughts are stray, unintended and unrelated to any substantial mind-related process. These are *asanskhārikha* (unintentional and uninvited) thoughts, yet they give us pain of mind and other emotional upheavals. The untrained mind suffers a great deal due to these. Therefore, cultivating a balanced mind is essential so that we can face these and to know these *asanskhārikha* formations as and when these appear.

After the yogi develops the ability to first note and then calm *citta sankhāra*, he is faced with *cetanā, prakalpana* (aspirations and ambitions) and *anusaya*. By pledging not to create any volition he maybe successful in not allowing *cetanā* to manifest, and

similarly for *prakalpana*. Yet *anusaya* (which are dormant defilements – referred to as *kilesa* that lie under the carpet) can surface. Fortunately the way to deal with such *anusaya* is by repeatedly seeing them for what they are; i.e. the more we see *anusaya* the more powerless they become. We must also know that all human beings have the same types of *anusaya*, without any discrimination.

The yogi should just become a detached observer who will apply choiceless awareness when faced with these various situations. Eventually he would allow the meditation to proceed on auto-pilot with no external interference on the yogi's part. Then he would be extinguishing existing *kamma* and not creating new *kamma* as he proceeds.

## Question 9(B)

**When watching the in-breath and out-breath during *ānāpānasati* meditation please advise how I should follow the breath until it disappears?**

Just watch very carefully for the gap between each in-breath and out-breath. We usually don't see this gap, and instead we see the breathing as one continuum. That is how the mind has been blind-folded with *tanhā*. As we keep training the mind we will see the gap between these two breaths. Similarly we will see the gap between two postures, between raising and placing the left and right feet during walking meditation, between two movements of any part of the body. This change from one to another can be a shift from *rūpa dhamma* to *rūpa dhamma*, or from *rūpa* to *nāma* or from *nāma* to *nāma*. It is fascinating. All our lives we have never seen this gap, we have been blind to it and instead we have seen the entire process as one compact unit. Whether it is the breath or any other component of the body or any activity. The day we see this transition we will see the *viparināma* or transformation of the

particular body part /activity/emotion/ or any *nāma dhamma*, and then we come close to understanding the real dhamma and that all of it is subject to cause and effect - *paticcasamuppanna*. Nothing happens in isolation – there is always a preceding cause. A mature yogi will begin to see this.

It is usually difficult to catch the end of the in-breath and the beginning of the out-breath, as opposed to catching the end of the out-breath and the beginning of the in-breath. Therefore teachers always advise beginners to watch the end of out-breath until it finishes. Once we master this, with the ensuing sharpness of mind we can catch the beginning of the in-breath. Mastering the ability to note each such shift, from out-breath to in-breath with strong *sati* is important. Take for instance walking meditation - when we raise the left foot we are automatically placing the right foot on the ground. Both movements appear to occur simultaneously and sometimes we don't know where we are placing *sati* – whether *sati* is placed on the raised left foot or on the right foot that is simultaneously placing itself on the ground. Venerable Katukurunde Nananananda refers to the perception (*saññā*) that occurs at this important junction as, *pacchāpuré saññā*. Perpetually we have missed these posture junctions (*iriyāpatha sandi*) due to the illusion of compactness we are used to, and have thus missed the seeds of ignorance that lie in those very minute and seemingly insignificant places.

When we are noting the out-breath until it fades away, we are noting the *kāya prasāda* (bodily touch). Before the shift to the in-breath takes place there is a momentary gap where, we shift from *kāya prasāda* to *mano prasāda*, i.e. from knowing the bodily touch (in this case knowing the air/*vāyo dhātu* touching the skin of the nostril) to knowing the mind, i.e. the shift from *kāya viññāna* to *mano viññāna*. Momentarily the *vāyo dhātu* gets replaced by *mano dhātu*, before it once again shifts to *vāyo dhātu* and *kāya prasāda*

of the in-breath. But our minds are so clouded with ignorance that we skip this transition and fail to notice the series of changes that occur in the gap as mentioned. Only by thin slicing of time, can we catch this minute but very significant changes of the *viññāna* that's sandwiched between the out-breath and in-breath. This noting needs to be done with no interference and the yogi should watch these transitions as a detached, un-involved observer, and thereafter he should continue to season/master this ability.

This is a lesson on how to develop the mind to understand the illusion or perception of compactness -(*ghana saññā*).

## Question 10

Can you describe the four types of clinging (*upādāna*)?

1. *Kāmupādāna*
2. *Sīlabbatupādāna*
3. *Ditthiupādāna*
4. *Atta-vādupādāna*

*Ditthi upādāna* and *atta-vādupādāna* both, facilitate the increase of ignorance and delusion (*avijjā*). *Ditthi upādāna* means clinging to views, and with the uprooting of self-view (*sakkāya ditthi*) this type of *upādāna* will be eradicated at stream entry (*sotāpatthi*). Whereas, in order to eradicate *atta-vādupādāna* (clinging to personality-belief/ego) one has to eradicate the five 'higher fetters' : *uddhambagiya-samyojana* (i.e. *rūpa-raga*, *arūpa-rāga*, *māna*, *udaccha*, *avijjā*). And this would take place only in an *arahant*. The five 'lower fetters' (*orambhāgiya -samyojana*) are *sakkāya ditthi*, *vicikicchā*, *sīlabbata parāmāsa*, *kāma raga*, *vyāpāda*. A stream entrant (*sotāpatthi*) would eradicate the first three of the 'lower fetters' (*sakkāya ditthi*, *vicikicchā*, *sīlabbata parāmāsa*).

Because *atta-vādupādāna* is a much deeper form of clinging which denotes ego, ( i.e. 'I, mine and myself'), a higher level of

purification of the mind is needed and therefore in such a person the five 'higher fetters' *uddhambagiya--samyojana* will necessarily have to be eradicated. Traces of *atta-vādupādāna* can remain even after *ditthi upādāna* is removed (as it would occur in stream entry where *sakkāya ditthi*, *vicikicchā*, *sīlabbata parāmāsa* are removed). And to maintain those traces of *atta-vādupādāna* we keep supplying the first two types of clinging, which nourishes and maintains *atta-vādupādāna*. However, after successfully eradicating the first three types of clinging, *atta-vādupādāna* becomes very weak and vulnerable. As long as the first three types of clinging are present the latter is very well protected and is strong.

(please also see Question 36)

## Question 11

**During moments of *sati* are we able to catch all *cetanā* and also the *kilesa* that arise in the mind? And does this ability change with the objects that arise in the mind?**

When in *sati*, if *cetanā* manifest we can catch them. Similarly we can catch pleasure/pain. Any *cetanā* or reactions to pleasure/pain will generate *kamma*. Therefore, even though we may not be able to prevent *kilesa* from arising, because we are in *sati* we can manage or govern the amounts of *kilesa* that we generate. When in *sati* we can self-audit and do book-keeping effectively. *Sati* is a neutral mental factor (*cetasika*) and it enables choiceless awareness which will keep in check the *kamma* we generate (via responses like pleasure/pain etc) and *sati* will manage that process. *Sati* cannot prevent *kamma* generation. Whereas *sampajañña* (clear comprehension) will enable *kusal* generation as opposed to *akusal*, i.e. it can play a role in preventing un arisen *kilesa* from arising. Allowing all our actions/speech to be exposed to the powerful



torch of *sati* alone is enough, because that exposure will disable further *kamma* generation and will keep us in check. Even when *kilesa* are exposed to *sati*, the *kilesa* will automatically lose its virulence. This is a cleansing process. And *sati* is the 'book keeper' which will enable this to happen.

## Question 12

**In the mind of a person who is not an *arahant* is there always *kamma-vipāka* in operation?**

In the mind of a person who is not an *arahant*, shedding of all three types of *sankhāra* (*kāya*, *vaci* and *citta*) is possible. This will happen during meditation but it will be momentary. Please refer to the *Ānāpānasati* sutta which describes this in detail. The existing *sankhāra* are extinguished and new *sankhāra* are not formed, and the yogi can catch the momentary 'empty space', i.e. the mind similar to that of an *arahant* can be experienced in that moment. However, this experience cannot last. Yet this ability to know that the yogi is able to experience such states where *sankhāra* are not generated even for a moment is a rare feat and is a great boon for the practice. Several moments of such empty, *sankhāra*-free 'mind-moments' can be experienced and in the Mahāyāna tradition these are named as *satori* (momentary spells of *nibbāna*). Gradually with experience the frequency of such states will increase and then eventually the yogi will be able to experience continuous *sankhāra*-free gaps or empty spaces during meditation.

These experiences give a lot of strength and encouragement to the yogi. The term *tadanganibbutthi* refers to such 'arahant-like' mind states (perhaps just one *cittakkhana* at a given time) experienced on and off, during meditation. *Arihattaphala Samādhi* is a different situation where the yogi will have long hours of *samādhi* which will include such *sankhāra*-free mind states.

This is a result of developing mastery of reaching and identifying such states, repeatedly.

## Question 13

***Dassanā pahāthabbhā* and *bhāvanā pahāthabbhā* – please can you explain these two terms?**

The former indicates stream entry (*sotāpatthi magga ñāṇa*) whilst the latter refers to *arahant-magga ñāṇa*. This depends on the *kilesa* we have extinguished and there are five types of *kilesa* that have to be neutralized to reach the latter state after reaching the former. (Please refer Question/Answer 10) The yogi develops a lot of confidence after the first attainment and realizes that as he progresses in meditation, more and more *kamma* is shed and that realizing full *nibbāna* is a possibility. Refer Sabbāsava sutta for details.

*Bhāvanā pahāthabbhā* is further mastery of the former, and the yogi becomes more skilled in terms of eradicating defilements. It is between these two states that the yogi begins to refine and develop his own *sammā vāca*, *sammā kammantha*, *sammā ājīva*. The real discipline begins at this stage.

## Question 14

**Please explain *anatta* in the context of meditation – should we consider there is no me/mine/self at the beginning of the practice and if so won't it be an obstruction to making headway in meditation?**

We should remember that at the start of meditation we will always have an *ātma*. If not we will not be able to observe precepts and join such a group like yours in a meditation retreat. What we need to do

is to initially introduce *ātma* as a hypothesis and then prove that it is not so – i.e. a null hypothesis. When proceeding in meditation the yogi will confirm the *ātma* view during all intentional activity - *sasankhāra*. But as he gets deeper into meditation when experiencing manifestations which are beyond his control he begins to feel that things happen devoid of control - *asanskhāra*. Gradually he will experience *anatta*. This transformation is unique to *vipassanā* practice : the transformation from *ātma* to *anatta*. This is a gradual transformation and in *vipassanā* practice becomes very vivid.

As we progress in the practice and the experiences shift from coarse to refine, we will see that what we took as 'myself/me' has no credence and is not substantial. I like to compare this to an onion which gets peeled off layer by layer – as we reach the inner most layers of our consciousness we discover the insubstantiality of what we thought of as 'self'. This is an interesting self-discovery.

However, this defies conventional understanding and scientific argument, and is difficult to understand devoid of true meditative practice. The *kilesas* trap and trick us at every juncture, preventing us from seeing this reality. Our task is to not succumb to these *kilesas* and to adopt skills to know and understand how these *kilesa* attack us, and thus prevent this occurrence. If not we will never see reality. I often compare how the *kilesas* attack to one of guerilla nature, i.e. covert and clever. In turn, we also should learn tactics to protect ourselves and to catch these as soon as this occurs.

When we undertake *sīla sikkha* (observing precepts) and when we undertake the practice of *samādhi sikkha* (suppressing the hindrances during sitting meditation), we are adopting the *ātma saññā* (the perception of 'self'). But thereafter, when we practice *vipassanā*, we totally transform and keep 'attacking' this perception of self. Here we note and contemplate on *sasankhāra* and

*asanskhāra* objects as we go along, seeing how they rise and fall – thus realizing the perception of non-self, *anattā*.

This is entirely a practical meditative realization and not a theoretical understanding which can be explained as a linear teaching.

## Question 15

**Please explain the types of views that a person with wisdom (*paññā*) is likely to have.**

In the Brahmajāla sutta (DN 1) these views (*ditthi*) are described in detail.

After yogi experiences *jhāna* and emerges from same, he may have 49 views. Furthermore, 13 types of views have been ascribed to those with sound thinking capacity, although their intellect is not directed towards *nibbāna*. For example world famous intellectuals like Noble Prize winners are of very high intellect. However they are trapped in the *ātma saññā*, (they believe in self-view) and are thus of wrong thought and wrong view – *micca sankalpa* and *micca ditthi*. Most of these world acclaimed personalities will always will have thoughts bent towards sense-pleasures, ill will and cruelty - *kāma vitakka*, *vyāpāda vikalpa* and *vihimsā vitakka*. Such personalities are considered 'wise and intellectual' in a worldly sense. However, the Buddha disregards such wisdom and teaches that it is only wisdom directed towards *nibbāna* that is worthy of consideration.

The Buddha taught that unless *paññā* is well balanced by *saddhā* (faith, confidence in the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha) it can in fact become dangerous and will harm the spiritual journey. Similarly, *samādhi* needs to be balanced with *virīya* (energy/effort) if not the practice becomes lopsided and will not bear fruit.



## Question 16

**Is it correct that if one *cittakkhana* (thought-moment) becomes polluted, we have allowed a new *bhava* (being) to occur?**

Pollution of a thought-moment means that pain/pleasure has arisen. This would mean that you have paved the way for a new thought based on pain/pleasure to take root during that thought-moment. Let me explain this further. When a thought-moment is occupied by pleasure or pain generally we perpetuate it and keep it going, thus giving rise to more and more thoughts of a similar nature. Whereas, if we experience and know a thought-moment that is devoid of pleasure or pain (a neutral feeling = *adukkhamasukha*), we will not perpetuate it due to its dullness and monotony. Thus we will not generate further thoughts and proliferate on them.

## Question 17

**It was mentioned that the in-breath and out-breath both arise out of the same base. Please can you explain this in the context of humans and animals?**

Both in and out-breath begin from energies. These energies will give rise to the in-breath and once it dissolves, the same energies will give rise to the out-breath. This is similar to the waves and the sea. One wave will give rise to another, large and small, deep and shallow, gigantic waves and ripples. But they all arise from the same source - the sea water. Similarly, these same energies can manifest as forms or shapes, sounds, smells, tastes etc. The primordial nature of all these are based on the same energies and they have the capacity and potential (referred to as possibilities) to manifest as or transform into any *rūpa* - form, sound, smell etc. As long as these energies remain as energies, they are free of defilements, i.e. we will be endowed with a defilement-free mind. According to science Schrodinger energy waves collapse into matter, when these waves interact with consciousness - either

human or animal. However, once these energies collapse into *rūpa* (in/out-breath, sound, touch, smell etc) and we develop a resultant feeling of pain/pleasure, then this pure mind-state gets bound to *kilesa*, and yield *kamma*. Then recognition and differentiations occur (eg. identity of man/woman, likes/dislikes). However, if we can return once again to the *kilesa*-free, pure, primordial energy then such a mind is totally purified – *pivithuru/nimala*. The mind of the Buddha is such a purified one.

The mind of the Buddha will remain in this purity irrespective of any provocation or stimulus. We, on the other hand will attach and cling to such provocations and stimuli of *rūpa*. We will then proliferate on same, calling it me/mine. The consequent suffering is enormous.

The Buddha's teaching is to meditate and to take our defiled minds back to that pure, identity-free state of mind which is devoid of *kilesa*. During those empty moments in meditation we become pure and truly human. Our minds then will become broadened, non-binding and expansive, capable of penetrative power. Defiled minds on the contrary are narrow and will cling to anything and everything and will claim these as me / mine. Such a mind is furthest from purity. *Yoniso manasikāra* or radical reflection, is the application we use to bring the mind back to the primordial energy state from the existing defiled state. This transformation or regression back in to energies is not colourful and exciting. In fact it results in monotony and boredom. Unfortunately some meditators abandon the practice when they meet this boredom. The Buddha advised us to encourage this 'boredom' and to avoid *kilesa* in terms of stimuli and provocation.

## Question 18 (B)

**When experiencing the in and out-breath, we were advised to note carefully its arising and ceasing. I can clearly experience the coolness and warmth of the air when I breath in and out.**

### **But I am not able to identify the beginning, middle or end of each breath.**

My advise is that we need to sharpen our mindfulness so that we can note the beginning, middle and end of every incident. Be it the in/out-breath or anger or feeling or any other emotion. This is the *vipassanā* practice. When we notice the finer characteristics of the breath (eg. coolness, warmth ) it is during the middle of the breath. At the beginning and end of the breath we are not able to note all of this. When our minds become more refined we will see the beginning of each breath. Such a refined mind will have more sensitivity to note the finer characteristics of the breath. Eventually we will begin to see the characteristics of thoughts and feelings, and other events in life.

### **Question 19**

**Please advice if, when the eye, form and eye-consciousness (*cakkhu viññāna*) meet, the resultant contact (*phassa*) is what we refer to as 'seeing'? How can we use this as a meditation practice?**

At the moment when the eye, form and eye-consciousness meet – 'a seer' is the result. Similarly, a 'hearer or taster' etc, as appropriate to each sense base. During an entire day we keep shifting from being a 'seer' to being a 'hearer', to being a 'taster' as and when sense-impingements hit each sense-door, resulting in the relevant sense-consciousness. This ceaseless shifting of consciousness, from one sensory transaction to another is more like a mad monkey leaping from branch to branch. This process occurs so fast that we are not able to discern the rapid movement from one sense station to another, as discreet and separate events. Instead we note this entire sequence as one compact incident. A good example is watching the television-where we keep seeing, hearing, thinking and proliferating on thoughts . We feel as though these are happening all at once. But that is not so.

Due to the coarseness of our minds we are not able to realize that only one sensory transaction can occur at a given mind-moment. For instance a 'seer' can never be a 'hearer' at the same time. These are sequential occurrences. When being a 'seer' we have rejected being a 'hearer' or a 'thinker' or a 'toucher'. In fact when engaged in one sensory transaction we effectively reject the other five sense stations. i.e. we choose one, rejecting five. The root cause of this 'choice' is our ignorance and delusion. These sensory choices are made based on the degree of *avijjā*.

With heightened *sati* we can become fully aware of the interaction as and when it occurs and be aware of the sense choice we make, as and when we make it. Then we know clearly, when we become a 'seer' and how we then move to become a 'hearer'. We become fully aware of the present moment. We are then able to interrupt and stem the flow of defilements with success. If not, with each sense impingement we indulge and ride the sensation and the resultant feeling, totally unaware of the entire process that is occurring behind the curtain. Thus allowing *kilesas* to develop ceaselessly. When watching TV we get the notion that we are actually watching and hearing at the same time. But this is not so. If we apply sharp *sati* and watch the TV we will note that seeing and hearing occur as two separate events. Both will never occur simultaneously during one given thought-moment. Applying the technique of thin slicing of time will show that this is true.

The perception of self (*ātma saññā*) is reinforced when we don't see these transactions as discreet and separate. The Buddha advises us to note with a sharpened awareness, these transactions as separate, so that we can pave the way for realization of *anattā*.

### **Question 20 (B)**

**During meditation when the mind shifts from the primary object is it because of defilements that have crept in?**

We should remember that it is the nature of the mind to shift from object to object. The mind does not like to stay with one object for long. This is common to every one's mind.

Several factors operate : when the mind is with one object for a while, we feel bored because the object becomes insipid and monotony sets in. We then want to change the object. During this process of changing the object we avoid experiencing the boredom and we camouflage the distaste and unpleasantness. Therefore if we wish to allow discontent (*dukkha*) to surface during meditation, we should stay with the same meditation object for a while.

Moreover, when the mind jumps from object to object and seems completely devoid of our control, we will begin to realize the un-governability of the mind. We are actually helpless victims of a natural process where the mind operates according to an agenda of its own. By understanding this un-governability of the mind we begin to realize that it is a natural phenomenon – that it is simply a *dhammatha*. At the beginning of our practice we may feel disappointed because we may think that this spontaneous mind-shift is due to our defilements. However, with repeated practice we will begin to accept and understand that this is the reality, that this is the way the *dhamma* operates, and that the mind is subject to cause and effect—i.e. *idappachayathāva* and *patīccasamuppāṇṇa*. Acceptance of this natural phenomenon is the key. Whereas if we become disappointed and remorse ensues, then we will be inviting defilements. Sometimes this feeling of remorse can become habitual. Therefore we should remain equanimous when the mind leaves the meditation object and later returns.

I remember my initial teacher at the Nilambe meditation centre - Mr. Godwin Samararatne used to say that one of the earliest results of our meditation practice is the realization that our mind is disobedient and stubborn. In fact, had we never started meditation we would have never known this fact. Because we always have the misconception that the mind is obedient, and that it will stay exactly

where we want it to stay and that it will do exactly what we want. How wrong we have been!

Think for a moment - if this mind of ours, which we have so tenderly looked after and nourished with all possible comforts behaves in this manner, can we ever expect our children or kith and kin to behave the way we want them to?

If we fail to accept and understand this reality with regards to the mind, it will only mean that our conceit (*māna*) and self-view (*sakkāya ditthi*) are very strong. Understanding the un-governability of the mind is a *dhamma niyāma* and a *dhammathā* and is a road to *nibbāna*. It is this understanding that would help us in the meditative stage of being aware of the mind – *cittānupassana*. Understanding that the mind is not governable is the first step in understanding *anattā* (non-self).

## Question 21

**During walking meditation the coarseness experienced on the soles of the feet is as though the feet get drawn towards the ground. I feel some discomfort when placing the foot but then feel comfort when the foot is raised. Can you please explain how the mental factors (*cetasika*) operate during this process? And should we simply contemplate the left and right feet as and when they are raised and placed?**

Try your best to allow the process to occur naturally without contemplation or facilitation. Be mindful of the materiality (*rūpa dhamma*) – hardness, softness, lightness when placing and raising the feet, but don't try to pre-empt or contemplate mentality (*nāma dhamma*). Don't try to investigate and analyze what is going on during the walking meditation process. However, if certain experiences or realizations occur naturally, don't try to reject those as well. During walking meditation we focus on *kāyānupassanā*

(knowing the body in the body) and we don't try to understand the mind, i.e. *cittānupassanā*. If we engage in the latter we may sacrifice the simplicity of the meditation practice as prescribed by the Buddha. We run the risk of allowing deductive knowledge/inferential knowledge to creep in and we may miss out on the experiential aspect, and we may even regress in our meditative practice.

We need to remember that in walking meditation we intentionally (i.e. with a *cetanā*) place mindfulness on the process of walking whilst contemplating the right/left feet, whereas in sitting meditation without any intention (with no *cetanā*) we allow the breath to manifest naturally and then mindfully observe the in/out-breath. Both these types of meditation and the diversity of mindfulness are important. Moreover, in day to day work and whilst multi-tasking, the experience derived during walking meditation helps when trying to place mindfulness on each of our activities. Therefore during a meditation retreat we practice mindfulness during non-intentional (sitting meditation), intentional (walking meditation) and a variety of activity. The latter two don't result in deep mindfulness as opposed to during a sitting session, but still are of great value when developing the practice of mindfulness.

## Question 22 (B)

**What is the secret of being able to sit in meditation in one posture for many hours?**

There is no real secret. Such an ability requires many hours and days of consistent, regular practice. There had been a discussion on the minimum requirement of meditation for a practitioner to see a distinct difference in his own personality, temperament and disposition. The answer had been to engage in 10,000 hours or three months of continuous practice! On further research it was

found that in order to see a visible change in the functioning of the brain (using functional MRI scans and other similar tests) a practitioner should do at least three ten-day retreats. These changes would be evident even before the meditator detects any changes in him/herself.

We need to realize that meditation practice will yield results only very gradually. The Buddha describes three stages – *āsevathi*, *bhāvēthi*, *bahulīkarōthi* in our practice.

1. *Āsevathi* is the initial association and familiarization with the practice where the meditator will first feel the breath as coarse and then gradually getting refined. Thereafter, the meditator will be able to note the in/out-breath even whilst being assailed by thoughts, pains and sounds.
2. After these experiences at the next stage (*bhāvēthi*) the meditator will prepare his own time table and begin to practice meditation diligently according to a schedule.
3. Subsequently, as the time goes on the meditator will realize on his own that his defilements are getting weaker when the practice gets stronger. At such a stage he would change his lifestyle and habits - *bahulīkarōthi*.

This is a very gradual journey. We begin to realize that sitting in one posture is very difficult unless we have many practice hours behind us. Therefore we must be compassionate and show understanding towards our fellow practitioners.

## Question 23 (B)

**During sitting meditation and *ānāpānasati* after a while without feeling the breath as an object I get a feeling of tranquility and calmness. I think this is similar to a *samatha***



**practice. This state is sometimes accompanied by no thoughts and has been quite frequent these past two years.**

I would prefer to refer to this state as *samādhi*, rather than use the term *samatha*. My advice is to first identify a time of day when you feel that the sitting session is usually good, and then attempt to sit comfortably without focusing on the breath. Instead, if you can simply be mindful of your posture and allow the mindfulness to stay with you without proactively directing it towards a particular object, you may reach this peaceful and calm state quite easily. When sitting in this manner don't seek the refuge of an object, but just allow the experiences to unfold, naturally. You may then find, that even without noting the breath and even before the breath settles from being coarse to refined, you will have reached that same state of *samādhi* sans an object (i.e. breath).

This means that a yogi who previously needed an aid like a walking stick to stand up, now does it with no aid. He/she will then realize that this calm one-pointedness of the mind is independent of an object.

Then the day will come when the yogi might be able to experience this same state when traveling in a bus, when sitting or standing or working at home. On his own the yogi will try this out in every posture in all situations, independent of place and time. He will then realize that the ability to experience this aspect of the meditative practice is always available within him, and that despite sounds, pains and other disturbances he can revert to this state at any time. The yogi will also understand that no person, no external power or situation can prevent him from reverting to this situation at any time that he wishes to.

This is why the Buddha said that even though we think that *kilesas* are strong and powerful, the *kusala* is stronger. We habitually give prominence to defilements and neglect allowing *kusala* to take pride of place. This is our folly. The day we come to understand that

any one of us can reach this stage of primordial awakening without effort, we would have gone far.

## Question 24 (B)

**For a while I have been meditating by watching my mind and the thoughts that arise. The experience has been very good and I find that my mind does not seek external inputs when engaged thus. Please advise how I can further this practice.**

Watching the mind and the thoughts are a good practice provided you do not get carried away by the thoughts and provided that you are not in a world of fantasy. This is why the Buddha recommended that we start with *kāyanupassanā* instead of *cittānupassanā*. We practice the former by using one of the four elements (*dhātu*) as an object to start with. The advantage is that if we have any doubt as to whether the mind has digressed we can always revert to the element and verify that we are still with mindfulness on the object. This is why teachers refer to *kāyānupassanā* as an anchor for the practice.

Yogis who use *ānāpānasati* as their practice object may also reach this stage after the breath becomes refined, but they will have a clear idea of every milestone that they pass during the journey of approaching this state. When that happens the yogi will see the empty state of the mind, free of pains and thoughts and sounds. This is a temporary stage and stray thoughts will appear less and less since the breath is the firm anchor that the yogi reverts to. This stage of emptiness should be welcomed since the *viññāna* (consciousness) is paralyzed temporarily (it has been transformed from *patitthita* to *appatitthita viññāna*) in this situation, and we should not give any nutriments (in the form of thoughts, intentions, plans etc) to nourish it once again.

We need to appreciate and allow this stage of *kilesa*-free emptiness of the mind to get stabilized and continue.

## Question 25

**During walking meditation I find that the sensitivity of the left sole differs from the right. This experience is quite significant irrespective of the nature of the walking meditation path (eg. sand, carpet, grass, cement floor). I also note very strange experiences like feeling as though I am falling into a pit and as though I am walking outside the path. These experiences make my mindfulness suffer.**

This is natural. Some of us have different sensitivities in the different feet/soles, similarly this experience can be forthcoming in relation to our palms. But this is a meditation experience. Don't try to investigate this proactively. This indicates that the practitioner is beginning to discover traits in relation to his body.

When mindfulness has become established during sitting or walking, it is not uncommon to experience bizarre manifestations as described. When the meditation object and the mind become closely aligned to each other, after a while certain changes occur. This is because the mind is not used to experiencing such uniformity. The mind's nature is to roam around, flitting from one object to another looking for variety. Alignment with only one object for a long time is not conducive to the conventional mind and it is as though the mind has undergone a paradigm shift. Hence these manifestations. The same thing can happen if we decide to slow down our usual activities and work at a slower pace than what we are used to.

I consider this as an indication of good progress in meditation.

## Question 26 (B)

**Although at the beginning walking meditation is very pleasant I find that after a while boredom and monotony sets in.**

Always be well prepared when commencing walking meditation, because monotony is inevitable after a while. Please remember that being with monotony and boredom is an indication of getting close to *nibbāna* whereas getting distracted with sensory pleasures would mean perpetuation of *samsāra*.

We need to test ourselves and see if our personality is strong enough to withstand boredom and to swim against the tide. The ability to tolerate *nibbidhā* (disenchantment) is a feature of a yogi who is developing capacity to reach *nibbāna*. However, if disenchantment is based on irritation/anger then it is very negative and won't direct us towards *nibbāna*. Instead, the aim should be to cope well with insipidity/boredom and to keep meditating (walking/sitting, daily life) despite the disenchantment. *Tapas* – meaning such conduct which is conducive to mental training, adopted by spiritual persons. I am not advocating that you proactively seek discomfort and austere living. That would be tantamount to *atthakilamathānuyoga* – which the Buddha did not advocate.

Take the middle path and mindfully face any difficulties with a balanced mind.

## Question 27

**During breath meditation after a while I feel as though I am going into a cave and I feel lost. But then I revert to the breath, but again after a while go back into the lonely 'cave'.**

This experience is similar to feeling disenchanted after a while during walking meditation. Some yogis feel as though a robot is walking after a while. My advice is to watch intently at the end of the out-breath when you enter into the 'cave'. It's like watching how a star gradually fades away during sun rise. If there has been keen *sati* you will note the exact point at which the star vanished – and similarly the breath. Can you catch that exact thought-moment when the breath becomes 'invisible'? This thought-moment can be



very illusory. Although we feel as though the breath has 'vanished' is it our mind that is playing tricks? Is the breath actually still there? These are some of the questions that may arise in a yogi's mind. You need to keep noting that thought-moment repeatedly and season or master that particular experience.

At a particular stage in the practice you will transcend that particular juncture and go into the next stage of the practice. It is then that the yogi will know that he/she can maintain *sati* effortlessly even without an object (i.e. the shift from *sati* with a *nimitta* to *animitta sati*). The confidence the yogi gains when this stage manifests is significant. The aim should be to not get disturbed or excited by this transition and to patiently practice with a balanced mind.

Initially the yogi will experience cessation of an object in relation to *rūpa* (eg breath) but eventually the same experience will be forthcoming when observing feelings (*vedanā*), thoughts (*vitakka*) and similar *nāma dhamma*. It is the same phenomenon but we must keep rehearsing this experience over and over again. Venerable Nānārāma used to describe these stages of realization as *vedanā vijaya*, *vitakka vijaya* etc. When the yogi begins to experience these stages successfully it ceases to be a huge challenge and becomes 'doable', and thus will increase the yogi's confidence in the practice. Moreover he will be able to relate this experience to any incident in his life. And instead of being easily swayed when facing adversity he will develop an ability to watch the incident with a mature eye, and watch how things arises and pass away, and also the cause and effect reality behind every incident.

We should be happy if difficult incidents/events come our way before we are very old, and when we are physically and mentally still alert and agile. We can use those experiences to practice this valuable dhamma. Such experiences would be the perfect training we will get to meet death.

## Question 28

**If a person who has been practicing the Noble Eight Fold Path dies before he attains the first stage of sainthood (*sotāpanna*), and due to *akusal kamma* of a previous birth if he gets re-born in a hell realm, will he gain any benefit from the effort of his *vipassanā* practice in this present birth?**

There is no clear answer to this question. But if reborn in a hell realm it's very difficult to reap benefits of the present birth practice because of the intense suffering one will experience in hell realms. However, subsequently if he is reborn in a higher realm he will reap these benefits as *upapajjanīya kamma*. The definitions of these *kamma* are as follows:

*Dittadhamma kamma* = *vipāka* or result is invariable in this very birth

*Upapajjanīya kamma* = someday, in some birth there will be results of action (*vipāka*) done in a previous birth. This can be good or bad.

*Aparāpariya kamma* = invariably *vipāka* will be experienced in the immediate next birth.

*Vipassanā* practice done in this birth will not yield *vipāka* if reborn in the animal realm or hell realms. If reborn in the human realm or in any deva realm, *vipāka* is possible, and will help. And in any subsequent birth, *vipassanā* practice will give good benefits as *Upapajjanīya kamma*.

I remember when I was practicing *sati* my first teacher, Venerable S Dhammika told me that there is a lot of safety in consistently practicing *sati*. Because he explained that even if I have a poor understanding of the dhamma if I continuously practice *sati* it will help me in the next birth. He said he cannot be equally sure of a similar outcome if *dana*, *sīla* and *samādhi* are practiced alone, without *sati*. I have a lot of confidence in that advice.

## Question 29 (B)

**During *ānāpānasati* when the breath gets refined I tend to fall asleep. What can I do to prevent this from happening?**

This is very common. In fact the experience of drowsiness when the breath gets refined, sometimes seems like the typical drowsiness associated with defilements (*thīna middha*). But if we keep mastering this experience and know clearly that after the spell of drowsiness you revert back to the breath meditation, then it is a good situation. Whereas if after 'awakening' from the drowsy spell if the mind is on another object then it is more likely that drowsiness was weighed in by defilements. If we learn to experience that after the drowsiness we are back to the breath, that means the mind had temporarily fallen 'into' the breath meditation and has subsequently come out of it. This is a healthy situation.

However it is sometimes difficult to clearly understand this. Walking meditation preceding a sitting session is useful in such situations. And if the yogi uses contemplation of the breath, when the breath 'disappears' if he is not able to continue with contemplation he can note the sitting posture – knowing that he is sitting, particularly noting the contact points where the body hits the floor will be helpful. The yogi is advised to use body contemplation as a reference point and to keep the mindfulness at the forefront.

## Question 30 (B)

**Is it necessary to practice *Buddhānusati*, *metta bhāvanā*, *asubha bhāvanā*, *maranānusati* for a few minutes before commencing *ānāpānasati*?**

My advice is to practice these and see if they help you. For some people these may help whilst for others it won't. If, as soon as you sit for meditation you are able to direct the mind to the posture or to the

breath effortlessly, then these practices may not be necessary. Whereas if that is not possible and if the yogi is familiar with the above practices as a prelude to sitting meditation then please go ahead.

This is an individual preference.

## Question 31

**In the case of *upādāna* we cling to one by abandoning another. Does the same apply to *tanhā*?**

When understanding these important dhamma, we need to realize that when *tanhā* occurs we will automatically cling – i.e. *upādāna* will occur. That's an inevitable reality. But before clinging gets established consequent to *tanhā*, there is a tiny window of opportunity that opens up. This is a fruit/product of meditation and is a manifestation of a balanced mind - *upekkhā*. Using this opening whenever *tanhā* occurs we can assess whether we are leaning towards *samsāra* or towards *nibbāna*? The ability to see this direction at the critical moment when *tanhā* occurs is vital. With a balanced mind we will be more cautious before we cling because we know there is a huge danger before us. This ability to understand the danger of *upādāna* is also a fruit of meditation practice. Gradually we learn to see *tanhā* as it operates and eventually we may opt for *adhi-kusal* (highly skillful) over and above ordinary *kusal*.

This is why the Buddha asked all meditators to apply :

*Sabbapāpassa akaranam kusalassa upasampadā* (..avoid all evil and purify the mind...).

**Dhammapada** – Buddhavagga.

The fear of *kilesa* gets stronger in meditators who understand this. Such yogis will be extra cautious to not allow *kilesa* to proliferate

by clinging, whenever *tanhā* occurs. Protecting one's self from getting provoked and stimulated will prevent opening doors for *kilesa* to generate.

### Question 32 (B)

**Is it advisable to do walking meditation for a few minutes at the beginning with the eyes closed?**

**I find that this helps me.**

This is good because it indicates that the yogi is now experimenting with various ways of engaging in the practice. The mind is being challenged to deviate from tradition and to accommodate non-conventional modes of practice. This is referred to as neurobics where new circuits in the brain open up and start functioning – the brain is getting trained! In fact I would encourage to try further methods of practice, such as doing walking meditation while walking backwards, or while being on a wall or even trying to do walking meditation while walking backwards on a wall!

The novice however, is advised to not close the eyes when doing walking meditation. After the practitioner gains experience and gets familiar with the walking path he may try these additional methods. Scientific research shows that various techniques and skills can be used to stop the brain from ageing. That helps our brains to remain alert, agile and 'awakened' even while we are growing

If not our brains will remain inside the same rut and we will go on with no 'awakening' of the brain.

Mindfulness plays a big role in these initiatives and helps the brain to get re-wired and energized.

### Question 33

**Please can you explain the following : using *samatha* meditation, by eradicating *tanhā* as a route to *nibbāna* as opposed to *vipassanā* meditation by eradicating *avijjā* as a route to *nibbāna*.**

This is a subject that evokes a lot of curiosity amongst meditators and is more of intellectual interest. However, it's an important subject. Some years ago the common belief was that without *samatha* practice and without *samādhi* one is not able to meditate. From such an era, thanks to Maha Si Sayadaw we have now reached a situation where it has been proved that by keeping mindfulness at the forefront we can successfully enter the route to *nibbāna*. This awakening by the Burmese Masters shone a light into the meditators world and made it possible for many practitioners to engage in meditation with *sati* as the key factor.

This is remarkable because more than 90% of the common suttas mentioned in the *tripitaka* as well as the commentaries, highlight the necessity of *samatha*, *samādhi* and *jhānas* for the practice.

However Venerable Maha Si Sayadaw scoured the entire *tripitaka* and identified several *suttas* which illustrated clearly how, by directly practicing *vipassanā* alone it is possible to reach *nibbāna*. We need to remember that in this battle with *samsāra* we have a near enemy (*tanhā*) and a distant enemy (*avijjā*). Using *samatha* practice primarily means we are attacking the near enemy. Yet the hidden enemy (*avijjā*) who is distant, is more lethal and we need to master sophisticated and crafty methods to detect and cripple him. The traditional *samatha/samādhi* practice alone cannot execute such a function satisfactorily.

Dry Insight practice, as taught by Maha Si Sayadaw employs the technique of momentary concentration (*khanika samādhi*) based on continuous and moment-to-moment awareness. (dry insight is

defined as: “dry, rough, unmoistened by the moisture of tranquility meditation”) ). This is akin to a car battery being charged by its own engine while it is still running, using a dynamo. The more the car engine is used, more the charge of the battery. This is a revolutionary method and has been proved to be very successful. In this method of practice, wisdom (*paññā*) is being systematically developed and the yogi will be able to experience the cunning, deceptive nature of *avijjā*. He/she will eventually understand how *micca patipatthi avijjā* tricks and deceives us. (*micca patipatthi avijjā* = delusive thinking that we know everything, veiling man's mental eye preventing him from seeing the true nature of things. Trickery, showing what is impermanent, sad and insubstantial – as permanent, happy and substantially I/mine/myself)

We will be able to know first-hand, how we are presented with a distortion of facts – e.g. what is not true is shown as though it is true, and what is unpleasant is shown as though it is pleasant – and vice versa. This is very powerful and such realizations can disable and weaken *avijjā* even without *samatha samādhi* or *jhānas*. The yogi who undertakes dry insight practice will be totally 'awakened' to the reality as he proceeds in the journey. As I said this is a remarkable revolution in comparison to traditional *samatha* practice.

It is amazing to see how a country like Burma which is so conventional, initiated and adopted this method of practice. And it is even more amazing to see how a country like Sri Lanka rapidly embraced the practice despite many obstacles. This is why I often say that we have been born into this country during this era not due to a chance occurrence. I feel as though this auspicious period with the dawn of the *vipassanā* practice in Sri Lanka was specifically considered when it came to choosing my birth

## Question 34

### How should a yogi practice *Dhammānupassanā*?

When a yogi is practicing *dhammānupassanā* he/she will be able to use any object to practice meditation and will not reject anything that comes his way. He will use every encounter/incident/object as an exercise to practice *vipassanā* : seeing things as they really are. When practicing *kāyānupassanā*, *vedanānānupassanā*, *cittānupassanā*, the yogi uses specific meditation objects (eg, body, elements, feelings, mind-states); whereas in *dhammānupassanā* there is no choosing specific objects. Any object can be used for the practice. During this stage, *sati* as well as *samādhi* and *paññā* (*satisampajañña*) are well developed. If the yogi wishes to know if *satisampajañña* (mindfulness and clear comprehension) is developed, it would be by the ability to face any situation that comes his way. The mind would be developed to such an extent that levels of tolerance and coping skills would be significantly established in such a yogi.

Until we come to this stage yogis' meditation would largely depend on comfortable postures, ideal circumstances and suitable environments. A yogi who has embarked upon *dhammānupassanā* would be able to maintain *sati* irrespective of place and posture.

## Question 35

### What is meant by *yuganaddha bhāvanā*?

This means that the yogi uses *samatha* and *vipassanā* practice as appropriate. This means that after practicing *vipassanā* for a while, the yogi decides to use a suitable object (eg, breath meditation, metta meditation) and commences pure *samatha* practice. This may even lead to *jhānas* due to such a person's high levels of tolerance. This is traditionally referred to as '*vipassanā purvangama samatha*'.



Alternatively, the yogi may first start with *samatha*, master the *jhānas* and then shift to *vipassanā* practice. This is traditionally referred to as '*samatha purvangama vipassanā*'. Yet another yogi may use *samatha* practice when the situation is ideally suited for same, and when the situation is demanding and challenging he/she will use *vipassanā*, keeping *sati* at the forefront. During the latter situation the yogi will not see a disadvantage and take a step back, and instead he will use the *vipassanā* practice.

This is a *yuganaddha* practice. In fact for those leading very busy lives, this would be an ideal method of practice. Eventually such a practitioner would be in a position to reap the benefits of *paññā vimutthi* (liberation born out of wisdom) as a result of diminishing *avijjā* (obtained from *vipassanā* practice), as well as enjoy the benefits *ceto vimutthi* – a result of diminishing *tanhā* (obtained from *samatha* practice). It is said that *paññā vimutthi* will always remain with the practitioner irrespective of the situation or environment, whereas *ditta dhamma sukha viharanaya* (pleasure here and now, born out of seclusion) can suffer during demanding and challenging situations where the practitioner's peace is threatened. Praise, gain and fame can also threaten the stability of *ditta dhamma sukha* or *jhānic* bliss. Even an *arahant* may experience disturbance of *ditta dhamma sukha* due to gain and fame. It is only the liberation gained from uprooting *avijjā* that is long lasting and cannot be disturbed. This is the case of an *arahant*.

The reality of *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anatta* is always present, irrespective place and person. We should master the technique of understanding this doctrine without always looking for situations and places that are quiet or conducive for practice. For a person who is eternally seeking *pīti*, *sukha* and the bliss of *samatha* practice will be disappointed if this understanding is not mastered.

## Question 36

**Please explain the teaching – '*bhāvanā pahā thabbā*'. Do we have the ability to know if we will reach liberation via the realizations of *anicca* or *anatta*? And will this depend on the type of defilements i.e. *anusaya/āsava* that each one of us has?**

As we discussed earlier *dassanā pahā thabbhā* is the first stage (stream entry) where the stream entrant will come to understand the Path that enabled him to reach the first stage of saint hood (*sotāpanna*). This is the first crack that occurs when such a person gets a glimpse of *nibbāna*. But thereafter he will change his lifestyle, speech and action (*sammā ājiva*, *sammā vacā*, *sammā kamantha*) to suit the further development of *vipassanā* practice. It is only then he would be referred to as a true trainee – a *sekha*. Until that stage we adopt various practices and life style changes, but those are superficial and they don't reflect the culmination of true purification. When true purification occurs, as it is in a *sekha*, he would repeatedly examine his lifestyle, speech, actions and will continue meditation.

At this stage he will be practicing with the aim of re-discovering the chance occurrence that led him to make the initial break through – the first crack that occurred at stream entry. He reflects on the life style changes and speech/action that led him to make that first breakthrough, and keeps going back to that situation. It is like a hidden tunnel in a cave that the entrapped man accidentally discovered one day. His next task is to seek that same opening using the same methods and perseverance he used before. He further improves the lifestyle, speech and action. Repeated meditation practice in that same identical way is essential. The *sekha* understands this requirement and he will automatically feel the urgency to escape and therefore to find the exit from the cave in which he is trapped. The Path is *nibbāna gamani pathipadā* – which needs to be mastered thoroughly to complete the journey. A stream entrant will discover this Path within the next seven births. At the

moment of death he will realize that he had been enslaved to the *kāmaloka* whilst this beautiful escape route was before him.

It is possible for the *sekha* to become an *arahant* even in that very same birth if he diligently practices as per the teachings of the Buddha. Only a stream entrant will see this possibility in a realistic sense. Such a person, whilst being on the Path will be able to move in society since he knows first hand/experientially what he needs to do to further his development. In the same society, the *sekha* will use all his skills and abilities to further develop his Path whereas the *puthujjana* will use all his abilities to remain further enslaved to the six sense world. The *sekha* will be exceptionally careful regards the lifestyle, speech and actions and will ensure these are in keeping with the Buddha's teachings, i.e. these will be tuned towards *nibbāna* and not towards gain, fame, praise and sense pleasures. This becomes very clear and natural for the *sekha*.

*Bhāvana pahāthabba* is often equated to realization of the fourth Noble Truth – i.e. *nibbāna gāmaṇi patipadā*.

## Question 37

**Deceptive *dhmma* (*vanchanika dhmma*) are these similar to *anusaya kilesa*?**

Not exactly. *Vanchanika dhmma* are deceptive mind states that distort the truth, as opposed to *anusaya kilesa* or dormant defilements which are hidden/underlying tendencies in the mind. *Vanchanika dhmma* can be explained by using the simile: a man may mistakenly treat a thief like his own son. It's a wrong understanding of the truth. I would like to further explain *Vanchanika dhmma* as *avijjā* operating in two ways, i.e. *appatipatthi avijjā* and *micchā patipatthi avijjā*. The former describes the lack of knowledge regards various subjects and disciplines. The latter denotes a situation where we believe what is untrue as true or what is true as untrue. And we cling to that belief.

It is very difficult to change the view of such a person who has tightly gripped that false belief.

It is most difficult to change the view of a person who has understood what is not the Path, as the Path and vice versa. The responsibility for projecting that false hood to the person concerned lies with *Vanchanika dhmma*. Unfortunately such a person can never be corrected, even though he may meditate and have the association of *kalyāṇamitta*; he will not shift from wrong beliefs and wrong thinking (*micchā sankappa*).

Please refer '**The Dhammapada**' translated by Acharya Buddhārakkhitha – *Yamakavagga*:

*'Asāre sāramantino sāre cāsradassino,  
te sāram nādhigcchanti micchāsaṅkappagocarā*

(those who mistake the unessential to be essential and the essential to be unessential, dwelling in wrong thoughts, never arrive at the essential)

A classic example of this situation amongst meditators is, when experienced practitioners use their practice for faith healing and other similar activity. When we engage in such activity our own *kilesa* (eg *kāma*) increases and it defeats the purpose. This Noble Dhamma as preached by the Buddha should never be used for anything other than for the Path to liberation. If we don't do so, one day, we will have to face the repercussions. This is why I always advise people to be exceptionally careful when working for the *sāsana*. We need to have our motives and goals very clear. If not it can become very dangerous, particularly as we gain mastery of the practice. It is always good to follow the righteousness and exemplary principles adopted by spiritual role models who practice the Buddha's teaching as it was prescribed.



Therefore, it is in our interest to ask our *kalyānamitta* to caution and advise us if we ever demonstrate cunningness, craftiness or deceptiveness in our behaviors. We should always adopt exceptional humility whenever we are admonished in such circumstances. If we are wise enough to cut through the illusion and face this truth we will be ever grateful to our spiritual teachers.

The mental factor that will always help us in this exercise of identifying and detecting *Vanchanika dhamma* as and when they arise, is *sati*. *Sati* will be the torch that shines into our minds showing us these cunning and deceptive traits, and the various illusions we are trapped in. It can be very unpleasant when *sati* 'shows' these to us, but we need to bravely face these situations and go forward in our practice.

Please also refer the Visuddhimagga (section on *Vīdarshana Upakkilesa*) for further details.

### Question 38 (B)

**When doing breath meditation at the end of the out-breath I can feel various sensations (*vedanā*). Should I contemplate on these *vedanā* as *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā*?**

My advice is to see if you can note each *vedanā* as it appears in relation to the in/out-breath. This should be done with a balanced mind. Don't try to contemplate on the *vedanā* as described because it seems as though you are rejecting or disliking those *vedanā*. Can you also see if the breath is more pleasantly felt than the *vedanā* OR is it the other way round? Also, on another occasion you may note if the *vedanā* is felt closer to yourself than the breath OR is it the other way round? Similarly see if you can note all eleven facets of the breath in relation to each *vedanā* – i.e., within/without, near/far, pleasant/unpleasant, coarse/refined, present/past/future. None of these observations on the breath will be possible if we don't note

with a balanced mind. A mind that is irritated cannot make a neutral observation. During meditation we should try to note each disturbance—eg. pain/sound/thought in relation to the in/out-breath and report that experience clearly to the Master.

### Question 39 (B)

**During breath meditation I firmly suppress thoughts and don't allow them to arise. After a while I reach a state of *samādhi*. Yet after further meditation the breath becomes refined and my entire body becomes very rigid. This happens in a cyclical fashion – refinement of the breath followed by rigidity, and again the breath gets refined, and so on.**

We don't advise yogis to suppress thoughts or pains that arise during meditation. Instead we advise them to note how these arise and pass away. The rigidity of the body denotes the activity of the *pathavi dhātu* (earth element) and we should just observe as it comes and goes. Yogis must learn the language of the elements – this is an international language, common to animate as well as inanimate objects. The elements represent reality, as opposed to concepts which we see in the conventional world. The elemental-language doesn't specify body-parts, it just indicates generalized hardness/softness, fluidity/cohesion, heat/cold, expansion/contraction. And as the in/out-breath gets more and more refined, the stage opens out for the 'elemental actors' to perform and play their roles. Each one takes a turn. The yogi is just a member of the audience watching how each element performs!

A person who is excessively attached to the body will feel uncomfortable or frightened when he/she experiences these elemental manifestations. But if the yogi can season or master this experience and move forward in the practice, he may begin to enjoy the journey and reach another milestone in meditation.

## Question 40

**During meditation, if an incident/person connected to the past or present manifests do we consider that situation as occurring due to cause and effect, i.e. *paticcasamuppañña*?**

My advice is to intently watch each manifestation. These may occur in the form of *rūpa* (visual images, sounds, smells etc) or as feelings or thoughts or memories. The occurrence should be watched each time it manifests. As you go on you will find that the intensity of the manifestation and your inner responsiveness diminishes. It is very important to allow these to appear, because it is like a cleansing process. It is only after repeated practice that we will be in a position to see it as cause and effect, and that too needs to be done with a balanced mind. Until then we should allow these manifestations to occur freely without labeling and proactive identification.

## Question 41 (B)

**Can you explain how walking meditation can be practiced as six stages?**

The Venerable Maha Si Sayadaw technique advises that walking meditation be contemplated in six stages. But this method can be a little complicated at the start. And therefore yogis are advised to start with three stages—initially as left, right; thereafter as lifting, placing and subsequently noting the feet as lifting, moving, placing (i.e. three stages). Please refer the Visuddhimagga for further details.

## Question 42

**I have a strong tendency for *samādhi* and feel that I can easily reach *jhānas* if I aspire for same. Please can you advise me accordingly.**

I intentionally avoid answering questions such as these, since I primarily teach the *satipatthāna* practice where *sati* is kept at the forefront, and not *samādhi*. I should also remind that there are two types of *samādhi* – i.e. *samatha samādhi*, and *vipassanā samādhi*. The former has clearly delineated nine types: i.e. *upacāra samādhi*, the four *rūpa jhānas* and the four *arūpa jhānas*. When I went to Burma, my teacher explained to me that four types of *vipassanā jhāna* are experienced by practitioners and that these were parallel to the four *rūpa jhānas* in the *samatha* practice. And these *vipassanā jhānas* are beautifully described in the book – 'In This Life Itself' by Sayadaw U Panditha, my teacher. As opposed to the *samatha jhānas* which, after substantial mastery can be entered/exited at the will of the meditator, the *vipassanā jhāna* are not the same and these are more of an open system.

It is not easy to determine if one has entered a *jhāna* or not. A lot of practice or mastery is needed for such a realization. A related incident is how Venerable Moggalāna had mentioned to a group of bhikkhus that whilst within the fourth *rūpa jhāna* he had heard the sounds of frolicking elephants in a distant lake. When the bhikkhus queried from the Buddha as to whether this was possible, because whilst in the fourth *jhāna* there can be moments where the *jhāna* gets disrupted and the mind leaves that state and hence hearing those far away noises. But the mind has the ability to re-enter that same state of the fourth *jhāna* once again. Therefore although it seems as if the noises were heard whilst within the *jhāna*, it is not so.

These are very refined states, *citta dhamma* – and unless mastered to perfection can lead to dangerous mental proliferation and overestimation of one's self. My advice is, whatever the type/stage of the practice, continuously be face to face with the primary object of meditation. Then you can never go wrong. To a *samatha* practitioner I would advise, if in the first *jhāna* (where *vitakkha*, *vicāra* are present) just see if *ānāpānasati* is present. If you reach the second *jhāna* (where *vitakkha*, *vicāra* are absent) try to identify

a point of contact/point of rubbing of the breath – so that you are sure the primary object is still with you. The problem is when trying to look for such point of contact you might lose the *jhāna*. Even in the fourth *jhāna* according to Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw, if you look for the breath you will still find it, but the problem is that you will then necessarily come out of the *jhāna*.

Therefore the advice is not to investigate anything when inside a *jhāna*. But unfortunately, by nature some people want to investigate whatever stage they are in! Whereas the Buddha says, if in *samādhi* you will see things as they are, eventually. Therefore don't investigate and thought-proliferate regards type of *samādhi*, whether in or out of *samādhi* etc, whilst in meditation. Just keep practicing with the primary object (eg, breath, abdomen rising and falling or feet in walking meditation) in the forefront and the rest will happen accordingly.

### Question 43

**Please explain how we could note every thought-moment that occurs in the mind (*mano dvāra*) and by watching its cessation (*nirodha*) how we could realize *nibbāna***

Noting every *cittakkhana* and its cessation will yield liberation, but how do we know for sure that the mind that is 'telling' this to us is free of *kilesa*? The only way to be sure is to repeatedly allow this experience to mature with consistency, and then by mastery we will come to the realization. We need to remember that the mind (*viññāna*) will always trick and deceive us, so how can we be sure that this information given to us is correct?

### Question 44 (B)

**Please explain the practice of meditation on impurities. Is it appropriate to interchangeably practice breath meditation and the meditation on impurities?**

My advise is that, only if a practitioner cannot practice breath meditation he/she should practice meditation on impurities. If not, the latter practice may not be a suitable point to start with. Only those with difficulties connected to breath meditation should embark upon these alternate methods.

### Question 45 (B)

**If we develop thoughts of greed or irritation in connection with some object should we stop interacting with that particular object and shift our attention elsewhere?**

The Buddha advised to use '*amanasikāra*' on such provocative objects and to shift attention to a more neutral object. This is a *samatha* practice. But this is temporary because you are not addressing the mind's response and the tendency of the mind to react to the provocation. Instead you are trying to adjust or remove the provocateur. The Buddha taught us to retreat into a forest or empty place to provide us with peaceful tranquil environments to commence the practice. But eventually we need to apply *vipassanā* practice and *paññā bhāvana* to see the true nature of the mind. Moreover we need to attain mastery to see and uproot the underlying defilements hidden within the mind. The practice of avoiding provocateurs is merely palliative and not a permanent cure.

### Question 46

**Every time the mind shifts from the present moment due to a *cetanā* and *tanhā* does it yield *kamma*?**

Treat this as a challenge. When we can't stay in the present moment and the mind shifts, does this occur due to *cetanā* or due to *tanhā*? Can we try and investigate this occurrence? It is actually a meditation practice. In fact we also should reflect that our mind

hates to stay in the present moment. Inherently we dislike the present moment so the mind shifts from object to object. This is a realization. This is *sammā ditthi* and only a teacher can show us the way to see these truths.

## Question 47

**In the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* the four tetrads and 16 steps, the fourth step of the first tetrad mentions *passambhayam kāyasankhāra assasissāmīti sikkhatī* – and the third tetrad the disappearance of *vacī sankhāra* is mentioned. Please explain this.**

This is a good question. The first tetrad of this *sutta* describes the practice of *kāyānupassanā* using in/out-breath. The calming of bodily formations (*kāyasankhāra*) and thereby refinement and 'disappearance' of the breath - *passambhayam kāyasankhāra assasissāmīti sikkhatī* is described. However there is a presumption that by the time the breath has calmed down, the calming of *vacī sankhāra* (word/speech formation in the mind or inner chatter) has already taken place. Maha Si Sayadaw's teachings say that when the speech formation has calmed down the practitioner finds that he cannot go on labeling, noting or contemplating the object. This means that *vitakka* (contemplation on the object) ceases well before the breath gets refined – i.e. before *passambhayam kāyasankhāra*.

The next step (the second tetrad) describes *pīti* (rapture) – *pīti patisamvedi assasissāmīti sikkhatī* - the yogi experiences rapture but may get attached to it due to the underlying dormant tendency for lust (*kāma/rāga anusaya*) and the mind may deviate from the primary object. Similarly he may have doubts in the mind about which stage of meditation he is in, and again the mind may digress and the breath may reappear. The recommended action at this stage is to once again align the mind to the breath, and to take refuge in the primary object. The same should be applied if bliss (*sukha*) appears and if the yogi gets distracted. Because again, various

doubts and attachment to the bliss can occur. The middle Path is recommended whatever the experience; i.e., after the breath calms down, whatever manifests (whether it is rapture or bliss or doubt) revert back to the neutral ground – the primary object or in/out-breath. Even though the breath may not be discernible at this stage keep adverting the mind to the breathing touch point, where the yogi feels it best. This is the recommended teaching. The breath will appear again when this is done.

When experiencing mental formations like *vedanā*, *saññā* (*cittasankhāra patisamvedi* - second tetrad) and again *cittapatisamvedi* (experiencing the mind), the mind can get distracted. The yogi shouldn't get distracted by anything (eg lights, images, feelings of pleasure or pain). The yogi's task is to keep bringing the mind back to the neutral object of in/out-breath. The breath is a tangible, verifiable, coarse and neutral object to which we can keep reverting to. It becomes our anchor and will help us to not get lured by doubt and other mind-made traps, and thus go astray. We should master this stage of the practice where we use a verifiable *rūpa dhamma* (i.e. breath) as opposed to a non-tangible mental object (*nāma dhamma*) to keep the mind centered on neutral ground, so that we are very clear as to what needs to be done as we progress on the path.

The experienced yogi learns the middle path and the art of being focused with *sati* in this manner even when the breath is non-discernible, and he will not get confused or be in doubt.

## Question 48

**Please explain *cittasankhāra* and *passambhayam cittasankhāra***

In the Chulavedalla *sutta* these are very clearly explained. *Cittasankhāra* are referred to as feelings and perceptions – *vedanā* and *saññā*. In our daily lives these play a very big role, because our personality traits, likes, dislikes and prejudices are all governed by



these mental states. During meditation even though we have closed our eyes and we intentionally disallow provocations, after a while when the breath calms down various images, signs, feelings appear from within the mind. These appear without our conscious involvement and maybe psychological wounds that are appearing freely since external impingements are not present.

Different yogis react differently to such manifestations. Some would feel exhilarated thinking they have reached mystical spiritual heights whereas others would fear and doubt such manifestations. If we keep reacting and responding to such feelings (pleasant or unpleasant) and perceptions, our progress on the meditative path won't be smooth. Instead it would be a haphazard and staggered journey, and we run the danger of getting side tracked. The advice is to be prepared to face these instances in the practice and to understand that this is a natural phase as the yogi progresses along the path. We should not claim ownership to these experiences as 'me/mine/I' and instead we should disclaim these mind-made manifestations without remorse or doubt. For a beginner it is essential to participate in dhamma discussions and to have interviews with the meditation teacher so as to clear all doubts in this regard.

*Passambhayam cittasankhāra* = calming and refining of *vedanā*, *saññā*. This is the next stage where the yogi learns to stay with a balanced mind when *cittasankhāra* cease to manifest.

#### Question 49

**On an average day there are times I feel elated and blissful, without any specific reason. Does this signify anything?**

Just as much as you are noting the elation you will also note serious bouts of depression that come and go. When *sati* is at the forefront you will notice these emotional swings. These are all different facets of our mind. The mind is like a stage on which these different

actors do their performances, one at a time. We don't own the mind but we have simply 'rented' it for use by different mental states. Our task is to understand this and watch each performance without interference. We have no control over which emotion will play itself out at which point. We cannot ask for what we want. But with development of equanimity we will be able to see the different acts in this drama as they appear and disappear.

#### Question 50 (B)

**How can we practice *metta* meditation?**

If you are not in a position to do breath meditation or if you feel that the practical value/utility value of *metta* supersedes that of breath meditation, I can take this discussion forward. If not, there is no purpose of changing track and diverting to another meditation object when we have taken breath as the object. *Metta* meditation is usually used when the practitioner has ill will or hatred towards the breath or any other activity done during the day OR ill will towards a person. Then he can use *metta* as an object for *samatha* meditation. I am willing to discuss this topic if there is a personal difficulty in practicing breath meditation. Actually the strength/power of breath meditation is huge, much greater than the power *metta* would yield.

If you wish to read the genesis and background of the *Ānāpānasati sutta*, you will find that amongst the monks to whom this discourse was preached, there had been those practicing *metta*, *karunā*, *muditha bhāvana* as well as other forms of meditation practices. Yet, the Buddha preached this *sutta* to all of them. He did not discriminate. By all means initiate the meditation session with *metta* practice if you have ill will or hatred predominant in your mind and you may need to repeat this a few times. But eventually you will find that breath meditation becomes very effective in dealing with all such situations.

Moreover, in the fourth tetrad of the *Sathiptthāna sutta* the Buddha mentions in the *Dhammānupassanā* section: ..*santham vā ajjhattam vyāpādam, satthi me ajjhattam vyāpādoti*..

(when ill will is present within, the monk knows 'there is ill will in me', and similarly when ill will is absent the monk knows 'there is no ill will'..).

Breath meditation is used by *samatha* practitioners as well as *vipassanā* practitioners. In the case of the former, by doing *metta* we are simply applying a palliative or a 'balm' on the situation whereas in the latter we eventually uproot the defilement of ill will/hatred (or *kāmacchanda* or other defilements whichever may arise), and hence the latter is more effective. We need to be very sharp in our objectives and know that this is an intensive *vipassanā* retreat and thereby not lose precious time in debating these matters.

## Question 51

**Can you explain these types of *samādhi* : *chanda samādhi*, *citta samādhi*, *virīya samādhi*, *vīmansa samādhi* in relation to *samatha* and *vipassanā* practices?**

*Chanda*, *citta samādhi* are close to the *samatha* practice whilst *virīya*, *vīmansana samādhi* seem related to *vipassanā*. But this is purely leaning towards deductive and inferential knowledge. However all four types of *samādhi* are essential whichever practice you undertake. When undertaking the *sathipatthāna* practice, using *sati* that has been built on the *vipassanā* practice the practitioner will embark upon *sathara sammappadhāna* (the four right efforts) he learns to resurrect a broken *samādhi* using either *virīya* or *adhishtāna* or *saddhā* or *paññā*. It is only when *samādhi* breaks down that the practitioner will learn to resurrect it. And he may use the above mentioned different tools on different occasions. The same person may use different methods depending on each individual's personality traits. And this changing nature of what

tool is used to resurrect a broken *samādhi* at different stages of the practice, is a manifestation of *anicca saññā*. We need to accept this.

## Question 52

**I have been meditating for quite a while and it has been my practice to note greed and ill will whenever they arise in the mind. During those moments I label those mind states. I go a step further and see these as impermanent and therefore reduce my reactivity. Yet I am not aware of how to note *moha* or delusion. Please can you explain why?**

**And I have also been noting greed and ill will as and when they arise in others' minds by observing their actions and speech. I then note that conceit is present in my mind.**

In the very valuable *Anumāna sutta* the Buddha said that it is important to repeatedly reflect that when we note actions/speech of others which reflect their inner greed or ill will, we should not judge or compare or feel unhappy. Instead we should immediately realize that when we speak/act with greed and ill will, others will view us through the same lens. They will feel exactly the same as what we feel about them under those same conditions. We should remember that in every action of ours there will be traces of greed and ill will, and yet by nature we habitually measure others. If we feed our mind with this reality, we will be extra careful during such interactions.

Every moment we are **not** in *sati*, we will be in *moha* (i.e. we harbor a deluded mind state, which is ignorant of reality). The mind is always in *moha* except when we know that we are with the present moment, with either greed or hatred, or with the in/out-breath or right/left foot during walking meditation. Those who practice mindfulness begin to understand the danger of *samsāra* and realize that every moment we don't spend in *sati* we are veiled with ignorance and we are deluded; because we are unaware of what we are doing, saying or thinking.



Due to our ignorance we are steeped in activity related to our families, jobs and 'responsibilities'. We take great pride and joy in such accomplishments as well. But we never recognize that during those spells the mind has greed, ill will and delusion running through it. Consequent to these responsibilities we have every excuse to offer as to why we can't practice sitting or walking meditation, or practice *sati* during day to day activity.

We are simply wasting our lives whenever we are not in *sati*. The mind is drained and strained due to these defilements that run through us like strong uncontrolled currents.

Simply remember that every moment that we are fully in the present, we are free of delusion/ignorance.

### Question 53 (B)

**Please advise how I can keep my mind on one object? I find it difficult to keep my mind on the breath during sitting meditation. It is a little better during walking meditation. Thoughts are very disturbing during these efforts.**

At the beginning please use a bigger and coarse object like the sitting posture, to start practicing mindfulness. The breath - its beginning, middle and end, are far too refined to use as a meditation object for such a practitioner. It is only after we gradually train the mind to keep attention on coarse objects (eg, posture, body, walking) that we can move to refined objects like the breath. Moreover, the mental health of a person who starts this practice should be sound. And this is why we teach that commencing meditation when very old, feeble and when close to death, is not advisable. It can be a very disturbing experience. When the physical and mental health of a person is good we should hasten to start meditation. It's a slow, gradual and skillful process.

### Question 54

**I am a yogi who has been listening to your Dhamma talks and practicing meditation for nearly eight years. When sitting in meditation after a while I find I encounter a darkness, after which I find I am without any perceptions (*saññā*). Thereafter I cannot account for passage of time, but I again reconnect with the breath. During this transition I feel I have a balanced mind, like you have described = *tādi*. I am also able to keep looking at my mind and sometimes find I am attached to thoughts or sounds. But with a determination I am able to transcend these situations and revert to the meditation. I also fear that conceit may occur in my mind when asking these questions.**

First, you need not fear about conceit since you are discussing these issues for a valid reason during this meditation Q and A session. Moreover these explanations will benefit many others in the audience. Every question that we discuss is common to all meditators. Similarly every answer will be a common answer. At these retreats don't fear that your conceit will build, because in fact these retreats are meant to reduce whatever conceit you may have. However, your statement of progress in meditation is an encouragement for others.

### Question 55 (B)

**I note the beginning and ending of each in and out-breath. I note the cessations with keen interest. Is that advisable?**

Cessation of the in and out-breath is an inevitability, since whatever arises will cease. Yet watching the cessation is not easy. The Buddha advises us to use *kayānupassanā*, *vayānupassanā*, *nirodhānupassanā* to watch the arising and ceasing of all phenomena. But our mind hates to watch the cessation. Instead we like to watch the beginning of everything because it brings joy.

Being able to repeatedly note the cessation is a special feature of *aniccānupassanā* – and is a significant milestone in the practice.

But fear always accompanies this situation and fear is due to our *kilesa*. Everything that arises will cease – whether it is the breath, a feeling, an emotion, a perception, a thought, a plan. With no external aid, facilitation or prompting cessation will always happen to whatever arose.

Similarly *dukkha* will arise and cease. Therefore we need not feel distraught and weep and wail when *dukkha* comes our way. Similarly when *dukkha* comes we should not react, construct, plan and project thoughts since, if we do so, we will be creating *sankhāra* (*cetanā*) and thereby adding fuel to the fire and lengthening our own *samsāric* journey. Our greatest training would be to develop a strong and balanced mind, with which we can watch how every unhappiness, discontent and difficulty arises with patience, fortitude and exceptional non-reactivity. Can we then maintain the same forbearance to watch how those disturbing emotions leave us, as they always would – without any reaction on our part?

## Question 56

**Our two children are exceptionally fond of and are very caring towards abandoned animals. It is a problem for us since all stray dogs, cats, squirrels are now in our house and it has even become a disturbance. My neighbors also complain. The children say that in the past, Venerable Arahant Seevali too practiced such compassion towards animals. Please advise what course of action we should take?**

First, I must say that I am very happy to hear this from you and would like to make a kind request. Please can you remove all the stray dogs and cats (plus maybe squirrels) from the Nissaranavanaya compound, and care for them in your home? I

could not ask for a bigger favour. In fact I would also like to offer Chutta malli to accompany them!

But please remember that anyone who shows excessive compassion and love to animals, simply does so because such persons have a lot of ill will towards humans. So it appears that your children have unlimited compassion for stray animals because they have limited compassion for humans. Those who don't have *metta* for humans show this peculiar trait towards animals and that's a natural *dhammatha*. This is why as long as we have associations with *asappurisa* (non-true persons) we will never have associations with *sappurisa* (true persons). In fact such people proclaim that they would rather associate with animals or people who have fallen into trouble, rather than associate with virtuous persons or monks. Such people may even seek out those in trouble and wish to help them.

These are mental states exhibited by different persons and we need to understand it well.

## Question 57 (B)

**After returning home from a retreat like this our family members and office workers tend to taunt us with sarcastic remarks and unwarranted comments – such as, 'have you attained stream entry? After so much of meditation why do you still get angry?' and so on. We face these comments mostly if we make a mistake or say an inappropriate thing. How do we face such discouraging situations?**

This means that you have made some mistake in your lifestyle. You have obviously made some unwarranted comment or tried to advise someone or tried to 'show off' that you attended a *vipassanā* retreat at Nissaranavanaya! Please be humble and never try to share these teachings with anyone, unless someone is really interested to learn. Then they will come and ask you. If not please remain silent. Trying

to teach the dhamma to disinterested persons is like throwing pearls before swine. Swine only like garbage. The dhamma is too precious for that.

And if you necessarily have to associate with such *asappurisa* please try and 'conceal' that you are a meditator as far as possible. If we have lot of conceit it is very difficult to do so. So we have trouble. In such company the less we speak the better on these matters. Try to use your intelligence and speak appropriately as you would in the presence of *kalyanamitta*.

Developing *Yoniso manasikāra*, *sammā ditthi* and *sappurisa* association will all contribute towards this transformation in our behavioral patterns.

## Question 58

**I have a constricting pain in the centre and inside my forehead during breath meditation**

Since you have noticed this during meditation, if it is bearable it means that your mind has turned inwards instead of roaming towards external impingements. And this is a good sign. If not and if it is a feature of a physical ailment as a head ache then it could mean that the meditation object suited for you is not the breath and it could be another object. And the pain in the forehead would be a result of you forcing yourself to catch the breath.

Your task should be to see if you can note breath when the pain is present as well as when the pain is absent, and know each such stage. If it is bearable you could see how the pain recedes to being far away and how the breath becomes close, and also note the reverse situation. These exercises will help you to see all the facets of the breath. And may result in the pain becoming less as well.

This pain could also be an elemental manifestation, perhaps hardness as shown by the earth element – *pathavi*.

## Question 59

**When we are asked to disclaim as - 'not me, mine, I' - who actually gets liberated from all this?**

During meditation, after we reach a stage when we are in a position to stop all intentional activity and speech, as well as planning, thinking and projecting in the mind, we will find that a large amount of unintentional 'activities' take place with no volition on our part. We need to disclaim all those unintentional volitions (*acetanika*, *asanskhārika*) of the body, speech and mind - as 'not me, mine, I am'.

If not and if we claim responsibility for all those activities and thoughts, the amount of problems we will face will be massive and unbearable. First we need to clearly identify and localize those unintentional activity and thoughts, and systematically disclaim each of them. Then you will realize that you never were their owner. Similarly, with practice you will also realize some day that even the activity, speech and thinking/planning we engage in with intention, have no owner.

Please remember that this exercise can be practiced only during meditation and only after the yogi has mastered noting the in/out-breath thoroughly, and after reaching the end of *kāyānupassanā*. When the breath calms down, even with no breath and no object, there is a lot of activity that goes on. The yogi may 'see' images with the mind's eye, he may 'hear' sounds, or experience smells or a variety of mind-made events that go on during this phase of meditation. If we claim all of these and feel responsible then we are clearly not hearing the Buddha's teachings or not following them. The ability to disclaim these uninvited thoughts, plans and other mind-made activity is what the yogi should master. Then it gives a lot of peace of mind and reduces stress.

Therefore, first the yogi should disclaim those uninvited images, thoughts, plans/projections and aspirations as – 'not me/mine/I am'. Subsequently, after much practice the yogi will realize that even invited thoughts, and intentional aspirations have no ownership. These are all simply a part of a process, i.e. a mechanized series of events and activity that go on endlessly, all of which are non-governable. The latter realizations will happen after repeated practice.

In fact this very question is demonstrative of a proliferative thought (*papañca*) and the question too is mind made! Actually our mind is the most cunning and deceptive trickster, always projecting what is not true as true, and vice versa. With progress in meditation we may be able to see this experientially. When we are able to see how the mind works 'behind the curtain', deceiving us by conjuring every trick in the book, we will then realize there is actually no 'me/mine/I' to get liberated! We need to therefore start the practice on the premise that there is a 'me/mine/I' and systematically dissect the entire process through meditation eventually and prove to yourself that that notion of 'me/mine/I' is an illusion. That would be the realization of *anatta*.

As we journey on the Path and as our spiritual faculties ripen we will realize the futility of the notions and concepts that we have held as near and dear to us. That is when we will meet reality face to face, first hand. At that stage we become humble, patient and full of humility. The *saddhā* we had previously will then evolve into *okappana saddhā* (a mature and unshakeable faith and confidence in the Buddha Dhamma Sangha). We will then begin to wonder how the Buddha on his own discovered this truth and moreover, how this precious teaching withstood the test of time for over 2600 years, and reached us.

By that time you will perhaps cease to ask these questions!

## Question 60

**When engaged in walking meditation slowly I feel sleepy. If I increase the speed and then follow it with a sitting I find that helpful.**

My advise regards the speed of walking meditation is to try it out and see which works best for you. Sometimes slowing down may become artificial and not help the yogi. I always ask yogis to initially use the speed that comes naturally. Don't introduce artificial speeds in to the pattern that suits you most. Different yogis may find that the speeds they are individually used to, differ from one another. The body will determine what's best for you. Sloth and torpor often get reduced when increasing the speed. Always challenge the mind and try various methods to overcome these hindrances. Our mind will always throw up excuses, hindrances, crafty ideas to encourage us to stop the practice. We should be even craftier and not allow the mind to have its own way. If the mind ambushes us lets work out a counter-ambush, a guerilla ambush!

When engaged in *ariyapariyeshana* (Noble Quest) this is to be expected. In the Chulasihanāda sutta the Buddha describes the variety of measures he had to adopt to overcome the tricks and traps of the mind during the six year period of austerities the Bodhisatva spent, prior to reaching enlightenment.

## Question 61

**Can you explain if a person who is destined to realize *nibbāna* in this birth, will know this fact with certainty?**

That's not easy to predict because we are trapped by the concepts of space and time. It would be like if I was to say that everyone who is born will definitely die, but we cannot predict when that will happen.

When progressing on the meditative life after we reach the fourth *vipassanā* insight knowledge (*udayabbhaya ñāna*) we will cease to be affected by time/space constraints. Time and space are actually mind-made concepts. It is only after we transcend time/space that we will reach reality, i.e. from conventional truth we will arrive at ultimate truth. Then we will leave our individual traits and arrive at common traits. We will cease to hold prejudices and preferences on people and situations. We will 'graduate' from conventional speech/activity to those compatible with ultimate truth and reality. Our lives will then take a dramatic turn.

It is difficult to understand this in the context of the conventional world, the conventional professions and jobs we do, and in the context of the conventional lives we lead. It is through that lens that we view people, situations and events in our worldly lives. And this only gives a distorted view and is far from the ultimate truth.

The day we make the transition from convention to reality we will see all this as 'child's play'. But until then you should understand this in a theoretical sense and continue the practice whilst associating with *kalyānamitta*.

Often I am asked how a lay practitioner can develop a steadfast practice within a home environment and within a conventional societal/professional milieu? My advice is, as first choice, to always try to opt for seclusion, but if that is difficult then engage in society very selectively. We should remember that the two situations are incomparable and bring relative benefits. And balancing one's spiritual practice with societal obligations will be not easy. The latter is usually done with a compassionate mind set, so as to not disappoint the family/societal obligations. Whereas spiritual advancement is done with *paññā* at the fore front. There were occasions where even the Buddha had to selectively 'sacrifice' *paññā* for the sake of *karuṇā*. In fact there had been times, when even though he lived close to a village he withdrew into the nearby forest frequently because the seclusion helped him. Yet, on

occasion he had to visit the village for alms food, mingle with the people and he chose to teach them the Dhamma.

I know how difficult it is to move in society whilst protecting the spiritual life style. It can be quite a torture! But often we have no choice and we have to engage with society and in our jobs/professions, so let's do it wisely and selectively.

## Question 62 (B)

**During the sitting meditation session within a short while a very bright light enveloped my entire body.**

As an encouragement for a beginner I should mention that this is a good indication that *samādhi* has set in. As a rule of thumb we should note that a mind full of hindrances is a dark mind. With clearing of or suppression of hindrances it becomes illuminated. At the next sitting session as well, try to follow the same steps that you did during this session. Repeatedly try to do this. Some days you will be successful with this type of *samādhi* and on some days you may not.

## Question 63

**When a yogi becomes a stream enterer can you explain how the Noble Eight Fold Path is developed and its contributory role?**

We need to remember that from amongst the thirty seven enlightenment factors the Noble Eight Fold Path is the final instrument that we use from our 'tool kit' when progressing along the path. At a particular stage *samma ditthi*, *samma sankappa*, *samma vāyāma*, *samma sati*, *samma samādhi*, all become aligned with one another with precision, and will positively pave the way for the yogi to experience the single critical mind-moment (*maggā citta*) of enlightenment. At such a stage the other factors (eg, *samma*



*vāca, samma kammantha, samma ājiva*) would be contributory by simply being absent (as *virathi cetasika*).

During stream entry (when the first stage of sainthood - *sotapanna* is reached), the yogi will not see this entire mechanism of operation. The yogi will describe this significant occurrence during meditation as an electric experience, and he will realize it only after it has happened. But he will not be able to describe the exact mechanism and process underlying the exceptional realization that had occurred. Whereas, when the stage of *anāgāmi* is reached, the yogi would have repeatedly experienced this enlightening mind-moment and moreover, he would be primed with theoretical knowledge, deductive/inferential knowledge after having being an experienced practitioner for a very long time. Therefore he would be able to describe the underlying process that led to the enlightening mind-moment with clarity. And he will be able to detect the alignment of the five mentioned factors in the Noble Eight Fold Path, as it occurs. He would say that a successful sitting meditation session had been achieved.

I remember Venerable Nanarama saying that such a yogi, who experiences such a breakthrough, would, after such an enlightening experience, trace that entire sitting session from the end to the beginning and reflect on all the auspicious moments that led to that particular sitting and the breakthrough experienced. In fact all sincere practitioners sit for meditation pledging to see *nibbāna* in this life itself. But how many of us become successful? After many attempts if we become successful we should reflect on the auspicious mile stones which led up to that successful sitting, and then we could replicate such situations in subsequent sitting meditation sessions. When the stage of *sakkadāgāmi* is reached the yogi will know early, the signs that herald such a break through. At *anāgāmi* he would have mastered the situation thoroughly and would be able to command the situation at will, with exceptional skill. An *arahant* will not be very enthusiastic about reaching stages or having 'successful sittings' and will face the event with an

extremely balanced mind. There will be no aspirations, wants and needs for an *arahant*, at this stage.

## Question 64

***Citta ekaggata (samādhi)* and *sati* : please can explain how they reinforce each other?**

These two factors have a symbiotic relationship, i.e. *samādhi* will help develop *sati* and *sati* will help to develop *samādhi*. When describing the meditative path of *samatha purvangama vipassanā*, the practitioner will first achieve *citta ekaggata*, and then, by using *sati* he will direct his meditation towards *vipassanā*. The practitioner who uses *vipassanā purvangama samatha*, will have only momentary concentration (*kanikha samādhi*) and not *citta ekaggata*. But with *sati* that he would have developed a strong base in the dhamma teachings and the meditative teachings. And with continued/uninterrupted *sati* he would develop *kanikha samādhi*, which is equally powerful.

Usually lay practitioners commence with *sati* practice and gradually develop *kanikha samādhi*. This helps them, since lay practitioners find it difficult to devote full time towards the development of deep *samādhi*. Since *sati* is a powerful book-keeping tool it helps the yogi to see things clearly, whilst engaged in day to day activities. In fact such yogis develop wisdom in this manner, i.e. worldly wisdom = *laukika paññā* (as opposed to spiritual wisdom = *lokottara paññā*) and thereby he will gradually distance himself from consumerism, luxury life styles and busy schedules. With this effort the yogi will find that opportunities open out for him to start developing *citta ekaggata*. This is a very gradual process.

*Sati* is the mental factor – *cetasika* - that does the initial feasibility study for the yogi, and helps the yogi to understand who he really is.

The multiple tasks and responsibilities we take on during our life time taxes us incessantly. The more we heap on ourselves multiple responsibilities the further we get away from spirituality. No one will help us to see this inevitability. Eventually we become the losers. *Sati* will always show us what we are doing and where we are going, so that before we become old and feeble we would have trained our minds. *Sampajjañña* (wise reflection) and *samādhi* are products of continued *sati* practice and will manifest later. For this to happen *sati* has to lay the foundation and pave the way. None of the other spiritual faculties (eg *saddhā*, *virīya*, *samādhi*, *paññā*) can do the task that *sati* can do.

When developed, *sati* will show us that in all our 'victories' in a lay life, we will eventually become 'losers'. I can personally testify for that. And I learnt this only after I had developed *sati*.

Seeing things as they really are, thus became a possibility.

## Question 65

**When participating in meditation programs such as these and after experiencing the benefits, I feel sad that I cannot get my parents to engage in a similar manner. I wish I could offer them the same benefits that I am getting.**

My simple answer is : '*mind your own business*'!

Whilst you are stuck deeply in the mud how can you expect to rescue another? If you try to do that you will get stuck deeper in that same mud. After we experience the benefits of meditation we tend to harbor an incorrect notion that we can 'rescue' our children and other family members, and friends who are not in the Path. The Buddha said to remember that we too are in the large mud pool. And to first save ourselves, or at least to grab a branch of a tree or a twig first, and then attempt to save others.

When you come on retreat please don't think of the past or family members or any other.

Make maximum use of this precious opportunity and always try to be in the present moment. And don't allow the mind to hanker after past events/people or fantasize/dream of the future. If you do so you will be allowing *kāmacchanda*, *bhava tanha*, *vibhava tanha*, to take the upper hand and you will sacrifice the time available for meditation.

## Question 66

**When we make *sañña* a primary object of meditation how do we deal with it?**

In the Ānāpānāsati sutta during the first tetrad the Buddha describes when the breath gets refined *kāyasankhāra* subsides. During *vedanānupassanā* – the second tetrad, third line, states: *cittasankhāra patisamvedi assasissāmītisikkhatī*. The yogi begins to experience *cittasankhāra* (*vedanā*, *saññā*) - various sensations like pain, pleasure as well as various images, sounds, smells etc can be experienced. These are all mind-made perceptions and will manifest only after the breath gets refined and indistinct. Although they appear as very real, these are not real and the yogi is often unsure if he is dreaming or fantasizing. These arise from the deep memories/signs that are 'stored' in the mind from the past or from an imaginary future. Not from the present. The Buddha advised us to disclaim all these mind-made perceptions (*saññā*) and not to consider them as 'mine, I am, me'. Then we will not cling to these stray perceptions, images, memories and imaginary signs, and thereby not suffer from the after effects of these *saññā*.

In the famous Mahayana sutta – Surangama sutta, the ten types of perceptions that we can meet during this stage of meditation are mentioned. In fact we can be led astray and even imagine that we are communicating with other realms such as the

Brahma/Deva/other worlds. Unfortunately some teachers cultivate a large following as a result of these teachings. This happens because some yogis will not recognize *saññā* as *saññā*, and have not understood that these are just An illusion, a mirage, giving us an impression of being real.

The well-known ten imperfections of insight (*dasa vidarshana upakkilesa*) which are traps that a yogi can fall into during his/her meditative journey, deal with *vedanā* and not with *saññā*.

This same Surangama sutta, further describes 50 dangerous situations the yogi may meet during deep meditation. And these are in relation to the five aggregates – 10 per each aggregate (*khandā*).

But I reiterate that these situations occur in meditators who meditate not with the idea of seeking *nibbāna*. In fact they have various ulterior motives in their mind, like developing healing abilities and similar activity. The importance of the spiritual faculty *paññā* is thus highlighted, since those with a preponderance of *saddhā* and with inadequate *paññā*, are more likely to be led astray than others. Hence the importance of understanding the *cetasika saññā* very well, and knowing when/where/how these can emerge during meditation. Similarly, the importance of *sīla* and the deep commitment to the practice and finally the yogi's commitment towards reaching *nibbāna*.

### Question 67 (B)

**After commencing sitting meditation I notice that the mind stays comfortably with the sitting posture, rather than with the breath. I can use the breath as an anchor but I find that staying with the posture helps me to meditate better.**

Whilst appreciating the question I would advise that if from the start of the sitting meditation session you are able to stay with the posture/body, then there is no serious requirement to have a specific object/anchor like the breath. And if you can keep the attention or

*sati* on the body posture, as continuous as possible, that is very good. This is not in any way intended to relegate *ānāpānasati* or walking meditation to a less important position. My only advice is that keeping *sati* intact without a specific anchor is preferable to using a specific anchor. This is indicative of a mind that is gaining ground in facing challenging situations.

Usually after about the third or fourth day at a retreat such as this, yogis are able to develop this ability.

### Question 68

**I use rise and fall of the abdomen as the object of my practice. After a while I cannot feel the rise/fall distinctly. Subsequently I also lose the body sensation gradually.**

I can describe this experience in three stages:

1. Coarse object – easy to note
2. Indistinct object – may or may not note
3. Totally refined object – cannot note at all

These are the natural phases of evolution of the same event. When reaching the third stage, yogis can become confused and doubtful when they had not kept a continuous/uninterrupted *sati* along the way. Had they ensured that *sati* was intact when they evolved from 1. to 3. There would be no confusion and the yogi would clearly know how he/she got there.

From knowing the coarse object to not knowing it, does not occur during one thought-moment. It is very gradual and occurs over time, accompanied by other changes like feeling chills/heat, trembling/swinging, lightness/heaviness, sleepiness etc. If the yogi can be well prepared and can notice all these happenings en-route and keep the *virīya*, energy levels high then the yogi will gradually transfer from the known to the unknown. As though he is transgressing the conventional mind to reach the 'subconscious' mind. This is a very important journey and *sati* is an indispensable tool for success. This is also an indication of the arising of *sampajañña* - a significant milestone in the *vipassanā* practise.

## Question 69

**When proceeding with *Ānāpānasati*, at a particular stage when the breath is exceedingly refined I feel as though thoughts emerge from deep within, and I am 'awakened' to those thoughts.**

Our mind is full of thoughts and other mental factors, and our mind cannot exist without thoughts. Inert thoughts are thoughts that always float to and fro with no aim and purpose. Like waves of an ocean that keep lapping throughout the day, such thoughts are always in existence. It is similar to a state between a dream and a partial dream-like state. However, when in *sati* we notice this situation for the first time. And we see how thoughts keep flowing incessantly devoid of our control. It is as though our mind is being used continuously without our knowledge. Invariably these inert thoughts take us in unwholesome directions based on the virulence of our defilements. And we keep claiming such a mind and thoughts as, 'me/mine/I am'.

Only the powerful torch of *sati* will expose this dangerous situation. Only when we intentionally stop bodily and verbal activity, and watch the state of mind can we see this drama being enacted according to an agenda that's not ours. This requires a lot of restraint in speech and action. Even then, when we reach the deeper layers of the mind we meet two types of thoughts – intentional and unintentional (*sasankhāra* and *asanskhāra*). But this is a very fine divide and are almost indistinguishable. Fortunately humans have the unique ability to watch this scenario as though from outside (using *sati*) and note how thoughts arise and pass away. We shouldn't pass judgments on these and try to analyse how this occurs. We should remember that >99% of these random thoughts have arisen spontaneously with no intention or control on our part. We cannot govern or claim these thoughts as mine. Indeed they are *anatta*.

If we claim these thoughts as I/ me/mine, we will invariably collect these into our *samsāric* baggage and these will travel with us into future births. But cultivating the ability to see these thoughts as a detached spectator, is a valuable practice. This needs a brave and courageous outlook. We advise practitioners to repeatedly try to reach this stage and to allow hidden thoughts to emerge instead of suppressing them. *Vipassanā* practice provides for such 'healing' where defilements get a chance for exposure and thereby loss of virulence.

## Question 70

**Can you explain the teaching how *dukkha* is always caused by *tanhā*?**

When the four Noble Truths are described we find that *tanhā* is referred to as the only cause of *dukkha*. However, when analyzing further we find that contributing towards *tanhā* and operating alongside, are its proximate causes such as *vedanā*, *phassa*, *upadhi*, *avijjā* – being ignorant of the four Noble Truths. Therefore, although *tanhā* takes a leadership role in causing *dukkha*, all the other factors mentioned have a big role to play. Indeed the cause of *dukkha* is multi factorial.

Supposing when a visual impingement occurs and we are unable to stop it at that point (i.e. *ditthe dittha mattham bahissathi*), thoughts and thought proliferation (*papañca*) occur and the next causal link become activated – *tanhā*. But we are taught that the greater amount of *akusal* is created during a day is not by *tanhā*, but due to *dosa* – anger, irritation, hatred. We may very genuinely pledge to stay in the present moment – but we actually detest being in the present. In fact we keep changing our postures and movements and we get engaged in various activities, all because we dislike the present moment. Therefore if I say that *samsāra* is perpetuated due to *dosa*, I think I am being accurate. Presently even though we are in a retreat environment, having observed eight precepts and sitting amidst a



similar group of persons, however much we try to get the mind to stay in the present moment it won't do so.

This shows the hatred we have for the present moment. I would also like to say that development of knowledge, modern scientific and other discoveries have taken place due to the dissatisfaction people have for the present moment. This is how hatred and irritation take over.

Yet, the Buddha said that *tanhā* was the cause of *dukkha*. What then is the link between *tanhā* and *dosa*? *Tanhā* is of three types – *kāma tanhā*, *bhava tanhā*, *vibhava tanhā*.

***Kāma tanhā*** – the desire to please our own senses with material/carnal pleasures. (*Āmisa sukha*)

***Bhava tanhā*** - the desire to extend those sense-pleasures to kith and kin, family and friends, in the present moment as well as in the future, and also wherever else we go. Clearly we are dissatisfied with the contentment of the present moment, and the *tanhā* to please 'me' becomes pleasing 'we, us/ours'. Gradually it becomes an extension and expansion of greed to mega levels.

***Vibhava tanhā*** - When the above aspirations cannot be fulfilled (which is normally the case) we develop anger/hatred. This can become very severe. We see this in ourselves, our family and in society. The greater the aspirations greater the obstacles and thereby greater the dissatisfaction. *Samsāra* gets lengthened due to these complicated reasons.

Being in the present moment and 'minding our own business' (as a mature yogi would do) is simple and uncomplicated. The moment we complicate this situation we will be asking for trouble. But such a person leading a simplified life is accused of being selfish and not caring about others. Society is likely to be critical. We need to mark out our functional jurisdiction and operate within such a frame

work only. The reason why we find it difficult to stay with the present moment and our object of meditation is because our mind plays tricks. Various deceptive and dormant *dhammas* appear in the mind, and monotony, doubt and hatred appear. With forbearance and wisdom we should continue the practice of being with the meditation object and in the present moment.

## Question 71

- **Do mindfulness and wise reflection (*sati* and *yoniso manasikāra*) have a significant role to play in preventing the arising of unskillful-unwholesome thoughts, which have not yet arisen?**
- **Seeing already arisen unskillful thoughts using *sati* – can this be achieved by suppressing the five hindrances?**

The first part of this question deals with guarding with effort (*virīya samvara*) - the first of the Four Right Efforts (*sathara sammappadhan virīya*), which is one of the thirty seven enlightenment factors. The practitioner needs to make special effort to guard against new impurities entering the mind. He would make effort to ensure that each next *cittakkhana* (thought-moment) is protected from unskillful-unwholesome thoughts that may arise.

Such a practitioner builds 'fences' for this type of protection by creating wholesome environments to be in, associating with *kalyānamitta* and thus developing one's own spirituality. This is entirely by perfecting *virīya samvara*. If these protective mechanisms aren't in place, even for a clever practitioner there is a big danger of the next thought-moment becoming impure. Because impurities in the surrounding environment, association with unwholesome persons and not developing one's own spirituality will lead to polluting mind-states and thoughts.



There is also a situation where even whilst being in a pure environment, due to past *kamma*, habits and addictions/ preferences and personality traits there will still be situations where impure thoughts and dislikes arise in the mind. This is where internal *kilesa* within mind will appear even though external causative factors have been eliminated. The chances of seeing and identifying the latter become easier when the first mentioned factors are accomplished – I.e when protective mechanisms have been put in place and *virīya samvara* is being practiced. When faced with external impurities and when internal thoughts become impure, it results in a mixture of the two and it becomes difficult to separate the two.

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We then find it difficult to distinguish:

- Unskillful-unwholesome thoughts, which have not yet arisen in the mind
- Unskillful thoughts that have already arisen in the mind

Therefore *virīya samvara* plays a big role in the first instance. It is only when those protective systems are in place that we can apply *sati samvara* and identify the already arisen *kilesa* within the mind. Theoretically therefore *virīya samvara* needs to be strengthened in

order for *sati samvara* to be effective. *Virīya* becomes a proximate cause for *sati*. However in practice it is not very easy to draw this distinction clearly. And we are not in a position to see clearly which defilement came from the past and which arose due to the present environment.

The novice meditator will not see these two operational mechanisms as being distinct from one another. However an experienced meditator will be able to identify these two situations clearly and will apply secondary data analysis so that he will identify *kilesa* that have arisen from within the mind distinctly. He will also know that it is only when the mind is protected and guarded from external impurities with right effort, that *sati* will be able to identify these internal *kilesa*. This protection will facilitate the second Right Effort (*sammappadhāna virīya*) –i.e, disallowing already arisen impure mind-states from proliferating, as well as getting rid of already arisen impure mind-states.

We should remember that *kilesa* are of three types:

1. *Vītikama kilesa* (transgressional defilements)
2. *Pariyuttāna kilesa* (obsessive defilements)
3. *Anusaya kilesa* (dormant, latent tendencies)

When preventing already arisen impure mind-states from proliferating, we have already applied the first Right Effort – i.e. preventing non-arisen impurities from arising. Which means that the necessary safe guards such as sense-restraint have been applied and *vītikama kilesa* (transgressions due to bodily actions and speech) are kept in check by wholesome associations and suitable environmental conditions. Thereafter until *samādhi* sets in there is significant disturbance to the mind due to the five hindrances. Due to the discursive nature of the mind it is not possible to see things as they really are. At some point when the meditator experiences a state of *samādhi* (either *samatha samādhi* or *vipassanā samādhi*) he/she would realize that *pariyuttāna kilesa* are getting suppressed

and that the mind is free of the hindrances. Yet, the meditator will feel discontent due to monotony and may want to leave the meditation session. This situation arises due to the dormant defilements – *anusaya kilesa*.

During a state of *samādhi* even though the five hindrances are suppressed and the *pariyuttāna kilesa* are kept in check, still the *anusaya kilesa* are very much active. This stage cannot be realized overnight or after a few sitting sessions. It is only after a very long time and after the mind gets accustomed to staying in states of purity with the hindrances suppressed, that the meditator will be primed to meet the *anusaya kilesa*. It is only with pure, hindrance-free mind states that *sati* will be able to detect and distinguish externally arisen impurities from the dormant defilements. This is a very difficult task. When impurities arise in the mind we have a tendency to attribute this situation to external factors. This is done due to the perception of self (*ātma saññā*). We rarely understand that this is due to our own deep dormant defilements. A lot of patience and understanding is needed to reach this stage, and necessarily the yogi would have overcome the transgressional defilements and would have suppressed the five hindrances to see the *anusaya*.

## Question 72

- **Please advise how a practitioner will know if the three lower fetters, i.e. *sakkāya ditthi* (self-view) , *vichikicca* (doubt) and *sīlabbatha parāmāsa* (attachment to rites and rituals) are weakening?**
- **Does such weakening occur entirely due to meditation practice?**

I would like to refer to some important *suttas* dealing with *animitta* (signless state). The Buddha reminds that every *kilesa* arises with a sign (*nimitta*), with an object, with a feeling (*vedanā*), with a relevant label/recognition (*saññā*) – thus arousing and provoking

us to create *sankhāra*. Therefore, if during meditation the practitioner feels that the *nimitta* or object of meditation is wearing off, and if pleasant/unpleasant feelings are lessening, if the ability to recognize the object diminishes - then it would mean that the yogi has progressed from knowing the individual characteristics of the object to the common characteristics. This is a significant step because it means that self-view, doubt and attachment to rituals are diminishing. When the *rūpa* (object), *vedanā*, *saññā*, **sankhāra** diminish it means that the lower fetters are weakening.

We should know that these lower fetters don't dramatically leave us with a bang!

It is a very gradual and slow process.

In day to day life we may choose objects and experience situations where we have pleasant feelings or anger – but these may not last long and these emotions may diminish rapidly. Similarly, we may choose people or situations as per our likes and dislikes, but then again these preferences will diminish with time. And we may get less provoked and excited about situations. This means our fetters are weakening and that they have a minimal impact. Generally such people who are non-responsive, non-provocative are referred to as 'wimps' in society, those with no personality, and as weaklings who don't take any stand on anything, who don't react and don't get provoked. Previously we all had a personality and identity we treasured and protected. This situation has changed in those with weakened fetters.

The interest and concern for maintaining one's personality, one's dwellings, food and one's associations were very important. But this situation changes and there will be a general disinterest. Attachments towards all assets would also change with weakening of lower fetters. It is as though we have lost our individuality or 'citizenship'!

## Question 73

**We have been advised regards thought-proliferation (*papañca*) and to be mindful when it occurs. Yet when issues regards one meditation practice arise how can we deal with this situation?**

The reason to avoid *papañca* is because it causes inner chatter and thus promotes formation of *sankhāra*. However when certain issues related to meditation practice arise they need to be clarified by a teacher. During the time of the Buddha, senior disciples like Venerable Sāriputta used to raise questions on the Dhamma so that the Buddha could give the answers for the benefit of the sangha. Whenever we are faced with a difficulty or an ambiguity related to our practice, always examine within and see if you are well on the Path and following the prescribed teachings. And if when such situations arise just see if your *kilesa* are on the decline? If YES, do not question or worry about the issue, because the next step will be towards a state with less *kilesa*. If the yogi does not question or *papañca* during those junctures, invariably the *patipadhā* will take him forward.

The reason for questions/*papañca* to form in the mind of such yogis, could be attributed to the work of Māra – who would wish to interrupt the meditative journey and block progress of a serious practitioner. Because even though the question may appear very appropriate and clever on the part of the yogi, Māra's objective of digressing from the trend would have been achieved. And we become Māra's slaves.

## Question 74

**During walking meditation I notice both feet and the steps I take, whilst at the same time I note the thoughts that come and go. In fact even when normally walking (when not in**

**meditation) I have the same experience. Are these two situations any different from one another?**

In fact we can take this question and describe it as three scenarios:

1. During walking meditation every detail of each step can be noticed with clarity. The individual characteristics of each step can be observed in detail
2. When in walking meditation knowing the walking process whilst noting sounds, thoughts and sights that come and go
3. In day to day life we note our walking in a similar fashion and also simultaneously note how thoughts come and go

*Viññāna* tricks us to make us see these as three distinct entities, and makes us question the veracity of each experience and makes us choose one from another! When in fact it is the same situation experienced in three different ways. *Viññāna* tries to exploit every situation in an extremely fraudulent and deceptive manner, so that doubts arise in our minds and we resort to proliferation of thought - *papañca*. We may think we have an inquiring mind and that our intellectual curiosity is at a height. In fact this is not so. We are simply succumbing and becoming victims of the traditional tricks of *viññāna*.

Can we proceed with the practice without creating doubts in our minds and can we accept things as they arise with no questioning or analysis? This is a significant deviation from what we have been trained to do – academically and professionally. We may then seem like not having a strong personality. But that's the only way to not succumb to the traps laid out for us. The Buddha warns us that each time we begin to question and doubt situations, we have left the present moment. We have started riding our thoughts. We have begun the journey of *papañca* and question the Dhamma the teaching, and wondering if this is included in the Abhidhamma,

Vinaya pitaka and much more. In fact we have become victims and *viññāna* becomes king!

That is indeed the task and the work assigned to *viññāna* – to perpetuate doubt and create situations where worry and restlessness ensue, i.e. to stir the pot! It is the most difficult of the five aggregates to identify and isolate. It is much sharper and shrewder than you will ever know. Therefore my advice is to not leave room for *viññāna* to take the upper hand, to create conflict in our minds and thereby fertilize the 'I, me, Mine' factor and the *kilesa*. Whenever divisions are created and choosing/judgments take place only the 'I, me, mine'- factor wins.

My advice is to remain uninvolved and unperturbed whatever issue comes your way. This is not traditional meditation, but application of deductive knowledge, *yoniso manasikāra* and correcting one's view. This is a mastery of one's mind to approach issues with wise reflection. This is the approach to wisdom.

Main thing is not to worry and Mind Your Own Business!

## Question 75

***Suññatā* and silence in the mind and *adukkhamasukha* – are these all the same?**

This could be explained as absolute truth and relative truth. Because in a gradual process when *animitta* replaces the *nimitta* during meditation, we progress with diminishing *rūpa*, to diminishing *vedanā*, to diminishing *saññā* and *sankhāra* and so on. There are different levels we experience during this journey. We tend to get attached to each level and to see each stage as *nicca*, *subha*, *ātma* (permanent, pleasant, as self). Each situation is relative to the other. And these events rapidly pass each other so much so that we cannot even take a sign of anything. *Suññatā* is also relative.

We cannot take as real and as permanent, anything or anyone. The aim should be to gradually increase the purification process.

## Question 76

**I tend to question and interpret experiences during meditation. On days when I feel I have not had a good session of meditation I attribute it to the mental state I had had.**

Questioning meditative experiences is healthy for a beginner. But as we progress if we consider and claim each experience as 'me, I and my self' then we have a problem. We all have a right to question. But the question needs to be for utility value. If we attach ourselves and make these meditative experiences me, mine, my self – then we have a problem and questions ensue. And if we view these experiences within a frame of '*nicca*, *subha*, *sukha*' then again we have an issue!

We don't need a frame. We don't need any interpretations. Just let go of everything and keep the practice. We need to have a balanced mind and not make anything as 'me, mine and myself' and thereby not cling to anything.

If we are able to experience empty mind states and still let go of the 'bliss' accompanying it that's good. It is even better if can experience thoughts invading such empty mind states, and still remain unperturbed. A sharpened *sati* is needed to know the latter and still remain balanced. The *virīya* and *sati* needed to face such states are immense.

## Question 77

***Mama den methane* (I am in the present moment) : I find this a very comfortable meditation whether I am working, traveling or in meditation. More recently I experience a kind of emptiness with this situation. Can you explain this?**

This is a very good state and should not pose a problem. In fact what is the problem faced? We should welcome this type of emptiness and not allow *viññāna* to exploit the situation. This type of *papañca* occurs due to *viññāna*. If we don't allow this exploitation then the *viññāna* becomes dysfunctional and non-effective, i.e. *anidassana*. Let us awaken to this type of double games played within our mind. If all 52 *cetasika* align with one another then it is very powerful whereas if the 52 mind states start pulling in different directions, then there will be conflict within.

### Question 78

**During meditation practice I have realized that I indulge in self-hate. I also have a lot of remorse and regret, and self-pity. My guess is that I am a 'dosa-charitha' and would like some advice regards the meditation practices I should adopt? Presently I do some *metta* radiation to everyone prior to *ānāpānasati*.**

The fact that you have recognized these features about yourself is a huge advantage spiritually. Most of us have these traits but fail to recognize them. I am not against *metta bhāvana* but I would recommend that you continue diligently with *ānāpānasati* and keep *sati* at the forefront and watch your mind states. I am reminded of a book written on the teachings of A. G. I. Gurdjieff (an influential Russian spiritual teacher of the early to mid-20th century) where it says that the following four features appearing in a person is diagnostic that *sati* is growing in him/her:

1. Fault finding
2. Self-hate
3. Irritation about everything and everyone around
4. Pedantic

Although these four features seem non-complementary to the individual it is a definite sign of progress in relation to development of *sati*.

*Kalyānamitta* are essential to teach this aspect of the *dhamma* during our journey. And continue with the practice incessantly.

### Question 79

**After settling down into a comfortable sitting posture and practicing breath meditation, after a while I wish to change my posture. Is this recommended?**

As soon as you get the indication that the body is not comfortable and as soon as the mind says that you should change the posture, you should not go ahead and do so. We should recognize the discomfort and first see if we could stay with the meditation object despite the discomfort and pain. If the meditation object is still more prominent than the discomfort then we should stay in the same posture. An experienced meditator would watch the signs of the mind first. If after sometime the pain is quite unbearable, and if it overrides the meditation object then he should 'ask the body' what it wants done. If the indication is to change posture then he should shift the position very slowly, with no sound, whilst being extremely mindful. Thereafter he should revert to the meditation object. Gradually, the meditator will learn the technique of coping with pain, sounds and thoughts and still remain with the meditation object. He will then learn that the meditation object becomes his refuge despite all disturbances.

### Question 80 (B)

**When a person is in distress (mentally or physically) how can we use meditation to help him/her to overcome his situation?**

The Buddha has taught that anyone in the *samsāric* circle will invariably have four *samsāric* diseases;

1. Birth (*jāti*)



2. Old age (*vyādi*)
3. Disease (*Jarā*)
4. Death (*marana*)

All other problems are less serious than these. Every one of us will have these four diseases. Even the Buddha. Certain Western therapists advocate that in certain situations we should use medication rather than meditation as therapy. In certain other conditions they advocate medication as well as meditation. In yet another situation, they say that pure meditation alone can be fully therapeutic.

I would advise that if a person is in some form of distress to first motivate generosity – *dāna*. Encourage and help them to offer *dāna*, and at least make them participants of *dāna* arranged by others. *Kalyānamitta* should do this.

Subsequently you should motivate them to practice *sīla sikkha* – restraint and discipline. These two would create a lot of mental peace and relief, and make the person fearless. Eventually after a while you could introduce the person to meditation.

Venerable Pa Auk Sayadaw used to say that in the case of Western practitioners, they first need to be introduced to *dāna* and the *sīla*, instead of immediately introducing meditation. Direct exposure to *vipassanā* practice often doesn't produce results in such practitioners.

Therefore a gradual approach is needed.

In the case of monastics, the step by step approach is *sīla, samādhi, paññā*. In the case of laity it is *dāna, sīla, bhāvana*. And the word *bhāvana* could be replaced by *sati*. And *sati* is simply awareness and is not exclusively the domain of the Buddhists. Although the Buddha exposed the value of *sati* with the exposition of the *satipatthāna*, Buddhists cannot claim monopoly. On his death bed at

*parinibbāna*, the Buddha said : '*Appamadena Bhikkhave Sampadetha Vaya Dhamma Sankhāra*' (with mindfulness strive on, all formations are impermanent). The Buddha never said to meditate. He just asked us to be mindful. This may not be 'religious' but is the first step in that direction.

## Question 81

**During sitting meditation after noting the breath for a while, when the breath seems to disappear I feel a vibratory sensation and I am not sure whether this is the breath or not. Later it appears as if the breath is circling in the chest area. Subsequently I feel as though the breath is moving from one direction to another. Please advise if I am heading in the correct direction?**

It appears as if the writer is in the junction between noting the *vāyo dhātu* (air element) of the breath (i.e. *rūpa*, materiality) and the transition to *rūpa saññā* (perception of the material form). A practitioner with uninterrupted mindfulness will be able to follow this gradual transition distinctly and with no doubt. When the *rūpa* gives way to *rūpa saññā*, we can be confused as to whether we are actually noting the breath or whether the mind is playing tricks on us. This is because the meditation is proceeding with the mind taking centre stage. It is difficult to identify what exactly we are experiencing. And we ask ourselves, 'are these experiences mind-made or real, or are we in a dream-like-state?'

$E=MC^2$  is the classic formula introduced by Einstein where he described the interrelatedness between energy and matter. That matter gets transformed to energy and vice versa. In fact it is primordial energy that becomes matter. This is how we experience *rūpa* and then we experience *rūpa saññā* and vice versa. The mind is at the forefront. It is the mind that tells us whether it is *rūpa* or a perception of *rūpa*. It is the mind that questions every experience in our meditation practice. So the mind dictates all.

Remember the Dhammapada first verse –

*'Mano pubbam gamā dhammā  
Mano setta mano mayā....'*

(The mind precedes everything. The mind is the fore-runner of all things..)

### Question 82 (B)

**During walking meditation I can proceed smoothly with no contemplation and with minimum thoughts. I also feel quite equanimous. Do you have any advice to offer to further progress on this path?**

My advice is to continue this repeatedly. There may be times that walking meditation proceeds very smoothly. Yet there may be times when thoughts and other disturbances occur. But if you can develop resilience to proceed with the practice with a balanced mind despite obstacles, then you have progressed. The ideal situation would be for the walking meditation to be almost 'robotic' or a mechanized process where you are simply a passive observer. This situation leads to a direct taming of *kilesa*. You need to replicate the same during day to day life. Then such work is done with no stress and you will feel fresh at the end of the day and may not need any rest! You will soon realize that this 'freshness' and lack of stress is not due to external factors or due to the posture you adopt. It is simply how the mind is getting adjusted to disturbances and still is able to remain balanced.

### Question 83 (B)

**In spite of meditating for quite a while I still have disturbances that appear during sitting and walking meditation. I have not yet conquered the situation successfully.**

The Buddha never intended us to completely conquer every disturbance with success. He only showed us how we could remain with a balanced mind despite disturbances. No garden will be ever free of weeds. Always disturbances will come our way. But can we continue the practice and walk the Path steadily in the midst of turbulence OR will we worry each step of the way?

Some people can be named as perpetual worriers. In fact they thrive on worry!

Instead we should learn to not claim each obstacle to the practice and consider them in the frame: 'mine, me, I'. You will notice that we suffer due to issues that we claim as 'me, mine, I'.

For example; **my** children, **my** spouse, **my** country, **my** race, **my** religion etc. will always cause sorrow. The moment we view this through a 'not-me, not-mine, not-I' lens the frustration and sorrow diminishes significantly. The Buddha constantly reminds us to first try to see reality in relation to our selves, and then we will see how futile it is to feel for and worry about others. When there is no real 'self' how can we correct/worry about others.

Please refer the **Dhammapada** :

*Attā hi attano nāto  
Kuto putto kuto danam*

(.. When there is no control over self, what control have we over sons or wealth?)

We need to remember that in this journey our aim is not to completely eradicate all *kilesa* but to reduce these to a manageable level. Once we achieve that state through regular diligent practice, the rest will be taken care of, with maturing *yoniso manasikāra* and *sammā ditthi*.

## Question 84

**After practicing breath meditation for a while, I feel I am stooping forwards. Then I correct my posture. Then after the breath fades away I feel further changes and movements, which I am tempted to correct. But will this disturb the progress of meditation.**

The breath 'fading away' is indicative of calming down of bodily formations (*passambhayam kāyāsanhāram*). The sequence of events is the manifestation of perceptions and sensations (*saññā* and *vedanā*). When the body 'stoops forward' it could mean that you have a perception that the body is changing posture – a *saññā*. If the yogi is fully aware of this transition from *kaya sankhāra* to *citta sankhāra*, this would mean that he has experienced the calming down of the bodily formations. The yogi should simply observe these new manifestations and not try to interfere. He should know clearly that these are *citta sankhāra* and not *kaya sankhāra* or *vacī ankhāra*, and simply watch these. This is progress on the path. However if we correct the posture or interfere in any way we will once again regress and *kaya sankhāra* will re appear and the breath will become coarse. We shouldn't keep questioning ourselves doubting our state of progress.

We should just note any change in postures and keep meditating. – *mute muta mattam bahissati*. (In the sensed, let there be only the sensed).

We need to stay in meditation with minimal reaction.

## Question 85

**After the breath 'diminishes' during meditation I can feel the manifestation of the four elements. But I wonder if I am actually experiencing these or if it is the knowledge I gain by**

**repeatedly listening to your Dhamma Talks, that is giving me this impression.**

**Please can you explain how I can clearly differentiate *cintāmaya ñāna* (deductive/inferential knowledge) from *bhāvanāmaya ñāna* (practical realization) ?**

**This is very difficult during a meditation sitting.**

I can understand this situation clearly. Yes, when *rūpa* start to fade away *citta sankhāra* appear, as I said before. These can create various impressions and the yogi will be confused not knowing what he is facing. What is not real can be made to seem real. But an experienced yogi will always ask himself whether he should fall for these tricks, and question if these perceptions are in fact real?

Who is the magician conjuring these tricks? Am I the doer? Should I claim these as 'me/mine'?

A meditator who does not have a healthy mind state or who is not stable physically or mentally, can easily get duped and may he may even seek support from external sources when confronted with such perceptions and illusions. He/she may think these are the result of some inadequacy of his/her *sīla* or *saddhā*. The Buddha advised us to ensure that all these aspects are well addressed. And we must be fully aware of what is going on and know that this is a situation where we can't distinguish a dream from reality, an illusion from the truth, a mirage from the truth. That is a fact.

Until we started meditating we never experienced this. And we thought all was real. That all is as we see it. But actually it is not so. Even when not meditating one day we will see that what we consider as *nicca*, *sukha*, *subha* are in fact the very opposite. What we see as real and true, are in fact a mirage, an illusion, a magician's trick.

It is very difficult to explain this to someone who does not meditate. The tricks of *citta sankhāra* are the most difficult to understand. We tend to be remorseful about the dreams we have and we think about these when we become awake. Dreams are the results of perceptions - *saññā*. But an *arahant* would see the entire life he led before becoming an *arahant*, as a dream. And he would recall how unnecessarily he had stress and tension. When 'awakened' (as would an *arahant* or the Buddha) the past seems so futile. We cry and weep and regret so much, so unnecessarily. The reality (i.e. 'truth') is so different.

It is only then that we will know what the Buddha actually taught.

## Question 86 (B)

**Please advise me whether, as a beginner, I should commence meditation practice with *ānāpānasati*?**

Since meditation seems a complicated term, my advice has always been to replace 'meditation' with *sati*. The question could therefore be rephrased as 'how can we begin to practice *sati*'?

Very simply, the answer is to know how unmindful we are during a day. If we make an attempt to know how we conduct our daily affairs with no mindfulness, it could be a reason for shame and for sadness. We keep making so many excuses regards our duties towards our family, workplace, our country and many others. As a result we neglect being mindful and we won't embark on meditation. By the time death is near we have nothing left to seek refuge in. And we would have wasted away our lives and this precious human birth.

*Appamāda* (i.e. heedfulness, being mindful) is a quality that only humans possess. Even devas and brahmas do not have this ability. And it is only through *Appamāda* that we would know the reason for living and the value of this human birth. If not, we work 24/7 and

we are not aware according to whose agenda this life is being dictated. Every such 'agenda' is dictated by Māra. The body is operating according to this agenda, i.e. to lengthen *samsara*. Only the Buddha said to analyse this aspect with awareness. And to use this human body in the best possible manner, towards spirituality. Only such a spiritual person will live this life to the best of his/her ability and will work towards liberation. All others will endeavor to become good slaves, working hard according to another's agenda.

Let me refer to the *Karaniya Metta sutta* –  
'*karaniya matta kusalena*  
*Yantam santam padam*  
*Abisamecca*  
*Sacco ujū ca sujūca...*'

(He who endeavors to be highly skillful, and wishes to attain the state of calm, *nibbāna* Such a person is able perfectly, to be rid of heedlessness/un-mindfulness, He has a positive mindset in that regard)

The Buddha urges us to develop a positive mindset that heedfulness can be developed. No one will help you in that regard, and we need to develop it ourselves. In fact, others near you make you work continuously and your colleagues may make use of you. And you will not realize that until you become 60+ and become irrelevant and of little use for all those people.

My advice is to start being heedful when young. Spend a small amount of the day being mindful and in seclusion. Start by devoting a little time towards this. Gradually you may increase this.

This is the best help you can give yourself.

## Question 87

**The Buddha has taught that he considers as his disciples, all those who practice the doctrine he preached, rather than those who observe Buddhist rituals only. As a nun who is observing ten precepts and having associated with nuns, I find that there is a discrimination between nuns who have observed a higher *sīla* (*upsampadā*) and those like us. We are all striving on the same Path, and due to a variety of reasons the precepts we have chosen to observe may vary. Hence I find this discrimination disturbing.**

There is no clear answer but let us try to analyse the issue you have raised.

Buddhist nuns can be categorized into the following:

1. Ten precept nuns (*sil meniyō*)
2. Meheninwahansa
3. Sikkha māna
4. Upasampadā

Similarly, Buddhist monks can be classified as following:

1. Sāmanera
2. Upasampadā

Always in Asian cultures like Sri Lanka there is male dominance in every sphere. Females are expected to be those who serve the males. This is not so in the West where even in an employment application form gender is not questioned. Yet, even in the West they apply discrimination in other forms. As long as the mental factor *māna* (conceit) exists, there will also be some form of discrimination and measurement of one another. But we have no ability to correct societal norms. All we can do is to note this and not get mentally disturbed as a result.

We meditate, not to correct the world. Nor do we meditate for accolades and veneration from the world. I remember the book written by the revered bhikkhu, Venerable Renukane Chandawimale: where he says that the sky and the *sangha* will be always subject to blame and criticism. When we enter the monastic Order, we should remember that we will be held responsible, whichever monk does wrong. Because we all belong to the same 'Organisation'!

Similarly, its public knowledge that female monastics are looked upon with disdain, generally. They rarely get offerings of the four requisites unlike the male *sangha*. Venerable Sayadaw Panditha used to pose the question, 'is the lack of offerings of the four requisites an obstruction to practicing breath meditation?'. Similarly, I would urge you to disregard these perceived obstacles and to not allow the mind to get disturbed by such matters because it will disturb your meditation practice. Please remember, just like the sky we members of the *sangha* community are destined to get blamed. And we need to take the blame for the mistakes our 'Company' colleagues make. But always ask yourself, whether this is a hindrance to develop *saddhā*, *sīla*, *sati*, *samādhi* or *paññā*?

I believe that such criticisms and obstacles can make *saddhā*, *sīla* and *sati* stronger. In fact I would be happy if I have to undergo difficulties and criticisms this birth, so that I would be paying off some of the *kamma* at least. These are the diseases of *samsāra*, we are reaping. Therefore our task would be to not collect new *kamma* by cultivating ill will and hatred towards these happenings. Let's rejoice that we have an opportunity to practice the dhamma. And please remember that at Nissarana Vanaya we are all equal, we are all simple yogis only, who have gathered under one roof to meditate.



## Question 88

**I have noticed that over the time I am able to sit longer during sitting meditation and that despite external disturbances I can maintain my meditation. This is the same for walking meditation.**

This is good, but eventually you will note that the meditation will not be limited to postures and that even when you finish a sitting, mindfulness will not leave you. And despite disturbances you will be able to continue having *sati* at the fore front. During day to day work, *sati* will always be with you from waking up until going to sleep. Then you have matured in the practice. The duration of the sitting and postures become irrelevant, and meditation with *sati* at the helm proceeds independent of such situations.

## Question 89

**During meditation I keep getting angry thoughts and they keep surfacing in various ways. Is this *kamma-vipāka*? And by knowing these thoughts as angry thoughts am I helping to be rid of these unskillful mind states (*akusal*)?**

The fact that anger is surfacing means that defilements are getting diminished. If not, anger will fester and boiling inside and will increase defilements within. But if we get angry with the angry thoughts that arise, then we create bad *kamma*. Because we are then allowing impure thoughts to creep into our mind, thus creating more defilements. Can we watch anger surfacing with no reaction? With no irritation? Can we have a neutral mind state and simply watch anger arise, and recognize it clearly as anger (as opposed to greed, jealousy or any other mind state) and clearly differentiate it from sloth/torpor or doubt or the breath/walking? Can we then watch it pass away free of remorse and regret? If we are successful in doing so then it's an insight, a realization (*ñāna*). Such a realization, after it occurs once, will always recur at the correct time

like an obedient pupil. This is the short cut to extinguish defilements as and when they occur.

We cannot prevent destructive emotions and unpleasant thoughts arising, but using *yoniso manasikāra* and protecting the mind from reactionary impurities when these defilements surge, is the lesson to learn.

## Question 90

**When listening to dhamma talks in a meditative state with my eyes closed, I feel very calm and collected. I also feel my breath (in and out breathing) clearly when listening to dhamma talks in this manner. Similarly even during walking meditation I feel in/out breathing.**

**Is it advisable to listen to dhamma talks while meditating in this manner? However, I cannot remember everything you say in each Talk. There are times when the Dhamma talks and the meditation don't connect.**

If this type of listening to Dhamma talks gives you some calmness then please continue. If the Dhamma Talk does not get connected to the meditation then it is a waste of time and more like empty speech. Dhamma talks need to be incorporated into a meditative life style in order to reap benefit. If not there is no use. These are the Buddha's words and therefore we must be extremely respectful and listen with whole hearted devotion. I am saddened that many 'Dhamma Talks' being preached today in many parts of the country, are not done in the true spirit of Buddha desana. I cannot see much benefit from that exercise since at most times the listeners aren't in a meditative mind set and nor are they in an environment conducive to such activity. In fact such desana can be likened to fairy tales.

In contrast, *vipassanā* based Dhamma Talks make a huge impact and creates a significant difference in the mind of the listener. With

*yoniso manasikāra* the practitioner will be able to discern the value of listening to *vipassanā* based Talks, and will realize if it helps in the progress of meditation or not. Such a yogi will feel that during listening to Dhamma Talks he is meditating and that when he is meditating he will 'hear' the dhamma. That is the best we can hope for. And this is all that will be left for us in this life.

## Question 91

**This Retreat was extremely useful for us female monastics, *silmeniyo*. The *Anumāna sutta* has been extremely useful for us in our monastic lives. The contents of this *sutta* as described by you are very relevant to us in our daily lives and the discipline we adhere to. On behalf of all the nuns present at this retreat let me express our heartfelt thanks for this excellent teaching.**

I am happy to hear this response. But I should caution all the nuns present at this retreat, that none of you realize the value of your selves and the fact that you are in the female monastic Order. It is not a simple or easy task. The step you'll have taken is a bold one, a giant one. You perhaps know that every Retreat at this Centre has a preponderance of female yogis, and most are very diligent in their practice. But how many of them will take the courageous step that you all have done, in becoming nuns? Therefore never underestimate your value as nuns. Be a shining example to all female meditators. Give them the inspiration to follow the steps you have taken.

I would urge you all to not grumble and take to heart trivial issues. Please don't allow trivia to stand in the way of the journey you have commenced. I am willing to offer this Centre for more retreats similar to this one, for nuns like you all. We need to move forward and create an era where nuns become a shining beacon to carry forward the teachings of the Buddha.

## Question 92

**When doing breath meditation after a while I notice only the draught of air, and I know I am noting the *vāyo dhātu* as air movements, and note how the experience keeps changing rapidly. You described how we are able to see the canvas and the drawings on the canvas as separate entities. I feel I am noting the canvas. I get a bit confused because I am not sure what I am drawing on the canvas. You have so far taken us in a stepwise manner to show how concepts get replaced by reality.**

I have mentioned how the air element can be experienced internally and externally, i.e. *vāyo dātu ajjhata, bahiddhā*. The internal air element as examples would be, the breath, the air in the intestines, in the lungs, within cavities in the joints etc . In the case of the breath we refer to the air element as internal when we inhale and when it is within the respiratory tract, and as external when we exhale the air. So it is very difficult to demarcate the boundaries. Where does internal merge with external? As long as we try to do this demarcation, we have the 'I, me ' concept. We are deluded and we have *māna*, conceit. Actually, the air element has no 'me, mine, I' boundary or demarcation. As long we identify such boundaries the meditation is at primary level. We have not transcended an important juncture. The *vāyo dhātu* is just an element. It doesn't know where it resides, whether it is within the body or not.

As long as *tanha, māna, ditthi* exists we will have these distinctions.

The Buddha advises us to first see the eleven aspects of in/out-breath and to familiarize this thoroughly. Until then the yogi needs assistance and advise from meditation centres, and masters. One day he will realize that this demarcation (eg, in/out, hard/soft, pleasant/unpleasant) are just concepts which keep rapidly changing. The day he realizes this the yogi will know that these

elements are not 'mine'. We will only invite sorrow when we make these elements 'I, me, mine' and not otherwise. If we cease to claim the elements as 'me/mine' and when we know that internal and external are simply concepts in relation to the elements, we will accept that all of this is subject to change – *anicca*. And the less we cling to any of the four elements, the less sorrow we will have.

The Buddha said that only if we ever claim anything or anybody as 'me, mine' will sorrow be guaranteed. He said, '*I have no cows, I have no sons, so I will not have sorrow*'. And this is so true.

The importance of treating the four elements as elements only, without claiming or assuming anything, is the lesson we must learn.

### Question 93

**As a nun who has participated at this valuable retreat I wish to make a comment. The nuns have not received the due offerings and veneration as expected from yogis. I am not saying this because we expect support or veneration, but because I felt that this was a duty of the laity to venerate those who deserve veneration. And also I wish we could start our meditation practice with metta meditation because I feel it will do everyone a lot of good.**

Thank you for raising this issue. I must announce that at Nissaranavanaya we don't encourage hierarchy or measure and discriminate yogis according to any criteria. We all are meditators. I don't allow bhikkhus in the upper monastery to wait for the head monk to arrive to begin taking alms food. We don't encourage ritual worship, rains retreat ceremonies (*Katina pinkama*) as well, because I feel all such ritualistic ceremony takes us away from our primary mandate. In fact I would like to eliminate all discriminating features in all monastics – whether they are in the Mahayana or Theravada lineage. Because the Buddha discouraged such

discrimination in every sense. Discrimination is only a manifestation of the presence of conceit, *māna* in our minds. Don't get provoked by anything and anybody and remember that as monastics we have no rights. This is a long tradition we have followed at Nissara Vanaya according precedence set by Venerable Nanarama, many years ago. And I am following that same tradition.

At Nissarana Vanaya the tradition has been to not use protective meditations as preliminaries to commence the meditation practice. This is not because we have any special objection towards this practice but because our teaching is based on keeping mindfulness at the forefront. And we advise yogis to use *sati* and being in the present moment as the preliminary steps to meditation. There are many meditation centres in Sri Lanka which teach protective meditations as preliminary meditations. But this is not the practice at this Centre.

Finally, I would like to advise everyone to use every opportunity you get, to further your practice, without expecting any rewards, veneration or accolades. I encourage every meditator to aim to become just another grain of sand in a bed of sand, or to be a drop of water in the vast ocean. To be just a nobody. We need to be like the wind that blows through a forest, leaving no trace. Please don't expect anything from anyone.

Let's strive to become true daughters and sons of the Buddha.

### Question 94

**During breath meditation, after a while I find that I the body keeps shaking to and fro rapidly. At this point I feel like opening the eyes and stopping the sitting session. This is a disturbing experience.**

Please describe the way you begin the sitting meditation session. Do you use mindfulness and note the sitting posture or the breath,

and if so what features of the breath do you note? Thereafter, even if the body shakes or there are other disturbances during the sitting, you have an anchor to return to. Therefore, however experienced you maybe always begin the sitting with a reflection on the posture or the breath at the outset. Once you get used to that it will not be a disturbance if the body shakes. Because you can always return to mindfulness or the primary object of meditation. This will also enhance your coping skills. Continue the practice, you are doing well.

## Question 95

**Please explain the meaning of *Uttharīthara hudakelawa* (ideal solitude)**

Please refer to the Baddhekaratta sutta (MN). There are four similar suttas by the same name in the Majjhima Nikāya. A devata visits a bhikkhu during the time of the Buddha and asks him to explain the term *Baddhekaratta*. The relevant Bhikkhu immediately consults the Buddha who explains this clearly. At that time *Baddhekaratta* used to be a very popular term and the *sutta* by this name was well known as much as the *Mangala sutta*, *Ratana sutta* and *Karaṇīya metta sutta*. In the four discourses in the MN the Buddha explains this in a similar fashion, but in four different situations.

More recently, there was a lot of research into the term Baddhekaratta. Venerable Nānamoli explained that *ekaratta* was derived from *eko* – solitude. The partiality shown towards solitude. Baddha = highest form. *Baddhekaratta* = the most noble form of solitude. Venerable Katukurunde Nanananda named it in Sinhala as *uttharīthara hudakelawa*. All the teachings of the Buddha ends with the recommendation for solitude, staying away from crowds and other material assets.

However, I should say that 'ideal solitude' can also be obtained even in the midst of crowds. In this meditation hall even though there are

about 50-60 people around, when we bring our awareness to the breath and maintain it, then we are in solitude. We are in the present moment. We have a degree of bodily freedom (*kaya viveka*). After a while if we can proceed with the breath meditation, the mind also becomes peaceful and restful, free of hindrances (*citta viveka*). Thereafter if the breath becomes less coarse and diminishes, and if we are able to remain in that state while being fully aware and equanimous about the changes in the breath, then we can even reach a sense of freedom from 'assets' - *upadhi viveka*.

Therefore even the in the midst of a group, if we can be in the present moment we can have an ideal solitude. Our aim should be to cultivate our minds to be used to staying alone, away from the crowds and being free from all assets. That is the biggest freedom we can enjoy. This is why I am reluctant to leave the forest and visit the cities. The four basic requisites (alms food, robes, dwellings and medicines) are available in the city in better quality and in bigger quantity. But we will never have the ideal solitude, simplicity and peacefulness that the forest offers.

Yet, The Buddha advised meditators that until voidness (*sunnatā*) - is experientially realized there is no need to leave the house holders' lay life. If we can get accustomed to experiencing *suññatā* intermittently and we know how the mind moves in and out of that state, then develop that mastery repeatedly. When mastery has been developed the yogi will on his own, wish to seek solitude. However, in order to be comfortable and to remain in ideal solitude, the yogi should first develop *kaya viveka* and thereafter practice *citta viveka* and finally, *upadhi viveka*. Then the yogi will always be in the present moment. He won't be delving into the past or dreaming about the future. He will apply *vipassanā* practice whilst being in the present at all times. While noting the breath if a thought of anger/greed arises, he will simply note it arising and passing away. Similarly if the breath changes from coarse to refined, he will just note it and let it go. Such a *vipassanā* practitioner will not analyse these intrusions and get disturbed by them. Thereafter he will apply

this same practice whilst being in the present moment in day to day work.

But this can be practiced only by an experienced yogi who has practiced *sīla and samādhi sikkhā*. If on the other hand, if a yogi with *sīla* and *samādhi* does not practice in this way, *suññatā* is unlikely to manifest and he will not experientially realize 'voidness'.

## Question 96

**We have been taught about attachments we have to our material self, our body and the need to practice letting go. Similarly the attachment to pleasing the senses. However, the attachment to a mother (a parent) is a stronger attachment than to one's senses. Even when seeing her degenerating body and by practicing *asubha bhāvanā* (meditation on impurities) I cannot reduce the attachment I have towards my mother. This is a severe impediment to practicing towards reaching *nibbāna*. Can you advise how I can reduce this strong attachment towards my mother?**

Your attachment is to **your** mother only and not to general/universal 'mothers'. This is your mind which is suffering from severe greed, and it is using your mother to express this defilement. This is another form of pleasing the senses. Because it is through your mind-sense-door that you are having these feelings towards your mother. Please remember attachment and greed is a defilement. It may be presently focusing on your mother, but at another time on another occasion it will be someone/something else. But in fact, all these attachments are due to your love for yourself!

Self-love is the culprit and masquerades as love for others. When King Kosala of Pasenadi asked his wife whom she was most attached to, she replied that it was herself. Although the King was

devastated, the Buddha praised Mallika's answer, because it was an honest one. When we say we love someone/something, it simply is a reflection of what type of attachment we have for ourselves and our assets. It is simply manifestations of our greed (*rāga*) in different facets. The Buddha said to uproot greed and attachment as though you are removing a flower from a dirty pool of mud, very swiftly and firmly. He said we cling to everything where ever we go. The danger is immense because it traps us in *samsāra*.

Please remember that every 'love' we have towards others, is a 'love' we have for our self. Deceptive and cunning dhammas (*vanchanika dhamma*) make us see this as otherwise. The efforts we take to consolidate the love we have for ourselves are immense. We use 'mothers, fathers, children, jobs, country etc' as excuses for our greed.

You should remember that even today there are Noble beings who can see through this cunning mind-states. So please understand this dangerous state and continue your practice to reach liberation, in this life itself.

## Question 97

**During an hour and half of walking meditation, towards the latter stages I noted the sensations felt at the soles of my feet very clearly. In addition I felt tingling sensations on my face. I did not feel any discomfort. Even after an hour and a half, I only felt good and realized that the mind was at ease when it was doing only one thing with full awareness. Is this comfortable feeling due to the fact the mind was not racing to the past and excited by the future?**

Only simple and straightforward things give pleasantness. Anything that is curved/convoluted or complicated will not generate pleasantness. A straight line is the shortest distance between two points. The mind is the same. The mind can tolerate



comfortably, only one thing at a time. Instead of multi-tasking and complicating the lives we lead, if we simply do one thing at a given time being fully aware, we can most definitely accomplish all what we need to accomplish in a shorter time. (i.e. One thing at a time and that done well). The tension and stress levels are low when we do only one thing at a time. There is a huge job satisfaction when we do that. Until we were six years old we did that. Unfortunately as we grew older we got more and more complicated. The knots we tie ourselves into are so difficult to untie and unravel. Some may need to be carried over to the next life as well. The recipe is to simplify our lives and make life straightforward, and do everything you do with a smile. And to do each task with full mindfulness - slowly, mindfully and silently!

### Question 98

**I have been doing breath meditating for a while. Initially when the breath used to become refined I used to have a lot of joy and my body tingled and shivered. Now this is not so, and instead when the breath diminishes my mind gets discursive. I then bring the attention to the present moment. Then once again the breath calms down. Is this the correct step?**

When this happens, with awareness watch the discursive mind and then watch the calmed mind. Keep awareness focused on both such mind states. You will then realize that when the mind calms down it will always be followed by discursiveness. And a discursive mind will always be followed by a calm state. These are relative to each other. A yogi who has a balanced attitude to both these states is advancing in the practice. If the yogi always wants a calm state, then there is a more work to be done. The Buddha says after reaching the fourth jhāna and you experience *suññatā*, again *rūpa* – eg, the breath or dhātu - may manifest. Know both as relative to one another. Emptiness and form (*rūpa*) are two sides of the same coin. One will always be expressed in relation to the other. These occur due to cause and effect. The aim should be to be equanimous

to either state. That will be progress. This is the teaching with regards to the development of *upekkha* towards the eight worldly winds. This is the gradual development of the balanced/equipoised (i.e. *Tādi*) quality of the mind.

### Question 99 (B)

- a) **Until we came for this retreat we were under the impression that the most meritorious acts were venerating the Bodhi tree (Bodhi pūja), lighting lamps (ālōka pūja), offering flowers to the Buddha, organizing Katina pinkama (ceremony at the end of the rains retreat), visiting the sacred sites of the Buddha in northern India, and many similar activity. Only now we realize that being in the present moment for even one thought-moment (*cittakkhana*) is more meritorious than all above. But will our past good deeds yield a fortunate re-birth?**
- b) **Even if a yogi doesn't gain experiential realizations would his practice be a skillful one, i.e, one which would generate *kusal*?**
- a) You should rejoice that you are presently enjoying a fortunate birth, a human birth! And it is due to those past meritorious deeds that you have now got an opportunity to practice meditation here at Nissarana Vanaya. Engaging in such meritorious activity even now is not harmful in any way. But please remember that such activity does not train the mind for liberation from *samsāra*.

Offering alms (*dāna*) will temporally suppress greed/lobha. Observing precepts (*sīla sikkha*) will only tame the transgressional defilements (*vītikama kilesa*) and *samādhi sikkha* will only suppress the five hindrances (*pariyuttāna kilesa*). Whereas to remove the deep seated *anusaya kilesa*, *paññā bhāvana*

(*vipassanā*) needs to be practiced. We should remember that our investment should be wisely selected, because it is only a suitable investment which will yield the ideal return we aim for.

No aspirations, *pūja* or devotional prayer will help to remove the fetters that have bound us to *samsāra* and to see things as they really are. We can't expect others to help us in this endeavor either. We have to do this task ourselves. Therefore venerating devas and the Bodhi tree, and expecting salvation are very childish actions and these will not help you. In fact devatas who are unable to practice meditation like us humans, eagerly await the merits we transfer to them each time we meditate. It is only our ignorance that makes us not realize that we presently have with us the most rare situations: i.e. born as human beings, born into a Buddha era, *kalyānamitta* association, opportunities to meditate.

Please remember that mindfulness practice or *satipatthāna* meditation is the only activity that will help you to realize the liberation you are seeking.

- b) The question is framed in such a way that I believe the writer feels that generating *kusal* is not an experiential realization. Meditation alone is a *kusal – bhāvana kusal* – in fact the most skillful, the highest *kusal*. Moreover, a meditator will fulfill *kusal* due to *sīla* (*sīla kusal*) completely. And also he fulfills *dāna kusal* because unless he/she is willing to let go of the entire world for a short while he cannot meditate. Therefore a meditator does no harm – *akusal* and thereby is doing the best possible practice. But he/she will realize this only when he becomes an *arahant* and until then there will always be questions and doubts, expecting results and dividends. There will always be expectation and wants.

We must realize that there are thousands of people who wish to meditate but have no opportunity. Such people have no *kusal* for

opportunity or the ability to meditate. We don't realize that it is only due to a lot of *kusal* done in the past, that we have the ability and opportunity to meditate. Let's be grateful for that and not grumble and find fault in ourselves. As long as we don't appreciate what we have, and as long as we don't value the meditation practice we do, we will live hating ourselves. And that means we are moving further away from generating *kusal*.

### Question 100

- a) Please explain the similarities of the following terms: *sati*, *satipatthāna*, *anupassanā*, *anussati*, *menchi kireema*.
  - b) Please explain the stages of purification or *vissuddhi* – *kankhāvitharana visuddhi* and *maggā magga ñānadassana visuddhi*, in relation to the progress in our practice
- a) These terms all are similar to one another and trying to analyse each is a manifestation of one's own *nicca saññā* (i.e. perception of permanency). Because these terms constantly evolve into another it's best not to identify one meaning. In the 37 aids to enlightenment – *Bodhi pakkhya dhamma*-, *sati* is mentioned in eight places. *Sathara Satipatthāna* (4), *Sati Indriya*, *Sati Balaya*, *Sati Bojjanga*, *Samma Sati*. In each of these categories the meaning of *sati* changes. Therefore we shouldn't cling to one distinct meaning because if we do so, the meditation will not progress. *Sati*, like everything else is subject to change always.

As we progress in meditation we will realize that the meaning of this term becomes different and our understanding will also change as we go along, and we will become open to new facets of this word. Therefore refrain

from assigning one meaning to the word *sati*. We keep learning every day. And the more refined our mind gets, the clearer this will become.

I used to have a book where I wrote all such words that appeared confusing at the start. I used to call this book – '*mage bana potha*' and I studied each of these words while meditating and while listening to dhamma talks. I referred the Sinhala, Pali, English and Burmese meanings of each word. Gradually I began to understand how each word had different aspects to it when relating it to my own meditation practice.

- b) In reference to the seven stages of purification (*sattha visuddhi*), these stages are reached after a considerable period of meditation practice. Such a yogi, when describing the experiences in meditation will use special skills. This communication cannot be compared with the worldly skills we generally acquire during our professional or academic lives. Such a yogi undergoes transformation. His/her conduct becomes exemplary, there will be humility and willingness to learn from the mistakes made, the respect for the dhamma increases, he will be able to see things as they appear and will relate experiences in the exact way they are experienced. These are some of the character traits that manifest during these stages of purification.

Such a yogi will note that the visible, coarse breath that he had experienced at the start of the meditation, eventually gets refined and 'disappears'. But he will remain unshaken. *Sati* will be established even before he notes the breath. *Sati* will continue to be uninterrupted and he will know the long/short breath, the pleasant/unpleasant breath, near/far, the external/internal breath, and all other facets of the in/out-breath. The yogi will have confidence that the entire practice can be experienced within *ānāpānasati*. The mind remains steady despite all these changes and he develops mastery over the changes in the breath.

Gradually as he progresses he will get confidence in calming down bodily formations and formations related to speech. This is the opening to *cittasankhāra- saññā*, *vedanā* i.e, the deeper layers of the mind. This signifies progress in the practice.