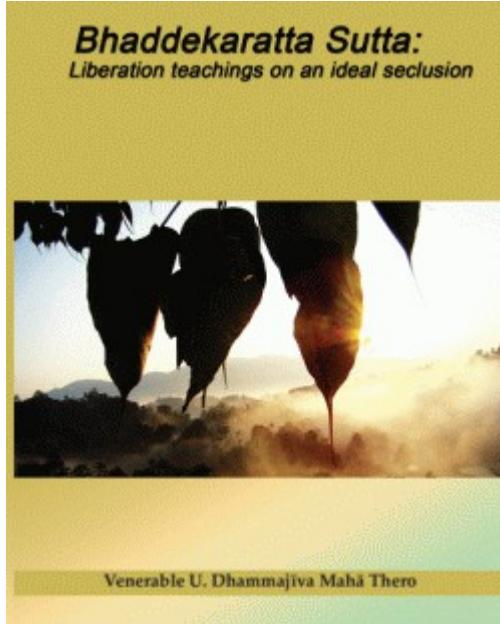


Bhaddekaratta Sutta:
Liberation teachings on an ideal seclusion
by Venerable U. Dhammajīva Mahā Thero



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Liberation teachings on an ideal
seclusion

Venerable U. Dhammajīva Mahā Thero

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Introduction

The *Bhaddekaratta Sutta* (MN 131) was taught when the Buddha was resident at *Savatthi* in Jeta's Grove at *Anāthapindika's* Park. The theme set by the Buddha in four versus, imparting invaluable instructions for one steeped in meditative contemplation features in three other instances: *Ānanda bhaddekaratta sutta* (MN 132); *Mahākaccāna bhaddekaratta sutta* (MN 133); and *Lomasakangiya bhaddekaratta sutta* (MN 134). In each of the subsequent *suttas*, the disciple's name appears prominently and takes on the task of carrying forward the summary of the exposition. In both the *Mahākaccāna bhaddekaratta sutta* and *Lomasakangiya bhaddekaratta sutta*, a deity appears before a *bhikkhu* disciple, recommending that he learn, master and bear in mind the summary and exposition of the *Bhaddekaratta Sutta*, clearly articulating its benefits and revealing its noble message.

The summary and the exposition of the *sutta* are translated as follows ¹:

Let not a person revive the past
 Or on the future build his hopes
 For the past has been left behind
 And the future has not been reached
 Instead with insight, let him see
 Each presently arisen state
 Let him know that and be sure of it

¹ Bhikku Bodhi, *Majjhima Nikaya* [1039]

Invincibly and unshakably
 Today the effort must be made;
 Tomorrow, death may come, who knows?
 No bargain with mortality
 Can keep him and his hordes
 But, one who dwells thus ardently,
 Relentlessly, by day, by night
 It is he, the peaceful sage has said
 Who has had a single excellent night

The title - 'bhaddekaratta'

Some criticism is directed to the reference of a “single night” (*ekaratta*) in this translation based on the fact that the *sutta* does not envisage a withdrawal of the past, the present and the future for such a limited span of time. A person referred to as a *bhaddekaratta* abides ardently, day and night. Thus, a reference to a “single night” makes it difficult to appreciate the context, fully.²

The term *bhadda* describes a circumstance which is auspicious, prosperous, ideal, noble or exalted. The *Pāli* reference to *ratta* is to “take pleasure in”. Venerable K Nānānanda Mahā Thero offers a practical meaning to this puzzle, describing a *bhaddekaratta* to be one who applies himself invincibly, unshakably, to know and to study the present arising state.³ Such an application is fortunate and auspicious as it leads to liberation.

Nevertheless, the significance of the title is surpassed by the summary and the exposition, which illuminates the es-

² See generally, Bhikku K Nānānanda Mahā Thero, *An Ideal Solitude* (2005)

² Ibid

sence of the *dhamma* to depict the true ideal as a seclusion of mind, available to one who does not revive the past or dwell in the future, disciplining one's desire and lust for one's present states. An ideal dweller in seclusion and detachment remains unsoiled to the arising of all phenomena. When there is a release and renunciation of the past, future and the present; the *sutta* hints at a mind state of *upadhi viveka* (detachment from all assets, denoting *nibbāna* (*sabbupadhi patinissagga*)) being the highest mental solitude (*cittaviveka*) to which physical solitude (*kāyaviveka*) is to be harnessed.

These teachings were given by Venerable Uda Eriyagama Dhammajīva Mahā Thero during a residential retreat at the Jhāna Grove Meditation Centre, Western Australia in January 2012. Drawing from his own mastery of the subject and practical insights as an experienced meditation master, he lucidly articulates the Buddha's original teaching with penetrative insight, making it readily accessible to any *yogi*, steeped in the cultivation of the meditation practice.

The translator is indebted to Mr. Kenneth Morris and Ms. Barbara Janus of the Saddhamma Foundation, USA for their suggestions, corrections, inspiration and criticism in reviewing a draft of this book.

About the Author

Venerable Uda Eriyagama Dhammajīva Mahā Thero is an experienced meditation teacher of the *Theravādhā* Buddhist tradition. He is presently the Chief Preceptor of the Mitirigala Nissarana Vanaya, a well known monastery in the strict forest tradition in Sri Lanka.

Venerable Dhammajīva Mahā Thero has undergone intensive training under the guidance of both Most Venerable Mātara Srī Ñāṇārāma Mahāthera and Sayādaw U Panditabhivamsa in Burma.

Speaking lucidly on the Buddhist meditation practice and drawing from his own personal experience as a dedicated *yogi*, Venerable Dhammajīva Mahā Thero articulates a vision of the Buddha's teaching, bent on the cultivation of the meditation practice. Giving the necessary instructions to harness the practice towards deeper insights, he maps the path for *yogis* to confidently steer ahead towards final liberation and a realisation of the Buddha's timeless wisdom.

Venerable Dhammajīva Mahā Thero is fluent in Sinhalese, English and Burmese and has translated many meditation guide books from Burmese to English and to Sinhalese. He is also the author of over forty publications in both English and Sinhalese languages.

Chapter 1

Seclusion from Form

The *Bhaddekaratta Sutta* (MN 131) presents an invaluable message for the dedicated *yogi* steeped in the practice of insight meditation. The term '*bhaddekaratta*' has been translated as "One Fortunate Attachment", "A Single Night's Shelter", "One Night's Shelter" or as Venerable Katukurunde Nānānanda Mahā Thero articulates, an "Ideal Solitude".

As the discussion of the *sutta* unfolds in the forthcoming chapters, many nuances and shades of meaning will be presented. Generally, the *sutta* imparts a meaning of one delighting in the mind's accomplishment in devotion to insight. *Baddha* is auspicious, noble, exalted or fortunate; *eka* is one; and *ratta* is attachment or yielding. The journey is one that tends towards a seclusion or solitude from the hindrances, defilements and the attachment to the five aggregates, towards final liberation.

Although the exact meaning of the title, *bhaddekaratta* remains a puzzle, the term appears to be coined to describe a stage of development in the meditation practice; and one bent on ardently cultivating the practice of insight. A *yogi*, who is a *bhaddekaratta*, does not dwell in the past, as it is left behind; or the future, which is yet unreached. Instead, a *bhaddekaratta* remains awakened to the witness of the present moment.

The ideal solitude captured in this *sutta* can be experienced through form (*rūpa khanda*), feelings (*vedhanā khanda*), perceptions (*saññā khanda*), volitional formations (*sankhāra khanda*) or consciousness (*viññāna khanda*). It

speaks of liberation through the five aggregates (*khandas*), utilising them and penetrating through them, towards liberation or an ideal seclusion, a detachment unsoiled by the presently arising phenomena.

Each aggregate will be taken in turn as the *sutta* unfolds in the following chapters to discuss the ideal solitude captured in the teaching.

The past and the future - two extremes

In the practice of insight meditation, the Buddha instructs that the mind ought to remain in the present moment, not wander after the future or to hanker after the past. The past and the future are two extremes. Although we plan, nothing eventuates according to our designs as it is *anatta* - non-self, which is not subject to governance. Dwelling in the past, we are met with disappointment.

The present is the middle path. Retaining the mind in the present moment, we commence the practice of meditation and enter the noble eightfold path.

The solitude of the *bhaddekaratta* is to keep the mind secluded in the presently arising moment for each of the five aggregates: materiality, feelings, perception, mental formations and consciousness.

The uninstructed mind traces after visual signs seen by the eye, recollecting the pleasure and the displeasure borne of it. The more significant events remain in our memory, depending on the intensity and the quality of our liking or disliking towards the experience.

If an unpleasant or boring object interferes with our pleasurable experience, we develop aversion or hatred towards it. This is because of our attachment and desire for

a pleasant outcome. Aversion or hatred is the flip side of intense desire.

Failing to get what we desire, we experience anger towards the unfulfilled outcome. The disappointment is far greater when it concerns something that we especially care about.

It is the same with future planning. Striving towards something better, we plan and design towards a more fulfilling outcome because we are bored (dissatisfied) with the present or feel disappointed or unfulfilled in the present. So, we wish for an alternative.

Any object seen, heard, smelt, tasted or touched in the past will give rise to either a desirable or undesirable memory. Recollecting the past based on what we have experienced through the six sense bases - eye, ear, nose, tongue, touch, mind ; we occupy our thoughts according to the quality we attribute to that experience. The future is thought of in terms of beautiful sights, desirable sounds or pleasant smells and we project our thoughts accordingly. This is the nature of the uninstructed mind.

The eye is the most sensitive to pleasant forms. It is difficult to become mindful of the visual objects attracted through eye sensitivity, as it is so swift and distracting. It is easier to contemplate on bodily sensations. Experiencing bodily comfort, we become mindful of the contact between the four elements and tactile sensations. Yet, we fail to notice the pockets of space in between material form, the space in between the nostrils; the space around the ear or that which surrounds the nerves in the brain (etc). These gaps do not generate a feeling. The experience is one which we cannot verbalise as the mind is unable to interpret the contact between external objects and this

space. There is emptiness in the experience.

Modern science proves that at least 96% of our environment consists of space. Yet, we invest so much of our energy and accomplishments based on the insignificant balance of form available to us. Any contact with space is meaningless to the cognitive capacity of the mind. Building our feelings, perceptions, mental formations and our consciousness on this insignificant proportion of form, we gain a distance from liberation. Yet, much remains as space. It is when we transcend form and reach this uncreated space (or gap), that we move towards liberation or seclusion.

With well aligned mindfulness, we contemplate the four elements: the hardness or the tension of the earth element; the heat or cold of the fire element; the vibration or retention of the air element; or the liquidity or the cohesive nature of the water element to transcend towards the space (or the gap) that exists between form (corporeality). It is like seeing the canvass through the painting. As long as we are immersed in the description of the painting, we fail to see the blank canvass in the background. When we see the blank canvass, we are unable to describe it as it lacks description. It is the same with space. It is not possible to describe space, as any contact with space is beyond description.

Towards an ideal solitude

The optimum seclusion of the *bhaddekaratta* is freedom from latent forms of defilements. Moving away from obsessional and transgressional forms of defilements, the mind develops *vipassanā* insights to uproot the latent forms of defilements (*anusaya kilesa*) that lurk deep in the mind's consciousness.

Our journey begins with an investigation of materiality and gradually, we reach the space, the uncreated, treading carefully towards this state of ideal solitude.

First, we experience *kāyaviveka* by physically moving to a forest or a place of solitude and then, an experience of *citta-viveka*, by keeping the mind free from the five hindrances.⁴

By keeping our awareness in each presently arising moment, we establish mindfulness. Moving to a place of few visual attractions or sounds, a suitable place such as a forest, or under a tree or some other place of solitude, we arrive at an environment of minimum external distractions. Adopting an erect posture, which does not require much volitional activity, we keep the body relaxed. We close our eyes to free ourselves from entertaining visual objects. Being comfortably seated in an erect manner, becoming aware of the present moment without worry about the past or dwelling in the future, we don't allow the mind to wander, day-dream or to fantasize.

Bringing the untrained mind to the present is like taking a wild buffalo out of the wilderness to a civilised place and tying it to a peg. Its' natural inclination is to run back to the wilderness. Similarly, the Buddha describes our mind to be like a mad monkey, jumping from one object to another, without an agenda. For a mind which is naturally extroverted, gaining seclusion from the external world is a novelty.

As *yogis*, we must try, again and again, to keep the mind in the present. Do not underestimate the power of defilements or be discouraged by wandering thoughts or the irritation caused by bodily pains. Retain your observation on what unfolds inwardly. Allow the breathing to take place naturally. Align your attention direct-

⁴ The five hindrances include: sensual desire (*kāmmaccanda*); aversion (*vyāpāda*); sloth and torpor (*tīna middha*); restlessness (*udacca kukkuccha*); and doubt (*vicikicchā*).

ly with the sitting posture or the primary object (the inhalation and the exhalation), as it unfolds in your awareness. Observe the in-breath and the out-breath in a discrete manner.

Keeping your attention aligned with the breath, discern the intrinsic characteristics of the in-breath and the out-breath, noting the process from the beginning to the middle and to the end. Diligently observing each process, you begin to see the transition from the in-breath to the out-breath, as and when it occurs and *vice versa*.

As instructed by the Buddha in the *Satipatthāna sutta*, when observing a long in-breath or out-breath, note it as such (*dīghanvā assasanto dīghan assa sā mīti pajānāti - dīghanvā passa santo, dīghan passa sā mīti pajānāti*). When the breath becomes shorter, become aware of the short in-breath and the short out-breath (*rassan vā assasanto rassan assa sā mīti pajānāti - rassan vā passa santo, rassan passa sā mīti pajānāti*). As the breath becomes subtle, retain sharper mindfulness to align your awareness with the object (the breath). When the object of meditation gradually dissolves in your awareness, sharpened mindfulness is essential as defilements can interrupt the continuity of mindfulness.

So you must go forward prepared and well instructed.

It is possible for boredom or over enthusiasm to set in when the breath is no longer visible. The mind could entertain doubt. Become aware of these mind states, how hindrances such as doubt infiltrate the mind and distract your awareness from the breath. If your awareness is aligned with the breath, there is less opportunity for hindrances to take over. Your aim must be to remain with the breath and your mindfulness must become

steady and sharper.

First, you develop concentration meditation with the aid of mindfulness. As concentration sets in, the mind will steer away from the five hindrances. When your awareness penetrates deeper, it will steer towards insight meditation. Delving deeper, the mind will direct itself towards an investigation of bodily phenomena.

As these investigations unfold, it is necessary to accurately report your meditation experience to a meditation master. Many *yogis* fall into traps during their practice as they are not able to accurately report their meditation and to receive the appropriate instructions. For a beginner, it is difficult to progress in the practice without a teacher. You must listen to *dhamma* talks and have discussions and interviews with an experienced teacher to constructively, clarify the meditation practice and to receive the appropriate instructions.

At the beginning, the in-breath would appear as one whole phenomena and the out-breath as a separate form. Delving deeper with penetrative awareness, you could see the individual episodes (i.e. lots of tiny breaths) within each breath. When the awareness is continuous, the gap between the in-breath and its transition to the out-breath will be observed. Within the many individual in-breaths in the inhalation process, there are many gaps. As the breath becomes subtle, awareness of the moving phase of the breathing process is replaced with these gaps (space). At this point, the mind could lose its grip due to the lack of qualitative discernment or description; and begin to entertain doubts.

Gradually, the individual characteristics of the in-breath

and the out-breath are replaced with the common characteristics of the two processes.

As the breath fades away and the common characteristics manifest, *yogis* could become distracted. Some may attempt to force the breath back to its gross form. This transition, however, is an important part of the meditation practice and serves as a backbone in your spiritual path. Sometimes desirable or undesirable thoughts set in. Observe whatever thoughts that arise in an unshaken manner. Each day, you will begin to delve deeper in your practice and gain a more detailed understanding of the breath as well as the mind.

When the gross individual characteristics disappear, the consciousness reaches a state of equilibrium, away from sensory experience. Your experience cannot be explained as mere “seeing”, “hearing”, or “touching”, although, you are fully aware of the process. When you penetrate to the deeper layers of consciousness, you are neither dead nor unconscious, but your awareness remains in deep concentration. Any sounds that may arise will not interrupt the practice. Although bodily feelings may arise, they will not interrupt the process of meditation. As far as materiality is concerned, you lose interest in the individual characteristics of form and your consciousness moves inward, towards the inner layers of consciousness.

As the mind reaches a state of *vipassanā* concentration, the speed of *rupa* (matter or form), overlaps with the noting mind. You can't see the breath, but you are attentive to what unfolds in your awareness. Just allow the noting mind to take over the observation of what unfolds. Do not interfere with the process. To remain in this state of seclusion, you must have substantial equanimity in the practice.

A distance from the hindrances

Gradually, you gain a distance from distractions and develop a mind free of the five hindrances. As the mind is freed from materiality and material pleasure borne of sensory contact (*āmisa sukha*), you begin to experience immaterial pleasure (*nirāmisa sukha*). Yet, this state of mind is not the end of the path. Even, Prince *Siddhartha*, as a child, experienced this during a paddy ploughing ceremony. Upon renunciation, he met many masters with deep meditative experience on immaterial pleasure, but was still not satisfied and continued in his quest to understand the ultimate truth. It is from a state of *cittaviveka*, where the mind is distant from sensory objects and the five hindrances that the path towards insight, unfolds.

Until then, you are simply finessing the pre-requisites to penetrate deeper into your consciousness. To understand the underlying tendencies of your consciousness (*upadhiviveka*), you must do away with transgressive forms of defilements (physical and verbal misdeeds) and then, deal with obsessive forms of defilements to experience *cittaviveka*, to commence a penetration into the latent forms of defilements (*anusaya kilesa*).

Until the first stage of *magga phala*, *yogis* can overestimate their mental development in the practice. When the breath (form) becomes subtle, the mind naturally comes to rest. If a *yogi* can appreciate this seclusion and respite from matter (or form); develop a strong will to meet the challenges in the practice and progress deeper into the practice, an unshakable faith in the Buddha is formed. Such faith is informed by the mental development in the practice. Realising that there is no other refuge, whatever the obstacle that lies ahead, a *yogi* forges

ahead towards the destination.

Be armed with triumphant effort at this stage of development. The mind remains in a state of one-pointed awareness and does not hanker after the past or the future. When a thought of the past intersects, observe how the concentration is interrupted. Remain unshaken by it, knowing that continuity of mindfulness is in tact. If you attach to the rapture (*pīti*) that you experience, become aware of it. Similarly, if you experience fatigue or feel sleepy, don't react to it, but simply become aware of it. When you have such continuity of awareness in your practice, you develop remarkable strength and the capacity to remain unshaken.

In the practice of insight meditation, whatever the obstacle, we move forward, unshaken, becoming aware of all processes. Any interruptions to the concentrated mind are noted. You remain unshaken. Moving forward without disappointment, you have maturity in the *dhamma*. The practice is not without obstacles. Every incident has its beginning, middle and the end. Observe the whole episode. If we reach a conclusion as we witness the middle of any obstacle, we react and generate *karma*. But, if we can see the whole process, from the beginning, through to the middle and to the end, we develop maturity in the practice.

Once you develop forbearance in the practice, in your day to day activities, whatever people say or do, you have the capacity to continue without disappointment and reaction. We can't change the nature of the world, but could develop the capacity to become resilient amidst obstacles. Whatever the incident, confine your experience to a confrontation of your defilements. Make it an inward journey of investigation and a triumph over defilements.

Chapter 2

Seclusion from Feelings

An understanding of *rupa dhamma* (materiality) is essential to gain an appreciation of the immaterial sphere.

Even in the present, investigating materiality, one experiences extremes: the hardness and the smoothness of the earth element; or its heaviness and lightness. Alternatively, the extremes of heat and cold of the fire element; the fluidity or cohesivity of the water element; or the expansion *versus* the contraction of the air element will manifest.

As long as form or materiality remains in extremes, it is subject to impermanence, suffering and non-governance. The space (*ākāsa*), that subtle gap in between, is not subject to change or affliction. It is difficult to become aware of it as the experience is not dramatic, although it maps the path to liberation.

Remaining in extremes, the mind continues in bewilderment. One loses track, tracing after the pleasures of the future; or the regrets of the past. Operating on a pleasure principle, one aims to maximise pleasurable experience. Fortunately, the Buddha has captured the varying nature of pleasure and its consequences. Seeing a beautiful object, experiencing comfort, hearing a pleasing sound or tasting something nice, one would experience sensual or household pleasure (*āmisa or gehasita sukha*). Attempting to maximise the pleasure, the experience could lead to a manipulation or transgression of morality. When things go well, there is material enrichment, children do well, get married and give birth to grandchildren. This is material, householder's pleasure.

On the other hand, some would prefer immaterial pleasure, become ordained and renounce worldly pleasures. Although there is pleasure and displeasure in the ordained life, the Buddha recommends immaterial pleasure over household (material) pleasure.

On retreat, during walking meditation, one experiences the sensation of the feeling of the touch of the right foot and the left foot. As the practice progresses, these forms of feelings (as well as the neutral feeling which is difficult to penetrate, unless our awareness is maintained on the primary object, time and again, staying in the present moment), can be observed.

Before we commence an investigation of immaterial pleasure, we must begin with moral restraint, to refrain from physical and verbal misdeeds.

A useful theoretical basis for any discussion on feelings is the *Culavedalla sutta*, which consists of a dialogue between *Upāsaka Visākha* and the *Bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā* (former husband and wife), two esteemed disciples of the Buddha. The dialogue ensues when *Upāsaka Visākha*, developed in his practice of insight meditation takes leave from his monastery to visit his former wife at her nunnery, to query whether she has progressed in her practice. Unknown to *Upāsaka Visākha*, the *Bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā* was fully enlightened.

Upāsaka Visākha asks the *arahant* nun: “what is the pain and pleasure of the pleasurable feeling?” *Bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā* responds: “the arising of the pleasurable feeling is a pleasure; the disappearance of a pleasurable feeling (*sukha vedhanā*) is pain”. Then, *Upāsaka Visākha* asks: “what is the pain and pleasure of the painful feeling?” *Bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā* responds: “the arising of the pain-

ful feeling is pain; the disappearance of a painful feeling is pleasure". Finally, *Upāsaka Visākha* asks: "what is the pain and the pleasure of the indifferent feeling (*adukkhamā sukha vedhanā*)?" *Bhikkhuni Dhammadinnā* responds: "being aware of an indifferent feeling is a pleasure; to not know an indifferent feeling is pain."

Immersed in pleasure, the uninstructed mind fails to understand its painful side. As the pleasure fades away, it precipitates in a painful feeling. If your awareness is sharp, you realise the impermanence of the pleasurable feeling. As long as you remain attached to the pleasurable sensation, you are distracted. You will not see the pleasure in the pain, unless your mind is aware of the transient nature of the painful sensation.

The neutral (indifferent) feeling, however, is not subject to change or impermanence. Our mind is not directed to it as long as we remain in the pleasure or pain that we experience in our daily lives. Because our consciousness cannot separately identify the neutral state of mind, we operate in extremes. We crave for pleasure and habitually, disregard pain. In the end, our experience is one of reaction.

We are rarely aware of indifferent feeling, that neutral feeling between the pleasure and pain. If you are aware of the neutral feeling, it is pleasurable. To be ignorant of it is painful. When indifferent feelings arise, as it feels rather boring and uneventful, you try to escape.

Steering the practice towards neutral feeling

Taking bodily contact as the primary object - the air element (the in and out-breath or the rising and falling of the abdomen) as the benchmark, we experience neutral

feeling in the practice. Keeping the breath aligned with the noting mind and experiencing the in-breath and the out-breath in a discriminate manner, we observe its natural characteristics. Try to observe it closely and vividly as and when it arises. With continued awareness of the breathing process, the breath becomes subtle.

As the body is physically inactive, the inhalation and the exhalation calms down. The breath can be seen as shorter and eventually, the noting mind will directly confront it. Gradually, you begin to see the in-breath and the out-breath as one process (*sabba kāya patisamvedhi assa sissā mīti sikkhati; sabba kāya patisamvedhi passa sissā mīti sikkhati*).

With continuity of mindfulness, you see how the in-breath gives way to the out-breath at the end of the process; how the out-breath ceases, to give way to the in-breath. As the breath fades away in your awareness, you enter the sphere of neutral feeling. This is a natural progression in the practice.

As the visible breath disappears, passive or inner thoughts could dominate your awareness. Or else, bodily pains may manifest in an extreme manner. With resolute effort, these challenges ought to be met, cut through them to meet the more subtle forms of the in-breath and the out-breath. Instead of doubt, a certainty, faith, gladness, tranquillity and rapture can set in. The boredom felt in the early stages of the practice, vanishes. The awareness is overtaken by feelings of rapture, tranquillity and calmness. This pleasure is of an immaterial (*nirāmisa*) nature, unconnected to sense impingement. These experiences indicate a smooth progress in the practice.

The change in feelings and sensations experienced could serve as a disincentive to the *yogi*, leading to irritation, frus-

tration or agitation. This is largely because the *yogi* fails to understand seclusion and withdrawal and the benefits of immaterial pleasure. This is natural, as convention has taught us to strive after pleasure. If you can recognise indifferent feeling there is a withdrawal from the material sphere. When you identify with indifferent (no-pain-no-pleasure) feeling, you appreciate seclusion, a respite and a fortuitous solitude that is available for us to experience as humans.

If the aim is not final liberation, but to further some ulterior objective such as to cultivate magical powers, you become more vulnerable at this stage of the practice. If you lack moral restraint, the mind may wander and entertain doubts. If faith in the triple gem is inadequate, a volatile response could generate.

Patiently, you must arrive at this destination, time and again, session after session. As you develop maturity in the practice, you can navigate accordingly.

On the other hand, one could forge ahead without worry of the uncertainty or the boredom experienced in this subtle stage of mental development. As the breath disappears, feelings of gladness, rapture and tranquillity will set in. Claiming these experiences with self-view, one could become conceited, attributing them to an achievement or success in the practice. Some might think that their experience is a result of path and fruition, or in the alternative, an advanced stage of *jhānic* development. Fortunately, these traps are mapped out in the literature.

The Buddha enumerates that some *yogis* commence the practice with tranquillity meditation to progress into concentration and then, shift to insight; some others commence with insight meditation, develop mindfulness to

progress towards pure concentration. Others undertake a combined method of practice, of both tranquillity and insight. The Buddha also prescribes that it is possible for agitation of the mind to occur due to overestimation (*dhamma uddhacca*), when the practice matures towards a deeper penetration.

Whatever the experience, always retain continuity of your awareness and anchor it upon the primary object. Do not personalise advancement in the practice or be distracted by finer states of mental development. Become aware of the pleasant sensations, borne of immaterial pleasure. Encourage your mindfulness to beam upon the painful states of mind, be it boredom, doubt or irritation. Then, you will gradually reach a state of awareness devoid of both pleasure and pain, just indifferent or neutral feeling.

The nature of neutral feeling

Mindfully, you realise that although the experience is uneventful, you are not asleep or unconscious, but well awakened to the present moment. Although the breathing process continues, it is not perceivable in your awareness. The feeling is neither pleasurable nor painful. Your experience is one of indifference. The feeling is neutral and without qualitative description. It is difficult for continuity of mindfulness to be retained in this awareness, but you must try to remain in this state for as long as possible. Some western books describe this state of mind as “inner peace” or “inner space” or as a “whole body experience”.

Daily, you must try to develop your practice towards a stage of inner peace, remaining there for as long as possible. If you sit for an hour and develop inner peace in forty five minutes, aim to sit for much longer. The key is to remain in

this state for as long as possible.

Walking meditation is an invaluable tool for *yogis* to undertake longer periods of sitting meditation as it mobilises the energy, enabling longer sessions of sitting meditation. The mindfulness and the concentration developed in the preceding session of walking meditation allow the mind to reach inner peace within a short period of time.

As the mind reaches a state of inner peace, indifference or neutral feeling, become aware of it as “knowing-knowing”. In this neutral state of awareness, the mind is at home. Do not think of what you ought to do next, whether you should contemplate on the thirty-two parts of the body, or on impermanence, suffering and non-self; or the virtuous qualities of the Buddha.

Try not to lead your mind to anything. Instead, let it lend itself towards liberation by maintaining a neutral stream of consciousness, for hours on end.

Maintaining a state of inner peace

To facilitate the state of inner peace, as the breath becomes subtle, experience the threshold of the last feeling of the in-breath and the out-breath; taking note of where the transition to the neutral feeling, occurred. In your awareness, make a mental note of when you step into this inner peace and when you step out. Your mindfulness must be double-fold, to trace the last drop of the touch of the breath. You will reach a state of inner peace without boundaries, becoming aware of the neutral state of mind. Maintain this equilibrium, without interference by thought or physical action. The breathing process will continue, even though, you can't feel it.

Become “choiceless” and indifferent without querying whether you are progressing in the practice or ought to direct it towards a particular outcome. Let go of your ego and preferences. Preference and choice are informed by defilements. Don’t give into them by intervening thoughts of indecision. The rational mind will intervene and wandering thoughts may gush in. Or else, the mind may be distracted by noise. Disclaim all manifestations. If you are not able to discern whether you are doing something (or whether something is happening), you are progressing towards final liberation, a seclusion from defilements.

Have foresight of your ultimate goal in the practice and recollect it. Extend the duration of walking and sitting meditation, gradually, to remain in this state of awareness, for as long as possible. Some teachers instruct *yogis* to make a firm determination to extend the period of inner peace during each sitting. If you are in this state for five minutes, at the peak of your concentration, make a mental resolve to remain for a further ten minutes. Increase your mental stamina and resolve, whilst balancing it with concentration.

With continuous awareness, you will see that when you enter this state of inner peace, it is pleasurable, but, towards the end, thoughts, sounds and pains intervene. Due to pain, volitional formations or perception, you may become impatient. As you become aware of the neutral feeling, some shades of perception, volitional formations or perverted actions could manifest in your consciousness. If you continuously note these mental states, you can see what distracts you the most, away from this state of inner peace.

The Buddha cannot navigate you towards liberation. So, you must discern your personality traits. Are you a

feelings-based personality? Or, someone who is driven by perception or a desire to plan, construct and manipulate? If you are impartial and vigilantly aware of what unfolds, you can observe all phenomena in an unassuming way to diagnose your character traits, clearly and concisely. As you diagnose your personality traits in a state of indifference, you begin to see the dirt under the carpet!

Those inner layers of defilements can be seen through your own lens. Some *yogis* are distracted by bodily pains; some others are distracted by their cognition and recognition of phenomena and how they differentiate; others are crafty, immersed in mental fabrications. Being vigilant to these tendencies by observing them, time and again, you will master the art of the practice.

When Sigmund Freud treated his patients, he listened attentively to all that was said by them during his 'free association' sessions without any interference. He allowed each patient to develop trust in him, to divulge all matters as honestly as possible without omission. He listened as if he were deaf, without directing the conversation towards a particular outcome. Listening to the story with maximum attention and concentration, without judgment; at the appropriate time, he commenced the healing process. Similarly, when you are mindful, you are both the patient and the doctor and you observe all phenomena, fully, without judgment. Allow all your tendencies and traits to come out. Just diagnose what unfolds. Do not rush to a decision.

Worldly affairs are smeared with fame, gain and popularity. In the spiritual sphere, you see things as they are. With feelings, you delve into the centre of the mind. At times, the function of perception and the manipulations of volition could interrupt your stream of awareness. Just become aware and disclaim. If you can diagnose your own person-

ality traits you can master the process of insight meditation and develop the capacity to train without a teacher, to undertake self-retreats and progress on your inward journey, in isolation.

Until then, you must have a sound understanding of theory and associate with a teacher or an advanced *yogi* to progress in the practice. These lucid and practical hints are not available in books. A colossal amount of literature is available, but in the practice you must have the maturity to understand what needs to be done, to fine-tune the subtle aspects with wisdom and non-interference.

Penetrating deeper, the *dhamma* becomes illuminating. Recognising indifferent feeling, you don't react to it. So, you give up household or material pleasure, replacing it with spiritual pleasure to transcend towards neutral (indifferent) feeling. If you like this, take pleasure in the uncreated and the loneliness of indifference, you become a *bhadekkaratta*. Yet, you have only arrived at a state of indifference. Liberation requires deeper penetration.

If you are able to withdraw from the hindrances, not attach to *jhānic* absorption, but reach a state of indifferent feeling and engage in it and recognise its value, you are ready to progress towards deeper insights in the practice. With astute awareness and moving towards the gap between the in-breath and the out-breath, a state of inner peace, you experience the solitude or the seclusion of a *bhadekkaratta*.

Penetrating through the extremes of pleasure and pain to appreciate the neutral feeling; a feeling beyond impermanence, suffering and non-self (the uncreated), which does not generate a qualitative discernment to fuel the *samsāric* knotting process, is rather like seeing the canvass through the painting.

It is a feeling which does not generate perception or thought, but remains in an equilibrium, an ideal seclusion from the material sphere. Delving deeper into this state of inner peace, you progress towards a realisation of deeper insights and the final destination.

Chapter 3

Seclusion from Perception

The Buddha enumerates that the five aggregates disturb one's freedom from solitude. Understanding and mastering the aggregates in the practice, you pave the path towards an ideal seclusion.

Threshold of feelings

The Buddha characterised feelings in a three-fold manner. Firstly, there is material pleasure (*āmisa sukha*) and pain (*āmisa dukkha*) - seeing beautiful objects and the pleasure borne of it. Or else, to see unpleasant objects, rejecting them or reviling them. These are feelings borne of sense impingement. Even Prince *Siddhartha* experienced such pleasure. Yet, he went forth in search of seclusion as he wished for immaterial pleasure (*nirāmisa sukha*). Going to a quiet place and developing the mind to experience *jhānic* bliss is an experience of immaterial pleasure. This too was not the ideal solitude from feelings, sought by Prince *Siddhartha*. So, he went in search of *avedhaita sukha*, a feeling which cannot be experienced or described in mere terms.

The Buddha describes *avedhaita sukha* as the most blissful form of feeling as it is not subject to change. Venerable *Sāriputta* describes *avedhaita sukha* as pleasurable, for it is not possible to experience it. In a state of *avedhaita sukha*, there is very little room for perception (*saññā*) to operate. Always fuelled by material pleasure or immaterial pleasure, perception is identified as worldly knowledge (*indriya gocara ñāna*). Living in a dream world created by perception, we believe in the past and the future as the truth and as something substantial.

Towards equanimity

As you practise, you move away from the extremes to assimilate the middle path. Much of our time is taken up by the past and the future. Chasing after pleasurable feelings or reliving the painful feelings of the past, we lose sight of the present moment. Focusing our attention on an object of meditation, continuously, aligning our awareness with it, we move away from the pleasures and the pain to reach the middle in the present moment. With continued mindfulness, we move towards neutral feeling - a state of indifference, a state of mind which appears monotonous and uneventful.

During walking meditation, when there is steadfast or continuous mindfulness and a certain amount of concentration, you can experience neutral feeling, whilst your eyes remain open and you continue to hear the sounds of birds in your surroundings. When doing your daily chores silently, mindfully and slowly, you can experience the same neutral feeling. Making a change to your lifestyle, associating with the wise and by undertaking the practice, you maximise your awareness on indifference. Then you facilitate the way of the *bhaddekaratta*.

Indifferent feeling is not a product of the meditation practice. Unknown to you, most of our day is spent in neutral feeling. It is only when you become mindful that you begin to identify neutral feeling. Pleasure and pain is the result of a cause. When the causes cease to exist, there is indifference. At this juncture, if the mind projects after another object, depending on the quality of mind attributed towards it, you begin to experience pleasure or pain. If it is pleasurable, you try to maximise it. Maximising pleasurable feeling, which is impermanent and non-governable by

its very nature, you are met with disappointment. So, you continue to operate in extremes, without realising their transient nature. Instead, remain in the present and gradually move towards a neutral feeling, away from the extremes, to a state of equilibrium.

The nature of perception

Perception is a label or a sign post to recognise what you feel as worthy of recognition. Not everything we recognise is of equal importance. Some you find important; others, you disclaim. It is a natural selection and the imprints remain in your memory. Your selection is aligned with the internal sense base(s): the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, the body and the mind. It is like a computer in which everything is stored and codified. When decoding takes place, everything is projected onto the monitor. This is how the mind works. We accept this as reality. We fail to realise that we are operating on perception, which is predicated on memory, a recollection of past events. It does not necessarily represent reality.

When a pleasurable object enters your cognitive awareness, you personalise it as “me” or “mine”. If something doesn’t conform to your personality traits, you reject it. If you accept it, it is under a notion of permanence. Unless you are astute and understand the mechanism of perception, your reality remains glossed over by it.

The Buddha cites the mirage as an example for perception. In a lonely desert, seeing a water-like reflection at a distance, a deer chases after it. Yet it is only an appearance of water caused by thermal action (heated air). In the eyes of the deer, the mirage is water! The speed of the deer does not reduce the distance. The distance remains the same

with no promise of water. Chasing after it with insatiable thirst, the deer only gets tired. It never finds the water!

Through a lens of perception, one tends to believe that what you see exists and what exists, you see! This is due to the wrong notion of permanence. Although you experience the physical activity and the sensations in a dream, once you wake up, you realise that it wasn't real. Similarly, the uninstructed mind operates in a dream world. This is the difference between an awakened mind and one which remains in a dream. It is like being part of a movie. When we are immersed in a movie, we feel as if we are a part of it. As we continue to watch, the story projected on the screen becomes real. It is when we leave the movie theatre that we realise how distant our lives are to what had transpired on the screen.

Perception is the main culprit that makes concept a reality. We are made to believe many things. Some believe in an omnipotent god that sets the agenda for our lives; or an evil element which generates suffering for us. Listening to a myriad of information available through the media, the conventional world is perceived as your reality.

The Buddha enumerates suffering as our own creation. It is not a punishment or a spell on a person. It is due to a cause and effect relationship. When the causes cease, there are no results to unfold. Due to perception, we blame our environment for all shortcomings. We are multi-tasking in our daily affairs, whether we are at work, home or at the supermarket. When things go wrong, without any understanding of the mind and sensory perception, we project the blame externally. Yet, if you mindfully become aware of what unfolds, you could see what a soap opera our life really is!

Perception carries with it, preference, based on our personality traits. The same incident could be interpreted by two people, quite differently. Try to understand what you see, hear, smell, taste and touch and develop a notion of impermanence as you experience such phenomena through the senses. Understanding the duality of pleasurable and painful feelings, you reach a state of indifferent or neutral feeling. In this state, you engage with a perception, closer to reality and unrelated to the senses.

Moving away from sensory perception

The Buddha instructs us to go to a forest or a secluded place where there is little socialisation. Being seated in an erect manner, in a silent environment, close your eyes to minimise the cognition and recognition of visual objects. When the body is retained in one place, without much intentional physical involvement, you do not respond to volitional activity and instead, could observe what unfolds in an involuntary manner.

Maintain a distance from your senses. Throughout *samsāra*, we gave into various objects, smells, sounds and tastes (etc). We chased after luxury and comfort. When you gain a distance from such pleasure, you see a clear difference in your mind states.

The nature of the uninstructed mind is to wander. It is like a piece of cork in water, it just wobbles around. With the presence of mindfulness, it penetrates into the object, just like a stone thrown into water (*apilāpana lakkhanā sati*). When mindful, the awareness is always retained on the object. When there is continued awareness on the primary object, the mind is alert. With each in-breath and out-breath, you observe the process. With continuity of awareness, you

develop a perception of the process (*tirasaññā padhattāna*). Your awareness naturally rests on the breathing process and you can discern the most prominent point where the breath manifests.

At the beginning of your practice, the mind is quite agitated. It may only perceive the gross (and rough) touching sensation of the in-breath and the out-breath. Some say that they are not able to feel the breath at all. This is why the late Most Venerable Mahāsi Sayadaw observed the movement of the rising and the falling of the abdomen. Generally, the in-breath and the out-breath have two peaks. With the rising and the falling of the abdomen, you could observe one big wave. At the beginning of the rising (and its end), there is a tense feeling. It is easier to observe and to perceive the movement of air.

The untrained mind can only see the tip of the in-breath and the tip of the out-breath. To facilitate an observation of the in-breath and the out-breath, you must follow the perception of the in-breath, its characteristics and the out-breath and its characteristics, continuously and with diligent effort. Silently, observe the process of the in-breath *vs* the out-breath. Try to see how one in-breath differs from the next. Do the same with the out-breath and by observing the breathing process continuously, try to gather as much information of the two processes as possible. Observe the individual characteristics of the in-breath and how it differs from the out-breath. To do this, your perception of the breathing process must be strengthened.

By familiarising with the breathing process, you begin to see the beginning of the in-breath. Your mindfulness must be sharp to perceive the in-breath and then, the out-breath. Be diligent to catch the in-breath and the out-breath as and when they arise. When the mind is aligned with the object

of meditation, your awareness confronts the object directly. You are not delayed in your observation. Do not worry if you cannot see the passing away of the in-breath and the out-breath. Simply become mindful of the beginning of the two processes, as much as possible.

With continued observation you can see the difference between the in-breath and the out-breath. As the breath becomes shorter and softer (or subtle in your awareness), you see the common characteristics of the two processes. When the individual characteristics of the breath are discernible, there is a magnetic attraction towards the breathing process. As the gross breath gradually disappears, you begin to see the common characteristics. It becomes rather boring as both processes appear the same in your awareness. The breath becomes subtle and gradually fades away.

This subtle awareness cannot be described in words. The experience cannot be communicated to the teacher. It appears as if the in-breath and the out-breath have ceased.

The Buddha does not instruct a beginner to attempt to see the cessation of the breath, but to observe the arising part first with astute awareness. The sharper the observation, the more detail you gain of the in-breath and the out-breath, especially by observing the beginning. Seeing the beginning and the middle of the in-breath and the out-breath, you will, one day, see the cessation of the same. With continuity of mindfulness, you begin to see the gap between the in-breath and the out-breath.

Neither perception nor non-perception

At this stage of the practice, you are clearly breathing; and not asleep. Yet the perception of the breath has moved from gross to subtle, so much so, that it is equal to the gap

or the space between the in-breath and the out-breath. You only see a continuity of energy. The perception has no boundaries. Many become frightened and feel lost due to fear of freedom. You may feel as if your mindfulness or concentration is distracted. Doubts begin to plague the mind. If you are not vigilant at this subtle state of awareness, as there is nothing descriptive to observe, you could fall asleep. Many could feel as if something unknown, unpredictable and unexpected is happening. When the in-breath and the out-breath are subtle, it is a challenge to maintain the continuity of mindfulness. This state of awareness (sharp mindfulness) is an important point of transition in the meditation practice.

With resolute faith in your practice, mindfulness and concentration; and a perception of impermanence, meeting the object of meditation (the whole phenomena) face to face, becomes a very vivid experience. Your past mistakes are your best teacher. Returning to this point, time and again in the practice, you become accustomed to it and develop the ability to face the unknown with strength and forbearance. You develop the confidence to forge ahead and to steer the practice to be in a state of equilibrium, where the concentration appears to be without perception (*animitta samādhi*) - it is subtle, yet, continuous and perceivable.

In the *Kalahaviyāda sutta*, the Buddha is asked the question, “at what point could one see through materiality or reach seclusion from material pleasure” (*kathan sametassa vibhuta rupam*)? The Buddha instructs that it is when the perception reaches a point where it is no longer related to the senses. You experience a state of mind, which cannot perceive the touch of the breath. It appears as if sensory contact has ceased, you are aware of an experience which cannot be described in words – a state of mind character-

ised by a seeing that is not apparent, a hearing that does not generate a sound, being alive when you feel as if personality is dead. Your perception of *rupa* at this stage is not ordinary (*na sannasaññi*), neither have you fainted (*na visanna-saññi*), nor have you reached the immaterial *brahma* realms and you are in neither perception nor non-perception (*no pi asaññi*), yet you are not without a perception either and you are alive and not dead (*na vibhutasaññi*). In this state of equilibrium, you experience a contact which does not arouse any mental proliferation (*evam samettassa vibhoti rupam saññānidānā hi papancasankhā*). All materiality dissolves back into energy.

At such subtle layers, sensation is not preceivable. The perception does not generate a positive or negative mental reaction. Some may begin to see a light; or else, smell flowers or food; and for some others, sometimes only one part of the body can be felt (with no perception of the other parts). The experience could be as if the body is encircling in a whirlwind; or as if it is rocking in a cradle. These are shadows of sense impingement. Various bodily experiences will manifest as you experience some features of rapture (*pīti*). With continued awareness, you will experience peace and calm in the mind.

When you reach this state of awareness, you see how consciousness is related to the senses: the eye and visual objects, the ear and sounds, the tongue and tastes (etc). Observing yourself as a second person, you see that the mind can't be completely free of sounds, thoughts and pains. Whatever is presented to the sense bases, one object will take priority, be it the eye, the ear or nose (etc). Whatever is presented through the six senses, you take one at a time. When you are "seeing", you can't hear, smell or think. One sense base takes the priority of your awareness and your experience is

1/6th of sensory perception. By selecting one, you deny the awareness of that which is projected through the other five sense faculties.

When you claim something as what you see; or you say that you are speaking from personal experience, you don't realise that your perception is tainted with personalisation. Everything is marred by your predilections and preferences. You don't see things as they are in their totality. Become observant and vigilant of your direct experience; armed with the appropriate instructions, see what unfolds right before you. Although the mind is not engaged with sense impingement, the mind is in a state of inner space. If you fail to entertain this state of inner space with equanimity, you spend your life entangled with sense impingements.

Going to a solitary place, free of sounds, smells and tastes; establishing mindfulness on a primary object, you progress to experience a satisfaction which is beyond human contentment.

As you advance towards neutral feelings, you confront various imperfections (*upakilesas*). Communication is not possible in this subtle state of awareness as description is not available. With resolute faith in morality and trust upon the strength of your mindfulness and concentration, you gain a clearer understanding of perception, as you penetrate deeper into the mind's consciousness. The mind is seen as cunning, perverted and dishonest. You can't trust it.

Without manipulation, you master this stage, time and again, to gradually see the latent forms of defilements (*anusaya kilesa*) in operation without your consent. Whatever it is that unfolds, do not claim with self-view. Instead, entertain equanimity - a neutral observation.

When you don't manipulate with self-view, things just unfold through their own accord, through the universal ways and means. You are just a neutral observer. This moment of neutral awareness is calm and peaceful. Don't chase after creativity, volition, will or motivation to spoil the present seclusion and spoil the present moment. There is no success or failure in this state of awareness and the perception is neutral. Although you are yet to arrive at the final destination, remaining in the middle, a neutral perception, the path towards liberation is open to you. Patiently, accustom yourself to this awareness with moment to moment awareness and the universal laws will work according to their ways and the *dhamma* will unfold as it really is. Just remain with the trend of equilibrium and a perception that generates equanimity.

Gaining a distance from perception, you reach that ideal seclusion. Continue with non-perception (*animitta*). Disclaim all developments as non-self. Don't allow room for defilements to infiltrate this subtle awareness, to muddy the clear water. Appreciate the maturity you have gained from developing mindfulness towards equanimity. You will see that the mind is the forerunner of all actions and that everything is a fabrication of the mind. In this state of awareness, you feel as if you are floating on air. This clarity of awareness is our primordial state of the mind. Continuing in this awareness, you will experience a state of blissful joy - a joy which emanates from an unshakable faith in the Buddha. It is beyond human pleasure. You experience enormous joy in your heart, recollecting your morality (*sīla*) and the path you have traversed.

Everything arises and passes away. We have jealousy, insecurity and hate when we value judge and measure what we see. Instead, by disclaiming defilements and pen-

etrating into the nature of things and awakening to the true nature of our being, we come into contact with our “humanness”. We realise the timeless *dhamma*, which we experience, directly, through our own effort. Otherwise, spending our lives immersed in qualitative judgment, we miss an invaluable opportunity in life.

Take on the practice when you are young and tend your mind towards an understanding of liberation, without giving into worldly advancement. Then you are not vulnerable to the *māra* as your intention is nothing short of liberation. Whenever possible, transcend to the uncreated, either through materiality, feelings, perception, mental formations or consciousness, to remain in a state of equanimity, to understand and reach that ideal solitude.

Chapter 4

Seclusion from Mental Formations

Reviving the past, we recollect what has been voluntarily committed as our own deeds. Projecting into the future, creating numerous mental fabrications, we entertain a dream world. Many thoughts proliferate as we manipulate, design and formulate future plans. We create mental turbulence. Oscillating between the present and the past, the mind becomes agitated, busy and involved.

Mental formations muddle the clarity of awareness, preventing us from seclusion, an inner peace of mind.

Even when the mind is retained in the present moment, some shades of mental formations (*sankhāra*) remain. Due to the presence of these sediments, the present remains vulnerable to attractions or distractions.

Try to understand the nature of mental formations (*sankhāra*), at least at a theoretical level; how they differ from materiality, feelings, perception and consciousness. In the practice, utilise mental formations to develop your mind to gain seclusion from volitional involvement or fabrication, to progress towards a finer state of awareness.

Understanding mental formations

Understand the various shades of meaning of *sankhāra* and what is stated in the *Sutta Pitaka*. Although phenomena are described in terms of the five aggregates, in *Abhidhamma*, they are separated as consciousness (*citta*), mental properties (*cetasika*) and materiality (*rūpa*). Mental factors (*nāma*) are described as both *citta* (consciousness) and *ce-*

tasika (mental properties or manifestations of the mind). It is described that if the sea (water) were *citta*, the waves are like *cetasika*. The waves exist due to the water, although the waves are neither the water; nor separate from it. The Buddha has dealt with fifty two *cetasikas* (mind and mental factors), considered as non-material (*nāma*). Faith, energy, concentration and wisdom (etc) fall under the category of *cetasika*. Desire, hatred, sloth and torpor are also *cetasika*. Feelings, although described as a separate aggregate are captured under the category of *cetasika*.

The term, *sankhāra* is also coined as *cetanā* (intention or volition). Where *cetanā* is concerned, there is volitional involvement - something is done wilfully. Understanding *sankhāra* is an acknowledgment of our will or volitional dispositions. *Cetanā* is the foremost factor for mental formations. *Kamma* is caused by *cetanā* and therefore, *kamma* is equalled to *cetanā*.

When the *kammic* forces mature, whether you like it or not, the consequences follow. All triumphs are our own will. All disappointments are our own creation. Engaging with mental preparation, always planning a way forward, we exert will and volition, giving rise to incessant mental proliferation, generating *kamma*. Each moment that we are alive, we have *cetanā* (volitional involvement). Knowingly or unknowingly, we are generating consequences as we fabricate, plan and design for the future. If we experience some form of turmoil in the future, it is because of our past deeds. Whatever that is pleasurable or unpleasant is a result of past action. It is due to cause and effect.

Discussing *sankhāra* in general terms and drawing a common thread is difficult as our *kammic* forces are different. Those who are reckless with their morality, find it difficult to understand *sankhāra* (volition or will). As a *yogi*, first and

foremost, you are encouraged to have moral restraint over verbal and physical misdeeds. So, we take the eight precepts to ensure restraint of our verbal and physical deeds before commencing a retreat.

Appreciate the difference between passive and active acts in all situations. For example, become aware of the difference between intentional breathing *versus* the mere observation of an in-breath. The act of forced inhalation is volitional involvement. Observing the natural breathing process is neutral. In meditation, we observe the process that unfolds without volitional involvement. Similarly, become aware of the difference between looking *versus* seeing; and listening *versus* hearing. Did I do something? Or did something happen to me? Understanding the difference between volitional and non-volitional involvement is a subtle discernment. It gives us depth in our understanding of cause (*kamma*) and effect (*vipāka*).

The acts of the past have simply eventuated. That which has transpired was not our creation. The uninstructed mind takes all past triumphs and adversities as one's own and in turn, creates more mental formations, volition and *kamma*. Understand the difference between what you do and what has occurred. Passively, witness all acts in a neutral and equal manner so that you do not generate mental formations, adding fuel to the unfolding of more future acts, or else there is no end to *samsāra*. There is nothing you can do as everything you experience is a result of past wilful acts. Train yourself to undertake all actions in a wholesome way. What unfolds is beyond our control. Accepting all consequences without a reaction is the way of the *yogi* life.

Various objects are attracted to our senses, be it a visual object, a sound or a taste (etc). The mind is unable to comprehend all six sense impingements at once. It selects one.

Selecting or prioritising one sense object, the awareness rests on that sense faculty. The remaining five are rejected. Sounds may strike the ear drum, but if you are engaged in 'seeing', you cannot hear.

The body may experience tactile sensations, but, you do not feel it, as long as you are engaged in 'seeing'. Your selection of one sense impingement over the other five is mere coincidence.

When you mindfully observe sensory transactions, whatever the sense impingement, there is no bondage (*tanhā*). The process of 'seeing' takes place, but, there is no involvement. Just like the 'clicking' of a camera. The same process continues with hearing and tasting. There is no clinging as you are mindful of the process that unfolds without any desire, conceit or self-view. There is no room for mental formations to proliferate.

Mindfulness is a neutral observation of what is being done and what is arising in each moment. Whether you are doing it or witnessing what transpires, the experience is the same, when the observation is neutral. Passively, become aware of the process that unfolds in each moment to gain a distance from mental formations.

Seeing mental formations in the practice

In the *Anāpānasathi sutta* or the *Girimānanda sutta*, the Buddha requests that a single object be taken, preferably materiality, to cut through to directly confront it in your awareness. You are instructed to go to a forest, under a tree or a secluded environment. Close your eyes and focus your attention on the involuntary breathing process. Continue your awareness until the breath becomes subtle and almost disappears from your awareness to a state where the con-

consciousness is separate from sense impingement.

Gradually, the gap between the observing mind and the object becomes closer and as the practice gathers momentum, it would appear as if the mind and the object are merging with one another. When this occurs in tranquil meditation (*samatha bhāvanā*), it is described as *jhānic* absorption. In the practice of *vipassanā* meditation, there is no merging of the object as such. Instead, the noting mind and the object operate at the same frequency. At that time, it is not possible to differentiate between *nāma* and *rūpa*. This stage of the practice is a transition from materiality to mentality. One gains a distance from the eye and visual objects; the ear and sounds; the nose and smells; the tongue and tastes; and the body and tactile sensations. When this occurs, a significant transition of our value system; a reshaping of our personality, takes place.

Many *yogis* become emotionally vulnerable, entertain fear, doubt and boredom. The uninstructed *yogi* may not ever penetrate to a deep calming down of bodily formations. If you confidently reach the deeper layers of your consciousness, instead of fear, doubt and boredom, gladness and rapture will arise. As the mind becomes concentrated, it gains security from the hindrances: sensual desire, anger, sloth and torpor, remorse and doubt. It has the capacity to enter into absorption or to penetrate into the object.

When the mind falls calm and collected on the object, it has one-pointed focus. You begin to see the operation of mental formations (*citta sankhāra*). As the awareness remains in the deeper layers of your consciousness, the underlying tendencies (*anusaya kilesa*) naturally manifest.

Take a step back to observe them as a neutral distant ob-

server, without any directed pre-disposition and mindfully observe how things unfold in your awareness.

Whatever that unfolds, do not personalise it. Claiming them as *me*, *mine* or *self*, you create *kammic* volition. Mindfully disclaim all that unfolds before you (as not me, not mine and not myself). Become a neutral observer. Maximise the solitude, the freedom and the equanimity. Don't get involved. Be calm, quiet and collected. Maintain this solitude and freedom. It is as if you are observing a river from ashore. Just let it flow at its own pace, its own frequency. Interfering with the flow of water and creating turbulence, you could get wet! Instead, simply, sit back and observe the stream of water. Observing this, the world and its universal laws, you see cause and effect, clearly. If you are not instructed in advance, you commit to what unfolds, instead of gaining a distance from it.

Just as you observed the breath, feelings and perceptions, observe the mind and its processes in an impartial manner. You may query how one becomes motivated, being a neutral observer, without any reaction, especially when volitional formations are what motivates people after fame, gain and money.

Withdraw from the external and turn inwards, towards that state of inner space or that vacuum, which is peaceful and calm. Instead of entertaining doubt that arises in the mind, giving into uncertainty and querying whether your meditation has diverted or reacting to the gradual disappearance of the meditation object, continue with steadfast mindfulness and concentration in your awareness. Otherwise, you give into the fear of freedom, which arises in your mind.

When the mind is calm and quiet, mental visions may

arise. Do not get entangled with them. Do the same with any noise in the background or bodily sensations and pain. Any object retained in your awareness will give cause for willful action or volitional formations. If you begin to think, deductive knowledge takes over from direct experiential knowledge.

Those inclined towards intellectual curiosity attempt to interfere with the process that unfolds, querying whether they must now commence a contemplation of the repulsive aspects of the body; commence a contemplation of death; or forcefully tend the mind towards the *vipassanā* practice. All of these actions are like dust falling upon the eyes. It only agitates, irritates or interferes with the clarity of vision. Instead, keep your stream of consciousness undisturbed. Practice without any promise of gain, benefit or achievement. Think in terms of freedom, emancipation and liberation. Treat this state of silent awareness as a taste of *nibbāna*, the desired seclusion from the *khandas*. An ideal solitude!

As the mind loses its grip of sense impingements, it follows a state of silent awareness or inner peace, where there is nothing tangible to observe. In the absence of gross perception, the mind becomes silent.

If you become a neutral observer, you will veer away from volition or will (*cetanā*). Instead, if you try to control the process, you will give into thinking, those new and bright ideas, which are distracting.

Unmindfully, claiming them as your thoughts and innovations, your consciousness receives the necessary nutrients to engage at a sensory level. Instead, silently progress to see the underlying tendencies (*anusaya kilesa*) in operation. There is so much backlog from *samsāra* to unwind. So it is natural for defilements to manifest in clear conscious-

ness and for the mind to naturally yield towards them. Yet, mindfully, if you continue in awareness, you gain a distance from latent forms of defilements. It is a freedom, a seclusion or respite from sense impression and some underlying tendencies.

Cessation of mental formations

In the first *vipassanā* insight, *nāma rupa pariccheda ñāna* (knowledge into mind and matter), you see the mind which discerns an in-breath from an out-breath; and the object (the breath), separately. At the second insight knowledge, *paccaya pariggaha ñāna* (knowledge into cause and effect), you see the beginning of the breath (the cause of the formation (breath)) and the formation, itself. You see the effect and its cause, together, when you see both the origin of the breath (and the middle of the breath), in your awareness. The same can be observed with the out-breath.

When you can see the beginning of the in-breath continuously, you develop the capacity to not only see its beginning and the middle, but, the very end. You can do the same with the out-breath. What arises would cease in the same way. Seeing the cessation of formations is a patient observation. When the breath ceases in your awareness, you realise that it is something that is created and conditioned.

At the third insight knowledge, *sammassana ñāna*, you develop the knowledge that all forms of mind and matter have their unique and individual characteristics, arising and passing away. Whatever phenomena that has a beginning, middle and an end is *sankhāra*, (formation). Whatever unfolds in your awareness, for example, the manifestation of the four elements, a heat, vibration, a shaking, stretching

or tension, observe the beginning, the middle and the end of its process. You may also deduce this to the past and future.

Progressing to *udayabbhaya ñāna*, gaining insight into the arising and passing away of all mind and body objects; and then the rapid cessation of all mind and body objects at the stage of *bhanga ñāna*, you are instilled with fear. Seeing all formations breaking apart in your awareness, you realise that there is no refuge.

All that you have accumulated, all that you own, is just subject to change and decay. You observe a cessation of mind objects, all mental formations, notions of ownership, permanence, fairness and unfairness, passing away. At this stage, each subsequent thought moment becomes an aid to see the preceding thought moment.

Equanimity towards mental formations

In the series of *vipassanā* insights, the last is equanimity towards all volitional formations (*sankhāra upekkhā ñāna*), where you see that what unfolds is without your intention. So, you are not disheartened. You don't claim it as yours (or mine). Everything unfolds in your awareness, yet there is no response, only a position of neutral observation, disclaiming all phenomena to be as they are. It is like a drop of water falling on a lotus. Even if a droplet is retained on the petal, it will not smear.

When your view is corrected, like the drop of water on a lotus petal, you have equanimity towards all formations. Things happen, knowingly or unknowingly, taking their own course. They arise, persist and fade away. When you are ignorant or you have simple unknowing or misperception, you become agitated. This is why you commit to what

unfolds. Clinging to what fades away, you suffer.

If your intention is solitude and freedom, as momentary concentration takes over, you will embrace what unfolds in your awareness, when everything appears fragile and breaks apart right before you. Develop equanimity towards all formations (*sankhāra upekkhā*). Do not become involved with what unfolds. For example, when a sewing machine is in operation, the needle tracks a piece of thread which penetrates into the bobbin beneath it. Each time the needle pierces into the cloth, it produces a stitch and the two pieces of cloth come together. Assume there is no thread in the bobbin. The machine goes on and the stitching process seems to continue, yet, in the end, the two pieces of cloth come apart. Likewise, noble beings operate without the thread in their bobbin. The machine is in operation, giving an appearance of a stitching process. Once the process ends, the cloth comes apart. Stitching has not taken place.

Now, do you understand how *sankhāra* works?

In the *Mahāvedalla sutta*, Venerable *Sāriputta* is asked for the proximate factors for emancipation from signs, labels and recognition (*animitta ceto vimutti*). Venerable *Sāriputta* responds: if one wishes to entertain sign-less solitude or freedom, whatever the hindrances, pay attention to them; whatever the bodily sensations, perceptions or thoughts of creativity, just become aware of them. Do not become entangled with them. Expect the sign-less state of awareness to arise. Just be in that primordial state of awareness, where there is no sign, no tendency, no motivation or other impingement, for as long as possible in the practice.

Where a sign, tendency, will or motivation is absent, consider it an advantage as far as volitional activities are concerned. The mind doesn't move towards success or failure.

Failing to appreciate the importance of this state of awareness, you entertain doubts or conceptual ideas. In worldly matters, our innovations are valued.

Yet, whatever the volitional activity committed, it is impermanent and gives rise to suffering.

So, become a silent observer without arriving at a decision. Whatever thoughts or sounds that enter your awareness, just disclaim them. Distance yourself from the senses and be in a primordial state of awareness. Maximise the sign-less state of awareness and persist in a state of sign-less concentration. Silently, transcend any fear of freedom to reach a space of ideal solitude, where there is no sign or feeling, just a state of inner space, where volition cannot take root.

Chapter 5

Seclusion from Consciousness

Consciousness has varying degrees and layers. Known as *citta*, *viññāna* or *mana*, it has different shades of meaning. *Viññāna* is the most commonly used term for consciousness. It is on this foundation of consciousness that mental factors (*cetasika*) develop. By its nature, consciousness is vibrant, although the corrosive defilements generated on its outermost layers take away the lustre as it engages with the sensory sphere. Yet, through the penetrative awareness of insight meditation, its purity is reclaimed, gradually, as preference and self-view are distanced from its purified state.

When consciousness is engaged with sensory objects, its' outermost layer is diversified and extroverted. Immersed in such superficial consciousness, many fall into the trap of oscillating between the past and the future, dissatisfied with the present, never knowing of the states of equilibrium found in the deeper layers of consciousness, through which one could experience inner contentment in this very life. In spite of this assurance, sacrificing sensual pleasure to spiritual solitude is an unrealistic journey for many.

A depth in the practice develops when one transcends a contemplation of materiality (*kāyānupassanā*) to mental factors, gaining a distance (temporarily) from sensory consciousness to *arupa lokha* (a state of non-materiality) where volitional formations are not generated. Disclaiming sensory experience without self-view, you allow the theatre of phenomena to unfold in your deeper-consciousness without being a part of the script. Neither did you write the script,

but simply remained in the audience to independently witness all that unfolded without interference or commitment. It is like seeing a waterfall projected on a screen - the screen does not get wet! Nor does an erupting volcano generated on a screen catch fire! Whatever the thought that proliferates in your awareness, there is no conceit or sorrow developed over it. Thoughts may generate, but, there is no thinker!

Consciousness and the mental faculties

When mindfulness comes into the equation of faith, energy, concentration and wisdom, the spiritual path gathers momentum. With faith, when you are mindful, you arouse a form of energy that propels you to take on the spiritual journey. In turn, warmed up energy becomes the most proximate cause for mindfulness. With mindfulness, concentration develops naturally and wisdom unfolds.

Keeping mindfulness at the forefront, the mental faculties of faith, energy, concentration and wisdom are proportionately balanced. Balancing faith, energy, concentration and wisdom is necessary to assimilate the path towards an ideal seclusion. If either one is more aggressive than the other, the path is hindered.

When mindfulness is steadfast (*sati indriya*), it takes a leading role in aligning the other four faculties (*saddhā, pannā, samādhi, viriya*), keeping them in proportion as they perform their distinctive roles in the practice. When mindfulness becomes powerful (*sati bala*), it is imperative that consciousness has sufficient maturity, flexibility and equanimity to remain undisturbed.

The Buddha spoke of the power of mindfulness in an emphatic way:

“Mindfulness, I declare, is all-helpful” (Samyutta, 46:59).

“All things can be mastered by mindfulness” (Anguttara, 8:83).

In the solemn and weighty utterance opening and concluding the *Satipatthāna Sutta* it is said:

“This is the only way, monks, for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the destruction of pain and grief, for reaching the right path, for the attainment of Nibbāna, namely the four foundations of mindfulness.”

In ordinary life, if mindfulness or attention is directed to any object, it would rarely be sustained long enough for the purpose of careful and factual observation. Generally, it is immediately followed by emotional reaction, discriminative thought, reflection, or purposeful action. To tap the actual and potential power of mindfulness it is necessary to understand and deliberately cultivate it in its basic, unalloyed form - bare attention.⁵

Even when keeping the noting mind aligned with the primary object (the breath, for example), it is natural for the mind to wander after sounds, thoughts or bodily pains. But, you must become aware of these ‘unmindful’ moments without regret. Do not punish yourself for any lapses. Instead, making finer adjustments to increase the span of mindfulness, develop the determination power, a confidence, to maintain continuity of mindfulness in the practice. Thoughts may interrupt your awareness, but it is the mind’s nature to return to the primary object after a certain amount of worrying, wandering and rationalisation. Be open to receive it when it returns, and continue being with the primary object. Appreciating the mind’s nature without complaint, being aware of both mindful and the unmindful states of mind, you experience the power of mindfulness.

⁵See Nyanaponika Thera, *Power of Mindfulness*, introductory pages, v-vii.

Whenever mindfulness is present, the consciousness will gain a distance from the faculties and sense impingements.

At times, you may feel like a flat tyre. Feeling disheartened, you may wish to abandon the practice. With faith, however, your consciousness is well supported and energised. Faith also, may come and go. Sometimes, you may feel energetic and bright. At other times, doubt sets in, leaving you discouraged.

Operating in the sensual plane, you are reactive to pleasurable moods and painful states. Instead, with maturity of consciousness, accept all mind states without a reaction. Then, you develop equanimity. Whatever the experience, don't personalise it as it could lead towards an immature and reactive state of consciousness. Without rushing to a conclusion, try to develop equanimity, an evenly suspended attention to what unfolds with choiceless awareness.

When concentration fluctuates, the consciousness is agitated. If we consider consciousness as the ocean; mental faculties of faith, energy, mindfulness and wisdom are like waves. They fluctuate. Consciousness is also subject to change. When these mental faculties calm down, the mind could prepare itself towards an ideal solitude. As the consciousness gains a distance from the faculties and the sense impingements and remains in the middle, in equanimity, it can reach a state of ideal seclusion. What you must do is to become aware of the fluctuation of these mental faculties with an objective distance and instead of a reaction, develop them as *powers*, reinforcing and galvanising their respective roles, whilst maintaining your consciousness in equilibrium.

Developing the resistance and the immunity to remain unshaken amidst any challenge, equanimity becomes

the backbone to one's spiritual life. Mindfully, become aware of the fluctuating mental faculties. Try to galvanise the faith, energy, mindfulness, wisdom or concentration with equanimity. As you relinquish the changing nature of these mind states, you experience emancipation, an ideal seclusion. The mind could appear irrational when it simply observes everything as an unfolding, without duality. Take a step back and just observe the performance of mental faculties. When the consciousness is equanimous, duality dissipates. An ideal lover of solitude makes all mishaps a reason to be glad in all circumstances!

Seclusion from sensory consciousness

How does the mind commit to what it sees, hears, smells, touches, tastes and thinks? Personalising sensory experience, all that is seen, heard or tasted (etc) is claimed with self-view, as "mine", and there is a reaction (an attachment or rejection). Like the gravitational force, nothing is allowed to escape the orbit and everything is pulled back to earth! The only escape from sensory experience is the Buddha's instruction to become aware of each sensory transaction with wise reflection (*yoniso manasikāra*). Otherwise, the mind habitually propels towards a grasping or a rejection of sense impingements, due to *kammic* forces, preference (likings and dislikings) or habitual training.

In each situation, the five sense bases, the eye, the ear, the tongue and body, fight for the attention of our consciousness. The eye is available to see visual objects. A healthy ear drum is available to receive sounds. The nose is available to receive different smells, the tongue for tastes and the body, to receive tactile sensations. The mind is involved with pet ideas, philosophising or rationalising. Concerning these six sense bases and the six sense impingements, which one

takes priority in a given moment, is a coincidence.

As eye sensitivity and the visual object come together, 'seeing' takes place (*cakkhunca paticca rupeca uppajati cakkhu viññānan*). When 'seeing' takes place, immediately, the eye-consciousness is formed. When the eye, the object and eye-consciousness come together, there is contact (*phassa*). Concurrently, sounds may strike the ear drum, but 'hearing' doesn't take place as the consciousness is engaged with the eye. Then, of the five sense organs, four are enlightened and only one is captured by sensory experience. By selecting one, say for example, 'seeing', the remaining four sensory impressions are rejected. Continuing with the 'seeing', defilements are not generated at the other five sense bases for sure.

So, we must not get drawn into sensory experience through the remaining four faculties.

A well-learned practitioner (*sutava ariyasāvako*), having seen and listened to noble persons (*ariyānam dassavi ariya dhamme kovido ariyadhamme suvinīto*), will practice according to the Buddha's instructions without attachment to sensory experience.

Go to a silent place and close your eyes with minimal distraction from sounds, tastes or smells (etc). Mindfully, become aware of the contact between the breath and the body. Thoughts and sounds may interrupt your awareness as you attempt to stay only with the touch of the breath. Observe how the mind shifts its priority from the breath to the thought and when a sound arises, to the sound (etc). Instead of reacting to the secondary objects (thoughts, sounds (etc)), become aware of the mind's shift from one sense impingement to the next. Mindfully, observe these sensory transactions, whilst developing a resistance to ensure con-

tinuity of mindfulness on the breath as your primary object. A clear stream of consciousness is never available as sounds, thoughts and bodily pains will always infiltrate our awareness.

In the *Mālukiyaputta sutta*, the Buddha is approached by an elderly disciple, *Mālukiyaputta* for meditation instructions, before going to a solitary place to commence his practice. The Buddha queries: *is there a visual object that you have never seen and for the moment, you are not looking at or that which you are not bound to look at in the future? Under such circumstances, can a visual object generate any attachment or desire?* *Mālukiyaputta* responds: “no”. Without contact in the past, the present or the future, defilements cannot manifest. So, the Buddha instructs that as long as you are engaged with one of the six sense bases, defilements are not created in the remaining five. Being aware of the ‘seeing’, ‘hearing’, ‘smelling’ or ‘touching’, from one moment to the next, the swift switch of the mind from one object to another could be noted.

Although the eye could see the whole world, it cannot see itself without the aid of a mirror. In the *vipassanā* practice, the main aim is to see things as they are. It is the mirror of our mind’s projection that makes sensory impression noteworthy or hopeless. However beautiful the object, in a bad mood, you experience displeasure. The quality of mind receiving the sense impingement determines the reaction, be it an attachment or a rejection. Personalising the experience, we entertain that which is pleasurable by attaching to it.

Instead, mindfully become aware of the sensory experience, ‘seeing’ (etc). Without delighting in the detail, the shapes and the manner of the visual object, observe the process of ‘seeing’ through eye sensitivity. Witnessing the

process without claiming it as a personal experience, just stop at the process of 'seeing' to avoid commentary (mental proliferation) about it. When a camera snaps to take a photo, it just clicks and stops. Similarly, there is no involvement in the 'seeing' process, no gender attached to it and no defilements created - it is just like the clicking of a camera!

The uninstructed mind adds to sensory experience, giving value to what is seen or heard (etc). All that is seen is personalised and biased and seen through mental projection. When we personalise experience through measurement, judgement and preference; what we see, hear and think becomes a projected or fabricated "truth". If you continue on a foundation of preference and measurement, the dormant forms of defilements (*anusaya kilesa*) receive the nutrients to proliferate. By going beyond preference, we can appreciate our common humanness.

By mindfully gaining a distance from what you see, you are vigilantly detached, and the vision fades off. Even when the breath becomes subtle, although there is progress in the practice, the rational mind entertains doubt or feels bored as the experience becomes monotonous. In *samsāra*, we have grown to appreciate anything that is caught in the track of birth and death (or death and rebirth) as colourful events. Seeing things fade away or experiencing a neutral impression, you experience boredom. Indifference is the character of *nibbāna*. Entering the realm of *nibbāna*, whatever the object you penetrate will fade off. This is where you hopefully find ideal solitude.

Being aware of 'seeing' or 'hearing', making a mental note of the process as 'seeing, seeing' or 'hearing, hearing', you detach from sensory experience. Let the various entertainments unfold and the different colours and shades become separate from you. Note all processes, remaining

detached from all that unfolds. Withdrawing from the external and bringing the sensitivity back to consciousness, you restrain your faculties. This is the proximate cause for developing wisdom. The past has lapsed and the future is yet to come. Be mindful of the present experience. Don't personalise the process.

Whether an event is auspicious or not, when you observe it as an unfolding, you are free and separate from the process. The external world is what we create through our interpretation. So we are responsible for our fabrications and manipulations. Simply know that the next moment will be yet another experience. That too will be an unfolding. Consciousness is such a magician as it can create so much!

The Buddha describes materiality to be like foam; feelings to be bubbles; perception to be a mirage; mental formations to be like the trunk of a banana tree and consciousness to be like a magician. You see the magic when you are in front of the magician. Going behind the magician, you see the tricks of the trade and the camouflage that unfolds as reality, at the front. When you see the magic of consciousness, your whole observation and attitude to life undergoes a reshuffle.

Becoming mindful in day to day activities and independent of the people around you, the preference you attribute to people and events will be a subject matter for observation. Delving into the human mind and understanding the projections of your mind, you can develop compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity towards the actions of others.

The Buddha asks that we restrain ourselves, and by doing this, we protect others. By protecting others, we are also protected. When the *dhamma* is alive, you see the Bud-

dha within you. The real solitude and freedom is not so far away. Becoming mindful of sensory transactions, moment to moment, day after day with non-judgmental awareness, reach a seclusion which is auspicious and ideal. So take responsibility for your own projections and mental proliferation by becoming mindful of all processes with moment to moment awareness.

Experiencing the 'deathless'

One day, we must meet death. Amusing ourselves in extremes (pleasure and pain), we try various tricks to avoid death or a contemplation of it. You cannot negotiate with *māra* and no favouritism is possible when death, approaches. Be diligent and take on the practice with moment to moment awareness. There is a causal link between the contemplation of death (*marana*) and deathlessness (*amatha*), liberation. It is through death that we reach the deathless.

Birth is the proximate cause of death, so, to experience deathlessness, there ought to be no birth. The proximate cause for birth is *kammic* volition. When you understand the accumulation of *kammic* forces, you realise that it is attachment to sense impression that pushes you towards *kammic* volition. By understanding the magic of the mind (the consciousness) with moment to moment awareness of sense impression you refrain from reaction and instead, become aware of things as and when they arise, with diligent effort.

It is by mastering the art of 'thin slicing of time', where you dissect each event as it unfolds with continuous awareness, that you reach the deathless. As long as you consider time as a chunk, it is impenetrable. You see, between an in-breath and an out-breath, there is a gap, the deathless.

With sharpened awareness, you could see each individual episode unfolding, moment to moment, a thin slicing of time and space.

Gradually, you see the transient and evolving nature of the breath (death) and the subtle gap; the space, the neutral feeling or the apparent absence of perception or the uncreated (deathlessness) in between each process. With the touch, death arises as it can arouse a contact that could generate volition and is subject to change. That which is not subject to arousal or devoid of description (space or the neutral feeling) is the realm of deathless, auspicious seclusion.

Between pain and pleasure, there is indifference (no pain-no pleasure); and between two thoughts or sounds, there is the deathless. With thin slicing of time, in each moment that unfolds, you must see death and the deathless in their interdependence. Where qualitative discernment is present, our consciousness creates duality - the subject and the object, the good and the bad and pleasure and pain. The oscillation continues. *Nibbāna* is non-duality, the space (*ākāsa*) between matter (*rūpa*), the gap between pleasure and pain (*avedaitha sukha*); sign-less state of perception (*animitta saññā*), non-descriptive consciousness (*anidassana viññāna*) or the uncreated, a state of equanimity towards all formations (*sankhāra upekkhā*).

In the absence of duality, there is contentment; rejuvenation, as you witness the fiction involved in sense impression. But the space or the indifferent feeling can be reached only by evading the extremes of materiality; or the pleasure and pain (etc), perception of sensory consciousness or mental proliferation. It is like moving to the middle of the see-saw from its edges - you gradually move away from the oscillation of duality to experience the equilibrium of

non-duality (equanimity) - an ideal seclusion from craving (*tanhā*), conceit (*māna*) and self-view (*dhitti*).

Day and night, you must maximise the aloneness gained of seclusion from the five aggregates, to experience *bhaddekaratta*, an auspicious one single delight or one night. Venerable Katukurunde Nānānanda gives the term *ekaratta*, the meaning, *ekavihari* or *ekacari*, one who delights in maximising aloneness.

Experiencing the aloneness of the uncreated, the unperceivable or indifference and maximising your awareness of it; you develop an immunity and a resistance to the unknown state where boundaries and verbalisation is unavailable. This is the ideal seclusion of a *bhaddekaratta*. Your aloneness will be a silent teaching to those around you as they too grapple with their spiritual journey. The journey so far has been one of birth and death (death and rebirth). So, penetrate that space, that gap, which does not oscillate, but stays neutral; that experience which is not subject to affliction, and impermanence.

In a state of non-descriptive or non-manifest consciousness (*anidassana viññāna*), the feeling is one that cannot be experienced (*avedaitha sukha*) and you experience sign-less perception, that which does not generate an arousal (*animitta saññā*) and equanimity towards all formations (*sankhāra upekkhā*). Maximising this state, you move towards liberation, a realm of deathlessness, a state of ideal seclusion.

May you delve into a state of ideal solitude and maximise your aloneness to reach liberation in this very life.

Pāli- English Glossary

<i>Ākasa</i>	Space
<i>Amatha</i>	Deathlessness
<i>Āmisa sukha</i>	Material pleasure
<i>Anidassana viññāna</i>	Non-descriptive/non-manifest consciousness
<i>Apilāpana lakkhana</i>	Characteristic of non-superficiality
<i>Anusaya kilesa</i>	Dormant or latent forms of defilements
<i>Animitta saññā</i>	Sign-less perception
<i>Animitta samādhi</i>	State of sign-less concentration
<i>Avedhāta sukha</i>	Feeling that cannot be experienced
<i>Bala</i>	Power
<i>Cetanā</i>	Intention
<i>Citta</i>	Mind state (consciousness)
<i>Cittaviveka</i>	Mental solitude
<i>Cetasika</i>	Mental factors
<i>Dhamma uddhacca</i>	Overestimation of spiritual progress
<i>Dhitti</i>	Self-view
<i>Gehasita sukha</i>	Household pleasure
<i>Jhāna</i>	Meditative absorption
<i>Kāmacchanda</i>	Sensual desire
<i>Kamma</i>	Intentional action
<i>Kāyaviveka</i>	Physical solitude
<i>Khanda</i>	Aggregates
<i>Kilesa</i>	Defilements
<i>Māna</i>	Conceit

<i>Nāma</i>	Name
<i>Nāma- rupa pariccheda ñāna</i>	Insight knowledge into mind/name and matter
<i>Nibbāna</i>	Liberation
<i>Nirāmisa sukha</i>	Immaterial pleasure
<i>Nirodha</i>	Cessation
<i>Paccaya-pariggaha ñāna</i>	Insight knowledge into cause and effect
<i>Pariyutthāna kilesa</i>	Obsessive forms of defilements
<i>Phassa</i>	Contact (of mind with an object)
<i>Pīti</i>	Rapture/ joy
<i>Rupa</i>	Matter/ corporeality
<i>Saddhā</i>	Faith
<i>Saññā</i>	Perception
<i>Samsāra</i>	Cycle of existence
<i>Sammassana ñāna</i>	Insight knowledge into arising and passing away of phenomena
<i>Sankhāra</i>	Volitional formations / mental fabrications
<i>Sankhāra Upekkhā</i>	Equanimity towards mental formations / fabrications
<i>Sati bala</i>	Power of mindfulness
<i>Sīla</i>	Morality
<i>Sutta</i>	Theoretical (book) knowledge
<i>Sutava ariyasāvako</i>	A well-learned practitioner
<i>Tanhā</i>	Craving
<i>Thīna-middha</i>	Sloth and torpor
<i>Tejo-dhātu</i>	Heat element

<i>Tirasaññā padatthāna</i>	Strong perception as the proximate factor
<i>Upakilesa</i>	Imperfections
<i>Udayabbaya-ñāna</i>	Insight knowledge into arising and passing away
<i>Upekkhā</i>	Equanimity
<i>Vāyo dhātu</i>	Air element
<i>Vedhanā</i>	Feeling
<i>Vicikicchā</i>	Sceptical doubt
<i>Vipāka</i>	Results from intentional action
<i>Viññāna</i>	Consciousness
<i>Vītikkama kilesa</i>	Transgressive forms of defilements

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