PRACTICAL VIPASSANÆ
MEDITATIONAL EXERCISES
THE VENERABLE MAHÆSØ SAYÆDAW

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The Venerable Mahæsø Sayædaw was born in the year 1904 at Seikkhun, a large prosperous village of pleasing appearance lying about seven miles to the west of historic Shwebo town in Upper Myanmar. His parents, peasant proprietors by occupation, were U Kan Taw and Daw Oke. At the age of six the Sayædaw was sent to receive his early monastic education under U Ædicca, presiding monk of Pyinmana monastery at Seikkhun. Six years later, he was initiated into the monastic Order as a sæma¼era under the same teacher and given the novice's name of Shin Sobhana (which means Auspicious), a name that befitted his stalwart, impressive features and his dignified, serene behavior. He proved to be an apt and bright pupil, making quick, remarkable progress in his scriptural studies. When U Ædicca left the Order, Shin Sobhana continued his studies under Sayædaw U Parama of Thugyikyaung monastery, Ingyintaw-taik, till he attained the age of nineteen when he had to make a fateful decision in his young life--whether to continue in the Order and devote the rest of his life to the service of the Buddha Sæsana or to return to lay life. Shin Sobhana knew where his heart lay and unhesitatingly chose the first course. With due and solemn ceremony, he was ordained a full-fledged bhikkhu on the 26th day of November 1923, Sumedhæ Sayædaw Ashin Nimmala acting as his spiritual preceptor. Within four years of his ordination, the future Mahæsø Sayædaw, now Ashin Sobhana took in his stride all the three grades (lower, middle and higher) of the Pæ¹i scriptural examinations conducted by Government.

Ashin Sobhana next went to the city of Mandalay, noted for its pre-eminence in Buddhist learning, to pursue advanced study of the scriptures under Sayædaws well known for their learning. His stay at Khinnmakan West monastery for this purpose was, however, cut short after little more than a year when he was called to Mawlamyaing by the head of the Taik-kyauang monastery, Taungwainggale (who came from the same village as Ashin Sobhana) to assist him with the teaching of his pupils. While teaching at Taungwainggale, Ashin Sobhana went on with his own studies of the scriptures, being specially interested in and making a thorough study of the Mahæsatipa¥¥hæna Sutta. His deepening interest in the satipa¥¥hæna method of vipassanæ meditation took him then to neighboring Thaton where the well-known Mingun Jetawan Sayædaw was teaching it. Under the Mingun Jetawan Sayædaw's instructions, Ven Sobhana took up intensive practice of vipassanæ meditation for four months with such good results that he was in turn able to teach it properly to his first three disciples at Seikkhun while he was on a visit there in 1938. After his return from Thaton to Taungwainggale (owing to the grave illness and subsequent death of the aged Taik-kyauang Sayædaw) to resume his teaching work and to take charge of the monastery, Ven Sobhana sat for and passed with flying colours the Government-held Dhammæcariya (Teacher of the Dhamma) examination in June 1941.

On the eve of the Japanese invasion of Myanmar, Mahæsø Sayædaw had to leave Taungwainggale and return to his native Seikkhun. This was a welcome opportunity for the Sayædaw to devote himself wholeheartedly to his own practice of satipa¥¥hæna vipassanæ meditation and to teaching it to a growing number of disciples at Mahæsø monastery, Ingyintaw-taik (whence the Sayædaw came to be known as Mahæsø Sayædaw) at Seikkhun which fortunately remained free from the horror and disruption of war. It was during this wartime period that the Sayædaw was prevailed upon by his disciples to write his monumental Manual of Vipassanæ Meditation, an authoritative and comprehensive work expounding both the doctrinal and practical aspects of satipa¥¥hæna method of meditation.
It was not long before Maheo Sayædaw’s reputation as an able teacher of vipassanaæ meditation spread far and wide in the Shwebo-Sagaing region and came to attract the attention of a devout and well-to-do Buddhist in the person of Sir U Thwin who wanted to promote the Buddha Saana by setting up a meditation centre to be directed by a meditation teacher of proven virtue and ability. After listening to a discourse on vipassanaæ meditation given by the Sayædaw and observing the Sayædaw’s serene and noble demeanor, Sir U Thwin had no difficulty in making up his mind that Maheo Sayædaw was the ideal meditation master he had been looking for.

Eventually, on the 13th of November 1947, the Buddhassaanaæuggaha Association was founded at Yangon with Sir U Thwin as its first President and scriptural learning and practice of the Dhamma as its object. Sir U Thwin donated to the Association a plot of land in Hermitage Road, Kokine, Yangon, measuring over five acres for erection of the proposed meditation centre. Today, in 1978, the Centre occupies an area of 19.6 acres, on which a vast complex of buildings and other structures has sprung up. Sir U Thwin told the Association that he had found a reliable meditation teacher and proposed that the then Prime Minister of Myanmar invite Maheo Sayædaw to the Centre.

After the end of the Second World War the Sayædaw alternated his residence between his native Seikkhun and Taungwalingale in Mawlamyaing. In the meantime Myanmar had regained her independence on 4th January 1948. In May 1949, during one of his sojourns at Seikkhun, the Sayædaw completed a new nissaya translation of Mahæsatipañña Sutta. This work excels the average nissaya translation of this Sutta which is of great importance for those who wish to practise vipassanaæ meditation but need guidance.

In November of that year, on the personal invitation of the former Prime Minister, Maheo Sayædaw came down from Shwebo and Sagaing to the Saana Yeikthæ (Meditation Centre) at Yangon, accompanied by two senior Sayædaws. Thus began twenty-nine years ago, Maheo Sayædaw’s spiritual headship and direction of the Saana Yeikthæ Yangon (then in its initial stage of development without the many appurtenances that grace it today). On 4th December 1949 Maheo Sayædaw personally inducted the very first batch of 25 yogøs into the practice of vipassanaæ meditation. As the yogøs grew in numbers later on, it became too strenuous for the Sayædaw himself to give the whole of the initiation talk. From July 1951 the talk was tape-recorded and played back to each new batch of yogøs with a few introductory words by the Sayædaw. Within a few years of the establishment of the principal Saana Yeikthæ Yangon, similar meditation centres sprang up in many parts of the country with Maheo trained members of the Sangha as meditation teachers. These centres were not confined to Myanmar alone, but extended to neighboring Theravaæda countries like Thailand and Sri Lanka. A few such centres also grew up in Cambodia and India. According to a 1972 census, the total number of yogøs trained at all these centres (both in Myanmar and abroad) had passed the figure of seven hundred thousand. In recognition of his distinguished scholarship and spiritual attainments, Maheo Sayædaw was honored in 1952 by the then President of the Union of Myanmar with the prestigious title of Agga Mahæ-Pa¼ðita (the Exaltedly Wise One).

Soon after attainment of Independence, the Government of Myanmar began planning to hold a Sixth Buddhist Council (Sangæyanæ) in Myanmar, with four other Theravaæda Buddhist countries (Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos) participating. For prior consultations for this purpose, Government dispatched a mission to Thailand and Cambodia, composed of Nyaungyan and Maheo Sayædaws and two laymen. The mission discussed the plan with the Thæthanæbaings (Primates of the Buddhist Church) of these two countries.

At the historic Sixth Buddhist Council which was inaugurated with every pomp and ceremony on 17th May 1954, Maheo Sayædaw played an eminent role, performing the exciting and onerous tasks of Osæna (Final Editor) and Pucchaka (Questioner) Sayædaw. A unique feature of this Council was the redaction not only of the Paæi Canon (canonical texts) but also of the a¥ækathæs (commentaries) and ¥økæs (subcommentaries). In the redaction of this commentarial literature, Maheo Sayædaw was responsible for his part for making a critical analysis, sound interpretation and skilful reconciliation of several crucial and divergent passages in these commentarial works.
A significant result of the Sixth Buddhist Council was the revival of interest in Theravada Buddhism among Mahayana Buddhists. In the year 1955 while the Council was in progress, twelve Japanese monks and a Japanese laywoman arrived in Myanmar to study Theravada Buddhism. The monks were initiated into the Theravada Buddhist Sangha as saṃghera (novitiates) while the laywoman was made a Buddhist nun. Next, in July 1957, at the instance of the Buddhist Association of Mojō on the island of Kyushu in Japan, the Buddha Sasana Council of Myanmar sent a Theravada Buddhist mission in which Mahā Sayādaw was one of the leading representatives of the Myanmar Sangha.

In the same year (1957) Mahā Sayādaw was assigned the task of writing in Pāli an introduction to the Viscuddhi-magga Aṭṭhakathā, one that would in particular refute certain misrepresentations and misstatements concerning the gifted and noble author of this Aṭṭhakathā, Ven Buddhaghosa. The Sayādaw completed this difficult task in 1960, his work bearing every mark of distinctive learning and depth of understanding. By then the Sayādaw had also completed two volumes (out of four) of his Myanmar translation of this famous commentary and classic work on Buddhist meditation.

At the request of the Government of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), a special mission headed by Sayādaw U Sujāta, a senior lieutenant of Mahā Sayādaw, was sent to Ceylon in July 1955 for the express purpose of promotion satipaṭṭhāna vipassanā meditation. The mission stayed in Ceylon for over a year doing good work, setting up 12 permanent and 17 temporary meditation centres. Following completion of a specially constructed central meditation centre on a site granted by the Ceylonese Government, a larger mission led by Mahā Sayādaw himself left on 6th January 1959 for Ceylon via India. The mission was in India for about three weeks, in the course of which its members visited several holy places associated with the life and work of Lord Buddha, Gave Religious talks on suitable occasions and had interviews with Prime Minister Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, President of India Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Vice-President Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. A especially interesting feature of the visit was the warm welcome accorded to the mission by members of the depressed classes who had embraced the Buddhist faith under the guidance of their late leader Dr. Ambedkar.

The mission emplaned at Madras for Ceylon on 29th January 1959 and arrived at Colombo the same day. On Sunday the 1st February, at the opening ceremony of the permanent central meditation centre named Bhāvanā Majjhāhāna, Mahā Sayādaw delivered an address in Pāli after Prime Minister Bandaranāyeke and some others had spoken. Led by Mahā Sayādaw, the members of the mission next went on an extended tour of the island, visiting several meditation centres where Mahā Sayādaw gave suitable discourses on vipassanā meditation and worshipping at various places of Buddhist pilgrimage like Polonnaruwa, Anuradhapura and Kandy. This historic visit of the Myanmar mission under the wise and inspiring leadership of Mahā Sayādaw was symbolic of the close and mutually beneficial ties (dating from ancient times) of spiritual kinship between these two Theravada Buddhist countries. Its positive contribution to the welfare of the Buddhist movement in Sri Lanka was a steady revival of interest and activity in Buddhist meditational discipline which seemed to have declined in this fraternal land of ours.

In February 1954, a visitor to the Sasana Yeikthaewould be struck by the spectacle of a young Chinese practising vipassanā meditation. The yogī in question was a young Chinese Buddhist teacher from Indonesia by the name of Bung An who had become interested in this kind of Buddhist meditation. Under the guidance and instructions of Mahā Sayādaw and of the late Sayādaw U Naśuttara, Mr. Bung An made such excellent progress in about a month’s time that Mahā Sayādaw himself gave him a detailed talk on the progress of insight. Later he was ordained a bhikkhu and named Ashin Jinarakkhita. Mahā Sayādaw himself acted as his spiritual preceptor. After his return as a Buddhist monk to his native Indonesia to launch a Theravada Buddhist movement in that country a request was received by the Buddha Sasana Council to send a Myanmar Buddhist monk to promote further missionary work in Indonesia. It was decided that Mahā Sayādaw himself, as the preceptor and mentor of Ashin Jinarakkhita, should go. Along with 13 other monks from other
Theravada countries, Mahāsāsayadaw undertook such essential missionary activities as consecrating saṅgās (ordination boundary), ordaining bhikkhus, initiating saṅgāvāras (novices in the Buddhist Sangha) and giving discourses on Buddha-dhamma, particularly talks on vipassanāmeditation.

Considering these auspicious and fruitful activities in the interests of initiating, promoting and strengthening the Buddhist movements in Indonesia and Sri Lanka respectively, Mahāsāsayadaw’s missions to these countries may well be described as “Dhamma-vijaya” (victory of the Dhamma) journeys.

As early as the year 1952, Mahāsāsayadaw, at the request of the Minister in charge of Sangha Affairs of Thailand, had sent Sayadaws U Āsābha and U Indavamsa to promote the practice of satipaṭṭhāna vipassanāmeditation in that country. Thanks to the efforts of these two Sayadaws, Mahāsāsayadaw’s method of satipaṭṭhāna vipassanāmeditation gained wide currency in Thailand where many meditation centres had come into existence by about the year 1960 and the number of trained yogas had exceeded the hundred thousandth mark.

On the exhortation of Abhidhajamahāraguru Māsoeyin Sayadaw who headed the Sanghanāyaka Executive Body at the Sixth Buddhist Council, Mahāsāsayadaw had undertaken to teach regularly Ven. Buddhaghosa’s Visuddhi-magga Aftekathā and Ven. Dhammapāla’s Visuddhi-magga Mahāvţkā to his Sangha associates at the Aeana Yeiktha. These two commentarial works of the Theravāda School deal in the main with Buddhist meditational theory and practice, though they also offer useful explanation of important doctrinal points in Buddha-vaţda. They are thus of the utmost importance for those who are going to be meditation teachers. In pursuance of his undertaking, Mahāsāsayadaw began teaching these two works on 2nd February 1961 and for one and one-half to two hours a day. On the basis of notes of his lectures taken by his pupils, Mahāsāsayadaw started writing his nissaya translation of Visuddhi-magga Mahāvţkā and completed it on 4th February 1966. The production of this nissaya translation was an exceptional performance on the part of Mahāsāsayadaw. The section on samayantarā (differing views held by other religions or faiths) formed the most exacting part of the Sayadaw’s task in producing this work. For tackling this part, the Sayadaw had to, among other things, familiarize himself with ancient Hindu philosophical doctrines and terminology by studying all available references, including works in Sanskrit and English.

Mahāsāsayadaw has to his credit up till now 67 volumes of Myanmar Buddhist literature. Space does not permit us to list them all here, but a complete up-to-date list of them is appended to the Sayadaw’s latest publication namely, A Discourse on Sakkāpañha Sutta (published in October 1978).

At one time, Mahāsāsayadaw was subjected to severe criticism in certain quarters for his advocacy of the allegedly unorthodox method of noting the rising and falling of the abdomen in vipassanāmeditation. It was mistakenly assumed that this method was an innovation of the Sayadaw on his own, whereas the truth is that it had been approved several years before Mahāsāsayadaw adopted it, by no less an authority than the āsā (original) Mingun Jetavan Sayadaw, and that it is in no way contrary to the Buddha’s teaching on the subject. The reason for Mahāsāsayadaw’s preference for this method is that the average yogā finds it easier to note this manifestation of vajro-dhatu (element of motion). It is not, however, imposed as an obligatory technique upon any yogā who comes and practises meditation at any of the Mahāsāsayadaw’s meditation centres. Such a yogā may, if he likes and if he finds that he is better accustomed to the asāpāsa way (observing the in breath and out breath), meditate in this latter mode. Mahāsāsayadaw himself refrained from joining issue with his critics on this point, but two learned Sayadaws brought out a book each in defence of Mahāsāsayadaw’s method, thus enabling those who are interested in the controversy to weigh and judge for themselves. This controversy was not confined to Myanmar alone, but arose in Ceylon also where some members of the indigenous Sangha, inexperienced and unknowledgeable in practical meditational work, publicly assailed Mahāsāsayadaw’s method in newspapers and journalistic articles. Since this criticism was voiced in the English language with its world-wide coverage,
silence could no longer be maintained and the late Sayadaw U Ñæuttara of Kabæ-aye (World Peace Pagoda campus) forcefully responded to the criticisms in the pages of the Ceylonese Buddhist periodical “World Buddhism”.

Mahæsø Sayædaw’s international reputation and standing in the field of Buddhist meditation has attracted numerous visitors and yogøs from abroad, some seeking enlightenment for their religious problems and perplexities and others intent on practising satipa¥¥hæna vipassanæ meditation under the Sayædaw’s personal guidance and instructions. Among the earliest of such yogøs was former British Rear Admiral E.H. Shattock who came on leave from Singapore and practised meditation at the Saæana Yeikthæ in 1952. On his return home to England he published a book entitled “An Experiment in Mindfulness” in which he related his experiences in generally appreciative terms. Another such practitioner was Mr. Robert Duvo, a French-born American from California. He came and practised meditation at the Centre, first as a lay yogi and later as an ordained bhikkhu. He has subsequently published a book in France about his experiences and the satipa¥¥hæna vipassanæ method of meditation. Particular mention should be made of Anægærika Shri Munindra of Buddha Gayæ in India, who became an antevasika (close) disciple of Mahæsø Sayædaw, spending several years with the Sayædaw learning the Buddhist scriptures and practicing satipa¥¥hæna vipassanæ (insight) meditation. He now directs an international meditation centre at Buddha Gayæ where many people from the West have come and practiced meditation. Among these yogøs was a young American, Joseph Goldstein, who has recently written a perceptive book on insight meditation under the name “The Experience of Insight: A Natural Unfolding”.

Some of Sayædaw’s works have been published abroad, such as “The Satipa¥¥hæna Vipassanæ Meditation” and “Practical Insight Meditation” by the Unity Press, San Francisco, California, U.S.A., and the “Progress of Insight” by the Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka. Selfless and able assistance was rendered by U Pe Thin (now deceased) and Myanaung U Tin in Sayædaw’s dealings with his visitors and yogøs from abroad and in the translation into English of some of Sayædaw’s discourses on vipassana meditation. Both of them were accomplished yogøs.

The Venerable Mahæsø Sayædaw is profoundly reverenced by countless numbers of grateful disciples at home in Myanmar and abroad. Today the Sayædaw is already in the seventy-fifth year of his life and has no longer the strength and vigour of youth and middle age. But like a true son of the Buddha, he carries on valiantly, spreading the word of the Master throughout the world and helping unnumbered thousands and tens of thousands on to the Path of Enlightenment and Deliverance. May the revered Sayædaw live long and continue to shower the blessings of the Buddha-dhamma on all and sundry for many many years to come!

U Nyi Nyi
Mahæsø Disciple and Yogø
Member of the Executive Committee
Buddhasæsanænuggaha Association
Yangon
The 18th day of October 1978
POSTSCRIPT

Although it was the earnest wish of his devoted disciples that the Venerable Mahæsì Sayædaw might continue to live for several more years and go on showering the blessings of the Buddha-dhamma on all those who seek freedom and deliverance, the ineluctable law of Anicca (Impermanence) terminated, with tragic suddenness, his selfless and dedicated life on the 14th, day of August 1982.

It was characteristic of the Venerable Sayædaw’s disinterested and single-minded devotion to the cause of the Buddha-saanaæ that, regardless of his advancing age and enfeebled health, he undertook three more Dhammadþta (missionary) tours to the West (Britain, Europe and America) and to India and Nepal in the three successive years of 1979, 1980 and 1981 preceding his death. Though the great Dhamma Master is no more with us in the flesh, his revered memory will remained enshrined in our grateful hearts for long and his priceless teachings on Satipa¥¥hæna Vipassanæ Bhævanæ (Insight meditation through Mindfulness) will be a source of lasting inspiration and enlightenment for all his devotees. We have happily been able to preserve them in the form of tape-recorded discourses and numerous publications in the Myanmar vernacular, with several of them in English translation (Vide “Mahæsi Publications in English” by this writer in this memorial publication).

U Nyi Nyi
Mahæsi Disciple and Yogø
Yangon, 5th Jan. 1983

PRACTICAL VIPASSANÆ/MEDITATIONAL EXERCISES

(The following is a talk by the Ven Mahæsø Sayædaw Agga MañaPa¼ðita U Sobhana given to his disciples on their induction into VipassanaæMeditation at Saana YeikthæMeditation Centre, Yangon, Myanmar. It was translated from the Burmese by U Nyi Nyi)

The practice of Vipassanaæ or Insight Meditation is the effort made by the meditator to understand correctly the nature of the psychophysical phenomena-taking place in his own body. Physical phenomena are the things or objects which one clearly perceives around one. The whole of one’s body that one clearly perceives constitutes a group of material qualities (rþpa). Psychical or mental phenomena are acts of consciousness or awareness (næma). These (næma -rþpas) are clearly perceived to be happening whenever they are seen, heard, smelt, tasted, touched, or thought of. We must make ourselves aware of them by observing them and noting thus: ‘Seeing, seeing’, ‘hearing, hearing’, ‘smelling smelling’, ‘tasting, tasting’, ‘touching, touching’, or ‘thinking, thinking.’

Every time one sees, hears, smells, tastes, touches, or thinks, one should make a note of the fact. But in the beginning of one’s practice, one cannot make a note of every one of these happenings. One should, therefore, begin with noting those happenings which are conspicuous and easily perceivable.

With every act of breathing, the abdomen rises and falls, which movement is always evident. This is the material quality known as väyodhætu (the element of motion). One should begin by noting this movement, which may be done by the mind intently observing the abdomen. You will find the abdomen rising when you breathe in, and falling when you breathe out. The rising should be noted mentally as ‘rising’, and the falling as ‘falling’. If the movement is not evident by just noting it mentally, keep touching the abdomen with the palm of your hand. Do not alter the manner of your breathing. Neither slow it down, nor make it faster. Do not breathe too vigorously, either. You will
tire if you change the manner of your breathing. Breathe steadily as usual and note the rising and falling of the abdomen as they occur. Note it mentally, not verbally.

In vipassanæ meditation, what you name or say doesn't matter. What really matters is to know or perceive. While noting the rising of the abdomen, do so from the beginning to the end of the movement just as if you are seeing it with your eyes. Do the same with the falling movement. Note the rising movement in such a way that your awareness of it is concurrent with the movement itself. The movement and the mental awareness of it should coincide in the same way as a stone thrown hits the target. Similarly with the falling movement.

Your mind may wander elsewhere while you are noting the abdominal movement. This must also be noted by mentally saying 'wandering, wandering'. When this has been noted once or twice, the mind stops wandering, in which case you go back to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen. If the mind reaches somewhere, note as 'reaching, reaching.' Then go back to the rising and falling of the abdomen. If you imagine meeting somebody, note as 'meeting, meeting.' Then back to the rising and falling. If you imagine meeting and talking to somebody, note as 'talking, talking.'

In short, whatever thought or reflection occurs should be noted. If you imagine, note as 'imagining'. If you think, 'thinking'. If you plan, 'planning'. If you perceive, 'perceiving'. If you reflect, 'reflecting'. If you feel happy, 'happy'. If you feel bored, bored. If you feel glad, 'glad'. If you feel disheartened, 'disheartened'. Noting all these acts of consciousness is called cittænupassanæ.

Because we fail to note these acts of consciousness, we tend to identify them with a person or individual. We tend to think that it is ‘I’ Who is imagining, thinking, planning, knowing (or perceiving). We think that there is a person who from childhood onwards has been living and thinking. Actually, no such person exists. There are instead only these continuing and successive acts of consciousness. That is why we have to note these acts of consciousness and know them for what they are. That is why we have to note each and every act of consciousness as it arises. When so noted, it tends to disappear. We then go back to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen.

When you have sat meditating for long, sensations of stiffness and heat will arise in your body. These are to be noted carefully too. Similarly with sensations of pain and tiredness. All of these sensations are dukkhavedanæ (feeling of unsatisfactoriness) and noting them is vedanænupassanæ. Failure or omission to note these sensations makes you think, “I am stiff, I am feeling hot, I am in pain. I was all right a moment ago. Now I am uneasy with these unpleasant sensations.” The identification of these sensations with the ego is mistaken. There is really no ‘I’ involved, only a succession of one new unpleasant sensation after another.

It is just like a continuous succession of new electrical impulses that light up electric lamps. Every time unpleasant contacts are encountered in the body, unpleasant sensations arise one after another. These sensations should be carefully and intently noted, whether they are sensations of stiffness, of heat or of pain. In the beginning of the yogø's meditational practice, these sensations may tend to increase and lead to a desire to change his posture. This desire should be noted, after which the yogø should go back to noting the sensations of stiffness, heat, etc.

‘Patience leads to Nibbæna,’ as the saying goes. This saying is most relevant in meditational effort. One must be patient in meditation. If one shifts or changes one's posture too often because one cannot be patient with the sensation of stiffness or heat that arises, samædhi (good concentration) cannot develop. If samædhi cannot develop, insight cannot result and there can be no attainment of magga (the path that leads to Nibbæna), phala (the fruit of that path) and Nibbæna. That is why patience is needed in meditation. It is patience mostly with unpleasant sensations in the body like stiffness, sensations of heat and pain, and other sensations that are hard to bear. One should not immediately give up one's meditation on the appearance of such sensations and change one's meditational posture. One should go on patiently, just noting as ‘stiffness, stiffness’ or ‘hot, hot’. Moderate sensations of these kinds will disappear if one goes on noting them patiently. When
concentration is good and strong, even intense sensations tend to disappear. One then reverts to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen.

One will, of course, have to change one’s posture if the sensations do not disappear even after one has noted them for a long time, and if on the other hand they become unbearable. One should then begin noting as ‘wishing to change, wishing to change.’ If the arm rises, note as ‘rising, rising.’ If it moves, note as ‘moving, moving.’ This change should be made gently and noted as ‘rising, rising,’ ‘moving, moving’ and ‘touching, touching.’

If the body sways, ‘swaying, swaying.’ If the foot rises, ‘rising, rising’. If it moves, ‘moving, moving.’ If it drops, ‘dropping, dropping.’ If there is no change, but only static rest, go back to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen. There must be no intermission in between, only contiguity between a preceding act of noting contiguity between a preceding act of noting and a succeeding one, between a preceding samædhi (state of concentration) and a succeeding one, between a preceding act of intelligence and a succeeding one. Only then will there be successive and ascending stages of maturity in the yogø’s state of intelligence. Magga and Phalañæ¼a (knowledge of the path and its fruition) are attained only when there is this kind of gathering momentum. The meditative process is like that of producing fire by energetically and unremittingly rubbing two sticks of wood together so as to attain the necessary intensity of heat (when the flame arises).

In the same way, the noting in vipassanæmeditation should be continual and unremitting, without any resting interval between acts of noting whatever phenomena may arise. For instance, if a sensation of itchiness intervenes and the yogø desires to scratch because it is hard to bear, both the sensation and the desire to get rid of it should be noted, without immediately getting rid of the sensation by scratching.

If one goes on perseveringly noting thus, the itchiness generally disappears, in which case one reverts to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen. If the itchiness does not in fact disappear, one has, of course, to eliminate it by scratching. But first, the desire to do so should be noted. All the movements involved in the process of eliminating this sensation should be noted, especially the touching, pulling and pushing, and scratching movements, with an eventual reversion to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen.

Every time you make a change of posture, you begin with noting your intention or desire to make the change, and go on to noting every movement closely, such as rising from the sitting posture, raising the arm, moving and stretching it. You should make the change at the same time as noting the movements involved. As your body sways forward, note it. As you rise, the body becomes light and rises. Concentrating your mind on this, you should gently note as ‘rising, rising.’

The yogø should behave as if he were a weak invalid. People in normal health rise easily and quickly or abruptly. Not so with feeble invalids, who do so slowly and gently. The same is the case with people suffering from ‘back-ache’ who rise gently lest the back hurt and cause pain.

So also with meditating yogøs. They have to make their changes of posture gradually and gently; only then will mindfulness, concentration and insight be good. Begin, therefore, with gentle and gradual movements. When rising, the yogø must do so gently like an invalid, at the same time noting as ‘rising, rising.’ Not only this: though the eye seeds, the yogø must act as if he does not see. Similarly when the ear hears. While meditating, the yogø’s concern is only to note. What he sees and hears are not his concern. So whatever strange or striking things he may see or hear, he must behave as if he does not see or hear them, merely noting carefully.

When making bodily movements, the yogø should do so gradually as if he were a weak invalid, gently moving the arms and legs, bending or stretching them, bending down the head and bringing it up. All these movements should be made gently. When rising from the sitting posture, he should do so gradually, noting as ‘rising, rising.’ When straightening up and standing, note as
‘standing, standing.’ When looking here and there, note as ‘looking, seeing.’ When walking note the steps, whether they are taken with the right or the left foot. You must be aware of all the successive movements involved, from the raising of the foot to the dropping of it. Note each step taken, whether with the right foot or the left foot. This is the manner of noting when one walks fast.

It will be enough if you note thus when walking fast and walking some distance. When walking slowly or doing the cankama walk (walking up and down), three movements should be noted in each step: when the foot is raised, when it is pushed forward, and when it is dropped. Begin with noting the raising and dropping movements. One must be properly aware of the raising of the foot. Similarly, when the foot is dropped, one should be properly aware of the ‘heavy’ falling of the foot.

One must walk, noting as ‘raising, dropping’ with each step. This noting will become easier after about two days. Then go on to noting the three movements as described above, as ‘raising, pushing forward, dropping.’ In the beginning it will suffice to note one or two movements only, thus ‘right step, left step’ when walking fast and ‘raising, dropping’ when walking slowly. If when walking thus, you want to sit down, note as ‘wanting to sit down, wanting to sit down.’ When actually sitting down, note concentratedly the ‘heavy’ falling of your body.

When you are seated, note the movements involved in arranging your legs and arms. When there are no such movements, but just a stillness (static rest) of the body, note the rising and falling of the abdomen. While noting thus and if stiffness of your limbs and sensation of heat in any part of your body arise, go on to note them. Then back to ‘rising, falling’. While noting thus and if a desire to lie down arises, note it and the movements of your legs and arms as you lie down. The raising of the arm, the moving of it, the resting of the elbow on the floor, the swaying of the body, the stretching of legs, the listing of the body as one slowly prepares to lie down, all these movements should be noted.

To note as you lie down thus is important. In the course of this movement (that is, lying down), you can gain a distinctive knowledge (that is, magga-ñāṇa and phala-ñāṇa—the knowledge of the path and its fruition). When sammāñā (concentration) and ānāñā (insight) are strong, the distinctive knowledge can come at any moment. It can come in a single ‘bend’ of the arm or in a single ‘stretch’ of the arm. Thus it was that the Venerable Ānanda became an arahat.

The Ven. Ānanda was trying strenuously to attain Arahatship overnight on the eve of the first Buddhist council. He was practising the whole night the form of vipassanā meditation known as kagātasaṭṭi, noting his steps, right and left, raising, pushing forward and dropping of the feet; noting, happening by happening, the mental desire to walk and the physical movement involved in walking. Although this went on till it was nearly dawn, he had not yet succeeded in attaining Arahatship. Realizing that he had practised the walking meditation to excess and that, in order to balance sammañā (concentration) and ānāñā (effort), he should practise meditation in the lying posture for a while, he entered his chamber. He sat on the couch and then lay himself down. While doing so and noting ‘lying, lying,’ he attained Arahatship in an instant.

The Ven. Ānanda was only a sotāpanna (that is, a stream winner or one who has attained the first stage on the path to Nibbāna) before he thus lay himself down. From sotāpannahood, he continued to meditate and reached sakadāgāmahood (that is, the condition of the once-returner or one who has attained the second stage on the path), anāgāmahood (that is, the state of the non-returner or one who has attained the third stage on the path) and arahatship (that is, the condition of the noble one who has attained the last stage on the path.) Reaching these three successive stages of the higher path took only a little while. Just think of this example of the Ven. Ānanda’s attainment of arahatship. Such attainment can come at any moment and need not take long.

That is why the yogas should note with diligence all the time. He should not relax in his noting, thinking “this little lapse should not matter much.” All movements involved in lying down
and arranging the arms and legs should be carefully and unremittingly noted. If there is no movement, but only stillness (of the body), go back to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen. Even when it is getting late and time for sleep, the yogø should not go to sleep yet, dropping his noting. A really serious and energetic yogø should practise mindfulness as if he were forgoing his sleep altogether. He should go on meditating till he falls asleep. If the meditation is good and has the upper hand, he will not fall asleep. If, on the other hand, drowsiness has the upper hand, he will fall asleep. When he feels sleepy, he should note as ‘sleepy, sleepy,’ if his eyelids droop, ‘drooping’; if they become heavy or leaden, ‘heavy’; if the eyes become smarting, ‘smarting’. Noting thus, the drowsiness may pass and the eyes become ‘clear’ again.

The yogø should then note as ‘clear, clear’ and go on to note the rising and falling of the abdomen. However perseveringly the yogø may go on meditating, if real drowsiness intervenes, he does fall asleep. It is not difficult to fall asleep; in fact, it is easy. If you meditate in the lying posture, you gradually become drowsy and eventually fall asleep. That is why the beginner in meditation should not meditate too much in the lying posture. He should meditate much more in the sitting and walking postures of the body. But as it grows late and becomes time for sleep, he should meditate in the lying position, noting the rising and falling movements of the abdomen. He will then naturally (automatically) fall asleep.

The time he is asleep is the resting time for the yogø. But for the really serious yogø he should limit his sleeping time to about four hours. This is the ‘midnight time’ permitted by the Buddha. Four hours’ sleep is quite enough. If the beginner in meditation thinks that four hours’ sleep is not enough for health, he may extend it to five or six hours. Six hours’ sleep is clearly enough for health.

When the yogø awakens, he should at once resume noting. The yogø who is really bent on attaining magga and phāna, should rest from meditational effort only when he is asleep. At other times, in his waking moments, he should be noting continually and without rest. That is why, as soon as he awakens, he should note the awakening state of his mind as ‘awakening, awakening.’ If he cannot yet make himself aware of this, he should begin noting the rising and falling of the abdomen.

If he intends to get up from bed, he should note as ‘intending to get up, intending to get up.’ He should then go on to note the changing movements he makes as he arranges his arms and legs. When he raises his head and rises, note as ‘rising, rising’. When he is seated; note as ‘sitting, sitting.’ If he makes any changing movements as he arranges his arms and legs, all of these movements should also be noted. If there are no such changes, but only a sitting quietly, he should revert to noting the rising and falling movements of the abdomen.

One should also note when one washes one’s face and when one takes a bath. As the movements involved in these acts are rather quick, as many of them should be noted as possible. There are then acts of dressing, of tidying up the bed, of opening and closing the door; all these should also be noted as closely as possible.

When the yogø has his meal and looks at the mealtable, he should note as ‘looking, seeing, looking, seeing.’ When he extends his arm towards the food, touches it, collects and arranges it, handles it and brings it to the mouth, bends his head and puts the morsel of food into his mouth, drops his arm and raises his head again, all these movements should be duly noted.

(This way of noting is in accordance with the Myanmar way of taking a meal. Those who use fork and spoon or chopsticks should note the movements in an appropriate manner.)

When he chews the food, he should note as ‘chewing, chewing.’ When he comes to know the taste of the food, he should note as ‘knowing, knowing.’ As he relishes the food and swallows it, as the food goes down his throat, he should note all these happenings. This is how the yogø should note
as he takes one morsel after another of his food. As he takes his soup, all the movements involved such as extending of the arm, handling of the spoon and scooping with it and so on, all these should be noted. To note thus at mealtime is rather difficult as there are so many things to observe and note. The beginning yogñ is likely to miss several things which he should note, but he should resolve to note all. He cannot, of course, help it if he overlooks and misses some, but as his samædhi (concentration) becomes strong, he will be able to note closely all these happenings.

Well, I have mentioned so many things for the yogñ to note. But to summarize, there are only a few things to note. When walking fast, note as ‘right step,’ ‘left step,’ and as ‘raising, dropping’ when walking slowly. When sitting quietly, just note the rising and falling of the abdomen. Note the same when you are lying, if there is nothing particular to note. While noting thus and if the mind wanders, note the acts of consciousness that arise. Then back to the rising and falling of the abdomen. Note also the sensations of stiffness, pain and ache, and itchiness as they arise. Then back to the rising and falling of the abdomen. Note also, as they arise, the bending and stretching and moving of the limbs, bending and raising of the head, swaying and straightening of the body. Then back to the rising and falling of the abdomen.

As the yogñ goes on noting thus, he will be able to note more and more of these happenings. In the beginning, as his mind wanders here and there, the yogñ may miss noting many things. But he should not be disheartened. Every beginner in meditation encounters the same difficulty, but as he becomes more practised, he becomes aware of every act of mind wandering till eventually the mind does not wander any more. The mind is then riveted on the object of its attention, the act of mindfulness becoming almost simultaneous with the object of its attention such as the rising and falling of the abdomen. (In other words the rising of the abdomen becomes concurrent with the act of noting it, and similarly with the falling of the abdomen.)

The physical object of attention and the mental act of noting are occurring as a pair. There is in this occurrence no person or individual involved, only this physical object of attention and the mental act of noting occurring as a pair. The yogñ will in time actually and personally experience these occurrences. While noting the rising and falling of the abdomen he will come to distinguish the rising of the abdomen as physical phenomenon and the mental act of noting of it as psychical phenomenon; similarly with the falling of the abdomen. Thus the yogñ will distinctly come to realize the simultaneous occurrence in pair of these psychophysical phenomena.

Thus, with every act of noting, the yogñ will come to know for himself clearly that there are only this material quality which is the object of awareness or attention and the mental quality that makes a note of it. This discriminating knowledge is called naæræ-pariccheda-ñæ¼a, the beginning of the vipassanæ-ñæ¼a. It is important to gain this knowledge correctly. This will be succeeded, as the yogñ goes on, by the knowledge that distinguishes between the cause and its effect, which knowledge is called paccaya-pariggaha-ñæ¼a.

As the yogñ goes on noting, he will see for himself that what arises passes away after a short while. Ordinary people assume that both the material and mental phenomena go on lasting throughout life, that is, from youth to adulthood. In fact, that is not so. There is no phenomenon that lasts forever. All phenomena arise and pass away so rapidly that they do not last even for the twinkling of an eye. The yogñ will come to know this for himself as he goes on noting. He will then become convinced of the impermanency of all such phenomena. Such conviction is called aniccænupassanæ-ñæ¼a.

This knowledge will be succeeded by dukkhaænupassanæ-ñæ¼a, which realizes that all this impermanency is suffering. The yogñ is also likely to encounter all kinds of hardship in his body, which is just an aggregate of sufferings. This is also dukkhaænupassanæ-ñæ¼a. Next, the yogñ will become convinced that all these psycho-physical phenomena are occurring of their own accord, following nobody’s will and subject to nobody’s control. They constitute no individual or ego-entity. This realization is anattaænupassanæ-ñæ¼a.
When, as he goes on meditating, the yogi comes to realize firmly that all these phenomena are anicca, dukkha and anatta, he will attain Nibbāna. All the former Buddhas, Arahats and Ariyas realized Nibbāna following this very path. All meditating yogis should recognize that they themselves are now on this sati-paññāna path, in fulfillment of their wish for attainment of magga-ñāṇa (knowledge of the path), phala-ñāṇa (knowledge of the fruition of the path) and Nibbāna-dhamma, and following the ripening of their pāramī (perfection of virtue). They should feel glad at this and at the prospect of experiencing the noble kind of samādhi (tranquility of mind brought about by concentration) and ānā (supramundane knowledge or wisdom) experienced by the Buddhas, Arahats and Ariyas and which they themselves have never experienced before.

It will not be long before they will experience for themselves the magga-ñāṇa, phala-ñāṇa and Nibbāna-dhamma experienced by the Buddhas, Arahats and Ariyas. As a matter of fact, these may be experienced in the space of a month or of twenty or fifteen days of their meditational practice. Those whose pāramī is exceptional may experience these dhammas even within seven days.

The yogi should, therefore, rest content in the faith that he will attain these dhammas in the time specified above, that he will be freed of sakkayā-diśhi (ego-belief) and vicikicchā (doubt or uncertainty) and saved from the danger of rebirth in the nether worlds. He should go on with his meditational practice in this faith.

May you all be able to practise meditation well and quickly attain that Nibbāna which the Buddhas, Arahats and Ariyas have experienced!

SĀDHU (WELL DONE)! SĀDHU! SĀDHU!