

INSIGHT MEDITATION

by A. Mahinda

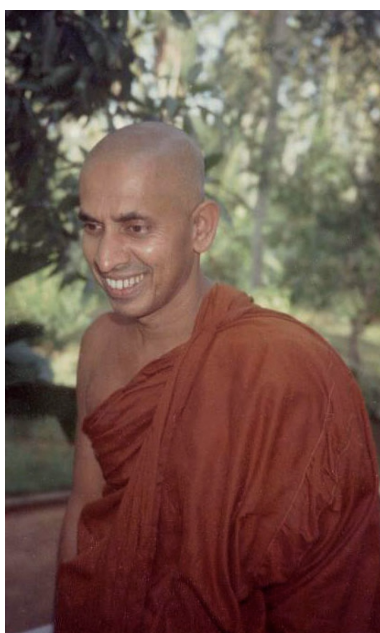


Written in 1969 at Kanduboda Meditation Centre, Sri Lanka

My Teachers:



Venerable Sumathipala Nayaka Thera



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INTRODUCTION

*“Though one should live a hundred years
With no true insight and self-control
Better indeed is a single day in the life
Of one who is wise and meditative.”*

The practice of Insight Meditation as expounded here is a modern-day revival of the Way of Mindfulness (*Satipatthāna*) made known by the Buddha over twenty-five hundred years ago. Its roots are found firmly planted in the ancient traditions, and its efficacy is well-proven by vast experience. It is the product of deep study and tireless practice on the part of some highly advanced monks of modern Burma, the most prominent being the Venerable Meditation Master U Sobhana Mahāthera, Mahasi Sayadaw. It is widely practiced in Burma, Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, and a few countries in the West, many of its adherents experiencing distinguished results.

Insight Meditation is particularly well suited to modern needs and conditions. Although the Buddha taught numerous meditation subjects, many prove nearly impossible to practice in the often noisy, crowded and hurried modern environments. Insight Meditation, on the other hand, may be developed in any environment, taking any condition as its object. What would normally be regarded as a distraction to meditation may in this practice be taken as an object of contemplation. Insight Meditation deals with existence —*as it is*—and though the conditions in a meditation center are best for its development, one need not postpone practice in the absence of one.

The object of contemplation, here, is a most familiar yet little-understood phenomenon: the human mind-body composite. The meditation seeks to make evident the true nature of “self-existence” —the illusory “I am” —and to make available a superior alternative to its bondage. It is at once a method for the development of wisdom concerning “personal existence,” and a vehicle for emancipation from its ills.

Truth is not an obscure idea. The truth is what *is*. Nonetheless, clear perception of the truth is often clouded by *thinking* about what *is* rather than being still and observing directly. Direct observation and experience of what *is* is the aim of Insight Meditation.

Whereas other methods of meditation have as their goal heightened, refined or very subtle sensual experience, Insight Meditation culminates in a state that entirely transcends, actually forsakes, the realm of normal experience. Beyond all feelings, ideas, opinions, and deceptive sense data is found the *ultimate truth*—that of Nibbana—and it can be realized as the culmination of this practice.

But this is a strenuous and demanding practice, requiring intense devotion and strength to carry it through to completion. As life has its ups and downs, so too does the practice of Insight Meditation; but its rewards are on the same scale as are its demands. Those incapable of following the practice to its completion will nevertheless gain results according to their degree of application, and there is much to be gained from the very onset.

This text is most valuable as an aid to clarification of stages of insight *already experienced*, for words can do little to explain an experience not yet encountered. For this reason, portions may be re-read periodically, perhaps yielding new significance each time, especially when linked with an advancing practice.

Chapter I presents the basis on which to build a sound meditative practice, and instructions for the method of the practice.

Chapter II, “Noting,” is most significant, for it is this sustained attention and application of mind that assures unencumbered progress.

Chapters III, IV, and V provide aids to comprehension and general guidelines to development.

Chapter VI, “Nibbana,” is concerned with the culmination of the practice.

Please keep in mind that this brief treatise can by *no means replace a teacher*. It *can* do much to prepare those who have no access to competent guidance for an intensive course in meditation when such guidance becomes available. Those who choose to carry on alone, however, may use this and other texts to great advantage if they follow them wisely.

May this work be an aid to those who,
Wearied of “running up and down the hither bank,”
Wish to strive for the further shore!

A. Mahinda

CHAPTER I: INSIGHT MEDITATION

*“To cease from all evil,
To cultivate good,
To purify one’s mind—
This is the advice of the Buddhas”*

A mind submerged in unwholesome activities is restless, anxious, unconcentrated, unhappy. Such a mind has little hope of making progress in this practice. A virtuous mind, on the other hand, is calm, secure, easily concentrated, and takes to the practice readily. For this reason, it is suggested that at least the basic Five Precepts of Buddhist morality should be observed during a period of intensive meditation.

They are as follows:

- 1) I undertake to abstain from killing;
- 2) I undertake to abstain from stealing;
- 3) I undertake to abstain from sexual misconduct;
- 4) I undertake to abstain from lying;
- 5) I undertake to abstain from intoxicating liquors and drugs that cause heedlessness.

These precepts are by no means commandments; rather, they are guidelines for conduct, voluntarily undertaken as an aid to meditative development. These observances yield great rewards to the non-meditator as well.

If a course of meditation is being followed in an accommodating environment, such as a meditation center, hermitage, or any place which provides the requirements of room and meals, the yogi (meditator) should observe the Ten Precepts. In this case, the third abstention becomes that of unchastity, and the following five precepts are added:

- 6) I undertake to abstain from eating solid food after mid-day;
- 7) I undertake to abstain from dancing, singing, music, entertainments and shows;
- 8) I undertake to abstain from the use of garlands, perfumes, unguents, and from things that beautify and adorn the body;
- 9) I undertake to abstain from using high and luxurious seats and beds;
- 10) I undertake to abstain from handling gold, silver, and money.

If one must handle money, he may observe the Eight Precepts, which delete the abstention from money, and combine the seventh and eighth precepts into one.

These observances were recommended by the Buddha as sound aids to the “Life Divine.” The principle is to assume a simple, wholesome, harmless, and clear-headed lifestyle. Nothing can be seen

clearly in “muddled water.” Quieting the mind and training it to see clearly is difficult enough, but without the sincere intention towards simplicity and virtue, it is nearly impossible.

The yogi should also keep all writing, reading, talking and unnecessary thinking (about family, business, etc.) to an absolute minimum. He should eat in moderation, and cut sleeping time down to just the basic required amount (generally four to six hours).

One should also have a realistic appreciation and respect towards the Buddha, as the personification of full and right enlightenment, and towards the Teacher, who makes known the profound Truths proclaimed only by a Buddha which the yogi is striving to realize: the Truths of Anatta (soul-lessness), of Nibbana (total emancipation), and of the Path which leads to Nibbana. Of supreme value is the teaching of the Buddha, for it clearly charts that Path for the yogi to follow. And of incomparable perfection, admirable and worthy of welcome and assistance, are those Accomplished Ones, the members of the Community of Saints who have themselves penetrated the teaching and realized its goal.

I go to the *Buddha* as my refuge;

I go to the *Dhamma* (Teaching) as my refuge;

I go to the *Sangha* (Community) as my refuge.

This formula is the traditional statement of confidence in the Teacher, of the desire to realize His teaching, and of the intention to oneself to become established in the Community of Saints. In these three is to be found the refuge secure.

Instructions for the Practice

*“This path leads to tranquility,
realization, enlightenment, Nibbana.”*

The practice of Insight Meditation as presented here is based on the structure of all-day, uninterrupted courses of meditation, as practiced in many meditation centers in the East, and a few in the West. The method, of course, may be adapted to whatever time schedule or environment is available to the yogi. Though every facet of daily activity is not dealt with in detail here, it is to be understood that this practice is applicable to *all* situations, at *all* times.

Simply put, the method of practice is to observe, according to their characteristics (see Chapter V), *one's own* mental and physical processes as they become evident through *one's own* six sense-doors of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. This is accomplished by continual noting (see Chapter II) of one's most obvious experience at any given time.

The two primary postures for meditation are sitting and walking. For sitting, a comfortable, cross-legged posture is best. One may lean against the wall if necessary, but the back should be kept straight and head erect. A chair may be used for sitting if the cross-legged posture is not possible, but the traditional cross-legged position is preferable.

Sitting and walking should be alternated, an hour of sitting with a half-hour of walking, continuously throughout the waking hours. The few interruptions in this schedule will be for meals, bathing, toilet, refreshment, and a brief interview with one's instructor (when and if available).

When sitting, the eyes should be kept closed, and the attention placed on the rising and falling movement of the abdomen caused by breathing. This is the *primary object* of contemplation when sitting (or lying), and should be maintained throughout the course of the practice. This rising and falling movement is only to be *observed*. The normal breathing should not be altered or forced. This is *not* a breathing exercise as found in some meditational practices.

As the abdomen rises, it should be observed with the “mind's eye” (as if it were being seen with the physical eyes), and mentally labelled as “rising.” (This is noting.) When the rising ceases, the falling motion begins, and it should be likewise observed and labelled as “falling.” In the beginning stages a hand may be placed on the abdomen if it is found to be helpful to observation.

Should one have prior experience and proficiency in the primary subject of meditation through observing the sensation of the breath passing through the openings of the nostrils, (*ānāpāna sātī*), or should one have a strong preference towards it, it may be used as the primary subject rather than the rising and falling of the abdomen. The observance of the rising and falling of the abdomen, however, has been found to be the most effective and suitable subject for this particular method of developing insight through mindfulness, and is therefore recommended.

One choosing the nostrils as his point of observation should note the sensation of the in-breath simply as “in,” and that of the out-breath as “out”; otherwise the practice remains the same throughout.

From time to time various sense impressions and mental activities will arise which are more prominent than the rising and falling movement. In these cases, the attention should be diverted to the more obvious experience, it should be noted accordingly, and the attention returned to the rising and

falling. In the early stages there will be many distractions. The yogi need not be concerned, but should clearly note them, and return to awareness of the rising and falling.

Distractions are generally noted according to their mode of origination: A sound should be noted as “hearing, hearing,” a thought as “thinking, thinking,” a body pain as “paining, pain,” etc. It is important to keep in mind that the yogi should concentrate on the actual sensation itself, the word chosen to label it being secondary. When a certain characteristic is most prominent in an experience, it may be noted accordingly as in “hating, hating,” “wanting, wanting,” “lusting, lusting,” or in the body as “feeling hot,” “feeling cold,” “aching,” “itching,” etc. The different mind processes such as “remembering, remembering,” “imagining, imagining,” “seeing (mental pictures), seeing,” may also be noted accordingly. In all situations noted, one should restrict himself simply to observing what *is*—the present experience—and try to refrain from the many thoughts *about* what is that will tend to arise.

If at times the rising and falling become vague or not easily discernible, or if there is a sizable pause between breaths, the yogi may note the general position and feeling of the body as a whole, sitting quietly at the practice, as “sitting, sitting.” The sensation of touch “touching, touching,” evidenced at the different points where the body touches the sitting cushion, the wall, or itself, may also be noted during these pauses. Rising and falling should be returned to when they are again noticeable.

A typical segment of a sitting meditation might therefore be noted thus:

“Rising, falling; rising, falling; rising, falling; rising, falling; rising, falling; itching, itching (distraction); wanting, wanting (to scratch); lifting (the arm); scratching, scratching; relaxing, relaxing (the arm); rising, falling; rising, falling; rising, falling; hearing, hearing (distraction); rising, falling; rising, falling; rising, falling; touching, touching; touching, touching (body sensations); sitting, sitting (body posture); rising, falling; rising, falling; rising, falling;and so on.

Walking is a meditation subject in itself, and should not be considered as just a break from sitting. Noting should be carried on continuously while walking and sitting, and in the transitional periods between them. Walking meditation is best done on a hallway, porch, on flat ground up to thirty feet long—but the yogi must use whatever facility is available. While walking, the head should be kept erect, the eyes cast downward, and the attention (mind’s eye) placed on the movements of the legs and feet. They should be noted as “left, right” as the respective feet are placed in stepping. At each end of the walkway, the yogi should stop (“stopping”), slowly turn (“turning, turning”), note the body posture (“standing, standing”), and again walk (“left, right, left, right”). Any prominent distractions may be noted as they occur, as in the sitting meditation, and awareness of walking, “left, right” returned to.

To facilitate easier observation and more detailed noting, all actions should be slowed down considerably in any bodily movements. The quantity of objects noted should be kept at a comfortable and easily manageable level. As noting speed and proficiency increase, the quantity of objects noted may be increased.

As the practice advances, different activities may become apparent in greater detail. These details may be noted as much as is manageable. When walking, for instance, each step may be seen as two, three, or more distinct phases, and they may all be noted accordingly. If the intention to step is seen, it should be noted as “intending.” In two-phase walking, “lifting” should be noted *as* the foot is lifted, and as it is being placed once should note “placing.” In three-phase walking, each step is seen as “lifting, moving (the foot forward), placing.”

Eating should also become part of one’s meditation practice. When eating, one may note the taking up of the fork as “taking, taking,” lifting to the mouth as “lifting, lifting,” putting food in the mouth

as “putting, putting,” chewing as “chewing,” tasting as “tasting,” swallowing as “swallowing,” sitting as “sitting (body posture),” wanting as “wanting,” liking as “liking,” (frame of mind), and so forth.

The same principle applies to drinking, brushing one’s teeth, washing, coughing, scratching—all activities that become observable. *There is always present some evident body or mind-process that may be noted!*

The yogi should seek to maintain a calm, steady and *impartial* attitude at all times, and to note as continuously as possible. *As long as the mind is noting, it is knowing; when it stops noting it falls into not-knowing, ignorance.*

If there is a lapse in noting due to forgetfulness, it will sooner or later become evident and should be noticed as “forgetting, forgetting,” whereafter the continual noting should be resumed.

This practice is directed primarily at body contemplation. Therefore, the physical processes (i.e., “rising, falling”; “left, right”; body postures, movements, etc.) should occupy the forefront. As the bodily processes become disentangled and clear, in an equal measure the mind-processes that have the bodily processes as their object will become evident and understood.

For maximum results, this practice should be applied to all activities throughout the waking hours. Observation should be made of as many phases as are evident in the physical processes, and of the subtle distinctions present in the closely associated stream of mental activities.

Once one has grasped the principle of this practice, he may use it to advantage whenever he cares to. While seated at one’s desk at the office, while walking between classes at school, riding the bus, washing dishes, mowing the lawn, etc., etc., one will find that just a few minutes of skillful contemplation can calm and concentrate the mind, lending clear vision and control to whatever the activity. The important factor is that a spiritual aspirant must have a *vehicle* to use to gain his goal; and a skillful meditator will see that Insight Meditation is just such a vehicle.

CHAPTER II: NOTING

*“ . . .with insight let him see
each idea arisen now, to know and be sure of that,
invincibly, unshakeably.”*

Noting is passively contemplating the different elements of the mind and body, and labelling them accordingly. It is the very essence of the practice of Insight Meditation. Its purpose is two-fold: *taking note of*, and *making note of*. “Taking note of” is accomplished by applied awareness that is alert and efficient in encountering and contemplating according to their true nature (see Chapter V) the different formations as they become evident. “Making note of” is the mental repetition of the word or words which best describe the object observed, e.g., “rising, falling,” “left, right,” etc. The note is easiest in the present participle form, i.e., the verb with the ending “-ing,” and may be repeated once, twice, or many times, depending on the duration and prominence of the object observed. The yogi should choose the word that he feels best describes the object and use that as his note. The word labelling the object is secondary to the knowing of the object itself. In each situation noted, the yogi should concentrate (use the mind’s eye) on the actual sensation, mentally labelling the experience.

For instance, anger may arise because of a distracting noise. The noise is labelled “hearing, hearing,” while the subsequent mental state is labelled “feeling angry,” or “noting, noting”—two entirely different formations which should be distinguished as such. Most formations are seen to pass away when efficiently noted. If they do not pass away completely right away, they can be seen to fade or disappear gradually, in stages.

Throughout the course, the yogi should concern himself only with what he can see clearly, simply noting what *is*, and not considering what *should* be, *could* be, or *was*. He should endeavor to remain concerned with the object that is immediately present, noting continuously at a comfortable pace for as extended periods as possible.

A free and pliable manner should be maintained in noting, as if by an impartial but curious onlooker, giving equal degree of attention and intensity to each object, be it pleasant or unpleasant.

Noting should be done with the intention only to know the object. The noting mind should neither *seize* the object, nor *avoid* it, but should simply *alight* directly upon it, label it clearly, and then move on.

If at times one feels confronted with many situations seemingly all at once, he should simply note the most obvious formation and proceed from there, noting only what is *present* and prominent. If he should reflect on objects that have passed (that he perhaps failed to note), he should note “thinking, thinking,” and return to *present* objects. In the very advanced stages there may be an apparent shortage of objects to note; but there is always some mental or bodily sensation evident, and it can be noted repeatedly in the absence of any other. It may be simply “knowing, knowing, knowing.” A vigilant, noting mind is a knowing mind. The field that is to be known is dealt with in Chapter III.

CHAPTER III: MIND AND MATTER

*“Mere suffering exists, no sufferer is found;
the deed is, but no doer of the deed is there;
Nibbana is, but not the man who seeks it;
the Path exists, but no traveler on it is seen.”*

By seeing clearly what *is* present in all experience—simply mind-and-matter processes—the meditator will also see clearly what *is not* present: a “self,” “soul,” “ego,” “person,” “living being.” These are seen to be mere concepts, having no validity in the light of reality.

In any given experience, two processes only are present: the material or body processes—which are here called by the names “rising, falling,” “left, right,” “sitting,” “walking,” etc., and the immaterial—the mind processes, i.e., noting, thinking, reflecting, etc. In some cases there may be present a second element of matter in the form of visual object, object touched, object tasted, etc.

Matter has no faculty of knowing. It takes no object, perceives no object, knows no object. Just as rocks, trees, and lumps of earth possess no facility of knowing, so too the material elements of the body possess no faculty of knowing. It is the processes of the mind, which come into being supported by the body, that possess the faculty of knowing.

The mind processes have the nature of inclining towards an object, taking an object, knowing an object.

These facts may be seen through direct experience. For instance, at the time of seeing, one may distinguish thus: “The eye is one (matter), the visual object is another (matter); seeing is another (mind), and knowing it is another (mind).” When observing the rising and falling of the abdomen, one will perceive thus: “The rising movement is one process (matter), the knowing of it (noting) is another (mind).” “The falling movement is another process (matter), the knowing of it is still another (mind).” Again: “Walking is one process (matter), the knowing of it another (mind).” In this way one may distinguish the two elements of mind and matter.

One may further discern that the body is moved by the mind. The mind does not eat, it does not drink, it does not speak, it does not adopt postures. The body, on the other hand, has no desire to eat, it has no desire to drink, it has no desire to speak, it has no desire to adopt postures. But when the mind has the desire to eat, the desire to drink, the desire to speak, the desire to adopt a posture, then it is the body that eats, drinks, speaks or adopts a posture. This is further understood by seeing the mind element of intention that arises prior to each bodily action. One understands “When there is consciousness intending to bend a limb, the bodily process of bending arises; when there is consciousness intending to stretch a limb, the bodily process of stretching arises.”

As regards thoughts, imaginations, etc., it may be stated that depending on the body (the base for mind), a series of mental activities arise. Each case is a composition of matter and mind: the body is matter, while thinking, imagining, etc., are mind.

Upon gaining insights into these processes, a yogi understands:

“Here is only a conditioned body and mind process, and a conditioning body and mind process, and it is to this pair alone (body-mind) that the terms of conventional usage, “person,” “soul,” “I,” or “another,” “man,” or “woman” refer. But apart from these processes *there is no person, being, man or woman, oneself or another.*

When bricks, timbers, cement, planks, shingles, etc. are arranged in a certain way, there comes to be the mere term of common usage “house”; yet, in the ultimate sense, when each component part is analyzed, there is no “house” to be found. So, too, when there is a mind and body, there comes to be the mere term of common usage “person,” “man,” “woman,” “I,” or “another”; yet in the ultimate sense, when each component is examined there is no “being” or “person” to be found.

There are many terms of common usage that refer to a set of circumstances rather than an actual “thing.” For instance, when there are soldiers, tanks, weapons, etc., there comes to be the common reference “army”; or when the thumb and fingers are placed in a certain way, there is a common term of reference “fist.” But in the ultimate sense, when the components are analyzed, there is no “army” or “fist” to be found. The same is the case with the common terms “me,” “I,” “woman,” “man,” “person,” etc. When the component parts are analyzed, there is found no “me,” “I,” “woman,” “man,” or “person.” Just mind and body processes are found. *This may be known by direct experience by the yogi*, as a result of diligent practice of Insight Meditation; it is *not* merely the product of intellectual reasoning.

CHAPTER IV: ARISING AND PASSING AWAY

*“Transient indeed are all formations,
arising and passing away is their nature;
having arisen, they cease.
The stilling of them is happiness.”*

By observing the varied components of the mind and body as they become evident, the meditator will see their fleeting, unstable nature. Formations are seen to arise, mature, and cease very quickly, to be followed by a new formation, itself short-lived.

Throughout the practice the yogi will be aware in varying degrees of the different manifestations and implications of arising and passing away. At times all three phases—arising, staying, and passing away—will be evident; at other times, perhaps only the arising or ceasing will be observed. The yogi should not be concerned, but should just see clearly whatever phase is evident and be aware of its significance.

Each formation is new as it arises. Not having been, it arises. Having been briefly, it vanishes into non-existence. Formations have no past or future, only a fleeting present. Through these observations the impermanent nature of the formations becomes manifest. The painful nature of the formations may become visible due to the discovery of oppression by this continual rise and fall. By seeing that the formations arise and pass away due to conditions beyond one’s mastery, their impersonal, ownerless nature becomes evident.

The yogi may come to see that it is to this rapid flow of formations, seen arising and dissolving, that the illusory terms “person,” “self,” “I,” or “me” have been applied, but apart from this series of rise and fall, there is naught to be found.

Comprehending the continual dissolution of all formations noted and the insight thought engaged in noting them, and perhaps seeing that this process of arising and passing away was the case of all past formations, and will remain the same as regards those of the future—the yogi may feel helpless and consider, “These formations are fearful.”

Maintaining his continuous noting, a feeling of misery or depression may arise, for at this time his insight will understand the empty, unsatisfactory nature of all formations, seeing only their oppressive, pain-laden aspect. Seeing only misery and unsatisfactoriness wherever the mind inclines, the yogi is liable to feel discontent and strong disgust. He should realize at this stage that his disgust is not with meditation, but with the nature of the formations.

Feeling disgust with regard to every formation noted, the desire to escape from the formations, to get free from them, will arise: “Oh! May I soon get free from these. May I reach a state where these formations cease.”

At this time his mind inclines only towards Nibbana, and he sets himself ever more resolutely to the task of noting, intent on release. At this time his insight is quite strong and lucid, though he may feel it is not. He should dismiss any doubts by noting them, and diligently maintain his continuous noting.

CHAPTER V: THE NATURE OF INSIGHT

*“Whatever is impermanent,
that is suffering.
Whatever is suffering,
that is not self.”*

One untrained in Insight Meditation generally has three misapprehensions concerning the nature of the mind and body:

- 1) He sees permanence, lastingness, endurance, where there is none;
- 2) He sees happiness, satisfactoriness, where there is none;
- 3) He sees a “self,” “ego,” “soul,” or “ownership” where there is none.

From the diligent observation of the arising and passing of the mind-body processes emerges the knowledge of the true nature of things; and it is this knowledge which, when fully matured, provides the gateway to emancipation.

One becomes aware that the formations observed and the insight-knowledge engaged in noting are themselves in a constant state of change, never standing still or remaining, but appearing and disappearing in rapid sequence. The bodily postures, dispositions and movements never remain static; nor do the various moods, thoughts and activities of the mind.

On seeing how all objects observed, and even the mental formations observing them come to destruction and disappearance, the yogi will realize: “Impermanent, fleeting are these formations; having arisen they pass away.” He understands further by intuitive inference that all the formations of the past, and those yet to come, have the same nature.

He further comprehends that this impermanent nature renders the formations as most unpleasurable, and that their continual occurrence is oppressive and a burden. He will therefore see the formations to be a mere mass of unpleasantness; painful and oppressive. “These formations are a source of suffering, they are no source of happiness.” Besides, one may experience many unpleasant sensations in the body, such as feeling hot, paining, aching, itching, etc., which further reveal it to be a collection of suffering.

Then, at any time of noting, it is seen that these elements of mind and body occur according to conditions, not according to the yogi’s wishes. He may become aware that he exercises no control over these formations, that he is neither their creator nor controller. He is therefore convinced: “They are not mine, they are simply elements; they are not governable, they are not a ‘person’ or ‘living entity.’”

Though these characteristics are seen in varying degrees throughout the practice, they gain intense impact and significance in the advanced stages when concentration is well developed, for at that

time the noting will function rapidly, seeing clearly in each object, by direct intuitive insight, any one of these three characteristics.

As these insights mature, the yogi should apply himself ever more diligently to the practice.

CHAPTER VI: NIBBANA

*“Strive and stop the stream;
discard, O Brahman, sense desires.
Having experienced the ceasing of the mental formations,
O Brahman, you are a knower of the Unmade.”*

When the yogi’s knowledge of the three characteristics becomes mature, strong and lucid, he will understand each formation noted as impermanent or suffering or not-self. Noting will function rapidly, as if automatically, seeing each formation clearly and easily. Generally, no body pains will arise, and the yogi will feel very peaceful, comfortable, calm.

Whereas in earlier stages his meditation was perhaps defiled by states of delight and attachment, or fear, discontent, or disgust, in this advanced stage he no longer is touched by either attraction or repulsion, but remains neutral, self-possessed, and at ease. There is effortless noting of each formation as it becomes evident.

This stage is the result of dedicated, intent practice. Upon its full ripening and culmination, the yogi will see *with perfect understanding* two, three or more formations according to any one characteristic.

If the yogi’s spiritual faculties are fully matured, and all necessary conditions are met, immediately after the last formation in this rapid series, his consciousness ceases to fall upon the continuous occurrence of mental and bodily formations, and reaches *beyond* the realm of sensual experience, taking as its object Nibbana, which is the non-occurrence or *cessation of all formations*.

The duration of this experience may be brief, lasting for just a moment. Following the attainment, the knowledge of reviewing occurs, and he reflects on the state just experienced.

He discerns that following the last phase of noting, his consciousness took as object the “Void,” entered into cessation, and abode in it until this knowledge of reviewing arose. He further discerns that the object just experienced was *void of all formations*—Nibbana. He will perhaps be quite overcome with joy, rapture and tranquility, produced by the attainment experience. He will feel as he has never felt before. Some feel as if they have put down, for the first time in their life, a very heavy burden which they may not even have been aware they were bearing.

With this first experience of Nibbana, the meditator has succeeded in entering upon the supramundane path of enlightenment. He has become a “Stream-winner”; he has won to the stream that leads to complete emancipation (Arahantship).

He now knows by *direct experience* what Nibbana is, and how it is realized. He also possesses new wisdom, confidence, and a high standard of moral conduct. He is free from doubts concerning the Buddha as being the personification of full and right enlightenment and as the peerless teacher who makes known the Path to that enlightenment. He now has unshakable confidence in the knowledge and vision which emerges from that Path, and in the community of Saints who themselves also experienced its fruition. The refuge sought at the beginning of the practice has been found.

The three remaining stages, having total enlightenment as the final attainment, are gained in the same manner as the first, that is, by noting all occurrences at the six sense doors with the mind set resolutely upon gaining the next higher stage. The higher stages are difficult, for insight must be developed anew, but they are not as difficult as when first beginning the practice. The attainments arise in the same manner, giving entry to the higher stage.

“So this life divine does not have gain, honour and
renown for its reward;

Nor perfect virtue, concentration or knowledge and vision
for its reward.

But it is *this unshakeable deliverance of mind* that is
the aim of this life divine,
Its heartwood and its end.”



I originally wrote this manuscript at my teacher's meditation center in Sri Lanka after completing a thorough training. It has been read and approved by many experienced yogis and teachers and refined over the last 50 plus years.

All the best,

A. Mahinda
(David Leonard)

March 2022, Mendocino County, California