

see that they are subject to change. Keep the mind open and receptive, not fixed, final and conclusive.

When we hold on *tightly* to our own opinions or beliefs, they cause us suffering. We want to argue with people, we want to put over *our* point of view, we want to change other people, change their lifestyle and their ways. So, as long as we are doing this in ourselves in our present moment, we are having a struggle and a fight. We struggle because we are dissatisfied with the way things are and about how we think the world should be and how we are going to change it. However, if you understand that the world is an unsatisfactory place or what I should say is, there is always the element or the possibility of dissatisfaction, then you can let it be. It doesn't mean that there is no satisfaction, sure there is, we can be satisfied with physical things, mental things, but how long does it last? We just get satisfied, we just get comfortable with something and it changes. It changes due to the first law or common characteristic and that is, change. All things are changing, all mental and physical phenomena are changing. Because they are changing, they are apparently slipping through our fingers and we feel loss. We feel these things changing and moving, disappearing and we can't catch them, we can't keep up and we become tired, disappointed and dissatisfied. That is suffering. This is not such a depressing point of view but it is more that when you understand it, you become lighter. You become more free, you understand that this is the way it is. You realize, "This is the way I felt in my life, this is why I have been dissatisfied, this is why I have always been striving for perfection and not actually attaining it." It is because of this element of dissatisfaction, which can arise at any moment. Actually I call it imperfection. I call these three characteristics the three "imps".

'Impermanent, Imperfect and Impersonal'

In our mind we want everything to be perfect, because when things are perfect – we think we will be satisfied. How can we perfect anything? Sometimes you think that you have perfected something and it starts changing. If you build a beautiful house, even whilst you are building it, it is in the process of decay and destruction. The elements are wearing it down. All things are changing. All things are in a flux and flow, the whole universe is working this way. When we can tune into that, the universal way, we start to go with the flow and we stop looking for perfection but we just realize that things are, the way they are. Then we may come to understand that our thoughts are based on this striving for perfection, getting control, making things perfect. We may realize; “this is what is causing all my problems, this is why I suffer, because I am going against the natural flow of the world. I am trying to make things permanent and perfect, I am trying to make things personal! While in fact everything is impermanent, imperfect and impersonal.”

Ah, then, we can relax. Relax, with an awareness of things as they really are. Allowing things to come, to be and to go, not taking it personally. This is the third aspect or the third characteristic of all mental and physical processes in the world, in our life – ‘nonself’. It is easy to see that physical things in the world are not ‘self’. Chairs, trees, cars, all the physical things in the world, they are not self, they have no soul. They are not permanent entities, they are inanimate objects. But what about the body? What about my body, this body, the body? It also is made up of natural physical elements.

The four elements and thinking

We can say, according to the ancient description of natural phenomena, that all physical things are made up of the four material elements, commonly referred to as; earth, wind, fire and water. These elements are symbolic representations of characteristics and natural processes that make up our

physical body and the material world. For example, earth is not just this planet or the ground, dirt or soil, it refers to the characteristics of hard, soft and texture - rough and smooth. Wind element is not just air or gas, as we know them but has the characteristics of movement, vibration, support. Fire means temperature, not just hot but cold, cool, warm, even boiling and freezing. Water has the nature of flowing, wet or moist and sticky.

There are two aspects to these four elements; our physical make up and our experience.

Our physical body is made up of hard and soft material, gas, temperature and water / liquids. All material things are made up of such elements. However, we may experience or feel these characteristics through our mind. We may feel the hardness or softness of what we sit on. We may feel vibration, movement and support, like when we try to stand still, we feel all of these processes. We sense temperature, we feel hot or cold. And we may feel flowing, wet and sticky.

The body is made up of these elements and their characteristics, just like the whole physical world. So, who owns this body? Does the mind own this body? Am I this body? Can I keep this body forever? No. This body belongs to the universe, it belongs to the earth. One day, we don't know when, this body will just go back to the earth, and then we must relinquish it, we must let it go. Even as we are sitting here right now, the body is deteriorating. The skin is flaking, drying and dying, the hairs are breaking and splitting and falling out, the nails are getting long and dying. Even our teeth – well, they are not really wearing down at this moment, but our teeth are wearing down. You see it with old people, their teeth are worn down. It is because all things are always changing. This body is not ours, we cannot control it as such. Oh, you can get

false teeth or try plastic surgery to change the structure of your face or body to make you look younger or sexier. You can fool others but you know the truth.

A lot of our thoughts are based around this body. We are taking it to be permanent, we are taking it to be our own personal property, and this can be a problem. Not only do we take our own body, our physical 'self', to be permanent and to be our own property, but we take all our mental states also to be our own personal property. I know this sounds strange and its hard to believe but as the Buddha taught and as I have tried to explain, these mental states are changing all the time, not remaining the same for two consecutive mind moments. These thoughts, opinions, our views, dreams and emotions are causing us stress, pain and suffering. But they are changing, always changing, so do we really own them? Or do they just arise and pass away within the present moment? This is a very interesting concept because if we don't own them, then we can let them go, watch them all go and watch our suffering go too! We should attempt to understand this through our own personal experience by watching closely the natural phenomena of the body and mind as it occurs. That's the practice of vipassana.

Memory

Another aspect of thinking is memory. Some people think that the memory is something stored in the brain. Somewhere, down in there, is this far-out, cosmic filing cabinet that stores all your stuff. (I don't know about you but that's what I thought!) I thought there must be some filing cabinet there, like a computer and when you get an experience, it was then automatically filed and any time you wanted, you could go and open the filing cabinet and bring that experience out, just as it was. But it is not so. Whenever you are remembering something, you are not actually re-experiencing that very thing again in the present moment, you are re-creating it. Memory is nothing but rethinking in the

present moment. We have the ability to remember things, based on our sense impressions but we cannot remember all of our sense impressions. Imagine if you are trying to remember all of your sense impressions, even within a few minutes there are millions of them. While you are sitting here, you are thinking, hearing, seeing, feeling, etc., all our senses are switched on, we cannot possibly remember, ALL of our senses. We only remember the major things, the things that are important to us. Because our present moment is caused by our past, it is connected to our past, we are able to recall or review, recollect these impressions. But where do they come from? This is a very good question. If the memory is not stored somewhere, how is it that we are able to recreate something? We recreate something because of our perception in the present moment. Because we perceived or cognized something before, then in the present moment, when we cognize or recognize, we reconstruct it instantly. We construct within the present moment from the sense impressions or information that we have at hand at the present moment. So it is not that we go back in time as such, it is a reconstruction in the present moment, caused by sense contact and perception, cognition, recognition, in the present moment.

An example may be if you want to remember a line of a song or perhaps chanting that you have learnt. Because you want to remember it, because it comes to mind, there is a chain of cause and effect memories. I remember chanting, I remember the name of the chant and then I remember the first words and on it goes. Maybe I remember the last part first, then my mind will rearrange the parts and words until it is in order – lightening fast!

Or I want to remember someone's face, first I remember their name, then maybe their hair, eyes, nose, skin and presto! I can see their face. Try it now, can you see your mother's face? Close your eyes. How do you remember her?

Are you remembering the last time you saw her or a photograph or as she was years ago? Look at the image closely, perhaps its not very clear, vague or it changes, it's not constant, in fact it's not even very reliable. Interesting, huh? So, this remembering or recalling, reliving, re-imagining, reconstructing, is also part of our problem. We cling to it, we rely on it but how many times has your memory let you down? How many times have you been talking to someone about what happened in the past when you were with them at that time but their memory or view is different to yours? Then, you question; "Am I right or are they right? Is their story correct or is my story correct?" Then you may think; "Is this mind really able to remember things in their pristine details? Or is it just a reconstruction within the present moment?" I would like you to see this for yourself. To examine what memory, remembering and recalling really is.

I've noticed that when I look very carefully, with some degree of concentration, at my mental images or pictures, that they even break up and dissolve. So, what does that mean? It means that the images are momentary in nature, not permanent, constantly changing and evolving and usually without my control. So this is the mind, a constantly arising, changing, dissolving series of processes, caused by that which has just arisen and passed away. The mind is a stream of consciousnesses, yes consciousnesses, not one but uncountable all arising faster than light, one after the other, based on sense contact, including the mind and thoughts, which appears like a permanent thing but in life, things are not as they seem.

Let me draw on the example of a river. It seems permanent, everyday it is there, it changes but not much, basically it is still a river. What is a river? It is water. What is water? Very tiny particles made up of H₂O - hydrogen and oxygen. But they are gases! Yep! They're gases, uncountable particles of gas.

So, what is a river? Uncountable, yet separate and individual particles of gas flowing and following one after the other to form what appears to be something large and permanent.

What is a mind? Uncountable moments of consciousness, caused by contact at the six senses, arising and passing away, one after the other, faster than anything else known to man, to form what appears to be a large and permanent mind, we can even say, self or ego too. The ego thinks / believes it is permanent. Buddha called this **miccha ditthi** (wrong view).

Then often the question arises; If there is no self then who is being mindful, who is the observer? The observer also is not permanent, it too is just a mental state that arises and passes away. The mind has the ability to see and know itself as it happens or momentarily after it happens, just like we observe anything else in our six senses. Just as I hear a sound as it arises, or a taste as it contacts my tongue, then I know my mind as it thinks or feels.

Easy huh? I hope this makes sense to you. If it doesn't, let me explain it to you at another time or better still, practice vipassana meditation under the guidance of a reputable teacher and see for yourself. Really that is the only way to fully understand the nature of the mind – through your own personal experience. Of course you can study the Buddhist Scriptures but you will still need to experience the Dhamma for yourself, by yourself to get the full understanding.

When we realize, that actually in this present moment we are just this constant construction and destruction of mental and physical 'particles', then we start to realize; "I am a flux, a flow, something that is changing all the time."

I get an image of rice boiling in a big pot. The water boiling and bubbling and these rice grains coming up to the surface and going back down and coming up and going down again, a huge pot of boiling rice, just churning

over, changing, moving about. The mind is changing that quickly, with many mental states arising and passing away.

Another image that is very familiar and clear to me is the one of ripples on the surface of water or the ocean. Watch them... they just arise for a moment, reflect a little bit of color or light and vanish, only to cause another to arise, very similar but completely new and changing and gone... The ripple is physical like our bodily processes, the reflection of color or light is like a mental state, they arise, and appear to be one but then disintegrate only to be replaced by another, and another... Our life too, goes on perpetuated by the law of cause and effect. Impersonal processes that don't last a finger snap, yet can cause so much trouble and suffering in the world and in ourselves.

When we really understand this, we are able to let it go. We realize this selfless nature of the mind, this constant arising and passing away, this changing aspect – and the fact that it is this mind that is creating or causing all our suffering. So we understand this impermanence, imperfection and impersonal nature of our mental and physical processes. In this way, we may not get so involved or attached to these body / mind processes and not take things too personally, which leaves the mind light, bright and free.

About thinking on retreat

Here are some tips for you while you're on an intensive retreat. These are not rules, not even guidelines as such but just sharing some of my experiences and observations over the years that may be of some assistance or perhaps some comfort or consolation for you.

Thinking in the beginning and at the end...

The first three days of a retreat are always the toughest. We have pain, sleepiness and thinking, not necessarily in that order. If you know this, you can try to be patient with yourself for at least three days, after that it usually gets

better, anyway, it will surely change. Don't expect anything, good or bad, just see it as it is and everything will be alright. Our daily life is very busy, as is our mind, it takes about three days (or three weeks) to shake off a lot of the worldly thoughts and stress, before we can settle into the practice, that's OK, its common.

At the end of a retreat, the mundane thoughts start to creep back in and we become restless. That's a very good time to watch the mind, you're going to need that skill when you go home. Vipassana is not just about meditation retreats, or only observing the physical processes, it is life training, we have to know how to adapt the principle to every situation in life, it can be done. That's how you get the benefit from the practice.

Talking – before, during and after.

Our meditation retreats are silent, that is, we don't talk with each other, only with the teacher at interview time or with the manager or staff if there is a problem. This, for many people, is rather difficult, in fact some people can't handle it and either talk, against the rules of the centre or they run away, they go back home! I think this is a bit funny, I understand them but for me, I love the opportunity to not talk for a change. To live in an environment where it is not necessary to talk or there is no pressure to talk. Now the reason why we don't talk is because it generates thinking. There must be at least one thought that precedes speech and usually there are many thoughts. Then as we speak, thoughts continue to arise and after speaking we think and reflect on what was said.

We think before, during and after speaking.

Once, in the early stages of my practice, still in Australia, I had done about seven meditation retreats in five months (I had nothing better to do!) so I went for a two week meditation retreat at my friends place, deep in the forest, by

myself. All was going very well for about eight days, it was very peaceful, no one to talk to, except the birds and the snakes and possums at night, when one morning I heard a voice calling my name. It was a man's voice, I wasn't imagining it and it got louder and louder. Then a big, black, friendly dog appeared, naturally I started talking to it! Then the man arrived, he wasn't calling me, he was calling his dog! He was a friend of my friend and was staying nearby, we only spoke for about two minutes and then he left.

As soon as he left, my mind started racing; "Who was he?" "Why did he say this?" "Why did he say that?" "I should have said this, I should have said that." "I wonder if he has a car, can I go to town with him?" "I will go and find him and I'll say this, he'll say that." Blah, blah, blah... Man! It didn't stop! Round and round and round again! Just a two minute conversation blew my mind(fulness) right away! Upon reflection, it was a great experience for me but at the time, I suffered a lot. I couldn't concentrate, the conversation kept coming back and my mind kept jumping into the future, planning my departure, planning everything! So, after two more days of this madness, I gave up, meditation was hopeless and I left four days early. From that valuable experience I learnt that talking is not useful when developing and strengthening mindfulness and concentration to gain insight, wisdom and enlightenment.

A little talking = a little concentration!

So, if you really want to be truly mindful of any mental or physical process that arises in the present moment, and then be able to penetrate into its true nature with some degree of concentration to gain insight and wisdom, talking is not going to help. Neither is thinking, if a thought arises, be aware of it first, when it has finished, observe the next most predominant object in your body or mind and continue.

Background thinking, shopping centre music

Another strange aspect of thinking is what I call 'background thinking'. It is related to 'automatic mental noting' but has some other implications too. In vipassana, we are often instructed to observe the 'rising and falling' movement of the stomach / abdomen. When we do that for some time, the mind becomes complacent, bored or even lazy and starts to drift off and think about other things and we lose the attention and the labeling of 'rising and falling'. However, with 'background thinking', the noting still continues but the awareness has disappeared. So we're noting, automatically, "rising", "falling", "rising", "falling" but there is some thought going on by itself in the 'background'. Usually it is not clear and neither is the attention on the rising and falling – so its useless, hopeless, you're like a dead person, 'The lights are on but nobody's home!'

Another simile I use here is the piped music in shopping centres. At first you notice it but then you get interested in all the other things and don't even hear it any more but it is still there, going on by itself. Are we really aware or awake when we are shopping? Not usually, we become like little greedy shopping robots going from one thing to the next, **thinking all the time!** Lost in the matrix. Even in meditation, we get lost in our dreams, our fantasies, our worries and fears. That's OK. As soon as you know it, note it and watch it change, dissolve, then you're back to reality, bare processes of body and mind.

Here arises one of my favorite subjects – concept and reality. Concept is just thought, an idea, a mental impression. In fact we can't share our thoughts with anyone, no-one knows our thoughts. So we have to share concepts, which are ideas shared in the shape or form of words, pictures, symbols or graphs, diagrams, movements, facial expressions, etc. That is all I'm doing

now, sharing concepts through ideas manifested as words but these are not real. So what is the reality here? (I love that question, I ask myself very often!) Seeing, and the function of reading, perceiving, cognizing / recognizing and comprehending are happening now but these are only some of the mental states, then there are all of the physical processes, especially the five physical senses that are being perceived by the mind. Wow!

In short, mental states and physical processes that are perceived by the mind are the reality. Even the physical processes are dependent upon a mind to perceive them or else how can they be proved to exist or to be real?

Here's one example of a concept that just popped into my mind; Is Africa real? Everyone would say, yes, of course it is. If I asked you to prove it to me right now... What are you going to do, show me pictures (concepts), show me books with words (concepts), show me live satellite TV images (more concepts – CNN is a concept!)? Even if you take me there, all I will see is trees, animals, people, buildings, etc. that are associated with Africa but I can't see Africa. I can see a tree, I can feel it, smell it and so-on. The seeing, feeling and smelling, etc. are real for me but the idea of 'tree' is not real. This means that everything, even your mother is just a concept, a mental fabrication (Sorry Mom!). Hey woh! That's tricky! My mom isn't real? Then I'm not real too. Right, except for the processes that you can sense and experience. So now we are left with just the mind. Wow! Is *it* real? Can you sense it, can you experience it? Yes, it's real. Life only exists in your own mind, through your own perception. We all live in our own little worlds. That's why we're all afraid, lonely, looking for love and affection, looking for security because behind all of these concepts there is only mind, consciousness and it is changing, in a flux and flow. There is nothing tangible, nothing you can grasp and hold and say, "This is mine!" because it's already gone!

No-one else can share your mind, there's no-one in there to catch you when you fall, to cheer you up when you're down, no-one to blame if you go the wrong way... only you, only your mind, only your mental states that change, come and go, exist and desist. Then it seems that nothing matters, we can do whatever we want – wrong! There is a universal law called Karma and the mind is subject to it. Your mind is suffering now, even thinking is just another form of mental strain and stress but we don't know it. We will continue to suffer as long as we don't wake up and reverse the progression of mental negativities such as, greed (desire), hatred (aversion) and delusion (confusion). It's all up to you, this is your path and you've got to go it alone. Don't be weak, don't be lazy, don't fall back, you have to be strong and do this by yourself, all enlightened beings realized this before you, now it's your turn, you can do it! Buddha's don't often arise in the world, it is rare to find this teaching, the Dhamma, and even rarer to practice it and extremely rare to perfect it but it is possible! If it wasn't, the Buddha wouldn't teach it.

Singing on retreat?

As you probably know, we don't indulge in entertainments on retreat, because we lose our mindfulness and get lost in it and the associated thinking it generates. This means we don't whistle, sing or dance either. This is not a condemnation of singing and dancing, everyone likes them but when we're on retreat it is a time of applied mindfulness and concentration, it's a time of training the mind.

However, sometimes, we get a song stuck in our 'head' / mind. One song can go round and round in there for days, even a week or more! It may arise due to a memory or it may be associated with what you have experienced. Most songs are about life and some of them are very profound. The Sixties was a new era for deep and meaningful songs about life. Sometimes we

realize something new in our practice and remember that Bob Dylan or Neil Young or Paul Simon (just to name a few) wrote about this stuff years ago and the song comes flooding back. At first it seems wonderful, life starts to make sense but then we can't get the song out of our head! Note it! "hearing, hearing, hearing", if you like it, you can label, liking, enjoying, wanting, desire, etc. Sometimes I just label, "thinking" because there is often a thought or profundity attached to it or it's *the story of the song* that you're attached to. If you don't like it, you can label, disliking or aversion. If you don't know why it's stuck there or it doesn't go away, try calling it, "delusion". Our ego doesn't like this word, 'delusion'. But this is good, it's like a psychological trick to play on yourself. If you say to yourself, "delusion, delusion, delusion," the ego says, "Hey, I'm not deluded!" Good! Now you've broken that deluded thought and you can continue with some clarity.

Movie mind

One analogy I have for the process of thinking is a movie film. These days we have VCD and DVD etc., but before, there were the old movie films on reels. When we sit in the cinema and watch the movie we just see the action and the story and get lost in the plot. But if you go to the projector room, you would see a different story, thousands of little pictures speeding past a light one after another to give the appearance of movement, flow and continuity. It's a trick, a lie! If we were to take a pair of scissors and cut, cut, cut that flow of pictures, the story would break up and be lost! The reality is that there is no story, just little pictures. In the case of thinking, the story is flowing along nicely but then we become mindful of it and label, "thinking, thinking, thinking", it's like cutting it up, interrupting the flow of the thought and it breaks up and disappears.

Or take for example a written story; there is the book, one story but it can be broken up into chapters, the chapters break up into paragraphs, which break up into sentences, which break up into words, into syllables and into individual letters. If you look at, study, investigate and concentrate on just one letter at a time, you don't see any story, 'story' is just a concept, made up of smaller and smaller concepts and it breaks down and becomes meaningless little characters or symbols. Thoughts are the same, they seem so important and we are very attached to them, their content and their possible conclusions and outcomes but when you look very carefully, with strong concentration, all you see are mind moments. They, by themselves are useless, meaningless, let them go and free your mind, find the peace that all beings aspire to.

Remember, this is not a judgment about thinking. Thinking is not bad or wrong, its just that if we can see through it and not be attached to it, lost in it or be controlled by it, then the mind is stronger, clearer and more useful and beneficial for yourself and other beings. We have to think and reflect on the past to learn valuable lessons and we have to plan the future, especially to fit in with other people and their busy lives. You will have all the time in the world to think when you're not in intensive retreat or formal practice. So just for this short time, try to watch your mind and its thinking processes to learn from your own experience, your own life. Be your own teacher and your own student.

Emotions like, fear, sad, lonely, grief ...

Believe it or not, these are largely caused by thinking. Yes, we can say that ignorance or greed, hatred or delusion are the root causes but on the surface, there is a whole lot of thinking going on. Thinking is like a virus upon which these unwanted emotions are carried. Some people suffer greatly through grief at the loss of their loved one for years and years because they just keep thinking the same old destructive or negative thoughts again and again. Or

maybe the memories are lovely but then they think about how the person has gone and can never have those good times again, then there may be happiness and sadness. This might sound harsh but grieving is based on selfishness, *you* don't want them to die, *you* want them to be here, *you* are attached to them, even after they've gone! No one to blame for the on-going sadness but yourself. It's OK to grieve, it's natural but we have to come back to the reality of the present moment and not live in our memories, not living in the past. The one who has gone wouldn't want you to waste your time crying and being sad, they want you to be happy and make the most of life while it lasts.

Loneliness happens because we keep thinking about other people. We also don't yet understand the truth that we are born alone, live alone and die alone. This means that no-one else can be in our mind, in our heart. We are all absolutely individual. Even Siamese twins, joined together physically have separate minds.

Marriage brings another closer to you but its impossible to share one heart. These days people seem bent on love and relationships which often end up in suffering. There are many beautiful things about trying to share your heart with another but the closer you come together the harder it is to separate and separation is inevitable. Either you break up or become critically ill or you die. This is the fate of all relationships – this is fact. So the point here is; we don't have to cut off all relationships, not even Buddhist monks need to do that. We simply need to understand the impermanent nature of ourselves, any other living being / person and our relationship with them. If you have real wisdom about this, then in your heart, you are prepared for the inevitable. Remember the Boy Scouts motto? *'Be Prepared!'* That's like what the Buddha taught too. Know your body, your mind and the nature of life and nothing will harm you or

cause you suffering. Your mind can live independently from anger, fear, sadness, loneliness, and grief, etc. It is true, you can do it, yes you, the one reading these concepts, you can become free!

Sadness happens because we think about sad things. Fear is caused by imagining that something bad will happen but the fact is that it hasn't happened yet and may not! We cause our own problems and complications because we are not wise. The Buddha Dhamma and especially vipassana is the only cure that I have found.

Dreams and de jar vu

I myself am a prolific dreamer, I can have many dreams in one night, even during a short nap. I used to try to analyze them and see how they fit into my life, etc. What I've come to realize is that any way that you interpret a dream – may or may not be right. There is no proof. It's fun and interesting to speculate and there are dream experts who make a lot of money out of it and yes, I admit, sometimes they are right but at the end of the day it is just more thinking and imagining. Just as I learnt to see through my thoughts and very vivid imagination, I learnt to see, know and watch my dreams dissolve. Now I leave them where they fall, in my sleep. I don't get involved in them and I am more free. Even bad dreams and nightmares should not be entertained, don't give them an audience. When you wake up just label your feeling like, "afraid, afraid", "worrying, worrying" or "remembering, remembering". Then fill your mind with thoughts of metta / loving-kindness. If you're still afraid you can do some Buddhist chanting or just thinking about good things.

As for de jar vu, again we can't prove whether it is past life experience or dreams or some kind of foresight into the future. Anyway, just let it go, let it be, its not important. If I followed all my dreams, visions, imaginations, etc., I'd be in a mental hospital now, sitting in the corner sucking my thumb.

Catch it too late

Often during the intensive practice of vipassana, we only know that we are thinking about five or ten minutes after it started. All of a sudden we realize that we're thinking. Many yogis get upset by this, they may get angry with themselves or feel disappointed that they can't practice well. This is based on thinking, expecting to be better than you are. You're OK the way you are and you do your best. If you feel angry, label it. If you feel disappointed, also label that. If you're expecting too much or judging, criticizing then label them too. Sometimes you catch the 'tail' of a thought as it disappears, it is still good practice to note it once or twice anyway.

The Garden of mind – an analogy

The mind is like a well established garden, big trees, grassy lawns and plants of many varieties bearing flowers, fruit and vegetables. It also has unwanted weeds and debris, fallen branches and leaf litter. If it is not maintained and cared for, it may become overgrown, even wild and out of control.

The mind is similar to the garden. We have big, well established habits, problems and emotions. There are many varieties of thoughts, imaginations and mental states. We have unwanted states such as anger, jealousy, fear and stress. These states, when left unchecked unguarded, can cause emotional and psychological breakdowns and disorders. The mind can become wild and scattered.

So, the garden needs to be looked after and kept tidy. The grass needs to be cut, the weeds need to be uprooted, the budding plants need to be trimmed and we need to plant some new flowers and vegetables from time to time. Of course it needs lots of water, light and warmth. Then it needs to be

checked and maintained on a regular basis. Then all beings can live in harmony, sharing and enjoying the beautiful garden.

Our mind too gets untidy, we get tired, confused, angry, stressed, etc. So it needs some order, vipassana is like tidying up the mind, 'putting things in their place'. Especially the mental noting is very efficient at facilitating this. When your mind is messy with thoughts and stress, you can simply label them, imagining, angry, confusion, tired and stress. Now you know what is going on, they don't get out of control and some order is re-established. Those states may even pass away once they've been acknowledged. If you look at anger objectively (without the story) it too passes away. Stress, when observed in its true nature can be broken up into its components, such as tired, frustrated, pressure / tension, confusion, etc., and each one of them is not seen to be stress, just different processes, it can lose its strength and your mind becomes clearer and stronger. The negativities, mental defilements need to be identified and seen in their true nature, by understanding them they will be disempowered and eventually they may be uprooted from the mind. With practice and skill, thoughts may be caught as they are arising and they don't come to blossom or fruition and don't proliferate. We call this, **'nipping them in the bud!'**

And we need to cultivate some positivities in the mind such as morality, mindfulness and concentration, so we may reap the fruits of insight and wisdom arising from direct observations of mind / body processes. We may sow the seeds of metta, loving-kindness to share with all living beings. We may reflect on the Dhamma, the Buddha's teaching or truth and natural law. We can share our merits with other beings too. Wow! The garden of the mind is clean, free from weeds, trimmed and neat and fresh with new growth, new life

and bearing fruit enough for all to share. You and all beings enjoy the light and warmth radiating from your beautiful heart.

May your garden prosper!

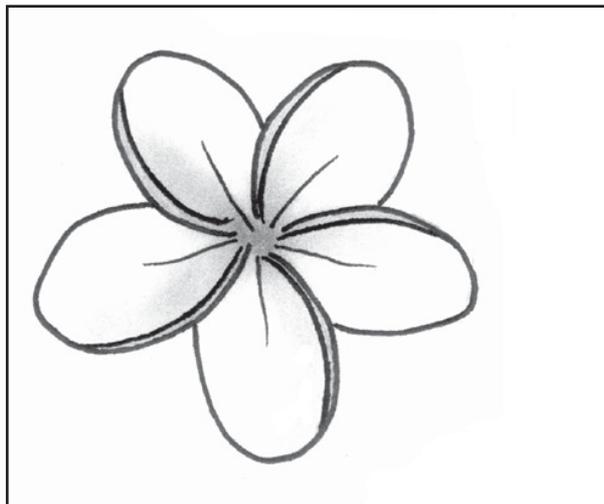
So, there is a lot more to be said about thinking but for now it is enough. Then, we are able to meditate in this Vipassana meditation by observing all mental processes, all of these thinking processes, as they are just now, as they are arising and passing away. When we are able to do this, we are able to see them, know them as they are and watch them go. Without attachment to thoughts, mental processes and the mind in general, we begin to become free from stress and suffering that comes along with this amazing and glorious mind and life. We are able to experience freedom and peace of mind with more time for metta and genuine caring for the welfare of all living beings.

May we all understand the nature of thinking and the mind.

May you live with wisdom, compassion and peace.

May you be free.

May we all be free!



The Five Hindrances

Or

The Five Friends?

There is the formal teaching on the five hindrances coming from the Buddha and the Pali Scriptures. Scholars and teachers have their own take on that but here I would like to briefly explain about them **through my own experience** in the practice of vipassana. So if you would like a more formal exposition please refer to the scriptures or a Pali scholar.

I'll list them here, so we all know what we're talking about.

The five hindrances are known in Pali as **panca nivarana**, panca is five, nivarana is hindrance. They are as follows:

Kamacchanda nivarana (Sensual desire) I call it greediness and selfishness.

Byapada nivarana (Ill will) Anger, aversion or dislike, hatred, revenge, etc.

Thina-middha nivarana (Sloth and torpor) Laziness and sleepiness.

Uddhacca-kukkucca nivarana (Restlessness or remorse) or regret.

Vicikiccha nivarana (Doubt)

As we attempt to develop mindfulness according to the **Satipatthana Sutta**, that is, by awareness of body, feelings, mind and Dhamma, we are fraught with various mental states that appear to impede our progress.

I say, 'appear to' impede our progress but then what exactly is progress? Progress with what? Mindfulness development or the removal of **kilesa** (mental defilements or negativities)? So are we developing or removing? (I know I'm answering questions with questions here but I'm getting to a point, please be patient.) So now we have to know why are we meditating in the first place? What are you trying to do? What do you want? Do you really know? Have you

asked yourself lately? It is very helpful for making progress if you do know. If you have a path or a direction, you can follow it. Once you know what you want, share it with your teacher, your 'good friend', or if you're not sure, you should consult your teacher, so that you can work together and achieve your goal.

Many teachers say to remove, destroy or uproot these defilements by cutting them off and getting rid of them, basically ignoring them and forcing the mind onto something else. I think that must work otherwise they wouldn't teach it. However, I find that most people are fighting or struggling with them or with their concentration on their chosen object of attention, which is very tiring and difficult to win. I also tend to think that if we do ignore them or suppress them, which is the ordinary way that we deal with difficult things in life, they are not really removed, they are just temporarily hidden and will arise again later when the conditions are right.

In life, if these negativities arise, we either indulge in and just go along and with them or we try to fight and get rid of them. Neither of these ways seem very effective to me as they do not solve the problem of the suffering caused by these states of mind.

Then there is a different approach, the middle way, mindfulness development, which means to simply acknowledge what is really happening in the mind, that's all. I would like to share this technique with you. I have already mentioned this repeatedly but here it comes again; try to observe and see the true nature of any mental state as it naturally occurs in the present moment. That mental state, especially any defilement or hindrance, is based in ignorance or delusion and if you observe it with a view to understanding it, you may learn something new and it will dissolve all by itself, naturally. Wisdom displaces delusion. All you have to do is see it, know it and watch it go. If it

arises again, be patient and repeat the process, after some time and repeated observation, it will barely or rarely arise and if it does, you can identify it quickly, it has no strength and it won't last long, until eventually it won't arise at all and you fully understand it. An excellent result, less struggle, with more wisdom and compassion, I like it!

So if you choose this way, the way of developing mindfulness and wisdom, then there is no need to worry about making progress because it is not measured by how many defilements you shot and killed today but the degree of your mindfulness and your ability to see things as they really are. If you can do that, be mindful, then you are making progress all the time. So here's the main point I want to make;

We make progress because of the 'hindrances', they help us to progress.

By watching them, learning from them, we develop our mindfulness, concentration and our insight, wisdom. At the same time we reduce and ultimately remove those defilements and hindrances.

Let's say for example, you had no hindrances to impede your progress, then you would already be enlightened, no need to make progress, you've finished! So, it is only by getting to know these defilements that we can make progress along the path to enlightenment. That's why I call them the five friends. We could call them the five teachers too!

These 'hindrances' are all perfectly natural states of mind, they aren't 'bad' or 'wrong', this is not a judgment of ourselves or the state of our mind, we are simply acknowledging their presence. Having said that, they are not productive, beneficial or wholesome either, try to understand them. By acknowledging them and understanding them more clearly, they won't be so predominant.

Lets take a closer look at these five friends individually;

Kamacchanda means sensual desire, desire for sense pleasure, something pleasant at the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, physical feelings and in the mind too. So there is a craving, which is also grasping and clinging. This desire is only for your own satisfaction, therefore I call it greediness or selfishness. Even if you *want* to help others, it is still greedy because it makes *you* feel good, this aspect of desire is almost inescapable. It is arising all day long, even while you're sleeping, in your dreams. The most basic function of kamacchanda is, liking, there are so many things in this world that we like. On meditation retreat, we keep eight precepts which takes away most of our physical luxuries, but then the mind replaces them with fantasies. We dream about food, sleep, friends, holidays, sex, music, dancing and the list goes on. All the time we are imagining our desires, we are not mindful and we are like lost puppies. We must wake up and apply mindfulness directly to this desire. We can label, "thinking", "fantasizing", "desire, desire" or "liking, liking". It will change and become clear for a while.

We always want what we can't have and on retreat there is no physical contact with others. So we want it, we want to be close to someone, it's natural. On retreat we meet good people who are doing the same as you, who think the same as you, that is very attractive, especially if they are good looking. But we can't talk to them, so we speculate, how old they are, where they're from, what their occupation is, married or not, sexy or not! Yes, even on retreat we get sexy thoughts, it's called LUST. A Big problem and it has been since the dawn of time, natural attraction, instinct, it's universal. Once your mind gets hooked on lust, it's very hard to escape, the more you get the more you want. The fantasies are so enticing, so exciting but it's all in your head, see the reality in the present moment and drop it! Don't waste your time thinking about

sex, if it happens, it happens (not on retreat!)... live in the present. You will have to note; “fantasizing”, “imagining”, “desire” and “lust, lust, lust!”

On retreat, we easily get distracted by our desire to look at the flowers or the ants, the other yogis or what the other people are doing. It's not wrong or bad to look but you lose your mindfulness. When we hear a song, we want to listen and sing along. We want to listen to other people talking or listen to the birds, then we get lost in that. We want to smell the flowers or the food cooking and we don't know our mind and get attached to it and start dreaming. When tasting food, we love it, we want more, we fantasize about a big dinner with the family. We feel the warm sun in the morning or the cool breeze, or washing the body with water feels nice, we enjoy the sensations and become subjective, the 'I' or self, greedy ego, is involved and we lose our objective awareness that sees things as they really are. Please label these desires, wants, loves, fantasies, enjoyment and greediness.

Even expectation is desire for good experiences, for satisfaction. Also the desire to make progress and the desire to remove these hindrances. Your mind is jumping ahead to the unknown future, grasping at what *might* be. As long as you have these desires blinding your clear awareness of the present moment reality, you won't make progress, you'll just go up and down on the same spot or go around and round in circles.

Byapada means ill will, which is the opposite of good will (metta). Other suitable terms that may come under this heading are anger, aversion or dislike, hatred, revenge, grudge, jealousy, etc.

This destructive and harmful mental state arises from the ignorant ego. Because we don't understand our own mind and the way of life, and because we are selfish, we get angry. Basically, we don't like things the way they are and we react, sometimes violently or abusively. There is also an absence of

metta, loving-kindness, genuine care, concern and compassion for oneself and others.

On retreat, we get annoyed by other yogis and their habits. Living with people is difficult because we are impatient and want things our own way. We get sense contact with unpleasant things, sights, sounds, etc. and we are repulsed, we reject them, try to get rid of them and get upset. We get attached to what we see, hear, etc. and we get involved and take it personally, resulting in the wrong view and thus misunderstanding and disappointment, dissatisfaction and anger arise. Wrong view here, means to think something is permanent or personal.

Aversion and desire are like brother and sister or two sides of the same coin. Because we don't like something, we want something else. Or because we can't fulfill our desires, we get angry. These two play and work with each other. If you see one, then the other won't be too far away.

On retreat, we could do what I call the, "**like and dislike practice**". That is, try to see these two mental states when they arise naturally, as often as you can throughout your day. You will be surprised, it is like they are just switching between the two all day long... if it's not this one, it's the other... "liking", "disliking", "liking", "disliking". Naturally we should do this at home or everyday, as much as we can, it's just easier on retreat because that is why we are there, to watch the body and mind, with fewer distractions.

Following this section on the hindrances, there is a whole chapter devoted to a more detailed explanation of anger, just because we all need to know more about it.

Thina-middha means sloth and torpor. These are funny words that I never heard in my life, except for the animal sloth, which is what it means, slow, dull,

vague, unenergetic and lazy. Torpor means sleepiness, drowsy, nodding off and can't stay awake.

These two have another brother, which doesn't appear in the formal teaching of the five hindrances, I just added it myself because it is very common for yogis and in life too. 'The three brothers' – lazy, sleepy and boredom! Three, low energy mental states, that overpower the mind.

You can easily see that if these states of mind are predominant then you are not able to be clearly mindful. They consume the mind, sweep it away, they cloud it and prevent concentration from arising. So we need to pay attention to them! Look directly at them like a hunter looking down the sights of his gun. Look at them like you look for split ends in your hair or at pimples on your face in the mirror! Veeerrry closely! What are these mind states? How do they arise, function, how do they affect us and then pass away? Try to see the whole process from start to finish.

One of the main causes for these is disinterest. The mind doesn't like (there's aversion again!) what is happening in the present, it is not interested and the mind drifts off the predominant object and enjoys (desire again!) thinking. Now this new state is predominant, catch it quickly, label it energetically and try to see its true nature, "lazy, lazy, lazy!" Actually the ego doesn't like to be called lazy, so it wakes up!

Sleeping is useful but sleepiness is useless. If you sleep, you rest your mind but sleepiness is when you are trying to stay awake and can't, so it is unproductive. Read the section on sleepiness in 'A Successful Retreat' at the beginning of this book.

"Boring! boring!", try to inject some energy into the mind. Boredom has the characteristic of disinterest, so get interested in it, pay precise attention to it and find out what it is. You will find that it is not boring, it is very interesting and

that it need not last long in the mind. Once you are interested in boredom, boredom is gone!

Don't just turn away from these mental states and try to find something better to do. Ignoring them won't make them go away forever, they'll just come back. Try to confront them, face them, look them between the eyes and stand your ground, I'm sure they will back down.

All three of these are mixed up with thinking. If you can catch the thinking first the others won't follow. Remove the cause and the effect is removed. Don't follow your lazy and boring thoughts.

If you don't like these 'three brothers' coming back to visit you all the time, then label them, "aversion, aversion", "disappointed" or "wanting, wanting" them to go away.

Uddhacca-kukkucca means restlessness and remorse. These too are caused by thinking, usually a lot of thinking!

A restless mind means the body too is restless, can't sit still, don't want to walk, don't want to lie down, can't sleep... OK, STOP! What is really going on in the mind? Is it aversion? Desire? Laziness? Frustration? Impatience? Check it out! And observe and label what you find.

We are often restless because we are dreaming, fantasizing and projecting into the future but we can't have it yet and we're impatient, we want it now – restless! Or we are remembering the past, which we can't change right now and the mind is trying to solve the problems of the past, too many thoughts, the mind is too fast and we get stressed, worried, agitated – restless! What's happening now? "Dreaming", "imagining", "reflecting", "worrying" and "restless, restless"...

Remorse or regret is just reflecting on the past about the bad things that you did or the good things that you missed or failed to do. Then the other

aforementioned mental and emotional states are getting all mixed up together. “Remembering”, “reflecting”, “remorse”, “regret”, “guilt”, “disappointment”, “frustrated”...

If remorse is *really* a problem and the mind keeps going over the same old story and you can't be mindful, then try to label the emotions attached to it. If *that* doesn't work, try to skillfully put it aside and make a determination that, “While I am meditating, I won't think about it!” If it comes back (and it will) just remind yourself, “Not now!” Try to be mindful of any other present moment process.

There may be the occasion when there is a need to do some forgiveness practice to help your mind to understand and let go of a big problem, emotion or trauma from the past. See the section on forgiveness at the beginning of this book. Then go through the phrases in order of one, two and three.

Vicikiccha means doubt, perplexity, questioning, not-knowing and confusion.

We have doubt about many things in life. It is good to not blindly believe but if we have too much doubt, we can't make progress. In meditation, doubt about the **Buddha**, the **Dhamma** (teachings) and the **Sangha** (those who have practiced well) can create a lot of thinking and thus the mind is scattered and not concentrated at all. If we doubt about the meditation **technique**, we think it doesn't work, doesn't lead to enlightenment, we are arguing and complaining in our mind, then we are not mindful. Or we doubt that the **teacher** is good, not wise, not well practiced and we don't want to follow. Or we doubt that this **place** is suitable for meditation, too busy, too noisy, too many mosquitoes, the food's not good, blah, blah, blah! But the worst doubt of them all, is the doubt about **yourself**, your own ability to practice or make progress. We think, “I'm

not good enough!" "Everyone else can do this but I can't!" "I think too much!"
"I have too many defilements!"

So, the way to overcome all of these doubts is to **just do it!** If you apply your attention to this doubt and label, "doubt, doubt, doubt", you will see that it doesn't last for long and it clears away completely. Now you are doubting what? Nothing, the Buddha was right, your teacher is right, the technique works, this place is OK and *you can do it!... You can fly if you want to!*

here I would like to mention the;

'Five Mental Powers /Faculties' (panca indriya in Pali). They are:

Saddha - faith, trust, confidence or interest.

Viriya - effort or energy.

Sati - mindfulness

Samadhi - concentration.

Pannya - insight or wisdom.

I will use the example of the practice of vipassana to explain these five mental states. Doubt can mean a lack of faith, you don't believe or you don't trust, as I just explained. This also means you have no confidence and along with that there is no interest. If you have no saddha, then you won't put forth any effort, you have no energy to do the work, then you are 'attacked' by the hindrances, like aversion and laziness. If you have no effort or energy, then you can't be mindful, you don't pay attention. If you don't have sati, your learning faculty is switched off. You see, in order to learn anything in life, we must pay attention first. If you don't pay attention to anything, you have nothing to concentrate on. Without concentration there is no deeper penetrative understanding, thus no wisdom arises.

In short, if you are not interested, you have no effort, no effort - no attention, no attention - no concentration, no concentration - no insight and no wisdom.

Then you make no progress, just go round in circles, complaining and doubting. You are wasting your time, you may as well go shopping!

Of course this works in the opposite order as well, and that is why it is important to see and understand the hindrance of doubt. If you can see through doubt, just an impermanent and somewhat useless mental state, then you will have *faith and confidence* in the technique and in yourself. So, *energy arises* and you put forth *steady and continuous effort*, which is the cause for *uninterrupted mindfulness* and attention. When the mindfulness is strong, *some degree of concentration* cuts in and penetrates into the true nature of any mental or physical process that is being observed. Thus insight, some revelation, some new realization and *wisdom arises* - that is the practice of vipassana!

These five faculties are not only working in vipassana but in everything you do in your life. If you get lost in your doubt, lack of confidence, disinterest or you don't trust anyone or anything, then you have no energy to do anything, so you don't. End of story, you're like a dead person. No-one has to live like that, all you need is a bit of faith in something, some confidence in yourself and you can do anything in this world. You are your own master, you hold the keys to your life, do whatever you want to do, in your heart, as long as it is wholesome and harmless... **go for it!**

Coming back to the 'five friendly hindrances', they are caused by and mixed up with thinking. If you can separate the thinking, the hindrance can't last long and you learn something new about it. Your mind becomes free and wise. Also, there are other emotions that arise due to these hindrances, to see and know them too.

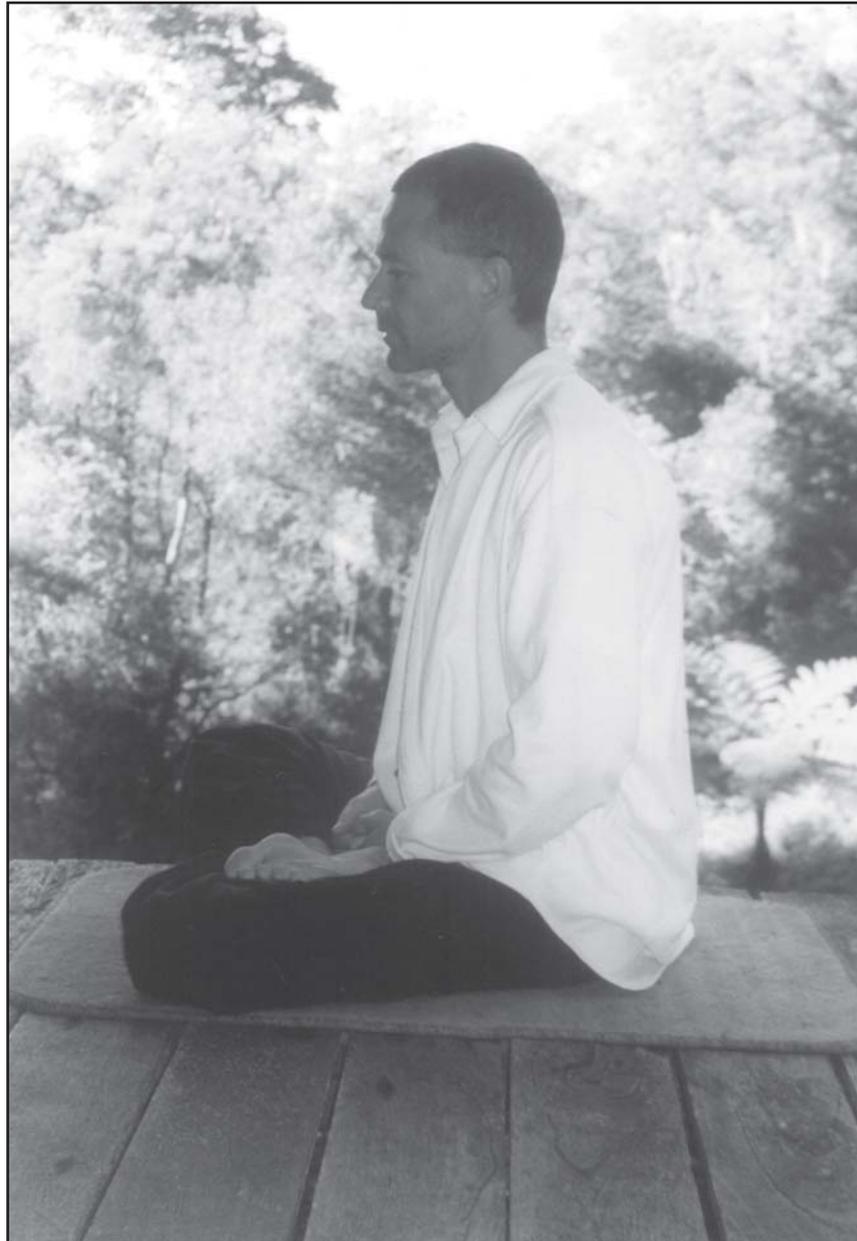
In our daily life, we are faced with many problems, especially at work or in relationships. These hindrances are the troublemakers that prevent us from

seeing clearly and solving a problem. So when you have a problem, stop for a moment, breathe in and breathe out and check your mind, "How do I feel now?" "What's the reality here?" If you can **identify and separate the hindrance and the thinking from the problem**, the problem will become clear. If there is any emotional involvement, just take it aside and look at it too. This all means that your mind is more objective, seeing processes as they really are and not getting involved in them and not taking them personally. These processes are not you, they are neither a person nor a being, neither a self nor a soul. (My teachers words!)

Some people say that since they practiced vipassana, they seem to have more mental defilements and hindrances - that's impossible, you couldn't have more! What you do have is more mindfulness, which sees the defilements, so this is a good thing, not bad. Don't be depressed or beat yourself up for being defiled, you have always been that way but celebrate the fact that now you see it and you are on the path of purification, be patient with yourself. Vipassana is not a 'quick fix', there is no quick fix when it comes to purification of the mind. It has taken many lifetimes for you to become this defiled, do you think you can just snap your fingers and it will just pop and disappear? Sorry but no. The best way to accelerate purification of mind is to do long term intensive vipassana, three months, six months or longer. Work your way up to it, slowly.

Everyday, everywhere, we can be mindful of these five mental states that stop us from having a full and wholesome life. Don't just let some useless, impermanent and unproductive mental states rule your life.

See them, know them and watch them gooooo!



ANGER

Introduction

I am writing about anger because everyone has got it in some degree or another and no-one wants it at all. It is one of the most common complaints that people have. I have met sweet little old ladies who look positively angelic who confess to me that they are so angry inside, it is very surprising. We are very good at covering it up and acting calm and sweet. This applies to supermodels, movie stars, TV personalities, doctors, teachers and even religious leaders. I want to help anyone who wants to realize the true nature of anger and gradually uproot it forever.

Right from the beginning, I have to state that I myself am not completely free from anger. However I have reduced it and harmful hatred, rage or even prolonged anger has not been experienced for a very long time. This isn't so amazing considering the amount of mindfulness meditation I have done over the last eleven years and the fact that I have spent almost all of that time living in meditation centres and monasteries.

Since I have been observing and investigating the nature of the mind, I have discovered many things that are not usually seen and known by ordinary folk who tend not to pay specific attention to their mental states. I would like to share some of my discoveries and experiences with you in the sincere hope that it may benefit you directly but also may it have a positive effect upon your family, friends and all beings that you meet during your life.

Please don't expect that by merely reading this book, you will become miraculously free from anger. It takes practice and patience to unwind this 'wound-up heart', this is just the beginning. In fact, the more I talk and write about anger, the more I learn and would like to share, so this exposition is not yet complete.

I start by defining the problem, then seeing the effects of anger and finding the various causes, then offering some ways of reducing and removing them to experience the peace that we seek.

It's funny, when I finish working on this file called, 'Anger' on the computer, a dialogue box would come up and ask, "Do you want to save changes you have made to anger?" YES PLEASE!! It would be nice if I could just delete it... the anger, that is!

Anger

Big problem! Not only for ourselves but also for those around us. Even if you yourself don't have much anger, you may have to meet and be with those who do, which can be rather uncomfortable and sometimes frustrating. I think no-one really wants to be angry and everyone agrees that anger is not good, not skillful or useful but it happens! It's natural. Relax, watch it, check it out, get to know yourself. Maybe you'll find the key to the door to release that dark negativity from your heart and let the sunshine in.

How does anger feel, in the body?

Unpleasant! The body may be tense, tight, shaking or hot. Maybe you've got 'butterflies' (or bumblebees!) in your stomach. Maybe there is tension in the eyes, face, head, neck, shoulders and chest. You know we look pretty ugly when we are angry. We screw our faces up, turn red and look nasty and scary, even attractive people turn ugly when they are angry. From habitual and unguarded anger comes some deep creases, wrinkles and lines on our face. There's a nice little saying, which is very applicable here;

**If people knew how ugly they are
when they are angry...
they wouldn't be!**

Do you want to be ugly or beautiful? Easy question, huh? Often we see young and angry people who don't know that all of their anger will change the look of their face and one day they will be ugly old people. You see your face is a manifestation, a reflection of your heart. So, it is time to turn your mind around from angry to calm, from sour to sweet. If you can make your heart shine, all the world will love you!

How is anger in the mind?

Definitely unpleasant! Like the body, the mind too may feel tight and restless. It gets agitated, busy and confused with many words, ideas and images flashing. The mind is scattered, concentration is lost and difficult to regain. Really, we can lose our senses, our awareness of what is going on around us and it's like the heart has become dark, like heavy storm clouds that block out the sunlight. Like a tornado that is self-centered and self-consuming, feeding on itself.

According to a section of the Buddhist Scriptures known as **abhidhamma** and that which we may experience for ourselves, consciousness is like a constantly arising and passing away, a flowing, ever-changing stream of mental states which arise due to their causes and pass away instantaneously. Anger is simply one of these transient states of mind. If we have some personal insight into this natural phenomenon, anger is not such a problem.

I use the term to 'see' the anger in the mind, some prefer to say, 'feel' and others say, 'know'. Another word may be, 'experience', they all pretty much mean the same thing if there is mindfulness present. Whichever way we say it, we have to experience, be aware of and know anger as it is happening.

I also use the words, heart and mind interchangeably, they mean the same thing. But sometimes I use the words, head and heart, that's a little bit different. The head is just our intellect, thinking and some accumulated

knowledge. It is our superficial desires, anger and confusion, which we all too often follow blindly. Our heart knows better. It is like our wisdom, instinct or intuition, our innate ability to know the useful from the useless and the wholesome from the unwholesome. 'Follow your heart', means to know how you feel deep in your heart and to follow that rather than the superficial and impulsive 'head'.

Just an aside, Westerners usually point to their head when they refer to their mind, whereas Asians tend to point to their physical heart. I think Westerners think too much, in some ways it is good but it also causes psychological problems and of course too much anger. The modern Asians, in big cities like Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Bangkok, etc. are now facing the same problems since adopting Western education standards and social behavior. Sorry about that! I love to visit the small villages where life is so simple and friendly, where the families are naturally socially supportive of each other. They live in peace and harmony.

"How do I feel now?"

This question helps us to isolate at least one feeling that we have in our heart just now. There maybe many different feelings such as, stress, frustration, sadness, confusion, panic, etc. but just observe the one that is strongest, most predominant or easy to detect. In this case it is anger and now you are aware of it. Even in the moment that it takes you to identify the anger, that is enough time to help contain that small 'heart fire' from breaking out into a full scale 'forest fire', spreading and causing more damage to yourself and others. Nobody wants your anger.

The world doesn't need another angry person.

When people are angry with us, we respond with anger. We know that two wrongs don't make a right but we do it anyway. Try to listen to what they have

to say, maybe they're telling you something that you really need to know. Maybe their delivery or way of telling you is not so cool but if you can remain cool, you might learn something about yourself or about them, or simply about human nature. They might learn something too. They might see how you didn't react but stayed calm, their anger didn't work on you, then maybe they can settle down, change their way and be more polite and relaxed, like you. This is a 'win-win' situation, everyone benefits.

Here I can mention '**non-reactive awareness**'. This is amazing if you can master it. It means to simply acknowledge, with a clear mind, exactly what is happening now and not reacting at all. Calm on the inside, calm on the outside. Let them be angry, let them scream and shout and jump up and down, getting red in the face and pulling their hair out, and just watch and listen, remain silent. When they have finished, if something needs to be said, say it, if not, let it be and wish them well.

They are suffering.

The person with the anger is suffering, have compassion (**karuna**) for them. After someone has been angry with you and you didn't react, you can say some words of karuna or metta for their well being.

"May they *really* be free from their anger, may they be free from their suffering."

**"We don't like anger in us,
so we give it away...
we let someone else have it!**

We don't like the feeling of anger inside us, so we try to get rid of it by sharing it with someone else. That is why we feel bad when we have been angry with someone because we know how much it hurts. The more we hurt

them, the worse we feel. Often the ones who get most of our anger are the ones we are closest to, the ones we love. This is such a shame! Why do we do this to each other? Maybe we think, "Ah, she already knows I'm an angry animal so what if I'm angry again... and again...!" Or getting angry with your parents or children, it's normal, you do it quite often but then it becomes 'alright'. People say, "Oh we always fight, it doesn't matter!" It might not matter now but after one year, two, five, ten or more years, it does matter and you feel old, tired and unloved.

We don't seem to care and don't know how much and how often we hurt people with our mindless anger. We expect them to get over it but maybe they can't, maybe we hurt them too much or too many times. Living with someone can show their anger and your own. That is sometimes why marriages don't work out, because when they were dating, there's not so much to argue about but living together is much more problematic. You get to see their heart more closely. Also you are spending more time with each other, which can be frustrating.

So we don't only have to be aware of our own feelings but also those of others. The best way to do that is to become more familiar with your own feelings. All hearts have similar characteristics and patterns. When we can understand our own emotions and feelings, we can understand others better.

It's up to you.

It always comes back to us. This world as you know it, only exists due to your perception of it. When you're happy, the world seems wonderful, when you're angry, the world seems dark and hostile. What really happened? What changed? Not the world, just you and your attitude. So, a change of attitude in you can change the whole world... YES!! Let's do it!

Sometimes, due to our inability to express ourselves in a gentle, harmless or at least in a neutral manner, we don't say anything, we stop talking altogether. 'The silent treatment', it's one way to 'punish' someone but meanwhile it hurts us too! Sometimes we go to great lengths to avoid seeing or speaking to THAT person, even in the same house! This is really sad. After I heard about the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, I thought about all the people who left home that morning with anger in their heart and were never seen again. Them, their families and friends, work colleagues, never got the chance to say, "I'm sorry, please forgive me." Or "I love you." Hey, we don't know the future, we never know when we might not see someone again, to have that chance to apologize or tell them how you feel. Perhaps it could be a daily practice to look your loved ones in the eye and ask for forgiveness and tell them you love them and care for them. It seems silly or unnecessary but it can be very meaningful and powerful, especially if someone dies. Please try the forgiveness practice at the beginning of this book.

When my father died, that was what I regretted the most, was not being able to tell him one last time, I love you Dad!

"Life is uncertain, death is certain."

Both you and I,
never know when we will die,
so when you say good-bye,
please look me in the eye,
and say it with metta...
for both you and I.

We even blame other people for our own anger, this is false, it's wrong! Nobody ever gave us anger. Anger arises because of **OUR OWN INABILITY** to understand the situation, to understand ourselves and others. That's why the wise ones never get angry because they know what is really going on.

**"Oh, may we have the wisdom
to know the reality of each present moment and
live in peace and harmony!"**

'Doubling your Dukkha.'

Dukkha is a Pali word which refers to unpleasant feeling, suffering and unsatisfactoriness (the feeling of never being satisfied). We react to our own anger, sometimes by being angry with ourselves for being angry, *again!* This judgment and criticism causes more anger and stress, try to see it, know it, watch it change and disappear. I call this phenomenon, **'Doubling your Dukkha.'** Anger itself is dukkha but then you get angry about that - double dukkha! Then you're frustrated because of all the anger, then you get depressed and stressed as well! **WHAT'S ALL THIS? Dukkha pancakes!** All stacked on top of each other, piling up the dukkha! And no maple syrup! Nothing sweet at all!

This is a habit, the habit of judging and criticizing oneself. We don't necessarily want to do this but we do it, unwittingly. When we were young, we were criticized by our parents, family, friends, peers, teachers, society and so on. Now, even when no one else is judging and criticizing us, we do it to ourselves. It is a really amazing experiment to try and see how many times you judge or criticize yourself in one day. It is so normal for us that we don't know that we're doing it.

Then of course, it's so easy for us to judge and criticize others, that's our habit too. Because we are unsatisfied with ourselves we either try to blame others for it or we simply find their faults. We are like **'fault-finding robots'**, programmed to find faults in everything and everyone. It seems that when we criticize, condemn and put others down, it makes us look better. Oh, what a shame! Why do we have to live like this? Why do we have to treat ourselves and others like this? Where's the metta, the loving-kindness, the friendliness? Even for oneself? When I went back to Australia after living in Buddhist monasteries for six years straight, I found that Westerners were very sarcastic, using black humor and making jokes about each other to make themselves look funny or better than the others. It is like a game to see who can be the nastiest, which apparently means to be the cleverest. To me it seems downright hurtful and insensitive. When we are criticized, even in jest, we reflect on it later and it hurts. Also, we often respond with anger. Our societies are breeding anger.

Perfectionism

Many of us, whether we know it or not, are perfectionists. We have a perfect image of ourselves, our families, friends, society and the whole world. Because our life doesn't match up with this perfect image we get disappointed, frustrated and we suffer – that's dukkha! If we can see this image, know its detrimental effects and let it go, we could see life just as it is and relax. Nobody is perfect, we have our faults and *it is OK* for people to notice and point them out to us. Hey, maybe they are trying to help us perfect our image, that's good!

All things are changing and thus, nothing is perfect. When we fully realize this truth we stop fighting with the world and we simply acknowledge things as they are. This word acknowledge, is important for us to understand. It doesn't

mean to just be lazy and do nothing. Nor does it mean to blindly accept. Accepting means to become the owner, that is attachment and thus suffering follows. Acknowledging doesn't mean to deny, ignore, reject or suppress. It simply means to be aware, pay attention, observe and to let it be. We can say, **non-reactive awareness**. What we may learn is that this anger is impermanent, it is not the same in the beginning as it is in the middle and it is not the same at the end. That's interesting isn't it? Check it out for yourself, is anger different from the beginning, to the middle, to the end? Is the end of anger the same as the beginning? It is constantly changing, flowing with the 'river' of the mind. Don't identify with this anger, don't call it 'me' or 'mine', don't hold on to it, just know that it is there, get to know it and know that it will pass, as all mental states do. Know how much suffering it causes you and others and abandon it. See it as a natural process that arises due to its various causes and passes away when it's 'life-span' has finished. All things come to an end – 'good' or 'bad'. This wisdom shows us that all things are naturally changing, that suffering is a part of life and that the mind is just a part of this natural universe too, like the weather. No need to try to perfect the world, just look, listen and learn. All things change for the better when we understand in the right way.

Never satisfied

Or, we just get a little bit of satisfaction and it slips away and we are on the search again, hunting for more. Or even if it does stay for a while, we grasp at it tenaciously and cause ourselves stress... let satisfaction go too, see what happens next, often it's a sense of relief.

Do your best, that's all. To the best of your ability today, work with the resources and energy that you have and do your best. Yesterday's or tomorrow's best might be better or worse, never mind, just do your best now

and relax. Stop punishing yourself, don't beat yourself up. Be gentle on yourself and others too.

Stop trying to be perfect and just be yourself!

Depression is referred to as anger turned inwards.

We get angry with ourselves and then we punish ourselves for that and that makes us feel worse... and then we don't like that, but we can't get rid of it and so we judge that we are useless or hopeless and can't even help ourselves and so we feel worse about that and thus a downward spiral. The heart is dark, closed for business, nobody's home. We then project this outwards, we think that no-one would want such an angry and depressing person in their life, so we don't let anyone get close to us. We don't like this either and get depressed about our lack of social interaction, so we don't go out and we become more introverted. Then we may judge our introversion and compare it to all of the beautiful people out there having so much fun and we get more depressed. All of those beautiful people have all their own psychological and emotional baggage too. Only enlightened ones are free from delusion and dukkha. To become enlightened you have to spend time by yourself.

Introverted is OK!

Especially if you have some meditation skills and turn introversion into introspection – excellent! But what does it mean, to see your own introversion, what is it? How does it affect you? Is there any anger associated with it? Are you angry with society – or with yourself because you don't understand society. You know, I think no one really understands this modern society, it is so fast and has so many levels. So you can be forgiven if you feel that you don't fit in. Personally, I don't fit in anywhere. I can adapt and function just about anywhere but as far as feeling perfectly comfortable, socially – well, not

yet. For me, that is OK, I know how I feel and I'm prepared to be different and not fit in. I like it, I don't feel much like a Westerner anymore but I'm not an Asian either. Oh, I'm just "a child of the universe, no lesser than the trees and stars..." (Desiderata).

It also helps if we know what extroversion is and between the two extremes, we may find the middle point of balance. I see extroversion sometimes to be quite superficial and in many cases just hyperactivity without any mindfulness at all. In short, it may be delusion. That is not always the case, there are wonderful people in prominent public positions who are very centred and grounded and hold their hold their status very well. But I think this is more balance than extroversion as such.

If someone is angry with or criticizing you.

Is what they are saying true? If so, no need to get angry but listen and learn about yourself. That's a good opportunity to correct your character. Is what they are saying untrue? If so, no need to get angry, later on, when the dust settles you can quietly and gently inform them of the truth. We should be thankful for the opportunity to practice patience and to learn more about our own mind, especially how anger arises, changes and passes away. It is really difficult to listen to someone criticize you but it can be very fruitful. If it is delivered gently, then it is fine but if it is harsh, it is too difficult not to defend yourself. Don't take it personally. Even if it is about you, just acknowledge it with non-reactive awareness. The one who judges or criticizes you is not perfect either, they have their faults and its not up to you to point them out for them. They too are suffering, have compassion for them,

**"May they be free from anger,
may they be free from suffering,
may they be happy and peaceful".**

Some Solutions, Remedies.

It has taken a long time for our anger to get this bad, it's going to take a long time to dissolve or uproot it, be patient.

I just remembered a little story about a boy's father who told him that every time he was angry to hammer a nail into the fence. They were surprised to see so many nails in the fence. The boy got tired of nailing into the fence so instead, he decided to not get angry. Good idea, can you do something like that? Try to make a note of all your 'angers' throughout each day. Make your own little angry book, just as an experiment. Or before going to sleep, try to remember your angry moments and check to see if they were pleasant or productive. Did you resolve them, are they finished now? If not, can you correct the fault and let it go and start afresh? Try making a determination to apologize on the spot or as soon as possible after being angry with someone so as not to let the hurt get deeper or worse, both in you and the other one. Or making a determination to ask for forgiveness every time you hurt someone with your anger. If you do that successfully, after a while, you will get sick of doing it and you'll learn to catch your anger before it explodes.

These two ways are quite difficult because it seems like the other person is the winner and you are the loser but things aren't always as they seem. You in fact are the winner in the long run because you can become humble and free from anger and the guilt that comes along with it. Meanwhile, they are stuck in their pride and ego thinking that they are better than you.

You don't have to accept other people's anger.

It's like someone throws to you a piece of burning wood, you don't catch it, you don't even budge or twitch, you just watch it fall away. Let the anger or problem fall on the floor in between you and the one who is angry. Don't pick it up but you can examine it, check it out. Is this a good thing for me or for them?

If you are at fault then you can accept the criticism and be happy to correct your fault.

If you aren't at fault then this criticism doesn't belong to you, it is false, incorrect, don't accept it, don't take it on, don't pick it up and let it be. Accept the constructive criticism but don't accept the anger. They can take it back with them.

**Wise people don't get angry,
therefore,
angry people are not wise.**

Who owns the problem?

Often people try to put their problems on to us. Or they ask us to solve their problems for them. It is good to help if you can but not getting involved deeply or not at all is much more comfortable. Often we want to get involved but end up with more trouble, so you have to decide for yourself; Who owns the problem? And Do I want to get involved? It is **OK to say no**, you don't have to help everyone, you can gently tell them that you are busy or that you have your own problems, which is true, right? Or at least try to strike a balance between helping others and helping yourself. Of course your spouse, parents and children are a priority and others can be helped if you have the time and energy.

Balance

People say we have to have **upekkha** (equanimity or balance of mind). That's easy to say but how to do it? This often results in one struggling with one's own mind, trying to make it something that it is not. Don't fight to change it, just be aware of it as it is. Everything is already changing, there is nothing to do but be alert, be awake. Learn from this experience in this present moment. Just see how the mind isn't in the middle and that awareness is the beginning

of that mental state naturally coming back to balance. So by seeing the extreme of anger, we can start to come back to the middle. If we don't see it and know it as it occurs, we get stuck out there on the extreme. Or we go out there often and we don't know it, the mind is out of balance and we don't know it. That is where mindfulness is so important. You don't need upekkha, you need **sati** (mindfulness!). Balance will naturally follow.

Self Hatred

This, to some people seems such a strange concept, "How could someone hate themselves?" On the other hand, some people can't imagine what self-love could feel like and in fact they have convinced themselves that it is not good. They think, "Don't love yourself, send love out to others, all living beings!" What love? They don't know what it is or at the very least they are confused about it. So what are they sending out? Confusion? Metta (loving-kindness) is the second best remedy for self-hatred. In the beginning, we develop metta towards our own heart, to love ourselves. This may be very difficult and a lot of doubt and opposition to it may arise but if one perseveres, these initial hindrances can be understood and seen through and natural metta can flow from the heart. An amazing transformation can happen. People who genuinely care for and feel good about themselves can easily love others.

The *best* remedy for self-hatred is wisdom, to actually understand the process, its causes, its effects and how it changes and disappears. A wise mind is not angry. Self-wisdom displaces self-hatred.

Relationships

Sometimes, angry people want to marry placid people so that they might be tamed by them, so that some of that peaceful nature will 'rub off' on them. Sometimes, placid people want to marry angry people thinking that they can tame their angry side and bring out their beautiful side. Both ways are often a

recipe for disaster. We can't really change other people, they don't change so easily. One has to change oneself, its the only way.

Anger is like a mask that we put on and show to people, unfortunately, the ones we love or work with see it the most. But to friends and new people we meet, we never dare display that side of ourselves, we hide it, we pretend to be patient and cool but as we get to know them more and more, we become complacent about our self-image and about their feelings. This is how relationships and marriages, even families break down over time.

"Life is uncertain, death is certain."

By reflecting on our own death, we may realize that life is too short to be angry. Besides, what if I die today, do I want to take this anger with me? Its better to live everyday like it is your last, so that when it comes time to die, and we don't know when that will be, there will be no regrets.

One of my first Buddhist monk teachers taught me these lines for daily contemplation, it changed my life:

**My life is not lasting;
My death is sure to come.
Inevitable is my death;
My life will end in death.
Life is uncertain;
Death is certain.**

People may see this as morbid, depressing or negative but in fact it is the opposite. When we get insight into the impermanence and unreliability of our life, we start to live more fully, making every day count. Every moment is important and an opportunity to grow wiser and let go of useless negativities such as anger.

Reminders and Remedies - in brief

- The most effective short and long term solution to anger is mindfulness, it facilitates the reduction and removal of aversion, anger and hatred.
- Metta is the antidote for anger.
- Stop, breathe, check the state of your heart, **“How do I feel now?”**
- Even in the moment that it takes you to identify the anger, that is enough time to help contain that small “heart fire”.
- Angry is ugly.
- Remember; **The world doesn't need another angry person.**
- Try non-reactive awareness. Don't respond with anger.
- It's OK to be angry, it's not OK to share it.
- Don't be angry about your own anger - it causes depression.
- **Stop trying to be perfect and just be yourself!**
- Nobody wants your anger.
- Nobody gives you anger, it's your own lack of wisdom.
- Wise people don't get angry, they just know!
- The person with the anger is suffering, have compassion (*karuna*) for them.
- **“May they *really* be free from their anger, may they be free from their suffering.”**
- Try to listen to them, maybe they're telling you something that you really need to know.
- Try to make notes of all your 'angers' throughout each day.
- **'Follow your heart'**, not your angry, superficial and impulsive 'head'.

- Try making a determination to apologize or ask for forgiveness on the spot or as soon as possible after anger.
- Remember and recite; **“Life is uncertain, death is certain.”**
- Be aware of our own feelings and also those of others. The best way to do that is to be more aware of your own feelings.
- Forgiveness is very good for repairing ‘damage’.
- Metta is good for healing.
- Precepts are good for prevention.
- Relax and try to do your best, nobody can ask for more.

Note: A nice little book that inspired me is; ‘Curbing Anger and Spreading Love’ by Visuddhacara, available through ‘Sukhi Hotu’ Malaysia.



GENERAL MINDFULNESS

These notes are to help people to take their mindfulness development practice home with them after an intensive retreat.

What is mindfulness?

I use the words; alert, aware, awake, acknowledge, attention (all start with the letter A!) and observe, to mean the same as mindfulness. They are only slightly different in meaning, therefore I use them interchangeably.

Mindfulness has two aspects; specific mindfulness and general mindfulness.

Firstly I would like to explain to you what specific mindfulness means, then we can have a better understanding of what general mindfulness is.

Specific mindfulness means to be momentarily or *from moment to moment*, aware of what is happening in your body and mind as it naturally occurs. Here it is good to cite the principle of vipassana meditation (*one more time!*)...

THE PRINCIPLE – Very important

The principle of vipassana meditation is to **observe**,
any mental or physical process
that is **predominant** within the present moment.

Specific mindfulness is a way of training the mind, developing, clearing and sharpening the mind in order to produce right understanding, clear comprehension of the true nature of our body and mind, of our life as it really is.

In the meditation retreat situation, where we are attempting to have continuous specific mindfulness as much as we can, we practice by developing mindfulness of four postures; sitting, standing, walking and lying down. We also observe any other daily activities, they are actions and

movements that we perform in our daily routine, such as eating, dressing, cleaning our body or the place we live in and so on. It means to specify one process of body or mind in the present moment and be precisely aware of that as it is.

Focused attention on one thing at a time

It is specific, careful and directed attention on a presently arising phenomenon of mentality or physicality. When we observe these natural processes from moment to moment continuously, without interruption, we are said to be practicing specific mindfulness. We also apply a technique which makes the practice more systematic and orderly. One way is the mental noting technique; please refer to notes in 'A Successful Retreat' at the beginning of this book.

Another way to develop and sharpen mindfulness in a specific way on meditation retreat is to perform all actions and movements as slowly as possible. This seems very strange to most people as it is so different to our busy life, but that is one point, because it is so different it attracts our attention and it is easier to be aware and sharpen the mindfulness. Another point is that when we do any action or movement slowly, we can see it, feel it, in more fine detail and really investigate its true nature. If we do something fast our awareness is gross and unrefined. Slowing down develops patience – we could all do with more of that! When we are specifically aware of any slow moving physical process, our awareness is acute which brings forth strong and clear, sharp, penetrative concentration which reveals the reality, the truth that is present in all mental states and physical processes. The problem why we don't develop this wisdom naturally is because our minds are too busy analyzing, judging, criticizing, comparing, evaluating, manipulating, designing, choreographing and generally liking, disliking or plain being

stressed out or confused. By slowing down any action or movement, we may have full attention and concentration on it, therefore removing, displacing or preventing any of the aforementioned mundane and deluded states of mind. Wisdom is the result. Wisdom, right understanding, peace and compassion – now that's the way of the Buddha.

The Buddha may not have taught mental noting or slowing down but with our modern, busy, stressed, information and stimulation-overloaded minds that think way too much, these 'tools' are very much effective – otherwise we wouldn't share them with you. Try and see for yourself.

Specific mindfulness doesn't only apply to physical phenomena but we must pay attention to any mental states that naturally arise, especially if they are more predominant than the physical. By observing specifically and in fine detail any thoughts, feelings or emotions we may gain great insights into their true nature and thus the nature of all living beings and life in general.

This is life training, practicing for life.

In the meditation retreat situation, we always practice specific mindfulness to the best of our ability. However, there are times when we will also use general mindfulness, for example if we need to do something quickly or involving other people. When we go home to our daily lives, our ordinary lives, we will be using general mindfulness most of the time but on some occasions we may be specifically mindful.

Specific mindfulness should not be stressful, however, in the beginning, it does take more mental power or energy to keep up the continuous awareness whereas general mindfulness is more relaxed and casual, suitable to practice anywhere. That's the difference between the intensive developing of mindfulness in a conducive retreat situation and our daily life where we are busy with so many people, distractions and activities.

General mindfulness refers to not having to apply any technique, nor being specifically aware of anything in fine detail but generally knowing what is happening now. Knowing what's happening in your mind and your body while you are busy doing something, such as working or driving. It's more like our natural awareness, natural mindfulness. Just being alert, awake, and knowing what is happening now. In this way, we don't have to force any technique, nor are we pressuring ourselves to be mindful, just checking things from moment to moment or from time to time. It is more of a relaxed and natural observation of things as they are now.

One way to use general mindfulness is to keep a couple of questions in mind. One very good question, of which I think everybody should remember, is to ask oneself;

“How do I feel?”

“How do I feel?” means your emotional feeling, right now. How do you feel in your heart, when talking, driving, working, walking, how do you feel now? If you very often ask yourself; “How do I feel?”, you will be learning how to tune in to the natural state of your heart. We could call this; ‘State-of-the-heart technology’. The technique of knowing how to tune in to, how to understand the state of your heart. This is really important for you to be able to communicate with other people and to be able to be efficient, effective and friendly in your life. So, asking yourself, “How do I feel?” helps you to know more about yourself, at least if only generally. Then, there is another question that we may ask;

“What is happening now?” or simply “What is this?”

This question means; What is happening in my body and mind now? Is there discomfort, is there pain or pressure, is there any feeling in the body? Which sense is predominant now? Am I hearing, or seeing, what is happening

now? What is this? Or mental states, maybe you are thinking, dreaming, fantasizing, planning or reflecting. Then you can be aware of these, even if only generally. No need to get rid of them, no need to cut them off but you may find that you don't indulge or get lost in them as well. So you will find that general mindfulness brings you back to the present, "Ah – I am thinking." Or, "I am reflecting." Or projecting and so-on, being aware of that, just as it is.

So, what is happening now? In fact, you can just close your eyes and ask yourself; "What is happening now?" Just check inwardly, a little introspection. Do it right now. "What is happening now?" Or; "How do I feel now?". Maybe some pressure, tension or temperature in the body. Or maybe some emotional or mental state. So it is just like this. Then you become aware of your own body and mind just now. This is general mindfulness and you can do this anywhere, anytime. You can do it on the train, airplane, traveling anywhere, walking anywhere, when you are sick you can do it, if you are well and happy you can do it. When you are talking, discussing. Anytime, you can just check and be mindful.

"What is happening now?"

"What am I doing now?"

"How do I feel now?"

"What's this?"

These questions help you to tune back in to your own body and mind. You see, most of our life, we are just doing things and thinking. Our mind is wandering off, all over the universe. Getting lost, planning, imagining, fantasizing, etc. But when you become mindful - even if only generally – we can say that you are living in the present moment. You are back to the present (sounds like a movie!). The present as we experience it, as we know it, is our only reality. The realities are the processes that we experience. The pain, the

pressure, hard, soft, hot, cold, or even thinking itself. The thinking process is a reality in the present but the story, well – that's just a story, a concept, an idea. But the process of thinking, that is a reality in the present moment. So this general mindfulness can lead us to experience realities rather than getting lost in concepts, wandering off, letting the mind go here and there.

All this **thinking** that we do, mindlessly, creates a lot of our problems. When we think and imagine about things, we get involved in them. Getting involved in them means that we are getting lost, carried away, losing our balance, our stability. We even lose our strength of mind. Not to a drastic point, not chronically unstable, but just shakable. When you are in touch with the reality in the present moment, even if only generally, then you become stable. That stability of mind, we can say, is also peace of mind. Your mind is not shaking, is not moving around, changing, oscillating, but steady, calm. For example, you may just realize, that you are afraid now, or angry or in pain. In this way, you know what is happening right now - and it is OK just like this. Even if it is unpleasant. Unpleasant physical feelings, unpleasant mental feelings, it's OK, this is the human realm, it is supposed to be like this. So we're not changing the feeling or getting rid of it or fighting with it... just acknowledging – usually that is enough to stabilize the mind, especially if you have the training with specific mindfulness.

Another example of a stable reality is breathing. If in doubt about what to do, if you feel afraid, angry, confused and so-on, you can just observe the reality of your breathing for a while and the mind will calm down.

Feelings - Pleasant, unpleasant and neutral

The trouble with most of us is that we just want pleasant things all the time, we *expect* pleasant things all the time. But in the human realm, we have got three types of feelings - **pleasant, unpleasant and neutral** and they are always

changing. Pleasant doesn't last so long, unpleasant doesn't last so long and neither does neutral. Actually we don't even experience neutral feeling so much because we are too busy trying to get rid of unpleasant things and trying to grasp and hold on to and get the pleasant things. So we are pretty busy pushing away and rejecting unpleasant things. Busy trying to grasp and hold on to pleasant things, it is rare to experience some neutrality, some balance and peace.

Even if do we feel neutral, we tend to judge it compared to our pleasant feeling, "Oh, this is not pleasant, I don't want it". On the other hand, if you are feeling unpleasant, then neutral seems to be OK. Anyway, we are still not satisfied with neutral. We always grasp for the pleasant.

All of this rejecting and accepting, causes us suffering. We are constantly in a struggle in our own mind. Pushing away things, trying to hold on to things... not understanding that everything we experience is impermanent anyway, it comes and goes according to the law of nature. If we can understand how this is working, then we start to relax.

Also, if we are able to check our thinking and our imagining, seeing how the mind is wandering off, getting lost, getting swept away, then we come back to the reality, even just the reality of; "Oh, I am thinking now". "Oh, this is just a fantasy". "Oh, I am imagining this". "Oh - this is just a dream, I am daydreaming!" Oh, OK! What's the reality? I am walking down the street. I am driving the car. I'm cleaning the bathroom. Or anything. "Aha! Here I am, just here, just like this!" Maybe you're in a crowded bus or train or something with many people around you, all those strangers, you don't want to be there, squashed in a train like a sardine... but that is where you are. Maybe you are hot and sweaty, maybe you have pain in the feet or you're annoyed with the people pushing you around. This is how you are right now, and 'How do you

feel? What is happening now?' Then awareness brings you back to the present moment and it's OK like this, unpleasant is OK. Because it is only going to last for a while. Something pleasant might arise. You know what I find; if I am aware of the unpleasant sensations, that awareness itself brings about a pleasant feeling in the mind; "I know what is happening to me now!" That awareness itself makes me feel somewhat more comfortable, somewhat steady. I celebrate the awareness of reality and I am not bothered by the unpleasant sensation anymore. At least I am in tune with the reality in the present and that is important.

Reflecting and projecting

With regard to our thinking, we are often reflecting and projecting. Reflecting on the past, thinking about the old things, remembering, reviewing, regretting and experiencing remorse. Also we are often projecting into the future, planning, speculating, even worrying about how things might be in the future, but realistically, you don't now how they are going to be. You can make a plan; "I will go there, I am going to do this, I am going to do that..." But when you get there, the situation will be the way it is, which means, it may not be the way you thought or it might change. Your plan cannot be perfected, nothing is for sure, nothing is certain, it is all uncertain (except death, of course!). So again, you should relax, knowing that things are changeable. Even the best laid plan can go wrong. Maybe not necessarily wrong, but maybe just not perfect. This is another thing that we need to understand as human beings, imperfection. The fact that all things are subject to change, to decay. Whatever you get, is bound to get old. So, when things get old, damaged, lost or stolen, our plans don't work out so well.

You know how quickly your mind changes, your opinions. Even from one morning to the afternoon, you can have a big attitude shift. Even in a minute,

you might be angry but then somebody gives you some new information and you realize that you misunderstood all the time and there is a change of heart. When you begin to understand, your mind changes, you no longer hold on to the old views you had, you have a new view, a new idea or opinion.

So with this changing all the time, a lot of our projection is a waste of time but not all of it. There are times when we have to plan, then apply your mind and plan. Don't let the mind wander off and think of other things, if you have got to plan something then plan it. Get a pen and paper, sit down, and plan it. If your mind wanders off, bring it back and continue planning. One point here is not to be attached to the outcome of a plan as it may change, in the beginning, the middle or the end. Keep an open mind and relax. Another point is don't waste time planning things that aren't going to happen, be realistic. You need enough mindfulness to know when you are daydreaming, fantasizing and just wasting mental energy on useless thoughts. It's like 'mind leakage'.

Also, reflecting. We need to reflect sometimes in our daily life and to be able to learn from the past, especially our mistakes. There are times for wise reflection. Not all reflection or memories are useless or a waste of time. Outside of the meditation retreat we may need to reflect on our past. Even as we are in the meditation retreat, memories come up, old problems come up, things that have not been resolved. During the retreat we don't try to solve those problems but we can't help thinking about them sometimes. So you can make a decision; "After this retreat, I will solve this problem but for now, I will put it aside." Or, the last thing before you go to sleep at night, you can spend a little bit of time thinking about that problem. When you finish it, write down the answer to the problem. If you didn't solve it, end it anyway and put it aside. Then before you go to sleep, do mindfulness of lying posture or maybe some

loving-kindness meditation. The next morning, when you wake up, when you start thinking about that problem again or that old thing, just say to yourself; “I finished that, I’m not going to go into that now. At the end of the retreat I will deal with it.” Or simply, “Not now!” In that way your mind becomes free for some time and you can develop your mindfulness, unhindered.

Useful or useless

In daily life, our thinking is either useful or useless. When we are thinking about things, sometimes they are wholesome, they are productive and beneficial and sometimes they are not. If your thinking is useful, then think about it. In daily life, it’s the time to use wise thinking, useful thinking. So if you need to think about something, then think about it. If it is useless, then let it go. Just let it go, don’t hold on to that, don’t continue it, don’t pursue it, drop it, abandon that useless thinking.

You yourself have to decide what is useful and what is useless but don’t forget that your mind will always try to **justify** what you want to think about. If it is something pleasant, you will justify it in your mind. “Oh, I want to think about this because I want it to work out, I want this to happen, it is important!”. But in reality it is just a fantasy. You are dreaming about some beautiful relationship you are going to have or some car or house or the job you want. You justify thinking about it because that is what you want, we still go on with our fantasies, thinking they are going to be realities but it also could be quite useless.

Also worrying about the past, things that cannot be changed, is also quite useless. If there is some problem from the past. Try forgiveness practice. If it is beyond your control, then drop it, don’t go there in your mind. Nip that thought in the bud! Catch it before it flowers and bears fruit - *again!*

Here is a very good saying that is applicable to every situation in life;

May I have the serenity to accept the things I cannot change;

May I have the courage to change the things I can;

May I have the wisdom to know the difference.

The wisdom is the most important part. If you don't have the wisdom to understand the difference between what should be changed and what shouldn't be changed, then you will be making mistakes. Or you will be trying to change things that is none of your business or out of your control, not your responsibility. When we practice mindfulness development, we naturally learn that everything is changing. Physical processes are changing, mental processes are changing. **What needs to be changed?** This is your question. What really needs to be changed or are things OK the way they are? You need to decide through your own wisdom, what needs to be changed and what needs to be left as it is. A good question is;

Is this my problem?

Or a better question is;

Who owns the problem?

Often, we take on problems that are not ours. We try to solve other people's problems and we get worked up about it and worry about it. We worry about our children, we worry about our parents, our brothers, our sisters, our friends, our partner... We worry about them, even until we become sick. Can you really solve their problems for them? Can you change them as people? Is it your duty? Maybe you can help them. If you can, you should, if you can't, relax and support them, try to encourage them. Even teach them a little bit of MINDFULNESS, a little bit of relaxation. Or at the very least, show them how to do loving-kindness meditation. I don't mean for you to call yourself a teacher, but share the things that you have learned. So that other people, especially those around you, can benefit from what you have learned.

With thinking and imagining;

We need to check our reflecting or projecting.

Is it useful or useless?

Who owns the problem?

Can I change this, or should I not change this?

We need to have the wisdom to know the difference.

Mindfulness itself is not 'meditation'. This is something that is largely misunderstood. It was misunderstood by myself for a very long time. Thinking that what I was doing was 'meditation' which conjures up images of sitting still like a Buddha Statue or having an empty mind or experiencing exalted and blissed-out mental states. But when we meditate in the way of vipassana, all we are really doing is developing mindfulness, sharpening mindfulness. Using our natural awareness, our natural attention, our own ability to observe, to see or watch things as they are. There's nothing magical or mystical, we observe ordinary, mundane processes, however when we penetrate with some degree of concentration into their true nature, they appear to be profound and extraordinary.

We already have this natural mental faculty of mindfulness, all we need to do is sharpen it. Even specific mindfulness that we practice in formal sitting and walking meditation, sharpens our mindfulness but it is still only mindfulness. I call it 'meditation' because everybody else calls it meditation, it's hard to escape that word and it's stigmas. Really it should be called mindfulness of sitting, mindfulness of walking, of standing etcetera. When we do it specifically, it helps us in our general practice and our daily life. So we are not just meditating in a single posture, we are mindful of what is happening now, whatever we are doing. It is just not something that you do in a temple, monastery or meditation center or a retreat, it is something that you take

everywhere with you. Take it home, take it to work, take it to the bathroom, the laundry, take it to a party, the movies or to a football match. One lady told me she will keep her 'sati' in her bag and take it everywhere she goes! I said, "That's great but don't forget to take it out and use it!"

Take your mindfulness with you wherever you go.

You will be careful, you will be gentle, polite and you will be friendly. People will accept you easily and quickly. Even if they don't, you are just mindful of your own feelings and everything is OK. This is really important. One of the problems that people have in mindfulness development is **expectation**. In fact this is a huge problem - expecting to be mindful. When we do specific mindfulness, often we are expecting some strong mental states to arise, maybe deep concentration, maybe insight, some amazing and profound wisdom to arise in our being. This is expectation, which is just another form of greediness, desire in the mind. Greediness and desire are pretty much the number one hindrances to your development or at least they are very strong hindrances. Expectation is an obstruction to mindfulness, you really need to now this.

Expectation is an obstruction to mindfulness

Both specific and general mindfulness. When we are practicing specific, we are expecting some strong concentration, or some amazing experience. When we go home or when we are practicing mindfulness at home, we are expecting to be mindful, 100%. If you expect 100% mindfulness you are going to be very disappointed. I like to think in another way, how about expecting 0% mindfulness? Expect to have no mindfulness, expect to be mindless, then you will not be disappointed. You might get 5%, "Oh good, I was 5% mindful today!" It is really OK to have 5% mindfulness, it is better than zero, which is what you had before you learnt how to develop mindfulness – so celebrate,

rejoice in your mindfulness, be happy for yourself. Relax and be gentle with yourself. In the beginning, set easy to achieve goals and as you achieve them slowly increase realistically according to your performance but remember, we all have hard times, low times and that's OK too. Don't expect progress, don't expect to be perfect, just know yourself as you are with all your faults and imperfections, relax.

People are really worried about their progress. They come to practice meditation to get rid of stress and worry, fear, and anxiety and what do they do? They start worrying about meditation, they start stressing about their mindfulness. "Am I doing it right? Am I using the right technique? What did the teacher say? Am I doing it wrong? Can I do this? I'm not good enough!" You are worrying about the technique and whether you are mindful or not. Complaining about yourself, judging and criticizing your own mindfulness. While you are doing all of this you are not being mindful! People lack confidence in mindfulness and they are doubting their own ability. **"I cant' do this, I am not good enough, I am not mindful"**. If you are doing that, if you only labeled and observed; "doubting, doubting, doubting" or your lacking in confidence; "lacking, lacking, lacking". Then, at that time, you are mindful, great! What's to be doubting about, what's to have a lack of confidence about? Now you are mindful, so continue with your mindfulness. Be mindful of the next thing that comes up after your doubt or your lack of confidence falls away. Or we can say; "judging, judging, judging" "criticizing, criticizing, criticizing." And then that falls away. Then you are clear again – or at least a little bit lighter. You have put down some of your heavy emotional baggage, some heavy, conditioning. When you do this, you will feel lighter. When you feel lighter, you will feel happier. When you feel happy, light and somewhat clear, you can be mindful of anything. So you should capitalize on this,

monopolize on this situation and try to continue with this mindfulness that has arisen. In that way, your mindfulness, even general mindfulness, gets some continuity about it. The mind is not wandering so much and the doubt and worry about yourself are not arising. So, all of this also arises out of expectation, be aware of expectation. If you find yourself expecting to be mindful, then just label, "expecting, expecting, expecting". Label the projecting, worrying and thinking too. Watch your expectations go and just open up to the present moment. As soon as you do that you are mindful, when you are mindful, everything is OK. Worrying about mindfulness is just as bad as worrying about anything else. Relax and see your mind as it is just now, take it easy.

Daily reminders

Some people translate the Pali word, **sati** (mindfulness) into remembering. It is right too but we don't use it much. The point here is that we forget to be mindful, mindfulness is absent or simply, we are mindless. So we need something to remind us to be mindful.

You can make your home into a kind of retreat center or like a temple. If it is your own home, you can change the furniture around and do the whole thing, make it really look like a temple. But if it is not your own home and you are sharing it with your family or other people, then maybe all you can do is arrange your room so that it reminds you of your meditation practice. Try to make it serene and conducive to peace.

You can make a little shrine in your house, put the Buddha image on the top – the Buddha image always goes above all the other things (you don't need a Buddha image). You can just make a little shrine, with crystals, candles, incense and flowers or any other special little trinkets or things that you have. Buddhist people keep their Dhamma books there, or pictures of

their loved ones, favorite monks or teacher. Make a special place where you can go and light the candle, sit down, do some chanting or loving-kindness meditation. It's good to have a sacred place, a special place in your home and to respect that place, to clean it, put fresh things there, change it from time to time. It reminds you of the practice, the teaching and helps you to be mindful.

Another idea for reminders is to make some little signs or labels for the door handle or the light switch, maybe on the mirror. Something like; 'Are you mindful?' 'Are you thinking now?' 'What's happening?' 'How do you/I feel now?' You can even make nice ones, decorate them, make them up on the computer – make stickers – yes! Make lots of stickers and give them to all your friends! Get them to be more mindful too! You can even stick them on the steering wheel of your car! Or on your hairbrush, on your bag or anything that you use quite often. You can stick a little sticker on it, some label, some reminder, to keep you more mindful. Make book marks or book covers.

Getting back to your home, **your room**. You can keep it clean and tidy. That also is a way of being mindful. Making sure that things are in their place, maintaining order. It is like having the continuity of mindfulness in specific practice and trying not to let the mind wander off. Keeping your room tidy all the time or as you go, not letting it get really messy and then tidying it once a week or once a month (or only when mother is there!), shows mindfulness and order. I think the state of our room shows the state of our mind. What do you think? People with untidy rooms don't agree with this but if they really knew their mind they would admit that they are lazy or stressed or confused. How is your work place? Same deal. Yeah I know, we get too busy but it only takes a few seconds to put something in its place. Vipassana is about getting one's life in order, mentally and physically. It's also about being more systematic and doing one thing at a time. Finishing this before you start that. Hey, now

this isn't a hard and fast judgment of people, some very neat and tidy people may have some psychological disorders and some messy people can be genius', its just my own idea, coming from my own experience.

You can find certain places in your house, where you do mindfulness practice. Your bathroom, or maybe your toilet. Yeah! Put a sign behind the toilet door and when you close it, you see the reminder; 'Are you thinking now?' 'How do you feel now?' 'What's happening!' That should give your visitors something to laugh about but meanwhile you are checking your mind and body. I am serious! Mostly when we are in the toilet we are just thinking all the time or we just want to get it over and done with and get the heck out of there. That's a waste of time! You waste your life while you are in the toilet, so try to be mindful there. Even in the laundry or the bathroom, any room, anywhere.

You can put some pictures or posters up in your house or room to remind you. Maybe of your teacher or your favorite temple, Buddhist shrine or meditation centre. Every time you see them, they remind you of your practice. It does help but you have to change it around occasionally or else you get used to it and become complacent. You can wear something on your body like a bracelet, or some beads to remind you to be mindful.

When I was a **Buddhist monk**, I was constantly reminded to be mindful because every time I looked down, I saw a Buddhist monks robes. "Oh, I'm a Buddhist monk, I must be mindful". Or I would see my reflection in a window and realize; "Oh, I've got my head shaved I'm a Buddhist monk, I have to be mindful".

You too can become a Buddhist nun or a Buddhist monk in order to train the mind very carefully day in, day out. If you really want to develop your mindfulness, then try to be a Buddhist monk or nun. Even for a few months,

three or six months. In the **Theravada** Buddhist tradition you are able to do this. It only leads to goodness. No harm arises from being a Buddhist monk or nun! Some people think that they are not good enough to be a monk or nun but that is what it is for, to train and develop the mind. You'll never get far just living an ordinary life, a little bit mindful here a little bit there, that's the slow way. That's why Buddha made the **Sangha**, the community of sincere seekers of the truth, to create the conducive environment to accelerate one's progress along the path to enlightenment. You don't have to be good to be a Buddhist monk or nun but by being so, it is sure you will be better.

In your daily life you have some routine, some responsibilities. So you could make some determination, that when you perform these routine things, you will do them mindfully. You could back up that routine by putting a label there or a little sign to remind you. Maybe in the bathroom, brushing your teeth or hair, you could remind yourself to be mindful and take that activity a little bit slower and try to label things as they unfold, mental states, physical processes. Changing mundane, ordinary routines into rituals. Bringing some respect, care, mindfulness and concentration to the things we do habitually and mindlessly. Other things such as going up and down the stairs. You could make a determination; **'These are my stairs of mindfulness.'** 'Every time I go up and down, I will go moderately.' (Instead of rushing up and down mindlessly like you usually do!) You don't have to go too slow, but not too fast either, moderately. If you want to go slow, then do so, take your time, slow is good, it helps you to be more specifically mindful. But otherwise, just go moderately and labeling with words like; lifting, placing or thinking or simply, stepping. Coming down you might note; lowering, bending and touching or pressure, pressure. Maybe you feel pain going up and down the stairs, then that is more predominant and you would be aware of that and label; "pain,

pain”, “aversion, aversion” or “complaining, complaining”, “thinking, thinking”, not too intensive but somewhat generally. You can put a picture on the stairs, a sign or even a passage of one of the Buddha’s texts, perhaps the **Dhammapada**, there are some good sayings in there for Vipassana meditators, good reminders. You can use these to bring about your mindfulness in daily life.

When you are at home, you might try not putting on the TV or the CD player or music. You might leave them off for a change. Try to be just by yourself. Try to be silent or even the natural sounds that are happening around. Even if it is dogs barking, traffic and sirens going off, natural city noises, they are just sounds too. Or you hear the birds chirping or the wind blowing through the trees. Then, you are just aware of those. Also the sounds inside the house. If there are no sounds, hear the silence. Be mindful of the silence. Relax and be aware of hearing, mindfulness of hearing inside your house where you are now. Or you can play some Dhamma tapes, play some recordings from a Dhamma teacher, or you can play some chanting tapes, maybe some Pali chanting or something like that, to put you in the mood. This can also help you to be mindful in daily life.

Daily practice

When you are at home, you might like to have some ‘daily practice’. You might like to set aside some time to do specific mindfulness. When you get up in the morning, you should try to do some specific mindfulness before you head off for your day. In fact I highly recommend it. As I suggested, if you have a little shrine or maybe a little place in the garden or somewhere outside, even out on the veranda / porch where it is fresh. Maybe you can see the sunrise. Or before the city gets too noisy, sit outside and just breathe the fresh air. And in that special place, wherever you are, you might like to chant the

homage to the Buddha or Triple gems, three refuges, five precepts, share some loving-kindness, maybe share your merits with other living beings. Then you might like to sit mindfully for a while. Practicing specific mindfulness in a sitting posture, in a chair is OK. Even five or ten minutes is good, that is enough. People are attached to time when they are 'meditating'. They think it must be half an hour, forty five minutes or an hour. Never mind, you are a busy person. If you have ten minutes, then just sit down for ten minutes. If you've got half an hour, good! You have an hour? That's great. Be careful of setting yourself a big goal like one hour every time. Then you are forcing yourself to meditate and you try to sit for one hour but most of the time you are thinking, dreaming, worrying about the time or the things you should be doing. Why sit there wasting your time? Try to set yourself a short achievable goal, say, ten or fifteen minutes. If you complete that goal, do another ten or fifteen minutes. You might just sit for one hour... *with* mindfulness!

It is better to sit for five minutes with good, clear mindfulness, than to try and sit for one or two hours with dreaming and sleeping and fantasizing and worrying. Try to develop mindfulness over a short period. Psychologically, it makes you feel better. "Oh, I can do five minutes!" "I can sit for ten or fifteen minutes, no problem." But if you think; "I must sit for an hour" – "Oh no, I'm going to be sleepy, I'm going to get lazy, I'm going to have pain and think too much..." And so you enter into the meditation with a bad attitude. If you give yourself a short goal, your attitude is fine, your mind is fresh, you can do ten or fifteen minutes, no problem and you are feeling fresh. Then you head off for work or whatever you have to do, school or shopping or something and throughout the day, little pockets of mindfulness, little moments and periods of mindfulness will arise as you go. In this way you make yourself happy. It is a great way to start your day.

If you have enough time in the morning, you might want to do a little bit of walking meditation before you sit. Ten minutes of walking meditation can center the mind very well. Then when you sit, you sit down with mindfulness, carrying over your mindfulness from the walking and continue with the mindfulness of sitting. This is very useful. Even throughout your day, if you get spare time – sometimes there is some quiet time, you can do a little bit of meditation. A bit of sitting, standing, walking, even at your office, you might get some time for yourself. Or in between shifts or in between duties, you might get some free time. So sit still or go and walk. Walk up and down the stairs, do some mindfulness of stairs, at that time.

In this way, we are practicing at least a little bit of specific mindfulness during the day. We might not be able to go and join a meditation retreat, but a little bit of specific mindfulness throughout the day, even if it is five minutes here, ten minutes there – then that's fine. Some people like to meditate when they get home after work. Now that sounds like a crazy time to meditate. You walk inside and you may be hot, tired, frustrated, hungry, - ah, these are good things to learn about! These are problems in your life, these are problems you are always trying to avoid! Sit down, even just walk in the door, put down your bags and just sit for five minutes, observing how busy the mind is. Thoughts flashing in and out, things you did today, things you said, thinking about tomorrow, things you have to do, worrying... Maybe you feel tired, restless, dirty, you want to wash, you want to eat - check all these things! After five or ten minutes of this mindfulness – you start to relax, you start to see these things more clearly, coming and going and you feel fresh. This is what you should do when you come home. Another way is to be very mindful, as much as possible on your way home from work, especially as you approach your home, be mindful of walking and thinking or any mental states. Then by the

time you arrive, you are stress-free and ready with energy to do things at home.

Lying meditation is also an excellent way of getting some relaxation and realization throughout your day, whenever you have time. Even when you wake up, you might like to do some before you get up (but don't fall back to sleep!). Lying posture is great because you don't have to use any physical energy to support the body, so you can relax the body but keep the mind alert. Just be mindful of the whole body lying. Rising, falling of the abdomen, breathing in, breathing out, maybe some pressure / contact points. Maybe just a calm and peaceful feeling. Maybe your mind is busy, thinking, projecting or planning, just note it and be in the present. We're not even out of bed yet but we are worrying about the whole day! Relax and just be here and when you're there, just be here. Wherever you are, you are here. I like to say;

“Be where you are.”

The truth is that we can't be anywhere else but our mind wants to be. What's so wrong with the 'here and now' that we have to race off into the past or future. Are you avoiding the present, is there something here you don't like? Is it boring? Are you impatient or greedy? Check them out! Be where you are, it may not be the way you like it or want it to be but at least it is REAL!

Lying down again... then throughout the day you might get a chance to lie down. Not necessarily on a bed, in fact, it is better to lie on the floor, on a carpet or rug. Not in a comfortable place but in a firm place and practice mindfulness of lying posture. You can do specific mindfulness by observing all the touching points of the body, or you can observe or use the freestyle observation, being aware of pain, pressure, hearing, thinking, feeling, etc. as they occur. It is better to lie down for ten or twenty minutes with mindfulness than to go and try to sleep – often sleeping causes more problems. We get

attached to that and want to sleep longer and don't want to get up or you wake up feeling groggy or heavy. But ten or fifteen minutes of lying meditation can get you feeling fresh and alert. Your body has been rested and the mind has been sharpened, so you are ready to go back to work or to do whatever has to be done. The last thing at night before you go to sleep, you should do some lying meditation. You are already there in the lying posture, be aware of lying, the feeling of the body, again, you can do specific or systematic mindfulness or just freestyle. If you fall asleep, no problem, it's good, that's what you went there for anyway. If you go to sleep mindfully, often you can wake up mindfully. The other thing is to do loving-kindness meditation. Some metta before sleeping, it soothes the mind and you may sleep peacefully, have no bad dreams and wake up feeling fresh.

Metta

A short exposition

Here are just some tips for metta in daily life to be used in the same sense as general mindfulness, for a more complete explanation please refer to my book, 'Metta Bhavana', available through the address given with this book.

Throughout your day, you should try to remember the welfare of other living beings, wishing them to be free from mental and physical suffering and to be happy and peaceful. Not forgetting the welfare of yourself too. If you remember to be gentle to yourself, to wish yourself to be happy and peaceful, healthy and strong, then you will feel good. When you feel good, you will share that with others. This is important.

Other beings need your loving-kindness and if you don't have loving-kindness in yourself, how can you share it with others? This is a really important point, which is largely overlooked by people. They want to send

loving-kindness out, to all living beings, to their friends and their family but they don't have any or not much for themselves. It is not selfish or greedy, it is logical and practical. Actually, you develop metta for yourself knowing that when it is 'ripe', you will share it with others. You have to develop it within yourself first, when you *really know and feel* the quality of loving-kindness in your own heart, you don't want to keep it for yourself, you naturally want to share it. In fact it overflows, it glows and beams out of you... you exude it! You can't help but share it with all living beings – that is true metta! That's the way to do loving-kindness. However, in the beginning we don't have that natural shine in our heart – or I should say, we have it but it is covered over by mental defilements and negativities like, greed, hatred and delusion. Like the beautiful morning sun covered up with storm clouds – it is there, we just can't see it, we can't feel it. So we need some technique to clear away the clouds of the heart, we need something to concentrate on, so we use words of loving-kindness to repeat and to contemplate. This is a **samatha** meditation technique – not vipassana. Samatha develops concentration on one single object, repeatedly. Here, we use words and sentences to focus on.

Try this basic sentence of loving-kindness first. It is quite complete with regard to our life, it refers to mind and body. If the other sentences are too awkward or confusing, just use this one:

“May I be happy and healthy.”

Then try memorizing these lines, again they are holistic well wishing for the mind and body. Practice by repeating these lines to yourself, for yourself, by yourself; “May I be safe from inner and outer harm,

May I be happy and peaceful,

May I be healthy and strong,

May I take care of myself, joyfully.”

At first it may seem quite strange just repeating words and often there is no feeling of metta with it but that is because there is still thinking, and judging mixed with it. Be patient, it takes some time for the heart to clear and to understand the technique but more importantly to understand the way of metta, the feeling of metta. Please be patient.

The best way to start is to repeat the first line over and over for a day or a week, then add the second line and repeat the first two lines, then add the third and the fourth.

Whenever you remember at anytime, early in the morning, during the day, late at night, try to repeat these lines for yourself to uncover and discover your own natural 'sunshine' of metta in your heart. Or if you find yourself in a difficult situation during the day, you can do loving-kindness to yourself, who else is going to do it for you? Good question, huh? Can we rely upon other people to love us, to wish us well? Not really, they may or may not, they might forget us or they might be too busy or sick or they might even die. No-one is 100% dependable. Can you depend upon yourself? Are you reliable to yourself or do you let yourself down? Then this metta is a good way to build self-confidence and strength of heart, not expecting anyone else to help you or save you. When you don't need anyone else's love or help, you are strong, very strong and you can help others – as much as you want to, you won't get tired. Metta is a universal energy that is unlimited, if you can tap into it, the power of the universe is yours! You don't believe me? Then try it out and prove me wrong, I guarantee that if you do this technique of metta in the right way, for long enough, you will find the keys to heaven and earth. Clouds will clear away for you, traffic lights will be green for you, police officers will salute you, your business will blossom, your staff and customers will love you and animals will

run up to you wanting to play with you... sounds like fun huh? And that's only if you do metta for yourself!!!

If you want to, you can do loving-kindness for the other living beings around you too. I call it spontaneous metta, whatever situation you find yourself in, you can switch your mind and adapt it with metta, here are some examples.

Share loving-kindness with all of the beings in your immediate vicinity:

“May all beings here be happy and peaceful, healthy and strong.”

“May they be free from enmity and danger.”

“May they be free from suffering.”

I think this is like planting flowers and making a garden around you. Say for example you're stuck in the traffic in a big city, on a hot and smelly street, nowhere to go, nothing to do – so plant some metta flowers all around you;

“May I be happy and healthy!”

“May all beings here be happy and healthy!”

“May we all be free from suffering!”

If you have to wait in the bank or government office, you should be aware of your body and mind while you are waiting or you can do loving-kindness. All the other people there are waiting also and there are people working hard with stress too. So we need to be able to share our loving-kindness and compassion with those other people who are waiting and working, they are suffering too. Drop a few metta flower seeds here and there...

“May all beings here be free from their suffering!”

“May all beings here be happy and healthy!”

That includes you too, you are a suffering being there. These are good thoughts, good mental states to develop throughout your daily life, wherever you go, anywhere, anytime.

You can do this anywhere, anytime; in an airplane, at the hospital, in your own house, in prison, while swimming, at work, anywhere! May the world be filled with your metta flowers!

Metta when driving is good too.

“May all beings along this journey be happy and well.”

That means ALL beings along the journey, not just your vehicle but all the other travelers, all the beings on the road, beside the road, in front and behind,

“May they arrive at their destinations safely.”

When you feel the breeze and enjoy its freshness, share it...

“May all beings touched by this wind feel happy like me.”

“May all beings on this wind

be free from suffering and be filled with loving-kindness!”

If you swim in the ocean, river or lake, there are so many living beings in there with you...

“May all beings living in this water

be happy and healthy and

may they be filled with loving-kindness!”

When you look down from a high place, like a tall building, a mountain or an airplane...

“May all beings below me

be free from stress, may they live in peace and harmony!”

When you see the night sky filled with beautiful twinkling and shining stars...

“May all beings under these stars

have shining hearts filled with metta!”

“May all beings have loving-kindness towards all beings!”

Why not?

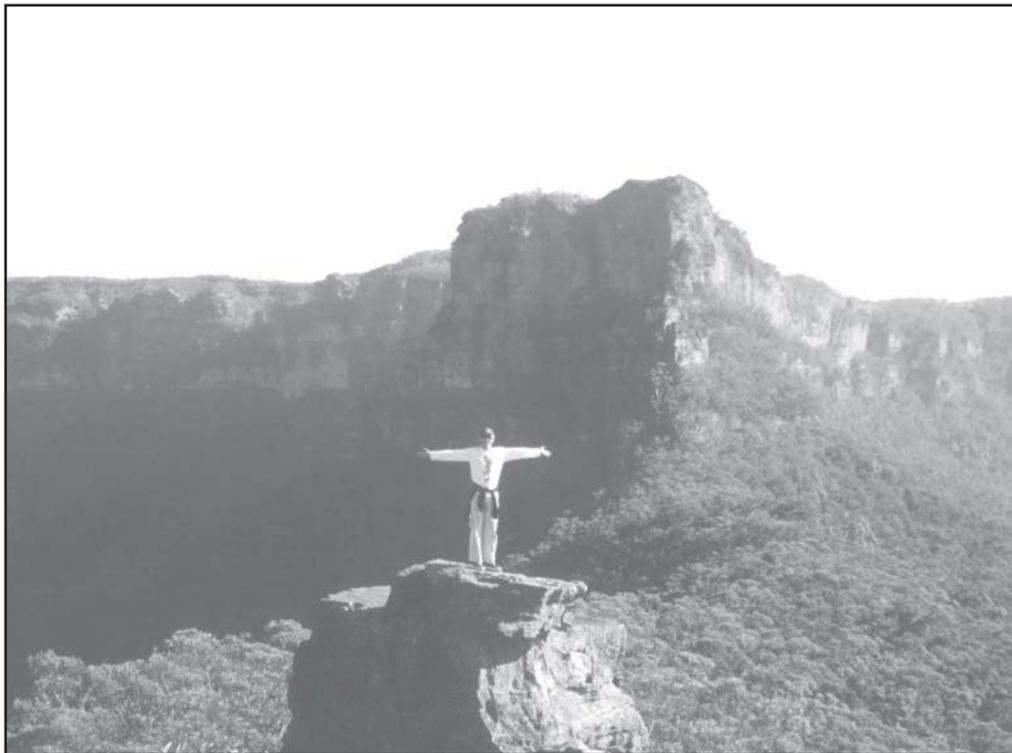
When it rains...

**“May these raindrops be drops of metta,
raining down goodwill on all beings!”**

When you see the big “M” of Macdonald’s, it can remind you of Metta.

**“May all beings before, during and after
a Macdonald’s hamburger be happy and well!”**

Have fun with metta and try to keep your heart light and open as you go about your life.



Back to vipassana – general mindfulness.

Even when you are commuting and traveling, going to school, going to work, coming back and forth, riding trains and buses or stuck in a traffic jam in the car, you should try to use mindfulness at these times. “How do I feel?” You can listen to Dhamma tapes or chanting or you can do loving-kindness meditation as you travel. Or you can just be generally mindful when riding in the train, being aware of the vibration, the shaking, the moving, the rocking and the rolling and labeling, “rock ‘n’ roll, rock ‘n’ roll!” Or whatever arises naturally, hearing, feeling, seeing, sometimes smelling, even tasting and also thinking, worrying, planning, reflecting, projecting. Just be generally mindful or be specifically mindful. Be aware of how you feel when you are traveling, maybe you feel happy, sad, lonely, tired... Are you self-conscious? Are you worrying about how you are dressed? Are you judging or comparing others, comparing yourself to others? Do you feel uncomfortable when alone in a crowd of strangers? When you are sitting in the traffic you might be getting impatient, frustrated or bored while you’re waiting for the traffic to move on. Then you should be aware of these feelings.

Wait a minute!

Anytime when we have to wait in our daily life, we usually get impatient. Wanting the train to hurry up, wanting the bus to come, wanting the traffic to move, even waiting for your friend to arrive, especially if they are late. Starting to get angry about that, getting angry with them for being late. Getting angry with someone for not meeting their appointment. Worrying about them, they might be sick, they might be hurt in a car accident, maybe they forgot and won’t come at all, worrying because they haven’t turned up. All these emotional states should be observed while you are standing or sitting and

waiting. The time will pass very quickly and you will remain calm and peaceful knowing that your mind was focused on positive thoughts.

Conversations

When we are at home or working or at school, in our daily life; wherever you go and whatever you do, you are going to have conversations, you have to talk, you have to discuss things with other people. Sometimes you have to discuss things with aggressive people, sometimes with dull, boring, happy, stupid or overexcited people. Then you get feelings, thoughts, judgments arising in your mind, for example, "I don't like this person, why do I have to talk to them?" Or you don't like their idea's or opinions and you start to get angry, frustrated or impatient. You can observe these even while you are talking. I don't mean to start labeling or doing specific mindfulness, then you are not listening to the other person. But simply knowing your own feelings, this is important because it is from those feelings that our actions and speech arise. If you're angry then you may say or do something in an angry manner, something harmful or destructive. So to know your feeling is important, again, you don't have to get rid of it, just know it and watch it change and pass.

Listen carefully

Part of mindfulness is being an effective listener. Listen to people when they are talking to you. Often people are telling you a problem or something they enjoy. When you are listening to someone, try to tune in to their 'heart words', the words that come from their heart. They might be telling you that they are frustrated, or angry or they are in love or whatever. Listen to their heart words and try to understand how they feel. Even if you cannot understand how someone else is feeling through their words, check your own feeling. Under all circumstances, as much as possible, when people are expressing their feelings to you, listen to them but also try to be aware of your

own feelings. For example, if someone is angry with you, how do you feel? Often you get angry back, right? That doesn't help, it doesn't solve any problems or help the world in any way for you to be angry as well. Just because there is one person angry, doesn't mean we need to double it. We don't need another angry person in the world. If someone else is angry, you can have compassion for them.

May they be free from their anger!

May they have clarity of mind!

May they live in peace!

If they are angry, they have tension in their mind, in their body, they have stress, their heart is tight, they are suffering! Just because they are suffering, it doesn't mean you have to take on their suffering. We tend to do this, we get involved in other people's problems, sometimes physically but often it is emotionally. Which means that we didn't do anything but we still feel bad inside. Feeling bad about someone else's misfortune, doesn't help them or you, you feel weak. Try to see that they own the problem and don't take it on yourself. In that way, you remain strong and you can help them if they need it. This practice of not getting involved sounds cold, unemotional or heartless but in fact it is the opposite. It is very compassionate to conserve your inner strength to help people in a more productive way, both physically and emotionally. If you're strong, they see that and get strength from you. If you do it right, you never get weak and you don't get tired. That's how all the great people in the world can help so many people, they are aloof and detached but full of compassion with the unlimited strength of universal energy behind them. We all have that ability to be great and help many living beings. Just do it!

Talking

So while you are having a conversation, discussing things, talking, you should be mindful of your own experience. Even as you are talking you might be aware of your own feelings. Try to be mindful of what you say, mindfulness of speech can save you a lot of trouble. Especially, if you are in the habit of saying things wrong, getting things mixed up or harming people accidentally. Then you should be mindful of what you say, which means you have to be mindful of what you think. Because what you say, comes from what you think, so mindfulness of thinking is very important. Thinking, imagining and emotions, if you can catch them and be mindful of them as they arise, exist and pass away, you can save yourself and others a lot of pain and problems. If you are not sure whether you should say something or not, because it might not be true or it may be harmful, then don't say it - be wise - be silent.

Stress

Then of course, we all have some kind of stress. Stress with the family, work, study, school, relationships and more. Even stress about yourself, worrying about yourself, criticizing, judging, analyzing yourself, causing your own stress. Meditators do this as well. They come to a retreat and start stressing about meditation. Relax!

What is stress anyway? Did you ever really experience it or were you just complaining about it? Or fighting with it? Are you just trying to get rid of it, 'nuke' it, trying to destroy it? Usually we are. You get stress and then you start fighting with it, so what are you doing?

Stressing about stress!

Oh, it seems like a whirlpool, a downward spiral. When you are stressed, you should be aware of stress. This is the fundamental point that you need to identify, stop and acknowledge, "Hey, I am stressed." OK, from this point on,

we can work with it. If you just complain about it, which is mostly what we do – then you don't get anywhere. You are complaining about your stress and you tell your family and friends, "Oh, I worked so hard today, so many hours, it was really busy, I'm exhausted". "I haven't had a holiday for ten years!"

Congratulations! Who cares? They usually are not interested and what do you expect them to do for you? You're complaining, we like to tell others about our stress, so they will feel sorry for us. Which seems to make us feel a little bit better but actually it doesn't because we are still stressed. Some people even lie about their stress. They lie or over exaggerate to other people so they can get some compassion or sympathy from them. Or we may try to hide it and pretend it is not there! Strange how we do things like that.

Do you really know what stress is, do you really know how it feels? Next time you feel stress, stop and ask yourself a question, "What does stress feel like?" "How do I experience stress". Not what you read in the magazines or books, or what your friends say about it or your boss or anybody else, "How do I experience stress?" Is it mental, is it physical, is it emotional? Is it hot, cold, does it vibrate, does it last a long or a short time? Is it always there or does it fluctuate, come and go? How does it really feel, mentally and physically? What IS stress? For YOU! Don't ask anybody else, define it within yourself. When you can understand how you experience stress, then you can find a way to reduce it. Even identifying it, acknowledging it is in a way reducing it. When you see stress arising, boiling up, getting higher, stronger and you are aware of that, then at that point the stress stops rising, it levels off from that point. You realize, "Oh, I'm just stressing out here!". That will help you to relax a little bit. Even from that point on, the stress may reduce, it may even completely disappear... it does happen, especially with applied and more specific mindfulness.

What is your stress and how do you feel it?

Usually, stress is caused by too many things happening at the same time, so one of the main characteristics is confusion. Not really knowing what to do first, next or last. Confusion is just confusion, you could specifically observe and even label it, "confused, confused, confused", after a while the mind centers on the feeling of confusion and it calms down. Why? Because it only has one thing to do, there is no more confusion and no stress. Now look at your work or your problem with a clear mind. Look at the reality of the situation and evaluate what needs to be done first, that is, to prioritize. Make a list if you have to, its better than trying to think it all in your head. Let the paper remember it, then all you have to do is remember the paper! Another characteristic of stress is pressure or tension. This could manifest as physical tension in your head, back or shoulders but it also appears to be pressure in your mind, in your heart. It feels tight, like it is being squeezed and there is little or no release. Everyday seems the same, even the weekends, you're so busy with the family, house, car, friends, that before you know it, you're back at work.

A quick meditation

Concentration on breathing - samatha meditation.

Releasing pressure can be done by observing your breathing in and out at the nostrils. Try counting the in breath, "one", out breath, "one", in breath, "two", out breath, "two", "three", three, "four", "four" and so-on, up to ten and then go back to one and continue for about three rounds and stop. If you start thinking or your mind wanders off to work or problems, gently bring it back to the breathing and counting. If you lose the number, it doesn't matter, just go back to one and start again. It is not a test or game or competition, just a way to focus the mind on a single object and get a little bit of peace and quiet for a

while. This is only a short method for calming and clearing the mind temporarily. It is not a long term practice nor does it give long term solutions – it's a 'quick fix'.

Another very good way is to do metta as I have described earlier. Just repeat the phrases for yourself until your mind calms down, then share some with other living beings. This can help to relieve some pressure. With regard to pressure, we think that other people or the company, the boss, your parents, teacher, lover, society put pressure on us but we can only pressure ourselves, you pressure yourself! You're trying to remember or do too many things at the same time. Try to simplify it, do one thing at a time or find the main point and work on that.

I just got the simile of a bee. You know how we say, 'Busy bee' or 'Busy as a bee'? Well, do bees seem stressed or confused? No, because they just go from one flower to the next, one flower at a time. So, even though we are busy, we don't need to stress, just try to do one thing at a time, do it to the best of your ability and when it is finished, start the next one.

While you're doing this,
don't worry about that,
while you're doing that,
don't worry about the next one,
one at a time.

See your mind worrying about the past, things that are gone.

See your mind jumping into the future, things that haven't happened yet.

See your mind and body in the present and relax.

Energy levels

Another part of stress is mental and physical energy. Low energy, tired, exhausted, burnt out, sleepy, lazy or bored. These are all natural states for

human beings. Try to know when your energy is getting low and take a short break. Do something that you like to do, distract yourself for a while at least go for a little walk. Don't keep pushing and pushing until you burn out, then you're useless, no help to anyone. Actually, by doing one thing at a time, you will find that it naturally regulates your energy and you can go from morning till night and not feel tired. Whether your energy is low or high, don't use it all up, go gradually, moderately, pace yourself, go the middle way, not too slow, not too fast. Like a marathon runner who tries to keep a steady pace all the way, not too fast but not too slow.

So here we can see that stress is made up of confusion, pressure, low energy and a few others such as frustration, impatience, greed, anger and there's some fear and anxiety in there too. A whole bunch of mental states and at any one time, one of these may be more predominant than the others. At that time, single it out, separate it from the others and observe it. That will weaken it and the stress. In fact we can fragment the stress, pull it apart and look at all the components one by one. Like a jigsaw puzzle, when it is together it looks like one thing but pull it apart and it looks like nothing. Pull your stress apart and throw the pieces away, one by one.

Stress is OK. Relaxing is OK too, you are allowed to relax, you know. You don't have to push yourself through life. This is your life, not your family's life, not your boss' life, not your country's life. This is your life. You are allowed to take things one at the time. You are allowed to see things just as they are now. Relaxing here, means to be mindful. Relax and be mindful. It doesn't mean to be lazy, it doesn't mean to say, "Oh well, things are changing, let them be, I won't do anything, I'll just stay at home and sleep all day." That's not going to work either. On the other hand, don't force or push yourself either but try to find a middle point, a middle way, where you can simply be objectively aware

of things as they are, acknowledging things, feelings, mental processes, physical processes and knowing them just as they are now.

Sometimes, we are working so hard and then resting so hard. Working so hard and then trying to relax so hard, working hard and holidaying hard, working hard and partying hard. These are also extremes. If we could find a middle way between these, if you can be more mindful as you work, you don't need to rest so much. Moderation, work moderately. Do one thing at the time and do it well. This is the middle way, taught by the Buddha.

Simplicity

This is in itself so simple and I think everyone instinctively knows it - keep your life simple. Simplicity is the path to peace. Why do you think the Buddha suggested for the earnest seekers of peace through the cessation of suffering to live simply? To just wear simple clothes (robes), eat moderately (once or twice a day), have few duties and few possessions, just the basic necessities, don't own a house or anything substantial, let everyone else look after themselves and go and live in the forest or some quiet place with few people, leads the mind to become stress and worry free.

You know, we buy and keep so many things in our life just to show off to other people, to impress them. When they're impressed, our ego puffs up a bit and momentarily, we are satisfied. Usually, we have to pay a lot of money or work very hard to buy and keep those things, basically we are suffering but we don't look at that, our pride is too strong.

Is that all life is about, impressing other people? Even when we meditate, we want to impress our teacher, our family and friends. We even want to become a teacher and have people look and listen to us and say how wonderful we are... man, be careful, its a big trap or is it a *trip!*? We get stuck or lost in that, its dangerous, don't go there, let it go. Teaching has its ups and

downs like everything else in life, let the future take care of itself... **Leave it to Dhamma.** At the end of the day it all just EGO, which also has to be seen through and relinquished.

The life of a Buddhist monk or nun or even a meditator engaged in the practice of vipassana is very conducive to peace. At first, when people come to practice with us, they seem stressed and restless but after they settle in, they don't want to go home, that's a good sign!

You may not be able to live like a monk, a nun or a yogi, but you can simplify your life, for your own benefit and those around you. Get rid of some of the things in your life that take up too much time and worry. Try to lighten your material baggage, unclutter your living space - empty out your handbag!!! I remember when I was leaving to become a monk, I was giving away all my little trinkets, clothes other things that I didn't use anymore and I sold some of the bigger things and turned them into useful money. Wow, it felt great! I felt really light and much more free, and I wasn't even a monk yet! Even now, since I disrobed, I just live out of an 'extended backpack'. Most of what I own can be packed up in a few minutes or given away and I'm ready to move on or travel.

'A rolling stone gathers no moss.'

No moss - no attachments... no attachments - no suffering.

Please don't overlook *simplicity*, it can be truly beautiful.

Ordinary things in life

Walking anywhere in daily life, we can just walk and be generally mindful or we could employ the mental noting in a general way, such as, "walking, walking, walking, thinking, thinking, walking, walking, hearing, hearing, walking, seeing, walking..." In this way, our attention is almost always on the movement or process of walking but when something else comes up, we

divert our attention to it and then come back to the walking. It's kind of fun, you don't get lost in thoughts, you don't stress about what to observe and you get some physical exercise at the same time, great! You can do it while jogging too, I would label, "feeling, feeling, thinking, thinking, pain, pain!" General awareness.

Driving is a good time for mindfulness development. Rather than listening to the radio or CD, you could observe what is happening in your body and mind. Not specifically but generally. I find when I watch my mind that I can see my ego that thinks it is a good driver and wants to judge others who are not. Sometimes desire to drive fast or aversion to going to slow arises. Sometimes impatience or boredom or sleepiness! Woh! That's dangerous! That one you can observe specifically and label it, "SLEEPY! SLEEPY! SLEEPY!" Shout it out if you have to or sing a song about it, just get rid of it! If you're too sleepy, stop and take a rest or a break, have a coffee and a walk around. Don't endanger yourself, or others. Metta when driving is good too.

Eating food is a good reminder to be mindful. Try to eat regularly, it helps with your energy levels. If you work too much and don't eat but then stop working and eat too much, it really screws up your energy levels, not to mention your body. Eating a good breakfast is important, you need energy to work. Even if it is only fruit, that's the best morning food. It's fresh and cleans the system and gives you energy. A main meal at lunchtime and something light at night. Most people are afraid of getting fat, this way is fine, you burn it all off.

People also say that eating too much makes them sleepy. For me, I found that even if I don't eat I get sleepy! I don't think it really matters but you experiment for yourself. When you eat try not to gobble down your food in five or ten minutes, take your time, it is important to your physical and mental

health. Be aware of your mind when you eat, there's lots of judging, comparing, desire and aversion, as well as thinking and imagining. How does your mind eat?!

Have you heard of the Japanese Tea Drinking Ceremony? Two people sit down to drink tea but don't talk, all actions and movements are performed slowly and purposefully. The two people are caring for each other, silently. Just being together, the energy is powerful. It can take two hours just to drink tea! OK, I know, you don't have time for that but we can be a little more ceremonial and respectful towards the food and drink, reflecting on where it has come from and sharing it with others.

The Psychology of Swimming

Or

Swimming meditation

A simple exercise like swimming some laps in a pool can become a Dhamma lesson. Firstly one would watch, observe, feel, experience the physical sensations as they arise, as they happen. The coolness of the water, the sensation of touch against the skin, the sensation of floating and weightlessness. Then there are the movements and the repelling and propelling against the water to perform motion in any desired direction. To swim forward, one propels backward. The mind desires, then there is the intention to move and the muscles move, motion is the result.

More swimming, more movements, then tension, tiredness and pain arise. When lapping, swimming up and down the length of the pool, one must concentrate on breathing, it's like breathing meditation. Breathing in swimming is really important, otherwise you might choke or drown. Then one should kick the legs too, which is a bit difficult while concentrating on the arms and breathing at the same time. Actually, it is impossible to concentrate on all three

at the same time. The mind can only go from one to another. I like to see how my mind does it naturally. For example, you feel your arms moving, or they are tight or painful but then you're aware of breathing, then you maybe seeing, and then feeling your legs kicking and then thinking, "How many laps have I done?" Or other thoughts and then back to the arms or breathing again. Various objects that change in predominance. Then the mind goes through stages of aversion, laziness, doubt / lack of confidence, wanting to give up, impatience, confidence, pride and satisfaction. One maybe counting the laps and comparing to the past or competing with oneself. There is a whole lot of thinking going on down there too! The mind is swimming, the body only follows orders.

I have just recently had an experience with goal setting. When I wanted to write this book, my good friend Khun Eed, offered me the family's holiday house to stay in. It just happened to be a million dollar penthouse on the ocean with island and harbor views, gardens and swimming pools. Thanks Eed and family!!

I grew up by the beach in Australia and have been able to swim since I was young but I never did swimming training, you know, laps up and down the pool. One reason is because I never owned any swimming goggles but when I came to stay here at Eed's place, I bought a pair and started to do laps.

I enjoyed the challenge of mindfulness of swimming. At first, I could do about 3 or 4 laps but my breathing was messy, as was my kicking. Then I set a goal, I will try to do 10 laps before I leave here (in about two weeks). I thought that was do-able. I was right. The next day I could do 6 laps, then the next day I did 8 and then the following day I did 10. Wow! I was proud of my self...
"proud, proud, proud!"

So I could increase by 2 laps per day. Now I thought it would be almost impossible to double my target but I set it anyway thinking that it doesn't matter if I don't reach it, I'm satisfied already. Once I got to 16, I jumped straight to 20. Great! 30? Can I get to 30? I did 22, then jumped to 26, "Hey cool, 30 should be easy!" Then I went to do 28 or 30, not really thinking that I could but I applied a technique that I realized during sitting meditation when watching pain.

Let me digress back to the meditation hall in Burma; I used to sit about four or five hours for meditation. I had to watch screaming pain in my leg, on and off for hours, sometimes it was so bad I wanted to cut my leg off! The most intense pain in my life, I felt it just sitting still on the floor! Then one day I realized that a moment of intense pain had just passed away and I survived it, then if I survived that one, I can survive another one, and another and another, I did it and it was OK, I didn't die or pass out, in fact I was calm and fully aware. I realized that it actually wasn't hurting me, I could endure intense pain without reacting!

If you have already done something repeatedly, you can do it again, especially if you understand it. Even if you feel aversion to do it, bored, lazy, restless, those are just ordinary mental states that slow you down, if you get some mindfulness and concentration happening, they'll disappear instantly and you can power on!

Back to swimming, I wanted to achieve 28 or 30 laps and I did it, and I thought, "I'm not tired, I'll see what I can do... besides, I might die tomorrow and not get a chance to go further." I kept swimming and concentrated on the movements, breathing, thinking, reflecting, projecting, etc. and just kept swimming and I did 40 laps! From 26, I jumped to 40. I checked my pride when I finished and it was OK. Actually there is some pride, pride in the power

of mindfulness and the Buddha's teachings that brings me back to the present and grounds me in reality! I appreciate the Buddha and his teachings!

When swimming, there's no need to label but if you have practiced vipassana intensively, you can watch many varieties of mental and physical processes as they appear and unfold in the present moment. Yeah, some thinking comes up, of course, but it goes again, so what? This is general mindfulness.

It is not necessary to swim to live life but it does keep one fit and if we can do it mindfully, it becomes a part of our practice, our journey, our life.

Another example while staying in the penthouse on the 21st floor, I thought it's a good opportunity to get fit, so I didn't use the lift, I used to walk. Now the same thing arises, after a few flights the negativities creep in, "I don't have to do this!" "This is boring / painful / too long..." The mind jumps from the past to the future, "I have come so far already..." "Oh so far to go..." Complaining because of the past and future but if the mind is in the present, there's no problem. Concentrate on one thing, just stepping, just the pain, or the arguing mind and keep going, before you know it you're there, you achieved your goal! One step at a time...

Any fitness, workout, yoga, physical exercises or training of any kind can often be done with mindfulness. Especially if you do it alone, that's why jogging and swimming are quite good for our practice. Yoga and Tai Chi / Chi Gong are also conducive, because they are slow, deliberate and easy to follow.

Life is your teacher

The present moment is the sum total of everything you have ever said, done and thought about, and not just in this life but in more than you know. Whatever arises now, especially your mental and emotional states, which are

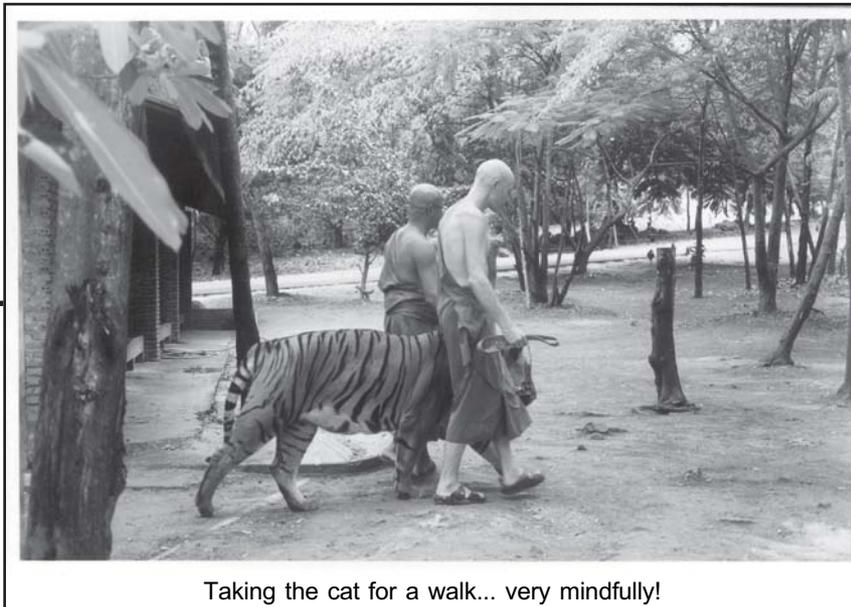
the direct results of your conditioning, is your lesson. This is what we need to learn now, this. However you feel now, is your lesson. If you're sleepy, look at it. Are you angry? Check it out! What is hunger, physical or mental? How does a smile feel, on the inside? Can you be mindful when you're excited? Why or why not? What is predominant when you run? Do you just complain when you carry something heavy or awkward? How does it really feel and what is your mind doing?

For me now, I am living in Thailand, everyday I have to speak with Thai people who don't speak English. I experience many different emotions, especially frustration, embarrassment, pride, joy, to mention a very few. It's hard for a grown man of mediocre intelligence like myself, to admit that he doesn't understand something so basic that a three year old Thai kid has already known for one year. So there is the deflation of the ego, sometimes even a feeling of defeat and the familiar, "I can't do this." Or "I'll never get it right." But then mindfulness of those emotions lets them pass naturally, which settles the mind and I can continue.

At times it is very difficult to express myself, like when I want to share Dhamma with Thai people, I know what to say in English, that's easy and comfortable but in Thai I have to struggle and fumble. Mindfulness helps me to remain calm and if I lose the plot, can't say something, misunderstand or I'm confused, I just see my pride and I say how I feel. When you are honest, most people understand. Even something simple like buying some fruit. I have detected a variety of mental and emotional states but then there are my body gestures, facial expressions, the verbalization of my thoughts, and trying to understand the expressions of the others and relate to their culture too. One small task turns into a myriad of perceptions which need to be processed and evaluated and responded to. Wow, it's no wonder we are all so tired! However,

if there is mindfulness at that time, even though it is all happening very fast, we are able to acknowledge things as they unfold, monitoring your emotions and mental states, especially attitude and keep the mind in balance, it's not so tiring or stressful afterall. Then we may learn many things about our own nature and the nature of others and there's more time and energy for sharing metta too.

Going back to nature is very good for your mindfulness. Preferably a place with few or no people. I find it is easier to be mindful when I'm in a natural environment and without too many people talking to me, filling my head with their stuff or useless information. To feel the sun on your skin, the wind in your hair, to swim in natural water, to listen to the sounds of the forest, to see the sunrise and sunset and the stars at night, being aware of your senses and connecting with reality, brings peace of mind.



My
wish
for you
and all living beings is;
May we rightly understand the technique and
practice of vipassana, mindfulness development.
May we be able to practice correctly, both
specific and general mindfulness.
May our mindfulness be clear
and produce great insight.
May our wisdom increase,
may our ignorance decrease.
May we all live with peace in our hearts.
May we share that peace with all living beings.

Dana - Donations

This book and in fact all of my Dhamma books thus far have been printed for free distribution. The money comes from kind well wishers who are willing to support the teaching and practice of the Buddha Dhamma and Vipassana. If you wish to donate for publications, please email me first and we can make the appropriate arrangements. Thanks for your consideration.

I also have two projects that I wish to support, the first is a Buddhist Hermitage in Australia under the patronage of Venerable Pannyavaro. The venerable is the webmaster of www.buddhanet.net one of the most popular Buddhist websites in the world. The latest figures are that the site receives 830,000 hits per day! He is also a very well known meditation teacher. He has been offered some land and would like to develop a hermitage. A place to train monks, especially as meditation teachers but also a place for people to practice and learn the Buddha's teachings, in short, a place of peace and wisdom. The upgrading and upkeep of Buddhanet and the hermitage projects need about 1 million Australian dollars / 500,000 US\$. please refer to Buddhanet.net on the internet for more information or email to me.

The second is a Buddhist 'Nunnery' in Myanmar. I propose to establish it in Myanmar because it is a Buddhist country and the nunnery will have the support of the entire community. Also, things are relatively cheap there. There is no concrete plan yet but there is a need for a place for women to practice meditation in a safe and peaceful environment. It will be designed for women, run by women and with women teachers. About 50,000 US\$ would be sufficient to get started and operational.

Please consider these projects and tell your friends.

The pictures and their stories in this book

Front cover. I drew these leaves from the garden in the monastery where I live in Thailand. I wanted to have a natural looking cover on my book because vipassana is natural and nature induces peace of mind.

Page 35. Facing the morning sun, high on a cliff in the Blue Mountains, Australia. Nothing but the cool and fresh morning air, the warmth of the sun, the sounds of birds near and far, a cold butt and my friend who took the photo.

Page 51. Sunset over the islands in the Gulf of Thailand. The view from the condominium where I wrote this book, very beautiful, peaceful and inspiring (Thanks to my friend Khun Eed and family).

Page 110. I drew a franjipani for my longtime friend, Moy.

Page 123. Sitting in the forest in Australia, a myriad of bird sounds fill the air.

Page 141. The Yawn! It must be boring being a tiger in a monastery. There were eight tigers in a monastery in Kanchanaburi, Thailand. The first ones came by themselves for shelter as they were sick, the others were born there. I stayed for a few days, wow! The tigers have since been removed by the 'authorities'.

Page 169. These rocks are called "The ruined Castle". They stand alone in the middle of a vast valley in the Blue Mountains, Australia. Such a perfect place to send loving-kindness to all living beings, above, below and all around.

Page 186. Taking the cat for a walk - just another example of general mindfulness!

Back cover. Who is that? Who am I? Who are you? Where am I? Where are you? It doesn't really matter - mind matters!