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SHORT BIOGRAPHY OF THE VENERABLE MAHĀSĪ SAYĀDAW

The Venerable U Sobhana Mahāthera, better known as Mahāsī Sayādaw was born on 29 July 1904 to the peasant proprietors, U Kan Taw and Daw Ok at Seikkhun Village, which is about seven miles to the west of the town of Shwebo in Upper Myanmar, once the capital of the founder of the last Myanmar dynasty. Sayādaw's name was Mg Thwin.

At the age of six he began his studies at a monastic school in his village, and at the age of twelve he was ordained a Sāmaṇera (novice) receiving the name of Sobhana. On reaching the age of twenty, he was ordained a bhikkhu on 26 November 1923. He passed the Government Pāli Examinations in all the three classes (lower, middle and highest) in the following three successive years.

In the fourth year after his Bhikkhu ordination, he proceeded to Mandalay, noted for its preeminence in Buddhist studies, where he continued his further education under various monks of high scholastic fame. In the fifth year he went to Mawlamyaing where he took up the work of teaching the Buddhist scriptures at a monastery known as “Taung-waing-galay Taikkyaung”

In the eighth year after his Bhikkhu ordination, he and another monk left Mawlamyaing equipped with the bare necessities of a bhikkhu (i.e. almsbowl, a set of three robes, etc.) and went in search of a clear and effective method in the practice of meditation. At Thaton he went to the well-known Meditation Teacher, the Venerable U Nārada, who is also known as “Mingun Jetavan Sayādaw the First” He then placed himself under the guidance of the Sayādaw and at once proceeded with an intensive course of meditation.

He had progressed so well in his practice that he was able to teach the method effectively to his first three disciples in Seikkhun while he was on a visit there in 1938. These three lay disciples, too, made remarkable progress. Inspired by the example of these three, gradually as many as fifty villagers joined the courses of intensive practice. The Venerable Mahāsī Sayādaw could not stay with the Venerable Mingun Sayādaw as long as he wanted as he was urgently asked to return to Mawlamyaing monastery. Its aged head monk was gravely ill and passed away not long after the Venerable Mahāsī Sayādaw's return. The Venerable Mahāsī Sayādaw was then asked to take charge of the monastery and to resume teaching the resident monks. During this time he sat for the Pāḷi Lecturership Examination on its first introduction, and passed on the first attempt in 1941 and was awarded the title of "Sāsanadhaja Siripavara Dhammācariya"

On the event of the Japanese invasion, the authorities gave an evacuation order to those living near Mawlamyaing at the Taungwaing-galay Monastery and its neighbourhood. These places were close to an air field and hence exposed to air attacks. For the Sayādaw this was a welcome opportunity to return to his native Seikkhun and to devote himself whole-heartedly to his own practice of Vipassanā meditation and to the teaching of it to others.

He took residence at a monastery known as Mahāsī-kyaung, which was thus called because a drum (Myanmar-si) of an unusually large (mahā) size was housed there. From that monastery, the Sayādaw's popular name, Mahāsī Sayādaw, is derived.

It was during this period, in 1945, that the Sayādaw wrote his great work, *Manual of Vipassanā Meditation*, a comprehensive and authoritative treatise expounding both the doctrinal and the practical aspects to the satipaṭṭhāna method of meditation. This work of two volumes, comprising 858 pages in print, was written by him in just seven months, while the neighbouring town of Shwebo was at times subjected to almost daily air attacks. So far, Volume I and Chapter V of Volume II have been translated into English and are published under the titles "A Practical way of (Insight Meditation) Volume I" and "Practical Insight Meditation: Basic and Progressive Stages".

It did not take long before the reputation of Mahāsī Sayādaw as an able teacher of Insight Meditation (Vipassanā) had spread throughout the Shwebo-Sagaing region and attracted the attention of a prominent and very devout Buddhist layman, Sir U Thwin, who was regarded as Myanmar's Elder Statesman. It was his wish to promote the inner strength of Buddhism in Myanmar by setting up a meditation centre to be guided by a meditation teacher of proven virtue and ability. After meeting Mahāsī Sayādaw and listening to a discourse given by him and to the meditation instructions given to the nuns in Sagaing, Sir U Thwin was in no doubt that he had found the ideal person he was looking for.

In 1947 the Buddha Sāsana Nuggaha Organization was founded in Yangon with its objectives of furthering the study (pariyatti) and practice (paṭipatti) of Buddhism, with Sir U Thwin as its first President. In 1948 Sir U Thwin donated five acres of land at Bahan Township, Yangon, to the organization for the erection of a meditation centre. It is on this site that the present (Thathana (or Sāsana) Yeiktha, i.e.: "Buddhist Retreat" is situated, which now, however, covers an area of twenty acres, with a large number of buildings.

In 1949, the then Prime Minister of Myanmar, U Nu, and Sir U Thwin requested that the Venerable Mahāsī Sayādaw come to Yangon and give training in meditational practice. On 4 December 1949, the Sayādaw introduced the first group of 25 meditators into the methodical practice of Vipassanā meditation. Within a few years of the Sayādaw's arrival in Yangon, similar meditation centres sprang up all over Myanmar, until they numbered over six hundred now. In neighboring Theravāda countries like Thailand and Sri Lanka, such centers were also established in which the same method was taught and practised. By end of December 2014 the total number of meditators trained at all these centres (both in Myanmar and abroad) had passed the figure of seventeen millions: In the East and in several Western countries as well, Vipassanā courses continue to be conducted.

At the historic Sixth Buddhist Council (Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyanā) held at Yangon for two years, culminating in the year 2500 Buddhist Era (1956), the Venerable Mahāsī Sayādaw had an important role. He was one of the Final Editors of the canonical texts, which were recited and thereby approved, in the sessions of the Council. Further, he was the Questioner (Pucchaka), that is, he had to ask the questions concerning the respective canonical texts that were to be recited.

They were then answered by an erudite monk with a phenomenal power of memory, by the name of Venerable Vicitta sārābhivamsa. To appreciate fully the importance of these roles, it may be mentioned that at the first Council held one hundred days after the passing away of the Buddha, it was the Venerable Mahākassapa who put forth those introductory questions which were then answered by the Venerable Upāli and the Venerable Ānanda.

After the recital of the canonical scriptures, the Tipiṭaka, had been completed at the Sixth Council, it was decided to continue with a rehearsal of the ancient commentaries and sub-commentaries, preceded by critical editing and scrutiny. In the large task, too, the Mahāsī Sayādaw took a prominent part.

In the midst of all of these tasks, he was also a prolific and scholarly writer. He authored more than 100 writings and translations, mostly in Myanmar, with a few in the Pāḷi language. One of these deserves to be singled out is his Myanmar translation of the Commentary to the Visuddhi magga (visuddhi-magga Mahāṭīkā), which, in two large volumes of the Pāḷi original, is even more voluminous than the work commented upon and presents explanations on many difficult points, linguistically and in its contents. In 1957 Mahāsī Sayādaw was awarded the title of 'Aggamahāpaṇḍita'.

Yet even all of this did not exhaust the Mahāsī Sayādaw's remarkable capacity for work in the cause of the Buddha-Dhamma. He undertook several travels abroad as follows; Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam (1952): India and Sri Lanka (1953-1959): Japan (1957): Indonesia (1959): America, Hawaii, England, Continental Europe (1979): England, Sri Lanka. Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand (1980): Nepal, India (1981).

The first two of his tours were in preparation for the Sixth Council, but were likewise used for preaching and teaching.

In the midst of all these manifold and strenuous activities, he never neglected his own meditative life which had enable him to give wise guidance to those instructed by him. His outstanding vigour of body and mind and his deep dedication to the Dhamma sustained him through a life of 78 years.

On 14 August 1982, the Venerable Mahāsī Sayādaw succumbed to a sudden and severe cerebral stroke which he had suffered the night before. Yet on the evening of the 13th, he had still given an introductory explanation to a group of new meditators.

His long career of teaching through the spoken and printed words had a beneficial impact on many hundreds of thousands in the East and the West. His personal stature and his life's work rank him among the great figures of contemporary Buddhism.

(Updated in March 2015)

Biography of Sayādaw Dhammikālaṅkārahivamaṃsa

Tharmanaykyaw is a pen name of *Sayādaw Ashin Dhammikālaṅkārahivamaṃsa*. *Sayādaw* was born on 28 July 1956 and became a novice at the age of 11. He received full ordination at the age of 20 under the tutelage of the well-known *Mahāgandhāyon Sayādaw Ashin Janakābhivamaṃsa* who was also his preceptor. He has received the well-respected *Tharmanaykyaw* degree, *Dhammācariya* degree and *Sakyasiha*, getting him the title *Abhivamaṃsa*. He started to practice meditation since he was a novice. Later, he stayed at the *Mahāsī* Meditation Centre for eight years and when *Paṇḍitarāma Sayādaw U Paṇḍita* moved to his new center, he helped *Sayādawgyī* to establish the *Paṇḍitārāma* Meditation Centre.

Since 2006 he has been residing at *Tharmanaykyaw Mahāgandhāyon* Monastery, Mawbin, Myanmar. He gives instruction to *vipassanā* yogis, teaches *Pāli* to monks, novices, nuns and children, and works actively for the preservation and propagation of the *Buddhasāsana*. He has written more than hundred books so far and has visited countries like Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, Canada, and United States to conduct meditation retreats.

In 2018, the government of Myanmar awarded him the title "*Aggamahāganthavācakapaṇḍita*" (Foremost Learned Teacher of *Dhamma*), which is the highest title given to those who are competent to teach *Dhamma*.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book is a compilation of Mahāsī Sayādaw's important meditation instructions from his original teaching. It is based on the meditation instruction VDO which was first developed on the occasion which Sayādaw Dhammikālaṅkārahivamaṃsa Aggamahāganthavācakaṇḍita accepted the invitation to teach Vipassanā meditation in Thailand at Sorntawee Meditation Center.

With his wide knowledge of Mahāsī Sayādaw's teaching, Sayādaw Dhammikālaṅkārahivamaṃsa brought essential meditation instructions from the original teachings of Mahāsī Sayādaw to help meditators gain a correct and clear understanding of Vipassanā practice.

The majority of the materials of this book come from Chapter 5 of Mahāsī Sayādaw's great work, *Manual of Vipassanā Meditation*, a comprehensive and authoritative treatise expounding both the doctrinal and practical aspects of Satipaṭṭhanā meditation. This part was translated from Burmese to English by Venerable Bhikkhu U Sobhana.

The sections "What is Vipassanā?" and "Right Understanding During Meditation" are taken from the book *Mahāsī Abroad Part 2*, published by the Buddha Sāsana Nuggaha Organization Mahāsī Sāsana Yeiktha.

The "Walking Meditation" section comes from Mahāsī Sayādaw's book, *Vipassanā Meditation Instructions*. This section was translated from Burmese to English by Ms. Simone Tai who is also generously helped to proofread the English translation of this book.

Venerable Sayalay Medhāvinī translated this book from English to Thai.

The original meditation instruction video is available to watch at www.sorntawee.org

Venerable Sayalay Medhāvinī

(Mariryn Pongpudpunth)

Organizer

September 2019

Meaning of Noting

The word “Noting” means to pay attention to a meditative object with the purpose to be aware of phenomena that are really happening from moment to moment.

(From The Discourse on Nibbāna by Mahāsī Sayādaw)

Synonyms

Here I translate the word *sallakhento* as "one observes," in other words, "a person notes." The terms "to note," "to observe," and "to bear in mind" are all synonyms for the purposes of insight practice.

(From Manual of Insights by Mahāsī Sayādaw)

What matter

In *Vipassanā* meditation, what you name or say doesn't matter.

What really matters is to know or perceive.

(From Practical Vipassana Meditational Exercise by Mahāsī Sayādaw)

Question: Venerable Sir, in Vipassana practice is it necessary to label or name an object such as “rising, falling” etc.?

Answer: Names, whether they are in technical terms or in ordinary language, are all conceptual or conventional and not that important. What matters most is to be aware of the phenomena involved in an object like “rising and falling of the abdomen when breathing.” In reality, just being aware of an object without labeling at all, will serve the purpose.

Without labeling, however, it may be difficult to be fully aware of an object precisely and accurately. Also, it will not be easy for the yogi to report his or her experience to the teacher, or for a teacher to give advice to the yogi. That is the reason why the yogi is instructed to label an object when he or she notes it. Even then, it would be difficult to use technical terms for all objects a yogi encounters. That is why I instruct yogis to use ordinary language like “rising, falling” when he or she practices.

(From *To Protect Buddha's Sasana From Dangers* by Mahāsī Sayādaw)

Question: Venerable Sir, do you always encourage us to label an object?

Answer: There are times you find objects occurring to you so fast that you have no time to label them each. Then you have to keep up with them by being merely aware of them moment to moment, without labeling. It is also possible to be aware of four, five or ten objects spontaneously, although you are able to label only one of them. Don't worry about that. It also serves your purpose. If you try to label all the objects occurring, you are likely to get soon exhausted. The point is to be scrupulously aware of objects.

(From Summary on How to Practice Vipassanā by Mahāsī Sayādaw)

Mahāsi Sayādaw's Instructions

For Vipassanā Meditation

What is Vipassanā?

¹Vipassanā is the noticing and observing of the arising and passing away of psycho-physical phenomena so that we may come to know them as they really are. Every time we see, hear, touch or know, these phenomena are constantly appearing and disappearing. It is important that we notice them and be aware of them every time they arise. But in the beginning, it will not be possible to notice all that we see, hear, touch or know. We should, therefore, begin with noticing the few that we can. Every time we breathe in and out, the rising and falling of our abdomen becomes apparent. This is (the manifestation of) the element of motion called *vāyo dhātu*. We should begin by noticing this.

The Preparation for Vipassanā

²The meditator who wishes to practice seriously to attain Path Knowledge (*Magga*), Fruition Knowledge (*Phala*), and *Nibbāna* in this very life has to cut off the impediments (*palibodha*), duties and concerns, within the duration of practice. As elaborated at the end of section one, morality has to be purified. The mind has to be directed wishing, “May this morality support the attainment of *Magga* knowledge.”

¹ From *Mahāsi Abroad Part. 2* (Starting from here)

² From *Practical Insight Meditation (Basic Practice)* (Starting from here)

If one has doubt about unwholesome actions related to 'speaking ill of noble persons' (ariyūpavādaka kamma), due to having criticized or wronged someone who has attained enlightenment, one should respectfully request for forgiveness from that person whom one has wronged by saying, "Please forgive me." If it is not possible to visit that person, one should respectfully request forgiveness in the presence of one's teacher.

It is said in the commentaries that if one relinquishes or entrusts oneself to the Buddha, then "while meditating, when fearful objects appear, there is the benefit of being free from fear." Similarly, if one entrusts oneself to the teacher "the teacher will be able to admonish and correct one's mistakes without hesitation." Hence, it is good to relinquish oneself to the Buddha during the duration of the practice and one should entrust oneself to the teacher by saying, "Please admonish me without hesitation." Even if one is unable to entrust oneself in this way, there is no doubt that one can get the distinctive knowledge and outstanding dhamma if one follows the teacher's words respectfully and practices without backing away.

The mind should be directed by considering, "The Nibbāna where all suffering ceases, which refers to the non-arising of material and immaterial aggregates, is good and noble. The Magga dhamma which knows Nibbāna directly and is capable of dispelling defilements is also good and noble. That special Magga and Nibbāna dhamma can be definitely attained through the practice of vipassanā." The mind should be energized by reflecting, "I am going to strive in the work of vipassanā, the path that is always taken by the Buddha, Arahats, and Noble beings."

After that one should reflect on the noble qualities of the supreme Buddha, as much as one has learnt or known, and do veneration. Beginning from the deities protecting the monastery, loving-kindness (*mettā*) should be radiated towards all beings thus, “Be happy...Be happy.” If one is able, one should also contemplate and reflect on ‘foulness’ (*asubha*) and ‘death’ (*maraṇa*) for some moments.

Then having sat down with legs crossed or in any other way of sitting and ⁵keep the body upright, ⁶one should observe, note, and strive according to the instructions given below. It is better if one can sit comfortably without the legs pressing against one another.

Primary Object

To start, you should attentively observe the belly with the mind. You will come to know the extension and contraction of the belly. If extension and contraction are not clear, observe by placing your hand on the belly. After a short time, if the extension and contraction become clear, then when there is movement of extension while breathing in, note as ‘rising’; when there is movement of contraction while breathing out, note as ‘falling’. When there is extension, the arising movement of the belly should be known clearly. When there is contraction, the falling movement of the belly should be known clearly.

⁵ From University Vipassanā (Starting from here)

⁶ From Practical Insight Meditation (Basic Practice) (Starting from here)

In this connection, do not be doubtful thinking that the yogi comes to know the shape concept (*saṅṭhāna paññatti*) of the abdomen too. At the beginning of the practice, it is not possible to observe by completely surmounting concept. Only when the observing and noting of the object which is mixed with concept is done will it be easy for concentration, mindfulness, and insight knowledge to ripen. When knowledge becomes mature, all types of conceptual objects will disappear, and the knowledge will keep reaching only to the nature of reality.

Besides, only the knowing and noting of the material and mental phenomena arising clearly at the six sense doors respectively is the complete and true practice of *vipassanā*. But, at the beginning of the practice, mindfulness and wisdom are not strong yet. Therefore, it is difficult to follow and note each one as it arises. One may tend not to be able to note. One may spend much time looking for the object which should be noted. Therefore, here the instructions are given to begin the practice by observing and noting the extension and contraction of the belly. These objects are always there, and they are obvious as well as easy to be noted and known. You will find the method of noting according to their arising later when wisdom becomes mature.

Therefore, note the extension and contraction whenever they happen as 'rising, falling; rising, falling' concurrently and continuously. Note only with the mind. It is not necessary to recite verbally. And do not force your in-breath and out-breath so as to make the extension and contraction clearer. Do not change the in-breath and out-breath to make them slow or fast. If you change them, you will be exhausted soon and may not be able to practice. Therefore, breathe normally and do the noting concurrently.

Distracting Thoughts

While continuously noting the rising and falling, between them, thoughts will arise every now and then. Note those thoughts using the labels that are normally used. This is how to note them. You should note 'wandering' when there is wandering. If there is 'pondering,' note as 'pondering.' Note 'thinking', when there is thinking. When there is 'contemplation,' note as 'contemplation.' If there is analysis, note as 'analyzing.' If the mind 'goes off' note as 'going off'. If the mind arrives to some place, note as 'arriving'. If you meet somebody in the mind, note as 'meeting'. If you talk with somebody in the mind, note as 'talking'. If you see somebody in the mind, note as 'seeing'. Note repeatedly so that the seeing disappears. If you speak with somebody in the mind, note as 'speaking, speaking.' After noting in such a manner, continue to note the 'rising, falling' again continuously.

Physical Discomfort

While noting in this way, if there is wanting to swallow saliva, note as 'wanting to swallow'. While swallowing, note as 'swallowing, swallowing, swallowing'. If there is wanting to spit, note as 'wanting to spit'. While spitting, note as 'spitting'. After that continue to note the usual object without a break as 'rising, falling'. If there is wanting to lower the head, note as 'wanting to lower the head'. While lowering the head, note each movement as 'lowering, lowering, lowering'. Do not do it quickly. Lower the head slowly. If there is wanting to raise the head, note as 'wanting to raise'. While raising the head, note each movement as 'raising, raising, raising'. Raise it slowly. After that continue to note the usual object as 'rising, falling'.

If stiffness becomes very evident in some area, pay close attention to that very area and note normally as 'stiff, stiff'. The noting should neither be slow nor quick and should be done part by part. It should be continuous. That stiffness might fade away slowly and disappear or become more unbearable. If one wants to adjust one's posture because one cannot bear it, note that mind as 'wanting to adjust'. Note the physical movements and activities involved in the adjustment according to their respective names. This is how to note. If there is wanting to lift the hand or leg, note as 'wanting to lift'. If there is lifting, note every movement as 'lifting, lifting, lifting, lifting'. If there is stretching, note as 'stretching, stretching, stretching, stretching'. If there is bending, note as 'bending, bending, bending, bending'. If there is placing down, note as 'placing, placing, placing, placing'. Do not do so quickly. Adjust slowly. If there is touching somewhere, note as 'touching, touching'. When one has finished the adjustment or when the stiffness disappears by itself while noting, return and note the rising and falling of the belly.

If heat becomes apparent in some area, pay close attention only to that heat and note it as 'heat, heat'. Note continuously, part by part normally, neither slowly nor quickly. If the heat disappears while noting, continue to note the rising and falling again. If the heat becomes extreme and one wants to adjust one's posture, one should note as 'wanting to adjust'. While adjusting, one should note the manner of adjustment as 'wanting to lift, lifting, lifting' according to the method mentioned above. Adjust slowly so that there will not be any lapse. After the adjustment finishes, one should note the rising and falling as usual without any break. There should not be rest or respite.

If itchiness arises in some area, pay attention only to that itchiness and note as 'itching, itching'. Note it part by part normally, neither slowly nor quickly. If the itchiness disappears while noting, return to note the rising and falling. If one wants to remove the itchiness because it is unbearable, note as 'wanting to remove' or 'wanting to scratch'. If there is wanting to lift the hand, note as 'wanting to lift the arm. If there is lifting, note as 'lifting, lifting, lifting, lifting'. If the itchy area is touched, note as 'touching, touching'. When there is scratching, on each pulling and pushing, note as 'rubbing, rubbing, rubbing, rubbing' or 'scratching, scratching, scratching, scratching'. When there is wanting to stop, note as 'wanting to stop'. When there is wanting to put the hand down, note as 'wanting to put down'. When there is putting down, note as 'putting down, putting down, putting down'. If the hand touches somewhere, note as 'touching, touching'. After that continue to note the rising and falling without any break.

If any unbearable sensation such as pain arises distinctly in the body, pay attention to that unbearable sensation and note as 'pain pain', 'sore sore', 'ache ache', 'tired tired', 'giddy giddy' according to their names. Do the noting part by part, neither slowly nor quickly. That sensation may pass away while noting or may become intense. If one does not give up and continues to note diligently, most of the time it disappears. However, if the sensation becomes so extreme that one cannot note, do not pay attention to that sensation. Continue to note the rising and falling with extra attention. Note without any breaks.

Odd Experiences

For some people, when concentration and mindfulness become good, very unbearable sensations can arise. It seems like there is an air bag inside the chest. A big lump of air may seem to rise up to the chest. The pain may seem as if the flesh is pierced with the point of a knife. The whole body might appear as if it is burning. It may seem as if it is pierced by sewing needles and one may experience prickling sensations. It may feel like insects are crawling up the body everywhere and one may become agitated. Strong itchiness, strong pain, and cold sensations may also arise. If one becomes afraid and stops observing and noting, those sensations tend to disappear immediately. If one notes again and the noting becomes good, it is likely that such sensations would arise again.

Do not be afraid when these types of sensations arise. It is neither a disease nor an extreme sensation. They are ordinary sensations that have been arising in the body in the past also. During the time when one did not practice, there were other distinct objects. Hence, these sensations were hidden. When mindfulness is good, those sensations become apparent according to their nature because of concentration. Note those sensations attentively to overcome them.

There will not be any harm because of noting. If one stops noting, in the future, when one's mindfulness and concentration become good to some extent, one will encounter such kinds of sensations repeatedly. If one does not give up and notes with diligence, one comes to know very soon that it has disappeared. The sensation appears as if it is thrown away. It is possible that the sensation will subside and will not arise anymore.

If one wants to sway the body, one should note as 'wanting to sway'. While swaying, note as 'swaying, swaying'. For some people, the swaying arises automatically while practicing normally. Do not be afraid. Do not encourage the mind to sway. Having confidence that it will disappear if noted, note that swaying very attentively as 'swaying, swaying'. Noting should be done normally, neither slowly nor fast, part by part. If the body sways too much, practice by leaning against a wall or other firm support, or by lying down. Very soon, the 'swaying' will disappear completely. If the body starts to shake, note it in a similar manner.

When mindfulness is very good, goose bumps can appear very rapidly; either in the back or throughout the body. Cold sensations also might arise intermittently. Do not be afraid. This is arising of joy according to the nature of practice. One may become suddenly scared when hearing some sound. Do not be afraid. When concentration is good, one feels the torture of contact.

Whenever there is wanting to adjust the hand, leg, or other parts of the body, note the wanting mind. Note the physical activities related to adjustment too, using the labels that are commonly used. Do not adjust quickly. Do it slowly.

Walking Meditation

It is enough if you note one part while walking fast or walking long distances.

While walking, you must note the footstep. While taking the right step, note it as 'right step'. While taking the left step, note it as 'left step'. Beginning from the lifting of the leg, until the placing of the foot, the movement should be known. 'right-step', 'left-step', 'right-step, left-step', 'right-step, left-step'. You should note once for each step in this way. This is how to note when walking quickly. When you walk fast or walk long distances, it is enough if you note once for each footstep. 'right step, left step'. It is enough to note once.

Begin walking meditation by noting two parts.

When you walk slowly, or when you do walking meditation, there are three parts in each footstep. Raising the leg is one part. Moving the leg forward is one part. Placing the leg down is one part. Among these three parts, you should begin by noting two parts, 'lifting' and 'placing'. Note the lifting of the leg as 'lifting'. The lifting should be known thoroughly. After that, note the placing down of the foot as 'placing'. The heaviness when placing down should be known thoroughly. You should begin by noting these two parts. 'Lifting', 'placing' – one footstep is complete. While noting 'placing' on one side, the other foot can also start to lift up. Do not let this happen. When lifting the foot, you should note it attentively to catch it well from the beginning of the lifting. 'Lifting', 'placing'. 'Lifting', 'placing'. In this way, for each footstep, two parts should be noted

⁹ From Vipassanā Meditation Instruction (Starting from here)

While standing for some time, note as ‘standing, standing’. If there is wanting to turn, note as ‘wanting to turn’. While turning, note as ‘turning’, ‘turning’, ‘turning, turning’. If there is wanting to go, note as ‘wanting to go’.

When noting two parts becomes easy, note three parts.

After about two days, the two-part noting may become easier. When it becomes easy, you should note three parts. ‘Lifting, moving forward, placing’. ‘Lifting, moving forward, placing’. ‘Lifting, moving forward, placing’. ‘Lifting, moving forward, placing’. You should note three steps in this way. Right now, at the beginning it is enough if you can note one or two parts. When walking quickly, note only one part – ‘right step’, ‘left step’. Note once for each step in this way when walking. When walking slowly, note two parts – ‘lifting’, ‘placing’.

Restraining the faculties

¹¹The yogī should behave as if he were a weak invalid. People in normal health get up easily and quickly or abruptly. Not so with feeble invalids, who do so slowly and gently. The same is the case with people suffering from backache who rise gently lest the back hurt and cause pain.

¹¹ From Practical Vipassanā Meditation Exercise (Starting from here)

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

Getting a drink

¹³If there is wanting to drink water, note as ‘wanting to drink’. If there is intention to stand up, note as ‘wanting to stand up’. Note the activities of the hand, leg, and body while standing according to the labels given to them. Stand up paying attention to the body which becomes lighter and lighter and note as ‘getting up, getting up’, ‘getting up, getting up’. Stand up slowly. While standing for some time, note as ‘standing, standing’. If one looks at something intentionally, note as ‘looking, seeing’.

¹³ From Vipassanā Meditation Instruction (Begin)

If there is wanting to go, note as 'wanting to go'. While going, note either as 'moving forward, moving forward' for each footstep or as 'right-step, left-step'. There should be knowing from the moment the foot is lifted up to the moment of placing. When going slowly, for example while doing walking meditation, for each footstep keep noting two parts, either 'lifting, moving forward' or 'lifting, placing' or 'moving forward, placing'. When one is able to note the two parts well, note three parts for each footstep as 'lifting, moving forward, placing'.

If something such as a water-pot is seen, note as 'looking seeing'. If there is standing, note as 'standing'. If the hand moves towards the water cup, note as 'moving, moving'. If the water cup is touched, note as 'touching, touching'. If the water cup is held, note as 'holding holding'. If the water is taken, note as 'taking, taking'. While drawing back, note as 'drawing, drawing', 'drawing, drawing'. If the lip is touched, note as 'touching, touching'. If cold is felt, note as 'cold, cold'. While drinking, note as 'drinking, swallowing', 'drinking, swallowing'. Note as 'cold, cold' when coldness is felt in the throat and stomach. When placing the cup back, note as 'placing, placing', 'placing, placing'. If the hand is put down, note as 'dropping, dropping', 'dropping, dropping'. If the body is touched, note as 'touching, touching'.

If there is wanting to turn, note as 'wanting to turn'. While turning, note as 'turning', 'turning', 'turning'. If you go back, do so without stopping your noting. If there is wanting to stand, note as 'wanting to stand'. While standing, note as 'standing, standing'. If you stand for some time, note as 'rising, falling, standing'. If there is intention to sit, note as 'wanting to sit'. If there is going to the seat, note as usual.

On arriving, note as 'arriving'. If there is turning, note as 'turning'. If the intention appears to sit down, note as 'wanting to sit'. While sitting, pay careful attention to the body that becomes gradually heavier while going down and note as 'sitting, sitting', 'sitting, sitting'. Sit down slowly. At the beginning of sitting, there will be adjusting of the arms and feet. Note them as they are normally called. If there is no significant object to note, continue as usual to note the rising and falling without any break.

Going to Bed

If there is wanting to lie down or wanting to sleep, note either as 'wanting to lie down' or 'wanting to sleep'. Note the adjustments of the hand and feet involved in lying down as 'lifting', 'bending', 'resting' and so on. As the body lowers down slowly step by step, pay close attention to it and note as 'lowering down, lowering down' or 'lying down, lying down'. When there is touching on the bed or pillow, note as 'touching, touching'. At the beginning of lying down, note the shifting or adjustments of the hands, legs, and body as 'lifting', 'bending', 'resting' and so on. Adjust slowly. When there is no other significant object to note, continue to note the rising and falling as usual without any break.

While noting in this way, if significant sensations such as stiffness, heat, pain, and itchiness arise, pay close attention to that sensation, and practice as in the sitting posture.

Also note wanting to swallow saliva or spit it out, wandering mind, thinking, reflection in the same way. When there is wanting to shift the body towards the left or right and when there is wanting to stretch or bend the arm and leg also, note the mind that arises during that time and also the adjustments, without any lapse. When there is no other significant object to note, continue to note the rising and falling as usual without any break.

When there is wanting to sleep, note as 'wanting to sleep, wanting to sleep'. If there is sleepiness, note as 'sleepy, sleepy'. When meditation is mature, the sleepiness disappears after noting in this way and the mind becomes very clear. At that time, note as 'clear, clear'. Then continue to note the rising and falling as usual without any break. Even though the desire to sleep may not go away, one should not stop noting and sleep. One should determine not to sleep and to do the noting continuously. One should keep noting the rising, falling and so on as usual. If the body is tired, one feels sleepy and falls asleep while noting in this way.

Sleeping is the arising of life-continuum consciousness (bhavaṅga) for an extended period. The life-continuum consciousness is similar to the consciousness that arises at the beginning of life and the last death-consciousness. Hence, it is very subtle. One cannot even know what object it takes. During waking hours also, it continues to arise, for example between seeing and thinking, between hearing and thinking and so on. Because it does not arise for a long time, its arising cannot be known clearly. When one is asleep, it can be known because it arises for a long time. Even then what object it takes and how it arises cannot be known. Thus, while sleeping it is not necessary to note; it is not possible to note.

Getting Up

But when one wakes up, at first one should note the waking mind as 'waking, waking'. At the beginning of the practice, it is difficult to begin by knowing and noting the waking mind. If one is unable to note the waking mind, after one remembers to note, one should note the objects according to their arising. If there is thinking, note as 'thinking' and continue to note the rising and falling. If one wakes up hearing something, one should note as 'hearing', and continue to note the rising and falling. If no other objects become especially obvious, note 'rising, falling' as usual without any break. Note them according to their labels and adjust slowly. Thinking may arise, such as "What time is it?" Note it as 'thinking'. If there is wanting to rise up, note as 'wanting to rise up'. Note the adjustments related to 'rising up' also. There should not be any lapse. While rising up, pay careful attention to the bodily activities involved in the rising up and note carefully as 'rising, rising'. If one sits down, note as 'sitting, sitting'. After that, note as 'rising, falling' as usual without a break.

When washing the face, taking a bath and so on, note according to their order the looking, seeing, extending the arm, holding, taking, pouring, coldness, rubbing and so on without any lapse. While wearing the clothes, preparing the bed, opening and closing the door, holding something, taking something and so on – note all these without any lapse.

Eating a meal

While eating food, if there is seeing, note as ‘looking, seeing’. While preparing the morsel, note the adjustments of the hand as ‘preparing, preparing, preparing, preparing’. When the morsel is taken up, note as ‘taking, taking, taking, taking’. If the head is bent, note as ‘bending, bending, bending, bending’. If the mouth is touched, note as ‘touching, touching, touching’. If the mouth is opened, note as ‘opening, opening, opening’. If the food is put in the mouth, note as ‘putting, putting, putting, putting’. If the mouth is closed again, note as ‘closing, closing, closing’. If the hand is put down, note as ‘putting down, putting down, putting down, putting down’. If the food plate is touched, note as ‘touching, touching’. If the head is raised up again, note as ‘raising’. After that one should eat noting every time one chews as ‘chewing, chewing, chewing, chewing’. If the taste is known, note as ‘knowing, knowing’. If swallowed, note as ‘swallowing, swallowing, swallowing’. Note the touching as the food passes through the throat and stomach as ‘touching, touching’. In this way, one should note thoroughly every time one makes a morsel and each time one drinks soup.

At the beginning of the practice, one may not be able to know or note them concurrently, and there will be many lapses. Do not be frustrated. If one determines to note continuously and practices seriously by paying close attention, gradually one will be able to note and know more. When wisdom is mature, one is able to know and note easily much more than what is mentioned here.

Increasing the Number of Objects

After a day, a night and so on, it seems that with each in-breath and out-breath, the noting of two aspects as 'rising, falling' becomes easier and that there is a space between rising and falling. At that time, add the sitting posture, and note the three aspects, namely 'rising, falling, sitting'. Similar to the knowing of rising and falling, while noting 'sitting', one should know the body as it is sitting. While lying down also, note the three aspects as 'rising, falling, lying down'.

If it seems that there is a gap between the noting of the three aspects, then add a distinct touching point at some place and note four aspects as 'rising, falling, sitting, touching'. If this order of noting is not helpful, add the sitting twice and note as 'rising, sitting, falling, sitting'. While lying down also, note four aspects as 'rising, falling, lying, touching or rising, lying, falling, lying'.

General Objects

While noting the internal behaviors such as ‘rising, falling’ and so on ardently, it is not essential to note ordinary seeing and hearing. By noting the rising and falling and so on attentively, the noting and knowing of seeing and hearing are also fulfilled. There is mere seeing and mere hearing. However, if one intentionally looks at something, then one should note as ‘looking, seeing’, and continue to note the normally observed object. Although one may not look intentionally, while seeing a distinct object such as a woman or a man, one should note as ‘seeing, seeing’ two or three times and continue to note the normally observed object. If one intentionally listens to something, one should note as ‘listening, hearing’ and continue to note the normally observed object. When one hears clearly the sounds of human conversation, songs, loud noises, sounds of dogs, birds, chickens and so on, one should note two or three times as ‘hearing, hearing’ and continue to note the normally observed object.

If one does not note these types of distinct seeing and hearing, then one may not be able to observe clearly the normally observed rising and falling and so on. One might think and defilements may arise. If this happens, note as ‘thinking’ and then continue to note. If one forgets and misses to note the bodily process and thinking, one should note as ‘forgetting’ and then continue to note what one is noting.

If the rising and falling are not distinct because of subtle in-breath and out-breath, note the objects such as sitting, lying down, touching. While noting in this way, note the touching by switching between four, five and six areas.

Mental States

After the passing of some time and when one thinks that there is no progress, one may become lazy. Note it as 'lazy lazy'. As long as distinction in mindfulness, concentration and wisdom is not achieved, one may think, "Nothing is different." Because of this, doubt might arise thinking, "Is this the right method? Can I attain the goal by following this method?" Note it as 'doubting, doubting'.

One may expect the noting to be good and expect to attain something special. Note it as 'expecting, wanting, desiring'. One may also think about one's previous practice. Note it as 'thinking'. One may think whether the noted object is materiality or mentality. Note it as 'thinking'. If the practice is not good, one may feel frustrated. Note it as 'frustration, frustration'. If the practice is good, one may feel happy. Note it as 'happy, happy'. After noting the mental behaviors in this way whenever they arise, continue to note the normally observed object such as rising and falling.

As for the time of practice, one should practice continuously without a break, starting from the moment one wakes up until one falls asleep automatically, while noting day and night without stopping even for the duration of an eye blink. At the beginning of the practice, one should do unbroken practice by considering, "I will not sleep, and practice continuously." When wisdom matures, one will not fall asleep automatically and will experience clarity and wakefulness.

Summary of the Method of Noting

Note all the mental behaviors, whenever there is thinking or wandering mind, whether it is good or bad. Note the physical behaviors, whenever there is any adjustment or movement, whether it is small or big. Note all types of feelings whenever they arise whether they are in the mind or the body, whether they are good and bearable or bad and unbearable. Whether good or bad, note all the objects that appear in the mind. When there are no distinct objects such as these to note, continue to note the rising and falling, sitting and so on as usual. While going also, note the lifting, pushing forward, and placing down continuously.

If one does the practice continuously in this way day and night, aside from sleeping time, one will be able to note all the material and mental phenomena arising and passing away at the present moment. Very soon one will be able to witness the arising of the knowledge of arising and passing away and other insight knowledges step by step.

Right Understanding During Meditation

¹⁵When concentration is strong, in every act of noting seeing, you can distinguish between the visual object, the eye base and the seeing consciousness. Out of these, the visual object and eye are matter which has no consciousness. Seeing -consciousness and the noting are mind which have consciousness. So in every act of noting seeing, you discern that there is only matter and mind and no ego or soul. This is the insight knowledge distinguishing between Mind and Matter (Nāma Rūpa Pariccheda Ñāṇa).

¹⁵ From Mahāsi Abroad Part. 2 (Starting from here)

In hearing also, you come to know that ear and sound are matter and hearing -consciousness and noting are mind. There is only matter and mind.

In smelling also nose and odour are matter and smelling consciousness and noting are mind. There is only matter and mind.

In eating also tongue and taste are matter and tasting-consciousness and noting are mind. There is only matter and mind.

When you note 'walking, standing, sitting, touching, rising, falling' etc., you come to know that body and tangible object are matter and touching-consciousness and noting are mind. There is only matter and mind.

When you note reflecting, thinking etc., you come to know that seat of consciousness and mental objects are matter and consciousness and noting are mind. There is only matter and mind. In this case, mental objects can be reflections, thoughts, concepts, forms etc. But mental objects are considered as tangible matter, that is why objects of mind are mentioned as matter.

The knowledge distinguishing between Mind and Matter occurs more in yogīs of good intelligence and less in those of poor intelligence. Even though a yogī has few occurrences of this knowledge, he is said to have accomplished it.

After this knowledge, with the improvement of concentration the yogī comes to know to a certain extent Cause and Effect in the following manner: -

While noting walking, he discerns that because there arises the intention to walk, there is walking. In sitting and standing also, he discerns that because the intention to sit arises, there is sitting, because the intention to stand arises, there is standing. While noting rising and falling, he discerns that because of the in-breath and outbreath there is rising and falling. While noting seeing, he discerns that because there is the visual object, seeing arises, because there is eye, seeing arises. In hearing also, he likewise discerns it. Noting thus he comes to realize to a certain extent that these acts are neither caused by ego nor self but are just the results of corresponding causes mentioned above. This is the knowledge distinguishing between Cause and Effect.

Then while noting 'walking, standing, sitting, rising, falling, seeing, hearing, stiff, pain, disappointment, happiness' etc. in every act of noting he notices that both the object of noting and noting mind arise anew and then pass away. At first, he notices the beginning and ending of a step and likewise in the rising movement of the abdomen. With the improvement of concentration and knowledge he notices them in segments. Thus, by direct knowledge he comes to understand clearly that, 'Things are neither permanent nor pleasurable but suffering. Life is just phenomena and there is neither ego nor soul'. This is maturity of true insight knowledges namely Aniccānupassanā, Dukkhānupassanā, and Anattānupassanā.

With the maturity of true Insight knowledges Nibbāna is realized through Ariya Magga and Phala Ñāṇa (Path & Fruition knowledge). Then one becomes at least a Stream-Winner (Sotāpanna) and forever escapes from the four lower worlds. He or she will be reborn in the good existences of human or celestial worlds and within seven existences will realize Arahatta Path and Fruition Knowledge. So it is highly essential to practise meditation to become at least a Stream-Winner (Sotāpanna).

By thus practicing may you all make progress in the development of concentration and realize Nibbāna in the near future through the Path and fruition Knowledge.

Sadhu! Sadhu! Sadhu!