

**practical  
insight  
meditation**

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**Unity Press**



**MINDFULNESS  
SERIES**

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name them, a collective designation will be sufficient. If one attempts to follow them in a detailed manner, one will get tired soon. The important thing is to notice clearly and to comprehend what arises. At this stage, the usual contemplation focused on a few selected objects should be set aside and mindful noticing should attend to every object that arises at the six sense doors. Only when one is not keen on this sort of noticing, then one should revert to the usual contemplation.

Bodily and mental processes are many times swifter than a wink of an eye or a flash of lightning. Yet, if the meditator goes on simply noticing these processes he can fully comprehend them as they happen. Then mindfulness becomes very strong. As a result, mindfulness seems as if plunging into an object that arises. The object too seems as if alighting on mindfulness. One comprehends each object clearly and singly. Therefore the meditator then believes: "Bodily and mental processes are very swift indeed. They are as fast as a machine or an engine. And yet, they all can be noticed and comprehended. Perhaps there is nothing more to know. What is to be known has been known." He believes so because he knows by direct experience what he has not even dreamt of before.

Again, as a result of insight, a brilliant light will appear to the meditator. There arises also in him rapture, causing "goose flesh," falling of tears, tremor in the limbs. It produces in him a subtle thrill and exhilaration. He feels as if on a swing. He even wonders whether he is just giddy. Then, there arises tranquility of mind and along with it appears mental agility. When sitting, lying, walking or standing, he feels quite at ease. Both body and mind are agile in functioning swiftly, they are pliant in being able to attend to any object desired; they are wieldy in being able to attend to an object for any length of time desired. One is free from stiffness, heat or pain. Insight penetrates objects with ease. Mind becomes sound and straight, and one wishes to avoid all evil. Through firm faith, mind is very bright. At times, when there is no

object to be noticed, the mind remains tranquil for a long time. There arise in him thoughts like these: "Verily, the Buddha is omniscient. Truly, the body-and-mind process is impermanent, painful and without self." While noticing objects he comprehends lucidly the three characteristics. He wishes to advise others to practice meditation. Free from sloth and torpor, his energy is neither lax nor tense. There also arises in him equanimity associated with insight. His happiness exceeds his former experiences. So he wishes to communicate his feelings and experiences to others. There arises further a subtle attachment of a calm nature that enjoys the insight associated with the brilliant light, mindfulness and rapture. He comes to believe it to be just the bliss of meditation.

The meditator should not reflect on these happenings. As each arises, he should notice them accordingly: "Brilliant light, faith, rapture, tranquility, happiness and so on." When there is brightness, one should notice it as "bright," until it disappears. Similar acts of noticing should be made in the other cases too. When brilliant light appears, at the beginning one tends to forget noticing and enjoys seeing the light. Even if the meditator applies mindful noticing to the light, it will be mixed with feelings of rapture and happiness, and it is likely to linger on. However, one later gets used to such phenomena and one will continue to notice them clearly until they disappear. Sometimes the light is so brilliant that one finds it difficult to make it vanish by the mere act of noticing it mindfully. Then one should cease to pay attention to it and turn energetically to the noticing of any object that arises in one's body. The meditator should not ponder as to whether the light is still there. If he does so, he is likely to see it. If such a thought arises, he should disperse it by vigorously directing his attention to that very thought. While concentration is intense, not only a brilliant light but also several other extraordinary objects arise and may continue if one inclines to one or the other of them. If such inclination happens to arise, the meditator must notice it quickly. In some cases, even

if there is no such inclination towards any object in particular, faint objects appear one after the other like a train of railway carriages. The meditator should then respond to such visual images simply by "seeing, seeing," and each object will disappear. When the meditator's insight becomes weaker, the objects may become more distinct. Then, each of them must be noticed until the whole train of objects disappears finally.

One must recognize the fact that cherishing an inclination towards such phenomena as a brilliant light, and being attached to them, is a wrong attitude. The correct response that is in conformity with the path of insight is to notice these objects mindfully and with detachment until they disappear.<sup>10</sup> When the meditator continues to apply mindfulness to body-and-mind, his insight will grow in clarity. He will come to perceive more distinctly the arising and disappearing of the bodily and mental processes. He will come to know that each object arises at one place and on the very place it disappears. He will know that the previous occurrence is one thing and the succeeding occurrence is another. So, at every act of noticing, he comprehends the characteristics of impermanence, painfulness and egolessness. After thus contemplating for a considerable time, he may come to believe: "This is surely the best that can be attained. It can't be better." He becomes so satisfied with his progress that he is likely to pause and relax. He should, however, not relax at this stage, but go ahead with his practice of noticing the bodily and mental processes continuously for a still longer time.<sup>11</sup>

With the improvement of practice and when knowledge becomes more mature, the arising of the objects is no longer apparent to the meditator; he notices only their ceasing. They pass away swiftly. So also do the mental processes of noticing them. For instance, while noticing the rising of the abdomen, that movement vanishes in no time. And in the same manner vanishes the mental process of noticing that movement. Thus it will be clearly known to the meditator that both the rising and the

noticing vanish immediately, one after another. The same applies in the case of the falling of the abdomen, of sitting, bending or stretching of an arm or leg, stiffness in the limbs, and so on. The noticing of an object and the knowledge of its ceasing occur in quick succession. Some meditators perceive distinctly three phases: noticing an object, its ceasing, and the passing away of the consciousness that cognizes that ceasing—all in quick succession. However, it is sufficient to know, in pairwise sequence, the dissolution of an object and the passing away of the consciousness of noticing that dissolution.

When a meditator can clearly notice these pairs uninterruptedly, the particular features such as body, head, hand, leg are no longer apparent to him, and there appears to him the idea that everything is ceasing and vanishing. At this stage he is likely to feel that his contemplation is not up to the mark. But in fact, it is not so. Mind as a rule takes delight in dwelling on the sight of particular features and forms. Because of their absence, mind is wanting in satisfaction. As a matter of fact, it is the manifestation of the progress of insight. At the beginning, it is features that are clearly noticed first, but now their ceasing is noticed first, because of the progress. Only on repeated reflection, features appear again, but if they are not noticed the fact of dissolution reappears to remain. So one comes to know by direct experience the truth of the wise saying: "When a name or designation arises, a reality lies hidden; when a reality reveals itself, a name or designation disappears."

When the meditator notices the objects clearly, he thinks that his noticing are not close enough. In fact, the insight is so swift and clear that he comes to know even the momentary subconsciousness in between the processes of cognition. He intends to do something, for instance, bending or stretching an arm, and he readily notices that intention which thereby tends to fade away, with the result that he cannot bend or stretch for some time. In that event, he should switch his attention to contemplating the occurrences at one of the six sense

doors.

If the meditator extends his contemplation over the whole body, as usual, beginning with the noticing of the rising and the falling of the abdomen, he will soon gain momentum, and then he should continue noticing touching and knowing, or seeing and knowing, or hearing and knowing and so on, as one or the other occurs. While so doing, if he feels that he is either restless or tired, then he should revert to noticing the rising and falling of the abdomen. After some time, when he gains momentum, he should notice any object that arises in the whole body.

When he can contemplate well in such a spread out manner, even if he does not notice an object with vigor, he knows what he hears fades away, what he sees dissolves in broken parts, with no continuation between them. This is seeing things as they really are. Some meditators do not see clearly what is happening because the vanishing is so swift that they feel their eyesight is getting poorer or they are giddy. It is not so. They are simply lacking the power of cognition to notice what happens before and after, with the result that they do not see the features or forms. At such a time, they should relax and stop contemplating. But the bodily and mental processes continue to appear to them, and consciousness, of its own accord, continues to notice them. The meditator may decide to sleep, but he does not fall asleep; and yet he remains fit and alert. He need not worry about the loss of sleep, because on this account he will not feel unwell or fall ill. He should go ahead with noticing energetically and he will feel that his mind is quite capable to perceive the objects fully and clearly.

When engaged in noticing continuously both the dissolution of the objects and the act of knowing it, he reflects: "Even for the wink of an eye or a flash of lightning nothing lasts. One did not realize this before. As it ceased and vanished in the past so will it cease and vanish in the future." One must notice such a reflection.<sup>12</sup> Besides, in the midst of contemplations, the meditator is likely to have an awareness of fearfulness. He

reflects: "One enjoys life, not knowing the truth. Now that one knows the truth of continuous dissolution it is truly fearful. At every moment of dissolution one can die. The beginning of this life itself is fearful. So are the endless repetitions of the arisings. Fearful it is to feel that in the absence of real features and forms the arisings appear to be real. So are the efforts to arrest the changing phenomena for the sake of well-being and happiness. To be reborn is fearful in that it will be a recurrence of objects that are ceasing and vanishing always. Fearful indeed it is to be old, to die, to experience sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair." Such reflection should be noticed and then dismissed.

Then the meditator sees nothing to depend on and becomes as it were weakened in mind as well as in body. He is seized with dejection. He is no longer bright and spirited. But he should not despair. This condition of his is a sign of the progress of insight. It is nothing more than being unhappy at the awareness of fearfulness. He must notice such a reflection and as he continues to notice objects as they arise, one after another, this unhappy feeling will disappear soon. However, if he fails to contemplate for some time, then grief will assert itself and fear will overpower him. This kind of fear is not associated with insight. Therefore, care must be taken to prevent the oncoming of such undesirable fear by energetic contemplation.<sup>13</sup>

Again in the midst of noticing objects, he is likely to find faults, in this manner: "This body-and-mind process, being impermanent, is unsatisfactory. It was not a good thing to have been born. It is not good either to continue in existence. It is disappointing to see the appearance of seemingly definite features and forms of objects while in fact they are not realities. It is in vain that one makes efforts to seek well-being and happiness. Birth is not desirable. Dreadful are old age, death, lamentation, pain, grief and despair." A reflection of this nature must likewise be noticed.<sup>14</sup>

Then, one tends to feel that body-and-mind as the

object and the consciousness of noticing it are very crude, low or worthless. By noticing their arising and disappearing he gets sick of them. He might see his own body decaying and decomposing. He looks upon it as being very fragile.

At this stage, while the meditator is noticing all that arises in his body and mind he is getting disgusted with it. Although he cognizes clearly their dissolution by a series of good noticing he is no longer alert and bright. His contemplation is associated with disgust. So he becomes lazy to contemplate. But nevertheless he cannot refrain from contemplating. For example, it is like one who feels disgusted at every step when he has to walk on a muddy and dirty path and yet he cannot stop going. He cannot help but go on. At this time, he sees the human abode as being subject to the process of dissolution, and he does not relish the prospect of being reborn as a human being, man or woman, king or multimillionaire. He has the same feelings towards the celestial abodes.<sup>15</sup>

When through this knowledge he feels disgusted with regard to every formation noticed, there will arise in him a desire to forsake these formations or be delivered from them.<sup>16</sup> Seeing, hearing, touching, reflecting, standing, sitting, bending, stretching, noticing—he wishes to get rid of them all. He should notice this wishing. He now longs for the liberation from bodily and mental processes. He reflects: "Every time I notice them, I am meeting with repetitions, which are all bad. I had better stop noticing them." He should take notice of such a reflection.

Some meditators, when so reflecting, actually stop noticing the formations. Although they do so, the formations do not stop taking place, namely, rising, falling, bending, stretching, intending and so on. They go on as ever. Noticing of the distinct formations also continues. So, reflecting thus, he feels pleased: "Although I stop noticing the body-and-mind, formations are taking place all the same. They are arising, and consciousness of them is there, by itself. So liberation from them cannot be achieved by mere stopping to notice them. They cannot

be forsaken in this way. Noticing them as usual, the three characteristics of life will be fully comprehended and then no heed being given to them, equanimity will be gained. The end of these formations, *nirvana*, will be realized. Peace and bliss will come." So reflecting with delight, he continues to notice the formations. In the case of those meditators who are not capable of reflecting in this way, they continue their meditation once they become satisfied with the explanation of their teachers.

Soon after continuing meditation they gain momentum and at that time usually various painful feelings arise in some cases. This need not cause despair. It is only the manifestation of the characteristic inherent in this mass of suffering, as stated in the Commentary thus: "Seeing the five aggregates as painful, as a disease, a boil, as a dart, a calamity, an affliction, etc." If such painful feelings are not experienced, one of the forty characteristics of impermanence, suffering or no-self<sup>17</sup> will be apparent at every noticing. Although the meditator is properly noticing he feels that he is not doing well. He thinks that the consciousness of noticing and the object noticed are not close enough. This is because he is too eager to comprehend fully the nature of the three characteristics. Not satisfied with his contemplation he changes his posture often. While sitting, he thinks he will do better walking. While walking he wants to resume sitting. After he has sat down he changes the position of his limbs. He wants to go to another place; he wants to lie down. Although he makes these changes he cannot remain long in one particular position. Again, he becomes restless. But he should not despair. All this happens because he has come to realize the true nature of the formations, and also because he has not yet acquired the "knowledge of equanimity about formations." He is doing well and yet he feels otherwise. He should try to adhere to one posture, and he will find that he is comfortable in that posture. Continuing to notice the formations energetically, his mind will gradually become composed and bright. In the end his restless feelings will disappear

totally.<sup>18</sup>

When the "knowledge of equanimity about formations" becomes mature, the mind will be very clear and able to notice the formations very lucidly. Noticing runs smoothly as if no effort is required. Subtle formations, too, are noticed without effort. The true characteristics of impermanence, pain and no-self are becoming evident without any reflection. Attention is directed to a particular spot at any part of the body wherever a sensation occurs, but the feeling of touch is as smooth as that of cotton. Sometimes, the objects to be noticed in the whole body are so many that noticing has to be accelerated. Both body and mind appear to be pulling upwards. The objects being noticed become sparse and one can notice them easily and calmly. Sometimes the bodily formations disappear altogether leaving only the mental formations. Then the meditator will experience within himself a feeling of rapture as if enjoying a shower of tiny particles of water. He is also suffused with serenity. He might also see brightness like a clear sky. These marked experiences, however, do not influence him excessively. He is not overjoyed. But he still enjoys them. He must notice this enjoyment. He must also notice rapture, serenity and bright light. If they do not vanish when being noticed, he should pay no heed to them and notice any other object that arises.

At this stage he becomes satisfied with the knowledge that there is no I, mine, he or his, and that only formations arise; formations only, are cognizing formations. He also finds delight in noticing the objects one after another. He is not tired of noticing the objects one after another. He is not tired of noticing them for a long time. He is free from painful feelings. So whatever posture he chooses he can retain it long. Either sitting or lying he can go on contemplating for two or three hours without experiencing any discomfort, spending his time tirelessly. Intending to contemplate for a while, he may go on for two or three hours. Even after that time his posture is as firm as before.

At times formations arise swiftly and he is noticing them well. Then he may become anxious as to what would happen to him. He should notice such an anxiety. He feels he is doing well. He should notice this feeling. He looks forward to the progress of insight. He should notice this anticipation. He should notice steadily whatever arises. He should not put forth a special effort nor relax. In some cases, because of the anxiety, joy, attachment or anticipation, noticing becomes lax and retrogressive. Some who think that the goal is very near contemplate with great energy. While doing so, noticing becomes lax and retrogression sets in. This happens because a restless mind cannot concentrate properly on formations. So when noticing is in good swing the meditator must go on steadily; that means he should neither relax nor put forth special effort. If he does go on steadily, he will rapidly gain insight into the end of all the formations and realize *nirvana*. In the case of some meditators, they may, at this stage, rise higher and again fall several times. They should not give way to despair but instead hold fast to determination. Heed must be paid also to noticing whatever arises at all the six sense doors. However, when noticing is going on smoothly and calmly, contemplation in such a spread out manner is not possible. So this manner of noticing should begin with the gaining of the momentum in contemplation until it becomes smooth and calm.

If the meditator begins either with the rising and falling of the abdomen or with any other bodily and mental object, he will find that he is gaining momentum. And then the noticing will go on of its own accord smoothly and calmly. It will appear to him that he is watching with ease the ceasing and vanishing of the formations in a clear manner. At this point, his mind is quite free from all the defilements. However pleasant and inviting an object may be, it is no longer so to him. Again, however loathsome an object may be, it is no longer so to him. He simply sees, hears, smells, tastes, feels a touch or cognizes. With six kinds of equanimity described in the Texts he notices all the formations. He is

not even aware of the length of time he is engaged in contemplation. Nor does he reflect in any manner. But if he does not develop sufficient progress of insight to gain the "knowledge of the path and its fruition" (*magga* and *phala*) within two or three hours, concentration becomes slack and reflection sets in. On the other hand, if he is making good progress he may anticipate further advance. He will become so delighted with the result that he will experience a fall. Then he must dispel such an anticipation or reflection by directing bare noticing to it. A steady contemplation will achieve smooth progress again. But if sufficient strength of insight has not yet been achieved, concentration becomes slack again. In this way, some meditators progress and fall back several times. Those who are acquainted with the stages of the progress of insight by way of study (or by hearing about them) encounter such ups and downs. Hence it is not good for a pupil who meditates under the guidance of a teacher to get acquainted with these stages before meditation begins. But for the benefit of those who have to practice without the guidance of an experienced teacher, these stages have been indicated here.

In spite of such fluctuations in his progress the meditator must not allow himself to be overcome by disappointment or despair. He is now, as it were, at the threshold of *magga* and *phala* (the entry and the fruition of the stages of sainthood). As soon as the five faculties (*indriya*) of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom are developed in an even manner, he will soon reach *magga* and *phala* and realize *nirvana*.

### How Nirvana is Realized

The ups and downs of insight knowledge occurring in the aforesaid manner are comparable to a bird let loose from a sea-going ship. In ancient times the captain of a sea-going ship, finding it difficult to know whether the ship was approaching land, released a bird that he had taken with him. The bird flies in all four directions to look for a shore. Whenever it cannot find any land, it comes back to the ship. As long as insight knowledge is not mature enough to grow into path and fruition knowledge and thereby attain to the realization of *nirvana*, it becomes lax and retarded, just as the bird returns to the ship. When the bird sees land, it flies on in that direction without returning to the ship. Similarly, when insight knowledge is mature, on having become keen, strong and lucid, it will understand one of the formations, at one of the six sense doors, as being impermanent or painful or without self. That act of noticing any one characteristic out of the three which has a higher degree of lucidity and strength in its perfect understanding, becomes faster and manifests itself three or four times in rapid succession. Immediately after the last consciousness in this series of accelerated noticing has ceased, *magga* and *phala* (path and fruition) arises, realizing *nirvana*, the cessation of all formations.

The acts of noticing are now more lucid than the previous ones immediately before the realization. After the last act of noticing, the cessation of the formations and realization of *nirvana* become manifest. That is why