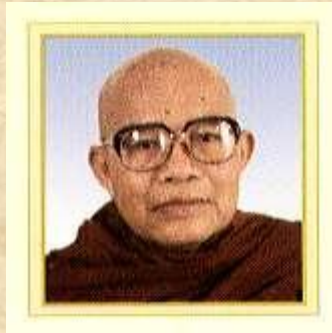


VIPASSANA MEDITATION

Dr. Rewata Dhamma



Buddhism and Buddhist Meditation has become a popular subject in the Western World. In the last twenty years the development of Buddha-Dhamma has accelerated greatly. Many westerners have found the application of the Buddha's teachings suitable for their daily lives, and one can find many groups, centres and institutions where the study of Buddhism and Buddhist Meditation and the Abhidhamma is pursued.

Today the world is very much involved with modern science and technology and because of great developments in these two fields modern society's living standards have risen rapidly and greatly. This over-development in the material aspect of modern life has proved, however, to be detrimental to society's spiritual development. No balance has been maintained between the two aspects and the development. Therefore, in as much as science and technology have contributed to progress on a material level this same progress has effected the growth of many mental diseases such as unhappiness, constant craving, depression, mental imbalance, nervous diseases, high blood pressure and migraine etc. Many Westerners are seeking an answer to these mental problems and are therefore taking a keen interest in the study of ancient Eastern cultures and philosophies and Buddhism is one of these. Moreover, Western psychotherapists have discovered the potential psychotherapeutic value in Buddhist psychology (the Abhidhamma). The Abhidhamma is the most ancient systematic psychology and philosophy which explains the very basis of human experiences and behaviour such as sensation (vedana), perception (sanna), emotions (sankhara), and consciousness (citta). Vipassana meditation is a very powerful and effective technique for mental discipline and it can be used in the

preliminary stages of psychotherapeutic treatment. Hence Western psychologists have taken a keen interest in the Abhidhamma and in Vipassana meditation.

Vipassana means to see things as they really are, not only as they seem to be. The technique of Vipassana is based on the Satipatthana Sutta. Satipatthana means the establishing of mindfulness. This is one of the oldest and most original teachings of the Buddha, and through it one can cultivate mindfulness and develop awareness. The proper practice and application of Vipassana meditation enables one to solve many problems and for this reason it has become a subject of interest and study for Western psychologists. This, however, is not the final goal. If one uses Vipassana meditation as a treatment for physical and mental ailments it is similar to using a certain medicine for a particular disease. The particular disease may be cured but one still has to face many other diseases as long as one remains in Samsara. Vipassana meditation, indeed, aims at the total purification of human beings and at the overcoming of sorrow, lamentation, the destruction of grief and suffering, the reaching of the right path and the attainment of the Nibbanic state. One who practises Vipassana meditation with this aim in mind, even before he attains the final goal, can achieve peace of mind, happiness, calmness, relaxation and tranquillity, and the ability to face life's daily problems and enjoy a corresponding greater degree of happiness in this very life here and now.

The Satipatthana Sutta on which Vipassana meditation is based is the oldest and most authoritative treatise on meditation among the Buddha's teachings. It has been highly respected and very widely practised for the last twenty-five centuries. It is beneficial for all kinds of individuals and many aspects of the practice can be selected by people to meet the needs of their individual temperaments. I would like to explain briefly the methods of practice most commonly used nowadays. There are four arousings or foundations of mindfulness and they are mindfulness of the body (*kayanupassana*), mindfulness of feeling (*vedananupassana*), mindfulness of consciousness (*Cittanupassana*) and mindfulness of mental objects (*dhammanupassana*). Here, mindfulness of the body includes mindfulness of the breath (*anapana*), mindfulness of the four postures (*iriyapatha*), mindfulness of the four kinds of clear comprehension (*sampajanna*), and mindfulness of the four elements of material qualities (*dhatumanasikara*).

Mindfulness of breath (*anapanasatj*) means awareness of respiration on the incoming and outgoing breaths. In the sutta it merely says how to arouse mindfulness on the object of meditation, that is "to arouse mindfulness in front" ("*satim upatthapetva*"). It is not made clear where to focus the attention, hence the yogi may wrongly think he must follow the breath inside. But the Buddha in the Patisambhidamagga said to focus the attention at the nostrils, at the point below the nostrils above the upper lip, ("*Nasikagge va mukkha-*

nimitte va sarmi upatthapetva"). "Where the breath is felt to pass in and out", is the precise point where the yogi should focus his attention so that awareness can be developed easily. When one breathes in long or short it is necessary to be aware of it just as it is. Thus the yogi develops awareness of the whole breath, ("*sabba kaya-patisam-vedi*"). Sometimes a yogi may mistakenly understand this instruction to mean that he has to experience the whole physical body whilst breathing in and out. But the body here means the breath. If one focuses his attention at the nostrils just above the upper lip one can be aware of the incoming and outgoing breath at the nostrils. Generally, the yogi will be aware of the whole breath process at that point, when his awareness and concentration have been developed to some extent. Moreover, his respiration will grow more subtle. At first the breath is gross and coarse but in as much as awareness is developed the breath becomes more and more subtle and a proper and more precise awareness of the breath arises. It is said in the sutta, "*Passambhayam kayasankharam*", "Calming the activity of the body", here the body again refers to the breath. Initially the breath is very strong and gross. In as much as awareness or concentration is developed to that extent does the breath become more calm and subtle. Sometimes, however, the breath is so subtle that the yogi has difficulty in being aware of the breath at all and consequently may feel as if the breath has disappeared or ceased.

Mindfulness of the four postures refers to awareness of the four modes of walking, sitting, standing and lying, when they occur. The four kinds of clear comprehension means awareness in going forwards, in going backwards, looking straight on and looking away. It includes awareness of the processes of walking, sitting, standing and lying and awareness of all other physical activities too. It means that awareness should be developed in detail and maintained from moment to -moment. Clear comprehension here means the discerning of things rightly, entirely, equally.

Mindfulness of the four elements of material qualities means to be aware of the four elements of which the body is composed. If one gives bare attention to the body one can experience heaviness and lightness, cohesion, heat and cold (temperature) and motion in the body. Then one can develop awareness of these four elements.

Mindfulness of feelings is as follows. There are many kinds of sensations in the body and they are both gross and subtle in type. They can be divided into two categories namely, bodily feelings (*kayikavedana*) and mental feelings (*cetasika vedana*). Bodily feelings are of three kinds, pleasure (*sukkha*), pain (*dukkha*) and neither pleasure nor pain (*adukkha-asukkha*). Mental feelings are also of three types, joy (*somanassa*), grief (*domanassa*) and neither joy nor grief (*upekkha*). Whatever feelings we experience we have to maintain a precise, moment-to-

moment awareness of them. All kinds of feeling, physical or mental, gross or subtle are included in the term *vedana*. It is essential to develop a precise awareness whenever any of these feelings arise, in as much as concentration and awareness are developed, that much is one able to develop awareness of the gross and subtle feelings and will experience them as they are and be able to note the arising of them from moment to moment.

Mindfulness of consciousness is mentioned in the Satipatthana Sutta and there it says that when consciousness arises with lust, hate and with delusion etc. one should be aware at the very moment when they arise. It is, however, difficult for the yogi to be aware of these consciousnesses all the time as these particular types of consciousness do not arise all the time. The best way to practise the mindfulness of consciousness is as follows. When, for example, the eye and visible object meet and seeing arises, one is to be aware of the seeing consciousness. In the same way one is to be aware when hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. When consciousness arises at the sense bases, it is important to know that awareness itself is consciousness. When this awareness arises it is important to be aware of that awareness. For example, when one is watching the incoming, and outgoing breaths one is to be aware not only of the incoming and outgoing breaths, but also one must note one's being aware of one's awareness of the breath going in and out. In this way, one can practise awareness of consciousness from moment to moment.

Mindfulness of mental objects refers to all kinds of mental and material objects, because of which consciousness arises. The sutta names many different kinds of mental objects such as the five hindrances (*nivarana*) - passion, ill-will, sloth and torpor, agitation, worry and doubt; the five aggregates of clinging (*upadanakkhandha*) - material form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness; the six external and internal bases (*ayatana*) - eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind, sight, sound, odour, taste, tangible objects and mental objects; the seven factors of Enlightenment (*bojjhanga*) - mindfulness, investigation, effort, joy, calmness, concentration and equanimity; and the four truths - suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering and the path leading to the cessation of suffering. These mental objects are nothing more than human experience in a mundane or supramundane state, and therefore all Vipassana meditation technique is based on the four arousings of mindfulness. According to tradition whoever starts to practise meditation has to begin with the meditation on the body and the feeling because mindfulness of consciousness and mental objects is so subtle that it is difficult for beginners to be aware of them. When they start to practise mindfulness of breathing, after a few days' practice as much as awareness and concentration are developed, to that extent one is able to be aware of the subtle sensations, consciousness (awareness) and mental objects.

There are four aspects of practice for the development of awareness and concentration and they are, *Anativattanattha*, *attha* meaning that the object and awareness of the object should arise together and precisely. Second is *ekarasattha*, meaning the function of the senses and the mind must be the same; for example, when one sees an object the first moment of seeing is just seeing, there is no sign, shape or form etc, seeing is reality (*paramattha*), this is the object of the seeing sense. In the same way, mind will accept seeing as seeing without any labelling. Therefore when seeing, hearing, feeling, thinking etc, arise one is to be aware just of the seeing, hearing, thinking etc. *Viriyavahanattha* is the third aspect and it is right effort in the sense of persistence and is the means by which the object and awareness arise together. *Asevanattha*, the fourth aspect means continual practice. The aforesaid three conditions will function properly when one practises again and again. If one follows these four aspects of practice one will be able to experience the arising and passing away of the objects from moment to moment, and none of them remain the same for two consecutive moments. Moreover because of this impermanence (*anicca*) there is unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and there is no permanent substance in any of these processes that can be called I or self (*atta*). Experience of these three characteristics of things is called Vipassana or Insight, seeing things as they really are and not only as they seem to be. At that moment the yogi will acquire an ability to accept things (*nama-rupa*) without concept or notion (*pannatti*), and can overcome like and dislike for them and remain with just the awareness of those processes. The Buddha wanted us to understand *anicca* by direct experience. If one understands *anicca* perfectly he understands *dukkha* as its sequel and realises *anatta* in its ultimate sense. This is the purpose of practising Vipassana meditation.

One who practises Vipassana properly will then gradually acquire three kinds of profound knowledge namely, *Natapanna* or autological knowledge, *tirapanna* or analytical knowledge and *pahanapanna* or dispelling knowledge. At first the Yogi realises the characteristics of the mental and physical processes with their proximate causes. This means that the yogi comes to know that this is materiality, whilst that is mentality and also breath awareness etc. This stage of realisation is called *natapanna*. After this stage comes the stage of understanding called *tiranapragna* in which the Yogi realises the three characteristics.

After this stage the Yogi will eliminate the concept of permanence and happiness (*nicca-sanna* and *sukkha-sanna*) and this stage is called *pahanapragna*. On the other hand the Yogi does realise at *natapragna* stage the characteristic of each mental and physical phenomenon he experiences. At the *tirapanna* stage he realises the common characteristics of *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering) and *anatta* (non-self). At

the *pahanapanna* stage he will eliminate all hallucinations, the concept of permanence together with concepts of happiness and self.

These profound knowledges belong to the mundane world and include all stages of Insight (*vipassana*). Anyone who acquires these stages of profound knowledge will come to experience the path (*magga*) and its fruition (*phala*), experience the Nibbanic peace within and enjoy the fruits of the path.

CONTENTMENT

contentment (*santutthita*) is a state of mind which arises when a person is satisfied or pleased with whatever possessions he obtains and with whatever circumstances in which he finds himself. It is a state of having few desires (*appicchata*). This quality was highly praised by the Buddha. In the Second Noble Truth the Buddha teaches us that the cause of *dukkha* (suffering) is *tanha* (thirst or craving). The unenlightened person brings unhappiness on himself by searching relentlessly for sense pleasures in the hope of finding happiness, seeking out ever new and more exciting forms of sensory enjoyment, or higher social status or influence.

The Buddha, however, pointed out that this thirst can never be fully and permanently satisfied. We cannot obtain everything we want. No sooner have we sated one sense desire than another one arises. He likened it to putting fuel on a burning fire; the fire will never say that it is satisfied and does not want any more. Furthermore, whatever we do obtain is subject to the universal law of *anicca* (impermanence) and will sooner or later change and decay, causing disappointment and frustration. So the way to find lasting happiness is not to chase endlessly after more fleeting or unobtainable sense pleasures, it is by dealing with desire at its root. This means developing contentment with whatever one has and not wanting something more. This frees us from the desire to obtain things, whether material objects such as money, or non-material ones such as power or reputation. A poor man may continually want more wealth and lives discontented, but even a rich man is not satisfied and wants still more money, so he too is not happy. Contentment is particularly stressed as an essential ingredient of the monk's way of life. The monk is trained to be satisfied with whatever he receives in the form of the four requisites - food, clothing, shelter and medicine. He should not want more or higher quality gifts than he receives, but be content with little.

Contentment is a state of mind which we can learn to cultivate by what the Buddha called, "guarding the doors of the senses," so that we remain unaffected by the sensory stimuli which continually bombard our senses. The eye seeks

pleasant sights, the ears seek pleasant sounds and so with all the six senses. But with training, we can learn to see the impermanent, unsatisfactory and impersonal nature of this process. This understanding leads to the overcoming of sense desires and the elimination of kama-raga, which is a fetter to our spiritual progress. In the Dhammapada it says Santutti paramam dhanam "Contentment is the greatest wealth" (v.204) and in the Mangala Sutta contentment is listed as one of the highest blessings (Sn.265)

Contentment is a way to face up to what the Buddha called the eight vicissitudes of life: praise and blame, fame and ill fame, gain and loss, and happiness and unhappiness. From time to time we shall all experience these. He advised us to accept them all with equanimity.

OBITUARIES

SAYADAW AGGAMAHA PANDITA DR. REWATA DHAMMA (1929 – 2004)

Dr. Rewata Dhamma passed away peacefully in Birmingham at the end of May and the Buddhist world mourns the loss of an outstanding scholar and tireless promoter of the Buddha's teachings. Dr. Rewata Dhamma was born into a Burmese peasant family and entered the local monastery as a novice monk. After higher ordination at the age of 20, he went on to study in India, obtaining an M.A. in Sanskrit in 1964 and Ph.D in 1967 from the Sanskrit University in Varanasi. It was there that he formed a life-long friendship with his fellow student, Most Ven. Dr. Vajiragnana.

In 1975 he came to the United Kingdom and in 1978 he set up the West Midlands Buddhist Centre in Birmingham. Continuing growth led to the founding of the Birmingham Buddhist Vihara in 1981, which has served as a focal point for Buddhists of all traditions since that time.

Dr. Rewata Dhamma was a renowned scholar and the author of many books including *The First Discourse of the Buddha* and *Emptying The Rose Apple Seat*. It is hoped that his last work, *The Process Consciousness and Matter*, will be published shortly. He was dedicated to spreading the Buddha's teachings and devoted much of his time to developing better inter-faith dialogue. He was admired and esteemed throughout the Buddhist world and much in demand to speak at conferences and international meetings.

May Dr. Rewata Dhamma attain the supreme bliss of Nibbana.