

Preface

Vipassana 101 is intended for beginners who start to have an interest in Vipassana, or Insight Meditation. It can be anyone who does not know anything at all about Vipassana, or anyone who has heard about Vipassana, but does not have a clear understanding of what it is and how to start practicing.

The brevity of this book may encourage those with no background on Vipassana since it can be read and finished in a short time. This book serves a purpose of being a jumpstart guide for first-timers, as well as a mean to give beginners a new perspective toward Vipassana in contrast to general beliefs. That is, to help them see Vipassana as something introverted instead of extroverted; easy instead of difficult; comfortable instead of stressful; fun instead of being a burden; understandable instead of doubtful, and simple instead of complex. You will begin to glimpse into what Vipassana practitioners have experienced, either in monasteries or in the forest, before you even take your eyes off these pages.

Eventhough the mission of this book is as mentioned above, please understand that one cannot suddenly transform into a Vipassana practitioner by merely reading any one particular idea of this book. But rest assured that, once you really understand what "Vipassana" is, even without any expectation, you will come to experience the miraculous calmness. Even without any striving, you will get to experience the wondrous taste of peace.

Just to be able to remain calm amidst a chaotic and over stimulated environment can be considered a major change of your life. Don't you agree?

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Chapter 1—What is Vipassana?

There are various ways to answer the question of “what is Vipassana?” Derived from the Pali language, Vipassana means “Insight.” But the best explanation is “seeing things as they truly are.”

Just try to think about the phrase “seeing things as they truly are.” What is your gut reaction? What were you thinking about as you read the phrase, “seeing things as they truly are?”

This book has been translated from Thai into English. You can read English, an undeniable fact. Therefore, saying that you are “thinking in English” would be correct. Congratulations to anyone who realizes this fact. You understand it correctly. **You are beginning to see things as they truly are already.**

Yet if one asks “Are you an American?,” it may become more complex than the previous statement, **as it depends on your perspective of what nationality you belong to.** If someone forces you to accept that you are an American, while your mind still wants to think that you are not, as you may have a stronger identification from a certain ethnicity, this means that you need to further explain the issue. And no matter how much you can come up with reasons or supporting evidence to back up your own concept, **the bottom line is that whatever you believe in will be equivalent to the reality you have.**

The question is if the fact is linked to the concept, isn't it true that there would not be any real seeing of things as they truly are? **Doesn't it mean that we have been living in a self-created virtual reality all along?** Each person is living in their own particular world of virtual-reality, without ever crossing into another boundary.

An argument, without any objective, in what is real and what is unreal would never be conclusive. Therefore, as one refers to the effort being put into one's practice to see things as they truly are, one needs to continue with the next question, "What is the purpose of such seeing?" Certain facts, like ethnicity may simply make one feel that "I am different from you" or "I am much better than you." Beyond that, things may get carried away to the point of ethnic cleansing, or it may just simply result in racism and the desire to harm others as we see these days.

The purpose of Vipassana is to see things as they truly are, in order to free oneself from all sorts of mind-luring attachments, and be liberated from being imprisoned by the dark force of delusion. We may not realize how dangerous this delusion is, until we have to struggle through some of the consequence that we have created. Isn't better off if we can realize the truth of life? For example, **we do not need to go to war based on the differences in our beliefs, or we do not have to suffer because of our thoughts.** This filters down to common daily problems. For example, by simply

leaving all the work behind at the office, **one does not have to bring the stress back home.**

Now we have a rough idea that Vipassana is to see things as they truly are in order to free oneself from clinging. And by freeing oneself from clinging, one does not have to suffer because of insubstantial matters. **The crucial question now becomes: What are the "things" that one should see as they truly are?** It is analogous to us realizing that it is now time to go to war to free ourselves from slavery, but then who are the enemies? Where are they? When will we meet them?

The answer for those who consider practicing Vipassana at home is that **"things" that we should see as they truly are, basically, are everything we cling to unnecessarily.** What are these unnecessary things that can turn around and hurt us as if they are our enemies? Try asking yourself whether you have experienced some of these situations:

Have you ever been cheated by someone out of a couple of dollars, yet it kept you thinking about it repeatedly? It can be said that not only you were cheated, but your own thoughts also stole your happiness.

Have you ever agreed to end your relationship with someone, but you were still jealous of your ex-lover, thinking about the past with regret, considering how happy he or she is with others?

Have you ever cheered for a team, but the other team won, which means you have also become a loser? But if you

look at it carefully you have not lost or gained anything along with the loser at all.

The above questions are just examples to demonstrate how unbelievably people suffer greatly from clinging to insubstantial matters. **But the frightening fact is that each day we may cling to as much as 9 unessential issues out of 10.**

Occasionally you may admit to yourself or complain to others that you were so stupid to be obsessed with insubstantial or trivial matters. Despite knowing that it was stupid, you could not stop thinking about it. You were unable to control it, and could not be aware of it.

Only if one truly understands Vipassana, one can save oneself from these clinging. To truly understand the meaning of Vipassana is the initial step. **And the first step is to accept it truthfully through investigation with a simple thought that anything that is not controllable according to our wish cannot be called ours.** For example, when we accept that thought is not ours, we would feel as if we have withdrawn over half of ourselves from suffering rooted in the thought, resulting in an instantaneous weakening of such thought.

It is like a single strand of hair obscuring the view of the whole mountain. And it is funny that we cannot see through the tricks, unable to grasp the situation. As we are unable to grasp it, we easily become victims that fall prey to this

phenomenon. Most people live to be a slave of their desires which are the cause of various degrees of suffering. And they may not be able to die peacefully because of the lifelong suffering that has erodes their hearts. **By understanding the meaning of Vipassana and realizing that by simply changing perspective of life toward the way of Vipassana, we do not need to go anywhere, or perform any ritual. Yet happiness has already replaced suffering, while we are alive and still breathing, before dying with ignorance, not knowing the cause of every new suffering.**

Conclusion

Vipassana is to see things as they truly are. Everything outside and inside ourselves is impermanent and actually uncontrollable according to our wish. So we should let go of mistakenly clinging which overwhelmingly causes us to suffer mentally in things that should not have concerned us. The job of Vipassana practitioners is simply to transform their perspective, from a demander, a desire-worshipping warrior, and an egotistical person, to an observer, a knower, and a person who fights for the truth as it truly appears.

Chapter 2—How to begin practicing Vipassana?

A good Vipassana practitioner starts with a right view. In our case, it means that whoever read Chapter 1, and is now able to give an answer to the question "What is Vipassana?" similar to what being concluded at the end of that chapter, then it can be said that he or she has already taken the first step.

Majority of people have an understanding that Vipassana practice is to sit with eyes closed and keeping a straight face, or to do a walking meditation along a monastery wall. Those are only the minority images that may stand out, but they still do not give us the whole picture. To the experts, true Vipassana may be practiced while putting food in one's mouth, or right after laughing one's head off, or even before one may not be done crying. **As soon as one is mindful and truly aware of the ongoing phenomena as impermanent and uncontrollable as one wish, at such a moment one is in Vipassana.**

When thinking of "becoming mindful," what does it remind you of? Taking examples from everyday life, one may think of being absent-minded while driving—when one started to be mindful of the fact, and stop daydreaming or thinking, when he/she was about to drive the car down a ditch. At this line of the book, please take a moment to remind yourself of what "being mindful" is like to you. Taking examples right now, you can experience the moment of mindfulness as you are aware of

yourself reading this book, or asking yourself this very question.

But even then, notice that when you started being aware that you were driving, or being aware after being asked to look back at yourself, **you still might not know how to look at your thoughts, in order to see them as something impermanent and uncontrollable.**

So, let's try something right now. Let's put the feeling of "not knowing where to look" into use. If at the moment you are puzzled, confused, or trying to figure out for an answer, then that is good, since it is exactly this feeling that we want.

The state of being confused, dull, not knowing of what to do, is called in technical term as "hindrance," which refers to mental obstacles that are barriers against our progression. The Buddha had given us guideline for dealing with it, which is to be mindful of the fact that our minds are currently besieged by doubt. And by being aware of such doubt, at that moment it can be said that you start to be mindful of things as they truly are. This is so because you start being aware that there is such a phenomenon (hindrance) existing.

But then, in order to see things as they truly are to the point where you can break free from doubt's influence, simply seeing the sustaining nature of doubt is not enough; **you must see the subsequent ceasing nature of doubt as well.**

So, now, to see the ceasing nature of doubt, the next question will be what to do so that the state of being doubtful

disappears. To answer the question, let's first take a breath.

At the point where you are able to tell yourself whether you are inhaling or exhaling, at that very second your doubt has already disappeared, and being replaced with mindfulness — being aware of inhaling or exhaling.

When your mindfulness slips away from being aware of the breath, doubt or eagerness to know resumes. A key point here is to differentiate between the state of doubt and the state of doubt-free.

By observing at the very second where you were able to tell yourself whether you were inhaling or exhaling, you will see that the state of doubt, which felt uncomfortable and uneasy, would change into a new state that felt worry-free, content, and happy. By just seeing this difference between the state of doubt and the state where you are temporarily doubt-free, it can be said that you already started **the initial phase of gaining mindfulness in Vipassana**. This is because when you started to feel that initially your mind was in one condition, but now it is in another one. In a way, this act of seeing is an indication that you started to see that your previous state of mind has already passed, ended, transformed, and is no longer in the present. **And by nature, whenever one's mind sees something disappearing, the mind will not see it as self-existing entity.**

This is a very interesting point to consider. **What does the mind see as a self-existing entity?** The answer is the ongoing present state that is apparent at this very moment.

For example, when contrasting between the state of doubt and the state of doubt-free, one would notice that the mind stopped clinging to the state of doubt in the past, **but instead it clings to the state of doubt free in the present as a self-existing entity.**

If you clearly understand this point and are able to observe the present nature of the mind that we are misperceiving, it means that you understand the principle of Vipassana rather well.

The next step that we need to know is **what could be the objects of observation within us?** The answer is that we can be aware of everything that is a part of our bodies and all things that are a nature of the mind with mindfulness in Vipassana.

But just being told only this much, you could still be confused. **You may be confused on how to observe everything within your body and mind. Should you observe it as a whole at once?** The answer is that you should analytically observe things separately because there is no such thing as seeing everything all together at once. Besides, it is impossible. Therefore, you should observe only whatever you can.

Next may be the most crucial question. **Which part should we observe first?** The Buddha advised us to be mindful of breathing the most. This is because breath is dependable. It can rescue mindfulness, nurture mindfulness,

as well as give rise to mindfulness so that we can realize the true nature of things as being impermanent.

As mentioned previously, just simply being aware of breathing in or breathing out can be called being mindful. Whenever you are mindful, doubt and distraction are being replaced temporarily. **Therefore, it is desirable to establish an aspiration in being aware of breathing in or breathing out as often as you can, in order for mindfulness to govern the mind, rather than letting doubt and distraction dominate.**

Whenever your mind is attentively mindful with your breath, you can feel that the experience of “disappearing from this world” is taking a shorter time, and your mind will be in the ready state of becoming more and more aware of the subtleties of various aspects of your body and mind.

The problem for most people is that we are unable to establish willingness or we have difficulty in prompting ourselves to be aware of our breath or the subtleties of various aspects of our body and mind. The next chapter will introduce some strategies to overcome this obstacle.

Conclusion

To start practicing Vipassana is not difficult. Once you understood what you should be reflecting your mind on for observation, it can be said that you are already on the right track, such as comparing the difference between the state of

doubt and the state of doubt-free. The energy-saving tool that will bring you out of the starting point is your breath. Simply being mindful of your breath for once is like having a dividing wall between the state of doubt and state of doubt-free for you to easily visualize. The following chapters will mention some basic strategies to help you to be able to practice Vipassana continuously and we will practice it together while reading this book!

Chapter 3—Training your breath to enhance mindfulness

In this chapter we will take our mindfulness to another level by observing the variations in our breath. You do not have to have any difficulty practicing Yoga. **Simply knowing how to observe your breath is enough.**

Let's do it right now. Ask yourself whether the very last breath was short or long. If you could not answer, that means your mindfulness was utilized in following your reading of this book not embedded with your breath and this breath tends to be short.

And now, at this moment, because you have been prompted to be aware of your breath, it will immediately become longer, even though you have not taken your eyes off the page. This is because when there is something that prompts you to be mindful of your breath, such mindfulness will condition your breath to be longer automatically. At this point let's observe the contrast that most people are aware of their breath whenever it is long, but seldom aware or even unaware of their breath whenever it is short.

While you are reading this line, is your breath long or short? Long is the sensation of drawing in a long deep breath, which may be the same or longer than the previous breath. Short is the feeling that your breath is shallow to the point of being difficult to observe. It is not a problem if you consciously draw in a deeper breath than usual when you were prompted—

but just one time—do not try to consecutively breathe deeply many times, because forcing yourself to breathe deeply or frequently will not enhance the quality of your mindfulness, but suppress it.

You were aware of whether your breath was long or short while reading the last paragraph. **Now you may ask yourself once more whether your breath is still prolonged or not while reading this paragraph.** Don't be dismayed if your breath is shorter, nor be glad if it is longer, **as there is no such thing as right or wrong with this method of practice. There is only seeing the ongoing phenomenon that one is experiencing truthfully.**

You will see that you could take a little break from reading to be aware of your breath, almost without taking your eyes off the pages. When you are aware of your breath, mindfulness may briefly disappear from the letters and the meaning of those words. But once you are aware of your breath, your eyesight would refocus on the content and you could understand the meaning of the book continuously like a flowing stream of water.

To be mindfully aware of your breath once in a while does not interfere with what you are doing. It is not doing two things at the very same time, which may disrupt your mindfulness. This is because even when working without being mindfully aware of one's breath, mindfulness of general population is always disruptive. If you practice by asking

yourself with ordinary mindfulness, e.g., by asking whether you are breathing long or short while reading each paragraph, you may set a pattern of being mindful while working. And with the very same method, it will greatly help you to improve the quality of your work.

In this paragraph, you should begin to sense the calmness and be more inspired by the awareness of your breath. **You should be especially aware of the long breath. And as you are experiencing such exceptional awareness, it will result in your body drawing in longer breaths than usual.**

This is the nature of how the mind works. By simply having a target for your mind to fix on, that target will become more obvious. This is because when the mind is focused on a certain thing, with time it will be aware of such thing more profoundly and extensively. Once mindfulness is heightened, it will condition your body to a finer quality accordingly, as you have experienced with the longer than usual breath.

Coming to this paragraph, **if your breath becomes shorter, yet you can still be clearly aware that your breath is in a shorter phase, it means that your mind has become a knower, and an observer of the whole breath body.** It means that while breathing out, you are mindfully aware of breathing out. Breathing in, you are mindfully aware of breathing in. Taking a long breath, you are mindfully aware of taking a long breath. Taking a short breath, you are mindfully aware of taking a short breath. **You will see that the nature of your mind has changed. That is, while**

breathing, you will be inwardly aware of the scope of your body more clearly and extensively.

At this point please observe that as you are breathing in your abdominal wall will expand a little. Then a suitable mindfulness will spontaneously let you know how far you should expand your abdominal wall to make it comfortable while taking a long breath, and how to release the air out of your chest to maintain the same level of comfort. **In this paragraph, please observe how short or long such a comfortable feeling would last.** Some may feel comfortable only while inhaling. Some may feel comfortable only while exhaling. Some may feel comfortable throughout the whole breath from the beginning of inhaling until the end of exhaling. **Do not concern on how long it lasts. Just clearly be aware of it as it truly is.**

Being aware of the comfort or discomfort “as it truly is” is considered having a clear awareness of something subtler than breath. This is another purpose of Vipassana. **That is to be mindful starting from something tangible to something subtle in order to be able to gain more realization that both tangible and subtle states would not last forever and we should not cling to them. They are but something to be mindfully aware of.**

Even after taking your eyes off this book, you can yet sense that mindfulness remains with you, as it is still anchoring with the awareness of the in-breath or the out-breath, **as well**

as being aware of how long such a comfortable feeling would last, which you may measure by counting the numbers of your breath. This means that your mindfulness has advanced from seeing physical phenomena according to its true nature to additionally seeing mental phenomena according to its true nature.

To practice Vipassana it is very important to realize that you have to be aware of both physical and mental phenomena. If you are only aware of physical phenomena, you just realize only a part of the truth, yet not realizing another part of the truth. On the contrary, if you are only aware of mental phenomena, it will not be enough either. You have to be aware of physical and mental phenomena to thoroughly realize the whole truth.

Good quality Vipassana should happen regularly. This simply means that as you keep practicing, it should happen often. **But do not try to force it to happen all the time, especially for a beginner. That is because it may kill the progression on the path of Vipassana from the initial step.** It is better to practice being aware as if playing with it in your spare time, but doing it frequently as if it were your most favorite hobby. This will be the underlying force to advance your practice. You will find yourself beginning to be more inspired with your breath, and be more observant towards your own physical and mental comfort. **It is because realizing with mindful awareness according to the true nature of things through an inward reflection within your body**

and mind would only result in benefit, and only lessen your habit of harming yourself and others. If you have not started practicing, you cannot picture the outcomes. Just simply try it. Within a few days, you will realize for yourself how valuable Vipassana is to your life.

The state of being clearly aware of breathing in or breathing out is neither boring nor uncomfortable. **If practicing while reading this chapter causes you to be bored or uncomfortable, just use this paragraph as a new starting point. Begin by observing whether your intention is too strong or you have too many expectations of your breath rather than just “gently being aware, like playing with it?”**

The mindfulness level that is right for the natural awareness of the present breath arises from reflection upon “being aware according to your capability.” Trying to be more aware than you possibly can result in being uncomfortable, feeling stressful, and being discouraged from pursuing your practice beyond this point.

On the contrary, if you start by gradually developing awareness from the phase suitable to your mindfulness, you will feel comfortable, calm, or even luminous—and having fun—which in turn will encourage you to make more effort to progress further. Even when you stop reading this book, you still will not want to quit.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have applied the context in this book to directly prompt you to be mindfully aware of your breath. According to the principle of Vipassana, being aware of your breath is not just a simple recognition that you are breathing, but an awareness of whether you are breathing out or in, long or short. Most people are aware of only the long breath, but not the short breath. This chapter has guided you to observe that if you could be aware of your breath even while you are taking a short breath, it will result in a new level of mindful awareness. **Such heightened mindful awareness which is capable of extensive coverage in various phenomena continuously, either long or short, gross or subtle, is what will advance you to higher levels of Vipassana.**

Chapter 4—Energy-saving technique for gaining continuity

In order to practice Vipassana continuously, the Buddha advised one to be aware of one's breath frequently, as breathing is something that must be ongoing 24 hours a day, and it is pure. The more one is aware of one's breath, the more mindfulness one would gain.

In the last chapter, you have practiced to be mindful with breathing in real time. You were reading and aware of your breath at the same time. You have already found out that it was simple because there were messages prompting you inwardly to be aware of what was going on within yourself.

The problem is that after taking your eyes off this book, there will be no messages to prompt you anymore. You must have enough determination to remind yourself in order to survive safely on the Vipassana path.

Another problem for a beginner is that if one puts too much effort to be aware of one's breath, one will be stressful, uncomfortable, or even having headache. Therefore, this chapter will introduce some strategies to assure that you will start practicing awareness of your breath easily and naturally, including preventing you from being stressful, confused, and discouraged. **That is we will practice being aware of our breath disconnectedly, or being aware of it once in a while.**

By using a timing device

Our present day technology used wisely can benefit every aspect of your life including practicing Vipassana. You may use a watch or a small digital clock that you can carry with you. Timing software on your computer can also be used while you are working. Set the alarm for every 2 minutes. Each time the alarm goes off, ask yourself whether you are breathing in, breathing out or have stopped breathing at that moment. Be aware of it as it truly is. Each time the alarm goes off, only be aware of your breath once. Do not try to be aware of it more than that.

It's normal for the beginner's mindfulness to be irregular, but an alarm clock maintains its regularity. Two minute intervals are frequent enough to generate mindfulness automatically, yet long enough to keep from creating stress. Not very long after you have practiced it, you will observe that you can be aware of your breath naturally without forcing it, or trying to calm your breath. **The result is that you will realize the true nature of your breath at that moment as it is.**

Apart from being aware of breathing in, breathing out, or not breathing, you should also observe whether you are happy or unhappy, including the various degrees of happiness or unhappiness, and observe whether it is more or less than those of the previous breathing during the two minutes earlier. **To**

be able to differentiate happiness and unhappiness between the two intervals will gradually create mindfulness in the way of Vipassana.

Promise yourself though, that you will not modify, adjust, or paint a picture of what is happening better than what it truly is, not only with your breath but also the degrees of happiness or unhappiness. If you are stressful, just accept that you are stressful. If you are comfortable, just perceive it truthfully that you are comfortable. Emphasize to yourself that **Vipassana is seeing things as they truly are in order to realize their impermanence. It is not seeing only what you love to keep for yourself, and discarding what you hate.**

The two minute timer will help your mindfulness to occur regularly, and help you to progress rapidly beyond imagination. Within one day, you will become a new person. You will stop being obsessed or pondering over insubstantial matters and you will begin to pay attention to things that are pure in their nature. Beginning with this two minutes exercise will not create stress, instead it will lead you to a stronger mindfulness.

Please observe that the more regularly you are mindful of your breath, it will be longer and more refined, and it will make you become more peaceful. If you feel that you begin to get used to it and it loses its effect, try to adjust the timing from every two minutes to every one minute. When you can be aware once every minute for half an hour, you may feel that the world is dramatically different and the timer becomes

excessive and no longer necessary. This is because your mindfulness begins to occur automatically.

By using sticky notes

Write down the phrase “be aware of your breath” on sticky notes and post them on many spots in your bedroom, at least two places or more. It will be best if you post them on the spots where you frequently, yet unintentionally, look at, like by a window or door.

You will find that the note “be aware of your breath” has a great influence upon your mind. **The note not only makes you conscious of your breath, but also acts as a powerful suggestion, prompting you to be mindfully aware of your breath.**

Don't forget to ask yourself while you are aware of your breath whether you are comfortable or uncomfortable. If you are comfortable, acknowledge being happy. If you are uncomfortable, acknowledge being unhappy. Try to compare the difference after each time seeing the notes. You will find out that your bedroom has been transformed into a productive environment, generating mindfulness so easily in just a few days.

By using posture

This technique may be slightly tougher than the previous ones, because there is no external tool to assist you beyond

your body. But the good thing is that posture is something already existing within you and we don't need to buy it from anywhere else.

A simple rule is **when changing posture from one position to another, breathe a little deeper than usual and contemplate that this is the nature of breathing in long, and this is the nature of breathing out long. Do it only once and try not to be aware beyond that.**

"Changing posture" means alternating positions between sitting, standing, walking and reclining, including turning oneself, or lying in a certain posture. For beginners, finer movements, such as moving arms, legs, hands, feet or head, are considered to be inconsequential, as they may be too subtle.

Once being aware of your breath, **you should further ask yourself about your overall feeling physically at that moment and whether you are comfortable or uncomfortable.** Only observe that much. If you feel indifferent, just take it as being comfortable. If you feel sluggish, you can count it as being uncomfortable. **Compare the difference between changing posture with comfortable breathing and changing posture with uncomfortable breathing.** Until you are more skillful at being mindful in such a way, this will result in more and more awareness of your body which will serve as a refuge.

By using the strong emotional reactions

Here we will consider anger and resentment which frequently happens to people in general many times a day. Yet it may be applicable to other reactions, such as, stress, worries, and having strong sensual desire at an inappropriate time.

When your mind reacts to things that come in contact with your eyes, or your ears, **first of all just accept it as it truly is that there is such an ongoing reactions. Never try to get rid of it. Then use your breath as a counter to see how many breaths it will take to calm your emotional reaction.**

At the beginning, you will feel incomplete, irritable, and bored like you are not in the mood to count your breath and see how many breaths it would take to calm your emotions. But once you do it, subsequent encounters will be much easier. When you have a strong mental reaction, you will start counting your breath automatically. **Upon reaching that point, you will find out that you start to take more interest in your breath even while there is no mental reaction.**

Conclusion

There are various strategies that can be used as energy-saving techniques to pull mindfulness out of a deep mental trench within our minds. This chapter only introduces some

practical techniques that most people can use. You will gain a fruitful result in a short time. When applying such techniques only for a couple days, your mindfulness will occur more frequently until you are amazed at how easy it is.

You will see that only being frequently mindfully aware of your breath, no matter which technique you use, your life will change from within. It will affect all of your thoughts and perspectives and it will be a stable foundation for you to progress towards advanced levels of Vipassana practice without having any difficulty.

Chapter 5—Turning problems into tools for mindfulness

Almost everybody has complex problems that cannot be solved. Here we will not emphasize the external problems which are the original sources of mental suffering. Instead, we will talk about “mental behavior” which is an internal problem. If we can solve the internal problem, no matter how serious the external problem is, it would ease your mental suffering. Or even if it is causing a great deal of mental suffering, you will not lose control of your mind and commit seriously bad acts like those who could not see their way out of their problem.

There are 5 types of mental behaviors with the potential to lead to “mental illness” as they can cause a great deal of suffering, as well as harm to one’s physical and mental health. They are arranged in the order of their harmful effects, or even critical danger to the present world, as follows.

- 1) Sexually perverted illness—being obsessed with sex, without restraint, and having the potential to commit sexual crimes.
- 2) Vindictive illness—being vengeful to the point of unconsciously willing to commit shocking homicide.
- 3) Depression illness—feeling depressed and discouraged to the point of not wanting to live any longer.
- 4) Anxiety neurosis illness—being stressed out to the point of insanity.

5) Indecisiveness illness—being uncertain and sloppy, to the point of being unable to succeed in any task.

If anybody has one of these illnesses in their nature, one can realize, even though it has not resulted in the most serious consequence of each type yet, that at least it may have already caused grief and suffering to some extent, on a daily basis or even on a moment-to-moment basis.

The bad habit or mental behavior, that occurs regularly, can never be differentiated into whether it is harming us in the worldly aspect or spiritual aspect. As long as the mental behavior still remains negative, then the worldly life will go downhill relentlessly, and the spiritual life will not progress any further as well.

If you try to be aware of your breath regularly as stated in the previous chapters until it becomes automatic to a certain level, you will be amazed that all sorts of mental problems have subsided without any need for medication, consulting of doctors, or waiting for the external problems to resolve.

However, for urban populations one of the mental problems which is very difficult to cure is anxiety and stress. One could not successfully get rid of the storm of distracting thoughts popping up in one's head, because one needs to work. Plus, available jobs nowadays are full of all sorts of obstacles. **If the way of thinking while you are working is incorrect, you will never be able to stop distracting thoughts with any kind of techniques.** This is because

most of your time is spent generating more distracting thoughts.

As already mentioned earlier in this chapter, we are going to observe the bad habits of the mind as being a problem. Now let's talk about using Vipassana to cure stress or anxiety neurosis. In theory, the following technique may seem to be too simple to believe that it could work. Yet in practice it may be more difficult to do. So please keep your mind unbiased and try to experiment with it many, many times. You will find for yourself that you do not need to study complex medical knowledge, like a psychiatrist, yet you can resolve your own stress and anxiety.

First of all, you need to seriously explore whether the way you think leads to stress. In other words, are you "stressed from thinking," or not? Try to address these issues.

- 1) Feeling uneasy while thinking, as if the more you think the more pressure you feel.
- 2) You finish thinking over a problem, yet still feel like it is unfinished.
- 3) You try to relax, yet you are still endlessly obsessed with thought.
- 4) Even a trivial matter can irritate you or at least make you feel tense.
- 5) Being impatient or always over-investing yourself in thinking above and beyond reasons.

After examining yourself, the more this list applies to you, the more stress you have. It does not matter how much it matches you, as the main thing is that you have realized that you are still a stressful person whenever you think, or in other words, the basis of your thought is stressful by nature.

Vipassana principle to solve the stressful thinking habit

1) First of all, you have to throw away your previous beliefs which you used to think that stress originates from the external encounter, such as pressure in the work place or at home. Just set yourself into a new perspective. **Make yourself believe that stress only derives from the way you think.** In order to narrow the scope of solving the problems, you need to correct only the nature of your thinking itself.

2) While you are thinking about something, please observe whether you are stressful or not—feeling mentally burdened, your eyebrows wrinkled, feeling tense in your forehead, chest getting tight, stiff in your hands and feet. Do you have any of the above symptoms, or all of them, or not? If there is any, stop thinking temporarily and turn your interest to being aware of the characteristic of the stress, which is happening in your body at the spot where you can perceive most clearly. Reflect upon it that it was something additional to the thought. **Do not try to do anything more than**

realizing this addition. Merely observe it. Then you will see that this additional entity has spontaneously disintegrated. It may take a short or long while, but it will eventually dissipate. Just try to do it wholeheartedly.

3) When you see the state of stress disappear, there will be a light feeling replacing that previous point of stress, plus you will be aware of your present posture, such as sitting or standing. **Try to be aware of the state of physical feeling lightness for a while to differentiate between the state of the heavy feeling of the previous moment and the state of the light feeling of the present moment.**

Reflecting upon the difference between the heavy feeling state and the light feeling state will play a very important role because the heavy feeling state and the light feeling state are what the mind would remember. Therefore, when one tries to observe it until gaining the perception capable of differentiating between the two states, the following result is the wisdom to see things as they truly are. That is, the heavy state is simply a condition of body and mind. The light state is also simply a condition of body and mind. There is no single particular condition that is permanently you. The more you realize the differences between such conditions, the more you will gain the wisdom to realize that every condition is not your true self-entity.

With only these three simple principles, when you are back thinking about your duty again with the more comfortable body and lighter mind, you will see that in the past you were making yourself stressful unnecessarily. Because we would be best to work or solve problems when our body and mind are clear, calm and peaceful. It is analogous to clearing the street to get ready for hundreds of speedy caravans of thoughts.

Try to practice step by step as advised in the following, as a basic exercise that one can experiment with while reading this book.

1) Observe your reading habit whether you are overly concentrating or feeling comfortable. If you are overly concentrating, you will see a limited number of letters. But if you feel comfortable, without frowning, are relaxing your forehead muscles, and keeping your neck and back straight, you can broaden your view. If you know your reading habit is overly concentrated. Initially, try to observe the nature of your staring, and stiffness of your body, and acknowledge it as a reflection of your mind which is heavily focusing unnecessary. Just stop reading to observe the residual tension in your mind. After a couple seconds you will feel a little lighter. Try to remember the nature of this feeling to use in further reading. If you become stressful again, then stop reading again. If you do it frequently, it will gradually become a new and permanent habit, but this cannot be done overnight or in a week. The

comfortable reading habit may be a good start and can be done immediately while you are reading at this very moment!

2) Walk into a place where there are trees, grass and clear weather. If the sky is clear, it would be perfect. And if you are able to walk bare foot on the soft grass, it would be wonderful. Then observe yourself what your mind is thinking while your eyes are looking at flowers, while your ears are listening to the birds singing, while your feet touch the grass. If the thought is not related to the flowers that you are seeing, the sound of birds that you are listening to, or the grass that you are touching, then it can be counted as the 'root' of stress. And without exception even the wish to have your loved one to appreciate the garden together can be the root of stress too. If your thought is simply on the color or the shape of flowers or trees, that is an example of being free of stress.

3) During the day, when you meet anyone, chatting about anything, or being alone and pondering over something, try to really observe whether in that moment you are stressful and then think, or think and then become more stressful, or free of stress and then think. **Just compare them frequently until you realize that stress is but an existing condition to be aware of. Free of stress or comfort is but another existing condition to be aware of. There is no particular condition that is your "self." You do not have to bury yourself in such a condition forever. Then it can be said that you know how to practice basic Vipassana.**

After practicing for a couple days, try to evaluate by investigating yourself with the following list. If these conditions appear "more frequently" or even "occur regularly," that means you are free of stress prior to thinking.

- 1) Feeling relaxed while thinking, as if the more you think the more you are mindfully aware.
- 2) When finish thinking, you feel lighthearted. Your job is finished with nothing left to do.
- 3) When you want to rest, you feel free and very comfortable.
- 4) Eventhough there is a serious problem to think about, your face is relaxed and your body remains comfortable.
- 5) Remain calm while waiting for a reasonable consequence appropriate to the time. And by using very little energy in thinking, you gain a perfect result.

If you evaluate yourself and find out that you have all these 5 characteristics, try to observe any small amount of stress or tension that may arise while you are absent-minded, **as well as reflect upon any trace of stress that may have sneaked in amidst a comfortable body and mind, that it is impermanent. When you are aware of it, it will normally dissipate. But once dissipated, you cannot make it disappear forever, because stress is not your "self," and your "self" are not stress.**

Conclusion

This chapter talks about the huge problem facing mankind of this current era which is stress, though in fact it can be solved easily. One does not need to attend a training course, nor ask for any remedy from anywhere else. Simply know how to think, and think proficiently from a relaxed nature. Within a few days, those horribly heavy burdens inside your mind will dissolve completely. The important thing is people do not know how to think from a relaxed nature. Therefore, one adds more stress to it constantly. One day it will blow up, which is regretful—as Thailand is a Buddhist country, having the practice of Vipassana which can help free people from stress so easily.

Chapter 6—Mental Reaction

Modern working and living conditions create over-stimulated mental activity for the average person.

Yet such unavoidable mental over-activity gives us an opportunity to use it as a tool in Vipassana **because one of the Vipassana principles is to observe that mental activity is something that arises temporarily. It arises then inevitably ceases to exist, unable to be sustained or expelled according to our wishes, since it is not ours.** It is different from a light bulb which can be turned on and off, as we wish, with a light switch.

One would not be able to use this as a tool for Vipassana without the over-activity problem and response. Therefore, instead of being sad and burdened by the mental reactions, one should be glad that this is a part of our human nature and we can acquire such a tool.

According to the principle of Vipassana, **you have to know that mental reaction is not something that arises by itself, because it did not exist previously as a self entity. But it results from the interaction between the mind and “something else” apart from the mind.** For example, the letters on this very line can be counted as a kind of mental stimulus as long as your eyes still keep on glancing and understanding what the book is trying to communicate to you.

You will have a better understanding of the idea “something else apart from the mind,” if you realize that **even stream of thought can be counted as internal mental stimulus**. This is the truth. Internal thought is actually something apart from the presently conscious mind. The conscious mind perceives or is stirred by the rippling waves of these thoughts.

Therefore, eventhough you step out of your office or are isolated from all of your loved ones or enemies, do not think that there will not be any mental stimulus to give rise to reaction. **Thought, which follows you everywhere, is the most frequent encounter to your mind in both positive and negative aspects. Therefore, if you can keep observing the reaction resulting from a thought encountering your mind, it means you have practiced Vipassana very competently.**

In this chapter, please try to observe **only the prominent mental reactions** coming from each of your senses: encountering form, color, or shape; ears encountering sound; nose encountering scent; tongue encountering flavor of food, or drinks; body encountering rough, or soft objects; and mind encountering simple, or stressful thought.

The phrase “prominent mental reaction” is abbreviated for easy recognition by simply using the terms as “like” and “dislike”—the two fundamental impulses. Please observe that when we have a special

feeling towards something, its mental meaning can only be converted into words simply as "like" or "dislike."

If one observes it in more detail, one may profoundly realize that only like and dislike may amazingly be differentiated into innumerable defilements. That is "like" will attract a flow of desire to acquire it as ours. Such mental flow is in the same category as lust or greed. On the other hand, "dislike" will generate a repulsive flow of desire to expel it from our senses. Such mental flow is in the same category as hatred or destructive thought.

Both like and dislike can be categorized as delusion.

Our minds have been unwarily shrouded with delusion. It is because such like and dislike are fueling us every single day.

Therefore, if one carefully observes like and dislike disintegrating by nature, one's mind will be released from all sorts of luring delusion, until finally it is extinguished.

An example is when you are startled in the middle of the night by the barking sound of a dog. If you only have "dislike" in the sound encountering your ears, you will be stressful and unable to fall asleep for hours because of resentment. Instead, you can use the barking sound of the dog as a tool to develop mindfulness, with a perspective that it is simply the sound encountering your eardrums, but not your "self." Then try to observe your mind. You will see that the detested reaction decreases. As time passes, your mind will be more indifferent,

despite that the barking sound is still as loud as it was previously. When mindfulness has fully developed, you would normally see such indifference arises. Even if the barking sound of the dog continues in the following nights, developing mindfulness will guard the mind from being startled by the barking. You may be awake just a little, and then would be indifferent towards the sound instead of being annoyed, and such indifference would let one fall back asleep fairly well. It is clearly a great benefit to observe mental reaction to the point of being indifferent.

In the beginning of the basic practice, try to be an observer who knows the length of duration of any mental reaction. **You can expect that all kinds of mental reaction have their own length of duration, depending on the counted number of the in-and-out breaths.** That is, when you like or dislike something, you may start counting such mental reaction arising with the first breath, and keep observing to see how many breaths it will take for such reaction to dissipate.

At the beginning of your practice, you may find that as soon as you are aware of your breath, like and dislike will extinguish instantaneously and transform into oppression because you are forcing your mind to be aware of the in-and-out breath instead. Yet with repeated practice, as if playing with it, you will be accustomed to it and realize that like and dislike are but mental reactions. It is internal and must be

realized only through the mind, while awareness of the breath is something external and is realized through the body.

When your mindful awareness can categorily differentiate, internal and external reactions will not interfere with each other. Mental reaction arising internally will express itself interiorly. Breath arising externally will express itself exteriorly. At this point, you will be aware of things without oppression, **and most importantly you will not rush to speak or do things under the influence of like and dislike at that moment.**

People in general cannot see like and dislike within their minds, because when like and dislike occur it becomes a chain reaction resulting in words and deeds according to one's desire instantaneously. But if you train to use your breath as a tool measuring how long like or dislike lasts, you will start to know how to be aware of like or dislike. And once you become skillful, you no longer need to rely on the breath as a tool, but can instantly observe the arising and ceasing of like and dislike.

Conclusion

At this point, you will see that when you truly understand Vipassana, you may practice it all the time. Even when others think that you are relaxing and look at stars in the sky, or even while you are chatting and laughing with friends. You don't have to only practice Vipassana in a monastery or in a special room for meditation.

Chapter 7— Vipassana 101 evaluation

Vipassana 101 points out that a good Vipassana practitioner must not be deluded and unaware, as most people have been for eons. One should establish a solid foundation for mindfulness, i.e., by embedding our mindfulness with the awareness of our ongoing and continuous breath.

Then, this course points out that a fruitful and encouraging Vipassana should be able to solve your own problems, e.g. if you are stressful, worried, and distracted, you will feel better, think less, be able to stop distractions as you wish. You will see no reason to secure the negative thoughts or uselessly lock them up in your head.

Finally, it points out that you should observe all mental reactions according to their nature of arising, sustaining, and vanishing patterns—not as a self-entity that you should cling to. The ultimate truth is the absolute emptiness. Things are arising and vanishing, arising and vanishing, arising and vanishing all the time. Whenever you experience this, you have already started practicing Vipassana fully.

Some may think that this book is just for beginners in Vipassana practice. Therefore it is impossible to fully practice Vipassana. But in fact whether you are a beginner or an advanced Vipassana practitioner, it is not based on how many times you read this book, or how many books you have sought out to read. **The decisive criterion is in your mind, whether you see your body and mind as they truly are or**

not—if you can see them moment to moment continuously that everything in this body and mind typically arises and then vanishes. You are not attached to any of them, either “form” [physical phenomena] or “name” [mental phenomena], as a self-existing entity, with less and less clinging to things, in proclaiming that this is yours, and that is yours. These are the decisive factors indicating that you are already a full Vipassana practitioner.

However, before reaching that point, the following guidelines can be used to investigate yourself whether your behavior will lead you to be a Vipassana practitioner or not. For convenience and avoiding doubt about whether you have practiced on the right or wrong path, please use such evidence for reassurance. The more “yes” answers you have, the closer you are to your goal.

1) When you have free time, e.g., waiting for someone for hours, you are not absent minded or day-dreaming, thinking about something of the past which is gone already, or pondering about something of the future which is still farther ahead, but instead you only think about your breath. You are inspired with your breath because it makes you happy in the present, and not forcing yourself to do it in order to be a Vipassana practitioner.

2) When someone makes you angry, you are aware truthfully that you are angry. But instead of staring at him or

her with an angry look, you look at your own anger within your mind objectively. That is, you do not think about him/her or you as being right or wrong. You are only concerned with your mind in anger, in order to see the true nature that anger is like a flashing flame expressing its impermanence for you to see once again.

3) As time passes, you begin to realize that you are monitoring and aware of every movement, every state of mind, in order to see that all of those things are impermanent, not subject to your control, even when using the toilet!

Such guidelines of self-observation would indicate that you have started practicing Vipassana. The followings are the minor details, which you may find occurring spontaneously after practicing Vipassana for a while.

1) When looking up to the sky, seeing cloud or stars, instead of having a romantic imagination, you simply see steady state of mental serenity, without clinging to the feeling of happiness, arising from the state of serenity.

2) When your ego and conceit arise as "you" or "I", with a strong sense of discrimination, you would hate what is going on within your mind, analogous to a person with keen eyes seeing innumerable parasites or fleas attached to one's body.

3) When you see your own mistakes arising from thinking, speaking or doing anything, and then realize that your mind has a nature of being unwholesome, such as being indignant, feeling gloomy, being manic, anxious, etc., then you become

mindful and remorseful in a new way. That is you do not feel sad, or keep blaming yourself. Instead you realize that unwholesomeness is simply a dark shadow casting on your mind. Simply realize that such a dark shadow is not your "self." Once it arises, it will have to eventually disintegrate, and you would gain the positive sense of voidness instead.

4) When you persistently continue to be a Vipassana practitioner, as days pass, voidness would expand itself exponentially. That is when seeing any mental phenomenon vanishing, your mind continuously gains more ground of emptiness and you have constantly gained more genuine happiness.

5) When stopping your habit of thinking that you know more than others and know how other people are, but instead you look at yourself and realize that you do not truly know much about yourself, until finally a new habit is gradually being cultivated. That is you investigating yourself more than prying into other people's business.

6) When fear arises, you realize that fear is simply another mental phenomenon that lures you to think that "you yourself" are being the unfortunate person. Yet when closely observed through Vipassana, you realize instead that there is only fear left. There is no such unfortunate person to be found anywhere.

7) When you realize that the extreme foible is absentmindedness or unawareness.

8) When you feel that the past is simply a memory, and you also feel that memory is like a candle light, that slowly dims into darkness.

9) When you notice that some of your behavior has changed, i.e., from being used to talking to yourself frequently, or even up to fighting a heavy war of words in your head, to resting quietly with the inner peace instead.

10) When someone told you that you are luminous, you feel that he or she is talking about the state of being luminous, not talking about you yourself.

11) When you are truly realize that you are unlike other surrounding people who do not practice Vipassana, yet you do not see yourself different from them. Because everyone by nature is the same as something that arises, eventually must disintegrate.

12) When someone introduces you to other people as a "Vipassana practitioner," your mind simply denies it and does not feel proud, does not think that it is an honor, and realizes that even "being a Vipassana practitioner" is not your true self .

Conclusion

The best dharma teaching clearly appears in our mindfulness at the present moment—anything demonstrating that once it arises, it must eventually

vanish. Once realized, it relinquishes the mind from clinging.

Such a thing is more interesting to see than all of the wonders of the world combined.

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