

## GROWING AWARENESS OF INSIGHT

By Yew Sim Hong

*Meditation is gaining respectability among many people partly because it is being accepted by modern science as a useful aid in healing the sick. The Buddha has explained the power of meditation in various ways. While other religionists explain the effects of meditation in terms of the manifestation of a god, for Buddhists it is nothing more than the power of mind over matter. In this article the writer, a Malaysian, describes just one such 'Miracle', complete with shining lights and so on which occurred to him through the power of meditation.*

*Ed.*

Life is not easy with its vicissitudes, uncertainty and misery. If life is ideal, perfect and free from suffering it would have served no purpose at all for the Buddha to seek liberation in a sublime and blissful state. As it is not so in the turmoil of the worldly life conditioned by suffering in the samsaric existence, the Buddha found a solution, a way to the non-conditioned, desireless and deathless state of *Nibbana*. The wisdom to find release is in man's mind and the key to it is mindfulness, the way to *Vipassana* meditation. *Ekyano maggo*, the one and only way, said the Buddha. There is no other way. It may be a tough and grueling task but the labour is worth the pain if liberation is the goal.

The initial groundwork of a meditator is to know something about mindfulness. Rising and falling! What is this recurring motion of the rise and fall, the progress of which may ultimately help the yogi gain insight knowledge? The rise and fall is a natural function of the physical body relating to the abdominal motion which keeps going freely on its own. When mindfulness is brought to work in harness with this material body process, all that the yogi has to do is to carry on the awareness in noting dispassionately the rising and falling motion that is taking place. He will be closely following the path of the physical rise and fall in the manner they occur in the pairwise nature of co-ordination. He begins to experience that the mind is being drawn to a conscious noting of the rise and fall due to the air motion that is in progress. The nature of this endeavour conveys a sense

of feeling of the pushing and pulling of air in motion within the abdomen. The yogi is now fully aware of the presence of the air element moving forward and receding which gives him a sense of the rise and fall occurring within his body system. The mind will hardly stray if the yogi's concentration is fairly good so long as he is actively engaged noting the rise and fall.

The yogi who is sincere in his search for reality through *Vipassana* meditation is able to understand the nature of his physical and mental life. He knows the abdominal motion has a physical base which is essentially the biological chemistry composition that makes up his physical life. The mind is able to identify the arising object through its sense base. So in the nature of things where the physical and mental phenomena associate and work as a unit, the yogi will be aware of a situation between the natural state of matter and the diverse element of consciousness. Now taking the occurring phenomena apart in respect of the physical motion of rise and fall and the consciousness arising due to the cause of the abdominal motion, it is apparent to the yogi that his physical body and the conscious mind arise in coming together and passing away together in succession to the further new series of rise and fall processes. He will have eventually gained an insight into the reality of mind and matter identity. The characteristic of *nama rupa* alternately breaking up begin to take shape and influence his life. They come in pairs and disappear in pairs from birth to death (*udayabbaya*) in every changing conscious moment as long as life continues. Also the consistent cessation of the life element while gaining a momentary existence becomes more resolute and prominent to be denied.

If the rise and fall movement is closely watched, the formation is seen to last only a few, brief seconds having the nature of a bubble, shortly coming to life and bursting to nothingness. Seen in one vivid cycle of life it cannot truly be perceived to have any stability that can be regarded as satisfactory to life. The incoming and outgoing of a perceptible life with its nature of change is a revealing experience that life after all is steeped in an ego-self and is a deception. Since life continues in this way the yogi fails to see the implication of this orderly formation though it is perpetually breaking up in the rise and fall when observed in the moment of mindfulness. The delusion about having a permanent entity begins to break down bit by bit while he has insight into the quality of *nama rupa* in his momentary conscious life.

Death is a natural function of life since all life ends in death. When this

happens in the final moment of rise and fall it will be seen that our earthly life finally come to an end. How much we may desperately cling to this human life, the saddest moment is when we realise the dearest and loved thing called life has ceased, when so much precious living could still continue. The delusion all of us wish to have of a long and unending basic life will never be however much we want it to be. It can only take a growing awareness of insight into each phase of the rise and fall element of life for the yogi to realise the transient nature of a mortal life each one of us goes through. The insight into the reality of the conditioned psycho-physical formations he has gained should be reviewed in constant awareness without relaxing. Due attention must be given and the yogi must continue to keep viewing rightly with wisdom the arising phenomena about this illusory life at all material times. Evidence of the truth of cessation is abundant to a yogi of progressive insight.

If the yogi is mindful about the truth of *anatta* (non self) as well as its fleeting nature his approach to life will begin to have a purpose and he will be less inclined toward survival that is burdened with greed, hatred and ignorance. Liberation to the yogi is a possibility but he has to give it a try. He has to develop a strong determined base of mindfulness and reduce conflict and worldly cares by not clinging to material gains. Insight is attainable for the human mind. The mind can be changed by following a course of devotion and strong spiritual aspiration towards what is called the path of Ariyan attainment. This is not a difficult task for any one with perseverance, vision and conviction.

A further awareness of the ceaseless change involved in the cycles of rise and fall appear to the yogi to be a persistent feature and he may sometimes harbour a feeling of boredom and frustration. He is now at the crossroads and may lose interest and be tempted to refuse to carry on any further. A monotonous and uneventful rise and fall of the *Vipassana* meditation will appear to have served no special purpose. He will see his dream of liberation fading away. The yogi is unaware he is being trapped and disillusioned by a perverted view of seeing reality as unreality. He is urged at this crucial stage to continue with greater zeal and effort. It is only natural for his mind to stray on another path of delusion to increase the desire and craving for existence.

The yogi may often be confronted with problems which make him restless and agitated. A long line of thoughts, unruly and aggressive, may appear

unsurmountable. These thoughts seem to have a virtual control over him. Regarding the nature of our mind the Buddha has said: 'No other thing do I know, O monk, that so quickly changes as the mind; so much so that it is not easy to give an illustration for the mind's quick change.' When thoughts are persistent in the mind it is essential for the yogi to be watchful and note with care the design and object of each thought that it is straying, desiring, wandering, wishing, worrying or resolving. He must treat these thoughts as mental objects. Regard the thinking only as thinking. Do not go further beyond this point. Do not get lost in a current state of thoughts either in joy, happiness or sorrow, or whatever running thoughts which may occur at the moment. A well balanced mindfulness alone can neutralise the arising of thoughts significantly. The element of thought will subside as is the nature of thought to come and go in a matter of seconds. There are tangible signs that thoughts can be contained by the overpowering factor of mindfulness. No yogi can afford to be unmindful but he must remain noting with mindfulness all the time when his meditation is in progress. In this way thoughts cannot penetrate his endeavour with ease. Even the arising of a thought can be determined by a watchful mind at the source of its rise. No yogi should take things easy and be flippant about the power of mindfulness. Also he must prevent his mind from gaining access to thought formations in the form of its passion and lust, ill-will sloth and torpor, restlessness and agitation as well as doubt. What he can do is to keep watching and awareness will take care of the situation. Be mindful however restive the mind is. The process of thoughts will stop taking effect.

Pain is inevitable and is an integral part of the body system. We have to learn to live with it though with a difference. Pain in reality is an ally. 'Treat it as a friend' the Sayadaw has said. We have a good reason to believe that the element of pain can provide us some knowledge of the fundamental basis of dukkha (*suffering*) so that we may be able to assess and appreciate the first Noble Truth. The conditioned state of the cause of suffering and its attendant formations in the arising and cessation may also give us insight into the second and third Noble Truths. By pursuing actively and faithfully the *Vipassana* meditation we make a decisive move towards the fourth Noble Truth. The Eightfold Noble path can serve us ideally in our search for liberation.

When a yogi is afflicted with great pain and is not mindful of the situation, he is suffering the agony of mental pain as well. As a result he has a desire for some relief from his mental pain due to an ignorance of phenomenal

things. That yogi is, therefore, a victim of his delusion (*avijja*) in submitting himself to suffer a mental pain (*domanassa*) and allowing himself to crave (*tanha*) for a relief of his physical pain (*dukkha*). In the critical moment of unmindfulness it is dreadful to think that the yogi in the distress of his *dukkha* (*suffering*) has willfully exposed himself to *domanassa* (*mental pain*), *tanha* (*craving*) and *avijja* (*ignorance*). He has missed the vital cue of his *Vipassana* meditation in bypassing the *nama rupa* reality of life. Finally, since the element of pain, like everything else, has the nature of Impermanence, it can be seen to have arisen and will in the course of time come to an end. It appears to stay only in the agony of its uprising and it remains unendurable thus giving the yogi a sense of suffering.

### **A Personal Experience**

The mass of suffering was unbearable. My only hope for a solution was patience and Fortitude serving as instrument of my aim. I had merely to deal from pain to pain, its rising and falling noting with increased mindfulness. As hours rolled by matters slightly improved where the throbbing pain in the head grew less in pressure. Each beat of pain passed on followed by the next arising, and a slow process appeared in the easing of pain somewhat. In the progress following a dull pain ensued. As relief was seen around the corner another violent pain began somewhere in the region of my abdomen which was initially felt earlier but was ignored. I had no choice then but to pick one from the other, both of which were equally demanding. It was an obvious course for me to presently cope with the abdominal pain. I felt it was too much for me to make under a single attempt of mindfulness. However, I realised it was worth the effort when I reflected on the words of the Buddha, that while the body was sick, the mind must not also be sick. Also in the process I kept close guard against losing mindfulness to the delusion of mental suffering (*domanassa*). It had a wondrous, psychological effect on an already sick man. In each passing moment the painful sensation grew stronger. Time to me was an eternity and the burden of pain a constant companion. I laboured to keep a cool front and my mindfulness evenly on the growing sensation of pain solely to allow it to permeate the region of its arising.

I perceived at that moment the element of pain however stressful remained only as the sensual object of the conscious mind. The physical pain was the prime mover and the mind being consciously affected noting the distress of its arising from moment to moment. When pain ceased even for a brief

duration consciousness also ceased together. It was the hour that the mind in its own element became isolated, detached and free. I was deeply mindful when pain at the moment of perception appeared likewise as pain only. An intermittent relief was felt at each cessation. As hours dragged on even in the agony of its arising the striking pain was bearable. With the insight into its nature pain pulsed from a high to low intensity in a matter of seconds. The ensuing pain began then next to cease momentarily. The repetition of this occurrence seemed to be endless. The conscious mind remained firmly aware on the point of physical pain.

It was an exhausting and tormenting day. Towards the evening when my meditation was in progress and concentration strong and deep, a strange vision surprised me. As a result I recovered and was well again. The incidence of the phenomenon I experienced was not only inconceivable but unexplainable. It came with astonishing speed and lightness. In a vivid, magic moment of time a scene of empty space appeared and a small, silver-grey screen was seen suspended in the void. In a moment I felt within my body something massive and solid gushing out forcefully and splashing on the screen which became alive with a glow of shimmering light. A clear outline of an object like a comet emerged in full view and in it all my physical pain was fully lodged. A final brilliance of light took flight into the space beyond. And along with it the stress and misery of all my ailments also ceased. A vision that came out of the realm of fantasy was seen as a reality.

The Sayadaw said this was truly a case where a physical pain was known to manifest itself some other part within or outside the body. The yogi had reached a stage which had surpassed the normal range of conscious mind. It was a process of the natural phenomenon which manifested itself in the somewhat strange and bizarre form of the vision I had experienced. It is important to note that no two yogis having reached the same level of penetrative insight will share identical results. As concentration on the ensuing physical pain gets deeper in penetration and intuitive perception develops finally a manifestation gradually transcends the state of normal experience. The yogi is expected to maintain his bare awareness absolutely throughout this crucial stage for him to keep a fixed and predetermined course while his concentration towards a penetrative insight is building up. He must not be tempted at any passing moment to have a wish or desire, or even to think about anything else that is mundane. He has to renounce his dream of material pursuit for a rewarding return. The Sayadaw also advised

that when an insight about the phenomenon is gained it should indicate clearly and unmistakably a sign of the order of its reality or a working "formula" in the nature of characteristic, function and manifestation. That yogi can then take to heart that he is not straying from reality but experiencing something in accordance with the attainment of his level of insight.

*[Readers are invited to read **Meditation the Only Way** by Ven. K. Sri Dhammananda for more information on this subject.]*