

A discourse on

# ARIYĀVĀSA SUTTA

by

The Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw  
of  
Burma



An Abridged Translation by U Aye Maung



*Buddha Sāsana Nuggaha Organization  
Mahasi Translation Committee, Rangoon.*

**An Abridged Translation of  
The Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw's**

**DISCOURSE ON  
ARIYAVASA SUTTA**

**Foreword by U Nyi Nyi**

**Translated by U Aye Maung**

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# FOREWORD

What follows is an abbreviated English translation of a talk by the Venerable Mahasi Sayadaw of Burma on the *Ariyavāsa Sutta* (Discourse on the Abode of the Noble Ones). The *sutta* was preached by the Buddha himself and takes its name from the fact that the Ariyas, that is, the Noble Ones at their respective stages on the Eightfold Path, have dwelt in the past, are dwelling in the present, and will go on dwelling in the future, in a safe haven of their own, ever mindful of and practising the *Ariyavāsa dhammas* (norms or ideals). These *dhammas*, are ten in number and may be enumerated as: (1) doing away with the five *angas* (limbs or members), (2) accomplishment or fulfilment of the six *angas*, (3) presence of a sentinel at the gate, (4) possession of the four dependences, (5) renunciation of religious beliefs external to the Buddhist faith, (6) giving up all forms of seeking, (7) unclouded (clear) aspiration, (8) attainment of the "breathless" state (the fourth *jhanic* state), (9) a mind free from defilements, and (10) the knowledge that liberates



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Of these ten, Nos. (3), (9) and (10) are the most important from the point of view of Buddhist awakening and Deliverance. They are concerned with the principles and practice of *Satipaṭṭhānā Vipassan* (Insight) Meditation, a subject to the active promotion of which the Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw has so selflessly dedicated his life and labour. The sentinel at the gate of No. (3) is none other than Mindfulness, the very foundation of *Satipaṭṭhānā Vipassanā* Meditation. The emancipated mind and the knowledge that liberates of Nos. (9) and (10) are the resultant benefits or rewards of diligent and sustained meditative effort.

*The message of this Sutta is loud and clear.* Let those who can, emulate the example of the Noble Ones and seek their release from the bondage of *Samsāric* suffering!

Although in this talk and in talks on other suttas the Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw never fails to stress the practice aspect of the Buddha's teaching, he has made available for us relevant and significant excerpt from the mine of scriptural learning that is so richly his. It may fairly be said that in every one of his talks, he virtually traverses the entire field of the Buddha-dhamma so far as the



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essential and pragmatic approach to the supreme Buddhist goal of Nibbāna through *Satipaṭṭhāna Vipassanā* Meditation is concerned.

The talk was translated into English by U Aye Maung, formerly of the editorial staff of Sarpaybeikman Institute and author of "The Buddha and his Creed." The translation is in conformity with the five guidelines laid down by the Scriptural Committee of the Buddha Sasana Nuggaha Organisation.

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Rangoon,  
2nd, October 1980



# Discourse On Ariyavasa Sutta

## Introduction

The subject-matter of this book is the Buddha's discourse on the Dhamma in the *Ariyāvāsa* sutta of *Anguttara-nikāya*. A sutta contains the Buddha's teaching and we make it a practice to be strictly guided by the suttas when we convey the message of the Dhamma to lay people.

In *Ariyāvāsa-sutta*, the Buddha says: "O bhikkhus! The *Ariyāvāsa-dhammas* or the abode of the Noble Ones are of ten kinds. The Noble Ones have dwelt in these abodes before, they are still dwelling there and they will dwell there in future."

Ariyā means the Noble One; avasa means abode and so *Ariyāvāsa* means the abode of the Noble Ones. There are eight kinds of Ariyas, viz., the first four Ariyas each of whom has attained one of the four stages on the holy path; and the other four Ariyas each of whom has attained the fruition (*phala*) corresponding to one of the four stages.



As to the first four of these Ariyas, i.e., *Magga-ariya* or Ariyas on the path, it is hard to point out clearly what kind of persons they are. For the duration of their spiritual climax is a single thought-moment. With the full attainment of insight-knowledge, the yogi has a flash of Nibbāna on Ariyan level and because of this split-second experience he is called the Magga-person at that moment. Then there follows the experience of *Ariyaphala* (fruit) consciousness and from that time he is called the phala-person. These phala-persons are the only yogis whom we can clearly point out as Ariyas.

## Two kinds of bhikkhus

The *Ariyāvāsa-sutta* is addressed to bhikkhus. There are two kinds of bhikkhus, viz., the *sutta-bhikkhu* and the *vinaya-bhikkhu*. The *sutta-bhikkhu* is, according to the commentaries, any person who practises the Dhamma to get liberated from the cycle of life (*samsāra*). He is not necessarily a member of the *Sangha*, for he may be a *deva* or a layman.

The practice of the Dhamma enables the yogi to overcome defilements. Through the practice of morality, the yogi seeks to



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overcome active defilements (*vitikkama kilesā*) such as greed, hatred, etc. that lead to killing, stealing and other misdeeds. The yogi who develops concentration (*samādhi bhāvanā*) overcomes the arousal of greed, hatred, etc that always lie in our consciousness (*pariyutthāna kilesā*). Finally the yogi overcomes potential or dormant defilements (*anusaya kilesā*) through the development of insight-knowledge and wisdom. Every moment of mindfulness means the gradual destruction of latent defilements. It is somewhat like cutting away a piece of wood with a small axe, every stroke helping to get rid of the unwanted fragments of wood. Whenever the yogi focuses on the psycho-physical phenomena arising from sense-contact with the external world, the defilements become weak and impotent. Such a yogi is the bhikkhu of *sutta pitaka*.

The *vinaya-bhikkhu* is the monk who leads a good life based on *vinaya* rules. In the time of the Buddha the Lord, himself ordained some of them by saying, "Come hither, bhikkhu". Most of them, however, were ordained by the Sangha in accordance with *vinaya* rules.

The bhikkhu referred to in *Ariyāvāsa-sutta* is the *sutta-bhikkhu*, a term that



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applies to any human being, *deva* or Brah-mā who practises the Dhamma.

The Buddha preached the *Ariyāvāsa-sutta* in order that we might live in the abode of Ariyas, safe, secure and protected from the perils of *samsāra*. The perils of *samsāra* (round of rebirth) are more terrifying than those that beset a man who does not live in a well-protected house. They follow us from one existence to another. One may land in the lower worlds as a *peta* or an animal and suffer for many years or one may be reborn as a poor, wretched man who has to face many hardships for a living as well as the universal evils of life viz. old age, sickness and death. These are the perils of *samsāra* that repeatedly engulf those who do not live in the abode of Ariyas or in other words, who do not practice *Ariyāvāsa dhamma*.

### Ten Ariyāvāsa Dhamma

There are ten *Ariyāvāsa dhamma*. The first *Ariyāvāsa dhamma* is the removal of the five hindrances. The second is the control of the six senses. The third is the presence of a guard or mindfulness. The fourth is that the yogi living in the abode of Ariyas should have four supports. The fifth *dhamma* is that the yogi must have renounced all the



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false doctrines (*paccekasacca*) that do not accord with the nature of life although they claim monopoly of truth. The sixth *Ariyāvāsa-dhamma* calls upon the yogi to give up all pursuits. The pursuit of something means lack of self-sufficiency whereas giving up all pursuits is a sign of non-attachment and self-fulfilment.

The seventh *dhamma* insists that the mind of the yogi who dwells in the Ariya abode is not confused but is clear and pure. The eighth dhamma is the possession of quiet bodily functions (*passaddha kāya sankhāra*). *Kāyasankhāra* here means in-and-out breathing. So this dhamma requires the yogi to seek the fourth *jhāna* that leads to the cessation of in-and-out breathing. But this shows only that the fourth *jhāna* is a spiritual experience that may appeal to some yogis. The main point is the need 'to become an *Arahat* with the extinction of all defilements. For there are persons who have become *Arahats* without attaining the fourth *jhāna*. The ninth and tenth *Ariyavāsa dhammas* are a fully liberated mind and fully liberated knowledge or the knowledge that one is fully liberated from defilements. These two dhammas are linked together. Once the mind is totally liberated, there follows the awareness of such a total liberation.



## The Guard of Mindfulness

We will begin with the third *dhamma*, that is mindfulness which is the key to the understanding of *Ariyāvāsa-sutta*. Mindfulness is essential to the practice of *Ariyāvāsa dhamma*. It forms the chief attribute of the Arahāt. The commentary says that the Arahāt is mindful even while he is asleep. Here it refers to mindfulness just before the Arahāt falls asleep and just after he wakes up. It is impossible for him to be mindful while sound asleep. What we should note specially is that the Arahāt is always on his guard whenever he acts, speaks or thinks.

Mindfulness not does develop suddenly only after the attainment of Arahātship. It develops gradually as a result of previous effort and practice. It is fairly well established at the *anāgāmi* stage before the yogi becomes an Arahāt and this is due to self-training at the *sakadāgāmi* stage. At this latter stage, too, the yogi possesses mindfulness since the foundation for it is laid at the *sotāpanna* level.

A *sotāpanna*, that is the yogi at the first stage on the noble path is not yet free from craving, ill-will, hatred, ignorance and conceit. But his unwholesome inclinations



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are not strong enough to lead him to killing, stealing, etc. He is mindful and this mindfulness keeps him on his guard. The Buddha says: “A *sotāpanna* avoids doing misdeeds that lead him to the lower worlds. Therefore he no longer takes life.” So you should have faith in the Buddha and meditate seriously.

When you have made some progress in meditation, you will find what mindfulness means. At the sight of a desirable object you crave for it and in the face of something offensive you become angry. For you are not yet free from these unwholesome emotions. But your mindfulness stands you in good stead and helps restrain them. They lose their momentum and wither away. They are not beyond control as in the case of common people. They are not strong enough to make a *sotāpanna* capable of doing evil.

### Satipaṭṭhāna Method

Hence the importance of mindfulness in the spiritual training of the yogi on the *Ariyan* path. Practice in mindfulness should begin at the time when the yogi is still a worldling. The practice of contemplating all psycho-physical phenomena that arise from six senses is *Satipaṭṭhāna* (the four applica-



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tions of attentiveness). *Satipaṭṭhāna* means full awareness of all physical and mental events that occur. It can be easily practised too. We teach this method simply as did the Lord Buddha.

“*Gacchanto vā gacchāmiti pajānāti.*

“Know that you are walking when walking.”

This is the simple instruction of the Buddha in the *Satipaṭṭhāna* sutta. It does not present any difficulty and say that one should know the fact of walking after analysing the inner corporeality, consciousness and so forth. The instruction is so simple that everyone can follow it in his meditation.

Some people insist that the yogi should avoid saying, “I walk” mentally as it implies some sort of ego-belief.

There are three different views of the ego or self. The first is the belief in self as the soul-entity. The second is the view of self based on conceit and pride, while the third is the self as a conventional term for the first person singular as distinct from other persons. The self or “I” implicit in the Pāli word “*gacchami*” has nothing to do with illusion or conceit. It is a term of common usage that is to be found in the sayings of the Buddha and Arahats.



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So we instruct the yogis to make a note of all phenomena in conventional terms, that is, for example, to note “walking” whenever they start walking. But as concentration develops, all these conventional usages disappear and there remains only the reality of everything arising-and-passing away ceaselessly.

### Initial Doubt

Some people who have never meditated may have some doubt and no wonder for only seeing is believing and their skepticism is due to their lack of experience. I myself was a skeptic at one time. I did not then like the *Satipaṭṭhāna* method as it makes no mention of *nāma-rūpa*, *anicca*, *anatta* and so forth. But the Sayadaw who taught the method was a learned monk and so I decided to give it a trial. At first I made little progress because I still had a lingering doubt about the method which, in my view, had nothing to do with ultimate reality.

It was only later on when I had followed the method seriously that its significance dawned on me. I realized then that it is the best method of meditation since it calls for attentiveness to everything that is to be known, leaving no room for absent-min-



dedness. So the Buddha describes the Sati-paṭṭhāna method as the only way: *Ekāyano-maggo*.

## Development Of Concentration

At the outset the yogi treats the sense-data as the raw material for his meditation and makes a note of “walking” “bending”, etc. Then as concentration develops, he becomes aware of all the psycho-physical phenomena arising from the six senses. Finally he is mindful only of the ceaseless passing away of the sense-object and the knowing consciousness. Thus he finds nothing that is permanent, pleasant and worthwhile, nothing that gives ground for the ego-belief.

At our meditation-center the yogi begins the exercise in mindfulness by making a note of the rising and falling of the belly when he breathes in and out. Later on he notes all mental events such as thinking, feeling, imagining, etc. The yogi who steadfastly keeps his mind occupied in this way can in due course become aware of all physical and mental events that occur whenever he sees, hears, etc. He is then in step with the ideal of *Ariyavāsa* sutta which stresses the need for self-possession and mindfulness: *Satārakkhena cetasā samannā gato*.



## Real Empirical Knowledge

Our method of meditation does not presuppose a thorough knowledge of *nāma-rūpa*, *anicca* and other Buddhist concepts. For our main object is to attain insight-knowledge which is accessible only to empirical approach. Through experience, the yogi observes the distinction between mind and matter and he realizes the impermanence of every thing. Experience may be followed by explanation on the part of the teacher but not the other way round. For real knowledge has nothing to do with preconceived notions but is based on personal experience.

The empirical knowledge acquired by the yogi is distinct and clear. He sees nothing except the vanishing of everything. This is called *bhanga*-insight about which he learns not from scriptures or a teacher but by experience. As he keeps on meditating, he becomes more and more mindful until his mindfulness becomes perfect at the last stage on the noble path.

Mindfulness is a matter of great importance. It tends to develop concentration and sharpen the intellect. It means being on one's guard and dwelling in the abode of Ariyas that protects us from the dangers of *samsāric*-existence. In order to dwell in the



† Ariyān abode you have to pay the price in terms of faith, will and effort.

It is impossible to do anything without faith or conviction, You will practise mindfulness only if you believe that it will help to develop insight-knowledge. But faith in itself will not do. You need, too, a strong will and unrelenting effort to attain the path and *Nibbāna*. Possession of these qualities is essential to success in the practice of mindfulness and security in the abode of *Ariyas*.

### **The Story Of Tambadathika**

Mindfulness even for a few moments ensures protection from *samsāric* dangers as is evident in the story of *Tambadathika*.

*Tambadathika* was a public executioner in the life-time of the Buddha. On the day of his retirement he was about to drink milk-gruel when there appeared *thera Sāriputta* who had come apparently in search of food. Because of his strong faith *Tambadathika* promptly offered the milk-gruel. After drinking it, the *thera* gave a talk on alms-giving, morality, insight-meditation and the Noble Path. *Tambadathika* could not follow the talk very well because he became stricken with remorse when he thought of his evil deeds in the past. He told the *thera* about his unhappiness.



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Questioned by the *thera*, *Tambadathika* said that he did not do the evil deeds of his own free-will, that he had to carry out the king's order. "In that case," asked *Sariputta*. "would those evils be of your own making?" This question was cleverly designed to ease his conscience. His anxiety being thus laid to rest, he was able to reflect on the *thera's* sermon and at last he attained a kind of insight-knowledge called *anulomañāṇa*. *Dhammapada* commentary identifies it with the higher stage of equanimity. It is said that the *bodhisattas* in the holy order practised meditation till they attained *anulomañāṇa*, but theirs is not the *anulomañāṇa* of the path process (*magga-vīthi*). The attainment of *anulomañāṇa* of the path process means outright attainment of the path and its result (*phala*). The spiritual development does not end with the attainment of *anulomañāṇa*. Moreover, a *bodhisatta* can attain the goal of the path only in his last life when he is about to become a Buddha. He cannot attain it in early lives. So the *anulomañāṇa* attributed to the *bodhisattas* is the advanced stage of equanimity-knowledge and the same may be said of the insight attained by *Tambadathika*.

*Tambadathika* became mindful as a result of his spiritual experience. Before long



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he was gored to death by a cow. His death formed the subject of conversation among the *bhikkhus*. The *bhikkhus* were much surprised when the Buddha told them that the man was reborn in *Tusita* heaven, that in spite of his evil deeds in the past, his mindfulness during the last moments of his life had protected him from the dangers of the lower worlds.

Through practice, mindfulness may become spontaneous as in the case of *Dhannañjānī*, a lay follower of the Buddha. She was told by her husband not to say anything to extol the Buddha while his brahmin teachers were being entertained. Yet when she tripped, she at once uttered thrice the sacred formula: “*Namo tassa bhagavato*—Praise to the Blessed One, etc.”

Mindfulness in the face of suffering or death is very important since it helps to lessen pain and ensure good rebirth. The yogi who seeks to develop it requires four supports. In the first place he needs clothes, food, medicine and dwelling. He needs them not because of his craving for pleasure but because they form the basic necessities of life. To deny oneself these necessities of life means asceticism which was practised by some non-Buddhist sects in ancient India.



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in fact the *bodhisatta* himself resorted to it, but later on he gave it up as he realized that it served no purpose. The Buddha's way is the middle way between asceticism and attachment to sensual pleasure.

The second support for the yogi is the fortitude of mind with which he contemplates physical and mental pain. He is prepared to face hardship or even death for the attainment of insight-knowledge. Meditation does not do any harm to health; on the contrary it is beneficial as is borne out by some yogis who regained their health after meditating for some time. There is the case of a woman who practised mindfulness and got rid of a growth in her womb, thereby making it unnecessary for her to undergo an operation as advised by her doctor.

The yogi should bear pain as far as possible. "Patience leads to *Nibbāna*," says a Burmese proverb. If a meditating yogi fidgets impatiently whenever an unpleasant sensation occurs, he will not be able to concentrate and without concentration, he cannot attain insight-knowledge. So patience or fortitude is one of the supports of the yogi.



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### Things to Avoid

The third support of the yogi is avoidance. He should avoid all kinds of danger. He must not take unnecessary risk by going to improper places. He should not allow his meditation to make him over-confident and foolhardy. He must be especially on his guard against close relationship with the opposite sex. In short, he should avoid all sense-objects that are likely to do harm to him physically or morally.

The fourth support of the yogi is the rejection of unwholesome thoughts that tend to make him sensuous, malicious and aggressive. It is hard to overcome these evil thoughts as most of us like to think about objects and people that we love or hate. The yogi should watch these thoughts and reject them. It is not easy for some people to do so because before taking up meditation they used to let their mind wander freely. To watch every thought is of course burdensome to them but in fact it takes only two or three days' effort to establish the habit of watchfulness.

Again, foreigners who come to our meditation-center are fond of reading and writing which lead to discursive thinking and do not help to develop mindfulness. So we have



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to tell them not to read and write. They do not like this restriction but they get used to it in due course and find it beneficial to their mind-training. One such foreigner was Mr Duval, an American who spent several months at the center. He was much impressed by the *Satipaṭṭhāna* method that had helped him to attain insight-knowledge and he thought it would also benefit many Westerners who have no inner peace in spite of their material prosperity,

### The five hindrances

It is through constant mindfulness that the yogi seeks to remove the five hindrances or *nivāraṇas*, viz. sensuous desire, ill-will, laziness, restlessness and doubt. They block the way to *Nibbāna* and so their removal is the first *Ariyavāsa dhamma*.

Sensuous desire is the desire for pleasant sense-objects such as sights, sounds, smells and so forth. Here the sense-object means not only the object that directly causes pleasant sensation but also other objects that are associated with it. Thus the object of sound refers to a man who speaks persuasively as well as to musical instruments. Smell as a sensuous object is represented by perfumes and human beings who use



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them. In short, all objects of desire are sensuous objects.

Love of pleasant sense-objects is the cause of conflict among people and nations. Yet modern man is excessively fond of sensual pleasure and to him it is the *summum bonum* of life, something that is to be sought by every possible means regardless of all moral considerations. According to the Buddha, sensuous desire is like debt that keeps a man in bondage. Just as the debtor has to be servile to the creditor, so also a man has to respect the object of his sensual desire. If it is a lifeless object, he must handle it with care and keep it under lock and key. If it is his wife who fuels his sensual desire, he has to avoid doing or saying anything that may displease her.

If you have no desire, it means freedom from worry or anxiety about any desired object or living being. The best way to overcome desire is to watch it constantly. You should focus on it and trace it back to its source. If you thus focus on desire with persistence and strong will, it usually disappears and you are assured of a place in the Ariyan abode.

Those who are outside the Ariyan abode remain attached to sense-objects and some-



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times this attachment spells disaster for them after their death. In the time of the Buddha a bhikkhu was so much attached to his robe on his death-bed that after his death he became a louse in it. Such a story may be scoffed at by skeptics who argue that a tamarind seed can produce no tree other than a tamarind tree, that gold cannot revert to its former state of earth and that likewise man cannot be reborn as a lower form of life. This argument does not accord with the Buddha's teaching.

In fact there is no being and life means only the process of consciousness and corporeality. Of these two consciousness is the determining factor. So according to the doctrine of Dependent Origination, because of ignorance there arise karma-formations (*sankhāra*) which in turn lead to consciousness and so forth. Hence when a new life arises, it is not the corporeality of the previous life or its potency but the force of the consciousness that passes on.

Moreover there is no such thing as big or small consciousness. The mind of an ordinary person does not differ basically from that of an animal. It may revert to a lower state as in the case of a man who becomes insane or a victim of rabies. In



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short, there is no basis for the view that it is impossible for a man to sink to a lower plane of existence after death.

So the pure mind of a dying person imbued with faith, good-will, etc ensures good rebirth whereas the defiled mind full of greed, hatred, etc leads to the lower worlds. We need not wonder how consciousness manages to reach a far distant place like heaven or hell. Consciousness has no substance and so distance makes no difference to it. Death means the vanishing of the last thought-moment and the emergence of rebirth-consciousness. For the dying person the last state of consciousness is crucial, for if it is unwholesome it may lead to the lower world in spite of his good moral life.

Hence the Buddha's instruction to the bhikkhus to have the right attitude towards food, robes, and dwellings. They should use them only to meet their physical needs and avoid sensual desire. One may also reflect on the impermanence and emptiness of most sensual objects to overcome attachment to them. But the best thing to do is to watch the arising of desires and reject them,

This instruction is important also for the lay men and women who have various



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attachments that are fraught with danger for their afterlife. They can be free from such danger through the practice of *Ariya-vāsa dhamma*. First they must have faith that is born of sound reasoning and a good knowledge of the Buddha's teaching. But the Buddha-dhamma insists on the need for empirical investigation as befits its attribute of "*ehi passiko*.—Come and see!" So for the follower of the Buddha practice is of paramount importance.

Most of the bhikkhus around the Buddha attained various stages of enlightenment because they practised Satipaṭṭhāna meditation zealously. They never did or said anything unmindfully. Their calm and gentle manners impressed even the wandering medicants who did not follow the Buddha's teaching. One medicant, Kandaraka by name paid a high tribute to them for their poise and self-possession.

So did his companion, a lay man named Pessa. He appreciated the Buddha's teaching that had helped reform people who were given to deceit and hypocrisy. But he was so much preoccupied with his worldly affairs that he did not hear the Buddha's sermon to the end or practise the Dhamma thoroughly. There are other reasons why



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men like Pessa failed to attain any stage on the holy path. They lack good teachers and a good knowledge of the Dhamma. Association with a bad friend or a bad teacher is disastrous as in the case of prince Ajātasattu who killed his father at the instigation of his teacher Devadatta.

A good teacher, a good friend and a good knowledge of the Dhamma will make a man realize the need for mindfulness as an antidote to defilements (*kilesā*). We must observe and note any sensation that arises from our contact with the external world. We should take note of the bodily sensation that we have when the body, hands, head, etc make any movement. We should also be mindful of our mental processes. By taking note of all mental events we can guard ourselves against evil thoughts and emotions.

Although there are ten Ariyāvasa-dhammas, mindfulness suffices to ensure the attainment of Nibbāna. In fact, it is the keystone of the Buddha's teaching. This is clearly borne out by the last saying of the Buddha which may be translated as follows.

“Bhikkhus, here is my last advice to you: All compounded things are subject to disintegration. Work out your own salvation with mindfulness”.



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All compounded things (*Sankhāra*) are impermanent. Many people do not take this fact of life seriously. On the contrary they believe in their personal identity and the permanence of their ego. The average man believes that he can live for a long time with his life-force and body.

“*Vaya dhammā sankhāra appamādena sampadetha*”. Here *sankhāra* means all the conditioned psycho-physical phenomena; *vaya dhamme* means that they are by nature subject to decay. Liberation from the phenomenal existence that is conditioned, impermanent, and unsatisfactory means Nibbāna and the way to it lies in the Buddha’s last words: *Appamādena sampā-detha*—Practise till you achieve constant mindfulness.

The commentaries describe this advice as the essence of the Buddha’s teaching. It is indeed the keynote of Ariyavāsa sutta that stresses the far-reaching importance of mindfulness. Through the practice of mindfulness the yogi attains the first stage on the holy path (*sotāpanna*) where he is free from coarse desire that leads to the lower worlds. At the second stage (*anāgāmi*) he becomes wholly free from the desire for sense-objects. At the last stage (Arahatship)



he has done away with all the refined desire for the material and the immaterial worlds.

### **Ill-Will, The Second Hindrance**

Ill-will (*vyāpāda*) is the second hindrance on the holy path. It is like a disease that creates a distaste for good food and makes the sick man listless and apathetic. Ill-will makes us irritable, bad-tempered and suspicious. We do not trust even our friend who is on good terms with the man we dislike. A man who has ill-will should regard himself as suffering from a disease. Unless it is treated promptly, it may gain ground and lead to death. Likewise the effect of unrestrained ill-will may be disastrous as is evident in the newspaper reports of violent crimes.

Some people may appear to have goodwill as long as they find everything agreeable, but anything that they dislike usually leads to outburst of bad temper. The Buddhist scriptures cite the story of Vedehika, a housewife who was noted for her affable manners. Her slave-girl had misgivings, however, and so one day in order to test her mistress she purposely got up late from bed. Then the woman flew into a rage and showed her true character.



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Ill-will is the root-cause of discord, friction, quarrel, and unhappiness among mankind. We tend to have ill-will against our relatives, co-workers, neighbours, etc. and yet these are the very people on whom we have to rely for help in times of trouble.

So in order to ensure unity, harmony and mutual understanding, we should keep off the disease of ill-will. If the disease infects us, it should be promptly treated. When you become angry, note your anger mentally and do away with it. You should not let it affect your speech and behaviour. You should not utter more than one or two words in a fit of temper.

The third hindrance on the path is sloth or laziness. A lazy man does not seek to understand the Dhamma or to practise it. So he fails to make any spiritual progress and misses the insight-knowledge attained by the yogis who practise meditation vigorously. He does not even have any idea of the ecstasy that occurs to the meditating yogis. Of course ecstasy is not to be confused with the goal of meditation that transcends all varieties of experience in life. But the unique experience of insight-knowledge is not for lazy people.

The fourth hindrance is restlessness and worry (*uddhacca kukkucca*). Here restlessness



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means mind-wandering while by worry we are to understand remorse over the mistakes we have made. Both these mental states should be removed since they form an obstacle to progress on the holy path.

The last hindrance is doubt (*vicikicchā*). It is doubt about the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. A man who has much doubt usually hesitates and wavers so much that he does not accomplish anything. He may come to grief as do some people who do not act decisively in important matters. Opposed to doubt is faith which makes a yogi follow the instruction of his teacher that accords with Buddha-dhamma.

The yogi can contemplate any one of the five *khandhas* or the five groups of psycho-physical elements comprising a human being. But it is better to start with the contemplation of the rising and falling of the belly. Both the rising and the falling indicate the element of motion. Motion or wind (*vāyo*) is one of the four primary elements. According to the commentaries, those who have not achieved tranquility (*samatha*) should begin with the four primary elements whereas the yogi in a tranquil state of mind can begin with *jhānic* (entranced) consciousness. The other three primary elements are the



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quality of hardness (*pathavī*), the quality of heat, cold or warmth (*tejo*) and the quality of liquidity or wetness (*āpo*).

We should begin meditation with what is obvious and easy. The Buddha himself pointed out a very easy method of meditation, viz., the contemplation of the four bodily postures. He told his disciples to be mindful of what they are doing. This advice is so easy to follow that some people do not take it seriously. They argue that since it makes no mention of *nāma-rūpa* etc, it has nothing to do with ultimate reality.

In one of his books Ledi Sayadaw says: “When you walk, you should focus on every step that you take”. This accords with the teaching of the Buddha: “When you walk, you should know that you are walking.” Although you merely note “walking”, you will realize, as your power of concentration develops, that the movement of the body is due to mind’s desire.

You should also observe physical changes such as the rising and falling of the belly which can be clearly and easily noted. Some people have doubt about this practice. This is due to their lack of experience that corresponds to what their teachers have told them about the distinction between mind and body,



the meanings of *anicca*, *dukkha*, etc. Lack of experience leads to doubt which forms one of the five hindrances.

The hindrances prevent good thoughts from arising. Good thoughts and evil thoughts do not occur together. You have good, wholesome thoughts when you are mindful, and bad, unwholesome thoughts when you are unmindful. Unmindfulness is largely due to hindrances and so those who practise meditation are likely to be distracted by doubt, worry, desire and so forth. Some people do not wish to meditate because they count on their acts of alms-giving, observance of moral precepts and recitation of scriptures, etc., for the purity of their minds. But they are quickly disillusioned when they take up meditation for then they find themselves harassed by impure thoughts.

An unmindful person cannot make himself morally pure for he is never aware of the true moral character of his thoughts. Sensuous desires, hatred, ill-will, etc., escape his notice. It is only through meditation that we can know whether the mind is pure or not, whether or not it is free from anger, greed, etc. Repeated introspection helps to purge the mind of its impurities.



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You have purity of mind, when you are mindful. It is a mistake to think that one can attain it only when one enters trance (*jhāna*). Purity of mind based on *jhāna* is due to the continuous stream of *jhānic* consciousness. Purity of mind through meditation is the purity that emerges at the moment of attaining insight. Both kind of consciousness are alike in respect of purity of mind and freedom from hindrances.

Our method of meditation begins with the practice of keeping the mind on the rising and falling of the belly. It accords with the Buddha's teaching: "Rising refers to the physical or material *khandhā*. *Vāyo dhātu* (element) is involved in the material *khandhā* and the characteristic mark of this element is strengthening." In the contemplation of mind and body, quantity and shape do not matter. Some yogis seek to focus on what they believe to be the combination of atomic particles in some shape. Shape is possessed only by the objects which have colour or which can be touched.

### Characteristics, Function, etc

Physical phenomena such as sound, smell, etc., may lend themselves to atomic analysis but the same cannot be said of mind and its elements. It is impossible to imagine



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greed, anger, etc. as particles. In point of fact, the yogi should focus only on the nature of a phenomenon in terms of its characteristics, (*lakkhana*) function (*rasa*) and resulting phenomenon (*paccupaṭṭhāna*). This is in accord with the instruction in *Visuddhi-māgga* ('Path of Purity') and *Abhidhamma-tṭhasangaha* ("Compendium of Philosophy").

So you should focus on the rising and falling of the belly with reference to its function, etc. The marks of *vāyo*-element are rigidity, stiffness and looseness. These marks will escape your notice in the beginning for you have to attend to the hindrances and overcome them by repression. Constant practice of mindfulness helps to overcome them and with the mind free from them the stiffness and rigidity become obvious in the rising of the belly. So too the abdominal falling helps to emphasise the quality of looseness.

The function of *vāyo* element is motion. *Vāyo* is air which moves from one place to another when its force is strong and remains still and rigid when the force is weak. You cannot watch rising and falling without being aware of motion. When you note the rising, you are aware of the gradual movement outward and in the case of falling,



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you become aware of the gradual movement inward.

The resulting phenomenon of *vāyo* element is the propulsion of things to wherever they tend. In the case of voluntary motion such as bending, the *vāyo* element tends in the direction in which the mind is inclined. There is inward motion when you bend your hand and outward motion when you stretch it. These two kinds of motions are apparent, too, in the rising and falling of the belly. The resulting phenomenon or *paccupaṭṭhana* is any impression that occurs to our mind when we think of something.

While watching the rising and falling, the yogi may have disagreeable feelings that arise from cramp, pain in the body, or heat. In connection with such feelings, the Buddha says: "The monk is aware of the disagreeable feeling even as he experiences them". Here "experience" as a verb is the translation of the Pali word *vedayāmi* in the text. Burmese Buddhists do not say, "I experience heat." Instead they say, "It is hot" etc. So the Burmese yogi is instructed to make a mental note of the specific sensation that he has, "It is hot" or "It is painful" and so on as the case may be.

In this way the yogi becomes aware of painful feelings. Its function is to depress



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the spirit, its resulting phenomenon is the irritating sensation. Thus the 'yogi' contemplates strain, ache, etc. and realizes the nature of painful feeling on the basis of its characteristics, function, etc. The same may be said of pleasant feeling and indifferent feeling.

It is the characteristic of mind or consciousness to know its sense-object. Hence we have different kinds of consciousness each being dependent on different contact (seeing, hearing, etc) with different sense-objects, (sound, smell, etc).

The function of the mind is to lead its concomitants (attendant dhammas). The mind takes the initiative and is followed by greed or faith or doubt. The resulting phenomenon of mind is its connection with the preceding mental state. By contemplating his mental states, the yogi becomes aware of their impermanence and their arising one after another without cessation.

If at the moment of seeing, you make a mental note of the event, you know that the eye and the colour are physical while the consciousness by way of sight is mental. The same may be said of the ear and the sound, the nose and the smell, the tongue and the taste, the body and the object of



contact, each pair of these physical phenomena having their corresponding mental phenomena of sound-consciousness, scent-consciousness and so forth. The mental field of contact or touch-consciousness is very wide. Bending, stretching, walking, etc, all belong to it.

### Stages of Insight-Knowledge

In taking a step, the feeling of lightness as you lift your foot indicates *tejo* (heat) element, tenseness and motion as you put your foot forward indicate *vāyo* (wind) element, the heaviness as you put the foot down is *āpo* element while the friction and resistance at the moment of the impact of the foot on the ground reflect *pathavi* (earth) element. Thus the distinctive features of each of the four primary elements is evident. Whenever you observe the behaviour of your body, you distinguish between the body which does not know its sense-object and the mind which knows it. This is insight into the distinction between mind and matter.

Later on as concentration develops, the yogi becomes more aware of the nature of the phenomenal world. He finds that when he bends his hand, the bending is preceded by the desire to bend his hand, the bending is preceded by the desire to bend; that seeing



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arises on account of the eye and the visible object; that hearing, .etc are due to the corresponding sense-organs and sense-objects. It takes only a few days' practice of mindfulness to realize that every phenomenon is made up of cause and effect, that there is no ego, person or being who creates it.

Then the yogi knows analytically the beginning and end of each unit of psychophysical phenomenon. The beginning is the arising and the end is the vanishing of an event. As he observes this ceaseless process of arising and vanishing, the yogi realizes the law of impermanence. Impermanence is the mark of the five *khandhā's* or mind-body complex. It has two aspects, viz., the arising from a state of non-existence and coming into a state of momentary existence; and vanishing and passing away into a state of momentary existence and then into a state of non-existence.

This arising and passing away is the sign of impermanence. If a thing does not arise at all, it cannot be called impermanent. Such a thing implies the concept of *Nibbāna* which has no origination. Nor can we call a thing impermanent if it arises and exists forever. But there is no such thing. Everything that has a beginning has also an end.



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The insight into the law of impermanence leads the 'yogi' to realize *dukkha* (suffering) and *anatta* (insubstantiality of life). These three marks of existence are intertwined and whenever we see *anatta*, we are close to *Nibbāna*. But here "seeing" *anatta* means not mere intellectual acceptance but insight-knowledge born of meditation.

After having insights into impermanence, etc., the yogi ceases to reflect and keeps on noting the psycho-physical phenomena. Then his consciousness deepens. He discriminates sharply between the beginning and the end of every phenomenon. He sees illumination and experiences joy, rapture, serenity, an upsurge of faith and heightened awareness. But the yogi should not mistake these blissful states for the peace of *Nibbāna*. He should note and overcome them.

Then as he continues to practise mindfulness, there comes a time when his consciousness is confined to ceaseless vanishing. When he contemplates an object, he no longer thinks of its shape or size or quality. He sees everything, the object, his mind, etc passing away ceaselessly. This is called *bhangañāṇa*.

Because the yogi sees everything passing away, he is seized with fear (*bhayañāṇa*).



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Fear leads to recognition of the evils of conditioned existence (*ādinavañāṇa*). So the yogi becomes sick of life (*nibbidañāṇa*). Because of his disillusionment, he wants to be free (*muñcatukamyatañāṇa*) and to achieve his object he has to resort to special contemplation. (*patisankhāñāṇa*). This results in the full comprehension of the three signs of existence, viz., *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta* (*sankhānupekkhañṇa*).

With the emergence of this insight, the yogi attains equanimity in regard to the six senses, which the Buddha describes follows:-

“O monks, the monk who has seen a visible object with his eyes is neither pleased nor displeased. His mind is in equilibrium, being affected neither by attachment nor by aversion. This is because he has right mindfulness.”

Note that the *Pāli* text refers to the monk who has seen the object. It makes no sense to speak of a yogi's equanimity in the absence of sense-objects that attract or repel him. In point of fact he is unperturbed in the face of sense-objects and this is due to his right mindfulness and insight into the nature of conditioned existence with its chief characteristics of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anatta*.



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“*Cakkhunā rupam disvā*...Having seen the object, the monk recognizes it with clear or right understanding.” Right understanding causes neither pleasure nor displeasure; it makes the yogi completely indifferent in his contact with the external world. This is the special attribute of the Arahāt and as the commentary says, it is possible for the yogi to possess it. He can have it when he attains all the successive stages of insight-knowledge through whole-hearted effort.

Some teachers of meditation tend to mislead their disciples by exaggerating the importance of their lectures. The yogi should not accept their words blindly. He should not regard himself, say, as a *sotāpanna*, on the authority of his teacher. Instead, he should examine himself on the basis of his experience and the Buddha’s teaching. If he is a true *sotāpanna*, his experience leaves no doubt about the three signs of conditioned existence, the nature of *Nibbana* and the other teachings of the Buddha. So he has unshakeable faith in the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha. He also strictly avoids killing, stealing, indulging in illicit sex, lying and drinking.

These then are the four essential attributes of a *sotāpanna* and this teaching of the Buddha can help the yogi to decide whether



he has attained the first stage on the path. A real *sotāpanna* has no desire to do evil. His moral life does not need self-restraint since it is spontaneous. In this respect he differs from the false *sotāpanna* whose morality is superficial and prone to back-sliding.

### False Views and False Pursuits

The two important *Ariyavāsa dhamma* that we have to consider now are those which call for the renunciation of false views about life after death. These views center on the ego that is supposed to survive death and take up its abode in another physical body and the belief that rejects any idea of an afterlife and insists on the annihilation of a living being by death. These two false beliefs can be overcome through the constant practice of mindfulness.

Equally to be rejected by the yogi on the holy path are the two false pursuits, viz., pursuit of sensual pleasure and the pursuit of life. The first pursuit dominates the yogi until he attains the third stage on the path. The second pursuit is motivated by the will-to-live. It does not end even at the third stage for there is still a lingering desire for immaterial existence. The yogi can overcome this attachment to life only



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on the attainment of Arahatship. He should therefore renounce the unwholesome pursuits and the false beliefs. He should follow the Noble Eightfold Path that will free him from illusions and unwholesome desires.

The yogi should also seek the fourth state of *jhāna* with its cessation of out-and-in breathing. He will have to make special effort to attain it since it is not within the reach of every Arahats. It is exclusively meant for specially gifted Arahats. Still, if the yogi cannot make great effort, it will do as well for him to bypass the *jhānic* state and seek *Nibbāna*. For when he attains *Nibbāna*, it makes no difference whether he is an ordinary Arahats or an outstanding Arahats or a Buddha.

### Self-knowledge

The last two essential attributes of the yogi who dwells in the Ariyan abode is (1) his mind is liberated from defilements and (2) he knows that he is so liberated. Full liberation means Arahatship and the Arahats is wholly free from attachment and restrictions associated with craving, hatred and ignorance. He is also independently aware of his freedom.

This awareness is not confined to Arahats. The *sotāpanna* knows, too, that he is relati-



vely free from defilements. There are qualitative degrees of freedom, corresponding to the different stages of spiritual attainment. Thus at the first stage the yogi is free from doubt and ego-belief, and at the third stage he is free from sensuous desire and ill-will. But some ignorant yogis are often deluded into a false sense of freedom. For they continue to do evil, thereby giving the lie to their claim. They say that it is not improper for a *sotāpanna* to drink under certain circumstances. Their arguments are purely rationalizations for unwholesome desires.

But for the yogi who has really attained certain important stages on the holy path, the realization of freedom is not bookish knowledge but a matter of independent insight. It is based on personal experience that leaves no doubt about its reality.

Now to conclude. If the yogi sees *Nibbāna* with the eye of wisdom, he becomes at least a *sotapanna* and he will never land in the lower worlds after his death. Therefore he should constantly contemplate everything that arises and guard his senses until he attains the first stage of liberation. He should of course continue the practice of mindfulness until he achieves Arahathship.



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