# The Mirror of Dharma Part 2

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So welcome to the second in our series of four talks around the general theme of the mirror of Dharma.

Last week we discussed the concept of the sotāpanna, stream enterer, in Mahasi Sayadaw's system of meditation. You might remember that the original text, the Mirror of Dhamma, was a talk given by Mahasi Sayadaw to, quote, "well-practiced yogis." In other words, people who he thought had attained stream entry. What we call the Mahasi method is explicitly designed to take the practitioner from here to awakening using the pure insight approach. This is suddha vipassanā, or sometimes you see it called dry insight, sukkha vipassanā. I can tell from the response in this room that a lot of people think, "Yeah, dry." The tradition says this approach to practice is dry, and if you need to moisten, to get a bit wet, try doing mettā, because mettā is wet.

Now this method is a product of the twentieth century, developed by Mahasi Sayadaw, who lived from 1904 to 1982. He established his reputation in Burma in 1945 when he published a book called Manual of Insight—probably in Pali it's called Vipassanā Dīpanī—which has recently been translated into English. This laid out his method along with the doctrinal context in which it's embedded.

Mahasi Sayadaw himself was part of a broader movement within Burmese Buddhism that began in the mid-nineteenth century. Specifically, it began after the Second Anglo-Burmese War of 1852. This was one of three wars through which the British Empire conquered and occupied Burma during the nineteenth century. The whole process had pretty much finished by 1888, which marked the end of the so-called pacification campaign in Upper Burma.

After the Anglo-Burmese War, their defeat in the Second Anglo-Burmese War shocked the Burmese. They were already shocked by their defeat in the first war, and it inspired them to begin a program of national revival in order to be ready to face the threat they were under. This national revival included the reform of Buddhism to make it fit for the purpose of preventing Burmese culture from being overwhelmed by that of the British.

A central part of this reform movement was the creation of methods of insight meditation—in Pali, vipassanā bhāvanā, the cultivation of insight, or mindfulness meditation, satipaṭṭhāna. The idea was to revive its practice in such a way that it would enable ordinary lay people to penetrate into the Buddha's Dhamma to the point of realizing awakening. In particular, it was focused on bringing as many people as possible to the vision of Dhamma, the dhammacakkhu, which represents the first stage of awakening.

So Mahasi Sayadaw was part of this broader movement. In 1945 he published his Manual of Insight, and

in 1947 he was invited to Rangoon to become the head teacher of a new center. Burma formally attained independence in January 1948, but it was actually granted through an act of parliament in 1947. So in 1947 and 1948, finally, the Burmese had shaken off the British and were embarking on a shaky career as an independent nation.

In 1947, Mahasi Sayadaw was invited to Rangoon to become the head teacher of a new center dedicated to the practice and propagation of insight meditation according to his method. In Burmese, this became known as the Mahasi Thathana Yeiktha, usually in English known as the Mahasi Center. This center became the headquarters of a movement to spread insight meditation throughout Burma and the world.

The aim of this center, like all the others that had been opened in the twentieth century and were flourishing, was to spread insight meditation to ordinary people—lay people, ordained people, men, women, makes no difference—and teach them the way to at least the first stage of awakening: stream entry.

To revise what we talked about last week, the Buddha saw awakening as a process, which is not surprising when you consider he saw pretty much everything as a process. It was marked by four distinct stages—four landmarks in this process. The first one is stream entry, the most junior. The last one, the most senior and therefore the most difficult, is full awakening or arahant.

As we talked about last week, the Buddha sees the human condition as consisting of two aspects: the cognitive and the affective. The cognitive is the area of reason, rationality, understanding and so on. The affective is the realm of feeling, emotion and so on. When he talked about the fundamental human problem, what is it from the Buddha's perspective? If we speak cognitively, it is avijjā or moha.

These are two Pali words which can be translated as ignorance, or they can be translated as delusion. Speaking affectively, what's the fundamental problem? It's *tanha*—literally "thirst," but normally translated as craving, or it could be translated as drivenness.

Now, what is the solution to the fundamental problem that we have? Speaking cognitively, it's *bodhi*: awakening, waking up. And again, you notice this is essentially cognitive. "Enlightenment" is the classic translation. Speaking affectively, it is *nibbana*. This is coolness, and it's literally the going out of the fires of greed, hatred, and ignorance.

When you look at this model and compare it to his model of the process of awakening, it does seem clear that he thought the cognitive aspects of our problem are more easily dealt with than the affective.

So stream entry—what marks stream entry is the vision of Dharma, which cuts through the cognitive problem of wrong view. Notice "vision," "seeing"—this is a hint that it's cognitive. This cuts through wrong view by abandoning what he called *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, which is essentially the view that the person is real, not just a bundle of concepts and drives that we cling to and believe to be "me." In other words, this is an insight into *anattā*, into not-self. So stream entry cuts through delusion, and it results in the perception of

not-self.

But the affective drives of greed and hatred, attraction and aversion—these continue to roll on. And as a result, let's say that someone has actually gone through this whole program, they've attained the first stage of enlightenment. Others may find it difficult to recognize that anything special has happened to this person. They still get pissed off. But they might not notice that they're not pissed off for as long as they used to be. It's subtle; the change is subtle. Even the stream enterer herself may have doubts.

But from the perspective of the tradition, once the practitioner has glimpsed the vision of Dharma, further progress along the path is inevitable. Such a person will complete the journey. Now, it may take a while—like lifetimes—but this journey will be completed. This is the Buddha's teaching.

Given the centrality of the experience of the vision of Dharma and the attainment of stream entry, and given that doubts may linger about this, it becomes important that practitioners learn to accurately assess their own attainment. Hence the importance of the mirror of Dharma that we talked about last week.

Tonight we're going to focus on the practice that leads toward, or culminates in, stream entry. In other words, we're going to talk about the practice which cuts through delusion. And we'll begin with the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, which is the root text of our practice in this lineage.

Now again, *satipaṭṭhāna* is essentially mindfulness meditation. You notice that people will use the expressions "insight meditation" and "mindfulness meditation" synonymously, and there's good reason for doing this. This particular discourse—again, it's the root text of the practice, and it's the text from which the teachers teach—begins with a quite remarkable statement. The Buddha says: "This is a one-way street for purifying beings, transcending sorrow and distress, dissipating pain and grief, attaining the method and realizing nibbana: the four applications of mindfulness."

So this is my translation of this introductory sentence. Notice that the practice of satipaṭṭhāna is a "one-way street." Now that's my translation. Anālayo translates it as "direct way." But they're really both pointing in the same direction. *Ekāyana magga*—"one going way."

And this is a one-way street, a direct way to where exactly? Well, the Buddha goes through a series of attainments and it culminates in nibbana. So, for practical purposes, at the very least: stream entry. Take this path and it will lead us to nibbana. Again, perhaps it will take a while, but if the practitioner matures in her mindfulness practice, she will attain nibbana.

Now this sounds very much like the promise that the stream enterer will attain full awakening. It's got the same measure of complete confidence and total certainty. And the resemblance becomes greater when we think of the belief that the stream enterer will attain awakening within seven existences. Because at the end of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, we find something very unusual. In fact, I can't think of any other discourse in which I've seen this. We have the Buddha making a prophecy—prophesying the future. And this is what he says.

Whoever practices these four applications of mindfulness like this for seven years can expect one of two results: either perfect insight here and now, or if a touch of clinging remains, the state of non-return. So full awakening, or number three in the process, non-return. Only seven years—this is pretty good.

But then he says, forget about seven years. Whoever practices these four applications of mindfulness like this for six years can expect one of two results: either perfect insight here and now, or if a touch of clinging remains, the state of non-return. Forget about six years. Whoever practices these four applications of mindfulness like this for five years, four years, three years, two years, one year, can expect one of two results: either perfect insight here and now, or if a touch of clinging remains, the state of non-return.

So he keeps bringing the bidding down, down, down. Forget about one year. Whoever practices these four applications of mindfulness like this for seven months, six months, five months, two weeks, can expect one of two results: either perfect insight here and now, or if a touch of clinging remains, the state of non-return. Forget about two weeks. Whoever practices these four applications of mindfulness like this for seven days can expect one of two results: either perfect insight here and now, or if a touch of clinging remains, the state of non-return.

This is why it is said: this is a one-way street for purifying beings, transcending sorrow and distress, vanishing pain and grief, gaining the method, and realizing Nibbana—the four applications of mindfulness.

Now, in all of this, first we have the prophecy, the absolute certainty, and this comes from the very earliest tradition. Second, notice the importance of the number seven. The Buddha begins with seven years, then takes it down. When it reaches one year, he resumes the bidding at seven months and ends up with seven days. But always seven.

Let me just remind the people in this room who are engaged in this practice: seven days. Does that mean continuous awareness for seven days? So if you've got any friends here and they come back unchanged, you can berate them. They can't make the excuse they didn't have enough time.

In an oral tradition—and of course this is all oral tradition—numbers often have symbolic meaning. In the case of seven, it seems to relate to natural cycles. In the Indian tradition, you have the five visible planets along with the sun and the moon, making up seven. Beyond the Indian tradition, in the book of Genesis, the cycle of creation takes seven days. So the number seven appears in Indian and non-Indian traditions alike, and it seems to indicate a natural cycle. Perhaps what they're suggesting here is that the practice journey of a stream enterer is part of a natural cycle which, when complete, will culminate in awakening.

To get a sense of how long this natural cycle might take, one simile we find in the tradition is that Samsara is like an infinite ocean within which beings are trapped. The vision of Dharma immediately, like that, evaporates that ocean so that only a puddle remains. Of course, if the ocean is infinitely large, there could

be a pretty big puddle. In other words, this attainment is highly significant, but it's not the end. Some people would say it's the beginning. One practitioner I know said it's like when you start the practice, you're crawling around on the floor. At stream entry, you can actually stand up. Basically, you're just beginning.

When the tradition talks about the eightfold path, sometimes you have the earlier eightfold path, and then the noble eightfold path. When does the noble eightfold path begin? It begins at stream entry. Before then, it's just the eightfold path. So stream entry is both a culmination of something profoundly significant and a beginning. It's a good beginning, but it's just a beginning.

So you've got this connection between Satipatthana, mindfulness meditation, and the attainment of stream entry—a very close connection. The Mahasi method of meditation represents an attempt to make available in our world the practice method presented in the Satipatthana Sutta.

So what is that method? Let's backtrack to the udesa, the summary or introduction to the Satipatthana Sutta. Here the Buddha gives a kind of executive summary of the practice, and he does it not by giving a definition, but by describing someone undertaking the practice. This is quite common for the Buddha—often, especially when it's practice-related, he won't give a definition.

He'll describe how it's done.

So you have a sentence which appears four times, one time for each of the four satipatthanas. We'll just go through the first one, where the object of meditation is body. And the Buddha says: a practitioner, surrendering longing and sorrow for the world, lives tracking body as body—ardent, clearly understanding, and mindful. This is the executive summary of the practice.

Now let's focus on the phrase "tracking body as body." This expression, "body as body," implies a direct, face-to-face encounter with body, with physical experience, rather than an experience mediated by concepts.

So let's say I'm doing sitting meditation. Let's say I'm in a retreat, doing lots of sitting meditation, and I feel a sudden pain in my left knee. And I know that the left knee is the dodgy one. So what is this experience? It could be a problem. It could be a serious problem. It could be a problem that, if it gets bad, could sabotage my whole practice—certainly my whole sitting meditation, not to mention involving visits to a physiotherapist. This is a serious problem and it could really screw up my retreat. So that's one way, one mode of experience. By the way, does this kind of encounter sound familiar?

Now, you notice that the answer to the question "what is this experience?" is entirely conceptual, and it's concerned with the fate of the self—me. It's not actually about body. It's a cloud of concepts.

Alternatively, we could ask the question "what is this experience?" and one might answer it with: sharp, tingling, numb, aversion, hard. Now these are also concepts, but they're concepts that are grounded in the

actual physical sensation. They indicate that the awareness is being aimed at the actual physical sensation and not at the cloud of concepts buzzing about. And this is being aware of body as body—keeping the mind grounded on the particulars of the actual physical event as it presents, rather than getting lost in concepts about the physical event. In other words, it indicates what sometimes we call intimacy, becoming intimate with the experience.

So: "Here a practitioner lives tracking body as body." We have the verb "tracking," and this translates the verb *anupassati*. You get different translations from different people. Bhikkhu Bodhi translates it as "contemplates" or "contemplating," which I don't like because it implies or suggests thinking about. I prefer "tracking."

It's a translation of the Pali verb *anupassati*, which is a compound made up of the prefix *anu* and the verb *passati*. And *passati* is the verb "to see"—*vipassana*, insight, for example. *Anu* denotes "along." So *anupassa na* is seeing along, tracking experience over time. And this is the central practice of satipatthana. This is essentially what it's about.

It implies, first of all, directing awareness towards something—in this case body—and so establishing awareness with a direct, face-to-face encounter with the object of experience, whatever it is. And then continuing this direct, face-to-face encounter over a period of time. In other words, establishing a continuity of awareness over time, which is what we've been talking about in this retreat. This is what mindfulness is. We experience mindfulness as the continuity of awareness.

Now, if this reminds you of Mahasi Sayadaw's practice of noting, it's hardly surprising, because that's exactly what it is.

There is some confusion over what Mahasi Sayadaw means by "noting" a meditation object. Does it, for example, mean to name something? Does it mean to write a note about something? And the problem is translation. This is a chronic problem in establishing the Buddha Dharma in the West, because it's astonishing—and it's very distressing, actually—how few meditation students know Sanskrit and Pali. I shake my head.

Much less Burmese. Now, I admit I've never learned Burmese. I didn't have time when I was in Burma—I was too busy noting.

Keep in mind, Mahasi Sayadaw wrote and taught in Burmese. Now the Burmese language, apparently—since this is what I've been told by someone who speaks Burmese—possesses a verb "to aware," as does Pali, as does Sanskrit. And of course Pali is what Mahasi Sayadaw draws upon in order to talk about the practice.

So the Pali word for awareness is viññāṇa, and this is derived directly from the verb vijānāti. In one discourse, when the Buddha is defining certain key terms, he defines them based on the verb. So he says, "When you say awareness, one awares, therefore one says awareness." Now, in English, this sounds rather

odd—like, what? But in Pali, it's: Why do you say viññāṇa? Vijānāti, therefore viññāṇa. And you can see the connection. Similarly with perception, saññā. Why do you say perception? One perceives, therefore one says perception. Why do you say saññā? Sañjānāti, therefore saññā. So there is this very close relationship between noun and verb in Indian languages.

Now, in English, by and large, we do not use the verb "to aware." We generally just use the noun "awareness." But there is a verb "to aware" in Burmese. And when Mahasi Sayadaw's translators—these were lay supporters, volunteers, not professional linguists by any stretch of the imagination—when they came to translate this, they were faced with the problem of the absence of the same verb in English. Mahasi Sayadaw is using an ordinary Burmese verb, but as far as they could see, it doesn't exist in English. What to do? So they used the verb "to note," not realizing the confusion that they were creating.

So when Mahasi Sayadaw says we must note something—body and mind—what he's saying is we must directly aware it without adding any layers of concepts on top of it. In other words, using the Buddha's language, we aware body as body, mind as mind.

Now this understanding of the meaning of noting, I get the distinct feeling, is not widespread in the lineage. So let's briefly look at the words of Mahasi Sayadaw. I'm calling on his authority to back me up.

Let's begin with his Manual of Insight, the central text of our lineage. Mahasi says, "True insight practice is an awareness of all the mental and physical phenomena that constantly arise at the six sense doors." You'll notice he backs away from using awareness as a verb. But in this context, awareness is clearly used to refer to what normally we would call noting. It is interesting, though, that it's presented as a noun rather than as an activity.

Elsewhere in the Manual of Insight, Mahasi says, "The terms 'to note,' 'to observe,' and 'to bear in mind' are synonyms for the purpose of insight practice." So to note, to observe—they're the same thing. To bear in mind. Now this is interesting because "bearing in mind" is an expression often used to explain mindfulness. To bear in mind, to carry in the mind, to be aware over a period of time.

Mahasi Sayadaw also tells us that his way of practice is called pure insight or dry insight—suddha vipassanā, sukkha vipassanā. And in his book The Progress of Insight, he says, "The approach followed is that of quite bare insight"—or what in the English translation is "bare insight" is also "dry insight." But let's say bare insight, "where by direct observation, one's own bodily and mental processes are seen with increasing clarity as being impermanent, liable to suffering, and without a self or soul."

So observation, seeing, awareness—all these terms indicate that when Mahasi is talking about noting, he's not talking about putting names on things and writing little notes about them. He does not mean building a concept on top of what is observed. Now, writing notes can in fact be useful. This is what in this retreat we've been calling naming. But it's an optional added extra. It's not noting.

Directly aware of experience, and doing this consistently over a period of time—this is the essence of his

approach. And it's designed to take us directly to insight.

Now, just to add that this approach remains controversial in the world of Theravada Buddhism. First of all, it's modern, invented in the twentieth century, along with other methods in Burma. Secondly—I don't know if I should really say this because I'm being recorded—I'll say it anyway. It's Burmese. Now, if you're a Thai Buddhist, you have to think, "Who the hell are the Burmese to teach us how to meditate?" And if you're Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, you might well be tempted to think, "Who the hell are you, the Burmese, to teach us how to meditate?" And in fact, there was a lot of controversy in the fifties, the sixties, and beyond. You find that some meditation lineages based in Thailand and Sri Lanka explicitly reject the Burmese way. So a certain amount of nationalism is involved in this controversy.

But the main controversy, the main problem, is that this approach of pure insight, dry insight, bare insight—it bypasses the better-known route of first establishing deep concentration or serenity, *samatha*, and then cultivating insight. This approach is repeated again and again in the discourses. It's part of the template of the practice called the gradual training, which tracks a linear progression of the student from the beginning, all the way to full awakening. And it involves first doing deep serenity practice, and then doing insight.

However, the early teachings are quite diverse when you actually get into them. Just to give an example, we can find mention of different approaches to meditation practice in a discourse called the *Yuganaddha Sutta*—"Intermeshed." This discourse was presented after the Buddha's death. We know this because the person speaking is the Venerable Ananda, who only became a teacher in his own right and only became fully awakened after the Buddha died. Because basically, when the Buddha was alive, Ananda was too busy looking after him and managing the traffic. He was, in a sense, the guard dog between the Buddha and the public.

If you go to Rajgir in northern India, this is where you find the ruins of the city of Rajagaha. Outside the ruins is a hill called Vulture's Peak, very famous in Mahayana Buddhism. If you follow a track up towards the top, you come to two rectangles of solid brick or stone—one right beside the track and the other further away. According to tradition, these are what remains of huts built for Ananda and the Buddha. Ananda lived right at the front. So if anybody wanted up the hill to see the Buddha, they literally had to go past him to get there. The Buddha was in the rear. This was very much part of Ananda's job. He was too busy to do a lot of meditation.

It was only after the Buddha died that he could devote himself to his practice, and eventually he became fully awakened and a major teacher in his own right. In the Zen and Chan tradition, he's seen as the third ancestor.

Now, here Ananda is talking about how different students of his, when they come to report full awakening and he asks them, "So how did you get there? What were you doing?"—they expressed one of four ways of practicing. We're going to drop the fourth because it's a bit strange. We'll just stick to the first three.

These are the three ways. Ananda says: Number one, a practitioner develops serenity preceding insight. First develop deep concentration, then develop insight. As he develops serenity preceding insight, the path is created. Number two, the practitioner develops insight preceding serenity. First you develop insight, then you develop the deep concentration. As she develops insight preceding serenity, the path is created. Or, a practitioner develops serenity and insight intermeshed. As you develop serenity and insight intermeshed, the path is created. And so on.

In other words, every way to awakening involves both serenity and insight, and they're working together in some way—but not necessarily always in the same way.

One of the images used is this: imagine you have an ox cart pulled by two oxen. Now, ox carts were incredibly important in the Buddha's time, a major form of land transportation for goods. Let's assume you've got two oxen and you've loaded up the cart and you want the oxen to take the cart to its destination. Now let's say that one of these oxen is particularly strong, and maybe a bit feisty. Well, you put that ox in at the front, and the other ox behind. The strong one leads the way. But let's say they're pretty evenly matched.

If the two oxen happen to get on quite well with each other, you simply put them side by side, and away they go. In other words, serenity and insight are qualities absolutely essential for the practice, regardless of what method one uses, but the relationship between them can vary from person to person.

Mahasi Sayadaw appears to have regarded his approach as an example of insight preceding serenity. Certainly, at the Mahasi Center, students who "graduate" by attaining the first stage through pure insight—or dry insight—are then offered instruction in serenity practice by their teachers. So insight first, serenity second. This seems to be Mahasi's approach.

Now, when one is actually doing this practice, we come back again to the difference between directly experiencing something and experiencing concepts about that something. This is really central for the Buddha and for the later tradition. The basis for this, the underlying concept, is the idea of *dharmas*—or in Pali, *dhammas*—always in the plural. Often you see the word *dharma* in the singular, where it has various possible meanings, but sometimes you see it in the plural, *dharmas*, and there it has quite a distinct meaning.

If we ask what is real—what is really out there, what is really in here—for the Buddha, what is really happening is a flow of dharmas. And what is a dharma? It is a directly encountered event.

Mahasi's explanation of this is that reality, whatever we mean by that word, comes to us in two forms. First, there is what we directly experience firsthand through the senses—and this includes mind, because for the Buddha, mind is a sense. Second, there is what comes to us indirectly, secondhand, through concepts about what we directly experience. So we have firsthand experience, what directly impacts the senses, and secondhand experience, which is made up of concepts about what is directly impacting the

senses.

Firsthand, direct experience is always associated with understanding and insight. Secondhand experience, made up of concepts, is associated with delusion and the suffering that comes from delusion. The aim of the practice, then, is to move from secondhand experience to firsthand experience. In a sense, that is the job—that is the boot camp.

In the Theravada tradition—this is not the Buddha himself but later Theravada—direct firsthand experience is called ultimate reality, while secondhand experience, concepts about what we directly experience, is called conventional reality.

So if we are practicing noting, what are we doing? We are training ourselves to ground our perception in what the Theravada calls ultimate reality—in other words, the world of directly experienced events. This is the world of dharmas. And this is the world where insight arises.

Normally, our habit is to live in the world of conventional reality, a world of concepts about what we are directly encountering. For the Buddha, this world is a product of our habitual conditioning from a very deep past. This conditioning has been shaping us since our birth—and in fact, for the Buddha, far longer than that. When we ask what forces accomplish this conditioning, they are the three *akusala mūla*, the three roots of the unwholesome: greed, hatred, and ignorance. This tells us that the world presented to us through our concepts is not just wrong, but actually entangles us in pain and misery.

The job of the practice is to move us out of this secondhand conceptual world into a world of ultimate reality, direct firsthand experience, because it is in this world where insight arises. And the practice of noting gives us entry into this world.

One way Mahasi Sayadaw speaks about the practice is to describe it as noting the *nāma-rūpa* stream. This comes out of our original text, *The Mirror of Dharma*. To understand what he means, we must examine this technical term, *nāma-rūpa*.

Essentially, what this is saying is that awareness is always accompanied by an object. If I am aware, I am aware of something. If I am seeing, I am seeing something. If I am hearing, I am hearing something. If I am thinking, I am thinking something. Awareness is structured as a dyad of awareness and its object. They always arise together in this dyad.

Now again, awareness—let's use the verb, "awareing." If there is awareing, it's tied to an object. There's something that is aware. So if something is happening, and this is the object of awareness, if something is happening, there must be awareness of it. Otherwise, it wouldn't be happening. And if there's awareness, then something must be happening. You can't separate them. You can't have one without the other. If you've got one, you've got both. They always arise and cease tied together. And the Buddha speaks of this as the dyad of nama-rupa. What exactly these words mean, we may or may not explore next week. But that's enough for this week.

Now, remembering that both the Buddha and Mahasi Sayadaw speak of awareness as a verb, as an activity—when we are aware, usually, habitually, we assume that what is important is the object of awareness. So when I am seeing, I assume that what I am seeing is important. When I'm thinking, I assume that what I am thinking is important. I don't normally pay any attention to the activity of seeing, the activity of thinking. But it's here, in the activity, that we find awareness. Not there, in the object.

And in the technical language that both the Buddha and Mahasi Sayadaw use, awareing is nama. The object of awareness is rupa. And so you have the compound nama-rupa. If you've got one, you've got the other. They come together.

So nama-rupa indicates the stream of direct, first-hand experience—events coming and going into and out of awareness. Not the web of concepts that surround our direct, first-hand experience. Unless, of course, we note the web of concepts, in which case the web of concepts becomes direct first-hand experience.

So here is how Mahasi Sayadaw describes the practice: "For the practicing yogi, he has to be noting the ever-arising nama-rupa phenomena and continuously noting such phenomena as rising-falling of the abdomen, sitting, touching, seeing, hearing, bending, stretching. Not just four, five or ten notings, not even a hundred, nor a thousand. It has to be continuous and in close succession."

What Mahasi is emphasizing is the continuity of the awareness—or rather, the continuity of awareing, of the activity. Now, you notice that he's not particularly concerned with the object of awareness. It could be breathing, it could be posture, it could be sitting, it could be moving, whatever. Although we can see that he's staying within the broad territory of the grounding object, or the primary object, because all these examples are body, the five physical senses. And body usually provides our grounding object, because for most people, body as an object of awareness is clear and available.

But you notice, first of all, continuity of awareness. And secondly, it doesn't really matter what the object is, so long as it's clear. That really helps. And you notice how he says that the meditation object consists of nama-rupa phenomena. So what are these phenomena? They are dharmas. They are the events we experience directly, first-hand, through the senses. They are not concepts about what we are directly encountering. In other words, they're not what comes to us indirectly, secondhand. They're not about. They're the actual direct encounter with the senses, cutting through the concept. And this is the key to the practice. And this is the gateway into insight for Mahasi Sayadaw.

Now, once through this gateway, the world of insight emerges. And it emerges as the three universal characteristics: anicca, dukkha, anatta—change, pain, not-self. And Mahasi Sayadaw maps our journey into these three characteristics.

using a conceptual framework developed by the later Orthodox Theravada of sixteen ñāṇas. A ñāṇa is often translated as insight knowledge or simply understanding. It's a very simple term—the root *ñā*, to know, to understand, with the suffix *ṇa* added, which turns it into an action noun. So: knowing,

understanding. In the Orthodox Theravada there's a system of sixteen of these understandings which map the journey of insight from here to Nibbāna. And next Wednesday, if all goes according to plan, we will explore this world as mapped by the Buddha and by Mahasi Sayadaw.

Any questions?

"You may not wish to answer this question, Patrick. It's just my voracious curiosity driving the question. What was the fourth somewhat weird method?"

The practitioner is seized by Dharma agitation. And once this agitation dies down, then the path is established. It's a very mysterious one. Basically, not practicing, but seized by something. What it could be, who knows? Some people, if you heard the story of Bahiya, would say, oh, that's Bahiya's method. But we don't really know. It's an interesting one.

"You were talking about the revival of cultural Buddhism in Burma and how it was remodeled in the twentieth century. I'm curious, there was this revival going on there—what was it that made it jump to the West? What was happening in the West?"

The question is enormous and would keep us here all night. There was this revival of Dharma and meditation practice in Burma, so what was it in the West that connected with this so that it spreads throughout the world? Very good question. Very big question. Don't know.

What is clear is that the Burmese themselves, even in the nineteenth century, had this sense that insight is universal and would be of benefit to non-Burmese. So from the very beginning they planned to export it. And it took a while. The attitudes of cultural superiority in the West in the mid-twentieth century were too great for very many people to actually encounter this approach. I think it was basically hippiedom in the 1960s and 70s. Peace Corps helped too. But culturally it was the explosion of hippiedom and people prepared to explore alternatives. People began to turn up at these different countries' meditation centers seeking out meditation teachers, and it particularly took off in the sixties and seventies.

"And maybe because the Burmese had this notion that it would be helpful beyond Burma, maybe they were more receptive to teaching Westerners?"

Yes, they were receptive to teaching Westerners, which, when you get there—when you got there—is very strange, because the Burmese do not adapt easily to other cultures. And Burmese culture, particularly back then in the seventies and eighties, was largely shut off from the world, quite authoritarian. You step into the monasteries, it's like you stepped into medieval times. Yet they had this commitment, this absolute commitment, that whoever walked through the gates, they would teach. And they asked no questions. They didn't care if you were atheist, Muslim, Christian, whatever.

There was one very senior Catholic monk who turned up when I was there, and they were really interested in him. But they didn't care. They just taught him. In fact, they gave him a lot of encouragement.

And they sent off their graduates into the world not knowing what they were going to do with it. Absolutely no idea what these people—who they never really understood, frankly—

what they would do with this. But they just spread it out because they had this complete faith: if we just get it out there, it's going to be good for humanity. And so they did it.

*Question from the audience: Why is it that Mahasi says this approach will be quicker than the other?*

Because generally it is—well, in terms of getting to the first stage. Once the whole thing settled down, basically if you went to Mahasi Center or one of the other centers to do a retreat, you were expected to sign off for two or three months to do the practice. So one month, you're just warming up, really. If you worked relentlessly hard for two or three months, a reasonable proportion of practitioners—particularly Burmese—would get through. Some people would take longer, but that's okay. They can leave, they can come back.

Whereas if you're talking about mastering the jhānas first, for most people that takes a fair bit of time. But some people get through them reasonably quickly. So a lot depends on the person. For some people this approach is quite good—it suits the way their mind works. But for other people it doesn't suit them at all, and they're better off heading into the serenity world. Any kind of meditation technique is appropriate for certain kinds of people, but not for others. And if you're a meditator looking around, your job is to find the approach that suits the way your mind operates.

In my case, I spent years wandering around the Dharma world, and I wandered into Mahasi Center in 1984. I think within 24 hours I knew: this is it. This suits me. So I've been there ever since. But for other people, it doesn't really suit them. It just depends on the person.

*Question: How did Japan, Korea, China, and Tibet get left out of this?*

They're not left out. We're just talking about this lineage. To talk about all of them—I mean, you'd spend the month discoursing on the history of modern Buddhism. So we just focused on this particular lineage.

*Follow-up question about distance and timing—whether it was too late for places like Japan when the Burmese teachers went out to teach.*

No, Zen was going through its own revolution that began with the Meiji Restoration in the late 19th century, again adapting to modernity. The Chinese had problems because they were busy being thrashed by Western imperialism. The Tibetans stayed behind their borders until they fled after the Chinese invasion. So each lineage has its own particular history.

What they have in common is the collision with modernity. And this collision pretty much everywhere came in the form of incredible suffering and disruption, courtesy of imperialism of one form or another. It was when that collision occurred that things started to spread out. But until then, people were happy to stay within their own walls. For the Burmese, it was national emergency that got them started—but it just

happened in the mid-19th century, so it gave them time to develop something. By the time the hippies turned up, they'd been working on it for a while.

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*Transcriptions produced locally using Swiss low-carbon electricity. Corrections and rewriting by cloud-hosted AI.*