The Mahasi Technique

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Dharma Talks · 48:59

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato samma sambuddhassa (repeated three times) — homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

So this evening I want to go just a little bit more in detail as to this particular technique. This morning we were really trying to understand what the Buddha meant by right awareness in this process of liberation, and we went through his life — specifically those four sections where as a young person he enjoys the ordinary sensual pleasures of the world but finds them empty, not leading anywhere, and he's still very much concerned with sickness, old age and death. And then he tries these absorptions, these blissed out states. He finds them wanting. They're beautiful in themselves and it's part of our — he made it part of our practice; it wasn't unwholesome for us, so it was good to do it — but it had this shortcoming that it didn't really tackle the fundamental problem of suffering. And then he tried the business of self-mortification and he only found that painful, didn't get him anywhere at all. He doesn't have a good word for it at all.

When we're practising — just as an aside to one of the questions — remember that we're not trying to get rid of the joys and pleasures of life. We're just trying to find a different relationship to it. So when the Buddha's eating, he knows that it's well-cooked food and tasty. He knew the last meal was off. He probably had eaten too much of it. And it's said he died of that meal. So he knew it was off. He told Chunda, the guy who made it for him, to bury the rest of it. Somehow he wasn't quick enough to stop himself eating it. So his teaching is not about getting rid of the pleasures and joys of life. It's about finding a different relationship — not seeing them as sources of complete, continual, eternal contentment. They just don't deliver.

And the fourth phase was when he had this insight about a different way of approaching suffering, which was to actually investigate the suffering — to stop trying to run away from it, find somewhere else to live, because he always seemed to carry his suffering with him — but to actually investigate the cause of suffering. And that's when he became liberated from it.

And what he meant by this awareness in terms of our *vipassanā* practice was to find this observation post within us, this place from which we could observe whatever was coming into our vision, our consciousness. So when we sit here and we put our attention on the breath just to collect ourselves, we're aware of the breath, the sensations caused by the breath. When some feelings come in the body and draw our attention, we go to them, we feel them. And you couldn't do that if you were already involved in, caught up in the feeling itself — just as when we get angry, for instance, slam the door. We lose that objectivity.

And you can't be thinking about it, because if you think about it, then in a sense you're lost in conceptual thinking about what it is you're experiencing. So that's once removed. It might be pleasing to sit there and wonder why we're suffering something or why we're being happy. But that wondering mind, that thinking mind, is just another place that we hide in — the place that we can escape to.

So this awareness that he's talking about in the sitting meditation is a place which is right there within the body and mind but somehow separate from it. It must be separate from it because it can look at it. It can feel it, can experience it. You've all been doing that all day. So therefore there's something about this awareness which doesn't belong there. That's the point. And our search in a way is to find out what the quality of this awareness is — what is it? What is this ability I have to be conscious of things, to be aware of things?

And that brings in another factor: this idea of curiosity. Although we separate the two — *sati*, *paññā*, awareness and intuitive intelligence — they're both the same thing. So that's why we practise this abiding in the present moment, this inhabiting the present moment in a very open way, completely receptive, teaching ourselves to be completely passive. No matter what's coming into our awareness, we just let it come and let it pass away. Even if it takes a whole day, it doesn't really matter. It will pass. And that's practising this ability just to receive, without questioning, without trying to do anything.

And once that's established, maintaining that state of the objective observing, objective feeling, objective experiencing, we turn on this curiosity.

Curiosity. I like to tell the tale when I was once in Penang and somebody offered a hut — well it was a house really — up in a plantation. And in the evening one evening I set this table out and sat on top of this table and put a net up, a mosquito net, and a great big mug of coffee. I was going to watch the sunset. It got darker and darker. And I suddenly realised that I was facing east. It was a disappointment. Anyway, every evening, these two dogs would meet. And they were great friends. They'd chase each other round and round this hut that I was living in. Well, this bungalow I was living in. And on that very evening, I was sat there, and one of the dogs arrived and began to whine because his friend hadn't turned up. And he hadn't noticed me, or perhaps he had, but he just wasn't concerned about that. He was concerned about where his friend was.

Now, when his friend turned up, they greeted each other. And then as he turned around, he saw this table with a net and somebody in it. And he looked and he went... See? Dogs have Buddha nature. They have this intelligence. They have this curiosity. And that really struck me because it's the same. It's the same consciousness that we have. It's that same ability to be aware and to question. I don't know whether the dog became fully liberated on that occasion. But definitely, I thought to myself, well, you see, even dogs have it. And they are free from this conceptual thinking.

Now, does that mean that all our education has been to waste? No, far from it, because our education has increased the ability to understand. That's the point. This intelligence we have comes in, as it were, blind.

And the education that we have has increased our ability to understand, to think. So remember, we're not trying to get rid of anything. The Buddha was accused of annihilation, annihilation theory — everything was destroyed. He said, no. He said, the only thing that is annihilated is greed, hatred and delusion.

So remember that once he became liberated, he spent the whole night, the first watch of the night, trying to understand the process whereby suffering is caused. The second watch of the night, how it was undone. And the third watch of the night, both ways, just in case he got it wrong. And that's what we call dependent origination. That's the psychology he teaches. Now he couldn't have done that without thought.

And one of the things that happens to us in meditation occasionally, is as we're looking, as we're observing, something will pop into the mind. It might just say impermanence, or, "God, that's suffering," "that's desire." It'll just, as it were, pop out. This is this intelligence telling itself what it knows. We don't know what we know until it manifests. It has to manifest as a word, or as a piece of art, or as an action. It has to come out somewhere. And then we know we know it.

I'm sure you've all had this amazing experience of saying something enormously wise to your great surprise. See? You didn't know you knew it. And then suddenly you are making these amazing statements. And the opposite — which is the measure of our delusion. It's fine. It's the way we are.

So it's not that we are in our meditation trying to get rid of thought. We're just trying to stop it for a while. And you might think to yourself, well, why doesn't it stop? Why do I have so much difficulty in just stopping this thinking mind? Well, just consider: from the moment you wake up to the moment you fall asleep, does it ever stop? No. The mind's always thinking. And it's usually thinking about me. Right? "Why do they think me and I should, why not myself and they should, I, I, I, I, I." It goes on and on and on, just thinking about ourselves. So there's never a point in the day where the mind actually stops unless you purposefully do so, and then it would only stop for a short while.

So here we are coming to a meditation retreat thinking that well we'll just sit for a minute and it'll just stop. Now one of the reasons that we practise this noting technique is to at least bring that intellect, that thinking mind, to a simple concrete place. Right? And in that way we can as it were contain its power and draw that energy from it just directly into the looking. Now we'll come to that in a minute.

So having understood that business of right awareness, intuitive awareness — sometimes called intuitive awareness — there are many techniques to establish that. In the scriptures there isn't a specific technique. The Buddha just guides. He says he observes the breath knowing it to be either short or long, heavy or coarse. In other words, when you first sit you're just contacting the breath as a feeling, and then you train upon it — calming the body, calming the mind — and then you begin to see its impermanence. Of the three, that one is the simplest to see — that it's impermanent. And when there is just enough awareness, just enough inquiry, curiosity, insight arises. That's all it is. And the breath is that part that we use to develop that quality.

Now there are many *vipassanā* techniques. If you've read Jack Kornfield's old book *Living Buddhist Masters* — I think there's only one alive now, but I think they've renamed it — and you'll see there are about twelve in there, if I remember rightly, all of whom have quite distinct different ways of approaching how to develop this right awareness.

And some of you will have experienced other techniques than this. Some of you will have tried for instance the Vipassana technique taught by Goenkaji, or that place in Wiltshire. And they centre, really their practice — because I did it for a while — their practice centres entirely on this *anicca*, this impermanence. That's enough, see? It's enough, because when you see impermanence, you see that holding on to anything is suffering, so you see the cause of suffering. When you see impermanence, you realise that nothing remains, so it can't be self, it can't be substantial. So impermanence, in the Buddha's understanding, is a gateway into these other two qualities, these other two characteristics of existence. It's a gateway. And you'll find that various techniques have a particular angle.

One that I practised in Thailand, in the bay of Bangkok there — that bay, I think it was called — and the teacher had died. And her teaching was entirely centred on *dukkha*, suffering. I'd never come across this before. And I was instructed — the instruction is very simple: to remain in the sitting posture until it hurt, until it really hurt. I mean until it really, really hurt. And then you could move either to another posture or standing posture. And then off you went again until it hurt, it really, really hurt. See?

And the idea was that you got into this dreadful state of pain, seeing your reaction to it, constantly trying to let go of your negativity towards it, trying to find a peacefulness with it, you see, until it became unbearable. Then as you moved, you noted, you saw that as the body became comfortable, the mind became comfortable. See? So just in that process of seeing pain and the rejection of pain, the resistance to pain, getting to a point where you can't bear it — which is only a limit within our ability — and then using that movement to see how the body and mind relate and how it's all manufactured, it's all two processes. And these were the directions I had. The only time we weren't supposed to follow them was when we were eating. Which makes a bit of sense.

So all these techniques have that purpose: to establish a certain level, a certain type of awareness, right awareness, to observe these three characteristics. And they've got their checks and balances. There's always a downside to these techniques and always a plus. And it's up to us to be able to know when we're going off piste and when we're directly on it.

Now, one thing that you have to give up if you want to do Vipassana in its pure sense is just give up any idea of it doing some good psychologically. See? Because if you set yourself a task — "Well, I'm going to sit here now and I'm going to get over my depression. I'm going to get over my anxiety. I'm going to get over this, get over that" — your whole practice is skewed onto observing this quality. And if you're sat there and it doesn't come up, you're disappointed. You want to work with this depression that's not coming. In fact, you feel happy and you can't be bothered with happiness anymore. You go, "I want to be depressed so

I can really understand my depression." So the whole practice becomes skewed towards this idea that we're going to do something about our psychology.

It's not about trying to get rid of any physical problems we have. If you have some sort of backache or something like that and you're trying to use the posture and everything to cure it because you've heard that sometimes physical problems disappear with meditation, then your whole effort is just trying to get rid of this problem, see? And you miss the point. You miss the point.

Now if you come off that and you practise the *vipassanā* in its pure sense, then of course the therapy takes care of itself. The body takes care of itself. The body will heal itself if it can do so. And if you need extra help to get it healed, then obviously you go to a therapist or a doctor or something. But when it comes to centring your attention on that, you see, you're going to come off — you're moving off the real purpose of our practice. The purpose of our practice is to cut right under that stuff, to go right down to the foundations as to how this whole suffering and dissatisfaction arose in the first place.

So it's not as though all these techniques that we have now — therapeutic techniques, psychotherapy, all these other therapies out there — are useless. Far from it. To use them in order to better our lives, that's not a problem. It's not against the Buddha's teaching, for his sake. When people fell sick, he was lucky to have the chief doctor, the chief person who looked after the king, who offered them free medical assistance, free medical care. I can't remember his name at the moment. And what happened was, this became so well known that people who are sick join the order, especially to get free medicine. So now when you join the order, you can't join the order if you're sick. See? It's against the rule to join the order if you're sick. See? I'm not talking about colds and flus. I mean some serious illness.

So, putting all that aside, you see, right? And bringing ourselves just to the practice of just establishing this awareness and being able to investigate it from this position of the objective observer. And that takes a bit of faith, you see. But hopefully, as our practice deepens, we see that the mind heals itself, just like the body does, for the most part. When you cut yourself, who heals it? I mean, we keep it antiseptic and all that, but the body does it. You're not in there telling the cells where to go, urging them on. They just do it.

So the mind, you see, you begin to realise that all these moods and emotions that we experience are just energy. They're just turbulence. They're just forms of energy. And if you just feel them, just let them express themselves, they exhaust themselves. But whenever they enter into this dream world, we grab them and we start through our stories to make them grow. And when we identify with them, they become solid. They become me. These are the sorts of things that we're looking at when we're practising Vipassana.

And as soon as we begin to see how we cause ourselves suffering, then of course the effort is to stop that. And as you stop it, everything begins to cool down. The mind begins to cool. So one of the descriptions of *Nibbāna* is coolness, like the fire goes out. So our purpose then is to establish this right intuitive intelligence and allow this intuitive wisdom to do its work. Remember that there is a connection between thought and

this intuitive wisdom.

And as he's getting into his bath you see, relaxed, at ease, I'm presuming, isn't he? He sees the water rising, dependent on the volume of his irregular body. Boom, boom, he's made it, you see? Eureka, I found it. That's how it works.

Those of you who know about Rinzai Zen, the koan. See, the koan posits impossible, posits paradoxes, which you try and work out, you see. There's some truth in it somewhere. What does it mean? One hand clapping. See, so you're trying to work it out, trying to work it out. And then finally, when you come to the end of what the intellect does, you drop it. But in that process, there's been a honing of that intelligence. And the insight comes. See?

So, always remember, we're not trying to get rid of anything. We're not trying to destroy anything except greed, hatred and delusion.

Now the other thing I've written here is the practice. Remember that especially those of you who have been practising a long time, you get this laziness about it, you know. It's easy to sit here and you find yourself sitting here for three quarters of an hour, an hour, and it's easy weasy peasy, you know. And then you get up and you go and do some walking but actually nothing's happened. And it's because we've fallen into that state of losing that sense of urgency, that sense of really investigating things, where you can just sit for an easy time. Maybe some stuff comes up, you get some things occasionally that interest you, but generally speaking your mind's in this flappy, flaccid state where nothing's happening - a gentle awareness. Or you get so lazy that in fact the mind really starts wandering and you find yourself three quarters of an hour, you know, saving the world, or worse.

And so that effort to keep bringing the attention back into the present moment is absolutely paramount, absolutely paramount. As soon as you see the mind wandering, to come out to recognise the attitude which is making it do that, and then to come back to the body. And it may be that as you come back to the breath, you can feel the attitude which is empowering. You can feel the emotional state - maybe the anger or the joy or the excitement. In which case you stay there. You stay there, you don't go back to the breath. You stay there. And as that begins to express itself as feeling, it's exhausting itself. And when it disappears, when it's gone, the thought stops.

When you've done that a few times then you realise that the problem doesn't lie in the head, it lies in the heart. It lies in our emotional base. So at the end of each sitting, that's why it's so important to do this little reflection. It doesn't have to be long, just pick up on one or two things, that's all. I mean I've given a certain structure to it but it doesn't have to be that way. It's just looking back and thinking well, you know, I could have put more effort into that, you know. Why did I fall asleep, you know? You know, it's like you just question yourself and if it was good you say yeah, that's good, you know. I really put some effort in there and the benefit was this, the benefit was this. You see, I was really very still on the breath, I got highly concentrated, I got right into that feeling, you see, that sensation. So you congratulate yourself as well.

And then that resolution - you see, now I know that the path to hell is paved with good intentions, but the idea is that you really empower a resolution. So for instance if you have been lazy about lethargy and you've allowed yourself to just fall asleep unwittingly, you know, half consciously, you might say, then you make that determination: Right, I know how overpowering that mental state is. The next time I feel even a dodgy of it, I'll get up, I'll stand up, because I know its power, yeah?

So that reflection after every sitting is important, see. Doesn't have to be long, just a little reflection. And it's like you're telling yourself, you're constantly urging yourself, constantly cajoling yourself, encouraging yourself.

So, what are these techniques and why do we use them? The Mahāsi himself was quite a scholar. He was famous at his time for his scholarship. So much so that when they had the 1956 sixth council - there's only been six great councils since the Buddha died - he was asked to be the questioner, the pucchaka. So this was an honorary position, but it meant that people recognised him as being a real scholar. Not just a scholar. If it was just a scholar, there were probably others who would have qualified. It was the fact that he was also a meditation master, meditation teacher.

And he was brought down to Bangkok just after independence, 1948, by the Prime Minister and some others. And very quickly he established a name for himself. And during the fifties he was travelling to Sri Lanka and all over the East. And then he came here, I think, in the seventies, something like that. I think that was his first time, the late seventies. And by which time this particular technique had really taken a hold. At the same time that the U Ba Khin technique - so these two techniques coming out of Burma really became quite fashionable and really showed you the state of play at that time when people, monks, monastics, monks and nuns really went meditating. So this was really something that was really pushing the system again. So in that sense he was an incredible inspiration.

Being a scholar, you see, being a word person, he took from his teacher this idea of noting. And I was surprised to find that it's also used in certain forms of Sōtō Zen. And the idea was that you kept the intellect contained through these very simple words, but they were also pushing you towards the object.

So if you think of a child, when they see something, they shout, don't they? Car, car, you know, bird, bird - they shout, you see, they're shouting. And what they're doing is they're actually making their attention stick onto the object. So the Mahāsi talked about it as throwing a stone at a wall. If you've got a bottle on a wall, you aim at it, you know, and the stone hopefully hits the bottle. So this word is something that you are using to get closer to the object.

Now what we find, especially for those of you who are trying this for the first time, is that the word is so loud you can't see anything. It's just up in your face, yeah? Rising, falling - that's all you can be aware of, this rising, falling, rising, falling. What this is telling us is that this intuition, this intuitive intelligence is stuck right there in the intellect.

So what we do is we keep that rising and falling but as it were we sneak around the word. We look over it or through it or under it - use whatever works for you - and contact the feeling, you see. And then there's this experience where the word becomes softer and begins to somehow receive. It feels as though it's coming from behind rather than leading you in front, see. And that shows us that this intelligence is just coming out of that confusion with the intellect. And the more you do that, the more you'll find the word really helps you to keep your attention on the object.

Now one of the questions is should we do it all the time like a mantra? You should do it all the time. From the moment you wake up, get in the habit of doing the whole day, no matter what you're doing. But it shouldn't be like a mantra, see. It should be really deliberate. So when you're saying rising, falling, it's a deliberate note concurrent with the action. Remember, if you say rising before the breath, you get the feeling you're controlling it. But if you're just feeling the breath and you're just using this word to push you into the breath, to get closer to those sensations, then that's the way it's supposed to work.

When you're opening a door, you see, you stand in front of the door, see - standing. You see the intention, intending to open the door. These intentions, like intending to walk, intention to open the door, they're not overpowering emotional states, right? They're just a desire, intending to open the door, right? That's what you mean to do. That's all you're saying. But you're making it a conscious thing, intending to open the door. You're not just crash through it, okay? So you're intending to open the door.

As your hand goes towards the door, you're feeling it. Your attention is in your hand, right? The feeling of your hand and your arm stretching, moving, see? Then as you hold onto the handle, there's that contact, see? So you're pressing, pressing. So first of all, there's the contact whereby you sense it to be metal. Even if you had your eyes closed, you'd pretty well guess it was metal, see? So it's actually getting down to that feeling. And then as you're pushing it down, pushing, pushing, you're communicating with the spring. You're not just trying to break its back and just burst through the door. You're actually just feeling the pressure of the spring, right? So that your effort and the spring's effort is exactly the same except yours is a little bit stronger because you're pushing against it.

And then when you finally got it down to its open state then you push to open the door, see. And then pushing, pushing, pushing, releasing, releasing. So you're still there with the spring, see. Standing, standing. Intending to walk, walk through the door. Standing. Intending to turn right.

So this should take you at least five minutes to get through the door. Now you don't have to do it with every door - you never get here. But you can do it at least once or twice to get to that minutiae, to see how when you really slow things down you see things very particularly. You really, really get down to how the mind, how the body is working.

So the word that we're using should be deliberate, it should be concrete. We shouldn't be searching for words. If a word doesn't come up, use something quite generic. Use the word which is expressing the process. So instead of feeling, feeling - in other words pain, pain - you can use the word feeling to express

what it is you're actually doing. And any word like that - sensation. If the word doesn't come up, just go for a generic word like feeling. But if a word does come up then just use it.

One thing we discover is that language is very poor when describing feelings, emotions, sensations. They're very general words. And we shouldn't spend time thinking for the right word, the poetic word. I mean, that's just silly. So it's really just using very obvious words for very concrete things we're doing.

So now the retreat, especially for those who are staying for the week. See, it's the same every day, see? Every day, you get up, you meditate, you walk, you eat, you meditate, you sit, see? All the day. So eventually, there's only a set of words anyway. It's not as though you have to keep discovering what to call this, because it's usually always the same. Every day is the same. And that's purposeful, see? The purpose is to make something so repetitive, so repetitive, that you can see the process, these mental, physical processes, over and over again. And it's seeing them over and over and over again that eventually, you know, like Chinese torture, it drops. It all gets through to you eventually. And there's a change of attitude, see? When there's a change of attitude, it's becoming systemic. It begins to express itself in the way we speak, in what we do, in our livelihood, see?

So it's not good enough to do the eating meditation once or twice. It's constant, constantly doing it, you see. And the end of that process doesn't come until we're liberated from delusion, see. So, you know, think of it as a long term practice. We're in for the duration.

So that business of noting, you see, is deliberate, it's to the point, and it's continuous, continuous. And like was suggested, you see, it becomes a mantra if you don't watch it. So, rising, falling, see? The mind shoots off to Acapulco. So you wake up and the mind's going, rising, falling, rising. Because you've trained it, you see? Completely useless. Absolutely completely useless.

We just talked about intentions. So intention in the Buddhist psychology is where it all begins. And I'll be going into this more deeply during the week. Intention is the beginning of an action, okay? When you repeat the action you're forming a habit. When you collect all your habits together that's your personality. And your personality is driving you to your destiny, right? When you come back on these habits and begin to sort them out as being wholesome or unwholesome, then your destiny changes, okay? And it all begins with this intention.

So what is an intention? An intention is just an idea, a thought empowered with desire. That's all - very simple. And if you catch the intention, it's not done anything. It's the product of a habit, it's not actually producing an action, it's not producing a habit. It's just come up as an idea laced with desire. And if you can stay with that, if you can catch it, you see, then you've got that moment, you see. You've got that release from it and you can let it go, let it die away if you see it's not wholesome. And if it is wholesome you can empower it. If you want, it might be the wrong time to do it, it doesn't matter. The point is, it's that moment of discernment.

So throughout the day, you see, and I'll keep urging you to do this, just keep stopping, keep stopping, keep stopping. Stopping, relaxing into the moment, noting the next intention, empowering it. Constantly like that. And what you'll find is when you do that, is that you really do begin to slow down. Because this stopping just stops things from snowballing, stops things from growing bigger and bigger.

Now, all these techniques can be taken into daily life. So this business of stopping, you see. When you - often we walk into a room and we walk into the atmosphere of the room and we're in conversation and we might be developing, quite unwittingly, some form of irritation with somebody, yeah? And then when we walk out of the room, we carry that with us to the next person, see? But if you actually stop at the door just for a moment and recognise this little irritation you've picked up and just let it drop, you're walking liberated of it. So it's the same with excitement. So you're getting yourself all excited, see? And instead of exhausting yourself by the end of the day, you just stop, see? Let it drop. And then reestablish calmness, see?

You can't do that without stopping. You can't do that without creating a break. So this business of stopping and just turning inward and just seeing where we are, just letting it drop—even if it doesn't drop away and if we've got ourselves truly excited or truly irritated, at least now we're aware of it so that when we walk into the next situation perhaps we can just leave it there. We can park it.

Parking an emotion is not the same as suppressing it. Whenever you suppress something, you're always using some form of aversion, some form of fear, or some form of pleasure. The pleasure is when you direct your attention away from it to something delightful. But by parking it, you know it's there but you're not paying attention to it, so you're not actually adding any further turbulence to the system. So this business of stopping and noting the intention is something you have to get into the habit of. The more you do it, the more you'll get that sense of presence, of being here.

And finally, there's slowing down. As I think I mentioned yesterday, driving through a forest is different from walking through a forest. So slow everything down. Just take your time. Get that feeling of having an eternity of time to do the simplest of things. Not that you have to take an eternity of time to do the simplest of things—it's just that sense of time. Get rid of that something that has to be done.

When I was with my teacher there, he would say, "Eating." I remember once a group of us were eating, and we were taking up to an hour to eat this food. And he'd come towards the end of the meal and stand over us and say, "Slower, slower." That was his constant command—he was constantly telling us to go slower. If you saw, even when you were going at the speed of a snail, there was this command to go slower, keep going slow, keep going slow.

The thing is that if you can find times of the day when you can go slow—there's the walking meditation, there's the eating meditation, but there's other times too when there are not people around you waiting or something like that—then just remind yourself: go slow. And you'll see the whole system calms down and things become very obvious, very obvious how we're causing suffering for ourselves.

One little thing is, if you find yourself rushing, just stop, acknowledge, and then go back to where you were and start again—but don't rush back. Go back slowly. Go back slowly. And then you'll see just that little correction—just like at school there are corrections—just that little correction re-establishes a new habit. You only have to do it once or twice and you'd be surprised.

One of the things about coming on a retreat like this, or any *vipassanā* retreat held here, is how quickly we can change our habits. I mean, you might not normally get up at five, or definitely not half past three or four o'clock—isn't it here? And not eating in the afternoon. At first it might feel a bit difficult, but then after that it's easy peasy. And sitting for so long—at first it's difficult, isn't it? The first day is hard, the second day is worse, third day is not much better. It's only by the fourth, fifth day that you suddenly get the fruit of your practice, the ease of practice and the natural calmness that comes with it. But that's all it's taken, just to change ourselves.

So with all these mundane things especially—opening doors, brushing your teeth, going up and down stairs—don't miss any of that as opportunities to just continue this mindful investigation. Clear comprehension—that's the Buddha's word for it. Clear comprehension. And it's translated as mindfulness sometimes.

So that's it really, just going through those techniques. Three basic techniques: noting, noting intentions, and going slow. That's it. That's the Mahāsi technique. And whenever you join a course and you see people walking slowly, like zombies, then you know, ooh, this is the influence of the Mahāsi. Whenever you hear somebody suggesting you might note, that's the influence of the Mahāsi. So it's just there, really, within all *vipassanā* teachers.

Most of the *vipassanā* teachers have done all sorts of techniques and have found their own particular way of teaching this *satipaṭṭhāna*. I try to maintain a fairly strict line, but I don't think if my teacher were here they'd be happy with my approach either, because in the East it's all full on—it's eighteen hours sitting, walking, sitting, walking, none of this open awareness space out. It's just try harder and then... And in the end, it works. For some people, it didn't. For some people, it was just the wrong technique.

So this is, as I said at the beginning, this is just an opportunity to investigate yourself. This is for you. This is self-caring. This is trying to do something about ourselves, with the obvious understanding that when I change, things change around me. People change.

So take this opportunity to really devote yourself to this practice. I can only hope my words have been of some assistance. May by your devoted effort, unrelenting devoted effort, you achieve liberation from all suffering sooner rather than later. That's what you're supposed to say. *Sādhu, sādhu, sādhu.*

I'll try again. May you be fully liberated sooner rather than later. That makes me feel good.

There were scriptures where the monks and nuns delighted in the Buddha's words, and there were those where they were silent. They didn't respond with delight. So *sādhu* is just the way of expressing your

delight. So if you don't say it, I think, oh, well.

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