

The Technique

Bhante Bodhidhamma · Retreat Talks · 24 min read

Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa. Homage to the Buddha, the blessed, noble and fully self-enlightened one.

The first thing we need to do when we start on a course is to make sure that we have the right intentions. If we have the wrong intentions, the practice will be skewed and we'll just end up disappointed. So we need to ask ourselves why we've come on a course of meditation. Now it's only fair to think that it's going to bring some sort of physical and psychological benefit, some sort of clarification of our thought, and some spiritual benefit. But if we make these objectives our moment-to-moment aims, then we'll simply get into that old grasping, getting, attaining mindset, and end up all frustrated and go away swearing we'll never waste our time doing something so useless again.

Why? Because the self brings into any equation a distortion, a projection. Remember, it is the self itself which is the delusion, and if we allow its ambitions to guide us, it really will be a case of the blind leading the blind. So ultimate objectives—the purification of the heart from all self-driven desire and the realization of *nibbāna*—are beyond the capability of self, beyond the capability of self-will. And as we progress in the course, the reasons for this should become apparent, I hope.

For instance, many of you will have heard of the *vipassanā ñāṇa*, the spiritual insights, of the four stages of sainthood, which lead to the awakening of the *arahat*, of course, the enlightened person, and *nibbāna*. It's impossible, I think, to come onto a course of this nature and not have some such ideas of attainment floating about in the mind. Well, let them float. Don't hang on to them. Because for sure, such desires are definitely beyond the self, for such attainments transcend the self itself.

Worse still, if we have some idea as to what spiritual attainments are, then only two things can happen. Either we won't attain what we've conceived and be disappointed, or worse we will and be utterly deluded. For whatever spiritual insights are, they are not expressions of our concepts, our thoughts, our imaginings. They are direct experiences beyond the capability of the mind to imagine. Indeed, all we do when we attain our concepts is to make manifest in the material world what we had imagined, just as a designer might finally get their dream car built. But cars, houses, jewellery are all of this phenomenal world. Our sights are aimed a little higher. Indeed, they are aimed at the supramundane world, beyond the phenomenal world.

Now so committed are we to these ideas that sometimes, when something strange or wonderful begins to happen in our meditation, we'll suddenly grasp onto it. "This is it, this is it," and we're all bated breath, hoping to attain. Now that's a very misleading word. The better word, if there can ever be a word, is to

realize. Suddenly there's a seeing, and that's it. Insight. And the only way we're going to realize an insight is, paradoxically, to get out of the way.

It's a bit like working out a mathematical problem. Take Archimedes. Now the king had asked him to prove that the crown was pure gold. To make sure, he had to get the specific gravity. And to get that, no doubt you remember your maths, you need to know the weight and volume of a given object. Now getting the weight was easy, but how to get the volume of an irregular shape? A real koan. He had given up and went to relax in the bath. Where else? And right there, "Eureka! I found it, I got it!" As his body slipped into the water, he saw that the amount of water rising was equal to the volume of his irregular-shaped body. Just then, when he was not thinking about it at all, when Archimedes was no longer in the way.

I think this sort of thing happens to us all the time. Sometimes we even sleep on a problem and wake up with the answer. There's some intelligence there which doesn't think. It just perceives directly. It realizes something just like that. Well, that's the very same faculty that sees the way things really are and brings about the liberation from our delusions and consequent sufferings. So the truth of the matter is, we have to get out of the way, get out of the way completely and let *paññā*, that wonderful intuitive intelligence within us, do the work. We have to have faith in this higher power, a higher power within us to set us free from our delusions.

The fact is that the truth is always there to be seen. It's more like looking into a dark room and suddenly the light goes on and we see everything. Just like that. Now the light didn't create the objects in the room. They were always there, always there to be seen. So the question is, how do we turn this light on? That's definitely THE question.

Well, the first thing is to be absolutely clear that we can't make physical, psychological, intellectual and certainly not spiritual aims the purpose of our meditation course because that's all self-desire, self-driven ambition. What then can we make a legitimate aim and thereby not end up disillusioned? Well, that aim is simply and solely to develop the skills of meditation. And the reason for this is that all skills involved in *vipassanā* training, whatever these skills may be, and they differ from school to school, are concerned with lifting consciousness out of its embeddedness, its confusion with the body, heart and mind, and to make those very areas of experience the object of consciousness itself.

In other words, all skills are there so that this intuitive consciousness, *satipaññā*, that which knows, can see and understand exactly what the body, with all its sensations, the heart, with all its feelings, and the mind, with all its thoughts, actually are. It is a process of investigation by way of direct experience and this can't be done without consciousness lifting itself to a higher ground.

You'll already be familiar with my favourite metaphor of the ornithologist from the *Vipassanā* tape. To study birds, indeed any wildlife, the scientist has to be hidden from them so that their presence doesn't distort the creature's natural behaviour. And just by watching, they come to know. Just watching. Another image is to be up on the crow's nest of a ship, able to see what's happening on the ship and far beyond.

And consider how our vision of planet Earth changed once we got those pictures from the moon. Suddenly, everybody's talking about the global village. We have to discover a similar vantage point within ourselves and once discovered, then the work truly begins. The work, the labour to maintain it. All of this will be down to the skilful means we employ.

Now the Buddha was brought up in the Kshatriya caste, the warrior caste. So he would have been well acquainted with the needs and demands of skills training. He'd have practiced archery, wrestling, and he probably learned how to play an instrument. He would have known the need to repeat the same action over and over again. Practice makes perfect. How many times do world-class tennis players practice serving backhands and volleys? So when Siddhartha Gautama set off on his spiritual quest to find the end of suffering, it's no wonder he sought out teachers who would show him how, the techniques of meditation. And the two teachers who helped him showed him how to attain all the blissful absorptions. But as we know, he wasn't satisfied with that, and that's when he went off on his own. And part of his greatness lies in the fact that he treads new territory and finds the solution to the great and overwhelming problem of human suffering.

In the same way, we ourselves need to become spiritual athletes. To become athletes demands constant devotion to the practice of skills. We can't stop until we're fully enlightened. So it's best to cultivate an attitude that the training period for the spiritual gold medal is going to take a long time. So let's start right now, little by little. Sometimes we take time off, sometimes we just forget. Well, that's all right, so long as we acknowledge that we'll have fallen back a bit and that it's going to take a little special effort to get us back on track.

Now, all skills training has to be self-reflective. We must in time be fully aware of what the skills are, why we're using them, when we should use them and so on. And we should know them so well that we can eventually guide ourselves and make teachers redundant. This is achieved not simply by practicing the techniques but also by reflecting on them, practicing the techniques and becoming aware of the feedback and becoming more and more aware of what the techniques are trying to help us do and how we can use them more and more skillfully.

All this focus on skills training, however, can lead to one big mistake. And I want to warn you right now, right at the beginning, because it's so important not to have this wrong understanding. We can become so involved in technique that we can't see the wood for the trees. Worse, we actually begin to believe that the technique is what really achieves the insight. The technique becomes a sacred ritual which has to be performed exactly right or nothing will be gained. Meditators become entirely wrapped up in the details and cordon off their retreat from others, saying it's the best or the pristine or quicker or even, so I've heard, more modern.

What we can say is that every valid system of *vipassanā* has its own built-in logic, checks and balances, and that ultimately a person centres on a particular technique for a variety of reasons, such as their

personality, their relationship with the teacher, the availability of courses, and so on. When this mistake of mystifying a technique is made, the reason is that the aim of the techniques has been lost and the aim is simply to get that consciousness of ours onto a steady position of inward observation. Once that is done we can let go of all technique.

Having said that, don't think that you can drop the technique within a week. Surely there'll be moments, minutes perhaps, when we can just observe. But then as soon as we lose it, we need to get back to the technique. The whole point then of the skills of meditation is to take us beyond themselves. They're part of the raft the Buddha talked about that takes us to the other shore. Once we've arrived, there'll be no need to carry it about, no need to carry the raft on our backs.

So the purpose then of all technique is to raise consciousness to a level where it can observe quite impartially the goings on of the body with all its sensations from the sense bases and all its feelings, the heart with all its varied moods and emotions, and the mind with all its teeming thoughts and imaginings. Just to be able to sit back and watch, as if at a cinema, just watching the film on the screen, the screen of cognition, our cognitive faculty. In this way we begin to taste the unconditioned consciousness that the Buddha exclaimed he had attained upon enlightenment. That's part of the verses we chant in the morning, the celebration of his liberation from suffering and unsatisfactoriness.

Now as time passes, the teaching becomes dulled. It's been over two and a half thousand years now since the teachings were first expounded. But there are always reformation movements throughout the history of Buddhism, some large and some small, which revitalize the teachings, the Dharma. And the Mahāsi Sayadaw must be accredited as one of the key teachers, if not the main influence, in revitalizing the practice of *vipassanā* in Theravāda Buddhist countries.

The Mahāsi had been teaching in the north of Burma when some people went looking for a teacher to start a meditation centre in Rangoon. Please note this was lay-led and the special quality of a Mahāsi centre is that there are always lay teachers and the majority of the centres are within the city or town boundaries. This in itself, it seems, was a revolution, since up until then it was generally presumed that only monastics could gain anything from meditation.

In fact, the lie goes deeper. It is still propagated by some, and some high-ranking members of the monastic Sangha, unfortunately, that no one can make any spiritual progress these days, let alone become enlightened, because of the corruption of the Buddha Dhamma. As far as I'm concerned, that may say more about them than the state of the Buddha Dhamma. The Mahāsi developed a technique which has helped so many people to develop their spiritual lives and attain the noble paths and fruits.

So what are these techniques he developed? The first of these techniques is to do with sitting meditation. Well, we've been through those on the tape you've just heard and you'll have noticed how detailed they are—there's a direction given for any and every situation that might arise in the sitting posture. Again, there are directions for walking meditation, which progresses from walking as fast as you want for

exercise, to walking as slowly as humanly possible. And when standing there are also clear instructions, though the ones I give, as far as the posture itself goes, are taken from the Chinese discipline of Qigong. But you can stand quite ordinarily if you want. And for other daily activities, such as eating, washing and lying down, there are equally direct instructions. But here I want to concentrate on why these different techniques are used.

The first technique that is, I believe, specific to the Mahāsi method, is noting. Although it may be pointed out that if there's any thinking, it's not real *vipassanā*, what is misunderstood here is that this is a technique to get a meditator beyond thinking. It's not an end in itself. According to the Buddha's teaching, there are two stages of concentrated thought before full concentration is established. The first is a simple noting or naming of the object. This simple thought, naming, noting, is known as *vitakka* and is likened to a bee flying towards a flower. A word which encapsulates the whole experience.

In a child this is very obvious and simplistic. When a two-year-old is beginning to speak, they'll rejoice at being able to name an object. "Ca, ca, ca." For that mind at that level of language, the word car simply points at the object, and there's not much thought around it, since language itself, which allows us to think about an object, is not developed enough for this to happen. But for us, the word car conjures up a host of memories and desires. This thinking about an object, this mentation, is known as *papañca*. Now there's a lovely word, *papañca*. It's proliferation.

And the effect of this thinking and daydreaming is to keep us off the presenting object and distract the mind. The Buddha likened it to a monkey jumping from branch to branch. Now this is exactly what we've got to stop. We've got to stop the mind moving off the present moment. So shrinking thought down to a single word is the preliminary effort. But at this stage the meditator is forever having to pull the attention out of wandering and into watching. When we find ourselves complaining that the mind won't stay still, we fail to understand that this is exactly what the training is about. It's all about reconditioning the mind to be present, to be attentive to what's happening now, not to what it would like to happen. So this is the stage of *vitakka*.

The meditator uses the noting word to limit the thinking mind and retrain the attention to rest upon the object. Now this noting has to be done with precise effort, a determined noting. Rising, falling, rising, falling. And although there is careful noting, the attention is not placed on the word itself, but on the experience, the feeling of a sensation, the sensation of an emotion, the knowing of a thought. Now thought can be split into two categories, a concept and an image. At the breath, for instance, as we note, there will be a concept of rising and falling, and also an image of the abdomen in the mind. We don't try to destroy them, we just keep pointing the attention at the feeling of movement, the sensations.

And this attention will then grow in strength until thought cannot distract it. The meditator is still noting, but the attention, instead of wanting to wander off, becomes stuck, as it were, on the object. This is the second stage of developing right concentration and is called *vicāra*. This is likened to a bee landing on and

sucking the nectar of a flower. The meditator continues to note diligently, placing the attention more and more on the object, really feeling those sensations, really experiencing them as they arise and pass away.

This unflagging effort will draw all the energy out of thought to a point where thought stops. Remember, thinking is always about something. It always comes after the event. So when thinking stops, that must mean we are right in the present moment. And it's at this point of bare knowing that the true *vipassanā* consciousness, *sammāsati*, right awareness, arises and our intuitive intelligence, *paññā*, free from the distortion of thought and image, can finally begin to see the way things really are.

So we don't have to worry about when to stop the noting. It will stop once we've arrived at a high enough level of awareness and concentration. These moments of pure *vipassanā* are few and far between and very short in duration but they have great potential for insight. Such moments are known as *khaṇika samādhi*, momentary concentration which lengthen into a moment to moment to moment concentrated awareness. And as we progress such moments of continual awareness lengthen and increase. It takes perseverance. So don't give up. When the going gets tough, the tough get going.

Now when it comes to choosing a word, the simplest and most direct will do. And if a word doesn't come to mind, then any general word such as feeling, moving and so on will do. The word in itself is not all that important. Its purpose, remember, is to stop the mind wandering away. If we start looking for a word as a poet might, and we ask for a dictionary, well then we've definitely lost the plot. Sometimes strange stuff comes up and it's difficult to be precise, so any approximate word will do. Actually, when strange feelings do arise, the attention is so riveted that noting usually falls away anyway.

Apart from noting in the basic postures of sitting, walking, standing and lying down, it's important to realize that we can't just limit our efforts to that. As the Mahāsi pointed out, it's the continuity of awareness that brings success. You can't just stop, take a break or go for a short holiday. Spiritual practice is relentless. To make a good sustained effort in the sitting and then to get up and let the mind run around like a headless chicken is like blowing up a balloon and letting all the air out before you've tied it up. Well, the awakening balloon doesn't get tied up till we're fully liberated. So we've just got to keep blowing up that balloon.

At various times of the day, we're not practicing formal meditation. Take the process of rising in the morning. As soon as we hear the bell and become aware of it, we immediately begin the noting. Hearing, hearing, aware of the process of hearing. And we are attentive to all the surrounding feelings. Tiredness, heaviness, depression, joy, interest, enthusiasm. We recognize all the surrounding thoughts that arise. "Damn bell, oh hell, can't get up, I'm too exhausted." "Bell, time to get up, quick, rush, rush, you'll be late." "Bell, how wonderful, time to meditate." And we observe it all, noting it all as best we can.

When finally a certain equanimity falls, we make our first intention, intending to rise. We pull back the bedclothes, pulling, pulling. But we also feel the feeling of the sheets, of the weight of the duvet. We're taking our time, noting and experiencing fully every movement, emotion and thought, using that noting to

keep the mind steady on the object. Now don't be concerned if you can't get to this level for the first few days, but hopefully, with persistent effort, you'll experience this moment-to-moment mindfulness before too long.

When it comes to the bathroom, there are obviously certain things we have to do at a normal speed, such as brushing our teeth. But even here we can slow down a little and become aware of all the intricate movements involved. We should become especially aware of that area around the necessary human activity, the calls of nature. Feeling the passing of water. Be aware of the thoughts and feelings surrounding the act. The same with the passing of stools. Normally our minds would prefer to be somewhere else. That's why we'll often stuff our toilets with holiday magazines. Well, this is an opportunity to find out how we really feel about those parts of our body that may disgust us. Is disgust necessary? A meditation course is a wonderful time to investigate the whole of our relationship to this body.

Then there are meal times and tea breaks. And I shall go into this in more detail tomorrow morning. But it's the same. Noting and experiencing every intention and noting and experiencing every action, every feeling, every thought.

Now you will have noticed that we are asked to note our intentions. Intentions play a crucial role in our psychology, according to the Buddha. They are thoughts laced with desire, both negative and positive, wanting and not wanting. These desires have all been conditioned by our past behavior, and the bulk of them have become habitual and barely conscious. How many of us are truly aware of our desire and intention to eat or sleep or talk to someone? We just find ourselves eating, sleeping and talking.

All these habitual intentions have to be made quite conscious so that we can come to understand clearly how we ourselves are conditioning our own minds. And of course what we'll begin to do is to reinforce those habits that are good and skilful, such as eating for health's sake, but not reinforce those that do us harm, such as eating for greed. In this way, we can begin to take control of our lives and guide it towards the good, the beautiful and the happy. This self-knowledge concerning our intentions and their role in our lives is a very important part of the process of purifying the heart. So please do make a special effort to note intentions before doing anything.

So, noting is a way to bring the thinking mind into the service of that higher consciousness, *satipaññā*, awareness with intuitive intelligence. However, there is something a little more subtle going on. As soon as we use a word to point at something, it distances the object from that which knows. When a child shouts car, car, they're actually saying there's a car, there, over there, out there. The child is objectifying the world. It is detaching itself from the world.

So what we're doing by pointing at all that we experience within us is to objectify the inner world. We are detaching ourselves from this inner world. We see it as if we were looking at a landscape. Only the landscape is within us. What Gerald Manley Hopkins, the poet, most happily called the inscape. Now,

whenever we do that, we're experiencing in some little way the meaning of *anattā*. This is the doctrine that this body, these emotions, these thoughts, this personality doesn't constitute anything substantial. It's all made up of pieces and parts. And that there is some faculty within us that can stand above it and come to know these psychophysical phenomena for what they are.

So noting something, naming it, allows that intelligence, *paññā*, to distance itself from the body, mind and heart and in so doing slowly comes to realize its own nature. In this way, noting becomes a very powerful tool to position that intelligent consciousness, *satipaññā*, so that it can come to realize the way things really are.

Now there are three things that can go wrong with the noting technique. The first happens if we stop doing it deliberately. It then becomes like a background mantra. And you'll be surprised to find that when you go off onto a fantasy, to Tuscany or somewhere, on return to the meditation room, the mind is happily repeating, "rising, falling, rising, falling." That's the amazing thing about the body-mind complex. It can be trained to do anything. Think of those concert performers. They're not directing their fingers, though they may be aware of them. They're using them to draw the sound they want out of the instrument. They play automatically, while the artist concentrates on feeling and expression.

The second error is to become lazy. As soon as we stop putting right effort into the noting the whole thing begins to drop away and we start to lose the sharpness of the seeing. And often that laziness sits on the irritated dullness of boredom. Now beware of boredom. Boredom will always blame the practice for being boring. But what the wise meditator does is not to listen to boredom and give it any credence whatsoever, but to make that boredom, that subtle state, the object of meditation. They note "boredom, boredom," while feeling the texture of boredom and losing their discomfort of being with the heart when it's in a bored state.

Remember, as soon as we say to ourselves, "I'm bored," well, we are bored. We've taken on that identity. So be careful. When boredom arises, see it for what it is. Yet another negative, unwholesome attitude that has to be noted, felt, observed, experienced and understood. And what is it that we come to understand about boredom? Well, the last thing we want to do is to appease it. Boredom tells us that if we don't want to get bored, we need distraction, we need a break, we need entertainment, we need a cup of tea, watch a bit of telly, call a friend and tell them how bored we are. Well, again, that's just playing into the hands of boredom.

And do we really believe that distraction will satisfy boredom? Not at all. The more you feed boredom, paradoxically, the bigger boredom gets. Boredom feeds off distraction. No, the way to undermine boredom is to keep repeating what we are doing with added attention while feeling the boredom. We even turn upon the feeling of boredom itself and make that the object to be noted, felt, observed, experienced and understood. Boredom sits on the flames of expectation of something engrossing, anticipation of something exciting. One road to depression and Prozac. When through diligent practice, boredom begins to lose

energy to our amazement, that energy turns into interest.

The third mistake is to pay too much attention to the word itself. The word, remember, is there only to point the mind at the object. We're putting our attention onto the process of physical and mental feelings and thoughts, not onto the thought itself, the noting itself. Occasionally, a person finds the use of words intrusive. It's as though they can only hear and think of the word, and it seems an obstacle to any real contact with the feelings and sensations they're supposed to be experiencing. What this is showing to the meditator is how much they're experiencing the world through the medium of thought.

By simply continuing to note, but with a clear intention to observe and experience sensations and feelings, this delusive way of experiencing the world will be slowly undermined and it will also correct the way we perceive the world. So it's worth persevering with. So noting should be done precisely as each object comes into the attention and it should be done deliberately.

The next technique which is particular to the Mahāsi method is to go slow. The body and mind work in total unison. Remember the Buddha said that it was like milk in water. The one affects the other. Sometimes the body affects the mind. When we get pain in the knees, we feel a mental discomfort as well. Sometimes the mind affects the body. When we feel depressed, the body feels heavy and dense. How well the body feels when we're in a state of joy or excitement.

Now, if we slow the body down and do everything very slowly and deliberately, then this connection between the mind and the body will become very apparent. It affects the speed at which the mind is working. The slower the mind goes, the more clearly we perceive its workings, especially in that area where suffering is created, that whole area of desire, will and action.

Take a film. The more you slow a film down, the more you can see. It's amazing to watch wildlife in slow motion. The balletic movements of a leopard in chase, usually just a blur. The flick of a frog's tongue as it catches a fly, usually we simply don't see it. But then we can actually stop a film and see things frame by frame. And did you know? A frog catches a fly underneath the tongue. Now there's something. In the same way, we find that as we go slower and slower, so many understandings will arise about how this human organism works. And because we are especially interested in this whole area of human suffering, we really begin to see how we get ourselves into a mess.

Now you'll find that old habits easily assert themselves. If you find yourself rushing, rushing, rushing to eat, rushing to get to meditation on time, then stop. Take a deep breath. Get in touch with what's impelling you. Anxiety, worry, fear of embarrassment, or just pure habit, whatever. Talk to yourself and quieten the whole body down and wait till peace and equanimity have re-established themselves. Now one good trick is to do the action again. If you find yourselves rushing, then stop. Wait for calmness to return, go back to where you started, and begin again. And it's surprising how effective it is to do right what we do wrong. If you remember at school, we were always told to do our corrections. You see, our education wasn't that bad after all.

Now take the simple and constant action of opening doors. Standing in front of a door, we make the intention to open it. We reach out, reaching, reaching. We touch the handle, touching, touching, experiencing just that sensual contact, the feel of metal. We turn the handle, feeling the resistance of the spring, turning, turning, applying the exact amount of pressure, and so on. Just think how many handles we've wrenched with oblivious cruelty. In this way, we communicate with the door.

When it comes to how slow we should move around or do things, we can modulate our speed. In walking meditation, for instance, we can go fast for exercise. In the dining room, in the bathroom and other places where we share facilities and services, we need to be aware that other people are waiting, and we can move at a faster pace, perhaps even at a normal pace in certain circumstances. The important times to go very slow are towards the end of a walking period, so that we build up a maximum attention and concentration to bring into the sitting meditation, and any other action where we want to really microscope in on what is actually happening at the physical and mental bases. Mealtime, for instance, is an excellent opportunity to do this.

Right at the start, we said that to become skilful we need to reflect on our experience. We need to acknowledge feedback. You'll see that after every sitting, I ask meditators to reflect on the experience of that hour. So we should every so often reflect on what's happening. And of course that's my job too, to reflect back to you how you're meditating. It's something I shall be constantly reminding you to do. However, there can arise here a confusion between being aware and being self-aware. We're not trying to be aware of ourselves practicing *vipassanā*. We are simply being aware of anything that arises and passes away. We're not trying to be aware of ourselves doing things. We're trying just to be mindful doing things.

If I'm washing the pots, I'm attentive to the actions. I'm not trying to be aware of myself washing pots. If, for instance, you try to be aware of yourself writing a letter or adding up a bill, you'll just get confused. Self-awareness will, of course, arise naturally. So note it, "self-aware, self-aware," and then put your attention entirely on what you're actually doing.

A final request. Please do not mix techniques. Give up for this period any other *vipassanā* technique you've learnt or technique from another religion. Anything Tibetan, anything Hindu, yoga breathing, visualization, mantra, beading, bowing and so on. Judeo-Christian prayer and exercises can be put aside for a while too. Why? Firstly, it will confuse your practice. Secondly, it will confuse me. And thirdly, you won't get the full benefit of what this course has to offer and for those of you who are new to this it will also mean that you will not know whether this form of meditation really suits you or not. You've got to give it your all. If you've any problems over this please talk to me about them at interview. So again, please do not mix techniques.

Let's pause here for a moment. So to recap, spiritual practice is utterly relentless and agonizingly repetitive. The purpose of our meditation course, and I prefer to call it a course and not a retreat for this reason, is to hone our skills of *vipassanā* meditation. The purpose of all these skills is to get consciousness

to observe physical sensations, emotional feelings and thought objectively. The noting technique is used primarily to stop the mind thinking about things, stop the mind launching itself into thought and daydream. By noting diligently, we shall progress through the two stages of concentrated thought into pure *vipassanā*.

Going slow has the purpose of centering us into this very moment and make us more and more aware of even the smallest movement of the body, heart and mind and how they are interrelated. And we need to become especially aware of intention and the role of intention.

Now we ought to practice with sincere effort and great diligence. In the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the Discourse on Establishing Right Awareness, the Buddha uses the words *ātāpī sampajāno satimā*. *Satimā* means with awareness, with mindfulness. *Sampajāno* means with intuitive intelligence, with understanding. From these two words the compound *satipaṇṇā* has been formed which encapsulates the enlightened mind, the awakened mind. And *ātāpī* comes from *tapo*, which means heavy ascetic mortifications. Now that's the sort of commitment and energy the Buddha is asking us to put into the practice.

The Buddha warns in the *Dhammapada*, a collection of verses: "Vigilance is the path to the deathless. Negligence, the path to death. The heedful do not die. The heedless are as if already dead." Now, let's not be dead, heaven forbid. Let's be alive, alive with bright awareness and sharp intelligence.

May your moment-to-moment vigilance and unshakable commitment to the practice bear you great fruit. May you be liberated from all suffering and attain the blissful freedom of *Nibbāna* sooner rather than later.

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