

QA1 complete -- 77 pages

Translated by Surin Chaturaphit, 4.28.11

UNDERSTANDING MEDITATION

CONTENTS

- Mind and Brain
- Love in Meditation
- Five Precepts and Meditation
- Basic Knowledge about Meditation
- What is Meditation?
- Types of Meditation
- How to Meditate
- Benefits of Meditation
- Meditation Q&A
 - Adjusting Your Body
 - Closing Your Eyes
 - Adjusting Your Mind
 - Training the Mind to Go to the Center
- Visualization
- Dhamma Sphere
- Reaching the Dhammakaya
- Mantra
- Calmness of the Mind
- How to “Look”
- Seeing
- Stilling Your Mind

- How Many Ways to Arrive at the Dhammakaya?
- Restlessness
- Stress and Tightness
- Sleepiness
- Craving
- Darkness
- Breathing
- Mental Object
- Laziness and Discouragement
- Fear and Worry
- Doubts
- Lack of Continuity
- Miscellaneous
- Concentration Methods
- What are Hindrances
- Benefits of Meditation
- Advising Others
- Varying Methods of Meditation

UNDERSTANDING MEDITATION

Q: *If “mind” is not the same thing as “brain”, then what is “mind”?*

A: Does a dead person have a brain? He does, but his brain can no longer function. This means there must be something that controls the brain and makes it function. A brain is sort-of like “hardware”. It requires “software” to tell it what to do. This “software” is the *mind*. The mind makes the nerves, muscles and the brain function. A quality mind gives quality orders to the brain.

“*Samadhi*”, is a Pali word translated as “concentration”, “mental development”, “mental cultivation”, “mental discipline”, and “meditation” (these words will be used interchangeably throughout this article). *Samadhi* is the process of training the mind. *Samadhi* is beneficial for us in this world, as well as the next. “World” in this sense means realm of existence, or cycle of rebirth. The main goal of mental development, or meditation, is to free us from the cycle of existence, not having to be reborn. The byproduct of mental development is to add quality to the way we think, speak, act, study and work.

The subject of “Meditation and Brain Development” is of interest to many people who want to improve the efficiency of their work. But this does not solve the problem of their suffering. Meditation should

serve to enhance the quality of the mind. “High mind should go with high tech”. Knowledge of mind is more interesting than knowledge of brain, which scientists emphasize. Samadhi is a deeper subject. It is a means to freedom from suffering.

There is a lot to the science of mind that we do not know. Mental development is not only for the purpose of conducting one’s life, but it is something that can enhance self reliance and self liberation. Self reliance in the viewpoint of Buddhism is more profound than just making a living.

Q: Is “love” necessary in the practice of meditation?

A: Love and good-will towards fellow human beings which is pure, selfless and not having to do with sexual desire, is a good thing. But in the practice of meditation, to be free of any kind of emotion is best. A mind that is relaxed and free is ideal for meditation. A mind that is free is the mind that is not attached to anyone or anything, as free as being alone in this world.

Love and good-will for mankind, wishing them happiness and joy with a mind that is pure, is called loving-kindness. Loving-kindness is conducive to meditation. I also meditate on loving-kindness, that is, to love and to have good intentions for all living beings, wanting everyone to have peace and happiness. Then I get down to concentration, letting go of everything, letting the mind be calm and

still. Letting go and letting the mind be still is a good way to meditate. So, it depends on what kind of love we are talking about.

Q: How does observation of the Five Precepts affect meditation? We know that meditation makes the mind radiant, but if we don't practice the Five Precepts along with it, how would that affect the progress in meditation?

A: Five Precepts and meditation go hand in hand. Ethical conduct (Pali, *sila*) is the foundation for mental development. It preserves the natural condition of a mind that is wholesome, pure, wise and happy. People with a normal mind, who are pure and happy inside, will not have ill will or hostility toward anyone or anything.

Not killing, stealing and hurting others are a normal nature of one who has purity, wisdom and inner happiness. Someone with a normal mind will not cause a family to divide. He will speak only things that are truthful, useful and pleasant. He will avoid harsh, contemptuous language and useless chatter.

A person whose mind is normal, happy and pure, and who understands the truth of life, will not engage in alcohol consumption or drug use because these substances bring harm to him as well as those around him.

Keeping the Five Precepts is keeping the normal condition of our mind. It enables us to be a “giver”, i.e., giving safety to our family and to others, giving truthfulness to everyone, giving mindfulness and consciousness to ourselves, which is the root of wisdom. If the fundamental condition of our mind is normal, the practice of our meditation will be easy and successful. All we have to do is to gently close our eyes and relax, and we will arrive at our inner happiness. This is an easy method that no one realizes.

BASIC KNOWLEDGE ABOUT MEDITATION



Q: *What is meditation?*

A: Meditation is not about holy men and hermits, or something practiced only by ascetics. Meditation is about mental development and cultivation of mind for better quality. In the Buddhist way, meditation can be practiced by a lay person for the benefit of a happy life, as well as by a monastic for the attainment of liberation.

Meditation is universal. It is not only for Buddhists, but for people of all faiths. Mental development emphasizes the importance of practice. By practicing, we will know what questions to ask that are specific to our meditation experience. No matter how much theoretical knowledge we possess, it will never be as good as getting down to doing the actual practice itself.



The meaning of meditation

Meditation is a form of peace and happiness that man can create for himself. It is a practice that Buddhism recommends for achieving a good and happy daily life that is complete with awareness and wisdom. Meditation is something everyone can do. Meditation can be explained in the context of outcome and in the context of practice.

In the context of outcome

Samadhi is a state of consciousness in which the mind becomes still, one-pointed or concentrated. It is the state of mind that is continuously stable, peaceful, bright and pure, so pure that one can “see” the purity through the mind’s eye. It is a condition that brings inspiration, wisdom, and happiness for the practitioner.

In the context of practice

Samadhi is the condition of mind that is stable, or a mind that is concentrated on a mental object, or a particular object. It is a mind that is not restless or distracted.

In the context of attaining the Dhammakaya

Luang Phaw Dhammajayo gave us this meaning: Meditation is the practice of training the mind to be calm and still inside the body. It is the process of bringing the wandering mind inside the body in a nice and easy way not to attach to anything regardless of what they are (i.e., family, work, study, social activities, and anything else), and to keep the mind in the state of one-pointedness.

He refers to Luang Pu Wat Paknam, who explained that meditation is the process of bringing the “seeing, remembering, thinking, and knowing” into a single-point at the center of the body, in a nice and easy way.

In short, the practice of meditation for the purpose of attaining the Dhammakaya is to train the mind to be calm and still at the center of the body.

Q: *How many types of meditation are there?*

A: People in general dislike suffering and want happiness. Unfortunately, the happiness they seek is either temporary or

external. It does not free them from the root of suffering and does not take them to permanent happiness.

Most people are not cognizant of the fact that suffering that arises from the mind has to be cured at the mind. It cannot be cured through the physical body or other means (such as using drugs, recreation and entertainment). Drugs or entertainment lets the mind forget the suffering, but only temporarily; it does not rid of suffering completely.



Meditation is an important practice that leads to solution of problems and freedom from suffering. This is why people in different societies today, especially in the west, begin to pay attention to the practice of meditation.

Meditation methods taught in different places have different objectives. Some do it to develop supernatural mind power in order to perform magic. This is a way to attract people's attention and

eneration. Others do it to cultivate mindfulness and to give rise to wisdom that leads to freedom from suffering.

Meditation methods can be divided based on their ideologies and styles. Fundamentally, there are two types:

1. Right Concentration
2. Wrong Concentration

1. Right Concentration

This is the practice of meditation to cultivate useful benefits and value. The practitioner wants to be trained and to practice in the right way. It is necessary for them to know the objectives of the training as well as the practice. The proper way of meditation practice in Buddhism is called “Right Concentration”. Right Concentration means cultivating the mind in a stable and right way. Right Concentration is mentioned in the Tipitaka in several places. Its meaning and characteristic are explained below:



And what is Right Concentration?

(i) Herein a monk aloof from sense desires, aloof from unwholesome thoughts, attains to and abides in the first meditative absorption [jhana], which is detachment-born and accompanied by applied thought, sustained thought, joy, and bliss.

(ii) By allaying applied and sustained thought he attains to, and abides in the second jhana, which is inner tranquility, which is unification (of the mind), devoid of applied and sustained thought, and which has joy and bliss.

(iii) By detachment from joy he dwells in equanimity, mindful, and with clear comprehension and enjoys bliss in body, and attains to and abides in the third jhana, which the noble ones [ariyas] call "dwelling in equanimity, mindfulness, and bliss".

(iv) By giving up of bliss and suffering, by the disappearance already of joy and sorrow, he attains to, and abides in the fourth jhana, which is neither suffering nor bliss, and which is the purity of equanimity — mindfulness.

This is called right concentration.

Dear Monks, this is the Noble Truth of the Path that leads to the cessation of suffering”

From the quote above, it explains that in Right Concentration, when one attains the First Absorption, his sensual perceptions and unwholesome nature are detached. When he reaches the Fourth Absorption, he is in the state of equanimity, neither happy nor unhappy. His mindfulness is pure.

The Tipitaka also describes the characteristic of Right Concentration as follows:

- Right Concentration is the state of the mind that does not scatter or wander
- Right Concentration is the mind that is stable and secure

In the Abhidhamma Pitaka, The Basket of Higher Doctrine, Right Concentration is described this way:

The Tipitaka also describes the characteristic of Right Concentration as follows:

- Right Concentration is the state of the mind that does not waver or wander.
- Right Concentration is the mind that is steady and secure.

The Tipitaka explains that Right Concentration is beneficial for the practitioner, because when the mind is stable and steady it can fend off Wrong Concentration (*Micchasamadhi*) and defilements.

The Buddha mentioned (in Brahmasutta) that, “Right Concentration, when frequently practiced and fully achieved, can truly eliminate greed, anger and delusion”.

This shows that Right Concentration can fend off Wrong Concentration, defilements, and an agitated mind. It allows the practitioner to follow the Path that leads to the ultimate goal of Nirvana.

In the practice of meditation, one should follow the Right Concentration method, training the mind to be free from sensual perceptions, wrongful actions and distractions, until the mind becomes stable and secure. This is the right way of practice

according to the teaching of the Buddha. It is the practice that enables one to reach the ultimate goal of Nirvana.

For the mind not to be agitated, it should avoid thoughts that lead to greed, anger and delusion. The Tipitaka describes an agitated mind as a mind that is preoccupied with the five objects of sensual pleasure namely: sight, taste, smell, sound, and touch; which contaminate the mind.

2. Wrong Concentration

As the name implies, Wrong Concentration is the opposite of Right Concentration. The Tipitaka explains that, in Wrong Concentration, the mind focuses on objects that are not reality. Wrong Concentration causes the mind to be restless. It is the condition of a mind that wanders outside the body and is exposed to the five objects of sensual pleasures mentioned earlier.

Wrong Concentration cannot diffuse the effect of greed, anger and delusion. It is also not the path that leads to Nirvana.

In the practice of meditation we should follow the Right Concentration method. We should not let our mind be influenced by the five sense objects: sight, sound, taste, smell and touch. Do the opposite. Bring the mind to settle inside the body and not let it be distracted.

See things according to reality. Abandon greed, anger and delusion that come across your mind. This will allow you to reach the path that takes you to the highest goal in the Buddhist religion: Nirvana.

Concentration based on where the mind is positioned

The practice of Concentration can be separated into three types based on how the mind is positioned and the locations of its bases:

1. Positioning the mind outside the body
2. Positioning the mind somewhere in the body
3. Positioning the mind at the center of the body

1. Positioning the mind outside the body

Most people practice with this method because they are accustomed to the habit of looking outward. Consequently, this method is more natural for them, and it is easy for everyone. The downside is the images they see tend to be illusionary, not real.

Some images are pleasant and some can be frightening. If your teacher is not well-trained or well-experienced you may be guided the wrong way and your mind will be let outside your body even more. This is problematic and is the reason why some people came up with the notion that the practice of meditation can make you go mad. The fact is you settle your mind in the wrong places resulting in experiences that are mostly false.

More than 90% of people in the world practice this way. This is not the right practice if you wish to achieve freedom from suffering and find inner refuge. In fact, you may end up having a false view of yourself, making mistakes, and moving in the wrong direction.

2. Positioning the mind somewhere in the body

This is keeping your mind and your feelings or emotions inside your body. You let your mind be still and float along different points in your body. The mind usually ends up around the chest area and settles. You may experience peace and tranquility. Mindfulness, wisdom, and knowledge may arise. This method is practiced by very few people.

This method can be good at times. That is, if you train your mind to let go of everything, attach to nothing, and let it become calm and still within your body, you may experience inner happiness.

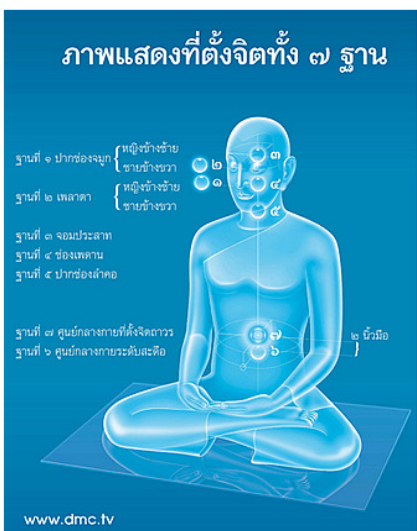
This type of concentration lets you feel like you are not attaching to anything and affected by nothing. Your mind will feel free, bright and peaceful and will rest calmly inside you. False images seldom appear because you are letting go of everything and keeping only purity and clarity. Your mind will be restful and soothing.

A wide range of knowledge will appear. But you will not yet experience body within body, feelings within feelings, mind within mind, and Dhamma within Dhamma, which means you still have not

reached the Threefold Refuge or the Path to end suffering completely.

3. Positioning the mind at the center of the body

This is the method of settling your mind at a point in the center of your body, known as the Seventh Base. You allow your mind to be calm and still until it reaches the right balance. Soon the Primary Path will appear in the form of a bright sphere. You will focus your mind at the center of the sphere and concentrate on “center in the center”. You will use the Noble Eightfold Path as your guide.



The word “Path” (Pali, *Magga*) means way or passage. It is the pathway of the mind that travels inward until it reaches a state of purity, free from all defilements. We rely on morality, mindfulness and wisdom to purify the mind until it becomes increasingly flawless and is radiant. Eventually, you will reach the Dhammakaya, a state of complete purity that is free of all defilements.

It is only through the Seventh Base that you will find the Path. Your mind will advance progressively to higher levels until it finally reaches the Dhammakaya. This is the Buddhist way of practice, the way to create happiness on earth. If you seek liberation, you have to create the Path for your mind to

follow until it reaches the Dhammakaya.

Buddhist texts, such as the *Visuttimaggā*, describe forty different methods of practice. All of them have the same goal, to train the mind to achieve the right balance and to attain the Dhammakaya within.

If you begin with a simple approach by placing your mind at the Seventh Base to be followed by a technique of your choice (e.g., “Ten Meditation Devices”, “Ten Stages of Decay”, “Consciousness of Loathsomeness of Food”, “Ten Reflections”, etc.), once your mind settles properly at the Seventh Base and progresses toward the center, you will find the Dhammakaya. Dhammakaya is an entity that exists inside every human being. This is not something that was newly created; it has always been there. Everyone can attain the Dhammakaya if he/she practices it the right way.

Samadhi based on bases of the mind

Right Concentration and Wrong Concentration categorized according to the bases of the mind.

There are two approaches: positioning the bases of the mind inside the body, and positioning the bases of the mind outside the body.

To conform to Right Concentration method, the bases of the mind should be established inside the body. The mind should not be restless or influenced by any of the five sense objects.

Wrong Concentration, on the other hand, places the bases of the mind outside the body. It lets the mind wander and be influenced by the five sense objects as well as other wholesome matters.

Right Concentration

Right Concentration establishes the bases of mind inside the body. This method allows defilements to fade away or leave the mind. This is the right way of practice to reach the goal of liberation and to develop clear wisdom that allows one to see the world according to reality. It is not a practice to satisfy one's craving, such as the desire to show off extraordinary power or abilities.

His Ven. Phraraj Bhavanaviriyakhun explains that Right Concentration is a practice of concentration in Buddhism that trains the mind to settle inside the body. It enables the mind to be purified, to be calm, to be alert and to have clear-seeing quality. This is different from the practice by those outside the Buddhist religion, or by the so-called holy men who tend to focus their attention outside the body. Although, at times, their method may give rise to clarity, but in general they often get false views. This method will not lead one to freedom from suffering.

Wrong Concentration

This is a method that places the bases of the mind outside the body, which is a wrong approach. But it also focuses the mind on the object of practice. It is possible to achieve wisdom that leads to freedom from suffering. But because the mind is incorrectly located it will have the tendency to be agitated.

To give an example, a killer may train his rifle at the center of his victim's forehead. His mind is fully focused on the target. His concentration is perfect, but his mind is overcome by ill-will which results in unrest.

To give another example, the mind of a gambler can be fully concentrated too, that is, at his cards. He can ignore a bathroom urge for hours on end. He can skip lunch and dinner altogether. He can stay awake from sunset to sunrise fully alert. Hunger and fatigue are not his concern. It is good concentration, but is it the right concentration?

Whether it be a billiard player concentrating on his ball, a hit man on his target, a drug user on his dope, a magician on his trick, or a criminal on his crime, they all have perfect attention in what they are doing. But their attention, no matter how concentrated, cannot be called Right Concentration.

In Buddhism, concentration is a process that allows the mind to be steady and secure, calm and tranquil. But a practice that allows the mind to be uneasy, to have craving for possession, or to be filled

with vengeance, belongs in the category of Wrong Concentration.

Wrong Concentration is something to be avoided

How to Meditate



Meditation is a state of ease, inner peace and happiness that we can bring into being, ourselves. It is a practice recommended by Buddhism for happiness, non-recklessness, mindfulness and wisdom in everyday life. It is no mystery, but something which can be easily practiced by all following the technique taught by Phramonkolthepmuni (Sodh Candasaro), Luang Phaw Wat Paknam, as follows:

Step-by-Step Instructions for the Meditation Technique

1 **(1) Paying respect to the Triple Gem:** To start one should soften one's mind by paying respect to the Triple Gem, before taking Five or Eight Precepts to consolidate one's virtue;

2 **(2) Recollect your goodness:** Kneel or sit with your feet to one side and think of all the good deeds you have done throughout the day, from your past, and all the good deeds you intend to do in the future. Recollect such good deeds in such a way, until you feel as if your whole body seems to be filled with tiny particles of goodness;

3 **(3) Sit for meditation, relaxing body and mind:** Sit in the half-lotus position, upright with your back and spine straight — cross-legged with your right leg over the left one. Your hands should rest palms-up on your lap, and the tip of your right index finger should touch your left thumb. Try to find a position of poise for yourself. Don't take up a position where you have to force or stress yourself unnaturally — but at the same time, don't slouch! Softly close your eyes as if you were falling asleep. Don't squeeze your eyes shut and make sure you have no tension across your eyebrows. Relax every part of your body, beginning with the muscles of your face, then relax your face, neck shoulders, arms, chest, trunk and legs. Make sure there are no signs of tension on your forehead or across your shoulders. Focus on the task in hand, creating a feeling of ease in your mind. Feel that you are entering upon a supreme state of calm and ease with both body and mind.

(4) Imagine a crystal ball as the object of your meditation: Imagine a clear, bright, flawless crystal ball as if it is floating at the centre of your body (see seventh base of the mind in the illustration). The crystal ball should be pure and soothing, like twinkling starlight to the eye. At the same time, softly repeat the

sound of the mantra ‘Samma-Araham’ to yourself as ‘recollection of the Buddha’ over and over again. Alternatively you can start by imagining the crystal ball at the first base of the mind, and gradually move it down to the seventh base via the other six bases (see diagram) while repeating the mantra to yourself.

Once the crystal ball becomes visible at the centre of the body, continue to maintain a feeling of ease, as if the mental object seen is part of that feeling. If the crystal ball should disappear, don’t feel disappointed — just keep the same feeling of ease in your mind as before, and imagine a new crystal ball in place of the old. If the mental object should appear anywhere else other than the centre of the body, gradually lead the object to the centre of the body, without using even the slightest of force. When the mental object has come to a standstill at the centre of the body, place the attention at the centre of that object, by imagining that there is an additional tiny star visible there. Focus your mind continuously on the tiny star at the centre of the object of meditation. The mind will adjust itself until it comes to a perfect standstill. At that point, the mind will fall through the centre and there will be a new brighter sphere which arises in place of the original one. This new sphere is known as the ‘Pathama-magga sphere’ or ‘sphere of Dhamma’. This sphere is the gateway or trailhead to the pathway to Nirvana.

Imagining the object of meditation is something you can do the whole of the time, wherever you may be, whether sitting, standing, walking, lying-down or performing other activities.

It is advised to imagine in such a way continuously at every moment of the day — but imagining without force. No matter how well you manage, you should be contented with your level of progress, in order to prevent excessive craving for immediate results becoming a hindrance to your progress. If you meditate until having attained a steadfast, diamond-bright 'sphere of Dhamma' at the centre of your body, you should try to maintain it by recollecting it as continuously as you can.

In such a way, the benefits of your meditation will not only keep your life on the pathway of happiness, success and non-recklessness, but also ensure your continuing progress in meditation.

ADDITIONAL ADVICE

- 1 ***Avoid force:*** Never force anything in your meditation. Don't squeeze your eyes closed thinking you will see the object of meditation more quickly. Don't tense your arms, your abdomen or your body — because any form of tension will only cause the mind to be displaced from the centre of the body to the place you are tensing.
- 2 ***Don't crave after seeing something:*** You should always maintain complete neutrality of mind. Don't let your mind be distracted from the object of meditation and the mantra. Don't worry yourself about when the object of meditation will appear. The image will appear itself when it comes to the right time, just as the sun rises and sets in its own time.
3. ***Don't worry about your breath:*** Meditating in this technique starts with the visualization of a bright object [Āloka kasina]. Once having meditated until attaining the sphere of Dhamma, one continues with meditation by passing through the refined human body (astral body), the angelic body, the form-Brahma body and the formless-Brahma body until attaining the Dhamma body (or Dhammakaya). Only then is one equipped to turn one's meditation towards insight [vipassana]. Thus there is no need to practice mindfulness of the breath at any stage.
4. ***Maintain your mind at the centre of the body all the time:*** Even after having finished your formal sitting, maintain your mind at the centre of the body the

whole of the time. No matter whether you are standing, walking, sitting or lying-down, don't allow your mind to slip away from the centre of the body. Continue repeating the mantra 'Samma-Araham' to yourself while visualizing the crystal ball at the centre of the body.

5. **Bring all objects arising in the mind to the centre of the body:** No matter what appears in the mind, bring it (gently) to the centre of the body. If the object disappears, there is no need to chase around looking for it. Just continue to rest your attention at the centre of the body while repeating the mantra to yourself. Eventually, when the mind becomes yet more peaceful, a new object of meditation will appear.

The basic meditation described here will lead to a deepening of happiness in life. If one doesn't abandon the practice but cultivates meditation regularly, to the point that the sphere of Dhamma is attained, one should try to maintain that sphere at the centre of one's body for the remainder of one's life, while leading one's life in a scrupulous way. It will offer one a refuge in life and will bring happiness both in this lifetime and the hereafter.

SUMMARY OF THE BENEFITS OF MEDITATION

1. Personal Benefits for the meditator

- ← **The Mind:** the mind will feel at ease — calm and peaceful. Memory will also improve;
- ← **Personality:** self-confidence will be improved. The true nature of calm will become apparent. Anger will diminish, leaving only the feeling of kindness towards others;
- ← **Daily life:** will be increased in quality in the newfound absence of stress. The results of work or study will be much more successful. The meditator can enjoy health of both body and mind;
- ← **Ethics and decision-making:** a right understanding of that which is good and that which is bad, will be clearly seen for any given situation. Important decisions will cause less worry because the meditator understands the outcome of his actions. The meditator can refrain from harmful actions and decisions, instead being content and confident about choices made.

2. Benefits for the Meditator's Family

- **Peace and success:** family life will be more harmonious, through the increased mutual respect and consideration between family members. Parents will be better able to lead the family successfully;
- **Cooperation:** Family members will be more enthusiastic to honor their duties and co-operate towards solving shared problems.

3. National Benefits

- ← **Peaceful Society:** most grave social problems originate from unwholesomeness of mind. If everybody learns to meditate and live peacefully, 'endemic' problems like crime and drug abuse will be diminished;
- ← **Respect:** Respect for others will be improved simply through keeping to a routine of meditation and following moral precepts. Honesty will diminish suspicion in the community;
- ← **A caring society:** as a result of meditation, the peacefulness of life can be more widely enjoyed and there will be a more widespread willingness to participate in social work

4. Spiritual Benefits

- ← **Understanding eternity:** all people, with or without their own faith can deepen the understanding of their own spirituality through meditation. Meditators of all faiths, through the practice of meditation, can explore their own faith in depth, particularly with reference to the understanding of eternity in their chosen faith;
- ← **Inspiration:** inspiration in your own spiritual tradition is strengthened as the meditator comes to realize the profound happiness that can be found through meditation;
- **Prolonging the lifetime of spiritual traditions:** the meditator's own spiritual tradition will be maintained as newcomers have a better understanding of moral conduct and self-discipline.

MEDITATION Q & A

Adjusting Your Body

Q: How do you get ready for meditation?

A: Before you close your eyes, check your sitting position. Adjust your body to make sure nothing impedes your breathing and circulation, and that you can sit in this position for a long time. When your body is relaxed, your mind will also be relaxed, and you will feel comfortable during meditation. Make sure your circulation is natural. When you begin to feel tense or numb in a certain area of your body, move that part of your body slightly to increase circulation (e.g., lifting one of your knees, etc.). Don't let your body become tense for too long, or your mind will be distracted from the center of your body to focus on the area of unease. Keep your consciousness at the center of your body at all times.

Q: What are the steps involved in adjusting your body?

1. Sit cross-legged. Put your right leg on your left leg, your right hand on your left hand, the finger of your right hand touching the tip of your left thumb. Place your hands on your lap, palms up.
2. Gently close your eyes as if you are going to fall to sleep. Don't tense or strain your eyes. Don't squeeze your eyelids. Close your eyes gently; this is the key. If you know how to close your eyes correctly you will be able to see inner images.
3. Feel as if you are sitting at home, or sitting alone by yourself. Let your entire body relax. The standard sitting position is replicated from the Dhammakaya posture. The Dhammakaya (Buddha) body is that of a Perfect Man. He sits in a perfectly straight position. Try to sit comfortably with a straight back, not overstretching or slouching your body.
4. Adjust your body. Make sure your circulation is natural. Relax every muscle of your body -- from your eyelids, your forehead, your head, your neck, your shoulders, your arms, to the tips of your toes. Relax everything.

5. Sometimes, when you are too engaged your body may become tense and your thumbs may become fidgety. Notice how your body reacts. If you are fully relaxed your hands will rest naturally.

Relax the muscles in your torso, your chest, your stomach, both of your legs all the way to the tips of your toes. Relax everything.

This is how you prepare your body for meditation. Once you get used to doing this you will find it easier the next time around.

Closing your eyes

Q: What is the right way to close your eyes?

A: Close your eyes gently as if you are going to sleep. Close your eyes 80-90% until you feel like your eyes are neither closing nor opening. Direct your mind toward the center of your body. You will find this approach effective and enjoyable for your meditation. It will make you want to meditate more.

Know how to close your eyes. Let your eyelids touch each other lightly (like someone about to doze off). The reason for closing your eyes is to avoid seeing outside images as they may distract your mind. Feel like you are closing the curtains of the eyes, and that you never need to use your eyes anymore. Forget that your eyes exist.

How you close your eyes is very important indeed. If you know how to close your eyes correctly you will be able to see inner visions. If you don't, or if you squeeze or strain your eyes, you might end up with a headache. Then your meditation will not be successful. If you don't close your eyes the right way you won't be able to see inner visions, and the bright light will not appear.

Observe your body. Notice if any part of your body is tense or tight. Usually, the areas around your eyes, your eyelids or eyebrows are most likely to become tense. This may be because, in your urge to see an image, you subconsciously strain your eyes trying to force out the image. This causes the muscles around our eyes to tense. It is human nature to see things with the eyes. During meditation, however, you should forego this human nature temporarily.

Adjusting your mind

Q: *Are there different levels of relaxation?*

A: Relaxation comes in two levels:

1. *Initial relaxation* – At this stage, your feeling is one that is neutral: not feeling uncomfortable or tense and not feeling happy or unhappy. It's like someone after a walk in harsh sunlight coming to rest under a tree. You feel calm but not yet fully relaxed. Try to maintain this state of calmness and stillness continuously and evenly as best as you can. Find your point of satisfaction and maintain your mind calmly and quietly there. This is an important turning point. Soon, you will experience a state of lightness and openness leading to a “true relaxation”.
2. *True relaxation* – At this stage you will feel refreshed and rejuvenated. Try to not be anxious, wanting your experience to be more clear or better. Try to control your eagerness, or your mind will withdraw, and you will find yourself back in square one. Keep your mind neutral like at the beginning. If you maintain this stable state of mind you will enjoy good experience.

Soon, a bright light will appear and it will become progressively brighter similar to a dusky sky before dawn becomes brighter as the day progresses, until it becomes as bright as midday. Continue to maintain this neutral state of mind. Don't be curious or concerned about the brightness that appears. As your mind becomes more subtle you will begin to see images which show up faintly. Observe calmly. Don't strain your eyes trying to make the images become clearer.

Q: *How does a happy feeling come about?*

A:

1. *By thinking of things that make you happy*, such as merits, goodness, or beauty of nature. If your emotion fluctuates, try to neutralize it. As your mind eventually becomes subtle your inner phenomena will arise. Try to keep a balanced effort by fine tuning your body, your mind, and your breathing pattern. Keep your breathing consistent and your mood stable. Soon you will feel lighter and more restful.

Eventually, your meditation will become natural. You no longer have to force yourself to it. Smiles and the feeling of contentment will show on your face. This

happy feeling will expand, and no distracting thoughts will enter. When the mind is happy everything about you feels natural. You will feel your breathing to be one with that of the universe. When you breathe out, your breathe reaches the sun and the stars, and when you breathe in, you breathe in the sun. This is an initial happiness before attaining the Dhammakaya.

2. *It happens on its own.* This is a true form of happy feeling. When you attain the Dhammakaya, your body will feel open, light and transcendental, as if there is no body, no weight, and no awareness of self. And finally you will absorb the feeling of the Dhammakaya.

Adjusting Your Mind

Q: *Training your mind to be still is a form of art – what does this mean?*

A: To be artistic one has to be creative, both in knowing how to create and knowing how to make use of what you create. A chef who is artistic is one who knows how to prepare food in a way that looks inviting and appetizing to his guests. To prepare the mind is the same way. One way to prepare the mind so that it is attracted to the center of the body is by letting mind frequent around the center of the body so that the mind and the center of the body become acquainted with each other. You should not be concerned about seeing brightness, the crystal sphere, or the Buddha image. Act impassively. Be content with whatever shows up, whether it is clear or not. Don't let any kind of thought enter your mind. Just observe easily and comfortably.

Learn how to concentrate your mind calmly and continuously at the center of your body. If you don't do this, it will take longer for you to settle your mind, because you have to constantly "clean out" old thoughts.

Frequently check the conditions of your mind. Don't let it engage in any sad or unhappy thoughts. Keep your mind radiant and full of spirit. Pay attention to how you arrive at the point of relaxation, openness and lightness. Also notice your shortcomings. Find out why your mind does not want to be still. Understand the cause and make frequent adjustments.

Q: *How do you adjust your mind?*

A:

1. Place your mind where you feel comfortable, in a manner that is easy and gentle, like placing a bird's feather on the surface of water ever so lightly. When you "touch" your mind and it feels confined, that means you are putting undue pressure on your effort. If it feels light and spacious it means you are doing something right. Let your mind stay at that right place. No need to move away or look for a new place to "park" it. If you know how to settle your mind you will indeed see inner images.
2. Don't fall asleep. If you fall asleep, it means your consciousness has eluded, or your awareness is slack.
3. Keep your mind in a pure state. Don't manipulate or expect anything. Keep it still and keep it at the center.
4. Make your mind passive. Don't accept, reject or resist. Let it go. You are "purposeful but not hopeful".
5. When your mind is light and easy you will progress quickly. A slight nudge will get it to the center, expanding and advancing inward, feeling light and easy, feeling easy and expanding. Touch your mind lightly, paying attention lightly, thinking lightly, feeling lightly. Train your mind to not think.
6. Relaxedness must come with alertness. Without alertness you will lose your awareness and you will easily fall asleep. Relax mindfully. This habit requires training and practice. If you don't get good at it you will always run into restlessness and drowsiness. You have to overcome this, or it will remain with you for a long, long time.

Q: How do you train your mind to go to the center?

A:

1. Training your mind to be still requires that you don't over exert your effort. Don't rush it, and don't slow it either. Don't be anxious to see the brightness. Just let your mind be quiet and calm and keep it in that state. After your mind has become calm, in the beginning it will feel open and free, light and easy, free from everyone and everything. Maintain your consciousness in that state.

Feel relaxed and comfortable. Relax your mind. Relax your body. Maintain the feeling of relaxedness, the quietness, and the stillness. Maintain the happy state

of mind, freely, openly, spaciouly, calmly and quietly. Maintain this feeling continuously and easily.

2. You will notice, when your mind becomes stable and still and your mood is consistent, you will feel the brightness appearing, the clarity increasing, the mind becomes more clear and enlightening. You will feel as if you have brightness inside you. Initially, this brightness is like that of a soft morning light covered by white mist. Even if you don't see any images except the white semi-brightness, you want to maintain this state of brightness continuously. Soon it will advance to the next stage.
3. Keep this quiet mood continuously. Pay no attention to what is happening. Let the brightness appear without reacting to it. When it comes to the point of balance you will see a bright, clear spot like that of a star in the sky to appear at the center of that clarity. Sometimes a bright clear sphere may expand from within the center of the bright area. Observe calmly and quietly. This is the correct way to maintain your mind.
4. As we continue to observe the bright sphere, we will see a middle path in the form of a bright, clear spot, like a star in the sky. It is a small, bright spot that appears in the center of the Dhamma sphere. Keep observing. At the beginning you may feel as if looking outward, sometime looking downward, and sometime looking closer up.
5. Observing passively is the right way to ease your mind toward the center. The bright, clear spot will gradually expand and evolve into another sphere, into a Buddha image in the center of that sphere. Keep observing step by step and keep your mind quiet and still. Soon your mind will adjust itself.

The mind is an extraordinary entity. All you have to do is to keep it still and it will find its own point of balance to the perfection of its own inner mood. We don't have to manipulate it. It happens naturally on its own.

We will experience the feeling that is subtle, soft, gentle and tender, and inner happiness will pour out blissfully from within the center point. If it wants to advance toward the center, let it do so impassively. Soon all your inner experience will appear at its own free will.

6. "Stop" so you will succeed. All you have to do is to stop your mind from wandering and let it be still. Observe it impassively. Soon everything will

happen. No need to give any help trying to make the image appear. This is a natural way. You will be happy, and you will make progress step by step. The light will become brighter, and your happiness will increase. The clarity will be clearer. Sometimes you will feel like your whole being is absorbed into the atmosphere, and time and date do not exist.

7. Continue this way easily without rushing. Take the attitude that you can afford to wait for as long as possible, whether it be ten, twenty, a hundred, or a thousand years. You will pay no attention to time or date. Time means nothing to you. The only thing that matters is the feeling of stillness, and you can remain still for as long as you want. Maintain this state of mind. Soon the Dhamma spheres will appear one by one, the Buddha image will appear one by one, and the inner bodies will appear one by one. Our mind will keep advancing inward toward the increasing brightness. It becomes bright and clear on its own. There is no need to put any effort to it. All you have to do is still your mind.

VISUALIZATION

Q: How many different types of mental images are there? What are the feelings associated with these mental images.

A: There are three types:

1. *Preliminary Sign (Parikamma-nimitta)*. Mental object that we create ourselves. This mental object comes and goes. The longer it stays with you it means the calmer your mind has become. The emotion is one that is neutral.
2. *Learning Sign (Uggaha-nimitta)*. Mental object that we replicate from what we see outside. You may be able to see it in full, but it is not one and the same with happiness.

3. *Counterpart Sign (Patibhaga-nimitta)*. You will become one and the same with the image. It will expand, and your feelings of happiness will be profound.

Q: *What are the difference between Preliminary Sign, Learning Sign and Counterpart Sign?*

A:

1. '*Preliminary Sign*' is an image that we create from our imagination, such as a crystal ball. It may appear vague and blurry at the beginning, but if we maintain this image continuously and easily while repeating the mantra "Samma Araham" along with it, soon the image will become clearer.
2. '*Learning Sign*' is an image we copy from what we see outside, such as a crystal ball. The crystal ball you see from outside is replicated mentally inside. It is perfectly clear as if seen by your physical eyes. This perfectly clear scenario is called 'Learning Sign'. When the mind is completely still to the state known as "attainment concentration" your body will feel rooted on the floor without any movement whatsoever, and your mind will be completely stable, not wavering or thinking about anything, only concentrating on the image, whether it be a crystal sphere or a Buddha image.
3. *Counterpart Sign*. As your mind continues in this subtle (transcendental) state, the image will become soft and tender. The crystal sphere will glow and become brighter and clearer. It is tender and light like a soap bubble. If this is a Buddha image, the image will become extremely bright and clear, clearer than diamond, and as-bright-as or brighter than a midday sun. The image will expand bigger. You can mentally make it smaller or bigger as you wish. This is called 'Counterpart Sign'.

Q: *What is the reason for not being able to visualize? How do we solve this?*

A:

1. This is due to too much effort.
2. You fail to imagine mentally, but attempt to see through your physical eyes.

3. Your emotion is “crude” because you have other thoughts remaining in your mind. This causes your internal flow of energy to be crude and your mind to be crude, resulting in inability to visualize.
4. Not getting used to imagining these objects, i.e., a crystal sphere or a Buddha image.

Solution:

You need to refine your mind. Begin with making your mind at rest. Then recite the mantra “Samma Araham”, letting it emanate from the center of your body. Keep repeating the mantra continuously and soothingly.

Q: Sometimes, I imagine a crystal sphere but after a while I see a Buddha image instead. What should I do? And sometimes, I recite the mantra but after a while the sound of the mantra disappears. Do I need to start repeating the mantra all over again?

A: If you imagine a crystal sphere, as your mind becomes relaxed, instead of seeing a crystal sphere you see the Buddha image. When this happens, you don't need to do anything, just observe the Buddha image. Or, sometime you imagine a Buddha image but, instead, a crystal ball appears. Same here, you don't need to do anything. Just observe the crystal sphere, and recite the mantra along with it in a smooth and easy manner.

As you continue to repeat the mantra, your mind will gradually become more calm and subtle and will eventually reach the right point of balance. At this point, you may feel like having forgotten about the mantra, although your mind is still quiet and calm. When this happens just let the mantra go. You don't need to repeat the mantra any more. It has already done its job. The function of the mantra is to keep your mind from wandering. When your mind has become stable and is content, and you want to maintain that stillness inside the crystal sphere or the Buddha image without reciting the mantra, or you have already forgotten about the mantra, that means the mantra is no longer necessary. You don't have to resume the mantra unless your mind has become distracted again.

Q: What is the difference between “mental sphere” and “Dhamma sphere?”

A:

1. Mental sphere is a sphere that is created by our own mind so the mind will have something to hold on to. This is an image that we are familiar with. It serves to indicate how still our mind is by how clear or how bright the image is.
2. Dhamma sphere is a sphere that occurs by its own free will when the mind achieves the right point of balance at the center of the body (whether we visualize or not). When it appears it will remain there. No effort is used to make it appear. There are three levels:
3. Sometimes you see it, sometimes you don't.
4. You see it every time you meditate.
5. You become one with it. It has the "life" of its own and can connect to other spheres, i.e., the Spheres of Morality, Concentration, Wisdom, Liberation, and Liberation Vision, until you reach the various inner "bodies".

Q: *What is the difference between reaching the Buddha image and reaching the Dhammakaya?*

A: Reaching the Buddha image and attaining the Dhammakaya are two different things. The Buddha image is an object of meditation (visualization object), but attaining the Dhammakaya is a process of reaching eighteen different transcendental inner bodies, which is very profound. The 'Gotrabhu' body is between the ninth and the tenth body. One has to reach the Arahant Dhamma body and move back to the center of Gotrabhu Dhammakaya body. This is called reaching the Dhammakaya.

As for reaching the Buddha image, everyone is potentially able to do so because everyone can “imagine”. It is interesting to note that, when the Buddha image appears inside the body it will have no base or platform of support. This is its nature. True Dhammakaya has no base but is supported by ‘jhana’ or ‘absorption’. By being able to “see” a Buddha image, one gains considerable merit because his mind is able to arrive at the center and will soon be able to control the visualization (i.e., growing bigger, smaller, or brighter).

Mantra

Q: How do you recite a mantra?

A : Softly repeat the sound of the mantra in your mind. It is a sound that is soothing and delicate coming from the center of your mental object located at the center of your stomach. The sound is indistinct but clear, as if coming from a distance. It is not the sound of someone reciting but a subtle and delicate sound coming from within your deep consciousness, “Samma-Araham, Samma-Araham, Samma-Araham”. Focus your mind at the center of a clear sphere while repeating the mantra. Don’t lose your awareness.

Q: How does your mind become purified with the mantra, and what are the steps involved?

A: While you are visualizing a mental object that is pure, your mind is being purified in the process. And as you repeat the sound of the mantra “Samma-Araham” that comes from a distance, from a source of purity deep within, every word of the mantra serves to purify your mind. Your mind goes through a process of purification every time you visualize a pure crystal sphere or a crystal Buddha, or Luang Pu Wat Paknam (who represents the Sangha).

- The purification process takes place every nanosecond and is never ending. They are constantly being purified; we are not aware of it. If we practice mental development frequently and continuously in a manner that is gentle and joyful, without losing our awareness, soon the mind will settle and become completely free of thoughts.
- When the mind is free of thoughts, the body will become light. The mind becomes light and expansive. The physical body will disappear. The body will feel open, spacious, and expansive, and it expands with the environment filling the room. The mind also expands to fill the room and keeps expanding until it fills the entire sky. This is a radiant state of mind, as radiant as a blooming flower that opens its petals little by little. It is a mind that expands little by little in every direction.

When the mind becomes still in a nice and easy way and if we maintain this stillness continuously, the light of purity will miraculously appear. Before this,

when we sat down to meditate we saw only darkness, but now the light of purity is shining upon us, and what appears like the darkness of the sky before dawn is now turning into the brightness of sunrise.

- The more our mind becomes still, in a nice and easy way, the brighter the light becomes as if made of crystal, so pure and radiant with inner happiness, this is “bliss”, a happiness that is lively and vibrant beyond any description. It is the light that shines brightly and vastly covers everything. This light of purity comes from a mind that is completely still.
- As the mind continues to be still and comes to the right point of balance, we will see the source where the light comes from. This is the source of “primary purity”, a spot of brightness that looks like a bright star in a dark, clear sky. It is the source of the purity of the mind, the initial state of the spiritual mind that is perfect. From this source of primary purity, the mind will advance through the “middle way” to reach the final destination, Nirvana. This phenomenon will occur amidst the stillness and tranquility and happiness that is beyond words.

Calmness of the mind

Q: What do you mean by “whatever is there to look at, just look at it”?

It means that whatever is there to be seen, just observe it easily without putting any thought to it. But most of us can't resist and want to see more of it. This is why we fail to reach our goal because we are doing it the wrong way. Look at it with a happy mood and with contentment. The image may not be as clear as you wish it to be, but soon it will become clear and will open the way—the middle way—that is full of Buddhas. It is more blissful to look at a Buddha image than to look at a tree. The key is to be content at every experience that comes your way and every image that shows up, regardless of whether it is darkness, brightness, a crystal sphere, or Buddha image. Just look at it calmly and comfortably.

How to “look”

Q: What is the correct way to “look”?

A :

1. Look impassively without any reaction. Whatever there is to be looked at, just look at it. Whether it is blurry or unclear, just look at it. Don't try to make it clearer. Don't be moody or agitated. Simply look. Soon, it will get clearer.
2. Look at it calmly without losing your awareness. Look at whatever shows up at the center of the body. If it is darkness, just look at the darkness. If it is brightness, look at the brightness. If it is a crude object, just look at the crude object. It does not matter what shape it is in, just look at it impassively.

The mind may become an empty, open space or a channel, just look calmly at the center of this openness. You may see a deep hole, a well, or a valley, and you may feel as if you are about to fall into it. Don't resist; let it go on naturally. Don't get excited whether you seem to be falling, or not falling; whether you are falling slowly, or falling and then feeling not falling again, or whatever. Just be calm and still, not letting anything affect you. Whether it is a star, a clear sphere, just look at it calmly. Look at the center points of the images that appear, calmly, easily. The image will keep changing until it reaches a point where it no longer changes.

3. Look at every image in a nice and easy way. Look at the dark spot, the bright spot, casually, easily, calmly, continuously, from the beginning to the ending. Look at whatever shows up. Sometimes the Buddha image turns into a crystal sphere, this is even better. Whatever shows up at the center of your body, just look at it and look at it with a mind that is radiant and restful.
4. Look at it calmly without any thinking. If you see only the face of the Buddha image, look at it without a desire to see the whole body. Whatever is available to be looked at, just look at what is available. Once your mind becomes more still you will be able to see the entire Buddha image clearly.
5. Focus your mind toward the center of the image; don't glance outward. In some occasion where you feel like the room is a part of the Buddha image and you sit inside it, you may feel the urge to take a glance at it. You should not do this, because your mind will not settle inward.
6. Don't get excited or be affected. Maintain the stillness of your mind continuously. Soon, the brightness or the sphere will appear. The way to maintain the image once it appears is to keep your mind neutral, not to become excited or overjoyed.

If you can't control this (getting excited or frightened) the image will disappear. If this happens, continue to keep the state of calmness, not be affected by anything that happens. Whatever happens at the center, just observe it casually. If it is only darkness, look at the darkness. Don't be disappointed or concerned. Just look impassively. It will soon turn brighter if we don't show our emotion.

When the brightness appears, look at the brightness continuously. The brightness will evolve into a bright spot or a bright sphere, a large sphere or a small sphere, etc. Just observe. Sometimes you see it, sometimes you don't. This is also OK. If there is only darkness, look at the darkness. If it turns into a bright sphere, look at the bright sphere. If it happens to be a sphere, look at the center of the sphere. If it is a bright spot, look at the center of the bright spot. If you can't find the center of the bright spot, just look at that bright spot. Look at it calmly and easily.

7. Don't get disappointed. Whatever there is to look at, just look at it. Think of it as someone taking a walk and seeing something along the way, he observes without thinking or questioning. If he becomes suspicious and stops to look at it, his mind will be distracted. If you told yourself, the moment you close your eyes, let darkness be the first thing you see, then you would not have any disappointment because you did not expect anything better.

Don't be concerned about losing the crystal sphere. Don't go chasing after it fearing that it might disappear. Look at it calmly. If it's gone, it's gone. There are millions of spheres inside your body. If one is gone, there are more to come. Don't care if you lose some. Just keep calm and still. This is the right approach.

Don't reject the image. Don't embellish it either. When you keep looking inside, your mind will get used to the inner images. Granted, some of them may be clear and some may be not. Observe their progression: from not so clear to becoming very clear; from not so bright to becoming very bright. When you take the neutral approach, not rejecting or trying to improve the image, the mind will begin to settle, calmly and quietly.

8. Look at the center of what you see. If it is a Buddha image, but you only see the head, just look at the head. Keep looking continuously. Soon, in a nice and easy way, you will find yourself in the center of the Buddha image. If you are tight or tense, you need to relax. If you are restless or sleepy, bring yourself back to the beginning. Start reciting the mantra again. Let go of that tense mood.

Restart in a nice and easy way. If the image shows up then disappears, don't feel disappointed. Keep calm and still. Soon you will see the brightness. Whether it be a sphere, a Buddha image, an inner body, or anything else, if it shows up momentarily and then disappears, don't be disappointed. Don't start looking for it. Just keep still. Don't worry if you lose it. All you have to do is to keep calm and still at the center of your body. Keep your mind firmly settled at the center. Soon, your mind will become purified and you will reach the Dhammakaya.

Seeing

Q: What do you mean by seeing with your mind?

A : If you can imagine you can see. Most of you are impatient, however. You want to see it clearly, and you want to see it right away. This is not the right approach. Seeing with your mind is a step by step approach. Some of you can imagine 40%, 50%, 60%, 70%, 80%, progressively. Seeing with the mind, the image normally evolves like an object from a distance. It is not exactly clear; like when a short-sighted person removes his glasses the pictures he sees are blurry.

This is an important consideration. Try to maintain the imagined image continuously. Imagine it easily and constantly. Build a happy mood in you as much and as full as you can. Get rid of anything that clouds your mind or makes you unhappy. Leave only the happy mood. This will help you not to become distracted and to be able to maintain your visual image continuously.

Q: What are the steps involved in seeing an image with your mind?

A : The step in seeing an image begins with the ability to see only 5% or 10% and progressively more. The beginning point is different from person to person. Be content with your own result. If you can make your mind bright and clear, that is equivalent to one million percent of success. Maintain that clearness continuously. Give yourself plenty of opportunity to meditate. Don't be impatient in your practice of meditation. One who is patient is one who can get to the center sooner, and his mind can be purified faster. Visualizing in a nice and easy way, not rushing, is a way to reach purity. If you do it this way, 1) your mind will become still easily and naturally; 2) your mind will be drawn to the center and will expand without limit.

Stilling your mind

Q: How do you still your mind?

A: Keep your mind still at the center. Whatever there is to be looked at, look at it in a nice and easy way without thinking of anything. Don't have any question in your mind while training your mind to be still. Don't let any thought enter your mind even if that thought is wholesome. You are training yourself to "not" think. Training the mind not to think is something most people are unfamiliar with.

When you are young and innocent your life is full of joy because you have not yet burdened yourself with many thoughts. As you grow older you are exposed to different circumstances that influence your life. You think more and worry more. The older you get the more responsibilities and burdens of life you encounter. You are influenced by conditions that happen around you.

In your quest for success and recognition, you compete with others, you create a defense around you, you carry on a lifestyle that does not allow you to stop thinking from the moment you wake up to the moment you go to bed. Even when you are asleep your mind never stops thinking. Whether you are awake, asleep or in your dreams your mind is always working. Life is thus full of suffering. Stress is always building.

So, when you sit down to meditate--training your mind to arrive at the sources of inner peace, mindfulness, wisdom, inner power, goodwill for all living beings, and

satisfaction--you are dealing with everything that is contrary to your preconditioned nature. You have to turn the clock back to the time when you were still an innocent child. You have to minimize and finally relinquish all of your thinking. This can be achieved through the means of visualization along with the mantra.

Q: *How do you bring your mind to the center and keep it calm and still?*

A: To bring your mind to the center you have to let go of all your thoughts and let your mind settle at the Seventh Base of the mind. Keep practicing this. Soon, your mind will become accustomed to staying at the Seventh Base. When your mind finds the right point of balance, the Primary Path will rise and you will see inner bodies and eventually be able to arrive at your own personal Refuge.

1. Keep your mind calm and still, gently, easily and continuously, at the Seventh Base of the mind.
2. Keep your mind free and comfortable. Don't expect to gain or see anything.
3. Maintain this state of mind continuously. You will see the Path or the visualization objects that arise, from the appearance of a bright light, to a bright spot, to a bright sphere, to the bright inner bodies.
4. Whatever shows up at the center of your body, look at it calmly and easily without any thinking, no matter whether it is near or far, whether the Buddha image is tumbling, or whether you imagine a bright light but it turns into a sphere, or you see something else, such as a person, a tree, etc., just look at it calmly and easily. Don't think of anything. This is very important. This is all you have to do.

The success formula is "*Stop, so you will succeed*". Even if you may know how to keep your mind still at the early stage, you will still need to keep practicing how to stop your mind from wandering. By "stopping" it changes you from one who does not know to one who knows; from one who is ignorant to one who is wise.

Q: *How many ways are there to arrive at the Dhammakaya, starting with the Primary Path?*

A : There are two ways:

1. The method that Luang Up Wat Paknam used the first time (when he was willing to give his life if he could not succeed in his meditation) was to maintain his mind to be calm and still until he arrived at the Sphere of Primary Path, Sphere of Morality, Sphere of Mindfulness, Sphere of Wisdom, Sphere of Liberation, Sphere of Liberation Vision, inner bodies, and finally reaching the Dhammakaya.
2. After he had attained the Dhammakaya, Luang Pu Wat Paknam found out that when he sat still and let his mind advance toward the center he would see a sphere and the Buddha image appearing alternately. He gave us a short cut: to imagine a mental object so the mind has something to hold on to and not be distracted, and for the mind to get acquainted with objects that are bright and clear. He taught us to repeat the mantra “Samma-Araham” continuously. When the mind comes to the right point of balance it will reach the Sphere of Primary Path, the small size of which is the size of a star in the sky, the medium size is the size of the moon, and the large size is the size of a midday sun.

Both methods can help you arrive at the Primary Path, Sphere of Morality, Sphere of Mindfulness, Sphere of Wisdom, Sphere of Liberation, Sphere of Liberation Vision, and bodies within bodies. Both methods are equally effective. You can choose either of these methods that suits you best. The key is for the mind to be at a standstill. When the mind becomes still, the mental object, the bright light, the Dhamma Sphere, and the Dhammakaya within will appear.

Restlessness

Q: *What are the symptoms of restlessness?*

Our minds have accumulated many thoughts from life. It is difficult for a person who has dealt with many circumstances of life to sit still and not let any thoughts enter. It

is especially difficult in the beginning because these thoughts will keep intruding your mind. If you can't let go or get rid of these thoughts, they will keep coming back. So, when you sit down to meditate, old thoughts or pent-up feelings that have built up in the mind will keep showing up. This is what is called "restlessness".

Q: *How do you overcome restlessness?*

1. If your distracted thoughts come in the form of images, replace them with other images, such as an image of a sphere or a Buddha so your mind will block out other images. This will allow your mind to become calm and still and be able to arrive at the center.
2. If your distractions come in the form of sound, replace it with the sound of the mantra so your mind will block out unwanted sound or thought. This will allow your mind to become calm and still.

Some people use their own techniques to replace the distracted image. For example, when thinking about the nice places that a person has been to and realizing that these are distractions, he replaces it with the thought that he is coming to the Dhammakaya Temple to pay respect to the Buddha image. The image of the Buddha replaces his other unwanted images. Your mind can go astray, but let the last image that shows up in your strayed mind be the image of the Buddha.

If your distracted mind comes in the form of sound, use the mantra to be the sound that replaces it. Think of the mantra "Samma-Araham" as a song that you sing in your mind relaxingly. Sing softly with a mind that is happy, cheery and smiling. This will prevent any thought from entering.

Q: *How do we overcome restlessness?*

1. *Don't let the thoughts continue.* Keep looking at the image. Don't reject it. Let the image change on its own. Your mind will get used to inner images, some of which may be clear, some may not, some may get clearer. Just keep looking.
2. *Imagine a mental object,* a sphere, a Buddha image, and repeat the mantra simultaneously. Let your mind hold on to the mental object (i.e., a crystal sphere,

a crystal Buddha). This will keep your mind concentrated on the object instead of wandering on other unwanted thoughts.

A mental object is helpful for someone who is easily distracted, one whose mind is susceptible to all kinds of thought. This allows his mind to have something to hold on to that he can focus on continuously. It is also good for someone who is imaginative, who can imagine easily and happily without much effort. And it is suitable for someone who worships the Buddha everyday; he can easily recall the Buddha image on his shrine.

If this doesn't work, mentally repeat the soft sound of the mantra along with it. The mantra should not be recited with any degree of force. It should be a soft and delicate sound coming from the center of the bright sphere that sounds like a soothing chant that we are fluent with, or a soothing song that we enjoy coming from within the mind.

Focus on the clear sphere. When your mind becomes still it will leave the mantra as if it has forgotten about it. But your mind is not distracted. Or you may let your mind become calm and still at the center of the sphere without repeating the mantra any further. If this is your feeling, there is no need to repeat the mantra again. Focus your mind on the clear sphere. Let the mind stay there, at the center of the sphere. Maintain the calmness and stillness. Sooner or later your mind will find its own right point of balance.

3. *Follow the seven bases of the mind.* Some of you may still have distractions even with the help of the mantra. This is because throughout your life you have been conditioned to think. It is hard for you to change your habits abruptly.

One way to overcome this is to learn how to "walk" your mind through the seven bases of the mind (i.e., from the first base to the seventh, from the seventh base back to the first) repeatedly until you are good at it.

If you can do this your mind will be less restless. Don't worry about how many times you have to repeat. If you are able to calm your mind after the first three rounds then there is no need to go to the fourth. But if after the first three rounds it still doesn't calm the mind, then you will go to the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, etc., until you get the job done. This will allow your mind to "hang around" the inside route that the mind travels, not to wander outside.

4. *Open your eyes.* If your mind is distracted and you can't concentrate, a simple fix is to slowly open your eyes and look at an object that is uplifting, such as a picture of Khun Yay, Luang Pu Wat Paknam, a crystal ball, or a Buddha image, etc. Look at this object until you feel happy and your restlessness is over, then gently close your eyes again and resume the feelings of happiness.

Simply remember this: if sleepy, sleep; if tense, move; if restless, open eyes; and start all over again. Always be prepared to restart in the right way. Sooner or later you will overcome restlessness. Don't be under any kind of pressure or worry. Just keep being calm and still. Good things will follow.

Don't be annoyed with any thoughts that occur during your meditation. If you are restless, recite the mantra "Samma-Araham". If this doesn't work, open your eyes to look at a picture of Khun Yay, Luang Pu Wat Paknam, a crystal ball, or a Buddha image on your personal shrine. If none of these are available, then look at a tree, or the darkness of night, whichever the case may be. When the distractions are gone, slowly close your eyes again. Keep your mind calm and still and slowly and gently close your eyes without fully shutting them, and continue to stay calm and still. Soon, your wish will be fulfilled.

Stress and tightness

Q: How do you handle stress and tightness?

A :

1. Don't be too tense. Don't stare or over-concentrate. Keep calm. Sit with a happy, smiling face and let your muscles relax.
2. Don't be anxious to see any images. Concentrate on keeping your mind calm and still in an easy and peaceful way. Treat "seeing" images as a side benefit.
3. Don't try to force out the image. It is not possible to squeeze out an image that is crystal clear. Imagine easily, comfortably and continuously. Be content with what you are able to imagine. But make sure it is continuous. Imagine gently. Let your mind be calm and still. Soon the image will become clear.
4. Don't "stare" at the center of your body. Keep calm and still. Focus your mind at the area in which you feel comfortable. Tune your mind with happiness. Don't worry, be happy. Soon your mind will settle itself.

5. Relax your mind. Relax all your muscles. Don't strain your eyes or eyebrows. Close your eyes gently and calmly.
6. Don't keep your eyes fully closed. Imagine gently. Soon your tension will go away. Open your eyes gently and slowly.
7. Think that you do this for merit. Your tension will soon disappear.
8. If your tension and stress is beyond control, stop meditating. Get up and take a walk to calm your mind. Then return to meditate.

Q: *I'm used to straining my eyes. How do I overcome this?*

1. Adjust your eyelids. Dim your eyes and "glance" vacantly at the center of your stomach. Glance blankly, dreamily, as if you don't intend to look. You can't tell whether you are looking or not looking. You can also recite the mantra "Samma-Araham". Or you can choose to not recite it. If you are certain you won't be restless, just let your mind stay still, gently, softly, tenderly and continuously. If you subconsciously tense your eyes, gently and slowly open your eyelids slightly and resume your "vacant glance" again. Adjust this way, and keep adjusting until you no longer strain your eyes.
2. Try to "park" your mind at the middle of your skull or your forehead, gently and quietly, or roll your eyes back. Stay at the position that you are comfortable with (around your forehead area).
3. Luang Pu Wat Paknam came up with a method to stop someone from straining his eyes looking at something by imagining a mental object that is pure and as bright as a diamond, at the front of his nostril. The reason for it to be poised at this position is because it is near the eyes, which makes it easy to imagine. In addition, he also came up with a method to prevent the mind from having distractions by reciting a mantra "Samma-Araham, Samma-Araham, Samma-Araham" (three times) gently at this location. Then move to the second base and recite the same mantra again, three times, then the third base, the fourth, etc., until finally reaching the seventh base of the mind.
4. Imagine our body to be inside the seventh base that expands vastly to cover the whole horizons. Or to imagine our body to be as clear as diamond.

Sleepiness

Q: *How do we overcome sleepiness?*

A : Realize whether our sleepiness during meditation is a result of lack of rest, or being tired. If it is due to lack of rest, then go ahead and sleep. It is OK for your body to fall asleep, or fall half asleep, or to doze off. This is the matter with your body. A little compromise is in its place.

If you feel sleepy, then sleep. But sleep in the seventh base of the mind at the center of your body, amidst the sea of merits, the way a Wise would do. Don't resist. If you resist, your body and your mind will feel uncomfortable, which will affect your nerves and your muscles. So, if you feel sleepy, sleep in the center of your body. Sleep in the manner that merit can be gained. Sleep in the manner that your mind can be purified. So follow your body; don't resist. Your sleep will not last long. When your body is refreshed it will wake by itself.

Craving

Q: *How do you overcome craving, the urge to see images?*

Look at an object in a calm and easy way; don't stare. You can say that it is neither "looking" nor "not looking"--something in between. If you know how to look this way, the clear spot that you see will become still. If you exert too much attention the clear spot will disappear. And if you are not conscious of it, it will also disappear. You can't stare, and you also can't lose your awareness.

You have to maintain the right balance by being calm and still. Don't do anything more. Don't precondition yourself, either by talking yourself into making sure that you will reject any mental objects that come out of your craving and accept only the ones that come from your relaxed effort.

In the practice to attain the Dhammakaya, don't let your craving come to play. You must keep your mind in a neutral state. Maintain equanimity. Keep your mind in a cool, calm, gentle and happy condition. This is how you can reach the Dhammakaya.

Q: *Pressing, rushing, gazing, staring, what do they mean?*

A :

1. Pressing: forcing inner experience to happen. For example, as your mind begins to settle, you press it to go to the center.
2. Rushing: speeding up mental image to get clearer, quicker.
3. Gazing: using your eyes to gaze at inner images instead of using your mind. This causes your eyes to strain.
4. Staring: looking at inner images with force. Keep your mind with calm composure, the image will get clearer by itself. Dhamma is something peaceful and “cool”, you can’t treat it with “heat”.

Q: *How come my meditation is not as good as before?*

Because you yearn for it to give you the same good experience as you had before. You give way to craving instead of calming. If you feel tense, move. If you feel sleepy, sleep. If you feel tight, open your eyes. Then start from the beginning. Adjust your mind to a happy mood. Don’t worry if you don’t achieve the same results. Start afresh in an easy manner. Pretend you have never experienced that feeling before.

So, train yourself to be satisfied with every experience, whether that experience is good or not. Practice calmly, easily and constantly.

Craving does not lead to success. Don’t be concerned that you might not achieve a successful outcome. You will be sure to succeed if you practice in a calm and easy way. But because you fear that you will not achieve the right results so you rush your effort. The more you rush the more stress you will get.

The moment you give way to craving your mind becomes restless. When you have yearning you give rise to anxiety. It impedes your ability to get to the center.

Sometimes you overly desire to maintain the continuity and pay extra care to maintaining it, the end result is you actually break that continuity. Your mental image which is about to be clear, ends up being unclear.

When the image gets clearer you yearn for it to get even more clear, or you desire that it stays with you all the times. This kind of yearning causes your mind to become restless, and you will end up seeing nothing as a result. You should try not to press on or to manipulate. Simply look at it in a casual manner. Don't feel agitated. Allow it to get its way; eventually, it will allow you to get your way.

Don't meditate with the feeling of urge or yearning. All you will get is restlessness and anxiety. Train your mind to be calm and peaceful. Once you find a state of mind that is satisfactory, keep that state of mind happily and continuously.

Craving causes tension. The stronger your craving, the more forceful your effort. Instead of placing your mind in a comfortable state you are forcing it. You use your energy instead of your wisdom. You must meditate with a happy mind. When the right balance is achieved you will reach your destination automatically.

Darkness

Q : How do you overcome seeing only darkness in your meditation?

1. Don't expect anything. Make the best of the present moment. Be happy with what you can achieve. Go step by step, little by little. Treat the darkness as if it is your friend. Embrace it. Accept it happily. Cheerfully accept the blurry images of the Buddha, the sphere, or other mental objects.
2. Give yourself encouragement that although the moment you close your eyes the first thing you may see is darkness, the darkness will gradually become brighter, and you will begin to see images. They may be familiar images of something pending in your mind. Don't be frustrated if you see only darkness. Keep calm and still. That darkness will eventually turn brighter until it becomes as bright as midday.

Breathing

Q : How do you overcome paying too much attention to breathing?

Focus your mind at the end point of your breath. This end point coincides with the center of the body. Breathe in deeply. The air of your breath will not end at your lungs but at the center of your body. Place your mind at the end point of your breath and pay no attention to your breathing. There is no conflict between breathing and this meditation method. You may have some doubt and apprehension that this may not be the right way; this doubt will affect the way you breathe. But if you don't put too much emphasis on your breathing, the breathing will eventually become subtle and natural. Keep your mind at ease. You will soon forget about your breathing.

Mental object outside the body

Q : What do you mean by “guiding” a mental object?

A : It means easing the mental object toward the center of the body effortlessly, without force. If you do it with force, the mental object will disappear. The correct way to do this is to keep your mind calm and still at the center of your body. If the mental object is situated in front of you, and your mind remains calm and still, both your body and mind are radiant, free, open, light and joyful, the image will become clearer, brighter and more refined. At that point it will find its way inside your body without you having to do anything.

Delusional mental objects

Q : How do you deal with delusional mental objects?

A : During meditation, different images may appear. Some of them are intelligible but some are not. Watch impassively without any emotion or involvement. Don't have questions in your mind (What are they? Are they real? Where do they come from? Why are they here? How did they get here?). These are delusional images that come out when your mind begins to settle at a certain level. They are not real. You don't need to seek answers. Just watch impassively. Don't involve your emotion with it. No matter what they may be, watch casually with a mind that is neutral and unaffected

Notice whether your experience coincides with what Luang Pu Wat Paknam has described. It should happen in this order: when your mind is calm and still you will

see brightness; from brightness you will see a clear sphere; from clear sphere you will see inner bodies; from inner bodies you will see the Dhammakaya.

If your mind is not completely pure or still, there will be many scenes that show up. Even when you see a sphere or a Buddha image, these scenes will interfere with them. This means your mind is not yet completely still, otherwise none of these scenes will appear. When your mind is completely still, you will see a bright light, followed by six different spheres that appears one after another; then the inner bodies will appear, and finally you will reach the Dhammakaya.

Laziness and discouragement

Q : How do we overcome the lack of diligence in practicing meditation?

A : Success depends on each one of us. It is up to us to exercise diligence, awareness, and wisdom in what we do. Laziness can be overcome if we replace it with diligence. Get on with meditation whenever you feel like it or whenever you have the opportunity. Keep doing this until it turns into a habit. Then you will no longer be lazy.

Success works the same way. Success is a condition of happiness. Success and happiness correlate. They attract one another. If we make our mind at ease it will get to the point of success.

Fear and worry

Q : How do we overcome fear and worry?

A : Fear of failure, fear of not seeing images, fear of not knowing how to, fear of taking too long, fear of not being able to catch up—forget them all. Root out all of your worries and fear. Don't let any of them bother you.

Be happy with every new beginning, like the sun is happy to shine a new light upon a new day. Be confident that you will be able to attain, to see, to have, and to do, because what you are doing is supported by the strength of reasons. We have the Dhamma sphere that sustains our human body the Seventh Base of the mind. We have the mind. We have the innovative method that works. We have our

community that supports. We have virtuous friends that encourage and guide us. With all these supports, how can we fail?

Doubts

Q : There are many doubts during meditation (e.g., where the Seventh Base of the mind is located; whether the mental objects are real). How do we overcome these doubts?

A : Simply remember that the mind has seven bases. The Seventh Base is in the middle of our stomach, two finger-breadths above the navel. Or just remember that it is in the middle of our stomach. Agree that this is the right position. Don't waste time looking for it, or it will cause your mind to become unsettled.

Don't doubt whether the mental objects that you see are real or not because they don't look clear or stable. If you have reached the true state of attainment all of your doubts will disappear. The reason you have doubts is because you have not yet reached the true state. You may only be close to it. Just look at what you see calmly and easily without questioning. As long as you keep calm and still, everything will come out fine.

Lack of continuity

Q : How important is consistency in meditation?

A : By meditating everyday our mind will be purified everyday and becomes more and more refined. Eventually our wish will be fulfilled.

Meditate daily until it becomes a habit. No matter how busy you are you will not use that as an excuse to not meditate. You will not use illness, sleepiness, weariness and fatigue as reasons for procrastination. It is easy to come up with excuses. Get on with meditation every day. Every time you sit down to meditate you are advancing a step closer to the attainment of the Dhammakaya.

Attaining the Dhamma is the business of the mind. It relies on subtlety. You can't expect it to happen overnight. So don't spend your time worrying. All that is asked of you is your effort and your determination for success.

Condition your mind throughout the day. You may feel unnatural at the beginning for not being used to the habit. Keep practicing. Soon you will get used to daily meditation and it will become a habit. Then any day that you fail to do so you will feel like missing something.

Mental development is a worthwhile practice that will become very beneficial for you in the future. Be diligent in training your mind to be at the center of your body every day. Remember this, only dedicated diligence, even at the cost of your life, will get you to the Dhammakaya.

Miscellaneous

Q : What are the two techniques for training the mind?

A:

1. *External mind training* – developing mindfulness in every activity (e.g., standing, lying down, sitting, etc.). Once external mindfulness is developed, internal mindfulness will be easy.
2. *Internal mind training* – Luang Pu Wat Paknam gave us a shortcut by showing us how to use the mantra “Samma-Araham” along with “walking” the mind through the seven bases.

Q : How many ways are there to reach the Dhammakaya?

A: There are many different methods. We will summarize these into two:

1. *Not visualizing any mental object*, just keeping the mind calm and still. When the mind finds its right point of balance it will arrive at the spheres, the inner bodies and eventually the Dhammakaya on its own.
2. *Visualizing a mental object* (such as a crystal Buddha) for the mind to focus on. Eventually, the mental object will lead to attainment.

The first method is suitable for the doubting types, the types who think they can do it without visualization, and the types who have difficulty visualizing. All they have to do is to sit still and calm their minds. The types who can't visualize often get a headache when they try to visualize because they have tendency to strain their eyes

to force out images. They find no joy in meditation and may even feel sorry that they have not enough merit to allow them to do it well.

The second method is suitable for those who are restless by nature. The mental objects allow them something to focus their mind with so their mind will not wander. Those who know how to visualize will not suffer any headaches. Their mental objects will get clearer. Also, those who chant and pay homage to the Buddha regularly will have no difficulty visualizing a Buddha image.

Find out what type you are and practice according to the method that suits you best. At times you may feel like alternating your methods, which is not wrong. Whichever method you choose to practice is fine as long as you practice it. Keep practicing. You will be certain to attain the Dhammakaya.

Q: How many different concentration methods are there that rely on the bases of the mind?

A:

1. *Concentration outside the body.* If a meditation device (*kasina*) is involved one may reflect on the four elements—earth, water, air, fire—to be in front of them as meditation device. When concentration (Samadhi) is achieved a bright sphere usually appears outside the body. Of all the forty methods available (including meditative attainments by yogi and holy men) the absorption or Samadhi that is attained takes place outside the body. Some practitioners may be able to develop a degree of Supramundane power through this method.
2. *Concentration inside the body.* Focus is placed on a certain part of the body or the movement of the body. Those often seen in Thailand include contemplation on bodily movement (such as walking; concentrating on the movement of the feet, i.e., lifting, stepping forward, going left, going right, etc.), on organs of the body (such as arms, legs, stomach, nostrils), or on breathing focusing at the nostrils (nostrils are one of the bases of the mind inside the body).
3. The method discovered by Luang Pu Wat Paknam is contemplation on the Seventh Base of the mind located at the center of the body, two finger-breadths above the navel. This is the most secure point. For the mind to be secure it has to settle at this center point. It is much like a spider and his web. For a spider to know in the quickest way where something is trapped in his web, it is at the

center of the web that he must stay. The same way, if your mind is situated at the center of your body your awareness of everything around you is most acute here. Placing your mind somewhere else, your awareness will be limited only to that area (e.g., your hand, your leg, etc.). The center of the body is the center of mindfulness and knowledge.

Q : What are hindrances?

A : ‘Hindrances’ are obstructions of the working of the mind and its goodness. There are five:

1. *Sensual desire* -- desire for the five sensual pleasures, namely, sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. This is a defilement of greed.

The Buddha compared sensual desire with “debt”. An indebted person is not free to argue with his lender even if the lender insults him with harsh language. He has to bite his tongue. Only when he has paid up his debt that he will regain his freedom and relief. Likewise, one who is able to free his mind from sensual desire will regain his freedom and relief.

2. *Ill-will* – it consists of hatred, vengefulness, negative outlook, bad intention, seeing others as enemies.

The Buddha compared ill will with “disease”. The diseased has sickness and illness as his conditions; he has to endure pain for his body and his mind. Because of his sickness, everything he does, he does it with difficulty and suffering. It is hard for him to find happiness and success. One who is overcome by hatred and hostility has a mind that is constantly agitated and disturbed. Even when he contemplates on meditation it is hard for him to delight in the taste of Dhamma. He will not reach happiness from meditative attainment.

3. *Apathy and inertia* – being gloomy and doleful, bored and weary. Feeling dejected, depressed, discouraged, lonely, blue, bored, indifference, lack of interest, are symptoms of the mind. Apathy, stupor, lethargy, weariness, sluggishness, idleness, laziness, sloth and lack of energy, are symptoms of the body.

The Buddha compared this symptom with “imprisonment”. The imprisoned loses opportunity to be entertained at shows and festivities. One who suffers from this symptom loses opportunities to enjoy peace and happiness from Dhamma and meditative attainment.

4. *Distraction and agitation* – restless mind, wandering mind, a mind that goes astray; to feel nervous, disturbed, suspicious, afflicted, apprehended, distressed and remorse, all fall under this category.

The Buddha compared this symptom with “slavery”. A slave has no freedom to go about his affairs as he pleases. He is constantly conscious of being watched by his master and fearing punishment.

5. Doubt and uncertainty – feeling doubtful and uncertain about the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Sangha, and the Discipline.

The Buddha compared this symptom with “a rich man traveling hard and far, facing numerable obstacles and difficulties”. A traveler paranoid of being robbed by bandits is reluctant to take on his journey. Fear of robbery is an impediment for a traveler. Likewise, doubt and reluctance for the Teachings of the Lord Buddha is an impediment for a monk in his quest for spiritual attainment.

Benefits of meditation

Q : *How does inner peace affect our thinking processes and the mechanism of our body?*

A : Notice how our bodies react when our mind is clouded, disturbed, agitated, restless, impatient, depressed, stressed, bored, upset, etc. Our breathing becomes obstructed. Our pretty faces become no longer pretty. Instead, they look stressful, wrinkled and old. Our immune system becomes weak.

Mind is master; body is servant. In an office, when the boss is moody, the workers become moody too. When the boss is in good mood, the workers are in good mood as well. The mind and the body act together and react together. They depend on each other. When the mind is unhappy we lose our inner peace.

We exist because our body and mind are together. A body without a mind is a corpse. A mind without a body is a ghost. A body with a mind is called human. Man has his mind as master, his body as servant. When the mind is not well the body is also not well. When the mind is upset, the body reacts negatively (i.e., the breathing is obstructed and the chemistry in the body is messed up). The body will produce an aging chemical that makes us look older.

Q : How can meditation stimulate wisdom and make a person competent? (In the Western world a competent person is often one who has a good education, one who uses his mental capacities to achieve success. But meditation tells people to stop thinking. How does this work?)

The second is knowledge from thought generated through information gathering (such as from reading and listening). This form of knowledge is not always reliable.

Most people know only these two levels. But there is another level of knowledge that is far deeper. This is the knowledge that comes from a mind that is free of thoughts -- a clear-seeing mind. It's like moving an object out of darkness into the open sunlight, you see it more clearly.

There is a lot more to the secrets of life that cannot be found in books or lectures, or through one's own thinking abilities. It is found through the intelligence of a "clear-seeing" mind developed through mental cultivation. This clear-seeing intelligence can only be acquired when an inner light appears through a mind that is completely calm and still during meditation--a mind that sees through the inner light to the source of this intelligence.

The inner light will only appear when our concentration is at its peak. This is called 'Samadhi', a state of meditative attainment achieved through a serene mind that is settled at the Seventh Base of the mind. This is the source where all inner knowledge is located. From this source, we gain insights to all things and all beings that exist within us. Meditation produces wisdom and intelligence. This is how a person can become more competent through meditation.

Q : I once persuaded a friend to join in on our meditation, but he questioned why there were so many different methods used in meditation; each method was different and everyone claimed his method is the best. What is the best way to answer this?

A : The first thing one should understand about meditation is why we practice it. Once you understand this basic point, everything else would be easy to explain. The objective of meditation is to learn how to control one's mind. The way to control your mind is to keep it inside your body.

It is the nature of the mind to wander, to think. These are the two characteristics:

1. A mind that wanders – it roams around everywhere. We may be sitting in Thailand but our mind goes off to China, to America, etc.
2. A mind full of thinking – it thinks about everything. If we are alone by ourselves our mind tends to think even more. The more we think the more we become restless. Besides, most of our thinking deals with external matters which take our mind further away from our body.

To stabilize our restless mind, the Buddha advised us to meditate and to concentrate our mind inside our body. When the mind stops wandering and starts settling inside the body, our mental power increases.

There are forty different techniques used in meditation practice. The reason why there are so many different techniques available is because different people have different temperaments. Some people are excitable, some are calm, some are articulate, some are quick to fall asleep, etc. A technique that works with one person may not work for another. There are three to five principal methods. The rest—more than thirty—are supplementary methods designed to fit each individual's temperament.

You can practice the principal methods in any schools that have experienced teachers to guide you seriously. Some schools have been established for a number of years. Their techniques are those taught by the Buddha, not invented by them, and the teachers are experienced. You can practice with these schools. If you find yourself making little or no progress after having put in considerable time and effort, then you may want to consider moving to a different school.

The reason for changing is not because the teacher or the teaching is inferior, but because the technique does not suit your temperament. Before making the decision to change, make sure you have put in the right amount of effort and attention in your practice. If you keep jumping from one school to the next and are still showing no progress, then it may be you who needs change.

Here are some considerations:

1. The essence of meditation practice is to stop the mind from wandering; to bring the mind to the center of the body; and to keep the mind calm and still.
2. If the method of practice conforms to the Buddha's teaching, then it is OK to use. Learn as you go. Eventually you will achieve good results.
3. If you want to play it safe, find a teacher who is an expert on the method you choose. He will know whether his method is suitable for your temperament or not. If not, he may send you to a different school whose method may suit you better. Follow his suggestion. Whichever school you go to, make sure you practice earnestly.

Remember the Buddha's resolution before he became enlightened. After practicing full-heartedly for six years with several different teachers, the Buddha surmised that he had done everything except one: to give it all. He made this resolution: "My flesh and blood can dry up leaving only skin, veins and bones. As long as I do not attain the Enlightenment I will not leave this seat. I will sit here until I perish."

What do you mean by "giving it all"? For the Buddha it meant his life. For us, it may mean giving at least one hour when we wake up and one hour before we go to bed. During the day, try to maintain your mind at the center of your body all the time. The moment your mind wanders, bring it back. Bring it back every time it leaves you. Keep fighting this battle until you win. Carry on your daily routine, but never lose your mindfulness. Don't miss your morning and evening meditation daily. Sooner or later, you will achieve your final goal.

Advising others

Q : How do I share my knowledge of Samadhi with those who don't believe?

A : Tell them to try it; there is nothing to lose. We use Samadhi all the times in our daily activities, whether we are taking a bath, washing our face, brushing our teeth, studying, working, or interacting with people. Samadhi strengthens our mental power and quality of speech.

Organized thoughts that come from a source of happiness produce organized speech and action that are full of happiness. The positive effect of this happiness is shared by people we interface with in conversation or at work. This is something

that they can find out for themselves whether they believe it or not. All they have to do is to maintain a calm and still mind.

Some people are hopelessly stubborn. We can try to tell them that a chili is hot. Not only would they not believe it but they would refuse to taste it. How can you know if you don't try? If you want to know if this chili is hot and what kind of "hot" it is, the only way to find out is to take a bite.

We can share the knowledge of mental development with someone, as long as he takes a non-bias attitude. If he tries it he will find out whether he has Samadhi or not, and how he can benefit from it. There is nothing to lose and everything to gain for him.

Q : When persuading a business friend to go to the temple, the friend would decline because his notion is that our religion teaches people to embrace contentment and detachment, which is unsuitable for the life style of a businessman. How do we overcome this misconception?

A : In this context, the word "contentment" means "to be satisfied with what should be had and what should be obtained". Don't crave for things that one should not have. If one has the knowledge, capability and morality to pursue wealth in the right way, by all means, go ahead. The Buddha did not object to this. This kind of misconception forms a barrier for going to the temple.

We should be aware of man's nature, especially the nature of business people, to want to be rich and then more. After riches are acquired, the desire for fame follows. Craving to be rich and famous seems to be the mantra of a businessman.

The Buddha was not against wealth. Many have this misconception. In fact, the Buddha even preached the "danger of poverty". He said, to be poor is suffering. In our practical world, borrowing money is suffering; paying interest from borrowing is suffering; not having money to repay the loan is suffering; to be chased by creditors is suffering. These are but a few examples of suffering caused by poverty. So we must be clear of the fact that the Buddha did not prohibit business people, or any people, to be rich.

In addition, the Buddha taught "Millionaire Mentality" showing people how to gain wealth in this world as well as the next, the kind of wealth that one can carry with him to future existence. He never taught people to be poor.

What the Buddha discouraged was wealth acquired through immoral means or through wrongful occupations. He warned that wrongful acquisitions lead to an unhappy destination and retribution in hell. One may succeed in accumulating wealth but may end up with more suffering at the end of life.

What are wrongful occupations? Any occupations dealing in weapons, humans (slavery, prostitution), poisons, narcotics, animals to be slaughtered, are wrongful occupations. Occupations that are considered illegal by human laws are also wrongful. The Buddha prohibited wealth acquired through wrongful means because he saw “danger in this life as well as the next”.

Persuading someone, rich or poor, to go to the temple is an act of good deed. Take one who has acquired wealth through wrongful means. By learning Dhamma from the temple, he will realize that it is better for him to discontinue the wrongful pursuit. By going to the temple, he will learn how to practice good deeds and accumulate merits as a way to lighten his negative karma.

If one is not yet rich and is conducting himself in a wrongful way, then he will be encouraged to restart in the right way according to the teaching of the Buddha.

The following are four wealth building principles taught by the Buddha:

1. Wise acquisition – knowing how to accumulate wealth in a rightful way, closing the door to hell.
2. Wise preservation – knowing how to preserve wealth, not letting it get away.
3. Wise networking – knowing how to build a network of virtuous friends (Kalayanamita) for doing business. Not only is this a good way to generate worldly wealth, it also closes the door to hell and opens the door to Nirvana.

It is interesting to note that the concept of “networking” in business was taught by the Buddha 2,500 years earlier. Networking with good people is beneficial, but networking with bad people is harmful. Not only would our bad actions put us in the hell realm after we die, but it can also put us in jail while we are still alive.

4. Wise spending – knowing how to spend money wisely, both for worldly needs as well as spiritual needs.

Going to the temple is a way to fill up your wealth: wealth of worldly possessions, morality and Dhamma. Having these three kinds of wealth is the most complete possession. It is wealth that you can enjoy in this life as well as the next. You won't have to worry about violating human laws or falling into an unhappy realm. This is righteous possession that is most worthwhile.

Benefits of meditation

Some people may not be the type that is interested in Dhamma but they give alms, practice generosity, and follow the precepts according to tradition. If your friends are this type, you should explain to them that their acts of good deed will be more enjoyable and meritorious if they practice meditation too. Explain to them, if they meditate before performing an act of generosity, their minds will be radiant giving rise to merit results that are more pure. In the same way, if they meditate, their precepts will become more pure.

At the beginning, they may understand your advice to a certain degree, but after they have meditated for a while they will understand your deeper advice. You can also share your meditation experience and insight with them. Gradually, they will have a full appreciation.

Another type is people who practice generosity, observe the precepts, and study Dhamma too. They know how to observe the precepts and practice generosity the right way, but they don't see the real benefits of meditation. Even some monks have the notion that their Samadhi is already good, so there is no need for them to practice meditation.

You can possibly open their mind this way: "Even though you have performed enough generosity to rid yourself of greed; observed enough precepts to be in control of your body, speech and mind; these may still be insufficient to make your mind radiant. Often times you run into circumstances that upset you, they make you miserable, or even cause you to break friendship with others. Are you happy with this condition of your mind?"

You can improve the quality of your mind through meditation. Meditation is a form of mental development that allows you to control your emotions and to develop wisdom. It does not cost you any money. All you have to do is try; then you will find out for yourself whether meditation is good for you or not.

For someone who is a “professional worker”, who does not run into conflict with people that much, but who sometimes suffers inertia due to overwork, the best remedy for him is meditation. Meditation will “reboot” his mind and spirit.

The best time to invite a somewhat stubborn person to practice meditation is:

1. When he is sick
2. When he suffers

When someone is in a situation of suffering, bodily or mentally (illness, family problems, office problems, etc.), he looks for refuge and spiritual support. He will be receptive to good advice. You will be certain to succeed in getting him to practice meditation under these circumstances.

Varying methods of meditation

Q : How come the methods used by each meditation master are so different?

A : This is due to the training background of each teaching master. Some masters simply say “just let everything go”. This sounds easy enough, but can we do it so easily? Perhaps not! The master is right, of course, but because our background and expertise are different, it is not that easy for us to just make this happen.

When I first met Khun Yay (this was before I was ordained as a Buddhist monk), I asked her what the right way to practice was. She said, “Keep your mind at the center of your stomach. When you are able to do this, you will find the Nirvana.”

I asked why you need to put your mind at the center of your stomach, she would say “Because it is the gateway to the Nirvana. The door to the Nirvana is there.” This perplexed me even further. So I asked a friend (then Luang Phaw Dhammajayo before he became a monk), “Why did Khun Yay talk like that?”

He remarked, “Have you forgotten the law of physics? The middle of the stomach is the “center of gravity”.” This enlightened me immediately. This is a term that is easily

understood in science. He further explained, if we put our mind at this “center of gravity”, scientific and spiritual outcomes coincide, because at this center point there is no propulsion or momentum. To explain in physics term, when the mind is situated at this center point, it will not be subject to outside forces.

I saw some truth in this. I realized every time I got angry at someone my mind would leave me and go to the face of the person who I was angry at, even though my body has not moved a bit.

Every time our mind leaves the center of our body, it is like a soldier being lured away from his bunker in the battle field to be mutilated by enemies. Likewise, our mind would be lured away to be defiled by bad elements and other nonsensical things if it leaves its “bunker”.

Unfortunately, our mind has been so constantly out of our body that it has become second nature. To bring it back inside, it is like forcing a camel through a needle hole.

All masters of meditation teach with their own familiar methods, which could be different from your own master’s. Regardless of what methods are taught, all of them lead to the same ultimate destination, Nirvana. The only difference is speed. How fast or how slow your speed on getting there depends on how direct or indirect the route you choose.

Atlanta, 4.28.11