

MANUAL OF INSIGHT

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Chapter 5: Practical Instructions

In this chapter, I will explain how to practice *vipassanā* meditation and experience path and fruition knowledges from a practical perspective. Thus I will use everyday language rather than technical terminology. I will also not be including many textual references or quotations. If the readers have any doubts on a subject, they can refer to the supporting material and references included in Volume One.

Preparations for Practice

If one aspires to attain path and fruition knowledge and *nibbāna* in this very life, one should cut any impediments during the time of his or her meditation practice through the following preparations:

- ❖ Purify moral conduct as explained in Chapter 1, and cultivate the wish, “may my moral conduct be supportive to path knowledge.” If one suspects that he or she may have ever committed some offence toward an enlightened person, one should apologize for the mistake. If one cannot go to see that person to apologize, one should offer the apology in front of a teacher.
- ❖ Entrust yourself to the Buddha’s wisdom, in order to be free from fear in the event frightening objects may appear during intensive practice. Also one should entrust oneself to a teacher’s care, so that the teacher may guide one without any hesitation. (This may not be necessary if one is already following a teacher’s instructions respectfully.)
- ❖ Reflect on the merits of *nibbāna*, which is completely free from any mental or physical suffering; path knowledge, which eradicates defilements and leads directly to *nibbāna*; and *vipassanā* practice, which will surely lead to the attainment of path knowledge and *nibbāna*. One should find inspiration by remembering that the path of *vipassanā* one is practicing is the same path that the Buddha, *arahats*, and all of the noble ones have followed.
- ❖ One should then bow to the Buddha, reflecting on as many of his attributes as one knows. After this, it is recommended that one cultivates lovingkindness to all living beings, beginning with the guardian *devas* of the monastery. If possible, one should then contemplate death and the impurity of one’s own body.

Finally, one should sit with legs crossed, or in any other sitting posture that is comfortable, and observe as explained below.

The Basic Practice

The Primary Object

The meditator should focus the mind on the abdomen. He or she will feel it rising and falling. If one doesn't feel this clearly, a hand should be placed on the abdomen, and the rising and falling will become obvious after a while. When breathing in, one will experience the rising movement of the abdomen. One notes this as "rising." When breathing out, one will experience the falling movement. One notes this as "falling."

While doing this, one may reflect that observing the form or concept of the abdomen is not what one should do. This is not cause to worry. Initially, of course, it is almost impossible to avoid a conceptual sense of solid form. So in the beginning, one must observe objects on a conceptual level. That is the only way that one's concentration, awareness, and *vipassanā* knowledge will mature. In due time, however, one's *vipassanā* knowledge will break through to the absolute reality beyond the concepts.

True *vipassanā* practice is awareness of all of the mental and physical phenomena that are constantly arising at the six sense doors. However, in the beginning, because one's concentration and awareness are not strong enough, it will be difficult to observe all of the phenomena that are constantly arising. One will not be skillful enough to follow all of the objects, or may get caught up in searching for an object to note. For these reasons, one should initially focus just on the rising and falling of the abdomen, which are occurring all the time and noticeable enough to observe without much difficulty. Later, when practice matures, one will be able to note the objects as they arise.

So one should note the movements of the abdomen as "rising" and "falling," concurrently and continuously from moment to moment. The meditator should do this mentally, not audibly. In order to make the rising and falling more distinct, one does not make the breath more vigorous than usual. Neither slow down nor speed up the breath. If the meditator changes the natural pattern of breathing, he or she may get tired quickly and not be able to note properly. One just breathes in and out normally and regularly, and observes concurrently.

A Textual Note

The rising and falling of the abdomen is a manifestation of the air element, one of the types of tactile, physical phenomena (see Chapter 4). When the rising and falling is observed, one will experience pressure and movement (the characteristics of the air element) in accordance with the following Pāli passages:

- a) "Monks, see the body correctly. Observe its impermanence as it really is."
- b) "Monks, a monk sees the impermanent body as impermanent. That is right view."
(Sam-2, 42; Khandasamyutta, SN)

This is in accordance with the *suttas* contained in Khandhasamyutta (SN). And it is also included in the contemplation of mind objects (the five aggregates) of the Mahasatipatthana Sutta.

- c) “Monks, see tangible objects correctly. Observe their impermanence as it really is.”
- d) “Monks, a monk sees impermanent tangible objects as impermanent. That is right view.” (Sam-2, 355)
- e) “Comprehending, realizing, disowning, and detaching oneself from the tangible objects leads to the end of suffering, *arahatta* fruition knowledge, and *nibbāna*.” (Sam-2, 250)
- f) “One who sees the tangible objects as impermanent removes delusion and arouses wisdom.” (Sam-2, 259; Salayatanasamyutta, SN)

This is in accordance with the discourses contained in Salayatanasamyutta (SN). It is also included in the contemplation of mind objects (the six bases) of the Mahasatipatthana Sutta.

- g) “Whether internal or external, the air element is just air element. Through wisdom which knows what is correct, one should regard it as it really is, ‘This is not mine. This I am not. This is not my self.’” (Ma-2, 85) (Ma-3, 285)

This is in accordance with the discourses dealing with the elements. It is also included in the contemplation of the body (elements) of the Mahasatipatthana Sutta.

Moreover, the air element is part of the physical body, and is therefore included in the truth of *dukkha*. It should be seen as it really is, in accord with the Buddha’s teaching: “The noble truth of *dukkha* should be realized.” (Sam 3-38)

This is in accordance with the discourses dealing with the Noble Truths. It is also included in the contemplation of the mind objects (the Four Noble Truths) of the Mahasatipatthana Sutta.

Thus the observation of the rising and falling of the abdomen is clearly consistent with the teaching of the Buddha because one understands the pressure and movement of the air element as it really is. With regard to the observation of the in and out breath, it is said: “Whatever posture the body is in, be aware of it as it really is.”

Distracting Thoughts

As one continually notes the rising and falling of the abdomen, various kinds of thoughts will arise. When this happens, one notes them using everyday language. For example, when one finds oneself thinking, it is noted it as “thinking, thinking.” If one is

daydreaming, it is noted as “daydreaming, daydreaming.” If one is imagining something, it is noted as “imagining, imagining.” If one is considering something, it is noted as “considering, considering.”

When the mind wanders off, one notes it as “wandering, wandering.” If one imagines traveling to some other place, it is noted as “traveling, traveling.” If one imagines meeting someone, it is noted as “meeting, meeting.” If one imagines speaking with someone, one notes it as “speaking, speaking.” Whenever one imagines seeing something or someone, it is repeatedly noted as “seeing, seeing” until that mental image disappears. Then, one immediately goes back to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen.

Physical Discomfort

While noting the rising and falling of the abdomen, one may feel like he or she wants to swallow or spit out the saliva in the mouth. This should be noted as “wanting to swallow,” or “wanting to spit.” If the meditator actually swallows or spits, it is noted as “swallowing, swallowing” or “spitting, spitting,” and he or she immediately goes back to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen. If one wants to lower the head, it is noted as “wanting to lower.” If he or she bends the neck to lower the head, it is noted as “bending, bending,” continuing to focus on every movement involved. This should be done slowly, not quickly. Similarly with bringing the head back up again. Afterward, one goes right back to the primary object of rising and falling.

When an uncomfortable stiffness arises in any part of the body, one focuses only on the stiffness and continuously notes it as “stiffness, stiffness.” The noting is kept concurrent with the actual sensation. The stiffness may slowly fade away, or it may get even more intense. If it becomes unbearable and one wants to shift the posture, that mental state is noted as “wanting to shift, wanting to shift.” If one actually shifts the posture, one continues with noting each of the physical movements involved in that process. For example, when one wants to lift a limb, it is noted as “wanting to lift.” Then, when one actually lifts it, each movement is noted as “lifting, lifting.” When stretching it, one notes that as “stretching.” When bending it, one notes that as “bending.” When lowering it again, one notes that as “lowering.” One does not make any of these movements quickly, rather slowly and steadily. If one feels something touching any part of the body during the movement, one notes it as “touching.” When one is done shifting the posture, or if the stiffness fades away without shifting the posture, one immediately goes back to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen.

When heat is felt somewhere in the body, one focuses the mind on it and notes it as “heat, heat” concurrently and continuously. If it fades away, one goes back to noting the rising and falling. If it becomes unbearable and one wants to shift the posture, it is noted as “wanting to shift.” If one actually shifts one’s posture, one notes the entire process of lifting each limb by noting concurrently and continuously as described above. Afterward, one immediately goes back to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen. He or she does not leave any gaps in the flow of noting.

When the meditator feels a bodily itch, he or she focuses on it and notes it steadily and continuously as “itching, itching.” While noting it this way, the itch may fade away. If so, one goes back to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen. If the itch becomes unbearable and one either wants it to disappear or to scratch it, it is noted as “wanting to disappear,” or “wanting to scratch.” If the meditator wants to raise the hand to scratch, it is noted as “wanting to raise.” As one actually raises the hand, it is noted as “raising”. This should be done slowly and steadily. When touching the itchy part of one’s body, it is noted as “touching.” As one scratches, it is noted as “scratching” every time the hand or fingers move back and forth. When one feels like he or she wants to stop scratching, it is noted as “wanting to stop.” When one wants to put the hand back down, one notes that as “wanting to put down.” The meditator then notes “lowering, lowering” as he or she actually lowers the hand. When one feels the touch of the hand coming to rest back in its place, it is noted as “touching.” Immediately afterward, the meditator goes back to noting the primary object of rising and falling.

When any kind of unpleasant sensation arises and becomes distinct, the meditator focuses his or her mind on it and notes it accurately and steadily using everyday language such as “pain, pain,” “numb, numb,” “ache, ache,” “tired, tired,” or “dizzy, dizzy.” When one notes it in this way, it may fade away or increase. If it is noted with patience and perseverance, it often fades away. If it becomes unbearable, one should ignore it and take extra care to note the rising and falling of the abdomen concurrently and continuously.

Odd Experiences

As one’s concentration gets stronger, unbearable pains may be experienced in the body. One may feel a strong pressure, like an airbag being inflated inside the chest, a sharp pain like being stabbed with a dagger, a stinging pain like being pricked with many small needles, or an overall irritation as if insects were crawling all over one’s body. One may feel fierce heat, severe itchiness, unbearable aching, extreme cold, or a variety of other unpleasant sensations.

If the meditator becomes frightened and stops noting when any of these kinds of extreme sensations occurs, he or she will find that it immediately disappears. However, it will generally reappear when one’s concentration becomes strong again. The meditator should not be afraid to encounter any of these kinds of experiences. It is not a sign of some serious disease, but only an ordinary sensation that one often has in the body. However, it is rarely noticed because one’s attention is occupied by more obvious sensations. It is actually one’s strong concentration that is making it obvious in this way. So there is no need to worry that something is wrong. One just continues to note it in order to overcome it. If the meditator stops noting, he or she may encounter the same kind of sensation every time concentration grows stronger. If it is noted with patience and perseverance, though, at some point it will suddenly disappear once and for all.

If one feels like the body wants to sway, it is noted as “wanting to sway.” If one’s body starts to actually sway, it is noted as “swaying, swaying.” If the meditator finds oneself swaying unintentionally, he or she does not become afraid of it and does not encourage it.

One just continues noting it, steadily and gradually, as “swaying, swaying” with confidence that it will disappear if it is noted. If the swaying becomes very strong, one can practice while sitting against a wall or other firm support, or while lying down. The swaying will soon stop entirely. The same procedure should be followed if trembling of the body is experienced.

Sometimes, there may be goose bumps or a chill on one’s back or through the whole body. There is no need to be afraid of this. It is just rapture caused by one’s meditation. Sometimes any sound that one hears may cause panic. One should not be afraid of this either. It is just that one’s sensitivity to mental contact has become very keen as a result of strong concentration. Any time one feels like rearranging one’s limbs or posture, the intention to do so is noted first, and then every single successive movement involved is noted as well. The meditator should not move fast. He or she should move slowly and steadily.

Getting a Drink

When one is thirsty, it should be noted as “thirsty.” If one intends to stand up to get a drink, it is noted as “intending to stand up.” As the meditator prepares to stand up, he or she notes all of the physical movements involved using everyday language. In standing up, one focuses on the gradual rising of the body and notes it as “standing up, standing up.” One should move slowly and steadily. When one has risen and is standing still, it is noted as “standing, standing.” If one happens to see or look at something or someone, it is noted as “seeing” or “looking.” When one wants to go get some water, it is noted as “wanting to go.” While one is actually going, every step is noted as “stepping, stepping” or “right, left.” One follows each step mindfully from the moment the foot is lifted until it is dropped back down again. When walking slowly, or during formal walking meditation, one should note two parts of each step: either “lifting, moving,” “lifting, dropping,” or “moving, dropping.” Once one can easily note two parts of each step, one should switch to noting three parts: “lifting, moving, dropping.”

When one looks at and sees the container of drinking water, it is noted as “looking, seeing.” When standing still in front of it, one notes that as “standing, standing.” When reaching for a cup, one notes that as “reaching, reaching.” When touching the cup, one notes that as “touching, touching.” When taking hold of the cup, one notes that as “holding, holding.” When pouring water into the cup, one notes that as “pouring, pouring.” When lifting the cup of water to the mouth, one notes that as “lifting, lifting.” When the cup touches the lips, one notes that as “touching, touching.” When feeling the coldness of the water, one notes that as “cold, cold.” When drinking and swallowing the water, one notes that as “drinking, swallowing.” When feeling the coldness of the water in one’s throat or stomach, it is noted as “cold, cold.” When putting the cup down, one notes that as “putting down, putting down.” When lowering the hand, one notes that as “lowering, lowering.” When the hand touches the body, one notes that as “touching, touching.”

When the intention arises to turn and go back to one's sitting place, that is noted as "intending to turn," and as one actually turns, one notes "turning, turning." As the meditator walks back to his or her place, he or she notes each step in the same way described above. When one intends to come to a stop and stand still, one notes that as "intending to stand," and then notes "standing, standing" as one stands. If one remains standing for some time, the rising and falling of the abdomen can be noted, along with the standing posture, as "rising, falling, standing." When one intends to sit down, one notes that as "intending to sit." If one needs to position oneself on the sitting place, he or she notes that in a similar manner. If one needs to turn, it is noted as "turning." As one is actually sitting down, it is noted as "sitting down, sitting down," with awareness of the weight of the body gradually being lowered. Everything should be done slowly and steadily. Once the meditator is sitting, one's hands and legs will need to be arranged again. All of the movements involved should be carefully noted using everyday language. Then, if there are no other obvious objects to note, one returns to noting the primary object of rising and falling as usual.

Going to Bed

When one wants to lie down, it is noted as "wanting to lie down." While one prepares the bed, he or she notes all of the movements of the arms and legs as "lifting," "stretching," "repositioning", and so on. As one is actually lying down, one focuses on the whole body that is gradually lying down and notes "lying down, lying down." When feeling the touch of the pillow and bedding, one notes that as "touching, touching." When finally lying, the movements of the arms, legs, and body are noted, as well as noting the adjusting of one's lying posture. This should be done slowly and mindfully. Then, if there is nothing else to note, one should focus on the rising and falling and note it continuously.

As the meditator lies in bed noting the rising and falling of the abdomen, he or she may feel some unpleasant sensations, such as stiffness, heat, pain, itchiness, and so on. If so, one notes these mindfully in the same way as in sitting meditation. Any distractions, such as swallowing, thinking, imagining, etcetera, should also be noted carefully as at other times. If one wants to turn over, bend or stretch the limbs, or adjust the position in any other way, one first notes the intention and then notes every single movement involved without missing one. When there is nothing else in particular to note, he or she should go back to noting the primary object of rising and falling.

If one feels sleepy, it is noted as "sleepy, sleepy." If the eyelids feel heavy, one notes that as "heavy, heavy." When one's meditation is mature, the sleepiness disappears and the mind becomes clear again. If so, one notes that as "clear, clear," and goes back to noting the rising and falling of the abdomen. If sleepiness has not disappeared, one should not stop noting. He or she just continues noting the rising and falling or any other object without any intention of falling asleep. When one's body gets really tired, one will eventually fall asleep in the midst of one's noting.

Sleep is a prolonged period of the "life continuum" or "functional" consciousness. It is the same kind of consciousness that arises during the first moment of one's life and the

last moment of one's life. This type of consciousness is so subtle that its sense object cannot be known. Life continuum also occurs between successive moments of full consciousness while awake. For example, it occurs between moments of seeing and thinking, hearing and thinking, and so on. However, at these times it does not last long enough for us to notice. When we sleep, it lasts long enough that we notice it, but we still can not detect its characteristics or object. Therefore, when we are asleep, it is not possible to note any objects.

Getting Up

As soon as one wakes up, one notes "awake, awake." At the beginning of the practice, one will find it difficult to catch the first moments of waking. If the meditator is not yet able to note right from the moment of waking up, he or she should start noting whatever object arises from the time one remembers to note. If one finds oneself thinking, it is noted as "thinking, thinking," and then one continues to note the rising and falling of the abdomen. If a sound awakens the meditator, it is noted as "hearing, hearing." If there is nothing else to note, he or she continues noting the rising and falling.

Turning over, bending, and stretching should all be done slowly and mindfully while noting it using everyday language. If one thinks about what time it is, it is noted as "thinking, thinking." If one feels like wanting to get up, it is noted as "wanting to get up." One should note without any gaps all of the movements involved in the process of getting out of bed. He or she focuses on the body getting up and notes it as "getting up, getting up." If the meditator sits afterward, it is noted as "sitting, sitting." Then he or she goes back to noting the primary object of rising and falling.

If one washes the face or bathes, every single action involved should be noted without any gaps. For example, one should note looking at and seeing the bathing bowl, reaching for it, picking it up, scooping up the water, pouring the water over the body, the coolness of the water, rubbing the body, and so on.¹ One should also note any other activities such as putting on clothes, making the bed, opening or closing the door, arranging one's things and so on, without any gaps.

Eating a Meal

When one has a meal and looks at the plate, it should be noted as "looking" or "seeing." When gathering a morsel of rice, one notes that as "gathering, gathering." As the morsel is lifted to the mouth, one notes that as "lifting, lifting." If one lowers the head, it is noted as "lowering, lowering." When one's fingers touch the lips, it is noted as "touching, touching." When the mouth is opening, it is noted as "opening, opening." When one places the morsel of rice into the mouth, it is noted as "placing, placing." When one closes the mouth, it is noted as "closing, closing." When one lowers the hand, it is noted as "lowering, lowering." If one raises the head again, it is noted as "raising, raising."

¹ This description is of the common way of bathing outside in Burma where there is no hot and cold running water piped into an interior shower stall. Use similar noting of all actions involved in bathing if using modern plumbing inside.

Each time one chews the food, it is noted as “chewing, chewing.” When tasting the flavor of the food, one notes “tasting, tasting.” When swallowing the food, one notes “swallowing, swallowing.” If one feels the food passing through the throat and digestive tract, it is noted as “touching, touching.”²

In this way, the meditator notes meticulously during the entire eating process. At the beginning of practice when one is not yet able to note things as they arise, there will be many gaps. There will also be many instances when one cannot be aware of and note the intentions to move the body. The meditator should not feel frustrated! If the meditator has the attitude to note meticulously and carefully, he or she will be able to note and observe more and more. When understanding becomes mature, one will be able to easily note even more objects than explained here.

Increasing the Number of Objects

After about a day, one is likely to feel that simply noting the rising and falling of the abdomen is too easy. He or she may find that there is a gap or empty interval between the rising and falling movements. In that case, the meditator should switch to noting three objects, adding a third object of the sitting posture itself. One will then be noting: “rising, falling, sitting; rising, falling, sitting;...” In the same way that one notes the rising and falling, one should be aware of the sitting posture of the body as one notes “sitting”. If one is lying down, the three objects of “rising, falling, lying” should be noted.

If the meditator still finds that there are gaps while noting these three objects, he or she can note “rising, falling, sitting, touching”, adding a distinct touching sensation in any part of the body as the fourth object. If one is not comfortable with that approach, then “rising, sitting, falling, sitting” can be noted. If one is lying down, the four objects to note are: “rising, falling, lying, touching” or “rising, lying, falling, lying.” If the breath becomes so subtle that one cannot feel the rising and falling of the abdomen clearly, the sitting or lying posture or “touch points” can be noted. The meditator can note four, five, or six touch points, one after another.

General Objects

While one is carefully noting phenomena within the body like the rising and falling, etcetera, there is no need to note functional seeing or hearing. With the careful noting of rising and falling, etcetera, the purpose of noting and understanding the seeing or hearing is also fulfilled. It is just simply seeing or hearing. However, if one intentionally looks at something or someone, “looking, looking” should be noted, followed by continuing to note the primary object. Even if it is not done intentionally, if one happens to see an object like a woman or a man, one notes “seeing, seeing” two or three times and then

² This description of the traditional way of eating with one’s fingers is common in Burma, particularly in the monasteries. When eating with utensils, the same meticulous noting of every moment of seeing, smelling, intention to lift a utensil of food, lifting, opening the mouth, placing food in the mouth, closing the mouth, withdrawing the utensil, lowering the utensil, beginning to chew, chewing, tasting, swallowing, etcetera, should be noted throughout the entire meal.

continues to note the primary object. If one intentionally listens to a sound, one notes “hearing, hearing,” followed by continuing to note the primary object. If a distinct sound is heard like people talking, a song, a loud noise, the voices of dogs, birds, and chickens, etcetera, one notes “hearing, hearing” two or three times and then continues to note the primary object.

If these other distinct objects that capture one’s attention are not noted, then one cannot be clearly aware of the primary object. One may also get caught up in thinking about them and arouse mental defilements. In that case, one should note “thinking, thinking,” and then go back to the primary object. If the meditator forgets to note bodily phenomena or thinking, he or she should note “forgetting, forgetting” and then continues to note the primary object.

Mental States

If the meditator has been practicing for a long time and is not making any progress, he or she may become lazy. One notes that as “lazy, lazy.” When mindfulness, concentration, and special *vipassanā* knowledges have not yet arisen, one may assume that noting does not get one anywhere, and therefore doubts arise. One notes that as “doubt, doubt.” At times, the meditator may hope for smoother practice or some special experience, and notes that as “hoping, hoping.” If one reflects on one’s previous practice, note it as “reflecting.” If one wonders whether the object is mental or physical, one notes that as “wondering.” Sometimes, when practice does not go smoothly, one may feel frustrated, and notes that as “frustrated, frustrated.” Sometimes when one finds that practice is going well, he or she may feel happy, and notes that as “happy, happy.” The meditator should note all mental states in this way, whenever they arise, and then continue to note the primary object.

Diligence

One should note each and every thought, whether wholesome or unwholesome. One should note each and every physical movement, whether large or small. One should note each and every feeling arising in the body or mind, whether pleasant or unpleasant. One should note each and every mental object, whether wholesome or unwholesome. If there is nothing else in particular to note, then one notes the primary object, such as the rising and falling of the abdomen when sitting, or the lifting, moving, and dropping of the foot when walking. One notes these objects uninterruptedly and continuously.

In this way, except for the sleeping hours, one should note continuously and uninterruptedly all day and all night. Before long all mental and physical phenomena will be observed the moment they arise, and the meditator will develop the *vipassanā* knowledges one by one.

Vipassanā

Mind and Body

When the meditator practices noting as described above and mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom mature, he or she will find that the noting mind and the noted objects occur in pairs. For example, one will observe both the physical phenomena (body) involved in the rising of the abdomen, and the mental phenomena (mind) that notes it; the physical phenomena of the falling of the abdomen, and the mind that notes it; the physical phenomena of lifting the foot, and the mind that notes it; the physical phenomena of moving the foot forward, and the mind that notes it; the physical phenomena of dropping the foot, and the mind that notes it; and so on.

When one's practice is going well, one will see the rising and falling of the abdomen, and the noting mind separately in this way. Thus, one is able to distinguish between mental and physical phenomena, or mind and body. It will seem like the noting mind is rushing toward the noted objects. This is awareness of the characteristic of the mind to incline toward its objects. The clearer one's observation of physical objects becomes, the more obvious the noting mind will become. The *Visuddhimagga* (2,225) says:

“Whenever the physical phenomena become clear, unambiguous, and obvious to a meditator, the mental phenomena associated with those physical sense objects will also become obvious of their own accord.”

When ordinary people experience this realization of mind and body in their meditation, they are pleased and tend to have thoughts such as: “Nothing exists but mind and body. There is only the rising of the abdomen and the mind noting it; only the falling of the abdomen and the mind noting it; only the sitting posture and the mind noting it; only the bending movement and the mind noting it. What we call a human being is nothing but these two kinds of phenomena. Except for these two phenomena there is nothing else. Also what we call a woman or man is only these two phenomena. Except for these two phenomena there is no independent person or being.”

When people with scriptural knowledge clearly experience physical sense objects, the sense bases, and the knowing mind, they are pleased and tend to reflect on it in this way: “It really is true that there are only mental and physical phenomena. In a moment of noting, what I really experience are the noted physical phenomena and the noting mind. The same is true at other times, too. There is no ‘woman,’ ‘man,’ or other living being that exists independent of these phenomena. All that really exists are the present moment's mental and physical phenomena. These phenomena are commonly called a person, being, woman, or man. But these are merely names. In reality, there is no independent ‘person,’ ‘being,’ ‘woman,’ or ‘man,’ only the mental and physical phenomena that are experienced while noting them.”

When these kinds of reflections arise, the mental state of reflecting itself should be noted as “reflecting, reflecting.” Then, one returns to the primary object and notes it uninterruptedly.

Cause and Effect

As practice matures further, the intention to move becomes obvious by itself when one intends to move the body. As soon as an intention arises, one will be able to be aware of it easily. For example, in the beginning of practice, even if “intending to bend” is noted, the meditator is not able to be clearly aware of the intention to bend one’s arm. However, when practice matures, one will be clearly aware of the intention to bend without confusing it with anything else. Therefore, any time one wants to change the bodily posture, one should note the intention first, and then note the actual movements involved.

When first beginning the practice, one changes the bodily posture often without noticing it. Because of this, one tends to think, “The body is fast; the noting mind is slow.” However, as *empirical knowledge* matures, it seems as if the noting mind is welcoming objects in advance. One is able to note the intentions to bend or stretch, sit, stand or walk, and so on, as well as noticing the different movements involved in bending, etcetera. Then, one realizes, “The body is slow; the noting mind is quick.” One experiences for oneself that only after the intention to move has arisen, can the movement of bending, stretching, etcetera, take place.

When one feels hot or cold, “hot, hot” or “cold, cold” is noted. While noting, one can experience whether the heat or cold gets stronger. When one notes while eating, he or she can experience for oneself that strength increases. After an object has been noted, he or she should not go back to the primary object if there is another object arising. The meditator should stay with that object and note it uninterruptedly. Moreover, while noting a mental image such as the Buddha, an *arahat*, or physical sensations like itchiness, heat, aching, or pain, another object may arise even before the object which is presently noted has disappeared. In this case one should change to the new object and continue to note it uninterruptedly.

By noting every object that occurs, one experiences that the noting mind arises whenever there is an object. Moreover, at times the rising and falling of the abdomen become so subtle that one cannot note them. Then, one realizes that the noting mind cannot arise if there is no object. In this case, one should switch to noting “sitting, touching” as the primary object if one is sitting, or “lying, touching” if one is lying down, rather than “rising, falling.” One can also alternate between various touch points. For example, after noting “sitting” once, the touch point of the right foot can be noted as “touching.” Then “sitting” can be noted again, followed by the touch point of the left foot. In this manner, one can alternate among four, five, or six touch points. And furthermore, at the time of noting “seeing” or “hearing” one clearly understands that when there is the eye and a visible form, seeing is experienced.

Thus as one notes various objects, one clearly understands the different causes that give rise to different effects. For example, the intention to bend or stretch results in the movement of bending or stretching; a cold or hot environment causes cold or hot physical sensations; eating nutritious food results in the survival of the physical body; because there are objects to note, such as the rising and falling of the abdomen, there arises the noting mind; attention to mental objects causes the mental states of thinking or imagining. Because there is the visible object of form or the audible object of sound, there arises the seeing consciousness or the hearing consciousness. Furthermore, because there are the physical phenomena of the eye or the ear; there arises the seeing consciousness or the hearing consciousness.

The meditator also comes to clearly understand that the volitional actions that one has performed in past lives give rise to pleasant or unpleasant feeling in the present. Because of past volitional actions, mental and physical phenomena have been happening in one's present life since birth. There is no "Creator" of these phenomena. They arise in accord with the law of cause and effect. When these realizations take place, one does not need to stop noting in order to intellectualize or reflect on them. These realizations will take place suddenly and by themselves as one is noting. One should note these realizations as "realizing, realizing" or "comprehending, comprehending" or "reflecting, reflecting," and then return to note the primary object continuously.

After realizing how the law of cause and effect, or the interaction of mind and body, operates in this present life, one will also comprehend how it operated in past lives and will operate in future lives. One may reflect, "The mental and physical phenomena of past and future lives had, or will have, the same causes as these present phenomena. There is neither an independent person, a being, nor a 'Creator' that exists, but only the law of cause and effect." These kinds of reflections tend to occur more often in people of high intelligence, and less often in those of average intelligence. The more intelligent the person, the broader his or her comprehension tends to be. However, the meditator should simply note these reflections and go back to the primary object. If one makes it a higher priority to continue with noting than to engage in reflection, less time will be spent in reflecting, and practice can develop faster. Just a few moments of reflection are sufficient.

Effects of Concentration

As concentration grows particularly strong, one may experience a variety of unpleasant feelings such as itchiness, heat, aches and pains, a feeling of heaviness or tightness, and so on. These often disappear immediately if one stops noting and tend to reappear when noting is resumed. Such feelings are not a sign of any kind of disease. It is the practice itself that makes them become apparent. So the meditator should not be afraid of them. He or she should focus exclusively on these feelings and note them persistently, then they will gradually become weaker and fade away.

The meditator may also see various kinds of images or visions. These can be as vivid as if one were actually seeing them with one's eyes. For example, one may see a radiant image

of a graceful Buddha, group of monks, or other noble people approaching. One may feel as if actually in front of a Buddha statue, a pagoda, a panoramic vista of woods, hills, gardens, clouds, and so on. Or one may feel as if actually seeing a swollen corpse or skeleton lying nearby, or a huge building or giant person disintegrating. Or a meditator may see visions of one's body swelling, bleeding, being torn into two or three pieces, or turning into a skeleton. Images of the internal parts of one's body may be seen, such as the bones, flesh, sinews, intestines, liver, and so on. Or there may be visions of the hell realms and its victims, the hungry ghosts, or the celestial world with its *devas* and *devīs*. It is only concentration that gives rise to these kinds of conceptual and unusual images and visions, so one should not be elated or frightened by them. They are just like dreams.

However, the mind consciousness that experiences these mental images is an obviously existing ultimate truth. Therefore, it has to be noted. However, one should not note it if it is not very obvious. An object should only be noted when it is obvious. Therefore, one should focus the mind on whatever image is being seen and note it as "seeing, seeing" until it disappears. One finds that the image or vision undergoes some changes and then fades away or disintegrates. Initially, one has to note three, four, or more times before it disappears. However, when *vipassanā* becomes mature, one will find that it disappears after noting it just once or twice.

On the other hand, if one is curious about these images, afraid of them, or attached to them, they will tend to last for a long time. So one should take extra care not to think about any of these unusual objects. If the meditator finds him or her self thinking about them, he or she should abandon that thought right away by noting it closely. As some people do not experience any of these unusual visions or bizarre feelings and are only noting the primary object, they get lazy. One notes this laziness as "lazy, lazy" until it disappears.

Seeing the Three Characteristics

Regardless of whether or not one has any unusual experiences at this level of *vipassanā*, one clearly sees the beginning, the middle, and the end of the object each time one notes it. Prior to this stage, one had to note new objects that arose before the previous objects had disappeared. Thus, one could not clearly see objects disappearing. At this level, one is able to see one object disappear before noting a new object and, therefore, one clearly sees the beginning, the middle, and the end of the object. Clearly seeing each object instantly arising and immediately disappearing with each noting, one understands the impermanence of objects as it is described in Pāli texts and commentaries:

“They are impermanent because they disappear;
they are impermanent because they arise and pass away.”

Or, one may realize, “Anything that is impermanent is unsatisfying. Because it is frightening, it is unsatisfactory. It is suffering to be constantly tormented by arising and passing away.” One may reflect, “We enjoy our lives because of delusion. In truth, there is nothing to enjoy in our lives. It is really frightening that everything is arising and

passing away. It is constant torment. Everything is miserable and unsatisfying because it arises and passes away immediately. We can die at any time.” When one encounters unpleasant feelings, one tends to comprehend the misery and suffering in things according to the Pāli texts and commentaries:

“...seeing them as a source of pain, a disease, an ulcer, a thorn,” and so on.

Or one may reflect, “All mental and physical phenomena are unsatisfying, and no one can make them otherwise. They do not obey anyone’s will. They pass away immediately after arising. Thus they are without a solid core, insubstantial, and useless. There is no ‘self’ that has control and can keep them from arising or passing away. In truth they arise and pass away of their own accord.” This realization is in accordance with the Pāli texts and commentaries:

“Whatever is unsatisfying is not self.
It is not self because it is empty [withouth essence/substance; AN] and does not obey anyone’s will.”

Immediately after these reflections have been noted, one goes back to noting the primary object.

After seeing for oneself that every object that one notes directly is impermanent, unsatisfying, and impersonal, one reflects that all other phenomena that are experienced must also be impermanent, unsatisfying, and impersonal. This inferential knowledge is called *anumānañāna*. Those who are less analytical or knowledgeable, or who give priority to continuous noting rather than analyzing, experience less reflection on this inferential knowledge. Those who give precedence to it tend to reflect a lot. For some meditators, though, analysis of this realization continues interspersed with their noting, and their practice stagnates. However, even without this kind of analysis, one’s understanding will become clearer at the higher levels of *vipassanā*. So one should give priority to noting rather than analyzing. If analyzing does occur, it should also be noted without fail.

After one realizes the arising and passing away of all phenomena inferentially, one will simply be aware of whatever arises without any further analysis. The five mental faculties (confidence, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom) will then come into harmony, and the noting mind will become quicker than ever before. Also the object, that is the mental and physical phenomena, appear extremely quickly. For example, each time one breathes in, one clearly sees that the rising movement of the abdomen consists of many segments. The same is true for other movements, such as the falling of the abdomen, bending, stretching, etcetera. One clearly experiences subtle vibrations or sensations all over one’s body, arising very quickly one after another. Some people experience fine sensations of itchiness or pricking that arise very quickly and instantly one after another. During this time unpleasant sensations are rarely experienced.

When the objects arise so quickly, one will not be able to keep up with the objects by trying to label or name each of them. The meditator should just be aware of them from moment to moment without naming them, so that one can follow them. If the meditator wants to name them, he or she does not try to name them all. When one object is labeled, he or she may become aware of four, five, or ten other objects. That is not a problem. If there is an attempt to name all of the objects occurring, one may become tired. What matters most is to be aware of each object precisely and accurately. In this situation, one should note any objects coming in through the six sense doors without following the normal procedure. Of course, if noting in this way does not go smoothly, one can always go back to the normal procedure.

Mental and physical phenomena arise and pass away much faster than the twinkling of an eye or a flash of lightning. However, when *vipassanā* knowledge matures, each fleeting phenomena can be clearly perceived without missing one by simply being aware of them from moment to moment. Mindfulness becomes so strong it seems as if it is rushing into the object that arises. It seems as if the objects fall into the noting mind. The knowing mind, too, knows each and every single arisen object clearly and distinctly. One might even think: “Phenomena are arising and passing away instantaneously; their appearance and disappearance are ‘very fast, like a machine running at full speed.’ Yet, I am able to perceive them all from moment to moment. I don’t think I am missing anything or that there’s anything else that I should be aware of.” This is the personally experienced insight of this *vipassanā* knowledge which cannot even be dreamt of.

Distractions from the Path

Because of the momentum of this *vipassanā* knowledge one is likely to see a bright light or experience rapture as a result of feeling great delight with both noting and noted objects. One may get goose bumps, feel a tear roll down one’s cheek, or find the body shaking. The meditator may have a “springy” feeling, which is often mistaken for dizziness, or a light, comfortable feeling that creeps over the whole body as if one were rocking back and forth in a hammock. He or she may experience a peaceful calm that makes one feel comfortable regardless of whether sitting, reclining, standing, or in any other posture. Furthermore, due to the quality of lightness, both the mind and body will become so light, supple, and flexible that one will feel comfortable during long periods of sitting or reclining, without any pain, heat, or stiffness.

At this point, the noting mind and noted objects flow along concurrently and harmoniously. One’s mental attitude becomes straightforward. One’s mind avoids unwholesome activities and becomes extremely clear due to strong faith and confidence. At times this mental clarity may last for a long time, even without any object to be noted. As faith grows stronger, one may reflect: “It really is true that the Buddha knew everything.” or, “There really is nothing other than mental and physical phenomena that are impermanent, unsatisfying, and impersonal.” While noting, one often sees the arising and passing away of mental and physical phenomena as well as *anicca* and *dukkha* extremely clearly, and will probably think about encouraging others to practice. Without straining too much and free from laziness, a balanced effort becomes obvious. It seems as

if the objects are known on their own accord and so *vipassanā* equanimity becomes apparent. The meditator is likely to experience an unusual degree of very strong delight or happiness and becomes excited to tell others about it.

One may like taking delight, in any of these pleasant experiences that occur: the bright light, good mindfulness, insight, rapture, and so on. This liking makes the meditator feel like he or she is really enjoying their practice. Time should not be wasted enjoying the bright light and other pleasant experiences. Instead, one should note them whenever they arise as, “brightness, comfort, knowing, reflecting, venerating, happiness, liking, delight,” and so on, according to the experience.

If one notices that it is bright, it is noted as “bright, bright.” If one thinks that one is seeing, it should be noted as “seeing, seeing” until it disappears. Often, one forgets to note the bright light and other pleasant experiences because he or she is so happy to experience them. Although one is noting, the light may not disappear very quickly because of the delight taken in it. Only after experiencing it many times will he or she be able to note it skillfully enough that it disappears quickly. For some meditators the light is so powerful that, even with noting it for a long time, it does not disappear but stays on. In this case, one should ignore the light completely and divert the attention to some other mental or physical object. He or she should not think about whether the light is still bright. If one does, one will find that it is. Any thoughts about the light should be noted so precisely that the awareness of them is very clear and firm.

Because one’s concentration is very powerful, other unusual objects besides the bright light can arise if one inclines one’s mind toward them. So one should not let the mind incline this way. If one does, it should be noted quickly until it disappears. Some meditators see various kinds of faint shapes and forms arising one after another like train carriages. If this happens, one notes it as “seeing, seeing.” With each noting, one object disappears. When one’s *vipassanā* becomes weak, the shapes and forms tend to become more pronounced. But, if one notes them closely, each object disappears on the spot as it is noted. Eventually they stop coming.

To take delight in the bright light and other pleasant experiences is being on the wrong path. The correct path of *vipassanā* is to just continue noting. If one keeps this in mind and carries on with noting mental and physical phenomena that actually arise, awareness will become clearer and clearer. The sudden appearance and disappearance of phenomena is clearly seen. Every time one notes, each object is seen arising and passing away on the spot. The meditator clearly sees that successive movements are distinct and break up bit by bit. Thus every object noted helps one to realize *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anatta*. However, after practicing for quite a while, the meditator may feel satisfied with practice and take a break every now and again, thinking, “It cannot get any better than this. There cannot be anything else special to experience.” But, he or she should not just relax whenever one wants, but instead should practice for longer and longer periods without taking a break.

Disappearance

When *vipassanā* knowledge develops to the next stage, one no longer sees objects arising, but only passing away. He or she thinks that they are disappearing faster and faster. The meditator also sees that the noting mind disappears one after the other. For example, when the rising of the abdomen is noted, one clearly sees how the tiny movements of rising instantly disappear and how the noting mind, too, vanishes very quickly. So one sees that moments of both the rising movement and the awareness of it disappear one after the other. This is clearly seen for all other objects as well, such as the falling of the abdomen, sitting, bending, stretching, stiffness, and so on. Each object and the awareness of it disappear moment by moment, one after the other. Some meditators even find that there are three things arising and passing away in sequence: a sense object, the awareness of it, and the knowing of that very awareness. But it is enough just to observe that the objects and the noting mind disappear in pairs.

When noting becomes clear enough that one can see both the sense objects and the awareness of them disappearing in pairs, one will lose the illusory sense of conceptual forms or shapes such as the form of one's body, head, arms, legs, etcetera. One only experiences phenomena disappearing instantly. As a result, one may feel like the practice has become superficial, is not as good as it had been before, or that there are many gaps in one's noting. However, that is not actually the case. It is only that the mind naturally takes delight in concepts of solid form, thus it cannot feel comfortable when those concepts are absent. In any case, this condition is an indication of progress in practice. When the meditation practice is immature, it is the concepts of solid form or shape that are first perceived when one notes seeing, hearing, touching, and so on. But at this level of *vipassanā*, the instant disappearance of phenomena is what one perceives first. In other words, one experiences the *vipassanā* knowledge of dissolution first. The sense of solid form only comes back when one deliberately evokes it. Otherwise, by just noting uninterruptedly, one's awareness remains attuned to the ultimate reality of the dissolution of phenomena. Thus one verifies the truth of this saying from the sages of old:

*“When conventional reality emerges, absolute reality submerges;
When absolute reality emerges, conventional reality submerges.”*

Although one's awareness has become extremely clear at this point, it may seem like there are gaps between successive moments of awareness. This is because one is starting to become aware of the life continuum that occurs between the mental processes of full consciousnesses. For example, when an intention is noted to bend or stretch the arm, one may find that the movement of bending or stretching seems to be delayed for a long time. Actually, the meditator is just noticing that the intention is interrupted by the life continuum. This means that one's awareness has become sharp and powerful.

At this level of practice, one does not note only the primary object, but also notes any other mental or physical objects coming through the six sense doors. After the practice gains momentum by noting the main objects, such as the rising and falling of the abdomen, sitting, and so on, one should randomly note any other obvious objects that

arise, such as any sensations in other parts of the body, seeing, hearing, and so on. If awareness becomes less precise or accurate while noting in this way, or if thoughts begin to interfere, or one feels exhausted, the meditator should go back to just noting the primary object of rising, falling, sitting, etcetera. Then, when practice gains momentum again after a while, one returns to noting whatever arises. The meditator should let his or her practice proceed in this way some of the time.

Once one is able to extend the range of the objects to be noted and observe without strain, one clearly sees that whatever one sees or hears instantly disappears, and that two consecutive moments are not connected but separate units. This is understanding as it really is. As a result, however, things may seem blurry or hazy when one looks at them. The meditator is likely to worry, "I think something is wrong with my eyesight; it's getting dim." But, nothing is actually wrong with one's vision. It is just that one's awareness is discerning each individual moment of sight separately, causing the conceptual forms to blur.

Also at this time, the meditator continues to be aware of mental and physical phenomena even if he or she stops trying to practice. One may not even fall asleep when trying to, but instead feels alert and awake both day and night. There is no need to worry about this, as it will not harm one's health in any way. The meditator should just continue practicing energetically. When one's *vipassanā* becomes powerful enough, it seems like awareness pierces into the objects.

Disillusionment

When one deeply understands that both the object and the noting mind are instantly disappearing, one tends to reflect: "Nothing lasts for the twinkling of an eye or a flash of lightning; indeed, it is impermanent. Previously, I was simply ignorant of this fact. Everything that has happened in the past must have also disappeared in this way. Everything that happens in the future will disappear in this way, too." These reflections should be noted. Moreover, one may occasionally reflect on how unstable and incessantly vanishing phenomena are, thinking: "Clearly, it is only because of ignorance that we are able to enjoy ourselves. It is really terrifying to realize that phenomena are instantly disappearing. Each time they disappear, it could be the moment of my death. It is really horrible to have come into existence and have to continue existing endlessly. How dreadful to make such a great effort to be well off in a situation in which everything is constantly vanishing. How appalling it is that these instantly disappearing phenomena continue to take place, now and in a new life. It is so frightening that we are all subject to old age, sickness, death, distress, worry, lamentation, and so on." One notes this mental state of reflection without fail.

At this stage of practice, the meditator generally feels helpless, dejected, and languid, being scared of the mental and physical phenomena that are disintegrating so quickly. There is no enthusiasm or joy and one tends to feel sad. There is no need to worry. This indicates that one's practice is improving according to the usual development of the meditation process. All that one needs to do is to remain equanimous by noting any

reflections and other objects that arise. If so, one will soon overcome this stage. Otherwise, by being caught in these reflections while having feelings of displeasure for a long time, the meditator might become so afraid that he or she cannot stand it. This fear based on displeasure is not *vipassanā* knowledge. Therefore, one notes all these reflections without fail so that no fear based on displeasure can arise.

Furthermore, in between notings, thoughts of blame may occur, such as: “Because these mental and physical phenomena are constantly vanishing and not lasting; they are no good. It is depressing to see how they are continuously arising without ever coming to an end and that they create all kinds of forms and shapes although they do not exist. Striving hard to become affluent and being born again feels so miserable. It is depressing to be subject to old age, sickness, death, distress, worry, and lamentation. This is all suffering and devoid of peace.” One should not forget to note these kinds of reflections.

Sometimes, it seems like every phenomenon that is noted and the noting mind are terrible, harsh, useless, disgusting, rotten, decaying, and fragile. At those times, even though mental and physical phenomena are being noted as they arise, one no longer feels pleased with them. They are seen to be clearly passing away every time they are noted, but the meditator is not as enthusiastic about this as before. Instead, one feels weary of the phenomena. As a result, he or she seems to become lazy about noting. However, one cannot help being aware. It is as if one were forced to travel on a filthy road, where every step makes one feel disgusted and disillusioned.

Thus, when one considers human life, it is understood that one cannot be without these incessantly vanishing mental and physical phenomena. So one does not see anything delightful in becoming a man, a woman, a king, a rich person, or a celestial being; instead it is disenchanting and disillusioning.

Looking for Relief

Because one feels so weary of phenomena every time they are noted, it seems as if the mind is struggling to escape from them. With the desire to be liberated from the conditioned phenomena, the meditator may think: “It would be so nice if there were no such thing as seeing, hearing, touching, thinking, sitting down, standing up, bending, stretching, and so on. I wish I could escape from those things or go somewhere where they don’t exist.” One should not fail to note such thoughts. At other times, the meditator may wonder: “What should I do to escape from these phenomena? Continuing to note them seems like deliberately contemplating vile things. Everything I notice is disgusting. It would be nice not to have to notice them at all.” Of course, one should note these mental states of wondering and thinking.

Based on such reflections, some meditators even try to avoid noting at this point and put off practicing. However, mental and physical phenomena such as seeing, hearing, knowing, the rising and falling of the abdomen, sitting, bending, stretching, thinking, and so on, do not stop arising but continue to appear as always. They continue to be apparent to these meditators as a result of their intensive *vipassanā* practice. So the awareness of

phenomena just continues of its own accord. Then they become encouraged, considering: “Even though I’m not trying to note, I keep noticing the phenomena that are arising anyway; my awareness of them just keeps going. So simply avoiding practice won’t help me get away from them. It’s only when I note them as they are and realize their *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā* characteristics that I don’t need to worry about them. That’s what will lead me to the experience of *nibbāna*, where none of these exist. Only then can I realize liberation.” Once they are able to appreciate their own experience in this way, these meditators will carry on with their practice. Some meditators do not come to this conclusion on their own. However, when it is explained by their teacher, they can also appreciate their experience and carry on with their practice.

Some meditators will experience unbearable pain when their practice gains this kind of momentum. However, they should not feel disappointed. Actually, the true characteristics of unpleasant sensation are becoming obvious to them as pain, disease, an ulcer, a thorn, agony, illness, and so on. They should note the pain until they can overcome it.

Those who do not encounter severe pain may experience one of the forty qualities of *anicca*, *dukkha*, or *anattā* whenever they note. Even though their practice is going well and their thoughts are not wandering, they tend to think that their practice is not good or feel that the objects and noting mind are not concurrent. Actually it is just that they are so eager to realize the *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā* of mental and physical phenomena that they cannot feel satisfied with their practice. As a result, they may often change their posture. For example, while they are sitting they feel like they want to walk. Then, while they are walking, they want to sit down again. Then they feel agitated and want to rearrange their arms and legs, move to another place, or lie down. They cannot manage to stay in one place or posture for very long and keep changing. One should not feel frustrated! The meditators lack satisfaction because they rightly understand that there are not any conditioned mental and physical phenomena that are pleasurable. At this point, they think that their noting is not good. They are not yet able to note with equanimity as during the next *vipassanā* knowledge of equanimity toward phenomena. They should try their best to practice without constantly changing their posture, and remain in one posture for a long time. After a while, they will be able to practice calmly again. If they practice with patience and persistence the mind will become clearer and clearer, until all of the agitation and dissatisfaction disappear.

Equanimity

Eventually, one’s *vipassanā* becomes strong enough that one can be equanimous about conditioned mental and physical phenomena without effort. The noting mind becomes so clear and subtle that awareness seems to flow easily by itself. The meditator is even able to perceive very subtle mental and physical activities without any effort, and sees their *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā* nature without reflecting about it. If the meditator is noting touch points at different places on the body, he or she is just aware of one sensation of touching after another, but not of any physical form or shape. Also the touching sensations feel very subtle, like the touch of a cotton ball. Sometimes one may feel so many different sensations in the body that the awareness moves very quickly all around

the body. Sometimes it feels as if both the body and the mind are moving upwards. At other times only a few regular objects are obvious, and one is able to note them calmly and steadily.

Sometimes the rising, falling, touching, hearing, etcetera, together with the whole body may disappear and one is only aware of the mind arising and passing away. One may experience rapture that feels as if one were being bathed in a cool, soothing shower, tranquility or a crystal clear light, like a bright sky. Although the meditator may not take such extreme delight in these pleasant experiences as before, he or she may still become attached to them. One should note any attachment that arises, in addition to the rapture, calmness, or clear light. If these experiences persist, he or she should ignore them and note other objects instead.

At this level of *vipassanā*, the meditator clearly comprehends every object and noting mind. One knows, “These phenomena are not me or mine, and they are also not anyone else or anyone else’s. They are only conditioned mental and physical phenomena. Conditioned phenomena are noting conditioned phenomena.” Observing objects becomes very pleasant at this point, like tasting a delicious flavor. No matter how long one practices, one is not gratified and does not feel any unpleasant sensations, such as stiffness, numbness, pain, or itching. Thus, the meditation postures become very stable. The positions of one’s head, body, arms, and legs can easily be maintained. One is able to practice for two or three hours in a single posture, either sitting or reclining, without getting tired or feeling stiff. The time passes so quickly that two or three hours of practice seem like just a few moments.

Sometimes the noting mind becomes very swift and the noting is especially good. If the meditator starts to feel anxious about what is happening, it is noted as “anxious, anxious.” If one starts to think that the practice is improving, it is noted as “evaluating, evaluating.” Or, if one starts to anticipate further progress in *vipassanā* knowledge, one notes that as “anticipating, anticipating.” Afterward, the meditator goes back to noting the usual objects steadily. At this stage, he or she should neither increase nor decrease one’s energy. Because some meditators fail to note these mental states such as anxiety, excitement, attachment, or anticipation, the awareness gets dispersed and decreases. Some meditators feel excited and increase their energy. Ironically, this leads to a decline in the practice because the wandering minds of anxiety, excitement, attachment, or anticipation take one far away from *vipassanā*. That is why, when one’s awareness becomes swift and noting becomes especially good, one should keep the practice steady, without increasing or decreasing one’s energy. With this approach, one’s practice leads directly to *nibbāna*, where all conditioned phenomena cease.

Nonetheless, the meditator may experience many fluctuations in his or her practice at this level of *vipassanā*. One should not be disappointed; one should be persistent. One should give priority to noting any objects arising at the six sense doors as they present themselves and widen his or her awareness to note whatever arises in any part of the body. However, it is impossible to note this way once practice becomes very subtle and continuous. So once the practice gains momentum, but before it becomes too subtle, one

should note objects without setting any limits. If the meditator notes objects carefully, either “rising,” “falling,” “sitting,” or other mental and physical activities, the practice will gain momentum before long. Then one’s awareness flows smoothly and as if by itself without much effort. The meditator clearly and calmly perceives the conditioned phenomena that are instantaneously disappearing.

At this point, one’s mind is no longer vulnerable to any kind of temptation or disturbance. However alluring an object might be, it will not be able to captivate one’s mind. Likewise, however disgusting an object might be, it will not affect one’s mind either. The meditator simply perceives seeing as seeing, hearing as hearing, smelling as smelling, tasting as tasting, touching as touching, and knowing as knowing. Thus, “six fold equanimity” or equanimity regarding the six senses is apparent every time one notes. Furthermore, thoughts or reflections like, “How long have I been sitting? What time is it?” do not arise anymore; they have ceased, let alone the previous kinds of reflections.

However, if one’s *vipassanā* knowledge is not yet mature enough to lead to the noble path knowledge, after one, two, or three hours concentration weakens and the mind starts to wander. Then the noting mind may slacken and have gaps in between. On the other hand, if the noting becomes swift and especially good, one may become excited and anticipate progress. This, too, can lead to slackening. If one notes these mental states of evaluation, anticipation, or excitement without fail, then one regains the strength of practice. However, if *vipassanā* knowledge is still not mature enough, one’s practice eventually declines again. Thus there can be a great deal of fluctuation in one’s practice at this time. Those who know or have heard about the stages of *vipassanā* knowledge may encounter even more fluctuations. That is why it is better not to learn in advance how the *vipassanā* knowledges progress. But, in any event, one should not be disappointed. These fluctuations indicate that one’s *vipassanā* is coming very close to path and fruition knowledges. One could realize *magga*, *phala*, and *nibbāna* at any time, once the mental faculties of faith, energy, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom come into harmony.

Enlightenment

The Experience of *Nibbāna*

These fluctuations in *vipassanā* knowledge can be compared to the flights of a bird that is sent out from a ship in the ocean. In the old days, when sailors did not know where the nearest land was, they sent out a crow that they had brought along on their voyage. The bird would fly in every direction, looking for the nearest shore. As long as it could not find any land nearby, it kept coming back to the ship. But, once it found land, it flew directly to that place.

In the same way, as long as one’s *vipassanā* is not strong enough to realize *nibbāna* by attaining path knowledge, it keeps drawing back, that is, there are gaps in one’s noting. But, once one’s *vipassanā* knowledge is mature enough and the five mental faculties are in harmony, one sees mental and physical phenomena arising and passing away with

increasing swiftness and clarity, for at least three or four moments. Then, immediately after noting an obvious object from one of the six kinds of conditioned mental and physical phenomena (in order of frequency: touching, knowing, hearing, seeing, tasting, and smelling), one attains to path and fruition while experiencing *nibbāna* as the cessation of both noted objects and the noting mind.

Those who reach that spiritual state clearly experience their awareness accelerating before their attainment. It is also very clear how all the conditioned objects are abandoned after the last moment of noting and how the mind takes *nibbāna*, which is the cessation of all those conditioned phenomena, as the object. These are some of the ways meditators describe the experience:

- ❖ “Both the objects and the noting mind were abruptly cut off and stopped.”
- ❖ “The objects and the noting mind were cut off, like when a creeping vine is chopped down.”
- ❖ “I saw the objects and the noting mind drop away, like the dumping of a heavy burden.”
- ❖ “The objects and noting mind seemed to fall away as if I had lost my hold on them.”
- ❖ “I got away from the objects and the noting mind as if I had suddenly escaped from confinement in prison.”
- ❖ “The objects and noting mind suddenly disappeared, like the light of a candle being blown out.”
- ❖ “I escaped from the objects and the noting mind like suddenly emerging from the darkness into the light.”
- ❖ “I got out of the object and the noting mind as if I was suddenly getting out from a mess into a clear space.”
- ❖ “I found that both the objects and the noting mind submerged, as if they were sinking into water.”
- ❖ “Both the objects and the noting mind suddenly stopped, like blocking the passage and pushing back a person who comes running along.”

The experience of the cessation of conditioned mental and physical phenomena does not last very long. It is as brief as a single moment of noting. Afterward, there is a recollection of the event, such as: “The cessation of the objects and the noting mind that I just experienced must be something special, or *nibbāna*, or path and fruition.” People with scriptural knowledge might reflect, “The cessation of conditioned mental and physical phenomena is *nibbāna*. While experiencing the cessation, what I have realized is path and fruition knowledges. I have realized *nibbāna* and I have attained the path and fruition of the first stage of enlightenment.” These kinds of reflections tend to arise in a systematic and thorough way for those who have heard how one can experience the cessation of conditioned mental and physical phenomena. They also tend to reflect on which mental defilements have been eliminated and which have not.

After these recollections, they go back to noting mental and physical phenomena as usual. At that time the arising and the disappearance of phenomena is quite coarse and so it is obvious. They are clearly aware of the beginning and end, or arising and passing away, of phenomena. Thus they may think that there must be gaps in their noting again or

that their practice must have declined. Actually, this is true. They have returned to the *vipassanā* knowledge of arising and passing away. Accordingly, they might experience bright light and images again, as is usual at this stage. Some meditators may find that suddenly their noting mind is not concurrent with the noted objects like at the beginning stage of the practice or encounter moments of various kinds of unpleasant sensation.

Mostly, however, their mind remains very clear from moment to moment. At this stage they feel very peaceful, as if their mind were floating alone in space. However, they will not be able to note that mental state. Even if they try to note it, they will not be able to be aware of it effectively. They do not want to contemplate anything else and they are not able to note other objects. Their mind is simply clear and peaceful. Gradually this clear mental state becomes weaker and weaker. Then, if they continue noting, they are able to see arising and passing away clearly again. After some time they return to a state of very subtle noting and, if their *vipassanā* is strong enough, they may fall into the cessation of phenomena again, as they did before. They might experience this repeatedly, depending on the strength of their concentration and *vipassanā* knowledge. Nowadays many people attain repeatedly the first fruition knowledge which they have already experienced because their main aim is to only attain the first path and fruition. This is how the fruition of the first stage of enlightenment is attained through successive insights.

The mental attitude of those who have achieved path and fruition is not the same as before; it is so special that they feel as if they have been reborn. Their faith becomes extremely strong and, as a result, very powerful rapture and tranquility arise. Happiness also often arises spontaneously. Sometimes these mental factors of faith, rapture, tranquility, and happiness may be so strong that immediately after having attained path and fruition the objects cannot be distinguished very well although they are noting. However, after a few hours or days, those mental factors will weaken and then objects can be distinguished again, so the practice will become good once more. Some meditators feel relieved, reluctant to note, or feel satisfied immediately after attaining path and fruition. This contentment arises probably because their initial motivation was only to achieve that path and fruition knowledge. If they wish to enjoy the peace of *nibbāna* again, through the fruition that they have already attained, they should note the present phenomena as usual.

Enjoying the Fruit

In the course of *vipassanā* meditation, the first *vipassanā* knowledge encountered by ordinary meditators is the knowledge of discerning mental and physical phenomena, while for meditators with path and fruition knowledge it is the *vipassanā* knowledge of arising and passing away. So, if the *vipassanā* knowledge of arising and passing away is the first to occur while one is noting phenomena, it will soon be followed by successively higher *vipassanā* knowledges, up through equanimity toward phenomena, which is the most subtle and best *vipassanā* knowledge. When that *vipassanā* knowledge is strong enough, in the same manner as before, the mind will shift its attention to *nibbāna* which is the cessation of all conditioned phenomena and the mental process of fruition will appear.

If one does not determine the period for this fruition absorption in advance, it may last for just a few moments or it may last for quite a long time: five, ten or fifteen minutes, half an hour, or an hour. The commentaries say that it can even last for a whole day and night, or whatever period one has predetermined. These days, too, one can find meditators with strong concentration and sharp *vipassanā* who are able to become absorbed in the fruition for long periods of time, such as one, two, or three hours, or a period that they have predetermined, as described in the commentaries. Even when there is no need for it, if one predetermines that it should end, one emerges easily. In the case of such long periods of absorption, however, there may be intervals of reflection. If one notes this reflection four or five times, one becomes absorbed in fruition again. In this way, one may experience the fruition absorption for hours.

During fruition absorption, the mind is fully absorbed in the object of *nibbāna*, the cessation of all conditioned phenomena. It does not perceive anything else. *Nibbāna* is completely different from the conditioned mental and physical phenomena and conceptual objects that belong to this world or any other worlds. So during fruition absorption one cannot perceive or remember this world (i.e. one's own body) or other worlds, and is free from all thoughts. Even if there are obvious objects around a person to see, hear, smell, touch, and so on, he or she is not aware of any of them. One's bodily posture is also firm and stable while one is absorbed, even for long periods. For example, if one is sitting when one becomes absorbed in fruition, then that sitting posture is maintained without swaying, slouching, or changing in any way. As the Pāli passage says:

“*Jhāna* and path and fruition support the bodily posture.”

When the mental process of fruition ends, the first object that one experiences might be the recollection of cessation or of absorption in that cessation, some kind of visual image, or simply thinking. Then the normal noting process, brightness, or reflections appear accordingly. Initially one is only able to be intermittently aware of obvious objects after one emerges from absorption in fruition. However, there can also be times when one is able to be continuously aware of subtle objects immediately after the fruition process if one's *vipassanā* is strong. Remember that one should make a determination only before beginning to note to enter fruition quickly, or to be absorbed for a long time. While one is noting, one should not think about it.

When one's *vipassanā* is not yet strong enough to become absorbed in fruition, one may experience goose bumps, yawning, shaking, and deep breathing, followed by intermittent noting. At other times, when one's noting is improving, one may become excited, thinking that *nibbāna* is near. But, as a result, one's noting then becomes discontinuous. So one should not entertain such thoughts. If they arise, one notes them precisely and accurately. Some meditators encounter these kinds of fluctuations many times before they are able to enter the fruition absorption. Even then, if one's concentration and *vipassanā* knowledge are still weak, it may take some time to reach the state of fruition, or one may not be able to remain there for very long.

Clarifying the *Vipassanā* Knowledges

Sometimes, the *vipassanā* knowledges are not clear because they were not experienced for a long time. If one wants to experience them clearly and distinctly, one should determine a time period for the experience of each *vipassanā* knowledge. For example, if one sets a time limit when one practices by resolving, “May the *vipassanā* knowledge of arising and passing away last for half an hour,” then that *vipassanā* knowledge will occur within that time period, but not beyond. Afterward, the subsequent *vipassanā* knowledge of dissolution will occur spontaneously as one only sees phenomena passing away. However, if that *vipassanā* knowledge does not occur spontaneously, one should make a resolution for it to arise. Then it will be present for that period of time, and the next higher *vipassanā* knowledge will follow it spontaneously. One should proceed in this way for all of the *vipassanā* knowledges in order. Whenever one’s practice does not move to the next higher *vipassanā* knowledge automatically after mastering the current level of *vipassanā* knowledge, he or she should make a resolution for it to arise.

So after the *vipassanā* knowledge of dissolution, one would resolve: “May I realize the *vipassanā* knowledge of fear.” That *vipassanā* knowledge will then occur, and when one is satisfied with it, one makes the resolution: “May I realize the *vipassanā* knowledge of danger.” Then one will realize that *vipassanā* knowledge by seeing the dangers of phenomena every time one notes them. When one is satisfied with that *vipassanā* knowledge, one resolves to attain the *vipassanā* knowledge of disenchantment. That *vipassanā* knowledge will then occur, causing one to become weary and disenchanted. When one is satisfied with that *vipassanā* knowledge, one resolves: “May the *vipassanā* knowledge of desire for deliverance arise.” Then that *vipassanā* knowledge will arise, causing one to wish for escape from phenomena every time one notes them. Then one resolves to attain the *vipassanā* knowledge of re-observation. That *vipassanā* knowledge will then take place, accompanied by unpleasant sensations, discontent, and the desire to change postures. Finally, the resolution should be made to attain the *vipassanā* knowledge of equanimity toward phenomena. Then that very subtle *vipassanā* knowledge will arise, during which the momentum of noting flows as if by itself.

Thus one will find that one can reach a particular level of *vipassanā* knowledge within a specified time limit, according to one’s resolve. One will also find that one’s *vipassanā* knowledge shifts, in due time, like the needle of a compass, to the next higher level of *vipassanā* knowledge once one is satisfied with the current level. If one has not yet experienced all of the *vipassanā* knowledges distinctly, one should practice in this way repeatedly. On the other hand, when people with strong concentration and sharp *vipassanā* note without making a resolution, they may reach the *vipassanā* knowledge of equanimity within a short time that is within about four, five, or ten notings. Fruition, too, is often experienced. If one becomes very proficient at the practice, one can even experience fruition while walking, eating, and so on.

Practicing for Higher Paths and Fruitions

When one is skilled enough in the practice that one can enter the fruition that one has attained very quickly and remain in it for a long time, one should practice with the purpose of attaining higher paths and fruitions. To do this, one should first determine how many days he or she is going to practice, and then make the resolution, “May I not return to the fruition that I have already attained during this period of time; may I attain a new and higher path and fruition instead.” After this, one should simply note the present phenomena as usual.

The reason for making this resolution is that one’s *vipassanā* knowledge can then lead directly to a higher path and fruition within one’s specified time period, if it is strong enough, rather than returning to the previous one. Otherwise, one will often go back to the fruition that one has already attained. The benefit of making this resolve in the form stated above is that, if one cannot yet attain a higher path and fruition, one can easily return to the previous fruition after one’s period of practice. Otherwise, if one resolves, “From now on, I will only practice for the attainment of higher paths and fruitions,” one may find it difficult to return to the previous fruition. Then the meditator may feel upset if he or she can neither gain a higher path and fruition nor return to the one attained previously.

After determining a time period and wishing not to return to the previous fruition before it ends, one should just note phenomena as usual. Then the *vipassanā* knowledges will arise in order, beginning with the *vipassanā* knowledge of arising and passing away. The *vipassanā* will develop in a manner that is similar to the *vipassanā* that led to the first path, rather than to that which leads to the first fruition. Thus before the *vipassanā* knowledge of arising and passing away matures, one may experience bright lights, images, and unpleasant sensations. The arising and passing away of mental and physical phenomena tends to be not very refined or distinct. Even if it usually only takes one a few moments to return to the *vipassanā* knowledge of equanimity toward phenomena and the absorption of fruition when one practices to reach fruition, one may now spend a long time at the lower levels of *vipassanā* knowledge. However, there will not be a lot of difficulty or delay in getting to the *vipassanā* knowledge of equanimity toward phenomena, as there was in the initial stage of practice. Within a single day, one can progress through the successive stages of *vipassanā* knowledges and return to the *vipassanā* knowledge of equanimity toward phenomena.

One’s awareness is much better than during the first stage of practice. It is more precise and accurate. One’s understanding is broader and clearer. Sensual, worldly objects and the cycle of suffering are more frightening, dangerous, and wearying to the meditator and the desire to escape becomes stronger than before. Even if one formerly was able to enter fruition three or four times an hour, one’s *vipassanā* knowledge may now stagnate at the level of equanimity toward phenomena because it is not strong enough to progress to the next higher path knowledge. One may remain in that condition for a long time, from one or two days to months or years. When one’s *vipassanā* knowledge eventually becomes strong enough, one’s noting mind becomes extremely clear and swift. After this

acceleration, the mind shifts its focus and takes *nibbāna* as the object, the cessation of all conditioned phenomena. Thus one attains the second stage of path and fruition knowledge. This is followed by a recollection of this new path and fruition and a review of remaining mental defilements. Afterward, as one is noting as usual, the *vipassanā* knowledge of arising and passing away will arise together with an extremely clear mind. This is how one should practice for and experience the second stage of path and fruition knowledge and become a once-returner.

If one wants to attain the path and fruition knowledge of the third stage of enlightenment, he or she should determine a period of time to practice and stop wishing for the absorption of the fruition that one already has attained. One then makes the determination: “May only a higher path and fruition that I have not yet experienced arise. May I realize a higher path and fruition.” Then one notes the mental and physical phenomena in the usual way. Beginning with the *vipassanā* knowledge of arising and passing away, the *vipassanā* knowledges will progress in sequence until one reaches the *vipassanā* knowledge of equanimity toward phenomena before long. If it is not yet mature, one’s *vipassanā* knowledge will then stagnate at that level for some time. In the same way it did previously, when it is powerful enough, it will shift its focus and take *nibbāna*, the cessation of conditioned phenomena as the object. Thus the path and fruition knowledge of the third stage of enlightenment will arise. This will be followed by the usual process of recollection. This is how one should practice for and experience the third path and fruition knowledge and become a non-returner.

To attain the path and fruition knowledge of the fourth and final stage of enlightenment, one just follows the same procedure: one notes the present mental and physical phenomena after determining a time period, setting aside the desire for the current fruition absorption, and making a resolution to experience the peak of enlightenment. There is no other way to practice. That is why the Satipatthāna Sutta uses the term “the only way.” Beginning with the *vipassanā* knowledge of arising and passing away, the *vipassanā* knowledges will progress in sequence until one reaches the *vipassanā* knowledge of equanimity toward phenomena before long. One will stop and remain at that stage if it is not yet powerful enough. In the same way it did previously, when it is powerful enough, it will shift its focus and take the cessation of conditioned phenomena as the object. Thus, the path and fruition knowledge of the fourth stage of enlightenment will arise.

Immediately after one has attained the *arahatta* path and fruition, one recollects the path, fruition, and *nibbāna* that were clearly comprehended. One might reflect: “All mental defilements have been eradicated; they will no longer arise. I have accomplished everything that needed to be done.” This is how to practice for and experience the attainment of *arahatship*.

A Note on *Pāramī*³

The phrase “Thus, the such-and-such path and fruition knowledge will arise” is only intended for those persons whose *pāramī* are mature. If one’s *pāramī* is not yet mature enough, one’s *vipassanā* will not move beyond the *vipassanā* knowledge of equanimity toward phenomena.

In addition, it is relatively easy to attain the second path and fruition knowledge fairly soon after attaining the first, but it will probably take a long time to attain the third path and fruition knowledge after the second. The reason for this is that only morality training need be completely fulfilled in order to attain both the first and second path and fruition knowledges, but one must also completely fulfill concentration training (*samādhi-sikkhā*) in order to attain the third path and fruition knowledge. Therefore, someone who has already attained the first path and fruition knowledge can easily attain the second, but it is not so easy to then attain the third.

In any event, it is not possible to know in advance whether one’s *pāramī* is mature enough to reach a particular level of path and fruition knowledge. Moreover, different people may need days, months, or years to attain enlightenment. If one just has been practicing for a few days or months without attaining path and fruition knowledge, one cannot yet decide that one’s *pāramī* is not mature. Besides, one’s current practice itself naturally helps one’s *pāramī* to mature. So one should not evaluate whether or not one’s *pāramī* is mature. One should never give up, but continue practicing with full energy, keeping this point in mind:

“If one doesn’t practice, then there is no way that one’s *pāramī* can be developed. And, even if one’s *pāramī* is mature, one cannot attain path and fruition in this life without practice. On the other hand, if one’s *pāramī* is mature and one also practices, then one can attain path and fruition easily and quickly. And, if one’s *pāramī* is fairly mature, then one’s current practice helps it to mature enough to attain path and fruition in this very life. At the very least, one’s current practice certainly develops one’s *pāramī* and the potential to attain path and fruition in the life to come.”

A Word of Advice

“During this era of the Gotama Buddha, those who aspire to know the truly enjoyable taste of *vipassanā* should practice the mindfulness that penetrates the phenomena of the body, feelings, mind, and mental objects.”

The explanations of how to practice *vipassanā* that have been given here in this book are perfectly sufficient for those who are fairly intelligent. If they read this book and practice

³ *Pāramī* is usually translated as “perfection.” However, its literal meaning is “deeds of noble people” (*paramānam kammam*). It refers to the qualities of generosity, morality, renunciation, wisdom, effort, patience, honesty, determination, loving-kindness, and equanimity. The potential of these qualities lies dormant in one’s mental process throughout one’s life cycle. –Tr.

properly and systematically, with strong faith, aspiration, and energy, they can surely attain the different *vipassanā* knowledges as well as the path and fruition knowledges. However, it is not possible to mention here all of the different experiences that meditators may have, and there are many that have not been included. A meditator will not experience everything that is mentioned here either. One person's particular experience may be quite different from another's, depending on the maturity of his or her *pāramī* and the accuracy, precision, and continuity of his or her awareness.

Moreover, it is impossible for a meditator's faith, aspiration, and energy to remain strong all the time. If a person practices by following the teachings based on intellectual knowledge and without a teacher, he or she may have doubts and feel uncertain, just like a person who is traveling alone in an unfamiliar place. So, it is not easy for an ordinary person to attain *vipassanā* knowledges as well as path and fruition knowledges if he or she practices without a teacher who can give careful guidance. That is why the *Nidāna-vagga Samyutta Pāli* (350) says:

“In order to understand things as they really are, a teacher should be sought.”

So I would like to advise one to practice under the close guidance of an experienced teacher who can clearly explain the stages of *vipassanā* knowledge up through the path and fruition knowledges, the knowledge of reviewing, and fruition absorptions. Please be humble. Remember the story of Venerable Potthila (see Chapter 4), and do not think proudly, “I am special and don't need anyone's guidance!” When one practices, one should do so sincerely and keep in mind the following advice given by the Buddha:

“One cannot attain *nibbāna*, which is free from all kinds of suffering, by practicing sloppily and half-heartedly.”
(*Nidāna-vagga-466*) [SN 21:4 - AN]

It means that with a great effort and a firm practice one can attain *nibbāna*.

Here ends Chapter 5 regarding Practical Instructions.