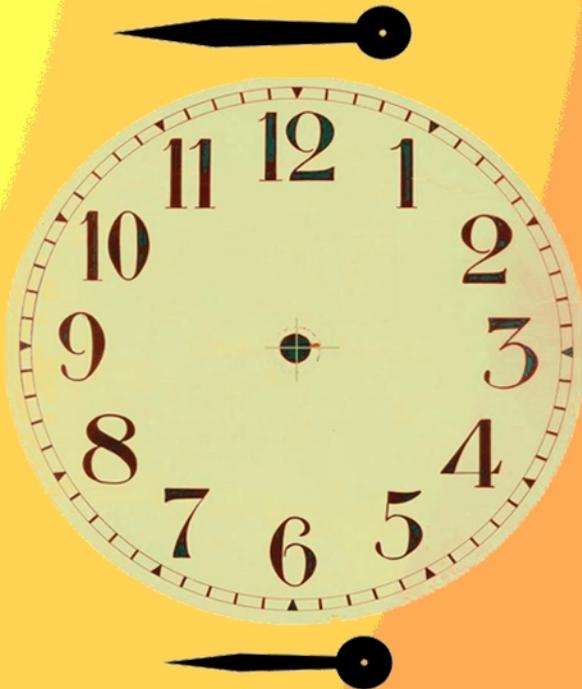


Save Time by Investing in Time



Upul Nishantha Gamage

We often think that earning money is our priority. However, if we make money our priority or our life or our 'self', we'll not to have enough time for anything else, because the time will be spent on earning, spending, and saving money. Not only money, if someone makes his/her occupation his/her life or 'self', that occupation won't let him/her have a successful family life, or attend to social and religious activities.

However, if you give priority to enquiring life, assessing life, valuating life or meditation, you'll have enough time to attend to all your needs. If you give priority to meditation, after finishing everything planned for the day, you'll have some more time to attend to something else. Meditation gives you time to attend to the needs of your physical health, and to fulfil your duties and responsibilities. You'll have enough time, ability and health to do everything you have valued in life. Only meditation can save your time, whereas everything else wastes your time. This is the nature, beauty, miracle, and wonder of meditation.



Published by
Upul Nishantha Gamage
Nilambe Deshana Publication Board
Buddhist Meditation Centre
Nilambe, Sri Lanka

Dhamma Dāna
For Free Distribution Only

ISBN 955-54570-7-1



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Dhamma Dāna

**In appreciation of
Valuable Guidance Given
for Leading a Peaceful Life**

Save Time by Investing in Time

Talk given by

Upul Nishantha Gamage

On February 25, 2013 (Full-moon Day)
At Nilambe Buddhist Meditation Centre

Translated and transcribed by
Chamara Illeperuma

Published by
Nilambe Deshana Publication Board
Nilambe Buddhist Meditation Centre
Nilambe, Sri Lanka

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ISBN 978 – 955 – 0332 – 7 – 1

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June 2013

Printer: Sanduni Offset Printers (Pvt.) Ltd.

No. 4/1, Sarasavi Uyana Good Shed Road,
Sarasavi Uyana, Peradeniya

Tel./Fax 081-2387777

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1. Mirage vs reality

Dear Dhamma Friends, having tried to meditate calmly, quietly and mindfully for a considerable time, this occasion is for enquiring about the Dhamma. A calm mind is essential to enquire about the Dhamma. A calm mind is essential to see the truth because an agitated mind is always deceptive. Such a mind accepts untruth as the truth and a mirage as the reality. Such a mind thinks of suffering as comfort. **An agitated, vociferous, restless and impulsive inner nature feels suffering as comfort.** Truly, what is felt is not comfort but suffering. However, **a mind chasing after a mirage sees cool water in distance.** Therefore, such a mind does not hear no matter how many times it is told that it is chasing after a mirage, not after reality. An unbearable thirst is within. **A mirage is real for an inner nature afflicted with thirst.** There is no other truth beyond that. **A mind that takes refuge in a mirage cannot experience comfort but suffering, relief but impatience, peace but friction.** There is no point in talking about such things. We tend to accept what we see more than what we are told. A pond filled with cool water is seen in distance. Therefore, the mind which is thirsty within sees the cool water in distance as a solution. A hell is created at a point

where these two, the inner thirst of a mind and a mirage, combine. Under such circumstances, comfort does not exist but suffering, because a mirage cannot produce comfort and thirst cannot show the right path for cooling down.

2. Sighted but cannot see

Dear Dhamma Friends, therefore, it is necessary to calm down within if a person wants to see the truth, to see the surrounds, to understand a mirage as a mirage. Therefore, meditation has **the basic duty to settle down the mind. Acquiring a settled down mind is not the final goal of meditation. However, a settled down mind is necessary to practise meditation beyond that point.**

A mind devoid of thoughts is necessary to see, to know, and to understand what is happening in the present moment. Suppose a person keeps his/her eyes open in the daytime. Or else, a healthy or a sighted person keeps his/her eyes open in the night-time illuminated with artificial lights. Suppose there are many things to see in front of his/her eyes. Scientifically and logically, under such circumstances, that person should be able to see the things that are in front of his/her eyes. If there is nothing to see, it is possible to know that there is nothing to see; nobody, no tree, no

star, no house, no vehicle etc. A sighted person knows that there is nothing to see, if his/her eyes are open, and if there is sufficient light. In the absence of one of these two, one's sight is lost, because it is not possible to see in the dark and also with eyes closed. It is impossible to see if a person is blind. If a person is not blind, if his/her eyes are open, and if there is sufficient light, then that person should be able to see.

Dear Dhamma Friends, even though this matter is logical and scientific, a thought can cover the eyes. There is no need of an eclipse of the sun or the moon. No need of imposing a curfew. No need to put out all the lights. **Even in the broad daylight, a sighted person with his/her eyes open may not see anything, because that person is lost in a thought.** Such a person is either in the past or the future. Such a person cannot see anything even if s/he is not blind, if she/he keeps his/her eyes open, and if s/he is in broad daylight. **A thought can cover both eyes.**

Dear Dhamma Friends, often we experience such blindness. **A thought can make us blind.** A thought can make us physically blind. We are spiritually blind anyway. We do not see physical things such as people, vehicles, animals etc. because thoughts have made us blind.

3. No sound and taste

Thoughts make us deaf too. Though our ears are healthy, though there are sounds, though we are not inside a vacuum that prevents sound waves from travelling through air, we do not hear. Though the birds are singing, **though the Dhamma discourses are being preached, we do not hear any of those if a thought blocks our ears.** A thought can make a person deaf and blind. **A person may not feel the taste of a food prepared using lots of flavourants and spending a lot of time, if that person is lost in a thought at the time of eating.** This is the truth or the reality of what we experience in the present.

4. Getting rid of blindness and deafness

We need to practise tranquillity meditation to get rid of blindness and deafness caused by thoughts. Tranquillity meditation helps us to get rid of deafness experienced by us, even though we have healthy ears, and also blindness, even though we have healthy eyes. **In tranquillity meditation, the thoughts covering our eyes, like a membrane are removed.** Even an eye surgeon cannot remove the thoughts projected onto an eye. No ENT surgeon can remove the thoughts trapped inside an ear. It is possible for a meditator to remove such

thoughts for his/her benefit. Nobody can cleanse our eyes, if the thoughts cover them. Nobody can cleanse our ears, if the thoughts are stuck inside them.

A person whose eyes and ears are covered with thoughts does not see the truth, does not hear the truth, and does not have the basic knowledge of what is happening. Therefore, s/he lives in an imaginary or presumptive world. Such a person does not see or hear things but assumes them to exist. Such a person does not live in reality. Such a person lives in an imaginary world or a hallucination or a mirage. Under such circumstances, though we refer to plentiful comfort, we use that wrapper known as comfort to experience suffering. This is something unfortunate. It is alright if a person, as a deaf and blind person, experiences true comfort and peace. However, a person undergoes so much suffering, unending weariness and unlimited stress. Moreover, a person is under so much pressure that grows over time. **A person experiences all these things thinking that s/he experiences comfort.**

5. The best indicator

Dear Dhamma Friends, if comfort, happiness, and ease experienced by us are real, such reality should make us

physically healthy. That is the best and the closest indicator we can use to find out whether comfort experienced by us is real or not. This indicator may not be 100% accurate. However, a person does not need profound knowledge of science and Dhamma to use such indicators. True ease and comfort do not make a person physically ill, but healthy. A person may fall ill due to other reasons. However, **true ease makes a person physically healthy.**

A person who experiences suffering, thinking that it is comfort, may fall physically ill as a result of that. Suppose a person is under pressure, thinking that s/he experiences ease. Though s/he thinks like that, pressure on his/her head makes him/her sick. Though pressure is covered with the cover called ease, and suffering is wrapped with the wrapper called comfort, pressure and suffering still exist. Moreover, influence of pressure, suffering and stress also exists. Therefore, a person falls sick.

This is the best indicator we can use to find out whether we experience comfort or suffering, whether we run after a mirage or not. **A person who is running after a mirage becomes more tired and thirstier step by step.** Such a person cannot become peaceful, cool, and calm. That is something impossible. No need of logics for that. No need to measure how close we are

to the mirage. None of these things are necessary. **If you are sensitive to yourself for a moment, you will realize that you are getting thirstier and wearier step by step. If that is the case, you are going after a mirage not after an oasis.**

6. Pure eyes and clean ears

Dear Dhamma Friends, you need to open your eyes. You need to listen carefully. You need to purify your eyes and clean your ears. You need pure eyes and empty ears. **Only pure eyes see the truth, and clean ears hear the truth.** Physical purification does not result in pure eyes. **You need to have eyes and ears that are devoid of thoughts.** Eyes and ears do not need thoughts. The less the thoughts are the more you see and hear.

You see only a fraction, only a tiny piece of a picture, not the entire one, if your eyes are covered with thoughts. You don't hear the entire message, if your mind is full of thoughts. Such a mind hears only a portion or a word or two in a sentence or a couple of sentences of a Dhamma discourse. A one-hour long Dhamma discourse does not consist of only couple of sentences or two to three words. Similarly, the entire scene is not a small section or a corner of a picture. Before you start seeing the entire scene, thoughts start arising and you start

thinking about a small section of the scene. Afterwards, **you see with a thinking mind. So you do not see the entire scene.** A huge curtain of thoughts is in front of your eyes, like a film that covers them. However, you think that you are looking at something. That is a mirage. That is a fallacy. A person thinks that s/he is listening. Or else, s/he is a listener. Therefore, **it is necessary to have pure eyes to see the truth, and clean ears to hear the truth.**

The first duty of meditation is this cleansing. The Dhamma presents the results of *Satipaṭṭhāna* (presence of mindfulness) meditation. One such result is purification of the mind. ***Satipaṭṭhāna* meditation purifies you, your eyes, and ears.** Only a person with purified eyes and ears sees and hears the truth. Till then, you may be thinking that you are experiencing so much comfort, while grabbing a thorny bush with both your hand. You may think that you are touching a delicate flower. However, that thought cannot suppress pain. Though a person thinks that a thorny bush is not a pain but a comfort, such a thought cannot stop him/her from getting scratched by the thorns.

7. The true witness

Dear Dhamma Friends, it is essential to correctly assess whether you are feeling comfort or suffering. Correct assessment and evaluation is essential. There are specialists for assessing many physical things such as your vehicle, your house, your furniture, your body etc. You can get your body parts assessed from the top of your head to your toes. Such assessment is easy. However, **there is nobody who can assess whether we are feeling comfort or suffering.** There is no point in asking another about that. Who are we going to ask?

Children may ask their parents about it. However, there is no benefit of such asking. Children can ask their mother and father: “Am I feeling comfort or suffering? I think what I am feeling is comfort. Is that true? I think what I am feeling is suffering. Is that true?” A person can pose such questions. A person will get advice, criticisms, praises and appreciations with regard to what s/he feels. However, there is no use. No point is asking a teacher either. **You’re the witness of what you are feeling.** The person himself/herself is the witness. **Feeling is a personal experience. Pain is a personal experience.** Therefore, ‘feelings’ belong to one of the five aggregates of mental formations. Life is the five aggregates of mental formations. In

any manner that ‘form’ is part of life, ‘feeling’ is also part of life.

The living person is the witness of his/her feelings. **“What do I feel? Is it comfort or suffering?”** That is something we need to observe and examine with each feeling. We need to clearly observe what we are feeling, instead of holding onto pre-opinions, pre-judgements or pre-conclusions with regard to comfort or suffering of life. Instead of feeling comfort or suffering with blind eyes and deaf ears, closely observe what you are feeling. See what you are feeling with everything you see and hear. **“What do I feel with each and every sound? What do I feel with each and every taste? What do I feel with each memory and expectation?”**

8. Meaningful assessments

Dear Dhamma Friends, you can assess your whole life correctly only if you see things in that manner. When you see only portions of your house such as the walls or the roof, and only some parts of your vehicle, you cannot assess the entire house or the entire vehicle correctly. You need to look at each and every part. ***Satipaṭṭhāna* meditation is about looking at each and every part of the entire life, from the beginning to the end,**

from the top to the bottom and from the left to the right, and fully assessing it. Nothing is left behind. You start with the body; contemplating the body and proceed through contemplating feelings, contemplating the mind and contemplating *dhammas* (phenomena, theories, laws of the nature, mental laws, and psychological principles).

9. A full-time duty

Satipaṭṭhāna is a full assessment and evaluation done by a person on the entire life. We must practise *Satipaṭṭhāna* because all of us like to enjoy comforts. Does anybody like to suffer? Everybody likes to live a life filled with ease. Therefore, one may pose a second question with regard to true ease. **What is the true ease? However, before you try to find out what the true ease is, you should know what you are feeling right now.** What do you feel throughout life while being stressful, weary and sweaty, and having a head like devil's workshop? What do you feel from the time you wake up till you sleep? ***Satipaṭṭhāna* is a full-time duty.** You can live without engaging in this duty.

There are so many who have not engaged in *Satipaṭṭhāna*. Millions and trillions of people had been born on this earth, lived and died without assessing themselves and without even

attempting to assess themselves. Billions and trillions of human beings, not animals, had been born on this earth, lived for some years and died without assessing them, even for one moment, from the time of birth till death. **They had died with blind eyes, deaf ears and a mind full of thoughts. It is only a handful of people who engage in *Satipaṭṭhāna*.**

10. One and only compass

We must talk about *Satipaṭṭhāna* on a full-moon day like today and at a place like this meditation centre. **How do we assess our life correctly? How do we get to know the truth about us? Thinking that we are feeling comforts, do we really feel comforts? Do we truly go after an oasis or a mirage? All this time, have we been going after an oasis or a mirage?** It is worth stopping for a moment and enquiring about this. Such an enquiry is helpful in correcting our journey and turning our journey towards the right direction. **Such an enquiry is the one and only compass, which focuses our life on the Right View or *Samma Diṭṭhi*.** We have heard, read and discussed enough about *Samma Diṭṭhi*.

Samma Diṭṭhi refers to knowing and understanding what we feel correctly. Do we feel comfort as suffering or suffering as

comfort? If we feel comfort as comfort, that is the Right View. If we feel suffering as suffering, that is also the Right View. However, **feeling comfort as suffering and vice versa is not *Samma Ditthi*, but *Michcha Ditthi*** (Wrong View). The Dhamma presents something very simple to understand *Samma Ditthi and Michcha Ditthi*. Not knowing about suffering, not knowing about the reason for suffering, not knowing about comfort, not knowing about how comfort is created is *Michcha Ditthi*. Moreover, not knowing about these 4 points is *Michcha Ditthi*. A person does not know about suffering. A person does not even know that s/he is not aware of suffering. If someone knows that s/he is not aware of suffering, then s/he can find out what s/he feels. However, because someone does not even know about suffering, s/he thinks that s/he is feeling comfort.

11. Blaming the wrong thing/person

Dear Dhamma Friends, suppose a person undergoes suffering, thinking that it is comfort. Therefore, s/he does not even know the reasons for suffering. S/he thinks: “Why don’t I have comforts? Why are there problems? Why are there hardships? Why isn’t my mind calm?” As we lack understanding, we try to reason out referring to previous kamma. “I suffer because of my

previous kamma or my husband's, my wife's, my children's, my parents' previous kamma.”

That is merely a statement made as an escape. We often refer to our past kamma, politics, society, country or planetary system. We often say that we suffer because of the fault of the past or the last birth, fault of something committed before the 10th birth and so on. We can easily point our finger to the past as the past is limitless. We can point our finger at somebody else. We can point our finger to the earth, sky, distant stars, invisible stars, social structure, and political system. **No matter whom you point your finger at, suffering does not diminish. Suffering does not end. We need to find out the real reason for suffering, if we need to end it.** We do not know the cause of suffering.

12. Unreachable comfort by running

To repeat; we do not know that we experience suffering, we do not know the cause of suffering, we do not know how to end suffering or how to put a full stop to suffering. We continue running after a mirage at a fast speed. How are we going to apply breaks to stop running? How are we going to turn back? How are we going to make a U-turn? We do not know any of

these things. **Cessation of suffering is comfort. Not running, but stopping is comfort. Not chasing after, but stopping is comfort.** However, we do not think that stopping is comfort. We think that running is comfort. We think that running after something at the highest possible speed and acquiring, owning and grasping that is comfort. We have come all this time while having that thinking and philosophy in our mind.

We can remember the happy moments we had in our lives, whether we truly had such occasions or not. At parties and get-togethers, we often talk about what we did in the past. We can talk days about such incidences associated with comfort. Books can be written on such things. Just look at the biographies written. There are autobiographies. There are biographies written by others. It is obvious that comforts felt in the past are presented in those biographies. If it is a 300-page or 500-page book, comforts felt in the past are given page by page. If you compile all these comforts, by now, there should be a person overflowing with comforts.

13. Unborn today

Is that the truth? Is that the reality? Is that the truth about the present? *Dear Dhamma Friends*, is that the truth about the

present moment? Wherein is that comfort? It is worth finding out wherein that comfort is. Wherein is the comfort you had yesterday? What has happened to it? If we don't have some money that we had yesterday, and if we have not spent it, lent it or kept it somewhere else either, then we wonder what has happened to that money; LKR 10, 100, 1000 or 2000. We look for that money. We look for a book that we had yesterday?

However, why don't we look for the comfort we had yesterday? Wherein is that comfort? What has happened to that comfort? Who has taken that comfort? How has it evaporated? How has it disappeared? We don't look for such things. Instead, we look for fresh comfort. We think about comfort to be experienced tomorrow. We waste today thinking about comfort felt yesterday and making plans on comfort to be felt tomorrow. We spend time and money in that manner. **A person who is engrossed in thoughts associated with these two extremes does not have a day called 'today.'** Such a person keeps thinking of the comfort felt yesterday and of comfort to be felt tomorrow. 'Today' is used only to keep thinking, remembering and making plans. Day by day, yesterday has become today and tomorrow will become today. In this manner each day is just wasted.

14. The truth about past/future comfort

It is worth finding out whether we experienced comfort in the past. Is that true? Is that really true? If that is really true, there is no fault in going back to the past. It is alright if the past can be re-established in the present. It is alright, if the past comfort is a real truth, to re-establish 18th century or 19th century or 50th decade or 60th decade or 80th decade or 90th decade.

Dear Dhamma Friends, every human being looks for comfort. **End of everything is not comfort, but the ultimate goal of everything is comfort.** Try to identify these two separately. If the end of everything is comfort, there is no problem at all. If that is the case, we just have to tolerate for some time expecting comfort in the end. **The thought of anticipating comfort in the end makes us run after a mirage while looking for an invisible end.** An end does not exist. A winning post does not exist. However, we see something like a winning post. We are shown something like a winning post. Therefore, we plead for comfort from everything.

15. Destination of an ordinary life

Dear Dhamma Friends; an ordinary life focuses on happiness. Everything associated with life, having education or becoming wealthy or getting married or getting divorced or acquiring power, focuses on happiness. We think happiness that does not exist now will be somewhere when we reach that point. **In an ordinary life or a wordling's life, we see a destination associated with happiness.** We think that happiness will be there at the destination. Why do we need money for? That is to be happy. Money is not for the sake of having money but for happiness. An ordinary life ends at that point. **An ordinary life does not end at happiness but at a goal associated with happiness.**

Meditation is not for becoming happy. We need to clearly see this difference. **The destination of an ordinary life is happiness. The beginning of meditation is happiness.** Only a happy mind can meditate. Happiness is necessary for meditation. **We do not meditate to be happy. Happiness is not our goal. Our goal is freedom.** Freedom and happiness are two different things. **Freedom is more valuable than happiness.** A free mind or a liberated mind is so valuable. Meditation produces happiness. **Freedom is a result of happiness. Only a**

happy mind can meditate. An unhappy, gloomy, lamentable, crying, sorrowful and depressed mind cannot meditate.

16. The best home remedy

When such things are stated, some questions may arise: **“Isn’t there a solution for such people?”** The solution is to take part in Dhamma discussions and to associate with spiritual friends. We all experience sorrows. Even stream enterers suffer and cry. Once-returners too cry. They cry not because they have become once-returners. They feel or express great sadness or disappointment about diverse events in life. A non-lamenting mind may arise after becoming a non-returner. No lamenting whatsoever after becoming a perfected one (Arahant).

We all lament, sigh and cry both inwardly and outwardly. This is the present truth about all of us. We don’t always lament, sigh and cry. However, that is possible at any time. Nobody can give a certificate about oneself that s/he won’t be lamenting or sighing or crying. Though we boast about the comfort we had in the past, we cannot issue any certificate with regards to any comfort being experienced in the present or to be experienced in the next moment. Even in any biography, though

the past comforts are boasted about, it is not possible to write anything about the comfort being experienced in the present or to be experienced in the next moment. We are not at a place like that.

Suffering can cover us at any moment. We have no idea when, where and over what matter we are going to be covered by suffering. Nobody can predict about that: “Where do we have to cry? Where do we have to sigh? For what matter do we have to lament? When will this happen?” All these predictions, whether they are scientific or non-scientific, stop at suffering. It is not possible to predict about: “Who will suffer? When will s/he suffer? For what matter will s/he suffer?” Astrology or palmistry cannot predict such things. Physics or biology or any other science cannot make such predictions. All these sciences and occultisms are under a deep ignorance when it comes to suffering. Under the title of ‘suffering’ all these are in a deep ignorance. These sciences may be scientific within the same discipline. However, under the title of ‘suffering to be experienced by the human beings’ all these sciences, demonologies and occultisms are in pitch darkness. Those who have taken refuge in such things are also in pitch darkness. Therefore, **when you suffer, the best thing to do is to associate**

with spiritual friends. That is the best help. That is the best home remedy. There is no better home remedy than meeting, seeing, associating with, talking to, listening to and discussing with a spiritual friend. All these are very good home remedies.

It is not easy to meditate when you suffer, because a **pleasurable mental state is necessary for meditation.** Associating with a spiritual friend, presenting your problems and discussing with him/her is also meditation. You can find out the point of view of a spiritual friend, and how s/he looks at the problems and suggests possible remedial measures. That is the best cause of action, instead of trying to settle down your mind on your own when having some difficulties. A person who has deeply meditated for a long time may be able to focus his/her mind on something else when experiencing a problem. However, the problem is left as it is, and it needs to be solved. The mind wanders back to the problem. It is difficult to stop the mind from wandering as long as the problem exists.

17. Cropping up problems

One day, a French couple visited here for a discussion, not for meditating. The wife said: “I take a lot of effort to meditate. I have experienced results of meditation too. However, when my mind settles down, my entire problems crop up and become alive. It is difficult to meditate beyond that point. I enquired many about this problem, but did not get an answer.”

Dear Dhamma Friends, this is the truth. I said: “It is impossible to prevent problems from arising as long as they exist. Don’t expect not to remember problems while meditating. **No matter where you are able to forget problems, they keep on cropping up when you meditate.**” That French couple was so happy about the answer. That is the reality. There may be ways to cover your problems. However, there is no point in covering your problems. You need to be open to your problems. You can take a painkiller and temporarily suppress your problems. That is not the truth.

If you have unsolved problems in your life, they are remembered in meditation. As soon as you close your eyes, these unsolved problem arise one after the other. You cannot see an elegant pageant when you close your eyes. These problems

arise one by one in disguise. You remember grief and distress. It is difficult to settle down the mind. Therefore, a person may look for meditation objects. If one meditation object does not work, then, look for another. A person may find it difficult to concentrate on the breath felt at the tip of the nose so s/he changes that object to movement of stomach. Then again s/he changes the object from movement of stomach to walking, the Burmese method, and methods given in Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. No matter how many meditation objects you choose, you may find it difficult to settle down the mind. That is the truth.

18. Basic needs of meditation

Therefore, a happy mental status is necessary for meditation. Also settled down body is necessary for meditation. These are the basic needs of meditation. You don't need an overwhelming happiness. You need some mental happiness for meditation. **You need to be happy about yourself, nothing else.** We are always happy about other things such as wealth. When you lose your wealth, then happiness disappears. When you cannot do what you want with your wealth, there is no happiness. **You need to be happy about yourself.** At least be happy about this opportunity you have got to meditate. You need at least that

happiness without thinking: “What a nuisance. What time is this programme going to be over? Today is an utter waste.” Such thoughts are called ‘Mara.’ Such thoughts may arise. What do we do?

Accepting these thoughts as true, being possessed by them, and covering us with them is a hindrance. **A hindrance is not a physical curtain that covers us but thoughts. These thoughts cover our eyes, ears, and mind.** As a result, we don’t see anything, like when we are in the mist. When the mist covers an area, there are no mountains, valleys, plateaux, precipices, rivers, brooks, trees, sky and earth. It seems that there is nothing. However, that is not the truth as all these things reappear when the mist disappears. Similarly, when a thought covers the mind, things that exist disappear.

Dear Dhamma Friends, therefore, **acquire happiness, complacency and delight in yourself.** That is valuable. That is very much essential. **Only a person who is delight in himself/herself can meditate.** A person, who is unhappy and disappointed with oneself, rejects oneself, and feels sick and tired of oneself cannot practise tranquillity or insight meditation. **A pessimistic mind cannot meditate.** Be happy about this opportunity you have got to meditate. In this world, only a

human being can meditate. Having been born as a human, being able to meditate is valuable.

19. Only one priority

Having been born as a human, we have done lots of things in life about which we often boast. We even boast about such things to be done later. We may or may not be able to do the things that we plan. However, having been born as a human, if a person is unable to meditate in his/her life, such life is so unfortunate. **Meditation brings fortune to life.** Meditation makes humanity meaningful. Meditation opens one's eyes. Meditation opens one's ears. Meditation gives us refuge in the Buddha. Nothing else does that. Wealth is something that needs to be kept on the side. Let the wealth be somewhere. You need to make money, save money and spend money. However, all these things should be done on the side, not the priority.

What should we give the first priority to? So, we make a list-the first priority is to make money. There are no second or third priorities in life. **There is only one priority in life.** What should we give that priority to? We think of a long list of things with different priorities-first priority, second priority, third priority 1000th priority, 100,000th priority. We can prepare a list.

However, such a list does not exist. Only one blank space is there on the list. There isn't a series of blank spaces. What should we give that space to? If there is only one blank space, and if this question is posed: "If you live for only one thing, what do you choose?" You cannot choose 4 to 5 things but only one. At that point, you'll definitely choose earning money as your priority. It seems like true as we need money for everything. What is 'I' for? "To earn money." You become subjective with money or **make a 'self' with money.**

20. What is 'self?'

According to the Dhamma, **'self' is not something mystical.** A mystical 'self' or an invisible 'self' was talked about before the time of the Lord Buddha. There is an invisible 'self' created by god or Maha Brahma. We cannot see that 'self.' That 'self' is in us. However, we cannot see that. It is not shown even on an x-ray or MRI. Nothing else can see that 'self.' It is the 'self' that feels comfort and suffering. The 'self' was born. The 'self' continues even after death. This is the story about 'self.'

That story is nonsense. The Lord Buddha preached: "Where does 'self' exist?" Is it inside 'form?' No, it isn't. Is it inside 'feelings?' No, it isn't. Is it inside memory? Is it inside

expectations? Is it inside the mind? No it isn't in all these five.” The Lord Buddha further preached: “Do you have things other than those five?” No, was the answer. Then The Lord Buddha said, not sarcastically but kindly: “Then what is this crazy story?” **Everybody thought that something mystical is in us. That was ‘self’ or ‘I.’ There is nothing like that. ‘Self’ refers to what we link with. ‘Self’ refers to what our life is.** If a person thinks that his/her life is occupation, then his/her ‘self’ is occupation. If a person thinks that education is his/her life, then his/her ‘self’ is education.

‘Self’ arises because of ego. The Lord Buddha presented a practical interpretation about ‘self’ in lieu of invisible mysticism. **‘Self’ is something that unites with ego.** If your life is your house, then your ‘self’ is your house. If your life is your physical beauty, then your ‘self’ is your physical beauty. Such a person spends time, reads about and spends money on physical beauty. If that is so, his/her ‘self’ is the beauty of his/her figure.

According to the Dhamma the term ‘self’ is clear. **‘Self’ is something visible, though we cannot see it with our eyes.** It is easy for us to understand what ‘self’ is. What is your ‘self?’ What have you made as your ‘self?’ Is it making money? Is it saving money? Is it spending money? Is it borrowing money? Is

it food? One's life can be food or its taste. Therefore, his/her 'self' is food. There may be another whose 'self' is watching movies. Watching movies is life. Such a person may think that living is useless if s/he is unable to watch at least one movie per day. So 'self' of such a person is watching movies. 'Self' of another may be watching television or using mobile phones.

According to Buddhism, we can find out what 'self' is. This 'self' also changes. There isn't any 'self' that has existed all along. We create 'self' from one thing to another. See how many different 'self' that we create within one hour. How many things do we unite with? How many things that we unit with ego?

21. The most important question

We need to ask this question now: "Was I born to create 'self'?" We do not ask that question when we unite with 'self' or when our eyes are covered, ears are blocked, and the mind is confused with thoughts associated with 'self.' Was I born for that? Was I born for making money, spending money, and saving money? Was I born for watching television? Was I born for drinking alcoholic beverages? Was I born for eating? These questions can be raised.

These questions are raised by the Dhamma, but we are not sensitive enough to hear them. We don't hear them as we are engrossed in a world of thoughts. **A person having his/her ears filled with his/her own thoughts hears only the echo of the call of reality, not the call. The ears need to be emptied of all the thoughts in order to hear the call of reality. The films of thoughts covering the eyes need to be removed in order to see the reality. Then we start hearing and seeing.** Was I born for that? Was this my 'self?'

We have got only one place or blank space? For what are we giving that place? We have been deceived in a big way, making us think that there are many places-1st, 2nd and 3rd place, first priority, second priority or third priority and so on. No, it isn't the case. There is only one place. There is only one blank space. We can fill that blank space with anything we want. However, there is only one blank space. What are we going to fill that with?

22. Nature of 'self'

We think that we need to first make money. *Dear Dhamma Friends*, see clearly. **Giving your 'self' for money won't let you have time for anything else.** At least it won't let you spend

time with your children. A person who has given one's *'self'* for money has time only for making, spending and saving money. If you have such life or if you give priority to money, you won't have secondary or tertiary place in life even for your wife/husband or children. There is no time for the temple, to give alms food to monks, to attend to social work, and at least to attend to his/her own health. Put all these aside. A person may not have time to sleep for a duration that is necessary to lead a healthy life. If you unite with money, you won't have any time, rest and opportunity even to sleep. However, a person may say that s/he makes money for his/her family. That is a lie. That is a lie uttered unknowingly. That is a lie uttered in deception.

Not only money, if you unite with anything, suppose you unite with your occupation, that does not let you attend to anything else, as if you have tied up a devil. **If you unite with something as *'self,'* it does not let you spend one second or minute on anything else. That is the nature of *'self.'*** If you give the first, the second and the third place to something else, and think of meditating whenever you find time, that will never happen. Those things will not give you time and opportunity for you to meditate. That is a lie. That is a mirage. You may think that you'll find some time one day upon retiring from your job

or after getting the children married. That will not happen. That is a mirage.

A person who has made his/her occupation his/her life, that occupation does not let him/her have a successful family life, attend to the duties of his/her children, listen to the problems of wife/husband, attend to the needs of neighbours, give alms, enquire about the wellbeing of monks at the temple, and so on. If you make something your '*self*,' it is like tying up a devil.

23. Nature of meditation

However, if you give priority to enquiring life, assessing life, valuating life or meditating, you'll have enough time to attend to all your needs. **Only meditation can save your time. Everything else wastes your time and also makes you late for everything. You are behind time.** Time is not enough for you. If you have made watching television your '*self*', then you won't have enough time even to watch all the programmes. If you have made making money your '*self*', then you won't have enough time even for that.

Meditation gives you time to attend to the needs of your physical health, to fulfil duties, and to engage in social and

religious services. **This is the nature of meditation.** Meditation saves time. Meditation makes you a punctual person. If you give priority to meditation, after finishing everything planned for the day, you'll have some more time left to attend to something else. If you give priority to things other than meditation, you won't have enough time for those things and never have time for meditation. Therefore, life is for meditation. We were born as human beings for meditation. **If you give priority to meditation, it lets you attend to all other responsibilities. That is the beauty. That is the miracle. That is the wonder.**

Dear Dhamma Friends, if you assess your life in that manner, it is possible for you to do everything you have valued in life. You'll have enough time, ability and health to do everything. However, if you give priority to something external and physical, you won't have time even for that, as well as for other things. Moreover, you won't be healthy enough to do what you have given the priority to. You'll never be healthy enough to attend to things outside your priority. In the end, a tired, stressful, restless and unhealthy person will be left.

24. One and only way of being close to the Buddha

Life is meditation. We commit lots of merits, expecting to attain nibbana after seeing the Buddha. That is a beautiful wish. A beautiful Dhamma discourse in this regard is given in the Tipitaka. The Lord Buddha preached: “A person who is holding My robe and walking behind Me step by step is so distant from Me.” You can visualize this. You may think that a person who is holding the robe of the Buddha is so close to Him, and another person cannot get closer than that to the Lord Buddha. Though we think like that, the Buddha’s mind is different.

The Lord Buddha continued: “If you have given priority to things other than meditation, if you run after such things in your mind (though your body is here) looking for pleasures and expecting pleasures here and there, if the mind is filled with such things, if the mind is dirtied by such thoughts, if you have unending greediness, if you are engrossed in sensuousness, if you run after new trends in society thinking that a life that has not watched a particular movie, not gone to a particular place, not used some fashion, not read a particular book is useless, if you think like this or if your mind is spoiled with such thoughts, if your mindfulness is tangled, if you are unaware of what is happening, such a person, even if he walks behind Me while

holding My robe, is so distant from Me, and I am also so distant from him.” See what a statement that was, made by the Lord Buddha. He did not stop saying: “That person is distant from Me.” He said: “I am also distant from that person because there is no Dhamma in him. Only a person who sees the Dhamma sees Me.”

The Lord Buddha talked about the opposite of that too. “Even if a person is physically distant from Me by about 100 *yojanas* (a unit of measuring distance like miles), if that person has not made life his ‘*self*’ uniting with shallow things, if that person does not think that the world is a beautiful botanical garden or was not charmed by such things, if his/her mind is pure or is not filled with thoughts associated with dirtying the mind, if that person has acquired mindfulness, if that person knows what is happening, such a person is so close to Me. I am also so close to such a person, because s/he sees the Dhamma. So s/he sees Me.”

May the Triple Gem Bless You!!!