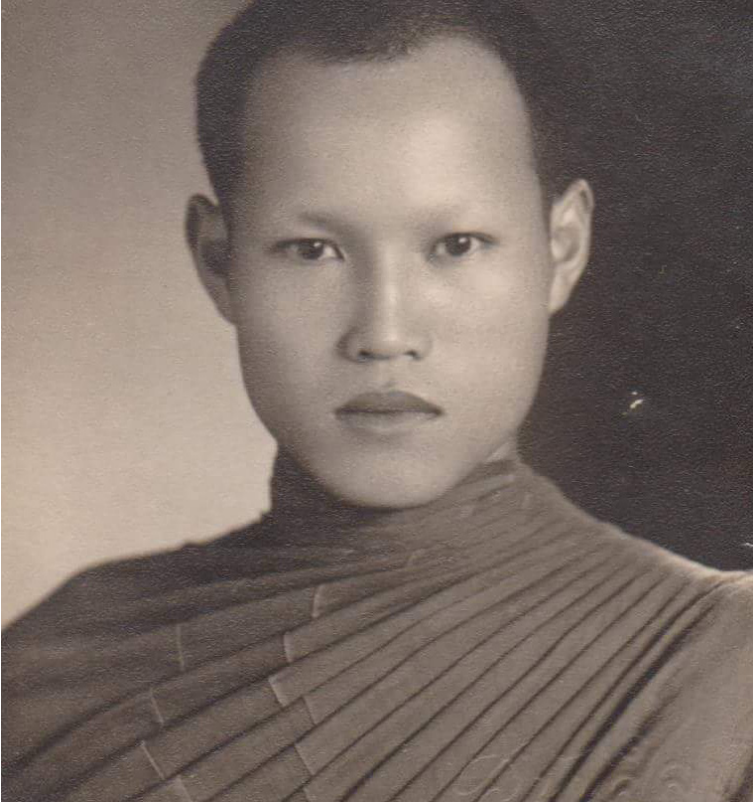


HOW TO PRACTICE
Vipassana
(Insight) Meditation



BEN HEFFER



Ajahn Chalee

How To Practice Vipassana (Insight) Meditation

Introduction

I am writing this manual at the request of my teacher Ajahn Chalee Phumipak. Ajahn Chalee has been my meditation teacher for over 15 years now and it is with deep respect for him and the Theravada tradition that I will attempt to describe in detail the very same techniques that he taught me, in his own style with few words and much practice! In fact, over the years both of us have become quieter! Now, when we are practicing together in the same room or at the same temple, only one or two words may pass between us for days at a time as he continues to reinforce that the depths of wisdom are only to be realized through your own intensive practice.

It has been interesting to watch my teacher in retreat situations with senior and junior monks. It is often typical for senior teachers' talks to go on and on while everyone sits and listens and tries to absorb their spoken wisdom. Ajahn Chalee sits and practices while this is going on. Years ago, he declared these lengthy talks to be a kind of "talk show" and said that he wanted nothing to do with them. And so, that became his principle way of teaching students through silence and by example for all students with the exception of the novice practitioners.

Ajahn Chalee and I share some common traits, one of them being uncomfortable in public speaking. On top of that, I do not have the gift of teaching in a formal setting and so my formal talks often last no longer than a succinct 5 to 10 minutes. I work much more effectively one on one addressing the needs of the person who has come to learn meditation practice. It is in this way that I will present this Vipassana manual, with as few words as possible for the beginning Vipassana student.

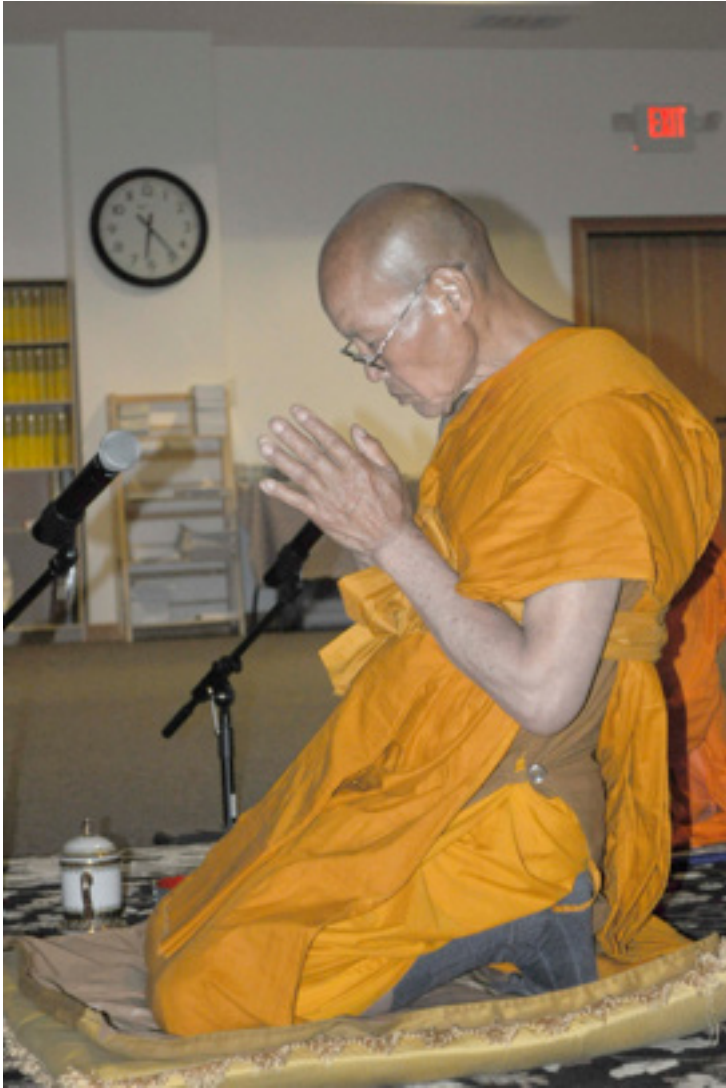
This is my third (probably not final) attempt at trying to capture both the depth of Vipassana practice as well as what it takes to grow into a deep practitioner. This is not an easy practice, and there are many challenges throughout the entire process. And then there comes a time when words

are no longer necessary to enhance understanding and deepen one's wisdom. A deep practitioner ceases to ask questions because the practice itself shows the way to increasing freedom, deeper peace and wisdom.

This is a manual of meditation practice not Buddhist philosophy and so I will focus upon the core of the Buddha's teachings that are relevant to meditation practice. There will be much theory intentionally left untouched and unexplained simply because that is not the purpose of this manual!

I will end here by asking that you read this manual knowing that all any author can do is explain a technique and point the way for you to go. It is you who must do the work and make the effort. Without work and effort, nothing will be accomplished!

This manual is dedicated to my teacher Ajahn Chalee Phumipak. I would also like to thank Ajahn Subin Singthong, abbot of Wat Buddha, Oregon, who arranged for the printing of the book in Thailand. I want to thank my two editors, Sue Heffer and Lama Dawa Zangpo. I need to also express my great appreciation to Jeri Hauth for her graphics and design work and Bill Wilkinson and Cynthia Copenhagen as web page and book design consultants. Lastly, I also wish to pay respect to my other teachers whom I have asked for further clarification and Dhamma explanations Dr. Theerapan and Ajahn Buasai Khonpiam through the years.



Ajahn Chalee

Why do people meditate? What are the purposes of meditation practice? What kinds of meditation are there? Can I do this? Is anything to be achieved by meditating and if so, what might I expect?

These are important questions to ask, and hopefully they can be answered well enough here for you to know why you might want to pursue a meditation practice.

To begin with, there are basically two forms of meditation practiced around the world, concentration practices and insight practices. These practices have important similarities as well as significant differences, and each might suit one person better than another. The goals of each type are different but in the various Buddhist forms of concentration and insight, wisdom and liberation are always the ultimate goals of the practice.

In any form of concentration practice, some object or sensation is chosen, and a person's attention holds onto it no matter what else arises. Generally, after doing this for awhile, a sense of peace and calm arises. The person feels pleasure and satisfaction. Sometimes altered states of reality may arise; these can emerge out of a person's mind in response to a deep relaxation experience. There are thousands of different forms of concentration practices found in most world religions and spiritual systems.

Common examples of these practices include yoga, controlled breathing, mantras, prayers, beads, chanting, repetitive dance steps, music, staring at candle flames, standing in certain positions for hours on end, etc.

During deep concentration practices, the pleasurable calm and quiet of practice is typically sought by those who just wish to have a few moments of respite from the stress and difficulties in their life. It is during these times that a sense of spiritual satisfaction can be derived. This is also a time when people might report having out of body experiences, perceiving auras, feeling as if their body is floating, and having mystical experiences.

However, when the concentration practice ends, all of the troubles of normal living return and nothing has fundamentally changed other than that one has had a moment or two of respite. In the various Buddhist concentration practices wisdom and liberation are the goals, so there is much more work to be done! Relaxation and pleasure may be nice,

temporary pit stops along the way, but they are not the ultimate goal! The second form of meditation practice is the main one the Buddha himself used and taught Vipassana, or Insight practice. The Buddha had also practiced and experienced very deep concentration practices during his lifetime, but these left him dissatisfied with the return of life's problems and struggles once leaving the concentrated state. He wanted a permanent solution. Vipassana is what he used to find a final end to his suffering.

Vipassana practice is a practice form that harnesses the power of concentration and insight together, and can reduce or eliminate suffering in life permanently. (See the Satipatthana Sutta: The Discourse on the Arousing of Mindfulness, which can be found at the end of this paper along with a few comments.)

Which form you pursue is really your choice and depends a great deal on what you are trying to accomplish in your meditation practice temporary relief, or permanent relief. The guide below talks about Vipassana practice which is the unification of concentration and insight. If you want more information regarding concentration practice alone, you will need to use other resources.

Ajahn Chalee and I teach only Vipassana meditation and discourage isolated concentration practices because it is not a direct or permanent fix to the issues that confront all living beings.

Here's how you get started:

Vipassana teaches us to see all things "just as they are" without any involvement other than to know that you are sensing or experiencing something. To do this requires a person to train his or her mind while restraining the senses. We have been conditioned to think about whatever happens, to plan ahead, to worry about the past, to remember past experiences, to value the positive feelings we have about whatever arises, to seek things, and to reject those things we don't like all to reduce discomfort or pain.

To unlearn some of these behaviors, the mind must be retrained. In Vipassana we do this simply by noting. Whatever arises in your mind or body, no matter what, just note it to yourself. Don't struggle looking for the exact right word, but choose whatever word first comes to mind. As

you note, see how whatever has been noted seems to change. Note the changes and continue to note whatever comes up. This “noting” process is also how we let go of painful or pleasurable experiences. Pleasure and pain are fully acknowledged when they arise, but we do not cling to them in any way. Rather we observe them in an evenhanded way, with equanimity.

Whenever you note some phenomenon in the body, mind, feelings, or mental objects, whatever you’ve noted immediately changes. You are not getting involved with whatever has arisen; you’re just seeing its nature as it truly exists. When you see nature just as it is, you become disentangled from the thinking mind and its wishes and wants. You look at whatever arises in the mind and body, pleasant or unpleasant, just as it is. You begin to learn first hand about the wildness of the mind and how out of control it is! You more easily see how a person is enslaved by his or her mind with its constant thinking, judging, evaluating, and likes and dislikes, and you therefore become increasingly freer of the passions and emotions.

By using concentration and mindfulness together to see reality, you are also walking the same path the Buddha did. I will discuss the Mahasi techniques used to develop both practices below. (Mahasi Sayadaw was the Burmese monk and teacher who originated this technique.)

As you observe the rising and falling of the breath observe the movement of your abdomen. While doing sitting meditation, as you get more skilled, you will notice more subtle aspects of the breath, i.e. the beginning of the inbreath, the middle of the inbreath, etc. Do not try to control the breathing; it is to be left normal and natural. Note the changes from breath to breath short, long, slight, strong, deep, shallow, etc. This is one form of concentration holding your focus on the breath entirely. However, if your attention goes to whatever else arises from your mind, body, feelings or contents of your mind, then this too is mindfulness but only if you are using words to actually match what you are doing as you are doing it. This is the Vipassana practice that Ajahn Chalee and I teach.

Please note in these images that many different postures of sitting practice are available to you. Some of them are not as suitable for practitioners who are less flexible while others are. All of them are potentially beneficial as long as your mindfulness is balanced with concentration. This is the bottom line of all meditation practice!

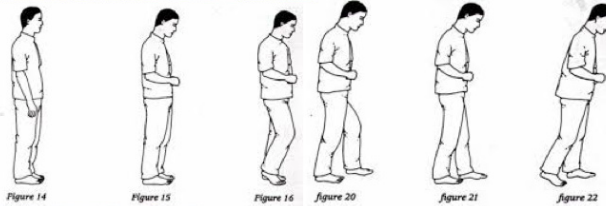


One should be careful of holding any one posture for too long, or of excessively squirming and shifting around after settling into a posture.

No matter which seated posture you are using, insignificant to significant discomfort can arise. It is our role to observe and note the discomforts clearly and allow them to rise and fall without shying away from it. Wisdom from observing your discomforts will arise. Watch everything arise with clarity and depth.

It should be mentioned that meditation practice is not just a sitting practice. It is also a walking practice, standing practice, lying practice, laundry practice, shopping practice, and work practice. In fact, to exclude anything in your life and activities would be an incorrect understanding of Vipassana practice. Furthermore, Vipassana practice requires you to walk, sit, stand, and use whatever other activities you do in a mindful, concentrated, and practiced way.

For example, when you're doing formal walking meditation, sub-vocally note the rising and falling of the foot. When you are starting out, walk at a normal pace and note right foot, left foot, right, left, etc. When you naturally slow down in speed, then change the words to, "Right, goes thus," (noting the different parts of the footstep). When and if the walking slows even more, change the words to match your actions to continue this mindfulness, through all of the movements of the walking pace. This is using mindfulness and concentration together, and is Vipassana practice.



You will observe from these images that walking, just like sitting practice, uses concentration and mindfulness together. Your attention should be focused and held on the various movements of your body and using words to help you know that you are being mindful is important here. When walking quickly, saying to yourself right, left, or right, goes thus, etc. you are able to move quickly and generate energy. As your concentration and mindfulness deepens, your pace will naturally slow. That is when more words can be added as you slow down and can keep closer attention to what you are doing.

Strive to maintain a balance between walking and sitting meditation practice. For example, do 15 minutes walking and 15 minutes sitting, or 30 minutes walking and 30 minutes sitting. Do not sit or walk in practice longer than 60 minutes at a time for each kind of practice. If you do, you'll start dozing and lose mindfulness, or become heavily fatigued. The walking practice is as important as the sitting practice in Vipassana and is somewhat different from technique to technique, depending on the teacher's preferences.

Stay aware when you are getting sleepy or bored and just note it. Strong

noting can be helpful here. Then closely observe how the sleepiness or boredom changes. If it doesn't change significantly, get up and walk briskly and mindfully.

Sometimes sleep can descend on you so quickly that you don't even realize that you've gone to sleep until you actually wake up from it! Sleeping while practicing is to be avoided, because you are unable to note whatever arises. When you are asleep there is no mindfulness or concentration, and therefore an opportunity for greater learning and wisdom to develop is missed.

Have you noticed how sleepy you get after a meal? If you reduce the quantity of food you consume, you will also reduce sleepiness. Avoid heavy and greasy foods, and lean towards more vegetarian fare. For me, practicing before a meal is generally much more effective than after because of the sleepiness issue. Skipping a meal or two is also an effective tool when you are on a retreat.

Be sure to watch your energy level relating to food consumption, and pay attention if your system has run out of food. You do need a certain amount of food to give you the necessary energy to practice, but the middle way is best do not eat too much or too little.

When your mind is agitated and scattered, be sure to walk a great deal. You could even walk for 55 minutes and sit for 5 minutes out of the hour's practice time. The mind is scattered mostly because you have not raised enough energy in your body to focus your noting mindfulness and hold it there. So, concentration has to be increased and walking helps raise the energy that is needed.

Mindfulness (noting) is being aware of everything that arises in succession. Complete and total mindfulness means that you are aware 24/7. The more you can raise your mindfulness and concentration throughout the day, the more your wisdom grows and the more powerful your practice becomes.

But mindfulness slips away all too easily! Be careful of the times you change from walking to sitting practice and back again. This is one of the first places it's lost for most beginning practitioners. When the end of practice time arrives, work at trying to sustain your mindfulness and concentration through the change in postures. You'll see that daily life

distracts very easily, and what energy and effort as well as intention it takes to regain your mindfulness and concentration. A person needs to bring himself back to mindfulness and concentration time after time.

The more you are able to extend your practice time with walking and sitting, the more detail you'll see in whatever arises, and you should be able to note how fast things change — impermanence in action! Everything that is impermanent is unsatisfactory, by definition. You can't hold onto anything because everything is changing so quickly. This holds true for our thoughts, opinions, feelings, sense experiences, passions, etc. Even your body is constantly changing, you can try to hold on, but it's going to change anyway. No matter how well you care for your body, it will change nonetheless. This is true for all material things as well as immaterial things.

In fact, whatever exists in the natural world has come together because of causes and conditions. When those causes and conditions change over time, then new causes and conditions arise, and this is a natural process. At this very moment, things are changing whether observed or not, and the natural rhythm of rising and falling away is also taking place. One can resist change, but it's of no avail, because things will change anyway. In meditation practice, you want to watch for change and observe impermanence. Seeing these changes is the dawning of wisdom the real goal of meditation!

While everyone acknowledges intellectually that things are impermanent, to observe it closely within yourself is very different. The closer you observe your body and mind, the more you see changes occurring, and you start to see that these changes are in fact happening all of the time. Most often, we shrug off or ignore these changes, as they seem to have no direct meaning to our lives. However we have all watched our bodies age, get sick, get well, get hurt and healed. This is impermanence. Now we must learn to look even more deeply, and develop our wisdom regarding the changes that naturally occur. With this knowledge from our own practice, we are better able to react in a more detached way to the changes in all things including emotions and thoughts, and not get carried away by them.

In addition, grabbing hold of anything and wishing it to not change (most often because it is pleasurable) is unrealistic and will be unsatisfactory and possibly painful. All material and mental things are

composites and will decompose by nature. Unless you come to grips with this reality, you are bound to be continually frustrated by all of the things that happen in and around you.

Furthermore, when dealing with unpleasant or difficult things in life, we wish these things to go away as fast as possible. Knowing that even these difficult things will change just by themselves liberates you from expending energy on having to push disturbances away. Of course, no one wishes to experience unpleasant things, but knowing that even the most difficult of things will go away eventually and naturally, makes bearing the unpleasantness in life more tolerable.

The more a person can acknowledge impermanence as it rises and falls, the deeper one's personal wisdom develops. And wisdom develops from acknowledging causes and conditions just as they occur. Finally, developing wisdom is the very thing that is discovered in Vipassana meditation, according to the Buddha, and the very thing that ultimately and permanently liberates a person from the difficulties in life.

So, the actual practice uses these tools to help develop the wisdom needed to free oneself. A successful student of meditation harnesses the five faculties of Confidence, Concentration, Mindfulness, Energy and Effort and Wisdom over and over again, as these are the tools not to be forgotten for productive practice. In my experience, you can dramatically improve your practice by seeing which faculties are in balance with the others or not.

For example, if your concentration is weak and your mind is either sluggish or flitting around, then you cannot not have enough energy to harness the power of concentration. So, walk briskly at first to raise the necessary energy. As your concentration builds, you will naturally slow down and be able to do more concentrated walking. With concentrated walking, mindfulness more easily develops and the mind's flitting will change, and more than likely stop. You've also probably witnessed how, from one minute to another, the condition of your mind changes. One moment you are distracted, the next you are concentrated. This is another example of impermanence.

If you tend to get swept away with emotional reactions to your practice (negative or positive), and with what is happening within your practice, you will need to raise the wisdom component of the faculties by looking

with more effort at impermanence, unsatisfactoriness and the reality of how your emotions are just not within your control. Knowing this allows you to note your strong personal emotional reactions to the practice and to what is happening. This noting lets you see your emotional responses and allows you to watch them change without engaging them.

When the practice is working well, the Five Faculties are more in balance. This, of course, is impermanent too! To help yourself grow in your practice, be sure to observe your faculties each time you sit down to practice or get up to walk. They can change in an instant. This is normal and expected. Stability of your practice will grow but it takes considerable time, and a lot of effort before you see lasting change in your practice.

By using the Five Faculties, you can analyze and adjust your practice moment by moment. This was extremely helpful to me. By noting the changes, I was more clearly seeing impermanence happening naturally. There was nothing I could do about it except adjust my practice moment by moment. When I did this, I no longer experienced a “good” practice or a “bad” practice: I just noted the change and went on. I was no longer giving way to my emotions and opinions about practice. I allowed things to be as they appeared without my wishing them to be otherwise. A natural peacefulness and calm develops because of this change in understanding about impermanence.

The “confidence” component of the Five Faculties refers to the conviction that meditation practice will benefit you. Even if you are just a beginner, you need just a bit of this to get started. In fact, if you did not believe that this would benefit you even a little, you wouldn’t do it. This is not to say there won’t be difficulties or problems in practice but most can easily be fixed when working with a teacher and using the Five Faculties. With more and more feedback from your practice, you are able to have more confidence, and the difficulties and challenges in practice become easier to bear.

Over time, you will see the negative emotional states of anger, hatred, and delusion arise and fall away and you’ll be freer of the entanglements from these mental conditions. One moment of mindfulness will cause another to arise. One moment of lack of mindfulness will cause another moment of lack of mindfulness to arise. The meaning of this should be obvious start off with mindfulness in your practice, and mindfulness will follow. Over time, you will see the negative emotional states of anger, hatred, and

delusion arise and fall away and you'll be freer of the entanglements from these mental conditions.

If we declare to ourselves that we will intentionally raise concentration or mindfulness or energy or effort, chances are pretty good that these will follow, but it's not always 100%. These states don't really belong to us nor do they have permanence. Ultimately we exercise no control over how things develop one after another. However, the chances are certainly better in empowering our practice and eventually winning our own liberation and peace. This is exactly what happened to the Buddha.

When these powerful insights occur, please take care and discuss this with your teacher. If no teacher is available to you, then discuss this with very experienced practitioners who may have had similar powerful insights. On the other hand, talking about these happenings with someone who has not had them himself can strip away the power of the experience.

It is also important that you are aware that delusions can arise in practice, and false understandings can arise due to too much concentration rather than from genuine wisdom. This is one of the reasons for a teacher to help you understand the difference between true insights and delusional understandings.

When you first experience functioning fully in this present moment, you begin to realize how much time has been put into thinking about the past and anticipating the future. Of course, this is usually done without paying attention to what is actually happening right here and now. In fact, we are usually missing most of what is going on right in front of us!

When you approach meditation without preconceptions and opinions, the chances of growth are enhanced and success can more easily be achieved. When you use the power of mindfulness through noting, you allow all things to arise and fall naturally and easily. When you note clearly, you introduce a new way of dealing with reality free from greed, hate and delusion. You are doing the same work the Buddha did to see his way to complete peace and freedom. By your doing the same work as the Buddha, you are increasing the chances of reaching the same permanent peace and freedom he did.

Things can occur during practice that you won't understand and that perhaps make no sense to you. This is when you need to speak to your

teacher. If your questions aren't answered in a way that resolves the matter for you, it is important to continue practicing anyway. In time, and in its own way, these deep questions will either be answered, or will cease to be burning questions to you as your wisdom grows.

All sorts of things can arise in your practice. The most distressing to a new practitioner is doubt. Doubt can show up in many ways; doubt about the practice, the teacher, the Buddha's teaching, your ability to become more peaceful and happy, etc. When those things arise, know that all you need to do is note it. Don't think about or worry about whatever arises, just note it and see what happens. You should see that these things just come and go, and that they are of no ultimate concern. It's just one more thought, feeling or experience, and it comes and it also goes. In fact, you are actually seeing impermanence and lack of self control. You are not controlling these happenings, yet they do happen.

The mind tends to rebel when everything it does is being noted. The thinking mind likes to be in control, and we've been conditioned to trust the mind and its thoughts by the world around us. In Vipassana practice, one of the earliest lessons is that the mind is so impermanent that you can't trust it. This is why Ajahn Chalee teaches, "No thinking just doing". But this behavior is counterintuitive and flies in the face of what our world teaches. While this is true, once you get a glimmer of how unstable the thinking mind actually is, you begin to understand that perhaps there is a better way of living and doing. Act with purity of intention, within a code of morality that reflects standards that are filled with justice and peace for all. You will be happier for doing this!

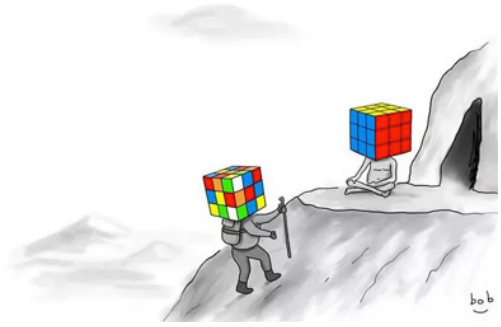
The Buddhist code of morality is not just for the Buddhist; the code is there to help anyone live in a better, more helpful way in this world. The layperson lives with this guidance not to kill, steal, lie, or use intoxicants, and to abstain from sexual misbehavior (known as the Five Precepts). As you can see, most of these values exist in just about every code of morality and religious system around the world. One does not need to be Buddhist! The techniques of practice are a teachable thing, and help in practice comes from living close to the values of these five precepts.

The practice itself will teach you all there is to learn about reality, nature and your own freedom. While you could study these things from a book, they would exist only as ideas on a page and only in the thinking part of your mind. If you discover them from within your own practice,

then this bit of wisdom
needs no words: rather
it's an understanding that
promotes further growth and
development of your own
deepening wisdom.

As you continue your
practice year after year, the
person you were when you
started practicing will have
changed completely due to

recognizing impermanence, and to your growth of wisdom. Wordless understandings will have developed and there will be a deepening and broadening peace of mind. In fact, your mind will become considerably less wild and distractible. Your patience grows greatly and your temper cools. You discover for yourself that the effort put into practice has changed your life in incalculable ways, some seen by others but mostly known by you.



As I end this handbook, I will include the Satipatthana Sutta, as this teaching by the Buddha serves as the foundation for Vipassana Meditation. There are several parts of this sutta that are quite important in the teaching that Ajahn Chalee and I do, and I hope that they become significant to you, too.

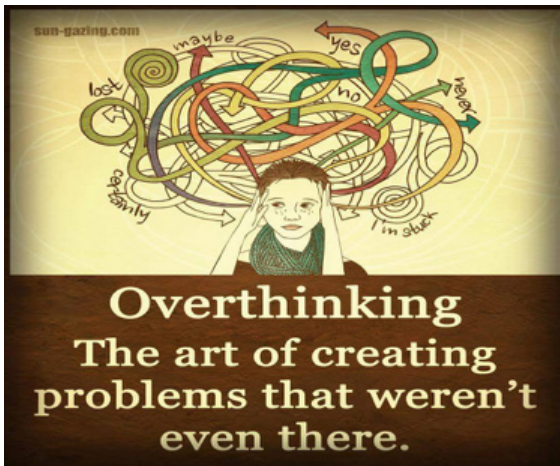
Please note the Pali term bhikku or bhikkus. This word traditionally referred to monks but today it is used as a reference to any meditator. This refers to you as well, a practitioner. In the Sutta itself there are many repeats of phrases as suttas were originally orally passed on and chanted and so repetitions served as an effective memory technique.

When noting the body or any part of the body, one notes it internally, externally or both. This means wisdom is learned from simply observing your own body, someone else's body or both your and someone else's body. You are to see impermanence of the body, you see the ravages of age on the body a form of suffering and you observe that there is no controlling of the inevitability of change. We observe these things closely.

Most meditators observe only their own body and ignore the bodies around them, and yet traditionally we are instructed to learn from the

body all bodies, human or otherwise.

Additionally, the body serves one and only one purpose for someone desiring their own liberation and freedom that is, as a source of wisdom. “The body exists, to the extent necessary, just for knowledge and remembrance, and he lives independent and clings to naught in the world.”



Ajahn Chalee has demonstrated to me several times, how he uses this information of the impermanence of the body. Once in Oregon, as several of us were taking our morning walk, we saw a dead fawn off to the side of the road. Most of us averted our eyes as we walked by the corpse of the fawn

but he stopped and stared at it closely for at least five minutes to learn from it. We never talked about what he took in but what I saw was the impermanence of the body and knowing what it would look and smell like over the next several days.

When I saw this, I realized that I needed to say to myself that I too am a mortal being and would eventually end up this way in some fashion. I am not immortal and my body is subject to decay and natural forces as my body changes over time.

I saw how the fawn was living one moment and dead the next. This certainly wouldn't be its wish nor would it be mine but neither of us can control the uncontrollable nature of life and death. No matter how quickly or slowly death comes to all beings, there is suffering as the body ages. Unless one learns how to be detached from clinging to the body and to this life, then the end of life can be very difficult and can be made more difficult if we do not acknowledge the natural happenings around us and in us.

There was a second happening I witnessed with Ajahn Chalee at the funeral of a woman. He was invited to participate in a funeral for someone in the Las Vegas Thai community. It was a new experience for me, while being on retreat, and I learned a great deal from watching and participating in it, to the limited degree I did participate. I was a witness to a major life event happening. When it was his turn to approach and view the body, he stood there for a long time observing the body, studying the body, and seeing that he too was going to come to a similar end at some point in the future. This was the first time I had ever experienced anything like this.

According to the Buddha's instructions to monks, they are to shy away from no aspect of life, even the most ugly or unfortunate, but to note everything as a technique to deepen and broaden wisdom. And this is what Ajahn was doing. Staring at the body of this woman, he could see that he too was mortal and would one day wind up dead as well. This mortal shell is impermanent. Our bodies are each impermanent in the same way.

I heard the woman's birth date and age and learned that she was exactly my age, born the same year and day, but in Thailand. It could have been my body in that casket. It shook me that this was the first time I had seen someone exactly my age dead. She was beautifully made up and looked healthy and well, but she clearly had not been. Her mortality was clear, and so in that moment was mine to me.

This is one way to study the body as an object to develop wisdom. Later in the Sutta, there is a very graphic description of a rotting corpse. By observing the body falling apart, one learns that it is completely impermanent, and a nest of disease and aging. It's not a pretty sight, but it is nature and the Sutta instructs us to observe it closely as a way to gain wisdom.

Perhaps the most graphic type of bodily treatment is referred to as Sky Burial in various parts of Asia and is even still practiced today in a few places. In a Sky Burial the wild animals living in the vicinity are allowed to take nourishment from the dead body. In these places this is understood as a natural process which is not hidden from the people in the community.

Living in the west as I do, walking in the forests, a person can see all forms of life and death even on the floor of the forest. You can observe young saplings and aged trees getting ready to fall and rot into the ground. Nature is all around us and we can use all of it for our own developing wisdom. Road kill is seen just about every day of the year out on the open highways and animals of all sorts feast on the dead and take their nourishment from the bodies. The process surrounds us; it is both within us and outside of us. We need to see it clearly and learn from all parts of life.

The Sutta also gives instruction on various ways of observing and noting the breath as it rises and falls. When we observe the breath we are seeing clearly a natural process common to all living creatures. We recall how a nonliving body no longer breathes and we observe breath in ourselves, in others or in both. We also learn that our bodies are simply made up of various materials, as are all other living creatures. We see deeply that certain causes and conditions bring these various materials together and just as they come together at a certain point in time, so too do they fall apart, and pass away. This is just as our breath is, rising and falling, it's all around us, this universal truth.

In our worldly lives we have learned to value and treasure deeply things of an impermanent nature. To gain true wisdom, we must see impermanent things as impermanent and learn not to hold on and cling. If we choose to do so, then when those things change, we mourn their loss and struggle to replace that which has been lost. And in just the opposite way, when pain and suffering happen, we push those things away instead of looking deeply at the meaning of the pain and suffering. We forget that even the painful parts of life are impermanent, and impermanence is not under our control. It is the force of nature and irreversible. It, too, is the Dhamma.

Satipatthana Sutta: Frames of Reference

translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

<http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.010.than.html>

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying in the Kuru country. Now there is a town of the Kurus called Kammasadhamma. There the Blessed One addressed the monks, “Monks.”

“Lord,” the monks replied.

The Blessed One said this: “This is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow & lamentation, for the disappearance of pain & distress, for the attainment of the right method, & for the realization of Unbinding — in other words, the four frames of reference. Which four?

“There is the case where a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself — ardent, alert, & mindful — putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world. He remains focused on feelings... mind... mental qualities in & of themselves — ardent, alert, & mindful — putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world.

A. Body

“And how does a monk remain focused on the body in & of itself?

[1] “There is the case where a monk — having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building — sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect and setting mindfulness to the fore [lit: the front of the chest]. Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out. “Breathing in long, he discerns, ‘I am breathing in long’; or breathing out long, he discerns, ‘I am breathing out long.’ Or breathing in short, he discerns, ‘I am breathing in short’; or breathing out short, he discerns, ‘I am breathing out short.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to the entire body.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to the entire body.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.’ Just as a skilled turner or his apprentice, when making a long

turn, discerns, 'I am making a long turn,' or when making a short turn discerns, 'I am making a short turn'; in the same way the monk, when breathing in long, discerns, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, he discerns, 'I am breathing out long' ... He trains himself, 'I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.'

"In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or externally on the body in & of itself, or both internally & externally on the body in & of itself. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the body, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the body, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to the body. Or his mindfulness that 'There is a body' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by (not clinging to) anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself.

[2] "Furthermore, when walking, the monk discerns, 'I am walking.' When standing, he discerns, 'I am standing.' When sitting, he discerns, 'I am sitting.' When lying down, he discerns, 'I am lying down.' Or however his body is disposed, that is how he discerns it.

"In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or focused externally...

unsustained by anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself.

[3] "Furthermore, when going forward & returning, he makes himself fully alert; when looking toward & looking away... when bending & extending his limbs... when carrying his outer cloak, his upper robe & his bowl... when eating, drinking, chewing, & savoring... when urinating & defecating... when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, & remaining silent, he makes himself fully alert.

"In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or focused externally...

unsustained by anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself.

[4] “Furthermore...just as if a sack with openings at both ends were full of various kinds of grain — wheat, rice, mung beans, kidney beans, sesame seeds, husked rice — and a man with good eyesight, pouring it out, were to reflect, ‘This is wheat. This is rice. These are mung beans. These are kidney beans. These are sesame seeds. This is husked rice,’ in the same way, monks, a monk reflects on this very body from the soles of the feet on up, from the crown of the head on down, surrounded by skin and full of various kinds of unclean things: ‘In this body there are head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, gorge, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, skinoil, saliva, mucus, fluid in the joints, urine.’

“In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or focused externally...

unsustained by anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself.

[5] “Furthermore...just as a skilled butcher or his apprentice, having killed a cow, would sit at a crossroads cutting it up into pieces, the monk contemplates this very body — however it stands, however it is disposed — in terms of properties: ‘In this body there is the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, & the wind property.’

“In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or focused externally...

unsustained by anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself.

[6] “Furthermore, as if he were to see a corpse cast away in a charnel ground — one day, two days, three days dead — bloated, livid, & festering, he applies it to this very body, ‘This body, too: Such is its nature, such is its future, such its unavoidable fate’...

“Or again, as if he were to see a corpse cast away in a charnel ground, picked at by crows, vultures, & hawks, by dogs, hyenas, & various other creatures... a skeleton smeared with flesh & blood, connected with tendons... a fleshless skeleton smeared with blood, connected with tendons... a skeleton without flesh or blood, connected with tendons...

bones detached from their tendons, scattered in all directions — here a hand bone, there a foot bone, here a shin bone, there a thigh bone, here a hip bone, there a back bone, here a rib, there a breast bone, here a shoulder bone, there a neck bone, here a jaw bone, there a tooth, here a skull... the bones whitened, somewhat like the color of shells... piled up, more than a year old... decomposed into a powder: He applies it to this very body, ‘This body, too: Such is its nature, such is its future, such its unavoidable fate.’

“In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or externally on the body in & of itself, or both internally & externally on the body in & of itself. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the body, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the body, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to the body. Or his mindfulness that ‘There is a body’ is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by (not clinging to) anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself.

B. Feelings

“And how does a monk remain focused on feelings in & of themselves? There is the case where a monk, when feeling a painful feeling, discerns, ‘I am feeling a painful feeling.’ When feeling a pleasant feeling, he discerns, ‘I am feeling a pleasant feeling.’ When feeling a neither painful nor-pleasant feeling, he discerns, ‘I am feeling a neither painful nor pleasant feeling.’

“When feeling a painful feeling of the flesh, he discerns, ‘I am feeling a painful feeling of the flesh.’ When feeling a painful feeling not of the flesh, he discerns, ‘I am feeling a painful feeling not of the flesh.’ When feeling a pleasant feeling of the flesh, he discerns, ‘I am feeling a pleasant feeling of the flesh.’ When feeling a pleasant feeling not of the flesh, he discerns, ‘I am feeling a pleasant feeling not of the flesh.’ When feeling a neither painful nor pleasant feeling of the flesh, he discerns, ‘I am feeling a neither painful nor pleasant feeling of the flesh.’ When feeling a neither painful nor pleasant feeling not of the flesh, he discerns, ‘I am feeling a neither painful nor pleasant feeling not of the flesh.’

“In this way he remains focused internally on feelings in & of themselves, or externally on feelings in & of themselves, or both internally &

externally on feelings in & of themselves. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to feelings, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to feelings, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to feelings. Or his mindfulness that ‘There are feelings’ is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by (not clinging to) anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on feelings in & of themselves.

C. Mind

“And how does a monk remain focused on the mind in & of itself? There is the case where a monk, when the mind has passion, discerns that the mind has passion. When the mind is without passion, he discerns that the mind is without passion. When the mind has aversion, he discerns that the mind has aversion. When the mind is without aversion, he discerns that the mind is without aversion. When the mind has delusion, he discerns that the mind has delusion. When the mind is without delusion, he discerns that the mind is without delusion.

“When the mind is constricted, he discerns that the mind is constricted. When the mind is scattered, he discerns that the mind is scattered. When the mind is enlarged, he discerns that the mind is enlarged. When the mind is not enlarged, he discerns that the mind is not enlarged. When the mind is surpassed, he discerns that the mind is surpassed. When the mind is unsurpassed, he discerns that the mind is unsurpassed. When the mind is concentrated, he discerns that the mind is concentrated. When the mind is not concentrated, he discerns that the mind is not concentrated. When the mind is released, he discerns that the mind is released. When the mind is not released, he discerns that the mind is not released.

“In this way he remains focused internally on the mind in & of itself, or externally on the mind in & of itself, or both internally & externally on the mind in & of itself. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the mind, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the mind, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to the mind. Or his mindfulness that ‘There is a mind’ is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by (not clinging to) anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the mind in & of itself.

D. Mental Qualities

“And how does a monk remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves?

[1] “There is the case where a monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the five hindrances. And how does a monk remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the five hindrances? There is the case where, there being sensual desire present within, a monk discerns that ‘There is sensual desire present within me.’ Or, there being no sensual desire present within, he discerns that ‘There is no sensual desire present within me.’ He discerns how there is the arising of unarisen sensual desire. And he discerns how there is the abandoning of sensual desire once it has arisen. And he discerns how there is no future arising of sensual desire that has been abandoned. (The same formula is repeated for the remaining hindrances: ill will, sloth & drowsiness, restlessness & anxiety, and uncertainty.)

“In this way he remains focused internally on mental qualities in & of themselves, or externally on mental qualities in & of themselves, or both internally & externally on mental qualities in & of themselves. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to mental qualities, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to mental qualities, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to mental qualities. Or his mindfulness that ‘There are mental qualities’ is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by (not clinging to) anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the five hindrances.

[2] “Furthermore, the monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the five clinging aggregates. And how does he remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the five clinging aggregates? There is the case where a monk [discerns]: ‘Such is form, such its origination, such its disappearance. Such is feeling...

Such is perception... Such are fabrications... Such is consciousness, such its origination, such its disappearance.’

“In this way he remains focused internally on the mental qualities in & of themselves, or focused externally... unsustained by anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the five clinging aggregates.

[3] “Furthermore, the monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the sixfold internal & external sense media. And how does he remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the sixfold internal & external sense media? There is the case where he discerns the eye, he discerns forms, he discerns the fetter that arises dependent on both. He discerns how there is the arising of an unarisen fetter. And he discerns how there is the abandoning of a fetter once it has arisen. And he discerns how there is no future arising of a fetter that has been abandoned. (The same formula is repeated for the remaining sense media: ear, nose, tongue, body, & intellect.)

“In this way he remains focused internally on the mental qualities in & of themselves, or focused externally... unsustained by anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the sixfold internal & external sense media.

[4] “Furthermore, the monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the seven factors for Awakening. And how does he remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the seven factors for Awakening? There is the case where, there being mindfulness as a factor for Awakening present within, he discerns that ‘Mindfulness as a factor for Awakening is present within me.’ Or, there being no mindfulness as a factor for Awakening present within, he discerns that ‘Mindfulness as a factor for Awakening is not present within me.’ He discerns how there is the arising of unarisen mindfulness as a factor for Awakening. And he discerns how there is the culmination of the development of mindfulness as a factor for Awakening once it has arisen. (The same formula is repeated for the remaining factors for Awakening: analysis of qualities, persistence, rapture, serenity, concentration, & equanimity.)

“In this way he remains focused internally on mental qualities in & of themselves, or externally... unsustained by (not clinging to) anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the seven factors for Awakening.

[5] “Furthermore, the monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the four noble truths. And how does he remain focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the four noble truths? There is the case where he discerns, as it has come to be, that ‘This is stress.’ He discerns, as it has come to be, that ‘This is the origination of stress.’ He discerns, as it has come to be, that ‘This is the cessation of stress.’ He discerns, as it has come to be, that ‘This is the way leading to the cessation of stress.’ [1]

“In this way he remains focused internally on mental qualities in & of themselves, or externally on mental qualities in & of themselves, or both internally & externally on mental qualities in & of themselves. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to mental qualities, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to mental qualities, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to mental qualities. Or his mindfulness that ‘There are mental qualities’ is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by (not clinging to) anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves with reference to the four noble truths...

E. Conclusion

“Now, if anyone would develop these four frames of reference in this way for seven years, one of two fruits can be expected for him: either gnosis right here & now, or — if there be any remnant of clinging/sustenance — nonreturn.

“Let alone seven years. If anyone would develop these four frames of reference in this way for six years... five... four... three... two years... one year... seven months... six months... five...

four... three... two months... one month... half a month, one of two fruits can be expected for him: either gnosis right here & now, or — if there be any remnant of clinging/sustenance — nonreturn.

“Let alone half a month. If anyone would develop these four frames of reference in this way for seven days, one of two fruits can be expected for him: either gnosis right here & now, or — if there be any remnant of clinging/sustenance — nonreturn.

“This is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow & lamentation, for the disappearance of pain & distress, for the attainment of the right method, & for the realization of Unbinding — in other words, the four frames of reference.’ Thus was it said, and in reference to this was it said.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One’s words.

“Satipatthana Sutta: Frames of Reference” (MN 10), translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Access to Insight (Legacy Edition), 30 November, 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.010.than.html>.



Donors

กนกรัตน์. แสงอุไรพร

สาวิตรี คชสีห์

Kanokrat Saenguraiporn

Amporn Kayanha

ดช.กฤษณะ เทมะสุทิน

Taweesak Teesompong

Pornpak Ninsom

Somjai Williams

กัณฐณัฏฐ์ ชูวิเชียร และครอบครัว / เรียงชาย เปรมปวีรรณ และครอบครัวค่ะ

Fonthong-Laongdao Chaicharn and family

Anantaporn-Thomas Evans and family

Vatanyoo Siriphatnaboon and family

Boalai Koenig and family

Sue Holtman and family

Ladawan-Hiran Kongkarat





Ajahn Chalee