

## ***Lesson One***

### ***Introduction***

This is our third Wisdom Meditation Handbook with 6 Lessons on the practice of Mindfulness of the 5 Aggregates. Welcome!

### ***Why go this far?***

*Aren't the basics sufficient?*

The basics are good enough if all you want is superficial calmness. Even superficial calmness is relatively good compared to those who don't experience it at all. However, you might wonder why problems always spring back when you are not in the formal meditation settings. For instance you continue to feel stressed out, overthinking, depressed, sad, negative, or consistently complaining of toxic people and situations or that you're unable to handle or solve your problems, especially when you are not in a meditation environment. If that is the case, it is very likely to be either one or all of these reasons.

Firstly, you lack the necessary wisdom of managing your mind, which is the practice of mindfulness of the 5 Hindrances. Secondly, it could be that those situations or objects are genuinely strong. That also means, the necessary mental factors such as mindfulness, detachment, mental-balance, wisdom and other wholesome mental factors are not sufficiently developed. Thirdly, there is simply a lack of those wholesome mental factors. Therefore any small problems could throw you off the bus.

If we want to be able to really solve our problems at the causal level, we must begin to clearly perceive 'things as they really are' (reality) and distinctly realise the difference between reality and mind-made (concepts) more constantly. I will explain the importance of this perception in the following

paragraphs. And precisely, this (perception) is what needs to be developed to pave the way for that a sustainable change and ability, from within.

*What will you learn and gain from Mindfulness of the 5 Aggregates?*

In this series, you will learn to perceive realities of form and mind more deeply and to distinguish between realities and concept clearly. You will gain the theoretical know-how (Pariyatti) to do that. But you will need formal meditation practice and application in daily life as much as you can (Patipati) to gain realisation of it (Pativeda).

Now I will explain the difference between reality and concept and importance of perceiving it (reality), and clearly knowing and realising the distinction between reality and concept.

*All concepts are mind-made*

Concepts are simply and merely,  
mind-made.

The perception, clarity and realisation of this may not be developed in the earlier stages of your practice. But the constant anchoring on reality-objects develops your perception of reality. These realities are simply, mind and material form. They are listed out in the Discourse of 4 Foundations of Mindfulness and detailed in the Abhidhamma (higher teaching of the Buddha). Hence, you find us stressing and reminding you in class to always follow the framework set out in the Discourse so to be able to recognise reality as reality.

When the perception of reality is developed, the mind has a comparison. When it sees reality clearly and constantly, it becomes clear and realisation of the distinction between reality and concept (mind-made) begins to unfold, as there is now, a comparison.

If you have never seen the other, you will not be able to compare and know the difference. You will just be going around and around in what you have been doing all these while and, that is concept.

*How is the ability to distinguish relevant to us?*

The ability to distinguish what is real and what is mind-made (concepts) is very important.

Because through that, we see and discern amongst many things, the permanent entity is merely a mind-made concept. When this perception becomes clear and constant, the realisation of the non-existence of any permanent & abiding entity (Anatta) begins to become clear. Anatta, as explained is part of Nature, i.e. impermanence (Anicca), suffering (Dukkha) and non-existence of any permanent & abiding entity (Anatta).

The realisation of this Nature is relevant to our life in many ways. Most of our problems, pain and suffering, stem from not realising and 'not knowing' this distinction.

*For instance*

Many suffer and act out of fears, insecurities or even loneliness because they couldn't see or distinguish between what is real and what is mind-made. Still, many feel trapped in depression, bitterness, anger, frustrations or fall

into a relapse because they too are caught up in concepts or sometimes we say thinking. They fail to see that it is mind-made. Often times, sufferers blame another or an external factor.

For some people, grief from separation lasts a long, long time, because they too are engrossed in the mind-made. In reality, a mental object is present and Sanna (perception) is doing its job of perceiving and associating it with what it has perceived before. Thus it remembers. The 'person' so and so, or object of loss that it remembers is nothing but a concept. I will explain more.

For instance, we call a person who is of certain colours, features, height and built as Jane, 'my sister' or so and so, which are all concepts. Constant associations with that object also add to the concept like my sister is funny, and etc. These concepts are built up in the mind from associations, conventions, culture, and other conditions.

In reality, it is merely the Sanna (perception) playing its role of perceiving and associating (remembering). Sanna (perception) is but a mental state. It is not a person, or any other entity. There is nothing more, nothing less apart from it being a mental state with a specific function that performs a specific task.

But when the mind grasps hold of concepts developed over the course of past associations and conditions, it pulls up attachment and pain associated with the concepts. The feelings of yesteryears connected to the concepts become a reality once again at present. Like in this example, pain associated with the loss of my sister, Jane (concept) arises. Feelings in turn cause more feelings and concepts to arise. Concept in turn causes more feeling to arise. And so it goes round and round, until another stronger object influences the mind into another direction. This is how an untrained is trapped without a way out.

The cultivated mind with wisdom brings out awareness and detachment to break the cycle.

Arguments get intensely heated up and sometimes violent because people hold on tightly to concepts, which are mind-made beliefs. Mind-mades are hollow, devoid of substance, devoid of entity, simply empty. They are literally like castles built in the air. But people fervently hold on, believing it to be true and substantially important.

And concepts, which are all mind made, differ from one person to another. If you ask 10 persons for an opinion, you might get 100 different opinions. It even differs in one person from one minute to minute as his understanding changes. It differs because it is not the reality and leads to arguments when we see it to be substantial or as 'I, me or mine'. Getting trapped in concepts leads to many arrays of problems.

So, the ability to distinguish between reality and concept is relevant and is what we need to develop, if overcoming our own problems from its root cause and persistent happiness is what we seek.

In order to distinguish between what is real and mind made, we must first recognise what reality is. We do this by constantly putting our mind to the 4 foundations of mindfulness objects to build a perception of these reality-objects.

I will exemplify the benefits of gaining this wisdom and how this wisdom could enable you to overcome your problems as I go along.

## ***Realising Nature***

Seeing things as they really are.

Once the meditator has a considerable amount of practice on the first three bases and is able to manage his mind, he should proceed develop mindfulness on the 5 Aggregates, which essentially encompass all mind and material form realities.

As the meditator directs and sustains his mindfulness on the 5 Aggregates-realities, he will begin to perceive each and all of the Aggregates clearly. Through that, he will also clearly perceive its relationships and concepts as mind-made. When his perception is cultivated as such and matures, in other words becomes constant, the meditator will realise the nature of insubstantiality, having no abiding or permanent entity (Anatta).

Along this process, the meditator would gain much ability to overcome many of his problems in life as he sees things as they really are, and seeing Nature. He would also enjoy many benefits such as experiencing more persistent happiness and mental ease arising from knowledge and detachment even before realisation.

### ***Benefits***

The perception of distinction between what is real (seeing things as they really are) and concept (mind-made) strengthen the mental balance, which arises together with mindfulness, detachment and other factors. As this perception becomes constant, mental balance becomes developed. This is the equanimity Parami (perfection) that is required for realisation of Nibbana, the highest and stable happiness.

How do you make that perception constant? You do so by constantly anchoring the mind on realities. In this process, mindfulness of the realities, which requires recognition, is essential. Directing the mind (Vitaka) to realities and sustaining the mind on it, are also necessary.

### *The importance of Mental Balance (Tatamajatrata)*

Mental balance is the mental state that plays the role of keeping the mind in balance equipoise. This is the mental state that prevents the mind from falling into depression, loneliness, sadness, anger, frustrations or any other negative mental states or from getting pulled by strong attachments or such distractions.

This balance is important not only because it makes you feel 'sane' as a human, more importantly, it prevents the mind from getting disturbed. Concepts disturb the mind, especially the ones that pull out attachment, illwill and ignorance. It shakes the mind and sometimes violently and that's when you feel highly-strung or highly agitated. When the mind is always disturbed, it will never have clarity.

If there is mental balance, there is also contentment in the mind. Hence, the mind stays still and it is able to sustain its attention on realities. As a result, concentration (Samadhi), calmness of mind (Pasadhi) and clarity of mind (Sampajanna) is developed.

With these factors maturing, the mind could perceive realities and Nature clearly. Only when it is able to perceive thus, detachment strengthens in the mind. This again, is also a very important mental state that must be developed in order to realise Nibbana.

## *The importance of Detachment (Alobha)*

Detachment is the mental state that plays the function of non-grasping or commonly known as 'letting go'.

Detachment is not the same as distracting the mind with another object as replacement. Detachment is not a mental state of not caring. It is a mental state that simply does not cling. There is no reason to cling if it is not real but merely a made-belief. It is a mental state that gives the mind the ability to abandon or let go. As a result, adversities or objects don't affect the mind as much as the uncultivated mind.

Detachment is a wholesome mental state, therefore can only pull out other beautiful mental states like compassion or loving kindness or knowledge. Therefore, it is not and cannot be an uncaring mind.

If the mental state of detachment is not built up, you will find it hard to let go. Hence, many often said letting go is easier said than done and that is because this mental state is not cultivated. It can be cultivated through 'seeing things as they really are' (Vipassana), seeing Nature. This is what Wisdom Meditation is all about.

The mind that has detachment is a mind that is free from bondage and suffering (unpleasant feelings).

And it can only arise with either wholesome pleasant feeling or wholesome equanimity feeling. Imagine if that arises 70% of the time in your mind during your waking hours. That means you experience 70% of mental



ease, inner happiness and peace on that day. So, do you see, as your practice progresses, the mind already begins to reap the results similar to the realisation of Nibbana, which is the apex? Of course, the experience would not in the same percentage of those enlightened ones but as your practice nears its apex, such percentage increases and you will know. The journey matters as it bears fruits along the way, not just the end. It is important that we continue the practice for this reason.

So let us get started with learning how to put the foundation blocks into practice. I will exemplify the other benefits as I go along.

### ***Getting Started***

As usual, we must first develop a perception of reality-object as mentioned by the Buddha. Here, there are 5 namely, form (Rupa), feeling (Vedana), perception (Sanna), consciousness (Vinanna) and mental formation (Sankhara).

A strong perception of the meditation object  
means building up a recognition of it.

This is essential as strong perception or recognition enables strong mindfulness. It is like when you could recognise a new friend, you start to become more aware of his existence when you walk into a room full of people which otherwise he is just one of the many unknown faces that doesn't catch your attention.

Body is part of material form. But material form includes other material derivative as well, such as colour, sound and etc. Whereas, feeling, perception, consciousness and mental formation are all part of the mind. Feeling and perception are the specific mental states that the Buddha pointed

out to be examined closely. Consciousness and mental formation are the mind itself. All these must be recognised and examined closely so to understand why and how it arises and passes away.

Therefore in mindfulness of the 5  
Aggregates, each Aggregate on its own and  
its interaction with the other Aggregates (5  
Aggregates in combination) must be clearly  
perceived in order for realisation to occur.

I will explain each of these Aggregate more in the following lessons to help you develop recognition. In practice, how do we cultivate mindfulness of the 5 Aggregates?

In the beginning of the sitting, we typically start with rising and falling of the abdomen as the preliminary starting point so we do not have to go searching for an object, and also to build up concentration. This is mindfulness of the material form, internally.

After some time, when mindfulness and concentration is built up, the other Aggregates (mind or mental states) become clearer. At this time, the meditator could switch over to one of the other Aggregates. The meditator should try to recognise the other Aggregate the way he does with the material form, internally.

In other words, the meditator switches from one Aggregate to another like a beginner switches from body base to feeling or other bases, back and forth, depending on which is more dominant after concentration is built up. I will explain how each Aggregate is to be observed and the direction of the practice in their corresponding lessons.