

# **The Practice of Mindfulness**

## **A Path to Skillful Living**

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Muskoka Insight Meditation Center

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## WHY MEDITATE ?

The Universe or the world we live in operates according to its own natural rules and laws. We are mostly not aware or ignorant of them. Most of our miseries and sufferings arise because of such ignorance or not being aware of them.

This was pointed out and explained by the Buddha in his teachings, since about more than some 2500 years ago.

The Buddha had discovered all of these Universal truths or Universal laws by himself since that time. These laws pertain to the nature of the universe we live in. The nature of life and death, and the nature of things around us.

We need to awaken ourselves and stay awake to these laws of nature, if we are to be able to live a relatively peaceful life with less sufferings.

The Buddha has also shown us the way to do this. This way being none other than the practice of Vipassana or Insight meditation. The practice of Vipassana or Insight meditation helps one to be awake to the nature of life and death and the nature of things around us, all of which operate according to its own natural rules and laws.

We undertake the practice or ‘meditate’ today as such, to train our minds to enable us to be “awake” and stay awake to the nature of life and death, the nature of things around us. To be able to see and be aware of the reality as it is and adjust and live our lives accordingly.

The practice of Vipassana or Insight meditation, helps train the mind to be aware of everything that arises within and around us from moment to moment - awareness of everything we see, hear, feel and think.

The Buddha explained further that, we do not have to look any where else to be able to discern these natural laws, but to look just within our body. That, all our miseries and happiness in life starts and end within this fathom long body of ours.

The awareness developed with the practice of Vipassna meditation, would in turn help us to deal with the various situations in our everyday life also, such as: at work, during leisure time, with our relationships with our family and those round us, etc. in our everyday dealings with life. Thus, to be awake or really be present to these nature of life as such is the central art of the practice of Vipassana.

The first thing we would discover, as we meditate and observe, is that: “everything one sees is in a state of change”. They are “the way things are” - the nature of things or “the natural laws”. Thus using awareness as a technique, it is possible for us to perceive the true nature of phenomena of every kind.

These nature of things or “the natural laws” were explained extensively by the Buddha too, in his teachings termed the Dhamma.

Ordinarily, everything we experience seems solid, including our personality, the world around us, our emotions and thoughts in our mind. Actually, nothing in our lives lasts or stays the same for very long. This is the law of nature or Universal law.

All things in nature, even the universe itself, have their spans of existence - birth and death, beginning and ending. All that we perceive and can conceive of is change. They are all impermanent. Life is always in a flux. Everything we think of as permanent is actually only temporary and constantly

changing. This includes our ideas, opinions, relationships, jobs, possessions, one's physical body, everything.

Thus, the ultimate aim of meditation is to sharpen the mind, so as to be able to look at things "the way they are" and live our life accordingly in a skillful way. It does not have to be associated with any particular faith or belief. Every one of us has a mind and every one of us can work on it and thereby live life in a skillful way. In fact, the Buddha had openly invited one and all to "come and see" them for oneself!

The more closely you observe, as we do in the practice of Vipassana meditation, the more you realize that everything is in a state of change or **impermanent**.

Ordinarily, everything we experience seems solid: our personality, the world around us, our emotions and thoughts in our mind. As we observe intently, we would find that: nothing in our lives lasts or stays the same for very long. Every thing is changing all the time!

The sequential corollary that follows from it is that: if we want things that are always changing, to stay the same and get attached to them, we get disappointed, we **suffer**. Getting attached to something the way it is, does not stop it from changing. To try to hold-on to "how it was" will only create suffering and disappointment, because life is like a river and everything changes. It is the "way things are", as basic as gravity. It is the law of nature - nobody's creation.

There is also a way to handle all this. The way out of all this, is to develop the "ability to flow with these changes", to see everything as a process of change. To relax with uncertainty. The practice of Vipassana teaches and helps us how to relax and "let go". How to stay centered in the midst of change and how to live in a wiser way.

“Letting go”, however, does not mean not caring about things. It means caring for them in a flexible and wise way.

The third aspect of the Buddha’s teachings of the law of nature is that of “**being un-controllable**” or uncontrollability. We cannot control anything too. We cannot wish for anything to come or anything to go away any time. They all come and go according to their own nature and according to their own time. They also work according to their own natural law.

When we realize, however, that everything passes away, not only the good but the painful things as well, we can also find composure in their midst.

The objective in practicing Vipassana meditation is thus to awaken oneself to “the laws of life”. To begin to see how our body and mind operate so that we can come to a wiser relationship with them.

The essence and truth of all this is that: things change whether we want them or not. They are un-controllable too.

Becoming attached to things as they are or pushing away things that we do not like, does not stop them from changing. It only leads to further suffering.

The refined and sharpened mind help one to see the reality and live with the vagaries of life in a spacious state of emotional balance, clarity and wisdom.

The systematic training of the mind in this way, helps us to see the world as it really is: and how we can relate to all with compassion, kindness and wisdom.

## THE ESSENCE OF THE PRACTICE.

The essence of the practice of Vipassana meditation thus consists of opening the mind to everything. Not choosing any particular object to concentrate on or absorb into. Just watching and observing in order to understand the way things are.

As we watch and observe about the way things are, we would find all sensory experience to be Impermanent. That is, everything one sees, hears, smells, taste, touch; all mental conditions - one's feelings, memories, and thoughts are all changing conditions of the mind, which **arise and pass away** or **Impermanent**.

This also includes the sense organs themselves - eye, ear nose tongue and other parts of the body. The objects of their senses and the consciousness that arises with their contact. Mental conditions of liking and disliking what we see, smell, taste, touch or feel, ideas words and concepts we create around the sensory experiences.

In other words, the essential aspect in Vipassana practice, is to be able to realize directly, personally and vividly this characteristic of impermanence as we practice.

### **Knowledge through Insight.**

Besides, this nature of impermanence is not just a philosophical attitude or belief. It is capable of and is to be “**insightfully**” known by “opening the mind to watch , observe and be aware of” the way things are through direct and personal experience.

With Insight practice, we are not trying to analyze ourselves by assuming that things should be a certain way and trying to

figure out why they are not, when they are not or the way we think it should be or trying to change anything to fit our desires.

In this practice, one just patiently observe that **whatever arises, passes away, whether it is mental or physical.**

This capacity for awareness that we have learnt in the practice helps one in every aspect of one's daily life, whether in one's profession or family life, or in recreational activities - like just strolling along a beach, etc. or listening to life around you.

Also, in a subtle but profound way, its effects can permeate one's outlook and approach to the things one do as well as to one's relations with people around one, especially at one's work place, community etc.

One can also develop a more accurate understanding of reality and get less effected by the reversals that inevitably occur in one's life and less carried away by superficial successes.

### **The arising of the mental phenomena.**

While the emphasis so far, has been more on the aspect of the "passing away" of phenomena, it is equally important and even crucial to be able to observe and be aware of the "**arising**" of certain phenomena, such as that of mental phenomena and specially that of negative emotions and mental attitudes. It is our emotions and mental attitudes that mostly affect so much of our everyday relationships and dealings in life.

Especially that of negative emotions and attitudes, such as annoyance and anger that has a tendency to lead to certain

negative actions -verbal or physical actions in life.

These negative emotions have a tendency to arise more frequently in our relationships and dealings in one's every day life. Actions that would certainly result in undesirable consequences. (Please see the section on "Emotions and mind states for more details).

The life-time of a "Consciousness" or "mind" is said to be extremely short. It is said to arise and dissolve in a person at a tremendous rate of more than a thousand billion times in the wink of an eye. The physical body which is comprised of matter and energy, is said to arise and dissolve at a rate of more than 58 billion times per second. Both the mind and matter are very short-lived. Together, they arise and dissolve at a rate of a trillion times per second.

As such, the arising and passing away of an emotion or mind-state in terms of the time span is invariably short. Not even for a wink of an eye. As such, one way to deal especially with negative emotions that have a tendency for disastrous consequences is to be able to remove oneself physically from the scene.

For example, where one is in a meeting or conference or even in daily casual conversations, where the exchange of conversation becomes heated. The subsequent pattern of the arising of the emotions would be as follows:

- first, the arising of the emotion of annoyance,
- which, if not deterred at this stage, could escalate to anger.
- and finally, if one is not aware, would inevitably aggravate to undesirable "showdowns".

If one were to have mindfulness at each stage ,or even before the final stage of anger, one could deter or prevent the subsequent disastrous actions that could follow.

The best way to avoid such a situation is to get away or remove oneself physically from the situation as soon as one realize the arising of such emotion or mind-state .Using even such small excuses like needing a drink of water or to go to the washroom. etc.

As stated above, the life-span of a mind-state or emotion does not last long. It would have been gone as soon after as one had removed oneself from the situation and save any undesirable consequences. (See the section on Emotions and mind-states for more details).

But then, one has to train oneself to be able to observe their “arising” in the first instant. Thus it is equally important to be able to observe the “**Arising**” too, to be able to prevent possible undesirable consequences.

Thus the essence of the practice of Vipassana meditation is in a way, “a training” to be able to face the Vicissitudes of life in a skillful way” and prevent undesirable disasters !

## **THE TECHNIQUE**

## THE FOUNDATION.

Even scaffolding needs a foundation upon which to rest. One cannot erect it on shifting sands, dirt or clay that could easily turn into mud.

More so regarding the practice of mindfulness or Vipassana or Insight practice. The foundation for the practice of mindfulness lies in “ethics and morality” and above all the motivation of “non-harming”.

### **The Moral / Ethical Aspect.**

When we transgress in some way such as: lying, stealing, killing, cause harm to others or pollute our minds by abusing substances such as alcohol and drugs etc. , the consequences are invariably destructive, causing untold harm to others and to ourselves, whether we are aware or not.

Among the consequences of such actions is the certainty that they cloud the mind - the very instrument one uses for looking. They take their toll on the body too, tending to keep it tense, aggressive, defensive, full of the effects of anger, agitation and confusion.

Thus, it is also important to examine how we are conducting our life, what our actual behavior is and to be aware of the downstream effects of our thoughts, words and deeds in the world and in our own hearts. If we are continually creating agitation in our own lives and causing harm to others and ourselves, it is that agitation and harm that we would encounter in our own practice, because that is what we are feeding.

The Buddha has thus prescribed some basic principles or guidelines that lead one away from doing harm to oneself

and others. The underlying principle of these is the idea of non-harming. In fact, the underlying principle of all Buddhist practice, is the idea of non-harming. There are five of them known as “The Five Precepts or Training”. They are :

1. To refrain from harming, killing or physical violence.

That is, to focus on being mindful to maintain a reverence for all life.

2.To refrain from stealing or taking that which is not offered.

Instead, to practice generosity.

3.To refrain from sexual misconduct (that is, using one’s sexual energy in harmful ways).

Instead, to practice compassion and sexual responsibility.

4.To refrain from lying, harsh speech, idle speech and slander.

To focus on deep listening and right speech.

5.To refrain from taking intoxicants that cloud the mind and cause heedlessness.

To practice mindful consuming, by not using alcohol, drugs or any other products that also bring toxins into our own body and consciousness.

## **THE FUNDAMENTALS OF THE PRACTICE.**

### **The Tool.**

The tool used for the purpose of investigating and understanding one-self is known as mindfulness.

### **Mindfulness.**

Mindfulness provides us with a powerful vehicle for the purpose of investigating and understanding one-self. Mindfulness helps us to have full “awareness” of everything that arises within and around us from moment to moment. It helps us to have a correct “understanding” of the nature of our perceptions.

Mindfulness thus trains us to be more conscious and awake to what’s going on in our world and helps us to respond with greater clarity to whatever situation we find ourselves in. It helps us to be more present in our lives.

However, mindfulness does not develop by itself. It has to be cultivated and developed through a systematic practice .

The cultivation and development of “Mindfulness” forms the core of all practice of Vipassana or Insight practice.

The practice of Vipassana or Insight meditation is not dependent on any belief system or ideology. As the Buddha had proclaimed : its benefits are accessible for anyone to test for himself or herself. The overriding concern in all this, is the relief from suffering, and the dispelling of illusions.

### **The Technique.**

There are various types of techniques or practice. A good meditation practice is one that develops awareness or mindfulness of our body and our senses, of our mind and

heart. Each Master usually passes on his/her own self-proven method of success in his/her practice. We all have different temperaments; there is no one size fits all. A technique that is suitable for one may not suit another. It does not really matter which kind one chooses. It is more important that one choose a technique that one feels most comfortable with and “stays” with it, so as to be able to create a foundation of basic understanding and become well-grounded in the particular method. Trying to mix different practices without first having some depth of experience and understanding in one practice, will only result in a potpourri of practices and not really help develop an effective practice.

As one faces the inevitable difficulties and challenges in the practice, there arise sometimes, a temptation to look for some easier way, some other teacher or method. Difficulties are part of the path in the practice. as in all ventures. We are inclined to seek ease and comfort, but sometimes one needs to extend beyond the boundaries of comfort zones. Like training in any discipline, as one comes to extend one’s limits, one will come to appreciate the strength that comes from having the possibility of extending limits and choosing the difficult.

### **Observing the breath.**

In Vipassana / Insight meditation, we begin our practice by observing the breath, or rather the sensations caused by the breath or the act of breathing, in order to concentrate from moment-to- moment. The breath is used as an anchor or starting point, as it provides us with a neutral object that is always there and easily discernable. There are several places where meditators feel the sensation of the breath and they vary from person to person. Some feel it at the nostrils or upper lip, others in the rising and falling of the chest and still others in the rising and falling of the abdomen. Observing the breath at any of these places is a valid practice.

## **The Mahasi Technique.**

The basic technique described here is based on the “Mahasi technique”, developed and taught by the said world-renowned Sayadaw of Myanmar since 1938, in accordance with the Four Foundations of Mindfulness as taught by the Buddha.

There are two distinct aspects to this Mahasi Technique.

One is the observing of the breath at the abdomen. Our benefactor, the late Most Ven Mahasi Sayadaw, favored observing the sensations of the breath at the abdomen, as he feels that awareness of the breath in the abdomen keeps one’s mind better focused on the object in a very obvious way for the better part of the practice. However, this technique does not preclude observing the breath at the nostrils.

Another distinctive component is the “noting or labeling”. Noting is not used as an end in itself. The objective in noting is to point one’s attention to the object. It is likened to a bee flying towards a flower. The label is to help encapsulate the whole experience rather than the thought around the word itself - the feeling of a sensation, the feeling of an emotion, the wandering mind, fantasizing, planning etc. The thinking and daydreaming for which we have been usually conditioned, keep our attention off the presenting object and distract the mind.

The Buddha likened this thinking mind to a captive monkey that jumps from branch to branch, that need to be reined in. Shrinking thought down to a single word is the preliminary effort. At this stage, the meditator has to keep pulling attention out of the wandering mind and into observing. Noting at this instance is an acknowledgment or recognition of what the body, heart and mind are doing. As one

continues to note in this way with increasing attention on the object and really experiencing these sensations as they arise and pass away, the mind wandering stops and one's attention stays on the object. In other words, it is a technique to rein in and master our mind.

Labeling is used only as a tool. Later on, as one gains momentum in one's concentration as one make progress in one's practice, one may abandon the labeling partially, (when the mind wanders less) or altogether if one feels more comfortable without it.

Although we begin the practice with the focus of our attention on our breathing, we are to pay our attention and observation in the same way to the multitudes of other phenomena that may arise during the course of the practice.

## **THE PRACTICE IN DETAILS**

## OBSERVING THE BREATH

### **Observing the breath at the abdomen.**

Although the practice may be done in any of the four postures of sitting, standing, walking or lying down, we usually start the practice in the sitting posture, as a still and settled physical state helps to better settle the mind.

The eyes are usually kept closed in a relaxed way. This is not to have any distractions to our central object and focus your mind on the abdomen.

When you breathe in, the air goes in and cause your abdomen to expand /rise (like in a balloon). When you breathe out, the air goes out and cause your abdominal muscles to contract / fall (again like in a balloon). For the purpose of our practice, ignore the breath now and just try to focus the mind on the area of the abdomen as it “expands or rises” and “contracts/falls”.

Focus your mind meticulously on the abdomen as it starts to rise. Make a mental note as “rising” for this upward movement. The rising takes place gradually in small increments (like the air being pumped into a balloon). The mind should be completely focused on it, as it starts to rise and following right through to its end, when the rising finally stops or comes to an end.

Similarly, focus your mind meticulously on the abdomen as it starts to fall. The falling also takes place gradually in small increments (like the releasing of air in a balloon). The mind should be completely focused on it as it starts to fall gradually and finally ends, as the falling stops or comes to an end. Make a mental note as “falling” for this downward movement.

That is, you are to try and concentrate on the movements of the rising and falling of the abdomen it in such a way that:

- as you observe the rising movement of the abdomen, you are aware of the rising from its very beginning right through to the ending of the rising.

- Similarly, as you observe the falling movement of the abdomen you are aware of the falling movement from its very beginning right through to the ending of the falling.

In other words, the observing and noting should be done with due diligence and not in a rote manner, so that you will really be able to see and feel in your mind or experience the “beginning or the arising” and “ending or passing away” of each phenomena with each of their beginning and ending. This is to help us to observe the characteristic of transience -the “arising and passing away” of the arisen phenomena, in a clear and lucid manner.

As the abdomen rises, there would also arise such feelings as tension, pushing etc in the inside of the abdomen. You are to keep aware of these sensations too.

As the abdomen falls, there would arise such feelings as the movements, vibrations and the releasing of tensions etc in the inside of the abdomen. You are to keep aware of these sensations too.

In fact as you become more adept at observing the physical rising and falling of the abdomen, the concentration should be more on these feelings inside of the abdomen. How these sensations arise and ends with the rising and falling of the abdomen.

As such, once you have gained momentum with the

observing of the physical rising and falling of the abdomen, you should try not to dwell your mind so much on the physical form of the abdomen. Concentrate your mind as much as possible on the sensations or pressures etc inside of the abdomen caused by the heaving movement of the physical abdomen.

One is to concern oneself on the actual manner of the movements, upward and downward of the abdomen and not with the form of the abdomen.

These sensations of stretching, contracting, fullness, hollowness, pressure etc. that we feel from the rising and falling of the abdomen with each breath, are the sensations of the body or bodily sensations.

### **Rising/ falling of the abdomen as the Main / Home Object**

For the purpose of our practice, we will call this act of “rising-falling” of the abdomen, our “home” object.

### **Observing the breath at the nostrils or upper lip.**

The goal is to experience the breath without directing or changing it.

Take a few deep breaths first and relax. This is to calm down your mind and make it ready to take further steps. Now, allow the breath to become natural, not trying to force or control it in anyway. Our goal here is to experience the breath without directing or changing it, but simply becoming aware of how the breath breathes itself in its own rhythm.

Notice the place where you feel the breath most distinctly. The “in and out” movement of the air from the breath at the

tip of the nostrils or upper lip. Do not try to follow the breath as it goes all the way down to your chest / abdomen or all the way out with the out-breath. Just keep your focus at the nostrils or upper lip, whichever is more distinct for you - like a doorman keep watching the door.

Try and observe the common sensations with the “in and out” breath such as coolness, warmth, tingling, vibration, pulsing, itching etc. as the air moves in and out with the breath. Try and concentrate your mind in that place to feel the breath and make mental notes as “in”, “out” to go with the actual feeling of the sensations of the breath.

Do not make the breath special. Take one breath at a time. Mindfulness is not a breathing exercise. It is an exercise in the training of your awareness, of being in the present moment. Try and feel the sensations from each in-breath and out-breath in this way.

As you gain momentum with observing your breath, try and observe how each breath passes away as soon as it has touched the upper lip or nose. How the in-breath passes away as soon as it has touched the upper lip or nose. How the out-breath passes away as soon as it has touched the upper lip or nose. Thus you will learn how the in-breath and out-breath each passes away or the fact of being Impermanent.

Try and also feel how the sensations, such as warmth, coolness etc also pass away with the passing away (impermanence) of each in-breath and out-breath.

That is, to try to bring your awareness to the very beginning of the in-breath. Feel the sense of touch as it begins and how this sense of touch ends (pass away), as the in-breath leaves the nostrils or upper lips and pass away. This signifies the passing away or end of “in-breath” at the nostrils / upper lip.

Try and observe the same with the sensations mentioned above for the “out-breath”.

Try to bring your awareness to the very beginning of the out-breath at the nostrils / upper lip and also see if you can feel the same for the out-breath too.(passing away or Impermanent.)

That is, to try and observe the same with the sensations of the out-breath too.

Sometimes you will notice that the breath gets very soft. Do not speed it up or make it stronger to feel it more easily. Our practice is to “refine” our attention and not to change the nature of the breath, so that you can feel more deeply what is naturally in your body. So, if you feel your breath as soft, try to let your attention match the softness of your breath and to notice its beginning and its end. Remember, it is the purpose of the practice to be able to observe the characteristic of transience: the arising and passing away, in whatever object we observe in a clear and lucid manner.

This will be your home-object, same as in the rising/falling of the abdomen.

## MOVEMENTS OF THE MIND

### **Mind wandering.**

One of the first things you will notice in the practice is how often the mind wanders off. You may tell your mind and try to make it stay on the home object of “rising and falling”(or the in-breath/out-breath), but does it listen to you and stay ? Hardly ever. Instead you will catch it planning what you are going to do after you are through with the practice, what you need to do for the day or struggling with memories, problems etc. You’ll find that each time you try to concentrate on the “rising/ falling” (or the in-breath/out-breath), the mind goes off and does something else after three or four attempts - wandering here, there, places you have been or like to be, thinking, planning etc. over and over again and often with great frequency and turmoil.

In our practice, the time when the mind wanders, is the time for you to let go of your awareness of “your home object” - the rising/falling of the abdomen or the in-out breath and focus on the “wandering mind” as soon as you observe it.

In fact one of the first things you will notice in this practice is how the mind often wanders off. This observation is actually the first “Insight” in the practice of Vipassanā meditation. It is sometimes called “seeing the waterfall” . The cascading mind, as if the stream of our thoughts and emotions like flowing over a high cliff, producing a great waterfall. As you try to concentrate on the “rising / falling”, what you begin to see is the mind’s constant chatter - inner movement or dialogue.

When we were not mindful, we were not even aware that we were having such thoughts. Even while in our practice, if we are not mindful enough we will not be aware of them. We

can be lost in them for quite a long time, for countless number of times, while our body is in just one stationary position of the practice. We notice them only now, because we are aware of them. In fact, it means our mind is now actually becoming aware or is now “in sync” with the practice of “being aware” of the present moment. We are now aware of the fact of the mind’s constant inner movement and dialogue.

Our task on this is simple. Just let go of your attention on the home-object . Observe and acknowledge that it is taking place and note them as “wandering, wandering”, etc., as the mind starts to wander. Do not make any judgement, evaluation or interpretation on the wandering mind or yourself. Do not pay any attention to or have any reaction to the contents of your wandering mind or identify with it. Just keep paying what is called “bare attention”. Just observe and simply note what is on our mind at the moment. What happens when you note it. Does it stop? Continue? Continue for long? Usually, when we just acknowledge and note them (as wandering, wandering ...) the wandering mind dissolves or pass away after a few noting. One can observe and see the transient nature here too- The thoughts arising and passing away. Then you can go back to your home object.

Our goal in Vipassanā practice, is to observe and see the “process” of what’s going on in the present moment and not to its “content/s” or make judgement or analyze on the wandering mind or on yourself. It is also important to let it stop/pass away by itself. One’s job is to just try to observe and see how it stops / passes away, as you keep observing and noting them.

It is also important, not to get lost, carried away or identify yourself with the wandering mind. The objective is to stay with the reality of the present moment. That is, the

wandering of the mind per se at that moment, not to the fantasies/ hopes/expectations/ worries or stories it try to tell. To just simply stay rooted in the awareness of the present moment.

### **Handling thoughts.**

There might arise sometimes some thoughts which you feel need attention. Thoughts worthy of further attention and exploration. Nevertheless, this is definitely not the time to “indulge” in them. There will be a lot of time when you are not meditating that you can explore them. Moreover, giving in to these temptations would just eventually become a habit, as it’s easy and they would tend to fill your mind often.

It is more useful to let the mind stay empty or just let go of everything including these powerful thoughts.

The way to deal with thoughts is not to block them or feed them. But to just let them arise and dissolve by themselves. Thus when a thought arise, just let it arise and pass away by itself, without either blocking ,prolonging or feeding them. In this way, they do not take over our minds.

The best thing is to just simply observe, acknowledge and note them as “wandering, wandering”, etc., and not indulge in any of the stories the mind tries to tell and go back to your home object after it has dissolved /passed away.

Our objective here is to be able to observe and see that all thoughts follow a natural cycle of “arising, dwelling and passing away”, a characteristic of Impermanence (change/ uncertainty). One will not be able to see the workings of this natural cycle, if one were to cut short or curtail the thought and bring the mind back to the home object also. This is one of the important and crucial aspect of the practice. From this,

we can also learn a lesson on the characteristic of transiency or Impermanence - the wandering mind arising and passing away!

Ordinarily, everything we experience seems solid, including our personality, the world around us, our emotions and the thoughts in our mind. We need to be able to experience this fact personally that “nothing in our lives lasts or stays the same for very long”. We thus need to be able to observe and see for ourselves this fact of transiency or Impermanence through the accumulation of these individual experiences through our Vipassanā practice.

It is also important not to get frustrated with the wandering mind or blame yourself for it. Although the mind does tend to quiet down relatively as we practice, it is the nature of the mind not to rest or be confined to one particular place / object but to go jumping from one thought / place to another. The mind knows no boundaries. It has been doing it for our entire life and it is part of what all minds do. There is nothing personal to it. It has nothing to do with one’s personality, traits or inhibitions etc. It does not matter how many times it wanders in one sitting. You don’t have to feel disturbed by the thinking mind. We are not practicing to prevent thinking, but rather to recognize and acknowledge thinking whenever it arises and return to the home object after it has spent itself and pass away. In our practice, our job is to focus our mind on whatever is taking place at the “present moment”.

But if you still get lost, try and observe and note as soon as you realize that you are lost, as “lost, lost....” and go back to your home object.

One should also be able to observe, whether the mind continues to wander after such noting, stop or pass away or the mind revert back to the home object.

## **SENSATIONS and FEELINGS**

### **Bodily Sensations.**

As one continues practicing in this way, there would arise after some time, some unpleasant sensations in one's body. Some may be because one has been unaccustomed to sitting still. You may feel some tension in your shoulders or jaw or back or belly etc. This may be because as you sit still, the areas of tension that you carry and accumulate in your life are now revealed to you. There may be other sensations such as itchiness, aches, numbness, tingling etc.

You are to receive what arises for you with the same quality of awareness that you have learned with the breath. As such you are to let go of what you have been observing and noting previously and observe and note on them as “tingling, tingling, or tension, tension” etc. If you experience itching, instead of scratching the itch immediately, you can simply note “itching, itching...”. Maybe for the first time in your life, you can acknowledge the sensation of the itch and what it is like and give it space to tingle and itch for some time without scratching it. Then you will notice how it eventually passes away. The same holds for every other bodily sensation - whether it is warmth, tension or pain etc.

It is being said that: “Pain is inevitable, but suffering is optional”. This statement portrays about, what one can learn about pain through mindfulness. One cannot avoid pain. Even if one is physically healthy now, at some point in one's life, one may get sick, get hurt, age. Physical changes are bound to occur. Pain is inevitable. It will come and there is nothing one can do to prevent it. Yet whether or not one suffers is another matter.

We can define “pain” as the pure physical sensation of the body responding to some negative stimuli, and “suffering” as our response to pain. From a mindfulness perspective, it is

important to be able to differentiate between pain and suffering. Because, however unavoidable pain is, we certainly have some leeway, when it comes to suffering.

The biggest difficulty in working with pain is not the pain itself; it is how we react to it. With mindfulness, you can learn to see how your mind reacts to suffering or functions, and how you can avoid being so caught up in them. Physical pain is unavoidable, but the practice can ease the mental suffering that accompanies it.

As one sits with the pain and get really absorbed with watching the nature of the pain, one would come to experience the differing faces of the pain such as: how the sensations keep changing: - stinging, throbbing, burning aching; the increasing and decreasing in the degree of pain etc.; the flowing in rapid succession in the region of the pain, blending into each other like a play of multicolored lights projected willy-nilly on a screen. If one's concentration is strong, one would feel as if one is detached from the sensations one is experiencing, as if it is not "your" pain so much as "just" pain. One may sometimes feel a sense of being calm "within" the pain or "behind" the pain.

Many, including some at our residential retreats, have reported experiencing in the same manner, even with their chronic pain. It is like as if watching a movie on a screen outside of their body right in front of them. Like it's not their personal pain, but just pain and feeling detached from the sensations. Finding it quite fascinating to just watch the pain.

This fact of how the mental and emotional factors can have a significant effect on one's physical health and one's capacity to recover from illness or injury has also been recognized and accepted by the medical field since some time ago.

As such, this approach has been used in hospitals since about 1979, to treat patients with chronic and sometimes excruciating pain. A special section known as the “Stress Reduction Clinic or Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)”, an integrative medicine for mind/body, has been added in hospitals as part of a complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). Patients in this program have reported how although their pain hasn’t changed much, they seemed more bearable after being in the program. The sessions for each clinic lasts for eight weeks, enough to train and provide one with the necessary basics. This had led to some “spill-overs” from these programs to our retreats, by those who appreciated and wished to continue with their practice.

One can try to experiment also by trying to sit with whatever pain that arises during one’s practice. and feel what those pains are like. You would be surprised that you can learn to sit with something that may be quite intense.

In this way, if one can try to bring mindfulness to exactly what one is feeling, one would probably find that how you relate to the sensations you experience, makes a big difference in the degree of pain you actually feel and how you suffer. It also effects one’s emotions and behavior. One would thus come to discover that one has a range of options for dealing with physical pain, even very intense pain, aside from just being overwhelmed by it.

Besides, one cannot expect to sit without any pain at all. During some sittings you may have pleasure and bliss, and in others you may have pain. In the practice, as in life, you will get a measure of both pleasure and pain. It is not to minimize or get rid of, or ignore or run away from the pain, because then you will have to spend some of your life running away from all the unpleasant experiences that comes into one’s life. It is more useful to learn to relate to all of it - the pleasure and pain - with compassion and understanding. You can learn to feel pain and realize that it is not

going to kill you. Perhaps, you have never let yourself feel pain fully before.

When you pay attention to the sensations in your body, there will invariably occur one of three things : they will either go away, stay the same or get worse. Your job is not to control them - something you cannot do anyway: like the breathing happening on its own, your heart beating on its own, your liver functioning on its own etc. Your job is to be just be with them and let them come and go in your awareness like every other phenomena in your practice.

The particular technique to handle all this is to:

1. direct one's mind on the particular area of the pain.
2. then watch and observe how the nature of these painful feelings or sensations change such as:
  - first increasing steadily; - then reaching a peak and
  - finally decreasing or - change into another type of pain or
  - move somewhere else , or stop or pass away altogether, etc.

These are the “nature” of the pain that one can witness and experience. That the pain is not necessarily a continuous stretch per se but how it keeps changing.

That is, one would thus come to realize that: these feelings of unpleasant physical sensations such as pain etc. do not remain the same but keep changing - one type of sensation changing to another etc.,and all passing away: All unpleasant sensations finally passing away. Some people experience less and some more frequently of these sensations. The most important thing is not the sensations themselves. But how we react and handle them. Having to deal with them in the practice, can strengthen and help one to experience the various changes in one's life.

## **EMOTIONS and MIND STATES.**

According to the Buddhist philosophy, the mind is not an entity but rather a dynamic stream of experiences, a succession of moments of consciousness. These experiences are often marked by confusion and suffering.

As such, the play of moods or states of mind and feelings also determine one's experience and outcomes.

There might arise some unpleasant or pleasant feelings in one's mind: feelings of pleasantness, restlessness, depression, boredom; or resentment, anger, etc. Usually these mind-states can color the whole of our world. If you wake up and you are in a rotten mood—angry, depressed etc. - there is bound to be something you would not like about in many situations, things or people. Whereas, when one is in good mood, anything that matters would always be accepted as being “alright”. It is thus obvious that the sensibility, feelings and flavors of one's mind and heart have a powerful effect on what one's life is like, almost more than the circumstances themselves.

Our practice is not try to suppress these emotions, but to observe them in the same way we would observe other arisen objects and allow them to dissolve by itself. It is also important not to identify with them or be carried away by them, but to just observe what happens to them as one observes and notes them. Especially with negative emotions like anger or hatred, as they can cause a lot of harm to oneself and to others, if acted upon.

We would normally let whatever emotions that arise dissolve away without taking any actions, while in the practice. But in real life situations, if one is not mindful, one might be tempted to identify with them or be carried away and even tempted to react to them.

For example, let's say an emotion like "anger" arise in a real life situation. If you are not mindful, you might not even be aware of the arising of such an emotion. When we are angry, we often find ourselves slipping out of control. If we are not mindful, we would be tempted to give in to our emotions and actions that we might later regret. You would more or less get carried away by it and react in such a way, it would probably result in undesirable consequences. Especially with such emotions as anger. Most of us would agree that anger is not a good thing. Still, when we're angry, we often find ourselves slipping out of control: we tremble, shout or grimace, we threaten others, we give in to thoughts and actions that we later regret.

However, with the experience we have acquired through training from our practice, one would now probably be able to be aware of the arising of such negative mind states and have the mindfulness to restrain yourself when you sense you are about to say or do something you'll regret later. That is, one would now be able to just observe the arising of the emotion and let it wear itself out or fade away, knowing fully well that they are bound to pass away before long, and avoid any undesirable consequences.

In this way, our practice could help us deal specially with moments of outbursts of our emotions such as anger etc. We would be endowed with the strength and stability of awareness to respond sensitively to difficult situations rather than reacting impulsively and thereby avoid the source of constant distress.

In fact, one of the regulars at the retreats at the Center, reported at one time about how he was able to avert the calamity of losing his job after a heated argument with his boss at one time: by surprisingly becoming aware of the arising of his anger and avoiding the possible disastrous consequences, by remembering to remove himself physically from the scene by simply walking away from the scene, to the surprise of everyone, without any

further interaction that would have resulted in the loss of his job. It shows how important it is to be able to develop one's awareness in one's life; especially with the arising of destructive emotions like anger, frustration or hatred.

In contrast, in another situation. I was at one time teaching the inmates at a nearby medium security correctional institution. I titled the name of my course "mind training", not to shy away people with words like "meditation" and people from other faiths.

A prisoner walked by and seeing the course in session enquired what course it is. I replied that this is a course in "mind training". I explained to him that : "you know, most of the time, people are not aware of what's going on in their mind and sometimes the resulting actions that follows would land some in undesirable consequences. For example you are in such a mind-state as anger. Not aware of your mind-state you go and do something awful. It might even land you in institutions like this".

He was quick to jump in and said: that's true, that's right. My wife and I were having an argument. I got real angry and in my anger, I hit her without realizing anything. The result is my being in this institution now. This course is really for me too. He became a regular at all my sessions after that! !

Such negative emotions and feelings are bound to arise again and again in life and are bound to come up anytime. Our practice is to help us become more mindful and more aware of anything that arises in life, whatever they may be. Especially negative emotions like anger and hatred, never seem to cease to arise completely, unless one has become a Saint (Arahant). There exists only so much space between the triggering of such negative emotions and the ability to look mindfully before reacting.

The difference in the way of reacting between those who are

trained with the practice and those who do not is that: those who are trained with the practice are usually able to come to observe and realize the arising of such negative emotions or mind-states at the time of arising and are able to practice some restraint regarding their reactions to them. The emotions still do arise, but they are able to practice restraints to their reactions.

Thus, to be mindful and be aware, is the most important aspect of one's life. For, despite knowing that everything is impermanent, we still keep holding onto objects that we think will bring us security. When these things slip out of our grasp, emotions of fear and anger arise.

## SOUNDS

Also, you may hear all sorts of sounds. Sounds from outside, like: sounds of birds, people, cars, etc.. Sounds from inside, like from the furnace, refrigerator or other equipments or movements such as from the shower, kitchen etc. Here also, we are to just observe and note it as “hearing, hearing” etc. Don’t try to shut them out or identify them with elaborations or diversions, such as, these are the sounds of cars (or even of particular makes etc!), these are the sound of birds etc..

In the words of the Buddha, “in the hearing there is only the heard”. Go back to your home object after it has passed away.

If it goes on for a while, you may let go of it after a few observing and noting and go back to your home object.

If you have any reaction to it as disturbing your practice, observe and note this reaction too, as “irritated, irritated. angry...angry etc”. until the reaction passes away.

## WALKING MINDFULLY.

Another aspect of the practice is observing and noting while in the walking posture.

Practicing walking meditation does not mean that we are trying to get anywhere. We are just trying to be with each step and stay completely with each step. As such, we usually walk back and forth on a chosen path. It is a practice of concentrated walking, whereby one is with the movement of one's feet.

### **Choosing a path**

As such, the first thing to do before doing the walking practice is to choose a path of about 20 -30 steps in length either inside one's house or somewhere outdoors. A place where one can walk back and forth for this practice. The recommended practice is to walk back and forth on this path for about twenty minutes. It is best if one practices this mostly in the same place so that one will not be distracted by the newness of the surroundings. This is not a nature walk. One would be concentrating on the movement of the feet, not the surroundings.

### **Walking on the path.**

The first thing to do then, is to go to that place and stand still at the beginning of the path. The eyes should be open, but slightly downcast. This is to minimize distractions. Keep your eyes downcast. Keep the gaze focused a few feet in front of you on the ground.

Don't look here and there. This is to avoid as much distractions as possible. If you happen to be looking anywhere, then you have to be mindful of looking and observe and note as "looking, looking". Then go back to your mindfulness of walking.

Your feet should be spread about shoulder-width apart. Feel your

feet on the ground or the floor. Feel the contact - softness, hardness etc.

Your hands can be put together either at the back or in front and keep it still.

### **Actual Walking.**

Before you begin the walk , close your eyes and take a deep breath and relax yourself. Bring your attention to the standing still. Try and feel your whole body being stiff and upright. Then, one is to bring one's attention to the walking of the body from the beginning of the path to the end and back. The body stopping and standing at the end of the path. Then turning around to walk back on the path. Before walking back on the path , there would first arise the "intention" to walk. Note it mentally as "intending, intending". Then walk, noting as usual.

To begin the walk, take a tiny step forward with your right foot, noting the action mentally of lifting the foot as "lifting, lifting" as you lift the foot and "placing, placing" as you put/place the foot on the ground. Wait until the foot is firmly on the ground / floor. Then take a tiny step with your left foot, observing and mentally noting in the same way as that of the movement of your right foot, "lifting, placing". Continue walking in this way, "lifting, placing; lifting, placing" until you get to the end of the Path.

The **emphasis**, as you make the walking movements is :

1.-to observe and be aware of the "upward movement" of the foot as you lift and note mentally as "lifting, lifting" .

- to also observe and be aware of the "end" (passing away) of the upward movement of lifting.

2. As you make the downward movement of the foot by dropping it down, make a mental note as "dropping, dropping":

- also observe and be aware of the “end” (passing away) of the downward movement, as the foot touches the ground/floor.

Try and also feel the sensations such as being “cool, warm” etc. as each foot touches the ground / floor.

In other words, with the walking movements also, the emphasis is still on the “Arising and Passing Away” of phenomena of each movement such as: the end of the upward movement in the lifting of the foot; the end of the downward movement in the placing of the foot. That is, one is to be able to observe and be aware of the Arising and Passing away of each movement in the phenomena.

### **Pace.**

You should choose a pace that is neither too slow or too fast but one that maximizes your ability to pay attention. In general, it should be slower than your normal pace of walking.

Also, don't look at your feet. Keep your mind on the “movement” of the leg as you walk and not on the foot. Observe and note as you raise each foot and place it on the ground and not as an afterthought. When your feet touches the ground, observe the feeling as soft, hard, warm, cold etc.. Just keep observing and concentrating on the movement, feeling the sensations of the lifting and dropping motions.

### **End of the Path**

After you have gone about 20 steps, stop and stand for a while. Observe and note “standing, standing”. This is the end of your path.

As you stand at the end of path, close your eyes and try to feel your body again as being stiff and upright, being propped up by the air element in your body and note as “standing, standing”.

After you have stood for a while, you may wish to turn to walk back. Observe and note this “wish / intention” to turn back as “wishing, wishing / intending, intending”. Then make your turn slowly, observing and noting as “turning, turning”. Then stop for a while and stand again. As you stand, observe and note again on the standing as “standing, standing” as done before.

Before making your steps to return in the opposite direction, there would arise the “intention” to walk. Note that as “intention, intention” Then walk back making mental notes on the steps as previously. Continue to walk in this way, back and forth, mindfully so that you are not on auto pilot.

### **Mind wandering while walking.**

The mind being what it is as we know already, it may start to play games as usual before long, like in the other postures. When such happens, we just make a brief note that it has wandered as “wondering, wondering” and simply go back to the walking movement.

We do a lot of walking every day. Walking around the house, walking to and from the car, walking to and from the bus station etc. We can do all of them mindfully too, without much of the details.

## METTA / LOVING-KINDNESS

We have our own perceptions and misconceptions of how things should be, how a person should be etc. and would usually respond based on these perceptions and misconceptions. Our likes and dislikes of persons, situations, the criticisms and discriminations etc.. The petty trivia which the mind builds up around various experiences.

We cannot influence the way things are in the world we live in. We cannot demand them to be otherwise. They are just the way they are ! We need to overlook what's wrong with ourselves as well as everyone else. It doesn't mean that we don't notice those things. It means we don't develop problems around them. The way to handle such kind of indulgence is by being "kind and patient - peacefully co-existing".

The way to do this, is to try to cultivate and develop what is termed formally as "patient-kindness" or "metta".It provides us with a very useful and effective instrument for dealing with all the petty trivia, which the mind builds up around the various experiences.

The technique for developing this is termed "Loving-kindness practice or the practice of metta". It is an ancient practice in which one consciously direct the intention of one's heart to oneself , one's loved ones and to "all sentient beings" in the whole world. The basic premise being that everyone, starting with oneself, regardless of their circumstances or situations, deserve to be "well and happy" like anyone else.

To wish others well or to send loving thoughts and prayers to another is not simply a rote or automatic activity. The practice is based on the effect our thoughts, feelings and actions have on those and the world around us. We all have sorrows enough to

make anyone weep to hear them. Everyone also experiences enough beautiful experiences to fill anyone with joy. Thus, by practicing loving-kindness, we connect our hearts to all those around us.

The effects of such actions were proven in a study by a large medical center in U.S. where half of a random group of patients were assigned to be specially prayed for by prayer groups. When the study was over, it was found that those who were chosen at random to be prayed for had fewer infections and problems and were able to leave the center a few days earlier than were usual.

Loving-kindness practice is in essence a complement to the Vipassna or Insight meditation we are practicing. One can practice it for a few minutes either at the beginning of one's meditation session to soften oneself up or at the end of the session as a way of extending the spirit of kindness in one's practice.

Some may feel it as being artificial or mechanical, while for others, they find it as an exercise that, when worked with regularly would gradually begin to develop and cultivate a stronger sensation of loving-kindness in their hearts. You may use phrases or words that work for you. As one plants loving-kindness in the garden of one's heart and continue to regularly nourish and fertilize it, it will begin to spread and grow.

Another beauty about loving-kindness practice is that one can do it anywhere, any time; not just formally in a sitting posture. You can do it walking down the street. "May this person be happy and may this person be filled with loving-kindness" etc. Pretty soon you can feel loving-kindness for all the people you pass on the street or in traffic. You can do it on a bus or airplane.

The "power" of metta, how small or big, can never be underestimated. One of our regulars reported, how at one time he

became irritated, having to be in such a long que at a supermarket cash counter. Realizing it as an unhealthy emotion, he switched to doing metta on all at the supermarket. Soon, he not only found another shorter que, but an offer by one before him to precede him, as he had only “a few items” !

Traditionally, we begin the practice by directing loving-kindness towards oneself. Because, if there are things that you hate or cannot accept in yourself, it is very hard to be loving of those things in others.

Next think of someone you love, someone for whom you naturally feel compassion and wish them to be well and happy.

Then open your heart a little wider to include other loved **ones** and wish that they will also be well and happy.

Then open your heart even further, large enough to let in all of your friends and the people you love. May they all be well and happy.

Next try to make your heart large enough to fill the entire room, expanding later to those in every direction; your neighborhood, city, province and the whole wide world.

Finally, extend to all beings - every creature, to all living beings.

Sample Practice of Metta:

1. May I be well, happy, peaceful and free from harm.
2. May my teachers
3. May my parents
4. May my family  
and relatives
5. May my friends
6. May the indifferent  
(neutral) persons
7. May the unfriendly  
persons
8. May all meditators
9. May all beings

and to recite the following wishes at the end:

May the suffering ones be suffering free  
and the fear-struck, fearless be,  
May the grieving shed all grief  
and all beings find relief.

## CONCLUSION.

### The Goal

The ultimate goal in taking up the practice is

1. to be able to maintain a certain way of being in the midst of our activities and live life in a skillful way with as less miseries and sufferings as possible.

2. to be able to accept such miseries and sufferings that comes our way meanwhile, with less agony.

These goals, however, can be achieved only if one had been able to develop a thorough and accurate understanding of the reality and the relevant facts of life with diligent practice and hence is also able to apply them in almost every aspect of one's life, actions and attitudes.

That means, our practice should have to be in such a way as to result in:

1. A clear and lucid personal and direct experience and understanding of the "Passing away" of all arising phenomena and the transient nature or characteristic of Impermanence or change in every thing".

-the understanding correctly of the true nature of all psycho-physical phenomena taking place in one's own body and mind. Such as the endless series of thoughts that pass through it. Which in turn feed our sensations, our imagination, our memories and projections about the future.

- the ability to be able to calm down and remain for a few moments in the non-conceptual experience of pure awareness;

such as :that thoughts are just thoughts; and they also arise and dissolve away.

The thoughts arise and pass away. The feelings of anger, irritation, frustration, sadness, happiness etc -whatever it is, they also arise and pass away. Even the feelings of unpleasant physical sensations such as pain, numbness, itching, tingling, hot, cold etc.. all change -one sensation after another, all passing away : all unpleasant sensations finally passing away.

Thus, while observing and noting the different objects as they arise, it is truly important to try and observe how everything that is observed and noted “arise” and “pass away

## 2. The “arising” of the phenomena.

It is not sufficient to be able to observe and understand the true nature of things. For, despite knowing that everything is impermanent, we still keep holding onto objects that we think will bring us security. When these things slip out of our grasp, destructive emotions like fear and anger arise.

As such, we need to be able to keep ourselves alert to the tendency to slip into negative pattern of thoughts. One would be able to observe them only with increased and sharp awareness. Hence, it is equally important to develop and sharpen our sense of awareness and mindfulness to such “arising”, as we practice.

We also need to acquire a sharp and acute sense of awareness to be able to restrain oneself, from saying or doing things that one would later regret. We also need to have the strength and stability of awareness to be able to respond sensitively to difficult situations rather than reacting impulsively, as mentioned earlier regarding emotions .

Unfortunately, wisdom cannot be learnt from books etc. It arises

from a direct personal and “experiential” understanding, which could only be acquired and enhanced with serious practice.

Thus, another equally important objective of mindfulness is to be able to look at our perceptions and reactions in a clear and lucid manner. Awareness makes it possible for us to perceive phenomena of every kind. However, we need to refine and sharpen our mindfulness and awareness so that we can discern our positive and negative thought patterns mindfully and clearly “as soon as they arise”. Then only will we be able to handle the negative thought patterns skillfully within the short space of such trigger and the reaction.

The observing should also be as continuous and constant as possible even outside of the practice, even if for short periods, as with all other any worthwhile activities. With having a body as such, with the society we live in and the pressures on all of us, the sensory world has a powerful and strong influence on us.

### **The benefits from Vipassana / Insight practice.**

How do we benefit from the practice ?

Mindfulness weakens the negative or unwholesome mind-states that cause us suffering, such as attachment, aversion and confusion and strengthens the wholesome mind states that lead to happiness, such as kindness, generosity and wisdom.

As we begin to gain fresh insights into the true nature of the reality of the Impermanent or transient nature of one’s own body and mental states , it helps us to become less attached to the inevitable ups and downs in our lives and less afraid of the changes in both pleasure and pain, knowing that they would pass away sooner than we could imagine. In this way, it also frees us from being disillusioned or depressed, especially when disappointments or tragedies occur in life.

We are able to see more clearly the people we live with and the world we live in and apply a greater sense of restraint and empathy or perspective in our dealings and relationships with others that we come into contact in our lives, whether at work, at home, with family etc. in any situation.

We are now being able to bring mindfulness in a world that is full of sensory information, emotions and change and are able to handle the trials and tribulations of life in a more skillful way and reduce much of the tensions, strains and stresses, and the miseries of daily living .

May you all be well and happy and be able to follow and practice well accordingly and reap the benefits of an effective and successful practice.

Daw Khema Nandi

July, 2012.

Muskoka Insight Meditation Center

## A Biographical Sketch

Rev. Sister Daw Khema Nandi is a Theravada Buddhist nun in the lineage of the Most Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw of Myanmar. Born and brought up in a traditional Buddhist family in Myanmar in 1931, she was a devout practicing Buddhist since from an early age.

She completed her education with a B.Com (University of Rangoon, Myanmar) and M.B.A (Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, USA) in 1955.

She took up the practice of Vipassana meditation informally in 1962 and formally later under various well-known masters in Myanmar, while still living a family life. Her very first formal teacher was the well-known Senior Master, Most Ven. Webu Sayadaw. She practiced under him until 1977, when the Ven. Sayadaw passed away in June of that year.

Continuing her practice under various teachers, she finally found her niche in the Mahasi lineage of meditation. She has since been practicing faithfully and diligently in this lineage.

She later went to and worked in Singapore from 1980 to 1988. There, she also helped establish the new Burmese Buddhist Temple and was a founding member while there. She also started a meditation group there. She came to Canada in late 1988 after that and also got involved with a meditation group, Theravada Buddhist Community (TBC), for some time soon after she arrived. She later founded the Buddha Sasana Yeiktha meditation center in 1994, with the blessing of the Ven. Sayadaw U Pandita, offering her own personal residence for use as the yeiktha for its lifetime. The Ven. Sayadaw U Pandita, a senior disciple and

successor to the Most Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw after his demise, also graciously accepted to honor the Yeiktha, as its founding Spiritual Director.

She was ordained as a nun in early 1996 by the Most Ven. Sayadaw U Pandita, at one of his branch meditation centers in California, USA., after becoming a widow and her children all grown up.

As her Kamma would have it, she was kindly accepted for further intensive practice and training not long after that, by the Most Ven. Saddhammaramsi Sayadaw, at his Saddhammaramsi Meditation Center in Myanmar, another well-known senior disciple of the Most Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw. She began her practice with him in 1997, initially, for one year; followed by two more intensive practice and training at his retreats abroad and a still two more further intensive practice and training for about one month each again at his Center in Myanmar. The Ven. Sayadaw is referred to by his disciples as the “Metta Sayadaw” - a teacher with great compassion for all beings.

Rev. Sister Daw Khema Nandi served as the Resident Spiritual Director of the Buddha Sasana Yeiktha since after her ordination and also led residential retreats, until the unfortunate closing of the Center in August, 2010, as she turned (80) years in age and became fragile in her health. She later founded the much smaller informal center- Muskoka Insight Meditation Center -as her residence , at the same place, where she continues to offer informal spiritual guidance as much as she can. She has also done some translations for the Most Ven. Saddhammaramsi Sayadaw for some of his discourses at his requests.