

無量法門一方便

——「毘婆舍那」在佛教修行中的地位

——摘錄自《聖道修行》

◆ 坦尼沙羅比丘 原著

◆ 鄭振煌 中譯

「毘婆舍那」到底是什麼呢？幾乎任何一本談論原始佛教禪修的書都會告訴你佛陀教授了兩種禪修方式：奢摩他（止）和毘婆舍那（觀）。奢摩他意指平靜，是深入禪那的方法。毘婆舍那（字面的意思是「看清」，但更常翻譯為「觀」）是運用少分的止來培養綿綿密密的正念，以直觀當下諸法的無常。這種正念使行者捨棄對諸法的貪愛，因此讓心從痛苦中解脫。那些書說這兩種法門差異很大，其中的「觀」是佛教對禪修科學的特殊貢獻。其他早於佛陀時代的禪修系統也教授「止」，但佛陀是最先發現並教授「觀」的人。儘管有些佛教禪修者在修「觀」之前會修「止」，但追求開悟不見得真的要修止。觀是禪修的一個方法，足以讓行者證悟，那些書這麼說。

但是如果你直接查閱巴利佛典（現存所知最早的佛陀教法），你會發現雖然巴利佛典確實用奢摩他來指稱「止」，用「毘婆舍那」來指稱「觀」，但是它們不符合這兩個名相既有的解釋。相較於經常使用「禪那」這個詞，佛典卻極少使用「觀」這個詞。當佛典描述佛陀叫弟子去禪修時，從未引述佛陀說「去修觀」，而總是說「去修禪那」。佛典也不會把「觀」這個詞和任何正念的技巧相提並論。佛典中確實有少數例子提到「觀」，但總是和「止」成對出現——這不是二選一的兩個法門，而是一個人可能「獲得」或「具備」並應該一起發展的兩種心之特質。舉例來說，《緊叔迦經》（相應部卷三十五第二百零四經）將止和觀和比喻為腳程快速的一對信差，他們經由八聖道這條路，進入身體的城堡，向裡面的司令（心識）正確呈報解脫或涅槃。《願品》（增支部卷第七十一經）建議任何想要止息煩惱的人，除了持戒清淨和遠離囂鬧，還應該勤修止，並且具備觀的能力。最後這一句話平凡無奇，但這部經也對想要成就禪那的人給予同樣的忠告：勤修止，並且具備觀的能力。這表示在結集巴利佛典的人們眼中，止、禪那和觀三者都是同一修行道的部分。禪那想要修得好，就必須止觀雙運，然後在禪那的基礎上，止觀甚至可以進一步止息煩惱並解脫痛苦。其他的經典也都支持這種說法。

例如，增支部卷四第一七零經描述三種止觀雙運而證得究竟智慧的方式：不是先止後觀，就是先觀後止，或是止觀並修。經文提供「兩頭牛一同拉車」的意象：可能一前一後，或者兩頭牛並行。增支部卷四第九十四經指出：若先止後觀，或先觀後止，修行就會不平衡，必須修正。若禪修者有某種程度的止，卻尚未具備「從慧而來的法觀」，他應請教修觀成就的法友：「如何觀照一切有為法？如何審視它們？如何有智慧地看它們？」而後應依照法友的教導來修觀。上述問題中的動詞，像是「觀照」、「審視」和「看」，指出修觀不只是念念分明。事實上，下文將解釋這些動詞反而是用在稱為「如理作意」的善巧詢問過程上。

反之，若禪修者已有覺觀能力，卻無定力，他應請教修止成就的行者：「如何讓

心念穩定？如何安住？如何調和？如何集中？」然後依其教導修止。從這裡使用的動詞可以看出「止」在此上下文中的意思是禪那，因為它們與巴利佛典描述證得禪那時一再使用的動詞一致「心念變得穩定、安住、調和和集中」。每次佛典指明「觀」需要哪些層次的「止」才能解脫時，若我們注意到那些層次就是指禪那，就會更確定「止」的意思是禪那。

一旦禪修者具備了止和觀，他應該將「止觀發展到更高境界以止息煩惱（漏，指欲漏、有漏、見漏和無明漏）」。這與止觀雙運的修行道相呼應。《大六處經》（中部第一四九經）描述止觀雙運的情形：如實知、如實見眼、耳、鼻、舌、身、意六根，色、聲、香、味、觸、法六境，六識，六觸，和依觸而生的苦、樂或不苦不樂受。保持這種覺照，不受上述種種的影響，不執著、不困惑，專注其過失，放棄對它們的貪求：這就算是「觀」。同時，止息身心的苦與煩惱，就可以體會身心輕安：這就算是「止」。這個方法不僅止觀雙運，也把三十七道品（包括成就禪那）修到極致。

所以，適當的修行道是止觀雙運，能夠平衡，相輔相成並相互抑制。觀能讓平靜的心不會停滯昏沈。當心識不情願地陷入當下時，止能避免反感的症狀，如反胃、頭暈、迷惘，甚至是完全空白。

因此，我們可以明顯知道止和觀並非分開的修道，而是讓行者處在當下的互補方法：止有助於當下輕安；觀則能讓我們看清事物的生滅和實相。這也顯示出為何成就禪那需要止觀雙運。如同《入出息念經》（中部第一一八經）所說，要成就禪那，必須具備三項條件：喜悅、專注和脫離。「喜悅」是覺受當下的輕安適意；「專注」是心能持續專注在所緣境上；而「脫離」則是讓心脫離構成較低層次的專注的粗糙因素，以便達到更高層次的禪定。前兩者為止的作用，而後者為觀的作用。這三者必須一起運作。以《涅槃》（增支部卷九第三十四經）為例：若心停留在喜悅和專注的狀態而不願放下，就無法提升其禪定境界。將心從 X 境界提昇至 Y 境界時，需要斷除的是指當初讓心到達 X 境界的因素。若不能看清在當下心念的活動，就絕不可能善巧地脫離把心綁在 X 境界和障礙心進入 Y 境界的因素。另一方面，假如只是簡單地放下這些因素而不好好安住當下，心就會整個脫離禪那。因此，止觀必須雙運，以便善巧地將心帶到正定上。

問題是：若觀能讓禪修者成就禪那，但禪那並非佛教專有，那麼佛教的「觀」到底是什麼呢？答案是觀本身並非佛教專有。佛教的特點是：一、止觀雙運的程度。二、止觀雙運的方式，亦即如理作意。三、止觀和許多禪修方便的結合方式，以讓心全然解脫。

《婆蹉衢多大經》（中部第七十三經）中提到，佛陀建議一位禪那功夫純熟的出家人進一步修持止和觀，才可成就六神足——其中最重要的是「一切有漏滅盡，無漏心解脫、慧解脫，現法自知作證」。這就是佛教的目標。某些論師宣稱這完全是觀的功勞，但有些經論卻不這麼說。

請注意！根據增支部卷二第二十九經、第三十經所說，「解脫」有兩種層次：心解脫與慧解脫。心解脫是指禪修者完全捨棄貪愛，這是止的最終作用。慧解脫是

指不受無明所惑，這是觀的最終作用。如此一來，這兩種層次的解脫就含有了止和觀。

中部的《一切漏經》認為，唯有如理作意地知和見，才能夠達到「有漏滅盡」的解脫狀態。經上說，如理作意即是對諸法提出適切的問題，不問「人／我」或「有／無」，而是從四聖諦的方向去發問。換句話說，不問「我存在嗎？」「我不存在嗎？」「我是誰？」這類的問題，而是從經驗上提出「這是苦嗎？苦從何而來？苦之滅為何？滅苦之道為何？」由於這四類問題都是需要去修的，故每個答案也將決定行動：應知苦，應斷苦因，應證苦滅，應修滅苦之道。

止和觀皆是修行道上的法門，故須加以修持。因此，禪修者必須對知苦如理作意，苦包括貪執色、受、想、行、識的五取蘊。故《戒》（相應部卷二十二第一二二經）提到：如理作意五取蘊，就是觀其過失為「無常、苦、病、癱、刺、痛、惱、他、壞、空及無我。」佛陀特別提出一些問題來幫助我們瞭解這點：「色是常，還是無常？」「無常者是苦，還是樂？」「以觀無常、苦且變易之法，可得『此是我所，此是我，此是我體』耶？」（請參閱相應部卷二十二第五十九經）這些問題可套用在色、受、想、行、識五蘊的「過去、未來、現在、內、外、粗、細、劣、勝、遠、近」之上。換言之，禪修者對六根的一切經驗提出質問。

這些問題是聖道的一部份，能夠成就「如實知見」，讓行者了知諸法的生、滅、壞、染、淨等五法。此處所謂的淨，就是捨欲。

部份論師認為禪修時，行者只需觀察當下的五蘊生滅，即可獲得上述五法；若其專注不間斷，就會自然了知壞、染、淨三法，足以完全解脫。經論沒有證實這點，但實修經驗似乎能支持它。如同《天臂經》（中部第一零一經）所說，禪修者會發現在某些情況下，只要以捨心觀照苦因，就能捨棄對它的貪欲；但是在其他情況中，他們需要作意才能捨欲而了知淨法。至於哪個方法在哪個情況下有用，經文有些語意模糊，這也許是刻意的，因為每一位禪修者都必須在修行時自行試驗。佛陀在《一切漏經》中詳細說明修習捨欲的七法門。觀是心的一種特質，跟這七個法門都有關，但是和第一項的「見」有最直接的關係，也就是觀照諸法的苦、集、滅、道而知苦、斷苦因，證苦之滅和修滅苦之道。其餘的六法門分別是：一、防護，避免心緣取外境而起煩惱。二、受用，合宜取用飲食、衣服、臥具及醫藥等物。三、忍刻苦受。四、避離，遠離危險與惡友。五、斷除，指貪、瞋、癡、煩惱等妄念。六、修習，也就是七覺支——念、擇法、精進、喜、輕安、定、捨。這七法門之下又各自涵蓋眾多的修行技巧。以「斷除」法為例，《想念止息經》（中部第二十經）提到若禪修者能以善心對治惡心，觀其過患不起憶念，止息妄念令其不生，則可除滅諸惡。許多相似的舉例也出現在其他經典中。重點就是眾生的心念多變而複雜。煩惱顯現的相貌多樣，因此需用不同的法門來對治。禪修者必須精通不同法門並培養正知正見，才能知道在什麼情況下，哪個法門能發揮最大的功效。

然而，就一個較基本的層面而言，禪修者首先需要強烈的動機來精通這些法門。因為如理作意需要摒除眾生本具的二分思惟模式：「有／沒有」和「我／非我」，

所以禪修者需要有力的理由來如理作意。故《一切漏經》強調任何人在如理作意前首先必須禮敬聖者（此指佛陀與諸證悟弟子）。換句話說，行者必須視那些成道者為典範，也必須通曉教法與戒律。根據《大四十經》（中部第一一七經）所說，「通曉教法」始於深信業力與輪迴，如此在理智和情感上，才會以四聖諦分析一切身心經驗。「通曉戒律」除了守戒外，也包含善巧上述斷除諸漏的七法門。若沒有這種背景，禪修者可能會把錯誤的心態和質疑帶到觀照當下生滅的修法上。例如，他們可能會尋求「真我」，最後則有意識或無意識地和寬廣、開放、包容一切變化、為萬法之來源和去處的覺性認同。或者他們希求能和交錯互動的浩瀚宇宙產生相連的感覺，深信任何追求常的意念都是無明的、否定生命的（因為諸行無常）。對於這些人，只是觀照當下現象的生滅並無法引導他們了知諸法的生、滅、壞、染、淨五法。他們不承認他們的見解是有漏的，也不承認他們的定境只是色界的有漏法。因此，他們並不願意以四聖諦來驗證那些見解和經驗。唯有願意觀其見解和經驗是有漏的，並且深信有必要超越它們的禪修者，才能善用如理作意而超越它們。

因此，篇首的問題要這麼回答：「觀並不是一種禪修方法。它是心的一種特質，能夠看清當下的現象。雖然「正念」可以增進「觀」，卻不足以讓「觀」強大到使行者完全解脫的程度。因此，其他的修行技巧和法門也是需要的。尤其是「觀」需要搭配「止」（在當下安止的能力），以便成就有力的禪那。以此為基礎，止與觀便可應用於善巧的訊問上，稱為直觀諸法的「如理作意」：不我以、非我或有／無來探究事物，而以四聖諦觀照。禪修者如理作意，直到了悟諸法的生、滅、壞、染、淨五法。唯有如此，心才能嚐到解脫味。

這套「止」和「觀」的修持法門，也需要正見、正念和其他修持技巧的輔助。這就是為什麼佛陀開示止觀為禮敬聖者、七覺支及八正道的一部份。減少修行方法，只會為修行效果減分，因為禪修就像做木工，需要精通許多工具，以滿足不同的需求。若畫地自限單修一法，就如動機不明，而且工具箱中只有榔頭卻想蓋房子。V

One Tool Among Many

-- The Place of Vipassana in

Buddhist Practice

Excerpt from Noble Strategy

by Thanissaro Bhikkhu

Chinese Translation by Cheng Chen-huang

What exactly is vipassana? Almost any book on early Buddhist meditation will tell you that the Buddha taught two types of meditation: samatha and vipassana. Samatha, which means tranquility, is said to be a method fostering strong states of mental

absorption, called jhana. Vipassana--literally “clear-seeing,” but more often translated as insight meditation--is said to be a method using a modicum of tranquility to foster moment-to-moment mindfulness of the inconstancy of events as they are directly experienced in the present. This mindfulness creates a sense of dispassion toward all events, thus leading the mind to release from suffering. These two methods are quite separate, we’re told, and of the two, vipassana is the distinctive Buddhist contribution to meditative science. Other systems of practice pre-dating the Buddha also taught samatha, but the Buddha was the first to discover and teach vipassana. Although some Buddhist meditators may practice samatha meditation before turning to vipassana, samatha practice is not really necessary for the pursuit of Awakening. As a meditative tool, the vipassana method is enough for attaining the goal. Or so we’re told.

But if you look directly at the Pali discourses--the earliest extant sources for our knowledge of the Buddha’s teachings—you’ll find that although they do use the word samatha to mean tranquility, and vipassana to mean clear-seeing, they otherwise confirm none of the received wisdom about these terms. Only rarely do they make use of the word vipassana--a sharp contrast to their frequent use of the word jhana. When they depict the Buddha telling his disciples to go meditate, they never quote him as saying “go do vipassana,” but always “go do jhana.” And they never equate the word vipassana with any mindfulness techniques. In the few instances where they do mention vipassana, they almost always pair it with samatha--not as two alternative methods, but as two qualities of mind that a person may “gain “or “be endowed with,” and that should be developed together. One simile, for instance (S.XXXV.204), compares samatha and vipassana to a swift pair of messengers who enter the citadel of the body via the noble eightfold path and present their accurate report--Unbinding, or nirvana--to the consciousness acting as the citadel’s commander. Another passage (A.X.71) recommends that anyone who wishes to put an end to mental defilement should--in addition to perfecting the principles of moral behavior and cultivating seclusion--be committed to samatha and endowed with vipassana. This last statement is unremarkable in itself, but the same discourse also gives the same advice to anyone who wants to master the jhanas: be committed to samatha and endowed with vipassana. This suggests that, in the eyes of those who assembled the Pali discourses, samatha, jhana, and vipassana were all part of a single path. Samatha and vipassana were used together to master jhana and then--based on jhana--were developed even further to give rise to the end of mental defilement and to bring release from suffering. This is a reading that finds support in other discourses as well. There’s a passage, for instance, describing three ways in which samatha and vipassana can work together to lead to the knowledge of Awakening: either samatha precedes

vipassana, vipassana precedes samatha, or they develop in tandem (A.IV.170). The wording suggests an image of two oxen pulling a cart: one is placed before the other or they are yoked side-by-side. Another passage (A.IV.94) indicates that if samatha precedes vipassana--or vipassana, samatha—one's practice is in a state of imbalance and needs to be rectified. A meditator who has attained a measure of samatha, but no "vipassana into events based on heightened discernment (adhipanna-dhamma-vipassana)," should question a fellow meditator who has attained vipassana: "How should fabrications (sankhara) be regarded? How should they be investigated? How should they be viewed with insight?" and then develop vipassana in line with that person's instructions. The verbs in these questions—"regarding," "investigating," "seeing" -indicate that there's more to the process of developing vipassana than a simple mindfulness technique. In fact, as we will see below, these verbs apply instead to a process of skillful questioning called "appropriate attention."

The opposite case--a meditator endowed with a measure of vipassana into events based on heightened discernment, but no samatha--should question someone who has attained samatha: "How should the mind be steadied? How should it be made to settle down? How should it be unified? How should it be concentrated?" and then follow that person's instructions so as to develop samatha. The verbs used here give the impression that "samatha?in this context means jhana, for they correspond to the verbal formula—"the mind becomes steady, settles down, grows unified and concentrated?-that the Pali discourses use repeatedly to describe the attainment of jhana. This impression is reinforced when we note that in every case where the discourses are explicit about the levels of concentration needed for insight to be liberating, those levels are the jhanas.

Once the meditator is endowed with both samatha and vipassana, he/she should "make an effort to establish those very same skillful qualities to a higher degree for the ending of the mental fermentations (asava--sensual passion, states of being, views, and ignorance)." This corresponds to the path of samatha and vipassana developing in tandem. A passage in M.149 describes how this can happen. One knows and sees, as they actually are, the six sense media (the five senses plus the intellect), their objects, consciousness at each medium, contact at each medium, and whatever is experienced as pleasure, pain, or neither-pleasure-nor-pain based on that contact. One maintains this awareness in such a way as to stay uninfatuated by any of these things, unattached, unconfused, focused on their drawbacks, abandoning any craving for them: this would count as vipassana. At the same time--abandoning physical and mental disturbances, torments, and distresses--one experiences ease in body and mind: this would count as samatha. This practice not only develops samatha and vipassana

in tandem, but also brings the 37 Wings to Awakening--which include the attainment of jhana--to the culmination of their development.

So the proper path is one in which vipassana and samatha are brought into balance, each supporting and acting as a check on the other. Vipassana helps keep tranquility from becoming stagnant and dull. Samatha helps prevent the manifestations of aversion--such as nausea, dizziness, disorientation, and even total blanking out--that can occur when the mind is trapped against its will in the present moment.

From this description it's obvious that samatha and vipassana are not separate paths of practice, but instead are complementary ways of relating to the present moment: samatha provides a sense of ease in the present; vipassana, a clear-eyed view of events as they actually occur, in and of themselves. It's also obvious why the two qualities need to function together in mastering jhana. As the standard instructions on breath meditation indicate (M.118), such a mastery involves three things: gladdening, concentrating, and liberating the mind. Gladdening means finding a sense of refreshment and satisfaction in the present. Concentrating means keeping the mind focused on its object, while liberating means freeing the mind from the grosser factors making up a lower stage of concentration so as to attain a higher stage. The first two activities are functions of samatha, while the last is a function of vipassana. All three must function together. If, for example, there is concentration and gladdening, with no letting go, the mind wouldn't be able to refine its concentration at all. The factors that have to be abandoned in raising the mind from stage x to stage y belong to the set of factors that got the mind to x in the first place (A.IX.34). Without the ability clearly to see mental events in the present, there would be no way skillfully to release the mind from precisely the right factors that tie it to a lower state of concentration and act as disturbances to a higher one. If, on the other hand, there is simply a letting go of those factors, without an appreciation of or steadiness in the stillness that remains, the mind would drop out of jhana altogether. Thus samatha and vipassana must work together to bring the mind to right concentration in a masterful way.

The question arises: if vipassana functions in the mastery of jhana, and jhana is not exclusive to Buddhists, then what is Buddhist about vipassana? The answer is that vipassana per se is not exclusively Buddhist. What's distinctly Buddhist is (1) the extent to which both samatha and vipassana are developed; and (2) the way they are developed--i.e., the line of questioning used to foster them; and (3) the way they are combined with an arsenal of meditative tools to bring the mind to total release.

In M.73, the Buddha advises a monk who has mastered jhana to further develop samatha and vipassana so as to master six cognitive skills, the most important of them being that 煖 through the ending of the mental fermentations, one remains in the fermentation-free release of awareness and release of discernment, having known and

made them manifest for oneself right in the here and now. This is a description of the Buddhist goal. Some commentators have asserted that this release is totally a function of vipassana, but there are discourses that indicate otherwise.

Note that release is twofold: release of awareness and release of discernment. Release of awareness occurs when a meditator becomes totally dispassionate toward passion: this is the ultimate function of samatha. Release of discernment occurs when there is dispassion for ignorance: this is the ultimate function of vipassana (A.II.29-30). Thus both samatha and vipassana are involved in the twofold nature of this release.

The Sabbasava Sutta (M.2) states that one's release can be "fermentation-free" only if one knows and sees in terms of "appropriate attention" (*yoniso manasikara*). As the discourse shows, appropriate attention means asking the proper questions about phenomena, regarding them not in terms of self/other or being/non-being, but in terms of the four noble truths. In other words, instead of asking "do I exist? Don't I exist? What am I?" one asks about an experience, "Is this stress? The origination of stress? The cessation of stress? The path leading to the cessation of stress?" Because each of these categories entails a duty, the answer to these questions determines a course of action: stress should be comprehended, its origination abandoned, its cessation realized, and the path to its cessation developed.

Samatha and vipassana belong to the category of the path and so should be developed. To develop them, one must apply appropriate attention to the task of comprehending stress, which is comprised of the five aggregates of clinging--clinging to physical form, feeling, perception, mental fabrications, and consciousness. Applying appropriate attention to these aggregates means viewing them in terms of their drawbacks, as "inconstant, stressful, a disease, a cancer, an arrow, painful, an affliction, alien, a dissolution, an emptiness, not-self" (S.XXII.122). A list of questions, distinctive to the Buddha, aids in this approach: "Is this aggregate constant or inconstant?" "And is anything inconstant easeful or stressful?" "And is it fitting to regard what is inconstant, stressful, subject to change as: This is mine. This is my self. This is what I am?" (S.XXII.59). These questions are applied to every instance of the five aggregates, whether "past, future, or present; internal or external; blatant or subtle, common or sublime, far or near." In other words, the meditator asks these questions of all experiences in the cosmos of the six sense media. This line of questioning is part of a strategy leading to a level of knowledge called "knowing and seeing things as they actually are (*yatha-bhuta-nana-dassana*)," where things are understood in terms of a fivefold perspective: their arising, their passing away, their drawbacks, their allure, and the escape from them--the escape, here, lying in dispassion.

Some commentators have suggested that, in practice, this fivefold perspective can be

gained simply by focusing on the arising and passing away of these aggregates in the present moment; if one's focus is relentless enough, it will lead naturally to a knowledge of drawbacks, allure, and escape, sufficient for total release. The texts, however, don't support this reading, and practical experience would seem to back them up. As M.101 points out, individual meditators will discover that, in some cases, they can develop dispassion for a particular cause of stress simply by watching it with equanimity; but in other cases, they will need to make a conscious exertion to develop the dispassion that will provide an escape. The discourse is vague--perhaps deliberately so--as to which approach will work where. This is something each meditator must test for him or herself in practice.

The Sabbasava Sutta expands on this point by listing seven approaches to take in developing dispassion. Vipassana, as a quality of mind, is related to all seven, but most directly with the first: "seeing," i.e., seeing events in terms of the four noble truths and the duties appropriate to them. The remaining six approaches cover ways of carrying out those duties: restraining the mind from focusing on sense data that would provoke unskillful states of mind; reflecting on the appropriate reasons for using the requisites of food, clothing, shelter, and medicine; tolerating painful sensations; avoiding obvious dangers and inappropriate companions; destroying thoughts of sensual desire, ill will, harmfulness, and other unskillful states; and developing the seven factors of awakening: mindfulness, analysis of qualities, persistence, rapture, serenity, concentration, and equanimity.

Each of these approaches covers a wide subset of approaches. Under

"destroying," for instance, one may eliminate an unskillful mental state by replacing it with a skillful one, focusing on its drawbacks, turning one's attention away from it, relaxing the process of thought--fabrication that formed it, or suppressing it with the brute power of one's will (M.20). Many similar examples could be drawn from other discourses as well. The overall point is that the ways of the mind are varied and complex. Different fermentations can come bubbling up in different guises and respond to different approaches. One's skill as a meditator lies in mastering a variety of approaches and developing the sensitivity to know which approach will work best in which situation.

On a more basic level, however, one needs strong motivation to master these skills in the first place. Because appropriate attention requires abandoning dichotomies that are so basic to the thought patterns of all people-- "being/not being?" and "me/not me?"--meditators need strong reasons for adopting it. This is why the Sabbasava Sutta insists that anyone developing appropriate attention must first hold the noble ones (here meaning the Buddha and his awakened disciples) in high regard. In other words, one must see that those who have followed the path are truly exemplary. One must

also be well-versed in their teaching and discipline. According to M.117, “being well-versed in their teaching” begins with having conviction in their teachings about karma and rebirth, which provide intellectual and emotional context for adopting the four noble truths as the basic categories of experience. Being well-versed in the discipline of the noble ones would include, in addition to observing the precepts, having some skill in the seven approaches mentioned above for abandoning the fermentations.

Without this sort of background, meditators might bring the wrong attitudes and questions to the practice of watching arising and passing away in the present moment. For instance, they might be looking for a “true self” and end up identifying--consciously or unconsciously--with the vast, open sense of awareness that embraces all change, from which it all seems to come and to which it all seems to return. Or they might long for a sense of connectedness with the vast interplay of the universe, convinced that--as all things are changing--any desire for changelessness is neurotic and life-denying. For people with agendas like these, the simple experience of events arising and passing away in the present won't lead to fivefold knowledge of things as they are. They'll resist recognizing that the ideas they hold to are a fermentation of views, or that the experiences of calm that seem to verify those ideas are simply a fermentation in the form of a state of being. As a result, they won't be willing to apply the four noble truths to those ideas and experiences. Only a person willing to see those fermentations as such, and convinced of the need to transcend them, will be in a position to apply the principles of appropriate attention to them and thus get beyond them.

So, to answer the question with which we began: Vipassana is not a meditation technique. It's a quality of mind--the ability to see events clearly in the present moment. Although mindfulness is helpful in fostering vipassana, it's not enough for developing vipassana to the point of total release. Other techniques and approaches are needed as well. In particular, vipassana needs to be teamed with samatha--the ability to settle the mind comfortably in the present--so as to master the attainment of strong states of absorption, or jhana. Based on this mastery, samatha and vipassana are then applied to a skillful program of questioning, called appropriate attention, directed at all experience: exploring events not in terms of me/not me, or being/not being, but in terms of the four noble truths. The meditator pursues this program until it leads to a fivefold understanding of all events: in terms of their arising, their passing away, their drawbacks, their allure, and the escape from them. Only then can the mind taste release.

This program for developing vipassana and samatha, in turn, needs the support of many other attitudes, mental qualities, and techniques of practice. This was why the

Buddha taught it as part of a still larger program, including respect for the noble ones, mastery of all seven approaches for abandoning the mental fermentations, and all eight factors of the noble path. To take a reductionist approach to the practice can produce only reduced results, for meditation is a skill like carpentry, requiring a mastery of many tools in response to many different needs. To limit ourselves to only one approach in meditation would be like trying to build a house when our motivation is uncertain and our tool box contains nothing but hammers.v

