



SATIPATTHANA MEDITATION SOCIETY OF CANADA

Vipassana Meditation and the Concept of Time

By: Sa-yar Myat, April 16, 2008

In practicing Vipassana meditation (Mahasi method), we observe rising and falling movements of the abdomen with accuracy and precision, as it is happening, not before and not after. This movement is happening on its own accord and you simply watch intently. Observe the rising movement, it may be short or long, it may move in any direction and eventually ceased. Then you see the falling movement from the beginning to the end. Sometimes you notice the fullness, pressure, tension or support. How detailed you see it depends on concentration, which is dependent on the degree of effort put towards mindfulness (attention). When you are able to watch intently, deeply, precisely and penetratively you will experience psychophysical phenomenon in its true nature. At that moment there is no judgement or thoughts, just bare awareness of phenomenon as they really are.

In daily life the arising of our unobserved thoughts is related to forms, feelings, senses, perceptions and emotions of past and future. Even during meditation if you are not able to observe attentively at the precise moment you would find yourself drifting back into the past or forward into the future. At that moment, thoughts with judgement, prejudice and emotions automatically spring up again. However, if we are precisely mindful of the present moment then defiled thoughts

dissolve and observing awareness takes their place. It is acutely important to use precision in being aware of the present moment.

What is the past, present and future? It is time, and its function is linear. How does one perceive past, present and future (time)? If we try to explain of what the date August 6, 1945 is from this present time, perhaps we can use our calculators and find out how many years, months, days and minutes in the past it was. It doesn't have the same relevance to us as, say, the day the first nuclear bomb was dropped to kill humans in the Second World War. That gives us an event, a situation that we can relate to and identify with. Time makes sense when measured with situations or events that had happened with relevancy to us. If it has an impact to make us feel, that is the real measurement of time in our psyche. A date (time) is just a date (time), but when that date has a common factor, such as the day of your birth, then it becomes significant. Time represents events and situations of the past and anticipation of events or situations in the future that are relevant to us. Time measured by the clock is just a human convention to relate to events that are connected to us. Events that have happened, or possibly might happen, are the measurement of time.

Whenever the mind drifts into the past, or shifts into the future, one must realise that there is nothing one can do to recreate the past or materialize the future according to your desire or will. However, the present moment is something that one can know, feel and experience with full alertness and awareness. One has the choice to be mindful or not to be mindful to make a difference. Everything is right in one's hand at this present moment, but not in the past nor in the future. Therefore, "real time" is the present moment because one can experience it, feel it and have the choice of infinite possibilities. If you practice mindfulness meditation and you are precisely in the moment you would be aware of the moment as tension, pressure, rising and falling. The past and the future have no influence over one who is in the present moment.

Past and future are just memories or anticipations, which are associated with craving, desire, greed, dissatisfaction, anger, hate or ill-will. In other words, events and situations of the past and future are a manifestation of Lobha, Dosa and Moha (greed, anger, ego and personalities). If you can live precisely at this present moment then you have no memories and no anticipation, which means that you have no craving, desire or greed -(Lobha), no agitation, anger, hatred or ill-will - (Dosa), because you are not identifying with any events or emotions. In addition, you precisely know what is happening at this moment, so there is no doubt or illusion of self - (Moha). Mind that is absent from Lobha, Dosa and Moha is an awakened mind experiencing the momentary state of no suffering (Dukkha).