

Insight Generates Mind Power

By Anagarika Tevijjo

Insight meditation generates healing power, and while this sounds somewhat mysterious, the explanation is simple. A person who can control his mind through refining the practice of *sila* (morality) and *sati* (mindfulness) will not be as stressed in performing his daily tasks, and, so, will be more positively balanced, and, therefore, more effective in his efforts, on both mental and practical levels.

On this point, Luang Por Viriyang has said (in his *Instructions for Meditation Teachers*, Book I), that the meditative mind is an effective rest which promotes positive thinking and management capability.”

Conversely, “the movement which is the vibration of the brain can become severe on some occasions,” and such severe moments can create severe impacts and result in severe effects.

We all know from experience how such severe mental movements can cause problems in life.

Yet, most so-called, “normal people” pay little or no attention to the mental vibrations and waves in their minds and react with a rather lackadaisical attitude towards mindfulness, allowing the prevalence of mental stress to increase and become worse.

There are, fortunately, a few people who have learned to cultivate mindfulness and equilibrium, through the development of *bhavana* (mental-culture), who are able to keep a cool head, and whose mental-physical systems will not be affected in the way which we often see in people who are always losing their heads and thereby ending-up with resultant health problems, arising from natural causal-effects.

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So how do we develop a state of contemplative mind which may bring us to a state of mental tranquility and equanimity to keep us from becoming overstressed?

Ajaarn Viriyang teaches — “a tranquil state of mind reduces the workload of the nervous system and keeps it from being overstressed.” (I. 91)

To explain, he provides a simile (I.102) which is that developing a tranquil mind “is comparable to the production of flour. Before we can get the flour, a number of processes are taken: from preparing the soil, to sowing the grain, watering, nourishing, spraying (against pests), reaping, milling, grinding, etc., until it becomes flour. People can then measure the quality of the flour and place its value at a certain degree.”

The refinement of flour is compared to the refinement of the mind.

By comparison, Luang Por says, “Long before the mind can control the meditative state, the meditator has to pass through a similar number of processes and mechanisms — from an initial state of developing meditative mind and mindfulness ... [gradually] ... to a condition in which the mind may obtain tranquility.”

Continuing the simile of the production of flour, Luang Por Viriyang explains that, in a meditator who has become firm in his foundations of mindfulness, the mind can become refined to a state of one-pointedness in which it may not be distracted and, hence, will not deteriorate.

Some meditators and monks serve as living examples of this.

Luang Por warns, however, that there are also many among us, who may achieve momentary or temporary one-pointedness — and then lose it again — through being distracted by our perceptions — which, to continue the analogy, would be comparable to pure flour being contaminated through contact with impure elements.

If the mind is nourished in the stillness of tranquility and equanimity, it should be able to remain there. If, however, the meditator should neglect to maintain proper concentration, the purity and value of mindfulness may fall and deteriorate.

In those of us who are not yet free from mental distraction and still striving to attain and maintain moral purity (*sila*), — in those of us who are, thus-distracted, by perceptions and consciousness of the eye, ear, nose, mouth and touch, leading to arising related mental associations and formations appearing in the mind, the anchor of any tranquility and equanimity which we may have formerly achieved and settled into can be unexpectedly ruffled and torn out of its base in stillness and calm.

Just as a good yachtsman is attentive when on anchor watch, so a good meditator must always be attentive and pay heed that perception — the six sense base — which is the enemy of tranquility and equanimity — that contact through the six senses — does not make the meditator lose his base in anchoring calm — through a welling-up of sense perceptions and mental formations which might heave him into a welter of swirling waves within the stormy seas of the senses — and even possibly hurtle him into whirling pools of uncontrollable emotive reactions, which could readily suck him down into the depths of primitive and powerful undercurrents of the mind from which there might well be no escape.

It is a well-kept secret that perception is the enemy — and the secret strategy of mental defense against the harmful effects of the senses — is that developing and maintaining mental detachment and equanimity goes against the way of the world.

The worldly mind, when left unattended, on its own, may be compared to a jungle full of monkeys, jumping every-which-way, without any sense of purpose or unity. Whereas, by contrast, in the well-trained meditative mind, once perception has been quelled and controlled and focused, the mind will be at one-pointed peace, in a state of rest and harmony, in equanimity, free of desire and anxiety.

The problem for a lot of us, however, will be that if there is still some trace of desire or anxiety left, we may remain adrift in a resultant state of perplexity so the mind will not be able to rest.

The way out of such mental perplexity is a gradual process of training.

Such progression,” says Luang Por Viriyang, “is analogous to the development of our physical body.” At its initial state, there is only an element of water. It unifies with vital substances and becomes part of a process in which natural unification and progression produces a micro-organism which is invisible to our eye, and the micro-organism, then, grows, (as we know), through increments and stages, to become a human body.

“The progression of the development of contemplative mind is similar. At its initial state, there is only the barest minimum of mind-awareness present.”

Its origination, then, develops through the process of meditation. Eventually, the meditative mind unifies with calmness, in the center of

the mind-body organism, and mindfulness develops to the point at which it is able to maintain control of the mind over the body.

The difficulty is that, (even then), it is still possible to become unexpectedly distracted, and it takes concentrated resolution and determination to be constantly on watch that the mind does not lose its firmness and balance in equanimity.

Ajaarn Viriyang says, the contemplative “mind that is neglected will deteriorate — “as sure as wood by worms and bugs — and iron and metal by rust.”

Sila (morality) does not remain constant if unprotected; so it must be persistently watched.

In summary, to reiterate what has been said above — it is like the mind watching the mind to see that waves of distracted perception cannot rush in and swirl themselves into accumulations of mental vibrations and waves that agitate into stormy seas.

While [on the one hand] in an unfocused mind, mental waves can get bundled-into a mass and readily get crisscrossed and short-circuited, throughout the nervous system — making the mind go haywire; —

[On the other hand], a mind which is properly centered has developed a strong positive current which can be skillfully focused, diverted and directed to any location at which there is arising sensation in the mind which may need immediate attention for mental-security’s sake.

The mind that is attentive to approaching intrusions has been cleverly compared by the Buddha to the way a watchful spider remains completely still in the center of its web, until it comes time to rush out to catch and entangle any intruder before it has time to do any damage.

Just as the spider has a net, which is set to warn and protect against invading intruders, so the watchful mind might be said to have its own security net, which works, (figuratively speaking), as an early-warning system of projected, protective vibrations, spread-out in all directions and prepared to give alarm, (whenever any potential unprofitable mental impulse may be approaching with the intention of making unskillful contact), so that the well-centered, attentive, “security spider-of-the-mind” can rush out and stop such harmful invasions of ill-intentions before they have time to become mental-physical actions.

In short, being mindful means developing mental discernment to provide prior-warning in time to allow us to prevent possible unprofitable arising actions.

Developing mindfulness, thereby, cultivates mental health — a sustainable state of mental health which may be maintained in an unstable world which, otherwise, seems to be going crazy, based on human ignorance, delusive perceptions and expectations, which are mere phantasmagorical products of the wishful, wandering, unsatisfied, constantly-scavenging human mind.

[To reiterate, as *sila* is cultivated and ardently practiced and emotional restlessness and imbalance are gradually reduced and slowly replaced by mental tranquility and equanimity, the mind becomes well-founded and established in its awareness, and an attentive mind will be more clearly and quickly able to detect potential negative vibrations of mind, approaching in the flow of the psycho-physical mind-body energy, and develop the skill to relinquish and abandon negative tendencies connected thereto prior to the point at which they are able to become actual actions.]

When the mind comes to the point where it begins to develop discernment, moreover, it slowly starts becoming aware of, sometimes slight and sometimes sudden, insights which further open and clear the path to the way of insight knowledge and wisdom.

Luang Por Viriyang provides us with yet another analogy, explaining that, much in the way that ice-cubes work to diminish the heat and energy in a pot of boiling water, when we see mental conflicts arising, which can heat-up into internal energy-combustion, the attentive part of the mind, which is clearly aware of what is occurring, can act with appropriate understanding and discernment to cool the heat of the mental conflict down.

Ideally, we need to develop the wisdom to make the mind into “a cool, still pool,” but, since mere knowledge is not yet established-practice, this is easier said than done.

To put it in a proverb, it is easier to fall into the pot than it is to get out of it.

Indeed, Luang Por Viriyang warns us clearly that there are those who can differentiate between right and wrong but cannot refrain from immoral

thoughts and acts because their mind power is too weak and still under the dominion of the emotions.

To condense the point, in the ignorant and deluded, as a result of the heat that rushes in whenever any of the six doors have been left open, whatever coolness of wisdom we may have previously developed and accumulated is still too weak and will as yet have insufficient power to curb and quell our inflammatory emotions. Many of us are like that.

Most of us are perfectly aware that we lack sufficient wisdom to counter emotion, and some of us know we must, therefore, continue to act with persistence, diligence and energy, in cultivating and sharpening our meditative powers — sharpening the knife of knowledge, as it were, as a tool which is capable of cutting out tangled-and-knotted bunches-and-bundles of short-circuiting energy.

The secret to success in mental cultivation is being aware, that within each of us, there is *the one who knows* —the one who knows that the cooling-power of the detached mind (which watches the combustible part of the mind) is capable of intervening and curbing potentially destructive arising powers.

Luang Por Viriyang in another comparative image, (I.152) says that the manifestation of such power of wisdom might be compared to a sharp needle which is able to run through every kind of fabric. If the needle is dull, it cannot run through any sort of fabric. A person with the knowledge of the manifested *nana** has a sharp mind. He is capable of comprehending various kinds of knowledge as the manifested *nana* emanates from the controlling mind power.”

*The term *nana* may here be understood as “insight wisdom.”

Elsewhere (II.1), he tells us that insight is the capability of discerning the true nature of things the way they really are: for example, the ability to discern the true nature of any physical body as impermanent and illusory, and in a state of flux — always in the process of arising and ceasing.

This is true for all solid-state physical bodies and, of course, the human physical body, included, which is subject to partial-decay every moment and not only when it totally ceases with death.

[On one level] being in state of denial of the immanent truth of the process of physical dissolution and decay within our own bodies, most of

us don't want to see ourselves in such an impermanent way. Within our worldly-oriented minds, don't want to admit that we are unwilling-passengers locked into series of inescapable-carriages trundling along death's railway.

While, at the same time, paradoxically, [on a more matter-of-fact level], we realize, perfectly well, that we are subject to the all-pervasive current of the flow of death and decay inherent in the nature of all things.

Insight meditation, indeed, teaches us to see the truth of the impermanence of all things — to see the truth of things which to us had formerly seemed so permanent — like the sea and the sky and the mountains — to see the truth that all phenomena are merely temporary — in a state of flux and dissolution — according to the arising and ceasing of currents and vibrations of energy waves in nature.

Furthermore, according to Buddhist cosmology, the earth and the sun and the moon and even the whole galaxy are impermanent and will implode or explode — and one day disappear into nothing but infinitesimal, vibrating energy particles.

So how can we imagine that we are permanently here to stay?" How can any one person be permanent in a world where absolutely everything else is impermanent?

Insight wisdom is the power of mind to see and accept, in a gradual process of development, through ever-recurring insights, how things are not permanent.

Insight is a gradual awakening-process in which, over time, through persistent practice, we slowly start to see, one after another, how all perceptual phenomena are all unsubstantial and not at all as they seem to appear to be.

This is not only true of big things in the universe but also of small things too — such as subtle mental-sense impressions as they impinge upon our minds — tingeing our perceptions — and making things appear to us as we might wish (or might not wish) them to be — especially when we are foolish enough to allow ourselves to follow the momentary, (ignorant) pursuit of what we vainly desire in the appearing illusions of sense imagery.

Moreover, we also need the insight to develop clear, incisive knowledge and wisdom to be able to see through the clever, sly, subtle tricks of the sense aggregates (bundles) — as they try to fool the mind — to deceive us into perceiving arising phenomena, — in the way that the aggregates want them to be seen so they can get their greedy hooks into resultant arising feelings and delusions of sense awareness.

This is why we urgently need to develop and depend on *sila* — to constantly guard the doors of the six senses — in the city of the mind — a city that is teeming and swarming with hoards of deceptive appearances and phantasms after which the untrained mind desires to chase and grasp — to devour and enjoy (or even crush and kill).

This is why it is absolutely crucial for the meditator to develop and depend on the defensive forces of *sila* and *sati* and *nana* (insight wisdom) — to secure the citadel of the mind — as defensive mental forces that may stand and serve as security-guards against deceptive apparitions which the untrained mind is wild to possess as imagined objects of obsessive fulfillment.

The normal worldly mind compulsively grasps after tempting illusions, and it aggressively dislikes being curbed or hindered. It wants what it wants, and it will not tolerate anything trying to get in its way. This is why it gets agitated, aggravated, enervated and often even out of control when things don't turn out the way it wants them to be.

The untrained mind is much like a monkey or a child that keeps grasping at things, following momentary impulses of the eye — just because it sees and wants them — even though — in reality — such impulses to grasp onto everything in sight are only momentary, empty visual images which bring no satisfaction at all.

Even though the normal mind is, indeed, very naughty and greedy and uncontrolled, it has also been compared by the Buddha to a wild elephant or stallion which resists being controlled — even though it actually has the capacity to eventually be calmed and tamed and trained.

You may even see yourself as similar to such an elephant or the stallion, and if you do, you will most likely know what to do, without anyone telling you. — The decision is up to you.

This is the situation we are up against when we begin to try to develop the mind. At first, we are very unskilled and have little success in

controlling the impulsive, grasping tendencies of our minds. But, then, slowly, as we begin to see the ever-recurring dangers which impulsiveness and compulsiveness inevitably cause, we begin and then continue to develop judgment (discernment) through direct observation and experience of what is a harmful action and what is not a harmful action to do.

[To reiterate, cultivating insight knowledge means slowly developing the wisdom through experience of knowing what is beneficial and what is not beneficial — of what brings fulfillment and happiness and of what brings lack of fulfillment and unhappiness — invariably leaving a person who is accustomed to worldly grasping, with an accompanying, inevitable sense of letdown of expectation and disappointment, which will inevitably follow in its train.]

To pin-point more exactly, focusing the imagery more precisely, the mind watching the mind eventually begins to recognize the illusion that what we, falsely consider to be “our mind,” or “our thoughts” or “our self” is actually nothing more than an impermanently, fluctuantly-accumulating bunching and bundling of illusive sensations, impressions and desires. We eventually come to realize that what we have always considered to be “our mind”— is just another perceptual phenomena which lacks any actual and abiding reality.

The point may be succinct, but it is not so easy to see.

When the mind watching the mind sees that there is actually no “our self” or “our mind” or “our thoughts” existing in any way as an independent entity, and, then, with time and discernment, it gradually comes to realize that there is only “the mind watching itself,” it becomes clear, through insight, that the mind is actually only a “tool” to be used in a process of observation and analysis — to be laid-down and left aside — once its task of locating and sorting-out and dissolving the delusions of phenomenal existence has been accomplished.

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When we are young and our minds are untrained, we are unwise and unskillful and follow every whim, but as we get older and wiser, we keep learning from our mistakes and continue becoming increasingly skillful in directing our ways.

As we get older and more experienced, some of us, who have heard about the powers of mindfulness, begin practicing insight meditation as a way of helping us to be more watchful — to learn to mend and mind our ways. As we become more skillful in discernment, we begin to know how to choose which actions will be constructive and which will not.

Some of us who are disposed thereto will seek a teacher who can guide us in following the instructions in the Buddha's teachings, as outlined in the Pali Canon, and, then, go on to do what we need to do to clear the path of self-made obstacles and hindrances — to seek a way through the tangle of the tangle of the jungle within the untamed mind, to unravel the seemingly hopelessly entangled bundles of anxieties related thereto — and finally find our way to a safe and more quiet and protected place, where we can sit in calm and peace, to slowly work our way through whatever other hidden delusions continue to cloud our minds, constantly sharpening the skills necessary to guide the one-pointed mind, in strengthening the power of mindfulness, which will enable us eventually to overcome the pull of the current of the flow of the attraction of the psycho-physical world, which constantly threatens to suck us into a perceptual whirlpool, full of dangerous undercurrents, from which, there may be little chance of escape.

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Luang Por Viriyang verifies (II.12-13) that developing insight wisdom is a slow and arduous process, which he compares to a man learning how to read and write:

He says, “At the beginning, he did not know or understand anything. Later, he began to understand little-by-little. Afterwards, he was able to read and write basic words. At this point, his ability equates with *samatha* (tranquility meditation). From that point on, he develops through experience and wisdom and knowledge, just as one would in medicine or architecture or engineering or agriculture, until he finally becomes fully skilled in his craft.”

Luang Por is also clear about the curriculum. There is no mystery here. He says “The structure of insight meditation has clear mechanisms ... When he begins to practice he begins to detach his mind from unwholesome attachments by destroying them, by seeing through them as they really are.”

In one single sentence, he states clearly that “The Four Noble Truths” are weapons that enable the insight meditator to reverse the current of the world. This is where you will have to look to find the tools you need to fight the ultimate battle.

Luang Por warns, however, “The meditator must ask himself if he is ready. If he does not feel determined, he is not ready,” and — just so there is no misunderstanding — Luang Por Viriyang also says (II.21) “There are very few meditators in the world who have attained insight meditation. The notion of *vipassana* meditation is being presented here for your information.”

Another warning Luang Por states clearly (II.25) is that “Once the meditator has commenced on meditation, it becomes his own responsibility.” This means that the meditator cannot depend on anybody or anything other than the focused, determined practice of mindfulness itself.

While the above statements sound discouraging, Luang Por also says, on a positive note, that in strengthening physical health and in aiding in healing — “an attainment of the meditative mind through attentive meditation usually affects the physical body” and can serve as an aid and deterrent to various illnesses.

“With a meditative mind and sufficient courage, a mental patient is already halfway recovered from his illness” (II.26).

I think we might agree that, in one way or another, we all remain mental patients as long as we have not attained final release.

Before concluding, another paradoxical, yet encouraging, comment which Luang Por makes, (II.37) is that, even though insight meditation goes against our will and our nature, it is still worthwhile to practice insight meditation and — anyone can do it.

“Anyone can do it” — and benefit from it — and, —for those who succeed and — do what has to be done — in training the mind to watch the mind — constantly refining itself — so it becomes pure in its every action, — for those who succeed — by doing what has to be done — the goal is to attain cessation of suffering — and the end is the achievement of Nibbana.

Note: This talk merely uses some quotations from Luang Por Viriyang’s teachings as highlights to be used as spring-boards to be helpful as jumping-off points in

explaining some of the basics of insight meditation. In no way should the foregoing pages be considered as a summary of Luang Por's overall teaching on Vipassana meditation practice — especially in matters concerning wisdom — which those who are close to Luang Por Viriyang know, go far beyond the limited scope of this talk.