

Rhythm
of

NILAMBE



Upul Nishantha Gamage

Working Meditation

Buddhism in its entirety can be described by the term 'working meditation,' which is extremely important.

'Working meditation' is a common activity such as cleaning the toilet and bathrooms, sweeping the paths, cleaning the dining hall etc. It is a selfless activity, which gets you to experience kindness, mettā and patience, and helps you to be mindful and to be attentive to what you are doing. In 'working meditation,' you get to learn to disregard likes and dislikes. It teaches us how to live amicably with others, how to work and live without being a burden to others, how to help another person, how to get help from another person, how to engage willingly in an activity after realising its importance.

Dhamma Dāna

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Rhythm of Nilambe

Based on a discussion held with the meditation instructor,
Upul Nishantha Gamage, about the timetable currently
being used at the Nilambe Meditation Centre.

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Rhythm of Nilambe

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A few words to ponder over.....

You are warmly welcome to the Nilambe Buddhist Meditation Centre to learn and practice Buddhist Meditation. We think that it could be a rare chance that you got to learn about yourself while staying in a place out of your busy life. You may not have this opportunity again. Therefore, it is very important to utilise the valuable time, wisely.

The purpose of this document is to provide the knowledge necessary for you to gain the maximum benefit during your stay at the Centre. We hope that, you will be able to make every effort to understand correctly and practice meditation successfully, with the help of the valuable information and guidance given in this document, regarding different features of the timetable.

Editor

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Common Timetable

04:45 am	Wake-up Gong
05:00am-06:00am	Guided Group Meditation
06:00am-06:30am	Tea
06:30am-07:30am	Mindfulness in Motion
07:30am-08:00am	Breakfast
08:00am-09:15am	Working Meditation
09:30am-11:00am	Guided Group Meditation (Sitting standing and walking)
11:00am-12:00pm	Dhamma Discourse
12:00pm-02:00pm	Lunch, Reflection and Rest
02:00pm-02:30pm	Outdoor Walking Meditation
02:30pm-03:30pm	Group Meditation(Self Guided), Interviews
03:30pm-04:30pm	Tea and Working Meditation
04:30pm-05:30pm	Guided Group Meditation
05:30pm-06:00pm	Outdoor Meditation with nature
06:00pm-06:30pm	Evening Snack
06:40pm-07:45pm	Chanting and Group Meditation
07:45pm	Group Discussion

WAKING UP

Q: The first component of the timetable is ‘waking up’. Please explain about ‘waking up’.

A: ‘Waking up’ is very important, because only a person who has woken up is able to accomplish worldly and spiritual goals/activities. ‘Waking up’ is the most important action in life, not only for meditation but also for spiritual life, education, employment, family life etc.

A person usually has to wake up at 4.30 or 4.45 am at Nilambe. That time may be a bit early for an ordinary Sri Lankan who wakes up at 5 am or 6 am. It is half an hour or one and half hours earlier than usual. A westerner may find it a lot earlier than usual, because many of them usually stay up late and wake up around 8 am. Therefore, a westerner may find it difficult to wake up at 4.30 am. The climate here is a bit cold. It rains often. Moreover, a person may remember the leeches and also having to walk to the meditation hall in the rain. We might think about these negative things soon after waking up. It is important to be mindful about the thoughts that arise soon after waking up.

Next, you need to think about the importance of ‘waking up’ or how good it is to wake up, as **only a person who has woken up can change and correct him/herself**. Next, you can experience ‘waking up’ mindfully. What does it mean to ‘wake up’? We get to hear the sounds that we did not hear while we were sleeping: the songs of birds and frogs, the sounds of

the wind, the sounds of the trees, and the sounds of opening and closing doors by those who are going to use the toilet. Our body also feels the numbness if it is numb, the coldness if the environment is cold, and rested if the body has got some rest after a long sleep. In this manner, a person can experience 'waking up' physically. If a person opens the eyes, s/he may see the darkness or the fireflies or the moon or the stars. In this manner the eyes feel 'waking up.' The nose may also feel the smell of the morning dew and the mist. **It is so important for a person to experience 'waking up' through each sense.**

However, to experience all this, your mind needs to wake up first. If your mind still feels sleepy, you do not know what you hear though you are hearing. The mind can be woken up mindfully and consciously through these experiences. You need to get out of bed soon after acquiring a wakeful mind. Otherwise, you'll wake up suddenly at 4.45 am and run mechanically to the meditation hall as you want to be there on time for meditation. It is impossible for you to meditate if you run to the meditation hall. If you start meditating from the moment you wake up, you'll be able to continue with meditation during the rest of the day.

It is very important for you to develop mettā (friendliness) and mindfulness towards 'waking up.' How much can you apply meditation if you have to wait to use the toilet? Patience is important. You can be patient and let another enter the meditation hall first. It is important to come patiently not only in the morning but also at other times of day to the meditation hall. Suppose the time is 4.57 am. So you

run to the meditation hall thinking that you need to be inside the hall by 5 am for meditation. There is no point in running. Meditation is something that can never be grabbed by running. The more you run the further meditation flees from you. Therefore, it is very important to walk slowly to the meditation hall for group meditation, as if you are engaged in walking meditation. If the door of the meditation hall is closed, open and close it slowly, perceive the calmness, quietness and pleasantness of the meditation hall through your eyes, ears, body and mind first, without entering the hall straightaway. Have the feeling that you are not merely entering a building, but arriving at meditation. If you come to the meditation hall in a hurry, only your body, not the mind, enters the hall. Your mind may still be in the bathroom or bedroom (kuti). You can meditate only if you bring your mind to the meditation hall because the body alone cannot meditate. Therefore, all of you or both your mind and body need to come to the hall. It is important to bear this point in mind.

GROUP MEDITATION

Q: What is the importance of ‘group meditation’?

A: Sometimes, although we think of meditating alone for one or one and half hours, it is not easy to do so, because we get tired of meditation. We tend to think of ‘more important’ things to do. We feel aches and pains that magnify with time. As a result, we tend to give up meditation. However, when we are engaged in ‘group meditation’, even if someone wants to get up

and leave the meditation hall, s/he does not do so because everybody else is seated. **The collective and group energy in all of us helps us to continue with meditation throughout the entire period.** Therefore, 'group meditation' is very important. Moreover, how do we meditate with a group of meditators? When we are engaged in 'group meditation', one person is coughing while another is walking or opening a window or closing a window or drinking some water. How do you practise meditation with all these noises and actions going on? This point is very important.

HAVING TEA/FOOD

Q: How do we relate 'eating and drinking' to meditation?

A: Let's talk about morning tea, breakfast, lunch and evening tea together. Most of the time, it is cold when we drink the morning tea at 6 am soon after morning meditation. Having to drink a warm cup of tea is a solution to the coldness. It also physically inspires us. Next, we can see how much we expect from our morning tea. Will it be warm? Will it be tasty? As we are used to having a cup of tea in the morning, we are enticed to drink it. All these are good meditation objects for a clever meditator. It is better if you think in advance why you are going to drink the morning tea, why you are going to have breakfast, why you are going to have lunch. Is it because it is lunch time or tea time? Or do you have a real need to have lunch or tea? Then you realize that you either feel cold or hungry or thirsty. It is important to experience these things mindfully. Then you realize that you drink

or eat as a solution to coldness or hunger or thirst, not as a habit or not because there are time slots allocated for such activities in the timetable, but you have a physical need to drink a cup of tea/coffee or eat breakfast/lunch. There are times when you do not feel cold or hungry or thirsty. **It is important to listen to your body and feel the needs of your body.** Then you realize that you feel hungry, and this is the time you need to go the dining hall. Most of the time, you have to wait in a queue for tea/coffee or breakfast/lunch. If you have practised mettā meditation a little, you can develop friendliness towards those who are in front of you. The Dhamma says: “In such a manner that a mother, having only one child, gives mettā and protects that child, all beings need to be cherished.” Can we practise mettā meditation while we are waiting in a queue at the dining hall? Can you look at those in front of you like a mother who has only one child? If those who are in front of you are your parents or your children, then you are not in a hurry and you do not feel bad either. You can put the mettā meditation you learnt in the morning into practice while you are waiting in a queue.

Q: Is it important to serve yourself food only once?

A: If possible, it is good to serve yourself food only once. If you know how hungry you are, then you can serve yourself the amount of food you need to relieve your hunger. This ability is very important. After some time, you’ll know how much food you need to relieve your hunger. Once you develop this ability, one serving of food is enough. The Dhamma presents this as a duthanga (i.e. an additional ascetic practice)

for monks, not as a common disciplinary rule. Monks need some special practice to acquire this ability. Some meditators may take a little more food if they feel the need. They think of eating little. They can practise this for a day or two. However, it is wrong to intentionally keep denying the needs of the body. That must be the reason why the Lord Buddha preached about wisdom associated with knowing the amount of food a person really needs to relieve his/her hunger.

You can recognize the thoughts that arise when you see food. Some thoughts are associated with the past: the types of food you have had, likes and dislikes about the food you have had. We are always under the influence of the past. If you are in the present, thoughts such as who prepared this for you arise. If you ponder on it, you can be thankful to those who prepared the food for you. Being thankful is worthwhile without being a slave of the past. Thankfulness is valued a lot in Buddhist society, especially being thankful for the food, to those who prepared it and cultivated the raw materials. Such thankfulness nourishes a person more than the food itself does. If you are not happy about the food, then you won't feel full. If you are happy about the food, if you are thankful to those who prepared it, then you feel fuller, more nourished and more energetic. It is possible for you to engage in meditation with all other senses at any time. However, you can meditate with the tongue only when you are eating or drinking. The time you spend on eating and drinking throughout the day is probably less than an hour. It is worth meditating with the tongue during the 10 to 15 minutes you spend on eating/drinking. When does the tongue feel the taste of the food? Does

it happen when you see the food? Does it happen when you serve the food? Does it happen when you mix the food? Does it happen when you put the food close to your mouth? No, you feel the taste only for few seconds when the food touches the tongue. If we are not attentive during that short time, we do not feel the taste. But we say that the food is very tasty. That is just a thought, not an experience. You do not feel the taste after swallowing the food. If you are not attentive when you eat, then you do not feel the taste at all. If you are attentive while eating, then you realize that there is nothing much to be happy or sad about the food as its taste lasts only for a short while. Being happy about the good taste or being sad about the bad taste is an act of little children.

If you eat little by little, then you can experience how your stomach is getting full. Though you felt the emptiness of your stomach before eating, now you feel how your stomach is getting full. As your stomach is getting full, the taste of the food diminishes. There will be a moment when you do not feel the taste at all. You can recognize that moment only if you are mindful. Afterwards, you do not feel the taste any more no matter how much more food you munch. If you eat forcefully, you dislike the food. After eating, if you are calm for a while, you can find out how your body feels, how your mind feels. Try to be attentive to that too. Taking a rest after eating is necessary for digestion. It is nice if you can stay in the same posture for about 5 minutes after eating.

Q: Is it useful to think that we eat merely for maintaining the body?

A: Yes, according to our Buddhist tradition, we can reduce cankers(mental negativities/defilements) by making use of food wisely with reflection. When you feel greedy for food, just think about why you eat. You eat not to experience non-existing pain, not to create problems that did not exist by eating a lot and eating unsuitable food, but to solve an existing problem. We have to solve that problem, **because we cannot carry on this journey with that problem unsolved.**

Q: Once I noticed that a foreign lady was angry because we had run out of bread. She said that a person who was before her in the queue took too many slices of bread. Another foreign lady heard that statement and shared some bread of hers with that lady. Though there was no bread, there were enough biscuits. How important is sharing?

A: It is important to share things equally. Sometimes, only one loaf of bread is available. Though one loaf of bread is not enough for everybody, it is worthwhile being friendly and sharing it with others. Even if only one loaf of bread is available, as there are other foods such as biscuits, bananas, butter etc. the most important thing is to share them with others. **Think that there may be a person who has not yet eaten.** It is good if you think like that first and then serve yourself with food.

Once I saw that there were biscuits for tea. There seems to be a lot when there is a whole packet of biscuits.

Some would take two biscuits and others would take three biscuits. In the end, there was only one biscuit left. Then, a foreign lady took half of that biscuit and left the other half for another who might come after her. See what a beautiful act that is. Thinking of others and sharing is a great quality.

I usually eat last. Sometimes, I find that there is no food. There is nothing to eat for breakfast and also for lunch. I feel hungry. Sometimes, I take the last bit of food that is left, thinking that I am the last person to eat. Then I see another person is coming. I feel so bad. I do not feel full even if I eat. I feel full if the last person gets some food, even if I do not have anything to eat. It is the usual practise to cook extra food. However, once in a while, the food is not sufficient due to diverse reasons. Sometimes, visitors come during the lunch time and eat. Someone may take a couple of helpings before the last person comes to the dining hall.

Practise to acquire spiritual nourishment by being happy about the food you have got, being thankful to those who prepared the food and being able to share with others.

Q: What is the reason for giving a light meal in the evening?

A: Taking evening meals is not practised at traditional Buddhist meditation centres where monastic tradition is given the priority. A person can opt for fasting. Fasting is very important. In any manner that the body needs food, it needs to fast too. However, a person who is not used to fasting finds it difficult to meditate while

hungry. Gastrointestinal disorders such as gastritis may also develop as a result of fasting.

The progress of meditation does not depend on fullness or emptiness of the stomach. Some meditators, including myself, don't always get enough food but we don't mind. Sometimes, as a consequence, we experience acid reflux, burning in the stomach and even vomiting. **But there is no need for us to go to that extreme to acquire liberation.**

Q: Does taking a heavy meal in the evening disturb the meditation practice?

A: When you spend the daytime according to the timetable currently being used at the Centre, you do not get to engage in heavy work that makes you tired. Therefore, you do not need a heavy meal for supper. Also, you do not feel hungry when you are at the Centre.

According to the timetable, you are expected to sit for group meditation soon after taking supper. It is not a good practice to sit in one posture for some time soon after taking a heavy meal. Moreover, you may not be able to pay attention to Dhamma discussions. You may also find it difficult to meditate at night after group meditation/Dhamma discussions if your stomach is full, because a heavy meal makes you feel sleepy. Furthermore, you may find it difficult to experience a relaxed sleep if your stomach is full. Based on all this practical aspects, taking a light meal for supper is always beneficial.

Q: Is there a reason for giving vegetarian meals?

A: A big trend exists in the world with regard to vegetarianism. There is no direct relationship between the path of spiritual liberation and vegetarianism. However, the kind thoughts associated with not harming a living or dead being for our living and for our sustenance make us happy. The Dhamma says that eating meat causes various illnesses. In the beginning of human evolution, only three illnesses existed: hunger, thirst and sleepiness. People were afflicted with ninety eight illnesses after they started eating beef.

Non-violence or friendliness towards all living beings is the most important point here. This is not a debate. Becoming a vegetarian must not be a problem to society and family. It is more important to say you eat vegetables than to say you are a vegetarian. Some vegetarians have conflict with the non-vegetarians who live in the same family and village because they think that they are superior and the non-vegetarians are inferior. It is a cheap act to divide society into superior and inferior elements based on the type of food we eat. **The Lord Buddha preaches in the Āmagandha Sutta: “I am more careful about what I put out of My mouth than what I put in My mouth.”**

PRACTISING MINDFULNESS IN MOTION

Q: Is there a relationship between exercise and meditation?

A: If a person practises sitting meditation throughout the day, s/he does not get to exercise. It is alright to do so for a day or two. Someone who meditates for a long period finds it difficult to walk outside, especially during the rainy season. Therefore, such a person cannot exercise at all. Therefore, on the one hand, exercise is needed. On the other hand, exercises such as yoga, tai chi, and chi gong are not associated with jumping and energetic body movements. All these exercises need to be done very slowly. The slower you do them, the better results you will get. It is possible to do yoga quickly after some practice. A person can stand on his/her head even if the mind wanders. However, it is impossible to do tai chi and chi gong without paying attention and without being mindful. If a person is not mindful, s/he makes mistakes. Therefore, **being attentive to oneself or being attentive to the body is more useful as a practical training than a physical exercise.** Many do not feel their body. Therefore, they find it difficult to pay attention to their body. They do not understand what they need to do. Even if they pay attention to the body, they do not feel it. Therefore, the exercises mentioned earlier are helpful for them to feel the body and practise Kayanupassana (Contemplation on the Body).

Most of us use the body to work like a machine. But the body is not a machine. Therefore, we need to be careful with the body, treat the body well and recognize the limits of the body. Exercises are also helpful with

all these. A person learns to balance his/her body with the help of these exercises. A person who tries to stand on his/her head needs to make an effort within the required limits for that exercise. Otherwise, s/he is unable to maintain that posture and falls. If someone's effort is more than that is needed to maintain that posture, s/he falls. Therefore, making moderate effort is necessary to maintain balance.

A person can recognize this moderate effort or the middle path with the help of the body through these exercises. Moreover, these exercises are helpful for being mindful. How does a person look at the body from a distance without making it his/her 'self?' The body only fulfils some of our responsibilities. 'Mindfulness in motion' is included in the timetable to give an opportunity to gain practical experience of some concepts associated with meditation.

Q: As the timetable refers to yoga, a foreigner might come here only for yoga. What do you think about that?

A: Yes, there was a time like that. However, the Nilambe Buddhist Meditation Centre is not a centre for practising yoga. When the term 'yoga' is used in the timetable, some visitors tend to imagine a whole different world associated with yoga. In the modern commercial world where fulfilling sensual desires is given the priority, yoga is nonsense. Fulfilling sensual desires is not a basic concept of yoga. The methodology of the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali is important. It talks about a substantial spiritual development. It talks about letting go. However, yoga practised in the modern world is about clinging, not about letting go.

It is a worldly style associated with clinging to the body or to an invisible and unclear goal. Therefore, the term 'yoga' is no longer used in the timetable. Instead, 'mindfulness in motion' is included, which is useful for developing all other spiritual qualities and skills. Yoga is alright. There are many benefits. However, today's yoga does not consist of even these benefits. It has become a business associated with modifying the body. It has become a technique for beautifying the body. It has become a technique for living long. It is practised to become united with Brahman (the Creator God) or 'Universal Soul.' So **yoga has become an entanglement. Life is already entangled, and meditation is for disentangling the entangled life.** Therefore, what is the point in getting more entangled by doing yoga?

No matter how beneficial yoga is, its results have limitations: there is a limit to becoming healthy, extending the lifespan and becoming beautiful. All these have limits. None of these can solve our basic problem. Therefore, meditation is essential. The basic concept of yoga is the ability to have control over things in a manner that we wish. However, that is something impossible. We need to meditate to understand this phenomenon.

We have no control over anything, which is one of the principles of nature. Understanding this principle of nature through meditation makes it possible for us to let go of things. The more you do yoga the more you cling to things, **as yoga is a practice taking place in ignorance thinking that it is possible for us to control nature.**

Q: What else should those who dislike exercises do?

A: Walking meditation or sitting meditation

WORKING MEDITATION

Q: Is 'working meditation' important for lay people?

A: Yes, 'working meditation' is extremely important. Formal meditation in the form of sitting meditation or walking meditation is the usual traditional practice in local and foreign Meditation Centres. Formal meditation is essential. However, when you leave the Meditation Centre, it is not possible to meditate for 5 or 6 hours a day. As a result, you face some difficulties. You want to meditate but it is not possible. As a result, you plan again to attend a retreat or go to a Meditation Centre. As a solution, 'working meditation' is introduced. **In fact Buddhism in its entirety can be described by the term 'working meditation,'** which is the message of the Lord Buddha.

Life and meditation are not two things but one single thing. Life is meditation. Meditation is life. Some concepts such as being mindful, living in the present moment and being attentive to what you are doing are associated with meditation. Furthermore, a person is able to attend to day-to-day activities without becoming stressed and mentally tired.

Washing your clothes is not considered 'working meditation.' 'Working meditation' is a common activity such as cleaning the toilets and bathrooms, sweeping

the paths, cleaning the dining hall etc. It may happen that today is your last day at the Centre. You may not be able use the path you are sweeping. So you are doing it for those who you have not met or you do not even know. Therefore, **'working meditation' is a selfless activity.** It is an activity which is not associated with 'self.' You get to practise doing something without creating 'self' because you are engaged in 'working meditation' for the sake of others. We always do things only for the sake of 'me' and 'my people.' How do you come out of the frame called 'I and my people' and do something for the sake of those who are not known to you? 'Working meditation' gets you to experience kindness, mettā and patience. **It helps you to be mindful and to be attentive to what you are doing.** Otherwise, you become stressed by trying to finish quickly what you are doing and also thinking about what you are going to do next.

The next important point with regard to 'working meditation' is this: When there are many choices between different activities, we have the habit of choosing the one we like the most. We try not to choose the activities we do not like. Choosing between likes and dislikes is alright if our life lets us do so. But life is not like that. We cannot always do what we like. Sometimes, we always have to do things that we do not like. If we are used to doing only things that we like, when we have to do things that we do not like, we are in conflict. Having to do things that we do not like may cause mental problems and physical illnesses such as allergies, collectively known as psychosomatic problems. Suppose a person falls ill because of his/her job. Having to engage in a job they dislike is one

reason for such illnesses. In **'working meditation'**, you get to learn to disregard likes and dislikes. Instead, you think about the importance of the activity, whether you like it or not. You also think of the activity as something essential. Where does this disliking exist? You can find that out and also why you do not like a particular activity. On the one hand, you can do it as an experiment.

There are some activities that we cannot do on our own. Suppose you have to lift a heavy piece of timber or firewood. As you cannot lift it alone, you have to seek help. At that point you get to learn to seek help from another, how to collaborate with others, how to help another person to do something, how to do team work etc. 'Working meditation' teaches us how to live amicably with others, how to work and live without being a burden to others, **how to help another person, and how to get help from another person etc.**

The next important point about 'working meditation' is associated with the type of activity you are engaged in. Only an hour is allocated for 'working meditation.' Someone starts an activity which takes a couple of days to finish. That is the nature of some kinds of work. Sometimes, finishing some work takes longer than a month. If you think of finishing something that is impossible to finish within an hour, you get into a big problem. "How do I finish it within an hour?" When you hear the bell ringing to indicate the time for group meditation, you feel sorry to stop working, if you cling to what you are doing.

You need to learn to engage willingly in an activity after realising its importance and also to let go of it when the time allocated for that activity is over. It is not wise to think: “I have been doing this for about an hour. How can I put it aside and leave?” You need to get used to leaving when the time comes. Such a practice is important. Most people find it difficult to retire after working for a long time. Retiring is a big mental problem. The same problem may arise at the time of death.

‘Working meditation’ helps you learn many other things. “I have done the best during the time allocated for working meditation. If I get some time and opportunity later, I’ll finish it. I may not even get an opportunity to finish it.” You are able to recognise clinging and aversion. If you do not like what you are doing, you are waiting for the bell to ring. What are the reactions arising in your mind when you find that someone else has finished the work that you started? Is it necessary for it to be done only by you? It is the activity that is important, not the person who does it. **You need to give priority to the action and leave ‘you’ behind.**

Q: Suppose we are ready to help another. Then we get to know that someone else has helped that person before us. Therefore, we feel bitter. Is it the ‘ego’ that makes us feel bitter?

A: If a feeling of disappointment arises when we are no longer needed, it means that our will to help another has never really been selfless. Our intention has not been pure. Therefore we feel jealous. We also resent

the other for getting help from another person. It is as if we could not live without being needed. Suppose someone is ill and asks you to bring him to a doctor. You agree and arrange your schedule accordingly. Later, he informs you that he no longer needs your help because another person will be taking him. If you do not accept this easily, without resentment or jealousy then your willingness to help has been tainted by the ego. The ego only wants to satisfy its own intention regardless of others' needs. In general, if we are unable to embrace a sudden shift of events wholeheartedly, we suffer.

The ego wants us to be important, to be regarded as indispensable in the the eyes of others, to be a person that others can't live without. It does not want to be omitted, forgotten or ignored. By trying to be an important person, we may not realize that our actions drive us further away from ourselves and from others.

INDIVIDUAL & OUTDOOR MEDITATION

Q: What is the speciality of 'individual outdoor meditation'?

A: 'Individual and outdoor meditation' is as important as 'group meditation.' Practising formal meditation with others while sitting on a mattress inside the meditation hall is one thing. Practising meditating alone in other places is also important. As a result, you become a person who can meditate at any place. If not, you always need an environment similar to the one that you practised meditating in. You walk out of

the meditation hall into an uncontrolled environment. Someone may be walking around you. If you are seated on a stone step, someone may be walking in front of your face. Someone else may be sitting close to you and talking to someone else. Another person may be breaking stones with a sledgehammer.

How do you open to all these activities going on around you and use them as meditation objects? How do you avoid getting disappointed? If we think of doing 'outdoor meditation' for one hour, how do we meditate during the entire period with determination and effort? When we are inside the meditation hall, we are compelled to meditate the whole time probably because of the indirect influence of others. It is really worth trying to meditate alone. **Then you can learn to be mindful in an open and uncontrolled environment without being impatient.** If you understand this timetable and get used to meditating according to it, you can meditate at any place. As you get to practise meditating with your eyes open, this 'individual outdoor meditation,' is very useful for everyday life.

Q: I have understood the importance of acting according to the timetable. Though I have stayed at the Centre many times, I had no clear understanding about the timetable. Why couldn't I understand?

A: Nobody has asked until now about the significance of the timetable. Therefore, it is obvious that the importance of the timetable would not be understood clearly. A timetable has both disadvantages and advantages. Having to eat at the time allocated for lunch, whether we are hungry or not, is a disadvantage.

We cannot eat when we are hungry because we are with a group of people. Truly, we should eat when we are hungry, not according to a timetable. Therefore, the timetable causes some artificiality.

However, there are many advantages. Therefore, a timetable is needed. I do not use the timetable for some meditation programs. If it is 10-day meditation programme, I do not give the timetable for one day. Those who got used to the timetable probably felt lost without it. In the beginning, the meditators find it difficult to understand what is going on, like new-born babies. As the meditators are used to acting according to a timetable, they probably feel as if they are stranded in outer space. However, it is important to learn to practise without a timetable, because **then we get to follow the nature's timetable**, not a man-made one written on a piece of paper. That is one other aspect of the timetable. When we follow a common timetable, we get to practise how to live cordially with others. Some newcomers to the Centre often ask about the timetable. They say that they have come away from a world where schedules are strictly followed in order to gain some experience that does not depend on time. Why do we have to wake up, meditate and eat at set times?

When I was new to the Centre a long time ago, I remember a French lady who visited here saying: "The biggest problem in life is to do with time. Having to follow a timetable is a big stress. I feel an even bigger stress when I see this timetable." Then I told her: "Very good. Please forget this timetable and make one that suits you. However, food is not available all

the time. Therefore, you need to come to the dining hall at the time specified in the timetable, but you can eat at any time you wish. Unless you come to the dining hall at that time, you won't have anything to eat. Please prepare a timetable that does not make you stressed, and show it to me." On the following day, I asked her about the timetable and found that it was not ready yet. I saw something scribbled on a piece of paper. On the fifth day, she brought a piece of paper and said happily: "I prepared a timetable that suits me the best. I love to follow this timetable throughout the day." I was curious to know what she had prepared, but found that she had prepared a timetable similar to the one used here. She could not remember. Then I said: "You spent about 5 or 6 days preparing a timetable. But it is the same as the one we use at the Centre." Then she said: "Is that so? Then it must be a perfect timetable." In a way it is good that she got an opportunity to understand the timetable. If I had said that the timetable used here was perfect and there was nothing to change in it, she would not have accepted it.

As time is a concept, there is nothing to grasp. Similarly, there is no reason to be against time either. When a bus or a train or an airplane is scheduled for 11.15 am, there is no point in asking why it has to leave at 11.15, not at 10.00 am or 12.30 pm. It is not a problem as time is a concept, a common need. **But if you think you are going to be mindful at 11.00 am and you do not need to be mindful after 12.00 noon**, then you are mistaken. Meditation should exist in the whole mind, from the time you wake up till you fall asleep. Though time periods are allocated

for meditation, it does not mean that meditation does not exist outside these time periods. I notice most of the time that chanting starts slowly in the beginning and ends quickly. Soon after chanting, the mats are folded very quickly and pillows are thrown away to get ready for meditation. That should not be the way. Chanting is a meditation. Folding the mats is also a meditation. Replacing a pillow is also a meditation. If you chant and fold the mats in a hurry, then you cannot meditate well. Meditation is not another job. We think meditation is the next job to do. We think the next job after chanting is meditation. That is a false idea.

Q: Is it because of our unawareness about proper meditation that we think of meditation as another job?

A: We do not know that meditation is a full-time process and not a full-time job. Take walking meditation as an example. There is a beginning and an ending as we cannot be walking throughout the whole day. However, the walking ends, not the meditation. **Meditation ends only when our suffering ends.**

REST

Q: Why is it important to rest during the day?

A: A person who woke up at 4.00 am has spent about 10 hours awake by 1.00 pm. Usually, a person feels tired by that time. Therefore, a rest period is given in

the timetable. Resting does not mean taking a nap. If a person really feels sleepy, it is alright to take a nap for 5 to 10 minutes. Taking a nap is useful. Resting is helpful for a person to meditate fresh for the rest (7 to 8 hours) of the day. If a person is tired, though s/he does not take a nap, it is worth being quiet and being alone while letting go of thoughts, thereby feeling fresh. **It is also worth practising how to experience rest mindfully and how to give the body and the mind some rest.**

WALKING MEDITATION

Q: What are the advantages of walking meditation?

A: When we do sitting meditation, we may be attentive to something. We are mindful of what is happening in meditation. We are calm and quiet. We are attentive to what is happening. Being calm and quiet and being attentive is important in meditation. However, it is not possible in ordinary life to be calm and quiet while being attentive all the time to what is happening. We have to do things and be active in life. If we have learnt only to be calm and quiet and to be passively attentive to what is happening, then we become disabled. Working and meditation do not coincide. The moment you start meditating, you stop working. However, both of these coincide in walking meditation. Walking and meditating happen simultaneously. We are attentive to walking; thinking of lifting a foot, walking quickly, walking slowly; how the decisions are made, how the right decisions are made; enquiring about whether we are tired or not; whether the walking is fast or

slow; how such actions are observed and assessed; how decisions are made based on observations and assessments; how the decisions are implemented. In this manner, walking meditation trains us more than sitting meditation on how to put the mind on the right track. When you are seated for one to one and half hours, stress may build up physically and mentally. We may or may not be aware of such stress. One half of the mind may become at ease and the other half may become stressful. Settling down the mind stops at a certain point because of stress, just as an air bubble inside a water pipe prevents it from getting filled with water. As the body and the mind are at ease, we may not even know that stress has built up. **Walking meditation relaxes the functioning of the mind and the body**, and relieves stress. After relieving stress by walking mindfully, you may feel that you have become calmer and quieter, and refreshed. This harmony of sitting meditation and walking meditation is really worthwhile.

WORSHIPPING AND CHANTING

Q: What is the purpose of worshipping the Triple Gem and chanting?

A: Worshipping and chanting. Both these activities are included in worshipping. Worshipping refers to an honourable regard and an offering we give as a token of gratitude to the Lord Buddha, who showed us the path for acquiring peace. Also, worshipping is the way we express our respect to the map of the path which helps us acquire peace, and to those who

have experienced the cessation of suffering. We have got this opportunity because of the Triple Gem. A map is meaningful only if there were and there are travellers. A traveller does not exist without a map as it is not possible to go somewhere without a map. Likewise, **the Dhamma does not visible without the Saṅgha, the Noble or spiritual community, and the Saṅgha does not exist without the Dhamma.** In the absence of the Saṅgha, the map is just a rough sketch. It is difficult to find the way with it. The Saṅgha is the living exemplar. The Noble map and the Noble Saṅgha exist because the Lord Buddha cleared the wild and found the path on His own. Therefore, we express our gratitude to the Lord Buddha in a traditional way practised in Sri Lanka by worshipping. A statue of the Buddha is not the Lord Buddha but a symbol of Him.

Any culture in the world gives a great value to flowers. Not only in Asia but also in the West and Africa, flowers are given a higher value than many and other things. Therefore, we offer flowers and pay our respect and express our trust in the traditional way by worshipping. As a result, our mind feels delighted. Worshipping also helps us in our journey in search of the end of suffering. That is one aspect. The next point is about devotional chanting or 'Sajjhāyanā' of stanzas, verses on the qualities of the Triple Gem, and the Mettā Sūta in Sinhala and English. The meaning of the word 'Sajjhāyanā' is as follows: concentrating together. Collective tranquillity of mind exists during chanting because everybody does the chanting together. The sound and rhythm of the chanting and the trust, confidence and delight in everybody turn into a common experience causing collective tranquillity.

In group meditation, tranquillity develops individually, not collectively. Therefore, it is possible to experience undistracted mental repose or oneness to some extent during chanting.

However, we need to open up, which does not happen with the head, but with the heart. Worshipping and chanting is more of an activity of the heart than of the head. **If you do it with your heart, individuality disappears and collective confidence, collective delight and a shared rhythm set in.** You may not understand the meaning of the stanzas. Even Sri Lankans may not understand all the Pāli stanzas. A foreigner does not understand Pāli at all unless s/he has learnt it. Though some of us do not understand the meaning of the stanzas, chanting is helpful for being in the present moment. Isn't sound helpful for being in the present? We learn to respect the joy that arises in others. Though you have no joy in chanting, others chant joyfully. Therefore, we learn to respect their joy, which is a valuable quality.

There is another aspect of chanting. As it is a group activity, we learn to chant to the rhythm of others. Do you need to compete with others? Do you try to chant before others? How do you follow others? Do you try to finish chanting quickly, as if chanting blessings quickly when a person is about to die? That is not the way to chant. There is a considerable gap of silence between two lines of a stanza. Let's take two lines of the stanza for offering flowers as an example.

1st line-*Pujemi Buddham kusumena' nena*

2nd line-*Puññaena m'etena ca hotu mokkhan*

We need to chant leaving a considerable gap between these two lines. We can experience the silence in the gap. However, that is not the popular way this stanza is often chanted. Both the lines are chanted together without leaving a gap. The sound of the chanting and the silence in between the lines of the stanza are useful for easing the mind, calming the mind. There is no benefit in finishing chanting quickly.

Some people are against chanting. They think that meditation is the most esteemed activity and chanting is a kindergarten activity. However, that is their ego. Foreigners have a different problem because they do not understand the meaning of the stanzas. When they practise mindfulness of breathing meditation, it is easy to describe how to do it. But they chant using a language that they do not understand. That is a problem for them. I advise them at least to sit and listen. A person can use chanting to stop his/her mind from wandering and to be in the present moment or to be here.

When I advise them on meditation I say: “I did not discover this knowledge. The Lord Buddha kindly preached the Dhamma that He found after making tremendous efforts in so many previous births. There are books in the library written about the Lord Buddha. There are Dhamma discourses in the library preached by the Lord Buddha. There are books in the library consisting of great quotes about the Lord Buddha made by great people in the world.” They look for such information and meditate for two or three weeks. Then they realize the value of chanting the stanzas. Afterwards, they learn the stanzas by heart.

They ask to take to their homes, The booklet used here for devotional chanting. They record the chanting. **In the end, the foreigners chant the stanzas they have learnt by heart, rhythmically and in a peaceful manner.**

GROUP DISCUSSION

Q: Would you explain the importance of Dhamma discussions?

A: Yes, discussions are very important. There are two types of discussions. The first type is about the personal problems of a meditator. Such problems are discussed personally with the teacher. The second type is group discussions. We discuss a problem or an experience common to everybody. The priority is given to experience, not to knowledge. Information given in books or by teachers gets the second priority. Such things can also be discussed. However, **it is more important to discuss experiences and problems.** What have you experienced about something? Have you faced a similar problem? How do you solve that problem? How do you look at a problem in light of your experience? How do you advise another? How do we make use of the Dhamma discourses preached by the Lord Buddha to solve a problem? Discussions of this nature may cause some blossoming.

Q: Often some question is posed to break the silence. I have noticed that theoretical questions and also information given in books are presented in the form of questions. Do we benefit from such questions?

A: We do not argue over theoretical matters here. I do not answer questions like: “What are the Four Noble Truths? What is the Noble Eightfold Path? What is Dependent Origination?” I think I am not here to answer such questions. There is even no need for those who pose such questions to come all the way here, with some difficulty, to gain theoretical knowledge. Such things are talked about in Dhamma discussions as a habit.

Usually, theoretical questions based on what is taught are asked at examinations. Answers are also given. For instance, the capital city of England is London and the capital city of France is Paris. Such things are taught throughout the year. Then questions such as, “What is the country with the capital city of Paris or London?” are asked. Often Dhamma discussions are like that. Such discussions are meaningless. They are good games to improve knowledge.

Proper questioning is an attribute of wisdom. Firstly, a person has to formulate the question before asking it. Only a wise person can ask questions, though any fool can answer. Asking an appropriate question is the most difficult thing. I asked many writers of books on Buddhism to first read the Sutta Pitaka (discourses and discussion given by the Lord Buddha), then compile the questions posed at that time by divine beings, Brahmans and human beings including kings and monks and write a book comprising those questions. What were the questions asked by people then to the Lord Buddha? What did people then enquire from the Lord Buddha? Nobody questioned the Lord Buddha as

to what the Four Noble Truths were. Such questions are like asking a doctor what paracetamol is. You do not go to a doctor to ask such questions. A doctor's duty is not to answer such questions. Often Dhamma discussions have turned into an intellectual game. Often questions are asked based on some relevant Pali terms. Then a person thinks that s/he has got some answers. This type of a discussion is merely an intellectual game.

Q: We ask questions to show our knowledge, don't we?

A: Questions are asked to show someone's knowledge and also to judge the knowledge of the teacher. Hallucination and illusion crop up with knowledge. Buddhism does not give any place for knowledge, but for awareness. Be aware of what is happening at the moment. Be aware of the breath. Be aware that you are breathing. Being aware that you are breathing is not knowledge. Knowledge is something that we accumulate. **Buddhism values the awareness of what is happening in the present, not accumulated knowledge.**

An illusion known as 'I am a knowledgeable person' arises because of the knowledge you have accumulated. Knowledge always creates an illusion: a knowledgeable person, a person who knows Mahayana Buddhism or Tibetan Buddhism or Krishnamurti. A person reads a couple of books and thinks that s/he has knowledge about the things read by him/her. A person probably thinks that s/he knows about Krishnamurti more than Krishnamurti himself. Likewise, a person may think that s/he knows about Buddhism more than the Lord

Buddha. What is meant by “the person who knows” is described in the first discourse preached by the Lord Buddha, called the Dhamma Chakka Pavattana Sutta. The disciple Kondaññais referred to as “the person who knows.” He was the first among humans to realize the Dhamma by listening to the Lord Buddha. Therefore, the Lord Buddha praised him saying *“aññāsi vata bho Kondañño.”* What did he know? **Everything that appears due to causes is subject to disappearing.** Arising and vanishing take place simultaneously. The nature of the Dhamma is that it disappears as it appears, which is ‘impermanence’, i.e., the timeless nature of the Dhamma.

There may be people who know about impermanence. Knowing about impermanence does not necessarily mean that they are aware of appearing and disappearing. Knowledge is one thing and really knowing is something else. There is a popular book called “The Third Eye” written by T. Lobsang Rampa. This book was written about Tibet, though the author has never been there. He was born in the United Kingdom. But he has written about Tibet probably better than a Tibetan. Likewise, Edgar Rice Burroughs, the writer of “Tarzan of the Apes” never went to Africa. But he has written well about Africa. The point is this: Knowledge creates an illusion. Knowledge is not based on what you are experiencing this moment.

SLEEPING

Q: Why is it important to have a calm and peaceful mind before falling asleep?

A: It is difficult to experience sleep 100 per cent, like waking up. If you experience sleep 100 per cent, you cannot fall asleep. The best thing to do before falling asleep is to let go of the agitation of the mind without suppressing it. There are incidents during the day that make us agitated. The moment you try to fall asleep, you remember all these incidents. You did not have enough time during the day to reflect about the excitements caused by these incidents because you were busy. You probably felt sad and angry over some incidents. As you have nothing else to do just before falling asleep, the agitations you suppressed during the day start surfacing. It is not wise to forget about these things. If you fall asleep without solving them, they reach the unconscious mind and become a part of it. As agitations are settled in the unconscious mind, you won't remember them on the following day. Afterwards, you find it difficult to understand what is going on as the agitations are suppressed.

Therefore, the best thing to do before falling asleep is to think back over the day and try to remember the incidents that caused agitation. Why did you get agitated? What is the reason for the agitation? Could you have responded differently? If so, what were the opportunities you had to respond differently? If you think like this before falling asleep, you can live the next day with understanding. Moreover, you can let

go of the agitations. **Therefore, it is worth emptying the mind before falling asleep.** As a result you can sleep peacefully with ease. Your mind is not confused by dreams, because the incidents settled in the unconscious surface as dreams when you are half asleep. You can wake up the next day with a peaceful mind. In this manner, you can experience to some extent how you fall asleep with a peaceful mind. First of all, we close our eyes. If you are awake, you have to close the eyes to fall asleep. Then you do not see anything. You can experience that you do not see anything. Next, you notice that your capacity to smell diminishes gradually. Afterwards, you start feeling your body, and the capacity to feel the body also diminishes. Only hearing is left now. Even hearing diminishes gradually. Only if you are mindful, you notice that thinking is left. You keep thinking. However, your thoughts are not clear. You see things vaguely in the mind. Only after you pass this last stage, you fall half asleep. Even if you cannot experience all of them 100 per cent, it is possible for you to experience at least a few of these things, if you are mindful. Such a sleep is a pleasure.

Often we talk about a comfortable sleep. However, no sleep is comfortable unless you fall asleep in the manner that I described. We say that sleep is comfortable because we do not experience suffering while we are asleep. For instance, you need money for different things. You have to respond to different people. You do not have any suffering while you are asleep. The only time when a person does not have any economic problem or health problems or relationship problems is at the time of sleeping.

However, according to the Dhamma, a sleep is comfortable not because we experience no suffering while we are asleep but because of the peacefulness caused by a calm and peaceful mind and also by letting go of agitation. This means we can experience all these through meditation. However, we experience ease and pleasure during the day in the midst of many actions. When we are falling asleep, these actions reduce. Therefore, the degree of ease and pleasure we experience during sleep varies.

Only if you fall asleep peacefully you can wake up peacefully. There is no other medicine. Even if a person can fall asleep using a pill, there is no medicine for waking up. You wake up to an alarm. You can ask another person to wake you up, but waking up in that manner is not a pleasant experience. However, falling asleep with an empty mind is very pleasant. Therefore, waking up is also pleasant. One can wake up like a flower which blossoms early in the morning.

Q: We cannot be aware during sleep, can we?

A: It is difficult, isn't it? You can be aware during sleep up to a certain point. We can close our eyes mindfully. Then, we can experience that we do not see anything. If there is no special smell to perceive, then we can experience that there is no smell. If there is any smell, our perception of it diminishes gradually and then disappears completely at the point of falling asleep. Then we feel the body. Feelings associated with the body also diminish. Even if you do not feel the body, hearing is left. Hearing also diminishes gradually.

There is no clear thinking but thoughts arise and disappear. Pictures appear and disappear in the mind. You remember things. Most of the time, the thoughts associated with the past arise and appear in the form of pictures. These thoughts also disappear and you experience some empty moments. But you have not yet fallen asleep 100 per cent. Beyond that point, when you are about to fall asleep, it is impossible to experience mindfulness associated with sleep. This means that sleep and mindfulness do not go together.

Q: Waking up is not always a pleasure, isn't it?

A: Waking up is different. That is why I said earlier that waking up is a pleasure. **Waking up is a pleasure if the mind wakes up earlier than the body.** If the body wakes up earlier than the mind, then waking up is not a pleasure. Suppose an alarm or a big noise wake you up. Or else, someone wakes you up by shouting at you. Under such circumstances, the sound that reaches your ears wakes you up. Suppose someone shakes your body. So the feeling of the body wakes you up. Whether a sound or a bodily feeling wake you up, your body wakes up before the mind. The mind is still asleep. The mind wants to sleep more. The body wakes up the mind. It is not a pleasant experience for the mind. It is unpleasant experience to wake up the body first and then the mind.

If you sleep with a calm mind, then the mind itself wakes up after it gets enough sleep. If the mind is restful before falling asleep, it does not need a long sleep. Under such circumstances, the mind wakes up first. If a tired mind or an agitated mind has fallen asleep, a sleep cannot make the mind fully calm.

Even if the body has got enough sleep, the mind is not satisfied.

The body has limits. For instance, hunger and the body have limits. However, the craving in the mind makes us eat more even if our stomach is full. If a restful mind falls asleep, it wakes up first. When the mind wakes up first, it knows that it has woken up. It also knows that the body is still asleep. So, you do not hear anything. You do not experience things associated with the five senses because only the mind has woken up and the body is still asleep. Then the mind decides to wake up the body. Waking up in this manner is very pleasant. **You feel the pleasure of waking up. You do not need any other device or method to wake up.** The one who was destined to become the Buddha left the Tusita heaven and was conceived mindfully. Therefore, he was born mindfully. These incidents are logical. If you die mindfully you can be born mindfully. If you fall asleep mindfully you can wake up mindfully. If you fall asleep in the absence of mindfulness, you have to wake up in the absence of mindfulness with confused mind.

Q: Can a person who falls asleep mindfully be woken up by a noise?

A: Yes, that is possible. According to the Sakka-pañha Sutta, once 'Sakka' visited the Lord Buddha and said: "I came to meet the Lord Buddha earlier. At that time You were in a state of composure. I told one lady at the village to let You know that I visited You. Did You get that message?" The Lord Buddha stated: "Yes I got

the message. But before that, I came out of the state of composure because of the noise of your vehicle.”

It is possible that there may have been noisy vehicles in India even at the time of the Lord Buddha. This shows it is possible to be in a state of composure that can be disturbed by a noise. Therefore, it is obvious that a noise can wake up a person. Even if a noise wakes up a person, if that person fell asleep mindfully, s/he regains mindfulness soon after waking up. Therefore, even if a noise wakes you up, it is not a big problem as it is easy to fall asleep again if you still feel sleepy.

Q: When I was woken up by the noise of the telephone, I realized later that I was not mindful at the beginning of the telephone conversation. Why was that?

A: Because you were half asleep. We have lost our natural sleep because of the facilities in the modern world.

SILENCE

Q: Most of the meditators come to Nilambe with the great idea of meditating in a silent environment, having set aside all their day to day responsibilities and obtaining leave from their working places with utmost difficulty. But once they are here we see some of them cannot adhere to that and start talking to each other, especially when they are in their rooms. This could be a hindrance to others as well.

A: There could be few reasons for this. One could be the stimulus within themselves to talk, because of their habits and inclinations. Therefore with whatever the intention they come here, they start to talk.

Most of the time what happens is: we start talking with our own stimulus which comes within. Those who come for meditation here, at the end of their stay, they are so thankful and appreciate the facilities at Nilambe, especially for maintaining such a silent environment, where they can see themselves, can understand themselves and be with them, in an isolated place without any disturbances like radios, televisions and such media. Such places are very rare. Such places are becoming less and less in the world. This fact is understood only at the end. Initially we come from an environment where we have known people and we associate them. When we see someone in the morning we talk, when we see at noon we talk, even if meet in the evening we talk, sometimes we talk over the telephone too. Our lives are sort of combined with communication, talking, exchanging ideas. Sometimes this desire could be even more than having food. Some people, feel at lose when they cannot talk to somebody, though they can even forgo a meal. When someone from such an environment comes here, feels that emptiness a lot. Loneliness is felt even more. Further the habit of talking is very powerful. We should be aware of these; we have not come here to feed and manure our past and long living habits. The habits have made us mechanical and we are imprisoned in our own habits. We have come here to get ourselves free from those. The meditation is not to continue our habitual life, but to begin a new life with awareness.

We must contemplate on this frequently. We must be mindful enough to recognize the urge that rises habitually to talk, no sooner we meet someone and must remember that we came here to become a new person.

When we talk, we hear what others say, we get to know their details, but we become deaf to ourselves. As soon as we start talking, we become deaf to ourselves and we go out from ourselves. We came here to bring back ourselves to us, to investigate what happens within and to recognize ourselves. The mindfulness we have established through meditation for a considerable time will vanish totally by a few minutes talking. We hear ourselves only if we are in silence. We would hear our mind, our thoughts, the rhythm of our heart, only if we are silent. If you experience that, it will be easier to be silent, since hearing our own sound is a wonderful experience. To hear the inner sound, the rhythm of the heart is magnificent. Since we have not experienced these only, we are trying to enjoy the external sounds. Another reason is, when we are not talking we may feel lonely. Whenever we feel loneliness, we are used to talk to somebody and if there is no one close by we may even take a telephone call and try to avoid that loneliness. But in meditation we try to confront that loneliness; not to avoid it with jabbering. By confronting loneliness and recognizing it we try to explore how to accept it without treating it as a problem. This is a major hurdle for us to overcome. The silence is mandatory for this. If we were not in silence we do not face loneliness; we do not get an opportunity to confront loneliness; it would not be possible to go through it; we would not be able to understand it and to win over the loneliness.

The next problem that crops up in meditation is the talking mind. Whatever the meditation technique we try to train ourselves in, the mind becomes talkative always; mind starts to jabber; to argue; to debate with our own self or with others or with the past or the future. Therefore it is not easy to meditate. However much the need is there, we fail to the jabbering, arguing and debating mind. At this point we can see something beautiful, there is a huge connection between our physical talk, external talk and our talking mind. When we stop talking to somebody, that External talking is over. But within our mind that talking continues. "I should have said like this; should have asked this; whatever was told is very important; it cannot be like that"; in this manner this talking mind may continue without an end for weeks or even months. This is just the echo, of that five minute talk with somebody else. It could continue with reverberation, re-answering, re-questioning, accepting and rejecting as a psychological uproar or inner noise.

There is a major relationship between the inner silence and verbal silence. However much we try to meditate, we will not be successful, if we are not verbally silent. The influence of other things that we see or feel is less. What we see is only an image; what we feel to the tongue is only a taste; to the nose we feel some fragrances; to the body some sensations. There is a major impact of what we hear, as there is a message in that. Those words have meanings and concepts. This is not there in what we see, smell or in bodily sensations. But the ear is different. Whatever we take in through the ear is taken straight to the brain,

and connects with all the old memories in the mind, accepted and rejected concepts and creates a huge mess. This could happen even with just one word.

Therefore we must try to keep our mouth shut than closing eyes in meditation. If you can close your ears too, it will be very beneficial for meditation. Another reason is: unlike when we are alone, when there is a group of people, we have the urge to get to know each other. We have been used to inquire the name, hometown, the job etc., and we like to introduce ourselves too. We think this is the way to become friends. And once we get to know their basic information like the name, the job, hometown; that greedy mind becomes satisfied that we know about that person. Otherwise we feel some emptiness within, when we are in a group. This is a requirement of the mind, the desire to collect information. But, after completing a week's silent meditation program, they say, initially got that urge to inquire, who is in same room or who is seated next to themselves . Since it was not allowed, did not do it. But now at the end there is a very good understanding of who they are, though we did not speak a word. When you associate someone for about a year, you get to know about that person and you get closer to that person. The same discovery could be made by being silent. This is usually the correct recognition. What you get to know by inquiring name and stuff, are just words, not really about that person. We never get any real understanding of a person with such information. But within the silence, a major communication happens; it is a direct communication, very slowly, sometimes we may not be aware when it

happens. But after some days, we understand that there was a great communication, a flow of information has happened.

Therefore silence is a medium. Things that cannot be told in words can be communicated through silence; things that cannot be asked too can be inquired through silence. We can understand so many things that cannot be understood with words, through silence. We are being entangled in a language unable to express ourselves and inquire what we want. This entangle could be totally disentangled through silence. Not only that, it gives answers to all the unanswered problems. The other thing is we can communicate only with a human being using words of a language we know, but not with animals, trees, earth, sky, flowers, leaves, birds or clouds. The silence gives the ability to build a great connection with everything; with a tree, a leaf, a flower, a brand new tender leaf, a dying leaf, a dried falling leaf, anything. All these reveal some norms. We begin to hear those norms, and understand them. Every tree; every leaf; every cloud; every mountain is talking to us and is teaching us the norms of nature. But if we are caught in talking we would not hear any of these. We would hear only some words which are not important and which could make us complex. Silence is the medium that talks about the norms.

The profound doctrine is communicated through silence. That is why doctrine is requesting us to be silent. This silence is called the most profound silence, the noble silence. That is to be silent in mind too, not

only by words. Without building up stories, creating problems, and answers, silence the mind. That silence is called the noble silence. Then only you begin to hear the sound of doctrine. To get to that point, this silence, the silence from words, becomes a great entrance, a great help and a great pathway.

Therefore start to love the silence; not the words; make love to silence. Get into silence whole-heartedly. That is an exclusive experience. It may be difficult at the beginning, that is because we are not getting attached, not loving the silence. But when you start to love the silence, and embrace silence whole-heartedly, it becomes an exclusive, exquisite, meaningful and a deep experience.

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Right Speech

(Practice in the society after the retreat)

Q: Would you explain 'right speech'?

A: Silence is very important for meditation. In fact, a trained mind is very quiet. That is one aspect of being quiet. Silence is helpful for us to meditate. However, meditation is not just being silent. Being silent mindfully is meditation. Being quiet in the absence of mindfulness is not meditation. Therefore, we need to practise being quiet while being mindful. We need to practise to experience silence mindfully. Silence gives us an opportunity to look at ourselves, to listen to ourselves. Therefore, silence is very important.

The moment you start talking, you forget yourself and pay attention to another. **You have come to Nilambe to enquire about yourself, not to enquire about others.** Therefore, silence is really worthwhile for a person who wants to enquire into him/herself. Outer silence causes inner silence. Silence paves the path for communication without words. We can communicate through words only with those who understand the same language. Experience gained through verbal communication has limits. Being silent mindfully is the door to the skill of listening to everything/everyone without language barriers. As a human being, a person needs to talk. Though you are quiet here, you have to speak and listen after leaving this place. How do you use speaking and listening as meditation objects? How do you use meditation to help you with communication? Unless you learn these things here, meditation disappears when you have to speak.

The Dhamma describes Right Speech as one of the most essential components for attaining Nibbāna (Enlightenment). Right Speech is one factor of the Noble Eightfold Path. Therefore, you do not have to abstain from speaking, but you need to practise Right Speech, as meditation is about developing the Noble Eightfold Path in us. The Lord Buddha defines the term 'meditation' as using the Noble Eightfold Path. The first Dhamma discourse preached by the Lord Buddha, called Dhamma Chakka PavattanaSutta (Setting the Wheel of Dhamma in Motion), refers to meditation as using the Noble Eightfold Path. By practising 'right speech,' a person can learn to talk about his/her experience associated with meditation, how to be open to others' experience, how to control

the voice, how to engage in speech using minimum energy. A person gets tired mostly by speaking. In a conversation between you and me, it is sufficient if I speak loud enough for only you to hear me. I need to be sensitive about this all the time. When you start talking, I need to get used to listening to you. Before you finish talking, if I interrupt, it shows that I am not interested in listening to you, and I expect you to listen to me. **Most of the time, there is no listening. We are inside our own world.** When someone speaks, we analyse what s/he is saying: Is it right? Is it wrong? How is this interpreted in a particular book? What did another person say about it? We judge in this manner. We never listen openly. We do not answer the question. How do you listen? How do you produce the right answer? If I do not agree with what you say, how do I express my views without creating conflict?

A conflict arises not because of different views, but because of narrow thinking. Though this is my view, there can be other views. My view is not the only view. If you understand these things, other views can also be accommodated, maybe even 100 views. This does not mean that I accept all of them. We need to pay attention to other views. Why does a person have such views? Just enquire. You have the opportunity and capacity for enquiring. Developing your capacity for enquiring is meditation. You get an opportunity to develop your capacity through 'right speech.' **Having chit-chats and cracking jokes are not 'right speech.'**

Q: Most of the time we try our best to express our ideas in telephone conversations or talking with others without giving enough time for listening. Sometimes, the other person does not get an opportunity to say what s/he wants to say. I have noticed that often another question is posed before finishing answering the previous question. What do you think about it?

A: That is haste. You need to develop the habit of not thinking while you are listening. If you are listening, do only that. You need to practise not doing both simultaneously. **This is an art which needs practising. You need to learn to listen first and think later as thinking does not take a lot of time.** The other point is to stick to the topic that you started taking about.

Let's think that I started talking about the timetable. Until the topic regarding the timetable is finished, nothing else should be talked about. We often change the topic. Therefore, we forget the topic that we started talking about. Most of the time, about 100 topics are covered within a 5-minute conversation. That is the nature of a wandering mind. A person with a settled down mind starts and ends a conversation within the same topic. Moreover, learning to stick to one topic helps acquire a settled-down or concentrated mind. It is a mutual relationship. A settled- down mind helps you stick to one topic. Learning to stick to one topic helps you to acquire a settled-down mind.

About Library

Q: Is reading an obstacle for meditation?

A: The library is closed on days when intensive meditation courses are running. There are no libraries at some Meditation Centres, and the meditators are not allowed to bring books either. There are occasions when reading is not allowed at all. If there is a meditation teacher, it is worth following the meditation objects taught by the teacher, avoiding unnecessary thoughts and doubts, and entangling the mind remembering what you read or heard from another teacher. That is one aspect. Therefore, it is not absolutely necessary to have a library at a Meditation Centre.

Moreover, there should be a balance between knowledge and practice. According to ZenBuddhism, practising without theory is like a ship sailing without a sail: not aware of where it is going, where does it want to go? Nothing is known. A person does not know where s/he wants to go. S/he cannot direct him/herself. Similarly, any theory that is not practised is useless like a treasure locked inside a coffer. Something valuable exists but it is of no use. Therefore, theory and practice need balance. One quality of the Lord Buddha known as Vijjā-carana-sampanno refers to having knowledge, and also practice or a practical way of living. Therefore, some knowledge is certainly necessary.

There used to be lots of books in the library at the Centre. Some books, especially all the travel guides, were removed. A cartoon drawn by a meditator was

kept in the library. This cartoon is about two travellers who come to an airport and board an airplane. They tell those who have come to see them off that they are going to attend a meditation retreat. They are wished a nice retreat. Having come here, they would stand on their head. One cartoon shows them doing a headstand in yoga. Afterwards, they would go to the library and read travel guides about India and Sri Lanka. One person reads about India and the other about Sri Lanka. During the tea break, they would eat biscuits and drink tea while laughing and shouting. A time was allocated then in the timetable for watching the sunset. Therefore, they would be watching the sunset. Afterwards, they would doze off in the meditation hall. In the end, they would buy a statue of the Lord Buddha and return home. They would disembark the airplane and leave the airport. When someone asks them about the retreat, they would say: "Wonderful, we'll go back."

This happens most of the time. It is not a joke. Even if a person did not do all these nonsense, the most frequently borrowed book was the travel guide. The library is beneficial to get to know about other meditation teachers in the world, other meditation techniques and other Meditation Centres.