

1st to 4th May 2013 (4 days) Mindfulness meditation retreat at Sam Poh Futt Mahayana temple, Bringchang, Cameron Highlands - Conducted by Bro. Teoh Kian Koon.

(Below is a **very good** write-up by an **Anonymous** Kalyanamitta to **assist** yogi attending **meditation** retreat there via sharing with them her own **very useful** and rather **beneficial** experiences while there.)

1.1 Before retreat

I had planned my **cultivation** seriously and I am looking forward to the five days of **mindfulness meditation retreat** at the Mahayana Triple Gems temple, Cameron Highlands. I intend to **strive on** with **heedfulness** to **progress** along the **path** of **Dharma** to **realize** my **good** and **noble wishes** via **proper cultivation**. My inquiry was – ‘Can **true peace, bliss, happiness, understanding** and **enlightenment** be realized by me during this retreat?’

I'm usually **not** the *serious* type. But after **understanding** the **danger** of **heedlessness** as **frequently pointed out** by Br. Teoh I **had decided** to **seize upon** this **golden opportunity** to **seriously cultivate** at this retreat. So earlier this year, I had already **signed up** for the retreat to immerse myself into the **cultivation** of the **daily mindful meditation** leading to the **Heedfulness** and **hopefully** to become **more wise**.

To realize the **silent, still, and peaceful state** of **mind** that is **free** of all *my usual* **fear, worry** and **anxiety** (over my **health, career, relationship** and other **life related problems**) is not **easy**. To see whether I **could just stop** for **five days** all these **heedless thinking** (*leading to all the* **fear, worries** and **anxieties**) and **perhaps** after that I **won't** be **heedless anymore**. I will be **more calm** and **peaceful** because by then I **would be able to know** the big **difference** between **heedless living** and **heedful living**.

1.2 During the retreat

On the third day of **silent meditation**, apart from chanting the puja, I **said just 14 words**, all of them in the course of **asking a question**. Experiences on Days one, two, four and five were all very different but they were really **beautiful**.

After the 3rd day, Not talking turned out to be **easy** but **mental chattering** is **not easy** to **relinquish**. Initially, the **Mindfulness meditation** was **not easy either but** somehow after the 1st day it **started to set in** and **later stabilized very quickly**. It is just like a **new way of living life** with **heedfulness most of the times** instead of being **totally heedless throughout the day or most of the times** like before. The **5 mental hindrances** that **hinder** my mind from **becoming peaceful** and **calm** have been **replaced by** the corresponding **5 spiritual faculties** which are so **wonderful**. The **spiritual faculties** (especially **saddha, viriya** and **sati**) had enable me to develop the **composed, calm** and **clear mind** so easily leading to **my ability to understand** the Buddha dharma so much easier now.

1.3 Understanding what is true mindfulness and Heedfulness.

As **opposed** to usual **thought based meditation** this is **awareness or mindfulness based meditation** that can lead one to ‘*seeing things as they are* **without the interference of thoughts**’ and to **awaken** (or **insight**) into the **3 universal characteristics** of nature – namely Annica, Dukkha and Anatta.

At first I thought the **noting** of **mental intentions** that I used to do at **other retreats** was mindfulness. I was wrong because I was doing it **without understanding** what **mindfulness** or **sati** is then. After listening **attentively**

to Bro. Teoh and *reading through* his rather clear and simple dharma transcript books and notes given to us I was able to understand what mindfulness or sati really is! Then I was able to cultivate with *understanding, confidence* and *ease*. It is just the silent mind with inner awareness before the knowing or the arising of thoughts. To be in a relax state of silent inner awareness to experience the moment (without any reaction or movement of thought) is true sati. Since you can only do 1 thing at a time, you are either aware or loss in thoughts. Then you will come to understand that unless you are mentally silent you cannot be attentively aware via sati otherwise you are heedlessly loss in thoughts – preoccupied with all the thinking and reactions of mind without any inner awareness at all. Heedfulness or Appamada means to use the silent mind with inner awareness to cultivate the Buddha dharma to develop the wisdom via the 'direct seeing' to insight into the 3 universal characteristics of nature - Annicca, Dukkha and Anatta.

1.4 Understanding the meditation as taught by the Buddha.

The meditation as taught by the Buddha are 2 (two) fold. First is just to train the mind to be heedful following dhammapada verses 21, 22 & 23 then secondly is to use it to cultivate the 3 turnings of the Four Noble Truth (especially the Noble 8-fold path). As stated by the Buddha in his 4th Noble Truth if one cultivates this Noble 8-Fold Path it will lead one to the cessation of all suffering or enlightenment. So any meditation that does not lead the cultivator back to the cultivation of the Noble 8-fold path is not the meditation as taught by the Buddha.

As clearly pointed out by Bro. Teoh, these 3 turnings of the Four Noble Truths were so clearly emphasized by the Buddha in his 1st sermon (the dhammacakkappavattana sutta) to the 5 ascetics and it is stated that even he himself as a Bodhisattva had to understand this Four Noble Truth in its 3 turnings and 12 aspects or modes otherwise he cannot be considered the fully enlightened one. The 3 turnings can give rise to the 3 types of corresponding wisdom called suttamaya panna, cintamaya panna and bhavanamaya panna. The 1st type of wisdom, sutta maya panna arise after hearing the sutta or discourse of the Buddha whereas the 2nd type of wisdom can only arise after attentive and creative contemplation, reflection and inquiry into the dharma as proclaimed by the Buddha under his 1st turning. Only after Bro. Teoh's very detail explanation of what this 2nd turning wisdom is, do I really understand the importance of dharma contemplation and investigation to arise this 2nd turning wisdom called cintamaya panna. The 3rd turning is all about meditation or bhavana leading to the awakening. The 2nd turnings wisdom is the most important because it can lead to awakening too if the cultivator's past cultivation is already very established otherwise it will act as a very stable base for them to receive later truths from any of the 3 turnings cultivation.

Dharma contemplation is best done in a retreat or a way place that is very quite (with a tranquil settings), with a lot of very conducive supporting conditions for dharma contemplation and wisdom to arise. Just like this Mahayana temple where the surrounding nature, flora, and energies are so conducive for dharma contemplation. One just has to be in a naturally relax state of mind to do this dharma contemplation & investigation while standing or walking or sitting in the open or within the vicinity of the temple.

When we silent our mind to reflect and contemplate on the beautiful nature within the temple and its surrounding we will be able to perceived the great stillness energies of the nature there within our heart. We will also be aware of all the flows of nature (like the swaying of the leaves and branches of the forest trees, the breeze, the beautiful cool and breezy weather, the beautiful cloud formation, the chippings of the birds & the beautiful insects and other nature's vibrations, the beautiful sights and sounds of all the colonial buildings, dead trees, temple chanting, vibration of temple's bells, moving cars and flowing streams etc.) When we are silent it is like our nature can take them all in. Our hearts like open up to embrace them all as the great Oneness in pure spacious awareness i.e. not caught in the proliferation of thoughts. Then we can radiate loving

kindness and compassion to all *living beings* and we can also share and transfer merits to them. As we **do these more and more, everything** we come to be aware of can become dharma for us to develop the wisdom borne of dharma contemplation. We can perceive the phenomena world so clearly and understand its condition arising nature leading to the penetrative understanding of the Buddha's teaching regarding Annica, Dukkha and Anatta. There were so much joy and realization - even the dead trees with its pristine beauty, stillness and wonders seem so beautiful. Contemplation on death or marananusati is like so easy. There is only Love and no negativity. The mind is always at ease and peaceful. Mind is so relax, creative, silent, still and peaceful within.

We can also 'see' our own physical flow like the blinking of our eyes, turning, bending, stretching, change of postures etc. - mind and body (or kaya) as one and always in harmony and perfect synchrony; and our mental flows, like every moment of perception, feeling, sankhara activities (such as our mental intentions, reactions, thinking, planning, scheming) and consciousness etc. as we contemplate and move around in a very relax and natural way. Even nature's flow like the moving cars, the moving clouds, the moving plants, the sways of the trees, branches and the various other movements and flow within nature, are so clear.

Our typical day's scheduled activities starts at 6 a.m. and end at 9:30 p.m. Inter space with formal sitting and lying down meditation, informal walking and bowing meditation (to strengthen our spiritual faculties), chanting, contemplative meditation (to arise the 2nd turning contemplative wisdom), dharma sharing, meditation reporting and Q & A, followed by a sustained continuous flow of daily mindfulness training via having a good religious routine. A lot of very important Essential Dharma notes given to us were also discussed and clearly explained to us by Bro. Teoh to enhance our dharma understanding.

1.5 Getting started

Most yogis normally arrive at the retreat place exhausted and burned out. Especially so during the first day's sitting meditation session, they started feeling tired, completely exhausted and useless. Their mind just cannot settle down to be mindful and aware and there are a lot of random thoughts and mind is just restless most of the time. But the retreat's activities and training really helps and yogis usually leave the retreat feeling buoyant, light, happy and much more relax, calm & peaceful. There is brightness in their eyes and much more faith, clarity and joy in their mind. Their body too is more relax, upright, light & fresh.

When I checked in, I was assigned to a dormitory with double Decker beds. I zeroed in to look for a nice bed and was happy to note that the toilet facilities with the hot water system and hotel like condition were available. But then I remembered: "I am here on a retreat to cultivate simplicity and silence of the mind. I felt apprehensive. I missed my children. But I didn't miss my BlackBerry.

Walking outside, a few minutes after dinner, my anxiety were calmed by the great beauty and rather conducive environment that this temple has to offer. The beautiful nature and natural setting surrounding the temple too were superb. The weather was just nice – cooling and surrounding air very fresh.

1.6 Daily meditation diary: From doubt to joy and confidence.

Meals were vegetarian, simple but healthy, fresh and delicious. We learn to move around, gather and eat mindfully. One of the few sounds at meals was that particular clinking of utensils hitting dinnerware. I really appreciate the silence at this time because there is no occasion to chat about hometowns, jobs, families, problems, jokes etc. After dinner, we had puja chanting followed by dharma talk and meditation instructions. While most yogis were silent most of the time to cultivate noble silence, some were not. Noble silence can only

be **appreciated** when one **had developed it well**. We started our **first formal sitting meditation** with instructions *to understand what is meditation?* And *what we are doing in the name of meditation*. Bro. Teoh explained to us **clearly** why yogis who had **yet to train our mind** is **heedless** and **think** a lot most of the **time**; it is due to **the presence** of the **5 mental hindrances** and he **teaches us** how to develop the opposite **5 spiritual faculties** to counter these **hindrances** via cultivating our **puja** and **contemplating** on **who our Buddha is** to develop the **understanding, faith, diligence** and **perseverance**. How to **reverse our heedless thinking** via using the **mind sweeping method** to **feel and relax** only (**no more thinking**) and the **use of metta** to lighten up the mind states to bring about **inner wellbeing**. This is followed by **Anapanasati training** to **stabilize our sati or mindfulness** via **anchoring it to our breath** which is *always in the moment*. Just **relax** and be **aware** at the **nostril area** to **feel the breath** - to **attend only to our breathing**. If it (the sati or awareness) *wanders off*, just **patiently return to its training, without any reaction or judgment** -- one of the **many easier-said-than-done** instructions. But if one is **patient enough** it is *easier than learning how to ride a bicycle*. After all, we are here **to train and tame the heedless mind**. I went **to sleep the first night tired, uncertain** but **unlike many other nights I had a good asleep**.

1.7 Sinking into the meditation training

There were signs posted everywhere **to preempt questions** and **remind** us to be **mindful, aware** and more **considerate**. There are signs in the bathrooms about **turning lights** off after use, **be mindful** to maintain **noble silence** and **taking out** the trash. There were also signs in the **kitchen** about how **to eat** and *move around mindfully* and **clean up, closing doors quietly**. Hand phones **to silent mode** while in the meditation and dharma hall etc.....

We woke up at 5.45 am and get ready for **morning chanting** at 6.15am followed by **formal meditation**. Then we had our breakfast. After breakfast we had our **chanting** and **reflections** followed by formal **group meditation**. After that we had our **meditation reporting** cum **Q & A session** followed by **dharma sharing**. During these sessions **I learnt** and *developed a lot of understanding* from this **group sharing**.

We maintained **noble silence** *most of the time to cultivate the* **daily mindfulness** and **dharma contemplation** during our **waking moments**. Also the **collective energies** of the **Group meditating** and **cultivating together** over a **sustained period** can **help improve, motivates** and **shores up** each individual's *effort and ability to meditate*.

We **meditated** on **cushions, floor mats** or **straight-backed chairs**. Each person **customized** his or her **own spot**, with **cushion** or **little kneeling platforms**. **Cross-legged** was the **predominant** position. The first day I looked around and **copied other postures** to find the right one for me, but no matter how I settled in, at some point, I **was itching** to move. **Was I the only one who could not sit with ease?** The **silence** was **intimidating**. What if I coughed? Just **scratching** my arm sounded like screeching cats.

By the **second** full day, I was **more calm** and **mindful** and my **sitting meditation** *improved*. At the beginning of the retreat I was longing for the **bell to ring** during **formal sitting meditation** but **towards the end of the retreat, there were sittings at which I looked forward** for it to be **longer** and the **ringing of the bell** was like **a bit too fast**. One hour of **awareness meditation** was like so fast.

1.8 Walking meditation

The advice by Bro. Teoh for *our walking meditations* was **to walk naturally** in a **very relax** state of **awareness** – always be **at ease** but **aware within**. The walking can be **slow or fast** up to the individual and the **main idea** is **to**

slow down the mind and (**not** the bodily movements) by anchoring it to **the kaya** so that the mind is **always silent** and **within the moment without** thought. When you are able to walk in a **very natural** and **relax state** following your **normal day to day speed** until you **can be aware** of your **breath, body** and **mind moving as one** then **you are in sati** and you will *become more* and **more mindful**. It is like training yourself to master Tai Chi or yoga. The **slowing down** will happen **on its own** and **your movements** will be **like a flow** and **very graceful**. Then you will **be able** to maintain **awareness** and *mindfulness* of **all the actions, movements** and **activities** within your kaya (or physical form) naturally. You will come **to be aware** of the **'birth'** and **'death'** of every **footstep**, followed **by its arising, sustenance** and **passing away** and **all other phenomena** like the **blinking** of your **eyes**, the **movement** of your **limbs** (hand and feet) and your **entire body**, the **turning, bending, stretching** and **sensations** within your kaya or physical body as you walk. They will all be **felt** by your **silent mind** with **clear awareness** within. Just **continue to be mindful** and **don't try to know anything** because **the awakening** or **true understanding** will **arise by itself** when you are **silently aware** of all phenomena **without any reaction** or **judgments** via your **direct seeing** with the **silent mind**. The awakening doesn't involve thought.

1.9 Meditation guidelines to help you maintain the cultivation after the retreat

According to Bro. Teoh many yogis are **unable** to *continue their cultivation* **after the retreat** and they always complained that it is very **difficult** to **cultivate** while still **working** and living the **householder's life** because the **environment** is just **not conducive** and **it is so difficult to maintain** the **silent mind** with **constant awareness** and **mindfulness to live life**. They realize that after the retreat within a short while (maybe only for a few days at the most) they are back to their **old habits** of **reacting, getting angry, unhappy, fearful** and **heedless life style** again because of **society's conditions** which are very **challenging, competitive** and at times **very harsh** and **aggressive**.

Bro. Teoh said, "Opportunities **to continue your cultivation in daily life** are *possible* and it **can be done** if one is **sincere, diligent** and **serious** about **liberating oneself** from the **shackles** of delusion and suffering." The daily **mindfulness** that Bro. Teoh had taught us, if **done with understanding** *can be develop to allow one to cultivate* this **stable daily mindfulness** leading to the **heedfulness** in the **midst of one's career** and **householder's life** – no problem at all because Bro. Teoh had done it before (20+ years ago).

According to Bro. Teoh the world is **not a quiet** place, **even when civilization** is less developed. **Distractions** and **problems** created by the **deluded mind** via our **mental projections** leading to **fear, worries** and **anxiety** can arise anytime because *'the world is the world'* and *'living beings are just the way they are'*. So without **wisdom** all **phenomena created** by the mind will be **grasped at** and they **will intrude** into your mind and **cause you suffering** and then there will be **no peace**. **But peace, silence and stillness** are **within us**, so if we can develop the **wisdom** via the **direct seeing** as taught by the Buddha then **'we can see things as they are'** to **'accept the reality of the moment'** so as to be **at peace** with all things then **liberation** from **suffering** is possible. All these are **so beautiful**.

My this retreat experiences had taken my **spiritual journey** deep enough to hold me through the long drive home, to get me and my family **started** on a **home practice**. I plan to **DILIGENTLY** and **SINCERELY** **keep cultivating** until I realize the **enlightenment**; or at least **able to settle** for just a **slightly calmer, a more peaceful** and **wiser** mind.

By an **Anonymous** Kalyanamitta (April, 2013)

