

3. STOPPING AND SLOWING DOWN

Keeping Still

For a full and unobstructed unfoldment of the mind's capacities, the influence of two complimentary forces is *needed: activating and restraining*. That twofold need was recognized by the Buddha, the great knower of mind. He advised that the faculties of energy (*viriy'indriya*) and of concentration (*samadh'indriya*) should be kept equally strong and well balanced.* Furthermore, he recommended three of the seven factors of enlightenment (*bojjhanga*) as suitable for rousing the mind, and another three for calming it.** In both cases, among the spiritual faculties and the enlightenment factors, it is mindfulness that not only watches over their equilibrium, but also activates those that are sluggish and restrains those that are too intense.

Mindfulness, though seemingly of a passive nature, is in fact an activating force. It makes the mind alert, and alertness is indispensable for all purposeful activity. In the present inquiry, however, we shall be mainly concerned with the *restraining* power of mindfulness. We shall examine how it makes for disentanglement and detachment, and how it positively helps in the development of the mental qualities required for the work of deliverance.

In practising bare attention, we *keep still* at the mental and spatial place of observation, amidst the loud demands of the inner and outer world. Mindfulness possesses the strength of tranquillity, the capacity for deferring action and applying the brake, for *stopping* rash interference and for suspending judgement while pausing to observe facts and to reflect upon them wisely. It also brings a wholesome *slowing down* in the impetuosity of thought, speech and action. Keeping still and stopping, pausing and slowing down – these will be our key words when speaking now of the restraining effect of bare attention.

An ancient Chinese book states:

“In making things end, and in making things start, there is nothing more glorious than *keeping still*.”

In the light of the Buddha's teaching, the true “end of things” is Nibbana which is called the “*stilling of formations*” (*sankharanam vupasamo*), that is, their final end or cessation. It is also called “the stopping” (*nirodha*). The “things” or “formations” meant here are the conditioned and impersonal phenomena rooted in craving and ignorance. The end of formations comes to be by the end of “forming,” that is, by the end of world-creating kammic activities. It is the “end of the world” and of suffering, which the Buddha proclaimed cannot be reached by walking, migrating or transmigrating, but can be found within ourselves. That end of the world is heralded by each deliberate act of *keeping still, stopping, or pausing*. “Keeping still,” in that highest sense, means stopping the

* See Path of Purification, pp. 135 f.

** Ibid, pp. 136 ff. The three rousing factors are investigation, energy and rapture; the three calming ones, tranquillity, concentration and equanimity.

accumulation of kamma, abstaining from our unceasing concern with evanescent things, abstaining from perpetually adding to our entanglements in samsara – the round of repeated birth and death. By following the way of mindfulness, by training ourselves to keep still and pause in the attitude of bare attention, we refuse to take up the world's persistent challenge to our dispositions for greed or hatred. We protect ourselves against rash and delusive judgements; we refrain from blindly plunging into the whirlpool of interfering action with all its inherent dangers.

He who abstains from interfering is everywhere secure.

SUTTA NIPATA, V. 953

He who keeps still and knows where to stop will not meet danger.

TAO-TE-CHING, CHAPTER 44

The Chinese saying quoted earlier states in its second part that there is nothing more glorious in *making things start* than in keeping still. Explained in the Buddhist sense, these things effectively started by keeping still are “the things (or qualities) making for decrease of kammic accumulation.” In dealing with them, we may follow the traditional division of mental training into morality (or conduct), concentration (or tranquility) and wisdom (or insight). All three are decisively helped by the attitude of *keeping still* cultivated by bare attention.

1. *Conduct.* How can we improve our conduct, its moral quality and its skill in taking right decisions? If we earnestly desire such an improvement, it will generally be wisest to choose the line of least resistance. If we turn too quickly against those shortcomings deeply rooted in old habits or in powerful impulses, we might suffer discouraging defeat. We should pay attention first to our blemishes of action and speech and our errors of judgement caused by thoughtlessness and rashness. Of these there are many. In our lives there are numerous instances where one short moment of reflection might have prevented a false step, and thereby warded off a long chain of misery or moral guilt that started with a single moment of thoughtlessness. But how can we curb our rash reactions, and replace them by moments of mindfulness and reflection? To do so will depend on our capacity to *stop and pause*, to apply the brakes at the right time, and this we can learn by practising bare attention. In that practice we shall train ourselves “to look and wait,” to suspend reactions or slow them down. We shall learn it first the easy way, in situations of our own choice, within the limited field of experiences met with during the periods of meditative practice. When facing again and again the incidental sense impressions, feelings or stray thoughts which interrupt our concentration; when curbing again and again our desire to respond to them in some way; when succeeding again and again in keeping still in face of them – we shall be preparing ourselves to preserve that inner stillness in the wider and unprotected field of everyday life. We shall have acquired a presence of mind that will enable us to pause and stop, even if we are taken by surprise or are suddenly provoked or tempted.

Our present remarks refer to those blemishes of conduct liable to arise through thoughtlessness and rashness, but which may be more or less easily checked through mindfulness. Dexterity in dealing with these will also affect those more obstinate deviations from moral conduct rooted in strong passionate impulses or in deeply ingrained

bad habits. The increased tranquility of mind achieved in keeping still for bare attention will restrain the impetuosity of passions. The acquired habit of pausing and stopping will act as a brake to the ingrained habits of indulging in unwholesome deeds.

By being able to keep still for bare attention, or to pause for wise reflection, very often the first temptation to lust, the first wave of anger, the first mist of delusion, will disappear without causing serious entanglement. At which point the current of unwholesome thought process is stopped will depend on the quality of mindfulness. If mindfulness is keen, it will succeed at a very early point in calling a stop to a series of defiled thoughts or actions before we are carried along by them too far. Then the respective defilements will not grow beyond their initial strength, less effort will be required to check them, and fewer kammic entanglements, or none, will follow.

Let us take the example of a pleasant visual object which has aroused our liking. At first that liking might not be very active and insistent. If at this point the mind is already able to keep still for detached observation or reflection, the visual perception can easily be divested of its still very slight admixture of lust. The object becomes registered as “just something seen that has caused a pleasant feeling,” or the attraction felt is sublimated into a quiet aesthetic pleasure. But if that earliest chance has been missed, the liking will grow into attachment and into the desire to possess. If now a stop is called, the thought of desire may gradually lose its strength; it will not easily turn into an insistent craving, and no actual attempts to get possession of the desired object will follow. But if the current of lust is still unchecked, then the thought of desire may express itself by speech in asking for the object or even demanding it with impetuous words. That is, unwholesome mental kamma is followed by unwholesome verbal kamma. A refusal will cause the original current of lust to branch out into additional streams of mental defilements, either sadness or anger. But if even at that late stage one can stop for quiet reflection or bare attention, accept the refusal, and renounce wish-fulfilment, further complications will be avoided. However, if clamouring words are followed by unwholesome bodily kamma, and if, driven by craving, one tries to get possession of the desired object by stealth or force, then the kammic entanglement is complete and its consequences must be experienced in their full impact. But still, if even after the completion of the evil act, one stops for reflection, it will not be in vain. For the mindfulness that arises in the form of remorseful retrospection will preclude a hardening of character and may prevent a repetition of the same action.

The Exalted One once said to his son, Rahula (Majjhima 61):

“Whatever action you intend to perform, by body, speech or mind, you should consider that action.... If, in considering it, you realize: ‘This action which I intend to perform will be harmful to myself, or harmful to others or harmful to both; it will be an unwholesome action, producing suffering, resulting in suffering, – then you should certainly not perform that action.

“Also while you are performing an action, by body, speech or mind, you should consider that action... If, in considering it, you realize: ‘This action which I am performing is harmful to myself, or harmful to others, or harmful to both; it is an unwholesome action, producing suffering, resulting in suffering’ – then you should desist from such an action.

“Also after you have performed an action, by body, speech or mind, you should consider that action.... If, in considering it, you realize: ‘This action which I have performed has been harmful to myself, or harmful to others, or harmful to both; it was an

unwholesome action, producing suffering, resulting in suffering' – then you should in the future refrain from it."

2. *Tranquillity*. We shall now consider how stopping for bare attention also helps one to attain and strengthen tranquillity (*samatha*) in its double sense: general peace of mind and meditative concentration.

By developing the habit of pausing for bare attention, it becomes increasingly easier to withdraw into one's own inner stillness when unable to escape bodily from the loud, insistent noises of the outer world. It will be easier to forego useless reactions to the foolish speech or deeds of others. When the blows of fate are particularly hard and incessant, a mind trained in bare attention will find a refuge in the haven of apparent passivity or watchful non-action, from which position it will be able to wait patiently until the storms have passed. There are situations in life when it is best to allow things to come to their natural end. He who is able to keep still and wait will often succeed where aggressiveness or busy activity would have been vanquished. Not only in critical situations, but also in the normal course of life, the experience won by observant keeping still will convince us that we need not actively respond to every impression we receive, or regard every encounter with people or things as a challenge to our interfering activity.

By refraining from busying ourselves unnecessarily, external frictions will be reduced and the internal tensions they bring will loosen up. Greater harmony and peace will pervade the life of every day, bridging the gap between normal life and the tranquillity of meditation. Then there will be fewer of those disturbing inner reverberations of everyday restlessness which, in a coarse or subtle form, invade the hours of meditation, producing bodily and mental unrest. Consequently, the hindrance of agitation, a chief obstacle to concentration, will appear less often and will be easier to overcome when it arises.

By cultivating the attitude of bare attention as often as opportunity offers, the centrifugal forces of mind, making for mental distraction, will peter out; the centripetal tendency, turning the mind inward and making for concentration, will gather strength. Craving will no longer run out in pursuit of a variety of changing objects.

Regular practice of sustained attention to a continuous series of events prepares the mind for sustained concentration on a single object, or a limited number of objects, in the strict practice of meditation. Firmness or steadiness of mind, another important factor in concentration, will likewise be cultivated.

Thus, the practice of keeping still, pausing and stopping for bare attention, fosters several salient components of meditative tranquillity: calmness, concentration, firmness, and reduction of the multiplicity of objects. It raises the average level of normal consciousness and brings it closer to the level of the meditative mind. This is an important point because often too wide a gap between these two mental levels repeatedly frustrates attempts at mental concentration and hinders the achievement of smooth continuity in meditative practice. In the sequence of the seven factors of enlightenment, we find that the enlightenment factor of tranquillity (*passaddhi sambojjhanga*) precedes that of concentration (*samadhi-sambojjhanga*). Expressing the same fact, the Buddha says: "If tranquillized within, the mind will become concentrated." Now in the light of our previous remarks, we shall better understand these statements.

3. *Insight*. It has been said by the Exalted One:

“He whose mind is concentrated sees things as they really are.” Therefore, all those ways by which bare attention strengthens concentration also provide a supporting condition for the development of insight. But there is also a more direct and specific help which insight receives from keeping still in bare attention.

Generally, we are more concerned with handling and using things than with knowing them in their true nature. Thus we usually grasp in haste the very first few signals conveyed to us by a perception. Then, through deeply ingrained habit, those signals evoke a standard response by way of judgements such as good- bad, pleasant-unpleasant, useful-harmful, right-wrong. These judgements, by which we define the objects in relation to ourselves, lead to corresponding reactions by word or deed. Only rarely does attention dwell upon a common or familiar object for any longer time than is needed to receive the first few signals. So, for the most part, we perceive things in a fragmentary manner and thence misconceive them. Further, only the very first phase of the object’s life-span, or a little more, comes into the focus of our attention. One may not even be consciously aware that the object is a process with an extension in time – a beginning and an end; that it has many aspects and relations beyond those casually perceived in a limited situation; that, in brief, it has a kind of evanescent individuality of its own. A world perceived in this superficial way will consist of shape- less little lumps of experiences marked by a few subjectively selected signs or symbols. The symbols chosen are determined mainly by the individual’s self-interest; sometimes they are even misapplied. The shadow-like world that results includes not only the outer environment and other persons, but also a good part of one’s own bodily and mental processes. These, too, become subjected to the same superficial manner of conceptualization. The Buddha points out four basic misconceptions that result from distorted perceptions and unmethodical attention: taking the impure for pure, the impermanent for lasting, the painful and pain-bringing for pleasant, and the impersonal for a self or something belonging to the self. When the seal of self-reference is thus stamped again and again upon the world of every- day experience, the basic misconception, “This belongs to me” (*attaniya*) will steadily put forth roots into all the bodily and mental factors of our being. Like the hair-roots of a plant, these will be fine, but firm and wide- spread – to such an extent, in fact, that the notions of “I” and “mine” will hardly be shaken by mere intellectual convictions about the non-existence of a self (*anatta*).

These grave consequences issue from that fundamental perceptual situation: our rush into hasty or habitual reactions after receiving the first few signals from our perceptions. But if we muster the restraining forces of mindfulness and pause for bare attention, the material and mental processes that form the objects of mind at the given moment will reveal themselves to us more fully and more truly. No longer dragged at once into the whirlpool of self-reference, allowed to unfold themselves before the watchful eye of mindfulness, they will disclose the diversity of their aspects and the wide net of their correlations and interconnections. The connection with self-interest, so narrow and often falsifying, will recede into the background, dwarfed by the wider view now gained. The processes observed display in their serial occurrence and in their component parts a constant birth and death, a rise and a fall. Thereby the facts of change and impermanence impress themselves on the mind with growing intensity. The same discernment of rise and fall dissolves the false conceptions of unity created under the influence of the egocentric attitude. Self-reference

uncritically overrides diversity; it lumps things together under the preconceptions of *being* a self or *belonging* to a self. But bare attention reveals these sham unities as impersonal and conditioned phenomena. Facing thus again and again the evanescent, dependent and impersonal nature of life-processes within and without, we will discover their monotony and unsatisfactory nature: in other words, the truth of suffering. Thus, by the simple device of slowing down, pausing and keeping still for bare attention, all three of the characteristics of existence – impermanence, suffering, and non-self – will open themselves to penetrative insight (*vipassana*).

Spontaneity

An acquired or strengthened habit of pausing mindfully before acting does not exclude a wholesome spontaneity of response. On the contrary, through training, the practice of pausing, stopping, and keeping still for bare attention will itself become quite spontaneous. It will grow into a selective mechanism of the mind that, with an increasing reliability and swiftness of response, can prevent the upsurge of evil or unwise impulses. Without such a skill we may intellectually realise those impulses to be unwholesome, but still succumb to them due to their own powerful spontaneity. The practice of pausing mindfully serves, therefore, to replace unwholesome spontaneity or habits by wholesome ones grounded in our better knowledge and nobler intentions.

Just as certain reflex movements automatically protect the body, similarly the mind needs spontaneous spiritual and moral self-protection. The practice of bare attention will provide this vital function. A person of average moral standards instinctively shrinks from thoughts of theft or murder. With the help of the method of bare attention, the range of such spontaneous moral brakes can be vastly extended and ethical sensitivity greatly heightened.

In an untrained mind, noble tendencies and right thoughts are often assailed by the sudden outbreak of passions and prejudices. They either succumb or assert themselves only with difficulty after an inner struggle. But if the spontaneity of the unwholesome is checked or greatly reduced, as described above, our good impulses and wise reflections will have greater scope to emerge and express themselves freely and spontaneously. Their natural flow will give us greater confidence in the power of the good within us; it will also carry more conviction for others. That spontaneity of the good will not be erratic, for it will have deep and firm roots in previous methodical training. Here appears a way by which a premeditated good thought (*sasankharika-kusala*) may be transformed into a spontaneous good thought (*asankharikakusala-citta*). According to the psychology of the Abhidhamma, such a thought, if combined with knowledge, takes the first place in the scale of ethical values. In this way we shall achieve a practical understanding of a saying in *The Secret of the Golden Flower*: *

“If one attains intentionally to an unintentional state one has comprehension.” This saying invites a paraphrase in Pali terms: *Sasankharena asankharikam pattabbam*, “by premeditated intentional effort spontaneity can be won.”

If the numerous aids to mental growth and liberation found in the Buddha’s teaching are wisely utilized, there is actually nothing that can finally withstand the Satipaṭṭhāna method; and this method starts with the simple practice of learning to pause and stop for bare attention.

* A treatise of Chinese Taoism, strongly influenced by Mahayana.

Slowing-down

Against the impetuosity, rashness and heedlessness of the untrained mind, the practice of pausing and stop-ping sets up a slowing-down. The demands of modern life, however deliberate, make it impracticable to introduce such a slow-down of functions into the routine of the average working day. But as an antidote against the harmful consequences of the hectic speed of modern life, it is all the more important to cultivate that practice in one's leisure hours, especially in periods of strict Satipaṭṭhāna practice. Such practice will also bestow the worldly benefits of greater calm, efficiency and skill in one's daily round of work.

For the purpose of meditative development, slowing-down serves as an effective training in heedfulness, sense-control, and concentration. But apart from that, it has a more specific significance for meditative practice. In the commentary to the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, it is said that the slowing down of movements may help in *regaining lost concentration* on a chosen object. A monk, so we read, had bent his arm quickly without remembering his subject of meditation as his rule of practice demanded. On becoming aware of that omission he took his arm back to its previous position and repeated the movement mindfully. The subject of meditation referred to was probably "clearly comprehending action," as mentioned in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta: "In bending and stretching he acts with clear comprehension."

The slowing-down of certain bodily movements during strict meditative training is particularly helpful in gaining *insight knowledge (vipassana-nana)*, especially the direct awareness of change and non-self. To a great extent, it is the rapidity of movement that strengthens the illusion of unity, identity, and substantiality in what is actually a complex evanescent process. Therefore, in the strict practice of Satipaṭṭhāna, the slowing down of such actions as walking, bending and stretching, so as to discern the several phases of each movement, provides a powerful aid for direct insight into the three characteristics of all phenomena. The meditator's contemplation will gain increasing force and significance if he notices clearly how each partial phase of the process observed arises and ceases by itself, and nothing of it goes over or "transmigrates" to the next phase.

Under the influence of pausing for bare attention, the average rhythm of our everyday actions, speech and thoughts will also become more quiet and peaceful. Slowing down the hurried rhythm of life means that thoughts, feelings, and perceptions will be able to complete the entire length of their natural lifetime. Full awareness will extend up to their end phase: to their last vibrations and reverberations. Too often that end phase is cut off by an impatient grasping at new impressions, or by hurrying on to the next stage of a line of thought before the earlier one has been clearly comprehended. This is one of the main reasons for the disorderly state of the average mind, which is burdened by a vast amount of indistinct or fragmentary perceptions, stunted emotions and undigested ideas. Slowing-down will prove an effective device for recovering the fullness and clarity of consciousness. A fitting simile, and at the same time an actual example, is the procedure called for in the practice of mindfulness of breathing (*ana-panasati*): mindfulness has to cover the whole extent of the breath, its beginning, middle and end. This is what is meant by the passage in the sutta, "Experiencing the *whole* (breath-) body, I shall breathe in and out." Similarly, the entire "breath" or rhythm of our life will become deeper and fuller if, through slowing-down, we get used to sustained attention.

The habit of prematurely cutting off processes of thought, or slurring over them, has assumed serious proportions in the man of modern urban civilization. Restlessly he clamours for ever new stimuli in increasingly quicker succession just as he demands increasing speed in his means of locomotion. This rapid bombardment of impressions has gradually blunted his sensitivity, and thus he always needs new stimuli, louder, coarser, and more variegated. Such a process, if not checked, can end only in disaster. Already we see at large a decline of finer aesthetic susceptibility and a growing incapacity for genuine natural joy. The place of both is taken by a hectic, short-breathed excitement incapable of giving any true aesthetic or emotional satisfaction. "Shallow mental breath" is to a great extent responsible for the growing superficiality of "civilized man" and for the frightening spread of nervous disorders in the West. It may well become the start of a general deterioration of human consciousness in its qualitative level, range and strength. This danger threatens all those, in the East as well as in the West, who lack adequate spiritual protection from the impact of technical civilization. Satipaṭṭhāna can make an important contribution to remedying these situations in the way we have briefly indicated here. Thus the method will prove beneficial from the worldly point of view as well.

Here, however, we are chiefly concerned with the psychological aspects of mindfulness and their significance for meditative development. Sustained attention, helped by slowing-down, will affect the quality of consciousness mainly in three ways: (a) in intensifying consciousness; (b) in clarifying the object's characteristic features; and (c) in revealing the object's relatedness.

(a) An object of sustained attention will exert a particularly *strong and long-lasting* impact on the mind. Its influence will be felt not only throughout the thought-series immediately following the particular perception, but may also extend far into the future. It is that causal efficacy which is the measure of the *intensity of consciousness*.

(b) Sustained attention leads to a fuller picture of the object in all its aspects. Generally, the first impression we gain of any new sense-object or idea will be its most striking feature; it is this aspect of the object which captures our attention up to the culminating point of the impact. But the object also displays other aspects or characteristics, and is capable of exercising other functions, than those we initially notice. These may be less obvious to us or subjectively less interesting; but still, they may be even more important. There may also be cases where our first impression is entirely deceptive. Only if we sustain our attention beyond that first impact will the object reveal itself more fully. In the downward course of the first perceptual wave the prejudicing force of the first impact lessens; and it is only then, in that end phase, that the object will yield a wider range of detail, a more complete picture of itself. It is therefore only by sustained attention that we can obtain a clearer understanding of an object's characteristic features.

(c) Among the characteristic features of any object, physical or mental, there is one class we often overlook due to hasty or superficial attention, and therefore needs to be treated separately. This is the relatedness of the object. The object's relatedness extends back to its past – to its origin, causes, reasons, and logical precedents; it also extends outward to embrace the total context – its background, environment, and presently active influences. We can never fully understand things if we view them in artificial isolation. We have to see them as part of a wider pattern, in their conditioned and conditioning nature; and this can be done only with the help of sustained attention.

Subliminal Influences

The three ways of heightening consciousness just discussed are evidently of prime importance for the development of insight. When consciousness is intensified, and its objective field clarified and discerned in its relational structure, the ground is prepared for "seeing things according to reality." But besides its obvious direct influence, this threefold process also has an indirect influence which is no less powerful and important: it strengthens and sharpens the mind's subliminal faculties of subconscious organization, memory and intuition. These again, on their part, nourish and consolidate the progress of liberating insight. The insight aided by them is like the mountain lake of the canonical simile: it is fed not only by the outside rains, but also by springs welling up from within its own depths. The insight nourished by these "under-ground" subliminal resources of the mind will have deep roots. The meditative results that it brings cannot be lost easily, even with unliberated worldlings who are still subject to relapse.

1. Perceptions or thoughts which have been objects of sustained attention make a stronger impact on the mind and reveal their characteristic features more distinctly than when attention is slack. Thus, when they sink into the subconscious, they occupy there a special position. This holds true for all three ways of enhancing the consciousness of an object. (a) In a process of consciousness, if attention is as strong in the end phase as in the earlier phases, then when the process is finished and the mind lapses back into subconsciousness, the latter will be more amenable to conscious control. (b) If an impression or idea has been marked by numerous distinct characteristics, then when it fades from immediate awareness, it will not be so easily lost in the vague contents of the subconscious or dragged by passionate biases into false subconscious associations. (c) The correct comprehension of the object's relatedness similarly will protect the experience from being merged with indistinct subconscious material. Perceptions or thoughts of enhanced intensity and clarity, absorbed into the subconscious, remain more articulate and more accessible than contents originating from hazy or "stunned" impressions. It will be easier to convert them into full consciousness and they will be less unaccountable in their hidden effects upon the mind. If, through an improvement in the quality and range of mindfulness, the number of such matured impressions increases, the results might be a subtle change in the very structure of subconsciousness itself.

2. It will be evident from our earlier remarks that those impressions which we have called "matured" or "more accessible and convertible," lend themselves more easily and more correctly to recollection – more easily because of their greater intensity, more correctly because their clearly marked features protect them from being distorted by false associative images or ideas.

Remembering them in their context and relatedness works both ways – it promotes both easier and more correct recollection. Thus *sati* in its meaning and function of mindfulness helps to strengthen *sati* in its meaning and function of memory.

3. The influence of sustained attention on the subconscious and on memory brings a deepening and strengthening of the faculty of intuition, particularly the intuitive insight which chiefly concerns us here. Intuition is not a gift from the unknown. Like any other mental faculty, it arises out of specific conditions. In this case the primary conditions are latent memories of perceptions and thoughts stored in the subconscious.

Obviously, the memories providing the most fertile soil for the growth of intuition will be those marked by greater intensity, clarity and wealth of distinctive marks; for it is these, that are most accessible. Here, too, the preserved relatedness of the impressions will contribute much. Recollections of that type will have a more organic character than memories of bare or vague isolated facts, and they will fall more easily into new patterns of meaning and significance. These more articulate memory images will be a strong stimulation and aid for the intuitive faculty. Silently, in the hidden depths of the subliminal mind, the work of collecting and organizing the subconscious material of experience and knowledge goes on until it is ripe to emerge as an *intuition*. The break-through of that intuition is sometimes occasioned by quite ordinary happenings. However, though seemingly ordinary, these events may have a strong evocative power if previously they had been made objects of sustained attention. Slowing-down and pausing for bare attention will uncover the depth dimension of the simple things of everyday life, and thus provide stimuli for the intuitive faculty. This applies also to the intuitive penetration of the Four Noble Truths that culminates in liberation (*arahatta*). The scriptures record many instances of monks who could not arrive at intuitive penetration when engaged in the actual practice of insight meditation. The flash of intuition struck them on quite different occasions: when stumbling against a rock or catching sight of a forest fire, a mirage, or a lump of froth in a river. We meet here another confirmation of that seemingly paradoxical saying that “intentionally an unintentional state may be won.” By deliberately turning the full light of mindfulness on the smallest events and actions of everyday life, eventually the liberating wisdom may arise. Sustained attention not only provides the nourishing soil for the *growth* of intuition, it also makes possible the fuller utilization and even repetition of the intuitive moment. Men of inspiration in various fields of creative activity have often deplored their common experience; the flash of intuition strikes so suddenly and vanishes so quickly that frequently the slow response of the mind hardly catches the last glimpse of it. But if the mind has been trained in observant pausing, in slowing down and sustained attention, and if – as indicated above – the subconscious has been influenced, then the intuitive moment too might gain that fuller, slower and stronger rhythm. This being the case, its impact will be strong and clear enough to allow for full use of that flash of intuitive insight. It might even be possible to lead its fading vibrations upward again to a new culmination, similar to the rhythmic repetition of a melody rising again in harmonious development out of the last notes of its first appearance.

The full utilization of a single moment of intuitive insight could be of decisive importance for one’s progress toward full realization. If one’s mental grip is too weak and one lets those elusive moments of intuitive insight slip away without having utilized them fully for the work of liberation, then they might not recur until many years have passed, or perhaps not at all during the present life. Skill in sustained attention, however, will allow one to make full use of such opportunities, and slowing-down and pausing during meditative practice is an important aid in acquiring that skill.

Through our treatment of pausing, stopping and slowing-down, one of the traditional definitions of mindfulness found in the Pali scriptures will have become more intelligible in its far-reaching implications: that is, its function of *anapilapanata*, meaning literally, “not floating (or slipping) away.” “Like pumpkin-pots on the surface of water,” add the

commentators, and they continue: “Mindfulness enters deeply into its object, instead of hurrying only over its surface.” Therefore, “nonsuperficiality” will be an appropriate rendering of the above Pali term, and a fitting characterization of mindfulness.