

**Venerable Prof. Āyukusala Thera:**

## **Pañca–Vasiyo, Five Masteries (of Meditation as well as of Any Job)**

A Dhamma–Talk given at the end of a Mediation Day in Āyukusala Assama, Kananvila on Esala Poya, the Full Moon of August 11th, 2003 recorded and transcribed by the Venerable Ayyā Vajirā

Buddha was teaching Dhamma and meditation not only to the monks and nuns. He was giving instructions to lay people also. So meditation is good for anybody. Buddha was teaching in a different way the laypeople who were trying to live frugal, holy life of *brahmacariya*, and those who lived as *kāma–bhogī*, that is enjoying sensuality. Most of you who are here enjoy family life, thus we were talking not only about meditation, but also about your caring for children. Buddha was teaching all kinds of people, people of high standing, generals and kings, but also barbers and sweepers, he was teaching courtesans, prostitutes, and also the ladies of high standing, queens and princesses. So Buddha was teaching meditation to anybody who was able to take his instruction and he was teaching each person accordingly.

In the same way, here today, my assistant teachers and myself looked after you; they were checking you and giving you additional instruction according to your personal needs.

Buddha was not just delivering some *sāsana*, some ready made lecture, but he was teaching accordingly, that is *anu–sāsana*, which means that he knew whom is he teaching and what is he teaching in any given situation. Yet there are some principles in the Buddha Teaching that apply generally. These are the Five Masteries, *Pañca–Vasiyo*, used for the methodical procedure in meditation. Today you have already heard about them repeatedly and now I will explain them systematically.

These Five Masteries are something that you should train as skills and also learn the knowledge about them. The first is the mastery in adverting, *āvajjana–vasī*, second the mastery in attaining, *samāpajjana–vasī*, third the mastery in abidance, *adhiṭṭhāna–vasī*, fourth the mastery in exiting, *vuṭṭhāna–vasī*, and fifth the mastery in reviewing, *paccavekkhana–vasī*.

However while teaching these masteries to different persons, we have to take into account their different capabilities. For that the Buddha had the knowledge called *indriya–paro–pariyatte ñānam*, that is, he knew what are the faculties, *indriyā* of different people. He also knew their predispositions, called *sattānam āsayā–anusaya ñānam*. This is knowledge what are the inclinations *āsayā* and the pathologies *anusaya*, what are the personal dispositions. He could see it perfectly. These are so–called Buddha–knowledges. But even now here, there are with us some meditation teachers, like this nun venerable Ayyā Vajirā or these monks venerable Hitakusala and venerable Ākāsakusala, who have these knowledges to some extent, too. And they watch you and then can tell what are your dispositions, your *āsaya* and *anusaya* — according to your bodily position, for example.

Sometimes you sit like this, proudly straight, sometimes like that, as if you are hiding, sometimes slouching or bent on some issue. One can thus see that the person has a certain type of character, a particular *āsaya*, that he has a certain disposition to manifest in his bodily posture. You can really tell the character of a person, when you watch the person how he walks, how he eats, how he cleans his place... I tell you this just to explain what we have been doing with you here today. Now. We need to do this in order to teach you the meditation accordingly.

That is also why I was asking everybody about the personal experience. I understood what you say but also how you say it. Everybody reacts differently — somebody like this, somebody like that. When I throw a cushion to you, it is a test. I see how you catch it, how you place it. I am doing this and then I teach you the meditation accordingly, according to how you are. I was asking you various things already at some previous occasions and I was looking what are your

reactions. When I asked you to bring something — for example asking Lal who likes to be seen as a rich man to bring the cartridge for printer, or Chandrasiri who is not that rich to bring the wire or some pictures of Buddha or photocopies of papers on meditation... That was not just because it is something what I would need. Of course I can use that, I can use the wires, I can use the pictures. But I wanted to see how you act, how you react, when you are asked to give something and what you do with whatever is given to you. What are you able to give and how you give. Darshan is a young student with no income, yet he is able to give much. The most valuable is his giving all the capacities of his mind, giving himself to the training. That is why he succeeded to develop *jhāna* in less than a year of practice. But he can take, too. And some of you, like Kumudini, are always giving generously, giving even too much, she knows how to let go, so I have to stop her giving, but I want to see also how she can take...

These are not questions of karma and merit only. These are technical issues of personality diagnosis. How do you take whatever *dāna* I give you. I gave you *Dhamma-dāna*. I want to see what you are doing with that. And according to that I will teach you then. The Buddha was observing his pupils while they were eating. Because if you watch a person eating, you know his character best. And then, accordingly we can teach. Even after we have taught you to eat slowly and mindfully, we can see the differences. So this is for you an explanation of what the teachers of Āyukusala are doing with you.

And now. Now I will teach you the systematic knowledge that is necessary for good meditation progress, that is for progress in any of those meditation techniques you were taught.

Buddha was teaching ten meditation skills, *dasa jhāna-kosalla*. However, as it might be difficult for meditators to remember them all, they were summed up into five only, that is as *pañca-vasiyo*. *Vasī* means skill or mastership. Skill is *kosalla*. When you are skilled in meditation, then you are *jhāna-kusala*, as the Buddha said. And the meditation mastery is *vasī*, thus the development of *pañca-vasiyo* is that what we support you in. These five masteries are described in Visuddhi-Magga. Some people say that Abhidhamma or Visuddhi-Magga do not contain the teaching of the Pāli Canon. Nonsense! Also a mahāthera who goes teaching meditation in America, was telling me things like that, also a lay Buddhist specialist criticized me for teaching Abhidhamma, which is not, according to him, the genuine Buddha Teaching. They both boasted to teach meditation only according to the Sutta. Then I ask them — monk and layman — what is different in Sutta and in Abhidhamma. They could not say what; they did not know the Tipitaka. They were just talking, those pseudo-masters! But this is an explanation for you so that you know that the *pañca-vasiyo* is something taught according to the Buddha's word.

The Buddha has elaborated upon ten meditation skills in forty five suttas of Jhāna-Samyutta which are recorded in the Khandha-Vagga of the Samyutta Nikāya and the *pañca-vasiyo* is a summary of it. The meditator should be skilled, according to the Buddha, in ten ways: first he should be skilled in entering into the *jhāna*, that is *samāpatti-kusalo*, second skilled in abiding, that is *ñhiti-kusalo*, third skilled in exiting, *vuṭṭhāna-kusalo*, fourth skilled in refreshing the mind, that is *kallita-kusalo*, fifth skilled in the meditation object, that is *ārammaṇa-kusalo*, sixth skilled in the realm of meditation experience, that is *gocara-kusalo*, seventh skilled in gathering and steering, that is *abhinīhāra-kusalo*, eighth he should be thorough, *sakkaccakārī*, ninth he should be unremitting, *sātaccakārī*, and, finally he should be ingenious, that *ssappāyakārī*. In our Āyukusala tradition, we have skillful means, which the Buddha called *akkheyyā*; these are the methodical procedures how to teach each of the ten *jhāna* skills. However, during the first years of meditation training we would teach you just the *Pañca-Vasiyo*, which is the practical summary of those ten. In the Āyukusala tradition — this nun, these monks here — they are teaching the skillful way of living, *āyu* is life, *kusala* means skillful. The meditation is just one part of it. The Buddha was teaching Dhamma as the methodical, skillful mastery in the three realms of life. We wish you happy life, when we say you the blessing *dīgh' āyu veva*, *supati veva*, but we do not stay in the wishes only, we also teach you the practical way how to get long life and happy life. In the

Āyukusala we teach good methodical procedures — this is what Buddha was teaching, too. And this skillful *kusala* mastering of the life *āyu* covers three realms of training:

First realm is the *sīla-sikkhā*, the training of ethically skillful action. Second realm is the *adhicitta-sikkhā*, the meditative mind training. Third is the *paññā-sikkhā*, the training that leads to the development of wisdom.

*Sīla* is usually translated as morality, which consists in refraining from unethical deeds. But it can be also trained by means of performing *sīlabbata*. *Bata* or *vata* are the ritualized procedures, they are the meaningful rituals you do to make your everyday life more beautiful and happy. In the ethical training *sīla-sikkhā* we use five decisions as bases *padāni*. But the training is not limited to the ritual of five *sikkhā-padāni*. There are many other useful rituals for healing, protection and regulation of social issues. These rituals of *sīlabbata* are something very good, but clinging to them, the *sīlabbata-upādāna* is not good, because it causes cramped attitude to life and prevents you to do good things in a natural way. We should say, when the Buddha was teaching Āyukusala in the realm of *sīla*, he taught how to act in such a way, that you are comfortable and happy. You should be at ease as a result of ethical training.

The Buddha was teaching the ethical training, *sīla-sikkhā* as a prerequisite for training of the mind by means of meditation, *samādhi-sikkhā*. This *samādhi-sikkhā* or *adhicitta-sikkhā* is the practice leading to the mind development, which is the proper meaning of the word *bhāvanā*. This word *bhāvanā* is used for the practice that is called meditation in the Western languages. There is no single word for meditation in Pāli; thus we speak about mind development *bhāvanā*, or absorption *jhāna*, or recollection *anussati*, and so on. All these meditative procedures can be trained systematically, if you have the know-how. And this is what I am going to teach you now, the know-how of *pañca-vasiyo* in more detail.

Thus repeat now aloud with me the Pāli names of the Five Masteries, the *Pañca-Vasiyo*: the mastery in adverting, *āvajjana-vasī*, the mastery in attaining, *samāpajjana-vasī*, the mastery in abidance, *adhiṭṭhāna-vasī*, the mastery in exiting, *vuṭṭhāna-vasī*, and the mastery in reviewing, *paccavekkhana-vasī*.

Now we know the names of the masteries and we have also some knowledge about them. But this is not yet acquiring the skill. As the third realm of skillful life *āyukusala*, the Buddha was teaching *paññā-sikkhā*, training to develop wisdom. The wisdom *paññā* is not just only knowledge *ñāna*; wisdom is something more. In Buddha Teaching, wisdom is the knowledge, which is practically relevant, which can be directly applied in life mastering and — which is the most important characteristic of *paññā* — wisdom leads to happiness.

*Sīla-sikkhā*, *samādhi-sikkhā*, *paññā-sikkhā* are the three realms of training that lead to *sīla-āyukusala*, *samādhi-āyukusala*, *paññā-āyukusala*, skillful mastery in three realms of life. And the knowledge about the methods how to do it counts as wisdom *paññā*.

Now you are instructed Buddhist. You took Triple Refuge *Ti-Saranam* and made the ethical decisions *sikkhā-padam* in the morning to start this Poya day. Thus you have the *sīla* as basis. Then you got the instruction for *samādhi-sikkhā* and started to meditate. In the evening, before you go home, we shall do the reviewing *paccavekkhanā*, we shall take account of all what we have done. And out of this *paccavekkhanā* we get the wisdom. *Paccavekkhanā* is the source of *paññā*. *Paccavekkhanā*, the reviewing is a very important thing, which is neglected by many meditation instructors and Dhamma teachers. Mastery of the *paccavekkhanā* is the most important skill for developing memory and for developing mindfulness. In Pāli memory and mindfulness is called by the same word *sati*. So those who are practicing *paccavekkhanā* are cultivating both their memory and their mindfulness. That is why in Āyukusala we put so much stress on it. O.K.? So far clear.

Now, before we become more technical with the *Pañca-Vasiyo*, do you have any questions? Can you follow? Good.

I want to make it sure that you yourself estimate your state of mind as the open-mindedness, which is called *saddhā* in Pāli. *Saddhā* is the mind's permeability for knowledge. *Saddhā* is not a

sort of believing or uncritical confidence as some explain it. In Abhidhamma, the *saddhā* is explained as *pasāda*, that is clearness or permeability. And this is what I need from you. Because it might happen that I am telling here something and some of you cannot get it. Thus I am checking whether you do follow. All right. I need your active participation. I want you to express what you already know about the skills of meditation before talking more about them.

There are five of them: *Pañca-Vasiyo*. So, which is the first one?

Yes, the *āvajjana-vasī*.

*Āvajjana* means turning your mind to something. This includes a preparation to grasp that object of mind, it is a sort of making the program of what you want to do. As an engineer or as a computer man, as a mathematics lecturer or as a businessman you have always some program, some strategy to do what you do. You know what you are going to do and you advert your mind to it. You know: I am going for this meeting, I am going to sell some cinnamon, or I am going to buy some transporter. As a businessman you go sometimes for working lunch. You may go for a business lunch or you may go with family for a pleasure lunch. When you go for the business lunch, you behave differently than when you take your children for outing. So you know where you are going and what you are going to do there. When you are going to meditate you should know in the same way what meditation you are going to do. Is that clear?

When I am going to do some *Buddha-anussati*, chanting the qualities of Buddha: *Iti pi so Bhagavā*... that is also meditation, but a meditation very different from say *vipassanā*, the insight meditation. *Buddha-anussati* is working with concepts and images, you are imagining the Buddha when you recite his qualities. Your mind becomes quiet, pacified. *Buddha-anussati* is a kind of mediation also different from the loving kindness, *mettā bhāvanā*. When you do *mettā* or *karunā-bhāvanā*, you should not work with concepts and images. As I taught you the other day, you have to develop *mettā* out of the intention to do good that is called *katu-kamyatā chanda* in Pāli. *Mettā-bhāvanā* is not just chanting or singing “Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitatā”. *Mettā* is a movement of mind that you realize by doing something technically with your mind. So you should do in your mind a similar movement as you did while kindly placating someone. And similarly with the compassion *karunā*, you exercise a movement of mind as you did in a situation where you tried to remove someone’s difficulty.

Before you enter to meditation, you should know: I am going to sit for such and such type of meditation or am I going to do walking meditation. In the walking meditation we can practice *vipassanā*, which is the analytical meditation. We analyze the steps as we mindfully notice the lifting, carrying, touching, lifting, carrying, touching... Or while walking you can also do chanting as a part of tranquility meditation, for example the *Buddha-anussati*. This is then a very different meditation. In the analytical meditation *vipassanā*, you watch what comes to your mind. In the tranquility *samathā* meditation you press into your mind what you chant. You use the formula of *gāthā* or *manta* in order to close your mind. In *vipassanā* you open your mind for the really existing phenomena. Thus it is very different whether you accept and receive and perceive or whether you press something and push the words into the mind. Very different! The same with the sitting for various types of meditation. You have to know definitely whether you are going to sit for *mettā-bhāvanā* or for *ānāpānasati*. You should not mix it. Those who say for example that they do *mettā-vipassanā*, talk nonsense. Yes, there are some people who mix all together. They say “All I do is meditation.”

If you ask somebody who does sports. You can ask him: “What sort of sports?” And he answers: “All I do is sports.” Then ask him second question: “Do you use a cricket ball while swimming?” So those doing sports, usually know whether they are going for swimming or for cricket and they dress up differently according to their choice of the sport. But when you ask meditators: “What you do for meditation?” They might say “Oh, I do some *ānāpāna* and *mettā* and some holy *nimitta* images.” So some do... Well, you would laugh about a sportsman who mixes swimming, chess, cricket and archery all into one practice.

Do not laugh about those mixing meditators, please. Let us take them very seriously. It may be just a nonsense what they do to themselves, but they may do lot of damage to others when they are in a power position of a teacher or priest.

So the *āvajjana–vasī* is the first important skill in Buddhist meditation. It means to be clear about the decision what meditation you are going to do, for how long are you going to do it, where are you going to do it, in what body posture. You have to advert your mind to all this. And whatever you decide for, you then stick to it! According to this decision you enter into the meditation! This is the mastery in adverting, *āvajjana–vasī*, whereas the second is the mastery in attaining, *samāpajjana–vasī*.

*Samāpajjana–vasī* is the skill to enter the meditation, to enter the meditation. It is the second skill in which we realize that what we adverted the mind to. So the *āvajjana–vasī* is making clear mind of what we are going to do, how to do, how long and so on. *Samāpajjana–vasī* is to start doing it, just to start. When we are about to start meditation, we sit down into the proper posture. We start being aware of touching the ground, touch between the hands, and then we direct the attention to the meditation object proper, we bring the mind to the place where we watch the breathing in and out, for example. This *samāpajjana–vasī* is an active movement of mind, in Pāli called *manasi–kāra*, literally mind–making. The word *manasikāra* is correctly translated as attention. According to the Abhidhamma, the attention is an active movement of mind, just opposite to the passively receptive mindfulness that is called *sati*.

When we have already started the meditation, then we use the mastery of abiding in it, the *adhiṭṭhāna–vasī*. *Ṭhāna* is the place, *adhi–* means to be on it, to stay on the place for that half an hour you have decided for. To keep up the decision, to fulfill it, to bring up the endurance, holding time, stamina, persistence — this is the mastery in abidance, *adhiṭṭhāna–vasī*. This mastery includes the skills how to treat the distractions, how to make out of them the stepping stones for re–entering the *jhāna* and so on. All these skills are in detail explained in the chapter Strategies of Ecstasy in my book *The Art of Happiness – Teachings of Buddhist Psychology* (Shambhala Publications, Boston and London 1989). We have been talking about it the other day and you got the photocopies of the relevant chapter section. The mindfulness *sati*, which coordinates all the other mental faculties, and especially balances the faculties of concentration *samādhi* and the faculty of effort *virīya*, is the most important power of the mastery in abidance, *adhiṭṭhāna–vasī*. Fourth comes the *vuṭṭhāna–vasī*, the mastery how to stop the meditation. When I give the sound signal that the time of sitting is over, you are ready to use this mastery. Eh? You have won the time. In meditation the time goes back, you are becoming younger. So, when the time of *bhāvana* is over, either your inner clock or the leader of the meditation group gives you the time signal. Now when you hear the signal, you do not just get up. This would not be a skillful exiting. *Vuṭṭhāna–vasī* is a skillful exit. Do you finish your meditation like this? ...standing up abruptly and starting to move around hastily?

Try it now! Notice how do you feel doing that! Do any results of your meditation stay?

No! You have to know clearly from what *gocara* to what *gocara* you are going. You must mindfully notice in what realm of experience situated, you must know what is your *gocara*, your experiential field or, literally the pasture of your mind. We have to train mindfully clear knowledge of realm, the *gocara–sati–sampajañña*. We have to mindfully know the transition from the meditation realm to the realm of everyday experiencing in the world of five senses. Give a thought to this example: When you are driving a car you should not watch your breathing in and out. You should watch what is on the road, unless you want to make an accident. *Vuṭṭhāna–vasī* is mastery based on the techniques how to stop meditating. Not just to interrupt meditation, but to stop meditating in such way that you don't spoil the results of the meditation! Eh? If you stop abruptly, you may get upset-minded. There are sadly also such meditation sportsmen who don't stop at all... Not that they would continue being mindful, they go on trying to give an impression that they are very meditative and continue staying in some state of drowsiness, which they sell for meditation.

So, when there is that sign that meditation is over, you should do a technique of ending the meditation. One of the techniques we taught you, which you know come-to-the-senses or count-down. Buddha was teaching several of them. Our technique come-to-the-senses was taught by him as the *salāyatanā-dhammā-anupassanā*. *Anupassanā* is the process watching, *dhammā* are the realities of the six senses *salāyatanā*. When you hear the signal you become aware of the first sense base, the body sense *kāya-āyatana*, of the touch *phoṭṭhabba*. You can help it by pressing together your thumbs. Eh? Then become aware of whatever other tactile impression or some movement of body. Is good to start the transition with directing the mind to the body. Then direct your attention to looking, opening your eyes, looking, and then closing again. Then you direct attention *manasi-kāra* to the, tasting, smelling, and hearing. These are five, and the sixth is the mind. You say to yourself: “How is my mind now?” and “What I want to do?” So notice what state is your mind and you want to do. Eh? This is the sixth sense. This come-to-the-senses is one good technique, but it has to be trained first.

Today you have been instructed the technique of count-down. So what you did first when you heard the signal? You made the decision to stop meditation methodically and then you did the counting *gaṇanā*. That is you counted ten breathes. You noticed hearing the sound, you named it as such, you knew that your meditation will be over after ten more breaths, and you did carry on noticing and naming “in, in, in – ten; out, out, out – nine; in, in, in – eight” and so on... till “in, in, in – two; out, out, out – one. Finished. Good bye! Āna-apāna, my dearest thing I have, I part with you now!” Thus you mindfully and clearly know that you part with your *bhāvanā-ārammanā*, the meditation object. You disposed it off. But I dispose it off like something dear, a jewel, some very precious thing, so that you can find it again with no difficulty. Disposing off is just saying good bye and knowing how to meet again. Like that you do finish your business in the realm of meditation and then do the transition and become aware of touch in the realm of the sensual world *kāma-loka*.

This is very important, the mastery in ending *vuṭṭhāna-vasī*. After you hear the signal or after your mind tells you “Now it is over”, you say “Now I decide to finish.” And then count ten breaths. So this is *vuṭṭhāna-vasī*. And after you have done that, you are here in this world, you can move your body, you can exercise your limbs, or do whatever you wish. But then again you should return to your meditation and re-member all the members of that experience. Eh? Remember how was the beginning, the middle, the end, how did you cope with distractions, and so on. This is *paccavekkhana-vasī*, the reviewing.

So these are the Five Masteries *Pañca-Vasiyo* of a skilled meditator. And they can be used in all meditations — walking meditation *cankamana*, meditation of love *mettā*, meditation on colors or elements...

And these Five Masteries can be used also in any project — selling, buying, designing, building, lecturing, teaching projects... Before you start lecturing or before you start conference with your people, you have to know... You are the boss. Imagine that you have a department to take care of. You may have ten or fifteen people with whom you want to confer, whose collaboration you want to coordinate. Thus, for example, I remember what I used to do before retiring and becoming a monk. I had five doctors, eight psychologists and three social workers at my Group Psychotherapy Department in Berne. So in order to work on a concrete project I got them together. And I knew in the beginning what I want to do with them. I knew how to start the meeting. I knew how to keep it going on without disturbance. I knew how to end it. And at the end we have reviewed what we have done and one of my secretaries took care of the record and wrote down the minutes. So you see that the same Five Masteries can be used in any undertaking, in any project.

All right?

Do you understand it?

So now, as I see, you understand it, and that is good.

ayukusala@gmx.ch  
bhante@ayukusala.org  
<http://www.ayukusala.org>