

The Essentials of Buddha-Dhamma in Meditative Practice

Sayagyi U Ba Khin

With a short biographical sketch of
U Ba Khin's life

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Preface

Although from a simple background, Sayagi U Ba Khin (1899-1971) was fortunate to receive an excellent education from missionary schools, where he learned to speak fluent English. With an abundance of innate abilities, he was able to excel at all he did, eventually becoming the Accountant General (AG) of the Union of Burma.

He started practicing meditation in 1937, when he was in his late thirties, and quickly excelled at this also. He started an association in his office called the “Vipassana Association of the Accountant General’s Office,” and began teaching meditation to his staff in a room that was specially set aside for this purpose. From this humble beginning in the AG office, the Vipassana Association eventually grew to become the International Meditation Center (IMC), off of Inya Myaing Road in Yangon. U Ko Lay, Sayagi’s student and biographer, has called IMC “a beacon of light for wayfarers in search of peace and truth.”

Foreigners visiting Myanmar who were interested in meditation were referred to U Ba Khin because of his fluency in English. Many of them became his Vipassana students. He also taught meditation to friends and family of his subordinates in the AG office, as well as to members of the local Indian community. It was in this way that the students who were to carry on after him came in contact with Sayagi and received the gift of Dhamma (the truth, the teaching, the path).

Sayagi always wanted to take the Dhamma forth from

Myanmar. He wished to bring the teaching to those of good paramī (accumulations of past meritorious actions), enabling them to hear the words of the Buddha and to walk this ancient path. However, due to circumstances in Myanmar at the time, he was unable to realize this wish. There were, however, a rare few who had the bright paramī to come to the land of golden pagodas, and learn at the feet of the master. These were precious times, when a handful of people from around the world had the opportunity to be personally instructed by Sayagyi—to meditate at his incomparable little island of peace, while being served in the most loving way by his devoted students.

The Essentials of Buddha-Dhamma is the transcription of a tape-recorded message from Sayagyi U Ba Khin to his international students. After visiting Myanmar and practicing Vipassana under Sayagyi’s guidance, they had by then returned to their home countries. This rare distillation of the Buddha’s teaching was offered by Sayagyi with great care and compassion, in lieu of his ability to guide his students in person. How fortunate that decades later, these instructions are available today, for us to incorporate into our lives and our practice.

In this talk, Sayagyi says, “Even today, this knowledge can be developed.” He does not say that during the time of the Buddha, people were capable of developing this knowledge; no—he says, “even today.” But he adds, “You must follow strictly.” This is the part of the message that must be heeded. Sayagyi lays out the path for us to walk on, the path to nibbāna [the stage of liberation, which is beyond mind and matter]. But in order to experience the fruits of practice, we must follow these instructions strictly. Sayagyi says, “It would suffice to reach the first stage [of liberation].” In today’s world, with its endless distractions, this first stage,

called sotāpanna, seems a lofty goal. But that is what this little booklet is about: it is about reaching the first stage on the path to final liberation. To get started, a sincere practitioner must begin by taking a ten-day meditation course under the guidance of a competent instructor. The purpose of this endeavor is not simply to get along better with others, or to feel better about oneself, although such benefits will flow naturally from one's practice. Dhamma is a path to enlightenment, and is not for the faint of heart.

Sayagyi U Ba Khin was a master of Dhamma, the art of living. People who came to him learned how to walk the path that leads to the final goal. I would venture to say if you have somehow come across this pamphlet—at a store, in a friend's house, at a meditation center or monastery—you too have the paramī to walk this path. All you have to do is take proper steps. The teaching is still here, the path is still here: we have but to walk on it, and good fruits will come.

The Buddha's last words were, "Decay is inherent in all component things. Work for your salvation with diligence." Unfortunately, Sayagyi U Ba Khin was never able to leave Myanmar. But through his disciple, S. N. Goenka, the teaching of the Buddha in its pure form is available throughout the world. It is now possible to hear these words of liberation, and come in contact with a teacher capable of instructing students in these teachings. So, let us work for salvation with diligence by walking the path of the enlightened ones.

—Bill Crecelius
Mendocino, California, 1997

Sayagyi U Ba Khin (1899-1971)

by Vipassana Research Institute

Sayagyi U Ba Khin was born in Yangon, the capital of Myanmar (formerly Burma), on March 6, 1899. He was the younger of two children in a family of modest means living in a working class district. Myanmar was ruled by Britain at the time, as it was until after the Second World War. Learning English was therefore very important; in fact, job advancement depended on having a good speaking knowledge of English.

Fortunately, an elderly man from a nearby factory assisted U Ba Khin in entering the Methodist Middle School at the age of eight. He proved a gifted student. He had the ability to commit his lessons to memory, learning his English grammar book by heart from cover to cover. He was first in every class and earned a middle school scholarship. A Burmese teacher helped him gain entrance to St. Paul's Institution, where every year he was again at the head of his high school class.

In March of 1917, he passed the final high school examination, winning a gold medal as well as a college scholarship. But family pressures forced him to discontinue his formal education to start earning money.

His first job was with a Burmese newspaper called The Sun, but after some time he began working as an accounts clerk in the office of the Accountant General of Burma. Few other Burmese were employed in this office since most of the civil servants in Myanmar at the time were British or Indian. In 1926 he passed the Accounts Service examination,

given by the provincial government of India. In 1937, when Myanmar was separated from India, he was appointed the first Special Office Superintendent.

It was on January 1, 1937, that Sayagyi tried meditation for the first time. A student of Saya Thetgyi—a wealthy farmer and meditation teacher—was visiting U Ba Khin and explained Anapana meditation to him. When Sayagyi tried it, he experienced good concentration, which impressed him so much that he resolved to complete a full course. Accordingly, he applied for a ten-day leave of absence and set out for Saya Thetgyi's teaching center.

It is a testament to U Ba Khin's determination to learn Vipassana that he left the headquarters on short notice. His desire to meditate was so strong that only one week after trying Anapana, he was on his way to Saya Thetgyi's center at Pyawbwegyi.

The small village of Pyawbwegyi is due south of Yangon, across the Yangon River and miles of rice paddies. Although it is only eight miles from the city, the muddy fields before harvest time make it seem longer; travellers must cross the equivalent of a shallow sea. When U Ba Khin crossed the Yangon River, it was low tide, and the sampan boat he hired could only take him to Phyarsu village—about half the distance—along a tributary which connected to Pyawbwegyi. Sayagyi climbed the river bank, sinking in mud up to his knees. He covered the remaining distance on foot across the fields, arriving with his legs caked in mud.

That same night, U Ba Khin and another Burmese student, who was a disciple of Ledi Sayadaw, received Anapana instructions from Saya Thetgyi. The two students advanced rapidly, and were given Vipassana the next day. Sayagyi progressed well during this first ten-day course, and continued his work during frequent visits to his teacher's center and

meetings with Saya Thetgyi whenever he came to Yangon.

When he returned to his office, Sayagyi found an envelope on his desk. He feared that it might be a dismissal note but found, to his surprise, that it was a promotion letter. He had been chosen for the post of Special Office Superintendent in the new office of the Auditor General of Burma.

In 1941, a seemingly happenstance incident occurred which was to be important in Sayagyi's life. While on government business in upper Myanmar, he met by chance Webu Sayadaw, a monk who had achieved high attainments in meditation. Webu Sayadaw was impressed with U Ba Khin's proficiency in meditation, and urged him to teach. He was the first person to exhort Sayagyi to start teaching. (An account of this historic meeting, and subsequent contacts between these two important figures, is described in the article "Ven. Webu Sayadaw and Sayagyi U Ba Khin" in the Sayagyi U Ba Khin Journal.)*

U Ba Khin did not begin teaching in a formal way until about a decade after he first met Webu Sayadaw. Saya Thetgyi also encouraged him to teach Vipassana. On one occasion during the Japanese occupation of Myanmar, Saya Thetgyi came to Yangon and stayed with one of his students who was a government official. When his host and other students expressed a wish to see Saya Thetgyi more often, he replied, "I am like the doctor who can only see you at certain times. But U Ba Khin is like the nurse who will see you any time."

Sayagyi's government service continued for another twenty-six years. He became Accountant General on January 4, 1948, the day Myanmar gained independence. For the next two decades, he was employed in various capacities in the government, most of the time holding two or more posts, each equivalent to the head of a department. At one time he served as head of three separate departments simultane-

ously for three years and, on another occasion, head of four departments for about one year. When he was appointed as the chairman of the State Agricultural Marketing Board in 1956, the Myanmar government conferred on him the title of “Thray Sithu,” a high honorary title. Only the last four years of Sayagyi’s life were devoted exclusively to teaching meditation. The rest of the time he combined his skill in meditation with his devotion to government service and his responsibilities to his family. Sayagyi was a married householder with five daughters and one son.

In 1950 he founded the Vipassana Association of the Accountant General’s Office where lay people, mainly employees of that office, could learn Vipassana. In 1952, the International Meditation Centre (IMC) was opened in Yangon, two miles north of the famous Shwedagon pagoda. Here many Burmese and foreign students had the good fortune to receive instruction in the Dhamma from Sayagyi.

Sayagyi was active in the planning for the Sixth Buddhist Council known as the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana (Sixth Recitation) which was held in 1954-56 in Yangon. Sayagyi was a founding member in 1950 of two organizations which were later merged to become the Union of Burma Buddha Sāsana Council (UBSC), the main planning body for the Great Council. U Ba Khin served as an executive member of the UBSC and as chairman of the committee for paṭipatti (the practice of meditation).

He also served as honorary auditor of the Council and was therefore responsible for maintaining the accounts for all dāna (donation) receipts and expenditures. There was an extensive building program spread over 170 acres to provide housing, dining areas and kitchen, a hospital, library, museum, four hostels and administrative buildings. The focal point of the entire enterprise was the Mahā Pāsāṅguhā

(Great Cave), a massive hall where approximately five thousand monks from Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, India, Cambodia and Laos gathered to recite, purify, edit and publish the Tipiṭaka (Buddhist scriptures). The monks, working in groups, prepared the Pāli texts for publication, comparing the Burmese, Sri Lankan, Thai, and Cambodian editions and the Roman-script edition of the Pāli Text Society in London. The corrected and approved texts were recited in the Great Cave. Ten to fifteen thousand lay men and women came to listen to the recitations of the monks.

To efficiently handle the millions in donations that came for this undertaking, U Ba Khin created a system of printing receipt books on different coloured paper for different amounts of dāna, ranging from the humblest donation up to very large amounts. Only selected people were allowed to handle the larger contributions, and every donation was scrupulously accounted for, avoiding any hint of misappropriation.

Sayagyi remained active with the UBSC in various capacities until 1967. In this way he combined his responsibilities and talents as a layman and government official with his strong Dhamma volition to spread the teaching of Buddha. In addition to the prominent public service he gave to that cause, he continued to teach Vipassana regularly at his center. Some of the Westerners who came to the Sixth Council were referred to Sayagyi for instruction in meditation since at that time there was no other teacher of Vipassana who was fluent in English.

Because of his highly demanding government duties, Sayagyi was only able to teach a small number of students. Many of his Burmese students were connected with his government work. Many Indian students were introduced by Goenkaji. Sayagyi's students from abroad were small in

number but diverse, including leading Western Buddhists, academicians, and members of the diplomatic community in Yangon.

From time to time, Sayagyi was invited to address foreign audiences in Myanmar on the subject of Dhamma. On one occasion, for example, he was asked to deliver a series of lectures at the Methodist Church in Yangon. These lectures were published as a booklet titled “What Buddhism Is.”* Copies were distributed to Burmese embassies and various Buddhist organisations around the world. This booklet attracted a number of Westerners to attend courses with Sayagyi. On another occasion he delivered a lecture to a group of press representatives from Israel, who were in Myanmar on the occasion of the visit of Israel’s prime minister, David Ben Gurion. This lecture was later published under the title “The Real Values of True Buddhist Meditation.”*

Sayagyi finally retired from his outstanding career in government service in 1967. From that time, until his death in 1971, he stayed at IMC, teaching Vipassana. Shortly before his death he thought back to all those who had helped him—the old man who had helped him start school, the Burmese teacher who helped him join St. Paul’s and, among many others, one friend whom he had lost sight of over forty years earlier and now found mentioned in the local newspaper. He dictated letters addressed to this old friend and to some foreign students and disciples, including Goenkaji. On the 18th of January, Sayagyi suddenly became ill. When his newly rediscovered friend received Sayagyi’s letter on the 20th, he was shocked to read Sayagyi’s death announcement in the same post.

Goenkaji was in India conducting a course when news of his teacher’s death reached him. He sent a telegram back to IMC which contained the famous Pāli verse:

Aniccā vata saṅkhārā,
uppādavaya-dhammino.
Uppajjitvā nirujjhanti,
tesaṃ vūpasamo sukho.

Impermanent truly are compounded things,
by nature arising and passing away.
If they arise and are extinguished,
their eradication brings happiness.

One year later, in a tribute to his teacher, Goenkaji wrote: “Even after his passing away one year ago, observing the continued success of the courses, I get more and more convinced that it is his mettā (loving-kindness) force which is giving me all the inspiration and strength to serve so many people... Obviously the force of Dhamma is immeasurable.”

Sayagyi’s aspirations are being accomplished. The Buddha’s teachings, carefully preserved all these centuries, are still being practiced, and are still bringing results here and now.

* These articles are published in the Sayagyi U Ba Khin Journal, available from the Vipassana Research Institute, Igatpuri, India, and from Pariyatti: www.pariyatti.org.

The Essentials of Buddha-Dhamma in Meditative Practice

by Sayagyi U Ba Khin

Anicca, dukkha and anattā—impermanence, suffering and egolessness—are the three essential characteristics of things in the teaching of the Buddha. If you know anicca correctly, you know dukkha as its corollary and anattā as ultimate truth. It takes time to understand the three together.

Impermanence (anicca) is, of course, the essential fact which must be first experienced and understood by practice. Mere book-knowledge of the Buddha-Dhamma will not be enough for the correct understanding of anicca because the experiential aspect will be missing. It is only through experiential understanding of the nature of anicca as an ever-changing process within yourself that you can understand anicca in the way the Buddha would like you to understand it. As in the days of the Buddha, so too now, this understanding of anicca can be developed by persons who have no book-knowledge whatsoever of Buddhism.

To understand impermanence (anicca), one must follow strictly and diligently the Eightfold Noble Path, which is divided into the three groups of *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*—morality, concentration and wisdom. *Sīla* or virtuous living is the basis for *samādhi* (control of the mind, leading to one-pointedness). It is only when *samādhi* is good that one can develop *paññā*. Therefore, *sīla* and *samādhi* are the pre-

requisites for paññā. By paññā is meant the understanding of anicca, dukkha and anattā through the practice of Vipassana, i.e., insight meditation.

Whether a Buddha has arisen or not, the practice of sila and samādhi may be present in the human world. They are, in fact, the common denominators of all religious faiths. They are not, however, sufficient means for the goal of Buddhism—the complete end of suffering. In his search for the end of suffering, Prince Siddhārtha, the future Buddha, found this out and worked his way through to find the path which would lead to the end of suffering. After solid work for six years, he found the way out, became completely enlightened, and then taught men and gods to follow the path which would lead them to the end of suffering.

In this connection, we should understand that each action—whether by deed, word or thought—leaves behind an active force called saṅkhāra (or kamma in popular terminology), which goes to the credit or debit account of the individual, according to whether the action is good or bad. There is, therefore, an accumulation of saṅkhāras (or kamma) with everyone, which functions as the supply-source of energy to sustain life, which is inevitably followed by suffering and death. It is by the development of the power inherent in the understanding of anicca, dukkha and anattā that one is able to rid oneself of the saṅkhāras accumulated in one's own personal account. This process begins with the correct understanding of anicca while further accumulations of fresh actions and the reduction of the supply of energy to sustain life are taking place simultaneously, from moment to moment and from day to day. It is, therefore, a matter of a whole lifetime or more to get rid of all one's saṅkhāras. He who has rid himself of all saṅkhāras comes to the end of suffering, for then no saṅkhāra remains to give the necessary energy to sustain him in any form of life. On the termination

of their lives the perfected saints, i.e., the Buddhas and the arahants, pass into parinibbāna, reaching the end of suffering. For us today who take to Vipassana meditation it would suffice if we can understand anicca well enough to reach the first stage of an ariya (a noble person), that is, a sotāpanna or stream-enterer, who will not take more than seven lives to come to the end of suffering.

The fact of anicca, which opens the door to the understanding of dukkha and anattā and eventually to the end of suffering, can be encountered in its full significance only through the teaching of a Buddha for as long as that teaching relating to the Eightfold Noble Path and the thirty-seven factors of enlightenment (bodhipakkhiya dhammā) remains intact and available to the aspirant.

For progress in Vipassana meditation, a student must keep knowing anicca as continuously as possible. The Buddha's advice to monks is that they should try to maintain the awareness of anicca, dukkha or anattā in all postures, whether sitting, standing, walking or lying down. Continuous awareness of anicca, and so of dukkha and anattā, is the secret of success. The last words of the Buddha just before he breathed his last and passed away into mahāparinibbāna were: "Decay (or anicca) is inherent in all component things. Work out your own salvation with diligence." This is in fact the essence of all his teachings during the forty-five years of his ministry. If you will keep up the awareness of the anicca that is inherent in all component things, you are sure to reach the goal in the course of time.

As you develop in the understanding of anicca, your insight into "what is true of nature" will become greater and greater, so that eventually you will have no doubt whatsoever of the three characteristics of anicca, dukkha and anattā. It is then only that you will be in a position to go ahead for the

goal in view. Now that you know anicca as the first essential factor, you should try to understand what anicca is with real clarity, as extensively as possible, so as not to get confused in the course of practice or discussion.

The real meaning of anicca is that impermanence or decay is the inherent nature of everything that exists in the universe—whether animate or inanimate. The Buddha taught his disciples that everything that exists at the material level is composed of kalāpas. Kalāpas are material units very much smaller than atoms, which die out almost immediately after they come into being. Each kalāpa is a mass formed of the eight basic constituents of matter: the solid, liquid, calorific and oscillatory, together with colour, smell, taste, and nutriment. The first four are called primary qualities, and are predominant in a kalāpa. The other four are subsidiaries dependent upon and springing from the former. A kalāpa is the minutest particle in the physical plane—still beyond the range of science today. It is only when the eight basic material constituents unite together that the kalāpa is formed. In other words, the momentary collocation of these eight basic elements of behavior, which makes a mass just for that moment, is known in Buddhism as a kalāpa. The lifespan of a kalāpa is termed a “moment,” and a trillion such moments are said to elapse during the wink of a man’s eye. These kalāpas are all in a state of perpetual change or flux. To a developed student in Vipassana meditation they can be felt as a stream of energy.

The human body is not, as it may appear, a solid stable entity, but a continuum of matter (rūpa) coexisting with mentality (nāma). To know that our body is tiny kalāpas all in a state of change is to know the true nature of change or decay. This change or decay (anicca) occasioned by the continual breakdown and replacement of kalāpas, all in a state of combustion, must necessarily be identified as dukkha, the

truth of suffering. It is only when you experience impermanence (anicca) as suffering (dukkha) that you come to the realization of the truth of suffering, the first of the Four Noble Truths basic to the doctrine of the Buddha.

Why? Because when you realize the subtle nature of dukkha from which you cannot escape for a moment, you become truly afraid of, disgusted with, and disinclined towards your very existence as mentality-materiality (nāma-rūpa), and look for a way of escape to a state beyond dukkha, and so to nibbāna, the end of suffering. What that end of suffering is like, you will be able to taste, even as a human being, when you reach the level of a sotāpanna, a stream-enterer, and develop well enough by practice to attain the unconditioned state of nibbāna, the peace within. But even in terms of everyday, ordinary life, no sooner than you are able to keep up the awareness of anicca in practice will you know for yourself that a change is taking place in you for the better, both physically and mentally.

Before entering upon the practice of Vipassana meditation (that is, after samādhi has been developed to a proper level), a student should acquaint himself with the theoretical knowledge of material and mental properties, i.e., of rūpa and nāma. For in Vipassana meditation one contemplates not only the changing nature of matter, but also the changing nature of mentality, of the thought-elements of attention directed towards the process of change going on within matter. At times the attention will be focussed on the impermanence of the material side of existence, i.e., upon anicca in regard to rūpa; and at other times on the impermanence of the thought-elements or mental side, i.e., upon anicca in regard to nāma. When one is contemplating the impermanence of matter, one realizes also that the thought-elements simultaneous with that awareness are also in a state of transition or change. In this case one will be knowing anicca in regard

to both rūpa and nāma together.

All I have said so far relates to the understanding of anicca through bodily feeling of the process of change of rūpa (or matter) and also of thought-elements depending upon such changing processes. You should know that anicca can also be understood through other types of feeling as well. Anicca can be contemplated through feeling:

1. by contact of visible form with the sense organ of the eye;
2. by contact of sound with the sense organ of the ear;
3. by contact of smell with the sense organ of the nose;
4. by contact of taste with the sense organ of the tongue;
5. by contact of touch with the sense organ of the body;
6. and by contact of mental objects with the sense organ of the mind.

One can thus develop the understanding of anicca through any of the six sense organs. In practice, however, we have found that of all types of feeling, the feeling by contact of touch with the component parts of the body in a process of change, covers the widest area for introspective meditation. Not only that, the feeling by contact of touch (by way of friction, radiation and vibration of the kalāpas within) with the component parts of the body is more evident than other types of feeling. Therefore a beginner in Vipassana meditation can come to the understanding of anicca more easily through bodily feeling of the change of rūpa, or matter. This is the main reason why we have chosen bodily feeling as a medium for quick understanding of anicca. It is open to anyone to try other means, but my suggestion is that one should be well-established in the understanding of anicca through bodily feeling before any attempt is made through other types of feeling.

There are ten levels of knowledge in Vipassana, namely:

1. sammasana: theoretical appreciation of anicca, dukkha and anattā by close observation and analysis.
2. udayabbaya: knowledge of the arising and dissolution of rūpa and nāma by direct observation.
3. bhaṅga: knowledge of the rapidly changing nature of rūpa and nāma as a swift current or stream of energy; in particular, clear awareness of the phase of dissolution.
4. bhaya: knowledge that this very existence is dreadful.
5. ādinava: knowledge that this very existence is full of evils.
6. nibbidā: knowledge that this very existence is disgusting.
7. muñcitakamyatā: knowledge of the urgent need and wish to escape from this very existence.
8. paṭisaṅkhā: knowledge that the time has come to work for full realization of deliverance with anicca as the base.
9. saṅkhārupekkhā: knowledge that the stage is now set to get detached from all conditioned phenomena (saṅkhāra) and to break away from egocentricity.
10. anuloma: knowledge that would accelerate the attempt to reach the goal.

These are the levels of attainment which one goes through during the course of Vipassana meditation. In the case of those who reach the goal in a short time, they can be known only in retrospect. Along with one's progress in understanding anicca, one may reach these levels of attainment—subject, however, to adjustments or help at certain levels by a competent teacher. One should avoid looking forward to such attainments in anticipation, as this will distract from the continuity of awareness of anicca which alone can and will give the desired reward.

Let me now deal with Vipassana meditation from the point of view of a householder in everyday life and explain the benefit one can derive from it—here and now—in this very lifetime.

The initial object of Vipassana meditation is to activate the experience of anicca in oneself and eventually to reach a state of inner and outer calmness and balance. This is achieved when one becomes engrossed in the feeling of anicca within. The world is now facing serious problems which threaten all mankind. It is just the right time for everyone to take to Vipassana meditation and learn how to find a deep pool of quiet in the midst of all that is happening today. Anicca is inside of everybody. It is within reach of everybody. Just a look into oneself and there it is—anicca to be experienced. When one can feel anicca, when one can experience anicca, and when one can become engrossed in anicca, one can and will cut oneself off from the world of ideation outside. Anicca is, for the householder, the gem of life which he will treasure to create a reservoir of calm and balanced energy for his own wellbeing and for the welfare of the society.

The experience of anicca, when properly developed, strikes at the root of one's physical and mental ills and removes gradually whatever is bad in him, i.e., the causes of such physical and mental ills. This experience is not reserved for men who have renounced the world for the homeless life. It is for the householder as well. In spite of drawbacks which make a householder restless in these days, a competent teacher or guide can help a student to get the experience of anicca activated in a comparatively short time. Once he has got it activated, all that is necessary for him is to try to preserve it; but he must make it a point, as soon as time or opportunity presents itself for further progress, to work for the stage of bhaṅgañāṇa (knowledge of bhaṅga).

However, there is likely to be some difficulty for one who has not reached the stage of *bhaṅga*. It will be just like a tug-of-war for him between *anicca* within, and physical and mental activities outside. So it would be wise for him to follow the motto of “Work while you work, play while you play.” There is no need for him to be activating the experience of *anicca* all the time. It should suffice if this could be confined to a regular period, or periods, set apart in the day or night for the purpose. During this time, at least, an attempt must be made to keep the attention focussed inside the body, with awareness devoted exclusively to *anicca*. That is to say, his awareness of *anicca* should go on from moment to moment so continuously as not to allow for the interpolation of any discursive or distracting thoughts, which are definitely detrimental to progress. In case this is not possible, he will have to go back to respiration-mindfulness, because *samādhi* is the key to the contemplation of *anicca*. To get good *samādhi*, *sīla* (morality) has to be perfect, since *samādhi* is built upon *sīla*. For a good experience of *anicca*, *samādhi* must be good. If *samādhi* is excellent, awareness of *anicca* will also become excellent.

There is no special technique for activating the experience of *anicca* other than the use of the mind adjusted to a perfect state of balance and attention projected upon the object of meditation. In *Vipassana* the object of meditation is *anicca*, and therefore in the case of those used to focussing their attention on bodily feelings, they can feel *anicca* directly. In experiencing *anicca* in relation to the body, it should first be in the area where one can easily get his attention engrossed, changing the area of attention from place to place, from head to feet and from feet to head, at times probing into the interior. At this stage it must clearly be understood that no attention is to be paid to the anatomy of the body, but to the formations of matter—the *kalāpas*—and the nature of

their constant change.

If these instructions are observed, there will surely be progress, but the progress depends also on pāramī (i.e., one's disposition for certain spiritual qualities) and devotion of the individual to the work of meditation. If he attains high levels of knowledge, his power to understand the three characteristics of anicca, dukkha and anattā will increase and he will accordingly come nearer and nearer to the goal of the ariya or noble saint—which every householder should keep in view.

This is the age of science. Man of today has no utopia. He will not accept anything unless the results are good, concrete, vivid, personal, and here-and-now.

When the Buddha was alive, he said to the people of Kālāma:

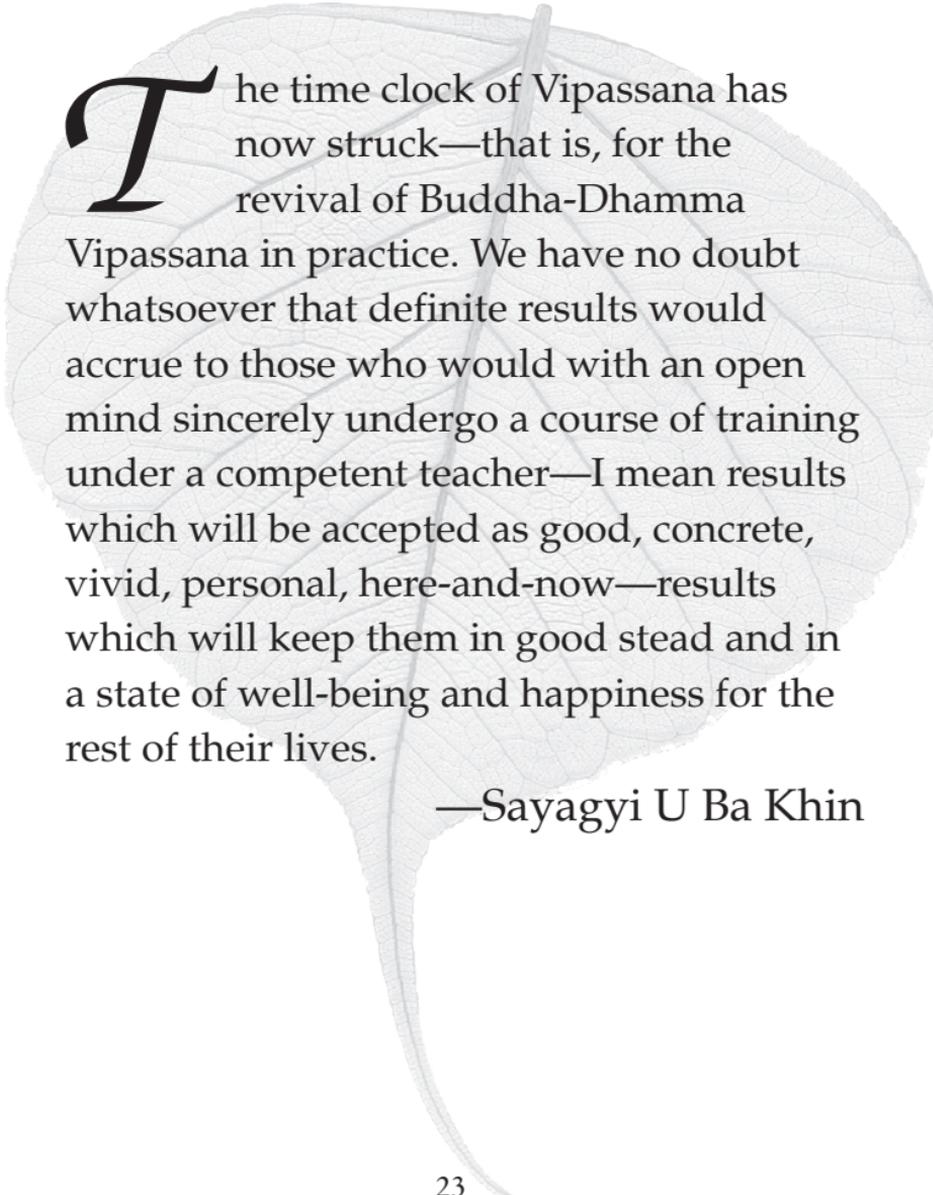
“Now look, you Kālāmas. Be not misled by report or tradition or hearsay. Be not misled by proficiency in the scriptural collections, or by reasoning or logic, or reflection on and approval of some theory, or because some view conforms with one's inclinations, or out of respect for the prestige of a teacher. But when you know for yourselves: these things are unwholesome, these things are blameworthy, these things are censured by the wise; these things, when practiced and observed, conduce to loss and sorrow—then do ye reject them. But if at any time you know for yourselves: these things are wholesome, these things are blameless, these things are praised by the intelligent; these things, when practiced and observed, conduce to welfare and happiness—then, Kālāmas, do ye, having practiced them, abide.”

The time clock of Vipassana has now struck—that is, for the revival of Buddha-Dhamma Vipassana in practice. We have no doubt whatsoever that definite results would accrue to those who would with an open mind sincerely

undergo a course of training under a competent teacher—I mean results which will be accepted as good, concrete, vivid, personal, here-and-now—results which will keep them in good stead and in a state of well-being and happiness for the rest of their lives.

May all beings be happy and may peace prevail in the world.





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—Sayagyi U Ba Khin

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