



bodhi tree  
FOREST MONASTERY AND RETREAT CENTRE

## **What to Report in an Interview – Ven. Pannyavaro**

Once the beginner is established in the basic techniques, students are then required to report their experience to the teacher in a formal interview throughout the retreat. As in the Zen tradition, the retreat interview is an essential part of the Theravadin Vipassana style of practice.

The interview is the basis for the relationship between the teacher and the student. It is crucial for the development of Vipassana meditation as it is where the meditator reports his or her experience and can be guided and given further instructions if need be by the teacher.

The communication with the teacher and the ability to report in the interview can greatly affect the outcome of the practice. While the teacher will try to encourage and inspire the meditator, it is not a counseling or therapy session. Rather it is more in the nature of a technical report by the meditator of what is happening in their practice. This requires that the student must be open and frank about his or her practice while keeping to the point so that the teacher and student can work in tandem.

The teacher will check the student's grasp of the technique and make corrections, and if need be give further instructions. In this way it will assist the meditator to eventually manage his or her own practice and clarify what they are doing to help them progress further.

As new meditators are usually working in the unfamiliar territory of the mind, often one will find that they do not report their experiences satisfactorily or are unable to describe what they are experiencing precisely, even though they might have practiced well.

The interview session can be either one-to-one with the teacher or in a small group. It can be on a daily basis or more usually every other day, while the length of an interview can vary from ten minutes or to twenty minutes.

If the student is having difficulties in reporting his or her practice, the following standard questions that a teacher would ask about the practice in an interview will help to clarify the meditation experience as well as be the basis for a succinct report that will assist both teacher and student.

## **What to Report**

Describe briefly and clearly what is happening in the three practice areas: sitting, walking and daily activities.

### **1) Sitting**

- How long for, and are there any problems?
- Can you follow the primary object of attention – the rising and falling of the abdomen?
- Describe what you notice about the movement?
- How much thinking is going on, and how are you handling the thinking?
- What about pain, and how are you working with it?
- Are you noticing feelings?
- Are you checking your mind states – and what are they predominately?
- Are there any unusual experiences and how are you relating to them?

### **2) Walking**

- How long for, and are there any problems?
- Are you mentally labeling (or just knowing) the movement concurrent with the experience?
- Is there much thinking during the walking, if so how do you handle it?
- What are you finding in the movement, and what specific characteristics – if any – are you able to notice?

### **3) Daily Activities**

- What percentage of the day are you able to stay attentive to what you are doing? What degree of attentiveness are you able to sustain?
- Are you able to keep a 'thread of awareness' during the day by noting the body postures together with the naming of walking as 'walking', 'walking' as you get around the retreat centre?
- Are you able to note the moment of awakening and the moments leading up to sleep?
- How detailed can you be?
- Can you describe what you noted during meal times?
- Have you been able to link the 'Three Areas of Practice'? If so to what extent?
- Are there any new experiences to report since the last interview?

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