

Faded, illegible text visible in the right margin of the page.

back to the source

GERMAN-BORN **VEN. ANALAYO** LEADS A LIFE STEEPED IN MEDITATION IN SRI LANKA. HIS STUDY OF THE BUDDHA'S ORIGINAL MEDITATION TEACHING HAS LED HIM TO QUESTION TRADITIONAL APPROACHES

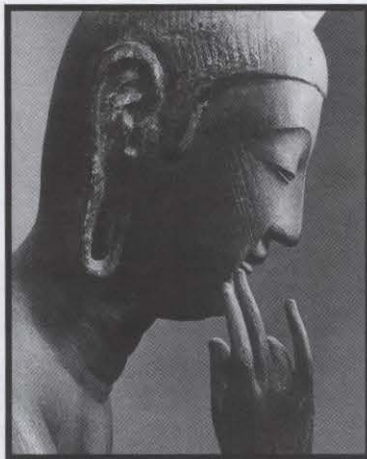
Dharma Life: How do you come to be living as a *bhikkhu* here in Sri Lanka?

Analayo: I studied martial arts in Berlin and I found that the discipline offered a way to express and contain my anger, but it didn't address the root of the problem. Along with martial arts I also learnt Soto Zen meditation, and when I found that through practising my anger no longer arose so quickly, I became interested in meditation. I travelled to Asia and ended up in Thailand where I did a course in Mindfulness of Breathing with Ajahn Buddhadasa. In Zen I had been told to 'just sit', nothing more, but through Buddhadasa's teaching I now received some instruction in meditation.

Then came the start of the rainy season and the custom in Thailand is for many people to become monks for the three months of the rains. So that's what I did. I stayed in a cave on a hilltop, surrounded on three sides by the sea, and there I had the opportunity to live a thoroughly meditative life.

Once I was in robes I found the monastic lifestyle supported meditation, so I decided to continue with it. Later I came to Sri Lanka and stayed with Godwin Samaratane, who was an excellent meditation teacher, and in 1995 he sent me to develop the Lewelle Meditation Centre. Here we have a main house with a small community, and we've built several *kutis* on the hill, where I stay and where other visitors can come to meditate.

Godwin brought out aspects of meditation that are in the suttas [the records of the



Buddha's discourses recorded in the Pali language] but which have been neglected in Theravada tradition. He had an open-minded approach that emphasised emptiness, working constructively with emotions and developing *metta* (loving-kindness). He wanted me to provide scholarly back-up for what he was doing, so he introduced me to a university professor and the people at the university just told me that I would be doing a PhD.

DL: As a dedicated meditator, what was your motivation for engaging with academic study?

A: I wanted a better understanding of the Buddha's teaching, and I hoped to approach Buddhism both from the inside perspective of a Buddhist monk and meditator, and also from a 'scientific' perspective. Being a meditating monk the most obvious topic was *sati-*

pathana, the development of mindfulness, and I found that there is almost no research on *satipatthana* nor the *Satipatthana Sutta*, the principal canonical text concerning it.

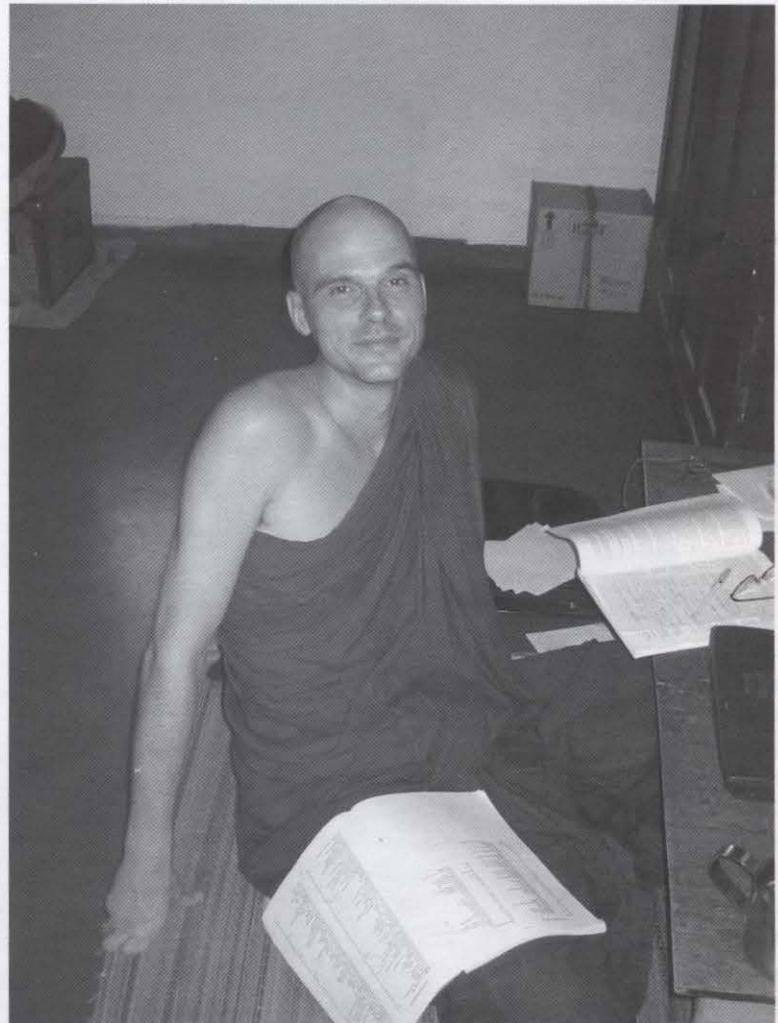
The book I have eventually written is not only a vindication of Godwin's teaching, but also an attempt to go back to the roots and ask: what were the Buddha's basic ideas? What did he mean by insight meditation? What is written in the *Satipatthana Sutta*, and how can other suttas illuminate it?

The book reflects my particular perspective as both a scholar and a practitioner. Academics sometimes go off at tangents because without experience of practice they can get caught up in ideas that are a long way from the original meanings. On the other hand meditation teachers tend either to express their ideas and experience without going back to the sources, or else to be steeped in the Theravada tradition. For traditional Theravadins the suttas that recount the Buddha's discourses and the later commentaries are one block. They see everything through the eyes of Buddhaghosa, the author of the *Visuddhimagga* [the most important commentary] despite the fact that there was a gap of 800 years between the Buddha and Buddhaghosa. So I wanted to separate these out. The ideas and techniques in the commentaries may well be good, but it's important to know that some were not taught by the Buddha.

DL: How would you characterise the Buddha's approach to meditation as it emerges from the discourses?

>>>

'I decided no matter how many hours I studied, I would spend more hours meditating'



Full immersion: Ven. Analayo and, opposite, his monastery in Sri Lanka

'YOU SHOULD ENJOY MEDITATING, FOR IN ENJOYING ITSELF THE MIND BECOMES UNIFIED'



>>>

A: In the discourses when a monk comes to the Buddha and says he wants to meditate, the Buddha usually just gives him a theme like, 'don't cling to anything'. The monk goes off and when he returns he is usually an Arahant [one with a high level of Realisation]! In other words, the Buddha gives the general pattern, not a precise technique such as you find in Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*, whose approach we have inherited. When the Buddha discusses concentration he talks about what happens with the mind. He says that when *pamojja* [delight] arises the mind naturally becomes joyful, and from that come happiness, calm, tranquillity and concentration. So you should enjoy meditating, for in enjoying itself the mind becomes unified.

At the same time the Buddha has a clear, analytical approach; when he speaks of 'the five hindrances', for example, he is pointing to specific experiences that imply specific antidotes. But that's different from issuing technical instructions. You could say that the Buddha didn't teach meditation so much as the skill of meditating or the ability to meditate. He was concerned with stirring the natural potential of individuals to awaken the mind on the basis of a clear distinction (that never gets lost) between what is mentally wholesome and what is unwholesome.

DL: What difference does the distinction between commentarial and sutta approaches to meditation make on what you do when you meditate?

A: Being an 'anger-type' I thought it was important to develop *metta*. In Thailand I followed the *Visuddhimagga* approach of send-

¶ Bhikkhus, suppose that on hearing, "The most beautiful girl in the land!" a great crowd of people would assemble. Now that most beautiful girl would dance exquisitely and sing exquisitely. On hearing "The most beautiful girl in the land is dancing! The most beautiful girl in the land is singing!" an even larger crowd would assemble.

'Then a man would come along, wishing to live, not wishing to die, wishing for happiness not suffering. Someone would say to him: "Good man, you must carry this bowl of oil filled to the brim between the crowd and the most beautiful girl in the land. A man with a drawn sword will be following and wherever you spill even a little, there he will fell your head."

What do you think, bhikkhus, would that man stop attending to the bowl of oil, and out of negligence turn his attention outwards?'

'No, venerable sir.'

'I have made up this simile, bhikkhus, in order to convey a meaning. The bowl filled to the brim is the designation of mindfulness directed to the body. Therefore, bhikkhus, you should train yourself thus: "We will develop and cultivate mindfulness directed towards the body, make it our vehicle, make it our basis, stabilise it, exercise ourselves in it, and fully perfect it". Thus, bhikkhus, should you train yourselves. ¶

Samyutta Nikaya V 170

ing *metta* to oneself, a friend, a neutral person and an enemy, and verbalising good wishes, as well as extending this to all beings. I found I got stuck in ideas, and when I turned to the suttas I read that the Buddha just says, 'with a mind full of *metta*' (an attitude or feeling of loving-kindness), 'he radiates *metta* in all directions'. There's no verbalisation, no particular people, just this radiation. That brought an incredible change to my practice and from then on it evolved strongly.

Another example is the counting methods in the commentarial approach to the Mindfulness of Breathing, which are also not found in the suttas. The *Anapanasati Sutta* describes how in 16 steps you can be aware of the breath, the body, feelings, and what is happening in the mind. This extends to seeing the impermanence of the breath.

This is an excellent approach. Firstly, you calm the mind by staying predominantly with bodily phenomena. Then you become aware of your whole self as it sits in meditation, and then you notice how the breath and the body become calmer. As soon as that happens thinking also calms down, and joy arises. You're aware of these changes and encourage them, and that takes you away from the thinking activity of the mind.

The commentarial approach implies narrowing the focus of attention onto one point and only prescribes contemplating the most prominent characteristics of the physical breath – not the many other dimensions that are described in the sutta. Having so little material to work on, your mind can get bored and wander, so you need counting as food for the mind. But counting can take you away

>>>

'I'VE TRIED TO RETURN TO THE
ROOTS AND ASK: WHAT DID THE
BUDDHA MEAN BY INSIGHT
MEDITATION?'

>>>

from the bodily experience of the breath to conceptual ideas about it. However, if the mind has something it likes, it will stay with it – and that's the way to deep concentration.

DL: What about the importance of one-pointed concentration [*ekagata*], which is usually taught as the way to become fully absorbed?

A: *Ekagata* can also be translated as 'unification of the mind'. So in developing meditative absorption it's not so much that you narrow everything down to a fine point. It's more that everything becomes 'one'. If I take a large object and move it around you have no trouble following it; but if you try to stay with a pin-point it is difficult and that can create tension.

As you go deeper into meditation (in developing the higher states of meditative absorption known as *jhana/dhyana*) you need a reference point. But to enter *jhana* you have to let go of the five physical senses. So the experience of the breath becomes a mental equivalent of it, a *nimitta*, not a felt experience. Sometimes meditators experience a light that is an equivalent of the breath, which may envelop you entirely. Or the *nimitta* could be an experience of happiness, or just mentally knowing the breath, and the mind becomes one with that.

An important term for meditative absorption is *samadhi*. We often translate that as 'concentration', but that can suggest a certain stiffness. Perhaps 'unification' is a better rendition, as *samadhi* means 'to bring together'. Deep *samadhi* is not at all stiff. It's



Getty Images

‘The Brahmin Kasi Bharadvaja’s food distribution was taking place. Then the Blessed One approached the place of food distribution and stood to one side. The brahmin Kasi Bharadvaja saw the Blessed One standing for alms and said to him: ‘Recluse I plough and sow, and when you have ploughed and sown, you will eat.’

‘I, too, brahmin plough and sow, and when I have ploughed and sown I eat.’

‘But we do not see Master Gotama’s yoke or plough or ploughshare or goad or oxen; yet Master Gotama says, “I plough and sow, and when you have ploughed and sown, I will eat”.’

Then the brahmin Kasi Bharadvaja addressed the Blessed One in verse:

‘You claim to be a man who works the plough, But I do not see your ploughing.

If you’re a ploughman answer me: How should we understand your ploughing.’

[The Blessed One:]

**‘Faith is the seed, austerity the rain,
Wisdom my yoke and plough;
Shame is the pole, mind the yoke-tie,
Mindfulness my ploughshare and goad.
Guarded in body, guarded in speech,
Controlled in my appetite for food,
I use truth as my weeding hook,
And gentleness as my unyoking.
Energy is my beast of burden,
Carrying me to security from bondage.**

**It goes ahead without stopping
To where, having gone, one does not sorrow.**

**In such a way this ploughing is done
Which has the Deathless as its fruit.**

**Having finished this work of ploughing,
One is released from all suffering.’**

**‘Let Master Gotama eat, since he is worthy!
Master Gotama does ploughing that has even
the Deathless for its fruit. 7**

Samyutta Nikaya 1 172

a process of letting go of other things and reaching a unified experience.

DL: I practise the five stages of the Metta Bhavana and I find that there’s a definite psychological value in that approach.

A: I’m not saying that the commentarial approach is wrong, only that if it doesn’t work for you then there is an alternative. And whatever practice you follow, be aware of whether it comes from the Buddha or someone else. I know people who say the five-stage Metta Bhavana or the Mindfulness of Breathing with counting works for them. That’s completely OK. I’m trying to add to the commentarial view, and to broaden perspectives; I’m not asking people to throw out the commentaries or their teacher’s approach, and only listen to me. I have been practising the Goenka technique for 10 years and I have had good results with it. But I wouldn’t say it’s the only correct technique.

In his discourses the Buddha did not say there’s one way for everybody. In the Theravada tradition there have been many debates about the relationship between *samatha* [absorption] and *vipassana* [insight] as goals of meditation. But the discourses say you can practise *samatha* first, then *vipassana*, or the other way around, or both together. Both *samatha* and *vipassana* develop the mind and the two co-operate, but how you engage with them depends on the individual.

DL: The breadth of this approach implies knowing yourself sufficiently so that you can plot a course.



A: The process of developing insight is a matter of gaining self-knowledge and learning to act accordingly. When you sit down to meditate you need to feel the tendency of the mind – what it needs and what it wants to do. More broadly, I know that my tendency is towards anger, which means I need to develop tranquillity to balance my personality.

DL: You place great emphasis on mindfulness, and you have a very broad view of its implications ...

A: The presentation of mindfulness in the discourses suggests an open, receptive state of mind in which you let things come to you. It's different from concentration or *samatha* – in that concentration means focus and mindfulness means breadth; but without mindfulness you can't develop concentration. It's also an important basis for insight meditation or *vipassana*.

Mindfulness has many facets. Many teachers speak of mindfulness of the body, but people don't talk much about the contemplations of feelings, mind and *dharmas* that are also in the *Satipatthana Sutta*. But if you take any experience – like sitting here now – you can be aware of the bodily aspect, how you feel about what we are discussing; the state of mind that we are each in; and you can see it in the light of the Buddha's teachings. Each situation has these four aspects, and mindfulness can focus on one or all of these as appropriate.

DL: How has studying these suttas affected your own meditation?

A: It has become the ground of my practice.

Before I started my academic work I decided that no matter how many hours I studied, I would spend more hours meditating. That's why it took me six years to complete this book. I would never lose touch with my meditation practice simply for the sake of theoretical study. On the other hand, though, a good knowledge of Buddha's teachings 'clears the path' – as it enables you to know what you're doing and then you don't experience doubt. Now I can learn from various meditation teachers without becoming confused because I know what lines I am pursuing in my own practice.

The Buddha gave all the talks that are recorded in the suttas because he thought people should know what they are doing. Meditation is like eating and the knowledge we can gain from the suttas is like the digestive juice that makes it possible for our bodies to digest the nutrients. The two belong together, but meditation has to have the priority. Doing PhD research is perhaps going to an extreme. But studying informed sources can be helpful for everyone. They can shine a beam of light onto your practice and that can inspire it.

Ven. Analayo's book *Satipatthana: the Direct Path to Awakening* will be published by the Buddhist Publication Society

Suppose, *bhikkhus*, a man would catch six animals – with different domains and different feeding grounds – and tie them by a strong rope. He would catch a snake, a crocodile, a bird, a dog, a jackal and a monkey, and tie each by a strong rope. Having done so, he would tie the ropes together with a knot in the middle and release them. Those six animals with different domains and different feeding grounds would each pull in the direction of their feeding ground and domain. The snake would pull one way, thinking, "Let me enter an anthill". The crocodile would pull another way, thinking, "Let me enter the water". The bird would pull another way thinking, "Let me fly up into the sky". The dog would pull another way, thinking, "Let me enter a village". The jackal would pull another way, thinking, "Let me enter a charnal ground". The monkey would pull another way, thinking, "Let me enter a forest".

'Now when those animals become worn out and fatigued they would be dominated by the one among them that was strongest; they would submit to it and come under its control. So, too, *bhikkhus*, when a *bhikkhu* has not cultivated mindfulness directed towards the body [the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind], each sense pulls in the direction of agreeable forms and finds disagreeable forms repulsive.

'Suppose, *bhikkhus*, a man would catch [the same] six animals ... and bind them to a strong post or pillar ... When those animals become worn out they would stand close to that post or pillar. They would sit down there ...

'A strong pillar or post is a designation for mindfulness directed to the body. Therefore, *bhikkhus*, you should train yourselves thus: "We will develop and cultivate mindfulness directed to the body, make it our vehicle, make it our basis, stabilise it, exercise ourselves in it, and fully perfect it". Thus should you train yourselves. ¶

Samyutta Nikaya IV 196

These passages on mindfulness, selected by Ven. Analayo, are from the recent translations of the Pali scriptures, which have made these key texts available for the first time in contemporary English drawing on modern scholarship.

The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (Majjhima Nikaya) translated by Bhikkhu Nyanamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Books, 1995, \$65/£44

The Connected Discourses of the Buddha (Samyutta Nikaya) translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi, Wisdom Books, 2000, \$95/£64

dharma life

BUDDHISM FOR TODAY

19 WINTER 2002 £3.50/\$7/CAN\$7.95



Subhuti:
a map to explore the mind

Beyond addiction:
Buddhism & recovery

Ayya Khema
on dissolving anger

Sexual abuse:
learning to forgive

TRANSFORMING MIND

