



Making the Transition from Intensive Retreat to Daily Life

Venerable Sayadaw U Vivekananda

This is the talk given by Sayadaw U Vivekananda on the final day of his recent five week retreat in April/May at BMIMC, transcribed and edited by Marcus, Pixy and Tara.

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The topic for our concluding dhamma talk is mindfulness in daily life. This topic is meant to support all of you during the transition period into your daily life. Being on a retreat for over a month brings about major changes, and to go back straight into daily life without any precautions one might end up badly. As an example, a yogi who had just finished a month retreat at the Malaysian Buddhist Meditation Centre was in a rush to catch a train. He couldn't get his ticket in time and the train took off without him. He was so furious about the whole thing that he stormed into the stationmaster's office and complained that the train didn't wait for him, even kicking the desk of the stationmaster. So I hope this is not going to happen to you!

But anyway, the transition into one's daily life is not always easy. One of the difficulties that we tend to face comes from the way we relate to our relatives and our friends and maybe our colleagues at work. When we've spent over a month in intensive practice our mind becomes more refined and then we assume that the world around us will be just as pure and

refined and gentle. And it's there, right there, where problems may arise. We go back to our ordinary life and discover that the people around us aren't so refined, their behaviour seems relatively coarse, and they may not understand that we are in, or coming from a rather delicate place; this may cause some friction.

I remember once, having done a ten month intensive retreat in Burma, then returning to my Mum's place. At the time she was managing a small spa hotel in Austria, and so I got there and the next day was already helping, working in that hotel. After lunch, after our staff lunch, we all took our plates and cutlery to the dishwashing area, and owing to a big lapse in mindfulness, I dropped a plate. Fortunately the plate didn't break, however my mum got upset, really upset, about the whole thing, and my reactions weren't that great either. This served as a very lively, very direct lesson. So when going back into our daily life, it's worth scheduling maybe a few days of interim time where you're not immediately



back on your job, but maybe have some time with your family and also some quiet time for yourself, in silence, and this then will help for the transition.

Also, after a longer retreat, you will have understood much better the potential of this mindfulness practice, and the potential in terms of developing the mind. So you may be quite excited about insight meditation and want to continue with it. If this is the case, then this is very good, and it's also helpful to realize that one's mindfulness practice doesn't, or shouldn't, end with the end of the retreat. The mindfulness practice should carry over into our daily life. We are well advised to schedule periods of daily practice, a little bit of formal practice at home, and maybe do a weekend retreat or weeklong retreat, complementing the occasional intensive retreat. So after a retreat, which serves as a booster, we can go back to our daily practice. If we keep doing this, over a longer period of time, then in most cases, the dhamma is bound to be ours.

A frequently asked question regarding daily practice is, "will I lose my level of mindfulness, concentration and wisdom, and will I continue to progress and how does this take place?" Well the answer is as follows: during intensive practice our progress tends to be quick and steep, so in a relatively short period of time we manage to traverse a number of insight knowledges - and this is all well and good. During daily practice, the regular daily practice of let's say 1 or 2 hours, our progress will not be as quick and not as steep but somewhat slower. However, when it comes to daily practice, what counts a lot is the regularity of it - sticking to it, maintaining one's daily practice on a regular basis without fail. If one does so over a longer period of time, not just a few days but several weeks, months, even over several years, then progress is bound to be there. To give you an example - a Burmese couple living in England, very much tied down with their private practice as physicians, having to see many patients every day and finding it very expensive to find a locum, had great difficulty finding the time to go to an intensive retreat. But, over a period of 10 years or so, they were very determined with regard to their daily practice, and over that time they managed, even without doing any, or not many, retreats,

it's important that we practise not just on the days when we already feel good, but on those days when we feel somewhat tired, or when we are agitated or angry because of some worldly issue. It's at those times that we have an opportunity to learn much about these unwholesome and difficult mental states in action



to develop their practice to a very high level. So, if there is a will, there is a way to do it.

When we do our daily practice, then what counts is not just sitting there until the hour is up, but rather, ensuring that the time we have scheduled for our practice is really wisely used so that our meditation will be of a high quality. If we are fully aware of the preciousness of our time and we make a big effort to be really attentive to what's happening, then even one hour of practice a day can make a big difference. As the Venerable Sayadaw U Pandita likes to point out, there are 3600 seconds to an hour and if one is really mindful every single second, then that's 3600 moments to observe whatever's happening and for concentration to be there and for wisdom to arise.

When we have done a longer retreat like this one and then we go back to daily practice, it is quite possible that after a while our mindfulness, effort, concentration and wisdom will drop. However this will depend on how many hours of formal practice you do every day. If you do 3 - 4 hours a day you should be able to maintain your level to some extent. If not, then gradually over weeks, your mindfulness will deteriorate and will stabilise somewhere. For some, it may fall back all the way, for others it could fall back to the fourth insight knowledge, some may stabilize their practice in one of the insight knowledges in the middle part of the practice, and if one has to spend weeks in dukkha, this will then obviously drive a meditator to do another retreat to get over this quickly!

Now the faith that has been developed in this retreat needs to be nourished, and the best way to do this is to keep up one's daily practice. As well, reading a dhamma book, listening to a dhamma talk, or participating in a dhamma discussion with friends may be very useful. What also helps is to seek the community of like minded people. So if in the city or town or village, wherever you happen to live, there is already a sitting group, a group of meditators who meet regularly, then obviously it would be a good idea to participate in this. Meditators can support each other a lot. Sometimes, as a lone meditator, it's not always easy in modern society, especially when others don't really understand what meditation is all about. However, this is gradually changing.

Also, for one's daily life, the observance of the 5 precepts would be a good idea. For one thing, it will introduce a very clear standard in which to live one's life. Whenever a situation comes up, where it's difficult to know what to say or do, then one can always go to the precepts and ask oneself, "would I like it if such and such an act would be done to me". If one doesn't like it oneself, then most likely others won't like it either and then it might be a good idea to refrain from it.

There is another point that I need to add with regard to one's daily practice, namely – it's important that we practise not just on the days when we already feel good, but on those days when we feel somewhat tired, or when we are agitated or angry because of some worldly issue. It's at those times that we have an opportunity to learn much about these unwholesome and difficult mental states in action, as they're happening, so we'll also learn how to overcome them. As we keep doing this, then gradually the arising of unwholesome mental states is no longer a problem.

Also for your daily practice, just like most of you are doing during this retreat, to keep a report log would be advisable. Simply writing down one's experiences after a good sitting helps us to observe properly. If one does this over a longer period of time plenty of reports accumulate and, by occasionally going back over these notes, how the practice unfolds may become clearer. One can then also compare one's daily meditation experiences with the experiences during an intensive retreat, and if need be even look back at what advice was given during the intensive retreat.

Mindfulness in daily life is not limited to just some formal meditation at home, some form of sitting meditation and maybe some form of walking meditation, but should furthermore be extended into other areas of our life. There are many things, many simple activities that we can carry out somewhat mindfully. If we do so then it helps us to remain grounded. During our daily life, of course we can not practice as intensively as we do on a retreat. If we were to cross a major road in downtown Sydney at the pace we are walking around here, doing slow walking meditation, well, we might get run over by a car. So we have to adjust to the conditions out there in world. The same thing goes for the labelling - labelling during an intensive retreat becomes something like second

nature. However, during our daily life, this may not be that easy, and as long as we can maintain a certain basic level of mindfulness regarding what we are doing, what we are saying, regarding our major thoughts and predominant mental states, then this is quite good enough.



After retreat when we go back to our respective families, or circle of friends, some of these family members or friends may not quite understand what meditation is all about, and they may even be critical of what we are doing. They may be viewing our meditation practice as an escape from work, and saying things like "you're just being lazy, and wasting your time", and the like. During one retreat in Europe there was an elderly man, a very quiet man, a very nice man, and he related that after an intensive retreat, he would go back to his family and he would then maintain his mindfulness practice

there at home. He would walk about really slowly, move about just like the meditators are doing here, and this in itself got everyone else really upset, they just couldn't take it. He was moving around like a zombie, so apparently this created a major issue in his family. He said it was very difficult to convince his family of the importance of meditation. But, well, when it comes to convincing others, indeed we have to be careful, some may not want to hear at all, and

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if we think we have to proselytise then in many cases this may be just the wrong approach. A more indirect way of doing it is simply to live your normal life but try to live it somewhat mindfully, try to be a good person, be kind to others and helpful and so on. Then others may sooner or later notice that something has changed with you, that you're maybe not as irritable as you used to be, and that you're more understanding than before, more patient than before. Then they start reflecting, "well, maybe there is really something about meditation". And if

then, at a later point, they really want to find out and start asking questions then one could explain.

So mindfulness practice does have certain benefits during daily life. It contributes to a relative purity of the mind. It also contributes to a relatively quick overcoming of unwholesome mental states. A great variety of unwholesome mental states may arise in the world. Many challenging situations come up, and it's not always easy, but meditation helps to see the unwholesome mental states, to be mindful of them and then to

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From the manager

Tara MacLachlan, Manager

Over the last six months at BMIMC I have had the fortunate opportunity to support and be involved in a number of successful retreats. A lot of work goes into the preparation and running of a retreat and it's very rewarding to feel that for the most part all has gone smoothly. What makes a retreat successful? Although we do informally invite feedback from yogis at the end of each retreat that does give us the yogi's perspective, this is mainly so that we can continue to improve the facilities at the centre. There is no clear cut or quantitative ways that define a successful retreat. But I know there are a number of things that I personally consider when assessing this.

All the planning and organization behind the scenes for a retreat takes some time, in some instances several years. If this falls into place with few problems it's a good start—making me feel relaxed and confident that all bodes well. This preparation involves communication with teachers or their representatives to confirm dates, travel plans and any special needs. It then requires publicising the retreat and teacher information on the website and in the newsletter, taking inquiries and bookings from interested yogis and making contact with volunteer staff.

Just before the retreat is due to start we need to ensure the buildings and grounds are clean and tidy, do the shopping – taking into account any special dietary needs – and put up schedules and yogi job and interview lists. And after a bit of juggling and sometimes a bit of angst about how it's all going to fall into place, all the yogis get allocated a room. All this work and more is of course done by the resident staff and committee members so their contribution to the success of the retreats here at BMIMC needs to be acknowledged.

Then everyone starts to arrive. For me, the beginning of a retreat is a very important time in terms of making a retreat successful—it's a time of high and somewhat unsettled energy, which usually takes a day or two to recede. Arriving yogis need to feel welcome at BMIMC. All the practical ways to do this include picking people up from the station, offering hot drinks and a meal, providing the necessary information to use the centre and its facilities, showing people to their rooms and helping with luggage if necessary. As well, it's a time for making and facilitating friendly personal connections so that people can begin to feel part of the cen-

tre's community or sangha, which may be just for the time of their retreat or be the beginning of an ongoing relationship. The end of a retreat is also a time for making these connections, when yogis can finally enjoy the camaraderie they have shared in silence now in conversation—it can be a noisy time. (Maybe this could give us a quantitative measure of success!)

Also the food and other practical comforts contribute to a retreat's success. We have a wonderful group of volunteers who put much care into the meals they prepare for the yogis, and the centre has developed a reputation for very good food. Over the last months we have had many people come to cook on retreats for various periods of time. They include Fab Giuliani, Nikki Peace, Donald Elniff, Daw Khin Pyone, Gayle Stanaway, Liz Oski, Kim Fisch, Ken Cameron, Thu Zar Maung, Aye Aye Kyaw, U Than Lwin, Brenda and Alfred Myat, Teresa Berg, Sarah Brooks, Al Usher, Robyn Howell, Di Evans, Beth Steff, Sandhya Jayawardhana, Yoon Suk Hwang, Patrick Kearney, Fiona Munro, Darren Procter and Michael Mook.

Thanks to you all and to the many others of you who have contributed in this way to a successful retreat over the years. Also, as the facilities—the individual rooms, the central heating, the hot water bottles and electric blankets, the comfortable sitting cushions etc.—at BMIMC continue to improve we receive many comments on the positive support that they provide for the yogis on retreat.

Of course, the teachers have a major role in determining the success of a retreat. At BMIMC we are very fortunate to have a number of very senior, experienced and skilled visiting teachers, both ordained and lay people. They offer yogis their support and extensive knowledge of the Dhamma. These teachers are complemented by several experienced long term meditators who conduct the shorter format weekends and workshops. It always gives me pleasure to hear yogis speak with gratitude about their teachers and the benefits they feel they have gained from their retreat. This feedback together with the clear happy faces that I see during retreat and on the final day is for me undeniable evidence of a successful retreat. So from my perspec-



tive many things, those mentioned and more, coming together well contribute to a successful retreat.

The last retreat period up to June this year ended with the five week retreat with Sayadaw U Vivekananda from Panditarama Lumbini International Vipassana Meditation Centre, Nepal. This was one of those retreats several years in the making and it was attended by many experienced meditators, including a number of BMIMC committee members. It was supported by about 20 staff – residents and volunteers. Sayadaw U Vivekananda, combining his many years of practice and training under the Venerable Sayadaw U Pandita of Burma and his Western cultural heritage and understanding, provided an opportunity for yogis to deepen their practice during this 5 weeks. His teaching ability was very much appreciated and it is hoped that he will be able to return to BMIMC in 2009.

Prior to this retreat we were very happy to have Sayādaw U Paññāthami here for both his annual 9-day March retreat as well as the Easter retreat. Sayadaw, as most of you will know, was a resident teacher at BMIMC several years ago and is now based in Villawood at Panditarama Sydney. Sayadaw also will be at BMIMC for an 8-day retreat in August.

Danny Taylor and Graham Wheeler, both BMIMC committee members led weekends in March and February. Danny and Graham's weekend retreats continue to be very popular and complement their leadership role at the BMIMC affiliated group sit in Sydney.

In January Patrick Kearney was here for his regular month long retreat, which as usual was fully booked well in advance and attended by yogis many of whom return annually especially to sit at this time with Patrick. Patrick is also teaching here for 9 days in September, kindly fitting us in to his growing national and international teaching program. Patrick will also be here again in January 2008.

In December we welcomed the Venerable Pannavaro, from Bodhi Tree Retreat Centre near Lismore, here for a 9-day retreat. The Venerable is also becoming increasingly busy travelling overseas, as well as running his own centre. So we are grateful he makes the time to come here to BMIMC as he will in December this year. And Lesley Fowler, an experienced meditator, led her first weekend here last December. She also leads a group sit in Canberra.

Since the last newsletter the resident staff has seen quite a few changes. Aung Kyaw Myo and I continue on here as was reported in the last issue of the newsletter. However, Jenny McKinnon completed her time here in March soon after my return from retreat in Nepal. Jenny went to live in Oberon, just up the road, so we hope to see her for the occasional visit. Thanks for your support and contribution to the centre Jenny. Beth Steff, who had traveled to Burma, returned in time to sit Patrick's January retreat then



stayed on as staff support for the time that Pixy and I were in Nepal and a few weeks beyond, before heading to New Zealand. Beth will be here for another stint in June/July to sit a retreat and relieve the resident staff for a few weeks. Pixy came back from Nepal to continue here as a full time member of staff. Marcus Allas, who had recently become a member of the management committee, volunteered to come onboard and has been here since mid- February. Sadly Marcus will be finishing here mid-July - but we will then benefit from the experi-

ence he gained on staff when he rejoins the management committee, at the completion of his time here. So for a few short weeks there are four resident staff members, Pixy, Marcus and Aung and me – then back to the usual complement of three in July.

The year ahead, from now until June next year, will continue with a full schedule of retreats and includes our first three month retreat, to be led by the Venerable Ariya Nani. I strongly encourage your participation in this retreat, either as a yogi or kitchen volunteer, as it is a rare and special opportunity to sit a teacher-led retreat of this length in Australia, in the Mahasi tradition. Although the full retreat is a great option, we have also made some shorter formats available within the three months and we hope there will be some spaces available to allow the flexibility of various other options also – so please contact us here at BMIMC and have a chat about possibilities.



Finally, don't forget our Dhamma service weekend, 22-23 September. This is a great way to get together with your Dhamma community and support the centre.

I hope to see you here at BMIMC soon.

Staff photos: Marcus and Pixy

Making the Transition from Intensive Retreat to Daily Life

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gradually overcome them.

Also, by doing daily practice, one is building a foundation for the next retreat. As one meditates every day a little bit, one gets more familiar and skilled with what's happening in the body and the mind, which helps for the next intensive retreat. And as already mentioned in one of our 'Question and Answer' sessions, our daily practice may be even a source of inspiration, or a source of intuition for the solving of some difficult problem. The meditation practice helps us to maintain a certain amount, or a certain degree of happiness, balance and harmony within oneself and also with regards to others.

When we have one or two hours to use for our daily meditation practice, then we could divide this time evenly among metta practice and satipatthana practice. So, a regular practice of loving-kindness, metta, will help to ensure this wholesome mental state within one's own mind, and if there are really any ill feelings towards another being or towards a certain situation, then the metta practice will help to overcome those. Usually regular metta practice also has a very positive influence on others, and we find that our relationship with others improves. It kind of smoothens out our social relations. So, one part of our practice could be devoted to metta, and the other part we could spend on the actual Satipatthana meditation.

Our daily meditation practice will yield other benefits, such as contributing towards good health, physical health and mental health, and in the long run, will help us to shape the mind in a more positive, in a more optimistic and wholesome direction. If this is done regularly, over a longer period of time, then it will surely make a big difference.

Sayadaw with Pixy and Marcus at Blackheath



Information about teachers at BMIMC

Graham Wheeler,
Committee Member, BMIMC

The foundation of Buddhist practice rests upon ethical guidelines (known as *sila*). In Buddhist countries meditation teachers are usually monks or nuns who have committed themselves to living by the traditional code of ethical conduct. For Theravadan monks this is governed by 227 vows contained in the *vinaya* and for nuns it is the 10 precepts. In countries that do not have a traditional Buddhist culture (like Australia) meditation is often taught by lay teachers who are not necessarily committed to one of the traditional codes of conduct.

The Blue Mountains Insight Meditation Centre recognises the importance of maintaining the tradition of ethical integrity for teachers of the Buddha-Dhamma. In keeping with this understanding all teachers at the BMIMC:

1. Have made a personal commitment to live in accordance with the Buddhist precepts. For lay teachers this means the five precepts of—
refraining from killing,
refraining from stealing,
refraining from sexual misconduct,
refraining from false or harsh speech, and
refraining from intoxicants that cause heedlessness or loss of awareness.
2. Are current meditation practitioners with at least 10 years experience in the tradition of Mahasi Sayadaw.
3. Have undertaken to maintain confidentiality in relation to each student's personal information.
4. Offer their teachings at the Centre freely.

Cost of retreats

Recently the BMIMC Management Committee discussed the running costs of the centre, notably the energy costs of running our central heating. It has been two years since the last increase. We try to keep costs as low as possible while still meeting our financial responsibilities. We also believe that it is important to provide the best conditions so that yogis can gain the most benefit from their retreat.

We hope that this increase, starting from 2008, will not cause any hardship for prospective meditators, and as usual we do offer various options for those who are in financial difficulty.

Vesak 2007 appeal

John McIntyre

Management Committee member

As supporters will know, in May we held our annual Vesak building appeal. Vesak, marking the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and passing away, is an occasion to reflect upon the development of our meditation centre and to appreciate the continuing generosity of staff and supporters that is the foundation for everything the Centre achieves.

Since 2002, hundreds of Vesak donations have made many things possible—bringing the new meditator accommodation into full use, installing heating in the two blocks and Sasana House and making other improvements. Now, we are considering the next stage of the building program, and the last newsletter announced plans to upgrade the paths and walkways around the Centre.

In February, we completed a new paved path from the accommodation to join the existing path from the meditation hall, resurfacing the main access steps and adding some low stonework retaining walls. There will also be work on a new path down from the back verandah.

The project so far has used most of our available Building Fund. Additional funds will be needed to complete the remaining work which includes upgrading the 'teacher's path' from the stupa area to provide much improved wet weather access for meditators heading to the dining room and interviews from the meditation hall. We also need to improve the path uphill



from the carpark to the meditator accommodation.

If you haven't yet been able to contribute to the Vesak Appeal, it is not too late. We offer you the opportunity to assist us to complete the pathway upgrading.

All donations to the Building Fund are tax deductible and a special receipt will be issued. Simply complete the form on the backpage and mail it back to us. If you wish to discuss a donation, please contact the manager on 02 4788 1024.

Canberra Insight Meditation Group

The Canberra Insight Meditation Group meets from 6.30 p.m. till 8.30 p.m. on Sunday evenings at the Sakyamuni Buddhist Centre, 32 Archibald Street, Lyneham. We begin with 30 minutes loving kindness practice, then 30 minutes walking meditation and another 30 minutes of sitting meditation. The last half hour is taken up with questions and answers

or a five minute dhamma talk and discussion. The group is led by Lesley Fowler. Contact Lesley on lesleyf@netspeed.com.au or just turn up. If you do not receive a reply from Lesley within a week, please contact Sue Holmes on sueholmes1808@yahoo.com. Bring your own cushions or bench.

Sydney Group Sit

The Centre sponsors a group meditation each week in Sydney. The meditation group meets at the Life & Balance Centre, 132 St John's Road, Glebe from 7 – 9 pm each Friday evening (except long weekends).

then usually a talk or some discussion. It is primarily a group sit for people who have attended a retreat at BMIMC but is open to anyone who is interested in meditation.

Entry is via the side gate, not at the main entrance to the building. There is no charge for attending but donations are most welcome. The format is 30 minutes sitting, 30 minutes walking, 30 minutes sitting

Three teachers from the Centre (Graham Wheeler, Danny Taylor, Michael Dash) take it in turns to lead the group and will give instructions on the practice if needed.

INFORMATION REQUEST AND DONATION FORM

If you would like to receive the newsletter or make a donation to the Centre, complete this form and send to BMIMC, 25 Rutland Road, Medlow Bath, NSW 2780.

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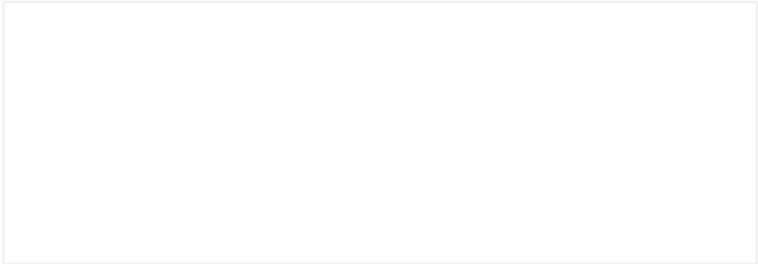
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