

**Dedicated Practitioners Program**  
**Reading and Homework for February 2004**  
**The Abhidhamma and External Forms of Practice**

**Readings:**

*Abhidhamma in Daily Life* by Nina van Gorkom, Ch 1: The Four Paramattha Dhammas, and Ch. 18: Elements, available online at <http://www.saigon.com/~anson/ebud/nina-abhidhamma/nina-abhi-00.htm>

*Visuddhimagga*: Table II. The Formations Aggregate (Ch. XIV, § 131ff.). Available on the DPP website.

The chapter on “Uposatha” by Bhikkhu Khantipalo, available at

<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/bps/wheels/wheel206/index.html>.

Anguttara Nikaya IV.255-259: The Discourse to Visakha on the Uposatha with the Eight Practices, available at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/bps/wheels/wheel206/visakha.html>.

**The Abhidhamma**

1. The Abhidhamma is committed to describing human life in terms of dhammas, things that are directly experienceable, like the six internal and external sense bases or the five aggregates. How does this relate to your understanding of our vipassana meditation instructions? Why do you think we practice in this way? What benefits have you seen in your practice or your life from training to consistently see the world in this way?
2. Begin to differentiate/notice when skillful states arise rooted in generosity, love and wisdom. Begin to differentiate/notice when unskillful states arise rooted in greed, hatred and delusion.
3. Which are most predominant? Which mind states predominate? Today? This week? Usually?
4. Notice if greed, hatred and delusion can co-exist with generosity, love and wisdom.

**The Four Elements**

1. Closing your eyes, learn to sense the four elements of earth, air, fire and water in your body and then around you. Which predominates in your experience:
  - a. When you are going to sleep?
  - b. When you are driving?
  - c. When you are sitting in meditation?
  - d. When you are talking?
2. How does sensing the play of the elements affect your understanding of anatta? Of sunnata? Of freedom?

**Optional Exercise:**

Answer the questions at the end of the chapters from the readings from *Abhidhamma in Daily Life*.

**External Forms of Practice**

One of the great supports on the spiritual path is to create intentionality around the formal ways in which we practice and live our lives. Some of the traditional ways we can do this are to place more emphasis on how we hold the precepts, and to practice renunciation or ascetic practices. In addition to the keeping of the Five Precepts (not killing, not stealing, not engaging in harmful sexual relations, using wise speech and refraining from intoxicants which lead to carelessness), many lay practitioners regularly take the Eight Precepts, which add to the Five Precepts not eating after noon, not indulging in entertainments or beautifying the body with cosmetics or adornments and not

sleeping in high and luxurious beds. The Eight Precepts also change the third precept to abstaining from sexual relations for the duration of the commitment to this set of precepts. In traditional Buddhist cultures, many lay people take the Eight Precepts once a month as a symbol of their dedication to the path of practice and as an act of renunciation.

1. What is your relationship to the Eight Precepts? Have you practiced with them? Do you consider them to be a helpful support to your practice? Which one do you feel is the most difficult to keep? Consider taking at least one day in the coming month to commit to the Eight Precepts.
2. The Eighth Precept is about sleeping. Though the main thrust of the precept is not to sleep on an overly luxurious bed, it also a reminder not to overindulge in sleep. One teacher said that sleep is the worldling's greatest pleasure. Is this your experience? Why do you think this might be so? Have you experimented with how many hours of sleep you actually need? On retreat, do you adjust your hours of sleep? Why? Are there benefits to sleeping less?
3. Are there other ways in which you have or might consider practicing increased discipline, perhaps in areas like food, entertainment or sex? What are the benefits of this kind of discipline?
4. What is your connection to the monastic tradition? If you have not done so, perhaps you might consider visiting a local monastery (if there is one) for a day of practice and to offer support to the monastics.

### Ascetic Practices

Dhutanga are voluntary ascetic practices that monks and other meditators may undertake from time to time or as a long-term commitment in order to cultivate renunciation and contentment, and to stir up energy. For the monks, there are thirteen such practices: (1) using only patched-up robes; (2) using only one set of three robes; (3) going for alms; (4) not by-passing any donors on one's alms path; (5) eating no more than one meal a day; (6) eating only from the alms-bowl; (7) refusing any food offered after the alms-round; (8) living in the forest; (9) living under a tree; (10) living under the open sky; (11) living in a cemetery; (12) being content with whatever dwelling one has; (13) not lying down.

1. Though most of these are not relevant to lay people, there are some that are. Have you ever practiced any? (e.g., eating one meal a day, not lying down.)
2. Another ascetic practice is to meditate continuously through the night (often done on full moon nights.) Have you done this? What was the experience like? If not, are you interested in trying it? What do you think the benefits of this practice might be?
3. Are there areas in your life where you use a high level of discipline to achieve certain goals? What is the effect of this kind of undertaking? This could include things like swimming in the bay, training for a marathon, doing a PhD dissertation.

### Practices: The Elements

Week 1	Pay particular attention to the earth element. Explore your experience to see how it manifests in different sensations. You can also expand this practice by noticing this element during the rest of your day.
Week 2	As above for the air element.
Week 3	As above for the fire element
Week 4	As above for the water element