

The Art and Science of Strengthening Mind and Body to Live a Healthy Life: My Vipassana Meditation

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Abstract

Vipassana meditation is not a religious practice, it is rather a scientific technique to purify the mind. When someone practices it properly, it helps the practitioner in coming out of miseries. It is a method of training mind to break the old habit pattern of thinking by focusing on (present) and observing to the sensations arising and passing away in every moment in every part of human body. It demands higher and deeper level of awareness with equanimity by understanding the law of impermanence. In this paper, I tried to share my own experiences of transformation and attempted to address the questions of the kind, 'what is the vipassana meditation? Why and how to do it? Who can/should do it and what changes/benefits can be experienced etc?' To this end, I employed Critical Autoethnography, as a method of inquiry to explore the process of transformation. In so doing, the meditative practices at experiential level enabled me to immerse deeply and reflectively in exhuming key moments of my learning. In this meditative practice I came to realize the universality of moral values which appeared to be deeply rooted in the practice. This deeper level of consciously knowing as a form of transformative learning provided an avenue for doing something meaningful for myself as a teacher educator and for the professional world surrounding me.

Key Words: *Vipassana Meditation; Mindfulness; Sensations; Autoethnography; Law of impermanence*

Introduction

Vipassana Meditation (VM) is a science of 'mind and matter' to liberate from miseries of materialistic life of the practitioner. To me, it seems like enabling oneself to understand the phenomena regarding the relationship between mind and matter and the impact of this relationship on human being – in the form of *craving* and *aversion* (Goenka, 1990; Sayadaw, 1991; Thatcher, 2011).

The approach to this meditation is all about understanding the *nature of mind* and its *old habit pattern of thinking* based on its contact with matter (every small segment/part of body). The contact of mind and matter is the basis for generating the sensations which arising and passing away in every moment in every part of human body including flux of thoughts (coming and passing away).

Perhaps, this is the VM that helps meditators to experience different sensations in body and developing awareness of equanimity by fully understanding the law of impermanence (Goenka, in press/2013; Sujiva, 2000). In an orientation session and after words in lectures I came to know that participants are trained in moral education – understanding and applying practically the universal moral values, which exist in every society and culture. Completing a ten days training, I found such practices hold three basic principles: 1) keeping oneself away from all kinds of immoral, unethical, intoxicants that affect state of mind, and also avoiding all kinds of inhuman activities – harmful, undesirable and unhealthy to other human beings, which are universal not contextual; 2) concentrating with mindfulness by observing natural breath in and breath out; and 3) observing sensations throughout the body and with complete equanimity by fully understanding the law of impermanence.

I came to realize that VM is not only a science of mind and matter but also an art of living a healthy life with peace of mind, with love for all and hate for none. Perhaps, the right practice of Vipassana or ‘*Insight Meditation: Practical Steps to Ultimate Truth* (Thatcher, 2011, p. xiv)... is the effort made by the meditator to understand right nature of psycho-physical phenomena taking place in his/her own body (Sayadaw, n.d: 138). The insight meditation appears to be a kind of detector of one’s nature that “shows us who and what we are, and what we can become.

Arriving at this point of my experience enabled me to infer that our own ‘minds and bodies are the workbooks...’ (Thatcher, 2011, p. 19). Perhaps vipassana meditation helps the practitioners to read these workbooks and practitioners can understand the reality of lifeworld. Let me discuss my views about vipassana meditation. It means to see the things as they are not as we see from our own way and with our own perception, personal view or mind set. That is why it is called the ...“insight meditation” and it means “inward-seeing: seeing reality as it is, not as we would like it to be” (Thatcher, 2011, p.3). Probably such practices are the basis for developing mindfulness in its right way through an introspection technique (Asabha, &Asbharam, 2001; Pagis, 2009).

To me, an insight meditation is, no doubt, a technique not a ritual or a religious performance is practiced to see things as they are with keen observations without reaction to the sensations. My

engagement with this practice enables me to reflect that to see things as they are not as we usually see things as we are a practitioner has to follow the practical steps to *ultimate truth*. Perhaps, with a proper practice of *inward-seeing a practitioner can* explore his/her nature, the nature of mind and body and impact of their relationship in the form of day to day *craving* and *aversion* to different sensations appearing in the body.

Arriving at this point of exploration, I came to realize that VM is neither a branch of any religion, as claimed by many Buddhists, nor a monopoly of a person or group of people or a sect rather it is a practice of scientific principles to train the mind to get rid of impurities in it (Goenka, 1990). However, this practice – a Theravada Buddhist practice (Conze, 2003), is ‘an introspection technique’ (Pagis, 2009) that appears to be very much common in Buddhist religion and many people attach to this technique as preaching and teaching are in Buddhist religion (Thatcher, 2011; Sayadaw, 1991). It could be one of the reasons many people believe that vipassana meditation is a Buddhist practice, however, this perceptions appears to be incorrect.

My own experiences inform me that there is nothing to do with the religion rather a universal technique (Goenka, 1990) and an active way of self-knowing that leads towards how to become free from all miseries of the life. In so doing, dedicated-self (the practitioner) slowly and gradually experience the world of Buddha (enlightenment one). Philosophically speaking Buddha is not a name of any person or any religion but it is a state of enlightenment that can be achieved by any person with such kind of meditative practices in this world. Thus this meditation seems to be an objective oriented approach to enlightenment not a kind of ritual, right and/or a particular dogma oriented practice. So, one can give any name to it depending upon how one understands its objective linked with its true essence of practice.

To this end, I agree with Sayadaw (n.d.) view about vipassana meditation that whatever a person assigns a name or say doesn't matter but what really matters is to look within and discover one's own nature which is the main aim of insight meditation. Engaging with this practice for the last four years, to me, exploring this insight seems to be a challenging job for the meditators and one needs vigorous efforts to reach at this stage and has to travel along with fulfilling all fundamental principles of practice. My experience informs me that the more you meditate the better you become. ...yes, this is the practice that makes a man perfect and this path is only for the committed persons who really want to liberate themselves through their own efforts using this technique.

Let me share what these principles states:

Dear practitioners, if one is to use this technique and follow the path to liberation, the most important step is to understand its base, the *Sila* – the universal moral values, the values which are common to all human beings in all societies, not contextual. Some of these values for example are: *avoid killing any living organism, avoid telling a lie, avoid stealing things, avoid sexual misconduct, avoid hurting anybody, avoid intoxicant or eating anything that changes the state of mind, avoid doing or involving in anything that directly or indirectly harm living things in any form* (Sujiva, 2000).

The second stage is *samadhi* – the practice of *Aana Panna*, with a focus on breathing in and breathing out. *Sella* and *samadhi* are the prerequisites of the VM and the practice of observing *sensation* and being *Equanimeous* (remain in state of observing rather reacting to sensations) is actually the practice of vipassana (Yupo, 1997). Now the question is what the sensations are and how to observe them with equanimity? Sensations are the phenomena which appear and pass away in the mind and on the surface of practitioners' body. For example feelings of itching, throbbing, tingling, prickling, heat, pain, vibrations, cold, and perspiration etc what Thatcher(2011) called this an 'object of consciousness'(p.19).

Probably, by developing and strengthening this personal practice observing sensations and remain with equanimity one can lead to *pannia* – the wisdom that finally leads towards liberation and enlightenment. The stage of liberation is actually the stage of freedom from all kinds of defilements and miseries and enjoying the everlasting peace and pleasure becoming a Buddha – an enlighten person.

Arriving at this stage of knowing, I came to realize that following these basic principles, a truly dedicated practitioner can become an enlighten person which appears to be very demanding. Because, in this whole personal journey the focus is on purification of the complex undetached fluid self (Qutoshi, 2016) while living in a state of equanimity that can lead towards transformation at personal level. In doing so, the practitioner appears to simply yet keenly observing and knowing whatever the sensations happen on body and in mind rather reacting to those sensations.

My experience to this practice cautions me that during the observation of sensations, if some feelings of smooth flow of vibrations in the body or some parts of boy and/or the feelings of pleasure appear, the meditator has not to fall in a state of clinging or craving and/or develop the feelings of good with that sensation. Because clinging or feeling pleasure/good with such kind of sensations can lead the practitioner going back to old habit of mind– a pattern of reactions we can usually see in our

everyday lives. Similarly, when one feels pain one has not to react to the pain or gross sensation because reacting to pain creates *aversion* – a tendency in human body to ease or get rid of the pain which is again an old pattern of mind.

The philosophy behind this practice is to break the old pattern of mind and its reactions to different sensations. Probably, by breaking the existing pattern of mind and matter relationship, in terms of reactions to sensations and feelings that create aversion to bad feelings and pain on one hand and craving to good feelings and pleasure on the other hand, the meditator trains the mind to accept the nature of impermanent sensations those just arise and pass away (Thatcher, 2011; (Sujiva, 2000). Perhaps, rightly understanding of this key insight of the meditation is the way to liberation which Gautama Buddha has explored. Therefore, many Buddhist monks and nuns relate it to their religion and preaching in their religion, however, purifying oneself and develop enlightenment appears to be the core of all religions.

Arriving at this point of learning I came to realize that without any ritual or rights, this practice whoever adopts, has unlimited benefits which can be experienced by the meditators with regular practice. For example some of such benefits are sharpening the concentration of mind, developing proactive rather reactive behavior, getting rid of impurities in mind and miseries of life, and getting enlightenment and liberation (Sujiva, 2000; Yupo, 1997). The practice of meditation is not limited to few courses to achieve this liberation but it needs a lifelong demonstration of universal moral values of harmony, peace, love and care with regular practice of observing sensations on body for at least one hour both in morning and evening as part of daily practice. Moreover, it demands preferably an hour weekly group meditation and an annually retreat of ten days course, which is a challenging and difficult to manage.

With this experience I came to know that a “gentle practice, this step-by-step training strengthens one’s awareness of mental and physical states until intuitive knowledge arises spontaneously in the mind (Goenka, 1990; Thatcher, 2011). After getting this knowledge of self and understanding the phenomena of mind and body one better live a very healthy life free from craving and aversion. According to Foucault (1978), Davies and Harre (1990), Butt and Langdridge (2003) in Pagis (2009) ‘studies of the self have focused on conversations, confessions, and diaries - all discursive tools that serve as anchors for self-reflexivity’ (p.2). However, these methods of self-knowing appear to be “inadequate to explain the importance of the body in self reflexivity” but in VM through observing the *noble silence*, focusing on respiration or sensations to in order to “know

oneself,... “self-knowledge is anchor in bodily sensations” (Pagis, 2009: 2). This embodied self-reflexivity is a powerful tool to explore self and study its nature with relation to body and mind in VM and to study such complex nature of self, methodologies such as Autoethnography appears to be one of the most suitable method of inquiries.

Methodology: An auto/ethnography

To study self and to explore personal accounts methodologies among other emerging new designs of qualitative paradigm within social science, the characteristics of autoethnography seem to be one of the best methodologies/methods of inquiries to conduct this research. Autoethnography is a product of three spaces – auto means self, ethno means socio cultural, and graphy means method of writing (Elis, 2004). It is a research approach which draws upon the researcher’s own personal lived experience with reference to socio cultural settings (Allen-Collinson, 2012; Luite, 2009; Taylor, Taylor & Luitel, 2012). It focuses on exploring and understanding self with reference to socio cultural environment and its influence on self.

The study of self in particular cultural context ‘Autoethnography synthesizes postmodern ethnography’ where realist conventions and ‘objectivity’ (Reed-Danahay, 1997: 2) are called into question and postmodern autobiography - in which the idea of the coherent, individual self is similarly called into question; a ‘demanding synthesis’ (Allen-Collinson (2012:4). In such kind of synthesis, the researcher in her/his social interaction with others, is the subject of the research, thus blurring putative distinctions between the personal and the social, and between self and other (Allen-Collinson, 2012; Ellis & Bochner, 1996; Reed-Danahay, 1997) by using ethnography as method of narrative inquiry and biography as source of primary data for research to conduct (Chang, 2007).

According to Spray (2001) ‘autoethnography as a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts (p. 6). Through such kind of engagement of self with others in a particular socio cultural context ‘autoethnographers seek systematically, rigorously and analytically to portray their own consciousness and emotions, to ‘open up the realm of the interior and the personal’ (Fiske, 1990: 90). To explore and understand the core of self kingdom, what I call it a *personal world*, in relation to others many referent points as sources of data collection can be blurred into this methodology. Therefore, looking at this emerging new paradigm in social science research where integrative /holistic /hybrid paradigm provide researcher to use multi-pardigmatic innovative approaches to data collection and analysis (Luitel, 2009; Taylor et at., 2012) I will use autoethnography as method of inquiry for this study.

A Journey to Self-exploration

What, for the lack of a better term (Stelzig, 2006), I call my Vipassana experience came in August 2013 as I was touring the *Mohan Pokhri*, the famous center of Vipassana Meditation in Nepal. At my arrival at city center (a base camp of the main training center) to join a team of practitioners getting a ten days boarding registration card to attend the training at VM Centre Nepal, I lost in my feelings of duality of 't/here' (Luitel, 2009). The duality in terms of like why I was doing such trainings and what to make of it, and, what if... anything happens wrong and so what if I just return without attending it to name but a few of the feelings which engulfed me for a while. Perhaps, it is not only true to say that 'training in meditation is like climbing a mountain' (Goenka, 1990) but also it is like living in a jail for what one has done nothing wrong. However, getting an orientation enabled me to make my mind and join the team for the training.

It could be a hot sunny day of August 1, 2013 I picked my luggage from my hostel room and left for city center, as per plan yet having some feelings of duality. However, I eventually managed to reach at one of the counters set up at the city centre where I found a diverse group of people ranging from age 20 to around 60 from different religions, casts, and nationalities waiting for their turns to receive registrations cards. After introducing myself to a person at one of the counters and remain in a long queue to meet a guide called assistant teacher, in the end I met a man in a hall sitting in a chair with one kushan, seat, for students like me for counseling one on one bases, who asked me to come closer to him to answer why I was there and what kind of worries I had in mind? He was looking so calm, cool and quite man gazing gently at me while inquiring meaning at the same time showing his empathy to let him know about my worries honestly.

Noticing this sort of situation around many other semi privacy counseling sessions organized around ten to twelve feet distance in a big hall, I finally dared to express some of my problems like "uncontrolled fluctuation of thoughts" and their "impact on concentration" while studying, talking, eating and drinking, sitting and sleeping etc... without any further probing he just recorded and says... "Look gentleman, "do not react to your thoughts whatever you are experiencing ... and try to just accept them as they are coming and going in the mind". Yes, perhaps it was a simple but at the same time a big lesson for me while being there for a short association with that teacher, if I could understand fully.

I remember, after that brief session with the teacher I was advised to join the trainees in the 'Dhamma' Hall and it was a place where meditators used to practice in front of an assistant teacher

(Payutto, 2003). It was a term I encountered first time in my life... 'liberating truth about reality is called Dhamma' (Thatcher, 2011:1). And In the hall, I found almost all the prospective trainees who were gathered to practice *AanaPaana*. A volunteer guided me, very silently, to sit on a kushan in the middle of the hall where a seat was available. Practicing *Anna Panna* around half an hour there and getting some instructions about the program, participants were called one by one to receive their registration card. Again, after a very long waiting for my turn ... I got a light blue colored registration card mentioning my name, room and bed No- R14 A. I still remember my state of mind and nonstop flux of thoughts that could not allow me even to wait for a while inside the city centre. And I rushed to my luggage to pick and proceed to catch a bus for the main training center... just entering inside the bus terminal covered with dozens of trainees instantly I noticed a young couple – seems friends, was apprehensively looking at each other and hugging again and again showing their emotions of separation from each other, multiplied my sense of duality for being there for something strange in life to face in a while.

Meanwhile, a bus comes to pick the trainees and few of us manage to get in and I was just waiting for another bus at the same time a well dressed man in his late 50s approaches me asking my nationality and very humbly exploring me whether I was on a diplomatic mission or for some other business in Nepal. This fellow kind man, a trainee fellow introduced me, helped me to engage in a discussion until I got a seat in a bus for my destination. It was a sunny day in afternoon when we left city centre but at reaching near the destination all of the sudden clouds cover the sky and after a short while it starts raining by changing the travel atmosphere at once. Oh yes, we reached at the Mohan Pokhri a fellow student sitting just beside me expressed excitedly.

The bus stops at a gate and I managed to get at entrance with my luggage where volunteers and workers of the centre greeted very warmly. They took us at administration block for the process of boarding and lodging and everything valuables including mobile phone, and cash to keep in lockers for safety as well as for keeping us in no contact with outer world. Yes, it was me who were arrested myself and handed over to the authorities there at their disposal. Because we (the trainees including me) were now inside a new world called Vipassana Meditation Center (VMC) Nepal – a place just at the lap of lush green hilly area, called Mohan Pokhari, with dense forest everywhere around covered a huge area of land inside the centre bordered with high walls and iron gates like a jail.

At the counter I showed my registration card and I handed over my passport, cell phone and cash. They gave me another card and assisted me to get into my room on second floor of a building looking purposefully built for boarders like us. Yes, I got my room and bed – a bed with partially clean sheets and covers. However, I just briskly put out my own bed sheets and pillow cover from my bag and set my bed and went to washroom to become fresh. After having a shower and trying to relax on my bed my roommate another fellow, an engineer by vocation, came and joined me in the same room at R14B. We introduced each other and discussed for a while. As we were instructed in the city center that after the first day we had to observe Noble Silence (NS) – a complete silence, means no talking, showing gestures, and/or any other body language with any person. However, we were advised to contact people in management/ volunteers in case of any emergency.

I remember the NS was not applicable till night discourse- the first discourse out of ten discourses which were scheduled for the complete course. Therefore, it was a time for Course Participants (CPs) to discuss with each other. Yes, we took full benefit of that opportunity and shared our views about the course, the environment inside and the possible challenges may arise etc. Meanwhile a bell rings, and we became alert about the instructions. It was actually, a call to gather at social area for a hi tea, called Nastah - breakfast, before proceeding to main Dhamma Hall (DH) where all male and female CPs had to sit for VM practice. We left for Nashta in social area which was planned in a big hall where volunteers were serving food to CPs standing in a long queue. Meanwhile I noticed there was a big area for washing cups, plates and spoons after taking food just outside the hall. Everyone who receives food in the hall comes to wash his dishes and keeps them above the washbasin from where volunteers collect the dishes for reuse. It was really a unique experience of being among different people with no difference from any perspective. Instantly I recalled my Eid Prayers gathering and the verses of famous national poet and great philosopher, DrAllama Muhammad Iqbal, about the notion of ‘equality in Mosque’ ...dropped in my mind.

aik hi suf me khadyhogayemehmood-e-ayyaz

nakoyibandaraha or nakoyibandanawaaz (Iqbal)

Stood all rich and poor in one single line

Neither king nor followers but altogether

The lesson of equality, patience and service demonstration impressed me a lot and thought what a practice of teaching unity! Anyhow after experiencing food I came out of the hall and met with different people and started chatting because we had left half an hour to DH for first day *Aana*

Panna Class. I just lost in social area looking at the notice boards about timetable – a schedule starts from 04:30am to 09:00pm with hardly one and half hours lunch, breakfast and tea breaks in addition to a few minutes breaks after every one hour practice out of this tough structured schedule, and seeing strangers all around with different facial expressions. Suddenly, the bell rings again! Oh yes, it is the call for DH now my roommate said. We briskly proceed towards a very big hall with a capacity of around 500 CPs sitting at the same time facing towards a dice (a place with around 3feet above the ground level for seating assistant teachers in front of practitioners) with sound system controlling by a senior assistant teacher to play Guru's instructions during the practice and updating on housekeeping announcements.

In a minute or so, I entered in DH where everyone is allotted a seat for complete ten days course and no one is supposed to change the seat without permission of teacher. I was instructed by a volunteer in my ear that you all foreigners are allotted seats beside the main entrance door just go and find your registration No put on kushans. Nodding my head, I proceeded towards the allocated area and found my seat where I tried to postured myself for practice. It could be five minutes passed after seating in DH the assistant teacher switches on his mike and announces, 'now you are going to practice *Anna Panna* by following the Guru ji's instruction'. Soon after this announcement he plays the recorded instruction of Guru, the S N Goenka, to practice *Anna Panna* – a practice of concentrating on breath in and breathe out (Payutto, 2003).

Initially, it was looking a simple way to working on respiration but later on concentrating on it for a longer period of time was really found to be challenging. I could not focus for even a minute or two because of having a mind of unrest with flux of limitless thoughts coming in and moving out one after the other. I found my mind wondering, and wondering becoming out of the track, losing its focus but sharply I recalled the instruction 'avoid to react'... there is no repentance of wondering mind, having bad feelings or pain in this sort of practice. The Guru in his instruction was repeatedly addressing similar issues with CPs and encouraging us to just recall the mind and start focusing on respiration.

This practice of focusing on respiration remained for continuously three days. The severe pain in throughout the body especially in posturing in, one of the seating styles on a soft kushans, was looking like sitting on a hard rock and someone looking like injecting needles in my whole legs for the first day when I tried to sit in a right posture for complete two hours practice. And after one and half days of practice I felt less pain in my body. It was looking that my body is becoming habitual to

experience pain and its effect was to some extent bearable and slowly and gradually I started noticing something happening below the nostril above the upper lip. Yes, that was a sensation observed due to remain focusing hours and hours of practice. Oh yes, this is a sensation ... a sensation! ...perhaps the first sensation that I noticed in DH.

It was the practice of *Samadhi*, the main practice of the course after becoming familiar with *anna panna* which remained for consecutive three days. In this practice we were instructed to just remain focused on the triangular area around the nostril and notice the flow of air inside the nostrils and coming out side of the nostrils. At the same time we had to observe whether the air goes through left nostril or right nostril and where the air touches the nose, inside the walls of the nostrils or outer ring side of the nostrils. In the whole process of breath in and out we had to observe the way of breath and its touching the areas of the nostril very closely. You know this practice goes on for a consecutive three days and after 3rd day, practice of vipassana, the practice of observing sensations starts.

I remember for remaining seven days, I have passed through many experiments while focusing on 'sensations- the observation of different kind of feelings in the body from head to toe. For example the experience of flowing electromagnetic waves in some parts of my body is called free flow of vibrations, creating a feeling that I cannot express in words but the taste of that specific moments cannot be forgotten in my life. However, clinging to such kind of sensations is not the practice of vipassana and just to experience and remain in equanimity and continue to observe sensation in every part of the body keeping in mind the aim of vipassana is what the technique demands.

Excluding these few moment of unique experiences during the course the most of these exercises during these ten days were found to be like ten years of my life and every hour during the mediation especially for the first three days were looking like a whole daylong stay within self bounded chains. Probably, it is very true to say that 'no pain no gain' and to gain a noble wisdom and liberation one has to bear all those challenging and painful moments of the practice otherwise there is no way to liberation. And at the same time it was unique in itself which had no alternative when compared with other practices of any form and shape using religious rights and rituals where feelings of being a labeled one at the end emerges. But in case of VM there is no such feeling of religious element except a *psychophysical practice* that has to do nothing with any belief system. However, one may or may not easily experience some unique feelings, the sensations, while practicing in an

environment different than to the center, where the whole external environment around the meditators was created, and that was its uniqueness. I can understand a regular practice in life after getting such trainings can help individual meditators to experience such changes in human body and can feel development depending commitment to the practice by following its aim and method of doing in a right way.

Impact of Discourses on my Meditation

Probably, well planned and structured ten discourses for meditators, no doubt, found very beneficial not only in terms of getting intellectual knowledge but also in terms of understanding emotional knowledge. The discourses helped me to understand VM theoretically and also helped me link the theory with my practice sessions for consecutive ten days. In discourses I enjoyed mostly but got hurt sometimes where I could not link the theory with my own practice and suffered badly while going through tough practice with lots of pain in my body during the early three days especially. I can understand, the practice was unique in its nature...what Thatcher (2011) describes as ‘simple, systematic and direct’ where meditator has to ‘observe his mind and body’ with complete awareness of being in the present state without any reaction to sensations arising and disappearing from different parts of the body ‘until intuitive knowledge arise spontaneously in mind (p.21).’ Through this practice, understanding the law of impermanence with an experiment on my own body, as an object, and my mind as a subject, by observing my sensations-a way of exploring myself, and developing a new habit of mind, which is no doubt a very challenging but found powerfully engaging. To me, to notice and accept all those sensations appearing on my body parts without any reaction keeping my sense of mind active and present was really and is, of course, a very difficult and complex phenomenon that still I could not master over.

Arriving at this point of my exposure enables me to realize that such a non-reactive behavior towards different sensations by developing ‘no more craving and no more aversion’ (Goenka, in press/2013) attitude of mind and becoming fully aware of *equanimity* was the main essence of the practice that I realized later on in course. However, developing this habit pattern of mind is not an easy task with theory and practice for ten days but it was a big get through. What I found, to achieve this goal one has to practice very hard and there is no way to seek help from any individual except the self. To me, liberating self from miseries means exploring myself not only on surface level of understanding the phenomena but a deep inside that was found far away from me – understanding self in a true sense with a deeper level of exploration to reach an ‘ultimate truth’ (Sayadaw,

1991) However, I acknowledged a visible change in myself by noticing sensations, being non reactive to different sensations, and my way of thinking about complex state of mind and matter relationship through keenly experiencing different feelings. The discourses, I found very effective to make confirmations of my experiential level of learning with the understanding of theory.

The discourses based on theory to practices during the course and their outcomes noticed at the experiential level while practicing, individual practice based outcomes and their reflections, were no doubt reflective moments for my own learning. The examples given during the discourses along with literature on step by step theory to practice found very much linking to my own experiences during a complete structured course. This purposefully powerful way of connecting theory to experiential level learning through learning by doing and knowing through discussions about way of practice, outcomes of the practice, benefits and the challenges has no alternative what I found during the course. This sort of learning as an active learner by practicing according to the instructions linking to theory enabled me to reflect my own way of teaching as a teacher educator and learner transformed me to come out of the established ways of my teaching styles and my own learning.

My Learning / Change in Self

Learning to pain and learning to gain

How I came to learn my pain

What a strange pan to fry the grains

The grains are soft and untidy to try

Oh pan be kind to fry in little time

Oh pan be kind to fry root of pain

I wana liberate to pain

I wana liberate to joy

I wana see my soul

I wana see my body

I wana see me alone

I wana see me alone

I think, the most interesting part of any practice in this material world or even in spiritual world appears to be based on and linked to the outcome and change in existing condition, and without any outcome no input is considered as a fruitful activity and hardly makes a sense. I don't think this

strange experience of my life has fundamentally changed my notions of belief and practices, but it could enable me to think in a different ways that has opened my mind – the way of looking at the life in the form of a complex combination of mind and matter – the relationship of mind with body and its reactions towards sensations of diverse nature that affect the human behavior.

Probably, this kind of learning experience and ways of looking things in different ways provided a wonderful opportunity to reflect on myself and my ways of teaching in an attempt to explore and study self. I came to realize that ‘studies of the self have focused on conversations, confessions, and diaries - all discursive tools that serve as anchors for self-reflexivity’ highly matters (Foucault, 1978; Davies & Harre, 1990; Butt & Langdrige, 2003 in Pagis, 2009, p.1). Thus such discursive tools are used to define, explain and elaborate self with reference to others. And use of these tools in teaching adults and involving them in practice based learning and in self reflections are some of the powerful ways of providing opportunities for learning self and others in a socio culture environment.

Perhaps my vipassana experience was a unique opportunity to understand and realize multiple forms of realities of my life. What I was thinking, before experiencing this experience, was quite different as compare to now – a thinking about feelings and thoughts with relation to matter (my body) was a result of the images in my mind with a fixed, final and authentic source of reality for me to react accordingly, which was absolutely a limited, materialist, secular and confined level of viewing the world of self with that of the world of others in a rigid socio cultural perspective. I must confess here, my vipassana experience was a type of confirmation of my limited ways of knowing due to a strong belief, as science graduate of Physics, in Newtonian laws of action and reaction type phenomena, as a form of reality only, and its philosophical underpinnings of having a positivist world view about phenomena in relation of human life activities at a greater extent.

Arriving at this point of departure, I can say that this experience enabled me to come out of a rigid so called scientific way of looking at phenomena with reference to ‘cause and effect relationship’ to generalize a meaning that is considered to be the only way of finding reality of human life rather looking for multiple realities of complex life. I think this change was, perhaps, the biggest change – a change of mind set, I found in myself in my life as an accidental exposure to my vipassana experience in Nepal, but a powerful way of understanding myself and the world around me with reference to others. As a teacher educator I found this method of teaching, a dominant way of engaging learners with experiential level learning that is what the transformational learning is all

about, what I personally believe in, where learner can experience the transformation from one stage of practice to another with change in thoughts, change in state of mind and state of body, experience of sensations and observing their nature of being impermanent– arising and passing away from moment to moment was unique.

My experiential learning with VM is, no doubt, a powerful way of digging the self to its deepest levels of reality and coming with facts which inform the nature of self with regard to a socio cultural environment exists outside the self by understand the law of impermanence. I found this technique of understanding of self at its deepest level of consciousness, which is although a challenging one, enables meditators to live a healthy life through a personal purification process. I came to realize that in such a process focused product oriented practice enables people with any identity to cultivate true humility for the humanity, help to remove mental impurities, lead to nurture consciousness, love and care for all and facilitate to develop complete mental health, depending upon the practitioners commitment to liberation through such kind of laborious training (Thatcher, 2011).

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