

# The Road to Nivarna

Translation of a Dhamma Talk by

Phra phāwnā k̄he ma khun wi

(Venerable Surasak Khaemarungsi)

Wat Mahaeyong, Ayutthaya



ขอมอบเป็นธรรมบรรณาการ

แต่.....

จาก.....

## The Road to Nivarna

Seeing Rupa (Form/physicality) and Nama (mind/mentality) and seeing the arising and passing away of phenomena mean being on the Road to Nivarna. When we are on the right path, we then have a chance to achieve the goal through continued effort and determination. On the other hand, if we cannot find the right way, we will be trapped in the Wheel of Rebirth, not knowing when the suffering ends.

Being attentive with clear consciousness while listening to the dhamma talk is the way to develop mindfulness along with listening. While listening, we can observe some naturally arising phenomena, both physical and mental. **The reason we practice mindfulness (insight) meditation is to develop insights into the true nature of life, that is, the ultimate reality of physical (Rupa) and mental (Nama) phenomena which are ever changing, arising and disappearing and cannot be manipulated due to being non-self, no “I”, no “mine”. The goal of practicing is to lessen, and to let go of our clinging to “self” and the concepts of “the existence of animals and persons” through the insights into all phenomena as they really are.**

This can be done by developing mindfulness, being aware of your body and mind. In practicing mindfulness meditation (Vipassana), you have to pay close attention right to the ultimate nature of physical and mental phenomena that are occurring in the present moment.

You should ask yourself whether you understand about sense objects which are physical (Rupa) and mental (Nama). Do you have clear perception of ultimate nature of all phenomena as opposed to conceptual objects? Since you have been practicing for some time, it's about time to assess yourself whether you're able to differentiate between the sense objects, which are natural phenomena and which are not.

**Phenomenon is the ultimate reality that really occurs and really exists.** Conversely, conceptual objects are conventional and unreal. We need to know clearly what real and unreal objects are in order to correctly develop insight meditation (Vipassana). Any objects which are concepts, forms and shapes are conceptual objects, for example, the shape of the body, parts of the body – arms, legs, and head – are all

concepts not reality. In practicing Vipassana, you have to follow the ultimate reality, that is, you have to observe and pay attention to the ultimate reality, always taking it as objects of meditation.

Practitioners should understand that when they observe the body and see the shape of the body and postures, they are observing conceptual objects. Sometimes, meanings may occur and the mind recognizes and knows them. Objects which convey meanings, e.g. growing bigger, getting smaller, getting in, getting out, long and short are also conceptual and unreal. Let's say this kind of posture is called 'sitting', this is called 'lying', this is called 'standing', this is called 'walking', etc. All those are conceptual objects.

The conceptual objects can be names, languages or stories. They are not natural phenomena and unreal. When the mind thinks or remembers, words occur in the mind. The mind is speaking the language. The mind itself forms the names and languages which are unreal.

In short, any objects that fall in three categories are unreal. The first are names, the second are meanings, and the third are shapes and forms.

In Vipassana, you need to be attentive to the ultimate reality, that is, to be aware of physical and mental phenomena occurring in the present moment. The ultimate reality can be divided into physicality (Rupa) and mentality (Nama). They are natural phenomena and they are real. Any phenomena which arise, deteriorate and cannot sense objects are called "Rupa". In contrast, any phenomena which can sense objects are called "Nama".

In practicing Vipassana, you should be aware of physical and mental phenomena which are occurring. This is called noting the ultimate reality (Paramattha) or acknowledging Paramatta. "Noting" means mindful acknowledging. It doesn't mean that you have to label it or to say something in your mind such as "Buddho". "Noting" means acknowledging it with mindfulness without saying anything in your mind, just paying close attention to the phenomena occurring in the present moment. This is also called "developing mindfulness". Developing mindfulness doesn't mean that we have to recite or to say anything. It means culturing the mind, being mindful continually.

Some people use words to label objects. You may use them temporarily, just to help engage the mind to itself and build up concentration. However, at some points, you have to drop the labeling so that it won't be a burden and hinder you to experience the more subtle phenomena. If you are busy saying words in your mind, you won't be able to catch many phenomena which come and go so quickly and continuously. In other words, without labelling or words, the concentrated mind will quickly acknowledge numerous phenomena

occurring consecutively, which, in turn, will develop mindfulness and cultivate wisdom. Those who just give up the labelling will feel void, with nothing to hold on to. They need to try to get used to practicing without labelling, dropping words, names and mental formation.

As the practice progresses, you need to be aware of the formation of the mind. If you acknowledge it, the formation will stop continuing because all the conceptual objects come from the formation of the mind. The mind has perception (Sanna), thought conception (Vitakka) and sustained thought (Vicara). When it thinks, concepts occur; that is, meanings, forms, names and languages arise. However, when you have mindfulness with clear consciousness, you will quickly acknowledge the mental formation. When thinking occurs, you are aware of it. When thought conception and sustained thought occur, you are aware of them. When perception occurs, you are aware of it. In this way, the mind doesn't have a chance to produce language, words, and meanings any longer. In other words, you are attentive to the reality since perception (Sanna), thought conception (Vitakka) as well as sustained thought (Vicara) are all real phenomena. And this is the path of Vipassana.

**While the mind is thinking, the objects are meanings, stories or words. You need to be attentive to the mind, acknowledging the thinking i.e. the mental formation. If your mindfulness is quick enough, the thinking will disappear, no more formation, no more expansion. Your mindfulness and clear consciousness are still maintained, continuing knowing the real phenomena.**

While observing the body, you won't either see the shapes, arms, legs, the face and eyes or the meanings of "sit" "stand". Instead, you will find the sensations in smaller parts in different points such as vibration, tension, movement, coldness, heat, pain, unhappiness, physical unpleasantness. Note the sensations occurring in different points. You won't see the self any more. Conversely, if you observe the whole thing with mental formation, shapes and forms will appear, the posture will appear and so will meanings. In shorts, the unreal concept arises and the "self" appears again.

As Lord Buddha said, perception of massiveness (Ghanasanna) prevents us from seeing "non-self". The perception of things as massiveness leads us to recognize them as "having self". You can remove the perception of massiveness by not focusing on the shapes and forms, but on the inner feelings such as vibration, wavy feeling without expanding into shapes and forms. While you are fully aware of the phenomena, there is no self- not any parts exist. On the contrary, if you are not attentive, you won't see the real phenomena. Then you are trapped, and cling to the self again.

Accordingly, in practicing Vipassana, you need to observe the feelings in smaller parts, being aware of both physical and mental sensations. You can't observe only the physical phenomena because when you focus on any part of the body, the mind won't stick to only the real phenomena, but will expand them into unreal concepts, forming them into shapes and meanings. If you are always aware of the physical sensations as well as the mental phenomena, the attention will still be within the realm of reality. Yet, all things are not unchanging.

Even though mindfulness and clear consciousness attend to the right phenomena, this occurs just only in a very short time. If you don't have clear consciousness to help keep you on track, the mind will get back to thinking, expanding, forming shapes again. Then, in practicing, you must try to develop your mindfulness with perseverance and to be aware of all real phenomena which are occurring continuously.

In practicing Vipassana, if you do not have clear understanding about real phenomena, no matter how hard you practice, you won't gain insights or wisdom because you do not follow the right path. The right path must be "Rupa" and "Nama" – the real phenomena. However, you may gain concentration and become calm and peaceful.

In fact, you can develop concentration by focusing on a single object which can be conceptual objects such as any part of the body, mental images, a phrase or word. However, Buddhism doesn't stop at teaching only about developing concentration but also how to gain insights and wisdom and to be free from all defilements and suffering. Concentration alone cannot get rid of defilements. Even though you have deeply concentrated states of mind or have special mental capacity such as Supernormal powers or higher psychic powers, you won't be able to eradicate defilements. The only way to remove and get rid of them is by developing Vipassana to gain insights and wisdom.

So, you should not focus only on developing concentration. Do concentrate on gaining wisdom. In gaining wisdom, you need to have mindfulness, clear consciousness, keep your mind alert and attentive, not being passive and deeply concentrated. Be aware of real phenomena – physical (Rupa) and mental (Nama). Wisdom here doesn't mean knowing any other things but knowing physical and mental phenomena – the ultimate reality. In fact, the reality of life is Rupa and Nama.

"Ultimate reality" rejects the concepts of "animals and persons" and the existence of self -"I" and "Mine". Ultimate reality is natural phenomena, occurring according to conditions, arising and passing away, impermanent and cannot be controlled.

Rupa and Nama can be divided into five groups of existence which are called "Five Aggregates". The first one is "corporeality" which includes all physical phenomena. The other four are "feeling"

“perception” “mental formation” and “consciousness”. These four aggregates include all mental phenomena.

Feeling is sensation such as pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling and neutral feeling.

Perception is recognition and acknowledging.

Mental formation is formation in the mind such as liking, disliking, calmness or unquietness.

Consciousness is the knowing element which is foremost of all.

Therefore, in Vipassana practice, we can say “observing Five Aggregates” or “observing physical (Rupa) and mental (Mental) phenomena” or just “observing real phenomena or natural phenomena”. Do natural phenomena which reject the concepts of animals and persons really exist? Of course, they do but there exists no self, nor “I” and “mine”. Nevertheless, they are not void. What really exist are real and natural phenomena- both physical and mental. When we say that life is selfless, it doesn’t mean that there is nothing. Actually, what really exists are Five Aggregates and Rupa and Nama- the ultimate reality. Five aggregates are not “myself” or “mine”.

Why are they not “myself” or “mine”? This is because they are always changing, arising, passing away, and uncontrollable. If they are “self”, they must be permanent and controllable. But here, we cannot control them at all. They arise and pass away according to conditions. That is why they are called “non-self”. Vipassana insights see that both physical and mental phenomena are ever changing, unsatisfactory and selfless. “Seeing” here means knowing through wisdom, not by thoughts or memories. You really see the physical and mental phenomena changing instantaneously in front of you, through your mind and through wisdom. Any physical phenomenon you observe will change. Any mental phenomenon you observe will change. There is only arising and passing away. You see Dukkha in front of you. Dukkha means that all natural phenomena cannot remain unchanged - they arise and pass away.

All phenomena arise and pass away. Seeing them passing away in front of you on and on means seeing Dukkha. When you see the arising and passing away, you also see Anatta, uncontrollability. The arising and passing away cannot be controlled (It changes by itself naturally). And this is Dukkha. Dukkha is the impermanence. In brief, the state of impermanence (Anicca), Dukkha, and Anatta coexist in the same place, i.e. in the physical and mental phenomena. Thus, it is crucial to be attentive directly to the physical and mental phenomena, the ultimate reality. Or else, you will never see the arising and passing away, impermanence (Anicca) and Anatta. In addition, your mindfulness must be exactly on the phenomenon which is occurring in the present moment. This happens in a flash. Once it has arisen, it instantaneously dissolves.

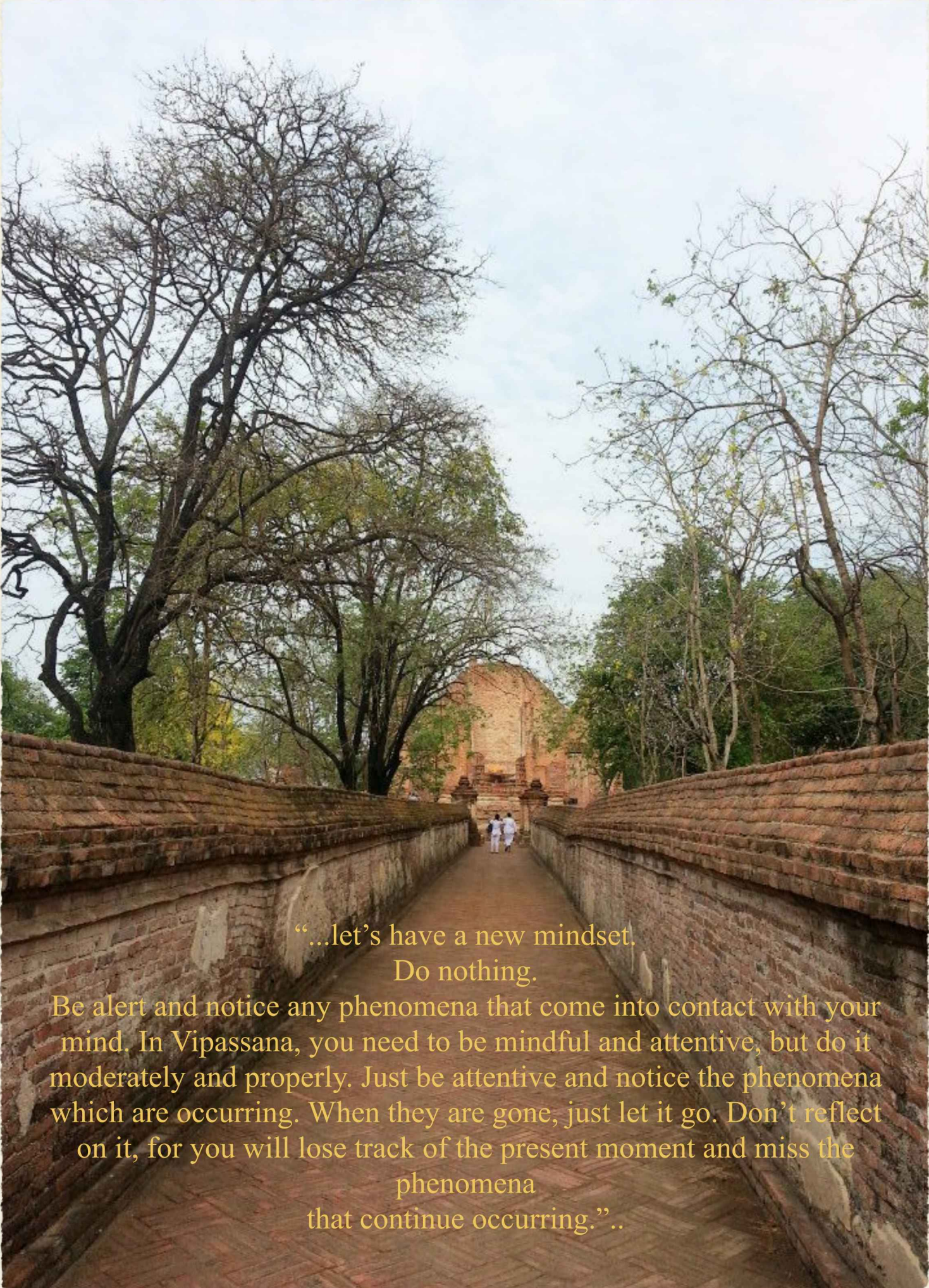
Seeing, knowing and having insights thus occur in a flash. **When the phenomenon passes away, don't even think back about it because it would be just a thought - there is no phenomenon as evidence.**

Accordingly, in Vipassana development, try to sustain your mindfulness and clear consciousness and always be in the present moment. When they slip away into the past or future, bring them back to the present moment and be attentive to the real phenomena. I would like to stress again that you need to have clear understanding about the ultimate reality as opposed to unreal concepts. When you have practiced Vipassana for some time, you need to give up the unreal concepts, that is, the words that you used to engage your mind in developing concentration. To move on to the insight development or Vipassana, you need to abandon them and use only your mindfulness and clear consciousness to keep up with the phenomena, from moment to moment continuously.

Some of you may have clear understanding about ultimate reality and what physical and mental or conceptual objects are. However, when it comes to practice, your mindfulness does not stick to physical and mental phenomena but tends to flow to unreal concepts. There is a technique to deal with this problem. If you are too attentive, trying to control and catch the phenomena, they will slip away and you won't see them. In contrast, if you are lax, inattentive, or uninterested, you won't see them either. You need to do it moderately, that is, you should not be too attentive, but not unmindful; not too tense but not too lax. When you see the phenomena, neither cling to them nor push them away. Just acknowledge them. Once you acknowledge them, let them go. In doing this, balance will occur. Some of you feared that you would not gain insights, so you tried so hard to see Anicca, Dukkha and Anatta and eventually failed.

So, let's have a new mindset. Do nothing. Be alert and notice any phenomena that come into contact with your mind. In Vipassana, you need to be mindful and attentive, but do it moderately and properly. Just be attentive and notice the phenomena which are occurring. When they are gone, just let it go. Don't reflect on it, for you will lose track of the present moment and miss the phenomena that continue occurring.

You, as practitioners, need to always adjust yourself so as to feel comfortable. Pay attention to the suitability of postures such as standing, walking, lying, bending, stretching and any other movements. Be aware of every present moment, connecting to your inner self, your own mind. You need to note the changing, the arising and passing away and uncontrollability. If your practice is on the right path, knowing Rupa and Nama, the ultimate reality (Paramattha), knowing how to set your mind to be in a neutral state, then we would say that the practice is



“...let’s have a new mindset.  
Do nothing.

Be alert and notice any phenomena that come into contact with your mind. In Vipassana, you need to be mindful and attentive, but do it moderately and properly. Just be attentive and notice the phenomena which are occurring. When they are gone, just let it go. Don’t reflect on it, for you will lose track of the present moment and miss the phenomena that continue occurring.”..

satisfactory.

Though we are not at the stage where we can eradicate all the defilements or attain Nivarna, knowing Rupa and Nama, the ultimate reality, and being able to differentiate between reality and unreal concepts correctly is said to be quite satisfactory. Even more than that, if you are able to see the arising and passing away of physical and mental phenomena, you are considered to gain treasures of great value. To be born in this life and see the physical and mental phenomena arising and passing away is considered to be very lucky, far more than gaining the worldly wealth. For, seeing Rupa (Form/physicality) and Nama (mind/mentality) and seeing the arising and passing away of phenomena mean being on the Road to Nivarna. When we are on the right path, we then have a chance to achieve the goal through continued effort and determination. On the other hand, if we cannot find the right way, we will be trapped in the Wheel of Rebirth, not knowing when the suffering ends.

Our past lives have gone through the cycle of rebirth, life after life without knowing the way to end the suffering. In this life, we have been on the right path, coming close to the end of the process of becoming, the end of the cycle of rebirth and we should be proud of.

For practitioners, nothing is more fortunate than seeing Dhamma, having insights into the Truth. Nothing is better than being able to end the suffering or free from sufferings. All the things in this world that we desire, wanting to get hold of them, can they end the suffering? No, The only way to end the sufferings is developing Vipassana. Even developing deep concentration (Samatha) cannot eradicate defilements and end the suffering, not to mention other kinds of worldly activities which are much further away from ending the suffering.

In conclusion, you should be proud of yourself to be able to develop Vipassana correctly. If you are an athlete, to attain this point is like to pass to the final round, get onto the path to the goal, ending of the sufferings which is “Nivarna”. If you still do not know how to see the physical and mental phenomena, listen to the teaching regularly and try to practice it continuously.

**Today, it's about time to finish the Dhamma talk. May you all be happy and gain insights into dhamma.**

อนุโมทนาศิษย์สุปฏิปันโน คุณ กฤตศรี สามะพุทธิ  
ผู้แปลจากภาษาไทยเป็นภาษาอังกฤษ