

Mindfulness of Breathing Online Course

Audio meditation transcription

Guided Meditation 2 – Contemplation of the Body

We are aware of the body in the sitting posture, and we let the mind rest on the body, just as the body rests on the cushion.

And without losing this embodied presence of the mind, we will now proceed through the preliminaries and the first tetrad of mindfulness of breathing.

And just as we found a secluded place for our practice, so we establish mental seclusion. Letting go of all of our worries, concerns, duties, responsibilities. No need for that now.

And just as we found the firm foundation for the body in the sitting posture, so we build up a firm foundation in the mental realm by formulating our motivation, our intention, what inspires us to practice meditation.

And having formulated our motivation, we pass our attention through the spine from bottom to top, moving from one vertebra to the next, relaxing, allowing the spine to naturally align itself. Until eventually the body feels as if it were suspended from above, on top of the head, and all the rest of the body relaxing downwards. Relaxed and straight.

And just as the body, relaxed and straight; so the mind, relaxed and straight. Straight by being straightly pointed at the present moment. Here and now, only time when we can live. We cannot live in the past; we cannot live in the future. Present moment.

Checking in on the condition of the mind, meeting the mind where it is. And being in the present moment, checking in on the condition of the mind, we are in the presence of our good friend, mindfulness.

And we take a moment just to be aware of the condition of our mind when mindfulness is present. Savouring, flavouring the texture of the mind. What does the mind feel like when *sati* is

there? Could be open, spacious. Could be soft, and gentle. Could be alert, awake. Broad, and spacious. Whichever of these qualities, in whatever combination, characterize our personal experience of the mind when mindfulness is present. To this we pay attention.

And in the company of mindfulness, with mindfulness made predominant in the mind, brought to the fore, we become aware of the process of breathing - aware whether the air, the breath, comes in or goes out.

And this basic form of being aware, being mindful - this knowing that distinction between breathing in, breathing out - is the backbone of our practice, that will continue throughout the whole scheme of 16 steps.

And the first step is the long breath. And we may, if we wish, take an intentional long breath. And with somewhat stronger focus on the breath, with an element of inquiry, investigation, even curiosity, we observe the length of the breath - the length of the breath as it gradually, naturally becomes shorter and softer.

Using this as an opportunity to explore working with the somewhat more focused attention. Seeing the benefit that this more focused attention with the length of the breath gives in supporting the mind in avoiding that the mind gets distracted. This continuous following of the breath to discern its length makes it easily noticeable when the mind is about to slip off. But this focus is not an exclusive focus. Some degree of whole-body awareness is still in the background. Some basic awareness of the body in the sitting posture, very faint, very much in the background. Most of attention is on the breath, following it closely. It doesn't need to be forceful. Can be gentle, gentle but sustained, sustained by that element of investigation, inquiry, even curiosity, directed towards the length of the breath.

And when we feel that this working with some degree of a stronger focus on the breath has fulfilled its purpose, has given some initial degree of stability of the mind, we shift, move on, proceed to whole-body awareness as the main object, experiencing the whole body.

And at this point it is as if whole-body and breath are exchanging their position in our field of awareness, our field of attention. Whole-body comes to the forefront - main object of our

interest, attention, awareness - and the breath moves to the background. The breath is now in peripheral awareness.

Being held in peripheral awareness, we can still notice whether it is going in or out. But we would no longer be able to follow it closely as we did earlier, to discern precisely its length. Just in-out, in-out, as a background melody, as it were, and main attention on the whole body in the sitting posture.

And due to the whole body being a broader object than the breath, naturally our experience, our mindfulness, our field of awareness becomes also broader. Aware of the whole body in the sitting posture.

And we notice that this experience of the whole body in the sitting posture is different from the one earlier when we were straightening up the spine. At that time, whole-body awareness was more anatomical, concerned with the bone, the flesh. But now, in the meantime, through working with the long and short breath, our attention has become more subtle, more in tune with the bodily winds, the bodily energies. And so our experience of whole-body in the sitting posture now is somewhat more on the energetic level, somewhat more subtle, somewhat more sophisticated perhaps. Experiencing the whole body, and in peripheral awareness breathing in, breathing out.

And as we watch the whole body, its energetic processes, naturally there comes a calming, calming of bodily activity. Allowing a deep sense of relaxation to occur throughout the whole body. Breath is so calm; body is so calm. So settled, so peaceful. The peace and settledness of non-agitation. Feeling no need to move at all. So peaceful. Calming bodily activity, a natural calmness, a natural bodily tranquillity.

And even with that deep bodily calmness, so relaxing, sooner or later, mind is bound to wander. And as soon as we realize, smilingly, without any trace of frustration or negativity, knowing that that is just the tendency of the mind – running off into past or future – and here we are back in the present moment. And if it was just a short distraction, somewhat like meeting somebody on the road, saying hello, and moving on, then we just relax back into bodily tranquillity. Just relaxing that mental agitation, tension, hyperactivity, and coming back to this so much more agreeable condition. Calming of bodily activity, all the while aware of breathing in and breathing

out. That continuous awareness of breathing in and breathing out is the only effort we are making here. Very gentle effort, very soft effort, just to maintain continuity.

But if the distraction was a longer one, we really went quite far, somewhat like meeting somebody on the road and then sitting down somewhere, and talking about this and that, then we might decide if it is perhaps better to give the mind more to do. Maybe start with a deep inhalation as a tool to ground ourselves in experience of the here and now.

Or if there was something very strong going on, we might even go back to our motivation, to reassure ourselves what we are doing here, why we are meditating, and start from there.

And if it is a manifestation of one of the five hindrances, then we work with that, using the appropriate antidotes, with which we are by now well familiar from our *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation practice.

And after having dealt with the hindrance, and coming back to mindfulness of breathing, in the understanding that mindfulness of breathing is a sophisticated meditation practice. It builds on a foundation in *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation.

And having dealt with the hindrances, moving again through this first tetrad – long breath, short breath – working with a more focused attention. And then whole body, experiencing the whole body in the sitting posture on the energetic level. And calming bodily activity, coming back to that experience of deep bodily tranquillity and relaxation.

At times we might even want to check if there is any tension anywhere - shoulders, facial muscles - and relaxing that tension. Letting all our tensions drop away, sink into the ground, as it were.

And if we feel at times, just for the sake of some variation in the practice, to move through this first tetrad again, we might do so. But then it would not be appropriate to take an intentional long breath. That'll be too gross. That is something to get us started, or when we got really distracted. But when we just like to proceed again through this first tetrad, we start off just noting inhalation-exhalation, from the preliminaries. And then just move to discerning the length of the breath, whether it is long or short, without any intentional breathing. Just arousing that sense of

investigation, curiosity, inquiry: “Let me see, let me see the length of the breath”. Just as a way to experiment with focused attention.

And when we feel that this deployment of focused attention has fulfilled its purpose - whole-body. Whole-body comes to the forefront, breath to the background, to be held in peripheral awareness. And again, calming bodily activity.

And these last two are also relevant whenever we decide to do walking meditation or any other activities. Walking with the whole body, fully embodied in all our activities. And whenever possible, calmness. Doing whatever we are doing with that inner dignity of tranquillity. It does not mean we have to slow down in an unnatural way. Of course, if we wish to do that, that is fine. It just means a natural calmness and tranquillity, an unruffledness, unagitatedness, in all our activities – walking, eating, whatever it is.

That is the main theme or topic at the completion of this first tetrad –that calmness of bodily activity.

And in the simile I like to use to illustrate this mindfulness of breathing - a condor. A condor that with the preliminaries has flown up, and now is just up high above the mountains, flying from mountain top to mountain top, just carried along by the current of the air, without needing to move its wings. Just like that condor, just flying along, without moving - so we keep moving along, moving along aware of impermanence. And with that subtle joy of being in the present moment, being in the company of our good friend, mindfulness.

Keep practicing like this.