

Mindfulness of Breathing Online Course

Audio meditation transcription

Guided Meditation 3 – Contemplation of Feeling Tones

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 preliminaries and first two tetrads of mindfulness of breathing.

And just as we found a secluded place to meditate, we establish mental seclusion by letting go of all our worries, concerns, plans, and duties. No need for them now.

And just as we found a firm foundation, bodily, by sitting down, we establish a firm foundation, mentally, by formulating our motivation.

And having formulated our motivation, we pass our attention through the spine, from bottom to top, relaxing and aligning.

And we point the mind straight at the present moment, here and now. And checking in on the condition of the mind.

And arousing mindfulness. Taking a moment again just to savour and flavour the texture of our mind when mindfulness is the predominant quality, when mindfulness is to the fore, at the forefront.

And with mindfulness to the fore, we become aware of the process of breathing - moving in, moving out.

And if we wish, we may take one long breath. Arousing an attitude of investigation, even curiosity, to closely follow the breath and discern its length as it gradually becomes shorter and softer. Using this as an opportunity to experiment with focused attention. Closely following the breath - not exclusive attention, some degree of whole-body awareness is still there, very much

in the background - but closely following the breath as an exercise in focused attention that enables us to collect the mind, to notice quickly when it is about to wander off.

And when we have explored this for however long it seemed appropriate, proceed to whole-body awareness, giving prominence to the whole body in the sitting posture. It is as if whole-body and breath are exchanging place in the field of our attention. The breath moves to the background, just inhalation and exhalation held in peripheral awareness, and whole-body in the sitting posture moves to the foreground.

Experiencing the whole body.

And as this experiencing of the whole body is taking place on its more energetic level, to which we have become attuned through watching the breath closely, it naturally leads over to calming bodily activity. Calming the body on the energetic level. Relaxing. Allowing the breath to become calm, the body to become calm. Letting go of whatever tension there might still be. Just dropping that off, letting it sink to the ground. Body feels so tranquil, settled. No need to move at all, just at rest and at ease.

And out of this deep ease, restfulness, relaxation, together with the subtle pleasant feeling of being in the present moment, joy can arise. Joy that is the fruition of the practice we have been doing up to now: our previous building a foundation in ethical conduct, our motivation, dedicating time and place to meditation practice, and engaging in the meditation practice that was the one the Buddha himself regularly practiced. Walking in the footsteps of the Buddha. Joy. Can be very subtle at times. Doesn't matter. Just allowing joy to manifest in whatever way it manifests. Experiencing joy, and all the while aware of inhalation and exhalation.

And sooner or later the joy naturally moves over into happiness, more settled, still more quiet. And if for any particular reason we did not experience any joy before, happiness is always possible - the happiness of contentment. So important for our meditation practice. Contentment. We do our part, dedicate ourselves to the practice, and then we are content with whatever results manifest now. No yearning, hankering, agitation. Contentment. The happiness of contentment is always possible. Experiencing happiness, allowing our whole body-mind to be suffused by happiness.

And now we move on to experiencing mental activity. And as a tool to help us, just as earlier during the previous first tetrad of body contemplation, we let the breath move into peripheral awareness - now we can also let the pleasant feeling of being in the present moment come to be in peripheral awareness together with the breath. That will further strengthen our ability not to be carried away.

And the whole front area of our attention, open space - let mental activity manifest in whatever way it wishes to manifest: perceptions, thoughts, whatever it is. Resting on that vantage point of observation established in continuity through peripheral awareness of the breath together with the pleasant feeling of being in the present moment, we learn to watch the game of the mind without taking part in it. And this particular step enables us to make this all-important discovery that it is possible to meditate even when thought is in the mind. All it takes is to step back and watch the thought. Just know that there is thinking, is enough for us to no longer be carried away by it. Watching mental activity without becoming active ourselves. So liberating.

Experiencing mental activity.

And that subtle pleasant feeling of being in the present moment is our tool, our handle, skilfully used to enable us to notice when we are about to become part of the game – when the present moment is about to be lost, that pleasant feeling disappears – and quickly we regain the vantage point of uninvolved observation. With all the complexity of mental activity, feeling tone is so simple. It enables us to easily handle the complexity of mental activity. And as we learn to watch the game of the mind without becoming part of it, we are almost like a mother who takes her children to the playground and lets them play, just watching. No need to join the game. With that same attitude of kindness and non-involvement, we watch mental activity. And the more we are able not to become active ourselves, the more mental activity naturally begins to quieten down, without any need for force. It just peters out, becomes quiet, settles - a natural calming of mental activity.

Just like making coffee in some cultures where they just put the powder in the water and shake it and then just wait for the dregs to sink to the ground - so we let all our thinking, associations, just sink to the ground, like dregs. No need for that now. Just as earlier, with the completion of the first tetrad, we let go of all bodily tension, dropping it to the ground, now we let go of any remainder of mental tension, just dropping it off to the ground.

Relaxing mental activity. Calming mental activity.

And sooner or later, of course, mind is bound to wander. We notice, smilingly, without any negativity or frustration. And at times we may just immediately switch over to watching mental activity and allowing it to calm by itself. At other times we may feel like some more sustained working through this progression of mindfulness of breathing is appropriate. We may choose, either picking up on the pleasant feeling in the present moment and allowing it to flower into joy, to move through the second tetrad, or else picking up earlier, noticing breathing-in, breathing-out, and then examining the length of the breath. Or, if it was really a distraction, we might even like to start with an intentional breath, intentional long breath, or several intentional long breaths, just to ground ourselves in the reality of the present moment.

Working flexibly, observing the situation and then deciding: what do I do now? Well, just in calming mental activity, or move one more time through the second tetrad, or pick up the first. Even when there is no distraction, still we can decide, choose what to do, which step to practice, for a long time, for a short time, move through a tetrad swiftly to get the flavour of its dynamics, pick up the single steps, dwell in them for a long time, making sure that the mind does not go into autopilot mode, that we meditate creatively, flexibly, adjusting. Like a skilled cook who watches how the food is received and adjusts the cooking accordingly, so we watch how our practice is being received by the mind, and we adjust accordingly.

The two steps of experiencing mental activity and calming mental activity are also what we can take along, walking, other activities. Whenever possible, walking with a still mind, a quiet mind. And if that is not possible, at least walking with the knowing of what is going on in the mind. Walking, experiencing mental activity, knowing what is happening in the mind. Sooner or later it will calm down by itself.

And in the image of the condor that I like to use to illustrate this practice, the condor that has flown up with the preliminaries, and with the first tetrad of body contemplation has come to fly high up from mountain top to mountain top without moving its wings, just carried along by the wind, now with the conclusion of the second tetrad – calming of mental activity – the head of the condor has become transparent. Like the Cheshire cat in Alice in Wonderland, the condor is

gradually becoming transparent, and now its head has become transparent, reflecting the calming of mental activity, the calming of mental chatter. The quiet mind.

Keep practicing like this.