

Mindfulness of Breathing Online Course

Audio meditation transcription

Guided Meditation 5 – Contemplation of Dharmas

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 whole scheme of mindfulness of breathing.

And just as we found a secluded spot for our practice, so 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 for our practice in the sitting posture, so we established a similar foundation in the mental realm by formulating our motivation.

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

And we point the mind straight at the present moment, checking in on the condition of the mind as it is now. And establishing mindfulness, making mindfulness predominant, bringing it to the fore. And again, taking a moment just to be with that condition of the mind when mindfulness is predominant.

And with mindfulness established, becoming aware of the inhalations and exhalations, in the understanding that this establishing of mindfulness is establishing the first of the seven factors of awakening.

And building on the presence of this first factor of awakening, mindfulness, we arouse investigation. Perhaps, if we wish, taking an intentional long breath. And investigating the length of the breath - scrutinizing it, having an attitude of interest, even curiosity, wanting to know the length of the breath, as from having been long, it slowly, gradually becomes shorter and softer. Investigation: second awakening factor.

And from the length of the breath, we shift to whole-body awareness. Whole body in the sitting posture comes to the forefront of our attention, and inhalation-exhalation recede into the background, to be held in peripheral awareness. And the continuity of this peripheral awareness of inhalation-exhalation: that is our training. That is our effort. That is our energy. Unwavering energy to sustain the continuity of practice by maintaining throughout, in peripheral awareness, that reference point: inhalation-exhalation. We use this to arouse the third awakening factor: energy.

And calming bodily activity - a deep sense of relaxation throughout the whole body, letting go of any remainder of tension that might be there, just dropping it off, letting it sink into the ground. And out of that deep sense of bodily relaxation, joy arises – the joy of being in the present moment, of the practice we have been doing so far, including our foundation building in morality, of walking in the footsteps of the Buddha. All of these together can become our opportunity, occasion to cultivate joy as an awakening factor. The fourth awakening factor: joy.

And from joy to happiness - the happiness of contentment. And shifting the subtle pleasant feeling of being in the present moment to join inhalation and exhalation in peripheral awareness, opening up the vista of our attention, of our field of attention, to mental activity. Experiencing mental activity without becoming active about it.

And this uninvolved observation, sooner or later, naturally leads to calming mental activity. And with the experiencing of the calming of mental activity, which complements the earlier calming of bodily activity, tranquillity as an awakening factor – number five, the fifth awakening factor - can be cultivated. Deep tranquillity, body and mind. All tensions dropping off, all agitations quietening down. Tranquillity of body and mind.

And with mental activity calmed, mind itself can be experienced, mind as such. Experiencing mind as such, in its bare, even naked condition. Like diving deep into the ocean, leaving all the ripples and waves of mental activity far behind. So still. Just that knowing is there; and in the background, of course, peripheral awareness of inhalation and exhalation.

And gladdening the mind - a gladness at a very profound and deep level, that touches us deep within. Gladdening the mind.

And out of such gladdening, mind naturally becomes composed, unified, as if the whole of experience is held in a gentle, tender embrace, so that all of its usual fragmentations disappear. Concentration, sixth awakening factor: *samādhī*.

And liberating the mind. In particular liberating it from any I-making, my-making, any conceit, appropriation, so that it becomes superbly balanced. Equipoise, seventh awakening factor: *upekkhā*.

And at this point, all seven awakening factors have been aroused. The mind is enriched by the presence of mindfulness, investigation, energy, joy, tranquillity, concentration, and equipoise.

And with the continuity of these seven jewels in the mind, we contemplate impermanence - impermanence that has been at the background of the practice throughout. Inhalation-exhalation as reminders of change, now comes right to the forefront of attention. Changing phenomena.

And, if we wish, we may bring in a little more detail by analyzing this very experience right now in terms of the five aggregates. The breath, the air moving in and out, is because of motion in the body: first aggregate of form, the body. Changing. And the sensation caused by the breath, usually neutral sensation as it moves in, moves out - that is *vedanā*, feeling: second aggregate. And that discerning, that knowing "oh, this in inhalation; oh, this is exhalation", that is perception: third aggregate. And that intention, one intention after the other, to stay with the breath, not let the mind wander off - that is *saṅkhārā*, volitional formations: fourth aggregate. And that knowing of all this, that is the process of consciousness: fifth aggregate.

Each of them changing. Changing phenomena. We may at times stay with one aggregate for quite some time, then move on to the next; or else move through them quickly. And eventually we are able to see all of them together, as facets of this experience of sitting here, meditating – mindfulness of breathing. Only at times when this seems appropriate, when we feel like some more detail is appropriate to this situation now; at other times we may just want to be aware of impermanence, without details. It depends on the situation, our inclination.

And another approach, if we wish, we can relate this step and the next three to aspects of the breath. For this purpose, the breath has to come a little bit more forward in our field of attention. From being in peripheral awareness, a little more attention, so that we are able to discern, not only in-out, but also beginning, middle and end of inhalations and exhalations.

And if we decide to use this additional tool, then we can relate the experience of impermanence to being aware of all three aspects: beginning, middle, and end of each inhalation, and of each exhalation.

And moving on, from impermanence to dispassion. Allowing the flow of impermanence to wash away our passion, wash away our attachment, wash away our clings, to transform our attitude.

And if we wish to work more closely with the breath, then at this point we could give attention only to middle and end of inhalation, middle and end of exhalation. Breath remains entirely natural. This is not about changing the breath in any way. This is just a matter of paying attention - giving less attention to the beginning, and more attention, more emphasis to changing while persisting and disappearing. Changing while persisting and disappearing. Just a tool to support our contemplation of dispassion: *virāga*.

And with the growth of dispassion, with the lessening of our attachment and clinging, it becomes easier to allow things to end, to see the ending of things: cessation.

And if we like to continue relating this to the breath, then we could give all attention to the ending - ending of inhalation, ending of exhalation. Vanishing, disappearing, ceasing. Working against the grain of the normal tendency of perception of wanting to see only what is new, young, fresh, beginning, and ignoring what is old, ending, disappearing. Working against that tendency, we now give all importance to the cutting edge of impermanence - the fact that things come to an end, that they cease, they vanish, they disappear. Body, feeling, perception, volitional formations, consciousness - each of them is bound to cease, disappear, vanish.

And the more we learn to face and be at ease with cessation, the easier it becomes for us to let go, let go of what we anyway cannot really hold on to. Letting go. What clinging to things that are anyway changing and disappearing? What passion? What attachment? Letting go.

And if we find it useful to relate these insight contemplations to the breath, then we could now give all importance to the gap - the gap between inhalation and exhalation, and the gap between exhalation and inhalation. Almost as if we were to let go into that gap. And at times we may even wait for the next breath to come by itself, on its own. Not some form of breath retention, not at all. But just, instead of initiating the next inhalation or exhalation, just relaxing into that gap, and waiting for the next thing to happen by itself, to start by itself. Letting go of our attachments. Letting go of our clingings. Letting go of our conceit 'I am', appropriation as 'mine'. And eventually, eventually letting go of all that is conditioned - to take the plunge into the Unconditioned, the supreme peace, the supreme happiness, the supreme freedom of *Nibbāna*.

Nothing to lose, only to gain, by letting go.

And after some time of dwelling in letting go, we may feel like picking up one or the other tetrad, to move through them. With the continuity of these seven awakening factors that have been established by our first procession through the previous three tetrads - we are free to choose, move here or there, according to what the situation and the mind seems to require. But it would be good, at the end, to come back to this last tetrad, to round off our cultivation of mindfulness of breathing, by one more time moving through impermanence, dispassion, cessation, and letting go.

Keep practicing like this.