

Satipaṭṭhāna Online Course

Audio meditation transcription

Guided Meditation – 3 Death

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 mindfulness, we will now proceed to the first three spokes in the wheel of our *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation: anatomical parts and elements done quickly, and contemplation of death.

Anatomical parts:

Starting with the head. Aware of the head, knowing that there is skin.

And from the head to the neck.

Shoulders.

Arms.

Hands.

Front and back of the torso simultaneously.

The hips.

The legs.

And the feet.

And we are aware of this whole body in the sitting posture, as covered by skin. Cultivating an attitude of non-attachment.

And the flesh:

From the feet to the legs.

Hips,

Torso.

Hands.

Arms.

Shoulders.

Neck.

And the head.

And we are aware of this whole body in the sitting posture, of its fleshy parts. Cultivating an attitude of non-attachment.

And the bones:

From the head to the neck.

Shoulders.

Arms.

Hands.

Torso.

Hips.

Legs.

And feet.

And we are aware of this body in the sitting posture, of its bones. Cultivating an attitude of non-attachment.

And the elements:

Earth element:

From the head to the neck.

Shoulders.

Arms.

Hands.

Torso.

Hips.

Legs.

And feet.

And we are aware of this body in the sitting posture, as pervaded by the earth element. With the understanding – earth element is empty. Empty of a self.

Water element:

Starting with the feet.

The legs.

Hips.

Torso.

The hands.

The arms.

The shoulders.

The neck.

And the head.

And we are aware of this body in the sitting posture, as pervaded by the water element. With the understanding – water element is empty. Empty of self.

And the fire element:

Starting with the head.

The neck.

Shoulders.

Arms.

Hands.

Torso.

Hips.

Legs.

And the feet.

And we are aware of this body in the sitting posture, as pervaded by the fire element. With the understanding – fire element is empty. Empty of self.

And the wind element:

Starting from the feet.

The legs.

The hips.

Torso.

The hands.

The arms.

The shoulders.

The neck.

And the head.

And we are aware of this body in the sitting posture, as pervaded by the wind element. With the understanding – wind element is empty. Empty of self.

And this body, made up of earth, water, fire, and wind element – so dependent on supply, supply of the elements from outside. And so dependent on the most ephemeral of these elements: the wind element, that constant supply of oxygen. And we connect with the breath, as that which connects us to life. Aware of the breath in whatever way we find suitable, whatever location works for us. Just aware of the breath, of the continuity of breath, as that which ensures the continuity of our life.

And there comes a time when this breath will stop and this body will die.

And if it were left out in the open, it would go through the stages of decay described in the *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*.

And we may use the mental image of a skeleton, or any other stage of decay, to remind us of the ultimate destiny of this body. This body too is of the same fate. It will fall apart. And we may attend to the felt sense of the skeleton in our body to strengthen this recollection, to bring home the fact that this, my body, will fall apart. And aware of the breath as that which connects us to life, we bring in the understanding of the uncertainty of when we will die. I don't know when I will die. It could happen very soon: some accident, some organ in the body no longer functioning, I cannot even be sure of the next breath. And with every inhalation we are aware "I cannot be sure: this could be my last breath." And with every exhalation we relax and let go, relax and let go.

And in doing this practice, we keep a keen eye on balance, balance of the mind: not overdoing it. Gradually allowing the fact of mortality to sink into the mind and transform it.

Whenever the thought of our impending death becomes too threatening, we give more importance to the exhalation, to relaxing and letting go. More importance does not mean to change the breath, it only means more attention, more importance mentally. And we relax and let go, relax and let go.

But at other times we might find that the fact of our mortality is not really sinking in into the mind. At such times we might decide to give more importance to the inhalation: to the fact that I cannot be sure, I cannot be sure even of the next breath. This could be my last breath. And even if it is not my last breath, it is certainly one breath closer to death. With every breath we are coming closer to death. And coming ever closer to death, we are preparing for death. We are facing it. We are training in the art of dying. We are no longer running away from our own shadow. And training in the art of dying is training in the art of living. Death is part of life. We can only live fully when we accept death, when we face death, rather than pretending it is not there. Gradually, slowly, we become whole by allowing death to be part of our life. So important not to turn a blind eye on death and mortality. With this practice we are facing ignorance head on. This is what most human beings most prefer to ignore: Their own mortality. And the more we face our own mortality, the less frightening it becomes. The more we get used to it. The more it becomes natural. And the more we come to be at peace within. A deep peace, because we are no longer running away from our own shadow.

And with this sense of wholeness and having come fully alive, we proceed to our open practice. Opening up to whatever happens at any of the sense doors. Mindfulness firmly rooted in the

body through these body scans, non-attachment, emptiness, and this bravely facing of our own mortality that made us so alive to the present moment, to the importance of living in the here and now and doing what is really important for us instead of wasting our time. With that liveliness we meet the present moment in the company of our good friend, *sati*. With mindfulness established, whole-body awareness, and if we wish as part of that whole-body awareness, the in-breathing and the out-breathing, not with an exclusive focus on the breath, just as part of whole-body awareness, and opening up to experience in whatever way it unfolds. Whatever happens is food for our mindfulness, food for our awareness.

And whenever the mind wanders, as soon as we recognize, smilingly we come back to the present moment. It has now become so much clearer for us that the present moment is really the only time when I can live. And if it was a longer distraction, we may decide whether it is appropriate to pick up any of these three body contemplations, whichever seems suitable, maybe even all three. And sooner or later we are back to open awareness at the six sense doors - and aware of impermanence, aware of change, the flow of experience, its process character, that is what we keep knowing, understanding, realizing - impermanence.

Planting the seeds of wisdom, growing the seeds of insight, step by step we are progressing, progressing on the path to the realization of the deathless.

Keep practicing like this.