Satipaṭṭhāna Online Course
Audio meditation transcription

Guided Meditation – 6 Hindrances

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 mindfulness, we will now proceed through six spokes in the wheel of satipaṭṭhāna meditation: the three body contemplations, contemplation of feeling, mind, and the hindrances.

But before doing so, we take a moment to formulate our intention. And having formulated our intention, we proceed through these body scannings, done in one flow for anatomical parts and the elements, with the understanding that, even though at times we may proceed very quickly, this is not in itself a sign of proficiency that we do them fast. It is just in order to be able to adjust our practice to what the present moment requires. And at other times, we might find it preferable to go very slowly, part by part.

Beginning with the anatomical parts:
Skin:
From the head, moving... down... to... the... feet.
Flesh:
From the feet, moving... up... to... the... head.
Bones:
From the head, moving... down... to... the... feet.
And we are aware of this body in the sitting posture, made up of skin, flesh, and bones - cultivating an attitude of non-attachment.

And the elements:
Starting with the earth element:
From the head, moving... down... to... the... feet.
Water element:
From the feet, moving... up... to... the... head.
Fire element:
From the head, moving... down... to... the... feet.
Wind element:
From the feet, moving... up... to... the... head.
And we are aware of this body in the sitting posture, as pervaded by these four elements – with an understanding of their empty nature.

And we connect with the breath as that which connects us to life. Bringing to mind the image of a skeleton to remind us of the fate of this body – to fall apart. And with every inhalation, aware – this could be my last breath. And even if it is not the last breath, it is certainly one breath closer to death. And with every exhalation, we relax and let go, relax and let go.

Feelings:
Pleasant feelings:
From the head to the neck, shoulders, arms, hands, torso, hips, legs, feet.
And painful feelings:
From the feet to the legs, hips, torso, the hands, arms, shoulders, neck, head.
And neutral feelings:
From the head to the neck, shoulders, arms, hands, torso, hips, legs, and the feet.
And we are aware of this body in the sitting posture, of any feeling - of the pleasant type, the unpleasant type, or the neutral type – manifesting in or on this body.

And from having explored bodily feelings, we open the vista of our awareness to any type of feelings, including those predominately manifesting on the mental level.

And from feelings, we proceed to mind: that which knows feelings, that which knows the body. In particular, aware of the mind in which mindfulness is present. Continuing to familiarize ourselves with the texture, flavor, with the distinct characteristic of our mind when mindfulness is there – when sati is established.

And with contemplation of body, feelings, and mind – it has become so unmistakably clear to us that body, feeling, mind are impermanent phenomena. And what is impermanent cannot yield lasting satisfaction. It is dukkha. And what is dukkha cannot be the self. It is empty.

And we proceed to exploring conditionality in a very practical manner, with the hindrances – where our task is not only to recognize their presence or absence, but to explore their
conditionality. We examine this mind: let me see. Let me see is there is any manifestation on the surface level of the mind of sensual desire, anger, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, or doubt. And if we find that any of these five hindrances is in the mind, with an attitude of a good chess player, we examine the situation. Hmmm, now it gets really interesting. Let me see. Let me see how this hindrance managed to get into my mind. What were the causes and conditions for its arising? And what are the causes and conditions that can help me to get out of it? And what are the causes and conditions that will prevent its recurrence in future?

And at times we may find just being mindful and examining these conditions will be sufficient for the hindrance to go into abeyance. If this is not the case, and if we wish to respond to these hindrances from within the scheme of our satipatthāna meditation - then with sensual desire and anger, we may give, for a moment, attention to the impermanent nature of feelings. The impermanent nature of pleasant feelings to undermine sensual desire, and the impermanent nature of painful feelings to counter anger. And if sloth and torpor or restlessness and worry are there, we may give attention to the subtle pleasure of being in the present moment – to help the mind gain balance, neither being with too little energy, nor with too much energy. That balance of the pleasure of being in the present moment. And if these should not suffice for us to emerge from the hindrance, then in the case of sensual desire, we may do contemplation of the anatomical parts to arouse an attitude of non-attachment. And in the case of anger, we may do contemplation of the elements, arousing the perception of emptiness as a way of deconstructing that solidified sense of ego that often stands behind anger. And in the case of sloth and torpor or restlessness and worry, we may take up contemplation of death. In the case of sloth and torpor, with particular attention to the inhalation - the understanding, this could be my last breath. And in the case of restlessness and worry, particular emphasis on the exhalation – relaxing and letting go. And in the case of doubt, we investigate. Some doubtful matters cannot be investigated now; they need to be set aside for a later time. But if the doubt concerns our practice, how to proceed – rather than feeling helpless, we investigate. Hmmm, let me see. I don’t know how to proceed now. So let me try, let me try this way, see what happens. No, no, this didn’t work. So let me try that way, see what happens. Ahh, this works. Sooner or later, by investigating, we will find a solution. And having found the solution, from our own experience, we know in future how to proceed. And we learn to rely on ourselves, to become our own teacher.
And sooner or later a time comes when none of these hindrances manifests in the mind. They have been surpassed. And the mind has become greater, more concentrated, and more liberated than it was before. What a relief. What a relief to be, even for a moment, free from being overpowered by these hindrances. Oh, the mind is like crystal clear water - not colored by sensual desire, not boiling in anger, not overgrown by the algae of sloth and torpor, not tossed around by the winds of restlessness and worry, not muddied and darkened by doubt. What a relief. Like having settled a debt, having recovered from disease, having been released from prison and slavery, having safely completed a dangerous journey. And we rejoice. Rejoice in this condition of the mind of temporary freedom from the hindrances.

This experience of the mind that is temporarily free from the hindrances gives us the foretaste of the final goal. This is what the practice leads us to: a mind in which the defilements do not manifest at all. A mind forever free from the hindrances.

And inspired by this goal, and with that clarity of the mind, that clarity through the temporary absence of the hindrances, we proceed to our open practice. Opening up to experience at any of the six sense doors in whatever way it unfolds. Just aware of it. Rooted in whole body awareness, fortified with non-attachment, emptiness. And that liveliness to the present moment thorough having faced our mortality. That direct feeling of impermanence. That exquisite flavor of the mind when mindfulness is present. And that clarity, that crystal clarity of the mind. With all these qualities and understandings, insights of our cultivation of satipatthāna up to this point – we face this present moment in whatever way it unfolds. Just aware. Just mindful. Mindful of the flow of experience, of the process of experience, of the all-pervading characteristic of impermanence. Changing phenomena. Just a flow. Just a flux. And we are aware of it.

Planting the seeds of wisdom, growing the seeds of insight, step by step. Step by step we are progressing on the path to complete freedom of the mind from all defilements.

Keep practicing like this.