

Audio Lesson 1

by Bro James Ong (30 minutes)

Introduction

1.1 Difference between Mindfulness Meditation & other meditation

There are many types of meditation methods existing today and all can be broadly categorized into 2, namely samatha (or tranquility meditation) and Satipatthana meditation or known as mindfulness meditation.

The Buddha taught 40 types of samatha meditation. Some samatha meditations lead to mental absorption (or Jhana) acquiring psychic power. Some samatha meditations lead to access concentration and then gain insight-wisdom. While the other samatha meditations lead to only access concentration and gain neither mental absorption nor insights.

In the case of mindfulness meditation, one builds up mindfulness on the mind and body base, gaining deep understanding and insight into the nature of this mind and body that is anicca, dukkha & anatta (impermanent, unsatisfactory & egoless).

In meditation you learn the nature of the mind and body which you can't learn from books. You can read books and gain knowledge from books but you cannot experience the book. You have to meditate to experience the nature of this mind and body – things as they really are – not just concepts, beliefs or thinking. Only then it arrives at the insight knowledge or known as experiential knowledge – the knowledge that is gained through experience & not through reading, listening, thinking or analyzing but through direct experience.

1.2 Why Satipatthana or why 4 fold Establishment of Mindfulness?

The Mahasatipatthana Sutta, the Great Discourse on the 4 Fold Establishments of Mindfulness is considered one of the most important discourses of the Buddha. The Buddha has declared: *“Bhikkhus, this is the one and only way for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the eradication of bodily pain and mental grief, for the gaining of the Right Method, for the realization of Nibbana, that is to say, the 4 Fold Establishments of Mindfulness.”*

The Buddha covered all aspects that one could possibly encounter in practice – body, feelings, mind and reality objects which includes the 5 hindrances, 5 aggregates, 6 internal and 6 external sense bases, 7 enlightenment factors and 4 noble truths.

The Discourse ends with the Buddha's assurance that one who ardently practices the 4 fold Establishment of Mindfulness is certain to attain the ultimate goal of realization (the state of being free from all mental pollutants).

The Discourse has such great importance that the Buddha reiterated this Discourse at great length before his Parinibbana.

So in this and the following audio lessons, I will be explaining the Satipatthana or mindfulness practice by going directly and referring to this Discourse which the Buddha originally expounded to the people of Kurus. So here we return to the basic orthodox Discourse spoken by the Buddha as a guide. In this way you gain a complete understanding of what the Buddha really taught. You can also gauge whether you are on the right track or if there is any missing part in your practice that you might need to include.

Why must we meditate? In the opening of the Discourse, the Buddha said that there are 7 kinds of benefits that can be attained by this mindfulness meditation. I shall now go through the 7 benefits one by one.

1.3 Benefits of practicing the Satipatthana

1.3.1 The 1st benefit is purification of beings...

By nature, human mind is a mixture of wholesome and unwholesome minds. Wholesome minds lead to a lot of peace and happiness for oneself and others while the unwholesome or impure mind causes a lot of conflict, disturbances, sadness, unhappiness & dissatisfaction.

There are 10 kinds of impurities named in the scriptures and they are *rites & rituals, doubts, wrong views, sensual lust, aversion, attachment to material and immaterial existence, conceit, restlessness & ignorance*. It is because of these defilements that a whole mass of suffering is caused.

Purifying one's mind give rise to wholesome minds which, as you know give rise to happiness.

The Buddha declared the 1st benefit of the Satipatthana meditation as purification of beings which is referring to purification of the mind.

How does mindfulness meditation purify the mind?

Satipatthana meditation is able to purify beings through continuous mindfulness. Continuous mindfulness develops concentration which in turn suppresses the defilements. In this way mind becomes pure.

The defilements are the ones that agitate the mind, cause a lot of confusion, a lot of sadness, one person against another out of jealousy, sometimes brothers against sisters, brothers against brothers and sometimes even children against parents, fighting among each other between our loved ones and even one country against another. If everyone could learn to purify one's mind, there would be more peace and happiness at home, at work and countries in the world. There would be less suffering.

1.3.2 The 2nd and 3rd benefits are overcoming of sorrow (Soka) & lamentation...

What is sorrow?

Sorrow is the intense worry and alarm that one experiences:

- through loss of loved ones or relative, burglary, robbery, epidemics, fire, flood, storm, accidents or any other calamity
- through destruction or loss of property or precious possession by theft, fire, disaster etc...
- through declining in health or inflicted by sicknesses or diseases

Sorrowful is one who loses someone who is so dear and precious such as husband, wife, children, parent, brothers and sisters

Sorrowful is one who loses all his wealth in bad investments

Sorrowful is one who lives in poverty (such as those lacking in basic necessity, food, clothing & proper dwelling).

Long ago my uncle was very poor. He has some money in his pocket and – should I buy rice or should I buy salt or should I buy vege– he asked himself because he cannot afford to buy both. He only has enough to buy just one. That is a lot of sorrow – don't you think so – if you go to sleep with an empty stomach without food...

Sorrowful is one who is afflicted with incurable diseases such as cancer Nowadays there are many who are sick with cancer – you can imagine the amount of physical pain and sorrow they have to go through ...

Sorrowful is one who feels unwanted. It is a common phenomenon that today's parents are, often so busy that their children feel unloved and lonely. Sometimes in retaliation or in their struggle for attention, they associate with bad characters, start smoking, use drugs, and create other social ills. That is sorrowful.

Sorrowful is he who is dying and forced to be separated with everything that he treasures and loves.

We cannot imagine what sorrow really is unless we experience it personally. Probably we say “Ya I understand”...

What is lamentation?

Lamentation is the crying, wailing, screaming due to intense mental pain or due to loss of loved-ones or precious property.

How does mindfulness overcome sorrow and lamentation?

(a) *Firstly through the development of detachment mental state (in Pali, Alobha Cetasika)*

Mindfulness meditation can be said as a practice of noting mind and matter. You will learn how to practice mindfulness on mind and body (matter) as you progressively listen to our audio courses.

If you are practicing mindfulness correctly it would mean mind and body processes are mindfully noted as an object. As such, the meditator is not attached (and should not be getting attached) to any phenomenon that arises. In doing the practice correctly detachment mental state is developed.

For example, you may get carried away by thoughts for a while before returning to the rising and falling of the abdomen. Now if and when you start to note the mind when thinking has arisen then, thinking becomes an object. In this way, the mind is detached from those thoughts, hence, not getting carried away by thoughts.

Getting carried away by thoughts means you are not aware of the thoughts at all. For instance, you got so angry that you start scolding, hitting and then perhaps regret it later. There are children who ended up in hospital after being caned by parents because the parents got carried away by their thoughts - thinking it is for the good of their child. In other words they lost their mind, got carried away by their thoughts as they were not detached.

When the mind is not detached from objects, one cannot think properly, one becomes emotional, because one is absorbed in the thinking. If the thoughts are negative or if a person is in sorrow and that person keeps thinking about those sorrowful thoughts. He is said to be absorbed in his thoughts. Now this is unwholesome absorption which brings out more sadness, sorrow and lamentation. One cannot sleep or eat and becomes dysfunctional because the mind is full of sorrow.

When the mind is trained to note mind and body with detachment, disagreeable object that touches the senses would not be able to find a foothold in the mind therefore unable to build up mental disturbances and sorrow. As the mind

detaches from the object, suffering subside and disappear. In this way, mindfulness can overcome sorrow and lamentation. Therefore mindfulness is the escape.

(b) *Secondly sorrow and lamentation are overcome through strong and continuous mindfulness*

No two or more minds arise or co-exist at the same time. For example in eating, you see food on your plate and you taste it in your mouth. You think you see and taste at the same time. But this is not so actually. As the seeing mind arises, it ceases and the tasting mind arises and then ceases – they arise and ceases in alternate moments continuously and very quickly, so quick that you think it is all happening at the same time. But mind arises one at a time. Therefore if there is wholesome mind existing there cannot be unwholesome ones arising or co-existing at that time.

The way to ensure that there are wholesome minds is to have strong and continuous mindfulness. When mindfulness is present, mind becomes wholesome. When mindfulness is sustained strongly and continuously wholesome minds are thereby sustained.

If and when you become unhappy or lonely or sad, I suggest you just sit down quietly and start noting your rising and falling movement on your abdomen or feelings whichever is strong at that time. You will find that after some time you become peaceful and those mental pain disappear because wholesome minds have arisen and have become strong.

When wholesome mind is strong, unwholesome mind is weak. They are the opposites just as when there is light, there can be no darkness only absence of light is darkness. Similarly absence of wholesome mind is the unwholesome mind.

On the other hand, if we continue to think a lot of negative thoughts, unwholesome minds would persist. Consequently, a lot of dissatisfaction, ill-will, discontentment, anger, frustration, sadness lamentation pain grief despair are produced.

On the other hand, continuous mindfulness produce wholesome mind that overcomes sorrow and lamentation.

(c) *Thirdly sorrow and lamentation is overcome through calmness, tranquility and peacefulness*

Strong mindfulness builds up Samadhi which is calmness.

As a comparison, in the samatha meditation concentration is in the forefront while mindfulness is not cultivated. In mindfulness meditation mindfulness is in the forefront and when mindfulness is strong only then concentration is developed.

When practicing samatha meditation the mind gets absorbed into object. When concentration turns to wrong concentration it leads to hallucination and madness because such meditation perceives unreal objects as real. The danger is the mind would not be able to distinguish hallucination from reality object. Without mindfulness, one is not aware that the mind is experiencing hallucination – it thinks it is real.

In mindfulness meditation one notes body, feeling, mind and reality objects and does not lead to madness. It leads to seeing more of reality. The more and more you practice mindfulness the more and more you understand your body, feeling, mind and reality and the more you know how to deal with such objects and overcome the whole mass of suffering, the whole mass of mental torture.

In this way mindfulness meditation is not dangerous at all if you practice it properly, following instructions, guidance and giving feedback during Q&A sessions instead of going about experimenting with your own mind. It is not dangerous because mindfulness meditation develops the wisdom to see the things as they really are not imagined or hallucinating.

Through practice of mindfulness when calmness is achieved in various degrees, it overcomes and suppresses sorrow and lamentation.

1.3.3 The 4th and 5th benefits are eradication of bodily pain & mental grief...

There are 2 types of pain that can be experienced most of the time namely bodily and mental pain. Bodily pain includes cuts on the body, headaches, stomach aches. Cancer patients suffer strong internal pain. What is mental grief? Mental grief includes ill-will, displeasure, anxiety, misery, sadness, fear etc...

Mind and body are interdependent. Bodily pain affects the mind. Mind in turn, affects body. When there is bodily pain and if we are not mindful, the mind feels the pain. When mind feels the pain and if we are not mindful, the body feels the pain.

There are times when one is overworked he or she takes it out on the others. Why? It is because their body is stressed. When the body feels stressed, the mind is stressed too. Without mindfulness one tends to take it out on the near persons or loved ones. Hence, it is good to have time in between work to rest the body.

When the mind is affected by the body it would be like being shot twice by an arrow – once in the body and next in the mind. However if you are mindful, you would only

experience the body pain but there would be no pain in the mind. You may ask if that is possible. If you meditate you will know that it is indeed possible.

Different types of body pain can be experienced during meditation – hot burning pain, numbness pain, tension pain, twisting pain – like your legs or arms or neck or back all twisted or pulled apart, piercing pain and just unbearable pain.

If you were to watch the body pain mindfully the mind is not affected by the pain because the mind is detached – observing pain as merely an object as if it is not yours. In this way the body does not affect the mind. Many meditators can attest to that.

Only when you practice that, you face the pain head-on otherwise you would always run away from it because mind fears pain.

This is how in mindfulness meditation the mind is trained so strongly that even our body pains do not affect the mind.

It has also been documented that mindfulness meditation heals bodily pain, sickness and many types of diseases. When the mind is peaceful and free from agitation or negative emotion, the body immune system works better at repairing the body.

1.3.4 The 6th benefit is gaining the Right Path...

It is a norm in our society to perceive material gains and sensual pleasures as a way to happiness. Hence our efforts are directed at pursuits for such gains and pleasures. In our constant pursuits we encounter things that are undesirable, stressful, causing grief and dissatisfaction. We overlook the price we have to pay to acquire such things. We are not aware of the stress, effort, frustration & disappointment involved in the process of renewing the sense pleasures. As such how can sensual pursuits be true happiness? How can such pursuits be the right path when pleasures could not be sustained and needs to be constantly replenished? Example: It is like chasing our own shadow or like a dog chasing after its tail to get rid of its itch.

On the other hand, there are those who inflict pain upon themselves thinking that through pain one purifies oneself or redeems their sins, guilt and wrong doings. Such extreme of causing harm and hurt to the body weakens the mind and body. It saps mental energy and physical strength. A weak mind and weak body is unable to strive towards realization. Therefore it is not the right path.

The Buddha says the way of Satipatthana which is the middle way is the Right Path to the attainment of fruition that is, realisation. Right Path leads to Right Concentration and insight-wisdom. Wrong path leads to wrong concentration, confusion and suffering.

1.3.5 The 7th and the last benefit is the attainment of Nibbana meaning:

- the total elimination of greed, hatred and delusion which are the root cause of all suffering
- it also means the cessation of birth, old age, disease and dying (in other words, overcoming the pain of birth --- It is because of birth -- there is this suffering of old age, decay, diseases and dying)
- attainment of Nibbana also means the total cessation of lamentation, pain, grief & despair (that is to say -- overcoming the pain associated with the burning of mental defilements)
- and of course, it is the attainment of the highest supreme bliss which is the happiness beyond all happiness

Even though Nibbana sounds lofty and abstract, we could still experience a lot of benefits along the way. One would experience less suffering by letting go and not holding on to negative states of mind such as remorse, jealousy, dissatisfaction and mental hurts of the past.

By acquiring more wholesome minds, we gain more calmness, contentment, peacefulness, bliss and happiness, and especially in the attainment of insight-wisdom more intense joy and happiness can be experienced.

So today I have covered the 7 benefits declared by the Buddha in the beginning of the Mahasatipatthana Discourse which explained why it is important that we meditate.

Next week I will talk about mindfulness of the body (in Pali, Kayanupassana).