

Lesson 2

by Bro James Ong (30 minutes)

CONTEMPLATION OF BODY (PART 1) Mindfulness on Breath

2.1 Introduction

Welcome to our second lesson of the Satipatthana Meditation Discourse Series. Previously, I have covered the 7 benefits mentioned in the opening of the Discourse. Today I shall explain a little on the practice of mindfulness of the body – Kayanupassana.

The Buddha expounded a few contemplations within Kayanupassana starting with Mindfulness on the Breath. For today I will cover Mindfulness on the Breath leaving the rest for the following talk.

I will firstly go through the Discourse on this section then explain the practice in accordance with the Discourse.

2.2 Mindfulness on Breath

The Buddha continues “*O monks, how does a monk live practicing body contemplation on the body? Herein, a monk having gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to a vacant place, sits down in crossed legged posture keeping his body erect he establishes mindfulness before him.*”

As a householder or a layperson, a quiet place or alone in your room would be sufficient to get into the practice. Sitting down in a cross-legged posture with the body erect is a stable posture and one would be able to maintain the practice for a relatively long time, therefore suitable for the purpose.

But on the other hand, sitting relaxed with one leg placed on the floor may be suitable for many people who are not used to the cross-legged posture. This alternative posture is less painful, less stiff and slightly more comfortable. The beginners’ mind might find it difficult to calm down when encounter with too much pain, discomfort and difficulties. So a comfortable posture with the mind prepared for meditation would be a good start to the practice.

2.3 Stages of the practice

The Buddha continues “*Mindfully, he breathes in and out*”. This is the first phase of the practice.

In the beginning, the meditator should try to maintain the breathing in and out or, stay on his breath continuously for a certain time, to build up calmness or Samadhi.

At this point I would like to explain: Meditators who practise Anapanasati by just breathing in and out without going into the characteristics of the breath described by the Buddha in the second phase, one is then considered, a samatha or tranquility meditator.

When they get too deeply into calmness, Samatha Nimittas (that is, calmness that brings out tranquility-sign-objects) will appear. Example of such Nimittas includes: the breath becomes smooth like silk, warm, or hot or cold, or perceiving the Nimittas like cotton wool or sewing thread or appears like cloud etc... Arriving at this stage, the meditator could experience joyful mental states or lightness of body. There is a likelihood that the meditator might get attached to this experience and not proceed onto the second phase of the mindfulness development.

When Samadhi is sufficiently established, the meditator should direct his attention to the second phase of mindfulness development without arriving at the Nimittas.

Now coming to the second phase:

Then the Buddha continues “*while breathing in a long breath, he knows I am breathing in a long breath or while breathing out a long breath he knows I am breathing out a long breath. While breathing in a short breath he knows I am breathing in a short breath or while breathing out a short breath he knows I am breathing out a short breath*”. This is the second phase of the mindfulness practice.

Coming to the third phase: “*Alertly aware of the whole breath body I shall breathe in he trains himself. Alertly aware of the whole breath body I shall breathe out so he trains himself.*” The whole ‘breath body’ means, being aware of the beginning, the middle, and the end of the breath.

When the meditator can see clearly the beginning, middle, and end then, his concentration is said to have strongly developed. At this stage, the characteristic of impermanence on the breath body which is the air element is clearly experienced.

Then the Buddha continued with the fourth phase: “*Calming down the bodily formations I shall breathe in he trains himself. Calming down the bodily formations I shall breathe out so he trains himself.*”

Arriving at this juncture, the mind is ready to experience the characteristic of ‘mind and body processes’ deeply and in due course, gaining insight-wisdom.

2.4 Direction of the practice

The Buddha continues “*Thus he lives practicing, internally body contemplation in the body*”. In practice, this means, the meditator should look internally to his breath body and nothing else, not allowing the mind to stray or be distracted by other non-meditation object such as intentional thinking, dreaming, imagining or allowing the mind to wander outward to external objects such as sound, music or chatter.

The Buddha continues “*...or practising externally body contemplation in the body*”.

Now why should we should we practice external body contemplation in the body?

Firstly, this practice trains the mind to view the external body as the same as the internal body – just the body breath or air element with the purpose of cutting out concepts of a being.

Secondly, if a meditator is able to practice internal as well as external body contemplation, then, the meditator will have the perception of elements even when dealing with external objects.

When mindfulness is directed on the external body, the meditator is the able to maintain mental balance and harmony when perceiving loved ones and others. This is so because such persons are perceived as only body or external elements. Usual habitual response of anger and frustrations do not arise when expectations are unfulfilled.

Only when they are perceived as ‘*you and me*’ then concept arises as ‘*I am right and you are wrong*’. Ego arouses ill-will and hatred leading to confrontations and fight. If there is no concept of ‘*you and me*’, but just elements which is the ultimate conditioned reality, there would be no problem at all.

The Buddha continues “*or practicing both internally and externally body contemplation in the body*”. This is to say, mindfulness can be maintained and strengthen continuously without interruption.

Again the Buddha continues “*or he lives contemplating the arising of air element in the body or he contemplates the passing away of air element in the body or both arising and passing away of air element in the body or the mindfulness that there is only this body now clearly established in him just enough for knowledge into reality (insight) and just enough mindfulness and he remains detached*”.

Note that the Buddha reminds the meditator to contemplate the arising and passing away in every section of the Discourse. Why did the Buddha constantly emphasize the arising and passing away? – Because it is important that the meditator is on the right direction in this development of insight-wisdom or mindfulness meditation.

Firstly, without this direction the meditator could easily fall for the craving of psychic power which when practiced wrongly could lead to hallucination and a lot of misery. That is not the way to insight-wisdom.

Secondly, without direction, meditators unknowingly diverted into a concept of developing pure consciousness to merge and be one with another supreme consciousness. This again, magnify and strengthen the 'ego' which is the source of suffering. The bigger the ego – the more the pain.

Thirdly, even the meditator who is practicing on the rising and falling or other foundations without this direction could also get stuck in merely practicing calmness or tranquility meditation.

Fourthly, if meditators do not perceive the meditation object in arising and passing away, they may get caught up with their strong craving for attainment of Nibbana. They would mistaken the by-products such lights, rainbows, hearing pleasant sound, seeing the Buddha-rupa or devas or getting into deep sleep as signs of attainment of Nibbana-enlightenment.

The arising and passing away is first applied as a direction for the practice. Not only is it used as a signpost it is of utmost importance that this experience is attained as insight-wisdom before deeper insights-wisdom can be achieved.

It is necessary to emphasise the importance of observing the arising and passing away of meditation objects as this leads to the realization of the universal characteristics of impermanence – the reality of constant changing.

I have mentioned only a few reasons which I deem sufficient but there are more.

In closing of this section on the Mindfulness of Breath, the Buddha said: *“Monks, thus indeed, a monk lives practicing body-contemplation in the body”*.

2.5 Comparing (the air element) breath through the nostrils and (the air element) rising and falling movements on the abdomen

In this course I will be using the rising and falling movement of the abdomen in the Contemplation of the Body instead of using the breathing through the nostrils (Anapanasati). I shall give a few reasons why I prefer the rising and falling of the abdomen.

Firstly to note: the breathing through the nostrils is air element, so is the rising and falling of the abdomen.

Although both are air element, breath through the nostrils is very subtle. As the area in the nostril is small, it is hard to detect the sensation of that air in-and-out.

In contrast, the area of the abdominal movement is larger and grosser, therefore the air element here is easily detectable especially, when the meditator puts one hand lightly on the abdomen to feel the rising and falling movements. As such, mindfulness on the body air-element is more easily built up this way, compared to using the breath or air element through the nostrils.

Secondly, through feedbacks, those who practise Anapanasati, frequently encounter side effects such as headaches, giddiness, forehead tension, head pain, dizziness, vomiting sensation etc... This is because the object is subtle and the meditators find it hard to detect the air going through the nostrils, so greater concentration and effort is applied.

Such complications do not occur in those who use rising and falling movements of the abdomen as the area is larger and movements are noticeable.

Thirdly, when the meditator gets too deeply into Anapanasati the meditators could develop Samatha-Nimittas, thereby getting into tranquility meditation. At this juncture, it becomes difficult for them to establish mindfulness on the other bases such as feelings, mind and dhamma. The mind tends to hold onto the Nimitta leading towards mental absorption, which is not the goal of mindfulness practice, in this Discourse.

For the above reasons, I would base Kayanupassana – Contemplation of the Body on the rising and falling of the abdomen.

2.6 How to practise establishing mindfulness on the rising and falling movements on the abdomen?

The approach is exactly the same as described in the Mindfulness on Breath – Anapanasati in the Discourse.

In the first phase, we establish mindfulness on the abdomen to gain Samadhi or calmness by staying on the rising and falling movements continuously for a certain time.

Secondly, when the Samadhi is established the meditator would be able to perceive clearly the characteristics of the air element on the abdomen – whether it is long or short.

Thirdly, when the mindfulness is further developed, concentration becomes strong and the meditator would be able to perceive the beginning, middle and end of the rising of the abdomen. Same goes with the falling of the abdomen.

In the fourth phase, the mind becomes peaceful, clear and free from hindrances. At this point he begins to experience the characteristic of the mind and body processes deeply, gaining insight-wisdom. The rest is as mentioned above.

We do not object or stop those meditators who are familiar and have long practices using Anapanasati. They are of course free to continue to use Anapanasati as the base bearing in mind the cautions mentioned above. For beginners who have yet practice Anapanasati it would be easier for them to meditate using rising and falling of the abdomen.

2.7 How do you begin the practice?

Before we do some practice, I will explain how the Buddha told the monks the way to prepare for practice in the opening of the Discourse. He said “*And monks here a monk lives contemplating body contemplation in the body ardent clearly comprehending and mindful having outgrown covetousness and grief about the world*”.

Now, this preparation also applies to the practice of mindfulness on all other bases, which would be covered in our course later on.

Ardent – means one should really put the mind to the meditation practice. In other words, one should be serious. One should bring out the energy and not be lazy nor be slacking, nor be half heartedly. One should put enough effort and be enthused and earnest in the practice.

Clearly comprehending and mindful – means, clearly seeing and knowing the object of meditation – that is to say: to look and observe deeply into the object and to know its characteristics whether it is long or short or if it is smooth or choppy or the motion is hard or soft etc...

Having outgrown covetousness – means detach or set aside the greediness of whatever that does not belong to us or the various attachments in the mind.

Anguish – means grief, pain, sadness, disappointment including remorse, fear, hopelessness and such.

About the world means worldly things.

2.8 Instructions for the practice

I will stop here for today and let us do a 15 minutes practice. Please try not to move around.

Look downward and then gently close your eyes. Don't look straight because if you do that you will tend to see colours or lights so, look downwards.

Firstly you prepare your mind in this way: mentally put aside all the busy-ness, ambitions, business affairs, various concerns, worries, frustrations, sadness, anger, ill-will etc... lay them aside for this duration so that you can concentrate and calm down.

Then go through the relaxation process: Direct your attention to your forehead area, consciously just relax, go to your eyes area, then mouth area and put a gentle smile on your lips so that you feel relax on your face and jaws, then go towards the shoulder areas, arms and fingers, legs and your toes. Do a couple of times if necessary.

Once you are relaxed lightly put your left or right hand on your stomach, take a deep breath and watch the rising of the abdomen, then stop. Then breathe out and stop. Do it again a couple of times or until you can feel the rising and falling movements of the abdomen.

When you can feel it, put your mind there and breathe normally. Just observe the air element of rising and falling.

If your mind is thinking and it is not strong, just ignore your mind. Ignore the thinking unless it is strong, only then you watch your mind and note “*thinking thinking thinking*”. When thinking stops or refused to stop after 10 times of noting, return your attention to the rising and falling movements in the abdomen. Keep your mind steady, peaceful and calm and stay on the meditation object.

When the mind gains some concentration only then you may direct your mind to watch to that stronger object which pulls the mind away from the rising and falling such as the agitated mind or thinking or pain. At this point, whenever a stronger object arises, take it as an object and observe it.

If you are agitated, watch that agitated mind. Do not do what your mind says just observe what the mind say. If the mind say move the leg – don’t move, just watch that mind. When it goes away, go back to the meditation object. When pain arises, observe that pain – see the intensity of the arising and fading away of that pain.

Just observe the internal phenomena unless there are stronger external object that interrupts like hearing a sudden loud sound then you note “*hearing hearing hearing*” then return to the internal object like rising and falling movements. Whatever strong external objects that attract the mind note it, and then return to your internal base.

Now, time’s up.

Meditation cultivates strong wholesome mind that generates merits. We shall now share our merits, repeat after me: *With this mindfulness meditation, having acquired great merits, I share this merit with my house protecting devas, and devas everywhere. I share these merits with my dear departed relatives. I share these merits with all beings seen and unseen, near and far, big and small, strong and weak. May all beings everywhere be well and happy sharing these merits! Sadhu Sadhu Sadhu!*