

Lesson 9
by Bro James Ong (30 minutes)

CONTEMPLATION OF MIND – Part 4
Final Lesson of Satipatthana Meditation Discourse for Beginners

9.1 Introduction

This is the 9th lesson of Satipatthana Meditation Discourse and also the closing talk on the mind-contemplation. After classifying the various minds, the Buddha continued and gave instructions on how mind-contemplation is to be practised.

9.2 Internal mind-contemplation

The Buddha says: *“Thus he lives practising internally mind-contemplation in the mind...”*.

How does he practise internally mind-contemplation, or in other words, practice establishing mindfulness on mind, internally?

Here is an example of how mindfulness on the mind can be practised with regard to an arisen greedy mind.

When a greedy mind arises, the meditator ought to be mindful of that greedy mind. He notes it as just another object of mindfulness and detaches from it. By doing so, the greedy mind does not find footing in one’s mind.

Greediness causes trouble and disturbances as it agitates the mind. Being unaware of its presence, it takes hold of the mind and magnifies it. Clinging is the intensified mental state of greediness which could result in unskilled actions like killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct or taking of drugs to divert from mental sufferings.

However, a meditator with mindfulness and detachment can let go of the thought that may cause harmful consequences. In doing so, the greedy mind ceases hence, he lets go of the thoughts that are causing pain and suffering.

Awareness of the mind prevents hasty decisions or actions. One who practises mindfulness on the mind does not become a slave, victim or a puppet of the mind controlled by its whims and fancy.

Here is an illustration of how greedy thoughts are interjected. If there is a thought that says: *“Suppose if I were to steal...”*

(and the meditator becomes aware of the greedy mind and the potential consequences, then so another thought follows...)

“but what if I am caught? That would be shameful and blamed by the wise – I can even be punished or cast into prison.”

Mindfulness intervenes such unwholesome thoughts and allows negative mental states to become positive. Hence, a meditator needs to be aware of strong desires that lead to clinging. If not, it obstructs and prevents the growth of concentration, calmness and wisdom.

There are many kinds of greedy minds – some yearn for self gratification which causes no harm to others, like the desire for tasty food, listening to nice music, enjoying bodily comfort like air conditioning, etc. If one can afford it with money rightly earned and if it is inoffensive and legal, one can enjoy such comfort and happiness through the senses. That is one’s privilege.

Although relatively less harmful, one must still be reminded that these are still unwholesome mental states. Enjoyment in excess or causes nuisance, hurt or harm to oneself or others mentally or physically should be refrained.

Here is another illustration of how mindfulness on the mind can be practised with regard to an arisen angry mind.

When an angry mind arises, it takes hold of the mind and gains momentum in the absence of awareness. It gets out of control, resulting in unkind speech, shouting, screaming and even violence. It is in the nature of an angry mind to harm and hurt another just like a forest fire that burns everything in its path.

On the other hand, a meditator who is mindful is able to detach from it and abandon such harmful thoughts. Mindfulness brings out wholesome mind to intervene and replace these unbeneficial mental states. One without mindfulness may not gain such benefits.

This is how mindfulness on the mind can be practised internally.

9.3 External mind-contemplation

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

Why must we also practise externally as instructed by the Buddha? --Because in daily life we will not be able to maintain continuous mindfulness all the time internally as we are also constantly coming in contact with strong external objects. So in order to maintain continuous mindfulness, we need to be mindful externally as well.

How does one practise establishing mindfulness on the mind externally?

One of the ways of being aware of external mind is through noting the expression of speech and bodily actions as these are the manifestations of the mind. Once the meditator becomes aware of such happenings, he then remains detached, noting and knowing it as just external minds.

Here is an example of how practising external mind-contemplation becomes helpful and beneficial.

In family gatherings the exchanging of views often gives rise to arguments and quarrels. If one does not practise mindfulness externally one could easily be sucked into the discussions, arguments or quarrels. Thereby ill-will arises and the mind becomes agitated and upset. This creates tension, dissatisfaction and hatred that may last for some time. Therefore, it is essential to be mindful externally only then one can remain detached noting the external mind as merely another object for establishing mindfulness. One could then clearly comprehend the apparent reality of the changing minds – the various mental states that arise and disappear. So one of many benefits that can be derived from this external contemplation is one can remain calm and peaceful among those who are hostile.

Another benefit of external mind-contemplation: - Meditators who go for long retreats experience calmness and peacefulness while meditating in the centre. But upon returning to their usual surroundings and conditions, many meditators fall back to their usual mental habit and become easily affected by external objects. This is so because they fail to apply mindfulness externally or do not know how to handle or cope with external objects. They become bewildered and confused. This is why peace and calmness acquired through months of intensive striving could easily vanish within just a week or 2 upon returning to their usual householder life.

9.4 Internal and external mind-contemplation in the mind

The Buddha continues further, he says: “...or practising internally and externally mind-contemplation in the mind...”

Through the practice of establishing mindfulness on mind internally and externally, one becomes aware of the positive aspects and also the imperfections of the internal mind. He also becomes aware that the external mind too has goodness and imperfections – like looking into the mirror, he see his own reflection.

One should be aware that just as anger arise and disappear internally due to conditions so may external anger arise and disappear due to conditions, likewise, greediness and ignorance. On the positive side, generosity, kindness, compassion and wholesomeness too can arise internally and externally.

As a meditator realises the internal mind is imperfect and needs further cultivation so too does the external mind. There was an occasion where one man was silently observing

another man. With the observation, a thought arose “*how bad this brother is*” then upon reflection, another thought arose in him “*how like me my brother is*”. Therefore one should not pass judgment on another without first reflecting on oneself – it is like pot calling kettle black.

He becomes less judgmental, discriminates or “quick to condemn”. He becomes more appreciative of wholesomeness internally and externally as he realises that it is difficult to cultivate wholesome minds because it requires great effort and patience.

9.5 Contemplation the arising phenomena in the mind

The Buddha continues “... *or he lives contemplating the arising phenomena in the mind...*”.

How does a meditator practise establishing mindfulness on the arising of mind?

Here, a meditator directs his attention to the mind to observe the arising of thoughts especially the strong ones. Normally, a meditator who does not have strong mindfulness is unable to perceive the actual moment of its arising but they would be able to see the thoughts that have arisen or are growing in the mind.

As the meditator becomes constantly aware and observant of thoughts, he begins to recognise the various types of mind arising or some of the 16 types of mind mentioned by the Buddha in the Discourse. If he continues with his practice of establishing mindfulness on the mind, the thoughts become clearer. When mindfulness becomes strong, the meditator will be able to note the actual moment of its arising.

Why is it beneficial to identify different types of mind?

If one is able to identify the various types of mind, one is also able to know the particular and distinctive behaviour of each type of mind. This is especially important when the meditator proceeds onto Dhammanupassana in managing the mind.

9.6 Contemplation the passing away phenomena in the mind

The Buddha continues “...*or he lives contemplating the passing away of phenomena in the mind...*”

By watching the mind constantly passing, the meditator would then notice that all wholesome or unwholesome minds, whenever it arises, it will also cease. One should understand that whenever there is arising, there will be passing as this is one of the universal characteristics of all that is conditioned...

If a meditator is unable to note the mind or thoughts at the point when it arises, he can note the passing away of such thoughts. The meditator should not be dragged into so much thinking otherwise he will not be able to notice the passing away of different kinds

of thoughts. Example: like a person sitting at the riverbank watching the flow of the water without jumping into the river.

By doing this, the meditator is also allowing the unwholesome mind to constantly cease since he is not anchoring on it and making it strong. He prompts wholesome minds to arise. Wholesome minds gradually increase and unwholesome minds decrease. The mind becomes balanced, peaceful, joyful and contented as wholesome mind does not agitate or disturb but brings happiness. Happiness is conducive to the development of concentration whereas an unhappy mind hinders calmness or concentration.

9.7 Contemplation the arising and passing away phenomena in the mind

The Buddha also continues “... *he lives contemplating the arising and passing away of phenomena in the mind...*”

This instruction deals with the strong foundation of insight. By constantly being mindful of the arising and passing away of the mind, the meditator becomes detached and does not actively participate in thinking. As such the thinking or the talking minds slowly subside or lessen. Consequently, the meditator can experience various degrees of calmness.

Also, as the movement of the thoughts slows down, the arising and passing away of each thought will be clearly comprehended. For example, one cannot see the blades of the fan when it is turning at full speed – one sees only the movement or colour. But, if the speed is lowered, the blades can be seen.

In the same way when the mind slows down by way of calmness, one could then note clearly, each mind that arises and passes away. Now, if a meditator could maintain the perception of such phenomena for a length of time then insight-knowledge (or wisdom) is established.

Perceiving arising and passing away is important in establishing insight-wisdom. It is a landmark or signpost of the Right Path or right direction towards Path and Fruition (Magga and Phala).

9.8 There is only this, the mind...

The Buddha continues further “... *or mindfulness that ‘There is only this, the mind’ is now clearly established in him...*”

Here, it means the meditator should not be attached to the mind as a permanent entity, ego or personality. He should observe that mind as only mind which changes all the time. He would understand that mind is merely due to conditioning and there is no one who controls the mind.

Therefore a meditator should practise watching mind as just, mind internally or externally. This is how covetousness and grief can be overcome. He would experience mental balance, peacefulness, calmness and increased happiness in this very life.

9.9 Closing statement

Finally, in the closing statement of this section, the Buddha says “...*just enough for knowledge into reality (insight), and just enough for mindfulness, and he remains completely detached, clinging to nothing in the world. Monks, thus indeed, a monk lives practising mind-contemplation in the mind.*”

So with the knowledge of perceiving the arising and passing away of phenomena, a meditator would have sufficient knowledge into reality and he would not deviate from the Right Path or right practices. The accomplishment of this experience builds a strong insight-foundation and the meditator acquires confidence and faith in the Path cultivating mindfulness and detachment according to the 4 Foundations of Mindfulness taught by the Buddha.

Now, I wish to answer a few questions.

9.10 Q & A

Question 1: Is the mind more difficult than the other objects to practise? Must one be of a good meditator before he can note the mind?

Answer: Yes and no.

Yes – because the mind is immaterial, more subtle than the body and it is swift. If one has not developed sufficient mindfulness, he finds it more difficult to watch the mind than the rising and falling of the abdomen which is the air element.

No – because there are times when the mind or thoughts have become strong such as anger, frustration, sadness, despair, fear or excitement. As such they become a grosser object compared to rising and falling. Now in these instances, it is easier to take mind as the object compared to the body.

Question 2: Is it easier to attain by way of mindfulness on the mind?

Answer:

Some meditators prefer to take mind as the primary object as they find it more interesting compared to rising and falling which they find dull and boring.

Generally, most meditators would find it very difficult to take mind as the primary object. The mind as an object is very blurry to them. Therefore they would not be able to build up continuous mindfulness for insight to arise.

Question 3: In watching the body one may get attached to the tranquillity aspect of watching the air element, so, is it better to watch the mind instead?

Answer:

A meditator who practises mindfulness on the mind too, can get attached to Samadhi/tranquillity as they watch the mind. When the thoughts gradually subside they feel a sense of calmness, tranquillity and pleasant sensations. They become attached to this kind of mental state and can also dwell in Samadhi for a long time. That is when the investigating factor of the mind is weak or absent.

Question 4: I have experienced this blankness and emptiness of mind? How could I relate this to any of the 16 types of mind mentioned by the Buddha?

Answer:

Yes, it can be related to deluded mind which cannot perceive mind, feelings or body objects – it is shrouded in darkness as experienced by other meditators too.

Question 5: Are we watching the mind to stop the thinking?

Answer:

The purpose of meditation is not to stop thinking. The slowing down of thinking is the result of concentration being developed. Calmness is not the end itself but a stepping stone for insight to arise.

Question 6: Do we meditate to control the mind?

Answer:

The mind cannot be ordered about to do this or that. But the mind can be directed by way of developing mindfulness to acquire right concentration for insight.

Question 7: Is it so difficult to practise mindfulness on the mind compared to other bases (*as we need to follow the 8-points of instructions mentioned in the Discourse*)?

Answer:

In the earlier bases too (body and feelings), the 8 points of instructions to be practised are also given by Buddha.

With this we have finished the last lesson of Satipatthana Meditation Discourse for Beginners. We will further continue with the Intermediate Course which covers the 4th Foundation of Mindfulness that is: Dhammanupassana, meaning Mindfulness of the Dhamma.