Talks on the Anapanasati Sutta

By Ajahn Pasanno

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This is a lightly edited transcript of talks on the Anapanasati Sutta, given by Ajahn Pasanno, in January of 2005.

These can be heard online, on both youtube and on Abhayagiri’s website, with the title *19 Talks From the Winter Retreat, 2005.*

Talk 1 - Turning to the Formal Practice

So this is our opening day of the retreat, and it’s good to just be turning attention to the formal practice of meditation. It inevitably ends up that our practice, our formal practice, waxes and wanes, and just having this time in the Winter to really put our attention on the formal practice, it’s really essential, important, necessary for our spiritual well-being and the well-being of the community, just putting our efforts into practice.

It was last night, chatting with Lee on the way up, talking about the comparisons between music and practice, and Lee brought up a quote of Arthur Rubenstein who said that, in terms of practice and his musicians, “If somebody didn’t practice for a day, then he would notice it. If they didn’t practice for two days, then the musicians noticed it; and if he didn’t practice for three days, then everybody noticed it.”

I think it’s very similar in terms of meditation, and the cultivation of the skills of looking after our mind, and looking after the subtleties of the way our moods and our impressions, and our feelings, our thoughts, where they go to and what they result in.

So in order to establish that basis of awareness and attention, so that we can start tuning into, well, not necessarily the more subtle, but to recognize more clearly the gross aspects of what are minds tend to do, is really essential. So that cultivation of mindfulness, and using a particular meditation technique, that starts to give us a handle on how we sustain attention.

So, using mindfulness of breathing, of course is my schtick; that’s where I tend to focus my own practice and I speak from that experience and use that as a framework for talking about practice. It can be extrapolated to different methods and techniques, but that is certainly my own foundation, one that I feel confident in.

This is using the mindfulness of breathing, as I was mentioning on Saturday night, really paying attention to posture to begin with; getting a good feel for the body as it’s sitting;

And to adjust your posture, adjust your cushions that you can be using that help to support your back.

Sit a bit forward. If you are sitting on a cushion, sit a bit forward on the cushion so that your weight is on your sit bones, not sitting on your tailbone;

There’s a difference because sometimes if you sit back a bit, then the weight is more on the tailbone as opposed to sitting a bit forward. Sitting a bit forward, then the weight is on the hips, and that gives it a bit better balance and poise for the back.

If you sit back a bit too much, then the bottom of your spine sort of collapses. What that does is it then rolls your shoulders forward, and the middle of your back starts to hurt, to ache.

By sitting a little bit forward, with your pelvis is tilted slightly forward, then you are able to sort of rise up out of the pelvis. The pelvic cradle and your spine rises up from that, and there’s a very nice balance where your spine is nice and straight - although it’s not straight, it just feels straight, because your spine is never going to be straight; what you’re doing is supporting the natural curvature of the spine where it has certain curves, and then you get a nice balance in the spine where you’re sitting up straight, not holding yourself with your back muscles.

That’s something that sometimes people try to do, bring themselves up into a straight posture by using their back muscles or their shoulder muscles, and that gets very tiring.

Again, it’s getting a balance in posture and then, the actual muscles that are used are the abdominal muscles that support the posture.

And then, keeping the head nice and straight, tilted a little bit forward, again that follows the natural curvature of the spine, it gives a nice balance.

And then you can let the breath start to be very natural, or smooth, without straining or pushing or controlling the breath; **(1)**

Just to allow the breath to enter the body, and leave the body, in a very relaxed and natural way.

In terms of mindfulness of breathing, it’s not an exercise in breath control. It’s an exercise in mindfulness and attentiveness to what the breath is doing **(2)**

So, whether it’s a short in-breath, to know that it’s a short in-breath. If it’s a short out breath, to know that it’s a short out breath. If it’s a long in-breath, to know that it’s a long in- breath. If it’s a long out-breath, to know that it’s a long out-breath.

Just *to be attentive* *to that much*, to recognize and use that as the basis of attention.

Whether it’s short or long, in the end, doesn’t really matter at all, but it’s the awareness and attentiveness to the breath which is the most important thing.

And generally, what will happen as one relaxes, as the mind settles, as the body becomes tranquil, then the general tendency is that there will be longer breaths. It’s just sort of a natural rhythm; the body is relaxed, it’s settled.

The breath comes in, and goes out, usually it’s longer, and again relaxed. There’s no rushing and there’s no need to rush, but the main thing is just that sense of *knowing clearly,* which is the verb that is used in the Buddha’s discourse, *pajanati,* for knowing the short breath, the long breath, whether it’s coming in, going out, *to know clearly*, to recognize *clearly* what the breath is doing.

In order to recognize clearly, it’s very helpful to really be attentive to the beginning of the breath, to really take a point as the breath first comes in, really, at the tip of the nose, use that as an entry point, and to *know clearly* the sensation of the breath.

*Is it cool?*

*Is it warm?*

*Does it feel restricted?*

*Is it flowing freely?*

*Does it itch?*

Whatever the sensation is, to really be attentive to that sensation, and really start to hone attention on the different subtleties of where you are experiencing the breath.

There’s the sensation at the tip of the nose as one is bringing the breath in, breathing in, as it comes into the nasal cavity, as it comes out, passing back into the throat, going down into the body- I mean, there’s sensation all the way along there… start to pay attention to that.

Again, we’ve got three months of opportunity to explore the breath, so don’t be afraid of looking at subtleties, and the nuances of how one experiences the breath.

Oftentimes, it happens that people tend to be trying to ‘get the nimita’ of the breath, and forget to really *attend* to the breath, *attend* to the breathing, *attend* to the sensation.

Again, it’s a matter of being more interested in exploring the breath, than trying to gain something from the breath, trying to get something out of the meditation.

There’s this frantic quality that comes into the mind when we are trying to make the meditation be a particular way, trying to get the results, trying to fulfill the ideal of what we think we should be doing - that sense of trying to ‘get the nimita’, because that’s what we’ve heard we should be doing. ‘There should that some sort of nimita arising’. We don’t even know what a nimita means, but ‘I am going to get it anyway’.

This is very much a part of our meditation, to start recognizing the underlying assumptions that come with just trying to perform a simple act, like being attentive to the breath, attentive to breathing in and breathing out.

It’s such a simple and ubiquitous act, that we have to be doing all the time, and it’s so easy to start overlaying it with our desires, our projections, our assumptions, our views and opinions, without even questioning that. We just sort of slip right into that.

A part of taking interest in the breath, is also starting to recognize a bit more clearly, what it is that hampers that clear knowledge of the in-breath and the out-breath.

We start to look and investigate that, because then we start to get insights into those particular tendencies that we have.

And we can do this without getting bogged down in that either, just sort of taking note, “well that’s interesting”, but the main focus, of course, is just coming back to the breath; paying attention to the sensation of the breath as it comes into the body, and then the out-breath as it leaves the body.

Particularly when we first start sitting, it’s helpful to really establish the mindfulness of the breath, the whole rhythm of the breath, the whole sensation of the breath;

As the breath comes in, *to feel it* coming in from the tip of the nose, back of the throat, down into the chest, down to the abdomen, as the abdomen rises, and then, as the abdomen falls, to be attentive to the sensation, really connecting the breath with the body, connecting the body and the breath together. That gives the anchor for the breath, and for the meditation.

If one feels more comfortable bringing attention down into the abdomen, at the end, after you’ve established that initial connection with the body and the breath, if one feels more comfortable to bring attention to the abdomen and use the abdomen as the main focal point, that is one point that is commonly used.

Probably the two main points are the tip of the nose and the abdomen.

The abdomen has advantages and disadvantages, as in everything, everything has an advantage and disadvantage.

The abdomen has the advantage of movement there, physical movement, so sometimes it can be a lot more clear, not quite as subtle a sensation. So it’s a bit more clear, and because of the physical movement of the abdomen rising and falling, the movement in and out, there’s a lot more to pay attention to, and therefore it gives you a clear object to be attending to.

That’s very helpful because the mind wanders. It needs to be engaged, and this is really important in terms of meditation, that one needs to be engaging attention, engaging the mind, in order to be able to sustain attention. If you’re not engaging awareness, engaging attention, taking an interest, assessing what are the results of that attention, then the mind is going to start going dull very quickly.

So often, what happens in meditation, people tend to sit down, place attention on the breath, and then wait for the results to come. They wait for the mind to become peaceful, and then what usually happens is the mind goes dull and gets sleepy and drowsy, or one starts daydreaming and proliferating.

So there’s this necessity to engage attention. The mind needs work to do - and this is *Kammathana,* the basis of action, the basis of work.

The work of the mind is its refinement.

The work of the meditator is that clarifying of awareness, and one needs to be engaged in that, engaging attention.

There’s different ways that one needs to experiment with. The actual object, the place where you pay attention, is already an aspect of what you need to be considering.

The abdomen, the sensation of the breath, the sensation of the abdomen rising and falling - there’s movement there. There’s a physical sensation engaging attention, and that’s very helpful.

I found it very helpful for a long time because it was far enough away from my thinking and proliferating, restless mind that was very helpful for me to be able to settle. If I tried to pay attention at the tip of the nose, I would just usually get caught up in my own thinking and proliferating, and that wasn’t useful for me.

So the actual coming down into the center of the body, anchoring the breath, not in an extremity, but really coming down into almost the core of ones being, I found that very grounding.

In the Chinese conception of the body, the abdomen is the focal, center point for energy. When people do Chi Gong, or Kung Fu, or Tai Chi, that’s where you move from, the abdomen. That’s where your center of energy or center of balance is.

So, when you’re using the mindfulness of breathing coming to the abdomen, then there’s a very strong centering and very energetic quality that is there. That’s an important aspect to be considering, when using the breath at that point. Experiment and see if that is useful, and recognize what its benefits are.

Using the tip of the nose as the point of attention, again, it has advantages and disadvantages. I mentioned the disadvantage that I experienced. Also as I’ve continued meditating over the years, I would say that a lot of the restlessness has settled internally for me, so that I end up finding the tip of the nose useful because of the subtlety of it, and it’s also at one point. It’s not moving in the same way as with the physical movement with the abdomen.

So that there’s a point of attention. To keep really honing that one pointedness, there’s an advantage to that as well. A lot of it is really just attending to it.

*What do I need in order help the meditation go smoothly?*

Certainly, what we all need is mindfulness - really bringing those qualities of mindfulness and awareness, attending to the breath.

When we use the word “mindfulness”, it’s that sense of being present for the breath, really receiving the breath, really being present, really receiving the breath with an open, clear quality within the mind.

To actually check,

*What does it mean to be mindful? -*

We talk about mindfulness of breathing, and so we leap into the breathing, but what about the mindfulness part?

*Are we actually being mindful?*

*What is mindfulness?*

*What does it mean to be mindful?*

*How do I sustain mindfulness?*

One has to question that.

Because again, if you just lock into the breath with say, “ok, now is my meditation time,” and lock into the breath without really establishing mindfulness, then all you do is drift off, wander, proliferate, get dull, and that defeats the purpose of it. So we need that effort, bringing up a quality of mindfulness.

*How do I be alert?*

*How do I create awareness?*

One of the qualities, the basic quality of mindfulness, is that you’re actually awake. If you’re not even awake, where’s the mindfulness? How does one even get out to first base in the meditation if it doesn’t start with wakefulness?

So creating that wakefulness, alertness is needed.

And if that means opening the eyes, then that’s fine. That’s not a problem. It’s better to sit with the eyes open, and be awake, than sort of drifting and spending the time in dullness.

Referring back to the posture, getting the posture straightened up; putting attention on energizing the body; using the body to energize the mind.

This is where the mind and body are functioning together.

Sitting up straight,

*How does one place the hands?*

*Where is the head?*

*How’s it feeling?*

*Where are the shoulders?*

To go through the body, and establish a posture that is energetic, that is upright - you are putting forth effort, and that’s really an important part of the meditation, creating that foundation for mindfulness to sustain itself.

Effort is a necessary part of that - bringing attention to posture; straightening the posture without making it stiff and rigid, but energizing. When I say energizing, there’s a relaxing quality there as well.

The actual energy of meditation is something that is very soothing, is very relaxing, and in that way it’s able to be sustained when it is relaxing.

If you relate to energy as something that is just ramping up something as if you’re on some sort of amphetamine high, that’s rather different.

There’s this energy that has a meditative quality to it, where there’s awareness, alertness, but also there’s a nice balance, and evenness. There’s a sense of relaxation that’s in there as well.

Again, that’s where the physical posture is very helpful to use, almost as a weather vane, to get a sense of,

*Is there balance there?*

*Is it alert?*

*Is it bright?*

*Am I present?*

*Am I mindful?*

So bring that attention back to the posture, to the breathing, with mindfulness.

That is the question that should be reverberating through the mind, in terms of,

*Is this meditation?*

*Is this mindfulness?*

*Is this mindfulness of breathing?*

*What am I doing?*

- because if the question isn’t there, then oftentimes the time passes, and the bell rings, and one does something else. So that sense of really questioning should be there.

In Thailand, one of the meditation techniques that is very, very common, is the use of the mantra *Buddho*, and it’s used in many different ways, particularly in conjunction with the breath - *Bud* on the in-breath, *dho* on the out- breath, but also one of the things that’s always emphasized is the meaning of Buddho.

Buddho means *the one who knows*.

And then the practice is that questioning of -

*Well, who is the one who knows?*

*What am I knowing?*

*What is this quality of the one who knows?*

*What* is *Buddho?*

Creating *a question* in the mind that is helping to bring up this alertness is necessary because without that questioning, without that querying, without the investigation, then mindfulness and meditation turn into something very flat.

There needs to be this questioning, investigation.

*What’s mindfulness for?*

*What am I looking at my nose for?*

*What’s its purpose?*

*What use is it?*

And through that then, there is this sense of, again, returning to the quality of mindfulness, of awareness.

*How to bring it up?*

*How to maintain it?,*

- and using the breath as that vehicle.

As the breath comes in, sustaining attention through the beginning of the breath, the middle of the breath, the end of the breath…

As the breath goes out, to be very attentive to the sensation, as the breath begins, the middle of the out-breath, the ending of the out-breath, to be very attentive to that, to recognize it, to see it clearly…

So that is using and cultivating this mindfulness of breathing.

As we are beginning the retreat, we’re not just doing sitting meditation, but also walking meditation. After we break, then we’ll go and do a period of walking meditation, and the exact same instructions can be applied to the walking meditation as well.

We are taking a very ordinary activity, and turning it into a meditation by the fact of creating awareness around what we’re doing.

We take a path of about 20 to 25 or 30 paces and bring up our attention to the physical act of walking. Again, relaxing the body so that there’s a nice posture, one is upright, and then walking a bit slower than normal is generally the way to do it.

Just slowing things down a bit is helpful to create awareness, and then, be attentive to the sensation of your foot as you raise your right foot, moving your right foot, bringing your attention down into the movement of the foot and then setting your right foot down…lifting your left foot, moving your left foot, setting your left foot down…

In this case, that sense of bringing attention into the extremity, the sensation of the feet is very helpful, one, because the sensation is strongest in walking - that’s where your contact point is, so that bringing attention down into the feet, you’ve got a clear sensation to attend to.

Walking slowly, following the rhythm of the walking until you get to the end of the walking meditation path;

Try to pick a path that is fairly flat and even, so that you are not having to be dodging obstacles and tripping on things. It’s distracting in that way.

So, finding a nice level spot where your walking meditation is quite easy to walk back and forth, then you can just concentrate on the physical sensation of walking, rather than having to be worrying about whether you are going to trip on something, or if it’s uneven and it’s making your body sway back and forth, or whatever.

So just be attentive to that simple, physical act of walking.

If the mind starts proliferating or wandering off, sometimes it’s helpful just to stop in the middle of the walking path until you clear the mind. Settle the mind, then come back to the physical sensation of walking, and resume the walking again.

Certainly at the end of the path, then stop either before you’ve turned around or after you’ve turned around, before you start walking back again.

Physically stop and to check and see,

*Ok, am I present?*

*Am I here?*

*Am I mindful?*

*Am I doing the walking meditation?*

And then, if it’s necessary, reestablish attention, and when you’re sure that the attention is established, then resume the walking, and continue back and forth like that.

In walking meditation, you are using the walking in the same way that you are using the breath. It’s a physical sensation that you can sustain a continuity of awareness on, and from that vantage point, then you can start to recognize more clearly,

*Well, what are the habits of mind?,*

*What are the moods that come in?*

*What are the tendencies that the mind throws out?*

*What does it feel like to be peaceful?*

*What does it feel like to be attentive?*

*What does it feel like to be aware?*

*What* is *awareness anyway?*

*What* is *mindfulness?*

*How do I sustain it?*

This is creating that interest, and investigation as to

*What is meditation?*

*What am I doing in meditation?…*

Talk 2 - Preparing the Mind to Receive the Dhamma

So as we begin this retreat, putting attention on the formal aspects of meditation, it’s very helpful to review practice, and review the approach to practice that one is familiar with, in the sense that, oftentimes, we take things for granted a lot, and it’s just easy to slip into habits that are maybe not so useful, and just to really review -

*How do we meditate?*

*What do we do when we meditate?*

*What actually comes up in the mind as a predominant mood, or predominant feeling?*

*How are we using the meditation?*

- to be reflecting on that, and considering, quite carefully, how that stacks up against the instructions that the Buddha gives in meditation, or the various meditation masters, because on a certain level, sometimes there is a lot of instruction that’s given and sometimes it can be even contradictory.

You know,

*How are we using it?*

*How are we applying it?*

*How are we approaching it? -*

because one can end up either dismissing various methods, ways of approaching meditation, just because it doesn’t agree with a particular perspective of one’s own, or what one is used to;

or at other times, one sort of blindly takes on a particular approach because it has some validity in terms of ones own faith or confidence, but it doesn’t actually line up with one’s experience.

What’s important is to always remember that the purpose of the whole practice is to be able to create balance and clarity, a certain clarity of mind, a certain balance, equipoise, evenness within the mind which then allows the mind to be able to clearly see and understand things as they truly are.

This is both a very necessary and essential part of the practice, in the stages of development of practice, that seeing, *the knowledge and vision of the way things truly are.* If the mind is not clear and balanced, then it never has the opportunity to see in that way;

So that the meditation, for whatever all the plethora of methodologies and approaches that are available, and that we ourselves experiment with, it’s really important to remember that that is its purpose: it’s for guiding the mind to a place of clarity and balance where it will then be able to really see things and understand them in a way that liberates the mind.

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As we cultivate the mindfulness of breathing, we are following the stages of practice that the Buddha lays down.

Yesterday, I talked about short and long breathing, knowing clearly. **(Steps 1 finding, or being aware of the breath, and 2, and evaluating the breath)**

The next stage that the Buddha talks about is *experiencing the* *kaya sankhara;* **(experiencing the whole body) (3)**

and there are two actions or verbs there to be understood here.

From this point on through to the end of the Anapanasati Sutta, the Buddha uses the verb *sikkhati*, which means *to train oneself,* and using the mindfulness of breathing as a foundation of training; and this is training, studying, making known within oneself through one’s experience, the results of the practice.

In the first section, on just knowing clearly, one is just attending to the breath as it is; whether there’s a long breath, whether there’s a short breath, one is attending to it as it is, and through the rest of the discourse, the emphasis is on *sikkhati*, *to be training oneself,* so that one is using, picking up different objects of attention, and working with them, and in this case, experiencing the kaya sankara.

The verb *patisamvedi* is *experiencing*, *experiencing fully*, being really *present for* the *kaya sankhara* , the *bodily formations* (the whole body)

And that sense of really *attending* to the experience, and *fully experiencing -*

*As one is breathing in, what is the body doing?…*

*As one is breathing out, what is the body doing?…*

- it’s really entering into the bodily experience of the breath, and that contrasts with ways that we oftentimes talk about meditation, or that are in common usage.

I do it myself - there’s that common idiom of saying " “watching the breath” or “watching the mind”, and *there is* a difference that we set internally, when we are almost sort of stepping back, separating ourselves, distancing ourselves, observing from afar, watching, rather than getting up close and experiencing; entering into and abiding in the experience.

There’s a difference there, and obviously the Buddha uses that word *experience* for a particular purpose.

I think it’s just that sense of - we can only really know something fully when we really enter into it, and feel it, experience it, rather than stepping back, distancing ourselves, and being a bit aloof and watching from afar as the breath goes in and out - there’s a certain dissonance that can happen when one does that.

So that experiencing is very important, and to be attentive, as we breathe in and as we breath out -

*What is the experience?*

*What is the bodily experience, of the breath?*

*What’s the bodily experience, the kaya-sankara, the conditioning factor of the body?*

As we breathe in,

*What’s the rest of the body doing?,* you know,

*Are we tense?*

*Are we balanced?*

*Are we relaxed?*

*Are we out of kilter?*

*Are we kind of knotted?*

*Are we spacious? -*

*What does it* feel *like?*

*What is the experience?*

So, to go into that experience and *to attend to it*, *to be there for the experience* of the body, as one is breathing in and breathing out - this is using that kaya sankhara, the conditioning factor of the body, (or the condition of the body) in this practice of meditation.

And then, the next part of the discourse uses calming, calming the body. **(4)**

*Kaya sankhara* can be both the conditioning factor of the body, or the condition of the body.

So the practice here is for both clarifying the experience, and then calming, settling, and bringing to tranquility the body.

And it’s important *to be attentive* - when we say calm, it doesn’t mean all calm is dozing off to sleep or something. Calm means something that is peaceful, it is tranquil, and is also *sensitized*, so that there’s this quality of the body being a suitable vehicle for a tranquil mind, a clear mind, a mind of brightness that is ready to work as well.

The qualities of samadhi are, say, that

the mind is one that is both tranquil,

and it’s bright, it’s energetic,

and, it’s ready to work.

One of the words that’s used to describe this is *kamaniyana*, - ready for work, ready for action.

So, your tranquilizing and making the body peaceful is also making it ready for the work of practice, for the work of investigation, the work of creating the conditions for insight and clarity.

This sense of calming the body is not just calming, zoning out, making it peaceful - it’s energizing and balancing, so that the kaya sankhara, the physical body, the physical conditioning factor of the body is really calm, but energized.

It’s relaxed, but there is an alertness there.

There’s a sense of relaxation, but also a sense of poise that’s there.

Here, we are working with the body, breathing in, really attentive to the posture, attentive to the body.

*How do you experience the body?*

*How do you calm the body so that it is ready for the work of being a meditator?*

- that’s the whole purpose of our practice, cultivating the sense of being a practitioner, somebody who is cultivating the Dhamma.

One needs to take the attention and bring that awareness into that sense of experiencing, just being with the breath, being with the body, as one is breathing in, as one is breathing out, taking attention through the body.

I think this is where the method of Ajahn’s Lee’s is very, very helpful, for taking awareness and going through the body. One goes down, bringing that breath energy and *experiencing* the body.

*Breathing in…*

*What’s it like as breath goes down the left arm, the energy flowing through the left arm..?*

*energy flowing through the right arm…*

*both sides of the body…*

*What’s it feel like?*

*What’s the experience?*

Breathing in and breathing out…

the breath energy…

- the experience of the breath, down the leg, from the whole side of the body, the left side of the body, as one breathes in, and breathes out…

*What kind of energy goes through the body, and down through the hip and out through the left leg?*

*What is it like on the right side?*

*What’s it* feel *like?*

*What’s* the experience*?*

*What’s the experience as one breathes in at the top of the head?*

*What’s the breath feel like as you breathe in?*

*What’s the experience at the top of the head?*

*What’s the experience at the throat?*

As one breathes in and breathes out,

*What is the energy along the whole front of the body?*

*How does one experience that?*

*How does one experience that down the spine?*

As one breathes in, and breathes out,

*What’s the experience as the energy goes through the spinal column?*

This is the kaya sankhara, the body conditioner.

*What is the experience?*

*How do we experience it?*

*And how do we use that experience to create balance and clarity? -*

*If that is the purpose of the practice, then how are we using the breath?*

*How are we using the body so that we can experience those qualities, of balance and clarity?*

So here we have the that sense of going into the experience, and training with that, working with that.

These are the aspects of practice that one needs to attend to.

The other way that the kaya sankhara is talked about and explained is as the breath itself, *the breath body*; distinguishing between the actual physical body, the corporeal body, and then the breath body.

*How does one experience the sensation of the breath?*

*As the breath comes in, how does one experience that?…*

*What is the experience of the body of the breath as it comes in?*

Where *does one experience it?*

*{and as the breath goes out…}*

And that’s where you can experiment with either holding attention at one point at the tip of the nose, that’s where one experiences the body of the breath, or, expanding it so that it’s the whole feeling of the breath, as it comes into the body, and goes out, or the abdomen rising and falling.

So that is the breath body. That is the way one experiences the body of the breath, and then *to attend to that*, to watch that closely.

And here also as one continues to practice, and particularly as concentration starts to settle, one can be experiencing the breath in ways that may or may not actually coincide to how one views the physical body.

One knows, on a rational level, the body has legs at the bottom, and a spine going up and the head at the top there, and one may not experience the breath in that same sort of way. One can experience the breath in many, many different ways, and the training here is not to be distracted by that, but just to recognize the experience of that.

And seeing - “ok, this is the experience of the breath coming in, breath going out” and it may not particularly coincide with how one thinks the body is functioning, or where the body is situated, but then also one needs to again be going to “that is the experience”, recognizing it clearly, then going to the quality of calming, and bringing the breath to a place of tranquility.

And there’ll be a balance that will establish itself, but don’t get distracted by the anomalies in how one can experience that.

Particularly with concentration, and as the mind settles, it isn’t strange to be experiencing things in different ways. It’s part of the nature of the mind and perception that it doesn’t necessarily have to correspond with rational reality all the time, and that desire to make everything rational and absolutely lined up according to our materialistic, rational view of things sometimes gets in the way of just letting the mind settle, and watching, experiencing.

*What* is *the experience?…*

As we practice, then there is this sense of settling and bringing the mind to a place of focus and concentration; one is shepherding, or shaping the mind in a certain way. This is that sense of training, the *sikkhati* part of mindfulness of breathing.

You are training with the breath.

You are learning how to energize the mind at this point.

There needs to be sense of clarity brought to things.

There needs to be a sense of calming -

*How do I actually calm things, and make the mind really ready for work, ready for the Dhamma?*

Again, that’s the whole point of the practice - it’s trying to establish the basis for the Dhamma to be realized.

That sense of the Dhamma being *opanayiko*, bringing it inwards, that it is *leading inwards. (or leading onwards)*

And in time, there is a sense of *namkama*, which is *to* *respectfully receive the Dhamma*, receiving the Dhamma with this quality of respect and gratitude.

The mind needs to be prepared in a way that it’s ready to receive the Dhamma, graciously, gratefully, appreciatively, delightfully.

So meditation is also preparing that quality of mind, so that there is this sense of really being ready for the Dhamma.

Without awareness and brightness, a kind of a softness, or gentleness to the mind, then it’s not really ready to receive the Dhamma. If there’s not attentiveness, if there’s not clarity, if there’s not balance, then the mind just isn’t ready to receive the Dhamma.

So the meditation is, with each in breath, with each out breath, really trying to prepare the mind to receive the Dhamma. It’s that important. If we are not really attending to the breath, attending to the meditation in a way that is preparing it to receive the Dhamma, then, we’re not going to experience it, we’re not going to see it, we’re not going to be able to recognize or realize it.

So that, with each in breath, and each out breath, really trying to *recollect* the fact that we have the opportunity to experience the Dhamma, to experience, to realize the fruits of the Buddha’s teaching and his guidance leading to liberation.

If we do the practice perfunctorily, or just go at it in a half hearted manner, then we are not going to experience it.

Or if we spend too much time kind of controlling, and tight, and forcing the mind to conform to our own views and perspectives of how we think it has to be, should be, must be, we are going to miss it as well - there is not that quality of balance.

So training the mind to experience the breath, to calm the breath, to experience the body, and calm the body, that is preparing it properly.

This is the foundation. This is what the practice is for.

You know, it ’s essential to have that perspective, because if we just go through the mechanics of the mindfulness of breathing, the mechanics of meditation, then it’s easy to miss -

*Well, what is the purpose of it?*

So, pay attention.

Obviously, I am trying to encourage people to attend to the details of the meditation, because on a certain level, it’s through the details that you create the refinement of awareness;

but also remember not to get just bogged down in the mechanics of the practice; remember, recollect you are doing it for a purpose, *and the purpose is really* *to receive the Dhamma*, *to receive the truth of these teachings, to realize liberation, to realize freedom of heart.*

- and with each in breath and each out breath, that opportunity is there.

So attending to the kaya sankhara, experiencing it, going *into* the experience -

*What* is *the experience as we sit here?*

*What’s the experience as we attend to the sensation of the breath coming in, the breath going out?*

Where *do we experience it?*

*How do we facilitate that experience so that it helps to calm, and establish tranquility?*

These are questions that we need to be asking ourselves so that the mindfulness of breathing can be of great fruit and great benefit.

This is an idiom that the Buddha uses in the Anapanasati Sutta. He says *Mindfulness of breathing is of great fruit, of great benefit*, but that great fruit and great benefit doesn’t just sort of appear because we are breathing. It appears because we learn how to attend to the breath. We learn how to train with the mindfulness of breathing. We learn how to experience things fully, to know things clearly.

And this is where the simple act of breathing changes into a meditation, into something that gives us the opportunity for growth.

So in the same way as with mindfulness of breathing, the same applies also to the walking meditation - to really tend to the experience of walking meditation.

*What’s the experience of lifting one foot up, and moving the foot?…*

Following that experience through to the end of one step, say, on the right side, and then,

*What’s the experience of the body as one lifts the left foot, moving the left foot, putting the left foot down?*

*What is the experience?*

*How does one experience that in a way that is conducive to calming?*

*How does one experience the body in walking meditation - the simple act of putting one foot in front of another?*

We do that all the time, but it doesn’t liberate us, but walking meditation, when it is done fully, when one trains with it, can allow us to experience the fruits of liberation.

There are so many discourses where somebody goes to the monastery and the monks are out doing walking meditation, or the Buddha is on his walking meditation path. This is obviously something that everybody at the time of the Buddha was incorporating. Walking meditation was a big part of the practice, of the training.

The Buddha himself continued doing walking meditation and mindfulness of breathing after his enlightenment. He encouraged people to be doing these things in order to realize enlightenment.

So these things are the foundations of practice.

Learning how to create the qualities, one has to breathe life into these practices, and attend to the qualities of the mind that the Buddha says are indicative of a meditative state, and those are things like peacefulness; there’s a peacefulness, a tranquility there;

There’s a sense of softness, of pliability. The mind is pliable. It’s not rigid. Pliable doesn’t mean mushy either;

The mind is energized, and bright. There’s a brightness there;

And then the sense of *kamaniya* - it’s ready for work. It’s ready *to attend* to what needs to be attended to. It’s not sort of just drifting off, or zoned out.

There’s this readiness for the work of being a practitioner.

So we can take the opportunity from here to go ahead and do the practice now.

Talk 3 - Being Present with Pain, Pleasure and the Neutral

In the discourse on mindfulness of breathing, the Buddha shifts from the mindfulness of the body to mindfulness of feelings, and that shift, on a certain level, is a very natural shift, in that going from making the body peaceful, tranquilizing the body, to making it relaxed **(4)** , and then going to feeling, the next is experiencing pīti (joy), which is the first aspect of mindfulness of feelings. **(5)**

I think that it’s a very natural shift in that when we really attend to the body, relax the body, are very mindful, and we become peaceful within the body, then there’s pleasant feeling arising. There's a sense of well-being, a sense of rapture.

And *pīti* is actually a word that's used in many different shades- it doesn't just mean kind of - blowing off the top of one’s head rapture - there are very subtle shades of relaxation and settledness.

I remember one time Ajahn Chah talking about the appearance of pīti, and he said that as you’re meditating, relaxing, settling, and using the breath, there's a point when, quite naturally, the body breathes in quite deeply, and there's kind of a settling, and Ajahn Chah said, Well, you know, that’s pīti - that's part of the range of pīti; and that’s not such an uncommon experience for meditators. It isn't as if these qualities are out of range for most meditators.

So, recognizing this, sometimes we tend to look for things that are generated by our desire. Our desire mind is conjuring up what we want to experience, what we think we should be experiencing, and how we would like to be experiencing our meditation, rather than just being attentive to our actual feelings and the subtleties of the experiences that are present.

So that using mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of breathing, really entering into and abiding in the sensation of the breath, there is this sense of relaxation that one focuses on and trains oneself in, but then also one definitely starts to experience that, and to recognize it, to see that is something that is actually occurring, or not, you know, in the sense that one is aware that there's still this tightness, or this restlessness in the body;

and then one can still bring up an actual positive frame of reference within the mind as one’s holding the breath, in the sense of recognizing that,

*Ok, I can direct attention to that which is more grounded in well-being, in feeling a feeling of pīti, a feeling of happiness that can be directed,*

and that attention - one can use that framework in order to set a tone for the meditation.

Oftentimes, we can either be a bit desperate, trying to make it work, or getting worried or getting anxious. It’s important to just relax in the meditation, and let the awareness work. Obviously, that’s a qualified statement - it’s not just about relaxing. It's relaxing in order that awareness can actually function.

Our awareness can really come to the fore of our experience, because sometimes we do relax and then awareness drifts off, drifts away.

This, attending to the meditation, attending to the framework in terms of feeling - the bringing up of a positive, pleasant feeling in the meditation, one can attend to places where one does feel relaxed, where one feels settled.

This is something that Ajahn Lee emphasizes in his instructions - bringing attention to places where one is experiencing the breath in a pleasant way, a positive, relaxed feeling is being generated.

There's a school of thought, not just in Buddhism, but in the world, that is a "more pain, more gain” sort of thing. That is, you're not really meditating unless you're experiencing lots of pain and that's a good thing.

And then the other kind of gung-ho type attitude is where one has to conquer the pain. Obviously, pain is an integral part of the meditator's experience, or, it has always been in my thirty years of meditating. Just having a physical body and sitting down in one position for a length of time, even if it’s only twenty minutes, half an hour, three quarters of an hour, or an hour or two, there's always some level of discomfort. It's just the nature of the body, so it’s important not to be shrinking away from the pain.

One has to have the patience to be present for unpleasant feelings as well, one of the characteristics of dukkha. One of the things that hides or covers up dukkha, is changing posture, that’s both on physical and mental levels. We’re constantly shifting and changing, trying to get away from dukkha.

When we're sitting and meditating, by necessity we’re having to be present for that which is both physically uncomfortable as well as mentally and emotionally uncomfortable, and having to develop the skills to foster awareness around that*.*

So that attending to something which is more pleasant, relaxed, tranquil, picking a point, is not just an escape, but is a skill that one develops, in that one is consciously aware. One has to make a conscious recognition, "ah, this is painful” but, then, using mindfulness and awareness, to find a place of abiding in which one cannot be intimidated by that pain.

For myself, I’ve experimented many different ways, and certainly, struggling with the pain, conquering pain, is one of those options, but I've found that that’s hard to maintain that over a long period of time. Whether it's a three month retreat or whether it’s a holy life of years, if one is always just sort of bashing away at pain, I’ve found myself getting averse, and that has its own repercussions, because the aversion starts to spread into not just the pain… it’s aversion to the body, aversion to the meditation, aversion to the Dhamma, aversion to the Buddha. “Why did he make me do this?”, and that is not a useful result.

So, taking physical pain that one is experiencing, and recognizing, well, that that’s not the whole picture -

*Where do I find a place of relaxation?*

*Where am I settled?*

… pain in the knee (which is, for me anyway, a constant), then,

*Where do I put attention?*

If I keep bringing attention down to the knee then, in the end, it ends up a distraction.

So, taking a place that’s just the rhythm of the breath, and then really relaxing the breath, and it isn't as if the pain goes away, or one's just trying to sugarcoat it, as if it's really not there, but it’s making a conscious choice:

*Aah, well, this is something that I can attend to for a long period of time*

Then, one still recognizes the pain is pain, but in terms of settling attention and relaxing the body, and then being able to spread that relaxation throughout the body, and then including the pain, you know that is possible. In my experience, that’s what I found has worked best for me.

So that, taking the breath, and the point in the body where one is feeling relaxed, and settled, and then allowing attention to settle there, and then going *into* the attention.

You know, there are times when the mind just keeps going to pain, or it feels overwhelmed by pain, and it is an interesting experiment to actually just take the pain and go into it, but I think it’s something that one does from time to time as opposed to every single meditation, just sort of going into pain all the time.

It is important for us to recognize how much perception plays in dealing with pain.

In the discourse on mindfulness of breathing the Buddha, in the section on feeling,

*Experiencing pīti, breathing in…*

*breathing out…*

*Experiencing pleasure or happiness, experiencing sukkha, (well being),*

*I breathe in…*

*I breathe out…* **(6)**

*I train myself in that way.*

And then, *experiencing the citta-sankhara* is the third step in the tetrad on feeling and then *calming citta-sankhāra* is the fourth. **(steps 7 and 8)**

Citta-sankhāra are *vedanā* and *saññā* (feeling and perception*)* together. Vedanā and saññā are that which conditions the mind, so that there’s a *feeling,* and then there's *perception[[1]](#footnote-1)*. It's impossible to split them out absolutely and completely. There’s two things happening within the mind, and those are fundamental constituents of the mind that are always present.

In the any mental state, there’s always feeling and perception, unless one has entered *nirodha-samāpatti* (the cessation of perception), which is a rare occurrence. Feeling and perception are what is conditioning the mind, what is creating the mind, what is building the content of the mind.

So, when we experience pain, then we tend to also have a perception. We perceive it in a certain way. We perceive it as something that is threatening. We perceive it as something that is unwanted. We perceive it as something that is benign, in the sense that, perception also conditions our reaction to it.

So it's important to recognize that sometimes, when we are practicing, how we're holding a painful or a pleasant, any feeling - or neutral, but I'm talking about pain at this point. There is the painful feeling, but then there’s also the perception.

Perception is both the memory of how we've related to things, how we've experienced things, and then the importance that we placed on it, the value that we placed on it.

So that something that can be painful or unpleasant, but we can perceive as something that is actually valuable:

*This is useful.*

*This is something that I can investigate.*

*This is something that I can bear with and learn from.*

It’s a perception, and to recognize this, because we can come up with the opposite perception as well.

We have experienced something painful: “This is awful.” “This is the end of the world.” “My meditation is finished.” “I'm hopeless.” All because of a painful sensation. Recognize how these are working in the mind.

We experience something that may be painful…we can cast it in another light as well:

*Okay, how do I use this?*

*How do I work with this?*

Come back to the sensation that is more neutral so that there's an opportunity for relaxing and settling - using the breath, and the sensation of the breathing; attending to the breathing, in places where it's not getting tight and constricted and fraught with the perception of difficulty and complication.

*How to attend to the breath so that there’s a sense of relaxation, settling, spaciousness, uncomplicated qualities of well-being?*

Again, this is where the Buddha does emphasize this as training oneself, in experiencing pīti, and experiencing sukkha helps to facilitate the practice. It helps to facilitate the deepening of well-being and stillness within the mind.

Obviously, you know it'll be dropped, it'll be relinquished, and one has to relate to that skillfully as well, because you know the perception that comes up, you know feeling and perception, vedanā, saññā, citta-sankhāra, is what proliferates (in) the mind, what creates the (state of one’s) mind.

There's this little flash of well-being that sort of flits through the mind, and the perception: "Wow, I'm really getting my meditation together now. Whew. Wow. Boy, I've got pīti now. This is such a wonderful thing. Boy, am I grateful. I've experienced the fruits of meditation now.”

That perception is just another feeling, so to recognize where the mind is starting to move, what it's starting to create within itself, and always returning to that quality of the breath, that rhythm of the in-breath, the out-breath, awareness, mindfulness, this is the anchor.

And then to watch the feelings, perceptions arise and pass away, and to recognize - *experiencing,* **(7)** and then *calming* feeling and perception **(8)**. One is using the breath to calm, and to settle and to bring the mind to a point of tranquility, and clarity.

Using awareness, using the mind… that sense of pīti, sukkha, those constituents of pīti and sukkha, are constituents of the first jhana.

It's helpful and useful to be working with that as a framework, but also the constituents of the first jhana: *vitakka, vicāra, pīti, sukkha, ekakata.*

*Vitakka* as the initial thought (applying the mind to an object of attention), and *vicāra* as sustained thought (or attention), *pīti, sukkha*, *ekakata*, one-pointedness.

So, using vitakka is like the lifting up of awareness, the lifting up of an object, the first thought of what one's attending to, the lifting up of attention onto the breath;

then, vicāra as the sustaining of attention around the feeling of the breath, as it comes in, and as it goes out…

And then, you’ll notice that the mind starts to wander or start to drift a little bit, and really be conscious of that lifting up the mind to the object of attention, lifting up and placing attention on the object, on the breath, and make that quite conscious and be aware:

*Ah that's vitakka,*

and then, *vicāra,*

as the mind sustains its attention on that object, in particular on the breath, and noticing, with clarity, the sensation of the breath, looking at it with interest and sustaining that interest, that's vicāra, that’s sustained attention, attending to things in a sustained way.

There can be some movement there, in investigating and attending, looking at it from different directions, but the object is sustained.

It's then, just as everything is impermanent, that attention starts to become a bit diffused, or to starts to wander a bit, so then to really consciously, recognize, ‘this is wandering’, and lifting up attention again, placing the attention on the breath, at whatever point one has lost it, or one recognizes,

*“Ok, well, I've lost it there. Ok, new breath. Vitakka. Here I am, lifting up, and placing attention back on the breath, again.*

*Ok, vicāra -*

*How do I sustain that?*

*How do I keep that sustained attention?”*

It’s that vitakka - vicāra that really gives the mind the work to stay with the breath, and the vicāra is looking at the different subtleties of sensation, the experience of the breath:

*How do I sustain attention?*

And then that lifting up again, you can can take it in a different angle, a different perspective, but there's that sense of vitakka, lifting it up and placing attention back onto the breath, and then vicāra, sustaining that.

This is the work as we're meditating, lifting up and sustaining, lifting up and sustaining.

And as one is sustaining the attention and it becomes more consistent, then there’s this settling, and that's where again the body relaxes, the mind relaxes, and that's naturally where the sense of pīti arises.

As one experiences *pīti and sukkha* (joy and ease), that quality of zest or of rapture that arises can in itself be very energizing.

The energy can be a cause for losing attention. One gets distracted because of the energetic feeling. Or, all of a sudden, one comes alive and there's a certain excitement, but it's difficult to sustain.

This is again where one has to return to the vitakka, lifting up attention onto the object, sustaining attention, lifting up, vitakka, and vicāra, lifting up and sustaining, and slowly shaping, composing, settling around the breath.

Then, that one pointing - it’s not just sort of immediately it comes on like there's this little green light in the microphone here. It isn't as if you press the switch and, boom, there it is, this little green light, this one-point that stays there all the time. It’s not like that.

When in meditation, there’s a certain brightness and settledness that arises, then one needs to shape, contain, one point, and bring it back to that point.

It's the nature of the mind to be looking for objects outside of itself. It's either looking for objects outside of itself or collapsing in on itself. So that shaping and using the energy of vitakka, and vicāra, that initial application of mind, and the sustained application of mind, in order to create continuity of awareness and attention - as one does that, that's when the mind really starts to settle.

And that's the work of meditation, just using the breath as that underlying theme or rhythm.

There's the breath there that we then use to relax, but then bringing the mind onto it with that vitakka-vicāra. As we sustain that and work with that one pointing, then those qualities of well-being and pleasure arise. The mindfulness and the meditation become a pleasurable experience.

And even if it is unpleasant in the sense of one experiencing pain, that doesn't preclude the opportunity to still work with that same vitakka-vicāra (the application of the mind, and, sustaining attention).

One is experiencing something that is physically painful, it might be mentally painful - some painful memory, painful emotion in the present moment-

*How does one work with that lifting up of attention to it, sustaining attention?*

*How does one relax around it so that there's a sense of zest and interest that has some quality of enlivening?*

And that changes it into something that can be quite pleasurable, joyful even.

So, working with attention is the key, and probably the examples I've been using are the more extreme aspects of our experience, in the sense of pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling, but what is actually more predominant is neutral feeling - neither painful or pleasant.

How much of our life is neutral? A lot of it. One of the problems or difficulties is that we're not used to sustaining attention, or lifting up attention to something that's neutral. We tend to look for something else or get bored and frustrated because it's neutral. That's oftentimes what happens with the breath.

Why is it that we can't sustain attention on the breath? You know, one of the reasons is because it's neutral, and we get bored. Nothing’s happening. But, the nothing happening is actually real important ground for us to be then cultivating the inner qualities of vitakka - lifting up, using the effort, the resilience within the mind, the inner qualities of patience and attention;

so that we're *lifting up* that attention and placing it back onto the breath - the neutral object, the neutral sensation, and then sustaining it.

*How do we sustain it without the inner qualities of interest, investigation and that query that underlies our spiritual quest, spiritual search?*

(If we don’t have these) then we're always going to spend our time looking for something that is either more interesting, more gratifying, more satisfying or, when that fails to bring results, then at least we can grumble and complain about that which is miserable and which we don't like. It's an option that we're constantly taking.

So that using the neutral sensation, the neutral quality vedanā, and *dukkha masukkha-vedanā* - neither painful or pleasant vedanā - it’s really important to really start to hone attention so that we can be present for neutral sensations.

And again, this is when we're able to lift up attention, with that initial application of mind, vitakka, and then vicara, sustain the application of mind on the neutral that then a change will take place. This sense of pīti and sukkha then arises in the mind, at one point, and (the mind) settles on the object.

And it's because of the quality of attention that our practice is one of working with vitakka-vicāra. A continuity of attention comes to the fore, and then whatever feeling is there whether it's pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, it's sort of beside the point, and that’s a real quality of freedom. There's a real stability of mind when we're not dependent on the range of feeling, because that's most of what people's lives are.

There's a wonderful quote that the Buddha gives

*For the ordinary unenlightened person, there is no escape from unpleasant feeling rather than pleasant feeling.*

- and that’s human existence in a nutshell! - that constant trying to escape from that which is unpleasant by finding that which is pleasant, through the senses, and, by it's very nature, it doesn't satisfy, so it's definitely a lost cause.

But, that being able to be present with feeling, seeing a feeling *as* a feeling, knowing a feeling as a feeling, experiencing a feeling, whether it's pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, and holding it with attention - that has a possibility of transforming into the qualities of well-being and one-pointedness, the mind coming together. We can work with that.

Talk 4 - Recognizing and Relinquishing the Hindrances

Having started the retreat now, and focussing on meditation, yesterday bringing up the qualities of *piti* and *sukha*, in terms of dealing with *vedana*, in meditation -

It’s very striking, actually, when the Buddha talks about the sense of well-being, and happiness that arises in the mind, it’s from the relinquishing of hindrances. It isn’t all just sort of technique - ‘If I get my focus down, If I get my mind concentrated, If I get the mind to just stay still’, then the mind will somehow experience well being, rapture, pleasure…

There needs to be an attentiveness to hindrances, and a relinquishing, a letting go of those hindrances.

Recognizing those hindrances, if they’re actually there - the first thing is to actually identify them -

*This is the hindrance of sensual desire;*

*This is the hindrance of ill will;*

*This is the hindrance of sloth and torpor;*

*This actually* is *the hindrance of restlessness, or doubt…*

- and to be able to get a handle on them, to that extent, because something that is unrecognized, and unnamed has a lot of power in the mind. The mind is influenced by it, and if we don’t recognize it clearly, and bring attention to it, understand *-*

*this is a hindrance - this is a nivarna, this is something that obstructs the well being of the mind*

- then we quite happily sort of trundle along on the path that the mind has set for itself.

You know, it could be just stuck in an underlying doubt, or wavering, or skepticism, or uncertainty, or any of the other hindrances, but that sort of informs the state of the mind.

So really the first thing in dealing with the hindrances is to really scan the mind to recognize more clearly -

*Well, what is the fundamental tone that is here?*

*What is effecting me in this present moment?*

- and that gives you a much more clear path forward.

*Oh wow, yeah, there is an irritation there…*

*That’s ill-will…*

*There is aversion in there…*

- and whether it’s directed outside, or directed inward, it doesn’t really matter. The content of it doesn’t really matter. It’s actually a hindrance. As much as it feels justified, or the mind has it rationale for it,

*Oh no, that’s actually a hindrance.*

And in the same vein, to similarly recognize more clearly when the hindrances are *not* there -

*Right now, I’m sitting, the breath is coming in, the breath is going out, the mind is clear, spacious, not really attracted to anything in terms of sensuality, or excitement, or gratification… good enough…*

*…irritation… ok, no, I’m not irritated…*

*The mind’s bright, not sleepy…*

*not drowsy, not restless…*

*I’m content to be with the meditation right now…*

*…not doubting, not really wavering, or doubting…*

to actually really recognize,

*Ah, ok, the hindrances are in abeyance…,*

and then to be able to delight in that, to recognize that, that’s a great bonus, that’s a great plus.

That puts a lot of emphasis on encouraging us to skillfully work with the hindrances, and to be able to relinquish them, and that is for our well being and happiness.

And the images that the Buddha uses are quite vivid.

For *sensual desire*, as long as one is still engrossed in the hindrance of sensual desire, then the Buddha said that *it’s as if one were in debt*.

And because one’s in debt, one has no freedom, and even if one makes a show of wealth, makes a show of material prosperity, there’s always that niggling feeling in the back that ‘I’m in debt, I’ve got to pay it back’, or, ‘When is my creditor going to come and take things back on me…’ so that there’s the quality of an inability to be at ease;

And then, in the opposite way, when one is free from debt, having no debt, then there’s this sense of happiness. When one pays off the debt, one gets one’s debts paid, then there’s this sense of lightness. There isn’t a burden on the mind.

Most people here who have ever had credit cards probably know what it’s like both to have debt, or, when you finally pay it off, there’s a sense of *Oh, wow…*

I think the only debt I ever had in my life, or felt a responsibility for debt was Casa Serena. As a lay-person, I never had any debt… that’s not quite true… I did have student loans, that hardly counts (laughs…) I never really thought of them…

But that sense that one has mortgaged one’s happiness to something else - and that’s what we do with sensual desire - we forsake our own quality of well being and inner contentment and peace, and then put it onto something else. We link it to something else. We make it dependent on something else.

*My happiness is dependent on getting that particular flavor, or having that particular sensation, or getting that particular… thing*…

- and we lose our happiness that way. We lose our peace of mind.

In meditation, to really start to look, and investigate, how we can not get trapped in that natural tendency of inclining to sensual desire, and relinquishing, letting it go, coming back to inner contentment and well being.

The Buddha gives that description of the happiness and well being, that the person who is free from debt is similar to the person who relinquishes sensual desire as a hindrance, and is then able to be free, to that extent.

The Buddha depicts the one who is entangled in the hindrance of ill-will *as one who is has an illness*, *as one who is sick*. One can never quite enjoy one’s food, enjoy one’s sleep, enjoy the company of the people around one, because one has a fever, or a headache, or an illness that is making one completely out of sorts.

And in the same way, when we harbor ill-will, when we harbor aversion, that anger, then we’ve made ourselves sick. We’ve made ourselves ill, and that’s not to our benefit. In the same way that we wouldn’t be going around testing different germs, different strains of disease, just to say,

*I had the experience, I wanted to see what it was like*,

- you know, one wouldn’t be doing that.

*No, I really wouldn’t want to know what it’s like to have pneumonia.* *I don’t really need it right now…*

We can have the same perspective with aversion, and ill-will.

*No, I really don’t want to go there… that’s truly upsetting…*

So in relinquishing the hindrance of ill-will, the Buddha says that the happiness of relinquishing ill-will is similar to a person when their illness goes away. When their fever breaks, there’s a sense of happiness.

One of the stories that pops into my mind, just how good I felt… One time I had scrub typhus, and there were about ten days or so of fevers over a hundred and four. It went up to a hundred and six on some days, and it was a bit higher than that even. It was really quite extreme.

And I was getting worried that I was actually going to survive, and end up without a brain, everything seemed fried, and after about ten days or two weeks, I was in hospital, and the fever broke, finally, and I hadn’t slept for many many days, because the fever was so high. I was just sort of delirious, and I fell asleep. I was so happy. I fell asleep, I rested. And then, I woke up, and I had an IV in my arm, and it had jostled the needle while I was sleeping, and my arm was about this big. It was filled with water. All the IV fluid had just gone into my arm, and I looked that that and,

*Ah, I don’t care… the fever’s gone, I’m so happy*…

I couldn’t care less. *That’ll go away eventually*… Just that feeling of happiness, of that illness going away, knowing that that was the end.

In the same way, when one relinquishes, or sets aside ill-will, it’s the sense of,

*Oh, I don’t care what they say!… I don’t have to get caught in the aversion, the ill-will…*

The happiness that comes to the mind is part of that piti and sukha, both in cultivating, but also recognizing that it’s a fruit of the practice, both the actual, say, one-pointing and attentiveness to the meditation object, but

also the relinquishing of the hindrances. That has to be a part of it.

As I was saying before, it’s not just bashing away, and trying to make the mind stick on one point, but there needs to be that investigation going on -

*Ok, what are the hindrances?,*

and,

*How do we relinquish the hindrances?*

*What are the nivarna - that which obstructs the goodness of the mind?*

*Drowsiness and sloth and torpor* is another hindrance that *the Buddha compares to* *a person who is in jail*. You know, when somebody’s in jail, or in prison, then the world goes on in its own way, and the person in prison isn’t able to partake in that, isn’t able to participate in the world around.

In the same way, when one is trapped in sloth and torpor, there’s this whole world of possibilities around one, and one’s unable to participate in it because of the sloth, the torpor, the dullness of mind, the sleepiness that takes over and one is collapsed in on a point of dullness.

In the Visuddhimagga, talking about sloth and torpor, when the monks are listening to the Buddha, the elder disciples, and the discourse has been given. The assembly breaks up, and the monks are gathering and talking, and saying,

*Wow, that was such a wonderful discourse. Wasn’t it great how Shariputra described this, or described that, and the points he gave*…

and then the monk who was engrossed in sloth and torpor says,

*I don’t know what he said… I didn’t hear anything…*

He wasimprisoned in the dullness of mind.

And in the same way, when somebody is released from prison, whether it’s for a short time or a long time - prison is not designed to be a pleasant experience - release from prison is the opportunity to live one’s life freely again.

In the same way, when the mind breaks through sloth and torpor - because you feel that, sometimes, when dullness starts to set in, and you keep attending to it, keep bringing up energy, or keep sharpening the mind in various ways, refining it on something that’s going to work, and then when it does, then you just really feel this sense of spaciousness and brightness of the mind, or lightness of the mind, where it’s really just so much more *at ease*, and there’s this happiness, or satisfaction that’s there. One doesn’t have to just be a helpless victim to the dullness of mind.

One can exercise some effort in that, and dispel that kind of dullness. It’s like when the weather changes. We can see it here a lot. When the weather changes, and the clouds are blown away and dispelled, and this bright sky comes out, it’s really a different feeling. I mean, cloudy, rainy skies have a certain charm to them as well, but there’s a different feeling when the sky is bright, and it comes out, and it’s fresh.

It’s the same way in the mind - dullness may have a certain charm to it, a certain attraction to it, but it doesn’t have the same quality of happiness and well being that a clear, peaceful mind does.

*Restlessness and worry the Buddha compares to somebody who is* *a slave.* Especially in the English language, and from our own cultural perspective, to be a slave is very very strong language, and being in slavery does not bring up any connotations of well being and happiness.

And that restlessness, on a certain level, it’s insidious how the mind is always restlessly looking for something *else* to do other than attend to the present moment, attend to its well being, attend to the cessation of suffering. It’s sort of restlessly looking for more suffering to poke its nose into. Our mind *is enslaved* by that habit.

So really seeing the harm, the lack of benefit in that kind of restlessness, this is where the Buddha really encourages the mindfulness of breathing, It’s the primary condition the Buddha gives for helping to alleviate the quality of restlessness, *uddhuccha-kukkucca* (restlessness and worry).

So attending to the mindfulness of breathing in the ways that help to calm and to settle, relax, and bringing to tranquility the body and the mind, moving attention and energy through the body, with the breathing, with the breath energy, that really is relaxing and settling.

And when restlessness starts to settle down, then there’s this sense of happiness that comes up in the mind because one is freeing oneself from slavery. It’s a very vivid image, and the happiness that arises from that is similarly vivid.

The last hindrance, of skeptical doubt, the image that the Buddha gives is of somebody who is, *like a merchant who is traveling*, especially in ancient timesin India, who is traveling over a desert, or in a very remoteareathat is fraught *with* brigands, or thieves and robbers - and *dangers;*

And reaching the destination and not having lost the caravan, or having been attacked by robbers, having been able to find enough feed and water for the animals in the caravan - that sense of happiness and well being that arises - is similar to being able to set aside doubt, wavering, skepticism…

*Am I right?*

*Am I doing it wrong?*

*Is the method right?*

*Is Buddhism right?*

*Is the teacher ok?*

*Am I in the right place? -*

All of those worries, and skepticism, doubt,

*Is this a true teaching?*

and,

*Even if it’s true, am I able to practice it?*

- being able to set aside that skepticism, that doubt, and put one’s attention back onto the practice of the training, going forward with the training, the happiness of setting aside that doubt and wavering is as if one had gone through these dangers, gone through this path of difficulty, and reached one’s goal.

This happiness that arises from attenuating, and bringing the hindrances into abeyance, undermining them, there’s an inherent happiness and well being that arises.

So to attend to the hindrance, in the sense of making it clear,

*Is this a hindrance, or is this not a hindrance?* -

and then working with the different ways of relinquishing hindrances, giving oneself the opportunity to experience the sense of well being and happiness, *piti, and sukha,* that is a part of the process of practice and training.

This is really a prime method, or means of giving oneself the opportunity to experience that sense of well being.

I offer that for reflection this morning.

Talk 5 - Working Further With the Hindrances

So this morning I’d like to continue with the theme of the hindrances. Across the board, in terms of practice, and living life in general, the hindrances are important to be attended to, to understand how they arise and how to deal with them.

Particularly in meditation, they have a really direct effect on the mind. If you’re sitting in meditation, and aversion comes up, or sensual desire comes up, sloth and torpor, or restlessness, or doubt arise, then the quality of clarity and peace is disturbed immediately. So that to direct attention to the presence or absence of these hindrances, in doing that, it’s always important to establish your base first.

Establishing the base in the mindfulness of breathing, getting a very firm foundation in attention on the breath, really settling into the rhythm of the breathing, and extending awareness through the whole body, really awakening the body, awakening the mind with awareness, and alertness, attention- there’s this feeling of awakening, energizing that is part and parcel of awareness.

One of the inherent characteristics of awareness, mindfulness, is that it does stop the flow of the outgoing mind, the proliferating mind, so that, using the breath, generating awareness and attention on the breath, moving attention and energy, mindfulness through the body, adjusting to the rhythm of the breathing so that that awareness pervades the body, and the mind…

*As the breath comes in, it’s really pervading and steeping the body, and the mind in that quality of alertness, and attention…*

*As the breath goes out, to let that awareness and attentiveness to the physical sensation of the breathing fill the body, and fill the mind…*

Again, there’s the sense of *e*stablishing a base, and the breath is the base, the body is the base.

What comes to mind is that when the Buddha talks of developing the four jhanas, the images that he uses are grounded in the body, the bodily experience. I haven’t read it for quite a while, but the phrase,

*fills, drenches, steeps, and pervades* *his body*, say, with the first jhana, *with the bliss of solitude*;

The second jhana is *the bliss of concentration*;

And it’s using the body as the basis to befilling, drenching, steeping, and pervading, so that the body and the mind are working together.

So that, starting from the very beginning, the first touch of the breath at the tip of the nose, to really fill the field of awareness, to pervade it with that sense of attention, of presence, being very present, being very aware of the breath, the sensation, both bringing that attention into the body,

*As the breath comes in, as the air fills the lungs, the diaphragm moves, the abdomen rises…*

you’re literally filling the body with air, so that it is able to survive,

*and then breathing out, allowing that to expel and regenerate itself…*

In the same way, we need to fill our minds, our hearts with awareness, and attention, in order to survive as spiritual beings. If we don’t return to that foundation, that base of awareness, and quality of knowing, knowing clearly, then, you know, we lose our base, we lose our foundation.

So that, using the breath, using the body as the vehicle, the means of extending awareness, and creating a presence, being present for the experience of the breath, as we do that, then of course we’ve got something concrete to hang awareness on.

It’s so easy for mindfulness to drift, for mindfulness to wander, and the tendency, of course, is to be going out, whether it’s going out to sensual desire, going out to something pleasurable, delightful, interesting, that sense of seeking an object, then one is getting the stimulation from that external object, in some sense - the hit of sensual delight in some way, the pleasure from that.

And we find ourselves in that situation, over and over, of seeking the pleasant because that’s the more apparent way out of suffering. It’s the more apparent way out of boredom. It’s the more apparent way out of our sense of lassitude. It’s very easy to sink into being fed up, bored, and to have this sense of lassitude of mind, where we just don’t want to put the energy out, and it’s looking to sensuality to *do* something, to get involved in something to feel alive.

And that’s where we have to really bring the breath to mind, to bring the attention to the body, to the breathing, to the awareness within, so that we’re not seeking our justification for existence in sensual objects, because, honestly, it’s a dead end. It doesn’t ever really satisfy. It is gratifying, and exciting, and, you know, it’s pleasurable, but satisfaction is a different thing.

For the mind to feel satisfied, to feel content within itself, to actually feel happy within itself, and to not be overwhelmed by suffering, even in the most subtle shades of suffering, discontent, dissatisfaction - realizing that that’s what the Buddha is pointing to - that we can come to a place, an abiding in non suffering.

So, to be taking that, choosing that option, on each in-breath and each out-breath, to be challenging oneself, encouraging oneself, giving the opportunity to oneself to experience that - that sense of really creating a question in the mind, a challenge in the mind:

*Can I just pay attention to this in-breath and this out-breath?*

- really giving oneself that opportunity, giving oneself that challenge…

Again, it’s so easy to drift.

When one is doing that, one is renewing the practice each moment, rather than waiting for the results to come, waiting for the crescendo, the peak experience.

Again, that is laying the foundation, the attentiveness to recognizing when irritation, ill-will starts to set in, because we can recognize it oftentimes when we’re starting to go off on a rant, against something, or somebody, and it agitates the mind with aversion, but particularly as meditators, to really start to attend to the qualities of the irritations, the dislikes, things that one shrinks away from, doesn’t want to deal with -

*I don’t like this.*

*I don’t want it.*

*It shouldn’t be this way…*

*Why does it have to bother me like this…*

- you know, those sort of things tend to nag away at the mind.

And so, to be quick on the uptake, and recognize when that kind of mental state comes, and starts to afflict the mind.

I love the way the Tibetans translate what we tend to call ‘defilements’, the Tibetans translate it as *afflictions.* That’s a great translation for the *kilesas*.

In particular, aversion, ill-will, a hindrance, is an affliction, and we are afflicting ourselves with pain, and we feel afflicted when it’s present.

In the same way that we would never sort of just walk into the kitchen, turn the stove on, and put our hand over the fire, or take a knife out of the drawer and start poking holes in our arm, you know - *we wouldn’t do that.* It’s an affliction. We’re afflicting pain and injury on ourselves.

But that harboring of ill-will, the harboring of aversion, the feeding anger is an affliction, torturing ourselves. So that to recognize when that cloud starts to roll in, of aversion, and see that, in terms of a meditator,

*What does that do to the body?*

This is one of the things where it’s really helpful to be using the body as an anchor, and that sense of filling, drenching, steeping, pervading the body with awareness, and a feeling of a fullness of attention, because it’s very relaxing on the body, and it’s extraordinarily difficult to keep that ill-will going if you’re actually physically relaxed.

Pay attention to what happens when there’s irritation, or aversion, ill-will that arises. There’s always some sort of tightening, or tensing. It’s the natural response to aversion, and because the feeling is one of justification, one is buying into the aversion, then we lock into the mentalfeeling of aversion and ill-will, and neglect to recognize that we’re physically afflictedas well. There’s this tenseness, tightness, there’s this knot of ill-will in the body, in different places.

So that returning to that quality of awareness, and really pervading the breath with this feeling of attention and awareness, and a natural relaxing, and deepening of that attention so that it pervades the body, and relaxes it, and settles it- it’s very easy to dispel ill-will in that way. It’s very difficult to hold onto ill-will in that way.

So this is using the mindfulness of breathing to work through those qualities of aversion, that ill-will that come up as a hindrance.

Sloth and torpor, you know, when the mind starts to settle, and things start to quiet down a little bit, you know, it’s not always a good thing, in the sense that, if one doesn’t sustain the attention, if one doesn’t apply effort,then it very quickly shifts into dullness, very easily, dullness, sloth and torpor, lassitude of mind, if the mind is not taking interest.

It’s particularly that quality offilling, steeping, and pervading the body with the awareness of the breath that really helps to dispel that lassitude of mind, that sinking of the mind that goes down into dullness, and when it goes down into dullness, the mind loses its brightness.

So that, to take awareness, using attention not just to focus and hold on the breath, but to allow that awareness to move, moving, flowing into the body

with the sensation of the breath, paying attention to the subtleties of sensation, the subtleties of *What does it feel like?* in different places in the body, and moving awareness around the body, so that the body is energized, so that the mind becomes energized.

It’s when the mind and the body are energized in that way that it can settle in a way that’s very stable, without slipping into sloth and torpor.

We tend to want to skip the hard work of things, and you know, we just want to experience the fruits of meditation.

I remember there was a group of people and they were asking Ajahn Jumien about jhana, and they were expecting to get detailed instructions, for jhana from Ajahn Jumien, and he gave detailed descriptions of various things, but not much on the how-to aspect, except, very quickly saying that

*You have to be ready to die.*

You have to be really ready to just stick with what you’re doing, and he said then the mind easily goes into jhana.

Talk 6 - Nourishing and Starving the Hindrances

*Namo Tassa Bhagavato, Arahato, Samma Sambuddhasa*

*Namo Tassa Bhagavato, Arahato, Samma Sambuddhasa*

*Namo Tassa Bhagavato, Arahato, Samma Sambuddhasa*

*Buddham, Dhammam, Sangham namasammi*

So, this evening I’ll continue on the theme of the hindrances in meditation. The idiom that’s used by the Buddha to describe the hindrances is *that which obstructs awareness and weakens wisdom*. That’s a good description of the things that the Buddha calls the hindrances - the hindrance of sensual desire, the hindrance of ill-will, the hindrance of sloth and torpor, the hindrance of restlessness, worry, and the hindrance of doubt, wavering.

These are qualities of mind that obstruct the ability of the mind to sustain awareness, and to be strong and firm in wisdom, discernment. They weaken the wisdom of the mind. So that in meditation, we need to put attention on dealing with these hindrances skillfully.

One of the things that the Buddha talked about was the feeding, or the nourishing of the hindrances, and the starving of them - cutting off their sustenance.

And, you know, we tend to feed the things that end up obstructing us, and starve the things we should be giving nourishment to, starving the factors of enlightenment.

Attending to what we’re feeding, what we’re nourishing…

One of my pet peeves in the monastery is people who feed the dogs all the time that come around. If you feed them, then they hang around, and you end up with pet dogs that you have to deal with… You end up with dogs howling, and barking at everybody who comes in the monastery.

Don’t feed the dogs. Let them go.If you don’t feed them, they won’t hang around. It’s like the hindrances - if you don’t feed them, they don’t hang around.

It’s like when somebody shows up, some visitor, some guest who you don’t particularly like or want to have to deal with, if you invite them in for coffee and feed them cake and give them all sorts of things, well, they’ll hang around. It’s not strange.

The same things with qualities of mind, learning,

*Well, what is it that is the nourishment of that hindrance of sensual desire?*

When the mind attends to that which is attractive, is interesting, when one sees it as appealing, then that feeds the desire mind -

*Oh, I like that. I want that. That’s really fascinating…*

*-* and that feeds the desire mind.

So that during meditation, learning how to attend to the things that help to cool the mind, and settlethe mind, the themes of contemplation that may be more sobering, they go against that stream of desire.

One of the chants that we do, that the Buddha says should be contemplated every day:

*I am of the nature to age. I’ve not gone beyond aging.*

*I am of the nature to sicken. I’ve not gone beyond sickness.*

*I am of the nature to die. I’ve not gone beyond dying.*

We bring those kinds of reflections up, and direct attention to those more sobering qualities, then that has the tendency to attenuate the desire mind, to attenuate that seeking gratification and stimulation.

So that allows the mind to settle, and become cool, because when the mind is functioning from that place of sensual desire, then there’s a sense of seeking, looking, desiring, wanting, craving, and it’s not really satisfied by anything.

Notice - when we’re eating, how the mind is - we’ll have food in our mouth, and we’re chewing it, and the eyes will be looking at

*What’s next?*

*What can I get now that will satisfy me? -*

- and of course it’s a constant shifting, moving. So it’s not settled, it’s not peaceful. It’s not mindful. So it obstructs awareness, it obstructs mindfulness, and weakens discernment, because when the mind is not settled, it’s not steady, then it’s difficult for it to discern clearly.

So that to recognize, the tools that we’re bringing up, that sense of feeding, or starving the hindrance - not giving it what it wants, and what it craves, is giving the mind an opportunity to come to a place of balance, and composure, being settled.

The hindrance of ill-will, we feed it, and nourish it by attending to those things that bring up resistance, what we bump up against, we don’t like - that we feel obstructed by, and then that moves into irritation, aversion, ill-will, anger…

So that to recognize, and to be turning attention to the things that nourish the sense of acceptance, or a softness, a gentleness - the qualities of loving kindness and compassion, of sympathetic joy, and equanimity - these are the qualities of mind where there’s a quality of acceptance.

There’s not that sense of aversion, irritation, or that sense of resistance - not wanting, pushing up against something. There’s more of an inclusive quality, a bringing in, a gathering in, and that attenuates the hindrance of ill-will.

So there are these different ways to hold the mind, depending on the predominant mood of the mind. If the mood of the mind is one of desire, the hindrance of desire, if sensual desire is coming up, then you actually put up resistance. Turn your attention to something that is blocking the flow of desire.

Whereas if the underlying mood of the mind, the tone, is one of aversion, ill-will, or irritation, then you want to be nourishing the quality of acceptance, of gathering in.

So you have to recognize clearly,

*Well*, w*hat’s the state of the mind?*

*What’s it being conditioned by?*,

- because if we don’t do that, then we tend to operate from our preferences, or our ideals.

*Well, I like this kind of feeling of acceptance, or gathering in, the sense of warmth, and appreciation*,

- but then if the mind keeps going to sensuality, then it gets trapped in that. It gets caught by it.

I remember one time, there was a monk who I knew, and out kind of idealism, he just kept using the objects of unattractiveness, and the contemplations of the body, contemplations of death, and he was just getting more and more morbid, and by nature, he was an aversive type - he was very sharp, aversive, abrasive, and it made him even more so. He just thought that the contemplations and the nourishing of loving kindness and compassion wasn’t for him. That was really what *should* have been cultivated.

So what one is attending to is that which really supports and nourishes wisdom, and awareness, those bright qualities of mind, when the mind is able to be attentive, and steady, understanding, using our time in meditation to contemplate:

*What is the conditioning factor in the mind?*

*What is pushing the mind into either wholesome states of mind or that which are unskillful and unwholesome? -*

- trying to understand the underlying hindrance, or the strength that we should be cultivating, such as the cultivation of loving kindness and compassion;

Or in the same way with the hindrance of sloth and torpor: when the mind turns to dullness, and lassitude, sleepiness, drowsiness, yawning, well there’s a certain kind of pleasure in that…

I remember one time there was this novice we had at a monastery, and there’s a saying from the Dhammapada:

*There’s no greater happiness than nibbana -*

and this novice was supposed to be helping out at the Abbot’s kuti, cleaning up and taking water up there, and he made it out there and did a few odds and ends, and there was another novice with him, and they ended up falling asleep underneath the Abbot’s kuti, and the senior monk heard them rouse themselves sometime later in the afternoon, and the novice, he could almost hear him yawn and give a big stretch, and say,

*Aah, there’s no greater happiness than sleeping…*

The novice’s nibbana.

The Buddha would say that’s a hindrance.

So how can we bring attention to exertion, to putting forth effort, bringing up energy, brightening the mind with energetic states, sustaining attention, because that takes energy. It takes a certain energy, and once one is skilled in that, has cultivated that, and sees the benefits that derive from bringing up energy, and *going against*, and not nourishing sloth and torpor, then it becomes quite natural, but it takes some time to recognize.

There’s that habit in the human condition of just following what is easiest - the path of least resistance, so that one goes against that tendency by putting forth effort and overcoming the tendency to sloth and torpor, to lassitude, and one experiences the fruit of that. The mind becomes brighter.

There’s a very satisfying feeling in the mind when one is able to sustain a sense of alertness and awakeness - really being awake, whether it’s for meditation, or for whatever one is doing. There’s a sense of satisfaction, and happiness that arises from that. There’s a waking up to our life, really.

Restlessness, as a hindrance, is when we tend to the things that agitate, that make us fretful, and we tend to worry about things, then there’s this restless energy that enters into the mind. It really does - it really obstructs mindfulness, awareness, it weakens discernment, weakens wisdom.

So not feeding the mind in that way,

*What can go wrong?*

*What am I missing?*

*What is problematic? -*

- there is this restlessness that goes into the mind all the time…

There’s a story I like to tell, of Winnie the Pooh. Pooh and Piglet were walking through the Five Acre Wood, and it was in the middle of a storm. The wind was blowing, the rains were coming down, and Piglet’s getting really worried that something disastrous was going to happen, and finally he bursts out and asks Pooh:

*What will happen if a branch falls down, or a tree falls down and crushes us, or hurts us?*

And Pooh went really quiet for a while, and said,

*Well, what if it doesn’t?*

Talk 7 - Silence, Composure, plus the Hindrances

*Namo Tassa Bhagavato, Arahato, Samma Sambuddhasa*

*Namo Tassa Bhagavato, Arahato, Samma Sambuddhasa*

*Namo Tassa Bhagavato, Arahato, Samma Sambuddhasa*

*Buddham, Dhammam, Sangham namasammi*

As we’ve only just recently started the retreat, I’d like to go over just a few things to help the retreat. When we entered the retreat, because there were several of us, including myself, who had various loose ends still sort of hanging, and things that needed to be wrapped up, and in general there were still things that needed to be done in order to finish off various duties and whatnot, so that, I specifically didn’t make mention of Noble Silence when we entered the retreat.

But now that we’ve had the time to settle a bit and get various things finished off, then I think it’s an appropriate time to bring up that aspect of creating a retreat atmosphere, and being attentive to speech, and refraining from unnecessary speech.

Noble Silence doesn’t necessarily mean absolute, total silence, but it’s really important to take the time to reflect and see,

*Well, What’s necessary?,*

*What’s useful to speak about?,*

*What is absolutely critical?,*

*and what can just be forgone, and left unspoken?*

And particularly in a time of retreat, this is a very precious opportunity to be able to cultivate mindfulness, sense restraint, and concentration in a consistent way, and if you pay attention to speech, you recognize how much of what we talk about isn’t about concentration, sense restraint, mindfulness, wisdom, or reflection on the Factors of Enlightenment. It’s usually about something very different. More often than not, it’s something uncritical to the Holy Life, and more often than not it’s something that is actually going in the opposite direction.

So that to give yourself the opportunity to just really check, and to put a check on speech, so that there’s a real restraint of speech, and a cultivation of a turning inward, because so much of speech is just sort of this outgoing flow, outward going exuberance, outward going attention…

And, as we follow that habit, then we forgo the opportunity to turn inwards, and to rest in the stillness of the mind, the quiet of the mind, the solitude of the mind, and that’s very unfortunate because that’s really where our peace is.

So that to use it, and bring it up is a point of training, and checking, to see,

*Is this necessary?*

*Is this essential?*

*Is this something that’s beneficial?*

If you see something on fire in the kitchen, you don’t have to think very much -

*Is this something that’s beneficial?*

*Is this essential?*

*Is this necessary?*

- I mean, you say something. You get in there and help to get something done here - put this out.

But the vast majority of what we talk about is not that critical, and there’s a lot of time in other parts of the year to talk about it, and we generally do.

We have a fairly full rein of the opportunity to talk and discuss, and to bring things up for conversation, but this period of Winter retreat is an opportunity to step back from that habit, to step back from that tendency, so that, for oneself it’s beneficial, and generally for others as well.

Generally, we all enjoy conversation and contact with each other. None of us are misanthropes, completely averse to other human beings, so that generally we enjoy contact with each other, but this time of retreat is an opportunity to give each other a break as well - to give each other the opportunity to focus attention on practice, on training, and on the cultivation of that which is more peaceful, more tranquil, more settled.

So to turn attention to that Noble Silence. You know, if something *is* necessary, then to be attentive to the occasion.

*Is it an appropriate occasion?*

*Is the setting alright?*

*Am I going to disturb anybody by speaking?*

And then if there *is* something that is necessary, then

*How am I bringing it up?*

*What’s the level of volume that I’m using?*

- because, even if there is something necessary, you know, it doesn’t need for everybody in the whole house to know about it either. Just bring up something in a quiet way, using a quiet voice, in a way that is not going to disturb others as well.

Just bring real mindfulness into speech, because again, Noble Silence is not trying to enforce and police absolute quiet, but I’m trying to really get everybody to be reflective on what’s useful, what’s necessary, and what are the ways of using speech that are not going to impinge on one’s own well being, and impinge on other people’s efforts at meditation and developing the inner solitude, the inner quiet.

Just being sensitive and respectful to each other as well - you know that’s very much a part of living in community - recognizing that our actions have effects on others. So, trying to support each other in this retreat, as well supporting as ourselves, giving ourselves the opportunity, for our minds, our hearts to really settle, because it is difficultfor the mind to settle. It’s not so easy, and one of the things that is an obstacle or an impediment to the peaceful mind is a lot of sound, and noise, and particularly the speech of others, because as human beings, we’re naturally attuned to the human voice, and the mind goes out to it.

Notice that, if you’re sitting in the forest, there can be all sorts of birds singing, and the sound of wind in the trees, and the various natural sounds, and the mind doesn’t really pick it up that much, but if somebody happens to be walking through the forest with a couple of people, and they were speaking with each other - and even, it doesn’t have to be raucous speech - the mind goes to it, naturally. As human beings, we’re attuned to the sound of each other.

So that, during this period of retreat, we want to give each other the opportunity to have a break from the mind going out to speech, conversation, and just general noise, and to turn more towards the quiet, and the more peaceful parts of the mind, giving that the precedence.

Obviously, the retreat helpers need to be consulting with each other, and sometimes they need to be consulting with us, concerning duties and whatnot, and that’s completely appropriate, and necessary, but to also gauge the volume and the situation so that it’s not impinging on others.

One of the things I did bring up when we started the retreat was that I’d like people to come in and out of the hall at the specific time. We will be ringing the bell, say, in the morning - it would be on the hour, at 9:30, and ending at 10:30, and then in the afternoon, the bell could be rung at forty-five minute intervals, and to be entering and leaving the hall at that time, and, I’d really like people to hold to that, to keep that.

If people are just sort of coming in and out of the hall at all times, then it’s very disruptive, and if we’re trying to cultivate an atmosphere of mutual support for meditation practice, then it’s important that the hall is really creating a space that is conducive to practice, conducive to a sense of support, and supporting each other. Coming in and out of the hall, really, at both times, and also for the people who are ringing the bell, really be attentive to ringing the bell at those times, so that we can be doing that.

I’m not trying to get everybody here, saying *you have to be sitting and walking each at the same time,* but if there’s a sitting going on in here, and the person who is ringing the bell is just ringing the little bell, that you can just hear inside, then those people who are walking, then to wait, and to pay attention to, *Ok, Has the person who is in the hall rung the bell yet?* So that people are getting up and moving, rather than, *I’m done with my walking meditation, I’m going into the hall now…* So people come traipsing in and out at all different times.

And, similarly, if the bell is being rung outside, and the person who is ringing the bell is doing walking meditation, then to wait for the bell to be rung.

If you’re sitting in here, waiting for that bell to be rung, and rather than just getting up, thinking *I’m done with my sitting now, I’m going to do walking meditation* - and then getting up whenever one wants, wait for for that bell to go when you hear it from the outside. This makes it a much more conducive atmosphere for meditation, when there’s not people going in and out all the time.

Also, when you *do* come in, it’s impossible to get everybody lined up at the door to come in all exactly at the same time - I mean, it’s not going to happen, but when you do come into the hall - whether it’s during the meditation, or during the evening here, make coming into the hall, or getting up and going out a meditation as well {a practice}, because some people are wanting to sit through two or three sessions, and unless one is in deep enough samadhi that one isn’t attending to sound at all, then it’s an impingement if people are going in and out of the hall not very mindfully.

So that, coming into the hall, the door has a handle, and you can be mindful and recognize - ‘There is a handle of the door’, and to gently pull on the handle. The door will open. Doors are meant to open - unless it’s locked, which it probably won’t be. It’s not necessary to just grab the handle and rip the door open, worried that it might not open or something.

You can feel that sometimes - rrrrrp *-* just this pulling this door apart - and there’s no rush to come in. Nobody’s going to take your seat. Come into the hall slowly. Put your hand on the door, and just pull it gently. And also, you don’t need to turn the handle. Just pull on it gently. Open it slowly. Let it close behind you gently, and then come slowly to one’s seat.

Pay attention to each step as you come to your meditation spot. How you’re putting down your foot on the floor - make it a meditation. There are quiet, and noisy ways to walk in a room, or anywhere for that matter.

On the Thanksgiving retreat, there was one person who it didn't take me that long to recognize. I could hear her coming, before she even got to the door. You could hear her coming down the hall, and then opening the door, and then there was a characteristic thump… thump thump thump thump thump… coming up to the door, to come into the meditation hall.

Just pay attention to how you put your foot down. One good way is just not putting your heels down first. Just put the ball of your foot down, and walk that way coming in. And when you get to your place, do your bows, quietly, gently… there’s no need to sigh… uhhh.. another meditation*…* If that’s the way one feels, you can just sort of feel it inside. We can all empathize.

Sometimes, when people are getting ready for meditation, for some people, it’s like they’re getting their nasal passages all cleaned up… (breathes in and out heavily) … you’re doing it in a meditation hall, with a whole bunch of people! It’s just having the sensitivity that other people are in the hall.

We are trying to do things as quietly as possible, and gently, mindfully. There’s no rush to get to your seat, and also if you’re wanting to arrange your cushion, or if you’re just coming in, picking up your mat, or rearranging your mat, just do that as quietly as possible.

You can hear people sometimes, dropping their cushion from about waist height, and getting themselves settled - just to be aware, *Oh, yeah, that makes noise…* and getting oneself settled, really to just try to be as quiet as possible. It is a meditation to be composed as possible, as quiet as possible.

A good role model is Ajahn Petit (spelling?), who comes in and out of the hall, and is very quiet. It’s possible to do.

Also, around the hall, during the times of meditation, particularly the monk’s room, to be very conscious during the mornings and the afternoon, that next door in the hall is a place of meditation, because these walls are very very thin, and you can hear when people go into their cupboards, go into draws, turn taps on - you can hear everything. Even when you turn taps on outside the building, you can hear that inside the hall here.

So that, if there’s something really necessary that you have to get from your cupboards, or from the draws, to be very, very quiet in doing that. Opening the drawer, or opening the cupboard, closing it, just to close the door. Don’t just let it close or push it close. Bring the door to a closed position with your hand on it so that it doesn’t make any noise. Make it a point of mindfulness.

The same next door, on this side, going in and out of the book room, that door, in and out, you can hear it. Also, sometimes it’s necessary to put the fan on, because there’s a lot of moisture, but during the meditation, the noise of the fan comes into the hall, so to not leave it on during those times, so that it doesn’t impinge on everybody else.

So these basic points of mindfulness and attentiveness to the others that are around us - both for ourselves, there is a sense of composure, mindfulness, slowing down, turning more inward…

When there’s restraint of speech, and real carefulness around our movement, just simple things such as coming in and out of the hall - it does create a quality of composure that’s very helpful for our meditation, for ourselves, and then of course for the group atmosphere that’s created, because if everybody is putting attention onto that, it lifts up the level of sharpness and clarity, and that’s beneficial. It helps everybody.

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In another vein, to take another tack, in terms of logistics, to return to the Five Hindrances - working with the hindrances in meditation, a lot of the meditation is working skillfully with the five hindrances, and these last days I’ve brought it up several times, but there are many ways one can use that theme of the hindrances to work with the meditation.

One of the ways that is very useful, as one is developing the practice and trying to settle and compose the mind, in the commentaries, they line up the five hindrances beside the five factors of the first jhana, and that’s a very nice way of seeing how those factors of jhana are not just something that manifest out of thin air. They arise out of the overcoming and the skillful diminishing of the hindrances.

Also, the hindrances have specific antidotes that are useful to bring up.

So when one is confronting a particular hindrance, the way that it is generally lined up, is that the five factors of jhana are

Vitaka

Vicara

Piti

Sukha

Ekaggata

*Vitaka* is the initial thought, awareness (bringing the mind to the object). Sometimes it’s even used as sustained awareness, and then *vicara* is more used as reflection as well, but I like to use initial, and sustained thought (or awareness), as *vitaka - vicara.*

The inital thought as vitaka, and the sustained thought as vicara, and then vicara can then branch off into more reflective aspects, if one wishes, but on a basic level, vicara is sustained thought (or attention);

*piti* is joy or rapture, *sukha* is happiness, and *ekaggata* is one pointedness, the focus of mind.

And vitaka lines up with its opposite, sloth and torpor

Vicara is the antidote for doubt, skeptical doubt, *vicikicchā;*

*Piti,* joy or rapture is the antidote for ill-will, or aversion;

*Sukha*, happiness is the antidote for restlessness and worry;

and *ekaggata,* one-pointedness, is the antidote for sensual desire.

So the quality of vitaka is that lifting up of the mind, that initial thought, raising up of the clear intention in the mind, the raising up of the thought process in the mind, the raising up of an object in the mind, and, just that raising up, in itself, goes against the lassitude, sloth, and torpor of the mind, that sinking…. it’s sinking, it’s drifting, it’s diffuse, it’s kind of lazy…

shiftless… lazy, shiftless mind…

So that vitaka, the raising up of initial thought, the raising up of the thought process, the raising up of attention, bringing attention onto an object, bringing attention onto the breath, bringing attention onto buddho, *whatever*… lifting up attention onto an object, vitaka, and as soon as you lift that up, just that very effort dispels that sloth, that lassitude of mind. So as one continues to lift that up, sloth and torpor is dispelled. It needs that initial lifting up to be able to get past the sloth and torpor.

Obviously, if the mind drifts, if one is unable to sustain attention, one has to keep lifting the mind up, and, again, there’s no sort of model that is absolutely perfect. In order to really dispel sloth and torpor, one needs to sustain that lifting up of the mind. As a model goes, these are good as basic antidotes.

I remember one time, watching Ajahn Choo - he was one of the senior monks at Wat Pah Pong, and he’s just a little bit junior to Ajahn Liem.

He and Ajahn Liem took on a lot of duties at Wat Pah Pong during the time that I was training there.

One time Ajahn Choo went to a kathina somewhere, I think it was up at Ajahn Kinnerly’s monastery, which was a couple of hundred kilometers North. And he went to a ceremony, and was up all night there, drove back that day, came back to Wat Pah Pong, and there was another all night session happening. They arrived basically right in time for evening puja.

Mostly the others went back to rest after, and Ajahn Choo stayed on. After evening puja there was some sort of ceremony, because there were talks that night, and he was obviously really tired, helping out at a ceremony, being up the night before, driving the whole next day and not getting any sleep at all, sitting, listening to more boring talks on Dhamma (laughs), andhe was falling asleep, but he kept picking himself up. You could just sort of feel that lifting himself up, and he’d fall asleep, and pick himself up, he’d fall asleep, and pick himself up, because the talks started probably about 10 o’clock at night, and he’d go down, and pick himself up, and about 1 or 2 o’clock in the morning, he picked himself up, and he didn’t move after that, until morning chanting, at 3 or 3:30.

He just kept working with that lifting up the mind, lifting up the mind, lifting up the mind, lifting up the mind, bringing the mind back, and that sloth and torpor will dissipate, because one is gaining that energy from lifting up and putting the mind on the object - vitaka - lifting up the mind to the object, lifting up the attention to the dhamma, lifting up the awareness to what one should be attentive to.

So that vitaka is a very important quality of mind. We need to have the patience to just keep bringing the mind back to its object, keep bringing the mind back to the dhamma, lifting up the mind to that which is wholesome and skillful.

*Vicara* is the sustained application of mind, that again, in this model, is the antidote for doubt, skeptical doubt, wavering.

As on sustains attention on an object, sustains attention on the Dhamma, sustains awareness on the teaching, things become clear. Obviously, if you sustain attention on an object of sensuality, then you’re going to have a very different result. Intrinsically, vicara is bringing the mind to an object of meditation, or an object of awareness - it has a wholesome connotation.

One is reflecting on Dhamma, one isn’t just absorbing into having sustained attention on, you know, some thought of ill will or something. That’s a whole different kettle of fish. Vicara is bringing attention either to a meditation object, or to a theme of contemplation, and as one sustains that attention, sustains that application of mind, then doubt, wavering, skepticism is dispelled. It doesn’t have a hold. It doesn’t grab the mind in the same way it did before. So that, working with vicara, sustained application, we are not buying into that wavering and doubtful quality of mind.

*Piti,* joy, rapture, delight in things, really dispels that negativity of aversion, and it’s something that we can bring attention to. Bringing attention to that which isjoyful, that has a sense of delight in it, something which is very wholesome, associated with Dhamma, associated with a memory of something, associated with a quality of well being - obviously, thoughts of loving kindness are intrinsically wholesome in that way, tending to a sense of well being and warmth within the heart, that has the capability, the capacity to dispel the tendency to the hindrance of aversion, ill-will, dislike, anger. It’s the antidote that one needs to bring attention to.

*Sukha,* is the quality of happiness, happiness both internally, within the mind, the heart being very happy, and physically as well, that quality of feeling very full, replete, happy in that way.

In the commentaries when they try to give the illustration - Well, what’s the difference between piti and sukha? What’s the difference between joy and happiness? - they give the illustration of a person who is walking in a desert, or in who is on a journey that’s in the wilderness - and, you’re hot, you’re tired, you’re thirsty, and there’s no break in it, it just seems endless, but then you see somebody whose hair is wet, they look fresh, they’re clean, they’re not dusty, they look refreshed - and they tell you,

*Oh yeah, I’ve just come from an oasis, an area where there’s a pond. There’s trees for shade. There’s good drinking water there. There’s a place for bathing, it’s a place where you can rest* -

and what would come up in the mind is this quality of joy -

*Oh wow! Looking forward to that…*

*Joy…*

And when one actually gets to that place, one’s able to bathe, refresh one’s body, to drink as much nice, clean, pure water as one would like, to dispel one’s thirst, to sit under the shade in a cool spot, and just to be able to feel physically and mentally at ease, and happy…

That’s the difference between joy and happiness. The joy is more on the mental level, of the rapture, and a certain expectation of more to come, and the happiness is more of a settled and replete feeling that is through the body and the mind.

That *sukha*, that happiness, is the antidote to restlessness, worry, that kind of agitation in the mind that is there. When there is that feeling of tranquility in the body, the mind feeling replete, and full, then that restlessness has nowhere to stand. It’s dispelled, it’s in abeyance, it’s settled.

In meditation, bringing attention to those things that are physically and mentally relaxing, settling, peaceful, pleasing to the mind, pleasing to consciousness - pleasing in the sense of - in accord with Dhamma - it always to qualify that.

The antidote for sensual desire is *ekkadata* - one pointedness of mind. The tendency of the mind to go out is so strong, to be able to bring the mind and settle it on a point of awareness, and to return to that point of awareness, that one-pointedness,

that strong draw and pull, the fascination with something other than the present moment, something else that’s going to fulfill, something outside that’s going to satisfy - that sensual desire is always going out, looking for gratification, satisfaction, fascination… looking for…

Like Ajahn Chah using the image of the person looking for the turtle with a mustache, looking for happiness in sensual desire, looking for satisfaction in the world outside, looking for the turtle with the mustache - one never finds it, not yet anyway… I don’t think there’s a genus in the animal realm devoted to turtles with mustaches, it just isn’t there;

Returning to one-pointedness, *ekkadata,* in terms of how we work with it, oftentimes what I do when I’m sitting, is just return to that, with the breath, that,

*Breathing in, vitaka, bringing the mind up to the sensation at the tip of the nose, or in the body itself,*

*Vicara, just feeling the those as the breath goes out…*

*As the breath comes in, piti, really bringing in a quality of joy and light*

*and on the out-breath, and sukha, in terms of pervading it through the whole body…*

A*s the breath comes in, ekkadata, holding that one point…*

*as the breath goes out, ekkadata, holding that one point*…

*Vitaka, bringing the breath in…*

So following that through,

Vitakka

Vichara

Piti

Sukha

Ekkadata

*- lifting up awareness, sustaining it, pervading awareness and a sense of well being through the whole body, through the mind, it’s working with that, one-pointing…*

and then when everything feels very settled, then just to drop the verbiage, of using those words, and then just staying with the sensation of the breath,

*as it comes in…*

*and the breath as it goes out…*

finding a point that is clear, and the mind is interested to stay there, and to hold that, work with that, staying with that,

*What’s that feel like?*

Or, if one wants to move attention through the body,

*How does one sustain that attention?*

And if the mind starts to wander, one loses that track again, ok,

*Vitaka, lifting up attention, bringing it to the breath, all the way in, right to the end of the in-breath…*

*Vicara, the breath going out, feeling the whole body, feeling attention going through the whole body, pervading the whole body with awareness…*

*The breath comes in, bringing piti, a sense of joy and lightness into the meditation, into the heart…*

*Sukha, breathing out, letting that settle and pervade through the whole body…*

*Ekkadata - holding, coming to one point…*

- using it as a theme to work with the meditation, working with the breath, cultivating the mindfulness of breathing…

I offer that for reflection this evening.

Talk 8 - Sitting, Walking, and the Hindrances

As we’re beginning our sitting, give attention to the breath and really try to anchor attention in the body, in the experience of the breath.

It’s quite common for us to drift into the concept of the breath, the idea of the breath, the thought of meditation, and miss the the actual experience;

Really ground attention in the actual experience of the breath and really be attentive to the the sensation of the breath as it comes in, being very present for the the breath.

*As you breath in at the tip of your nose, attend to that sensation in a way that is really trying to feel it rather than than just watch it, and let the the body receive the breath…*

*As the breath goes out, then just let the body relax and let the breath follow its nature… It’s going to go out of the body, but to be very present for that, be very attentive…*

It’s almost like riding the breath, or just being really *with* the breath.

I’ve never ever surfed, but that’s the image that is coming up - in order to surf, one really has to be *with* the wave, and *with* the water. You can’t just be sort of on your board and thinking about something else, or thinking about what you’re doing. You have to be really present.

So this is in a similar way, as being with the breath. That’s how I imagine it would be with, say, surfing.

But certainly with the breath, that is what we have to do. We have to be with the breath.

Also what comes to mind is just how Ajaan Lee uses that phrase, “keeping the breath in mind.” It’s sort of like really keeping the breath in the mind. It’s not letting the breath wander and not letting the mind wander. And keeping the breath in mind; keeping the mind on the breath - both those have to be working together.

That lovely image he gives of how it is the same way for eating: When you eat you have to get the spoon into the mouth and you have to get the mouth onto the spoon. They both have to work together. If we ate in the same way that we watched our breath when we’re meditating, the spoon would not reach the mouth and the mouth would be missing the spoon a lot. There would be a big mess around one if one were eating in the same way that we meditate.

So to really bring that attention to the the sensation of the breath, the mind being *with* the breath. The breath being *on* the mind, *in* the mind. The mind, the awareness envelopes and surrounds the breath. It’s there. It’s present for it. It’s with it. It’s experiencing it fully…

So to really bring that on to the experiential level, and to be relaxing the body, not making the meditation into something that is really driven or tense or tight because that takes the mind away from the breath as well. If you’re forcing too hard, or you just have this driven feeling behind it - the whole point of the meditation is to to be experiencing a quality of tranquility and ease.

So to bring that into each breath as you begin the breathing process, you begin the meditation…

*The beginning of each breath and the beginning of each ‘in’ breath, the beginning of each ‘out’ breath, to be really relaxing and settling, bringing a sense of ease into the meditation, into the body…*

Again, that’s really grounding awareness in the body. The mindfulness of breathing is a bodily experience. And just to engage the body in that process, and allow awareness to suffuse the body so that there’s a kind of a full awareness that is receiving the breath and is present with the breath.

It’s like the story I’ve told many times of a person who I met. It was the first year I was meditating and living at another meditation center, not Ajahn Chah’s. This person had been practicing in a zen monastery, a Rinzai zen monastery in Japan, and he’d gone and lived there for for quite some time.

Of course the Rinzai style is the koan style where during sesshin or, retreat periods you’d be going and giving an answer to your koan each day, sometimes a couple times a day even, where you’re supposed to come and present the answer, the response to the koan.

Then the teacher will evaluate the response, whether it’s off or on, and then send you back to continue meditating if you didn’t get the answer to the koan properly.

And of course what happens is there’s this endless line of people going into the to see the roshi. You do your bows. You give your answer, and then the roshi rings a bell, and then that’s your dismissal and you go back and meditate. [Slight laugher…]

So, this particular person was getting extremely frustrated because he’d go in and come out and try to come up with an answer to his koan. He’d get the bell rung, have to do his bows, go back and meditate. He just thought, “I’m not getting this. This is really frustrating.” Then he’d after some time… Each time he would get dismissed…

The roshi was very big, a big man as well as having a big sort of belly on him, a big gut, and he’d ring the bell [sound of bell], dismiss him, slap his belly, and laugh and say, “Body understands.”

It was getting (to be) endless frustration… He’s working away, trying to figure out his meditation and trying to figure out this koan and meditating with his mind, and the roshi keeps telling him, “Body understands.” He spends his whole time there and never did figure it out there… [laughter]

But that sense of *experience*, fully experiencing something so that the mind is *on* the breath; the breath is *in* the mind. The body is present with full awareness. Awareness is enveloping and surrounding the body completely, so that there’s not a separation, and the breath is what one is attending to. One is experiencing fully, knowing clearly the breath, and the body is the base, the anchor.

To allow the awareness and attention to absorb into the sensation of the breath; To allow the breath *to receive* the awareness and attention; For the body, the bodily sensation of the breath to be, say, permeable, to be ready to receive that awareness - so that sense of real integration of of the body-mind.

So that, being with the breath, what is very important is the sensation. It’s a bodily sensation and then just grounding attention in the body.

In order to do that one has to sort of really *relax the whole body*. The breath is not separate from the rest of the body. There’s not this breath happening and then there’s a body that one can just sort of just put up with, or set aside. The whole body is what is breathing. The whole body is what is present for the breath, and is where the mind, of course, is grounded, is anchored.

You notice in Buddhist practice, like in the *Paṭiccasamuppāda* that we chanted this morning, that *nāma-rūpa* is always working together, the body-mind is always there, form and the mental processes are together, it’s not a separate thing.

Even in the *Paṭiccasamuppāda*, the *viññāṇa-paccaya*(??) *nāma-rūpa* is… with consciousness as condition there is the body-mind experience.

The traditional explanation is always with the relink in consciousness, rebirth consciousness, then there is body and mind. It’s not as if we’ve got disembodied consciousness that is functioning in the world.

In order for life to exist, there needs to be body and mind. That is what sustains life through our whole existence.

So that for if some reason the body is jeopardized or dies and that is the embodiment of consciousness - the mind ceases to have a formal relationship with the body. The body dies, it’s very integral function.

So that in meditation, really trying to recognize that, to honor that, and particularly for us I think it’s important to really attend to the body, the bodily experience, so that we’re really having a a stable anchor in the meditation.

I’ve been taking about the Hindrances these last days. As meditators, we have to be savvy to what is a hindrance -

*How do they show themselves?*

*What do they manifest as?*

and

*How do they obstruct us, obstruct awareness and weaken wisdom?*

*How do they keep doing that?*

and,

*What’s it like when there* aren’t *hindrances?*

Images that the Buddha uses, which illustrate both of those aspects is, to say, it is like water.

So that the mind without hindrances is like clear, still water, very clear, very clean, very pure.

There are discourses where the Buddha talks of when the mind settles and it gains a basis in stillness and has insight, and the mind is able to see things clearly as if one were standing at the edge of a pool and one could see, “Those are rocks. Those are fish. Those are crabs.” You could see through things so clearly. The mind that is free from hindrances and free of those obstructions has this clarity to it.

The mind with the hindrances, the Buddha gives various images, say, like with sensual desire, then the mind is like water that has various colors put into it, various dyes. You put red dye in it and it turns red; blue dye and turns blue; you put a few different colors in, it becomes all mushy, an indistinct sort of color.

That is similar to the desire mind. As the mind goes out to an object of desire, then it takes on the characteristic of that object and the mind is tainted by the desire for that object. That’s how it starts to view the world, through that object of desire. That’s what one wants, and that desire is coloring everything. It’s like the saying that ‘a pickpocket doesn’t actually see people, he just sees pockets and wallets.’

It’s the same way with all of our various desires. We shape the world by the various desires that we have, and they start to color it in that way. The hindrance of sensual desire is staining, coloring what was clear.

So the working with relinquishing of sensual desire gives one the opportunity to come back to the space of clarity, and being able to see things more clearly.

The hindrance of ill-will and aversion the Buddha compares to boiling water, in that, with boiling water, of course, one can’t see things clearly in it. The nature of the water changes from something being clear and still, to becoming very agitated.

And also just like with just ordinary clear, cool water, you can put your finger in it and it’s cool. It’s refreshing. You can wash your face with it. It’s cool and refreshing - with boiling water you get burned, you get scalded by it. In the same way ill-will aversion is a scalding tendency, burning up the mind, itself, and the objects that it touches.

So, in terms of meditation, we create this real sense of pain in our own hearts when we cling to ill-will and aversion, when we buy into the hindrance of ill-will, because it really burns. It scalds. Besides the lack of clarity, it’s very painful, and so that to work with the hindrance, one is able to bring the water back to a place of coolness, allowing it to cool, allowing it to settle down.

The hindrance of sloth and torpor, the Buddha compares to water that is in a swamp or a pond, and it has these water plants, and kind of scum that floats on the top, and clouds the water. When the water is covered in water hyacinths or these kinds of pond algae that float on the top, it covers it up so that one can’t see in it. The image the Buddha gives is that, in order to drink that water one would need to push that algae, and those plants away, so that one could get at the clear pond that’s underneath.

In the same way with sloth and torpor, we need to be able to push those hindrances away. We need to be able to clear them out. Put forth the effort to push them back, that bringing up of energy, bringing up of effort, clearing the mind off, pushing off the scum that sits on top of it, or that sort of comes in.

In the same way with the water, often times you’ll see on a pond depending on which way the wind blows, you’ll see it moving back and forth, things like water plants and different pond scum.

Sometimes you can see that sort of cloud of dullness starting to come into the mind when you’re meditating and you need to push it back immediately rather than letting it drift over one and cloud the mind, or cover up the mind that is clear.

So that in working with the hindrance of of sloth and torpor, bring up the different techniques that are helpful for dispelling that.

Certainly the mindfulness of the body, sitting up straight, putting energy in the body - those are very immediate methods that give one the opportunity to let that hindrance go, at least to go back to the edges of the pond there.

The hindrance of restlessness, the Buddha compares to a pond or a lake with waves on it. The surface is unsettled so one can’t see through it very clearly, and one can’t use it for a reflection.

Especially in the Buddha’s time, when one of the ways that was used as a mirror that reflected one’s image back, was water in a dish that was still.

But water that has wind is blowing on it, when there are waves on it, you can’t see any image of reflection.

Similarly, on a reflection on a pond or a stream where there’s a lot of wind blowing and there are ripples and waves on the surface, then one can’t use it to see. That seeing, as in that image the Buddha gives, of seeing the rocks, seeing the shoal, seeing the gravel, seeing the fish, seeing the crabs - it needs to be still, besides being clear, it needs to be still.

Restlessness is similar, because sometimes the mind may not be going so much even into really the negative, aversive, unwholesome things, but it’s just kind of restless, maybe restlessly thinking about good things, or benign things, but it’s still restless, so it’s still not still. It’s not sullied or swamped with negativity, but it’s not still. It’s just restlessness there that is not allowing the mind to see itself clearly.

Working with the ways that are skillful in settling that restlessness, and bringing up those images that are peaceful, that are settling.

Again, that being with the breath in a very complete, present way is very settling. It’s very stilling, very calming; or bringing up different images in the mind that bring up a sense of peace, of settling.

You’re using as an image, an object of attention like that image of a very peaceful Buddha image. It’s a very positive. There’s a sense of happiness, of the peace of the Buddha. Those really tend to cut through that restlessness of the mind. So one uses objects of attention that are settling.

For the hindrance of doubt, the Buddha gives the image of water that is muddy, or has sediment in it. It’s dirty, it clouded. This clouded sediment obstructs the clarity of the water.

The Buddha goes even further with this one. He says that not only is it sort of clouded and filled with sediment and muddy, it’s also stuck off in a cupboard and closed up. Definitely clarity is not on the screen.

So purifying the mind of doubt and finding the ways that help the mind to step out of its tendency to doubt, to waver, to be trapped by uncertainty - again, the use of the body is very important, bringing a real clarity, because it’s tangible.

So many of the things we doubt about and are uncertain about or wavering about are so ephemeral. They’re usually in the realm of ideas and beliefs. They’re not so tangible.

In order to help the mind get back on track so that it can see clearly, see through the ideas and beliefs so one can get a handle on it, we can come back to the body, bringing energy to the body, bringing energy to the posture, bringing energy to the certainty of being with the sensation as it is.

It builds that momentum of, let’s say, the non-wavering of clarity, and then one is able to cut through that tendency to doubt.

So working with, and undermining, cutting through and finding skillful means to relinquish the hindrances are ways of coming back to the original nature of the clear mind, to be able to come back to the mind that is refreshed, and refreshing, in the same way that clear, cool water is refreshing.

So when we’re doing this, and whether it’s in sitting meditation or walking meditation, this is working with the hindrances, taking these hindrances and observing what’s going on.

In walking meditation, in the same way that one is attentive to the breath, attend very closely to the the sensation of movement, the sensation of lifting the foot, moving the foot, setting the foot down, and lifting your left foot, moving it, setting it down;

Come back to the simple sensation, the simple rhythm of the walking meditation, and be attentive to posture in the same way, because sometimes we get walking and we’re either tense or tight, or we’re just kind of sloppily swinging arms and shuffling from one end of the walking meditation path to the other. There are those two extremes: too loose and too tight. Bring it back to a point of balance where there’s this attentiveness to the body, but there’s a really nice composed quality.

Keep the hands clasped in front of one, so that there’s, again, this nice sense of composure, walking with one’s head down, just gazing in front of oneself, about six feet or so. One is not looking up too much or looking down so much that it’s a strain on the neck. Get this nice posture for walking, and then really relax your shoulders, relax bringing your back up nice and straight and even.

When one is walking as well, just walking, sometimes you see people and you really see what’s going on in their minds sometimes. They’re walking with their head really going forward. You can see that their thoughts are just pulling them along. (chuckle). They’re not present with the moment.

So that to let the awareness suffuse the body, walking slowly, a bit slower than normal, it’s useful to walk slowly. The tendency, of course, is that the mind is conditioned by the body, so that just walking a bit slower, we are conditioning the mind in a way that we slow down and take it easy. No rush. This is giving the mind that opportunity to settle, to become more still.

It’s natural for more thoughts to come up in walking meditation because one is doing physical movement, so it conditions the mind to move as well.

So recognize those tendencies for thoughts to arise, and then come back to the walking, come back to the sensation.

Oftentimes there can tend to be some very insightful reflections coming up in walking meditation, but again, it’s really helpful to have that base of peacefulness, that base of composure and stability of mind in order for those reflections to really go a bit deeper. So don’t get too caught in the sort of the analysis in investigation part as one is walking, because it’s quite a natural movement of the mind anyway.

This is not to just sort of squelch the mind, because as they say, it’s natural for the the mind to be turning a bit more, to be reflecting a bit more in the walking, but to try to really protect the underlying settledness of the mind so that those reflections are able to penetrate a bit more.

Ajahn Chah would always say you can get a lot of wisdom from walking meditation, because there’s this natural tendency for the mind to move so that these reflections come up often times more readily or naturally in walking meditation.

But then again, it is important to try to keep the base of composure and stability. When there’s more stillness, then there’s more penetration, and so even when the mind is moving, then it’s moving from a place of stillness. It’s moving from a place of clarity. So, looking after that.

Then those reflections, the Dhamma becomes the interest to reflect on. There is more stillness, because it’s not skipping from one thought to another. It’s reflecting on

*How does this work?*

*How does this apply?*

*What* is *the end of suffering?*

*How* does *it come about?*

So, I offer that for reflection this morning.

Talk 9 - Working With Mind Objects [[2]](#footnote-2), [[3]](#footnote-3)

Okay. Is everybody happy? (Laughter) She’s had her fill of doughnuts…

The meditation of feeling - it’s where I stepped off into the realm of the hindrances, from the section on feeling in mindfulness of breathing, in the tetrad on feeling.

It’s an apt theme of contemplation today. One of the reasons, of course, that I started on the hindrances is that those first two parts of the this tetrad are contemplation of experiencing *pīti*, rapture **(5)**, and experiencing happiness, *sukha* **(6)***,* breathing in, breathing out, and trying to use that theme of bringing the hindrances into abeyance in order to bring out this feeling of rapture and happiness.

So we are dealing with them skillfully, relinquishing the hindrances in order to cultivate those positive feelings, rather than rapture and happiness through donuts. Satiation has a limited time span in its effect. (ha)

The contemplation of feeling, in terms of this tetrad, is then also attending to the *citta-saṅkhāra,* experiencing the *citta-saṅkhāra,* **(7)** and calming *citta-saṅkhāra*. **(8)**

C*itta-saṅkhāra* being *that which conditions the mind*, *the mind conditioner,* or *the condition of the mind*.

It can be interpreted in both those ways. The primary aspects of *citta-saṅkhāra -* is that it is your base, your fundamental condition for moving the mind, or feeling and perception.

As we practice and contemplate, and having settled the mind through dealing skillfully with the hindrances, then to direct attention to the arising and movement within the mind -

*What is it that moves the mind?*

***…*** *those feelings…*

On a certain level it’s essential to be able to recognize that tendency, that dynamic, in order to understand the hindrances, because the mind immediately goes there…

It experiences something pleasant, and almost invariably it will go to the object of sensuality. It experiences something unpleasant, and it will go to something negative or aversion or confusion.

So that investigation of the feeling (and) perception, to really be contemplating that,

*as the breath comes in…*

*as the breath goes out…*

to really attend to the experience of feeling as something pleasant, and then,

*What is its result?*

*What’s its association? -*

because \*perception is both (related to) memory, and association. It’s that ability to immediately try to find meaning in a particular experience.

*What* is its meaning *to one when we experience something either pleasant or unpleasant?*

*What importance, what meaning do we read into it?*

*Immediately, what’s the immediate impression?*

And then to be able to question that, and recognize, “Well this is just a perception.” -

and then to be looking,

*Is it valid or is it not valid?”*

On a certain level, of course, it’s valid because it’s rising; but,

*Is it useful or is it not useful?*

*Is it going to be beneficial or not?*

*Is it going to lead to suffering, or is it going to lead to the cessation of suffering?*

As practitioners we need to be investigating this, and be attentive to that.

*When we experience something that is* unpleasant*, is it necessarily problematic?*

*Can we use it as an opportunity to be patient?*

- because that changes its quality, doesn’t it?

Or even when we experience a hindrance - in itself, it’s negative. It’s what the Buddha points to as being that which undermines awareness and weakens wisdom, but as soon as we’re able to establish awareness, and again, this is where it’s very helpful, useful, necessary to have mindfulness of breathing;

anchoring, grounding the awareness in the (body and breathing) and making it very familiar to yourself so that you can keep returning to the breath. You’re familiar… It’s like a home ground for one. You can return to the breath.

Because as soon as you establish awareness of that recognition, “Ah, this is aversion. This is restlessness” - that, in itself, is a positive mental state. It’s the way that the mind functions.

The map of the mind from a Buddhist perspective, and particularly the Abhidhamma, says that these mental states don’t exist beside each other. They exist sequentially, so that you can’t have a negative state of mind co-existing together with a positive state of mind. They can shift back and forth. They can shift back and forth very quickly, but as soon as you establish awareness, intrinsically the nature of mindfulness is that it is a positive mental state.

That mental state is one that is wholesome. Whether or not one can sustain it is another story, because it might just be drawn back into the negativity, but as soon as one establishes awareness, then one has moved from the unwholesome, unskillful, to the wholesome and skillful. Then the work is to sustain that.

That’s again where the mindfulness of breathing is so important because the more familiar you become with it, the more skilled you are in taking that object and its associations, its perceptions are those of skillfulness, peace, tranquility, and clarity. Then the mind can go back to that. It’s able to extend its stability of the wholesome, of the peaceful, of the clear.

The mindfulness of feeling here is to be attending to how these feelings condition us. The feeling - perception, what comes to mind is a little vignette from Winnie the Pooh again.

Winnie the Pooh is sitting under a tree, and he hears this buzzing noise. And then he thinks to himself, “What’s this buzzing and buzzing sound?” “Well, there’s only one thing that can can make a buzzing noise like this, and that’s bees!” Of course, the next thought is, “Well, there’s only one thing that bees do, and they make honey.” Then he thinks again. “And there’s only one thing that honey is good for. And it’s for me to eat it!” (laughs) So, then he gets up and he goes and climbs this tree, looking for the honey.

So it’s these associations… it’s more or less how our own minds work. You hear something and there’s a feeling, an association, a perception, and then the thought arises associated with that and then there’s a feeling and perception associated with that, and you end up in various places, climbing trees, looking for honey. If I’m not mistaken, I think he got stuck or something in this particular adventure.

Here, we are investigating and tracking how these mental states arise, how they are conditioned.

*How do the hindrances come about?*

There are all these sets of conditioning factors.

We are setting the conditions for our practice, in that mindfulness of breathing is a major conditioning factor for bringing into being the wholesome states of mind, the peaceful states of mind, and bringing the hindrances into abeyance. This is when we are attending to the mindfulness of breathing.

When we experience that which is maybe painful, a painful sensation, it’s important to be investigating that, and seeing,

*What are the results?*

- because the general knee jerk reaction if is something is pleasant is: “I want it,” and if something’s is unpleasant: “I don’t want it. I can’t stand it.” On a worldly level that’s mostly how we function, but for the Buddha, he’s always looking at the conditioning factors and seeing things in a much broader perspective, recognizing that there’s happiness or pleasant *sukha*, that which is pleasant, that is the condition leading to more happiness, and there’s happiness or pleasure that leads to suffering.

There’s *sukha* that leads to *sukha* and there’s *sukha* that leads to *dukkha*.

And similarly, there’s *dukkha*.

There’s the unpleasant that leads to more *dukkha,* and then there’s *dukkha* that leads to that which is pleasant, which is the way out of *dukkha*.

So it’s important to be able to bring that into perspective and work with feelings, especially with that which is unpleasant, *dukkha-vedana.* Just because of the unpleasant nature of it, we tend to think it’s disastrous.

*It’s awful. How can I get rid of it? Somebody is to blame.*

- and we generate more negativity, but using the the *dukkha-vedana,* webring mindfulness to bear, using the steadying of attention on the feeling and then directing attention to that which is at least on the level of equanimity and stability, so that one is not shaken.

That’s where the Buddha talks as if one were experiencing illness, then, How can you let the experience, the bodily illness be, without experiencing mental illness, without making the mind ill at ease? The body is already feeling a discomfort. Why go and make the mind feel pain and discomfort also?

It’s the same in meditation, or in whatever experience we’re engaged with. How can we attend to the feeling of “This is unpleasant”, and then learn to bring up the qualities which are wholesome? - and equanimity is a wholesome factor. Patience is a wholesome factor. Effort is a wholesome factor.

One doesn’t have to try to sugar coat it and say “I’m experiencing *dukkha-vedana.* I must be progressing” or “This must be good for me.” One doesn’t have to try to sugarcoat it, make it what it isn’t, but it’s,

*Well, how can I use this skillfully?*

When one is experiencing painful sensation in mediation, as we’re in retreat, and doing many hours of meditation a day, it’s inevitable that we feel some discomfort in the body, some physical pain. How can that be used in a way that that helps us to develop the meditation? Again, that mindfulness of breathing is so important because it’s this same relaxing into the breath.

When we’re experiencing physical pain, a painful sensation in the back, or in the knee, how do we stay with the breath in a way that doesn’t tighten up, tense up, start to fret, and get restless, or start to get really averse to the feeling?

That being very present with the breath, and just relaxing the breath and recognizing,

*Well, despite the fact that there is a painful sensation, say, in the knee, or in the back, the breath is still here…*

- and the breath is always, or generally, a neutral object.

So we are trying to relax everything around the breath, rather than the mind being grabbed and co-opted by that particular sensation in the body.

It’s really taking each in-breath and relaxing and settling into that breath…

The pain can still be there, but one changes the relationship with it. When one starts to take a more relaxed, neutral object of attention, the perception changes. It becomes not so strident, not so shrill. Or if it is still shrill, screaming out at one, then (the practice is) to actually surround that, using the breath, really trying to relax the breath and permeating the body with the breath, and then surrounding that feeling, say, in the knee with that easeful breath, the breath being very easeful, very relaxed, and trying to permeate the body with that soft, gentle breath, and then surrounding that particular feeling with that…

And again, the perception can change, and when the perception changes, then the feeling can also change. It can start to be not so painful. It can turn into a more neutral feeling. It can be just sensation. Or it can be painful, but then again when the perception isn’t so shrill and demanding, then it doesn’t agitate the mind in the same way, so it’s not concocting the mind in a negative way. So that is attending to *the mind conditioners*. They are *conditioning* the mind.

Now, that which is pleasant…

Sometimes we can we feel something that is pleasant. Especially sitting and watching the breath, can be very pleasant. And then the perception, the association, the memory - because a lot of our pleasantness, when we think of relaxing, being at ease, it’s not usually associated with energy and effort. When we feel really relaxed and at ease, it’s really when we can not have to deal with things - not have to bother. We can just let things go.

And one has to question that.

*Is that actually useful in terms of Dhamma?*

- because that kind of relaxing, letting things go, just letting it all be at ease, what usually happens is the mind starts to drift with that, doesn’t it? It doesn’t retain its sharpness. It doesn’t retain its clarity.

Sometimes with pleasant sensation there’s a real need to be on one’s guard, to be alert, to bring up ways of energizing:

energizing the breath, energizing the body, energizing the object of attention, energizing the reflection, so that there’s not that drifting taking place, because the feeling and perception then condition the mind.

If the feeling is pleasant, the perception is one of kicking back, and it’s a real nice kind of comfortable chair on a porch on a nice sunny day… summer… with a very easy book to read. There’s something cool to drink beside… just laying back and (smile)… There’s not really sharp meditation. (Soft laughter) There’s that drifting taking place.

So one needs to recognize that, and then attend to the breath, attend to the body, attend to the mind in a way that is going to energize and bring up the qualities of clarity.

When we experience that which is neutral, we talk about feeling, the feeling tone of things.

There are always three feelings that the Buddha talks about: the pleasant, the unpleasant, and the neutral.

And the neutral is probably what we have to be more alert to, more sensitive to because, one, it’s a bit more predominant, especially in terms of meditation. You know, a lot of what we experience is rather neutral.

Also, because with neutral sensation, then we tend to start to fill things in, and again, that’s where feeling - perception… (unfolds, or comes to be)

There’s a neutral feeling, and then the perception is - we’re almost scrambling sometimes to find a perception that’s going to fit. It’s going to make sense to us. Even though it doesn’t necessarily *have to* because it’s just a neutral sensation anyway - but the mind is always working at these perceptual levels, associations. It’s trying to make its associations.

And when there’s neutral feeling, it’s almost like a gap there that is then trying to be filled, and if we’re not attentive to perception, if we’re not attending to -

*Well, what are the associations that are coming up?*

*On the perceptual level, what is actually happening?*

- then we very easily get co-opted by these. It’s almost like perception by default, or association by default. I’m feeling neutral, so that’s boring.

And then from there, this neutral “nothing much is happening,” so let’s get something going here. Let’s find something that’s interesting to think about: sensual desire.

Or, this is - “Nothing much is happening. I’m fed up with this. This is really irritating.”

Or going into dullness or restlessness. Or doubt….

- Just because there’s a neutral sensation… It’s like we’re abhorring a vacuum, not wanting to deal with that which is not defined clearly. It’s not *something.*

And then we will take a something that is negative and destructive just because at least it’s something, and we didn’t have patience to stay with the neutral feeling.

How does that neutral feeling turn into something that is bright, or is equanimous in the sense of being very even, being very balanced?

- because that’s where we have that turning of that which is neutral into something that is very positive.

One needs to stay with the neutral sensation so that it can be grounded in, let’s say, that equanimity of being very evenly balanced, having this quality of acceptance and clarity, and then it is able to transform into equanimity, and equanimity being a very positive mental state.

You think of the seven factors of enlightenment: it’s mindfulness, reflection on Dhamma, effort, joy, tranquility, concentration, equanimity.

Equanimity is your culminating point in the Factors of Enlightenment.

One works to that point. One builds on these different other positive qualities to come to a place of equanimity.

So that using and relying on the neutral sensation, which is then bringing mindfulness to that neutral feeling, bringing awareness and attention, making that neutral feeling come alive with alertness - then that has a transformative quality.

The perception then is one of bringing things into the heart, bringing things into the contemplation. Whereas with the neutrality, a neutral feeling, which is then not really attended to, then one starts again looking outwards, looking at somebody else, or rejecting that, and then seeking something else.

So that in our practice, taking feeling and working with that, recognizing,

*What is the particular feeling that I’m experiencing?*

*What is the tone of this sensation?*

*How to work with it?*

*What are the perceptions that come up?*

*What are the associations?*

because from there the mind starts to spin out, or it can start spinning out into the hindrances, into the different forms of negativity;

but then in the same way, it’s the same feeling and perception that is generating the reflections on Dhamma - when we take something, a pleasant sensation, and recognize, perceiving it as potential for something that can be very can bring more well being.

Same with the *dukkha*-*vedana*, that which is unpleasant feeling, bringing up the perception of its potential of Dhamma, of being something that,

*I can really learn something from this.*

*I can use this to cultivate some very wholesome qualities.*

*All the qualities of Dhamma can be cultivated out of this particular feeling…*

So that the perception in one that is then assisting one in practice.

Again, the feeling- perceptions are on a very basic level of the mind, and it happens very quickly, and one needs to recognize what perceptions are functioning, because we can be, or we are completely conditioned by them;

And it’s important to be putting in place the positive associations and reinforcing the potential for these positive associations in the mind so that the perception keeps going to Dhamma.

And the same with the neutral. It’s like the mind tends to be kind of flummoxed, or just wanting to fill in the gaps all the time. So that with bringing up that intention to take the breath, which is a neutral sensation, take the breath, and to be consistently returning awareness to the breath,

*as the breath comes in, this quality of knowing and knowing clearly…*

*as the breath goes out, establishing that quality of knowing, of knowing clearly…*

and using the body as a foundation, using feeling as a foundation for this experiencing clearly the different aspects of content, and what is happening within the mind.

And not just trying to figure it out on an intellectual level, but coming back to…

*as the breath comes in, say, experiencing the mental…the citta-saṅkhāra, the mind conditioner…*

*breathing out, experiencing the mind conditioner…* **(7)**

*As one breaths in, calming the mind conditioner, the citta-saṅkhāra…*

*as the breath goes out, calming the citta-saṅkhāra…* **(8)**

It’s that sense of calming, coming to a place of awareness, attentiveness, alertness, mindfulness.

It’s always that quality of mindfulness that we need to be relying on, that returning of mindfulness to the breath, making the breath the central piece of what our practice revolves around. Then we have this opportunity to investigate and apply attention in all these different ways, which lay the foundation for peacefulness, stability of mind, and lay the foundation for insight, and penetration.

So, I’ll offer that for reflection this morning.

Talk 10 - Experiencing the Mind

As we attend to mindfulness of breathing, the different focuses of attention that are possible, it’s important to recognize the possibilities or the different ways and modes of attention.

Using the body as the basis for attention, using feeling as a basis for attention, all of this is happening within the sphere of this mindfulness of breathing. This is your baseline. The mindfulness of the in-breath, mindfulness of the out-breath is your base, your foundation, and from that base, then you direct attention to the body, to feelings, and also to the mind.

This is the third tetrad in the Discourse on Mindfulness of Breathing. It’s the third foundation of mindfulness, and it’s a necessary foundation to be attentive to because the mind is where we experience things. That’s the function of the citta. It’s where we experience things. All the functions of our awareness, cognition, perception, the conceptualizations within the mind, emotions – these are all happening in the mind base.

And this is the first step in this tetrad **(9)** :

*Experiencing the mind, I breathe in…*

*Experiencing the mind, I breathe out…*

- and *recognizing* what is happening within the mind, because we experience things within the mind, and more often than not, we don’t actually see it or recognize it as “This is just the mind” - we see it as “This is me”. There is the assumption of me-ness, my-ness, and there is whatever mental state, or mood experienced as “this is me”.

Or it is seen as the external world that is believed in, invested, interested in, and we end up deluded by it. So we spend our time either deluded by the world outside us, or deluded by ourselves, our assumption of self-ness, of me-ness, and as Ajahn Chah would oftentimes say,

*The one who is lost in the world, is lost in their moods. The one who is lost in their moods is lost in the world.*

There is that basic confusion, or misapprehension of reality, and so the foundation to be able to cut through that, and at least get a beginning, a toehold on reality, is experiencing the mind - recognizing clearly what is the mind, and what is going on in the mind.

It’s like in the Satipatthana Sutta, the Buddha, when he describes the *citta upasana* - the mindfulness of, the recollection of the mind, and it’s

*Seeing the mind with desire as the mind with desire,*

*the mind without desire as the mind without desire;*

*the mind with aversion as the mind with aversion,*

*the mind without aversion as the mind without aversion;*

*the mind with delusion as the mind with delusion,*

*the mind without delusion as the mind without delusion…*

- seeing these fundamental conditionings of the mind, or the additions to the mind, the defilements of mind, *klesa*, and whether they are there or not.

Are they conditioning the mind?, because that is what we take as the mind, how it manifests itself.

And generally, we get spun around by greed, hatred and delusion, and we’re not usually aware of when the mind is *without* greed, hatred and delusion. We are not attentive to it, not recognizing, not experiencing the mind in its true nature.

So, that experiencing the mind, when we really experience it fully, the mind with greed, with hatred, with delusion, then the direct experience of that is suffering. We see it very clearly.

As soon as we acquiesce to the mind of greed, of hatred, of delusion, we are also acquiescing to suffering. We are also accepting, welcoming, giving full throttle to suffering, and if we experience that with mindfulness and clarity, then the result would be stepping back from that.

It’s just,

*Why would we make ourselves suffer?*

*-* but because we don’t experience it with mindfulness, we don’t experience it clearly, we don’t experience it with full awareness, then we just sort of bumble along, and that’s kind of the story of our lives.

So that - experiencing the mind without greed, without hatred, without delusion - that has a very opposite effect. When we experience that fully, we really take note of and recognize clearly,

*This is what the experience of a mind without greed is like.*

*This is what the experience of a mind without aversion, without delusion - this is what’s it’s like.*

*This is what the experience is.*

*This is how it manifests itself,*

- then the experience is one of the alleviation of suffering, and being free from suffering, an experience of well-being and of peace, and that just gives a whole different perspective on our human existence, that we can actually live without greed, hatred and delusion, and this is really the direction we want to be going in. This is really what is satisfying, and anything else is painful.

So there is a clear recognition of these fundamental forces in the human mind.

Also the Buddha is describing *citta upasana* in the Satipatthanna,

*Knowing the contracted mind as contracted;*

*knowing the distracted mind as distracted;*

*knowing the exalted mind as exalted,*

*knowing the unexalted mind as unexalted;*

*knowing the concentrated mind as concentrated,*

*knowing the unconcentrated mind as unconcentrated;*

*knowing the developed mind as developed,*

*knowing the undeveloped mind as undeveloped;*

*knowing the liberated mind as liberated,*

and

*knowing the unliberated mind as unliberated*

So this is understanding the mind, understanding what is going on in the mind, what is the mood of the mind, what is the basic content of the mind, and what its repercussions are.

So that in using this mindfulness of breathing and,

*Experiencing the mind, I breathe in…*

*experiencing the mind, I breathe out…*

we are starting to really hone in and attend to the mind itself.

We have been laying the foundations of calmness and clarity, mindfulness and awareness through using the body, and using obviously the breath in its many guises, or ways, using the different ways of really relaxing and settling the body, settling the mind so that we can really start to look at the mind itself.

Here we are peering into the world of our inner experience, and seeing more clearly:

*What is it that motivates us?*

*What pushes us?*

*What is it that is peaceful and liberating?*

and,

*What is it that is entangling and painful?*

- and it’s the mind that creates that.

And to take a real interest in your own mind, not just relying on theory or what one has heard – one uses those for pointers – but to be really looking at, well,

*What is my experience?*

*What do I know about my own mind?”*

Larry Rosenberg gives a little story of when he was teaching an introduction to meditation over an eight week period or something, an ongoing course that he teaches at the Cambridge Insight Meditation Society. There were many people who joined this course, but there were these three professors from Harvard who joined. Two of them were actually Buddhist scholars and the three of them all had Ph.ds. Two of them were Buddhist scholars with their Ph.ds in Buddhist studies, and one of them was a Ph.d in political science. He was a Yugoslavian communist Marxist, and he thought religion was just for softheaded idiots, and the only reason why he was taking the course was because his girlfriend was really interested in Buddhism and was on the course, and he figured if he did not come along with the course, he was jeopardizing his opportunities with his girlfriend, so it was not a particularly noble intention.

But by the end of the course, these two Ph.d’s in Buddhist studies hadn’t really made their minds peaceful at all, or learned very much because they were always looking at and trying to compare it to some treatise, or some book, or something they had heard from somewhere else.

Or they were trying to line it up against the Buddhist Abhidhamma, and Buddhist maps of the mind, and they forgot to look at their own minds, whereas this hardheaded Marxist took a real interest in his own mind, and had some really quite remarkable results, and gained a lot of faith in the practice because he was willing to look at his own mind.

For ourselves, this is what the practice is about. When we say *experiencing the mind*, what comes up? Do we start looking at what such and such a teacher says about the mind, or what such and such a sutta says about the mind, or such and such a theory of mind is in this particular school of Buddhism? Or do we really start to look at our own minds?

*What is the mind that has greed?*

*What is the mind that doesn’t have greed?*

*What is the mind without hatred?*

*What is it like with hatred?*

*How do we* experience *that?*

- so that really, on each in-breath and each out-breath, really being attentive to the mind.

*What is the mind?*

*What’s going on in the mind?*

*What’s the feeling?*

*What’s the tone?*

*What’s the mood?*

*What is its content?*

- and being really attentive to that.

Of course, Ajahn Chah was very much pushing us in that direction all the time, to be studying the mind. He would oftentimes say, just to put away the books, and study the mind. Study your own heart, study your own minds.

This is what living in the forest, practicing in the forest is very helpful for, because it gives us the opportunity to step back from a lot of distractions – external distractions. I mean, we find all sorts of distractions in our own mind, but then, you know, we don’t have any excuse.

I remember one time the first year that we went out to Pujungyong, which is a branch monastery on the border of Laos. It’s very remote area, very simple surroundings, very, very quiet, probably one of the quietest places I have ever experienced in Thailand. And, this is the first year that we had started the place up, and were spending the rains retreat out there, and we were asking one of the monks during the retreat how it was going, how the meditation was going, and he said, “Well, I guess it’s going great. I am not very peaceful, but I don’t have any excuses anymore.”

So that, recognizing that so often the mind comes up with all sorts of excuses why it should be distracted, or what it needs to be thinking about, and when you are in a peaceful setting, a peaceful environment, then you realize that is just more stuff in the mind. It is sort of mind driven. It’s not at all the reality of things.

And in actuality that’s pretty much what it’s like all the time. We don’t *need* to be filling our minds with greed, hatred, and delusion just for the fun of it, or just because it is some sort of duty or expectation. We take that on voluntarily, and we don’t recognize it. We don’t see it clearly.

So that experiencing the mind, really being attentive to

*What is the mood in the mind?*

*What is it conditioned by?*

*What is its feeling tone?*

*What are the constituents of it?*

- these are experiencing the mind, the different ways that the mind gets caught in its distraction or contraction, or even goes to an exalted state, very sublime.

Do we just see that as the mind? Or do we then immediately add on to that? You know,

*“My mind is in a contracted state, or a distracted state, therefore I am a diminished being. I am not a worthy person. I am not a good meditator…”*

Or the mind experiences some sublime radiance and becomes extraordinarily peaceful and radiant, and then is that just experienced as mind? Or is it then,

*“Wow, I really got it now. I’ve got the handle on Buddhism now. I’m really getting my meditation together now. I’m a good meditator. My practice is really good now… Wait until I tell the Ajahn”… (laughs)*

Or is it just experiencing the mind?

*Experiencing the mind, I breathe in…*

*experiencing the mind, I breathe out…*

- and not getting caught in the additions of who I am, what I am, within that.

On a certain level, this is that sense of recognizing more clearly what the mind is.

On a certain level*, citta* is a neutral word or base. It is a potential for so many things. Actually “mind” is a good translation of citta because citta is the framework, container, or the space that is then utilized by all the different aspects of mind. It has this fundamental potential for awareness, and then there are all the moods of the mind, all the movement of the mind.

When Ajahn Chah went to pay respects to Ajahn Mun, this was really the big thing that he came away from his meeting with Ajahn Mun. The advice that Ajahn Mun gave was to start discerning and recognizing more clearly what’s the difference between the mind and the moods of the mind.

There is this fundamental mind base that has its potential of clarity and knowing, and then there are all the moods of the mind, the moods of joy and sorrow, the moods of intelligence and confusion, the moods of irritation or kindness and compassion. All of these are moods of the mind, objects of the mind, and underlying that is this fundamental mind base, the mind itself.

When we are sitting and meditating and practicing, as you’re breathing in, experiencing the mind and really taking the observation and discernment, sort of cut through, you know?

*What is just the mood, the object, the content of the mind?*

*And what is the fundamental mind base?*

- experiencing the citta in its simplicity and its openness. That is really coming back to experiencing the citta, and recognizing the citta as that potential. We have the potential of being very peaceful, unshaken.

In the same way, the images that are often used are the sky and the clouds. You have this open blue sky, and then you have the clouds that pass through it.

The sun and moon sort of pass through the sky, but it’s behind it all. We get attracted to and make all the commentary on the clouds and the sun and the different things that we see in the sky. We don’t pay much attention to the sky itself. We take it for granted.

It’s similar with the mind. We get attracted to, we get averse to, we get confused by, we get intellectually stimulated by the content of the mind, the moods that pass through the mind, and we fail to direct attention to the mind, the mind of knowing, the mind that is able to just be present, to be clear, to know clearly.

Experiencing the mind

And this is where it’s so necessary to develop the stillness within the mind.

The mind is there all the time, and we can take it for granted. We can distract ourselves from it. It’s there all the time, but we need to attend to it in a way that we start to appreciate its potential, and its stillness.

If we’re always stirring it up, always adding things to it, proliferating with it, then we fail to recognize its potential. We fail to taste the fruit of the potential of the mind.

So the meditation and the developing of stillness, the still, settled, clear mind, gives us a window of opportunity to recognize more clearly that potential within the mind.

The developing of samadhi is a necessary part of the cultivation, and samadhi has conditions. It comes and goes seemingly on a random basis but you keep plugging away at it because it gives us an opportunity to experience the mind, and as we experience the mind, then we can start to recognize,

*Ok, this is mind, and these are the objects of mind, and these are the moods of the mind…*

And the moods of the mind can then be experienced within a framework, and when we see that more clearly, then it is so much easier to let go of the moods of the mind, the objects of the mind, the content of the mind.

Again, that tendency of taking the content, the mood of the mind, and either taking it as self, ‘this is who I am, this is me, this is mine’, or taking what is just a mood of the mind and looking on the world, extrapolating it out to the world - the world being pleasant, unpleasant, desirable, undesirable, and it is not because of the world.

The world is just sort of as it is. The things outside of us are just as they are. It is we ourselves that imbue it with meaning, give value to it through the mind itself, through the mood of the mind.

You see that all the time in certain situations, or even just on a day to day basis. You come down into the meditation hall, and some days you are looking forward to the meditation and sometimes you are dreading it. Is it the space? Is it the world being dreadful or delightful? It is the mind creating, putting the value on it, but, you know, it’s believable. We keep believing it.

So returning to experiencing the mind, just be present with the breath and the awareness of the breath, and then directing it to that sense of,

*What is the mind?*

*What are the moods of the mind?*

Citta…there’s a lot of interpretations… it can be pretty confusing sometimes, with conflicting definitions and ways that it is talked about.

Even in the tradition, there is a very well known discourse where the Buddha talks about this mind being radiant but it is defiled by adventitious defilements, stained by adventitious defilements.

And then what they talk about – *papacira citta*, “*the mind is radiant*”, and the commentary then goes off in saying the papcira citta is the *bhavanga citta*, the subconscious, the stream of subconsciousness, but in the discourse, the Buddha talks about this. It is stained by adventitious defilements, but it can be purified of those adventitious defilements.

You can’t do much with the bhavanga citta. It is just this subconscious stream that is there. It’s just sort of a force of nature. So citta in that sense is much more *the potential* for a mind of peace, of freedom from suffering. It’s a potential. Citta is a container. It’s not a fixed thing.

Or, sometimes people talk of the “papacira citta” as the unconditioned, original mind, being the unconditioned mind, but then you can’t really do much with the unconditioned mind either. It’s sort of an end point. And then what would the unconditioned mind be having adventitious defilements coming into it? It’s not really part of the picture.

So this citta has *its potential* of radiance, but it needs to be trained, needs to be seen clearly for what it is.

Ok, it can experience greed, it can experience non greed. It can experience anger, it can experience non anger. It can experience delusion, it can experience non delusion. It has all those potentials. It can be distracted, it can be exalted. It can be concentrated, it can be unconcentrated. It can be liberated, it can be unliberated.

It’s up to us to experience it so clearly, so fully that the obvious thing is to allow that which is unsettling the mind to drop away, and to return to the stillness of the mind and its potential to just be the knowing, that base of knowing.

Tan Chacun Dhammawito (?) Prayudh Payutto defines “citta” as ‘that which receives the objects of the senses and knows’, and the mind being another sense- that which knows and brings it into the heart; the citta being the fundamental awareness that knows, and knows clearly;

Experiencing the mind, experiencing the citta, experiencing that capacity for knowing, and returning to that knowing, staying with that knowing;

Recognizing that that is where our refuge and peace is - it’s not in the moods of the mind, the objects of the senses, the world outside us.

We obviously can’t shut it out, and there is no point in trying to negate it, because we just end up spinning ourselves out that way, but having a ground to experience it from, that is the citta - experiencing the citta, experiencing the mind, and not being drawn out into the confusion.

As Ajahn Chah said,

*One who is lost in the world, gets lost in the moods of the mind; one who gets lost in the moods of the mind, gets lost in the world.*

- so not being lost in either of those, or confused with them, returning to the citta, returning to the knowing.

So I’ll offer that for reflection this morning.

Talk 11 - Gladdening the Mind

The next step in the Sutta on Mindfulness of Breathing is called “Gladdening the Mind”**(10)**.

*Gladdening the mind, I breathe in…*

*Gladdening the mind, I breathe out…*

- that sense of bringing delight to the mind, brightening it with these qualities of well-being.

This is a very necessary part of the development of the mind. It’s not just kind of bashing away at the mind and making it submit. There’s a necessity to learn how to allow the mind to really delight in the practice, in the dhamma, in stillness, because on a certain level, it’s the antithesis of what we are familiar with.

We’re familiar with finding our happiness, pleasure, delight in the world outside, around us, outside us, and even if it’s sort of an internal happiness, it’s still sort of outside in the sense that it’s focused on the realm of thought, proliferation, movement, propping up fantasy, ideals, a sense of self.

*And gladdening of the mind through the meditation and through dhamma is one of relinquishment, of settling, of a sense of contentment, and peace.*

So these are qualities to be bringing up for reflection, or remembering. At this point there doesn’t need to be a lot of reflection, investigation, thought processes going on. This is more *the feeling tone* of the internal illumination of the mind itself.

The earlier stages of the practice are much more actively engaged in this bringing up of objects, and working with the body, relaxing the body, working with the mental states of piti and sukha. This is a bit more subtle.

In the sequence of things, one can only speculate, of course, what the Buddha is intending for us, but logically what it means to me is that this is situated after experiencing the mind, there is the developing of the piti and sukha on the feeling level. Then those investigations on the feeling-perception, the mental constituents, the citta sankhara, and then one starts to go the basic foundations of the mind, experiencing the mind.

But there is always this need to brighten the mind, to gladden the mind.

It is just so easy for the mind to lose balance, and if it gets too absorbed into experience and investigation, then it’s easy to get caught up in the details of things.

And one needs to brighten the mind again, to bring it back to a point of balance, and this is a subtler balance than before. You’re always sort of working with balance, but you notice as this process continues, this is just a finer degree of balance, a fine tuning of the mind.

That balance of samatha, vipasanna - tranquility and insight - the whole path, you’re always working with those two elements of the tranquility aspect, the emotional tone of the mind, and then the vipasanna, the insight, the penetration, the grasp that the mind has in terms of knowledge and vision. These are two aspects of the mind. You’re working with balancing those two.

So that with gladdening the mind, as you continue the process, you’re always fine tuning that balance. Having spent time investigating the citta sankhara **(7)**, and calming the citta sankhara **(8)**, experiencing the mind **(9)**, pulling back to the emotional tone again, fine tuning that, brightening it, bringing it up to the level of the knowledge - this is where {we know} these two different aspects of the mind, and what cloud us, or entrap us.

The idiom that the Buddha uses of “Bound by ignorance and obstructed by desire”- these two, ignorance on the knowledge realm, say, the grasp that the mind has on its rational level or intellectual level;

and the desire realm, the emotional realm, ‘obstructed by desire’ that is worked with through the tranquility aspects, the samadhi aspects, the settling of the mind, to bring it to a point of settling, of composure, being composed, where it’s not being moved and shaken by the emotional and desire driven objects of attention.

Those are broad brush tendencies, but recognizing those two realms, then you’re working with them alongside each other, so that the gladdening of the mind is again allowing the mind to compose and settle emotionally, in the sense that the desire mind is satisfied when it is happy, and as we refine that and settle it, then the mind is able to deepen its concentration, deepen its composure and deepen its one-pointedness **(11)**, and then able to investigate and see through the traps that are our lack of understanding of the true nature of things, our *a-vijja*, our ignorance is tripping us up on. (liberating the mind, step **12** in the Anapanasati Sutta)

And the opposite, of course, is true as well. The more clearly we see through things, the more clearly we’re able to have an insight into the true nature of things, then that facilitates the ability of the mind to settle, to be happy, to be able to set aside its restless worrying and grasping and be able to just allow desire to fall away.

Working on those two elements of, “bound by ignorance and obstructed by desire” - those two elements of the samatha and vipasanna aspects are being balanced and being fine-tuned and being brought into focus to see what is helpful.

So, the gladdening of the mind is very helpful. If there’s this constant sort of driving to just figure things out, figure out the dependent origination, or figure out the four noble truths and its twelve aspects, there can be some very clear insights that come, but oftentimes the mind isn’t left with a brightness if it’s not gladdened along with it, if it’s not able to settle.

So {this is} finding the ways that help to bring a gladness to the mind.

And certainly, one of the easiest ways or most useful ways is to step back and review the whole process of mindfulness of breathing;

To go back, and whether it’s on each session, or from time to time, or during particular meditations, one goes back, starting from the very beginning of the first step of mindfulness of breathing.

*Breathing in a short breath, he knows he breathes in a short breath…*

*Breathing out a short breath, he knows he breathes out a short breath…*

*Breathing in a long breath, the meditator knows he breathes in a long breath…*

*Breathing out a long breath, the meditator knows he is breathing out a long breath…*

- just those basic foundations, the start, the beginning.

And in reviewing that, and continuing through the different steps of anapanasati , a confidence arises, a happiness, a certainty in the mind – a sense *of appreciation* of those very processes whereby one has been practicing and training.

And that brings up a gladness. There’s a gladness in the mind that arises with confidence, with a reestablishing of clarity of what one is doing. There’s this sense of gladness arising.

One can take maybe different objects as well, where the attention has been more geared to the analytical, and withdrawing attention from the analytical, and turning it to either the feeling tone itself of just gladness.

\*When one cultivates the meditations on loving kindness, ideally what one’s doing is taking the emotional tone of the heart as the object of meditation, as opposed to the discursive element of sending loving kindness to this person, that person, that quarter and that quarter. One maybe starts in that way, but the object of attention, the focus of attention is the actual feeling within the heart.

So that taking an object of gladness, the mood of gladness, bringing up that sense of delight - some of it can be just the remembering with appreciation, with gratitude, the truth of the Buddha’s teaching, and that has a power to bring a sense of gladness, delight, delighting in Dhamma.

Or taking some other object that brings up a sense of gladness and wellbeing, taking the mood of brightness and just allowing the mind to dwell in that brightness.

*As one is breathing in, really imbuing the breath with this brightness, suffusing the body and the mind with this brightness, this gladness that is associated with brightness, brightening the mind…*

*As the breath comes in, really allowing that brightness and delight in Dhamma to be coming into the heart… and staying, settling, radiating from that point…*

*Breathing out, there’s a brightness being established…*

The meditation is working from a point, a center, of brightness, the association of gladness, of delight that is there, working with that, allowing that to establish the quality, the tone, in a very positive sense. It brightens the mind in a way that is helpful for the continuing reflections.

As we continue to work with the mindfulness of breathing, then there’s an increased need for a refinement of investigation, a stillness and clarity to really be able to discern things in their true nature. So in order to do that, returning to a place of stillness and brightness, gladness, gladdening the mind is a necessary part of that process, bringing the mind to that point…

As we cultivate the practice, you recognize how much a positive, useful result of the practice relies on these qualities of gladness, gladdening, brightening the mind. The Buddha talks in many, many places, about how these positive elements are a necessary part of the cultivation and development of insight. It comes up in many, many places…

I guess it’s a similar root in the Anapanasati Sutta, the word for gladdening is *apipamodiya* (sp?), and then in the majority of discourses that the Buddha talks about these different positive mental states, the beginning one is *pamojja,* with thesame sort of root, pamojja. It means gladness, wellbeing.

There are many sources for that gladness to arise. Probably one of the most well-known discourses is one where the Buddha begins with *sila* - virtue. There’s others where the beginning point is faith - *saddha, a*lso with *yoniso manasikara* - wise attention, attending skillfully to things.

And in one of the discourses that the Buddha teaches on this sequence, he says it’s quite natural that one with virtue is going to feel a sense of gladness. One doesn’t have to force gladness to arise because of virtue. Gladness is a natural result when the condition of skillful virtue has been established.

And then he continues in that vein. For one with gladness, one doesn’t have to try to force joy to arise. Joy is a natural result of gladness. With pamojja as the basis, joy is a natural result.

And with joy, or *piti* as a base, one doesn’t have to try to force tranquility to arise. Tranquility is a natural result of joy. And the same with tranquility as the base, one doesn’t worry; one doesn’t have to be fraught with expectation that happiness is not going to result. It’s a natural result that happiness will arise from the mind that is tranquil.

Similarly, with the concentration that arises from happiness. It’s not as if one has to force the mind into concentration. The natural result of the happy mind is that it settles into concentration, settles into samadhi. This is a natural sequence of events that takes place.

And the Buddha goes on in sequences through samadhi, to the arising of knowledge and vision of the way things truly are. Similarly, one doesn’t have to worry that knowledge and vision of things as they truly are…’When is it ever going to arise?’, because it’s a natural result of the samadhi. One doesn’t have to worry with expectation, ‘What will be the result of it?’ The natural result of the concentrated mind, the settled mind is to see things clearly.

Similarly, the natural result of seeing things as they truly are is to be established in disenchantment. Disenchantment naturally arises with that sense of seeing things clearly; And the natural result of disenchantment, of *nibbida*, the natural result of nibbida, in the normal course of events, what nibbida comes to fruition in is liberation, in freedom. This is a natural event.

The Buddha talks about it in the sense of when the rain falls on the mountain tops, and you see that tall mountains have their own sort of weather patterns, the clouds sort of cluster around them. When the rain falls on those mountain tops, the water comes down and it fills the little streamlets, and it fills the little cracks and crevices, and it fills the little water courses, and then it fills the little creeks, and then it fills the little lakes and ponds, and then it fills the rivers. This is nature functioning in its way. This is the way it works.

So, attending to the causes, attending to things in their appropriate sequence, the looking after, wise reflection, looking after faith, looking after virtue, and putting attention on the practice, and bringing the mind to gladness, gladdening the mind - this is an important part of the meditation, gladdening the mind, finding ways to gladden it.

One of the things, when we say “gladdening the mind”, is also just learning how to brighten it, not letting it drift into dullness; not letting it wander and fade into diffuse sorts of mental states that aren’t clear.

And part of that is again where {we bring} the investigations, that wise attention- *yoniso manasikara,* and insight practice, turning toward more reflective, investigative insight practices, but also, turning attention to

*What is it that helps to settle?*

*What helps to gladden it?*

*What does the mind take interest in as an object of meditation?*

*How do you make the breath something that it’s gladdened* with*, gladdened* by*?*

*How can it* receive *the breath in a way that it’s not bored by it, it’s not inured to it?, it’s gladdened by the breath…*

So (this is) taking interest in and finding ways to both energize, and balance the energy of the mind.

Again, the trick of meditation is always working with balance, finding the balance so that there is a clear sense of the mind turning to the object, returning to the meditation in a rejuvenated way, and sometimes that rejuvenation takes place through the reflective, investigative aspects, and sometimes it’s through the emotional and stepping back from the desire realm.

And that composure of tranquility: taking an object of stillness and directing attention to that, sustaining attention on that object of stillness within the mind, expanding that point of stillness so that it envelopes one, and then you find the mind really brightening because one is really being surrounded by this quality of stillness.

Because the mind, again, is so used to movement and proliferation, but if one is turning attention to stillness, and falling into an abyss of darkness, that’s not a balance is it? Then one needs to learn how to move the mind in a way that *it brightens*, that it is gladdened by the movement, so that the movement is finding an object of reflection and investigation that it takes interest in.

And when we start practicing meditation and reflecting on Dhamma, especially as one is continuing this practice, it can be gladdened by some pretty strange things, in the sense that contemplation of corpses can be really gladdening, really settle the mind, really make the mind bright!

The other night I was talking with Mei Chee Sansanee and she was saying she just spent time down in the south of Thailand and took a bunch of volunteers to help out and help people that were survivors, and then helping people deal with the bodies, helping to collect bodies.

And she said, “Oh, it was really wonderful. Everybody was exactly the same, whether they were young or old, or Asian or farang, whether they were men or women – they were all bloated and stinking. It was great!” - that sense of gladdening the mind.

How could *that* be gladdening? - but it really brings you back to cutting the desire mind, really cutting through the desire mind, and letting that desire mind drop away, and that nattering mind that’s looking for gratification and satisfaction and is never able to be happy, and that sense of having something to focus attention on, or reflect on, that cuts through that.

So the objects that we take may not, by the logic of our defilements, may not seem to be something that is gladdening. When we talk about gladdening, it is not just looking for some sort of nice, Pollyanna-ish sort of way of viewing the world – “Aren’t things lovely? Don’t we live in a lovely world? And aren’t I glad?”

I mean, sometimes it is taking loving kindness and everything should be applied with loving kindness, but sometimes it is really looking at things in different ways, taking an object just like that example of bloated corpses. It doesn’t immediately come to mind as a gladdening tool, but when it’s brought in and the mind embraces that, then the mind becomes very bright and gladdened because, ‘Wow, that’s really the way it is!’

We go around clinging to life and clinging to beauty, and clinging to - at least trying to make ourselves acceptable. In the end, it’s all going to fall apart, and then there’s a sense of gladdening that comes up. The mind is brightened by that.

It’s like the Chinese painting of the Chinese monk with the hands over the head, “Oh joy, just to know that everything is suffering!”

{alternately: ’Oh joy, to know at last, there is no happiness in samsara!’}

How can that be joyful? How can that be gladdening? - but when it’s seeing the Dhamma, then it’s gladdening. The mind is gladdened by being able to take on that reality fully.

So that taking on of that reality fully needs a certain settling as well. You can’t be approaching it from a desire mind. It has to be brought from the mind of Dhamma, the mind that is settling.

So, we are working with balance, gladdening the mind, giving the mind the opportunity to settle by turning attention to that which is gladdening.

So I offer that for reflection this morning.

Talk 12 - Concentrating the Mind

Yesterday I talked about gladdening the mind. The next step, stage in *Ānāpānasati* is concentrating the mind, *samādhi*. And that is actually the word that’s used: *samadahan*, in the Sutta. It is talking about *samādhi*, concentrating.

I think I tend to like to rely on the Thai translation of this word, which means more like “establishing firmly.” So, *establishing the mind firmly*, and particularly when we’re using it in conjunction with the breath,

*Establishing the mind firmly as one breathes in…*

*establishing the mind firmly as one breathes out…*

- this sense of really pulling the mind together, one-pointing, focusing, and purifying, in order for it to settle.

The “not mind” needs to be purified of the coarser elements. We need to relinquish the coarser elements that tend to agitate and stain the mind. So, the practice here is to be intent on that purification.

I’m almost hesitating to use that word, because it sometimes seems very strong, and then also in the English language there is a kind of puritanical aspect to the word ‘purification’.

But it’s important to recognize that we we need to cleanse the mind of the elements that stain it, in the same way that when we do our observance day clean up of the hall. We clean the windows so we can see through them, otherwise they pick up dust and dirt.

So that purification, settling of those things that are within the mind that are incongruous to peace, to draw attention to those elements…

We are settling, concentrating, one-pointing, focusing, making the mind malleable, making the mind very pliant.

And this is where gladdening the mind also helps the mind to become very pliant and malleable. There’s a softness…you know, it’s not because the mind isn’t firmly established, but it doesn’t have those hard edges to it that are strident, that are driven. There’s a malleability to it that is very important.

So that in concentrating the mind, we need to know how to bring balance to the mind so that there’s this sense of settling.

And taking the breath as the object is learning how to take that breath and allow the mind to engage in the sensation of the breath, and the perception of the breath, because at some point there’s as the mind starts to settle, then the actual sensation becomes a bit indistinct or not so clear. As long as that’s coming from the mind, settling and not *needing* to attend to the sensations so clearly, then that is a natural process.

Sometimes the indistinctness can be one of the hindrances, but at this point this isn’t what we’re talking about or using as as a basis. The mind is gladdened, is bright…

One of the description or words that Ajahn Brahmavaṃso uses, is very very useful, “the beautiful breath.” For the mind to really concentrate and settle, there’s this need for the mind to delight in the object, or feel a sense of warmth and friendliness to the breath. The breath becomes one’s friend, one’s companion. So this sense of the beautiful breath,

*Just the breath, as it’s coming in, really delighting in the beauty of that sensation, and that moment of being with the breath…*

*As one breathes out, the beautiful breath being the foundation, and that sense of it’s being, say, beautiful, being benign, being benevolent…*

*The breath really being something that one is relying on, and that brings beauty into the heart…*

*So that once we breath in, just allowing that to suffuse the mind…*

*as we breathe out, just allowing that to suffuse the mind, this beautiful breath…*

This is where we are both allowing the mind to concentrate, and maybe also just directing attention to it in that way, bringing up that perception. In that sense, the sensation of the breath sometimes may be less distinct as the mind starts to settle and there’s this peaceful feeling…

There’s the perception of the breath, and particularly the perceiving of the breath as it comes in and goes, in its beauty, in its benevolence, so that there’s a nourishing and settling of the mind…

This is working with the breath. As the mind settles on this perception of beauty and benevolence, what happens is the mind really enters into that perception, and that feeling, and the sensation, either entering into it, because it’s welcoming - the mind moves forward into that sensation of the breath, or, it is almost subsumed into that sensation, into that perception.

I think different people would experience it in different ways, but the main thing is allowing that perception, and sustaining attention to be suffused with that quality of benevolence, and beauty, so that either it can move into and absorb into the breath, into that sensation, or the sensation envelopes the experience.

So, as we are working with the breath and concentration, firmly establishing the mind on the breath, using this base, this foundation of attention, it all comes back to this - mindfulness, and being very mindful.

But then, the mindfulness isn’t a mechanical forcing of the mind onto the object, then results happen. One has to be working with the feeling tone of it, and this is where the gladdening of the mind is a laying of the foundation for the concentrating, the settling, the one pointing, the merging into a point, allowing a point of awareness to form, rather than the moving of attention and consciousness.

There’s a settling. So that *sama samadhawanha* (? sp) The settling of the mind as the breath comes in, as the breath goes out…

The word that’s most often used for the settling of the mind is the word *jhāna. S*ometimes it’s used as the equivalent of meditation. This is what meditation is.

The well known idiom or phrase that is used by the Buddha:

*Meditate bhikkhus. There are these roots of trees. There are these empty places. Meditate bhikkhus, lest you regret the opportunity that’s passed.*

and the word that is used is the word *jhāna*.

Sometimes there’s an over-exalted use of the word that has a whole constellation of expectations that are coupled with that, and it’s important to not get drawn into that measuring of the mind too much in the sense of attainment.

One obviously has to measure the mind, but measuring the mind from the point of,

*Is the mind at ease?*

*Is the mind not as ease?*

*Is the mind comparing and feeling driven to attain something that one only has a concept of?*

*Am I trying to compare myself to others?*

*… so and so got second jhāna, I’m just a lowly first jhāna…*

- that kind of competitive, comparing, measuring, is so inimical to the whole practice.

The mind needs to be settled, focused, steady, bright, and peaceful, and it gets in the way when there is that sense of counting up how much one has gained, or what level one has achieved.

Ajahn Chah would always emphasize,

*Is the mind suffering, or is it not suffering?*

*Is the mind steady, or is it not steady?*

*Is it mindful, or is it not mindful?*

All of these… that tendency is so unmindful and it obstructs.

So to attend to what is it that allows the mind to become more peaceful and to be more clear, rather than

*What level did I get?*

Or,

*Did I get anything at all?*

- because that’s suffering right there.

*I didn’t get it. I’m bereft. I’m missing out. I’m never going to get it.*

- that whole line of of thought trajectory in the mind is painful.

The whole purpose of the practice is gladdening the mind, settling the mind.

Also, depending on different temperaments there are the different ways or approaches to how one one places the mind, and utilizes it in order to settle it.

This is from the Commentaries, but I’ve always found it very useful. The definition of two different types of *jhāna* or two different types ways of meditating, are the *aramanupanicca jhāna* , (sp ?) and *lakaniccanuppa jhāna.*

So that, *jhāna* or meditation that is using *the object* as the focus;

Then the meditation that’s using *characteristics* as the focus, *aramana?,* as being an object, a mood, an object of attention.

And that’s usually how the *samatha* practice is, *taking an object* as the focus.

*Vipassanā* is usually *taking the characteristics* as a focus, so the characteristics of *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anatta;*

*-* but there’s still this focus of meditation. It has a different result, but it’s still a focus.

So that, using the object as a focus, using the breath, using an image, whether it’s an image that inspires faith, like an image of the Buddha, or an image of the *asubha kammaṭṭhāna -* parts of the body, or using a *kasina*, a color, those are objects the mind is able to focus on and attend to and keep returning to. There’s that steadiness of the object. Then the mind keeps returning to that, and settling, absorbing into that.

And then, the *lakaniccanuppa (sp?)*  *jhāna*, the *jhāna* or meditation of using the characteristics of focus, one is using a bit more analysis and discernment of the impermanence. There’s change happening, but rather than getting absorbed into the change and going through the objects of change, one’s looking at it from the view of *the characteristic of change*, impermanence, uncertainty, it’s unsure…

So, the mind is very focused, and steady, but it has a different object of attention, in the sense of the object is one of a characteristic. And then it attains peace through that insight, and recognition, and the relinquishment that comes from that.

We also have to learn how to shift attention to that, because sometimes,

*I need to make my mind peaceful so that I can see things clearly.*

*I have to have enough samādhi so that I can gain insight…*

- but the nature of the mind, the nature of desire, often times what happens is, you know,

*How do we make that decision?*

*When is it clear that I’ve got enough samādhi, so that I can have have insight?*

This desire mind is, well, there’s never enough *samādhi*. That’s just the nature of desire.

So, one is using and relying on that settling and composing the mind, and learning how to do that, but one needs to consciously use these different modes of meditation, of settling, of focus, so that one takes up the mode of attending to characteristics, and then observing,

*Well, what’s the result?*

*What is the feeling within the mind?*

*What’s the result?*

- learning how to become skilled in applying the mind, because the stillness of the mind, we cultivate that in order to energize the mind, to brighten it, to allow it to be more clear, but then we also have to learn how to utilize that clarity, and stay with an object of change, to be able to sustain attention on *a characteristic* with the mind of steadiness, and that’s where a penetration occurs.

It’s really the ability for the mind to drop some of its preconceptions and basic attachments. It’s when we see through the aspect of and characteristic of suffering, say, of the unsatisfactoriness nature of things, the pervasive quality of of *dukkha,* and we’re not shaken by it. We’re not moved by it.

There’s a steadiness that is there. It’s cultivated. One needs to have worked with these two modes of objects of focus in the *aramanuppaniccaccana (?)* [and] *lakhaniccanuppa?* *jhāna -* these are two two ways of attending within the meditation, and they’re both composing, they’re settling, they’re one-pointing. They’re focusing with just using slightly different objects of attention, or modes of attending.

Now, as we sustain attention on the breath there are these different results that come from concentration. They are the natural result of the concentration. At this point in *Ānāpānasati,* the purpose of this establishing of concentration is to really settle the mind, but it’s also important to recognize that within the concentration, within that settling, then there are different potentials, and to become familiar with that potential.

The Buddha talks about different results of concentration. There’s the concentration that results in

*a pleasant abiding here and now*

*-* that is an idiom that is used in the Suttas, that

*pleasant abiding, here and now,*

- dwelling in meditation, peaceful meditations and settled states of consciousness, in particular the four *jhānas,* that’s the description: “the pleasant abiding here and now”, and that’s a result of concentration.

It’s a necessary goal to be setting for one’s self.

*How do I abide peacefully and pleasantly in the here and now with these states of consciousness that are very positive, very bright, very settled?…*

- because it rejuvenates and freshens the mind to be peaceful, to concentrate, to settle.

Whatever attempt and effort we put in toward that, it’s bearing fruit on something that is a good thing. The inherent benefit of turning to that which is peaceful, whether or not, or to what degree the mind is able to settle, whatever steps along the way we make, those are fruitful, very beneficial. They give us the opportunity to really experience peace and well being.

Another result that the Buddha gives of concentration is knowledge and vision. These are when the mind is concentrated and settled, very settled, and takes a perception of light, and takes that settled mind, it’s able to gain knowledge and vision into things. It’s a capacity of the mind. It’s a knowing that is possible in there.

One of the senior forest masters, Luang Pa Put (**?**), he passed away a couple years ago. He was really skilled in meditation. He was very skilled in various psychic powers. Anyway, he said when he was a novice, meditating and also doing his studies, his Dhamma studies, then he would put his mind into states of stillness and brightness, and direct attention to the question of ‘What’s going to be on the exam?’ And it would come up in his mind what all the questions were that were going to be on the exams. Then he knew what to study.

He’s never had any problems with his studies. He said when he teaches meditation, and particularly to school groups and school kids, he always tells them that. He says it really gets them motivated to practice meditation because it has results, it can happen. One can have knowledge of such things. It’s a capacity of the mind. It’s a possible result of concentration. Depending on the person, it can be used skillfully or not used skillfully, but it *is* a possibility.

There’s a third result of concentration called mindfulness and alertness. So that one uses the concentration to then direct attention to the mindfulness and alertness of experience, again, because the mind can absorb in many different ways. It has potential for different things. It doesn’t necessarily mean, just because the mind is able to concentrate, that there is a great degree of a real sharp mindfulness and alertness.

And the Buddha talks of this as the mindfulness and alertness of knowing feelings as they arise, knowing feelings as they persist, knowing feelings as they subside;

knowing *perceptions* as they arise, knowing perceptions as they persist, knowing perceptions as they subside;

knowing *thoughts* as they arise, knowing thoughts as they persist, knowing thoughts as they subside…

And, if one just looks superficially at it, one thinks, “Well, so what’s the big deal?”, but it’s obvious that the problem of being stuck in *saṃsāra* is because we’re actually *not* mindful and alert to the implications of our feelings, of our perceptions, of our thoughts, and it takes a great degree of concentration, of settledness to have that knowledge, that clear mindfulness and alertness as it’s happening, as they’re arising, as they’re persisting, as they’re subsiding, because we’re conditioned beings, and we’re prey to these conditions.

The conditions, the conditioning that is always going on is within the realm of the feelings, perceptions, thoughts, we keep spinning in s*aṃsāra* with these as the motivating factors, the motivating forces. So that to be able to be mindful and alert to these phenomena, we’re able to maintain and sustain this degree of clarity and presence.

The last result of concentration that the Buddha talks about is the concentration which is for the ending of the *āsava*, of the taints.

The mode of how that is accomplished or the way the Buddha talks about it is that being able to see the five *khandas* as

*This is form; this is its arising; this is its passing away.*

*This is feeling.*

*This is perception.*

*This is saṅkhāra.*

*This is consciousness.*

*- seeing these as just the five khandas.*

*This is just a khanda. This is not me. This is not mine.*

*I’m not afflicted from it from the outside of the world. This is not something that one is creating a self view about.*

*This is a khanda. This is form. This is feeling. This is perception. This is saṅkhāra. This is viññāṇa. This is consciousness.*

*This is its arising. This is its passing away.*

And that concentration, when it’s directed in that way, is the concentration that leads to the the ending of the *āsavas*, the ending of the taints.

So, we develop the concentration, we develop the settling of the mind, and we need to be skilled and experienced in how to go about that, but then we also have to be skilled and experienced in how to use that, how to apply it, and where to direct it.

*What’s useful at a particular time?*

*When is it useful to direct attention to pleasant abiding here and now?*

*When is it useful to really apply that faculty of stillness towards mindfulness and alertness?*

*How do we direct that concentration in a way that we can be bringing the āsavas, the taints, to an end?*

This encompasses really all of the practice, doesn’t it? You see how this mindfulness of breathing is such a complete practice. You start off with,

*I’ve got a short breath here, a long breath there….*

then it keeps expanding, and it’s becoming more subtle, becoming more profound, really, in its application.

We have the opportunity as we’re in retreat to develop this mindfulness of breathing. There’s nothing else happening really, and so give yourselves the opportunity to cultivate this mindfulness of breathing and this whole way of applying the mind; we are not just sitting down, watching the breath, but the breath is happening all the time, and doing walking meditation, standing meditation, and even if one directs attention in a different way, not using the breath in particular, still, all of those principles are applicable.

So, I’ll offer that for reflection this morning…

Talk 13 - Releasing the Mind

*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassā.*

*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassā.*

*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassā.*

*Buddham, Dhammam, Sangham, Namassami.*

So this evening I’ll continue on the theme following the Ānāpānasati Sutta. I guess I started this two weeks ago. I gave a random talk at the beginning of the retreat about sitting meditation. I thought, “Ah, well, I’ll give a couple more about meditation.” So, we started the retreat and got on to Ānāpānasati, mindfulness of breathing, and haven’t really stopped.

So just continuing…This morning I spoke about about the section on concentrating the mind, which is step number eleven. Step number twelve is

*Liberating the mind, I breathe in…*

*liberating the mind, I breathe out…*

Or ‘freeing the mind’… The Pali word is vimuttayan (**?**) and the connotation is of vimochiya (?) is the freeing, liberating, *releasing* the mind, dropping things away from the mind. The idiom that’s used more often is freeing, or liberating.

And there are many ways of describing the freeing of the mind, or releasing, letting go of certain things, but the one thing that is useful is the releasing of attachment, the releasing of *upādāna*, clinging, attachment, as this is tied to the breath.

As we sit in meditation,

*as one breathes in, really attending to that quality of releasing…*

So much of the meditation is (like this)… There is so much clinging involved, without even going into the structures, just the kind of hope, or clinging that is involved in trying to make the breath be a certain way.

So that *releasing the breath*, beginning with that, releasing the breath,

*As one breathes in, to release the breath, to drop away, to let the mind that is desperately trying to control, to let that drop away, to release that…*

*And as one breathes out, releasing, setting aside, putting down, putting down the desire to control, to make things be the way one wants it…*

We spend so much time in meditation trying to make things be the way we want them to be, and we forget that’s not actually what Dhamma is about. We are practicing Dhamma to really let things be the way they are.

*This is the way things are.*

*This is the reality of the moment.*

*This is the truth in this moment,*

- to release into that truth, to release the preferences, the mind that is desiring, not desiring, becoming, trying to become something…

There’s the whole, force of attachment and clinging that is always going towards becoming, being, trying to make things be;

trying to get, *to become* certain ways that we prefer, or trying to get away from the things that we don’t want or don’t like.

So that, in releasing, we are freeing the mind from that tendency.

*As we breathe in, releasing, turning to a non-clinging in the present moment…*

*as we breathe out…*

It’s not a matter of practicing so that we can realize non-clinging, realize release sometime in the future, some other time - ‘When I get this meditation down, then I’ll figure out, I’ll be able to experience release and non-clinging’, it’s applying it right now.

Each breath as we breathe in, this is the moment, this is the opportunity, this is the occasion to apply that attitude, that effort that is not conditioned by that clinging, that attachment, being able to release that…

So that this mindfulness of breathing is learning how to apply these principles, not waiting for the result somehow, sometime in the future, some other time other than now.

Because when there is this clinging attachment, the inability to release, the inability to free the mind, then, of course, we create suffering, we create problems. We create difficulties for ourselves. This is where the problems and difficulties arise, whether it’s in terms of the mindfulness of breathing in the present moment, having difficulties with it, not feeling one’s getting it, or whether it’s in terms of just living together as human beings, creating a life that is smooth and harmonious, a hassle free life, it all comes back to this point of release, releasing, putting down, setting aside that clinging and attachment.

And it’s really an action of the mind. As we’re sitting and practicing meditating, to have that image in the mind of really releasing, or letting go, putting down, dropping. Obviously this is a combination of having developed effort and balancing the faculties of tranquility and discernment.

There’s a gladdening of the mind. The mind is bright. Now, as the mind is ready, then you’re entering into that sphere of non-clinging, the activity of non-clinging, and really to do it in the moment-to-moment basis as one’s practicing, really visualize it, feel it.

*Try to feel as we breathe in that sense of releasing, non-clinging…*

*As we breathe out, to bring it on to an experiential level, the feeling…*

*What’s it like to breathe?*

- and really release that quality of knowing, release the quality of awareness and attention so that it isn’t sticky. There’s this quality of not its getting stuck on anything. It’s not being held by anything…

One of the images, of course, of clinging, is always the hand that’s grasping. In Asia one of the ways that you catch monkeys is with a coconut. You hollow out a coconut and then fix it to the ground really firmly. Then you put a hole in the coconut just big enough so that a monkey can put his hand through it. Then you put some some food or some fruit inside. And what the monkey does is reach in and it grabs the food and then it can’t get its hand back out again.

And what will happen, as soon as it does that, the hunter is back behind the bushes watching. As soon as they notice that the monkey has got its hand inside the coconut, it’s grabbing onto the fruit, the hunter just goes and walks over and picks up the monkey because the monkey will see the hunter coming, and it’ll go “eee eee eee eee (laughs) eeee eeee eeee eeee eeee” - it wants to run away, it wants to, but it can’t let go. It won’t let go of that fruit. It won’t drop it. It won’t release it. So you end up with monkey soup. (laughs).

That’s so much what we do. It isn’t as if we can’t let go of our attachments and desires and our various focuses for clinging. It isn’t as if they are attached to us. *We* *attach* *to them*. We attach to them, and there are these different classical forms, or focuses of grasping that the Buddha points out:

the clinging to sensuality,

clinging to views,

clinging to precepts and practices,

and

clinging to self-belief.

These aren’t things that are inherent in the mind. They’re not things that are inherent in human existence. They are things that we attach to. They are things that we cling to. They are things that we create a bond with, and we hold on to them, and we don’t release them.

So, to be attentive to release, to making that conscious, releasing, freeing the mind from its tendency to hold on to.

It’s just like with sensuality. We’re not diminished beings if we don’t get what we want that we think is going to gratify us, satisfy us. The things that we look forward to so much, that we invest so much energy in trying to get - they’re just kind of wispy memories after a while… It doesn’t have the same satisfaction at all.

It’s like when you’re hungry, and you go into the kitchen or into the house. It’s in the morning, and you can smell the smells of cooking are going on.

It’s so, “Wow, I wonder what’s for the meal today. Boy that smells good. Wow. Can’t wait ’til the meal.” Then you have the meal, and there are varying degrees of excitement and gratification, and then after the meal you walk into the house, or you walk in and you smell… there are the smells of food and you think, “Oh, geez, it’s smells awful in here. Light some incense. Open the window. Get the smell out of here.” (laughs)

What was so alluring - it’s like a wispy passing thing… We’re on to the next thing already.

So that, to direct, to notice when the mind is attaching on to an object, and just turn attention to release, turn attention to freeing the mind, sensuality in particular, to recognize its drawback, to recognize its limitation.

The Buddha compares it to the dog that is just waiting by the butcher, or the butcher’s apprentice. It’s just waiting… You can imagine the fantasies going on in the dog’s mind, and all the butcher does is throw these bones with a little bit of blood pasted on it is all. There’s nothing much there at all, and the dog jumps on that bone and gnaws away at it, and all it gets is tiredness, and not much satisfaction at all. You know, that’s the story of our lives, isn’t it? (laughs)

*It seemed like it was going to be so good…*

- It never really quite lives up to the advertising that the mind conjures up…

And the problem isn’t that there isn’t pleasure involved in things. The problem is the clinging. The problem is that grasping, that attachment, and the expectation that’s formed, and the inability to release it, the inability to put it down, to just let it be the way it is, to be,

*This is what it is.*

*This is what the experience is right now.*

So that to be working with that as the breath comes in, as the breath goes out, recognizing when there is the draw, the attraction to sensuality, seeing,

*How can I release around that?*

*How can I put that down?*

*How can I let go?*

*How can I not be drawn into (this)…letting the mind open around it, and not get caught by it?*

Then, there is the attachment to views, opinions.

There’s the problematic nature of views when we hold a view, or beliefs that are unrealistic, ungrounded in reality, and that have detrimental results;

When we are living from the baseline view, the traditional formulation of wrong view that -

there are no results of giving, there are no results of good action. There are no results from unskillful action…

- when one holds that view, the result is one of not having a clear sense of conscience, and a fear of wrongdoing.

From the Buddhist perspective, this is fundamental: that there *are* results of actions:

Those things which are skillful and wholesome bring about wholesome results, and those things which are unskillful, unwholesome bring about unwholesome results, unpleasant results.

All the rest of the formulations of right and wrong view are really around the results of actions. They are extrapolations or they’re implied within that.

Once you start recognizing that this is how the world functions, then you realize:

There is mother and father, and we have a particular relationship with certain beings;

There is this life and the next life. There is rebirth.

There are other realms.

There are beings who are liberated. That is a possibility.

- so that when we hold a view that (cause and effect) doesn’t exist, then that sets a course in our life to be doing that which is unskillful and then reaping the results of that, or living from a particular perspective, a very materialistic view, the view that, “I just need to get what I can in this lifetime as much as I can, and gratify myself as much as possible because there’s nothing after this anyway.” And that creates a very miserable existence.

All the many views, the particular materialistic views, the nihilistic views, they’re just as common today as they were at the time of the Buddha…

Another aspect of views is the problematic nature of views when we hold to them, or we cling to them, is the contentious nature of views. When we hold a particular view, then we exclude others. Then we end up contending it and in conflict because of the particular views we hold because when we hold a view, then there’s “I’m right. Everything else is wrong. This is the right way to do things. That is wrong. Other people are wrong.”

So that, clinging to views, holding to views creates this conflict and tension, because in order to do that, we have to prop that up, and hold that up. It’s being held up in the face of conflicting evidence that it may be wrong, so that we have to put more effort into holding it up and clinging. So there’s tension in the mind.

There’s suffering in the mind - to be able to put that down, putting down the views that we hold, the opinions that we then either cling to and hold as “This is right” or “This is the way it is” - and spend our time either trying to prop those up, or forcing them on to other people. It’s very wearisome.

Being able to recognize within the mind when we’re holding to a particular view, holding to a particular opinion - and you see how much conflict arises in our mind and within our relationships with other people that -holding people and situations to particular standards of how one thinks it should be -

“If this were right, this is how it would be. If these people would only do things right, then I’d be happy. If only this monastery would practice in the right way, then I’d be enlightened. I’d be happy.”

- and there isn’t such a place, but the view is very attractive, isn’t it? If we could just get everybody to line up, do everything right, then we’d all be happy. Of course, everybody’s got a different view of what things are right, so there isn’t a solution to that. It’s inherently problematic.

So the Buddha said, this releasing the clinging, putting down the opinions, putting down the views, putting down the attachments - that’s the only place where we can find peace.

An attachment to precepts and practices is the expectation of purification through doing things in a particular way, perhaps to the extreme of what they would do in the time of the Buddha - the weird and wonderful practices that they used to do, well, and probably still do in India.

There’s one discourse where these two ascetics come to visit the Buddha. One of them does the dog practice, or the ascetic practice of doing all his conduct like a dog. Another one is the cow practice, or practitioner. He does everything like a cow, imitating the cow, and these are ascetic practices. They’d really sort of curl up, going up to visiting the Buddha and paying homage, and then sort of curling up like a dog at his feet (laughs)… and licking himself… They did these things with the belief that just following as much as possible this kind of a practice, this kind of action, as an ascetic purification, *tapas,* would would bring about rebirth in heaven, a heavenly rebirth. The Buddha didn’t really concur with that.

They asked him, “What would be the result of perfecting this practice?”, and the Buddha didn’t want to answer until he was pressed. Finally he said, “Well, it’s one of two results. Either one is reborn as a dog by perfecting that action and imitating that action, or one is reborn in a hell realm because of the delusion and ignorance that is so firmly rooted, but at best one gets reborn as a dog.”

So that is what the clinging to this precept and practice means, the attachment to the precept and practice, that purification comes through keeping this particular set of rules, this particular set of of ways of doing…

And, you know, one can do that with mindfulness of breathing as well.

“If I just sit here and watch this breath coming and watching it go out and make that breath perfect, somehow it’s going to make me liberated. I don’t know how, but somehow it’s going to do it, if I just do it enough.” (laughs)… and that’s not true…That’s is an attachment.

And the thing is, relinquishing attachment doesn’t mean relinquishing the actual practice and training. It’s approaching it with wisdom and understanding, using it so that it’s freeing one’s self from attachment and clinging.

The developing of all the nuances of this practice and training are so that one is cultivating those balances of discernment and faith, the balances of energy and tranquility, the balances of attending wisely to the breath.

Of course with that attending wisely comes this release, this relinquishing, this letting go, the dropping of attachment, the dropping of the clinging and the object of clinging.

The last form of *upādāna*, attachment, is the attachment to the views of self, self view.

It’s important to note that it’s *atta-vādupādāna.* The *upādāna* being the clinging, clinging to the *atta* is self, *vada* being view, belief.

It’s only *the belief* in self in its strictest sense, (in that) it didn’t exist in the first place. One can’t really relinquish it. You can’t let go of something that isn’t there in the first place, but *the belief* in its existence is what we get hooked by. We get hooked by the belief in the reality, the kind of tangibility that somehow there is a me -

“I am this. I am my body. I am my feelings. I am these perceptions, mental constructs, consciousness. I’m *somethin*g.”

- *I am*, and that feeling of “I am” permeates even the subtle feelings of consciousness.

“This is what I am”, and there’s a certain level of fear of , “Well, if I’m not that, I must be nothing”, Which is another belief, isn’t it?

So that what the Buddha is always pointing to is “this - is - what - is.”

There is the experience of the body.

There is the experience of the breath.

There is the feeling tone. There this is.

There is perception.

There is the mental constructs, which are either wholesome, or unwholesome, whether wise, or deluded, whether exalted, or mundane;

but, there are thoughts, mental constructs, consciousness, knowing, and all of that is arising and ceasing.

We don’t have to prop up anything… and again, it’s where we get hooked, and we get stuck. These are the kinds of hooks that keep dragging us back into suffering.

When we can allow the release, freeing, freeing the mind…

*Freeing the mind, I breathe in…*

*Freeing the mind, I breathe out…*

- freeing it from that compulsion to have to prop up a sense of I, of me, of mine…

We have to formulate that idea, and, of course, we do it habitually. It seems real enough, but, as we investigate more and more deeply, more clearly, more attentively, we start recognizing that,

*No, that’s a complete addition.*

*That’s what constellates, or crystalizes to form all the different nuances of suffering around it…*

It’s like the sun having all the planets and astroids revolving around it, and there’s all this happening, and at the center of it is this belief in self.

It’s all self view. It’s the core that creates the gravitational sphere that it all revolves around.

So to release that is to free that, to allow that to *not* formulate, to not create this, or buy into the gravitational pull of it.

So that this sense of attending to release, attending to freeing the mind, there’s tending to putting down the clinging, relinquishing, rather than holding things, that fist like the monkey who can’t let go;

*…just opening and working with that image in the mind that as we breathe in…*

*…as we breathe out, opening the heart with that…opening that heart of awareness…*

- and it’s so much more peaceful, so much more satisfying, instead of that driving to make the practice work, driving to make our desires satisfy, driving to make the world conform to my views and opinions of how I think it should be, to make everything work according to me and mine…

That simple act of release has tremendous implications, and it’s something that’s very difficult to do. We’re so used to clinging, and it’s *the sustenance* that feeds us.

That’s one of the alternate translations of clinging, also - this sense of sustenance. This is what feeds us. We feed off of suffering. We feed off of clinging. Our suffering is fed and sustained by clinging, attachment, *upādāna*.

So that, this sense of - to not be feeding that heart of attachment, not sustaining, giving sustenance to the ways we suffer - it’s just this releasing, release, putting it down, not picking it up and holding it…

So I’ll offer that for reflection this evening…

Talk 14 - Contemplating Impermanence

*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassā.*

*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassā.*

*Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassā.*

*Buddham, Dhammam, Sangham, Namassami.*

I’ll continue this evening on the theme of mindfulness of breathing, and move into the last tetrad from the Discourse on the Mindfulness of Breathing.

This last tetrad of the sixteen stages of mindfulness of breathing lines up in terms of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. It lines up with the *Dhammānupassanā* section of the *Satipatṭhāna*, the last section of the *Satipatṭhāna*, concerning the mental states, and aspects of insight in particular.

So that this, in a certain way, is a culmination of the foundations that we’ve been laying in the mindfulness of breathing, in terms of the whole structure of the Buddha’s teachings. It culminates in insight, culminates in understanding.

The whole purpose of the path of practice in the Buddha’s teachings is to bring us to a point of insight and understanding.

All of the foundations we lay are very essential, but it’s good to recognize that it is for a purpose. There are many discourses where the Buddha talks about these different aspects of laying a foundation of a path, but it’s for a particular goal.

One of the famous discourses, of course, is the discourse on the raft, the simile of the raft, where one is on this shore, which is dangerous, is fraught with difficulty, and one builds a raft with whatever is at hand - sticks and twigs and branches and things that float - ties them together and through the strength of one’s arms and legs, goes across the water and gets to the other shore, which is a shore of safety.

One leaves the raft at that shore, and goes up onto the bank and in a place of safety. The Buddha gives that to say, this shore being that *dukkha* and crossing the water, the expanse of water, as being the path of practice, of training, and being able to reach the other shore of *Nibbāna*.

So that this (practice) creates this path and one relies on it, depends on it in order to get across to a place of safety.

The same in the *Ānāpānasati*, laying these foundations of mindfulness of the breath, mindfulness of breathing, mindfulness of the body, feelings, of the mind, and of the aspects of insight - they’re a part of the path that we’re having to rely on.

There’s another discourse where the Buddha goes through the various aspects of the training, and saying,

*… this is not what it’s all about*

in a sense of,

*…it’s not for gain, honor, and fame. It’s not for the benefits of virtue and goodness. It’s not for the benefits of mindfulness and clear comprehension. It’s not for the benefits of samādhi and peace. It’s not for the benefits of insight and wisdom even, but it’s for the sure heart’s release…*

But that insight is obviously playing a role in this path, this progression of training. It builds on these other aspects, so that we’re in the mindfulness of breathing.

We’ve been laying this foundation of peace, of mindfulness, of a degree of understanding of how the feelings and mind actually work. Now it’s time to turn and shine the light of insight onto the aspects, onto the process of breathing, and the process of being attentive to breathing, attending to the breath.

So that the first quality to be attentive to is the quality of impermanence. **(13)**

*Investigating impermanence, I breathe in…*

*Investigating impermanence, I breathe out…*

- starting to take this characteristic of impermanence as the basis for investigation, attending closely to the quality of change.

The breath is an obvious candidate for investigating impermanence because it is always changing. We’re always having to breathe in and breathe out. We can’t just decide to stop breathing so that we don’t have to bother with things.

And impermanence is how things actually function, where everything is impermanent. Everything is changing.

Impermanence is the first element of insight that we are attentive to. This whole section encompasses all of the other aspects of the characteristics -  *aniccā, dukkha, anattā*- the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, non-self aspects that are the heart of the *vipassanā*, the insight practice.

So that impermanence is the doorway in, and tends to be the more common or the more predominant, the more noticeable characteristic. But as soon as you start investigating impermanence, you start recognizing that the other qualities are folded into that. The reason why on a certain level things are unsatisfactory is because they change. They become something other. They become something else. You can’t ever make it stable so that it will always satisfy, be there for you. You can’t have a permanent condition.

You can’t make things be stable, if we had that power, and that’s the sense of not self. The reason why things are not self is because we don’t really have the power to make things be stable, therefore, we’re not really in control.

When we talk about the insight that characterizes the insight into that of entering the stream of Dhamma, *Yankiñci samudaya sambantang (?) nirodha dhammam*, **(13:35 - 13:39?**)

*Whatever has the nature to arise, that has the nature to cease.*

This is the insight that when we talk about somebody who has entered the stream, has had the insight that makes that shift from the worldly realm into the realm of transcendence and liberation, that is the characteristic…

*Whatever is of the nature to arise, that is of the nature to cease.*

So that is an insight into impermanence, but also maybe it’s important to recognize that it’s a bit more profound than that, in that one is also recognizing the conditioned nature of things, that seeing as a part of that insight into impermanence is also the recognition that how conditioned everything is. Everything exists because of conditions -

*Whatever is of* the nature *to arise, that has* the nature *to cease.*

So, the nature of conditioning: all things are dependent on conditions and because they’re dependent on conditions, then they’re always fraught with contradictory conditions being very much a part of that.

So there’s always this tension involved, and the tension is *dukkha*. The tension is suffering. The tension of wanting to be gratified and satisfied, but then, things always falling apart, changing. Wanting to be happy and content and peaceful, but that relies on so many conditions that it’s always just sort of out of one’s grasp. There’s always some other condition that’s part of that. That sets up a dissonance, and that is the nature of unsatisfactoriness, of *dukkha*.

And we’re always trying to perfect things. We always want things perfect, so that we’re always suffering. That’s not news. (Self-laughter) We know that, but the response is always, “Well, if only I could get it right”, or, “I must have it wrong somehow.” We neglect to recognize the inherent unsatisfactoriness, the inherent *dukkha*, the inherent *dukkha* factor, so that we get stuck on this shore with danger, difficulty, and *dukkha*.

That impermanence is also the reason why *aniccā,* that non- self is a part of that because that which is impermanent, changing, dependent on conditions, is just that: it is completely dependent on conditions. There’s no independent quality of self, of me, of mine that is able to be separated out from that and can be independent. It’s just not possible, and that’s very liberating.

It’s very freeing to recognize that, because there’s the feeling of the ordinary, unenlightened being is that there is some sort of independent me or self or me the watcher, me the observer, me the experiencer, me the controller and commander of things, and when that me is trying to be in control then that me is suffering miserably. But that seeing that ‘whatever is the nature to arise, that is of the nature to cease’ - that also enfolds this insight into not self as well.

That doorway into the realm of insight is the *aniccānupasī*.

*Investigating impermanence, I breathe in…*

*investigating impermanence, I breathe out…*

- taking that impermanence, change as the focal point for attending closely, watching, investigating.

And you can be attending to that whether it’s on the physical level of the breath, to just attend to the sensation of the breath coming in, recognizing how each in breath is changing from the immediate contact of the sensation touching the tip of the nose. There’s the change taking place of the breath coming in, the feeling of the sensation moving in the body, the nuances of temperature, of cooling as the breath comes in, to the touch of different points… The feeling of either the softness or the hardness, harshness of the sensation… There’s this whole range of changing experience on just the in breath.

Even in the point as we finish the in breath, there’s a gap there, it isn’t as if that’s a static piece of nothingness. There’s a change happening all the time… There’s moment-to-moment subtle changes of the feeling of tension in the body, the feeling just on a physical level, not even considering the realm on the mental level what’s happening.

But then as we begin breathing out, there’s that attending to the subtle changes and trying to see change more clearly as an arising and ceasing of changing sensation.

You’re allowing the mind to try to settle on the sensation, like moving into the sensation of the breath… Feeling the sensation of the body, attending closely to just the feeling of the actual posture. However one wants to watch, observe, experience, feel on the physical level what is changing, what is impermanent, what is shifting, what is moving - all of that is aspects of impermanence:

Seeing it especially in terms of a basis for insight, really starting to experience it from a place of just change, just the body changing, just the sensation changing, rather than the attempts to make it be how one wants it to be, trying to say, “I should be,” trying, observing the breath at a particular point, “It should be like this… It should be flowing… It should be…” It doesn’t have to be anything, because it’s changing.

Observe and be attentive to what the experience actually *is*, at whatever point is observable, or somewhat clear for one, because that’s changing as well. Sometimes it’s clearer at the tip of the nose. Sometimes it’s clearer at the back of the palate. Sometimes it’s clearer or more observable in the diaphragm area, or down at the lower abdomen, but that’s impermanent also. So you don’t have to fix it at a point and then fret about it that it has to be there. This is taking impermanence as the theme, the basis…

This is where one also is recognizing there’s the impermanence on the physical level, and impermanence on the mental level - how the mind actually is relating to the breath, mindfulness.

*How do we establish the mindfulness on the breath?*

Well, it is impermanent. The mind is shifting and changing, and this is why they say that working with *vitakka-vicara* is so important. Ajahn Ṭhānissaro’s translation of *vitakka-vicara* I thinkis really very, very useful because he translates it as directed thought, *vitakka*, and *vicara* as evaluation.

So that, one is taking for granted, or recognizing clearly - yeah, there is this impermanence, the body, the physical sensation is impermanent, the mind is shifting and changing, so *to recognize* that, try to direct attention and mindfulness to that. That *vitakka*, that directed thought, is directing the thought at the sensation, directing the thought at the particular feeling that is arising, and then, that evaluation is staying with that, is sticking with it, is following through…

So that, picking a particular point, or recognizing a particular point of experience, and then that evaluation, watching the subtle changes that take place, and not to be thrown off by those changes, but sustaining that *vicara*, that evaluation, that sustaining the awareness, not in a forced way. Because things *are* impermanent, then you recognize you don’t have to force it to be constantly stable and steady and unchanging, but that *vicara* is supporting the awareness that follows change, so that the steadiness comes from that *vicara*.

And then when the *vicara* is impermanent, when it starts to shift, when it starts to seek another object, or another object distracts it in some way, then one recognizes, well, that is impermanent. What was impermanent is showing its impermanence, and that *vitakka* is lifting up, directing thought to that recognition of impermanence, and then the re-establishing of attention on the object of meditation… and that can be the breath, or the recognition of impermanence.

*Oh, that was impermanent. How do I return to that place of awareness and stability? (vitakka)*

- and then, *vicara*, evaluating the quality of our attention, evaluating and sustaining attention on that particular feeling….

As we work with impermanence and change like that, there’s a characteristic of this kind of concentration or settledness. The Buddha talks about it as a result of the attending to impermanence, but also it’s actually a basis for the insight or *vipassanā* practice and that is *animitta samādhi*.

The *samādhi* is based on *animitta,* which means *signless,* because it’s taking impermanence as the object. Then it’s not being drawn into the characteristics of things. It’s not being drawn into the change for change sake, but it’s *seeing through* impermanence. That which is impermanent has to be impermanent, and the mind settles in a composed state that is then able to not be drawn into the characteristics of things, the signs.

It goes to a signless *a-nimitta*, not going to the signs, characteristics, markers that normally are part of the conscious experience of things, or unconscious even, because it’s *seeing through* those characteristics. So the mind becomes very settled because it’s not drawn into those *nimitta* that mark the characteristics.

*Nimitta* is also, say like, when we mark our robes, we make a stain on them, that’s also called a *nimitta.* Say like when we do a *bintu, bintu (*?) (**34:23?**) - when we determine our robes, we have to mark them. We make three little marks on a new robe, those are also called *nimittas,* as well.

So the marks or signs as well are *nimitta* in terms of, say, a *nimitta* of light that comes up in meditation. Sometimes like an image that comes up in meditation. It could be a light, it could be full blown characters, but *a-nimitta* is not holding to those signs, marks, images, and is able to then establish itself on the quality of awareness itself.

So this investigation of impermanence - it’s very key to the Buddha’s teachings, but it has more implications than just the impermanence, just sort of: “Well, that’s impermanent. That’s impermanent. That’s impermanent.” It’s really taking it in and really seeing the implications of that.

Ajahn Chah used impermanence a lot in his teaching. One of the ways he also talked about it, to fill out its implication was as the unsure nature of things, the uncertain nature of things, because that tendency of the mind to want things to be sure, to be certain, seeking stability and security in the physical or the mental realm. We endlessly frustrate ourselves by trying to do that.

But when we can be clear and content

*Aah… What’s this…?*

*It’s an unsure thing. It’s uncertain…*

- you know, whether it’s some desire that comes up in the mind, or some fear, some sort of worry, to be able to see that in its impermanent, uncertain light, then the mind doesn’t hold to it, grasp it. It doesn’t proliferate around it, because one has accepted its impermanence. One *sees through* its changing nature.

So, on a mental realm, the seeing of that impermanent, uncertain nature, whether it’s a feeling, a perception, a mental formation, even the act of consciousness, itself,

*This is changing. It’s uncertain. It’s impermanent…*

- this is the base of insight, the seeing *nāma-rūpa* as impermanent.

When we see all, whatever is of form, whether it’s internal or external, *rūpa*, whether it’s the body, our own personal *rūpa*, form, whether it’s anything external to us, seeing that impermanent, changing nature… Of course, the at the end, that tapping into the breath, which is extremely impermanent, it’s the first clue.

And the *nāma*, all those aspects of the *citta*, of the mind, all the moods, all the feelings, sensation of pleasant, unpleasant, neutral, all the thoughts, whether they’re wise or foolish - really seeing those in the light of impermanence, not creating an evaluation of things:

*That was a wise thought, therefore, it’s good. I must be a wise person.*

- It was just impermanent. It was an impermanent wise thought. It was no big deal.

Foolish… sort of, off the wall, stupid, idiotic thought… That’s all it was.

*Oh, what was that? impermanent, changing, idiotic thought- have them all the time…*

(Laughter)

It’s seeing it from the ground of impermanence. As soon as one sees that, you realize,

*It was just a thought. Why do I have to make a big deal out of that?*

Again, that’s where the impermanence starts to show itself in the other aspects of the traditional elements of insight.

The *dukkha* element, when one *sees through* dukkha, then the concentration that arises, or one develops is called *apanihita*-*samādhi*. *Apanihita* meaning, literally, desireless *samādhi,* or non-hankering, non-aiming. It’s not looking for anything.

Can you imagine a mental state, the mind state that isn’t looking for anything else?

We’re pushed by desire, looking for something. It’s like a dog. You see these dogs sniffing all the time, (sniff sniff sniff), (laughter) looking for something, looking for something gratifying, looking for something interesting, looking for something just because there’s nothing else to do. It’s sniffing around looking for some other thought to follow, some other thought to think, some other experience to experience, some other…like we’re dogs following our noses all the time. It’s desire pulling us.

So that - *apanihita* *samādhi* that desireless *samādhi,* that is the *samādhi*. This is *samādhi*. These are also called the *vimokkhas*, liberations, *animitta* *vimokkha*, the liberation through the signless, *apanihita* *vimokkha*, the liberation through desirelessness.

*So, that mental state, the mind of peace, of samādhi, of concentration that is grounded in a non-hankering, a non-moving to the tune of desire, to really work with that as we breathe in…*

*What would it be like to breathe in without desire, without hankering, without aiming for anything other than just to breathe in- not evaluating, not measuring, not trying to make it be something other than it is? And to breathe out with just that quality of desirelessness…*

To bring it up as a contemplation, to allow the heart to settle into that quality of desirelessness - what would it be like?

Obviously then you see it’s impermanent, (laughter) but returning to that, bringing attention to it, attending to that heart of desirelessness, non-wanting, non-craving, non-seeking, *apanihita* *samādhi*…

When we accept impermanence, those things that are the change, the uncertainty, the impermanent nature of things, then we can rest in that quality of non-desiring much more because this is the way things are.

Again, I’ve always found it helpful, using the *vitakka-vicara*, that lifting up, that directing thought to a particular quality of mind and then evaluating:

*What’s that feel like?*

*What’s the tone?*

*What’s the result?*

*What comes in the mind?*

*What comes into the mind when we bring up a quality of desirelessness, as a possibility?*

Sometimes what happens is, it comes up with absolute resistance:

*No way am I going to to be desireless…*

The mind sometimes just balks, but other times it’s just really,

*Oh, wow…*

It opens up a possibility of escape, of peace. It opens up a possibility of real vimokkha, liberation. It’s a liberating quality of being able to be present with attention and awareness, with knowing, and not having to be looking for anything else, not desiring anything*…*

So *apanihita* *vimokkha*, *apanihita* *samādhi*, and developing of that meditation and concentration, settledness of mind, because it isn’t to say that this quality of *samādhi* and insight… they’re not just things that pop out of nowhere - they also have conditions. It’s setting the conditions for the mind to experience composure, peace, one-pointedness.

*Suññatā-samādhi:* This is the traditional counterpart of *anattā,* on the experiential level is emptiness, s*uññatā*. It’s not an emptiness, a voidness. It’s when we really experience things from a point of non-self, not frantically trying to prop up an I, a me, a being, but just recognizing conditions as conditions.

*This is a physical condition. This is a condition of physicality. This is a condition of mentality. These are nāma. These are rūpa. This is an impermanent, changing condition. This is just a condition…*

As one sees it from that perspective, then one starts seeing the empty nature of it, *empty of an abiding essence*. It’s empty of a focal point of selfhood. It’s just conditions.

Again, that has a liberating quality to it. It has a peaceful quality to it, and giving ourselves the opportunity to enter into and abide into that quality of emptiness. It’s not a metaphysical emptiness. It’s an experiential emptiness.

Recognizing impermanence, recognizing change, recognizing the conditioned nature of things, being conditioned - recognizing that there is an ability of the mind to see that clearly, and to see through it, without creating anything else, anything other - that’s our place of abiding. That’s the,

*Investigating impermanence, I breathe in…*

*investigating impermanence, I breathe out…*

- just coming back to that very simple base, that very simple foundation of breathing…

The breath is changing, but it’s giving us a clue. It’s giving us an opportunity to penetrate, and to relinquish, to see through, turning our attention to the insight elements of breath meditation.

So, I’ll offer that for reflection this evening.

Talk 15 - Investigating Dispassion

So the next step in the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* is *virāga*, *virāga nupasi*, **(14)**

*Investigating dispassion, I breathe in…*

*investigating dispassion, I breathe out…*

When Ajahn Buddhādasa uses that term, he has it translated as *fading away*, a sense of diminishing the strength of emotion that is afflicted by defilement, which is basically what the sense of dispassion is as well;

but using that sense of *fading away*, because so much of our suffering is the latching onto an idea, a feeling, an object of attention, particular view, an opinion and grabbing it with this passion, and using passion in a more general sense of - a deep belief in what it is representing.

So that we swim in the opposite direction of the Dhamma, by getting hooked in with this passionate belief in a- whatever: a sense of self, a particular fear, a particular object of desire, a particular view or opinion, a particular aversion, and it perpetuates the whole cycle of suffering.

And that’s always what *Ānāpānasati* is about, or any practice in Buddhism is always about- cutting through suffering, bringing suffering to a point of cessation, *seeing through* the self inflicted problems that we create for ourselves, and it arises out of that passion for things. Generally the passion, usually we associate that with sensuality, but for the Buddha’s perspective it’s much, much broader and deeper.

So to be attentive to

*As we breathe in, what’s the particular passion of the moment?…*

And particularly, say riding on, or coming after the *anicca,* impermanence - this is a natural result of when we really take impermanence into the heart and see the inherent changing nature of things, the inherent uncertainty of things. Then, one of the natural results would tend to be an attenuating of passion, *a dispassion* within the heart, that fading away of the strength of the tenacity of the mind that is proliferating around that which creates suffering.

So, to allow that to arise, and then also to actually check and see,

*Are the reflections on impermanence actually working?*

*Am I taking this to heart?*

*Am I actually getting a handle on this fundamental teaching of anicca?*

- and if dispassion is not the result, then it’s an indication of missing the shot. We have that opportunity to be able to allow that to arise.

Give the space for that quality of dispassion to arise within the heart, otherwise, we miss the opportunity that the Buddha is giving us to taste the results of his teaching.

So this quality of dispassion, to direct attention to that consciously, so one is recognizing it as a natural result of seeing impermanence, being very present for the breath…

But then there’s also the opportunity to direct attention to dispassion, to bring it up as the first thing as a desirable element to be incorporating within the heart, because it’s that quality of dispassion that leads to a sense of cooling, and a quality of settledness.

It’s always the being swept up by the particular mood of the moment that unsettles the mind, and keeps the mind agitated, and creates a veil over the mind so that we’re not really being able to see things as they truly are. We’re seeing things through the light of our particular bias that we have passion for, whether it’s the bias of liking and wanting, or the bias of disliking, and not wanting, or just the bias of confusion and delusion. It creates a veil that we’re unable to see clearly with.

So that, directing attention to dispassion, gives us the opportunity to drop that veil, to stop the tendency to tint everything we see and experience with the color that we’re seeing through at that time. This quality of dispassion is very, very important from the Buddha’s perspective.

We see through that. We’re constantly seeing with the tint of our biases. Part of it is the stories that go on in our minds that we don’t have dispassion for. We keep repeating the same old storyline that is the basis of our self view and world view. The storyline of whatever: “Me, the hopeless case”, or “Me, the fortunate one”, or “Me the, having had such and such an experience - this is who I am now.” We repeat these stories or things. You see in our minds when we sit in meditation. Some of the stories, they just keep on going.

I’ve been meditating for thirty years. There are stories that I continue to repeat to myself, and it’s so pathetic. (laughs) It’s just so pathetic, and so worthy of dispassion. (laughs) But there’s some morbid fascination with a particular story that gets repeated. We’re loathe to put down the story.

Ajahn Amaro gives that wonderful example that he had when he was at Amavarati. A person who I think was from New York, American anyway. I think he was from New York, who requested to come to stay at Amavarati. I think this was in the late 80’s, something like that. He had been diagnosed with AIDS, and in those days there was no effective treatment. So that was basically facing a death sentence, an imminent death, and he was feeling that what he really wanted to do was was spend as much of his energy and health allowed to be in a spiritual community and practice the Dhamma.

He told the situation, and also that as of yet the symptoms were not extreme, and he asked to come to live in the community. So he was accepted and was living and practicing, and would go into the city from time to time for medical check-ups and just to keep track of what was happening with his body, his physical condition. Then one day he had gone into the city. Then he’d come back and he was sitting in the hall, just looked totally glum and despondent.

Ajahn Amaro walked into the hall and saw him there. Immediately he came up and asked him, “What wrong. How are you doing.” And he gave him the opportunity to speak and share whatever disastrous thing that happened that day. So he started relating to Ajahn Amaro that they’d been doing a series of tests over the previous weeks or months and the results came in that day, and actually he didn’t have AIDS at all. He had a very very rare blood disorder that had somewhat similar symptoms but was actually treatable. So he’s telling this story, and giving the account of this, and Ajahn Amaro said, “Wow! Isn’t that good news?” and the guy said, “Yeah, I guess so, but I lost my story.” (laughs)

And that is the investment, the passion for the particular story, even if it’s one of disaster and imminent death… It’s a great story. It created an identity, and now he was just somebody else.

And you think of ourselves, you know,

*What stories do we live by?*

*What stories do we create for ourselves?*

*What stories do we have passion for?*

- and without even noticing it, or because we weave them into the fabric of who we perceive ourselves to be and what we think we are.

And to be able to step back and look on things with dispassion and say,

*This is a thought. It arises. It ceases.*

*This is a feeling. It arises. It ceases.*

*This is a particular view. It arises. It ceases.*

*This is the body. It arises and ceases.*

So we direct attention to dispassion, to give oneself the opportunity to have a break from the whole realm of what we find life fraught with- because in the end it’s all just this endless sort of suffering that we create.

So to look on the experience within our mind, within ourselves, through the lens of dispassion, and to attend to this -

*As we breathe in, what’s the feeling?…*

*What’s the perception?*

*As we breathe in, can we really hold that with dispassion?*

*Investigating dispassion, I breathe in…*

*Investigating dispassion, I breathe out…*

- to allow that dispassion to encompass the particular feeling, perception, thought, idea, mood; to imbue that with dis-passion, with *fading awa*y, to allow this in the same way that, let’s say,

*The breath comes in… as we get to the end of the breath and there’s a fading away of the in-breath… It’s natural…*

*And then as we breathe out, there’s the energy towards it, and then it fades away. It can’t go on forever…*

In the same way, it’s allowing that fading away of the thoughts and feelings and the mind that is creating the perception and views.

So, it’s giving the opportunity to the heart to establish itself in this quality of dispassion, and dispassion is not a sense of cold sterility. It’s freeing. It’s liberating, to not be crippled by the particular biases and clingings on that we tend to experience.

The Buddha talked about the biases of the mind. (**21:38-21:41**?) *Chanda Āghāṭi, dosa Āghāṭi Moha Āghāṭi Paya Āghāṭi. Āghāṭi (*sp?) are biases, ways that the mind *leans*, and is being *leaned on* by these particular modes: biased by fear, biased by aversion, biased by delusion, biased by fear. These are the ways that the biases of the mind establish themselves. And to allow that to fade away, to recognize- that is a particular bias, the mind is being tainted, is being tinted by that particular bias, and to allow that to fade.

There are certain things that we can be doing that are proactive in terms of dispassion. One of the classic modes of fostering dispassion, of course, are reflections on the body, and seeing the impermanence and constructed nature of the body, the way that is, in order to temper the perception.

Normally we would relate to the body in a way of either as an object of desire, an object of sensuality, sexuality, either viewing other people’s bodies from that perspective, or viewing one’s own as a mode, a vehicle for sensual and sexual gratification, but also the modes of health and vigor and being something, being *somebody* in a body who is somebody.

We create a whole realm of our perceptions of personality and self view through the vehicle of the body, and to step back and see,

*What* is *the body?*

- because when you begin with that assumption, then it permeates everything else, how we live our life and the various choices we make, obsessions, and fears, or whatever that we get caught up in.

There’s even just the sense of what the body is. We begin with a certain perceptual bias already, which maybe we’re not even aware of. It’s like the perception of food. Well, what is food? Normally when we think of food, we think of something nicely laid out on the table, and nicely presented, and something that has particular flavors, has particular fragrances and looks pleasing and delicious.

But in order for food to be something that is is actually useful, it’s just the raw material for food, for something to be food then you’ve got to get it into your mouth and chew it and masticate it, but that’s still not even food that has much benefit to us. We have to swallow it from there. Then it gets mixed with bile and digestive juices. Then it brings benefit to us.

When we think of food as something that nourishes us and supports us, we eat, we live. We live because we can have food, but it isn’t until it’s gone through a whole process of being mixed with saliva and bile and chewed and swallowed that it turns into something that’s useful.

So, the perception, the reality is something different than the perception, and the body is quite similar. Our bodies are useful to us not because of it’s covering- skin and its particular shape and form- but through all the internal muscles and tendons and internal organs that work and pump blood around. The whole thing is what creates a body that we can rely on and use and live our life with.

So that reflecting on, say, the 32 parts of the body, taking that as a meditation, that is particularly helpful for creating and fostering dispassion, again, rather than the observation of the body through, say, the eye of desire, the eye of passion. It’s a looking at it from a different perspective, and using those 32 parts of the body: hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, and skin… Those are the external elements which we can see, which, when we start to even separate those out, they’re already turned to something. As you start separating them out, none of them start to look particularly desirable or worthy of passion.

It’s also interesting how things change, as an increasingly senior monk. As I’m going to Thailand these days, because I’ve been ordained for so long, people know me, respect me, then people are starting to ask for my hair and my nails…(laughs) They want to save them (laughs)… On a certain level, it’s absurd. Passion can be created for anything, really.

In general, that’s normally not the case. When you look at a clump of hair, it doesn’t arouse desire, it tends to cool the mind. Then, as you review through yourself going internally, underneath the skin, and starting to investigate inside, visualizing the hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, and skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone marrow… Those are the structural elements of the body, and you realize that they have the individual characteristic of sinews and muscles and bones and what not. The tendency in looking at, say, either one’s own body or bodies of others, there’s this individuality that is almost immediately imputed.

But when one looks at just the muscles, bones, it takes one away from the individuality, internal organs, intestines, and liver and kidneys, heart, lungs… One doesn’t even consider individuality when one looks in that way. These are just organs, and everybody has their internal organs. As long as they stay internal, then they’re bearable and you don’t have to view them or see them…

Brian was telling me a story of a patient that, because of his illness and fluids that were building up in the abdominal cavity over time, they had to actually make an abdominal incision and then have all the intestines actually outside in order for the body not to be too stressed, and create pressure that would shut the whole digestive system down.

Then, of course, when the relatives come, you’ve got to get them neat and tidy somehow, (laughs), cover them… Well, they weren’t strewn around the table, but they all had to be sterile. So it was encapsulated and then taped…

But still, when the relatives came, they were definitely covering it up. {It wasn’t} ‘Come see ‘ole old uncle Joe, with his intestines spewing out around and about…’ This definitely shifts perception.

One of the things I always find striking is seeing autopsies is the layer of fat that is underneath the skin. I find it curious. I’ve seen several autopsies, and I always find it striking in a dispassionate way, the body having its layer of fat. Even on a rather slim person, still there’s this layer of fat that’s this yellowish stuff that is underneath the skin.

Each of us, when we start to reflect on the body in those different ways, there are different things that are striking that would tend to create dispassion. Even in contemplating skin, which is normally considered the external part of the body that you see, and is all the focus of attention, is normally that the skin or what one can see, even something like knuckles - just the way the skin is around knuckles - it’s hard for it to arouse much fascination, or passion.

So, one can direct attention even to something that might arouse passion, directing attention to different aspects that *are cooling*, that take the the mind away from its perception that arouses interest and passion.

We’re doing that with this contemplation, of the 32 parts of the body:

*…hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth…skin, sinews, flesh, bones, bone marrow… various internal organs… fluids of the body, blood, sweat, fat, tears…*

- all these different elements that we don’t even think about.

And as soon as you *do* think about, *do* bring attention to it, then it gives one the opportunity to step back, to step out of the habit, the bias that tends to this fashion. What it does help do is this sense of dispassion, fading away, allowing that attention to fade from its tendency to desire, attachment, *belief* in that which is either supporting greed, hatred, and delusion in one way or another.

So that, giving ourselves the opportunity to experience dispassion, cooling, because when that quality of cooling within the heart appears, then there’s this possibility of peacefulness, and that’s what we’re practicing for.

We want to be peaceful, but we keep getting caught up in the things that feed the greed, hatred, and delusion, feed the passions of belief and bias.

It’s only we ourselves that can take responsibility for the practice, and the Buddha says that over and over again. All he can do is point the way, and it’s up to each individual to do the practice themselves.

So, the pointers are pointing in the direction of dispassion, cooling, of seeing clearly the implications of impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, non-self, and really embracing that. Keep placing that foremost in the heart rather than from time to time bringing it up and then merrily continuing to get absorbed and caught by the things that keep us suffering, keep us agitated.

So I’ll offer that for reflection this morning.

Talk 16 - Death and Dispassion

This morning I’d like to continue with the theme of investigating dispassion - *vi-raga…*

*Investigating dispassion, I breathe in…*

*Investigating dispassion, I breathe out…*

… directing attention to that quality of fading away, of allowing the mood, or particular feeling to be experienced from a place of dispassion, rather than passion, rather than the holding, clinging, constant affirmation of a particular feeling, or mood, or view, that one comes to. Attend to it with this quality of dispassion.

So much of how we experience ourselves and the world around us is completely generated by the inner biases, or inner holding, and we constantly believe that. We constantly work from those assumptions, and from that position.

So that, with mindfulness of breathing, at this point, it’s really trying to look more clearly at the way that we are viewing, our emotional tone, how we’re perceiving something, and, can we put that down? Can we set that aside? Can we have dispassion towards a particular feeling that we’re experiencing, right now?

And if we can’t, it’s a very clear indication of clinging, attachment, proliferation. The mind is proliferating with its particular flavor of the moment, and it’ll change, and then we’ll go on and believe the next thing. It has a certain power at that time, and the whole world seems to be aligned with that particular perspective.

But, in the light of Dhamma, and in the light of the impermanent, changing nature of things, its uncertainty, then those particular views, and feelings, and perspectives tend to crumble very quickly, and either we rush back in and support them, because they’re dear to us, or we go on to the next thing, and find some other cause to invest our energy and our obsessions with.

This is mostly how we spend our time. Rarely do we return to a place of dispassion, and allow things to settle, and to be contemplating the possibility of dispassion, and trying to experience the particular moods and feelings, the particular views that we have - what would they be if one were truly able to establish dispassion? What meaning would they have? What value would they have?

Because that quality of dispassion just gives such a space to the mind, to settle and cool. You know, without that possibility of settling and cooling, then we just tend to keep the mind spinning.

One of the themes that’s very helpful for reflection for encouraging dispassion is the theme of death, contemplating in particular *one’s own death*, and to make it very clear in one’s mind: *This is a very real possibility.* It’s not just conjecture.

And to take it past the intellectual level, because in a certain way, everybody knows that - everybody knows they’re going to die, but most people work from the assumption that it’s going to be somebody else first, not us, yet. Like soldiers going into battle, there may be some fear, and anticipation there, but they tend to think that it’s somebody else who’s going to experience death - the enemy, some unfortunate people on our side, maybe, but certainly not us, not *me*. They make plans for what they’re going to do after…

I remember a few years ago, there was someone in Yosemite, in one of the various parachute clubs, jumping off a big rock there - I guess there’s a few big rocks there (laughs), and the Park Service was trying to curtail that, and saying that it was dangerous, and people have been hurt;

and then various people and clubs got together to protest this ‘draconian measure’ of the Park Service, and organized a jump over there, with the leader of the group, and they said, Parachuting can be dangerous, but it’s certainly not the case…

So anyway, they went ahead, and the leader jumped off, and neither parachute opened, and he just splattered at the bottom. He didn’t start the day thinking*, Maybe I could die.* He didn’t think that at all.

And obviously this is a contemplation for dispassion. It’s a contemplation for restructuring one’s priorities and values, so that one places Dhamma foremost. It’s not a contemplation just to try to make oneself fearful of death, and then avoid anything that is a bit fearful or worrisome, and one can paralyze oneself with fear also, but that’s not the point of these contemplations.

Again, any contemplation is for creating this balance within the heart so that the Dhamma can shine forth, and one facilitates one’s opportunity for practice and training as much as possible.

So this contemplation of death is contemplating one’s own death - really bringing it up, is in order to encourage oneself, and to spur one on to be cautious, careful, circumspect, heedful.

*Appamada* is the Pali term for being circumspect, heedful, and the Buddha said this is a foremost quality in laying the ground for liberation. When this heedfulness, or circumspect quality comes up, then the Buddha gives the image of dawn. In the same way, when one sees the first light of dawn, one knows the day will unfold, and become light. The same thing, when one recognizes this quality of appamada, circumspection, heedfulness, a kind of care and attention to things, then one can expect the unfolding and ripening of the Eightfold Path, and its resultant liberation.

So the contemplations on death are helpful tools for spurring one on in that direction, and resetting one’s priorities. Again, it lays that ground for dispassion, to really cool the heart of its impulses to follow a particular desire, mood, bias, and to return to Dhamma.

And to really do that,

*As one breathes in…*

*as one breathes out, contemplating the image of death, and one’s own death, the death of everybody…*

It’s like Larry Rosenberg talking about how he’s a bit of a film buff. He enjoys movies, and one night, when he was working on one of his books, and working through some of these contemplations, and he got a movie to watch. It was an old 1938 movie with Clark Gable and Carol Lombard, and he’s watching this movie, and of course these people are vibrant and full of life, and then he started contemplating…

*Gee… Clark Gable’s dead… and Carol Lombard’s dead… every single actor that was acting in it is dead…*

*the people who directed it, footed the film, produced it, the people who worked on the sets - probably everybody who had anything to do with this movie is dead. Everybody dies…*

And the illusion is one of life, and continuing life, ongoing life…onward and upward life, forever and ever (laughs)… Somehow, I’m going to…

We ourselves die. Everybody dies, and not to be making decisions as if one were going to live forever; to make one’s decisions from a place of - death is certain. Death is a certain thing.

The timing of it is very uncertain, and one of the contemplations that I’ve found very helpful, and have used over time, is to contemplate, as one is practicing,

*Breathing in…*

*breathing out…*

*If this were the last moment of my life, if I were going to die, right now, is this the kind of mental state that I would want to carry with me into my death?*

*Is this the kind of mood, or thought that I want in my last moment?*

I’ve always found that it restructures, radically, what I’m holding onto, and where I want to direct attention.

Dispassion- and not dispassion in a cool, unfeeling sense - it’s dispassion in the sense of a cool, clear, circumspect observation of reality and truth.

Dispassion brings us back to the possibility of the mind to be really clear, and not be shaken or moved by the moods and thoughts that endlessly bubble up in the mind.

So that, reflection on death -

*If I were to die right now, is this a suitable mental state?*

*Is this a suitable thought to be carrying with me?*

*And what kind of mental state* do *I want to bring to my last moment, to my last breath?*

Certainly that quality of dispassion is high up on the list.

So to bring those reflections into play:

*Investigating dispassion, I breathe in…*

*Investigating dispassion, I breathe out…*

There’s a very famous monk in Thailand, and what he’s most famous for, really, is his medallions. They’re considered to be extremely potent, and protective. And he has huge crowds at his monastery who come to seek blessings from him, because it’s considered that, whatever he says - a blessing or a perspective - is auspicious, and will come to be. And then his amulets are considered to be very very auspicious and protective, and at one point, somebody asked him,

*Besides receiving the blessings and the amulets, and doing the external practice, what’s the most suitable way to practice meditation?*

In terms of meditation technique and method, these developments - it’s very easy…

The Burmese method, of noting,

*Rising… falling… moving… touching…*

*-* it’s done in a sort of way of *a question* - it’s actually quite an interesting technique in that way, so that breathing in is

Y*up naaw…*

*pan naaw…*

- breathing out is that question, and it’s a question -

*Is it falling?*

breathing in,

*Is it rising?*

And he said, the quickest way, he used that -

on the in breath:

*Die naaw*

on the out breath:

*Die naaw -*

on the in breath:

*Am I dying?*

on the out breath:

*Am I dying?*

*-* keeping death as constant theme - that’s probably the most auspicious, protective thing one could ever do.

So to be bringing that reflection, raising up that contemplation…

And you know, it’s something people *don’t do* - we don’t live our lives from a place of recognition of death…

One time I went to Daodam (sp?) - this place along the Burmese border where they have a retreat center, and it was the first time I’d gone back to visit. I took a group from Wat Nana Chat - and they actually hadn’t had any monks in there since the year that I had spent a rains retreat.

So it had been about seven years there hadn’t been any monks there, and the people that were there were very excited to have monks, and one of the reasons they were excited was because many of the people had died during those seven years, and there had not been any monks to do any proper funeral ceremonies. So they had buried everybody, and then they wanted us to do a proper cremation for all of the people who had died.

In order to do that, the idea was that the villagers would help, and we would go to each gravesite, and take out a part of the body of each person, so that we could do a communal cremation.

So the time was set, the day was set, and we convened to go out to the charnel ground area, and the villagers - and these are miners, they’re tough sort of people who are out on the fringes, on kind of a frontier society, and they were absolutely terrified, and so in order to get over their fear of death, of course they were fortified with large amounts of alcohol. And they started digging up the sites, and as we get to the first one, and we get to the coffin, and immediately knock a hole in the side of the coffin, and a person sort of puts their hand in, trying to just get something - and a head came rolling out, a skull came rolling out (laughs) and these villagers just bolted into the forest, they just ran off in different directions…aaahhh!.. (laughs…)

And so we went and got this skull, and then they came back, and sort of slopped back more alcohol to keep them going, but in the end, they were *so drunk* that they couldn’t dig any more, and they said, *That’s enough*…

We only did about two, and there had been, I don’t know, easily fifteen or twenty people had died, anyway, that was enough. By the time we did about three, they were finished. But you could just see the fear, and it didn’t matter how much alcohol they had put down their throats, they were just never able to get past that fear.

And, as monks, it was actually a really interesting contemplation. It was a really nice day outing (laughs), to be able to go to a charnel ground, to see death, and to see the human body…

I posted up an article on the board, which is similar, well, much grosser, and much grander. The article about a monastery in Thailand that has turned into a makeshift morgue, and center for people who are still coming and trying to identify relatives after the tsunami. And there are a huge number of bodies there, a thousand, fifteen hundred bodies.

And of course, as each day goes past, they are in increasing stages of decomposition. It’s the story of the monks that are living in that monastery, and their perspectives and reflections on living in the middle of a makeshift morgue.

They said their ordinary, daily routine is a bit impacted by just the presence of so many people. One, there’s large groups of forensic scientists who are trying to do their detailing work, and whatnot, and then relatives coming, so that they’re just trying to respond to the circumstances.

And then morning and evening meditations, and meal offerings are all taking place there, and there’s this strong sense of - *This opportunity to reflect on death, is really priceless… This* is *the reality of human existence*, and it’s beyond what anybody has ever imagined, or conceived of, having so much death around…

Bringing it inwards, and using it to contemplate priorities, and what’s important, and the nature of human life in general…

to be bringing that in… investigating…

And as we reflect on death, and on *our own death* in particular, really trying to keep that contemplation going, there are certain aspects or permutations of that that are important to reflect on. One is just the resistance we have to even contemplating death - that desire, that *somehow* it’s not going to effect us, somehow, or, we distance ourselves from it in a way that it doesn’t touch our hearts.

Because there’s this very deep seated - on almost a cellular level - somehow, the desire not to die, and that is nature, but then on the mind and the personality level, it takes over. And it’s always been a quest, the great, epic quest is for immortality.

I remember the Woody Allen line - *I don’t want to achieve immortality through my works. I want to achieve it through not dying…*

(laughs…)

- but that’s the feeling in everybody’s heart.

So to really try to make it clear that - *this is inevitable.*

This is a part of contemplating the death of the people we love, we respect, of our parents… teachers…

And somebody like Ajahn Chah - was so larger than life - he’s been dead for over ten years now. He was somebody who was the wisest being that I’ve met, the most sort of vitality and a kind of *presence,* and he got sick and he died. That is natural, for everybody. The Buddha died a long time ago. In the physical realm, for the physical body, death is what awaits us all.

And we have to do it ourselves. We’ll be alone when we die. Whether or not we’re surrounded by all sorts of people, who are either cheering us on and chanting mantras and meditating, or there’s people around weeping and wailing, or there’s people around who are indifferent, in the ultimate sense, we are alone. We have to do that ourselves. We will be on our own at that point.

And we need to cultivate the qualities of balance, and equanimity, and dispassion, and clarity *now.* It’s not something that is going to somehow manifest at that time because we thought it was a good idea. It’s something that we need to develop, cultivate, and continually bring to our practice, bring to our training, because when the time comes, it’s not at all what one thought it was going to be.

There’s a person who does a lot of hospice work in Seattle, working with dying people, and he said, it’s usually the people who have the most difficult time are the people who thought their death was going to be spiritual somehow. They had some *idea*, that somehow their death was going to be a spiritual death, that they were going to die in this spiritually illumined sort of fashion, somehow…

But you know, it’s a nice idea, but if you’re really not cultivating it, living it all the time, every day, nice ideas don’t come to much.

That contemplation of

*As I breathe in, investigating dispassion…*

*As I breathe out, investigating dispassion…*

- cultivating the qualities that lead to clarity and stability, and constantly returning to that, and not wasting time…

How much time do we waste, either in things that we think are useful, valuable, or things that other people think are useful or valuable?, and you know, in the end…

I remember the line, from one of Warapano’s (sp?) verses,

*In the end,*

*one is cooked and eaten by the king of death*

It’s a very vivid image that is helpful to bring up, because we do need to motivate ourselves. We do need to encourage that quality of making the practice immediate, and to set our priorities straight, to really relinquish what needs to be let go of, and to cultivate what needs to be cultivated.

One of the qualities that the Buddha praises for cultivation is dispassion, and it’s also something that naturally arises. Dispassion naturally arises when we see things really clearly, when we see things in their true light.

So those contemplations on impermanence - in all its permutations - right down to *us* - this person, this being, this body, this personality, this thing we call ‘me’ - are about really seeing it in the light of its death.

So I offer that for reflection this morning.

Talk 17 - Attending to Cessation

I'd like to continue with the theme of the mindfulness of breathing. As we're approaching the end of the discourse on Ānāpānasati, the elements of insight are much more prominent. These are the culmination of the practice that has been laying the foundation through mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of feelings, mindfulness of the mind itself, and now turning attention to contemplating Dhamma.

This is the second to last stage of mindfulness of breathing, *nirodha no passi (sp?)*. **(15)**

*Contemplating cessation, I breathe in…*

*contemplating cessation, I breathe out…*

And there's a whole constellation of nuances around this contemplation of cessation. It's interesting that the Buddha is bringing this toward the very end of the aspects of insight.

Certainly, the most striking thing to me, when we contemplate cessation is that - really allowing things to cease, because the drive, the tendency, the habit is always toward becoming or, almost always. It's always toward becoming, being, on to the next thing. ‘What do I do now?’, and to just attend to cessation and allow that to form the basis for peace.

One of the aspects of reflection, when we think of cessation, is to put it in the Buddhist context. Everything is turning toward balance. The cessation that we're talking about is not annihilation, or non-existence. This is a natural phenomenon of the quality of ceasing.

There's a very lovely discourse when the Buddha is speaking with Kochana Gota (sp?) saying that the world is always caught up in one extreme or another, and tending toward the notion of existence and the notion of nonexistence, *atita* and *natita*,(sp?) affirmation and negation, being and the annihilation of being.

And as long as the mind is caught in those extremes, that flip-flopping back between extremes, the mind can never really find peace. It doesn't really find a point of balance. But the reflection on cessation is a helpful tool for creating balance.

One translations of the word *nirodha* from ancient times is, along with the sense of cessation and ending, destruction, is ‘free of impediment, free of imprisonment, free of negation.’ ‘*Rodha’* as being the impediment or restriction, constriction, imprisonment. So, ‘being free from imprisonment’ - that cessation is the opportunity to free the heart from the qualities that imprison, hold, stick it in suffering.

We talk about cessation. The main use of the word is around cessation of suffering, bringing suffering to an end, allowing suffering to come to a point of ending, because the tendency is that we keep viewing things in the way that perpetuates suffering, or perpetuates dissatisfaction, perpetuates discontent.

So with the mindfulness of breathing, to attend to that quality of allowing discontent to cease… Allowing that dissatisfaction to cease… Allowing the quality of suffering, of stress to cease…

When we practice, when we're sitting, as we breathe in, to pay attention to a quality of ceasing.

Naturally, as we breathe in, of course there's a becoming, a being. The breath comes into being and then the in-breath has to come to end. It has a natural ending point. It ceases.

And the same with the out breath. As the breath goes out, there is this movement, and then it ceases. In the natural order of things, there's always cessation.

In terms of our practice, to attend to the quality of cessation and ceasing, with the mental framework of how we're holding things- the quality of trying too hard, trying to make things be the way we want it to be, and not relaxing, that sense of the mind getting stuck in this feeling of stress, a feeling of insecurity, a feeling of trying to prop up security- that sense of letting it all cease. The mind is trying so hard to make things be the way we want them to be, and we allow that to cease.

What happens when we sit? Rather than becoming peaceful, oftentimes in the mind there’s just this stuff popping up all the time. We grab on to it and the mind starts to proliferate around it. It starts to buy into the particular mood of:

*I want this.*

*I need this.*

*I have to have it this way…*

Or, feelings of agitation, and irritation:

*It shouldn't be this way.*

*I don't like it.*

*This is awful…*

And there's this becoming power. The mind is moving to becoming. The mind that is unwilling to settle, unwilling to be peaceful, is always looking for something to buy into, to think about, or to have that affirmation of feeling.

So, to turn attention to ceasing, to really allow ceasing to become conscious, allow that particular feeling of thought,

*I want that.*

*I need that.*

*This has to be done.*

*That person is like this and like this and like this…*

- just allow that to cease. You don't have to annihilate it, in the way that's another extreme.

*I need to destroy it.*

*I need to annihilate it.*

*I have to get rid of it…*

- that’s another extreme in the mind. Naturally, it has to cease. Cessation is part of natural phenomenon. So, *to allow it to cease*, to attend to that ceasing so that there's an opportunity for peace to establish itself, and this is an important part of our practice in terms of giving ourselves the opportunity to experience what a peaceful mind is like, because the mind is always filling itself up with stuff.

When they first went to Chithurst, they bought this old mansion, and the place was old. It was derelict. It hadn't been looked after. It was really falling apart. What is now the shrine room you could look up from there through two stories and see out the roof. You could look down through the hole in the floor and see down into the basement. It was completely derelict.

It was also filled with junk. Absolutely everything that the owners had ever, ever, ever had in their lives, they had kept, and the place was choc-a-block full. Every single room was full of junk. Outside was full of junk. I can't remember how many derelict cars there were. There were a dozen or twenty derelict cars that had been left to rot. They had hung on to them. They kept them.

And, you know, how much of that same squirreling away of thoughts, ideas, impressions, worries, fears, irritations, pet peeves, do we just keep squirreling away, and keep hanging on, finding a corner to stuff them in? That's what our mind starts to look like. It's the sense of this unnavigable kind of conglomeration of impressions, feelings, and thoughts because they're never allowed to cease. We never give them the space to cease and really come to cessation.

So, to really make that conscious, to make conscious that quality of ceasing and cessation. As we're practicing, bringing to mind the natural quality of cessation, to feel that both, not just on the intellectual level but on a very physical level, experiential level -

*What does it feel like when the breath ceases and stops?*

There's just a small window there - start to pay attention to that.

*What does it feel like when a particular feeling or thought stops, ceases?*

Start to attend to that because that's like a wedge that we can place in the mind-stream that keeps proliferating, keeps entangling itself.

As we pay attention to that wedge of an opening of cessation then you realize that we can actually move into that quality of peace. We can actually abide in that quality of cessation. That is a possibility, just as the Buddha's encouragement in this part of the discourse.

*Contemplating cessation, I breathe in…*

*Contemplating cessation, I breathe out…*

So that each in breath and each out breath is imbued with this quality of cessation, turning to peace, turning to settling; Allowing the quality of the mind to turn to balance, rather than the leaping out at becoming and being, or lashing out at annihilation and extinguishing, pushing away - allowing the mind to truly settle.

That quality of cessation…

As we attend to cessation, one of the aspects of this quality of cessation, I was thinking about a few days ago, within the three characteristics, was tying that in with the quality of emptiness. In cessation, particularly, self view, self grasping, allowing that to cease, then we're able to have a window into emptiness, attending to cessation, tending to emptiness.

I’m remembering a little exercise that Ajahn Jumnien had people do at the retreat this last year: having people sit with their eyes open, and start to attend to, say, there’s the floor, and then there’s the eye.

And that sense of: O.k., There’s the act of cognition. There's the thing cognized, and start to rest attention at a midway point in between them. Start to pay attention, resting attention, focussing attention at the place between that which is cognized and that which is cognizing. Say, the eye, and the object of the eye.

And it's a place of emptiness. And you notice how difficult, if you do that, it isn't the natural thing that we do. We don't pay much attention to emptiness or the in-between spaces. We're always going to one thing or another that is tangible or that is clear to us in some way.

And it's similiar with cessation. Either we're going to the notion of existence or the notion of nonexistence, and we don't really abide in cessation. We don't pay attention to cessation. In the same way, in terms of the act of cognition, we either go to the object or we go to the subject, and we don't pay much attention to the actual emptiness in-between. So that to do that as an exercise, to work with that , to cultivate that, that attention to a middle point, a point of balance.

And rather than seeing cessation as an ending, a ceasing, an annihilation, a destroying of something, it's a natural quality of peace that is within the cycle of the coming into being and passing away of all things.

And that opens a window for us to view things in a different way, and to start to relinquish the attachments to existence and non-existence, trying to get something, to gratify, or aversion and pushing away, liking and disliking.

Can we be in a place in the middle, which is a point of ceasing of suffering, a cessation of suffering? Because the suffering is always going around trying to get, or trying to get *away from*, trying to be or trying to not be.

And to come to a place of allowing the suffering, the stress, the dissatisfaction to actually cease, and to do it consciously, to be present for that, to be there with it…

So, that this mindfulness of breathing is starting to give us a window into an opportunity of liberation, of freedom, a freedom from impediment, a freedom of getting out of the prison that we set for ourselves.

In terms of practice and training, this is why the samatha practices are very important, in order to become more and more familiar with the peaceful places of our mind, the settled and still quality of the mind, of the heart, to be able to become increasingly familiar with the ability of the mind to actually stop and to settle.

And then, one doesn't have to make anything of it. That’s just the capacity of the mind to stop, to settle.

But then, to take that further, the sense of making cessation very conscious, because the becoming mind can infect the practice of tranquility as well, where we obstruct the capacity of the mind to become really peaceful.

So, giving oneself the opportunity to really bring cessation into consciousness, and contemplating it, opens up a window for the mind to settle.

So that, contemplating cessation, tying it in with emptiness, particularly of that sense of self that arises, allowing that quality of that I and me, that gets so involved in evaluating results, trying to become something, trying to look for a pat on the back, trying to affirm something. Or, going in the other direction, of feelings of not measuring up to what we wanted to be, thinking that one is hopeless, thinking that ‘I'm never gonna get this practice’, ‘I'm never gonna understand anything, my mind is never going to become peaceful’ - that’s just the nattering of the self.

And to start attending to the cessation of things because nothing arises that doesn't cease. Start to attend to the cessation of things.

It’s like Ajahn Chah was being asked one time by a person- this was in England- and she was experiencing strong anger and being swept up by it, and asked, “How do I deal with this anger? It just seems so ingrained.” And Ajahn Chah, rather than giving some other technique, directly went and said go to the root of it. He said just take an alarm clock and set it for two hours. Next time you get angry, just go and set that alarm clock and see if you can be angry for two hours. See if you can be completely, and totally in an unalloyed state of anger for two hours. We can't do it! It's always in a process of flux. It’s arising and ceasing. The cessation is happening, it’s just that we don't attend to the cessation. What we attend to is the becoming, the being, all the reasons why it should be there, why it's justified, why it's right and righteous to be following that train of thought.

But, the reality is that there's a constant arising and ceasing taking place and we don't pay attention to cessation. We forget about the cessation so we don't open up an opportunity for peace for ourselves. So that attending to cessation gives us a window of cutting through the mind that entangles itself and suffers.

You know, we *say*, “I don't want to suffer." “I want to experience the end of suffering." “I want to be free.” “I want to be liberated”, but we keep biting into the things that perpetuate the agitation and the dukkha. We don't make conscious, the cessation, the ceasing, the quelling.

And there’s a word that Ajahn Buddhadasa uses in this. The word that he uses for nirodha, that he prefers is *quenching… quenching…*

When you think of cessation, the association is one of ceasing and annihilation, so it’s important to have these terminologies that re-configure our associations and perceptions. So, that sense of quenching, really coming to a place of quenching,

*As we breathe in, to almost steep the heart in a quality of quenching…*

- Like a thirst is quenched. A hunger is quenched. A feeling of desire and agitation is quenched.

There's this very peaceful quality that we're able to access, the sense of attending to cessation, nirodha…

Inevitably, the quality of nirodha is one that sometimes we just forget to attend to. We forget that it's a part of the whole picture.

So that we’re very much needing to make that conscious, and use it as a tool to step back from the tendency to always go to the next thing, to always be looking for something else that we have to do, something that we have to make happen in our practice.

So this , attending to quenching, attending to cessation…

I offer that for reflection this morning.

Talk 18 - Relinquishing the Defilements

This morning we’ll use the last piece of the anapanasati sutta as the theme, *patinissagga - , ‘*contemplating relinquishment, or ‘contemplating abandoning’ is the way it’s normally translated. **(16)** So,

*Contemplating relinquishment, I breathe in…*

*contemplating relinquishment, I breathe out…*

Oftentimes, it’s particularly talking about the relinquishing of self, but it also applies to the abandoning of all defilements. So that contemplation of really relinquishing, of giving up, abandoning, on each in breath and on each out breath open up to that possibility of real relinquishment.

We spend so much of our time, just holding back all the time, and we’ve got all our reasons for it, and all our logic for it and all our necessity of why we have to hold back, why we can’t give up, why we can’t relinquish, why we can’t abandon, and we don’t really contemplate just relinquishing, just giving up, just abandoning, really letting go of our perceptions of self, our particular biases, particular fears.

We’re always going back and renewing ourselves at the source of our suffering, rather than giving ourselves the opportunity to really step into an abiding of peace, an abiding of freedom.

Dukkata (sp?) sent these pictures, I just got them this morning, pictures from her time in the south of Thailand, and there’s just all these bodies, and one of the things they had to keep protecting against was the dogs coming and gnawing on the corpses; and you get the feeling of the same thing with our defilement and our habits. It’s like a dog coming in and gnawing on a rotten corpse of our defilements and attachments, and we don’t chase him away. We just let him gnaw away.

Obviously, the thing to do is to really relinquish, let go, drop, and each time that the mind goes back to chew on its defilements, to really establish that awareness of relinquishing, of letting go, rather than being content having the mind sort of gnawing on this rotten corpse of our suffering.

It seems so useless, and we do it all the time. We do it all the time. Again, we’ve got all the logic, we’ve got all the habit there for it, the conditioning there for it, and we don’t really bring up, consciously, the opportunity that we *do* have, to relinquish, to set aside, to put down.

So this last contemplation is very very powerful, if one gives it some attention, and pays an interest in that quality of relinquishing.

This is something that inspired me with Ajahn Chah’s practice, or if I would typify Ajahn Chah’s practice. The characteristic that I would think of first is his complete relinquishment, really full, total relinquishment, abandoning, and that is extraordinarily inspiring and also what he really wanted to foster in all of us who lived with him, and studied with him. That was his hope, his goal.

And to try to embody, or partake, even a little bit, in that legacy of Ajahn Chah is to be interested and focused on relinquishment, abandoning, giving up, letting go.

One of the words he used to use was to surrender. Do we really surrender to the Dhamma, or do we keep surrendering to our defilements, our desires, our attachments? That sense of really surrendering and giving oneself to the Dhamma, to that which is actually the base for real peace and real contentment- you know, when you see clearly, of course, that is really what the heart wants to do.

Of course, then what comes up in the mind is, “This is what I really want to do…*but, but,* but there’s this thing that is really bugging me, or there’s this thing that I really have to have, or, I really have to get this done first.”

With relinquishing, there’s no “buts” in there. It’s really turning to that quality of abandoning and letting go. And as we sit and watch, to attend to the in breath and the out breath, to really attend to,

*What am I holding?*

*What am I not yet ready to abandon?*

*What am I not yet ready to relinquish?*

- and right there is where we have to put our attention and effort on relinquishing, and you don’t need to figure it out, you don’t have to analyze it, you don’t need to formulate a treatise in your mind about it. It just needs to be dropped, needs to be abandoned, needs to be relinquished.

So that making it into a present moment practice, it isn’t that,

*When I get my knowledge of the discourses down, then I’ll really be able to relinquish.*

*When I get my samadhi together, then I’ll be able to relinquish.*

*When I really refine the insight into dependent origination, I’ll be able to relinquish.*

*When I really contemplate suffering, then I’ll be able to relinquish.*

It’s not like that. In this moment, we have the opportunity to relinquish, to abandon, to let go, and that’s what we have to learn how to do, just by doing it.

Bringing attention to that quality of relinquishing, abandoning as we breathe in, as we breathe out in this present moment, not with any conditions placed on it, not with any timeline of when it’s going to happen, but attending to it, in the present moment.

There’s a story in the Tibetan tradition that is somewhat similar in terms of the theme, the thrust, where the monk is doing his circumambulations of the chedi, and doing his recitations, circumambulations going around the shrine.

The teacher, the Rinpoche walks past, commends him, and says, “ Doing circumambulations is a good thing, but it doesn’t really compare to practicing the Dhamma.” And then he walked off.

And the monk thinks, “I guess maybe this is considered a preliminary practice.. He must mean I should be reciting the sutras”. So he finds a spot in front of the library, gets the sutras out and is reading and reciting, doing that for a while, putting up a lot of energy for doing that.

And one day the Rinpoche walks past, similarly, and says, “Reciting the sutras is a good thing, but it doesn’t compare to really practicing the Dhamma.”

And he gets shocked at that; he thought he really got it this time and started thinking, “I guess this means I should really be practicing meditation. Everybody says that meditation is the highest practice.” So he starts doing a lot of sitting meditation, developing the different aspects of concentration, and reflection, and he does that for quite some time.

Again, the Rinpoche one day is walking past while the monk is doing his sitting meditation, and says, “Sitting meditation is a good thing, but it doesn’t compare to really practicing the Dhamma.”

And that was just really the straw that broke the camel’s back. He just burst out in frustration, “You keep saying all the things that I am doing are good, but it doesn’t compare to practicing the Dhamma. What does it mean to practice the Dhamma?”

And the Rinpoche just said, “Renounce this life. Renounce this life.”

- That sense of renunciation, relinquishing , abandoning, directing attention to that, and obviously, we have varying degrees of success at it, but without bringing up that perspective, without shining the light of that kind of relinquishment on what goes on in our minds, then everything becomes really believable. It becomes sort of right and righteous, the need is really strong, but then if we really bring up that quality and surround the content of our experience with that field of relinquishment, then things change a lot, and you have to keep repeating that. Keep bringing the mind back to that point of really relinquishing, letting go, putting down.

It’s really both the fruit of practice as well as the actual practice itself. As we continue to work with the mindfulness of breathing, and bringing it into all of the different aspects of our experience – bodily, physical, feeling, the mind, objects of mind itself – the dhammas, then as our mindfulness of breathing is permeated with the quality of this practice, it has to have a direction. It has to have a point, and certainly one of the points of the whole thing is this quality of relinquishment, to be encouraging the mind to come to this point of relinquishment, to be able to put things down.

As we put things down, on a certain level, things don’t change a lot, in the sense that there’s still a body, there’s still feelings, there’s still mind, but we relate to it in a very different way.

One of the ways of helping to foster that, or to bring up, having a means to reflect on, is just the recognition of things being just what they are, in the sense that the khandas being the khandas.

Seeing that: this is body, this is feeling, this is perception, this is a thought, these are mental formations, this is consciousness, and relinquishing of the self that tries to establish itself within those natural phenomena- the relinquishing, abandoning the whole perception of the world that is just these five khandas arising and passing away.

It isn’t as if one relinquishes, abandons, and there’s nothing there, there’s nothing left, there’s nothing. What is left is just that which is natural. Things are as they are. We don’t have to try to make them into anything different.

Something that is a feeling, whether it’s pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, it doesn’t have to become anything else, but just seeing it in that light and relinquishing any movement towards the story, the proliferation, the bias, the opinion, the me that’s trying to establish itself - even in terms of the practice,

*What am I getting?*

*What am I getting out of this?*

*What am I achieving,*

*What am I attaining?*

*I must be getting somewhere…*

- just to relinquish the whole idea of that mind that’s trying to establish a point for me to feel comfortable, and me to feel that I’ve got something, to see things as they truly are.

That perception of self and me is an addition that inevitably just creates more suffering - me trying to feel that I have attained, and I’m a worthy being because of that

- just seeing that sight, sounds, smells, taste, touch, mental formations or mind objects, the just seeing that that’s what they are, and then relinquishing, putting attention on relinquishing of that mind that’s trying to establish itself in some way, an importance.

And it doesn’t need to annihilate anything. That’s just another position of self - pushing away, rejecting, not wanting, feeling uncomfortable and then pushing it away. It’s only when we can experience things, and say, *This is the way things are*, that there is any real peace.

Sometimes just working with the feeling, how we experience the four elements- again, the impulse and the habit is to go to me and my body, me and a solid world around me, but just to go to the elements, those primary elements of earth, fire, water and air, and those are tangibles that depict an experience.

An experience of that which is solid, that which is tangible is the earth element. Solidity, the feeling of solidity, the experience of solidity, the feeling of groundedness - whether we feel it on the physical level or feel it on the mental level, just experiencing that feeling of that which is solid, which is grounded, firm- these are the characteristics of what we call the earth element. And to experience that with a quality of relinquishing the tendency to make a story out of it, or create a sense of self, an identity around it -

*This is just a feeling…*

- and coming back to that experiential simplicity of something in the present moment…

The elements - the feeling of the water element of that which is fluid, the element of cohesion. It’s the water element that helps to bind and flow…

Again, whether it’s felt as a tangible physical experience, or on a mental level, the characteristic of a particular element doesn’t have to have an imputing of self or world, or any of the other complicated constructs that we add to it.

Returning to that very basic felt sense of what we’re experiencing, whether we are sitting and meditating, and there’s the actual sensation of wet in the mouth, the feeling as one’s breathing in and breathing out, the feeling of the liquid element… It’s just a basic sensation of the human condition.

And it really helps to return to that simplicity of experience so that, one, we cut through the proliferation, and two, we start to realize, yeah, there are just these elements. All of the life that we consider me, is just the elements. All of the life around us that we see, the world around us is just these elements. The world that we live in and rely upon is just these elements.

The food that we take in to sustain the body is just the elements. The whole exchange of breathing is just these elements, the breath coming in to the body, the feeling of expanding, distending, movement of the breath – this is the air element. As the breath goes out, there’s the movement, the sinking of the abdomen, the movement of the breath going out – this is air. It has the quality, the ability to move and distend, to expand, to contract. These are a felt sense of these elements.

So, we attend to that experience so we can relinquish the more complicated constructs of our mind and experience, relinquish and abandon the tendencies of the mind and just return to present moment experience.

In the present moment, what do we experience? We experience the sense of either hardness or softness, of movement, of wet or dry – these elements, heat and cold, the fire element.

The heat in the body that is keeping us warm is the fire element, and we need to maintain that fire element. In the suttas they say it is the heat that digests our food, the heat digesting our donuts. It’s the elements.

So to look at it in that way, rather than there’s all the fears or worries.

*I’m too hot or too cold.*

*I’ve got to have it exactly like this. In order to be comfortable, it should be like that*

- but it’s just the element of heat or lack of heat. All cold is a lack of heat.

So just return to these very simple foundations of experience so that we can relinquish the more complicating tendencies of the mind. As we relinquish that, we’re able to really see clearly.

Also, we relinquish and abandon the sense of self, the “I” construct, giving something for the mind to attend to so that it doesn’t get hooked back into the self construct just out of force of habit. So attending to the elements is a very useful theme for doing that, giving the mind a break, giving the sense of self a rest.

Just go sit in a corner for a while. Take a break for a while.

It’s just so ready to leap up and volunteer for everything. The sense of self is just sitting there, “Give me something to do! Don’t let me get bored!”.

- and it keeps getting in trouble. For all its good intentions, it just keeps creating suffering.

Inevitably you have characters like that, a person who is always really well-intentioned but just keeps messing things up. You sort of moan and groan and get irritated, but we don’t view ourselves that way, but that’s really what this whole sense of self is. It’s well-intentioned in that it wants to experience happiness and well-being, does want to experience some sense of peace and satisfaction, gratification, but it really doesn’t know how to do it, because there isn’t a way it can do it. The sense of self is always undermining its goals, just because it holds on. It’s unable to relinquish, unable to abandon, unable to let go, unable to put down what is to its detriment. So that relinquishing is a key quality for entering into and abiding in Dhamma.

Ajahn Buddhadasa when he translates *patinissagga*, rather than translating it as “relinquishing”, he translates it as “giving back.” It’s giving back, and he says it quite nicely in the sense that he says we have to give back what we have misappropriated, or taken, that didn’t belong to us.

And of course, we keep appropriating and taking on form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness, the five khandas. We take them on and try to make them into self. We have to give them back. They’re just that which is in nature.

We take sight, sounds, smells, taste, touch, mental objects. We appropriate them, we take them. We take them on and we have to learn how to give them back. That is all they were. They were just a sight. A feeling that arose is just a feeling. A consciousness that arose out of contact was just that - elements of nature that need to be given back, and can’t be appropriated, can’t be taken and considered self.

So Ajahn Buddhadasa says that we have to give back what isn’t ours. We have to give back what we’ve stolen. He says we’re just like a bunch of thieves. We steal things all the time. We have to give them back at some point. We’re constantly taking what isn’t ours and trying to make it ours.

The life of a thief is not a happy existence. It just can’t be. You know on some level that you’re living with stolen goods. You’re spending your life trying to avoid the authorities, to keep away from the law. The law in this case is Dhamma. It’s one of the truths. The truth comes along and we have to give it up, we have to relinquish, we have to abandon.

To actually practice doing that on each in breath, on each out breath – *patinissagga*.

*As we breathe in, contemplating relinquishment…*

*as we breathe out, contemplating relinquishment…*

As an image in the mind, bringing that up as an image, and breathing in just really surrounding the whole experience with that quality of relinquishing, abandoning, the image of letting go, dropping, putting down.

As we cultivate that and become skilled in that, then that’s really where our peace is. The sense of well-being really arises from that quality of relinquishment.

So I’ll offer that for reflection this morning.

Talk 19 - The Backbone of the Practice

*Namo Tassa Bhagavato, Arahato, Samma Sambuddhasa*

*Namo Tassa Bhagavato, Arahato, Samma Sambuddhasa*

*Namo Tassa Bhagavato, Arahato, Samma Sambuddhasa*

*Buddham, Dhammam, Sangham namasammi*

These last few weeks, I’ve been talking about mindfulness of breathing, and it really forms the backbone of our practice, and can be applied in so many ways. I think that one of the things that is important is the whole development of mindfulness, the using of mindfulness in it’s different forms, and taking the breathing as the anchor, as the focal point, and learning how to develop, sustain, and cultivate the quality of attention on the breath, as it comes in, and as it goes out…

Sometimes I hear people say that it’s hard to use the breath as the focus of attention, because it doesn’t really interest - they say, *It’s boring…*

There’s a story in the Zen Tradition, with something similar with a student, who was talking with a Zen master, and saying:

*I’m not having much success in my meditation, because I just find the breath really boring…*

And the Zen master grabs the student, pulls him over to a pond, and grabs him by the scruff of the neck, and pushes his head into the water, and holds it down there for quite a long time as he’s struggling away… then he yanks him up again after a while, and says,

*How was that? Did you find the breath boring?*

He was really interested in the breath, with a certain motivation…

So that a lot of it is putting it in its context.

*Why are we watching the breath?*

*Why are we cultivating the breath as an object?*

*What importance do we place on it?*

So that establishing of a sense of -

*This is really important.*

and, Ajahn Chah used to say about the cultivation of mindfulness, that

*A moment of a lack of mindfulness is a moment of derangement*…

…or several moments of derangement, however long we’re unmindful, that’s how long we’re kind of deranged, or mentally disturbed.

So that cultivation of mindfulness, bringing mindfulness to the breath, learning how to develop that, learning how to sustain that- because this is where we find our clarity, our point of balance, the opportunity for wisdom to arise.

It’s that moment to moment developing of awareness on the breath, or the development of mindfulness, in whatever way, shape or form, particularly of breathing as a very clear exercise - this is where we develop a sense of calmness, a focussed attention that is very stable, and concentrated, and then an ability to contemplate and learn how to use discernment, wisdom, so that we really penetrate into what is it that holds us in suffering, in discontent, dissatisfaction, and how we free ourselves from that.

So that, this developing mindfulness of breathing - it’s probably helpful to consider some of the aspects of mindfulness, when particularly in meditation, it’s really necessary to recognize the value, how crucial it is for there to be mindfulness at all stages.

Whether we’re first beginning, when we first settle, when we first start to deal with the different hindrances, or disturbances to tranquility, and then to full concentration and settledness, at all of those points along the way there’s a need for mindfulness and awareness. There isn’t a point where it’s not used, or is not necessary.

It’s not uncommon sometimes for people to be meditating, and there’s a certain pleasantness there, there’s a certain feeling of well being and there’s *a certain* quality of knowing there, and then the meditation goes for a while, and then you see sometimes people start slumping, and swaying back and forth, and then the bell goes, and somebody talking and saying

*Waah, What a great meditation! It’s so peaceful… just time went by in a flash… I hardly had a thought in the mind… it was great…*

Not really. That’s not really what meditation is for. There has to be this awareness, this mindfulness, and as the meditation becomes *more* settled, the awareness and mindfulness has to be *more sharp*, has to be more clear.

Sharpness and clarity doesn’t manifest itself in thinking so much, it might be very very settled, but it’s knowledgable of the state of clarity itself.

So this mindfulness is either mindful of the different stages of cultivation, it’s mindful of the mental states - whether it’s concentrated or not concentrated, and this is a critical factor, getting a basic feel of what the mindfulness is constituting…

Bhante Gunaratana wrote a very well known book on Mindfulness in Plain English, and he said that he heard that one of his students, or somebody that was interested in his teachings was reading this book, and was walking around the streets and was hit by a car… so one has to learn how *to apply* mindfulness, as well as know some of the facts about it.

The basic description that the Buddha gives when he describes mindfulness is that there are four constituents. It is:

*ardent,*

*fully aware,*

*mindful,*

*and*

*having put away longing and displeasure for the world.*

These are characteristics of the mind of mindfulness.

So that there's this quality of ardent - *atapi* in Pali, which means *an application of effort*. There’s an effort involved. There’s an energetic quality to it. It’s not just kind of slack, and flaccid. There’s *an energy* to it.

*Ardent* is the word that’s usually translated in English, and just naturally. It’s not a forced effort. For mindfulness to be in its proper balance, there’s this quality kind of a vigor that’s there, because when you’re being mindful of something, you’re *engaged with it*. You’re *interested in it*. There's a willingness to put forth that attention, because it reciprocates with a nurturing of the heart.

So when we’re really mindful, there’s a sense of the mind being very satisfied. The heart is really nurtured by that application of mindfulness. It’s not a burden or a chore to be mindful. It’s what really nourishes us as human beings, really. It’s when we’re unmindful, when we’re scatted, when we’re distracted that it’s really disturbing or distracting for the mind.

So this sense of *atapi* - ardent - the putting forth of effort…

The next quality is *sampajanno*, which is usually translated as fully aware, or clearly comprehending, fully understanding

In the commentaries sampajanna *is to have the characteristic of non-confusion*; It’s function is *to investigate*, and it manifests *as scrutiny*.

Sometimes it’s used synonymously with wisdom, so *there there’s this application of wisdom.*

Mindfulness is not a static quality of just being mindful of a fixed thing, a fixed attention. There’s a dynamic quality that is investigating, is scrutinizing, is weighing the benefits or the drawbacks; there’s a sense of recognition of time and place, the situation that one’s in, so that there is this characteristic of non-confusion, a function of investigation, manifesting as scrutiny. These are the characteristics of sampajanna, clear comprehension.

Particularly in meditation it’s very necessary to have that quality because you’re always needing to make slight adjustments. When we’re paying attention to the breath, we’re always needing to be making slight adjustments, either to the meditation object, or the degree of effort that we’re putting in, or the balancing of our investigation, as opposed to the degree of calmness… so that there’s this sense that you’re always needing to make slight adjustments, in order to find a point of balance.

And this is one of the functions of mindfulness, but in its aspect of sampajanna, clear comprehension.

The third quality, of *sati*, is usually what is translated as *mindfulness*. In the commentaries, mindfulness has the characteristic of *remembering*. Its function is *not forgetting*, and it manifests as *guarding.*

\*The way that mindfulness is working is that sense of remembering what we’re actually doing. Remembering to be attentive to the breath; remembering to be attentive to the posture; remembering what is useful and beneficial for working with, bringing up positive, wholesome qualities in the mind.

And it’s guarding the mind in the sense of protecting the wholesome qualities within the mind, that which tend to calmness or brightness, or a sense of settledness and well being.

These are qualities in the general application of mindfulness, and particularly in meditation it’s important to be attending to what is useful, what’s beneficial, what’s helping the mind settle and become clear.

It’s like in training the mind, you realize that there are some things that we shouldn’t just let the mind wander off and be getting caught up in, to disturb it: ill-will, aversion, anger… it’s really, the mind gets absorbed into it… or desire, attachment.

If we just let mind merrily go on in those streams of thought, then it disturbs the well-being, the wholesomeness of the mind, its calm, its peace.

In the same way that one, say, with a small child, or a baby, you look over it, you keep an eye on it, and you provide or you set out some toys and things to play with that it’s interested in…

If it goes over and picks up a pair of scissors, I mean, you don’t just sort of let it play with a pair of scissors. You take the scissors away, and you hide them.

In the same way with the meditation, you want to be *protecting, guarding* the mind from it picking up objects that are not helpful for it, are dangerous to it.

Especially with the mindfulness of breathing, there’s many many ways that we can be using the mindfulness of breathing, and the Buddha gives this whole scope - I mean, I’ve spent this past three weeks, really just talking about all the different ways of using mindfulness of breathing, using aspects of the body, feelings, mind, and dhammas as the foundation for applying attention, and there’s lots of wholesome, skillful ways that we can be directing attention.

But there’s also, there’s so many unskillful things that we can be doing. You have to be attentive in guarding the mind.

In the same way that you might have a whole medicine cabinet full of medicines, you have to know what to take.

Say I’ve got a headache - you don’t go in and sort of randomly take out the medicine from the medicine chest, since, It’s medicines, I’ll take it -

You have to read the label and say, this is actually something for a headache, as opposed to medicine for something else.

In the same way, with the different tools, techniques, and ways of applying attention, they have a particular purpose, they have a function. And learning how to develop the skill and familiarity with ourselves, with our own mind, with our own personalities, with our own temperaments,

*Well, What works for us?*

*What is beneficial?*

*What protects, or guards the mind so that the wholesome states of mind have an opportunity to flourish, and the unskillful states of mind have an opportunity to settle, to dissolve, to be let go of, finally?*

So that mindfulness, in its different aspects, is a key factor.

The last quality that is considered part of the characteristics of mindfulness is the *having put away longing and displeasure for the world*, or, oftentimes it’s translated as *having put away covetousness and grief for the world.*

So that the tendency to either be drawn into desire and aversion, liking and disliking, wanting, not wanting - those - flip-flopping back and forth of the mind, where the mind is either being attracted, or repelled, and to actually start to get bored with that. Because we tend to allay the things that we dislike, we don’t want, with something that’s interesting, fascinating, that we can be attracted to. We get some longing, or something pleasurable going, but that can’t sustain itself. So we get fed up with that, and then we get averse to things.

And so that back and forth is so typical of how the human condition is, but there is *the way out*, which is of course the whole purpose of the Buddha’s teaching. He’s giving us a way out - giving us a way to direct attention to that which is truly peaceful, is settled.

So that this learning is to apply and develop mindfulness so that we’re, one, able in meditation to settle the mind, and also to carry it into our daily life in different ways.

So that sense of *ardent, fully aware and mindful, having put away longing and displeasure for the world…*

So when we are cultivating mindfulness, in particular with mindfulness of breathing, to bring attention to the quality of the awareness that we’re using, we’re relying on, learning how to brighten the mind with the quality of awareness that is more focussed, more comprehensive;

It’s not uncommon, as we continue the meditation, to drift into habits, and to do it in a mechanical, rote fashion. We lose kind of the life in it. So it takes some patience, really, to just keep bringing the mind back to a simple object like the breath, and putting life into it, bringing up that quality of interest and attention.

The repetition, and willingness to fail at it, and to maybe think that one is not making any great progress, but just to keep doing it, to keep coming back and doing it…

There’s a woman in England who holds the Guinness Book of Records for doing a driving test. On her 39th attempt at getting her driver’s test, she ran a red light and crashed the car, and, *she still went back*. The next year she went back for her driver’s test again, and she finally passed - *on her 40th time.*

There’s just something really good about that. To be really willing to -

*Ok - I’m going to get it next time*…

and with the meditation, to have that same sense, because sometimes the meditations go fine, and sometimes they’re a total washout, but it’s just having the patience to come back, and start over again, to keep trying to bring forth those balancing qualities of mindfulness, clear comprehension, effort, right attitude, right application…

And of course the reason we do that is because it is possible for the mind to become very very peaceful. It’s the capacity of the mind to be very peaceful, very still, very clear, and to really understand this human condition, this curious predicament we’re in, and to be free, but it does depend on really composing the mind, with awareness, and to keep returning to the settling, and focussing, until the mind really does start to settle. Then, when the mind starts to settle, starting to have confidence in the peaceful mind, in the mind of awareness.

Say, when we’re using the breath as the object, and as the mind starts to settle, the breath starts to become a bit more fine, and a bit more subtle, and sometimes we don’t have the confidence in ourselves or in the mindfulness, and then we say, *Oh, my mind is wandering,* so then we try to make the breath more clear, but at that point, when there is a good stable foundation of awareness, of mindfulness in its comprehensive way, then one doesn’t need to be attending to the breath in the same way, the sensation of the breath.

What you start attending to is the actual feeling, or presence of the breath, or image of the breath… language is a bit difficult at that point, but you know where you’re experiencing the breath, and to attend to that point.

The mind becomes very settled, and as one attends to that point where one experiences the breath, and one sustains that, then the mind will oftentimes then just really settle and absorb into that sensation. It almost just sort of dives into that sensation.

Or sometimes you experience it just sort of being, all of the sudden just surrounded by that awareness, that fullness of that sensation, so that there’s a solidity of attention, and that’s when we can start to really pay attention to the knower itself, the mind itself.

Of course, this is what the meditation is *for.* We use mindfulness of breathing, but it’s a vehicle, it’s a method, it’s a skillful means to give us the opportunity to start to experience more clearly the mind itself, the knower. Awareness turns back on itself, and starts to see itself more clearly, and it’s at that point that we can really start to disentangle this delusion and confusion that is such a ubiquitous experience in the human condition.

We’re starting to experience things from a place of clarity and discernment, and of course that’s where we are able to start attending to letting go and relinquishing, dropping attachments, because we start seeing clearly that that’s where we create pain for ourselves, confusion for ourselves, and it doesn’t make sense when you see it clearly.

From the perspective of confusion and delusion, it makes perfect sense why we should be upset and angry at somebody, or why we just *have to* get that in order to be happy, or why something really needs to be doubted and fretted over. It makes *complete sense*, from the standpoint of confusion, but from the standpoint of clarity and discernment, it ceases to have the same logic, and you can start to let go of things. You can start to drop things, relinquish.

Actually, Ajahn Chan was always pointing out the importance of coming to a place of really putting things down, letting go, dropping things, dropping everything… He said that:

*If you let a little, you get a little peace.*

*If you let go a lot, you get a lot of peace.*

*And if you let go completely, you get complete peace.*

It’s a very simple equation. Ajahn Chan had a wonderful ability to put something into a very succinct manner.

But that letting go, it takes clarity, it takes mindfulness, so that developing mindfulness, developing mindfulness of breathing, this is a basic foundation of our spiritual practice.

So I offer that for reflection this evening.

1. Perception here is memory, association, and interpretation, as will be explained. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Exercise seven is on the relationship between thought and feeling, observing how feeling and perception condition the mind. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Perception* is described in Buddhism as association, categorization, and *interpretation.* A more detailed description follows. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)