



Breathing Like a Buddha

AJAHN SUCITTO



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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
TO RICHARD ALLEN (1949-2019),
DEVOTED DHAMMA-DISCIPLE,
STEWARD AND KALYĀṆAMITTA.

Welcome to the Book



Before we get involved with the subject matter, I'd like to take a few moments to acknowledge its basis: a basis without which it couldn't have been written.

During the course of writing this book, and over many years of practice, I have liberally inhaled various translations of the Pali suttas. The versions I draw from are principally those of Vens. Bhikkhu Bodhi and Ñāṇaponika Mahathera as published by Wisdom Publications of Somerville, MA, 02144, USA (wisdomexperience.org). The slightly different translations of Thānissaro Bhikkhu (dhammatalks.org) and Sujāto Bhikkhu (suttacentral.net) have presented useful nuances to further assist my understanding of how to render the meanings of key Pali terms. Although I have made my own variations in certain areas, I express my gratitude for all their efforts.

This text has been brought into shape through the supportive feedback and editorial skills of Ajahns Gavesako and Karunadhammo, Lisa Gorecki, and the Lotus Volunteer Group.

The typesetting and design have been carefully crafted by Nicholas Halliday.

Anumodana to all concerned!

Ajahn Sucitto
Cittaviveka, 2022

Abbreviations

Throughout this book, references to the sutta collections (*Nikāya*) of the Pali Canon, the source of its teachings, are cited using the following abbreviations:

A = Numerical Discourses (*Anguttara Nikāya*)

D = Long Discourses (*Dīgha Nikāya*)

M = Middle Length Discourses (*Majjhima Nikāya*)

S = Connected Discourses (*Samyutta Nikāya*)

Other Canonical references are to *Dhammapada* (of which there are many translations) and to *Therīgāthā* – Poems of the Elder Nuns.

In these quotes, the first number refers to the sutta (in the case of the Long and Middle Length Discourses) or the chapter or book (in the case of the Connected and Numerical Discourses). This number is followed by either the number of the section within a sutta (Long and Middle Length Discourses) or the sutta within a chapter or book (Connected and Numerical Discourses).

The classification of these suttas is that of the Wisdom Publications series of translations. The Pali version is that of the *Mahāsaṅgīti Tipiṭaka Buddhavasse 2500*.

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1

Breathing is Life



This book began as an essay to add some guiding notes to the practice of mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati**). The intention was to be concise, with the understanding that plenty of meditation manuals are available, as are several thorough expositions of the theory and practice of mindfulness of breathing. However, as this meditation is so crucial, it seems useful to contribute any fresh approaches. And I have noticed that the way I understand and approach mindfulness of breathing is both somewhat different from what I was originally taught, and yet can fit the original sutta presentation.

*This term is also written as *ānāpānassati*, but in this case I have followed the version in the majority of the English language texts.

I was introduced to meditation in 1975 through a systematic approach of maintaining moment-by-moment mindfulness of the sensations associated with breathing. I found that approach to be useful for discipline, but quite intense and demanding, and not conducive to joy and ease. Moreover, when I looked into the original texts, I found that they didn't mention awareness of physical sensations, nor of mindfulness as a practice of tracking sensations a moment at a time – though these references are plausible interpretations of '*mindfully one knows one is breathing in ... breathing out.*' But, as an exploration, I went back to the basics of noticing how I was aware of breathing, and picked up on the fluid rhythm of the life force that the physical act of breathing moves and moderates. The Pali word for this is '*pāṇa*'. This is the energy, rather than the sensations, associated with breathing. This aspect of the breath as an energy is commonly acknowledged in the spiritual traditions of India and China, as well as in non-mechanist cultures – so it seems reasonable to assume that it informed the meditative process that the Buddha outlined. The significant point is that this embodied energy connects the material to the mental realm. Embodied energy runs through the stirring, stress, calm and gladdening of our entire nervous system: if it's distorted, it inflames and corrupts the mind; if it's healthy, it clears it. Accordingly, a trained focus on the energy associated with breathing offers a means to calm, brighten, understand and clear states of mind (and heart).

If this seems unusual, note that in the Buddha's discourses there is no mention of maintaining a one-pointed focus on any particular physical feature of the body. On the other hand, focusing on the energy associated with a living body does fulfil instructions such as *'thoroughly and fully sensitive to the entire body'* and *'calming the bodily formation.'* And it brings around the bodily ease that mindfulness of breathing is said to lead to. Discourses in the collection on *ānāpānasati* (*Ānāpānasati Saṃyutta*, S.54) add remarks such as *'neither my body nor my eyes become fatigued'* (S.54:8) and *'no shaking or trembling occurs in the body, and no shaking or trembling occurs in the mind'* (S.54:7) when cultivating this meditation. This is not suggestive of an intense drive, but of accessing an ease that is felt in the body, so that *'my mind, by not clinging, was liberated from the taints.'* (S.54:8) References such as these support the view that the aspect of the body that is being focused on is its autonomic nervous system – where the reflexes that trigger our emotions and mind-states occur. (Getting irritated, defensive or inspired is a reflex, not a decision.) As an extension, 'bodily formation' would refer to the weave of embodied energies that are conducted through connective tissue and calmed through breathing. (You may know this if you practise hatha yoga or qi gong, which maps the weave in terms of 'nadis' and 'meridians'.) Approached in this way, breathing provides a path to the refreshment and soothing of body

and mind; this effect encourages one to persevere with meditation without a huge amount of willpower.

This is a pragmatic approach: the vitality and ease that a settled body can bring can lift the mind out of oppressive emotional and psychological obstructions. It also brings around a greater degree of grounded stability. This has far-reaching significance: with an increase in hyperactive mentality, attention disorders, psychological breakdowns and social dysfunction, as well as a disregard for the natural world, society in general has become disembodied and groundless. This condition speaks of an urgent need to get aligned with the subtle and life-enhancing aspects of our material reality. In the microcosm of our own bodies, *ānāpānasati* offers this.

The discourses describe the ongoing cultivation that leads through *samādhi* to liberation as being based on recollecting virtue and thereby feeling uplifted. So the ethical clarity of right view is the foundation, the guiding principle for what one should be mindful of and with what intent. This right mindfulness settles on the gladness of the heart and lets that steady to bring around bodily ease. It's a flowing process, rather than a push to get concentrated. (See, for example, A.10:2, where the development is described as '*one stage flows into the next.*') The stage in that process wherein mental and bodily energies settle and consolidate is called '*samādhi*'.

This is an experience that the standard English translation ‘concentration’ does not adequately cover; *samādhi* is a firm abiding in ease that serves as the platform for clear seeing and liberation.

MEDITATION BEGINS WITH LETTING GO

To introduce the practice: If you disengage your attention from any particular object or topic, but remain attentive, you’ll probably notice certain fundamental qualities, even if these are only a backdrop to the streams of thought that swirl through your mind. These qualities aren’t bound up with circumstance and hence are more stable: they include the vitality, solidity and warmth that tell you you have a body – along with a non-verbal awareness of that embodied condition. If you settle into that matrix, you’ll likely become aware of the rhythm of breathing. That is, the overall flow. Being involuntary, it is restful; being rhythmic, it attracts attention and is soothing.

Just settling into this for five or ten minutes can be a relief and offer a perspective on one’s current preoccupations. And yet ... you’ll notice that the mind will rarely stay with breathing for long; it gets driven to memories and speculation, to irritation and longing, to recrimination and anxiety. Why one doesn’t relax for long is because there are underlying tendencies and issues that come to the surface when

other circumstances calm down. So meditation, like life in general, isn't just about relaxing: in line with the teachings, one has to 'train' – guidance is needed. On the other hand, too much control restricts embodiment and strains the mind.

Keeping your awareness in touch with breathing offers a middle way between doing too much – or too little. Too much mental doing blocks receptivity and compresses the energy of breathing. 'Doing too little' means one isn't maintaining a responsive supervision and encouragement of the process. Although breathing is involuntary – and hence brings its steady and pervasive energy to bear on our impulses – that energy can be refined and directed. Then reactions and attachments over which we seem to have no control, and which thinking is unable to check or dispel, can be penetrated at their roots, and released through the direct insight that this process facilitates. As I've said before, this takes skill – and time – but what makes it manageable is that it is an approach based on pleasure. And as you'll see in this sutta (and elsewhere), the Buddha encourages a pleasure based on steadying and being sensitive to body and heart.

In my opinion, returning to the root discourses in order to ponder and practise in accord with what they do and don't say, is a wise approach. For example, the Buddha was adamant that in using

ānāpānasati for awakening, one needed to fulfil this practice in line with the instructions that he gave.*

This discourse is the record of a teaching that he offered to an assembly of bhikkhus who had been earnestly cultivating several other meditations for an unbroken four-month session. But this wasn't the only time or place: in other places (A.9:3; A.10:60), the Buddha mentions *ānāpānasati* among a list of practices that includes the contemplation of the unattractive aspects of the body, and the sending-forth of loving-kindness. On one occasion, he specifically advocated *ānāpānasati* as an antidote to wayward thinking (A.9:3).

Having said this much, I have to add that I don't see the pursuit of *ānāpānasati* as something that a beginner can fulfil without other forms of mind-cultivation. It is not a matter of doggedly fixing attention on the breath – this approach can actually intensify rather than correct mental imbalances. Wisely used, *ānāpānasati* comprises one theme in a mental cultivation that should encourage ethical orientation, careful attention, goodwill – and a turning away from worldly aims and values. Guiding mental behaviour in line with these themes, one can return to in- and out-breathing over the years as a regular meditation practice. Certainly, cultivate

*S.54:6 records an occasion when Bhikkhu Ariththa reports practising mindfulness of breathing free from sense-desire and ill-will – and yet receives a gentle correction from the Buddha, who instructs him in the sixteen-step instruction.

spacious awareness; relax goal-orientation and self-criticism – yes, of course. But the cultivation of breathing as *pāṇa* within a safe and grounded embodiment offers something to come back to and work at; it will be a practice that is enriched by all the skills that you cultivate. If practised even for five or ten minutes, it is a key to alleviating tension, hyperactivity, overwhelm and fatigue. As breathing is universal, mindfulness of it doesn't require adopting any view or philosophical standpoint. On the contrary, I'd say that it causes views to fade out – other than that of how suffering and stress can come to an end. And that is a fitting and universal aim.

All books have limitations, and when such a book focuses on any single theme within the Buddha's teachings, that means that it sidelines many other important themes, such as the roles of kindness, generosity and ethics. I've also been brief on guidance on dealing with hindrances and other obstacles, with the feeling that such guidance can be found elsewhere, and is often given directly by one's teacher. For this reason – and that, as people's minds differ, I don't see how any book or any one approach can be adequate – I've limited the scope of this book to one of offering a guide to this one practice rather than a thorough exposition on mind-cultivation.

Notwithstanding these limitations, may this text be a source of guidance for your life and liberation!

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The ensuing text presents a series of sections that alternate between explorations of the sixteen steps of *ānāpānasati*, and considerations of complementary themes. These considerations may appear theoretical and abstract at times, but they can clarify points about the language or about the traditional interpretations that have accumulated around this form of meditation. (And you can put them aside for later if you wish.) Views differ, and the reader is invited to consider mine as she or he sees fit. The sixteen steps themselves are universally referred to (with minor differences) by all Buddhist traditions, and are grouped into four clusters of four instructions each. These clusters are called ‘tetrads’.

The first three tetrads work through calming and refining body, mental formation and mind/heart, whereas the fourth gives instructions on witnessing or ‘insight’. I have structured the exploration of the text so that the insight instructions of the fourth tetrad (the chapters labelled ‘Insight’) are related to each of the preceding three tetrads after the teachings on that tetrad have concluded. This means that the practice of insight is explained for each of these in turn. I’ll explain this more fully in the next chapter.

As different translators use different English words to translate the Pali of the texts, I have added the Pali terms to provide consistency.

I have used standard translations in order to avoid confusing the reader, but although the term '*citta*' is normally translated as 'mind', I have often used 'heart' in the body of the text for reasons that are explained. (You can bear both words in mind, though 'awareness' becomes the paramount feature by which one knows the calm and steady *citta*.) Another key word, '*saṅkhāra*', is rendered in many ways, but I have used a common translation, 'formations', and explained what this refers to as the instructions unfold. I have, however, replaced 'he/his' wherever it isn't needed with the gender-neutral 'one/one's'.

2

Guided by the Buddha's View



I find it inspiring to be handling the words that the Buddha gave as guidelines for this meditation practice. To imagine him offering these phrases gives rise to a sense of respect for the terminology that he used, for what he said and what he didn't say, as well as for the process that he outlined. So, this book refers to the classical discourses on this practice. The root texts that I refer to are the collection of teachings in the *Ānāpānasati Saṃyutta* in the Connected Discourses (*Saṃyutta Nikāya*, Chap. 54) and the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* from the Middle Length Discourses (*Majjhima Nikāya*, 118). It may be that the *Saṃyutta* collection provided the raw material for the more polished and complete *Majjhima* discourse. Anyway, both these and the early Sanskrit versions (*Āgama*) of the texts present *ānāpānasati* in terms

of sixteen instructions that connect mindfulness of breathing to the four establishments of mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) and the seven factors of awakening (*bojjhaṅga*). This interweaving of *satipaṭṭhāna*, *bojjhaṅga* and *ānāpānasati* amply indicates why ‘mindfulness of in-and-out breathing is ... of great fruit.’ These results issue from a line of practice that is encapsulated in this sixteen-step instruction; this guideline is therefore the thematic axis of this book.

We can pick up the thread here:

Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhu araṇṇagato vā rukkhamūlagato vā suñṇāgāragato vā nisīdati pallāṅkaṃ ābhujitvā ujum kāyaṃ paṇidhāya parimukhaṃ satiṃ upaṭṭhapetvā. So satova assasati satova passasati.

“There is the case where a bhikkhu, having gone to the wilderness, or to the root of a tree, or to an empty building, sits down folding his legs crosswise, holds his body erect, and sets mindfulness to the fore. Mindful, he breathes in; mindful, he breathes out.

*Dīghaṃ vā assasanto ‘dīghaṃ assasāmi’ ti pajānāti,
dīghaṃ vā passasanto ‘dīghaṃ passasāmi’ ti pajānāti;*

“Breathing in long, one directly knows: ‘breathing in long’;
or breathing out long, one directly knows: ‘breathing out long.’

rassaṃ vā assasanto ‘rassaṃ assasāmī’ ti pajānāti,
rassaṃ vā passasanto ‘rassaṃ passasāmī’ ti pajānāti;

“Breathing in short, one directly knows: ‘breathing in short’;
or breathing out short, one directly knows: ‘breathing out short.’

‘sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī assasissāmī’ ti sikkhati,
‘sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī passasissāmī’ ti sikkhati;

“One trains: ‘breathe in fully and completely sensitive to the entire body’;
one trains: ‘breathe out fully and completely sensitive to the entire body.’

‘passambhayaṃ kāyasaṅkhāraṃ assasissāmī’ ti sikkhati,
passambhayaṃ kāyasaṅkhāraṃ passasissāmī’ ti sikkhati.

“One trains: ‘breathe in calming bodily formation’;
one trains: ‘breathe out calming bodily formation.’

‘Pītipaṭisaṃvedī assasissāmī’ ti sikkhati,
‘pītipaṭisaṃvedī passasissāmī’ ti sikkhati;

“One trains: ‘breathe in fully and completely sensitive to rapture’;
one trains: ‘breathe out fully and completely sensitive to rapture.’

‘sukhapaṭisaṃvedī assasissāmī’ ti sikkhati,
‘sukhapaṭisaṃvedī passasissāmī’ ti sikkhati;

“One trains: ‘breathe in fully and completely sensitive to ease’;
one trains: ‘breathe out fully and completely sensitive to ease.’

‘cittasaṅkhārapāṭisaṃvedī assasissāmī’ ti sikkhati,
‘cittasaṅkhārapāṭisaṃvedī passasissāmī’ ti sikkhati.

“One trains: ‘breathe in fully and completely sensitive to
mental formation’;
one trains: ‘breathe out fully and completely sensitive to
mental formation.’

‘passambhayaṃ cittasaṅkhāraṃ assasissāmī’ ti sikkhati,
‘passambhayaṃ cittasaṅkhāraṃ passasissāmī’ ti sikkhati;

“One trains: ‘breathe in calming mental formation’;
one trains: ‘breathe out calming mental formation.’

‘Cittapaṭisaṃvedī assasissāmī’ ti sikkhati,
‘cittapaṭisaṃvedī passasissāmī’ ti sikkhati;

“One trains: ‘breathe in fully and completely sensitive to mind/heart’;
one trains: ‘breathe out fully and completely sensitive to mind/heart.’

‘abhippamodayaṃ cittaṃ assasissāmī’ ti sikkhati,
‘abhippamodayaṃ cittaṃ passasissāmī’ ti sikkhati;

“One trains: ‘breathe in deeply gladdening mind/heart’;
one trains: ‘breathe out deeply gladdening mind/heart.’

‘samādahaṃ cittaṃ assasissāmī’ ti sikkhati,
‘samādahaṃ cittaṃ passasissāmī’ ti sikkhati;

“One trains: ‘breathe in steadying mind/heart’;
one trains: ‘breathe out steadying mind/heart.’

‘vimocayaṃ cittaṃ assasissāmī’ ti sikkhati,
‘vimocayaṃ cittaṃ passasissāmī’ ti sikkhati;

“One trains: ‘breathe in releasing mind/heart’;
one trains: ‘breathe out releasing mind/heart.’

‘Aniccānupassī assasissāmī’ ti sikkhati,
‘aniccānupassī passasissāmī’ ti sikkhati;

“One trains: ‘breathe in witnessing changeability’;
one trains: ‘breathe out witnessing changeability.’

‘virāgānupassī assasissāmī’ ti sikkhati,
‘virāgānupassī passasissāmī’ ti sikkhati;

“One trains: ‘breathe in witnessing dispassion’;
one trains: ‘breathe out witnessing dispassion.’

‘nirodhānupassī assasissāmī’ ti sikkhati,
‘nirodhānupassī passasissāmī’ ti sikkhati;

“One trains: ‘breathe in witnessing cessation’;
one trains: ‘breathe out witnessing cessation.’

*‘paṭinissaggānupassī assasissāmī’ ti sikkhati,
‘paṭinissaggānupassī passasissāmī’ ti sikkhati;*

“One trains: ‘breathe in witnessing relinquishment’;
one trains: ‘breathe out witnessing relinquishment.’

*Evaṃ bhāvītā kho, bhikkhave, ānāpānassati evaṃ bahulikatā
mahapphalā hoti mahānisamsā.*

“This is how mindfulness of in- and out-breathing is developed and made much of so as to be of great fruit, of great benefit.”

There are a number of ways of translating the Pali text, but here I’ve used terms and syntax that are fairly standard to catch the meaning of the text and guide the practice. Some terms are rather cryptic, but I’ll explain these as we go along.

A STRUCTURE OF TETRADS

Firstly, overviewing the structure of these sixteen instructions, we can see why they’re generally listed as four separate ‘tetrads’, that is, four clusters containing four instructions each. This is because the first tetrad refers to the body and its ‘formation’, that is, the weave of energies that sustains and moderates the workings of the body; the second tetrad refers to the ‘mental formation’, i.e. the energies and

attitudes that formulate the mind or heart; the third tetrad refers to this mind (or heart), *citta*; and the fourth tetrad uses a different frame of reference altogether. That is, the first three tetrads refer to getting involved with the material we're working with – in other words, fully sensitizing to the entire body and its energies, to mental formation, and to mind, with an intent to soothe and steady. All these are calming, cleansing practices, or *samatha*. The fourth tetrad, on the other hand, details '*anupassī*' – that is, 'seeing in the presence of' or 'witnessing'. This is in line with the development of insight (*vipassanā*). Taken as a whole, the presentation of the instructions suggests that one first gets one's body and mind settled and steady, and then the process of insight can proceed.

However, although the form of the instructions has to be laid out in separate categories, in practice the tetrads interplay, rather as a thumb would interact with the fingers of a hand. A similar pattern of instruction occurs with the *satipaṭṭhāna* template: one works with 'mental phenomena' (*dhammā*), the fourth establishment, in tandem with mindfulness of the first *satipaṭṭhāna*, that of the body, and the second and third – feeling and mind-states. It's not a rigidly sequential process: the meditator doesn't have to work through body, feeling and mind-states before he or she uses the *dhamma* of

mindfulness or of energy to counteract the *dhamma* of restlessness or of sense-desire. Another example of this interwoven pattern is in the Four Noble Truths; the Fourth Noble Truth of the Path is initiated by acknowledging the First – that of suffering and stress. One doesn't have to have arrived at cessation, the Third Truth, before the Path can be glimpsed and undertaken.

In terms of *ānāpānasati*, the fourth tetrad, the theme of 'witnessing', can occur with reference to body, mental formation or mind itself. It's also not the case that *samatha* and *vipassanā* are undertaken in a strictly sequential way: the Buddha mentions that *samatha* and *vipassanā* are to be practised in tandem (A.4:170; S.45:159). This conjoined approach becomes eminently practical and symbiotic: the dispassion of witnessing has a calming effect; and the calming of body and mind supports an in-depth witnessing of the roots of their agitation, stagnation, gladness and ease. These categories and approaches interplay. One might, for instance, witness the changeability of bodily experience, and that will affect the emotional reactivity of *citta*, so that it becomes more serenely aware. As another example: acknowledging and relinquishing the control-achieve mental formation as one tries to maintain a focus on breathing will lead to a calmer and more sensitive bodily energy – so breathing calms and comes to the fore. And

again, if the body feels more relaxed, balanced and malleable, then afflictive mental energies and attitudes subside and wiser ones arise.

Taken as a whole, the tetrads can be seen as describing layers of experience, in which the embodied layer comes first; then as one steadies and calms that, the layers of mental formation and mind can be viewed and cultivated – rather as one might, through unblocking and calming the erratic flow of a stream, discern and calm the underlying currents and see the bed of that stream. So, with the calming of bodily energy, the mental dynamics of mood, attitude and psychological conditioning can be seen and dealt with – in the same embodied frame of reference. This is because, at an energetic level, body and mind are codependent. Calming the body, one calms the mind; stressing the mind, one stresses the body. When there is a release in terms of worry or aversion, there will be an embodied response of ease. Everything works together. This codependency instructs the meditator; any wrong attitude such as pressurizing or trying to hold on to some fortunate state – however rational that may seem – will have a counterproductive effect on the bodily energy. Such learning is the basis for ending suffering or stress, and the realization of *nibbāna*.

As a footnote to the instructions: the use of direct speech may suggest that one consciously thinks these phrases; however, direct

speech is used simply because indirect speech is very rarely adopted in Pali texts. So where the Pali text has ‘*one directly knows “breathing in long”*’, the normal English usage would be ‘one directly knows *that one is breathing in long*’. An internal monologue is certainly not recommended!

3

Touching Your Ground



THERE IS THE CASE WHERE A BHIKKHU, HAVING GONE TO THE WILDERNESS, OR TO THE ROOT OF A TREE, OR TO AN EMPTY BUILDING, SITS DOWN FOLDING HIS LEGS CROSSWISE, HOLDS HIS BODY ERECT, AND SETS MINDFULNESS TO THE FORE. MINDFUL, HE BREATHES IN; MINDFUL, HE BREATHES OUT.

INSTRUCTIONS

1 FIND A QUIET, IDEALLY NATURAL, PLACE FREE FROM CLUTTER. IN A CONTEMPORARY HOUSEHOLD, THAT COULD MEAN THAT YOU FIND A QUIET ROOM OR CORNER THAT IS EMPTY OF GADGETS AND ITEMS THAT WILL CAPTURE YOUR ATTENTION.

2 ESTABLISH A SPECIAL TIME OF DAY TO GET IN TOUCH WITH WHAT'S MOST FUNDAMENTAL TO YOUR PEACE OF MIND. REFLECT UPON AND BRING UP THE SENSE OF 'NO HURRY', 'NO INTRUSIONS'. TAKE IN SUCH SUGGESTIONS AND LINGER IN THEM.

3 NOTE ANY IDEAS AND CONCERNS AND PUT ASIDE WHAT'S NOT NECESSARY TO DEAL WITH AT THIS TIME. ALTHOUGH THE THINKING WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE, DIRECT YOUR ATTENTION TO YOUR BODY AND LET THE MIND RUMBLE IN THE BACKGROUND.

4 WHEN YOU FEEL SETTLED, EXPLORE HOW YOU EXPERIENCE YOUR BODY, AND HOW YOU'RE AWARE OF BREATHING.

EXPERIENCE IS A LIVING ENVIRONMENT

These opening remarks precede the sixteen steps, but lay down the essential foundation: right environment. Our life force arises in a body-mind system that is attuned to its location, and as far as that system goes, safety is essential. So a scenario that's free from obstruction and intrusion tells it that we can relax and go inward. However, there's also our internal environment: the blend of your bodily and psychological disposition. In that environment, there's probably some stress and discord rattling around. Hence the Buddha's advice is to hold the body upright – because that will draw your energy together, and is the natural posture for the upright mind. So the encouragement (dwelt upon in the extended text of the discourse) is to get your attitudes clear and straight – the ethical basis needs to be firm, and attitudes of goodwill, truthfulness and letting go should be made firm. Only if there is a conscious connection to virtues and values can there be aspiration and resolve. So, consider what sets your heart upright; by sustaining that you establish the right view that can clear your inner world.

Upright in mind, upright in body: the two work together because, apart from its physical (i.e. tactile) sensitivity, the body has an embodied sense that registers ease, agitation, tension, fear, joy and so on, and that directly affects the heart of the mind. So as you work

towards settling in, wherever you sense a bodily settledness, attune to that, linger and sustain awareness of it – and that will help to draw your attention out of its tangle and keep your view straight. This sustaining of awareness is ‘mindfulness’ (*sati*), the faculty that bears something in mind. Initially, we use this faculty to get a firm basis, a sense of ground.

What constitutes your experience of body may be a number of things. Your idea of what your body looks like is a mental construction, based on a visual impression, conceptual information and a perceptual bias. More directly, you’ll experience a series of sensations, pressures, warmth and vitality. Some of these will be physical – such as the pressure of your body on the mat, the brushing of your clothes against your skin, or of temperature or aches. These all occur dependent on physical circumstances. A more constant reference, one that is related directly to breathing and to mind, is to qualities of firmness, vitality, movement and suppleness in your body. In the Buddhist analysis, these ‘elements’ are respectively earth, fire, air and water. They manifest in negative and positive states physically (bone, for example, is firm ‘earth’), in terms of embodied reflexes (arousal is warm ‘fire’) and also in psychological terms (joy is warm/‘fire’, and restlessness is ‘air’). You experience these, but may not recognize them. When a fever or a psychological crisis passes, isn’t it reassuring

to feel 'solid' again? That's an embodied reference; physically, you're no more solid than when you felt like a woolly blob.

Notice how emotions and moods are normally described according to that elemental palette – 'rigid mentality', 'all fired up', 'cold-hearted', 'flexible'. You've probably sensed these. And don't forget the 'space' element – open, free from pressure (or the converse). In this context, the point is that at a fundamental and involuntary level, our mental states are based on embodied sensitivity. If your heart is agitated or depressed, you feel it in your body – and that affects your outlook and mindset. This also means that if you settle and refresh your embodied condition, your mind gets settled and refreshed.

The snag is that although this natural mind is connected to your embodied sensitivity, most likely you aren't: you're used to operating in terms of ideas and abstractions like 'tomorrow' and 'that place is forty miles, an hour in a car (etc.) away.' All accurate in terms of mapping, but they're abstractions, not embodied experiences. In addition to this, most of our current ways of orientation, guidance, informing and learning are done through the written word (or an image on a screen). This mode of perception operates through a narrow aperture of visual attention, one that ignores the major part of the visual field and all other sensory input. While watching

a screen, one may be almost completely unaware of one's bodily presence. A lot of the time it seems we are experiencing a stream of written words, which one's eyes and mind follow – from one point to the next and so on. This is unlike the body's way of perceiving, in which, even as a hand or foot negotiates a detail, awareness of the body's presence as an entirety is retained as a backdrop. Through this embodied awareness we retain balance when we walk, and are able to place food in our mouths without losing touch with the rest of our bodies. While driving a car, we can discern whether we need to eat or urinate without letting go of the steering wheel. It is this embodied sensitivity, with its reflexes and releases, that breathing can steady and bring to brightness and ease.

EMBODIED INTELLIGENCE

For forest-dwellers at the time of the Buddha, with nothing to read, no schedule or deadline to meet, no future to speak of, and no concerns regarding family or income to manage, direct embodied awareness would have been the norm. The written word was a rarity; teachings were delivered through speech – whereby the listener picked up the body language, tonality, and breath-pauses of the speaker (who was attending to the responses of the listener in a similar way). It was the whole picture that transmitted the

meaning. In general, the attention of such a forest-dweller would not be focused on any single point: focus too intently on a sight and you might trip over a root or not detect the odour of a tiger on the wind. No, to get through the forest, indeed to survive, you have to have an overall receptivity, grounded in your body in the here and now. Your thinking has to be minimal, your mind quietly attentive. You may notice sights and sounds of course, but you don't follow them carelessly. Instead, you notice if you're tired or weak or excited – and you balance that mind-state and energy against the presentation of external phenomena. As with 'Can I climb over that?', 'Do I have the strength to deal with that?', 'Am I getting fearful and careless?'

The state of awareness in a wilderness at night is not concerned with ideas and plans for next year; it's processing the relationship between the vulnerable body and the world that opens directly around it. In this environment, mind is not a preoccupied planner or detached commentator – it's the intelligent receptivity attuned to how one's body (and life force) is contacting a world of otherness. It is acutely sensitive and resourceful.

People of non-industrial cultures used and still use this embodied intelligence to track animals, predict weather and navigate across vast ocean tracts; in that respect, they were and are far more intelligent than today's city-dwellers. This is an important point to

grasp, because embodied intelligence plays a crucial part in attending to breathing. And it's an intelligence that we've by and large lost touch with. So the training that most people will need to work on is one of accessing their bodily sensitivity, and responding to it carefully to refresh and calm it. Breathing-based meditation will help with this, but *don't focus on the breathing until you can sense it happening*. When your body is adequately settled, the rhythm of breathing will become apparent; if it's not apparent, give more attention to settling your body into its environment, and establishing that upright, receptive mind. Otherwise meditation can be hard work that requires strong mental effort – and may strain the mind and stifle the heart.

As a reference to embodied awareness, you might use the awareness that accompanies swimming or T'ai Chi – where it is not overlaid with a sense of getting something or somewhere, and instead participates in the here and now. As with sitting quietly at the root of a tree: deeply settled, not perched; fully resting on what's beneath you, and feeling safe under the canopy with the firm trunk behind you – attuned and at ease.

PRACTICAL DETAILS

POSTURE

The ideal to work towards in terms of posture is one of having the backside firmly planted on the ground; then one can tune in to the sense of being supported. With sitting, the pelvic floor and thighs are set in a triangular form to support the torso. You might use a chair, but don't lean on the back and do keep your legs apart to replicate that supportive triangle. It's important to keep your spine erect, so that the weight of the chest doesn't press onto the abdomen and restrict the breathing. You might need to gently draw the lumbar back in so that the abdomen opens and lengthens, but don't go too far: if your lower back is pulled into a bow, it may pressurize and tighten the abdomen. In the correct posture, the abdomen feels open but light because the weight of the torso is transferred down the spine, through the pelvic floor and into what you're sitting on. Draw your arms slightly away from the sides of the chest, and resting your hands, palms open on your thighs or in your lap, let your upper body open. The chest should expand and subside easily with the flow of air; the abdomen doesn't pull or swell. Instead, that region feels free but only flexes slightly. Then the breathing tends to go deeper and is enriching. The fundamental sense is of being supported, rather than holding yourself up.

TUNE IN TO THE GIVEN

The felt impression of resting down through the base of the body provides the embodied sense of 'ground'. It's a given. Letting your awareness linger in that will introduce you to how to sense elemental embodied qualities whose harmony brings stability and replenishment. That is, you don't *try* to experience them; instead, you sense what is already there. The first impression that may arise from that restful state of ground is one of firmness: 'earth'. Sense that quality in the body as a whole; also notice how it's conducive to an upright spine. Mental attitude – firm, or more relaxed – can negotiate the balance between slack and stiff; then when that balance gets clear, linger in that and take in how it feels. The embodied effect, or 'sign', of balance will help to settle the mind. Breathing may become apparent.

Then attune to comfortable and vital warmth: 'fire'. Can you rest your awareness in that and let your unforced breathing draw from that warmth and spread it through your body? Then air: is the breathing at ease, unrestricted, passing through the body freely? Give it time and space. As for water ... are there any aspects of the body that feel disconnected from the whole? Consciously connect the more integrated parts of the body to include the head and throat. Also, are you in touch with the space around your body? If not, widen your span of attention

to include the boundaries of your skin, and the absence of pressure there. Breathe into this too. Because breathing connects awareness to the felt 'inner' body of the nervous system, if you cultivate it in this way, it will carry these subtly vital effects through the entire system.

To add to the sense of being supported, you might imagine that a thread is descending from above your head into the crown and holding it up – but don't lift your head. Then imagine that this thread can carry the rest of your body – first let the neck be long, then gradually relax the shoulders and so on down your back. Another image that may be useful is of warm water or oil slowly running down your back, over the haunches and down into the ground. I emphasize the 'downward' direction as this helps to release stress. On occasion, you might also practise a slow sweep of awareness through the physical body – scalp, eyelids, eye-sockets, temples, around the mouth – and so on.

Establish and keep referring to the spinal axis – not so much as a stack of vertebrae, but as the embodied sense of 'upright, balanced'.

In such ways, you bring sensitive awareness through the entire body, from top to toe. The sense of support is to be encouraged, because the workaday lifestyle can produce wilful 'get it done' attitudes that condition stress. As you know, under pressure, the belly tightens

up, and the diaphragm – the sheet of muscle between the abdomen and the chest that participates in the regulation of breathing – also tightens. This tightening effect constricts the abdomen; breathing is then restricted to the chest, and lacks depth. Then we don't breathe out fully and we don't get relaxed.

Attuning to breathing is only possible in a comfortably receptive way when the body is poised and at ease. So keep settling in, until when you ask 'How do I directly know I'm breathing?', you sense the tide of the breathing process. Let it arise rather than go hunting for it. Don't map the breathing either – just settle down and let it flow through.

When you sustain this balanced and upright awareness, and centre your awareness of your body, there is a steady and spacious embodied sense that the breathing flows through. That current of breathing and the upright sense support each other. Then you are firmly established, like a wide-canopied tree rooted in the Earth. Well done! To have touched and stayed on your own ground is a huge step towards improving your clarity and calm.

4

*Right Mindfulness
Needs Right View*



MINDFULLY ONE ABANDONS WRONG VIEW,
MINDFULLY ONE ENTERS UPON AND ABIDES IN
RIGHT VIEW: THIS IS ONE'S RIGHT MINDFULNESS.
THUS THESE THREE STATES RUN AND CIRCLE
AROUND RIGHT VIEW, THAT IS, RIGHT VIEW,
RIGHT EFFORT, AND RIGHT MINDFULNESS.

(M.117:9)

AN AWARENESS GUIDED BY RIGHT VIEW

Before we go much further in exploring mindfulness of breathing, I thought to digress a little and look into the topic of mindfulness or *sati*. It's a crucial factor because in order to steady the mind and benefit from the calm vitality of breathing, one needs to stay with it and ward off concerns about family and work, calculations of how long you have to sit ... and so on. This 'staying on topic' is a function of mindfulness. With mindfulness, the mind doesn't elaborate and it doesn't go forward; there's no 'it could be this ...' or '... and next'.

Mindfulness is described as the ability to bear something in mind, as in: '[One] *has mindfulness; one possesses the highest mindfulness and skill; one recalls and recollects what was done and spoken of long ago.*' (M.53:16; S.48:9; S.48:50) So the establishment of mindfulness is a mental action that's akin to throwing a loop around an experience in order to fully and receptively attend to it.

In terms of meditation practice, 'right' mindfulness is not just a matter of sustained attention, but is also attuned with regard to the suitability of what it settles on. This sensitivity is right view. As the Buddha pointed out: '*Here, bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu is giving attention to some sign [i.e. 'feature' (nimitta)] and owing to that sign there arise in him evil, unwholesome thoughts connected with desire, with hate, and with*

delusion, then he should give attention to some other sign connected with what is wholesome.’ (M.20:2)

This is in accord with the nature of mind: what one sustains attention on forms the dominant input for the mind, so one has to train attention in terms of what one focuses on and with what intention. This is called ‘deep’ (or ‘careful’, or ‘appropriate’) attention (*yoniso manasikāra*). This kind of attention senses whether, for example, giving attention to something inflames or steadies the heart, or is too subtle for the mind to grasp.

The Buddha also referred to ‘wrong’ mindfulness and stated its consequences: *‘In a person of wrong view, wrong attitude comes into being. In a person of wrong attitude, wrong speech. In a person of wrong speech, wrong action. In a person of wrong action, wrong livelihood. In a person of wrong livelihood, wrong effort. In a person of wrong effort, wrong mindfulness. In a person of wrong mindfulness, wrong concentration. In a person of wrong concentration, wrong knowledge. In a person of wrong knowledge, wrong release.’ (A.10:103)*

So right and wrong view condition attitude and attention, the foundations of mindfulness. Whereas wrong view doesn’t give any significance to ethical uprightness, right view does the opposite: *‘There is what is given and what is offered and what is sacrificed; there is*

fruit and result of good and bad actions' And so ... 'One makes an effort to abandon wrong view and to enter upon right view: this is one's right effort. Mindfully one abandons wrong view, mindfully one enters upon and abides in right view: this is one's right mindfulness.' (M.117:9)

ATTITUDE AND EFFORT

With right view, one recollects that what the mind engages with will have fortunate or unfortunate results; and this is also the case with reference to *how* one engages. Get forceful or reactive and you'll foster impulsiveness or agitation; respond with care and sensitivity and you get clearer and more composed. However, if your focus is too tight, it restricts receptivity. Therefore attitudes and modes of attention and engagement that we may have picked up from work or from other people have to be acknowledged and adjusted in accord with careful attention.

As we consider right attitude, another point to bear in mind is that the establishment of mindfulness doesn't mean that you can't think. Mindfulness is associated with the ability to remember, that is, the capacity to distil the essence of an experience in order to dwell on it. This uses thinking in a reflective way – to arrive at a skilful meaning, rather than to proliferate and speculate. As the

Buddha advised: *‘Whenever, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu dwelling thus withdrawn recollects that Dhamma and thinks it over, on that occasion the enlightenment factor of mindfulness is aroused by the bhikkhu; on that occasion the bhikkhu develops the enlightenment factor of mindfulness’* (S.46:3)

There are many teachings that one can reflect on towards this end – such as the value of virtue, the self-respect that comes with sense-restraint, the freedom and happiness that come with the cultivation of goodwill, the mortality that makes our every day of life a precious gift ... and the liberation potential of mindfulness of breathing. What these skilful themes have in common is that they deepen and enrich our perspectives, are guided by right view and right attitude, and are conducive to right effort.

‘When your virtue is well purified and your view straight, based upon virtue, established upon virtue, you should develop the four establishments of mindfulness’ (S.47:3; cf. S.47:15; S.47:47) The ‘rightness’ is that the mind is shielded from distraction, and collected on what is nourishing and fruitful.

It’s good to remember this twofold quality because although the mind can be as mischievous as a monkey and needs to be restrained, it can also be depleted – and so benefits from a focus on gladdening or steadying themes. As we come to realize, one reason

that the mind is so erratic is because it's hungry and confused – therefore it has to be fed. The kind of foods that are advocated aren't sense-data, ideals and opinions, but calm energies, helpful considerations, and skilful attitudes. Getting these foods depends on establishing mindfulness based on right view.

With right view, we consider a more wholesome way of relating. This is with right attitude – an approach to meditation (and to life in general) that rules out forcefulness, insensitivity and sensory gratification. It may not be apparent that these tendencies are present until you enter the refined sphere of meditation – and you find yourself forcing the mind to follow the breath rather than attending to it carefully in order to find out what works. Either that or you grow impatient to get to the sweet stuff. Wrong view, wrong attitude, wrong effort. Instead, with right attitude we explore ways of encouraging and sustaining a steady energy: this inquiry is right effort. So you get the view straight first, *then* see what (if anything) is needed. Maybe you just need to slow down and attend more deeply; to let the steadiness of not pushing or distracting or calculating have its natural result. Or maybe you need to reflect wisely on how you're using your time, and consequently firm up your intention.

Right effort develops out of view and attitude rather than out of blind willpower. It means you apply an attentive inquiry to your practice: you apply, you linger, you note the results, you're willing to learn. Right view offers trust in the power of skilfulness; right attitude lays down some details of what is skilful; and then right effort can follow through on the attitudes and intentions with some pragmatic application. This careful attentiveness should be undertaken in terms of whatever one is involved with – whether this be a relationship with another person, a task, or establishing mindful receptivity to one's breathing.

In outline, right effort is fourfold – to refrain from, and protect the heart from, the influence of hurtful, greedy or distracting phenomena; and to uplift and establish the heart in whatever is peaceful, wholesome and meaningful. It needn't be a battle or a strain. If that's what your effort is becoming, you should step back and reflect with deep attention. Ask yourself: 'Where is the skilful factor, theme or person that can help me get my direction straight?' In this way, you ward off what is unskilful, contradictory or irrelevant, and kindle and sustain what is skilful and supportive.

Such right effort, as it matures into steady persistence, is the proximate condition for right mindfulness. It maintains the understanding

of right view and the boundaries of appropriate attention. Properly maintained, such mindfulness, when established in the body, is regarded as invaluable: ‘... *whoever develops and cultivates mindfulness immersed in the body includes all wholesome qualities that pertain to clear knowledge.*’ (A.1:575) ‘*Bhikkhus, they have not directly known the deathless who have not directly known mindfulness immersed in the body.*’ (A.1:625) So, by holding a mirror to your attitudes, how you engage and the consequences, mindfulness opens the door to awakening.

As for closing the door against harmful influences – in M.119 the Buddha likens mindfulness immersed in the body to a door-panel made of heartwood: just as throwing a ball of string at such a panel will not open the door, so any attempts by Mara (the force of ignorance and corruption) will not get into the mind of someone who has developed mindfulness of body. But the same discourse also alludes to the agility consequent upon such a training: ‘*when one has developed and cultivated mindfulness immersed in the body, one has the ability to witness any state that can be realized by supreme knowledge to which one inclines the mind.*’ (M.119:29) This ability to witness is alluded to (in the fourth tetrad of *ānāpānasati*) as a consummate skill. It stems from mindfulness.

*The phrase ‘immersed in’ (*kāyagatā*) seems to indicate a depth of access – i.e. not just aware of the physical aspects, but of the sensitivities of the inner body.

MINDFULNESS AND CONCENTRATION

Based on right view and right effort, mindfulness brings forth sensitivity and firmness whereby attitudes and impulses are reviewed, supportive ones are encouraged, and hindrances starved. Consequently, the mind is settled in its purity. It is steady and has a unified intent. This is how mindfulness supports concentration.

In terms of the details of what we apply mindfulness to, the teachings encourage us to begin with mindfulness of body in the postures of sitting, standing, walking and reclining. Even within these simple frames of reference, things may get tricky because of wrong view. That is, the mind can be relating to life, mind and body in accord with the materialist view of much of our culture: i.e. that the thinking mind is in charge, it plans and organizes, and that the body is a passive vehicle for that mind. At best, it's a pedigree donkey, so feed it, bathe it, dress it and make it work. The unskilful results of that view become apparent when the mind ignores or blocks the body's natural way of sensing, and tries to get focused by recording sensations. Through this approach, meditation gets off on a wrong footing, because it's based on what the mind considers breathing to be, rather than attending to how the body itself senses its breathing.

So how does the body know it's breathing? In one analogy, the Buddha likened mindfulness immersed in the body to a post to

which six wild animals are tethered so that they don't tug and pull in different directions. In this analogy, the six animals are the six senses (including that of the thinking mind).^{*} These pull awareness out into diverse sensory phenomena, where it loses its stability. So we are encouraged to establish mindfulness on an aspect of the body that is not linked to tactile impressions. This is the inner body/nervous system with its sensitivity. Consequently, it follows that we should attune to breathing not as a series of sensations, but as an energy that affects the nervous system. As the teachings make clear, this is a source of refined and nourishing pleasure.

Because of this feedback of pleasure, the meditator is encouraged to attend to the body as a feeling-sensitive system. This is the result of regarding the body with right view. Based on that, and with mindfulness and appropriate effort, agitation, stress and fatigue can be cleared. You can sense where and with what attitude a quality of gladness or ease arises. And through immersing your awareness in a calm and easeful body, you discern the attitudes that cause and sustain tension. You notice what makes you compulsive or operate on automatic pilot, and when you're missing the point and getting stale and bored. Accordingly, you find a way to apply yourself that has been

^{*}S.35:247.

educated by goodwill, sensitivity and restraint. Then the results can only be for the good: *‘When one thus dwells diligently, gladness is born. When one is gladdened, rapture is born. When the mind is uplifted by rapture, the body becomes tranquil. One tranquil in body experiences happiness. The mind of one who is happy becomes concentrated. When the mind is concentrated, phenomena become manifest. Because phenomena become manifest, one is reckoned as “one who dwells diligently.”’* (S.55:40)

5

Direct Knowing



BREATHING IN LONG, ONE DIRECTLY KNOWS:
'BREATHING IN LONG'; OR BREATHING OUT
LONG, ONE DIRECTLY KNOWS: 'BREATHING
OUT LONG'.

BREATHING IN SHORT, ONE DIRECTLY KNOWS:
'BREATHING IN SHORT'; OR BREATHING OUT
SHORT, ONE DIRECTLY KNOWS: 'BREATHING
OUT SHORT'.

INSTRUCTIONS

1 CULTIVATE LIGHTLY BUT CLEARLY PLACING YOUR ATTENTION ON POINTS IN YOUR BODY AND SENSING HOW THEY FEEL.

2 ACKNOWLEDGE TENSE OR NUMB PLACES AND WIDEN YOUR ATTENTION TO INCLUDE THEM WITHIN THE WIDER FRAME OF BODILY REFERENCE. BE ESPECIALLY ATTENTIVE AROUND YOUR FACE - IF THE FOREHEAD, TEMPLES AND EYE-SOCKETS CAN BE RELAXED, THINKING WILL LESSEN AND THE BODY WILL BE MORE AT EASE.

3 REVIEW BODILY PHENOMENA AS ARISING WITHIN THE FIELD OF AWARENESS.

4 REFER TO AND ENCOURAGE THE UNCONSTRICTED PROCESS OF BREATHING.

5 STAY MINDFULLY IN TOUCH WITH THE BREATHING AS IT LENGTHENS OUT OF CONSTRICTIONS AND GRADUALLY SHORTENS WITH CALM.

6 ENJOY.

THE EMBODIED SENSE AND DIRECT KNOWING

We know that the body has a nervous system that registers tension, relaxation, safety and shock to a refined degree. However, as becomes evident in instances of love, anxiety, depression, joy and grief, the body has an innate relationship to the mind, and to what happens to it. This aspect of the body, its sensitive intelligence, is what I'm calling 'the embodied sense'. (Technically, it's called the peripheral nervous system, but I'll spare you the jargon.) On account of this, mentally-derived phenomena get registered in terms of bodily uplift, ease or tension and contraction – and they can get stuck there long after the mental trigger has disappeared. The relationship of emotion and attitude to body is the key to understanding the relevance of mindfulness of body as a path to liberation. That is, just as mental suffering and stress get embedded in the body, through the body runs the path to their release. Moreover, through directly knowing your embodied condition, you can read suffering and stress, its arising and its ceasing: *'... there is no making an end of suffering without reaching the end of the world. Yet it is just within this fathom-long body, with its perception and conceiving mind, that I declare that there is the world, the arising of the world, the cessation of the world, and the path of practice leading to the cessation of the world.'* (A.4:45)

Directly knowing (*pajānāti*) isn't knowing *about* something; it's a non-conceptual and sensitive clarity. The distinction between directly knowing and conceptualizing (*maññati*) causes us to reset our understanding of 'mind'. In the teachings of the Buddha, there are two words that are translated as 'mind' – *manas* and *citta* (pronounced 'chitta'). *Manas*, the conceiver, creates a mental object ('that patch of colour is a dog/a car/a play of light'). Its action is 'attention' (*manasikāra*); attention creates a focus, a boundary within the field of sensory data that isolates an area of sight (sound and so on) from the rest of the visual field. Thus an 'object' arises.

Citta, on the other hand, refers to the seat of impulses, directives, sensed or intuited experience, greed, hatred, compassion, imagination, aspiration – and liberation. *Citta* provides the subjective reference 'I feel like this', 'that affects me in this way', 'this is happening to me'. To distinguish it from *manas*, I'll call it 'heart' – although as it quietens and stabilizes, 'awareness' fits *citta* better.

Manas deals with abstractions such as measurements, possibilities, conventions, ideals and organization. These are representations of what is, or might be, or has happened – and in this respect, if *manas* is free from bias or delusion, it serves us through integrating what has been immediately, presently sensed into a knowledge that can be stored and used later. Then it's a source of guidance.

But there is an ‘if’. *Manas* is by default tilted towards organizing the ever-fluctuating stream of sense-data and our impressions of that to form a cohesive world ‘out there’. It shapes and organizes what we attend to – but with the flooded input of modern life, and the pressure to organize and plan, it goes into a hyperactive mode. That brings stress into the heart and dulls receptivity.

BALANCE CONCEIVING WITH SENSING

The most significant object that *manas* creates is a notion of ‘myself’ that arises from measuring the changing feel, content and energy of *citta*. *Citta* feels – and it gets highly activated by the performance drive, the need to be better, and the fear of not being ‘good’ (attractive, smart, strong, effective) enough. Coupled with a low degree of loving acceptance, this self-conscious drive can play out as the need to be a ‘good’ meditator (resulting in a tense and fixated mindset). *Manas* locks this wavering subject into a notional self, an ‘I am’ that can’t be directly known (or released) because it is only a notion, a virtual reality. However, when this notion takes hold of the *citta*, it generates programs that can run your life: ‘I have to be strong, get ahead and hold on.’ Thus, the conceiving mind can pump out ideas and programs and haunt the heart with what could and shouldn’t be.

Because our idea of intelligence is biased towards the *manas* aspect of mind, we've learnt to render experience in terms of concepts, rather than directly sense how we're affected – and conceiving has limited benefits. It's great for organizing times and to-do lists, but it doesn't touch into what can nourish us. With conceiving, direct experience gets translated into the virtual reality of concepts, and aims for the virtual reality of a conclusion; taken to excess, it throws your energy out of balance. So, if you're thinking a lot, most likely there's a tightness in the eyes, forehead and temples. This is because the energy of *manas*, 'object-defining' mind, also emphasizes and isolates the head as the base of attention and thereby creates an observing self in that part of the body. If we attend from this base, we practise 'watching the breath' (even though we can't see it), and monitor it in a clockwork fashion rather than directly sensing it. Embodied intelligence thereby gets left out of its own process.

The unawakened *citta* is also inadequate on its own, because it gets tainted with self-centredness whereby rather than float as a reference to what is volatile, stirring, gladdening or intoxicating, a 'me' sense anchors itself to views and preferences. Or sails into damaged territory or psychic energies. This also leads in the wrong direction, that of obsession.

As the *citta* is the ‘place’ where data lands, where contact happens and feeling gets generated, it’s the source of our responses, moment-to-moment inclinations and engaged intentions. When such mental activities are based on self-view, the *citta* is organized around personal needs – such as for security, or for happiness for ‘me’. Understandably so – that’s a major piece of conditioning. However, on account of that view, the *citta* easily activates in terms of fear, aversion and greed, and feels isolated; *manas* reads that and generates an isolated and needy ‘I am’ based on that. Embodied energy contracts, and the *citta* feels insecure.

On the other hand, if the object-defining mind is trained in terms of careful attention, mindfulness and investigation, it can point out that experience is actually a process of ongoing states and qualities, not a constant ‘I am’ at all. Although this reads like a recipe for chaos, the wisdom that reveals this truth of ‘not-self’ is grounded, reliable and dispassionate. So if *manas* is asked to simply record a natural, intimate experience (like breathing) ... and if the *citta* is linked to something comfortable and freely arising (like breathing) ... and if there is no pressure or competition in that process ... liberation from the psychologies and stress of ‘I am’ is possible.

In this process, the guided embodied experience acts as a modifying reference for habitual mind-states. That is, in the presence of

personal anxiety, or the compulsion to do something, *manas* can acknowledge how the body is being affected, then widen its attention to cover aspects of the body that are not anxious (such as the back, or the soles of the feet, or the out-breath). This soothes and balances body and mind.

In order to bring this about, one has to train the *manas* to connect to the embodied experience. You can do this by using a question about what you're directly experiencing: for example, 'How does the body do its breathing? And what is that like?' Use this direct approach rather than an abstract speculation, such as 'How can I get better at doing meditation?' For its part, the *citta* should stay with right view and extend some steady goodwill. Then, as these heartfelt effects come into play, *manas* can stay on track with the breathing.

Over time, the breathing is likely to lengthen, or fully extend out of the contracted state – this is breathing 'long'. Subsequently, as the energy starts flowing more smoothly, less energy is needed so the breathing shortens. But the energy remains bright. Meanwhile, as the energy field of the body has cleared and calmed, the impression of what the breathing and the body are will change. As a spoiler: they will be experienced as a source of pleasure that releases stress and supports awakening.

PRACTICAL DETAILS

PLACING-AND-SENSING

It's good to experiment with ways to apply and sustain mindfulness. You might do this by turning attention towards a part of your body and flagging it with one word – like 'hand', for example. This 'placing' of attention is *vitakka*, or 'bringing to mind'. You may not need a word; *vitakka* is the pointing and placing of attention that is the precondition for thought. Its partner, *vicāra*, senses: it lingers, and takes in directly what *vitakka* has pointed out – in the case of 'hand', for example, that would be a range of sensations and degrees of warmth along with undertones of sensitivity. So the instruction is to think short (to place) and linger long (to sense) on what has been brought to mind – and thereby get the direct experience (rather than to think long, get complicated, lose receptivity, and arrive at an idea). At first, this conjoined pair may need to be cultivated as a sequence: first place the attention, and follow that with sensing and evaluating what you've placed it on. In time, these two will occur simultaneously, as with touching something *lightly* with a finger – you place and sense at the same time. And if you push too hard, you lose the receptivity. So use the mind like a finger, not like an eye.

You can then practise moving this receptive attention around your

body, focusing on broad areas, on fine details, on vibrant centres, or on quiet, bony sections. Get the big picture of the territory. Learning to move your attention carefully is also an excellent training for heightening sensitivity. In this respect, the practice is about using the body as a workshop in which to train the mind.

You even get to reset what your body and mind are! If you compare your direct impression of this body to any idea or notion of it, you'll notice that these two impressions are not the same. Your face probably feels larger than your chest – but it lacks a scalp, and the back of the skull. Much of the back of your body is probably quite faint, and has less sensation than occurs in one hand. Different elemental qualities may prevail at different times. So your directly-known body is a field of sensations and feelings that change ... dependent on contact, attention and energy. Accordingly, you can get a fuller, more balanced and comfortable body if you cultivate attention and effort in a supportive way: relax, keep the aperture of attention steady but not intense, then deepen your awareness into what your attention tells you is there.

AWAKEN EMBODIED RESPONSE

Once you've sensed and attuned to the body's responsiveness, bring up the suggestion, a kind of invitation, that your body could be more

open and take up as much space as it likes. Practise this for a while, feeling into restricted areas and giving more attention to places like your lower back or sides that might not have much sensation. Also be aware of energy – a vibrancy or stirring that might be most obvious in the face or belly or around the centre of the chest.

This reference will also help you to sense where tension – stuck energy – lies. Any place where you discover tension will benefit from having a receptive awareness placed over it that then steadily widens to connect the tense place to a neighbouring non-tense area in the field of sensation and energy. (This might be at some distance in terms of anatomy: it could be, for example, that widening your attention to include the soles of your feet helps the lower belly to relax.) Don't go into the tense area, and make no effort to abolish the tension; instead, the area needs to be welcomed to join the rest of the body. Allow the body to respond in its own time. It may be that some places are very tight, but anywhere that does release a little will improve the balance and ease of the body as a whole. So if you feel tight in your shoulders, scan around and note any area that is less tight (you might slowly extend to include your hands), and begin softening and widening wherever there is an opening. The effect of relaxing in a fully attentive way will transfer through the mind and heart.

Such practice will support the experience of breathing as a vibrant flow, with the out-breath slowly completing itself as if it's emptying out. Allow it to come to a standstill so that the in-breath arises at its own time and rate. Similarly for the in-breath: don't assume it's finished because it slows down and the sensations wane. Stay with it into the pause. In fact, get interested in the process of breath-energy subsiding into and arising out of that pause phase – even if you don't get much of a pause at first. This entire slowing down/pausing phase is associated with the relaxation of the will – which is a relief – but it may take time before the heart can allow embodied intelligence to take over. You might *suggest* to your body that it could breathe more slowly – but don't work too hard at it. As a tip, the Buddha offered the analogy of holding a quail: hold it too tight and you kill it; hold it too loose and it flies away (M.128:22).

Another tip is to notice what approach encourages your *citta* to settle and become clear. You learn by the results. To illustrate this, the Buddha used the analogy of two cooks who each serve meals to a king (S.47:8). The foolish cook serves his master the king a meal, '*doesn't pick up the sign of his master's preference*' – and serves the king the same food every day. The wise cook, on the other hand, does take note of what the king enjoys or dislikes and the next day serves

the food the king enjoys. The fool gets fired and the wise cook gets rewarded. In such a way, the Buddha compares the foolish meditator who *'doesn't pick up the sign of the mind'* with the wise one who does.

So really listen to how your embodied system responds to your practice. Check the extremities of the breathing for any resistances. Is any attitude stopping your out-breath from continuing? Is there any pressure to breathe in rather than let it happen? Anything abbreviating the inhalation – in your chest, throat or forehead? You may find it helpful to extend your awareness to lightly cover your face as the inhalation comes to completion, and to cover the base of your body and even your legs as the exhalation subsides. But don't push the breath. Support the release of the breath-tide by relaxing inhibitions and resistances. Then linger, and savour the psychological and emotional effects.

As the breathing begins to manifest in a steady and comfortable way, it will more fully extend through the body – 'breathing long'. Then with thinking being reined in and receptivity directed to the breathing, less energy is being expended – and so the breathing settles. Consequently, less breath is needed and the physical action of breathing becomes quite brief and the breath becomes more subtle – 'breathing short'. But as this isn't associated with

the breath being constricted, it's not a dull state. In fact, the energy grows brighter and steady.

If this isn't the case, it's likely that your awareness is being dulled. In which case, breathe out steadily, and at the point when you're about to breathe in – don't. Pause for ten or more seconds, then allow the breath in *slowly*. Relax for a breath or two, then repeat the exercise a few more times.

When the energy is smoothly flowing, you can be mindful of the inhalation, exhalation and the pause that connects these flows. Then you have a breath-current that you can work with. And as your attention unifies the current of breathing and the upright axis within its focus, these energies merge and strengthen. Then you experience the breathing body as a subtle, living and flexing form, a '*body among the bodies*' as the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* puts it (M.118:24). Linger in it, and appreciate it. This is *supposed* to be enjoyable – how about that?

6

Get to the Point



UNIFICATION OF HEART

[CITTASSA EKAGGATĀ] ...

IS CONCENTRATION

(M.44:12)

DEVELOP FOCUS

I haven't specified a particular point in the body at which to place attention in order to be mindful of breathing.* This is because the Buddha didn't leave any instruction to do so. Nor does 'concentration' (*samādhi*) mean holding attention onto a particular point – *samādhi* is a state that the mind enters into as it settles down and feels at ease. Such inner stability is the result of sustained mindfulness.

Discarding any hindrance to mindfulness is a major point. To this end, moving attention slowly around the body through placing-and-sensing is a useful exercise for developing agility and precision of focus, so that the mind doesn't get bogged down with, or spin out into, thoughts, passions and agitation. Also, when meditating on breathing, a focus can be placed on any part of the body that is affected by the flow of breath – nostrils, back of the throat, centre of the chest, or diaphragm are obvious examples. Conducted in the right way, and gradually widening the focus to include more of the felt body, such

*One argument is that when the word '*parimukhaṃ*' is used with reference to establishing mindfulness, it means placing it at the nose-tip – because '*mukha*' can mean 'mouth', or 'entrance'. However, '*mukha*' can also mean 'foremost' – as in the case of something being at the fore of one's attention or aims. As the prefix '*pari*' denotes 'final' or 'completely' (*parinibbāna* – 'final *nibbāna*'; *parisuddhi* – 'completely pure'), '*parimukhaṃ*' would emphasize this sense – i.e. one is placing 'mindfulness to the fore', or 'prioritizing mindfulness'. A reference to a 'complete mouth' doesn't make sense.

exercises will support right effort and right mindfulness and help to dislodge obsessive thoughts.

However, as the sutta suggests, the main gathering point is the upright axis. Slowly sweeping attention along that axis (like stroking a cat) should smooth out any distortions and freshen up numb places in that axis; over time, the energy of breathing will flow in line with that and open through a widening area of your body. I would caution against placing attention on a narrow point, unless it calls for your kind attention. Experience indicates that many people these days live in a contracted bodily condition that goes along with pressurized mind-states. When the default of attention is to be narrow and driven, and when the embodied energies are tense or numb (to the degree that a comfortable experience of the body as an entirety is rare or unknown), the instruction to focus on one point in the body can be problematic.

It's also good to remember that the meditation is on *breathing*, not on the breath. So whereas focusing on the *breath* will generally mean focusing on sensations in the body where the air strikes it, *breathing* is a process that affects the body's energy system – which connects directly to the *citta* as 'heart'. Moreover, the instructions mention being fully sensitive to the *entire body*; in which case

focusing on one particular point would only be relevant in order to bring that area in line with the whole body. In which case I'd recommend bearing that point in mind and steadily widening the focus to cover your physical (and felt) form.

THE BREATH OF LIFE

We should consider that in India, as in China and other ancient cultures, the breath wasn't just air moving between the nose and the lungs; it was understood to be the life force, the channel for both vitality and the spirit. You may have heard of *prāṇāyāma*, the yogic skill of using breathing to harness subtle bodily energy – well, that *prāṇa* (breath-energy) is the Sanskrit for what Pali renders as *pāṇa*.^{*} So, the physical action of breathing in and out moves *pāṇa* through the body, wherein it acts upon the body's energy system (*kāyasaṅkhāra*), in a benevolent and liberating way. This is because breathing as an energetic process connects directly to the nervous system and through that to mental energy, emotions, and subtler aspects of awareness. It also acts as the channel for spiritual intelligence to come forth and moderate the short-term perspectives and wilfulness of the secular materialist mindset. 'Pāṇa'

^{*}One important distinction to make between *prāṇāyāma* and *ānāpānasati* is that *prāṇāyāma* uses deliberate locks and retentions of breathing; *ānāpānasati* doesn't.

has a fuller connotation than that of the materialist view of breath as a flow of air; it is a gate to mystical experience and liberation.

This understanding should affect one's approach by encouraging attitudes and inclinations that bring forth one's aspiration. An overhaul of one's inclinations and attitudes is always a good point to begin with; as is mentioned in the *Kāyagāti Sutta*: *'As he abides thus diligent, ardent, and resolute, his memories and intentions based on the household life are abandoned; with their abandoning, his heart becomes steadied internally, quieted, brought to singleness [ekodhibhūtaṃ], and concentrated. That is how a bhikkhu develops mindfulness immersed in the body.'* (M.119:21)

Putting aside the topics and the energies associated with owning, planning and regretting is an essential part of meditation practice. It's not that such topics are morally wrong, but if they bring an agitated, hasty energy with them, or if they stimulate fault-finding and anxiety, heart and mind aren't going to settle. If you find a topic can't be put aside, you should investigate more deeply the effect it has on you, and consider how to breathe calm energy into that state. Concentration and singleness of heart come about through filtering and pruning mental content and approach, not through focusing on a point in the body.

ONE-POINTEDNESS IS A MATTER OF HEART

There is a term ‘*ekaggatā*’ that is often translated as ‘one-pointedness’; but rather than referring to a physical point, it is associated with mental and bodily composure. In the discourses this most commonly occurs as one of a list of factors associated with absorption (*jhāna*) – which *ānāpānasati* can lead to. The Buddha mentions this when describing his own awakening: ‘*Tireless energy was aroused in me and unremitting mindfulness was established, my body was tranquil and untroubled, my heart steadied [samāhitam] and unified [ekaggaṃ].*’ (M.4)

At A.4:12, *ekaggatā* is one of four groups of factors to be sustained while walking; the others being absence of hindrances, good energy and mindfulness, tranquillity and ease of body. Overall then, this ‘one-pointedness’ refers to a purposeful and settled mode of awareness, not to a microscopic focus. It’s a matter of heart. This is also evidenced by A.5:151, where ‘*one listens to the Dhamma with an undistracted and one-pointed heart*’: if this meant maintaining a one-pointedness based on the moment-by-moment arising of auditory consciousness, one wouldn’t be able to appreciate the meaning of the discourse.

To review the practice from another source: the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (M.10) refers to mindfulness of breathing by using the simile of

a lathe-operator focusing on the turning of a length of wood. This implies steady attention – but the one-pointedness is an attribute of the attention, rather than a point on the wood (which is moving). The other attribute of that focus is that it discerns whether that turn is long or short. The sense seems to be that an undistracted purpose encourages the focus to be both subtly flexible to accommodate rather than pin down the flow of the breathing process, and at the same time be a manifestation of a single intent.

The impression that comes across in these readings is that wayward and agitated thinking has to be abandoned so that one can steadily bear a theme in mind (that is, mindfulness is established). Once established, mindfulness of body is likened to a post to which the outwards-turning senses (conceiving, seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching) are tethered (S.35:247). With regard to this, one can bear the upright axis of the body in mind. Thus there is a very open but firm bodily posture, within which body energy, gathered and moderated by breathing, will calm. And when the body feels calm, heart and mind easily settle.

As a purposeful and receptive attention meets the breathing, mental and bodily energies settle together. A focus will arise where they meet

most comfortably and naturally. Then one is not straining to focus, nor is one's attention moving around the body wondering which point to focus on. Through sustained mindfulness of that state, the mind disengages from the pull of the senses, thoughts and memories, feels the pleasure of that, and directly knows that pleasure. Thus from the single-minded purpose – to steady and ease body, heart and mind – energy consolidates on a non-sensual basis.

TOOLS TO IMPROVE ATTENTION

In the tradition of practising *ānāpānasati*, various means have been tried and passed on as supportive in terms of sustaining mindfulness of breathing. Here are a few:

- Silently intone 'Bud' throughout the duration of an inhalation, and 'dho' throughout an exhalation.

Pros: Good for terminating distracting thoughts.

Cons: One can get distracted by forming the words and trying to stretch a syllable over an inhalation or exhalation.

- Count each exhalation from one to ten; if you forget the number of the exhalation, go back to 'one'.

Pros: This is good for retentive mindfulness.

Cons: One can make getting the numbers right into a kind of game, and thereby prioritize enumeration over sampling the quality of the breathing. This method also cuts the unbroken flow of breath-energy into separate breaths, thereby ignoring the pause.

- Count the length of an exhalation, or of both an exhalation and an inhalation.

Pros: This is good for studying breath-energy and slowing it down. A fairly calm breath could take five seconds or so to complete, but if you linger and relax more deeply in the pause, the breath-rhythm might slow further. The consensus of all traditions is that less breathing is better for health and calm; it allows the energy to be more completely absorbed, so less breath is needed and the mind gets less activated.

Cons: One can strain to control the breathing, thereby generating tension.

In all cases, beware of getting anxious about mistakes, or becoming too goal-oriented. Having a friendly and easeful attitude helps to encourage the *citta* to linger in the pauses; and it's the pauses that naturally moderate the breathing process and allow the

energies to settle and calm. This is a natural process, so let the body breathing guide you steadily through the cycle of inhalation, pause, exhalation and pause: it's the smoothness of that cycle that has a calming effect, so let the inhalations and exhalations subside into the pause and change at their own rate. This will release constrictions around breathing.

Whatever method you use, what is needed is to place attention (*vitakka*) and sense what it has been placed on (*vicāra*). That is – when the attention wanders excessively, notice that, pause and add a note: ‘How do I sense breathing out, now?’ Wait for an out-breath to become apparent and then release awareness into its stream. Over time you'll notice the *citta* gets quieter and firmer and supportive words are needed less and less.

When attention is liberated, however temporarily, from unnecessary thoughts and distracting moods, the mind is experienced as a sensitive, steady awareness. Its vital energies aren't being used up in extraneous or negative moods and notions, so they collect. This collected awareness can be directed with *vitakka-vicāra* to locate and unpick obstructions where they arise as turbulence or hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*). However, don't focus on the thoughts and stories that flavour these hindrances – instead, notice them as either scurries

of thought and emotion or areas of agitation or constriction in the body. And breathe through them: ‘How do I sense breathing in all this?’

In terms of the body, the afflicted areas will most likely be a) the head – the jaw and the band that includes the eyes and forehead, and b) the diaphragm and the area below the navel. Subtler restrictions may occur at the top of the chest just beneath the throat notch, and also at the base of the torso, where the legs join the trunk. Clearing these areas allows the breathing to first lengthen (as it is unconstricted) and consequently quieten down (as calm suffuses the body and mind). The long breath is one where most of the experience is of the flow of sensations, and the pause phase is minimal. As things calm down, however, the pauses lengthen and the track of sensations lessens; the inhale-exhale phases of the breathing grow briefer and merge into the pause phase. It may seem that one is hardly breathing, but it’s just that the respiration that uses muscles is becoming less necessary. This is ‘*breathing in [out] short*’: breathing is slower with longer pauses. And yet, as it’s associated with a quiet mind and bright energy, it’s very refreshing.

7

Training the Mind with the Body



ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE IN FULLY AND COMPLETELY SENSITIVE TO THE ENTIRE BODY';
ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE OUT FULLY AND COMPLETELY SENSITIVE TO THE ENTIRE BODY.'

ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE IN CALMING BODILY FORMATION'; ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE OUT CALMING BODILY FORMATION.'

INSTRUCTIONS

1 FOCUS ON THE RHYTHMIC PROCESS AND ENERGY OF BREATHING. AS THE MIND SETTLES INTO THAT, MAINTAIN MINDFULNESS SO THAT DISCURSIVE AND AFFLICTIVE THOUGHTS SUBSIDE.

2 AS MOMENTS OF EMBODIED, OPEN AND RECEPTIVE AWARENESS BECOME APPARENT, LINGER IN THEM, SO THAT BODY AND MIND 'LEARN' THIS EXPERIENCE.

3 BRING THAT QUALITY TO BEAR ON THE BODY AS AN ENTIRETY, WITH THE BREATHING ACTING AS A STEADY MODERATOR OF THE MIND. LET THE BREATH-FLOW CARRY YOUR AWARENESS.

4 GIVE FULL ATTENTION TO THE PAUSES AND LET YOUR HEART DWELL ON THE EMOTIONAL TONES OF RELEASE - RELAXING AT THE END OF THE OUT-BREATH AND BRIGHTENING AT THE END OF THE IN-BREATH.

5 WHEN THE BODY FEELS OPEN AND ALIVE, SCAN SLOWLY THROUGH IT, DETECTING ANY IMBALANCES AND TENSE PLACES. BRING YOUR EMBODIED AND RECEPTIVE AWARENESS TO BEAR ON THEM, WITHOUT TRYING TO CHANGE OR UNDERSTAND ANYTHING.

THE BODILY FORMATION

For the forest-dwelling contemplatives of the Buddha's time – who often lived in seclusion and were distanced from social appearance – the visual perception of the body was not that relevant. Such a person would directly 'know' the body through how it felt and how its living qualities arose. Also, the intelligence of the body was essential in order to navigate with full awareness through the uncertainties of natural, irregular and unlit territory that was shared with wild animals and outlaws.

Within this embodied domain, breathing is an essential centring medium, connected as it is to emotions and to bodily vitality. Although other sensations and energies come and go in accord with circumstances, breathing is the ongoing life force that brings the individual into an embodied form. It's also that which can be immediately felt forming the experience of body as it gets aroused, strengthens, becomes agitated or relaxes. The bodily experience of breathing in and out is then rightly referred to as an active, formative process, *kāyasaṅkhāra* – 'bodily formation'. And as it gets calmed, it supports subtle and sensitive mind-states.

This soothing and steadying of the *kāyasaṅkhāra* is given further significance in the discourses by instructions on it being connected to unskillful actions – one's own or those initiated by others:

‘Either on one’s own initiative, Ānanda ... or prompted by others, one generates that bodily/verbal/mental saṅkhāra conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally. Either deliberately, Ānanda ... or undeliberately, one generates that bodily/verbal/mental saṅkhāra conditioned by which pleasure and pain arise internally.’ (S.12:25)

This is evidenced by the aroused bodily energy that we might experience amongst a crowd of angry people or when our heart gets stirred into consumer thirst through advertising. There’s also the agitated nervous energy that accompanies restlessness, the flaring of passion or the clogged and stagnant bodily sense that accompanies despond. So *kāyasaṅkhāra* is not *just* the breathing, but more broadly speaking, embodied energy, and in particular the weave or patterns that it forms – such as hyper or hypo – dependent on states of mind. These patterns can become fixed, as in the case of oversensitivity or depression, or when one is acting compulsively. Such behaviour patterns are a breeding ground for the hindrances of sense-desire, ill-will, lethargy, restlessness and doubt. These hindrances cannot be released through intellectual understanding or mental willpower alone; one has to work on *kāyasaṅkhāra*. However, when the breathing channels and steadies *kāyasaṅkhāra*, it brightens and calms the entire body. Then there’s not much room for hindrances.

RESET AROUND RECEPTIVITY

Attuning to how the body regulates its breathing involves resetting how the mind operates. As if reading a pulse with your fingers, your training is to be sensitive, open and restrained while ‘listening’ to the energy system that runs through the entire body and is bound up with the mind. This receptivity can be refined with a degree of precision.

‘Open’ means that we’re attentive to the body as an intelligent entirety. Rather than decide what it should feel, or how breathing should be, being open to how the body is allows it to relax, and unwind. The breathing process becomes increasingly apparent as we put aside a lot of mental content – including ideas about meditation – and prioritize this embodied intelligence. This means training yourself to relate to any unbalanced or confused mental content by aligning its energies to those of the entirety of the upright body. You keep in touch with the feel of that presence, so that it becomes a guide to being centred; here your breathing is relaxed and replenishing. Any mental dissonances can then be registered in terms of disturbances in the body – and released by connecting them to this open (and breathful) presence.

As for being restrained ... the idea may bring up images of choke-chains on mastiffs, but in this context it means putting a check on thinking that follows, reacts to, or even obsessively wrangles

with the hindrances. Restraint supports pausing and returning to the centre, rather than following inherited assumptions. In this way, careful, direct attention replaces careless attention. Through careful, deep attention, the verbal and non-verbal messages of our unawakened state, with their tension and turbulence, get to be expressed – but also gradually released.

PRACTICAL DETAILS

SENSING THE ENTIRE BODY

To get the sense of the entire body, the initial step is to disengage from specific sensations while inquiring: ‘How do I know I have, or am in, a body?’ Then notice what you feel. To get an overall impression, you might imagine you’re in a shower. This impression may not be that clear, but one can train the mind to be more sensitive by moving awareness through the body in a gentle sweep.

For example, if breathing settles in the head, extend awareness down the back of the head and the spine as you breathe in and out. You may not get all the details, but slowly sweep down your back and down one leg at a time to the sole of the respective foot. The soles of the feet will tingle; they are sensitive energy points. Then draw awareness up through the soles with the in-breath to return to the head. Over the course of time, you may notice the body energy begins

to flow along these and other lines, being most clearly discerned between muscle groups or where the muscles are more relaxed.

You can cultivate a similar process in the lateral direction; that is, through extending awareness from the centre of the head, or chest, etc., down the arms and into the palms of the hands. Keep the hands in the *samādhi mudrā* – that is, with palms relaxed and turned up, fingers and thumb tips completing the circle above them. You can keep the hands separate, one on each thigh, with each thumb tip resting on its respective index or middle finger (or both); or have one hand cradling the other in your lap, with the thumb tips touching.

Palms and soles are particularly receptive: imagine having a small ball in each palm or sole that steadily inflates and subsides with the breathing. But however you relax your palms, if you include the soles of the feet in your field of awareness, they will relax too. This ‘embodied sympathy’ eases the body into a more vibrant and open form. So rather than move your awareness in line with the breath-rhythm (as with ‘inhale into left foot, exhale out of left foot ... inhale into right foot ...’ and so on) – simply linger in one part for a while as breathing goes on, feeling that area of the body respond. When any clenching or numbness has gone and the area feels full and rich, you can extend further. You might imagine that a soft ball is in the centre of your body, and as you breathe, it expands

and subsides in all directions simultaneously. As this effect spreads to cover the entire body, *kāyasañkhāra* is smoothed and steadied.

RESTRICTIONS UNRAVEL THROUGH OPEN AWARENESS

If you feel restrictions, don't go into them, but widen your awareness over them as if it's a canopy. For example, with a tight chest, widen across it to include the cavities where the arms join the trunk and on down through the hands. For the abdomen, widen awareness into the back and down through the grooves where the legs join the trunk. Imagining small breathing balls in the arm-chest cavities and the leg-abdomen grooves may help this.

If things are going well with such practices, you might refine your attention to tracking a line that proceeds from the crown, down through the throat, heart, navel and the end-point of the breathing below the navel. These anatomical references are only approximate pointers: the heart area may include the central upper torso between the breast-bone and the back. The navel and lower area may widen and deepen to include the entire base of the body and the perineum. Trace sensitively, lingering on any numb or agitated points and let awareness breathe into them. When the entire body is full of clean energy, it feels comfortably solid, and there isn't room for hindrances to get embedded.

The *citta* is a sympathetic awareness, and it takes on the energies of what you give attention to, for good or for bad. Bury yourself in media and you absorb that buzzy and stimulated energy – to the point where the mind can barely function without stimulation. On the other hand, if you attend to steady and bright bodily energy, your awareness becomes steady and bright. This is a crucial point: meditation allows the *citta* to feel good without force or stimulation.

As for the breathing itself: after practising for a while, you'll more readily detect breathing as a stirring that becomes a flow of vitality. Along with that there's a quality of enrichment, brightening – and then of relaxing and releasing. Pauses will lengthen between the end of the exhalation and the beginning of the inhalation, and vice versa. I'd again emphasize that these 'pauses' in terms of muscular movement are a vital part of the energetic cycle of breathing. They are windows into another level of energy, 'open energy': it's the open but grounded state that activated energy discharges into as the out-breath concludes. In that pause, the breath picks up fresh energy. This is then transferred through the body by the inhalation. At the end of the inhalation, there's another pause as the energy opens into felt space.

Learn to linger in order to sense the full cycle of breathing. It's one of discharge through the exhalation, rest and refreshment in

the pause phase, brightening with the inhalation, and an opening when the inhalation ends. This is the healthy cycle. As we'll see, this also resets the *citta*.

RELAX THE DRIVE AND SETTLE INTO EASE

If embodied energy, *kāyasāṅkhāra*, is overactive, there is no lingering. This overactivity is on account of a pushy, stressful *citta*. When pushing becomes the norm, the body becomes accustomed to stress, and the heart gets even more tense and jumpy. This results in an inadequate discharge of energy, and one's system isn't fully cleared and rested. Consequently, the inhalation is inhibited and refreshment is limited. Then, when we're operating on an energy whose potential has been reduced, more energy is required to do what one has to do, and we use the forcefulness of 'trying'. Trying to 'get it right' and 'get on to the next thing' is driven energy rather than steady, regenerative energy. This drive may be necessary for a short period or a crisis – but then one needs to discharge in order to replenish.

If that driven mode has become a way of life that covers whatever you set your mind on, it locks into how the mind conceives of reality (as a series of projects and episodes that have to be planned in advance and then filed away). It also affects the nervous system and the

muscle tone in the body. We may feel restlessly active, and yet not fresh; the body may get so tense and cramped that one can barely feel much at all.

In that case, take time and care to establish bodily presence. Then, when the body is settled and the heart is receptive, establish mindfulness and follow the natural flow of the breathing. Get interested in how breathing affects heart and mind. If you sustain that awareness through the cycle, the breathing will find its unhurried length, the mind will calm – and the track of the breathing will shorten.

If this occurs, then heart and mind settle – because they're not orienting around potentially distracting phenomena (mostly thoughts and sounds). The felt boundaries of the body and the anatomical impression that derives from that will increasingly soften, until the body is felt as a unified field with no hard edges. Breathing will manifest as a subtly vibrant energy that suffuses this entire field and sustains this new bodily form. If you give attention to that, the *citta* gets steeped in the suffusive effect.

This process clears staleness and tension from the body and transfers energy into the *citta*. This runs in tandem with the freeing of the mind from hindrances. The result is rapture and ease (*pīti-sukha* – which we'll explore in due course) – and a base for insight.

8

Hindrances



BHIKKHUS, THERE ARE THESE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS, HINDRANCES, ENCUMBRANCES OF THE MIND, STATES THAT WEAKEN WISDOM. WHAT FIVE? SENSUAL DESIRE IS AN OBSTRUCTION, A HINDRANCE, AN ENCUMBRANCE OF THE MIND, A STATE THAT WEAKENS WISDOM. ILL WILL ... MENTAL STIFFNESS AND LETHARGY ... RESTLESSNESS AND REMORSE ... DOUBT. THESE ARE THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS, HINDRANCES, ENCUMBRANCES OF THE MIND, STATES THAT WEAKEN WISDOM.

BHIKKHUS, WITHOUT HAVING ABANDONED
THESE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS, HINDRANCES,
ENCUMBRANCES OF THE MIND, STATES THAT
WEAKEN WISDOM, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE THAT A
BHIKKHU, WITH HIS POWERLESS AND FEEBLE
WISDOM, MIGHT KNOW HIS OWN GOOD, THE
GOOD OF OTHERS, OR THE GOOD OF BOTH,
OR REALIZE A SUPERHUMAN DISTINCTION
IN KNOWLEDGE AND VISION WORTHY OF THE
NOBLE ONES.

(A.5:51)

HOOKS IN THE HEART

Throughout the processes we've touched into, you will have to deal with various obstructions: clouds of thoughts, bursts and spools of emotions, as well as unevenness in the breathing. Unfortunately, the attitudes and environment associated with mainstream life in the world do leave negative side-effects. These 'hooks in the heart' seem very personal, and vary in degree dependent on each individual's experience. But they are a natural feature that we all have to deal with.

Getting born brings the heart into the sense-world; so it gets affected by sense-contact, or, more accurately, by the mental *interpretations* (or 'perceptions', *saññā*) of sense-contact. In this case, we see, hear, smell or taste something – and the mind perceives it as attractive or repugnant. Dependent on that perception, impulses arise. These impulses are a leading feature of a mental formation and, as we know, they send a shot of energy through the body. With shock or delight or even wavering, embodied energies shift. Thus *cittasañkhāra* conditions *kāyasañkhāra*. These impulses generate patterns of energy that if not integrated or resolved, get embedded in the nervous system. So, if the energetic effects of the shock or loss or abuse that occur in anyone's life aren't discharged, areas of numbness, hypersensitivity, tension or

overactivity develop. Consequently, as the *citta* tends to lock onto any emotional and embodied impressions, hindrances arise.

The hindrances are summarized as sense-desire (*kāmacchanda*), aversion (*byāpāda*), mental stiffness and lethargy (*thīna-middha*), restlessness and flurry (*uddhacca-kukkucca*), and a loss of confidence (*vicikicchā*) – although they may well manifest in conglomerate mixes.

To flesh this last piece out: the hindrances manifest as thoughts and emotions that hobble the mind and lead to a lack of confidence. This is a syndrome that arrests enthusiasm for practice, and at its worst can plunge the mind into meaninglessness and depression. There's much that can be said about the hindrances, but all advice has to contain the instruction to unfasten attention from engagement with the topics that support them: thoughts and emotions associated with sense-pleasure, ill-will or needless speculation. One therefore trains the *manas* faculty to step out of such attitudes and at the same time refrain from judging oneself by, or getting fixated on, these defects. Instead, we learn to disengage and see the bigger picture – in the light of birth, death and liberation, how valuable is the quick hit, how valid is the growling grudge or the sniping accusation? And when we come into the certainty of the present – what is important about being alive? If mental habits based on distraction, gratification and hostility are starting to shape your life, it's high

time to loosen their grip. Just this loosening up of locked stuff such as grievances, addictions, self-hatred and despond is one of the main reasons to meditate. It may well be an ongoing requirement. Fortunately, the release from these states can be experienced.

Other than the wise reflection outlined above, you can also apply counteractive mind-states: a sense of value and dignity to replace sense-desire; of goodwill and acceptance to counteract ill-will; of urgency in the face of mortality in order to shake off mental stiffness and lethargy; of embodiment to give firm ground to neutralize restlessness; and of awareness based on that firm ground in order to clear the spin of doubt and anxiety. Tackling the hindrances can bring forth great compassion, understanding and strength.

SUPPORT FROM THE BODY

The hindrances can't be dispelled by reasoning alone. This is because, like any addiction, they have an embodied grip. If you attend to how they affect your body, you'll notice the reactive surge of sense-desire, the hardening of ill-will, the stagnation of the dull mind, the agitated instability of worry and the whirling spiral of doubt. As their mental aspects arise, such 'hindrance forms' manifest in the embodied field as tangles or flares of energy. You

can even name them, the way that people name hurricanes. The Buddha likened them to the turbulence or slime that can take over a pond of bright water (S.46:55). Such analogies make these reflexes less topical and personal. However, the question is: how to relate to and dispel them without getting tangled up?

This point is the function of right mindfulness: the ability to be with an experience but not involved with it. In terms of breath meditation, *manas* places the loop of mindfulness around the experience of breathing to shield it, and support its 'body' as it grows. Thus there can arise a continuum of vitality and grounded energy that can ward off the hindrances. Breathing can also be directed to flow through the body's nervous system to flush out the currents of the hindrances in the same way that a great and steady river will capture the erratic flow of a stream.

To fortify the breath-energy, keep returning to the breathing, crucially to the rest-potential in the pause phase of the breathing. This is the point where energy turns from activation into rest-potential, and it's where the *kāyaśāṅkhāra* can release – along with compulsive psychological reflexes. In anatomical terms, this opening effect is most clearly discernible in the palms and soles or any open point in the body, such as the heart, temples,

or forehead. So, lingering in that open point through the slowing-down pause phase, widen your field of attention and calm your attitudes to go against the constricting effect of the hindrances. Avoid mentally engaging with your agitation or despond, and instead, as the breathing picks up again, spread this quiet energy over and through the form of the hindrance. The exhalations will tend to discharge the distorted energy of the hindrance, and the inhalations will refresh and rebuild one's state of mind.

To give an example: say I am experiencing agitation over something or the other. I could mentally review the topic, consider that I am not in control of other people or the turn of events, step back and look after my own peace of mind. Furthermore, especially as there are plenty of sources of restlessness and worry, I could acknowledge that my heart has to skilfully respond to this rather than follow it. I may direct some goodwill in all directions, or focus on a topic that gladdens and comforts. At some stage, I might also address the embodied underpinnings of this phenomenon; that is, not try to get rid of it or change my reactions, but handle them with a compassionate regard for how my system has been conditioned: it gets nervous, it feels insecure, it wants stability. So I meet such phenomena in the body.

This is like encountering an animal in the woods. I have to go quietly and with focus. How does this feel in my body? Is it buzzy, spinning, prickling, tightening? Can I step back from that, not get involved with it, and find a more grounded and open area of my body and feel the breathing there? With some careful attention, I can. So I encourage the mind to disengage; and as it shifts to a more spacious mode, I widen attention to include a steadily increasing area of my body, and even include the space around it. I can then wrap that wider, softer awareness around the form of the hindrance and capture its energy. My breathing may lengthen, or even become slightly erratic as it encompasses and transmutes the energy of the hindrance, but in time it settles. As it does, I feel brighter, stronger, and my 'inner space' feels wide and clear.

So in meeting and resolving a hindrance, I not only clear an obstruction, but also experience significant gains. Although life will continue to be problematic, if there is a clear and strong embodied presence, problems won't get under my skin and offer afflictions room to breed. With this increased confidence and clarity, I can then review the trigger of my agitation or ill-will (etc.), and by seeing it with dispassion, erase the sense of 'me' being attacked, belittled, or insecure, that was at the heart of my reactivity.

In outline, this is how calm supports insight, and how the body can serve as a resource for the mind. Because when we meet, steady and calm bodily energy, we can meet, steady and resolve heart-energy. The heart learns to be sensitive, firm, but non-reactive. This is a huge development.

Here's a checklist on this aspect of the meditative process:

1. Acknowledge any sense of imbalance: its pattern may be compulsive, fruitlessly repetitive, and constrictive. Notice the thoughts and emotions that accompany that, and see if you can drop them.
2. If they can't be dispelled or put aside, investigate how and where they affect your body.
3. Find an area or aspect of your embodied state that isn't being negatively affected. Linger there. Can you sense any effect associated with breathing?
4. When your heart has absorbed the steadying effect of this, extend this replenished awareness to cover the afflicted area, maintaining a sense of inquiry.

9

Insight: Embodied Freedom



ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE IN WITNESSING
CHANGEABILITY'; ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE OUT
WITNESSING CHANGEABILITY.'

ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE IN WITNESSING
DISPASSION'; ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE OUT
WITNESSING DISPASSION.'

ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE IN WITNESSING
CESSATION'; ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE OUT
WITNESSING CESSATION.'

ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE IN WITNESSING
RELINQUISHMENT'; ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE OUT
WITNESSING RELINQUISHMENT.'

CALM AND INSIGHT

So far in this presentation, the teaching has been aimed at steadying and soothing the body, and bringing around a harmonious relationship between this living creature and the (socially and personally) conditioned mind. All this supports *samatha*, the practice of steadying and soothing the *citta*.

The other aspect of meditation – ‘insight’ or ‘*vipassanā*’ – focuses on witnessing phenomena. It is the inquiring view that arises from questions like: ‘What is this experience established on?’ and ‘From what basis does this attitude arise?’ and ‘Contact with what gives rise to this response?’ Insight is the clear seeing that can arise when the mind is calm; it is made possible by *samatha*.

Speaking directly, *samatha* (which is an extension of the principles of restraint and goodwill) allows you to maintain a steady focus on your chosen meditation theme. Then, when you don’t have to keep extracting your attention from obsessive thoughts or soothing frayed emotions, you can look into the nature of experience at some depth. With reference to the hindrances, this means that one’s attention won’t be chasing images of sensuality, revisiting grudges and phobias, sinking into a dull and stagnant state, restlessly fidgeting or feeling hopeless and inadequate. The triggers for the hindrances may still arise, but when the mind has the strong

anchor of *samatha* to stop it from tipping over, these pushes and spins can be reviewed insightfully. Then you can look into what conditions, thoughts, attitudes or assumptions support hindrances, and what causes them to disband; or you can do the same with the factors of awakening. When your mind and heart are steadied by the skills of Dhamma practice, you have the capacity to notice that the hindrances are aroused and supported by a habitual interpretation of sights, sounds and the rest – including ideas and mental creations. We can get dazzled or enraged by opinions, thrown off-kilter by a memory, and be habitually searching for security in plans and dogmas.

NAME, FORM AND THE END OF OLD STORIES

This interpretative process is summed up as *nāma*, ‘**name**’, and it is linked to *rūpa* or ‘**form**’ in a functioning **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*). In detail, this ‘name’ consists of five factors: **intention/impulse** (*cetanā*), **attention** (*manasikāra*), **contact** (*phassa*), **perception** (*saññā*) and **feeling** (*vedanā*). This means that the eye sees (i.e. there is visual consciousness), attention registers a form, and as the mind perceives that form, the impression that has arisen makes contact with the heart. There the impression is felt as a thing ‘out there’, be it a person or an animal, or whatever – and based on the impression, the sign (*nimitta*) of ill-will, anxiety, gratitude

or affection arises in the *citta*. This sign triggers an intention to meet, avoid or otherwise respond to that thing. That process is *nāma*.

The problem is firstly that perceptions are subject to bias; and secondly, that one's mind becomes a very full library of interpretations and signs – so full that we don't see things afresh, as they really are. Living in a library gets stuffy, even if the books are good. And most people's libraries have pulp fiction in them. But based on a biased perception and a reactive impulse, there is projection, confusion and suffering. Full liberation is therefore equated with breaking the compulsive link between name and form. That may sound painful, but what it means is that experience is not just a recycling narrative with its episodes of horror and anguish.

How this break-up comes around is through insight. Insight focuses on certain key characteristics of all conditioned experience: that it is subject to change, that it is unsatisfactory and that it does not occur to, or create, a person. When meditation provides an increasing ability to disengage from *nāma*, one can witness perceptions and signs, associated mental feeling, and the compulsive inner narrative that arises from them in the light of these characteristics. This reduces the passion that acts as the habitual link between a thing, event, inner

or outer experience and our interpretation of it. With increasing dispassion, that link can cease. Furthermore, signs can be abandoned.

This is quite a process, involving as it does the entirety of one's experience. But if you can work it out where it arises, then you sever the root. Here we're taking the experience of a breathing body as that basis. As I've explained earlier, this is where the reactive flushes and contractions rise up and bind – and here is where they come undone.

CHANGEABILITY BRINGS LETTING GO

This is great, because the aspect of conditioned experience that is easiest to observe is that of form as it arises in bodily terms. So, as we're directly experiencing the body, we're witnessing it in line with changeability (*anicca*). For example, one could experience body as a matrix of sensations and elemental properties (solidity, caloricity, motility and cohesiveness) – and witness any and all of this as a changeable experience. Even the visual impression we have of a body changes dependent on what angle we see it from and in terms of what criteria; and its appearance changes with time anyway. The tactile form of the body is also variable in terms of hardness or softness, moistness or dryness, smoothness or roughness (compare the inside of your wrist with the sole of your foot). So

we can experience a body in many ways, and they're all bound to change. But the most changeable aspect of the body by far is its energy. This is a continuum of pulses and flows, with the occasional jolt, shift or surge. So when one trains the mind, one trains it to witness this most quintessential aspect of body: the very movement of the life force as it is regulated and calmed through *ānāpānasati*.

When this aspect of bodily experience is steadied and soothed, then the passion and prickliness of bodily instinct doesn't trigger sense-desire and ill-will. Stagnant or unsettled energy can be noted, managed and ameliorated rather than produce lethargy or restlessness. Then the body and heart feel comfortable. Consequently, the groundlessness of the thinking mind doesn't destroy confidence: the insightful practitioner knows that thinking is not going to provide certainty, so they don't depend on it. When one addresses the energies of body, heart and mind, one feels steady and assured – even in the face of uncertainty and discomfort.

Training in this way reduces reactivity and clears habitual assumptions; you get to experience things as they really are. Even with regard to your body, this is liberating, because however you experience your body, and whatever perceptions, anxieties or concerns you have about its form, with insight you realize that 'the body' is really a flow of changeable bodily factors arising in

awareness. Whether the flow is of sensation, perception, or energy, it's not a solid thing; and, as you are aware of it, it can't be a true subject – 'me', 'myself'. All of which is going to make a non-issue out of your hair, or your figure – at least from your own point of view. This is a good direction; it sets your focus with regard to the body to something more valuable: your calm, clear embodied awareness. The heart gets off the hooks associated with bodily appearance.

Furthermore, as the instruction on dispassion highlights, when the perception of changeability is firmly established, you'll become more serene with regard to discomfort, sickness, and high and low energies. Dispassion is not about becoming cold or averse, but is a freedom from being fascinated or rocked by the ups and downs in bodily experience – because you know how to open the body and mind to allow things to pass. And this is wise: getting upset or excited about bodily experience only stirs up energies and challenges mental stability; these emotions take you to a negative state. So, as your mindfulness handles bodily impressions in the light of changeability, *nāma* signs, such as 'old', or 'attractive', or 'vibrant', or 'feeble' don't penetrate the heart and become an identity. Aspects of your familiar way of describing your body – your perceptions, and assessments – stop. There's nothing much to say about the body, because there's no 'it' anymore: what you experience is materiality going through change.

The effect of this growing dispassion is cessation. That is, interpretive programs that might include anxiety or vanity regarding one's body, or comparing it with other people's, or fantasizing over the body of someone else, are seen through. Therefore, the *citta* doesn't get entangled with them and give them energy. So they cease. And if such programs cease, the mind doesn't grasp at bodily conditions. The sense of being, owning, or otherwise firming up a mental impression of the body, ceases – along with the sense: 'this is me, this is mine, this is my self'. And when that bias ceases, that's a weight off the mind.

Even holding onto a positive impression of the body hinders liberation, because it rests on a shaky basis: 'my body' depends on a fixed mode of attention on characteristics of shape and size with their accompanying signs. And these characteristics will change. So, if this sign, the sign of change, is focused on, a release from the signs associated with visual contact can be experienced. Furthermore, the perception of being someone encased in a material form can fall away. Embodied awareness is free to know and be itself.

All this amounts to a relinquishment. If you've done this much, you've already dropped a lot of potential stress; but when your practice can penetrate mental behaviour and the mind itself, then it is complete. This then is what the ensuing instructions lead on through.

10

Rapture and Ease



ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE IN FULLY AND
COMPLETELY SENSITIVE TO RAPTURE';
ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE OUT FULLY AND
COMPLETELY SENSITIVE TO RAPTURE.'

ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE IN FULLY AND
COMPLETELY SENSITIVE TO EASE'; ONE TRAINS:
'BREATHE OUT FULLY AND COMPLETELY
SENSITIVE TO EASE.'

INSTRUCTIONS

1 LET THE REFRESHMENT OF THE UNCONSTRICTED BODY BE FELT IN THE MIND. TUNE INTO THAT UPLIFTING ENERGY AS IT SOOTHES AGITATION, BRIGHTENS DULLNESS AND UNRAVELS SPECULATIVE THOUGHT.

2 EMOTIONALLY WITHDRAW A LITTLE TO COOL ANY MENTAL EXCITEMENT THAT ARISES. CHECK THE PAUSES. AIM FOR CONTENTMENT RATHER THAN HIGH SPOTS.

CONCENTRATION IS BASED ON PLEASURE

Does this heading come as a surprise? Well, read on The practice of clearing the mind through mindfulness of breathing is obviously an embodied one. It's an approach that accesses the life-energy in breathing and uses it to clean, strengthen and reset what we experience as mind. In the course of so doing, the roles of the twofold mental intelligence of the *citta* or 'heart' (awareness that is subjective and sensitive) and *manas* (intelligence that locates and measures an object) are revealed, and brought into a fruitful relationship with each other and with the body. To develop this in terms of harmony and steadiness leads to refined happiness, and the abiding in this is called '*samādhi*'.

Samādhi is generally translated as 'concentration' but to qualify that, I will refer to other words that appear as a definition of *samādhi* in the suttas - 'unification' (*ekaggatā*) and 'singleness' (*ekodibhāva*). These terms signify that things are coming together: mindfulness established in the body brings mental and bodily factors into a pleasingly harmonious union. So, rather than being a reference to the *process* of concentrating - a process that is accomplished through right mindfulness - *samādhi* refers to settling into the results of that mindfulness. You linger and settle in rather than hold tight.

The significance of an approach based on pleasure and harmony is that it brings heart-based sensitivity to the fore. This rules out the notion that *manas* – the intelligence with which we normally concentrate on a task – can be in sole command. Although that objective clarity has a part to play, the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* emphasizes feeling, sensitizing, calming and happiness – functions of heart. Through the careful engagement of *vitakka-vicāra* with the felt quality of breathing, *samādhi* arrives. The training is about being receptive, and adjusting your thinking mind to serve that process.

The immediate antecedent to this unification is the paired experience of *pīti* (rapture, refreshment) and *sukha* (ease, pleasure). This pair are qualified as being born of *viveka* (disengagement). Through disengagement from unwholesome qualities (hindrances), and from the conditions they are based on – the mind settles into the relaxed breath-energy. As this settling deepens, a pleasure that is both bright and easeful arises. When this becomes evident, the *citta* resonates with perceptual signs, such as warmth, spaciousness or light.

Naturally, in order to supervise this process, one has to be single-minded. This single-mindedness is of intent, but also of contact: the *citta* has one impression that it unifies around. As this becomes the case, awareness collects where the breath-energy's steady, radiant effect can be dwelt upon – rather like reading a pulse.

This settling has a consolidating effect, and in tandem with that, there is enjoyment. This encourages the meditator to soak up the deepening quality of the meditative experience – which is an amalgam of subtle body energy, mental focus and heartfelt uplift and ease. Such a ‘soaking up’, a working of skilful qualities into the embodied mind, is called ‘*jhāna*’ – a term that I’ll discuss later.

PRACTICAL DETAILS

CLEARING THE WORLD FROM THE HEART

The instructions indicate no break between calming the *kāyasaṅkhāra* and being sensitive to rapture; in practice, the first tetrad flows into the second. There is, however, a significant clearance and adjustment that needs to happen in following that flow. Essentially this amounts to clearing the five hindrances and the world-view that they support. This clearance is made possible by the steady embodied energy that has arisen in the first tetrad, as well as a shift away from the strategies and attitudes of the world in general.

This is because the dominant socio-cultural model that we live within supports hindrances. Sense-desire is encouraged by the repeatedly emphasized message that life is enriched by consuming more, even beyond one’s reasonable needs. Politics, especially

nationalist, legitimizes ill-will, fear and mistrust of others to the point of armed conflict. A kind of lethargy settles over us as we experience the disempowerment that comes as authority is given to a financial and political elite and their systems. On account of these, we're unsettled, not at home, restless and worried. Hence anxiety is prevalent, as is its partner, depression. These rob us of any confidence; life seems meaningless. This is the grim culmination of the hindrance that goes under the innocuous name of 'doubt'. 'Why am I here? What's the point? Where is there something I can trust?'

Assumptions about my rights or needs or how other people should be can disguise ill-will; a philosophical shrug at challenging situations may cloak underlying dullness and lethargy. Therefore, it's wise to refer a mind-state to what is happening in the body: then you can directly sense righteousness, self-criticism, and even perfectionism as forms of ill-will. A lethargic state may be revealed under the guise of 'non-attachment'; on the other hand, a compulsion to 'get things done' may in fact be restlessness.

Even if we have pushed these influences to one side so that they are not rampant, the mindset that they encourage (and which pushing aside also fosters) is one of being an isolated individual who has to be in control so that she/he will get away from annoying things, get the goods, have guaranteed security and so on. We assume that this

tense and constricted scenario is normal. It can become so. We lose faith in the mind as a naturally receptive intelligence, and treat it as something that has to be driven. Then, although the busy lifestyle that all this entails makes us energized rather than lethargic, the energy is overactive and centres in the head and in ideas and notions. So the heart gets put aside and we become insensitive – and, lacking joy, we get beset with restless anxiety and doubt. The point is that the ‘do it, make it happen, put more effort in to get the good stuff’ attitudes lack the skill and sensitivity to sustain mindfulness in a comfortable way. An approach that leaves out the heart can’t relieve the body of tension, and this makes the breathing uncomfortable and difficult to follow. Therefore we need to energize and maintain receptivity; ease and composure depend on a heart-based focus.

Hindrances may also be dormant. For example, I may feel peaceful if things are going my way, but when that changes ... I realize that ‘my way’ has a certain push to it. If that self-view becomes wilful, not only does it impair relationships with others, it also constricts the heart (and its energy) and supports hindrances: I get stuck, forceful – and take that personally. Taking anxiety or sexuality personally through following the thoughts and emotions that they bring up will just embed these energies more deeply. This is where an insightful understanding offers a clear perspective: put aside the personal

assumptions, drives and time frame, and form a careful and healthy relationship with the embodied condition. Then calming and steadying can take place so that a rich and embodied sensitivity gains authority over the hindered state. It is this, rather than the personal will, that can effectively handle heart-energies and psychological formations.

ATTUNE TO THE OPEN ENERGY

Embodied practice thus transforms our approach and mindset. It bypasses self-view to directly unbind hindering reflexes and enrich the heart. And, by presenting happiness as a result, it offers an agreeable alternative to ingrained personal psychologies. As the mindful heart attends to embodied sensitivity, ‘getting my way’ feels hard and insensitive, and ‘getting ahead’ feels pressurized. These worldly approaches feel like unnecessary stress, and don’t resolve passion, fear and doubt. Instead, we breathe through our world with its energies and psychologies – and an increasingly steady receptivity arises. This change of heart changes the ‘shape’, or sign, of the *citta*: from narrow and hard, it becomes wide and malleable. If we pick up and linger on that sign, there is a release from constriction, and rapture and ease come into being.

These effects may first be sensed as a kind of relief, then as a refreshing peacefulness. If you linger in that, the pressure of self-

view abates, and hindrances don't take over. The effect is both uplifting and energizing (*pīti*) and easeful (*sukha*) – and as awareness expands in that state, hindrances dissolve.

A meditator who has accessed this experience a few times, however, will sense that the rapturous aspect itself is a little too busy. It stimulates, and that adds ripples to a depth and serenity that it would be good to settle into more fully. So there is an inclination towards ease.

Attending to the open energy of the pause is valuable here. Bearing that in mind, review the wave-like nature of *pīti*, and the steadier quality of *sukha*. Ease feels more comfortable. In cases of imbalance, the move into that open energy at the end of the inhalation feels different from the movement into the end of the exhalation. One may feel more hasty or blurred. If so, spread open awareness to include the pauses and the movement as aspects of one continuum. This will encourage greater balance and ease.

The non-sensual basis of this kind of pleasure, as well as the inclination to the cool pleasure of ease, transform your world. The heart refines and opens. Then it can be investigated: rapture feels less steady and comfortable; ease encourages greater sensitivity. In the steady focus born of disengaging from sensuality, and of subsequently eliminating the tense or contracted features of the inner body,

pleasure can be steady and sustained. And so the inclination of the *citta* turns – in a way that has life-changing ramifications.

11
Saiṅkhāra



THERE ARE THESE THREE FORMATIONS ... THE
BODILY FORMATION, THE VERBAL FORMATION,
AND THE MENTAL FORMATION.

IN-BREATHING AND OUT-BREATHING ... ARE
THE BODILY FORMATION; APPLIED THOUGHT/
PLACING AND SUSTAINED THOUGHT/SENSING
ARE THE VERBAL FORMATION; PERCEPTION
AND FEELING ARE THE MENTAL FORMATION.

(M.44:13-14)

FORMATIVE ENERGIES AND THE CONTRACTED STATE

As an overview of the process that I've detailed in the last few chapters, I'd like to explore what is referred to as 'formation', '*saṅkhāra*' (plural: *saṅkhārā*). 'Formation' is a common though not very accessible translation – but the number of ways of translating '*saṅkhāra*' indicates the difficulty of finding a single word or compound to cover all its meaning and applications. *Saṅkhāra* is also rendered as 'volitional formation', 'kamma-formation', 'fabrication', 'condition', 'determination', 'preparation', 'activity', 'conditioning force' and 'synergy'. Without wishing to further complicate the matter, I'd suggest 'formative energy' or 'program' can also help to make its meaning clear. In terms of experience, *saṅkhārā* are the reflexes and responses – for example, of forcefulness, agitation, or enthusiasm – that steer us.

Moreover, these formative energies *shape* us. You can witness these in terms of body language – when people get angry or fearful, visible and palpable changes occur. Depending on how it's triggered, *kāyasāṅkhāra* can activate bodily reflexes of tension or relaxation, defence or welcome and so on. And in tandem with that, *cittasāṅkhāra*, the mental (or heart) formation, sends emotions and impulses rippling through the body. So the heart gets shaped as light or compressed, expansive or tight. Finally, based upon these energies

and shapes, the mind gets activated and fabricates trains of thought: the formation/program called '*vacīsaṅkhāra*'. That *manas* program produces thought-streams that may be clear and direct or muddy and meandering – and shape a course of action. *Saṅkhārā*: once you unwrap the word, you see how crucial and intimate they are.

To summarize: these three *saṅkhārā* are energetic programs that underpin and connect body, heart and thinking. They get things going, and the way *saṅkhārā* move in the bodily and mental domains lays down results and establishes patterns for further action – for one's welfare or harm. *Saṅkhārā* are the basis of cause and effect. This is why understanding them is so central.

To grasp the full significance of *saṅkhārā*, it should be borne in mind that these formative energies co-activate bodily and mental experiences. A bodily *saṅkhāra* will form a corresponding emotional form and vice versa. To take a simple example: discordant *saṅkhārā* are experienced as bodily tension, or somatic blocks, that link to emotional reactivity, psychological imbalance and compulsive, afflictive thinking. In this state, they establish what in classical parlance is referred to as 'clinging to the aggregates (*khandhā*)' and which I'll call 'the contracted state'. This is the norm wherein the *citta* is experienced as an isolated self, stuck inside a body, separated from and yet surrounded by a world. In this condition, the thinking

process tries to establish the future, work on an identity, and speculates and obsesses over the details of that virtual reality. All that can be summarized as *saṅkhāra* affected by ignorance.

This scenario becomes apparent in meditation, when there is no apparent reason to feel tense or depressed, or to plan the future. What is occurring is that a mental formation (*cittasaṅkhāra*) is producing these moods, impulses and attitudes. These may be familiar and they are all convincing – intense dramas of the wrongs others have done to you (or of the wrongs you have done to others) will arise; either that or colourful fantasies of what you could be doing now rather than just sitting here. Consequently, there’s a lot of thinking (i.e. the verbal formation picks up the emotional theme). What the average person doesn’t really give attention to is the effect on their bodies and how this amalgam of heart, thought and body shapes the contracted world-view. And yet, acting on this, one generates consequent scenarios: *‘... some person generates hurtful bodily saṅkhārā, hurtful verbal saṅkhārā, and hurtful mental saṅkhārā. In consequence, they arise in a hurtful context. When they arise in a hurtful context, they receive hurtful contact. Being touched by hurtful contact, they feel feelings that are hurtful and miserable.’* (A.3:23)

The kind of scenario that this outlines is one wherein one’s own contracted state gives rise to a sense of isolation, and configures an

alienated world through focusing on details that will confirm that view. Then, from that basis, there arise emotional proliferations about one's inadequacies or that of others, along with the need to go somewhere else or be someone else. These patterns can become established with traumatic intensity. Moreover, personal strategies and attitudes, far from being able to unravel these *saṅkhārā*, often get generated as a response to deflect attention from their underlying presence. We fidget, distract, nibble, switch on a device – and so on. This gets compulsive. Someone who seeks their own welfare therefore has to proceed in the face of distorted *saṅkhārā*, guided by the direct experience that 'this is stressful, constricted, is good for neither myself nor others – and it can be changed.'

HANDLING REFLEXES

Yes, *saṅkhārā* can be managed to bring around harmony and release. This is the thrust of the sequence of meditation teachings we're exploring, whereby bodily, mental and verbal *saṅkhārā* are cleared of obstructions. The result is bodily refreshment, ease, and quiet lucidity. Even more profound, the insightful understanding of them opens the *citta* to the realization of the *asaṅkhata*, the unconditioned release of the heart.

For an undeveloped mind, the roots of *saṅkhārā* are involuntary and inaccessible; one finds oneself caught in, or overwhelmed by, a sudden surge or constriction in the body and heart. So it takes a practice such as *ānāpānasati* – which covers the energies of body, heart and thinking – to penetrate that involuntary reflex; then to steady, soothe and release it. Just sensing the true ground of the body, in an unobstructive space with breathing rhythmically flowing through it, offers a cleansing. As the results of this clearance are a bright and easeful heart, this alone makes *ānāpānasati* a powerful resource for liberation.

Understanding that *saṅkhārā* are conditioned energies rather than aspects of a true self is another important theme. In fact, although they build me (or my psychological shape anyway) and my world, these formative energies don't even depend on what I've done. *Saṅkhārā* are also acquired through the actions or influence of others (as mentioned in **7 Training the Mind with the Body**). In other words, your mindset is not fundamentally your own; it has been conditioned by the parental and social contexts within which you grew up, with their perspectives, imperatives and aims. Your bodily energies and impulses – open, relaxed, defensive, jittery – are similarly conditioned. You've been programmed by the modes and language of your nation

and family. And that involves taboos, prejudices, and the aims of the mainstream – including striving for goals that you can’t achieve and an identity you can’t have. At best, the conditioning forces of the social world bind you into being a person subject to loss and gain, competition and comparison, the need to get on, and anxiety about failure and social rejection.

The impulsive and creative aspects of these formations, their potency and ability to steer behaviour for good or bad, are taken to be an agent known as ‘I’. Thus, these *saṅkhārā* form a kammic footprint or blueprint: ‘myself’. They shape a self-impression and establish a behavioural basis day after day: we keep becoming, embellishing and confirming *saṅkhāra* patterns laid down in the past. Yet, as one begins to recognize, although it seems like *I’m* doing the worrying, doubting or craving, ‘I’ can’t seem to stop it (granted, one might be able to suppress the *saṅkhāra* for a while). So what kind of an agent am ‘I’ – when I can’t establish decisive agency over my mind?

Now we might start to call ourselves names such as ‘worrier’, ‘compulsive’ – or avoid the issue altogether. But none of these check the stress that our minds inflict on ourselves and others; nor do they allow our considerable potential as wise and great-hearted beings to actualize. The Dhamma-strategy then is to meet these *saṅkhārā*, and

steady and cool them – and through that gain access to the *asañkhata*, the unconditioned ‘unbinding’: *nibbāna*.

RELEASING BLOCKAGE

In order to release the knot whereby *sañkhārā* form the contracted state, you use skilful *sañkhārā*. These helpful formations include the kind of thinking and the heart-energies and attitudes that flow along with healthy breath-energy. In a nutshell: be guided by your breathing rather than your self.

As a practical tip, this means that you don’t aim for the centre of the problem, and you don’t try to fix it; instead, you turn your attention to the overall embodied presence and let that steady your awareness. From that basis you access a source of steady and soothing energy – in this case, that of in- and out-breathing. (Otherwise, the presence of a kind and steady person is an invaluable resource.) Then the practice is to keep connecting the difficult area to the healthy mix of verbal, heart and embodied energies you have established as a foundation. This can then flow into and work on the difficult pieces – in its own time and way. Herein the golden rule is that you don’t go into a bodily or psychological area that feels highly

activated, troubled or potent without that steady presence. The motto is: ‘good energy knows what it’s doing, so stay with it.’

As this work, and the releasing effect that it has, may seem disorienting, how can you be confident that this is the correct approach? The two standards to keep checking in with are a) ‘Is my whole body here – can I feel my feet, and my back? If I can’t, am I spinning out or tightening up? Better stand up, flex a little, or walk.’ This approach can help to facilitate a proper boundary within which energy can settle. In tandem with that, point b) is ‘Can I establish and maintain a quality of goodwill towards this experience?’ This isn’t as straightforward as it may seem, because it requires wise goodwill, not a sentimental coating. Goodwill as a Dhamma practice is informed by the understanding that ‘This energy or condition needs some supportive attention. I will place my awareness next to it and listen. May this quality of patient and sympathetic attention help it to find its resolution.’

This may seem to be over-cautious, but *saṅkhārā* are both the patterns laid down by reactions such as fear or repression or other forms of stress, as well as the ways whereby we manage these reactions. In brief, our emotional outbursts, our skilful and unskilful responses – kamma – are *saṅkhārā*. But rather than suppress or complicate

them, the wise approach is to use embodiment and a steady heart to release and resolve these ‘kamma-formations’.

SKILFUL THOUGHTFULNESS

The energy and effective use of *vacīsaṅkhāra* is encouraged. As the thinking mind is the most common form of mind that feels contracted and stressful, meditators will often attempt to silence this thinking process. It’s true that a lessening in conceptual activity and intensity is encouraged: the Buddha comments that even skilful thinking *‘might tire the body, and when the body is tired, the mind becomes strained, and when the mind is strained, it is far from concentration.’* (M.19:8) However, what we often fail to make use of is simple and skilful thoughtfulness, the *manas* activity of careful, deep attention. In practice, this means to use a word or a reminder to keep lifting attention and placing it on the simple grounding presence of the whole body until the flow of breathing can be sensed.

When there is enough stability, the thinking mind can also be employed to investigate and explore the qualities (*dhammā*) of the contracted state – and their release. For this, rather than suppress thinking altogether, we contemplate the tone of the emotion that supports the thought as it arises and takes hold. This is the

sign of the mental formation – there’s a pressure, a blurring or a contraction of some sort. One should know it as such (rather than as an objectively true state of affairs) and, again, pause, widen attention to include the entire body, and hold that sign within the calming and receptive flow of the breathing. As the hindrances abate, you’ll get some understanding of how your heart gets caught, how it forms you and your history, and how you can step out of that. As you feel the sign shift, maintain attention and stay open – and gradually energies and feelings of refreshment and ease will arise. Let them determine how you experience your body and moderate your mind.

Working in this area, understanding dawns – that any mental form, mind-state or attitude is conditioned and not-self; and that the true basis is not any of these, but signlessness. When the open, unconditioned balance of mind is directly known, any contracted state is also recognized as needing to be released – rather than allowed to support confused and afflictive mental states. There are further aspects to this *saṅkhāra* process, but we’ll get into that later.

12

Emotional Equilibrium



ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE IN FULLY AND COMPLETELY SENSITIVE TO MENTAL FORMATION'; ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE OUT FULLY AND COMPLETELY SENSITIVE TO MENTAL FORMATION.'

ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE IN CALMING MENTAL FORMATION'; ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE OUT CALMING MENTAL FORMATION.'

INSTRUCTIONS

1 GIVE ATTENTION TO THE SENSITIVITY OF HEART; EXTEND YOUR AWARENESS FROM HOW YOU FEEL TO THE MORE FUNDAMENTAL EXPERIENCE OF BEING SENSITIVE.

2 IN THAT FOCAL RANGE, DEFINE YOUR GENERAL MOOD OR MODE OF FEELING AT THIS TIME IN SIMPLE TERMS - SUCH AS 'SETTLED' OR 'EAGER' OR 'INTENSE' OR 'OPEN'. IF YOU'RE NOT CLEAR ON THAT, ACKNOWLEDGE WHAT YOU'RE NOT FEELING - SUCH AS 'I DON'T FEEL CLEAR' (OR 'HAPPY', ETC.).

3 EVEN IF YOU CAN'T FIND WORDS THAT FIT, EXPLORE THE DOMAIN OF HEART, AND SPREAD AWARENESS OVER IT IN A WAY THAT IS SPACIOUS AND BRINGS CALM.

MENTAL FORMATION SHAPES YOU

These two terse phrases in the sutta sketch out the process of sensitizing and calming the mental formation (*cittasaṅkhāra*). And what is that mental formation? In the suttas, *cittasaṅkhāra* is described in two ways: as perception and feeling, and as the heart's 'volitional formation'. If those experiences are explored, we get the sense that perception (i.e. meaning, impression, my 'take' on what's happening), and the agreeable, disagreeable or neutral feeling that goes along with that, make the heart hard or relaxed, etc. That making is the 'mental formation'. It also steers our responses, aka the 'volitional formation'. Put more simply – how experience is received and responded to condition the state of mind. And that affects how we act. Affect and response: these are the two aspects of *cittasaṅkhāra*. They determine how I act.

You may also notice, when you get psychologically affected or emotionally moved, that the heart takes on a corresponding 'shape' – such as open-heartedness, or narrow-mindedness. This 'being shaped' – and the most habitual heart-shapes – become a fundamental aspect of who I seem to be. But how true is that?

Bear in mind that the programs that *cittasaṅkhāra* establishes are the moods, tendencies and attitudes that you seem to be – so you can't

explore them by means of who you normally seem to be (aka ‘the person’). However, with training, awareness can access a level of mind that is not ‘who I normally seem to be’ and work on those formations. This is because ‘I am’ is a construction, not a final reality, and the aware *citta* can step out of that.

STEPPING OUT OF SELF-VIEW

We are from time to time not always who we seem to be – and that allows us to grow out of old habits and find new directions. Sometimes the shift out of the old norm can be dramatic and wonderful – as with mystical experiences, or a psychological breakthrough. It can also take unskilful forms – as when the mind is entranced, intoxicated, or has any one of the minor and major lapses that give rise to expressions such as: ‘I wasn’t feeling like myself; what came over me?’ Or, ‘He wasn’t responsible for his actions.’ In Buddhist parlance, what this means is that unawakened and unskilful *saṅkhārā* arose and the ‘I am’ construction (*ahaṃkāra*) made a self out of them.

In mind-training in general, this variable formation of *citta* – with its potential to get triggered, rise up, feel crushed or fall apart – is what we’re dealing with. In meditation, it becomes possible to sense this conditioning force and calm the impulses that issue from it. You can

mature out of needing to be some fixed identity; you can be free of that reflex to seize on any formation or attitude as ‘this is what I am’. For this, you operate in the atmosphere of skilful mental pleasure, because the pleasant feeling born of disengagement causes the mind to shift its attention away from the erratic swings of emotions and feeling based on sight, sound, touch, thought and the rest. Steadied by disengagement, the *citta* has an open energy that settles and loosens the contracted state and consolidates into a sense of steady presence. With that, many actions and reactions come to rest, and the basis of *cittasaṅkhāra*, the sensitivity of the heart, is revealed. Then you can calm and appreciate it. Worth looking into, don’t you think?

PRACTICAL DETAILS

HELPFUL SIGNS

To recap, the line of practice is first to disengage from the whirl of distractive thoughts and negative emotions: this supports an open awareness. The subsequent skill is to linger in that state and take in how your body and breathing feel; and by so doing, deepen that pleasure into a firm foundation. As I’ve described earlier, the process of doing this will proceed by clearing hindrances and moderating unbalanced energy. To the extent to which this is fulfilled, the bodily and mental energies settle and there is rapture

– a skilful *saṅkhāra* – and ease – a feeling not based on sense-contact, but rather on the release from that. In this mode, one is liable to experience non-sensory impressions or ‘signs’ (*nimittā*), such as brightness or spaciousness.

Nimitta (plural: *nimittā*), what it means and what it signifies, can be a charged topic. The Theravada commentarial tradition, whose understanding is consolidated in the 5th century meditation manual, *Visuddhimagga*, refers to cultivating *nimittā* of progressive degrees of subtlety. This leads to the appearance of a quasi-visual bead of light in the mind. In the meditation approach mentioned in that text, this is a crucial step in developing *samādhi*. However, there is no apparent reference to this in the suttas. These discourses do refer to *nimittā*, and hold them to be important, but in this context the term has a broader connotation, as I’ve illustrated in the quotes so far. As we’ve seen, one discourse (M.44:12) has it that the *nimitta* of *samādhi* are the four establishments of mindfulness. Another discourse (M.43:37) mentions greed, hatred and delusion as makers of *nimittā*. There are other instances in which the term appears in the context of meditation practice: one is in the simile of the cook that I alluded to earlier (S.47:8), in which the difference between the wise and the foolish cooks is that the wise one notices the ‘sign’ that his master enjoys certain foods more than others. This is likened to the skilful

meditator who notices the felt impression that arises in the *citta* as it picks up an aspect of the meditation theme that supports its concentration and release – this impression is the *nimitta*.

So I suggest that the meaning of the word ‘*nimitta*’ changed through the 1,000-year gap between the life of the Buddha and the *Visuddhimagga*. Most likely, if you use the mind like an eye, in line with the *Visuddhimagga*’s style of practice, you’ll get a visual sign. But it’s also the case that if you use it like an ear, it will produce an auditory sign – whereas if it operates as if it’s touching, it will produce a sign of soft warmth. And some people’s minds aren’t that expressive. I would say that any characteristic that you notice as your mind steadies and deepens – it may feel more spacious, or buoyant, or bright – can be a useful *nimitta*. One benefit is that you get to know and trust your mind when its heart isn’t bound up in tension, turbulence, numbness or other such unskilful *nimittā*. Then, when these unskilful signs are disbanded, one should notice that and enjoy it. There may, for example, be perceptions of space or coolness or light or comfort. These can be fascinating – but the Buddha doesn’t encourage fascination. Instead, he calls attention to the skilful effect that these perceptions can have: they calm, rather than intensify, the sensitivity of the heart.

However, as the *citta* steps back from sense-contact, there is the risk of getting fascinated by unusual signs – such as dramatic shifts of energy, or lights – to the point of imbalance. Energy, bright or distorted, attracts attention. And it can throw the mind into obsessive or ecstatic states. Thus there is the need to stabilize energy by maintaining awareness of the breathing body – and also by shifting one’s attention back a little as if moving from the detail of a painting to seeing the whole picture. Other than that, an attitude of restraint, and a lingering in the effect of cooling, are appropriate.

Don’t get too excited by a feeling – although when the pleasure born of meditation does arise, it’s naturally enjoyable. The mind needs to learn to enjoy, without grasping or asking for more. And here the Buddha makes it clear: it’s not pleasure that’s the problem; in fact, one kind of pleasure is part of the process. It’s just that any fascination and grasping associated with pleasure hinders liberation. And the really important aspect of skilful pleasant feeling is that it causes negative or habitual *sañkhārā* to decline. If your mind gets shaped into grasping and indulging, and if your heart is taken over by wanting more and holding on, then it’s the wrong formation.

As distractions and hindrances abate, there is an enrichment of *pīti-sukha*. With this, the inhalations and exhalations become subtler and merge into the pause phase. The open energy of the pauses infuses

the *citta*, which becomes richer and fuller. The form that it takes becomes wide and gently radiant, with soft boundaries.

From that basis one can inquire into and read the heart-sensitivity of *cittasankhāra*. Give attention to the shape and ‘body’ of this mental formation: it should be even, grounded and uncompressed. It won’t be elated and excited, or driving anywhere. If it’s in a solidly wholesome state, its energies will be at ease; then sensory pleasure and ideas have no attraction. And although this experience is intimate, it’s not personal. So rapture and ease offer a transformation of basis – one not based on one’s habitual social personality. This allows the behaviour of *citta* to be experienced with dispassion rather than fascination. It also allows the *citta* to unwrap and be sensed as clear presence – as the ensuing instructions describe.

13

The Web, the Weave and the Way



BHIKKHUS, I DO NOT SEE EVEN ONE OTHER
THING THAT, WHEN TAMED, GUARDED,
PROTECTED, AND RESTRAINED, LEADS TO
SUCH GREAT GOOD AS THE CITTA. THE CITTA,
WHEN TAMED, GUARDED, PROTECTED, AND
RESTRAINED, LEADS TO GREAT GOOD.

(A.1:40)

AT THE HEART OF A CHANGING WEB

The Buddha realized that experience, whether it's sensorial, psychological or meditative, is an ever-shifting and interactive play of conditioned forces and forms. The clarity of his awareness enabled him to see through this play and thereby quell the energies that give rise to the experience of being someone embedded in a highly insecure world. This scenario brings with it the pressure to arrange sights, sounds, events and other people according to the wishes of that self. I want things to be my way. Not only is this state of affairs unlikely to happen (therefore bringing dissatisfaction), but also the attempt to control life is stressful and can give rise to selfish, even brutal, actions. Suffering and stress (*dukkha*) follow the fixed self.

So penetrating this web and deconstructing the self that is stuck in it is what awakening is about. As the terminology that the Buddha used is tailored to reveal and undo the weave of that web, I thought to dedicate some space to explaining it. These language tools take time to learn how to apply, but, as they were used by the Buddha, it's worth the effort. Bear with me for a while!

Firstly, manifest experience is conditioned (*sankhata*). That means the existence of things is conditioned by the kind of consciousness in which it arises. An example of this would be that we don't see what

butterflies do, as we have no infrared vision, so our perception of flowers is different from theirs. Our sense of smell is meagre compared with that of a dog, so a dog's experience of Toronto or Glasgow will be compounded out of odours that have little effect on us rather than from displays in shop windows or grand porticos. The kind of consciousness we have therefore shapes our experience; significantly, it adds qualifiers of how pleasurable or important an object is.

THE STRANDS OF THE WEB

Fundamental to how experience happens is the weave of **consciousness** (*viññāṇa*) and some object (**form**, *rūpa*) to be conscious of. In this weave, the sensory base of consciousness affects how we experience an object. Seeing an apple is nothing like tasting one. Furthermore, the condition of any individual's sense-consciousness is significantly variable: for example, for someone with a hearing disorder, the note 'B flat' may not be a discernible experience. So, even though we rely upon and base our preferences on them, the sense-organs and their data (collectively called 'the sixfold sense-sphere' – *salāyatana*) are partial and unreliable conveyors of truth. Mind-consciousness alone has many levels – from mystic absorption to drunken stupor – which all present reality in different ways. Notice also that in meditation one can turn away from the sense-spheres to a greater or lesser

degree: therefore seeing, hearing, touching, thinking and so on are not permanent features of reality. So another qualifier is what you attend to and how – **attention** (*manasikāra*) is a significant condition.

Another important factor is felt meaning or **perception** (*saññā*): how things appear depends on a flow of felt meanings such as ‘beautiful’, ‘polite’, ‘important’. What is a laptop computer to a polar bear? Or to an Amazonian forest-dweller? And what are the rich array of plants that she or he knows so well to an urban European? So, perception is also conditioned. And it depends on the condition of repeatedly giving attention to an object until a meaning is learned. This is because perception is an important condition: we operate through knowing what a credit card or a calendar *is* – apart from being a flat, rectangular shape. Even more significant: what is your perception of other people? Or of yourself? What feelings and responses do these perceptions give rise to? Do perceptions get overwhelming? Again, meditative training gives you a handle on this – you *can* put aside to some degree or another perceptions of your body, your role, past events and other people. In brief: the *citta* can disengage. How does that feel?

Feeling (*vedanā*), the agreeable or disagreeable tone that accompanies experience, is another conditioning factor. We notice

and are moved by what we feel; and we steer our lives around pleasure and pain. Obviously, pleasure attracts us, but there is also a compulsive labelling of sounds, sights, and events as being ‘unpleasant’ simply because we don’t favour them. When does a sound become a ‘noise’? Or a taste become ‘disgusting’? Or a lecture become ‘boring’? The dominant determinant of how things feel is one’s taste or preference. That preference is conditioned – by custom, mood, and so on. Yet it becomes embedded by being encoded, that is, by impression or **contact** (*phassa*).

Of course, contact is also conditioned by other senses – something strikes the ear or grabs the eye – but it’s the mental impression that jumps into your heart and sticks a felt meaning onto sense-impact. Consequently, you get reactive. This is why meditation teaches you to step back from contact and mental impressions. You both learn to moderate how you make contact (with your breathing, for example); and also to stay steadily focused through the flow of impressions and feelings that arise. Over time, as sense-contact is moderated, you experience heart-qualities such as quiet joy, stillness or spaciousness that give rise to subtle pleasure. This softens the impact that the *citta* experiences: the difference between handling sensual and heart-based feeling is like the difference

between ducking and lunging in a boxing ring, and steering a boat through increasingly calm water. Moreover, as you learn to hold the mind steady in meditation, feeling loses its push and pull.

The push-and-pull aspect of experience is more fully taken up by a factor variously called ‘**intention**’, ‘**impulse**’, ‘**inclination**’, or ‘**volition**’ (*cetanā*). This is the moment-at-a-time driver of the mind, as well as its long-term trajectory – and it conditions what we attend to. Generally intention is set to respond to sense-contact dependent on the pleasure/pain, threat, or urgency that it triggers. So intention gets us to focus on what perceptions and impressions move us most. And these perceptions and feelings trigger further volitional energies. That’s how form comes alive in consciousness: contact, perception and feeling activate intentions. We hear a bleep or see a waving flag, interpret, and react.

You may remember this *nāma-rūpa-viññāṇa* weave from **9 Insight: Embodied Freedom**. There is, however, another twist in the mesh that bears on the text and practice we’re exploring. It’s the sub-vortex in the web – that is, the interplay between attention, contact and intention. This is summarized as ‘**formation**’ (*saṅkhāra*). And in another analysis, the Buddha summed up form, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness as a conglomerate called ‘**aggregates**’ (*khandhā*).

As I said before, the pragmatic significance of all this is the fact that these weaves give rise to the sense of a solid person at the heart of experience, a self bound up in a tangle of unstable conditions. And that through Dhamma practice, the heart-impressions and the self who is created by them can cease – if we work on the *saṅkhāra* threads of attention and intention. Then instead of there being a person stuck in the web of conditions, there's a liberated *citta*.

THE WAY TO A TRUE CENTRE

Let's look into that. For a start, the web is not rock-solid. Even without training, we learn to not react to the sound of traffic or the bleeps that various navigation systems make. But with training in terms of grounding the mind, cultivating careful attention and moderating intention, you can open the weave of the web. That is, when you lessen the intensity of your engagement with the sensory world, especially with the mental sense, you experience what I'll call 'heart-realities' such as ethical orientation, benevolence and calm. Through meditation you learn how to steady and relax the 'inner body' with its energies. All this reduces the intensity of sense-contact and ensuing reactivity. Of course, you may well experience some old embedded

patterns – such as restlessness, anxiety and turbulence – but when you’re coming from the heart, you can disengage and moderate that. Putting aside short-term interest and attending to the long-lasting improvement of the heart and mind, you can derive beneficial psychological (and physiological) results, results that *feel* good.

We therefore realize that *citta* – heart-based awareness – is intrinsic to our being, and it has the capacity to turn. It can disengage from our habitual angles on, and formulations of, experience, and incline to more meaningful ones. But it needs support, and this is what meditation can offer. Furthermore, meditation practice strengthens and refines the *citta* so that we can witness the weave of ‘me’ – that flow of ideas and moods – as a program, not a self.

Of primary importance in this way of release are the factors of intention/inclination and attention/focus. These are your tools, and they have immediate effects in the domains of the body and heart: narrow attention tends to sharpen and contract the body and heart, while a broader focus eases them. Different qualities of intention tighten or open these domains. So intention and attention have to be wisely balanced so that the *citta* can open and bring its skilful aspects to the fore rather than get flooded or distract itself. Then you feel a release from the pressure of the personal world and the web that is its home.

OUTFLOWS AND TENDENCIES

What draws the *citta* into this uncomfortable web? The Buddha pointed to a group of reflexes called ‘**outflows**’, ‘**taints**’, or ‘**corruptions**’ (*āsavā*) as being prime agents. These are experienced as three sets of impulses, or compulsive inclinations: towards sense-contact (*kām’āsava*), towards continuity, being or becoming (*bhav’āsava*), and towards ignorance, confusion or distraction (*avijj’āsava*). These references may seem either remote (‘What are you talking about?’) – or not a problem (‘Of course, I live in a sense-world, of course I am someone moving from past to future, of course I like to have a few hobbies and entertainments: what’s the problem with that?’). Well, that scenario doesn’t prepare you for ageing, sickness and death, or for separation from sights, sounds and contact that you enjoy. And these will happen. Isn’t that a problem? Moreover, the suffering and stress that is bound up with these outflows is avoidable. That was the Buddha’s life-project, and subsequently the thrust of his teaching.

‘When my concentrated citta was thus purified ... I directed it to knowledge of the destruction of the āsavā. I directly knew as it actually is: “This is suffering”; ... “This is the origin of suffering”; ... “This is the cessation of suffering”; ... “This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering”; ... “These

are the āsavā”; ... “This is the origin of the āsavā”; ... “This is the cessation of the āsavā”; ... “This is the way leading to the cessation of the āsavā.”

When I knew and saw thus, my citta was liberated from the āsavā ... When it was liberated there came the knowledge: “It is liberated.” I directly knew: “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.” (M.4; M.19; M.36)

So once you’ve directly known the conditioned nature of what binds the heart, you’re encouraged to distinguish the *citta* in the context of, but distinct from, these factors. This entails investigation of the weave of the aggregates and how they get stuck in the outflows.

What you may realize is that, in a way that can be likened to the flaring up of bouts of a chronic disease, the outflows well up from underlying proclivities called ‘**latent tendencies**’ (*anusaya*) such as (the tendency to) sense-desire, irritability/grudges, views and opinions, speculative doubt, conceiving self and other, craving for continuity and becoming, and ignorance (A.7:11,12). They are not always apparent but support more obvious obstacles: for example, there is the tendency to cling to views – and that supports the hindrance of ill-will. Although we may not be experiencing ill-will when people agree with us and when we have no painful memories,

what happens if these conditions change? As meditators come to know, when on an isolated and supported retreat, the mind can feel contented, blissful and benevolent – and yet the real test comes on returning to the workplace or family situation. Yes, the tendencies may be subdued in the calm of *samādhi*, but they are only eliminated through insight into the web. And through challenging our beliefs and attachments. It takes a firm and rightly-centred *citta* to withstand such influences – along with the wisdom to reveal them as inadequate and impersonal programs. But when the woven web of conditions is recognized as being contracted, changeable, and not intrinsic to the heart, disenchantment (*nibbidā*) occurs. The *citta* stands apart from the web, and opens to freedom.

Admittedly, the above is a brief summary, but even a more detailed explanation doesn't bring liberation. So, keeping this sketch of conditioned reality somewhere in mind, let's continue the practice.

14

Insight: Deconstructing Reactions and Habits



THIS IS PEACEFUL, THIS IS SUBLIME - THAT
IS THE STILLING OF ALL SAÑKHĀRA, THE
RELINQUISHMENT OF ALL ATTACHMENTS
[UPADHI], THE DESTRUCTION OF CRAVING,
DISPASSION, CESSATION, NIBBĀNA.

(M.64:9)

HABITS CREATE THE PERSON

As we maintain watchfulness over the mind, we come to realize how compulsive and habitual our mental behaviour can be. ‘Here I am again getting indignant about other people, getting captured by the sight of food, erupting with turbulent thinking – and disliking myself for it.’ These irrational and compulsive forms of mental behaviour are *cittasaṅkhārā*. Triggered by perceptions and feeling that arise with contact, launching intentions and impulses, and given specific aim by attention, *cittasaṅkhāra* is the conditioning force that forms ‘me in a world’ based on the platform that consciousness provides.

To review some of these factors in detail: **intention**, the energy that accompanies each impulse, goes fast or slow, meanders and vacillates, or shoots like an arrow. We can recognize ‘quick-fire’ or ‘wavering’ or ‘half-hearted’ or ‘headstrong’ as palpable characteristics of inclination/intention. **Attention**, or focus, adds shape to that: we can recognize narrow or broad, sharp or soft focuses. Attention and intention are moderated by **contact**. For example, with contact being how things ‘strike’ you, the impression of a person, based on their gestures, or tone of voice, is learnt, and then stored as the basis for our friendly or defensive inclinations towards them.

Perception – my ‘take’ on a thing, person or event – is the trigger for mental action. It is the labelling that familiarizes and categorizes experience: a four-legged woolly animal is (probably) a ‘sheep’. Therefore, we place that particular creature in a ‘sheep’ category, and expect certain behaviours (and shagginess). This categorization does, however, set up the stress of comparing how a thing or a person (including oneself) is, with the stored perception of how they *should* be.

It’s easier to see things in line with our past knowledge and perceptual prejudices than to see things afresh. The lure of the familiar is that it makes our responses easy, even automatic. And this offers a seemingly secure basis; my sense of self is cradled by familiar perceptions and automatic responses. I can even take a stand on them. Say I am intrigued by the body language and flock instincts of sheep, while others see them as rather stupid creatures: I can form myself as a ‘sheep-expert’ and judge others as ‘sheep-ignorant’. Thus attachment to perceptions and responses generates a basis for ‘I am’; this is another *saṅkhāra* – *ahaṃkāra* – and with that comes the potential for discord.

Nevertheless, the Buddha and the arahants were able to orient to, and handle, perception with skill and without stress, because they had relinquished this ‘I am’ construction. Perception can be known as a

perception and not held onto. This doesn't entail a descent into inaction, impotence or meaninglessness, but quite the contrary. The mind can be clearly and intelligently perceptive, but not running on automatic. This encourages us to consider that of all conditioned forces, it is the 'I am', with its compulsions and fixed positions, that is to be, and can be, turned off. To summarize, a wise penetration of *cittasaṅkhāra* enables release through revealing where and how compulsive habits generate a position, how that becomes a self – and how all this can be uprooted to allow more enlightened responses to arise.

UNDOING THE 'I AM'

The abolition of 'I am' hinges on penetrating *saṅkhārā*. But first one has to settle their more obviously troublesome aspects in order to gain access to their roots. Because if we're always tangling with personal issues, attachments, judgements and phobias, then we don't penetrate to the source of 'I am'. So we cultivate a steady, embodied basis to get a handle on our anxiety or obsessiveness – because thinking about them just adds more person-forming *saṅkhārā* to the mix. However, take note: volatile *citta* formations – your personal stuff with its fault lines and upheavals – form a gate to liberation. If you can turn the key, that is. And the key is

to disengage from and to meet the *cittasāṅkhāra* in the embodied domain. There you can undo self-construction as it happens.

Undoing ‘I am’ begins with meditative self-improvement. This means carefully lifting that improvement program out of the sensory domain and into the heart. Reflecting on the brevity of the happiness that sight, taste, touch and sound can provide lessens one’s interest in consumer pursuits and entertainment; remembering our mortality causes us to prioritize heart-values and freedom from attachment. These reflections channel our *cittasāṅkhāra*, and its self-interest, in transformative ways.

On top of this, with mindfulness of breathing we gather attention on the embodied process and keep the mind from straying into notions and opinions. This consolidates the energy of heart and mind and adjusts its drives; a steady focus on calming perceptions replaces the ever-shifting attention and short-term reward of the social norm. In this way, attention and intention, the mental factors that direct one’s focus, impulses and responses, begin to consolidate around a source of intimate comfort that’s not about ‘me’ and ‘mine’. This re-shapes the *citta*.

This consequent mode of experience, whereby the heart becomes firm and imbued with clarity and subtle pleasure, is *samādhi*. In

this condition, as *cittasaṅkhāra* unifies with the *kāyasaṅkhāra*, the heart isn't tuning into the social, person-creating world; and yet the experience is enjoyable and nourishing. But in itself, *samādhi* is only a temporary step out of the personal world – and one can even make a personal achievement out of that state. So what's more significant is the perspective that *samādhi* provides, one whereby the underlying reflex and view 'I am' can be directly felt. The heart gets active, and tightens up as it takes on attitudes of gaining and wishes to hold on – and what shapes up is a world 'out there' and a 'me' and 'mine' 'in here'. It's good to study that process as a formation, rather than as a self. This is what insight practice is about.

The self-formation reflex kicks in even though its 'I am' has no solid basis; it perches now on a body, now a mood, then an idea, a wish and so on. All of which change and are unreliable. So the 'selfing' process and its disbanding are therefore hinge points for insight-liberation. As the Buddha teaches: '*... someone who hasn't heard Dhamma ... regards form as self Even if they don't regard form as self or self as possessing form, they regard form as in self ... self as in form. That regarding is a formation* [This analysis is then repeated by substituting 'form' for 'feeling', 'perception', 'formations' and 'consciousness'.] *That regarding is a formation When one knows and sees thus, bhikkhus, the immediate destruction of the āsavā occurs.*' (S.22:81)

So, how to turn that hinge? As the very act of regarding has a formative effect, mindfulness is crucial, because its reflective reference turns away from 'I am' and attends instead to the skilful or unskilful basis of the current mind-state. What follows on is insight-wisdom, whereby alert knowing (*sampajāno*) is directed to the changeable nature of formations and the results of activating them. This clear seeing of changeability ripens into dispassion (why get stirred up if this will change?), and this facilitates letting go. The relinquishment of the 'I am' habit follows on from there.

ATTEND TO CHANGE

Insightful witnessing means that even as we get the mind into a relatively stable state, we then contemplate that this very state has arisen, is subject to change, and is affected by agreeable but changeable perceptions and feelings. And we're alert to any aims or attitudes that attach to these: conditions change and can't be made solid, so any sense of ownership, even to the extent of having a definite idea of the future, creates holding on and stress. And as the stress that comes with this habit is realized, there is a growing dispassion. With steady attention and dispassion regarding *cittasaṅkhāra*, there can be a ceasing of the idea that I have or need or am anything – even this

mental state. This is because the mind feels so firmly grounded and clear in itself that it doesn't need to hold onto conditions for support. That confused view and its insecure basis can be relinquished.

Even though one may get the idea, insight isn't theoretical: the reality of the practice is that the qualities of attachment have to stand out and be directly sensed before they can be dismantled by wisdom. And for that scenario to come to be, there needs to be both a steady mode of mind that these agitations and stresses stand out from, and an awareness that is keen enough to discern and withdraw energy from them. This is provided by the rightly concentrated *citta*.

This concentration is not the kind we'd use when concentrating on a problem or an object with fixed boundaries; such activity brings a narrowing of attention and an orientation of intention to solve, engage with, or acquire, something. As intention and attention are both *saṅkhārā*, this has a formative effect on the mind – and even on the body. And one should be careful about how one's mind gets shaped. Does the notion and view 'I am meditating' make me obsessive? Does it bring around bodily tension? Can I feel open and yet undisturbed? When one's mindfulness is immersed in the energy of breathing, the answer is 'yes' – because that energy is a condition that supports all mental and bodily activity: it's always accessible.

Mindfulness grants that access. Note that in the discourses, the Buddha doesn't refer to concentrating on the breath, but to being mindful of breathing. And as breathing is a fluid process, one's focus has to be open yet collected; attention isn't pinned down but is attuned to the changing nature of the experience. The intention that fits is receptive rather than goal-oriented: one is *sensitive* to the entire body and so on, rather than *concentrating* on the breath. In the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, a reference to *samādhi* doesn't even occur until the third tetrad, whereupon the instruction is that one steadies, unifies, 'concentrates' (or 'collects', or 'consolidates') the *citta*. That is, one gathers the heart into the purity that mindfulness has distilled; so it's not that one concentrates on any object, but that mindfulness concentrates mind (or heart).*

BEYOND INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL

Because *samādhi* provides a base for the *citta* that isn't dependent on sense-contact, your experience of presence changes. Sense-contact, with its perceptions and feeling tones, gives rise to the impression of being a constant entity 'in this body' – when actually what arises and passes are pleasant and unpleasant feelings that affect bodily

*The phrase 'object of concentration' does appear in the suttas, but this 'object' means the theme that one is using to arrive at concentration, or, as in 'with release as object', the result that one is inclining towards.

formations/energies or mental formations/energies. In terms of *citta*, there's no 'in' or 'out'. Naturally, sensations and energies are interpreted as *belonging* to a body; however, it's also the case that with bodily damage, it's possible to feel a severed limb. And it is equally possible to not feel the organs and even areas of an intact body. As for the heart, and the formative effect of perception and feeling – that too depends on what the mind is focused on. The logic of *samādhi* then is to steer and refine mental consciousness so that its experience is not based on sense-data, but on subtler levels of perception, originating from disengagement and sustained by the wholesome energy of the embodied mind. These subtler levels are called 'jhāna' (absorption); they are levels of *samādhi* wherein the sense of inner and outer is subdued or even eliminated. More on that later.

Although it is possible to establish the view that 'I am a boundless and luminous being' (!) dependent on such states, the truer purpose is to use them to lift attention, contact and therefore inclination out of the sensory domain. So one inclines towards dispassion with regard to sense-contact and what it brings. As for what remains – qualities of perception and feeling – these are to be reviewed insightfully as conditioned by this acquired state, not lasting and hence not-self. This is peaceful, this is sublime.

15

Reflective Awareness



ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE IN FULLY AND
COMPLETELY SENSITIVE TO MIND/HEART';

ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE OUT FULLY AND
COMPLETELY SENSITIVE TO MIND/HEART.'

ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE IN DEEPLY GLADDENING
MIND/HEART'; ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE OUT

DEEPLY GLADDENING MIND/HEART.'

INSTRUCTIONS

1 ATTUNE TO THE RECEPTIVITY OF HEART. WHAT (OR WHERE) IS THAT WHICH RECEIVES (OR ATTENDS TO) EXPERIENCE?

2 LIGHTLY ACKNOWLEDGE THE OVERALL FLOW OF YOUR INNER EXPERIENCE AND STEP BACK A LITTLE. IN OTHER WORDS, DON'T GET TOO INTERESTED IN IT; DISTANCE A LITTLE.

3 AS YOU FEEL THE SPACIOUS, OR GROUNDING, EFFECTS OF THAT DISENGAGED AWARENESS, LINGER IN IT. ENJOY HOW IT FEELS.

4 ATTUNE TO YOUR BREATHING TO MAINTAIN BALANCE (IF YOU FEEL FLOODED), FEEL GROUNDED (IF YOU FEEL OVER-ENERGIZED), OR GET CLEAR (IF YOU FEEL FOGGY).

SENSITIVITY CAN BE DIRECTED

Ideas of freedom and deep wisdom are attractive. But how do these experiences happen? Well, a way to realize these is through directly touching and gladly appreciating the *citta* – which is the third tetrad of the instructions on *ānāpānasati*.

This section of the teaching indicates that as the resonances and reverberations of *cittasaṅkhāra* get stilled, the meditator is more able to sense the *citta* as a sensitivity – that is, a reflective awareness. It's apparent when you ask yourself: 'How (or where) is experience received?' 'How do I know that experience happens?' There's a turn (we call it 'inwards') to the *citta*. It's a knowing presence that peeks out in our calmer moments, beneath the self-image and personality. It's also that which can be liberated.

In the suttas, the *citta* is the main focus for wellbeing, ethical clarity and liberation. *'For a long time this citta has been defiled by lust, hatred, and delusion. Through the defilements of the citta beings are defiled; with the cleansing of the citta beings are purified.'* (S.22:100) Even more incisive and direct is the statement: *'This is the deathless, namely, the liberation of citta through non-clinging.'* (M.106:13) Towards this end, *citta* can be 'turned', as in: *'He turns his citta away from [the aggregates] and directs it towards the deathless element thus: "This is the peaceful, this is the sublime, that is, the stilling of all formation, the*

relinquishing of all attachments, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, nibbāna.” (M.64; A.9:36) So it can be turned – and directed – when it is collected: as in the case of the Buddha’s awakening: ‘*When my concentrated citta was thus purified ... I directed it to knowledge of the destruction of the taints.*’ (M.4:31)

I’ve explained earlier how *citta* differs from *manas*; but as *citta* can be directed, it also differs from consciousness, *viññāṇa*, which is the passive recipient of sense-data. *Citta* normally acts to direct mind-consciousness (*mano-viññāṇa*), both in terms of an object (‘look for that’) and in terms of ethics (‘be restrained’; ‘watch over your speech’). As the associated Pali word ‘*cetanā*’ (intention/inclination) suggests, *citta* takes a direction that refers to its living environment, and can follow that: it can aim for virtue or gratification, it can be impassioned, get interested, or reach out with kindness and compassion. So I call it the ‘heart’ of mental consciousness. And yet, *citta* is not a thing: one of the wrong views held by certain *samaṇas* and brahmins is that ‘*what is called citta ... is a self that is permanent, stable, eternal, not subject to change, the same for ever and ever.*’ (D.1:2.13) But, as the Buddha remarked, ‘*I do not see even one thing that changes so quickly as the citta.*’ (A.1:48) So not a thing, and not a soul. We might liken the *citta* to the wind; it can turn, incline from stormy to balmy and tranquil – and from ignorance to clarity.

And like the wind, it can drop. In less poetic terms, just as one can change one's mind or lose interest in going to parties, the *citta* is a non-conceptual intelligence that can get interested – or turn away.

In *samādhi*, such reflective intelligence can be experienced as luminous and liberated from defiling influences (A.1:49-52). The heart is bright and radiant, 'gladdened' by resting in itself – although it doesn't mean that *citta* is *fully* liberated yet.* However, the *citta*'s reflective capacity is intelligent, and it can develop. More like a lake than a mirror, this reflective awareness can get stirred up by what appears in its domain, and give distorted reflections. But, to repeat the message, the water of the *citta*'s lake can be directed; this is the theme of this tetrad.

BRIGHTEN BEYOND THE PERSONAL FORM

Ordinarily the *citta*'s domain is the turbulent world of perceptions and feelings born of mind-contact, in which case it is constantly resonating; those resonances (*cittasaṅkhārā*) become its location,

*Other references seem to suggest that the luminosity is a refined manifestation that can disappear – as in: 'With the cessation [nirodhā] of name-and-form there is the disappearance [atthaṅgamo] of *citta*.' (S.47:42) It's notable that the term 'nīrodhā' isn't replicated; and that the term 'atthaṅgamo' is normally applied to the sun as it sets. So whereas from the text one would expect the phrase 'the cessation of *citta*', a 'sunset' suggests that the *citta*'s energies aren't manifesting in terms of *nāma*, but are not annihilated. Also there is the exclamation of the arahant Bhikkhuni Patacārā, who likens her *citta*'s release to the going out of a flame (*Therīgāthā* 5:10). These references suggest that the *citta* has an energetic potency, and this can switch off.

and the weave of perceptions, feeling and activating energies, when affected by clinging, push and pull that *citta* into a tangle. With ignorance, the notion arises that this tangle is myself, or that I am stuck with all this, or there is a self I could be that stands apart from all this. All these impressions do not release the heart and don't bring an end to stress. The meditative work then is to not adopt a notion, but to directly brighten and steady the reflective capacity and thereby undo the turmoil and tangle that clinging makes out of it.

For now, let's focus on revealing the reflective sensitivity of *citta* and gladdening it. This gladdening is essential for feeding and strengthening the heart: a contented heart lets go more easily than a desperate or dejected one.

In this process, there's a shift from deriving pleasure from sense-based feelings, ideas or memories, to a joy in the purity of the *citta* itself. This enjoyment lingers in the heart and encourages it to find happiness in itself and to disengage from and clear its cluttered library of memories and imaginings. We train to acknowledge that sensitivity of heart, independent of the impressions and signs that appear in its awareness. This entails attuning to this awareness and opening to the suffusive energy of its easeful state. On account of this, the *citta* begins to reflect on itself, rather than on the tangled web.

PRACTICAL DETAILS

SENSE HOW YOU *REALLY* FEEL

Considering that the *citta* is sensitive and feels, it may sound strange if I say that it can take practice to know what the *citta* is feeling. This is *because* it's sensitive! That is, the *citta* gets buried because its perceptions and feelings can trigger powerful or socially unacceptable emotions. Those that are linked to sense-contact set up the view of gain and loss, and the reaction of clinging. But the resonances and responses that are more poignant are generated through human contact and carry signs of loss, abuse, fear, worry and so on. In these cases, the numbing (or diverting) reflex is to shut the heart and suppress the reaction. The heart-mind may therefore be somewhat numb or closed. So in order to clear and enjoy the *citta*, we need to know the perception-based feeling mindfully outside of the tangle of the resultant emotional flood and reactive identity. Then that strand of the web can pass and an opening can occur.

The steady and safe environment of embodied meditation offers a basis from which we can attend to perceptions as they arise. We can learn to deal with that tendency to jump into pre-formulated perceptions and reactions when perceptions of ourselves or others arise. In fact, some of that formulated self-tangle is about avoiding painful perceptions, and some is about having something

to hold on to. The sensitive tangle called ‘me’ has to be unwrapped carefully. Gladdening is an aspect of that.

First linger in the gently agreeable perceptions of breathing. Then, when random memories or images arise, *place* attention (as ‘What’s this?’), *linger*, and *sense* how they feel and what they do. Their net result is to create you: there’s the sense of being stirred, and then being activated, and of reacting to that (as in, ‘This means that, I am this, and now what? How am I seen? What should I do ...? I should stop reacting ...’, etc., etc.). When those activating energies, *cittasankhārā*, arise, don’t close them down; instead, by referring to the breathing, just step back a little. Attune to that sense which can step back a tad. Notice the signs of stirring, blurring or grasping and turn back to the breathing’s energy. Settle in that embodied energy without continuing in the perception-feeling-activation cycle; let the activations and formations pass.

KNOW THE KNOWING

Notice *how* you immediately know. Focus on the knowing itself, not on what you know. This immediate knowing is not about understanding what you’re experiencing. Direct *citta*-based knowing is non-conceptual. It’s just the reflective awareness that contact and impression are happening. This kind of knowing is behind everything

that touches you, good or bad. That's the *citta*. Get used to knowing the ordinary, the bright, the weird and the agitated. You can always return to this knowing; it just requires sustaining your embodied foundation, acknowledging the reactions, breathing through them and letting them pass. If you think you shouldn't react so foolishly or compulsively (etc.), know those secondary reactions in the same way. If this gets confusing, then return to the embodied basis until you can steady through breathing – and let the confusion pass.

This is the way you reach through your afflictive perceptions and reactions and encourage the intelligence of the *citta*. Over time, this territory becomes more refined. You may feel centred, or have a sense of spaciousness, or feel bright and sensitive – these *nimittā*, or any quasi-sensual ones (radiance, softness and so on), may occur. Allow any of these to be there – but don't go into them. This may bring around shifts in your embodied domain, and subtle bodily movements (a release in the shoulders or abdomen, for example). The ordinary experience of your body will change to a more centred and suffusive energy. Don't go into the mind yet, but spread awareness over the breath-energy and the awareness of it. Enjoy and linger in that. Let the blended energy support and stabilize *citta*'s coming to the fore. This will allow the bright *citta* to grow firmer. As you get a sense of that, widen your awareness to include the heartfelt

experience. You can refer to the suffusive feel of the breathing to support that widening. Be aware of that spaciousness and how you feel in that. This is gladdening.

16

Jhāna



BHIKKHUS, I SAY THAT THE ENDING OF THE CORRUPTIONS [ĀSAVĀ] DEPENDS ON THE FIRST JHĀNA THERE IS THE CASE WHERE A MONK, DISENGAGED FROM SENSUALITY, DISENGAGED FROM UNSKILFUL QUALITIES, ENTERS AND REMAINS IN THE FIRST JHĀNA HE REGARDS WHATEVER PHENOMENA THERE THAT ARE CONNECTED WITH FORM, FEELING, PERCEPTION, FORMATIONS AND CONSCIOUSNESS, AS CHANGEABLE, STRESSFUL HE TURNS HIS MIND AWAY FROM THOSE PHENOMENA, AND HAVING DONE SO, INCLINES HIS MIND TO THE DEATHLESS: 'THIS IS PEACEFUL, THIS IS SUBLIME - THAT IS THE STILLING OF ALL SAÑKHĀRA ... NIBBĀNA.'

(A.9:36)

JHĀNA AS A SKILFUL RESOURCE

As we're working through the instructions in theory and in practice, we're approaching experiences that are not of the common world: occasions and practices whereby thinking calms down, and embodied suffusions of refreshment and ease are experienced. And as we come into the teachings on *citta*, we're bringing to the fore a non-conceptual intelligence (or sensitivity, or awareness) that often sits behind our thinking mind. We're also touching into the native place of that *citta*: it's not the domain of seeing, hearing, touching and the rest (*kāma-loka*, the sensual domain), nor is it the abstract domain of thoughts and ideas. Awareness persists, and flourishes, when both these domains have been quietened. As that quietening or settling occurs, what comes to the fore is the experience of mood, intuition, embodied energies and 'gut knowledge'. Through encompassing all or any of that with breathing, activations settle and the *citta* enters the fine-material domain (*rūpa-loka*) of subtle energies and inner silence. The experience of being settled within this is called '*jhāna*'.

In the discourses, *jhāna* is almost always translated as 'absorption' – a condition whereby the mind experiences refined agreeable and wholesome states; its focus is unified and its activities are reduced. In the suttas, it is equated with right concentration, *sammā-samādhi*. In this context, *jhāna* is considered to be an essential

foundation whereby the most fundamental corruptions – the ‘outflows’ or ‘taints’ (*āsavā*) – are withheld so that insight-wisdom can abolish them (A.9:36). This process might be likened to repairing a breach in a dam: one first of all holds back or calms the flood, and that allows one to examine where the breach is and then fix it. Likewise, the power and steadiness of *jhāna* stop the outflow into ‘the world out there’, so that insight-wisdom can address why the *citta* feels it has to keep all that running. Accordingly, the *citta* is liberated (*cetovimutti*) – i.e. no longer caught in the effects of the *āsavā* – and there is the clarity that clears the cause that supported these outflows. Dependent on *jhāna*, the *citta* can be directed to formless states and/or to the ending of the outflows. The latter direction is a liberation by wisdom (*paññāvimutti*); one’s awareness sees through the ignorance that binds conditions into a state of being called ‘myself’, and thereby lets go of that basis. In terms of this process, *jhāna* is not a final liberation – but it is important as a step in that direction.

There are four *jhānā*. These represent four levels of increasingly reduced mental/emotional activity and increasingly refined sources of steadiness and pleasure. For example, wayward thoughts and distracting moods cease before the mind ‘enters’ the first *jhāna*; placing-and-sensing (*vitakka-vicāra*) ceases in the second *jhāna*;

rapture ceases in the third; and the tides of pleasure and pain dissolve into equanimity in the fourth. The *jhānā* are also described in terms of what does manifest in them: *vitakka-vicāra*, rapture and ease are to the fore in the first; confidence, unification, rapture and bodily ease in the second; equanimity, bodily ease, mindfulness and full awareness in the third; and mindfulness and equanimity in the fourth. These *jhānā* are all embodied and have notable embodied effects – here are a few snippets from the descriptions of how they feel:

(first *jhāna*) *‘He makes the rapture and ease born of disengagement [viveka] drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the rapture and ease born of disengagement.’*

(second *jhāna*) [the same but instead of ‘disengagement’ read ‘concentration’] *‘... no part of his whole body unpervaded by the rapture and ease born of concentration.’*

(third *jhāna*) *‘He makes the ease divested of rapture drench ... [as above] ... so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the ease divested of rapture.’*

(fourth *jhāna*) *‘He sits pervading this body with the pure bright mind, so there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the pure bright mind.’* (M.39:15-18; M.77:25-28; M.119:18-21)

The images that flesh out these descriptions are of bathing and otherwise easing the entire body and covering it in cool (this is a tropical country) and pleasant wrappings. So *jhāna* is embodied and felt. As the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* states: *‘In one whose body is tranquil and who feels pleasure, the mind becomes concentrated.’* (M.118:35) Note, however, that ‘concentration’ isn’t mentioned as a factor of the first *jhāna*. The first *jhāna* is a state wherein the mind isn’t going into or occupied by sense-contact, is lingering in the ease of the settled bodily formation, but hasn’t yet settled into its own presence. Yet, in the suttas this *jhāna* is referred to as a base for insight-liberation (see A.9:36 above).

JHĀNA AS THE BASIS OF MEDITATION - AND OBSESSION

The practice of arriving at these states is fundamental enough for the Buddha to use the verbal form *‘jhāyati’* (translated as ‘meditate’) to urge his disciples to deepen their practice. *‘Meditate [jhāyatha], bhikkhus, do not be negligent ... this is my advice.’* The occasions when this exhortation occurs are at the end of a teaching, as in the *Kamma Sutta* (S.35:145). In this instance the Buddha wasn’t giving instructions on a meditation technique, but on kamma and the Eightfold Path. So the meaning is: ‘Get on with the meditative work, don’t waste time!’ It’s a broad encouragement of right view, right effort and right mindfulness – not an instruction on focusing on a meditation object.

In British parlance, he might have said: ‘Get stuck in!’ (= ‘Engage, work at it!’). On occasion, the suttas use this term humorously when disciples ‘get stuck’ or ‘come unstuck’ in the wrong kind of preoccupation:

‘While he harbours sensual lust within, he meditates [jhāyati], un-meditates [pajjhāyati], de-meditates [nijjhāyati], and mis-meditates [apajjhāyati]. He abides with his mind obsessed by ill will, a prey to ill will ... with his mind obsessed by sloth and torpor, a prey to sloth and torpor ... with his mind obsessed by restlessness and remorse, a prey to restlessness and remorse ... with his mind obsessed by doubt, a prey to doubt, and he does not understand as it actually is the escape from arisen doubt. While he harbours doubt within, he meditates, un-meditates, de-meditates, and mis-meditates. The Blessed One did not praise that kind of meditation [jhāna].’ (M.108:26)

and:

‘just as a donkey unladen, standing by a door-post or a dustbin or a drain, meditates, un-meditates, de-meditates, and mis-meditates ...’ (M.50:13)

So the word ‘jhāna’ can also be applied to all kinds of absorptions, good or bad. But with the right view and approach, and if carried out with finesse, *jhāyati* will bring around the correct kind of *jhāna*. The finesse that’s needed is first to clear the hindrances, and then to steady and settle the mind in the fine-material domain. In

the latter stages of this process, snags called ‘*upakkilesa*’ – such as inattention, elation, an imbalance of energy – have to be met and remedied. This takes time and skill, and there is an incident recorded at M.128 where the Buddha himself speaks to one of his great disciples of the difficulties of working through these defects. The effect to me is reassuring – even the Buddha had to persevere and work with some ungratifying but understandable stuff.

DISEMBODIED AND EMBODIED *JHĀNA*

There is often confusion about the use of the term ‘*jhāna*’ because the later commentaries, notably the *Visuddhimagga*, use it differently. In the *Visuddhimagga*, *jhāna* is disembodied, and it relies on a method of generating paranormal *nimitta* in the mind that the meditator consequently absorbs his or her attention into. And, yes, in the above incident of the Buddha’s working with *upakkilesa*, he does speak of referring to light and ‘the vision of forms’ – but these phenomena are signs that can arise as rapture and ease are experienced in embodied meditation. Significantly, and in contradiction to the mental *nimitta* of the *Visuddhimagga*, he doesn’t absorb into these signs, but uses them as indicators of occasions when his mind slips out of *samādhi*. Just as one might use a signpost, or the line of lights on the highway: you don’t absorb into them, but use them to

affirm that you're on the right road. This indicates that the mind can note and reflect on its state in the *jhāna* process – a referencing that is also mentioned at A.5:28. This is the reflective capacity that allows insight-wisdom to occur within the *jhāna* context – that is, one reviews the mind-state as compounded out of conditioned and changeable factors (as at M.52:4-7; M.64:9-12). One does not fixate, and, according to these accounts, full liberation ensues.

The *Visuddhimagga* also separates meditation practice into two distinct paths: *samatha* – which leads to a *jhāna* wherein sensory phenomena and mental activity cease; and *vipassanā* – which avoids such absorption, and through a refined scrutiny of the impermanent and selfless nature of all phenomena, leads to *nibbāna*. In this presentation, *samatha* is pleasant and leads to sublime states, but is a dead-end in terms of liberation because from its viewpoint, *jhāna* curtails the functioning of analytical wisdom. Instead, the *Visuddhimagga* presents a path of 'dry' insight; its practice operates around an ongoing and detailed analysis of *citta*, bypasses feeling, doesn't support cultivating pleasant states and lingering in them, doesn't require *jhāna*, but leads directly to *nibbāna* through analytical discernment alone. This path of insight proceeds through specific realizations that, however, aren't mentioned in the suttas.

Without wishing to discount this approach, I find it confusing. It may well be the case that fashioning a mind-made *nimitta* and focusing on it will result in some kind of *jhāna*, but I don't see an instance where the Buddha recommends this. Also, why did he not mention an 'insight-only' path? And why make so much of *jhāna* if it was extremely difficult to achieve, and not leading to liberation? Regarding this last point: in the suttas, the mind in *jhāna* is able to be directed or turned towards either immaterial states or the ending of the *āsavā*. In other words, it acts as the basis for insight, not as an alternative. This is in line with the suttas' presentation of *samatha* and *vipassanā* working together 'like two oxen yoked' (A.4:93-94). My conclusion is that we're looking at two different kinds of *jhāna* – a disembodied one in which the *citta* is fixed on a mind-made sign, and an embodied one in which the *citta* is firmly settled in itself and able to review the aggregates and the outflows.

So a key to the suttas' *jhāna* may well be the support that embodiment gives to the mind. In the commentaries, the body is seen as an object, and its sensory aspect dwelt upon in ways that will produce distaste. It belongs to the *kāma-loka*, the sensory world. The embodied domain that one can access through mindfulness of the energies in the body isn't mentioned – yet this is the territory that if cultivated opens into the fine-material world (*rūpa-loka*), and will give rise

to the kind of *jhāna* that is mentioned in the suttas. They refer to touching deliverance with the body (M.70:15; S.12:70; A.9:43).

This ‘embodied *jhāna*’ may resolve certain anomalies. For example, *jhāna* is held to be secluded/disengaged from sense-contact, and yet at A.3:63, the Buddha mentions abiding in *jhāna* while sitting, walking, standing or reclining. Walking without any awareness of sight and touch seems unlikely; so instead of the complete absence of sensory awareness, what could be the case is that he is fully collected within the fine-material aspect of the body, while allowing such sense-contact as was relevant to be made. There is an instance where the Buddha remains oblivious to a thunderstorm – apparently on account of his absorption (D.16:4.31-32). In such a case, the *citta* would remain turned away from phenomena that it wasn’t involved with (unlike walking or breathing). So the accounts, limited as they are, do suggest some flexibility. Furthermore: before his awakening the Buddha did experience immaterial states (*āruppa*) but found them inadequate for realization of the Deathless. (Incidentally, the commentaries refer to these immaterial states as *jhāna*, again in contradiction to the embodied basis of the suttas’ *jhāna*.)

One account of the Buddha’s awakening (M.36:30-32) has it that he withdrew from that approach and began the cultivation of *ānāpānasati* that resulted in *jhāna*, commenting that he was ‘not

afraid of that pleasure, since it has nothing to do with sensual pleasures and unwholesome states. This approach led to full enlightenment. Could it be that his breakthrough was one of accessing and cultivating the fine-material domain within the body? It's natural enough to discount that troubled and volatile 'inner body' and aim for an immaterial abiding. And yet, the Buddha touched that territory, made it pleasurable, and was awakened through it. He even passed away in *jhāna*, not in a formless state.

JHĀNA AS A NATURAL PROCESS

As to whether you can do this ... my sense is that the *jhāna* process is a natural progression: if you'd rather feel settled than agitated; if you wish to clear your mind of dullness, irritation and sense-desire; and if you make the process of clearing these obstacles and settling thorough and enjoyable, then you are cultivating *jhāna*, whether you complete it, or define it as such, or not. If you absorb into any of those states the sutta outlines after soothing the bodily formation, you'll get the results.

Putting aside the theory for now, my advice then is to begin with settling into your body where you are, and bringing up themes that have to do with your values and meanings. This reflecting on and training the *citta* in terms of virtue, goodwill and renunciation is the

standard approach. As the *citta* attunes to right view, you immerse awareness in your body as you sense your breathing. Keep referring to and deepening into this embodied and heartfelt focus, discarding distractions and hindrances as best you can. Even if there are residual blemishes and agitations, practise placing your attention on and fully sensing the occasions when the mind is unhindered. Carried through, this will bring refreshment/rapture and ease in terms of body and mind. Then linger in that and firm it up. This does require a wise intent – to neither waver, nor hold tight; to flexibly accommodate shifts of energy and tone, but to not get drawn into them; to cool elation and warm the stillness. Although writing about this makes it seem very tricky, non-conceptual intelligence will find a balanced way – just as it does for a gymnast, singer or calligrapher. And it’s an intelligence that can always be entered by dwelling fully in the heart-intelligence behind ethics: not fixated on rules, but with sensitivity attuned to the welfare of beings. Enter with that spirit and learn by trial and error.

17

Liberating the Heart



ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE IN STEADYING
MIND/HEART'; ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE OUT
STEADYING MIND/HEART.'

ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE IN RELEASING
MIND/HEART'; ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE OUT
RELEASING MIND/HEART.'

INSTRUCTIONS

1 ATTUNE TO THE SENSE OF KNOWING - IN TERMS OF BOTH AWARENESS AND A STABLE, OPEN ENERGY.

2 WHATEVER THE IMPRESSIONS THAT ARISE, DON'T ADOPT THEM, AND DON'T REJECT THEM. IN ALL CASES, SUSTAIN THE OPEN ENERGY OF RESTFUL AWARENESS.

3 AS INCLINATIONS TO FORM A CONCLUSION OR TO DEVELOP SOMETHING ARISE, REFER TO THAT AWARENESS AND LET THESE INCLINATIONS PASS.

A BASIS IN GLADDENING

The gladdening of the *citta* is more than pleasant: it gives assurance that states of feeling just about OK, or mindsets that assume you can't go very far in meditation practice, are not a final reality. Actually, the 'getting by/managing' mindset is a constricted state of awareness, but this program does get normalized as the base for identity. Here the teaching is that the heart can move out of that and open into an unrestricted clarity.

The training so far streamlines and enriches the *citta*. Absorbing the steady stream of embodied energy nourishes and soothes mind and heart. As the *citta*'s non-conceptual awareness is thus increasingly strengthened and brought to the fore, it is relieved of the ragged energy of personal preoccupations; instead, its energy and the energy of the body blend. This collected energy feels open and unrestricted, but isn't invaded by hindrances. It allows the *citta* to settle into its unoccupied state, and thereby serves as the most secure foundation for liberation.

Furthermore, on account of this meditative process, dispassion arises regarding the aggregates. One learns to witness one's perceptions and mental impulses, incline to alternative experiences

such as lingering in the whole body, and feel the more compulsive material die down. As this compulsive material comprises one's habitual world and one's apparent self, the experience of letting that apparent reality arise and pass is profoundly transformative.

As a meditator knows, the old realities do get to look pretty shaky, but there's no need to panic. Awareness can stay steady with regard to the experiences of change and not-self. A trained *citta* feels stable. It's not a solid object, but it has a stable, if fluid, presence. This is subjective, so it's not something that your attention can form as an object: but you can notice how your *citta* as presence is affected and consequently adopts subtle forms. And you can notice what appears in its domain and what doesn't: *'Here a bhikkhu directly knows citta affected by lust as citta affected by lust, and citta unaffected by lust as citta unaffected by lust ... affected ... unaffected by hate ... contracted citta as contracted citta, and distracted citta as distracted citta They directly know concentrated citta ... and unconcentrated citta directly know liberated citta as liberated citta ... and unliberated citta as unliberated citta.'* (M.10:34) This direct knowing lifts the *citta* away from what it's affected by without denial, critique, acclaim or ignorance. Not much self here.

THOUGHTLESS INTELLIGENCE

How can *citta* directly 'know' itself? Because of its intelligence. We are so used to limiting intelligence to the domain of concepts and abstractions that we don't give full recognition to an intelligence that doesn't need to translate experience into concepts in order to gain understanding. The obvious example of such non-conceptual intelligence is bodily intelligence. Through this, the body knows how to balance and walk. It also has emergency reflexes. All of these require non-conceptual assessment and response. Bodily intelligence can run on semi-automatic in prescribed and habitual situations (as in walking from one room to another in one's dwelling), but if one is walking through a wilderness at night, it has to be wakeful.

Citta has a similar intelligence: on account of this, a person will flush with shame at the awareness of their unskilful deeds; recoil from the prospect of lashing out and abusing; feel a surge of compassion at the plight of others; experience resolve when meeting a challenge – and so on. It's not the case that we have to mentally 'translate' the shivering and whining of a dog into a clinical analysis and then decide to respond with compassion. There is a natural movement, a turning that the *citta* does by itself. It is both aware and responsive – depending on its degree of wakefulness. Notions of what to do may well arise a moment or two later as that compassionate

interest gets the *manas* faculty to scan one's internal 'library' for an appropriate line of action. In this way, skilful actions involve an interplay between the intelligences of heart, mind and body.

However, if our conceptual library is full of fiction, this overload may obscure a deeper and fuller *citta* response. We can be so eager to arrive at a conclusion that we can't linger and wait for the *citta* to rise up, or steady itself, or turn away. Instead, we rush in and panic in order to get things right; or we condemn our unskilful instincts or shortcomings with a flood of critical and wounding thoughts. Or we don't extend heartfelt awareness to other creatures. All of these shape, misshape and cover the *citta*. The meditative training then is to bring *citta* more fully to the fore, reveal it, steady it, nourish it – and trust the signs and tonal shifts that are its wise responses. This is how direct knowing works. With this we find our *citta* turning away from unskilful drives and instincts without a lot of thought and judgement. By not creating a scanner and a librarian, it also significantly lessens the sense of 'I am'.

Although understanding that one's *citta* is affected by lust or hatred doesn't seem that liberating, as is often the case with the Buddha's expositions, a sequential process begins with easily accessible experience and then develops out of that. Of course, it's not always the case that people inflamed with hatred even 'know' it in the way of direct knowing: they blame their mood on someone else,

or call it ‘firmness’. Direct knowing, however, is deeper and cooler than an intellectual assessment or emotional justification; it brings with it a disengagement from activating the perceptions, mental feeling and energies that would normally make an ‘I am’ out of the *citta*’s forms and states. This brings insight and supports liberation.

THE POWER OF PRESENCE

The open energy state, or pure presence, is to be given attention so that by being steadied, the *citta* doesn’t run out into sensuality. The outflow of becoming (*bhav’āsava*), which brings with it the sense of ‘I will be’, ‘I was’ and ‘I am’, can be experienced as pressure pushing the *citta*; by maintaining pure presence, that can cease. Similarly, the sense of having to do something, get something or know something can be sensed as conditioned impulses arising within the open, stable *citta*. Thus, by directly knowing – without engaging, narrowing or agitating – *citta* feels bright; its form is spacious and timeless. The atmosphere of the personality is thinned or absent.

The Buddha referred to such *samādhi* as ‘the best base of clinging’; it provides a place of rest and an opportunity for the *citta* to reset its aims and values. From this basis, there can be a turning that gives liberating results. ‘*And what is the development of concentration that, when cultivated and grown, leads to the ending of the āsavā? There*

is the case where a bhikkhu remains focused on arising and subsiding with reference to the five aggregates: “Such is form, such its arising [samudāya], such its disappearance [atthaṅgamo]. Such is feeling Such is perception Such are formations Such is consciousness, such its arising, such its disappearance.” This is the development of concentration that, when cultivated and grown, leads to the ending of the āsavā.’ (A.4:41)

PRACTICAL DETAILS

RESOLVE AND RELEASE

Use placing-and-sensing to refer to what the *citta* is experiencing in a non-conceptual way. Signs of brightness or emptiness that attract or repel the heart may arise; cut off their movement into thoughts. Feel their energetic effect on the weave of the *citta*, but don’t adopt any impressions. Instead, spread awareness over the weave and let the *citta* release those subtle signs. Get interested in the alert stillness; attune to that quiet ‘no position’. Placing-and-sensing can fall away as the *citta* returns to its basis. Awareness feels open, but with a focus on that steady openness, *citta* is not invaded. It feels strong and light at the same time. This focus is like resting; it doesn’t hold tight, but it is bright.

Can you resolve to take a break from knowing anything, while remaining wakeful and calm?

It's likely that inclinations to find a superior state of mind, or to claim one, will arise. Feel how they affect the openness, and how the *citta* consequently acquires a variable form. The open energy that was first detected in the long pause between the breaths, then sensed as the foundation for calm, will be a helpful reference. So, abandoning time boundaries and softening energetic contraction, firm up awareness with the aim of relinquishment. It will widen beyond boundaries. Settle into knowing.

From time to time there may arise a reflex to form a centre within that continuum of awareness. You may also sense it as an inclination to get busy, formulate an idea or somehow nail things down. This is the 'thirst for becoming' (*bhava-taṇhā*); be the knowing of that. Keep awareness open to its peripheries, making it evenly spread. The accompanying tone is equanimity rather than rapture.

When the *citta* is collecting itself in *samādhi*, there may be an imbalance in terms of rapture. If this factor is over-intense, withdraw attention a little, so that one is less emotionally engaged. Note the unsteady fluctuations of rapture and allow a sense of disenchantment (*nibbidā*) to arise. This brings around a cool timelessness and a release from the restricting influence of the aggregates, notably from perceptions and *saṅkhārā*.

18

Insight: Maturing into Relinquishment



ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE IN WITNESSING
CHANGEABILITY'; ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE OUT
WITNESSING CHANGEABILITY.'

ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE IN WITNESSING
DISPASSION'; ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE OUT
WITNESSING DISPASSION.'

ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE IN WITNESSING
CESSATION'; ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE OUT
WITNESSING CESSATION.'

ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE IN WITNESSING
RELINQUISHMENT'; ONE TRAINS: 'BREATHE
OUT WITNESSING RELINQUISHMENT.'

CHANGEABILITY AND DISPASSION

When a degree of stillness has been established, it's easy to notice how changeable everything is. What is most changeable is the state of mind – by which I mean more than the obvious content of thoughts and emotions, but also the particular energy, inclination and subtle shape of the *citta*. One's *citta* can be broad or unsteady or sluggish or vibrant. What then is still? What is aware of this *citta*? And why is it important to focus on changeability in this respect?

The simple answer to all of these questions is the nature of the *citta*. It is both the subtle form and the reflective 'knowing' of that. It is both still awareness and sensitive heart. Just as a lake will always offer some kind of reflection, and yet is often stirred and rippling, the *citta* is both constantly aware and also circumstantially resonant and affected by contact – so its awareness is often clouded or shaky. What it's aware of are habitual psychological activities, *saṅkhārā*, that create subtle forms – rather like the ripples and vortices on a lake. These forms attract energy into them, energy that amplifies and solidifies the vortex. In more down-to-earth terms, we get obsessive. Thus there is kamma: there is engagement with obsessions, and we get formed by them. But this is a curable habit.

To get things into the right perspective for that cure: it's not that there are lots of thoughts that flood the mind; instead, it's the case that as the *cittasaṅkhāra* gets engrossed it generates perceptions, impulses and thoughts. (So rather than there being things to annihilate, it's more the case that there are energies that need to be stilled.) Sure, we might speak of having lots of unpleasant thoughts, but can there be a thought that exists as something independent of the energy that forms it and the emotion that arouses that? It's this conditioning force – one that gets stuck in thought-forming patterns – that can be trained. And this begins with shifting the habitual reactions to those thoughts and emotions. This is because if we get fascinated or averse to thoughts and emotions, that adds more emotional energy to the mental stream, and so intensifies the *saṅkhāra* vortex. Also if any aspect of the vortex – the thought, the reactions or the memory that it evokes – is seen as a separate thing, it's fixated upon, and the fixation forms a person as the spinning centre of the vortex. It is because of all this spin and counter-spin, that the truth about vortices and how to release them is obscured: there's the experience of being somebody having or doing mental stuff and getting overwhelmed.

But all that depends on ignorance. What if the vortex is seen as it is, rather than judged and made into a person? What about cooling the energies in all that? *'This is peaceful, this is sublime – that is the*

stilling of all saṅkhāra, the relinquishment of all attachments [upadhi], the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, nibbāna.' (M.64:9) So, rather than try to annihilate perceptions, opinions and memories, calming moderates their energies and supports a witnessing of how a person gets created in that vortex. This apparent person is a continuum of changing psychologies, impressions, feelings, reactions, and skilful and unskilful inclinations. And through inquiring into the changes that any of these go through, insight arises.

Most obviously, any process – such as a line of thought, or a surge of emotion – begins and ends, or at least *seems* to. Insight therefore reviews these personal processes in terms of their apparent beginnings and endings. What you'll find as you look for the beginning of a thought isn't a person creating that thought, but a felt stirring that crystallizes into a train of thoughts with an underlying mood. You'll also note a subsiding rather than a crisp stop. Where is the thinker in any of that? If your mind is calmer, notice the pause after a mood has passed through: if you stay aware at that point, you'll notice that as the energy and the mood change, the mental process softens and diffuses. It's like the mist that forms on cool glass. Observe the window of a room as you sit yourself next to it on a cold morning. Is there a drop-at-a-time forming

of condensation, or doesn't the overall surface gradually tint and grow misty? Doesn't the mist evaporate if you warm the glass?

Similarly, when the *citta* is warm and open, phenomena either don't well up and crystallize, or they evaporate. And as thoughts, impressions, impulses and so on lose intensity, their mist-like nature is revealed; mistiest of all is the person. The trapped person is the result of the *citta* getting stirred up and reacting; but if that very heart of the conscious process doesn't rise up, and grasp, it doesn't get stuck. Moods and memories subside or are not taken personally; there is increasing dispassion, and energy moves from the *sankhāra* into the knowing. Thus awareness isn't immersed in a state where suffering and stress and an overwhelming world arise.

LATENT TENDENCIES AND CESSATION

This pattern of self keeps forming because of the underlying blueprint of the *anusaya*. Latent tendencies are like reflexes: when there is the pressure of self-view, along with a compulsive grasp in the heart, the *anusaya* reflex takes over. Then when an impression strikes the heart, energies tighten into pressure and grasping – and the spinning vortex of a personal formation becomes the reference point and centre. Accordingly, action gets compulsive and

any one of the familiar persons that we form – responsible, firm, kindly, agitated, controlling, etc. – takes shape.

One powerful *anusaya* is that of **becoming**: we are all born with the latent tendency to be a solid and successful person.* It wells up as *bhav'āsava* on account of circumstances that are *taken* personally – as in ‘this is happening in my life’ – or on account of habits and kamma (‘I’m like this’; ‘I’m this kind of a person because of my past actions’). The person arises dependent on what isn’t here and now, yet forms a basic reference point for the heart and mind: ‘I am sure that such and such an event is going to happen; so I must think about it.’ Or, ‘I have acted in such ways in the past; so now I must experience these memories and thoughts.’ It’s a tangled weave, this ‘I am’ vortex.

Thus becoming creates the sense of a person travelling through time. However, meditation reveals that the qualities that give rise to the sense of time – the drive towards another state, the pressure to maintain solidity within change, and the arising of memory – occur dependent on how the *citta* contracts, spins out or gets stuck. These are not a person, but a reflex. So when phenomena are revealed as ephemeral, and the *citta* relaxes its reflex, the experience of being a time-bound person need not occur. Thus the potential for

*M.78:8.

suffering and stress bound up with getting to the next thing, finding an answer, harbouring malice, fantasizing and worrying can fall away.

The latent tendency towards **conceiving self** is conditioned by the need to manage what becoming makes solid. This vortex forms by holding onto forces, events and energies that it can't manage. It tries to function well and make the right choice; but there are no guarantees that it will get things right. What is guaranteed is that it will always experience inner and outer events that it *wants* to get right. So the vortex feeds its own turbulence: that feedback loop – that's the person. And occasionally the person realizes that they will malfunction at some time, make the wrong choice, or become powerless. Maybe other people will bar the person's actions and choices; maybe the person will be forgetful, or inadequate; or maybe their health or mental balance will fail. What will the self experience, or be, then? Most likely it will be suffering and stress. So the person gets compulsive about dealing with everything that might go wrong, produces complex and convoluted mind-states – and gets stressed here and now.

Another powerful *anusaya* is towards **views** – because holding a point of view can weld its notions and beliefs into a firm basis for self. The grosser manifestation occurs with dogmatic belief, but the latent tendency is to grant supremacy to conceptual intelligence in general. Through this we know *about* something – we name it,

measure and assess its value, and so on – and that process gives us reference points for how likeable or important we deem something to be, and consequently what to do with it. This process is particularly abusive when we apply it to living beings – including ourselves – as it focuses a harsh spotlight. It activates that mode of mind that is about doing and achieving – so much so that we assume that our life is limited to getting things done and getting things right in order to be good enough. Thus activated, the mind establishes our personal world on the basis of doing business, generating pleasure, and doing what it takes to belong. It's a powerful vortex. But such activation doesn't arrive at a stable state; it just produces more things to do and more choices to make. Nobody wins. So ... can you allow yourself to sensitively, directly 'know' rather than have a point of view?

The most fundamental tendency is that of **ignorance**. It is this that blurs the knowing awareness of the *citta* so that it doesn't know itself – therefore it loses balance. With that loss of balance, awareness attaches to some state of mind or another in order to find stability – and thus there becomes 'I am in this state'. And 'I am' spins into 'I do', creating unstable thoughts, drives and attitudes ... and this tumbling-on stimulates other reflex tendencies. How to stop this? Well, if one tries to erase the 'I am' – that 'trying to get rid of' brings more

tilting and tumbling and entanglement. That approach is also an outflow, a negative vortex called ‘*vibhava*’. So instead of surging between becoming and negating, the practice is to shift from getting tangled up in the person and instead relate to the stress of the *anusaya*.

In practice, this means that rather than take issue with the topics and shifts of the mind, you lightly acknowledge the inner person who has them, and contemplate the vortex as a direct experience. (With goodwill, of course.) Similarly, with regard to your habits, your past and so on: can you acknowledge the mood and the energy of ‘I am’ – and, by firming up aware presence, generate space around all that? This opens dispassionate awareness – and that penetrates inclination and feeling to provide a more stable abiding. In its equanimous embrace, the leaning self-corrects, and the *citta* stops creating things to lean into.

UNCONDITIONED AND RELINQUISHED

Release is possible because *anusaya* and grasping are habits, not fixed realities. *Citta* has a clear and unoccupied centre, and that can be realized through contemplative practice. This realization moderates the *citta*’s energies and radically affects the experience of being. There is pure presence. You can touch into this by sensing the ‘I’

that occurs in experience; the 'I' that has no 'am' is still, aware and unoccupied. The *citta* can touch a basis which doesn't carry such signs as 'arising' or 'ceasing', 'here' or 'there'; instead, there's a resting that is unconditioned, timeless, and has no sensation or feeling. Just as you can't describe the balance in the body in terms of weight, movement, vitality or any other way in which we directly know our bodies, you can't describe the Unconditioned in terms of 'mind' or 'heart'. More realistically, it's the absence of leaning and stress.

The way of expressing the entry into that unconditioned domain is through relinquishment, ripening into 'release' (*vossagga*). There can be a release from the imbalance that the *citta* adopts. This is what we've been working on through getting the body to organize around its own intelligence while sitting, standing, walking and breathing. We let go of views about the 'right', properly authorized Buddhist practice, and instead we let the body and heart adjust and find the way to pure and steady presence.

Then as you feel and sense your way, be spacious and allowing in terms of the process. You'll be aware of the *citta*'s confusion and discomfort, but by placing it in a safe, natural body, you're taking the *citta* out of the reach of the biases and pressures of self-conceiving. Trust full embodiment. You can't arrive at the

right meditation by figuring things out, but, through careful embodied attention, goodwill and direct knowing, there can be freedom from the pressure of becoming and self-view. This is the environment that supports the realization of the Unconditioned.

If all this brings about a relinquishment of function, choice and belonging, is insight practice a recipe for dysfunction? No. The stable *citta* never fully absorbs into function, and never becomes a solid person; but it can be innovative rather than automatically functional, and it can be motivated and operate free of personal concern. It does so from the basis of the factors that brought around dispassion and relinquishment. Herein the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* specifically highlights the four establishments of mindfulness and the seven factors of awakening – which we'll look into later. But in brief, the result is an engagement with life which at the same time is disengaged from the outflows and hindrances. The heart's stability, dignity and reflective awareness are then revealed, and the capacity for goodwill, courage and patience blossoms. *Citta* remains open and shares itself wherever there is the occasion, but to an increasing extent it doesn't lean away from its basis.

19

Great Fruit



THIS IS HOW MINDFULNESS OF IN-AND-
OUT BREATHING IS DEVELOPED AND MADE
MUCH OF SO AS TO BE OF GREAT FRUIT, OF
GREAT BENEFIT.

IMMEDIATE BENEFITS

Apart from the value to one's physical and neurological health, mindfulness of breathing calms and steadies the emotions and provides a useful anchor to return to when one's mind is swamped with urgent or obsessive thoughts. These are the first manifest, accessible and beneficial results of establishing mindfulness of breathing.

These benefits, if developed, lead on to the liberation of the heart. This means freedom from the suffering of fear, depression and bitterness. This doesn't mean that we don't feel anything, but rather that we can breathe a steady and remedial energy through qualities such as rage, anxiety or stagnation. Then the discomfort of life doesn't cause the *citta* to lose its balance and generate ripples of stress and anguish.

In more detail, the Buddha points out that this freedom occurs in tandem with the development of **seven factors of awakening** and **four establishments of mindfulness**. These are the strengths and perspectives that effect that liberation. The seven factors are: **mindfulness, exploration of *dhammā*, energy, rapture, tranquillity/soothing, concentration** and **equanimity**. With some reflection, you can see how all of these factors come into play as you practice; in fact, some factors are directly referenced in the sutta.

MINDFULNESS IS THE KEY TO A GREAT OPENING

The common denominator between the factors of awakening and the four ‘establishments’ (*upaṭṭhāna*) is mindfulness. These establishments represent where one directs mindfulness – towards the **body, feeling, mind/heart** and ***dhammā*** – with liberating results. Of these four, the body acts as the fundamental base for mindfulness. With a good grounding in the breathing body, we can manage to not react when meeting the evocative experience of feeling. That being the case, it becomes possible to remain open and steady in the face of the even more moving experience of the affective *citta*. As the *citta*, with its impulsive energies and compelling habits, is that with which we identify, to maintain a coolly disengaged attention when meeting that is transformational. A skilful handling of *citta*’s phenomena (*dhammā*) liberates.

The fourth establishment, of *dhammā*, is where mindfulness forms a path out of worldly currents. The contemplative trains to witness how obstructive *dhammā* such as hindrances come into being and what causes them to persist or decline. Similarly for supportive factors. This is the wisdom of know-how, the wisdom of Path. It leads to the wisdom of realization: that none of this is personal. With directly experienced realization, form, feeling, perception, activations and consciousness are seen as relative and changeable, and a reset occurs.

For example, one can only witness one's embodiment as a changing process of sensations and energies for so long before orientation around its visual appearance wanes and is replaced by something healthier and more realistic. Wisdom in terms of addressing and steadying bodily energies will make illness, ageing and death less oppressive. In terms of perceptions, long-established attitudes about oneself, and others, when seen as changeable breezes that flutter in the heart, tend to die down, void of passion and belief. Memories and personal history can be accessed, but they don't flood the *citta*. All in all, one's relationship to conditioned reality becomes dispassionate and filled with care and integrity. And as far as the *citta*'s knowing aspect goes, that rests on an unconditioned basis.

Given the predominant role that mindfulness plays in the path of liberation, mindfulness can be understood to be the aware state that accompanies all processes and steps in *ānāpānasati*. This causes us to consider mindfulness to encompass all the skills needed to stay with and supervise the handling of a topic with the purpose of awakening. This is because right mindfulness is based on right view; we bear breathing in mind in line with that view of the potential for unskilful and skilful states. And within this frame of reference, hindrances get abandoned and the factors of awakening arise.

These factors detail what spiritual assets arise on the path of awakening and in what order. The first three – mindfulness, exploration (*dhammavicāya*), and energy (*virīya*) – are qualities that one can arouse. We apply mindfulness, establish it and thereby facilitate a process of exploring the conditioning forces that make up our everyday reality. This takes energy, but also liberates it from being used in damaging or distracting ways. As the embodied *citta* gets released from concocting fantasies, doubts, grudges and anxieties, the energy that these programs run on gets freed up. It then refreshes the *citta* with rapture – an experience likened to the uplift one would receive on recovering from a grievous illness or on being released from prison.

Rapture then is something that happens rather than something you do. This is the turning point in awakening where the more active and directive factors act as a foundation for enhanced and enjoyed receptivity. The first of these is tranquillity (*passadhi*): mindfully one soothes and steadies the *citta* by referring to how rapture affects the body (rather than focusing intently on the feeling itself – which will tend to excite the heart-mind). To do this requires the dispassionate receptivity that allows one’s heart-energies to consolidate. The consequent consolidation is *samādhi*, the contented and settled mind. The *citta* therefore has an equanimous tone and outlook.

KEY POINTS

A few points may outline the awakening process:

- It's about getting embodied, being with the primary experience of being alive, rather than with the nervous energy of our daily and kammic functions. When there is embodied security and confidence, the breathing-energy will carry that message through the entire body.
- It's about feeling, and working with that. From sensory to embodied and heart-based.
- It's about simplifying and getting to the roots of what you're experiencing. Notice how triggering and conditioning occur. Learn to calm these *saṅkhārā* by referring to them directly: not so much 'They don't like me' but 'agitation and uncertainty'. Translate 'I should be' and 'I ought to do' into 'pressure'. Then you can contain these activating effects in your entire body (widen attention to include feet and back) and through mindfully relaxing, release them.
- It's about cooling and releasing. Take time to disengage heart and mind from what affects them. Linger in that open state, appreciating it. Then give careful attention to what arises.
- Remember: there's nothing wrong with you.

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Keep Breathing!



HERE IN SYNOPSIS ARE GUIDELINES ON MINDFULNESS OF BREATHING.

- 1 TRUST EMBODIMENT.
- 2 PUT ASIDE THE ANATOMICAL BODY IN ACCORDANCE WITH DEEPENING.
- 3 ANCHOR ENERGY WITHIN THE BREATHING.
- 4 USE BREATHING TO MODERATE THE MIND, NOT VICE VERSA.
- 5 HINDRANCES ARE A MAJOR ARENA FOR LEARNING TO DEPERSONALIZE.
- 6 PRACTICE PROCEEDS IN ACCORD WITH DHAMMA; IT'S THE WHOLENESS
- WHOLE-HEARTED, WHOLE BODY, WHOLE PATH - THAT DOES THE WORK.

1. TRUST EMBODIMENT

Embodiment doesn't mean being attached to a physical form. What I mean by this term is: awareness centred in how the body feels and senses itself. As long as we 'know' our body from our mental and visual impression of it, we measure it in accordance with ideas of what it is and should be and make it into a person. The result of that is that we only have a very partial experience of our own body. This feels unbalanced and uncomfortable. An important aim of embodiment therefore is to re-educate the mind; to attune to direct experience and cultivate comfort through a full and sympathetic awareness of it. Then the body offers the lifelong reference to living reality – which is a good place to start if you're interested in truth and awakening.

Also trust the timing of embodiment. The body itself doesn't operate according to the clock, nor according to the mind's wishes. Tune in to breathing at your body's natural rate – which will change. Settling, opening and releasing occur in accordance with embodied awareness. Establishing safety and stability can take repeated occasions of focused practice. Release comes after that. Understanding comes later.

2. PUT ASIDE THE ANATOMICAL BODY IN ACCORDANCE WITH DEEPENING

By ‘the anatomical body’ I mean the perceptual map of the body’s anatomy that we carry in our minds. This ‘virtual picture’ of the body doesn’t match what we directly feel, and it doesn’t support settling into, and harmonizing with, what is felt. The mental concept of the body sets up a map and a mode of attention that prevent energy and awareness from covering the entire body and addressing the imbalances that are a source of pain. For example, the way one stands can cause an imbalance that creates tension and pain in the shoulders, but, because from the anatomical viewpoint the shoulders are far from the feet, we don’t consider that changing the stance might allow the entire body to settle and the breathing to deepen – which would help the shoulders to relax. In terms of direct experience, everything is connected: bodily tension and imbalance are bound up with emotional and psychological stress; and the breath-energy is pivotal to physical and emotional wellbeing. We need to experience the body as it’s felt to really understand that.

Nevertheless, we begin with the anatomical body in order to establish posture and set up the body as a foundation for mindfulness. Then, when mindfulness is established within the body, we notice the body occupies a field of fluctuating sensations – the ‘sensation-field’ –

and the contours and measures of the anatomical map become more charged. The sense of having a visual shape recedes and the body is experienced in terms of varying intensities of felt experience. This does relate to the anatomy, but the felt shape is different: for example, a sensitive place like the hand generates a fuller sensation-field than the entirety of your back does. Your attention is also drawn to uncomfortable sensations and in so doing, magnifies them. So this sensate body gets us in touch with what the heart gets bound up with, and with what it struggles. This is the Buddha's First Noble Truth. And this encourages a careful and kindly response: be patient, don't fight; your felt body can change if you widen your focus and soften your energy.

Dealing with this sentient body therefore requires us to acknowledge and handle bodily energies. This energy can be detected in terms of the vitality, tension, stability, agitation or stagnation experienced in the body. It is activated by sensations, and stirred by the physical and mental feelings that arise dependent on those sensations. (It's also stirred by mental energies and supports mental states.) Imbalanced energy can make the body feel asymmetrical, top-heavy, ungrounded or flooded – but giving careful attention to energy offers a way to stability and ease. The field of bodily energy can be settled, consolidated, soothed and released from the sensation-field through breathing.

Although we can at a certain point put aside the anatomical perception, I do not advise dissociation. The proper process is to sense, establish and understand the boundaries of the anatomical body first. This focuses the mind. Then mindfulness of the field of sensations as it covers the anatomy takes the mind into the body as a sensitive system (rather than a lump of meat and bones). Meeting the feelings that run through the body then becomes a Dhamma practice that encourages awareness of the energies of body and mind that can moderate their impact. As these energies settle and consolidate, there is a foundation for *samādhi* and liberation. Yet we also have to integrate the energy and its purifying effects into how we regard and use the physical body when we leave *samādhi*. All this is why we bear the body in mind.

3. ANCHOR ENERGY WITHIN THE BREATHING

This is the initial and ongoing function of mindfulness of breathing. Practise settling the body with grounding and spaciousness until breathing comes to the fore and extends through the body in an even and unrestricted way. Meet any agitation, imbalance or stagnation in this wide field through the grounding, spaciousness and rhythm of breathing. Give attention to the pause phase rather than focus on a point. A narrow focus can create an unfavourable intensity, a line of constrictive

energy that may be captivating, but is brittle. When it breaks, the mind can get disoriented, irritable or worse. So anchor energy within ground, space and rhythm; don't force it onto a point in the anatomy. It's the energy, not the sensations, that liberates the *citta*.

4. USE BREATHING TO MODERATE THE MIND, NOT VICE VERSA

This follows on from all of the above. Acknowledge, learn from and grow deeper than the meddling mind. This is about moderating intention and flexing attention to be receptive to the breathing; adjust the mind rather than direct the breathing.

We need to apply intention; it's just that the kind of intention changes. At first we use ideas, aims and wishes to set up meditation. Then as we establish mindfulness, the conceiving mind has to be trained to follow the breathing through placing-and-sensing: think short, listen long. Wisely restrain the thinking mind in order to 'listen' more receptively within the meditative process.

We also train the emotional and impulsive energies of the *citta*. It's good to be emotionally attuned and extend an attitude of goodwill to one's body and mind in order to come out of abstract notions or mechanical techniques. Sensitivity and responsiveness

are to be encouraged. As these deepen, they loosen reactivity, and abbreviate expectation or despond, so the *citta* attunes to equanimity. Equanimity and dispassion allow us to let go of impatient inclinations to get concentrated, to understand why we feel the way we do, to hang on to pleasure, or to get on to the next stage. Such fretfulness intrudes on the embodied process and hinders the impersonal unfolding of calm and insight. Instead, we train to acknowledge and steady the emotional aspect of the *citta*. In this way, the *citta* gets cleaner and clearer.

As the patterns of psychological and emotional tweaking are a template of the personality, putting these aside is an aspect of abandoning personality-view, the first fetter to awakening.

5. HINDRANCES ARE A MAJOR ARENA FOR LEARNING TO DEPERSONALIZE

This is a reminder to do all of the above. Taking irritability, sense-desire, dullness, restlessness or vacillating doubt personally will lead to despond. Grounding and moderating the mind will support the resources needed to clear the hindrances. Meanwhile, there is a learning to be done, both in terms of acknowledging the biases and conditioning that support hindrances, and in terms of realizing a more

secure and easeful basis. If you take your cues from worldly values and signs, hindrances will arise conditioned by worldly glows, nagging pressures, performance drives and judgements. Taken personally, these programs steer and shape your life. On the other hand, if you wisely respond to their challenge, you'll learn disengagement, magnanimity, and skills for handling attitude and energy. These skills and what they reveal become a reference to orient your life around that's more reliable than any idea of what you are.

6. PRACTICE PROCEEDS IN ACCORD WITH DHAMMA; IT'S THE WHOLENESS THAT DOES THE WORK

This summarizes all of the above. Have faith in Dhamma. Practise in accord with what arises for you in terms of your acquired bodily and mental kamma. This is Dhamma practice. Through meditation you enter the weave of energies, skills and understanding that liberates. Mindfulness of breathing is a good meditation theme, but you should also cultivate the values and virtues of a supportive lifestyle. Ethics, giving and sharing, restraint and goodwill are the great Dhamma body that we breathe through – and it is the wisdom of this that takes the practice beyond what we can do from a personal basis.

Glossary

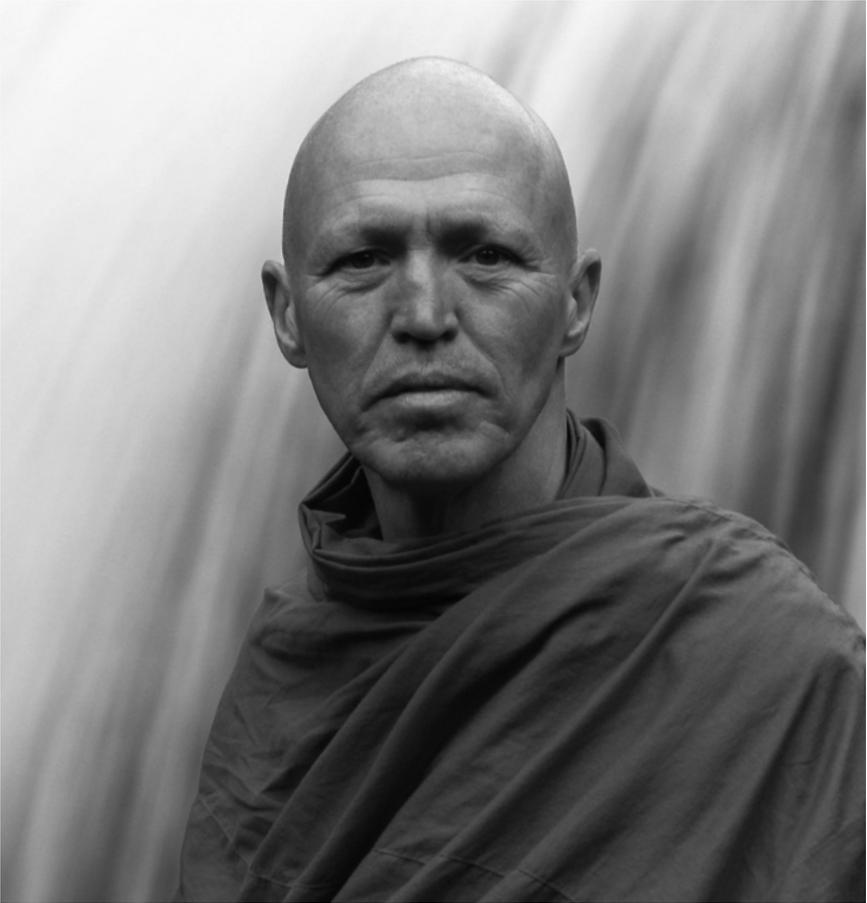
Here is a list of the Pali words used in this book, along with some of their English translations.

<i>ahaṃkāra</i>	the 'I am' construction
<i>ānāpānasati</i>	mindfulness of breathing
<i>anicca</i>	changeability, impermanence, inconstancy
<i>anupassi</i>	seeing in the presence of, witnessing
<i>anusaya</i>	latent tendency, obsession
<i>āruppa</i>	formless, immaterial
<i>asaṅkhata</i>	the Unconditioned, <i>nibbāna</i>
<i>āsava</i>	outflow, taint, canker, effluent, corruption
<i>atthaṅgamo</i>	disappearance
<i>avijjā</i>	ignorance
<i>bhava</i>	becoming, existence, continuity
<i>bojjhaṅga</i>	factor of awakening/enlightenment
<i>byāpāda</i>	ill-will, aversion
<i>cetanā</i>	intention, inclination, volition, impulse
<i>cetovimutti</i>	liberated in heart

<i>citta</i>	heart, mind, awareness
<i>cittasaṅkhāra</i>	mental formation, heart sensitivity, volitional formation
<i>dhamma/ā</i>	quality/qualities, mental object/s, phenomenon/phenomena
<i>dhammavicāya</i>	exploration of qualities, investigation of phenomena/states
<i>dukkha</i>	suffering, stress, unsatisfactoriness
<i>ekaggatā</i>	one-pointedness, unification
<i>ekodhibhāva/ ekodhibhūtaṃ</i>	singleness, collectedness
<i>jhāna</i>	absorption, meditation
<i>kāmacchanda</i>	sense desire
<i>kāma-loka</i>	sensual domain
<i>kāya</i>	body
<i>kāyasaṅkhāra</i>	bodily formation
<i>khandha/ā</i>	aggregate/s
<i>manas</i>	mind, mentality, intellect
<i>manasikāra</i>	attention
<i>nāma</i>	name, interpretation
<i>nibbāna</i>	untranslated, but rendered as 'unbinding' or 'blowing out'

<i>nibbidā</i>	disenchantment
<i>nirodhā</i>	cessation, stopping, ceasing
<i>nīvaraṇa</i>	hindrance
<i>pañānati</i>	directly knows
<i>pāṇa</i>	breathing
<i>paññāvimutti</i>	liberation in wisdom/discernment
<i>passadhi</i>	tranquillity
<i>paṭinissagga</i>	relinquishment, abandonment
<i>phassa</i>	contact, impression
<i>pīti</i>	rapture, refreshment
<i>rūpa</i>	form, shape
<i>rūpa-loka</i>	fine-material domain
<i>salāyatana</i>	six sense-spheres
<i>samādhi</i>	concentration, collectedness, unification
<i>samatha</i>	calming, stabilizing
<i>sampajāno</i>	alert knowing, full awareness, clear comprehension
<i>samudāya</i>	arising
<i>saṅkhāra/ā</i>	formation/s, fabrication/s, program/s, condition/s
<i>saṅkhata</i>	conditioned
<i>saññā</i>	perception, felt meaning
<i>sati</i>	mindfulness
<i>satipaṭṭhāna</i>	establishment of mindfulness
<i>sukha</i>	ease, pleasure, happiness

<i>taṇhā</i>	craving, thirst
<i>thīna-middha</i>	mental stiffness/dullness and lethargy, sloth and torpor
<i>uddhacca-kukkucca</i>	restlessness, worry-and-flurry
<i>upadhi</i>	attachment, acquisition, residue
<i>upakkilesa</i>	refined blemish
<i>upaṭṭhāna</i>	establishment (of mindfulness)
<i>vacīsaṅkhāra</i>	thought formation, verbal formation
<i>vedanā</i>	feeling, feeling tone
<i>vibhava</i>	negation of existence, non-becoming
<i>vicāra</i>	sensing, evaluation, sustained thought, pondering
<i>vicikicchā</i>	doubt, scepticism
<i>viññāṇa</i>	consciousness
<i>vipāka</i>	effect, result (of intended action)
<i>vipassanā</i>	insight
<i>virāga</i>	dispassion
<i>viriyā</i>	energy
<i>vitakka</i>	placing, bringing to mind, conceiving
<i>viveka</i>	disengagement, withdrawal, seclusion
<i>vossagga</i>	release
<i>yoniso manasikāra</i>	deep or careful or appropriate attention



Note on the Author



Ajahn Sucitto was born in London, England, in 1949 and became a bhikkhu in Thailand in 1976. He returned to Britain in 1978 and trained under Ajahn Sumedho at Cittaviveka and Amaravati Monasteries. He was abbot of Cittaviveka from 1992 until 2014, and still resides there (see: cittaviveka.org). His website, ajahnsucitto.org, has links to his free-distribution books, articles, and talks, as well as news of upcoming teaching engagements.

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Breathing with full awareness is fundamental to many spiritual traditions and is recognised as being supportive of neurological health and psychological well-being.

In this book, Ajahn Sucitto explores the Buddha's systematic presentation of mindfulness of breathing as a practice that unravels stress from body, heart and mind and leads to the peace of awakening.