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The Breath: A Vehicle for Liberation

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This is a transcript of Thanissaro Bhikkhu's seminar held at the Insight Meditation Center in Redwood City, California, on the 6th of May, 2006. The seminar dealt with the practice of mindfulness of breathing using the Buddha's discourse—the Ānāpānasati Sutta—as a practical road map to states of meditative absorption and, ultimately, total release from suffering.

The pages of the transcript correspond to the 3 audio files from Audiodharma.org as follows:

	Page	Audio duration
1.	4	1:14:45
2.	16	1:10:36
3.	31	1:08:39

Two suttas are appended, both taken from Accesstoinsight.org:

1. MN 118, the Ānāpānasati Sutta
2. SN 54.6, the Arittha Sutta

Headings to different sections of the seminar have been added, as well as a table of contents. Pali terms and passages from the Ānāpānasati Sutta are italicized, but otherwise, editing has been kept to a bare minimum.

The 'Gentium' typeface is used throughout the transcript, for its native support of Pali diacritical marks. If some characters fail to render correctly, installing this freely downloadable typeface may help.

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The Breath: A Vehicle for Liberation

Guided Meditation

Today's topic, as you know, is mindfulness of breathing. And the best way to start, of course, is to do it. So let's do some meditation.

Close your eyes, and be aware of your breathing. Being aware involves two things: one, keep the breath in mind, and two, watch the breath. But to bring the proper attitude to the breath, let's first start with thoughts of good will, because that's the underlying motivation for the whole teaching.

Good will is a wish for happiness, for release from stress and suffering—both for yourself and for the people around you, i.e., all over the world. So just express that thought in your mind: “May I be happy. May I find true happiness.” And remind yourself that this is not a selfish thought. True happiness is something that comes from within, it doesn't take anything away from anyone else. The more happiness you find within, the less of a burden you are to other people, and the more happiness you can share with them.

So the next thought is wishing good will for the people around you. Start first with people who are close to your heart: your family, your very close friends. May they find true happiness too. And then spread those thoughts out in ever widening circles: people you know well and like ... people you like even though you don't know them so well ... people you're neutral about ... and people you don't like. Remember, you don't have to like people to wish that they find true happiness. If more people would find true happiness in their lives, the world would be a much better place, so don't let your likes and dislikes limit your good will.

Then spread thoughts of good will to people you don't even know. And not just people, living beings of all kinds. East, West, North, South, above and below, out to infinity. May we all find true happiness in our lives.

And now bring your attention back to the breath. Bring good will to the breath as well. In other words, allow the breath to come in, go out, in any way that feels comfortable for the body. It might be long or short, deep or shallow. You can think of the whole body breathing in, the whole body breathing out—whatever rhythm or texture of breathing feels best right now. Explore a bit to see what feels good, and when you find something that does feel good, stick with it. If after sticking with it for a while it doesn't feel good, you can change. Try to keep on top of what feels best for the body and the breath right now.

We're developing two qualities as we're doing this. One is *mindfulness*, the ability to keep something in mind. Right now we're keeping the breath in mind. The second is *alertness*, keeping watch over what's actually going on: knowing the breath when it comes in, when it goes out, knowing whether it's comfortable or not, and at the same time knowing whether your mind is staying with the breath. If you catch it slipping off, you can bring it back. If it slips off again, bring it back again. If it slips off ten times, a hundred times, bring it back ten times, a hundred times. Don't get discouraged. The fact that you've caught it is a good sign. So allow yourself to come back to the breath with a sense of good will. Don't think of the breath as an enemy. If you're an enemy with your own breath, you're in really bad shape.

A third quality we're developing is something called *ardency*. The Pali term is *ātappa*. In other words, as soon as you catch the mind slipping off, you bring it back. Don't let it wander around

sniffing the flowers, looking at the sky. You've got work to do here. But it's good work.

When you are with the breath, this quality of ardency means you try to be as sensitive as possible to how the breathing feels.

When you have these three qualities working together—mindfulness, alertness, and ardency—you've got a foundation—what in Pali is called *vihāra-dhamma*, which means a home for the mind. A place where you can stay, where you feel sheltered, protected and at ease.

When the breath feels comfortable, then you can start exploring in more detail the process of breathing throughout the body. A good place to start is down around the navel. Locate your abdomen. Where is it right now, among all the sensations of the body you may feel? Which ones correspond to the abdomen? Watch those sensations for a while as you breathe in, breathe out. And if you notice any sense of tension or tightness in that part of the body, allow it to relax, so that no tension builds up there as you breathe in, and you don't hold on to any tension as you breathe out. And at the same time you don't try to squeeze the end of the in-breath, or squeeze the end of the out-breath. If you want, you can think of breath energy coming in and out of the body right there at the navel.

...

Then bring your attention up to the solar plexus, and follow the same three steps there. In other words, one, locate that part of the body in your awareness. You don't have to be too precise. Two, watch it for a while, as you breathe in, as you breathe out. And then three, if you notice any sense of tension or tightness in that part of the body, allow it to relax. Think of it dissolving away in the breath.

...

Now move your attention up to the middle of the chest, and follow the same three steps there.

...

Now move your attention to the base of the throat.

...

And then to the middle of the head. When you focus on the head, try not to put too much pressure on it. You can think of the breath coming in, going out of the head from all directions, not just in and out through the nose. In other words, think of it coming in and out the eyes, the ears, in from the back of the head, down from the top of the head, gently working through any patterns of tension, any bands of tension you may have around the head, in the face, in the jaw, working through those and just lifting them away.

...

Now think of the breath coming in and out from the back of the skull, at the base of the skull where it meets the neck. This is pretty counter-intuitive, but it is a very important spot when you're dealing with the breath energy in the body, because this is Tension Central of the body. Think of the breath coming in there just going down the spine, like melted butter, just dissolving away everything, any tension and any tightness you feel in that part of the body.

...

Now if you were meditating on your own, you could continue the survey of the body at your own pace. Down the back, out the legs, and starting again at the back of the neck, going down the shoulders, down the arms, out to the fingers—until you’ve covered the whole body. You could do that as many times as you’d like. Starting again at the navel, going through the whole body once again. A second time, third time. Till you’re ready to settle down.

But for the time being, let’s settle down right now. Find a spot, any one of the spots we’ve focused on just now: the navel, the solar plexus, the middle of the chest, the base of the throat, the middle of the head, the back of the neck, any spot that feels most comfortable to stay focused on, most congenial. Allow your attention to settle there, and then think of it spreading out from that spot to fill the whole body, so you’re aware of the whole body breathing in, aware of the whole body breathing out.

And then try to maintain that sense of centered but broad awareness each time you breathe in, each time you breathe out. It will have a tendency to shrink, so think “whole body” every time you breathe in, “whole body” every time you breathe out.

...

And before you leave meditation, think thoughts of good will once more. Whatever sense of calm or rest that you’ve felt for the past half hour, think of dedicating it to all living beings in all directions, out to infinity. May we all find peace and calm in our lives.

And before you open your eyes, remember, there is a skill to opening your eyes at the end of meditation. The mind has the tendency, as soon as the eyes open, to go rushing out, survey the room, the world outside. But it is possible to be aware of the world outside and yet to stay fully inhabiting your body. So, as much as you can, throughout the day, try to stay with this sense of being at ease, being friends with your breath—fully inhabiting your body, as aware of the breath as you can be. Let the discussion be on the fringes of your awareness, and let the breath fill the center.

Okay, now open your eyes.

The Sutta — Introduction

Today we’re going to do something different from the way I’ve run my classes here in the past. Essentially we’re going to go over only one discourse: Mindfulness of Breathing, the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, *Majjhima Nikāya* 118. These are the Buddha’s most detailed instructions on the breath; in fact they’re his most detailed instructions on meditation anywhere in the Canon. And so for that immediate purpose it’s good to take this discourse and look at it in detail, and at the same time to look at some of the other issues that you might find in reading one of these old discourses. After all, this is something 2,500 years old, as far as we know, and it’s good to know some of the background of some of this literature, so that if you want to read other discourses, you have an idea of how to approach literature that was addressed to monks, in another part of the world, under very different circumstances, but all facing the same problem that we all face. In other words, there’s the suffering we cause ourselves unnecessarily in life. And this is part of the solution to that problem. Let’s just start on page one: *Mindfulness of Breathing*.

The Pali word *ānāpānasati*: Some people have translated it as “mindfulness with breathing,” in the sense that you’re not focusing only on your breath, but you’re also going to be focusing on other things as well.

And then there's that word mindfulness, *sati*. I ran into someone recently who said they couldn't find the word mindfulness in his dictionary. It's a strange Buddhist invention. Actually, it was a solution to a dilemma that was encountered several decades back, when people in the West were starting to translate these discourses: what does this word, *sati*, mean? In the Canon it's defined as the ability to remember, the ability to keep something in mind. It doesn't refer to specific memories but it means the mind's capacity to hold something in mind. The closest that could be found in English, by this one translator Rhys Davids, was mindfulness. It's probably related to the old Christian injunction to be ever mindful of the needs of others, i.e., keep them in mind, don't forget them.

Mindfulness, however, is also taught together with another quality that I mentioned just now, which is *sampajañña*. This is related to your alertness to what you're doing, your own actions. When you do something, you're alert to what you're doing. At the same time, you're alert to the results.

So you've got a combination of two things here under the word "mindfulness": you're keeping the breath in mind and you also keep in mind that there are certain tasks to be done while you're focused on the breath. Under alertness you're watching whether you're actually doing those tasks, and at the same time checking to see the results. As for the tasks, there are sixteen steps in all, and beginning with step number three, you start training yourself. What this means is that there's going to be an intentional element to the steps of the practice.

There's a sutta that I appended on the back here [SN 54.6, the Arittha Sutta]—you can look at it later—where the Buddha essentially asks the monks, "How many of you are practicing mindfulness of breathing?" and this one monk says "I am." And the Buddha asks him "How do you do that?" And the monk says "Well, I put aside all thoughts of desire and aversion related to the past and the future, and focus just on being mindful of the breath as it comes in, mindful of the breath as it goes out." And the Buddha says, "There is that kind of mindfulness of breathing," but that's not the way he taught it. It's not just being in the present. Then he goes ahead and lists the sixteen steps of breath meditation. In each one there's an element of being aware of the breath, keeping the breath in mind, and also keeping in mind that you're going to do something intentional, in conjunction with the breath. So this might expand your notion of what mindfulness means. Many of us have been taught that mindfulness means acceptance of the present, bare awareness of the present, without any agendas, total equanimity, nonreactivity. But the way the Buddha teaches it, it's more keeping a task in mind.

And you have to remember that in the Buddha's teaching, intention is *the* big element in the mind. It's what shapes our experience more than anything else, i.e., intention is your karma. This is how the teaching on karma is related to meditation. He wants you to keep a certain intention in mind so that you can see the power of intention, and to realize how your present intentions may be shaping the present moment for the purposes of who knows what. In this case you're trying to use your intentions to shape your awareness for the purpose of keeping the mind on the path to the end of suffering.

So that's unpacking just that one word, *ānāpānasati*, keeping the breath in mind. Being mindful of the breath, and also being mindful of certain intentions that you're going to pursue with each and every breath.

We won't take every word in the sutta in such detail, otherwise we'd be here for a whole week. However, there's that first phrase, you've probably heard: "Thus have I heard," or in this case it is translated as "*I have heard that.*" The question is: who is this "I" here? Traditionally, they say it's Ananda. The tradition is that, after the Buddha passed away, Mahā Kassapa was concerned that the Buddha's teachings would disappear, or that they would get garbled, and so he called the monks together to have a meeting of the arahants, to decide how they were going to standardize the Buddha's teachings so they could be passed on. Ananda was the member of the Council who was in charge of reciting the suttas, and Upali, who had been the barber for the Sakyan clan,

who'd become an expert on the Discipline, would recite the Vinaya, or Discipline.

However, if you look at this "I have heard," it applies to all the suttas, even in the ones where Ananda appears as one of the characters. So in that case it wasn't just what Ananda had heard. I think it's more profitable to look at this in terms of, "I have heard" is whoever is reciting the sutta, whoever is telling you the sutta. This is the basis of their knowledge. There's one of the suttas, Majjhima 95, where the Buddha talks about how you preserve the truth, how you arrive at the truth. Preserving the truth means being very clear about what's the basis for what you're about to say. What's the basis for this truth that you believe in? Is it something you've heard? Is it something you've directly experienced? Is it something you've attained yourself? If it's something you've heard, it's still on a pretty low level. You haven't proven it to yourself. So these suttas are things that people have heard and passed on. Of course, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. In other words, if you take the teachings and put them into practice, then it becomes something more than what you've just heard. It becomes something you really know. So each sutta begins with a reminder: this is just something that has been passed down. We can't say we know for sure what the Buddha said, but we've heard that he has said this, and it seems reasonable. So the next thing, after seeing that it is reasonable, is to put it into practice and see the results. So that's the "I have heard."

Okay. "*The Blessed One was staying at Savatthi, in the Eastern Monastery, at the Palace of Migara's mother.*" Migara's mother, Lady Visakha, was actually Migara's daughter. They called her Migara's mother because she learned the Dhamma from the Buddha, became a stream-enterer, went back and taught her father. Because she was her father's teacher, they said she's not just his daughter any more, she's now his mother, in the Dhamma. The Eastern Monastery was originally an old palace that the family had, and so they gave it to the monks, as a monastery.

Now on this particular Rains retreat, we have an all-star cast. We have Sariputta, Maha Mogallana, Maha Kassapa, Maha Kaccayana, Maha Kotthita, and all the rest that are listed right there. "*And other well-known elder disciples.*" This is to give a sense of the importance of the instructions we're about to get. The passage talks about how the monks were in training, and very serious about their training. As they say, "*We're discerning grand successive distinctions.*" In other words, they were attaining various levels of awakening.

"*Now on that occasion—the Uposatha day of the fifteenth, the full-moon night of the Pavāranā ceremony —*" Uposatha is an old, pre-Buddhist tradition that they had in India, of basically taking the day off for the full moon, new moon, sometimes the half moons, as a day of rest, as a day devoted to Dhamma. And the Buddhists took on this tradition. For the lay people, it became traditional to take the eight precepts on the Uposatha day. And for the monks, it became traditional that on the fifteenth Uposatha day—in other words the day of the full moon, the day of the new moon—they would recite their *Patimokkha*, which was their code of discipline.

Except for this day of the Pavāranā ceremony. The word *Pavāranā* means invitation. At the end of the Rains retreat, at the full moon in October, which marks the end of the Rains retreat, the monks are supposed to invite one another to question them about their behavior. Normally it's a tradition in Buddhism that if you suspect anybody of a misdeed—you've seen it or heard it, and you want to talk to them about it—you first ask their permission. Say, "I have an issue with you. Can we talk about it?" Can you think of all the disputes that would be solved by that one? If people just said "I have an issue with you. I want to talk to you about it. Will you give me your permission to talk to you about it?"

I actually had one case where I got a letter from a monk that was filled with verbal abuse, and I wrote back saying, "Can I talk to you about this letter?" He wrote back and said, "No." That was the end of that relationship. But anyway, on the *Pavāranā* day every monk in the assembly invites everybody else. "If you have any suspicions about my misbehavior, my misdeeds during these past three months, I give you permission now to speak."

And the tradition is once that invitation has been given, it marks the end of the Rains retreat.

The next day everybody can go wherever they want. That's the end of their time spent together. However, if they find that this has been a very congenial community, everybody likes practicing with everybody else, nobody has any doubts, you can delay the invitation, which is what the Buddha does here. "So let's delay it for another month, we want to stick together as a group. Everybody's meditating well, this is a good congenial environment for practice. So let's keep it going."

So that's exactly what the Buddha does. He says "*Monks, I am content with this practice. I am content at heart with this practice. So arouse even more intense persistence for the attaining of the as-yet-unattained, the reaching of the as-yet-unreached, the realization of the as-yet-unrealized. I will remain right here at Savatthi [for another month] .*" What they call the White Water-lily Month is the month November, when the water-lilies all bloom in India. If you've ever been in India in November, that's still happening. Global warming hasn't changed that yet.

That's the introduction to the topic of breath meditation. In other words, they're basically trying to establish how important this teaching is. You've got all the famous monks gathered, the monks are serious in their practice, the Buddha is content with their practice. Obviously they're doing something right.

The Buddha goes on, at the bottom of the page: at the end of the month, this extra month—this is the longest you can delay this *Pavāranā* Ceremony, this one month—at the end of the full-moon of November you have that ceremony and everybody goes off wandering.

So the Buddha goes into a description of what a really good assembly of monks this is. He says "*free from idle chatter, devoid of idle chatter, and is established on pure heartwood: such is this community of monks, such is this assembly. The sort of assembly that is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of respect, an incomparable field of merit for the world: such is this community of monks, such is this assembly.*"

The idea of the field of merit is that any gift given to these people is like a seed planted in a good field: it grows well.

"*The sort of assembly to which a small gift, when given, becomes great, and a great gift greater: such is this community of monks, such is this assembly. The sort of assembly that it is rare to see in the world: such is this community of monks, such is this assembly—the sort of assembly that it would be worth traveling for leagues, taking along provisions, in order to see,*" i.e., this is one really good group of monks. Then he goes in and starts describing them, and this is where he gets into a description of the stages of awakening.

Effluents

Here he's setting forth the whole purpose: why do you do breath meditation? Is it simply so you can learn to relate to your body in a nice way in the present moment? It's actually more than that. The people who follow this practice: "*there are monks who are arahants, whose mental effluents are ended.*" Sometimes the word effluent is translated as "fermentations." The Pali word is *āsava*.

There are actually four kinds of *āsava*: sensual desire, becoming—which we'll get back to in a minute—views, and ignorance. These are things that flow out of the mind. The mind flows out to its particular issues in its sensory experience or sensory input. Don't think that when something comes in to your senses, it comes to a blank slate. How many people in here have a blank slate? We all have our agendas, we all have our desires, shaping our experience, driving us to look for experience.

One agenda is based on the fact that we're attached to our sensual desire. I think the Buddha's discussion of sensual desire is really fascinating. He says we're not attached to the *object* of our desire as much as we're attached to the desire itself. Desire is something we enjoy doing. If the desire gets frustrated in one thing, if you're told that you can't have this container of water, for

instance, you'll find something else to desire. It's very quick and very easy for the mind to shift from one thing to the next. Some shifts are more difficult, but you find eventually that the mind does have this tendency to shift its objects of desire around—even when the object has been a very intense and very pleasurable relationship with someone else. That can shift very quickly, in some cases. In other cases it takes a long, long time to shift. But if we were told, "You can't have this, and at the same time you can't desire anything else," the mind would really rebel. Our sense of desire, as we see it, is our sense of freedom. One of the most difficult parts of the Buddha's teaching is where he has to focus on the issue of how to use desire in order to overcome desire, and to sell people on the idea that maybe there is even greater freedom by being able to put an end to desire, beginning with sensual desire, in a skillful way. So that's the first of the effluents: sensual desire.

The second one, becoming, is the mind's way of creating mental worlds. We do this all the time. You can just sit here and think of New York and you've got a little picture of New York in your mind. It can be more detailed depending on how long you were there, or how much you've read about it. But you then can create "New York" and you can actually think of yourself going into this little world you have. The creation of the mental world is becoming, going into the mental world is birth. We do this on a small scale all the time. It's an effluent in the sense that once we have these little worlds, we try to make reality conform to that little world. That's when it becomes an effluent.

The way that you can see this most blatantly is when you fall asleep at night. You're there, breathing, calm, and all of a sudden your mind is not in your body anymore. You're some place else. This vision of some other place will appear: that's becoming. And then you go into it, i.e., you fall asleep and start dreaming: that's birth. There's a parallel process when you die. They talk about how visions will appear to people, two kinds of visions: one is basically remembrances of things you've done in the past, which can either be very good or very bad; and then the next vision will be of where you're going to go next. And it may be associated with that particular action.

In Thailand there's this author who's written a whole series of books called *The Law of Karma*. It's a series of short stories, and he insists that the short stories are at least based on actual events. Some are simply reports of actual events; others are a little more dressed up to make them dramatic short stories. In the monastery where I first stayed in Thailand, one of the monks liked to pull out this book for his Dhamma talks. The place where I was staying, the people were not that much into the Dhamma. They came, wanted to make merit and go home, and so he tried to pull out the most gripping of the stories. I remember one story in particular—everybody was absolutely quiet throughout the whole story as he read it. It was the story of a butcher facing death. Many of the farmers there in Thailand had killed animals in the past and so when the story talked about how the butcher was lying on his deathbed and starts suddenly screaming like a pig about to be killed, you could've heard a pin drop. This was the butcher going through a vision of what he'd done in the past. Oftentimes if you allow your mind to be affected by those visions, then the next step is a vision of where you're going to go as a result of that action, and the mind will follow that vision. You reach a point where you can't stay in the body, so what can you grab onto? A vision appears in the mind, you go. That's becoming, and then you find yourself in the middle of that becoming. That's birth. That's the second of the effluents.

The third is views, holding to views. And holding to views here, the Buddha says, means not only thinking: "What I think is right, and everybody else is wrong." It can also include views like: "I don't know," "agnosticism is the best position to take." You take a position, basically, even if it's holding to the position of not taking a position. You can take a position of skepticism, or you can take a position of saying, "All views can be true in one way or another." If you hold to that as your position, that too is an effluent or fermentation of views. The Buddha's got you. Except for one way: if you use a view as a tool. Then you see: what does this view do to you? What does it

lead you to do? What are the results of those actions? If you find that they alleviate suffering, that's a good view to use as a tool. A very pragmatic approach to views.

Finally, ignorance is the last of the effluents. It means not looking at things in terms of the four noble truths. The four noble truths are not just a list of truths to remember; they're a framework for looking at your experience. You look for where there's suffering, or where there's stress, and then try to see what's causing that stress, and then do what you can to put an end to that stress, so you can realize the end of the stress. That's seeing things in terms of the four noble truths.

Now, each of the truths carries a duty: stress is to be comprehended, its cause is to be abandoned, its cessation realized, and the path to its cessation developed. That's what the framework is for: to give you a sense of what to do. Looking at things in any other way, through any other framework, would be ignorance, from this point of view.

So, the arahants are people who have abandoned all of these effluents or fermentations. The word effluent is used in this translation because it's about as literal a translation as you can get.

The word in Pali, *āsava*, means something that flows out. Not only does it flow out; it's also sticky: that's one of the intended meanings. The other meaning, which is an often-used translation, is fermentation. The idea is that these things come bubbling up out of the mind and get you intoxicated. Because the word for wine in Pali is also *āsava*. Fruit wine would be *phalāsava*, or something like that. These are things that intoxicate the mind. The arahants have abandoned these effluents. "*They've attained the true goal, laid to waste the fetter of becoming, and who are released through right gnosis,*" or right knowledge, "*such are the monks in this community of monks.*"

Noble Ones

We're going to have to read through these backwards. The Buddha goes down through the list of the four noble attainments, and we're going to go up the list.

Let's start with the paragraph that says "*In this community of monks there are monks who, with the wasting away of [the first] three fetters, are stream-winners, steadfast, never again destined for states of woe, headed for self-awakening.*" What are those three fetters? The first one is self-identification, identifying the five *khandas* as you or yours, or identifying yourself, defining your sense of self, around the five aggregates. The aggregates are form, feeling, perception, fabrication and consciousness, sensory consciousness. And you can define your sense of self in any of four ways around any of these five. Take the body for instance, your sense of the body, the form of the body. When you close your eyes, that's the form of the body, how you sense what you've got here. You can either identify yourself as "this is me," or you can say "this is mine, I have a self that's something else from the body but the body belongs to this sense of self."

Or you can say "my self is in the body." I don't know if you were raised as a Christian, but if you did you probably had the idea that you have this soul that's a little thing inside you someplace, a little picture of a little homunculus living inside your body. I was very unimaginative in how I imagined the soul. I thought it was like a little piece of leather, like the sole on the bottom of your shoe. That was my mental image. My older brother says his mental image—I don't know where he got this one—was of a rusty tin can with a rod through it. That was his soul. So you might have the idea that you have this little spark of spirit inside you, and that that's your true self, inhabiting the body. That's one way of defining the self with reference to the body.

The final way is seeing the body as in yourself. This could be just kind of an astral body, or a self that surrounds the body. It could be an infinite self. The Buddha was not talking just about separate self or small self. He's talking about any kind of idea of self, which could be cosmic, infinite. Still you have this body which moves in the infinity of your self.

The Buddha says that with the experience of stream-entry, when the mind touches the deathless, or sees the deathless, at that point all of the aggregates fall away and you can't really identify your self in any of those ways with regard to any of the aggregates. That's how stream-entry puts an end to self-identification. You can't say specifically "my self is X" anymore. You can't define it in terms of the five aggregates because they fall away, but there still is an awareness of the deathless.

Because you know that you did this based on developing your intentions, your attachments to rites and precepts, or rituals and practices also falls away.

Then, finally, you have no doubt about the Buddha, the Dhamma and the Sangha, because you've seen that what the Buddha taught was true. This is where you prove the truth of the teachings: there is a deathless, it is an end of suffering. You're not totally there yet but you've seen it. You know it for sure.

Those are the three fetters you put away. Self-identification, attachment to rites and rituals, or precepts and practices, and then finally uncertainty about the Triple Gem.

Okay, the next one, moving up. We have the once-returners, who have abandoned the three fetters and have experienced "*the attenuation of passion, aversion, & delusion.*" Now, nowhere does it explain exactly how attenuated these are. But the distinction about these people is that they're going to return only once more to this world. In other words, they have the opportunity of going to the different levels of heaven if they want.

I forgot to say that stream-enterers will not fall below the human realm in any of their future rebirths. There's another place where they say they're never destined for more than seven rebirths. And in those seven, they'll never fall below the human realm. Once-returners are going to come back once as human beings and then become arahants.

Move up, "*In this community of monks there are monks who, with the wasting away of the five lower fetters...*" Now the five lower fetters are the three we just mentioned, plus sensual passion and irritation. The two go together. Non-returners have seen enough of the deathless so that it actually puts an end to their sensual desire. There's no passion for anything sensual anymore. And because there's no passion for these things, there's no irritation when they don't get sensual pleasures.

I once had a dream that the world was made up out of two kinds of people: dreamers and criminals. The two go together. You dream, and then you go out looking for what you dream. You don't get it and you become a criminal. So that's how those two fetters go together.

The fetter of becoming, that was mentioned in that paragraph on arahants, is actually broken down into five. But first let's finish with the non-returners. "*With the wasting away of the five lower fetters, are due to be reborn [in the Pure Abodes].*" Now these are brahma-realms, up in the realm of form, and once they get up there they're not coming back. They will attain awakening in those realms.

As for arahants, they don't take rebirth at all. And the fetter of becoming that was mentioned in that paragraph, on the very last line on the first page, is actually composed of five fetters.

One is passion for form: the sense of form that you inhabit when the mind is really deep in concentration, based on a sense of the body.

The second one is passion for formlessness. This is passion for any formless experience. It could be an experience of space, an experience of unlimited consciousness, an experience of nothingness, or even some of the more refined states of concentration that don't even have objects. You abandon your passion for that.

There's the end of restlessness, which in this case is the restlessness of wanting to go on to nirvana right away, wanting to finish up and not do the work properly.

There's the end of conceit. The fetter of conceit is not just that you think you're better than other people, but when you compare yourself: "I am this and it is either better than what other people are, or worse than what other people are, or equal to what other people are." It's a sense

of identifying “this is me” and you compare your “me” with other people’s “me.” There’s the end of that.

Finally, there’s the end of ignorance. The arahants at all times see things in terms of the four noble truths. So those are the five fetters that the arahants have dropped when they drop this fetter of becoming.

So there you have the four noble attainments. The traditional meaning of the word Sangha meant those four, in terms of the Noble Sangha. Then there’s the monastic sangha, who are just the monks and nuns, and anybody who ordains. That’s called the conventional sangha.

Then, of course, there’s the vipassana sangha, which is a totally new invention. As far as I can trace it out, the idea that anybody who wants to be a Buddhist is a member of the sangha goes back to Sangharakshita. He was a British monk who studied in India for a while, came back and said, “Enough of this monk stuff, we want everybody to be a member of the sangha: the mahasangha, or Great Sangha.” (Why do all these movements in Buddhism have to dress themselves up as “great”?) Actually Buddhism already has a perfectly good word that includes everybody who is a Buddhist, and that is *parisā*. You might want to try it on for a little bit. It covers all monks, nuns, lay women, and lay men who have taken refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha. So if you have a Sangha newsletter, you might want to change it to a *Parisā* newsletter. Because if you’re going to take refuge in the Sangha, and the person meditating next to you is wearing a nylon jacket, it’s hard to think of that person as your refuge. What does refuge mean? It means you take the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha as your example in how to find true happiness.

Refuge has a higher meaning than just a sense of support you get from everybody sitting together in the same room meditating. Refuge goes deeper than that. It’s something you really want to take as an example. You want to see what good qualities the Sangha has and you want to internalize them, to make them your own qualities, so that you can become a member of that Sangha and you truly can become a refuge yourself.

Okay, that’s the Noble Sangha. In addition to the members of the Noble Sangha, “*In this community of monks there are monks who remain devoted to the development of the four frames of reference...*”—that’s also translated many times as “foundations of mindfulness” or “establishings of mindfulness”—“*the four right exertions... the four bases of power... the five faculties... the five strengths... the seven factors for awakening... the noble eightfold path.*” Now we could be here all day discussing those.

However, there’s a book on the table, and you can read that instead. These are called the Wings to Awakening. The Buddha, toward the end of his life, called the monks together and said: “If you want to maintain the teachings, then maintain these seven sets of teachings.” This was the essence, he said, of what he had taught. So you have monks who are devoted to these practices. You have monks who, in the next paragraph, are “*devoted to the development of good will... compassion... appreciation... equanimity... [the perception of the] foulness [of the body]... the perception of inconstancy,*” sometimes called the perception of impermanence. It’s interesting, this impermanence or inconstancy is often called one of the three characteristics. But if you do a search in the Pali Canon you will never find the words “three characteristics.” You’ll never find the words “the characteristic of impermanence” or any of these as characteristics. They’re all taught as perceptions. These are perceptions that you apply to your experience. You look for the inconstancy in things. You look for the stress in things. You look at the non-selfness of things. As a meditative practice.

Finally he says: “*In this community of monks there are monks who remain devoted to mindfulness of in-&-out breathing.*” It took him all this time to get there. Now you can imagine if the Buddha had to write this for a magazine, they would say “okay, we want everything in the first paragraph; hook the reader right from the beginning.” 2,500 years ago people were more relaxed.

Also, taking your time like this is a very important technique in dhamma talks. Sometimes

you don't go straight to the matter in a straight paragraph, because it would knock people off their feet. Especially if you see somebody in the community who has been lying, you don't say "okay, tonight's dhamma talk is going to be on lying." People get very defensive right away, and they put up a sort of barrier. They don't want to hear about lying if they know they have been caught lying. However, you can start about something a little bit more vague, like the noble path, and how this is a good path to be on, it's good for everybody, it's good for you, it's good for the people around you; what is this noble path composed of? You start going down right view, right resolve and then all of a sudden there's right speech. You have to touch on right speech and then you move on. That way, the person is relaxed, they don't feel like they're being attacked, and you can get your message in and then move on. Which is why magazine articles are not the ideal place to discuss dhamma.

Just wanted to get that off my chest.

Okay, so now the Buddha is going to explain mindfulness of in and out breathing. But before he explains mindfulness of in and out breathing, here he does have a hook. And the hook is this: if you do mindfulness of in and out breathing, "*when developed & pursued, is of great fruit, of great benefit.*" In other words, it's going to be good for you, big-time.

"*Mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, when developed & pursued, brings the four frames of reference to their culmination.*" Or the four establishings of mindfulness. "*The four frames of reference, when developed & pursued, bring the seven factors for awakening to their culmination. The seven factors for awakening, when developed & pursued, bring clear knowing & release to their culmination.*" In other words, this is not an indirect path: you do mindfulness of breathing and it leads straight to something more important. In and of itself, if you do this practice, the four frames of reference get developed, the seven factors for awakening get developed, and clear knowing and release get developed; in other words, this practice leads straight to the attainment of nirvana. So, in and of itself, mindfulness of breathing covers all these things. That's an important point, because all too often you hear that mindfulness of in and out breathing is something you do for the first three days of the retreat, and then you move on to vipassana, something better. The Buddha, however, says to stick with it. But it's not just staying with the tip of your nose. He's saying there are actually these 16 steps, which we'll get to in a minute.

But first I'd like to break for questions. Any questions on these first two pages of the discourse?

Questions & Answers

Question: The five lower fetters, you mentioned sensual passion and ... ?

Than Geoff: Irritation.

Question: The various... I don't know what to call them. The different focuses. I'm just wondering, this "monks devoted," does that mean they stay with it for a period of time, or are they devoted to all the wings of awakening for instance or, ... I'm just wondering what the devotion part meant.

Than Geoff: It means you stick with them. The way the Buddha explains these different wings to awakening, is that you can do any one of them and it covers the path. Different people relate to different explanations. For me the seven factors for awakening always seemed very congenial. You start with mindfulness and then you analyze things, and then you get to concentration.

Or you may find that one set really speaks to you at one part of your practice, and then another set speaks to you at another part. But they're all considered to be equivalent. Now in that

next paragraph, where they're focused on developing good will, compassion, et cetera: this is usually in response to a particular tendency you might have. If you find that you really have trouble with wishing yourself well, okay, it's time to work on good will for a while. There are different ways of approaching the development of good will. One is—the one that you find in the Mahāsi tradition—where you just try to think passages of good will over and over and over and over in your head. In the Forest Tradition, it's more a sense of starting out the day, and then repeatedly through the day, reminding yourself of what your intention is in practicing, spreading good will for everybody, and then actually getting back to your meditation object, which might be a meditation word or the breath.

I find focusing on the breath—and this is not mentioned in the text—but if, focusing on the breath, you can get a sense of good will for your breath, it then can become a basis for good will that you can feel for yourself in other ways, and good will you feel for other people. I would find the idea of taking good will phrases and running them through my head all day... I would rebel. It's like Judith Crist's comment about watching *The Sound of Music* and wanting to go kick over a baby carriage afterwards.

Question: Can I ask you a question about meditation practice?

Than Geoff: I was going to save the discussion for the actual technique for the 16 steps, if that's okay.

Question: I have a question about your translation. Usually, you talk about the four frames of reference. I usually think of those as the four foundations of mindfulness. Why did you translate it in that particular way?

Than Geoff: One is, I personally find that useful in my own practice, to think of it in an idiomatic term in English. If you think of foundation of mindfulness... you go out and talk to people on the street, "what is your foundation of mindfulness?" and they look at you funny. But you can ask people when they're talking about something: "what's your frame of reference?" they'll understand you. This is something you're referring all of your experience to. You can refer it to the body. In other words, you take the body not only as your object, but when things come at you, you primarily look at them in terms of the effects they're having on the body. If things happen in the mind, look at them not so much as the content of the thought, but where in the body is there tension that corresponds to that thought? In this way you maintain the body as your frame of reference throughout. I was going to get into more detail about this, because it's still a problematic translation, because it's not just the frame that you're focusing on, there's also the establishing of the whole process of mind. So it's a process rather than just a thing that you're focused on: how do you get settled in a frame of reference, and then how do you use that frame of reference to relate to other things. So it's a whole process that we're working on. But I found frame of reference to be a good idiomatic way of presenting that. Any other questions?

Question: You mentioned something before and after the word *parisā*, and one was someone who said "okay, enough of this monk stuff." I didn't catch that name.

Than Geoff: Sangharakshita. In the 1950s.

Question: And then the other item was, I missed some of the verbiage, "you can become a refuge to yourself." What preceded that?

Than Geoff: When you develop the qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha in

yourself: now you have an internal refuge. And when you have that kind of internal refuge—especially if you become a member of the Noble Sangha—you’re counted as a refuge for other people as well.

Question: And how do you get away from that semantical dilemma of that word “self” within that context?

Than Geoff: The Buddha never said there is no self. He never said there is a self. He said self is an activity that we do. He calls it “I-making and my-making.” And to the extent that it’s skillful he encourages it. There’s a passage where he said, “The self is its own mainstay, the self is its own refuge.” It’s going to be its own refuge only when you become a very responsible person, and develop these qualities that you can depend on.

Question: And that would fall also to the word attachment to practice, if this were skillful means; the attachment’s acceptable?

Than Geoff: Right. It’s like taking the raft across the river. You’ve heard of that image. You get to the other side of the river, you can abandon the raft. *Don’t* abandon it until you get to the other side of the river. You’ve got to hold on. And there are many passages where the Buddha makes that point. While you’re on the path, you do hold on. It’s not counted as clinging, or if it is, it’s a skillful kind of clinging. You let go totally only when you don’t need to hold on anymore.

Question: In this section you talked about the five fetters, ignorance being one of them. What does ignorance mean here?

Than Geoff: It means seeing things in terms other than the four noble truths. In other words, you place an “I” or “not I” on an experience. And the Buddha says that’s ignorance. Ignorance is not looking where there is stress, where stress is passing away, and what’s causing that. Looking at your experience with those questions in mind: that’s knowledge. Ignorance is looking at your experience not in those terms.

The Sutta — Sixteen Steps

Okay. Let’s talk a little about the 16 steps. Page two. Mindfulness of in-&-out breathing. So, “*how is mindfulness of in-&-out breathing developed & pursued so as to be of great fruit, of great benefit? There is the case where a monk,*”—and the commentary always makes the point that monk here means any serious practitioner, lay or ordained—“*having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building, sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect, and setting mindfulness to the fore.*” That phrase “to the fore” is one of the controversial ones in this sutta. The Pali word is *parimukhaṃ*.

Literally, if you took the word apart, *pari-* means “around” and *mukhaṃ* means either “face” or “mouth.” Some people have interpreted it as that you have to focus around your mouth, or around your face. However there is a passage in the Canon where the word *parimukhaṃ* is specifically used and has a very clear meaning: around the chest. However, it seems forced to say that you have to put it either around your mouth or around your chest. The idiomatic meaning might also be to just bring it to the fore, to emphasize it. Mindfulness is something that’s brought up to the fore. Which is why I chose to translate it that way.

Just this quality of setting mindfulness to the fore: “I’m going to have an intention in mind and be very deliberate about what I’m keeping in mind.” Because mindfulness is something we

have all the time. You're always keeping something in mind. It might be the tune to some stupid commercial from the 1950s, but you've got something you're keeping in mind, and for most of us it's pretty unplanned. Things come up in the mind and they stick with us and then we drop them after a while. The Buddha is basically saying here that if you want to establish mindfulness, be very clear about what you're going to keep in mind. Be very intent. "*Always mindful,*" try to keep mindful all the way through the breath. "*Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.*" Okay, what is he going to be mindful of?

First Tetrad — Body

"[1] *Breathing in long, he discerns, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, he discerns, 'I am breathing out long.'* [2] *Or breathing in short, he discerns, 'I am breathing in short'; or breathing out short, he discerns, 'I am breathing out short.'*" These are the first things you want to keep in mind: how is the breathing going? And you try to analyze it in terms of whether it's long or short. Now some breath meditation teachers will say that while you're doing long and short, you might as well do comfortable and uncomfortable. See what feels good. In other words, you want to be more sensitive to what's going on with the breath. Here is another case where the word "I" is okay. Introductory meditation. You notice that in all sixteen of the steps, the word "I" is still there. The Buddha hasn't dropped that quite yet.

Beginning with step number three though, there is a new phrase: you *train* yourself. In other words, you become intent, you're going to do something intentionally. This is where you begin to see that the development of mindfulness is not just bare awareness, it's not just acceptance of whatever happens. You're training yourself, you've got an agenda, you've got something in mind that you're going to, and this is what you're going to keep in mind. Each time you breathe in, you keep in mind:

"*I will breathe in sensitive to the entire body.*" Breathing out, you keep in mind: "*I will breathe out sensitive to the entire body.*" Each breath in, each breath out.

Again, this is another passage, another phrase that is controversial. What does it mean to be sensitive to the entire body? The commentary, which was written in a time when breath meditation had pretty much fallen out of favor, another type of meditation was preferred, and that was called *kasīṇa* meditation. Have you ever heard of this? It's basically a meditation practice of staring. You stare either at disks of different colors, or you stare at a candle flame, or you can make a hole in the wall and you stare at the hole in the wall. The basic pattern of that particular way of meditation is that you try to block out all of your awareness except for that little, tiny disk of color, that little, tiny spot of light. You stare at it until you get to the point where you can see it even with your eyes closed. It's gotten that imprinted on your nervous system. And then you keep staring at it until it turns into what's called the counter-sign. It becomes very bright. And then you try to expand that counter-sign to fill all of your awareness. That became the paradigm for meditation practice in the time of the commentary.

So when they were describing breath meditation, and the Buddha says "be aware of your entire body," it goes against the pattern. You're trying to get focused on just one little spot, and the Buddha says "entire body." So you get a passage in the commentary where it says that this cannot possibly mean your entire physical body, because if you try to breathe through the entire physical body, you have the sensation that your body is made entirely out of beans or out of fat; i.e., you can't get the breath through it.

So they say instead: what this "entire body" means is, when you breathe you're sensitive to the entire length of the breath. All the way through the in-breath, all the way through the out-breath. Now to me that seems redundant with steps one and two, because if you're not with the whole breath in and out, how are you going to know whether it's long or short? And secondly,

the whole problem with this “sensitive to the entire body,” the only meaning for the word “body” throughout the text, as it’s used several times, is your physical body.

What’s more important is, when you start comparing these breath meditation instructions with other meditation instruction in the Canon, all the images for the state of mind that you’re trying to develop are of full-body awareness. I don’t know if you’ve ever heard of the four similes that the Buddha has for *jhāna* practice. The first one talks about a bathman kneading water into a ball of bath-powder. You might think of kneading water into flour when you’re making bread. You want the water to fill the entire ball of dough. You don’t want to have a dry part and a wet part. You want everything to be equally moisturized. The Buddha says that when you get a sense of ease and rapture in the body, you try to work that sense of ease and rapture throughout the entire body in just the same way.

For the second *jhāna* the image is of a lake with a spring welling up inside, so that all of the lake is constantly cooled by the cool water from the spring. There’s no part of the lake that hasn’t been cooled. Again, the image is one of taking the ease or rapture from the meditation and allowing it to spread throughout the entire body. There’s no conscious agent doing the spreading, here. The rapture and pleasure spread naturally.

For the third *jhāna* the image is of lotuses that grow in a lake, and they’re entirely immersed in the lake. From the tips of the roots to the top of the flower, they don’t come up above the lake, and they’re entirely suffused by the cool water of the lake.

The image for the fourth *jhāna* is a person sitting with his body entirely covered by white cloth. There’s no part of your body that’s not covered by the white cloth. In the same way, in the fourth *jhāna* you have this pure, bright awareness, and you let this awareness spread to fill the entire body.

So obviously, the Buddha’s heading you in the direction of full-body awareness. Which is why I think the literal translation here is the best: that you’re trying to be sensitive to the whole body, all the way through the in-breath, the whole body all the way through the out.

Fourth step. You train yourself “*I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication.*” And you train yourself, “*I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.*” The term bodily fabrication here is translated elsewhere in the Canon as meaning the breath. In other words, you let the breath calm down.

If you’ve ever been breathing, you will notice that sometimes the breath is an involuntary process, and sometimes it’s voluntary. The voluntary part of the process is the one that you tend to screw up the most; i.e., we all have this particular conception of what happens when the breath comes in, what happens when the breath goes out, which muscles in the body have to contract, which muscles have to expand in order to get the breath in, in order to get the breath out. We also have sensations. The in-breath has to feel like this, you can almost feel it pulling up in your face. All of this is actually added stuff. The breath can come in and out without all these added preconceived notions of what’s happening.

A lot of the calming of bodily fabrication is involved with calming that stuff, the excess stuff that we put on to the breathing process: the unnecessary tension, the unnecessary pulling and pushing. You may notice that when an out-breath goes out, you push it out a little bit more just to make it clear to yourself that now the out-breath is out, totally. When you pull it in, “Let’s pull it in just a little bit more, just in case.” All that is bodily fabrication, and it makes the breath more uncomfortable than it has to be. So what you’re consciously doing in this fourth step, is noticing that now that you’ve got full-body awareness established, where in the body is there any unnecessary tension associated with the breathing process? In some cases you can see it clearly; other cases require that you change your perception of what the breath is.

For me, studying the Ajaan Lee method in Thailand, the first big block was this. The idea sounded attractive: breathe in with the whole body, all the way down to the tips of your toes. Sounds cool. Okay, what does it mean? What are your breath sensations? What are *not* your

breath sensations?

Where does the breath come in? I immediately thought, “Well, the breath comes in *here*, and I’ve got one whole breath, I’ve got to get it down to my toes.” So I meditated like that for a while, and it got pretty oppressive. Then you start realizing: the breath energy comes in and out the body from all directions. You’ve got breath coming in and out all your pores. If you don’t believe that, go watch *Goldfinger*. You know, the golden lady; why did she die? She couldn’t breathe.

So there’s already breath coming in and out your pores. These perceptions you have about the breath are like one part of the mind talking with the other part. “Okay, now do that breathing stuff because we need more breath.” How do you know what “breathing stuff” is? You already have a personal code: this is what you have to do when you breathe. How about changing the code? Think of the body as a sponge. As soon as you breathe in, there’s no obstruction anywhere to the breath energy coming in, going out.

You also find sometimes that if you think of the breath energy as being centered in one part of the body, as soon as you start breathing in, the breath energy has gone throughout the whole body already. Otherwise you couldn’t pull the grosser breath in. The subtle breath already goes in, all the way down to the tips of your toes. Try breathing with that perception of breath. You’ll find that the whole process of breathing gets more and more calm, more and more refined, less and less oppressive.

Let’s stop right there, after the first tetrad. Any questions on the first four steps?

Questions & Answers

Question: I find, when the breath gets calm, the hardest thing for me to do is say what’s an in and what’s out. I just lose it immediately. And I’ve decided to stop losing it. I mean, to just forget about what’s in and what’s out. But I find it’s a bother to think of what’s in and what’s out.

Than Geoff: Okay, at that point when it gets so still, what you’ve got to do is be aware of the whole body. Take that as your frame of reference. And think of the breath not only as the in and out, but kind of the energy stasis at that point in the body, and just be with that. Because there’s a problem if you’re being simply with the in and out of the breath and, as you say, it gets more and more refined, you will lose it. You don’t have a good focus or a good foundation for your awareness. So what you want to do is be aware of the whole body and when that gets still, say “still.” You don’t have to think “in,” you don’t have to think “out,” just say “still breath,” and stay with the stillness.

Question: And then it’s just like a flow?

Than Geoff: Right.

Question: When I think of the body and the breath going throughout the body, I have to use my imagination. Is that what you’re supposed to do?

Than Geoff: Yes. That’s part of the training.

Question: So you sort of visualize, use a visualization?

Than Geoff: You use the visualization as an aid to get more sensitive to what’s going on in the body.

Question: Okay, because the breath is not is not literally in the whole body?

Than Geoff: It depends on how you define “breath.” It’s an energy.

Question: So how much of the attention is still on the in and out process and how much is on the field of energy in the body?

Than Geoff: That’s really up to you. You start out with the in and out breath because that’s easiest to focus on, but when you find that you can be aware of the whole body, the level of energy throughout the whole body, *that* becomes your frame of reference.

Question: And then you drop the in and out?

Than Geoff: You can drop the in and out, yes. Because what you’re trying to do, as he says, is that you’re trying to calm bodily fabrication, which is this process of creating these bodily sensations to get the air in and out. You find that you don’t need to keep creating them. You’ve got plenty of oxygen in your blood and you don’t have to do the pumping. So you allow that to calm down. You’re trying to develop this full-body awareness, full-body sensitivity, and it’s a lot easier to do that with the idea that this is energy.

We tend to think of our primary sensation of the body as being solid, and then there’s this stuff called breath that we pull in and push out. But when you close your eyes, what is your immediate experience of the body? There’s kind of an energy field. That’s what the Buddha’s talking about. That’s your primary experience of the body. He’s trying to get you back to that level of experience. There may have been blockages in the energy; you think “that must be a bone so it has to be solid.” But when you think, even before the experience of “bone,” there’s the experience of energy: if the energy is blocked, we’ve got to do something about it.

Question: What was the Pali word for “train?”

Than Geoff: *Sikkhati*.

Question: And also, what is the sutta “the self is its own mainstay, its own refuge?” [Dhp. XII.4]

Than Geoff: That’s in the Dhammapada, I’ve forgotten which verse. Gil, can you remember? Two Dhammapada translators and we can’t help you.

Question: In reviewing this sutta the past couple of days in anticipation of coming here, this is the section that I really somehow focused on. I certainly accept conceptually, intellectually, the idea that everything is mental, in other words, we fabricate everything, our bodies and everything else, all of our experience. I don’t challenge that intellectually. I can notice it, everything, almost every thought that comes up, has something to do with fabrication. I just want to be sure that I’m clear on what the Buddha means with fabrication, say, as opposed to becoming. I don’t see that the natural inclination of my mind is to accept anything as it is; if something has gotten nicer I want it nicer still. This has to be a step toward somewhere else. Which seems to me is also fabrication. So is there some distinction there?

Than Geoff: Well, the word for fabrication in Pali, *sankhāra*, is a huge blanket term, it covers all kinds of things. Beginning from simply the process of putting things together, all the way through any intentional putting together in the mind. And you were right to say that our present experience is all fabricated. It’s either a result of past intentions, or it is the actual current

intention to shape this raw material, and then the immediate results of that current intention. All this comes under fabrication.

Now, there are different types of fabrication. Becoming is a type of fabrication: when you create this world of experience out of the raw material coming from past karma. And then birth is the type of fabrication where you create an identity inside this world and take on that identity. If you look at dependent co-arising; you've created this world, but then you decide you're going to *be* in that world. You create a little identity that goes in and becomes a player in that world. That's also a kind of fabrication. You actually start having ideas about the self beforehand and then you move it in to a particular world. That's the birth.

Question: But is there anything apart from fabrication?

Than Geoff: Nirvana. That's the only thing apart from fabrication there is.

Question: My question is about knowing, in doing this, and noting. When it's in and out, and when it becomes just energy, and there's a knowing, but should you be noting? I'm confused about that process.

Than Geoff: When the in and out is obvious enough for you to focus on it, stay with the in and out. When it gets more and more calm, you've *got* to get to this full-body awareness. Notice here that the Buddha recommends that you go full-body first and then you calm things down.

So he wants you to get to full-body awareness as quickly as possible. Once you're there, okay, you remind yourself: "Whole body breathing in, whole body breathing out." However the breath flows, you want to have the whole body as your main focus of awareness, your frame of reference. Because as the breath gets more and more still, it gets so that you can't follow the in and out. But you can still be with the whole body, so just maintain that. That can be the little note in your mind: "Whole body." And if it's still: "Whole body still, whole body still." Try to keep the note as light and unobtrusive as possible.

He's giving you a foundation here, so that when things change, you've got a place to go, and you're not just left hanging.

Question: And the intention, to train...

Than Geoff: The intention is essential. Because the Buddha points out, the main factor shaping our experience is this fabricating through intention. He's trying to make you see this clearly through the practice. You keep an intention in mind: "I'm going to be aware of the whole body as I breathe in, I'm going to be aware of the whole body as I breathe out." That's the intention you're keeping in mind. This is what mindfulness does, it keeps the intention in mind. Then the alertness to the body is something that grows out of the intention.

Because, as you go through the meditation, more and more you're going to find how huge a role intention plays in shaping your experience. Even with just your basic experience of the body, things as intimate as the breath, intention comes first. So he's trying to get you in touch with that.

One of the mysteries of the present moment is: why do we have this freedom of intention in the present moment? We've got things coming in from the past, results of our old karmic baggage, but we have the ability to shape it. We have the freedom to choose, not everything is determined. So freedom in our experience lies around this issue of intention. The Buddha is trying to get us to focus here. And this is one way of doing it: setting up this training in mind. "This is how I'm going to be aware as I breathe in, this is how I will be aware as I breathe out." Just keep that in mind.

Question: Is intention identical with volition in dependent origination?

Than Geoff: No. When they talk about “volitional formations,” that’s something else. I wouldn’t have translated it as “volitional formations.” Just plain fabrication is *sankhāra*. You look under *nāmarūpa* [in dependent co-arising]: intention is right there.

Question: My first experience with feeling the breath like that in the whole body and working with it was in training in qigong. Do you have any thoughts about the utility of using something like a qigong practice, or yoga, pranayama practice with this work?

Than Geoff: It’s helpful in getting you sensitive to the body. I myself haven’t done that much, I’ve got one qigong exercise that I do, and a little bit of yoga. And I’ve found that breath-work gets you better at qigong and yoga. I think both sides help each other. The problem is, in some pranayama exercises they actually have you control the breath too much. What we’re doing to get in touch with the body is ask, “What really feels best for the body right now? How are you directly experiencing the breath?” And learn how to adjust the breath in line with what you’re experiencing. The purpose of that is to refine your discernment.

Second Tetrad — Feelings

Okay, next tetrad. “[5] *You train yourself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to rapture.’ You train yourself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to rapture.’*” Sounds good. How do we do that? You’ll notice, as you’re working with this process of trying to calm the bodily fabrication, if you think of your awareness of the body... Close your eyes for a minute. Notice what you experience of the body right now. Do you experience solidity? Do you experience the skin? Or do you just have this kind of fog of sensations? It’s basically these sensations that are just impinging, coming and going away, coming and going away. When you breathe in and breathe out, do you ever squeeze any of these sensations? Do you put pressure on them? Do you try to force them into a different shape? Can you notice yourself doing that? Can you breathe in and out without doing that? Notice which parts of the body you tend to squeeze most. Or find one part that you tend to squeeze a lot when you breathe in, and tell yourself, “Now I’m going to breathe in without squeezing it.” And just stick with that. Keep that intention in mind. Allow the sensation just to be. If you stick with it long enough, you’ll find that there’s a sense of fullness that develops in that sensation, it’s not squeezed anymore. It’s just allowed to be itself. That kind of sensation is something the Buddha calls a “foothold for rapture.” The more of those footholds you can get going, and the more continually you can get them going, and the more you can connect them, then the more rapture you’ll feel. Now the Pali word for rapture here is *pīti*. It’s related to the word for “drink”—something you drink in. It can also be translated as refreshment. It feels refreshing not to keep squeezing those sensations.

This is something that requires a good amount of concentration in order to maintain. It’s so easy to slip off and start squeezing it again. But if you can keep the sense of that squeezed sensation not happening, that little sensation is just allowed to be there, not being squeezed: when you get sensitive to that, you realize there are other spots in the body you’ve been squeezing as well. You just go through the body no longer squeezing things. Some people, when they do this, get a sensation that they’re about to drown, because all the muscles they normally use for breathing are not being put into use. Trust me, you will not drown. You will actually get all the breath you need without squeezing these parts of the body. You allow that to happen and there will be a sense of rapture.

Step number six, “[6] *You train yourself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to pleasure.’ You train yourself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to pleasure.’*” The word “pleasure” here, *sukha*, can also be translated as “ease.” It’s a more refined feeling than rapture. It’s not so full, it’s not so energetic. Some people, I’ve found, actually dislike the feeling of rapture when it comes up in the meditation, because they feel like they’re losing control. Once you have enough of the rapture, you say “Okay, enough.” This doesn’t mean that you go back to squeezing, it means that you’re just going to allow things to relax very much. Whatever part is fighting the rapture, you allow that to relax as well.

And so what this does, dealing with the calming of bodily fabrication, and being sensitive to rapture, sensitive to pleasure... I use the word sensitive here because these things exist as potentials in the field of your bodily experience. And if you’re not sensitive to them, you’ll run roughshod over them. But if you are sensitive to this potential, you can give it space and allow it to develop.

Once you’ve gone through that sense of rapture—and it’s supposed to be refreshing, because for the most part our sense of the body tends to be starved of energy. Because we’ve been pushing it around, pulling it around, especially when you start thinking about things. Have you ever noticed what happens to your body when you think intensely? All these weird patterns of tension come in. I was reading a Chinese medical treatise once that says people whose jobs are spent in thinking actually use up three times as much energy as people who spend their days in physical labor. Because, for one thing, you’re using a lot of physical energy in very subtle ways, and secondly, it’s hard to stop. You’ve got a mental job, you don’t leave it at the office, you take it home, and it’s there with you almost all the time. Physical labor, when it’s done it’s done. You’re home, you relax. But with mental labor you’re constantly there.

So what you’re trying to do here is to give the body more space. Whatever parts that have been starved of energy: feed them the energy they need. Once they’ve been fed, they can calm down. Let them be still.

The traditional way of describing the difference between rapture and pleasure is, you’ve been going across a desert and you finally come to some water. Now rapture is what you feel with that first drink of water. When you continue drinking, then it turns into just plain old pleasure. It’s not as obsessive anymore.

One of my favorite stories from Thailand is of a nobleman who eventually became king, who was separated from his troops one time. He came across this one house. There was a young woman in front of the house, who was about sixteen years old. He asked her for some water. So she went to the well, and she got a bowl—in Thailand they drink out of bowls—she filled the bowl with water and then, before she handed it to him, she took a lotus flower, crushed it, and sprinkled the stamens all across the top of the water, and then handed it to him. Here this poor guy is thirsty and he gets this lotus-crap on his water. And so very carefully he has to drink water, so that he doesn’t swallow the lotus stamens.

When he handed it back to her, he asked, “Was that a trick?” She said, “No, I saw you were very thirsty and I was afraid you might choke on the water if you drank it too quickly.” He asked, “Where are your parents, are your parents around?” And, being a Thai nobleman, he took her off to his army camp.

So watch out when you meditate. Don’t gulp down the water.

You’ll find that there are times when you come to the meditation really, really weary, and this is one way that you can deal with the weariness very fast. Think, “What am I squeezing in my body when I think, what am I squeezing when I breathe?” Let’s just stop that squeezing, and allow it to be for a while. Once the need for intense relaxation is over, then it goes to a sense of ease where the body really doesn’t impinge that much on your awareness at all.

Then you’re able to see the mind. This is where we get into seven: “*I will breathe in sensitive to mental fabrication.*” Now, mental fabrication here is feeling and perception: “feeling” being the

feeling-tone—pleasant, painful or neutral—and “perception” being the way you label things. Once the movement of the energy in the body gets more and more calm, you find that mental events come more and more to the fore. You see them more clearly. The analogy I like to use is of tuning in to a radio station. If you’re right on the frequency, you can hear things clearly. If you’re a little bit off the frequency, there’s a lot of static and you can’t hear what’s being said, or if it’s music, the music doesn’t sound that nice. But when you get everything right on the frequency, then it’s all clear.

In the same way, when all the movement of this energy in the body finally calms down, then you can see the mental side of fabrication, which are these activities of feeling and perception. Once you get sensitive to the movement of feelings and perceptions—noticing how one particular way of perceiving things is more pleasant than another, one way is more stressful than another—then you move on to step eight, which is to calm these mental fabrications. All the way through the in-breath, all the way through the out. In other words, you try to find the perception that’s the most subtle, that causes the less stress, the less sense of burdensomeness, so that the feelings are calm and then the perceptions become very calm as well.

Any questions on that tetrad?

Questions & Answers

Question: I’m not sure what you mean by squeezing in the body. Is that like a resistance?

Than Geoff: It’s your idea of what you have to do physically to get the breath in. Are there any parts of the body where you feel a pulling?

Question: So like, controlling, like a sense of controlling?

Than Geoff: Yes, a sense that you’re trying to control or trying to augment the breath, make it come in faster, or make it come in deeper. Where are you putting pressure in your body when you do that? Try to let up on that pressure, and basically keep the pressure off of that spot all the way through the in-breath, all the way through the out.

Sometimes people will try to put a little squeeze at the end of the breath or the beginning of the breath—especially when you’re meditating—to let yourself know, “Now *in*, now *out*.” But you don’t do that. If it’s going to come in, it’s going to come in. If not, it’s not. Just allow those sensations. At the same time, there’s a pattern of tension you may find, corresponding to the way you ordinarily breathe. You just allow it to dissolve, and keep it dissolved. Try that.

Question: What do you call each one of these, “tetrads”?

Than Geoff: “Tetrad” means a set of four.

Question: When you talk about calming the perceptions, do you mean there’s a more or less skillful way of using language?

Than Geoff: Yes. It’s like when you have a pain. If you say, “Pain! Pain! Pain!”—that’s not a calm perception. If you say, “Sensation. Sensation.”—it’s a calmer perception. Or with the breath. You can think of breath energy just being very refined, a kind of mist in the body. You just hold that perception in mind. Because perception here can either be visual or linguistic. You find that there are more and more refined ways of perceiving the breath process, and you just stick to whichever is most refined.

Questions: Is a perception then a recognition of what a feeling is, or...?

Than Geoff: Again, you can recognize either what a feeling is, or what it means. Now many times the feeling *means* something, especially if there's a pain. When you put the perception of pain on that sensation, it means "I've got to do something about this." If you put the label "sensation" on it, that doesn't carry the meaning that you've got to do something about it.

Question: Perception might be able to make it worse for yourself?

Than Geoff: Right.

Question: I'm just trying to correlate this tetrad to my own meditation experience. It seems like for me when I get past the place of the rapture and the pleasure, there is less of a sense of the body. There's kind of an expansiveness. It sounds like what he's trying to point to here is, "Well, then what do you pay attention to, when you're not so aware of your body anymore?" It's like, where's your tether or where's your anchor? One thing that comes up for me in that moment is a subtle sense panic. Like: "Well, now what happens to me? Where am I now?" It seems he's trying to help you have a sense of mind observation at that point, that's very subtle.

Than Geoff: Once you get to this point where everything's very still in the body, one thing you can do is go for space. But here he's saying, "Why not just try looking for how your perception of the body affects the mind?" Because when he's talking about feeling, it's not just physical feeling. There's going to be a mental feeling. You'll begin to see that certain perceptions will move you out of that stillness; other perceptions will help keep you in. So you go with the calmer ones. Just stick with that. He's getting you more and more into mind observation. As I've said, you've got all this energy stuff out of the way, the body feels good. Now you've got to settle down and work on the real issue which is the mind.

Third Tetrad — Mind

Let's move on to the next tetrad. Step number nine. Years back, when Larry Rosenberg was writing his book on breath meditation, he would call me up and say, "Let's talk about nine." Nine what? And then I realized, "Okay, step number nine." It was great for having to memorize these things.

"He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to the mind.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to the mind.'" Now "mind" here can mean anything related to the state of your mind; emotional, mental activity in the mind. Also, you can just be generally sensitive to this bright awareness that comes at this stage of concentration.

The first meaning we will relate to what comes on later; the second meaning: when you get to this point you begin to see exactly how still the mind can get, how luminous the mind can get in concentration. This gives you something to compare. Because you then begin to realize it's not always going to stay that way. But you have tasted the luminosity of the mind, the stillness of the mind, and from that point on you have something to compare all your other mental states with. The Buddha doesn't say to just notice that it's impermanent, inconstant, and just leave it at that. He tells you to maintain it if it's good.

Step number ten: *"I will train myself to breathe in satisfying the mind, to breathe out satisfying the mind."* In other words, when the mind begins to get a little bit dissatisfied with whatever its state

is, you learn how to give it some satisfaction. This may mean changing the way you breathe, changing the way you perceive things. Either bodily fabrication or mental fabrication are your tools here for helping to keep the mind state as clear and as calm as you want it. In some cases where it needs a little encouragement, this is what the satisfaction is for. But the term that's used for "satisfying the mind" here can also be translated as "gladdening the mind." When the mind feels depressed, when it feels low: how can you give it some more energy, more encouragement?

Step number eleven: "*You breathe in and out steadying the mind.*" The mind is not quite as steady, it's beginning to get a little loose and wobbly, you figure out some way of getting it more firmly implanted on this object—again, either through the way you fabricate the breath or the way you fabricate feelings and perceptions.

And then finally releasing. "*I will breathe in releasing the mind. I will breathe out releasing the mind.*" "Releasing" here refers to releasing it from grosser mental states and bringing it to a higher mental state. You can notice that the mind has gotten totally out of concentration, so you release it from all the hindrances and all the other things that keep it out of concentration and you get it back in. Once it's back in, you notice that this state of mind, even after you've gladdened it, steadied it to some extent, still has some element of stress, some element of burdensomeness to it. Let's see if we can release it from that. Classically they talk about going from the first *jhāna* into the second *jhāna*: you've released it from the factors of directed thought and evaluation.

In other words, you're adjusting the breath, you're kneading the water through the dough, and then you realize: it's all kneaded, I don't need to do any more kneading. So you just stop that unnecessary activity and stay, stay, stay with the breath. That's called releasing it from the factors of the first *jhāna* and bring it to a more refined state, which should be the second *jhāna*. You can follow that all the way through the different stages of concentration.

So in other words, what he's talking about here is, once you've got the mind at a point where you can really watch it, and you begin to see what the mind state is, what a luminous mind is, what concentration is like, then you learn to master this skill. It's not that you hit it once and you're done with it. You learn to bring yourself to the point where whatever situation you're in, you can read your mind, basically. What does it need? Is it getting kind of depressed, is it getting kind of low in its energy? Well, what can we do to give it some more encouragement, to give it some visceral satisfaction out of being concentrated? If you find that the mind is too energetic, maybe it needs some steadying to calm it down, so it's more and more firmly on the object. Once you've got it firmly there, you say "Okay, is there something better than this? Is there still some burdensomeness, is there still some stress? What am I doing that's unnecessary in this particular training of the mind?"

A couple of years back I was reading a book on learning how to be a good swimmer. The author pointed out that when you're doing any kind of practice for sport, it's not just a matter of putting in time, but it's also a matter of learning how to do what you're doing more efficiently. Observe all the unnecessary movements you're making in the course of this swim stroke, and drop the unnecessary ones so you can become a faster swimmer, and it's less of a burden on you to go swimming through the water. The same thing applies to learning a musical instrument, learning how to play those runs on the piano that sound like they're made out of liquid. It's learning how to do it with a minimum amount of effort, learning to be more efficient.

It's the same way for a meditator. You want to learn how to keep the mind centered more and more efficiently, with less and less effort.

A person staying at the monastery one time was complaining about how she was trying to keep with the breath in the midst of some pain in her body. I said, "Just leave the pain alone, stay with the breath." She said, "I tried it the last five minutes of the meditation last night, it was really, really painful. I really had to put in this heroic effort, staying with each breath all way in, all the way out." I think she was trying to get me to say, "Well, you don't have to put that much

effort in, just be more relaxed.” But I said, “Yeah, that’s what you have to do.” She asked, “Is it going to be like this all the time?!” I said, “No, but when you’re learning how to do it you really have to put a lot of effort in to get the mind under control.” Once you’ve learned it, keep doing it again and again and again, and be more observant about what you’re doing so you do it more efficiently, so that it takes less effort. Then you can release the mind from, in this case, the unnecessary effort that’s being put in to it.

So that’s the third tetrad. Any questions on this one?

Questions & Answers

Question: There seems to be a major leap between all the previous steps and step twelve. It seems like all the preceding ones are very active, what you’re actually doing. Whereas twelve seems to be much more passive, now you’re kind of letting it all go. Is that a correct understanding?

Than Geoff: All the way up, you’re trying to find a balance between too much activity and too little activity. Because being sensitive to rapture and being sensitive to pleasure, you’re certainly doing something, but you’re also telling yourself: don’t do these painful ways of breathing, or stressful ways of breathing. Sometimes, to observe that, you have to be very, very still, to see where it’s happening. So it’s a combination of sometimes being active and sometimes being more passive. For this step, number twelve, you have to be active in looking to see where in the mind there’s still unnecessary effort, but then as soon as you see that, you drop it. So it’s a combination of active questioning and inquiry and then when you see anything that’s painful or unnecessary you drop it.

Question: When you say unnecessary effort in the mind, do you mean our stories?

Than Geoff: Hopefully, by this point, we’ve left our stories at the door. But you do have a story about your breathing.

Question: So the story about my breathing. I’m not talking about what I’m thinking about, or ...

Than Geoff: As I said, we hope we left those other stories a while back. It’s a lot easier to get out of your stories if you follow the Buddha’s example. The night of his awakening, he started out with a story. He wanted to know: Have I lived in the past? He wanted to find out what his story was, and he found it was a *long* story, it goes back eons. And if you think your stories are complicated, think of all the stories the Buddha had from all his previous lifetimes... My teacher once said, it’s a good thing we can’t remember our previous lifetimes, because then we’d have a lot more issues with lots more people.

So the Buddha followed the narrative back, and I’ve always thought the narrative was interesting. “I was born in such and such a place, I had such and such a name, this was my appearance, this was my food, this was what I fed on, such was my experience of pleasure and pain, such was my death.” That’s life, right there. Name, appearance, pleasure, pain, food, death. And he just followed it back. It was all in terms of “where I was,” and just tracing this “I” back as far as he could go. It goes way back. Freud had nothing on the Buddha that night.

But then the Buddha realized the next question would be “Is this just me? What about other beings in the universe? Does this happen to them too?” And it turns out: yes, everybody. He saw beings dying and then being reborn in line with their actions. This performed two very useful

purposes. One, it got him out of his narratives, so that he began to realize that this is a universal pattern. Again and again throughout the Buddha's teachings he points out that if you can universalize your issues, realize you're not the only one, it takes a lot of the burden off, for some reason. Say, your mother dies. Well, everybody's mother dies, at some point. For some reason that makes it less of a burden, because it's not just you. "Why is this happening to me?" Well, it happens to everybody. Seeing that it's universal. Start looking for the pattern. It was through looking for the pattern that the Buddha was able to see that people die and are reborn in line with their actions, their intentions. That realization is what directed him back to the present moment for the third knowledge. Which was: let's look at intention in the present moment. That's where he saw things in terms of the four noble truths and gained awakening.

So, before you sit down to be in the present moment, look at yourself, acknowledge your story, and see "Is this universal? Is it just me or lots of people?" Once you get out of the "just me" then it's a lot easier to settle down with what you've got right here.

So if you find yourself entangled in a story, the first thing you should do would be to ask "What kind of story is this?" You try to look at it in terms of the Buddha's teachings of the hindrances.

"Is this a sensual desire story? Is this an ill-will story? Is this a sloth and torpor story? Is this a restlessness and anxiety story? Is it an uncertainty story?" You see that these are just these plain old hindrances. No big deal. You see, "This is a movie I've watched lots of times, and it doesn't even star Humphrey Bogart." And then you drop it.

Then as you get the mind into states of concentration, you find that you stick with a particular way of relating to your breath, a particular way of relating to your body, relating to your mind. As you get more used to it, you find that you get more and more refined, more and more skillful, more and more efficient in getting the mind to stay. Or when you come out of meditation, maintaining that sense of center in the body without losing it so fast. All this is related to these steps. Steadying, gladdening the mind, satisfying the mind, and then releasing it from anything that's unnecessary.

Because right here he has you look at the mind in terms of the four noble truths. Where is there stress, where can it be released? So he's getting you in that direction already. In fact, he's got you there from the very beginning: calming bodily fabrication. The pulling in and the pushing out, and then the pinching of the breath at the end, etc. You learn: hands off, because it's not necessary. It's unnecessary stress. Then he has you go deeper and deeper and see where there is still unnecessary stress even in these deeper states of mind. This is getting you used to looking at things in terms of stress and the cause of stress. What am I doing that's causing the stress? How can I abandon that? How can I stop that action? So it starts from the stories and works in.

Question: What do you do if you find that you slip into the story, in the middle of the breathing? What do you find helpful?

Than Geoff: All kinds of stuff. Just that one thing: "If this were a movie, would I pay money to watch it?" Or if it's a story about what I have to do, and it's really not that pressing an issue: "I could die before this ever happens. In fact, I could die right now while I'm meditating. Do I really want to die in the middle of this story? I wouldn't want to be caught dead in this story."

It's kind of like Miss Manners' "Kafka Relationship Reducer." Instead of telling the other person you're going to break up, you just disappear. In other words, you don't have to tie all these loose ends together before you can get out of the story. Just cut it off. You have no obligation to finish the story. It's not like a TV show where once you get sucked in you have to see it to the end of the half hour. Try to think of it in those terms. Pull yourself out of the story and look at it as a stranger might look at it. Or if the hook in the story is "poor me, I'm such a miserable person, either because I'm such a fool, or because other people are nasty"—step back and think: "There

are other fools, other nasty people in the world. It's not such a big deal." And then you can move on.

Question: You talk sometimes about *jhāna*. Are we entering *jhāna* states when we're entering this concentration?

Than Geoff: *Jhāna* is related to a word which means "to burn steadily." They have different verbs in Pali for burn, but the one that's related to *jhāna* is *jhāyati*. It's used to describe the burning of an oil lamp, which has a very steady flame, the kind of flame you can read by. They have other verbs for burning in Pali which they also use for the mind, like when you're burning with desire, burning with anger, but those are different verbs entirely. Those are the kinds of fire you can't read by. What you're trying to do is to get the mind steadily focused on one object. It's still attached to the object, but due to the fact that its focus is steady, you can begin to see the mind a lot more clearly.

Now, they talk about four stages of *jhāna* in the texts. The first one: you're focusing on the object and you keep directing your thoughts to it, and at the same time you're evaluating the object to make it more comfortable. As you get more and more absorbed in it, it becomes the single object that you're really into. You're thinking about that one thing and nothing else.

You can make a parallel with getting really involved in a novel, where you're just totally focused on the novel; you're not paying attention to anything else. But the difference is, here you're dealing with a sensation in the body. Then you take that sensation and spread it to fill the body. The sense of ease that comes with the breath, the sense of rapture, you use that to fill the whole body.

Now those five factors—directed thought, evaluation, singleness of object, ease and rapture—are the five factors of the first *jhāna*. Here you're using the breath as your object; you just get really into the breath, everything in the whole body becomes breath, and there's a sense of ease. You work with the breath so it gets comfortable, so there's a sense of refreshment and a sense of ease. And then you just maintain that. That's the first *jhāna*.

In the second *jhāna* you can drop the directed thought and the evaluation, you don't need them anymore. The breath is full in the body, and you just plow into that pleasant sensation and stay there.

The third *jhāna*: the rapture starts getting too oppressive. You've had enough of the rapture, so you drop that as a mental factor, leaving just singleness of object and ease.

Finally, you're not even thinking about whether it's pleasant or not, you're just very, very still. The mind gets really implanted in this sense of full body. At that point the breath has stopped. You're breathing through your pores. Your brain is still enough so you're not using the oxygen that would require you to breathe in and out. The oxygen you're getting through your skin is enough. That's the fourth *jhāna*.

Question: So by the time we're really seeing the mind, we're in a *jhāna* state?

Than Geoff: Starting with the pleasure and the rapture, you're already there. Then there's the question of mastering it. Many people think, "Hey, I got into this state and it'll stay this way forever." The next thing you know, it's gone, because it's one of the easiest things to drop. So what you're learning to do is how to stay centered there as long as you can, and noticing how the mind loses it. Sometimes it loses it because it's running out of energy. It's not getting any visceral kick out of it. That's where you bring in a little bit of gladdening the mind. Go back for a little bit more rapture. Or when you find that you're getting too active, you calm it down. Then, when it's calmed down and steadied, you ask, "Is this the most refined state of concentration I can manage at this point? To what extent can I detect other forms of unnecessary stress that I'm causing?"

When you see what you're doing to cause the stress, you drop that. That brings us to mastering *jhāna*, in step number twelve.

Question: I think you've answered part of my question, but I was wondering, when you get very steady in the mind, and you're trying to stay steady, or gladden the mind, satisfy the mind, there is a tendency to be able to do that for some time, but what I feel is, depending on how the day went, either one of those old reverberations can get you knocked off the mind, and you almost have to get back to being sensitive to bodily fabrication. So there could be some bouncing up and down between these tetrads.

Than Geoff: Yes. It's not that you have to do 1-2-3-4-5-6... Sometimes you find yourself going back to one or three or four or whatever is needed at the time. That's part of the mastery of the process, looking: what does the mind need right now? Then you go back to calming bodily fabrication, if that's what it needs.

Your main concern now is the state of the mind. You're beginning to see the impact of the body on the mind, the impact the mind has on itself. And sometimes to gladden the mind, all you have to do is just think of a few inspiring themes and that gets it gladder. Other times, you have to do some work with the breath. So what you're doing in this state is seeing: what does the mind need right now? Then work from there. You pull out whatever tricks you have.

Question: The way that you talk about it in terms of "what does the mind need now?" Is it sufficient to just think those words in your mind and wait for the answer, or is this a point for discursive thought?

Than Geoff: Part of it comes just through experience. "I've seen the mind like this before. What worked in the past?" Secondly, just looking at it in those terms, often it's a matter of learning how to ask the right questions, and you've got the answer right there. I remember when I was ten years old, my family moved out to Kansas, and the Kansas newspaper had Ann Landers. I had never heard about Ann Landers before, and I thought she was really wise. All these people writing questions and she would answer them just like that. Then as I got older I realized she had those questions fed to her. As soon as you see the question, you know the answer. For the person writing the letter, the problem was in shaping the question into a proper question. As soon as you've got the proper question, the answer's sometimes pretty obvious. So if you learn to see, "What does my mind need right now? Does it need to be gladdened, or to be steadied? Does it need to be calmed down or does it need to be lifted up?" And then the tools you have here for dealing with the breath, you know which one you'll need, of the different skills you've mastered up to that point. What does it need right now? You bring that question to the mind and then look at the different tools you have, may times, over time. You get quicker in identifying what the problem is and what the solution is going to be.

Question: I'm not sure if this happens in monastic life, but have you found that an array of events occur that overwhelm your ability to be mindful? Are there any situations, or have you heard from lay people describe it as such, that sometimes events happen and you just can't sit. And there's a need to maybe walk away for a bit, and take up some movement, exercise such a yoga or the qigong that was mentioned earlier.

Than Geoff: Yes, that's one of your tools. Among the monks in the Forest Tradition, one of the practices that's used in this case is known as walking to the next mountain, and walking back. You just pick up your stuff and you go to the next mountain. Then you come back. It's like learning how to be a boxer. I was taught Thai boxing, before I was a monk, when I was in Thailand

for two years. Number one step in Thai boxing is retreat—I think it’s the same in most of the martial arts—how to get out. It’s a useful skill.

Question: That’s an interesting thought, it’s also in *The Art of War* by Sun Tzu. There are times when you should retreat. I never made that correlation. Also, is that one of the ideas behind the walking meditation?

Than Geoff: You can’t just sit all day. When you do walking meditation, you can walk as fast or as slow as you like. This slow walking that you usually see is not really good for working off a lot of extra energy. So you can just walk around the block, walk at whatever speed you need.

Fourth Tetrad – Mental Qualities

These last four steps, this last tetrad, starts with the assumption that you’ve got a fairly good basis in concentration. Now you can focus more directly on the issues of insight. Step number thirteen, “*I will breathe in and out focusing on inconstancy.*” As I said earlier, the Pali word here is *anicca*, which is often translated as impermanent or impermanence. The reason I’ve translated it as inconstancy here is that it’s the opposite of a word, *nicca*, which most clearly means constant, something you do constantly, something that’s reliable, steady.

So here you focus on inconstancy. You can focus on the inconstancy of form, feeling, perceptions, fabrications, or consciousness. Also, as I said earlier, these themes—constant, stressful and not-self—are in the commentaries called the three characteristics. But in the Canon they’re used only in reference to the word *sañña*, which means perception. You perceive things as constant, stressful and not-self. Or you do this process of focusing on that theme as your theme of meditation. The Pali word here is *anupassanā*. The word *anu-* means to follow. *Passanā* meaning looking. You look at something and you follow it along, you keep track of it. So this is the theme you want to keep track of, which is how constant your experiences are. Included in this is the realization that if it’s constant it’s going to be stressful; if it’s stressful you’re better off seeing it as not-self.

This becomes the theme of your meditation, each time you breathe in, each time you breathe out.

Now I’ve heard some people say that you can focus on this right away—notice how your breath changes, and that’s inconstancy. But it doesn’t really hit you until the mind has gotten really nice and concentrated. Until then the inconstancy of the breath doesn’t really matter or make a real difference. The teaching on inconstancy comes within a larger context, and that’s the question of why we’re meditating to begin with: we’re looking for happiness, we’re looking for a solid, reliable foundation for our happiness. And when the mind gets concentrated, the first thing you want to look out for is anything that would distract you from your concentration. That’s where you first focus your perception of inconstancy: You want to realize how constant they are, how unreliable they are. If you’re trying to base your happiness on those things, you’d be setting yourself up for a fall.

This is why the mastery of concentration is said to go along with the overcoming of sensual passion. Earlier we talked a little bit about non-returners, how non-returners are the ones who’ve gotten to the point where they’re no longer fettered by sensual passion, no longer fettered by irritation. There are other passages in the Canon which talk about how non-returners have also thoroughly mastered concentration. The two go together. When concentration is strong, sensory input is just not going to knock you off base, because when you compare the pleasure that comes from sensory input with the pleasure, the sense of ease that comes from concentration, it just doesn’t compare. Now you may have some old habits that say, “But I really like that.” So you have

look at the sensory pleasure a little bit more carefully until you realize that it's not worth it, not worth all the effort that goes into it. Because one of the things you learn in the course of meditation is that pleasure doesn't come for free. There's a cost, there's got to be effort put into it one way or another, and the question is: is the effort worth it? When you see the effort that goes into trying to develop a sense of happiness based on inconstant things, you think, "Enough. I'd much rather go for something that's more solid, more reliable."

To put it in really crass terms, "It gives a better return on my investment." You're investing all this effort into happiness, and many times, what do you have to show for it? Not much. So this focusing on the theme of inconstancy—you focus it first on things outside your state of concentration. When you've taken care of all of that, then the only attachment that remains is your state of concentration—and the sense of ease, rapture, equanimity, well-being that comes with the concentration—then you turn it on the concentration itself. "This wonderful mind state that I've been developing here that's so calm and clear and steady: is it really steady?" The more carefully you watch it, the more you realize that it's not. Even this is fabricated, even this can't totally be depended on. When you see that, then the mind moves on to the next step, which is: "*You train yourself to breathe in focusing on dispassion.*" The word dispassion here, *virāga*, literally means fading. Your desire for it begins to fade. And again, instead of getting caught up in aversion about the thing, you simply don't want to get involved in that particular process.

When we use the words clinging and holding on and grasping, the image is basically of a hand that holds onto things. But when you realize that the things you're holding onto are all activities, they're all fabrications, they're all things that are put together, it's not so much that you're grasping a *thing*, you've been repeatedly doing an *activity* over and over and over again. It's your knee-jerk reaction. Letting go means, basically, that you stop repeating the activity.

Sharon Salzberg tells a story about a woman she knew who got into a small automobile accident. But before calling the police, she went into a nearby store and bought some lingerie. Some people's immediate reaction, you know. You're not feeling right, you do whatever is your first knee-jerk reaction for making yourself feel good. So she went in, she bought a little lingerie, to put herself in the right mood before calling the police. We all have these patterns of behavior that sometimes make sense and lots of times make no sense at all.

Konrad Lorenz, the famous biologist, raised a goose one time. It started out when it was a little gosling and its mother died, and so immediately the gosling fastened on Konrad Lorenz as its mother. Everywhere Konrad Lorenz went around the yard, the little gosling would follow behind him. He kept the gosling outside all during the spring and summer, and finally toward the end of summer, it was getting into autumn, and the gosling was turning into a goose, he realized he was going to have to bring it inside.

So one night, instead of feeding it outside, he opened the door and walked into his house, and the goose, of course, followed him in. Now this was the first time the goose had ever been inside, and it immediately freaked out. It saw at the end of the hall a large window. Halfway down the hall was a stairway that went up to Konrad Lorenz's apartment. So Konrad Lorenz was going up the stairs, but the goose wasn't interested about the stairs, it wanted to get out, so it went straight for the window, got to the window, and realized it couldn't get out. In the meantime it saw Konrad Lorenz so it turned around and followed him up the stairs. The next day, the goose came into the house, went to the window, came back, went up the stairs. Every day: come in the house, go to the window, back up, go up the stairs—although the trip to the window, over time, became shorter and shorter until it finally got so that when it came in the house, it would shake its foot at the window, and then head up the stairs.

Now one day Konrad Lorenz came home late and the goose was hungry. And so Konrad Lorenz opens the door, and the goose immediately goes running up the stairs, stops about half way and shivers all over. Then it goes down to the bottom of the stairs, walks over to the window, comes back and goes up the stairs. So we have all these patters of behavior. As I said the other night,

when you have this need for your own personal little rituals, it's your "inner goose" speaking.

So what we're learning dispassion here for is not so much dispassion for *things* as it's dispassion for *ways of behavior*, the effort we put into trying to find happiness, and after a while it just doesn't seem worth it anymore. So it's not that you're going to feel aversion for something, or you're going to throw it away; it's simply an activity you see and realize it doesn't produce anything worth the effort that went into it. And so you stop. That's the next step: "*You breathe in and out focusing on cessation.*"

Question: Assuming that I'm doing this in a concentrated state, there's not a whole lot of thoughts happening in particular. Inconstancy is pretty easy to work with, but I can't quite get a sense of how to go to dispassion.

Than Geoff: What you have to do is notice: what are you doing to create that inconstancy? It's not like you're a passive viewer watching a TV show of inconstancy that's being produced for you. It's more like an interactive game, where you're actually deciding what the characters are going to do, how much beauty you want to endow them with, how much brains; you're putting an effort into this. After a while you begin to realize it's not just things you're passively watching. You have a role to play in that. What are you *doing* that's creating this inconstancy in your state of concentration? There's a wobbling of the mind, there's a unsteadiness in the mind—and we're talking here about when the mind has gotten well-tamed. But even if it's well-tamed and it's well-trained and it's good at the concentration, it's impossible to make it a totally solid, constant state of concentration. There's always going to be a little bit of wobbling, and sometimes it may take days for you to see this. Especially when you're getting into a strong state of concentration and you're new to it. It's like going into a very bright room; your eyes haven't adjusted yet, everything seems dazzlingly white. But then after a while you begin to get used to the room, your eyes begin to adjust, and you begin to see: there really is furniture, there really are things in the room aside from the bright white light.

In the same way, you settle into a state of concentration. The first thing you notice about it is how much relief you feel from getting into this deeper state of concentration. It's more solid, more secure, more expansive. But then after a while as you stay with it—and this is why when you teach *jhāna* you can't have people jumping through *jhāna* hoops, they've got to learn how to stay in that state for long times to really get to know it before they move on. Because it's only when you stay with it for a long time that you understand: what exactly am I *doing* that's creating this state? So it's not just that you're seeing inconstancy and thinking, "Isn't that interesting, it's like watching a TV show, isn't that strange?" You have to realize that you're putting an effort into this. Are you getting everything out of it that you want for your effort? And again, it's part of that process that we talked about earlier, when you see that the mind isn't quite as solid as it could be, and you want to see what you're doing that's not efficient. You finally get to the point where the only thing you could do, the only way you get into a more steady or more solid state, would be not to fabricate anything at all. That's where the dispassion comes in. So, good question.

When you finally get thoroughly dispassionate toward that activity, you stop doing it. That's the cessation; focusing on cessation. That's step number fifteen. As you notice, through all of these, especially since step number nine, you've developed this quality within your mind of being able to observe your own mind. It's like you have a separate persona in there that's the observer, the watcher. When you're working on step number fifteen, the cessation, it's a process of not just one thing ceasing; it's a whole series of things ceasing. But to get closer and closer to the very core of intention, which is this basic drive of "what next, what next, what next," as you get more sensitive to the fact that every present moment requires your input to shape it in any way, you finally realize that even that is a disturbance, and you'd like to let go of that. That's the final thing that ceases.

What's left is this position of the observer. You finally have to relinquish that as well. That too is a construct, the observer that you've been holding onto as the still eye in the storm, or even if it's not a storm, just a very still part of the mind that's watching the rest of the mind. You finally have to relinquish that as well. That's the final intention you drop as a meditator.

So what you're doing here is testing. As the mind is thoroughly concentrated, first you look for the things outside, and you see that they're not constant and you become dispassionate for those, and you stop getting involved in them, you relinquish any interest in them. Then you have to turn around and do the same thing for your state of concentration. You see that it, too, is inconstant. You develop a certain amount of dispassion, and you think, "Enough of this stuff, I want something that's better."

In other passages the Buddha talks about inclining the mind to the deathless. The only thing at that point that would hold any appeal for you would be something totally free from change, totally free from conditions. You allow even the state of concentration to cease, you relinquish even the observer that's watching that, and that's when you attain release. Any questions?

Questions & Answers

Question: In all these steps, it starts with: *He trains himself*. And then it's like a quote: *I will ...* Is this like an affirmation?

Than Geoff: It's an intention. You set that intention up in the mind.

Question: And I noticed that there's four sets of four. The first one sets the physical things we're supposed to do. Now in breathing, does it matter if you breathe through your nose or your mouth?

Than Geoff: If you can't breathe through your nose, then you can breathe through your mouth. It's even better if you can breathe through your eyes. It's possible.

Question: So, the second set, how would you characterize that one?

Than Geoff: It's funny that you're asking, because the next section deals with this directly. The first set's dealing with body, the second set is dealing with feelings, the third set is dealing with mind and the fourth set is dealing with what they call dhammas, or mental qualities; i.e., the four foundations of mindfulness, the four frames of reference.

Question: If you let go of concentration, do you just go back? Do you go to nothing?

Than Geoff: At that point the only thing you're holding onto is the concentration. You've gotten yourself thoroughly disillusioned with other kinds of activity, so at this point when you let go the only direction you could go would be to the deathless.

Now for most of us that's not what happens. It just requires a lot of effort to, one, get the mind in concentration, and then once it's there, you really look carefully at the other things you could be running out to. Because it's so instinctive to think, as soon as we leave concentration: "What's next, what's next, what's next? Got to get back to my life." And for those of us whose attitude is: "Meditation is a nice thing to have as long as it fits nicely into what I want to do with my life," that's the way it's always going to be. But if you're more open to the idea that meditation might actually change your center of gravity, point you in a different direction, then when you come back and look at the things you could go back to, you start getting more disillusioned with them,

more disenchanted with them, and more intent on developing the concentration. Now when that sense of disillusionment gets strong enough, you deal with things outside only when you really have to. Then when the time comes that you let go of the concentration, that's not where your mind heads, it heads in the other direction.

Because in all these cases, you notice, "He or she trains him- or herself."—there's an element of intention. All states of concentration have an intention, and what you're trying to do is refine your awareness of that intention. The only standing between you and the deathless now is this one intention. Prior to that there were lots of intentions, all over the place. But once you've narrowed things down: "This is one thing that I'd really like to do for the sake of happiness, for its own sake"—when you finally get disillusioned with that, it's like the Buddha has you cornered. And the only way to get out is to fly.

Question: Specifically on the issue of concentration, one of the reasons that I am really committed to concentration, the four foundations of mindfulness, through the body and specifically through the breath—because the breath has always been the focus of my attention, my primary object of meditation. For the first time in recent months, this whole business of "you're meditating and now you're not," it has always been very hard for me to be meditating and then to remember it fifteen minutes after I've stopped doing it. What I have noticed with reference to the breath is something I didn't intentionally set out to have happen. There did come such a level of concentration that seemed to have its own momentum. I am able to stay with that without even trying to. My life would go on, and without thinking about it each step of the way, I really am with the breath. And I noticed, in retrospect, that in some of the situations that caused stress before, I don't feel any stress anymore as a result of this. What would you do with it at this point; meditate more, or be more mindful of the breath outside the formal sitting periods?

Than Geoff: I would do both. Both increase the amount of time you meditate, and also be more conscious of maintaining your center of the breath throughout the rest of the day. Try to adopt it as your basic stance. It sounds like you're adding one more thing to juggle in the course of the day, but you're not. We're giving you a foundation from which to do the juggling of your daily activities. But try to be conscious of keeping the breath comfortable. The more comfortable the breath is, the easier it is to stay. This is probably one of the reasons why you find your mind reverting to it more and more often, because it's just a nicer place to be. The mind knows it can go there, it's had that experience.

Now what you want to do is maximize the benefit you can get from that, by keeping it comfortable, by keeping it still, and then noticing the different ways the mind might get knocked off: either from external stimuli or from other thoughts welling up in the mind, that might start flowing out. Because what you find even if you have that state of being solid, there are going to be lapses in the course of the day. And the lapses really tell you the most interesting things about your mind. How does the mind lapse? The investigation will start there. Even when you don't have enough time to do the investigation, still this is a good place to be. As you said, when negative things are coming up, you've got a solid foundation.

You can sit through lay persons' hell, i.e., meetings, and just be blissing out. Everybody else is doing their meeting stuff, but you can be blissing out on the breath. In any situation. And notice where the difficulties are, when it's hard to stay with the breath. What pulls you out? Then there's this process of the mind pulling out: you begin to notice more often that it's kind of a blanking out for a second, and then you're someplace else. There's also an almost physical sense of energy flowing out, and you want to catch sight of that without flowing along with it. You can see the energy flow, but you're watching it, from that much better position. You have the choice to go or not.

Question: It's interesting what you said about the energy flowing out, because the experience of staying with the breath, even when you're not necessarily totally aware of it at any given moment, and then realize sporadically that you're still with this, there is a sense of taking something in. Whereas of course when you get distracted about something, something frustrating happens, all the energy is dissipating. You're losing that foundation.

Than Geoff: Exactly. What you really have to watch for is that moment of blanking out, when you're here and all of a sudden you're out there: why does the mind do this? It's a habit that the mind has. It's like in a play, when they want to change scenery, they don't let you see them remove the old scenery and put the new scenery in, because that would destroy the illusion. They put down a curtain, bring it up and you're in a whole new place. What you want to see is all the way through these machinations: what the mind does to change its frame of reference and head out. You discover that there's a lot of self-deception right there.

There was a science fiction story I read one time in Thailand. English books were very rare in Thailand, and every now and then someone would leave a book at the monastery, intentionally or not, I don't know, but I'd find it and I would devour anything. One of these science fiction stories—the reason I keep remembering it nowadays is because it had a beautiful metaphor for the mind—had a spaceship that instead of using fuel, would change its frame of reference. If its frame of reference were Earth, it would just sit right here. If its frame of reference were the Sun, all of a sudden it would go off in the other direction from the Earth's movement. If its frame of reference were the center of the galaxy, it would be way out there very fast. The whole story revolved around the fact that when the ship changed its frame of reference, everybody in it would pass out for a while, and then gradually come to.

This is the way the mind is. When we're ready to change our frame of reference, we pass out for a second, and we're gone. But when you're with the breath, you can begin to see the movements of the mind. You catch that tendency and you say, "I don't have to pass out anymore. I don't have to lie to myself. I know I'm changing my frame of reference and I have a reason." This way you help get over a lot of the mind's own delusion, its tendency to deceive itself.

Question: That disappearing while you're changing your frame of reference, would you call that the "*bhavanga*?" I mean, the *abhidhamma* would call that "going back to the *bhavanga* state."

Than Geoff: In the *abhidhamma*, I think they probably do. That word *bhavanga* doesn't exist in the suttas. There's also an element of forgetting that goes into that, and I don't know if "reverting to the *bhavanga*" involves forgetting.

Question: I would like to add one piece of my experience. In the past I've had an anoxic brain injury, and as I recovered from it, my sense of thinking was very slow. The sense of space between thoughts was very great. The self-making mechanism was almost disabled. Almost like I wasn't able to whip up enough energy to think about who I was, or what was going on, what to do next or anything. And through the healing process over the years now—it's been about four years—I've actually begun to watch that whole process become more vivid. It's like parts of my mind are speeding up again. And I'm just trying to catch on and notice that I'm doing it again. And when I go back into the states of *jhāna* that I was able to do before I had the cardiac arrest, they offer me great peace, much more than they did before the arrest. Because I now feel that I sense what's going on better than I did before. But I wouldn't recommend it to anyone, it was really quite frightening and I still feel like I'm healing from it. But I do agree with what you said about what the teachings suggest, because I am aware of myself thinking, and I am also sensing that I am not my thoughts.

Than Geoff: And I would imagine it would also help you see more clearly the amount of effort that goes into thinking, and why you need rest. For most of us it's like a healthy person running around. He doesn't really notice how much energy goes into that. Then when you get sick, all of a sudden you just can't move. You have less energy to put in, and you realize you're wasting a lot of energy on this activity. Now the question is: what's the payoff? And the Buddha says, if the payoff isn't enough, why bother?

Question: I'm curious about the blanking out state. Could you speak a little bit more about that trying to catch it before it goes off again?

Than Geoff: Okay, one thing you want to notice when you're meditating is what we always do when we're meditating: the mind wanders off, we come back to the breath and think, "I'm *not* going to wander off again." And then it wanders again. So when you bring it back, think, "It's going to wander again. Let's watch for the warning signs." What does it do before it wanders? You begin to notice that there's... The image I like to use is of an inchworm at the end of a leaf. It comes out to the end of the leaf, and one end is still on the leaf, but the other end is waving back and forth, looking around for the next leaf. And as soon as another leaf comes, *pop*, it's gone. So you want to catch the mind when it's in this state of looking for another place to go. Just see what the warning signs are. There's going to be a little bit of boredom, and a little bit of "how about *this*?"—it's almost like the mind is trying to lie to itself about this decision making process, about whether you should go or not.

Like little kids in a school room: as long as the teacher's in the school room, the kids are not going to run around. As soon as the teacher's attention is distracted, they start running around. So the mind actually tries to distract itself.

The mind is like a committee. We talked about this before. It's like the Chicago City Council, not this nice Sati Center or IMC committee where everybody is trying to be mindful and polite and everything. It's like the Chicago City Council. They're trying to get away with things. And what you're trying to do as a meditator is trying to get a really good reporter in there to watch what's happening. When the reporters are in the city council room, they behave themselves and they're all nice. And of course they'll try to divert the reporters' attention and then do their stuff. But as a meditator you want to become a better and better reporter, i.e., you don't let yourself get distracted.

I'll just leave it as an image, the whole Zen story about the finger and the moon: don't mistake the finger for the moon. This version of the story is: watch out for that finger, it's trying to distract your attention, it's trying to get you to look at the moon. Look at the finger. Look for how the mind is trying to distract its attention, and then how the rest of the committee heads off. Because many times the decision has been made to go, on a subliminal level, before you blank out. So you want to watch for that. You're on your way before you blank out. So watch for the warning signals. Okay, next section.

The Sutta — Rewards

Now the Buddha's gone over the sixteen steps, and notice what these sixteen steps teach you about the meaning of the word "mindfulness." There's a lot going on, a lot of different steps, a lot of different intentions that you bring to the breath. It's not just, "I am breathing in, I am breathing out." Notice, as someone else has pointed out over here, it's in the future tense. Future tense is intention. "I will do this. I will do that. As I breathe in, I will breathe in doing this, I'll breathe out doing that." So the mindfulness here is essentially: you've got this intention, and you're going to keep it in mind each time you breathe. It's the keeping in mind that's the

mindfulness. The reason we're working on intention here is, as I said earlier, intention is *the* big element in shaping your experience, so you want to get very clear on how it does this. The only way you can get clear is by being very conscious about doing the process. And here the Buddha's giving you guidance on what kind of intentions to set up in your mind, what kind of intentions to keep in mind, in order to observe what's going to happen as a result. You find that the mind gets to greater and greater stages of calm and peace. Then, finally, you get to the point where you can ultimately relinquish any kind of intention at all.

Four Frames of Reference

That's as far as intention can take you, as far as mindfulness can take you. But, as we'll find out, in the process of doing this it takes you pretty far. First, it fulfills all four frames of reference, all the *satipaṭṭhāna*. "Frames of reference," as I said earlier, is not quite the ideal translation for the term *satipaṭṭhāna*, because *satipaṭṭhāna* is not just the frame; it's also the process of establishing a frame of reference. There are four, and we'll go through all four of them. Number one. "*On whatever occasion a monk breathing in long discerns, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, discerns, 'I am breathing out long';*"—through all four of the steps—"on that occasion he remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world." That sentence there is the definition of the *satipaṭṭhāna*, the establishing of mindfulness; i.e., you are focused on something—in this case the body—in and of itself. "In and of itself" here means that you're not worried about your body in terms of how it looks to other people, or whether it's strong enough to do your work, or in any way that's going to relate to anything outside in the world, other people, other things. You're simply concerned with what this experience is of having a body, in and of itself. That's your frame of reference.

Now as you're doing this, you develop three mental qualities: ardency, alertness, and mindfulness. Let's take those in reverse order. Mindfulness means keeping in mind, in other words, you're keeping the idea of the body in and of itself in mind. You're reminding yourself that this is the frame you want to stick with. Secondly, you're alert to what's going on: what the body's doing, what the mind is doing as it tries to relate to the body. And the final one is ardency: you're ardent, you really keep at it. The commentary explains ardency in terms of all four Right Exertions or the four forms of Right Effort. In other words, if you see anything unskillful going on in the mind, or a potential for anything unskillful, you try to prevent it from arising. If something unskillful already has arisen in the mind, you try to abandon it. Then you try to give rise to skillful qualities in the mind and you try to maintain them and develop them once they've arisen.

So again, you're not just sitting there watching things coming and going; this quality of ardency means you're beginning to look at things in terms of skillful and unskillful, trying to promote what's skillful and to undercut what's unskillful. And then finally to maintain that frame of reference of the body in and of itself, you try to put aside any greed and distress with reference to the world—i.e., the outside world, the world of your senses, that would pull you away from this frame of reference.

All of that in and of itself is what *satipaṭṭhāna* is, that whole phrase. So it involves concentration, you stay focused on the body. It requires effort, it requires discernment, alertness, mindfulness: A lot of qualities are brought into play here. So it's not just mindfulness pure and simple, it's a cluster of qualities that are working together, centered on this experience of the body in and of itself. So while you're doing those first four steps—being aware of the breath, long or short, training yourself to breathe in and out sensitive to the entire body, and training yourself to breathe in and out calming the process of bodily fabrication; you're with the body in and of itself, doing all those things—you're fulfilling the definition of *satipaṭṭhāna*.

The Buddha goes on to say, "*I tell you, monks, that this—the in-&-out breath—is classed as a body*

among bodies.” In other words, when you’re staying with the breath, you’re staying with one aspect of the body, pure and simple.

As we go through this you begin to realize that the mind focused on the breath... Actually, you can focus on any of those four frames of reference in relationship to the breath; there’s the feeling that arises with the breath, the mind state that’s right there with the breath, and there are mental qualities that you bring to the breath. So when you go from one frame of reference to the next, you don’t really leave the breath, you just look at a different aspect of the mind focused on the breath.

Number two. *“On whatever occasion you train yourself to breathe in and out sensitive to rapture, sensitive to pleasure, sensitive to mental fabrication, or calming mental fabrication—in that case you remain focused on feelings in and of themselves, ardent, alert and mindful, putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world.”* Because remember, what does mental fabrication cover? It covers feelings and perceptions. So you’ve got feelings there, you’ve got the feeling of rapture, the feeling of ease, of pleasure. So in this sense, being with these feelings would count as fulfilling that second frame of reference, the second foundation of mindfulness. But the Buddha has a very interesting explanation of the connection here. He says: *“I tell you monks, that this, careful attention to in and out breaths is classed as a feeling among feelings.”* This is the only place in the Canon that I’ve ever seen attention classed as a feeling. If you asked me to explain that, I’d say that I’m really at a loss about how I would explain that—except that the important point is that when you’re focusing on feelings as your frame of reference, you’re not supposed to leave the breath. You’re still with the breath. Now you will find some places where they tell you, “Okay, now that you’ve done the body, drop the breath and just go with feeling as your focus.” That is a very unstable focus. You can think of it as constructing a building, and you’re standing on the scaffold and a cloud comes along, the cloud looks nice so you jump on the cloud. You go right through. That’s the feeling. It can’t support you on its own because the feeling is based on being with the breath.

One way of explaining this idea of defining attention as a kind of feeling is that while you’re with the breath, you’ve got a foundation for the feeling, a definite frame of reference for the feeling that you want to keep constant. As you’re keeping careful attention on the breath, it means that you’re not losing your foundation.

Paragraph number three. *“On whatever occasion a monk trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&...out sensitive to the mind’; trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&...out satisfying the mind’; trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&...out steadying the mind’; trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&...out releasing the mind’: On that occasion the monk remains focused on the mind in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world.”* That’s pretty obvious: all these things are “mind, mind, mind.” But then the Buddha goes on to say: *“I don’t say that there is mindfulness of in-&-out breathing in one of lapsed mindfulness and no alertness.”* So this ability to stay with the mind in and of itself, ardent, alert and mindful, fulfills that quality of being ardent, alert and mindful with reference to the mind. Again, you’re not looking at the mind as a separate thing, you’re looking at the mind as it’s focused on the breath. It’s like being a wildlife photographer. You go out into the savannah, and you want to take pictures of all the animals in the savannah. Now do you wander around all the savannah? No. You go to the waterhole, you stay at that one spot and all the animals, in the course of the day, are going to have to come to the waterhole. In the same way, when you want to look at your mind, the best way to do this is to focus your mind on the breath, and you’ve got it right there. It’s showing itself in its activities around the breath. So with each of these frames of reference, you never really leave the breath. You stay right with the breath, it’s simply that you begin to focus your awareness on a different aspect of the relationship between mind and breath.

Then finally, *“On whatever occasion a monk trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&...out focusing on inconstancy’; trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&...out focusing on dispassion’; trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&...out focusing on cessation’; trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&...out focusing on relinquishment’: On*

that occasion the monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves.” Because that’s what these mental qualities are: inconstancy, dispassion, cessation and relinquishment. And then the Buddha goes on to explain this. *“One who sees with discernment the abandoning of greed & distress is one who watches carefully with equanimity.”* Watching carefully is part of being mindful and alert; being equanimous helps keep your mindfulness clear, your perception clear. Notice here he’s talking not just about putting aside greed and distress, it’s actually abandoning greed and distress. This is the point where it gets more radical. The term “putting aside” can also be translated as “subduing.” There’s a tendency in the mind where you want to go and get involved with the issues of the world, but you calm it down, you keep a lid on it. But in the last step you’re actually abandoning it. No more greed and distress for the world. At all. You’ve had enough. At that point, when you’re watching that happening, you’re watching on with equanimity as these events are happening in the mind, which is why you’re with that fourth mental quality, that fourth frame of reference there.

Any questions on any of these frames of reference?

Questions & Answers

Question: The phrase “body among bodies,” what does it mean?

Than Geoff: You’ve got lots of bodies. You’ve got your physical body, you’ve got what they call your mind-made body, which in western discussions they call your astral body—the descriptions in the Pali Canon fit the whole idea of an astral body that you can pull out of the physical body and can go here and there and come back in. But sometimes when it comes back in it doesn’t fit, and you’re in really bad shape. That’s one of your bodies. The breath-body, which is your energy body, that’s another body. As long as you’re with any of these bodies, you’re with the body in and of itself.

Question: “In and of itself,” is that often translated as, “on the mind, in the mind; on the body, in the body”—is there some reason why you chose this translation? Because “in and of itself” is so much clearer.

Than Geoff: It’s so much clearer. It’s basically a description of what’s going on. It seems to be the most idiomatic way of saying that. Literally the phrase in Pali says “body in the body,” but there are other places where you see that when you put something in what’s called the locative case, a pronoun, “body in the body” means in reference to the body. So the body in reference to the body: the body in and of itself.

Question: Going back to the “waterhole”—if you sit at the waterhole and watch the animals, then I will always see animals that are thirsty coming to the waterhole. How can I feel certain that I don’t need to see animals that are in some other state in order to really photograph them properly?

Than Geoff: You know it’s the nature of all animals to be thirsty. Except for kangaroo rats. But they’re in the desert and you’re in the savannah.

Question: I guess what I’m asking is: only seeing the mind in this state when it’s focused on the breath, is that sufficient to learn everything about the mind, and release it?

Than Geoff: Yes.

Question: I know the answer is yes, but I'm not convinced.

Than Geoff: The question is why. One explanation for why this is enough to release the mind is that you know that the nature of the mind is to search for happiness. And you're providing it with happiness, you're providing it with a sense of pleasure that goes really, really deep, a lot deeper than any other kind of pleasure. So that's an important mind-state to observe: the mind when it's looking for happiness and then evaluating the best happiness it's ever found.

Second, the Buddha's principle of causality—we could talk for a couple of hours on this one. Essentially it's chaos theory; if you look for a parallel with western theories of causality, the closest thing we have is chaos theory. One of the principles of chaos theory is something called scale invariance: if you look at something on a small scale you see the same thing as when you look at a large scale. You look at the mind as it is in the present moment, and you understand the mind as it moves on larger scales, because it's the same process.

And finally, the breath is really good because it's your one guarantee that you really are in the present moment: you can't watch a past breath, you can't watch a future breath. This is the only breath you can watch. So when you've got the mind with the breath you know you've got the mind here in the present moment. When you're sitting at the waterhole you're not only seeing the animals lapping up the water. You're seeing animals as they're thirsty, you see animals as their thirst has been quenched, as they come and they go. But they've got to come here before they can go. But it's that principle of scale invariance, which is the crux of the matter. If that weren't operating, there would be no meditative technique that would ever show you the mind as a whole. You would have to observe the mind in the past, you would have to observe the mind in the future, and you can't do that. Because causality works the way it does, everything you need to know about the mind is happening right here. So just give the mind something that will bring it right here and then you can watch it.

Question: On number four: I've never felt greed when I was meditating, or aversion when I was meditating. But I feel that as I transact life, as I go through life, as I eat, as I meet people. So is this frame of reference meant only for when you're meditating, or outside of meditation as well?

Than Geoff: Try to maintain that outside of meditation too and see what happens. We were talking earlier about trying to stay with the breath all throughout the day, you begin to notice when your greed arises, when your distress arises. If you're dealing with the world while keeping your body as your frame of reference, it means whatever event comes up, your first reaction is: how is this affecting the body? You don't want to lose sight of the body as your point of reference, as your grounding. And then if you find that greed comes up, you notice what greed does to the body.

The other advantage of going through life taking the body as your frame of reference is that it really changes your attitude toward the stuff you can get from the world. If you find that you can sit here and just breathe and be happy, why bother with all that other garbage out there? That makes it a lot easier to get rid of greed, and not to be so upset about what's happening in the world.

One of the famous ajaans in Thailand, before he died, told his students, who were about my age: "I'm not going to see World War III, but you will, so get ready." And where can you get ready? Just make the body your frame of reference. The world is a crazy place, it's going to go through some craziness, but as long as you have your frame of reference solid, you're in a much better position to negotiate the craziness. So that's an advantage.

Question: Are these four frames of reference meant to be sequential? Do you graduate from

the first to the fourth?

Than Geoff: It's not necessary. Because, as the Buddha will point out in the next section, you can take any one of the four and pursue it, and it will take you all the way to awakening.

Question: I just wanted to go back to that careful attention of breathing being classified as a feeling among feelings. I have a problem distinguishing between feelings and sensations. My understanding is that when he says feeling, he means whether something is pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. You're not supposed to go beyond that. Whereas when you're talking about mental factors, depression for instance, you might think "depression" but then that's what leads you to looking at sensations, maybe triggered by the thought that you're depressed. You don't know which came first, the chicken or the egg, or at least I don't much of the time. I'm concerned about what I'm supposed to do with reference to careful attention and regarding this as a feeling among feelings, and I want to know what is meant by feeling here.

Than Geoff: That is one of the mysteries of that passage. I've never seen it adequately explained. The important point is that if you just do those four things—learn how to breathe in and out sensitive to rapture, breathe in and out sensitive to pleasure, start noticing the coming and going of feelings and perceptions, and then calming those down—you've taken care of feeling as a frame of reference, you're established in feeling as a frame of reference.

Question: In this case would the feeling, the thought, the word depression be a perception as opposed to whatever I find in the body, *viz a viz* sensation?

Than Geoff: Right. So you're trying to stay with precisely the pleasant or painful feelings that surround the depression.

Question: I'm just confused about three and four, the mind and the mental qualities. Could you speak more about those?

Than Geoff: To get back to that analogy—and this is one of the issues, there are lots of different theories about the distinction between the two—my favorite way of thinking about it is looking at the mind as a committee. Now the committee can be either unanimous, or you can start breaking it down into its individual members: what the committee does as a whole as opposed to what the individual members are doing at any one particular time. So "mind" would be the whole committee, whereas "mental qualities" would be the individual members that you're trying to keep track of.

Question: I wonder if the Buddha ever talked about the subject of dreams, and how it relates to meditation. And I also heard a rumor that the Buddha didn't dream. Could you speak about that?

Than Geoff: You're right, there is a rumor. He does talk about dreams he had before his awakening. He never talks about dreams he had after his awakening. And he doesn't talk much about dreams with regard to meditation at all. Now I know from my own experience, when I was in Thailand I'd occasionally have very vivid dreams, and my teacher would either be interested in the dream and we'd talk about it a little bit, or otherwise he'd just kind of look at me and that was the end of that discussion.

What it comes down to is that sometimes dreams can be prophetic, or sometimes they can tell you something about what's going on inside, or sometimes they can actually tell you about events some place else. But that's pretty rare and pretty undependable so you can't place too much stock

in it.

When I was over there one time, I got a letter from my father that he was going to get remarried, and that night I had a dream that a rat had gotten into the house. It was eating up the draperies. And more symbolically, it was also eating up the bed cover in my parents' bed. I woke up the next morning thinking, "I don't have to tell him about this dream..." I hope my stepmother doesn't listen to this on the web.

Question: Maybe I've just read this too many times, but this: "He who sees with discernment the abandoning of greed and distress is one who watches carefully with equanimity." It seems like there's something extra going on there. Because we've been abandoning greed and distress in the first three...

Than Geoff: We've been putting it aside. We haven't been abandoning it. Different verb.

Question: So then we put it aside, and then we see with discernment. So that means we see with discernment the effect of putting it aside?

Than Geoff: The phrase is actually "having seen with discernment." In other words, the discernment here is seeing the inconstancy, the dispassion, the cessation and relinquishment. Then the next step is: "One who watches carefully with equanimity." Because the discernment requires that even these events, even the dispassion, the cessation: you cannot get worked up about the fact: "Hey, I'm finally letting go!"

Question: So it's watching the entire array of mental qualities with equanimity, even the letting go of it?

Than Geoff: Right. Because as we all know, one of the big things that gets in the way when it's getting good, you think: "Hey, it's getting good!" And then it stops getting good.

Question: So as we make this attempt to get fully concentrated, dislocations happen all the time. And when you're on retreat, the first thing the teachers point out is that a lot of people are there because there's some suffering going on. Unskillful choices, whatever it is. I always think of John Lennon saying, "Life happens when you're busy making other plans." So you're making these plans to sit, get fully concentrated, but invariably you're going to have dislocations in your life. Whether it's a divorce that's painful at first but leads you to a wonderful relationship. Or it's a person who has a cardiac arrest but is able to see more freshly now into her experience. Or a friend of mine who was in a mudslide: 300,000 dollars in damage, first the insurance wasn't going to pay, then insurance was going to pay but she ultimately moves, and the new landlord is a wonderful role model for her daughter, teaches her the violin. And then lastly, some political instability that forces someone out of the country, but then they have a new family and that becomes your neighbor.

So my point is, it seems to me that dislocations are wonderful vehicles for new insights, in many respects more than trying to sit and get the insights that we try to do. And yet we're attempting to remedy suffering, yet it's the very suffering many times that leads us to a place of bliss and joy.

Than Geoff: Okay, you've got several things going there. Sometimes that bliss and joy can turn into something else. Secondly, you have to be in the right position in order to view all these changes with enough equanimity so that you can really negotiate them, so you don't get blown away; i.e., the mudslide and the insurance people say they're not going to pay: you don't commit

suicide at that point. You've got enough mental strength to carry through until things turn to be something positive. Now to get that kind of mental strength—some people seem to be born with it, but even people with this sort of inborn mental strength, there are incidents in life that can really knock them for a loop. Whereas the meditation helps give you this foundation, so you realize: even if the world goes crazy, I've still got the body in and of itself, feelings, et cetera, in and of themselves; I can stay here and make this my home. Once your happiness is not dependent on things out there, then you can start learning interesting lessons about the process of change.

We talked earlier about this process of scale invariance: the things that happen on the small scale follow the same pattern as things happening on the large scale, and vice versa. The Buddha says you can take both as opportunities for insight. You can look at the processes in the mind, and the lessons you learn from watching the processes in the mind help you negotiate things outside a lot better. If you're good at negotiating outside, that helps you deal with issues that come up inside, on the small scale. So everything is a potential opportunity for insight. You just have to get the mind in the right place, which is why the emphasis is on careful attention, being equanimous, being mindful, ardent and alert. Those are the qualities that will keep the mind in a position where it actually can learn from these ups and downs. Because I know a lot of people who've been through mudslides and earthquakes and tsunamis and all these other things, and they don't come out with any wisdom at all.

Question: So basically you're saying that this is a training ground to fortify the mind, so that not only can we see more clearly as we're sitting and doing this practice, but also to prepare us for those dislocations that may occur in our lives? And that we may not be able to fully concentrate when they happen, but we are aware of them, and in time will be able to reflect back and learn from them?

Than Geoff: The best thing is when you can actually maintain that tether throughout the incident. But if you can't, the wisdom you've learned can help you through. As with any storm, there are times when you just have to lay low. Then when the storm is over you can come out. But in the meantime you've got some protection to help you lay low and there's the conviction that this will have to pass. It's not going to last forever.

Question: And although it seems like it's permanent, ultimately you realize it's not. Thank you.

Than Geoff: Coming from southern California, I find that one of my most useful metaphors in teaching meditation is the gym. You go down to the gym and, one, you can't say, "I'm only going to go down there when I'm strong enough so I don't feel embarrassed in front of the other people." You have to take whatever body you've got and take it down to the gym. That's how your weak body gets stronger. When you start out to meditate, you start where you are. Secondly, once you've gained strength in the gym, it's useful not only in the gym. You don't leave your bigger body down in the locker room. You take it out with you and you use it in real life. If you keep fit in your day to day life, it makes it easier to go down to the gym, so you don't become a weekend warrior and break a leg. So there are a lot of parallels.

[Unfortunately, at this point the audio recording is cut off.]

Anapanasati Sutta: Mindfulness of Breathing

translated from the Pali by

Thanissaro Bhikkhu

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I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying at Savatthi in the Eastern Monastery, the palace of Migara’s mother, together with many well-known elder disciples—with Ven. Sariputta, Ven. Maha Moggallana, Ven. Maha Kassapa, Ven. Maha Kaccana, Ven. Maha Kotthita, Ven. Maha Kappina, Ven. Maha Cunda, Ven. Revata, Ven. Ananda, and other well-known elder disciples. On that occasion the elder monks were teaching & instructing. Some elder monks were teaching & instructing ten monks, some were teaching & instructing twenty monks, some were teaching & instructing thirty monks, some were teaching & instructing forty monks. The new monks, being taught & instructed by the elder monks, were discerning grand, successive distinctions.

Now on that occasion—the Uposatha day of the fifteenth, the full-moon night of the Pavarana ceremony—the Blessed One was seated in the open air surrounded by the community of monks. Surveying the silent community of monks, he addressed them:

“Monks, I am content with this practice. I am content at heart with this practice. So arouse even more intense persistence for the attaining of the as-yet-unattained, the reaching of the as-yet-unreached, the realization of the as-yet-unrealized. I will remain right here at Savatthi [for another month] through the ‘White Water-lily’ Month, the fourth month of the rains.”

The monks in the countryside heard, “The Blessed One, they say, will remain right there at Savatthi through the White Water-lily Month, the fourth month of the rains.” So they left for Savatthi to see the Blessed One.

Then the elder monks taught & instructed the new monks even more intensely. Some elder monks were teaching & instructing ten monks, some were teaching & instructing twenty monks, some were teaching & instructing thirty monks, some were teaching & instructing forty monks. The new monks, being taught & instructed by the elder monks, were discerning grand, successive distinctions.

Now on that occasion—the Uposatha day of the fifteenth, the full-moon night of the White Water-lily Month, the fourth month of the rains—the Blessed One was seated in the open air surrounded by the community of monks. Surveying the silent community of monks, he addressed them:

“Monks, this assembly is free from idle chatter, devoid of idle chatter, and is established on pure heartwood: such is this community of monks, such is this assembly. The sort of assembly that is worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of respect, an incomparable field of merit for the world: such is this community of monks, such is this assembly. The sort of assembly to which a small gift, when given, becomes great, and a great gift greater: such is this community of monks, such is this assembly. The sort of assembly that it is rare to see in the world: such is this community of monks, such is this assembly—the sort of assembly that it would be worth traveling for leagues, taking along provisions, in order to see.

“In this community of monks there are monks who are arahants, whose mental effluents are ended, who have reached fulfillment, done the task, laid down the burden, attained the true goal, laid to waste the fetter of becoming, and who are released through right gnosis: such are the monks in this community of monks.

“In this community of monks there are monks who, with the wasting away of the five lower fetters, are due to be reborn [in the Pure Abodes], there to be totally unbound, destined never again to return from that world: such are the monks in this community of monks.

“In this community of monks there are monks who, with the wasting away of [the first] three fetters, and with the attenuation of passion, aversion, & delusion, are once-returners, who—on returning only once more to this world—will make an ending to stress: such are the monks in this community of monks.

“In this community of monks there are monks who, with the wasting away of [the first] three fetters, are stream-winners, steadfast, never again destined for states of woe, headed for self-awakening: such are the monks in this community of monks.

“In this community of monks there are monks who remain devoted to the development of the four frames of reference... the four right exertions... the four bases of power... the five faculties... the five strengths... the seven factors for awakening... the noble eightfold path: such are the monks in this community of monks.

“In this community of monks there are monks who remain devoted to the development of good will... compassion... appreciation... equanimity... [the perception of the] foulness [of the body]... the perception of inconstancy: such are the monks in this community of monks.

“In this community of monks there are monks who remain devoted to mindfulness of in-&-out breathing.

“Mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, when developed & pursued, is of great fruit, of great benefit. Mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, when developed & pursued, brings the four frames of reference to their culmination. The four frames of reference, when developed & pursued, bring the seven factors for awakening to their culmination. The seven factors for awakening, when developed & pursued, bring clear knowing & release to their culmination.

Mindfulness of In-&-Out Breathing

“Now how is mindfulness of in-&-out breathing developed & pursued so as to be of great fruit, of great benefit?

“There is the case where a monk, having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building, sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect, and setting mindfulness to the fore.¹ Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.

“[1] Breathing in long, he discerns, ‘I am breathing in long’; or breathing out long, he discerns, ‘I am breathing out long.’ [2] Or breathing in short, he discerns, ‘I am breathing in short’; or breathing out short, he discerns, ‘I am breathing out short.’ [3] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to the entire body.’² He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to the entire body.’ [4] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication.’³ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe

out calming bodily fabrication.’

“[5] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to rapture.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to rapture.’ [6] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to pleasure.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to pleasure.’ [7] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to mental fabrication.’⁴ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to mental fabrication.’ [8] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in calming mental fabrication.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out calming mental fabrication.’

“[9] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to the mind.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to the mind.’ [10] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in satisfying the mind.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out satisfying the mind.’ [11] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in steadying the mind.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out steadying the mind.’ [12] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in releasing the mind.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out releasing the mind.’⁵

“[13] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in focusing on inconstancy.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out focusing on inconstancy.’ [14] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in focusing on dispassion [literally, fading].’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out focusing on dispassion.’ [15] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in focusing on cessation.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out focusing on cessation.’ [16] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in focusing on relinquishment.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out focusing on relinquishment.’

“This is how mindfulness of in-&-out breathing is developed & pursued so as to be of great fruit, of great benefit.

The Four Frames of Reference

“And how is mindfulness of in-&-out breathing developed & pursued so as to bring the four frames of reference to their culmination?

“[1] On whatever occasion a monk breathing in long discerns, ‘I am breathing in long’; or breathing out long, discerns, ‘I am breathing out long’; or breathing in short, discerns, ‘I am breathing in short’; or breathing out short, discerns, ‘I am breathing out short’; trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&... out sensitive to the entire body’; trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&...out calming bodily fabrication’: On that occasion the monk remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world. I tell you, monks, that this—the in-&-out breath—is classed as a body among bodies, which is why the monk on that occasion remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world.

“[2] On whatever occasion a monk trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&...out sensitive to rapture’; trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&...out sensitive to pleasure’; trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&...out sensitive to mental fabrication’; trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&...out calming mental fabrication’: On that occasion the monk remains focused on feelings in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world. I tell you, monks, that this—careful attention to in-&-out breaths—is classed as a feeling among feelings,⁶ which is why the monk on that occasion remains focused on feelings in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world.

“[3] On whatever occasion a monk trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&...out sensitive to the mind’;

trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&...out satisfying the mind’; trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&...out steadying the mind’; trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&...out releasing the mind’: On that occasion the monk remains focused on the mind in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world. I don’t say that there is mindfulness of in-&-out breathing in one of lapsed mindfulness and no alertness, which is why the monk on that occasion remains focused on the mind in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world.

“[4] On whatever occasion a monk trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&...out focusing on inconstancy’; trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&...out focusing on dispassion’; trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&...out focusing on cessation’; trains himself, ‘I will breathe in...&...out focusing on relinquishment’: On that occasion the monk remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world. He who sees with discernment the abandoning of greed & distress is one who watches carefully with equanimity, which is why the monk on that occasion remains focused on mental qualities in & of themselves—ardent, alert, & mindful—putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world.

“This is how mindfulness of in-&-out breathing is developed & pursued so as to bring the four frames of reference to their culmination.

The Seven Factors for Awakening

“And how are the four frames of reference developed & pursued so as to bring the seven factors for awakening to their culmination?

“[1] On whatever occasion the monk remains focused on the body in & of itself—ardent, alert, & mindful—putting aside greed & distress with reference to the world, on that occasion his mindfulness is steady & without lapse. When his mindfulness is steady & without lapse, then mindfulness as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

“[2] Remaining mindful in this way, he examines, analyzes, & comes to a comprehension of that quality with discernment. When he remains mindful in this way, examining, analyzing, & coming to a comprehension of that quality with discernment, then analysis of qualities as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

“[3] In one who examines, analyzes, & comes to a comprehension of that quality with discernment, persistence is aroused unflaggingly. When persistence is aroused unflaggingly in one who examines, analyzes, & comes to a comprehension of that quality with discernment, then persistence as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

“[4] In one whose persistence is aroused, a rapture not-of-the-flesh arises. When a rapture not-of-the-flesh arises in one whose persistence is aroused, then rapture as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

“[5] For one enraptured at heart, the body grows calm and the mind grows calm. When the body

& mind of an monk enraptured at heart grow calm, then serenity as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

“[6] For one who is at ease—his body calmed—the mind becomes concentrated. When the mind of one who is at ease—his body calmed—becomes concentrated, then concentration as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

“[7] He carefully watches the mind thus concentrated with equanimity. When he carefully watches the mind thus concentrated with equanimity, equanimity as a factor for awakening becomes aroused. He develops it, and for him it goes to the culmination of its development.

(Similarly with the other three frames of reference: feelings, mind, & mental qualities.)

“This is how the four frames of reference are developed & pursued so as to bring the seven factors for awakening to their culmination.

Clear Knowing & Release

“And how are the seven factors for awakening developed & pursued so as to bring clear knowing & release to their culmination? There is the case where a monk develops mindfulness as a factor for awakening dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in relinquishment. He develops analysis of qualities as a factor for awakening... persistence as a factor for awakening... rapture as a factor for awakening... serenity as a factor for awakening... concentration as a factor for awakening... equanimity as a factor for awakening dependent on seclusion, dependent on dispassion, dependent on cessation, resulting in relinquishment.

“This is how the seven factors for awakening are developed & pursued so as to bring clear knowing & release to their culmination.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One’s words.

Notes

1. To the fore (*parimukham*): The Abhidhamma takes an etymological approach to this term, defining it as around (*pari-*) the mouth (*mukham*). In the Vinaya, however, it is used in a context (Cv.V.27.4) where it undoubtedly means the front of the chest. There is also the possibility that the term could be used idiomatically as “to the front,” which is how I have translated it here.
2. The commentaries insist that “body” here means the breath, but this is unlikely in this context, for the next step—without further explanation—refers to the breath as “bodily fabrication.” If the Buddha were using two different terms to refer to the breath in such close proximity, he would have been careful to signal that he was redefining his terms (as he does below, when explaining that the first four steps in breath meditation correspond to the practice of focusing on the body in and of itself as a frame of reference). The step of breathing in and out sensitive to the entire body relates to the many similes in the suttas depicting jhana as a state of whole-body awareness (see MN 119).
3. “In-&-out breaths are bodily; these are things tied up with the body. That’s why in-&-out breaths are bodily fabrications.”—MN 44.

4. “Perceptions & feelings are mental; these are things tied up with the mind. That’s why perceptions & feelings are mental fabrications.”—MN 44.
5. AN 9.34 shows how the mind, step by step, is temporarily released from burdensome mental states of greater and greater refinement as it advances through the stages of jhana.
6. As this shows, a meditator focusing on feelings in themselves as a frame of reference should not abandon the breath as the basis for his/her concentration.

See also: SN 54.8.

SN 54.6 PTS: S v 314 CDB ii 1768

Arittha Sutta: To Arittha

(On Mindfulness of Breathing)

translated from the Pali by

Thanissaro Bhikkhu

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At Savatthi. There the Blessed One said, “Monks, do you develop mindfulness of in-&-out breathing?”

When this was said, Ven. Arittha replied to the Blessed One, “I develop mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, lord.”

“But how do you develop mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, Arittha?”

“Having abandoned sensual desire for past sensual pleasures, lord, having done away with sensual desire for future sensual pleasures, and having thoroughly subdued perceptions of irritation with regard to internal & external events, I breathe in mindfully and breathe out mindfully.”¹

“There is that mindfulness of in-&-out breathing, Arittha. I don’t say that there isn’t. But as to how mindfulness of in-&-out breathing is brought in detail to its culmination, listen and pay close attention. I will speak.”

“As you say, lord,” Ven. Arittha responded to the Blessed One.

The Blessed One said, “And how, Arittha, is mindfulness of in-&-out breathing brought in detail to its culmination? There is the case where a monk, having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building, sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect, and setting mindfulness to the fore.² Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.

“[1] Breathing in long, he discerns, ‘I am breathing in long’; or breathing out long, he discerns, ‘I am breathing out long.’ [2] Or breathing in short, he discerns, ‘I am breathing in short’; or breathing out short, he discerns, ‘I am breathing out short.’ [3] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to the entire body.’³ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to the entire body.’ [4] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication.’⁴ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.’

“[5] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to rapture.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out

sensitive to rapture.’ [6] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to pleasure.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to pleasure.’ [7] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to mental fabrication.’⁵ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to mental fabrication.’ [8] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in calming mental fabrication.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out calming mental fabrication.’

“[9] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to the mind.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to the mind.’ [10] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in satisfying the mind.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out satisfying the mind.’ [11] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in steadying the mind.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out steadying the mind.’ [12] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in releasing the mind.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out releasing the mind.’⁶

“[13] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in focusing on inconstancy.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out focusing on inconstancy.’ [14] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in focusing on dispassion.’⁷ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out focusing on dispassion.’ [15] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in focusing on cessation.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out focusing on cessation.’ [16] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in focusing on relinquishment.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out focusing on relinquishment.’

“This, Arittha, is how mindfulness of in-&-out breathing is brought in detail to its culmination.”

Notes

1. The Commentary reads this statement as indicating that Arittha has attained the third level of Awakening, non-return, but it is also possible to interpret the statement on a more mundane level: Arittha is simply practicing mindfulness in the present moment, having temporarily subdued desire for past and future sensual pleasures, and having temporarily subdued any thought of irritation with regard to the present.
2. To the fore (parimukham): The Abhidhamma takes an etymological approach to this term, defining it as around (pari-) the mouth (mukham). In the Vinaya, however, it is used in a context (Cv.V.27.4) where it undoubtedly means the front of the chest. There is also the possibility that the term could be used idiomatically as “to the front,” which is how I have translated it here.
3. The commentaries insist that “body” here means the breath, but this is unlikely in this context, for the next step—without further explanation—refers to the breath as “bodily fabrication.” If the Buddha were using two different terms to refer to the breath in such close proximity, he would have been careful to signal that he was redefining his terms (as he does below, when explaining that the first four steps in breath meditation correspond to the practice of focusing on the body in and of itself as a frame of reference). The step of breathing in and out sensitive to the entire body relates to the many similes in the suttas depicting jhana as a state of whole-body awareness (see MN 119).
4. “In-&-out breaths are bodily; these are things tied up with the body. That’s why in-&-out breaths are bodily fabrications.”—MN 44.
5. “Perceptions & feelings are mental; these are things tied up with the mind. That’s why perceptions & feelings are mental fabrications.”—MN 44.
6. AN 9.34 shows how the mind, step by step, is temporarily released from burdensome mental states of greater and greater refinement as it advances through the stages of jhana.
7. Lit., “fading.”

See also: MN 118; SN 54.8.