“All the Unpopular Buddhist Topics” (Devas, Body Contemplation & More!):
A Morning of Practice with Ajahn Nisabho
Resources to Accompany Sati Center for Buddhist Studies Presentation
9:00 am-noon Saturday, January 6, 2024

Schedule:
Introduction: Right View

1) Death & Rebirth
   For Heedfulness (Appamāda)
   For Compassion & Equanimity (Karunā & Upekkhā)
   Supplementary Resources

2) Buddhist Cosmology
   Hell Realm
   Deva Realm
   Brahmā Realms
   Supplementary Resources

3) Body Contemplation
   Supplementary Resources

Schedule

- 9:00-9:10: Introductions
- 9:10-9:30: Guided Death Meditation
- 9:30-10:00: Talk on Death Contemplation & Rebirth
- 10:00-10:20: Q&A
- 10:20-10:30: Break
- 10:30-11:00: Talk on Buddhist Cosmology
- 11:00-11:20: Guided “4 Elements” Meditation
- 11:20-11:40: Talk on Body Contemplation
- 11:40-11:55: Q&A
- 11:55-12:00: Closing

Introduction: Right View

- “And what is right view? Knowledge with regard to stress, knowledge with regard to the
  origination of stress, knowledge with regard to the cessation of stress, knowledge with
  regard to the way of practice leading to the cessation of stress: This is called right view.”
- (DN 22)
- “And how is right view the forerunner? One discerns wrong view as wrong view, and right view as right view. This is one’s right view. And what is wrong view? ‘There is nothing given, nothing offered, nothing sacrificed. There is no fruit or result of good or bad actions. There is no this world, no next world, no mother, no father, no spontaneously reborn beings; no brahmans or contemplatives who, faring rightly & practicing rightly, proclaim this world & the next after having directly known & realized it for themselves.’ This is wrong view… - (MN 117)

1) Death & Rebirth

For Heedfulness (Appamāda)

- “When newly ordained, mindfulness of breathing and the contemplation of death were my main methods of meditation. This was because I still used to think and fantasise a lot about the future. When young and youthful, we tend to think only in terms of gain and progress, never of decline and loss. For this reason, I took up the theme of death for contemplation, seeing the danger in the endless round of birth and demise, where the fortunes of life are unpredictable, and where the only certainty is that of passing away. Through such reflections, the heart is moved by a sense of profound sadness towards the universality of suffering and by a deep urgency to transcend it, like the desire to flee from a burning house.” - Pg. 29, *Seeking Buddha* by Ajahn Anan

- “Monks, suppose that this great earth were totally covered with water, and a man were to toss a yoke with a single hole there. A wind from the east would push it west; a wind from the west would push it east. A wind from the north would push it south; a wind from the south would push it north. And suppose a blind sea turtle were there. It would come to the surface once every one hundred years. Now what do you think? Would that blind sea turtle, coming to the surface once every one hundred years, stick his neck into the yoke with a single hole?”

  “It would be a sheer coincidence, lord, that the blind sea turtle, coming to the surface once every one hundred years, would stick his neck into the yoke with a single hole.”

  “It’s likewise a sheer coincidence that one obtains the human state. It’s likewise a sheer coincidence that a Tathāgata, worthy & rightly self-awakened, arises in the world. It’s likewise a sheer coincidence that a Dhamma & Vinaya expounded by a Tathāgata appears in the world. Now, this human state has been obtained. A Tathāgata, worthy & rightly self-awakened, has arisen in the world. A Dhamma & Vinaya expounded by a Tathāgata appears in the world.
“Therefore your duty is the contemplation, ‘This is stress … This is the origination of stress … This is the cessation of stress.’ Your duty is the contemplation, ‘This is the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress.’” - (SN 56:48)

- “...There are, bhikkhus, these eight inopportune moments that are not right occasions for living the spiritual life. What eight?

(1) “Here, a Tathāgata has arisen in the world, an arahant, perfectly enlightened, accomplished in true knowledge and conduct, fortunate, knower of the world, unsurpassed trainer of persons to be tamed, teacher of devas and humans, an Enlightened One, a Blessed One, and the Dhamma leading to peace, nibbāna, and enlightenment is taught as proclaimed by a Fortunate One. But a person has been reborn in hell. This is the first inopportune moment that is not the right occasion for living the spiritual life.

(2) “Again, a Tathāgata has arisen in the world … and the Dhamma leading to peace, nibbāna, and enlightenment is taught as proclaimed by a Fortunate One. But a person has been reborn in the animal realm. This is the second inopportune moment that is not the right occasion for living the spiritual life.

(3) “Again, a Tathāgata has arisen in the world … and the Dhamma leading to peace, nibbāna, and enlightenment is taught as proclaimed by a Fortunate One. But a person has been reborn in the sphere of afflicted spirits. This is the third inopportune moment that is not the right occasion for living the spiritual life.

(4) “Again, a Tathāgata has arisen in the world … and the Dhamma leading to peace, nibbāna, and enlightenment is taught as proclaimed by a Fortunate One. But a person has been reborn in a certain order of long-lived devas. This is the fourth inopportune moment that is not the right occasion for living the spiritual life.

(5) “Again, a Tathāgata has arisen in the world … and the Dhamma leading to peace, nibbāna, and enlightenment is taught as proclaimed by a Fortunate One. But a person has been reborn in the outlying provinces among the uncouth foreigners, a place to which bhikkhus, bhikkhunīs, male lay followers, and female lay followers do not travel. This is the fifth inopportune moment that is not the right occasion for living the spiritual life.

(6) “Again, a Tathāgata has arisen in the world … and the Dhamma leading to peace, nibbāna, and enlightenment is taught as proclaimed by a Fortunate One. A person has been reborn in the central provinces, but he holds wrong view and has a distorted perspective: ‘There is nothing given, nothing sacrificed, nothing offered; there is no fruit
or result of good and bad actions; there is no this world, no other world; there is no
mother, no father; there are no beings spontaneously reborn; there are in the world no
ascetics and brahmins of right conduct and right practice who, having realized this world
and the other world for themselves by direct knowledge, make them known to others.’
This is the sixth inopportune moment that is not the right occasion for living the spiritual
life.

(7) “Again, a Tathāgata has arisen in the world … and the Dhamma leading to peace,
nibbāna, and enlightenment is taught as proclaimed by a Fortunate One. A person has
been reborn in the central provinces, but he is unwise, stupid, obtuse, unable to
understand the meaning of what has been well stated and badly stated. This is the seventh
inopportune moment that is not the right occasion for living the spiritual life.

(8) “Again, a Tathāgata has not arisen in the world … and the Dhamma leading to peace,
nibbāna, and enlightenment is not taught as proclaimed by a Fortunate One. But a person
has been reborn in the central provinces, and he is wise, intelligent, astute, able to
understand the meaning of what has been well stated and badly stated. This is the eighth
inopportune moment that is not the right occasion for living the spiritual life.

“These are the eight inopportune moments that are not the right occasions for living the
spiritual life.

“There is, bhikkhus, one unique opportune moment that is the right occasion for living
the spiritual life. What is it? Here, a Tathāgata has arisen in the world, an arahant,
perfectly enlightened, accomplished in true knowledge and conduct, fortunate, knower of
the world, unsurpassed trainer of persons to be tamed, teacher of devas and humans, an
Enlightened One, a Blessed One, and the Dhamma leading to peace, nibbāna, and
enlightenment is taught as proclaimed by a Fortunate One. And a person has been reborn
in the central provinces, and he is wise, intelligent, astute, able to understand the meaning
of what has been well stated and badly stated. This, bhikkhus, is the one unique
opportune moment that is the right occasion for living the spiritual life.” - (AN 8.29)

For Compassion & Equanimity (Karuṇā & Upekkhā)

- From an inconstruable beginning comes transmigration. A beginning point is not evident,
though beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving are transmigrating &
wandering on. When you see someone who is happy & well-provided in life, you should
conclude: 'We, too, have experienced just this sort of thing in the course of that long, long
time (...)’ When you see someone who has fallen on hard times, overwhelmed with hard
times, you should conclude: 'We, too, have experienced just this sort of thing in the
course of that long, long time.'
"Why is that? From an inconstruable beginning comes transmigration. A beginning point is not evident, though beings hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving are transmigrating & wandering on. Long have you thus experienced stress, experienced pain, experienced loss, swelling the cemeteries — enough to become disenchanted with all fabricated things, enough to become dispassionate, enough to be released. - *(SN 15:11,12)*

### Supplementary Resources

- *Is Rebirth Real | Ajahn Nisabho*
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfho4r7jHYs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfho4r7jHYs)
- *The Truth of Rebirth: And Why It Matters for Buddhist Practice:*
  [https://www.dhammatalks.org/books/#truthofrebirth](https://www.dhammatalks.org/books/#truthofrebirth)
- *Is There Life After Death?* moderated by John Cleese - 2018 Tom Tom Festival:
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RGizqsLumo&t=0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4RGizqsLumo&t=0s)
- *The Self & Survival (Podcast):*
- *Dhammachakka Sutta Dhammaruwan:*
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOB2c9QVa_M&t=0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOB2c9QVa_M&t=0s)

### 2) Buddhist Cosmology

- (1) “By encompassing mind with mind I understand a certain person thus: ‘This person so behaves, so conducts himself, has taken such a path that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he will reappear in a state of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell.’ And then later on, with the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, I see that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he has reappeared in a state of deprivation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, in hell, and is experiencing exclusively painful, racking, piercing feelings. Suppose there were a charcoal pit deeper than a man’s height full of glowing coals without flame or smoke; and then a man scorched and exhausted by hot weather, weary, parched, and thirsty, came by a path going in one way only and directed to that same charcoal pit. Then a man with good sight on seeing him would say: ‘This person so behaves, so conducts himself, has taken such a path, that he will come to this same charcoal pit’; and then later on he sees that he has fallen into that charcoal pit and is experiencing exclusively painful, racking, piercing feelings. So too, by encompassing mind with mind…piercing feelings.

- (2) “By encompassing mind with mind I understand a certain person thus: ‘This person so behaves, so conducts himself, has taken such a path that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he will reappear in the animal realm.’ ... Suppose there were a cesspit deeper
than a man’s height full of filth; and then a man scorched and exhausted by hot weather, weary, parched, and thirsty, came by a path going in one way only and directed to that same cesspit… piercing feeling.

(3) “By encompassing mind with mind I understand a certain person thus: ‘This person so behaves, so conducts himself, has taken such a path that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he will reappear in the realm of ghosts.’... Suppose there were a tree growing on uneven ground with scanty foliage casting a dappled shadow; and then a man scorched and exhausted by hot weather, weary, parched, and thirsty, came by a path going in one way only and directed to that same tree… painful feeling.

(4) “By encompassing mind with mind I understand a certain person thus: ‘This person so behaves, so conducts himself, has taken such a path that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he will reappear among human beings.’... Suppose there were a tree growing on even ground with thick foliage casting a deep shade; and then a man scorched and exhausted by hot weather, weary, parched, and thirsty, came by a path going in one way only and directed to that same tree… pleasant feeling.

(5) “By encompassing mind with mind I understand a certain person thus: ‘This person so behaves, so conducts himself, has taken such a path that on the dissolution of the body, after death, he will reappear in a happy destination, in the heavenly world.’... Suppose there were a mansion, and it had an upper chamber plastered within and without, shut off, secured by bars, with shuttered windows, and in it there was a couch spread with rugs, blankets, and sheets, with a deer-skin coverlet, with a canopy as well as crimson pillows for both head and feet; and then a man scorched and exhausted by hot weather, weary, parched, and thirsty, came by a path going in one way only and directed to that same mansion… exclusively pleasant feelings.

(6) “By encompassing mind with mind I understand a certain person thus: ‘This person so behaves, so conducts himself, has taken such a path that by realising for himself with direct knowledge, he here and now will enter upon and abide in the deliverance of mind and deliverance by wisdom that are taintless with the destruction of the taints.’... Suppose there were a pond with clean, agreeable, cool water, transparent, with smooth banks, delightful, and nearby a dense wood; and then a man scorched and exhausted by hot weather, weary, parched, and thirsty, came by a path going in one way only towards that same pond… exclusively pleasant feelings. These are the five destinations.
what’s called a five-fold imprisonment. They drive a red-hot iron stake through one hand, they drive a red-hot iron stake through the other hand, they drive a red-hot iron stake through one foot, they drive a red-hot iron stake through the other foot, they drive a red-hot iron stake through the middle of his chest. There he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings, yet he does not die as long as his evil kamma is not exhausted.

“They then the hell-wardens lay him down and slice him with axes. Then they hold him feet up & head down and slice him with adzes. Then they harness him to a chariot and drive him back & forth over ground that is burning, blazing, & glowing. Then they make him climb up & down a vast mountain of embers that is burning, blazing, & glowing. There he boils with bubbles foaming. And as he is boiling there with bubbles foaming, he goes now up, he goes now down, he goes now around. There he feels painful, racking, piercing feelings, yet he does not die as long as his evil kamma is not exhausted… (and so much more!) - (MN 130)

**Deva Realm**

- *After Sakka, King of the Realm of the Thirty-Three, has been instructed by the Buddha…* Now at that time the venerable Moggallāna the Great was sitting down near the Lord. Then it occurred to the venerable Moggallāna the Great: “Now, did that yakkha, when he thanked the Lord for his words, grasp them or not? Suppose that I should find out whether that yakkha, when he thanked the Lord for his words, grasped them or not?” Then the venerable Moggallāna the Great, as a strong man might stretch out his bent arm or might bend back his out-stretched arm, vanishing from the palace of Migāra's mother in the Eastern Monastery, appeared among the devas of the Thirty-Three.

Now at that time Sakka, the lord of devas, equipped and provided with five hundred deva-like musical instruments, was amusing himself in the One Lotus pleasure grove. Sakka, the lord of devas, saw the venerable Moggallāna the Great coming in the distance; seeing him, having had those five hundred deva-like musical instruments stopped, he approached the venerable Moggallāna the Great; having approached, he spoke thus to the venerable Moggallāna the Great: “Come, my good Moggallāna, you are welcome, my good Moggallāna; at last, my good Moggallāna, you take this occasion for coming here; sit down, my good Moggallāna, this seat is appointed.” The venerable Moggallāna the Great sat down on the appointed seat. Sakka, the lord of devas, having taken a low seat, sat down at a respectful distance.

The venerable Moggallāna the Great spoke thus to Sakka, the lord of devas, as he was sitting down at a respectful distance: “In regard to the talk that the Lord spoke in brief to you, Kosiya, on freedom by the destruction of craving, it were good even for me to hear
“I, my good Moggallāna, am very busy, there is much to be done by me; both on my own account there are things to be done, and there are also (still more) things to be done for the devas of the Thirty-Three. Further, my good Moggallāna, it was properly heard, properly learnt, properly attended to, properly reflected upon, so that it cannot vanish quickly.

Once upon a time, my good Moggallāna, a battle was in full swing between devas and demons. In that battle, my good Moggallāna, the devas conquered, the demons were defeated. So I, my good Moggallāna, having won that battle and being victorious in the battle, when I came back from there built a palace named Vejayanta (Victory). Now, my good Moggallāna, there are a hundred towers to the Vejayanta Palace, in each tower there are seven gabled houses, in each gabled house there are seven nymphs, and for each nymph there are seven attendants. Would you, my good Moggallāna, like to see the delights of the Vejayanta Palace?” The venerable Moggallāna the Great consented by becoming silent.

Then Sakka, the lord of devas, and the great rajah Vessavaṇa, having put the venerable Moggallāna the Great in front of them approached Vejayanta Palace. The female attendants of Sakka, the lord of devas, saw the venerable Moggallāna the Great coming in the distance; on seeing him, shrinking and shy, each entered her own inner room. As a daughter-in-law shrinks and is shy on seeing her father-in-law, even so did the female attendants of Sakka, the lord of devas, on seeing the venerable Moggallāna the Great, shrinking and shy, each enter her own inner room.

Then Sakka, the lord of devas, and Vessavaṇa, the great rajah, made the venerable Moggallāna the Great follow them into the Vejayanta Palace and roam about in it, and (they said): “My dear Moggallāna, see this delight of the Vejayanta Palace, and, dear Moggallāna, see that delight of the Vejayanta Palace.” “This shines forth as a deed of merit formerly done by the venerable Kosiya, and people seeing anything delightful speak thus: ‘Indeed it shines forth from the devas of the Thirty-Three, that is to say it shines forth as a deed of merit formerly done by the venerable Kosiya.’”

Then it occurred to the venerable Moggallāna the Great: “This yakkha lives much too indolently. Suppose that I were to agitate this yakkha?” Then the venerable Moggallāna the Great worked such a working of psychic power that with his big toe he made Vejayanta Palace tremble, shake and quake. Then the minds of Sakka, the lord of devas, and of the great rajah Vessavaṇa and of the devas of the Thirty-Three were full of wonder and marvel, and they said: “Indeed, the great psychic power, the great majesty of the recluse is wonderful, it is indeed marvellous, inasmuch as with his big toe he makes this deva-like abode tremble, shake and quake.” - (MN 37)
Brahmā Realms

- Furthermore, take a mendicant who has faith, ethics, learning, generosity, and wisdom. And they’ve heard: ‘The Brahmā of a thousand is long-lived, beautiful, and very happy.’ Now the Brahmā of a thousand meditates determined on pervading a galaxy of a thousand solar systems, as well as the sentient beings reborn there. As a person might pick up a gallnut in their hand and examine it, so too the Brahmā of a thousand meditates determined on pervading a galaxy of a thousand solar systems, as well as the sentient beings reborn there. They think: ‘If only, when my body breaks up, after death, I would be reborn in the company of the Brahmā of a thousand!’ They settle on that thought, stabilize it and develop it. Those choices and meditations of theirs, developed and cultivated like this, lead to rebirth there. This is the path and the practice that leads to rebirth there. - (MN 120)

…and much more

Supplementary Resources

- Buddhist Cosmology Video Playlist by Ajahn Sona & Ajahn Punnadhammo: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lFTkpFsLfrs&list=PLAP2qNgi-LGsFpVqxHPBq4ItCdpIywoqc
- Demons to Devas: A Tour of the Buddhist Cinematic Universe | Ajahn Nisabho: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82kEaZnpciE

3) Body Contemplation

- Anyone who has developed and cultivated mindfulness of the body includes all of the skillful qualities that play a part in realization. Anyone who brings into their mind the great ocean includes all of the streams that run down into it. In the same way, anyone who has developed and cultivated mindfulness of the body includes all of the skillful qualities that play a part in realization. - (MN 119)

- (32 parts) “And further… just as if a sack with openings at both ends were full of various kinds of grain—wheat, rice, mung beans, kidney beans, sesame seeds, husked rice—and a man with good eyesight, pouring it out, were to reflect, ‘This is wheat. This is rice. These are mung beans. These are kidney beans. These are sesame seeds. This is husked rice,’ in the same way, the monk reflects on this very body from the soles of the feet on up, from the crown of the head on down, surrounded by skin and full of various kinds of unclean things: ‘In this body there are head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh,
tendons, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, gorge, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, skin-oil, saliva, mucus, fluid in the joints, urine.”

(Elements) And further… just as a dexterous butcher or his apprentice, having killed a cow, would sit at a crossroads cutting it up into pieces, the monk reflects on this very body—however it stands, however it is disposed—in terms of properties: ‘In this body there is the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, & the wind property.’

(Charnel ground contemplations) “And further, as if he were to see a corpse cast away in a charnel ground—one day, two days, three days dead—bloated, livid, & festering, he applies it to this very body, ‘This body, too: Such is its nature, such is its future, such its unavoidable fate.’” - (MN 119, DN 22)

- During my fifth rains retreat, I began the practice of asubha kamma-thana. I had previously determined not to seriously take up this type of meditation until after I’d been a monk for five years. I have no idea why I made this resolution, but the upshot was that I never practised asubha before this time. During my fifth rains-retreat therefore, I was determined to focus on asubha meditation. Through the power of imagination and visualisation, I created images in the mind of the ugly and unattractive aspects of the body. The clarity of these visualisations increased to the point where they became what are called ‘nimitta’ or ‘fixed mental images’. Sometimes I experienced nauseating visions of blood dribbling from my mouth down to my belly. These nimitta were so real that I almost vomited. Seeing the repulsiveness of the body through the cultivation of these nimitta causes pīti, or rapture, to arise. The clearer the insight into the loathsome nature of the body – both internally and externally – then the greater these feeling of piti will be. If the contemplation deepens even further than this, then sukha, or bliss, arises and eventually the mind becomes still and serene.

Nimitta are of two different types. At first these nimitta are merely lucid visions that arise during meditation for short periods of time. However, with practice, they later become fixed mental images that are as vivid and as easy to hold in mind as if one were seeing the real thing with open eyes. When these nimitta are fixed in the mind, if we desire it, they can be expanded or enlarged. Initially when contemplating the body, we can visualise any of its parts. These visualisations can then be transformed into fixed mental images, which can be enlarged or expanded for deeper contemplation. This ability is essential.

If the mind has reached this stage, it will be able to analyse physical phenomena in terms of dhātu or fundamental elements. Contemplating fallen leaves for example; whether
green, brown or yellow, we can see that they revert to the state of soil. If we then turn towards the body, we can see that its nature is also one of decline and fall. Like fallen leaves, the physical body also returns to the earth. If the body can be seen as a mere composition of earth, then the heart will be peaceful and at ease. At this point, although the mind may enter upacāra samādhi or even jhāna at times, the state of emptiness has not yet been realised. However, if we analyse this earth-element by reducing it to its most refined state – seeing it break apart into dust and then disperse as mere atoms – the heart will realise the state of emptiness, that is, not-self. When the mind is refined, still and serene, the empty nature of the body is seen. With this realization of emptiness, the heart abandons attachment to the view that the body is one’s self11. This clear insight into emptiness arises through wisdom. This experience is called tadaīga vimutti; temporary liberation of the heart through wisdom. - (Seeking Buddho by Ajahn Anan, Pg. 31)

Supplementary Resources

- **Bag of Bones:**
  https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/khantipalo/wheel271.pdf

- **This Talk Will Get Under Your Skin: The Ancient Practice of Body Contemplation | Ajahn Nisabho:**
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-CysBsc1GU