

Traditional Mindfulness Practice

Training text

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REFERENCES

This text is compiled by Coorain practitioners from the lineage network of the late Ven. Namgyal Rinpoche. Lama Chimé is presiding teacher at Coorain, the seat of our lineage network in Balingup, Western Australia. Coorain practitioners study the Buddhadhamma and the Teachings associated with it in a universal context.

Main reference: The Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta

Other references: The written and oral teachings of Ven. Namgyal Rinpoche and our lineage network which includes the Teaching and guidance of Ven. Sayadaw U Thila Wunta (Mon, Mahathera); The Visuddhimagga by Buddhagosa; The Heart of Buddhist Meditation by Nyanaponika Thera; Pāli studies and discussion and Reference library Coorain.

INTRODUCTION

Coorain in Balingup, Western Australia, is a place of Dhamma practice and part of a global network established by the late Ven. Namgyal Rinpoche, a Canadian Buddhist Teacher. Rinpoche worked globally to illuminate the Dhamma through universal exploration and to express it in contemporary language. Rinpoche’s first teacher was Ven. Sayadaw U Thila Wunta (Mon), a Burmese Mahathera and builder of world peace pagodas, *stupas*, on five continents. The Tibetan title ‘Rinpoche’ was given by the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa.

The teachings and exercises of traditional Mindfulness practice are a gift to humanity from the Sakyamuni Buddha. They have been maintained and transmitted faithfully by Buddhist practitioners for 25 centuries. These Teachings are offered by Buddhadhamma to universal human culture. Mindfulness practice is not meant to be confined to cultural Buddhism.

Mindfulness is essentially a Teaching about the integration of love, calm, insight and compassion without conditions of belief or ritual.

Formal exercises support the general view and intent of the Teachings. These Teachings are today being absorbed into global human culture.

Calm is a major feature of mindfulness. Calm forms the vessel for insight and experience; learning requires calm.

Mindfulness is understood as an innate human capacity. The Teachings seek to protect, maintain and develop this quality of mindfulness.

The micro of formal exercise practice is meant to support the macro of a life well lived. We should practice in a way that suits us, sufficient to our purposes.

In the broad view, some say, this simply means cultivating mental health. Mindfulness belongs into mental health medicine. In this view the cultivation of mindfulness is itself an expression of both individual and collective mental health.

The Teachings, *Dhamma*, speak to a kind of symbiosis between the inner and outer worlds of experience. Internal and external are interactive. There is one mind, not two, as the Dhamma says: one interactive world of nature. Mindfulness allows compassion to flourish.

Mindfulness exercises can be universally taught and practiced.

The great purpose, as always with the Dhamma, is the growth of compassion as a means to peace, and compassion requires the cultivation of mindfulness. Mindfulness, Buddha taught, is the one road to enlightenment. There is a strong recognition within the tradition that life experience is itself the great vehicle. Formal practice is seen as skilful means.

Good teaching is a great asset. Friends who practice together and places that support practice are also wonderful. In the end, however, Mindfulness practice can be understood and practiced by individuals alone, and, indeed, this is one of its greatest virtues.

The maturing of mindfulness is seen as an expression of the maturing of the individual.

Wonderful to find,
This Practice, a Medicine,
So common, so profound!

SARVA MANGALAM

PREAMBLE

Mahāsatipathāna is a set of Dhamma Teachings which are the thoughts of Sakyamuni Buddha on the cultivation of Mindfulness.

Familiarity with the original Mahāsatipathāna Suttā and the Dhamma context generally, provides a platform for further study and practice. Reading the text aloud, alone or in groups, creates familiarity and provides a common basis for discussion and practice.

This text is compiled especially for those seeking to help others use the practice.

It must be understood that ‘mindfulness’ is seen by the Teaching as a universal human attribute that can be directly cultivated through thoughtfulness and practice. The capacity to care and act mindfully has always been recognised as the great human potential, the indispensable foundation.

The Dhamma is presented in the context of the Pāli language, the closest we have to the original oral teachings. These original Dhamma Teachings are the historical basis of the subsequent teachings and practices that have been developed by the various communities involved in Mahāsatipathāna.

MAHĀSATIPATTHĀNA

The universal way of mindfulness
Wonderful gift that Buddha taught
Way of all Buddhas' awakening.

Etymology:

MAHĀ - great, all-embracing, universal.

SATI - awareness, attention, question and intelligence.

SARATI - memory; the cultivation and purification of memory.

SOTĀ - stream, flow, experience.

PATTHA - independent, self-reliant.

PATTHĀNA - to set out, survey, to enter the stream of experience.

To sum up, mindfulness is a universal Dhamma practice, recognised by all schools and continuously taught for 2,500 years. All Dhamma practices encourage deep respect for the effort to become calm, inquiring and dedicated to the greater good.

HOMAGE AND REFLECTIONS

This Heart for awakening, sacred in the human birth
Inseparable from nature; one mind, not two.
Cultivate this Bodhi Seed with Mahāsatipatthāna

Be sure that there is dukkha,
Subversion and distraction
Unhelpful thought and influence
Darkening, misunderstanding.

This dukkha can be reconciled with the path that fosters mindfulness.

Mindfulness is medicine Bodhi is renewable, so long as life endures.

Sakyamuni Buddha taught:

‘I teach but two things, dukkha and the cessation thereof’

‘Through right method and right understanding, seek the good’

Cultivate the human birth, Bodhi, vast resource,
 With this practice Mahāsatipatthāna.
 Rare to find a way effective proven, practical.
 No belief or ritual required.
 Here is a practice that has endured established by the Buddha
 Twenty five hundred years ago still today, useable, suitable and safe.
 The method is venerable practice matters
 Practice cultivates compassion.

The method is, itself, a work of great compassion
 Venerable, worthy of respect.

The potential is Bodhi, basis for practice.
 Repetition furthers understanding practice becomes ever engaging.

Inspired by METTĀ - love and goodwill
 Regulated by SĪLA - moral, ethical, cool

In order to overcome
 Both hankering and dejection
 Common in the world,
 Be ardent, self possessed and mindful,
 Internally and externally,
 Far enough for knowledge and self possession.
 So say the Discourses words of Sakyamuni Buddha.
 Strengthen self-reliance help others foster dialogue
 Overcome enmity
 Practice well enough to suit your purposes.

PRACTICE NOTES

Two qualities

Mahāsatiṭṭhāna, the full teaching of mindfulness, unites calm and insight. It develops calm abiding and skilful means together.

These two generate compassion.

Relaxed in body, calm in mind
 Attentive unassuming and warmhearted
 Reason always present inquiring and engaged
 Ask oneself, each other what does compassion mean?

Three aspects *(found in all dhamma practices)*

1. Respect: respect for self and others; respect for experience and the path; non judgemental; ethical and moral.
2. Practice: meaningful, responsible, suitable and causative; willingly and gladly done.
3. Dedication: cultivated, purposeful and peaceful.

These are three aspects of one practice.

Note: The Teaching can be expressed in various ways, so each practitioner must in the end interpret and understand for themselves. Discussion with others can be helpful. Peacefulness and the cultivation of peacefulness are inseparable. In the formal exercises, ‘Respect’ and ‘Dedication’ are usually expressed in some physical purposeful way - with actual gestures and words. One customarily expresses respect at the outset and dedication at the conclusion of an exercise session. Respect may also mean appreciation and dedication may mean solidarity with others. Buddha taught that respect meant putting the Teaching to the test.

Four efforts *(made on the path of mindfulness)*

1. Recognising states of dukkha are possible and not allowing this dukkha to arise.
2. Recognising states of dukkha as they arise and putting this dukkha away.
3. Recognising that beneficial states are possible and cultivating their arising.

4. Recognising beneficial states as they arise and cultivating their growth.

Note: Cultivate mindfulness in these four ways. Become familiar - gain insight and knowledge, *nupassana*, of what hinders, *dukkha*, and what helps, *sukha*. Become familiar with the arising and the passing of experience, far enough for knowledge and self-possession.

Focus on the Dhamma leave feelings of unworth behind
Practice in this manner relaxed, calm, glad, attentive.

Tathagata Prayer

Calm abiding, skilful means, loving and compassionate
Mortal, sentient, human, being
Find the Teaching - Mahāsatiṭṭhāna
Find a place to set up formal practice, make it suitable and quiet
Sitting, standing, walking, lying
Moving or still gather yourself and set it up
Mahāsatiṭṭhāna

FOUR FEATURES OF MINDFULNESS PRACTICE

- 1. KĀYA NUPASSANA Physical/Body**
 - 2. VEDANĀ NUPASSANA Feel/Framework** (*emotional outlook*)
 - 3. CITTA NUPASSANA Moods/Mind States**
 - 4. DHAMMA NUPASSANA Concepts/Ideas**
1. KĀYA NUPASSANA – gaining knowledge, familiarity and insight through awareness of the physical patterns and expressions of experience whether one’s own or another’s. In formal practice ‘calming the bodily formations’ is the foundation exercise. It focuses on the physical body.
 2. VEDANĀ NUPASSANA – gaining knowledge, familiarity and insight through awareness of basic feel or outlook, whether one’s own

or another's. One goes so far as to identify the positive, negative or indifferent nature of this outlook or feel. Restraint is important. One should avoid too much commentary.

3. CITTA NUPASSANA – gaining knowledge, familiarity and insight through awareness of moods, mind states and attitudes whether one's own or another's.
4. DHAMMA NUPASSANA – gaining knowledge, familiarity and insight through awareness of ideas, concepts and mental constructs, whether one's own or another's.

Non-judgementalism, a certain objectivity, matters very much. Focus on the reality of experience, not the identity of self and other. "This is not me; this is not other; this is experience." In this way, take responsibility.

Notes: Start with body for clarity's sake. 'Posture is everything' so it is said. Become physically familiar - then include the other three features in order. Without distraction, keep an unbroken thread of awareness continuously with the body, the form, the physical, even while the other three features of practice are becoming conjoined. The purpose of practice is to understand dukkha and the healing thereof.

After becoming familiar with, first, the body and then the full body of experience, all four features, one then develops 'Bare Attention': undistracted mindfulness - awareness, pure and simple. Do your practice in a relaxed, calm, glad and attentive manner.

NOTES FOR CALMING THE PHYSICAL FORMATIONS

(Setting up the formal exercise practice)

1. **Short sessions:** 10-20 minutes at a time. Sessions should be kept fresh and alive. When skill is established through practice, then longer sessions can be helpful.
2. **Set up** a place of practice for sitting, lying down, walking or standing practice. Seek teaching on posture; enjoy the process; relax and learn naturally; repetition furthers.
3. **Pay respect:** At the beginning of a session express your good will and respect - many expressions are possible.
4. **Dedication:** At the conclusion of a session dedicate your practice by expressing your active support for a peaceful world.
5. **Avoid excessive self-criticism.** Say: “This alone is not me; this alone is not the other; this is dhamma, life happening”.
6. **Notice and relax** physical tensions or hindrances. Be careful not to inhibit air or blood flow or to pinch nerves or exacerbate injury. Begin with the obvious muscles, major formations, and then notice and relax the more subtle patterns and formations. Practice calmly, gladly and attentively. A little practice can be a catalyst for good benefits generally.
7. **Calm** – do the practice calmly, slowly and easily. Avoid judgementalism. Be like a good nurse with a kindly and objective attitude. Practice is meant to serve the general welfare.
8. **Glad, Sukha** – cultivate wellbeing and a willing, positive attitude. Benefit will become gradually apparent. Healing happens in advance of awareness. Practice is an expression of awakening; medicine for living, and especially with regard to mental health.
9. **Attentive** – be interested, notice things; remember. If you repeatedly notice some phenomenon then remember and be attentive, on the

look-out at your next practice. Avoid judgementalism, especially about self. Seek to understand the whole picture.

10.**General-specific** – begin by trying to calm the general posture before paying attention to details. General awareness is maintained as a backdrop, an ongoing awareness, even as you come to notice particular details. Leave mindfulness of facial expressions until you have experience. Find Teaching about this and keep your sessions brief and alive. Practice with others can enhance personal practice. The same approach applies to all ‘four features’ of practice.

11.**Breath** – allow the breath to flow naturally, ensure the physical movement of breathing is relaxed and natural. In this way mindfulness of breath is an aspect of ‘calming the bodily formations’. Don’t become fixated on breathing. Meditation on the breath is a practice that requires instruction and skill.

12.**Movement** – exercise before formal practice can be helpful. If you adjust posture during a practice session, move easily, naturally and mindfully. Forced stillness or agitated movement are both unhelpful.

13.**Posture** – eyes open; body poised and relaxed; lying, standing, walking or sitting. Establish an approach to posture; become comfortable with your approach. If you want to sit on the ground rather than a chair it will take practice but has advantages. Mindfulness of body posture has many ramifications. Most formal practice is about calming the bodily formations. This is an accessible, useful practice, a foundation practice.

FURTHER THOUGHTS ON PRACTICE

Teaching: Finding an experienced teacher is a great asset, particularly at the outset of formal practice.

Collective: Learning and practicing with others can be very helpful.

Body: Learn to develop a relaxed, poised posture. Be calm about relaxing tensions. Find teaching.

Self-reliance: This practice can be understood for oneself - it is 'self-checking'; reason is comfortable; self-reliance is maintained and developed.

Purpose: To establish Mindfulness in the stream of experience - that is to develop a clear awareness of satipatthāna and its benefits through first 'calming the bodily formations' with mindfulness, then developing the practice from that basis.

Thread of Awareness: Maintain a thread of bare attention to the whole body even while attending to specifics or noticing feeling or thought patterns.

Patterns: Note recurring patterns as you would note the conditions of a patient, or changes in the natural landscape. At the beginning of a session, note them, declare your interest and then return to general work. Return to your particular interest from time to time. Don't be dominated or obsessed with them. Remain non-judgemental and engaged with the long-term view.

Senses: Senses are alive, natural and open. Eyes usually look comfortably downward, at about 45°. Though aware of sense activity, try to nonetheless keep the thread of awareness with the whole body. Seek instruction on balancing the senses.

Micro-Macro: Seek to develop, with the micro of formal practice, those qualities you want to develop in the macro of general life.

Amount: For many people, a little formal practice, particularly collective practice, goes a long way. Practice in a way that is effective for you.

Learn to recognise mindfulness and encourage it. This is the point of practice.

Universality: Mindfulness is a universal tool for human mental health. It requires no belief in gods or rituals but is not inimical to cultural expression. It can temper the involvement with particular causes or occupations.

Meditation, *jhāna or samadhi*: The stable absorption, or undistracted awareness that can be developed with mindfulness. Mindfulness can be practiced with or without meditation. ‘Meditation’ here means actual, formal, practice of a meditation method, such as *ānāpānasati*. Seek teaching if you do formal meditation exercises; avoid narrow-mindedness; practice effectively and safely. It is better to not do much without adequate teaching and experience. One gradually understands that ‘meditation’ is an aspect of developed mindfulness. Seek teaching.

Ānāpānasati: Mindfulness of the flow of breathing. This is a wonderful meditation practice, much trusted and effective. One should learn properly with a teacher and be careful to practice properly. *Ānāpānasati* is famous in the context of *Mahāsatipathāna*.

Internal/external: Inner illumination can illuminate the outer or other, and vice versa. The practitioner is training in compassionate mindfulness and avoids emphasising thoughts of ‘self’ and ‘other’.

SEEKING INSIGHT

Calm and insight are the two central aspects of Mahāsatipatthāna. One can emphasise the practice of one or the other as required. Question and investigation have long been essential features of mindfulness practice. A question might be studied outside formal ‘sits’ and the knowledge thus gained by study can influence practice. Sometimes a question or topic is investigated from within formal practice. In this case an idea or interest is held in awareness. One considers the idea or observation from time to time, but avoids distraction and preoccupation, returning repeatedly to the main practise.

It does help some people very much to become familiar with the traditional Teachings. An intellectual grasp of Mahāsatipatthāna helps practice unfold smoothly and coherently.

TRADITIONAL TOPICS OF INSIGHT PRACTICE

(see Theravāda Pūjā for further reference)

1. **Bojjanga** – the passive and active qualities of mindfulness. Developed realisation is called Ariyasatisambojjanga – the integration of attention, calm, coherence, balance, interest, diligence and engagement – the bojjanga can also be thought of as qualities that develop calm and insight.
2. **The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Noble Path.**
3. **Anicca**, *impermanence*; **Dukkha**, *harm, unwholesome states and actions*, and **Anatta**, *freedom from self-centredness, ‘no final substance’ or interpretation of meaning.*
4. **Birth, Death** – all that arises from a cause will one day pass away. Also, birth and death in the broad sense as well as the personal one.
5. **The Elements** – fire, water, air, earth, space.

6. The Obstacles and Hindrances: ‘This is not me alone or other alone, this is Dhamma, a life process, a reality’ – formulae like this inhibit judgemental projections and distractions that easily arise with this topic. First relate to the physical effect of a particular hindrance then investigate further. Seek teaching.

7. Meditation, *jhāna or samādhi* – states of absorption and tranquillity that are well focussed, clear and undistracted.

8. Parts and Functions of the Body – biology; non-delusion in relation to the body.

9. The Pāramiyo – qualities of character that can transcend dukkha; development of character.

10. Food and Nutrition – the entire cycle - growing, preparing, eating, waste stream, recycling, ecology...

11. Sensing – sound, movement, smell and taste, touch, imagination.

12. Holding a Question – establish mindfulness practice then from time to time declare your question and respectfully aspire to understanding. Then return to the main exercise. This practice encourages respect for purposeful question and the clarity of memory and thought that allows for contemplation. Raise the question; return to mindfulness, especially of the body, then again raise the question. The question should, of course, be meaningful to the practitioner. Seek teaching. Contemplation is a developed, cultivated practice. According to Mindfulness practice, humanity and the cultivation of mindfulness go together.

13. Satisampajañña – comprehensive; non-presuming; actual effectiveness; appropriate.

14. Four Aspects of Satisampajañña:

1. SATTHAKA – SAMPAJAÑÑA – clarity of purpose, initiative.
2. SAPPĀYA – SAMPAJAÑÑA – suitable, practicable, in accord with the practitioner’s requirements.

3. GOCARA – SAMPAJAÑÑĀ – clarity of ‘domain’, of suitable practice; co-ordination of inner discipline with outer action.
4. ASSAMOHA – SAMPAJAÑÑĀ – clarity of need, willingness to learn, adaptable, undeluded.

NOTES ON THE HINDRANCES AND OBSTACLES

Pāli words:

KILESA – the lack of balance, exhaustion and extremism that can result from the play of passions and the dynamics of experience; unhelpful patterns forming and building.

SAMYOJANAM – the types of binding and entanglement that occur when misunderstanding, Dukkha, prevails with KILESA.

NĪVARANAM – the hindered, obstructed states that result from entanglement; a particular expression of Dukkha; the forms of bondage that can result from the SAMYOJANAM.

Note: Mindfulness of ‘Hindrances and Obstacles’ fosters insight and avoids judgementalism. Personalised wrongly, this practice can become self-centred rather than life-centred. Excessive self-criticism is harmful to mindfulness.

Samyojanam:

1. SAKKĀYADITTHI – self-preoccupation, self-obsession, belief in a permanent self, soul, ego, identity.
2. VICIKICCĀ – sceptical, defensive doubt.
3. SĪLABATA PĀRĀMĀSO – belief in ‘rite and ritual’ as an end in itself; appearances alone, wrongly esteemed and relied upon; blind belief.
4. KĀMARĀGO – indulgent lust, hypnotic sensuality.
5. PATIGHO – hatred and ill will; inflamed, concussed by experience.
6. RŪPARĀGO – material greed, avarice.

7. ARŪPARĀGO – immaterial greed, self-absorption.
8. MĀNO – arrogance, conceit, cold heartedness.
9. UDDHACCAM – puffed up, vain, garrulous.
10. AVIJJĀ – unclear, ignorant, unable to see or understand.

Note:

These Samyojanam, expressions of entanglement and confusion, can combine and overlap. The different aspects clarify the idea that Dukkha is expressed emotionally, physically and mentally. Mindfulness can calm, reveal, understand and heal these Samyojanam. As always, find and calm the bodily formations.

Nīvaranam:

(blocked, hindered states that can result from unreconciled samyojanam.)

1. KĀMACCHANDA – lust, harmful desire.
2. VYĀPĀDA – ill will, enmity.
3. THĪNA-MIDDHA – sloth, torpor and rigidity, unresponsiveness.
4. UDDHACCA-KUKUCCA – flurry and worry, excessive concern.
5. VICIKICCHĀ – sceptical doubt, opinionated, argumentative.

PURIFICATION PRAYER

Mindfulness the purifier, fosters understanding
 Inspires through respect illuminates through practice
 Grows with dedication

Founded on goodwill morality and ethics
 Mindfulness develops, calm abiding, skilful means
 Wisdom and compassion

Satisambojjanga - Bare attention, undistracted and aware
 Satisampajañña - Clearly comprehending and effective

IDAM TE PUÑÑA KAMMAM, ĀSAVAKAYA VAHAM HOTU

IN THE LIFE OF THE WORLD
 MAY THE BENEFIT GROW

ALL THAT LIVE, BE WELL, BE HAPPY

PEACE TO ALL THE WORLD.