

Anapanasati Sutta Student Notes: Session One

1. “Anapana” means “in-breath and out-breath”

“Sati” means “mindfulness” or present moment awareness that simply notices what is happening without in any way interfering, without adding or subtracting anything to or from the experience. It’s bare awareness.

So, anapanasati means “mindfulness while breathing in and out”.

2. Background to the sutta:

It’s the end of the rainy-season retreat, and the Buddha is so pleased with the meditation practice of those gathered with him, that he announces he is going to stay on another month, the month of the white water-lily or white lotus moon.

At the end of that month he gives this teaching on anapanasati, giving the teaching under the full moon at night. The Buddha says:

“Mindfulness of in-and-out breathing, when developed and pursued, is of great benefit. Mindfulness of in-and-out breathing, when developed and pursued, brings the four foundations of mindfulness to perfection. The four foundations of mindfulness, when developed and pursued, bring the seven factors of awakening to their culmination. The seven factors of awakening, when developed and pursued, perfect clear insight and liberation.”

In other words, anapanasati can lead to enlightenment.

Four foundations of mindfulness (satipatthana) are:

- Kaya (Body)
- Vedana (Feelings or experiencing sensations as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral)
- Citta (Mind or mental formations, thoughts and emotions)
- Dhammas (mental objects, or perspectives on experience used to investigate reality)

These four categories correspond to the four sets of contemplations in the anapanasati method.

Seven factors of awakening are a spiral path of conditionality, leading towards enlightenment:

1. Sati (mindfulness)
2. Dhamma-vicaya (investigation of mental states)
3. Viriya (energy)
4. Piti (rapture)
5. Passaddhi (tension release)
6. Samadhi (concentration, absorption)
7. Upekkha (equanimity)

3. Anapanasati is both “samatha” (calming) and “vipassana” (insight) meditation.

4. It’s a rare step-by-step guide to meditation given by the Buddha. It’s divided into four sets of four contemplations, making sixteen contemplations in total. Each set of four is called a

“tetrad”. The four sets or tetrads are the same as the four foundations of mindfulness, i.e. body (kaya), feelings (vedana), mind (citta), and dhammas. (See the full set of contemplations in separate hand-out.)

5. Only the first two contemplations are exclusively concerned with the breath, but the breath is always there throughout the meditation. With every contemplation, the breath is the anchor.

6. Each “contemplation” is not to be approached as intellectual theorising or as a “heady” exercise. It’s to do with simply and directly experiencing what’s happening right now.

7. The contemplations are a set of instructions from the Buddha. But you don’t have to approach each contemplation as a goal that must be achieved as you progress through the meditation. If you grasp after goals, this won’t help the meditation. It’s better to have a sense of direction during the meditation, and to be aware, to be in contact with what’s happening now.

8. The contemplations are linked by conditionality, by the perspective of paticca-samuppada (‘pratitya samutpada’ in Sanskrit). Each contemplation connects with the next and interconnects the others. The sixteen contemplations form a spiral, positive pattern of conditionality that can lead to enlightenment.

9. In the separate hand-out on the sixteen contemplations, down the left-hand side are given the Buddha’s explicit instructions for each of the sixteen contemplations, drawn from the sutta itself. Down the right-hand side are given another set of instructions, which parallel the Buddha’s and which are designed to help us understand what is required of us, when we try to apply the contemplations.

10. There are different ways in which we can use the sixteen contemplations, but we do need first to spend time methodically learning about each of the four groups or tetrads. In this session we are focusing on the body (kaya) tetrad.

11. Read the first tetrad (first four contemplations). (See separate hand-out)

12. General advice: When we become aware of the breath this can become habitual. We don’t actually experience the breath, we just have an idea of the breath. So, it’s important to watch out for this, and to be physically aware, to have a physical experience of the breath in the body.

13. In the first two contemplations we are training the mind to aim at the experience of the breath, and to stay engaged with the experience of the breath. Although the first two contemplations talk about long and short breaths we can take this as short-hand for experiencing the fullness of the breath, i.e. location of breath, duration of breath, and quality of breath.

We can do three meditation exercises whilst following the breath:

(i) Location. Where is the breath most prominently felt in the body? Notice over time how this position moves. The breath makes itself felt in different places. There is no single or right answer to where we should physically experience the breath in the body.

(ii) Duration. Is the breath long or short? Whilst there is no absolute standard of measurement of length of breath, you could use counting whilst breathing in or out, or you could use movement in the chest and abdomen. (When the breath is short it tends to be felt physically in only one of the chest or abdomen. When the breath is longer, then it tends to be felt in both abdomen and chest.) Again there is no right or wrong way to breathe, just observe the length of the breath and how it can vary over time.

(iii) Quality. Is the breath rough or smooth, tight or relaxed, easy or difficult, energetic or sleepy, smooth or bumpy? Not *thinking* about the breath but *feeling* it. Focus on the experience rather than worrying about finding the correct word to describe the quality.

Notice how quality, duration and location all vary and affect each other.

When there's a long breath:

Where in the body do you feel the breath?

What is the quality of the breath?

When there's a short breath:

Where in the body do you feel the breath?

What is the quality of the breath?

14. Some general advice: - your mind will wander away from the breath. When this happens, bring a kind awareness to bear, acknowledge where the breath has wandered to, then gently but firmly return your attention to the breathing. Similarly, whatever contemplation you are focused on, when the mind wanders, bring a kind awareness to bear, acknowledge where the mind has wandered to, then gently but firmly return attention to the breathing and to the contemplation in hand.

15. In the third contemplation, we keep awareness of the breath as an anchor, and extend awareness to the whole body, focusing on simple, tangible characteristics of the body, such as the feel of the knees; the touch of hands on thighs, knees or on each other; the touch of clothes on skin; the weight of the body on the cushions or the chair; the temperature of different parts of the body.

16. You can bring awareness to the body in one of two ways; do a more structured body scan, bringing gentle awareness systematically to all parts of the body; or, just let body sensations arise and be aware of whatever comes to your attention.

17. At the same time we are beginning to explore how the breath and body condition each other, noticing how body sensations change with the breath. By being aware of the breath and extending our awareness to the body, we allow the body to be as it is without reacting; we calm the breath and calm the body.

18. In the fourth contemplation, we are exploring further how the breath can calm the body (and the mind). The usual approach to this contemplation is the same as the fourth stage of the normal mindfulness of breathing meditation, that is, "guarding the breath" at the tip of the nose or in the nostrils. Or you could focus on one spot where you feel physical movement in the body with the breathing. We are becoming more aware of the way breath, body and mind are interconnected and condition each other.

19. Again, if your mind wanders, and you get distracted, then with a kind curiosity gently let awareness spread to the distraction and fully see it, then return to breath and body.

20. Guided meditation based on first tetrad:

Just sitting quietly

Read or remember first two contemplations

Turn attention to breath:-

Check its location, notice any changes in location

Check its duration, notice any changes in duration

Check its quality, notice any changes in quality

Notice how location, duration and quality of breath change and interact with each other

Now keeping breath as an anchor

Read or remember the third contemplation

Focus on experiencing simple characteristics or sensations in the body:-

You can do this by a systematic body scan or by being sensitive to whatever sensations arise in the body

Notice how body sensations change

Notice how body sensations change with changes in the breath

Still keeping breath as an anchor

Read or remember the fourth contemplation

Focus on experiencing the breath at one spot:-

Noticing how calming the breath, calms the body and mind

Relaxing effort

Just sitting quietly for a few minutes, absorbing the effects of the meditation.

General advice: Whenever the mind wanders (as it will!), expand a kind awareness to take in and acknowledge where the mind has wandered to, then gently but firmly return attention to the breathing and the subject of contemplation.

Anapanasati Sutta Student Notes: Session Two

1. Repeat guided meditation from end of session one, and:-

During the fourth contemplation, when you're noticing how calming the breath calms the body and mind, look for the experience of a sense of physical pleasure and contentment arising with the experience of the meditation. Look for and encourage a sense of well-being.

Relaxing effort

Just sitting quietly, absorbing effects of the meditation.

2. At the end of the meditation, when you begin to explore the experience of pleasure and contentment, then you are beginning to move into the fifth and sixth contemplations, the first two contemplations of the second tetrad, the vedana tetrad

3. Read the second tetrad.

4. Although they do implicitly contain an insight or vipassana element – the element of conditionality between breath, body and mind - the first six contemplations are primarily intended to build a samatha base, a calming base, for the rest of the meditation. When the body and mind are calmed and concentrated this provides the foundation for the explicitly vipassana or insight section of the meditation, which follows with the seventh contemplation onwards.

In building this samatha base we are in fact building something called the “five jhana (‘dhyana’ in Sanskrit) factors”. “Jhana” means ‘absorption’.

The five jhana factors are:-

- Vittaka Aiming the mind at (the breath)
- Vicara Sustaining experience of, and interest in (the breath)
- Citta-ekagatta One pointedness of mind on (the breath)
- Piti Rapture or pleasure
- Sukha Bliss or deep contentment

In this meditation we decide to focus the mind on the breath, then we develop and sustain an interest in the breath through exploring its qualities, location, length. Out of this comes a sustained, one pointed attention on, or absorption with the breath (if all goes well!).

With this absorption there also arises a sense of ease and well-being. We are developing an internal sense of well-being, not dependent on external stimulation. This sense of well-being has two aspects; piti and sukha.

We might call the first three jhana factors, the ‘cool’ factors. With the fifth and sixth contemplations we move on to the ‘warm’ jhana factors.

Piti is a feeling of delight or pleasure, an energy moving freely in the body and mind.

With piti we can get a release of tension that leads to a tranquillity, a serenity, a deep contentment, that can result in the meditator even losing a sense of the body. This is sukha.

If you think of a person in the desert without water, imagine their thirst. Then the person comes across an oasis, sheltered and cool with clear, fresh water. The sensation of pleasure that they experience as they drink the water and quench their thirst is piti. The feeling of contentment as they sit quietly in the cool shade, after quenching their thirst, is sukha.

On the one hand it's important to stress that the experience of jhana, of full absorption with the breath with the experience of piti and sukha, does not happen every time in meditation! For some people such an experience will only happen in very good conditions, like a retreat, and for some people, such an experience will happen very rarely. We are not Buddhas who can simply repeat such an experience every time we meditate!

And on the other hand, it's important to stress that the experience of jhana, or absorption, is something that we can all experience in everyday life. It's something that we *know*. Here's an example from the writing of Tolstoy that might help to explain what is meant by absorption. In "Anna Karenina" Tolstoy describes a scene involving a landowner, Konstantin Levin, who in an unusual step decides to join the peasants and work in the fields, cutting the grass. Levin finds himself getting caught up in a rhythm that changes his state of consciousness:

"The grass cut with a juicy sound and fell in high, fragrant rows. On the short rows the mowers bunched together, their tin dippers rattling, their scythes ringing when they touched, the whetstones whistling upon their blades, and their good-humoured voices resounding as they urged each other on. The longer Levin mowed, the more often he experienced those moments of oblivion when it was not his arms which swung the scythe but the scythe seemed to mow of itself, a body full of life and consciousness of its own, and as though by magic, without a thought being given to it, the work did itself regularly and carefully. These were the most blessed moments."

When we are completely involved in an activity whether it's walking in the forest, cutting wood, playing a musical instrument, reading a good book, writing a letter, or even washing up, we can become absorbed, our consciousness may be altered, we can potentially enter jhana. The psychologist Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi describes this state of seemingly effortless activity and pleasure as "*flow*"; and athletes talk about "*being in the zone*".

And the simple activity of being aware, of a kind and open exploration of one's experience, can bring about this sense of aliveness and pleasure.

Thus jhana or absorption can bring about; a loosening of our dependence on external sources of sensual pleasure; an integrated, concentrated platform of calmness, which provides for a pliable and focused mind; and a refreshing of the mind like rain on dry earth.

5. When we turn to the fifth and sixth contemplations it is however possible that we will experience a range of vedana, including unpleasant as well as pleasant sensations. But where we do experience pleasant sensations of piti or sukha we can notice them and gently nourish them, so as to help our samatha basis of meditation. And where we experience unpleasant vedana the very act of bringing an open awareness to bear upon those unpleasant vedana can transform the experience from unpleasant to pleasant, and can help bring about a degree of

absorption in the meditation, sufficient to progress with the contemplations. In other words we don't have to be in full jhana to progress with the meditation.

6. Read the seventh and eighth contemplations.

With the seventh and eighth contemplations we're now beginning to move more into the vipassana (insight) aspect of the meditation. We're now beginning to explore how our mind works, to focus on the relationship between vedana and emotional responses or reactions to vedana.

Every moment of the day and night we are – through various sense organs – making contact with the world around us and within us, and these contacts give rise to vedana -- pleasant, unpleasant and neutral (neither pleasant nor unpleasant) sensations.

Whether it's through the eye (sight), or ear (sound), or nose (smell), or tongue (taste), or body (touch), or through the mind (thoughts), we are always making contact with something, and this contact gives rise – every single moment of the day and night -- to pleasant, unpleasant or neutral sensations or vedana.

Vedana are like the simple, basic responses of like, dislike, or indifference to sense contacts. This is a process that is conditioned by our previous karma.

But then vedana give rise to a more active emotional response or reaction, and this is where we do have a choice, where we can create new karma, either positive or negative. Unfortunately, most of the time we react almost automatically, without awareness, and we roll through life allowing our emotions to be controlled by the three root poisons of greed, hatred and delusion.

Pleasant vedana give rise to attachment, craving, greed

Unpleasant vedana give rise to aversion, pushing away, hatred

Neutral vedana give rise to ignorance (don't want to know), indifference, confusion, boredom (and to fantasising to cover up the boredom!)

All of this happens incredibly quickly, often without us realising this is what is happening every single moment of the day. This is how we are conditioned. In the seventh contemplation the word translated as “mental processes” is “cittasankhara”. Buddhadasa Bhikkhu gives an alternative translation of “cittasankhara” as “mind conditioner”.

But through awareness we can begin to see this conditioning at work. We can gain insight into how our mind works. And with awareness we can begin to reduce the power of vedana to control our lives. Vedana are like the heartbeat and the breath – they are with us every moment of our lives.

With the seventh contemplation we are beginning to see how vedana can lead to emotional responses and reactions. We can begin to see how, when we meet someone and experience unpleasant vedana, we respond by shutting them out or pushing them away, or by closing down to them. When we meet someone and experience pleasant vedana, we can notice how we respond by moving closer, by opening up to them. When we meet someone and

experience neutral vedana, we can notice how we respond with indifference or disinterest, or with boredom.

Indeed, when we become more aware of our vedana, in particular the experience of neutral vedana, we may discover just how much energy we put into fantasising so as to avoid boredom!

But with awareness we can open up a gap between vedana and active emotional responses, and give ourselves the choice to react habitually or to act creatively.

And at the same time during the meditation (and increasingly during our everyday lives) we can begin to notice how the very act of bringing awareness to the interplay of vedana and active emotional responses, can often be enough, by itself, to lessen the power of vedana to disturb and control our emotional responses. This is the eighth contemplation. Awareness calms the mind. We are developing the capacity to watch what is happening in terms of our moment-by-moment vedana, and to watch calmly and with equanimity, without reacting.

The Buddha uses a simile or metaphor to describe the power of non-reactive awareness of one's state of mind to calm mental processes in the Vitakkasanthana Sutta. (Majjhima Nikaya). In this simile one is walking fast for no particular reason. Becoming fully aware of what one is doing, one might walk slower, or even stand still, or instead of standing one might sit or lie down. This progressive increase in physical comfort and tranquillity vividly illustrates how the usual rapid link from vedana to emotional reaction can be gradually reduced and overcome through direct observation or awareness.

7. Remember, the breath is the anchor throughout the whole meditation!

8. Meditation exercise on second tetrad:

Keep awareness of breathing throughout as an anchor

Explore vedana in body and mind; as sensations arise notice whether they are pleasant or unpleasant or neutral

Look for and cultivate any sense of pleasant vedana; look for elements of pleasure in the experience of the breath or body, or elements of contentment in the mind, and nourish these to help stabilise absorption

Begin to explore connections between vedana and active emotional responses. Just observe with bare awareness.

Notice how non-reactive awareness diminishes the power of vedana to take us over, notice how awareness of the vedana/emotional response sequence by itself calms the mind

Relaxing effort

Just sitting absorbing effects of meditation

Anapanasati Sutta Student Notes: Session Three

1. Guided meditation based on first eight contemplations

Just sitting quietly

Read or remember first eight contemplations (first two tetrads) on kaya and vedana

Turn attention to breath:

Don't seek any particular kind of breath, just -

Observe its location, notice any changes in location

Observe its duration, notice any changes in duration

Observe its quality, notice any changes in quality

Notice how location, duration and quality of breath condition each other

Keeping awareness of breath as an anchor:

Focus on experiencing simple sensations in the body

Use either the body scan approach or simply be sensitive to whatever sensations arise

Notice how body sensations change

Notice how body sensations and breath condition each other

Focus on the physical experience of the breath at one spot

Notice how breath, body and mind condition each other

Calming the breath, calming the mind

As breath calms the body and mind, begin to explore vedana arising in body and mind

Notice whether body sensations are pleasant, unpleasant or neutral

Notice whether sound sensations are pleasant, unpleasant or neutral

Notice whether sensations arising through any of the other physical sense doors (eye, nose or tongue) are pleasant, unpleasant or neutral

Notice whether vedana associated with thoughts arising in the mind are pleasant, unpleasant or neutral

Be sensitive to, and encourage any experience of piti (sense of pleasure or of energy freeing up) or sukha (release of tension, sense of contentment)

Aware of the breath, aware of vedana

Beginning to explore conditioning relationship between vedana and active emotional response to vedana:

If body sensations arise, are they pleasant, unpleasant or neutral? What is your emotional response to them? Do you push them away, do you feel attracted towards them or indifferent? What effect does this have on your mind?

If sound sensations arise, are they pleasant, unpleasant or neutral? What is your emotional response to them? Do you push them away, do you feel attracted towards them or indifferent? What effect does this have on your mind?

In the same way, observe what happens with sensations arising through any of the other physical sense doors (eye, nose, tongue)

Notice whether the vedana associated with thoughts arising in the mind are pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. What is your emotional response to them? What effect does this have on your mind?

Not getting caught up with vedana and emotional proliferations, not pushing them away. Just giving them space and observing with kindly awareness the interplay between vedana and emotions.

Notice how bringing a spacious, kindly awareness to vedana and emotions diminishes the power of vedana and emotions to take over the mind

Notice how a spacious, kindly awareness leads to a calming of the body and a calming of the mind

Aware of the breath, aware of the body, aware of vedana, aware of the mind

Calming the breath, calming the body, calming the mind

Relaxing your effort

Just sitting quietly, absorbing the effects of the meditation

2. Read contemplations 9 to 12 (the third tetrad) on the mind (citta)

In the first two tetrads we've been exploring the relationship between breath, body and vedana, and begun to get a sense of how our mind works. We're exploring the mystery of our own mind. And we're going to take this deeper with the third tetrad.

Perhaps we are already beginning to realise that our body/mind complex is not a fixed 'thing' but is a process that's open and changing

Perhaps our experience is already beginning to loosen the idea that there is a fixed 'me'. Instead, with awareness, we can experience a changing flow of experiences in breath, body, vedana and emotions. Perhaps we can begin to see that our mind is a changing flow of experiences.

Sometimes it's said that the mind is "sunya" (the pali is 'sunna') – which means "empty of fixed self-nature". The word "sunya" comes from a root word "su" – which means "swollen" which in turn can call to mind the metaphor "pregnant with possibility".

"Sunyata" (the noun derived from the adjective "sunya") isn't therefore just an emptiness, a void of nothingness, it's an open dimension of being, a field of potential with nothing fixed. It's because our mind is "sunya" that all of us have the potential to become Buddhas.

3. To explore the mind further it's useful to look more closely at our moment-by-moment experience. The experience of each moment can be broken down into what's called the "five skandhas ('khandha' in pali)" or "aggregates" or "constants"

P.T.O.

The Five Skandhas:

- Form (rupa /kaya)
- Feeling (vedana)
- Perception (samjna) ('sanna' in pali)
- Volitions (samskara) ('sankhara' in pali)
- Consciousness (vijnana) ('vinnana' in pali)

“Rupa” is matter or form, that which manifests itself to the senses as substance. In this context it stands for the material body (kaya) of the human being.

“Vedana” is the psycho-physiological faculty of experiencing sensations as pleasant, unpleasant or neutral.

“Samjna” is the mental act of picking out an object, recognising its features, and labelling it.

“Samskara” is the emotional response to vedana and samjna

“Vijnana” is the union of the other four constants in the act of consciousness, an act that is performed every single moment.

Each moment of experience is an interaction between form, feeling, perception and volitions coming together in a moment of consciousness.

4. When we practice sensitivity to the mind (contemplation nine) we are particularly focusing on samskara / volitions or emotional responses in the mind. We begin to see how the mind is consumed first with one emotional state, then another. So it's important at this stage of the meditation to bring awareness to bear on our mental states. We bring a kind and non-interfering awareness, and we begin to distinguish between our mental or emotional states.

To do this we need a framework that can help us to recognise our mental states. Here is a framework based on the three “root poisons” of greed, hatred and delusion, showing both negative and positive mental states:

See framework over page

P.T.O.

Three root poisons:	Associated hindrances / Negative mental states:	Positive mental states:
Greed	Craving for sense desire	Non-greed: - peace, serenity, contentment, generosity, inner confidence, feeling free
Hatred	Ill-will	Non-hatred: - Metta, kindness, Openness, Acceptance of things as they are
Delusion	Sloth and torpor, Restlessness and Anxiety, Doubt and Indecision	Non-confusion: - Awareness, wisdom, clarity of view, natural radiance of mind

Another way of expressing this framework might be to ask whether the mind is:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|----|-----------------------|
| • Closed or grasping | or | contented and free |
| • Irritated | or | open, accepting, kind |
| • Wandering, restless | or | still and calm |
| • Dull | or | energetic and bright |
| • Uncertain | or | Committed and clear |

5. With contemplation nine, being sensitive to the mind;

We are simply aware of our mental states, without judging or interfering in them, whether they are positive or negative

We become familiar with our mental states and see how they rise and fall

By awareness we begin to reduce the power of our mental states to control our mind

All this depends, not on theory or intellectual reflection, but on direct experience in meditation

A poem by the sufi poet Rumi captures this process well:

*“This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness.
Some momentary awareness
Comes as an unexpected visitor.*

Welcome and entertain them all!

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
Meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.*

*Be grateful for whoever comes,
Because each has been sent
As a guide from beyond.”*

Larry Rosenberg comments:

“We are learning to observe these states in a friendly way, instead of identifying with them, resisting them, or rejecting them. The point is to change our mind from a battlefield, where we’re always fighting these states, or getting lost in them, to a place of peaceful co-existence.”

And Alan Watts says:

“Instead of applying specific antidotes to all the toxins in the mind, one simply tries to stop polluting one’s mind-stream with grasping onto afflictive thoughts and emotions.”

6. Read contemplations 10, 11 and 12 again.

7. Contemplation 10, gladdening the mind, is to experience joy at being able to practice the dharma, getting joy and pleasure from a sense of progress as we begin to get a sense of ‘how things are’.

8. Contemplation 11, steadying the mind, is to become familiar with one’s mental states, seeing them emerge from stillness and return to stillness. Seeing this, then mental states begin to lose their power to control the mind. Then the mind steadies.

9. Contemplation 12, liberating the mind, is to notice how our sense of time falls away as the mind grows quiet and still, and we open up to a vast spaciousness. It’s like the clouds in the sky dissolving away to reveal a vast, open blue sky that’s always been there waiting for us to see it.

10. Meditation exercise on mental states:

Work your way through the contemplations of the first tetrad

When you have calmed the mind, then keeping awareness of the breath as an anchor, investigate your mental states, not pushing anything away, and not getting caught up with anything, just being aware

Don't interfere in your mental states just observe with a kind awareness

Identify mental states

Closed or grasping	or	contented and free
Irritated	or	open, accepting, kind
Wandering, restless	or	still and calm
Dull	or	energetic and bright
Uncertain, confused	or	Committed and clear

Notice how mental states arise and fall

Notice how awareness of negative mental states reduces their power to take over the mind

As the mind steadies and calms, becoming aware of a sense of openness and spaciousness in the mind

Relaxing your effort

Just sitting absorbing the effects of the meditation

from unsatisfactoriness requires us to directly experience things as impermanent and transient, to see them as insubstantial. It requires us to let go of attachment and to take pleasure in the transience of things. William Blake catches this wonderfully in his poem “Eternity”:

*“He who binds to himself a joy,
Does the winged life destroy;
But he who kisses the joy as it flies,
Lives in eternity’s sunrise.”*

This threefold teaching of impermanence, insubstantiality and unsatisfactoriness is one of the central teachings and insights of the Buddha. The focus in the anapanasati meditation is on impermanence because the second and third characteristics flow from impermanence, the first. So, in the meditation we revisit the first three tetrads or groups of contemplations from the perspective of impermanence, aware of the arising and falling and changing of breath, of body sensations, of vedana (feeling tone), of thoughts and emotions (mental states).

3. Contemplations 14, 15 and 16 come into effect: when we are able to truly see the impermanence of all phenomena, and begin; first to emotionally let go of attachment, to see how we’ve been caught up in experience and let it go, to see it’s not mine, it’s not me, then we experience the “fading away” of attachment (contemplation 14); second, when we notice that we no longer experience attachment, then we notice the “cessation” of attachment, the ending of dukkha (unsatisfactoriness) (contemplation 15); and finally, when we become liberated, “relinquishing” ourselves, and giving ourselves back to the universe (contemplation 16).

4. Guided meditation on impermanence (See next page)

Guided Meditation on Impermanence:

(i) Establishing calm awareness through breath and body (0 - 10 minutes)

(ii) Becoming aware of the breath

Noticing how the breath is always changing

Letting go and following the changing flow of the breath (10 – 15 minutes)

(iii) Aware of your breathing and becoming aware of body sensations

Whether pleasant, unpleasant or neutral just being aware of body sensations

Noticing how body sensations are always changing

Letting go and watching body sensations coming and going (15 – 20 minutes)

(iv) Aware of your breathing and becoming aware of thoughts and emotions

Not pushing away any thoughts, trying not to get carried away by thoughts

Noticing how thoughts and emotions appear to arise from nothingness (shunyata) and dissolve back into nothingness (20 – 25 minutes)

(v) Keeping awareness of breath as an anchor:

Letting whatever presents itself be the object of your attention, whether it be the breath, body, other sense objects (sounds, sight, smell, taste), vedana, or thoughts and emotions

Practising not being for or against what is happening. Not judging, just noticing how things arise and pass away.

Not holding on to anything. Letting go. (25 – 35 minutes)

(vi) Relaxing any effort

Just sitting quietly, absorbing the effects of the meditation. (35 – 40 minutes)

Anapanasati Sutta Student Notes: Session Five

1. The sixteen contemplations of the anapanasati sutta provide a comprehensive course of meditative training. It's important to carefully work your way through all sixteen contemplations to get a thorough idea of what's involved with each of them. Doing them on a course or on retreat is the best way to do that. But when it comes to regular meditation practice at home then it's often not possible to have the time to go through all sixteen contemplations. There are, however, two shorter or 'condensed' methods of practising anapanasati meditation.

2. The first condensed method involves practising the first tetrad on the breath and body until a level of calm and concentration is reached. Or, if you prefer to achieve a state of calm and concentration by doing the normal mindfulness of breathing, then do that. Whichever of the normal four stages of the mindfulness of breathing meditation or the first tetrad of the anapanasati method helps you to become calm and concentrated is fine.

3. Then, once you have become calm and concentrated, turn your attention to any one of the first three tetrads, either, body (*kaya*) or feelings (*vedana*) or mind (*citta*), and thoroughly explore that single tetrad. Make that tetrad the main focus of your meditation.

With the *kaya* tetrad carefully notice how the breath, body and mind condition each other. Then go through the *kaya* tetrad again, but this time from the perspective of the fourth tetrad, from the perspective of impermanence, insubstantiality and unsatisfactoriness.

With the *vedana* tetrad carefully notice how the breath, body, *vedana* and mental states mutually condition each other, particularly noticing how *vedana* condition mental states. Then go through the *vedana* tetrad again from the perspective of impermanence, insubstantiality and unsatisfactoriness.

With the *citta* tetrad carefully explore your mental states, becoming familiar with them, and learning the power of awareness to diminish the hold of mental states over your mind, discovering the spaciousness of mind. Then go through the *citta* tetrad again from the perspective of impermanence, insubstantiality and unsatisfactoriness.

When going through the tetrads from the perspective of impermanence, look for any experience of fading away of attachment, of letting go of oneself.

Always finish the meditation with a short period of just sitting, relaxing any effort to meditate, just absorbing the effects of the meditation.

4. For those still relatively new to meditation, I recommend that you use this first short method to practice the anapanasati meditation, as it is more focused than the second short method.

5. The second condensed method can be called 'choiceless awareness'. As with the first condensed method, practice with the breathing until a level of calm and concentration is achieved.

You may find it useful to finish the period of calming preparation with the following words:

Remain with the body like a mountain

Remain with the heart open like a child gazing with wonder out across an ocean

Remain with a mind like the clear blue sky

Remain with the senses like a mirror

Then open the awareness to whatever arises in the mind-body process and observe it from the perspective of impermanence (or insubstantiality or unsatisfactoriness).

Whatever turns up in consciousness will inevitably be encompassed by one or more of the first twelve contemplations. Just observe this from the perspective of impermanence.

Always finish the meditation with a short period of just sitting, relaxing any effort to meditate, just absorbing the effects of the meditation.

The danger with this second, choiceless awareness approach is that it is easy to fool yourself, to keep getting caught up in thought, and still believe that you are practicing. If this happens, and you find yourself getting caught up with one mental state after another, then take this as a signal that it's best to go back to the breath as an exclusive object of attention. Just focus on the samatha aspect of meditation. This isn't a failure in the meditation, it's just the way your mind is at that particular time. It happens to all of us!

6. For those of you who wish to find out more about the anapanasati meditation method, here are some references:

“Breath by Breath” by Larry Rosenberg, Shambala

“Mindfulness with Breathing” by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Wisdom

“Mindfulness, Bliss and Beyond” by Ajahn Brahm, Wisdom

“Breathe! You are alive” by Thich Nhat Hanh, Rider or

“The Path of Emancipation” by Thich Nhat Hanh, Full Circle

“Anapanasati Sutta” by Viveka, talks and led meditations available for free download at <http://www.freebuddhistaudio.com/>

7. These notes are very much based on what I have learnt from Viveka's talks, and from courses given by Dharmacharis Sona, Dhammarati and Prakasha. I have also benefited considerably from collaboratively developing and teaching an Anapanasati course with Taivo Org.

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