

## Mindfulness Immersed In The Body by Nick Koch

Mindfulness of breathing is probably the most popular answer for how to begin a mediation practice, and with good reason. This article will explore the broader framework of mindfulness of the body, of which mindfulness of breathing is the first of six traditional Buddhist methods. Bellow is a review of the five sections of the Buddhist text on mindfulness immersed in the body, the Kayagatasati Sutta, which states “mindfulness immersed in the body, when developed & pursued [is] of great fruit & great benefit.” The basic progression of the text is from right mindfulness to right concentration, and then to right knowledge. But first lets review mindfulness in general. Here is a brief summary of mindfulness and right mindfulness from Thanissaro Bhikkhu's book Right Mindfulness:

- 1) Mindfulness is primarily the ability to remember, to hold something in mind.
- 2) Right mindfulness is a complex process called the establishing of mindfulness in which you undertake the practice of remaining focused on a particular frame of reference in and of itself—body in and of itself, feelings in and of themselves, mind in and of itself, or mental qualities in and of themselves—ardent, alert, and mindful, subduing greed and distress with reference to the world. Of the three qualities applied to this process, mindfulness remembers from the past what should be done; alertness notices what is happening—and what you are doing—in the present; ardency generates the desire to deal skillfully with the raw material from which present experience can be formed, so as to lead to wellbeing both in the present and on into the future. Without this desire, right mindfulness would not be established. (p. 91)

The following body contemplations presented in the Kayagatasati Sutta are also included in the well known Satipatthana (establishing of mindfulness) Sutta. Before the six practices the text states the usual preface to beginning meditation: “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. Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.”

1. Mindfulness of breathing is a well known meditation subject, and the one the Buddha recommended most often and used himself. The Anapanasati Sutta outlines the Buddha's 16 step framework for breath mediation. The first four steps are related to the body: (1) Breathing in/out long you know you are breathing in/out long. (2) Breathing in/out short you know you are breathing in/out short. (3) Train yourself to breathe sensitive to the entire body. (4) Train yourself to breathe calming bodily fabrication (sankhara). This is a broad framework, so these steps cover all the way from beginning meditation to states of high concentration where the breath falls still. Starting with long breathing might suggest beginning by breathing deeply before settling into more subtle breathing. Regardless, one knows the breath as it is. One popular modern method for developing sensitivity to the body is known as body-scan meditation, popularized by S. N. Goenka. Fabrication is a technical term dealing with intentionally calming the breath & body. The remaining 12 steps in the Anapanasati Sutta cover feelings, mental states, and mental qualities.

2. Alertness to posture – sitting, standing, walking, and lying down, or anything else. The quality of mindfulness can be cultivated in any posture. Sitting is usually used in formal practice because it offers the best balance between alertness and relaxation. Walking sessions are typically used between sitting periods so the body does not become stiff and painful. A simple practice to hone alertness to the body is to pay special attention as you transition between postures throughout the day.

3. Alertness to bodily activities is described as clearly comprehending when “going forward & returning; when looking toward & looking away... when bending & extending limbs...when carrying [objects]... when eating, drinking, chewing, and savoring... when urinating and defecating... when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and remaining silent.” This seems to be an extension of the previous practice that results in a complete inclusion of all bodily activities. This practice is most suitable during a meditation retreat, but there are ways to include more alertness of your body throughout the day. You might pick several activities to be especially aware while you carry them out—gardening, bathroom activities, eating, washing dishes, listening. Or try an interesting method—move very slowly so you are keenly aware of every bodily action.

4. Reflection on the 31 parts of the body includes: head hair, body hair, 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, joint fluid, urine. The commentators added a 32<sup>nd</sup> part, the brain. Beyond focusing on and analyzing the body, this practice is used to foster perceptions of unattractiveness to counteract perceptions of sensuality in relation to the body. The purpose is not to loath the uncleanness of the body, but use these perceptions as necessary to develop objectivity & equanimity. Working with perceptions also gives insight into the way you actively participate in shaping your experience.

5. Four elements contemplation. This practice is associated with the ancient idea that the world is composed of the four basic properties of earth, water, fire, and wind. The elements are quite close to the modern four states of matter—solid, liquid, plasma, and gas. How does this relate to your own experience of the body? Earth stands for the property of solidity which includes hardness of bones, muscles, etc. Water is fluidity as felt in the movement of liquids like blood, saliva, etc. Fire is the heat element that includes bodily temperature and digestion. Wind is the gas in the lungs, stomach, and bowels felt pushing through the body. Perhaps wind also includes the more subtle movement of oxygen and nerve impulses. Four elements contemplation is associated with patience and perception of not self. One of the teachings the Buddha taught his son was to develop a mind in tune with the elements, so that ones likes and dislikes do not rule the mind. Perception of not self is about not identifying with the body as yours, who you are, your self. After all, the four elements are natural properties that also make up the external world, as well as the world of your experience.

6. Mindfulness of death. Technically this refers to the historical practice of going to cemeteries and viewing corpses in various stages of decomposition. Currently, some monasteries have skeletons or cadavers on display. Modern monks may simply use pictures or visualization. More generally, we can consider this any practice that brings to mind death for the purpose of developing spiritual urgency (samvega) and renunciation.

How should one approach these practices? Mindfulness of breathing is clearly the main practice. But for those that have difficulty with the breath due to asthma, past trauma, or other conditions, they might have a better start contemplating goodwill (metta) or another practice. Alertness to posture and activities seem primarily daily life practices to support continuity of mindfulness. Additionally, they help foster right speech and right action. The last three practices are more particular and may be practiced as helpful. These practices are often used to develop certain perceptions—unattractiveness, equanimity, patience, not self, urgency—to help comprehend the body more objectively and thus change ones perspective. It is worth noting that if you attempt to contemplate unpleasant perceptions beyond a small amount an experienced teacher is recommended for supervision since there is more potential for side effects like anxiety, fear, and distress.

Next the Kayagatasati Sutta proceeds to an explanation of four states of right concentration reached through right mindfulness, which are called the four jhanas. The refrain used for both the mindfulness of the body practices and jhanas is the same: “He remains thus heedful, ardent, & resolute, any memories & resolves related to the household life are abandoned, and with their abandoning his mind gathers & settles inwardly, grows unified & centered.” The jhanas are closely connected to abandoning the 5 hindrances, and developing the 7 factors of awakening. The first jhana describes one as being, “quite withdrawn from sensuality, withdrawn from unskillful mental qualities, he enters & remains in the first jhana: rapture & pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. He permeates & pervades, suffuses & fills this very body with the rapture & pleasure born from withdrawal.” An analogy related to the body accompanies each jhana in order to further explain these experiences. The jhanas progress from grosser to more subtle and settled mind states. The basic process is one of building up to the first jhana through directed thought (vitakka) and evaluation (vicara), then refining the process toward the fourth jhana where there is, “purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither-pleasure-nor-pain. He sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness”.

The third section starts, “whoever develops & pursues mindfulness immersed in the body encompasses whatever skillful qualities are on the side of clear knowing”. Clear knowing (vijja) is opposed to ignorance/delusion (avijja) and usually follows on the development of the seven factors of awakening and the qualities of calm (samatha) and insight (vipassana). This section includes a set of three similes and their opposites that expand upon the teaching that, “in whomever mindfulness immersed in the body is developed, is pursued, Mara gains no entry, no foothold.” Mara is often regarded as the personification of unskillful mental qualities, and in this context is likely equivalent to the central unwholesome mental qualities (kilesas) of greed, hate, and delusion.

The fourth section states that for one who has developed mindfulness immersed in the body there is an opening to six higher knowledges (chalabhinna) if one “turns their mind to know & realize them”. The Buddha gives three similes, likely explaining increasing levels of skill. The first being able to tip over a jar so the water spills out. The last being able to drive a chariot down whatever road you like. Understandably these six knowledges are controversial. A skeptical minded person is not going to be inclined to believe these are literally true. Nonetheless, they may attempt to re-frame these experiences. For example, they may interpret what is literally “penetrating the minds of others” as heightened intuition rather than mind reading. One modern teacher describes these as part of the intermediate realms of consciousness related to the unconscious and subconscious where usual experiences often occur. Regardless, the first five higher knowledges are not necessary and can even distract from the ultimate aim of Buddhist practice, unbinding (nibbana) through non-clinging.

Finally the Sutta outlines ten benefits for one whose mindfulness immersed in the body is well developed. (1) Overcoming displeasure and delight. (2) Overcoming fear and dread. (3) Resilience to painful bodily feelings. (4) Attainment of the four jhanas at will. The next six are the higher knowledges previously mentioned. (5) Supernormal powers such as walking on water and through walls. There is reason to believe this refers to skill in lucid dreaming and/or astral travel. The next two are related to what is usually called extra-sensory perception. (6) The divine ear, or clairaudience. (7) Discerning the minds of others, or claircognizance. The last three are knowledges traditionally attributed to the Buddha on the night of his awakening. (8) Recollection of past lives. (9) The divine eye, or knowing others kammic destinations. (10) The ending of the mental effluents or fermentations (asavas) that support clinging and suffering.

## RESOURCES

- 1) Kayagatasati Sutta, Satipatthana Sutta, & Anapanasati Sutta  
<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.119.than.html>  
<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.010.than.html>  
<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.118.than.html>  
Bhikkhu Bodhi's translations at <https://suttacentral.net/mn>
- 2) Right Mindfulness by Thanissaro Bhikkhu  
Pages 90-97 for a 5 point summary of mindfulness  
Pages 161-174 for a summary of the 6 body contemplations  
Pages 98-154 for an explanation of the 16 step framework of breath meditation  
Pages 39-78 on fabrication  
[http://www.dhammadata.org/ebook\\_index.html#right\\_mindfulness](http://www.dhammadata.org/ebook_index.html#right_mindfulness)
- 3) Mindful of the Body: A Study Guide by Thanissaro Bhikkhu  
[http://www.dhammadata.org/ebook\\_index.html#study\\_guides](http://www.dhammadata.org/ebook_index.html#study_guides)
- 4) Introduction to mindfulness of the body & homework by Gil Fronsdal  
<http://www.insightmeditationcenter.org/books-articles/articles/introduction-to-meditation-transcripts/2/>
- 5) 32 parts of the body practice resource with descriptions, pictures , audio, & more  
<http://www.32parts.com/>
- 6) The Supreme Meditation by Larry Rosenberg  
<http://www.lionsroar.com/the-supreme-meditation/>
- 7) Kayagatasati Sutta lectures by Bhikkhu Bodhi  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nU2u\\_kwSrij8&list=PLyBTMbrh1dLcozpAwLAqDKatF10oh3AZc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nU2u_kwSrij8&list=PLyBTMbrh1dLcozpAwLAqDKatF10oh3AZc)
- 8) Kayagatasati Sutta commentary by Piya Tan  
<http://dharmafarer.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/12.21-Kayagatasati-S-m119-piya.pdf>
- 9) Commentary on the Four Elements by Pa Auk Sayadaw  
[http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf\\_file/fourelements.pdf](http://www.buddhanet.net/pdf_file/fourelements.pdf)
- 10) A History of Mindfulness by Bhikkhu Sujato  
Includes some comparison of Theravada and Sarvastivada Kayagatasati Suttas  
[http://santifm.org/santipada/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/A\\_History\\_of\\_Mindfulness\\_Bhikkhu\\_Sujato.pdf](http://santifm.org/santipada/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/A_History_of_Mindfulness_Bhikkhu_Sujato.pdf)
- 11) Short (15-20 minute) guided meditations by Malcolm Hunter including:  
body scan, progressive relaxation, calming the body with the breath, cultivating peace and joy with the breath, mindful standing and walking, and mindfulness of the breath  
<http://www.buddhanet.net/audio-meditation.htm>
- 12) Search Dharma Seed for a variety of guided meditations and talks on the topics covered  
<http://dharmafeed.org/talks/>