



RECOVERY DHARMA

Fourth Foundation of Mindfulness Meditation: Mindfulness of Dharmas

[Note on the meditation: Just as the Fourth Noble Truth—there is a path that leads to the end of suffering—opens out into the new areas of the Eightfold Path, the Fourth Foundation of Mindfulness—Mindfulness of Dharmas—is far more expansive than what has gone before it. This means that the fourth foundation does not fit very easily into the format of the twenty-minute meeting meditation. Nevertheless, the meditation is a key element of the practice, and all the elements of it assist in lessening the craving that leads to addictive suffering. It is suggested, therefore, for the whole meditation to become part of personal practice, but to select sections of it for use at meetings.]

Sit in a comfortable but attentive posture, allowing your back to be straight but not rigid or stiff. Feel your head balanced on your shoulders, allow your face and jaw to relax, with arms and hands resting in a comfortable position.

Be attentive to what's happening within your own awareness, right here and right now, without judgment.

As you sit, begin to notice the sensations of breath. Pay attention for a moment to how your abdomen moves on each in-breath and out-breath, the movement of air through your nostrils, the slight movement of your chest and shoulders.

Find the spot in your body where the sensation of breathing is most vivid, whether it be your abdomen, your chest, or your shoulders, or the movement of air through your nostrils. Try to keep your attention at that spot.

As you breathe in, be aware of the in-breath; as you breathe out, be aware of the out-breath. Simply observe the breath going in and the breath going out.

You will notice your attention shifting away from the breath from time to time. It's perfectly normal for thoughts to wander into fantasies, memories, worries, or things you need to do. When you notice your mind has wandered, try to meet it with a spirit of friendliness. You don't need to do anything about it. There is nothing to fix. Rather than forcing it, just try to allow yourself to become curious about what it's like to be breathing right now, and you'll find that the attention is naturally drawn back to the physical sensations of breath as it moves through your body.

[Three minutes of silence]

After building a foundation of calm attention to the breath, you may wish to expand your awareness to include the experience of the body.

Are there sounds?

Are there sights—even from behind closed eyes?

Are there smells?

Are there tastes?

Are there physical or emotional sensations?

Allow the sensations to arise as naturally as possible. Stay with them gently; let them go as they pass. There is no need to chase or pursue them. Pay attention to how they change.

If, at any point, you find yourself being carried away by a particular experience, or you find yourself lost in thought, try to take your attention back to the breath, and then gently return to focusing on the flow of sensation.

[Pause]

As you pay attention to these changing sensations, try to be aware of the feeling tone of each experience. Are the sensations and experiences pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral?

[Two minutes of silence]

Now gently direct your attention to the experience of mind.

[Pause]

What is happening in the mind right now? What is its attitude, its energy?

[Pause]

Is desire present? A wanting, a craving?

Is there an experience of anger? Are frustration or resistance present?

Is there delusion? Is there a sense of distraction or confusion?

[Pause]

Allowing your mind to be as open and relaxed as possible, now notice how particular thoughts arise in the mind. Allow the thoughts to occur naturally, without judgment.

Notice how thoughts themselves generate new and changing thoughts. Observe the process of their coming and going. There is no need to engage with the content of the thoughts. Watch thinking happening.

[Two minutes of silence]

In this stage of practice, we try to attend to our states of mind and being with particularly careful discernment. The Buddha identified several clusters of mental phenomena, or mental objects, of which the practitioner should try to be fully aware. These are often called dharmas. In this meditation, we attempt to apprehend the reality of these mental objects, to experience these dharmas as they truly are. By familiarizing ourselves with these objects, by investigating them without judgment, we learn how to cultivate what is helpful for us and to let go of what is not.

The Hindrances are mental phenomena which can impede us and obstruct our development. Right now:

Is there an experience of desire? Investigate its presence or absence.

[Pause]

Is there an experience of aversion? Investigate its presence or absence.

[Pause]

Is there an experience of sleepiness? Investigate its presence or absence.

[Pause]

Is there an experience of agitation? Investigate its presence or absence.

[Pause]

Is there an experience of doubt? Investigate its presence or absence.

[Pause]

The Aggregates of Clinging are phenomena through which we can become attached to impermanent objects. Right now:

Is there awareness of material form?

[Pause]

Is there awareness of feeling, of sensation?

[Pause]

Is there awareness of perception, of identifying, labelling?

[Pause]

Is there awareness of mental activity, the beginning of mental actions and reactions?

[Pause]

Is there awareness of consciousness, of discernment and discrimination?

[Pause]

The Sense Bases are the six organs and senses of Buddhist psychology, to which we can become stuck or fettered. Right now:

Is there awareness of the eye and the visions of the eye? Investigate how one could be restricted by the eye or vision.

[Pause]

Is there awareness of the ear and the sounds heard by the ear? Investigate how one could be restricted by the ear or sound.

[Pause]

Is there awareness of the nose and the odors smelt by the nose? Investigate how one could be restricted by the nose or by odor.

[Pause]

Is there awareness of the tongue and the tastes tasted by the tongue? Investigate how one could be restricted by the tongue or taste.

[Pause]

Is there awareness of the body and the touches felt by the body? Investigate how one could be restricted by the body or touch.

[Pause]

Is there awareness of the mind and the mind-objects of the mind? Investigate how one could be restricted by the mind or mind-objects.

[Pause]

The Seven Factors of Awakening are phenomena that assist our development towards freedom. Right now:

Is the factor of mindfulness present to the mind? What is the experience of mindfulness like?

[Pause]

Is the factor of investigation present to the mind? What is the experience of investigation of phenomena?

[Pause]

Is the factor of energy present to the mind? What is the experience of energy?

[Pause]

Is the factor of joy present to the mind? What is the experience of joy?

[Pause]

Is the factor of tranquility present to the mind? What is the experience of tranquility?

[Pause]

Is the factor of concentration present to the mind? What is the experience of concentration?

[Pause]

Is the factor of equanimity present to the mind? What is the experience of equanimity?

[Pause]

The last of the dhammas to be investigated in this meditation are the Four Noble Truths themselves. Right now:

Is there awareness of the truth of suffering?

[Pause]

Is there awareness of the truth of the cause of suffering? Is there awareness that craving leads to suffering?

[Pause]

Is there awareness of the truth of an end to suffering? Is there awareness that less craving leads to less suffering?

[Pause]

Is there awareness of the truth of the path that leads to the end of suffering? Is there awareness that cultivating the path will lead to the end of suffering?

[Pause]

As this meditation comes to an end, recognize that you spent this time intentionally aware of your moment to moment experience, building the capacity for opening the senses to the vividness, to the change, to the vitality of the present moment, expanding your skill to be curious about, and open to, whatever presents itself, without judgment.

Then, whenever you're ready, allow your eyes to open and gently bring your attention back to the space you're in.