

## Mindfulness Meditation Foundations



Anushka Fernandopulle gave an entertaining and insightful Dharma talk last night at Coastside Vipassana at our regularly scheduled Wednesday night session.

Anushka has practiced meditation for 20 years and teaches meditation classes and retreats around the U.S., including at Spirit Rock Meditation Center in CA and Insight Meditation Society in MA. Anushka appreciates spending time in nature, creative arts, urban life, and social change movements. She also works as an organizational development consultant and as a life/career coach in the Bay Area.

The subject was Mindfulness meditation foundations. Anushka focused on contemplation of the body, opening with a quote from the Satipatthana Sutta (<http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.010.nysa.html>). One of the most basic ways to contemplate the body is to be aware of breathing:

### **1. Mindfulness of Breathing**

*And how does a monk live contemplating the body in the body?*

*Herein, monks, a monk, having gone to the forest, to the foot of a tree or to an empty place, sits down with his legs crossed, keeps his body erect and his mindfulness alert.*

*Ever mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out. Breathing in a long breath, he knows, "I am breathing in a long breath"; breathing out a long breath, he knows, "I am breathing out a long breath"; breathing in a short breath, he knows, "I am breathing in a short breath"; breathing out a short breath, he knows, "I am breathing out a short breath."*

*"Experiencing the whole (breath-) body, I shall breathe in," thus he trains himself. "Experiencing the whole (breath-) body, I shall breathe out," thus he trains himself. "Calming the activity of the (breath-) body, I shall breathe in," thus he trains himself. "Calming the activity of the (breath-) body, I shall breathe out," thus he trains himself.*

*Just as a skillful turner or turner's apprentice, making a long turn, knows, "I am making a long turn," or making a short turn, knows, "I am making a short turn," just so the monk, breathing in a long breath, knows, "I am breathing in a long breath"; breathing out a long breath, he knows, "I am breathing out a long breath"; breathing in a short breath, he knows, "I am breathing in a short breath"; breathing out a short breath, he knows, "I am breathing out a short breath."*  
*"Experiencing the whole (breath-) body, I shall breathe in," thus he trains himself. "Experiencing the whole (breath-) body, I shall breathe out," thus he trains himself. "Calming the activity of the (breath-) body, I shall breathe in," thus he trains himself. "Calming the activity of the (breath-) body, I shall breathe out," thus he trains himself.*

*Thus he lives contemplating the body in the body internally, or he lives contemplating the body in the body externally, or he lives contemplating the body in the body internally and externally.<sup>4</sup> He lives contemplating origination factors in the body, or he lives contemplating dissolution factors in*

*the body, or he lives contemplating origination-and-dissolution factors in the body. Or his mindfulness is established with the thought: "The body exists," to the extent necessary just for knowledge and mindfulness, and he lives detached, and clings to nothing in the world. Thus also, monks, a monk lives contemplating the body in the body.*

Mindfulness of breathing is one of the easiest and useful ways to be mindful of the body. During meditation, it is one of the most basic ways of becoming mindful.

There are several contemplations of the body that are frequently ignored and may not be considered "appropriate topics in polite conversation." This is an interesting topic, since so there is so much denial around it. It is like trying convince oneself of one's immortality by denying that death exists. Yet, we all die. All things are impermanent. Nothing stays the same -- like a flowing stream, change is continuous and unending. As part of awakening, we must face reality, no matter how unpleasant. Many of the functions of the body are unpleasant. Yet, you would probably never hear a fully enlightened person say "Ewwwwwwwwww! Gross!" while being mindful of the body.

Here are some things to contemplate:

#### **4. The Reflection on the Repulsiveness of the Body**

*And further, monks, a monk reflects on this very body enveloped by the skin and full of manifold impurity, from the soles up, and from the top of the head-hairs down, thinking thus: "There are in this body hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, kidney, heart, liver, midriff, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, gorge, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, saliva, nasal mucus, synovial fluid, urine."*

*Just as if there were a double-mouthed provision bag full of various kinds of grain such as hill paddy, paddy, green gram, cow-peas, sesamum, and husked rice, and a man with sound eyes, having opened that bag, were to take stock of the contents thus: "This is hill paddy, this is paddy, this is green gram, this is cow-pea, this is sesamum, this is husked rice." Just so, monks, a monk reflects on this very body enveloped by the skin and full of manifold impurity, from the soles up, and from the top of the head-hairs down, thinking thus: "There are in this body hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, kidney, heart, liver, midriff, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, gorge, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, saliva, nasal mucus, synovial fluid, urine."*

*Thus he lives contemplating the body in the body...*

One practice which monks frequently undertake, and which Anushka has observed, is the Charnel House mediation. In this, a practitioner meditates in the presence of corpses, observing the decay and deterioration. In some countries, bodies are left in the open, that they may be devoured by animals. While shocking to most of us, this is part of acceptance of things as they are. We die, we decay. We can be reduced to ashes and scattered. We are impermanent.

#### **6. The Nine Cemetery Contemplations**

*(1) And further, monks, as if a monk sees a body dead one, two, or three days; swollen, blue and festering, thrown in the charnel ground, he then applies this perception to his own body thus: "Verily, also my own body is of the same nature; such it will become and will not escape it."*

*Thus he lives contemplating the body in the body internally, or he lives contemplating the body in the body externally, or he lives contemplating the body in the body internally and externally. He*

*lives contemplating origination-factors in the body, or he lives contemplating dissolution factors in the body, or he lives contemplating origination-and-dissolution-factors in the body. Or his mindfulness is established with the thought: "The body exists," to the extent necessary just for knowledge and mindfulness, and he lives detached, and clings to nothing in the world. Thus also, monks, a monk lives contemplating the body in the body.*

*(2) And further, monks, as if a monk sees a body thrown in the charnel ground, being eaten by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, jackals or by different kinds of worms, he then applies this perception to his own body thus: "Verily, also my own body is of the same nature; such it will become and will not escape it."*

*Thus he lives contemplating the body in the body...*

*(3) And further, monks, as if a monk sees a body thrown in the charnel ground and reduced to a skeleton with some flesh and blood attached to it, held together by the tendons...*

*(4) And further, monks, as if a monk sees a body thrown in the charnel ground and reduced to a skeleton blood-besmeared and without flesh, held together by the tendons...*

*(5) And further, monks, as if a monk sees a body thrown in the charnel ground and reduced to a skeleton without flesh and blood, held together by the tendons...*

*(6) And further, monks, as if a monk sees a body thrown in the charnel ground and reduced to disconnected bones, scattered in all directions\_ here a bone of the hand, there a bone of the foot, a shin bone, a thigh bone, the pelvis, spine and skull...*

*(7) And further, monks, as if a monk sees a body thrown in the charnel ground, reduced to bleached bones of conchlike color...*

*(8) And further, monks, as if a monk sees a body thrown in the charnel ground reduced to bones, more than a year-old, lying in a heap...*

*(9) And further, monks, as if a monk sees a body thrown in the charnel ground, reduced to bones gone rotten and become dust, he then applies this perception to his own body thus: "Verily, also my own body is of the same nature; such it will become and will not escape it."*

*Thus he lives contemplating the body in the body internally, or he lives contemplating the body in the body externally, or he lives contemplating the body in the body internally and externally. He lives contemplating origination factors in the body, or he lives contemplating dissolution factors in the body, or he lives contemplating origination-and-dissolution factors in the body. Or his mindfulness is established with the thought: "The body exists," to the extent necessary just for knowledge and mindfulness, and he lives detached, and clings to nothing in the world. Thus also, monks, a monk lives contemplating the body in the body.*

Anushka suggested that while charnel house meditation might be difficult to practice in our culture, a good substitute would be what she refers to humorously as Roadkill Meditation. When you see an animal that had been hit by a car, lying by the roadside, think of the similarities with what happens to us, and the relationship with our bodies upon death. As you pass by the dead animal over a few days, note the deterioration that occurs. This is what will come to pass.

It is easy to forget the body, and daydream or think without paying attention to what the body is doing. Yet we should strive to be aware of the body at all times -- when walking, when eating, when sitting. Do you

have an ache or pain? Is your posture uncomfortable? Can you feel the ground beneath your feet, and the wind on your face? Are you full? Are you hungry?

Why would we want to contemplate these things that we would rather ignore or deny? These are not pleasant subjects, and besides they are "Ewwwwwww, Gross!"

What's the point?

*"Now, if anyone would develop these four frames of reference in this way for seven years, one of two fruits can be expected for him: either enlightenment right here & now, or - if there be any remnant of clinging/sustenance - non-return.*

*"Let alone seven years. If anyone would develop these four frames of reference in this way for six years... five... four... three... two years... one year... seven months... six months... five... four... three... two months... one month... half a month, one of two fruits can be expected for him: either enlightenment right here & now, or - if there be any remnant of clinging/sustenance - non-return.*

*"Let alone half a month. If anyone would develop these four frames of reference in this way for seven days, one of two fruits can be expected for him: either enlightenment right here & now, or - if there be any remnant of clinging/sustenance - non-return.*

*"This is the direct path for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow & lamentation, for the disappearance of pain & distress, for the attainment of the right method, & for the realization of Unbinding - in other words, the four frames of reference.' Thus was it said, and in reference to this was it said."*

*That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One's words.*

For more information:

Dharma Talk on Mindfulness Meditation: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/mahasi/wheel370.html>

The Satipatthana Sutta: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.010.nysa.html>

More talks by Anushka:

<http://www.dharmaseed.org/teacher/222/>

<http://www.audiodharma.org/talks/AnushkaFernandopulle.html>