

Dedicated Practitioners Program Reading and Homework February 2002

At the DPP retreat we didn't spend time with mindfulness of Breathing because we often focus on it in our silent retreats. Although we utilize the breath to develop both concentration and awareness we don't often teach the traditional outline of Anapanasati (mindfulness of breathing). Most people tend to think they 'know' about mindfulness of breathing. Let's see if this broadens your understanding and practice. Please read through the 16 practices that the Buddha outlines in the sutta and if possible take a look at one of the commentaries listed as 'further reference'.

Readings:

Majjhima Nikaya # 118 Anapanasati Sutta;

Suzuki Roshi, Zen Mind Beginners Mind, *Breathing and Constancy*

For further reference:

Thich Nhat Han, *The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*; Larry Rosenberg, *Breath by Breath*; Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, *Mindfulness with Breathing*; Aiken Roshi, *The Practice of Perfection*.

Reflections

1. Reflect on the history of your relationship with breathing. When did you first notice yourself as a breathing creature? Have you ever had difficulty breathing? Do you ever get breathless? Have you ever witnessed someone (a baby) taking their first breath or someone taking their last breath?
2. In the commentary Bhikkhu Bodhi suggests that 'Breathing in one is mindful of the whole body' refers to the whole body of breath. Thich Nhat Han disagrees with this interpretation and suggests that the instruction is to be mindful of the whole physical body as we breath. Larry Rosenberg includes both. What is your understanding? What works for you?
3. As you read the 16 exercises on breathing do they seem familiar? Which have you formally practiced and which do you recognize as having informally practiced?
4. Pick one or more of the Anapanasati practices and work with it formally for the month.
5. Notice how you balance the qualities of will and receptivity in your sitting meditation when practicing mindfulness of breathing.
6. Notice your breath in various activities throughout your week: walking, exercising, eating, working, talking, making love, etc. Don't try and control it but bring awareness to the various expressions of breath. At times in your week when you find yourself tense, stressed or agitated consciously bring mindfulness of breathing to that experience.
7. How do you understand the subtle (or not so subtle) sense of presence/wakefulness/spaciousness that arises when we consciously pay attention to the breath in daily life?
8. Our parami for this month is that of patience. (Khanti) Patience is defined as: "The state or quality of being patient; the power of suffering with fortitude, The act or power of calmly or contentedly waiting for something due or hoped for; forbearance. Constancy in labor or application; perseverance." Patience includes qualities of fortitude, forbearance, perseverance and constancy. How do you

understand this parami as part of one's 'perfection'? What does it look like in your formal meditation and in ongoing practice? How is patience cultivated? How does insight support patience? What is the relationship between mindfulness of breathing and patience?

Practices

Week	Attention	Suggestions
1	Concentration	Spend this week working with actively using the breath as a concentration practice. Use a variety of techniques to support the concentration: labeling in, out, rising falling; counting the breath from 1 to 10 and then starting again; paying attention to specifics of beginning middle and end. Acknowledging long, short, rough, smooth, etc. Be diligent!
2	Receptivity	Work with a sense of receiving the breathing. Let the attention be more on the whole body and as that is established let the breath come to you. Notice how the body experiences the breathing.
3	Tranquility	Begin your meditation by breathing <i>with</i> some stressful experience, either mental or physical, to consciously nurture a sense of relaxation and tranquility.
4	Non-dual	Begin your meditation each day this week by reading Suzuki Roshi's teaching on the breath. Notice the tendency to conceptualize 'inner and outer'. Is it possible to let go of this conceptualization, to experience 'no inner and outer'? After mindfulness of breathing is established spend some time playing with the idea/guideline that 'you don't know what a breath is'. Notice how this impacts your experience of breath.

Please schedule a time to connect with your dharma buddy for a discussion of this month's reflections and practices, and for an interview with your mentor if you are receiving monthly interviews.