

Handout #2

Mindfulness of Breathing Meditation

Introduction

In the mindfulness of breathing meditation, the sensations of our natural breath are the object of our mindfulness. We emphasize the practice of mindfulness as the simple act of repeatedly returning our attention to the breath sensations. In fact, it is very helpful to think that the more times we get to return our attention gracefully to the breath sensations, the stronger the connection and familiarity between mindfulness and the breath will become.

Moreover, each time we notice a natural out-breath and the subtle feeling of physical release that accompanies it, we can consciously associate that with a chance to release bodily tensions and mental agitation in order to build up a positive association with mindfulness of breathing. This is especially true when introspection alerts us to the presence of involuntary reactive thinking or dullness of mind. We remind ourselves as we breathe out to allow anything unnecessary or unneeded in this moment to flow away and be released.

A similar meditation on counting the breaths is also included in the FPMT Buddhist Meditation 101 course. The following can be used as a meditation script to guide ourselves and others into meditation.

Motivation

We bring forth an altruistic motivation for the meditation session. Think that we are meditating not just for our own individual benefit, but we are taking the time now to meditate and develop our mind to become a wiser and kinder person, able to be of benefit to all beings.

The main body of the meditation

We begin by adopting a suitable meditation posture, either sitting or lying down. We can sit on a chair, cross-legged on the floor, or lay down on our back...

We allow our spine to be in its natural and comfortable position. We rest our hands and arms on some physical support to allow our shoulders to be relaxed. We are free to close our eyes or leave them open.

We return our attention to our own body, to be in touch with the simple sensations here in order to settle our body into meditation.

Notice areas of softness, ease and relaxation with comfortable feelings. Can we welcome these feelings and allow ourselves to enjoy them while they are here?

Also notice areas of tension or tightness with uncomfortable feelings. Can we simply acknowledge them for the time being? Don't feel that we have to change them immediately for the better. Just let them be.

We check in with the sensations at our face. Are we tensing up any of the facial muscles? Those at the forehead, around our eyes or at the jaw? Can we gently relax these muscles and let in a different feeling, one of softness, ease and comfort into our face?

We can allow this softening and relaxing to spread on its own to the rest of our body, helping our body to settle into meditation in its own time.

Among the different bodily sensations, see if we can highlight those sensations associated with breathing. Some of us will notice subtle sensations around our nostrils, where we can feel the air flow in and out of the body. Others may notice the movement of the chest, expanding and contracting with each breath. And still others may detect the rising and falling movements of the abdomen.

We rest our attention on some of these breath sensations, allowing ourselves to fully experience our in-breath and out-breath.

Rest our attention here with our breath. Each time we notice ourselves breathing out, let's use it as an opportunity to release... Releasing anything unhelpful and unwanted, just like the way we breathe out to let go of the stale air in our lungs.

If we wish to, we can gently say the guiding word "Release" in our mind each time we notice an out-breath. This is to remind our body that it does not need to hold onto unnecessary tightness and contraction. This is also to remind our mind that it can let go of thoughts, memories and fantasy that preoccupy it. It can also release states of dullness and drowsiness, allowing them to flow away with the out-breath. We are not forcing anything to happen nor pushing things away.

When we notice that our attention is distracted elsewhere or is feeling drowsy, we simply invite it to come back to the breath sensations, and to release on the out-breath.

[Long pause... till end of meditation]

Dedication

Finally, dedicate our positive energy and insights to the well-being and happiness of all living beings.