

Shamatha-Vipashyana Meditation
From Jamgon Kongtrul (and Others) to Chogyam Trungpa
A Rime Shedra NYC Course
Tuesdays, January 19 to April 15, 2021, 7-9:15 pm

Class Five: Syllabus

1) Shamatha: The Progression of the Practice

a) Classical Presentation:

- i) The Progression of the Actual Meditation
 - (1) Setting the mind with concrete support
 - (2) Setting the mind without concrete support
 - (3) Setting the mind in the Essential Nature
- ii) Identifying the Experiences Arising from Meditation
 - (1) The Tradition of the Great Treatises:
 - (a) The five faults
 - (b) The eight antidotes
 - (c) The Five Nyams
 - (d) The nine mental abidings
 - (e) The six powers
 - (f) The four mental engagements
 - (2) The Tradition of Oral Instructions:
 - (a) The five experiences

b) Trungpa Rinpoche's Presentation:

- i) Four foundations of mindfulness as a description of the progression of shamatha
- ii) The psychosomatic body
- iii) Working with life force
- iv) The development of the watcher and its progression
- v) Mindfulness, awareness, Shamatha, Vipashyana

Materials for Class Five

1) Classical Readings:

- a) Shamatha: The Progression of the Practice, The Stages of Meditation of Shamatha and Vipashyana, Jamgon Kongtrul, *The Treasury of Knowledge*, Translated by Kiki Ekselius and Chryssoula Zerbini, six pages
- b) The Five Flaws and the Eight Applications, From *Middle Beyond Extremes: Maitreya's Madhyāntavibhāga, with commentaries by Khenpo Shenga and Ju Mipham*, Translated by The Dharmachakra Translation Committee, pp. 106-108, two pages
- c) Stages and Characteristics of Shamatha Chart, one page
- d) Preventing the Strayings of Blank Shamatha, from *The Royal Seal of Mahamudra, Volume One: A Guidebook for the Realization of Coemergence*, The Third Khamtrul Rinpoche, Ngawang Kunga Tenzin, Translated by Gerardo Abboud, pp. 199-201, two pages

2) Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche Readings:

- a) *The Profound Treasury of the Ocean of Dharma, Volume One, The Path of Individual Liberation*, by Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, Ed. Judith L. Lief, 13 pages,
 - i) An Element of Magic, pp. 264-266
 - ii) The Four Foundations of Mindfulness (Introduction), pp. 285-287
 - iii) Penetrating Being and Psychosomatic Body, Mindfulness of Body, p. 287-289
 - iv) Well-Being, Mindfulness of Life, p. 298-303
 - v) Sudden Flash: The Abstract Watcher, 41. Mindfulness of Effort, p. 308-311
 - vi) The transcendental watcher, 42. Mindfulness of Mind, p. 320-322
 - vii) Five Basic Nyams, p. 323-324
 - viii) Three Fundamental Nyam, pp. 324-326
- b) *Mindfulness in Action: Making Friends with Yourself through Meditation and Everyday Awareness*, by Chogyam Trungpa, Compiled, arranged, and edited by Carolyn Rose Gimian, 6 pages
 - i) Life Force, excerpts from pp. 76-82
 - ii) Touching the Surface of Mind, excerpts from pp. 91-96

The Stages of Meditation of Shamatha and Vipashyana
The Treasury of Knowledge by Jamgon Kongtrul
Chapter Eight: The Progressive Classification of the Training in Superior Samadhi
Part One: The Stages of Meditation of Shamatha and Vipashyana –
The General Basis of All Samadhis
Translated by Kiki Ekselius and Chrissy Zerbini

Shamatha Part II: The Progression of the Practice

The Progression of the Actual Meditation

Setting the mind with a concrete support

The particular method for setting the mind is to focus on an impure and a pure support.

In the beginning, it is important to train using a support. An impure support refers to any small object such as a piece of wood or a pebble, which one uses as an object of concentration. A pure support refers to a statue or relief of the Buddha, a seed syllable or the attributes of a deity etc. The manner of concentrating should be similar to the way a Brahmin twines his cord, i.e. neither too tight nor too loose.

Setting the mind without concrete support

“Without concrete supports” refers to setting the mind on individual parts; on the complete form; outwardly; and inwardly on the body and on that which depends on the body.

Once one is able to rest even slightly on a concrete support, one can proceed to meditate without concrete support, i.e. using a mental image of a statue of a deity, etc. First one concentrates on the individual parts such as the face, hands, etc.; this is known as meditation with a *partial support*. Then, having become familiar with that, one concentrates on the complete form; this is known as meditation with a *complete support*. The former and latter are summarized as follows by the master Jangchub Zangpo in *The Prerequisites for Samadhi*:

“Shamatha is classified into *observation*, which is directed outwards, and *attainment*, which is directed inwards. Observation is of two kinds; *special*, which refers to statues and seed syllables, and *ordinary*. Attainment can be either *directed towards the body* or *towards something dependent on the body*. The former is of three types: visualizing the body as a deity, as an attribute of a deity or as a skeleton etc. The latter is of five types: concentrating on the breath, on subtle parts, on bindu, on light and on joyful bliss.”

Although there are indeed many ways of enumerating objects of observation in other texts, they are all included in the two categories of with concrete support and without concrete support.

Setting the Mind in the Essential Nature

Strive to remain absorbed in the essential nature, waves of thought having dissolved into the ocean of the all-basis.

Having familiarized oneself with the methods mentioned above, one settles into the state in which all notions of subject and object are completely pacified, with no concept of a support. By this, the endless flow of thought waves is completely dissolved into the ocean of the all-basis, and one arrives at a state of absorption in the essential nature. This is ultimate shamatha, therefore, strive for it!

Identifying the Experiences Arising from Meditation

Brief Explanation

There are two ways of identifying the experiences arising from these.

There are two ways of identifying the experiences arising from meditating on the three kinds of shamatha: with a concrete support, without concrete support and in the essential nature.

Detailed Explanation

The tradition of the great treatises - the eight antidotes to the five faults

According to the treatises, there are five faults: three types of laziness, forgetting the instructions, laxity and agitation (each with two aspects), non-application, and over-application.

The eight antidotes to these are: aspiration, exertion, faith and suppleness which counteract the first; the samadhi of not forgetting with three particularities; examination; application; and equanimity when resting in a balanced state.

According to the tradition of the great treatises, one must rely on the eight antidotes in order to remove the five faults which hinder the arising of experiences. The *Discrimination of the Middle Way and the Extremes* says:

“Abiding in that gives rise to workability and accomplishes all aims. This comes about through relying on the eight antidotes to the five faults which are laziness, forgetting the instructions, laxity and agitation, non-application and over-application. The basis, abiding in that, the cause, the effect, not to forget the object, to examine the mind for laxity and agitation, actual application which removes them, and resting naturally when calm are the eight antidotes.”

Here, “abiding in that” means abiding in joyous effort in order to dispel unfavorable conditions. From this, the samadhi of workability arises. This samadhi achieves all aims, since it is the foundation of miraculous powers, such as the supersensible cognitions etc. Such a samadhi results from the elimination of the five faults by means of the eight antidotes.

As for the five faults, they are as follows:

1. At the time of engaging in samadhi, laziness is a fault, since it prevents application to the practice. There are three types of laziness: the laziness of neutral activities such as sleep etc.; attachment to negative activities; and lack of self-confidence.
2. Forgetting the instructions when exerting oneself in samadhi is a fault, since if one forgets the object, one is unable to rest in equipoise.

3. When resting in equipoise, laxity and agitation are hindrances, since they make the mind unworkable. Each of these has two aspects, coarse and subtle. Coarse laxity refers to obscurity of mind, the object being unclear through loss of firmness in one's awareness of it; subtle laxity refers to weak apprehension of the object even though clarity is present. Coarse agitation cannot be suppressed even by remedies, due to very strong attachment to sense objects; subtle agitation refers to slight movement of thought, the mind being unable to rest undisturbed.
4. Non-application of remedies when laxity and agitation have arisen is a fault, since then one is unable to pacify them.
5. Application of remedies when one is free from laxity and agitation is a fault since then one is unable to rest in equanimity.

If, as here, laxity and agitation are counted as one, this makes five faults; if they are counted separately, as in the Stages of Meditation it makes six.

The remedy to these five faults is to rely on the eight antidotes which remove them:

- The first four, namely aspiration, exertion, faith (the cause), and suppleness (the effect) remove the first fault of laziness.
- The remedy to forgetting is the samadhi of not forgetting the instructions, which has three particularities: strong clarity of mind, non-discursiveness, i.e. resting one-pointedly on the object, and a resulting experience of bliss which is accompanied by a sensation of well-being.
- The sixth remedy is introspection, which examines whether laxity and agitation have arisen or not; if they have arisen, one counteracts them by means of appropriate visualizations, gazes, and physical activities.
- The antidote for non-application of the remedies to laxity and agitation is to exert oneself in their application.
- If when resting undisturbed in a balanced state, one is still making effort in application, the remedy is to train in equanimity, without application.

The Six Powers, the Four Mental Engagements and the Nine Mental Abidings

The nine mental abidings such as setting the mind on the object etc, arise through the six powers of listening, reflecting, mindfulness, introspection,

joyous effort and familiarity. To these mental abidings correspond four mental engagements: forcible, interrupted, uninterrupted and spontaneous.

The six powers, which are the means for developing shamatha, are:

1. the power of listening,
2. the power of reflecting,
3. the power of recollection,
4. the power of introspection,
5. the power of joyous effort and
6. the power of familiarity.

Through relying on the first power, the first mental abiding is accomplished; through the second power, the second; through the third power, the third and fourth; through the fourth power, the fifth and sixth; through the fifth power, the seventh and eighth; and through the sixth, the ninth.

There are four mental engagements corresponding to the nine mental abidings:

1. forcible engagement, which corresponds to the first and second mental abidings;
2. interrupted engagement, which corresponds to the third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh mental abidings;
3. uninterrupted engagement, corresponding to the eighth'; and
4. spontaneous engagement, corresponding to the ninth.

These describe the manner in which the mind engages in samadhi.

The nine successive mental abidings arising from the six powers mentioned above are as follows:

1. Setting the mind: having withdrawn from outer objects, the mind is directed towards an inner object of observation.
2. Continuous setting: having turned inwards, the mind is able to remain continuously on its object without being distracted elsewhere.

3. Re-setting: having become aware of distraction towards outer objects, the mind is set once again on its object of observation.
4. Close setting: setting the mind on its object, having refined it by withdrawing it again and again from its natural coarseness.
5. Disciplining: rejoicing in the qualities of samadhi, having reflected on them.
6. Pacifying: having seen distraction as a fault, one pacifies dislike of samadhi,
7. Thorough pacifying: here, attachment and mental discomfort are pacified.
8. Making one-pointed: making effort in order to be able to rest effortlessly.
9. Setting in equipoise: resting in equanimity when the mind is already balanced.

Thus the succession of the nine mental abidings reaches its perfection.

The nine mental abidings have been taught in the *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* while the six powers and four mental engagements are explained in the Levels of Hearers.

The Tradition of Oral Instructions

In the oral tradition, the five experiences of agitation, attainment, familiarity, stability and perfection are illustrated by examples.

In the oral tradition, the experiences which accompany the development of shamatha are summarized into five:

1. The first experience is that of mental agitation, which is compared to a waterfall;
2. the second is that of attainment, compared to a river flowing through a gorge;
3. the third is that of familiarity, compared to a large river flowing leisurely;
4. the fourth is that of stability, compared to an ocean free from waves; and
5. the fifth is that of perfect stability, compared to an oil lamp not blown by the wind, resting bright and clear, unmoved by anything.

Thus the different experiences are illustrated by individual examples.

The Five Flaws and the Eight Applications
From *Middle Beyond Extremes: Maitreya's Madhyāntavibhāga*
With commentaries by Khenpo Shenga and Ju Mipham
Translated by The Dharmachakra Translation Committee, pp. 106-108

The Five Flaws

On the first topic, the treatise (by Maitreya) states:

**Being lazy, forgetting the instructions,
Dullness and agitation,
Non-application, and application—
These are held to be the five flaws. [IV.4]**

[Khenpo Shenga] What are the five flaws? They are (1) being lazy when it comes to the cultivation of meditative absorption; (2) forgetting the instructions on how to meditate; (3) dullness and agitation, which are counted as one flaw; (4) non-application, when it comes to pacifying these two; and (5) over-application once they have already been thoroughly pacified— these are held to be the five flaws.

[Ju Mipham] What are the five flaws that hinder the accomplishment of meditative absorption? They are (1) falling under the sway of laziness and, consequently, not exerting oneself, and (2) forgetting the instructions on meditative absorption; both of these hinder taking up the practice of meditative absorption. (3) Dullness and agitation hinder the actual practice of meditative absorption; the former is a state of inner withdrawal and the latter a proliferation of thought activity directed towards external objects. These two are counted as a single flaw. (4) When one is engaged in meditative absorption and dullness, agitation, or another flaw occurs, one should apply the appropriate remedy. Not applying the remedy in such a way is a hindrance. (5) On the other hand, once the remedies have been used to pacify dullness and agitation, to go on applying them in an excessive manner is also a hindrance, because that itself is a factor that creates turbulence. These last two flaws keep one's meditative absorption from developing. Laziness and the other four factors presented here are asserted to be the five flaws.

The Eight Applications

On the second topic, the treatise (by Maitreya) states:

**The basis and what is based on this,
Cause and result,
To not forget one's focal point and
To notice dullness or agitation,
To fully apply oneself to the elimination of these factors
And rest naturally once pacified. [IV.5]**

[Khenpo Shenga] The eight applications that eliminate these flaws are classified as follows. (1) Intention, the basis for effort, and (2) effort, what is based on this intention; (3) faith, the cause, or basis, of intention; and (4) flexibility, the result that rests on [the basis of] effort. The four remaining applications that eliminate [their respective flaws] are as follows: (5) mindfulness, to not forget one's focal point and (6) alertness, to notice the presence of either dullness or agitation; (7) volition, which allows one to fully apply oneself to the elimination of these factors once they have been noticed; and (8) equanimity, the mind's resting naturally once dullness and agitation have been pacified.

[Ju Mipham] There are four remedies that lead to the elimination of laziness: faith, intention, effort, and flexibility. If flexibility is attained laziness will not occur. This flexibility, in turn, is achieved through effort, which is itself attained by having one's intent directed towards cultivating meditative absorption. Intention arises by having trust and faith in this [practice] at the outset. Therefore, effort is based on intention, the explicit desire to achieve meditative absorption, while intention forms the basis for effort. The cause of this intention is faith and the result of effort is the achievement of flexibility. Laziness is eliminated by means of these four remedies.

Similarly, there are four remedies associated with the remaining four flaws: mindfulness, alertness, volition, and equanimity. Mindfulness prevents one from forgetting the focal point of the instructions. Alertness notices and comprehends occurrences of dullness and agitation. Volition allows one to apply the remedies that eliminate the flaws of dullness and agitation, while equanimity settles the mind in a natural state of ease once they have been pacified.

STAGES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF SHAMATHA

FIVE OBSTACLES	EIGHT ANTIDOTES	SIX POWERS	NINE STAGES	EXPERIENCE	THREE LEVELS	THREE QUALITIES	FOUR MENTAL APPLICATIONS
1. Laziness	1. Faith 2. Aspiration 3. Effort 4. Suppleness/ pliancy	Learning	1. Directed Attention	Movement (waterfall)	Preparation (stages 1-3)	Stability (stages 1-3)	engaging through concentration (stages 1-2)
		Contemplating	2. Repeated Attention				
2. Forgetting the instructions	5. Mindfulness or Remembering to apply the Instructions	Mindfulness	3. Continuous Attention				
			4. Close Placement (coarse laxity)	Approach (fast river)	Actual Meditation (stages 4-6)	Vividness Clarity (stages 4-5)	interruptedly engaging (stages 3-7)
3. Elation / Laxity	6. Awareness / Introspection	Awareness/ Introspection (sheshin)	5. Taming (subtle laxity)				
			6. Pacifying (subtle elation)	7. Thoroughly Pacifying (subtle elation and laxity)	Stability (calm lake)	effortlessly engaging (stage 9)	
4. Not applying the antidotes	7. Applying the antidotes	Exertion or Enthusiasm	8. Making One-Pointed	Perfection (mountain)			
			9. Even Placement				
5. Over-application of the antidotes	8. Resting in equanimity	Thorough Familiarity					

Preventing the Strayings of Blank Shamatha
From *The Royal Seal of Mahamudra, Volume One:*
A Guidebook for the Realization of Coemergence
The Third Khamtrul Rinpoche, Ngawang Kunga Tenzin
Translated by Gerardo Abboud, pp. 199-201

In this connection, regarding mindful knowing, mindfulness prevents the mind from wandering from the object; and knowing makes it recognize agitation or dullness and whether it has wandered or not. In other words, after strongly arousing the determination that decides, “I shall not wander from the object even for an instant,” extend the continuity of mindfulness on the object, and constantly keep this concern in your mind by dint of the mindfulness that prevents the object from being forgotten. In this state, knowing recognizes if there is distraction or not, or if there are faults of dullness and agitation. Apart from this, don’t analyze too much; simply be vigilant, watching closely.

In the sutra section, mindfulness and knowing are separated and there are many explanations in this regard. However, many of the pith instructions of the practice lineage condense them into mindful presence or simply mindfulness. If you wonder how this is you should know that there is nothing wrong with that. As said in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*:

When mindfulness remains with the purpose
Of guarding the doorway of the mind,
Then knowing comes about.

The mindfulness and knowing explained in this quotation are distinguished from each other in terms of subtle and gross or fine and [200] coarse because within a mindfulness strong in clarity, knowing is included. Thus, in the commentary to the *Center and Boundary* as well we find:

If mindfulness is fully present, it will possess knowing.

At this point it may happen that scholars think as follows. When the mind is held one-pointedly on the object through mindful knowing, if a subtle thought were produced discerning whether it remains on the object or not, or whether there is dullness or agitation, then there wouldn’t be nonthought. On the other hand, if it were not produced, the knowing that notices that there is dullness, agitation, etc. would not

occur. So what should we do? Unskillful people, regarding a subtle thought such as this one as a fault, in the absence of the sharp brightness of knowing, sustain a lucidity of the mind consisting of whatever sense of clarity there may have been before. However this kind of subtle thought is not a thought as such, it is knowing or cognizance similar to vipashyana and therefore it ought to be produced. As said in the intermediate *Stages of Meditation*:

Thus, after placing the mind on the chosen object, you should subsequently place it right there all the time. Once it settles completely, you should mentally cultivate the following questions by examining and thinking, “Is the mind properly fixed on the object? Or is there dullness? Or is it completely fascinated by outer objects and thus distracted?”

The way to produce this type of thought is not by first abandoning the stream of undistracted mindfulness, but rather by simply being watchful while the continuity of samadhi is not lost. Further, if this thought is repeatedly aroused with too much strength, it will lead to the fault of mindfulness slipping away; and that thought would then become a fault. Each instant simply watches over the next one, while the confidence of the preceding one is just strong enough to not disappear. In short, these ways of balancing tightness and looseness and sustaining [201] the practice are excellent key points among the many ways of maintaining concentration. By sustaining in this way, the meaning of shamatha concurrent with vipashyana will unmistakably be realized. According to Lord Yangtonpa, the distinction between these is as follows:

There is the danger of confusing dullness with shamatha. Shamatha, or calm abiding, is when once the movement of subtle and coarse thoughts has grown *calm*, the mind *abides* in a continuity. Dullness is failing to recognize and being in a dark area with no idea of what is happening. The nature of vipashyana, insight, is to nakedly see one’s original face of emptiness. The analytical cognizance is such that based on verbal conventions a mental image arises in the field of the conceptual mind.

Thus, in the samadhi of shamatha, there are two aspects: stillness— the mind calmly resting one-pointedly without thoughts—and the undiminishing sharpness of mindfulness and knowing, including confidence. These two must be present no matter what.

Excerpts on The Progression of Shamatha
The Profound Treasury of the Ocean of Dharma
Volume One: The Path of Individual Liberation
By Chögyam Trungpa, Ed. Judith L. Lief

An Element of Magic, pp. 246-266

[page 264] The unconditioned truth, or dharma, has extraordinary power. In the mahayana sutras, such as the *Heart Sutra*, that power is referred to as a spell, or mantra. At the hinayana level, that power is referred as merit. Practicing dharma is considered to be a meritorious deed, but the hinayana idea of merit is quite different from the ordinary idea of bargaining tit for tat, or the idea that if you do good, you're going to get a goody. It is more than a mere exchange in which you accumulate good karma so that you can have the reward of that good karmic action. Even at the hinayana level, the dharma has tremendous energy and power. Throughout the dharma there is hidden power and magic. According to the popular view of dharma, the idea that there is magic involved is, to say the least, corny, or even bizarre. But there is some kind of magic.

In meditation practice, we are tuning ourselves into an entirely different way of thinking, as opposed to our ordinary, samsaric way of thinking. We have decided to relate with the truth, to tune in to the dharma. Tuning ourselves in to the dharma, committing ourselves in to that stream or flow, means that we are automatically entered into a kind of spiritual power. It is not particularly exciting or extraordinary, but there is power [page 265] and mystical energy. The reason dharma is regarded as sacred is because its contents are outrageous. It is in touch with the energy or cosmic flow of the world.

Magic is the cause, and it is what we are creating in the simple practice of meditation. Through meditation we are putting that particular miracle into effect. So let us not regard meditation as a purely mechanical process that leads one to enlightenment. Instead, the essence of meditation is tuning oneself in to higher truth or magic. The practice of meditation as a way of tuning oneself in to higher truth can only be taught by a competent teacher who has the message and the personal experience handed down through the lineage. Otherwise, if meditation could be approached from a purely scientific level, we could quite possibly read a book on how to meditate and attain enlightenment. The reason that this is not possible is because of the abstract magical quality of the dharma, handed down from generation to generation. That magical

quality accompanies the experienced teacher, who has tremendous common sense and wisdom, and is the holder of the *vajra*, or the mystical power.

It is very important to know about the magical quality of meditation. While it is true that Buddhism is very scientific, ordinary, and extremely straightforward, nevertheless it has magical power. At this point, that mystical power may involve nothing more than employing a simple meditative technique—but in doing so, something happens to you. It is quite different from a mere imitation of the lineage. It is not that you are converted to Buddhism or become a true believer, and it is not that you happen to zap yourself, or that you convince yourself through the power of suggestion. It is that even the simplest teaching has power. Introducing this power or truth is called “turning the wheel of the dharma,” or dharmachakra.

When a person sits and meditates, it is a special situation, a sacred act. Patrül Rinpoche (1808-1887), a prominent Nyingma teacher and author of *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, said that even if you have impure thoughts in the meditation hall, those thoughts are still regarded as sacred thoughts. So in meditation, even the most impure, crude, or confused [page 266] thoughts are regarded as sacred. Discipline is important, whether you have accomplished that discipline or not. You may fall asleep on your cushion, or feel that you have not actually meditated at all. You may feel that as soon as you sat down on your cushion, you began to venture out all over the world, and the only thing that reminded you that you were meditating was that the gong rang and you realized you were supposedly meditating, at least physically. But even such daydreams are important. Viewing meditation as a sacred activity does not mean that the sitting practice of meditation has to be absolutely solemn and rigid. However, you should have the attitude that you are involved with a system and a tradition that is valid and has its roots in solid thinking. Meditation is a definite approach. It is an extremely valid thing to do.

The Four Foundations of Mindfulness, pp. 285-287

In order to free ourselves from too much self-conscious involvement in the practice—in thoughts, sense perceptions, and emotional playback—a technique has been introduced called the “four foundations of mindfulness.” The four foundations of mindfulness are mentioned in texts such as the *Satipatthana Sutra*, or the *Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness*; and the *Visuddhimagga*, or *The Path of Purification* which [page 286] talk about the functions of your mind and how it can be worked with.

The four foundations are usually presented as “mindfulness of body,” “mindfulness of feeling,” “mindfulness of mind,” and “mindfulness of mental contents.” That

presentation has a slightly philosophical orientation, but in this discussion of the four foundations the emphasis is on meditation practice. Therefore, I have translated the four foundations as “mindfulness of body,” “mindfulness of life,” “mindfulness of effort,” and “mindfulness of mind.” The first foundation includes the body and other solid things, so I have called it “mindfulness of body.” The second foundation is about relating with life as a whole, rather than simply with the skandha of feelings, so I have called it “mindfulness of life.” The third foundation is based on the idea of mental concentration, so I have called it “mindfulness of effort.” The fourth foundation is based on “mindfulness of mental contents,” and since the abhidharma definition of mind is “that which can perceive its own contents,” I have called this foundation “mindfulness of mind.”

In some traditions, the four foundations are used to separate very precisely what you are experiencing in your meditation practice. Teachers may use the four foundations in that way, dividing up the different categories of awareness and attention, but mindfulness practice does not need to be that scientific.

The four foundations of mindfulness are not four different practices, but four stages of shamatha practice. Although all four foundations are [page 287] considered to be shamatha, they could also be considered to extend to vipashyana practice. The first foundation, mindfulness of body, is pure shamatha, because it only involves your own body and mind. You do not make an attempt to go out beyond that.

Body-Body and Psychosomatic Body, pp. 287-289

In referring to mindfulness of body, we mean not only this particular body, but any form or body-ness. We mean all body-ness: the body-ness of grass and water and sun and moon and everything else. However, mindfulness of body does not mean that you should be aware of each and every body—there would be so many bodies to be aware of at the same time—it means being aware of the totality. It is a general understanding of where things are, rather than being aware of each hair growing on your head. We are not talking about multiple-awareness systems. Instead, the whole approach is simple and direct: just sit and meditate. You sit and meditate, and you relate with your breath—there’s no further promise. That is all we are talking about. It doesn’t matter if you are a beginner, or old and [page 288] accomplished. Since everybody is a professional samsara-dweller, in terms of samsara nobody is a beginner—everybody is a professional.

In the mindfulness of body, there is a need for solidness, presence, and groundedness. However, we might have difficulty with that. Although we possess a body—we sit on the ground, we eat, we sleep, we wear clothes—there are a lot of questions about the

particular body we think we have. We are uncertain as to whether it is an unconditional body or a body of conceptualization. An ordinary person's experience of the body, known as the psychosomatic body, is largely based on concepts or ideas of body, whereas an enlightened person's attitude toward the body, known as body-body, is a simple, direct, and straightforward relationship with the earth. In our case, we don't have much of a relationship with the earth. We may have some relationship with our body, but we are uncertain. We flicker back and forth between the body and something else. Different levels are going on at the same time: the undercurrent is enlightened, and the superficial aspect is confused, or samsaric.

The experience of psychosomatic body could be quite solid in terms of conceptualization and expectations. You think, "My body exists; therefore, I have to refuel it, entertain it, wash it." It may include a feeling of being. For instance, when you are meditating, you may feel your body resting on your cushion. You may feel somewhat settled, not particularly nervous or self-conscious. If you are tense, however, you may begin to perch on the ground like a bird on a branch. When there are demands being made on you, you feel less of your body and more of your tension and nervousness. Even if you feel your body sitting on the ground and relaxed, it is not actually the body per se sitting on the ground, but your psychosomatic body.

It is your psychosomatic body sitting on the ground, because somehow sitting on the ground gives you ideas. You are doing the sitting down, but at the same time you are not doing it. Your mind is shaping itself in accordance with your body, so your mind is sitting on the ground, your mind is wearing a pair of glasses, your mind is having a certain hairdo, or wearing certain clothes. It is all mental activity. From that point of view, everybody is a self-portrait. That is known as the psychosomatic body. Since that psychosomatic body exists, activity takes place according to that body.

Whatever we do in our life, we are affected by the mind. Our true body is being pressured by the speed of the mind. Consequently, although you have the possibility of sitting properly, on this very spot, in a non-[page 289]psychosomatic way, the whole situation has been brought together by that same driving force. It has been set up by that psychosomatic system. So fundamentally, the whole thing is psychosomatic. This is not regarded as a short-term sickness, but sickness in the long run, in terms of samsara.

A hang-up of some kind has brought you to sitting practice. The desire to study the teachings arises because you begin to be aware of your hangups; therefore, you would like to create a further hang-up to clear the existing hang-ups. That is the process. You never relate directly until the level at which you have flashes of the essential nature of mind. Until that point, anything you do is always by innuendo. So not only is the disease or hang-up psychosomatic, but even when you are healthy, it is psychosomatic. That is,

you are infected by psychosomatic problems already, and disease is something extra, like yeast growing on your back. Therefore, in order to relate to the experience of body directly, the practice of mindfulness of body is suggested.

In meditation practice, we are trying to include this psychosomatic, mind-imitating body; we are going along with that bodylike attitude. Sitting practice has been suggested, practiced, and proven to be the best way to work with that. In sitting practice, the basic technique is working with the breath. Your breath is your physical body from the point of view of mindfulness of body. Sensations of all kinds go along with the breath, including pain, aches, and itches, as well as pleasurable feelings. Since all that goes along with the breath, the breath is the leading point. The idea of mindfulness is simply being precise as to what you are experiencing. However, those experiences are not regarded as your actual body's experiences. At this point, you are in no position to experience your body at all—that is impossible. Your bodily experiences are just thoughts: the thought of pain, the thought of itch, and so forth.

Well-Being of Body, Speech, and Mind, pp. 298-303

The basic approach of the mindfulness of life is that what goes on with your body and your state of consciousness is worthy of respect. There is a feeling of well-being. You see further subtleties, and sense perceptions are more appreciated. Mindfulness of life is rediscovering your world. You develop reverence and respect, which is more than just an attitude; it is something you actually experience in your relationship to yourself and to the world. You are able to experience magic, majesty, beauty, and well-being not just in the meditative state, but in ordinary states as well. That experience is based on being able to see the process of contact with the phenomenal world, which is divided into preparing, proceeding, and touching.

It is important to describe the idea of well-being clearly, as there are several notions of well-being. It may mean that you are secure, and because you are secure, you can afford to relax and to extend yourself. Well-being may be based on a feeling of power, meaning that you are ready to defend yourself or conquer others. It may mean you are on top of the world, that you feel extremely healthy and physically comfortable. You have had a good meal; the clothes you are wearing are elegant; your company is exciting and amiable; everything is completely secure. In this case, well-being is similar to that which is felt by somebody who is on vacation or at a ski resort. Well-being in terms of the meditative state is unlike any of those. In the case of the second foundation of mindfulness, well-being is based on appreciating your own existence, rather than being conditioned by that or this.

There are several analogies for well-being in the scriptures. Well-being of body is like a majestically solid mountain with no mist and no rain. Wellbeing of speech is like a stringed instrument disengaged from the strings so that it no longer has any desire to communicate with the musician. Well-being of mind is like a great lake with no ripples, no waves, and no wind. Well-being is simple, majestic, and uninterrupted.

[page 299] The three types of well-being are referred to in the scriptures as *chokshak namsum*. *Chok* has the feeling of perkiness or cheerfulness. *Chok* is also a synonym for a soup ladle. A soup ladle is uniquely curved, with a definite shape and its own self-expressive perkiness, and you can hold it in your hand. *Shak* means “rest,” or “put down.” The combination, *chokshak*, is fundamental well-being, rather than conditional well-being. It is not based on comfort or entertainment. In fact, *chokshak* is not based on any conditions at all. *Namsum* means “three aspects,” so *chokshak namsum* means “three aspects of well-being.”

Chokshak is egoless and free from dualistic notions. Nevertheless, there is a personal experience of immediateness. You are not concerned with security, but at the same time, there is consciousness and there is body. Although we talk about “letting go” or the “death of ego,” that is at the philosophical level of greater vision. Obviously, in our ordinary experience, there is the world and there is you. Recognizing this does not mean that you are going against the Buddha’s teaching of egolessness. There is definitely something there, which is the working basis and magic of the path. You cannot negate the fact that you taste a good cup of coffee. You cannot say that there is no coffee and there is no “you” to taste it—there are such things! Mindfulness of life is based on that kind of immediate appreciation. The meditation practice is to learn to appreciate the immediateness of what is happening right here and now.

Sudden Flash: The Abstract Watcher, pp. 308-311

There is a way to bring your mind back, which we might call the “abstract watcher.” The abstract watcher does not have an aim or goal; it is just mind being aware of itself. In mindfulness of effort, there is a sudden flash of the watcher’s being there. At that point, you don’t think in terms of getting back to the breath or trying to get away from thoughts. You [page 309] do not need to have a concrete and logical mind that repeats to itself the purpose of sitting practice. You don’t need any of that. Instead, there is a general sense that something is happening here—and you are suddenly brought back. Without even a name or an idea why, how, or where, there is a quick glimpse or change of tone. That is the core of mindfulness of effort.

Mindfulness of effort cannot be manufactured. It comes along when there is discipline, which sets the general pattern of the sitting practice. Once you have the attitude or idea

of discipline, then there's something that reminds you: *that! that! that!* "That what?" and "What is that?" no longer apply. Just *that!* So the mindfulness of effort triggers an entirely new realm of thinking, a new state of consciousness that brings you back automatically to sitting practice. It brings you back to the mindfulness of breathing and the general awareness of well-being.

Right effort is instant effort. You could call this sudden kind of effort "leap," "jerk," or "sudden reminder." You could call it "amazement," or "sudden, abrupt amazement." It could also be referred to as "panic," or "panic without conditions." It is unconditioned panic because it comes to you and changes your whole course. The idea is not to try to maintain that sudden instant of mindfulness, to hold on to it or to cultivate it, but to get back to the meditation. Rather than nursing the reminder or entertaining the messenger, you should relate to what the messenger has to say. That sudden flash of effort, or instantaneous reminding trick, is universal to all practices of meditation, from hinayana practices up to the highest level of tantra. Therefore, effort is the most important point in the practice of meditation.

The trick of bringing your mind back does not only apply at the time of sitting meditation; it also applies to postmeditation experiences, or meditation in action. It applies to day-to-day living. In the case of eating, for instance, you don't meditate on the breathing while you are eating—you just eat. When that flash comes up, you relate with the food. In daily life, that sudden jerk happens constantly.

Mindfulness of body creates the general setting, bringing meditation into the geography of your life. Mindfulness of life is about making a personal relationship with the meditation practice. Mindfulness of effort makes both the mindfulness of body and the mindfulness of life more valid and workable. With mindfulness of effort you are clearly on the path. Effort is like the wheel of a chariot, which connects the chariot and [page 310] the road. It's like the oar in a boat, which connects the boat to the water. Effort is the connection that makes things move forward and proceed. So mindfulness of effort—the sudden reminder or sudden jerk of mindfulness—is extremely important for the practice of meditation.

The sudden jerk of effort is not about improving your meditation, but about bringing it back to the ground, sitting on a cushion and breathing. With that sudden jerk, you are meditating properly; without it, you could be sitting for five hours a day and find that you had actually gotten back to your breathing practice only fifteen minutes during the whole period. Instead, you were reading your own autobiography and doing all kinds of other things.

You cannot bring about mindfulness of effort just by hoping a flash will come to you and you will be reminded. You cannot leave it up to that flash of effort to just happen to you. You have to set up some kind of general alarm system, so to speak, or general atmosphere of effort. That atmosphere of effort is important. You need to be diligent and not have the faintest notion of looking for any form of entertainment, none whatsoever. You have to give something up. Unless you give up reservations, it will be virtually impossible to develop instantaneous effort or to have it dawn on you. So it is extremely important to have respect, appreciation, and the willingness to work hard.

You need to understand the virtue and importance of effort. Diligence is an extremely powerful thing. If you are willing to give birth to such an inspiration, or if you have that conviction already, then that spontaneous, abstract flash of effort occurs more easily. In terms of the flash, you have to develop the sense that you are completely possessed and haunted, that you can't get rid of it, rather than that you have to cultivate it—which is an entirely different approach.

In the mindfulness of effort, appreciation is said to be similar to falling in love. When you are in love with a person or care for a person, your whole attitude is open toward that person. You get a very sudden abstract flash of your lover as being *that!* *That* is what first comes into your mind. Later you might ponder it, enjoy your daydreams, or entertain yourself by thinking about that person in detail, but those are afterthoughts. The idea is that first there is this jerk. You don't have to figure out where it came from; it just happens to you. You don't have to figure out, "Because I love this person, this thought occurred to me." You don't have to say that—it is in your being. You are in the state of love, rather than being in love with [page 311] somebody. It is almost as if you were in love with yourself. There is always such a result with openness: something flashes. It is like a bubble rising in the water. In the mindfulness of effort, sudden flashes of *that* and *me* happen.

In the Buddhist tradition, the two main analogies for right effort are that of a person in a love and a hunter. A hunter hunting for animals doesn't have to think of a stag or a mountain goat or a bear or any particular animal—he is looking for *that*. As the hunter is walking, if he hears a sound and senses the subtle possibility of finding an animal to shoot, he doesn't think of which animal he is going to find—just the feeling of that comes up. Anybody in any kind of complete involvement—at the hunter's level, the lover's level, or the meditator's level—has that same kind of openness. Such openness brings about sudden flashes, an almost magical sensation of *thatness*—without name, without concept, without idea.

That openness is the most important aspect of effort—awareness happens afterward. Within openness there is an instant flash of effort, concentrated effort, and awareness

follows. Having disowned that sudden experience, awareness occurs very slowly and brings things back to level. If you are able to relate with this sudden mindfulness of effort, then you have no problem as to where you are coming from—you came from somewhere. That is what I mean by disowning the experience. You do not entertain the messenger and you do not have to find out where you came from. Instead you could be like a snowflake released from the clouds, just about to come down onto the ground. You have no choice: you are going to land on the ground in any case. It feels very real.

The Transcendental Watcher, pp. 320-322

Mindfulness of mind is based on a somewhat glorified watcher—a transcendental or divine watcher, as opposed to an ordinary watcher. The term *divine* does not mean that a foreign agent is coming to help us, but that a superordinary watcher supersedes the ordinary watcher. The ordinary watcher is simply the state of consciousness that watches what is happening within us, takes note of it, evaluates it, and tries to compare whether it is good or bad, should happen or shouldn't happen. The ordinary watcher has feelings of fear, aggression, impatience, and all kinds of things mixed up with its ordinary watching. In contrast, the transcendental watcher is simple self-consciousness. It is not clumsy self-consciousness that feels me-ness, bigheadedness, and a faint element of embarrassment. It is simply being aware and conscious of what is happening, completely and totally. The superordinary watcher is able to see what is happening while the application of awareness of breathing is taking place. Knowing intelligently what is happening is still not complete freedom from the point of view of mahayana or vajrayana; nevertheless, it is the only way to develop the potential of prajna, or discriminating-awareness wisdom.

The best way you can begin to practice this is to be aware of what you are doing. There's no other way than that. From there, you begin to develop more space. Being aware of what you are doing does not have to become heavy-handed. You can just do it. Just be aware of what you are doing. Just be there and then disown: touch and go. You don't have to utilize that experience for something spiritual or metaphysical. For example, you might see that you are washing your dish. You see it. That's it. Disown it. Don't cling to it. Just continue. Don't break your bowls and plates; do it properly. Then look at yourself doing it properly. Go ahead and see yourself rinse them and put them into the cabinet. Just look at yourself. Look! That is all the mind can accommodate at that time. If you try to add something else, you will probably lose your grip or miss a speck of dirt. We are not secularizing mindfulness by doing this; instead, we are creating sacredness out of the secular. Whatever you are doing, such as driving, using the computer, or buying postage stamps, does not have to be a religious act—but whatever you do is dignified.

Effort comes into practice at the beginning and at the end—and during, occasionally. It is not that you have to strain to hang on to your effort and push yourself. A journey back and forth is taking place, rather than effort constantly being maintained. Otherwise there is no practice, and the whole thing becomes a big deal of effort all the time. There's no experience, no meditation, just effort. You are being effortful rather than actually meditating. So in meditating, something other than effort is happening: an alternating, shifting situation is taking place.

If you are one-hundred-percent effortful, you blow the whole thing. There's nothing left but a lump of tense muscle sitting in the middle of a field. If you are kneading dough and you knead too hard, you no longer have dough in your hand, you are just pushing on the board. So in working with the dough, you have to make some compromises. Otherwise, your effort ruins the whole thing. It doesn't work.

At the beginning, pushing yourself to the practice takes effort. During the practice you occasionally check that you are still keeping up with it. You may try to make effort continuous and solid, like a pipe running through the ground, but it is not solid, it is pulsating. In the end, you decide to deliberately let go of that particular project. So effort in the [page 322] Buddhist tradition of meditation is based on an enormous trust in impermanence. Nothing is continuous, but just let it be that way. Death and birth are taking place moment to moment. Let us work with that rather than work toward eternity.

This particular technique of Buddhist meditation allows a certain amount of subconscious gossip. Such gossip is not at the level of repeating or replaying events of the past or expectations of the future; it is simply taking note of what is happening at this very moment. It is keeping track of the nowness. That much gossip seems to be necessary at this point. We cannot expect complete perfection without any thought process or thought movement at all. If we try to do so, we are inviting the further confusion of real subconscious-gossip. We are engaging in fistfights with ourselves while we are sitting. In mindfulness of mind, mind is that which knows, that which takes note of what is happening. While still being fully mindful and steady, ongoing and patient, it is keeping track of the sitting practice of meditation and the techniques that have developed.

Temporary Meditative Experiences: Five Basic Nyam, pp. 323-324

There are five basic nyam. In addition to these five, there are three further, more fundamental categories of nyam, making eight altogether. All eight of these nyam are temporary as opposed to permanent. The first five nyam are experiences of temporary

physical or psychophysical sensations, rather than more fundamental states of being, or states of mind.

BROOK ON A STEEP HILL. Within the first set of nyam, the first nyam is the speed and movement in your mind, which is like a brook on a very steep hill. The first nyam is very busy, like water rushing down from the hills with no turbulence, none whatsoever, just like a pipe running from a gravity feed.

TURBULENT RIVER. In the second nyam, your relationship with your mind is like a turbulent river in a gorge between two rocky valleys. This river has lots of rocks with waves hitting all kinds of big stones. The second nyam has an appreciation of its existence. The turbulent river hitting those rocks reemphasizes the waterness of it, whereas the rushing brook is very speedy, very fast, but also quite nonchalant.

SLOWLY FLOWING RIVER. In the third nyam your mind is like a slowly flowing river. The thought processes that go on in your mind have become familiar and easy to live with. You are familiar with what's happening with your practice, so there are no particular problems and no particular speediness. It is smooth, like a big river slowly flowing.

OCEAN WITHOUT WAVES. The fourth nyam is the experience of absolute stillness. It is an experience of meditative absorption, which is like an ocean without waves.

[page 324] **CANDLE UNDISTURBED BY THE WIND.** The fifth nyam is somewhat extra. It is a reconfirmation of the accomplishment of the fourth. That is, the fifth nyam confirms that what you have experienced as stillness is real stillness, like a burning candle undisturbed by wind.

If you look at these experiences from the ordinary point of view, you might think the fourth nyam is nicest, the third is nice, and the others are undesirable. But in actual fact, they are all temporary experiences, so all of them are the same. They are just experiences that occur in your state of mind, rather than one state of mind being higher or more spiritual than another. So there are no differences, none whatsoever, absolutely not! They are all just temporary experiences.

Temporary Meditative Experiences: Three Fundamental Nyam, pp. 324-326

The second set of nyam is more fundamental, in a sense. These three nyam denote the progress you are making, although the experiences themselves are by no means permanent. You are still not arriving at, or achieving, a permanent state of realization. These temporary experiences are the landmarks, somewhat, of one's growth, one's spiritual path, and one's meditation. However, it is very tricky if you try to re-create

them. They are temporary, so you can't hang on to them. That would be like seeing a signpost on the highway saying "New York City," and thinking you had gotten to New York City already, getting out of the car and settling down at the bottom of the signpost.

BLISS OR JOY. The first of the three fundamental nyam is bliss, or joy. In Tibetan it is dewa. You are completely refreshed, like after a long day of skiing when you have had a hot bath, a good dinner and good wine, and you are settling down to bed. It is completely refreshing, and there is a feeling of absolute well-being. Physically, tingling sensations and pulsations may happen in the body. Psychologically, there are little twinkling flashes of light and joy, and feelings of being good, extremely cheerful, and highly inspired. In everyday life, you might feel that you can do anything you want, and do it beautifully. Whatever work you are doing, whatever handicraft you are doing, all of it is inspired.

In comparison, in the second foundation of mindfulness, mindfulness of life, the quality of well-being is not all that dramatic. It is just a sensation of being, of having a body and some kind of ground. You experience [page 325] a much more solid sense of well-being and security based on the inspiration of the teachings.

In the first fundamental nyam, the experience of bliss is romantic and flimsy. It has a flowing quality. The only solidity would be if you were self-perpetuating it and you began to feel that it was ongoing. In sitting practice, your experience is a tremendously pleasant one of radiating love and kindness to everyone. It feels extraordinarily rewarding to sit and practice, and you feel that you are worthy to be here. The first fundamental nyam includes all those extraordinarily good and absolutely splendid feelings. However, the experience of bliss could be an obstacle if you regard it as permanent. If you feel that everything comes along very easily, thoroughly, and smoothly, there is no room for effort. It is like moving from the mountains to an apartment, where everything is automatic and easy. It begins to make you very impatient and soft. Therefore, you have to come back to the fourth foundation of mindfulness practice, the mindfulness of mind.

LUMINOSITY. The second fundamental nyam is luminosity. The Tibetan term selwa means "luminosity," "brilliant light," or "clarity." However, luminosity does not mean that you literally see a brilliant light; it means that you are able to work with a tremendous amount of energy. You are able to create a link between your body and mind, a link between the psyche and your physical existence. It is as if you were the mechanism to run the universe. You create the link between that and this. You feel very able, extraordinarily able, in the sense that you could order the universe. It is not as abstract and joyful as the first fundamental nyam, but it is more industrious. It is pragmatic in that you are able to handle anything that comes along, without disjuncting the

experience. You are able to make things workable. There is tremendous confidence and light, a farseeing quality, panoramic vision.

NONTHOUGHT. The third fundamental nyam is called mitokpa, which means “nonthinking,” or “without thought.” This does not refer to a complete state of being without thoughts, but rather to a quality of stillness. There is a quality of solidity and stillness that does not want to move. Any experience that occurs in your state of mind is very still and solid. Nothing happens.

This nyam could bring tremendous depression. You may feel that you are almost going backward, that you are stuck somewhere, with nothing [page 326] happening. Everything is getting very monotonous and repetitious. It is difficult to summon energy. Even a suggestion of moving outward is too tiring to think about. You just want to stay in one spot. You may feel drowsy and faintly aggressive. At the same time, this nyam could lead to a state without thoughts. As you sit, everything is so smooth and ordinary. In this case, you are not excited or depressed. There are no thoughts, no irritations. When the end of meditation occurs, you find it very easy to stop. You are not getting into a trancelike state of meditative absorption, but there is a quality of stillness and solidity.

Like the first five basic nyam, these three fundamental nyam are also temporary experiences. They can be perceived as temporary by mindfulness of mind, that self-conscious awareness. The idea is not to dispel these experiences nor to cultivate them, but just to acknowledge them: “This is happening. This is happening. This is happening.” You do not have to try to pigeonhole or categorize. Instead, whenever any extraordinary experience occurs, you could relate with it simply as a temporary experience, or nyam. That seems to be the point.

Excerpts on Progress in Shamatha
From *Mindfulness in Action* by Chögyam Trungpa
Compiled, arranged, and edited by Carolyn Rose Gimian

Life Force, Excerpt pp. 80-82

Sometimes, the truth of life makes us indignant. We feel that we deserve more happiness, less hassle, or whatever it is that we want. So we complain about our life. But in the midst of that complaining process, we find that we are suddenly quite connected to reality, quite sane. In the midst of enormous bundles of insanity, there's a sudden realization of sanity. We have to face facts, simply and precisely. That is what we're talking about in terms of the mindfulness of life. It is the experience of being alive, which can happen in the midst of irritation or chaos.

When there is more chaos, we have a tendency to check back with ourselves, to be sure we're coping okay with the chaos. The process of checking back or checking in with ourselves connects us with immediate reality. It's good to do this: Just check in, without any purpose. The checking in is a kind of jerk. When you check in and evaluate the whole thing, the situation may seem extremely messy. You may find some leaks in your pipes. But just check in. Just look, look, look, constantly.

This checking-in process is part of the practice of meditation. When you meditate, you may find a lot of chaos in your thoughts and feelings, as well as conflict, uncertainty, and a feeling of being a fool. At the same time, you begin to hear sounds more clearly, you begin to see more clearly, and you begin to feel your body more distinctly. When you check in with this process, you realize that there is a feeling of being very alive in the midst of all this chaotic activity. You also begin to recognize that this feeling of being so alive is connected with being sane, being fully there. If you check in again and again, then slowly, slowly, you connect with sanity. Sanity in this case is being in contact with reality at its fullest, as much as possible. It is being fully mindful, to begin with, and beyond that, there might be a greater experience of freedom.

Feeling your life force is an experience of being. It brings your mind into focus, into one-pointedness. You may wonder if it's really this simple, or you may feel that you've learned a new trick. In fact, it is the first trick and the last trick at the same time. It runs throughout the practice of meditation, from top to bottom, beginning to end.

When you meditate, you actually are meditating even when you think you're not. You have no choice, in fact. In your mind, you may be miles away from your meditation cushion, but you're still sitting there. There is still communication between your body

and your mind. It might seem like a schizophrenic level of communication to be aware of both the irritations of your body and your distant thoughts. However, you are having a real experience of life, a real experience of reality, whether you like it or not. There is some magic, if you'd like to put it that way, some force of life that takes place. It doesn't matter whether you have an enormous pornographic show going on in your mind or whether you are having a delicious mental meal miles from the meditation hall. In actual fact, you are still sitting on your meditation cushion or in your chair. If you check in with yourself, you'll realize this.

When you have a lot of mental distraction, it is very helpful and necessary to relate with the breath. The awareness of your breathing accentuates that you are sitting on the cushion. Breathing is also a powerful symbol of being alive. If you stop breathing, you are dead, so experiencing breath is experiencing life, constantly. When you mentally lose track of where you are, that's precisely the point where you need the discipline of following your breath. Then, as you begin to notice that you are breathing, it brings you back to the aches and pains in your body. You are actually alive and struggling.

There is a connection to your life, some sanity that truly takes place when you meditate. Sitting on a cushion or in a chair and practicing meditation is more than a token gesture. It is an expression of commitment, an expression of truth, honesty, and genuineness. That commitment is the basic aliveness in our practice. There is so much speed in our society. We have so many things to do. We jump back and forth from one thing to another. The practice of meditation teaches you to slow down and appreciate your life. Appreciate your partner's cooking. Appreciate your kids. Appreciate your job. Appreciate the weather. Experience everything in its own way.

When you drink hot tea, it burns your lips and your tongue. That's reality. There's a good lesson: how to drink tea. Everything in life is literal, direct, and personal—and very demanding. But that demand seems to be necessary. Your commitment is to be present. You're going to experience life as it is, rather than your expectations from the past or your desires for the future. You're going to relate with life in the fullest sense.

Touching the Surface of Mind, pp. 91-96

[page 91] Another foundation of mindfulness practice is being mindful of the mind itself. This is not as mysterious as it may at first sound. Mind reflects our thoughts, feelings, sensations, and emotions, which is its experiential or experience-based aspect. Gaps, or glimpses of clarity without any particular content, also appear in our minds. I refer to these as the intuitive aspect of the mind. These glimpses are just part of our basic makeup, rather than being particularly insightful.

We experience both aspects of mind—the experience-based aspect and the intuitive glimpses—in the practice of meditation. It may be somewhat challenging to sort out how to relate to these two qualities in our practice. We may wonder whether we should focus on the experiential or the intuitive aspects of our minds. Should we pay attention to the mental and emotional upsurges or to the momentary clarity without content? This can be a source of restlessness in the practice of meditation. We are unable to decide which of these to rest with.

[page 92] In the sitting practice of meditation, thoughts and emotions come in the form of memories, habitual thought patterns, fantasies, and expectations for the future. This experiential aspect of our minds is quite provocative and entertaining, and it is an easy source of preoccupation. The intuitive aspect, or the clarity, is refreshing and provides relief from the torrent of thoughts and emotions. The emotional reference points in our minds change from one topic to another, and they also alternate with this sense of relief. We experience the gears shifting from one mood to another. Occasional clarity occurs between one mood or fantasy and the next.

We ask ourselves whether we should pull back from those preoccupations and try to be a good boy or girl, clean and pure. However, sometimes our boredom suggests to us that we might enjoy these little entertainments. If we can involve ourselves in fantasies of this and that in our practice, it almost provides a break from the tension of sitting. Sometimes we feel hypnotized by our memories, and we find that we can kill time this way. Three minutes go by, five minutes go by, or maybe even ten minutes go by. When we indulge in this way, we feel both some satisfaction and a sense of guilt at the same time.

Is there a conflict between the emotional and mental content and the occasional gap? Which should we focus on? When you experience mental confusion and emotional cloudiness, you might hesitate to come back to the awareness of the breath. You might like to remain there exploring, finding out about the emotional cloudiness. In fact, you can relate to both of these situations: the empty clarity and the emotional and mental content. In working with the mindfulness of mind, you don't need to choose one or the other.

The intensity of our conflicting emotions is a workable situation, and it is also a source of developing our mindfulness. Without some juicy material to work on, as we discussed in the previous chapter, there's no journey. The practice of meditation consists of working mindfully with those conflicting thoughts [page 93] and emotions as well as with the occasional gaps that may create a feeling of relief. Without those two, there is actually no meditation. I think people often have the wrong concept of meditation,

thinking that once you become a professional meditator, you won't have to think a single thought. The only activity will just be to b-r-e-a-t-h-e. But that could be quite zombie-like, quite horrific. You utilize the conflicting emotions; you don't cut them off. You may cut through the hard core of ego. But the emotions are just the tentacles, which could be pickled!

So the technique of mindfulness of mind is to be with whatever happens. The movement of breath, the experience of the body, and the fickleness of thoughts all take place simultaneously. Obviously, you don't stop breathing when you think. Mindfulness here is a larger notion of covering all the areas of breathing and the thought patterns.

Concentration usually implies that we have one focus rather than splitting our awareness between more than one object at a time. But in this case, at the level of mindfulness of mind, our concentration or overall awareness can develop a more panoramic quality. It's a beam of light that expands or widens when it reflects off an object. With our light beam of mindfulness, we touch the highlights of the emotions and the thoughts, we touch the highlights of the breath, and both are seen simultaneously by the mindfulness of mind. You may hear sounds; you may see visions and sights of all kinds; you may have thought patterns of all kinds. All of those are connected by a binding factor, which is the mind. Therefore, whenever there is mind, there are possibilities of being aware of whatever is happening, rather than reducing the focus of our concentration to one level alone. Overall, this is what we mean by mindfulness [page 94] of mind, where the cognitive mind is actually functioning in its utter precision.

Awareness of the glimpses of clarity in the mind is also direct and simple. When mind is preoccupied with an emotional theme that involves you personally, you are very taken up with those preoccupations that arise. In contrast to those thoughts there are gaps, which don't make a big deal about *you*. The gap is just a change or a shift. It's like transferring the weight from your right leg to your left leg. When that transfer is taking place, there's a gap where the weight isn't exactly on either foot. It is not particularly mystical. It is just a shift, a change of emphasis. That gap in our meditation is also touched by the presence of awareness.

The totality of the mindfulness of mind is like sunlight simultaneously reflecting on both the mountain peaks and the valleys. Such awareness isn't regarded as a big deal, as such. You don't constantly refer back and tell yourself, "I'm being *aware* now." "Now, I'm being *fully* mindful." Nevertheless, a quality of being there takes place, which goes along with a quality of what could be called "touching." One touches the thoughts. One touches the emotions. One touches the gaps. An even distribution of mindfulness takes place, in that whatever one is touching, there is also the simultaneous experience of touching the other aspect, or the other shore.

You are gently touching everything throughout your state of mind. It's like stroking a kitty-cat. As your fingers move down the cat's back, you feel the individuality of each hair, but you also feel the continuity, the totality of the hair. This approach involves sharpness, precision, and simultaneous awareness of many different individual components. It's like looking at your toothbrush. You don't have the actual, literal, gross awareness of each bristle on the toothbrush. Yet you see all of those bristles, all of the toothbrush, completely, at once. Your mindfulness is direct and literal, but at the same time it is panoramic.

There is total awareness without being selective. You might [page 95] find this idea of mindfulness rather perplexing, and you might ask what being mindful really means in this context. Are we still talking about being fully committed to the very moment? In the practice of the mindfulness of mind, if you try to be selective and find *the* famous experience of mindfulness, as you look harder and harder, you begin to lose the sense of mindfulness altogether. There seems to be no such thing as real mindfulness at all. The whole thing becomes illusory. You find yourself peeling away the layers of the onion. You think you are being mindful, but you are *watching* yourself being mindful. Then you're watching yourself watching yourself being mindful. And then you're watching yourself doing all that. There's a constant, constant, constant reflection back and forth, and finally you get completely bewildered. At that point you may have to give up the idea of developing or cultivating "true" mindfulness as such. You just accept what goes on and make the best of it, so to speak. In this way, you leave the world undisturbed, rather than trying to disentangle everything too efficiently.

This approach, from one point of view, is not at all demanding. It's a light touch rather than hard work. From another point of view it is *extremely* demanding. If you put all of your effort and energy into something, it occupies your mind, which makes you feel better. However, if your mindfulness practice is touching and experiencing everything without being heavy-handed, you feel suspended in the middle of nowhere. It seems very dubious. You may feel that there is more to go, more to develop in your practice. You may feel that you've only done something in a halfhearted way rather than being fully engaged. But you are there, constantly, at the same time, without any aggression.

If we push ourselves to the level of enormous concentration, if we try to push ourselves painfully and exert ourselves more than is necessary, it becomes aggressive rather than meditative. Meditation practice, however, is regarded as the action of nonaggression, which is a light touch.

[page 96] Nonaggression is quite different from an absence of conflict. When you look from the meditative or mindful point of view, you see how even conflict can contain

nonaggression. You might discover how the rugged desert of conflicts in your life could be quite still, quite peaceful. Cactuses are sticking up with thorns growing out of them, but those seeming threats are very earthy.

It's difficult to explain this logically. However, it's possible that the ups and downs we experience can in themselves become the evenness or equanimity of our experience. They can actually be a symbol of peace. The textures of conflict are not gentle, smooth, nor particularly soft. But *how* the challenges exist and how they present themselves is more important than the texture. Seeing in this way is precisely the meaning of mindfulness. You learn to look from an existential point of view—allowing things to exist—rather than trying to even them out or bulldoze the whole landscape. With this view, fighting or resistance isn't necessary.

It is possible to glide through the different landscapes of mind without becoming distracted or wooly-minded, because there is an actual experience of each moment. You develop enormous appreciation of the little things that happen in everyday life. Life becomes humorous and workable. Sound, sight, feelings, and experience altogether become *real*. Then, you never tire of looking at the same rock sitting outside your door. Each time you see it, it's refreshing.

If you paid less attention to what is happening, you might become dreamy. Things might become vague. In this case, however, there is actual contact, actual touch. You are touching the surface of mind very gently. At the beginning, it doesn't seem like a particularly heavy dose of mindfulness. However, in the long run, as you go on, this light touch makes a big impression on your mind.