**Mindfulness of Body Postures with Full Awareness**

The Satipatthana Sutta (sah-tee-pah-tah-nah soo-tah) is one of the most important discourses within Buddhism. The discourse, often translated as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, begins with *kayanupassana* (kah-yah-noo-pah-sah-nah), *mindfulness of the body*. *Kaya* is translated as *body* and does describe different aspect of embodied experience. Nupassana relates being mindful of the embodied experience as a foundational practice for Awakening.

Kaya also can be understood to describe as an aggregate, such as a body of water—a lake is not just the water in it, but also includes any animals, plants or sediment found in the lakebed. With the Buddhist principle of anatta (ah-nah-tah) in mind, kaya here represents an accumulation of body parts, along with actions.

Anatta is translated as non-self, meaning that the body can’t be just considered as an entire unit, but rather as an aggregate of various parts assembled and functioning in a particular way. A simile in the ancient teachings compares the body to a chariot, composed of many parts. If you take away the yoke, is it still a chariot? What if you take off the wheels? At one point is it not possible to readily identify the various disassembled parts as a chariot?

Kayanupassana represents investigation of embodied experience—the physicality of lived experience—combined with the way the mind makes meaning out of sensational awareness, thereby creating a self. There are different categorical descriptives of bodily experience that provide targets for contemplation: breath sensations, postural awareness, awareness of movements, contemplations of body parts, and witnessing the decaying of a dead human body. The last two categories are not particularly relevant in today’s culture, but the first three remain useful. Mindfulness of breathing is not the focus of this talk, which will instead focus on cultivating mindful awareness of how the limbs of the body are arranged, along with becoming more consciously intentional regarding routine daily movements.

Here is the entire section from the sutta that invites contemplation of the body other than breath sensations, translated by Thanissaro:

"Furthermore, when walking, the monk discerns, 'I am walking.' When standing, he discerns, 'I am standing.' When sitting, he discerns, 'I am sitting.' When lying down, he discerns, 'I am lying down.' Or however his body is disposed, that is how he discerns it.

"In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or focused externally... unsustained by anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself.

"Furthermore, when going forward & returning, he makes himself fully alert; when looking toward & looking away... when bending & extending his limbs... when carrying his outer cloak, his upper robe & his bowl... when eating, drinking, chewing, & savoring... when urinating & defecating... when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, & remaining silent, he makes himself fully alert.

"In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or focused externally... unsustained by anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself.

"Furthermore...just as if a sack with openings at both ends were full of various kinds of grain — wheat, rice, mung beans, kidney beans, sesame seeds, husked rice — and a man with good eyesight, pouring it out, were to reflect, 'This is wheat. This is rice. These are mung beans. These are kidney beans. These are sesame seeds. This is husked rice,' in the same way, monks, a monk reflects on this very body from the soles of the feet on up, from the crown of the head on down, surrounded by skin and full of various kinds of unclean things: 'In this body there are head hairs, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, gorge, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, skin-oil, saliva, mucus, fluid in the joints, urine.'

"In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or focused externally... unsustained by anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself.

"Furthermore...just as a skilled butcher or his apprentice, having killed a cow, would sit at a crossroads cutting it up into pieces, the monk contemplates this very body — however it stands, however it is disposed — in terms of properties: 'In this body there is the earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, & the wind property.'

"In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or focused externally... unsustained by anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself.

"Furthermore, as if he were to see a corpse cast away in a charnel ground — one day, two days, three days dead — bloated, livid, & festering, he applies it to this very body, 'This body, too: Such is its nature, such is its future, such its unavoidable fate'...

"Or again, as if he were to see a corpse cast away in a charnel ground, picked at by crows, vultures, & hawks, by dogs, hyenas, & various other creatures... a skeleton smeared with flesh & blood, connected with tendons... a fleshless skeleton smeared with blood, connected with tendons... a skeleton without flesh or blood, connected with tendons... bones detached from their tendons, scattered in all directions — here a hand bone, there a foot bone, here a shin bone, there a thigh bone, here a hip bone, there a back bone, here a rib, there a breast bone, here a shoulder bone, there a neck bone, here a jaw bone, there a tooth, here a skull... the bones whitened, somewhat like the color of shells... piled up, more than a year old... decomposed into a powder: He applies it to this very body, 'This body, too: Such is its nature, such is its future, such its unavoidable fate.'

"In this way he remains focused internally on the body in & of itself, or externally on the body in & of itself, or both internally & externally on the body in & of itself. Or he remains focused on the phenomenon of origination with regard to the body, on the phenomenon of passing away with regard to the body, or on the phenomenon of origination & passing away with regard to the body. Or his mindfulness that 'There is a body' is maintained to the extent of knowledge & remembrance. And he remains independent, unsustained by (not clinging to) anything in the world. This is how a monk remains focused on the body in & of itself.

In addition to reviewing posture and movement, a review of a commentary called “the four clear comprehensions” is provided. A repeated phrase in the Satipatthana Sutta is “atapi sati sampajanna” (ah-tah-pee sah-tee sahm-pah-jahn-yah), translated as “diligent mindful clear comprehension”. Cultivating this quality of ongoing attention is a primary goal of mindfulness practice. When we move through the day, our focus of attention is often dominated by thoughts and impulsive emotional reactions, with little insight regarding the interactions between the thoughts and embodied, sensational reactions. The suggestions in the discourse instruct us to investigate the actual sensations associated with walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, the way we are dressed, the various burdens we might be carrying, or the various activities that arise during daily life events, which provides opportunities to investigate the integrated body/mind processes, to understand the conditional ways the mind interprets the phenomena.

An integral part of mindfulness training involves the cultivation of intentional, investigative awareness, which, in Pali, is termed vitakka (vee-tah-kah) and vicara (vee-chah-rah). *Vitakka* involves *intentionally directing attention to a mental object*—this could be awareness of the feeling of pressure at the sole of a foot while standing, or to the stream of thoughts transiting through awareness. *Vicara* is *the maintenance of the applied attention* in a way sufficient to understand how the experience of selfing occurs. A simile would be intentionally pressing your thumb against a surface—vitakka—and then discerning the texture of the material—vicara.

Contemplating one’s posture intentionally—walking, standing, sitting, reclining—also provides a way to “unify” attention with mindfulness of breathing. A common Buddhist meditation practice is mindful walking, which involves intentionally being aware of standing posture, the initiation of lifting the foot, moving it forward, then placing the foot down, noticing the feeling of pressure as weight shifts onto the foot. This practice is done slowly, practicing vitakka/vicara with every movement, not only of the body, but also of attention—from body sensations to sounds, to thoughts, moods, etc. This practice provides a way to expand and integrate insightful awareness developed while practicing formal mindfulness of breathing meditation out into the world.

This intentional awareness is also applied to one’s daily activities—“when eating, drinking, chewing, and savoring…” When on retreat, I remind myself and others that our task is to be mindful from the moment of waking up until the moment of going to sleep—to integrate the intentional awareness cultivated during formal mindfulness of breathing meditation sessions with everything else we do. This is the ultimate practice for Awakening.

**The Four Clear Comprehensions**

As mentioned above, an important concept in Buddhism that is closely associated with the practices noted above is *sampajanna* (sahm-pah-jahn-yah), translated as *clear comprehension* or *clearly knowing*. Here is a quote about this topic from Wikipedia, referring to various interpreters:

***Sampajanna*** has been variously translated into English as "continuity", "clear comprehension”, “clear knowing", "constant thorough understanding of impermanence", "fully alert" or "full awareness”, “attention, consideration, discrimination, comprehension, circumspection", and "introspection".

There are four aspects of sampajanna, found in the commentaries on the Satipatthana Sutta: *Purpose, Suitability, Domain*, and *Non-Delusion*. The following descriptions follow two tracks—one is the traditional description of how to apply the aspects, and the other is a more contemporary, universally applicable application of the aspects.

**Purpose**

1. Traditionally, this orients a renunciate’s choices in regard to daily routines—alms rounds, chanting, studying, the precepts, etc. The goal is to maintain a diligent and insightful investigation of the transient nature of subjective experience and to “deconstruct” the belief that there is an autonomous self.
2. Contemporaneously, this could be useful for orienting a householder towards effective planning, what is called “goal-mapping”, on a daily basis or considering more long-term goals. Of course, this will be related to practicality and ethical considerations, related to the fourth aspect, non-delusion. For example, if I want to set my schedule for that day, I would consider whether to go shopping, where to go, and what to buy. Within this plan, my ethical concerns about the products ecological impact, my expenses, and so on. The ultimate goal for a lay practitioner is to create a purposeful life that maximizes the potential for Awakening while still maintaining one’s livelihood.

**Suitability**

1. Traditionally, the renunciate’s movements towards purposeful activity would include whether the choices involved would be appropriate regarding the precepts, and whether the choices provide ample opportunities for effective contemplative training.
2. Contemporaneously, this aspect would involve the ways and means developed in relation to the decided goal. It would be important to consider which routes to take while shopping, considering traffic, mileage, and other behavioral considerations. Would it be more effective to use cash or a credit card? These considerations would also keep in mind realizing ethical standards, necessary to further the process of Awakening.

**Domain**

1. Traditionally, the domain involves being mindful regarding the purpose and suitability associated with one’s circumstances and behaviors. For example, if a renunciate is on an alms round, being mindful of such things as eye contact with someone of the other sex or managing to maneuver through a crowd virtuously, avoiding unwholesome temptations and actions.
2. Contemporaneously, the domain also requires mindfulness regarding being alert to other drivers’ behaviors, the alternative cost and quality of an item being considered. Being mindful towards the moods and behaviors of others in your vicinity while shopping is also important. It is also beneficial to be able to monitor changing circumstances and be able to alter plans effectively with minimal stress, and this also requires introspective mindfulness.

**Non-Delusion**

1. Traditionally, this involves developing the ability to persistently orient one’s thoughts and actions towards realizing the three characteristics: *anicca* (ah-nee-chah), *the transient nature of subjective experience*, *dukkha* (doo-kah), *the distress and confusion that results from craving and clinging*, and *anatta* (ah-nah-tah), *the absence of an enduring/autonomous self*.
2. Contemporaneously, this can involve being aware of how our consumer culture is designed to condition us in ways that can be harmful to ourselves, those around us, and the environment, and be able to make better choices that move us toward Awakening. Of course, this still involves ongoing insights regarding anicca, dukkha, and anatta.