**OVERVIEW OF THE ANAPANASATI SUTTA**

I just completed an online course focusing on the book “Mindfulness of Breathing”, by Analayo, organized by the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies. I want to use this talk to provide an overview of the Anapanasati Sutta, which is translated as “The Mindfulness of Breathing Discourse”. I regard this sutta and the Satipatthana Sutta, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness Discourse, as the key teachings of Theravada Buddhism.

I will go through each tetrad and comment about my understanding of the material, using the translation created by Analayo for the book. The sutta is divided into four tetrads, each having four steps, so there are 16 steps for the teaching. My comments reflect my understanding of the teaching and may or may not be in agreement with other commentaries. The first tetrad:

Breathing in long, one understands: ‘I breathe in long’; breathing out long, one understands: ; I breathe out long.’ Breathing in short, one understands: ‘I breath in short’; breathing out short, one understands: ‘I breathe out short.’ One trains: ‘Experiencing the whole body I shall breathe in’; one trains: ‘Experiencing the whole body I shall breathe out.’ One trains: ‘calming bodily activity I shall breathe in’; one trains: ‘calming bodily activity I shall breathe out.’

At the beginning of each sitting practice, I intentionally focus attention at the beginning of the in-breath and sustain this attention for the duration of the in-breath and repeating this process for the out-breath. establishing the persistent intention to diligently repeat the procedure, noting when attention wanders and re-establishing breath awareness. My attention is focused on sensations noticeable in the nose and the flesh of the upper lip, making sure that my tongue is not touching the roof of my mouth.

For me, “experiencing the whole body” involves investigating sensations occurring with the breath while moving attention through the body systematically, I’ve been following this practice diligently for many years, and can cultivate what I call unified breath/body awareness. This persistent investigation of the embodied experience while meditating basically sets aside and disregards the hindrances, creating the experience of “calming bodily activity”. This creates a flow of neutral sensational experience during which I can sit comfortably for extended periods of time.

This leads to the second tetrad:

One trains: ‘experiencing joy I shall breathe in’; one trains: ‘experiencing joy I shall breathe out.’ One trains: ‘experiencing happiness I shall breathe in’; one trains: ‘experiencing happiness I shall breathe out.’ One trains: ‘Experiencing mental activity I shall breathe in’; ‘experiencing mental activity I shall breathe out.’ One trains: ‘calming mental activity I shall breathe in’; one trains: ‘calming mental activity I shall breathe out.’

Because my attention is not captured by the hindrances, the experience of joy can occur. This joy and happiness can have different characteristics, depending upon whether one proceeds into highly concentrated states of mind called jhana, or instead focuses on developing insight into the way the mind fabricates the misperception that there is an enduring/autonomous self. My practice does not attempt to develop jhana, but instead settles attention further into the whole breath/body experience, and this calms mental activity. Any intrusion of thoughts is minimal, and often faint and fleeting when thoughts occur. This is “calming mental activity”.

The third tetrad has these steps:

One trains: ‘experiencing the mind I shall breathe in’; one trains: ‘experiencing the mind I shall breathe out.’ One trains: ‘gladdening the mind I shall breathe in’; one trains: ‘gladdening the mind I shall breathe out.’ One trains: ‘concentrating the mind I shall breathe in’; one trains: ‘concentrating the mind I shall breathe out.’ One trains: ‘liberating the mind I shall breathe in’; one trains: ‘liberating the mind I shall breathe out.’

The focus of practice for me during these steps is the intersection between unified/concentrated attention and breath/body awareness, which is often experienced as a subtle vibratory field. With the diminishing effect of internal commentary, the flow of attention is less disrupted, and what is called “gladdening the mind” occurs, which, in my experience, is a quiet satisfaction and curiosity regarding what might occur in awareness in a non-reactive way. Liberating the mind is the net effect of this process in terms of increasing tranquility and stability of attention; this is not rigid or controlled, but rather an ongoing opening/non-resistance to the flow of experience. While meditating during the second and third tetrad, the pattern of breathing changes, the sensations becomes more subtle, and I experience long periods without breathing between the end of the out-breath and the beginning of the in-breath.

The fourth tetrad operates through the lens of open-minded, non-attached curiosity that is cultivated in the third tetrad:

One trains: ‘contemplating impermanence I shall breathe in’; one trains: ‘contemplating impermanence I shall breathe out.’ One trains: ‘contemplating dispassion I shall breathe in’; one trains: contemplating dispassion I shall breathe out.’ One trains: ‘contemplating cessation I shall breathe in’; one trains: ‘contemplating cessation I shall breathe out.’ One trains: ‘contemplating letting go I shall breathe in’; one trains: contemplating letting go I shall breathe out.’

At this stage of practice, I am more interested in the opening/non-resistance “letting go” intentions than investigating impermanence. I hope to devote more contemplations regarding how quickly attention can shift from moment to moment; unification and stability of attention at this stage is not frozen, but is rather fluid, and subtle changes in the mind’s manifestation can be investigated, which opens up curiosity about the fraction of a second that each moment of experience endures. Dispassion for me is associated with the fading away of interest in any flow of consciousness other than opening/non-resistance in the mind. As I mentioned previously while describing previous characteristics of the 16 steps, the breath pattern becomes softer, with long pauses between the end of the out-breath and the beginning of the in-breath. I consider this to be the realm of cessation (of the out-breath) and letting go (opening/non-resistance). Gladdening keeps me interested in the process—a persistent non-reactive curiosity about what might happen next, the cooperative unification of the seven awakening factors.

The fourth tetrad then focuses on how the development of the full potential of the seven awakening factors can be fulfilled. They are Mindfulness, Investigation of Mental Phenomena, Energy, Joy, Tranquility, Concentration, and Equipoise. The following quote only describes the first of the seven awakening factors:

One dwells contemplating, diligent, clearly comprehending, and mindful, free from desire and discontent with regard to the world. At that time mindfulness is established continuously. At a time when mindfulness is established in one continuously, at that time the awakening factor of mindfulness is aroused in one, at that time the awakening factor of mindfulness comes to be accomplished in one by cultivation.

This wording is repeated for each of the other awakening factors, except the last one, focused on the awakening factor of Equipoise:

One carefully oversees, without interfering, the mind that has become concentrated in this way. At a time when one carefully oversees, without interfering, the mind that has become concentrated in this way, at that time the awakening factor of equipoise is aroused in one, at that time one cultivates the awakening factor of equipoise, at that time the awakening factor of equipoise comes to be accomplished in one by cultivation.

The cultivation of the seven awakening factors is the intended benefit of the Anapanasati Sutta.

The term “diligent, clearly comprehending, and mindful, free from desire and discontent with regard to the world.” Is repeated throughout the Satipatthana Sutta, and provides guidance for nurturing the skill of self-observation. The word for diligence in Pali is *atapi* (ah-tah-pee) and can also be translated as ardency. This, I believe, is associated with gladdening--engaged interest in what the awakening factors can realize regarding liberation.

“Clearly comprehending” in Pali is *sampajanna* (sahm-pah-jahn-yah), and is associated with Right Understanding and Right Intention, within the Wisdom aggregate of the Noble Eightfold Path. Right Understanding involves increasing awareness of how quickly the mind creates the subjective self as well as the impersonality of one’s personal history in the process of self-creation. This realization, through the power of dispassion, liberation, and cessation to see through the illusion of an autonomous, enduring self. Right Intention involves the cultivation of letting go, “free from desire and discontent with regard to the world.”, first of the hindrances, next of resistance to letting go, and ultimately the experience of the unconditioned, Nirvana.

The word for mindful is *sati* (sah-tee) in Pali and provides the maximum benefit of a process of “selfing-awareness”. It is “non-forgetful” regarding the task of monitoring the cooperation of the seven awakening factors, along with the self-regulatory effects of the awakening factors of investigation of mental phenomena and energy (As the effort to sustain an already arisen wholesome mind-state).

I regard the first three awakening factors, Mindfulness, Investigation of Mental Phenomena and Energy, as the mind conditioning factors that nurture the awakening factors of Joy, Tranquility, and Concentration/Unification.

The remaining awakening factor is equipoise, *upekkha* (ooh-peh-kah) in Pali, and is traditionally translated as equanimity. I prefer another term, *tatramajhattata* (tah-trah-mah-jah-tah-tah), which can be translated as *that which can be found in the middle*. I believe this is the reference to “At a time when one carefully oversees, without interfering, the mind that has become concentrated in this way, at that time the awakening factor of equipoise is aroused in one”. This represents the best functioning of mindfulness, investigation of mental phenomena, and energy, as they persistently monitor and balance the other awakening factors—not too energized or too relaxed, not too fixated or too scattered in their functioning.

**THE AWAKENING THEMES**

The following quote summarizes the beneficial effects that come from realizing the fully liberating potential of seven awakening factors:

One develops the mindfulness awakening factor in dependence on seclusion, in dependence on dispassion, and in dependence on cessation, culminating in letting go.

One develops the investigation-of-dharmas awakening factor *in dependence on seclusion, in dependence on dispassion, and in dependence on cessations, culminating in letting go*.

One develops the energy awakening factor *in dependence on seclusion, in dependence on dispassion, and in dependence on cessations, culminating in letting go.*

One develops the joy awakening factor *in dependence on seclusion, in dependence on dispassion, and in dependence on cessations, culminating in letting go.*

One develops the tranquility awakening factor *in dependence on seclusion, in dependence on dispassion, and in dependence on cessations, culminating in letting go.*

one develops the concentration awakening factor *in dependence on seclusion, in dependence on dispassion, and in dependence on cessations, culminating in letting go.*

one develops the equipoise awakening factor in dependence on seclusion, in dependence on dispassion, and in dependence on cessations, culminating in letting go*.*

*Seclusion* means both a quiet place to practice, but also a flow of consciousness unaffected by the hindrances or internal narrative. *Dispassion* is the ability to be aware of what the mind creates in a nonreactive way. *Cessation* involves a clear understanding of impermanence and impersonality in how the mind operates in ways that are liberating. *Letting go* operates on two levels: First, renouncing any distractions, and secondly the level of relinquishing any belief in an enduring, autonomous self. The fulfilled potential for awakening is brought to maturity through the inter dependence of the factors.

Here is a brief description of the characteristics of the factors:

Mindfulness is present moment awareness—it functions without distraction, cooperating with Investigation-of-Dharmas.

Investigation-of-dharmas is a highly developed introspective, nonreactive awareness.

Energy is the unhindered flow of effort to maintain the integrated capabilities of the factors.

Joy has the characteristic of internal curiosity and buoyancy, enthusiastic, interested, and engaged.

Tranquility is calmness—attention is not rigid or fixed, but smooth and lacking turbulence.

Concentration is stability of attention—the integrated and harmoniously activation of the seven awakening factors

Equanimity/Equipoise provides balance—not too excited or too dull, not too fixated or too lax.