

Day Two Notes for Reflection

Effective Observation (Samma Sati)

The Four Aspects of Conditioned Existence

The Buddha points out four broad categorizations for one to contemplate and observe. This powerful and simple way of Effective Observation of the Reality of our situation in relation to the Body, Feeling, Mindset, and Phenomena provides one the ability to take a pause between the reception of stimuli and what one responds with, which would then habitually be rooted in Effective Choice.

Body (Kaya)

The body is comprised of trillions of cells, trillions of microorganisms and micro biomes. It is a composite of various chemicals, atomic structures and neurons and nerves and other elements that various physicians of various concentrations can pinpoint that are always changing according to a situation in any given microsecond.

The body is dependent upon and affected by countless external and internal factors that are always in flux to be in some form of balance, but in all of that where is there a sense of self? Is there a self that controls which genes are passed down and which are activated? Is there a self that controls when white blood cells move into action when an infection invades the body? Or are these dependent on causes and conditions? Is the self found in the skin cells one sheds or in the bacteria that make up the digestive micro biome?

Reflect on how the body can function without a need for a homunculus, a singular unchanging and controlling self. A condition arises and the body changes. Did such a self decide when the body had hit puberty or did it decide when it would stop growing? Did it decide the body's metabolism or the inherited genetic conditions the body faces? Or were these dependent upon various circumstances, external stimuli, input, actions and reactions - in short, upon causes and conditions?

When the body moves, observe how that movement occurs through a series of processes starting in the mind and through the neurons that fire. Is the self found in any aspect of these processes? Was the intention to move itself caused by a self or was there a self in that intention? If it was and the self is considered permanent then why does it change with every movement and every changing intention behind that movement if such was the case? In walking, in lying down, in sitting, in standing, in eating, in any biological process that arises, try to pinpoint a self. Is it there or are these dependent upon a series of conditions and causes?

Go as deep as you intend to, with different levels of the body, starting at the skin and organs, all the way down to the electrons and quarks making up the body.

Everything is a composite of smaller parts and even those smaller parts are made up of even smaller parts and so on.

Feeling (Vedana)

Feeling is dependent upon contact. All that is dependent arises and passes away. Feeling that arises does so dependent upon neuronal, hormonal, and genetic causes and conditions. Simply put, in using the example of the eye, light hits the photoreceptors and a signal in the form of neurons firing creates an image in the brain. Likewise for each of the five physical senses. The thoughts that arise are a result of various external and internal stimuli that then cause neurons to fire and through which a thought arises.

Reflect first on the physical Feeling. In daily activities and daily meditation, when this Feeling arises, observe it. Does the Feeling arise with a sense of self or do we superimpose that sense of self upon it seemingly before or after the fact?

Does the painful Feeling arise because we perceive it as such right after and because it is conditioned by our past experiences, memory and associations?

Likewise, when a pleasant Feeling arises, is the Feeling itself inherently pleasant or do we project onto it our personal perceptions based on past experiences, memory and associations?

And when a purely neutral Feeling arises, do we still attach some sense of control or sense of self upon that Feeling? If so, observe if that sense of self arises before the Feeling or after the fact? Or is it in the Feeling itself? If the sense of self arises based around the Feeling then it would mean such a self ceases with the passing away of that Feeling. In other words, such a self would not be a singular, independent and permanent self.

Pay Attention to each Feeling and observe how the Perception that labels that Feeling immediately arises. Why was it that particular Perception? What is it based on? Observe Feeling as an outsider looking in, like a scientist looking through a microscope. Remain as impersonal as possible and purely observe without attaching the need to personalize the Feeling.

When thoughts arise, observe and see how such thoughts arose. Did they arise dependent on and affected by other sensory stimuli? Were they brought on by another thought? Thoughts arise and pass away in the same way as all Feeling does. If it were not so and one were to say thoughts were self, then the thoughts that do arise would never pass away. The very fact that one's mind is observant of multiple thoughts in just one moment shows the fleeting nature of thoughts in general. How then could one attach a sense of permanent, independent self to thoughts, which are impermanent, in flux, always arising and passing away, affected by and dependent on other factors?

Mindset and Mood (Citta)

A Mindset is a collection of similar thoughts, concepts, and beliefs that come in and out of one's life. It may last a few seconds or it may last lifetimes. Nevertheless it too is impermanent. Since Mindsets are made up of various thoughts of one kind, they are dependent on those thoughts for their existence.

When these thoughts pass away, so does the Mindset. Moods are similar in the way of emotions. They are a collective of similar emotions, which are thoughts heavily taken to be personal and affecting and being affected by other physical stimuli within the body. For example, when the body is tired, mind can become restless. Or when the body is tense and too active, it may produce anxiety in the mind. By observing and letting go the unwholesome causes rooted in the state of the body, it also produces a beneficial effect on the mind. Conversely, when one lets go of the unwholesome causes rooted in the mind, it also produces a beneficial effect on the body.

Upon waking up in the day, are you aware of what the first thought was that arose in the mind? What kind of emotional coloring did it resonate and how did that thought then culminate into a Mindset and Mood? Moreover, did that Mindset and Mood change as stimuli affected it in a way to either become pleasant or unpleasant or neutral?

During meditation, was the Mindset one of peace and tranquility? Was the Mood consisting of joy and equanimity? Or was the Mindset hazy and in unease? Was the preceding Mood filled with Craving and resistance?

While listening to a Dhamma talk, is the Mood relaxed or tensed? Is the Mindset open or closed? While attending to bodily needs, is the Mindset observant and clear or distracted, allowing for changing Moods? When reading, is the Mindset loose and liberated or is it rigid and stressed? Is the Mood one of clarity or is it one of confusion?

In general, was one's Mindset and Mood filled with Craving, aversion, or taken to be personal? Were they seen as being collected or distracted, rooted in form or in the formless realms during sitting meditation, limited and closed or limitless and spacious, tranquil or restless, experiencing release in jhana or beyond or still as of yet unreleased of Craving, Conceit and Ignorance?

Observe how Mindsets and Moods change. See how the very nature of change in Mindset and Mood denotes their inability to be taken as self. They arise and they pass away. To observe them is to see that the very observing denotes separateness between Mindset/Mood and the "observer." In that sense, even the observed body, Feeling and Phenomena in general cannot be taken to be self.

The observer too is not self, because the observer is dependent on its object of observation. It changes dependent on the change in object and observation.

Phenomena (Dhamma)

All is Phenomena. What we perceive and the Perception itself is Phenomena. The hindrances are Phenomena. The six senses, their receptors and their stimuli, are Phenomena. The Five Aggregates are Phenomena. The Seven Factors of Awakening are Phenomena. The Four Noble Truths are Phenomena.

Observing when these Phenomena arise in mind, dominate the mind, cease, and are no longer present in mind, provides one clarity into the realities of impermanence, unsatisfactory nature of these Phenomena, and of no inherent, permanent, independent self attached to them.

In every moment, see if any of the hindrances of sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness, or uncertainty are present or not present in mind. Use the 6Rs if they are, whether during a sitting meditation, walking meditation, yoga, or if they are present in the mind in general. Remember to see if mind craves in the form of taking the hindrance personal, delighting in it, avoiding it, or fighting it. If so, come back to the 6Rs practice.

The Five Aggregates constitute the ways in which all Phenomena is experienced, through Contact in Form, which results in Feeling, which then result in Perception, which then influence Formations, and which give rise to the next Consciousness, which ties up in Form and Feeling and thus the cycle goes on. Notice this cycle and the awareness of each of these and if there is Craving rooted to any of them, or if mind takes any of them personally as a self. If you begin to identify with any of these aggregates, 6R and come back to your object of meditation.

Observe the six senses. Watch and be aware of any Craving, resistance, or sense of ownership and control that might arise, and that might be present or not present, when any of the stimuli make contact with the receptors. The same for thought. Is the thought superimposed with Craving or sense of self or is void of it, being observed impersonally and without involvement? For example, when the nose makes contact with the aroma of good food, does that make the mind relish in that aroma? When one enters the shower and turns on the hot water on a cold day or cool water on a muggy day, does the mind immediately take relief in that through the body? Is there a sense of self in that relishing and relief? Start to see the impersonal process in the senses and that they are not tied to a self.

Understand by paying Attention and seeing if the Seven Factors are present. Observe what levels of each factor are present and if one factor is too much or too little in terms of degree, whether there is too much joy, or too much tranquility, or whether there is not enough equanimity.

Observe that when the Factors are present, one is in a jhana, whether sitting in meditation, walking, or practicing yoga or eating. The degree to which the factors are present denotes the level of jhana.

The Four Noble Truths are to be understood, analyzed, penetrated, and experienced through insight and wisdom. Observe if mind comprehends them intellectually, is able to analyze them through discussion and study, penetrate them in Effective Collectedness, and experience them in Effective Release. In short, one is to see if mind comprehends Suffering, abandons Craving, realizes its Cessation and fulfills the Eightfold Path.

The Five Precepts and the Five Hindrances

There is an invariable connection between following or not following of the Five Precepts and the arising or non-arising of the Five Hindrances. The origin of the Five Hindrances is not following the Five Precepts and the cessation of the Five Hindrances is keeping the Five Precepts. In short, there is an inverse relationship between the Five Precepts and the Five Hindrances.

When one intentionally harms (with speech, action or thought) or kills another living being, one cultivates the hindrance of Ill Will. This is because one acts from Ill Will whenever there is an intention to harm.

When one intentionally takes what is not given, one cultivates the hindrance of Restlessness. This is because one has developed a view through such action that causes the mind to always be in a state of paranoia – as one takes from others in a way that is unwholesome by essentially having the intention to take away what is not given freely (time, resources, credit, attention, needs, etc.), this only deepens the hold of conceit. Through this conceit, there is the subtlest fear and worry that one’s own “possessions” or on a broader level what one may consider to be a need from the sense of conceit (both tangible and intangible, physical, mental and emotional) will be taken away in the same way.

When one indulges in sensual (and particularly sexual) pleasures to the point of heedlessness and misconduct, one cultivates the hindrance of Sensual Desire. This is because one has indulged the senses to the point that one identifies in their pleasure and becomes prone to misconduct, to acting in a way that causes harm to another being and to oneself.

When one uses false speech, one cultivates the hindrance of Doubt. This is because if one develops an attitude of tricking others with false speech, one continues to create a view to doubt others of their trustworthiness. This translates to doubt in one’s own capabilities and capacities, both in daily living and in meditation.

When one uses intoxicants, one cultivates the hindrance of Sloth and Torpor. This is because if one indulges in alcohol, drugs, or overindulges even in the use of social media, phones, the Internet, and even coffee or tea in general, which create surges of various neurotransmitters, including dopamine and serotonin, one loses one's ability to stay balanced. This makes one seek happiness outside of themselves and become dependent on these things to make them happy. Even if there is indulgence in a stimulant, which may produce energy in the short-term and in fact cause restlessness immediately after its use, the long-term effect is dullness of mind. The overuse and dependence on anything that creates imbalances in one's thoughts thus dulls the mind and dampens its abilities to cultivate wholesome qualities.

The Seven Factors of Awakening

The Seven Factors of Awakening are present when the Five Hindrances are not present. They arise in different degrees, depending on the nature of the Mindset.

In a mind that observes and remembers to 6R and come back to object of meditation, **Observation (Mindfulness)** is present.

When such Observation is developed further, **Investigation** arises.

This continuance of Investigation of the state of one's mind provides one the capacity and information required to use **Effective Application (Energy)** to bring mind to a wholesome state if necessary.

When this happens, **Joy** arises.

When Joy arises, it remains and then fades into **Relaxation (Tranquility)**.

This provides one with a mind free of distractions, and thus there is **Collectedness**.

This grows into **Equanimity** to understand Reality as it is, without Craving, resistance or superimposition of self.

As one deepens one's practice, one begins to be more aware of which factor is present, which is too active, and which is not enough in terms of presence. Then, one starts to balance each of the factors into alignment in small amounts until it clicks and Awakening occurs. This is done through intending the factors required and keeping them present with Attention rooted in Reality until mind returns to a balance between laziness and restlessness

Open, flowing Attention rooted in Reality (*Yoniso Manasikara*) fuels each of the Seven Factors of Awakening and has Release as its fruition. Unsteady Attention or not paying Attention at all (*Ayoniso Manasikara*) makes one distracted and when one is distracted, it fuels the hindrances.

When sensual craving, ill will, and restlessness are present in the mind, the factors of Collectedness, Equanimity and Relaxation are to be brought up through intention and maintained through Attention rooted in Reality. When sloth, torpor and uncertainty are present in the mind, the factors of Investigation, Effective Application, and Joy are to be brought up through intention and maintained through Attention rooted in Reality. In both cases, Observation is necessary for the bringing up of the other factors.

The Factors and the 6Rs

When one RECOGNIZES that one is distracted, one has brought up the factors of Observation and Investigation.

When one RELEASES that Attention from distraction, one has brought up the factor of Effective Application.

When one RELAXES tension and Craving, one has brought up the factor of Tranquility (Relaxation).

When one SMILES (or RE-SMILES), one has brought up the factor of Joy.

When one RETURNS to one's object of meditation, one has brought up the factor of Collectedness.

When one REPEATS the process of the 6Rs, one is not resisting, delighting, or taking the hindrance personal. One understands that there is a hindrance and remains unaffected upon observing and thus has brought up the factor of Equanimity.