

Mindfulness Meditation on the Body and Extensions of Sensation

A technique which can be used for mindfulness meditation is scanning the body and the extensions of sensation (*āyatana*). This method has been taught in a variety of styles, the usual purpose of which is to help the practitioner broaden their knowledge of the range of sense-objects where mindfulness meditation can be applied. It is intended to be used as a training method only and not as a substitute to the primary meditation practice of ‘mindfulness on in and out breathing’ (*ānāpānasati*), because the overall development of contemplative ‘mindfulness’ is intended to broaden naturally, resting in calm abiding with the breath. Thusly, as a *tool for practice*, it is simply used as an aid to strengthen the habit of directing mindfulness to experience the range of phenomena which can be missed if one is struggling to stay with the object of ‘mindfulness on in and out breathing’, or with interruptions of discursive thought. It is through development of this ‘habit of mindfulness’ that both the object of the breath becomes easeful, and discursive thought falls away.

Further, this technique instructs the practitioner on how contemplative knowledge of feelings and senses of the mind and body develop, without the interruption of discriminating impulses and discursive thought. In this way, awareness is brought to ‘fall upon’ whatever sense-phenomena are present, naturally within breath meditation. Whatever mental-impressions arise with the senses, are also assimilated by awareness as contemplative knowledge.

To do the full schedule of scanning-meditation listed below you will need to set aside at least 30 minutes. This technique is not intended to be used rigidly or as a primary practice, and as such can be adapted to one’s preferences to use any part of the schedule for the entire meditation session if one likes.

As with ordinary meditation sessions, choose a sitting posture that is comfortable. This can be cross-legged; right foot resting on the left thigh, left foot resting on the right thigh (or other ‘lotus’ style postures), using a comfortable cushion. Or if cross-legged postures are uncomfortable, you can use a straight-backed chair with your feet flat on the floor at shoulder width.

1. Begin by sitting in a comfortable position with the back straight and the head tilted slightly down. Let your eyes be either gently closed or just slightly open; enough to be aware of some light yet unfocused from your surroundings.

2. Breathing in and out only through the nose, take a few full breaths, with your awareness focused on a starting point at the nose and an ending point where the breath is full at the abdomen. Focus your awareness on the feeling of the breath at the nose, wherever feeling of the breath is noticeable there, and the movement of the breath from the nose to the point where it becomes full at the abdomen, and then following it back out as you exhale. Do this for several full breaths. This will help to focus awareness on the breath and how it feels in the body.

3. Now bring your attention to the sensation of in and out breathing at the nose, at the point where the sensation of the breath going in and out is most distinct. Be aware of how the breath feels; long or short, fast or slow.

Scanning of the Body

4. From awareness of respiration at the nose, allow your awareness to shift to a point at the center of the forehead about the size of a small coin. And for a few breath-cycles, simply notice whatever sensations of feeling are present. Pay close attention to how these are felt; whether they tingle, itch or pulsate, or if there is no perceptible sensation present at all. Simply allow your awareness to be present with this area.

5. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the top of the head. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

6. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the back of the head. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

7. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the top of the spine, at the base of the neck. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

8. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the center of the spine, at the middle of the back. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

9. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the bottom of the spine, at the base of the back. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

10. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the left kneecap. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

11. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the center of the arch of the left foot. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

12. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the center of the arch of the right foot. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

13. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the right kneecap. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

14. From this point, allow your awareness to shift again to the bottom of the spine, at the base of the back. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

15. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the center of the spine, at the middle of the back. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

16. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the top of the spine, at the base of the neck. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

17. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the top of the left shoulder. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

18. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the left elbow. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

19. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the center of the left palm. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

20. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the center of the right palm. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

21. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the right elbow. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

22. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the top of the right shoulder. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

23. From this point, allow your awareness to shift back to the top of the spine at the base of the neck. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

24. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the back of the head. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

25. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the top of the head. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

26. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the center of the forehead. And likewise notice whatever sensations of feeling are present.

27. From this point, allow your awareness to shift back to the sensation of in and out breathing at the nose. Breathe comfortably for a few breath-cycles.

Scanning of the Extensions of Sensations

28. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the eyes and the sensation of sight. And for a few breath-cycles, simply notice whatever sensations of sight are perceptible at the eyes. Even with the eyes closed in meditation there is often some sensation of either ambient light through the eyelids, or some internal flickering of light. Or if there is no perceptible sensation at all; simply allow your awareness to be present with this area.

29. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the ears and the sensation of sounds. And for a few breath-cycles, simply notice whatever sensations of sounds are perceptible at the ears. As sounds are heard, rather than following these with ideation of meaning or preference, simply be aware of *how* sounds are heard at the ears. How are the sounds formed and how do they fade away. Or if there is no perceptible sensation at all, as when

in a very quiet room, there may be a faint ringing. In this way simply allow your awareness to be present with this area.

30. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the nose and the sensation of smell. And for a few breath-cycles, simply notice whatever sensations of smell are perceptible at the nose. Or if there is no perceptible sensation at all; simply allow your awareness to be present with this area.

31. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the tongue and the sensation of taste. And for a few breath-cycles, simply notice whatever sensations of taste are perceptible at the tongue. Or if there is no perceptible sensation at all; simply allow your awareness to be present with this area.

32. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the body and the sensation of contact at the body. And for a few breath-cycles, simply notice whatever sensations of contact are perceptible at the body. Whether these are the sensations of clothing on the skin, or the touch of air, or if there is only a quiet sense of contact; simply allow your awareness to be present with this area.

33. From this point, allow your awareness to shift to the mind and the phenomena of mental processes. And for a few breath-cycles, simply notice whatever sensations of moods are present. Are these pleasant or not, or is there tightness or tension from residual feelings of the day? If thinking or imagination connected with perceptions of other sensations are present, or the scenarios of mental projections; rather than following these, simply allow your awareness to assimilate how these phenomena are sensed. Notice how imagination and thinking are supported by a *sense* of internal seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling; how these construct and how these fade away.

And now, allow your awareness to shift back to the sensation of in and out breathing. And for a few breath-cycles allow the mind and body to relax. Allow your awareness to simply be present with whatever sensations and phenomena are rising and falling. And at a point when you are ready, easefully transition to the ending of your meditation session. Notice the intending-mind and the intention to open the eyes. Allow the mind and body to transition slowly, keeping mindfulness present with ordinary activities of the day.

Mindfulness Meditation, is a method of awareness training applied to contemplation of physical and mental states ‘with intense endeavor, attentiveness and mindfulness’, as the Buddha tells us in the *satipaṭṭhāna* refrain. This training progresses to a natural examination of these phenomena unobstructed by habitual and preferential tendencies. This produces an active knowledge of the conditions which make up sentient awareness – *as it is*. And it is this knowledge which forms wisdom and insight into the causes of all of the dissatisfaction, angst and mental distresses of living. As the practitioner trains awareness to investigate even the most subtle sensate experiences, knowledge and wisdom of how the mind interprets these develops to the most rarified levels of one’s being.

As it has been stated already, the meditation technique of scanning sensations of body and mind is a training tool to give the practitioner a way to open their awareness to the range of possibilities of sensate phenomena as they may occur in contemplative effort. But as with all training methods, it is to give-way to the natural progression of insight for the individual engaged in mind-development as a whole; just as learning to drive may be based on training and instructions which are intended to give-way to the open road.

[Prepared by Khantijayo Bhikkhu – 2004]