

**THE DISCOURSE ON
MINDFULNESS DIRECTED TO THE BODY**
Kāyagatāsati¹ Sutta

Middle Length Discourse #119
Translated by Gil Fronsdal

This is what I heard:

Once the Blessed One was staying in Anathapindika's park in the Jeta Forest in Sāvatti. After returning from their alms-round and after the meal, a large number of monks were sitting together in the assembly hall. Talking, this occurred to them,

“Friends, how wonderful! Friends, how marvelous that the Blessed One – who knows, who sees, who is worthy and fully Awakened – has said, ‘When developed and made much of, mindfulness directed to the body is of great fruit, of great advantage.’”

But the discussion of these monks was left unfinished.

In the evening the Blessed One arose from seclusion, went up to the assembly hall and sat down on a designated seat. Having sat, he said to the monks, “Monks, what are you discussing sitting here? What discussion was left unfinished?”

“Here, venerable sir, after returning from our alms-rounds and after the meal, we sat together in the assembly hall. Talking, this occurred to us,

‘Friends, how wonderful! Friends, how marvelous that the Blessed One – who knows, who sees, who is worthy and fully Awakened – has said, ‘When developed and made much of, mindfulness directed to the body is of great fruit, of great advantage.’’

This is the conversation that was left unfinished when the Blessed One appeared.”

“And how, monks, is mindfulness directed to the body developed and made much of so as to bring great fruit, great advantage?”

(Mindfulness of Breathing)

“And how does a monk abide focused on the body in itself?”

“Having gone to the wilderness, a foot of a tree, or an empty building, a monk sits down with legs crossed and body erect. Establishing² mindfulness to the forefront,³ always attentive, he breathes in with mindfulness and breathes out with mindfulness.

¹ *Kāya* (body), *gata* (arrived at, directed to, connected with, concerning), *sati* (mindfulness).

² *Upaṭṭhāpetvā* (established, applied).

“**Breathing in long** he knows⁴ ‘I am breathing in long.’

Breathing out long he knows ‘I am breathing out long.’

Breathing in short he knows ‘I am breathing in short.’

Breathing out short he knows ‘I am breathing out short.’

He trains himself ‘**breathing in, I experience the whole body;**
‘**breathing out, I experience the whole body.**’

He trains himself, ‘**breathing in, I calm the bodily formation;**
‘**breathing out, I calm the bodily formation.**’

“By staying vigilant, ardent and resolute he gives up recollections and intentions dependent on household life. Having given them up his mind becomes composed, settled, one-pointed⁵ and concentrated. This, monks, is how a monk develops mindfulness directed to the body.

(Postures)

“In addition, monks,

when **walking** a monk knows, ‘I am walking;’

when **standing**, he knows, ‘I am standing;’

when **sitting**, he knows, ‘I am sitting;’

when **lying down**, he knows, ‘I am lying down;’

Or in **whatever way his body is disposed**, that he knows.

“By staying vigilant, ardent and resolute he gives up recollections and intentions dependent on household life. Having given them up his mind becomes composed, settled,

³ *Parimukham* literally means around (*pari*) the mouth or face (*mukham*). In the *Vinaya* (Culavagga 5.27.4) it refers to a monk’s chest. In this regard it could mean “to the front” or “to the front of the body.” In Sanskrit it can also mean around or about any person (Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit English Dictionary* p. 599). With this meaning it could perhaps be translated “around himself.”

⁴ *Pajānāti* (“knows”) is the most frequently used verb in this discourse, used well over 100 times. It is a compound of the verb *jānāti* (to know) and the intensifying prefix *pa*. [Could “clearly know” be appropriate?]

⁵ *Ekodhi*

one-pointed and concentrated. This, monks, is how a monk develops mindfulness directed to the body.

(Comprehension (in activity))

“In addition, monks,

when **going forward and coming back** he acts with comprehension⁶;

when **looking toward or looking away** he acts with comprehension;

when **bending or stretching** his limbs he acts with comprehension;

when **holding his outer robe, upper robe, and bowl**, he acts with comprehension;

when **eating, drinking, chewing, and tasting** he acts with comprehension;

when **urinating and defecating** he acts with comprehension;

when **walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and remaining silent** he acts with comprehension.

“By staying vigilant, ardent and resolute he gives up recollections and intentions dependent on household life. Having given them up his mind becomes composed, settled, one-pointed and concentrated. This, monks, is how a monk develops mindfulness directed to the body.

[Attention⁷ to the repulsive]

“In addition, monks, a monk reviews this very body upward from the soles of the feet and downward from the hair of the head, covered with skin and full of various kinds of unclean things:

‘In this body there are the **crown of the head, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, contents of the stomach, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, skin-oil, saliva, mucus, joint fluid, and urine**’.⁸

⁶ Sampajāna (*sam* (with) + *pajāna* (know)).

⁷ *Manisikara*

⁸ In the *Path of Purification* Buddhaghosa adds the brain to make up the meditation practice on the 32 parts of the body.

“Just as if a man with good eyesight were to look into a sack with an opening at each end filled with various kinds of seeds such as fine rice, paddy rice, mung beans, garbanzo beans, sesame seeds, and husked rice, he would [recognize], ‘this is fine rice, this is paddy rice, these are mung beans, these are garbanzo seeds, these are sesame seeds,’ so a monk reviews this very body upward from the soles of the feet and downward from the hair of the head, covered with skin and full of various kinds of unclean things:

‘In this body there are the crown of the head, body hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, tendons, bones, bone marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, contents of the stomach, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, skin-oil, saliva, mucus, joint fluid, and urine’.

“By staying vigilant, ardent and resolute he gives up recollections and intentions dependent on household life. Having given them up his mind becomes composed, settled, one-pointed and concentrated. This, monks, is how a monk develops mindfulness directed to the body.

[Attention to the elements]

“In addition, monks, a monk reflecting⁹ on this body, however it stands and however it is disposed, in terms of the elements:

‘In this body there is **the earth element, the water-element, the fire-element, and the air-element.**”¹⁰

“Just as a butcher, or a butcher’s apprentice, having slaughtered a cow and having sat down at a crossroad, would cut it up in pieces, so, monks, a monk looks into this body, however it stands and however it is disposed, in terms of the elements:

‘In this body there is the earth element, the water-element, the fire-element, and the air-element.”

“By staying vigilant, ardent and resolute he gives up recollections and intentions dependent on household life. Having given them up his mind becomes composed, settled, one-pointed and concentrated. This, monks, is how a monk develops mindfulness directed to the body.

⁹ *Paccavekkhati* from *paṭi* (toward) and *avekkhati* (to look, to consider, to see).

¹⁰ The Four Elements are usually defined, respectively, as the sensations of solidity, cohesion, heat, and movement. A detailed explanation of each is found in MN 140.14-17.

[Nine Charnel-ground (reflections)]

(1)“In addition, monks, just as if a monk were to see **a corpse cast away in a charnel-ground, dead for one day, two days or three days – swollen, blue, and festering – so he considers his own body, ‘This body too has a nature like this, will become like this, will not avoid this.’**”

“By staying vigilant, ardent and resolute he gives up recollections and intentions dependent on household life. Having given them up his mind becomes composed, settled, one-pointed and concentrated. This, monks, is how a monk develops mindfulness directed to the body.

(2)“In addition, monks, just as if a monk were to see **a corpse cast away in a charnel-ground, chewed by crows, vultures or hawks, dogs, leopards, tigers, jackals or various kinds of worms, so he considers his own body, ‘This body too has a nature like this, will become like this, will not avoid this.’**”

...

(3) In addition, monks, just as if a monk were to see **a corpse cast away in a charnel-ground, [reduced to] a skeleton with some flesh and blood, held together by tendons, so he considers his own body, ‘This body too has a nature like this, will become like this, will not avoid this.’**”

...

(4) In addition, monks, just as if a monk were to see **a corpse cast away in a charnel-ground, [reduced to] a skeleton with blood but no flesh, held together by tendons, so he considers his own body, ‘This body too has a nature like this, will become like this, will not avoid this.’**”

...

(5) In addition, monks, just as if a monk were to see **a corpse cast away in a charnel-ground, [reduced to] a skeleton without flesh or blood, held together by tendons, so he considers his own body, ‘This body too has a nature like this, will become like this, will not avoid this.’**”

...

(6) In addition, monks, just as if a monk were to see **a corpse cast away in a charnel-ground, [reduced to] bones not held by tendons, scattered in all directions, here a hand bone, there a foot bone, here a shin bone, there a thigh bone, here a pelvis, there a spine, here a jaw bone, there a tooth, here a skull, so he considers his own body, ‘This body too has a nature like this, will become like this, will not avoid this.’**”

...

(7) In addition, monks, just as if a monk were to see **a corpse cast away in a charnel-ground, [reduced to] whitened, shell-colored bones, so he considers his own body, ‘This body too has a nature like this, will become like this, will not avoid this.’**

...

(8) In addition, monks, just as if a monk were to see **a corpse cast away in a charnel-ground, [reduced] year-old bones heaped up, so he considers his own body, ‘This body too has a nature like this, will become like this, will not avoid this.’**

...

(9) In addition, monks, just as if a monk were to see **a corpse cast away in a charnel-ground, [reduced] to rotted bones crumbling to dust, so he considers his own body, ‘This body too has a nature like this, will become like this, will not avoid this.’**

“By staying vigilant, ardent and resolute he gives up recollections and intentions dependent on household life. Having given them up his mind becomes composed, settled, one-pointed and concentrated. This, monks, is how a monk develops mindfulness directed to the body.

(The First *Jhana*)

“Furthermore, monks, **secluded from sensual desire and unskillful states, a monk enters and abides in the first *jhana* which is [characterized by] joy and happiness born of seclusion, and accompanied with *thought-and-examination*.¹¹ He fills, pervades, saturates and permeates this body with the joy and happiness born of seclusion so that no part of his entire body is not touched with it.**

Monks, it is just as if an able bath attendant or a bath attendant’s apprentice had poured bath powder in a metal dish and having sprinkled it with water was to knead it. Moistened, thoroughly moistened inside and out, this bath ball would be saturated with moisture without any oozing out.

Monks, in the same way a monk fills, pervades, saturates, and permeates this body with the joy and happiness born of seclusion so no part of his entire body is not touched. By staying vigilant, ardent and resolute he gives up recollections and intentions

¹¹ *Vitakka-vicāra*. It is common to translate these terms into English by using their derived meanings rather than their literal meaning. *Vitakka* literally means ‘thinking’ and *vicāra* literally means to investigate, examine, consider (which is how non-Buddhist yogic traditions understand the term). In the suttas, *vicāra* is rarely used alone, occurring mostly in together with *vitakka*. An ongoing controversy exists about how to understand these two words when they are referring to jhanic factors. Some understand the words as referring to a particular kind of thinking used in focusing on the object of meditation. Others understand the words as describing the silent or thought-free “initial application of attention” and the “sustained application of attention” on the object of meditation. I have chosen the literal translation without intending to choose sides in the controversy. This means that, as in the original language, derived meanings will have to be explained through commentary rather than through non-literal translation choices.

dependent on household life. Having given them up his mind becomes composed, settled, one-pointed and concentrated. This, monks, is how a monk develops mindfulness directed to the body.

(The Second *Jhana*)

Furthermore, monks, with **the stilling of thought-and-examination, the monk enters and abides in the second *jhana* which is [characterized by] joy and happiness born of composure,¹² and is accompanied with serene purity¹³ and unification of mind, and is without thought-and-examination. He fills, pervades, saturates, and permeates this body with the joy and happiness born of composure so that no part of his entire body is not touched.**

Monks, it is just like a lake that has water welling up from its depths [but] which has no water sources from the east, south, west or north and where the skies did not occasionally shower rain. The cool, up-welling body of water would fill, pervade, saturate, and permeate the lake with cool water so no part of the entire lake would not be touched with cool water.

Monks, in this way a monk fills, pervades, saturates, and permeates this body with the joy and happiness born of composure so that no part of the entire body is not touched with it. By staying vigilant, ardent and resolute he gives up recollections and intentions dependent on household life. Having given them up his mind becomes composed, settled, one-pointed and concentrated. This, monks, is how a monk develops mindfulness directed to the body.

(The Third *Jhana*)

Furthermore monks, **with the fading of joy a monk dwells in equanimity, is mindful and comprehending, and experiences pleasure¹⁴ with the body. He enters and abides in the third *jhana* of which the Noble Ones declare, “Equanimous and mindful he abides in pleasure.” He fills, pervades, saturates, and permeates this body with pleasure freed of joy so that no part of his entire body is not touched.**

“Monks, it is just like a pool of blue lotuses, or a pool of red lotuses, or a pool of white lotuses where some of the blue, red, or white lotuses would be born in the water, would grow in the water, would be nourished by the water without [ever] rising out of the water. The cool water would fill, pervade, saturate and permeate them from their tips to their roots so no part of the blue, red or white lotuses would not be touched with cool water.

¹² *Samadhi*, usually translated as ‘concentration.’

¹³ *Sampasādanam*

¹⁴ *Sukha*, in many contexts this is translated as ‘happiness.’ As a feeling tone it was earlier translated as ‘pleasant.’ Since the *sukha* here is physical, ‘pleasure’ is being used here instead of happiness. However, ‘pleasure’ doesn’t convey adequately how sublime or deeply satisfying the *sukha* is in the third *jhana*.

Monks, like this also a monk fills, pervades, saturates and permeates this body with happiness freed of joy so no part of his entire body is not touched. By staying vigilant, ardent and resolute he gives up recollections and intentions dependent on household life. Having given them up his mind becomes composed, settled, one-pointed and concentrated. This, monks, is how a monk develops mindfulness directed to the body.

(The Fourth *Jhana*)

Furthermore monks, **with giving up pleasure and pain¹⁵, and with the previous vanishing of happiness and unhappiness,¹⁶ a monk enters and abides in the purity of mindfulness and equanimity of the fourth *jhana* which has no pleasure or pain. Sitting, he suffuses this body with the purity of a pure mind so that no part of his entire body is not touched by the purity of a pure mind.**

Monks, it is just like a person sitting covered all over with a clean cloth so that no part of the body is not touched by the clean cloth.

Monks, like this also, a monk sitting suffuses this body with a pure, clear mind so that no part of his entire body is not touched by the purity of a pure mind. By staying vigilant, ardent and resolute he gives up recollections and intentions dependent on household life. Having given them up his mind becomes composed, settled, one-pointed and concentrated. This, monks, is how a monk develops mindfulness directed to the body.

(Similes)

Monks, whoever develops and makes much of mindfulness directed to the body includes therein the skillful qualities connected to knowledge.¹⁷ Monks, it is just like whoever spreads his mind over the great ocean includes therein the creeks which flow into the ocean. Like this also, monks, whoever develops and makes much of mindfulness directed to the body includes therein the skillful qualities which partake of knowledge.

Monks, Māra gains entry, Māra gains a footing in whoever does not develop and make much of mindfulness directed to the body. Monks, suppose a person were to hurl a **heavy round stone into a pile of wet clay**. What do you think, monks? Would that heavy round stone gain entry into that pile of wet clay?"

“So it would, venerable sir.”

“Like this also, monks, Māra gains entry, Māra gains a footing in whoever does not develop and make much of mindfulness directed to the body.

¹⁵ *Sukha* and *dukkha*.

¹⁶ *Somanassa* and *domanassa*

¹⁷ *Vijjābhāgiyā*. *Vijjā* (knowledge) + *bhāgiyā* (connected with, conducive to).

“Suppose there was a **dry sapless piece of wood** and a person came along and, taking an upper fire stick, thought ‘I will make fire, I will produce heat.’ What do you think, monks? Would it be possible for that person to make fire and produce heat by rubbing a dry sapless piece of wood with the upper fire stick?”

“So it would, venerable sir.”

“Like this also, monks, Māra gains entry, Māra gains a footing in whoever does not develop and make much of mindfulness directed to the body.

“Suppose there was a **totally empty water pot placed on a stand** and a person came carrying a supply of water. What do you think, monks? Would it be possible for that person to pour in that water?”

“So, it would, venerable sir.”

“Like this also, monks, Māra gains entry, Māra gains a footing in whoever does not develop and make a footing of mindfulness directed to the body.

“Monks, Māra cannot gain entry, cannot gain a footing in whoever develops and makes much of mindfulness directed to the body.

“Suppose a person were to hurl a **light ball of string against a secured door** made entirely of heartwood. What do you think, monks? Would that like ball of string gain entry through that secured door made entirely of heartwood?”

“No, venerable sir.”

“Like this also, monks, Māra gains no entry, Māra gains no footing in whoever develops and make much of mindfulness directed to the body.

“Suppose there was a **moist sappy piece of wood** and a person came, and taking an upper fire stick, thought, ‘I will make fire. I will produce heat.’ What do you think, monks? Would it be possible for that person to make fire and produce heat by rubbing the wet sappy piece of wood with an upper fire stick?”

“No, venerable sir.”

“Like this also, monks, Māra gains no entry, Māra gains no footing in whoever develops and makes much of mindfulness directed to the body.

“Monks, suppose that placed on a stand was a **water pot full to the brim** with water so that a crow could sip from it. And suppose that a person came along carrying a supply of water. What do you think, monks?” Would it be possible for that person to pour water into [the water pot]?”

“No, venerable sir.”

“Like this also, monks, Māra gains no entry, Māra gains no footing in whoever develops and makes much of mindfulness directed to the body.

(Witnessing Higher Knowledge)

“Monks, whoever develops and makes much of mindfulness directed to the body can, when there is an opportunity, makes witness to higher knowledge¹⁸ by directing the mind to those dharmas one can witness as higher knowledge.

“Monks, suppose that placed on a stand was a water pot full to the brim with water so that a crow could sip from it [while standing on the edge]. If a strong man came along and tipped it, would any water spill out?”

“It would, venerable sir.”

“Like this also, monks, whoever develops and makes much of mindfulness directed to the body can, when there is an opportunity, makes witness to higher knowledge by directing the mind to those dharmas one can witness as higher knowledge.

“Monks, suppose that on level ground a **four cornered reservoir** was full of water right up to the brim of its embankments so that a crow could sip from it [while standing on the edge]. If a strong man came along and open the embankment, would the water pour out?”

“It would, venerable sir.”

“Like this also, monks, whoever develops and makes much of mindfulness directed to the body can, when there is an opportunity, makes witness to higher knowledge by directing the mind to those dharmas one can witness as higher knowledge.

“Monks, suppose there was a **chariot**, with a whip laying ready [next to it], harnessed to a thoroughbred, stationed on level ground at the intersection of four great roads. Mounting and grasping the reins with his left hand and the whip with his right, a skilled horse trainer could roll forward or backwards anytime and anywhere he wants.

“Like this also, monks, whoever develops and makes much of mindfulness directed to the body can, when there is an opportunity, makes witness to higher knowledge by directing the mind to those dharmas one can witness as higher knowledge.

¹⁸ *Abhiññā*. While this often refers to psychic powers here it means the special knowledge that leads to *nibbāna* or results with the attainment of *nibbāna*.

(Benefits)

When mindfulness directed to the body is practiced, cultivated, made much of, used as a vehicle, used a foundation, established, woven together and well undertaken, ten benefits can be expected. What ten?

1. One becomes a **conqueror of displeasure and fondness**.¹⁹ Displeasure does not conquer one. One overcomes any displeasure that arises.
2. One becomes a **conqueror of fear and dread**. Fear and dread do not conquer one. One overcomes any fear and dread that arise.
3. **One is patient** with cold and heat, hunger and thirst, and contact with gadflies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and creeping creatures. **One endures** ill-spoken and unwelcome speech and physical sensations that are painful, piercing, sharp, bitter, disagreeable, unpleasant, and lethal.
4. At one's pleasure²⁰ and without difficulty or trouble one obtains the heightened mind of **the four jhanas** which are a happy dwelling here and now.²¹
5. One realizes the various forms of **supernatural power**. Being one, one becomes many; being many one becomes one. One appears and disappears. One goes unobstructed through walls, barriers, and mountains as if through space. One sinks in and arises out of the earth as if it were water. One walks on water as if on earth. Sitting cross-legged one travels through space like a bird. One's hand touches and strokes the powerful and mighty moon and sun. With one's body one exerts control as far as the Brahma-world.
6. With the **purified divine ear** which surpasses human [ears], one hears both divine and human sounds, distant and near.
7. With one's own mind one **knows the mind of other people** and beings. One knows

a mind state with lust as a '**mind state with lust**,'
a lust-free mind state as a '**lust-free mind state**,'

an aversive mind state as an '**aversive mind state**,'
an aversive-free mind state as an '**aversive-free mind state**,'

a delusive mind state as a '**delusive mind state**,'

¹⁹ *Arati* and *rati*. *Rati* means love, attachment, pleasure, delight, liking, fondness. *Arati* is the opposite of this.

²⁰ *Nikāṃ* (pleasure, desire).

²¹ *Ditthi dhamme*

a delusive-free mind state as a ‘**delusive-free mind state,**’

a collected mind state as a ‘**collected mind state,**’
a scattered mind state as a ‘**scattered mind state,**’²²

an expanded mind state as an ‘**expanded mind state,**’
a not expanded mind state as a ‘**not expanded mind state,**’

a surpassable mind state as a ‘**surpassable mind state,**’
an unsurpassable mind state as an ‘**unsurpassable mind state,**’

a steadied mind state as a ‘**steadied**²³ **mind state,**’
a not steadied mind state as a ‘**not steadied mind state,**’

a freed mind state as a ‘**freed mind state,**’
a mind state not freed as a ‘**mind state not freed.**’

8. One **recollects one’s many past lives**²⁴ for one birth, two births, three births, four births, five births, ten births, twenty births, thirty births, forty births, fifty births, one hundred births, a thousand births, a hundred thousand births, [for] many aeons of cosmic expansion, many aeons of cosmic contraction, and for many aeons of cosmic expansion and contraction. One recollects the characteristics and aspects of one’s many past lives: ‘In this place I had such a name, such clan, such an appearance,²⁵ such food, this experience of happiness and suffering, this dying. Passing away from that place, I reappeared in the next place with such a name, such clan, such an appearance, such food, this experience of happiness and suffering, this dying. Passing away from that place I reappeared here.’
9. With the **purified divine eye** which surpasses human [eyes] one sees beings passing away and reappearing and knows them as inferior or superior, of good appearance or bad, of good circumstances²⁶ or bad²⁷ according to their karma.

²² The root *khitta* meaning to throw (e.g. to throw seeds or to throw against the wind); *sankhitta*, ‘collected’ means to throw together; *vikkhita*, ‘scattered’ means to throw out. Theravada commentaries refer to these two as minds under the influence of either sloth and torpor or restlessness or anxiety. English translators have thus used ‘shrunkened’ and ‘distracted’, ‘contracted’ and ‘distracted’, ‘restricted’ and ‘scattered’. *Sankhitta* is the past participle of *sankhipati* meaning to collect or heap together. I have translated it in a positive sense so that all the polarities are consistent in listing an undesirable quality together with a desirable one.

²³ *samāhitam*. This word is used in the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* where it refers to a mind state which is sufficiently concentrated to be able to provide a steady, stable enough foundation for the awakening factor of equanimity.

²⁴ Literally, ‘one’s previous dwellings’.

²⁵ *Vanna*

²⁶ *Sugate*

²⁷ *Dugate*

10. With toxins destroyed and having made witness to higher knowledge in the here and now, one enters into and **dwells in the liberation of mind and the liberation of wisdom.**

“When mindfulness directed to the body is practiced, developed, made much of, used as a vehicle, used as a foundation, established, woven together and well under-taken, these ten benefits can be expected.”

This is what the Blessed One said; uplifted, the monks were delighted by his words.