# MN 119 — MN 119 Mindfulness Immersed in the Body | Kāyagatā-sati Sutta

English translation by Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu.

Source: https://www.dhammatalks.org/suttas/MN/MN119.html

Source revision: sha256:06db98f11dbe5b66e3b290b0f8bcaa44ec5f2fe3d1e1b74062fcf0baea044036

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## Text

Mindfulness Immersed in the Body

Kāyagatā-sati Sutta (MN 119)

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Sāvatthī in Jeta’s Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika’s monastery. Now at that time a large number of monks, after the meal, on returning from their alms round, had gathered at the meeting hall when this discussion arose: “Isn’t it amazing, friends! Isn’t it astounding!—the extent to which mindfulness immersed in the body, when developed & pursued, is said by the Blessed One who knows, who sees—the worthy one, rightly self-awakened—to be of great fruit & great benefit.” And this discussion came to no conclusion.

Then the Blessed One, emerging from his seclusion in the evening, went to the meeting hall and, on arrival, sat down on a seat made ready. As he was sitting there, he addressed the monks: "For what topic are you gathered together here? And what was the discussion that came to no conclusion?"

"Just now, lord, after the meal, on returning from our alms round, we gathered at the meeting hall when this discussion arose: 'Isn't it amazing, friends! Isn't it astounding!—the extent to which mindfulness immersed in the body, when developed & pursued, is said by the Blessed One who knows, who sees—worthy & rightly self-awakened—to be of great fruit & great benefit.' This was the discussion that had come to no conclusion when the Blessed One arrived."

(The Blessed One said:) "And how is mindfulness immersed in the body developed, how is it pursued, so as to be of great fruit & great benefit?

"There is the case where a monk—having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building—sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect and establishing mindfulness to the fore. Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.1

Breathing in long, he discerns, 'I am breathing in long'; or breathing out long, he discerns, 'I am breathing out long.' Or breathing in short, he discerns, 'I am breathing in short'; or breathing out short, he discerns, 'I am breathing out short.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in sensitive to the entire body.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out sensitive to the entire body.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication.' He trains himself, 'I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.' And as he remains thus heedful, ardent, & resolute, any memories & resolves related to the household life are abandoned, and with their abandoning his mind gathers & settles inwardly, grows unified & concentrated. This is how a monk develops mindfulness immersed in the body.

"And further, 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. And as he remains thus heedful, ardent, & resolute, any memories & resolves related to the household life are abandoned, and with their abandoning his mind gathers & settles inwardly, grows unified & concentrated. This is how a monk develops mindfulness immersed in the body.

"And further, 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. And as he remains thus heedful, ardent, & resolute, any memories & resolves related to the household life are abandoned, and with their abandoning his mind gathers & settles inwardly, grows unified & concentrated. This is how a monk develops mindfulness immersed in the body.

“And further, the 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.’ 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, the 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.’ And as he remains thus heedful, ardent, & resolute, any memories & resolves related to the household life are abandoned, and with their abandoning his mind gathers & settles inwardly, grows unified & concentrated. This is how a monk develops mindfulness immersed in the body.

“And further, 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.’ Just as a dexterous 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.’ And as he remains thus heedful, ardent, & resolute, any memories & resolves related to the household life are abandoned, and with their abandoning his mind gathers & settles inwardly, grows unified & concentrated. This is how a monk develops mindfulness immersed in the body.

“And further, 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 chest 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.’

“And as he remains thus heedful, ardent,  & resolute, any memories & resolves related to the household life are abandoned, and with their abandoning his mind gathers & settles inwardly, grows unified & concentrated. This is how a monk develops mindfulness immersed in the body.

The Four Jhānas

“And further, quite secluded from sensuality, secluded from unskillful qualities, he enters & remains in the first jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. He permeates & pervades, suffuses & fills this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of seclusion. Just as if a dexterous bathman or bathman’s apprentice would pour bath powder into a brass basin and knead it together, sprinkling it again & again with water, so that his ball of bath powder—saturated, moisture-laden, permeated within & without—would nevertheless not drip; even so, the monk permeates… this very body2 with the rapture & pleasure born of seclusion. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture & pleasure born of seclusion. And as he remains thus heedful, ardent,  & resolute, any memories & resolves related to the household life are abandoned, and with their abandoning his mind gathers & settles inwardly, grows unified & concentrated. This is how a monk develops mindfulness immersed in the body.

“Then, with the stilling of directed thoughts & evaluations, he enters & remains in the second jhāna: rapture & pleasure born of concentration, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation—internal assurance. He permeates & pervades, suffuses & fills this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of concentration. Just like a lake with spring-water welling up from within, having no inflow from the east, west, north, or south, and with the skies supplying abundant showers time & again,3 so that the cool fount of water welling up from within the lake would permeate & pervade, suffuse & fill it with cool waters, there being no part of the lake unpervaded by the cool waters; even so, the monk permeates… this very body with the rapture & pleasure born of concentration. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by rapture & pleasure born of concentration. And as he remains thus heedful, ardent,  & resolute, any memories & resolves related to the household life are abandoned, and with their abandoning his mind gathers & settles inwardly, grows unified & concentrated. This is how a monk develops mindfulness immersed in the body.

“Then, with the fading of rapture, he remains equanimous, mindful,  & alert, and senses pleasure with the body. He enters & remains in the third jhāna, of which the noble ones declare,  ‘Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasant abiding.’ He permeates & pervades, suffuses & fills this very body with the pleasure divested of rapture. Just as in a lotus pond, some of the lotuses, born & growing in the water, stay immersed in the water and flourish without standing up out of the water, so that they are permeated & pervaded, suffused & filled with cool water from their roots to their tips, and nothing of those lotuses would be unpervaded with cool water; even so, the monk permeates… this very body with the pleasure divested of rapture. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded with pleasure divested of rapture. And as he remains thus heedful, ardent,  & resolute, any memories & resolves related to the household life are abandoned, and with their abandoning his mind

gathers & settles inwardly, grows unified & concentrated. This is how a monk develops mindfulness immersed in the body.

“Then, with the abandoning of pleasure & pain—as with the earlier disappearance of joys & distresses—he enters & remains in the fourth jhāna: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither-pleasure-nor-pain. He sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness. Just as if a man were sitting covered from head to foot with a white cloth so that there would be no part of his body to which the white cloth did not extend; even so, the monk sits, permeating the body with a pure, bright awareness. There is nothing of his entire body unpervaded by pure, bright awareness. And as he remains thus heedful, ardent, & resolute, any memories & resolves related to the household life are abandoned, and with their abandoning his mind gathers & settles inwardly, grows unified & concentrated. This is how a monk develops mindfulness immersed in the body.

Fullness of Mind

“Monks, whoever develops & pursues mindfulness immersed in the body encompasses whatever skillful qualities are on the side of clear knowing. Just as whoever pervades the great ocean with his awareness encompasses whatever rivulets flow down into the ocean, in the same way, whoever develops & pursues mindfulness immersed in the body encompasses whatever skillful qualities are on the side of clear knowing.

“In whomever mindfulness immersed in the body is not developed, not pursued, Māra gains entry, Māra gains a foothold.

“Suppose that a man were to throw a heavy stone ball into a pile of wet clay. What do you think, monks? Would the heavy stone ball gain entry into the pile of wet clay?”

“Yes, lord.”

“In the same way, in whomever mindfulness immersed in the body is not developed, not pursued, Māra gains entry, Māra gains a foothold.

“Now, suppose that there were a dry, sapless piece of timber, and a man were to come along with an upper fire-stick, thinking, ‘I’ll light a fire. I’ll produce heat.’ What do you think? Would he be able to light a fire and produce heat by rubbing the upper fire-stick in the dry, sapless piece of timber?”

“Yes, lord.”

“In the same way, in whomever mindfulness immersed in the body is not developed, not pursued, Māra gains entry, Māra gains a foothold.

“Now, suppose that there were an empty, hollow water-pot set on a stand, and a man were to come along carrying a load of water. What do you think—would he get a place to put his water?”

“Yes, lord.”

“In the same way, in whomever mindfulness immersed in the body is not developed, not pursued, Māra gains entry, Māra gains a foothold.

“Now, in whomever mindfulness immersed in the body is developed, is pursued, Māra gains no entry, Māra gains no foothold. Suppose that a man were to throw a ball of string against a door panel made entirely of heartwood. What do you think? Would that light ball of string gain entry into that door panel made entirely of heartwood?”

“No, lord.”

“In the same way, in whomever mindfulness immersed in the body is developed, is pursued, Māra gains no entry, Māra gains no foothold.

“Now, suppose that there were a wet, sappy piece of timber, and a man were to come along with an upper fire-stick, thinking, ‘I’ll light a fire. I’ll produce heat.’ What do you think? Would he be able to light a fire and produce heat by rubbing the upper fire-stick in the wet, sappy piece of timber?”

“No, lord.”

“In the same way, in whomever mindfulness immersed in the body is developed, is pursued, Māra gains no entry, Māra gains no foothold.

“Now, suppose that there were a water-pot set on a stand, full of water up to the brim so that crows could drink out of it, and a man were to come along carrying a load of water. What do you think? Would he get a place to put his water?”

“No, lord.”

“In the same way, in whomever mindfulness immersed in the body is developed, is pursued, Māra gains no entry, Māra gains no foothold.

An Opening to the Higher Knowledges

“When anyone has developed & pursued mindfulness immersed in the body, then whichever of the six higher knowledges he turns his mind to know & realize, he can witness them for himself whenever there is an opening.

“Suppose that there were a water jar, set on a stand, brimful of water so that a crow could drink from it. If a strong man were to tip it in any way at all, would water spill out?”

“Yes, lord.”

“In the same way, when anyone has developed & pursued mindfulness immersed in the body, then whichever of the six higher knowledges he turns his mind to know & realize, he can witness them for himself whenever there is an opening.

“Suppose there were a rectangular water tank—set on level ground, bounded by dikes—brimful of water so that a crow could drink from it. If a strong man were to loosen the dikes anywhere at all, would water spill out?”

“Yes, lord.”

“In the same way, when anyone has developed & pursued mindfulness immersed in the body, then whichever of the six higher knowledges he turns his mind to know & realize, he can witness them for himself whenever there is an opening.

“Suppose there were a chariot on level ground at four crossroads, harnessed to thoroughbreds, waiting with whips lying ready, so that a dexterous driver, a trainer of tamable horses, might mount and—taking the reins with his left hand and the whip with his right—drive out & back, to whatever place & by whichever road he liked; in the same way, when anyone has developed & pursued mindfulness immersed in the body, then whichever of the six higher knowledges he turns his mind to know & realize, he can witness them for himself whenever there is an opening.

Ten Benefits

“Monks, for one in whom mindfulness immersed in the body is cultivated, developed, pursued, given a means of transport, given a grounding, steadied, consolidated, & well-undertaken, ten benefits can be expected. Which ten?

“[1] He conquers displeasure & delight, and displeasure does not conquer him. He remains victorious over any displeasure that has arisen.

“[2] He conquers fear & dread, and fear & dread do not conquer him. He remains victorious over any fear & dread that have arisen.

“[3] He is resistant to cold, heat, hunger, thirst, the touch of gadflies & mosquitoes, wind & sun & creeping things; to abusive, hurtful language; he is the sort that can endure bodily feelings that, when they arise, are painful, sharp, stabbing, fierce, distasteful, disagreeable, deadly.

“[4] He can attain at will, without trouble or difficulty, the four jhānas—heightened mental states providing a pleasant abiding in the here & now.

“[5] He wields manifold supranormal powers. Having been one he becomes many; having been many he becomes one. He appears. He vanishes. He goes unimpeded through walls, ramparts, & mountains as if through space. He dives in & out of the earth as if it were water. He walks on water without sinking as if it were dry land. Sitting cross-legged he flies

through the air like a winged bird. With his hand he touches & strokes even the sun & moon, so mighty & powerful. He exercises influence with his body even as far as the Brahmā worlds.

"[6] He hears—by means of the divine ear-element, purified & surpassing the human—both kinds of sounds: divine & human, whether near or far.

"[7] He knows the awareness of other beings, other individuals, having encompassed it with his own awareness. He discerns a mind with passion as 'a mind with passion,' and a mind without passion as 'a mind without passion.' He discerns a mind with aversion as 'a mind with aversion,' and a mind without aversion as 'a mind without aversion.' He discerns a mind with delusion as 'a mind with delusion,' and a mind without delusion as 'a mind without delusion.' He discerns a restricted mind as 'a restricted mind,' and a scattered mind as 'a scattered mind.' He discerns an enlarged mind as 'an enlarged mind,' and an unenlarged mind as 'an unenlarged mind.' He discerns a surpassed mind [one that is not at the most excellent level] as 'a surpassed mind,' and an unsurpassed mind as 'an unsurpassed mind.' He discerns a concentrated mind as 'a concentrated mind,' and an unconcentrated mind as 'an unconcentrated mind.' He discerns a released mind as 'a released mind,' and an unreleased mind as 'an unreleased mind.'

"[8] He recollects his manifold past lives [lit: previous homes], i.e., one birth, two births, three births, four, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, one hundred, one thousand, one hundred thousand, many eons of cosmic contraction, many eons of cosmic expansion, many eons of cosmic contraction & expansion, (recollecting,) 'There I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure & pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose there. There too I had such a name, belonged to such a clan, had such an appearance. Such was my food, such my experience of pleasure & pain, such the end of my life. Passing away from that state, I re-arose here.' Thus he remembers his manifold past lives in their modes & details.

"[9] He sees—by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human—beings passing away & re-appearing, and he discerns how they are inferior & superior, beautiful & ugly, fortunate & unfortunate in accordance with their kamma: 'These beings—who were endowed with bad conduct of body, speech, & mind, who reviled the noble ones, held wrong views and undertook actions under the influence of wrong views—with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in a plane of deprivation, a bad destination, a lower realm, hell. But these beings—who were endowed with good conduct of body, speech, & mind, who did not revile the noble ones, who held right views and undertook actions under the influence of right views—with the break-up of the body, after death, have re-appeared in the good destination, a heavenly world.' Thus—by means of the divine eye, purified & surpassing the human—he sees beings passing away & re-appearing, and he discerns how they are inferior & superior, beautiful & ugly, fortunate & unfortunate in accordance with their kamma.

“[10] Through the ending of effluents, he remains in the effluent-free awareness-release & discernment-release, having known and realized them for himself right in the here & now.

“Monks, for one in whom mindfulness immersed in the body is cultivated, developed, pursued, given a means of transport, given a grounding, steadied, consolidated, & well-undertaken, these ten benefits can be expected.”

That is what the Blessed One said. Gratified, the monks delighted in the Blessed One’s words.

Notes

1. For notes on these four steps of breath meditation, see notes 1–3 under MN 118.

2. The fact that the discussion goes straight from the mindfulness immersed in the body to the four jhānas without a redefinition of terms shows that “body” has the same meaning in both contexts: i.e., the physical body.

3. Reading, Devo ca kālena kālaṁ sammādhāraṁ anuppaveccheyya, with the Thai edition.

## Publisher references (not part of the sutta)

See also: SN 35:206; SN 47:20; AN 4:159; AN 4:184; AN 7:48; Sn 1:11; Sn 5:16; Thag 1:104; Thag 2:16; Thag 5:1; Thag 10:5; Thig 5:4; Thig 14