

Mindfulness of Breathing (52) Wholesome Nourishment for *Samādhī*

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SUMMARY KEYWORDS

mind, nourishing, wholesome, wholesomeness, meditation, tai chi, concentrates, gladdening, satisfying, breathing, nourishment, skillful, unification, concentration, unifies, *samādhī*, *citta*, *ānāpānasati*, steady, settled, enjoy, inner, goodness

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One of the foundational cornerstone teachings of the Buddha – which intimately connects to both meditation and daily life – is the idea of “wholesome and unwholesome.” Sometimes it is translated as “skillful and unskillful.” Informally, I like to translate it as “helpful and unhelpful.”

This cornerstone has to do with actions – what we do. Some of the actions, which we may think are more like states – wholesome states – are rather an activity of the mind. These states of mind, actions or activities of the mind, ways of being feel nourishing. The Buddha used the word “nourishing” to express how different mental

states and mental activities operate as food, as nourishment for us.

Generosity is not simply generosity. Generosity is a wholesome, healthy state, which is nourishing and has a good influence on us. Loving-kindness and mindfulness are also considered wholesome states, which are nourishing and have a good influence on us. Tranquility is a wholesome state – a wholesome way of being, which nourishes us and nourishes more tranquility.

This idea of nourishment and wholesomeness comes into play in the third tetrad of the sixteen steps of *ānāpānasati* in a number of ways. The tenth step is “gladdening the mind.” Some people have translated “gladdening the mind” as “satisfying the mind” or “enjoying the mind.”

This comes with the ability to feel the goodness, delight, and enjoyment of not just pleasure, but also of the nourishment, the wholesomeness, that can happen. This comes as we no longer fixate or focus on the details of our inner life, but begin looking at the big picture – experiencing the mind as a whole.

We are not preoccupied with the past or future. We are not focused on desires or particular emotions that are troublesome for us. These are all reasonable things to

do at times. As we go deeper into meditation, we are relaxing, letting go, and not fixating on things. A softening, deepening, and opening begins happening. We become aware of the general quality of our inner life.

Another way I like to translate *citta* – the mind or the heart – is the whole quality of the inner life. As we let go – going through deeper states of meditation – we tap into a sense of wholesomeness, goodness, and nourishment. Something feels very satisfying just to be here. This becomes a valuable experience to imbibe, feel, and allow oneself to be influenced by.

Understand that the Buddha's teachings are based on this movement towards the wholesome. The degree to which we do things that are skillful – that are ethically and psychologically wholesome – leads to a sense of being whole rather than fragmented, a sense of being inclusive rather than holding things at bay or holding things in check.

This becomes very important as we start moving into developing *samādhi* or unification, the eleventh step of *ānāpānasati*:

Breathing in, one unifies the mind. Breathing out, one unifies the mind.

Another translation is:

*Breathing in, one steadies the mind. Breathing out,
one steadies the mind.*

And another translation is:

*Breathing in, one concentrates the mind. Breathing
out, one concentrates the mind.*

The words unify, steady, and concentrate are all in the domain of the third tetrad:

One experiences the mind.

One gladdens or satisfies the mind.

One concentrates, unifies the mind.

This sequence points to the fact that it is a lot easier for the mind to get unified – to gather together, get organized, get settled, and become steady – when the mind feels like a satisfying and enjoyable place to be. Now the heart is wholesome and good.

We are not recoiling from inner pain, struggle, or angst. We are not afraid of ourselves or trying to avoid parts of ourselves. We have come to the place where we are now inclusive. We associate more with the inclusivity of the big mind rather than the particular details.

We might still have particular details that are difficult, but we are not locked into or preoccupied with them. We respect them. Now the mind holds it all in a more expansive, open way. That expansive, open mind is

where we begin to feel and allow for something wholesome, satisfying, and deep to happen.

Rather than huffing and puffing to get concentrated, it's more like, "Wow, this is good. The mind wants to settle. The mind doesn't want to be scattered." In fact, to be scattered – to go into the past and future, to be caught up in thoughts, to become narrow or locked into something again – doesn't feel interesting. It's like, "Why would you?" There is not much juice for being distracted because it feels so good to be here – right here.

The way I'm talking may seem kind of grand or a little beyond what's possible for you. What I want to emphasize is that we are moving in the direction of inner goodness and wholesomeness, a way that the inner life feels satisfying. I like to use the phrase, "We feel at home with ourselves." "Oh, I'm home. It's so good to be here. Of course, I want to be here."

When we connect to our breathing with this mind – this way of being – we do it in a way that feels satisfying, tender, and caring. We appreciate the opportunity to start again. Rather than it being a burden, rather than being dejected or dismayed that we wandered off in thought, we feel, "Ah, yes, I've come home! This is good."

When we sustain the attention, it is not because we are struggling to do it or holding things at bay. It's because we feel, "Ahh, this is good. I'm home. This feels nice – to be here in the present moment."

The initial application of attention is connecting. The sustained application of attention is sustaining attention. Ideally, it is all nourishing. Each of you may have a different reference point or example that supports you in this.

In the meditation, I used the idea of doing tai chi. Tai chi of the mind – coming back to your breathing, hanging in there with breathing. Those gentle, flowing movements of tai chi. The point is not to get to the end of the tai chi movements as quickly as we can. Tai chi is an action we're doing, but each moment is complete in itself. We're really into each part of the movement.

For some of you, it might be gardening. You may love gardening – just being, weeding and planting, just doing it. There's no hurry to do it. It's tender and nourishing. You may have a parental feeling – tending and caring – for your plants. Maybe it's doing a craft. Or, perhaps, it's caring for someone who is sick, and you do it in a loving way.

You might think of an example from your life of doing something that has qualities of wholesomeness,

nourishment, satisfaction, and inner goodness. An example that represents for you the movement of where we're going – the downhill slope, the pull of gravity, of meditation. This is where we're going. With that we cultivate unification. We cultivate steadiness, deep settledness, and what some people call concentration.

Enjoy yourself. Enjoy your mind. Provide your mind with a way of being that the mind enjoys. Let your inner actions – inner attitudes, thoughts, and feelings – be something that the mind really appreciates and feels, “Ahh. This is good.”

The mind says, “Oh, I like being with this person. I like being here. I don't feel like I need to run off anymore. The way this is operating for this person is really good.” Maybe your mind will stick around – stick around for your breathing and for your meditation in the present moment.

Thank you all very much and I look forward to tomorrow.