

Incomplete Transcript

Four Modes of Mindfulness

So, for example if you look at something, then you have the visual object and then you have the eye sensitivity and then you have the consciousness. So these three things refer to the experience and this is contact, this is phassa. So the objects, relating to governing the sense faculties, it refers to the external five objects, but also to the mind and body process itself. So it refers to you in relation to these objects. So the distance you need to have is in regard to the experience.

So governing the sense faculties means that you don't look too close to the experience of the sense stimuli, you are just a little bit far away and then just in a very general way you are aware, oh there is sound, there is sight, there is touch, there is smell. So you don't go into the details, you don't go into the experience of the sense encounter.

So there is a kind of objectivity that is being developed, so that objectivity and that type of distance that you have towards the experience gives you just the possibility to be there and not to be affected by it. Because the aim, the objective of governing the sense faculties is just to protect the mind does not get polluted or tainted with all these things that come from the outside. Polluted or tainted with greed or aversion or ignorance. So the fact of keeping some distance helps you not to allow them to enter the mind to the extent that you will be disturbed by them.

And then on the second mode of mindfulness - mindfulness and clear comprehension. So here we see that the box is a little bit closer to the object. So here the object refers to the objects themselves, but also it refers to the body. The senses are related to the body. So when you are developing mindfulness and clear comprehension in this situation you are a little bit closer to physical activities and also to the experience of it. So you are just there. But just to the extent of knowing what you are doing. So you are moving, you are eating and you are looking and things like this. You are just clearly comprehending what is happening and also for which purpose the activities of the body are being performed. So you are a little bit closer to the object, and the object represents yourself as well.

In the case of samatha, we see that the box is very close to the objects. So here the objects refer to the objects of mind. Because in samatha meditation the subject of meditation comes to be perceived as an object. So if you practice metta, for example, then you have the idea of a human being or any kind of being. So the being becomes the object of your meditation, the object of your mind. If you are observing the breath, the breath itself becomes the object of your mind.

So with all these subjects of meditation, there is an object on which the mind depends. So regarding samatha meditation, then the purpose of it is just to develop concentration and to get very tranquil and very close to the object, and eventually to develop such a type of harmony and also unity that you become one with the object. So you become absorbed in the object. So that's why in the samatha mode of mindfulness, then the object and the mind, the subject. So the subject which is yourself, the mind, is very very close to the object. And at the point of very very deep concentration then the mind comes into the object, sinks in the object. Or the object just swallows the mind. So the mind is in the object, or the object is just completely in the mind.

So here it refers to the object of meditation.

In the case of the vipassana, then there is no full absorption in the objects, for the simple reason that vipassana has, and will always need to have an analytical observation. It will always analyse and also always use the initial application of the mind and also the sustaining application of the mind. In other words vitakka and vicara will always need to be there in the case of vipassana.

But since the vipassana, the mind of insight, is a mind that is investigating, if you want to investigate something you cannot absorb completely in the object, you have to have some distance. But, the mind of the vipassana is very sharp and has the possibility to take the object to look at it very very closely and to see its characteristics in a deep way. So that's why it's not so far, but it's not in the object. It's not a complete absorption.

So the object of the vipassana will be all kinds of phenomena. External objects or your body or your mind. Whatever is happening can be the object of insight meditation.

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When we are in the vipassana then what is seen is not the particular characteristic but the general characteristic. That means we see the objects, they are no more objects, they are objects of the mind but they are seen as a process.

So the particular characteristic in object meditation will deal mostly with the concepts of things. Like this is a table, this is a book. All these things are a little bit conceptual. Whereas the process meditation you just see arising and passing away, it is just impermanent flux of energy. So this is the difference here with process and content meditation.

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So if I'm very disturbed and very stimulated with all kinds of things, then it's not the time to look very closely at the objects or to try to concentrate. It's the time to relax, and to keep some distance from what is happening and to guard the sense doors in general. So you don't care so much, but you are just aware that sense objects, also the impressions that you get from them does not invade your mind with states of greed or hatred or delusion.

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Could you please explain the difference, if any, between the equanimity that accompanies vipassana and it's insight, such as Sankharupekkha nyana, and the equanimity of the Brahmavihara in terms of the qualities they bring to the mind and also the benefits in daily life.

So here the question relates to what is the difference of the equanimity when we practice vipassana.

First of all if you like a very precise definition of the word equanimity given and explained in different contexts, then we have the reference in the Visuddhimagga.

So we have the type of equanimity in regard to the six senses, so we are experiencing things in contact with the six senses, and then in regard to the six senses, when the vipassana mind is looking at that, then there is a type of equanimity. So it's called the equanimity regarding the six senses.

Also with the practice of vipassana, this is sankharupekkha. So the word upekkha, equanimity means it comes from upa and ikshati. That means upa can mean a little bit above, a little bit upper. And ikshati means to look, it means you are looking from a different stand-point you are looking above. That means the mind is very balanced and the quality of observation, it's not indifferent but it is very objective or it is very equanimous.

In the case of the equanimity that happens in the formation, in regard to the vipassana, sankharupekkha nyana, then it's another type of equanimity. But the question is about that equanimity, sankharupekkha nyana, and the equanimity of the brahma vihara.

So the quality, they are a little bit different. So the quality of the fourth jhana, so when someone is developing very strong samadhi then there comes a point when the mind is really equanimous towards the object. But that equanimity is based on a really strong concentration. So of course it is really peaceful and you are not affected by piti and sukka and things like this and also it is really stable. But it is very much conditioned and also it depends on these conditions to be there. So it depends on the strong concentration that has been built by the previous jhana, so it is quite much conditioned.

So the strength of it is very powerful because the mind is so concentrated that it does not get disturbed and it is completely absorbed in the object. No disturbances, the mind is just absorbed in the object, with full balance and full equanimity.

So this is just the quality of it. But compared to the quality of the vipassana, since the equanimity of the vipassana is in direct contact with the experience then the mind is not shaken. So the quality of the equanimity there, the unshakability of the mind, the perfect equipoise of the mind is in relation to the experience, and the experience is changing all the time. So somehow it is much more difficult to keep that equanimity to the experience which is always in a flux. Because we cannot control it. So in a way, although it might not be as strong and powerful with the strength of the mind, still it is much more stable, because whatever is happening, the mind is completely equanimous.

So that's why also I think the benefits in daily life will be much more if you are able to develop the equanimity of the six senses. That means if you are able to develop the equanimity of the vipassana. Because whatever objects come within your experience, then you don't care so much, you are just aware of it and then you can keep a complete balance of the mind.

What difference do you notice between those meditators who realise some degree of mastery in the jhana and those who do not?

So the main difference will be that someone who has mastery over the jhana means someone who has mastery over their mind. So the mind is much more disciplined, the mind is much more concentrated. Then if the mastery is there, and the mastery is kept, then it can be useful for all kinds of things. Whatever the person wants to do, then the mastery can keep the mind very much in order, because you are able to master these states of mind.

But what is the difference between those who have the mastery and those who do not have the mastery of the jhanas. So we spoke about the equanimity related to the vipassana and then the equanimity related to the jhana.

So if we compare those meditators that have mastery over the practice of jhana, together with those who have a very high level of vipassana, then there will be a huge difference. Because mastery of the jhana is not permanent, and if conditions are changing, like we saw the example of Assaji, he was a master of jhana, but he lost that mastery because he got so sick and he got so weak and he could not mastery his jhana any more. So when the mastery of the jhanas disappeared, then someone who has the upekkha of the vipassana can be differentiated, because the wisdom will be there and the wisdom will give the possibility to deal with the thing properly.

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So that means in meditation, we can sometimes get so high, and we can have very deep insight and it is not necessarily grounded in the actual practicality of daily life and this will be the difference. So the wheels that we need to have in daily life are seen however, in the gradual training.

That means if we know how to use the steps of governing the senses and also mindfulness and clear comprehension, then there is absolutely no difference with the retreat context or your daily life.

So if you know how to practice guarding the sense faculty, controlling the mind, here, and also clear comprehension, if you practice that here you will not have such a gap in daily life.

Because what is the difference in daily life? Here, of course, everything is much more organised, you don't need to cook, you don't need to do anything. And everything is so organised, everything is so fine that you don't need to worry about the plumbing or anything, you just have to meditate. But still you are walking, still you are eating, still you have to wash your plate and still you have a little bit of work to do every day. So on a basic level, then it's the same thing.

It's just that in daily life, activities will be a little bit more fast. But it doesn't matter. If you know how to handle the thing properly and then how to guard your mind, then in daily life there will be much less difficulties.

Of course transition will be there, but if the basics are there there will not be so much problem.

Also the wheels, that refers to the quality of the mind, the quality of your physical actions, and also the quality of your verbal actions. So this is aspects of sila. So if your sila is good.

Like on retreat you have the possibility to get a perspective on your daily life and then you know, like now you are doing research, you know - ok now I have to improve this aspect of my daily life, I need to do a little bit less of that and a little bit more of this. So you have a perspective on your daily life and on many things and when you come back you adjust it and then you change it and then it's much easier.

So this is the advantage of being outside your daily life that you can have some kind of insight. But these insights have to be practical.

So if you know how to change the modes of mindfulness when necessary, then you know the situation you are in. So in daily life or on retreat you start where you are. So you are in trouble, you are in trouble, you are peaceful, you are peaceful. Wherever you are in your life, this is where you start. So depending on the conditions, physical and mental then you will know your objective. So the objective will be to be balanced and then to do your best thing out of it.

But the understanding will depend on seeing clearly the situation in which you are. So then there won't be so much of a gap. If you are proceeding properly with the steps.

If you think that meditation and also spiritual practice is just when you go to a centre and then you sit very quietly with other meditators and then you go very concentrated in jhana, and that's all you know about meditation, then the dependence that you have in regard to retreat conditions will be very strong.

Because definitely when you go back to daily life then your possibility to get so concentrated and to be so quiet will not be there. So concentration definitely will be difficult to keep and then what do you do if you don't have these conditions. If you don't know what to do when these conditions are not there.

So that's what we try to do and that's what we try to adapt sometimes when there is a retreat. So sometimes when there's a lot of agitation, or sometimes when there's a lot of turmoil or turbulence in the mind then we know it's not the time to look closely at the object, or it's not the time really to strive for something that's a little bit out of context. It's the time just to relax. It's the time just to observe and to see what would be the adequate response to that situation.

As sukha is not classified as a mental factor, like piti, but as a feeling tone, is it then a vedana and therefore a mental aggregate?

So, yes, sukha of the five jhana factors, refers to the aggregate of vedana. And then the piti, the joy or the bliss is also part of the mental aggregate, but the aggregate of sankhara. So, in some cases, here, piti is related to the class of mental aggregates, of which sankhara.

So we have four mental aggregates, vedana, sanna, vinnana and sankhara. So the last one, mental formations has a whole list of mental formations. So four mental aggregates and many mental factors. So piti is a mental factor that fits in the class of the mental aggregate of sankhara.

In which way does ekaggata differ from vitakka and vicara on an experiential level as they all focus and connect with the object. Or is it the case that ekaggata is the outcome of vitakka and vicara.

First, let's define vitakka and vicara. So here I brought a towel because it's easy to make a demonstration. So the vitakka and the vicara, this is the two hands. So vitakka is the applying. So you are applying the towel to your face. And vicara is the constant sustenance or you sustain

the application. So the fact of having the towel on your face, this is ekaggata. So ekaggata refers to the fact of having the mind close to the object. So here we have the object, and it can refer to the object of samatha, the object of meditation, and here I refer to the object as a towel. So initial application and then sustaining.

Is it true that ekaggata is the outcome of vitakka and vicara. So this is true that ekaggata is coming together with application and sustaining. So it's almost the outcome, but the thing is that they come together. And sometime you have one pointedness without applying and sustaining. So if you put your towel like that, and then you don't hold it any more, then this is ekaggata.

But this type of thing without the vitakka and vicara can happen in the jhana. This means that the mind has applied and directed the attention so much on the object that you don't need the two hands of vitakka and vicara, there is only one pointedness of mind on the object, so there is no longer dependence on the vitakka and the vicara in this case.

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Development of Meditation

So when we develop the meditation then we use an object that we know. Like we know the breath, we are experiencing the breath. So based on a real experience of the in-breath and the out-breath, then somehow there is a mental knowing of the breath as a concept, that means as a unit. That means it's a breath, so we are aware of that. So that awareness comes to be perceived as a mental image. And that perception comes to create an image depending on how it is conditioned. So at some point the initial object of your meditation comes to be perceived as a pure concept on which your mind can depend and on which your mind can develop very strong concentration.

So for example, with the body parts, suppose you are doing all the anatomy of your body and then the bones and then your teeth and then your hair. These are real components of your body. But when you do it like this, at some point you start to get an image of your body part. That image of your body part comes to be your nimitta. So you keep that in mind and then your mind just gets absorbed or the mind goes again and again to that image and then the concentration gets built up.

But in regard to the four elements, if someone is practicing the body meditation and that person comes to experience the body as just the sensations. The sensations actually are just the characteristics of the physical elements. So you are sitting here and you are experiencing heat or you are experiencing cold. This is the element of temperature. Or you are sitting here and you are experiencing heaviness or very light or you are experiencing the movement or all the energy, the flowing. So all these things are the characteristics based on the sensations can be classified by way of the four elements.

So someone who is practicing the body meditation with the four elements as subject will not develop a nimitta because the experience itself, the experience of these characteristics of heat, cold, lightness and then heaviness and then liquidity and all that refers to the direct experience. So it cannot lead to the full jhana, the full absorption, but it can lead to a very high degree of concentration which can be used for the vipassana.

So it is just different, it is not conceptual. So if you have been sitting here for a long time, then you feel heat in your back or you feel pain. So the pain actually is just the sensation that is happening due to the interactions of diverse elements. So you start to have a lot of heat there and a lot of pressure. So the pressure is the interaction of the physical elements. So if you stay with that, with that experience, then you don't get very high concentration, but you get concentration to some level. But you can't merge in the object, because if you look at it very closely then the object just dissolves. It's not solid. So the more you are with the elements, the more you see that it is just a field of energy. You see that it's a whole field of forces with different combinations of physical elements.

So there is a degree of possibility with the different meditation subjects that you chose to do.

Whereas if you use a concept in the mind, then the mind just gets absorbed in that concept. In that person that you love, or that you develop metta or karuna. The mind gets really absorbed in that concept. Or if you develop anapanasati then the concept of the breath or the knowing of the breath, then the mind gets to be absorbed in that representation of what is the breath. So this is the slight difference.

Ajjhatta bahiddha

The refrain of the satipatthana sutta says that we contemplate feelings and mind internally, externally and both internally and externally. Is this to be understood to contemplate feelings and mind-states of other people?

So of course if we see in the sutta, they say now, if we are observing the sensation or observing the five aggregates inside and outside. So we are observing the body and also we are observing the body of someone else. This is not a problem. It's very easy. Now you are observing your own body and then you can open your eyes and you can see the body of others.

And also with closed eyes it's not a deduction but it's more an induction, ok now this is the body of another person. So as much as it is internally that much it is externally. So inside and outside. So you start inside and then you see outside. But when it comes to vedana then it can be questionable by way of psychological health.

The thing is that we are not here to develop psychic powers and we should not trust that now you look at somebody and then you see exactly what type of feeling that person experiences or what type of mind that person experiences.

So as much insight as you have got into the rising and passing away of the feeling and the mind and all kinds of phenomena, you just see that as a process of arising and passing away, then you are also able to see that in somebody else. So as much as you can see someone else's body, then you are also able to see the feelings and the different states of mind in somebody else.

But you don't need to be very specific and say, ok now, exactly this is what that other person is feeling or what that other person is thinking. It's not like that, it is just a kind of generalisation which asks you to do outside and then also to do inside.

Another interpretation is that inside and outside refers to very subtle aspects of experience. So inside will refer to really inside the body, whereas the outside will refer to the objects that are in contact with the surface of the body and also with the surface of the senses, but it doesn't refer to the sensation and also to the thoughts of other people or emotions of other people. Because definitely this is something that is outside the continuum of your own mind and body.

So I think it is important to do that type of relationship. So you practice inside and you also see the same thing outside. And eventually you see that actually there is no difference, that all beings alive have the same principle of mind and body. So that as much as it is impermanent and has the same process inside, so much also it is outside.