

## Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta #9 - There Is a Body

A talk offered by Philip Jones to the Silent Mind-Open Heart Sangha on 04/08/2014.

Over the past month, I've been exploring what is sometimes referred to as the "refrain" of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. This sutta is the Buddha's teaching on ways of developing mindfulness in the four fields of body, feeling-tone, mind-states and certain categories of experience.

The refrain offers four basic ways that we are to bring mindfulness to the different practices used to develop mindfulness in each of these fields. At this point we're still working with the first practice in the first field: mindfulness of breathing. The refrain first tells us to mindfully contemplate the experience of breathing internally, externally, and internally and externally. Then we are told to mindfully contemplate breathing by noticing the arising, vanishing and arising and vanishing, of the breath, or some aspect of the breath. These are approaches we've already explored. If you missed the talks and want to know more about them, you can find them in essay form on the website.

In the instructions we're looking at tonight, the Buddha is recorded as saying:

"Or else mindfulness that 'there is a body' is simply established in one to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and repeated mindfulness."<sup>1</sup>

There's actually a lot that can be said about this one sentence. But, I'm not going to try to say it all tonight.

Let's begin with "mindfulness that 'there is a body.'" What does "body" mean in terms of mindfulness of breathing?

The commentaries tell us earlier in this section on mindfulness of breathing, that "body" is a reference to the body of the breath. In other words, a reference to each full in- and out-breath. So in this sense we're being asked to be mindful of each full breath "to the extent necessary for bare knowledge and repeated mindfulness."

Another way of understanding "there is a body" is as a reference to our whole physical body, from the tops of our heads to the soles of our feet. Since early in my practice, after I had actually read this part of the sutta, I've always questioned the commentary's view of making the word "body" a reference to something other than our actual physical bodies. It has always just seemed much more simple to understand it as "there is this physical body".

So tonight our guided instructions were for developing mindfulness in relationship to the whole physical body. With this approach we're holding the whole body in the field of awareness while also noticing the experience of breathing occurring within that field. Some of

the advantages of this approach are that: While it gives us something to hang our attention on —this sense of "body", it can also help to foster a more relaxed and spacious kind of attention simply because the whole body is a bigger target for our field of awareness. Perhaps you noticed this for yourselves.

I used to go back and forth, trying to decide which approach was correct. But for now I've settled on a more pragmatic approach: which approach is more useful at this particular time to help develop a continuity of mindfulness?

It seems to me that when the mind is rather distracted but not overly tight, it can be useful to focus attention at the tip of the nose or in the abdomen and follow the sensations of breathing the full in- and out-breath in that location. This narrower focus can help in settling and collecting the mind.

But when the mind is distracted but tight, or when one has been doing choice-less awareness and getting spacey and lost, then taking the whole body as the field of awareness provides a nice focused-yet-relaxed balance between too tight and too spacey.

So this is where I'd like to stop for tonight.

#### Notes

1. adapted from Bhikkhu Bodhi. MN 10, "The Four Establishments of Mindfulness," In the Buddha's Words, Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2005, p. 282. (Used gender neutral "one" in place of "he.")