

The Four Applications of Mindfulness

四念處



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Chinese Translation by Yu Chen and Lan Huang

恒實法師講於2016年6月4日柏克萊聖寺
陳玉、黃藍 中譯

Mindfulness of the body;
Mindfulness of feelings;
Mindfulness of the mind;
Mindfulness of dharmas (mental phenomena).

In Buddhism, there are a lot of lists like the one above; there is a lot to learn. So, what is the point of all these lists? What is its use? Well, I want to make the case that these are not only useful, but they are precious — you can't do without them if you want to cultivate. They are so beautiful.

The Four Applications of Mindfulness. What does this mean? They are four ways of looking, four places to think, four contemplations to consider — things to keep in mind, stuff to remember. So what are these four things to remember? They are:

觀身；
觀受；
觀心；
觀法（心理現象）。

佛教裡面有很多像這樣的清單，有很多需要學的。那麼為什麼有這些清單呢？它們的作用在哪裡呢？我想說，它們不但有用，而且很珍貴——如果你要修行，那麼你離不開它們。它們是很美的。

以下是四念處。它是什麼意思呢？有四種方式來看，四種地方來想，四種思維的方法——都是要記在心裡的。那麼有哪四件事情要常常記得呢？它們分別是：

1. *We contemplate the body is not a pure object.*
2. *We contemplate how feelings lead to dissatisfaction.*
3. *We contemplate how thoughts do not last.*
4. *We contemplate how dharmas are free of any discrete or separate identity.*

These four applications of mindfulness are, mind you, only the first of the thirty-seven limbs of enlightenment. This is just the beginning. So, if we are setting out to do the work that a Bodhisattva does in order to help people he/she cares about to get over their suffering, we better be good at these. This is a place to begin.

What do you do in this contemplation? You contemplate how the body is not pure, how it is not essential. It is mixed, made up of all sorts of different things. For example, in the Theravada tradition they have the contemplation of the thirty-two parts of the body. They chant these thirty-two impure aspects of the body. It is designed to help us get past our attachment to looking pretty. How much time and money do we spend trying to get our bodies looking different than they do? A lot. If that weren't true, Sav-Rite Drug Store wouldn't have shelf after shelf of cosmetics. So, contemplate how the body is not a pure object.

How do you practice that contemplation? You maintain mindfulness of that, and your energy goes to a different place. You no longer aim for some idea of perfection of beauty that too often is manipulated by others. For example, the notion that every woman is supposed to look like an anorexic fashion model, and that if you don't look like that, there is something wrong with you. That is so destructive. And who cares? It's an external manipulation of what is natural, which is that everybody's got a body. There is no one who doesn't have a body unless they are a ghost or a spirit.

So, if we can constantly contemplate how the body is not a pure object and keep this in mind, we then will notice that the body is indeed that way. If you don't believe it, when was the last time you were sick? Wow, as soon as you get a cold, grab the Kleenex because you are going to leave a trail of mucus for the next three days, four days, five days, six days, and if the body is pure and satisfying, how is that the case?

I know people who spend all their money on clothes. They really do. How they look is very important to them. They are always dressed in the latest fashion. That's one way to go. But the reality is that underneath the fancy clothes, cloth and name brands, it's the same old aging, connections between earth, air, fire, and water, temporary and not really solid.

We have this body because it came from our parents. So we should use it to cultivate wisely. The point of the contemplation is compassion: compassion based on the realization that we are of the

1. 觀身不淨
2. 觀受是苦
3. 觀心無常
4. 觀法無我

這四念處只是三十七助道品最前面的，它們僅僅是一個開始。所以如果你要學習像菩薩一樣去幫助所關心的人離苦，最好能把這些做好，這是一個入手的地方。

首先，觀什麼呢？觀身是如何不淨，並且觀這個身體並不是最重要的。身體是各種物質的一個混合物。比如說，南傳佛教觀身體的三十二個組成部分。他們有一個唱誦列出身體三十二個不淨的部分，來幫助修行者克服對愛美的執著。我們花多少時間和金錢，讓這個身體看起來跟本來的不一樣？很多很多。如果所言非實，那麼Sav-Rite藥店不會有一個貨架接著一個貨架的化妝品。所以，我們觀察思維身體是如何的不淨。

這樣觀想之後會怎樣？你會意識到這個而小心，你的精力就會轉移到別的地方。你不會過分追求容貌的姣好，更何況美醜的標準往往是人為界定的。例如，女性應該看起來像患厭食症的時尚模特，如果你看起來不是那樣的，那你肯定有問題——這種審美觀是極具毀滅性的，但是誰在乎呢？除非是鬼神，否則人人都有身體，但我們卻願意讓天生自然的東西任人擺布。

如果能夠一直觀身不淨，那麼就會發現身體的確如此。如果你不相信，那麼想想上次生病的時候，要是感冒，你就得時時抓一張紙巾，因為接下來的三到六天都會流很多鼻涕之類的東西。如果身體是潔淨美好，怎麼會這樣呢？

我知道有人把所有的錢都花在衣服上，外表對於他們而言非常重要，他們總是穿著最時尚的衣服。這是一種生活方式。但事實上，在這些美麗的衣服、布料和名牌之下，同樣是漸趨衰老的身體、地水火風的假和，是暫時、不持久的。

這個身體來自父母，所以我們應該善用它來修行。觀想的重點是慈悲，慈悲根植於意識到一切眾生同體。觀想到某個程度時，比如說看到腐爛的屍體，你會想到自己也是如此。對方會這樣，我也會這樣。重點不在觀想的對象有多噁心：「呃，看看蟲子從眼眶爬出來，肚子裡也有。」如果是這樣，那你就別觀了，這不是在做觀想。真正要做的，是心地的功夫。

same substance. At a certain point, as you look at, for example, a decaying corpse, you go, “Oh yeah, that’s me too.” You will get there and I will get there. The point is not to get all fascinated by how disgusting the object of meditation is, going, “Oh wow! look at the bugs crawling out of the eye sockets. Cool. Wow, there are worms coming from its belly. Wow!” If you do that, forget it. You are not doing the contemplation. The contemplation is in the mind.

If I look at my body and want it to be different than it is, if I look at other’s bodies and I feel attracted to them, then I have not seen the nature of bodies. But the way you counter attraction is not to hate it, and be repelled by it, and cut it off, and destroy it. Because you won’t get to the goal, which is to recognize sameness, that all beings have bodies born of karma and a nature inside that is not yet awake. However, if you can see that, that’s the right contemplation. So, that’s number one, and it changes things if you contemplate that way.

Number two says, let’s go deeper than just the body. The body is kind of coarse, it’s made of earth, air, fire, water. When you go to the next level, there are feelings. In the Buddhist technical sense, this is a generic word that covers both sensations and emotions.

Literally, in Chinese it says “All feelings are suffering.” So, does that mean suffering? Are all feelings suffering? Clearly not. Some feelings are very pleasant, right? That’s why I am not translating it in that way. No, feelings lead to dissatisfaction. When you pursue feelings, what happens is that they go away, they change. If you don’t believe it, try to find happiness that stays. It’s hard, right? Happiness. What does the Joni Mitchell song say? “Pleasure moves on too early /And trouble leaves too slow.” So it’s that way.

And if you look our experiences, if we are honest about them, our feelings don’t hit the spot. They don’t last. So what do you do? Do you become a piece of wood or some object that has no feelings? No, clearly not. It’s a contemplation, a place of mindfulness. You are mindful of feelings and if you look at them clearly, you don’t waste a lot of time trying to manipulate feelings to be the way you want them. This is a huge liberation for a lot of people.

Feelings do lead to dissatisfaction. Why am I spending my life running from pain and pursuing pleasure? It doesn’t last. What’s the point running for fame, running for benefit? Because I will be happier? No. I would make so many enemies in the pursuit of them, that will wind up miserable. Contemplate, see how it is. What is the dharma? The dharma is things as they are, not the way advertising promises them to be, not the way Hollywood leads us to expect it’s going to be. There is an idiom: “It

You are mindful of feelings and if you look at it clearly, you don’t waste a lot of time trying to manipulate feelings the way you want them.

當看清它的時候，你就不會浪費這麼多的時間想去操縱它，把它變成你想要的樣子。

如果我希望自己的身體變得不是它原來的樣子，或是被他人身體的美好所吸引，這都是沒有看清五蘊色身的本質。雖然如此，對於這個身體，我們也不應該去憎恨它、厭惡它、終結或是摧毀它，這樣都無法達到目標，也就是無法認識同體性——一切眾生都是業力所生，內在的佛性還尚未覺醒。如是觀察，才是正確的觀法。這是四念處的第一個觀，如果你能這樣觀，就會有所改變。

第二個觀，從色身繼續深入下去。色身是粗重的地、水、火、風，四大和合，下一個階段就是關於感受。在佛教中，「受」概括了感官的感覺和情感。

這第二個觀，直接翻譯作「觀受是苦」。那麼，這是說所有感受都是痛苦的嗎？當然不是。有的感受是令人愉悅的，對吧？所以我不這麼翻譯。這個意思是說，感受最終將導致不滿足。當你追求感受，它們最終都會消逝、變化。如果不相信這個說法，試著找一個永恆的幸福。這很難的。幸福，瓊尼·米契爾的歌是怎麼唱的？「幸福離開得太快，煩惱離開得太慢」。就是這麼回事。

如果你審視自己的經歷，很誠實地檢視，會發現感受無法令人滿足，它們不會持久。那該怎麼辦呢？就變成一個沒有感受的木頭或東西嗎？當然不是。四念處講的是觀想，一個提起正念的地方。你專注於感受，而且當看清它的時候，你就不會浪費這麼多的時間想去操縱它，把它變成你想要的樣子。對很多人來說，這是一種很大的解脫。

感覺最終導致不滿足。那為什麼一生都花在避苦求樂？這根本無法長久。追名逐利又有什麼意義？因為那樣會比較快樂嗎？不會。為了求得名利，過程必然樹立很多敵人，因此最終依然導致痛苦的結果，所以要觀察它的真相。什麼是法？法是一切事物的本來面目，不是廣告裡承諾的那樣，也不是好萊塢讓我們相信的景像。有句諺語說：「讀到的永遠比經歷的好。」聽到的，總是比現實中發生的要好太多。

reads better than it lives.” When we hear it, it sounds a lot better than how things actually turn out.

The third is the contemplation of thoughts, these are even less coarse; they are subtle and quick. What is the contemplation? We contemplate that they don't last. Normally, instead of seeing how thoughts don't last, we anticipate things that haven't yet arrived. And we brew over things that have already gone. The current moment, the present thought, we don't recognize. How strange we are. And because of that habit, we get afflicted. In this contemplation we notice what rises and falls. Everything arises in the mind, and ceases in the mind. You yourself can observe it. The Buddha wants to empower us to notice this. To see that is truth. These are things as they really are. They are impermanent. They don't last. They move on. They are transient.

Then we come to the last contemplation. This is the hardest one to grasp. But when we do, we can find liberation from all kinds of confusion. We contemplate how mental qualities, dharmas, phenomena, states of mind have no separate identity, they are free of a self. This idea that there is no self is hard because we don't know what the self is. Look at the things in your life that you project the self onto, that's my car, that's my career, that's my family, that's my pride. Right? You hurt my pride.

And the current moment, present thought, we don't recognize it. How strange we are. And because of that habit, we get afflicted.

對於當下這一念，我們反而不認識，就是這麼奇怪。也因為這種習性，我們經常起煩惱。

You insulted me. You looked at me the wrong way. These reactions are all totally tied up in a lack of truth, tied up in an inability to see that there is no self in anything. There is no self in dharmas, in things that are created, and that are conditioned. You cannot identify with anything. That's totally a projection of the mind. When you pull the projection of the mind back, dharmas just go away. You empty out the self. You empty out dharmas to get liberated.

So, body, feelings including sensations, thoughts and dharmas — what do you do with them? You look at them. You contemplate them. Contemplate how they are. They, respectively, are not pure, they lead to dissatisfaction, they don't last, and you cannot identify with them. Just see it that way. Let it go. It's not real. These are the contemplations. They are a technique for looking. It's a lens that you hold up. You are holding up this lens to be able to see the way things are. You have gained an insight. You've learned to see things that way. And it's never the same. This is how a Bodhisattva begins to cultivate those thirty-seven limbs of enlightenment. ❀

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因為純粹是心意識的投射。當把投射的心收回來，諸法就消失了。

第三個是觀察心念，這就更微細了，幽隱而迅速。觀察什麼呢？觀察念頭的無常。通常情況下，我們都不是去觀察它的無常變化，而是去想未來還沒發生的事情，放不下過去的事情；對於當下這一念，我們反而不認識，就是這麼奇怪。也因為這種習性，我們經常起煩惱。因此，第三種觀照教我們觀察心念的起伏；一切從心起，一切從心滅，自己都可以覺察到。佛陀希望我們都能具備這種觀察力，觀察實相，認識事物本來的面目——那就是無常、不長久。它們不斷地變化，轉瞬即逝。

最後一種觀，也是最難掌握的。但是如果能夠去練習的話，我們就能不為境界所惑，而得到解脫。第四念處就是觀察心法、一切理法、一切事法、心所有法，都沒有獨立的自我，根本就沒有一個「我」。「無我」的概念不容易掌握，因為我們不知道「我」是什麼。看看生活中那些自我意識投射的事物——我的車、我的職業、我的家庭、我的自尊。對吧？還有，你傷害了我的自尊、你錯看我了。這些纏縛，都是因為不明白真相，沒有看清楚諸法無我的道理。一切法無我，因為都是有為、造作的，找不到「自我」的定位，因為純粹是心意識的投射。當把投射的心收回來，諸法就消失了；我相空了，諸法也空了，最終獲得解脫。

因此，在身、受、心、法這四念處，你該怎麼做？你觀察、思維，思維它們如何不淨，如何導致不滿足，如何不長久，如何缺乏「自我」。這樣地思維，然後放下，因為它們是不真實。四念處就是觀照、思維，提供我們觀察事物的技巧。藉由這些鏡片，我們能穿透事相，看清它們的本來面目。擁有這樣的覺照力，你的世界將因此而不同，這也正是菩薩修行三十七道品的起點。❀