**NAMO BUDDHAYA !**

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Samma Sambuddhassa !..

Homage to the Blessed One, the Worthy One, the Supremely Enlightened One !..

**Mindfulness of Elements in the Four Establishments of Mindfulness**

You have now learned about several methods of meditation and are becoming familiar with the four establishments of mindfulness meditation. These methods include mindfulness of breathing meditation or *anapanasati*, walking meditation, and *satisampajanna* or sustained awareness meditation. We have also learned about *asubha bhavana* or the meditation of the impurities of body.

There is another meditation method within the four establishments of mindfulness meditations; that is *“dhathu manasikara”* meditation or ‘mindfulness of elements.’ If we consider the different meditation methods, loving kindness meditation is one we should be doing all the time but mindfulness of breathing meditation can be somewhat difficult for us initially. If that is the case, mindfulness of the impurities of body or mindfulness of the elements would be very beneficial to you as a precursor to mindfulness of breathing meditation.

Once, the little monk Rahula was instructed by the great *arahant* Sariputta to practice mindfulness of breathing meditation. At that point, the monk Rahula did not know how to go about the mindfulness of breathing mediation. He went to the Buddha and asked him for instructions on practicing mindfulness of breathing meditation. It was at that point that the Buddha told him to start with the mindfulness of the elements. Contemplation of the elements is an accelerated and effective path to understanding life. The elements or *dhathu* is the basic or the fundamental nature of things. The term contemplation here refers to skilful investigation of four fundamental or basic natures of things: *“patavi’* or solidity, *“apo”* or fluidity. *“thejo”* or the heat and *“vayo”* or air. *Patavi* is associated with earth, *apo* is associated with water, *thejo* is associated with fire and *vayo* is associated with wind.

In this meditation method, it is crucial that we understand the fact that these words are used to contemplate our bodies and not the outside world. The Buddha preached to consider by wisdom Pathavi Dhātu like the earth; see it as something that is similar to earth. The Buddha further preached us to consider Āpō Dhātu like water, Tējō Dhātu like fire, and Vāyō Dhātu like the wind.

From all these methods, the great teacher’s intention was always the understanding life not the gain of temporary kudos or gratification. The Buddha gave an example here. A butcher kills a cow, separates cuts of meat and sets up a stall at a cross roads. This butcher does not have a sense of selling a cow. The buyers of meat have no sense that they are buying a cow. At this point the usage of the term cow has been transcended and is referred to as meat or in this case beef. This is how we contemplate the elements, which make up our bodies. We can use this example to understand how to separate our body’s composition of the basic natures of solidity, liquidity, heat and air. That which decomposes to become earth is the element of solidity or *patavi*. That which flows or runs is the element of liquidity or *apo*; that which is warm is the element of heat or *thejo*; that which moves like the air is the gaseous element or *vayo*. In us we can recognize parts, which are solid and would eventually become earth. In us we can recognize components which are liquids. In us we can recognize components, which have warmth. In us we can recognize movement of gas or air.

Your task now is to see these elements separately as the separate cuts of meat in a butcher’s stall. You should consider these as follows: you can find a tranquil spot and contemplate separately those parts of your body, which are of the earth element. The hair is of the earth element. You can consider the hair thus, up to now how much hair that have removed from my head. What has happened to that hair? Most of it had already become earth. A part of your life has become earth while you are still living. What has happened to other body hairs and nails that you have removed from your body? Consider teeth. As you listen to this you may not have even one tooth in your mouth; all of us have lost at least our baby teeth. What happened to the teeth that you lost? They have all become earth. Your skin is constantly regenerating itself. When you scrub your body, you can feel and see the dead skin leave your body to instantly become earth. You consider your flesh as becoming earth. You consider your blood vessels as becoming earth. You consider your bones as the earth element. You consider your bone marrow as becoming earth. You consider your kidneys as turning into earth. You consider your heart as becoming earth. You consider your liver as being of the earth element. You consider your diaphragm as becoming earth. You consider your as becoming earth. You consider your lungs as becoming earth. You consider your large intestine as being of the earth element. You consider your small intestine as the earth element. You consider your undigested food in the stomach as becoming earth. You consider your fecal matter in the intestine as becoming earth. These body parts are all of the element of the earth.

It is crucial for us to recall for the reason to doing this. The Buddha gave these guidelines not for the investigation of the nature of the earth or other universes. They were given to us because we suffer internally, both physically and mentally. And we try to find comfort through comfortable things, which actually takes us deeper into suffering. The Buddha’s instructions were that if we want eternal happiness we must find the point where suffering or un-satisfactoriness arises. That is what we are trying to do. When you consider these things that become earth, your humility becomes enhanced. Think of the lords or kings who lived in the early days who killed for the thrones or for power or for other gains. All these people became earth in the end. This shows us that there is nothing in this world to seize. Everything we have eventually becomes earth. Those who understand this live with immense freedom, a mind free of meanness, a mind full of compassion and *mettha*. Such a person does not envy; does not seek revenge; does not indulge in eye for eye retaliation. Such a person knows that this life is made up of parts, which become earth in the end. Now we can see how worthwhile it would be to practice this meditation of contemplation of the elements.

In a similar fashion, you need to consider the parts of the body, which flow, which are ones with water. The body has fluids such as bile which has a nature similar to water, therefore, are of the water element. Bile is of the water element. Then you consider the phlegm. This is the frothy liquid, which flows and is of the water element. This body has pus. The body creates pus when there are infections. Pus is of the water element. This body makes blood. Blood flows and is of the water element. This body creates perspiration, this is of the water element and it flows. Along with the perspiration this body has the stickiness, which is the body fat. This is of the water element too. This body creates tears, which is of the water element. This body has lymph fluids, which are also of the water element. The saliva produced by this body is also of the water element. This body produces mucus, which is of the water element. This body has synovial fluids, which lubricate joints which can be moved. This fluid is also of the water element. This body creates urine, which is of the water element or *apo dhathu*.

Similarly, this body has a warm nature. This is made up of the heat element or *thejo dhathu*. There are fluctuations of this warm nature, which is also of the heat element. Then, the food we consume is digested by this heat from the food. That is also the *thejo dhathu*. The aging process of the body is also because of the *thejo dhathu*.

Similarly, this body has components belonging to the wind or gaseous element, which is called *vayo dhathu*. There is gas created inside the stomach. This sometimes comes up through the gullet and is called *“uddhangamaneeya”* or upward wind. The gas created in the intestines escapes from our bottom end, and it is called *“adhogamaneeya”* or the downward wind. Then, this body has gaseous element that circulates throughout the body, which is called *“angamanganusari”* or circulatory wind. Then, there is the air we breathe in and out. All these components are of the wind element or *vayo dhathu*.

If you understand this correctly, as you mature in age, you would become somebody who understands life very well indeed. These instructions have been given by the Buddha. So, it is beneficial to practice the contemplation of elements. We can be totally confident that we are on the right track to understanding life.

**Mindfulness of Elements meditation**

Pay close attention to your body. In the head, we have **hairs** and they are like leaves on a tree. They fall when they are ripe. If all of your hair is detached, it will drop on to the earth. Let’s say all of this hair came out from our head and on to our hands. We will not keep it. We will throw it away, and it will gradually decay and transform into soil in the earth. Therefore, hair is something that transforms into soil, and it is pathavi dhātu.

**Body-hairs** in this body is also like head hairs. they get detached from this body. When all these body hairs are detached from the body, they fall onto earth and decay until they transform into soil. It is like those ripe leaves on a tree falling onto the ground and changing into soil after their deterioration.

**Nails** of this body grow. They get cut at some point. Nails that were cut were thrown away onto the ground. These transform into soil with time, and we don’t even notice it. In this way, nails on these fingers and toes mix with soil in earth and vanish forever.

**Teeth** are also something that transforms into soil. Teeth get decayed when they are still inside our mouths. Teeth rot, decay, and get crushed. Teeth that break from the mouth fall into the ground and decay until they transform into soil. How many teeth of countless people may have fallen onto the ground and transformed into soil? Teeth are something that transforms into soil. They are pathavi dhātu.

This **skin** is also like that. The skin gets scratched. This skin suffers from various things such as injuries, scabies, and eczema. This skin contracts, wrinkles and when we grow old, it rubs off. Someday when this skin falls onto the ground, it will disappear into the soil.

**Tendons** are also like that. These tendons also fall onto the ground and decay, transform into soil, and vanish someday.

We all have **bones** in our bodies. We all have a skeleton. How many countless skeletons we may have had in our past lives? In each life, we thought the skeleton like what have now is *ours*. There is a skull inside this head. There are neck-bones inside the neck. There are collar-bones. There are bones inside hands, elbows, and wrists. There are chest-bones, back-bones, waist-bones, thigh-bones, knee-bones, and calf-bones. There are lots of bones inside this body. One day, all these bones will fall onto the ground and decay, transform into soil, and completely vanish.

There is **bone-marrow** inside our bones. This bone-marrow also decays, transform into soil, and vanish together with bones.

There will be a day that **kidneys** also fall into the ground. Then they will decay and transform into the soil.

**The heart** will also decay and mix with the soil.

**The liver** will also fall onto the ground. It will also decay and transform into soil.

**The lungs** expand when we breathe in. They shrink when we breathe out. These also fall onto the earth, decay, and transform into soil.

Then, there is the **small-intestine** in this body. It is like a large, coiled rope. There is also a **large-intestine**. All of these rot and mix with soil in the earth. They transform into soil by decaying.

What we ate leaves our bodies as **feces**, which also transforms into soil after some time.

In this way, all these things have the nature of transforming into soil. They are pathavi dhātu. There are also things in this body that dissolve.

**Bile** in this body dissolves in water and vanishes. It is āpō dhātu.

There is also **phlegm** in this body. It is a foamy liquid. It also dissolves in water and vanishes. It is āpō dhātu.

**Pus** in this body forms when blood has rotted. It is a yellowish liquid. That pus also dissolves in water and disappears. Pus is also āpō dhātu.

There is also **blood** in this body. Blood also dissolves in water and disappears. Blood is āpō dhātu.

In this body, there is a liquid that forms throughout this body, from the head to the soles of the feet. It is called sweat. It also dissolves in water and disappears. Sweat belongs to āpō dhātu.

**Fat** is a sticky thing that comes out with sweat. It also dissolves in water.

There are also **tears** in this body. Tears come out from the eyes and also dissolve in water. Tears are āpō dhātu.

In this body, **mucus** also flows and come out from the nose. Sometimes it comes out suddenly. Mucus also get dissolved.

We have **saliva** in this body which flows. Right now, it doesn’t come out from our mouths because we swallow it and close our mouths. If we do not swallow saliva that flows in the mouth, it will come out. If that is the case, we will have to either wipe it off or wash it away.

Also, there is**urine** in this body. Urine also dissolves in water and vanishes. It is āpō dhātu.

These are the things that belong to āpō dhātu. They dissolve in water. All these can be found in this body.

There is also **heat** in this body. This body is created with that heat.

When that heat increases, we sweat and get fever.

When food and drink goes inside this body, that heat digests them and helps the body to absorb its nutrient. This happens by tējō dhātu.

It is also this tējō dhātu that ages this body. It also deteriorates this body until it get destroyed completely. All these are impermanent things.

Next, this body has things that blow with wind. Air that comes to the throat blows away with wind.

Air that comes out from the back also mixes with wind and blows away.

Air we breathe in also blows away with wind. Air that we breathe out is of the same nature. This air that we inhale and exhale also blows away with wind.

There is also air that moves here and there inside this body. This belong to vāyō dhātu.

So, you can see that these are the things that we have in our body. The things that transform into soil are pathavi dhātu. Things that dissolve are āpō dhātu. Things with the nature of warmth are tējō dhātu. Things that blow are vāyō dhātu. This is what we have. The Buddha taught us to contemplate well the fact that these kinds of things are in this body. He taught us to divide up this body like a butcher that sells cow-meat after he killed a cow and cut its flesh into pieces. That is when we can see the truth of this body. Then the attachment we have will become weakened and disappear.