

A Reading Course on the Saṃyukta Āgama (Saṃyutta Nikāya)

Lecture 10 | Aug 1, 2026

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1: Principles and Attitudes of Chan Meditation (Part I)

Introduction to the Saṃyukta Āgama and Four Foundations of Mindfulness

2: What is Chan Meditation?

Shattering Three Major Misconceptions, Seeing the True Nature of Reality

- [X] (1) It is NOT relaxation or (2) emptying the mind: True meditation is not blinding oneself to escape life.
- [X] (3) It does NOT pursue mystical peaceful experiences: Approaching with wrong expectations is like wanting to head north but traveling south.
- [✓] It is mental training to see the true nature of reality: Helping us truly awaken from the habitual dream of ignorance.

3: The Story of the Turtle and the Jackal (SA1167)

Preparing a "Shell of Awareness" for Yourself

Hungry Jackal = Life's Temptations: Sarcastic words, late-night shopping urges, anxiety about the future.

Large Turtle Retracting Six Limbs = Guarding the Six Sense Faculties: When facing external stimuli, temporarily withdraw your attention.

Not Avoidance, but Wisdom: Creating space to reflect on ego-clinging, refusing to blindly dance to external circumstances.

Turtle

Māra Pāpimant

4: Discipline of the Six Sense Faculties: Life as the Practice Ground

The Protective Shield Against Greed and Aversion

Eye – Ear – Nose – Tongue – Body - Mind

Life is Response: Life is the continuous encounter between the six sense faculties with external objects.

Breaking Free from Autopilot: No Longer reacting like a machine, instantly falling into craving or anger whenever a stimulus arises

The Wisdom of Temporarily Letting Go: Pausing Between “Contact” and “Sensation” to Protect the Mind

5: Attitude I: Focus Only on Cultivation, Not the Harvest

Spiritual Practice Is a Process of Ripening; It Cannot Be Rushed or Forced.

Letting Go of KPI Anxiety: Meditation cannot yield "enlightenment in three days"; it is a natural process of mental ripening.

SA263

Inspiration from the Hen Hatching Eggs: Simply maintain the warmth without praying daily, and the chick will hatch naturally.

Trusting the Law of Cause and Effect: Water and weed regularly; when conditions mature, the fruit ripens naturally.

6: Attitude II: Live in the Present, Cut Off Mental Exhaustion

SA1078

Neither Grieving the Past nor Desiring the Future

External conditions are like a play; internal mental states are like a movie.

Withered by Mental Exhaustion: Regretting yesterday and worrying about tomorrow causes one to wither quickly, like cut grass under a scorching sun.

Freshness of the Present: Focus solely on "this exact moment"—when eating, just eat; when walking, just walk.

Only the Present is Real: The past is gone, the future has not arrived; focusing on the present restores mental vitality.

7: Meditation Principle I: Ignore Wandering Thoughts

Neither Welcoming nor Rejecting; Gently Return to the Method

Engaging with Wandering Thoughts Brings a Double Loss: Regret , Tackle ; Wasting Time.

Return to the Method

Wandering Thoughts Are Natural: Treat distracting thoughts like naughty children; do not scold or chase them away.

Neither Suppress nor Pursue: Do not take wandering thoughts as real, nor try to forcefully eliminate them.

Return to the Method: Stay focused on your own practice; left unattended, wandering thoughts lose their appeal and naturally dissolve.

8: Meditation Principle II: Observe, Aware, Return

Joyfully Bringing the Mind Back

Observe (Operation): Applying the method, such as focusing on counting breaths or observing the rise and fall of the abdomen.

Aware (Awareness): Clearly knowing you are using the method, fully aware of the present state.

Return (Reclaiming): Upon realizing the mind has wandered, feel no annoyance, and joyfully bring the method back.

9: The Middle Way: Diligence and Balance

Metaphor of Sona Tuning the Lute Strings SA254

Too Tight / Restlessness and Remorse

The Middle Way / Balanced Practice

Too Loose / Slackness

Common Mistake: Meditation often falls into one of two extremes: striving too hard to empty the mind, or becoming too lax and dull.

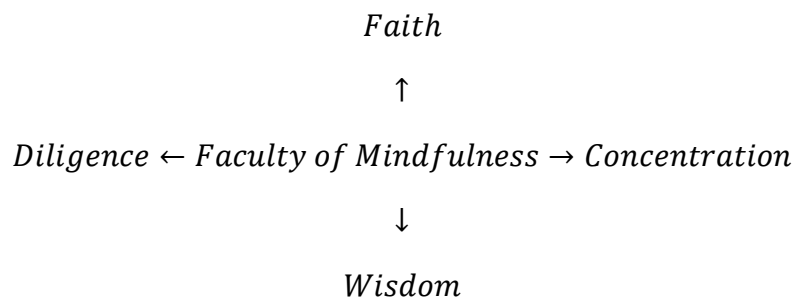
Wisdom of Tuning Strings: Strings that are too tight snap easily (restlessness and remorse); strings that are too loose make no sound (slackness).

Gentle and Steady Awareness: Maintaining an equanimous mind that is neither rushed nor sluggish is the fundamental attitude.

10: The Balancing System of the Five Spiritual Faculties SA654 & 657

Taking the "Faculty of Mindfulness" as the Primary Anchor to Balance and Harmonize Diligence and Concentration

- Balance of Faith and Wisdom: Avoid blind superstition and being misled by one's own cleverness.
- Balance of Diligence and Concentration: Avoid restlessness (excessive effort) and drowsiness/sloth (excessive stillness).
- Faculty of Mindfulness as the Primary Anchor: Right mindfulness holds the four faculties together, preventing the mind from forgetting its object and maintaining a state that is neither distracted nor sunk into dullness.



*Add "balance" around the Faculty of Mindfulness circle

11: Core Attitude I: Ardent Diligence (Ātāpī) [Right Effort]

Constant Small Streams of Water Can Pierce Stone

A Steady Fine Stream: Neither hurried nor lax, sustaining steady and uninterrupted effort.

Vigorous, Yet Not Reckless: Apply wholehearted effort to overcome the defilements, but not with the self-destructive intensity of a raging flood.

Countering the Five Hindrances: Through sustained and diligent contemplation, one dispels the mental obscurations of attachment, aversion, and delusion.

12: Core Attitude II: Heedfulness (Appamāda)

The Ultimate Safeguard of Clear and Continuous Mindfulness

- The Vigilance of A Gatekeeper: Like a turtle withdrawing its six limbs into its shell, one remains guarded at the very moment the senses come into contact with external objects.
- The Concentration in the Simile of the Bowl of Oil: Like carrying a bowl filled to the brim with oil through a crowd, it symbolizes supreme groundings in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness.
- The Defensive Mechanism of Liberation: The very first method among the Thirty-Seven Aids to Enlightenment, ensuring practice stays on course.

13: Fundamental Principle: Seeing Things as They Truly Are (Yathābhūta)

Wiping Away the Subjective Judgmental Dust from the Mirror

Neither Adding nor Altering: Let go of expectations of "how I want it to be" and simply remain a pure observer.

Wiping Away the Mist: Emotions are like mist on a mirror; seeing things as they truly are allows the mind to simply reflect reality.

Pain is Simply Pain: Do not add the self-identification of "I am in pain", avoiding secondary emotional harm.

14: Right Mindfulness, Right Comprehension, and Right Conduct

Mutually Supporting One Another and Integrated into Daily Activities

Right Mindfulness (Sati): Seeing the present moment

Right Conduct: Practice in daily life

Right Comprehension (Sampajañña): Understanding and responding

Right Mindfulness (Sati): Like turning on a light in a room, clearly aware of the present, preventing the mind from being carried away by emotions.

Life Is Practice: One clearly knows what one is doing while walking, sitting, lying down, speaking, or staying silent.

Right Comprehension (Sampajañña): Clearly understand observed phenomena and know how to respond and guide oneself correctly.

15: Quiet the Mind Within, Reality Reveals Itself as It Is

Stop Stirring, Allowing the Mind's Muddy Water to Settle and Clarify Naturally

SA 367

One should diligently cultivate skillful means in meditative contemplation, quieting the mind within... through diligent and skillful practice, reality reveals itself as it truly is.

SA207

One should cultivate the immeasurable samādhi with diligent mindfulness. Why so? *Having cultivated the immeasurable samadhi with diligent mindfulness, reality naturally reveals itself as it truly is.*

Stop Stirring Muddy Water: Concentration is not about creating results, but letting the mind become clear so reality can naturally emerge.

Counting the Breath (Simplifying Complexity): Use a single, simple meditation object to gather the scattered mind into unity.

Silent Illumination (Life Is Practice): Relax and let go of body and mind; neither welcoming nor rejecting, resting peacefully in the present moment of everyday life.

16: The Meditation Methods of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (Part II)

Contemplation of Body, Feeling, Mind, and Dharma

17: Overview of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness

Four Dimensions of Observation, Awakening from Inverted Views

Body → Awakening ← Feeling

Mind → Awakening ← Dharma

Practicing the Four Foundations of Mindfulness is practicing the Path. By cultivating the Path, one abandons the origin of suffering and realizes the cessation of suffering.

Four Foundations: Establishing a protective shield of awareness through four dimensions: Body, Feeling, Mind, and Dharma.

Reversing Inverted Views: Transforming ordinary people's attachments to purity, pleasure, permanence, and self into true wisdom by seeing reality exactly as it is.

18: Operational Dimensions of Contemplation

From Observing Local Features to Realizing Universal Characteristics

Particular-aspect mindfulness (Contemplating distinct individual features): In the early stages of practice, observe the unique characteristics of the Body, Feeling, Mind, and Dharma respectively.

Universal-aspect mindfulness (Contemplating shared universal characteristics): As concentration and wisdom strengthen, one perceives the shared nature of all phenomena - impermanence, suffering, non-self.

Unified Direct Contemplation: From observing localized, fragmented aspects to realizing the empty and tranquil nature of the five aggregates as an integrated whole.

【Particular aspects】 —► 【Impermanence, suffering, non-self】 —►
【Universal aspects】

Holistic contemplation

In this dimension, each act of contemplation simultaneously includes the other three.

19: Threefold Contemplation

Dissolving the Sense of Boundary Between Self and Others

Internal Contemplation: Observe the true nature of one's own body and mind—for example, one's own breathing and mental states.

External Contemplation: Observe others or the external environment, realizing they share the same nature of impermanence and suffering.

Interactive Internal-External Contemplation: Realize that both "self" and "other" are illusory arising and ceasing, dissolving the boundaries that give rise to conceit and opposition.

Internal → (No Boundaries) ← External

20: Dynamic Flow

Realizing the Middle Way of Dependent Origination: "When This Exists, That Comes to Be."

Contemplation of Arizing: Observe how phenomena arise due to the aggregation of causes and conditions.

Contemplation of Ceasing: Observe how phenomena inevitably cease when conditions disperse.

Contemplation of Arising and Ceasing: Realize impermanence through the continuous flow of arising and ceasing, without clinging to either existence or non-existence, thereby entering the Middle Way.

*Origination (Arising) ← [Middle Way of Dependent Origination]
→ Cessation (Ceasing)*

21: Mindfulness of Body (I)

Body-View is Hardest to Shatter: Is This Body Truly Mine?

- The Inflation of Self-Consciousness: We often regard the body as "me" and try to control it, giving rise to endless afflictions.
- Shattering the Illusion of Purity: Fallen hair, bathtub grime—once separated from the body, do you still feel that they are "you"?
- Facing Impurity Directly: The body ages and falls ill; clinging to it as the sole source of happiness inevitably gives rise to suffering.

Contemplation of Impurity

This is me!

Is this you?

22: Mindfulness of Body (II)

Shifting Perspective: The Body as a “Vessel for the Path” of Practice.

Burden / Affliction → Vessel for the Path / Wisdom

Accepting the Reality of Suffering: The body is inherently impure and subject to birth, aging, illness, and death; resisting these realities only contaminates the mind.

Observing Without Attachment: One may accept and enjoy temporary physical comfort, but must never cling to it.

Transforming Affliction into Bodhi: Use the body as an instrument for cultivating mindfulness in the present moment and for forming wholesome connections with others, transforming it into a source of wisdom and merit.

23: Mindfulness of Feeling (I)

Pleasure and Suffering Are Inseparable: The Lesson of Scratching an Itch

Fleeting Illusions: Eating, listening to music, sleeping—all sensory pleasures are merely temporary phenomena.

Scratching an Itch Analogy: The pleasure of satisfied desire is like the relief of scratching an itch; how long can it last?

Resistance Equals Suffering: Seeking pleasure and avoiding pain are natural instincts, but life's nature is impermanence; the more one resists impermanence, the greater the suffering.

Fleeting Pleasure / Scratching an Itch

Suffering

24: Mindfulness of Feeling (II)

Contemplating Feeling as Suffering: Seeing Reality Clearly, Not Pessimism

- All Pleasures in the Three Realms Are Fleeting: Whether in the desire realm (sensory), form realm (subtle), or formless realm, happiness eventually vanishes.
- Seeing the Suffering Within Pleasure: Understanding the potential decay and loss hidden within happiness helps us avoid being trapped by it.
- Facing It Peacefully: Contemplating feeling as suffering is not a teaching of despair or self-pity, but a way of learning to face and accept reality.

Stairway of Three Realms: Desire Realm → Form Realm → Formless Realm

All are impermanent and subject to suffering

25: Mindfulness of the Mind (I)

Deep Deconstruction in Buddhist Psychology

Conscious Awareness (Recognition): The most immediate awareness and cognition that arise when the five senses interact with the external world.

Intellect (Thinking and Memory): Mental processes that operate without relying on the senses, such as dreaming and recalling memories.

Mind (Continuity): The underlying continuum beneath consciousness that allows the stream of life and karmic processes to continue without interruption.

Conscious Awareness

Intellect

Mind

26: Mindfulness of the Mind (II)

Three Levels of Contemplating the Mind: Increasing Clarity Through Deeper Contemplation

- First Level (Awareness of Sensations): Observing intense, coarse, and temporary mental reactions triggered by senses.
- Second Level (Arising and Ceasing of thoughts): Beyond sensory influences, recognizing the illusory nature and rapid changes of thoughts themselves.
- Third Level (Clear Insight): As the mind becomes increasingly subtle, it gains the capacity to perceive the countless movements of mental processes, becoming ever clearer and more luminous.

Progression of levels: 【Coarse】 —► 【Subtle】 —► 【Clear & Luminous】

27: Mindfulness of the Mind (III)

Seeing the Mind's Impermanence Is Wisdom: Which Mind Is Truly You?

Mistaking Thoughts as the "Self": Taking successive thoughts such as pride, jealousy, and anger as oneself is the root of suffering.

The Mind is Merely A Mirror: Realizing that the mind is constantly flowing and changing, merely a vessel reflecting impermanence.

No Longer Identifying: When you stop identifying continuous thoughts as a "permanent self," suffering ceases; this is wisdom.

Thought Cluster (Anger, Jealousy, Pride) = The Mistaken Self

Round Mirror – like Reflection with clouds = The True Mind (Impermanence)

28: Mindfulness of the Dharma (I)

Choosing Between the Defiled and the Undefiled

What is Dharma? Refers to all physical phenomena, mental activities, and the teachings of the Buddha.

Defiled Dharma (Worldly Phenomena)

- Conditioned Arising and Ceasing

- Constant Change and Decay
- Giving Rise to Afflictions

Undeified Dharma (The Path to Liberation)

- Liberating Wisdom
- Realization of Non-Self
- Purity Free from Defilement

29: Mindfulness of the Dharma (II)

All Phenomena Are Non-Self: Nothing Has A Fixed or Eternal Substance

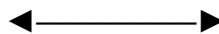
- Observing Inner Dharmas: In daily life, examine how various mental states give rise to our afflictions.
- Deconstructing the Illusion of the "Self": The so-called “self” is merely a patchwork of ever-changing positive and negative mental states.
- Everything is Dependent Origination and Illusory Cessation: All things arise through the aggregation of conditions; they change continuously, and nothing can be grasped as eternal.

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30: Summary and Conclusion

Benefiting Oneself and Others: Practicing the Path to Liberation in the World

【 Benefiting Oneself (Liberation through Mindful Awareness) 】



【 Benefiting Others (Delivering Sentient Beings with Compassion) 】

Skillfully Using the Body:

Devote your whole body and mind to spiritual practice and wholesome deeds, and realize impermanence and non-self through direct experience.

The Union of Compassion and Wisdom:

As you overcome your own afflictions through contemplation, you also come to see that other beings remain trapped in suffering.

The Ultimate Goal:

To dedicate all the wisdom and insight gained through practice, along with your body and mind, to helping all sentient beings be free from suffering and attain liberation.