

Going Deeper Meditation: Conditionality

Posture

We can support the development of concentration in the mind through the body's posture because body and mind are not separate, but mutually dependent

Just as two sheaves of reeds might stand leaning against each other, so too with experience as condition, awareness comes to be, with awareness as condition experience comes to be.

If friend, one were to remove one of those sheaves of reeds, the other would fall, and if one were to remove the other sheaf, the first would fall, so too with the cessation of experience comes the cessation of awareness, with the cessation of awareness comes the cessation of experience. SN 12:67

Habitually the body adapts a posture that reflects our state of mind, so that state of mind conditions posture of body. We can use the relationship creatively in the other direction by adopting a posture that holds objective qualities that support our practice. In particular

Stability/Groundedness

Balance

Poise/Lift

Openness

To develop a facility in this, we can do an exercise in three stages for any of these qualities:

1. Establish one's posture, and check that the quality is objectively present: for example that the torso is balanced on the sitting bones, not leaning over
2. Relax in to the posture so that you can get a sense of the experiential flavour of the quality in one's physical experience, for example attend to the quality of balance of the torso on the sitting bones
3. Find the parallel quality in one's state of mind. With balance that might be
 - a. a sense of balanced effort, with the attention leaning lightly in to the experience one is focusing on, as one sheaf of reeds might lean in to the other sheaf
 - b. a sense of balance of attention between the focus and a broad awareness

Bhavana Practice

The mindfulness of breathing (anapanasati bhavana) and metta bhavana meditations are both bhavana or 'cultivation and development' practices. They are both based on working creatively with the way in which our minds are conditioned.

As Sangharakshita says in the Survey (p141):

conditionality ... Is an all-inclusive reality ... within which are included two trends or orders of things, one cyclic between opposites, the other progressive between factors that mutually complement and augment each other.

Bhante has coined the terms 'mind reactive' and 'mind creative' for the two trends. In meditation, 'mind reactive' describes the experience of being stuck in hindrance, where

The underlying tendency to lust underlies pleasant feeling. The underlying tendency to aversion underlies painful feeling The underlying tendency to ignorance underlies neutral feeling MN 44.25

This also describes an ineffective approach to meditation in which we try to eradicate the unpleasant experience we are having in order to attain the pleasant experience we wish to have: wilful effort is characteristic of mind reactive.

Mind creative encompasses a creative engagement with hindrances, transforming them, and a cultivation of the qualities of concentration. It is not characterised by willed effort. As the Buddha said:

for one whose behaviour is virtuous, no volition need be exerted: 'let non-regret arise in me'. It is natural that non-regret arises in one whose behaviour is virtuous.

for one without regret, no volition need be exerted: 'let joy arise in me'. It is natural that joy arises in one without regret.

for one who is joyful, no volition need be exerted: 'let rapture arise in me'. It is natural that rapture arises in one who is joyful.

for one with a rapturous mind, no volition need be exerted: 'let tranquility arise in me'. It is natural that tranquility arises in one with a rapturous mind.

for one tranquil in body, no volition need be exerted: 'let pleasure arise in me'. It is natural that pleasure arises in one tranquil in body.

for one feeling pleasure, no volition need be exerted: 'let concentration arise in me'. It is natural that concentration arises in one feeling pleasure. AN 10.2

This creative engagement is Bhavana meditation practice: it is characterised by turning towards experience, being patient with what is difficult, appreciating what is positive, holding all experience in an equal positive regard.

It is relatively free of a wanting to be rid of what is difficult and wanting to have what is thought to be the goal of the practice one is doing. The passage above outlines a path towards insight through a succession of pleasurable experiences. Frequently we find that the experience we sit down to meditate with is a mix of pleasurable and painful, but with the withdrawing of wanting and not-wanting the feeling tone of experience becomes more neutral, closer to bare sense experience. Dhammadinna says of this neutral experience that

*it is pleasant when there is knowledge (of it) and painful when there is no knowledge
(of it) MN 44.24*

In the knowing quality with which awareness directly apprehends experience there is a pleasurable feeling tone (sukha) quite independent of any pleasurable feeling tone that might be found in the physical sensation itself (priti). Here Dhammadinna is indicating a path with more of an understanding orientation than a pleasure orientation. Whilst this might seem less attractive, an intention to develop a deeper understanding of one's experience is a much surer motivation in meditation than an intention to cultivate a more pleasurable experience.