

Dharma Drum Mountain Toronto: Selected Readings from the Saṃyukta Āgama

Lecture 9 | July 18, 2026

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Urban Sanctuary

Lecture Notes & Key Readings

1: Where is Your Mind Right Now?

- **Urban life** is filled with high stress and noise, causing the mind to constantly rush outward and wander.
- **The Four Foundations of Mindfulness:** Mapping out an exclusive "territory" for yourself.
- **A portable "sanctuary":** Allowing the mind to return and be protected at any time.

2: [SA 617 The Parable of the Quail]

- **Home Ground** : Safe Territory – The small bird retreats to its own ground, while the hawk crashes and shatters against a clod of earth.
- **Other's Territory** : Dangerous Open Area – When the small bird leaves its parents' territory, it is immediately captured by the hawk.

3: Two Territories of the Mind: Home (Where You Belong) vs. Dangerous Foreign Land

- **Home Ground (Home / *Gocara*):**
 - The Four Foundations of Mindfulness
 - The defensive fortress of the mind
 - Peaceful, stable, and secure
- **Other's Territory (Foreign Land / *Agocara*):**
 - The Five Desires (social media likes, emails, evaluations)
 - A chaotic zone full of danger
 - Lost and depleted

"On the path of cultivation, what is your '**Home Ground**' (own territory)? And what is the '**Other's Territory**' that causes you to bring about your own destruction, just like the hawk?

4: Subduing the Five Desires (SA 752 Kāma Sūtra): The Sickness is in the Mind, Not the Environment

- "The world is mixed with five forms, but they themselves are not love and desire."
- **Desire** is not external luxury, material possessions, or urban noise.
- The true pathology is "**clinging to perceptions and thoughts**" — the mind's internal attachment to external environments.
- Changing the rhythm of the city is difficult, but cutting off inner noise is entirely up to you.

5: The Path to Cutting-off Love and Desire: The Noble Eightfold Path

- Confronting invisible love and desire requires a concrete, traceable system.
- Moving from "**Right View**" to "**Right Concentration**" serves as the surgical knife that cuts through afflictions.
- The threefold learning of **Precepts, Concentration, and Wisdom** works in synergy.
- Transforming scattered urban life into a place of cultivation practice.
- **[SA 752]:** "There is a path and a track, to cut-off this love/desire."

6: The Clinging Mind (Mind Clinging Outward): Without a Master and Swayed by External Circumstances

- Constantly scrolling on phones and unconsciously looking for people to chat all because of a mind with nowhere to rest.
- When the inner self lacks a "**master**," the mind searches outward for an anchor externally.
- Clinging cannot bring satisfaction; instead, it causes the spirit to revolve around external circumstances, depleting its energy.
- Ceasing to cling outward is the first step to reclaiming dominance.

7: The Parable of the Six Sense Faculties (SA 1171): Internal Depletion of Sentient Beings in the Six Realms

- **Eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind:** Like six wild beasts with different habits, each rushing toward its desired stimulus.
- **Extreme tug-of-war:** The conflict among these six directions creates the deepest fatigue of urban life.
- **Energy loss:** The mind and spirit become completely exhausted in the fragmented pursuit of the senses.

8: Mindfulness of the Body = A Strong Pillar: The Stabilizing Anchor that Gathers the Six Senses

- Instead of killing the six beasts, erect an immovable pillar.
- "**Mindfulness of the Body**" — Pure awareness of the body's present state.
- Tying the six sense faculties to the strong pillar, clinging inwardly towards a pure state.
- When the senses exhausted from struggling, the mind naturally settles and stabilizes.

9: Grasping the Signs of One's Own Mind (SA 616 Parable of the Cook): Becoming the Master Chef of Your Mind Intellect

- **[SA 616 Parable of the Cook]:** A clever cook observes the master's tastes and flexibly adjusts the seasoning.
- Cultivation is fine-tuning: one must constantly "**grasp the signs of one's own mind**" and engage in dynamic self-dialogue.
- **Real-time monitoring:** Is it anxiety right now? Fatigue? Or peace?
- **Antidote formula:** Read the dashboard of your inner mind and provide the correct solution.

10: Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra: Antidotes for "Skillfully Grasping the Signs of One's Own Mind"

- **Dullness (昏沈) vs. Restlessness (掉舉)**
- Reaction → Awareness → Focus — Mindfulness — Diligence → Precision → Taming
- Blind practice without guidance will lead to a decline in concentration.
- **Dullness:** The mind is too heavy and powerless; and needs to be uplifted with diligence.
- **Restlessness:** The mind is too careless, excited, and scattered; and needs relaxation and tranquility.
- **Awareness:** Mindful, dynamic fine-tuning keeps meditative concentration (*samādhi*) from regressing.

11: Aniruddha Practicing the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (SA 535): The Only Way Out

- Supernatural powers are not magic; they are the highest form of focus. When you fully master your present moment, you become the sovereign territory of your own life.
- **[SA 535] Venerable Aniruddha's Realization:** The fundamental great path that cannot be bypassed.
- **The Singular Path (The One-Way Path):** The only path to purify sentient beings and freeing from sorrow, grief, pain, and anxiety.
- Only by starting with the Four Foundations of Mindfulness can one strip away the anxiety accumulated from the urban life.
- This is not escapism, but an answer that directly strikes the true reality of life.

12: Transcend Birth and Death through the Six Senses: Affliction is the Gate to Liberation

- **Six Senses as the Root of Birth and Death:** Senses blindly reaching outward serve as the root cause of samsara and daily depletion.
- **Six Senses as the Gate to Liberation:** Awakening must likewise be achieved through the senses. First relax the body and mind, concentrate the mental strength, and turn the trap into an entrance.

13: Three Abandonments to Transcend Desire (1): Relying on Food to abandon Food

- **[SA 564] Mindful Eating:** Restoring eating to a pure replenishment of energy.
- **Strip away the four mindsets:** The mind of pleasure, the mind of arrogance, the mind of pampering (attachment), and the mind of decoration.
- View food as the lubricant that maintains cultivation and life.
- In three daily meals, practice cutting off the endless dependence on material things.

14: Three Abandonments to Transcend Desire (2): Relying on Arrogance to abandon Arrogance

- Sublimating competitiveness and ambition in a highly stressed workplace into a spiritual driving force.
- Break through self-limiting "**negative arrogance**": Stop saying you cannot do it.
- Make good use of positive pride/arrogance: "Others can attain liberation, why can't I?"
- Utilize the momentum of refusing to give-up, to ultimately transcend afflictions altogether.

15: Three Abandonments to Transcend Desire (3): Relying on Craving to abandon Craving

- Mundane love and desire are mixed with control and scarcity, like small flames that consume the mind spirit.
- Do not suppress it; but rather look for a "**greater aspiration**."
- Transform small love for people and things into a great love for absolute freedom.
- Replace and extinguish sensual pleasures and private love with a powerful love and joy for Nirvana and liberation.

16: Three Core Highlights of the SA 564 Scripture

1. **Hearing the Dharma to cut-off Doubt, Attaining the Pure Dharma Eye:** Venerable Ānanda explained the principle of cutting-off sexual desire. Upon hearing the Dharma, the Bhikkhunī (nun) was suddenly enlightened,

"leaving behind the dust and defilement, attaining the Pure Dharma Eye," transcending her doubts and giving rise to fearlessness toward the True Dharma.

2. **Seeing the Dharma to Realize to the Path, Revealing and Confessing:** After seeing the Dharma, the Bhikkhuni no longer escape, but bravely faced her past foolishness and unwholesomeness. She took the initiative to pay respect to the Venerable, sincerely confessed her faults, and openly repented, demonstrating the courage of a practitioner.
3. **Compassionate Acceptance, Growth of Wholesome Qualities:** Venerable Ānanda compassionately accepted her confession and encouraged her: as long as one can recognize and see one's own faults and sincerely repent, one will fully attain the precepts in the future, and one's "wholesome qualities" will continuously grow and never regress.

17: Golden Quote from the Sutta

"If there are those who see their own faults, know their own faults, and can repent, they will attain the full precepts in future lives; their wholesome qualities will increase, and they will ultimately never regress." — *Venerable Ānanda, Samyukta Āgama, Sutra 564*

18: Mindfulness of Breathing (Anapanasati - SA 803): The Core of Cultivating "Śamatha"

The cultivation logic of this sutra can be presented in a linear progression:

Preliminary Practice (alms-gathering & guarding sense bases) → Sitting Meditation (abandoning the five hindrances) → Body (knowing breath, calming body-conditioning) → Feeling (knowing joy and pleasure, calming feeling-conditioning) → Mind (knowing the mind, calming the mind, concentrating the mind, knowing liberation) → Wisdom (contemplating impermanence, abandoning, dispassion, cessation)

19: The Three-Stage Integration of Meditation Practice

1. **Daily Integration:** In daily life (such as alms-gathering), one must properly guard the body and mind and protect the sense gates. Maintain vigilance at all times and abide in right mindfulness as the solid foundation for meditation.
2. **Advance Preparation:** Find a clean, quiet place (in the forest, a quiet room, or an open space). Before starting, one must "sit upright with a straight body" in the auspicious posture (full lotus posture) to stabilize body and mind, making it easy to enter the state of concentration.
3. **The Present Moment of Practice:** One must "set mindfulness in front" (maintain presence of mind), focusing the mind on the object of meditation (such as observing the breath or contemplating the impurity). Simultaneously stay far away from the "**Five Hindrances**" that obstruct wisdom and weaken the individual.

20: Eradicating Afflictions: A Comparison of Concentration and Wisdom

- **Practicing Concentration (e.g., Anapanasati) — [Like Suppressing Grass with a Stone]:** A convenient method for practicing concentration that helps practitioners attain the cessation of body and mind, temporarily eliminating perceptions and afflictions. However, upon emerging from samādhi (concentration), afflictions will still arise. Therefore, "Concentration" is a supporting condition for liberation.

- **Practicing Wisdom (e.g., Four Foundations of Mindfulness) — [Like Uprooting from the Core]:** Contemplating the body and mind from moment to moment, knowing and seeing things as they truly are. When unwholesome states arise, bring forth the "Right Knowledge (true wisdom)" to eradicate them completely. Afflictions will not recur; therefore, "Wisdom" is the primary cause of liberation.

21: Core Message

Liberation relies primarily on wisdom; meditative concentration and cessation are merely supporting conditions. — *The Core Spirit of Samyukta Āgama, Sutra 803*

22: Mindfulness of Breathing (SA 803): The Core of Cultivating "Śamatha"

Contemplate "Single-pointedness of mind" (bring the mind to a single point)

Contemplate "Breathing"

- The most portable dharma practice method: Awareness of the incoming and outgoing breath.
- No control, no artificial manipulation—simply relax and observe.
- Gently rest your attention on the rise and fall, like sitting on a riverbank watching the current.
- As the breath becomes subtle, the coarse fabrications of body and mind naturally cease.

23: Two Core Essentials for Practicing the Four Foundations of Mindfulness in SA 615

"Skillfully bind the mind and dwell; know its preceding and succeeding rise and fall."

- **Skillfully bind the mind and dwell, knowing things as they truly are:** if the mind reaches outward and clings to external objects, it must be promptly stopped and gathered back. There is no need to forcefully suppress the scattering of thoughts; simply maintain clarity and objectively "knowing as it truly is."
- **Counteracting dullness, skillfully transforming thoughts:** When practicing the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (Body, Feelings, Mind, Phenomena), if one falls into drowsiness and laziness, one must not force the mind into dead stillness. Instead, one should skillfully "grasp the sign of purity" (arouse pure faith) to uplift the spirit.

24: The Sequence of Calming the Mind to Dissolve Dullness

1. **Grasp the pure aspects to arouse faith:** When body and mind are lax, recollect pure characteristics to give rise to pure, undefiled faith.
2. **Generate joy and pleasure:** Because pure faith arises, the inner mind feels pleased, further triggering a joyful heart.
3. **Tranquility of the body and experience of pleasure:** Joy brings relaxation and lightens the body (tranquility), thereby experiencing the physical bliss of meditation.
4. **Concentrated mind and true knowing:** Joy leads to a settled mind. Free from thought and examination, putting anxieties to rest and forgetting external conditions, one abides in meditative bliss and truly aware of things as they really are.

25: Sixteen Steps of Mindfulness (1): The Cessation of Body and Feeling

[Mindfulness of Body] Physical Level: Knowing long and short breaths, be aware of the whole body breathing, and calm the bodily conditioning (bodily tension).

[Mindfulness of Feeling] Experiential Level: Be aware of the subtle joy and happiness, and calm the mind conditioning (emotional fluctuations).

- **Core Benefit:** Allowing the body and emotions to completely reset within the rhythm of breathing.

26: Sixteen Steps of Mindfulness (2): The Unfolding of Mind and Dharma

[Mindfulness of Mind] Cognitive Level: Clearly aware of the state of mind, bringing joy, stability and single-mindedness, knowing the mind's liberation.

[Mindfulness of Dharmas] Wisdom Level: Objectively contemplate impermanence, to cut-off attachment → dispassion → complete cessation.

- **Core Benefit:** When the body and feelings are tranquil, the mind “intellect” possesses extremely high resolution of clarity to understand, and enabling direct insight into reality as it truly is.

27: Śamatha and Vipassanā: The Same Breath, from Coarse to Subtle

Śamatha: The first half (Body, Feeling) calms the coarse disturbances, allowing the mind to settle into stillness.

Vipassanā : The second half (Mind, Phenomena) unfolds razor-sharp wisdom within absolute stillness.

- **Core Conclusion:** A perfectly integrated dual-track system — from letting go of anxiety to the realization of liberation, all within the span of a single breath.

28: Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration of the Eightfold Path (SA 785)

- **Right Mindfulness:** Maintaining awareness, the method of mindfulness:
 - Firmly bind the mind to the present-moment target (like the breath).
 - Without losing the slightest awareness or distraction; as a stable anchor.
- **Right Concentration:** Continuous abiding, aligning with the state of meditative concentration.
 - The state of mind remains undisturbed and unmoving. Completely absorbed in absolute tranquility, like the surface of a windless sea.
 - The ultimate state of unity between body and mind, the pinnacle of the Noble Eightfold Path.

29: Guarding the Mind in a Busy Marketplace: The Oil Bowl and the Tightrope Walker

[SA 623 The Parable of the Oil Bowl]

- Even though in a noisy crowd, the mind is like holding a bowl filled to the brim with oil.
- Focused entirely on one single-minded thought, not daring to look around.

[SA 619 The Tightrope Walker]

- On a dangerous tightrope, carefully maintain your own balance (self-protection).
- Self-protection also means protecting the companion below (protecting others).
- **Core Summary:** True Practice of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness is not about closing your eyes in the deep mountains, but remaining calm and stable even when your eyes are open in a busy marketplace.