

LESSON 4

HOW TO REPORT DURING MEDITATION INTERVIEWS

1. Relax. You are not visiting the dentist. Just reporting your meditation experience. There is no need to impress. And the teacher is here to help you, not to intimidate. So just report objectively whatever you can recollect, telling it as it is.
2. As there is not much time for the interview and there are other yogis waiting, please try to keep to the time allotted, so as not to keep the others waiting. Thus you have to report concisely. How?
3. First report on your primary or main meditation object. For example, if your main object is the inbreath and outbreath at the nostrils, please report what you observe of the breath. What was the inbreath like? What was the outbreath like? Try to report on the breath separately: instead of just saying my breath is like this or that, be more specific by saying my inbreath felt like this and my outbreath felt like this? Other observations that may be reported: Was the breath long, short, medium? gross, subtle, fine? deep, shallow? clear, distinct, faint, unclear? difficult or easy to notice? Was it continuous or were there pauses, such as in between breaths? Did the mind wander during the pauses? Did the breath stop in the sense that you could not discern it at all? Did the breath become more and more subtle as the meditation progresses? Were there sensations at the area around the nostrils where the attention of the mind was placed? Etc.
4. How did the body feel – relax, calm, at ease? Tense, tight, taut, agitated, uncomfortable? Similarly, how was the mind? Was it calm or tense? Was it interested, absorbed, concentrated, calm, peaceful, tranquil, light, soft or disinterested, bored, restless, agitated? Was it dull, sleepy, lazy, lethargic, heavy or light, clear, alert, fresh, mindful? Did the mind wander much? Were you able to note the wandering mind? Did it stop? How long can you stay with the breath before the mind wanders? Ten in- and outbreaths? 20 such breaths? 5 minutes? 10 minutes? Did you notice the content or nature of your thoughts; in other words what were you thinking about? From the content of your thoughts you can learn a lot about yourself, too; for example you can know whether you are the worrisome type or not, you can know what are the things that are worrying or troubling you, how you are conditioned to respond or react in a certain way; etc. You may note the content of your thought and then let it go and come back to your breath. In other words don't chase the thoughts, don't pursue after it, don't continue to think; after you have noticed the thought, drop it and come back to your breath.
5. If you are following the breath into the chest, then report accordingly. How does it feel like? How would you describe the in- and outbreath? How is the sensation in the chest like? Expansion, tightness, relaxation, contraction, etc.
6. If your primary object is the rising and falling of the abdomen, then place your attention at the abdomen. There is no need to follow your breath from the nostrils right down to your abdomen. Rather place your attention at the abdomen and wait there to observe the rise and fall as they occur. You may be asked: "How was the rising movement like? How was the falling movement like? Was it long, short, medium? fast, slow, moderate? gross, subtle, fine? clear, distinct, unclear, faint? Did you notice tightness, pressure, hardness or relaxation, softness? Were there pauses in between the fall and rise and the rise and fall? Was it easy or difficult to notice the movements? And so on.
7. If your object is the sitting and touching sensations, describe how and what you observe. What did you notice in the sitting posture: the feeling of uprightness in the back, stiffness, tension? What did you notice of the touching sensations at the buttocks and seat, legs and seat, hand on hand, hands on leg, etc? Warmth, pressure, hardness, tingling, etc?

8. If as you observe the abdominal rise and fall or the inbreath and outbreath, you also notice the sitting and touching sensations, then describe how you alternate between these objects. For example, a meditator may say: "I was observing the inbreath and outbreath at the nostrils but after a while I found that I could not stay with it, the mind tends to wander away, and the breath too was very subtle and difficult to notice, so I became more aware of my sitting and touching sensations – they became more apparent and dominant while the breath tends to fade into the background...but sometimes the breath became apparent again and the touching sensations fade off or became less noticeable and were more in the background..." Or "As I breathe in and out I found that the sitting and touching sensations were also apparent and I could not help noticing both the breath and the sitting and touching sensations at the same time...."

(Please note that when you are being given precise instructions and examples on how to report, you might form certain concepts and expectations in your mind and you may project these concepts and expectations onto your meditation practice. At the same time if you are not given such precise instructions and examples, you might be at a loss as to what to do, how and what to report, what to look out for, what is important, etc. Thus I think it is better that you be given clear guidelines from the start rather than be groping about in the dark. Especially as this is a short retreat and we can't afford to spend too much time in diversions. The above directions and examples are, however, just some guidelines: your meditation experience may be very varied and differ from those mentioned here. So what is important is to observe with an open and objective mind. Report accordingly what you observe, report it as it is, and not as what you think or imagine it to be. In other words when you're meditating you should let go of or put aside your pre-conceived concepts and expectations and observe your meditation objects with a beginner's mind, as if you don't know anything and are observing the object for the first time. What you want to ensure is that you are reporting what you actually observe, that your experience is authentic and not presumed or imagined.)

9. Report secondary objects observed such as numbness, ache, itch, and pain. What were those sensations like? Could you describe them? Did they change? Did you notice the various changes, the increase and decrease in intensity, etc.? And how was the mental response towards the pain and discomfort? Was there aversion, resistance, tension or was there acceptance and equanimity? Did you have to scratch or move your body? Other secondary objects that may be reported are hearing sounds and seeing mental images. How did you note these when they arise? Did they disappear?
10. Report on the various states of mind you noticed during the course of your sitting, such as feeling of calm, peace, agitation, restlessness, clarity, dullness, heaviness, sleepiness, wandering mind, thoughts, etc.
11. **Walking meditation:** In say the three-step walking meditation, report on what you observe in the lifting of the foot, in the pushing and placing of it. For example, when you lift your foot what did you observe? Could you follow that lifting movement from beginning to end? What kind of sensations could you discern? Lightness, heaviness, stiffness, hardness, etc? Similarly when you push the foot forward, could your attention be placed on that movement from the beginning to the end? What sensations could you discern? And similarly for the placing or lowering of the foot onto the ground, could you be with that movement from beginning to end? And when the foot touches the floor/ground, what sensations do you discern? Hardness, softness, warmth, cold, etc. Then when you reached the end of the walk, did you note the stopping, standing, intending to turn, turning, standing, intending to walk, lifting....? (Please note that when doing brisk walking you may turn without stopping.)
12. **Mindfulness in other activities:** How is your continuity of mindfulness from the moment you get up till the moment you lie down on your bed to retire for the night? Could you be mindful of the waking moment and the getting up? And the last act of lying down at night? Could you be mindful

of all the other activities in between this first and last act of the day, in other words, of all your activities in the course of the day, of going to washroom, washing the face, urinating, defecating, bathing, changing, eating, drinking, getting up, sitting down, opening/closing door, switching on/off light, turning on/off tap, washing the dishes and cups, slipping your foot into your slipper, etc? How much of the time could you be mindful? Was the mind often distracted or was it quite focused? Could you note the **intention** too before you do something, such as the intention to get up or sit down before doing so?

13. Any other event or experience you deem significant for reporting. So as you can see, there are lots of things to report, more than enough to fill up the mere ten minutes of interview time. So please report as concisely as you can. There is, of course, no time to report everything. So report what you feel are the significant experiences.

Sometimes you may feel after a few days that you have nothing new to report, like it is the same old thing, same old experience. Then report that same old experience again. It is okay, we don't mind listening again. - *Visuddhacara*

RADIATING OF METTA (GOODWILL, LOVING KINDNESS, GOOD WISHES, FRIENDLINESS)

Besides the nightly metta session, you can spend a few minutes radiating metta at the start of each sitting by mentally reciting:

May I be happy.
May I be safe.
May I be peaceful.
May I be healthy.
May I take care of myself happily.
May I be healed.
May I find true peace and happiness.

(By healing is meant not only physical but also mental healing – healing from our mental wounds, anguish, neuroses, traumas and unwholesome psychological conditioning.)

Then you can radiate to persons you wish to radiate to by mentally reciting: *May so and so be happy. May he/she be safe...* and so on.

And you can also radiate to all beings, saying: *May all beings be happy. May they be safe* and so on.

You can also use your own words, frame your own lines/ phrases/ wishes.

Many ways of radiating: to (a) oneself (b) dear ones, friends, teachers, benefactors (c) neutral ones (acquaintances, people we know casually or just by sight or have little feeling for) (d) difficult ones (hostile ones, people we have difficulty or conflict with now or in the past.

To beings around us, say to our helpers in this retreat, to neighbours and unseen beings (spirits); to all those in the area/locality/village spreading out to the town, city, state, country, world, universe, all planes of existence.

Can radiate randomly, just think of anybody, now this person, now that person.

Can radiate to all beings using different terms such as May all beings.....may all living things.....all creatures.....all individuals.....personalities (i.e. conventional selves).

Can radiate to specific groups: (1) all females (2) all males (3) all ariyas [noble ones] (4) all anariyas [ordinary beings who have not attained any stage of sainthood] (5) all devas [heavenly beings] (6) all human beings (7) all *apaya* beings (i.e. all those in the four woeful states of existence – hell beings, ghosts, *asuras* [titans], animals).

Can radiate according to directions: all those in the north...east...south...west...north-east...south-east...north-west...south-west...above...below.

- The above ways of radiating are taken from the Visuddhimagga, an ancient Buddhist manual on meditation.

Manner of radiating

1. Try to concentrate and recite the words slowly in the mind and really mean what you are saying or wishing, really feel the good wish for others. Try to get absorbed, fully concentrated, in this wishing. Forget about everything else, i.e., let go of all other thoughts.
2. Then as you get proficient in the radiating, you can adjust your speed, i.e. you can go fast and slow as you like, sometimes picking up speed and sometimes slowing down. Sometimes you find that the mind can go very fast on its own and sometimes at a moderate or slow pace. It can seem to go like a tape recorder, i.e., going by itself without any apparent effort on your part, effortlessly, so to speak. Also as you become more proficient, you may sometimes not have to recite but just think the thought – may he be happy, etc.
3. If you like, you may visualise or have a glimpse of the face of the person from time to time but it is not necessary to do this all the time, only when you feel like doing so.
4. You can also use any other techniques as long as you find that it works for you, i.e. your mind can become concentrated and absorbed in the radiating.
5. You can also be aware sometimes of your breath and body sensations as you radiate.
6. If you are having bodily pain/discomfort, you can try to ignore it and continue to radiate and the pain/discomfort might just not be felt after some time. But if you find that the pain persists, you can move or adjust your body/limbs to get rid of the discomfort.
7. In everyday life you can, besides making it a habit to be mindful, also cultivate the habit of radiating metta every now and then wherever you are and in whatever you are doing. You just have to mentally make a wish, recite the line which won't take more than a few seconds or more if you choose to radiate a little longer. Try radiating everywhere in any or every kind of activity, situation, occasion.

* By radiating we mean just to make the wish, to form the thought, and send it out to the person concerned, that is, to send it out by way of making the wish. And we make the wish by way of mentally saying the line: 'May he be happy...'