



This is the document to read out during a RAFT to Recovery meeting. The full document is available for download in the table available via this [link](#).

A section from this week's practice.

Mindfulness of the body's impermanence – contemplating change, ageing, and death

Recognising the impermanent nature of our raft

Facing life's ultimate destination

"All conditioned things are impermanent. When one sees this with wisdom, one turns away from suffering". Gotama – The Buddha

We now arrive at the sixth and final exploration within the **First anchor of mindfulness** (mindfulness of the body), serving to help us **recognise** what it is to be human. This practice delves into the profound and often challenging territory of the body's ultimate impermanence, looking at the body through the lens of ageing, sickness, death, and decomposition. Traditionally, this includes the contemplation known as mindfulness of death.

It is vital to approach this practice with wisdom, clarity of purpose, and self-compassion. The intention is not to cultivate morbidity, disgust, aversion, or self-hatred. As Gotama cautioned against extremes, this practice should not lead to self-affliction. Rather, its purpose, when undertaken skillfully, is deeply liberating:

In Gotama's famous talk on the four anchors of mindfulness, he describes the 'charnel ground contemplations' where one observes corpses in various stages of decomposition – bloated, discoloured, festering, being eaten, reduced to bones and turning to dust. Gotama describes the practice in detail as a sequence of contemplations focused on the decomposition of a corpse. We

are invited to visualise or directly observe various stages of decay to reflect on the nature of our bodies. The key passages describe observing a corpse in stages of decay such as:

- Swollen and bloated.
- Discoloured and festering.
- Gnawed by animals, dismembered, and scattered.
- Reduced to a skeleton with flesh and blood.
- Bones scattered and eventually reduced to dust.

We are advised to reflect on the reality:

“My body, too, is of the same nature, it will be like that, it is not exempt from that fate.”

This direct reflection aims to break through our denial and see our body's true nature without romanticisation or aversion. For many modern practitioners without access to actual charnel grounds, this contemplation is done through visualisation or reflection on the natural processes of decay observed elsewhere. Although this practice is ancient and traditional, it still continues to be practiced by some monastics today.

Self-Reflections

Approach these reflections gently, with self-compassion:

- ★ What feelings or thoughts arise when I honestly consider my own ageing process?
- ★ What are my fears or anxieties surrounding illness and death? How much mental energy do they occupy?
- ★ How strongly do I identify with my physical body as ‘me’? How does the idea of its eventual decay affect that identification?
- ★ Can I recall moments where contemplating the brevity of life motivated me to act more wisely or compassionately?
- ★ How does the reflection *“This body, too, is of the same nature...”* feel when applied to myself?

- ★ How does understanding the impermanence of the raft change how you view your journey to the safe shore?
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Remember to remember

This practice demands wisdom, balance, and profound self-compassion. It is not about forcing ourselves into morbid states but about gently and persistently cultivating realistic insight to foster liberation. We can adapt the practice, focus on impermanence generally, or choose other methods if needed. The ultimate aim, as with all these practices, is the reduction of suffering and the cultivation of peace. Having now explored the body through these six lenses, we gain a much clearer, more grounded recognition of our starting point, preparing us to investigate further aspects of human experience on the first stage of our journey.

"The body is like a water bubble, it is here for a moment and then it is gone. Contemplate this and you will find peace." Ajahn Chah

"With a greater sense of understanding comes a greater sense of wonder, and a greater realization that we are part of and not apart from the rest of nature. And, when the end of consciousness comes, there is nothing to be afraid of, nothing at all."

Anil Seph - Being You.

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