

## **Meditating Away the Coronavirus, Outer and Inner**

Bhikkhu Mihita, Toronto, Canada (March 10 2020)

As the WHO and other organizations and institutions, global, national and local, keep reminding us, it is imperative that each of us take responsibility to take the maximum precautions to protect ourselves from being contaminated from the Coronavirus that is in the environment, i.e., outside of us. But from a Buddhist perspective, it is the *Coronavirus of the inside* as well that may need immediate attention, to deal with the outside threat, even if we were to stay indoors 24 hours of the day.

The Coronavirus of the inside (CVI) is the *anxiety* each of us may have of catching the Coronavirus outside (CVO), and an envisaged imminent death. To see how the CVI can be calmed, then, let us get an understanding of death.

In Buddhism, death is characterized as the ‘Thirst to be not’ (TTBN) (*vibhava tanha*). It is the opposite of the ‘Thirst to be’ (TTB) (*bhava tanha*), i.e., ongoing living, and something that each of us desires within the bosom of our psyche. Joining in the Thirst stream is a third, namely, Sense Thirst – the Thirst for sense gratification (*kama tanha*) (TSG).

To enjoy that ice cream, or the daily shot of whiskey, or the sexual intimacy, or to yell in anger or hold that gun to get your enemy, or invade that hated country is the TSG. This is all by way of gratification of the senses – the five physical senses as in the western understanding, the Buddha positing a sixth *mind sense*, holding the conductor baton.

And so what’s the connection between and among the Thirst trio relevant to the CVI anxiety?

To begin with, it is only if we are born that we can enjoy the ‘Sense Thirst’, TSG, would you not grant? But as we keep enjoying, we die, as is nature - suddenly as we fly in business class or in deep sleep in your humble bed, or gradually as in illness or ageing. But, sudden or otherwise, the senses haven’t had enough gratification! So, wanting more, we yearn to come back, and thus come to born again. But, to be born, we have to die! Don’t we? This then is what makes death a Thirst, the inherent Thirst to be not, waiting to be quenched serving as the condition for the generation of a next mindbody, a rebecoming, based in the TTB. With an inherent Sense Thirst within, it alone allows for that continuing gratification cut off. This then is the cycle.

So we see that death is as much part of reality as is birth. Yet, we fret when it arrives at our door, not wanting to accept the reality in our ignorance, but also in the greed for gratifying the senses. Ironically then the beloved ‘Thirst to be not’, which brought the life, now comes to be your enemy, creating anxiety, because you are still in the throes of enjoying the Thirst in the Senses. This, then, is what explains the anxiety at the thought of death. Why the anxiety? Because we don’t want to accept that death is a reality as much as birth is.

So we can see that *anxiety is the CVI* – the inner Coronavirus, and that it needs immediate attention. The CVO we can avoid because it is, by definition, outside of us, and we can keep

away from it. But the CVO is self-created, and staring in our face. This would be a classic example of what the Buddha calls ‘created suffering’ (samkhara dukkha). Because the suffering is self-created, only you can work towards getting rid of it.

So can Buddhism help? Yes, indeed! Putting to work what every living being comes with, namely, breathing. But, in an extension of it. Let’s call it *Deep breathing meditation* (DBM)!

Now the word ‘meditation’ may immediately bring the corporate world, or any other, the words, “Oh, I have no time”. But it is a thorough misunderstanding that the Buddha wants you to go to the bush or a temple, or a specific place, while your home and the neighborhood goes into chaos, your business collapses or the country goes on fire. Or sit cross-legged until the cry of your thigh muscles overwhelms you. Yes, both keeping a distance from the busy world, and sitting in a disciplined posture do have their place. But it is only in the context of the lengthy practice of Cultivating the Establishment of Mindfulness (*satipatthana bhavana*) that such a strict practice is called for by the Buddha.

But DBM is a practice that can be done sitting in your most comfortable chair in your most comfortable posture. But if in that comfort you have come to fall asleep, or your mind has gone astray, then may be you will have taken to crossing the legs, and keeping the back straight, having self-graduated to the hard floor!

So what is DBM? Simple. Take a *deep breath*, aware that it is a breath longer than the standard. Then, follow the breath up the nasal canal, down to the lungs, holding it to a count of 5 to 10, and then begin the reverse process. Dealing with the CVO, we wash our hands for 20 seconds, with water or a cleanser. In a parallel way, in each phase of DBM, the mind comes to be washed for 20 seconds as well, mindfully: 5 seconds taking in the breath up the nasal and down the air canal; 5 secs. holding it in the lungs; 5 secs. the air back up the lungs; and once out, ‘in a holding pattern’, i.e., not taking in any air, for 5 more seconds.

Doing this 15 times, i.e., 5 minutes, we return to the *normal breathing*. After the same number of times, we repeat the DBM. Doing this ‘internally’ 15 times, i.e., 5 minutes, we return to the *normal breathing*. On and on goes the cycle, spending a minimum of 20 minutes at each sitting. Try it and see how you feel! Don’t be surprised if you were to ask yourself, “What anxiety? Get lost, will ya, old man anxiety! I am with my breath, I mean, with my diligent young self”!

So how does it work? In the Buddha’s analysis, an individual is made up of six parts- the *four Great Elements* (4GE) – liquidity, heatity, airity (sorry for my linguistic entrepreneurship, making up the two terms) and solidity, in interaction with each other, plus *space* – in the nose, ear, etc., with *consciousness*, i.e., mind, holding the conductor baton. It is the *interactional imbalance* among the 4GE in the face of CVO that brings anxiety, fall sick or die. That is to say that a CVO can catch you easier if and when the mindbody system is out of balance. This imbalance is not only in relation to the physical ANS (Autonomic Nervous System) but also the

psychological, what I have come to call the ASPS – Autonomic Spiritual System, of which DBM is a form of praxis.

In deep breathing, the air travels *deeper* than in normal breathing, and when held for a few seconds in the lungs, allows more time to travel and impact upon the interaction. This may help move the body cells into a healthier interaction and positioning, aided by an adjustment in the airity, heatity and liquidity. So, doing the deep breathing, alternating with the normal breathing, can help the out of balance system to regain its lost balance through anxiety. And then, being mindful to do the breathing, normal and deep, the health regained can help overcome the anxiety, the enemy within. This then serves as the shield against the enemy without - the CVO. The CVI under control, the chances of CVO being successful in sneaking its way to your mindbody comes to be slimmer. This then is how DBM can help contain the anxiety.

A critical direction given by the Buddha during the practice of meditation is ‘clinging to nary a thing in the world’ (*na ca kinci loke upadiyati*). So, in this entire DBM process, one needs to be with no clinging. We begin with the air that is breathed, short or long. Any need to be attached? The shoving and the pushing done as the air element holds fort in the lungs, it is not done with any attachment either.

It is the same attitude of non-clinging that one needs to have in breathing in and out. After all, it is only a process, with hardly a reason to be attached to. But this ‘process’, of course, is the very mind. Thus the non-attachment can be said to be to the mind, too.

Now we are at a point where the non-clinging needs to be cultivated consciously. If as you practice DBM, there comes to appear in your mind anything at all - a sound, a smell, a pain in your body, your work at office, research in the lab, or your loved one or the arch enemy, you simply acknowledge it, with a smile, neither going after it nor looking to chase it away. Imagine a gate keeper. s/he watches people, tall short fat lean, going and coming, but not going after or chasing them away, as in the Buddha’s analogy. We continue to watch the breath mindfully, like one slicing up a tree trunk into smaller pieces, fully focused on where the blade touches the trunk, as again in the Buddha’s analogy. This is non-clinging in practice and cultivation.

Done diligently, over time, non-attachment and the stronger non-clinging in the *mind sense* comes to be cultivated. Mind the ‘forerunner’ tamed, the obedient servants, namely, the five physical senses, quietly go under. As in both the Buddhist and the Westernscientific understanding, any given mindmoment can pay attention only to a single stimulus. So, if the mind is, without a break, on the breath, watching it move back and forth, then there is no room for anything else to appear on the mind’s screen. Sense-thirst comes to be weakened and weakened and weakened, and with continuing diligence, totally disappear. Out of mind, out of sight! Sight, here, of course, is the imagined catching of the CVO and immediate death.

So, with the ‘Thirst to be’ (i.e., living) getting no attention, the ‘Thirst to be not’, i.e., death, also comes to be weakened and in the end, the internal Corona-anxiety CVI, conditioned by the

external CVO, vanishes. This then is how being with nary clinging in the world, practiced and cultivated in DBM, can contribute to the elimination of anxiety, the immune system returned to its original strength. So here we see the physical holding hands with the psychological, impacting upon the total mindbody.

Meditating with nary a clinging in the world is also be in the mindset of *being in the moment*. Just in the moment! We have no control of the past, and certainly not of the future. All we have control of is the present moment. So it is that MBD is being in the present.

However, looking after the present can also be a looking after the future, since each ‘future’ moment is nothing but a ‘present’ moment when it arrives. Thus we see the future also taken care of. So, with the future also taken care of, and the grip of the CVI anxiety loosened, the virus of the outside – CVO, become a virus of the past, and not the teeth-baring devil of the future.

But, one caution. If you were to come to, or practice DBM, with any expectations of such an outcome, then no matter how diligently you practice, your anxiety will continue on. A quality of mind supportive of it, and needs to be cultivated, would be equanimity (upekkha), accepting whatever result, but continuing to practice diligently.

So we can see how doing DBM practice diligently with nary a clinging can help eliminate the terror of anxiety of catching the Coronavirus. Let’s then meditate away the Coronavirus, outer and inner, beginning right now - in your office, at home, in your car, in a park or in the packed subway! While it can also be practiced in the other three postures as well the Buddha talks about - standing, walking and lying down, you will find the sitting posture the most friendly.

If you can breathe, you can do Deep Breathing Meditation.

May DBM bring continuing good health! Metta!

**You may end each practice with the following words, repeating them throughout the day:**

*May I be well & be freed of the anxiety of the fear of death!*

*May my family & relatives be well & be freed of the anxiety of the fear of death!*

*May my neighborhood and the passers-by be well & be freed of the anxiety of the fear of death!*

*May both my friends and enemies be well & be freed of the anxiety of the fear of death!*

*May all beings be well & be freed of the anxiety of the fear of death!*

*May I be well & be freed of the anxiety of the fear of death!*

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