

Sense of Contraction

In addition to a variety of ways of feeling physical and energetic appearances. We can also feel a sense of tension, constriction, rigidity and the opposite of these; relaxation, spaciousness and fluidity. This is one of the ways we can notice what dukkha is like.

Contraction is the sensation of dukkha. Clinging could be seen as grasping: feel how a tight grip doesn't feel free.

Physical Contraction

Without feeling, this is a project to get rid of anything, not even contraction, but rather to see: could this moment be nicer for all of us, could things be less rigid and tight? Is there an obvious place to relax? Explore relaxing the shoulders, the stomach, the face-jaw, around the eyes, the forehead. Without collapsing, we may find other areas that can soften, open, release. Even if we don't imagine them holding, can they relax?

Can the breath relax; allow the rhythm to slow and deepen. Allow the feeling of the exhaled breath to support the release. Whatever remains can stay: we relax what can relax as far as it can relax; and we allow what can't relax any further. Allowing is a mental relaxation - it is like this, right now.

Energetic Contraction

After working with the physical contraction and supporting the mental relaxation of allowing what remains, we can bring a kind attention to the level of energetic holding. There may be a sense of areas being blocked from flowing or not being able to feel free. Whatever the feeling, this needs to be changed. We can bring whatever level of skill we have in seeing the breath as energy into breathing towards, around or through these tensions. If we can't go through, we can go around or 'under': a moment when the breath disappears on one side of a block and appears on the other. The block is not a problem to be solved, but an appearance to be met well.

At other times, we can work mainly in areas where the breath energy is flowing well. There is no need to focus too much on areas where we don't feel it. Playfully explore and train in moving, spreading, and holding.

Contraction of Awareness and Attention

When we learn meditation, we bring with us ideas of what we should be doing. Many of these are beautiful and liberating, but every concept will have limitations. Including in our ability to attend well. The concept of concentration and focus can add a degree of intensity that at times is not helpful. Attending to something can become overly flavoured with a sense of holding it in attention, then a certain tension can dominate our attention. How little effort is required to be with a subtle sense of the breath moving through? What would it look like for us to soften our attention without zoning out? We can use this as a meditative question. But here are some ideas to explore. We could shift from a sense of 'focusing on' to a sense of 'allowing this to be felt', permitting more receptivity in listening to experience and less demand to see everything exactly. Notice the shift in the sense of

shifting senses. What would it be like to taste-feel this moment of knowing as fully as possible, rather than seeing it clearly?

Playfulness and patience can support a sense of continuous exploration. This can even be framed within a sense of infinite development rather than a sense of getting somewhere. Our energy can be alive and appropriate to what it encounters.

Noticing the boundlessness of knowing when it is available. Sometimes we can induce this sensibility. We have already explored this by extending a sense of attentiveness to the whole body or through a wide listening awareness. There is the possibility of stretching attention into the space around the body: feeling-tasting the energetics of the space around the typically known boundary of the body space. In contrast to stretching, we can allow awareness not to be drawn into a narrow conception of the body or a sense of self behind the face, and like releasing the tethers of a hot air balloon, we can allow this sense of awareness to be free to expand.