

Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammâ Sambuddhassa!

A BUDDHIST APPROACH TO THE AWARENESS OF IN-AND-OUT BREATH MEDITATION - ANAPANASATI ¹

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The awareness of in and out breath meditation (*anapanasati*) is a very important meditation for all Buddhists as it allows for the development of mindfulness of the present moment and calms the mind allowing for contemplation and insight (*vipassana*) into the reality into ‘the way things really are.’ This was the meditation utilized by the [Gotama Lord Buddha](#) (while still a *Boddhisatta*) to calm his mind for the penetration of dependant origination (*paticca-samuppada*) and insight into the [Four Noble Truths](#). In light of this, it becomes clear how important this meditation is for anyone who is serious about the practice of the *Dhamma* (Teachings) and the attainment of insight into reality.

The correct posture is important to allow the breath to easily ‘flow’ in and out of the body. The back should be upright yet relaxed. Hold your body upright in a way such that it is at its perfect centre of balance (this can be perceived with the mind), where one is neither leaning too far forwards, backwards or to either side. When one gains this perfect ‘equilibrium’ of the bodily trunk, all swaying of the body will cease.² It is important to train oneself to keep the body still during meditation - if you can't keep your body still, how can you hope to keep your mind still? The legs can be bent in the form of the full or half [lotus position](#) and the palms should be placed on top of each other (right on left) facing upwards on top of the lap (refer to a seated statue of the Lord Buddha for reference). The eyes should be fully closed to minimize distractions for the mind. If the posture becomes uncomfortable after a while, you can persevere to keep it despite the physical pain for as long as possible and/or change your posture, e.g. from a cushion to a stool or chair, or from [lotus position](#) to a kneeling position – keep switching (the lesser the better) while continuing with the meditation (the longer the better). Once one gains a state of perfect stillness and a state of *jhanic* peace, the physical body and its sensations will ‘disappear’ and pain will no longer affect the mind. So strive for these states at all times during meditation.³

Before beginning the meditation, bring and focus your mind’s attention to the front (of your head/body).⁴ The mind has a habit of ‘talking’ (thinking) and it takes the form of an ‘inner commentary.’ This commentary needs to be completely stopped (repeat as required) by will as and when it starts up, before the meditation can begin (otherwise it will be impossible to focus on the breath as the ‘inner noise’ will destroy concentration).⁵ Once the mind gets the signal that thinking is undesired, it will become calm and quiet. Now the meditation can begin.

While keeping your awareness in front (of the head/body), direct your quite mind to observing the incoming and outgoing breath. There should be no controlling or forcing of the breath, but simply quiet watching of its details. Try to see the whole ‘length’ of the breath as it enters and leaves the body.⁶ So you should be noticing the various characteristics of the breath, such as whether it is short, long, calm or quick. Just as you know you are full, when you have eaten enough, or that have a headache when there is one - in the same manner you should know when you are breathing in and out when you are doing so. So there is no need to watch a particular point in the body such as the tip of the nose or the abdomen – doing so will take one’s concentration away from the object of the meditation (one’s breath). In fact in the *Anapanasati Sutta* (discourse) where the [Lord Buddha](#) details the particulars of this meditation, there is no mention whatsoever of watching a particular part of the body such as the tip of the nose or the abdomen.⁷

When the mind becomes calm, tranquil and still (i.e. state of *samadhi*) due to this meditation, this is the best time to contemplate (think/analyse/understand) some aspect of the *Dhamma* to gain insight (*vipassana*), which is what the term ‘see things as they really are’ refers to. You can contemplate on any aspect of the *Dhamma* that touches on the three signs of all conditioned things, i.e. impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*) and ‘no real self in anything/anyone’ (*anatta*). You can also contemplate on the [Four Noble Truths](#) or the dependent origination (*paticca-samuppada*) in aid of this. You may also prefer to refer to a discourse (*sutta*) to find a section of *Dhamma* that touches on the above and contemplate on that once the mind is in a state of *samadhi*. Try to understand the meaning behind these concepts and how they relate to your life through analysis.

The aim of this contemplation is to realize the Truth about our lives and all conditioned things and to enter the stream (*sotapatti*) leading to *Nibbana*. Once you become a stream enterer/winner, there can be no further rebirth in any of the lower *hellish realms* and you will be assured of *Nibbana* within a maximum of seven lifetimes or less. However to break through to the stream, one should ideally aim for *jhanic* states of *samadhi* in one's meditation. This requires a lot of dedication on one's part with the daily taking of at least the *eight precepts* (the absolute minimum being the *5 precepts*), being on the *Noble Eightfold Path*, renouncing a lot of one's duties, commitments and belongings, giving up the indulgence of the *senses*⁸ and daily meditation regime of more than a few hours a day as a basic requirement. Such a way of life can even be pursued by a lay person with duties such as work, study, etc if there is enough will to do so.⁹ To stand a good chance of attaining *jhanic* states of absorption and breaking through to stream entry, one should ideally enter the monastic life (life in a monastery/temple as a monk/nun/*eight* or *ten preceptor*).

May you seize this extremely rare opportunity of the appearance of the true *Dhamma* along with your extremely rare fortune of gaining a good rebirth with access to that true *Dhamma* (neither of which will last very long) to find it within yourself to develop *samadhi* allowing you to break through to the *stream* taking you directly to the supreme bliss of *Nibbana*!

CALM IS NOT ENOUGH

Just calmness meditation,
samatha,
 is not enough.
 Once the mind is super calm,
 ideally in a *jhanic* state,
 you need to contemplate, analyse and understand,
 some aspect of the *Dhamma*,
 perhaps a section,
 or a line of the Buddha's words,
 that touches on the three characteristics,
 of impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*) and no self (*anatta*),
 or the *Four Noble Truths*,
 or *dependant origination*,
 and relate it to your life,
 to penetrate (*vipassana*) the truth,
 to enter the *stream* or even higher,
 for the mind to 'break through,'
 to the 'other side.'^[1]
 May you break through,
 to the other side!

[1] Stream-entry (*sotapatti*) or higher.

Notes

1. The latest version of this document can be found in **HTML** format here <http://tinyurl.com/d6uwxr> (or <http://sites.google.com/site/dhammagroupweb/pubs/anapanasati>) and in **PDF** format here <http://tinyurl.com/dx6p8x> (or http://sites.google.com/site/dhammagroupweb/pubs/A_Buddhist_Approach_to_the_Awareness_of_In-and-Out_Breath_Meditation-Anapanasati.pdf).
2. Even if one cannot maintain a perfect bodily posture (e.g. due to ill-health, fatigue, etc.) one should still persevere with the breath.
3. Regularly practicing meditation will reduce the physical pain and increase one's endurance for sitting for long periods.
4. Refer to the *Anapanasati Sutta* (Mindfulness of Breathing) where the *Lord Buddha* describes this:

“There is the case where a monk, having gone to the wilderness, to the shade of a tree, or to an empty building, sits down folding his legs crosswise, holding his body erect, and setting mindfulness to the fore. Always mindful, he breathes in; mindful he breathes out.”

5. The inner commentary can be significantly reduced through will and training. This inner quiet must however be developed during the meditation training and it will then become an automatic habitual practice throughout day. Before commencing on meditation the meditation object (**breath**, loving-kindness (*metta*), foulness (*asubha*), etc) take a short while to watch the mind and thoughts. When the mind starts to ‘speak’ (i.e. the inner commentary begins) then immediately stop it through effort of will. Keep doing this until the mind gets the idea and stops ‘talking.’ Then you can start the meditation. During the meditation if the mind tries to start ‘talking’ again, then again shut it up as before and resume the meditation (repeat as required). If you consistently develop this during meditation, after a while you will find that this habit flows through to the times outside of meditation as well. When you realize that all **mental hindrances** and inner problems arise because of this inner voice (taking away your inner peace) you will strive even harder to make it quiet within.
6. Again refer to the *Anapanasati Sutta* (Mindfulness of Breathing) where the **Lord Buddha** describes this:

“[1] Breathing in long, he discerns, ‘I am breathing in long;’ or breathing out long, he discerns, ‘I am breathing out long.’ [2] Or breathing in short, he discerns, ‘I am breathing in short;’ or breathing out short, he discerns, ‘I am breathing out short.’ [3] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in sensitive to the entire body.’ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out sensitive to the entire body.’ [4] He trains himself, ‘I will breathe in calming bodily fabrication.’³ He trains himself, ‘I will breathe out calming bodily fabrication.’”
7. This seems to be a later development/addition to the Lord Buddha’s instructions on the awareness of breath (*anapanasati*) meditation.
8. To stand a good chance of attaining *jhana* states, one should give up, abandon and cut off completely any desires and pleasures associated with pleasing the five senses (and the mind). See *APPENDIX A: Majjhima Nikaya 26, Ariyapariyesana Sutta, The Noble Search (Extract)* below.
9. ‘Where there is a will, there is a way.’

APPENDIX A: *Majjhima Nikaya* 26, Ariyapariyesana Sutta, The Noble Search (Extract)

Source: www.accesstoinsight.org

URL: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.026.than.html>

"And any priests or contemplatives tied to these five strings of sensuality — infatuated with them, have totally fallen for them, consuming them without seeing their drawbacks or discerning the escape from them — should be known as having met with misfortune, having met with ruin; Mara can do with them as he will. Just as if a wild deer were to lie bound on a heap of snares: it should be known as having met with misfortune, having met with ruin; the hunter can do with it as he will. When the hunter comes, it won't get away as it would like. In the same way, any priests or contemplatives tied to these five strings of sensuality — infatuated with them, have totally fallen for them, consuming them without seeing their drawbacks or discerning the escape from them — should be known as having met with misfortune, having met with ruin; Mara can do with them as he will.

"But any priests or contemplatives not tied to these five strings of sensuality — uninfatuated with them, having not totally fallen for them, consuming them seeing their drawbacks and discerning the escape from them — should be known as not having met with misfortune, not having met with ruin; Mara cannot do with them as he will. Just as if a wild deer were to lie unbound on a heap of snares: it should be known as not having met with misfortune, not having met with ruin; the hunter cannot do with it as he will. When the hunter comes, it will get away as it would like. In the same way, any priests or contemplatives not tied to these five strings of sensuality — uninfatuated with them, having not totally fallen for them, consuming them seeing their drawbacks and discerning the escape from them — should be known as not having met with misfortune, not having met with ruin; Mara cannot do with them as he will.

"Suppose that a wild deer is living in wilderness glen. Carefree it walks, carefree it stands, carefree it sits, carefree it lies down. Why is that? Because it has gone beyond the hunter's range.⁵ In the same way, a monk — quite withdrawn from sensual pleasures, withdrawn from unskillful qualities — enters & remains in the first jhana: rapture & pleasure born from withdrawal, accompanied by directed thought & evaluation. This monk is said to have blinded Mara. Trackless, he has destroyed Mara's vision and has become invisible to the Evil One.⁶

"Then again the monk, with the stilling of directed thought & evaluation, enters & remains in the second jhana: rapture & pleasure born of composure, unification of awareness free from directed thought & evaluation — internal assurance. This monk is said to have blinded Mara. Trackless, he has destroyed Mara's vision and has become invisible to the Evil One.

"Then again the monk, with the fading of rapture, remains in equanimity, mindful & alert, is physically sensitive to pleasure, and enters & remains in the third jhana, of which the Noble Ones declare, 'Equanimous & mindful, he has a pleasurable abiding.' This monk is said to have blinded Mara. Trackless, he has destroyed Mara's vision and has become invisible to the Evil One.

"Then again the monk, with the abandoning of pleasure & stress — as with the earlier disappearance of elation & distress — enters & remains in the fourth jhana: purity of equanimity & mindfulness, neither-pleasure-nor-pain. This monk is said to have blinded Mara. Trackless, he has destroyed Mara's vision and has become invisible to the Evil One.

"Then again the monk, with the complete transcending of perceptions of [physical] form, with the disappearance of perceptions of resistance, and not heeding perceptions of diversity, thinking, 'Infinite space,' enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of space. This monk is said to have blinded Mara. Trackless, he has destroyed Mara's vision and has become invisible to the Evil One.

"Then again the monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of space, thinking, 'Infinite consciousness,' enters & remains in the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness. This monk is said to have blinded Mara. Trackless, he has destroyed Mara's vision and has become invisible to the Evil One.

"Then again the monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, thinking, 'There is nothing,' enters & remains in the dimension of nothingness. This monk is said to have blinded Mara. Trackless, he has destroyed Mara's vision and has become invisible to the Evil One.

"Then again the monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of nothingness, enters & remains in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. This monk is said to have blinded Mara. Trackless, he has destroyed Mara's vision and has become invisible to the Evil One.

"Then again the monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, enters & remains in the cessation of perception & feeling. And, having seen [that] with discernment, his mental fermentations are completely ended. This monk is said to have blinded Mara. Trackless, he has destroyed Mara's vision and has become invisible to the Evil One. Having crossed over, he is unattached in the world. Carefree he walks, carefree he stands, carefree he sits, carefree he lies down. Why is that? Because he has gone beyond the Evil One's range."

5. For another use of the wild deer as a symbol for a free mind, see Ud 2.10.

6. As the Commentary points out, simply attaining the states of concentration from the first *jhana* through the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception blinds Mara only temporarily. Only with the arising of discernment is Mara blinded for good. On Mara's blindness, see *Sn* 5.15 and *SN* 22.87 (the latter in *The Mind Like Fire Unbound*). For the meaning of "trackless," see *Dhp* 92-93, 179-180.

Related Discourses (*Sutta*)

1. *Majjhima Nikaya* 118, *Anapanasati Sutta*, *Mindfulness of Breathing* see <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.118.than.html>
2. *Digha Nikaya* 22, *Maha-satipatthana Sutta*, *The Great Frames of Reference* see <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/dn/dn.22.0.than.html>
3. *Majjhima Nikaya* 26, *Ariyapariyesana Sutta*, *The Noble Search* see <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.026.than.html>

Related Buddhism (*Dhamma*) Articles

1. *Daily Dana* - On giving and generosity, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=dailydana>
2. *Five Precepts* - Developing virtue through the five precepts, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=pansil>
3. *Buddhist Positive Thinking* - Positive thinking from a Buddhist perspective, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=postthink>
4. *Mental Purity* - Five ways prescribed by the Buddha for subduing mental defilements, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=vitakkasantana>
5. *A Buddhist Approach to Disillusionment* - A Buddhist approach to seeing past the trickery and into reality, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=disill>
6. *A Buddhist Approach to Disenchantment* - A Buddhist approach to becoming disenchanted with all that gives rise to stress, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=disench>
7. *An Introduction to Buddhist Meditation* - Basic instructions for doing the meditations of loving kindness (*metta*), awareness of breath (*ana-pana-sati*) and foulness of the body (*asubha*), see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=intromed>
8. *A Buddhist Approach to the Contemplation on Body Parts – Asubha* - A Buddhist approach to bodily revulsion (*asubha*), see <http://sites.google.com/site/dhammagroupweb/pubs/asubhaparts>
9. *Attachment* - An analysis of how attachment leads to unsatisfactoriness, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=attachment>
10. *One Hour of Unsatisfactoriness* - The unsatisfactoriness that can be felt within the space of an hour, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=onehour>
11. *A Buddhist Approach to Mental Health* - A Buddhist perspective and approach to mental health, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=mentalhealth>
12. *Four Noble Truths* - The essence of Buddhism, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=fourtruths>
13. *Noble Eightfold Path* - The path for ending stress and suffering, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=noblepath>

Online Resources

1. *AccessToInsight.org* here <http://www.accesstoinight.org>
2. *Mettanet.org* here <http://www.mettanet.org>
3. *What-Buddha-Said.net* here <http://what-buddha-said.net>
4. *What-Buddha-Taught.net* here <http://what-buddha-taught.net>
5. *Buddhanet.net* here <http://www.buddhanet.net>
6. *Vihara.org.au* here <http://www.vihara.org.au>
7. *DhammaGroup.tk* here <http://www.dhammagroup.tk>