

A serene beach scene with a small wooden boat on the water and driftwood on the sand. The background is a soft, hazy sky and sea. The foreground shows a sandy beach with scattered driftwood and a small green plant.

THE MEDITATIVE DEVELOPMENT
OF
MINDFULNESS OF BREATHING

BUDDHADĀSA BHIKKHU



Echoes from the Garden of Liberation #02

THE MEDITATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF MINDFULNESS OF BREATHING
(ĀNĀPĀNASATI-BHĀVĀNA)

By Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu

Translated from the Thai [วิธีปฏิบัติอานาปานสติ] by Stephen R. Schmidt

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« *The gift of Dhamma surpasses all other gifts.* »

Anumodanā

To all Dhamma Comrades, those helping to spread Dhamma:

Break out the funds to spread Dhamma to let Faithful Trust flow,
Broadcast majestic Dhamma to radiate long-living joy.

Release unexcelled Dhamma to tap the spring of Virtue,
Let safely peaceful delight flow like a cool mountain stream.

Dhamma leaves of many years sprouting anew, reaching out,
To unfold and bloom in the Dhamma Centers of all towns.

To spread lustrous Dhamma and in hearts glorified plant it,
Before long, weeds of sorrow, pain, and affliction will flee.

As Virtue revives and resounds throughout Thai society,
All hearts feel certain love toward those born, aging, and dying.

Congratulations and Blessings to all Dhamma Comrades,
You who share Dhamma to widen the people's prosperous joy.

Heartiest appreciation from Buddhadāsa Indapañño,
Buddhist Science ever shines beams of Bodhi long-lasting.

In grateful service, fruits of merit and wholesome successes,
Are all devoted in honor to Lord Father Buddha.

Thus may the Thai people be renowned for their Virtue,
May perfect success through Buddhist Science awaken their hearts.

May the King and His Family live long in triumphant strength,
May joy long endure throughout this our world upon earth.

from

Buddha dāsa Indapañño

Mokkhabalārāma

Chaiya, 2nd November 2530

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Translator's Foreword

May all sentient beings come to know and tread the Way that leads to the cessation of suffering.

The present translation, as is the case of any translation, must be indeterminate to a greater or lesser degree. In order to lessen that indeterminacy, I would like to offer some observations concerning the Venerable Buddhadāsa's work and my efforts to translate part of that work.

The Venerable Buddhadāsa has, for the last fifty years, practiced and expounded the Buddha-Dharma at Suan Mokkh, a forest monastery in Southern Thailand. Although the Venerable Buddhadāsa has encouraged the application of modern technology in the dissemination of the Dharma, he himself has written virtually nothing for direct publication. His work has consisted almost exclusively of the verbal exposition of the Dharma. The innumerable publications in Thai bearing his name have almost entirely been taken from his sermons, lectures and discussions of the past twenty-five years when the practice of tape-recording his talks was begun. It is upon the transcripts of these tape-recordings that almost all of his works in Thai, and their English translations are based.

The Venerable Buddhādāsa's style is very traditional. He speaks calmly and slowly with very frequent repetitions. Frequently, he will deliver a series of talks on various aspects of one general topic. To sit at his feet and listen to him speak two or three or more times per week over the space of three or four months, as I have done, is to witness something of a miracle as the Buddha-Dharma actually blossoms before one's mind under his calm, compassionate and cheerful ministrations. How appropriate that the lotus blossom, a traditional symbol of the Dharma, is to be found repeated again and again all over Suan Mokkh, both in natural blossoms and in symbolic works of art. This then, is the first element contributing to the indeterminacy of translating the work of the Venerable Buddhādāsa; his work is that of the living word: calm and compassionate; warm, cheerful and charming. It is alive with the imperceptible motion of the blossoming lotus. The hard regimentation of the grammatically correct word imprisoned on the printed page is a poor substitute.

Another element contributing to the indeterminacy of translating the Venerable Buddhādāsa's works is his Zen-like penchant for putting things in startling, strange or seemingly provocative ways. This feature of his work is greatly determined by the Thai language and culture and is so often lost in translation.

But the fact remains that the Venerable Buddhādāsa's exposition of the Dharma is so fresh, clear and insightful that many

translators have taken the challenge motivated by the desire and hope that others also may profit from this Great Man's work.

In an attempt to achieve a more comprehensive work, I have made some additions to the text of the talk, with the encouragement of the Venerable Buddhādāsa.

A final note about Buddha-Dharma: it is a practical guide to right livelihood, not a matter for philosophical dispute and debate. Although much relative value may be derived from the philosophical-philological-psychological-historical study of the Dharma, its absolute value derives from the attempt to practice it. May this brief text act as a guide, inadequate though it may be, to those attempting to practice the Dharma.

May all sentient beings come to see and tread the Way to the cessation of suffering.

Suan Mokkh

17th October 2525/1982

The Meditative Development of Mindfulness of Breathing

(*Ānāpānasati-bhāvāna*)

[A talk given on 13th August 1972 at Suan Mokkhabalārāma]

Introduction

Mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*) is a complete meditation practice in itself. It is complete from the beginning to the end – even up to the path-fruit (*magga-phala*), that is Nibbāna [Sanskrit, ‘Nirvāṇa’]. Because of this completeness, its aim is different from other meditation objects (*kammaṭṭhāna*). This practice has breathing in and breathing out as its only object. Thus, there is nothing that has to be moved, changed or set up. The breathing is always present.

Mindfulness of breathing is an extremely convenient method of practice for, as indicated above, there is no need for external objects to carry around or set up. Whenever one decides to practice, he or she will find the in- and out-breathing there. This is not the case with many of the other kinds of meditation objects which depend upon external objects such as colored discs, corpses and so on. Rather, by

taking the in- and out-breathing as a meditation object, one takes his meditation object wherever he or she goes, since the in- and out-breathing always accompanies the meditator. Thus, it is rightly said that the practice of *ānāpānasati* is convenient.

Another noteworthy feature of the practice of mindfulness of breathing is that it is harmless. It is an extremely refined meditation object that doesn't lead to fear, excitement, commotion or confusion. In this way it is not like meditating on corpses which, indeed, may cause a great sense of fear or loathing to arise in the mind of the meditator.

Occasionally, one hears stories about meditators who go mad as a result of their meditation practice. However, when mindfulness of breathing is the system of practice chosen, there is no danger of the meditator going mad. Sometimes it happens that an individual simply cannot develop the practice. In such a case it is just that, a case of not being able to develop the practice of mindfulness of breathing. There is no danger that the meditator will go mad because of that. If someone says that he or she practiced *ānāpānasati* and it caused him or her to go mad, then that person is speaking falsely. There are people, in fact, who do say such things; but they are filled with misunderstanding, which is what I mean when I say that they speak falsely. Perhaps they are practicing a kind of mindfulness of breathing that is not the same as the one explained herein – i.e., such people are not practicing *ānāpānasati* as taught by the Buddha and as recorded in the Pāli scriptures which I have taken as the standard. This standard mindfulness of breathing will in no way lead one to

madness. If one can't do the practice, then that's all there is to it – it can't be done by that person.

For those cases where people actually do go mad, we can say, in general, two things: (a) the initial intention of the meditator was impure, or (b) the meditator was already on the verge of madness.

In the first case, a person comes to meditation seeking results other than a realization of the Dhamma [Sanskrit, 'Dharma']. They come seeking results other than a calming and pacifying of the mind, which is the goal of meditation as taught by the Buddha. Rather, such people rebel against the Dhamma and meditate in order to achieve magical and miraculous powers or for some other selfish reason. Meditating with such improper motivation may lead one to madness, indeed.

In the second case we find meditators who are already on the threshold of madness. We might say that they are already mad, but don't know it themselves or don't manifest it to others. When such persons attempt serious mind cultivation, they may easily come across the line and display the signs of madness.

In neither case, of course, would it be right to say that someone became mad because of the practice of mindfulness of breathing. For normal, ordinary people who practice mindfulness of breathing as described herein, there is no danger at all of becoming mad.

Preliminaries

Preparatory Rites

Many people, especially in the East, maintain that certain rites – such as lighting candles and incense, or chants such as the chant of taking refuge in the Buddha, the Dhamma, and the Sangha – are necessary for success in one’s meditation. Such people tend to look upon such rites and chants in a magical way. The fact is that such preparatory rites and chants are in themselves completely neutral. If one practices them with blind faith they are more of an obstacle than an aid. However, if one practices such rites and chants with insight, they may be helpful in strengthening one’s effort and resolve. Whether or not one makes use of these practices is strictly an individual matter. Meditators should beware of relying upon such things as if they had some sort of magical power.

Health and Posture

General good health is important. This simply means that one should be fairly fit, although with enough effort even sickly people can practice mindfulness of breathing. Moderation is the ideal. A meditator should not seek for the slightest excuse to stop meditating, nor should he push himself to unreasonable extremes.

As we are concerned with breathing, we must suitably adjust our system of breathing. We must clean our nostrils to make them open and fluent. The general method is to hold some water in your palm; draw the water into your nostrils and then force it out. But do not

draw the water too deep inside or you might choke. Do this a few times and your nostrils will be fit for the easy breathing used in gaining concentration.

The traditional meditative posture is the lotus position. This is sitting cross-legged with the right foot resting on the left thigh and the left foot resting on the right thigh. Many Westerners find it very difficult and painful to sit in this posture. In such a case it is acceptable to sit in the half-lotus position (where only one foot is brought up onto the opposite thigh) or even to sit cross-legged ‘tailor’ fashion. The advantage of the traditional full-lotus position is that it is a stable position which helps to keep the body erect without it being stiff or unnatural. The important thing is to be able to sit still, with the back straight and erect, for the full period of meditation. If using any of the above postures causes too much pain, then one may sit on a stool or a hard, straight chair – again, keeping the back straight and erect.

Pain and Other Distracting Physical Symptoms

Sitting still in a cross-legged position for a long period of time may cause much pain in the knees, ankles and back, as well as cause the legs and feet to feel numb. Also, mosquitos, ants and other insects may cause pain, itchiness and other distracting symptoms. In each case, when the meditator becomes aware of the distraction, he or she should not hold on to the distraction, but should continue being mindful of the meditation object – the breathing. If the pain, itching or other distraction is very persistent or powerful, then the meditator should reflect upon the conditional nature of the pain or

distraction; all such phenomena arise because of causes and conditions, persist for a moment, and then pass away. They are natural events and do not belong to the meditator. It is not a case of 'I feel pain' or 'my pain is great.' Rather, it is a case of 'pain has arisen and soon will pass away.' Frequently, such reflections will cause the pain to disappear or lessen sufficiently to allow the meditator to resume directing mindfulness to the in- and out-breathing. However, if the distraction is so strong that it persists and even becomes stronger despite such reflections, then the meditator, with clear comprehension, should try to alleviate the distracting symptom. For example, with slow deliberation the meditator should shift his position, brush away the mosquito or scratch the itchy area. Then the meditator should return to directing mindfulness to the breathing. Again, moderation is the keyword; the meditator must exert considerable effort in order to succeed, but the meditator should not permit the extremes of self-torture and overconsiderate pampering. As one progresses in *ānāpānasati*, there comes a point where such distractions will be powerless to effect the concentrated mind, as will be explained later on in the text.

Time and Length of Meditation

The most appropriate time for meditating will depend on each individual. At the outset it is good for the meditator to try to meditate at a regular time or times. When progress is made, the meditator will find it is possible to meditate under a variety of conditions throughout the day, such as on a bus on the way to work. Most importantly, the meditator will discover that his or her mindfulness

and power of insight become sharper and clearer. As this happens, the fruit of the meditation practice should become more and more a part of each waking moment. At this point, the meditation will no longer be limited to just those periods of ‘sitting.’

How much time will the practice take? How many days? weeks? months? Do not worry about time. Just start! That’s it. Practically speaking, the meditator should set a specific length of time as a minimum for each ‘sitting’ and work hard to sit at least that long. As the meditation practice develops, the meditator can increase the length of each sitting. A convenient way of getting started in meditation is to begin at a meditation center, at a temple, or with some other person or people who are meditating regularly. Such situations offer the advantages of group support, a regular schedule and the presence of more experienced people as guides or ‘teachers.’

Place of Meditation

The scriptures advise the meditator to go to the forest or any other quiet place. Although the advantages of having one’s own space are quite significant, the fact is that meditation can be practiced anywhere, even in the middle of a busy, bustling, noisy market. However, at the beginning, the meditator should go to the quietest place he can find for his practice. This does not mean, though, that because one cannot go to a forest monastery that he or she should not begin the practice of meditation.

Teachers

Having a teacher, a guide or a ‘good friend’ to help one in one’s meditation can be a great advantage. Nonetheless, in the development of mindfulness of breathing, the most important teacher is the practice itself. It’s like learning how to ride a bicycle: one can listen to the greatest of teachers, read all the books, and watch the greatest bicycle riders in the world; but if one doesn’t actually get on a bicycle and practice riding it, there is no way that one will learn to ride a bicycle. The actual practice of riding is the teacher; the actual practice of meditation is the teacher.

Non-Self

Finally, the meditator is encouraged to reflect upon the Buddha’s centrally significant theme of selflessness or non-self (*anattā*). Despite the necessity of using personal pronouns and other vocabulary denoting personal and/or intentional activity, the fact is that the ‘doer,’ the ‘meditator,’ the ‘knower’ is the mind and not a self, a me, or a person.

The Four Tetrads: The System in General

Let us now examine the overall system used in the practice of mindfulness of breathing as explained in the Pāli scriptures, which has sixteen steps arranged into four groups, or tetrads, of four steps each.

The First Tetrad

The first four steps have the development of concentration (*samādhi*) as their goal. At this level, the practice refines the breathing by making it subtle and calm, with the result that *samādhi* is developed.

The Second Tetrad

The next four steps examine or contemplate the rapture (*pīti*) and happiness (*sukha*) which arise from the concentrated mind. In this way, one learns what it is that gives rise to thinking, distractions, mental restlessness and so on. In this tetrad the meditator begins to know that which conditions the mind.

The Third Tetrad

The next four steps specifically examine, or contemplate, the mind and its varied manifestations. In this tetrad the meditator tries to control the mind in this and that way, looking at the mind as he or she pleases.

The Fourth Tetrad

The last four steps examine or contemplate impermanence. This is a matter of insight (*paññā*) and not simply a matter of the mind (*citta*). Insight contemplates the impermanence until the mind becomes fed up and detached to the point of liberation. Such, in general, are the four tetrads which constitute the system of practice that is called mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*). A more detailed explanation of each step now follows.

The First Tetrad: The Foundation of Mindfulness of Contemplation of the Body (*Kāyānupassanā-satipaṭṭhāna*)

The first tetrad deals with the breathing, that is, with the body, and it makes the mind peaceful and calm. Making the body-conditioner (*kāya-saṅkhāra*), or the in- and out-breathing, peaceful and calm leads to concentration. The result is happiness. If the bodily function, the in- and out-breathing, is calm, then the mind will be concentrated. Happiness immediately follows the concentration of the mind and it is the same happiness as experienced in Nibbāna, except that it is limited and impermanent, unlike actual Nibbāna.

The first step is to know the long in-coming breath and the long out-going breath. The second step is to know the short in-coming breath and the short out-going breath. The third step is to know how breathing in and out, long and short, conditions the physical body. The fourth step is to make this body-conditioning breathing calmer and calmer until concentration (*samādhi*) develops. These are the first four steps of the practice, all of which must be developed. Now I will explain each step in greater detail.

Step One: In this step, we study the long breathing until we know all about it, from all angles and all aspects. What is the long breath? When breathing in long, know that you are breathing in long; when breathing out long, know that you are breathing out long. Study the long in- and out-breathing until you are completely familiar with it.

What is it like? Once the long in- and out-breathing arises, what is it like? Know the long in-breaths and the long out-breaths. Study them until you know how they influence the body.

Step Two: Watch the short breathing to see what it is like, what its qualities are, and how its influence on the body differs from the influence of the long breathing. Compare the short and long breathing with each other. Sometimes we stipulate that breathing is long. What is it like? What effect does it have? Next, we fix it as short. How is it short? What effect does the short breath have? One practices until one knows all there is to know about the breathing: the breath itself, its causes, its effects, and its influence. Now, we don't know any of these things. We must practice until we are totally familiar with both long and short breathing.

While practicing *ānāpānasati*, distracting thoughts will arise. They must not be held onto. One must continue examining the breathing. This holds true for the entire sixteen steps of the practice.

Step Three: In this step, you see how both kinds of breath, long and short, are connected with the physical body. Because of this connection the breathing in and out, long and short, is called the 'body-conditioner' (*kāya-saṅkhāra*), that which conditions the body. If the breathing is rough and coarse, the physical body will likewise be rough and coarse, that is restless. If the breathing is subtle and refined, then the physical body will likewise be subtle and refined, that is peaceful and calm. Normally, the breath will be long and when the breathing is long it will cause the body to be in a normal state or condition. The breathing will be short when the body is not in a

normal state, such as when there is anger or fatigue. When the mind is in an abnormal state, the breathing will be short and the body will also be in an abnormal state. Know the secret of the breath's conditioning of the body all the time. This, which in the Pāli scriptures is called 'all bodies,' is what one must come to know in the practice of the third step. Know all of the bodies. All bodies are the breath which conditions the physical body in every way – this is the meaning of 'all bodies.' The breath is called 'body' and the physical body is called 'body.' One must know both kinds in order to truly know all bodies. Each kind has many parts and manifests itself in very many different ways. Look at each part and each manifestation, then you will understand the body of the breath and the physical body in a detailed way. Then, one can come to know well that they, indeed, are connected, that they condition each other. If you follow the practice of being mindful each time you breathe in and out, then you will see the truth of the fact that the body of the breath conditions the physical body. This completes the third part of the practice.

Step Four: In this step, concentration (*samādhi*) is established. The bodily function (the breathing) is made calm. Breathing in the breath is made to be calm; breathing out the breath is made to be calm. As the breath becomes calmer and calmer, the body also becomes calmer and calmer and the mind becomes concentrated. In step four, unlike the other steps, there is a trick or technique to calm the breathing. This is a mechanical manipulation of the breathing which

will make it very subtle. Altogether there are five exercises to the calming technique.

The **first exercise** is to closely track the breath as the mind is following it. Run after it, so to speak. Set mindfulness to following the breath as it comes in and as it goes out between two points – one inside and one outside. These points are purely imaginary. Suppose that the outer one is at the tip of the nose and the inner one is in the area of the navel. The incoming breath starts at the tip of the nose and ends at the navel. The out-going breath starts at the navel and ends at the tip of the nose. Don't be concerned with the breath anywhere else but at these two points and the path that the breath follows between them. The mind comes to know clearly two things: the starting point and the finishing point for both the in-breath and the out-breath. Sit and contemplate breathing in this way for a while; follow the breath as if the mind were running after it.

While breathing in, mindfulness is fixed upon the breath as it travels from the tip of the nose to the navel. While breathing out, mindfulness is fixed upon the breath from the navel to the tip of the nose. In order to make it easy to establish the mind upon the breath in this way, imagine that there is a channel or a tube going from the tip of the nose to the navel. As the breath flows in and out along this path, the mind follows it along the same path. This method is also a good way to counter sleepiness. If the breath becomes too still or too quiet, you may breathe in with more force, even if need be, with enough force to make an audible sound. In this way the breath is

more easily followed, because there is also the sense of sound to help develop mindfulness. And, as I said, it helps to counter sleepiness.

The **second exercise** in the technique of calming the breath is ‘watching’ or being on guard. There is no longer a running after the breath, there is just a careful scrutiny. The best place to watch the breath is at the nostrils. When the in-coming breath or the out-going breath makes contact with the nostrils, don’t follow it. Just be mindful of it at that point. If you are carefully on guard and watching for the in-coming and out-going breaths, the mind will have no opportunity to wander to some other place.

You will notice that there will be short gaps after the in-coming breath is completed and before the out-going breath begins, and again after the out-going breath is completed and before the in-coming breath begins. There may be many short gaps during which mindfulness must remain carefully established at its post lest it wander off seeking some other attraction. If the first method of following the breath has been well practiced and developed, then it is less likely that the mind will wander. (This is an important principle of practice to remember: each step of the practice must be done fully and carefully so that it will be possible to practice the later steps. If the initial steps of the practice are not done well, it will not be possible to do the later steps of the practice well.) Here at this step of the practice, you must stop running after the breath. Simply and carefully watch the in- and out-breathing at the nostrils, as a guard carefully watches the people coming and going at the city gate. If it is coarse, know that it is coarse; if it is subtle, know that it is subtle.

Breathing in know that you are breathing in; breathing out know that you are breathing out. This is the exercise called ‘watching.’

Once the second exercise of ‘watching’ can be done well, you may move onto the **third exercise** which is called ‘giving rise to the mental image (*nimitta*).’ The *nimitta* is a mental image which can only be seen with the eye of the mind. It will arise at the point where the watching mindfulness has been established – at the nostrils or at the tip of the nose. At this stage of the practice, the watching becomes so firm and fixed that an image arises. It may look like a star, or some such thing, and may now be taken as the meditation object in place of the point where the in- and out-breathing makes contact with the nostrils. This *nimitta* which arises is a purely mental image. It may look like a gem, a small sun, or a small moon; it may look colored; it may look like a white cloud, like a drop of dew or like a sparkling spider web in the sunlight. The mental image is similar to ‘seeing stars’ when your eyes are closed.

Different people ‘see’ different things, there is no correct *nimitta* and there is no *real* thing. It is only a mental image, an image made by the mind during the meditation practice. The mind creates this image to serve as a point on which to fix the mindfulness in order to continue the practice. Its appearance signifies that the breathing and the body have now become very refined and calm. If we compare the state of quietude of both the body and breathing during the three exercises of following, watching and giving rise to the image, we will see that the body and breathing become progressively more and more

refined at each stage. This is the technique used to give rise to the *uggaha-nimitta* (the mind-made image or acquired sign).

The **fourth exercise** is ‘controlling the acquired sign.’ The *nimitta* is bent and transformed until it becomes the counterpart sign (*paṭibhāga-nimitta*). One focuses on the acquired sign, whatever appearance it has, then changes it in any way that one chooses. The mind, which is now very calm and subtle, causes the changes in the *nimitta*. It changes with every in-breath and every out-breath.

The meditator’s mind gradually, gently and carefully changes the acquired sign by making it float toward one or away from one; or by making it smaller and smaller or larger and larger; or by making it change color, shape, location; or in any other way at all. If you think any of this is really happening – that is, happening independently of the mind of the meditator – then, indeed, you may go mad. But if one realizes, that it’s just happening as a result of a manipulative technique used to make the mind ever more calm and subtle, then there will be no problem. If you can do it, fine; if you can’t do it, fine. There’s no danger of madness involved, so don’t worry about it.

Up to this point, there have been the four exercises of following, watching, giving rise to the mental image and controlling the mental image. If you can perform these four, then you can say that you are able to control the mind, the body, and the breathing. In reality, controlling the breathing affects the body by calming it. This in turn affects the mind and it too is calmed. In other words, when the mind is calm the body and breathing are also calm. The only thing left to

do is to give rise to the state of absorption (*jhāna*), which is the last exercise.

The **fifth exercise**, the development of *jhāna*, is accomplished by becoming adroit in the *paṭibhāga-nimitta*. The sign is made to remain still and becomes very clear. At this point, all is ready for the development of *jhāna*. So far, the practice has gone well and the mind is adroit and agile in manipulating the *nimitta*. Now, the five factors of the first absorption will manifest themselves: applied thought (*vitakka*), sustained thought (*vicāra*), rapture (*pīti*), happiness (*sukha*) and one-pointedness (*ekaggatā*). Some people are able to remember these names and some are not. It doesn't really matter. If the first absorption is attained, they will arise automatically whether you know what to call them or not.

Applied thought means that the mind is firmly and quietly locked onto one single object – the counterpart sign. Sustained thought means that the mind thoroughly knows and is imbued with the sign. Watch this. Here, in that very moment, probe the feeling that is rapture – the rapture of satisfaction. This rapture is free of all sensual desire. It is not the same in all people, but is strong in some and weak in others. Experiencing success, we are satisfied; this is rapture. Now, watch the feeling of happiness. There is an intense joy and sublime bliss which is called happiness. Here, also, experience the mind collected on a single point. Without any distraction or disturbance it is directed only to its sign. This is one-pointedness.

The simultaneous arising of these five factors is called the first absorption or first *jhāna*. In it, the in- and out-breathing is

accompanied by these five factors. Achieving the first absorption is not easy because it is an exceptionally subtle state. If distractions are frequent, it probably can't be done, but you can never be sure. If you have a chance to practice, do so! Practice at home, if you have your own room, or wherever you can get away from distractions. If you can get off by yourself, then practice, for there is always a possibility that you will be able to achieve the first absorption. This is why it is appropriate to practice in the forest or some other peaceful place. If one is able to enter the first *jhāna* it means that one has been able to completely calm the body-function, i.e., the breathing, making it calm and peaceful.

Now, let's review the first tetrad. **Step one** is to fix the mindfulness on breathing-in-long and breathing-out-long until one is familiar with long breaths. **Step two** is to know breathing-in-short and breathing-out-short in the same way that one knows the long breaths. **Step three** is knowing that all of the kinds of breathing condition the body and all are connected to it; coarse and fine, disturbed and calm breathing are connected. **Step four** is to begin to control the breathing by making it increasingly refined using the techniques of following and watching. Next, the acquired sign is caused to arise and it is then manipulated until it stops changing and becomes the counterpart sign. At this point, the mind will be ready to establish the five factors of absorption.

This is all there is to the first tetrad called *kāyānupassanā-satipaṭṭhāna*. If you have any problems understanding any of this, then you must start practicing.

If you want to enter the second, third or fourth *jhānas* it is not so hard. They are smaller aspects of the first *jhāna* in the sense that each succeeding absorption is composed of fewer absorption factors. But since I want to give an overall view of *ānāpānasati*, I will not explain the details of entering the other *jhānas*.

The Second Tetrad: The Foundation of Mindfulness of Contemplation of the Feelings (*Vedanānupassanā-satipaṭṭhāna*)

This tetrad deals with the feelings (*vedanā*). Where do the feelings that are the objects of meditation come from? They come from among the factors of absorption that were experienced in the first tetrad. The rapture and happiness of the first absorption are used and practiced upon in this tetrad.

Step Five: In this step, we consider only the feeling of rapture. The mind experiences rapture as we breathe in and out. There is great comfort and pleasure. Taste and know this feeling to the detailed degree that we came to know the long breathing. Know only this rapture; know its characteristics, its causes, and its influence. This is step five in the overall system and the first step of the second tetrad.

After rapture is known, move on to **Step Six:** contemplating happiness. Happiness is made the meditation object while breathing in and out. It is important to observe that *pīti* and *sukha* are not the same. *Pīti* is like satisfaction and is coarser than *sukha*, which is like joy. Happiness is calmer and more refined. For example, when one successfully completes something, one feels satisfied and may manifest that feeling in a bodily way, such as a shaking or swaying of the body or a twitching of the flesh. That is rapture.

Once there is rapture, happiness arises. If both rapture and happiness are present together, it is not possible to distinguish

between them. Thus, rapture is swept away, leaving happiness, which grows calmer and finer. It is more peaceful and pleasant than rapture. The mind contemplates this happiness until it is known in its entirety, until one is expert regarding this feeling. What is the nature of happiness? What are its qualities, causes, effects and influence? We practice until we know it like we know the long and short breathing.

Step Seven: We take the mind-conditioner (*citta-saṅkhāra*), as the meditation object. The mental function is that which conditions the mind, namely *pīti* and *sukha*, which are called feelings. These feelings condition the mind. They make us think in this or that way. For example, if happiness or pleasure arises, it will condition the mind in a certain way. Perhaps there is desire to have or possess this or that thing, if happiness arises when contact is made with that thing. In that case, what follows thereafter is *dukkha* (dissatisfaction or suffering), because the desire to possess or to have is a defilement (*kilesa*) of the mind.

Sukha conditions the mind in one way; *dukkha* conditions it in another. Whenever we talk about feelings (*vedanā*), we are talking about that which conditions the mind. In step seven, we see how *pīti* and *sukha* condition the mind in different ways until this conditioning of the mind is understood in its entirety. While breathing-in and breathing-out, contemplate that which conditions the mind. The purpose of this is that you may know how to reduce the power of feelings in the eighth step, the last step of this second tetrad.

Step Eight: that which conditions the mind is made weaker and weaker. Don't allow it (*citta-saṅkhāra*) to condition the mind in whatever way it desires. Don't allow the mind-conditioner to condition the mind in a defiled way. For example, when feeling happy there is a tendency to become attached to that which produces the feeling of happiness. Now, we must counter this tendency of mind conditioning by seeing that this feeling of happiness is impermanent. It is a deceiver. It is an illusion. In this way the power of happiness as a mind conditioner will automatically be reduced, because the mind is not satisfied with deception and illusion. If we let the mind follow its own tendency, it will be enamored with whatever gives rise to *sukha* or *pīti*. But if we realize that the result is a defilement which leads to suffering, we will not leave the feelings to their own devices, to freely condition the mind. Their power over us that bursts forth in a rush of attachments will automatically be reduced at this eighth step of *ānāpānasati*.

The Third Tetrad: The Foundation of Mindfulness of Contemplation of the Mind (*Cittānupassanā-satipaṭṭhāna*)

In this tetrad the practice concerns itself with the mind (*citta*) directly.

Step Nine: The ninth step in the overall system, or the first step in the third tetrad, is to contemplate the mind itself. Every time the meditator breathes in or breathes out, what is the state of the mind? Perhaps the mind is in a state of *pīti* or *sukha*. Maybe it is filled with greed (*lobha*) or maybe it is without greed (*alobha*). Perhaps the mind is in a state of anger (*paṭigha*); maybe it is in a state of fear or of fearlessness. The list of possible mind states is long indeed. What we must do, is know each different kind of mental state as it arises. Good and bad mind states, noble and base mind states, we know them as they are in the mind. Therefore, sit and be mindful of the mind until you are skilled and know the mind well.

Step Ten: Force the mind to be delighted, only delighted. Control it, force it, or whatever it takes to maintain a state of refreshing, amusing delight throughout the breathing in and out. This is not an easy step, but when it can be done the mind will be under our power, forced into a constant state of delight.

Step Eleven: We change to forcing the mind to be completely still, firm, steadfast and secure – no longer feeling any delight at all. Make it firm, steady and stopped in order to give rise to a kind of

concentration (*samādhi*) that does not include the Factors of Absorption, or anything else at all. Practice stilling the mind, all the while breathing in and breathing out.

Step Twelve: Free the mind, completely liberate it. If anything comes along and holds or hooks onto the mind, the mind casts it off – liberate the mind from all things. We can strip the mind away from everything or we can strip everything away from the mind. The result is the same. While breathing in and breathing out, liberate the mind; make the mind free and detached. This is the end of the third tetrad, throughout which mindfulness (*sati*) tackles the mind.

The Fourth Tetrad: The Foundation of Mindfulness of Contemplation of Mental Objects (*Dharmānupassanā-satipaṭṭhāna*)

In the fourth tetrad, mental objects, called *dharmas* in the discourse, are the meditation object.

Step Thirteen: Impermanence (*anicca*) is contemplated until it is seen clearly. This is the impermanence of all conditioned things (*sāṅkhāra*). Clearly seeing impermanence the meditator breathes in; clearly seeing impermanence the meditator breathes out.

Where do we see impermanence? It must be seen internally. In the practice of mindfulness of breathing, one does not go outside to external things or to other people. Rather, see impermanence internally. See it in exceptional detail. See that even long breaths and short breaths are not permanent. See the conditioning of the body by the breath as impermanent. The calmed, quieted breath and the calmed, quieted mind are not permanent. The first *jhāna* is not permanent. Applied thought, sustained thought, rapture, happiness, one-pointedness are all impermanent. See everything as impermanent.

Now, look back to the second tetrad. *Pīti* and *sukha* are impermanent. Their conditioning of the mind doesn't last either. Even a quiet mind will change and so it, also, is not permanent. See impermanence in each step. The various mind states in the third tetrad are all

impermanent; the delighted, concentrated and liberated minds are all impermanent.

Even *jhāna* and *samādhi* are not permanent. Isn't this amusing? We said that the mind is made concentrated and steadfast, but when we look again – oh – it is impermanent too! Don't bother looking for impermanence outside; it is readily available inside yourself. This, then, is the thirteenth step, the contemplation of impermanence.

This step, the thirteenth, is the most important of all. This is the step where we either survive or fail. If one doesn't see impermanence, then there will be no fruits to the practice. If impermanence is seen, then there will be further fruits of the practice. If one sees impermanence more firmly, more deeply, more clearly and in more detail with each moment, then there will be the result that it will give rise to the next step, the contemplation of dispassion (*virāgānupassanā*), that is the fading away of attachment.

Step Fourteen: Dispassion is a fading away, a petering out, a disappearing, a becoming weary; like a color that has completely faded away, the defilements (*kilesa*) fade away. As one sees impermanence ever more distinctly, the fading away of all attachments begins. Contemplating this dispassion is the meditation of the fourteenth step. Breathing in and breathing out we contemplate this fading away ever more clearly. In and out, clinging fades away, attachment fades away. The defiled clinging that is sensual desire for conditioned things fades and fades.

Seeing this fading away is the result of the previous step. The more one realizes impermanence at step thirteen, the stronger the results will be at step fourteen. However well one sees impermanence, to that extent the mind becomes detached and lets go of defilements.

Step Fifteen: This is the contemplation of cessation (*nirodhānupassanā*). By constantly contemplating the cessation of clinging and *dukkha*, the defilements and *dukkha* are extinguished. As we breathe in and as we breathe out, as the defilements are extinguished, we contemplate the cessation of suffering (*dukkha*).

In fact, step fifteen is enough already. It is the realization of the fruition of the path. Steps fourteen and fifteen are closely connected. The stronger the fading of the defilements, the stronger the cessation of suffering. Fading is called path (*magga*) and cessation is called fruition (*phala*).

One last step remains to be seen. **Step Sixteen** is contemplating the completed task and is called the contemplation of abandonment or relinquishment (*patinissaggānupassanā*). Breathing in and breathing out one contemplates abandonment. It is like seeing the final escape, the end of whatever gives rise to suffering. We're finished with all attachments. Metaphorically, we give back all the things that we've clung to and hoarded, and which caused us much suffering. We practiced up to the extinction of *dukkha* and now throw all those things back. We had stolen them from their owner, that is Dhamma or nature. We were thieves. Now we return everything. There is no more illusion of possession, no more attachment. This is the final

step, the end of the practice. Only metaphor can adequately convey it.

Impermanence, dispassion, cessation and relinquishment are four kinds of *dhammas* (mind-objects). This tetrad completes the practice because the defilements have been overcome and suffering has ended, the holy life (*brahmacariya*) has come to an end.

These four tetrads correspond to the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*). If one completely develops the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the result will be the cessation of all suffering. When the Four Foundations are well cultivated, the Seven Factors of Enlightenment (*bojjhaṅga*) will then arise together. These seven factors are mindfulness (*sati*), investigation of reality (*dhamma-vicaya*), energy (*virīya*), rapture (*pīti*), tranquility (*passaddhī*), concentration (*samādhi*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*).

When these Seven Factors of Enlightenment are perfected, then higher knowledge (*vijjā*) and deliverance (*vimutti*) are also perfected. All of the knowledges (*ñāṇa*) are states of perfected wisdom. Deliverance is release from all suffering and dissatisfaction which are *dukkha*. Thus, when we perfect *ānāpānasati* through all sixteen steps, we perfect the Four Foundations of Mindfulness at the same time, along with the Seven Factors of Enlightenment, Wisdom and Deliverance.

Can you see how fine and detailed mindfulness of breathing is? But perhaps you can't take it. Maybe at first you thought you wanted to practice it, but now that you've seen it in detail, maybe you don't

want it. However, if you are still game, then practice it step by step by yourself and see what it is really like.

The Short-Cut Method

Now, I would like to introduce a new, much shorter, set of practical steps. I have already explained that the full practice is difficult and heavy enough! However, in this new set of practical steps things get a bit easier. This set doesn't have sixteen steps, but it follows the same path. This new method is as follows: First of all, develop sufficient *samādhi* in any way that one can – perhaps by using tetrad one. When there is sufficient *samādhi*, move on to contemplate impermanence. Having adequately contemplated impermanence, one will receive the results of dispassion and cessation. So, in this short way you must find a way to make your mind comfortable, clearly translucent, firm and bright.

My suggestion is to do *ānāpānasati* to achieve light, energy and happiness. From there you must try to lift it to a contemplation of impermanence within yourself: in the body; in the feelings of happiness and of suffering; in consciousness, the mental formations, the ideas and the perceptions; in all of these see impermanence.

Even if you don't call these things by their Buddhist names, you can still know them as impermanent. The elements of earth, water, fire and wind; the six sense doors, the six sense objects, see them all as impermanent. See impermanence internally so that you won't get lost by thinking that this good taste is permanent, or by thinking that this bad taste is permanent. All the while you breathe in and breathe out know impermanence in this way.

So you must have mindfulness in order to know these things quickly enough. When something arises in the mind know it as impermanent. Forms, aromas, good and bad tastes – know them all as impermanent. This is the quick way; from sufficient *samādhi* jump to impermanence. It's sort of like doing the first tetrad and then jumping to step thirteen. And, however well you perfect your contemplation of impermanence, to that extent will dispassion and cessation manifest themselves.

This is the three step way: (1) Develop sufficient *samādhi*. (2) Look at impermanence, then there will be dissatisfaction. (3) When dissatisfaction arises it will burst forth on its own and lead to a state of release from suffering. We can let go by practicing these three steps using the breathing as before. The breathing in and the breathing out is the foundation of the practice. By calming the breathing, the body and the mind are calmed. These are the special fruits of controlling the breathing. In fact, some people practice *ānāpānasati* for calm, quiet and comfort alone.

The Combination Method of *Ānāpānasati*

We can train the mind in other ways, but they aren't as good as the way the Buddha taught. If one has the time and the ability, practice the sixteen steps. If one doesn't have the time and ability, follow these three steps: gather the mind into a sufficient level of concentration, use it to examine impermanence, and loosen clinging according to the depth of that examining. In essentials, this is the same as the full method, but is less detailed and complete. If one can do no more, do at least this much.

Nonetheless, if one can't do the short method either, there remains the essential ingredient of mindfulness (*sati*). Before speaking, acting or thinking, mindfulness can consider and be aware. Whenever a sense object makes contact, always be aware before saying anything, before doing anything, even before thinking anything. For example, before we become angry with someone, we must have *sati*: mindfulness before speaking and mindfulness before cursing someone, because with mindfulness we don't curse anyone, we don't strike anyone.

If we practice the complete set of sixteen steps, mindfulness will be perfect. Nothing will be done unexpectedly. But such mindfulness is practiced from within and is very involved. For stubborn minds, we practice externally, so that nothing is said, done or thought unless *sati* is there first. This is 'the combination method.' If one practices correctly, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom and clear

comprehension are trained in ‘combination.’ It is *ānāpānasati* because one trains when breathing in and breathing out. Finally, the fruit of the practice is the mindfulness that is developed.

We have the above method, the incomplete method of only three steps and the complete practice of sixteen steps. All that remains are a few odds and ends. If one is sleepy, stand up, wash the face and eyes, then try it again. If you’re really sleepy, hit yourself over the head with a stick. In Zen temples, someone walks behind the row of meditators to swat the shoulders of the sleepy-heads. They only use bamboo paddles, so it isn’t dangerous. But it wakes people up. You can find things like this to help you. Don’t eat heavily. Don’t do things that disturb the body. Exercise, eat, sit and sleep properly. Do everything correctly and you won’t feel sleepy. Actually, we shouldn’t need to talk about problems like this.

Summary

Ānāpānasati is always concerned with breathing in and breathing out. Mindfulness is tied to the breathing continuously. There are four foundations upon which to set the mind while breathing in and breathing out: the body, the feelings, the mind and the mind objects. Completion of the practice comes when contemplating the mind-objects; one sees the impermanence of all *saṅkhāra*, of all compounded things, while breathing in and breathing out.





About the Author

Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu was born in 1906, the son of a southern Thai mother and an ethnic Chinese father. He followed Thai custom by entering a local monastery in 1926, studied for a couple years in Bangkok, and then founded his own refuge for study and practice in 1932. Since then, he has had a profound influence on not only Thai Buddhism but other religions in Siam and Buddhism in the West. Among his more important accomplishments, he:

- Challenged the hegemony of later commentarial texts with the primacy of the Buddha's original discourses.
- Integrated serious Dhamma study, intellectual creativity, and rigorous practice.
- Explained Buddha-Dhamma with an emphasis on this life, including the possibility of experiencing Nibbāna ourselves.
- Softened the dichotomy between householder and monastic practice, stressing that noble eightfold path is available to everyone.
- Offered doctrinal support for addressing social and environmental issues, helping to foster socially engaged Buddhism in Siam.

- Shaped his forest monastery as an innovative teaching environment and Garden of Liberation (Suan Mokkh).

After a series of illnesses, including strokes, he died in 1993. He was cremated without the usual pomp and expense.

About the Translator

A former Catholic seminarian, Steve served with the U.S. Peace Corps in the late 1970s and then continued living in Thailand and working with non-government development agencies, such as in Thung Song, Nakhorn Srithammarat. He was a frequent visitor at Suan Mokkh, keen student of Tan Ajahn's approach to Buddha-Dhamma, and also helped with some of the early meditation retreats organized by Ajahn Poh. Steve returned to the USA around 1987.

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#01 *The A, B, C of Buddhism*

#02 *The Meditative Development of Mindfulness of Breathing*

#03 *Paṭiccasamuppāda: Practical Dependent Origination**

* forthcoming

Recommended Reading (Books)

- *Buddha-Dhamma for Inquiring Minds*
- *Christianity and Buddhism*
- *The First Ten Years of Suan Mokkh*
- *Handbook for Mankind*
- *Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree*
- *Keys to Natural Truth*
- *Living in the Present without Past without Future*
- *Mindfulness with Breathing: a Manual for Serious Beginners*
- *Natural Cure for Spiritual Disease: a Guide into Buddhist Science*
- *Nibbāna for Everyone*
- *No Religion*
- *Paticcasamuppada: Practical Dependent Origination*
- *The Prison of Life*
- *A Single Bowl of Sauce: Teachings beyond Good and Evil*
- *Under the Bodhi Tree: Buddha's Original Vision of Dependent Co-Arising*

Online Resources

- www.bia.or.th
- www.suanmokkh.org
- www.soundcloud.com/buddhadasa
- www.facebook.com/suanmokkhbangkok

Buddhadāsa Foundation

Established in 1994, the Buddhadāsa Foundation aims to promote the study and practice of Buddha-Dhamma according to Ven. Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu’s teachings. It encourages compilation and translation of his works from Thai into foreign languages, as well as supports publication of translated teachings for free distribution.



Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives

Established in 2010, the Buddhadāsa Indapañño Archives collect, maintain, and present the original works of Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu. Also known as Suan Mokkh Bangkok, it is an innovative place for fostering mutual understanding between traditions, studying and practicing Dhamma.

